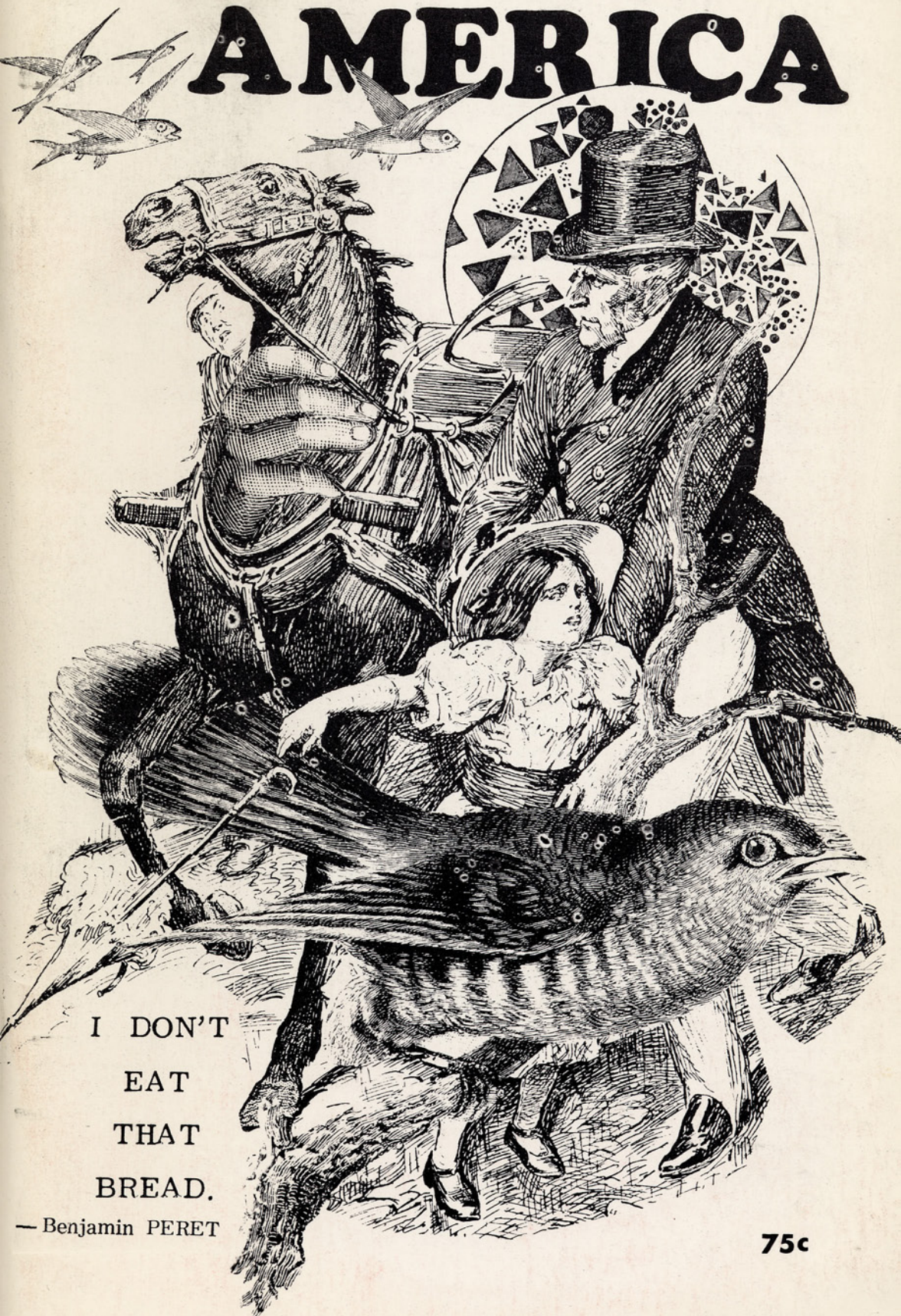


RADICAL AMERICA



I DON'T
EAT
THAT
BREAD.

— Benjamin PERET

75c

BENJAMIN PERET

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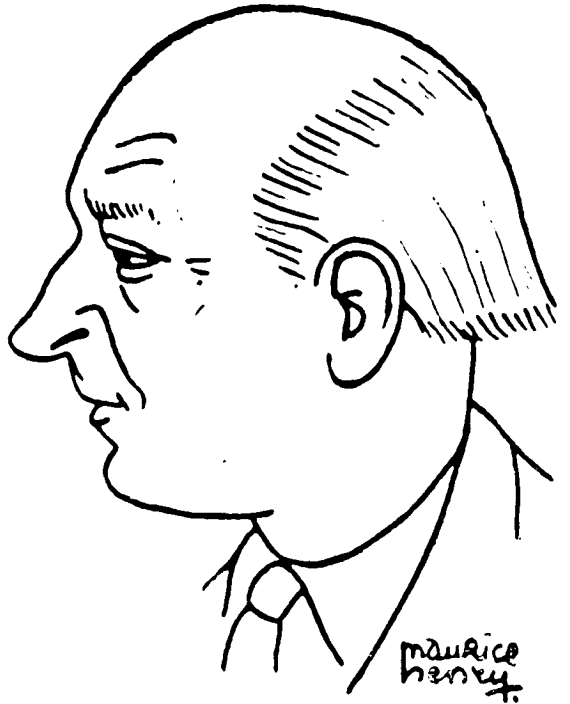
An

INTRODUCTION

to

Benjamin

PÉRET



Marcel Noll: "What is Benjamin Péret?"

Raymond Queneau: "A menagerie in revolt, a jungle, liberty."

("Dialogue in 1928", in LA REVOLUTION SURREALISTE)

The destiny of Benjamin Péret, at once poignantly heroic and wildly innocent, is something I continue to find immeasurably moving. It is doubtless impossible to convey anything more than the very slightest impression of the vertiginous intellectual joy which I experienced as I discovered, around the age of seventeen, the photograph of Péret in the eighth issue of LA REVOLUTION SURREALISTE captioned: "Our Collaborator Benjamin Péret Insulting a Priest". But this simple encounter, which may seem trivial, was nonetheless decisive for me. The straw lions of Truth and the wooden ostriches of Beauty rushed together, thoroughly combustible, across the pale vicissitudes of everyday life, leaving in their ravaged wake of ashes a trail of immense possibilities which, irresistibly, I began to follow wherever it might lead. This path, moreover, has never disappointed me....

Péret is one of those few men whose entire lives have been given over to the cause of human emancipation. There is not a line in his work which does not pulsate with this profound passion for freedom. It is thus that one must speak of Péret, as also of his friend André Breton, as an example. The names of Breton and Péret, specialists in revolt, are inseparable from the revolutionary dream of our epoch.

The attempt has been made by certain critics—feebly enough, to be sure, but no less despicable for that—to create the altogether mistaken impression that Péret was some sort of "shadow" of Breton, a vague personality confined to the background, who contributed merely another signature at the bottom of

manifestoes. This conception, at such variance with the facts, seems obviously calculated to justify the appalling refusal of almost all critics to concern themselves seriously and intelligently with P  ret's invaluable contributions. (1) I agree completely with Jehan Mayoux (2) that this neglect and its hypocritical justification must be seen as an entirely defensive reflex on the part of these critics, and that their "refusal" to concern themselves with his work is actually nothing more than a confession of their obvious inability to do so.

This silence of the critics is especially striking when one considers the exceedingly high estimation in which P  ret has never ceased to be held by his fellow surrealists. "...A force of purer quality than the one the poetry of P  ret possesses does not exist in or outside surrealism," wrote Nicolas Calas in 1940. (3) Eluard, to cite another example, considered P  ret a greater poet than himself. (4) When one reflects that it is often Eluard whom these same critics enjoy acclaiming as the "greatest poet of surrealism", this testimony assumes greater significance. We know that the younger adherents to surrealism, following the second World War, regarded P  ret as the equal of Breton. (5) Yet P  ret alone has been the victim of this complete critical interdiction.

It is Jehan Mayoux, himself a member of the surrealist group and a close friend of P  ret's, who first analyzed this "politics of silence". P  ret's role within the surrealist movement, according to Mayoux, was to assume "more especially—but not exclusively—the functions of aggressivity and discrimination." (6) That is, P  ret especially exemplified the surrealist principles of attack. He is, in every sense, a stormer of the barricades. Victor Crastre, as Claude Courtot has pointed out, suggests practically the same thing when he describes P  ret as the "musketeer of surrealism", embodying the traditional musketeer's virtues of courage and fidelity. (7) One has only to read a fraction of any paragraph written by P  ret to recognize the intrinsically and scandalously combative quality of his work. And it was precisely this boundless and merciless intransigence, this perpetual extremism, this "eternal adolescence" (in the words of Mayoux) (8) that from the very beginning of his work anathematized P  ret in the eyes of Literary Authority.

It is not without interest to contemplate the contrast between Breton and P  ret. One could say, perhaps, borrowing certain expressions from military theory, that the work of Breton constitutes a massive war of position and siege, a vast movement of overwhelming grandeur. The "classicism" of Breton, the extreme gravity of his demeanor—emphasized in one way or another by nearly all his commentators—would seem to support this conception of his essentially "Clausewitzian" character. P  ret, however, invariably prefers the frontal assault: he is the master of the violent, reckless, head-on collision of forces. Each of his poems and tales constitutes an ambush, a solitary demolition, a hurried act of sabotage, an assassination. And it seems precisely this "non-Clausewitzian" character, this deliriously aggressive unorthodoxy which (to pursue a moment longer the military analogy) situates P  ret's work in the context of asymmetrical, revolutionary guerrilla warfare, and which would seem to have originally provoked, and to still reinforce, the conspiracy of silence against him by critics and academicians.

Of course we repudiate any suggestion of a "contradiction" or even a conflict between these two attitudes. In fact, precisely the opposite is true. As has been demonstrated by Jehan Mayoux, Jean-Louis Bédouin, and Claude Courtot, the position of Péret complements and completes the position of Breton.



There is no point consuming time and space complaining further of the neglect Péret has suffered at the hands of the critics. Totally ignored by most, barely mentioned by others, he is customarily written off as a "minor" surrealist. (9) Such misinformed neglect, as we have seen, is sufficient in itself to condemn these critics completely. But the work of Péret is of such astonishing purity and clarity that impassioned pursuers of real revelations will inevitably find their way to it. "All the waters of the ocean," wrote Isidore Ducasse in his *Poésies*, "would be insufficient to wash away a single intellectual drop of blood." And Péret's contributions, let it be understood, are much more than a drop: they are, in fact, a magnificent and inexhaustible artery of the poetic marvelous circulating perpetually through the days and nights of human potentiality.

A brief illustration may help to sharpen one's perception of Péret's unreserved revolutionary attitude. In the summer of 1928 the American literary magazine *TRANSITION* conducted an "Inquiry Among European Writers into the Spirit of America". "How, in your opinion," it asked, "are the influences of the United States manifesting themselves upon Europe and in Europe?" Most of the replies ran to a page and sometimes longer, and were characterized by one or another species of vacillation and doubt. By way of contrast, here is Péret's entire response to this question: "Through the most emphatic garbage, the ignoble sense of money, the indigence of ideas, the savage hypocrisy in morals, and altogether, through a loathesome swinishness pushed to the point of paroxysm." (10)



In the history of surrealism Péret holds, securely, a position of the first rank. (11) He had participated in the activities of Dada in Paris, and was one of the first to advance beyond the limitations of this movement into the more subversive terrain of surrealism. He is, in fact, with René Crevel and Robert Desnos, one of the central pillars and reference-points of the "period of sleeping fits", the months of intensive experimentation with hypnotic trances immediately preceding the establishment of surrealism as an organized movement. We find his name among those cited in the first *Surrealist Manifesto* of 1924 as having proclaimed "ABSOLUTE SURREALISM". The same year, with Pierre Naville, he edited the first issue of *LA REVOLUTION SURREALISTE*. His published works of these years possess an exalted and exalting grandeur and vitality which, almost half a century later, have lost none of their illuminating force.

In the face of continual desertions, retreats, and betrayals, Péret, on the social as well as the poetic plane, maintained his steadfast revolutionary zeal. It is a hobby of the most stupid critics to gloat over the numerous defections

from surrealism, to poke fun at the schisms and expulsions which, indeed, have played a prominent role in its development, as in every living moment, but of which, it must be said, the critics had never had even the slightest understanding. For them it is sufficient to pretend 1) that these internecine quarrels were and are of no importance; 2) that the "function" of surrealism has been to serve as an adolescent training-ground in which poets like Aragon, Eluard, and Char first found their voice; and 3) that these gentlemen wrote their truly "great" poetry only after renouncing surrealism. The time is long overdue when such imbecile contentions must be hurled into the flames of laughter to perish once and for all. Excuse us if we state simply and sincerely that the post-surrealist exercises of Aragon, Eluard, and Char constitute nothing more than a surrender to the basest literary vanity and complacency which has absolutely nothing to do with the emancipatory character of authentic poetic practice. Excuse us if we see in the later work of these gentlemen only a series of boring regressions, a senile return to the safe and protective womb of literary convention. (As Nicolas Calas wrote a propos Aragon's novels of the late '30s—so different from his incredible surrealist Le Paysan de Paris of the preceding decade: "...it seems to me that if one wishes to read novels in the manner of Balzac one should take the trouble to go back to the masters and not be satisfied with imitations such as those offered by Aragon. The return to a pre-surrealist position does not solve the problems of modern poetry.")⁽¹²⁾ Excuse us, finally, if we insist that a single line by Benjamin Péret is worth every "post-surrealist" apology that ever was or will be.

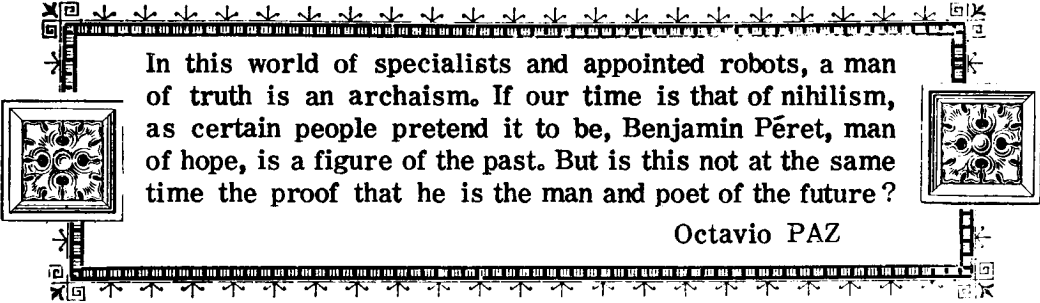
Benjamin Péret never once succumbed to the conformist temptations which eventually brought so many of the companions of his youth into the camp of literary Law and Order. Marvelously uncompromising to the very end, we find him writing in 1959—the year of his death at the age of sixty—such amazingly youthful lines as these:

"a sigh cut across by the rumble of drums
and the raucous cries of insane tables
at grips with the fury of physical laws
more intolerant than a wagon of Jesuits painted in two colors."

(from "Sign of the Times")



The unextinguishable impenitence and intransigence which characterizes Péret's intervention in the domain of poetry is no less characteristic of his intervention in the domain of politics. Completely against the fashionable current according to which radical intellectuals are supposed, sooner or later, to "return to the fold", to "outgrow" the revolutionary proclivities of their youth, Péret's entire life was lived "in the service of the Revolution". He is one of the five (with Aragon, Breton, Eluard, and Unik) who, in 1927, in the pamphlet Au Grand Jour, declared their adhesion, as surrealists and militants, to the French Communist Party. Shortly afterward, in Brazil (whither he had moved with his Brazilian wife), he adheres to the Liga Comunista (Oposição), affiliated with the international Left Opposition. It is his revolutionary activity which led to his incarceration and expulsion from Brazil by the government in 1931. In 1936 he is in Spain fighting as a militiaman for



In this world of specialists and appointed robots, a man of truth is an archaism. If our time is that of nihilism, as certain people pretend it to be, Benjamin P  ret, man of hope, is a figure of the past. But is this not at the same time the proof that he is the man and poet of the future ?

Octavio PAZ

the proletarian revolution against the fascist counter-revolution, its bourgeois support, and the betrayal of the workers by the stalinists and the anarchist leaders. In these years P  ret, like the entire surrealist movement (and like so many other honest revolutionaries of the 1930s, revolted by the monstrous bureaucratic degeneration of the Russian Revolution in the hands of Stalin and his faction) made no secret of his sympathy for Leon Trotsky, for the Left Opposition, for the cause of genuine Leninism, for workers' power. He participated in the International Federation for an Independent Revolutionary Art (FIARI) inaugurated in 1938 by a manifesto written by Trotsky and Andr   Breton. Throughout the second World War he was active in revolutionary activity in Mexico. In 1945, in a group which shortly afterward included Natalia Trotsky, P  ret resigned from the Fourth International, mostly because of its theoretical and practical decline after the murder of Trotsky, but also in keeping with Trotsky's own pronouncements regarding the necessity of completely rethinking marxist theory if socialist revolution did not emerge from the second World War. This departure by P  ret by no means indicated political retirement. His subsequent activity in the realm of politics is given primarily to the re-examination of important theoretical questions and insufficiently studied episodes of revolutionary history. In this sense P  ret's last political efforts could be said to parallel certain aspects of the work of INFORMATIONS CORRESPONDANCE OUVRIERES, SOCIALISME OU BARBARIE, the London SOLIDARITY group, Herbert Marcuse, C.L.R. James, Raya Dunayevskaya and others whose critical revaluations of the past remain of considerable importance in the forging of a new revolutionary theory and practice today. No one can pretend that any of these groups or individuals has found more than a small portion of the revolutionary truth necessary for the development of a movement capable of truly overthrowing the capitalist order and inaugurating "the kingdom of freedom". But against a background of stalinist defamation and lies, social-democratic senility, sectarian irrelevance and new left pompousness, it is especially important to explore the testimony of those who pursued independent courses against the grain of the general stagnation and defeat. It is essential to learn what can be learned from them, to understand which of their efforts can be considered advances, as well as which are merely retreats. What must be avoided at all costs is the dogmatic, essentially religious spirit of simple-minded pseudo-critical complete acceptance or rejection. Lenin's critical remarks, in his Philosophical Notebooks, on the relative superficiality of Plekhanov are clearly applicable in this regard. "Plekhanov criticizes Kantianism (and agnosticism in general)", Lenin writes, "more from a vulgar-materialistic standpoint than from a dialectical materialist standpoint, insofar as he merely rejects their views from the threshold, but does not correct them (as Hegel corrected Kant),

deepening, generalizing, and extending them, showing the connection and transitions of each and every concept." In order to supersede the weaknesses and shortcomings of earlier efforts, it is necessary to critically assimilate their real contributions.

Péret's contributions, moreover, possess a dimension lacking in the work of his more narrowly political contemporaries. It is John Reed who once claimed to have found the thread that united cubism and the Industrial Workers of the World. A still more marvelous thread runs through the life of Benjamin Péret uniting the permanent revelation of surrealism to the permanent revolution of the working class: a double adherence to the revolutionary cause which gives Péret's entire poetic and political message a special resonance today.

Let us single out, from Péret's many political writings from this last period, a few which are of particular interest: a series of articles on labor unions published in *LIBERTAIRE*, in one section of which he defends certain conceptions of the little-known Dutch marxist Hermann Gorter (13); his review of Trotsky's autobiography in *MEDIUM: COMMUNICATION SURREALISTE*, in which he discusses, among other things, the urgent significance of the Spanish Revolution (14); and his small book (forbidden to be advertised in France) Pour Un Second Manifeste Communiste, written in collaboration with G. Munis (15). This last work, the point of departure of which is a critique of the post-war degeneration of the Fourth International, and which also contains a brief survey of the evolution of modern capitalism, calls for a "trenchant break with dead tactics and dead ideas" and for the elaboration of a "program of demands in accord with the maximum possibilities of modern technology and culture put in the service of humanity".



The most vital and revolutionary currents in modern poetry owe much to Benjamin Péret. The appearance of his work in English translation is especially welcome (16) since Péret's characteristic aggressivity, revolt, and humor, as well as his admirably incurable passion for all that is marvelous, are precisely the qualities most lacking in poetry in the English language in this century. (One would have to go to Blake's Island in the Moon or to certain works of Lewis Carroll: The Hunting of the Snark, for example, or the songs of the gardener in Sylvie and Bruno, to approach, in English, the poetic universe of Péret.) André Breton, in his Anthologie de l'Humour Noir, has described the great poetic advance made by Péret. Before him the greatest poets in the French language had been able to see only "a mosque in place of

As a poet, Benjamin Péret is among the first surrealists; as a revolutionary, among the first communists. As a revolutionary he was the contrary of a politician; as a poet, the opposite of a litterateur.

G. MUNIS

a factory" (Rimbaud) or to see "a fig eating a donkey" (Lautréamont). Moreover, "...they seem to hold to the sentiment that they are committing a violation, that they are profaning human consciousness, that they are infringing on the most sacred of taboos. With Benjamin Péret, to the contrary, this sort of 'bad conscience' is done away with, censorship no longer exerts itself, one pleads that 'all is permitted.'" (17) For example:

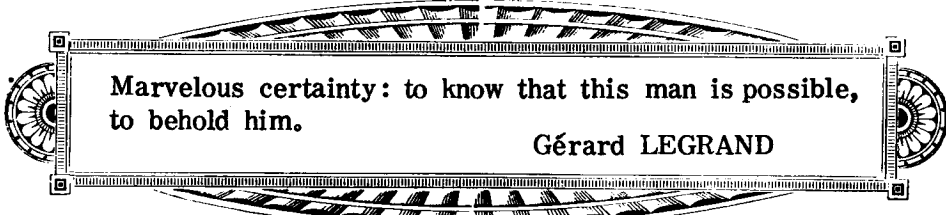
"I call tobacco that which is ear
and the mites take their chance to throw themselves on the ham
hence a remarkable fight between the springs
flowing from gingerbread
and the spectacles that prevent blind men from seeing clearly"

(from "Who is it?")

It must be emphasized that Péret is, far more than is generally thought, a poet of love. But love for Péret has nothing to do with conventional pseudo-amorous sentimentality nor the vile platitudes of so-called "popular" music: it is, rather, the most decisive and thoroughgoing individual human experience, comprising the most delirious and overpowering moments of one's life: love which is wild, succulent, corrosive, frenzied, violently opposed to the last shred of Christian morality and to every other conceivable social constraint; love which, in a single glance, is capable of reinventing, from scratch, one's conception of life.

The poetry of Benjamin Péret, with its rapid and violent metamorphoses, its wild shattering flights, like a Roman candle, into the blue sky of appearances, and its mad plunges, like an uncontrollable bathysphere, into the deepest sea of dreams, seems to me especially well-equipped to disperse the stale mythological fog that still obscures man's desperate glance into the future, and to restore to man a truer vision of his infinite capacities for transforming the world. Long before reaching the second line, Péret has established the dictatorship of the imagination and rigorously enforces the revolutionary terror of the convulsively beautiful image.

The same may be said for another category of Péret's work, his considerable number of tales (18), which are in fact really inseparable from the rest of his poetic practice. It goes without saying that these "prose" works are entirely independent of the various insignificant devices of fiction—plot, character development, setting, et cetera—literary gadgets which Péret turns against themselves in the service of a superior order of imaginative activity. Thus these narratives do not meet the ordinary definitions of a "short story", any more than the longer tales—some of which are of book length, and divided into chapters—may accurately be called "novels". The effect of these tales is like a fresh breath of pure oxygen in a musty room: one feels a certain exhilaration, a sense of expansiveness; one feels freer, surer of oneself, perhaps slightly dizzy—but it is a dizziness quite distinct from intoxication: it is the feeling of looking over a cliff at a great height which one is delighted to have reached. It is to Péret's everlasting credit that he continually reaches such heights, as far as possible from the mundane, that he does so without effort, and that he takes the reader along with him on these lyrical expeditions.



Marvelous certainty: to know that this man is possible,
to behold him.

Gérard LEGRAND

Alongside and allied with his poetry and tales is Péret's theoretical work, the importance of which, for surrealism, is immense. In *La Parole est à Péret*, *Le Dishonneur des Poètes*, "Thought is ONE and Indivisible", and "Noyau de Comète", Péret explores, with verve and lucidity, the origins and development of the poetic faculties, their applications, implications, and ramifications. Always emphasizing the liberatory essence of poetry, always defending the subversive primacy of love in the gamut of emotions, always celebrating the revolt of the mind against its jailers, he traces the trajectory of myths and legends, the perversions of religious mystification, the interrelationships between poetry and society, between poetry and revolution. These texts testify with burning clarity to Péret's relentless devotion to the cause of breaking the social, cultural, and psychological fetters which reduce the imagination to misery and degradation. "The poet of today," he wrote, "has no other choice than to be a revolutionist or not to be a poet." (19)

It was Péret's rare genius to be able to speak of revolutionary poetry and revolutionary politics equally from within. But let us hasten to add, to avoid confusion on a fundamental point, that Péret consistently refused any false, arbitrary, superficial syntheses of these two complementary but independent planes of revolutionary activity. Unlike many current so-called "cultural revolutionaries", including the ideologists of various "avant-garde" sects who boast of having "surpassed" surrealism, and who proclaim that they are able to "solve" the problems of poetry and revolution, and all problems, with the mere application of a few convenient "anti-artistic" formulas, Péret disdained such evasive pretensions and invariably approached the burning questions of human freedom with full recognition of their complexity and diversity. The cause of the liberation of the mind (surrealism) and the cause of proletarian revolution (marxism) are not at all, in the eyes of Péret, reducible to abstract philosophical schemes or readymade slogans. They represent, rather, concrete and miraculous moments in the struggle for the total liberation of man. "These two activities", as Jean Schuster has written, "for him, surely, were but one. But the lucidity of his consciousness permitted him to understand that an objective conciliation was premature. That is why, belonging to these two very close but separate movements, he strictly forbade himself to bend the course of one in terms of the essential principles or circumstantial imperatives of the other. That is why, in all serenity, he served, on two planes, revolutionary truth." (20)



Let us mention, briefly, certain other aspects of Péret's work.

His researches into the origins of poetry led him inevitably into the realm of anthropology. *La Parole est à Péret*, a veritable manifesto of surrealist

poetry, was in fact written as an introduction to an anthology of pre-columbian myths and legends. Péret visited with Indians in Mexico and in Brazil, and wrote some very interesting "Notes on Pre-Columbian Art" (21). He translated the Mayan Book of Chilam Balam of Chumayel into French, contributing to it an important introduction. (22) Here as in his other work one perceives the same remarkable freshness of vision, the same impassioned search for real significations beyond the surfaces of academic research.

Péret's Anthologie de l'Amour Sublime (23) is in many ways a counterpart of Breton's Anthologie de l'Humour Noir. (Is it not remarkable that Breton, theoretician of mad love, should compile an anthology of black humor, and that Péret, incomparable black humorist, should compile an anthology of sublime love?) He also prepared, in 1959, an extensive Anthologie de la Poésie Surréaliste, for which he wrote a militant introduction.(24)

He wrote many prefaces to exhibitions of surrealist painters, which, if collected, would make a marvelous small volume. (25) These essays—on Wifredo Lam, Jindrich Styrsky, Joan Miro, Victor Brauner, E. F. Granell, Toyen, and others—demonstrate Péret's masterful clairvoyance, his magnetic sensitivity to the most vibrant and electrifying currents in modern painting.

Finally, it is touching to note that this author, so notorious for his alleged "incoherence", for his completely unpredictable verbal play, was employed, for a considerable period of his life, as a proofreader.

The life of Benjamin Péret: a life—as his surrealist friends expressed it in their salutation to him in a preface to the original edition of La Parole est à Péret—"singularly pure of concessions".



For some of us, Benjamin Péret is one of the surest guides of the spirit through the labyrinths of contemporary confusion. Our fervent regard for his attitude of total subversion, for his exemplary poetic and revolutionary position, will doubtless seem to some professionally solemn ideologists to be exaggerated or even hysterical. But it is precisely these ideologists who reflect the incredible backwardness of this country in matters of poetry and revolutionary thought. Is it not agonizing to contemplate the great influence exerted, not so long ago, upon radicals in this country by a ludicrous mediocrity like Albert Camus, while the work of Breton and Péret went unnoticed?

With him, the revolutionary movement has lost, September 1959, one of the very rare creative spirits who have, during an entire life, refused to convert their breath into money, or Goncourt or Stalin Prizes, or cocktails at Gallimard. Péret will remain for us an example, because he has defended his ideas not only in some exceptional circumstances, but day after day for forty years, by his refusal, renewed daily, to accept the least compromise with bourgeois or stalinist infamy.

SOCIALISME OU BARBARIE



Marat
(1744-1793).

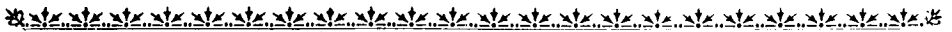
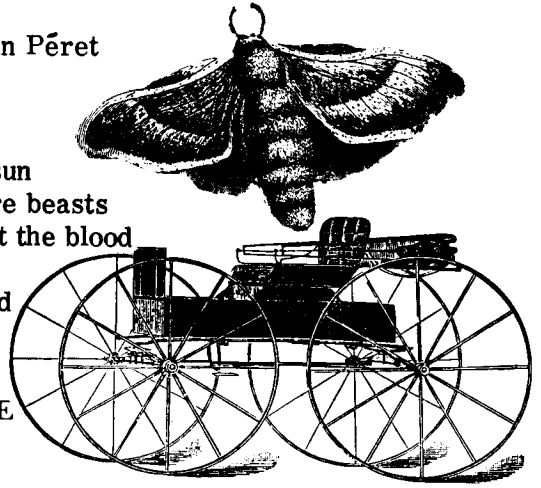
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for Benjamin Péret

even the river of blood of land
even the blood of the broken sun
even the blood of a hundred nails of sun
even the blood of suicide from the fire beasts
even the blood of ash the blood of salt the blood
 from the bloods of love
even the flaming blood of the fire bird
herons and falcons
rise and burn

Aimé CESAIRE

(translated by Cheryl Seaman)



The immediate occasion of this phenomenon is not especially difficult to ascertain. The aftermath of the Second World War, which saw the decline of the international workingclass movement, the dissolution of its most cherished traditions, the accompanying collapse of revolutionary socialist forces, and the ensuing long period of reactionary consolidation, brought about a situation in which what was left of the radical intelligentsia became particularly responsive to the most sour and funereal philosophies. It is true that to these despairing comrades there doubtless seemed little enough to inspire "optimism" or humor in the America deluged with mccarthyism. It was in this atmosphere of guilt and frustration that the "new left" was born, and though it eventually transcended its spiritual origins on the practical plane, it continued to suffer, theoretically, from a terrible hangover, the effects of which still linger on.

Today of course it is the neo-stalinists, the structuralists of the Althusserian school, the watchdogs of sectarian sterility rather than defeated existentialists or sentimental social-democratic apologists such as Erich Fromm who cast the most somber shadows over the light which is only beginning to glimmer. I think the time has come, however, when it is necessary to put an end to this humorless farce. "Perseus wore a magic cap that the monsters he hunted down might not see him. We draw the magic cap down over eyes and ears as a make-believe that there are no monsters." So said Marx. (26) It is time, once and for all, to tear off the cap and confront the monsters. What is called for now is the ability to look squarely at that from which almost everybody has until now turned aside: social, human reality in its complex totality. The time has come when the grimace of the existentialist, the pout of the structuralist, the expressionlessness of the stalinist, the mindless uncritical grin of the hippie, the leer of the sectarian, the complacent shrug of the analyst, and the supercilious sneer of the "post-scarcity" anarchist ("Tics, tics, tics!" cried Lautréamont) must give way, definitively, to the tidal wave of scathing humor which alone can silence the death-knells of pseudo-theory, overpower the guards of the prison of alienation, open the floodgates of authentic inspiration, and return to man a proper sense of his revolutionary destiny. No one is

better suited to assist in the elaboration of this project of creative destruction than Benjamin Péret. In restoring to language the immense pride of laughter he has revealed the most limitless and exhilarating promise of what life can and will be.

Fortunately there are certain signs, now, of a decisive change in the orientation of American radicalism. More and more one sees, in stray corners of the emerging revolutionary movement, indications of a resurgence of critical and penetrating marxist thought. These indications, which have just bubbled above the surface, are still isolated, just beginning to recognize themselves, and scarcely aware of each other's existence. It is the greatest hope of surrealism that these emerging rivulets will multiply, broaden, deepen, amplify their voice, and converge into an implacable river. It goes without saying that it is only in such an atmosphere of intellectual effervescence that the work of Benjamin Péret can find readers equal to its sublime message. So close to us, so astonishingly alive among us while so many others who are better known and more influential are actually little more than dead weights restraining the forward thrust, this man remains a beacon; the light he sheds is vast and second to none. To emerge from the cloisters of traditional thinking into Péret's black light of words is, to be sure, to take an extraordinary risk. But let no one who is afraid of such risks dare speak to us of freedom! In the quest for the Golden Fleece of the Revolution, he will be the loser who does not, sooner or later, encounter the illuminating, immortal, intractable, and irreducible genius of Benjamin Péret.

Franklin ROSEMONT

- notes -

(1) The only full-length studies devoted to Péret have been written by surrealists. These are: Jehan Mayoux, "Benjamin Péret: la Fourchette Coupante" in *LE SURREALISME, MÊME*, Numbers 2 and 3 (1957); Jean-Louis Bédouin, *Benjamin Péret* (Paris, Seghers, 1961); and Claude Courtot, *Introduction à la Lecture de Benjamin Péret* (Paris, le Terrain Vague, 1965). In English there is almost nothing: a preface by J. H. Matthews to his translations of twenty poems by Péret, entitled *Péret's Score* (Paris, Minard, 1965); a chapter in Matthews' *Surrealist Poetry in France* (Syracuse University Press, 1969); Matthews' article, "Mechanics of the Marvelous: The Short Stories of Benjamin Péret", in *L'ESPRIT CREATEUR* (VI, 1, 1966); an excerpt from Courtot's study in *RADICAL AMERICA* (January 1970); and a worthless article by Mary Ann Caws, "Péret: Plausible Surrealist", in *YALE FRENCH STUDIES* 31 (May 1964). Miss Caws is the author of another article on Péret ("Péret's Amour sublime—just another amour fou?" in *THE FRENCH REVIEW*, November 1966) which I have not seen; however, her most recent book, *The Poetry of Dada and Surrealism* (Princeton, 1970), from which she excludes Péret because "his theoretical work tends toward the simplistic" (Page 14), situates her clearly in the category of those who have nothing to say.

- (2) Mayoux, LE SURREALISME, MEME 2.
- (3) Nicolas Calas, "Towards a Third Manifesto of Surrealism", in NEW DIRECTIONS 1940, Page 419.
- (4) Mayoux, LE SURREALISME, MEME 2, Page 156.
- (5) Courtot, Page 68.
- (6) Mayoux, LE SURREALISME, MEME 2, Page 152.
- (7) Quoted in Courtot, Page 70.
- (8) Mayoux, LE SURREALISME, MEME 2, Page 157.
- (9) Péret is described as a "lesser surrealist writer" in David Cauter, Communism and the French Intellectuals (New York, Macmillan, 1964), Page 96. Most critical works on surrealism in English mention Péret's name only in lists of signers of manifestoes, participants in surrealist demonstrations, et cetera.
- (10) TRANSITION 13, Summer 1928, Page 250.
- (11) A biographical and bibliographical chronology of Péret's life and work may be found in Courtot, Pages 11-57.
- (12) Nicolas Calas, Confound the Wise (New York, Arrow Editions, 1942), Chapter 1, "The Light of Words", Page 28. This chapter, incidentally, carries a dedication to Péret.
- (13) These articles, which originally appeared in 1952, have recently been collected, supplemented with an essay by G. Munis and a preface by Jehan Mayoux, published under the title Les Syndicats Contre la Revolution (Paris, le Terrain Vague, 1968).
- (14) "Sa Vie", in MEDIUM: COMMUNICATION SURREALISTE 3, May 1954, Pages 32-36. "The Spanish Revolution", Péret writes, "has not been the object of the attentive examination that it deserves." (He notes as an exception G. Munis, Jalones de derrota, promesa de victoria, Editorial Lucha Obrera, Mexico 1947.) "However, at its beginnings it had gone much farther than the Russian Revolution."
- (15) A small volume of 76 pages, published bilingually in French and Spanish by le Terrain Vague, Paris, 1965, under the auspices of the group Fomento Obrero Revolucionario.
- (16) Two small volumes of Péret's poetry have appeared in English translation. The first, Remove Your Hat (London, Contemporary Poetry and Prose, 1936) is today quite scarce, but is scheduled to be reprinted by the Black Swan Press. Matthews' volume is cited in Note 1 above. Translations of poems by Péret have also appeared in THIS QUARTER (Surrealist Number,

1932); Julien Levy, Surrealism (New York, Black Sun Press, 1936); NEW DIRECTIONS 1940, and in surrealist and surrealist-oriented periodicals such as LONDON BULLETIN, VIEW, CONTEMPORARY POETRY AND PROSE, REBEL WORKER, et cetera.

(17) André Breton, Anthologie de l'Humour Noir (Paris, Pauvert, 1966), Page 506.

(18) Péret's tales, in French, were collected under the title Le Gigot: Sa Vie, Son Oeuvre (Paris, le Terrain Vague, 1957). The first volume of Péret's Oeuvres Completes has just been published by le Terrain Vague. In English see "At 125, Boulevard Saint-Germain" in THISQUARTER (Surrealist Number, 1932); "In a Clinch", in TRANSITION 12, later in Transition Workshop (New York, Vanguard Press, 1949); "The Gallant Sheep", Chapter 4, in RADICAL AMERICA, Surrealist Number, January 1970.

(19) "Magic: The Flesh and Blood of Poetry", in VIEW (Series 3, Number 2, 1943). This is a slightly abridged translation of La Parole est à Péret. It was recently reprinted in ANTINARCISSUS: SURREALIST CONQUEST, an anthology published in San Francisco. Also see "Thought is ONE and Indivisible", in Surrealism and Revolution (Chicago, Solidarity, 1966).

(20) Jean Schuster, "Profil de Péret", introduction to the most recent edition of Péret's Le Deshonneur des poètes (Paris, Pauvert, 1965), Pages 16 and 17.

(21) "Notes on Pre-Columbian Art", in HORIZON (Volume 15, Number 89, 1947).

(22) Livre de Chilam Balam de Chumayel (Paris, Denoël, 1955).

(23) Anthologie de l'Amour Sublime (Paris, Albin Michel, 1956).

(24) La Poesia surrealista francese (Milan, Schwarz, 1959).

(25) See also Péret's critique of abstract art, "La soupe deshydratée" in the Almanach surréaliste du demi-siècle, special issue of LA NEF, 1950.

(26) Karl Marx, Capital, Volume I (Chicago, Charles H. Kerr and Company, 1906), Preface, Page 14.

The poetic works of the end of the last century that were considered the most hermetic or the most delirious are becoming clearer day by day. When the majority of the other works that offer no resistance to immediate comprehension have grown dim, when those voices in which a very large audience was pleased to recognize effortlessly its own voice have been stilled, it is strikingly clear that these difficult works have contradictorily begun to speak for us. Their darkness, pierced in the beginning by a single phosphorescent point that only very experienced eyes could see, has been replaced by a light that we know one day will be total. It is now beyond question that surrealist works will share the same lot as all previous works that are historically situated. The climate of Benjamin Péret's poetry or Max Ernst's painting will then be the very climate of life.

André BRETON

Homage to Benjamin Péret



drawing by Schlechter Duvall



La prise de la Bastille.

The Dishonor of Poets

If one searches for the original significance of poetry, today concealed behind the thousand tawdry ornaments of society, one realizes that it is the veritable breath of man, the source of all knowledge, and knowledge itself in its most immaculate aspect. The entire spiritual life of humanity since the beginning of its consciousness is condensed in poetry; in it palpitates the highest creations and, soil forever fertile, it holds perpetually in reserve the colorless crystals and the harvests of tomorrow. Tutelary divinity with a thousand faces, it is here called love, there freedom, and elsewhere science. It remains omnipotent: it rushes forth in the mythical tales of the Eskimo, blazes in a love letter, machine guns the execution squad shooting the worker who breathes his last sigh of social revolution, and therefore of freedom; it sparkles in the discovery of the scholar; faints, anemic, as the most stupid productions make use of it; and its memory, a eulogy which would like to be funereal, still pierces the mummified words of the priest, its assassin, to whom the faithful listen in seeking it, blind and deaf, in the tomb of dogma where it is no more than fallacious dust.

Its innumerable slanderers, true and false priests, more hypocritical than the priesthood of all churches, false witnesses of all time, accuse it of being a means of evasion, a flight from reality, as if it were not reality itself, its essence and its exaltation. Incapable of conceiving reality in its totality and its complex relationships, they want to see it only in its most immediate and sordid aspect. They perceive only adultery without ever feeling love; the bomber planes without remembering Icarus; the adventure novel without



Although The Dishonor of Poets (written in response to a famous French Resistance anthology of sentimental nationalist verse entitled The Honor of Poets) is one of Péret's best-known theoretical-polemical texts, it has not previously appeared in English translation. Much more than merely a critique of a now-foreign compilation, it is—as Jean Schuster has written—“a manifesto of revolutionary poetry”.

understanding the permanent, elementary, and profound poetic aspiration which its vain ambition is to satisfy. They scorn dreams in favor of reality as if dreams were not one, and the most overwhelming, of its aspects; they exalt action at the expense of meditation as if the first without the second was not a sport as insignificant as any other sport. Formerly, they opposed the spirit to matter, their god to man; today they defend matter against the spirit. Finally, they have put intuition in the aid of reason without recollection of the source of reason.

At all times the enemies of poetry have been obsessed with submitting it to their immediate ends, to crush it with their god, or, as now, to chain it to the proclamations of the new brown or "red" divinity* — the reddish brown of dried blood — even bloodier than the former. For them, life and culture are summed up in useful and useless, it being understood that the useful takes the form of a pick-axe wielded for their benefit. For them poetry is only a luxury of the rich, the aristocrat or the banker, and if it should want to make itself "useful" to the masses, it must be resigned to the "applied", "decorative", "household" arts, et cetera.

Instinctively, they feel poetry is the fulcrum demanded by Archimedes, and fear that if it is overturned, the world might fall on top of them. Thus their ambition to revile it, to take away from it all efficacy, all exalting value, in order to give it the hypocritically consoling role of a sister of charity.

But the poet does not have to maintain for others an illusory hope, human or celestial, or appease the spirits by inflating them with an unlimited confidence in a father or leader, against whom all criticism becomes sacrilege. Quite the contrary, it is for the poet to pronounce the forever sacrilegious words and permanent blasphemies. The poet must first of all be conscious of his nature and place in the world. An inventor for whom discovery is only the means of attaining new discoveries, he must struggle ceaselessly against the paralyzing gods who strive to maintain man in his servitude, both the social authority and the divinity, which mutually complete each other.

He will therefore be revolutionary, but not among those who oppose only the tyrant of today, inauspicious in their eyes because he offends their interests, but who extol the excellence of tomorrow's oppressor, whose servants they already are. No, the poet struggles against all oppression: in the first place that of man by man, and the oppression of his thought by religious, philosophical, and social dogmas. He fights so that man may attain an ever more perfectible knowledge of himself and the universe. It does not follow that he desires to put poetry in the service of a political action, even revolutionary. But his very nature as a poet makes him a revolutionary who must fight on all fronts: that of poetry by the means proper to it, and on the field of social action, without ever confounding the two fields of action for fear of re-establishing the very confusion which it is its task to dissipate, consequently ceasing to be a poet, which is to say, revolutionary.

Wars such as we are now undergoing are possible only during a conjunction of all forces of regression, and signify, among other things, an arrest in

* that is, fascism and stalinism (editor's note)

cultural growth, checked by these forces of regression that culture threatens. This is too evident to need elaboration. From the momentary defeat of culture flows, fatally, the triumphant spirit of reaction, and from the very first, of religious obscurantism, the necessary crown of all reaction. It would be necessary to go very far back in history to find a period when God, Providence, the All-Powerful, et cetera had been as frequently invoked by or for heads of state. Churchill delivers practically no speech without assuring himself of His protection, Roosevelt does as much, de Gaulle places himself under the aegis of the cross of Lorraine, Hitler invokes Providence daily, and citizens of all kinds, from morning till night, thank the Lord of stalinist blessings. Far from being an unwonted manifestation on their part, their attitude sanctions the general movement of regression at the same time that it displays their panic. During the preceding war, the clergy in France solemnly declared that God was not German, while on the other side of the Rhine, their counterparts claimed for him German nationality; never have French churches had as many faithful as since the beginning of the present hostilities.

Where does this renaissance of fideism come from? First, from the despair engendered by war and general misery: no longer does man see on earth any way out of his terrible situation; or he does not see it yet, and seeks, in a fabled heaven, consolation for the vile implements unleashed by the war in unheard-of proportions. Meanwhile, during the unstable time called peace, the material conditions of humanity which had roused the consoling religious illusion, although weakened, held on and imperiously required satisfaction. Society presided at the slow dissolution of the religious myth without being able to substitute anything for it, outside of civic saccharine: fatherland or leader.

Some, faced with such ersatz, because of war and the conditions of its development, remained disabled, without any other resource than a pure and simple return to religious faith. Others, estimating fatherland and leader to be incompetent and obsolete, sought either to replace them with new mythical products, or to regenerate the ancient myths. From whence arises the general apotheosis of the world, on the one hand Christianity and on the other hand the fatherland and the leader. But country and leader, like religion, of which they are brothers and rivals at the same time, have in our time no more means with which to reign over minds other than coercion. Their present triumph, a result of the ostrich reflex, far from signifying their dazzling rebirth, presages their imminent end.

This resurrection of God, of the fatherland and leader, was also a result of the extreme confusion of minds, engendered by war and maintained by its beneficiaries. Consequently, the intellectual fermentation produced by this situation, insofar as one abandons oneself to the current, remains entirely regressive, in the form of a negative coefficient. Its products remain reactionary, whether they are "poetry" of fascist or anti-fascist propaganda or religious exaltation. Aphrodisiacs of old men, they restore a fugitive vigor to society only to better ruin it. These "poets" participate in none of the creative thought of the revolutionaries of the Year II or of Russia in 1917, for example, nor in that of the mystics or heretics of the Middle Ages, because they are destined to provoke only an artificial exaltation in the masses, whereas the revolutionaries and mystics were the product of a real and

profound collective exaltation which their words interpreted. They therefore expressed the thought and the hope of a whole people, imbued with the same myth or animated with the same impulse, while the "poetry" of propaganda tends merely to restore a little bit of life to a myth in the throes of its death agony. As civic hymns, they have the same soporific virtues as the religious patrons, from whom they directly inherited the conservative function, for if mythical and then mystical poetry created the divinity, the hymn exploits this same divinity. Similarly, the revolutionary of the Year II or of 1917 created a new society of which the patriots and Stalinists take advantage today.

To confront the revolutionaries of the Year II and 1917 with the mystics of the Middle Ages is nowhere tantamount to situating them on an equal plane; but in trying to bring the illusory paradise of religion down to earth, the first are not without manifestations of psychological procedures similar to those one discovers in the second. Again, is it necessary to distinguish between the mystics who tend in spite of themselves toward the consolidation of myth and involuntarily prepare the conditions which will bring on its reduction to religious dogma, and the heretics whose intellectual and social role is always revolutionary since it calls into question the principles which support the myth in order to mummify them into dogma? Indeed, if the mystical orthodoxy (but can one speak of a mystical orthodoxy?) translates a certain relative conformity, the heretic, in exchange, expresses an opposition to the society in which he lives. Only the priests therefore are to be considered in the same light as the actual supporters of the fatherland and leader, for they have the same parasitic function in regard to myth.

To illustrate what has preceded, I need only a small pamphlet published in Rio de Janeiro: The Honor of Poets, which comprises a selection of poems published clandestinely in Paris during the Nazi occupation. Not one of these "poems" surpasses the lyrical level of pharmaceutical advertising, and it is not accidental that their authors, in the great majority, believed they should return to rhyme and classical Alexandrines. Form and content necessarily keep the strictest rapports, and in these "verses" the one and the other react against each other in a frantic race to the worst sort of reaction. It is indeed significant that most of these texts closely associate Christianity and nationalism, as if they wanted to demonstrate that religious dogma and nationalist dogma have a common origin and an identical social function. Even the title of the pamphlet, The Honor of Poets, considered with respect to its content, assumes a direction foreign to all poetry. In short, the honor of these "poets" consists in ceasing to be poets in order to become publicity agents.

In the work of Loys Masson the alloy religion-nationalism comprises a greater proportion of fideism than of patriotism. In fact, he limits himself to embellishing the catechism:

Christ, grant that my prayer may draw force from the deep roots
Cause me to merit the light of my wife at my side
That I may go without weakness toward the people of jails
that she may wash her hair like Mary
I know that behind the hills your great step advances.
I hear Joseph of Arimathy crush the limp wheat on the Tomb

and the vine singing in the broken arms of the thief on the cross.
I see you: As he touched the willow and the periwinkle
spring is posed on the thorns of the Crown.
They blaze:
Torches of deliverance, voyaging torches
ah! let them pass through us and consume us
if it is their way toward the prisons.

The dosage is more equal with Pierre Emmanuel:

O France gown without seam of faith
dirtied by deserting feet and spittle
O gown of sweet breath which tears
the tender voice ferociously from offenders
O gown of linen finer than hope
You are always the only garment of those
who know the price of being naked before God....

Accustomed to the amens and the ecclesiastical power of stalinism, Aragon does not, however, succeed as well as the aforementioned in uniting God and country. He recovers the first, I dare say, only tangentially, and obtains a text capable of making only one author turn green with envy — the author of the tiresome phrase on French radio: "Furniture by Levitan is guaranteed for a long time."

It was a time for suffering
When Jeanne came to Vaucouleurs
Ah! Cut France into pieces
Day had that pallor
I remain king of my sorrows.

But it was Paul Eluard who alone of all the authors in the pamphlet was a poet, and who wrote the most finished civic litany:

On my gourmand and tender dog
On his raised ears
On his clumsy paw
I write your name

On the springboard of my door
On familiar objects
On the tide of blessed water
I write your name....

It would be well to remark here, incidentally, that the litannical form crops up in the majority of these poems doubtless because of the idea of poetry and lamentation which it implies, and the perverse taste of unhappiness that the Christian litany tends to exalt with the object of meriting celestial happiness. Even Aragon and Eluard, formerly atheists, felt this obligation: one, to evoke in his works the "saints and prophets", the "tomb of Lazarus"; and the other, to return to the litany, without doubt in obedience to the celebrated watchword, "the priests are with us".

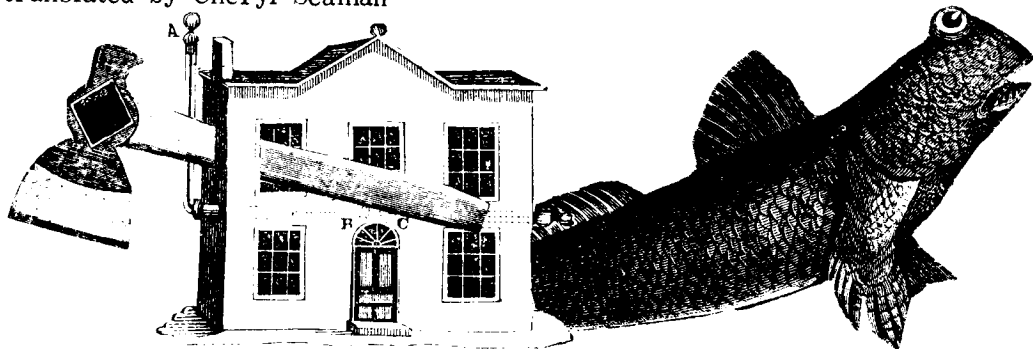
In reality, all the authors of this pamphlet, without admitting it, even to themselves, depart from and aggravate an error of Guillaume Apollinaire. Apollinaire wished to consider war as a subject for poetry. But if war, considered as combat and relieved of any nationalist spirit, can remain strictly speaking a poetic subject, it is not similar to a nationalist password, even if the nation in question, like France, were savagely oppressed by the Nazis. The expulsion of the oppressor and the propaganda to that end, spring from political action, social or military, according to the manner in which the expulsion is envisaged. In any case, poetry does not have to intervene in the debate other than by its own action, by its own cultural significance, for poets are free to participate as much as revolutionaries in overthrowing the Nazi adversary, without ever forgetting that this oppression corresponded to the wishes, admitted or not, of all the enemies — first national, then foreign — of poetry, which is understood to be the total liberation of the human mind, for, to paraphrase Marx, poetry has no country since it exists in all times and all places.

There is still much to be said of freedom, so often evoked in these pages. First, of what freedom is it a question? Freedom for a small number to oppress the whole population or the freedom for this population to bring the small number of the privileged to their senses? Freedom for believers to impose their god and morality on the whole society or freedom for the society to reject God, his philosophy, and his morality? Freedom is like "an inhalation of air", said André Breton, and in order to fulfill its role, this inhalation of air must first throw off the miasma of the past which infests this pamphlet. As long as the malevolent phantoms of religion and fatherland collide with the social and intellectual atmosphere, under whatever disguise they borrow, no freedom will be conceivable: their previous expulsion is one of the prime conditions of the advent of freedom. Every "poem" which willfully exalts an indefinite "freedom", even when it is not embellished with religious or nationalist attributes, ceases first of all to be a poem and ultimately becomes an obstacle to the total liberation of man, for it deceives by indicating a "freedom" concealing new chains. On the other hand, from every authentic poem escapes a breath of complete and stirring freedom (even if this freedom is not evoked in its political or social aspect), and thus it contributes to the effective liberation of man.

Benjamin PÉRET

Mexico, February 1945

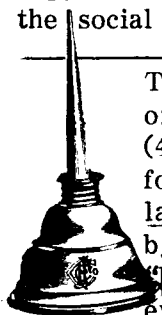
translated by Cheryl Seaman



The FACTORY COMMITTEE: Motor of the SOCIAL REVOLUTION

No one will deny that capitalist society has entered a period of permanent crisis which induces it to reassemble its weakened forces and to concentrate, more and more, all political and economic power in the hands of the state, by means of nationalizations. To this concentration of capitalist power, are we going to continue to oppose the scattered forces of the workers? To do so would be to run into definitive defeat. And one of the principal reasons for the present apathy of the working class resides in the interminable series of defeats suffered by the social revolution throughout this century. The working class no longer has confidence in any organization because it has observed them all at work, here and there, and seen that all of them, including the anarchist organizations, have revealed themselves to be incapable of resolving the crisis of capitalism—that is to say, of assuring the triumph of the social revolution. One must not be afraid to say that all of these organizations are outdated and no longer valid. On the contrary, only this very realization—the importance of which should not be reduced by more or less circumstantial considerations, nor by blaming others for the consequences of one's own errors—provides a point of departure from which we can truly prepare ourselves to revise all doctrines (which today share a substantial portion of outdatedness), perhaps resulting in a fundamental ideological unification of the workers' movement in the direction of the social revolution. It goes without saying that I do not by any means dream of a movement whose thought would be monolithic, but a movement unified from within, and in which diverse tendencies could enjoy the most ample freedom to manifest themselves.

On the other hand, it is no less true that action is called for immediately. This action must obey two general principles: first, it must facilitate the ideological regroupment mentioned above; and second, it must cease considering the revolution as the work of future generations for whom we are supposed to make the preparations. We are faced with this dilemma: either the social revolution and a new impetus for humanity, or war and a social



This article, appearing here in translation for the first time, was originally published in the French anarchist paper *LE LIBERTAIRE* (4 September 1952). The series of four articles (of which this is the fourth) were recently reprinted as a pamphlet, *Les Syndicats contre la Revolution* (Paris, le terrain vague, 1968) supplemented by an essay by G. Munis and a preface by Jehan Mayoux, who emphasizes the “burning actuality” of these articles in the light of the May-June 1968 events in France.

decomposition of which the past offers only a few pale examples. History is granting us a breathing space the duration of which we do not know. Let us make use of it to reverse the course of the present degeneration and to bring about the revolution. The present apathy of the working class is only temporary. It indicates, at this time, both the workers' loss of confidence in all organizations, and a certain detachment on their part. It depends on us, as revolutionaries, to draw the lessons which will enable this detachment to be transformed into active revolt. The energy of the working class asks only to exert itself. Nevertheless, it is necessary to give it not only an end—it has had a presentiment of this for a long time—but also means of attaining this end. If the task of revolutionaries is to bring about a fraternal society, this necessitates, beginning immediately, an organism in which this fraternity can form and develop itself.

At the present time it is on the factory level that workers' fraternity attains its maximum. Thus it is there that we must act, but not in clamouring for a trade-union unity which is chimerical today, in the actual conditions of the capitalist world, and which, moreover, could only come forward AGAINST the working class, since the trade unions represent now only different tendencies of capitalism. In fact, a "united front" of the unions could happen only on the eve of the revolution—and would act against the revolution since the major unions would all be equally interested in torpedoing it to assure their own survival in the capitalist state. Henceforth, as integral parts of the capitalist system, they defend this system by defending themselves. The interests of the union are essentially their own and not those of the workers.

Moreover, one of the most powerful obstacles to a workers' regroupment and a revolutionary renaissance is constituted by the apparatus of the union bureaucrats, even in the factory, beginning with the stalinist apparatus. The enemy of the worker, today, is the union bureaucrat every bit as much as the boss who, without the union bureaucrat, would most of the time be powerless. It is the union bureaucrat who paralyzes workers' action. And thus the first watchword of revolutionaries must be: Out the door with the union bureaucrats!

But the principal enemy consists of stalinism and its union apparatus, because it is the partisan of state capitalism—that is to say, the complete fusion of the state and unionism. It is therefore the most clear-sighted defender of the capitalist system, since it outlines, for this system, the most stable state conceivable today.

Meanwhile, one should not destroy an existing organism without proposing another in its place, better adapted to the necessities of the revolution. And it is precisely the revolution that has taken it upon itself to show us, each time that it has appeared, the instrument of its choice: the factory committee directly elected by the workers assembled on the shop-floor, and the members of which are revocable at any time. This is the only organism which is able, without alteration, to direct the workers' interests within capitalist society while looking to the social revolution; and which is also able to accomplish this revolution and, once having attained victory, to constitute the base of future society. Its structure is the most democratic conceivable, since it is directly elected in the workplace by all the workers, who control its actions from day to day and are able to recall a member of the committee, or the

entire committee, at any time, and choose another. Its constitution offers the minimum of risks of degeneration, because of the constant and direct control that the workers are able to exercise over their delegates. Furthermore, the constant contact between elected and electors favors a maximum of creative initiative of the working class, which is thus called upon to take its destiny in its own hands and to directly lead its own struggles. This committee, which authentically represents the will of the workers, is called upon to administer the factory and to organize the workers' defense against the police and the reactionary gangs of stalinism and traditional capitalism. After the victory of the revolution, it is the factory committee which must indicate to the regional, national, and international leaders (these also are directly elected by the workers), the productive capacities of the factory and its needs of raw materials and manpower. Finally, the representatives of each factory would be called to form, on the regional, national, and international scale, the new government, distinct from the management of the economy, and whose principal task would be to liquidate the heritage of capitalism and to assure the material and cultural conditions of its own progressive disappearance.

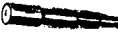
At once economic and political, the factory committee is the revolutionary organism par excellence. That is why even its establishment represents a sort of insurrection against the capitalist state and its trade-union branches, because it assembles all the workers' energies against the capitalist state, and even assumes the latter's economic power. For the same reason one sees it burst forth spontaneously in moments of acute social crisis. But in our epoch of chronic crisis, it is necessary for revolutionaries to passionately defend and advocate this conception starting now if they wish, in the first place, to put an end to the meddling of union bureaucrats in the factories, and to restore to the workers the initiative of their emancipation. Let us therefore destroy the unions in the name of the factory committees, democratically elected by all the workers in the plant, and revocable at any time.

Benjamin PÉRET

Poetry Above All

Hardly a year or even a month goes by without a voice being raised in protest against the ranking of art and poetry higher than science. Right now there is someone who praises the latest conclusions reached by psychology; sooner or later, another comes along who bases himself on the recent results of physics—it being well understood of course that this could only mean nuclear physics.

It so happens that reading such boorish humbug makes me shrug my shoulders. More often, however, I make a vain effort to repress grating my teeth, especially when such opinions come from artists and poets. I know well that those who have already tested this illusion are numerous, beginning with the futurists. But what remains of their manifestoes and of most of the works responding to this unreasonable demand?

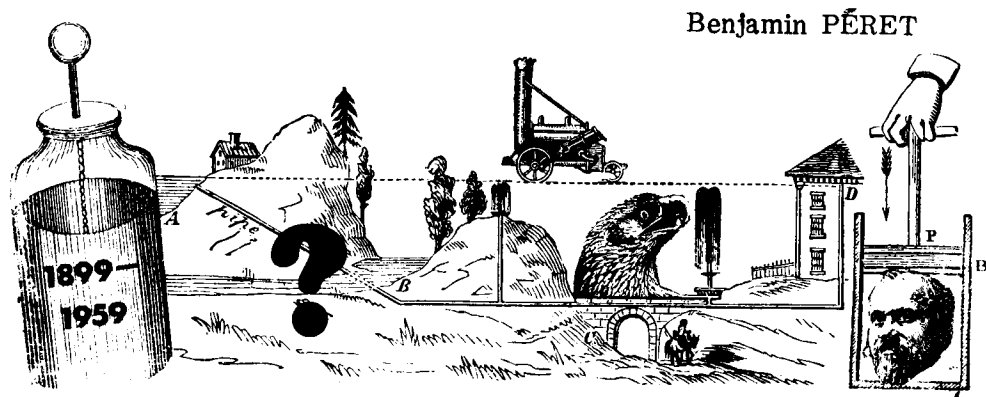
 This article, previously untranslated, appeared originally in BIEF : JONCTION SURREALISTE, 15 November 1958.

To require the subordination of poetry and art to science is nothing but a redoubtable aberration, the denunciation of which must be pursued relentlessly since it consists in reversing the natural order of things, in which intuition fully precedes science. After all, the precedence of intuition and its ultimately determining character have come to be proclaimed to some degree even by those who scorn it, since they have not hesitated to give an atomic power station the name of Melusine—without the least preoccupation with the noxious emanations which risk dissolving its image, hitherto poetically unaltered.

Nuclear fission and its consequences will never provoke a new mode of sensibility any more than they will engender original poetry. On the contrary, it is precisely the extreme agitation of the sensibility initiated by Jean-Jacques Rousseau which—through the Revolution of 1789, romanticism and surrealism—has led, in the last analysis, to the scientific spirit, despite the abominable perversion of the latter which one knows only too well. Is it necessary to underline, for the purpose of illustrating this affirmation, the recent remark in the press reporting that the rocket launched toward the moon departed from the very point that Jules Verne had chosen a hundred years earlier?

No, poetry and art cannot rely on science for their take-off. For an artist, it would be proof of a singular inferiority complex to recognize the right of the latter to guide the former. To do so would be, perhaps without realizing it, to deny, purely and simply, art and poetry, since they can no more prosper in a scientific climate than could a fish in the burning sands of the Sahara. Ultimately, both demand a total freedom, toward the establishment of which they contribute simultaneously. Science which, for its part, remains subject to strict disciplines, can nonetheless contribute to the liberation of man as well as to his enslavement. The invention of the atomic bomb proves this with such great refulgence that it is unnecessary to insist further. But as long as science is not placed in the direct and immediate service of humanity, but withholds the possibility of being employed against it, it is impossible to accord the least confidence in its intentions.

And even if this were not so, there would still be no reason for accepting its tutelage, as is proposed by a so-called "Situationist International" which imagines itself to be the bearer of the new while creating merely equivocation and confusion. But is it not in such troubled waters as these that one fishes for a situation?



THE THAW

a surrealist tale

THE road bordered by blue trees hid itself in a well. A fine rain of red wine fell on the cottony ground. A man advancing spinelessly with quilty steps, giving anyone who watched him a sensation of softness, rose with a galaxy in his hair from the well over the spongy road. As he approached, I noted, to my surprise, that he did not have a galaxy on his head, but that his skull sweated stars, which rose into the red air and burst white.

At the edge of the road a girl with eyes like a burning building looked out of the window of her house, which resembled a wooden shoe, and watched the man approach. Emotion animated her translucent face; from it emanated rainbow waves; she even seemed to be awaiting him. But it was not the case; and she left her window when the man was only a few steps from the shoe. He seemed to hesitate a moment; then he rounded the tip of the shoe, and flowed like a cask of oil into a thicket of bottles surrounding the strange building, murmuring: "Leopardi! Leopardi!" in a heartrending tone. At the shoe's window appeared a delicate hand with crystal nails, holding a blossoming almond tree, which gave off fitful spirals of splashed smoke. The almond tree fell on the cloudy road, where at once it took root, and a loud cry of surprise rang inside the shoe: "Monaco! Oh my Monaco!"

The rain of red wine fell thick and fast; it hastened the coming of the blood-coloured night. Black, winged forms, seemingly condensations of mist, moved heavily through the damp air, now and then giving off a brief phosphorescent lightning. The shoe seemed to house a strange, disquieting life; you didn't care to look it in the face for fear of becoming involved in it. Dull sounds of sacks falling on the beaten earth alternated with sharp reports of broken window-panes and long drawn out, scarcely human sighs, like the slow tearing of heavy stuffs. Through the window which had remained open, the hand appeared for an occasional moment, shaking as to punctuate a speech that could not be heard; but it alone was seen; the rest of the body remained invisible, either because it did not exist, or because the dense gloom prevailing inside the shoe hid it from sight.

Meanwhile heavy winged forms gathered above the house, encompassing it with great soft circles streaked by pale lightnings; and steadily the circles diminished, as if to fascinate the house. And indeed, the anxiety, the dire anguish clearly prevailing within, permitted no doubt that this was the intent. An extreme agitation filled the house with a humming composed of varied sounds, dominated at times by a long, piercing shriek. Now and then the shoe was even taken with a convulsive trembling; and innumerable black balls, the size of a fist, spurted from the roof to fall in a

This tale is reproduced from the "Surrealist Section" of the anthology NEW ROAD 1943, published in London.

bundle on the ground, where they burst and mingled at once with the earth. The trembling became progressively more frequent and more accentuated, the stream of black balls became denser, and at last the shoe seemed shaken in all directions by incessant shudders, so violent that it inevitably burst apart. So brutal, so violent and so complete was the collapse when it occurred, you wondered if it had really taken place. The earth trembled, and seemed to rise up like a milk-soup; a long sombre flame with aquarium glints gushed beneath the shoe, which was hurled into the cavernous air, danced an instant in the flame, and burst like a wolf's bane blossom into moths which darted madly in all directions, colliding with one another, and forming a mass so dense that the light, already diffuse like that of solar eclipses, grew darker still, becoming a shadowy dusk woven of dusty spider-webs.

When you became accustomed to the reddish shadows, you could distinguish in place of the shoe a white human form, which you soon guessed to be a woman, her reclining body prolonged by her long blond hair. Her breathing like a killing machine, the spasms which shook her whole body, disclosed long perfect legs like a camellia branch, showing her to be alive. Suddenly a poisonous lightning darted through the thick layer of moths, and the woman vanished, covered over, absorbed by the great black forms, whose wing-beats unleashed a heavy, damp tempest. Cries and moans pierced holes in the mass of wings, which became a sort of sieve, through which you could sometimes see an arm, a breast, or the bold gleam of hair.

Suddenly a new lightning pierced the cloud of moths in the opposite direction, and the woman appeared, nude, her two arms raised towards the invisible heaven in a gesture of ecstasy, crying out at the top of her lungs: "I want all of life, all of life: Men, the birds who fly through flowery clouds, the flowers which simulate wild beasts like the beating of an outraged heart, the sea which can be held in its entirety in the palm of a hand, and the sulphurous night which is summed up in one drop of mortal perfume, gliding like a delirious locomotive over the rains of my veins, paying no heed to the thousand signals of my nerves. I want all of life for I am the whole world, all nature, even to the stones which sparkle in the inviolable coffers of the toneless mountains."

Then the day reappeared, triumphing like forest of flames. The cloud of moths vanished, dissolved like a pinch of sugar in a glass of clear water, and came to rest, like drops of milky dew, on the body of the motionless woman, mute as a buried city which suddenly reappears in the daylight, invaded by clusters of parietary, and beves of sparrows. Thus was the woman. A honey-suckle vine, gliding along her legs, began to wind a long flowery shoot about her, and a little bird made a nesting place in her dense hair.

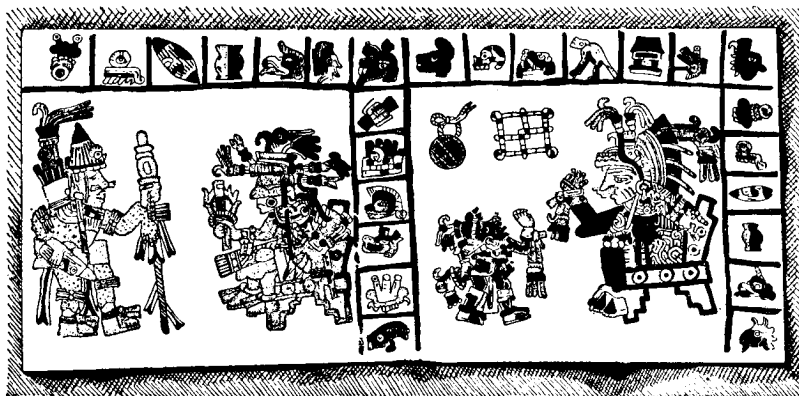
A multitude of stars of every colour gleamed in the soft air, like the lights thrown by fishes leaping out of sunny water. Still motionless in her ecstatic pose, the nude woman was visibly undergoing a change. The veins of her arms, her temples, her whole body were rapidly turning a tender green, while her skin assumed the transparency of opal; soon it was plain that the woman was dead, that there remained of her nothing but a light envelope, like a soap bubble. And this empty form began to move slowly, with

a solemn step, barely touching the grass which discoloured beneath her steps and left behind her a wake of heavy shadow, like that which is brewed by the flight of bats at nightfall. She quickly regained the road, where the birds were shedding their multi-coloured plumage to make her a path of glory. And yet the shadow deepened behind her shoulders, giving her two half-open wings, infinitely prolonged. This shadow, growing denser and denser, was peopled with impalpable forms, moving, changing, and seeming to absorb one another. You had hardly distinguished a gigantic lion's head when the head unfolded, burst into bloom, and became an orchid, a hundred-fold larger than nature. The orchid in turn moved, ramified, and became a windmill. The wind-mill liquefied, and from the black pool of shadow rose a Hindu divinity with a thousand flaming eyes, like a machine-gun firing in the night. The eyes blinked and went out, replaced by telegraph-wires along which you could see the telegrams running. There were strange ones among them: "The black poppy invades the bridal gown. Where are the swallow's beaks?" Simple ones: "First thing to-morrow colour the bread." Touching ones: "My two arms are useless without you." Sinister ones: "The blood is stirred." And many more which filed by, jostling one another, hurrying each other in hope of arriving first. But the telegrams became rapidly illegible, and the wires mingled in a great head of hair, where there gleamed a diadem.

And the woman, or rather, her transparent phantom, kept advancing toward a gilded lake, which gleamed in the distance like the eye of a wild beast in a shadowy corpse. Ahead of her, everything crystallised, lost its volume, and its capacity, melted into Rupert's drops, which condensed behind her neck into heavy, soft, intertwined shadows, seeking their life and their forms. But in the distance, far behind her, bright spangles glittered.

A crayfish stopped the stone that was rolling in the torrent, and covered it with a long gray veil.

Benjamin PÉRET



PAGE OF AZTEC BOOK. (FROM PHOTOGRAPH.)

Two Poems



Portrait of Saint-Pol-Roux

The sun withdraws from the mitres and casques
driven by the anger of forests
sweeping with its shadow
faces blackened with the soot of their dreams

like stairways
their dreams simulate nights and days
absurd like a pin at the summit of Kilima N'diara

Alone on the stale snow
A man with eyes like planets
raised his arms burdened with lilies
toward a marble sky
where eyes were raining
so beautiful that revolvers crackedled

A true marriage sky of marriage
where the bride naked like the sea
awaited the man to throw down his lilies
replacing the echo
that trembled at the sound of his voice

Without Tomatoes No Artichokes

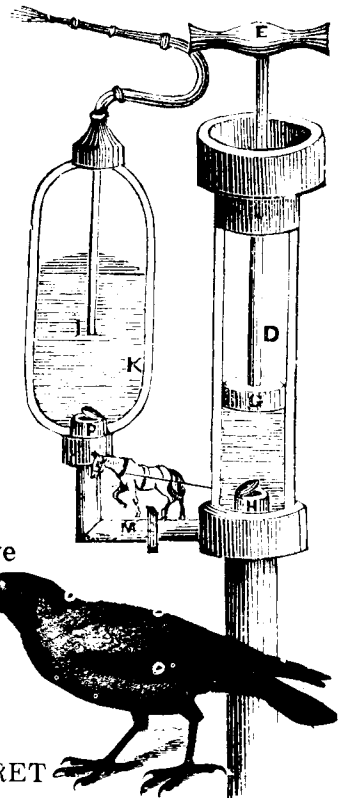
My tomatoes are riper than your wooden shoes
And your artichokes resemble my girl

At the market place
there was a tomato and an artichoke
and both were dancing round a turnip
who turned on the root

Dance tomato dance artichoke
your wedding day will be clear as the gaze
of carps

The wooden shoes contemplate us
while crying tears of overripe pears
and when they sing they make a noise from the grave
which explodes and brings forth a corpse
The corpse beats his hands like a pebble on a
window pane
and says
No you will not have my tomato at that price

(translated by Cheryl Seaman)



Benjamin PÉRET

W.A. WILLIAMS' HISTORIOGRAPHY

by Michael Meeropol

William Appleman Williams, The Roots of the Modern American Empire,
New York: Random House, 1969. \$15.

(Author's note: I am indebted to Paul Buhle and Jerry Markowitz for reading an earlier draft of this essay and making many valuable suggestions.)

William Appleman Williams' work stresses the independent force of ideas in determining reality. In the introduction to The Contours of American History he wrote

...it should be obvious that ideas persist for a long time after their immediate relevance is gone, and therefore may act as independent variables in later circumstances. For this reason...it is always an arbitrary choice as to which—reality or existing ideas—will be discussed first. (1)

Marxist historiography in the United States has rarely risen above unsophisticated economic determinism. Therefore it should not be surprising that some Marxists have criticized Williams' emphasis on the Weltanschauung (defined as a "...definition of the world combined with an explanation of how it works") of an epoch in American history as reversing the importance of base and superstructure. But if economic reality determined the course of history directly, all history would be economic history. To a certain extent in Contours..., and more fully in The Roots of the Modern American Empire, Williams has combined the facts of economic reality with an exposition and analysis of how the articulate population conceptualized and attempted to deal with that reality. In the latter work he has very carefully added a new element to Marx's analysis of capitalist society: the struggle of the capitalist class to come to grips with the contradictions of capitalism.

From his writings it is apparent that Marx felt that the competitive nature of the capitalist marketplace and the individualistic nature of the bourgeoisie would preclude the development of a "class consciousness" among the capitalists that would seek to use the power of the state to save capitalism in a positive sense. Thus, the recognition that the state was an organ of the "entire bourgeoisie" was only relevant to actual political struggle against the working class or foreign bourgeois groups. There are hints that Marx did not dogmatically adhere to this view, as in his discussion of the passage of the British Factory Acts; but it is probably safe to say that if he foresaw the possibility of the rise of a class consciousness within the bourgeois state

that would transcend the parochial interest of individual capitalists he probably felt the socialist revolution would come first. (2)

Outside of laissez faire England the use of the state for positive reform and economic development was continuous throughout the Nineteenth Century. The Belgian railroads and the extremely centralized developmental efforts of Russia and Japan are all examples of the conscious use of the state for general bourgeois class interests. In the United States, the rise of a broad outlook among some members of the ruling class can be traced throughout our history. In Contours... Williams indicated that such "class consciousness" transcending special interests, especially in the positive sense of balancing and moderating the conflicts within the political economy, was more in ascendance during the early years of the Republic than after, say, 1830. (3) In The Roots of the Modern American Empire, Williams shows how some members of the ruling class (he calls them "metropolitan leaders") recognized the challenge between 1866 and 1896 from a self-proclaimed oppressed majority, and sought to respond to that protest and agitation not merely with repression but with creative, positive solutions. The key solution, originally formulated by a significant (perhaps a majority) segment of the population, turned out to be none other than American Open-Door Imperialism.

The basis for the self-proclamation of a neo-colonial status on the part of agriculture is stated neatly and succinctly. Quoting from Adam Smith, Williams notes that economic development of an industrial nature is nurtured by agricultural development. "...the town may very properly be said to gain its whole wealth and subsistence from the country." (4) Modern analyses of economic development extend the discussion. Potentially agriculture can provide a marketable surplus of food for the urban and industrial areas and create rural markets for the industrial goods produced in these areas. It can release surplus labor to work in the industrial sector and release savings to mobilize resources there. Finally, it can export a portion of its production and earn much-needed foreign exchange to import needed equipment or other goods for the industrial sector. (5) Now, notice how all of the advantages to industry stem from the utilization of the increased productivity in agriculture. If city population keeps pace with agricultural productivity and expansion, farmers will not find their incomes decreasing. However, one of the important contributions to be made by agriculture is the supplying of surplus population for the industrial work force. Thus, it is assumed that agricultural productivity will outrun demand in urban areas and that this will force a percentage of the agricultural population off the land. Further, it is expected that much of the profit made in agricultural business will be invested in urban areas. One way this might happen is through absentee ownership of agricultural resources. Another is through middleman profits (like those of railroads). A third is through monopolistic pricing of industrial goods which increase the profits of the monopolists while decreasing those of agriculturalists whose costs are higher.

In the American experience, immigration reduced the need for a migration from country to city while the period of relatively easy access to land kept agricultural costs down and made farmers rather prosperous. Thus the predicted disruption of agriculture implicit in Smith and the modern development economists did not occur in the early decades of the Nineteenth Century. However, one thing did carry over from the scenario, and that was

the structural commitment of certain key agricultural products (the earliest was cotton) (6) to the export market. In the period after the Civil War, the elements that staved off the developmental squeeze on agriculture began to disappear. Long before the official end of the frontier with the 1890 census, good cheap land was impossible to get because of the largess of the Federal Government with railroads and the development of the large Bonanza farms (often controlled by foreign capital) in the western plains states. (7) At the same time, capital costs began to increase due to the longer transportation haul to market for products, the higher prices of building materials, the increased utilization of farm machinery, and the difficulty of getting free land in good locations.

Now this developmental squeeze on agriculture did not occur in a smooth progression between 1866 and 1896. Assumptions that this is what the farmers were complaining about have led economists to refute this straw man with facts and figures. (8) Since these economists find that agriculture did not suffer over the long run, they conclude that agricultural discontent was based on non-economic reasons. (9) However, the latter statement is a non-sequitur. The squeeze came in short spurts of two to three years and finally culminated in a wrenching depression between 1890 and 1896. During these short periods, the people the farmers raged at (the railroads, the "trusts", the bankers — in short, what Williams calls the metropolitan rulers) appeared to continue to rake in profits. For every business that failed there was another to take its place and continue selling the farmers (what they claimed were) over-priced goods. When a railroad went bankrupt and sold out, the farmer did not suddenly get a better shake from the new owner. Thus, the farmers in those short-run periods did feel the "developmental squeeze". Relative prices did plummet in depression periods, forcing many farmers to give up the ghost and leaving bitter activist people on the soil demanding more security and redress. (10)

Although Williams does marshal facts to support these assertions (11), perhaps it would give our discussion more scope if we presented a table of the ups and downs in the economy between 1865 and 1897.

DATES OF TURNING POINTS		DURATION IN MONTHS		
Peak	Trough	Expansion	Contraction	Full Cycle
Apr 1865	Dec 1867	--	32	--
Jun 1869	Dec 1870	18	18	36
Oct 1873	Mar 1879	34	65	99
Mar 1882	May 1885	36	38	74
Mar 1887	Apr 1888	22	13	35
Jul 1890	May 1891	27	10	37
Jan 1893	Jun 1894	20	17	37
Dec 1895	Jun 1897	18	18	36

(Expansion measured from trough on preceding line to peak. Contraction from peak to trough on same line. Source: R. A. Gordon, *Business Fluctuations* (New York, Harper and Brothers, 1961), Page 251.)

Since these refer to the short-term business cycles (except in the case of the 65-month depression between 1873 and 1879) we can get a supplementary feel for the trends in the economy by examining longer cycles. Williams refers to Abramovitz's table showing peaks and troughs in the rate of growth. (12) The table buttresses the information in the above table for 1864-74, but contradicts it between 1874 and 1881. To understand this let us refer to Abramovitz's own explanation: "The retardation phase of each long swing in output growth has culminated in a depression of unusual severity or in a succession of depressions of lesser severity interrupted by only short-lived or disappointing recoveries." (13) Thus, the rate of growth contraction during 1889-1892 was followed by the depression of 1893-1896. (He believes the revival of 1894-1895 to have been weak, incomplete, and transient.) (14) But what about the agricultural depression of 1890-1896? We must remember here that aggregate indicators do not necessarily reflect the prosperity or lack of same in the agricultural sector. We should remember that in the period 1921-1929 the economy as a whole was very prosperous while agriculture languished. (15) As a final supplement, let us quote the reporting of Willard Thorp, who investigated contemporary business annals and characterized each year on a spectrum from prosperity to depression.

1865	boom, recession	1881	prosperity
1866	mild depression	1882	prosperity, slight recession
1867	depression	1883	recession
1868	revival	1884	depression
1869	prosperity	1885	depression, revival
1870	recession, mild depression	1886	revival
1871	revival, prosperity	1887	prosperity
1872	prosperity	1888	brief recession
1873	prosperity, panic recession	1889	prosperity
1874	depression	1890	prosperity, recession
1875	depression	1891	depression, revival
1876	depression	1892	prosperity
1877	depression	1893	recession, panic, depression
1878	depression, revival	1894	deep depression
1879	revival, prosperity	1895	depression, revival
1880	prosperity	1896	recession, depression

(Source: Abramovitz in Adriano (editor): New Views on American Economic Development.)

With these facts in mind, Williams' discussion of farmer discontent, notably the timing of the agitation, appears firmly rooted in economic reality rather than a result of psychological problems, et cetera.

Finally, there were the political aspects of the neo-colonialism felt by the farmers: "With considerable reason Westerners viewed territorial government as a system of quasi-colonial rule by the metropolis...." (Page 117) (16) An example of how the national government politically controlled by the metropolis became an instrument of colonial oppression of the West was in paying for the Civil War. We quote the following passage at length to show how Williams deftly weaves the analysis together.

The revenue law of July 1, 1862, for example, did tax the high metropolitan incomes, but it also contained excise levies that hurt the farmer because they raised consumer prices. In a similar way, the farmers gained some benefits from the inflationary legal tender acts of February 25, 1863 and June 3, 1864, but those measures operated primarily to increase the concentration of financial power in the metropolis. Connecticut held more of the authorized \$300,000,000 banknotes than Kentucky, Tennessee, Michigan, Iowa, Missouri, and Kansas. That was impressive, to be sure, but Massachusetts did even better: it controlled more than the West and the South combined.

Western agriculturalists increasingly concluded that the tariff laws filled the tills of the metropolis in a similar manner. The first bill, passed on February 20, 1861, was generally moderate. It raised individual rates from 5 to 10 per cent, and that resulted in an average duty of approximately 30 per cent. But the subsequent legislation of 1861, 1862, and 1864 boosted existing schedules, and added levies on consumer items such as coffee, tea, and sugar. Those changes pushed the general rate to 47 per cent. Farm businessmen had accepted the early laws as part of the bargain with the Northeast—as a quid pro quo, say, for the Homestead Act. But the later increases rapidly generated opposition after the surrender of the Confederacy.... Some farmers bluntly called the tariff a subsidy to the manufacturers and the assistance given the Union Pacific Railroad intensified such criticism. The agriculturalists were not misled by the rhetoric about free benefits. They knew from personal experience that they paid most of the taxes that financed such federal internal improvements, and also contributed much other capital for railroad construction through local and state governments. The law of July 1, 1862, for example, gave the Union Pacific 6500 acres for every mile of track. Two years later (July 2, 1864) the subsidy was doubled. The failure to appropriate comparable sums for other internal improvements dramatized the special treatment of the railroad and aggravated the resentment. By the end of the war, as the farmer knew, the railroads, so largely financed by the citizen, were nevertheless controlled by, and for the benefit of, a small group of metropolitan capitalists.

The money to move crops, most of which went to the transportation and commercial entrepreneurs, was likewise managed by Eastern financiers. And they used their superior political party within the Republican Party to set national monetary policy. They made it clear as early as 1866 that a deflationary policy would be adopted. In their view, at any rate, the gold standard was sacred. The greenbacks would be retired, therefore, even if that decreased the operating capital available to the smaller entrepreneur. The man who had been wealthy enough to lend money to the Union in 1860 and 1861 would receive his just reward for financing freedom, and the metropolis would retain its control of the economic system. (Page 115 f)

The Roots of the Modern American Empire traces the response of the agricultural population to many of their problems between 1865 and 1896. Williams constantly relates all the elements in the agricultural protest movements of these decades to a "marketplace conception of reality" which was deeply ingrained in the American farmer. By the reiteration of the term "agricultural businessmen" he drives home the fact that American farmers were always producing a surplus for the market. They were in a business, not a group of humble rustics enjoying the "elbow room" of the frontier like Daniel Boone and growing just enough to live on. Following the gospel according to Adam Smith, they felt that a free growing market was essential for the maintenance of prosperity. (17)

Thus the control of transportation, even the demand for government nationalization, was not a cry for socialization of the means of production, but for a freeing of the access routes to the marketplace. (18) The fight over silver was not a struggle for inflation to help keep the farmers' prices up, but an attempt to break the British hold on international markets.

...an English wheat importer began his maneuvers by having L 833 of silver bullion coined into 10,000 Indian rupees. Because India used silver money, that operation rewarded the Englishman with L 1000 of purchasing power. The difference, L 167, paid the transportation cost on the grain to Liverpool, and...gave the Englishman the capacity to undersell American wheat and thereby cut exports from Illinois, Kansas, or Minnesota. (Page 198)

Southerners became concerned about silver because of its role in financing British cotton production in India, and as a result of their desire to penetrate the markets of silver-using countries. (ibid.)

The Alliance's Subtreasury Plan (20) was a "classic marketplace strategy" whose "aim was to replace British control with American control." (Page 329f) It attempted to cut down price manipulations overseas by balancing supply with demand throughout the year. Otherwise, the yearly glut at harvest time would continue to fill the pockets of British and metropolitan speculators and other middlemen.

The need to expand exports became especially important because short-run spurts (as early as post-1819 for Cotton) of exports saved agriculture from depressions. Such experience tended to reinforce a growing belief that without such exports calamity would befall the farmers. Especially significant for Williams was the large wheat and pork exportation between 1877 and 1881.

Exports of all foods reached \$216,000,000 in 1875, and in that year all agricultural exports accounted for 78 per cent of the total American exports and supplied about 6 per cent of the gross national product. Overseas sales of cotton exports, dominated by the rough uncolored cloth produced in Southern mills, stood at \$4,071,882. Then came the rapid expansion generated by bad weather, diseases, and the war in Europe. Food sales moved to \$271,000,000 in 1877, when agricultural

exports provided 6.8 per cent of the gross national product. The next year food exports jumped to \$352,000,000. In three years, considering wheat alone, American farmers opened 5,000,000 acres and produced 135,900,000 additional bushels of grain.

The figure for the next eleven quarters, through September 1881, exhilarated Americans and staggered Europeans. Food sales reached their highest point during the second quarter of 1880, when exports were moving abroad at an annual rate of \$520,400,000. The yearly totals: 1879, \$392,000,000; 1880, \$488,000,000; 1881, \$409,000,000. Wheat acreage increased to 40,960,000 in 1881, and production peaked at 549,700,000 bushels in 1879. The share of gross national product supplied directly by agricultural exports averaged more than 7 per cent for those three years, and the farm share of all exports hit peaks of 79.8, 84.3, and 83.5 per cent. Tobacco exports also increased, and raw cotton sales moved from \$2,890,000 in 1876 to \$3,210,000 in 1877, \$3,250,000 in 1878, and \$4,380,000 in 1880. The exports of uncolored cottons tripled between 1875 and 1878, when they topped \$7,000,000; and they averaged more than \$6,000,000 during the next three years. All cotton textile exports climbed from \$4,070,000 in 1875 to \$13,570,000 in 1881. (Page 208)

The title of the chapter in which these paragraphs occur is "An Export Bonanza Turns America Toward Imperialism" (Page 206 ff). The response of Europeans was to try to restrict imports of American agricultural products. The reaction of the farmers to this was to demand retaliation. In this and the following chapter Williams describes the different groups' reactions to this state of affairs and concludes in summary:

A strong majority of Americans accepted the necessity of market expansion. The sense of necessity thus produced actions that created the conditions that defined foreign affairs as a struggle for economic supremacy against unfree foreigners. And that battle required the use of American power against foreign governments and people. (Page 268)

As initially formulated against European intransigence toward agricultural exports, this only included the use of force. Yet in the concept of imperialism is the element of control. Even the Open-Door Imperialism, or what Robinson and Gallagher have called "The Imperialism of Free Trade", involves control through the exercise of "...the sufficient political force involved in integrating new regions into the expanding economy...." (21) The way the willingness to use force became transformed into a willingness to control was in the shifting of focus from European markets to underdeveloped areas like Latin America and Asia. Though the original impetus was not for control, as the choices presented themselves the American majority continually chose to use power rather than give up what they believed were important economic advantages. In the case of Hawaii they responded angrily to President Cleveland's attempt to reinstate Queen Liliuokalani, recently deposed in a pro-American coup.

Some Populists criticized Harrison's initial intervention, but insisted on maintaining the controls necessary to "trade products to our advantage whenever possible." The most significant development was the evolution of an informal coalition between metropolitan and Western Republicans, Populists...and dissident Democrats...farm spokesmen wanted to recognize the new government in the islands and establish a protectorate. (Page 366 f)

Another example used by Williams is the case of a revolt in Brazil in 1893.

The rebels wanted to abrogate the reciprocity treaty negotiated by Blaine in 1890-91 because they feared it was harmful to the Brazilian political economy. (Page 365)

The new Secretary of State ordered naval intervention, and the rebellion was defeated. The culmination of this process is described vis a vis Cuba, the Philippines, and the China market in the final two chapters (Pages 408-445). In a sense, this book ends where Williams's path-breaking The Tragedy of American Diplomacy begins.

Summarizing the book would be a hopelessly impossible task; a halfway job would be dangerous inasmuch as it might give the reader the mistaken impression that he no longer had to read it. What I have tried to do in the first part of this article is to give some background information to indicate what kind of things lie behind Williams's startling claim: Imperialism in the American experience was in a very important sense a majoritarian movement. "There (is) thus no elite or other scapegoat to blame or replace. There are only ourselves to confront and change." (Page 46)

According to population statistics, the majority of the American people lived in rural areas even as late as 1910. (22) While the statistics on the farm versus non-farm labor force show non-farm occupations surpassing farm employment in the late 1870s (23), this is less relevant. The dependence of rural people on agriculture's fortunes for their own well being, whether it is the local retailer, wholesaler, or newspaper editor, makes the agricultural population much larger than the agricultural labor force. Thus, if Williams is right about the push supplied by the agricultural population (and he includes processors, politicians, and newspaper editors in this group) toward expansionism, it does represent a majority of the population between 1880 and 1910 and the idea of majoritarian imperialism is supported.

But was the groundswell of opinion marshaled by Williams in his book a majoritarian movement? For example, a large percentage of the population continued to live in the South during this period. (24) In the census years between 1870 and 1890 the South had 12.3, 16.5, and 20.0 million inhabitants, while the North Central had 12.3, 17.4, and 22.4 million respectively. If C. Vann Woodward is correct, Southern agrarians were less like the agricultural businessmen of the Midwest due to sharecropping and especially the crop-lien system which reduced even the owner of his own land to debt peonage. (25) Tenant farmers in the Midwest and plains states still maintained their businessmen's outlook despite their non-ownership of the land they worked.

This dichotomy is echoed politically in the more radical approach of Southern Alliance men and Populists. It is interesting that a Southerner who Williams constantly refers to as an expansionist was an anti-Populist Senator from Alabama, John T. Morgan. Though Tom Watson, a leading Southern Populist, is quoted often on the importance of foreign markets and the need to stand up to foreigners, the group that supported him was not caught up in the Populist move to join forces with the Bryanite Democrats neglecting their domestic reform programs. Williams notes

The choice was between a coalition with the Democrats...and a gallant gesture of determined and militant reformism. The majority of the delegates clearly favored the first alternative and the angry rhetoric of the minority has to be discounted as an indicator of its actual strength. (Page 399)

Williams considers the nomination of Watson indicative because of his interest in expansionism, but more interesting is the interpretation that Watson's nomination was a compromise with those who favored a "gallant gesture of determined and militant reformism."

The issue of a radical Southern Populism domestically oriented is one that should be investigated to round out Williams's discussion. However, leaving absolute numbers aside, the group of agricultural businessmen who were most in a position to influence metropolitan political leaders lived in the Midwest and not in the South.

"When you take the nine Republican States that begin with Ohio and end with Kansas," Blaine wrote Garfield... "you have the very heart of the Republican Party." That region, as both men very well knew, was one of the two centers of sustained and militant agitation by agricultural businessmen for overseas market expansion. They concluded that such expansion offered the best preventive therapy to keep the heart beating. (Page 245)

Here we arrive at another key issue. Granted the importance of the demands for overseas market expansion, one might suggest that this was but one element in the demands of the farm protest movement. Suppose farmers were concerned with many elements in the political economy. Some of their demands would have reduced the freedom of action of metropolitan capitalists and financiers while others were directly aimed at overseas market expansion. Instead of an integrated conception in which all the elements in their programs were related to each other the farmers might have had contradictory demands. The metropolitan leaders who emphasized market expansion and convinced enough farmers to forget their other demands were thus manipulating the majority rather than learning from them. By this argument, the key moving forces were metropolitan leaders like Blaine, Harrison, and Jeremiah Rusk who in turn influenced McKinley away from a narrow protectionist outlook to one in favor of reciprocity. (26)

Williams, on the other hand, believes that these elements were consistently integrated, that all other issues related to the need to expand and were not in contradiction to it. To support this view, he refers to purely domestic reform

approaches that were contradictory to the marketplace expansionist outlook and that were not accepted by more than a small minority.

Take the question of transportation reform. As early as 1877, President Grant asked Congress to study transportation improvements from the West and South to the Atlantic Seaboard. A Select Committee on Transportation Routes to the Seaboard, called the Windom Committee after Senator William Windom of Minnesota, was formed. (27) Williams considers the Committee's report extremely important.

The danger was great because American cereals and cotton were being challenged by Russian, Indian, and other competitors in a market that was dominated by Great Britain. There were three alternatives. The nation could await the creation of a metropolitan market large enough to absorb a steadily rising surplus. It could try to re-establish the pre-Civil War pattern of selling Northern and Western food surpluses to the South, enlarging that old domestic market by having the Southerners concentrate exclusively on cotton, tobacco, and other such crops. Or it could meet the crisis by overcoming Russian and Indian competition in the European market while simultaneously undertaking a program of market expansion in other areas of the world. (Page 164f)

The Committee chose the third over the more domestically oriented solutions. Also, its "...Report formalized the process whereby the nations that blocked or challenged America's market expansion were defined as primary threats to American prosperity and freedom." (Page 165) This definition was what prompted the desires for market expansion to follow militant expansionism implicitly accepting the use of force if needed. There was a free trade and non-imperial alternative:

A mature political economy, resting content with the apolitical advantage it enjoyed in its marketplace dealings with any underdeveloped (or primarily agricultural) system, and disciplining itself to honor Smith's central axioms, might maintain its prosperity and social health without undertaking imperial activities. (Page 236)

But:

...even the opportunity for one country to test itself against that challenge depends upon every other nation's willingness to make the same attempt. And, to an extensive degree, that caveat was used by the majority of Americans during the late 1880s and the 1890s to justify their own imperial expansion. (ibid.)

But let us consider the Report. Was this a bona fide representation of farm opinion? All we know about the make-up of the Committee from Williams is that Senator Windom played a "vital role in determining its approach and in guiding its energetic collection of evidence" (Page 151) and that the Senator "...sympathized with the needs of the farmers and processors, and understood

the power of the Grange" (ibid.) If one were arguing the manipulation tack, one could say the Windom Committee represented metropolitan representatives in rural areas striving to deflect farm opinion away from railroad regulation and other potentially anti-capitalist activities. Without more information on the make-up of the Committee we cannot be sure. However, there is one indication that the Committee was not a group of metropolitan "lackeys", and that is the rejection of the first alternative. One of the key arguments for high tariffs was that it would result in industrial growth and "a vast and ever-expanding home market" (Page 121) for agricultural businessmen. This argument was a metropolitan propagandists' argument not readily accepted by farmers because of the implied postponement of benefits. That the Committee rejected this approach indicates that they were quite in tune with farm opinion. On the other hand, one could claim that this was an obvious concession to farm opinion in view of their rejection of the domestic market promise. The issue cannot be settled without actually retracing Williams's research, and even then it is a matter of point of view.

Or take the response to the end of cheap good land and the rise of foreign owned and Eastern owned Bonanza farms. (28) Some people did turn to the radical single-tax ideas of Henry George.

His single-tax remedy (and various proposals for modifying land policy) were neither illogical nor unappealing, but they did not mesh easily and naturally with the expansionist spirit of the era. (Page 277)

The reason is clear. "Given the marketplace-expansionist conception of reality the end of one frontier implied the need for a new frontier." (ibid.)

George attracted significant (and dedicated) support for his program, but he was trying to modify a commitment to the marketplace outlook that was too deep and too intense to be shaken. The vast majority of agricultural businessmen who were affected by his blunt talk about the end of the frontier, formulated their response in terms of the new frontier of overseas market expansion. (Page 285)

An alternative view stressed intensive and diversified agriculture. However that kind of farming required more capital, thereby increasing costs, while the problem was the disappearance of cheap good land. Also had this procedure been followed it would have required even bigger markets.

The third approach included a plan to acquire capital in the form of land and a larger share of the profits as well as an argument pointing to such market expansion. The majority of the farmers settled on an integration of the demands to force aliens off the land and to balance the relationship between the metropolis and the country. (ibid.)

Notice that once again this weaved domestic reform with international expansion, lending support to Williams's view that the farmers had a unified conception of what they wanted. However, one could retort that adroit political leadership split the demands and that there was no direct linear relationship from agricultural discontent to open-door imperialism or even expansionism.

This view would emphasize the role of the political leadership of the Republican Party (29) and the Democratic Party (30) which came to accept the expansionist element in the farmers' demands and used it successfully to bypass the more reformist demands and maintain metropolitan control.

The difference between this position and Williams's position may not be very great, as indicated by Williams's own words in the accompanying interview. However, to the extent that he stresses the interrelationship of the expansion demands with other domestic reform demands, to the extent that he emphasizes the rejection of more radical proposals like the single-tax proposal, and to the extent that he emphasizes the educative effect of the agriculturalists on the metropolitan leaders, it appears that he continues to put the stress on the majoritarian nature of American Open-Door Imperialism which did not hesitate to use force even though such actions were not contemplated when the need to expand economically was first recognized. We must leave these questions up in the air. Williams has made a strong case for the view that the vast majority of the agricultural population became committed to market expansionism and were willing to use force to follow this route to prosperity and freedom.

What about the working class? This group is largely ignored in Williams's book. Even in Contours... he concentrates on the role of the official labor movement as part of the syndicalist oligarchy in formation even before World War I. He does not deal with history from the bottom up as far as the industrial sector is concerned. However, we can see the implications for understanding the acculturation of the American working class within Williams's conception of a marketplace-expansionist ideology which arose in the agricultural groups and was transformed by the metropolitan leaders of the late Nineteenth Century into an industrially-oriented imperialist vision.

In the traditional capitalist society, England for example, the industrial revolution was accompanied by severe hardships as a previously agrarian population was disciplined into the capitalist mode of production. The resistance to industrialization generated the class struggle that Engels and Marx considered perpetual. The economic aspect of that analysis has indeed remained with us, and even economists are beginning to see that the key to the economic process is the distribution of income between capital and labor. However, the antagonistic economic struggle, at first reflected in an equally antagonistic political struggle (Chartism in Britain, Blanquism in France), became more and more ideologically confined within limits that did not threaten capitalism politically. It was the recognition of the need to battle the ideological hegemony of the bourgeoisie that kept this struggle within acceptable bounds that earned Antonio Gramsci his well-deserved place as a creative innovator in the Marxian tradition.

In the United States the absorption of a pre-industrial lower class into the industrial system was a continuous process. It is true that this reproduced the "painful transition from a pre-industrial to an industrial society" at many different times in our history. However it is also true that in comparison to the English experience, a relatively lesser percentage of the American population was going through this process at anyone time. (31) Thus repression was a more successful weapon for the American ruling class when confronting

its urban opponents, while the flexibility and co-optation employed by European ruling classes was more in evidence when the American rulers confronted their agricultural critics. (32) In fact, the struggle for ideological hegemony that occurred as the ex-agrarians were becoming disciplined proletarians was never really joined in the United States. The agrarian majority in this country merited Williams's description as agricultural businessmen inasmuch as they totally accepted the promise of competitive capitalism. Therefore, overwhelming whatever anti-capitalist sentiments existed within each acculturating group of workers was a much easier task for the American ruling class than for their British counterpart. As Paul Faler puts it:

In England, Thompson found that by 1832 there were many indications of a distinctive culture: trade unions and benefit societies, newspapers, even a "working-class structure of feeling". Labor historians in the United States have yet to provide evidence of a working-class culture of the same breadth and completeness. (33)

During the Nineteenth Century, the disciplining of wave after wave of immigrant (or internal migrant) groups occurred while the majority of the population was agricultural in the extended sense used above. This majority remained wedded to the concept of competitive capitalism with its exultant promises of rewards for individual initiative. An example of the strength of this commitment occurred when Congress was considering a repeal of the general pre-emption bill so as to keep foreigners from continuing to gobble up the rest of the available land. Even though it was perfectly consistent with their anti-monopoly and anti-foreign sentiments, "A significant group of worried spokesmen from the South and West fretted that the bill would open the way for a general assault on property rights...." (Page 287)

The "making of the American working class" did not create an anti-capitalist culture which struggled but ultimately lost to the dominant bourgeois culture. The opposition to the flaws in American capitalism was transformed into its opposite by the agricultural businessmen (with some sophisticated manipulation by key metropolitan political leaders) and a chauvinistic imperial culture to which successive waves of acculturated workers could adapt emerged victorious. This is why the origins of this dominant culture remain relevant today despite the agrarian nature of those beginnings.

The comparison in working-class acculturation just described indicates different problems for organizing the American majority (which is today of the working class) than, say, the British majority. An advantage to the American Left is that the cultural opposition to capitalism has not been fossilized into, say, a British-style Labor Party or a French Communist Party. On the other hand, a severe disadvantage is that radicals have relatively lesser anti-capitalist cultural history upon which to draw in trying to convert Americans from the pernicious marketplace conception of reality which has limited the vision of the population since the early Nineteenth Century. (34) Mechanistic Marxists have continually hoped that hard times would arrive to shock Americans out of their faith in capitalism, but Williams's book should indicate that such fundamental re-thinking rarely occurs when people have alternative responses to their problems. Recently it has become fashionable for people to pass off the majority of Americans as imperialist and racist pigs

because they do choose imperialism and white-skin privilege and when they are threatened show clear signs of choosing fascism rather than socialism. The latter view has just enough credence to be dangerous. The former view should not need to be even seriously discussed at this late date.

In a much-quoted and pertinent passage, Marx wrote :

Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves but under circumstances directly encountered given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living. (35)

It was the tradition of all the dead generations, the tradition of conquering a bountiful continent, the tradition of the promise of competitive capitalism, and the tradition of steady improvement in living standards over the long run that shaped the rather lop-sided choices made by the agricultural majority in favor of expansionism rather than anti-capitalism. It is this same tradition, that finds foreign causes for domestic problems overseas, that does not even believe there is a choice beyond certain remedies here and there to make capitalism better; it is this tradition whose weight radicals must remove from "the brain of the living". To approach this task with the snarling superiority of a Weatherman is to fail before starting.

One must have empathy for a people who never really were motivated to change direction. Though there were many choices not taken, and Williams is quick to say "Nothing is inevitable until men close off their options..." (page 316), the whole tenor of his book indicates that the cards were heavily stacked by the "tradition of all the dead generations".

A changing reality creates the need for a new social consciousness, and even impels men and women toward that new image of the world. But the new vision does not come automatically. It emerges slowly and painfully from the moral and intellectual imagination of specific men and women. If it does not come, as it did not come between 1860 and 1900, then the old social consciousness is forced to be sufficient unto the need. Forced because there is no alternative, and forced because that is the only way to make it function. (page 445)

His book The Great Evasion indicates that despite many economic problems, the American citizen has been able to evade the major issues. The introduction to The Roots of the Modern American Empire opens with his most recent view: "Yesterday's not dead or gone. We're just meeting it head-on for the first time in a hundred years." (Page ix) Thus, he believes that the increasing pain that Americans have come to feel over the Empire (Vietnam, inflation, the rise of a radical opposition, and a split within the Establishment—exemplified by people like Fulbright) can be transformed into a real opposition to corporate capitalism and imperialism. He suggests (but does not say how) we have something to learn from

...those once Republican farmers who came to understand after 1898 that a different world required a different conception of the world, a different conception of freedom, and a different conception of how to realize that freedom through a different political economy. Those farmers, concentrated mainly in the Middlewestern states of Iowa, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Nebraska, and Kansas, with comrades scattered through other Northern states, began the arduous task of evolving such a new social consciousness behind the leadership of Eugene Debs. (page 445)

They attempted to present a positive picture of an alternate universe, not just in negative reaction to the ills of society but as a good in its own right. Unfortunately, the last two pages of The Roots of the Modern American Empire and the last nine pages of The Great Evasion are all Williams has left us in the way of a positive program. Yet the principle is clear and bears repeating, especially since radicals have ignored it for too long: the majority of Americans must be presented with something new to look at so their choices will no longer be circumscribed by our hundred years of imperial consciousness. In what follows I will briefly sketch some of the principles of this alternative universe as suggested or alluded to by Williams in both his published works and in his conversations and speeches.

The first point is social property.

We must begin by ceasing to limit our conception of humanity and freedom by tying it to the possession of property.... We must abandon this crutch of identity and learn to walk on our own. The point is not that we must abandon our possessions, but rather that we must re-define the possessions as incidental to our functioning as humans, instead of as crucial to our existence as humans. (36)

This does not mean state capitalism or "market socialism" but a new and democratically organized political economy. Williams approaches the problem of democratic socialism by pointing out the potentials of cybernated production and explaining the dangers inherent in capitalist cybernation. (37) Note that he does not ignore the negative aspects of capitalism in attempting to reach people but uses them to introduce alternatives. From cybernated production as an escape from economic necessity he then proceeds to suggest how such a nation might be democratically run. On the last pages of The Roots of the Modern American Empire he confronts this problem.

Radicals confront many extremely difficult questions. The central one concerns a different conception of freedom. It is very easy, in dealing with that problem, to change the language of the marketplace conception of freedom yet retain most of its limiting substance. "Doing one's own thing", after all, is not so very different from doing what Adam Smith advised.... Doing our own thing exposes one to similar dangers unless our is defined very carefully, and unless our decisions about the things are made and acted upon very carefully defined processes.

The definition must be inclusive, for otherwise we posit ourselves as an elite dispensing our brand of freedom to the rest of society in some kind of an enforced mass feeding.

Yet it must not be inclusive in a literal, operational sense. No meaningful conception of freedom can survive in a mass democracy, for we have learned the painful way that mass democracy becomes very little democracy.

Hence it is essential for radicals to devise workable plans and procedures for decentralization that will enable all of us to realize a richer and more creative conception of freedom. (Page 451f)

Decentralization as the way to make social property a democratic reality is the key Williams message. It has echoes in the far right, in the original New Left, and in the demands of Black and Third World communities for self-determination. Indeed, the negative aspects of our over-centralized corporate (liberal) capitalism are readily apparent to most Americans. The point is for us to indicate how the alternative that will solve the problems can and will work.

On the two pillars of decentralization and social property, the Movement must consistently try to erect locally appropriate models of local alternatives, state alternatives, and finally a national alternative. This process must include the struggle for short-term reformist changes that seek to establish (a) the limitation of the freedom of action of corporate enterprise and/or big government and (b) the increase in power to local communities and democratic diffusion of power within those communities. Radicals have been turned off to reformism mostly because reforms in the United States have strengthened the hegemony of the ruling class via centralization and rationalized capitalism to give it more staying power. However, there are potential reforms that actually do fulfill the two criteria just listed. From Fulbright's foreign policy to Nadar's consumerism, there are elements that circumscribe American corporate imperialism. It is the job of radicals to emphasize these elements and not permit the Establishment to co-opt reform movements.

An example of an anti-capitalist reform might be the institutionalization of an "ecology tax" on corporate entities responsible for pollution of all kinds, a tax that cannot be passed on to the consumer. Union demands for control over the workplace, such as the recent educational reform demands of the Teaching Assistants' Association at the University of Wisconsin, are objectively anti-capitalist whatever the intentions of the membership.

Williams's politics flow out of his historical understanding in his recognition that there are non-metropolitan regions of this country, not agricultural as in the Nineteenth Century, but non-metropolitan in the sense of not being centers of power. He believes a patient approach without arrogance will be the only way to break off segments of the coalition that permits the ruling class to remain in power. His politics also flows from his view of history.

...it is illuminating, and productive of humility as well, to watch other men make their decisions, and to consider the consequences of their values and methods. If the issues are similar, then the experience is more directly valuable. But in either case the procedure can transform history as a way of learning into a way of breaking the chains of the past. For by watching other men confront the disparity between existing patterns of thought and a reality to which they are no longer relevant, the outsider may be encouraged to muster his own moral and intellectual courage and discipline and undertake a similar re-examination and re-evaluation of his own outlook.... History offers no answers per se, it only offers a way of encouraging men to use their minds to make their own history. (38)

Thus he, like the late economist Paul A. Baran, believes in the power of reason. Perhaps this is where he is flawed as a political activist. As a historian he recognizes how reality keeps impinging on the existing idea, but as a radical he continues to believe that reason will convince people to act. Though there may be a contradiction here, it is at least worthwhile to mention that since the era of Debsian socialism American radicals have rarely sustained a reasoned approach to the vast majority of the population. This is certainly the case in the post-1960 white movement.

For radicals, a most striking lesson from Williams's history is how complex and intellectual were the reasoning processes of the ruling class decision makers. Far from being money-grubbing economic men, the members of the ruling class who achieved a broad outlook carefully weighed the multi-faceted reality that confronted them and reasoned out a response. This is important to understand in order to destroy myths of history inculcated by old-fashioned American radicalism. However, it is even more important for us to understand that the ruling class today goes through the same processes with infinitely more talent at their disposal. This is not mentioned to indicate the invincibility of the ruling class but to remind radicals that we must take account of our adversaries.

For myself, Williams's history has been a great myth-destroyer. Brought up intellectually on Old Left historiography, I was searching for the "economic interpretation" of every historical event, hoping for the next depression, et cetera, and Williams's Contours... sounded vaguely correct in emphasis on economic reality. But in retrospect I didn't understand it at all. As I have come back to Williams again and again, I feel that the major influence he has had has been the sweeping away of mechanistic Marxian cobwebs. At the same time, his appreciation of Marx as a social critic has opened the door to what is generally called today "creative Marxism". Basically the essence of this approach is to never stop thinking and questioning.

For honest liberals who loved FDR and supported the Korean War, but who began to become uneasy in the mid-1950s and then panicked in the mid-1960s, Williams should be a useful line to sanity and (hopefully) radicalism. Once again, his work (and here I refer more to Contours... and Tragedy...) should sweep away many myths about the New Deal and the Cold War, and the re-thinking that follows should lead to "creative Marxism", though the reader would not likely call it that.

Finally, those Americans, generally considered right-wing, who have reacted negatively to the centralization of post-New Deal America, should find ample prodding to make the perfectly logical Old Right - New Left shift of Karl Hess. (39) For intertwined with the commitment to competitive capitalism and with the negative expansionism that has been nothing but anti-communism since 1945, has been

...a loyalty to an ideal of humanity which defines man as more than a creature of property; which defines him as a man by reason of his individual fidelity to one of several humane standards of conduct and by his association with other men in a community honoring those codes. (40)

This kind of humanity provides the basis for the rebellion against the over-centralization of government and "...the functional and syndicalist fragmentation of American society...along technological and economic lines." (41) If radicals do not present these people with a meaningful alternative, the manipulative demagoguery of George Wallace may signal the advent of "fascism, American style".

Though one might wish to argue that groups of people move and act because of structural factors and not because of their individual reasoning processes, Williams's appeal to reason should at least be taken up by radicals. The ruling class has continually brought the full quota of its brain power (and all it could hire) to bear in keeping itself in power. Can we as radicals do less in trying to remove them?

NOTES

(1) The Contours of American History (New York, World Publishing Company, 1961), Page 21.

(2) Note this is the same implicit view that probably turned him away from an exposition of the "laws of motion" of Monopoly Capitalism, the establishment of which he most certainly did predict. I am indebted to Martin Sklar for the ideas behind this paragraph—though my interpretation of it should absolve him of responsibility.

(3) See Contours..., Pages 75-225. See also "The Age of Mercantilism, An Interpretation of the American Political Economy, 1763-1828", William and Mary Quarterly, 1958.

(4) Quoted in The Roots of the Modern American Empire, Page 60. See Pages 60-63 for much of the theoretical background and quotations from Smith. All parenthetical page references after quotations will refer to this work. All page references without work references will likewise refer to this work.

(5) See M. Boserup, "Agrarian Structure and Take-Off", The Economics of Take-Off into Sustained Growth, edited by W. W. Rostow (New York, St. Martin's Press, 1965), especially Page 202. See also Mellor and Johnston, "The Role of

Agriculture in Economic Development", American Economic Review (1961), especially Pages 571-581.

(6) See North, The Economic Growth of the United States, 1790-1860 (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, Prentice-Hall, 1961), especially Chapter 7.

(7) See Page 222 for example.

(8) See North, Growth and Welfare in the American Past (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, Prentice-Hall, 1966), Chapter 10. One key weak reed that critics have concentrated on is the supposed worsening of the price ratio between agricultural and industrial products (in economists' words "deteriorating terms of trade") as the major mechanism for the transfer of agricultural earnings to the industrial sector. In fact, absentee ownership by railroads, speculators, et cetera, the middleman's profit, and high interest rates which were keenly felt as prices fell were much more significant.

(9) "Throughout all our earlier history, his had been the dominant voice in politics and in an essentially rural society. Now, he was being dispossessed by the growing industrial might of America and its rapid urbanization. The farmer keenly felt his deteriorating status." North, *op. cit.*, Page 145.

(10) See John D. Hicks, The Populist Revolt (Lincoln, Nebraska, A Bison Book, 1961), Pages 31-35 for a description of one such short-run problem in one region which was fertile ground for agricultural rebellion.

(11) He only brings in facts as they relate to farmers' own conception of their times. Thus, their complaint about "stagnation" in the period after the Civil War is immediately buttressed by reference to business-cycle history. (See Page 113f.)

(12) M. Abramovitz, "Long Swings in American Economic Growth", in Ralph Andreano (editor), New Views on American Economic Development (Cambridge Massachusetts, Schenkman Publishing Company, 1965), Page 403. Peak: 1864.25, 1881, 1889.75, 1899. Trough: 1874.25, 1886.5, 1892.25. (The decimal places refer to the quarter of the year in which the peak or trough occurred.)

(13) *Ibid.*, Page 394.

(14) *Ibid.*, Page 395.

(15) See G. Soule, Prosperity Decade (New York, Rinehart and Company, 1947) Chapter 11.

(16) See Page 280 for a list of territorial governors and their home states on appointment.

(17) See Pages 60-63.

- (18) See Pages 132-171. "Given the absolutely essential role of an open and equitable marketplace in the theory and practice of laissez faire, they (the Populists) concluded that the only way to guarantee the cornerstone of the system was by taking it out of the hand of any entrepreneur." Contours..., Page 337.
- (19) See also Page 306f.
- (20) See Hicks, Chapter 7.
- (21) Robinson and Gallagher, "The Imperialism of Free Trade", Economic History Review (1953), Page 5.
- (22) Historical Statistics of the United States Colonial Times to 1957, Page 9.
- (23) Ibid., Page 72.
- (24) Ibid., Pages 11-13.
- (25) See Woodward, Origins of the New South (Baton Rouge, Louisiana Paperbacks, 1951), Chapters 7, 8, and 9.
- (26) See Pages 245-248.
- (27) See Page 51.
- (28) See Chapter 10.
- (29) See Pages 245-249; the Republican leadership was "in tune" as early as 1881 though Garfield's assassination slowed things down.
- (30) They only really began to move in 1894.
- (31) See Paul Faler, "Working Class Historiography", Radical America, Volume 3, Number 2, 1969, Pages 56-68. This article compares the work of Gutman (from whom the above phrase is quoted on Page 66) with Thompson's The Making of the English Working Class, and stresses the recurrence of violence and the parallels to the disciplining process of many immigrant groups and migrants from rural areas. He does not mention the smallness of the percentage so affected at any given time.
- (32) See Brumbach and associates, "Literature on Working Class Culture", in Radical America, same issue, Pages 32-55, especially Page 43.
- (33) Faler, op. cit., Page 63. Eugene Genovese has argued that the Southern Slavocracy was such an anti-capitalist element (see his essay in Towards a New Past). Perhaps this is true of the political leadership of the South and in the South Atlantic states, but in the New South Morton Rothstein's recent research indicates a mentality more in tune with Williams's agricultural

businessmen. See Rothstein, "The South as a Dual Economy", in Agricultural History (1967), "Sugar and Secession: A New York Firm in Ante-Bellum Louisiana", in Explorations in Entrepreneurial History, Second Series, 1968. It is true that German-American socialists set up such a structure of anti-capitalist culture, but "...immigrant subcultures in American cities were both a major source of socialist sentiment and a serious obstacle to unification of the labor movement in the first two decades of the Twentieth Century." Brumbach and associates, Page 42 f. Thus the dominant culture was confronted by at best a group of non-integrated immigrant subcultures.

(34) See Studies on the Left, Number 8 (March - April 1967), Pages 3-12.

(35) Marx, The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte (New York, International Publishers, 1963), Page 15.

(36) The Great Evasion (Chicago, Quadrangle Books, 1964), Page 174.

(37) See ibid., Pages 91-98 and 173-176.

(38) Contours..., Page 479 f.

(39) See "An Open Letter to Barry Goldwater", Ramparts, September 1969.

(40) Contours..., Page 480.

(41) Ibid.

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COMMENT

by James P. O'Brien

The postwar American Left has had two really towering intellectual figures. C. Wright Mills, tragically, died almost a decade ago, but William A. Williams is still writing vigorously. His latest book, The Roots of the Modern American Empire, is in some ways his best. What Williams has done in this book is to add a wholly new dimension to the common understanding of the nature of agricultural unrest in the late nineteenth century. He shows that farm spokesmen were keenly aware that overseas markets for American farm products were a way to increase the farmers' income, and that many of these spokesmen were insistent in calling for governmental action to maintain and expand these overseas markets. Taking this analysis one step — a very dubious step — further, Williams asserts that when the U.S. embarked on an expansionist foreign policy at the end of the 1890s "It was their (the farmers') policy in the deepest sense of being a manifestation of the social consciousness they had developed and molded."

Leaving aside this particular question for the moment, it is clear that The Roots of the Modern American Empire makes necessary a rethinking of American political history between the Civil War and the start of the Twentieth Century. To see why this is so requires a detailed reading of the book itself. On one level, William's overall arguments can be easily grasped by reading his "Survey of the Territory" on Pages 5-46; on another level, the whole work has to be read through at least once (and probably twice to catch all the nuances of his arguments). As with earlier books by Williams, this is a pioneering work designed to open up questions to which historians have generally paid little heed. The idea that economic expansion has been a pervasive feature of Twentieth Century American history, developed very ably by Williams in The Tragedy of American Diplomacy and other writings, has been evaded by most American historians. In the standard view, "American imperialism" was simply a curious episode occurring in the McKinley and Theodore Roosevelt administrations. Similarly, historians of the late Nineteenth Century have almost entirely neglected the issues which Williams has now brought to light in his latest work.

Because Williams has, for the first time, delved deeply into the social thought of a large sector of the American population rather than focusing on ruling class ideologies, The Roots of the Modern American Empire should be harder than any of his other books for historians to ignore. At the same time, the protracted Vietnam war is a background factor that makes more believable than ever Williams's insistence that American history has to be understood in a world context. Finally, the emergence of increasing numbers of left-liberal and radical young historians, who sense at least dimly their immense debt to Williams, guarantees that his new book will be a topic of intense discussion in historical circles whether the Oscar Handlins read it or not.

In reaching an evaluation of The Roots, two methodological criticisms are

especially pertinent. First, Williams relies too heavily on stray quotations from farm spokesmen to prove his points, quotations that can too easily be manipulated. Of course, taken by itself this criticism can be formalistic and therefore meaningless. For example, Williams's earlier book Contours of American History (1961) is studded with assertions which seem to the impatient reader to be backed by nothing more than one or two illustrative quotations; it is an enlightening experience to re-read Contours today and see how many of these seemingly offhand judgments have been confirmed by subsequent scholarship. Still, in his discussion of the Farmers Alliance and Populist movements of the 1890s in his present book, Williams does appear to have used his quotations as a substitute for other evidence rather than as a means of making his points clear. An example of this is in his passage describing the Ocala Platform of 1890, a key document in articulating the farmers' grievances of the following decade. Williams does not directly confront the problem that the document does not mention farm exports. Instead, he quotes a speaker at the Ocala convention who mentioned this subject. Similarly, Williams's quotations from farm-state Congressmen and Senators during this period would be much more convincing if he coupled them with statistical analyses of the way that farm-state representatives voted on important roll calls. Dan Pope has argued, in a review of this book in Liberation, that Williams seriously understates the importance of domestic-oriented reform sentiment in the farmers' movement. It is, at the very least, a question that deserves much more investigation, and that is not resolvable on the basis of rival sets of quotations.

A second methodological criticism, one which (as Mike Meeropol notes in his essay) is less applicable to this book than to earlier works by Williams, is a tendency to de-emphasize economic history in favor of the history of social consciousness. The problem in this book is not that Williams has failed to blend the two together in his discussion of the farmers' movement — Williams has done this very well, and thus provides a refreshing contrast to historians who have treated imperialist ideology solely in terms of a few intellectuals — but rather that he has dealt in this manner only with the agricultural sector of the political economy. During the period covered by this book American manufacturing expanded to the point where the U.S. was the world's leading industrial nation. Yet the urban-oriented "metropolitan leaders" whom Williams discusses in this book, and who appear to have had effective decision-making power in the U.S., are dealt with in a vacuum. Reading The Roots, one is left wondering why these leaders seem to have resisted for so long the farmers' demands for an expansionist foreign policy and why they turned to Open Door imperialism only at the end of the century. Since, as Williams notes, the decision finally to embrace an imperialist policy was made for immediate reasons that had to do with expanding the market for manufactured goods rather than foodstuffs, the development of American industry was perhaps the crucial factor in determining the changing responses of Williams's "metropolitan leaders".

If it is true that, on the one hand, Williams has partially distorted the nature of the farm protest movement by exaggerating its focus on overseas markets and, on the other hand, he has paid too little attention to the industrial sector of the political economy, then the result is ironic. For Williams's earlier

books have tended to slight the role of "the masses" in history by focusing almost exclusively on the views of men close to the centers of power. Now in this book he has gone out of his way to assert a diametrically opposite view of the historical process. He has attributed to the "agricultural majority" of the population the origination of modern American imperialism. He would have been much more consistent with his previous books, and in my view much more convincing, if he had asserted a more limited conclusion. What he has really shown in this book is that economics and ideology, as they interacted in the agricultural sector, provided support for the adoption of an imperialist policy. The most basic explanation for Twentieth Century American imperialism lies in the development of a strong industrial sector with goods and capital to export. Approximately this same expansionist drive appears to have developed in all the advanced capitalist countries, despite immense variations among them in the kind of agriculture they have had. The fact that agricultural expansion (primarily within the continental U.S.) has been such a salient feature of American history does not negate the fact that American imperialism is part of this general pattern.

Meeropol, whose essay discusses Williams's book in much more depth than does this one — and who, to be sure, emerges much less skeptical of Williams's basic contention than am I — concludes with a long and extremely useful discussion of the political relevance of Williams's book, starting with a note on the acculturation of the American working class. Industrial workers in the U.S. have entered a culture in which the desirability of the worldwide expansion of what Williams calls "marketplace freedoms" is a basic assumption. Thus, according to Williams and Meeropol, the Left has to learn to appreciate the way in which most of our fellow Americans are locked into this assumption, and must develop and demonstrate alternative ways of meeting present-day social problems. They suggest hopefully that the protest movement against the Vietnam War is a sign that more Americans than ever before are ready to consider such alternatives.

My only quarrel with this point is a qualification that has to do with the changing nature of the American Left. As recently as four or five years ago, we could say that virtually everyone in the U.S. with a radical viewpoint was part of a broad (though relatively small) "radical movement", but we can no longer do so. The primary road to radicalism for the past several years has been the alienation of young people (and by this I do not mean people such as Meeropol and myself who are in their late twenties). This alienation proceeds apace in thousands of cities and towns across the country, while the organized Left groups represent a smaller proportion than ever before of the Americans who consider themselves revolutionaries. Williams's main audience, however, is composed primarily of radical professors and graduate students (and hopefully a number of liberal graduate students as well). Those of us who are part of this audience are increasingly isolated from the young undergraduates, high school students, and nonstudents who occupy center stage at this time in the American Left.

To say this is not in any way to deny the relevance and importance of radical scholarship — quite the opposite. Radicalization is taking place in the U.S. in an intellectual vacuum, in the sense that the new radicals are not heirs to a thoroughgoing critique of American society. This is in part the reason why the

speed of radicalization has taken nearly everyone by surprise (since so few people realized the society's immense contradictions); and it is also a reason for the frequent lack of a real intellectual basis for the instinctive revolutionary feelings of so many young people. Present-day radicalism is not, as many people have claimed, nihilistic, but there is a point at which empirical feelings of oppression and the ready identification of the oppressor are not a sufficient guide to action. The responsibility of radical intellectuals in the U.S. today is to develop a rigorous understanding of the way the society works and how it got that way. The books, articles, and pamphlets that are written in this quest will have no guaranteed influence — because of the present gulf between most radical intellectuals and most young radicals — but they must still be written. It may be hard to assess the influence of a William A. Williams; but what is clear is that he is engaged, with immense skill, imagination, and patience, in doing what has to be done.



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Reply: A Reading of Marx, II

by ANDREW LEVINE

EDITORS' NOTE: RA Vol. III, No. 5 with the first segment of this debate is available for 75 cents.

What follows is a continuation of an earlier, entirely expository article on the Marxism of Louis Althusser, and indirectly also a "reply" to the criticism of Althusser's position that accompanied that exposition. (1) It is my conviction here, as in the earlier article, that the work of Althusser and his colleagues—until this spring practically unknown and virtually inaccessible to the American left—is of enormous theoretical and practical importance for our movement. But for its importance to be realized, Althusser's position must first be understood. Thus this article, like its predecessor, has as its principal aim the preliminary task of "introducing" Althusser: of sketching the general character of his thought and suggesting its relation to other tendencies in Marxism. That a second article is necessary is occasioned not only by the inadequacies of the first article, and the criticisms it elicited, but also by the circumstances in which that earlier discussion took place. The first article appeared at a time when Althusser's work was still unavailable in English, and when, in consequence, whatever interest a discussion of his views might arouse could not be sustained. Now, fortunately, an excellent translation of Pour Marx has appeared (For Marx, Allen Lane and the Penguin Press, 1969), and publication of the two volumes of Lire le Capital is scheduled for the summer (by New Left Books). Thus it is possible and even likely that interest in Althusser's work will finally develop in America. And so the time is propitious to continue the discussion begun prematurely last autumn.

◆ READING ALTHUSSER: THE "POLEMICAL SHELL"

It is not easy to read Althusser. He writes, first of all, as a philosopher in a philosophical tradition foreign to an American audience that is, in any case, just becoming accustomed to sophisticated theoretical-political discourse. (2) But the principal difficulty in understanding Althusser, if the discussion of my first article is any indication, is of a different order. It is instructive to recall Althusser's own prefatory warning in the English edition of For Marx:

These essays were conceived, written, and published by a Communist philosopher in a particular ideological and theoretical conjuncture.... They are philosophical essays, the first stages of a long-term investigation...(concerning) the specific nature of the principles of the science and philosophy founded by Marx. However, these philosophical essays do not derive from a merely erudite or

speculative investigation. They are simultaneously interventions in a definite conjuncture. (For Marx, Page 9)

This "definite conjuncture" is of course the political situation in France in the early and middle 1960s, and particularly the situation within the French Communist party and consequently within the international Communist movement. To be sure, Althusser's work does not deal directly with the explicitly political elements of this conjuncture—the struggle between orthodox, Leninist currents and "reformist" and "revisionist" tendencies within the European Communist parties, and, of course, also the Sino-Soviet split. Rather, Althusser's work deals "with the ideological and theoretical problems present in this conjuncture and produced by it". For Althusser to be understood rightly, the political aspect of his theoretical contribution must be taken into account. Otherwise, it will be impossible to ascertain precisely what is the content and scope of his writings.

However, contrary to what was suggested repeatedly, particularly by Piconne and Calvert, the fact that Althusser writes as a Communist intellectual does not in itself seem to matter significantly. (3) In fact the chief omissions in Althusser's writings lie precisely in those areas in which membership in a pro-Russian Communist party might be expected to limit the value of theoretical investigation: in questions of political organization and revolutionary strategy. Of this "gap", Althusser is himself quite conscious, as the preface to the English edition of For Marx shows:

...I did not enter into the question of the union of theory and practice within political practice. Let us be precise: I did not examine the general form of the historical existence of this union: the "fusion" of Marxist theory and the workers' movement. I did not examine the concrete forms of existence of this "fusion" (organization of the class struggle—trade unions, parties—the means and method of direction of the class struggle by these organizations, et cetera). I did not give precise indications as to the function, place, and role of Marxist theory in these concrete forms of existence: where and how Marxist theory intervenes in the development of political practice, where and how political practice intervenes in the development of Marxist theory. (For Marx, Page 15)

It is this gap that, Althusser acknowledges, encourages "theoreticist" interpretations of this work; that gives rise, in other words, to the view that Althusser dissociates theory from practice in favor of a pure, theoretical vision of the world. The burden of this present article will be to begin to show not only that this theoreticist "reading" is entirely without foundation, but also that, on the contrary, the relation between theory and practice implicit in Althusser's thought is the only relation possible for a revolutionary movement. For the moment, however, it is enough to reflect on the consequences of Althusser's failure to face "the question of the union of theory and practice in political practice". For it is precisely by virtue of this omission that the theoretical and practical limitations that might be expected to follow from Althusser's political commitments are avoided. Indeed, it will be suggested below that, implicit in Althusser's theoretical

position, these political limitations are actually transcended. (4)

What must be taken into account, then, is not the fact that Althusser is a militant in the French Communist party, so much as the manner in which political and theoretical problems arose for a Communist philosopher in France in the 1960s. While it is plainly beyond the limits of a brief essay to sketch even in rough detail the contents of this "conjuncture", something of its mood should be noted. Suffice it to say that French political thinking has succeeded in forging a union between philosophical discourse and political practice to a far greater extent than has so far been achieved in America. This aspect of French thought gives, particularly to Marxist philosophy, a polemical tone that, if not "situated", can easily produce distortions and misunderstandings. Thus Althusser's celebrated "anti-humanism", his insistence on an "epistemological break" (coupure épistémologique) between the early Marx and Capital, his strictures against "historicism"—though the results of a developed theoretical position genuinely at odds with other tendencies in Marxism—serve politically to draw "lines of demarcation" between Althusser's "reading" of Marx (and Lenin) and tendencies foreign to that reading.

In this theoretical-political struggle, Althusser emerges as a philosophical defender of Leninism, not only against "revisionist" and "dogmatic" tendencies on the right, but also against neo-Hegelian, "spontaneous" currents on the left. This debate is of course a perennial one in the history of socialism, and is of the greatest importance. What must be stressed, however, is how, for Althusser, the debate is conducted on the level of theory. That this "theoretical" formulation is not only licit, but even necessary, will be argued below. What must be stressed here is how a long-term theoretical and practical labor will be able to explicate precisely the relation of this theoretical position to the political level on which the debate between "revisionism" and Leninism, and, more important between Leninism and "leftism", is generally conducted. It is clear, at the very least, that the connection is not the mechanical one tacitly supposed by Glaberman, Tomich, Calvert, and Piccone; that "theoretical" Leninism does not necessarily entail a commitment to a bolshevist model of political organization and program, and may, at least for circumstances pertaining in the United States, entail, or at least be compatible with, models of organization and political strategies traditionally considered "leftist". Leninism (in Althusser's sense) is more a method than a science; exactly as it is sometimes claimed (for example by Lukacs) that Marxism is only a method and not a science. The rejection of this latter view is one way of characterizing Althusser's theoretical contribution. Paradoxically, its acceptance may well entail the parallel view about Lenin. Perhaps the principal benefit of a developing interest in Althusser will be a revolutionary strategy developed, in part, through the closing of the "gap" in virtue of which Althusser's thought is so important theoretically, and, paradoxically again, also in its practical implications. In any case, this question cannot even be approached properly until the theoretical content of Leninism (in Althusser's sense) is set forth clearly. And to do so, we must be careful to extract the "rational kernel" of his thought from the specifically French and Communist "polemical shell" in which it is cast.

That Althusser's work has this polemical aspect is hardly a reproach. For all theoretical analysis is essentially polemical. Even Capital itself is,

from a certain point of view, a theoretical polemic directed against bourgeois political economy. If blame is to be attributed for the superficiality of so much of the discussion on Althusser's work, it is surely on those who focus exclusively on its polemical aspect, ignoring or obscuring its theoretical substance. Of the articles that accompanied my earlier exposition, only one, "The Peculiarities of Structuralism", by Dale Tomich, seems to me to have attempted to go beneath the polemical shell in an effort to clarify what Althusser's position is and what it is against. The problem Tomich's argument raises is the problem of consciousness and its relation to theoretical and political practice. Since this problem--a genuine theoretical problem--affords a convenient point of entry into Althusser's thoughts, I should like to use it as the basis for organizing the remainder of my remarks. Of course, in its full generality, the problem of consciousness intrudes upon the entirety of Althusser's reading of Marx, including emphatically his "omissions". Since my aim here is hardly to complete Althusser's program, but simply to exposit his views, I shall not even attempt a general treatment of the problem of consciousness from an Althusserian perspective. Rather, I will deal with the problem of consciousness only insofar as it figures in the one area where Althusser does discuss the union of theory and practice--within the level of "theoretical practice". This partial treatment will nevertheless constitute an "answer" to the principal charge of Tomich's criticism: that Althusser's treatment of consciousness has disastrous consequences for Marxist theory, or, more precisely, for Marxist history. For within the limits of what will remain essentially an exposition, I will attempt to describe and justify the Althusserian view. (5)

It will be seen that Althusser's treatment of "consciousness" in theoretical practice (Althusser does not deal with the writing of history per se, and so neither shall I) relates directly to his account of ideology and its relation to scientific discourse, and indirectly to the whole of Althusser's expressed thought. My account will therefore cover much the same ground as my earlier article; but with the difference that my aim here is not so much to provide a general overview of Althusser's thought, as to discuss his treatment of a specific problem. But first a preliminary remark is in order on how Althusser's "reading" of Marx is to be understood and evaluated. What prompts this remark is a charge raised in the piece by Martin Glaberman, "Lenin Versus Althusser"; but the confusion that underlies this charge is a very general one, and is best treated apart from the specifics of Glaberman's argument.

◆ ALTHUSSER'S MARXISM

In the introduction to the first volume of Lire le Capital, Althusser presents a remarkable analysis of what it means to read a text. Reading is, first of all, always an active relation between the reader and the text. One does not passively imbibe the thought of an author. For the text is just a "symptom" of the author's thought; and often what matters is as much the absence of concepts and problems in a text as their presence. Thus following an analogy with psychoanalysis, Althusser calls for a consciously "symptomatic" reading (une lecture symptomale), in which the reader's relation to the text is

analogous to the psychoanalyst's relation to the utterances of a patient, and expressly rejects the literal or dogmatic approach to a text in which attention is confined strictly to what is present and not equally to what is significantly absent, or, in other words, to what is not fully conscious and explicit. (6) In Althusser's view, a symptomatic reading is particularly crucial in reading *Capital*. For in *Capital*, Althusser argues, Marx founded a new science and a new philosophy of whose principles and methods he was not always fully conscious. Marx introduced this entirely new genre of thought in a vocabulary borrowed from sources, particularly Hegel and Feuerbach, with which it has, in Althusser's account, literally "no rapport". For the shift from the Hegelian to the Marxian dialectic is represented as a shift in "problematic" (problematique); a shift from one conceptual scheme in which problems are formulated and generated to another. More precisely, in his mature works, Marx is held to have broken fundamentally with a pre-scientific philosophy of history and to have founded in its stead a science of successive modes of production and of the relation of these modes of production to the social totality. In other words, Marx opened up the historical "object" for scientific investigation. And the result is held to be radically incomparable with its pre-scientific predecessor. (7) To read *Capital* is thus to read "the epistemological break" in virtue of which Marx founded a science of history.

Inevitably, such a reading of Marx will simultaneously be a reading into Marx; and what is read in will have origins frequently extraneous to the texts themselves. And indeed Althusser's debt is certainly as great to psychoanalysis and linguistics--understood as instances of a certain (structuralist) genre of scientific discourse--as to a literal or dogmatic reading of Marx. And in such a program there is of course always the possibility of "subjectivist" intrusions: of reading into Marx what is not in Marx at all, but what is just "one's own philosophy". Thus it is argued, for example by Glaberman, that under the guise of defending Leninist orthodoxy, Althusser in fact transgresses both Marx and Lenin in favor of what is just a "positive" philosophy of science. (8) Against this line of criticism, the following commentary is in order.

First, if reading really is as Althusser describes, no reading can be "literal" in the strict sense. Reading is always an active "exchange" between the reader and the text. A dogmatic reading is necessarily a false reading in which the reader's contribution, necessarily present, is, because not consciously acknowledged, likely to intrude in entirely unpredictable ways. A dogmatic reading is an ideological reading in which the reader is "falsely conscious" of his absence. Moreover, a dogmatic reading is ideological in a special sense: it has obvious affinities with the religious mode of thought that finds in the text *The Great Open Book* in which all Truth is revealed. In this regard Althusser's position is exactly that of the great Hegelian Marxists, his philosophical opponents, but simultaneously his allies in the struggle against dogmatism. One is not a Marxist the way one is a Christian; ultimately, the question is not who is more faithful to what Marx said, but who is right.

Of course, for Althusser, there is the conviction that what Marx did say (and what is implicit in what he did say) is right; in other words, that "reality is Marxist". But this conviction is a theoretical and political one, and not an article of faith. Marx is important, in Althusser's view, principally for having founded a new science and a new philosophy: a science whose "object"--the

capitalist mode of production and, by extension, the succession of modes of production from barbarism to a classless society--must be known if the proletariat is to succeed in its struggle against capitalism and for socialism; and a philosophy that gives general expression to this movement. (9) Marx is important, in other words, for having founded a science; for having broken "epistemologically" with a pre-scientific philosophy of history. We have already seen how the evidence for an epistemological break (coupure epistemologique) is not to be found exclusively in a literal reading of the text. Nevertheless, this thesis has strong textual support, and, contrary to what Glaberman suggests, is corroborated by the best Marxist scholarship. (10) However, Althusser's account of an epistemological break is not exclusively a textual thesis and is not to be settled, one way or another, exclusively by textual arguments.

It will be well to note some of the other elements that figure in this reading. There is first of all that formidable tradition in French history and philosophy of science, alluded to briefly above (Note 7). There is also the influence of French "structuralism" and its scientific achievements, particularly in linguistics and psychoanalysis. And above all, there are Althusser's very sensitive reflections on the practice of revolutionary Marxists--especially Lenin and Mao Tse-tung. We shall see below that these reflections are of particular importance in Althusser's reading, and constitute the real substance of his Leninism. Still, there are influences upon Althusser's reading that are extraneous to the Marxist tradition. This is just as might be expected, once the program of a symptomatic reading is consciously articulated and put into effect. There is nothing illicit or disingenuous in such a program, except from a dogmatic point of view. The results of such a reading may be inadequate or even fundamentally wrong, but this has to be shown: it is beside the point to argue whether or not it is "Marxist".

Thus to argue, as Glaberman does, that Althusser's reading is "non-Marxist and non-Leninist" because "positivist", is not really to evaluate his position so much as to pose the question of its evaluation in a tendentious and misleading way. This is especially so when "positivism" is not defined, except in contrast to the Hegelian dialectic with which, if Althusser is right, the Marxian dialectic has no rapport. (11) One remains fixated on the polemical shell so long as one argues solely over the propriety of applying various honorific or opprobrious terms to a theoretical position. The point is to discuss what Althusser's contribution is, and whether it is right; not whether it can be described in one way or another. (12)

◆ PRAXIS VERSUS PRACTICES

Implicit in the notion of an "epistemological break" dividing Marx's early writings from *Capital* is a rejection of the view of the union of theory and practice proposed in the early writings, and revived in one or another form by later-day Hegelian Marxists. To be precise, what Althusser rejects is the notion of "praxis", of an essential unity of which human society and human history are "expressions". For the early Marx, this essential unity is located in the human subject, or, more precisely, in the proletariat as the historical form in which the essentially human subject of history is presented.

This view is evident in Marx's writings at least through The German

Ideology (1846) and is discussed explicitly in the Introduction to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right (1843). It will be well to recall the main features of Marx's argument. The goal of the Hegelian Philosophy of Right, Marx argues, is Freedom--depicted in its "idealist" form as the overcoming of the alienated consciousness in Absolute Knowledge. But from a "materialist" point of view, the point of view of Feuerbach most notably, consciousness is just an aspect of man's struggle with nature to produce the conditions of his emancipation. Human activity is essentially productive activity, and the production of consciousness is just an aspect of production in general. Hence, the argument runs, the condition for overcoming spiritual alienation, for attaining the idealist form of freedom in Absolute Knowledge, is just the overcoming of real social alienation through revolution. And the German proletariat, the revolutionary agent, thus completes the task begun, although imperfectly envisioned, by classical German philosophy. The proletariat, through its praxis, recreates the original human unity; in making a proletarian revolution, it abolishes itself as a class, thereby ending class society. It establishes Freedom, real material freedom, and therefore also (one might say incidentally) the spiritual freedom described by Hegel. The proletariat "realizes" the Hegelian program by fulfilling its mission. In Marx's stirring image, the arm of criticism passes into the criticism of arms; theoretical activity merges into revolutionary praxis.

For Althusser, this account of the unity of theory and practice as revolutionary praxis is a result of a pre-scientific, specifically "ideological" conception of society and history derived from the Hegelian philosophy of history, superseded and radically reconstituted in virtue of the epistemological break. Like Hegel and the early Marx, Capital too presents a unified and coherent account of society and history. Historical materialism is a "totalizing" science. But unlike its pre-scientific predecessors the conception of totality (social and historical) in Marx's mature writings is one "in which unity, far from being the expressive or spiritual unity of Leibniz and Hegel, is constituted by a certain type of complexity; it is a structured unity...formed of what is to be regarded as levels or elements of a relatively autonomous sort" (Lire le Capital, Volume 2, Page 37). The whole is a complex, structured unity; and not, as the notion of praxis would require, a single unfolding essence.

In my earlier article, I tried to show how the rejection of the Hegelian view of the social totality in favor of a "structural" view was tantamount to rejecting "historicist" readings of Marx. Events are no longer to be understood as expressive of some "original unity" working itself out in history. Rather, history itself is made the object of scientific study--for the first time--on the basis of a scientific understanding of the social order. A philosophy of history, of the "self-development" of praxis, gives way to a scientific study of concrete practices.

In Althusser's view, the scientific analysis of practices is what Marx initiates in Capital, and what is characteristic of subsequent Marxist practice. Following the classification introduced by Engels and elaborated by Mao Tse-tung in On Practice and On Contradiction, Althusser distinguishes three relatively distinct structures that constitute the social totality (la formation sociale): the economic, the political, and the ideological. "Economic practice is the transformation of nature by human labor into social products, political

practice the transformation of social relations by revolution, ideological practice the transformation of one relation to the lived world into a new relation by ideological struggle." (For Marx, Page 253) Each level is relatively independent of the other; development, as Mao stresses, is always "uneven". Historical materialism is the science of these relatively autonomous levels and of their "articulations", of their relations one to another.

In virtue of the elaboration of that science in Capital, the economic level is acknowledged as "determining in the last instance", and it is because of this principle that the social totality can be said to constitute a "structured unity". However, "the phrase 'in the last instance' does not indicate that there will be some ultimate time or ever was some starting point when the economy will be or was solely determinant, the other instances preceding or following it: 'the last instance never comes'; the structure is always the co-presence of all its elements and their relations of dominance and subordination--in an 'ever-pre-given structure' (structure toujours-deja-donnee)." (For Marx, Page 255) Thus what is traditionally designated "superstructural" is not, as for philosophies of praxis, "expressive" of a society's economic relations. Rather, the "superstructural" is conceived as consisting of relatively independent levels, related to the "base" in determinant and specifiable ways. As Mao argued in On Contradiction, the economic level as such is rarely "dominant" in a given social formation. The Hegelian dialectic, in Althusser's view, is incapable of rendering the distinction between "dominant" and "determinant" contradictions intelligible. As I tried to show in my earlier article, what is needed is a non-Hegelian reformulation of dialectical notions, particularly the notion of contradiction. In the essays "Contradiction and Overdetermination" and "On the Materialist Dialectic", it is precisely this reformulation that Althusser attempts.

Here we are at one of the sources of Althusser's thought: the rejection of historicism, the scientific reading of Capital, depends in large part on Althusser's "reading" of the political practice of Lenin and Mao, and their reflections on their practice. It is for this reason that Althusser maintains that the distinguishing features (la difference specifique) separating the Marxian dialectic from its Hegelian predecessor have been apprehended for many years, though on the level of political practice (compare For Marx, Page 165). What remains is to express these distinguishing features rigorously. The possibility of such a rigorous--theoretical--expression is found in the scientificity of Capital and in the philosophy it calls forth. It is, so to speak, implicit in the epistemological break. Thus Althusser insists that "theory" constitutes a fourth level of practice, theoretical practice. Thanks to the scientificity of Capital, what is "signaled" (signale) in the political practice of revolutionaries (Lenin and Mao) and in their still ideological reflections (Mao) can be "known" (connu) rigorously. The foundations for this knowledge exist in Capital, but, again, not explicitly. To make the principles of this program explicit is a task of theoretical practice. Like other practices, theoretical practice leads a relatively independent existence, related to other levels of practice only in virtue of its "determination" by the economic level "in the last instance". Still, theoretical practice is of enormous political importance, as we shall see. Thus it is to that level of the social formation that we now turn, and particularly to the "union" of theory and practice within that level.

◆ THEORETICAL PRACTICE

Although, for Althusser, there is no "original unity" that is expressed in the different and relatively independent types of practice, there is a "general concept" on the basis of which what is "interior" to each level of practice can be thought. Thus Althusser proposes a definition of practice in general.

By practice in general I shall mean any process of transformation of a determinate given raw material (matiere premiere donnee) into a determinate product, a transformation effected by a determinate human labor, using determinate means (of "production"). (For Marx, Page 166)

Each level of practice is intelligible in terms of the same structural relationship. Thus each level of practice has the same sort of "determining element".

In any practice thus conceived, the determinant moment (or element) is neither the raw material nor the product, but the practice in the narrow sense: the moment of the labor transformation itself, which sets to work, in a specific structure, men, means, and a technical method of utilizing the means. (For Marx, Page 167)

The determining element of economic practice, as set forth in Capital, is labor power, operating upon an object (raw material) to produce another object (the commodity). In Capital, this determining element is rendered intelligible by means of conceptual entities--notions like "forces of production" and "social relations of production"--and not, as in the 1844 Manuscripts, for example, in terms of the men who perform the work of transformation. (Hence, Althusser's "anti-humanism"; which is really just a rejection of the problematic of the early Marx, a rejection of an "anthropological" account of practice as praxis.)

Theoretical practice, then, is just a specific form of practice in general. And like economic, political, and ideological practices, theoretical practice figures as a relatively independent part of a complex, structured totality. The production of knowledge through theoretical practice takes place entirely on the level of thought. It is the process of production of an object of knowledge (Generality III) from some still conceptual, though pre-scientific, "raw material" (Generality I) in virtue of some "determining labor of transformation" (Generality II).

In Althusser's view, it is precisely the relative independence of the theoretical level that accounts for the possibility of a genuinely materialist theoretical practice as we find in the science of historical materialism. (13) For scientific discourse, Althusser argues, presupposes an absolute and rigorous distinction between the "real object" and the "object of knowledge". The real object exists totally outside of thought; and is neither "constituted" by it (Kant) nor transformed by it (Hegel). (14) These "idealist" incursions, in Althusser's view, militate against a rigorously scientific respect for the reality of the object of a science. Thus the relative autonomy of the theoretical

level is implicit in the epistemological break, in a scientific reading of Capital.

The determining element of this relatively independent level is thus the "labor of transformation" (Generality II) of pre-scientific objects of thought into objects of scientific knowledge. The explication of the principles of theoretical practice on this level of generality is what Althusser calls "Theory" (with a capital "T"), or, alternatively, "dialectical materialism". Thus Theory is the specification of the principles according to which theoretical practice proceeds. In this respect, Theory or dialectical materialism fulfills a traditional function of philosophical discourse: to establish "the conditions for the possibility" of a kind of knowledge; in this case, the possibility of a science of history such as Marx founded in Capital. Dialectical materialism is the theory of historical materialism. Thus the materialist dialectic, for Althusser, is to be regarded not as a metaphysical principle (Plekhanov), or even as a meta-scientific generalization (Engels in The Dialectics of Nature), but as an epistemological foundation for the practice of historical materialism as a rigorous science.

Such an investigation is of the utmost importance for theoretical practice. For it is integral to the rigor of scientific discourse. It is essential, moreover, in precisely the way Lenin argued, on the level of political practice against the ideology of "spontaneity":

For Lenin, the real spontaneity, capacity for action, inventiveness, and so on of the "masses" was to be respected as the most precious aspect of the workers' movement: but at the same time Lenin condemned "the ideology of spontaneity" (a dangerous ideology) shared by his opponents (populists and "Socialist Revolutionaries"), and recognized that the real spontaneity of the masses was to be sustained and criticized...to "liberate" it from the influence of bourgeois ideology. (For Marx, Page 254)

It is the same with the "spontaneity" of theoretical practice within historical materialism. Epistemological criticism is essential for its liberation from "bourgeois ideas" foreign to its problematic, and therefore for its proper functioning and development. For, as we know from a literal reading of Capital, not even Marx himself was entirely free from the remnants of bourgeois ideology--from the idealist, Hegelian dialectic. Still, Marx was able to enunciate a new science and a new philosophy, having no rapport with the Hegelian problematic. This accomplishment, however, is the exception and not the rule. In general, theoretical practice requires the "sustenance" of epistemological criticism.

Thus Theory (with a capital "T") is a condition for the rigorous exercise of theoretical practice, and therefore for its efficacy as theoretical practice. The efficacy of theoretical practice itself remains to be explicated. As we have seen, it is here, above all, that Althusser's program must be completed. Still, we do know that "without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary practice", and it is likely that as the capacity to destroy or deflect revolutionary energies intensifies (in advanced capitalist societies), the more acute becomes the need for revolutionary theory. Thus the rigor of epistemological criticism becomes increasingly an urgent political exigency.

The existence of a relatively independent level of theoretical practice has profound implications for the way ideology and consciousness are to be understood. Here is perhaps the sharpest "line of demarcation" between scientific and historicist readings of Marx. For the latter (Lukacs' History and Class Consciousness is perhaps the most striking example), consciousness (or more specifically class consciousness) is the key theoretical notion. Consciousness is that "region", conditioned by social praxis and ultimately determined by it, where ideology (false consciousness) is located, and, again through praxis, superseded (true consciousness). It is this notion, as Tomich rightly points out, that drops out of the Althusserian problematic. And indeed, this is precisely what one should expect. For "consciousness" (in the sense described) is a profoundly historicist notion. The claim is precisely that the conditions and possibilities of knowledge are mediated historically--in virtue of the level of consciousness achieved by a social group (the latter, in turn, since "consciousness arises out of life", being a consequence of the praxis of that group). Thus we find, for example in Lukacs' attempt to "generalize" the problem of knowledge into the problem of consciousness (Hegel) and the latter, in turn, into the practical-critical task of overcoming reification (early Marx), the suggestion that knowledge--mediated through class consciousness--will always be "partial" and even inadequate, so long as social praxis is inadequate (alienated). Social revolution is a condition for the overcoming of reification and the consequent attainment of real knowledge. (15)

Thus "consciousness" figures prominently as part of the problematic radically superseded, in Althusser's view, by the epistemological break. Implicit in the scientificity of Capital is a rejection of the view that knowledge of the historical object is conditioned by a mediating level of consciousness, itself historically determined. The results of historical materialism, products of theoretical practice, are independent logically (though, of course, not causally) of the social conditions pertaining at the moment of their production. Indeed, knowledge cannot depend on class consciousness, on a scientific reading; for, as we have seen, the scientificity of Capital requires a rigorous separation of theory from its object. Thus it is at variance with the criteria for scientific discourse--that is, with a materialist point of view--to hold, as historicists do, that theory is constituted by its object.

On the contrary, consciousness, for Althusser, becomes an object for theoretical investigation. The ideological productions of a society (including its ethical, religious, juridical, artistic, and pre-scientific philosophical productions), the formation of consciousness and its transformations, are at last susceptible to scientific treatment. For it is their relations to other levels of society (economic and political) that historical materialism makes possible on a scientific basis. It is obvious that the political and theoretical fruits of such an investigation can be enormous. (16)

Thus the account of consciousness implicit in Althusser's account of a relatively independent level of theoretical practice, and of the unity of theory and practice at least within that level, depends ultimately upon the possibility of regarding historical materialism as a science, on the viability of the thesis of an epistemological break. For if Althusser is right, Capital introduces a science whose problematic has nothing to do with the one (presupposed by the early Marx) in which consciousness (in the historicist sense) figures so

prominently. I have not so much tried to justify Althusser's reading, as to indicate some of its sources, its scope, and its potential theoretical and political importance. Within the limits of what has remained mainly an exposition, this account nevertheless does at least begin to answer Tomich's objection. Althusser's account of consciousness is not a theoretical "oversight", but, so to speak, an "overdetermined" theoretical position. Its viability depends on nothing less than the viability of a scientific reading of Capital.

(1) Radical America, Volume 3, Number 5, September 1969: Andrew Levine, "A Reading of Marx"; Martin Glaberman, "Lenin Versus Althusser"; Paul Piccone, "Structuralist Marxism?"; Dale Tomich, "The Peculiarities of Structuralism"; Greg Calvert, "Through a Glass Darkly".

(2) There are, however, striking points of convergence between Althusser's philosophical preoccupations (and those of Althusser's main philosophical predecessors, for example Gaston Bachelard in La Formation de l'Esprit Scientifique) and currents beginning to emerge in "mainstream" American philosophy, particularly the philosophy of science. The work of Paul Feyerabend ((for example, the essay "Problems of Empiricism" in Colodny (editor), Beyond the Edge of Certainty (Prentice Hall, 1965)), and T. S. Kuhn, notably in The Structure of Scientific Revolutions (University of Chicago Press, 1962) afford striking examples of convergences. That this is not more widely acknowledged certainly has to do in large part with the traditional insularity and parochialism of both French and American philosophy. At any rate, and for whatever it matters, it is certainly easier to "translate" Althusser into an American philosophical idiom than to effect similar translations of Marxists whose philosophy derives from German romanticism and particularly from Hegel.

(3) What is in question of course is the politics implicit in Althusser's theoretical position, and not his personal activities. It is symptomatic of the superficiality of the criticisms leveled in the articles that accompanied mine that this elementary distinction was constantly overlooked. For example, Piccone: "...it will be sufficient to briefly relate his (Althusser's) work to the politics of the French Communist party, indicate some of its major theoretical shortcomings...et cetera." (Page 25) Or again, Calvert: "...if Althusser had indeed escaped Stalinist stultification, why then did he not freely express a non-Stalinist position in response to the official CP line...?" (Page 348)

It is entirely beside the point both that Althusser remains in the French Communist Party, even after May 1968 and Czechoslovakia, and also that many in the group around him in the early and middle 1960s, when the essays composing Pour Marx and Lire le Capital were written, have gone over to pro-Chinese formations. To uphold this position is not to vindicate "armchairitis", as Calvert insinuates, but to make an elementary distinction between serious political thinking and gossip.

(4) This is not to deny that particularly in the more popular essays in For Marx ("Marxism and Humanism", for example), an apologetic posture resulting from a pro-Russian position is very evident. This "ideological" cast is, so to speak, almost entirely a matter of political "idiom", however. It is easily recognizable and virtually insignificant, and it certainly does not detract from the general position outlined above.

(5) Tomich also claims that Althusser's position has disastrous practical political consequences; that it militates against a "self-developing workers' struggle" and favors instead a view of struggle "directed from above", presumably in the manner of the traditional Communist parties. I have argued above against this kind of facile identification of theoretical and practical political levels. And indeed, inasmuch as Tomich offers absolutely nothing in the way of argument supporting this view, it need not be considered further here.

With regard to the charge on the theoretical level, I will deal directly only with the issue Tomich raises, and not with the substance of his arguments. These arguments seem to me to be faulty independent of the faultiness of the charge. To establish his first point, Tomich presents a critical account of Perry Anderson's and Tom Nairn's discussion of the development of English society (Anderson, "Origins of the Present Crisis", New Left Review 23; Nairn, "The English Working Class", New Left Review 24, and "The Anatomy of the Labour Party", New Left Review 28--all collected in Anderson and Blackburn (editors), Towards Socialism), along the lines of E. P. Thompson's essay "Some Peculiarities of the English", Socialist Register 1965, arguing that the authors' intellectual debt to Althusser results in their incorrectly divorcing "the actual struggles that took place" during and after the English Civil War from "the terms in which they were fought".

Two brief remarks on this line of argument: (1) Taking for granted that Anderson's and Nairn's treatment is faulty in the ways Thompson and Tomich indicate (and this is far from obvious), it is yet to be established that the authors are, in any relevant sense, Althusserian. There is at least strong presumptive evidence that they are not. For example, Anderson's and Nairn's own journal, New Left Review, subsequently published an article critical of their position from an explicitly Althusserian perspective (Nicos Poulantzos, "Marxist Political Theory in Great Britain", New Left Review 43). (2) Even if it were shown that Anderson and Nairn err, and err because of Althusserian influences (and I think Tomich shows neither), it is not at all clear what would follow. That liberal and even conservative historians frequently write "better" history than Marxist historians does not in itself prove that liberal or conservative assumptions are "right" and Marxist assumptions are "wrong", even if--as is probably the rule rather than the exception--the errors of Marxist historians can be traced to their theoretical presuppositions. (For example, see Eugene Genovese's historiographical essay "Marxist Interpretations of the Slave South" in Towards a New Past.)

The connection between Marxist philosophy and the writing of history, like the connection between philosophy and political practice, is certainly a far more complex relation than Tomich assumes. In neither case is a mechanical identification of notions from one level to another licit.

(6) For two excellent examples of "symptomatic readings", less formidable than the monumental task of "reading Capital", see the essay by Emmanuel Terray, "Morgan et l'Anthropologie Contemporaine", in E. Terray, Le Marxisme devant les Sociétés "Primitives" (Maspero, 1969), and also L. Althusser, "L'Impensé de Jean-Jacques Rousseau", in Cahiers pour l'Analyse, Number 8 (La Société du Graphe aux Editions de Seuil).

(7) Feyerabend and Kuhn (Note 2) have argued the view that different scientific theories are generated out of essentially different conceptual schemes and are therefore fundamentally incomparable. What is invoked here is the related idea of an essential incomparability between the problematic of pre-scientific discourse and scientific discourse, a theme that has preoccupied French philosophy of science for many years. See, for example, the work of Bachelard and also of G. Canguilhem, many of whose most important essays are now collected conveniently in Etudes d'Histoire et de Philosophie des Sciences (Paris, 1968). For an explicitly "Althusserian" account of this view of scientific discourse and of "the epistemological break" see M. Fichant and M. Pecheux, Sur l'Histoire des Sciences (Paris, Maspero, 1969). For an extended discussion of what it means to read Capital as the product of an "epistemological break" see the article by Pierre Machery "Lire le Capital" in Le Centenaire du Capital (Mouton, 1969).

(8) Glaberman argues by marshaling quotations, particularly from Lenin's Philosophical Notebooks (Collected Works, Volume 38) in an effort to show a divergence of Althusser's position from Lenin's. From such an argument, the conclusion that Glaberman draws obviously cannot follow.

However, there is an interesting theoretical and practical question suggested by the Glaberman piece: the historical-theoretical problem of the relation of Lenin's own views to the changing circumstances of the Russian revolution and its aftermath.

(9) A philosophy, for Althusser, is however not a *Weltaanschauung*, a view of the world derivative from, or anterior to, the results of historical materialism. In the first instance, as will be argued below, a philosophy is just an (epistemological) explication of the conditions for the possibility of a science. Marxist philosophy, then, dialectical materialism, is just the philosophical foundation for Marxist science, historical materialism. However in Lenine et la Philosophie (Maspero 1969) and elsewhere, Althusser has extended this account to acknowledge the political dimensions of philosophical practice. Althusser's view of philosophy cannot be discussed here. It is enough to refer the reader to Lenine et la Philosophie and to reproduce Althusser's own summary of his present position, given in the glossary of the English edition of *For Marx*:

The new definition of philosophy can be resumed in three points: (1) philosophy "represents" the class struggle in the realm of theory, hence philosophy is neither a science, nor a pure theory ("Theory", in the sense to be explained further on), but a political practice of intervention in the realm of theory; (2) philosophy "represents" scientificity in the realm of political practice, hence philosophy is

not the political practice, but a theoretical practice of intervention in the realm of politics; (3) philosophy is an original "instance" (different from the instances of science and politics) that represents the one instance alongside (aupres de) the other, in the form of a specific intervention (political-theoretical). (Page 256)

(10) For example, it would be difficult to underestimate Althusser's debt to August Cornu, whose monumental study of the early Marx (Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, Volumes 1-3, P.U.F.) affords indirect evidence for an "epistemological break" around 1845-1846.

(11) It is interesting to note to what "half-silences" Althusser attributes "positivist" readings of his essays:

I left vague the difference distinguishing philosophy from science, a difference which is, however, of great importance. I did not show what it is, as distinct from science, that constitutes philosophy proper, the organic relation between every philosophy, as a theoretical discipline, and even within its theoretical forms of existence and exigencies, and politics. I did not point out the nature of this relation, which, in Marxist philosophy, has nothing to do with a pragmatic relation. So I did not show clearly enough what in this respect distinguishes Marxist philosophy from my earlier philosophies. (For Marx, Page 15)

It is to remedy this half-silence that Althusser has turned in his later work, particularly in Lenine et la Philosophie (compare Note 9).

Probably owing to Marcuse's (faulty) distinction between "positive" and "negative" thinking in the introduction to Reason and Revolution and throughout One-Dimensional Man, "positivism" has become one of the catchwords of the American left, that militate against serious political and philosophical thinking. There is simply no good reason to assume that any position to which the term "positivist" can conceivably be applied (with or without reason) is necessarily undone. For an incisive attack on Marcuse's position, see the article by Peter Sedgwick, "Natural Science and Human Theory: a Critique of Herbert Marcuse", in the Socialist Register 1966.

(12) Unfortunately, most of the comments elicited by my first exposition fell on this superficial level. Thus Paul Piccone, for example, claims to be refuting Althusser by pointing out, as would be readily admitted and was in fact stressed repeatedly in my article, that Althusser's account of dialectics is non-Hegelian, therefore non-dialectical, therefore wrong. Similarly, with Glaberman the point apparently is that a good Leninism (Glaberman's) is to be distinguished from a bad "Stalinism" (Althusser's), and that the attribution of one or another term settles the matter. It is curious that Greg Calvert then goes on to attack Althusser precisely for his "Leninism", this time with a bad connotation, showing only that logomania can have unexpected and even contradictory consequences.

(13) For Althusser, a "materialist" philosophy is characteristic of all scientific practice. Hence, as in Lenine et la Philosophie, the terms may be used coextensively: "Materialism is simply the rigorous respect the scientist maintains for the reality of his object that allows him, as Engels remarked, 'to grasp nature with no foreign additions'." (Page 27)

(14) The failure to recognize this distinction and its consequences is, in Althusser's analysis, the characteristic feature of "empiricism", including the latent (and unacknowledged) "empiricism" of Hegel. Compare especially For Marx, Pages 182-193, and also Lire le Capital, Volume 1, Pages 41-53 (on "abstraction") and Lire le Capital, Volume 2, Pages 172-174 (on Appearance and Reality).

(15) Compare Georg Lukacs, Histoire et Conscience de Classe, Editions de Minuit: 1959, Pages 109-256, "La Reification et la Conscience du Proletariat". In Lukacs' actual formulation, proletarian class consciousness is sufficient for something like adequate knowledge in virtue of the historical role of the proletariat as the subject-object of history.

(16) So far, the scientific study of ideological production remains largely programmatic. An important attempt in this regard should be noted however: Pour une Theorie de la Production Litteraire, by Pierre Machery (Maspero, 1968). Althusser's own study of the relationship obtaining between ideology and political practice, "Marxism and Humanism", in For Marx, is also of the greatest importance, though, as noted above, allowance must be made for its particularly polemical (and ideological) shell.

COMMENT

by Dale Tomich

We are not the bearers of consciousness. We are the whores of reason.

—Jan Myrdal

Marxism in the view of Louis Althusser, Andrew Levine demonstrates, is the scientific analysis of practices. The social totality is comprised of various relatively independent levels of practice — economic, political, ideological, theoretical. Each of these levels is intelligible in terms of the same structural relationship — "practice in general" — which Althusser defines as the transformation of a determinate given raw material into a determinate product; a transformation effected by a determinate human labor using determinate means of production. The "determining element" within each level is the labor of transformation. Levine thoughtfully provides us with an example of this analysis: "The determining element of economic practice, as set forth in

Capital, is labor power operating on an object (raw material) to produce another object (the commodity). In Capital, this determining element is rendered intelligible by means of conceptual entities — notions like 'forces of production' and 'social relations of production' — and not, as in the 1844 Manuscripts, for example, in terms of the men who perform the work of transformation."

This analysis removes human subjectivity from theoretical consideration. The rigorous definition of "practice in general" tells us nothing except that there is a "transformation effected by determinate human labor". Implicit in any conception of transformation is the idea that some raw material is made into something else. It therefore seems neither surprising nor profound that practice at each of the levels which Levine presents to us should "be intelligible in terms of the same structural relationship". The real question, it seems to me, is not that human labor is the determinant factor of the social totality, but the nature of that labor and the way in which we understand it. The "scientific Marxism" presented in the above essay has little to offer in the way of explanation. It draws an absolute distinction between "the real object" and the "object of knowledge", and, as we shall see below, the labor of transformation in its scheme remains at the level of the concept of labor which is applied to specific labor rather than an examination of the conditions of actual, concrete labor. Instead of trying to comprehend reality, "scientific Marxism", with great rigor, posits logical statements about reality and then reflects upon its own categories — not upon society. As a result, historical problems become epistemological problems.

The weakness of this brand of science is clear in Levine's statement, quoted above, about the determining element of economic practice as set forth in Capital. In this statement, labor power is understood by means of conceptual entities (my emphasis) like "forces of production" and "social relations of production", not the men who perform the labor. In its eagerness to purge itself of any vestigial, "pre-scientific" anthropology, "scientific Marxism" has also gotten rid of the *raison d'être* and focus of Marx's own study — Man (or more correctly, men). Once real men and women are no longer considered as agents of their own history, the "forces of production" and the "social relations of production" must become conceptual entities, for they are no longer rooted in the concrete activities of real people which are their only real embodiment. Once we accept the definition of historical materialism as "the science of successive modes of production and the relation of these modes of production to the social totality", men are moved outside of their own history and the nature of society is determined by various structures and the relation between them. But once the real men and women are removed and we locate the determining factor in the autonomous rationality of the social system, the structures that the "scientific Marxists" offer us become logical categories, and the relations between them are logical connections rather than social and historical categories with social and historical connections. Practice is explained in terms of a "general concept" of "practice in general". The social totality is explained in terms of logically connected structures (that is, conceptions of what practice is at each level), not the totality of social relations in which men actually live. Instead of concerning itself with the analysis and criticism of the specific and concrete conditions of the lives of real people, what would be revolutionary theory becomes fetishized into a Theory of the

Revolution with a different set of concerns and for which epistemological criticism becomes the order of the day.

Implicit in this conceptualization of the world, this separation of "the object of knowledge" from the "real object", is the separation of men from the society in which they live. As we have seen, and as Levine himself distinguishes, if there are no men who produce (or who at least are not theoretically accounted for as producers) then the "forces of production" and the "social relations of production" can only be conceptual entities. But the forces and relations of production do not exist independently of human activity; rather, their only real existence is in the actual activity of men and women. The actual activity of real people in specific contexts gives labor power and the forces and relations of production an existence not as abstract logical categories, but as concrete entities. Labor is a human relationship. The forces and relations of production are social and historical relationships between men, and have no existence outside of the people who create and embody them. Theory which does not see the basis of social relationships in human activity mystifies the nature of those relationships. Seen in this reified manner, they appear as things, natural phenomena, et cetera. In this case, theory is no longer concerned with transforming human activity, but is concerned rather with comprehending these autonomous social structures.

The quest for "objectivity" and "scientific rigor" has caused the "scientific Marxists" to pose the relationship between men and society in a misleading way. (See Miriam Glucksmann, "Reply to Ian Birchall", *New Left Review* 59, Page 112; also Nicos Poulantzas, "Capitalism and the State", *NLR* 58) Historical materialism, the Althusserians would have it, has a specific object with a specific determinacy — the socio-economic formation. To look to men for an understanding of social reality would be, from their point of view, a lapse into naive social psychology and tantamount to saying that capitalism is bad because the individual capitalists are bad — agreeably a simple-minded notion. But to pose the relationship in this way is to conceal its nature. As we have already seen, "socio-economic formations" in this "scientific" view exist not at a real level, but at a conceptual level. What must be clearly understood is that socio-economic formations are real relations between people. They indeed have a social character, and cannot be understood in terms of isolated individuals. What is essential for understanding these relationships is not a retreat into epistemological preoccupations, but the study of the specific relationships between real people in actual contexts. Human reality is of a historical and social, not logical, nature. It cannot be understood by merely reflecting on categories of thought, but can only be comprehended by studying and analyzing the concrete relationships of real people.

Althusser's interpretation of Marxism has little, if anything, to add to a revolutionary theory of society. Once men are removed from consideration as creators of social reality, we must wait for the social formation with its autonomous rationality to change that reality. The reason for revolution is entirely extrinsic to the theoretical system. "Science" is concerned with "successive modes of production" conceived of as levels of practice separate from the people engaged in that practice, and itself offers no explanation of why one mode of production is any better than another. Like bourgeois ideology, "scientific Marxism" assumes that the appearance of capitalist society — that is, the autonomous socio-economic formation existing in itself and independent

of man—is its essence. As the notorious “young” Lukacs pointed out, if society assumes a rationality foreign to man, the consequences are a fatalistic response to “immutable laws” or a purely ethical humanism in which the imperative for revolutionary action is located outside of theoretical considerations. (“Rosa Luxemburg”, History and Class-consciousness) Capitalist society does appear to assume a rationality foreign to man; but the Althusserians embrace this assumption, whereas Marx, by recognizing concrete human social existence and activity as the ground of social life and social theory, broke through the reifications of political economy and philosophical alienations to lay bare the essence of capitalist society, thus creating the possibility of the conscious, critical, practical transformation of both social theory and social life.

The object of “scientific Marxism” is “science”, not the revolutionary transformation of the world. The Marxist Scientist vigorously applies his Theory to the “social totality” which we have seen is a logical, not a socio-historical entity. He is concerned not with transforming the real world, but with rigorously demonstrating the “objectivity” of his own intellectual constructions. Instead of real people changing the conditions of their world through their own activity, we are presented with the Marxist Scientist working an algebra of revolution. The political practices of Lenin and Mao call not for the study of their activity in its real social and historical context, but for rigorous epistemological criticism—thus political practice is not an activity but a logical category whose principles are to be elaborated. The entire Althusserian discourse takes place at the level of reified thought. Althusser himself states that thought does not transform the real world. This is true as long as thought does not inform social practice and seek to transform it. The Althusserian project of putting Marxian theory outside of history can only mean the end of Marxism. The only revolution that is possible under Althusser’s system is a revolution in thought (that is, in revolutionizing epistemology) and it is not surprising that in Althusser’s *Lire le Capital*, Marx is discussed only as having revolutionized theory. Far from being revolutionary, “scientific Marxism” does not concern itself with the transformation of social life and in fact reinforces the separation of revolutionary theory from practical activity.

The object of revolutionary theory is to transform social life, and it is in this light that it aims at the transformation of theories of social life. We must be critical about the way we think, but the object of our thought and the basis of our criticism must be the real social world, not some “object of knowledge” divorced from it. The actual transformation of the social world is the task before us. This project is the essence of Marxism, and can only be realized by keeping in mind that the social relationships which must be changed have a real existence as they are embodied by real people in a real context. Revolutionary theory calls for the examination of the concrete conditions of human existence. Social relationships are rooted in human activity, and to transform these relations living men and women and the actual conditions of their lives must be the focus of our theoretical and political concerns. It is they who create and give meaning to revolution.



Reviews

Armed Struggle in Africa, by Gerard Chaliand (New York, Monthly Review Press, 1969, 142 pages, \$5.00)

Georges N. Nzongola

The most successful revolutionary struggle on the African continent today is taking place in the little West African country of Guinea-Bissau (not to be confused with the Republic of Guinea, capital Conakry, or with Equatorial Guinea, another sovereign nation). This triangular enclave between Senegal and Guinea-Conakry and the crescent-shaped 10-island archipelago of Cape Verde is peopled by some 800,000 Africans who have heroically taken up arms to defeat Portuguese fascism and colonial rule, and to establish a socialist republic. The armed struggle was begun in January 1963 by the Partido Africano da Independencia da Guinea e Cabo verde (PAIGC), and it had succeeded by the end of 1968 in liberating two thirds of the mainland including two towns. Gerard Chaliand's *Armed Struggle in Africa* is primarily the on-the-spot situation or progress report for 1966.

Chaliand, a French journalist who gained his revolutionary experience with the FNL during and after the Algerian War, spent two weeks inside Guinea during the summer of 1966. His report was first published in France in 1967 as *Lutte armee en Afrique*. The English translation (by David Rattray and Robert Leonhardt) is therefore a little outdated, but this shortcoming is compensated for by the fact that the revolutionary experience whose account forms the major part of this book (Part 2) is not simply an admirable piece of battlefield journalism. It is, more significantly, a portrayal of brave men, women, and children seriously engaged in a creative struggle for a better life, and thus a source of immense inspiration to revolutionaries all over the world.

Chaliand's purpose in this book--and this is very evident in Part 2--is "to outline the inner sociology of an African maquis" (Page 14). No less than 25 pages (Part 3) are devoted to general considerations on the African experience in armed struggle and the political strategy of guerrilla warfare. As this brief review will attempt to show, the author is not as successful in this latter endeavor as he is in the former. The Introduction, or Part 1, deals with Guinea's social structure and how it is related to the PAIGC struggle.

In the context of imperialist exploitation the country had a primarily monocrop economy, getting almost all of its export earnings from peanuts. The Portuguese Companhia Uniao Fabril (CUF), one of the biggest monopolies in the Iberian peninsula--with West German, French, and American interests --held a monopoly over all of Guinea's foreign trade. The country's relatively poor economic base, its low population density, and Portuguese fascism explain the slow development and the small size of its national petty bourgeoisie. Colonial rule was maintained by force and intimidation, with the Portuguese relying heavily on the police and African feudal rulers to maintain their system. More than 95 per cent of the population were illiterate. Among the 25,000 to 30,000 salaried workers, the most politically conscious element was found among the dock and other transport workers. And it was from their ranks that most of the middle-level PAIGC cadres and some of the top-level ones were recruited.

In Guinea, as PAIGC Secretary-General Amilcar Cabral himself has pointed out (1), the peasantry were not, initially, the primary revolutionary force. The PAIGC "found the principal revolutionary force in the urban milieu, as much among the petty bourgeois class which was conscious of the foreign domination in our country as among the salaried workers of the ports, the ships, the repair shops, et cetera." But this does not mean that the PAIGC was going to rely on these two social classes for the success of the revolution. For soon after the Pijiguitu massacre of August 3, 1959 in which 50 Bissau dock workers were killed by the Portuguese to end a two-week-old strike, the three-year-old PAIGC decided on a new strategy: avoidance of all urban demonstrations and mobilization of the rural masses. Chaliand's book offers little information on this difficult stage of the struggle, but he gives the reader a rare opportunity of hearing for himself some of the PAIGC cadres and early organizers talk about their experiences. That is the best aspect of the book.

The successful mobilization of the peasants in Guinea was the most important determinant of the success of the PAIGC struggle. For this peasantry with plenty of land, the main task of the PAIGC organizer was to convince individual peasants that they were being exploited by the Portuguese, through trade (through the wide difference between prices and the real value of the products), through heavy taxation, and through various forms of humiliation: rape, senseless imprisonment, et cetera.

If Chaliand is at his best as a journalist in his account of the tremendous social change in the countryside, of the democratization of political life, of the encouraging improvement in productive forces and the level of modern social services, and of the definitive emancipation of women and their elevation to full equality with men under socialism in the Guinea maquis, he comes out pretty bad as a social scientist. He makes no effort to qualify his generalizations on the African revolutionary experience, and his imagination is often substituted for historical fact. He tells us, for example, that in tropical Africa, "social discontent remains at present essentially an urban phenomenon. It should be pointed out that almost everywhere the bureaucratic bourgeoisie are more numerous than the proletariat." (Page 115) He gives no empirical evidence to support these serious assertions.

The first one is definitely false and misleading. False because there have been many "rural" risings such as the so-called tax riots in several

countries, the anti-chief riots in Sierra Leone and elsewhere, and the major rebellions in Congo-Kinshasa and Chad. It is misleading because it is usually difficult to make a sharp distinction between urban and rural factors in political protests in Africa. Many or most youth of the lumpenproletariat in African cities are recent migrants from the countryside, who left it out of discontent and a desire to make it in the cities. Many of the participants in the so-called rural protests are also members of the urban lumpenproletariat on short visits or forced repatriation to the countryside who decide to join forces with the peasants. The second assertion is doubtful. Its accuracy depends on one's definition of the proletariat in Africa. If all the skilled and semi-skilled workers are included in the category, it is false, especially for those countries in which 5 to 10 per cent of the gross national product is of industrial origin.

Many of Chaliand's other generalizations on the objective conditions of the armed struggle in Africa and many factual statements need to be revised. He does, for example, cite Algeria, but leaves out the UAR as a major source of military assistance to African freedom fighters. Only two important conclusions are worth noting: the one on the weakness of the now-famous foco theory, especially in the light of the Bolivian experience, and the other on how magical beliefs may become a considerable hindrance to the organization of the armed struggle in Africa, a fact that was demonstrated by the tragic consequences of magic practices in the abortive struggle in Congo-Kinshasha. This book should be read together with Basil Davidson's *The Liberation of Guine* (Penguin, 1969), a progress report for 1967 and 1968.

(1) "Guinea: the Power of Arms", *Tricontinental*, Number 12, May-June 1969, Page 10.



The Poetry of My Politics, by Walter Lowenfels (Olivant Press, Homestead, Florida, 1968, hardbound, 131 pages, \$5.95)

The Portable Walter, Walter Lowenfels, edited by Robert Gover (International Publishers, New York, New York, 1968, hardbound, 160 pages, \$5.95)

Douglas Blazek

Despite Lowenfels being a Marxist, his work should not be judged with a political touchstone. The cards he carries in his wallet do not necessarily reflect the ethics or ideals he works for in his life & writing, no matter how much he would wish it so. Indeed, in this respect he is a good example of a fluman being whose membership in any organization is incidental to the results he is working for. In other words, he goes beyond party alignments & truly becomes a member of something larger: brotherhood, a cosmic one at that.

Lowenfels speaks of the "poetry of my politics," but it is his politics which he is, in the long run, trying to dissolve so that political relationships won't be necessary; rather, poetic ones will exist. So when he mentions the phrase "poetry of my politics" he is not trying to "pretty-up" politics, making culturally hip legislatures, but trying to turn political manipulations into human compassion. Understanding, truth, freedom, openness. These should replace systems whereby certain men shrewdly control others, make laws for their own good & keep everything on schedule in order to produce a mathematically formulated superplan.

In the first section of *The Poetry of My Politics* he pokes sharply at the publishers of poetry anthologies who claim to publish a representative selection of America's best poetry but, even though there are poems written by white men on black inequality, etc., there are no poems by the men who know what it means to *be black & live black*—although introductions to these anthologies always allude to them. Lowenfels's case is convincing and accurate. Either black poets don't write any good poems or else editors won't depart from the aristocratic tradition of poetry being for a certain privileged elite. The same situation exists with other minorities, including the so-called hard-core underground poets.

A new poetry is amongst us—new in many ways: texture, insights, experiences, language. This new poetry doesn't fit the "pattern" that "authorities" recognize or accept. I'm afraid this is true of all the arts as well as ways-of-living, philosophies and religions.

The only alternative to this seems to be all black anthologies. Literary curiosities. An integrating of black poets & any other "type" of poet that doesn't fit the conception, that hasn't the right image, is a touchy thing. Everyone is very conscious of this matter now. Tokenism is readily recognized & trite, mediocre art always has its peculiar dullness. I don't think any editor has solved this problem yet, not even Lowenfels in his "Poets of Today" anthology a few years back. I think that when enuf black poets, freak poets, meat poets, whatever you call them, evolve an identity that refers back to themselves as individuals rather than ethnic groups, races, schools, etc., that the problem will tend to solve itself. But this doesn't mean we should ease the toe hold we're trying to keep. Hell, try for a half nelson!

The second part describes the need for Lowenfels' social awareness (he was then an editor/reporter for the *Daily Worker* in Philadelphia) to blend with his anthropological awareness. But how to do it in poems? Somehow he worked it out, he had to, the stakes were at their highest. You see, for Lowenfels a poem is not "just some lines of verse" but rather an "effort, along with all our others, to identify & integrate the dignity of human personality beneath the world's terrific freight."

His eloquence & spirit are marvelous thruout the book—they are much more marvelous than either the capitalist system which he despises or the socialist system which he hopes will replace the other. To me it seems an incongruity, & a painful one, to see a man's macrocosmic sensing of poetry having to be confined by a microcosmic systematizing of things. It is here that he says "politics as poetry saved my life." Ah, Jesus saves! & now I question—in Lowenfels' abandonment of cynicism, despair, violence & death as permanent fixtures of his deliberations, has he not copped out to an emotional complexity that demands an intensity, a versatility of comprehension & a total consciousness that is too much an overload for him to handle constantly? He fears them blinding his perspective. He fears them being dominant. He fears being engulfed &, finally, destroyed by them.

& again I question, when one looks at the world point-blank, quickly eyeing the past & then staring into the future, is it a one-sided schema with all negative emotions amputated that will rebuild the world into a better place or is it a positive employment of doubt, cynicism, despair, etc., that will develop

us into men who have come into our own as whole men, individuals with a voice blended with all substances?

In other words, it is the human personality & our environmental circumstances that must be dealt with face-to-face, *as is*. Reality can't be prettied-up nor can it be bent without bending the alloys that make people what they are. If Marxists or PL people or SDS'ers or Panthers want to change life for the better, it will have to be done by changing the human personality for the better, & such changes evolve from within & emanate outward. Political adroitness only effects surfaces. This is why Lowenfels is a more effective poet than he is a politician no matter how hard he tries to meld the two together.

For this reason he is a perfect example of how a late 20th century revolutionary chooses his own unique weapons for maximum effectiveness. Revolution is no longer *exclusively* propelled from out of a gun barrel. The gun cannot force people to think, to love, to be merciful, to understand, to be beautiful, to be generous, to not misuse power. Such things cannot be forced. Nor does the gun serve as an instrument of self-exploration so that one can penetrate his psyche & correct his weaknesses. The gun is, as even the poem can be, propaganda for the doing of such things; but it cannot force results. & when I say "the gun," I mean the bomb, the army or just simple dictatorial laws as well.

If a poem is a gun, it will do nothing but set the clock ahead 360 degrees.

To gather insight of a specified dimension & use it to fatten your conclusions as to what *must* be for *all* is equal to gathering data from encyclopdias that support your thesis while ignoring other information that negates it. I sometimes wonder whether Lowenfels doesn't create in order to wrap up a package that is too bulky and asymmetrical to be contained as he wishes.

Despite my skepticism and disenchantment with some of Lowenfels' ideas, I think his *ideals* his spirit & his eloquent clarity alone qualify him as being the only communist which I've ever known (thru his writings, not personally) who makes sense & whom I admire. He almost redeems such formal organizing.

The CP has spewed as many lies & as much bullshit as any other political group. I feel certain, altho I have no evidence, that Lowenfels has been one of those magnetic men who attracts & mainly associates with the most creative, individualistic, intellectual & sincere members. For this reason I feel he has been duped & is quite naive about those who drive the bus to paradise, & even about the bus itself. He is infatuated with the advertising panels on the outer sides. It says what he wants it to say. The driver even lets him write copy for it. Lowenfels, get your own bus! Or better yet, walk!

Oh, but Walter does indeed walk by himself a good deal of the time; & when he does, every step he takes is something to grasp with the eyes of all our bodies' cells: "To build a new world requires people with a deepened consciousness on all levels—not just the 'right' level—but every human experience."

"Killing yourself is a last effort to talk to somebody. . ."

"Peace is the avant-garde manifesto of three billion people."

"The essential question remains—what time is it?"

Parts 3 & 4 explain this question in many different ways & answers it on many different levels. Generally, what I wrote concerning part 2 also applies to these parts.

Parts 5 & 6 are letters to poets & novelists; &, as would be expected, are about the relationship of writing with changing the world. His insight is consistently high-charged, his horizon is the beginning of time to its end & his ability to enrage a lion of an idea & then tame it in order to stick his head in its mouth is certainly impressive. In so doing, he manages to stretch our heads

a bit further into the jaws of the beast than what we thought we were willing to go.

But then he will say something like: "A friend of mine expressed. . . I am not trying to organize people with my writing, I am trying to put them in the state of mind where they *can* be organized" & makes it imply his explicit & ideological sentiments. & so I question, is all this insight really only rhetorical propaganda for that archaic socialistic vision? Damn it! I don't want to be organized, nor do I want my mind put into the state where it can be organized. I've been organized enuf. This isn't a plea for anarchy, either.

Without turning what is supposed to be a review into an essay, & in concise terms, I think what Lowenfels & all of us could benefit from is trying to conceive of government sans labels (i.e., right, left, communistic, socialistic, capitalistic, party, card, premier, president, caucus, electoral, docket, form 3201a, passport, etc.). Look to the future & try to envision a world-wide community existence: Each man is responsible for himself rather than having the responsibility rest with customs, codes, traditions, laws, governments & nations. With such responsibility, there is no room for politics because enlightenment dissolves such exchanges of conniving for egocentric gain. With such responsibility, organization is not how an integer serves a group but rather how a group serves the individual. Organization is not associated with a frame of mind but rather with the functional processes of production & distribution according to one's need and without the prerequisite of possessing loyalty—because there is nothing that one needs be loyal to except the purity in oneself.

To orient our vision, our energy & our culture toward *this* "goal" seems to be the most necessary thing a writer can do. If Lowenfels were to do this all he would have to do is eliminate his urge to save himself with his contrapuntal socialism & his abbreviated contour of disposition.

The Portable Walter is an excellent introduction to Lowenfels. It is well-balanced between his poetry & his prose. It contains substantial excerpts from seven of his other books & offers a more heterogeneous gaze upon the man. Everything that I've said about *The Poetry of My Politics* holds true for this volume as well.

There was something I sensed about what Walter says more so in this book than in the other, tho. It is vague, but I think what it might be is that he needs too much for the writing of his poems to be a ritual that makes him a martyr. This is well covered up by all sorts of succinct & pithy thoughts, but somehow I sense that he finds glory in the idea of man finally achieving something "better" than what he had in life, once he dies. That in dying & being buried & decomposing a man first then becomes unified with the elements & finally unites with his "comrades" working for a common cause. In other words, we all fail at this in life & even life itself fails, but death is perfect & it is absolute positive energy & it succeeds where nothing else does. It appears to satisfy him that the chance of his being a legend will blot out his value & meaning as a living human being. That if he had to choose between the two he would choose being a legned rather than being a living man. That being a poet is something of being a martyr. That sacrificing oneself to History & Geology & Time & The Galaxy is the tantamount achievement of existence. This is probably overstating it a little but not much. For all I know, Lowenfels is right in feeling this way, if indeed this is how he feels. It's just that I find it disturbing.

But, despite his "desperate" positivism, Lowenfels does not bullshit. His work has the scope of the universe, the wisdom of man's protoplasm, the experience of earth's crust & the aim of a laser. These books are important to our growth. Yes, I said *important*—the way a dictionary is important. Hell, the way oxygen is important!

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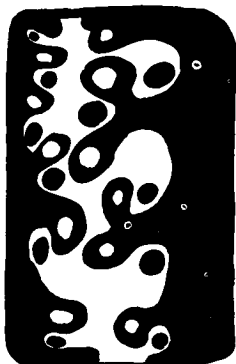
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Poetry & Revolution

It was Romanticism that re-discovered the marvelous and gave it a revolutionary significance which it has kept to this day, and which has allowed it to live—like an outlaw, but to live, nevertheless. I say outlaw because the real poet cannot be recognized as such if he does not oppose the world in which he lives by total nonconformism. He combats everyone, including the revolutionists who take a purely political viewpoint—which must necessarily be isolated from the cultural movement as a whole—and who advance the idea that culture should give way to the attainment of the social revolution. There is not a single poet or artist, conscious of his place in society, who does not think that this urgently needed and indispensable revolution is the key of the future. However, the idea of submitting poetry and all culture dictatorially to a political movement seems to me as reactionary as to want to keep them separated from politics. The "ivory tower" is only one face of the obscurantist's coin—the other face is "proletarian art". While the reactionaries would like to make poetry the lay equivalent of religious prayer, the revolutionists are too apt to confuse it with publicity. The poet of today has no other choice than to be a revolutionist or not to be a poet, for he must constantly hurl himself into the unknown; the step he took yesterday in no way dispenses with the one he will take tomorrow, since every day everything has to be begun all over again. Even what he acquired in sleep turns to ashes on awakening. There is no secure movement—there, where he has nothing to receive, neither praise nor laurels, but where he has to give all his strength to the task of beating down the barricades of habit and routine—barricades which keep on rising. Today he must be the "accursed" poet. This malediction cast at him by society points out his revolutionary position; but he will come out of his enforced reserve and be placed at the head of society when it has been split from top to bottom, and when it will have recognized the common human origin of both poetry and science. Then the poet, with the active and passive collaboration of the people, will create marvelously exalting myths that will send the entire world out to the assault of the Unknown.

Benjamin Péret