

COMMUNISM, MARXISM AND LIBERTY

The American Humanist Tradition

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Introduction

Although my topic includes Communism as an integral part, it would be out of place to an audience of this type first "to prove" Communism wrong politically. At the end I'll have something to say of its economic laws. No one here mistakes the totalitarian tyranny existing in Russia for a Communist paradise just because it calls itself such, any more than any one anywhere mistook Nazi "National Socialism." A despot, whether he be a Hitler or a Stalin, is a man of purpose and is without shame. If humanity seems ready for a new social order—and in the 1930's millions certainly were striving for one—the dictator creates the glitter while making sure that behind the flashy neon signs there resides the Gestapos and GPU's.

Nor do I consider the "American part" of the title as a license to begin spouting the Declaration of Independence and the Gettysburg Address in the manner in which the American Communists, during the war alliance, attempted to make Thomas Jefferson a pseudonym for Marx and Abraham Lincoln a pseudonym for Joseph Stalin.

It is true that Marx was one intellectual who, instead of crediting the French philosophes for the thoughts of the American leaders of 1776, wrote lusciously on the fact that the American Revolution had sounded the tocsin for the French Revolution, not vice-versa. It is even more true that he wrote—passionately, if you will—that the workers' simple question, "When does my day begin and when does it end?" was a more magnificent philosophy than either the Declaration of Independence or the Rights of Man. "In place of the pompous catalogue of the 'inalienable rights of man' comes the modest Magna Charta of a legally limited working day which shall make clear when the time which the worker sells is ended and when his own begins. Quantum mutatus ab illo."

In any case, one element, whether it is the lesser truth or the greater truth, does not make the whole, and I will not vulgarize either the American or the Marxist Humanist Traditions in this talk which aims to relate Marx's thinking to the historic aspects of American thought.

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I proceed on the assumption that this serious, scholarly audience has come to hear a dissenter's point of view on the parallels and sharp divisions between the two. I understand this is predominantly an economic seminar and would therefore feel more at home in the economic and sociological aspects rather than in the purely philosophical ones. It is not to say that in the present period of world crisis when not only the fate of civilization but civilization itself is within the orbit of the ICBM that any of us can fail to question the deep human basis of all phenomena. As Marx explained his philosophy in the very first place of writing at the time of his break from bourgeois society, A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law. "To be radical is to grasp the matter by its root. Now the root of mankind is man himself."

No, I'm afraid this get-rich-quick type of search for American roots of Marxism from which poor Veblen, with both the Communists and Technocrats trying to claim him, suffers more than any single American, better be allowed to rest in peace. Neither do I wish to consider native radicalism like Edward Bellamy's Looking Backward or Henry George's Progress and Poverty. The economic determinists from Turner through Farrington to Beard were certainly ~~very~~ influential in establishing a view of our historical development that in some minor ways parallel elements of Marxism. But there again any one element does not make the whole--and the whole is wholly opposed to Marxism.

The only Marxist root I consider genuine is the Abolitionist movement in America and that despite the fact that most of them did not even know Marx. What is of far greater importance is the spontaneous affinity of ideas, the independent working out of the problems of the age as manifested in one's own country, and the common source--the Negro in America and his own activity in fighting for freedom.

It is this which I wish to develop as the American roots of Marxism--and then proceed directly to our own age where I will not have the authority of a living Marx to back me up and have to swim on my own.

Before we do either however, we want a quick glance at Marx's tail [Here pp 11-14]
A--The American Roots of Marxism--The Abolitionist Movement

The least known part of Marxism is its American roots. I'm not referring to any organization that called itself Marxist either in Marx's own time or ours. Of many of those Marx said, "If this is Marxism, I'm not a Marxist." He found he had to separate himself from the self-styled Marxists in America who tried to evade the whole issue of the Civil War by saying they were opposed to "all slavery, wage and chattel." ~~Marx~~ Marx was actively and unashamedly on the side of the North, ~~this, too, is not basic to my topic today.~~ I will not minimize the mass demonstrations in England which stopped ~~the~~ the British government's flirtations with the thought of entering on the side of the South--The Workingmen's International Association, headed by Marx, is certainly an important manifestation of the relationship between the Marxist concept of freedom and the American.

There was however a difference: a fundamental difference between the subject of the American Civil War and the North's purpose in not recognizing the American purpose in the Civil War. I thought I had thought that.

The most famous p.u. book

(Marxism and Freedom, 280)

"And by the South I mean likewise a principle, and not a locality, an element of civil life, in fourteen rebellious States. I mean an element which, like the days of Queen Mary and the Inquisition, cannot tolerate free speech, and punishes it with the stake. I mean the aristocracy of the skin, which considers the Declaration of Independence a sham and democracy a snare--which believes that one third of the race is born booted and spurred, and the other two thirds ready saddled for that third to ride. I mean a civilization which prohibits the Bible by statute to every sixth man of its community, and puts a woman in a felon's cell for teaching a black sister to read. I mean the intellectual, social aristocratic South--the thing that manifests itself by barbarism and the bowie-knife, by ~~but~~ bullying and lynch-law, by ignorance and idleness, by the claim of one man to own his brother, by statutes making it penal for the State of Massachusetts to bring an action in her courts, by statutes, standing on the books of Georgia today, offering five thousand dollars for the head of William Lloyd Garrison. ~~That~~ That South is to be annihilated. (Loud applause). The totality of my common sense--or whatever you may call it--is this, all summed up in one word: This country will never know peace nor union until the South (using the word in the sense I have described) is annihilated, and the North is spread over it... Our struggle is between barbarism and civilization."

It is tempting, of course, in a talk to an economics seminar--and I assume that most of us are members in good standing in the AEA--to point to the founders of that organization, men like Richard Ely, who had rebelled against the ruthlessness of the laissez faire system of the 1880's and 1890's which had produced the violence of the great labor battles at Homestead, steel mills, Idaho's silver mines, the Pullman strike in Illinois, and had written a work on The Labor Movement in America which had been slandered in his day as "the ravings of an anarchist." As a founder of the AEA he had stressed the need to HUMANIZE economics and, furthermore, had praised Marx's CAPITAL as one of the "ablest politico-economic treatises ever written."

I could then proceed to invade the field of history

Wendell Phillips further spelled this out most concretely: he said that unless the blacks become the basis of Southern Reconstruction we might as well not have fought and won, we will retrogress to another form of barbarism.

The question of land and the peasant as the prerequisite for a successful revolution was brought home to us in the Civil War. Frederick Engels, Marx's great collaborator, had written before, ~~that~~ in his analysis of the Peasant Wars in Germany, that because the German Reformation in the 16th Century had betrayed the peasant revolts by not giving the peasants land, the country itself "disappeared for three centuries from the ranks of countries playing an independent part in history." We still suffer from the incomplete revolution in the South where the Negro did not get his "40 acres and a mule." (I hope everyone read W. E. B. DuBois' Black Reconstruction because, although it is one of the greatest contributions—and certainly the most original—to that period of America's development, it is hardly known because it was written by a Negro and supposedly for that reason—forgive the word—"prejudiced." Yet many, ~~as~~ a so-called objective historian, and I include our greatest in that category, have yet ~~to~~ even to see the problem, much less to analyze it profoundly.)

Wendell Phillips is the only abolitionist who made the transition to the labor movement itself. So young is our country that if I had time I could show an actual living connection between him and Eugene V. Debs, and thus Marxian socialism, but now I must proceed to the changes in Marx's greatest theoretical work, CAPITAL, made under the impact of the decade of the 1860's in general and the Civil War in the United States in particular.

R--Marx's CAPITAL

All of us know what it is to be damned with faint praise. Joseph Schumpeter however has tried it with excessive praise.

Joseph Schumpeter considers Marx's materialistic conception of history as nothing short of a work of genius whereupon he complains that Marx overestimated the value of philosophy in general and of Hegelian methodology in particular. He proceeds to call Marx the most erudite of all economists and cannot contain his praise for Marx's "idea of theory," of being able to transform "historic narrative into historic raisonne"; whereupon he proceeds to dissect him as "economist" only and disregard entirely what made it possible to transform historic narrative into historic reason, how did Marx's "idea" of theory evolve. He does this not maliciously or even consciously—it is impossible for an intellectual nowadays even when he admires another intellectual with whom he completely disagrees, to conceive of the fact that genius has any connection with common man's activity.

Marx, on the other hand, always felt the pulse of what he called "the spontaneous organization of the working class," and never more so than when he worked on "theory."

for Marx to work on theory

Marx had been working out his economic theories ever since 1844. By 1859 he finally published what he considered to be the first volume of Capital and which he had called Critique of Political Economy. But he no sooner published it than he was dissatisfied with it. Under the impact of the Civil War he returned to the manuscripts and began a thorough overhaul, in structure and form particularly. The two most fundamental reorganizations occurred in 1863 and in 1866 and the work was finally published in the form we have it today, except some other additions of a lesser nature that he added after the Paris Commune of 1871. It was in 1866 that he added the section on the Working Day, which will illuminate what Schumpeter calls "the idea" of theory and what I call the Humanism of Marxism or Marxism as a theory of liberation. It completed Marx's transcendence of both classical political economy and Hegelian philosophy, the two main sources of his theory, and the creation of a new world view of history which was solidly based on the actual activity of man. First, there was the relationship of the abolition of slavery to the struggle for the eight hour day. As Marx was to write in CAPITAL: "In the United States of North America, every independent movement for the workers was paralyzed so long as slavery disfigured a part of the Republic. Labor cannot emancipate itself in the white skin where in the black it is branded. But out of the death of slavery a new life at once arose. The first fruit of the Civil War was the eight hours' agitation that ran with the seven-leagued boots of the locomotive from the Atlantic to the Pacific, from New England to California. The General Congress of Labor at Baltimore & (August 16, 1866) declared: 'The first and great necessity of the present, to free the labor of this country from capitalistic slavery, is the passing of a law by which eight hours shall be the normal working-day in all States of the American Union. We are resolved to put forth all our strength until this glorious result is attained.'"

which for Marx purposes the direct basis of theory, etc

The workers having by their own "correct instinct" formulated a demand in almost the precise terms that Marx had worked so hard to present to the first International, the theoretician's mind took wing. New categories were created, a step forward in philosophic cognition was made, and a new way of thinking resulted. First--this is our SECOND in tracing the illuminations the 1860's cast for Marx--came the shift from the history of theory to the history of production relations. In CRITIQUE, he would state his theory on commodities and money and then supplement it with the other theories on that subject. In CAPITAL, he removed all other theories to the end of the work, Volume I, and straightaway from the mentioning of the duality in the commodity between use-value and exchange-value moves over to the duality in labor itself, between abstract and concrete, and after that he split the category of labor into labor standing for the function, the activity itself, and labor power, the mere ability to labor which the capitalist buys as a commodity according to the laws of exchange. This does not get transformed into the function itself until he belongs to the capitalist and is made by him to produce a greater value than it itself is or gets paid after the day's work. Marx is the only theoretical economist who entered the factory--and stayed there for the greater part of Volume I analyzing the relations at the point of production.

It is in this part--"The Production of Absolute Surplus Value"--that the section on the Working Day appears. The academic economists, who look upon these pages as "sod story stuff," forget that society itself would have collapsed had the workers not fought for the shortening of the working day. Capitalism destroyed nine generations of spinners in only three generations. The Humanism of CAPITAL gives it that profundity, that force and direction which made possible the prediction of monopolies and depressions.

Marx didn't predict them because he was a prophet but because of two factors and two factors only, 1) he dialectically carried through to the end the economic laws of development of capitalist society and 2) having put the Human Being--the wage laborer--instead of the thing--wage labor--at the center of his theoretical world, Marx discerned in the struggles and new thinking the "new forces and new passions" out for a new society. The winning of the shortening of the working day which Marx called "a veritable civil war" was finally the material basis for freedom.

Two principles are involved in the structural change in CAPITAL, one flowing from theory and one from practice. The philosophy of the shortening of the working day, which arose out of the actual class struggles, embraced all concepts inside and outside it. The thinking of the theoretician was thus constantly filled with more and more content, filled by workers' struggles and workers' thoughts. Those were the conditions created for the leap. The leap itself developed the idea that the ultimate creation of freedom rests upon the shortening of the working day:

*P. C. - Own the power of the machine - in many
of hands - concentrated - priority - of the machine*

The socialization of labor meant, in human terms, a great army of labor, united and disciplined by the very mechanism of labor and forced, in order to straighten their bent backs, to throw off not only capitalist oppression but put an end to class society, and reunite once and for all, in the human being himself, mental and manual labor so that the pre-history of society can end and humanity's true history begin on the basis that the free development of each is the condition for the free and full development of all.

Since his CAPITAL was built mainly on the most advanced country of his day—England—he warned: "Intrinsically it is not a question of the higher or lower degree of development of the social antagonisms that result from the natural laws of capitalist production. It is a question of these laws themselves, of these tendencies working with iron necessity towards inevitable results. The country that is more developed only shows, to the less developed, the image of its own future."

The same, we must add, is true in reverse.

Given the context of the world ^{*technical state*} & the accelerated development of a backward country once it begins 'catching up' with the advanced country, the formershow the latter the image of its own future.

Sputniks I & II certainly proved that point.

The Hitlers, the Mussolinis, the Khrushchevs are not Germans, Italians and Russians only. They represent objective forces. Mc Carthyism was but a pale, impotent shadow, but it is a warning all the same as to what happens when deep fundamental crises in production and in society just keep piling up.

The 1929 crash was the dividing line in the American mind as well as the economy.

We had, on the one hand, the Brain Trust—and I do not mean only those who went by that name in the government. I mean all intellectual planners, small and large, those without purpose and those with, those who invented the New Deal to save capitalism and those who wanted "to use" the New Deal to move headlong to totalitarian planning on the Russian model.

Certainly these were not so totally different that they did not find cohabitation pleasant—the Communist Party made a shambles of all independent thought.

They fell not because they were traitors, although a few were, but because they all had the same name for all the ill: PLAN. It is this that made them meant-for-each-other bedfellows of the Communists. Paradoxically, this became clearest ~~of~~ they threw off the direct Communists—at the end of World War II, for it was then precisely that the Communists hit the jackpot with their new form of popular frontism—peace. No one short of the ex-vice-president of America came to head the Progressive Party. Do not think that Wallace was a misled backwoodsman. He was misled all right, but it was not because he was "backward." His being "taken in" was a symbol of an OBJECTIVE factor—the unresolved CRISIS AND CONTRADICTIONS WHICH FOLLOWED A VICTORY THAT DID NOT RESULT IN ANY NEW SOCIAL ORDER.

The heretofore colonial countries from India through the French Cameroons in Africa to the West European civilizations like France and Italy just didn't go for the hollow slogans of Democracy.

I say "hollow" not because I deprecate the American traditions of liberty, but rather because I contrast these great traditions to the actual dollar diplomacy that made the rounds of the awakening Asian giant in the company of the very powers that had held them in subjection for centuries.

And by "hollow" I also mean what was happening in our country, for nothing is better known in Europe and the world over than the Negro question and we cannot keep a tenth of the nation—over whom a Civil War was fought—in the conditions they are in and lecture to others on democracy vs. Communist totalitarianism. To the rest of the world not only the Senator Eastlands and Governor Faubuses are no different, but the statement of the cultured Faulkner that he would be ready to spill blood of the Negro to keep "the Southern way of Life" sounds as barbaric as indeed it is. When Eisenhower asks such as Faulkner to head a Committee of Intellectuals for Cultural Freedom—it is the stillbirth it was.

We need not merely go back to the traditions of the Abolitionists but forward to a New Humanism comprehensive enough in theory, scope, logic and life to win the global struggle for the minds of men. And our country is rich enough in traditions of self-activity from the committees of correspondence in colonial times that appeared just a big nuisance to the British authorities ~~and~~ who awoke one day to find that these nuisances were, as Charles A. Beard put it, "THE ENGINES OF REVOLUTION" through the sit-downers of 1936 who transformed the industrial face of the nation, to the present kind of wildcats against the existing labor bureaucracy which demand a more fundamental answer to automation than either the economists, scientists, or labor leadership has yet come to.

I am sorry to sound harsh, but I ask anyone to turn to books on AUTOMATION which seriously treat man as if he were indeed a buildable machine and then follow John R. Commons' advice and go seek out workers and talk to them and get their attitudes and you will see what I mean when I say that the new impulses are only to be gotten from the workers themselves and not from abstract theories of "Automation is progress."

The struggle for the minds of men--and our century is exactly that--cannot be won with hollow words of democracy. But so rich are the traditions of America, so uninhibited are the American workers by the preconceived notions of leaders, including those from their own labor ranks, that a new Humanism is ~~evolving~~. They have no Labor Party to "lead" them or mislead them--and they have no awe of intellectuals like the French Existentialists. That does not mean they reject theory. On the contrary. THERE IS A MOVEMENT FROM PRACTICE TO THEORY THAT IS LITERALLY BEGGING FOR A MOVEMENT FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE TO MEET IT.

When these finally do meet--and I have no doubt of the meeting--it cannot be anything short of a NEW HUMANISM.