THE RISE & FALL OF MARXISM

A reappraisal of radical politics in the 20th Century

Convenor: Gavin Simpson, (071 737 7582)

This series of open discussions is sponsored by Analysis magazine, and aims to provide a forum for people who are interested in the future of Marxist politics. The talks are not 'educationals', and participants are asked to make an active contribution to the discussions.

The main aim of the talks is to consider why Marxism has never been able to separate itself from the changing fortunes of bourgeois ideology and social theory. Marxism first developed as critique and radical synthesis of the best that bourgeois theory could offer. By the late 19th Century, bourgeois thought became conservative, abstract and functionalist. Unfortunately, Marxists showed themselves all too eager to incorporate every fad and fancy of a culture in decay. After 1945 the domination of mainstream ideology over Marxism became complete and 'Marxism' became little more than a vague recognition of 'the class struggle' and an agenda for reform in favour of the 'have-nots'. Why has an ostensibly revolutionary theoretical tradition never able to shake-off the influence of bourgeois ideology? The final session proposes that we are not witnessing the 'collapse of Marxism' - ***there has never been an established Marxist tradition to defeat*** - but the collapse of radicalism. If Marxism can break loose of its traditional subservience it will be able to provide a philosophy and a social theory for the 21st Century. If not, it will follow its bourgeois counterparts into the mire.

Cheap photocopies of most of the material indicated are available.

The aim of the first two meetings, under the general heading 'The Politics of Duplicity', is an attempt to show why a thorough reappraisal of Marxism and radical politics in the 20th Century is necessary. British radical politics owes more to William Morris and George Orwell than to Karl Marx, and combines a mixture of a middle class radicalism with a strident evocation militancy and fundamentalism.

1. The Politics of Duplicity: Radicalism

7.30, Monday, 29th March

This talk explores the non-Marxist origins of radicalism in Britain, from the dissenting Protestant tradition to today's Green movement. The aim of the discussion is to explain why there has never been a Marxist tradition in Britain.

2. The Politics of Duplicity: British Trotskyism

7.30 Monday 12th April

Far from being the successor of Leon Bronstein, British Trotskyism after 1945 represents an adaptation of the traditional preoccupations of British radicalism to the post-war liberal, welfare, consensus.

3. The Rise of Bourgeois and Marxist Thought

7.30, Monday, 26th April

The contribution of the English and Scottish Political Economists, Hegel and early French social thoery on the formative years of Marxism will be considered. Though a return to a 'golden age' is neither possible nor desireable, it will be argued that the future of Marxism depends on its ability to adopt the revolutionary approach of its formative years.

H. Grossmann, 'The Evolutionist Revolt Against Classical Economics', 'Classical Political Economy and the Problem of Dynamics'.
Lenin, *The Three Component Parts of Marxism*
Marx & Engels, extracts from *Feuerbach and the End of German Classical Philosophy, The German Ideology.*
A. Skinner, 'Historical Theory', from his *A System of Social Science*, OUP

Also useful: L. Colleti, *From Rousseau to Lenin;* F. A. Hayek, *The Counter-Revolution of Science;* H. Marcuse, *Revolution and Reason;* T. I. Oizerman, *The Making of Marxist Philosophy;* Isaac Rubin, *A History of Economic Theory.*

4. The Degeneration of Bourgeois and Marxist Thought 1870-1914

7.30, Monday, 10th May

During the late 19th Century the emergence of monopoly capitalism and mass working class politics provoked a crisis in bourgeois ideas. Mainstream social theory split into two divergent but complimentary 'schools' which expressed both a romanitc reaction against mass politics and 'finance capital', and an uncritical subservience to 'modern society'. The divide persists to this day. On the one hand, the Positivist School stressed a mechanistic world view, bureaucratic rationality, State supervision of the economy, and the 'appliance of science' to social problems. On the other, the 'subjectivists' stressed the role of the individual will, 'exemplary action' and 'pure politics'. At the end of the 19th Century Marxism was capable of stepping in to the arena as a philosophy which could overcome this divide between Man and Nature, between economics and politics. Tragically, the emergent Marxist tradition itself split into 'mechanistic' and 'voluntatirst' wings. In the conservative wing, Karl Kautsky's 'inexorable laws of capitalist motion' undermined the need for working class politics. On the radical side, Rosa Luxemburg's celebration of the general strike emphasised action to the detriment of understanding. By the eve of the first world war official Marxism was in much the same mess as bourgeois social theory. Both were spent.

C. Antoni, *From History to Sociology*, Merlin
L. Colleti, *Fom Rousseau to Lenin*, NLB
C. Levy, *Socialism and the Intelligensia, 1880-1914*, RKP
G. Lukacs, *The Destruction of Reason*, Merlin
F. Nietzsche, 'On the Uses and Disadvantages of History'
M. Salvador, *Karl Kautsky and the Socialist Revolution 1880-1930*, NLB
G. Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*, Cam, Mass 1951.
H. Stuart Hughes, *Consciousness & Society*, OUP
M. Weber, extracts from several works.

5. Post-War Bourgeois and Marxist Thought

7.30, Monday, 24th May

The main theme of this talk is how the 'new ideologies' which arose out of the post-war liberal consensus affected Marxism. In particular we will examine:
a) How the Keynesian-Socialist synthesis in economics and social policy led to a 'statification' of radical politics, and eventually its incorporation into bourgeois society.
b) How the negation of class led to the politics of 'new social movements' such as 'student power', 'peoples power', 'Third Worldism', militant consumerism, the greens, etc.
c) How the denial of imperialism shattered Marxism's most solid contribution: political economy.

D. Cohn-Bendit, *Obsolete Communism: The Left-Wing Alternative*, Penguin
A. Gorz, *Farewell to the Working Class*, Pluto
M. Kidron, *Western Capitalism*, Penguin.
L. Panich, *Working Class Politics in Crisis*, Verso

6. The Positivist-Humanist Controversy

7.30, Monday, 7th June

Continuing the theme of the previous talk, this session will discuss the rise and fall of Althusserianism as the final moment of the destruction of Marxism. Althusser represented the highest expression of the Stalinist mechanistic world view, a 'Marxism' full of 'objective processes' devoid of all human consciousness and agency. Once such a world view was exposed as unsustainable, it collapsed into its opposite; unbridled subjectivism and relativism. It is no suprise to find that almost all post-modernist thinkers were once card-carrying Stalinists. It will also be argued that Sartre and E. P. Thompson's defence of Humanism is an inadequate response.

P. Anderson, *In the Tracks of Historical Materialism*, Verso
P. Anderson, *The Problems of Western Marxism*, Verso
A. Callinicos, *Althusser's Marxism*. Pluto
G. Elliot, Althusser, *The Detour of Theory*, Verso
E. P. Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory*, Merlin
J. P. Sartre, *A Critique of Dialectical Reason*, NLB
S. Timpanaro, *On Materialism*, NLR

7. End Game: Post-Modernism and Identity

7.30, Monday, 21st June

Just as Marxism hit the buffers with Althusser, it will be argued that Post-Modernism represents the final dissolution of bourgeois social theory, offering only a bleached and arid landscape.

P. Anderson, *In the Tracks of Historical Materialism*, Verso *
P. Anderson, *The Problems of Western Marxism*, Verso *
A. Callinicos, *Against Post Modernism*. Polity
D. Harvey, *The Condition of Post-Modernity*, Blackwell
F. Lyotard, *The Post-Modern Condition*, MUP.
H. Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*. RKP

8. Marxism in the 21st Century

7.30, Monday 5th July

In a necessarily exploratory and suggestive session, this talk will argue that after a detour of almost a hundred years, Marxism will be the philosophy of the 21st Century if it abandons its attachment to a dying culture. It will revitalise itself by a return to both philosophy and economics, by providing a concept of Man and a theory of the world economy, and by explaining how society makes its own future, even in circumstances not of our choosing.

If you would like to discuss any aspect of this series of talks please give Gavin Simpson a ring on 071 737 7582. People without a formal education should in no way feel discouraged from participating. Most of the sessions will be introduced by experienced teachers who, for the price of a pint, will explain the mysteries of the Universe. All that is necessary is an open mind, a sense of history, and a commitment to do something serious See you soon.

All meetings will be held 7.30 pm on alternate Mondays at:

THE RED ROSE CLUB
129 Seven Sisters Road, N7
Tube: Finsbury Pk, Bus: 4,19,29,253

Ring 071 737 7582 or write to 27 Old Gloucester Street, London WC1N 3XX

ANALYSIS

ISSUE No. 1

The Ecology of Green Failure. Alison Costello exposes the reactionary nature of Green ideology and argues that the Green Party is not able to cohere either a stable organization nor an effective strategy.

The Aids Fraud. In one of the first studies of its kind Susil Gupta shows that the threat of a generalised Aids epidemic in the West is entirely bogus. The Aids scare is a moral panic.

Cuba: Nationalism and Socialism? Javier Gonzalez argues that Castro's Cuba has never been a model of Socialist democracy or development.

Do The Right Thing. Andrew Chitty examines Marx's theory of knowledge, and argues that an understanding of reality, rather than morality, is the only real guide to political action.

ISSUE No. 2

It's a Depression! Tony Allen, Brian Green, Susil Gupta and Tom Kemp examine the crisis in the world economy.

Booms, Busts & the Working Class. Alison Costello casts an empirical eye on the much publicised prosperity of the working class during the 1960s.

Oliver's Twist. Brian Turner takes a few shots at the Kennedy Myth and argues that Stone's movie lets Americans off the hook.

ANL Fixation. Barry O'Brien shows that the British Left's obsession with Nazis is not anti-racism but an attempt to rebuild its relationship with the liberal middle class.

'The Last Man' (interview). Francis Fukuyama talks about history, Hegel, and capitalism.

Marxism and Subjectivity. In a polemical essay, Don Milligan argues that Marxism's inability to understand subjectivity has been its undoing.

Do Something Now! Andrew Chitty examines the Marxist theory of history.

ISSUE No. 3 SPECIAL ISSUE ON THE CRISIS IN BRITAIN

1. The Economic Crisis. 2. The End of Cowley Man, 3. The Road to War. 4. The Remaking of the English Working Class.

AVAILABLE AT £2 EACH.

Please send me a copy of issue(s) No.....

Name _____

Address _____

_____

City _____

Send to 'Analysis Publishing' 27 Old Gloucester St, London WC1N 3XX