

Chapter 9: Remarks on Bernstein, ‘Neo-Utopianism’ and Political Amalgams

Turning Bernstein into a Closet Utopian

In his remarks on Bernstein, North claims that the founder of revisionism “was not an enemy of utopianism. Bernstein argued against the conception that the socialist movement needed to legitimize its existence on the basis of science” (106). This is misleading on two counts. First, Bernstein was very much an opponent of *revolutionary* utopianism, as epitomized by his famous credo, “The movement is everything, the goal is nothing”; as we will see, what North cites as evidence of Bernstein’s ‘utopianism’ was his espousal of so-called ‘ethical socialism’, which was indistinguishable from liberalism. Second, Bernstein’s opposition to utopianism was *of a piece* with his opposition to Marxism on scientific grounds. Indeed, he made his entire case against Marxism in the name of science. But Bernstein could only do that because what he meant by science was the positivist and empiricist model of *bourgeois* science, which was radically different from the science of Marxism. This distinction between bourgeois and Marxist science is a crucial point, which we discussed at length in Chapter 3.¹ As we showed there, North himself ignores this distinction, and so his criticism of Bernstein necessarily becomes muddled. Bernstein’s attack on Marxist science was an attack on the ‘utopianism’ within that science, which is to say, an attack on Marxism’s uncovering of meaning in history, an attack on its dialectical categories which, unlike the ‘value-free’ science of positivism, emphasized (as Marcuse put it) “the essential potentialities and contradictions within the social whole, thereby stressing what could be done with society and also exposing the inadequacy of its actual form.”² Thus to present Bernstein’s case in terms of a simple dichotomy between utopianism and science is to miss something essential about revisionism – that it is often bourgeois ‘science’ that becomes the means for its surrender to bourgeois society.³

Bernstein’s attack on ‘utopianism’ was a central theme of his revisionism. A quote from the final chapter of his best-known book, *The Preconditions of Socialism*, is enough to establish this. Here Bernstein speaks of “a dualism which runs through the whole monumental work of Marx [i.e. *Capital*]”, which he explains as follows:

... the work aims at being a scientific inquiry and also at proving a theory laid down long before its drafting; a formula lies at the basis of it in which the result to which the exposition should lead is fixed beforehand. The return to the *Communist Manifesto* [at the end of the final chapter of the first volume of *Capital*] points here to a real residue of Utopianism in the Marxist system. Marx had accepted the solution of the Utopians in essentials, but had recognized their means and proofs as inadequate. He therefore undertook a revision of them, and this with the zeal, the

¹ “Their Science and Ours”: http://www.permanent-revolution.org/polemics/mwhh_ch03.pdf

² Herbert Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution*, p. 342.

³ Other examples in the history of Trotskyism are Shachtman and Burnham in 1940 and the American SWP in 1963. Their renegacy from Marxism was carried out in the name of “concrete issues” or “the facts”.

critical acuteness, and love of truth of a scientific genius. He suppressed no important fact, he also forebore belittling artificially the importance of these facts as long as the object of the inquiry had no immediate reference to the final aim of the formula to be proved. To that point his work is free of every tendency necessarily interfering with the scientific method.

For the general sympathy with the strivings for emancipation of the working classes does not in itself stand in the way of the scientific method. But, as Marx approaches a point when that final aim enters seriously into the question, he becomes uncertain and unreliable. Such contradictions then appear as were shown in the book under consideration, for instance, in the section on the movement of incomes in modern society. It thus appears that this great scientific spirit was, in the end, a slave to a doctrine. To express it figuratively, he has raised a mighty building within the framework of a scaffolding he found existing, and in its erection he kept strictly to the laws of scientific architecture as long as they did not collide with the conditions which the construction of the scaffolding prescribed, but he neglected or evaded them when the scaffolding did not allow of their observance. Where the scaffolding put limits in the way of the building, instead of destroying the scaffolding, he changed the building itself at the cost of its right proportions and so made it all the more dependent on the scaffolding. Was it the consciousness of this irrational relation which caused him continually to pass from completing his work to amending special parts of it? However that may be, my conviction is that wherever that dualism shows itself the scaffolding must fall if the building is to grow in its right proportions. In the latter, and not in the former, is found what is worthy to live in Marx.⁴

This is plain enough: Marx's great work was marred by a "residue of Utopianism." His scientific genius was evident so long as his investigation "had no immediate reference to the final aim" (i.e. of socialism), but as soon as it did, Marx sacrificed his science to his utopianism. Utopianism was the scaffolding that eventually got in the way of the scientific edifice Marx was building, and the only way to rescue the latter is to tear the scaffolding down. It is the science, not the utopianism, which is the only thing "worthy to live in Marx." It is perfectly clear here that Bernstein was indeed an "enemy of utopianism" – specifically the revolutionary utopianism he saw in Marx. And this was key to Bernstein's appeal to a wide layer of party functionaries and union bureaucrats inside the SPD because these 'practical' men, who spent their lives horsetrading with the bourgeoisie and its state apparatus, were becoming increasingly hostile to the utopian 'dogmas' of Marxism.

Now for North, what is wrong about this argument is not Bernstein's counterposing of utopianism and science as mutually exclusive opposites; North simply rejects that there is any "dualism" in Marx at all, insisting that there is only science. But Rosa Luxemburg saw the matter differently in her great polemic against Bernstein, *Reform or Revolution*. There she argued that the "dualism" in Marx was quite real, and it was precisely what made Marxism revolutionary:

⁴ E. Bernstein *Evolutionary Socialism*, pp. 209-10. This translation (Schocken: 1961) uses the title *Evolutionary Socialism* instead of the original *The Preconditions of Socialism*. It is the same translation posted on the Marxist Internet Archive:

<http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/bernstein/works/1899/evsoc/ch04-conc.htm>

Marx's "dualism," however, is nothing but the dualism of the socialist future and the capitalist present, of capital and labor, of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. It is the monumental scientific reflection of the dualism existing in bourgeois society, the dualism of the bourgeois class antagonisms.

When Bernstein sees this theoretical dualism in Marx as "a survival of utopianism," this is only his naïve avowal that he denies the historical dualism of bourgeois society, the existence of class antagonisms in capitalism, that for him socialism itself has become only a "survival of utopianism." Bernstein's "monism"—that is, his unity—is but the unity of the eternalized capitalist order, the unity of the socialist who has renounced his aim and has decided to find in bourgeois society, one and immutable, the goal of human development.⁵

Of course this makes neither Luxemburg nor Marx a utopian in the traditional sense of that term. But it certainly does make them utopian from the standpoint of someone who sees bourgeois society as "the goal of human development"—which is to say, not just Bernstein *but everyone under the sway of spontaneous consciousness within bourgeois society*.⁶ As we'll come back to in a moment, it was this "dualism", this incorporation of "the socialist future" into the understanding of the capitalist present, that made it possible for Marxism to become a science that could lay bare the workings of capitalism.

Since North doesn't see the issue in these terms, since for him it is a straightforward matter of utopianism versus science, it becomes necessary to cast Bernstein as a utopian, no matter how much that flies in the face of Bernstein's own pronounced anti-utopianism. To that end, North patches together some quotes from a 1901 lecture by Bernstein called "How is Scientific Socialism Possible?" Bernstein's answer is, of course, that it isn't possible because all that science can do is to examine developments within capitalism itself; the moment you go beyond that and make claims about the future, you have gone beyond science. Socialism is therefore an ethical conception, not an historical necessity: it is about what should be, as opposed to what has to be. Here is a characteristic passage:

[W]hether one defines it as a condition, a theory or a movement, socialism is always pervaded by an idealistic element that represents either the ideal itself or the movement toward such an ideal. Thus socialism is a piece of the *beyond*—obviously not beyond the planet we live on but beyond that of which we have positive experience. Socialism is something that *ought* to be or a movement toward something that *ought* to be.⁷

⁵ R. Luxemburg, *Social Reform or Revolution in Selected Political Writings of Rosa Luxemburg*, ed. Dick Howard, pp. 101-2. An older, clunkier translation is available on the Marxist Internet Archive: <http://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1900/reform-revolution/ch06.htm>.

⁶ What Luxemburg called Bernstein's "monism" is what Marcuse would later refer to as "one-dimensional", which is to say an outlook that is entirely circumscribed by capitalism. Similarly the "dualism" of Marx is "two-dimensional" in that it incorporates the possibilities beyond capitalism (i.e. "utopianism" from the point of view of one-dimensionality) into its understanding of the world as it is. There is much about politics, culture and everyday life that these concepts can help illuminate, despite the fact that Marcuse developed them in a book, *One-Dimensional Man*, deeply flawed by his own political pessimism.

⁷ E. Bernstein, "How is Scientific Socialism Possible?" in *Selected Writings of Eduard Bernstein 1900-1921*, ed. Manfred Steger, p. 95.

Elsewhere in the same lecture Bernstein speaks of this “ought to be” as “utopianism” or “speculative idealism” and he even argues that the differences between Marx and the socialist utopians (i.e. Saint-Simon, Fourier and Owen) were not as great as Engels had made them out to be, since Marx’s socialism, though it put more emphasis on science, still also had its share of “inventions and imaginings”, like its utopian predecessors.⁸ At first glance, these remarks seem to contradict Bernstein’s many statements opposing utopianism, as for instance the following remark from a lecture eight years later: “The maturing modern proletariat dispenses with utopias; it can carry on the socialist struggle without a blurry ‘final goal.’”⁹ Indeed, it seems to contradict the very essence of what Bernstein stood for, summed up in his famous motto about the final goal of socialism being nothing. North is only too happy to pin the label of ‘utopian’ on Bernstein and move on, but if we look a little more carefully, it isn’t hard to figure out what is going on. Just as what Bernstein meant by science isn’t what Marxists mean, so the same is true in the case of utopianism. The point was explained by Peter Gay in his classic biography of Bernstein, *The Dilemma of Democratic Socialism*:

Bernstein distinguishes two kinds of Utopianism. The first sort, championed by the great Utopian Socialists, set a goal apart from an investigation of the possibilities of its realization. The second, which Bernstein advocates, sets itself the task of studying present-day society without fear or favor. It then establishes its aims realistically; it goes beyond ascertained fact, making an imaginative leap into the future, but it is careful to curb its imagination. To Bernstein, the goal of Socialism appears as a never-ending task. The world is never finished, never perfect; the reformer’s work, like the housewife’s, is never done. This is one sense in which his remark, “The goal is nothing, the movement is everything,” may be understood.¹⁰

Gay nicely captures here the timid and vacuous nature of Bernstein’s ‘utopianism’. It is a thoroughly ‘realistic’ utopianism – which is to say, that it accommodates itself entirely to capitalism. To be sure, on occasion it strays “beyond ascertained fact” and makes “an imaginative leap” or two, but it is always “careful to curb its imagination.” As the whole history of social democracy since Bernstein’s time demonstrates, this ‘utopianism’ was nothing more than liberal reformism. It was a “monist” utopianism, i.e. it completely excluded the socialist future and instead took capitalism to be “the goal of human development,” as Luxemburg put it. This was not the case with the great utopians: for all their serious limitations, they never curbed their imaginations to accommodate themselves to capitalism. In this sense at least, their utopianism was grandly (if often fantastically) “dualist”. The socialism they imagined meant a radical transformation of every aspect of life and their image of a rejuvenated humanity was on a colossal scale: Marx once spoke of Fourier’s “Gargantuan view of man”.¹¹ There is nothing of that in Bernstein’s ‘ethical socialism’: instead we have the image of the bourgeois hausfrau busily attending to this small reform here and that small reform there. One might say that

⁸ Ibid, pp. 96-7.

⁹ E. Bernstein, “Revisionism in Social Democracy” [1909] in *Selected Writings of Eduard Bernstein 1900-1921*, p. 79.

¹⁰ Peter Gay, *The Dilemma of Democratic Socialism* (1962/ [1952]), p. 164.

¹¹ Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, p. 540.

Bernstein was as much a revisionist in regards to utopianism as he was in regards to Marxism as a whole.

Such distinctions are of no interest to North. Having stuck the utopian label on Bernstein, he can ignore Bernstein's attack on the "final goal" of socialism and instead focus the discussion on science: "Bernstein recognized that the main challenge to his revisionist project stemmed not from utopianism but from the identification of socialism with science" (107). But here everything depends of what is meant by "science". If this is the everyday sense of the term, i.e. a 'value-free' study of the facts modeled on the natural sciences, then this is certainly not true: Bernstein's writing abounds in that sort of "monist" science and the whole thrust of his argument against Marxism was on such positivist grounds. But if we understand "science" as Marx understood it, then of course it does represent the antithesis of Bernstein's revisionism, but that is because of its "dualism", i.e. its incorporation of the "final goal" of socialism into its science. As Luxemburg showed, Marxism was only able to become a science because of that "dualism":

But what precisely is the magic key which enabled Marx to open the door to the deepest secrets of all capitalist phenomena and solve, as if at play, problems that were not even suspected by the greatest minds of classic bourgeois political economy, such as Smith and Ricardo? Nothing other than his conception of the whole capitalist economy as an historical phenomenon – not merely, as in the best of cases with the classical economists, concerning the feudal past of capitalism, but also concerning the socialist future. The secret of Marx's theory of value, of his analysis of money, his theory of capital, his theory of the rate of profit, and consequently of the whole existing economic system is – the transitory nature of the capitalist economy, its collapse: thus – and this is only another aspect of the same phenomenon – the final goal, socialism. And precisely because, *a priori*, Marx looked at capitalism from the socialist's viewpoint, that is, from the historical viewpoint, he was enabled to decipher the hieroglyphics of capitalist economy. And because he took the socialist viewpoint as a point of departure for his analysis of bourgeois society, he was in a position to give a scientific base to socialism.¹²

In part 7 of *To know a thing is to know its end*, Brenner cited that quote and noted how it "turned the tables" on Bernstein. As we saw (in the passage from *The Preconditions of Socialism*), the latter had argued that it was the utopian "scaffolding" that had marred Marx's scientific project. But here Luxemburg showed that just the opposite was the case: what Bernstein called "utopianism" was in fact "the magic key" that allowed Marx to unlock "the deepest secrets" of capitalism. Expanding on that idea, Brenner added:

It was because his social vision extended beyond the horizon of class oppression that Marx could see capitalism as a product of history rather than the incarnation of reason (or of human nature) that bourgeois ideology made it out to be. It needs to be emphasized that Luxemburg's point is not merely the commonplace one that Marx took an historical approach to political economy, which is typically how the matter is viewed by Marxists. The classical political economists, as she notes, had already adopted such an approach as regards the past, specifically feudalism. What was

¹² Luxemburg, op.cit., p. 101.

different about Marx – and what made it possible for him “to decipher the hieroglyphics of capitalist economy” – was that “*a priori*” he “looked at capitalism from the socialist’s viewpoint,” in other words that *his historicism encompassed a future beyond capitalism*.¹³

North never takes into account this unique character of Marxist science, and so he necessarily misrepresents the nature of Bernstein’s revisionism. Indeed, North adopts the same line of attack on Bernstein that Kautsky and the orthodox wing of Social Democracy had taken,¹⁴ which is to say that Bernstein was wrong on narrowly empirical grounds and that science (understood as modeled on the natural sciences) was broader than Bernstein claimed. And to be sure, on both counts it was possible to make valid criticisms of Bernstein, as Kautsky did, but this still left the underlying problems in Bernstein’s position unexamined.¹⁵ Indeed, it is obvious from the example of Rudolf Hilferding, Kautsky’s successor as the leading theoretician of the SPD ‘center’, that Kautsky and company fundamentally agreed with Bernstein’s positivism.¹⁶ (Indicative of Kautsky’s position is the following remark from a letter he wrote Plekhanov at the height of the Bernstein controversy inside the SPD in 1898: “I openly admit that I am least of all bothered by neo-Kantianism. Philosophy has never been my strong side, and although I am standing on the foundations of historical materialism, I do believe that the economic and historical position of Marx and Engels could, if push comes to shove, be reconciled with neo-Kantianism.”¹⁷)

The crucial point here is that this kind of ‘defense’ of Marxism, i.e. by identifying socialism with “monist” science, did not, contrary to North, fundamentally challenge Bernstein. On the contrary, those like Kautsky and Hilferding who took this line in the controversy over revisionism eventually ended up on the same side as Bernstein – i.e. against Luxemburg and against the revolution. There is a direct connection between this capitulation to positivism by the SPD leadership and what one historian called the “taboo” against utopianism within Social Democracy. As Brenner explained in *To know a thing is to know its end*:

The orthodox reply to Bernstein, notably by Kautsky, challenged the accuracy of Bernstein’s facts or argued that they didn’t prove what he claimed they did. This was legitimate insofar as it defended the scientific validity of Marxism, but even in this respect the issues tended to be cast in narrowly empirical terms. What no one questioned was Bernstein’s essential premise that utopianism and Marxism were mutually exclusive. Indeed, Kautsky was as eager as Bernstein to disavow any

¹³ http://www.permanent-revolution.org/polemics/to_know.pdf

¹⁴ This is evident in a 1998 lecture North gave on Bernstein called “Reform and Revolution in the Epoch of Imperialism”: <http://www.wsws.org/history/1998/jan1998/reform.shtml>

¹⁵ Here the points we made about Popper in Chapter 3 are directly relevant, since on this issue Bernstein is a direct forerunner of Popper’s attack on Marxist historicism. See: http://www.permanent-revolution.org/polemics/mwhh_ch03.pdf, p.77.

¹⁶ See our discussion of Hilferding in Chapter 3: http://www.permanent-revolution.org/polemics/mwhh_ch03.pdf, pp. 71-3.

¹⁷ Cited in Manfred Steger, “Introduction,” in *Selected Writings of Eduard Bernstein 1900-1921*, p. 27, n. 27. The letter is dated May 22, 1898. To a Trotskyist, these remarks inevitably bring to mind Max Shachtman’s ‘agnostic’ position on the dialectic four decades later in the internal party struggle documented in *In Defense of Marxism*.

connection to utopianism. "I am thoroughly convinced that it is not our task to invent recipes for the kitchens of the future," he once declared, which was essentially how the entire party leadership viewed the issue.¹⁸ Indeed, one historian writes about it being "one of the universally respected taboos" within the party that no one talked about what would happen after the revolution, and by way of illustration points out that "between 1882 and 1914, the party journal *Neue Zeit* (edited by Kautsky) contained only *one* article dealing with future society and that this was Kautsky's own discussion of *past* millenarian societies."¹⁹ Whenever the issue came up in public debate, party leaders tended to deal with it facetiously (as in Kautsky's remark about recipes), if at all. Yet this was such a glaring gap in SPD politics that even a reactionary like Bismarck could make political hay out of it. "Bismarck mocked [SPD leader August] Bebel with an invitation to an evening's conversation where he 'would hope at last to learn how Herr Bebel and his comrades really imagine the state of the future for which they would prepare us by tearing down all that exists, that we cherish, and that protects us.'"²⁰

It was this unreality of the socialist future *within* socialist ideology that was crucial to the effectiveness of Bernstein's position. Unlike Kautsky and company (but like Bismarck), Bernstein had a vision of the future: his attack on socialist utopianism really amounted to another kind of utopianism – that of a bourgeois liberal ... The attenuation of class contradictions, the growth of a prosperous middle class, the expansion of democracy – Bernstein took trends (as he saw them) from a temporary period of bourgeois prosperity and expansion, and simply extended them into the future to arrive at the familiar reformist utopia of evolutionary socialism. Bernstein's 'science' was nothing more than a rationalization for his reactionary form of utopianism, his way of disqualifying any notion of the future that was at odds with the endless perpetuation of the present. And since his orthodox opponents shared his antipathy to *socialist* utopianism, they had virtually nothing to offer as an alternative – and eventually many of them, including Kautsky and even Plekhanov, ended up with a view of the future much the same as Bernstein's.²¹

One further point: in this section of North's polemic there is a long footnote (104-106) that returns to the issue of classical Marxism and utopianism. Yet again North proves what no one disputes, which is that works like Marx's *Critique of the Gotha Program* and Lenin's *State and Revolution* are not utopian in the conventional sense of that term. They are most certainly, however, works that contain what Cannon called "marvelous flashes of insight" about the socialist future, and it was in this sense that Brenner considered them examples of utopianism within the Marxist tradition. This is evident to anyone familiar with the content of these works. For example, Marx scholar David McLellan, in the prefatory note to the *Critique of the Gotha Program* (in his edition of *Selected Writings* by Marx) calls that work "Marx's most important statement on organization in the future communist society."²²

¹⁸ K. Kautsky, *The Social Revolution*: <http://www.marxists.org/archive/kautsky/1902/socrev/pt2-1.htm>

¹⁹ Vincent Geoghegan, *Utopianism and Marxism*, p. 38. The historian cited here is J. P. Nettl.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 38-9.

²¹ http://www.permanent-revolution.org/polemics/to_know.pdf, Part 7, p. 26.

²² David McLellan, ed., *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, p. 564. As for *State and Revolution*, its utopian character (in the sense we are defining it here) is widely acknowledged. Here for example is a passage from Isaac Deutscher's classic biography of Trotsky: "After the July days, while he was hunted as a German spy and expected to be assassinated at any moment, Lenin wrote *State and Revolution*, a sort of political

There is a vein of this sort of utopianism that runs right through the classical Marxist tradition, something that was evident to Cannon and many others, but that North deliberately tries to obscure. This gets particularly difficult with a work like Paul Lafargue's *The Right to be Lazy*, where there is an explicit affinity to the utopian tradition. North gets around this by claiming that there is nothing utopian about the work except "certain stylistic devices that draw upon the literary tradition of Fourier and Proudhon", but anyone who has read the pamphlet knows that its utopianism has much more to do with its content than its style.²³ North finally dismisses it as "a rather minor work," which is true, but even a minor work can have a significant impact, depending on its subject matter and the originality of its ideas (a good example being the *Critique of*

testament, in which he revived the half-forgotten Marxist idea about the withering away of the state, the idea of government which in a classless society would cease to be government, because it would administer 'things' instead of governing human beings and so would no longer wield the instruments of coercion (prisons, courts, etc.). To be sure, this was the ideal state of the future, not the Russian state of 1917. But the Soviet republic, as it emerged from the revolution, was to be directly related to the ideal" (*The Prophet Armed*, Vintage edition, p. 318).

²³ Brenner gave the following summary of Lafargue's pamphlet:

The Right to be Lazy (1880) is a passionate denunciation of the work ethic, of the misery and ruination that comes from a lifetime of being a beast of burden. "In capitalist society work is the cause of all intellectual degeneracy, of all organic deformity," and later Lafargue calls work "the most terrible scourge that has ever struck humanity." He calls on the proletariat to "proclaim the Rights of Laziness, a thousand times more noble and more sacred than the anemic Rights of Man concocted by the metaphysical lawyers of the bourgeois revolution." He demands that work be restricted to no more than three hours a day, "reserving the rest of the day and night for leisure and feasting." Work, he envisions in socialist society, "will become a mere condiment to the pleasures of idleness" ... The right to be lazy is really the right to leisure, the right to a life where the great majority of time is devoted to developing oneself as a human being.

Lafargue sounds a note almost never heard within Marxist literature, which tends to treat 'labor' as sacrosanct, often not making any distinction between toil, i.e. work imposed by economic necessity, and the kind of work that is freely engaged in out of interest and pleasure. It is a note, however, that runs right through the popular folk tradition, as in the hobo's heaven described in the American folk ballad "The Big Rock Candy Mountain," (itself a variation on the age-old theme of the land of Cockaigne, El Dorado, etc.) a place where free food and drink abound, all "the cops have wooden legs" and "Where they hung the jerk/That invented work." Mainstream Marxism has a distinctly tin ear when it comes to understanding mass consciousness on this issue. To state the obvious, the great majority of humanity work only because they have to; their real life, i.e. the meaningful part of their existence, only begins when work ends. This doesn't change the objective significance of one's class position, but it makes a huge difference as to how the individual worker understands his life, including his work. Marxists are quick to present themselves as defenders of the right to work, and of course this is a legitimate demand against unemployment. But we have virtually nothing to say about the long-term goals of socialism, which are not about the right to work (Lafargue in fact called his pamphlet "a refutation of the Right to Work"), but about the right to be *free* of work, something which taps into a much deeper aspiration of workers – and especially of young workers – than the immediate need for a job (*To know a thing is to know its end*, part 5).

Brenner went on to show that far from this being some anomaly in the Marxist tradition, Lafargue's pamphlet was in line with Marx's own thinking, notably a remarkable passage in the *Grundrisse* where Marx shows that after capitalism leisure will replace labor-time as the standard of wealth.

the Gotha Program). In fact, *The Right to be Lazy* was remarkably popular: it went through several editions in Lafargue's lifetime and has remained in print ever since. A Lafargue biographer reports: "According to Alexandre Bracke, the longtime socialist deputy, it was the socialist pamphlet most extensively translated after the *Communist Manifesto* and was translated into Russian before the *Manifesto*. In between and at both ends of the political spectrum it enjoyed the reputation of a small masterpiece of socialist revolutionary literature."²⁴ One should add that Lafargue, who was Marx's son-in-law, wrote his pamphlet at a time (1880) when Marx and Engels were both alive and when Lafargue himself was a leader of the French Socialist movement. If this pamphlet were in some way 'heretical', one imagines that Marx or Engels would have made some comment to that effect, but there is no record of that having been the case. One therefore has every reason to consider it a part of the legacy of classical Marxism.²⁵

Moreover, there are other works in the classical Marxist tradition, notably Bebel's *Women and Socialism*, which cannot be so easily dismissed as minor. This was the single most popular book the SPD ever put out, running through fifty editions, and its final ten chapters (about 150 pages) are devoted to a full-scale 'vision' of socialist society, encompassing a wide range of topics including rarely discussed matters such as fashion, food (including viniculture!), overpopulation and sexuality. It would be absurd to deny that this work is utopian (again, in the sense of anticipating rather than inventing the future); even the Soviet publishing house, which put out the final ten chapters as a separate book, acknowledged this by titling it *Society of the Future*. Not surprisingly, then, North never mentions Bebel's book, even though Brenner devoted a section to it in *To know a thing is to know its end*.

Using the Straw Man of Neo-Utopianism to Ignore the Need to Rebuild a Socialist Culture in the Working Class

We come now to a crucial part of North's argument, his claims about neo-utopianism (108-114). He tries to conjure up an image of a significant political movement, one which is a "form of contemporary political pessimism" which is seeking "to revive the pre-Marxian and utopian stages of socialist thought," as he put it in a 2005 lecture.²⁶ In *Objectivism or Marxism* we took issue with this characterization - first of all - the notion that neo-utopianism represents a significant political tendency:

One would think from [North's] description that there was some new spate of Fourierist phalanxes or Owenite communes springing up, but this is nonsense. 'Neo-Utopianism' is simply a straw-man, and the fact that the only evidence for it that

²⁴ Leslie Derfler, *Paul Lafargue and the Founding of French Marxism 1841-1882*, p. 181.

²⁵ It is interesting to note that a few years ago a Chicago philosophy professor wrote a book called *The Importance of Being Lazy* that was popular enough to go paperback and garner its author, Al Gini, lots of media attention. A self-help book for surviving life under capitalism, it not surprisingly makes no mention of Lafargue, but it does attest to the underlying interest in 'laziness'.

²⁶ David North, "The Russian Revolution and the unresolved historical problems of the 20th century", WSWS, Aug. 29, 2005: <http://www.wsws.org/articles/2005/aug2005/le1-all.shtml>

North offers are some quotes from a two-decade-old volume by an academic only underscores how flimsy his case is.²⁷

North never responds to this point, he never shows that there is any political movement that has sprung up around ‘neo-utopianism’. In fact there is a great deal of evidence that shows exactly the opposite – i.e. that the contemporary political landscape is overwhelmingly dominated by *anti-utopianism*. As Brenner wrote:

In the last two decades in particular, utopian thought has been marginalized almost to the point of extinction. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, ‘the end of history’ was proclaimed, that is the end of any possible future outside of capitalism. After 9/11, we now have ‘the end of irony’, which is to say the end of official tolerance for any sort of oppositional stance, no matter how minimal or half-hearted. And then there is ‘the end of the meta-narratives’ proclaimed by post-modernism, which dissolved knowledge and truth into solipsistic relativism. The upshot of all of these ‘ends’ has been the end of hope, of any widespread sensibility that the world can be significantly different than it is (*To know a thing is to know its end*, Part 4).²⁸

And nowhere is this anti-utopian zeitgeist more evident than on the political left, both within middle class radicalism and the mass protest movements, again something that Brenner discussed at some length in his document.²⁹ There really is nothing more to so-called ‘neo-utopianism’ than the writings of a relative handful of academics, and even among them there are wide differences as to what is meant by ‘utopianism’.

What North does do is cite material from the journal *Socialist Register* (which he had briefly referred to in his 2005 lecture). This journal, a typical example of academic Marxism (it is edited by York University’s Leo Panitch, a left social democrat and longtime radical academic fixture in Canada), devoted its 2000 edition to the subject of

²⁷ http://www.permanent-revolution.org/polemics/objectivism_marxism.pdf, pt. 14. The book referred to is *Utopianism and Marxism* (1987) by the Irish academic Vincent Geoghegan.

²⁸ http://www.permanent-revolution.org/polemics/to_know.pdf, Part 4, p.14.

²⁹ Brenner looked at the politics of the IS in this regard and also the anti-globalization movement. Concerning the latter he wrote:

In defining itself as ‘anti-globalization’ or ‘anti-capitalist’, the movement backhandedly acknowledged its lack of coherence about what it was fighting *for*. To be sure, it was a movement full of youthful energy and progressive instincts: those who took to the streets were clearly looking for a way out of the social impasse of capitalism, and far from taking the economic structure of society for granted, they made it their central concern. But none of this automatically led to a revival of utopian spirit; indeed, pretty much from its inception the movement fell prey to reactionary ideas, notably the uncritical identification of globalization with globalized capitalism, which bred illusions in national capitalism and hence the nation-state as a supposed bulwark against globalization. ‘Anti-capitalism’ turned out to be something of a misnomer since it was only anti-certain-kinds-of-capitalism, i.e. the MacDonald’s and Starbucks variety. But defending the ‘home-grown’ brand as preferable to its globalized competitors is the kind of dead-end choice [Russell] Jacoby was talking about, i.e. “between the status quo and something worse.” The notion that neither the local coffee shop nor the Starbucks are the limits of human possibility, or that besides capitalist rapaciousness a globalized economy might also contain a new basis for global solidarity of the oppressed – that ideas like these receive no public attention whatsoever attests to the vanishing of the utopian spirit (*To know a thing is to know its end*, part 4).

utopianism. North uses this material to prove that there is a “clear connection” between neo-utopianism and political pessimism in the petty bourgeois left. But before we get to the particulars, the fact is that the writings of academic Marxists on pretty much *any* subject matter could be used to prove the same point. In general academic Marxists are pessimistic about the possibilities of ever overthrowing capitalism or of ever freeing the masses from the sway of consumerism, the ‘culture industry’ or illusions in bourgeois democracy (to the extent, that is, that these academics aren’t themselves under the sway of such illusions).

To be sure, the already rampant pessimism within these circles deepened considerably in the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union, but this had far more to do with the dashing of their lingering hopes in the Stalinist bureaucracy than with any change of attitude to the working class. For half a century if not more, renunciation of the revolutionary role of the working class has been the conventional wisdom among academic Marxists. If a few of these academics now take an interest in utopianism, this isn’t some ‘step back’ from revolutionary Marxism because they had never ‘stepped forward’ in the first place. What is new about this interest isn’t pessimism about the working class, which is a given for these academics; rather, what is noteworthy is that it represents a response, if a necessarily distorted one, to an extraordinary political fact of life – the glaring political vacuum within capitalist society in terms of any alternative on the left. And while these academics rarely understand the issue in these terms, the root cause of that vacuum is something that should be of the gravest concern to Marxists – the wiping out of virtually any trace of a socialist culture in the working class. As we pointed out in *Objectivism or Marxism*, to dismiss the significance of utopianism because some academics have taken an interest in it is deeply misguided: “It amounts to focusing on the vices of a handful of academics while turning a blind eye to the vices of mainstream political culture.”³⁰

We have already seen how little interest North himself has in the issue rebuilding a socialist culture in the working class, having nothing to say about it in his polemic.³¹ Thus when it comes to assessing the writings of these academics, his only concern is to tar utopianism with the brush of political pessimism. For that purpose the *Socialist Register* issue comes in handy, particularly an article by Panitch and fellow academic Sam Gindin which even makes this association in its title: “Transcending Pessimism: Rekindling Socialist Imagination.” There is only one problem: Brenner never made any mention of this article or the *Socialist Register* in *To know a thing is to know its end*. Similarly, there is no reference to it in *Objectivism or Marxism* or in any of our other material. In point of fact, Brenner had never read the *Socialist Register* issue prior to writing his document, and even if he had, he still wouldn’t have referred to it, except possibly as a negative example of what to avoid. As we just noted, Panitch (and Gindin) are left social democrats, and it is evident from reading the article in question that their ‘utopianism’ is far more in the tradition of Bernstein than of revolutionary Marxism.³²

³⁰ http://www.permanent-revolution.org/polemics/objectivism_marxism.pdf, pt. 17.

³¹ See Chapt. 7, pp. 197-8: http://www.permanent-revolution.org/polemics/mwhh_ch07.pdf

³² This isn’t the place for a serious analysis of this article, but it bears all the characteristics of left reformism. Panitch and Gindin want “to democratize the economy” and “alter the nature of the state” so

But there was no lack of *other* material by academic Marxists on utopianism in Brenner's document. In fact Brenner made no less than a dozen references to one such book, *The End of Utopia* by Russell Jacoby. Yet North has virtually nothing to say on this book and instead drags in the *Socialist Register*. Why does he do this? It wouldn't have been hard for him to show that Jacoby, an adherent of the Frankfurt School, shares the political pessimism about the working class that prevails in academic Marxism, something that Brenner himself had pointed out.³³ What then accounts for North's studious avoidance of this book?³⁴

The answer is simple enough, and indeed we already pointed it out in *Objectivism or Marxism*: the reason North avoids Jacoby's book is because it "demonstrates that hostility to utopianism is one of the defining traits of postmodernism."³⁵ That is obviously something North would rather not discuss because he shares that hostility with the postmodernists, whom he otherwise vehemently claims to be against. In fact Jacoby goes through major branches of contemporary academic life – postmodernism, multiculturalism, cultural studies etc. – and in each case he paints a scathing portrait of the cynicism, apathy and intellectual decline that are the manifestations of the 'There Is No Alternative' zeitgeist.³⁶ His book makes an incontestable case that it is anti-

that it "does not stand external to everyday economic life as a bureaucratic regulator, but is integrated in the struggles to transform social relations", all of which they propose to do without a revolution! For them the purpose of utopianism is "to help us conceive how to inhabit capitalism while building bridges to those individual/institutional capacities to get socialism on the agenda." That is as far as these 'visionaries' can see – not the end of capitalism but learning to "inhabit" it, and not the establishment of socialism but just getting it "on the agenda". This is very much in the vein of Bernstein's 'realistic' utopianism, which was always "careful to curb its imagination". (Leo Panitch and Sam Gindin, "Transcending Pessimism: Rekindling Socialist Imagination" in *Socialist Register 2000*, pp. 20-22.)

³³ Here is the relevant passage from *To know a thing is to know its end*:

Here it is necessary to take issue with Jacoby who writes: "Anarchists, Trotskyists and new-leftists might despise Stalinism, but they partake in the wider left and share its fate. This is indisputable. The demise of the Soviet Union and its Communist allies eviscerates the idea of socialism. Intellectually cogent protests in the name of an unsullied socialism or 'classical' Marxism are both necessary and useless." Jacoby's political shortcomings, as an adherent of the Frankfurt School, are on display here. First, he misses the essential point about the Soviet Union: it was far less its demise that eviscerated socialism than its prolonged existence as a Stalinist monstrosity. What is worse, he identifies the fate of socialism with the fate of Stalinism, and it would be hard to think of a more damning concession to anti-utopianism than that. This underlying pessimism, even as Jacoby is arguing against such moods, is rooted in the blind spot that all 'Frankfurters' have when it comes to the proletariat. In this respect, Jacoby's views amount to standing orthodox Marxism on its head: instead of the proletariat without utopia, he gives us utopia without the proletariat. One-sidedness of either kind cannot save socialism from evisceration (Part 11).

³⁴ One might add that in his only mention of Jacoby (in a footnote), North refers mockingly to "your beloved *The End of Utopia*" and then describes Jacoby as "a proponent of a liberal revival" (35), so it is evident that North was well aware of Jacoby's political and ideological affiliations. But this makes his reluctance to discuss Jacoby's book all the more striking. Moreover, compared to a relatively obscure academic journal like *Socialist Register*, Jacoby's book generated a good deal of attention and discussion, including in the mass media, when it came out in 1999, which would again make it an obvious choice for an analysis of contemporary utopianism. (Later in this chapter we will come back to this footnote of North's for other reasons – because it involves an attempt to smear us as well as an appeal to intellectual backwardness.)

³⁵ http://www.permanent-revolution.org/polemics/objectivism_marxism.pdf, pt. 14.

³⁶ Here is Brenner's summary of the book:

utopianism that is overwhelmingly the way the political pessimism of today's left-wing academics and intellectuals expresses itself, which is the very opposite of what North is contending.

It also has to be asked: why is North so insistent on this point? Why does he go out of his way to set up and then defend the straw-man of neo-utopianism in the face of all the evidence of anti-utopianism within the mainstream political culture? North talks about political pessimism as if it were solely manifest within academia, as if outside university campuses a thriving socialist opposition to capitalism was alive and well. Never once does he discuss the prevailing zeitgeist whose central theme is 'There Is No Alternative',

Sketching out his theme, [Jacoby] explains: "We are increasingly asked to choose between the status quo or something worse. Other alternatives do not seem to exist. We have entered the era of acquiescence, in which we build our lives, families and careers with little expectation the future will diverge from the present. To put this another way: A utopian spirit – a sense that the future could transcend the present – has vanished." Jacoby immediately feels compelled to specify what he means by utopian because the word "today connotes irrelevancies or bloodletting. Someone who believes in utopias is widely considered out to lunch or out to kill." That in itself says a good deal about the contemporary zeitgeist. He then provides a serviceable definition of utopia – "a belief that the future could fundamentally surpass the present ... the notion that the future texture of life, work and even love might little resemble that now familiar to us ... the idea that history contains possibilities of freedom and pleasure hardly tapped." He adds: "This belief is stone dead."

A good example of this malaise is the ideology of multiculturalism. "Multiculturalists see only culture and hardly attend to economic imperatives. Yet how can culture subsist apart from work and the production of wealth?" The moment that economics enters the picture, it becomes evident that most cultures "rest on the same infrastructures," that cultural pluralism doesn't correlate to any "economic pluralism." But nobody in the field discusses this: "The economic structure of society ... stands as the invariant; few can imagine a different economic project. The silent agreement says much about multiculturalism. No divergent political or economic vision animates cultural diversity. From the most militant Afrocentrists to the most ardent feminists, all quarters subscribe to very similar beliefs about work, equality and success. The secret of cultural diversity is its political and economic uniformity. The future looks like the present with more options." This last remark captures concisely the narrowed horizons and debased hopes that are endemic in contemporary culture. (*To know a thing is to know its end*, part 4)

Much more could have been added. For example, Jacoby does an excellent job of taking apart Foucault's conception of "power", one of the staples of postmodernist discourse:

Leftist thinkers monomaniacally extend the truism that power is powerful to the proposition that power is everything, as if this were a subversive notion. "In this book," goes a typical sentence by two culture-studies practitioners, "we make the scandalous claim: *everything* in social and cultural life is fundamentally to do with *power*. Power is at the centre of cultural politics ... We are either active subjects ... or we are subjected to ... others." Scandalous claim? This is the wisdom of executive suites and abandoned streets. "Money talks." The bottom line is ..." "You're either with us or against us." "It's who you know ..." The belief engenders a vision of the world of insiders and outsiders, those on top and those on bottom, all beyond good and evil ... Those out of power offer the same program as those in power, except that they list different individuals to be shot or imprisoned ... Foucault redoubled the cynicism with his idea of total, not partial, power. Those who follow Foucault scrap as too limited notions of power and politics defined by the state; rather, power expands to encompass all domains, including concepts, rules, representations and categories. Power and

a zeitgeist manifest far beyond the groves of academe. As we wrote in *Objectivism or Marxism*:

This attitude pervades political life, most obviously in mainstream politics and the mass media, whose fundamental premise is There Is No Alternative. It is the same story in the official labor movement, in academia or in the various social movements from human rights to environmentalism where, as Jacoby rightly puts it, “a commitment to reasonable measures supplants a commitment to unreasonable ones – those more subversive and visionary.” The antipathy to utopianism is also evident in the way contemporary mass protest movements are defined solely by what they are against (globalization, war) without being able to articulate any alternative to capitalism. It is evident as well in the way socialism is a blank space in the literature of even the most seemingly radical left groups. Even the popular slogan, ‘Another world is possible’, partakes of the zeitgeist it seems to oppose: it is as if socialism is too embarrassing to mention, so it is replaced with the vacuous concept of ‘another world’ which commits no one to fighting for any world in particular. Under these circumstances, to attack utopianism is to swim *with* the stream of bourgeois public opinion, not against it.³⁷

This last point is crucial: North’s attacks on ‘neo-utopianism’ are part and parcel of his objectivism, of his capitulation to spontaneous consciousness. Confronting anti-utopianism is an essential part of confronting the problems of the development of political consciousness in the working class. Again from *Objectivism or Marxism*:

Rebuilding a socialist culture in the working class *is* the decisive question for Marxism at the outset of the 21st century. But this is inconceivable without utopianism in the form of a revived socialist idealism. North never considers this side of the question in his attacks on utopianism, which is to say he leaves out what is crucial from a revolutionary perspective. The working class doesn’t exist in a cocoon; it isn’t immune to the prevailing zeitgeist. Of course this doesn’t manifest itself in the same way as it does among demoralized radicals or academics, but this doesn’t make it any *less* of an obstacle to socialist consciousness. The growth of right wing populism in America and of Le Pen-type movements across the Atlantic are obvious indications of this: their appeal is in large measure to sections of workers who in the past would have been union members in the US or Socialist or Communist party voters in Europe. And while it is only a minority of workers who have been taken in by this reactionary demagoguery, there are deeper problems that affect the consciousness of virtually the entire class and go back much further than the doom and gloom of the post-Soviet era.³⁸

This is what North is avoiding with his straw-man of ‘neo-utopianism’ – the problems of rebuilding a socialist culture in the working class. And North won’t confront those

politics saturate everything. Truth itself is a function of power ... Traditionally, political thinking began, not ended, with the recognition of power ... The ability to distinguish what is and what should be, the *sine qua non* of political thinking, dwindles; the reality of a multifarious domination stuns liberal and leftist thinkers into reiterating platitudes that all categories deceive (*The End of Utopia*, pp. 141-3).

³⁷ http://www.permanent-revolution.org/polemics/objectivism_marxism.pdf, pt. 16.

³⁸ http://www.permanent-revolution.org/polemics/objectivism_marxism.pdf, pt. 18.

problems because to do so would mean confronting his own abstentionism; it is much easier to make the problems go away by resorting to demagogic arguments.

What's in a Name and a Bit of Intellectual Character Assassination

Unable to answer our criticism that neo-utopianism is a straw-man and unable to deal with the evidence in Jacoby's book that it is anti-utopianism that is the real expression of political pessimism, North resorts to evasions and some bizarre accusations. Since Brenner never made any reference to the *Socialist Register*, North tries to manufacture one:

Written by Leo Panitch and Sam Gindin, many of the themes present in Brenner's essay are anticipated in this chapter [i.e. of *Socialist Register*] – including the invocation of the work of Ernst Bloch, from whom you, Comrade Brenner obtained the title of your tract on utopianism (“To know a thing is to know its end.”) Your own work is clearly influenced by this chapter (109-10).

Now, the claim about Brenner taking “many of the themes” for his document from Panitch and Gindin is nonsense: as we have seen, North simply doesn't want to deal with the real sources of Brenner's themes, such as Jacoby's book. As for the title, North bizarrely tries to turn this into a major indictment of Brenner. North's claim is that Brenner got this title from Bloch via Panitch and Gindin. North then includes a long footnote about Bloch which uses a couple of quotes from a biography to establish that he was interested in religion and that he was a fervent Stalinist, facts which are well-known to anyone familiar with Bloch's work. The footnote ends with an accusatory exclamation: “This is the man, Comrade Brenner, from whom you believe the International Committee has much to learn, and whose theoretical example you invoke in the title of your document on utopia!” (111). Not content with this, North picks up the theme a few paragraphs later, and in the same tone of denunciation:

Comrades Steiner and Brenner: it is your right to oppose and criticize the International Committee, but don't take us for fools. We are quite familiar with the literature that is circulating in petty-bourgeois political and academic circles, and are able to identify the sources with which you are working. So please don't argue that neo-utopianism – and the pessimism from which it is derived – is a “straw man” that we created to counter your brilliant original ideas. You are not deceiving us. Rather, you are deceiving yourselves (111-12).

All of this overblown rhetoric is due to a title. And typically North adduces no evidence for his denunciations: the phrase he claims that is Brenner's source from Bloch (“The true genesis is not at the beginning, but at the end”) is nothing like Brenner's title. In fact, the title comes from Aristotle, from book two of *The Physics* where Aristotle discusses his concept of purpose in nature, i.e. the ‘end’ of something being its purpose. (He makes a similar point in book one of *The Politics*: “the nature of a thing is its end”). As the Scottish academic Scott Meikle showed in his important 1985 book, *Essentialism in the Thought of Karl Marx*, an understanding of Aristotelian teleology is crucial to resisting what he called the ‘atomism’ (i.e. reductionism) that prevails within bourgeois

philosophy and science today. (Steiner's 1997 essay, "From Alienation to Revolution: A Defense of Marx's Theory of Alienation", contains an excellent discussion of teleology and its relevance to Marxism. It should come as no surprise to readers of this polemic that North refused to publish this essay, but it is available on our web site.³⁹) In any case, Brenner's title was an invocation of Aristotelian (and Marxist) teleology: you cannot know socialism unless you know the ends that socialism is fighting to achieve. The point was for the title to be the polar opposite of the Bernstein motto: the final goal is not nothing, it is everything.

While it was an oversight of Brenner's not to have referenced Aristotle for the title, North's accusations are nonsense. First of all, if Bloch had been the source of Brenner's title, there wouldn't have been any reason to hide that fact. Brenner cited Bloch several times in *To know a thing is to know its end*, which isn't surprising since any informed discussion of utopianism and Marxism can hardly ignore Bloch's monumental work, *The Principle of Hope*.

(In his footnote on Bloch, North never confronts any of Bloch's ideas, merely citing some 'incriminating' statements by a Bloch biographer. It is laughable to call this a "perceptive evaluation" [to quote the promotional blurb on the back cover of North's polemic] of a body of work like Bloch's; it is nothing more than a bit of intellectual character assassination. One doesn't have to be an apologist for Bloch or overlook his many serious failings, above all his support for Stalinism, to recognize that his work might still contain something of value. One immediately thinks of a figure like Georg Lukacs, who was just as deeply implicated in support for Stalinist crimes, and yet it would be an intellectual travesty to dismiss his entire body of work out of hand for that reason. One of Bloch's concepts that merits attention is 'educated hope', which Brenner briefly discusses, showing its affinity to what Lenin once called 'useful dreaming'. Furthermore, Bloch provided an important overview of the history of utopianism and, perhaps most importantly, he demonstrated the extent to which utopian thought pervades myriad activities in everyday life. But it also needs to be said that Bloch was not a major source of Brenner's ideas regarding utopianism: far more important – apart from the classical Marxists of course – was Marcuse, who is referenced many more times than Bloch, as is Jacoby. The reason for this, on theoretical grounds, was Bloch's opposition to psychoanalysis [he spends a good many pages in the first volume of *The Principle of Hope* on a not very convincing critique of Freud]. Without the insights of psychoanalysis, it becomes all but impossible to understand how utopianism can play a role in the development of socialist consciousness in the working class. Since this was the central theme of *To know a thing is to know its end* and since incorporating psychoanalytic insights into Marxism defined virtually all of Brenner's theoretical work, North's accusation that Bloch is somehow Brenner's guiding spirit makes absolutely no sense. To anyone who had actually read Bloch this would have been apparent, but clearly North never bothered with reading; his only interest was to tar Brenner with Bloch's crimes. To call this Marxism is a disgrace.⁴⁰)

³⁹ http://www.permanent-revolution.org/essays/alienation_revolution.pdf

⁴⁰ We will come back to this theme of how Marxists should read the works of figures like Bloch, Marcuse, Jacoby etc. later in this chapter.

As for North's claim that we don't identify our sources or that we are trying to pass off somebody else's ideas as our own, this again is rubbish. Apart from the title, everything else in Brenner's document was meticulously referenced, with nearly a hundred endnotes. There isn't any trouble in identifying Brenner's sources; rather, it is North who doesn't want to deal with them. We already saw this in relation to Jacoby's book, but it is also noteworthy that North says almost nothing about Marcuse. Given North's cynical approach to these matters, the reason for this can only be that he found Marcuse less useful because his political sins were less sensational than Bloch's. Marcuse was never an avid backer of Stalinism and the Moscow Trials, though he (along with most of the other Frankfurt School intellectuals) chose not speak out against Stalinist crimes. For North's purposes, therefore, Marcuse had less 'smear value' than Bloch.

Another "Perceptive Evaluation" and an Invisible Polemic

Two further points deserve some comment as yet more examples of North's intellectual dishonesty. First, North goes out of his way to include a long footnote (114-15) about Hendrik de Man, author of *The Psychology of Marxian Socialism* (1926) and a Belgian social democrat who ended up a Nazi collaborator during the war. This footnote (again touted as one of the "perceptive evaluations" on the back cover of North's book) claims that de Man was a precursor of the Frankfurt School as well as a source for Vincent Geoghegan's book *Utopianism and Marxism* (or, to quote North directly, one of "the various sources from which Geoghegan has drawn inspiration"). We will have more to say on the Geoghegan book later, but as a point of fact there is no mention in that book of de Man or *The Psychology of Marxian Socialism*. As we have already seen, North tends to invent sources whenever he finds it convenient to do so. As for the Frankfurt School, North claims de Man's book "was immensely influential" in the 1920s among the intellectuals who would later form the Frankfurt School. While admitting that "De Man's thoroughgoing repudiation of Marxism was not acceptable to the founders of the Frankfurt School," North nonetheless goes on to assert that de Man's "attempt to supplant historical materialism with psychology anticipated trends that were to become increasingly pronounced among [Frankfurt School founder Max] Horkheimer's colleagues."

North provides no proof for this claim, and in fact it turns out to be bogus. In Martin Jay's classic account of The Frankfurt School, *The Dialectical Imagination*, there is one passing mention of de Man and no indication that his book had any influence on the Frankfurt intellectuals.⁴¹ In fact there is evidence of just the opposite – that the 'Frankfurters' opposed de Man not only because of his blatant opposition to Marxism but also because of the reactionary nature of his psychology. Thus, in a 1932 essay by Erich Fromm (who was then a leading 'Frankfurter' and also an important figure in what came to be known as 'Freudo-Marxism'), he attacks de Man for putting forward a conception of psychology that turned the character traits typical of bourgeois society into human nature: "The idea that the 'acquisitive drive' is the basic or only motive of human

⁴¹ Martin Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination*, p. 31. De Man is mentioned along with liberal theologian Paul Tillich as having participated in discussions organized by the School (then know as the Institute of Social Research) about the future of socialism.

behavior is the brainchild of bourgeois liberalism, used as a psychological argument against the possibility of the realization of socialism.”⁴²

In fact, de Man’s book is an extreme example of “monist” thought (as we defined it earlier): his psychology as much as his politics are entirely circumscribed by bourgeois society. Thus he conceived of the typical worker as a “philistine” only interested in material comforts who regards “a bourgeois existence as desirable” and whose political consciousness was nothing other than a “herd instinct.”⁴³ As for psychoanalysis, he dispenses with it by claiming that “beyond all the manifestations of animalism” (i.e. the instinctive drives at the core of Freudian theory), there was “what in common parlance is termed ‘conscience’. Is it not touching, is it not sublime, that when we delve deeply enough into the human mind, even if we are only on the look-out for traces of man’s animal heritage, we should always find these elements of the divine? In truth, we did not need to wait for psychoanalysis to disclose the power of the faith in good and evil.”⁴⁴ Aside from the stunning banality of these remarks, there is, in the book as a whole, what one commentator called “the seeds of a fascist temperament.”⁴⁵ Whatever else one might say about the Frankfurt School, it is nonsense to claim that this sort of proto-fascist bilge had any appreciable influence on them. The point here isn’t to defend the Frankfurt School but to treat intellectual history with a basic degree of honesty. Instead, North’s approach is to grab hold of whatever he can to try to discredit Brenner. This is the age-old method of mud-slinging, the idea being that if you throw enough mud, some of it will stick.

The second point that deserves mention is another footnote of North’s that comes up while he is citing one of the criticisms we made in *Objectivism or Marxism* (again concerning his remarks about the Vincent Geoghegan book). Here it is:

By this point, it should be fairly obvious to all objective readers that you were well aware that my lectures last summer provided a reply to your earlier documents. And, I might add, that your present document is an attempt to answer the critique of your views that were presented in the course of those lectures (112).

This note doesn’t have any direct bearing on the issue at hand. Quite obviously it is intended to answer our criticism that the IC leadership had stonewalled a discussion of our documents for 3 years. But it is done in a shame-faced manner, tossed into a footnote on page 112. And the reason for that isn’t hard to fathom: North doesn’t want to draw much attention to this point because it opens him up to serious criticism. After all, if the 2005 summer school lecture that he is referring to here was indeed intended as “a reply” to our documents, ***then why was there no mention made of those documents in the***

⁴² This essay bears the dry title, “The Method and Function of an Analytic Social Psychology,” but its subtitle better reflects its contents – “Notes on Psychoanalysis and Historical Materialism”. Originally published in The Frankfurt School’s journal, it was reprinted in a volume of essays Fromm put out in 1970 called *The Crisis of Psychoanalysis*. The quote here is from p. 151.

⁴³ Henry de Man *The Psychology of Marxian Socialism* (1985/1926), pp. 71, 108, 126.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, p. 506.

⁴⁵ Peter Steinberger, “Introduction,” *The Psychology of Marxian Socialism*, p. vi.

*lecture itself?*⁴⁶ Why did North hide this fact from his audience? (As we already noted in the first chapter of the present statement, North claims that these summer school lectures, along with the WSWs International Editorial Board reports of 2006, represented “an unequivocal repudiation” of our positions – and yet there is not a single quotation from or even mention of our documents in any of this material.) To say the least, this is a thoroughly unprincipled way to respond to criticism, where you never mention who your critics are or the substance of their arguments. And it shows contempt for the lecture audience and for WSWs readers: since they were kept ‘out of the loop’ about the real context of North’s remarks on ‘neo-Utopianism’ in his lecture, how could they assess the validity of his remarks? North argues that because we recognized those remarks as being a response to our documents, this somehow gets him off the hook. But this is preposterous: of course we were able to read between the lines of North’s ‘invisible polemic’ since it was our documents that were the hidden context, but those who attended that lecture or read it on the WSWs were denied that knowledge by North. And the only possible reason he had for doing that was because he didn’t want to draw attention to our documents. In other words, he was suppressing information from his members and readers about the existence of a major critique of the IC’s politics. To say that this sort of behavior is alien to the traditions of Marxism is to state the obvious. In this revealing glimpse of North’s polemical practices, one gets the sense of a leader who has gone for so long without facing critical debate within his own movement that he has lost touch with elementary requirements of intellectual honesty.

* * * * *

A Catechism of Approved Authors and the Use of the Political Amalgam

A digression is in order here concerning the footnote of North’s we mentioned earlier, where he attempts to smear us by the method of guilt by association, claiming that because we cite the works of Marcuse, Bloch and others, we are therefore guilty of “excusing the grossest blunders” of said authors. This childish attempt to smear us is itself laughable but it does raise the very important issue of how a Marxist should engage with authors who have demonstrated a profound antipathy to the politics of Marxism. This issue was touched on by Steiner in the WSWs on the eve of the millennium, when Steiner, along with other regular contributors to the web site, were asked to provide a list of their 10 favorite authors from the 20th century. Steiner contributed his list of the best non-fiction works of the last century. His number one pick was Trotsky’s *History of the Russian Revolution*, but number three on his list was Georg Lukacs’s *History and Class Consciousness*. In explaining why he chose this work, Steiner wrote:

To be sure, there are many problems with this book, both philosophical and political. It can not be denied however that its presentation of Marxism as the antithesis of dogmatism and mechanical materialism represented a milestone in the retrieval of Marxist philosophy from the decay of the Social Democracy. Unfortunately, Lukacs

⁴⁶ North’s lecture referred to here is “The Russian Revolution and the unresolved historical problems of the 20th century”, WSWs, Aug. 29, 2005: <http://www.wsws.org/articles/2005/aug2005/le1-all.shtml>.

abandoned the critique of Stalinism that was logically demanded in his work once he made his peace with the bureaucracy. The book had a profound influence on many intellectuals in the West.⁴⁷

It should be noted that not only were there no objections or even any particular controversy surrounding Steiner's citation of a Stalinist author as having made important contributions to Marxist theory, but the editor of the WSWS arts section, David Walsh, in partnership with Joanne Laurier, also picked another work of Lukacs's, *The Young Hegel*, for honorable mention in their list of the best non-fiction books of the 20th century.⁴⁸ And while *History and Class Consciousness* was written at a time before Lukacs aligned himself with the Stalinist bureaucracy, his *Young Hegel* was written in the immediate post-war period, at the height of the Stalinist era.

Steiner returned to a discussion of the problem of the relationship between a philosopher and his political activity in the pages of the WSWS in more detail several months later, this time in relation to the truly reprehensible figure of Martin Heidegger:

Prior to a discussion of the philosophy of Martin Heidegger it seems necessary to dispose of a possible objection. This objection can be expressed as follows: if it is true that the thought reflects the man, and if the man is known to be morally and politically reprehensible, then the thinking behind the man must be equally reprehensible. If that is the case, then we are in a position to render judgment on someone's thinking without actually reading what he wrote. When stated in this way, the absurdity of this mode of thinking becomes self-evident. The problem with this type of reasoning is that it takes what is a partial truth, that indeed a thinker does in some way reflect the man and his times, and transforms this insight one-sidedly into an absolute dictum such that it becomes as false as it is true. In general, the relation between a thinker and his action is far too complex to be summed up in a well-phrased maxim.

At the same time, we must reject the opposite, equally one-sided judgment, one that has been championed by Heidegger apologists, that there is no relation between a thinker and his politics. The proponents of this viewpoint often bring up the example of Gottlob Frege, a vicious anti-Semite whose politics apparently had no bearing on his technical work on logic. Yet even if one concedes that there are cases—particularly in technical areas removed from political and sociological concern—where theoretical work can be pursued unrelated to a person's biography or social status, it does not follow that such a dichotomy is present in the work of any particular theorist. It would be particularly surprising to find a discordance between the political activity of a man such as Heidegger and his theorizing, knowing that his theorizing was itself intimately concerned with personal and political activity.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ "Favorite artists, works and performers of the twentieth century: a survey of WSWS contributors 30 December 1999, Comments by Alex Steiner": <http://www.wsws.org/articles/1999/dec1999/fav-d30.shtml>

⁴⁸ "Favorite artists, works and performers of the twentieth century: a survey of WSWS contributors 30 December 1999, Comments by David Walsh and Joanne Laurier": <http://www.wsws.org/articles/1999/dec1999/fav-d30.shtml>

Whereas Steiner found little of value in the thought of Martin Heidegger, the principle adopted in examining Heidegger's thought was the same as that employed in reading Lukacs. We neither reduce the theoretical position of the man to his politics, nor do we ignore his politics. Our task as Marxists is to examine and appropriate for our own use what is living in the work of these authors. And this was apparently the principle under which the WSWS operated – until Dave North discovered one day that we were trying to excuse “the grossest blunders of our utopian heroes.”

North introduces one of the most dishonest diatribes in his entire polemic with a crude attempt to link our citations of certain “questionable” authors to our alleged political indifference, writing:

One especially unpleasant expression of your indifference to political analysis is the manner in which you are willing to excuse even the grossest blunders of your utopian heroes (35).

Not only is the charge of our political indifference meant to discredit anything else we may say about philosophy or other theoretical issues, it is also used by North to condemn us for being apologists for those who supported the Moscow Trials! This fantastic amalgam is made by North in the following bit of perverse logic:

When comrade Steve Long pointed out to you, Comrade Steiner, that Jacoby (the author of your beloved *The End of Utopia*) is writing as a proponent of a liberal revival, you merely shrugged your shoulders and replied: “Does that mean that we as Marxists are therefore entitled to ignore everything he writes beyond page 8 where he announces his intentions of reviving a form of radical liberalism?” Or in response to comrade Long's reference to the unsavory political history of Herbert Marcuse and Theodor Adorno, you replied: “Yes, both Adorno and Marcuse were political opportunists who went along with the Moscow trials in the name of a ‘united front’ against fascism in the 1930s. Does that mean they had nothing relevant to say to us afterward?” Has it not occurred to you that the political swinishness of these individuals (and let us not forget to include Ernst Bloch, who greeted with rapture the murder of Old Bolsheviks), had something to do with their utopianism? Why should confidence be placed in the utopian conceptions of individuals who were incapable of making a correct appraisal of objective reality, or even distinguishing truth from the noxious lies of the Stalinist regime? Would it be impolite to ask what method they employed when they considered political issues? Or perhaps their genius was of such a rarified and special character that it worked only in the future tense! (35-6)

In this paragraph North brings together several threads of his campaign of distortions. He first of all tries to reinforce, by virtue of repetition, the canard that we are indifferent to political analysis. At the same time, he imputes that we are indifferent to the most virulent enemies of Trotskyism. Last but not least, he makes a case for dismissing the

⁴⁹ Alex Steiner, “The Case of Martin Heidegger, Philosopher and Nazi, Part 3: History, Philosophy and Mythology”, WSWS, April 5, 2000: http://www.wsws.org/articles/2000/apr2000/heid-a05_prn.shtml

entire corpus of theoretical work carried on by anyone who is not politically of the right character.

The attempt to dismiss the work of Adorno and Marcuse, as well as Ernst Bloch on the grounds that they were politically reprehensible is nothing less than an appeal to intellectual and cultural backwardness.⁵⁰ The point of Steiner's exchange with Long (which is here fully reproduced)⁵¹ is not that we should be indifferent to the politics of Marcuse and Adorno as well as Jacoby, but that their work deserves to be considered on its own merits. Steiner was saying that these figures may have had some valuable insights that we ignore at our peril. This is not to imply that their work is beyond criticism or that there is nothing in their work that can impinge on their politics and vice-versa. But the task for Marxists when confronted with such a heterogeneous oeuvre is to sift through the body of work and critically assimilate it. It is pointedly not to ignore or dismiss it as worthless before even reading it on the grounds that the author was politically reprehensible.

Furthermore, North is fully aware that the pages of the WSWS have at times been replete with examples of a critical and sympathetic approach to the work of many writers, artists and philosophers who have exhibited marked anti-Marxist tendencies. If Jacoby's work is to be dismissed because he is a supporter of left-liberal politics, then why is the work of historian James McPherson not likewise rejected? McPherson, a prominent Civil War historian, has been enthusiastically interviewed and his work has been championed by David Walsh of the WSWS on several occasions.⁵² Yet McPherson makes no bones about the fact that he is not a Marxist but a liberal.

The brazen hypocrisy and factionalism behind North's tirade can be gauged by the fact that North and other authors who have contributed to the WSWS have themselves cited the work of some politically reprehensible individuals in a favorable light. Take for instance the following statement by Nick Beams, in which Georg Lukacs is introduced as a "Marxist philosopher" and favorably quoted:

The Marxist philosopher Georg Lukacs also examined these central issues of methodology. All knowledge, he wrote, starts from the facts. But that is only the beginning. It is necessary to progress from "facts" as they are immediately given and "perceive their historical conditioning as such and to abandon the point of view that

⁵⁰ Here we should make a distinction between the attitude of Bloch and those of Adorno and Marcuse. Neither Adorno nor Marcuse were "enthusiastic supporters" of the Moscow Trials, though Bloch certainly was. Adorno and Marcuse, like many left intellectuals of the 1930's, failed to condemn the Moscow Trials because they thought that the left intelligentsia should not break ranks with the Soviet Union at a time when it seemed to be the only possible bulwark against fascism. That position was certainly wrong and reprehensible, but it is not equivalent to Bloch's enthusiastic support for the Moscow Trials.

⁵¹ *Utopia and Revolution*, correspondence between Steve L. and Alex Steiner. http://www.permanent-revolution.org/polemics/utopia_revolution.pdf

⁵²

See for instance the interview from Dec. 1999 <http://www.wsws.org/articles/1999/dec1999/cvw-d24.shtml>

would see them as immediately given: they themselves must be subjected to a historical and dialectical examination.”

“If the facts are to be understood, this distinction between the real existence and their inner core must be grasped clearly and precisely. This distinction is the first premise of a truly scientific study, which in Marx’s words, ‘would be superfluous if the outward appearance of things coincided with their essence.’”

Lukacs concluded that only through the use of a method which “sees the isolated facts of social life as aspects of the historical process and integrates them in a totality, can knowledge of the facts hope to become knowledge of reality” (Georg Lukacs, *History and Class Consciousness*, pp. 5-8).⁵³

We also have a favorable, if qualified endorsement, of some of Lukacs’s theoretical work, from WSWS author Stefan Steinberg:

Despite weaknesses Georg Lukacs: *The Destruction of Reason* (1946) remains one of the best historical treatments of “irrational philosophy” in nineteenth century Germany. As a theorist, Lukacs stood head and shoulders above most of the intellectuals working inside the Stalinist Soviet Union. Nevertheless Lukacs adapts his position to Stalinist orthodoxy on a number of occasions in *The Destruction of Reason*. In the final chapter of the book Lukacs descends in [sic] obvious propaganda for Stalin, at one point extolling socialism as a system that encourages “conscious national life and culture”. In other passages of the book Lukacs spreads his web of “irrationalism” too wide. According to Lukacs any progressive bourgeois philosophy had come to any end with Nietzsche. As a result he then proceeds to consign the progressive and democratic elements in the work of a philosopher such as the American pragmatist John Dewey to his general category of irrationalism.⁵⁴

Finally, North himself has expressed his admiration for Georg Lukacs’ last work, *The Ontology of Social Being*, on several occasions.⁵⁵ Yet Georg Lukacs was at least as much an enthusiastic supporter of the Moscow Trials as Ernst Bloch! And although he himself was a victim of Stalinism – having been arrested by the NKVD twice, once in 1941 following the Stalin-Hitler pact, a time when being a foreign Communist in exile in Moscow was enough to bring you under suspicion, and again following the collapse of the Hungarian workers revolution against Stalinism in 1956 – he never recanted his vitriolic hatred for Trotsky and Trotskyism.

⁵³ Nick Beams, “The Australian 2004 election: the secret of Howard’s ‘success’”, Part 1, WSWS, Nov. 3, 2004, <http://www.wsws.org/articles/2004/nov2004/ele1-n03.shtml>

⁵⁴ Stefan Steinberg “One hundred years since the death of Friedrich Nietzsche: a review of his ideas and influence”, Part 1, WSWS, October 20, 2000: <http://www.wsws.org/articles/2000/oct2000/niet-o20.shtml>

⁵⁵ North in fact inserts a quote from Lukacs last work, *The Ontology of Social Being*, in making his case against Popper in one of his lectures from the 2005 Summer School. See note 4 in David North, “Lecture four: Marxism, history and the science of perspective”, WSWS, September 14, 2005: <http://www.wsws.org/articles/2005/sep2005/le4-all.shtml>

In an interview conducted in 1971, just months before his death, Lukacs gave what was his final assessment of Trotsky and the Moscow trials:

At all events Trotskyism – and here I would include Zinoviev, Kamenev and Bukharin – could only be seen as a trend which would help to bias public opinion in England and America against the Soviet Union in the struggle against Hitler. It is significant that Bloch, who was in America, refused in much the same terms to identify with Trotskyism.

To which the interviewer, obviously perplexed by Lukacs unwillingness to concede that the Moscow Trials were a historical abomination, replied,

Comrade Lukacs, you seem to be saying that Trotsky did more damage to the Soviet Union in the eyes of American public opinion than did the trials? I have the feeling that the trials caused the greater damage.

But Lukacs would not bend, finding excuses for Stalinism and repeating the time-worn Stalinist slanders against Trotsky and the Left Opposition to the very end,

These things cannot simply be weighed against each other. There is no doubt that the trials caused damage. It is also beyond doubt that they did damage simply because they took place. I think we are talking about a complex issue here. What was at stake at the time was the whole question of the Stalinist leadership, of whether Stalinism had given rise to a worse dictatorship than was to be expected from Trotsky and his supporters. Of course we answered this in the negative.⁵⁶

It would be a terrible travesty to use Lukacs' embrace of Stalinism right up to his death to condemn the writings of Beams, Steinberg or North. In fact, Steinberg's balanced critique of Lukacs strikes us as precisely the right attitude to adopt when assessing a complicated thinker such as Lukacs.

Another good example from recent years of how Marxists should approach the works of complex thinkers can be found in a letter written to the WSWS by Ulrich Rippert, a leader of the German Socialist Equality Party. Rippert wrote his letter in reply to a review by Stefan Steinberg that he felt presented a one-sided and vulgarized portrait of the works of Thomas Mann and Friedrich Nietzsche. We can do no better than provide an extensive quote from Rippert's excellently argued piece:

The reference to the "thoroughly reactionary ideas" of Nietzsche and Schopenhauer does not advance us any farther. This tinkering with formal, empty concepts always contains the danger that extremely superficial conclusions may be drawn. Somewhat along the following lines: Nietzsche's philosophy is deeply reactionary, it was used by the Nazis and, as a result, Nietzsche's influence devalues Mann's literary work and his opposition to Hitler. For this reason, goes the argument, the opinion of [literary critic Marcel] Reich-Ranicki that Thomas Mann was the greatest

⁵⁶ *Georg Lukacs: Record of a Life*, edited by Istvan Eörsi, (Verso), p. 108

democratic opponent to Hitler and represented both the “opposed poles of Germanness” is not just effusive, but false.

You do not argue precisely in this manner, but your comment about an “overly tolerant and humanist Mann” leaves the door open for various interpretations.

In addition, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche must themselves be understood as very complex thinkers. From the standpoint of the history of philosophy, both represented a retrograde response to the objective idealism of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and both advanced reactionary criticisms of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution. Their subjectivism and turning inward, their emphasis on individualism, will and drive also had another side, which was not simply negative, but rather led in the direction of the study of psychology as far as Sigmund Freud’s work and exercised a powerful attraction for artists.

While the conflict over the pros and cons of Nietzsche’s work continues, it is very interesting to listen to Mann’s own evaluation of Nietzsche’s philosophy. In 1947, while still in exile in America, Mann undertook his first trip to Europe since the end of the war and gave a lecture entitled “Nietzsche’s Philosophy in the Light of Recent History”. He made the point that Nietzsche’s moral criticism was not just a personal quirk, but “is to some extent impersonal, an attribute of his era. For around the turn of the century the European intelligentsia was making its first head-on assault upon the hypocritical morality of the middle-class Victorian age.” (all quotes from “Nietzsche’s Philosophy in the Light of Recent History” in *Last Essays*, translated by Richard and Clara Winston and Tania and James Stern, New York, Knopf, 1959)

As proof he refers to the “close kinship of many of Nietzsche’s *aperçus* with the far from vain tilts against morality with which, at approximately the same time, Oscar Wilde was shocking and amusing his public.” An essential relationship exists between Wilde’s provocative claim that “It is only shallow people who do not judge by appearances,” and Nietzsche’s comment: “It is only moral prejudice to assert that truth is more valuable than appearance.”

“As far as I can see,” Mann continues, “there are two prime errors which deranged Nietzsche’s thinking and gave it its fatal cast. The first was a total and, we must assume, wilful misinterpretation of the relative power of instinct and intellect on this earth. It seems to have been his notion that intellect is dangerously dominant, is on the point of overwhelming instinct, so that instinct must be saved from it.” Mann describes this view as “absurd,” in view of the fact that “in the great majority of men, will, instinct, and selfishness dominate and repress intellect, reason and sense of justice.”

Mann continues: “Elementary fairness should counsel us to cherish and protect the feeble little flame of reason, intellect, and justice, not join sides with power and the instinctual life and riotously whoop it up for negatives, for every sort of criminality. In our contemporary world we have seen the folly of this. Nietzsche did a great deal of mischief by acting as if man’s moral consciousness were a devil threatening life, like Mephistopheles, with a cold diabolic fist.”

The second of Nietzsche's errors, according to Mann, consists in treating life and morality as antagonists and thereby placing them in an "utterly false relationship." He asserts: "The truth is that they belong together. Ethics is the prop of life, and the moral man a true citizen of life's realm—perhaps a somewhat boring fellow, but highly useful. The real dichotomy lies between ethics and aesthetics. Not morality, but beauty is allied to death, as many poets have said and sung. How could Nietzsche not know this?"

A few pages later Mann writes that with his attack on morals, Nietzsche "was prone to confuse morality in general with bourgeois morality," and he emphasises: "All his ranting against morality, humanity, pity, and Christianity, all his diseased enthusiasm for sublime amorality, war, and evil, unfortunately had its place in the trashy ideology of fascism. ... If it is true that 'By their fruits ye shall know them,' Nietzsche's case is lost."

But Mann rejected the vulgar and mechanical connection made between Nietzsche and the Nazi regime by the Stalinists, on the one side, and the fascists, on the other. "Let us not deceive ourselves. Fascism as a mousetrap for the masses, as the most shameless rabble-rousing and the lowest sort of cultural vulgarism history has ever known, could only have been alien to the spirit of the man for whom everything revolved on the question: 'What is aristocratic?' He could not even have imagined such a phenomenon as fascism. And that the German middle class confounded the onslaught of the Nazis with Nietzsche's dreams of a barbarism that would renew civilisation—this was the crudest of misunderstandings."⁵⁷

It seems then that even in recent years leading members of the International Committee, including North himself, recognized that an important weapon in the arsenal of Marxism was the critical appropriation of the work of writers who are political opponents. Why then does North condemn us for insisting that the works of thinkers such as Marcuse, Bloch or Jacoby may hold some valuable insights for Marxists?

(Indeed, we could apply the standard that North uses against us to one of North's own favorite authors – Plekhanov. Plekhanov ended his days a virulent social patriot and opponent of revolution. So vile was his patriotism at the outbreak of the First World War that he railed at a comrade from Italy: "So far as I am concerned, if I were not old and sick I would join the army. To bayonet your German comrades would give me great pleasure."⁵⁸ It was a position Plekhanov never recanted. Thus all we need to do is change a couple of words in North's formulation to adjust for the particulars of Plekhanov's situation [i.e. utopian to philosophical, Stalinist to Czarist] and we have an all-purpose denunciation of anyone [including Lenin and Trotsky] who ever cited Plekhanov approvingly: "Why should confidence be placed in the philosophical conceptions of individuals who were incapable of making a correct appraisal of objective reality, or even

⁵⁷ Ulrich Rippert, "Was not Thomas Mann one of the great humanists? Comment on 'Opulent, but flawed': a review of *The Manns: a Novel of a Century*", WSWS, April 2, 2002: <http://www.wsws.org/articles/2002/apr2002/mann-a02.shtml>

⁵⁸ The comrade in question was the Russian socialist Angelica Balabanoff, who was then a leading member of the Italian Socialist Party. The incident is recounted in her memoir, *My Life as a Rebel*, p. 120. It is also recounted in Samuel Baron's biography, *Plekhanov: The Father of Russian Marxism*, p. 324.

distinguishing truth from the noxious lies of the Czarist regime?" One can only wonder what would then become of "member Number 1 of the Michigan Branch of the G.V Plekhanov fan club", as North once styled himself.)

That North is a hypocrite of the first order is obvious enough. But there is much more involved here than the pettiness, malice and dishonesty of an individual. As North himself said elsewhere in his polemic, a resort to the political lie has vast significance.

As Trotsky pointed out, the lie serves an essential function in political life: it is employed to conceal social interests and to cover over weaknesses and contradictions in a political position. In your case, the dishonest methods flow from your efforts to pose publicly as a Marxist while having rejected – and not all that unconsciously – the theoretical and political foundations of Marxism (61-2).

North is betrayed by his own words. Nothing exposes the political and theoretical degeneration of North so much as his inability to counter the arguments of a polemical opponent other than by resorting to lies, Stalinist-style amalgams and character assassination. Such is the fruit of decades of neglect of theoretical issues in the movement.

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