

The LOM on "Althusserian Marxism"
 by the Chicago Primacy of Theory Study Group
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I. INTRODUCTION

In its May-June and July-August 1981 issues, the rectificationist journal Line of March (LOM) published a "beginning critique" of what they term "Althusserian Marxism", in two parts. Ostensibly, the purpose of their critique is to struggle against the theoretical positions being advanced by the "primacy of theory" journal Theoretical Review (TR), within the anti-dogmatist anti-revisionist trend of the US communist movement. The LOM critique has two aspects: its form, which is overwhelmingly negative, and its content, which is mainly positive (in the sense of being useful).

In form, the LOM critique has created a fictitious "Althusserian Marxism" as a means of reading TR out of the trend without struggle over the concrete issues which TR has been raising for the US communist movement. What TR has done over the past four years has been to try to popularize and to apply certain portions of the writings of modern anti-revisionist Marxists such as Althusser, Bettelheim, and Poulantzas, in order to rescue Marxist-Leninist theory from the degeneration which it has suffered under the domination of Stalinism. TR has also published a number of historical articles (in TR #11,12,19,21, & 22) which demonstrate the revisionism of the CPUSA while it was still explicitly Stalinist, thereby raising issues the Stalinists of LOM can only ignore. In order to establish its hegemony within the trend upon the ruins of the OC, LOM is trying to saddle TR with an "Althusserian School" which is imaginary because its supposed leading figures have actually been attempting to overcome Stalinist ideology from independent perspectives. In this way, by presenting "Althusserian Marxism" as an ideological system being advanced by TR, LOM can stick TR with positions which TR neither accepts nor advances to the US communist movement. However, as we shall see, LOM is not content with this subterfuge to avoid dealing with the concrete issues TR has been raising; the LOM critique of "Althusserian Marxism" also includes distortions and outright lies concerning its opponents' views.

On the other hand, in content the LOM critique of "Althusserian Marxism" is quite useful, for it presents a reasoned, coherent defense of certain aspects of Stalinist ideology. In order to expunge these bourgeois ideas from our political theory, we must understand them thoroughly, especially how they can be represented as being consistent with Marxism-Leninism. In this paper we have attempted to identify the two lines in cases in which LOM advances the Stalinist position, so that further study of these important issues can be undertaken. (We have also indicated our agreement with several, important criticisms which LOM makes of the "Althusserians".) After first examining the malicious form of the LOM critique, we shall thus have a more productive look at the content of its critique of "Althusserian Marxism".

II. FORM

A. Lumping the "Althusserians" Together

As pointed out above, LOM lumps together the works of Althusser, Poulantzas, and Bettelheim as an ideological system, in order to stick TR with theoretical errors and weaknesses of each one, thereby avoiding the concrete issues which TR raises to the US communist movement. In the next three subsections we shall see in detail how LOM lumps together these "Althusserians".

LOM states from the start that Althusser, Poulantzas, and Bettelheim belong to the same "school", that of "Althusserian Marxism":

Although it would not be completely accurate to see Althusserian Marxism as having absolutely no connection at all with politics, Althusser himself, while maintaining membership in the Communist Party of France, has indeed remained peripheral to the political life of the communist movement. But the work of certain luminaries of the Althusser School has had a decided political impact. Chief among these are Nicos Poulantzas, whose work on the state has both reflected and impacted the theory and practice of Eurocommunism, and Charles Bettelheim who has become Maoism's major theoretical exponent in the West. Any estimate of both these significant ideological currents in the communist movement, therefore, ultimately forces us into a consideration of Althusserian Marxism as a whole. (I,70)*

When one examines the particular positions of these "Althusserians", however, one finds widely divergent views, as LOM is forced to admit:

This much is in the nature of Althusserian Marxism whose "critical" character embraces a wide-ranging assortment of political views. It is hard to imagine a single political organization capable of containing both a Poulantzas and a Bettelheim, for instance, which would still be able to maintain a politically effective basis of unity. The very eclectic nature of Althusserian Marxism leads to a certain inevitable political paralysis as a trend. (II,111)

Now, one might conclude, perhaps it is not true that Althusser, Poulantzas, and Bettelheim are part of a unified school. But this obvious conclusion is not what serves LOM's needs. So they try to explain away these widely divergent political views as indicating the "eclectic nature" of "Althusserian Marxism", an "explanation" without content. What is necessary of course, is to demonstrate that the views of the three "Althusserians" are unified in an ideological system, and LOM certainly tells us that this is true:

An examination of the Althusserian school begins with Althusser himself. Althusser's philosophical system provides the general theoretical framework and "connecting thread" for this eclectic school. The two most prominent political representatives of this school, Poulantzas and Bettelheim, utilize this framework as the organizing principle of their work, as does the TR. (I,74)

Studying the work of the late Nicos Poulantzas therefore is especially useful to our general study of the Althusserian school. For Poulantzas, whose entire outlook and methodology is clearly steeped in Althusserian Marxism, addresses certain central political questions before the communist movement in a much less ambiguous manner. His break with Marxism-Leninism is much more readily obvious. (I,100-101)

...the theories of Charles Bettelheim, many of whose underlying philosophical assumptions are based on Althusserian Marxism. Bettelheim's views on socialism, socialist construction, and political economy in general provide much of TR's underlying ideological framework.

*References in this form mean, for example, Part I, page 70 of the LOM critique.

Unfortunately, in its extensive critique of "Althusserian Marxism", LOM provides no substantiation for its claim that Poulantzas and Bettelheim, in their political views, are taking off from Althusser's philosophical writings. And this in spite of its having worked through a very lengthy criticism of Althusser's philosophical ideas (I,74-100)! Instead, in its flailings to lump together ideologically the three "Althusserians", LOM resorts to the outright lie, calling Bettelheim a Eurocommunist in his political views:

It can hardly be coincidental that the leading Althusserians are political supporters of Eurocommunism... (I,89)

(As usual, LOM simply makes such a statement, without offering any justification for it.)

LOM cannot demonstrate the ideological cohesiveness of Althusser, Poulantzas, and Bettelheim because, in fact, these are three anti-revisionist Marxists each working, from his own independent perspective, to rescue communist theory from the degeneration it suffered under Stalinism. The Stalinists of LOM must fend off the political attacks of TR, who incorporate the theoretical advances made by Althusser, Poulantzas, and Bettelheim, into their work, but LOM tries to do this by first creating a fictitious "Althusserian School" and then taking theoretical errors and weaknesses of the three "Althusserians" as being integral components of "Althusserian Marxism". We shall now examine how LOM pulls this off.

B. Anti-Leninism

In his views on the dictatorship of the proletariat and on the proletarian vanguard party, Poulantzas is explicitly anti-Leninist. LOM gives the standard Leninist critique of these fundamental errors in Poulantzas' "democratic road to socialism" (I,106-111), a critique which we, as Leninists, agree with wholeheartedly. LOM does a fine job of demonstrating Poulantzas' fundamental break with Leninism on these questions. We should point out, however, that LOM has not yet refuted Poulantzas' arguments in support of his "democratic road to socialism". Poulantzas (as LOM repeatedly points out) makes no pretense of following the Leninist strategy for socialist transformation of society, and instead offers arguments based on current experience (e.g., that of Portugal) to advance his anti-Leninist views. To effectively combat Poulantzas' errors on these questions, it is necessary to go beyond repeating Lenin's arguments, showing through current analyses that the Leninist strategy remains valid today. Neither LOM nor we have yet done this, and we therefore cannot yet claim that Poulantzas' anti-Leninism has been refuted.

LOM does, however, achieve its primary goal of clearly demonstrating Poulantzas' anti-Leninism (which Poulantzas, of course, is quite open about). And this is what LOM's goal is, for it is LOM's objective to tag these erroneous views onto "Althusserian Marxism" as a whole. Thus:

Showing the Althusserians' break with Marxism-Leninism will be accomplished easily since the more serious practitioners of this school are, to their credit, quite candid on this point. Poulantzas, especially, is to be commended in this regard, because he is quite frank in his criticism of Lenin's views on the dictatorship of the proletariat, the smashing of the state, and the nature and role of the vanguard party. Althusser poses more difficulties in this respect, not only because he is less candid, but because he rarely ventures into the explicitly political, as a result of which his departures from Marxism appear on relatively high levels of theoretical abstraction. Nevertheless, it is possible to demonstrate what we might call the "Althusserian deviation." (I,72-73)

Difficulties indeed does Althusser pose in his views concerning the nature and role of the vanguard party, but not because, as LOM claims in this bit of doubletalk (see the first quotation in subsection A), "it would not be completely accurate to see Althusserian Marxism as having absolutely no connection at all with politics" (I,70). Rather, the problem for LOM is that Althusser does talk about this important question, supporting this fundamental Leninist concept. While LOM chooses to let Poulantzas alone speak for the "Althusserian School" on this issue, TR does the opposite, publishing Althusser's defense of the vanguard party while refusing to advance Poulantzas' erroneous views. Thus one finds published in TR #6 (July-August 1978) a very lengthy (30 pages) political article by Althusser, written in 1978 and entitled "A Fundamental Critique of the Communist Party of France: What Cannot Continue in the PCF". A few quotations from it illustrate Althusser's views on the vanguard party:

A party and a line are indispensable in aiding the working class in organizing itself as a class, which is the same thing as organizing the class struggle. (p. 35)

To say a word on a theme which today mobilizes all the bourgeois propaganda apparatus against the party, democratic centralism, it is clear that the membership will not fall into a trap. They will defend this principle, not out of a fetish for statutes or from an attachment to the past, but because they know that the party needs, in order not to be "like the others", rules different from the others. It needs a freedom without relation to bourgeois law and richer than it. They know that if the party is living it will invent with the masses the new forms of this freedom, without taking council from experts on bourgeois democracy, whether they are communists or not. (p.39)

A profound critique and reform of the internal organization of the party and of its manner of functioning. The great debate within the rank and file of the party must engage it is a concrete analysis of the present practice of democratic centralism and its political consequences. It is not a matter of renouncing democratic centralism, but of renovating it and transforming it in the service of a revolutionary party of the masses, in order to preserve the specificity and the independence of this party vis-a-vis the bourgeoisie. (p.39)

Now we agree with LOM that writings of Althusser addressing concrete political questions are difficult to come by. All the more important, then, for LOM to give their opinions of this major political article by Althusser, especially since TR has seen fit to publish it in their contemptible attempt to foist "Althusserian Marxism" onto the US communist movement! But this article, besides shattering LOM's carefully constructed image of an anti-Leninist "Althusserian Marxism" (at least concerning the vanguard party), also "poses the difficulty" of being a highly specific criticism of Stalinist practices within the Communist Party of France. And LOM, it would appear, finds it necessary to simply ignore concrete criticisms of Stalinist practices.

Undaunted by the facts, LOM continues to try to stick TR with Poulantzas' anti-Leninist views on the "democratic road to socialism", with:

The most remarkable aspect of the TR-Poulantzas connection is that in all of TR's commentary there is not the slightest admission of Poulantzas' concluding notion of the "democratic road to socialism" or his explicit disavowals of Lenin's views on the state and the dictatorship of the proletariat. Considering the central role played by this conception in forging Poulantzas' entire theoretical construct, the omission can hardly be an oversight. (II,114-115)

TR of course is quite open about trying to present to the US movement what it considers to be theoretical advances of Poulantzas, and it does so explicitly in one article, "Poulantzas and Marxism" (TR #15, (March-April 1980, pp. 12-19)). So does LOM offer their views in any detail on what TR finds to be of major importance in Poulantzas' work? No, they rather try to dismiss Poulantzas' theoretical advances with the completely unsupported and patently false statement that Poulantzas' conception of the "democratic road to socialism" plays the central role in forging his entire theoretical construct. Similarly, LOM simply states, without any preferred justification, that

TR's examples applying Poulantzas' theories to the U.S. inevitably lead to such a view, despite rhetorical militance about "class struggle on the terrain of the state." (II,116-117) (our emphasis).

(See Section III for an obvious alternate strategy for revolution which incorporates Poulantzas' pioneering work on the nature of the state.)

Another of LOM's "dirty tricks" deserves mention here. In the middle of creaming Poulantzas over his disavowal of the dictatorship of the proletariat, LOM sneaks in the following: "In promoting Poulantzas' theories before our movement, the editors of TR...". This occurs in Part I (p.109), and it is not until Part II that LOM acknowledges that TR has refused to publish Poulantzas' anti-Leninist views on the dictatorship of the proletariat. (See the second quotation back.) Thus, by default, one is left with the impression that TR has been advancing Poulantzas' disavowal of the dictatorship of the proletariat. We shall see in the next subsection what sort of view on the dictatorship of the proletariat TR really presents to the US communist movement.

C. Balibar on the Dictatorship of the Proletariat

In order to examine the "Althusserian conception" of proletarian dictatorship, LOM turns to Etienne Balibar, "Althusser's principal collaborator", with the following quotation:

"The dictatorship of the proletariat is a general historical tendency toward communism which, under capitalism, manifests itself in increasing socialization of production on the one hand and the class struggle of the proletariat on the other. And inasmuch as socialism is a transition period, embodying within it elements of its past (capitalism) and its future (communism) the dictatorship of the proletariat exists to the degree that the class struggle of the proletariat serves the strengthening of the communist elements at the expense of the capitalists ones." (LOM's emphasis) (II,109)

LOM says this is a direct quote from Balibar, but it is actually from a three-page review of Balibar's book, On the Dictatorship of the Proletariat, published in TR #2 (November-December 1977, pp. 13-15). At any rate, LOM then goes into convulsions about what Balibar could possibly mean about the dictatorship of the proletariat under capitalism:

Surely Balibar is not suggesting with this remarkable comment on the role of the dictatorship of the proletariat under capitalism that the proletariat holds power in a capitalist society. What kind of class dictatorship is this which does not yet hold power? What does he mean? Apparently for Balibar the seizure of state power by the proletariat and the expropriators - the transformation of property relations - is a mere quantitative difference of degree compared to the situation prevailing under capitalism. An incidental "conjuncture" tilting the teeter-totter of history in favor of the "communist" interests of the proletariat - oh so tenuously! possibly only temporarily! (II,109)

Now based on what they have quoted, LOM is quite right to enter into convulsions, for what Balibar (actually TR) is saying makes little sense. The mystery is solved, however, when one looks at the entire paragraph from which the offending sentence is taken (TR #2, p.14):

As stated before the dictatorship of the proletariat is not a "road to socialism" but it is identical with socialism itself, it is the transition period between capitalism and communism. Therefore the dictatorship of the proletariat cannot be defined in relation to itself, to socialism, it can only be defined in relation to communism. The dictatorship of the proletariat is a general historical tendency toward communism which, under capitalism, manifests itself in increasing socialization of production on the one hand and the class struggle of the proletariat on the other.

We see now that Balibar explicitly identifies the dictatorship of the proletariat as being identical with socialism, the transition period between capitalism and communism. Had LOM bother to read (or at least quote) the first part of the TR paragraph, it would have been clear that the confusion which LOM bemoans mightily is obviously either a misprint or very sloppy writing on TR's part. Evidently what TR means to say is that "the dictatorship of the proletariat is part of a general historical tendency toward communism, which, under capitalism, manifests itself in ...". Besides leaving out that which would have nullified its convulsions, LOM in its quoting unfortunately added to the confused sentence the first sentence of the next paragraph, thereby revising the connections among what TR was saying.

At least LOM was trying to get at Althusser's views of the dictatorship of the proletariat through Balibar, we can assure ourselves. And after all, a three-page book review is a lot to read, and we can certainly understand LOM's failure to notice TR's summary of Balibar's views on the dictatorship of the proletariat (p.13):

Balibar... has produced a systematic presentation of the Leninist theory of the dictatorship of the proletariat which is at the same time a sharply worded polemic against Eurocommunism.

Balibar effectively illuminates the theory of the dictatorship of the proletariat by means of three theoretical arguments or theses, which briefly stated are:

1. State power is always the political power of a single class. The only possible historical alternative to the state power of the bourgeoisie is the equally absolute hold on state power by the proletariat.
2. State power can be realized only through the development and function of the state apparatus. The overthrow of the state power of the bourgeoisie is impossible without the destruction of their state apparatus.
3. The dictatorship of the proletariat is not a form of "transition to socialism" nor is it a "road to socialism". It is identical with socialism itself, it is the transition period between capitalism and communism.

Not exactly Poulantzas and Eurocommunism, is this? And again we can recall LOM's outright lie, already mentioned in subsection A, that "the leading Althusserians are political supporters of Eurocommunism" (I,89). But whether or not Althusser's views on the dictatorship of the proletariat are the same as those of his "closest collaborator", as LOM would have us believe, we do know from this book review that TR is advancing to the US communist movement the classical Marxist-Leninist thesis on the need to destroy the bourgeois state apparatus, rather than Poulantzas' reformist views.

D. Marxism-Leninism as a Science

As we shall discuss in Section III, LOM quite properly criticizes Althusser for abandoning "the whole Marxist philosophical framework of law-governed historical development" (I,87) based on "the central and defining role of production" (I,75), instead offering apparently unconnected economic, political, and ideological factors as the basis for understanding reality. But what LOM correctly criticizes in Althusser, it erroneously extends to all the "Althusserians". Thus;

The "science" of Marxism is solely in its methodology and not in the scientific laws of historical development uncovered chiefly by Marx, Engels, and Lenin; any claim that Marxism has uncovered certain definite laws of history and society is seen by the Althusserians as prima facie evidence of dogmatism. As a result, Althusserian Marxism does not recognize the achievements of Marxism-Leninism as a body of scientifically verified theory encompassing philosophy, political economy, political strategy, and so on. (I, 74-75)

Yes, of course, each revolution has its particularities. Anyone who fails to understand that elementary truth is doomed to remain on the fringes of politics in any event. But Althusser and his cohorts believe - and this is completely consistent with their conceptions of "over-determination of contradiction" and "relative autonomy" - that there is nothing general to be gathered from the experience of others. (I,89)

The worship of particularity is the denial of universality. The theory of the "conjuncture" inevitably leads to the view that no generalizations can be made from the historical experience of others and that even the very conclusions arrived at theoretically at any given moment cannot be deemed scientific since altered circumstances would undoubtedly make them invalid. This is the significance of TR's comment on the overdetermination of contradiction, holding that "changes at any level, be it economic, political or ideological, change the entire social formation as a whole." (I,90) (our emphasis)

In extending Althusser's fundamental philosophical error to the other "Althusserians" (including TR), LOM is operating in its fantasy world of an "Althusserian School". It is easy enough to shoot down LOM's claim that TR follows Althusser in rejecting generalization of experience. In LOM's own words,

True to form, TR brings Althusser's idealist theory of knowledge into the political realm, preferring to start its analysis from "the fundamental Leninist principles." (I,95)

But, what can these "fundamental Leninist principles" be but the generalization of historical experience? Regardless of whether TR's understanding of Leninism is accurate, it is clear just from this quotation that TR's outlook on theory includes the existence of such principles.

Similarly, Bettelheim is quite clear on the necessity for generalizing (systematizing) the experiences of the proletariat in struggle in order to draw out revolutionary principles and conceptions. In Volume 2 of his Class Struggles in the U.S.S.R. (pp. 501-502), we find

At the core of Marxism as historically constituted, a variable place was given to revolutionary principles and conceptions resulting from scientific analysis carried out from the standpoint of the proletariat's class positions and based on the lessons drawn from the proletariat's own struggles. The outcome of this analysis and of these lessons is the scientific nucleus of Marxism. Marxist scientific thought was not "brought from outside" into the working class. It was a scientific systematization of that class's own struggles and initiatives. It resulted from a process of elaboration which started from the masses and returned to the masses, and which involved a conceptual systematization.

Marxist scientific thought is not "given" once and for all: it has to be developed, enriched, and rectified on the basis of new struggles and new initiatives. Substantial rectifications are inevitable, for Marxist scientific thought, which can be called revolutionary Marxism, has to learn from the struggles waged by the working masses as they advance along a road never previously explored.

What Bettelheim says here stands in rather stark contrast to what LOM says his ideas are on Marxism-Leninism as a science.

E. Conclusion

We conclude our study of the form of LOM's criticism of "Althusserian Marxism" with two of its more outrageously false assertions. According to LOM,

Bukharin increasingly fell into the habit of discussing the peasantry as an undifferentiated mass, a habit continued by Bettelheim and his followers today. (II,101)

To expose this lie, we need but look at Volume 2 of Bettelheim's Class Struggles in the U.S.S.R., a work with which LOM is quite familiar. Part II of this work, constituting over one hundred pages, is entitled "The village during the NEP period. Differentiation and class struggles. Agricultural policy and transformation of social relations in agriculture." As its title suggests, in Part II Bettelheim analyzes in great detail the condition and class struggles of the various sectors of the peasantry in the Soviet Union during the NEP period.

Furthermore, LOM states

Idealists such as our Althusserians, on the other hand, hold that any conceivable system of relations of production can be effected simply by an act of will irrespective of the level of development of the productive forces. On this point, then, TR and the Althusserians completely revise Marxism. (II,113)

As usual, LOM offers nothing concrete to back up this absurd claim. LOM is again lost in its fantasy world of "Althusserian Marxism", in which it hides from the concrete issues which TR brings before the US communist movement. But regardless of the form of LOM's attack on TR, its critique is useful in its coherent,

reasoned statement of certain aspects of Stalinism. Since it is important for Marxist-Leninists to understand the theoretical positions of the Stalinian deviation in order to combat this intrusion of bourgeois ideology, we now identify for further study the Stalinist positions which LOM advances.

III. CONTENT

A. Theory of Productive Forces

LOM upholds the economist outlook of Stalinism, that historical materialism is "the view that development of the forces of production is principal in the forward motion of history" (II,95). They of course agree with the materialist thesis that the economic base determines (at least ultimately) the superstructure of society, and they recognize that the economic base consists of two contradictory aspects, the forces of production and the relations of production. It is the Marxist thesis that, within the economic base, it is actually the relations of production which "determine" the superstructure, but their reply, following Stalin's essay Dialectical and Historical Materialism, would be that the relations of production must necessarily correspond to the level of the productive forces. (They are also able to invoke certain writings of Marx and Engels in their argument.) Thus they arrive at the "theory of productive forces", which applied to socialism says that the main aspect of the struggle for socialism is the development of the forces of production, so that, with the suppression of individual ownership of economic property and with centralized economic planning, continually increasing development of the productive forces is going to lead necessarily to the transformation of the relations of production and of the superstructure of society, resulting in communism.

The "theory of productive forces" thus stands or falls on the relationship between the forces and relations of production, on whether, as the economist view holds, the relations of production are uniquely determined by the particular level of development of the productive forces. In Volume 2 of Class Struggles in the U.S.S.R. (pp. 516-517), Bettelheim quotes Marx to demonstrate the primacy in the development of society not of the productive forces, but of class struggle to alter the relations of production:

On this point I shall confine myself to two examples, taken from the writings of 1865 and concerned with the development of capitalist relations. Dealing with this question, Marx shows that capitalist relations do not result from a "technological change" but from class struggle - in this case, bourgeois class struggle. This change corresponds to what Marx calls "the formal subsumption of labour under capital", which involves constraint to perform surplus labor. Marx points out that when capital begins to subordinate wage labor and in this way develops new social relations, it does so on the basis of the existing technology. As he says, "technologically speaking (Marx's emphasis - C.B.) the labour-process goes on as before": what is new is "that it is now subordinated to capital".

It is precisely on the basis of these new (or modified) relations that new productive forces develop, namely, those that correspond to the development of machine production. Marx writes: "On the basis of that change, ... specific changes in the mode of production are introduced which create new forces of production, and these in turn influence the mode of production so that new real conditions come into being".

Here we see a real dialectical movement, in which what changes first is not the "productive forces", or the "instruments of production", but social relations, and this as the result of class struggle, of bourgeois class struggle. We are therefore very far away from the affirmation made in Dialectical and Historical Materialism that changes in production "always begin with changes and development of the productive forces, and in the first place, with changes and development of the instruments of production".

It is one of the distinctive features of revolutionary Marxism that it reckons with the possibility and necessity of first of all changing production relations, in order to ensure, under certain conditions, the development of the productive forces. It was toward the end of the 1920s that this feature of revolutionary Marxism tended to become inhibited from the Bolshevik ideological formation, in favor of a mechanical materialist position, which emphasized in a one-sided way the changing of the instruments of production.

Part II of the LOM critique of "Althusserian Marxism" starts off (pp. 95-110) with a lengthy defense of the application of the theory of productive forces to Soviet society, at the time fo the abandonment of the NEP. Unfortunately, their understanding of the contradictions facing Soviet society at that time is wrong, as well as their understanding of the motive force in the development of society. In order to settle the question, it is necessary to undertake a detailed analysis of Soviet society during the NEP period, and (not surprisingly) we refer the reader to Volume 2 of Bettelheim's Class Struggles in the U.S.S.R. In particular, Part 5 of this work (pp. 589-594) demonstrates, on the basis of its preceding analysis, the errors of various economist interpretations of the demise of the NEP.

In order for the masses to successfully transform socialist society towards communism, it is of fundamental necessity for the vanguard Party to lead them in class struggle to increasingly replace capitalist relations of production with communist ones. Thus it is crucial that the Party understand that socialism is not a distinct mode of production, with its attendant system of production relations; rather, socialism is the transition period between the capitalist and communist modes, in which the determining role is played by the transformation of the relations of production through class struggle. This necessary understanding of the nature of socialism and the consequent role of the Party is advanced, for example, in Etienne Balibar's On the Dictatorship of the Proletariat, and Harry Eastmarsh's article "Analyzing China Since Mao's Death" (TR #16, May-June 1980, pp. 12-34).

The Stalinists of LOM, of course, hold that what is primary for the Party to do under socialism is to organize the development of the productive forces, rather than to lead the masses in the transformation of the relations of production. Following the anti-theory bias of Stalinism, they even hold that it is impossible to know, "before developed communism has actually appeared in the world", what these communist relations of production might be (II,109). Thus they would follow their empirical noses, relying on the development of the forces of production to necessarily bring about communist society; the role of the masses, of their class struggle, in transforming society is thus reduced to the "struggle for production". Unfortunately, this is not how the real world works, and a necessary precondition for the formation of a Marxist-Leninist vanguard party in the US is the expulsion from our political theory of the erroneous "theory of productive forces".

B. Althusser's Philosophy

LOM has provided a lengthy critique of Althusser's philosophy in Part I (pp. 74-100), especially concerning two of his major works published in For Marx: "Contradiction and Overdetermination" and "On the Materialist Dialectic". One of LOM's major criticisms of Althusser we agree with, and the rest of their critique we shall try to place in the context of their economist outlook.

As LOM points out, in these two works Althusser is indeed attempting to rid Marxist philosophy of the "shade of Hegel", and especially of Hegel's conception of the "negation of the negation". What Althusser is actually attacking here, on the philosophical level, is the "theory of productive forces", whereby the historical development of society is seen as the linear, progressive manifestation of a single essence, the productive capability of society. For Hegel, the fundamental essence was the Idea, transformed to ever higher and higher levels through the process of the "negation of the negation". In the Hegelian dialectic (whether idealist or materialist), everything else is the external phenomena of this single underlying essence, reflecting the essence without an independent life of its own. Thus, for example, racism is seen by economists to be a mere manifestation of the (fundamental) contradiction between the forces and relations of production, something which is intrinsically bound up with the capitalist mode of production and which will naturally die out under "socialist relations of production". From the discussion of the previous subsection we understand how closely bound up this Hegelian outlook is with the "theory of productive forces". We also understand how important it is to rid ourselves of the Hegelian philosophical outlook, and this is what Althusser has started to achieve.

Unfortunately, as LOM emphasizes, Althusser in getting away from mechanical materialism does lose sight of the central role of the economy (specifically, of production relations) in determining the superstructure of society. By concentrating on analysis of the multiplicity of contradictions at all levels of society (economic, political, ideological), and putting to the forefront their relative autonomy, Althusser does promote a nonscientific view of historical development, one which (unlike any other science) is not governed by knowable laws relating the objects under consideration among themselves. Indeed, we would trace this error in Althusser's conceptual system to his understanding of a science. While he makes the important point that a science concerns itself with concepts rather than with particular objects, he considers scientific theory (his "Generality II", p. 184 in For Marx) to be a body of concepts (or the contradictory unity of this body of concepts), rather than, as it should be, explicitly a set of relationships ("laws") among the concepts which are the object of a science.

On the other hand, we disagree with LOM that Althusser's concept of the "conjuncture" necessarily implies the denial of the existence of historical laws. Conjuncture is defined by TR (TR #24, September-October 1981, pp. 35-36) to be "the particular state of the combination of social contradictions and balance of class forces in any concrete social formation at a particular time or period of time". As TR explains, conjunctural analysis serves as an antidote to dogmatic thinking:

Because we can understand that any particular social formation is changing and contradictory, the intervention of communists must reflect this movement in their political practice. This calls for a continuous and rigorous investigation and analysis to increase our understanding of this changing conjuncture in order to advance the interests of the working class in the generalized class struggle. A mistaken view is that any social formation is static, where the hope is that revolution is always possible, and all that is necessary is to apply the traditional "orthodox" formula that has succeeded in the past. This mistaken view

treats the social formation as mechanically rigid and eternal; but such a conception also conforms to, and is consistent with, the dogmatic problematic where the "universal" theory need only be "applied" to the "universal" conditions to be successful. The conceptual rigidity of dogmatic theory thus finds its match in the supposed rigidity of the social formation. The concept of the conjuncture serves as a real tool which can be used to guard against dogmatic and sterile "universal" formulas.

Althusser has also elaborated the extremely important concept of theoretical practice, which differs from other social practices (economic, political, ideological) in that its object is the production of scientific knowledge. Needless to say, LOM, imbued with an ideology which long ago reduced "theory" to the justification (often after the fact) of political decisions taken on a pragmatic basis, will have none of this: in their view (I,96-98), "theoretical practice" actually means the separation of theory from practice. The rebuttal to this anti-theory outlook is provided by TR's definition of Marxist-Leninist theory and theoretical production (TR #23, July-August 1981, pp. 33-34), especially the following:

Theory is produced, not for itself, but as a guide to the practice of communists. In this way Marxist-Leninist theory, in constituting itself as a science, simultaneously creates a new relationship between theory and practice - a complex two sided relationship. First Marxist-Leninist theory abolished the characteristic dichotomy existing in dominant social thought between theory and practice, by turning theory itself in to a practice alongside the others. By making theory scientific instead of ideological, Marxist-Leninist theory makes its production the result of a determinant practice - a scientific practice - a practice of the transformation of raw materials (raw information) into a finished product (knowledge) through the application of determinate tools (scientific methodology and concepts). Theory becomes a social practice alongside the others, subject to similar constraints, and also subject to specific limits.

Second, Marxist-Leninist theory establishes a definite relationship between theoretical practice and the other practices. The social practice of society as a whole (its economic, political and ideological practices) provides theoretical practice with the raw data with which to work. This is what Mao meant when he said that correct ideas (and incorrect ones too, we might add) come from social practice and it alone. After transforming this data into knowledge by theoretical practice, that knowledge is returned to the other practices in the form of analyses, strategies, tactics, slogans, etc., to guide communists in those practices.

C. Poulantzas' Theory of the State

LOM has a field day (I,106-111) criticizing Poulantzas' anti-Leninist views on the dictatorship of the proletariat and the vanguard party. We of course agree with these criticisms of Poulantzas' strategy for achieving state power, the "democratic road to socialism". However, Poulantzas' strategy for the transformation of society is by ^{no} means his main theoretical contribution to Marxist theory, nor is it (contrary to LOM's unsubstantiated assertion, II,114-115) central to his entire theoretical construct. Poulantzas' main theoretical contribution concerns the theory of the state,

and for some appreciation of his pioneering work we refer the reader to Mark Glick's article, "Poulantzas and Marxism" (TR #15, March-April 1980, pp. 12-19) and to Paul Costello's application of his contributions in "Capitalism, the State and Crises" (TR #20, January-February 1981, pp. 3-10).

The richness of Poulantzas' analysis of the state stands in stark contrast to the instrumentalism defended by LOM (I,101-105) - see in particular the discussion of instrumentalism in Costello's article (p. 3). As Leninists, we must incorporate detailed knowledge of the structure and functioning of the state into our strategy for the revolutionary seizure of state power by the proletariat. Thus, while we shall not follow Poulantzas' "democratic road to socialism", we must examine his contributions to the theory of the state and make our own use of his work.

D. Democratic Centralism

Concerning party-building, LOM defends the "democratic centralism" of the Stalinian deviation (II,120-121). This is of course bureaucratic centralism, and we can see in LOM's discussion no understanding of the crucial role of leadership: the liberation of the energies and initiatives of all members of the group (Party members or the masses), through advancing correct ways (political lines) for doing things. Rather, just as the Stalinist parties in the revisionist countries have degenerated into vehicles for organizing production, so have Stalinists everywhere come to conceive of the primary function of leadership as being to organize people's work for them. Under Stalinism, the dialectical relationship between leadership and the group as a whole has been transformed into a mechanical, bourgeois one of unquestioned authority. Thus one finds LOM defining the democratic character of the Party not by its internal functioning, but in a meaningless external way:

What gives a party its democratic character? First and foremost, the party is in the service of proletarian revolution, that is, it will lead the struggle for the realization of proletarian democracy.

In contrast, we have Lenin's view on what a democratic party means (Lenin's Collected Works Volume 11, p. 320, as quote on p. 94 of From Marx to Mao by George Thomson):

We have already more than once enunciated our theoretical views on the importance of discipline and how this concept is to be understood in the party of the working class. We defined it as unity of action, freedom of criticism. Only such discipline is worthy of the democratic party of the advanced class. The strength of the working class lies in organisation. Unless the masses are organised, the proletariat is nothing. Organised - it is everything. Organisation means unity of action, unity in practical operations. ... Therefore the proletariat does not recognise unity of action without freedom to discuss and criticise.

Breaking away from the bureaucratic centralism of Stalinism is crucial for party-building. For an important contribution to this process, we refer the reader to the section entitled "Democratic Centralism" (pp. 40-44) in the booklet "Confronting Reality/Learning from the History of Our Movement" published in April 1981 by the Bay area Socialist Organizing Committee.