

open to serious and cogent objection, not least to the objection that it involves an attempt to prostitute Marxism in a reformist manner. Here much depends on the crucial premise of the continuing viability and indeed creativity of capitalism in the short run. Such initiatives would remain intra-capitalist and not 'socialist' or 'Marxist' initiatives. They would depend on what might be called an intra-capitalist application of Marxist doctrines for essentially intra-capitalist purposes. From a strictly Marxist perspective, such initiatives might be 'erroneous'. Nonetheless, the fact that these initiatives are not wholly remote from perceptions of contemporary problems already current in capitalist society means that they might have a chance of influencing future perceptions of such problems. If Marxism could indeed provide indications for such 'errors', it would not be an unimportant source of hope.

For your information,
see p 229.

Beyond the Illusions of the Left

Greg George and Brian Laver*

Throughout this discussion the questions of how a genuinely liberatory social change can occur and of what individuals and groups wishing to promote such change can do, remain entangled. What people do depends on what they think might happen. On the whole Marxism provides a practical example of what not to think and, consequently, what not to do.

Our theme can be summed up in the words of the anarchist Gustav Landauer, who pointed out that the State is not an institution which can be destroyed by revolution. 'The State is a condition, a certain relationship between human beings; we destroy it by contracting other relationships, by behaving differently.'¹ Similarly, Kropotkin corrected Bakunin's flaming words 'by destroying we create' with 'by creating we destroy' as a truer expression of a liberatory movement.

* Written substantially by G. George in association with B Laver after a long mutual learning process with other comrades in the Brisbane libertarian socialist movement.

¹ Quoted in M. Buber, *Paths in Utopia*. Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1949, p. 46



Cornelius Castoriadis², writing of the 1956 workers' council movement in Hungary, gives reality to this thought.

The intellectuals (and students) had begun months before the outburst to play an important, positive role by demolishing the political, ideological and theoretical nonsense with which the Stalinist bureaucracy had (presented itself as socialism). They played this role not by bringing people to a new, ready-made truth, but by courageously exposing the old lies. New positive truths were created by the people themselves during and by means of their autonomous activity (not just against bureaucracy), but also as new forms for the organization of collective life on the basis of new principles. This, in turn, overthrew the traditional relationship between theory and practice, as well as that between theoreticians and plain people.³

'Is organization the opposite of spontaneity?' Castoriadis suggests that the question is precisely what organization, and whose organization? The spontaneous action of the Hungarian people was, he argues, action toward organization; and even more, their spontaneity was exactly that, their self-organization. Castoriadis points out that such organization simultaneously involves new consciousness:

By the same token it obviously presupposes having become conscious of the essential characteristics and mechanisms of the established system and of the desire and the will to invent a new solution to the problem posed. It is clear, for instance, that the understanding possessed by the Hungarian workers in their activity of the social character of the bureaucracy as an exploitative and oppressive class, and of the conditions for its existence, was from a theoretical viewpoint infinitely superior to all ... Trotskyist and most Marxist writings.) Self-organization is here self-organizing, and conscious is becoming-conscious: both are processes, not states. It is not that people have finally found the appropriate form of social organization, but that they realize that this form is their activity of organizing themselves in accordance with their understanding of the situation and the ends they set for themselves.⁴

Castoriadis draws a further lesson from the Hungarian events:

History is creation; i.e. the emergence of that which is not already contained in its causes, conditions, etc., that which is not repetition ... The aims and the demands formulated by these Councils are in line with

² Castoriadis was a member of the group around the journal *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, which developed libertarian thought from 1944 to 1965 and has had a continuing influence, especially through the publication of pamphlets by the British group Solidarity.

³ C. Castoriadis, 'The Hungarian Source', *Telos*, 29, Fall 1976, p. 82.

⁴ *Ibid*, pp. 12-13.

the aims and demands implied by the whole history of the working class movement, even if on certain basic points (e.g. self-management, abolition of work norms) they are more explicit and more radical. Thus, in the modern world, there is a unity of the revolutionary project. This unity can be rendered more intelligible by pointing to its historical inheritance and continuity; the similarity of the conditions in which the working class is placed ... But, even though these factors are relevant and important, they can never give us the sum of necessary and sufficient conditions for the production of the specific content of responses in 1871, 1905, 1917, 1936-37, 1956, or indeed, for the failure to produce such responses in other instances. For what we have here is not an objective unity—not a unity as in the identity of a class of effects stemming from a class of identical causes—but a unity in the making.⁵

The libertarian espousal of such creative self-activity will be reviewed later, but first Marxism will be examined from this perspective.

In the oft-quoted passage from the 'Preface to a Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy'⁶ Marx describes the 'guiding thread' of his studies from 1844 onwards. The economic structure is the foundation of the social, political and intellectual life process. The economic structure is transformed because the material productive forces conflict with the existing relations of production when those relations come to restrain their development. In consequence the ideological (legal, political, religious, aesthetic, philosophic) forms express this conflict. This is an epoch of social revolution.

When Marx wrote this in 1859 he had already written the *Grundrisse* which was the foundation for the planned work of which *Capital* was only a part. Basic to his thought is a dichotomy in which one element is 'in the final analysis' primary: that is, social being determines consciousness. Passages show that class struggle is a subsidiary reflection of the economic base; that its course is determined by changes in the forces of production; and that its result in revolution and the society thereby created is an inevitable product of the level of development of these productive forces, for example, 'process of natural history', 'inexorable', 'analogous to the history of evolution', etc. The aims and consciousness of the proletariat do not determine the result but are determined. Marx approvingly quotes a Russian reviewer of *Capital*:

⁵ *Ibid*, p. 13.

⁶ K. Marx and F. Engels, *Selected Works*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1968, pp. 182-83.



Marx only troubles himself about one thing, to show, by rigid scientific investigation, the necessity of successive determinate orders of social conditions, and to establish, as impartially as possible, the facts that serve him for fundamental starting-points. For this it is quite enough if he proves, at the same time, both the necessity of the present order of things, and the necessity of another order into which the first must inevitably pass over, and thus all the same whether men believe or do not believe it, whether they are conscious or unconscious of it.⁷

What is the practical result of this theory of inevitability? In this view 'revolution becomes the mere question of more or less expenses on the bill of history—since the end result of history is already settled'.⁸ There is no need to define or to create socialism in order to act in the way most likely to produce it. If the basis for revolutionary consciousness is the preordained developments of capitalism, no demand need be made for consistency of means and ends, since the end is so to speak 'value free'. This great brooding future did serve as the source of teleological ethics—the deferred future of communism as a justifying goal. Later adherents found solutions for the gaps and ambiguities left by Marx from within the logic of his system. In the absence of ethics, referral to the absolute inevitability of communism became the basis for the quite obvious conclusion that whatever assists this inevitable result can only be thoroughly right.

Wellmer has detected a gap between Marx's philosophy of history and his criticism—this criticism being designed to further the need for liberatory activity. Where this gap is revealed Marx's argument would, he asserts, seem through some tacit compulsion to be dually grounded, because only thus can the utopian goal be read in the lines of technical-economic necessity: 'In reality, the historico-philosophical scheme of interpretation, which is dominated by the logic of production, no longer admits of a formulation of problems of the social system in which questions of survival also appear as questions of the "good life".'⁹ This is because the existentially necessary (that is, historically inevitable) new order of production is made equivalent to the commonwealth of freedom. Further, Wellmer argues that the objective possibility and the practical necessity of enlightening the proletariat about its social

⁷ K. Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1954, p. 27.

⁸ A. Wellmer, *Critical Theory of Society*, Herder and Herder, New York, 1971, p. 75. See especially the second essay, 'The Latent Positivism of Marx's Philosophy of History'.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 105–6

situation become the historical (existential) necessity that 'the proletariat comprehends its own situation, which in the end turns into the necessity that the proletariat will actually achieve the revolutionary goal—the building of the classless society—already "irrevocably ordained" in its present situation.'¹⁰

The belief that the coming of classless society is inevitable destroys the activity of actually building the classless society now. The idea that a *process* must produce the alternative, including the consciousness necessary for that alternative, leads to an abandonment of the centrality of the notion that personal change, active comprehension and collective effort around defined aims and applying recognized values are the basis for attaining classless society.

It is not denied that there is a stream of thought running through Marxism which could have avoided scientism and objectivism. Though this presence is maintained, it is conquered by a historical materialism which traces the dialectics of morality back to the dialectics of production and has been shown historically to have certain manifest consequences for revolutionary activity, chiefly the suppression of the view that liberating practice depends on a transformation of attitudes and modes of behaviour. This view is the major lesson provided by the women's movement for contemporary revolutionaries. The distinguishing feature of libertarian activity is the tendency to align with the creative activity of the masses which involved such a transformatory practice, while other leftists served to actively oppose or manipulate such tendencies. The anarcho-syndicalist abandonment of this principle, with the creation of organization which recruited without challenging attitudes and modes of behaviour, had the eventual result that anarchists stood in opposition to the self-activity of the people. Historical materialism neither allows the revolutionary process to be seriously comprehended as a process of enlightenment on which the success of the revolution is ultimately dependent, nor does it permit an appropriate materialistic explication and criticism of the bourgeois concept of political freedom from which practical norms for revolutionary political freedom can be deduced. As Wellmer demonstrates, the two are closely connected:

Processes of collective enlightenment can be anticipated only on the premise of a normative concept of autonomy and 'undistorted' communication. Understood as a process of enlightenment, the revolutionary

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 70

process is subject to norms the explication of which is at one and the same time an explication of the political freedom to be realized, and the fulfilment of which, moreover, no historic destiny can guarantee.¹¹

The blind forces that supposedly guarantee the final collapse of capitalist society are also blind to the result and here they offer no guarantees. Marx's allegiance to the crisis theory was based on his overwhelming concern to be scientific. To the nineteenth century philosopher this meant to discover absolute laws. An unpredictable phenomenon like the class struggle, involving as it does so many unverifiable phenomena, could find no place in this science and had to be subsumed under other factors. For us, an understanding of capitalist crisis is neither restricted to economic phenomena (since economic phenomena are not restricted to economic factors) nor concerned to prove the inevitability of the exercise of laws. The significant crisis for us, the crisis that lays the basis for a challenge to capitalism, is a crisis of values, meanings, motivations, responsibility, beliefs, attitudes, socialization—in other words a cultural crisis. The challenge that such a crisis allows is based on the construction of alternative forms of interaction embodying socialist values. That there can be such a crisis is obviously the result of 'objective factors'. These can be summed up as the increasing bureaucratization of society—the phenomena of apathy, privatization, consumerism, alienation, etc. But a cultural crisis itself is an 'objective' factor. Indeed the possibility of an alternative is also dependent on 'objective' factors. But the realization of this possibility is dependent on personal change (on a mass scale), the spread of ideas and the expression of the self-activity of the majority in the form of democratic organization which sees itself as the total base for the management of society, in other words autonomy in organization and ideas.

This is the *only* objective factor that promises a communist future. Marx says (and there are many similar passages):

Communism for us is not a state of things that ought to be made to exist, an ideal by which reality has to orient itself. We call communism the real movement which transcends the existing state of things. The determining factors of this movement are obtained from the premise existing now.¹²

After the factors that make a revolution a possibility are considered, the only premise existing now that can determine communism is

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 89.

¹² Quoted in A. Wellmer, *op cit.*, p. 101

that the revolution be a conscious attempt to bring a state of affairs that ought to exist into existence.

It seems quite likely that the determination of Marx and Engels to resist the proposing of ideals, ethics and a socialist vision was given a strong impetus by Max Stirner's denunciation of these elements in socialism.¹³ In their defence they felt the need to remove all such elements from their socialism. The defeats of 1848 must also have added to a tendency to see socialism as a gift of historical forces rather than as a result of human will and the power of utopian thinking to activate people. In a market-dominated capitalism, in a positivistic scientific climate, in a post-idealist but pre-Freudian intellectual climate, it is not surprising that Marx's thought took a particular direction. But because of the tendency to accept Marx as a whole, it has taken the most terrible historical experiences and the most abject theoretical failure to bring some Marxists back to a consideration of the meaning of socialism and the nature of socialist values.

Despite his historical faith Marx did not abjure political action. But there is an implacable contradiction between the slogan 'the emancipation of the working class must be the act of the working class itself' and the idea that objective conditions would make the proletariat bring socialism about. How do you get to a situation where people determine the direction of society toward agreed goals, where there are no quasi-natural forces acting behind the backs of people, through the operation of a determinist causality in which awareness itself is determined? Scientific understanding of the laws operating assumes that people are totally controlled by processes. All this had powerful results in Marx's own political activity.

Marx stresses the direct self-emancipation of the proletariat by a process of enlightenment on a number of occasions. In 1852, 'What we say to the worker is. You will have 15, 20, 32 years of civil war and national struggle and that not merely to bring about a change in society but also to change yourselves and prepare yourselves for the exercise of political power.'¹⁴ In his 1888 Preface to *The Communist Manifesto* Engels says Marx 'entirely trusted to the intellectual development of the working class, which was sure

¹³ See 'Editor's Introduction' to K. Marx and F. Engels, *The German Ideology*. International, New York, 1970, p. 23ff.

¹⁴ K. Marx, *The Cologne Communist Trial*. International, New York, 1971, p. 62.



to result from combined actions and mutual discussions.¹⁵ In *The German Ideology* they said 'In revolutionary activity the changing of oneself coincides with the changing of circumstances.'¹⁶

But in the objectivist framework the substitution for the change of people by the change of objective circumstance remained basic. A liberatory revolution should express the self-activity of people, not their victimization by *History* (or by a vanguard). They must create self-awareness and self-organization in order to make revolution, even if they do so in weeks or even days. But this is the reverse of what Marx requires. 'The alteration of men on a mass scale is necessary, an alteration which can only take place in a practical movement, a revolution; this revolution is necessary, therefore, not only because the ruling class cannot be overthrown in any other way, but also because the class overthrowing it can only in a revolution succeed in ridding itself of all the muck of ages and become fitted to found society anew.'¹⁷

Here Marx is saying 'You need a revolution to create revolutionary consciousness.' This statement and its reverse portray a mechanistic view of the interrelation between activity and thought which has its basis in the being and consciousness dichotomy. The Hungarians overthrew the traditional relationship between theory and practice. Their self-organization presupposed and expressed an understanding of the bureaucratic system and the will and ideas to invent libertarian relationships. In Marx's view, revolution is the last political act. It is followed by the introduction of a social form that supersedes political rulership.

Buber summarizes Marx's view:

First the political act of social revolution will annihilate not merely the class state, but, the State as a power-formation altogether, whereas the political revolution was the very thing that 'constituted the state as a public concern, that, as the real State'. On the other hand, 'the organizing activity' will begin, i.e. the reconstruction of society, only after the complete overthrow of existing power—whatever organizing activity preceded the Revolution was only organization for the struggle.¹⁸

He argues that from this we can see with the greatest clarity what it is that connects Marx with 'utopian' socialism: the will to super-

¹⁵ L. Feuer, ed., *Marx and Engel's Basic Writing on Politics and Philosophy*, Anchor, New York, 1959, p. 2

¹⁶ *The German Ideology*, p. 29

¹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 95.

¹⁸ M. Buber, *op. cit.*, p. 82.

sede the political principle by the social principle, and what divides him from it:

His opinion that this supercession can be effected by exclusively political means—hence by way of sheer suicide, so to speak, on the part of the political principle. This opinion is rooted deep in Marx's dialectical view of history.¹⁹

The concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat gave Marx's attitude its permanent and historically disastrous form. Even with the post-Paris Commune correction that the bourgeois state must be smashed not seized, the commitment to political action amounted to the denial of the advocacy of the emancipation of the working class through a social movement which constructs alternative forms. Thus Marx says in 'On the Jewish Question'

Revolution in general—the overthrow of the existing power and dissolution of previous relationships—is a political act. Socialism cannot be realized without a revolution. But when its organizing activity begins, when its peculiarities, its soul, comes forward, then socialism casts aside its political cloak.²⁰

Only to reveal its political dagger! This dagger was first used by Lenin and Trotsky, and by Ebert and Noske. In each case it was used to violently suppress working class and peasant self-activity.

In the words of Erich Fromm (whose contribution will be discussed later) Marx and Engels 'could not free themselves from the traditional view of the importance of the state and political power, from the idea of the primary significance of mere political change, an idea which had been the guiding principle of the great middle-class revolutions of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In this respect [they] were much more "bourgeois" thinkers than were men like Proudhon, Bakunin, Kropotkin and Landauer.'²¹ In order to find out how this attitude is, as Buber claims, 'rooted deep in Marx's dialectical view of history', it is necessary to look further at Marx's political statements. In *The Civil War in France* Marx announced that the Paris Commune of 1871 was 'the political form, at last discovered under which to work out the economic emancipation of labour.'²² The Commune was the positive abolition of the state and Marx's acceptance of this connects him with

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 83.

²⁰ D. McLellan, *The Thought of Karl Marx*, Macmillan, London, 1971, p. 27.

²¹ E. Fromm, *The Sane Society*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1963, p. 259

²² *Selected Works*, p. 294.



a federation of co-operatives and communes under a common plan as 'Communism, "possible" Communism'.²³

Yet it is unfortunately true that Marx's statements were prompted largely by respect for the dead and, along with them, he buried the lessons of the Commune. Marx was against the rising in the first place, but this could be accepted as realism. In 1881 Marx wrote that the Commune's policies 'were not socialist, nor in the circumstances could they have been'.²⁴ This might appear as initially necessary criticism of the Commune's failings. Kropotkin's criticism was chiefly designed to show that what the Commune required was more of the same—more democratization and more co-operative control. Kropotkin saw that, despite the right of recall, the Commune was a parliament. People sent delegates to the Commune without a clear mandate on given issues but with the right to represent them, to discuss and decide on whatever came up on behalf of their arrondissements, which remained merely constituencies rather than organized bodies for decision-making. The result was a loss of initiative and drive on the part of the populace and the incapability of the representatives on the Commune to deal with the manifold issues. The inchoate tendency, for both those reasons, to establish a dictatorial Committee of Public Safety is hardly surprising. Was this the nature of Marx's criticism? It seems unlikely. Before the Commune's defeat he wrote 'The Central Committee (of the National Guard) surrendered its power too soon, to make way for the Commune.'²⁵ In 1873 he wrote 'The workers must . . . influence the most decisive centralization of force in the hands of state power. They should not allow themselves to be confused by democratic talk of communes and self-government.'²⁶

Marx often attacked co-operatives (and trade unions) because they did not change the system. He sometimes praised them as proving that wage-labour is destined to give way to associated labour. In these statements he ascribes a central significance to co-operation. But he still does not see the co-operatives as the basis for revolution. Russian revolutionaries were debating whether they should work amongst the peasants to end constraints on the already existing village co-operatives. Some thought the co-

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 294.

²⁴ D. McLellan, *op. cit.*, p. 185

²⁵ *Selected Works*, p. 680.

²⁶ Quoted in H. Arendt, *On Revolution*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1973, p. 325

operatives could be the basis of a socialist federation. Others were using *Capital* to argue that the co-operatives were doomed. They asked Marx to solve the dilemma, and after much thought he 'in theory affirmed the possibility of a pre-revolutionary development of the commune in the direction desired, but in practice he made its "salvation" dependent on the timely appearance of the revolution. Here as elsewhere the determining factor is clearly the political element.'²⁷ This question for the Russian socialists was a 'life and death' question. Whether they tried to free the communities or whether, in this peasant country, they stayed with urban workers was to be decided. Buber says Marx feared 'lest the constructive work should sap the strength of the revolutionary impetus'.²⁸

In 1850 'The workers . . . must not only strive for a single and indivisible German republic, but also within this republic for the most determined centralization of power in the hands of the state authority.'²⁹ McLellan remarks that such comments are usually associated with the problem of what aspects of the bourgeois revolution the proletariat should support. This is the clue to what ties all these statements together in the context of Marx's view of history. Because Marx identified the ultimate hope of revolution most essentially with the development of the productive forces, he wished to actively support the bourgeoisie's efforts. It is not that he did not want to see workers' or peasants' co-operatives. He was not being misanthropic. He believed they did not have a chance against the laws of capitalist development, so he sometimes called them 'reactionary'. They could only hold up the inevitable and it would bring with it revolution. It is with the same reasoning that he so often supported imperialism (U.S. vs. Mexicans, Britain vs. Indians, Anyone vs. Slavs), and why he took sides in the Crimean War and undertook his peculiar study of Russian diplomacy (he believed Russia would hold up development³⁰). It is thus that the political principle and historical materialism are linked.

But if people are not to prepare themselves and their organizations for a new society, then there must be a transitional stage in which communism would not be applied but in which people would learn how to establish these personal and organizational

²⁷ M. Buber, *op. cit.*, p. 93 and p. 85

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

²⁹ Quoted in D. McLellan, *op. cit.*, p. 185

³⁰ D. Fernbach, Introduction to K. Marx, *Surveys from Exile*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1973.

changes. Marx discusses this in *Critique of Gotha Programme*: 'Between capitalism and communist society lies the period of revolutionary transformation of the one into the other. Corresponding to this is also a political transition period in which the state can be nothing but the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat.'³¹ 'Freedom consists in converting the state from an organization superimposed upon society into one completely subordinated to it.'³² But then Marx goes on to speak of a state in communist society itself: 'What social functions will remain in existence there that are analogous to the present state functions? This question can only be answered scientifically.'³³ Libertarians accept that society requires a centre. If such a centre is not organized democratically then it will emerge in an authoritarian form. This problem requires explicit consideration. The Hungarian workers' council movement began to recognize itself as the total basis for management in society. Such a recognition allows the application of that ideal. This has nothing to do with 'science'. A conclusion that can be tentatively reached is that Marx remained ambiguous on the question. But the deeper problem here is the contrast between a transitional and a communist society.

The idea of a transitional society itself originates because people, even in revolution, have insufficiently removed the 'muck of ages'. Such a situation comes about because they did not institute the ideational, characterological and organizational changes to make revolution. It will become clear later how much this inability depends on the totally open, 'over-socialized' view of human nature that Marx has. Human alienation is 'practically complete'. This was necessary scientifically because laws can only be inevitable if people are totally conditioned. Totally conditioned people are dependent on change in circumstances to such a degree that, while they can develop needs that exceed the bounds of capitalism, and while they can (must) make revolution, they cannot construct true communism without an intervening period of new conditioning.

But just because of the belief in the total openness of humanity, the idea of the human in communist society becomes one of a remote otherness. As the gap grows between practically complete alienation of humanity and the human 'in the absolute movement

³¹ *Selected Works*, p. 331

³² *Ibid.*, p. 330.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 131.

of becoming'³⁴, the transitional period becomes more mundane and compromised. Vague injunctions to total human change actually become justifications for authoritarian and capitalist organization.

Self-activity and social change

Scientific Marxism has failed to explain the defeat of revolutions in the advanced countries and their repeated success in backward countries, the rise of fascism, the growth of Stalinism and its counter-revolutionary role, rising material standards in capitalist nations, the integration of the working class, capitalism's continuing development of the productive forces, the militancy of non-proletarian strata, the importance and independence of the State, the limitation of economic crises, bureaucracy and changes in class structure, etc. Many of the theoretical issues centre on exactly the questions of being and consciousness, of conditions and behaviour, of society and human nature, of class and class consciousness, of self-activity and social change.

The contemporary trend is the subsumption of humaneness under the constricting and obliterating growth of division and hierarchy. Human satisfaction is to be derived from increasingly partial and divided activity in all areas of life, including relatedness, in which the privatized nuclear unit is the model. The 'capitalist pimp' mediates for a shallow passion of consumption. Hence we seek to delineate the limits of this process and to find an explanation for the forces of resistance and revolt which daily place such palpable limitations on this process, so that the level of control never achieves its ideal state as in *Brave New World*³⁵ or the ideal bureaucratic type described by Castoriadis in *Modern Capitalism and Revolution*.³⁶

It is certainly true that scientific and technological developments have expanded the realm of satisfaction of human needs. It is equally true that they have provided the basis of an ecologically unsound and consumerist society in which it becomes important to differentiate between needs, wants or desires in order to portray any alternative.

If certain benefits of technological progress are to become rights, then it makes sense to say that there are new and necessary needs,

³⁴ K. Marx, *Grundrisse*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1973, p. 488.

³⁵ A. Huxley, *Brave New World*, Harper Bros., New York, 1946.

³⁶ C. Castoriadis, *Modern Capitalism and Revolution*, Solidarity, London, 1967.

not needs that reside in the existential conditions of humanity, but needs that embody the demand of all people to take full advantage of what combined human effort can offer them. However, an analysis of consumer society, of conspicuous consumption, of waste, of the neuroticism of satisfaction and status deriving from material possessions could not be based on such a purely historical view of needs but would have to refer to the alienated expression of human capacities and what constituted unalienated satisfaction. Without this latter aspect, what exists must be considered normal and terms like 'degraded', 'dehumanized', 'fragmented', 'thwarted', etc., are invalid. But if the 'thwarted', etc., nature of the worker is only defined by a 'future' unalienated state then where is the bridge to this state, what is the source of a reactive resistance to degradation?

Marx's answer, 'practically complete' alienation, reflects his oversocialized concept of humanity, from which it becomes difficult to escape. If the worker can be so degraded then he she will be incapable of awareness of that degradation, or to put it another way, will be 'happy'. Marx's only way out of this bind is a concept of durable rationality descended from the naive optimism of the Enlightenment. 'The main weakness in Marx's conception of human nature is that the link between conditions and behaviour, for all the attention accorded to it, is underdeveloped.'³⁷

Even while granting almost total power to society, Marx could not explain phenomena of working class conservatism and of the irrational in politics. Rational awareness would be a natural product of capitalist development. Such confident objectivism has been deflated by numerous events, not the least of which was the rise of fascism and, for many Marxists in the 1930s, the failure of the workers to defeat it. In this context the first flourish of Marxist interest in psychoanalysis occurred (Fromm, Reich, the Frankfurt School). This was duly suppressed by the movement where possible but re-emerged to confront the problem of a stabilized post war capitalism. Some acknowledgement of the psyche is now the stock-in-trade of many Marxists (aside from Trotskyites and Stalinists). But this has not usually been associated with any attempt to understand what elements in Marxism led to these theoretical failures. Many accept that this was solely a result of the fact that Marx was pre-Freudian. They maintain their scientism, only now they consider that Freudian psychoanalysis is the complementary

³⁷ B. Ollman, *Alienation*. C.U.P., London, 1975, p. 238

science for Marxism (for example, Althusser, Juliet Mitchell). An uncritical combination of Marxism and Freudianism will be as helpful for theory as banging two bricks together.

The avenue for understanding the link between conditions and behaviour is Erich Fromm's concept of social character. Fromm uncritically accepts historical materialism, but he argues that the most dangerous errors in Marx's thinking derived from his 'underestimation of the complexity of human passions He did not recognize the irrational forces in man which make him afraid of freedom, and which produce his lust for power and his destructiveness. On the contrary, underlying his concept of man was the implicit assumption of man's natural goodness.'³⁸ In Fromm's view, Marx had not sufficiently recognized that human nature has itself needs and laws which are in constant interaction with the economic conditions that shape historical development; lacking in satisfactory psychological insights, he did not have a sufficient concept of human character, and was not aware of the fact that while man was shaped by the form of social and economic organization, he in turn also moulded it. He did not sufficiently see the passions and strivings that are rooted in man's nature and in the conditions of his existence, and that are in themselves the most powerful driving force for human development.³⁹

In Castoriadis' analysis, this resistance is expressed as a contradiction—at the most fundamental level in production. The capitalist system can only maintain itself by trying to reduce workers into mere order-takers, into automatons, into 'executants' of decisions taken elsewhere. At the same time, the system can function only as long as this reduction is never achieved. Capitalism is constantly obliged to solicit the participation of workers in the process of production. (If workers didn't participate to some extent, the system would soon grind to a halt.) On the other hand, capitalism constantly has to limit participation. (If it didn't, the workers would soon start deciding themselves and would show in practice how superfluous the ruling class really is.) The same contradiction, Castoriadis argues, is to be found in almost identical form in politics and in cultural life. It is this that constitutes the fundamental fact of capitalism, the kernel of capitalist social relations, both yesterday and today.⁴⁰

³⁸ E. Fromm, *The Sane Society*, p. 264.

³⁹ *Ibid*, p. 263.

⁴⁰ C. Castoriadis, *op cit*, p. 37.

The concept of social character provides at one and the same time an explanation of those factors of stability by which society organizes people's energies into patterns suitable to social structures and processes and also those factors of resistance by which the achievement of the ideal state of social control is thwarted.

The problem with Castoriadis' analysis of the contradiction in capitalism is similar to the problem just discussed in Marxism. He maintains a naive concept of the permanent openness of people under capitalism. This permanently virginal and uncorrupted state is supposedly maintained by a hectic need of capitalism for total adaptability and changeability on the part of its workers. It is one thing to understand that bureaucracy is inherently inefficient and would die of total incapacity to respond but for the informal initiative of individuals, or that the consumer market requires the manipulation and creation of needs, or that the production process and capitalist technique require the adaptability of the workers. It is quite another thing to picture capitalism as a society of 'perpetual renewal' constantly overturning its 'norms, rules, techniques and values' and constantly requiring transformation of behaviour. Castoriadis argues that this distinguishes capitalism from 'long periods of history' during which mankind was actually converted into 'quasi-objects'. Humanity 'is almost indefinitely plastic'. Therefore in certain circumstances, such as slavery or the concentration camps, 'men have almost been reduced to the status of objects'. Only 'the look or the speech of a slave . . . bore witness to his indestructible humanity'.⁴¹

In fact, conditions of slavery and concentration camps reveal exactly opposite conclusions. It was possible in the concentration camps for an inmate to remain in such a state of shock that without a deliberate effort by his fellows he would respond like a zombie. But the inmates (not those who were hustled straight from the trains to their deaths, but those who were selected to work) constructed a varied and complex pattern of interaction and developed and expanded a level of awareness and a system of co-operation that clearly made them subjects, even to the extent where the Nazis' own attempt to perceive them as objects became a barrier to total Nazi control of camp life. All that was required for such a development was time, some continuity of personnel, and will. Because such real camp societies were created, the inmates were able to undertake

⁴¹ *Ibid*, p. 69.

the enormously complicated and dangerous task of organizing revolts. These were not sudden outbursts of enraged beasts, but planned, co-operative efforts and they involved camp-wide experiences of elation, despair, anticipation, etc.⁴²

Castoriadis argues that the demand for fluidity by capitalism prevents people from becoming objects, which is the natural tendency of bureaucratic society. 'We are not saying that bureaucratic society is contrary to human nature. There is no human nature . . . And it is precisely for this reason that man cannot become an object and that the bureaucratic goal is utopian.'⁴³

Castoriadis underestimates the requirement in the capitalist workplace for automatic discipline and obedience. Though social needs differ in different societies, in the development of capitalism man, as Fromm argues, had to be moulded into a person who was eager to spend most of his energy for the purpose of work, who acquired discipline, particularly orderliness and punctuality, to a degree unknown in most other cultures. This means that society had to produce a social character in which these strivings were inherent.⁴⁴ The social character's function is to 'mould and channel human energy within a given society for the purpose of the continued functioning of this society'.⁴⁵

Castoriadis' emphasis on capitalism's need for fluidity is an attempt to explain resistance without relying on a concept of the resilience of the human personality. He falls between the two stools and explains neither resistance nor how capitalism satisfies its demands, just as Marx could not explain resistance except by a naive faith in rationality which then crippled any ability to explain working class conservatism and irrationalism.

Marx saw an unlimited 'growth' of needs as a result of capitalism and he meant this both in the negative exploitative sense that 'Every person speculates on creating a new need in another in order to force him to a new sacrifice, to place him in a new dependence, and to entice him into a new kind of pleasure,'⁴⁶ and also in the positive sense of the cultivation of the qualities of the social human being. Though Heller tries to develop the idea of manipulated needs, she says:

⁴² J. Steiner, *Treblinka*, Corgi, London, 1969. T. de Pres, *The Survivor*, Oxford University Press, 1976

⁴³ C. Castoriadis. *op. cit.*, p. 70.

⁴⁴ E. Fromm, *The Sane Society*, p. 80

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, p. 79

⁴⁶ E. Fromm. *Marx's Concept of Man*, p. 141.



Whether needs are 'normal' or whether they are 'artificial' . . . depends completely upon the value judgements with which we define 'normality'. However, even if we sought a so-called 'objective' criterion we would only be able to conclude that, at any time, 'normal' needs are those which individuals deem to be such, 'sophisticated' or 'unnatural' needs, on the other hand, are those which the majority regards as such.⁴⁷

How then is it possible to separate 'the development of a qualitatively many-sided rich world of needs' from a multitude of 'inhuman, artificial cravings'?

In 'Wage Labour and Capital' Marx describes how a small house surrounded by small houses 'satisfies all social demands for a dwelling', but if a palace is erected the occupant of the small house 'will feel more and more uncomfortable, dissatisfied and cramped within his four walls'. Marx uses this as an example of how the rapid growth of productive capital brings about an equally rapid growth of wealth, luxury, social wants, social enjoyment. He concludes, 'Our desires and pleasures spring from society; we measure them, therefore, by society and not by the objects which serve for their satisfaction. Because they are of a social nature, they are of a relative value.'⁴⁸

Marx lost one side of the interaction between need and object. Furthermore it becomes necessary to imitate pre-Freudian psychology and propose a new separate need for each object—an entirely mechanical exercise.

Marx would find it difficult to separate himself from a theory of motivation summed up in the adage 'keeping up with the Joneses' unless he abandoned this relativism and began to look for universal standards. But the only standard of limit is that of other needs (even the many-sided individual can only have so many sides). Thus Heller's description of manipulated needs comes down to separating out those needs that arise when commodities have been produced to make a particularly good profit (satisfying the needs of an alien force). But since a need has been created there is little reason to suppose that it really matters how it was created. Since standards are relative, the need's existence should be sufficient justification of its existence. Heller expands this idea to say 'the typical consequence of the mechanism of capitalist production is that there is an increase in needs within a group of needs of a determined type . . . while other types of needs, which shape the

⁴⁷ A. Heller, *Theory of Need in Marx*, Allison and Busby, London, 1976, p. 50

⁴⁸ *Selected Works*, p. 89

human personality, which do not help the valorisation of capital and can even hinder it, wither or fail to develop.'⁴⁹ But who needs these needs when they have gone? Exactly how do you say 'they should be there' when they are not?

The brilliant descriptions, in the 1844 Manuscripts, that provide an account of the hoarding orientation of the nineteenth century, but also anticipate the marketing orientation of consumer capitalism, derive their power from Marx's use of the concept 'having' as expressing a passive relationship. His concept of human nature certainly cannot be criticized for omitting the concept 'activity'. Self-activity, as opposed to alienated activity in which what we produce becomes a power above us, involved self-motivation and self-control. The having relationship was also the reduction of the personality to the dominance of one, or a few needs. From Marx's view of human nature it is obviously far easier to criticize the reduction of need than it is to criticize the multiplicity of needs existing in consumerism. But the main problem is that Marx entirely restricted the use of the concept self-activity to future society.

Fromm's concept of human nature was inspired partly by Marx. Fromm agrees that human nature is not an abstract substance which remains the same through all periods. He also has an evolutionary or emergent concept of human nature. But in his application of both these characteristics he deviates from Marx because his view of the existential condition of humanity varies almost completely. (Fromm is so uncritical of Marx that he seems oblivious to this.)

Fromm's theory is psychoanalytic. However, Fromm's revisionist Freudianism is not based on the structuring of instinctual human psychic energy as in Freud but on non-instinctual energy deriving from the conditions of human existence.

Fromm's view of human nature is that the existential condition of mankind is a biological given: 'The main argument in favour of the assumption of the existence of human nature is that we can define the essence of *Homo sapiens* in morphological, anatomical, physiological and neurological terms. In fact we can give an exact and generally accepted definition of the species man by data referring to posture, formation of the brain, the teeth, diet and many other factors by which we clearly differentiate him from the

⁴⁹ A. Heller, *op cit*, p. 85.

most developed nonhuman primates. Surely we must assume, unless we regress to a view that considers body and mind as separate realms, that the species man must be definable mentally as well as physically.⁵⁰ To define the species mentally two fundamental biological conditions that mark the arrival of *Homo sapiens* in evolution are considered. Firstly, no other species is less determined by instincts than mankind. 'It is generally accepted that the higher an animal has risen in the stages of evolution, the less is the weight of stereotyped behaviour patterns that are strictly determined and phylogenetically programmed in the brain'⁵¹ and we are the culmination of this trend. Secondly, we are at the height of an evolutionary continuum starting with the most primitive nervous system and culminating in the human brain, more complex than any other, with a neo-cortex three times as large as that of our nearest hominid ancestors 'and a truly fantastic number of inter-neuronal connections'.⁵² The Marxists have evaded an ominously material fact and the most decisive distinguishing fact about humanity—the development of the cerebral neo-cortex. Recognizing this fact is the only possible basis for Marx's definition of human nature as 'free, conscious activity'. Not only does the brain not compensate for the absence of determined behaviour (instincts) but it enables self-awareness and therefore an awareness of separatedness from nature and others, of powerlessness, ignorance and death. This is the essential contradiction of being at once in and out of nature. It is associated also with certain universal experiences. The very behavioural weakness resulting from the absence of instincts means that human babies require a long nurturing period during which they are dependent and subject to adults and from which they only gradually emerge emotionally from a state of necessary narcissism to sociality and, at the same time, develop in their realization of the possibilities of self-awareness and reason consequent on developing brain function. Each baby is a re-establishment of the existential conditions of human life in a universal context of dependence that has a profound impact on the nature of human needs, providing as it does the psychic models for the alternatives on the continuum of human growth. For example, most importantly as regards the need for relatedness, it provides

⁵⁰ E. Fromm, *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness*, Holt Rinehart and Winston, New York, 1973, p. 220.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 223.

⁵² *Ibid.*

the model for regression to self-dissolution in another. It is here Fromm is able to use the form of Freud's child psychology without the impediment of the crucial role for Freud of the 'universal' Oedipus conflict which has anyway been shown not to be universal. Instead it is replaced by an understanding of a universal situation of emergence from powerlessness in which parents and others are power figures.

There are many models of needs and they usually have similar conclusions, which can be loosely grouped under survival, affiliation and effectiveness categories. But none have as clear a combination of the benefits of psychoanalysis and an understanding of the human condition as in Fromm. Needs are conceptual categories which have to be backed by evidence and coherence of explanation. The human psyche is a structure charged with energy, not a receptacle to be filled by society or a predetermined behaviour pattern that is set off automatically and that is redirected to create new equally controlled behaviour. Retaining the dynamic aspect of Freud, Fromm argues that 'man's nature cannot be defined in terms of a specific quality, such as love, hate, reason, good or evil but only in terms of fundamental contradictions which characterize human existence and have their root in the biological dichotomy between missing instincts and self-awareness'.⁵³ This conflict produces certain psychic needs common to all men, needs for excitation and stimulation (without human social stimulation, warmth and freedom for curiosity the brain may not develop properly), for effectiveness, for relatedness, for transcendent unity, for a frame of orientation and devotion, for cohesion or identity in a character structure.

Through these needs the attempt is made to overcome separate-ness, powerlessness and lostness. These needs can be satisfied in different ways depending on different social conditions. 'The different ways of satisfying the existential needs manifest themselves in passions, such as love, tenderness, striving for justice, independence, truth, hate, sadism, masochism, destructiveness, narcissism. I call them character rooted passions—or simply human passions—because they are integrated in man's character'.⁵⁴

The existential contradiction produces a disequilibrium which can be stabilized in culture but will reappear if the conditions for stability change.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 226.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

'Character is the relatively permanent system of all non-instinctual strivings through which man relates himself to the human and natural world.'⁵⁵ All people have their organic drives and their existential needs in common. Where they vary is in the kinds of passions that dominate their characters and this is largely due to social conditions. Therefore the character-rooted passions are an historical category but not purely so 'because they are the result of the impact the various historical constellations have on the biologically given conditions of human existence'.⁵⁶ In the absence of instincts, character allows effective behaviour to occur—immediate action, limited doubts and integrated patterns.

The more *Homo* developed the less was adaptation a result of genetic changes, and in fact in the last forty thousand years such changes are virtually nil. Yet different environmental situations made it necessary for each group to adapt its behaviour to these respective situations, not only by learning but also by developing a 'social character'⁵⁷ the aim of which was to organize energies so that people will want to do what they have to do if society is to function properly.

Does it follow then that humanity conforms to the view of the environmentalists (including many Marxists and feminists) that a person is a blank sheet of paper on which the culture writes its text? Obviously not, given the role of biologically given conditions. Adaptation to society is both active and passive. Character cannot just embody the needs of society. Social needs are enmeshed in the needs of the individual. In fact it is the need for relatedness that holds society together, not hierarchies. A minimum level of human co-operation is maintained. At work, informal structures approximating community prevent the uninvolved synthesizers of the divided work process from stifling production, while outside networks of mutuality compensate for the potentially crippling divisions created by bureaucracy. Again the concentration camps serve to illustrate. Until co-operation emerged amongst the inmates, the only way the Nazis could keep production going was to maintain so total a programme of supervision and absolute terror that it was bound to prove inefficient and was changed. Human nature must mould the social conditions. As Fromm argues, needs are also dynamic factors in the historical process which, if frus-

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 226.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 227.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

trated, tend to arouse psychic reactions, ultimately creating the very conditions suited to the original strivings.⁵⁸ Indeed if a society too drastically distorts satisfaction it can set up such pressure for different solutions, rational and irrational, as to establish a destructive dynamic. Or the process can occur in another way. The modes of satisfaction in a particular social character having become traditional can remain resistant to new social conditions that attempt to enforce new demands and can play a decisive role in the way these new conditions establish themselves, cause delay or prevent their implantation. E.P. Thompson points to this effect in *The Making of the English Working Class*.⁵⁹ The traditional Marxist could only see such effects as reactionary when in fact they can become a positive part of an ongoing resistance. Similarly the Marxist would not see the determining role played by a pre-existing culture. It was no accident that child labour was so common in early industrial capitalism. The bosses were attempting to deliberately mould a working class in habits they required because adults persisted in maintaining a certain attitude to work. It is thus possible, either by this latter process of a 'lag' or by the assertion of needs for what was social cement to become social dynamite. The social character itself is the most important productive force and can advance or inhibit the social development of a society, including its technical development.

The social character can only stabilize society if it is able to satisfy human needs substantially for long periods of time. Fromm's point is that the life-thwarting passions (for example, destructiveness or masochism) are as much an answer to man's existential needs as life-furthering passions: they are both profoundly human. The former necessarily develop when the realistic conditions for the realization of the latter are absent.⁶⁰

Rather than suggest that there is a self-actualization need, Fromm sees that there is a need to be active or in search of optimal development.⁶¹ In this sense, the passions can be irrational by not

⁵⁸ E. Fromm, *The Sane Society*, p. 81.

⁵⁹ E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1968.

⁶⁰ E. Fromm, *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness*, p. 264.

⁶¹ Evidence is building up for this. Animals undertake difficult tasks with pleasure without other rewards. Neurophysiological experiments demonstrate the activity in the nerve cells. Infantile behaviour shows a capacity to respond actively to complicated stimuli. Activity and initiative are mobilized by good learning environments. See E. Fromm, *To Have or To Be?*, Harper and Row, New York, 1976, p. 100; and E. Fromm, *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness*, p. 254ff.



furthering the growth and well-being of the organism, unlike the organic drives, hunger etc., which are always rational. Yet they 'have their rationality in terms of the particular historical structure within which a person lives'⁶² because particular conditions deny optimal development of humanity. It follows that the only claim socialism can make for itself is that it allows optimal development. Therefore the question for socialists is 'what conditions are necessary for this goal?'

Man the destroyer may be called vicious because destructiveness is a vice; but he is human. He has not regressed to animal existence and is not motivated by animal instincts; he cannot change the structure of his brain. One might consider him an existential failure, a man who has failed to become what he could be according to the possibilities of his existence. In any case for a man to become stunted in his growth and become vicious is as much a real possibility as to develop fully and to be productive, the one or the other outcome mainly depends on the presence or absence of social conditions conducive to growth.⁶³

Few societies exclude conditions for the development of life-furthering passions. Fromm's review of primitive tribes⁶⁴ shows that most were life affirmative or non-destructive-aggressive rather than destructive. With the growth of civilization proportionally more destructive societies appeared. Even so, in a society a variety of passions will usually exist commensurate with the variety of humanity attested by literature of the past. It is not insignificant that we can identify with our predecessors. It is only on the basis of variety that there were people able to record their times in fact or fiction, and that people dedicated to reason were able to preside over philosophical developments based on what had gone before and not a simple product of social conditions. Even before our own individualistic times, variety of human personality was an omnipresent reality of human life. While this is not necessarily relevant at the social theoretical level because patterns and trends must necessarily 'smooth out' reality for the sake of coherence, this bumpy reality does not disappear when a 'smooth' theory appears and therefore should not be forgotten. Fromm says that the social character types he describes are types and that most people show a mixture of traits with a minority cluster at the extremes. In fact this has been supported by large scale social-psychological survey

⁶² E. Fromm, *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness*, p. 264.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 265.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 167ff.

work by Fromm and others. There is a tendency in Marxism to rigidly perceive people through their class.

Part of the dynamic of human history is changing situations for the satisfaction of human needs. In a situation of social change or disintegration, no matter what the cause, 'we see the disappearance of traditional ties that maintained the stability of society; there is change in traditional emotional attitudes. Libidinal energies are freed for new uses and thus change their social function. They no longer serve the preservation of the society, but contribute to the development of new social formations.'⁶⁵ New social formations may embody a higher development of needs in the sense that a closer approximation to optimal human development becomes more general. Needs that were thwarted or irrationally redirected may no longer be so restricted. Their satisfaction in the most rational way (in the sense described before) may become a widely articulated social demand. All this may be solidified in certain rights and ideals for which people will struggle. New conditions may also involve a step backward.

Further to this point, in the situation of social change or disintegration what is occurring more often than not is a dramatic aggravation of the existential condition of people. Old certainties may be destroyed and psychic refuges for basic needs broken up. Answers, rational or irrational, to the human problem that have worked for generations may have to be given up. Individuals may find themselves naked, alone, powerless and without direction, and their search for new answers will be desperate. Examples of such periods are numerous. This may only be happening to certain groups in society. But what if this situation has become basic? Fromm argues that the collapse of the feudal order and catholicism with the development of capitalism, the Renaissance, the Reformation, the great revolutions and the Enlightenment meant the destruction of primary ties in which humankind was immersed. However, he maintains that the primary ties block full human development; they stand in the way of the development of man's reason and his critical capacities; they let him recognize himself and others only through the medium of his, or their, participation in a clan, a social or religious community, and not as human beings; in other words, they block his development as a free, self-deter-

⁶⁵ E. Fromm, *The Crisis of Psychoanalysis*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1973, p. 179
In this early essay, Fromm was still using Freudian terminology, hence 'libidinal'.

mining, productive individual. But although this is one aspect, there is another one:

This identity with nature, clan, religion, gives the individual security. He belongs to, he is rooted in, a structuralized whole in which he has an unquestionable place. He may suffer from hunger or suppression, but he does not suffer from the worst of all pains—complete aloneness and doubt.⁶⁶

Fromm argues that each step in the direction of growing individuation threatened people with new insecurities. To him there is only one possible productive solution for the relationship of the individualized man with the world: his active solidarity with all men and women and his spontaneous activity, love and work that unite him again with the world, not by primary ties but as a free and independent individual. However, if the economic, social and political conditions do not offer a basis for the realization of individuality in the sense just mentioned, while at the same time people have lost those ties which gave them security, this lag makes freedom an unbearable burden:

It then becomes identical with doubt, with a kind of life which lacks meaning and direction. Powerful tendencies arise to escape from this kind of freedom into submission or some kind of relationship to man and the world which promises relief from uncertainty, even if it deprives the individual of his freedom.⁶⁷

He maintains that the individual pays for this new security by giving up the integrity of his self to authorities. Fromm continues:

The factual dichotomy between him and these authorities does not disappear. They thwart and cripple his life even though consciously he may submit voluntarily. At the same time he lives in a world in which he has not only developed into being an 'atom' but which also provides him with every potentiality for becoming an individual.⁶⁸

The evolutionary aspect of Fromm's thought has parallels with Marx. However, it does not operate on the concept of historic needs or of growth of needs. In fact, catholicism, for example, held sway because it provided satisfaction for profound and lasting human strivings and in the absence of such unitary satisfaction these strivings took on a new historical role. The apparent drive for progress, according to Fromm, is

⁶⁶ E. Fromm, *Escape from Freedom*, Avon, New York, 1965, p. 51.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 263.

nothing other than the dynamic of a search for new solutions. At any new level man has reached, new contradictions appear which force him to go on with the task of finding new solutions. This process goes on until he has reached the final goal of becoming fully human and being in complete union with the world.

He concludes:

If the essence of man is neither good nor evil, neither love nor hate, but a contradiction which demands the search for new solutions which, in turn, create new contradictions, then indeed man can answer his dilemma, either in a regressive or in a progressive way.⁶⁹

What is the objective basis that has enabled the people to formulate socialist revolutionary ends? Castoriadis argues that while other societies have involved the dominator/dominated division it is only capitalism that expressed a contradiction between society's absolute need for participation and its constant limitation of this participation. This contradiction can only appear when there is generalized wage labour, evolving technology and a political, cultural background provided by the Enlightenment and the bourgeois-democratic revolution which, among other things, introduced the principle that the only foundation for social organization is reason. Obviously Fromm's concept of individuation is relevant here. His evolutionary view also connects with Castoriadis' view of history. The contradiction in production keeps alive the human conditions for expanded and fully conscious resistance.

Castoriadis says that the revolutions of the last century and a half have shown a progressive development of libertarian aims. He denies that this is due to a linear development of 'proletarian consciousness', though he does acknowledge that at the beginning of each period groups of revolutionaries have played a role. But Castoriadis points out that this would not matter unless workers had been prepared for a new phase. He argues that this 'preparation' consists in the fact that present reality contains the mass creations of past class struggles. The working class 'compels itself to carry its own struggle to a higher level at the next stage'. This does not mean that there is a 'revolutionary providence' assigning libertarian revolution as the goal. It only means that as long as the solutions the working class seeks to its problems are false, partial or insufficient, the problem remains. Thus today the working class, to enter the struggle, must oppose the trade union and party bosses. Thus

⁶⁹ E. Fromm, *The Heart of Man*, Harper and Row, New York, 1969, pp. 120-21.



consumerism may now be a cause not of stabilization but of disaffection. In this simple and undetermined sense it becomes all the more likely that a crisis of culture will produce an adequate response—adequate in the sense that people will create the necessary characterological, ideational and organizational conditions for a workable self-managed society. I say 'people will create' because this process provides no guarantees as to the production of consciousness. 'The maturing of the conditions of socialism is thus the accumulation of the objective conditions for an adequate consciousness. This accumulation is itself the product of the actions of the working class . . . The process is historic. The subjective is only of importance in as much as it modifies what is objective. And what is objective only acquires the meaning the actions of the subjective confer to it in a given context and connection.'

The trouble with the first sentence of this quotation is that it implies that at a certain stage sufficient objective conditions will have accumulated and a revolution would have to occur in the way that Marx argues. In the comments that follow, Castoriadis is making clear that the 'adequacy' of the objective conditions is totally dependent on the meanings conferred by the subjects—that is, what people believe and do. This is the role of ideas. It is also the role of the process of creation of the new that Castoriadis describes elsewhere. There is nothing that 'must' happen regardless of these subjective factors. The background to all of this is the contradiction and the expression of human needs. As long as there is domination, etc., 'the constant conflict between the social objective, the liberation of man, and the transient formations through which the workers thought they could achieve their ends will drive history forward'.⁷⁰

Another example of this is the achievement of constantly higher real wages, which forced the capitalists to see the advantages of a big internal consumer market, which inaugurated the consumer society, allowing the illusion of consumption as satisfaction to dominate people's strivings and values, and which has created a situation where any struggle for broad ends or even half-way revolutionary aims must conceive of satisfaction outside the realm of consumer goods and look for it in the realm of human relatedness and an ecological ordering of society.

⁷⁰ See 'The Real Conditions for Socialist Revolution' in C. Castoriadis, *Modern Capitalism and Revolution*, p. 85ff.

There has been no tendency whatsoever for society to divide into classes as Marx believed. Marx believed that 'all human servitude is involved in the relation of the worker to production, and all the types of servitude are only modifications or consequences of this relation'⁷¹ and also that 'communist consciousness [may] arise among the other classes too through the contemplation of the situation of [the proletariat].'⁷² This belief must be rejected. Leninists only see other struggles as relevant if they follow like ducklings after the mother duck of proletarian revolution under the vanguard.

In fact, the immediate struggles of people are the source of consciousness which can develop into a grasp of the link between issues and therefore of the general solution. There is no particular revolutionary subject. Bureaucratization in politics, culture, sports, etc., has placed people throughout society within the contradictory situation that began in the factory. All sectors of the population are available (or unavailable) for revolutionary change. At any given time due to specific factors a particular sector may be particularly active. But given the right circumstances this can happen to any sector and given revolutionary circumstances all sectors can be involved (as was revealed in France in 1968), except those at the top—the ruling class. The legacy of the 1960s is that the women's movement, gay lib, student movements, counter culture, New Left, cultural and racial groups and the ecology movement have all entered the stage.

A challenge is developing to authority, as such. This has been characterized as a new enlightenment:

The Enlightenment is slowly undermining the patriarchal family, the school as an organized system of repressive socialization, the institutions of state, and the factory hierarchy. It is eroding the work ethic, the sanctity of property, and the fabric of guilt and renunciation that internally denies to each individual the right to the full realization of her or his potentialities and pleasures. Indeed, no longer is it merely capitalism that stands in the dock of history, but the cumulative legacy of domination that has policed the individual from within for thousands of

⁷¹ E. Fromm, *Marx's Concept of Man*, p. 107

⁷² K. Marx and F. Engels, *The German Ideology*, p. 99. Marx originally said that alienated labour was the basis and cause of private property. This could easily, with a stronger concept of human nature, have given an analysis that fully recognized domination. However, he says 'later this relationship reverses itself' (McLellan, *op. cit.*, p. 25) or becomes 'reciprocal' (Fromm, *Marx's Concept of Man*, p. 106) depending on the translation.

years, the 'archetypes' of domination, as it were, that comprise the State within our unconscious lives.⁷³

The anarchists were the only socialists who saw that part of the specificity of capitalism was that struggles, basically of the working class and peasantry, were issuing into a challenge to the capitalist form of domination and by positive efforts at social construction, to domination as such. In his attempt to capture scientifically the specificity of capitalism, Marx unknowingly put himself outside this project and in terms of the fate of his ideas ended up on the other side of the barricades. At the moment, new groups bound for a better future offer conditions which make awareness of reality easier. But like the working class in Castoriadis' description, there is a tendency for their struggles to become simply an effort to win their full place in capitalist society. The significance is that until they fully express their anti-authoritarian possibilities positively, they will face the problem of constantly having to recreate themselves in order to fight the renewed form of the original problems (contradictions), including the historical sediment of their last effort. The further significance is that the presence of these groups will ensure that sexist, racist and other repressive attitudes will not exist in a libertarian society—in other words that society should be socialist in content as well as form.

Fromm is in the tradition of those social revolutionaries who see the problem as affecting all aspects of personal and social living. Without an inner change in human beings no economic change can ever lead to the good society. As with Marxism, all great reform movements of the last two thousand years have emphasized one sector of life to the exclusion of the other. He concludes that while their proposals for reform and renewal were radical their results were almost complete failure:

The preaching of the Gospel led to the establishment of the Catholic Church; the teachings of the nationalists of the eighteenth century to Robespierre and Napoleon; the doctrines of Marx to Stalin.⁷⁴

The results Fromm argues could hardly have been different:

Man is a unit; his thinking, feeling, and his practice of life are inseparably connected. He cannot be free in his thought when he is not free emotionally; and he cannot be free emotionally if he is dependent and unfree in

his practice of life, in his economic and social relations. Trying to advance radically in one sector to the exclusion of the others must necessarily lead to the result to which it did lead, namely, that the radical demands in one sphere are fulfilled only by a few individuals, while for the majority they become formulae and rituals, serving to cover up the fact that in other spheres nothing has changed.⁷⁵

Fromm argues that:

... one step of integrated progression in all spheres of life will have more far-reaching and more lasting results for the progress of the human race than a hundred steps preached—and even for a short while lived—in only one isolated sphere. Several thousands of years of failure in 'isolated progress' should be a rather convincing lesson.⁷⁶

Fromm has clearly outlined the criteria by which a revolutionary assesses which reforms are worthy of support: 'The true criteria for reform are not its tempo but its realism, its true "radicalism"; it is the question whether it goes to the roots and attempts to change causes or whether it remains on the surface and attempts to deal only with symptoms.'⁷⁷ Fromm's error does not lie in the reforms he supports in his practical efforts to link issues to the struggle for a self-organized society. It lies in his inability to describe what is the nature of a socialist organization of society. In this regard he can be criticized in the same way that he criticized such failing in other socialists. 'Earlier socialists and communists, from Marx to Lenin, had no concrete plans for a socialist or communist society; this was the greatest weakness of socialism.'⁷⁸

Fromm, as opposed to most Marxists, is aware that motivation for political, social, economic and cultural freedom demands a specific answer to the question: what is the meaning of socialism? 'Our only hope lies in the emerging attraction of a new vision. To propose this or that reform that does not change the system is useless in the long run because it does not carry with it the impelling force of a strong motivation. The "utopian goal" is more realistic than the "realism" of today's leaders.'⁷⁹

The inadequacy of Fromm's own conception of socialism derives from his attempt to formulate it from his own head. Indeed, his main failing is elitism which begins with the belief that the best

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 273.

⁷⁸ E. Fromm, *To Have or To Be*, p. 175

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 201.

⁷³ M. Bookchin, *On Spontaneity and Organisation*. Solidarity, London, 1975, p. 5.

⁷⁴ E. Fromm, *The Same Society*, p. 272.

models for society will come from the heads of intellectuals. This explains his astounding ignorance of the libertarian revolutions from which an adequate idea of socialism can be reached. The first and most absolute premise of socialism is that it be the self-organization of society by the people and that therefore the socialist movement be autonomous. This, of course, does not exclude the possibility that such a movement will learn from the past in a second sense—a knowledge of the virtues and defeats of previous forms of freedom.

In this respect, those who can see a little further (revolutionaries) can communicate this knowledge. Not to do so is to fail to understand how change has occurred. It should be clear that revolution is not some elemental, inarticulate rebellion, but involves ideas and goals. But no one has the right to aspire to be a leader simply because she/he thinks he/she has a better understanding of events than other people. The task is not to represent or lead because this can only contribute to people's inability to run their own lives. The task is to inform and demystify. This requires honesty and accuracy; honesty about the general idea from which conclusions are reached and accuracy about all the events around which the left is usually willing to create myths. It is wrong, for example, to support democracy here and authoritarianism in another country. Furthermore the vision of socialism can be kept alive and clarified in reference to an understanding of the unalienated, self-directed individual, and to the multiform challenge to domination occurring today from which comes the possibility of new creative efforts of social construction. Without this multiform challenge the activity of revolutionaries would be absurd, for their tasks are to help people become revolutionaries, not to make revolutions. 'Meaningful action' for revolutionaries, is whatever increase the confidence, the autonomy, the initiative, the participation, the solidarity, the egalitarian tendencies and the self-activity of people and whatever assists in their demystification. 'Sterile and harmful action' is whatever reinforces the passivity of the people, their apathy, their cynicism, their differentiation through hierarchy, their alienation, their reliance on others to do things for them and the degree to which they can therefore be manipulated by others—even those allegedly acting on their behalf. All wills are paralysed and confused, if the ends of socialism are not clear and the means not morally appropriate. The Marxist/Leninist vision of the highly centralized state run by the Party and dedicated to production for

production's sake and materialism has been achieved. It appropriated the term socialism and destroyed the vision. Socialist revolutionaries must now attempt to restate that vision and the moral guidelines for achieving it.