CRITICAL
THEORY

Louis Althusser replies to criticism
Unions in business
Education and democracy
In this issue we continue with our announced venture of a series of articles which seek to clarify fundamental conceptions of marxism in the world today.

In the last issue, we published an article by the British philosopher John Lewis on the French marxist Louis Althusser. In this issue, we publish Althusser's reply to Lewis. Lewis' article is one of the few that has elicited a response from Althusser himself. Readers can therefore judge the merits and demerits of the arguments advanced, and will, we hope, themselves enter into the discussion, which is certainly not exhausted by these two articles. This is an important exchange for it deals with one important area of theoretical difference within the world communist movement and within world marxism.

John Sinclair also deals with some related controversies. This brief article on one of the most important streams of marxism this century traces its roots in Hegel and in Marx, and provides a stimulating discussion of the concept of negation in the thought of the Critical Theorists.

Russell Edwards' article on the "Counter-Culture" and revolution is also not unrelated, in the theoretical issues it raises.

Grant Evans, in his review of Sweezy's and Magdoff's latest books on American capitalism also points to important theoretical differences which are becoming more acute within the field of marxist economics. On a somewhat different tack, Bernie Taft's article on ACTU enterprises shows that such enterprises perform an integrative function for capitalism. To do this, he draws valuable lessons from the West German experience.

The relation between democracy and education under capitalism is being debated more frequently, and is becoming a central issue of struggle in the schools. Dean Ashenden's article is one of several ALR plans to publish on this subject.

We invite criticism comment, and contributions on all these and other issues.

AUSTRALIAN LEFT REVIEW

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CRITICAL THEORY

John Sinclair

(The Institut fur Socialforschung was set up at Frankfurt-am-Main in 1923. Horkheimer, whose father endowed it, became director in 1930, and continued in exile after 1933, in France, and then in the United States. The Institute closed in 1941, with some members returning to Germany, and others, notably Fromm and Marcuse, remaining in the USA. Adorno and Horkheimer re-established the School at Frankfurt in 1950. Habermas (now at the Max Planck Institute) came in at that stage. Adorno died in 1969; Horkheimer is still alive. These three all moved to a conservative position, especially after the 1968 student revolts, which they denounced.)

This article is an attempt to define and assess what is known as critical theory. The perspective which is taken here is that there are common themes running through the work of Marx, Lukacs and the Frankfurt School, including its living exponents, Marcuse and Habermas, and that although there are significant differences between these theorists, they all share a critical position.

The defining characteristic of this position is a critical and transcendent view of reality which encompasses the negation of the existing reality which presents itself to us, and urges such negation in practice in order to liberate the possibilities for man immunent in that reality. This characteristic will usually be referred to in this essay as the critical position, a term which will be used in a general way to include also themes concomitant with this characteristic.

"The truth is the whole." Hegel's dictum is the point of departure for critical theory, but it is in Marx that it acquires its material relevance. I intend to base my explication of Marx's critical theory upon Marcuse's lucid statement of "The Marxian Dialectic." (1)

Both Hegel and Marx, says Marcuse, saw the negative character of reality, and truth was only to be found in the "negative totality". The elements of transcendence and negation are already apparent - the truth was the whole, and the whole was reality as it presented itself to us, plus the negation of that reality as discerned in its negativity, which was its motor. It was only in the context of the negative totality, said Marx, that the process and structure of social reality could be understood, for it enabled one to see through the reification and mystification of class society to its contradictions.

The difference between the Hegelian and the Marxian dialectic, as Marcuse points out, is that the former was "..... a universal ontological one in which history was patterned on the metaphysical process of being," whilst the latter was historically specific and materialist. ("The critic ... can ... develop the true actuality out of the forms inherent in existing actuality as its ought-to-be and goal." (2) Similarly, his materialism is evident in "The German Ideology," especially on the first few pages where he says that his premises " ... are men, not in any fantastic isolation and fixation, but in their real, empirically perceptible process of development under certain conditions." (3)

It is Marx's view of the negative totality of social reality that has come to be called "dialectical materialism". But there is more to dialectical materialism than this, and it is now that we see the defining characteristic of critical theory:

"The historical character of the Marxian dialectic embraces the prevailing negativity (that is, the contradictions of class society) as well as its negation. The given state of affairs is negative and can be rendered positive only by liberating the possibilities immunent in it. This last, the negation of the negation (obviously not in the same sense as Hegel used the term) is accomplished by establishing a new order of things.”


The negativity and its negation are two different phases of the same historical process, straddled by man's historical action. The new state is the truth of the old, but that truth does not steadily and automatically grow out of the earlier state; it can be set free only by an autonomous act on the part of men, that will cancel the whole of the existing negative state.” (4)

The negation of negativity then, is not inevitable nor is it just a philosophical conception as far as Marx is concerned -- rather, it needs conscious action to bring it about. Thus, two consequent elements which emerge from Marx's critical theory are the emphasis on consciousness, and the emphasis on Praxis, both of which are necessary to bring about negation and therefore central to the critical position. For Marx, the conscious and acting men who were to bring this about were the proletariat:

"Heralding the dissolution of the existing order of things, the proletariat merely announces the secret of its own existence because it is the real dissolution of this order.” (5) The object of the negation of the proletariat's negativity was human emancipation:

“The role of emancipator ... finally reaches the class which actualises social freedom, no longer assuming certain conditions external to man and yet created by human society but rather organising all the conditions of human existence on the basis of social freedom.” (6)

Marx was aware, however, of the difficulties which capitalism put against the attainment of consciousness and the inspiration to Praxis:

"The class having the means of material production has also control over the means of intellectual production, so that it also controls, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of intellectual production.” (7)

Similarly, science and philosophy were subject to the mystification of capitalism:

"Science was either pressed 'into the service' of capital or degraded to the position of a leisurely past-time remote from any concern with the actual struggles of mankind, while philosophy undertook in the medium of abstract thought to guard the solutions to man's problems of needs, fears and desires.” (8)

What then, were the implications of Marx's thought for philosophy and sociology? Marcuse answers:

"The material connection of his theory with a definite historical form of practice negated not only philosophy but sociology as well ... The fundamental relations of the Marxian categories are not within the reach of sociology or of any science that is preoccupied with describing and organising the objective phenomena of society. They will appear as facts only to a theory that takes them in the preview of their negation. According to Marx, the correct theory is the consciousness of a practice that aims at changing the world.” (9)

We can now see, particularly in this last statement, the defining characteristic and the concomitant themes of critical theory as it is found in Marx: the critical and transcendent view of reality as negative totality, which, given a materialistic cast, saw through the ideology of class society to reveal its contradictions and made possible the negations of this negativity. This could only be done through the proletariat acting with this consciousness to liberate the human possibilities immanent in class society, that is, negating it by creating socialism. This is the critical position as found in Marx and which is carried through to a greater or lesser degree in Lukacs and the Frankfurt School.

Lukacs' What is Orthodox Marxism?, a polemic against Bernstein and other revisionists, clearly places him in the critical theory tradition. (10) He emphasises, like Marx, the method of dialectical materialism, the relationship of theory and practice, historical specificity, capitalism’s use of science and so on. However, with Lukacs is found a movement away from Hegel and the concept of negative totality when he insists on the importance of the "concrete totality.”

Starting from Marx's dictum that “the relations of production form a whole,” Lukacs lays emphasis on the historical character of reality, and argues that the reality which we experience (as distinct from the negative totality) must be viewed holistically and historically, but further, that we must also come to know “the concrete totality i.e. the conceptual reproduction of reality.” (11) That is to say, it is only by seeing past the concepts through which capitalism reproduces itself that we can see its real contradictions.

It is this consideration that leads Lukacs, as it was later to lead Habermas, to an emphasis on the critique 9. ibid., cf. Marx's Eleventh Thesis on Feuerbach; also "As philosophy finds its material weapons in the proletariat, the proletariat finds its intellectual weapons in philosophy.” Marx, in Easton and Guddat, op. cit., p. 263 (original stress).


11. ibid., p. 8 (stress added).
of ideology and a corresponding emphasis on reification and the problem of consciousness. Lukacs’ argument is made clearest when he says:

“The fetishistic illusions enveloping all phenomena in capitalist society succeed in concealing reality, but more is concealed than the historical, i.e. transitory, ephemeral nature of the phenomena. This concealment is made possible by the fact that in capitalist society man’s environment, and especially the categories of economics, appear to him immediately and necessarily in forms of objectivity which conceal the fact that they are the categories of the relations of men with each other. Instead they appear as things and the relations of things with each other. Therefore, when the dialectical method destroys the fiction of the immortality of the categories it also destroys their reified character and clears the way to a knowledge of reality.” (12)

This echoes Marx, certainly, but in the emphasis on knowing the reality of the ideological superstructure, it appears that Lukacs’ emphasis here is quite different to the Hegelian and Marxian emphasis on the negativity of reality. However, whilst this may be so, Lukacs comes back to Marx and Hegel when he sees the proletariat as the negations of capitalism:

“... for the proletariat the total knowledge of its class-situation was a vital necessity ... its class situation becomes comprehensible only if the whole of society can be understood ... this understanding is the inescapable pre-condition of its actions ... From its own point of view, self-knowledge coincides with knowledge of the whole so that the proletariat is at one and the same time the subject and object of its own knowledge.” (13) Thus, for Lukacs, as with Marx, critical theory is clearly identified with the proletariat, an identification which later was to be lost in critical theory.

Although I have previously used the term “critical theory” in regard to Marx and to Lukacs, for reasons already given, it is most clearly associated with the work of the Frankfurt School: mainly Horkheimer, Adorno, *Marcuse and Habermas.

In regard to the term itself, an orthodox Marxist critic of the Frankfurt School, Goran Therborn, points out that Horkheimer used the term “materialism” rather than “critical theory” at first; that Adorno saw critical theory as an attempt to bring materialism “to theoretical self-consciousness;” and that the phrase derives “from the conventional description of Marxism as the critique of political economy.” (14) It would appear, then, that there is at least nominal continuity between Marx, Lukacs, and the Frankfurt School: however, Therborn’s judgment is that “Critical theory is primarily a prise de position (Haltung) and only secondarily a theory of a specific type.” Further, he says that “the content of critical theory was essentially indeterminate.” (15)

I share sufficient reservation with Therborn to incline me to use the phrase “critical position,” as indicated above, when trying to discern the continuities in all the theorists with whom I am dealing. However, whilst being aware of emphasising similarity at the expense of distinction, it seems to me that with Horkheimer’s statements that the critical theorist is “the theoretician whose only concern is to accelerate a development which should lead to a society without exploitation” and that “Critical theory explains: it must not be like this, men could alter being, the conditions for doing so already exist,” (16) the continuity is more than nominal with Marcuse’s judgment on Marx, cited above: “According to Marx, the correct theory is the consciousness of a practice that aims at changing the world.” (17)

However, the radical programme which Horkheimer set out in 1937 was not and has not been realised by the Frankfurt School -- on the contrary, the School has been characterised by a marked retreat from practice, especially from practice identified with the proletariat. This marks a clear break with Lukacs and with Marx, who saw clearly that “real liberation can be achieved only in the real world and with real means ... ‘Liberation’ is a historical and not a mental act.” (18)

Therborn argues that the Frankfurt School’s retreat is characterised by a “double reduction of science and politics to philosophy.” (19) Therborn apparently shares Marx’s attraction to positivism and materialism: “Where speculation ends, namely in actual life, there, real, positive science begins as the presentation of the practical activity and practical process of the development of men. ... Apart from actual history ... abstractions have in themselves no value whatsoever.” (20)

It is from a similar position that Therborn criticises the Frankfurt School. He argues that the School’s critical theory is rooted in the tradition of classical philosophy by virtue of its idealism and objective view of truth which leads to the use of a “metaphysical humanism” as its epistemology. This in turn leads to a critique of political economy, as with Marx, but its transcendence of bourgeois economics “leaves its system of concepts intact ... It leaves

12. ibid., p. 14 (stress original).
13. ibid., p. 20. One commentator on Lukacs, Istvan Meszaros, has remarked that this “out-Hegel Hegel.”
Also, in regard to the relationship of critical theory to the proletariat, * Therborn argues that Horkheimer's programme is vague and unsure, and that -

"Critical theory's" conception of politics also ends in a paradox. On the one hand, it presents itself as a mere component of a political practice; on the other, it lacks any specific political anchorage. This is not just a description of its historical situation after the victory of Nazism in Germany, but a rigorous consequence of Frankfurt School theory.

The over-politicisation of theory leads logically to the substitution of theory as a surrogate for politics -- an Ersatz-politik. " (22) (Therborn goes on to discuss the continuities of the Frankfurt School with Lukacs in its critique of science as contemplation, which in time moved to a critique of science as domination. This element reaches its apogee in Habermas, to be discussed below.)

Like Lukacs, and like Marx, critical theory takes the Hegelian view of history as an unfolding, as the realisation of the subject, such that conscious action to negate the negativity of capitalism realises socialism. Therbom's essential criticism here of this view is that it is non-scientific and non-materialist, but what leads him to this view, apart from his own bias towards science, is his concentration on the "social totality" rather than on the "negative totality." In looking for the Frankfurt School's continuities with Marx, then, it becomes a question of which element is dominant in Marx -- positivism ("scientific socialism") or Hegelianism. Therbom argues from the former, this essay from the latter, so that my own judgment on this theoretical score is that the critical position is maintained through Marx, Lukacs and the Frankfurt School.

However, the question of the relationship of theory and practice is another one entirely, and it is clearly demonstrable that the post-War developments in the Frankfurt School, with an exception perhaps in the case of Marcuse, have led to the retreat from practice to pure abstraction. This negativism, apart from his own bias towards science, is his concentration on the "social totality" rather than on the "negative totality." In looking for the Frankfurt School's continuities with Marx, then, it becomes a question of which element is dominant in Marx -- positivism ("scientific socialism") or Hegelianism. Therbom argues from the former, this essay from the latter, so that my own judgment on this theoretical score is that the critical position is maintained through Marx, Lukacs and the Frankfurt School.

The effect of the combined factors of formal presentation of the theory, exclusive individualisation and academic integration is a cumulative mystification. The formula here provides a legitimisation for a purely ideological radicalism smugly installed in the cosy academic institution, without even an indirect relationship to politics as experienced by the masses but still cultivating a critical theory going back to an interpretation of Marx."

(23)

Bearing in mind the distinction between critical theory as theory and the relationship of the theory to practice, we now pass to the two most influential living Frankfurters, Marcuse and Habermas. In regard to this distinction, Marcuse can be said to maintain the relationship of theory to practice in practice, although his theory is open to Therborn's criticism of the Frankfurt School. For Marcuse, critical theory is concerned to analyse the contradictions of society, its modes of domination and its ideology (or "concrete totality" as Lukacs puts it.)

"... in the light of its used and unused or abused capabilities for improving the human condition ... critical theory must abstract from the actual organisation and utilisation of society's resources . . . Such abstraction which refuses to accept the given universe of facts as the final context of validation, such 'transcending' analysis of the facts in the light of their arrested and denied possibilities, pertains to the very structure of social theory. It is opposed to all metaphysics by virtue of the rigorously historical character of the transcendence ...” (24)

However, because, as Marcuse argues, society has become "one-dimensional," and absorbed the proletariat, "in the absence of demonstrable agents and agencies of social change, the critique is thus thrown back to a high level of abstraction. There is no ground on which theory and practice, thought and action meet . . . " (25)

All the elements of the critical position which were identified above can be seen clearly here -- immanent critique in terms of real possibilities, the historical and materialist elements, the aim of human liberation, transcendence of reality -- however, Marcuse's analysis at this stage leads him away from Praxis "in the absence of demonstrable agents and agencies of social change" -- not just the proletariat, but anyone. Thus, "the analysis is forced to proceed from a position 'outside' the positive as well as negative, the productive as well as destructive tendencies in society." (26) Thus, Marcuse finds himself in the same dilemma as his peers at Frankfurt -- having the critical position, but no group with which it might be identified.

Whilst it might be argued that Marcuse's One Dimensional Man shows precisely how this dilemma has come about, Marcuse's critics are keen to point out that he

21. Therborn, op. cit., p. 70.
22. ibid., p. 73.

* See note 9 above.

25. ibid., pp. 11-12.
was wrong -- if society really were one-dimensional, Marcuse could not have written a book like that: (27) the critical position would be impossible. Further, in "mistranslating an interlude for an inexorable trend," (28) Marcuse, like Daniel Bell of all people, failed to see the political resurgence which was to occur in the late 'sixties amongst the American Blacks, Third World revolutionaries and students in all capitalist countries. The irony in the latter case is that "They act in order to negate the reality he described, even if that entails negating his theory at the same time." (29)

Marcuse also criticized for alleged departures from Marx -- for emphasising culture at the expense of social structure, and consumption at the expense of production. (30) Marcuse could defend himself from most of these -- he has made himself aware of the new groups in opposition and addressed himself to them; he has modified his view of one-dimensionality, and re-asserted his Marxism. (31) However, the most telling criticism of Marcuse's 'One Dimensional Man' is that it is characterised by a "self-destructive hyper-radicalism." (32) This criticism will be returned to later.

The last member of the Frankfurt School to be discussed is Jurgen Habermas, whose work represents a clear break with the other theorists discussed, although certain continuities are still discernible: he can still be identified with the "critical position."

Habermas' argument that technology and science are at once the form of domination and legitimation in contemporary capitalist society (33) is certainly consistent with the critical position -- as seen above, this notion arose with Marx, was carried through by Lukacs and developed by Horkheimer. Similarly, his method is one of immanent critique (the defining characteristic of the critical position) seeing as he does the possibility of individual liberation through the rationalisation of communication. (34) However, the content of the immanent critique breaks with the critical position, moving from social to personal possibilities for liberation, but although this has come a long way from Marx, it is not inconsistent with others of the post-war Frankfurt School, as noted above.

However, it is not Habermas' conclusions so much that mark the departure, but how he arrives at them, taking as he does merely elements from Marx (whom he explicitly rejects otherwise (35) as well as from Freud and, of all people, Talcott Parsons. (36) Further, his concern is more epistemological and ontological (37), rooted as it is in Erkenntnistheorie -- involving the three sorts of interests and their corresponding sciences and social mediation -- rather than in Kritische Theorie.

On the other hand, Habermas, although rejecting the proletariat, did have an eye open for a group to bring about negation at the time of writing Science and Technology as Ideology, and this was the radical students. However, whereas Marcuse has exonerated himself as a practical critical theorist since One Dimensional Man, Habermas has moved right away from the critical position since Science and Technology as Ideology with his denunciation of the students and his own absorption into the Max Planck Institute. Embourgeoisement came at an earlier age for Habermas than it did for Horkheimer or Adorno. Thus, even though Habermas may be broadly considered to take the critical position, his work is further apart from the other theorists considered than the distance of the difference between them.

I have now examined Marx, Lukacs, and the Frankfurt School in terms of the critical position as I have defined it, and have found it present in the thought of each considered. It remains, however, to assess the Frankfurt School overall. In doing so, Therborn's judgment is of interest:

"Critical theory rejects any positive presence in capitalist society (such as the proletariat) and seeks the purest negation, the negation of the negation, as the essence of the revolution. This Hegelian notion of revolutionary change has played a central and disastrous role in Frankfurt thought. In their search for the absolute negations of the prevailing theoretical and ideological discourse, the thinkers of the Frankfurt School feel forced to go outside both science, concrete social analysis, and formal logic. [sic] Horkheimer's 1937 programme for a critical theory tried to find an Archimedean point outside society in order to uproot itself from the process of social reproduction. In the 1940s, Horkheimer and Adorno considered it necessary to go even further, formulating their social critique only in philosophical fragments, because any continuous discourse was not possible."

35. ibid., p. 113.


37. ibid., p. 72.
bound to lapse into positivity. The search for an absolute negation of the negation is also the rationale for Marcuse’s retreat from Marxism in *One Dimensional Man* ...” (38)

It is in the light of this that one sees the full impact of Therborn’s critique noted earlier. It is not a question of the degree to which critical theory has stayed in the Marxist tradition -- this is a question of interpretation of Marx: Marcuse’s own thought, for instance, seems consistent with his interpretation of Marx discussed above. (39) The flaw however, in Marcuse’s interpretation which lends validity to Therborn’s criticism is that Marcuse emphasised the negation of the negation at the expense of this aspect: “... the struggle with the ‘realm of necessity’ will continue with man’s passage to the stage of his ‘actual history’ and the negativity and the contradiction will not disappear.” (40) That is, the search for the absolute negation of the negation is futile. As Therborn notes, it leads to the search for an external negating subject at the expense of the analysis of structural contradictions, and to an Hegelian concern with consciousness, and to a preoccupation with ideological domination. (41)

But the argument that this is not Marxist is less important, and from my viewpoint, less valid, than the tendency of the search for pure negation to lead away from Praxis and social emancipation. That this is the case is evident from the foregoing, and it is in this sense that critical theory, through its retreat to philosophy and self-reflection, is self-destructive, for even though it maintains the critical position, it has done little to change society by its negation, except for Marcuse’s efforts and through its influence, by default, on radical students.

The philosophers continue to interpret the world, the point remains, to change it.

40. ibid., pp. 316-7 (stress added).
SHOULD TRADE UNIONS ENTER BUSINESS?

Bernie Taft

The entry of the Australian Council of Trade Unions into retail business and its plans to enter into other spheres of business activity such as consumer credit, insurance and housing have evoked very little serious discussion in the labor movement.

When the ACTU Executive resolved in August 1971 that it favored in principle the ACTU entering these business activities, ACTU President Hawke described it as the most important decision ever made by the Executive.

The Executive also welcomed offers that had been conveyed to Bob Hawke by the West German trade union enterprises to provide assistance to the ACTU. Yet curiously this decision was endorsed by the ACTU Congress which followed it (August -September 1971) without producing a serious discussion about the aims, perspectives and likely consequences of such a step.

This is indeed strange. In March 1972 a German delegation of nine representatives of trade union-owned enterprises in the Federal Republic of Germany visited Australia as guests of the ACTU to assist in the conduct of studies into the feasibility of the ACTU entering this range of economic activities.

The decision of the ACTU to enter into such enterprises has aroused more serious comment abroad than it has in Australia. Apparently the implications of involving the trade union movement in large-scale business operations is more clearly understood in a country like Germany, which is the model for these plans.

The German big business paper Handelsblatt in its issue of May 9, 1972, devotes a long article to the ACTU plans under the heading: "Australian Trade Unions Re-think -- Employer Role in Accordance with the German Recipe Against being Strike-happy."
These are some of its more significant comments:

"If the partnership between the ACTU and the DGB (German equivalent of the ACTU) works out, the surplus energies of the militant trade unions will be diverted to new functions – the establishment of trade union industrial undertakings, according to the German pattern."

"These ambitions of the Australian trade union movement signify a moving away from the hitherto official policy of socialisation of industry."

The writer goes on to say that the Australian trade union movement “has become bogged down in the ideas of class struggle,” and bemoans the fact that “demands for co-determination with the employers in the industries have not yet forced their way through in Australia.”

Interestingly, this big business journal estimates that “... the help of the DGB in the establishment of trade union enterprises could contribute to the diminution of Marxist influence inside the Australian trade union movement.” And, “the DGB thrust into Australia is based on the conception to set the Australian trade union movement on the road to ‘People’s Capitalism’ ... ”

The comments, which reveal a considerable insight, highlight the paucity of discussion about these plans in Australia, as well as the fact that they have no real mass base. They stand or fall with one man. This raises some pertinent questions about democratic methods, about rank and file involvement in decision-making in the trade union movement.

It is certainly a serious state of affairs that plans are made to take the trade union movement in the direction of large-scale business undertakings without an elaboration of the underlying conception and the social and economic perspectives involved, and without an informed public discussion.

The ACTU REVIEW of July 31, 1972, carries this comment by Bob Hawke:

"Dividends from the ACTU Store will increase supporting unions’ funds for the benefit of their members."

"Trade unionism, in its early and formative years, was heavily and almost exclusively focused on matters which can shortly be described as ‘industrial,’ that is, matters pertaining to hours of work, days of work, conditions of working, rates of pay, overtime and other penalty provisions, staff amenities, holidays and sick leave. Whilst all of these things are of great importance in regulating relationships between employee and employer, they have no final bearing on the ultimate question of what effective standard of living is promoted for the mass of the community because they ignore the very vital matter of the purchasing power of the wage and salary earner’s takehome pay. To continue to increase, through bitter, difficult and prolonged struggles, the number of money units going to make up a pay packet loses much of its meaning, force and effect, if the purchasing power of those money units is subject to continued and uncontrolled erosion, because of the inability of the consumer to exercise any restraining influence on the price levels.

“But now, shopping at the ACTU Store guarantees members a fair price and also enables them to take a personal part in the fight against retail exploitation."

"More support for Bourke's will hasten the development of other ACTU enterprises for the good of the whole community."

Comments such as these can hardly be treated as a serious analysis of the economic and political issues and consequences involved.

Bob Hawke knows very well what other factors are involved in inflation. West Germany, the model of this type of enterprise, has a high and even rising rate of inflation.

In the absence of a serious discussion it is little wonder that the ACTU plans have the support of a strange alliance of forces.

The Board of Directors of Bourke's has Ralph Marsh, Rightwing Sydney Labor Council secretary, as well as Bob Hawke and Harold Souter as members.

In light of this it will be useful and indeed necessary to turn to the experience of West Germany, which is the model for these plans.

At first, as seen through the eyes of British orthodox economists, Management Today, a big business magazine published by the British Institute of Management, The Financial Times and The Economist, had this to say in its January 1971 issue, which is devoted to the West German economy:

"The (pound sterling) 1700 million Bank fur Gemeinwirtschaft, fourth largest commercial bank in Germany ... is wholly owned by the German trade
unions. It makes neither a secret of its ownership, nor has it any shame over wearing a strictly capitalist hat, striving after the same rewards as any other major bank...

"As a result its achievement in banking terms is good. If its achievements in social terms appear modest, that too is for good and sufficient economic reasons."

In an article under the heading "The Bank that Unions Built" Tom Lester writes: "Critics may argue that the Bank fur Gemeinwirtschaft's philosophy, however admirable in itself, will be no more effective in promoting the common good than the cooperative movement in this country (Britain): in practical terms, Marks and Spencer, for all its pure capitalism, has probably done more for the man-in-the-street than any dividend- or profit-sharing scheme could ever do..."

"The unions do not, Hesselbach (the bank's General Manager) stresses, influence the day-to-day decisions made by bank executives according to commercial interests. In theory if a strike hit a client firm, the bank would lend the client money to help it over a cash crisis; but would also lend money to the strikers to help them with hire purchase instalments. That is the essence of compromise." Perhaps -- but it also keeps the hire purchase companies solvent.

"Many of the B.f.G. executives are indeed card-carrying Social-Democratic Party members as well as unionists ... while extremists from either Left or Right wings would be excluded." "The bank makes no political distinction in granting credit ... All parties and churches receive equal treatment, but the exception is made of extremists, Left or Right..."

"That the Bank fur Gemeinwirtschaft is free to act in these capitalist ways is its saving grace -- it has no inhibitions about making profits where they are appropriate and in Hesselbach's philosophy they provide a stimulus which serves the general good. In this respect, it is very lucky that the German unions are willing to stay right out of the day-to-day running of the B.f.G..... Bank executives emphasise that the unions have never attempted to influence the granting of credit -- to do so, it is felt, would destroy the bank's credibility. 'We are a bank dealing with money, not ideology,' says personnel manager Frau Radke, herself an active trade unionist."

All this is a foreign big business view. Let us look at the views of the German leaders involved in these enterprises. For unlike here in Australia, they have spelled out quite clearly the concepts, the theoretical premises that guide the German trade union movement in their business enterprises. They are put forward by a trade union leadership that is openly committed to the preservation of the capitalist private enterprise system, but seeks to mitigate some of its more glaring evils. It is a philosophy that accepts the consumer society and its values without question. It only seeks to improve it.

Dr. Hesselbach in a talk in 1970 (published in a booklet called Commonweal Enterprise [meaning public and cooperative enterprise]) states: "We must emphasise the fact that the commercial type of enterprise is completely justified. However, this latter type of enterprise ought to lose its monopoly. According to our ideas commonweal enterprises should appear in all markets. The competition between real entrepreneurial efforts can only function satisfactorily, in a social and operative way, if there are different competing types of enterprises with different roles of behavior, alongside the competition between private entrepreneurs," and "... commonweal enterprise will be able to compete with private enterprise under conditions of free competition."

Certainly, German capitalism, big business and monopoly has not been weakened at all as a result of this type of enterprise. Nor has it opposed it. West German strike figures are the lowest in advanced Western countries.

No wonder that West German big business papers evaluate the Australian efforts to enter this field positively.

Hesselbach, after dealing with the attitudes of the old-style producers' society, "who thought that its deadly enemy was the private industrial capitalist entrepreneur," contrasts this with the attitude of the commonweal enterprises.

"They do not encounter any concrete adversary, no class or group which they would like to eliminate. They are no longer aiming at being the only victor in the end, on the battlefield, they only tackle concrete public grievances, working in general in such a way as to regulate prices, and they do not do this in order to deprive somebody of profits, but chiefly only in order to keep the wheels of price competition going which are an instrument of planning par excellence. On the other hand, they are quite ready to join coalition with private enterprise, from time to time, whenever necessary... They do no longer think of themselves as adversaries of the market economy, on the contrary they are its most active partisans" (emphasis added -- B.T.)

"Nowadays, the German Workers' Movement does not demand that the State protect them against exploiters or under-cutting. Instead the German Trade Unions have proposed to take the necessary steps in order to defend the existing market order and to improve it."

This attitude of the official West German trade
union movement reflects a situation where the extensive trade union enterprises have inevitably become integrated into the highly developed West German monopoly capitalist economic structure.

For all practical purposes these enterprises have become indistinguishable from other capitalist enterprises, with at best only marginal benefits, including jobs for trade union officials. On the negative side they have a strong integrative effect. The scale of the investment of funds involved gives the West German trade union movement a considerable stake in the system.

It has also adapted the trade union movement more strongly to consumerism, and the values generated by it. Large-scale trade union involvement in business ventures would have the same effect in Australia. It is interesting that the real debates in the West German trade union and working class movement today are not about these enterprises -- they are about co-determination or participation (Mitbestimmung). The trade union enterprises have become irrelevant as part of a socialist strategy. It is almost taken as natural that the trade union-owned bank lends money to Krupp, acting in the same way as any other commercial enterprise. As a result, capitalism is under less challenge in West Germany today than it might be.

In any case, it is very doubtful whether the conditions which made the large trade union enterprises possible in the Federal Republic of Germany apply to Australia. Germany had a tradition of trade union enterprises going back over 100 years. Moreover in the post-war situation after 1945, with the need for large-scale reconstruction, the union enterprises got in on the ground floor. They also had large surplus funds to invest. None of these conditions applies here. We already have a developed capitalist economy. In fact, it would take a considerable diversion of trade union efforts and energies to create the basis for any significant trade union involvement in economic ventures.

The conditions in Israel are still less applicable to us. The Histadruth (the Israeli equivalent of the ACTU) play a very significant part as a collective employer. But this arose in specific historical conditions, and certainly preceded large-scale private capital investment. In any case, it acts as a bureaucracy based on the commercial principles of the existing capitalist economy. It certainly is no threat to the capitalist system and as in West Germany reinforces consumerism.

For these reasons, it is very doubtful whether these efforts can succeed in Australia today. But the more serious question is whether the Australian trade union movement should direct its energies and efforts in this direction, or in another direction.

The struggle against the re-sale price maintenance had a positive effect. Bob Hawke, who came out strongly against the monopoly practices of big business business, struck a chord in most people's hearts. His victory over the Dunlop Company was seen by many people as the trade union standing up successfully to big business, and was applauded.

Nevertheless, what has been its long-term effect? The profits of the big retailers have not declined, despite the period of some economic decline in the country. In fact, Bourke's Store seems to be facing some problems. It is complaining that some unions and unionists are not giving their support to Bourke's. It asks unions to suppress advertising material from other firms and offers 2½% to unions on all purchases of its members who participate in this promotion scheme (as well as an extra 1% to the parent body, THC or ACSPA).

Big business has great powers of adaptation and a absorption. The big stores and manufacturers find new ways of getting over or recouping concessions they have been forced to make. It does not necessarily cut into their profits.

It is an illusion that this is the way to challenge capitalism. There can be no objection to unions running their own establishment or organisation to serve their members, such as research organisations, printeries, legal departments, even medical research into industrial diseases, credit unions, etc. The crucial question is whether these things are subsidiary, enabling unions to do their MAIN job better, or whether they become the MAIN preoccupation of trade unions, diverting them from their more significant objectives.

In our view trade union strategy should focus on widening the horizons of the workers and involving the workers directly in the great social struggles -- it should show them that the system itself needs to be challenged, and how to do this in practice. This involves active struggle against bureaucracy, against integrative trends, against the ethos of the consumer society, which trade unions have traditionally gone along with.

It means raising demands which are concerned with control, which challenge established "sacred" property rights, and help to overcome deeply ingrained prejudices and capitalist-fostered values in the ranks of the working class.

Demands for workers' control, for a decisive say in all the things which affect the worker's life -- his surroundings, his children's education and health, the destruction of the environment -- need the active encouragement of the trade union movement if it is to act as an instrument for a real and lasting protection of the worker's living standards and conditions and his eventual liberation from his oppressed condition.

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EDUCATION AND DEMOCRACY

Dean Ashenden

(This article is the text of a paper given at the seminar DEMOCRACY AND EDUCATION conducted by the South Australian Institute of Teachers in Adelaide in September this year. Mr. Ashenden was debating the topic “How Democratic is South Australian Education?” with Mr. K.E. Barter, Director of Secondary Education, South Australian Education Department.

I have often been a critic of Australian education, and my criticism has usually been severe. I suppose, then, that I'm the sort of person Mr. Barter referred to when he addressed a student meeting at Adelaide University on May 16 this year. He said:

It is all too common these days to hear public spokesmen voice the opinion, with a lack of close knowledge, but with a confidence usually reserved for certainty, that Australian education is poor and even worse. (1)

By the time I read this remark, reprinted in the Education Gazette, I was well into the preparation of this paper, and so I decided that, common or not, another piece of such criticism would have to be inflicted on a helpless public. When I read the next sentence, though, I was ready to give up the attempt, for Mr. Barter went on to tell his audience that he was able to deny that Australian education was poor or even worse and, he continued, that he could:

add emphasis from my close knowledge of what is happening in South Australia by saying that such criticism is rubbish. (2)

At this stage, I realised that there was no point in going on. I rang Murray Haines, told him the Institute had backed the wrong horse, Brin Munro (3) was right after all, and he'd better scrub the conference. Murray pointed out that this would leave the Blue Moon catering service with hundreds of unwanted cocktail frankfurts, that dozens of teachers would lose their day off, and what with one thing and another, I'd better press on regardless. Here, then, is your reluctant critic.

The topic of the debate is How Democratic is South Australian Education?, and the usual thing is to define your terms.

The first part is the most difficult, and so I'm happy to subscribe to the idea of democracy which Brian Abbey stated or implied in his paper this morning. The part of the topic that does need clarification is ‘education’.

I want to separate the process of education from the institutions of schooling. This is not to say that the two are entirely separate, for it is notorious that education often occurs in the schooling system. It is less often realised that education, of a kind, also happens outside the formal school situation. Sometimes this is a fairly obvious process -- radio, newspapers, TV and the like influence the way people understand the world and themselves, and whatever one might think of the consequences it is, in its way, education. People are also affected by their everyday experience, they learn from it, are educated by it. These sorts of education lie, I think, outside the terms of this debate, but I think it important, before I get onto the schooling system, to point out that whilst this sort of in-

The Gazette is the official publication of the Education Department, and the appearance in it of Mr. Barter's statement suggests that he was enunciating an official line in response to left and progressive criticism of the Department.

2. loc. cit.

3. Murray Haines is current President of the South Australian Institute of Teachers, and Convenor of the Democracy in Education seminar; Brian Munro is a leading DLP activist in SA education, and was foremost in an attack mounted against Haines and the Institute for allowing itself to become the instrument of the subversive left, etc.
formal education is pretty universal, it is in consequence undemocratic. The media confirm the addictions of passive consumers and serve to protect them from ideas or information which would lead to a questioning of their society’s order. The media’s more crucial function is to confirm the lessons of experience in society — that the ‘average man’ cannot expect to create, decide or influence, but must labour, accept, and be swayed. This diffuse, informal education is so thorough-going that the ‘average man’ will be unlikely to conceive of man as a creative being capable of choice; to suggest that he could be, flies so flatly in the face of experience as to seem to him to be pie in the sky. Such are the results of informal learning. Is formal schooling different?

The schooling system in South Australia has three main components. There is the infant, primary and secondary sector, with its subdivisions of state and private schools. There is the tertiary system, including universities, teachers’ colleges, colleges of advanced education, and various trade and specialist institutions. And thirdly, there is a variety of other institutions, including pre-schools, adult education, the university radio, and the like. We can describe this complicated set of institutions by asking six questions about them:

1. Who gets into them?
2. What processes go on in the system?
3. What happens to the schooled as a consequence of their schooling?
4. Who manages the system as a whole?
5. Who manages the components of the system (e.g. a primary school)?
6. In whose interest does this system operate?

Questions 2 and 5 are the concern of the next two sessions of the conference, and I’ll steer clear of them. (4) I will try to answer the four questions, which, to repeat, are:

1. Who gets into the schooling system?
2. What happens to them as a consequence?
3. Who controls the system as a whole?
4. In whose interests does the schooling system operate?

Most people concerned with education would say that everybody gets into the schooling system. This belief is summed up in the slogan of ‘equality of opportunity’. Thus, the Karmel Report:

The schools provided by the state therefore attempt to provide the means to realise equality of opportunity between children from every kind of home (5)

This seems to approximate reality, for it seems obvious that everyone has a more or less fair go at what the schooling system offers. In fact, if we can imagine South Australian society sliced down the middle, and hold it up for inspection, things look different.

If we look firstly at the ten year old layer, we can see that all, or nearly all, the ten year olds are to be found in the schooling system. But quite aside from the undemocratic processes of school life (a descriptive task belonging to tomorrow’s sessions), the arrangements of groups of ten year olds is markedly unequal. Small numbers of them are comfortably closted in private schools, usually because their parents belong to an elite or, on occasions, because they want their sons and daughters to join one. We can also see inequalities which come from class or race or ethnic group, and to some extent, from where the ten year old lives (itself a consequence of class or ethnic group). But at this point in his life, the ten year olds share a relatively equal life-situation in the school, and this is one of the few bouquets one can accord Australia’s centralised education system. Lest Mr. Barter thinks I’ve decided to stop talking rubbish and start talking sense, I’d remind him that whilst the shared experience of these ten year olds is equal, it is equally unpleasant and undemocratic.

If we now look at the twenty year olds in South Australia today, a very different picture emerges. The life-situations of the twenty year olds vary enormously. Firstly, we can now see that the ten inter­vening years have taken their toll, and very few remain inside the schooling system. There are approximately 26,000 ten year olds in the schooling system today; there are approximately 5,000 twenty year olds.

Even allowing for population structure, it is safe to say that, at best, only one in four will survive the schooling system to their twentieth year.

If we inspect them closely, we find that the notion of equality of opportunity has long since been abandoned. In the first place, these people are there because their parents are higher up the scales of salary, status, school-
should systems, in short, has not merely failed to counteract the circumstances to their race, or ethnic group, or their sex. Further, their actual place within the system will be strongly influenced by the same variables. As we climb up the schooling ladder from trade school to technical school to teachers’ college, college of advanced education to university (and within the university from arts up to medicine), we will find more and more Australian, middle class, eastern suburbs males, and less and less migrants, workers, females, or residents of Bowden. The schooling system, in short, has not merely failed to counteract the inequalities of the society which surrounds it, but is serving to reinforce those inequalities. The defender of the system will, at this point, want to say that I’ve forgotten the most significant index of all -- namely intelligence, ability. These twenty year olds, the argument runs, are where they are because they deserve to be there. This argument seems to me to ignore two crucial considerations. Firstly, success in schooling is probably less dependent on such intellectual ability than it is on the ability to conform, to perform routine tasks to the system will, at this point, want to say that I’ve for­

Secondly, the argument implies that individuals should be put into a highly competitive system and given fat rewards for being good at what the system demands. Neither competition nor discrimination, however, help to make democratic man. The twenty year olds still in the schooling system have access to a disproportionate share of social resources, and will, because of it, be able to get their hands on a whole lot more before they’re through. I will defer, for the moment, saying why it happens that way. The two most difficult questions remain: who controls the schooling system, and in whose interest? Who controls the system? I don’t think anyone would want to deny that the schooling system is at least partly controlled by its bureaucracies. Each school has its internal bureaucracy, and in the case of the State schools, its point of connection with the bureaucracy beyond is the headmaster. The head­master’s function within the school is not really my province in this paper. I wish it were, because Mr. A.W. Jones has been helpfully candid about that matter. “Let me say at the outset,” he says in his well-known memo Freedom and Authority, “that you as Head of your school, by delegated authority from the Minister and the Director-General, are in undisputed control of your school.”

This same remark also suggests where control goes from there. It belongs to a large and complex bureaucracy which is made up of people, almost invariably middle-aged males, who have been successful in the political environment within the school and in the conduct of relations between that school and the bureaucracy. This mechanism of recruitment ensures the continuity of a strict definition of role and function, partly confirms, partly determines the distribution of wealth, of self-esteem, of chances for self-realisation, of power. Secondly, it places power in the hands of people who have not only had long experience of a highly competitive, hierarchical and undemocratic social system, but have been very good at surviving it, and are therefore likely to identify themselves with it, to see the world in its terms. That is, the schooling system has served to perpetuate undemocratic social arrangements -- and has in the process generated an ideology which so shapes and selects views of those arrangements as to make them appear the reverse of what they are; at least I assume that’s why Mr. Barter, in the talk already quoted, said that: “Without complacency we can be proud of our system.”

**Thirdly, and briefly, we can look at the thirty year olds. A few of them are still in the schooling system, for varying periods of time. They take post-graduate courses, attend re-training schools, or come to conferences. They are almost entirely members of an elite. By any calculation, they have succeeded in cornering most of what this society offers in the way of a chance to make decisions, realise self and to influence others. Any equitable use of social resources would be at least wanting to compensate the losers for the lack of any of these in their life experience, but in fact they get nothing, and those who already have more get more. Here again, another small bouquet is due to the WEA, Adult Education, district libraries and the like. Their size and resources are an accurate reflection, however, of the forces which determine the allocation of resources.**

I have already gone some way, then, to tackling my second question -- what happens as a consequence of experience in the schooling system? In brief, two undemocratic things happen. Firstly, the schooling system partly confirms, partly determines the distribution of wealth, of self-esteem, of chances for self-realisation, of power. Secondly, it places power in the hands of people who have not only had long experience of a highly competitive, hierarchical and undemocratic social system, but have been very good at surviving it, and are therefore likely to identify themselves with it, to see the world in its terms. That is, the schooling system has served to perpetuate undemocratic social arrangements -- and has in the process generated an ideology which so shapes and selects views of those arrangements as to make them appear the reverse of what they are; at least I assume that’s why Mr. Barter, in the talk already quoted, said that: “Without complacency we can be proud of our system.”

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8. As quoted in ibid. This is, in my view, the heart of this notorious memorandum. Many readers will remember Mr. Jones bruiting it about on the ABC’s Great Debate, in a sales line already familiar to South Australians, as a progressive democratic document. In fact, it opens the way for a despotism which is all the more pernicious because it is on site, not away in Flinders St.; it also exploits the popular confusion in teachers’ minds about the real role of the headmaster and by projecting him as a staff-member-cum-embodiment-of ‘the school’, it divides teachers’ loyalties; thus, when previously teachers were almost unanimous in their opposition to Flinders St., they are now often unable to oppose administrative dominance of education because it is carried out by the headmaster, a role not so clear in their minds as that of a ‘Flinders St. bureaucrat’. The same memorandum uses the same strategy in its promotion of SRC’s, school councils, etc.
of conduct regulated by finely-detailed rules, instructions and regulations which accrete like coral. It ensures a strong emphasis on continuity, and where change occurs, it must be change which can be accommodated by the structure and its personnel — often the changes are not merely accommodated, but are co-opted to reinforce the system. Student reps, school councils, staff meetings and so forth are just such changes.

We must also remember that those who are in the bureaucracy have been attracted into it — after all, no-one made them go there, and the attraction is the apparent potential for decision-making, for influencing people, for exercising power. Those who have joined the bureaucracy soon become aware that such opportunities are relatively greater as one rises up the internal ladder. A very few realise, to their dismay, that bureaucracies have very often been too successful in making their operations routine, reliable, defined and regulated; that matters for decision are so selected and so defined that the real choices available to an individual are relatively small in size and number. One has only to hear Hugh Hudson (9) bemoan the tiny amounts of money available to him for “discretionary spending” to realise that if things are so crook for the whales, it must be positively crummy for the minnows. And when one remembers that there is a high degree of identity of views and dispositions amongst these individuals, it is scarcely surprising that there are few surprises.

The characteristics of this system will percolate downwards. This is partly because those in the bureaucracy control entry into their own ranks, and its members will approve of those who embody their own best qualities — regularity, predictability, commitment to system stability, competitiveness, and a willingness to acquire and use power. In this way, people in the schools are encouraged to take on these qualities. The process of downwards percolation is further assisted by the willingness of bureaucrats to define the site, nature, and, they hope, consequences of the operations under their control. Thus, Mr. Barter in the address already quoted:

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The Education Department sets the broad policy aims, gives advice, and sets up training schemes on ways to achieve such aims. It appoints skilled advisers in curriculum and teaching methods in the form of inspectors and consultants who visit the schools. (10)

Further, the bureaucracy reserves for itself the right to regulate, weigh-up, and adjudicate between various competing “interest groups”. Mr. Barter again:

> working rules are adopted as policy by the Education Department, taking into account

9. The Labor Government’s Minister for Education.


One more example of the percolation process will suffice. The Director-General’s memorandum already referred to tells the head that he should extend prerogatives to his staff just as he (the Director-General) is extending prerogatives to heads. The head is, of course, free to construe this as he likes. As for the parents, the memo says that things should be done “with their full knowledge”. It also adds that “student opinion should make itself known”. (12)

Thus the bureaucratic values of clearly delineated individual responsibility and power, paternalism and noblesse oblige, and the notion that olympian neutrality can be combined with individual power find their way into the school. Thus the great majority must consent or resist — a resistance loaded with all the risks involved in crossing a more or less benevolent despotism.

I have gone into the disposition of power within the Education Department in a little detail because it is the largest schooling bureaucracy. I think that the same general description could be applied to the smaller bureaucracies which manage the universities, the private schools and so on. Without going into that assertion, the point of interest now becomes the place where these numerous power structures merge into the over-arching structure. Obviously, the Education Department is very directly coupled to the State Minister; increasingly, but less obviously, private schools and the rest are, in varying degrees, also influenced by him as the keeper of the purse, for beyond the Minister is the Federal Government and its bevy of commissions and boards which regulate the flow of cash. This cash sometimes goes through the State Minister, and sometimes directly into universities and colleges of advanced education and schools.

This disposition of resources is interesting in two ways. Firstly, its amount determines the extent of the schooling system, and thus its place in the social

11. loc. cit. Note who comes last.


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system as a whole. Secondly, it is often parcelled out in specified directions or under specific conditions, and thus the priorities of the federal administration are directly reflected in the shape of the schooling system. The shape and functioning of this system is extremely complex, and rather than try to describe it more carefully, I refer you to Doug White's excellent chapter in Kirsner and Playford. (13)

For my purpose, the actual operation of these mechanisms is less important than the imperatives which determine its functioning. That is, these structures certainly do have an independent influence on the systems they service, but more fundamental and crucial are the forces which shape their distribution of resources.

Thus we come to the fourth question. In whose interest does the schooling system operate?

Much of my paper has implied that the kind and amount of schooling made available to people varies with their class, race, sex and language group, and whilst this is clearly so, the most powerful single factor from the beginning of the secondary schooling on is, however, the potential productivity of that person. That is, money and resources will only be available to an individual in the form of schooling insofar as there will be a greater return than there was expenditure on him. The usual phrase here is "investment in manpower".

Like any other investment its purpose is to ensure the stability of the productive system and to increase production and profit. I am claiming, then, that the purpose of schooling in our society is overwhelmingly dominated by the needs of the economic system. The shape and functioning of this system is extremely complex, and rather than try to describe this version of the purposes of schooling with a more common version.

Thus, my own institution, Bedford Park Teachers' College, states the purposes of a "liberal education" as they particularly apply to a teachers college, but I think you'll find that the words have a familiar ring:

Pervading all our efforts .... is the ideal of a liberal education. By this I mean that education which endeavours to free the individual from the limitations of ignorance, prejudice, and provincialism and prepares him to seek the truth in all fields of human thought and endeavour through the use of reason. It is the education which enables him to make wise decisions independently, discriminate between truth and falsehood, the worthwhile and the trivial. It is, echoing the view of the Athenians, the education of free men and women - free in the sense of having knowledge and mastery of the selves as well as their environment. (14)

This seems to me to be very far from describing what are, in fact, the functions of the schooling system, or even the small part the teachers' colleges play in it. Oddly enough, a more realistic summary is available in the Karmel Report, even though we may have to translate a few terms. Thus, the report says:

From the point of view of society the steady march of technological progress is dependent on an increasing flow of highly educated persons in the field of technology, economics, business administration, psychology, education and so on. (15)

The key terms here are society, progress and educated. They are misleading terms. In fact, the word "society" refers to that part of social activity which leads to production, and is much better termed the economic system. The word "progress" is loaded with favourable connotations, and a more objective description is "production". The term "education" conjures up the world of the handbook when, in fact, what is referred to is the acquisition of highly specific skills, a process better known as "training". We can now get close to the truth by offering a translation which reads:

From the point of view of the economic system the steady march of technological production is dependent on an increasing flow of highly trained persons in the fields of technology, economics, business administration, psychology, education and so on.

Surprisingly, the Karmel Report also comes close to making clear the crucial role of the schooling system in all this - namely, the weeding out of unprofitable investments, and the transmutation of people into personnel. Thus the report says:

The individual, by equipping himself (note the equal opportunity ideology here) with sophisticated skills, raises his earning power relative to others and fits himself for a high level of employment. Indeed it is becoming increasingly difficult to obtain responsible and interesting jobs without a tertiary education. (16)

Now I want to remind you that three-quarters of the population of this democracy of ours are pushed out of the schooling system before they get to any kind


16. loc. cit.
of tertiary schooling at all. The full impact of that can be gleaned by inverting that last quote from the Karmel Report:

The individual, by failing to equip himself with sophisticated skills, lowers his earning power relative to others and fits himself for low level employment. Indeed it is becoming increasingly difficult to get anything but irresponsible and boring jobs without a tertiary education.

On the face of it, then, clearly only a quarter or less, of the population stand to gain whilst the schooling system performs its present functions. I think that it’s worse than that, however. The economic system, for which schooling provides such crucial services, is rigged even more thoroughly than the schooling system itself. In the first place, don’t forget that all these expensively schooled people go on to make money for their employers, but are provided to the employers at public cost. Just as roads, railways and the like are run at public expense for private profit, so, too, is the schooling system.

This singular fact points to the role of the modern state in servicing the needs of capitalist economies. What’s more, I don’t think it needs a detailed statement on my part to demonstrate that capitalism is not oriented to social goals such as democracy. Prof. Frymier, the keynote speaker of this seminar, put it quite succinctly when he said approvingly of US capitalism:

The basic purpose of the economic enterprise as we know in this country (and we know about capitalism in this country, too, Professor Frymier) is to make money: to show profit. Unless the individual or organisation engaged in economic activity can show financial gain, the basic objective has not been realised. (17)

That basic purpose demands social arrangements which are the converse of democracy. It demands that people be competitive, not co-operative; it demands that their success in a lifelong competition be measured in material terms; it demands that there be many, many more losers than winners; it demands that people be organised in such a way as to make them productive, and this demands that they behave in highly routine, predictable and uniform ways. It requires that social and financial resources be spent upon people only insofar as that expenditure will make them more productive. Thus, the men who wrote the Karmel Report are not villains; they are merely the sophisticated interpreters of the imperatives of a system of production whose aim is to make more profit from more production. They are ideally suited to the task because they have so absorbed the imperatives of the system as to scarcely notice when they are describing them. Let me quote from them once more:

Many large employers recognise the advantages of recruiting employees who have completed their basic tertiary education: these employees are more adaptable, are ready for specialised in-service training, and can devote their efforts more wholeheartedly to the interests of their employers. (18)

It’s the kind of thing you’d expect to find on the secret files of the Chamber of Commerce!

What conclusions can we draw from this? The schooling system is highly competitive and selective; its successes are those who learn to be good at its competitiveness, accept its essentially bureaucratic characteristics of order, efficiency, routine; who can submerge the self and not mind the concentration of real power; they are those who really desire its rewards. It goes without saying that these essential characteristics are the reverse of democratic. It is urgent that teachers and students realise that it is no accident that their life-experience in the schooling system is as it is. The schooling system does not merely imitate many of the qualities of the system outside it, but it is because the system of which it is an integral part requires that it be so. On the face of it then, any attempt to bring democracy into the schooling system must wait on the end of capitalism. It is certain that this is in large measure true. It remains, however, the urgent task of socialists in schooling to lighten the weight on the inmates of the system by striving to make experience there creative, critical and chosen, for these are the qualities of education, not schooling, just as they are the purposes of socialism, not capitalism. Such an attempt will be part of the achievement of a socialist and democratic society.

17. Jack R. Frymier. This remark is made as part of an amazing thesis - that if US education could only be made to more closely imitate the US economic and political systems, it would at last be on the right track.
There seems to be some confusion amongst marxists in Australia as to how to regard the emergence in the late 'sixties and early 'seventies of a substantial group of disillusioned young people, intent on exploring non-materialist life styles. Reactions to the counter-culture have ranged from uncritical enthusiasm to outright contempt. Lyn Donaldson (ALR, No. 35) is certainly correct in her view that bourgeois society can tolerate the counter-culture, and absorb it into its own ethos. She then states, however, that:

"... despite antagonistic polemics between the culturo-revolutionaries and the political-revolutionaries, it is inevitable that their coalition will provide a triumphant assault on capitalist bourgeois society."

Well, maybe, but maybe not. I have been involved in the counter-culture for several years, and over that time developed some major doubts as to its revolutionary potential.

We have made so many mistakes, the artificial divorce of culture from politics being only one of them. In doing so we followed Leary up a blind alley, right into an exiled hole in Algeria. We created a grotesque caricature of straight society, little Wah-roongas in Balmain or Glebe. A dope market which is an exact sickening replica of Wall Street. We enabled the hippie-capitalist to rationalise his behaviour - rip-off your friends for fun and profit, especially profit. We engaged in pretentious ego tussles and called them consciousness-raising. We justified structured and hierarchical movements -- and the voice of the "anarachists" became more frenziedly fascist. Pretence became more important than content, and as Richard Neville laments, the advertising campaign was a resounding success, but there was nothing inside the wrapping paper. We sought happiness within unhappiness, consolation within the status quo. But the source of that unhappiness, the capitalist State, did not change.

One of the most consistent themes of the counter-culture is that the great bulk of the population are shits (anyone who disagrees is a super-shit). They are all "sold-out, screwed-up, mindless materialists, grey-flannel skinheads." The concept of a bourgeois consensus society stems from Marcuse. But before him, curiously enough, this theory was developed by American sociologists who are considered to be ultra-conservative. Writers like Seymour Martin Lipset and Talcott Parsons optimistically and complacently asserted that all the conflicting forces in society had been smoothed out and the whole structure was functioning because of an almost universal acceptance of common values. Herbert Marcuse argued that this consensus was a symptom of moral and political decay. In One Dimensional Man he argued that this condition had been brought about by the use to which technology was being put in capitalist society. Capitalism, he correctly perceives, must expand in order to survive, and this growth is ensured if, among other things, the level of consumption is pushed higher and higher within existing incomes (and the consumer "durables" have built-in obsolescence). Marcuse emphasises strongly the power of a technological society to manipulate and mould the whole life-style and aspirations of mankind in its own image, and in accordance with its own objective requirements.

Counter-culture sophists have certainly accepted this thesis uncritically. Moreover, in its popularised form, it is usually argued that this bourgeois, consensus has been produced by the "conditioning" powers of the media, and that consumption is stimulated by "psychic manipulation." Certainly advertisers use psychological gimmickry, but it is not so much this as the objective social reality which surrounds advertising that determines consumption patterns. Could anyone deny that in this age of inadequate public transport and rapacious landlords with poor quality houses to offer, a car and a home are desirable things to own? More specifically, while many advertisers stress male dominance as a selling point, the ideology of male supremacy originated in the property relations of the economy. The media reflects this ideology, and in turn reinforces it, but does not determine it. As capitalism has expanded, and the division of labor and mechanisation has increased, more and more workers are required for tertiary activities. Hence the ideology of male sup-
remacy is becoming obsolete, as illustrated by the acceptance of the women's liberation movement. No amount of "psychic manipulation" can change this process. Thus, consumer capitalism was a logical extension of a culture which already stressed aggrandisement by property, although obviously abetted by the media.

Although never acknowledged, the "conditioned consumer" theory owes its debt to J.B. Watson, who demonstrated that the human being consisted of nothing but a few stripped muscles and some conditioned reflexes. Today Watson musters few defenders for his extreme views, and yet so many young rebels believe that if you ring a bell, the consumer salivates. This view is popular amongst intellectuals as well. As Ellen Willis states, "because it appeals to their dislike of capitalism and their feeling of superiority over the working classes. This elitism is evident in their conviction that they have seen through the system while the average working slob is brainwashed by the media." (1) No matter how much fuel the "conditioned bourgeois consensus" theory provides for elitist fantasies, it is an over-simplification of reality. It denies the existence of substantial groups in society who live in completely different and often antagonistic ways to that of the middle-class materialist ideal propagated by the all-powerful conditioning media. Different groups have varying degrees of awareness, as one author notes: "Those of us who talk to workers of all political lines will know if they have tried that when the question of domination by their property is brought up, you frequently strike an instant response." (2) Obviously, the conditioning process is not as efficient as is commonly believed by counter-culture sophists, but then affluent youth are far removed from working-class social reality. It is easy to forget that in May, 1968, workers and revolutionary students came close to overthrowing the French government. Presumably they were "conditioned" not to do that. At what point did the chosen few of the counter-culture cast off this conditioning? Those who claim that it was LSD, that magical substance guaranteed to turn a bourgeois child into a revolutionary, are surely putting the cart before the horse. And the thesis, common amongst students, that it is a matter of intelligence, is certainly an elitist one.

Intellectual snobbishness has been with us for a long time. A decade ago Allan Ashbolt described the "proles" as being no more than glutinous masses of second-hand sensations and ad-fed desires, morons manipulated by faceless organisation men and Anderson ratings researchers. That sort of view is par with the one which suggests that all our contemporary social problems like drug-use are communist plots, devised by faceless men in the Kremlin. Yet so many, so many of the coffee-table counter-culture set would agree with Ashbolt, and so it seems does their current mentor, Yale professor Charles Reich. He writes:

"Look again at a fascist, tight-lipped, tense, crew-cut, correctly dressed, church going, an American flag on his car window, a hostile eye for communists, youth and blacks. He has had very little of love, poetry, music, nature or joy. He has been dominated by fear. He has been condemned to narrow-minded prejudice, to self-defending materialism ... he has fled all his life from consciousness and responsibility." (3) Reich urges his readers to be "tolerant" and "loving" to the blue-collar worker because the poor creature hasn't had an artistic-cultural background. And this comes from a self-announced agent of a superior consciousness, so prepared to dismiss the lives of ordinary people as beneath contempt. His heart might be in the right place, but this is, as Craig McGregor notes, "the authentic voice of the aristocrat indignant at the failure of others to be as high-brow, as cultivated, as intelligent as himself." (4)

And this, too, is the voice of the so-called revolutionary counter-culture. It has grown so far apart from the society which spawned it that it cannot possibly accurately portray it. To rely on smart witticisms and snobbish generalisations is hardly a sign of intellectual strength or cultural superiority.

It is important to note that the counter-culture is almost entirely made up of the young affluent middle class. A study of American students found that amongst politically radical groups, and those exploring alternative life styles, individuals from high-income families were disproportionately represented. Students from blue-collar backgrounds were more likely to have adopted the norms and aspirations of conventional society. (5) This tends to disprove the old cliche of the generation gap. Since affluence is its base, it is not surprising that the counter-culture developed an elitist outlook. Also it is no accident that this developed at the same time as there has been an unprecedented number able to avail themselves of tertiary education. The position of students involves an invidious degree of dependence for most. The student has a feeling of being in the society, but not of it, a feeling which quite accurately reflects the student's relationship to the economy. At the same time youthful idealism convinces many that their work is futile. So just at that time when assertion of independence becomes important, the society consigns the student to the role of an object of indulgence. (6) Not surprisingly, a significant proportion of them turn with fine savagery on the society responsible. This does not imply maladjustment, a theory much believed by social scientists, but rather that there is something very wrong with the society which causes such alienation. Very few individuals are able to examine objectively their own position in society, or analyse the reasons for the way
they feel, and radical students are no exception. Instead there is just a feeling of helplessness.

But at least most are aware of the exploitative nature of capitalist society, and its outward manifestations of imperialism, pollution and poverty. But socialism as a means of overcoming these has not become a sustaining ideology for most. Firstly, because of the class origin of the radicals themselves -- and, secondly, there is widespread acceptance of the thesis of convergence between capitalist and socialist economies. In fact, crude technological determinism is a strong current of thought within the counter-culture. Technology itself represents a "death-trip." Theodore Roszak, who first coined the phrase "counter-culture," has consistently emphasised technology's destructive and dehumanising aspects. While Marcuse argued that it was those who owned and controlled technology who were responsible for its dehumanising effects (but in turn this domination was so strong that virtually nothing could be done about it), Roszak considers that it is the responsibility of technology per se. He states: "It is essential to realise that the technocracy is not the exclusive product of that old devil capitalism. Rather it is the product of a mature and accelerating industrialism." (7)

Roszak sees in the counter-culture a vision of a future world at one with nature and mankind's own spirit. He argues that this liberation will occur not when the means of production have been removed from capitalist exploitation, but when they have been abandoned. How this will "liberate" the lives of 220 million Americans, let alone the population of the rest of the world, Roszak never really considers. A few words about Indian mysticism and tribal culture is all he includes. Presumably he has in mind a non-technological society, with its high death rates, and stifling dependence on primitive means of subsistence. It's a rather naive vision of Utopia -- history has shown what happens when a primitive society comes in contact with a technologically advanced one. Roszak considers that it is the responsibility of technology per se. He states: "It is essential to realise that the technocracy is not the exclusive product of that old devil capitalism. Rather it is the product of a mature and accelerating industrialism." (7)

For Marx, human liberation could not be achieved by anarchistic acts or by withdrawing into isolated communities. Technology itself held the key. In a socialist society, in the absence of market forces playing a decisive role, welfare, environmental and social considerations can be incorporated into the decision-making process of the productive enterprise. Within a capitalist framework, however, such matters are described as "externalities," unable to be calculated, and hence ignored. But, the counter-culture advocates (especially Roszak) charge, the notion that resources can be allocated to achieve maximum social utility is utopian, and certainly doesn't occur in contemporary socialist countries. It's like the "withering away of the State," it's claimed: no communist party in the socialist world has so far shown any signs of declaring itself superfluous. According to Roszak and many others, technological determinism explains this, and no further historical and sociological scholarship is considered necessary.

Indeed, in Richard Neville's view, the study of historical and social processes is part of the problem, and not part of the solution. In Playpower he describes a discussion group led by Ernest Mandel: "It was obviously a solemn occasion... The man in the chair was speaking heavy Marx with a German accent... In the discussion which followed, tense for those involved, three hours were spent arguing over the definition of neo-capitalism." Neville comments: "One man's revolution is another man's purgatory." (10) I can understand his frustration, but nevertheless true analysis of society is essential if social action is to be effective. In a later paper, entitled Counter-Culture Crap, Neville laments the failure of the counter-culture revolution, a fact which surely emphasises this point. Like the Yippies, Neville believed in smashing the capitalist State, and both believed the youth of the world would be the revolutionary agency. This notion is now well and truly dead. Time magazine's polls have indicated that over 50% of the 18-24 year olds in the US are voting for Nixon...

The whole malaise of counter-culture theory stems from this fundamental error. By concentrating on youth alone, it has ignored the role of the working class as an agency of social change altogether. Roszak, Neville and Reich can only look on in disillusionment as the counter-culture becomes swiftly and pain-
lessly absorbed into the bourgeois ethos. Charles Reich, in fact, in *The Greening of America*, unwittingly highlights this process.

Reich praises the emergence of the youth rebellion in its rejection of the materialist values of capitalist civilisation, and lauds it as the beginning of a superior consciousness—a state of mind which will eventually transform the capitalist economy and State independently of any political action. What Reich seems to be saying is that the capitalist State rests on nothing but consciousness. Now, normally when a writer is exploring relationships between the base of society and its superstructure, he should be aware that he is in contentious territory. But Reich is blissfully unaware of any problems. While it is true that to some degree there is a two-way relationship between the economy and ideology, each element having some degree of autonomy, so that obviously a change in consciousness is important, that cannot alone change the property relations of the economic structure. A society will function without crises provided that its productive processes are capable of meeting its essential needs, and its image of man and society are capable of rationalising those processes. A discrepancy causes conflict, and consciousness must be translated into action in order to transcend that crisis. But to Reich, like the hippies who preceded him, no action is required, just drop out, and dream of the day when General Motors is going to hand over its capital to its employees. Four years ago, John Lennon claimed “the war is over—if you want it;” but it continues today with increased ferocity. The Yippies’ ritualistic burning of the holy dollar on the floor of New York Stock Exchange did nothing to alter American acquisitive society. At any rate, Reich is forgetting that only a few have developed this change of consciousness, the children of the affluent middle class. The individual growing up surrounded by abundance correctly perceives that the traditional bourgeois morality of hard work, competitiveness and achievement is obsolete. And so on to university, paid for by parents or the State (which looks after members of its own class). It is quite logical that he should be unimpressed by the prospect of living like his parents. The point is that only the affluent have been able to develop this change of consciousness—and that affluence is based on the inequality of capitalism. To Marcuse, Reich’s thesis is the Establishment version of the revolution—not the real one.

But even if Reich’s thesis was based on sound philosophical and sociological premises, history has already proven him wrong. Back in 1967, the “superior consciousness” of the hippies may have been a beautiful and ominous thing to feel, but it died a messy and horrible death. Methedrine and peace made uneasy partners. Violence and commercial exploitation marked the end of the era. Even the communes dried up, and those few which survived started to bear an uncomfortable resemblance to the surrounding society. While it was a minority movement, its culture could remain unadulterated. But as soon as it was transformed into a near consumer product, it was quickly absorbed by bourgeois culture. And yet so much of the counter-culture, dressed in Levis and riding “freedom machines,” intent on making Dylan, Kubrik, Harry M. Miller, Mick Jagger, the Mafia, CBS, Abbie Hoffman and Peter Fonda all multi-millionaires, still naively holds that its adherents can remain aloof from bourgeois culture. But bourgeois culture is not static. It accommodates all but direct attacks upon itself. Instead of one cultural consciousness replacing another, the two fuse and interact. The counter-culture, by its very nature, was a confused and diffuse challenge. This, and the fact that its dominant characteristic is an elitist and fatalistic outlook, allow for few claims of revolutionary potential.

I realise that I have painted the counter-culture with a broad brush, but these impressions are based on my experience, and backed up by the scanty literature on the subject. Nevertheless, the counterculture remains an ongoing phenomenon, and it does consist of a vast rejection of many of the norms and values of capitalist society. As such it provides the basis for acceptance of socialist ideas by young people. Already there are some signs that this is happening.


LOUIS ALTHUSSER REPLIES TO JOHN LEWIS

The following text is a reply to an article by John Lewis which appeared in two parts in the January and February issues of *Marxism Today*. The author has agreed to the addition of a small number of notes by the translator, Grahame Lock, designed to clarify certain points for British readers. The sub-titles are also by the translator. The author has seen the translation and notes.

Part I

I. NEVER FORGET THE CLASS STRUGGLE!

I want to thank *Marxism Today* for having published John Lewis' article about the books I have written on Marxist philosophy: *For Marx* and *Reading Capital*, which appeared in France in 1965. He took care to treat me in a special way, in the way a medical specialist treats a patient. The rest of the family, as it were, stood silent and still at the bedside, while Dr. Lewis leaned over to examine "the Althusser case". He made his diagnosis. A very grave one: the patient is suffering from an attack of severe "dogmatism". The prognosis is equally grave: the patient has not long to last.

It is an honour for this attention to be paid to me. But it is also an opportunity for me to clear up certain matters, twelve years after the event. For my first article (reprinted in *For Marx*), which was concerned with the question of the "young Marx", actually appeared in 1960, and I write in 1972.

Philosophy and Politics

A good deal of water has flowed under the bridge of history since 1960. The Workers' Movement has been touched by many important events. It has seen the Proletarian Cultural Revolution in China (1966-69). It has seen the greatest workers' strike in world history—ten million French workers on strike for a month (May 1968), as well as the important ideological revolt among French students and petty-bourgeois intellectuals which "preceded" and "accompanied" it. It has seen the occupation of Czechoslovakia by the armies of the Warsaw Pact nations. It has seen the war in Ireland, & c. The Cultural Revolution and May 1968 have had ideological and political repercussions in the whole capitalist world.

With hindsight one can judge things better. With the passing of the period between the writing of the pieces collected in my books and the present time—twelve, ten, seven years—one can look back and see more clearly whether one was right or wrong.

It is really an excellent opportunity.

Just one small point in this connection. John Lewis, in his article, never for one moment talks about this political history of the Workers' Movement. In *For Marx*—that is, in 1965—I was already writing about Stalin, about the Twentieth Congress of the Soviet Communist Party, and about the split in the International Communist Movement. John Lewis, on the other hand, writes as if Stalin had never existed, as if the Twentieth Congress and the split in the International Communist Movement had never occurred, as if the Proletarian Cultural Revolution had never taken place, nor the occupation of Czechoslovakia, nor the war in Ireland, & c. John Lewis is a pure spirit, he prefers not to talk about such concrete things as politics.

When he talks about philosophy, he talks about philosophy. Just that. Full stop.

The title of John Lewis' article was *The Althusser Case*. And in his conclusion, the author compares Marxism to ... medicine.
philosophy.

struggle exists and must be fought out by the pro-

economic form and a political form

class struggle. The class struggle has not only an

and in the theoretical field. When it is fought out

letariat in the economic field, in the political field

political

struggle.

The Peasant War

concentrated form " . We can now add that philo­

which are used in philosophy are weapons in the

and since the highest level of the class struggle is the

them "graduated flunkies" of the bourgeois state2. What a wretched sight they

make! For all the great philosophers in history, since the time of Plato, even the great bourgeois

philosophers—not only the materialists but even idealists like Hegel—have talked about politics.

They more or less recognised that to do philosophy was to do politics in the field of theory. And they

had the courage to do their politics openly, to talk

politics.

Heaven be thanked, John Lewis has changed all

that. John Lewis is a Marxist and we are in 1972.

He does not feel the need to talk about politics.

Let someone work that one out.

But to Marxism Today I must express my thanks

for giving an important place to a discussion about

philosophy. It is quite correct to give it this im-

portant place. The point has been made not only

by Engels and of course by Lenin, but by Stalin

himself! And, as we know, it has also been made

by Gramsci and by Mao: the working class needs

philosophy in the class struggle. They need not only

the Marxist science of history (historical materialism),

but also Marxist philosophy (dialectical materialism).

Why?

I should like to reply by using a formula. I will

take the (personal) risk of putting it this way: the

reason is that philosophy is, in the last instance,3

class struggle in the field of theory.

All this is perfectly orthodox. Engels, whom

Lenin quotes on this point in What is to be Done?,

wrote in 1874 in a supplement to his Preface to

The Peasant War that there are three forms of the

class struggle. The class struggle has not only an

economic form and a political form but also a

theoretical form. Or if you prefer: the same class

struggle exists and must be fought out by the pro-

letariat in the economic field, in the political field

and in the theoretical field. When it is fought out

in the theoretical field, the class struggle is called

philosophy.

Now some people will say that all this is nothing

but words. But that is not true. These words are

weapons in the class struggle in the field of theory,

and since this is part of the class struggle as a whole,

and since the highest level of the class struggle is the

political class struggle, it follows that these words

which are used in philosophy are weapons in the

political struggle.

Lenin wrote that "politics is economics in a

concentrated form". We can now add that philo-

2 See V. I. Lenin, Materialism and Empirio-criticism,


(Translator's note)

3 One must always add: in the last instance, so as not

to be misunderstood. I will explain in another place why

it is necessary to be precise in this way, not simply to

say that philosophy is class struggle in the field of theory,

but to add that it is in the last instance that this is the
case.

sophy is politics in a concentrated form. This is a

"schematic" formula. No matter! It expresses its

meaning quite well.

Everything that happens in philosophy has, in

the last instance, not only political consequences in

philosophy, but also political consequences in

politics: in the political class struggle.

We will show in a moment why that is so.

Of course, since I cite Engels and Lenin in support

of my point, John Lewis will surely say, once again,

that I am talking like "the last champion of an

orthodoxy in grave difficulties". O.K.! I am the

defender of orthodoxy, of that "orthodoxy" which

is called the theory of Marx and Lenin. Is this

orthodoxy in "grave difficulties"? Yes, it is and has

been since it came to birth. And these grave diffi-
culties are the difficulties posed by the threat of

bourgeois ideology. John Lewis says that I am

"crying in the wilderness". Is that so? No, it is not!

For Communists, when they are Marxists, and

Marxists when they are Communists, never cry in

the wilderness. Even when they are alone.

Why is that? We shall see.

I therefore take my stand on this theoretical

basis of Marxism—a basis which is "orthodox"

precisely in so far as it is in conformity with the

theory of Marx and Lenin. And it is on this basis

that I want to take issue both with John Lewis and

4 See note 3. Althusser's formulae may be compared

with a number of propositions he put forward on the

same question in 1969, in the article "Lenin before

Hegel" (Lenin and Philosophy, pp. 103-120):

"1. Philosophy is not a science, and it has no object,

in the sense in which a science has an object.

"2. Philosophy is a practice of political intervention

carried out in a theoretical form.

"3. It intervenes essentially in two privileged domains,

the political domain of the effects of the class struggle

and the theoretical domain of the effects of scientific

practice.

"4. In its essence, it is itself produced in the theoretical

domain by the conjunction of the effects of the class

struggle and the effects of scientific practice.

"5. It therefore intervenes politically, in a theoretical

form, in the two domains, that of political practice

and that of scientific practice: these two domains of in-

tervention being its domains, insofar as it is itself produced

by the combination of effects from these two practices.

"6. All philosophy expresses a class position, a 'partisan-

ship' in the great debate which dominates the whole

history of philosophy, the debate between idealism and

materialism.

"7. The Marxist-Leninist revolution in philosophy

consists of a rejection of the idealist conception of

philosophy (philosophy as an 'interpretation of the world')

which denies that philosophy expresses a class position,

although it always does so itself, and the adoption of the

proletarian class position in philosophy, which is

materialist, i.e. the inauguration of a new materialist

and revolutionary practice of philosophy which induces

effects of class division in theory.

"All these Theses can be found in Materialism and

Empirio-criticism (by Lenin). All I have done is to begin

to make them more explicit". (Translator's note)
with my own past errors, on the basis of the need to carry on the class struggle in the field of theory, as Engels and Lenin argued, and on the basis of the definition of philosophy which I have proposed in this article: philosophy is, in the last instance, class struggle in the field of theory.

I will therefore leave aside all the rather imprudent remarks, some of them "psychological", which John Lewis thought it useful to make at the end of his article, about Althusser's "whole style of life and writing". John Lewis is for example very worried, very put out, quite upset—good "humanist" that he is—by the fact that Althusser "argues exhaustively and with an extreme dogmatism", in a way which makes him think not so much of the Scholastics, who were great philosophers of the Middle Ages, but of the schoolmen, commentators of commentators, erudite splitters of philosophical hairs, who could not rise above the level of quotation. Thank you! But really, this kind of argument has no place in a debate between Communists in the journal of a Communist Party. I will not follow John Lewis onto this ground.

I approach John Lewis as a comrade, as a militant of a fraternal party: the Communist Party of Great Britain. In the face of the history of the Workers' Movement, in the face of the theoretical and practical work of Marx and of Lenin, all Communist Parties are equal, in virtue of proletarian internationalism. And all their militants are equal.

I will try to speak plainly and clearly, in a way that can be understood by all such militants.

So as not to make my reply too long, I will only take up those theoretical questions which are most important, politically speaking, for us today, in 1972.

II. WHAT WORRIES JOHN LEWIS?

To understand my reply, the reader must obviously know what John Lewis, in his "radical" critique of my "philosophical writings", essentially holds against me.

In a few words, we can sum this up as follows. John Lewis holds:
1. that I do not understand Marx's philosophy;
2. that I do not understand the history of the formation of Marx's thought.

In short, his reproach is that I do not understand Marxist theory.

That is his right.

I will consider these two points in succession.

III.

First point: Althusser does not understand Marx's philosophy.

To demonstrate this point, John Lewis employs a very simple method. First he sets out Marx's real philosophy, which is Marx as he understands him. Then, beside this, he puts Althusser's interpretation. You just have to compare them, it seems, to see the difference!

Well, let us follow our guide to Marxist philosophy and see how John Lewis sums up his own view of Marx. He does it in three formulae, which I will call three Theses.5

How John Lewis sees Marx

1. Thesis no. 1. It is man who makes history.

John Lewis' proof: no need of proof, since it is obvious, it is quite evident, everyone knows it.

John Lewis' example: revolution. Man makes revolution.

2. Thesis no. 2. Man makes history by remaking existing history, by "transcendence", by the "negation of the negation" of existing history.

John Lewis' proof: since it is man who makes history, it follows that in order to make history man must transform the history which he has already made (since it is man who has made history). To transform what one has already made is to "transcend" it, to negate what exists. And since what exists is the history which man has already made, it is already negated history. To make history is therefore "to negate the negation", and so on without end.

John Lewis' example: revolution. To make revolution, man "transcends" ("negates") existing history, itself the "negation" of the history which preceded it.

3. Thesis no. 3. Man only knows what he himself does.6

John Lewis' proof: no proof, probably because of lack of space. So let us work one out for him. He could have taken the case of science and said that the scientist "only knows what he himself does" because he is the one who has to work out his proof, either by experiment or by demonstration (mathematics).

John Lewis' example: no example. So let us provide one. John Lewis could have taken history as an example: man's knowledge of history comes from the fact that he is the one who makes it. This is like the Thesis of Giambattista Vico: verum factum.7

5 In a Philosophy Course for Scientists (given in 1967 and to be published) I proposed the following definition: "Philosophy states propositions which are Theses". It therefore differs from the sciences: "a science states propositions which are Demonstrations".

6 See Part I of John Lewis' article, p. 46. Lewis writes that Marx "does not present us with any system. Had he thought one necessary he would certainly have constructed one. What he has in mind is the development of consciousness, of understanding, of the possibilities, the problems, the opportunities and necessities in the actual social situation. This Marx calls praxis, because it is always concrete, always we are involved and acting, and therefore thinking as we act, and acting as we think." (Translator's note).

7 Verum factum: "that which is true is that which has been done". Giambattista Vico (1668-1744) was an
A little Difficulty for John Lewis

These then are the three Theses which sum up John Lewis' idea of Marx's philosophy:

Thesis no. 1: It is man who makes history.

Thesis no. 2: Man makes history by transcending history.

Thesis no. 3: Man only knows what he himself does.

This is all very simple. Everyone "understands" the words involved: man, make, history, know. There is only one word which is a bit complicated, a "philosopher's" word: "transcendence", or "negation of the negation". But if he wanted to, John Lewis could say the same thing more simply. Instead of saying: man makes history, in transcending it, by the "negation of the negation", he could say that man makes history by "transferring" it, &c. Wouldn't that be more simple?

But a little difficulty still remains. When John Lewis says that it is man who makes history, everyone understands. Or rather, everyone thinks he understands. But when it is a question of going further, when John Lewis honestly asks himself the question: "what is it that man does when he makes history?", then you realize that a nasty problem appears just when everything seemed simple, that there is a nasty obscurity just in the place where everything seemed clear.

What was obscure? The little word make, in the Thesis "it is man who makes history". What can this little word make possibly mean, when we are talking about history? Because when you say: "I made a mistake" or "I made a trip around the world", or when a carpenter says: "I made a table", &c., everyone knows what the term "make" means. The sense of the word changes according to the expression, but in each case we can easily explain what it means.

For example, when a carpenter "makes" a table, that means he constructs it. But to make history? What can that mean? And the man who makes history, do you know that individual, that "species of individual", as Hegel used to say?

So John Lewis sets to work. He does not try to avoid the problem: he confronts it. And he explains the thing. He tells us: to "make", in the case of history, that means to "transcend" (negation of the negation), that means to transform the raw material of existing history by going beyond it. So far, so good.

But the carpenter who "makes" a table, he has a "raw material" in front of him too: the wood. And he transforms the wood into a table. But John Lewis would never say that the carpenter "transcends" the wood in order to "make" a table out of it. And he is right. For if he said that, the first carpenter who came along, and all the other carpenters and all the other working people in the world would send him packing Italian philosopher of history, famous for his "new science of humanity". He claimed that we can know the social world precisely because it is we who have made it. He wrote the Scienza nuova. (Translator's note)

with his "transcendence." John Lewis uses the term "transcendence" (negation of the negation) only for history. Why? We have to work out the answer, for John Lewis himself does not provide any explanation.

In my opinion, John Lewis holds on to his "transcendence" for the following reason: because the raw material of history is already history. The carpenter's raw material is wood. But the carpenter who "makes" the table would never say that he was the one who "made" the wood, because he knows very well that it is nature which produces the wood. Before a tree can be cut up and sold off as planks, it first has to have grown somewhere in the forest, either in the same country or thousands of miles away on the other side of the equator.

Now, for John Lewis it is man who has made the history with which he makes history. In history man produces everything: it is not only the result, the product of his "labour", which is history: so is the raw material that he transforms. Aristotle said that man is a two-legged, reasoning, speaking, political animal. Franklin, quoted by Marx in Capital, said that man is a "toolmaking animal". John Lewis is a philosopher of quite another class from Aristotle or Marx. John Lewis says that man is not only a toolmaking animal, but an animal who makes history, in the strong sense, because he makes everything. He "makes" the raw material. He makes the instruments of production (John Lewis says nothing about these—and for good reason! Because otherwise he would have to talk about the class struggle, and his "man who makes history" would disappear in one flash, together with the whole system). And he makes the final product: history.

A Little Human God

Do you know of any being under the sun endowed with such a power? Yes—there does exist such a being in the tradition of human culture: God. Only God "makes" the raw material with which he "makes" the world. But there is a very important difference. John Lewis' God is not outside of history: he is inside. And it is just because John Lewis' little human god—man—is inside history ("en situation", as our good Jean-Paul Sartre used to say) that Lewis does not endow him with a power of absolute creation (when one creates everything, it is relatively easy: there are no constraints!) but something even more stupifying—the power of "transcendence", of being able indefinitely to supersede the history in which he lives, the power to transcend history by his human liberty.8

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8 I do not know John Lewis' personal philosophical history. But I am not sticking my neck out much in betting that he has a weakness for Jean-Paul Sartre. His Marxism in fact bears a remarkable resemblance to a (pale) copy of Sartrian existentialism, in a slightly Hegelianised version, which no doubt makes it more easily acceptable to Communist readers.

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John Lewis’ *man* is a little lay god. Like every living being he is “up to his neck” in reality, but endowed with the prodigious power of being able at any moment to step outside of that reality, of being able to change its character. A little Sartrian god, always “en situation” in history, endowed with the amazing power of “transcending” every situation, of resolving all the difficulties which history presents, and of going forward towards the golden future of the human, socialist revolution: man is a free animal.

Please excuse all this if you are not a philosopher. We philosophers are well acquainted with this kind of argument. And we Communist philosophers know that this old line in philosophy has always had its political consequences.

The first people who talked about “transcendence” in philosophy were the idealist-religious philosophers of Plato’s school: the Platonic and neo-Platonic philosophers. They had an urgent need of the category of “transcendence” in order to be able to construct their philosophical or religious theology, and this theology was then the official philosophy of the slave state. No need to say more. Later, in the Middle Ages, the Augustinian and Thomist theologians took up the same category again and used it in systems whose function was to serve the interests of the Church and feudal state (the ideological state apparatus of the Church is the number one ideological state apparatus of the feudal state). No need to say more.

Much later, with the rise of the bourgeoisie, the notion of “transcendence” received, in Hegelian philosophy, a new function: the same category, but “wrapped” in the veil of the “negation of the negation”. This time it served the bourgeois state. It was quite simply the *philosophical name* for *bourgeois liberty*. It was then revolutionary in relation to the philosophical systems of feudal “transcendence”. But it was one hundred per cent bourgeois, and that is the way it stays.

Since that time, Jean-Paul Sartre has taken up the same idea once more, in his theory of man “en situation”: the petty-bourgeois version of *bourgeois liberty*. And Sartre is not alone, for transcendence has flourished even since his early days, among for example large numbers of theologians, both reactionary and avant-garde, and even among the “red” theologians of Germany and Holland, of Spain and Latin America. The bourgeoisie no longer needs to believe—and anyway has for thirty years no longer been able to believe—that its liberty is all-embracing. But the petty-bourgeois intellectual, yes! The more *his* liberty is crushed and denied by the development of imperialism, the more he exalts its power (“transcendence”, “negation of the negation”). The “conscious” petty-bourgeois exists in his perfect form only when he *protests*. The petty-bourgeois ideologist is an animal of protest!

John Lewis now, in 1972, takes up the old arguments in his turn, in the theoretical journal of the British Communist Party. He can, if I may say so, rest assured: he is certainly not crying in the wilderness! He is not the only person to take up this theme. He is in the company of many Communists. Everyone knows that. But why should it be that since the nineteen-sixties it has been so easy to find Communists eager to resurrect this worn-out philosophy of petty-bourgeois liberty and yet still claiming to be *Marxists*?

We shall see.

IV. WHAT DOES MARXISM SAY ABOUT HISTORY?

But first, I shall do like John Lewis. I shall compare John Lewis’ “Marxist” Theses with the Theses of Marxist-Leninist philosophy. And everyone will be able to see the difference and judge.

I will go over the points in John Lewis’ order. That way things will be clearer. I am making an enormous concession to John Lewis by taking his order, because his order is idealist. But we will do him the favour.

To understand what follows, note that in the case of each Thesis (1,2,3) I begin by repeating Lewis’ Thesis and then state the Marxist-Leninist Thesis.


John Lewis: *It is man who makes history.*

Marxism-Leninism: *It is the masses which make history.*

What are these *masses* which “make history”? In a class society they are the *exploited masses*, that is, the exploited social classes, social strata and social categories, grouped around the exploited class capable of uniting them in a movement against the dominant class which holds state power.

The exploited class capable of doing this is not always the *most exploited class*, or the *most wretched social “stratum”*.

In Antiquity, for example, it was not the slaves (except in a few periods—Spartacus) who “made” history in the strong, political sense of the term, but the most exploited classes among the “free” men (at Rome, the urban or rural “plebs”).

In the same way, under capitalism the “lumpen-proletariat”, as Marx called it, groups together the most wretched of men. But it is not a class, and certainly not *the class which is exploited* in capitalist production: that is, the proletariat. It is around the *proletariat* that you will find grouped the masses who...

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9 Althusser is of course not only or even specially referring to the British Communist Party. His argument is that the struggle between the positions he outlines is taking place or must take place wherever what he calls *bourgeois* and *petty-bourgeois* Theses have penetrated Marxism. (Translator’s note)

10 It is not certain—here I shall have to bow to the judgement of Marxist historians—that the slave class did not, in spite of everything, quietly but genuinely “make history”. The transition from the small-property slave system to the large-scale system at Rome had its historical effects.
"make history", who are going to "make history"—that is, who are going to make the revolution which will break out in the "weakest link" of the world imperialist chain.

Against John Lewis' Thesis—it is man who makes history—Marxism-Leninism has always opposed the Thesis: it is the masses which make history. Under capitalism, the masses can be defined as the set of exploited classes, strata and categories grouped around the exploited class in large-scale production, around the only class capable of directing their action against the bourgeois state. Compare the two Theses.

2. Thesis no. 2.

John Lewis: Man makes history by "transcending" history.

Marxism-Leninism: The class struggle is the motor of history (Thesis of the Communist Manifesto, 1847).

Here things become extremely interesting. Because Marxism-Leninism blows up John Lewis' whole philosophical system. How?

John Lewis has said: it is man who makes history. To which Marxism-Leninism replied: it is the masses.

But if we went no further, we would give the impression that Marxism-Leninism gives a different reply to the same question. That question being: who makes history? This question therefore supposes that history is the result of the action of a subject, of what that subject does. For John Lewis, the subject is man. For Marxism-Leninism, the subject would be the masses.

Yes and no. When we started to sketch out a definition of the masses, when we argued about this idea of the masses, we saw that the whole thing was rather complicated. The masses are actually several social classes, social strata and social categories grouped together in a way which is both complex and changing (the positions of the different classes and strata, and of course the fractions of classes within the classes, change in the course of the revolutionary process itself). And we are dealing with huge numbers: in France and Britain, for example, with millions of people, in China with hundreds of millions! Can anyone still claim that we are talking about a "subject"? Compared with John Lewis' "subject", as simple and neat as you can imagine, the masses, considered as a "subject", pose nasty problems of identity and identification. A subject is a being about which we can say: "that's it!" How do we do that when the masses are supposed to be the "subject"?

It is precisely the Thesis of the Communist Manifesto—"the class struggle is the motor of history"—that brings this problem into the open, which shows us how to pose it properly and therefore how to solve it.

It is the masses which "make" history, but "it is the class struggle which is the motor of history". To John Lewis' question: "how does man make history?", Marxism-Leninism replies by replacing his idealist philosophical categories with categories of a quite different kind.

The question is no longer posed in terms of "man". That much we know. But in the proposition that "the class struggle is the motor of history", the question of "making" history is also eliminated. It is no longer, that is, a question of looking for a "subject" of history. It is no longer a question of who makes history.

Marxism-Leninism, then tells us something quite different: that it is the class struggle (new concept) which is the motor (new concept) of history, it is the class struggle which moves history, which advances it. This Thesis is of very great importance, because it puts the class struggle in the front rank.

Absolute Primacy of the Class Struggle

In the preceding Thesis: "it is the masses which make history", the accent was put (1) on the exploited classes grouped around the class capable of uniting them, and (2) on their power to carry through a revolutionary transformation of history. It was therefore the masses which were put in the front rank.

In the Thesis taken from the Communist Manifesto, what is put in the front rank is no longer the exploited classes, &c., but the class struggle. This Thesis is decisive for Marxism-Leninism. It draws a radical demarcation line between revolutionaries and reformists.

For the reformists (even if they call themselves Marxists) it is not the class struggle which is in the front rank: it is the classes. Let us take a simple example, and suppose that we are dealing with just two classes. For the reformists these classes exist before the class struggle, a bit like two football teams exist, separately, before the match. Each class exists in its own camp, lives according to its particular conditions of existence. One class may be exploiting another, but for reformism that is not the same thing as class struggle. One day the two classes come up against one another and come into conflict. They begin a hand-to-hand battle, the battle becomes acute, and finally the exploited class defeats its enemy. That is revolution. However you turn the thing around, you will always find the same idea here: the classes exist before the class struggle, independently of the class struggle. The class struggle exists only afterwards.

Revolutionaries, on the other hand, consider that it is impossible to separate the classes from class struggle. The class struggle and the existence of classes are one and the same thing. In order for there to be classes in a "society", the society has to be divided into classes: this division is the exploitation of one class by another. It is therefore the class struggle, for exploitation is already class struggle. You must therefore begin with the class struggle if you want to understand class division and the classes. The class struggle must be put in the front rank.

But that means that our Thesis 1 (it is the masses
which make history) must be explained in terms of Thesis 2 (the class struggle is the motor of history). That means that the revolutionary power of the masses comes from the class struggle. And that means that it is not enough, if you want to understand what is happening in the world, just to look at the exploited classes. You also have to look at the exploiting classes. Better, you have to go beyond the football match idea, the idea of two antagonistic groups of classes, to examine the basis of the existence not only of classes but also of the antagonism between classes: that is, the class struggle. Absolute primacy of the class struggle (Marx, Lenin). Never forget the class struggle (Mao).

Now the class struggle does not go on in the air, or on something like a football pitch. It is rooted in the mode of production and exploitation in a given class society. You therefore have to consider the material basis of the class struggle, that is, the material existence of the class struggle. It is the unity of the relations of production and the productive forces of a given mode of production, in a concrete historical social formation, which is at the same time the "basis" (Marx) of the class struggle and its material existence. It is this profound truth which Marxism-Leninism expresses in the well-known Thesis of class struggle in the infrastructure, in the economy, in class exploitation, and in the Thesis that all the forms of the class struggle are rooted in economic class struggle.

When that is clear, the question of the "subject" of history disappears. History is an immense natural-human system in movement, and the motor of history is class struggle. History is a process, and a process without a subject.11

The question about how "man makes history" disappears altogether. Marxist theory leaves it to bourgeois ideology.

And with it disappears the "necessity" of the concept of "transcendence" and its subject, man.

That does not mean that "men", the individuals, disappear. For social classes are made up of human individuals. But these classes are certainly not just all those individuals "added together". They have material conditions of existence. Nor does it mean that the question of political action disappears: for the class struggle, in the last instance, is practical, which means that it is a struggle of the organised masses for the conquest and retention of state power. Nor does it mean that the question of the revolutionary party disappears, because without such a party the conquest of state power by the exploited masses under the leadership of the proletariat is impossible.

But it does mean that the "role of the individual in history", the existence, nature, objectives and practice of the revolutionary party are not determined by "transcendence", that is, by the free will of "man". They are determined by the class struggle, by the state of the Workers' Movement, by the ideology of this movement (petty-bourgeois or proletarian), by its forms of organisation and its relation to the scientific theory of the class struggle, Marxist theory. All Communists know that.

3. Thesis No. 3

John Lewis: Man only knows what he himself does. Marxism-Leninism: One can only know what exists.

A big difference! For John Lewis man only knows what he himself "does". For dialectical materialism, the philosophy of Marxism-Leninism, one can only know what exists. That is the basic materialist Thesis: the primacy of being over thought. That is where we have to begin in philosophy.

Materialism and Science

This Thesis is at one and the same time a Thesis about existence, about materiality and about objectivity. It means not only that one can only know what exists, but also that what exists is both "material"—that is, distinct from the "mental" character of the thought by which it is known—and objective—that is, exists independently of the subjectivity which knows it.

That of course does not mean that Marxist philosophy denies the activity of thought, that it denies practical scientific work, the work of experiment in the natural sciences or the work of historical experiment represented by political work (for Marxists, the proletarian class struggle). On the contrary! Marx and Lenin even said that certain idealist philosophers (Hegel, for example) had understood the principle of this activity better than certain materialist philosophers. That is how we "get into" the dialectical Theses of Marxist-Leninist philosophy. But—and here it differs fundamentally from John Lewis—Marxism-Leninism has always subordinated the dialectical Theses to the materialist Theses. It is thanks to scientific work that we can know what exists. But we only ever have knowledge of what exists. Knowing something is not the same as "making" or "doing" it.

As far as nature is concerned, there is no problem. Who would argue that it was man who "made" the nature which he comes to know! Only idealists, or rather only that crazy species of idealists who attribute God's omnipotence to man. Even idealists are not normally so stupid.

But what about history? We know that the Thesis: "it is man who makes history" has, literally, no meaning. But a trace of it remains in the idea that history is easier to understand than nature because it is "human". That is the idea of Giambattista Vico.

Well, Marxism-Leninism is categorical on this point. History is as difficult to understand as nature. Or, rather, it is even more difficult to understand. Why? Because "men" always think they understand it, because each ruling and exploiting class offers them "its" explanation of history—in the form of

11 This idea I put forward in a brief study called "On the Relation of Marx to Hegel" (February 1968).
its own dominant ideology, which serves its class interests and keeps "men" under its heel.

Look at the Middle Ages. The Church offered all its flock—that is to say, primarily the exploited masses—a very simple and clear explanation of history. History is made by God, and obeys the laws or follows the ends of Providence.

Look at the eighteenth century in France. The situation is different: the bourgeoisie is not yet in power, it is critical and revolutionary. And it offers to everyone (without distinction of class, not only to the bourgeoisie itself and its allies but also to the people it exploits) an "enlightened" explanation of history: history is moved by Reason, and it obeys the laws or follows the ends of Truth, Reason and Liberty.

If history is difficult to understand scientifically, it is because between real history and men there always come a class-ideological explanation of history, a class philosophy of history in which the masses spontaneously believe. Why? Because this ideology is pumped into them by the ruling or ascending class, and serves class exploitation. In the eighteenth century the bourgeoisie is already an exploiting class.

To succeed in piercing this ideological and idealist "smokescreen" of the ruling classes, the special circumstances of the first half of the nineteenth century were required: the class struggles following the French Revolution, the first proletarian class struggles, plus English political economy, plus French socialism. The result of these circumstances was Marx's discovery. He was the first to open up the "continent" of history to scientific knowledge.

But in history, as in nature, man only knows what exists. There is no automatic relation between what he knows and what he "does". The fact that, in order to get to know what really does exist, an enormous amount of scientific work and gigantic practical struggles were necessary, does not disprove the point. One can only know what exists.

But we must go further. You will notice that I said that the Marxist-Leninist Thesis is not Man can only know "what exists", but: "one can only know what exists". Here too the term "man" has disappeared. We should say in this respect that scientific history, like all history, is a "process without a subject", and that scientific knowledge, even when it is the work of a particular individual scientist, is actually the result of a complex process which has no real subject or goal. That is how it is with Marxist science. It was Marx who "discovered" it, but as the result of a complex process, combining German philosophy, English political economy and French socialism, the whole thing based on the struggles between the bourgeoisie and working class. All Communists know that.

Scientists, in general, do not know it. But if they are prepared to, Communists can help to persuade scientists (including natural scientists, including mathematicians) of its truth. Because all scientific knowledge really is the result of a process without any subject or goal. This is undoubtedly a Thesis which is difficult to understand. But it gives a very important insight, not only into scientific work but also into the political struggle.

Yes, it has both scientific and political consequences.

You will remember the definition of philosophy which I proposed: philosophy is, in the last instance, class struggle in the field of theory.

If philosophy is class struggle in the field of theory, it is political. And it has political effects. But if it is class struggle in the field of theory, it has theoretical effects, both in the sciences and in certain ideologies. It also of course has effects in all the other fields of human activity, from the "struggle for production" (Mao) to art, etc.

But I cannot deal with everything here. I will just say that, as class struggle in the field of theory, philosophy has two main effects: in politics and in the sciences, in political practice and in scientific practice. All Communists know that, or ought to know it, because Marxism-Leninism has never ceased to repeat it and to argue for it.

Part II

PHILOSOPHY AND REVISIONISM

I

Let us prove the point about the scientific and political effects of philosophical Theses by comparing John Lewis' Theses with the Theses of Marxism-Leninism. That way we shall be able to see how philosophy "functions".

John Lewis' Thesis: It is man who makes history.

Theses of Marxism-Leninism: It is the masses which make history. The class struggle is the motor of history.

Let us look at the effects of these Theses.

Effects in the Field of Science

When someone now, in 1972, defends the Thesis that it is man who makes history, what effect does that have as far as the science of history is concerned? Can one make use of it to produce some scientific knowledge?

In fact, it is of no use at all from this point of view. John Lewis does not show how one could get anything out of it which might be of use in teaching us about the way the class struggle works. You might say that he lacked the space to do so in a single article. So let us turn to his "Master", Jean-Paul Sartre, to the philosopher of "human liberty", of man-projecting-himself-into-the-future (transcendence), of man "en situation", "transcending his

1 See John Lewis, The Althusser Case, in Marxism Today, January and February 1972. (Translator's note)
place in the world” by his liberty. This famous philosopher has written two enormous books—
*Being and Nothingness* (1939), and later a book which deals with history and Marxism, *Critique of Dialectical Reason* (1960). More than two thousand pages. Did Jean-Paul Sartre manage to use the Thesis that “it is man who makes history” to produce some scientific historical knowledge? Did this Thesis enable him to produce scientific knowledge which would help us act in history? No. Not a single bit of scientific knowledge came out of it.

But someone will say: here’s an example that proves the opposite of your Thesis about philosophy! For this “humanist” philosophy has no effect at all on scientific knowledge. Sorry! I claim that the Thesis defended by John Lewis and Jean-Paul Sartre really do have an effect: they prevent the development of existing scientific knowledge. They are an obstacle to knowledge. Instead of helping it to progress, they hold it back. More precisely, they take knowledge back to the state it was in before the scientific discoveries and developments made by Marx and Lenin. They take things back to the pre-scientific state.

It is not the first time that this has happened in the history of humanity. For example, half a century after Galileo—that is, half a century after physics had been founded as a science—there were still philosophers who defended Aristotelian “physics”! They attacked Galileo’s discoveries and wanted to take knowledge of the natural world back to its pre-scientific Aristotelian state. There are no longer any Aristotelian “physicists”, but the same thing is happening in other fields. For example: there are anti-Freudian “psychologists”. And there are anti-Marxist philosophers of history, who carry on as if Marx had never existed, or had never founded a science. They may be personally honest. They may even, like Sartre, want to “help” Marxism and psychoanalysis! But it is not their intentions that count. What count are the real effects in science of their philosophy. The fact is that although he has Marx and Freud before him, Sartre is a pre-Marxist and pre-Freudian ideologist. Instead of helping to build on the scientific discoveries of Marx and Freud, he mixes things up and paralyses research.

That is how philosophy “works” in the sciences. *Either* it helps them to produce new scientific knowledge, *or* it tries to wipe out these advances and drag humanity back to a time when the science did not yet exist. Philosophy therefore works in the sciences in a progressive or retrogressive way.

You can see what is at stake. It is not enough to say that what John Lewis or Sartre says does not help us to produce any scientific knowledge of history. It is not even enough to say that what they say represents an “epistemological obstacle” (to use Gaston Bachelard’s term). We are forced to say that their Thesis produces effects which are extremely harmful to scientific knowledge, retrogressive effects, because instead of helping us, in 1972, to understand the great scientific treasure that we possess in the knowledge given us by Marx, they go back to zero. They take us back to the good old days of Hegel and Feuerbach, to the time before Marx’s discovery, before his "epistemological break". They mix everything up, and thus they disarm revolutionary philosophers, theoreticians and militants. They disarm them because in effect they deprive them of an irreplaceable weapon: the objective knowledge of the conditions, mechanisms and forms of the class struggle.

### The Function of Marxist-Leninist Philosophy

If you now look at the Marxist-Leninist Theses—“it is the masses which make history”, “the class struggle is the motor of history”—the contrast is striking. These Theses are on the side of a scientific understanding of history. They do not ignore Marx’s scientific discovery. On the contrary. These philosophical Theses are also proven propositions of the science of history, of historical materialism.

These Theses, then, take account of the existence of the science of history. But at the same time they help the working out of new explanations, of new scientific discoveries. For example, they force us to define the masses which are “making” history: in class terms. Then again, they force us to define the form of union between the classes which make up the masses. As far as we are concerned, they put the working class in the forefront. They force us to define the proletariat as the class whose conditions of exploitation render it capable of directing the struggle of all the oppressed and exploited classes, the struggle to take the state power held by the imperialist bourgeoisie, These Theses allow us to understand that the “class struggle” is the “motor of history”, they force us “never to forget the class struggle”.

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2 Epistemology: literally, talk (logos) about science (episteme). Normally used to designate philosophical investigation of scientific practice. [Translator’s note]
The theoretical consequences of these propositions are known to every Communist. They require us, for example, to break with the bourgeois conception of political economy (Capital is subtitled: A Critique of Political Economy), of the state, of ideologies, of "culture", etc., etc. These Theses help to stimulate scientific research in the field of the science of history.

On the one hand, then, we have philosophical Theses which have retrogressive effects, in relation to theoretical work, on the science of history. On the other hand we have philosophical Theses which have progressive effects, in relation to theoretical work, in the existing fields of the Marxist science of history, and revolutionary effects in the fields which this science has not yet really touched (for example, in anthropology, in the history of the sciences, in art, in philosophy, etc., etc.).

That is what is at stake, for science, in the class struggle in the field of theory.

**Political effects**

I think that, as far as political effects are concerned, things are rather clear.

How could one carry on the class struggle on the basis of the philosophical Thesis: "it is man who makes history"? It might be said that this Thesis serves everyone, without distinction, whether he be a capitalist, a petty-bourgeois or a worker, because these are all "men". But that is not true. It serves those whose interest it is to talk about "man" and not about the masses, about "man" and not about classes and the class struggle. Above all, it serves the bourgeois class. It also serves the petty-bourgeoisie. In his *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, Marx wrote: "The bourgeois have very good grounds for falsely ascribing supernatural creative power to human labour". Why? Because by making "men" think that "labour is the source of all wealth and all culture", the bourgeoisie can keep quiet about the power of nature, about the decisive importance of the natural, material conditions of human labour. And why does the bourgeoisie want to keep quiet about the natural-material conditions of labour? Because it controls them. The bourgeoisie knows what it is doing.

If the workers are told that "it is men who make history", that helps to disarm them. It tends to make them think that they are all-powerful as men, whereas in fact they are disarmed as workers in the face of the power which is really in command: that of the bourgeoisie, which controls the material and political conditions determining history. The humanist line turns them away from the class struggle, prevents them from making use of the only power they possess: that of their organisation as a class, by means of their class organisations (the trade unions, the party).

On the one hand, then, we have Theses which directly help the working class to understand its role, its conditions of existence, of exploitation and of struggle, which help them to create organisations which will lead the struggle of all exploited people to seize state power from the bourgeoisie.

No need to say more.

None of this is affected by the fact that these bourgeois or petty-bourgeois Theses are defended, in 1972, by a militant of a Communist Party. Read chapter 3 of the *Communist Manifesto*. You will see that in 1847 Marx distinguished three kinds of socialism: reactionary (feudal, petty-bourgeois, humanist) socialism, conservative or bourgeois socialism, and critical-utopian socialism and communism. You have the choice! Read the great polemical writings of Engels and of Lenin about the influence of bourgeois ideology in the workers’ parties (reformism, revisionism). You have the choice!

What we want to know now is how, after so many solemn warnings and so many testing experiences, it is possible for a Communist—John Lewis—to present his "Theses" as Marxist.

We shall see.

**II**

But first, I will deal with John Lewis’ second reproach: *that Althusser does not understand the history of the formation of Marx’s thought*. I will deal with it briefly, so as not to hold up the reader.

**Does Something Really Happen in 1845?**

Here I must make my “self criticism”, and give way to John Lewis on one precise point.

In my first essays, I suggested that after the “epistemological break of 1845 (after the discovery by which Marx founded the science of history) the philosophical categories of alienation and of the negation of the negation disappear. John Lewis replies that this is not true. And he is right. You certainly do find these concepts (directly or indirectly) in the German Ideology, in the Grundrisse (two texts which Marx never published) and also, though much more rarely, in Capital (the negation of the negation, for example, appears only once).

On the other hand John Lewis would have a hard job finding these concepts in the *Communist Manifesto*, in the *Poverty of Philosophy*, in *Wage Labour and Capital*, in his *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, in the *Critique of the Gotha Programme* or in the Notes on Wagner’s Textbook. And this is to cite only theoretical texts. As far as the

6 Marx was therefore criticising the socialist John Lewises of his time, inscribed in the Unity Programme of the German Social-Democratic Party and Lassalle’s Party: “Labour is the source of all wealth and all culture”. 32

7 Marx called it German or “True” Socialism. He writes that these German literati "wrote their philosophical nonsense beneath the French original. For instance, beneath the French criticism of the economic functions of money, they wrote 'Alienation of Humanity' . . ." [Translator’s note]

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political texts are concerned—and this of course is equally true of the political texts of Lenin, Gramsci or Mao—well, he can always try!

But in any case, formally speaking John Lewis is right. And so, even if his argument in fact depends on leaving aside all the texts which could bother him, I must nevertheless reply.

Here, briefly, is my reply.

I. If you look at the whole of Marx’s work, there is no doubt that there does exist a “break” in 1845. Marx says so himself. But no-one should be believed simply on his word, not even Marx. You have to judge on the evidence. Nevertheless, the whole of Marx’s work shows him to be right on this point. In 1845 Marx began to “lay down” the foundations of a science which did not exist before he came along: the science of history. And in order to do that he set out a number of new concepts which cannot be found anywhere in his humanist works of youth: mode of production, productive forces, relations of production, infrastructure-superstructure, ideologies, etc. No-one in the world can deny that.

If John Lewis still doubts the reality of this “break”, or rather of this irruption of a new science in a still “ideological” or pre-scientific universe, he should compare two judgements made by Marx on Feuerbach and Proudhon.

Feuerbach is described in the 1844 Manuscripts as a philosopher who has made extraordinary discoveries, who has discovered both the basis and the principle of the critique of political economy. But a year later, in the Theses on Feuerbach, and in the German Ideology, he is the object of an all-out attack. After that he simply disappears.

Proudhon is described in the Holy Family (end of 1844) as the “scientific theoretician of the French proletariat”. But in 1847, in the Poverty of Philosophy, he gets a hiding from which he will never recover. After that he simply disappears.

If, as John Lewis says, nothing really happened in 1845, and if everything that I have said about the “epistemological break” is “a complete myth”, then I’ll be hung for it.

II. So something irreversible really does start in 1845: the “epistemological break” is a point of no return. Something begins which will have no end. A “continuous break”, I wrote, the beginning of a long period of work, as in every other science, And although the way ahead is open, it is difficult and sometimes even dramatic, marked by events— theoretical events—which concern the scientific knowledge of a particular object: the conditions, the workings and the forms of the class struggle. In simpler terms, the science of history.

We can say, then, that this science does not emerge, ready-made, from Marx’s head. It merely has its beginning in 1845, and has not yet got rid of all its past—of all the ideological and philosophical prehistory out of which it emerges.

We can add: look at Marx’s texts, look at the birth and development of his scientific concepts, and—since John Lewis insists on talking about them—you will at the same time see the gradual disappearance of these two philosophical categories inherited from the past and still subsisting as remnants, known as alienation and the negation of the negation. Now in fact, the more we advance in time, the more these categories disappear. Capital speaks only once of the negation of the negation (in 2,500 pages!). It is true that Marx several times uses the term “alienation”. But all that disappears in Marx’s later texts and in Lenin. Completely. We can therefore say: what is important is the tendency. And Marx’s scientific work does tend to get rid of these philosophical categories.

A Self Criticism

III. But this is not enough. And here is my self criticism.

I was not attentive enough to the fact which John Lewis points out, that is, to the fact of the continuing presence of the said philosophical categories after the “epistemological break”. And that was because I identified the “epistemological break” with Marx’s philosophical revolution. More precisely, I never separated Marx’s philosophical revolution and the “epistemological break”. I talked about philosophy as if it were science, and wrote that in 1845 Marx made a double break, scientific and philosophical.

That was a mistake. It is an example of the deviation of theoreticism which I denounced in the brief self criticism contained in the Preface to the Italian edition of Reading Capital (1966). This Preface was reproduced in the English edition. The mistake consists in thinking that philosophy is a science and that, like every science, it has 1. an object, 2. a beginning (the “epistemological break” takes place at the moment when it looms up in the pre-scientific, ideological cultural universe), and 3. a history (comparable to the history of a science). This theoreticist error found its clearest and purest expression in my formula: philosophy is “Theory of theoretical practice”.

Since that time I have begun to “put things right”. In a philosophy course for scientists, dating from 1967, and again in Lenin and Philosophy (February 1968), I put forward other propositions:

1. Philosophy is not a science.
2. Philosophy has no object, in the sense in which a science has an object.
3. Philosophy has no history, in the sense in which a science has a history.
4. Philosophy is politics in the field of theory. What are the consequences?

1. It is impossible to reduce philosophy to science, and it is impossible to reduce Marx’s

8 One really must be short of arguments to have to use, as a proof of Lenin’s “humanist philosophy”, a few lines from The German Ideology (1844) which Lenin copied into his notebooks! John Lewis is obviously not worried about gaining the reputation of “schoolman” himself.
philosophical revolution to the “epistemological break”.

2. Marx’s philosophical revolution preceded Marx’s “epistemological break”. It made the break possible.

You can of course argue quite seriously that there is a sense in which philosophy, as Hegel said, and as I repeated in *Lenin and Philosophy*, always “lags behind” science or the sciences. But from another point of view, which is essential here, you have to say the opposite, and argue that in the history of Marx’s thought the philosophical revolution necessarily preceded the scientific “break”.

In the case of other sciences, we lack evidence and proof. But in the case of Marx, what happens is that although the philosophical revolution and the epistemological break take place at the same point in time, it is the philosophical revolution which determines the scientific “break”.

Concretely, that means the following. The young Marx, born of a good bourgeois family in the Rhineland, entered public life as editor of a liberal newspaper of the same land. That was in 1841. A young and brilliant intellectual, he was, within three or four years, to undergo an astonishing evolution in politics. He was to pass from radical bourgeois liberalism (1841-42) to petty bourgeois communism (1843-44), then to proletarian communism (1844-45). These are incontestable facts. But parallel to this political evolution you can observe an evolution in philosophy. In philosophy, over the same period, the young Marx was to pass from a position of subjective neo-Hegelianism (of a Kant-Fichte type) to theoretical humanism (Feuerbach), before rejecting this to pass over to a philosophy which would no longer merely “interpret” the world, but “change it”.

If you now compare Marx’s political evolution with his philosophical evolution, you will see:

1. that his philosophical evolution is based on his political evolution; and
2. that his scientific discovery (the “break”) is based on his political evolution.

That means, in practice, that it is because the young Marx went over to a revolutionary proletarian class position in his theoretical work that he was able to lay down the foundations of the scientific theory of history as history of the class struggle.

IV. On the basis of these points it should be possible to account for the intermittent survival of categories like those of alienation and of the negation of the negation. Note that I talk about intermittent survival. For alongside their tendency to disappear in Marx’s work, considered as a whole, there is a strange phenomenon which must be accounted for: their total disappearance in certain works, then their subsequent reappearance. For example, the two categories in question are totally absent from the *Communist Manifesto* as well as from the *Poverty of Philosophy* (published by Marx in 1847). They are absent from his *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (which he published in 1859). But there are many references to alienation in the *Grundrisse* (preparatory notes made by Marx in the years 1857-58, and which he did not publish). We know, because of a letter sent to Engels that Marx had, “by chance”, re-read Hegel’s *Logic* in 1858 and had been fascinated by it. In *Capital* (1867) alienation comes up again, but much more rarely, and the negation of the negation appears just once. And so on.

However that might be, and in spite of all the work which still remains to be done, one fact is clear. The Marxist science of history did not progress in a simple straight line, under its own power, from the moment of the “epistemological break” onwards. If it is true that Marx had to go over to proletarian class positions in his theoretical work in order to be able to found the science of history, he did not make that transition all at once, once and for all, with no going back. The philosophical battle continued within Marx himself, in his work, around the principles of the new science. The science only gained its ground little by little, in theoretical struggle, in theoretical class struggle, and in close relation to the class struggle going on in the world outside theory. This struggle lasted all of Marx’s life. It has continued after him, in the labour movement. And it continues in our own time.

It is therefore possible to understand the partial disappearance and reappearance of certain categories in Marx’s work as indicative of attempts, advances and failures in the long dual struggle to take up class positions in theoretical work and to found the science of history.

**Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Philosophy**

When I said that it was the “epistemological break” which was primary, and when I failed to distinguish it from the “philosophical break”, I therefore made two mistakes. In the case of Marx it is the philosophical revolution which is primary. And if we are allowed to keep the term “break” to designate the beginning of the *science* of history, the point of no return, we cannot use the same term for philosophy, because in philosophy, as for long periods in the class struggle, there is no point of no return. We must therefore talk about “revolution in philosophy”. This expression is more correct, because we all know that a revolution is always exposed to attacks, to reverses and to counter-revolution.

Nothing then is ever definitively settled in philosophy: there are always “come-backs”, and the oldest philosophies are always ready to mount an offensive disguised in modern trappings. Why?

Because philosophy is, in the last instance, class struggle in the field of theory. Because the revolutionary classes are always opposed by the old conservative and reactionary ruling classes, who will never give up their ambition for revenge, even when they no longer hold state power. According
to the state of affairs, they will defend their power or mount an assault against the new power, under the guise of such and such a philosophy: the one that serves them best, even if its is the oldest in the world. It just has to be done up a bit and given a modern coat of paint. Philosophical Theses have no age. That is the sense in which I took up Marx's comment in the German Ideology that "philosophy has no history".

In practice bourgeois ideology, when it is able to put on enough pressure, can penetrate Marxism itself. The class struggle in the field of theory is not just a phrase: it is a reality, a terrible reality. Without understanding that, it is impossible to understand either the dramatic history of the formation of Marx's thought or the "grave difficulties" which even today, in 1972, weigh on the "orthodoxy" defended by a certain number of Communists.

The dramatic history of Marx and of his thought can be reduced, if we follow John Lewis, to a peaceful and problem-free university career! A certain Marx appears on the literary and philosophical scene. Quite naturally, he begins to talk about politics in the Communist Manifesto, then about economics in Capital. He founds and directs the First International, opposes the inscription in Paris, then in the space of two months, takes a firm stand on the side of the Paris Commune. He wages a battle to the death against the anarchists and followers of Proudhon, etc., etc. All that without the hint of a problem, of a drama, apart from all the assaults of the struggle, with no regard to the difficulties, the questions, all the torments of the search for "truth" in that struggle itself. Like a good bourgeois intellectual, as well installed in his thought as he is in the comfort of his existence, Marx (in this view) always thought the same thing, without a revolution or "break" in his thinking. Here I will merely say that only someone who has no experience or is blind to all experience of the class struggle in the field of theory—or even simply of the way scientific research is done—could argue such nonsense, and thus insult the life and sufferings not only of Marx himself but of all Communists (and also of those scientists who succeed in finding something out). Now, not only did Marx "find something out" (and at what risk, and of what importance!), but he was also a leader of the labour movement for thirty-five years. He always "did his thinking" in the struggle, that is the only way in which he did it.

The whole history of the labour movement is marked by endless crises, dramas and struggles. There is no need for me to go over them here. But as far as philosophy is concerned, we ought at least to mention the great struggles of Engels and Lenin against the intervention of bourgeois philosophy in Marxism and in the workers’ parties: the struggle against the intervention of the idealism of Dühring and of Bernstein, both of them declared neo-Kantians and humanists, whose theoretical revisionism covered their political reformism and political revisionism.

John Lewis would do well to re-read the first pages of What is to be Done? In this text a petty-bourgeois intellectual named Lenin is defending Marx's "orthodoxy", itself "in grave difficulties", with "extreme dogmatism". Yes, Lenin declared himself proud to be attacked as a "dogmatist" by the international coalition of "critical" revisionists, with the "English Fabians" and "French Ministers" at their head! Yes, Lenin declared himself proud to defend this old problem-ridden "orthodoxy", the orthodoxy of Marx's teaching. Yes, he thought it was "in grave difficulties". The cause: reformism and revisionism!

Some Communists, today, are thinking and doing the same. There certainly are not too many of them, and they are rather alone. That is how things are. Why? We shall see.

III

Let us see why.

We have to answer two questions.

1. Why are there Communists like John Lewis (and there are quite a lot of them) who, in 1972, can openly argue in Communist journals for a philosophy which they call Marxist, but which is in fact simply a variant of bourgeois idealism?

2. Why are the Communist philosophers who defend Marx's philosophy so few in number, and why are they so isolated in their own parties?

To answer these two questions, which are really one and the same, we must—all apologies to John Lewis—briefly enter the field of political history.

I have made the basic points in For Marx. But John Lewis does not seem to have read the political pages of For Marx. John Lewis is a pure spirit.

Stalin and the Twentieth Congress

I said in For Marx that my period of philosophical silence ended with the Twentieth Congress of the Soviet Party in 1956.

That is true. Before the Twentieth Congress it was not possible for a Communist philosopher, at least in France, to publish serious philosophical texts—that is to say, texts which would be both deep and capable of being put to use ideologically and politically. That is the good side of the Twentieth Congress. From that time on it was possible to publish such texts. The French Party, to take only one case, explicitly recognised (at the Argenteuil Central Committee meeting in 1966) the right of party members to carry out and publish their philosophical research.

But the "criticism of Stalin's errors" was formulated at the Twentieth Congress in terms such that there inevitably followed what we must call an unleashing of bourgeois ideological and philosophical themes within the Communist Parties themselves. This was the case above all among Communist intellectuals, but it also touched certain leaders and
even certain leaderships.

Why?

Because the "criticism of Stalin’s errors" (some of which—and rather a lot!—turned out to be crimes) was made in a non-Marxist way.

The Twentieth Congress criticised and denounced the “cult of personality” (the cult in general, personality in general. . . .) and summed up Stalin’s “errors” in the concept of “violation of Socialist legality”. The Twentieth Congress therefore limited itself to denouncing certain facts about what went on in the legal superstructure, without relating them—as every Marxist analysis must do—firstly, to the rest of the Soviet superstructure (above all the state and party), and secondly, to the infrastructure, namely the relations of production, class relations and the class struggle in the USSR.

Instead of relating the “violations of socialist legality” to 1. the state, plus the party, and 2. the class struggle, the Twentieth Congress instead related them to . . . the “cult of personality”. That is, it related them to a concept which, as I pointed out in For Marx, cannot be “found” in Marxist theory. I now venture to say that it can perfectly well be “found” elsewhere: in bourgeois philosophy and psycho-sociological ideology.

If you take Communist philosophers and other Communist “intellectuals” and set them officially on a bourgeois ideological and philosophical line, in order to “criticise” a regime under which they (and others) have suffered deeply, you must not be surprised when the same Communist philosophers and intellectuals go straight forward on the road of bourgeois philosophy. It has been opened up right in front of them! You must not be surprised when the same Communist philosophers and intellectuals go straight forward on the road of bourgeois philosophy. It has been opened up right in front of them! You must not be surprised when they make up their own little bourgeois Marxist philosophy of the Rights of Man, exalting Man and his Rights, the first of which is liberty, whose reverse side is alienation. It is quite natural that they will lean on Marx’s early works—that is what those works are there for—and then on humanism in all its forms! Shall it be Garaudy’s socialist humanism, John Lewis’ humanism, the “true” or “real” humanism of others, or even (why not?) “scientific” humanism itself? Between these different varieties of the philosophy of human liberty, each philosopher can of course freely take his choice! All that is perfectly normal.

Two Things Which are not the Same

Having said that, we must add that it is important not to mix things up which, politically speaking, ought not to be confused, things which are quite different from one another. The humanist reactions of western Communist theoreticians, and even of some from eastern Europe, are one thing. It would however be an extremely serious political mistake, for example, to claim to judge and condemn—on account of an adjective (“human”)—something like “socialism with a human face”, a slogan under which the Czech masses let everyone know (even if the form was sometimes confused) about their class and national grievances and aspirations. It would be an extremely serious political mistake to confuse this national mass movement, this important historical fact, with the humanist pedantry of our western, sometimes Communist philosophers (or of such and such a philosopher of eastern Europe). There were intellectuals in the Czech national mass movement, but it was not a “movement of intellectuals”. What the Czech people wanted was socialism, and not humanism. They wanted a socialism whose face (not the body: the body does not occur in the formula) would not be disfigured by practices unworthy both of themselves (the Czech people: a people of a high political culture) and of socialism. A socialism with a human face. The adjective is in the right place. The national mass movement of the Czech people, even if it is no longer to be heard of (and the struggle is nevertheless still going on) merits the respect and support of all Communists. Exactly as the “humanist” philosophies of western intellectuals (at ease in their academic chairs or elsewhere), the philosophies of “Marxist humanism”, whether they are called “true” or “scientific”, merit the criticism of all Communists.

It is for all the reasons outlined above, then, that there are cases like John Lewis in the western Communist Parties—and that there are rather a lot of them.

And it is for the same reasons—directly political reasons—that I want to repeat my thanks to Marxism Today, journal of the Communist Party of Great Britain, for accepting to publish my reply.


The two books under review are the latest by Sweezy and Magdoff and add to the rapidly expanding list of publications by Monthly Review Press. The two books are made up of essays taken mainly from the journal that Sweezy and Magdoff edit, Monthly Review, and the respective publication dates of the essays range from 1965 up to 1971. The time lapse between the essays does not detract from their effectiveness or their relevance. In fact, part of their interest lies in the fact that one is able to trace through them an evolution of Sweezy's and Magdoff's critique of US capitalism. However, they suffer from the problem of any collection of essays anchored to specific topics, namely repetition. Sweezy acknowledges this but felt that the overlapping was unavoidable.

Paul Sweezy is most well known for his book Theory of Capitalist Development (1942), and for the book he co-authored with Paul Baran Monopoly Capital (1966). Harry Magdoff's The Age of Imperialism (1969) is his most widely known work. The elaborated theoretical basis of this latest collection of essays can be found in these books.

Yet what is so good about this recent collection for the reader who has not got the time to go back and study these earlier works is that they contain concise outline statements of the broader thesis held to by Sweezy and Magdoff.

This is especially the case with the collection Modern Capitalism and Other Essays which contains the two valuable essays 'Modern Capitalism' and 'On the Theory of Monopoly Capitalism'. Their central object of analysis is monopoly capitalism and hence they place a great deal of emphasis on the difference between monopolistic and competitive capitalism. They claim that the basic assumptions of Marxist economics are only operative in competitive capitalism and that while Marx's analysis was correct for the 19th century competitive capitalism, it has to be radically revised if it is to cope with present-day capitalism. The authors claim their Marxist lineage by asserting that they avail themselves of Marx's powerful analytic method.

Briefly, their argument runs this way. Under competitive capitalism, capitalists stay in business through being able to increase productivity and thereby reduce costs and therefore prices. Such competition ultimately leads to the weeding out of the weaker capitalists and results in a concentration of capital in fewer and fewer hands. At a certain stage in this process, a decisive change in the way the market operates occurs. Under monopoly capitalism the need for capital expansion continues, technological change continues apace, but at the same time, the now dominant corporations can almost suppress price competition. Thus there is a widening gap between production costs and prices. In the authors' words, there is now a continual tendency for the economic surplus to rise.

Such increase in profits makes possible even greater expansion. This leads to a central problem of monopoly capitalism today -- "reduced scope for expansion versus increased ability to expand."

"The resolution of this contradiction", says Sweezy, "becomes the key to the understanding of firm behaviour in the period of monopoly capitalism."

A consequence of the emergence of this 'new' contradiction is that crucial aspects of classical political economy are no longer valid. Namely, the theory of "the average rate of profit has no operational significance ....... neither does a rise or fall in the average rate of profit ...... have the significance attaching to it in conditions of competition."

The main problem with monopoly capitalism today, according to Sweezy and Magdoff, is that it has a tendency to stagnation due to "overaccumulation in relation to the growth of consumption". As a consequence the sales effort and state expenditure now occupies the centre of economic analysis. This thus becomes the starting point of their analysis -- and by doing this they have shifted from a study of production relations (the starting point of Marx's analysis) to a study of market relations.

US capitalism, the authors claim, exhibits all these features of monopoly capitalism and in fact the US provides their main empirical data (Sweezy and Magdoff rarely concern themselves with other developed capitalisms). The Dynamics of US Capitalism is more concerned with the concrete application of their general theory of monopoly to the United States.

The most important essay in this regard is Harry Magdoff's 'Problems of United States Capitalism' even though it is one of the oldest (it was written in 1965). Magdoff draws attention to the fact that even after 20 so-called boom years for American capitalism it is still afflicted with idle machinery and idle labour (unemployment in the US generally runs at around about six per cent). This would be worse says Magdoff if it was not for massive military spending on the part of the US government. This is a perennial theme of both Sweezy and Magdoff. As Sweezy argues:

"Some of us have been saying for a long time now that if it weren't for the enormous military outlays of today, the US economy would be as profoundly depressed as it was during the Great Depression of the 1930s. Can this assertion be supported by evidence? I think it can. Let us add to the unemployed just calculated (7.9 million), the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Number (in millions)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Members of the Armed Forces</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civilian employees of the</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>defence department</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employees in defence industries</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Those employed because of</td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>indirect effects of military</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>spending (multiplier - 1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thus, using conservative estimates where estimates are necessary the total number of unemployed works out to 25.6 per cent ...... For comparison, the
highest unemployed rate ever recorded was 24.9 per cent at the depth of the Depression in 1933". (On the Theory of Monopoly Capitalism). Magdoff points to the way military spending acts as a backstop at strategic points in the business cycle. He says that business profits are highly volatile due to the inverse proportional relationship between sales and costs. "Mild recessions can thus turn into severe depressions if losses in key capital goods industries force a complete shutdown of many plants. However, the orders for military goods in the otherwise vulnerable industries help to pay for overhead costs, build resistance to depression losses, and inhibit the cumulative effect of recessions".

Magdoff also locates a problem of the US economy in the failure of the civilian economy to fully utilise the economic resources of the country which is reflected in the declining role of capital investment. But then this is a result of the main functional problem of monopoly capitalism. "The declining relative importance of capital investment, even in the face of substantial military needs, should come as no surprise if he takes into account the tendency in a capitalist economy for productive capacity to outpace effective consumer demands."

In 1965, Magdoff located the 'present' trouble of the US economy not in competition with other capitalist nations but in its increasingly unfavourable balance of payments. After a recession in 1957 the economy needed strong stimulation, more than military spending was capable of and this meant an ever-increasing debt structure. This latter focus, the focus on the monetary problems of American capitalism, is the strongest section of The Dynamics of US Capitalism, for it is here that we find the most clear recognition by Sweezy and Magdoff of the problems of WORLD imperialism. Sweezy and Magdoff have recently been accused of being 'third worldists' (legitimately in my opinion) for their almost total lack of focus on inter-imperialist conflict and competition in favour of emphasis on the conflict between US imperialism and the people in the under-developed countries. This emphasis figures mainly in the theoretical articles and in the essays we have already discussed. The question of inter-imperialist competition just does not figure in their theorising on monopoly capitalism. This is because their argument is implicitly premised on the absolute supremacy of US imperialism over the world capitalist system. And even when they are discussing the serious problems faced by the US with its enormous balance of payments deficits, its manoeuvring is discussed in these terms: "What appears to be happening (i.e. 1968) is that the United States is moving to stake out a claim to full dominance over the entire capitalist world" ('Gold, Dollars, and Empire'). However, their mere focus on this area has meant that they have come up with some important insights into the problems of world capitalism. In the same essay quoted above they say: "... it is not far fetched to assume that not only France but the Common Market as a whole might elect to fight United States imperialism rather than join it. In monetary terms this would mean establishing a rival currency block ... Tariff and trade wars would again become the order of the day ..."

However, this is far from integrated into their total analysis of world capitalism, and thus when they retreat from their former position on the absolute dominance of US imperialism over the rest of the capitalist world in the essay 'The End of US Hegemony' it is more a pragmatic response to events. After all, Nixon himself had all but admitted the end of such hegemony. This is hardly a desirable state of affairs for revolutionary socialists to find themselves in. Revolutionaries must have a clear idea of the possible future events in order to be able to intervene effectively in them. Indeed, such under-estimation of future events by both Sweezy and Magdoff demands that the theoretical premises of their works be carefully scrutinised.

This has begun to happen and the Baran/Sweezy/Magdoff thesis is being criticised more and more frequently by various Marxists. The most devastating criticism of these various writers' 'third worldism' has come from Ernest Mandel who has at the same time presented the most coherent framework for understanding the present inter-imperialist rivalry. An English communist, Bill Warren, has cast severe doubt on the notion that military spending in the US is as absolutely central to the US economy as Sweezy and Magdoff claim. Warren argues that the various problems faced by US capitalism could be partly surmounted by more sophisticated state intervention in that economy. That it has only just begun to do this is a result, he claims, of the composition of the US ruling class. Another theorist has also challenged what appeared to be the stronghold of the authors under discussion. Ernesto Laclau claims that their theory of underdevelopment is too vague and general. It is not based on a clear specification of the modes of production of the under-developed countries and therefore leads to a false understanding of the relationship between the under-developed countries and the imperial metropoles and therefore of the relations between the social forces in the under-developed countries themselves. Within the American left itself Baran, Sweezy and Magdoff have come under increasing attack. Bob Fitch and Mary Oppenheimer have convincingly argued that finance capital retains its dominant position within the ruling class and thereby locates conflicts within the US ruling class where the authors under discussion locate an over-riding harmony.

This review was originally going to take up the above questions with reference to the two books under discussion, however the problems raised spread far beyond its scope. The fault in Sweezy and Magdoff's perspective lies, I believe in their 'original sin' of forsaking Marx's theory of value in their endeavour to differentiate monopoly from competitive capitalism. Marx's analysis focused on the production process and central to this analysis was his theory of value. The market relations the above authors focus on are a result of value relations, and therefore a study of capitalism must begin with value relations. The Marxist value analysis disregards competition, for in the social aggregate all processes equate with total value. Hence the Marxist analysis does not rest on the assumption of competitive capitalism, but on the abstract concept of total capital. This is valid regardless of whether the actual capital structure is competitive or monopolistic. By shifting their focus from the production process to the level of appearances in the world of circulation of commodities the class content of the Marxist framework is lost. It is in this original misunderstanding of Marxist theory that we can locate the authors' under-estimation of the working class in the advanced capitalist countries, their emphasis of class conflict within the national boundaries and the abstract posing of an undifferentiated global struggle between the third world and US imperialism. However, this is merely an indication of where an appraisal of Sweezy and Magdoff would start, and to finish it would demand an article much lengthier than the present one.
It is a pity that the otherwise excellent article by Joe Palmada in the October issue of the Australian Left Review had to be marred by an error in the use of statistics.

In the article he uses a table of official statistics of the number of industrial disputes over a number of years to substantiate a proposition that there is a growing number of strikes associated with political and social issues and questions of managerial policy.

The official statistics do not distinguish disputes arising out of political and social issues so there is no way of telling how many took place on those issues.

The statistics do however distinguish disputes arising out of managerial policy. The trends in relation to these have been analysed in the table below by providing what percentage such disputes are of the total number of disputes. A similar analysis has been made of disputes arising out of wages.

Three significant points are clearly revealed by this table. The first is that far from the percentage of managerial disputes increasing, the trend has been for them to fall substantially over recent years.

The second point is that the trend for wages disputes has been a substantial rise over the years.

The third point is that in 1966 the proportion of managerial disputes was greater than wage disputes, but in 1970 the proportion of wage disputes was greater than managerial disputes. That is, over that period the relationship between managerial and wage disputes was completely reversed.

This is a sad case of an ugly little fact murdering a beautiful theory.

J. Hutson.

REPLY

There is an old saying that one can form two opinions from one set of statistics, and both be right.

I neither agree that my argument is 'fallacious' nor that it 'is a sad case of an ugly little fact murdering a beautiful theory'.

If you read carefully that section of the article again, you will notice that I claim that the MAIN motivation for the rising struggle 'is the steady erosion of real wages through inflationary cost spirals, monopoly manipulation of prices, and the effects of increasing direct and indirect taxation'.

I also say that 'whilst these factors constitute the MAIN PRESSURES propelling the spontaneous movement, other issues of deeper significance are beginning to emerge which demand further analysis. This is the GROWING number of strikes associated with political and social issues and questions of managerial policy'.

By reducing the number of strikes on 'managerial policy' to percentages, you draw the erroneous conclusion that I am claiming that strikes over such issues have been increasing relatively as well as absolutely. You surely would not dispute that 785 disputes on managerial policy in 1970 is not greater than 529 in 1966, and that this represents a growth in the number of disputes on this question.

The number of disputes on all causes in the statistics has increased and the fact that the number of disputes concerning managerial policy have, at the one time, INCREASED in number and, at the same time, decreased IN RELATION to the number of strikes does not, in my opinion, invalidate my contention that this is a trend which requires further analysis.

It is true, as you say, that 'the official statistics do not distinguish disputes arising out of political and social issues, so there is no way of telling how many took place on those issues'. But the statistics are grouped under various headings which exclude specifically 'political and social' issues.

As you are no doubt also aware, the statistics define 'other' causes as disputes concerning 'protests directed against persons or situations other than those dealing with employer/employee relationships, e.g. political matters, fining and gaoling of persons, protests against lack of work, and lack of adequate transport; non-award public holidays, accidents and funerals; no reason given for stoppages; etc.'

I think it is logical to assume that these strikes are included in 'other' causes, and this has shown, with the exception of 1970, a tendency to increase in number.

One must assume that the strikes around the Vietnam war, penal powers (1968-1969), pensions, and, more recently, the actions around ecological and other issues, are included in the category of 'other'.

You have proved that, in relation to the total number of strikes, those motivated by 'managerial policy' show a decline, but you have not demolished my contention that the 'growing number' of such strikes is of no little significance, reflecting 'the BEGINNING of consciousness towards challenging the power base, and for greater workers' participation in decision making'.

J. Palmada.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total No. Disputes</th>
<th>Disputes on Managerial Policy</th>
<th>Disputes on Wages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>No. (2)</td>
<td>Percentage (2) of (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1966</td>
<td>1,273</td>
<td>529</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1967</td>
<td>1,340</td>
<td>572</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1968</td>
<td>1,713</td>
<td>695</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1969</td>
<td>2,014</td>
<td>768</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>2,738</td>
<td>785</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>