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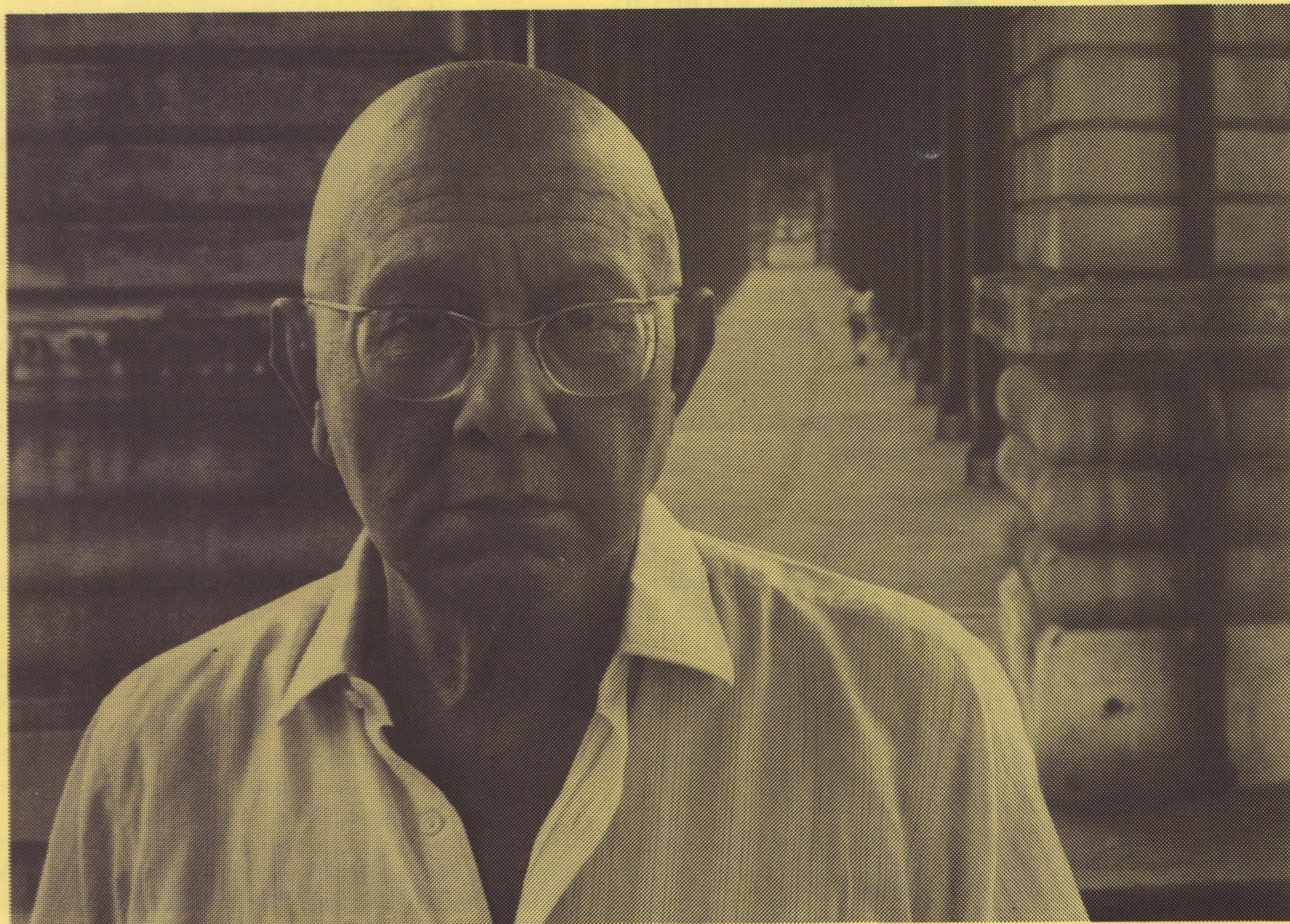
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Israel

Zionists become what they most hate

Interview

Cornelius Castoriadis on the use of Marx today



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Solidarity is also the imprint of a series of pamphlets and books which now numbers more than sixty titles; and which have been variously translated into fifteen foreign languages. A list of those titles currently in print will be found elsewhere in this issue.

Publishing history. The present Solidarity Journal is the latest in a line of magazines produced by the Solidarity Group and stretching back to the early sixties. Solidarity for Workers Power, first in this sequence, was founded in 1960 and ran to 89 issues. This was succeeded by the nationally produced Solidarity for Social Revolution which ran to 16 issues and was in turn succeeded by the current journal. Our publishing history is complicated further by the existence in the sixties and early seventies of six or seven regional Solidarity magazines, among them those produced by the Scottish, South Wales, and North Western Solidarity groups; and by the publication of the shortlived, nationally produced, Solidarity for Self Management.

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COVER PICTURE: Cornelius Castoriadis photographed in Paris by Martine Franck (Magnum Photos).

AS WE SEE IT

ISRAEL



Oscar Zarate

Spilling the blood to save the sperm

What lies behind Israel's determination to continue its occupation of Palestine indefinitely, whatever the cost? Not reasons of security, argues AKIVA ORR, an Israeli socialist living in London.

ISRAEL IS NOT AN EASY PLACE to understand. The foreign correspondents report facts, but they are usually wrong when they try to understand Israeli motivations. Moreover, they are easily fooled when fed arguments plausible to Western minds but actually

irrelevant to most Israelis. Consider this item, reported in the February 10 edition of the popular Israeli daily, Yediot Aharonot:

"TEST TUBE FERTILISATION FOR THE RELIGIOUS BY MEANS OF A KOSHER CONDOM

Yesterday, for the first time, three hundred respectable rabbis received a thorough lesson in innovations in the treatment of infertility. Lectures by doctors, with colour slides, demonstrated the collecting of an egg cell, reception of sperm, test tube fertilisation, freezing of the embryo, and its return to the womb.

The rabbis stated afterwards: 'We learnt so as to understand the problem better and give religious advice when consulted by couples'. According to the doctors the meeting was necessary because rabbis do not read the secular press and it is important that they know the truth.

This unusual meeting in the Sheeba hospital was organised by Ariel, a society for 'Bible, Judaism, and Community in Israel' headed by Rabbi She'ar-Yashuv Cohen, the Chief Rabbi of Haifa, and by the test tube fertilisation teams headed by Professor Shlomo Messiah.

There was a sensation when Rabbi Tsvi Weiman demonstrated to the doctors a strictly kosher condom which enables male contact with the female body during intercourse and collects the sperm without spilling a drop [a necessary religious requirement, since it says in the Bible "Thou shalt not spill thy seed in vain"]. The sperm is collected in this special condom, which is free of sperm-killing chemicals.

The rabbis sighed with relief when they were told that test tube fertilisation is not done during the holy periods [i.e. during menstruation], and that during the operation there is only sperm of one husband and egg of one woman, as ordained by a religious verdict issued by Rabbi Shlomo Goren. This ensures that there will not occur - heavens forbid - an error or exchange [of someone else's sperm] in any form

and that test tube fertilisation will be strictly kosher."

Is this a joke? Not at all. The doctors, rabbis, and a section of the Israeli public are absolutely serious about this matter. Does this mean that Israel is a religious country, that most people are believers or live by religious law? Not at all. Nowhere on earth is such a massive violation of Jewish religious laws perpetrated as regularly as in Israel.

So how serious is an issue such as 'the kosher condom'? It is crucial for twenty per cent; relevant to another twenty per cent; and totally irrelevant - even funny - to the remaining sixty per cent. But half of these sixty per cent uphold religious-nationalistic views when it comes to the issue of the Palestinians and the Israeli occupation. The atheists - to whom the kosher condom issue is a joke - use religion as a rationalisation for their nationalism. As for the 'kosher condom rabbis', none of them protested about the killing and beating of unarmed Palestinians. According to the Jewish faith a non-Jew does not possess a soul, and since Palestine was promised by God to the Jews, non-Jews have no rights there. This is deadly serious. It accounts for much of the readiness to pull the trigger. Are there any Israelis who uphold universal humanistic values? There are indeed; a twenty-five per cent minority. Here is an article published on February 15 in Yediot Aharanot expressing a typical view:

"A RESERVIST DOCTOR: THE SOLDIERS HAVE LEARNED TO DEAL DRY BLOWS.

'I always finish my reserve service with a broken back. But now I finish with a broken soul. These were the worst three weeks of my life', stated M, who did his reserve duty as a doctor in 'The Beach' prison camp Ansar 2. I met him yesterday at the Erez roadblock [at the entrance to the Gaza Strip].

'I emigrated from Europe and I know from my parents' tales what they suffered. In my worst dreams I never imagined that we, Jews, will do to another nation what the Germans did to us. Perhaps we don't build gas chambers and we don't have an organised extermination machinery, but we are not far from it... The beatings, the humiliations. I saw them when they reached me: wet, covered in mud, marked by blows, with tied-up hands and blind-folded.

I saw the marks of the blows on hands, legs, back, and sometimes on the head. The soldiers have learned to give dry blows which leave marks and inflict pain but do not cause damage... I had two cases of swollen testicles, but it is hard to assess if they were caused by blows or disease... My work had two aspects: to check arriving detainees, and complaints within the camp. There are some ten to fifteen complaints per day, about blows, or the work in the camp. Most arrivals from outside have been beaten up. It depends who caught them. Inside the camp I know of no beatings. I don't accept those who arrive with a broken arm, Ansar is a prison camp, not a hospital. Nowadays such cases are few. The soldiers have learned to deal dry blows.

I'm glad to leave. These were the worst three weeks in my life. Even so I'm in two minds: I see the kids throwing stones, and in the camp I see those beaten up. In the first days it was very hard at night, I used to wake up with nightmares. Gradually one represses [them]. Now I'll try to forget I was there'."

The last two sentences provide the insight into this kind of mentality. Instead of doing something to stop the atrocities he tries to repress the memories and forget the whole thing. Why? Not, usually, for lack of conviction, but due to the powerful sense of

'Jewish loyalty' which is the major psychological barrier inhibiting Jews from criticising 'our country' in front of the 'gentiles'. It is this 'loyalty to the Jewish people' rather than to humanity which dominates Jewish responses to Israeli atrocities against the Palestinians.

The politics of the situation are fairly straightforward. Israel was established by Jewish immigrants in a county which was already inhabited by another population who had their own political aspirations. Since 1967 the entire territory of British Palestine has been under Israeli rule. One and a half million Palestinians have lived for twenty years under military occupation, deprived of any rights.

The central issue, both for Palestinians and Israelis, is the future of these occupied territories. The Palestinians want independence in these areas where they have lived for many generations and where they constitute an absolute majority. The Israeli government - and seventy per cent of the Israeli population - are committed to permanent Israeli sovereignty over these territories, not for reasons of security (as they keep misleading the Western media), but due to primitive nationalism of the sort common in Europe before World War Two.

For seventy per cent of Israelis the nationalist obsession overrules security considerations. They know that the new settlements in the occupied territories - populated mainly by 'born-again' Jews from the USA, and financed by the Israeli government - are a liability for the defence policy. They also know that the hostile Palestinians are a major security problem. But they consider defence policy subordinated to the principle of Jewish rule over the entire territory west of the Jordan. They know that this is unacceptable to western public opinion (and they are totally dependent on the West, mainly the

USA), so they use the 'security' argument. Most Israelis would never give up sovereignty over territories west of the Jordan.

The Palestinians do not accept the prospects of living forever under Israeli rule. They expected the Arab regimes to do something about it. They produced the Palestine Liberation Organisation to try to do something about it themselves. When no results were forthcoming after twenty years the

frustration and anger spilled over into the mass popular unarmed uprising we have been seeing recently.

Whatever happens in the future it is clear that the Palestinians will no longer passively accept Israel's occupation. Nor are they subordinated to the PLO. The common people, unarmed, have completely changed the balance of power in Palestine. No future arrangement will be possible without their consent.

TROTSKYISM

Unfinished business

TOM BURNS reports back on last issue's exposé of British trotskysts.

OUR LAST ISSUE, largely devoted to the affairs of the Workers Revolutionary Party, and published on January 20, elicited a substantial response. Not only, despite an increased print run, did the issue rapidly sell out, but our story of the WRP's corruption was taken up by Time Out, who ran a two page investigation into the allegations on January 27.

This was followed by articles in The Daily Mail and The Star, and a (wildly distorted) piece in The Sunday Times. The story was also picked up by Radio London, and the Italian news glossy Domenica della Corriere.

We also know from inside sources that several other national papers, among them the Independent and the Observer, backed off the story. The Sunday Mirror approached Corin Redgrave for a response to the allegations, and was promptly issued with a solicitor's letter denying the charges and threatening legal action. This incident is all the more piquant for the fact that within the week the Redgraves' new Marxist Party held its first public meeting, a one day conference at

London's Young Vic theatre, on the subject of press freedom.

All this and not a murmur of response from the WRP. Then, in the February 13 issue of the Workers Press, the (anti-Healy) WRP finally replied with a Central Committee statement. In the main this confined itself to attacking the more fanciful statements in The Sunday Times article, without at any time commenting on the authenticity of the document we published or dealing with the substance of the allegations therein. Such silence speaks volumes.

To update on the WRP saga, on February 20-21 the anti-Healy WRP held a National Conference which led to further splits. A fortnight later, on March 7, the Central Committee suspended publication of the Workers Press. As we go to print, there are no longer six, but at least nine groups deriving from the implosion of Healy's private gulag in 1985. Despite their differences they share one thing in common, namely an inability to come to grips with what happened, and its political basis.

CORNELIUS CASTORIADIS

Marx today: the tragicomical paradox

The French thinker CORNELIUS CASTORIADIS finds the ideas of Karl Marx largely irrelevant to the world of today. In this long interview, conducted by the French journal 'Lutter', he contends that marxism is irredeemably vitiated by a simple paradox which cannot but undermine any political movement adhering to it. Yet in the revolutionary 'dance of the seven veils', which is the shedding of illusions in labourism, trotskyism, stalinism and so on, it seems the hardest illusion to abandon is faith in the universal validity of marxism itself.



INTERVIEW

LUTTER: What is the use of Marx today for militants who want to fight against capitalism, be it Western capitalism or the bureaucratic societies of Eastern Europe?

CORNELIUS CASTORIADIS: It is not quite appropriate to speak in terms of

usefulness, since an author is not a tool. That said, if one reads Marx as all great authors should be read (not in order to find in him a dogma or ready-made truths, but critically) one understands what it means to think, one discovers new ways of thinking and of criticising thought.

In this respect, Marx is a particularly difficult and even

'dangerous' author; indeed, he is so 'deceptive' that he managed to deceive himself. Marx has written a very great number of works, but his writings are neither homogeneous nor consistent; Marx is a complex and ultimately antinomic author.

Why antinomic? Because Marx provides us with a relatively new idea or inspiration, namely that it is men who make their own history, and that the emancipation of the workers will be accomplished by the workers themselves. In other words, the source of truth, especially in the realm of politics, is not to be sought in heaven or in books, but in the living activities of people operating within society. This apparently simple and even commonplace idea implies a great number of extremely important consequences that Marx never managed to bring out. Why? Because at the same time, that is to say since his youth, Marx was dominated by the ghost of a complete, total, fully accomplished theory. Not by the ghost of the obviously indispen-

sible theoretical work, but by the ghost of the definitive system.

Thus, from The German Ideology onwards, he sets himself up as the theoretician who has discovered the law ruling society and history, the law of how society functions, the law of the order of appearance of social formations within history, the 'laws of capitalist economy', and so on.

This second element, which we are justified in calling the theoretical or speculative element, dominates Marx's thought and attitude from the very beginning. It relegates the first element to some lapidary and enigmatic expressions. This helps us understand why he spent thirty years of his adult life in an attempt to finish Capital, the book whose task was to prove theoretically, and on the basis of economic considerations, the inevitability of the collapse of capitalism. Marx would obviously fail in this attempt, and he could not finish Capital.

The second element is false, and at the same time incompatible with the first. Either history is really governed by laws, and in that case a truly human activity is impossible, except perhaps in a technical sense; or human beings really make their own history, and then the task of theory will not be directed to discovering 'laws', but to the elucidation of the conditions within which human activity unfolds, the regularity of their appearance, and so on.

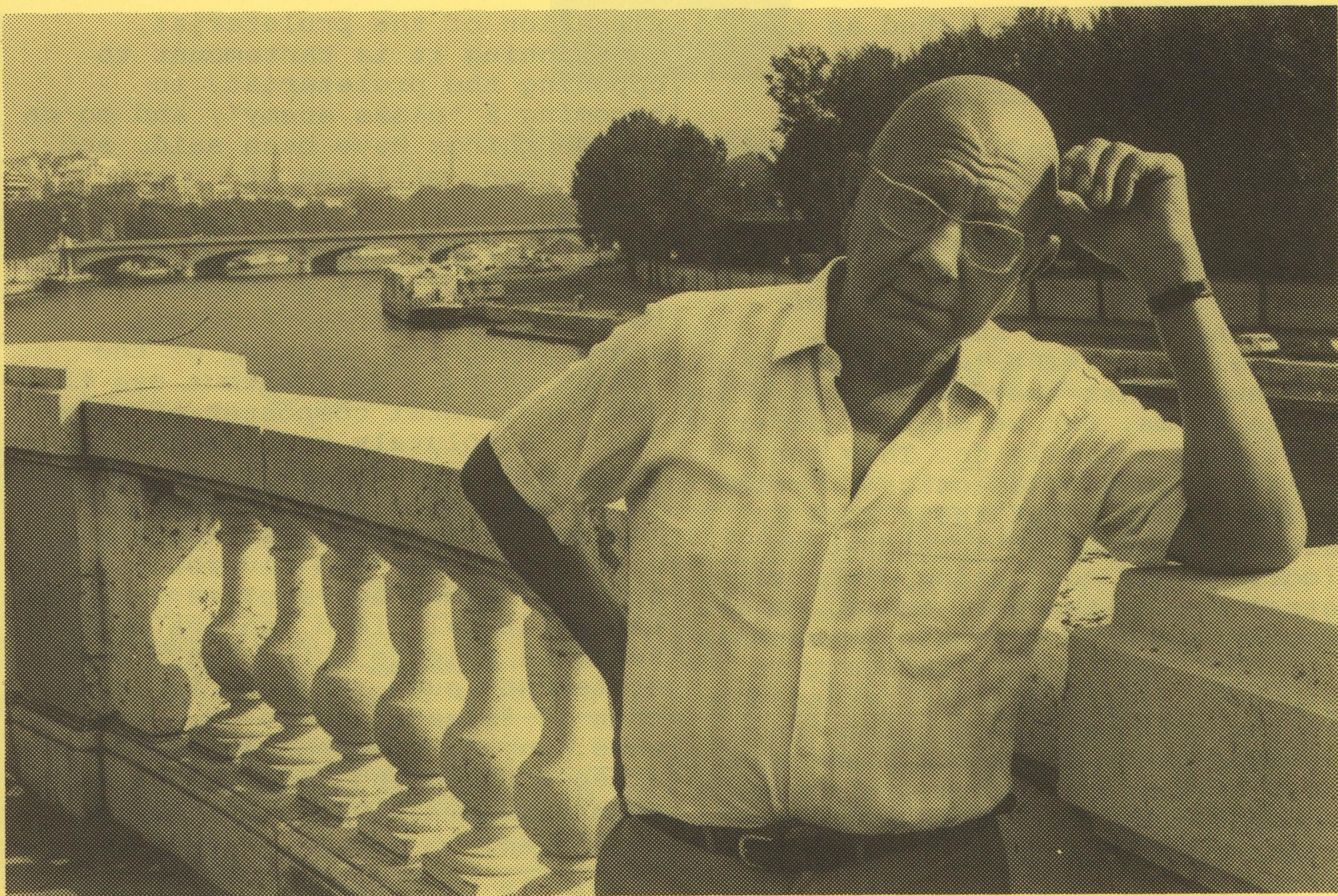
However, it is this second element which has enabled Marx and marxism to play such an important and catastrophic role in the working-class movement. In Marx, people have sought (and have believed they had found) a certain number of ready-made truths. They have believed that all truths, or in any case the most important truths, can be found in Marx, and that it is therefore not worthwhile, and even dangerous and

suspect, to think for oneself. It is this second position which has legitimised the bureaucracies of the working-class organisations invoking Marx, and which has helped them to become the official and authorised interpreters of socialist orthodoxy.

One must acknowledge that the success of the marxist claim to represent scientific truth has not done violence to people. It has, indeed, represented an answer to something which people were seeking and are still seeking. At a very deep level, this something corresponds to the alienation, the heteronomy of people. People need certainties, they need psychological and intellectual security. They consequently tend to abdicate the task of thinking for themselves, and to entrust it to others.

And, of course, the theory is there to provide pseudo-guarantees. Our theory proves that capitalism is doomed to collapse and to be 'followed by socialism'. The nineteenth-century fascination with 'science' is obviously still alive, a fascination made stronger by the fact that this strange 'science' (marxism) claims to be 'objective', namely independent of the wishes and desires of those professing it. At the same time, like a magician pulling a rabbit out of a hat, the 'science' is able to 'produce' a future condition of mankind in full harmony with our wishes and desires, and 'historical laws' which guarantee that the society of the future will necessarily be a 'good society'.

Incidentally, it is funny to see marxists, interminably busy 'interpreting' such or such a point of Marx's theory, never asking themselves the marxist question par excellence: how has marxism really worked in real history, and why? This simple fact totally and irrevocably disqualifies them.



Martine Franck / Magnum Photos

CORNELIUS CASTORIADIS: 'Either history is really governed by laws, and in that case a truly human activity is impossible, or men really make their own history'.

LUTTER: We can then find a totalitarian aspect within the very conception of theory, its nature and role, in Marx himself. But libertarians tend to condemn marxism globally and rather hurriedly, by claiming that it contains the theoretical foundations of what they call authoritarian socialism (leninism, stalinism, and so on). But don't you think that it is possible to find in Marx categories and theoretical notions that could be useful to the struggle for self-management?

CASTORIADIS: Marx's relationship with the birth of totalitarianism is a very complex question. I would not talk about a totalitarian theory. The term 'totalitarianism' applies to social and political regimes. I do not think that Marx was totalitarian, nor that he was 'the father' of totalitarianism.

It is quite simple to prove it. Marxism did not only give rise to leninism-stalinism. First and foremost it gave rise to social-democracy, which can be described in many ways but cannot be called totalitarian. Many historical ingredients were necessary to give birth to totalitarianism. Among the most important of these we can list the creation by Lenin of the very type of totalitarian organisation, the Bolshevik Party, and the role it was given within the state and Russian society after 1917. From this point of view, Lenin is the real father of totalitarianism.

No doubt some of the ingredients can be traced back to Marx himself and to his theory. I have tried to discuss these in the texts published in Socialisme ou Barbarie in 1959 ('Proletariat and Organisation') and then in 1964 ('Marxism and Revolutionary

Theory'), now republished as the first part of The Imaginary Institution of Society.

The first ingredient, to which I have already alluded, is the very position of theory as such. Just like Hegelian philosophy, Marx's theory is presented as the 'last theory': it takes the place of Hegel's 'absolute knowledge'. Naturally, marxists will protest and swear that they do not think in these terms. But we must consider what they actually do. They can chatter about 'dialectics', 'relativism', etc., but their work is always directed to interpreting (correcting, completing, improving, etc.) Marx's thought, as if, on the whole, one had to remain permanently submitted to that thought. In general their practice corresponds to the affirmation that the fundamental truth about our times was told by Marx. This has grotesque consequences, for instance in the realm of economics. More than a century after the conception and formulation of Marx's ideas and analyses marxists continue to want to prove at all costs that Marx was right, as if the important thing were to salvage some of Marx's statements, rather than to ascertain and understand what really happens in the economic field.

This concept of theory as 'the last theory' (in effect as 'absolute knowledge') is not something external, which could be discarded allowing the rest to be saved. It is imperatively born out of and demanded by the very content of theory. The latter claims that on the one hand the proletariat is the 'last class' in history, and on the other hand that to each class there corresponds a conception that 'truly' expresses its interests or historical role. It follows that either marxism is nothing at all, or it is the theory, the only true theory of the proletariat, the 'last class' in history. And, if this theory is the theoretical expression of the historical

situation of the proletariat, questioning it is tantamount to opposing the proletariat, to becoming a 'class enemy', and so on (these things have been said, and acted upon, millions of times).

But what happens if someone, you, me, a worker, does not agree? Well, he places himself outside his class. He joins the side of the 'class enemy'. We can thus see that one fundamental component of marxism is absolutely unacceptable to a democratic working-class movement, to a democratic revolutionary movement. Democracy is impossible without freedom and diversity of opinion. Democracy implies that, in the political field, no one possesses a science which can justify statements such as 'this is true; this is false', and so on. Otherwise, anyone possessing such a science could and should take a sovereign position in the body politic.

This is exactly what has happened, at the ideological level, within the leninist parties. The ruling bureaucracy of the working-class parties of the Second International legitimised itself in its own eyes and sought to legitimise itself in the eyes of the workers on the strength of this idea: we are those who hold the truth, marxist theory. But a theory merely consists of words and sentences, necessarily endowed with several possible meanings and thus requiring an interpretation. An interpretation itself still consists of words and sentences themselves requiring an interpretation, and so on. How can all that be stopped? Churches found an answer long ago: they defined an orthodox interpretation, and above all, a real structure which incarnates, guarantees, and 'defends' orthodoxy. And it is never noted that this reactionary monstrosity, the idea of orthodoxy and of guardians of orthodoxy, seizes the working-class movement and enslaves it through marxism and thanks to marxism. At this level, leninism

has definitely been more consistent than social-democracy, hence its much greater success.

There is another example, another ingredient that has played a very great role in legitimising leninist-stalinist bureaucracy: the talk of crypto-stalinists and fellow-travellers aimed at covering up the horrors of the stalinist regime. Historical materialism maintains that each stage of the development of the productive forces is accompanied by a specific social regime, and that the establishment of socialism is therefore dependent upon a 'sufficient' degree of development of the productive forces. It follows that even though Stalin kept terrorising, murdering, sending millions of people to Siberia, factories were still being constructed, and also therefore the material bases of socialism. Thanks to a 'sufficient' development of the productive system, the other evils, which can be attributed to the 'backwardness' of the Russian productive forces, will finally disappear. Even today, if you scratch a Communist a little, he will talk exactly like this. This is the outcome of the content of marxist theory. Socialism is not seen as a political and historical project, the socially rooted activity of a great number of people who aim at modifying the institution of society, but as the result of an objective historical movement incarnated by the development of the productive forces.

LUTTER: But are there or are there not, in Marx, ideas that can be used in the struggle for self-management?

CASTORIADIS: I will use the example I know best, my own. When I began to write on self-management, on the collective management of production and of social life in 1949, as from the first number of Socialisme ou Barbarie I was a marxist. But once I began to develop this idea as from 1955 (in 'The Content of Socialism'), I rapidly realised that it was profoundly incompatible

with Marx's conception and that in that respect Marx was useless.

In developing the idea of workers' management, of the management of production by the producers themselves, one rapidly comes up against the question of technology. Marx has nothing to say on this issue. Marx and marxists have provided no critique of capitalist technology. What they criticise is the misappropriation in favour of capitalists of a technology which appears, as such, unquestionable.

And is there, in Marx, a critique of the organisation of capitalist factories? No, there is not. He does, of course, denounce its most cruel and inhuman aspects. But in Marx's view, this organisation is a true incarnation of rationality, because it is completely and necessarily dictated by the state of technology. Nothing central to it can, therefore, be changed. This is why he thinks that production and the economy are destined to remain within the realm of necessity, and that 'the kingdom of freedom' can only be built outside the realm of necessity through the reduction of the working day. It is like saying that work, in itself, is slavery and cannot ever become a centre for the unfolding of human creativity.

In point of fact, contemporary technology is well and truly capitalistic; there is nothing neutral about it. It is modelled upon specifically capitalist objectives, which do not consist so much in the increase of profits as, above all, in the elimination of the role of human beings in production, in the subordination of producers in the impersonal mechanisms of the productive process. Consequently, as long as this type of technology prevails, it is impossible to speak of self-management. The self-management of the assembly line by the assembly-line workers is a sinister joke. To establish self-management, it is necessary to abolish the assembly-line. I am not saying that all existing factories should be

destroyed overnight. Nevertheless, a revolution which does not immediately tackle the question of a conscious transformation of technology in order to allow people, as individuals, as groups, as a working collectivity, to have access to the control of the production process; such a revolution would be condemned to a rapid death. People who work on the assembly-line six days a week cannot be expected to enjoy, as Lenin pretended, Sundays of soviet freedom.

Marx did not and could not develop such a critique of technology. The reason is profoundly bound to his conception of history. Like Hegel's 'Reason' or 'Spirit of the World', in Marx it is the 'rationality' incarnated by technology (the 'development of productive forces') which makes history advance. This explains why Marx and marxism could only be massive obstacles to a movement aiming at self-management, autonomy, or self-government.

LUTTER: However, in reading your writings, which have obviously developed in time and show fortunately a thought in a state of evolution, one gets the impression that, while you formulate a critique of marxism, you utilise a number of categories moulded or at least systemised by Marx. One example is when you show that the societies of Eastern Europe practise exploitation. On the other hand, your critique of technology is quite valid. But in positing the elements of a revolutionary project, you too rely upon certain aspects of existing technology which in your opinion can be positively utilised. Data processing, for example, can be an element leading to the totalitarianisation of society, but can also be appropriately transformed and become an element of democracy throughout the world.

CASTORIADIS: Once again it must be said that Marx is a very important

author. But in the history of Greek-western society, we can find about thirty or forty authors of equal importance, whose ideas, methods, etc., are being constantly utilised without anyone, for that reason, being called a Platonist, an Aristotelian, a Kantian, and I know not what. In this perspective, Marx enjoys no privilege.

Marx does hold a privileged position in relation to the first element of the antinomy I formulated earlier, to the extent that he sees that it is the living activity of human beings which creates social and historical forms (it is no accident that Marx does not express the concept in these terms). At the same time he does not simply decide to wait for the next stage of this activity, but he takes up a political stand. He wants to be an active part of the movement or take charge of it (in this last formulation we can see already the sinister ambiguity underlying this position). Having a historical project, and trying, at the same time, to understand to what extent this political project is nourished and borne by historical reality, by the workers' struggle against capitalism, therein lies Marx's originality, his absolute singularity. In so far as I still personally feel a specific link with Marx, it is through this element which he taught me (or which I found in him). But this does not mean 'being a marxist'.

Once we come to content, it is obvious that several notions put forward by Marx have now become incorporated in our thought. But even in these cases we are compelled to be critical and to move further. One example is my text 'The Social Regime in Russia' (Esprit, July-August 1978, republished by Editions Le Vent du Chemin), in which I summarise in the form of theses all I have written on Russia since 1946. The exposition begins with a somewhat educational part, intended for

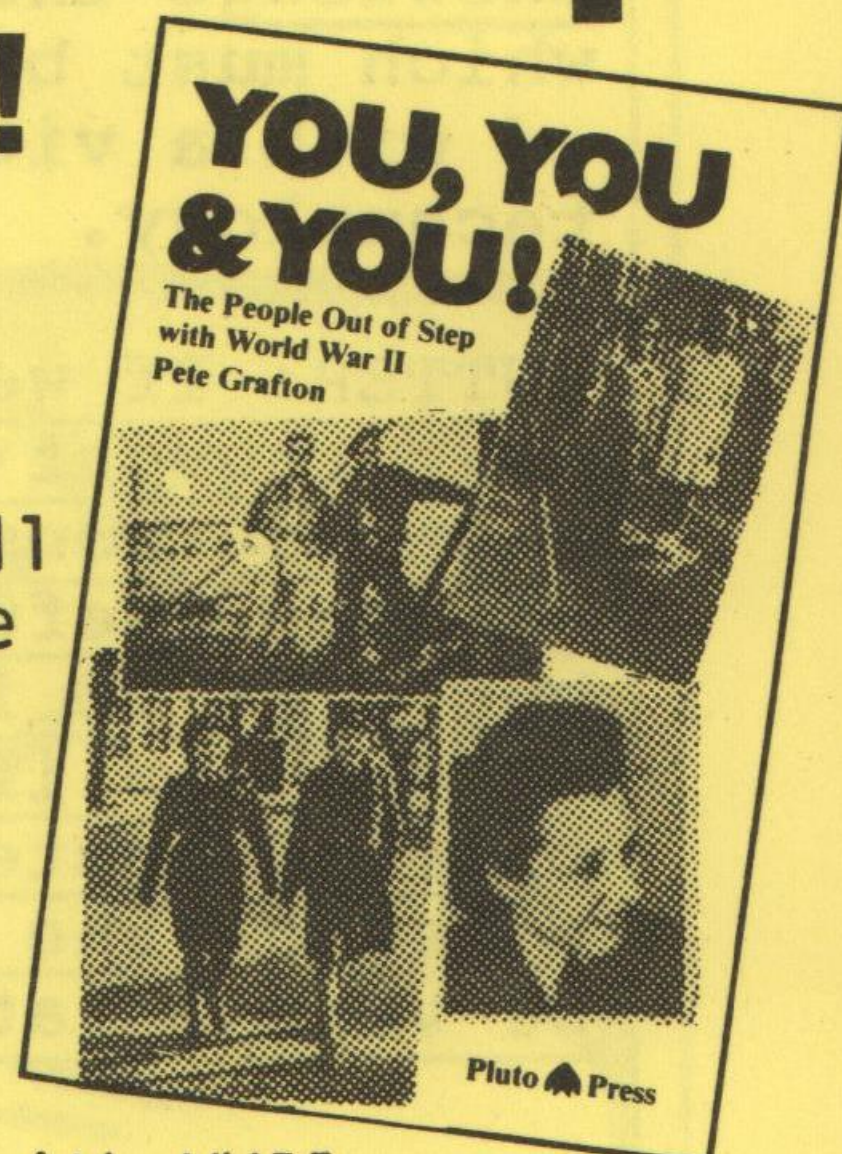
marxists, which makes use of the notions of the relations of production and of classes defined in terms of their positions within these relations, so as to say to them: if you are really marxists you must agree that the Russian regime is based on exploitation, that it is a class regime, and so on. But immediately after, I show that this analysis is quite unsatisfactory, because, for example, in Russia, the total political subjugation of the working-class totally transforms its position, even within the relations of production. This leads us very far. Independently of the concrete case of Russia, this situation carries deep implications both in respect to concepts and in respect to methodology. It means that I cannot define the position of a social category within the relations of production solely by taking into consideration the relations of production. Consequently the concept of 'historical determinism' and the view that the base determines superstructures and that the economy determines politics begins to crumble.

As for technology, what I wish to say is that there is no neutrality as to how it is actually applied. To give an example, television, as it is today, is a means of brutalisation. And it would be false to say that another society would use this television differently; there would no longer be this television in a different society. Many things would have to be modified in television, to allow it to be 'used differently'. This type of relationship, in which everybody is connected to a single actively emitting centre, whilst all the others hold the position of passive, horizontally unrelated, receivers, obviously constitutes an alienating political structure, incarnated within the applied technology. How all this could be changed is another issue, an issue which cannot be solved by a single individual, but partakes of social creativity.

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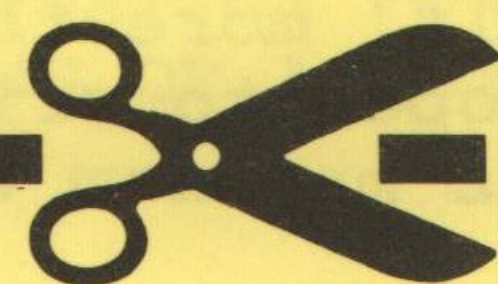
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What remains true is that in today's scientific and technical knowledge there is a potential which must be explored and exploited with a view to modifying present technology.

LUTTER: If we want to summarise your thought on Marx, we can say that you consider him an important author, useful in certain respects, but that it is useless to refer to marxism as if it were an accomplished system of thought. You consider the usefulness of Marx to be very relative indeed.

CASTORIADIS: There is something that has amazed and even shocked me for a long time. There is a tragicomical paradox in the spectacle of people who claim to be revolutionary, who wish to overthrow the world and at the same time try to cling at all costs to a reference system, who would feel lost if the author or the system which guarantees the truth of what they believe, were to be taken away from them. How is it possible not to see that these people place themselves by their own volition in a position of mental subjection to a work which is already there, which has mastered a truth which henceforth can only be interpreted, refined, patched up?

We must create our own thought as we advance; we must create it, of course, always in connection with a certain past, a certain tradition. We must stop believing that the truth was revealed once and for all in a work written a hundred and twenty years ago. It is essential to communicate this conception to people, especially to young people.

There is something else equally important. It is impossible to avoid drawing up a balance sheet of the history of marxism, of what marxism has actually become, of how it worked and still works in real history. There is first Marx himself, more than complex, more than open to criticism. Then we have a marxism without inverted

commas, a number of authors and trends claiming to derive from Marx, who make an honest and serious attempt at interpretation, (let us say Lukacs up to 1923, or the Frankfurt School). By the way, this type of marxism no longer exists today. And then we have 'marxism', the historically powerful and overwhelming 'marxism' of the bureaucratic states, of Stalinist parties, of their various appendages. It is a 'marxism' that plays an extremely important role; indeed, it is the only marxism to play a real role. It still continues (almost no longer in Europe, but still to a great extent in the Third World) to attract people who want to do something against the horrible situations prevailing in their countries. It continues to convince them to join movements that appropriate their activities and deflect them to the benefit of bureaucratic regimes. This 'marxism' still continues to offer legitimacy to the Russian regime and its expansionist undertakings.

LUTTER: This is true, but we are still faced with a problem. Militants do need psychological security, but this is only one side of the story. A revolutionary who wants to transform the world needs a certain number of tools. One cannot just face the world, keep one's eyes and ears wide open and try to understand in a subjective manner. I agree with your critical remarks, but I still think that the problem of the reference framework remains. It is the type of process that you got involved in, to some extent, when you wrote 'The Imaginary Institution of Society'; the first third of the book is devoted to a critical assessment of marxism. Today there remains a real void, a real gap.

CASTORIADIS: I am not suggesting that everyone should start by making a tabula rasa. In any case, no one does it and no one can do it. Everyone carries along, at all times, an ensemble of ideas,

convictions, readings, etc. The question is to get rid of the idea that there is, before one starts, a given theory in a privileged position. When I wrote the beginning of the text you mentioned, I aimed among other things at destroying this idea because I am convinced that it bars the way to lucid thinking.

But let us consider seriously the problem you raise. It is true that we need to find an orientation in the modern world. And we do need to elucidate our project for a future society, what we want, what people want, what the project implies, how it could be implemented, what new problems and contradictions it might give rise to, and so on.

Concerning all these things, Marx has nothing to say, strictly nothing, except that we must abolish private property in the means of production, which is right, provided that we know exactly what this means (after all, don't nationalisations continue to pass as socialism?). And there are other problems as well: all forced collectivisation is to be radically excluded. At bottom, all the essential ideas that still maintain some relevance for us as revolutionaries had already been formulated by the working-class movement before Marx, between 1800 and 1848, more exactly in the newspapers of the first English trade-unions and in the writings of the French socialists.

And if we want to find an orientation in the contemporary social world, our main object (in respect to power structures, economics and even culture) is obviously bureaucracy and bureaucratic apparatuses. What can Marx tell us on these issues? Nothing. Less than nothing, worse than nothing. It is by means of Marx's ideas that trotskyists have sought for sixty years to eliminate the problem of the bureaucracy: "the problem is the ownership of capital, not the bureaucracy; the bureaucracy is not

a class", and so on - whereas it is clear that the problem lies more and more in the bureaucracy, and not in 'capital' (in Marx's sense).

And it is not just the bureaucracy 'opposite us', as a dominant layer: it is also the bureaucracy 'in us', the enormous and anguishing questions raised by the perpetual and perpetually recurring bureaucratisation of all organisations, trade unions, political parties, and so on. This has been a fundamental experience for a century. Yet Marx and marxism have nothing to say about this. Worse: they blind us. It is not possible, within marxism, to conceive of a working-class bureaucracy, rising from a political and organisational differentiation, and pursuing its own objectives, becoming

'autonomous' and finally seizing power and the state for its own benefit. From a marxist viewpoint, such a bureaucracy must not exist, because it is not rooted in the 'relations of production'. So much the worse for reality, since stalinism exists all the same.

INTERVIEW

● This interview was conducted on 23 March 1983 for the May-August issue of the French journal Lutter. It was translated by Franco Schiavoni for the January 1984 issue of the Australian magazine Thesis Eleven. Our version, based on this translation, has been amended and corrected for Solidarity by Castoriadis himself.

● Some chapters of Castoriadis' book The Imaginary Institution of Society (Polity Press, 1987) have previously appeared as Solidarity pamphlets.

1956

Making a right pig of it

From KEN WELLER, London:

Memory plays tricks, and it has been pointed out to me that there were some factual errors in the interview with me run in Solidarity 15. For instance, Peter Fryer's paper was just called The Newsletter, and he left the SLL in 1959. More importantly, I described a meeting at which Jimmy McLoughlin attacked Andrew Rothstein; what he actually said was "You're the enemy, you lying old swine" (and not "filthy old swine", as I remembered it). This is significant, precisely because it was Rothstein's lies which got up his nose. My apologies.

Also, for the record, in my article 'Cherished Myths of Radical Action' in Solidarity 14, I gave a short rundown of the published material dealing with mutinies in the British forces during World War One, from which I inadvertently omitted an important, and the first modern, source. This was Walter Kendall's important book The Revolutionary Movement in Britain 1900-1921, published by Weidenfeld in 1969, which, while dealing with the whole radical milieu, contains much valuable information on unrest among the military.

It is significant that in a period when huge chunks of historically worthless material purporting to deal with the socialist movement have been churned out by publishers, 'radical' or otherwise, this text has been allowed to go out of print.

sincerely,

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