



The Neofreudism of E. Fromm And H. Marcuse (A Critical Analysis)

STOJU G. STOEV

Neofreudism is a widespread and influential stream in ideological life of the capitalist world nowadays. It has its representatives and influences in such spheres of ideology as: philosophy, sociology, psychology, pedagogy, aesthetics, art, etc. With this article we endeavour to take a critical attitude towards some of the most actual concepts of Neofreudism, uttered by its widely known American representatives Erich Fromm and Herbert Marcuse, towards those of man and society.

Our choice of these American Neofreudists is not accidental. It is determined first by the fact that the USA became the second native country of the Freud teaching and fatherland of Neofreudism. Second, because the names of Fromm and Marcuse became widely known and have a stressed influence upon the modern ideological life. And third, because these authors do not simply revise Freudism, but make an attempt to integrate their concepts with Marxism, sometimes claiming and often being launched as Marxists, and even creative Marxists.

In our analysis we try to clear up how far their concepts respond to the contemporary scientific requirements and how realistic the offered solutions of these so actual problems set by life itself about man and the development of modern society are. Simultaneously we try to give an answer to the question-is the claim of both the spoken authors to “enrich” and “supplement” Marxism by means of their Neofreudist concepts well founded, and is an integration between Neofreudism and Marxism perspective.

The problem about the intrinsic nature and being of man has excited people in the deep antiquity, it excites them still today. Man is interested not only in what his surrounding world is, but in what he himself, the discoverer of this world, is. In our time, as a result of a whole complex



fo deep changes occurred in technical, economical, political and cultural life, this problem assumes a peculiar actuality.

The fact itself, that Marxism and Freudism are treating, each one in its own way, the problems of man and man's society, has got a wide international fame and evokes the temptation among a wide range of authors to put the question: whether in the concepts of these two teachings there are no analytical moments and whether their fusion will not enrich them mutually. In answer to the so put question emerged the "Freudo-Marxism" of the 20's and 30's. But put to criticism and rejected by the Marxists it suffered fiasco.

Nowadays the incompatibility between the high productivity of labour and the misery of millions of people in capitalist countries, un employment, the incertitude in the life of single individuals, the enslaving of man by techniques and monopolistic top clique, the danger of a nuclear war make many people from these countries look for an answer of the question about the intrinsic nature of man and the perspectives of his development. At the same time the successes of the socialist countries evoke in many of them an interest in the Marxist theory and in socialism. All this has its reflection upon the concepts of many contemporary bourgeois teachings, including also upon Neofreudism.

Neofreudism emerged as an attempt to revise Freudism, in order to overcome its biologicistic onesidedness in treating man, through the inclusion of some social factors. Its followers [K. Horney, H. Hartman, H. Sullivan] take into consideration the culture of the social environment in which personality is formed, and created the so called "culture-psychoanalysis". Fromm and Marcuse go farther, they attempt to integrate Neofreudism with Marxism, borrowing from it a number of elements for their concepts.

The name of Erich Fromm is widely known. This is due on the one hand to his sharp criticism of the capitalist society, its antifascist antiracial and antiwar positions, and on the other hand—to his orientation towards Marxism to his open standpoint, that the future of mankind is socialism.

Fromm deals with a large range of problems — psychological, sociological, philosophic, religious, cultural, etc.¹ He was born in 1900 in Germany, where he received his education and the title Doctor of Philosophy, in Heidelberg, but after establishing of fascism he emigrated to the USA. More important works of his are: *Escape from Freedom*, 1941; *Man for Himself*, 1947; *The Sane Society*, 1953; *The Art of Loving*, 1956; *Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis*, 1960; *Das Menschenbild bei Marx*, 1961; *The Revolution of Hope*, 1968, etc.

Fromm's concepts are mainly shaped under the influence of Existentialism, Freudism and Marxism. A certain influence is exerted here by the ideas of the utopic socialism and the Zen Buddhism. He calls his eclectic system — *humanist psychoanalysis*

1 E. Fromm, *Fear of Freedom*, London, 1960, p 9



Fromm criticises Freudism for its mechanicism and biologism, for ignoring the social environment, He rejects Freud's comprehension that man is on principle antisocial, that the contradiction between him and society is eternal. For Fromm man is not a Robinson, he does not live in a vacuum, but in a social environment. He buys and sells, gives and takes, i. e. he enters the economic relations with other people and can not be understood beyond these mutual relations. Beside his biological necessities and inclinations — hunger, thirst, sex, there are to be found in man other endeavours and inclinations too — for power, love, faith, political and other ideals, which are a product of his social-political development. According to him society not only suppresses some specified biological functions, but creates new ones. "The nature of man," he writes, "his passion and fears, are a product of culture."²

Fromm rejects Freud's pansexualism and revises his concepts of the libido. While Freud thinks, that an important part for suppression is played by the fear of castration, Fromm stresses that fear in man is evoked by his breaking off with nature and his like creatures. From here he introduces a significant correction in the conception of Oedipus' complex and its role in man's life.

For Fromm the essence of man is determined by two sorts of contradictions: existential and social ones. The existential ones are, he writes, primary and are derived from the nature of man, that is disunited — as a spiritual and bodily one. With his body man is related to nature, while with his sense he stands above nature. "With his selfconsciousness, writes Fromm, he (the man) understands his weakness and the limits of his being, foresees his end — his death. He is never free of the contradictions about his being — on the one hand he can not subject himself to his mind, even if he wants to; on the other hand he can not subject himself to his body, while he lives, his body makes him want to live."¹ Moreover "selfconsciousness, mind and imagination, according to Fromm, have destructed "the harmony", which characterises the animal being"³ Animals do not comprehend themselves as something separate from nature and therefore feel themselves quiet and sure. The differentiation of man as an individual creates the feeling in him to be isolated, independent, and uncertain. The existential contradictions, according to Fromm, are permanent, unchangeable and unsoluble. They do characterise the deepest gift of man.

The social contradictions spring up in the process of the social-historical development. Work helps man, Freud points out, to subject nature, but also to subject other people. So it helps still more the increase of isolation among them. Borrowing from Marx the idea of alienation, Fromm points out that man in the modern capitalist society

2 E. Fromm, *Man for Himself*, London, 1960, p. 40

3 *Ibidem*

resembles a shipwrecked, who dies of thirst among the ocean. He lives among millions of human beings, but as never feels alone and isolated. He is compelled to struggle incessantly and to defend himself against the hostile surrounding, exhausts his strength and changes into a miserable and neurotised creature.

Polemising with Daniel Bell, Fromm opposes him Marx who was right in his assertion, that the “human being” “was not a properly biological one, it was not abstract, but such a one, that could be understood only historically, because it grew up in history.”⁴ But he defends this apprehension up to the end and different from Marx and Engels, in his characteristic of man he does not point out his labour activity in the first place, but people’s consciousness, their ability to name the things, to use symbols, etc., thus deviating from the right historico-materialistic position, taking a stand on the idealistic one.

Fromm does not succeed either in overcoming Freudism and existentialism in his concept about the relation individual environment. For him the individual has its primary, unchangeable virtues, that it adapts to the cultural conditions. “Man’s evolution, writes Fromm, consists of adaptation to the *unstructable virtues of his nature* (5), which compell him never to cease with his requirements towards outer conditions to correspond in a better way to his inner necessities.”⁵ The starting point of Fromm’s concept about man remains the individual with his “unchangeable virtues;” and the social environment is contemplated only as a condition for their suppression or satisfaction. Its investigation is necessary to understand “how man has been spoiled by conditions, how he has been alienated by himself, by his own powers.”⁶

Thus, unlike to Marxism, which considers man as a unity of social relations as a product of the social-historical development, in the eclectic symbiosis of Neofreudism with Marxism, a defining place in the conception of Fromm is occupied by the conception of Freudism about the unchangeable nature of man.

E. Fromm is very persuasive and strong, when he makes an analysis and unveils the alienation of man in the contemporary capitalist society. He comes to the conclusion, that this is a “sick society”, because it consists of neurotised citizens. In his works “The Sane Society” and “The Revolution of Hope” he suggests the idea of a radical reconstruction of this society and the building up of a new “sane society”, which he calls socialistic. But the improvement in the material welfare of the citizens, according to his, is not enough, to make their life better. The main is to change the mutual relations among people, clearing away their alienation with each other and with nature. This could be achieved, after Fromm,

4 E. Fromm, *Das Menschenbild bei Marx*, Frankfurt a.M., 1963 S. 78-79

5 E. Fromm, *Man for Himself*, L., 1960, p. 23

6 E. Fromm, *The Sane Society*, L., 1968, p. 254



not by way of class struggle and revolution, but through reconstruction of the single individuals, who were to be freed from the complexes inherited from capitalism aspirations after power, riches, destruction and conformism. As a result love, set by the instincts in every man, should be deblocked and people would begin to love each other as brothers. The form of ownership would have no significance, the manufacturer and the worker would begin working together for the good of mankind and not for profit. Thus the social contradictions and the alienation among people would be abolished. An important role in this process would be played by a new “universal” religion, uniting in itself the worthiest from Dualism, Judaism, Christianity and utopic socialism.

The so generously outlined picture of the “humanist socialism” of Fromm is much nearer to the concepts of the anarchistic syndicalism and utopic socialism of Fourier and Owen, than to the Marxist scientific socialism. The basic difference between them is, that while for the utopist socialists and for Fromm socialism remains above all an ideal of society, conformed to the “natural” necessities of man, for Marxism it is a necessary and legal step in the development of human society. Another essential difference between “socialism” of Fromm and Marx’s socialism is in the attitude to the form of ownership of the means of production. While for Marxism the alienation of the means of production is an inevitable condition for building up the socialist society, for Fromm this is not necessary. But then arises the question—who will force the owners to hand over their enterprises to the “direct rule of workers”? The historical experience shows that not only one a lot of very enticing ideas (humanist by philosophers and sociologists and by religious functionaries) have been raised for a humane reconstruction of society but all of them remained fruitless. And this not because of the imperfection of the model, but because of its subjectivity and utopicality, because of its non-conformity with the inexorable objective laws of the social-historical development and the class-struggle.

Not better are Fromm’s concepts about reconstruction of the leading administrative and state political apparatus. The basic means that he suggests is the keeping of the principle for elective representability by villages, enterprises and in a national scope. But the question in a class society is — who will assure and what possibilities the working people will have to elect their representatives for the relevant ruling organs, in order to keep their own interests. For Fromm however class contradictions have no significance. They seem to disappear under the influence of a magic stick. It is only enough the fairy from the tales to appear. But history shows that when state rulers emerge from the people, as for example Indira Gandhi or Sirimavo Bandaranayke, and want by means of extreme democratic forms to put the means of production and the national wealth in service of the people, the big internal and foreign bourgeoisie, instead of being imbued by love to their likes (according to Fromm an



innate love) and feel tender in respect of nationalisation, they begin a rageful fight, without choosing the means, in order to push down these “good fairies” from power. The social historical experience shows, that a really national representation in the ruling organs, which seems to be pleaded by Fromm, can be achieved not by way of good wishes and intentions, but only through class struggle, as Marxism teaches.

The other well known representative of Neofreudism — Herbert Marcuse* also offers his own conception about man and overcoming the ailments of the contemporary industrial society by building up a new “non-repressive society” that he also calls socialistic.

In his theoretical development Marcuse experiences the influence of the idea of Heidegger, Hegel, Freud and Marx. His attempt to unite “creatively” these ideas ends with the creation of an eclectic conception about man and society. While Fromm is a humanist and reformist-utopist, Marcuse is a radicalist. He aims his sharp criticism at the contemporary capitalist society and puts it as doomed to ruin. That ruin however, will come according to Marcuse, not from where it is usually expected, but from where it is least expected. Usually as a reason for this the struggle of the working class is pointed at. But, according to Marcuse, this has been in force in the XIXth and in the beginning of the XXth century, when the worker’s class created the goods, but lived in misery. In the century of the scientific and technical revolution however, as Marcuse states, this is not valid already, because now workers are not only creating goods, but are using them.

Marcuse puts the North-American society as a “closed” one, because it succeeded to integrate all measurements of human being. Two results of the development of this society, he writes, are of a peculiar importance: “the assimilation of the oppositional powers and interests in the system, and the methodical mobilisation of human instincts, that makes in this way the explosive “anti-social” elements of the non conscious, socially rutable and usable.”⁷ Thus the adherent powers of negation of the past—the exploited classes, have not only been conquered, but also turned over into forces of cohesion and affirmation.

The basic factor that contributes to the absorption of the oppositional forces, is, after him, the technical progress. The capitalist society of our days, he points out, is a technical society. Under the influence of the technical progress, politics and economy have fused into an all-embracing system that absorbs and rejects all possibilities of a change. The technical rationality itself, Marcuse writes, has gradually changed into a technical

* Marcuse is born in 1898 in Berlin. After 1933 he leaves Germany and settles in the USA. His more important works are: “Reason and Revolution”, 194 ; “Eros and Civilization”, 1955; “Soviet Marxism,” 1957; “Unidimensionnel Man”, 1964; “An Essay on liberation”, 1968, etc.

7 H. Marcuse, *L’Homme unidimensionnel*, Paris, 1968, p. 7



rationality, “the comfort, productivity, the lack of freedom in some democratic frames—that is what a developed civilization is characterised with.”⁸ The technicism itself pushed the modern industrial society towards totalitarianism, independently from the presence of “pluralism” of parties in political life.

Marcuse thinks, that the ruin of the contemporary industrial society will come from the contradiction, which it penetrates more and more with its primary biological human nature, with its instincts, with its aspirations after freedom, individuality and creativeness. The laws of technicism, according to him, are the laws of dead nature. While man as a living creature is lead by the laws of Eros, of liberty and of pleasure, The liberation of man could be achieved only if repression exerted upon him by modern technicism was abolished. Here Marcuse looks for the source of revolt in the contemporary society in the biologic nature of man. The fight against the old world has, after him, not so much an economic as a biological ground and incentive. The task of the revolution theory was to unveil the instinctive basis of fight for liberation.

Marcuse looks for the powers of social reconstruction not in the economic class contradictions, but in the representatives of man’s biological nature — youth, coloured skin people, the unjustified in society. “The classes outside of conservatism, writes Marcuse, have a substrate of pariahs and outsiders — the people of other races, of other colours, the exploited and chased, the unemployed and unoccupied. Their life expresses the most immediate necessity to put an end to the intolerant conditions and institutions. So their position is revolutionary, even when their conscience is not. Their opposition hits the system from outside and that is why the system can not integrate them.”⁹ Here Marcuse adds the national liberation movements in the countries of the “third world”, for which liberation is also a vital, biological necessity.

A basic means for the reconstruction of the modern society, according to Marcuse, is the “elemental explosion” The struggle of the revolutionary forces should be spontaneous, unorganised. In the contrary it would fall under the assimilation forces of society. In the “non repressive society” of Marcuse there is no centralisation of production, nor of the administrative life, there are no organisations nor officers. People are grouped by three to five, they produce and interchange the products. In their mutual relations they are lead by their instincts, that would prompt what is good and evil, just and unjust. beautiful and ugly.

To the underdeveloped countries Marcuse offers the so called “third way” of development, i. e. neither capitalist, nor socialist, because both would inevitably bring them to a domination of technicism, to a “repressive society”. He advises them to abstain from industrialisation, being contented with those natural resources, that nature gives them. “To achieve this aim, Marcuse writes, the social revolution, the land reform, the fight against overpopulation, would be preliminary conditions, and not an industrialisation by the model of developed societies. One form of progress, adapted to the conditions of the countries, looks fully possible

8 Ibid., p. 27

9 Ibid., p. 280

at places where, if they are safeguarded, the natural resources are enough for living and assuring a life, deserving this name.”¹⁰

But rejecting the organised struggle and the uniting of the progressive classes, Marcuse does not show which is this power, that will be able to overcome the resistance of the conservative classes. And without this neither socialisation of the means of production, nor land reform, nor whatsoever other social changes could be achieved. The historical experience with the development of many countries shows convincingly, that in the process of even the most attentive transformations one comes to a moment, when one has to encroach on property of the dominating classes — the banks, factories, the oil, copper and other companies, the lands of the big landowners, and then the reactionary forces. without stepping back before the choice of means, have always exerted a decisive resistance. Without the presence of a revolutionary political power, without strong party and other organisations, capable to unite the efforts of the working people, it is not possible to effect, neither to keep the successes in social transformation. Historical experience in this respect has since a very long time yet said its categorical word: either building up of a strong revolutionary political regime of the working people and victory of the revolutionary transformation, or feeding the utopical, anarchist or reformist hopes and destruction of the revolution.

Marcuse's conception about man and society interchanges the social peculiarities and laws for biological ones and is thatfore still not studied enough in its starting position. With his comprehension of a “spontaneous explosion” he sows illusion and disorientation into progressive forces of the capitalist countries. His understanding of decentralisation without whatsoever organisation of production in an “unoppressive society” is nothing else than an utopy. The “third way” of Marcuse disorients the progressive forces in the undeveloped countries and is doomed to a longlasting backwardness and puts their independence under a permanent threat and insecurity. And this is the ideological expression of the economic interests of neocolonialism.

Fromm's conceptions, and those of Marcuse, express the criticism in which man finds himself in the modern capitalist society. Both authors are very strong when they unveil the ailments of this society and particularly the repressing role of technicism upon human interrelations and psychic. But their misery and powerlessness stand always out, when they try to find a way out from this situation. Here the limitedness of their starting methodologic and class positions is disclosed. In spite of their efforts, Fromm and Marcuse do not succeed to overcome the old understanding about man as once ever differentiated individual, opposed to society. Although they borrow some elements from Marxism, their conceptions about man and society by their deep gist remain non-historical, speculative, unrealistic and thatfore non-scientific. They have nothing in common with the Marxist understanding of the objective regular foundation of social development and the social-historical nature of man. That is why they come at their best to well intended, but unrealistic decisions. What concerns the ideologic function of their views, we must decisively say, that with the illusion they spread, they deviate the progressive forces from their right way of a progressive transformation of the modern society of today, and so independently from the subjective intentions of their authors, they serve not the progress but the reaction

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 72



Propriety of the Erich Fromm Document Center. For personal use only. Citation or publication of material prohibited without express written permission of the copyright holder.

Eigentum des Erich Fromm Dokumentationszentrums. Nutzung nur für persönliche Zwecke. Veröffentlichungen – auch von Teilen – bedürfen der schriftlichen Erlaubnis des Rechteinhabers.

DARSHANA INTERNATIONAL

An International Quarterly
OF
Philosophy, Psychology, Psychological
Research, Religion, Mysticism
& Sociology

59

MORADABAD (INDIA)

VOLUME XV

JULY 1975

NUMBER 3