

A Discussion on "Listen, Marxist!"

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Robert B. Carson, in an article published in the April 1970 issue of *Monthly Review*, writes that the "major thrust" of 'Listen, Marxist!' is to "destroy a class-based analysis of society and revolutionary activity." This criticism has been made by many Marxists who read the article.¹

Carson's accusation is quite absurd. I seriously doubt if he did more than skim the article. Carson goes on to say that my approach is "ahistorical" and that I try to promote a "crude kind of individualistic anarchism"—this despite the fact that a large portion of the article attempts to draw important historical lessons from earlier revolutions and despite the fact that the article is unequivocally committed to anarcho-communism.

The most interesting thing about Carson's criticism is what it reveals about the theoretical level of many Marxists. Apparently Carson regards a *futuristic* approach as "ahistorical." He also seems to regard my belief that freedom exists only when each individual controls his daily life as "a crude kind of individualistic anarchism." Here we get to the nub of the problem. Futurism and individual freedom are indeed the "main thrust" of the pamphlet. Carson's reply confirms *precisely* what the pamphlet set out to prove about Marxism today, namely that Marxism (I do not speak of Marx here) is *not* futuristic and that its perspectives are oriented not toward concrete, existential freedom, but toward an abstract freedom—freedom for "Society," for the "Proletariat," for *categories* rather than for people. Carson's first charge, I might emphasize, should be leveled not only at me but at Marx—at his futurism in the *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon*.

As to the charge that I am opposed to a "class-based analysis of society and revolutionary activity," need I say that a "class analysis" permeates the pamphlet? Is it conceivable that I could have terms like "capitalist" and "bourgeois" without working with a "class-based analysis"? Originally I thought there could have been no doubt about the matter. I have since changed the expression "class analysis" in the text to "class line," and perhaps I had better explain the difference this change is meant to convey.

What Carson is *really* saying is that I do not have a *Marxist* "class analysis"—a "class analysis" in which the industrial proletariat is driven to revolution by destitution and immiseration. Carson apparently assumes that Marx's traditional "class *line*" exhausts all there is to say about the class struggle. And in this respect, he assumes far too much. One need only turn to Bakunin, for

¹ This is an edited summary of several discussions on "Listen, Marxist!," most of which occurred at my anarcho-communism class at Alternate U, New York's liberation school. I have selected the most representative and recurrent questions raised by readers of the pamphlet.

example, to find a class analysis that was quite different from Marx's—and more relevant today. Bakunin believed that the industrial proletariat by no means constitutes the most revolutionary class in society. He never received the credit due him for predicting the *embourgeoisement* of the industrial working class with the development of capitalist industry. In Bakunin's view, the most revolutionary class was not the industrial proletariat—"a class always increasing in numbers, and disciplined, united, organized by the very mechanisms of capitalist production itself" (Marx)—but the uprooted peasantry and urban *declasses*, the rural and urban lumpen elements Marx so heartily despised. We need go no further than the urban centers of America—not to speak of the rice paddies of Asia—to find how accurate Bakunin was by comparison with Marx.

As it turned out, the development of capitalist industry not only "disciplined," "united" and "organized" the working class but, *by these very measures*, denatured the proletariat for generations. By contrast, the transitional and lumpenized classes of society today (such as blacks, dropout youth, people like students, intellectuals and artists who are not rooted in the factory system, and young workers whose allegiance to the work ethic has been shaken by cultural factors) are the most radical elements in the world today.

A "class analysis" does not necessarily begin and end with Marx's nineteenth-century version, a version I regard as grossly inaccurate. The class struggle, moreover, does not begin and end at the point of production. It may emerge from the poverty of the unemployed and unemployables, many of whom have never done a day's work in industry; it may emerge from a new sense of possibility that slowly pervades society—the tension between "what is" and "what could be"—which percolates through virtually all traditional classes; it may emerge from the cultural and physical decomposition of the traditional class structure on which the social stability of capitalism was based. Finally, every class struggle is not necessarily revolutionary. The class struggle between the original Roman *proletarius* and *patricius* was decidedly reactionary and eventually ended, as Marx observed in the opening lines of the *Communist Manifesto*, "in the common ruin of the contending classes."²

Today, not only poverty but also a relative degree of affluence is causing revolutionary unrest—a factor Marx never anticipated. Capitalism, having started out by proletarianizing the urban *declasses*, is now ending its life-cycle by creating new urban *declasses*, including "shiftless" young industrial workers who no longer take the jobs, the factory discipline or the work ethic seriously. This stratum of *declasses* rests on a new economic base—a post-scarcity technology, automation, a relative degree of material abundance—and it prefigures culturally the classless society the Marxists so devoutly envision as humanity's future. One would have thought that this remarkable dialectic, this "negation of the negation," would have stirred a flicker of understanding in the heavy thinkers of the Marxist movement.

It would be difficult to conceive of a revolution in any industrially advanced capitalist country without the support of the industrial proletariat.

Of course. And "Listen, Marxist!" makes no claim that a social revolution is possible without the participation of the industrial proletariat. The article, in fact, tries to show how the proletariat can be won to the revolutionary movement by stressing issues that concern the quality of life and work. I agree, of course, with the libertarian Marxists and anarcho-syndicalists, who raise the slogan "workers' management of production." I wonder, however, if this slogan goes far enough now. My suspicion is that the workers, when they get into revolutionary motion, will demand

² Marx and Engels, "The Communist Manifesto."

even more than control of the factories. I think they will demand the elimination of toil, or, what amounts to the same thing, freedom from work. Certainly a dropout outlook is growing among kids from working-class families—high school kids who are being influenced by the youth culture.

Although many other factors may contribute to the situation, it remains true that the workers will develop revolutionary views to the degree that they shed their traditional working-class traits. Young workers, I think, will increasingly demand leisure and the abolition of alienated labor. The young Marx, I might add, was not indifferent to the development of unconventional values in the proletariat. In *The Holy Family*, he cites with obvious favor a Parisian working-class girl in Eugene Sue's *The Wandering Jew* who gives of her love and loyalty spontaneously, disdain- ing marriage and bourgeois conventions. He notes, "she constitutes a really human contrast to the hypocritical, narrow-hearted, self-seeking wife of the bourgeois, to the whole circle of the bourgeoisie, that is, to the official circle."³ The working class, in the young Marx's view, is the negation of capitalism not only in that it suffers total alienation, abasement and dehumanization, but also in that it affirms life forces and human values. Unfortunately, observations of this kind tend to fade away as Marx's socialism becomes increasingly "objectivist" and "scientific" (the admirers of Marx's famous—but untranslated and little-read—*Grundrisse* notwithstanding). The later Marx begins to prize the bourgeois traits of the worker—the worker's "discipline," "practi- cality," and "realism"—as the characteristics necessary for a revolutionary class.

The approach which Marx followed in *The Holy Family* was, I think, the correct one. Trapped by the notion that the working class, *qua* class, implied the liquidation of class society, Marx failed to see that this class was the alter ego of the bourgeoisie. Only a new cultural movement could rework the outlook of the proletariat—and deproletarianize it. Ironically, the Parisian working- class girls of Marx's youth were not industrial workers, but rather people of transitional classes who straddled small- and large-scale production. They were largely lumpenized elements, like the *sans-culottes* of the French Revolution.

If the analysis in "Listen, Marxist!" is "class-based," what is the nature of the class struggle?

The class struggle does not center around material exploitation alone but also around spiritual exploitation. In addition, entirely new issues emerge: coercive attitudes, the quality of work, ecol- ogy (or, stated in more general terms, psychological and environmental oppression). Moreover, the alienated and oppressed sectors of society are now the *majority* of the people, not a single class defined by its relationship to the means of production; the more radical as well as more liberatory sensibilities appear in the younger, not in the more "mature," age groups. Terms like "classes" and "class struggle," conceived of almost entirely as economic categories and relations, are too one-sided to express the *universalization* of the struggle. Use these limited expressions if you like (the target is still a ruling class and a class society), but this terminology, with its tradi- tional connotations, does not reflect the sweep and the multi-dimensional nature of the struggle. Words like "class struggle" fail to encompass the cultural and spiritual revolt that is taking place along with the economic struggle.

"Listen, Marxist!" speaks a great deal about the potentialities of a post-scarcity society, but what of the actualities? There is still a great deal of poverty and hunger in the U.S. Inflation is a growing

³ Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The Holy Family* (Foreign Languages Publishing House; Moscow, 1956), p. 102.

problem, not to speak of unemployment, bad housing, racial discrimination, work speed-ups, trade union bureaucracy, and the danger of fascism, imperialism and war.

"Listen, Marxist!" was written to deal with the simplifications of social problems (the economic and Third World-oriented "either/or" notions) that were developing in the "New Left." The post-scarcity viewpoint advanced in the pamphlet was not designed to replace one simplification (class struggle) by another (utopia). Yes, these economic, racial and bureaucratic actualities exist for millions of people in the U.S. and abroad. Any revolutionary movement that fails to deal energetically and militantly with them will be as distorted as a movement that deals with them, singly or severally, to the exclusion of all others. My writings on post-scarcity possibilities, ecology, utopia, the youth culture and alienation are intended to help fill a major gap in radical theory and praxis, not to create another gap.

The really important problem we face is how the actualities of the present scarcity society are related to—and conditioned by—the potentialities for a future post-scarcity society. So far as this really dialectical problem is concerned, the heavy thinkers of the "left" show themselves to be incredibly light-minded and narrowly empirical. In the industrialized Western world, scarcity has to be enforced, so great is the productive potential of technology. Today economic planning has one basic purpose: to confine a highly advanced technology within a commodity framework. Many of the social problems which were endured almost passively a generation ago are now regarded as intolerable because the tension between "what is" and "what could be" has reached a point where "what is" seems utterly irrational. This tension adds an explosive character to many actualities that evoked only a flicker of protest a quarter of a century ago. Moreover, the tension between "what is" and "what could be" conditions all the traditional economic and social issues that have occupied radical movements for generations. We can no longer deal with these issues adequately unless we view them in the light of the economic, social and cultural possibilities of post-scarcity.

Let me present a concrete example. Assume there is a struggle by welfare mothers to increase their allotments. In the past, the mothers were organized by liberal groups or Stalinists; petitions were drawn up, demonstrations were organized, and *perhaps* a welfare center or two was occupied. Almost invariably, one of the groups or parties trotted out a "reform candidate" who promised that, if elected, he would fight "unflinchingly" for higher welfare expenditures. The entire struggle was contained within the organizational forms and institutions of the system: formal meetings of the mothers (with the patronizing "organizers" pulling the strings), formal modes of actions (petitions, demonstrations, elections for public office), and maybe a modest amount of direct action. The issue pretty much came to an end with a compromise on allotment increases and perhaps a lingering formal organization to oversee (and later sell out) future struggles around welfare issues.

Here actuality triumphed completely over potentiality. At best, a few mothers might be "radicalized," which meant that they joined (or were shamelessly used by) organizations such as the Communist Party to promote their political influence. For the rest, most of the welfare mothers returned to the shabbiness of their daily lives and to varying degrees of passivity as human beings. Nothing was really changed for those who did not ego trip as "leaders," "politicals" and "organizers."

To revolutionaries with a "post-scarcity consciousness" (to use Todd Gitlin's phrase), this kind of situation would be intolerable. Without losing sight of the concrete issues that initially motivated the struggle, revolutionaries would try to catalyze an order of relationships between the

mothers entirely different from relationships the usual organizational format imposes. They would try to foster a deep sense of community, a rounded human relationship that would transform the very subjectivity of the people involved. Groups would be small, in order to achieve the full participation of everyone involved. Personal relationships would be intimate, not merely issue-oriented. People would get to *know* each other, to *confront* each other; they would *explore* each other with a view toward achieving the most complete, unalienated relationships. Women would discuss sexism as well as their welfare allotments, child-rearing as well as harassment by landlords, their dreams and hopes as human beings as well as the cost of living.

From this intimacy there would grow, hopefully, a supportive system of kinship, mutual aid, sympathy and solidarity in daily life. The women might collaborate to establish a rotating system of baby sitters and child-care attendants, the cooperative buying of good food at greatly reduced prices, the common cooking and partaking of meals, the mutual learning of survival skills and new social ideas, the fostering of creative talents, and many other shared experiences. Every aspect of life that could be explored and changed would be one part of the new kinds of relationships. This "extended family"—based on explored affinities and collective activities—would replace relationships mediated by "organizers," "chairmen," an "executive committee," *Robert's Rules of Order*, elites, and political manipulators.

The struggle for increased allotments would expand beyond the welfare system to the schools, the hospitals, the police, the physical, cultural, aesthetic and recreational resources of the neighborhood, the stores, the houses, the doctors and lawyers in the area, and so on—into the very ecology of the district.

What I have said on this issue could be applied to every issue—unemployment, bad housing, racism, work conditions—in which an insidious assimilation of bourgeois modes of functioning is masked as "realism" and "actuality." The new order of relationships that could be developed from a welfare struggle is Utopian only in the sense that actuality is informed and conditioned by post-scarcity consciousness. The future penetrates the present; it recasts the way people "organize" and the goals for which they strive.

Perhaps a post-scarcity perspective is possible in the U.S. and Europe, but it is hard to see how a post-scarcity approach has any relevance for the Third World, where technological development is grossly inadequate to meet the most elementary needs of the people. It would seem that the libertarian revolution and the non-coercive, unmediated social forms that are possible for the U.S. and Europe would have to be supplanted by the rigorous planning of highly centralized, coercive institutions in Asia, Africa and Latin America. Carl Oglesby has even argued that to help these continents catch up with the U.S., it will be necessary for Americans to work ten or twelve hours daily to produce the goods needed.

I think we must dispel the confusion that exists about the Third World. This confusion, due partly to the superficiality of knowledge about the Third World, has done enormous harm to radical movements in the First World. "Third World" ideology in the U.S., by promoting a mindless imitation of movements in Asia and Latin America, leads to a bypassing of the social tasks in the First World. The result is that American radicals have often eased the tasks of American imperialism by creating an alien movement that does not speak to issues at home. The "Movement" (whatever *that* is) is isolated and the American people are fair game for every tendency, reactionary as well as liberal, that speaks to their problems.

I think we should begin with some essentials. The Third World is *not* engaged in a "socialist revolution." One must be grossly ignorant of Marxism—the favored ideology of the Third World

fetishists—in order to overlook the *real* nature of the struggle in Asia, Africa and Latin America. These areas are still taking up the tasks that capitalism resolved for the U.S. and Europe more than a century ago—national unification, national independence and industrial development. The Third World takes up these tasks in an era when state capitalism is becoming predominant in the U.S. and Europe, with the result that its own social forces have a highly stratified character. Socialism and advanced forms of state capitalism are not easy to distinguish from each other, especially if one's conception of "socialism" is highly schematic. Drape hierarchy with a red flag, submerge the crudest system of primitive accumulation and forced collectivization in rhetoric about the interests of "the People" or "the Proletariat," cover up hierarchy, elitism and a police state with huge portraits of Marx, Engels and Lenin, print little "Red Books" that invite the most authoritarian adulation and preach the most inane banalities in the name of "dialectics" and "socialism"—and any gullible liberal who is becoming disenchanted with his ideology, yet is totally unconscious of the bourgeois conditioning he has acquired from the patriarchal family and authoritarian school, can suddenly become a flaming "revolutionary" socialist.

The whole process is disgusting—all the more so because it stands at odds with every aspect of reality. One is tempted to scream: "Look, motherfucker! Help the Third World by fighting capitalism at home! Don't cop out by hiding under Ho's and Mao's skirts when your real job is to overthrow domestic capitalism by dealing with the real possibilities of an American revolution! Develop a revolutionary project at home because every revolutionary project here is *necessarily* internationalist and anti-imperialist, no matter how much its goals and language are limited to the American condition." Oglesby's hostility to a post-scarcity approach on the grounds that we will have to work ten or twelve hours daily to meet the Third World's needs is simply preposterous. To assume that the working day will be increased by an American revolution is to invite its defeat before the first blow is struck. If, in some miraculous way, Oglesby's "revolution" were to be victorious, surely he doesn't think that the American people would accept an increased working day without a strong, centralized state apparatus cracking its whip over the entire population. In which case, one wonders what kind of "aid" such a regime would "offer" to the Third World?

Like many of the "Third World" zealots, Oglesby seems to have an incomplete knowledge of America's industrial capacity and the real needs of the Third World. Roughly seventy percent of the American labor force does absolutely no productive work that could be translated into terms of real output or the maintenance of a rational system of distribution. Their work is largely limited to servicing the commodity economy—filing, billing, bookkeeping for a profit and loss statement, sales promotion, advertising, retailing, finance, the stock market, government work, military work, police work, etc., *ad nauseam*. Roughly the same percentage of the goods produced is such pure garbage that people would voluntarily stop consuming it in a rational society. Working hours could be reduced enormously after a revolution without losing high productive output, provided that the available labor supply and raw materials were used rationally. The quality of the productive output, moreover, could be so improved that its durability and usefulness would more than cancel out any reduction in productive capacity.

On the other side, let us look more closely at the material needs of the Third World. As Westerners, "we" tend to assume out of hand that "they" want or need the same kind of technologies and commodities that capitalism produced in America and Europe. This crude assumption is bolstered by the fear consciously generated by imperialist ideology, that millions of black, brown, and yellow people are hungrily eyeing "our" vast resources and standard of living. This ideol-

ogy reminds us how lucky "we" are to be Americans or Europeans, enjoying the blessings of "free enterprise," and how menacing "they" are, festering in poverty, misery and the ills of overpopulation. Ironically, the "Third World" zealots share this ideology in the sense that they, too, conceive of Asian, African and Latin American needs in Western terms—an approach that might be called the Nkrumah mentality of technological gigantism. Whatever is living and vital in the pre-capitalist society of the Third World is sacrificed to industrial *machismo*, oozing with the egomaniacal elitism of the newly converted male radical.

Perhaps no area of the world is more suitable for an eco-technology than the Third World.⁴ Most of Asia, Africa and Latin America lie in the "solar belt," between latitudes 40 degrees north and south, where solar energy can be used with the greatest effectiveness for industrial and domestic purposes. New, small-scale technologies are more easily adapted for use in the underdeveloped areas than elsewhere. The small-scale gardening technologies, in fact, are indispensable for the productive use of the soil types that are prevalent in semi-tropical, tropical, and highland biomes. The peasantry in these areas have a long tradition of technological know-how in terracing and horticulture, for which small machines are already available or easily designable. Great strides have been made in developing an irrigation technology to provide year-round water resources for agriculture and industry. A unique combination could be made of machine and handcrafts, crafts in which these areas still excel. With advances in the standard of living and in education, the population of these areas could be expected to stabilize sufficiently to remove pressure on the land. What the Third World needs above all is a rational, sophisticated communications network to redistribute food and manufactures from areas of plentiful supply to those in need.

A technology of this kind could be developed for the Third World fairly rapidly by American and European industry without placing undue strain on the resources of the West. The rational use of such a technology presupposes a sweeping social revolution in the Third World itself—a revolution, I believe, that would almost immediately follow a social revolution in the U.S. With the removal of imperialism's mailed fist, a new perspective could open for the Third World. The village would acquire a new sense of unity with the elimination of the local hierarchies appointed by the central governments which have so heavily parasitized the regions. An exchange economy would continue to exist in the Third World, although its base would probably be collectivist. In any case, the exploitation of labor and the domination of women by men would be eliminated, thus imposing severe restrictions on the use of income differentials for exploitative purposes.⁵ The resources of the First World could be used to promote the most revolutionary social alternatives—a people's movement as against an authoritarian one, decentralized, immediate relations as against centralized mediated institutions.

It would be difficult to say what kind of institutional structure would emerge from revolutionary changes in the Third World following a complete social revolution in the First World. Until

⁴ The alternatives to a "Western"-type technology for the Third World and the resolution of the "population problem" in this area will be discussed in some detail in my forthcoming book, *The Ecology of Freedom*, to be published by Alfred A. Knopf and as a Vintage paperback.

⁵ More can be learned, I think, from the impact the Spanish anarchist movement had on the village economy than from Mao or Ho and the movements they spoke for. Unfortunately, very little information on this development is available in English. The spontaneous takeover and collectivization of the land by Spanish *pueblos* during the early weeks of Franco's rebellion provides us with one of the most remarkable accounts of how the peasantry can respond to libertarian influence.

now, the Third World has been obliged to fight imperialism largely on its own. Although there has been a great deal of international solidarity from millions of people in Europe and the U.S. for Third World struggles, there has been no real, disinterested material support from these key industrial areas. One wonders what will happen when a revolutionary United States and Europe begin to aid the Third World fully and disinterestedly, with nothing but the well being of the African, Asian and Latin American peoples at issue. I believe that the social development in the Third World will take a more benign and libertarian form than we suspect; and that surprisingly little coercion will be needed to deal with material scarcity in these areas.

In any case, there is no reason to fear that a quasi-statist development in the Third World would be more than temporary or that it would affect the world development. If the U.S. and Europe took a libertarian direction, their strategic industrial position in the world economy would, I think, favor a libertarian alternative for the world as a whole. Revolution is contagious, even when it occurs in a relatively small and economically insignificant country. I cannot imagine that Eastern Europe could withstand the effects of a libertarian revolution in Western Europe and the U.S. The revolution would almost certainly engulf the Soviet Union, where massive dissatisfaction exists, and finally the entire Asian continent. If one doubts the fulfillment of this possibility, let him consider the impact of the French Revolution on Europe at a time when the world economy was far less interdependent than it is today.

After the revolution the planet would be dealt with as a whole. The relocation of populations in areas of high density, the development of rational, humanistic birth control programs oriented toward improving the quality of life, and the modification of technology along ecological lines—all of these programs would be on the agenda of history. Aside from suggesting some basic guidelines drawn from ecology, I can do no more than speculate about how the resources and land areas of the world could be used to improve life in a post-revolutionary period. These programs will be solved in practice and by human communities that stand on a far higher level, culturally, psychologically and materially, than any community that exists today.

"Listen, Marxist!" seems to be quite relevant as a critique of the vulgar Marxists—Progressive Labor, the Trotskyists, and other "Old Left" movements. But what of the more sophisticated Marxists—people such as Marcuse, Gorz and the admirers of Gramsci? Surely "Listen, Marxist!" imputes too much to the "Old Left" in taking it as the point of departure for a critique of Marxism.

Marcuse is the most original of the thinkers who still call themselves Marxists, and I must confess that even on those points where I may have disagreements with him, I am stimulated by what he has to say.

With this exception, I would differ with the claim that "Listen, Marxist!" is relevant only as a critique of the "Old Left." The article is relevant to all types of Marxist ideology. Two things trouble me about Marx's mature writings: their pseudo-objectivity and the obstacles they raise to Utopian thinking. The Marxian project, as it was formulated by Marx himself, deepened the early socialist tradition but also narrowed it, and in the long run this has produced a net setback rather than a net gain.

By Marx's pseudo-objectivity I mean the astonishing extent to which Marx identified "scientific socialism" with the scientism of the nineteenth century. Although there is a tendency today for the more sophisticated "neo-Marxists" to cast the Marxian project in terms of alienation, the project (as it developed in Marx's hands) was above all an attempt to make socialism "scientific," to provide it with the authority of a scientific critique. This led to an emphasis on "objectivity" that increasingly subverted the humanistic goals of socialism. Freedom and Eros (where the latter

was taken up at all) were anchored so completely in the material preconditions for freedom that even the loss of freedom, if it promoted the material development, was viewed as an "advance" of freedom. Marx, for example, welcomed state centralization as a step in the development of the productive forces without once considering how this process enhanced the capacity of the bourgeoisie to resist revolution. He disclaimed any moral evaluation of society and in his later years became increasingly captive to scientism and to mathematical criteria of truth.

The result of this development has been a major loss for the humanistic and imaginative elements of socialism. Marxism has damaged the left enormously by anchoring it in a pseudo-objectivity that is almost indistinguishable from the juridical mentality. Whenever I hear "New Left" Marxists denounce a position as "objectively counter-revolutionary," "objectively racist," or "objectively sexist," my flesh crawls. The charge, flung randomly against all opponents, circumvents the need for an analytic or a dialectical critique. One simply traces "counterrevolution," "racism" or "sexism" to be the preconceived "objective effects." Marx rarely exhibited the crudity of the "Old Left" and "New Left" in his use of this approach, but he used the approach often enough—and often as a substitute for a multidimensional analysis of phenomena.

You must see how consequential this is. Freedom is divested of its autonomy, of its sovereignty over the human condition. It is turned into a means instead of an end. Whether freedom is desirable or not depends upon whether it furthers the "objective" development. Accordingly, any authoritarian organization, any system of repression, any manipulatory tactic can become acceptable, indeed admirable, if it favors the "building of socialism" or "resistance to imperialism"—as though "socialism" or "anti-imperialism" is meaningful when it is poisoned by manipulation, repression, and authoritarian forms of organization. Categories replace realities; abstract goals replace real goals; "History" replaces everyday life. The universal, which requires a complex, many-sided analysis to be grasped, is replaced by the particular; the total, by the one-sided.

No less serious is the rejection of Utopian thought—the imaginative forays of Charles Fourier and William Morris. What Martin Buber called the "utopian element in socialism" is rejected for a "hardheaded" and "objective" treatment of "reality." But, in fact, this approach shrivels reality by limiting one's purview of social experience and data. The hidden potential of a given reality is either subverted by an emphasis on the "objective" actualities or, at least, diminished by a one-sided treatment. The revolutionary becomes a captive to experience not as it exists dialectically, in *all* its actualities and potentialities, but as it is defined in advance by "scientific socialism." Not surprisingly, the New Left, like the Old Left, has never grasped the revolutionary potential of the ecology issue, nor has it used ecology as a basis for understanding the problems of communist reconstruction and Utopia. At best the issue is given lip service, with some drivel about how "pollution is profitable"; at worst it is denounced as spurious, diversionary and "objectively counter-revolutionary." Most of the sophisticated Marxists are as captive to these limiting features of Marxism as their New Left brethren. The difference is that they are simply more sophisticated.

In contrast to most radical works, "Listen, Marxist!" continually speaks of "hierarchical society" instead of "class society," of "domination" instead of "exploitation." What significance do these differences in language have?

A difference is definitely intended. Pre-Marxian socialism was, in many ways, much broader than the Marxian variety. Not only was it more utopian, it was also occupied more with the general than the particular. Varlet, the last of the great *enrages*, who survived the death of his comrade Jacques Roux and Robespierre's purge of the left, concluded that government and revolution are utterly "incompatible." What a splendid insight! In this one observation revolutionary

consciousness expanded from a critique of a specific class society to a critique of hierarchical society as such. The pre-Marxian socialist and radical theorists began to occupy themselves with domination, not only exploitation; with hierarchy, not only class rule. With Fourier, consciousness advanced to the point where the goal of society was viewed as pleasure, not simply happiness.

You must see what an enormous gain this was. Exploitation, class rule and happiness are the *particular* within the more *generalized* concepts of domination, hierarchy and pleasure. It is theoretically—and, in great part, actually-possible to eliminate exploitation and class rule or to achieve happiness, as these concepts are defined by Marxism, without achieving a life of pleasure or eliminating domination and hierarchy. Marx, by "scientifically" anchoring exploitation, classes, and happiness in the economic domain, actually provided the rationale for a theoretical regression from the original socialist values. Marxian economic solutions, such as nationalization of property, may even create the illusion that hierarchy has disappeared. One has only to study the torment of the Trotskyist movement over the nature of the Russian state to see how obfuscating Marxian theory can be.

This particularization of the general is precisely what Marxism achieved. As I noted in reply to the previous question, socialism was given greater theoretical depth by the acquisition of dialectical philosophy, but it was narrowed disastrously by Marx's economic emphasis. Even Marx's writings shrivel in content as the man "matures." They increasingly center on the "objective" economic elements of society, until Marx sinks into a grotesque fetishization of economic theory of the kind we find in volume two of *Capital*. With Marx's death, an immense exegetical literature emerges on capitalist circulation, accumulation and "realization theory." Even Rosa Luxemburg was caught in this swamp, not to speak of the Keynesian Marxists who churn out their papers for the *American Economic Review* and *Science and Society*.

Marxism created a stupendous intellectual furniture that one must clear away to make contact with reality. The field abounds with "experts" and heavies, with academics and authorities whose bullshit makes original, indeed dialectical, thought virtually impossible. Once we rescue the essentials, this theoretical garbage must be junked. It is vitally necessary that we return to the generalized terrain that pre-Marxian socialism established, and then go forward again.

The youth culture has already posed the "social question" in its richest and most meaningful terms—"Life versus death." I would say, with an eye towards the insights of Marxism, "Life versus survival." In any case, we have to get away from the one-sided, repressive jargon of Marxism, which defines our perspective in a limiting manner. I am reminded of a fine passage from Paul Avrich's recent book, *Kronstadt 1921*, in which the language of the revolutionary Kronstadt sailors is contrasted with that of the Bolsheviks. "Rebel agitators," Avrich notes, speaking of the sailors, "wrote and spoke (as an interviewer later noted) in a homespun language free of Marxist jargon and foreign-sounding expressions. Eschewing the word 'proletariat,' they called, in true populist fashion, for a society in which all the 'toilers'—peasants, workers and the 'toiling intelligentsia'—would play a dominant role. They were inclined to speak of a 'social' rather than a 'socialist' revolution, viewing class conflict not in the narrow sense of industrial workers versus bourgeoisie, but in the traditional *narodnik* sense of the laboring masses as a whole pitted against all who thrive on their misery and exploitation, including politicians and bureaucrats as

well as landlords and capitalists. Western ideologies—Marxism and liberalism alike—had little place in their mental outlook.”⁶

The point, of course, is not Western ideologies versus Russian, or “homespun” versus “foreign-sounding” language. The real point is the *broader* concepts with which the “masses” worked almost intuitively—concepts drawn from the experience of their own oppression. Note how the sailors had a broader view of the “laboring masses” and their “oppressors” than the Bolsheviks, a view that included the elitist Bolsheviks among the oppressors. Note well, too, how Marxist jargon made it possible for the Bolsheviks to exclude themselves as oppressors in flat denial of the real situation. For my part, I am delighted that the New Left in America has replaced the words “workers and “proletariat” by “people.” Indeed, it is significant that even professedly Marxian groups like the Panthers and Weathermen have been obliged to use a populist language, for this language reflects the changed reality and problems of our times.

To sum up: what I am talking about is a human condition reflected by the word “power.” We must finally resolve the historic and everyday dichotomies: man’s power over woman, man’s power over man, and man’s power over nature. For inherent in the issue of power—of domination—are the contradictory, destructive effects of power: the corruption of life-giving sexuality, of a life-nourishing society, of a life-orienting ego, and of a life-sustaining ecology. The statement “power corrupts” is not a truism because it has never been fully understood. It may yet become understood because power now *destroys*. No amount of theoretical exegesis can place power in the service of history or of a revolutionary organization. The only act of power that is excusable any longer is that one act—*popular* revolution—that will finally dissolve power as such by giving each individual power over his or her everyday life.

⁶ Paul Avrich, *Kronstadt 1921* (Princeton University Press; Princeton, N.J., 1970), pp. 172-73. For a different interpretation of the Kronstadt events see my introduction to Ida Mett, *The Kronstadt Uprising* (Black Rose Books; Montreal, 1971).

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Murray Bookchin
A Discussion on "Listen, Marxist!"
1970

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