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**Nature, Society, and Thought**

**a Journal of Dialectical and Historical Materialism**

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**University of Minnesota  
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Nature, Society, and Thought

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a Journal of Dialectical and Historical Materialism

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## Editorial

The publication of *The Downfall and Future of Socialism* by Hans Heinz Holz as a special issue of *Nature, Society, and Thought* (vol. 5, no. 3 [1992]) brought unexpected results. Within half a year of its publication, the entire printing of 1300 copies was exhausted and a new printing was needed to meet continuing demand. (Orders for the hardcover edition of the work, published as volume 30 in the MEP book series *Studies in Marxism*, primarily from libraries, are also good.)

The nature of the response has been unusual for a theoretical work, with orders by individuals of five to ten copies being common. Many multiple orders are from readers wishing to give the book to broad circles of acquaintances. Several readers have reported organizing study groups.

Why has Holz's work stimulated this level of interest at a moment when the spirit of revolutionary Marxism in the United States seems to be at an unprecedented low point in this century? Clearly, the rapid reversal of the process of social transformation in the USSR and Eastern Europe that so many Marxists considered irreversible has led many to question Lenin's theoretical elaboration of the scientific socialism of Marx and Engels. Not only the Leninist content of twentieth-century Marxism has been called into question, but Marx and Engels's materialist conception of history as well.

Holz's argument has validated convincingly to many the foundations of Marxism and Lenin's fusion of Marxist theory with the organization of a revolutionary working-class movement. Readers recognize the daunting task of separating the necessary organizational practice from the distortions of that practice on the one hand, and the elimination of its revolutionary character on the other.

The debates over these questions have had catastrophic consequences for Marxist organizations that have traditionally served as the material foundations for the further development of Marxist theory. In many countries, including some of the former socialist ones, no significant Marxist political organizations remain on the scene. In others, as we described in our introduction to Holz's book, more than one organization identifies its orientation with the tradition of Marx, Engels, and Lenin. It was appropriate, if not entirely foreseen by us, that large orders for our English-language edition of Holz's *Downfall and Future of Socialism* came from other countries—in particular, Australia, Canada, Great Britain, Guyana, India, Ireland, and New Zealand.

Since the formation of the Marxist Forum (see page 56) was stimulated by the Holz book, it seems appropriate to open the journal periodically to materials provided by the Forum. We begin with the present issue. Our aim in publishing these materials is to generate debate. We invite readers to send us discussion—from brief comments to analytical articles—for publication in *NST*.

Though primarily a North American journal, *Nature, Society, and Thought*, from its very first issue, encouraged contributions from authors from other countries, in keeping with the internationalism that has characterized Marxism from the time of its birth in the 1840s. The international character of the ideological and organizational crisis suggests the need for enhancing international exchanges on theoretical questions among Marxists. To help us in this task we ask those readers who read languages other than English both to bring to our attention articles that may be of special interest and to assist us in the task of translation.

We have already begun discussion on expanding cooperation between *NST* and Marxist journals in other countries. The inclusion of bilingual abstracts (in English and French) in the current issue was the first result of our discussions with colleagues abroad. We hope that our journal, now entering its sixth year, will be increasingly relevant to the interests and needs of our readers.



# **Gramsci's Path through the Tension between "Absolute Historicism" and Materialist Dialectics**

## **Marxism as Historical Philosophy**

**András Gedó**

*We must hold to the conviction that it is the nature of truth to prevail when its time has come, and that it appears only when this time has come, and therefore never appears prematurely, nor finds a public not ripe to receive it; also, we must accept that the individual needs that this should be so in order to verify what is yet a matter for himself alone and to experience the conviction, which in the first place belongs only to a particular individual, as something universally held.*

Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*

### **1**

Can Hegel's idealistically conceived but profoundly realistic idea in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1977, 44) be materialistically reinterpreted and applied to Gramsci's theoretical work? This question of applicability to the corpus of Gramsci's philosophical work is relevant in two connections: that Hegelian thought belongs, on the one hand, to the core of the philosophical category of historicity and, on the other hand, to the core of

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the historicity of philosophy, and thus to the essential content of Gramsci's philosophizing, to the central element of his thinking—to the concept of historicity—around which his philosophical reflections and self-reflections revolve. The intellectual content of this concept determines the particular character of his creative work in the historical process of Marxist philosophy; he regards the concept as his key problem. Here, in the area of tension between “absolute historicism” and materialist dialectics, he traverses his paths of thought;<sup>1</sup> here the results and contradictions of his philosophical activity have located the possibilities of further intellectual progress and also of its partial failures.

The temporal coordinates of that breakthrough in truth in Gramsci's thinking are, however, difficult to determine. It must have come in a flash, when Gramsci was in the early phase of his intellectual journey;<sup>2</sup> that phase seemed past when he was working in prison on his theoretical writings. A decade after his death, this posthumously published writing began to acquire its historical influence. Norberto Bobbio, who describes his attitude to Gramsci with the dual formula of “intellectual sympathy and critical distance”<sup>3</sup> (where intellectual sympathy applies more to the personal mental activity while the critical distance relates to the Marxist approach of this activity), refers in retrospect to the 1930s and early 1940s and asserts that “Marxism was the only major trend of European thinking toward which the new generation had remained almost completely alien.” His description is also self-reflection: “Only when Antonio Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks* appeared did we find out that Marxism not only was not dead but also had stimulated one of the greatest philosophical works of those years” (1990, 99).

Particularly in the period just after its publication, the combination of two elements of this work was fascinating: on the one hand, the novelty and the standard of intellectual achievement of Marxist thinking; on the other, the personal fate of the author. The Marxist thinking in this work, even though it consisted of fragments, demonstrated its universal perspective and its cognitive capacity. The themes of these fragments moved, however, in an almost boundless field of reality and knowledge, and the fragmentary remarks allowed the contours of

an emerging new “great philosophy” to be perceived in the process of being thought through and summarized. That which is clearly worked out and that which is problematic stand alongside each other, together with reflections of the highest level of abstraction, with analyses of empirical conditions and individual historical events. Since the empirical conditions appeared in the context of changing totalities, the individual historical events and facts lost their congealed and isolated facticity. Gramsci’s personal fate, not mentioned in his theoretical work—in accordance with the maxim of objectivity, “*de nobis ipsis silemus*” [we are silent concerning ourselves]—was, nevertheless, implicit in it. This work, read together with Gramsci’s letters from prison, proved to be the product and evidence of a heroism without any heroic posturing, of a political and intellectual pathos that rejected every melodramatic gesture. Gramsci created this document of revolutionary conviction, of power of intellect and will, during a decade of fascist imprisonment under the double pressure of enforced isolation and illness and in a hopeless personal situation. Thus, a work was formed in which the author descended, with Faustian resoluteness, into the depths of philosophy and, at the same time, wandered through the broad landscapes of history and contemporary intellectual events. This thinking was in preparation for future activity. The discussions in the *Prison Notebooks*, however, never clearly indicated that Gramsci probably knew that this activity would no longer involve him personally. After the defeat of the political movement that was the main focus of his life and when his practical activity in this movement was made impossible, the meaning of his otherwise seemingly hopeless individual existence consisted of this probing intellectual work.

If, to be sure, this personal, existential connectedness of his paths of thought—for him, eminently political—is considered also in the course of later interest in Gramsci, there is nevertheless an attribute of the historicity of the ideas and works that does not lapse into the “immediacy” of their origin, such that their second life in the stream of that which is intellectually objectified separates the conceptual contents from the personal meaning that originally attached to them, from the individual life-destiny in

which they were embedded. The paths of thought are, in the given present, continued, altered, or abandoned, whereby the directions of the historical course of enduring ideas arise from the interference of their intellectually objectified contents with the historical logic, both social and cognitive, of the developments and problems in which they share and with which they are confronted as elements within a changed and changing context.

According to Walter Benjamin, “historical ‘understanding’ is to be grasped fundamentally as an after-effect of what is understood, and so that which was discerned in the analysis of the ‘after-effect of works,’ of ‘fame,’ is to be regarded in general as the basis of history” (1983, 574–75). In this cryptic version is a quite problematic thesis. If what is problematic therein overlaps with what is questionable and unclarified in Benjamin’s concept of history, there is also conceptualized here, nevertheless, a dialectical insight, namely, that the comprehension of the historicity of intellectual formations, which includes origin, effect, and “after-effect,” as well as the dimension of the future, is unfinished, involving neither partiality toward the past nor absorption in the given present.

The prehistory and the posthistory of some historical state of affairs appear by virtue of its dialectical representation in itself. Furthermore, every dialectically represented historical state of affairs is polarized and becomes a force field in which the tension between its prehistory and its posthistory is worked out. It becomes such, as relevance takes hold in it. And thus the historical state of affairs is polarized ever anew as prehistory and posthistory, but never in the same way.” (Benjamin 1983, 587–88)

If events, processes, and facts of the past are not *immediately* present in their posthistory in their *original* character, then the “after-effect” of intellectual structures (to a certain extent in a way similar to the technological means of labor and knowledge) brings with itself their *direct* presence in the later course of history. The comprehended historicity of the intellectually objectified contents of thinking is situated both in this dialectic

of cognition of historical events, processes, and facts as well as in dealing with the continuing presence of those contents of thinking, so that these two relationships are subsumed under *one* process of history (though branching and multilayered) along with its real contradictions. In the “after-effect” of Gramsci’s philosophical work we encounter the reflection of these contradictions—above all, the changed form of class struggles—the ups and downs and crises of the workers’ movement, the political currents and their needs, as well the pragmatic deliberations, advance, and stagnation in the development of Marxist thought, and the development of philosophy outside materialist dialectics. All of this is entangled in a unique texture of interpretations and criticisms. The history of arguments for and against Gramsci is interwoven with controversies about Marxism and, indeed, about philosophy as such. On occasion, Gramsci’s work is even considered a medium for carrying on debates that do not have their roots in that work.

Thus, Gramsci’s paths of philosophical thought are surrounded by an extensive thicket of interpretations and counterinterpretations, partly making those paths of thought more accessible to view, but also partly obscuring them. Since Gramsci’s paths of thought ran in a tension-filled, ambiguously marked, dense, and heterogeneous field, since they were sometimes circular and sometimes interrupted, since the representation of an idea was mixed with indications of mediations that limited, qualified, or even contradicted the idea, since quite a few paths of thought led to new questions or returned to the initial ones, since here and there both time and strength were lacking for thinking through particular ideas to the end, therefore the strong light that falls on *individual* routes or open spaces can leave the directions of the movement *as a whole* in relative darkness and even fail to illuminate them at all. For this reason as well there is the recurring necessity for a return to his original work, for a renewed experience of reading and comprehending, and for a repeated, bold endeavor to understand afresh, whereby each new act of philosophical understanding has to become aware of its own conceptual presuppositions and cannot step outside the history of that “after-effect.”

In the *Prison Notebooks*, Gramsci wrote:

The process of historical development is a unity in time through which the present contains the entire past but realizes, in the present, only that much of the past that is “fundamental,” leaving out the rest that is indiscernible and would be the real “essence.” . . . What has been “lost,” that is, what was dialectically not mediated in the historical process, was irrelevant in itself; it was random and contingent “slag,” chronicle but not history, a superficial episode.” (1976, 2:873)

If Gramsci’s reflection is valid only with a grain of salt—that which is forced into obscurity can later turn out to be relevant and can be recalled—his work, at any rate, stands up to the strict criteria that he himself formulated: his paths of thought and his ideas do not become lost and they are mediated dialectically in the historical process. In the drama of the “after-effect” of his work is encountered not only the drama of his paths of thought and of his fate but also the drama of the actual intellectual processes of history in which the posthumous existence of Gramsci’s world of ideas takes place.

## 2

Croce commented with sympathetic concern on the first edition of Gramsci’s letters from prison that Gramsci, “as a man of thought, was one of our own”—the highest praise from Croce’s pen. He not only showed moral respect for the personality of Gramsci and for his life of suffering but also praised his philosophical endeavors and abilities (insofar as these were manifested in the letters). Meeting with Croce’s approval was “the renewed concept of philosophy in its speculative and dialectical but not at all positivistic and classificatory tradition, the broad historical view, and the unity of erudition and philosophizing, so that the path that is opened can acknowledge all ideal categories in their positivity and autonomy” (*Quaderni della “Critica,”* 1947, no. 10, 86ff.). The interpretation that he seemed to inaugurate, that Gramsci was a Crocean in philosophy, was rescinded by Croce over the next few years in a vehemently

negative reaction to the publication of Gramsci's Croce-critique and philosophical reflections in the *Prison Notebooks*. Instead of counterarguments, Croce made unsubstantiated accusations against Gramsci—for example, that the principle of “practical need” prevented Gramsci “from investigating what he has declared to be nonexistent, that is, thinking and truth” (78–78).

Croce's reproaches concluded with the assertion that Gramsci, as a result of his political involvement and activity, was not able “to create a new kind of thinking” and “to carry out the wonderful revolution” attributed to him by Marxists (*Quaderni della “Critica,”* 1950, nos. 17–18, 231). Croce's harsh rejection of Gramsci's theoretical work was not only a retraction of his previous judgment recognizing and acknowledging in Gramsci a disciple of himself, it anticipated—together with his former polemic against Labriola—rejection of the establishment of an “Italian Marxism” shaped by idealist historicism in a line of thought essentially unbroken and continuous: Spaventa–Labriola–Croce and Gentile–Gramsci.

The attempt to separate Gramsci's personal fate, his moral outlook, and the confessional quality of his prison letters from the theoretical contents of the *Prison Notebooks* and to let the reference to the link between philosophy and politics in Gramsci's life and work count as refutation or as grounds for the disparagement of his philosophical ideas broke down in the late 1940s and in the 1950s. The earlier supremacy, if not virtual dictatorship, of historical idealism in the laical philosophy of Italy was, at this time, already being challenged; philosophies and schools of idealist historicism were regarded as in decomposition and decline. The process that was later was characterized as the death throes of Italian idealism had begun (see Garin 1985).

In the period of upturn in the revolutionary workers' movement, an attractiveness derived from the union between the course of personal life and the Marxist-oriented theoretical thinking and from the closeness of philosophy and politics in Gramsci, the effect of which far transcended the boundaries of the revolutionary workers' movement, elicited also respect for, and interest in, Gramsci's work by non-Marxists and resulted in their collaboration in research on Gramsci. Gramsci's theoretical

corpus thus became a component of the national philosophical culture. This same rise of the revolutionary workers' movement concurrently created a basis and motive for moving toward Marxism and its philosophy, a process that started to develop *before* Gramsci's theoretical work became known and that developed without its influence. Thus, philosophical approaches and conceptions arose that, in the way they posed problems and in their contents, arrived at results sometimes similar to Gramsci's, sometimes different, and occasionally even in direct opposition to them. Insofar as their development was at first set in motion by the experience of class struggles,<sup>4</sup> they admittedly stood under the historically mediated influence of Gramsci's political activity, which was integrated into the practice of the Marxist workers' movement. They were nevertheless theoretically formed outside the sphere of influence of Gramsci's philosophizing. Banfi, Geymonat, or della Volpe did not take Croce as a starting-point. The original distance from, or contrast with, idealist historicism could, under the influence of Marxism, be radicalized into a unsparing critique of Croce's philosophy.<sup>5</sup> The other philosophical source—phenomenology, logical positivism, or neo-Kantian anti-Hegelianism—implied assumptions and pitfalls different from Gramscian paths of thought.

In the 1950s and 1960s, Gramsci's work was dominant in Italian philosophy oriented toward Marxism and not only because of the special, fascinating effect of the interweaving of political and personal greatness with the form of the philosophical work, the intellectual fullness and diversity of which guaranteed its central status, but also because of its relevance to national political and intellectual history. Gramsci's work was directly current and present in the Italian workers' movement of the time. Two particular features in Gramsci's understanding of Marxism, which later turned out to be a problem for the interpretation of Gramsci and the theoretical incorporation of his philosophical work, had favored reception of Gramsci in the political and intellectual circumstances prevailing in Italy, a problem that remained in the background during the initial phase of the "after-effect" of Gramsci's corpus.

On the one hand, Gramsci was first of all a *political thinker* in



matters of theory. His conceptions and analyses, problem formulations, and observations in the *Prison Notebooks* took as themes, above all, the general nature and history of politics (which he comprehended in their dialectical identity), the connections of political theory and practice—which accounts for the key position of Machiavelli in his trains of thought—the categories of political theory (state, “civil society,” “hegemony,” “historic bloc,” and so on), a strategy of the “modern prince,” the social specificity of national history, and the sociohistorical content of the national spirit.

At the same time, Gramsci understood Marxism, first of all, as *philosophy*. Gramsci mediated these two factors—the predominance of political theory and the concept of Marxism as historical philosophy—by means of the idea of the *identity of philosophy and politics*.

On the other hand, Gramsci’s paths of philosophical thought were situated in the area of tension between “absolute historicism” and materialist dialectics. The concepts of philosophy, historicity, and practice with which he described his formulation of Marxism as philosophy remained in this area of tension, which also included an element of the inconsistent, free-floating, and incoherent. What was relevant in this philosophy consisted first and foremost in its paths of thought, whose principal direction from “absolute historicism” to materialist dialectics was a tendency (intersecting with countertendencies) of questions and quests for Marxist philosophy and of endeavoring to pursue this philosophy in its historicity and in its cognitive movement.

The first Gramsci conference at the end of the 1950s stood as a sign that the reception of, and occupation with, Gramsci was flourishing. Central in the interpretations of Gramsci were his Leninism, his Leninist conception of politics that implied a definite political activity, and his historical-political examination of Italian society and culture.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, Gramsci’s work was discussed in the context of the history of Italian philosophical thought without an attempt to reinterpret Gramsci as a Crocean and to devalue his Marxist approach to thinking or cast doubt upon it.<sup>7</sup> These expositions were brief summaries of the developing study of Gramsci and a lever to further work on

Gramsci's writings. The conference demonstrated the primacy of Gramsci's thought in Marxist-oriented philosophical activity together with its presence elsewhere. Also expressed, however, was a philosophical critique of Gramsci that although acknowledging his merit in understanding the social nature of knowledge, too quickly characterized him as an idealist who leaned toward empirio-criticism and foreshortened his paths of thought by reducing the content of his philosophy to "absolute historicism" and accused his philosophical approach of Hegelianism that tended by its appeal to science to call philosophy as such into question.<sup>8</sup> In a different interpretation and without a general critique of Gramsci's philosophy or a contrasting of science and philosophy, the opinion was also expressed that Marxist philosophical thought cannot be reduced to the range of problems delineated by Croce and Gramsci and that philosophical relationships to the natural sciences and mathematics, disregarded in the Italian tradition after the Renaissance, should be established (Geymonat 1958, 148). Although in the predominant portrayals of Gramsci, the tensions and the inconsistency in his philosophical work were scarcely described, still the contradictions about his thought and about materialist dialectics as such did come out, at first, at the margins of the discussion of Gramsci.<sup>9</sup> In the debates about Gramsci's theoretical work, the themes formulated in the late 1950s are regarded as key problems up to the present. In addition, to the opponents of Gramsci's Marxism, it remained crucial "to comprehend how profoundly Gramsci was a Leninist . . . and, conversely, to understand that he was completely rooted in the Italian political-philosophical culture" (Argeri 1986, 141).

The often-repeated observation that the standing of Gramsci's philosophical work reached its highest point in Italy in the 1960s is probably correct. Also at this time, however, its primacy in the intellectual life of the Left began to waver.<sup>10</sup> This contradiction-laden process was, at least in part, mediated and complicated by both the rise and fall (and the collapse in the 1970s) of philosophical "Gramscianism." The elusiveness of the concept and phenomenon of Gramscianism lay in the ambiguity of very term. "Gramscianism" did not have clear contours and boundaries—a

certain vagueness was attached to its essential character. Yet certain unmistakable features and implications were particular to it. Though seldom coherently formulated, “Gramscianism” nevertheless formed an intellectual, though loosely demarcated, current. There were some treatments where its theses were formulated perhaps more or less compendiously, but many writings (though mixed with other philosophical ideas) suggested tendencies and implications of “Gramscianism,” even while ignoring and occasionally rejecting this term. “Gramscianism” was not identical with Gramsci’s philosophical work but constituted a rather questionable interpretation of this work and an absolutizing of the validity and historical status of Gramsci’s thought.

If there were, admittedly, important differences of detail within “Gramscianism” in the understanding of Gramsci, there was, in any case, implicit in it the predominant tendency to emphasize what was *nonmaterialist*, what was *disposed toward idealism*, in Gramsci’s thought, to represent a distinctive *final result* as his own,<sup>11</sup> to misjudge or disregard Gramsci’s *paths of thought* insofar as they led in the direction of *materialist dialectics*, and to push into the background his thinking on the theory of dialectics. Gramsci’s philosophical work was understood and praised as a nonmaterialist type of Marxist philosophy; it was depicted as a general alternative to the materialist current of thought in Marxism. The consequence of this procedure was a threefold reduction and truncation: transformation of Gramsci’s philosophy was intermingled with distortion both of the paths and contents of his thought that were tending toward materialist dialectics or were situated within it and also of the tensions and unresolved problems in his philosophical work; the authentic problems of Marxist philosophy were restricted to the topics discussed in connection with Gramsci interpreted in this way; and the productive interrelationship between the reconstruction of Gramscian paths of thought and the study of other traditions, problems, and lines of thought in the development of Marxist philosophy, historiography, and economy—for example, the writings of Mehring, the economic and political literature of Rosa Luxemburg, and especially the philosophical ideas of Lenin—was

obstructed. If the problematical in Gramsci's identification of philosophy, history, and politics was disregarded or suppressed, the tendency still existed in "Gramscianism" to connect the philosophical interpretation of Gramsci directly to strategies and tactics of the political organization of the revolutionary workers' movement of the time, indeed to identify it with them. Although possibly corresponding pragmatically to this tendency, the attempt of "Gramscianism" to locate Gramsci's philosophy in Italian historicism as its Marxist version was, however, hardly consistent with it; and this version had to carry on a controversy with the reactionary and conservative variant on the common terrain of philosophical historicism.<sup>12</sup>

The relations between the "after-effect" of Gramsci's philosophy and the disintegration of historicist idealism had paradoxical and consequences. Gramsci's critique of Croce, together with the enhancement of the standing of Gramsci's philosophical work, were among the causes for the decline of historicist idealism. That disintegration attested, of course, to Gramsci's anti-Croce undertaking, but it also had a retroactive effect that limited the relevance of Gramscian philosophizing. In part, the effort of "Gramscianism" to place Gramsci's philosophy as a whole upon the common terrain of an idealistically molded philosophical historicism turned against Gramsci's thought; in part—also independently of "Gramscianism" and its inadequate understanding of Gramsci—the death throes and the demise of Italian idealism (as Garin later formulated succinctly this process of collapse) resulted in the development and growing influence of philosophical trends such as Husserlian phenomenology, the Frankfurt School, Nietzscheanism, twentieth-century positivisms (with whose problems Gramsci had not concerned himself) or conceptions opposed to his philosophy such as the critique of dialectics that came out of the della Volpe school or Althusser's antihistoricism and theoretical antihumanism.<sup>13</sup>

In this changed configuration, the preservation or recovery of Gramsci's philosophical topicality would have been possible only as a result of a separation of Gramsci's work from "Gramscianism," which might have taken place in the course of further pursuing Gramsci's paths of thought toward materialist

dialectics, of forsaking side-paths, and of renouncing an uncritical and unhistorical examination of Gramsci. This possibility could not be fully accomplished; it was carried out only fragmentarily. Many advocates of Gramsci's philosophical work incorporated critical motifs in their exposition of Gramsci and pointed out limitations and contradictions in his philosophy and in his understanding of Marxism.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, a movement of thought emerged that supported the materialism of Marxism but that developed alongside the "after-effect" of Gramsci while investigating its own complex of philosophical questions linked to results in the natural sciences, mathematics, etc. After the collapse of historicist idealism, this heterogeneous *anti-historicism* seemed, at least for a certain time, to have conquered—if not completely, nevertheless in considerable measure—the philosophical domain driven by a Marxist imperative. The spectrum of this philosophizing extended from skepticism about the concept of history, a skepticism that was paired with a certain affirmation of materialism and dialectics (but not of the concept of materialist dialectics),<sup>15</sup> to a deeply felt antidialectics (see, e.g., Colletti 1974). The shipwreck of "Gramscianism," its retreat, and its dissolution brought with them a definite separation of Gramsci's writings from "Gramscianism." However, the lines of fracture also cut into Gramsci's work: the union of philosophy and politics therein fell prey as well to the new divisions.<sup>16</sup> Many opponents of Gramsci's philosophy and of dialectics in general, who rejected from the beginning Gramsci's concept of Marxism as historical philosophy and considered it obsolete, seemed to accept some elements of Gramsci's theory of politics, but at the price of separating it in fragments from the philosophically influenced context of his revolutionary thought and thereby of fundamentally altering its meaning.

The waning of interest in Gramsci's philosophical work and the turning away from him may be attributed to the emerging crisis of the revolutionary workers' movement and the effort to resolve this crisis by abandoning Marxism and the perspective of revolution in society. "Rethinking Gramsci," which programmatically was already starting in the late 1970s, rejected the

pragmatic use of Gramsci's ideas for purposes of legitimization and "official founding of a 'Gramscianism.'" The proclaimed "distance" from Gramsci (Mussi 1977b, 1), however, introduced remoteness from Gramsci's Marxism, from his revolutionary attitude, and from his conception of politics. The development and ascendancy of this trend led to a renunciation of Marxism, accompanied by the maxim to place oneself beyond Marx (Schiafone, 1986, 42). The total withdrawal from Marx and Marxism was a radical shift from the idea that we are beyond Marx and Marxism to the claim that we are without Marx and Marxism, where the core of Marxism itself was called into question. Gramsci, too, was subsumed under this general negation of everything Marxist.<sup>17</sup> Since the endeavor was made not only to refute Marx but also "to eliminate [him] from the contemporary debate," the demand arose that "one must not by any means give the impression that one may be recovering a tradition. On the contrary, one should say that it has to do with the squandering of a legacy."<sup>18</sup> The fact that the legacy that one wanted to renounce was that of Marx and Gramsci attested in a negative way to Gramsci's work being part of the Marxist tradition of thought. If the paths of Marxism in Italian philosophy are regarded from the point of view of life-philosophy, primarily Heideggerianism, then, in such a picture, Gentile, who is said to anticipate Heidegger, assumes the key position, and Gramsci's philosophical work appears ephemeral (Giovanni 1983; Racinaro 1983).<sup>19</sup> The repeatedly established silence about Gramsci, his being forgotten<sup>20</sup>—which, of course, has not meant cessation of all study of Gramsci (see Liguori 1987) but rather displacement of his body of ideas from the central spheres of intellectual work and discussion—is a consequence of two processes joined together: dissolution of the former connection of the workers' movement with Marxism and a change in the intellectual situation (see Tosel 1989), namely, the rise of postmodern philosophy shaped by Nietzsche and Heidegger.

### 3

Is this silence, this being forgotten, the final act in the intellectual and political drama of Gramsci's philosophical work

or a scene from its dramatic “after-effect” in his homeland? If the history of the *international* impact of Gramsci’s philosophical writings is considered,<sup>21</sup> the impression—misleading even in Italian intellectual life—that Gramsci’s philosophy is definitely discarded vanishes. In this international context, the active “after-effect” of Gramscian thought appears. It becomes the focus of controversy. Philosophical activity around Gramsci’s work from new viewpoints produces interpretations differing from previous interpretations, and sets in motion new movements of thought in the categorial realm of materialist dialectics. At the same time, the tensions within Gramsci’s thought and the different possibilities of understanding that are in it are more sharply manifested in the international “after-effect.” There, his paths of thought are for the most part abbreviated insofar as they are limited to the *Prison Notebooks*. Neglect of the process of development that led to the mass of ideas in the *Prison Notebooks* implies detracting from the historicity of the exposition. If Gramsci’s thought becomes enmeshed in other philosophical traditions and other intellectual conditions, and if it is investigated in connection with other problems, it then becomes possible to move it beyond previously fixed patterns of interpretation (although these are reflected from time to time in the international history of Gramsci’s influence). Since in this international process the philosophical work of Gramsci is taken up anew and assimilated time and again, the work stands out separated from its national “after-effect,” so that gains and losses in the history of its national impact are more or less ignored.

The first phase of the international reception of Gramsci was dominated (as with the Italian “Gramscianism” of the time) by placing Gramsci’s thought in the tradition of a nonmaterialist Marxism. Within this tradition, it nevertheless occupied a specific place. In his exposition and critique of this tradition, Perry Anderson wrote of “his greatness, which sets him apart from all other figures in this tradition. Logically: for he alone embodied in his person a revolutionary unity of theory and practice, of the type that had defined the classical heritage. After Gramsci, no other Marxist in Western Europe was ever to repeat the same order of attainment” (1976, 45).

The concept of a dichotomy between a “critical Marxism” and a “scientific Marxism” persists to the present day, with Gramsci subsumed under “critical Marxism” (Gouldner 1980). Nevertheless, the second phase of the history of the international influence of Gramsci’s philosophy is marked by a direction of thought set apart from that dichotomous concept on the basis of independent reflection on Gramsci’s work in connection with the current problematic state of Marxist philosophy and of the discussions within and outside it. This direction of thought linked up to the subject of the Marxist concept of philosophy and the concept of Marxist philosophy. Changes in the way Gramsci is viewed in France reflected changes in the status of philosophical problems within (and outside of) Marxism, which was shaped first by an existential, anthropologizing interpretation, followed by antihistoricism and “theoretical antihumanism” or alternatively by the two together (Texier 1966; Tosel 1984). The wrestling with the Gramsci problematic inspired a search for a way to overcome this alternative.

A certain change occurred in the enduring West German debate about Gramsci when the debate overlapped with arguments about the nature of Marxist philosophy and about the de-philosophizing of Marxism.<sup>22</sup> Even the attempt at de-philosophizing invoked Gramsci. Putting in place a concept of Marxism without philosophy, however, required the suppression of Gramsci’s view of Marxism as historical philosophy. Active affirmation of the theory of materialist dialectics implied acceptance of the anti-idealist focus of Gramsci’s philosophy and its unity with the workers’ movement (see Holz and Sandkühler 1980b and Sandkühler 1980).

In contrast to the French and West German reception, which started with Gramsci’s philosophy and only later took up his theory of the state as a theme, the Gramsci surge in England was defined by debates on his theory of politics (although, from the beginning, these debates also had philosophical characteristics).<sup>23</sup> When part of these debates turned away from Marxism and toward post-Marxism in regard to the problematic of state and politics, a Marxist counter-critique then developed accordingly in this domain. Elements of philosophy were also included



in the analysis of “Gramsci’s antinomies” (Anderson 1977), in the objectively critical description of the “Gramscian challenge” (Hofmann 1984), and in the discussions of problems and contradictions in his political theory. Within these English-language discussions an independent and original philosophical investigation of Gramsci’s historicism finally arose that threw new and realistic light on Gramsci’s philosophy.<sup>24</sup>

The ebb and flow of the philosophical interest in Gramsci together with its direct political connections to Italian intellectual history differ from the corresponding interest and political connections in the international context. The two *fundamental* trends in the philosophical understanding of Gramsci that were developed in the dramatic “after-effect” of his work, are, in the last analysis, *common* to the national and international history of its influence. (They become evident with varying intensity in individual countries). They were stamped in their very approaches by *philosophical* contents that transcended national boundaries.

In the 1960s Enzo Paci and Norberto Bobbio came up with a new approach, Paci on the basis of his phenomenological outlook in life philosophy, and Bobbio within the framework of programmatically eclectic philosophizing. The crux of this interpretation was to establish an intellectual continuum of “Italian Marxism,” the principal characteristic of which was either nonmaterialism or antimaterialism. Paci placed Labriola close to Sartre, and placed Labriola, Gramsci, and Marx close to Husserl. A Husserlian concept of history was imputed to Labriola and Gramsci—“historical intersubjectivity constitutes, for all subjects, universally valid objectivity” (Paci, 1963, 327)—and, by means of this reversal of the decisively determinative relationship between objectivity and intersubjectivity, Labriola and Gramsci, as well as Marx, were subsumed under the *philosophy of subjectivity*. Dialectics was, to be sure, not removed from “Italian Marxism” or, rather, Marxism as such, but—in accordance with the tradition of irrationalizing and subjectivizing dialectics—its place was relocated outside the “objectivized sciences” into the immediacy of the self.<sup>25</sup> If one ought to “find once again the meaning of history and its truth in the actual present in which *we*

live,” then one could perhaps accord a phenomenological interpretation to Croce’s historicism (Paci 1963, 334). Meanwhile, the *dialectics of history*, for whose rational comprehension Labriola and Gramsci strove, was discarded.

Bobbio formulated his thesis of “Italian Marxism” without attributing to it elements of Husserlian phenomenology. His thesis, nevertheless, coincided with that of Paci insofar as Bobbio also accentuated what is antimaterialist as the common feature of “Italian Marxism.” He brought this into “the synthetic formula of humanistic historicism,” wherein Labriola and Gramsci were supposed to be found together with Mondolfo as well as with Gentile and Croce (Bobbio 1968, xlvif). In the early 1980s, Piccone linked both varieties of nonmaterialist and antimaterialist “Italian Marxism.” He revised much in the doctrines of his predecessors. (He did not want to consider, and thus accept, Marx or Gramsci as crypto-Husserlians; he did not discuss Husserlian phenomenology in his book about “Italian Marxism”; he admitted that Labriola acknowledged the concept of historical inevitability and the idea of historical continuity; and so on.) In essence, he expanded those theses into an interpretation that drew a continuous line from Spaventa through Labriola and Croce to Gramsci. Herein, the divergencies and oppositions between Croce and Labriola and between Gramsci and Croce were minimized to differing degrees of radicality: Croce deradicalized Labriola’s Marxism, and “Gramsci’s Marxism was essentially a reradicalization of Croce” (Piccone 1983, 103–4). According to this interpretation, Gramsci remained a Crocean to the end, “committed to his vision of a subjectivist and historicist Marxism,” that was “an almost direct continuation of the Italian tradition of social and political thought . . . from Spaventa to Labriola and Croce.” (162–63) Remaining ultimately relevant in Gramsci’s work was an “ethical vision trapped historically in an incompatible Leninist framework” and a dialectic, unlike the Marxist and the Hegelian, for understanding particularity, which presupposed an instrumentalist conception of concepts and that “life and subjectivity have uncontested primacy” (200). In addition, however, the constructing of this “Crocean Marxism” proved to be merely an intermediate stage

leading to displacement of this same “Crocean Marxism” by a “phenomenologically grounded dialectic.”<sup>26</sup>

In the other direction of activity around Gramsci’s philosophical work, the cognitive approach of *materialist dialectics* is regarded as the leading thread and focus of interpretation (see Mazzone 1980 and Baratta 1987). Also under way is an epistemic process of incorporating relevant elements of Gramsci’s philosophy into the conceptual inventory of materialist dialectics, of assimilating them in the developing theory of this dialectics (see Holz 1990a, 1:544ff.) and of situating Gramsci’s work in the history of dialectics (see Sichirollo 1983, 187ff.). Paradoxically, it was precisely Bobbio, one of the initiators of the contrary tendency, who, at the end of the 1950s, had raised the question of dialectics in Gramsci’s philosophy. “The central subject for the study of theoretical Marxism is always the subject of dialectics. What does ‘dialectics’ mean? Does the term ‘dialectics’ have an unambiguous sense? If it has several meanings, what is the relationship between the different meanings?” (1990, 25). Corresponding to this presentation of the problem, his query about dialectics in Gramsci was formulated in this way: “Is the concept of dialectics of importance in Gramsci’s thought? Is it a central or a marginal concept in his theoretical system? What use does he make of this concept and what problems does he have to solve with it?”

This kind of questioning made it possible to establish the “fundamental importance” of dialectics in Gramsci and to reconstruct the different meanings of the term “dialectics” in his writings. Since in this presentation of the problem, the (inherently necessary) description of the semantics of the term “dialectics” came to the fore, consideration of dialectics in Gramsci was limited to those places or expressions in which the term occurs. While dialectics was recognized and expounded as a key concept in later Marxist research on Gramsci—a key concept of both the interpretative theory present and the interpreted historical construction, that is, Gramsci’s philosophy—and while Gramsci’s philosophical work on the theory of materialist dialectics were discussed, the concept of dialectics was considered with the different meanings of this term but without

using it. Comprehension of Gramsci's paths of thought in the area of tension between "absolute historicism" and materialist dialectics requires operation with concepts to which a certain ambivalence is specific in this area of tension. This ambivalence is superseded, however, in the historicist perspective of the philosophical theory of Marxism. In the *Prison Notebooks*, Gramsci mentioned his own view that Marxism is a historical philosophy of "absolute historicism" (1976, 2:1437, 3:1826–27), by which he wanted to articulate not only his relationship to Croce's thought but also, even more, the critical distance he had established in relation to this thought. Croce concurrently employed the same term, "absolute historicism" (with a different conceptual content) as a designation for his idealist philosophy (Croce 1941). If Gramsci's paths of thought are examined, the double meaning of "absolute historicism" indicates different phases of these paths of thought, as well as the strained relationship in the attachment to Croce's historicism and in Gramsci's break with him (which became predominant in Gramsci's thought). The other pole in the area of tension—materialist dialectics—is not present as a term in Gramsci's reflections; the explanation for the absence of this term lies in its philosophical content, above all a certain lack of clarity on the problem of materialism. Even so, materialist dialectics—insofar as the realist, materialist study of history and knowledge finally gains the upper hand in Gramsci's work (without completely removing what is idealist)—is inherent in his philosophy and determines its orientation (see Morena 1990).

#### 4

Since the historical self-understanding of materialist dialectics embraces Gramsci's questions about, and quest for, Marxism as historical philosophy and since it also reflects the historical and epistemic context of the development of Marxist thought, then that awareness becomes a constitutive factor in recognition of this development, to which life-work, ideas, and discussions also contribute. This development originated prior to and contemporaneously with Gramsci—but either unknown to him or only partially considered by him—and continued after Gramsci

but without taking cognizance of his paths of thought. In face of the seemingly philosophical (and political) *irrelevance* of Gramsci and the dismissal of his theoretical work, the attempt at re-establishment of “Gramscianism” as a countermovement could hardly be successful. Gramsci’s *relevance* is established through the work carried out on the theory of materialist dialectics and the support given it. The concept of *real and cognitive historicity*, with which Gramsci wrestled, stands nowadays at the center of philosophical activity involving, among other things, discussions about realism and the philosophical reflection of scientific knowledge. The relationship between *theory and history*, likewise one of the principal themes once considered to have been solved in Gramsci’s thought, is today a fundamental point of contact between philosophy and the historical sciences. Thinking about the *concept of philosophy*—a recurring problem in Gramsci’s paths of thought—is considered to be a task for self-reflecting philosophizing today, a perennial philosophical matter of debate that is currently taking on new contours.

The relevance of Gramsci’s investigations on the historical philosophy of Marxism acquires dramatic significance in the state of weakness, crisis, and defeat of the Marxist workers’ movement, where the influence of Marxism has not only diminished drastically but occasionally seems almost to disappear, where shock, lethargy, and disappointment also threaten to overwhelm the consciousness of many Marxists, to reduce the possibility of understanding the changes, obstruct critical self-reflection, and cause thinking to oscillate between nostalgia and resignation. The *concept of the historicity of Marxist philosophical theory* implies in this situation critical continuity *and* the undertaking of a new beginning after the decisively clear historical retrogression. This is the alternative to that *ahistorical pragmatism* that has permeated the treatment of Marxist philosophy, indeed of Marxism as a whole, for many decades and that brought with it fatal atrophy and erosion discrediting all that fell under its influence. The thematization in Gramsci’s work of the historicity of Marxism as philosophy, the explanation of the paths of thought leading to and within that work, along with their enormous difficulties and errors, and Gramsci’s effort to engage

the most difficult theoretical problems and to think through and follow through the arguments with the strongest opposing positions, all of this testifies to the fact that Marxism, taken seriously, was and is distinct from ahistorical pragmatism, and that to become aware of the epistemic course of materialist dialectics both requires and enables one to overcome this ahistorical pragmatism.

In Gramsci, the identification of philosophy, politics, and history involves a complex and, in certain respects, a questionable construction—among other things, economy as reality and as theory seems unable to find its appropriate place in this identity). It was not thought of in terms of a pragmatic subsumption of philosophy under tactical considerations. Since politics was understood here as historical action with historical objectives and a historical tempo, that is, as history, this identification was also directed against immediate political tendentiousness in viewing historical facts (Gramsci 1976, 2:1162). In his polemic against Proudhon and Gioberti's "mutilation of Hegel and dialectics," and against the idea and practice of "restoration of revolution," Gramsci appealed to Hegel's dialectics: "Hegelian dialectics, though in a speculative form, does not allow such restraints and mutilating compulsions. Thereby it grants no space to the irrationalism and the arbitrariness that are contained in Bergson's conception." Gramsci disapproved of the philosophical glorification of direct "politics": "In real history, the dialectical process breaks into innumerable partial elements; the mistake consists in elevating that which is merely immediate to a methodological factor" (2:1222).

Gramsci also applied the same insight to the understanding of Marxist philosophy in that he ascertained "remnants of a mechanistic view" where "one speaks of theory as 'completion' or 'accessory' of practice, of theory as a handmaiden of practice" (2:1386). Gramsci's critique of textbook-style systematization with its scholastic expositions, its ahistorically vacuous and abstract generalities, its assertions expressed without explication and argumentation, its vulgarizing simplifications, its seeming finality, and its subordination of the theoretical to the didactic—this critique anticipated the dangers of an immensely

swollen ahistorical and pragmatic degradation of Marxist philosophy.

Thinking back on Gramsci's paths of philosophical thought is not a return to them. "Absolute historicism," as represented by Croce and Gentile, has collapsed. The philosophies of Nietzsche and Heidegger, Husserl and Wittgenstein, Popper and Quine involved topics that did not lie on Gramsci's paths of thought. Nevertheless, looking backward to Gramsci's paths of thought is today, in three different respects, a looking forward to future trends of development in Marxist thought. In the first place, reflection on these paths of thought is fruitful insofar as Gramsci came to the realization that Marxist philosophy is unique, original, and comprehensive. In the second place, his examination of nonidealist and anti-idealist dialectics was valid. In the third place, Marxism as historical philosophy was for him organically connected with the existence and activity of the workers' movement that would revolutionize society, of the collective "modern prince." Even though contact and unity between Marxism and the workers' movement today is severed in many places, Gramsci's paths of thought anticipate and inspire the search for possible ways to reestablish and develop the position of Marxism (and its philosophy) in the workers' movement (see Holz 1990b), to revive and reconstruct Marxist practice (see Catone 1988 and Preve 1989).

Gramsci's work originated in the alternation of defeat, revolutionary upturn, then defeat once again—the last being dominant during his lifetime. The victory that he experienced and pondered upon as a world-historical turning point and that shaped his attitude in the long period of the second defeat was the October Revolution. At the time of the international, as well as Italian, upsurge of revolutionary forces, when Croce's idealist historicism still held Gramsci in its philosophical spell, he came to a realization that was based upon an already not quite Crocean concept of the dialectics of history and that also involved the possibility of later setbacks and defeats: "History, which is a permanent and fundamental activity of the most manifold, unifying energy, does not wane and weaken because of the destruction of individuals, institutions, and organizations in possible battles"

(1984, 601). Defeats of the workers' movement and democracy, together with seizure of power and rule by fascism, were not, therefore, for Gramsci motivations for weakening his Marxist outlook, because from the outset he considered the setbacks as elements of the dialectics of history. "I have become convinced that even if everything is lost or seems lost one should calmly return to work and take it up from the beginning" (1975, 126), wrote Gramsci in his first year of imprisonment. His philosophical ideas, which turned away conceptually from idealist historicism and moved in the direction of materialist dialectics, also motivated Gramsci's personal conduct and perspective on life. The nonidealist concept of history was the framework for an idea of immortality that was understood in an inner-world sense, "in the sense of realism and historicism," an idea that bestowed meaning on the individual, seemingly absolutely isolated and hopeless activity of intellectual work in that it made one aware of the connection of this activity with the objective, universally historical process (1975, 805).<sup>27</sup> Gramsci acted under the most difficult circumstances, something which Brecht considered as exigency: "*Life in the grand manner* . . . Not to be at one with oneself, to be thrust into crises, to transform small changes into large ones, etc.; one cannot only observe all this but also do it." (Brecht 1971, 88–89).<sup>28</sup> Life in the grand manner signified for Gramsci, above all else, preserving the identity of a human being "who has his profound convictions and does not change them for any price in the world" (1975, 126) and who has attempted to draw conclusions from defeat, in that he has thought about the coming historical process, the continuation of class struggles, and the furtherance of philosophical research and discussion—not about and for a future that is illusory and unidentifiable, but rather one that emerges in the course of history and is comprehensible. Gramsci's dictum about pessimism of the intellect and optimism of the will was regarded more as a maxim of living than as a theoretical assertion. It signified, on the basis of his own personal experience of life, the precept that he formulated on his own to reckon with the graver possibility and to adjust to this in thought, coupled with the determination to persevere even with the occurrence of this worse possibility, in the conviction



that this perseverance, this optimistically motivated action, is historically meaningful. This presupposed an ultimately optimistic view of history with regard to the perspective on struggle, to which Gramsci was committed with his entire being.<sup>29</sup>

In view of the present intellectual conjuncture, it is clear that in regard to the dialectical philosophy of Marxism with which he occupied himself, Gramsci's paths of philosophical thought, the fortunes of his theoretical work, and the history of its influence are evidence of the validity of Hegel's insight: "We must hold to the conviction that it is the nature of truth to prevail when its time has come" (1977, 446). An incomplete historicity is characteristic of this truth. Time has historical scales.<sup>30</sup> And this breakthrough, interrupted and slowed by setbacks but not thwarted, is the product of the combination of experience and concentrated intellectual activity, of the capacity for self-reflection, of persistence, and of starting out anew, which, through a dialectical process, is identical with resuming one's journey.

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## NOTES

1. The term "absolute historicism" refers to the idealism of Croce, which was kindred though not identical with historicist idealism in German philosophy in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Dilthey, Simmel, and others), and which had a considerable influence on Collingwood. Croce's philosophy, as well that of Gentile, was frankly idealist. Croce asserted the primacy of history conceived as thought and deed as a manifestation of spirit. He reduced all reality and knowledge to history understood in this sense. Gramsci's "absolute historicism" differed from that of Croce. Interwoven in the changing Gramscian content of "absolute historicism" were his criticisms of Croce, along

with his partial continuity with Croce's thinking, though the criticism became predominant.

2. Gramsci's ideas, expounded in his special kind of journalism with a scope that reflected political events—developments in the international, Italian, and local workers' movements, and personal observations extending into concise philosophical essays and theater reviews—had an influence during his lifetime primarily within the Italian workers' movement, but even at that time, went beyond it. Gobetti, the supporter of a "liberal revolution," viewed Gramsci as the "theorist of revolution," considered him to be one of his most important partners in intellectual discussions, and also discerned what was philosophical in Gramsci's views published at the time (1960, 282ff., 644ff., 1002ff.). For the relationship between Gramsci and Gobetti, see Spriano 1977. For reflections on Gramsci and his writings during his lifetime, see Liguori 1984.

3. "It is, incidentally, significant," declares Lentini, who was rather critically oriented toward Gramsci and toward Marxism as such, and who emphasized Gramsci's attachment to Croce, "that Croce excluded precisely this extensive and friendly review, which was virtually an impassioned salutation offered to the disciple who was lost and then regained, from *Nuove and Terze pagine sparse* [his last collections of articles—A. G.], while he incorporated in these collections only those defensive or critical comments which he wrote from 1948 to 1950 about the successive volumes of *Quaderni*" (1967, 14).

4. "The philosophers who can be called Marxists today in Italy arrived at Marxism primarily through the experience of political and social struggle," maintained Antonio Banfi; "precisely on account of the basically practical source of their orientation, they came, with respect to theory, from different trends and currents of contemporary philosophy" (Geymonat, 1976, 743).

5. "Spiritualism is, in reality, the *caput mortuum* or the program of degeneration of idealism," Banfi wrote in his treatise, published in 1947, "Truth and Respect for Humanity in Contemporary Thought" (1965, 101). He dealt with three Italian versions of idealism, namely, those of Martinetti, Gentile, and Croce. In essential respects, there was a fundamental convergence in Gramsci's and Banfi's critiques of Croce (although Banfi's exposition arose independently of Gramsci's, since the *Prison Notebooks* was still unpublished at that time). They coincided in the definition of the sociohistorical standpoint of Croce. In addition, according to Banfi, Croce was in a certain sense "*magister Italiae*, but the teacher of a bourgeois intellectual Italy" (120). Banfi, who openly entertained doubts about Croce's philosophical originality and greatness, explained in these observations that Croce's historical idealism was a fundamental step backward in comparison to Hegel's dialectical philosophy of objective spirit, that Croce betrayed Hegel's insight into historicity, especially of philosophy, that history in Croce proved to be antihistory, that spiritualistic historicism did not at all live up to its promises, and that it led into the emptiness of the subjectivism of individual psychology. Banfi's critical reflection on Croce's 1917 interpretation of Marx turned out to be a harbinger of an effort developing later to bring Croce and Marx (by means of Gramsci) to the

common denominator of idealist historicism. Banfi noticed and disapproved of Croce's "tendency to reduce Marxism to a general and neutral historicism," namely to Croce's historicism, which overlapped with the "conservative neutrality of liberalism" (156).

6. See Togliatti (1967, 135ff., 135ff. For Togliatti's interpretation of Gramsci, see Holz (1980) and Spriano (1981, 778ff.). For critical reflections on Togliatti's interpretation of Gramsci, which are not limited to political objections but also contain philosophical arguments such as calling into question the accentuation of Gramsci's closeness to neoidealism, see Baratta (1987, 241ff.). Togliatti's understanding of Gramsci has been for many years the subject of fierce political, historical, and philosophical debates on the fate of Marxism, Gramsci's work, and the workers' movement in Italy. This understanding functions also as a recurring theme in the international discussion of Gramsci. For attacks on Togliatti's interpretation of Gramsci from the standpoint of a general critique of Marxism, see Piccone (1983). My article disregards the directly political, strategic, and tactical motives and consequences of interpretations of Gramsci. This arises not only from the philosophical way of posing the problem in the article and the impossibility of describing those relationships within a limited scope, but the history of ideas and problems itself implies such a separation. Whereas Gramsci's work became a component and an object for reflection in international intellectual processes, those earlier directly political motives and consequences either receded into the background—especially in the reception and exploration of his philosophical thought—or they were lost.

7. "Apart from an initial sympathy, Gramsci's 'Croceanism' consisted in the fact that he systematically 'combated' Croce, because he considered Croce the most important (and 'most dangerous') voice in Italian life," stated Eugenio Garin, himself no Marxist, whose labors on the history of Marxist philosophy in Italy nevertheless belong to the most important results of research on Labriola and Gramsci. "What was effectively said of Gobetti with a Gobettian mode of expression can be said still more strongly of Gramsci: 'he has read the Marx of Lenin and not the Marx of Croce; he has therefore not thrown Marx overboard. Yet, even more should it be said: Gramsci has neither thrown Marx overboard nor glorified him; he has rendered him into the Italian 'vernacular'" (1958, 9, 11).

8. See Tronti (1958, 195ff.). Later, Christian Riechers made the presumed "unbroken coherence of the theoretical approach" in Gramsci, and thus the ostensibly uninterrupted preservation of his original idealist approach, the guiding thread of his book on Gramsci (1970). It is a symptom of the confused nature of the controversy over interpretations of Gramsci that Franco Fergnani, in his dispute with Riechers's book, admittedly rejected the picture of a diametrically opposite idealist, subjectivist Gramsci, but nevertheless accepted several important components of the disputed interpretation, and highlighted in his critical exposition idealist (or, rather, idealistically interpreted) elements of Gramsci's work. However, he questioned the idealism of these elements, in view of which he presented the thesis that idealism, insofar as it exists in

Gramsci, is predominantly solely metaphorical. In contrast to some later notions of Gramsci's reformism and Croceanism, Fergnani nevertheless maintained that Gramsci was "indisputably a dialectical and revolutionary thinker" (1974).

9. What came to light on the margin of the general discussion of Gramsci in Tronti's critique of him had a prior history in the journal *Società*. See Bedeschi (1985, 200f.). The basic motives for Tronti's critique of Gramsci were derived from Galvano della Volpe's ideas, whose *Logik als positive Wissenschaft*—a rebuttal of idealist historicism and of the putatively Hegelian concept of dialectical theory—appeared in the course of the 1950s in two editions. This *Logik als positive Wissenschaft* was, without any direct criticism of Gramsci, also an argument with several of the philosophical approaches of the *Prison Notebooks*.

10. For philosophical discussions about Marxism from differing standpoints, especially about Gramsci's work in the Italy of the 1960s, see Badaloni (1971), Luporini (1974, xxxii ff.), and Bedeschi (1985, 213ff.).

11. Gramsci sent an admonition in advance of notebook 10, in which he discussed philosophical subjects: "The remarks contained in this number, as in the other numbers, have been written hastily in order to record fleeting ideas. All of them should be examined and checked carefully, because they doubtlessly contain inaccuracies, erroneous ways of approach, and anachronisms. They have been written without my having the books referred to, so it is possible that they must be radically corrected by editorial inspection in case just the opposite of what is written turns out to be true" (1976, 1:1365).

12. Luporini retrospectively asserted in the middle of the 1970s that in this interpretation Gramsci's actual thinking was confounded with a general interpretation "formed directly on the terrain of *historicism*. Historicism against historicism, Marxist and revolutionary historicism against bourgeois and idealist (conservative or reactionary) historicism. The most antispeculative historicism as *true* interpretation of Marxism" (1974, xxviii).

13. For Althusser's critique of Gramsci, see Althusser 1968, 160ff.

14. At the end of the 1960s, Badaloni already established that in regard to the economic aspect of Marxism we "do not find in Gramsci an original formulation. There is with him such great wealth regarding other aspects (at least insofar as they concern the political struggle in certain types of society) that we should have the courage to say that this does not wholly matter. Otherwise, in fact, we risk idealistically abridging the wealth and significance of Gramsci's contribution and losing an essential component of the theoretical elaboration of Marxism" (1969, 167).

15. See Luporini (1974, xxxii ff.). In this perspective, shaped by philosophical structuralism, the situation of Gramsci's philosophy changed. Even in the attempt at philosophical rehabilitation of his writings, the theoretical activity of Gramsci was localized in the "rectification of Marxism in the Second International." In Gramsci's defense, Luporini offered the following argument: "He would never have thought that structures should be ignored; this is absolutely a mystification of Gramsci's way of posing a problem" —an inherently relevant

remark that indicates, however, the change in the atmosphere in relation to Gramsci (Luporini 1977, 41).

16. For changes in interpretations of Gramsci in the 1970s, see Prestipino 1976. In the middle of the 1980s, Badaloni reported on the dispute over Gramsci between those who emphasized what is philosophical in his work and those who regarded as basic the smooth transition from rejuvenated liberalism to a new rendering of Marxism (Badaloni 1985a, 22).

17. See Veca (1980, viii f). According to Veca, “the differences, which at times are very striking and of great consequence”—for example, between Gramsci and Bukharin, Althusser and Plekhanov, Lenin and Labriola, and so on—“are not decisive from a conceptual standpoint. There is undoubtedly a core of commonly shared assumptions concerning which variations are possible. It is this core which, in my opinion, is unsatisfactory” (ix).

18. By Mario Tronti (1984, 17), for example.

19. For a Marxist critique of this mode of examination, see Mazzone 1984.

20. “Whereas the philosopher B. De Giovanni observed in 1984 the suspension of ‘reflection’ on Gramsci, the historian P. Spriano asked several years later: ‘Did Antonio Gramsci really exist? How many centuries ago? . . . By now, hardly anyone reads his writings’” (De Domenico, manuscript, 30).

21. For certain aspects of this reception, especially in political and political-theoretical perspectives, see Badaloni 1985, Aricó 1985, and “Gramsci nel mondo” 1987.

22. At the beginning of the West German discussion of Gramsci in the late 1960s, Abendroth formulated an approach for an adequate understanding of Gramsci, according to which Gramsci was a theorist “who grasps Marxism as a dialectical philosophy of history and therefore in a politically up-to-date manner, as a unity of theory and practice in the revolutionary activity of the working class” (1967, 9). See also Holz 1972.

23. On the reception of Gramsci in England, see Mussi (1977a, 21–22). The unevenness of the philosophical discussion of, and occupation with, Marxism produced quite paradoxical phenomena. Whereas the acceptance of Althusser in Italy played a part in the abandonment of “Gramscianism,” the involvement with Althusserian ideas in England was not only one of the motives for the critique of philosophical interpretations of Marxism that were idealist and historicist, but “Gramscianism” appeared later as victor over the failed “Althusserianism.” “If the history of Marxist theory in the 1960s can be characterized as the domination of ‘Althusserianism,’ then we have now doubtlessly entered into a new phase: into that of ‘Gramscianism’” (Mouffe 1979, 1). Also among the paradoxes is the fact that in its reception in English-speaking lands, Althusser’s earlier critique of Gramsci and the philosophical opposition between “Althusserianism” and “Gramscianism” were so extensively relativized that the idealist tendency of Althusserian philosophy was recognizable. Thus, Alex Callinicos declared at the beginning of the 1980s that “there is Althusser’s idealism, in particular his tendency to collapse the base into the superstructure. . . . Having first reduced the relations of production to intersubjective relations, it is a small step to treat the latter as forms of

consciousness and thus collapse the base into the superstructure, inverting Marx so that consciousness determines social being” (Callinicos 1982, 76).

24. See Morera 1990. Morera’s line of reasoning also bears out the dominating status of political theory in Gramsci’s work. “Gramsci’s *Prison Notebooks* are mostly concerned with political, cultural, and historical issues. His comments on philosophical issues are not negligible, but they are often inconsistent. They are also easily misunderstood, as he used a language that suggested Croce’s influence, and he often had recourse to the arguments of idealist philosophers in his critique of positivism and vulgar materialism. Although his philosophy offers some interesting suggestions for the study of social phenomena, his most important work, it is generally agreed, relates to political theory” (189). Morera shows that Gramsci’s historical and political analyses—for example, of the *Risorgimento*, of Americanism and of Fordism—are much closer to the conception of historical materialism in “classical Marxism” than to the idea of the primacy of the “superstructure.” This affirms the message of Morera’s book, which offers an important new voice in the philosophical discussion of Gramsci. However understandable and justified may be the aversion to hypertrophizing the philosophical presentation of Gramsci and to restyling it in an independent form of philosophy by means of “Gramscianism,” the arguments of Morera’s book also demonstrate that the significance of the subject matter and influence of Gramsci’s philosophy can hardly be reduced to proffering some interesting suggestions for the study of social phenomena. The concluding sentence of the book takes this fact more fully into account: “Gramsci’s political theory is his most important and lasting contribution to Marxist thought; his historicism, however, is an interesting attempt to reconstruct historical materialism that cannot be lightly dismissed” (193).

25. “Dialectics was even identified here with the crisis-consciousness that was critical of science. One of the most important consequences of phenomenological experience manifested itself in the rediscovery of dialectics. Husserl knew that the crisis of the sciences is the crisis of humanity” (Paci 1963, 335).

26. See Piccone (1988, 9ff). “But historicist Marxism, like the Leninist realism it was meant to replace, is an ‘apocalyptic,’ dogmatic solution. It argues that knowledge of history is possible because of the possession of the appropriate consciousness” (D’Amico 1988, 32).

27. This idea had engrossed Gramsci much earlier. See Brecht (1982, 504). There, Gramsci connected the problem of immortality to worldly consciousness. Later, he connected consciousness to the objective process of history, which transcends individual will and personal life.

28. Brecht’s philosophical deliberations in the 1930s and early 1940s—deliberations for which (as is the case with Gramsci’s notes) the attempt at canonization and at inflated reformulation in a coherent, philosophical, total conception or in a substitute is scarcely appropriate—exhibit certain contrasts, yet also parallels, with Gramsci’s philosophical reflections. The contrasts are due in part to the fact that Brecht emphatically insisted upon *materialism*,

exposed and ridiculed every idealism, including that which was disguised and not openly expressed, and consistently adhered to the primacy of economic factors as the basic principle in his theoretical thinking as well as in his artistic creation. Though unintended, this can be regarded as a corrective to the partially unsettled character of the problem of materialism in Gramsci. Brecht's deliberations about *superstructural phenomena*, about what is *anticipatory* in them, and about "*engaged thinking*" show definite correspondences, meanwhile, with Gramsci's conceptual endeavors. The intellectual attitude of the two, in view of the defeat of the revolutionary workers' movement in the face of fascism, was related in an essential way. "Probably no respectable revolutionary was diverted from his cause by the appearance of fascism, but, in addition, no one will have had his views untested," (1982, 93). Brecht's maxim was in agreement with Gramsci's outlook. The parallels originated from the central part of the intellectual work of Gramsci, the practitioner and theorist of politics, and Brecht, the poet and "writer of fragments." *Dialectics* was, in the last analysis, the common axis around which their philosophical ideas moved.

29. Gramsci's confidence in history, which rejected any fatalism and shallow, linear evolutionism and which embraced the dialectical idea of historical necessity, was one of the factors that differentiated his concept from Benjamin's 1930 concept of history. This divergence was linked with other disparities (in the attitude to theological matters and in the conception of the possibilities of discursive thought and of the nature and explicability of what is philosophical). The differences remove, however, neither the junctures and parallels of certain of their problems and ideas, nor the intrinsic value of Benjamin's insights.

30. Gramsci made the following projection: "A historical epoch begins intellectually with Marx, which will probably last centuries" (1976, 2:882).

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## Commentaries

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### **On Holz's *Downfall and Future of Socialism***

I applaud your publication of the essay by Hans Heinz Holz, *The Downfall and Future of Socialism*. Critiquing the experience of socialist construction from a *socialist* Marxist-Leninist standpoint is one of the vital tasks of this period. The collapse of socialism has not refuted the theory of Marxism-Leninism but, on the contrary, has brilliantly confirmed it.

I do feel that in your foreword you may have unwittingly contributed to the erroneous idea spread by some liberals and reformists that the idea of proletarian dictatorship was first put forward by Lenin. They do this as part of an effort to create the image of Marx as a scientific, scholarly social scientist, devoid of revolutionary content and acceptable to certain sections of the bourgeoisie and counterposed to the portrait of a ruthless Lenin who instituted a totalitarian dictatorship.

It is useful, therefore, to cite Marx's March 5, 1852, letter to Weydemeyer in which he states:

I do not claim to have discovered either the existence of classes in modern society or the struggle between them. . . . My own contribution was 1. to show that the *existence of classes* is merely bound up with *certain historical phases in the development of production*; 2. that the class struggle necessarily leads to the *dictatorship of the proletariat*. (*Karl Marx and Frederick Engels: Collected Works*, vol. 39 [New York: International Publishers 1982], 62–63)

Furthermore, in Engels's 1891 preface to the third German edition of Marx's *Civil War in France* he concludes:

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Of late, the German philistine has once more been filled with wholesome terror at the words: Dictatorship of the Proletariat. Well and good, gentlemen, do you want to know what this dictatorship looks like? Look at the Paris Commune. That was the Dictatorship of the Proletariat. (*Karl Marx and Frederick Engels: Collected Works*, vol. 27 [New York: International Publishers 1990], 191)

Many Communist parties (including the CPUSA [see this issue of *Nature, Society, and Thought*, pages 89–90, editor’s note 2]) have indeed become filled with terror at this indispensable component of the Marxist theory of the state without which, as Lenin has shown, one cannot be a Marxist:

Recognition of the *dictatorship of the proletariat* . . . is what constitutes the most profound distinction between the Marxist and the ordinary petty (as well as big) bourgeois. This is the touchstone on which the *real* understanding and recognition of Marxism should be tested (*State and Revolution*, in *V. I. Lenin: Collected Works*, vol. 25 [Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1964], 417).

Joe Kaye  
New York

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## Background Materials

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### Everyday Racism: Recent German Experience

Ute Osterkamp

The concept *race* has been defined by Robert Miles (as by others) as a social construction assuming a biological reality subsequently used to explain or justify social conditions or differences (1990). Historically we may note that societies tend to interpret their problems in a biological, and hence racist, manner especially when their structures are formally egalitarian, with the status of individual members no longer set by birth or profession, but—at least apparently—dependent on their individual capacity and skill in surpassing competitors. By claiming biological or racial reasons for superficial differences, the winners can consider their opponents as inferior and justly subject to exploitation.

Racism, therefore, is always a defensive process, and is combined with exclusion and discrimination directed not against individuals as such, but as members of the excluded group. Balibar has pointed out that not “an Arab” or “a black person” is a favorite object of racial discrimination, but “Arabs,” “drug addicts,” “criminals,” or “rapists” (1990c, 63). Such subsuming of people within a group makes them anonymous and de-individualized, denying them the protection normally extended to individuals

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individuals personally known and evaluated by us.

Segregating “foreigners,” however, does not mean severing all contacts with them, but only subordinating their interests to those of the dominating group. The German economy, for example, cannot do without “foreign workers.” On the contrary, it is interested in their continuing availability, which is ensured by the position of relative deprivation of rights in which the immigrants must live. Native-born workers, therefore, often view the intensified exploitation of immigrants in quite an ambiguous way: either as a privilege for themselves or as a danger to rights they have acquired. At the same time they blame for underselling their labor on the employment market those whom they have forced into this desperate situation by withholding their solidarity.

The central problem of racism is not “race,” but rather the general tendency to imbue all problems with a racial content; this interpretation is supported by the fact that the objects of racism can be exchanged arbitrarily. Their choice depends merely on the respective circumstances and seldom has anything to do with “differences” of the segregated people. Thus the Nazis had first to establish the foreignness of Jews before they could be segregated. (The difficulty in recognizing their basic “difference,” moreover, could be interpreted as a special sign of Jewish maliciousness.) Some can always be classified as “niggers,” according to Wallerstein (1990a, 45). If there happen to be no blacks around to take up this role, then “white niggers” are conjured up.

### ***“Enlightened” racism***

Interpreting social repression as natural underdevelopment, typical for racist thought, has recently been somewhat modified. “Old” racism used to speak of superior and inferior races. Today we tend to refer more to the diversity in culture and lifestyle, which are considered to be of equal value, but need not correspond with one another and therefore should be kept apart. The quintessence of such “enlightened” racism runs as follows: If we wish to prevent racism, we must observe strict segregation and avoid an abstract antiracism that would strain the limits of natural tolerance. Thus, according to Balibar, racist theories, which



actually have the goal of segregation, can masquerade as genuine antiracist convictions and humanism (1990a).

This new look adapts itself adroitly to changes in the political situation. Whereas during the age of colonial expansion, “natives” of occupied territories had to be classified as primitive in order for the invasion of their countries to be interpreted as help for underdeveloped indigenous populations, nowadays things have changed. Due to the systematic exploitation of the Third World by the industrialized nations, millions are forced to leave their home countries to seek work in richer nations. This “influx,” however, can only be checked with a good conscience if the rejected are considered as equals under the assumption that they can look after themselves despite the extensive destruction of their means of livelihood (cf. Balibar 1990b, 28; Finkelkraut 1989).

The notion of being master in one’s own house is the core of every racist ideology. Those who are not members of the “household”—foreigners—are entitled to rights according to the advantage or disadvantage resulting to the interests of the household. This attitude is not only characteristic of right-wing extremists, but has permeated many of our institutions. Robert Miles (1989), therefore, speaks of “institutionalized racism”—racism not recognized as such because it has already merged with everyday life and politics. A typical example of such institutionalized racism is the current policy in Germany concerning foreigners. Its main aim is to deter all immigrants who cannot be put to use, while claiming at the same time that “foreigners” will only be welcome in our country if they serve “German interests.”

### ***Real anxieties and problems***

The personal fear of being overwhelmed by social developments or having to live in the shadows underlies all hostile remarks about foreigners. This fear of being subjected to forces beyond comprehension and control is clearly demonstrated in terms currently being used, such as “flood,” “glut,” “foreign infiltration.” Foreigners are scapegoats for aggressions originated by such fears. Aggressions thus channeled have the “advantage” of

fighting the emergency in a permitted manner, reinforcing rather than challenging dominant public opinion. They are also directed against an "enemy" clearly in a weaker position. Racist tendencies, therefore, always originate in real anxieties and dangers. They disregard reality, however, by trying to solve problems not where they originate, but where the least difficulties are to be expected.

Generally speaking, racism and hostility to foreigners camouflage more than they reveal. They divert attention from the real source of the problems and transfer it to the psychological and emotional level, suggesting that only personal attitudes need to be changed and not real conditions of life. Thus we ignore the real sources of aggression against foreigners and do not recognize that even those who do not harbor or express any hostile feelings against foreigners, may nevertheless silently condone denial of their rights. Even those who openly express hostility to foreigners claim not to have a grudge against them, but only wish to avoid any curtailment of their own living conditions. Such is not only the attitude of so-called racists, but also the spontaneous belief of those who believe they stand on the other side. So what bothers a Berliner is not the Poles or Gypsies or whatever, but standing in queues or being molested by children begging in prestigious streets like Kurfürstendamm. Instead of paying attention to the needs of others and feeling responsible for helping them, we experience them as a nuisance to be checked in one way or another. This specific absence of any solidarity with others, justified subsequently by the notion that they do not deserve any help, seems to be the essence of racism.

Summarizing the present policy of the German government on foreigners, one can say that it has made them second-class citizens, ready, for all practical purposes, to be shot or deported during any crisis. This poses the question whether the government is really interested in overcoming prejudice against foreigners, or whether (as Reinhard Opitz has repeatedly emphasized [1983]), hostility against foreigners and racism are part of an offensive strategy directed not only against so-called

foreigners but also against the social rights of the native-born population and the scope of its democratic movements—thus serving expansionist foreign-policy aims.

### ***The good and the evil***

Granting political asylum has been employed as a tactic in the Cold War, aiding expansionist policies directed against East European countries. This is exemplified by the fact that nationals of these countries suffering real need after the collapse of the socialist countries were treated as “normal” refugees and considered merely as a growing burden to the country. All means necessary were employed to keep them out—in the cases of Austria and Switzerland, even armed border guards. When West Germany experienced a wave of refugees from the former German Democratic Republic in late summer of 1989, Chancellor Helmut Kohl suddenly discovered the “human right of economic welfare.” Previously, economic refugees had generally been defamed for abusing the right of asylum. Nationalism, racism, and expansion by force have always been united in a common aim: in every military combat the so-called enemy has been debased not only abroad, but also at home, thus bolstering racism, asserting one’s own moral superiority, and emphasizing the inferiority of “the others.” Those others are the unbelievers, the unjust; they are portrayed as subhuman to justify clearing them out of the way. According to a survey by the left-liberal English *Guardian* of terms employed in British reports on the Gulf War, George Bush “gets things straight,” is “resolute” and “statesmanlike,” whereas Saddam Hussein is considered to be a “lunatic,” an “evil tyrant,” a “mad monster,” etc.

“All honest people realize that Saddam Hussein is the aggressor,” President Richard von Weizsäcker declared (*Der Tagesspiegel*, 30 January 1991). People not sharing this view who criticize the justification of military actions are consequently considered dishonest. They are defamed as potential enemies and terrorists who have to be isolated and observed. These politics of isolation and surveillance are executed in an especially crude manner against “foreigners” in Germany.

*Everyday racism*

The political task of fighting racism, therefore, involves more than confrontations with people openly supporting racism and goes beyond criticism of explicitly racist ideas. To overcome racism and nationalism we have to understand the structure of everyday racism and realize how we ourselves are bound up with it. People advocating the unlimited admission of foreigners, for instance, may overlook their own racist tendencies in the assumption that one's own advantage must be a prerequisite for accepting others. Members of the Green Party in Germany have always advocated the advantages of a multicultural society. This they consider as a chance of acquainting themselves with different outlooks on the world, of freeing themselves from the narrowmindedness of a conventional identity, and of relativizing their own point of view (Brumlik 1990). (This argument disregards the fact that relativizing one's own point of view under some circumstances may arouse fears that provoke a counter-reaction.) A development is thus regarded as positive, only if one can turn it to one's own benefit. The idea of communicating with other cultures primarily with the aim of realizing one's own advantage should be superseded by the higher ethical goal of universal human emancipation.

Simply praising the advantages of a multicultural society neglects people's fears and anxieties by attempting to make them believe that what they most fear in reality is in fact beautiful. We shall convince nobody by ignoring difficulties created for many people by the presence of foreign nationals in our country. Such neglect of actual problems breeds elitism, which sets up an opposition between one's own "progressive" ideas and the "reactionary majority." Obviously, we shall never win over people by simultaneously scorning them for intellectual or moral inferiority. Typical of this attitude, for instance, is the remark of Lea Rosh in a talk show on racism and our relationship to foreigners: "We are fat, well-fed Philistines who are afraid of foreigners." The "we" formulation is not intended literally. A person describing others as Philistines generally excludes himself or herself (and this term does not, indeed, apply to Lea Rosh). In the same transmission,

Gerhard Schröder, president of Lower Saxony, to my mind argued more to the point. The ideology of the Republicans [a German right-wing party], claiming that foreigners live at the expense of Germans, may win the assent of many, he said, when they hear that large sums of public money go for language courses for immigrants while funds for retraining German unemployed are cut.

Widespread scorning of Philistine attitudes fails to recognize that opinions about a multicultural society and views toward foreign nationals originate in differing living conditions and opportunities for interaction. The seemingly open-minded attitude of intellectuals compared to the narrow-minded hostility of the so-called masses is related to the fact that intellectuals are not threatened with competition by foreigners. On closer investigation, one often finds the most “enlightened” people bandy slogans hostile to foreigners once they feel a threat—for example, if their own child is sent to a school where the presence of many foreign students seems to lower educational quality, or if their own daughter is accosted by Turkish youths.

Simple propaganda for a multicultural society is also problematic, insofar as it amounts to an attempt to make the presence of foreigners more palatable for the native population, implying that the development, if disapproved, could be reversed. The problems connected with widespread migration, however, can only be solved by addressing and not suppressing them. All attempts to reverse the development shun reality and produce the chaos they pretend to avoid.

### ***Sloganeering on the Left***

In confrontations over the phenomenon of racism, it is usually someone else who is held responsible. The fight against racism comes down to a fight against racists, and also gives us an opportunity to demonstrate our own antiracism. The notion seems to prevail that those who fight racists are themselves above suspicion of being racist themselves. even if they use the same methods as their opponents. The slogan “Out with foreigners” is met with the slogan “Out with Nazis,” and antifascists may use the same kind of “purge” language used by fascists.

Confining the struggle against racism to fighting racists has the consequence that those wishing to understand conditions under which individuals resort to racism as a particular form of coping with problems posed by reality are suspected of complicity with racists (with the question of motivation generally left open). Prominent among advocates of this view have been Thomas Ebermann (1990) and Wolfgang Pohrt (1991), publishing in *Konkret*. According to them, racism is merely a bad habit of someone else, by which, however, one might oneself be infected and which, therefore, for self-protection, one should seek to eradicate more or less forcibly. Wolfgang Pohrt seeks to enlist the power of the state to put a forcible stop to the activities of the radical right “before they can enlist more adherents and threaten democratic politicians and critical journalists with the present fate of immigrants” (1991, 35). That the state, called upon here to help, has itself helped to create racist hostility against foreigners, which it uses for its own ends, passes unnoticed.

Fighting racist attitudes in others can again unnoticeably acquire the function of keeping at arm’s length—in the name of a higher morality—those who interfere. For many professed antiracists, these are citizens of the former GDR, who have made life and work more difficult for large sections of the public in western Germany and the former West Berlin. Debasing former citizens of the GDR encourages them to feel superior to the “foreigners.” This, in turn, provides a pretext for many “progressive” West Germans to withhold solidarity from them, which according to their theories should be extended to all suffering from “discrimination.” West German conditions under these circumstances tend to be viewed as a model democracy.

According to Jan Ross in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (7 August 1991), discussions about right-wing activities in the former GDR become extraordinarily distasteful. Uninformed spectators diagnose symptoms in the way one might discuss habits of underdeveloped tribes. This attitude is adopted mainly, according to Ross, to provide an alibi for anger felt against the uninvited new citizens who have been causing such trouble recently. Since it might appear stingy to refer to the new states [the former GDR] as a financial burden, the score is settled on

moral grounds. At the same time, this a revenge against the GDR, which after the World War II adorned itself with the glory of antifascist resistance, with the Federal Republic being branded as home of the die-hard reactionaries. Good conscience has changed sides, without being less untruthful.

### ***Solidarity against all discrimination***

Adequate action against racism can only be taken if we refrain from disqualifying others as racist, but instead analyze as clearly as possible the entire complex of relations and conditions engendering racism. As a rule, we will discover in the course of such an analysis that we ourselves are more involved in the affair than we assumed. This may account for our inclination to be satisfied with superficial explanations. Taking a closer look we may discover, for instance, that the hostility to foreigners in the former GDR is not due to fewer individual contacts with them, as alleged. It is far more due to the time and the circumstances under which applicants for immigration were admitted. Western authorities must be held responsible for the conditions under which this took place: provisional accommodation, totally unprepared authorities, unsatisfactory medical care and welfare services, smaller chances of acquiring citizenship there due to general difficulties in establishing the new system of administration. From the standpoint of the immigrants, it is obvious that they will use any means to gain entry to the West by defaming everything in the East. This, of course, is eagerly picked up by the press. *Der Spiegel* runs a headline: "Refugees in the former GDR get beaten and punished daily, yet they are not allowed to return to the West." Such headlines will increase not only the fear among immigrants of being transported to the East. They will also embitter citizens of the former GDR who are indiscriminately accused of having committed such excesses. Their bitterness will be increased, the more they begin to feel themselves as displaced persons and unjustly treated in their own country. This again will make them even more susceptible to ubiquitous slogans about foreigners swamping and dominating their country.

The point, therefore, is not to strive for moral superiority over

the others by reproaching them for racism, but to build up solidarity with all victims of discrimination. And that, in fact, means nothing less than equal rights for all. An all-out fight for democracy is the only effective answer to racism and hostility to foreigners. Social peace is not to be had at a lesser cost.

Pointing out the interrelation of social problems does not alleviate us of our responsibility for racist behavior. On the contrary, we realize that such behavior can only be overcome in the course of changing conditions which pressure us to segregate others in order to solve our own problems. The responsibility for this change, however, does not rest with “outsiders” or “marginal groups,” but primarily with those of us who are less uprooted and threatened, whose existence is more secure, and whose influence is greater.

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## Initiating the Marxist Forum

The "Call for A Marxist Forum" that appeared in the last issue of *Nature, Society, and Thought* (vol. 5, no. 4, pp. 369–70) pointed to the need for a network for communication of information among those who continue to be inspired by the communist ideal. This first brief announcement has brought response from Marxists from several countries. These constitute the first participants in the new network.

A Marxist Forum coordinating committee is being formed for to generate ideas and plans for putting them into effect. Several initiatives are already underway. The first is the publication, on the following pages, of a summary report of a seminar in May 1993, first theoretical exchange of views by some two dozen Communist parties since the collapse of the USSR. Papers from two of the participating parties are published in full. This publication in *Nature, Society, and Thought* signals the beginning of support for the Marxist Forum by the Marxist Educational Press, which will administer distribution of materials of the Forum.

A second initiative was the preparation of a list of programmatic and theoretical materials from Marxist parties and organizations from different countries that is now available to the participants in the Marxist Forum. The Forum also plans to circulate commentaries on these materials.

To participate in the Forum, send your name and address to Gerald Erickson, Marxist Forum, University of Minnesota, 9 Pleasant Street S.E., Room 331, Minneapolis, MN 55455.

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The full proceedings of the seminar are available from the Marxist Forum in book form (387 pages) or on PC or Macintosh compatible diskettes for \$10 plus \$1.50 shipping/handling (\$2.00 foreign). When ordering diskettes, indicate whether on PC or Macintosh, double density or high density diskettes. For PC diskettes, also indicate whether 5--inch or 3--inch.

## Marxist Forum

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### **International Seminar of Communist Parties Marking the 175th Anniversary of the Birth of Karl Marx, Calcutta, 5–7 May 1993**

*To inaugurate the Marxist Forum (see announcement on facing page), we are publishing this report about the Calcutta Seminar and the full text of the papers of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) and the Communist Party of South Africa. We wish to thank the executive bodies of these parties for permission to reprint their papers. The report was prepared by members of the Marxist Forum collective in Minnesota: Lenore Burgard, Gerald Erickson, April Knutson, Harry McAllister, Erwin Marquit, Janet Quaiife, and Harold Schwartz. The parties presenting papers and the authors of the papers (who were not necessarily present at the seminar) are listed at the end of this report. References to the contributions will be made by indicating the party presenting the paper, rather than the name of the author.*

To commemorate the 175th anniversary of the birth of Karl Marx, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) sent invitations to thirty Communist parties to participate in a seminar in Calcutta, 5–7 May 1993. Papers from twenty-four parties from Africa, Asia, Australia, Europe, North America, and South America were presented at the seminar, which was held under the title “Contemporary World Situation and the Validity of Marxism.”

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***Participation in the seminar***

The following twenty-one parties were represented at the seminar: Socialist Party of Australia (SPAustral), Workers Party of Bangladesh (WPBangl), Workers Party of Belgium (WPBelg), Communist Party of Brazil (CPBraz), Communist Party of Britain (CPBrit), New Communist Party of Britain (NCPBrit), Communist Party of Canada (CPCan), Communist Party of Cuba (CPCuba), Communist Party of France (CPFr), German Communist Party (GerCP), Communist Party of Greece (CPGre), Communist Party of India (CPInd), Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPInd[M]), Tudeh Party of Iran (TPIran), Workers Party of Korea (WPKor), Popular Socialist Party of Mexico (PSPMex), Communist Party of Nepal (UML) (CPNep[UML]), Communist Party of the Philippines (CPPhil), Portuguese Communist Party (PortCP), South African Communist Party (SoAfCP), Workers Party of Turkey (WPTur), Communist Party of Vietnam (CPViet).

Papers were received from the Tudeh Party of Iran (TPIran); the Syrian Communist Party (CPSyr); and the Communist Party, USA (CPUSA).

Greetings and/or apologies for inability to send representatives were received from the Communist Party of China, AKEL of Cyprus, Communist Refoundation of Italy, Communist Party of Mauritius, Communist Party of the Russian Federation, and the Russian Communist Workers Party. Messages (the nature of which was not indicated) were also received from the Communist Party of Colombia and the Communist Party of Spain. Kim Il Sung sent a separate message of greetings.

***Continuing validity of Marxism***

All parties present agreed that Marxism continues to be a valid guide for formulating strategies and tactics in the struggle for socialism. "The theory of scientific socialism, an integral part of Marxism, a theory of the liberation of human kind from all forms of exploitation and enslavement, is still the right thought of humanity," said the CPViet. The CPMex posited that the "strongest demonstration of the validity of Marxism" is the objective reality

that “millions of men and women are questioning themselves under diverse forms on the problems of civilisation that the crisis of capitalism engenders.”

Nearly all of the parties characterized their viewpoint as Marxist-Leninist. No paper attempted a comprehensive definition of the term, but from the various contexts in which the term was used, it appears to embrace the following: dialectical and historical materialism, including scientific socialism and the continuing relevance of the theory of surplus value; Lenin’s analysis of imperialism; the class character of capitalist and socialist states; Lenin’s concept of a working-class vanguard party with democratic centralism as its organizational basis; and international solidarity as expressed by the slogan “workers and oppressed peoples of all countries unite!”<sup>1</sup> Most speakers highlighted the class component of Marxism as the component that lies at the heart of Marxism. “Class and class struggle were foundational concepts of Marx’s theoretical and practical work,.” Now as well as then these concepts help to illuminate the inner, multilayered texture of societies and how they change. They have lost none of their analytic power,” stated the CPUSA. All but one of the parties that did not explicitly associate themselves with the term *Marxism-Leninism* in their papers, namely, CPBraz, GerCP, CPNep(UML), and CPTur, indicated an orientation that could nevertheless be so characterized. The CPFr, having earlier dropped the characterization Marxist-Leninist, still considers itself a vanguard party.

The issue of whether a Communist party should consider the establishment of a dictatorship of the proletariat as a programmatic goal in the revolutionary transformation process has long been a subject of discussion. The CPFr paper stated on this question: “From the mid-seventies . . . we have renounced the dictatorship of the proletariat and undertaken the task of elaborating a strategy corresponding to the needs and conditions of France,” a self-governed path for socialism. Since the CPFr does not characterize itself as Marxist-Leninist, the question still remains whether the concept of dictatorship of the proletariat is a necessary part of Marxism-Leninism. The WPBangl, WPBelg, NCPBrit, CPNep(UML), and CPPhil all endorsed the necessity of

the concept. The CPBrit and CPInd(M) criticized the way the dictatorship of the proletariat was applied in the USSR, but did not address the question of the appropriateness of the concept today. In the discussion, the representative from the WPBelg proposed that the question be discussed at the seminar, but his proposal was not taken up.<sup>2</sup>

While the contributions of Marx, Engels, and Lenin in developing the theoretical basis for scientific socialism were commonly recognized, a few parties mentioned the contributions in theory and practice made by others.

The WPBangl, WPBelg, CPPhil, and CPSyr referred to Stalin's contributions. The WPBangl and CPTur stressed Stalin's leadership in eliminating exploiting classes in the USSR, his initiation of a planned economy, and his struggle against revisionism. The CPPhil said that Stalin

succeeded in undertaking socialist revolution and construction. He built and expanded the industrial foundation of the Soviet Union, collectivized and mechanized Soviet agriculture, educated the largest corps of scientific, technical, cultural and administrative personnel in the world and raised the people's standard of living in so short a time. Stalin demonstrated the superiority of socialism over capitalism, especially when the latter was being beset by the worst depression ever and was afflicted by fascism in several countries. . . . [After World War II] Stalin reconstructed the Soviet economy, raised higher the material and cultural standards, strengthened the internal and peripheral defenses, completed the reversal of the ratio of urban-rural population prior to 1917 and supported the cause of national liberation and socialism abroad.

At the same time the CPPhil criticized Stalin for what they considered to be his mechanistic materialism, as a result of which

he thought of the bourgeoisie in terms of socioeconomic and legal definition alone. He could not see that the old bourgeoisie can be deprived of their properties but not of their ideas and influence and that the bourgeoisie can

re-arise from the bureaucracy and new intelligentsia if the bourgeoisie is considered only in terms of being the external enemy in the shape of the imperialists and their local agents.

The CPSyr argued in favor of the correctness of “Stalin’s thesis about the intensification of class-struggle during the process of building socialism.” The paper from the CPBraz began:

In his *Principles of Leninism*,<sup>3</sup> Stalin synthesized the essential elements of Lenin’s legacy to the class struggle of the proletariat in all its different aspects. This book contributed to the formation of generations of communists through an inspired understanding of the fecund and revolutionary thought of [this follower of] Marx and Engels, who led with great success the first large socialist revolution in history.

The CPBraz paper, however, did not deal with Stalin’s own contributions, but focused on Lenin’s recognition of the necessity of state capitalism and seemed to imply that the duration of this stage was erroneously shortened in the USSR.

The CPTur praised Mao Zedong’s theory of counterrevolution, which it described as follows:

In the 19th century, socialist theories raised by the big masters [were] limited. They were limited simply because of the lack of practice in the socialist movement. Marx and Engels took lessons from the short experiences of the Paris Commune. In the 20th century another master Mao Zedong also took lessons from what had happened in this century. By observing the USSR and the revisionism [that had] taken over after 1960’s in the USSR, Mao raised his counter revolution theory as regards to the degenerations of the previous revolutionary movements. According to Mao, socialism is a long process starting with the proletarian revolution and lasting until the establishment [of] the classless society. During the period the struggle between the working class and the bourgeoisie, socialism and capitalism, Marxism and revisionism would be carried out by

the proletarian party. Within the period nationalising the means of production would not stop the counterrevolution. After this stage [the] biggest danger would not only come out of the defeated bourgeoisie but also from the capitalist-minded members of the socialist government. The initiative of the working class should be kept alert all the time.

This theory was actually a new description for a working class democracy. The party members should be there not only for governing the country but physically dealing with the needs of the people as well. The only guarantee of the real socialism is the working class to take over again and again.

If the party can continue to harness the initiative of the masses then socialism can survive.

The WPBelg urged that more attention be given to Mao's "theory of continuing revolution, combating revisionism, and preventing the restoration of capitalism for the entire historical epoch of socialism" and that "here is a whole set of principles clarified by this theory, which must be thoroughly studied even if its application in the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution failed after a longer period of success than the Paris Commune."

According to the CPPhil,

Mao Zedong extended and further developed our understanding of the problems to pose and solve beyond those previously pointed to by Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin, such as the vestiges of the exploiting classes, the contradictions between the workers and peasants, between town and country and between manual and mental labor, the problem of petty commodity production generating the bourgeoisie and the force of old habits and customs.

The WPKor attributed to Kim Il Sung the creation of the idea of *juche*, which it considers to be a further development of dialectical materialism. The *juche* idea means "that the masters of the revolution and construction are the masses of people and that they are also the motive force of the revolution and construction." Consequently, "our Party has regarded . . . the basic method of



the revolution and construction [to be] to strengthen the motive force and enhance its role.” During the discussion, the WPKor representative supplemented the explanation of the *juche* idea: “The party and the masses form the subject or the motive force of the revolution. The leader is the centre of unity and leadership. And the party is the core political organisation which can be likened to the backbone of the human-body.”<sup>4</sup>

The CPViet stressed the theoretical contributions of Ho Chi Minh, who “was the one who applied creatively and developed the revolutionary and scientific theory put forth by Marx and Lenin for liberating peoples of various colonies, linking the revolution of national liberation with socialist revolution, and connecting national independence to socialism.”

### ***Collapse of socialism in the USSR and Eastern Europe***

Divergent views were presented on the reasons for the collapse of socialism in the USSR and Eastern Europe. Nevertheless, the CPBrit noted that “there is widespread agreement that imperialism’s political, ideological, militaristic and—wherever possible, economic offensive against them—presented substantial obstacles, took a heavy toll, and should not be underestimated.” The seminar participants still found it necessary to explain the failure to withstand this assault.

One group of papers identified the primary source for the inability to withstand this assault as what they saw as a faulty model of socialist construction that led to severe economic difficulties, violations of internal democracy in the party and in the state as a whole, and bureaucratization of the party and its leadership that exacerbated the economic difficulties and isolated the party and state leaders from the masses of people. Citing one or more of these reasons were the CPBraz, CPBrit, CPCuba, CPFr, CPInd, CPNep(UML), PortCP, SoAfCP, and CPViet.

A second group of papers put the principal blame largely on revisionist policies associated with Gorbachev. This group included the NCPBrit and CPGre.

A third group traced the beginnings of the collapse to what they saw as Khrushchev’s revisionism in departing from Stalin’s

Leninist course for the construction of socialism in the USSR and attributed to this source most of the same difficulties mentioned in connection with the first group. Associated with this view were the WPBangl, WPBelg, CPInd(M), CPPhil, CPSyr, and CPTur.

The association of the papers with a particular group here should not be taken too strictly, since the positions presented in individual papers sometimes reflect those associated with more than one group. Several of the parties, namely, the SPAustral, CPCan, GerCP, TPIran, WPKor, PSPMex, and the CPUSA were not assigned to any group for this report because their seminar papers did not address directly, or commented too briefly, on what they saw as the principal reasons for the collapse of the USSR and the European socialist countries, even though documents are available from some of these parties with detailed statements on the collapse.<sup>5</sup>

As was already indicated, the CPBraz's paper focused on the need for an extended period of state capitalism before embarking on complete socialization.

It is a pity that this scientific contribution of Lenin on the question of transition had been forgotten. This damaged the revolutionary movement. In its place, the rigid and schematic line adopted by the Soviet Union prevailed for a long time. According to this view, the developmental march of society in every field seemed to depend mainly on men's will, on leaders, without taking into consideration that these developments have objective roots and involve certain stages.

In the discussion period, the CPBrit argued:

Our party believes that the socialist countries were weakened from within, not just by reactionary elements but by the substantial mistakes—and even crimes—committed by the ruling parties and authorities. Serious violations of human and national rights occurred from the 1930s onwards in the Soviet Union and from the late 1940s in Eastern Europe. The clear and necessary distinction between state, party, trade union and other social bodies

became blurred, and a privileged—in the end even hereditary-bureaucratic nomenclature usurped power from delegates who should have been genuinely accountable to the working class and its allies.

Dictatorship of the proletariat turned into dictatorship *over* the proletariat.

The highly centralised bureaucratic command system in the economy, combining large-scale public ownership and planning, succeeded until the 1970s in producing higher rates of growth in the socialist countries than in the imperialist ones, but this success occurred in specific historical conditions which changed.

But our estimation is that these methods of organising the new production relations turned into restrictive fetters, holding back the full development and utilisation of the productive forces. The application of the fruits of the scientific and technological revolution and the expansion of production and productivity generally, require—under socialism—the initiative, commitment and participation of the masses. In societies based on public ownership and state planning, these necessities have to find their expression in democratic practice in the political as well as the economic sphere.

This became impossible in societies where initiative, criticism, protest, alternative suggestions and ideas, and “unofficial” aspirations were not only discouraged—they were punished.

According to the CPCuba paper “what was buried was not socialism as a social system . . . [but] a specific model which was gradually losing its socialist values.” Among these direct causes was, “the denial of the democratic essence of socialism.” Further,

the democratic viability of the socialist project is not defined by single party or multiparty systems, but by its validity and coherence with the reality of the political model adopted. The working class in these countries was stripped of its leading role and, therefore, it was impossible to promote real democratic relations in a situation in which

there was a power monopoly without a real participation of the masses.

Another undeniable factor was the access to power of a ruling group that gave up the socialist ideal. The existence of “objective” and “subjective” conditions for certain changes cannot hide the fact that the failure was begotten and began from “top to bottom” in most of the countries.

Today it is much more evident that the shared and unobjectionable aim was manipulated for other purposes and that these societies demanded deep changes. Under the just banner of transforming the stagnant socialism, the course was changed—deliberately by some and indulgently by others—to capitalism. . . .

The mechanical transplant of the Soviet economic and political model to other countries was the original mistake that made possible and produced the gradual loss of the Marxist-Leninist nature of the party. This brought about the alienation of the masses from the party, the usurpation of the legitimate power of the working class, the omnipotence of the ruling classes and the corruption that prevented the masses from having the leading role in society. . . .

The irregularities that began to appear in the new relations did not stem from the very immaturity of the development, but, above all, from the gradual alienation of their socialist nature. This was reflected in the economic mechanism and the workers continued to distance themselves from the means of production, without becoming their real owners.

As a result of the above-mentioned, at a given time there was a stagnation of the productive forces which froze the possibility of a wide use of the technical and scientific advances as the initial relations started to divert [their] socialist potential.

The periodic and cosmetic economic reforms carried out in these countries were aimed at patching the “holes” of the implanted economic mechanism, regardless of the essential causes. That was the cause of their failure, with

the subsequent impact on the living standard of the population due to the hindering of the extended self-reproduction based on truly socialist economic factors.

The above-mentioned situations were reflected on the social consciousness of the citizens of these countries, bringing about an attitude of rejection that later on resulted in openly anti-socialist and pro-capitalist positions.

By hiding the existing relations and contradictions, the theoretical reflection made about reality generated in the society a concealed rejection [of] that reality and [of] the theory which sanctified the official policy in a compromised way. . . .

The most harmful element of all lay in the fact that this false ideology was held to be the one true Marxism-Leninism and was received and, of course, rejected as such by society. . . .

True socialist objectives were gradually supplanted by other ideals, with the incorporation of the values and customs of Western consumerism. The principles of the genuine socialist ideal were being displaced by the widespread desire to move nearer to Western societies. . . .

We cannot ignore the destabilizing role played by the centres of capitalist power. Imperialist military pressure forced socialism to develop a powerful arms industry far and above its real economic capabilities, subsequently affecting the rest of the economy and the standard of living of the population. On top of this, imperialism unleashed an ideological attack all along the line.

The idealizing pro-capitalist ideology of the consumer societies was able to flourish because the existing structures in these countries were rotten to the core.

The ideology imperialism exported by all possible means could only prosper under these conditions. This situation could not last. In the destructive counterrevolutionary avalanche, just and worthy causes were mixed up with others that were reactionary and opportunist, all of which was prompted, accepted and accelerated by the Soviet perestroika.

In the view of the CPFr, the working class “in almost all the European socialist countries did not play any real political role. . . . The confusion between the State and the Communist party in power has reduced the Party to a bureaucratic organ, an organ regulating the society in its smallest detail, but then forgetting its political and ideological role.”

The CPNep(UML) sees the source for the collapse of the USSR arising in the Khrushchev period, but for reasons essentially different from those in the third group.

After the beginning of [the] Khrushchev and Brezhnev era, which was characterized by concentration of power in few hands, too much bureaucratisation, alienation of party from the people, suppression of dissident views, low level of agricultural and industrial productivity and technological backwardness, the Soviet socialist model became quite unpopular among the people of different walks of life. . . . No precautionary measures to overcome defects of [the] Soviet model were pursued in [the] USSR and Eastern Europe and also no attempt was made to introduce certain elements of [the] capitalist system which were useful for socialist countries too. . . . Bureaucrats had the privileges of enjoying the power and controlling the government machinery. Absence of democratic practices in the party and the lack of interaction between people and leaders coupled with institutionalization of corruption led to [increased] resentment among the people in spite of equity in income distribution and the implementation of social welfare programmes in a big way. The suppression of dissident views and inability to provide incentive to the working people . . . created a situation in which no managers and the workers were motivated to raise productivity and enhance efficiency in the production process.

However, unlike these countries, China started reforms and open-up policies from 1979. As a result, China’s pace of development has now surpassed the so-called newly industrializing economies of Asia which are quite often cited by western countries as the development models for

the rest of the developing countries. More than that what we find is that the distribution pattern in China is the best among the developing countries of the world. These two opposite scenarios clearly point out that [Marxism] has not failed [in] the world but only the Soviet model has failed.

The PortCP reported that their Thirteenth Congress and Fourteenth Congress drew the conclusion that the “defeats of socialism do not represent the failure of the Communist ideal, but the failure of a ‘model’ which departed from the Communist ideal in essential aspects that had to do with political power, participatory democracy, the Party’s role and the theory, and which countered fundamental characteristics of socialism which the Communists have always proclaimed.”

In the discussion following the presentation of papers, the South African representative was critical of certain tendencies in the analyses presented:

It does worry me if we seem to approach the problem whether or not revisionism began in 1936 or began in 1956, or Gorbachev is the Judas of the world communist movement, and maybe he was a revisionist the day he came out of his mother’s womb. And it concerns me, because it seems to me that it still seeks to identify the fundamental weakness at the level of individual idiosyncrasies . . . a class approach seems to be missing. . . . The question which we need to ask ourselves—and I ask myself this question, that even in the space of the last few years of what happened in the Soviet Union, what happened in the other East European countries. . . . Where was the organised working class in whose name socialism was being developed, and in whose name the policies of socialism were carried out? It seems to me that unless we try to grapple with this problem we will keep on falling back into blaming individuals or individual idiosyncrasies in terms of fundamental policy making. And how in the future do we try to develop a system in which the class that we claim to be speaking for can actually act, if necessary,

independent of the political parties' position? . . . Having lived in Prague for over ten years it always astonished me as to why the Czechoslovakian Communist Party could not bring out its own people's militia to oppose the other demonstrations that were taking place in the streets of Prague. I am really posing the question from the point of view of not individuals but from the point of view of social forces and the incapacity at significant moments in history for the social forces to be brought to the fore in order to achieve certain objectives. So I seriously do not believe that it takes our own analysis a great deal further, even if it is proved that revisionism in the Soviet Union began in 1936. I seriously do not believe that in 1993 it takes our own understanding that much forward in trying to understand what is for us anyway probably one of the greatest blows the progressive movement has received in a very long time.

The CPViet began its discussion of the question by asking: "How then can we analyse the recent collapse of the former Soviet Union and other socialist countries in Eastern Europe?" It continued:

The answer lies in the fact that this collapse had its deep roots from the erroneous understanding in theory together with its leftist dogmatism in the determining of policies, forms, measures and steps in the process of socialist construction. The direct reason lies in the *perestroika* strategy of voluntarism and the rightist opportunism which represent an ideological and political betrayal. The opposing acts from hostile forces against socialism had quickened the pace of the collapse.

. . . The prolonged defects and imperfections of existing socialism have resulted in the stagnation and crises in many fields. A number of opportunist elements who betrayed the communist ideals were brought to the fore by the bureaucracy of existing socialism, and a part of the masses living in the existing socialist government model (in Marx's words) were alienated.



Dogmatism was a starting-point for the deformations and deviations of the model leading to bureaucratism and gradual shift from the communist goals. In the new situation, in the face of bitter confrontation by the anti-communist forces, and under the pressure of a small number of people holding power, bureaucratism in its turn rapidly degenerated to opportunism and betrayal leading to catastrophe for socialism. . . .

. . . For many times, Karl Marx and Engels had stressed that their theory was not a dogma and that they did not have the intention to provide a detailed design for a future society. . . .

Unfortunately, these important teachings have been put aside or neglected. Not a few theoretical points of Marx, even his unfinished forecasts or personal notes which were not for the purpose of publishing have been turned into creeds and absolute truths. All these have made a lively theory become a sclerotic one; a guiding theory has become a force that held back any creative search. . . .

. . . A socialist model containing many deviations in theory and many shortcomings in reality [was established] right after the success of the October Revolution. Lenin had earlier revealed these deviations and shortcomings and put forth the New Economic Policy (NEP) as a way for solving them. Unfortunately, the successors of Lenin did not know how to maintain and develop these valuable ideas contained in NEP; on the contrary, they pushed up the building of socialism with the model of socialist government. They did not put into practice Marx's instructions on the parallel existence of two economic structures, on the role of bourgeois [right] in the period of transition to communism, and valuable experiences on the use of state capitalism, on the restoration and development of the commodity economy at the time of new economic policy as well. The mistakes made in the perceiving of [a] socialist model have resulted in one system of subjective, voluntary decision and policies on, for example, the abolishment of the commodity economy and the market

mechanism, the imposition of only two forms of ownership, i.e. state-owned and collective ones. All these have gradually made socialism fall into stagnation and increasingly grave crisis. . . .

. . . Like many other socialist countries and for different reasons, Vietnam was also influenced by the old-style socialist model and found itself in crisis. . . .

. . . From our own experiences, our party has determined that there must be principles in the process of renovation and the most important of which is the maintenance of the socialist orientation and the leading role of the Party. The renovation strategy is aimed at overcoming those mistakes committed in the past, bringing into play achievements and taking the country out of the socio-economic crisis. The accurately established processes of that strategy are as follows: to maintain political stability, to shift to multi-sectored commodity economy operated by market mechanism with the management of the government, to democratize social life in an all-round manner, to build a socialist government governed by law, and to implement a foreign strategy of "Vietnam wants to be a friend with all states for peace, independence and development."

We now consider the assessment given by the second group, those who saw the collapse of the USSR and Eastern European socialism as primarily resulting from the policies introduced by Gorbachev.

The NCPBrit stated its view briefly.

The counter-revolution orchestrated by the Gorbachev administration in alliance with imperialism aimed for the comprehensive destruction of all the socialist countries, the weakening of the non-aligned movement and through so-called "new thinking" sought to negate the ideological philosophy of Marxism-Leninism with the consequent marginalisation of Communist parties throughout the world.

In the discussion, the NCPBrit took issue with the argument that the NEP in the Soviet Union should have continued longer than it did. It based this position on the fact that collectivization had been successful, the towns had expanded, the industrial working class had grown, and the families of the workers were being fed.

And yes, there was massive and enthusiastic involvement of the people in that revolutionary process that took place in very difficult circumstances. Comrades have referred to the fact that one of the achievements of socialism was that it played a major part in destroying the Nazi war machine. Would that have been possible without the industrialisation process that had been carried out before the war? I don't think it would. . . . It also needs to be reminded that Lenin introduced NEP and envisaged it as a temporary measure and the necessary retreat and he stated that as long as Russia remained a small-scale producer there would be more economic places for capitalism than for socialism. In any case, the strategy of the different imperialist powers at that time in the 20s and the 30s, did not allow for the same strategy and development for consolidating socialism that exists today.

The CPGre focused on the period beginning with perestroika in 1985.

The restructuring process in the Soviet Union brought to the surface long-standing problems that had accumulated over many years, contradictions within various strata, groups and inter-ethnic relations. . . . The CPSU leadership pursued a policy which shifted away from its initial declarations. . . . The restructuring process evolved into a struggle over the settlement of numerous contradictions, the main one being the clash between a socialist and non-socialist orientation for society. It was not a disagreement over one or the other model and type of socialism but over the form and character of ownership and the character of political power. . . .

With the CPSU leadership responsible, a period of indiscriminate confrontation, nihilism and even of slander against the past of the country and the party itself resulted in completely shaking its prestige, particularly in the eyes of the younger generations, who had no experience of the conditions that prevailed during the construction of socialism. . . .

. . . The policy of “Perestroika” provided for multiple forms of socialist property ownership in the process; however, these were abandoned and part of the CPSU leadership adopted views in favour of the uncontrolled development of a market economy. The principles of planning and management were violated. . . .

The intensity of the social differentiation that followed, the emergence of class contradictions, the formation of poles of wealth and poverty, combined with the ever-increasing alienation of the working people from management and administration, led to a search for ways to seize political power and to secessionist tendencies. . . .

One of the fundamental causes for the failure of “Perestroika” was, in fact, the abandonment—with the leadership responsible—of the CPSU’s leading and vanguard role, while trying to solve problems, such as those of bureaucracy, the side effects stemming from the monopolising of power and its increasing alienation from Soviet society. The initiative passed into the hands of political forces and, in particular, those of public figures who used demagoguery and took advantage of the difficulties of “Perestroika” in order to exercise their opposition policy. . . .

The CPGre, however, did not limit itself to the perestroika period:

The loss of the CPSU’s prestige and influence is not due only to its relinquishing its leading role. It had for many years distanced itself from the active social forces, the working class. It had become bureaucratic, monopolised power and identified itself with the state. . . .

. . . The existence of forms of social ownership and the

political power of the working class and its allies do not lead automatically to the desired development of all forms of democracy. On the contrary, experience has shown that phenomena of alienation, indifference and apathy, bureaucracy, subrogation and the violation of socialist democracy and legality do appear. Many of these phenomena resulted from the identification of the party with the state and by the subrogation of the working class by its own party.

The parties in the third group—that is, parties that traced the source for the collapse of the USSR and the European socialist countries to the Khrushchev period—usually began their criticism with Khrushchev but also had criticisms similar to those in the first group. We can see this in the following excerpts from the CPBangl paper, which began its discussion of this question by asserting that

the period of Stalin was the most glorious period of Russian history. However, the revisionists and the capitalist roaders always try to put blame on Stalin only to undermine and demolish socialism itself. Starting from Khrushchev the successive leaders of USSR denounced Stalin on the charge of so-called personality cult and alleged that he distorted inner-party life, did great damage to the social development and hindered economic development. . . .

Since the 20th party congress, the party started to deviate from Marxism-Leninism. Khrushchev undermined the dictatorship of proletariat stating that it is no longer the state of the working class. He undermined and in some cases negated the importance of national liberation movements and of revolution. He put forward the theory of peaceful transition and peaceful competition and misinterpreted the Leninist idea of peaceful co-existence. He wanted “to be friends with the United States and cooperate with them in the struggle for peace and security for the people.” He gave a false hope of bringing communism [to the] USSR within [the] next twenty years.

Similar wrong ideas are also reflected in the 81-party conference of the Communist and Workers Parties of the world held in 1960 where it is stated, "The time is not far off when socialism's share of the world production will be greater than that of capitalism. . . . Capitalism will be defeated in the decisive sphere of human endeavor, the sphere of material production. . . . World capitalism is going through an intense process of disintegration and decay."

. . . Brezhnev in the main continued the policy of Khrushchevite revisionism. However there were certain differences, though not in the essence. For example [the] USSR helped directly the Vietnam revolution and the national liberation movements of Arab and African people. We recognize these positive aspects of the then CPSU. But at the same time there were instances of causing harm to the liberation movements and betrayal of the principle of proletarian internationalism. In the main Brezhnev continued the revisionist ideology. In 1966 he "excommunicated" China and Albania. Intoxicated by the idea of Khrushchev and Brezhnev revisionism some Communist parties or the right sections of the Communist parties pushed toward a reconciliation with the bourgeoisie in their own country. In order to maintain parity with [the] USA, Brezhnev adopted the policy of maximum expansion of military and nuclear strength of [the] USSR, which adversely affected Soviet economy. As long as imperialism exists, it is of course necessary to have sufficient military power to defend [the] socialist state. But, in our opinion, it was not wise and practical to spend such a huge amount of resources only to maintain military and nuclear parity with the Western military-industrial complex. Brezhnev relied solely on military strength and not on mobilization of masses, continuation of class struggle and revolutionary education. Military expenditure out of proportion is also one of the main causes of economic crisis and collapse of [Soviet socialism].

The WPBangl gave the following summary of the causes for the collapse of Soviet socialism: revisionism; bureaucracy and corruption arising out of the revisionist policies of the leadership; lack of socialist democracy within the party and society; absence of ideological education among the people; influence of bourgeois ideology emanating from the leadership; undermining of the dictatorship of the proletariat; failure to utilize scientific and technological developments despite socialism's immense capacity to do so; betrayal of the principle of proletarian internationalism; and excessive spending on the military build-up.

In the view of the WPBelg, "In 1956, Khrushchev attacked Stalin in order to change the fundamental line of the leadership of the Communist Party; the slow degeneration of the political economic system that followed has led to the global and final break with socialism, accomplished in 1990 by Gorbachev."

The CPIInd(M) focused on internal structural problems that were exacerbated by the policies that largely began with Khrushchev.

Firmly convinced of the fundamental basis of the Marxist understanding, the CPI(M), while probing the factors leading to the dismantling of socialism in the USSR and East European countries, basically identified three main areas where certain incorrect assessments led to incorrect political and tactical lines which instead of strengthening the international communist movement only eroded its strongest bastions.

These relate to an understanding of the transition period from capitalism to socialism; a correct estimation of capitalism and its potential; and deviations from the revolutionary content of Marxism-Leninism.

. . . One such [incorrect assessment], a major one, was the estimation regarding the strength and potential of capitalism made by the international conferences in 1957 and 1960. The document of the 1960 conference, while endorsing the shift in the world balance of forces in favour of socialism, went far beyond, to deny capitalism any future and to describe socialism as the decisive factor in shaping

world developments. Such a conclusion, apart from re-enforcing the simplistic understanding regarding the irreversible nature of the transition period, grossly underestimated the potential of world capitalism, both of its capacity to further develop productive forces as well as its capacity to adapt to changed circumstances.

. . . This underestimation of capitalism was accompanied by an incorrect estimation of the correlation of class forces under changed circumstances by the 20th Congress of the CPSU. The gross distortion of the Leninist concept of peaceful coexistence and the advocacy of peaceful competition and peaceful transition by the CPSU leadership under Khrushchev threw the door open for revisionism and class collaboration of the worst kind. As a consequence, many a communist party was decimated leaving the international communist movement much emasculated.

. . . Apart from such incorrect estimations and deviations, there were specific mistakes and shortcomings in four broad areas in the process of socialist construction. These relate to: form of state under socialism—dictatorship of the proletariat; socialist democracy in practice; socialist economic construction; and ideological consciousness of the party and people in the socialist countries. The CPI(M) 14th Party Congress resolution has examined these aspects in some detail.<sup>6</sup>

The CPPhil, while putting its principal focus on policies initiated by Khrushchev and continued by Brezhnev and Gorbachev, traced part of the source back to 1936.

After the death of Stalin, exactly in a period when more than one third of the world's population were in several socialist countries, the monster of modern revisionism would arise, especially in the Soviet Union. Khrushchev totally negated Stalin in order to promote modern revisionism and to split the international communist movement.

The petty bourgeoisification of the large mass of bureaucrats and new intelligentsia had already given rise to a monopoly capitalist bourgeoisie. The waning of the



proletarian class standpoint started in 1936 when it was proclaimed that there were no more exploiting and exploited classes in the Soviet Union and no more class struggle, except the ever intensifying one between the Soviet people and the external enemy (e.g., the imperialists and their agents).

. . . We trace the path of modern revisionism and capitalist restoration from Khrushchev through Brezhnev to Gorbachev.

The CPSyr put forth the view that the “starting point of right-wing revisionism” that led to the collapse of socialism in the USSR began with the rejection by the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU of “Stalin’s thesis about the intensification of the class struggle during the process of building socialism” and that “experience proved that the defect is not in the theory rather in the people who could not use it well upon application, or could not develop it to meet life necessities i.e. they could not ascend to its level. This happened out of objective uncontrolled factors, or out of subjective factors in the people themselves.”

### ***Achievements of socialism***

As in the discussion on the shortcomings that led to the ending of socialism in the USSR and Eastern Europe, the achievements selected for mention, the manner in which they were mentioned, and the credit for their success often reflected the ideological orientation of the various parties. The CPPhil praised the role played by Stalin in securing and building the socialism that triumphed over fascism during World War II. The WPBangl set forth the successes achieved during the period of socialism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, including the elimination of class exploitation; guarantee to all of the basic material necessities of modern life (education, medical care, housing, pensions, job security); development from a backward country into a powerful, developed nation; end of unemployment; development of cultural, scientific, and intellectual life; development of high moral and human values; contributions toward national liberation struggles; eradication of fascism during World War II; and a

steadfast commitment to peace. The WPBelg praised the achievements of socialism in both Cuba and Korea: “Cuba and Korea show what small countries of the Third World can achieve when socialism has liberated the masses of the workers.”

The CPCuba stressed the achievements of the socialist revolution in Cuba: the reduction of the infant mortality rate to 10.3 per thousand live births and a life expectancy of seventy-five years (on a par with those of the world’s most developed countries), the right to combine study with work (a legacy from Marti and Marx), and the real possibility for children and young people to study, especially the large number of people with university degrees.

Both the CPViet and the CPCuba pointed out that despite the collapse in Eastern Europe, there are millions of people around the world who are still actively building socialism. The CPViet stressed the difference between the human condition in the nineteenth century and today:

The face of our humanity in this 20th century has changed so much in comparison with that in the 19th century. Illuminated by the ideology of Marxism, enjoying the encouragement of the October Revolution and the support from socialist countries, hundreds of nations with thousands of millions of people have stood up for national independence and they have gained to different extents the rights to life and democracy. . . . Today, when talking about socialism and the proletarian revolution, we do not talk the same way as we did of [the] *Paris Commune*, but [of] a great actual force both materially and spiritually.

### ***Imperialism***

Solidarity with Cuba in its resistance to the economic blockade by the United States and with the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea in its resistance to the threat of U.S. aggression over the nuclear inspection issue was called for in many of the papers. The need to oppose all other forms of aggression by imperialism against these and the other socialist countries—China and Vietnam (the WPBelg and PortCP also included Laos among

the socialist countries)—and other peoples struggling to defend their independence was also stressed. There was broad condemnation of the United States for its role in the Gulf war.

The principal centers of imperialism were generally identified as the United States, the EEC (in which Germany is considered to be the leading power), and Japan. There was no disagreement that the United States is still able to assert its dominance as the leading imperialist power. The CPPhil drew attention to the growing threats from nationalism and militarism in Japan and Germany as the U.S. military budget decreases.

Several parties warned of the growing danger represented by Germany's emergence as the leading force in the EEC bloc in the "new world order." The GerCP warned that Germany is already extending its influence into the Baltics, former areas of Yugoslavia, and in a short time will be able to "ensure its influence in Russia, Ukraine and in other republics of the erstwhile Soviet Union."

German imperialism is attempting to comprehensively strengthen itself economically, politically and militarily, which should enable it to play a leading role in West Europe and also in the larger parts of the world. Its craving for expansion has found a concrete form also in its desire to create a political union out of the European community under its leadership. The EC internal market and the new market of East Europe are meant to be the domain of influence dominated by it. . . .

A special task of the communists is to make the objective, economic and social laws clear and to fight against any illusion that the essence of imperialism can be changed. This struggle, at the forefront of which the GCP stays, cannot simply merge with a petty reform of the capitalist system. The goal of our struggle is socialism.

In an obvious reference to the absence of a Marxist-Leninist party in the eastern part of Germany, the GerCP stated that the extension of its organization and distribution of its newspaper to the whole of Germany "are the preconditions for the future

strengthening of the communist movement in Germany. The development of an essentially anti-fascist strategy with an anti-imperialistic component will then be objectively possible and can become a reality.”<sup>7</sup>

Most of the European parties spoke in opposition to the Maastricht treaty and a united Europe. The CPFr spoke about united action in France against this project of big capital:

Communists have formulated concrete proposals for a social, democratic, peaceful and fraternal Europe. On this basis, we asked for and obtained a referendum on the treaty of Maastricht, to which we called for a *NO* from the Left. We are proud to have thus helped the people to gather against this infamous project. We nearly reached the majority. Recently, we are taking up action in combination with other progressive forces in Europe.

During the discussion, the CPGre called for a meeting of the Communist parties of Europe to develop the struggle against the Maastricht treaty. The CPBrit tied the importance of combatting the Maastricht treaty to the fact that the main terrain of struggle among the three imperialist centers is the markets within the imperialist countries themselves. “We should not lose sight of the fact that imperialism’s exploitation of the Third World forms only the minor part of its income,” noted the CPBrit. “This exploitation is enough to enforce mass misery throughout the Third World—but imperialist enslavement, although of a less brutal kind, of the working class in the advanced capitalist countries remains an essential feature for imperialism.” The CPBrit representative added that eighty-four percent of the investments of British transnational corporations were in other imperialist countries. He continued:

Should the Maastricht treaty go through, we will all have to change it. Therefore, the Communist Parties of member states of the European Community may have to consider meeting within a short period of time in order to exchange views and ideas on the European Community and the

dangers presented by the construction of a European super-state.

The CPBrit representative cited what he thought were prophetic words by Lenin:

The United States of Europe is either impossible or reactionary under capitalism. . . . Of course, temporary agreements between capitalists and the capitalist powers are possible. In this sense the United States of Europe is possible . . . but what for? Only for the purpose of jointly suppressing socialism in Europe, and of jointly protecting colonial booty against Japan and America.

A PSPMex representative spoke strongly against the North American Free Trade Agreement:

My party, the Popular Socialist Party of Mexico, has categorically affirmed that the Agreement . . . is nothing but a design of imperialism and the big transnational monopolies for accelerating and deepening the exploitation of the working class, for exercising imperialist right of exploitation and sabotage of the economies of other nations.

Several parties, notably the WPBelg, CPIInd, and SoAfCP warned of the growing strength of the right and ultraright. The WPBelg noted that the human rights that the West defends are the rights of the reactionaries and the fascists. The CPIInd discussed the growing strength of the Bharatiya Janata Party, whose aim is to “impose a theocratic state in India” and that this party is in power in four states in India. Pointing to the “strong secular and democratic tradition of the Indian people,” the CPIInd reported that “Communist and left parties . . . took the initiative in rallying together the secular parties, groups, and individuals in a broad ‘Campaign for National Unity.’” The SoAfCP stated that as part of an ongoing debate of a number of critical questions, it is discussing national and ethnic questions. It said that the “right-wing forces are using narrow nationalism, chauvinism, and racism to divide the working class at the national level and international levels.”

*The crisis of capitalism and the socialist perspective*

The PSPMex stated, “It is clear that those who preferred [the] capitalist path of development and thought that this was the only panacea against recession and crisis are finding that instead of economic salvation, the neo-liberal path of development is producing more recession. The net result is further concentration of riches in the hands of [a] few and total destitution of the people at large.” The SoAfCP stressed that while “it is true that capitalism has scored some remarkable successes in a number of countries, it has failed as a world system.” The CPFr quoted the famous observation of half a century ago: “India is not a poor country, but a country inhabited by poor people” and updated it to the present: “We can say too that the world in which we live is not poor, far from it, but more and more, it has people who are poor. At the other end of the chain, a small number of rich getting richer and richer are ruling as masters over millions of people.”

The CPCan observed that “the new conditions are no reason for communists to collapse and declare capitalism the winner, rather the new conditions call for new demands and new methods of struggle.” It cited mass unemployment in the capitalist countries as a condition which puts demands for a shorter work week in sharp perspective: “A 35-hour work week with no reduction in take-home pay, a ban on mandatory overtime, reduced pension age, and increased vacation time would go a long way to putting Canada back to work.” Referring to the former USSR and the former socialist countries, the CPFr asserted that these states have been “brutally destabilized” and that a “veritable massacre of human and natural resources is happening there.” Many of the parties agreed with the CPIInd(M) that it had been an error to view the period of transition from capitalism to socialism as a “straightforward path” and “irreversible.” The CPUSA stressed that the class struggle does not proceed in a straight line from stage to stage.

The SoAfCP representative suggested that an analysis of the transition from socialism to capitalism is needed.

It seems to me that within the communist movement, within the broad anti-imperialist movement, there is an

absolute need for a thoroughgoing analysis of this process. I do not think it is sufficient to merely characterise it as a counter-revolutionary process. There are some fundamental lessons we need to learn. Of course our ideological and class opponents never cease to tell us that our policies for transition from capitalism to socialism would lead to a catastrophic flight of capital, drop in output, drop in GDP [gross domestic product] and the consequent lowering of the living standards of the people. Yet when it comes to the other transition they seem to be remarkably silent. There has been a catastrophic decline in some of the most important economic indicators as well as a growth in others such as unemployment, homelessness and even poverty. In that sense, this process of transition from socialism to capitalism is certainly not irreversible. It is interesting that the bourgeois ideologues may well be making the same mistakes that we communists made earlier—that the transition process of [the] building of socialism was irreversible. But this is of course not to underestimate the very difficult situation facing the fraternal parties in those countries that were formerly socialist.

The dynamic and contradictory aspects of the transition period were emphasized in the papers and the discussion. On the basis of its direct experience in socialist construction, the CPCuba stated:

We all know that socialism is not a perfect society. As a developing society, it has deficiencies and imperfections in the political, economic and social fields as an unavoidable result of the very dialectics surrounding the emergence of what is new and superior compared to what is old and backward.

These contradictions are surmountable, provided there is a political will to openly face and rectify in constant and total unity with the people the mistakes made.

The CPViet affirmed that the journey to socialism must include every class and every strata of the working people, the core of which is the alliance between workers, farmers, and intellectuals.

The CPGre stressed that the transition to socialism is not a spontaneous event, but rather “a task for conscientious action by millions of working people and their allies headed by the working class.” The GerCP agreed that class consciousness was necessary for the socialist transformation of society, but “class consciousness cannot be generated merely by moral appeals. It is produced by the struggle for the interests which are experienced by those belonging to a class.”

The problems of revolutionary transformation were raised in several contexts. The SoAfCP stated that a multiparty system “is good enough for us now and certainly will have to be good enough for us when we reach the phase of the construction of a socialist society.” In the discussion the representative of SPAustral asked what happens in circumstances in which reactionary bourgeois parties win subsequent elections. Can they undo the program of public ownership? A representative from the CPInd commented that his party’s position is that opposition parties will be allowed to function and that if communists say that they will not allow other parties to function then the people will say, “All right we will see to it that you don’t come to power.” The WPBelg replied that the dictatorship of the proletariat “encompasses the need for the working class and its allies to crush the state machinery of the oppressing class and the building of a new state machine of a totally different kind” and that this means establishing “the hegemony of the working class under the leadership of its revolutionary vanguard party and maintaining it during the whole period of transition between capitalism and communism.” The representative from the GerCP said that the 1975 program of his party allowed for the possibility for more than one party to carry out the transition to socialism under the hegemony of the working class.

An approach similar to this last position had already been presented by the CPNep(UML) on the opening day of the seminar in a paper stating that its program is based on a “people’s multi-party democracy” because its program is also based on “our struggle of [over] 40 years in which the left forces of Nepal had fought without break against autocratic regimes for establishing multi-party democracy in the country.” In its view, “a communist



party should also compete in the election and it should get mandates from people from time to time to rule the country and run the government. We believe that only a people's multi-party democracy based on rule of law can alert us to check the mistakes and sustain the popularity of the party among the people." The party's program characterizes the state system it envisages as an "anti-feudal, anti-comprador capitalist and anti-imperialist people's multi-party democracy" and at the same time characterizes it as a "people's democratic dictatorship or people's democratic state."

A representative from Brazil stated, "We feel that socialism in our country can be achieved through the consolidation of a form of multi-party democracy." He continued, however, "We are absolutely sure that the comrades from Cuba are correct in understanding that the slogan of multi-party democracy today in Cuba is the banner of counter-revolution." He added that last year's electoral victory showed that "the path that was taken by the Cuban comrades to strengthen socialist democracy was a correct one." This demonstrates that "we cannot generalise formulas."

A number of parties commented on the transitional economic forms in the case of economically backward countries. The approach was generally along the lines taken by the SoAFCP, which saw the necessity of an interim phase of reconstruction and development before socialism could be introduced. This phase would be characterized by the presence of a mixture of property relations.

The CPPhil has been engaged in armed struggle since 1969. It described its situation as follows:

We are of the view that the Filipino proletariat and the people are carrying the flaming torch of armed revolution from an old to a new period of revolutionary struggle in the world. We uphold the Marxist-Leninist theory of state and revolution and are confident that in due time revolutionary armed struggle led by Marxist-Leninist parties will increase in the world.

. . . We have no timetable for winning the new democratic revolution. After expressing a number of times our

desire to win it in ten or twenty years, we now declare that we are willing to wage armed resistance in the spirit of Dagohoy and his descendants who fought Spanish colonialism for eighty-five years without letup. Without the cumulative effect of the Filipino people's armed resistance in more than 300 years, Spanish colonialism would not have been overthrown. There would be no end to foreign and feudal domination if the Filipino people ceased to wage armed revolution.

### ***Conclusion***

In this report we have concentrated our attention on those subjects that received the most attention at the seminar. We did not attempt to cover all areas of interest. As announced on page 56, the full proceedings are available in book form and computer diskette from the Marxist Forum through MEP Publications. This material contains much information on the political and economic conditions of the countries participating in the seminar.

As the report indicates, significant differences on several fundamental theoretical questions exist. These differences have made it impractical to convene a conference that would seek to establish a unified international Communist movement despite the wishes expressed by some of the participants for such a conference.<sup>8</sup>

In his concluding remarks to the seminar, CPIInd(M) General Secretary Harkishan Singh Surjeet listed a number of fundamental principles on which he saw general agreement: (1) Marxism as a creative science and guide to action is as valid today as when it was propounded; (2) the setbacks were due to distortions and deviations, but do not negate Marxism or the goal of socialism; (3) socialism remains the objective goal the communist parties; (4) class struggle is the motive force of history; (5) capitalism cannot provide remedies for the ills of present society; (6) imperialism remains the main enemy of humanity and it is necessary to unite in the struggle against it and to defend socialist countries from its attacks against them; and (7) communist parties stand in defense of Marxism and lead the working class and other working

people to socialism. Surjeet suggested that today there cannot be any guiding world revolutionary center, that time is needed to absorb the consequences of the recent experiences, and that bilateral ties among the parties should be strengthened and opportunities for such multilateral sharing of experiences pursued.

*List of parties presenting papers and the papers' authors*

SPAustral—Socialist Party of Australia: Peter Symon  
WPBangl—Workers Party of Bangladesh: Amal Sen  
WPBelg—Workers Party of Belgium: Daudouin Deckers  
CPBraz—Communist Party of Brazil: Joao Amazonas  
CPBrit—Communist Party of Britain: Robert Griffiths  
NCPBrit—New Communist Party of Britain: Eric Travett  
CPCan—Communist Party of Canada: Elizabeth Rowley  
CPCuba—Communist Party of Cuba: Maria de los Angeles Garcia  
CPFr—Communist Party of France: Gisele Moreau  
GerCP—German Communist Party: Fred Herger  
CPGre—Communist Party of Greece: Ellas Lengeris  
CPInd—Communist Party of India: A. B. Bardhan  
CPInd(M)—Communist Party of India (Marxist): Harkishan Singh Surjeet  
TPIran—Tudeh Party of Iran (no author given)  
WPKor—Workers Party of Korea: Hwang Jang Yop  
PSPMex—Popular Socialist Party of Mexico: Francisco Hernandez Juarez  
CPNep(UML)—Communist Party of Nepal (UML): Madan Bhandari  
CPPhil—Communist Party of the Philippines: Emil Villa  
PortCP—Portuguese Communist Party: Alban Nunes  
SoAfCP—South African Communist Party: Essop Pahad  
CPSyr—Syrian Communist Party: no author given  
WPTur—Workers Party of Turkey: Murat Metin  
CPUSA—Communist Party, U.S.A.: Sam Webb  
CPViet—Communist Party of Vietnam: Dang Xuan Ky

**NOTES**

1. See the ten theses of Marxism-Leninism in *The Downfall and Future of Socialism*, by Hans Heinz Holz (*Nature, Society, and Thought*, vol. 5, no. 3 [1992]), 32–37).

2. Underlying the hesitancy to undertake such a discussion is the traditional Marxist position that every state is a dictatorship of the ruling class in its essence, but that the forms in which this essence is realized vary; for example, the bourgeois state can be a monarchy, parliamentary democracy, or fascist dictatorship. The association of the term *dictatorship* with fascist governments in

this century leads to misunderstandings about what Marxists mean when they refer to dictatorship of the proletariat. Therefore the CPUSA, for example, long ago dropped the establishment of a proletarian dictatorship from its programmatic goals, but still retained the view that this would be the essence of the state at least during a certain stage in the transition from capitalism to communism.

3. Presumably one of the following: *Foundations of Leninism* (Moscow: International Publishers, 1932, 127 pages) or *Problems of Leninism* (Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1947, 642 pages).

4. At the Korean-U.S. Scholars Interdisciplinary Colloquium in Pyongyang in 1990, it was explained that the term *juche* has the literal meaning “master of the body” and that without this concept materialist dialectics sees the world developing by interaction of objectively existing things, thus failing to recognize that human beings, as the only independent beings, creatively guide the course of this development. For a more detailed discussion of *juche*, see report of the colloquium in *Nature, Society, and Thought*, vol. 3, no. 3 (1990), 353–62.

5. Party documents and articles in their publications would place the CPCan and GerCP in the first group, the WPKor and the CPUSA in the third group.

6. The CPI(M) paper did not refer explicitly to Stalin, as had the other parties in the third group. The resolution referred to here, however (Resolution on Certain Ideological Issues), does deal with what it characterized as Khrushchev’s “ahistorical evaluation of the role of Joseph Stalin” as follows:

The CPI(M), since the Burdwan Plenum in 1968, has repeatedly made clear its assessment of the positive and negative aspects of Stalin’s leadership. While being severely critical of certain gross violations of inner-party democracy and socialist legality, the May 1990 C. C. resolution had stated: “The CPI(M) rejected the approach which, in the name of correcting the personality cult, is negating the history of socialism. The uncontested contribution of Joseph Stalin in defence of Leninism, against Trotskyism and other ideological deviations, the building of socialism in the USSR, the victory over fascism and the reconstruction of the war-ravaged Soviet Union enabling it to acquire enough strength to check imperialist aggressive moves, are ineradicable from the history of socialism.”

7. By the summer of 1993, the German Communist Party had established three district organizations in eastern Germany: in former West Berlin, in former East Berlin, and in the state of Brandenburg. The decision to form party organizations in the eastern part of the country came after the Party of Democratic Socialism, which is still based almost entirely in the region of the former GDR, refused any cooperation in the forthcoming elections with the German Communist Party, which before the unification had been exclusively a West German party.

8. One of the Communist parties attending the Fourteenth Congress of the Portuguese Communist Party in December 1992 proposed to the other parties present that the occasion be used for a conference of Communist parties. The proposal drew little support and was not taken up.

# **Calcutta Seminar: Presentation by the Communist Party of India (Marxist)**

**Harkishan Singh Surjeet**

Dear Comrades,

At the outset, on behalf of the CPI(M), I express my gratitude for your acceptance of our invitation and participation in this seminar.

The need to address ourselves to this issue arises not only because of the renewed offensive, both ideological and political, by the enemies of human liberation—imperialism and its agents. The need arises more out of the necessity to reassert the invincible validity of this creative science, rectifying the mistakes of the past, reassessing the estimations of the correlation of class forces made at various points of time, in order to overcome the weaknesses and lags in understanding, precisely to strengthen and carry forward the struggle for human emancipation.

Of the vast complexity of processes that define the contemporary world situation, two aspects continue to be utilised to mount this renewed offensive which seeks to disintegrate the ranks of communists. First, the dismantling of socialism in the USSR and East European countries. Secondly, the so-called “invincibility” of capitalism as a system signifying the end of the human social evolution.

On both these counts, as on all others, the creative science of Marxism, far from being repudiated, emerges as the only basis to properly understand and evaluate these developments.

Before proceeding to substantiate this assertion, it would be

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necessary to briefly recapitulate the essential qualities of Marxism.

We can do no better than to quote Lenin.

The history of philosophy and the history of social science show with perfect clarity that there is nothing resembling “sectarianism” in Marxism, in the sense of its being a hidebound, petrified doctrine, a doctrine which arose *away from* the high road of the development of world civilisation. On the contrary, the genius of Marx consists precisely in his having furnished answers to questions already raised by the foremost minds of mankind. His doctrine emerged as the direct and immediate *continuation* of the teachings of the greatest representatives of philosophy, political economy and socialism. (“On the Three Sources and Components of Marxism”)

Further he said, “the genius of Marx lies in his having been the first to deduce . . . the lesson world history teaches and to apply that lesson consistently. The deduction he made is the doctrine of *class struggle*.”

The CPI(M)’s 14th Congress Resolution On Certain Ideological Issues had noted:

Marxism-Leninism is inherently materialistic, creative and intrinsically dialectical. It is hence supremely anti-dogmatic. It is a world-view that embraces the vision of liberation and expresses emancipatory ideals. It is a tool for understanding and analysing the multitude of phenomena that constitute changing historical situations. It is a guide to action that defines programmatic objectives for the people’s struggle for liberation, subject to the necessary adaptations as required by changing historical situations.

As a creative science, Marxism-Leninism identifies the tendencies and directions of development. In doing so it provides the possibilities for popular mass intervention in these developments in the pursuit of establishing an exploitation-free society. For instance, the historical

inevitability of the replacement of the exploitation-based capitalism by socialism is not automatic. The key factor that can effect such a social transformation is the correct ideological, political and organisational leadership of the growing struggles of the working class, the peasantry and all working people. When this class consciousness is defused or blunted, the forces of counter-revolution exploit the situation to perpetuate their class rule.

Subsequent world developments and the present situation vindicate the fundamental Marxist world-view, its scientific method and its fundamental conclusion that class struggle is the motive force of history.

Firmly convinced of the fundamental basis of the Marxist understanding, the CPI(M), while probing the factors leading to the dismantling of socialism in the USSR and East European countries, basically identified three main areas where certain incorrect assessments led to incorrect political and tactical lines which instead of strengthening the international communist movement only eroded its strongest bastions.

These relate to an understanding of the transition period from capitalism to socialism; a correct estimation of capitalism and its potential; and deviations from the revolutionary content of Marxism-Leninism.

The period of transition from capitalism to socialism was often simplistically and mechanically construed as a straightforward path without any zigzags and, more importantly, as irreversible. Socialism, in fact, represents the transition of humanity from capitalism, the highest form of class society, to communism, a classless society. Integral, therefore, to this stage is not merely the co-existence but the constant and growing struggle between counter-revolutionary forces who wish to preserve the exploitative capitalist order and the revolutionary forces that seek to liberate humanity.

The success or failure in this struggle, at any point of time, is determined both by the successes achieved in socialist construction in the socialist countries and the international and internal correlation of class forces and its correct estimation. The correct

estimation assumes importance since from this follows a corresponding political, tactical line which either advances or retards the progress towards liberation. Incorrect assessment and estimation based on ideological deviations, as the history of the international communist movement is witness, lead to distortions. These were exploited by the counter-revolutionary forces time and again to derail the international communist movement from its class moorings.

One such instance, a major one, was the estimation regarding the strength and potential of capitalism made by the international conferences in 1957 and 1960. The document of the 1960 conference, while endorsing the shift in the world balance of forces in favour of socialism, went far beyond, to deny capitalism any future and to describe socialism as the decisive factor in shaping world developments. Such a conclusion, apart from re-enforcing the simplistic understanding regarding the irreversible nature of the transition period, grossly underestimated the potential of world capitalism, both of its capacity to further develop productive forces as well as its capacity to adapt to changed circumstances.

This, of course, does not mean that capitalism has or can ever have the strength to overcome its inherent crisis that Marx had analysed bare in his work. But crises by themselves cannot and do not cause the collapse of capitalism automatically. A conclusion of seminal importance drawn by Marx was that capitalism has to be overthrown. It does not automatically collapse.

This underestimation of capitalism was accompanied by an incorrect estimation of the correlation of class forces under changed circumstances by the 20th Congress of the CPSU. The gross distortion of the Leninist concept of peaceful coexistence and the advocacy of peaceful competition and peaceful transition by the CPSU leadership under Khrushchev threw the door open for revisionism and class collaboration of the worst kind. As a consequence, many a communist party was decimated leaving the international communist movement much emasculated.

While capitalism was adapting to changing realities, finding newer forms of exploitation and intensifying the ideological struggle against socialism, the underestimation of capitalism and



deviations, both dogmatic and revisionist, combined to dilute the socialist ideological counter-offensive and the struggle against capitalism. Instead of correcting the deviations and distortions that crept in, mistakes continued to accumulate in the subsequent decades of socialist construction in 70s and 80s. This permitted imperialism and capitalism to gain the political advantage.

The task of overthrowing capitalism needs the constant sharpening and strengthening of the revolutionary ideological struggle of the working class and its decisive intervention under the leadership of a party wedded to Marxism-Leninism—a subjective factor without which no revolutionary transformation is possible. This subjective factor was, as we noted, further weakened due to the revisionist deviations.

Such errors, it must be accepted in the spirit of truthful self-criticism, were also accompanied by an overestimation of the strength of socialism. Socialism, being a superior system, made gigantic strides in the initial years, capable of facing the severest of onslaughts and rebuffing them, was beset with certain limitations. First, the fact that socialist revolutions triumphed not in the advanced but relatively backward capitalistically developed countries. This meant that though the physical size of the imperialist market was reduced, the level of productive forces already achieved by capitalism and its capacity to develop it further remained. This in itself imposed severe limitations in terms of carrying forward the process of social change from immense relative backwardness to a stage higher than that of capitalism. Lenin was ever conscious of these problems. While emphasising the prolonged and complex character of the transition period, Lenin, in his lifetime, advanced and implemented many initiatives like the NEP keeping in mind the backwardness and concrete conditions of Russia. That the process of socialist construction is both prolonged and complex needs to be underlined.

However, it will be wrong to conclude that the socialist revolutions in these countries were premature. The sharpening of the world-wide contradictions permitted the rupture of the imperialist chain at its weakest link. Seizing this initiative, the socialist revolution triumphed, ushering in a new era in human

civilisation. The Great October Socialist Revolution radically altered the world situation, galvanising both the international working class movement and the struggles in the colonial world. The gigantic economic strides that it made within a short period of time, vindicating the superiority of the socialist system, inspired many a revolutionary movement across the globe.

Apart from such incorrect estimations and deviations, there were specific mistakes and shortcomings in four broad areas in the process of socialist construction. These relate to: form of state under socialism—dictatorship of the proletariat; socialist democracy in practice; socialist economic construction; and ideological consciousness of the party and people in the socialist countries. The CPI(M) 14th Party Congress resolution has examined these aspects in some detail.

However, instead of correcting the mistakes of the past and overcoming the distortions within the framework of socialism and Marxism-Leninism, the CPSU under Gorbachev's leadership pursued a liquidationist course that ultimately led to the dismantling of socialism.

Though a lot more study has to be undertaken into the specifics of these experiences, the CPI(M) is of the firm opinion that the dismantling of socialism in these countries was due to these deviations, mistakes and distortions that have occurred during the process of socialist construction.

These developments hence do not and cannot constitute a repudiation of socialism or Marxism-Leninism.

Notwithstanding these incorrect estimations and present-day reverses, the 20th century, particularly the epoch beginning with the October Revolution, was marked by the victories of the working class, the peasantry and people in every continent of the world, in varying degree.

During this century, capitalism plunged humanity into two barbaric world wars claiming millions of lives. It produced and used nuclear weapons to demonstrate its inhuman superiority and plunged the world into a nuclear race with devastating consequences. It launched numerous wars to contain humanity's advance to socialism, intervened in the internal affairs of independent countries, organised coups, foisted reactionary and

dictatorial regimes to suit its interests. Its most barbaric form was exposed in the fascist dictatorships.

On the other hand, the socialist revolutions and national liberation struggles imparted a richer content to human civilisation by making it possible for the majority of the working people in many countries to lead their lives without national oppression and free from exploitation. This impact continues to chart the future course of human development towards national and social liberation. This process, however, will be long, complex and full of twists and turns. But the fundamental direction of the epoch continues to be that of a transition from capitalism to socialism.

The validity of Marxism as a science, a method, a guide to action and its abiding relevance is justified by the nature of the present world developments. It would be unnecessary, in our opinion, to burden this august gathering of revolutionaries with statistical data that is familiar. It, however, needs emphasis that the contemporary world situation continues to be characterised by the four fundamental contradictions. The continuing recessionary spell in the capitalist economy is accentuating the contradictions between labour and capital. The effort to shift the burden of this crisis by imperialism onto the third world countries is bound to intensify the contradiction between imperialism and the peoples of the third world countries. Accompanied by the political offensive of the USA to establish its "New World Order," this portends further sharpening of this contradiction. Inter-imperialist contradictions continue to grow and express themselves in various forms, particularly in the economic sphere. The US-led economic blockade against Cuba, the new offensive on the issue of nuclear inspection of North Korea and the continued embargo against Vietnam signify imperialism's continued offensive against socialism.

While these contradictions continue to influence world developments, the forms of resolving these would vary according to the concrete situations. For instance, the inter-imperialist rivalries ending up in an imperialist war like the first and second world wars today remains a very remote possibility for a variety of reasons.

Though these developments vindicate the fundamental basis of the Marxist analysis and understanding, a point that we noted earlier needs underlining. The subjective factor—and its weakness today—permits capitalism to create enough space for its manoeuvres to survive its inherent contradictions.

However, it is necessary to identify the concrete specificities that permit the continued capitalist advance despite its basic contradictions. The living essence of Marxism, as Lenin had said, is the “concrete analysis of concrete conditions.” We venture to pose a few issues that in our opinion distinguish the post-World War II capitalist economy, particularly since the 70s. We are fully conscious of the limitations of our capacity to undertake a profound analysis. This is a task that is necessary, however.

The two decades [ending in] 1973 witnessed rates of growth of output in the imperialist world that were unprecedented in the entire history of capitalism. This was achieved under the new post-war political and economic leadership of the USA. The reconstruction boom after the devastation of World War II, the spread of automobiles, the Keynesian demand management policies pursued in individual capitalist countries, and above all huge state expenditures, especially on armaments in the leading country, the U.S., all contributed to the maintenance of high demand in the imperialist world, which, under the new Bretton Woods financial arrangement facilitating global trade and financial flows, ushered in high growth rates in virtually all of them. To be sure, there was uneven development among them, with Japan being by far the fastest grower among them all, but this was uneven development in the context of a general boom. In these boom conditions, technological innovations were rapidly adopted, bringing about significant growth rates in labour productivity, which, despite rising rates of surplus value, raised the living standards of large segments of the working class in the imperialist countries.

All this is well known. What is particularly intriguing however is the development after 1973. With high rates of inflation in the mid-70s, with a recession in 1974–75 which was by far the worst since the Great Depression of the 30s, and with the Bretton Woods system having collapsed, world capitalism appeared to be

heading for another period of severe crisis in conformity with traditional Marxist understanding. This however did not come about the way it was anticipated, and nothing underscores more clearly the resilience of imperialism and our underestimation of its potential strength than its subsequent performance. No doubt, the growth rates in the advanced capitalist world have come down sharply from their post-war levels; no doubt the growth of world trade has shrunk rapidly; no doubt, at the very present moment the entire imperialist world is experiencing a recession; and no doubt the unemployment rates in all of them have been higher in a secular sense in the 80s and the 90s than during the long boom of the 50s and the 60s. Nevertheless, none of these adds up to portend a repetition of a 1930s-type crisis, at least not as yet. The question is why?

The inflationary upsurge of the late 70s and the early 80s in the imperialist countries was checked in two ways: by enlarging the domestic reserve army of labour (which explains the high unemployment rates), which weakened the trade unions and prevented real wage claims from rising in tandem with productivity increases, and, even more important, by turning the terms of trade against the primary commodity producers of the third world. The collapse of primary commodity prices relative to manufactures, which has brought indebtedness, loss of economic sovereignty to the IMF, decline in per capita incomes, and starvation and famines to vast stretches of the third world, notably Africa and Latin America, is the direct outcome of the “success” of inflation-control in the imperialist countries.

But with declining incomes in the third world, and lower wage-shares in the imperialist countries themselves, metropolitan capitalism would have been expected to have moved into a serious slump. How was this avoided? Apart from the scientific and technological advances, we come to the significance of the centralisation of international finance that has taken place. The basic support for the level of economic activity in the metropolitan countries was provided by the huge expansion in the U.S. fiscal deficit which occurred with Reagan. And this deficit, which gave rise to a large current account deficit in the U.S. balance of payments, was financed through incurring an enormous external

debt, which was facilitated by the centralisation of international finance.

The hallmark of the current centralisation of international finance, or globalisation as some have called it, lies in the fact that capital is sucked out from all corners of the globe to be invested in a few selected areas deemed fit, or creditworthy, by a handful of multinational banks. It is not that the multinational banks themselves exclusively control the financial flows; but the lead given by them is followed by myriads of individual rentiers, so that without there being any “conspiracy” about it the whole world’s finances, as it were, are subjected to one centralised controlling authority with regard to their deployment, the authority consisting of a handful of multinational banks. However, the competition between multinational corporations and banks, often leading to conflicts, may well upset the present arrangement.

The recurring U.S. fiscal deficit gives centralised international finance capital an avenue of investment. It thus accentuates third world recession by sucking in finance from elsewhere; it imposes a financial crunch on the third world which forces the latter to surrender its economic sovereignty to imperialist agencies like the IMF and the World Bank; and it also makes the third world hand over control over its assets and resources “for a song” to international creditors for servicing past debt; besides it sustains the level of activity in the imperialist world and prevents the onset of any sharp slump.

All this, namely the ability to stabilise their own economies at the expense of the third world, would not have been possible if, despite their undoubted contradictions, the imperialist economies had not displayed a measure of agreement amongst themselves. Periods of imperialist disunity are periods which are not only characterised by crisis at the core, but which also provide “space” to the third world, as well as the socialist countries, to assert themselves. On the other hand, as long as the imperialist countries act with a degree of common purpose, they can deny this space and more effectively pass on the burdens of their crisis onto the shoulders of the third world, thus stabilising themselves at the latter’s expense. Apart from the objective basis of

interpenetration of capital leading to a degree of coherence, the compelling political reason for this was the existence [of] a powerful socialist power that could check imperialist attempts to impose global hegemony. With its absence today, the shifting of the burdens onto the third world is bound to intensify. Ironically, these periods are marked by disunity within the third world, not only within countries, but even inside countries where secessionist and other fissiparous tendencies raise their heads as the dream of “national reconstruction” gets snuffed out.

To say this is not to retreat to the Kautskyite position of “ultra-imperialism” from Lenin’s emphasis on inter-imperialist rivalry. The point is not to absolutise the degree of coherence that the imperialist powers have displayed hitherto. Severe inter-imperialist contradictions exist and intensify with the U.S. progressively losing its pre-eminent position, her markets progressively being taken over by Japanese capital, her debtor status getting progressively accentuated, and her government under increasing pressure to go protectionist. The “stability” that has hitherto characterised the capitalist world despite all its vicissitudes, is bound to disappear with the intensification of inter-imperialist contradictions. The point is to underline the complexity characterising capitalist development in particular conjunctures which cannot be reduced to simple formulae.

Imperialism thus, has shown far greater reserves of strength and far greater resilience than had been earlier imagined. To underestimate this strength, its manoeuvres to recover from defeats, is not only suicidal from a strategic point of view, but what is more it creates false hopes among the revolutionary ranks and quickly leads to ideological disillusionment. This does not and cannot mean that capitalism and imperialism are invincible. *We live in a present situation, when favourable conjunctures for imperialism are bound to be followed by periods when it is driven with incoherence, antagonisms, rivalries and crises. And in this sense there can be no going back upon the Leninist vision.* But the transition from capitalism to socialism is likely to be a far more protracted process with setbacks upon the way, with imperialism regrouping its strength with reversals even in countries that had once witnessed socialist revolutions and appeared

firmly set on the path of socialism and so on. The point is to change the world by looking unflinchingly at the objective reality, falling prey neither to false euphoria nor to petty-bourgeois despair.

The task of enriching Marxism and carrying forward the revolutionary struggle in the present circumstances requires a deeper theoretical study of the contemporary processes that are taking place. In fact, the stupendous task which was undertaken by Lenin in his time needs to be carried forward. The Marxist scientific methodology continues to remain the richest source of tools capable [of undertaking] this task. A lot of work needs to be done not only regarding contemporary capitalism and imperialism but also in the field of political economy of socialism.

The CPI(M) had, in its 14th Congress, stated: "The shortcomings and failures in the process of enriching this creative science in accordance with the unfolding historical developments [are] not due to its inadequacies or lack of scientific method of its content. *[They are] due to the inadequacies and lack of scientific rigour on the part of those who have embraced this philosophy.*"

The overriding validity and the abiding relevance of Marxism lie in its liberating vision and emancipatory goals. It remains today the highest form of philosophy that expresses all that humanism constitutes and ought to constitute.

The entire quest of Marx during his lifetime and that of all subsequent Marxists was to establish the basic factors necessary for complete human liberation. Capitalism, as Marx had shown and subsequent developments justify, is a system based on human exploitation. As long as exploitation of man by man and nation by nation continues to be the basis of the capitalist system, the yearning for human liberation can never be snuffed out. The world that we know today, the rights that humanity has come to accept as a matter of course, had all been contributions of people's struggles. It is this class struggle that continues to shape the present day developments and its associated human consciousness. The imprint of Marxism on contemporary society and the intellectual development of humanity is unerasable.

The contemporary world situation tellingly demonstrate the unjust and inhuman nature of capitalism. It is its rapacious



plunder that is responsible for the terrible situation of hunger, misery, sickness, illiteracy that stalk the millions in the developing world. It is directly responsible for the dangers of nuclear holocaust and worsening major ecological imbalances. The increasing moral and ethical degeneration of capitalist societies, drug abuse, violence, gender and racial discrimination are continuously debasing the finer qualities of human beings. Despite the perennial propaganda, intensified following these reverses to socialism, that “capitalism is eternal,” it today, as in the past, proves itself as a system incapable of solving the major problems confronting humanity.

This is all the more evident from the experience of the former socialist countries. Millions are today deprived of the means of daily existence, unknown to generations under the socialist system. The process of restoration of capitalism in these countries is accompanied by its natural consequences of growing unemployment, insecurity, hunger and the merciless tearing asunder of the social and moral fabric. In the name of “democracy,” the dismantling of socialism took place. Today democracy has been rendered meaningless for the people. The recent attack on May Day demonstrators at Red Square has shown the face of this “democracy.” Imperialism’s open support to Yeltsin exposes the real class nature of the new order in these countries. Capitalism has thus proven to be incapable of solving the problems of these countries.

The tasks facing communists are indeed immense. The accentuation of the fundamental contradictions of our epoch, the new insidious and vicious process of economic “re-colonisation” of the third world, and the imperialist attempts to impose its New World Order call for a greater closing of ranks amongst communists and anti-imperialist contingents. The unity of all communists, progressive and anti-imperialist forces is the basis for strengthening internationalism in the present situation. It is only on the basis of this that the imperialist offensive can be rebuffed.

*Long live Marxism-Leninism*

*Long live Proletarian Internationalism*

**REPLACES AD PAGE.**

# **Calcutta Seminar: Presentation by the South African Communist Party**

**Essop Pahad**

Allow me to express our profound gratitude to the Communist Party of India (Marxist) for making it possible for the South African Communist Party to participate in this important seminar.

Before I make my contribution to this seminar, may I take this opportunity to thank all the parties present here on behalf of the SACP and its allies, the ANC and COSATU [Congress of South African Trade Unions], for the messages of support and sympathy we received after the assassination of our general secretary, Comrade Chris Hani. This killing unleashed a tidal wave of anger and grief never before seen in our country. Millions of people participated in the events surrounding his funeral, including two of the most successful stay-away's seen in South Africa. For the party his assassination is a devastating blow. But as one of our peoples' slogans go (this was after 1976) "don't mourn—mobilise."

May I also on behalf of the ANC and its allies thank all of you for the messages of support and sympathy received by the ANC on the occasion of the death of Comrade Oliver Tambo, the National Chairperson of ANC.

Over the past two days, we have had various interesting contributions demonstrating the validity of Marxism-Leninism and its continuing importance in the struggle for socialism. I would like to associate the SACP with the fundamental ideas put forward eloquently yesterday and today that Marxism-Leninism

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is a science, a guide to action, and a body of methodological principles which should assist us not only to interpret the world but to change it.

The theory and practice of Marxism-Leninism cannot be treated as a closed book, i.e., once we have defined a phenomenon in a certain way we stick to it dogmatically. To cite one example, many parties including our own followed a simple definition of socialism basically arising from the experiences following the October Revolution of 1917 that socialism is characterised by the public ownership of the means of production. Without doubt this is an important characteristic. But as the Vietnamese comrade pointed out, this simple definition led to policies which were voluntarist, which led to wrong conclusions that under socialism you are rid of commodity production, the market mechanism and that basically only two forms of ownership exist—state owned and cooperatives.

In this context, Marxism-Leninism must remain a creative ever-developing science of theory and practice. On the other hand we are not pragmatists in the philosophical as well as practical political sense, i.e., we merely decide what is good now and what is bad then and selectively choose from the vast body of knowledge that which would support a specific point of view. In our own work, we are guided by two fundamental approaches: (a) does our understanding and actions enhance the positions of the working class and its allies; and (b) does it take us one or more steps further along the zigzag path of achieving our stated objectives. It is of course a truism that as long as there are classes there will be class struggle. We communists did not invent the class struggle, but we do try to give it a direction and a political content.

In his very interesting and thought-provoking paper, Comrade Surjeet asked us to examine the correlation of forces nationally and internationally. This is a critical starting point. Now many of us in this room, and our Party was one of them, used to assert with authority that the world balance of forces at the time when the Soviet Union was strong was in favour of the forces of peace, democracy, socialism and social progress. I believe it was then a correct characterisation. But if so, the collapse of the Soviet

Union and socialist societies in Eastern Europe has fundamentally altered the world balance of forces in favour of imperialism and its myriad agencies. Thus the need for the closest cooperation of the progressive and anti-imperialist forces is of great significance. By working together we can and we must resist the blandishments and intimidations of the major imperialist powers and their agencies.

Looking at this specific area, I would like to stress that whilst it is true that capitalism has scored some remarkable successes in a number of countries it has failed as a world system. And it would seem to me that if we are to judge whether or not a system is successful, one of the characteristics will have to be whether it has succeeded as a world system. As a world system, capitalism has, as the comrade from the Communist Party of Britain pointed out, basically delivered nothing but misery to more than 500 million people around the globe.

Naturally, as communists we are preoccupied by the theory and practice of transition from capitalism to socialism, but I would like to say a few words about another transition process, i.e., from socialism to capitalism. And it seems to me that within the communist movement, within the broad anti-imperialist movement there is an absolute need for a thoroughgoing analysis of this process. I do not think it is sufficient to merely characterise it as a counter-revolutionary process. There are some fundamental lessons we need to learn. Of course our ideological and class opponents never cease to tell us that our policies for transition from capitalism to socialism would lead to a catastrophic flight of capital, drop in output, drop in GDP [gross domestic product] and the consequent lowering of the living standards of the people. Yet when it comes to the other transition they seem to be remarkably silent. There has been a catastrophic decline in some of the most important economic indicators as well as a growth in others such as unemployment, homelessness and even poverty. In that sense, this process of transition from socialism to capitalism is certainly not irreversible. It is interesting that the bourgeois ideologues may well be making the same mistakes that we communists made earlier—that the transition process of building of socialism was irreversible.

But this is of course not to underestimate the very difficult situation facing the fraternal parties in those countries that were formerly socialist.

Nevertheless, even at this stage it is necessary to pose the question: what is the price that the Russian Federation has to pay for this transition? Surely one seems to be, at this moment of time, the loss of political and economic independence. The paper money promised to Yeltsin by the USA and G-7 countries will only be made available if the present regime succumbs to the demands of these countries. The other side of the coin is that it may possibly lead to an authoritarian regime in which the process of democratisation of society will be pushed into the background. The SACP like other fraternal parties is also engaging in a debate and analysis of a number of critical issues facing the communist movement. One of these is the national and ethnic questions. Right-wing forces are using narrow nationalism, chauvinism and racism to divide the working class at the national level and international level.

Another question is the composition and character of the working class. The question of the changing composition of the working class is not only important for the developed capitalist countries in the wake of the scientific and technological revolution but, it seems to me, to all of us. To what extent we require a differentiated approach to the question of the composition of working class, the question of those who are employed and those who are unemployed; to what extent we may need to have a differentiated approach to categories such as youth and women.

At the end of this month we are holding a strategic conference to examine amongst others issues such as: (a) what kind of parties do we want to build in South Africa; (b) the relationship between a planned economy, the market and democracy; (c) the power of the big monopolies and how to break this, including looking at various ways to bring about the central role of the working class at all levels of decision making; d) how to initiate a policy of reconstruction and development which is linked to the struggle to consummate the national democratic revolution, and internationalism in the present world situation. Let me very briefly touch on these points.

What type of party do we want to build? The core of the debate at least for us is the relationship between a mass party and a party of quality. For example, following the assassination of Chris Hani should we go on the offensive and recruit members in their thousands if possible? On the other hand, should we seek to consolidate our present membership which stands at 50,000, or do we seek to do both? Now the simple answer for this is always to say, do both. But it is much more complicated when we actually try to put that in practice. At least speaking for our own Party, we face serious problems of servicing our present membership and our present structures. We face a serious problem in carrying out a consistent and sustained campaign of political education. For us the question of raising the level of political consciousness and understanding of our own membership is a priority area, because we feel that it is a specific contribution that we can make which would have impact both on the national liberation and the trade union movement.

We are also of the opinion that being a Communist Party does not automatically give us a monopoly of ideas both in the realm of theory as well as political practice, that we need to find the ways and means in which we can interact with other left forces in order to achieve the aims of bringing about a socialist society in South Africa.

At the same time these discussions would also examine how we can strengthen our alliance with the ANC and the Congress of South African Trade Unions to ensure a fundamental restructuring of the socio-economic life of our country.

On the relationship between the planned economy and the market and democracy: This is an area which concerns all of us as individual parties as well as a collective. Like other parties, we are constantly under attack that these three elements are so contradictory that they are not possible to achieve. We are of the view that not only is it theoretically feasible but without a combination of all three factors socialism cannot have an unshakable condition. And I was particularly interested in the input by our comrade from Portugal and I want to quote what he said, because I think it has a very important approach for us. He said that socialism and democracy (economic, social, political and

cultural) are inseparable and “that the new society can only be built by the revolutionary action and engagement of the workers and popular masses, never without their engagement and much less against their will.”

Proceeding from our own experiences, and really speaking only about South Africa, we are convinced that in our own country, multi-party democracy is central to the different stages of our struggle even in the future. And we would insist, at least speaking about South Africa itself, that multi-party democracy is good enough for us now and certainly will have to be good enough for us when we reach the phase of the construction of a socialist society.

South Africa has one of the highest concentrations and centralisations of capital in any comparable capitalist country. Four large corporations control almost seventy percent of the shares in the Johannesburg Stock Exchange. They also control large tracts of land and the commercial property in every major city. To achieve economic democracy requires therefore the weakening and then breaking up of these huge conglomerates. Again like so many other fraternal parties, we are grappling with the question of how to bring this about. In this context we also proceed from the notion, and I want to emphasise that we are speaking only for ourselves, that the trade-union movement must in its organisational, structural and decision making processes be independent of all political parties. Let me give an example. If you take COSATU, the biggest trade-union federation in South Africa, many of its leaders are leaders and members of our Party. But COSATU and ourselves would regard it as intolerable if the Communist Party was to intervene in any of the decision-making processes of the trade-union movement.

On the issue of reconstruction and development: As you may know the ANC and its allies have proposed a two-phased approach to bringing about change in our country. We are proposing that as soon as elections are held for a Constituent Assembly (whose main task is to draft a new constitution), an interim government should be formed. This government would be based on the percentage of votes won by the parties who would be contesting the elections. Now any party winning the



minimum of 5% of the votes would be entitled to a seat in the cabinet. Once the new constitution has been adopted we propose that the interim government be transformed into a government of national unity, reconstruction and development. This certainly has elements of power-sharing since the majority party would have voluntarily agreed to include other parties in the cabinet. But it is clear that even this affects only one aspect of the state structures. There are other vital component parts such as the police, defence, intelligence services and the civil service which will have to be radically transformed. Thus these areas of the state structures will form part of our strategy of reconstruction and development. May I just add in passing that in our view those elements that were responsible for the assassination of Chris Hani are to be found within those state structures, certainly within elements of the military intelligence and some of the other security forces. At the level of socio-economic policy it is commonly agreed between the ANC, the Party and COSATU that a policy of reconstruction and development would have to form the core of the ANC's election programme. But in our view we need to embark on this road as soon as we have an interim government. We would expect an ANC dominated interim government to immediately initiate a massive house-building programme, a public works programme, electrification—it is interesting that the South African government always boasts that at least 40% of all electricity utilised in the entire African continent is used in South Africa, yet 85% of the African population is deprived of access to electricity, access to health care and services—and a drastic overhaul of the education system. In this context a job creation programme, given that at least 50% of the African population is unemployed, is for us critical. At the same time the government would need to pursue policies which would encourage the growth of small and medium-size businesses especially for the African population. Here, of course, like everywhere else the new government would be under considerable pressure to liberalise trade patterns and to open South Africa to imports. The process of the national democratic revolution has to be pursued to create the basis on which we could seek to build a socialist society.

Lastly, let me say a few words on internationalism. One fully agrees with all other comrades who said that there is a crying need to improve both bilateral and multilateral relations. We think one of the important aspect of this is, for example, the Sao Paulo forum, which had been initiated some years ago and which will have its conference in Cuba in July. Hopefully at this seminar we may usefully explore in our discussion how, if it is possible, to build a powerful anti-imperialist front. Then how do we support those countries, parties and peoples who are under intense pressure from imperialism, in this case specifically as has been mentioned, the existing socialist countries. How do we continue to exchange views and experiences on major theoretical issues confronting us? Of course, obviously with the collapse of the Soviet Union, at least those parties who had closer relations with the Soviet had certain advantages in that the socialist countries actually paid for most of these conferences that were held. But there were also disadvantages, I think, in the sense that in my view we were not openly honest with each other about our differences of opinion and even of our criticisms of what was happening in those countries.

It seems it might be useful here to exchange views and experiences on how we can be constructively critical of each other without seeming to interfere in the internal affairs of other parties. It seems to be important, if it is all possible, to try to share experiences on a number of questions such as the fact that there are a number of communist parties, including the CPI(M), which has accumulated some experience in terms of holding and exercising power on a regional basis—how and in what way does the power exercised, limited as it is, have its impact on the national political scene? It would be interesting, I think, for us to examine developments in Guyana, where the PPP [People's Progressive Party] has won power through the ballot box. It would be interesting to see to what extent a small country is able to carry out progressive socio-economic policies. It would seem to me that it would be useful if over the next few hours left to us we are able to try to share some experiences on this question and on the question of how we take our own collective work together a step forward.

## Book Reviews

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*Cuba Looks to the Year 2000.* By Marc Frank. New York: International Publishers, 1993, 209 pages, paper \$9.95.

*Cuba and the USA: A New World Order?* By Harry R. Targ. New York: International Publishers, 1992, 120 pages, paper \$5.50.

Marc Frank, former *People's Daily World* Havana-based Latin American correspondent, has written a very current, incisive, informed, and readable summary of where Cuba finds itself at this moment in history. He brings to this task not only reportorial skills, but seven years of experience with the country and its people, gained through his sympathies with the revolution, his respect for Latin culture in general and Cuban culture in particular, and a fluency in Spanish that enabled him to travel all over the island to interview ordinary people as well as officials.

Frank clearly states his own biases: "I believe in a nation's right to independence. . . . I also dislike bullies, and it's a fact that the United States, the wealthiest and most powerful country in history, has been knocking tiny Cuba around for a long, long time." In that context he provides a richly nuanced analysis of Cuba's government and people and a provocative comparison of why socialism has crumbled elsewhere and continued to thrive in Cuba. He surveys World War I and II, and the urgent need of the USSR, as the first socialist nation, for a buffer zone following the ravages of fascism in World War II. He acknowledges that socialist regimes were partially imposed during the post-World War II period and that, subsequently, "Grave errors were made throughout socialist Europe that included criminal repression, corruption, and the development of a bureaucratic and inefficient

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administrative and economic system.” On the other hand, in Cuba the indigenous struggle for freedom and economic equity and against racism was a hundred-year-old battle by the time of the overthrow of the Batista government in 1959.

Cuba, while benefiting from the protection and assistance of the socialist bloc, says Frank, sought its own model of socialist development. This model was strongly influenced by Ché Guevara’s philosophy as articulated in *Man and Socialism in Cuba*: “The tool [for motivating the masses] has to be basically moral, without obviating a correct use of material incentives, especially the social kind.” However, by the early seventies, according to the author, Cuba began to slip more and more into relying on administrative means and purely economic incentives to build socialism. Bureaucracy mushroomed and active mass participation in the revolutionary process faltered. By November of 1984 the severity of the decline forced Party leadership to take action, well before Perestroika was introduced in the Soviet Union.

Here, as elsewhere, Frank ignores the size of Cuba as a factor in its destiny. It is much easier to turn around a system in a country with 10.5 million people than in a Soviet Union with a population of 268 million. It is far simpler to try experiments (such as the partial free market in agricultural products), to analyze them, fine-tune or abandon them, and move on to better alternatives. When the Reagan administration’s threats forced a national re-evaluation, Cuba could involve almost the entire country in the debate about its response. During the “Special Period” of increased diplomatic and economic pressure on the island from the United States, preparations for the Fourth Party Congress could halt mid-stride to induce more democratic participation.

Frank also tends to ignore Cuba’s level of progress in developing equal roles and opportunities for women. Some of the more basic insights of feminism, such as the importance of official use of inclusive language, are absent in Frank’s discussion. As Cuban revolutionary leader Haydée Santamaria said in 1979, “The revolution gave human beings their dignity back. Because I don’t believe that the words man [*hombre*] or men [*hombres*] include

women. I don't agree that when one is going to talk about human beings one should say men [*hombres*]. I don't think men would agree that our saying women [*mujeres*] when what we mean is men and women really includes them." For anyone who occasionally reads *Granma*, the official Party daily newspaper, it is clear that Santamaria's plea fell on deaf ears. The author mentions the statistics—women are 40 percent of the workforce, 20 percent of Party members, 17 percent of elected officials, with the numbers tapering off for higher offices. This same Party controls the Federation of Cuban Woman (FMC). American feminist Margaret Randall, who lived in Cuba from 1969 to 1980, argues, "Women's lives were changed to better serve the goals of the revolution, not for their own self-realization." Frank concludes, "The fight against sexism in Cuba today centers on convincing men to do their share of the housework" He does demonstrate the significance to women of child care, education, housing, health care, and low sexual-assault rates. (Oddly, he brushes by the Cuban Family Code, which requires Cuban men to perform half the housework and child care, perhaps because it seems not to be enforced.)

One of the most useful parts of Frank's book is his analysis of why most Western journalists woefully misinterpret Cuba. He calls the island the "Magic Mirror," noting that journalists bring preconceptions that they always attempt to verify, for example, "Cuba is stagnant, unchanging, caught in a time warp best illustrated by the vintage U.S. cars still found on the streets." Another myth he debunks is "Castro, the demonic dictator," outlining the shared Cuban presidency and the limitations this imposes. (A surprising aside is the quote from Mother Teresa, "The most beautiful gift God has given me is my meeting with President Fidel Castro.") Frank's account of the Fourth Party Congress and the accelerating democratization of governmental structures is the most detailed I have seen and will prove invaluable in understanding future developments in Cuba.

Professor Targ begins with Cuba as metaphor: "symbolic representation of the possibilities of human potential, . . . the disadvantaged seizing history and reworking society in the

direction of equality and human liberation.” He concludes, “At the time of this writing, the defense of Cuba necessitates that concerned U.S. citizens march, rally, write to newspapers, and communicate with Congresspersons to demand that U.S. foreign policy change.” There is no pretense at an objective view of Cuban history, politics, and foreign relations.

However, within this context, this book is a fascinating effort to look broadly and sympathetically at Cuba’s revolutionary background, its significance as a sociopolitical experiment, and its relationship over the past thirty years with its bullying northern neighbor. Targ takes as his conceptual models for his writing in this book three seminal works on Cuba: *Cuba: Anatomy of a Revolution* by Leo Huberman and Paul Sweezy (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1962); *Listen, Yankee: The Revolution in Cuba* by C. Wright Mills (New York, McGraw-Hill, 1960); *Cuba: Hope of the Hemisphere* by Joseph North (New York: International Publishers, 1961). Targ describes these as a combination of journalism and scholarship, although the clear and passionate advocacy the books evidence would be questionable to most journalists and scholars. Unfortunately, Targ ignores most of the scholarship since the early years of the revolution, not just the hostile and critical, such as Tad Szulc’s *Fidel*, but balanced and fair works such as Philip Foner’s two volumes, *A History of Cuba and Its Relations with the United States*, Huberman and Sweezy’s 1970 *Socialism in Cuba*, Andrew Zimbalist’s 1987 *Cuba’s Socialist Economy Toward the 1990’s*, Medea Benjamin’s (along with J. Collins and M. Scott) 1984 *No Free Lunch: Food and Revolution in Cuba Today*, and many, many others (by John Gerassi, Jonathon Kozol, Margaret Randall, Wayne S. Smith, Hugh Thomas, and others).

What Targ does best is encapsulate a great deal of information in a meaningful and understandable context. For instance, he covers a vast overview of Cuban history within the framework of what he terms *shaping experiences*. He tells his reader these *experiences* are derived by him from both his historical study and from conversations with contemporary Cubans. However, most of the latter seem to be based on conversations with government officials in two very brief visits to Havana in 1990 and 1991 to

attend the Radical Philosophy Association's annual conferences hosted by the University of Havana Faculty of Philosophy, History, and Sociology. However, it seems fairly obvious Professor Targ's language proficiencies do not include Spanish, so he had little opportunity to speak with any Cubans not fluent in English or without official translators. Despite this limitation, the author's background on international relations (Department of Political Science, Purdue University) enables him to develop highly useful "framing" categories within which to understand Cuban history and character.

These categories are outlined in a chapter titled "Themes in Cuban History," which breaks these into ten parts:

1. *Spanish Conquest*—establishment of private property, disease, repression, deadly mine work, induced suicide, and final eradication of the aboriginal people, the indigenous Taino, Ciboney, and Guanahatabey people. Targ gives fairly short shrift to this period, although the Cuban educational system emphasizes the heroic struggles of these doomed people and the semi-apocryphal Hatuey, a sub-Taino who fled what is now the Dominican Republic to warn Cubans of the Spanish invasion.

2. *Cuba as Sugar Producer*—Targ traces the increasing importance of exploitation of Cuba for sugar production through the British conquest in the late 1700s and the U.S. hegemony in the nineteenth century.

3. *Cuba as Slave Society*—the logical extension of the exploitative sugar monoculture and the extermination of the indigenous people was the importation of slaves from Africa. Targ brushes over the drastic differences between Cuban and United States slavery that Cubans today seem to believe important to their national character. African slaves in Cuba were brought over in groups of Bantu, Congolese, Dahoman, Mandingo, Senegalese, and Yoruba, who were allowed to marry, keep their families, retain their languages and culture, own property and, ultimately, buy their own freedom. Even the efforts of the Catholic priests (mostly Jesuit) sent from Spain to serve the religious needs of the plantation owners had to compromise with the African religions to win any allegiance from the slaves. A long-term result was that the institutional Church was always a religion of the upper

classes, not the masses as elsewhere in Latin America. Another interesting aspect: as world slavery was ending in the nineteenth century, desperate Cuban landholders imported over 130,000 indentured servants from China; genetic evidence of Cuba's impetus to integration can be seen visually among many Cubans.

4. *Economic Penetration by Great Britain*—the Seven Years War (1756–1763), where Spain (as well as French elements in what became Canada) aligned with France against Britain. As with British dominance in the French and Indian War, Britain prevailed against Spain, and occupied Havana for almost a year. Targ focuses on the economic impact of this, as the occupation led to commerce with British colonies to the north. Cubans usually also note the influence of revolutionary ideas from the U.S. Declaration of Independence, Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man*, and, some years later, the French Revolution.

5. *The United States Envisions Control of Cuba*—The Monroe Doctrine in 1823 proclaimed U.S. hegemony over the Western Hemisphere. Targ asserts (correctly), although with little evidence or analysis, that the United States decided Cuba must remain bound to Spain or to the United States, as the island would be ungovernable on its own.

6. *Revolutionary Ferment*—This section gracefully condenses five hundred years of Cuban struggle into five paragraphs, giving ample credit to Jose Martí and ample discredit to U.S.-backed dictators Gerardo Machado and Fulgencio Batista. Targ acknowledges the roles of nationalism and self-determination in Cuba's history of resistance.

7. *Nineteenth Century U.S. Penetration*—The author notes the entrance of U.S. entrepreneurs into the Cuban economy in the 1880s, along with the U.S. need for refueling stations for its naval fleet. The Spanish-American War in 1898 was a natural outcome of increasing interest by U.S. investors, and, unmentioned here by Targ, resulted in a complete undermining of local owners and investors.

8. *The United States Control from 1898 to 1959*—Here Targ examines the Platt Amendment, which forced U.S. control into Cuba's own constitution.

9. *A Weak Indigenous Bourgeoisie*—Here Targ does discuss



the effects of U.S. domination on local owners and investors. He points out that the corrupting influence of the United States meant the avenue to material gain on the island was through currying political favor with the United States and created a tradition of political profiteering that made Fidel Castro and Ché Guevara burst upon the horizon as mythological self-sacrificing heroes.

10. *Great Wealth for the Few; Immiseration for the Many*—Targ presents the telling statistics on poverty, poor health, lack of education, housing, jobs, and the repressive regime necessary to maintain such a system in Cuba before 1959.

These ten factors are a useful set of concepts that help to obtain a quick “fix” on Cuban history, politics, and its current situation. Professor Targ is no expert on Cuba, but he is a clear-sighted, sympathetic visitor who provides a roadmap for people wanting to learn about Cuba and helpful tourist information for those planning to travel there. He is able to place astute insights into a broader geopolitical context that is valuable even for the much more expert and traveled students of Cuba.

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*American Cities: A Working Class View.* By Morris Zeitlin. New York: International Publishers, 1990, 224 pages, paper, \$6.95.

Morris Zeitlin meticulously traces urban development from colonial times to the present, persuasively describing how cities have been shaped by monopoly capitalism. And he rightly debunks establishment, bourgeois, and occasionally, left disciplines along the way. Yet the Marxist promise of ultimate working-class victory, also embraced by Zeitlin in this work, must be seriously questioned.

To understand cities, says Zeitlin, we have to recognize the connection between city formation and capital accumulation. In colonial times, the founding fathers were buying land at a shilling and selling it for two dollars an acre in ten-thousand-acre lots.

This set the pattern for private land ownership in the United States, precluding public city planning for the public good.

A second, perhaps even greater, influence on city development derived from the British system of chartering cities and appointing a governor to govern them. After the war of independence, Zeitlin recounts, the states kept the power to charter cities, towns, etc., as subordinate units. With no taxing power of their own, neglected by state and federal governments (the handmaidens of capitalism), they have to borrow to provide needed services, leading to financial control boards and austerity. Privatization doesn't work. Authorities and special districts are formed for water, road systems, sewers, etc., further degrading the democratic process. Cities are also prohibited from undertaking profit-making enterprises, unlike cities on the continent. As a result, cities easily fall under monopoly-capitalist control.

From land speculation and exploitation of the farm economy in the early 1800s, Zeitlin describes the dizzying growth of manufacturing and urban development as technological improvements and access to markets increase. Between 1860 and 1910, factory employment rose from 1.3 to 13 million. Huge factories were located in all the big cities, producing a growing number of products. A variety of jobs, skill levels, and wage scales emerged. Cities were shaped into discrete manufacturing, wholesale, commercial, and residential districts. Still later, monopoly capital began to exploit pools of cheap labor in the South. Manufacturing jobs in the Northeast fell by seventy-five percent from 1939 to 1984.

Early city governments, dominated by business leaders, taxed the working class for improvements that business needed. They completely ignored the slums and shantytowns where the poorest people lived, and only when epidemics spread to the districts of the rich did cities supply piped water and sanitation systems. Cities continue to serve capitalism; they promote division through racism, and still neglect the needs of the poor. More recently, gentrification and "planned shrinkage" have been embraced as ways to push poor Black and other minority populations out of the central cities, turning their neighborhoods over to the emerging managerial class.

As the industrial revolution matured, workers did organize

and become class conscious. The AFL started in 1886, with 550,000 members. Between 1877 and 1900, there were 24,000 strikes in factories employing 6.6 million workers. During the depression of the 1930s, unions (including the recently formed CIO) forced the nation to adopt Social Security, unemployment insurance, public housing, wage and hour laws, and public works. By the 1950s, however, labor's influence was on the decline, and has yet to show signs of recovery.

Transnational corporations (TNCs) in the United States now operate on a world scale. The new capitalism is based on extending manufacturing to developing countries and maximizing its potential markets through the location of distribution centers. By 1980, the one hundred largest enterprises controlled two-thirds of the capitalist world's production. The dependence of countries on manufacturing, and state help in pursuing transnational interests, make TNCs politically dominant in the capitalist world. The economic and political fate of cities is being determined by the decisions of a few people behind the scenes.

Zeitlin expects central cities outside the CBD (Central Business District) to continue their decline. Disinvestment will continue in the Northeast. Suburbia will face problems of increasing intensity including racial segregation, high cost of living, waste disposal, pollution, congestion, and unemployment.

Up to this point, Zeitlin's analysis is comprehensive, enlightening, full of insights and fascinating detail. But when he turns to the inevitability of working-class victory, he offers hope where there is none to be found.

The devastation being visited on central cities and suburbs could be checked by a powerful people's political force, writes Zeitlin. Jobs close to home, ample (even free) public transport, long-term management of land uses, higher medium densities, reduced housing costs, provision of parks, etc., are all possible through working-class political action.

Organized labor, in coalition with local communities, should lead the way, according to Zeitlin. He sees great potential in local community organizing, and calls for coalitions between city and suburbs as well. At the very least, Zeitlin looks to preserve democracy against the totalitarian thrust of capitalism. He also

wants public ownership of the nation's resources, and hopes to free government to really look after the people.

This Zeitlin view is too rosy. Organizing a big metropolitan area is as difficult as organizing a nation. The citizenry is being continuously brainwashed and manipulated by very sophisticated techniques. The power elites are invisible; their spokespersons come in many different guises. Cities co-opt dissident leadership. Enforcement and spy agencies identify potential activists for detention in case of trouble; *agents provocateur* are used to sow dissension. Competition among community leaders and the burn-out of activists help dampen attempts to form broad coalitions.

More to the point, "growing contradictions" show no signs of weakening the hold of capitalism on urban development or on the working class. So complete is capitalist domination of cities (and states and nations), it is difficult to see cracks in its armor. International capitalism is well on the way to world hegemony, and nothing appears likely to stand in its way.

If the working class did somehow rise and win its war against capitalism, it is unlikely to choose socialism or government ownership of national wealth as a viable replacement. The late USSR gave workers low-rent housing, but never enough housing, and never enough of anything that mattered. Central planning did not give us a Moscow such as Zeitlin envisions for U.S. cities, nor did central planning distinguish itself in the development of the Soviet economy.

The fact is that neither socialism nor capitalism—as we have experienced them—gives people an appropriate share of society's wealth. Governments and ruling elites have their own agendas, which have little to do with satisfying the needs of citizens. It turns out that "power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely" in socialist as well as capitalist states. It would be nice to have a system combining the spur of capitalist competition (with an effective oversight mechanism) and a system for equitably distributing wealth, but we have yet to identify it.

Lack of faith is perhaps the most serious impediment to working-class struggle. Never has disillusion with systems and leadership been so prevalent. Until a latter-day Marx develops a workable system and shows us how to achieve it, the working

classes will not rise, and will not be the catalyst for real social transformation.

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### Reply by Morris Zeitlin

These are trying times for the morale of long-time activists in the class struggle. The setbacks and retreats are hard on one's nerves, understandably. But retreats, like advances, are among the fortunes of war, especially in the long interclass war, on many world fronts, for the commanding heights in history.

A morale problem arises for fighters who equate the battleground around them with the whole theater of operations, and their personal condition with the fighting potential of their side in the war. They tend to confuse retreat with defeat.

Walter Thabit is not alone in this mood; these days many feel the bitter taste of despair. Losing heart is bad enough for our side, but far worse is losing vision. Things are not as bad as we feel when we manage to view objectively our universe and ourselves.

To begin with, let us recall that humanity has progressed along an upward-moving average curve. That may be small comfort in a time of a dizzying downzag slide too frightening to perceive the yet invisible but inevitable upzig. But that is a matter of subjective myopia, not a measure of objective reality.

Secondly, keeping our Marxist wits, let us see our nation and cities dialectically—that is, in their constant change impelled by the inner struggle between opposites in their unities. All things in cities and society continually change—communities, neighborhoods, populations, districts, democracy, government policies—they change as their circumstances change and, hence, also corresponding class and group actions.

No social action is ever easy; it takes much effort and energy under the best of conditions. Organizing a nation, a metropolis, or the working class *is* difficult. Yet nations *are* organized, metropolises *are* integrated, and fourteen million workers stay in unions

despite the worst union-busting in recent memory. And despite its ability to brainwash and manipulate the people, to co-opt, provoke, and divide them, reaction could not stop the mass youth rebellion and peace movement of the 60s and 70s, the great civil rights movement, or the women's mass movement.

It is typical of despair to magnify weaknesses in the people's camp and slight those of their enemies. Awed by the power of global capital, despair is blind to the relentless strife among capital's competing centers of power. It sees the "complete domination of cities" and not "cracks in the armor"—the developing people's urban coalitions and their capture of city councils and mayoralities. And finally, it feeds on the collapse of the USSR and falsely equates one country's fate with that of socialism.

The USSR was *a*, not *the*, model of socialism, tried under the most excruciating historical circumstances. Its inner, ultimately fatal, contradictions were born from the attempt to build socialism in a backward, war-ruined country with a long history of despotic rule, surrounded by menacing capitalist states controlling five-sixths of the globe. That produced, arguably, a necessarily centralized economy and authoritarian government capable of defending its system but inevitably generating a centralized bureaucracy and subsequent corruption, in contradiction to the humanist socialist ideals it set out to promote. Typically, despair remembers the dark but not the bright side of things. It forgets that the USSR, over a tormented lifetime, championed progress in the world, always pushed for peace, saved humanity from fascism, aided developing nations to stand up to imperialism, and succored revolutionary movements around the globe.

Working classes in other nations and places on earth will create socialism by development stages unique to their own histories. But nowhere can an ideal socialist society emerge neatly in full bloom, for creating something new out of the debris of the old is by its nature a messy process. There is no neat way to give birth, erect a building, raise food, or renew a city. It all takes patient hard work, sweat, and tears, mitigated in time by knowledge born out of trial and error.

The experiences of the USSR taught humanity two cardinal lessons: one, that the working classes of the world are the main

agents of social progress; and two, that they must create democracies that check bureaucracy and make corruption impossible.

How? That is the challenge to socialist theory and practice from now on. We need to think hard, question, and plan ahead. But let us leave despair to our adversaries, whose political future is running out of time.

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## ABSTRACTS OF ARTICLES

**András Gedő, “Gramsci’s Path through the Tension between ‘Absolute Historicism’ and Materialist Dialectics: Marxism as Historical Philosophy”**—Changes in the reception and perception of Gramsci are traced from the time of his prison letters and *Prison Notebooks* to the present. Croceans initially viewed Gramsci as one of theirs. They attributed his subsequent critique of Croce’s idealistic “absolute historicism” to an impairment of his philosophizing capability as a result of his political involvement. Two particular features in his thinking led to Gramsci’s domination of Marxist-oriented Italian philosophy and his influence abroad during the upsurge in the revolutionary workers’ movement in Italy from the late 1940s to the 1960s. He was primarily a political thinker and at the same time understood Marxism as historical philosophy. He integrated these two factors through his idea of the identity of philosophy and politics. The philosophical inconsistencies between his own variant of “absolute historicism” and the Leninist dialectical-materialist content of his political thinking would later serve as a basis for distortion of his views and the declining interest in both his philosophical and political views among Left intellectuals as the revolutionary workers’ movement began to wane. Gramsci’s concept of the historicity of Marxist philosophical theory implies continuity and a new beginning after the decisively clear historical retrogression. “I have become convinced that even if everything is lost or seems lost one should calmly return to work and take it up from the beginning,” concluded Gramsci.

**Ute Osterkamp, “Everyday Racism: Recent German Experience.”**—Recourse to arguments of biological superiority is no longer acceptable in Germany; new forms of “enlightened racism” have emerged, extending even into the Left. German government manipulation of immigration policies for political purposes is examined. The political task of fighting racism involves more than confronting open racists and countering explicit hostility toward foreigners; it must include addressing real social problems as well as our own complicity in everyday racism.

## ABREGES D'ARTICLES

**András Gedő, “Le Chemin de Gramsci à travers la tension entre ‘l’historicisme absolu’ et les dialectiques matérialistes: le marxisme comme philosophie historique”**—Les changements dans la réception et la perception de l’oeuvre de Gramsci se tracent de l’époque de ses lettres de la prison et *Les Cahiers de Prison* jusqu’au présent. Au début les crocéistes comptèrent Gramsci parmi eux. Ils attribuèrent sa critique postérieure de “l’historicisme absolu” idéal à une détérioration de sa capacité de faire de la philosophie en conséquence de son engagement politique. Deux traits particuliers de sa pensée menèrent Gramsci à une position dominante dans la philosophie italienne marxiste et assurèrent son influence à l’étranger pendant la montée du mouvement révolutionnaire des ouvriers en Italie de la seconde moitié des années quarante aux années soixante. Gramsci fut d’abord un penseur politique et en même temps il entendit le marxisme comme philosophie historique. Il intégra ces deux traits à travers l’idée de l’identité de la philosophie et la politique. Les inconsistances philosophiques entre sa variante à lui de “l’historicisme absolu” et le fond dialectique matérialiste léniniste de sa pensée politique serviraient plus tard comme base de déformation de ses vues et du déclin de l’intérêt de ses opinions philosophiques et politiques parmi les intellectuels de la gauche dès que le mouvement révolutionnaire des ouvriers commença à décliner. Le concept de Gramsci de l’historicité de la théorie philosophique marxiste implique de la continuité et un nouveau commencement après la rétrogradation historique décisive. “Je me suis convaincu que même si tout se perd ou semble se perdre, on devrait calmement se remettre à travailler et à repartir de zéro,” conclut Gramsci.

**Ute Osterkamp, “Le Racisme de tous les jours: l’expérience récente en Allemagne.”**—Recourir aux arguments de la supériorité biologique n’est plus acceptable en Allemagne; alors les formes nouvelles du “racisme éclairé” ont surgi qui s’étendent jusqu’à la gauche. La manipulation de la part du gouvernement allemand de la politique d’immigration pour des buts politiques s’est démontrée. La tâche politique de lutter contre le racisme comprend plus que la confrontation des racistes déclarés et le contrepois de l’hostilité explicite envers les étrangers; on doit s’adresser aux problèmes sociaux véritables aussi bien qu’à sa propre complicité dans le racisme de tous les jours.