"The strength of every society is in the last resort a spiritual strength. And from this we can only be liberated by knowledge. This knowledge cannot be of the abstract kind that remains in one's head. It must be flesh of one's flesh, and blood of one's blood; to use Marx's phrase, it must be 'practical critical activity'."

- GEORG LUKACS.

A list of the best-known contributors to marxist theory would surely have to include George Lukacs' name in a prominent position. Yet his contribution remains shadowy and paradoxical, due not only to the fact that it spans over five decades and incorporates many shifts of fortune and party lines, but also to the fact that it spans many disciplines -- philosophy, aesthetics, sociology and politics.

Lukacs was born in 1885, the son of a successful Budapest banker, and his early milieu was the upper middle class in that city. His preoccupations with aesthetics and philosophy meant that his first contact with marxism was a purely intellectual one. Towards the end of the first world war he became convinced that marxism represented the culmination of western philosophy.

There were two reasons for this. Firstly, it took over Hegel's achievement of overcoming what Lukacs calls "the antinomies of bourgeois thought," meaning the irreducibility of such categories as "is" and "ought", subject and object, etc. -- categories that underpin most non-marxist philosophy and social science to this day. Secondly, marxism transcended the abstract idealism of Hegel's system itself, and thus held the promise of philosophy fulfilling itself in practice, in social change.

This realisation about marxism led Lukacs to become politically committed, since it is above all a philosophy of action, of praxis. He became politically active, and in 1919 he was Deputy Commissar for Culture in the short-lived Hungarian Soviet Republic. Its collapse, and his subsequent exile abroad, established a pattern in Lukacs' political career: his appearances in this arena -- in the 'twenties in the international communist movement, and for a few days in Imre Nagy's revolutionary government in 1956 -- were to be few, brief, unsuccessful, and punctuated by long periods of exile. His importance lies wholly in his theoretical contribution, which itself could not escape the deformations which are inevitable in the absence of practical involvement in real political struggles. From the mid-'twenties on, there was a second deforming influence on his theoretical activity: the need to follow the zigs and zags of the party line under an unfree regime in which the function of that party line was, among other things, to cover a multitude of Stalinist sins -- opportunism, terror, and philistinism.

In this article I am concerned with History and Class Consciousness, which is unquestionably Lukacs' most influential book, and is the reason for the current revival of interest in him as a political thinker. This book is made up of essays written in exile between 1919 and 1922 and was first published in 1923. It is therefore the fruit of several years' political involvement, and yet it is the product of philosophical inquiry as yet free from the Stalinist terror.

History and Class Consciousness does not seek to add to the marxist tradition: on the contrary, it is a major enterprise of restoration; in it Lukacs seeks to expound its fundamental propositions and point out precisely why it represents the culmination of modern philosophy. Two major themes run throughout the work: firstly, the way in which marxism has surpassed earlier philosophical systems and remains the only system capable of comprehending history and guiding men's activity in creating history; secondly, Lukacs attacks certain vulgarisations of the tradition, such as economism and
scientism, which were prevalent in his time -- and still are today.

This second theme represented an important corrective. Even though Marx himself had heavily criticised traditional materialism, there can be no doubt that, at the time Lukacs was writing, the mainstream of marxism had collapsed back into it, and the emphasis on dialectical method and praxis had been lost. Among important marxists, only Rosa Luxemburg and Trotsky had remained entirely outside this mainstream, and the only adequate statement of Marx's historical materialism had been that of Antonio Labriola. The restorative work which Lukacs started was later to be carried much further in Gramsci's writings.

In the first part of this article, I shall attempt to summarise some of the ideas in History and Class Consciousness which come close to the problems facing us today. In the second part, I shall discuss how these ideas differ from Marx's own account. Thirdly, I shall attempt to point to the deficiencies in Lukacs' system and tentatively suggest how they are to be overcome.

I.

History and Class Consciousness is a dense and encyclopaedic work. It contains a theory of history and of the role of consciousness in the revolutionary process, a history of philosophy and an elaboration of the marxist theory of knowledge, the role of the party and the state. This attempt to draw out of it those ideas that are directly concerned with a theory of revolution cannot avoid doing some violence to the balance and completeness of the book itself.

Marxism is more than an alternative social theory or political program. It is an original and autonomous conception of the world, made up of categories which are peculiar to it and bear the stamp of its historical dimension. Lukacs sees the marxist theory of history as encapsulated in the oft-quoted aphorism from The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte: "Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they may please." For Lukacs, history is first of all consciousness human activity. "Conscious" in this context means no more than "deliberate," since all historical activity hitherto has been directed by a necessarily impaired vision -- a false consciousness -- of the social process in its totality. The second aspect of history is an objective one: "the succession of those processes in which the forms taken by this activity and the relations of man to himself (to nature, to other men) are overthrown." (History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics. [H.C.C.], Merlin, London, 1971, p. 186.)

History, in turn, is the mutual interaction between deliberate human action and objective circumstances, and can only be grasped in terms of a dialectical method, using categories adequate to that method. Lukacs quotes Marx's dictum in his A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy:

"In the study of economic categories, as in the case of every historical and social science, it must be borne in mind that the categories are therefore but forms of being, conditions of existence."

and notes that the essential determinants of dialectics ("the interaction of subject and object, the unity of theory and practice, the historical changes underlying the categories as the root cause of changes in thought, etc.") (H.C.C. p. 24, note 6) apply only to social reality -- the realm of conscious human activity -- and not to nature.

The return to a dialectical perspective is basic to Lukacs' notion of "orthodox marxism," an orthodoxy he defines exclusively in terms of method. This return leads him to emphasise two categories fundamental to dialectics -- "totality" and "mediation."

The category of totality embodies the unity of the historical process. Marx notes:

"The result we arrive at is not that production, distribution, exchange and consumption are identical, but that they are all members of one totality... Thus a definite form of production determines definite forms of consumption, distribution and exchange as well as definite relations between these different elements... A mutual interaction takes place between these various elements. This is the case with every organic body." (Critique.)

For Lukacs, this concept of totality is a crucial feature of the marxist method:

"It is not the primacy of economic motives in historical explanations that constitutes the decisive difference between marxism and bourgeois thought, but the point of view of the totality. The category of totality, the all-pervasive supremacy of the whole over the parts, is the essence of the method which Marx took over from Hegel and brilliantly transformed into the foundation of a wholly new science." (H.C.C., p. 27.)

Lukacs' rejection of economic determinism is clear from this passage, and from this standpoint of the totality he launches his attack on both economism and bourgeois thought.

But the relationships between social phenomena (which is the same as their relation to the social totality) are not immediately obvious, and the immediacy of their appearance must be overcome if the total structure is to be revealed. The category of mediation is the "leverage with which to overcome the mere immediacy of the empirical world and as such is not something (subjective) foisted onto objects from outside, it is no value judgment, or 'ought' opposed to their 'is.' It is rather the manifestation of their authentic, objective character." (H.C.C., p. 162.) Mediations reveal the relation between a thing and the totality: it reveals in social phenomena what to a marxist is their essential nature: their place in the total structure of society.

Both categories are essential for grasping what Lukacs calls the "concrete reality" of social phenomena, the structural meaning of objects. But unlike bourgeois thinkers, he denies a rigid separation between perceiver and perceived. Starting with Hegel's formula that "truth must be understood not merely as substance, but also as subject," Lukacs affirms Marx's thesis that perception involved the practical sensuous activity of the perceiver, the subject, such that consciousness changes the object and does not merely reflect it. Subject and object are unified in a total process which overcomes "the reified disintegration of the subject, and the -- likewise reified -- rigidity and impenetrability of its objects" (H.C.C., p. 140.) Here, too, Lukacs distances himself from both bourgeois thought and vulgar marxist "scientism" which posit an "objective" reality free from subjective intervention.

What are the implications for the materialist conception of history of this renovation of dialectical method? To answer this question, we must refer to the statement in the Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy:
"It is not the consciousness of men that determines their social being but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness. If "social being" is interpreted passively so as to treat man simply as the object of the social process, a mechanistic (and therefore false) view of the social process results. Lukacs emphasises that man is both the subject and the object of this process, that "social being" is nothing but the practical activity of men, within social relations that are themselves a human product. The active sense of both being and consciousness is the basis upon which Marx criticised Feuerbach's materialism: "The materialist doctrine that men are the product of circumstances and education, that changed men are therefore the product of other circumstances and of a different education, forgets that circumstances are in fact changed by men and that the educator must himself be educated." (3rd Thesis).

Lukacs criticises economism for this same "forgetfulness". The above is a summary of the method Lukacs calls orthodox marxism, or historical materialism. What is the method for? He opens his book on Lenin with the definition: "Historical materialism is the theory of the proletarian revolution." Although this is rather too simple to encapsulate its meaning in History and Class Consciousness, it is its point of departure from the formal disciplines of philosophy and history. Their irrelevance as a guide to human action was acknowledged by Hegel: "When philosophy paints its gloomy picture a form of life has grown old. It cannot be rejuvenated by the gloomy picture, but only understood. Only when the dusk starts to fall does the owl of Minerva spread its wings and fly." (quoted in HCC, p.59).

The philosopher arrives after the event -- "post festum", as Marx puts it -- and his consciousness is "subsequent consciousness". This tardiness means for Lukacs that "the real motor forces of history are independent of men's (psychological) consciousness of them". (HCC, p.47).

We have seen that man is the subject and object of the historical process, but false consciousness as to his role in the process or the nature of the process itself prevents him from achieving his subjective goals. True consciousness, on the other hand, means both self-knowledge and a correct perception of concrete reality. If truth is not only substance but subject, as Hegel says, the precondition of a true consciousness capable of guiding (not just explaining the event) historical actions is the existence of a self-knowing, identical subject-object.

In marxist theory, the human subject materialises in the form of social classes, which are both created in the social process and are in turn the motors of it. The consciousness of a class is therefore the only historically significant consciousness in class society. Lukacs says that if the realm of freedom is to be realised "the emergence of consciousness must become the decisive step which the historical process must take towards its proper end". (HCC, p.2). Class consciousness is defined as consisting of: "the appropriate and rational reactions 'imputed' to a particular typical position in the process of production. This consciousness is, therefore, neither the sum nor the average of what is thought or felt by the single individuals who make up the class. And yet the historically significant actions of the class as a whole are determined in the last resort by this consciousness and not by the thought of the individual -- and these actions can be understood only by reference to this consciousness." (HCC, p.51).

Lukacs, with Lenin, raises a distinction between the actual or empirical consciousness of the members of a class on the one hand, and true class consciousness, the rational response to social reality, as it can be gleaned from the "vantage point" of a particular class, on the other.

By no means every class is capable of a class consciousness able to move history, for "class consciousness implies a conditioned unconsciousness of one's own socio-historical and economic conditions", so that "if from the vantage point of a particular class the totality of existing society is not visible .... then such a class is doomed to play a subordinate role. It can never influence the course of history". (HCC, p.52).

The ability to influence the course of history depends on the capacity of a class to exercise hegemony at a particular moment. It will only have this capacity if its interests and consciousness "enable it to organise the whole of society in accordance with its interests". (HCC, p.52).

A significant part of History and Class Consciousness is given over to establishing the point that the hegemony of the bourgeoisie is no longer viable, but I can only indicate the line of argument here. Essentially restating Marx's thesis in The German Ideology, Lukacs says: "For (the bourgeoisie) it is a matter of life or death to understand its own system of production in terms of eternally valid categories: it must think of capitalism as being pre-destined to eternal survival by the eternal laws of nature and reason. Conversely, contradictions that cannot be ignored must be shown to be purely surface phenomena, unrelated to this mode of production." (HCC, pp.10-11).

Bourgeois thought, then, must lack the historical dimension essential to an adequate comprehension of the age. The problem of the present is an historical problem, but as Marx says of bourgeois economics in The Poverty of Philosophy, "history existed once upon a time, but it does not exist any more".

The necessity of the historical dimension arises from the fact that only here is the dialectical motion of the total process expressible. The denial of this totality simultaneously denies to empirical social phenomena the mediation that would allow us to understand their essential reality. Denied this mediation, social phenomena remain locked in their immediacy, and retain the isolation and opacity of "things-in-themselves". For Lukacs, the isolated "thing-in-itself" -- the Kantian noumenon -- is the source of the irreducible antagonisms of bourgeois thought: subject and object, theory and practice, "is" and "ought", etc.

The immediate thinghood of these "things-in-themselves" is reflected in the reified consciousness of the bourgeoisie, epitomised in the fetishism of commodities, whereby a real social relation between men (in Marx's words) "assumes, in their eyes, the fantastic form of a relation between things".

Economic crisis represents the simultaneous objective and subjective breakdown of bourgeois society. It is here that the "eternal" laws of capitalist production and reproduction reach their historical limits, the operational rationality of bourgeois economics is outflanked, and the reified mind is unable to perceive a pattern in the "chaos", for "the qualitative existence of the "things" that lead their lives beyond the purview of economics as misunderstood and neglected things-in-themselves .... suddenly becomes the decisive factor". (HCC, p.105).
When crisis overwhelms capitalist society, Lukacs reveals, in messianic fashion, that class “entrusted by history with the task of transforming society consciously,” since “the school of history confers upon it the leadership of mankind” (HCC pp. 71 & 76): the proletariat. For the class situation of the proletariat is both the negation of capitalist society and the only vantage point from which its totality can be understood. As Marx puts it:

“When the proletariat proclaims the dissolution of the old world-order it does no more than reveal the secret of its own existence, for it represents the effective dissolution of that world order.” (“Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right.”)

In order to understand its own nature and role in society, the proletariat is forced to understand society as a whole. While the bourgeoisie and the proletariat are interdependent and both products and components of capitalist society, with the crisis of that society the proletariat emerges as that class whose interests are those of society at large. It is this universalism that signifies that when the proletariat “finds itself,” history will have found the self-conscious subject-object capable of guiding society by human rationality.

But even for Lukacs, the emergence of proletarian class consciousness is not so easy. The proletariat is itself subject to reified consciousness, and in the analysis of what he calls the proletariat’s “ideological crisis,” he comes close to Gramsci’s notion of hegemony. For the proletariat can see itself as a component of bourgeois society (a self-image promulgated by revisionist parties and many trade unions) or as the agent of its destruction. The ideological crisis of the proletariat consists in the struggle for self-education, for the overthrow of revisionism and trade union consciousness which faithfully reflect the immediate experience of bourgeois life-forms (thereby obstructing the authentic self- mediation of the class and delivering it up to an unreconcilable antagonism between theory and practice, thought and existence):

“The proletariat can only be liberated from its dependence on the life-forms created by capitalism when it has learnt to act without these life-forms inwardly influencing its actions. As motive forces they must sink to the status of matters of complete indifference... The self-education of the proletariat is a lengthy and difficult process by which it becomes ‘ripe’ for revolution, and the more highly developed capitalism and bourgeois culture are in a country, the more arduous this process becomes because the proletariat becomes infected with the life forms of capitalism.” (HCC, p.264).

The ideological crisis of the proletariat is an “inward barrier”, but the reified forms of bourgeois life are not to be overcome in a merely theoretical manner. They only reflect the actual conditions of existence of bourgeoisie society, and the real task is the practical abolition of that society – a task which demands the unity of theory and practice, realised in authentic revolutionary praxis.

In the proletariat’s struggle to achieve consciousness, the role played by the communist party becomes crucial. Quoting Lenin’s statement that “politics cannot be separated mechanically from organisation”, Lukacs points out that the party is no mere technical question, but is part and parcel of the theory of revolution. The question “what then shall we do?” demands an answer in terms of organisation. Lukacs relates the question to the socio-historical process in this way:

“Organisation is the form of mediation between theory and practice. And, as in every dialectical relationship, the terms of the relation only acquire concreteness in and by virtue of this mediation.” (HCC,p.330).

When it comes to the likelihood or necessity of the proletariat’s bridging the gap between empirical and “imputed” class consciousness, Lukacs is highly problematical. He rejects the undialectical dichotomy between “fatalism” and “voluntarism”, but appears to waver between the two himself:

“The proletariat cannot abdicate its mission. The only question at issue is how much it has to suffer before it achieves ideological maturity, before it acquires a true understanding of its class situation, and a true class consciousness.” (HCC,p.76).

And later we find that proletarian class consciousness is “nothing but the expression of historical necessity”. (HCC,p.177). Yet “the aspiration (to grasp the truth) only yields the possibility. The accomplishment can only be the fruit of conscious deeds of the proletariat”. Moreover, “history is at its least automatic when it is the consciousness of the proletariat that is at issue”. (HCC,pp.73 & 208).

It is concerning the crucial question of economic crisis that the problematical nature of the proletariat’s ideological maturity comes to the fore. Lukacs suggests that “the active and practical side of class consciousness can emerge only in an acute crisis; but the proletariat must evidently be prepared in advance, since it is crucial whether it “experiences the crisis as the object or the subject of decision”. (HCC, p.244). As the subject of decision it will not make demands “but impose an effective reality”. As the object of decision, it will see capitalist society drag on, with the attendant possibility of a descent into barbarism:

“Lenin has very rightly pointed out that there is no situation from which there is no way out. Whatever position capitalism finds itself in there will always be some ‘purely economic’ solutions available. The question is only whether these solutions will be viable when they emerge from the pure theoretical world of economics into the reality of the class struggle. Whether they can be put into practice depends ....... on the proletariat.” (HCC, p.306).

II.

History and Class Consciousness is avowedly an attempt to interpret Marx’s theory of revolution, without revisions or additions. It is hard to believe that Lukacs was unaware at the time that there is little or no warrant in Marx’s work for the leninist contribution concerning revolutionary consciousness and organisation, which is a vital part of the book. However, in this section I wish to show that the book is an imperfect account of Marx’s theory, notwithstanding its considerable contribution in correcting fundamental misconceptions that were more widespread in the marxist tradition that Lukacs’. The root of the problem is acknowledged by him in his self-critical Preface to the 1967 edition of the book: the failure to locate the proletariat’s experience and consciousness in the labor process. His self-criticism, however, falls short.

Marx and Engels state:

“The production of ideas, conceptions, and consciousness is at first directly interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse of men, the language of real life .... men are the producers of their conceptions,
This method of approach is not devoid of premisses. It starts out from real premisses and does not abandon them for a moment. Its premisses are men, not in any fantastic isolation or rigidity, but in their actual, empirically perceptible process of development under definite conditions. As soon as this active life-process is described, history ceases to be a collection of dead facts ... or an imagined activity of imagined subjects." (The German Ideology, Lawrence and Wishart, pp. 47-8).

"Their actual life process" under capitalism is the labour-process. In the marxian scheme, the contradictions of capitalism are not a series of abstract propositions to be handed the worker to explain his life to him: they are existential realities that impinge upon him painfully in his daily life. Without this materialist base, the marxian dialectic and its notion of praxis turn into their opposite -- subjectivism -- as Lukacs now admits. (HCC, pp. xvii - xviii).

In the result he ends up with an "historical necessity" profoundly different from Marx's. The latter expresses the process of the emergence of revolutionary consciousness as follows:

"If socialist writers attribute this world-historical role to the proletariat this is not at all ... because they regard the proletarians as gods. On the contrary, in the fully developed proletariat everything human has been taken away ... Man has lost himself, but he has not only acquired, at the same time, a theoretical consciousness of his loss, he has been forced by an ineluctable, irremediable and imperious distress -- by practical necessity -- to revolt against this inhumanity. It is for these reasons that the proletariat can and must emancipate itself ... It is not in vain that it passes through the rough but stimulating school of labour. It is not a matter of knowing what this or that proletarian, or even the proletariat as a whole, conceives as its aim at any particular moment. It is a question of knowing what the proletariat is, and what it must accomplish in accordance with its nature." (The Holy Family).

"In this way Marx dethrones the Idea and replaces it with real men, abolishing Hegel's metaphysical teleology. Lukacs, however, implicitly restores this teleology as his proletariat responds to the promptings of history ("the school of history" rather than "the rough but stimulating school of labour"), etc.). Marx sets up the question -- and provides an answer -- that Lukacs obscures: what is the process that generates actual revolutionary consciousness in the proletariat?

But Lukacs also poses a problem that does not arise in Marx: how does the proletariat come to adopt its "imputed" class consciousness as its own -- a consciousness that arises independently of its social being? The question cannot be answered in terms of historical materialism, since the concept of "imputed" class consciousness itself is an idealist construct, the opposite to Marx's "conscious existence".

Lacking any dialectical connection with the materialist base through social being, "imputed" class consciousness must be irrelevant to authentic praxis. Theory here divorces itself from practice, and in these circumstances, Lukacs' notion of a "theory of praxis" becoming a "practical theory" (HCC, p.205) is a contradiction in terms. By contrast, what Marx meant by praxis has been summed up as follows:

"Within a continuous historical process, in successive moments, men produce and are reproduced by new conditions of existence. Through practical activity, through their daily involvement in the struggle for existence which is here a class struggle, men forge the instruments and opportunities for new thought and action. Revolution and revolutionary consciousness are the outcome of the actual interaction of subjective perceptions and objective conditions within this process of struggle. Praxis is, in this case, the vehicle of interaction -- the political struggle of classes, the experience of mobilisation and organisation which links conditions to consciousness in action. The theoretical determinancy of either consciousness or the material bases of production does not in itself animate their relationship in the real world. On Marx's terms, to rely on material forces of change exclusive of an active self-conscious human agency is to perpetuate men's alienation in contradiction to men's power; to rely on spontaneous human will for self-emancipation is to perpetuate false consciousness of men's power." (Ann Bastian, Class Consciousness and Socialist Revolution, unpublished M.Sc. dissertation, 1971, pp.10-11).

The disjunction between theory and practice not only destroys the basis for a meaningful praxis, but also falsifies the role of the party: in Lukacs' account, it becomes a self-generating sovereign, separate from and exercising tutelage over the proletariat, whose "conscious existence" has no determinant role in the relationship.

The similarity with stalinism is as obvious as the departure from the original marxian schema. In Part II of The Communist Manifesto, Marx and Engels set forth an -- admittedly embryonic -- model of an organic proletarian party, organising around the oppression of the class. Lukacs' model inevitably reduces itself to an elite organism, around which is its exclusive stock-in-trade, optimal consciousness. And so we find him taking to task one of his own important influences, Rosa Luxemburg, for saying:

"Let us speak plainly. Historically, the errors committed by a truly revolutionary movement are infinitely more fruitful and more valuable than the infallibility of the best of all 'Central Committees.'" (Marxism or Leninism).

Historical materialism is concerned among other things with the question of how different ideologies arise out of the dialectical interaction between base and superstructure, and how these ideologies in their turn become determinants in this interaction. Lukacs is correct in saying that historical materialism does not permit us to merely confront true and false consciousness: it requires us to investigate the content of all forms of consciousness and their origins in the total process, and that it can and must be applied to itself. We might now add that, after a period of over 120 years in which historical materialism has failed to decisively "seize the masses" in advanced capitalist societies, we should be seeking an explanation in its terms for this non-event, and we may well, in so doing, establish some guidelines for the theoretical and practical problems facing us. If we do apply historical materialism to itself (and this section can at best be only an indication of an outline of such a project) a pattern of the ups and downs of the doctrine, as scientific method and revolutionary ideology, may begin to emerge.
Mid-nineteenth century capitalism, which provided the raw material for Marx's analysis, had certain features which distinguish it from present-day capitalism. The conditions of productivity were lower, so that industry was far more labor-intensive, and the imperative of capital accumulation forced capitalists to rely more on absolute surplus-value. In social terms, this meant large concentrations of workers united in appalling working and living conditions, as the capitalists, driven by "the gales of competition," attempted unceasingly to lower wages and extend the working day. The cyclical crises that inhere in the system were softened by the stabilising mechanisms later invented by bourgeois economics, and the former increased the distress, exacerbating the system's tendency to produce an ever larger body of unemployment. The superstructures of bourgeois society, especially on the continent, were undeveloped, incapable either of absorbing the blows that dealt society by crises, or of successfully imposing a false mediation between the real conditions of life and people's perception of them. Bourgeois dominance appeared fragile.

In these circumstances, Marx's writings on the dynamics of revolution seem quite circumspect: Labriola pointed out that The Communist Manifesto, though written from the edge of the volcano of the 1848 revolutionary upheavals, is no prophecy or promise of revolution, but a "morphological prevision" based on the workings of the system itself. It was, in particular, not based upon any idea of the absolute impoverishment of the working class, but on the idea of a widening gulf between the socio-economic conditions of the two major classes, itself a systematic reflex of capitalist exploitation.

However, from the late-nineteenth century on, a gradual change took place in the nature of capitalist society which altered the basis of the original analysis. The increasing preponderance of constant capital, bringing with it an enormous increase in the productivity of labor, changed the pattern of exploitation to a greater reliance on relative surplus-value, which allowed the bourgeoisie to make strategic concessions to an organised and threatening working class on the issues of wages and working conditions. Exploitative economic relations with overseas territories also provided the bourgeoisie with another source of capital. Moreover, that class reinforced its grip on society through superstructural development. The territories also provided the bourgeoisie with another source of capital.

Lenin's response to this new situation was historically the most important. If revolutionary consciousness did not spring "spontaneously" from the contradictions at the material base (and the chances of this seemed to be diminishing), what was called for was a vanguard party to instill into the working class an adequate appreciation of their condition and revolutionary mission. The actual content of this revolutionary consciousness, far from arising from the working class and its social existence, was the product of intellectuals and was to be "imposed" on the class from outside. Lenin implicitly reversed the original relation between social being and consciousness, and this carried with it the danger, which he himself strenuously resisted in his lifetime, of the actual condition of the masses becoming irrelevant to party theory.

If, in this new age of imperialism, the contradictions of capitalism impinged less on man's daily experience, they found new expression in the trauma of world war. The less consolidated the bourgeoisie hegemony in a particular society, the less it could sustain this trauma, and in eastern Europe at least, its knell had apparently sounded in the first world war. It is from this perspective of social crisis, of what Lenin called "the actuality of the revolution," that History and Class Consciousness was written. The period was both a salutary reminder that only a dialectical method was adequate to the understanding of the social process, and an invitation to assume, rather than establish empirically, the objective dynamics of revolution. It explains the assumption underlying History and Class Consciousness, that "history" had delivered the goods in the form of a revolutionary situation, and only the "subjective factor" remained problematical.

The extent to which the book is thus dated is the extent to which it is both a defective statement of the marxist dialectic and inadequate as a guide to theory and practice today. We have already seen how Lukacs emasculated the concept of praxis; we must now take note in passing of the resulting deformations of method, as these are instructive in the project of constructing an adequate theory of revolution for our own time.

One immediately raises the central problem of Lukacs' approach by asking: what is the entry point into his system for empirical economic, sociological and cultural data? Related to this question, and even more importantly: how are we to relate consciousness to the life process -- the experience -- of the concrete individual in his class, his society and his time? In Lukacs' case, the short answer is that a frozen form of Marx's method has been raised above, and made no longer answerable to, concrete reality. This reality is relegated to the at-tic: essentially empirical questions, and ones about the lives of real people (as opposed to the abstract entities which Lukacs moves around the stage of history), including those questions concerned with actual class struggle and consciousness, are given a priori answers. Dialectic method, in Ann Bastian's formulation, "bases the categories of thought on the categories of reality; it may not reflect the conditions of existence in their immediacy, but it must reproduce reality in thought in order to totally perceive it." (Dissertation, p.53). This Lukacs fails to do.

The reflux that had already set in in western Europe by the time History and Class Consciousness was written threw a cold light on the inadequacy of pre-existing theory. It thereupon fell to Gramsci to begin a genuine advance towards a theory of consciousness. To understand this advance, we must first look at the limits of Marx's theory.

Marx's base-superstructure model is a dialectical conception which accords the superstructure a relative autonomy rather than the status of a "mere emanation" of the base. However, only the base itself seems susceptible to rigorous scientific analysis since, as Wolpe points out, Marx specifically contrasts "the economic conditions of production which can be determined with the precision of a natural science [on the one hand], and the legal, political, religious, aesthetic or philosophic -- in short, ideological forms [on the other]." (Socialist Register, 1970, p.274). As it stands then, Marx's theory cannot tell us, in relation to the development of consciousness,
how the various superstructural elements are to be taken into account.

The groundwork for Gramsci's concept of hegemony was laid in *The German Ideology*, and both Lenin and Lukacs were aware of the determinant role of superstructural factors, without making any significant contribution to a theory of the superstructure. For Gramsci such a theory was indispensable for an understanding of class power in developed capitalist society, and hence, "the problems of superstructure should not be abandoned to themselves, to their spontaneous development, to a hap-hazard and sporadic germination." (Prison Notebooks, Lawrence & Wishart, p.247).

In order to overcome the bourgeois leadership of society, a new cultural, ethical and political counter-hegemonic initiative must be launched, and this in turn called for an analysis of all the superstructural factors at play in the development of consciousness. This counter-hegemonic initiative would have to contain many dimensions, which in sum would add up to a new and unified conception of the world, but which, seen severally, would negate the specific values and illusions upon which bourgeois leadership is founded. The ideological struggle that Gramsci called for was not to be confined to the rarefied atmosphere of high culture, but was to be conducted where people lived and worked, in the factories and workplaces themselves.

We have seen how history has added to, rather than replaced, the complexus of factors to be taken into account in the development of consciousness, and hence the challenge implicit in the Marxian concept of praxis seems more formidable than ever. If we ask what factors are relevant to our present era and how the determination of each and the relationship between them is to be assessed, we face the added problem of grasping, before the owl of Minerva has spread its wings, the historical significance of factors in an ongoing process.

Goldmann suggests that the era of "imperialist capitalism" (about 1900 to the present) should be seen in two phases -- "crisis capitalism" from 1912 to 1950, and "organised capitalism" from 1950 to the present. The first salient feature of this latter period is a growing complexity of class structure, which makes the use of the Marxian analytic concept of class at once more difficult, and more crucial, to apply. The second salient feature is the growth of monopolies, and connected to that, the change in the phenomenal form of the contradictions of capital: instead of oscillating between boom and -- more or less severe -- depression, the economic system is maintained in a more stable state of "permanent crisis," characterised by unemployment and low utilisation of productive capacity. The price of this "stability" is the ruling class's greater dependence on the state apparatus to keep the economy functioning "normally", and production for waste and warfare.

To these features of our present era might be added two analytic problems. Firstly, the structural necessity of imperialism for metropolitan countries poses the problem of a global, as opposed to a national, class structure. Secondly, the thesis that neo-capitalism, in order to pacify the class struggle, engineers consent by means of psychological manipulation, points to the need for research into the whole question of how social conditions and relations impinge on the human psyche, and how the latter in turn is to be located in a determinate social process.

If these aspects and their interconnections are rigorously analysed within the tradition of historical materialism, we shall have taken a long step towards a theory of the development of revolutionary consciousness which confronts the actual situation of the working class itself and of the minorities and excluded groups whose anti-capitalist struggles are so important today. Such a theory is clearly a precondition to the revolutionary project itself.

CONCLUSION

The argument for a restoration of the empirical content of historical materialism is not an invitation to collapse into crass empiricism. The "facts" themselves explain nothing; they can only answer theoretically adequate questions. Still less does the suggestion that the dynamics of the human psyche must be comprehended in a theory of consciousness validate psychologism in general, or the apologettes of bourgeois ego-psychology (which contrives to define the social dimension out of existence) in particular.

This said, it is apparent that the deficiencies in Lukacs' treatment of consciousness must be made up by theoretical analysis and empirical investigation focussed in three areas:

1. An economic and sociological investigation of the structure of advanced capitalist society, including crisis theory, the structural aspects of imperialism (especially from the point of view of the imperialist metropolis), inter-imperialist trade and conflict, and class structure.

2. The development of a theory of the superstructure, the differentiation of its components and their articulation. Such a theory would have to redefine and constantly revise the relation between base and superstructure, for example, in revamping the notion of the state in the light of its new role in the economy.

3. The development of a "structural anthropology," to use Sartre's term, which locates the concrete man in his class and in his society, and which accounts for his conditioning, needs and responses in that social milieu.

These foci are complex in themselves, and more complex in the totality of their interrelations. Even to approach them is to grapple with the problem of developing methods adequate -- and answerable -- to their content. Moreover, theories constructed so abstractly have strictly limited usefulness; they are only a guide to, not a substitute for, specific analyses on the national level. This conceptual complexity, however, merely reflects a complex reality -- the present seen as history. And understanding history, Labriola reminds us, is a question of explaining the connection and the complexus precisely insofar as it is a connection and a complexus. It is not merely a question of discovering and determining the social groundwork, and then of making men appear upon it like so many marionettes, whose threads are held and moved, no longer by Providence, but by economic categories. These categories have themselves developed and are developing -- because men change as to the capacity and the art of vanquishing, subduing and transforming and utilising natural conditions; because men change in spirit and attitude through the reaction of their tools upon themselves; because men change in their respective and co-associated relations; and because men change as individuals depending in various degrees upon one another. We have, in fine, to deal with history, and not with its skeleton." ("Essays on the Materialist Conception of History", Kerr & Co., Chicago, 1908, pp. 208-9.)