

AN ANTHOLOGY  
OF WESTERN MARXISM

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*From Lukács and Gramsci  
to Socialist-Feminism*

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2. it is asserted that a given political solution is "ideological"—i.e., that it is not sufficient to change the structure, although it thinks that it can do so; it is asserted that it is useless, stupid, etc.;

3. one then passes to the assertion that every ideology is "pure" appearance, useless, stupid, etc.

One must therefore distinguish between historically organic ideologies, those, that is, which are necessary to a given structure, and ideologies that are arbitrary, rationalistic, or "willed." To the extent that ideologies are historically necessary they have a validity which is "psychological"; they "organize" human masses, and create the terrain on which men move, acquire consciousness of their position, struggle, etc. To the extent that they are arbitrary they only create individual "movements," polemics and so on (though even these are not completely useless, since they function like an error which by contrasting with truth, demonstrates it).

It is worth recalling the frequent affirmation made by Marx on the "solidity of popular beliefs" as a necessary element of a specific situation. What he says more or less is "when this way of conceiving things has the force of popular beliefs," etc. Another proposition of Marx is that a popular conviction often has the same energy as a material force or something of the kind, which is extremely significant. The analysis of these propositions tends, I think, to reinforce the conception of *historical bloc* in which precisely material forces are the content and ideologies are the form, though this distinction between form and content has purely didactic value, since the material forces would be inconceivable historically without form and the ideologies would be individual fancies without the material forces.

### Notes

1. Perhaps it is useful to make a "practical" distinction between philosophy and common sense in order to indicate more clearly the passage from one moment to the other. In philosophy the features of individual elaboration of thought are the most salient: in common sense on the other hand it is the diffuse, uncoordinated features of a generic form of thought common to a particular period and a particular popular environment. But every philosophy has a tendency to become the common sense of a fairly limited environment (that of all the intellectuals). It is a matter therefore of starting with a philosophy which already enjoys, or could enjoy, a certain diffusion, because it is connected to and implicit in practical life, and elaborating it so that it becomes a renewed common sense pos-

sessing the coherence and the sinew of individual philosophies. But this can only happen if the demands of cultural contact with the "simple" are continually felt.

2. The heretical movements of the Middle Ages were a simultaneous reaction against the politicking of the Church and against the scholastic philosophy which expressed this. They were based on social conflicts determined by the birth of the Communes, and represented a split between masses and intellectuals within the Church. This split was "stitched over" by the birth of popular religious movements subsequently reabsorbed by the Church through the formation of the mendicant orders and a new religious unity.

3. Recall the anecdote, recounted by Steed in his Memoirs, about the Cardinal who explains to the pro-Catholic English Protestant that the miracles of San Gennaro [St. Januarius] are an article of faith for the ordinary people of Naples, but not for the intellectuals, and that even the Gospels contain "exaggerations," and who answers the question "But aren't we Christians?" with the words "We are the 'prelates,' that is the 'politicians,' of the Church of Rome."

4. On this question see: Max Weber, *L'etica protestante e lo spirito del capitalismo*; published in *Nuovi Studi*, volume for 1931 et seq. [*Die protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Capitalismus*; first published in the *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik*, Vols. XX and XXI, 1904 and 1905. English translation (by Talcott Parsons) *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, London, Allen and Unwin, 1930.] And see Groethuysen's book on the religious origins of the bourgeoisie in France. [*Origines de l'esprit bourgeois en France*, Vol. I. *L'Eglise et la bourgeoisie*, Paris, 1927.]

### PROBLEMS OF MARXISM

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### Philosophy—Politics—Economics

If these three activities are the necessary constituent elements of the same conception of the world, there must necessarily be, in their theoretical principles, a convertibility from one to the others and a reciprocal translation into the specific language proper to each constituent element. Any one is implicit in the others, and the three together form a homogeneous circle.

From these propositions (still in need of elaboration) there derive for the historian of culture and of ideas a number of research criteria and critical canons of great significance. It can be that a great personality expresses the more fecund aspects of his thought not in the section which,

or so it would appear from the point of view of external classification, ought to be the most logical, but elsewhere, in a part which apparently could be judged extraneous. A man of politics writes about philosophy: it could be that his "true" philosophy should be looked for rather in his writings on politics. In every personality there is one dominant and predominant activity: it is here that his thought must be looked for, in a form that is more often than not implicit and at times even in contradiction with what is professedly expressed. Admittedly such a criterion of historical judgment contains many dangers of dilettantism and it is necessary to be very cautious in applying it, but that does not deprive it of its capacity to generate truth.

In reality the occasional "philosopher" can succeed only with difficulty in making abstractions from the currents dominant in his age and from interpretations of a certain conception of the world that have become dogmatic (etc.). As a scientist of politics on the other hand he feels himself free from these idols of his age and of his group and treats the same conception with more immediacy and with total originality; he penetrates to its heart and develops it in a vital way. Here again the thought expressed by [Rosa] Luxemburg remains useful and suggestive when she writes about the impossibility of treating certain questions of the philosophy of praxis in so far as they have not yet become *actual* for the course of history in general or that of a given social grouping. To the economicorporate phase, to the phase of struggle for hegemony in civil society and to the phase of State power there correspond specific intellectual activities which cannot be arbitrarily improvised or anticipated. In the phase of struggle for hegemony it is the science of politics which is developed; in the State phase all the superstructures must be developed, if one is not to risk the dissolution of the State.

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### Economy and Ideology

The claim, presented as an essential postulate of historical materialism, that every fluctuation of politics and ideology can be presented and expounded as an immediate expression of the structure, must be contested in theory as primitive infantilism, and combated in practice with the authentic testimony of Marx, the author of concrete political and historical works. Particularly important from this point of view are *The 18th Brumaire* and the writings on the Eastern Question, but also other writings

(*Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Germany*, *The Civil War in France* and lesser works). An analysis of these works allows one to establish better the Marxist historical methodology, integrating, illuminating and interpreting the theoretical affirmations scattered throughout his works.

One will be able to see from this the real precautions introduced by Marx into his concrete researches, precautions which could have no place in his general works.<sup>1</sup> Among these precautions the following examples can be enumerated:

1. The difficulty of identifying at any given time, statically (like an instantaneous photographic image) the structure. **Politics in fact is at any given time the reflection of the tendencies of development in the structure, but it is not necessarily the case that these tendencies must be realized. A structural phase can be correctly studied and analyzed only after it has gone through its whole process of development, and not during the process itself, except hypothetically and with the explicit proviso that one is dealing with hypotheses.**

2. From this it can be deduced that a particular political act may have been an error of calculation on the part of the leaders [*dirigenti*] of the dominant classes, an error which historical development, through the parliamentary and governmental "crises" of the directive [*dirigenti*] classes, then corrects and goes beyond. Mechanical historical materialism does not allow for the possibility of error, but assumes that every political act is determined, immediately, by the structure, and therefore as a real and permanent (in the sense of achieved) modification of the structure. The principle of "error" is a complex one: one may be dealing with an individual impulse based on mistaken calculations or equally it may be a manifestation of the attempts of specific groups or sects to take over hegemony within the directive grouping, attempts which may well be unsuccessful.

3. **It is not sufficiently borne in mind that many political acts are due to internal necessities of an organizational character, that is they are tied to the need to give coherence to a party, a group, a society.** This is made clear for example in the history of the Catholic Church. If, for every ideological struggle within the Church one wanted to find an immediate primary explanation in the structure one would really be caught napping: all sorts of politicoeconomic romances have been written for this reason. It is evident on the contrary that the majority of these discussions are connected with sectarian and organizational necessities. In the discussion between Rome and Byzantium on the Procession of the Holy Spirit, it would be ridiculous to look in the structure of the European East for the claim that it proceeds only from the Father, and in that of the West for

the claim that it proceeds from the Father and the Son. The two Churches, whose existence and whose conflict is dependent on the structure and on the whole of history, posed questions which are principles of distinction and internal cohesion for each side, but it could have happened that either of the Churches could have argued what in fact was argued by the other. The principle of distinction and conflict would have been upheld all the same, and it is this problem of distinction and conflict that constitutes the historical problem, and not the banner that happened to be hoisted by one side or the other.

*Note II.* The author of ideological serial stories in *Problemi del Lavoro* (who must be none other than the notorious Franz Weiss), during his farcical fairy tale "Russian dumping and its historical significance," speaking about precisely these controversies in early Christian times, asserts that they are tied to the immediate material conditions of the age, and that if we do not succeed in identifying this immediate link it is because the facts are so distant from us or because of some other intellectual weakness. The position is a convenient one, but scientifically insignificant. In fact every real historical phase leaves traces of itself in succeeding phases, which then become in a sense the best document of its existence. The process of historical development is a unity in time through which the present contains the whole of the past and in the present is realized that part of the past which is "essential"—with no residue of any "unknowable" representing the true "essence." The part which is lost, i.e., not transmitted dialectically in the historical process, was in itself of no import, casual and contingent "dross," chronicle and not history, a superficial and negligible episode in the last analysis.

### Passage from Knowing to Understanding and to Feeling and Vice Versa from Feeling to Understanding and to Knowing

The popular element "feels" but does not always know or understand; the intellectual element "knows" but does not always understand and in particular does not always feel. The two extremes are therefore pedantry and philistinism on the one hand and blind passion and sectarianism on the other. Not that the pedant cannot be impassioned; far from it. Impassioned pedantry is every bit as ridiculous and dangerous as the wildest sectarianism and demagoguery. The intellectual's error consists in believing that one can know without understanding and even more without feeling and being impassioned (not only for knowledge in itself but also for the object of knowledge): in other words that the intellectual can be an in-

tellectual (and not a pure pedant) if distinct and separate from the people-nation, that is, without feeling the elementary passions of the people, understanding them and therefore explaining and justifying them in the particular historical situation and connecting them dialectically to the laws of history and to a superior conception of the world, scientifically and coherently elaborated—i.e., knowledge. One cannot make politics-history without this passion, without this sentimental connection between intellectuals and people-nation. In the absence of such a nexus the relations between the intellectual and the people-nation are, or are reduced to, relationships of a purely bureaucratic and formal order; the intellectuals become a caste, or a priesthood (so-called organic centralism).

If the relationship between intellectuals and people-nation, between the leaders and the led, the rulers and the ruled, is provided by an organic cohesion in which feeling-passion becomes understanding and thence knowledge (not mechanically but in a way that is alive), then and only then is the relationship one of representation. Only then can there take place an exchange of individual elements between the rulers and ruled, leaders [*dirigenti*] and led, and can the shared life be realized which alone is a social force—with the creation of the "historical bloc."

De Man "studies" popular feelings: he does not feel with them to guide them, and lead them into a catharsis of modern civilization. His position is that of the scholarly student of folklore who is permanently afraid that modernity is going to destroy the object of his study. What one finds in his book is the pedantic reflection of what is, however, a real need: for popular feelings to be known and studied in the way in which they present themselves objectively and for them not to be considered something negligible and inert within the movement of history.

### Note

1. They could have a place only in a systematic and methodical exposition such as that of Bernheim, and Bernheim's book can be held up as a "model" for a scholastic or "popular manual" of historical materialism, in which, apart from the philological and scholarly method (which Bernheim holds to as a matter of principle, although in his treatment there is implicit a conception of the world) the Marxist conception of history should be explicitly treated.