

Louis Althusser and the Revitalization of Revolutionary Marxism

by Neil Eriksen

Someday we'll need to explain what *For Marx* and *Reading Capital* meant for the generation of [French] intellectuals who were twenty in the sixties—harsh and haughty books which forged their concepts as you hammer out slogans, which made words resonate like banners flapping in the wind, which unfurled their logic as you set out a battle plan; and the style, especially the style, redundant and triumphal, allusive and programmatic, operated all by itself like a prodigious machine for mobilizing the will to know and the desire to be a militant. Theorize it said: The revolution comes at that price!

Nearly twenty years have passed since the days of heady enthusiasm this statement exclaims. But in those years Louis Althusser's books *For Marx* and *Reading Capital* have generated even more interest—as well as a good deal of criticism and controversy. And if the passion of the moment has given way to calm and reasoned investigation, the significance of these texts for the revitalization of revolutionary marxist theory and politics is even more immediate.

In the countless debates that have sprung up around Althusser's works—in the various claims and counter-claims that have been hurled back and forth, Althusser's conscious interventions in the struggle to invigorate marxism with new life and hope stand as indispensable bursts of illumination in the often dark recesses of the legacy of communist theory and practice.

The usefulness of this metaphor, of course, hinges on an acknowledgement that, in spite of all that is owed Althusser for the light he sheds on problems that must be solved if revolutionary marxism is to advance, there should be no illusions that his work is easy, or without contradiction. Nor does he provide us with a ready-made set of answers. Rather, he has shown us how to produce the necessary tools for asking our own questions—posing our own problems, and reaching our own conclusions specific to contemporary problems of science, philosophy and political strategy.

Neil Eriksen is the Cultural Editor of the Theoretical Review, and has published several articles on rock and roll and other musical styles, including reviews published in the Guardian newspaper. This article would not have been possible without the help, knowledge, encouragement and diligence of Paul Costello, who deserves a good deal of credit for the depth of the article, but bears only minor responsibility for any factual or political errors contained herein.

But for many people, particularly in North America, basic concerns remain open: Who *is* this French communist philosopher who has generated so much controversy? What are the ideas and theories he has presented that could generate such diverse political and theoretical responses? What are the political consequences of this philosophical debate?

In what follows we hope to provide some initial answers to these questions. Since it is impossible in this short article to provide adequate definitions of many of the concepts we will be using, where ever possible we have added footnotes directing our readers to texts in which such definitions can be found.

Introduction

Louis Althusser's expressed intent in producing his various philosophical and theoretical texts has been to defend and advance the scientific character of historical materialism, the science of history, and to articulate the development of the new revolutionary philosophy, dialectical materialism, which arose in response to the birth of that science. The most important purpose of this project is the production of a body of knowledge dedicated to the political cause of working and oppressed people in their struggles for liberation.

Althusser starts from the irreplaceable role played by Marx's break with prescientific theories in the drama that is the class struggle in theory. The stakes in this theoretical and political struggle can be seen in the social tragedies of the Stalin era, the brutal defeat of the Chilean experiment in socialist democracy, Pol Pot in Kampuchea, and the state of martial law in Poland, all glaring examples of the consequences of incorrect theory and politics in a revolutionary process. By contributing to the assessment of past and present theories of marxism and leninism, Althusser has helped to lay the basis for future revolutionary scientific and political work.

And while Althusser's contributions to marxist philosophy are truly groundbreaking, it is in the realm of historical materialism, and specifically in the areas of ideology and theories of the State, that some of his most far reaching insights have been achieved. If it can be said that Marx laid only the cornerstones of revolutionary

marxism, we can say that Althusser has helped develop certain key elements to permit even more construction, building on the indispensable contributions of Frederick Engels, Vladimir Lenin, Antonio Gramsci and Mao zedong. In doing so, Althusser has inspired a number of younger theoretical and political militants who have further shown the value of his contributions in their own work.

To understand the full implications of these assertions, we must step back a moment and take account of the context in which Althusser has worked. We must return to a brief assessment of the 'crisis of marxism' which has been central to the work of this journal since its inception.²

Since the late 1920s, marxism as it has generally been practiced around the world has failed to maintain the necessary links between scientific analysis and strategic political questions (with certain exceptions), tending only to confront them in the most generalized manner.³ In other words, marxism has not addressed the specificity of each situation, but has tended to hold to dogmas that over-simplified various questions and generally reduced all phenomena to mere reflections of economic contradictions. Further, historically socialist theory has tended to be mechanical and stagnant except in certain key—and relatively short—periods of productive activity and effective practice. In other words, the connection of theory to political practice was generally reduced to pragmatic, after-the-fact justifications and apologies for failed analysis and strategies. The link between creative theory and political practice in the real world of day-to-day social struggles was essentially liquidated for all intents and purposes, except for a few, quite notable exceptions (Gramsci in an Italian fascist prison, and Mao in the mountains of western China).

But not only was the fundamental connection between science and politics lost in the period of dogmatic formulas, but even the process of 'auto-analysis' and internal evaluation, necessary for the continuing development of any science, was halted. The 'crisis in marxism' that became consolidated in the Stalinian deviation in the 1930s was suppressed and hidden from scrutiny until it erupted in the mid 1950s. After it had burst out in the open so dramatically in 1956, a new freedom arose in the international movements for socialism; gains were registered in opposition to the existing communist parties, some even *within* the world communist movement under the domination of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU).

It was in the very middle of this explosion of the decades long crisis that Althusser reached his maturity as a communist philosopher and teacher of politics and epistemology. The possibilities for intervening and generating new innovations and contributions to the body of marxist theory were immense. Althusser seized the time and has produced a well-spring of knowledge of use to revolutionaries around the world.

It is our intent in this article to outline Althusser's contributions to revolutionary marxist theory, to combatting anti-marxist ideologies, and to defeating political deviations generated in the workers' and communist movements. Just as the initiation of historical materialism by Marx was a political and theoretical

event without precedent; and the rupture with the 2nd International led by Lenin permitted the revolutionary revitalization of socialist theory and practice; just as Mao's break with the 3rd International gave new life to the Chinese revolutionary process; we can say that Althusser's contributions to the current struggles to solve the 'crisis of marxism' are the basis of a fundamentally new practice of revolutionary science and politics.

It is our intent to show that the work of Louis Althusser and his associates has provided such critical insights into the process of the revitalization of socialist and communist theory that all future work will have to come to terms with the revolutionary discontinuity it represents. For, without a vigorous insistence on the necessity for marxist theory to change from *within*—change which is its life-blood if it is to grow and facilitate the progressive transformation of social relations—revolutionary marxism will not be able to break free of the theoretical stagnation and decay, and the political tragedies that have accompanied the Stalinian indifference to the conditions of existence of marxist science, philosophy and politics.

Five Contributions

Althusser's theoretical recommencement of Marxism and Marxism-Leninism was the first clear indication of a left-wing road from the Stalinian deviation.⁴

The following five achievements of Althusser are the basis of our claim for his specific place in the development of the science of historical materialism and marxist politics.

(1) *Althusser rescued a body of basic theoretical concepts from the long night of Stalinian marxism in which they had laid dormant, and reasserted their crucial importance in scientific analysis and revolutionary strategy.*

Throughout the 1930s and '40s, generations of communist militants were raised on Stalin's *Dialectical and Historical Materialism*, the so-called "succinct presentation of the philosophic foundations of Marxism." This barren text, with all its economism, evolutionism and mechanical materialism, reduced the analysis of history to the development of technology, liquidated the class struggle and the complexities of real social formations, and essentially rendered the theoretical and philosophical concepts of revolutionary marxism inert and unusable.⁵ Althusser's writings permit the revitalization of these fields: from new general definitions of dialectical and historical materialism themselves, to more specific concepts such as social practice, contradiction, relations of production and the process of change.

(2) *At the same time Althusser provided a strong critique of certain non-scientific notions that were enshrined as immutable and everlasting 'principles of marxism' by the (mis)leaders of the communist movement, 'principles' which have generally served to mystify reality and reproduce repressive and exploitative social relations rather than generating new and liberating ones.*

Althusser gave theoretical content to the struggle against the idea that the development of the productive

forces is the motor force of history. Further, he struggled to develop a theoretical alternative to the instrumentalist theory of ideology which has so hampered revolutionaries with the notion that anti-working class ideas are simply a tool to divide the workers' movement, created and manipulated at will by capitalists. And in the realm of organizational and political issues, Althusser has provided us with elements to struggle against the Stalinian deviation's elevation of centralism over democracy in a democratic centralist structure, and the notion of a monolithic Party.⁶

(3) *In addition he also provided a strong critique of certain non-scientific notions present in the writings of the Early Marx, which their proponents are attempting to incorporate into the problematic of scientific marxism.*

While Althusser's contributions to theoretical and political struggles against Stalinian deviations were crucial to settle accounts with the dominant strains of marxism in the '30s and '40s, deviations in marxist theory from the '50s, through the '70s were not left unchallenged. In defending the radical break in Marx's own thought—in defending the initiation of a new scientific framework to analyze history, represented initially in the "Theses on Feuerbach" and *The German Ideology*, and further elaborated throughout Marx's life, Althusser laid the basis for struggling against various non-scientific notions which are the central theses of the writings of the young Marx and later proponents of "marxist humanism" (not to be confused with a democratic and humane marxism).

(4) *Althusser drew out of the texts of Marx, Lenin and Mao latent theoretical and political conceptions that they themselves did not, or could not specify in the course of their own practice, and made such conceptions explicit. He took concepts that existed in the practical state in various forms, and brought them into clear focus at the theoretical level, thus permitting their own effective translation into political practice by others.*

From Lenin's political writings, Althusser drew out the conceptions and implications of "conjunctural analysis" for the practice of a revolutionary political practice. And from Lenin and Mao's philosophical writings Althusser drew his conception of philosophy as class struggle in theory.

(5) *Finally, he developed altogether new concepts appropriate to the current demands of theoretical and political practice.* From such diverse sources as Sigmund Freud, Jacques Lacan, Gaston Bachelard, discourse theory and structuralism, Althusser generated new concepts for marxist analysis of its own theoretical practice. The results of this process were such crucial concepts for the advancement of marxism in the contemporary period as 'problematic', 'overdetermination' and the 'epistemological break'.

From these five points it should be clear that our debt to Althusser in the revitalization of revolutionary marxism is very great indeed. But saying all of this does not mean that we consider all of Althusser's work to be entirely correct or of equal importance. We must be critical in our utilization of his work, and we must be quite conscious of the contradictions that make his work so difficult and controversial; which we attempt to do in what follows. But again, Althusser's work is indispensable for producing the necessary theory for revolutionary

militants to understand the complexities of contemporary social struggles and to act in effective ways to change existing social relations.

Without scientific theory to guide political and ideological practice, and to assess actual victories and defeats, the spontaneous struggles of the popular masses against the oppression and exploitation imposed by the social relations of capitalism would be severely restrained. As Mao said, "Marxism emphasizes the importance of theory precisely and only because it can guide action."⁷ Without revolutionary strategies and tactics, and the tools with which to judge their potentialities, the popular masses are quite disarmed in the life and death struggles imposed by capital.

But what direction does Althusser take in presenting his theories on dialectical and historical materialism? What tack does he chart to move ahead?

We will begin to answer these questions by starting with an overview of Althusser's political life, briefly summarizing his various books and articles, and the French and international political circumstances into which he was consciously intervening. Following this we will discuss how the great thinkers of marxism have approached those who preceded them; and, utilizing Althusser's conception of a 'symptomatic reading', attempt to show the significance of this approach for the work of communist militants in the US today. This will include reference to how the *Theoretical Review* has attempted to appropriate Althusser's works in a critical manner. Certainly, our concern is that the contributions of the great revolutionary marxists not be taken as dogma, but rather as contradictory contributions to a complex and living science and politics.

This will lay the basis for us to discuss in an Appendix the immense influence that Althusser has had on various contemporary marxists searching to use the science of historical materialism to guide their political and theoretical interventions in contemporary society. In reviewing certain of the theoretical and political contributions of the followers of Althusser we will provide quite brief critical comments on our own appropriation of their work.

In section two we will discuss the significance of scientific practice, and in section three that of the philosophical struggle, for the class and popular struggles of working and oppressed people, including the concrete links between science and politics. In this process we will first discuss Althusser's major contributions to theoretical production, including ideological practice, the concepts of overdetermination, problematic, symptomatic reading and relative autonomy. In this section we will also address the concepts of theoretical practice, the radical distinction between science and ideology, the distinction between marxist science and the physical sciences, as well as Althusser's understanding of modes of production, social formation, economism, conjunctural analysis, and the State. Then in the section on philosophy, in addition to a discussion of the role of dialectical materialism in the struggle between scientific practice and theoretical ideologies, we will assess certain aspects of the historical development of the revolutionary practice of philosophy, as well as the trajectory of Althusser's own philosophical development. We will finally discuss Althusser's

contributions to political practice, including his conception of 'fusion' in relation to the marxist science and the workers' movement, and the necessity for, and process by which it must be developed and maintained.

But first, we will begin with a brief political and theoretical biography of the man who has generated so much controversy in marxist circles around the world today.

A Political Biography

Louis Althusser first became significantly acquainted with communist ideals in a fascist prison, where he was being held by the Germans following his capture for Resistance work in France during World War II. Not unlike the experiences of countless other European students at the time, the struggles against fascism and the war brought Althusser into "living contact" with workers and peasants, and dedicated communist militants (including his future wife, Helene Rytman), who were to profoundly shape his life.

Born in Birmandreis, Algeria in 1918 of French parents, Althusser had been an active militant in the Catholic student movement prior to the War. But in 1948, the year that he turned 30 and took his degree in philosophy at the *Ecole Normale Supérieure* in Paris, he joined the Communist Party of France. At that time the Party (PCF) was the largest and most influential organization on the Left with organic ties to the French working class, and thereby a powerful force for social change. Clearly his exposure to communism during the war had fundamentally transformed his life. In the years that followed, this young philosophy teacher would come to repay his debt to materialist philosophy, and contribute to a fundamental transformation of the very politics that so changed him.

Initially, however, Althusser went relatively unnoticed. Quietly lecturing on philosophy at the *Ecole Normale*, he prepared for the publication of his first book, a study of the French political philosopher Montesquieu.⁸ But in 1956 Althusser was caught up in the revelations of the scope of the tragedies of the Stalin era that shook the world communist movement following the Twentieth Party Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU).

With Khrushchev's 'secret speech' to the Congress, the crisis of marxist theory and politics, hitherto hidden, was brought into the open for all to see. The crisis in *theory* reflected the fact that the marxist science and philosophy had stagnated during the long night of the Stalin era—neither developing themselves, nor learning from developments in other sciences and theoretical disciplines. The crisis in *politics* was reflected in the bureaucratic and inflexible Parties—products of Stalinian dogmatism—which were incapable of effectively participating in the development of the means necessary for revolution in the modern world. Not only were rank and file militants disillusioned and thrown into crisis—quite often searching for alternatives to what had been a secular religion for many; but also the leading intellectuals of the world communist movement were shaken and forced to rethink accepted dogmas and

history. A vast attempt was made to account for the tragedies of the Stalin era, and a multiplicity of new 'marxisms' were born.

At this point it should be remembered that the 'crisis of marxism' was far from being as openly acknowledged as it generally is today. While the 20th Congress of the CPSU had provided tentative theoretical and philosophical openings in the dominant discourse of world communism—space in which to maneuver—the political constraints by which communists were bound were scarcely loosened. Particularly, unquestioning loyalty to the Soviet Union was still demanded of Communist Party members around the world.

Politically, many of the attempts to overcome the crisis took the form of an opening to traditional social-democracy, reformism and class collaboration in strategy, while retaining Stalinian forms of organizational practice and mass line. Theoretically, among the most prominent responses, which especially flowered in Western Europe, was an attempt to "humanize" marxism, particularly relying on the works of the young Karl Marx. Utilizing such writings as the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, "On the Jewish Question" and "Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right," certain theoreticians attempted to construct a 'marxist humanism' as an alternative to the dogmas of the Stalin era. It is no coincidence that in France leading intellectuals on the political right-wing of the PCF embraced the new theory of 'marxist humanism'. (For more on this see the section on Philosophy.)

It was into this debate on the crisis of Stalinian marxism, and the marxist humanist response, that Althusser made his first important theoretical and political interventions. Those interventions can be outlined in three major categories, including: the publication of a number of path-breaking essays in French Party journals, the organization of a new type of study group in marxist theory and politics, and collaboration with communist militants in the development of new forms of communist political practice.

Representing the first of these interventions in the crisis of marxism, were a number of essays dating from 1960-65, including "On the Young Marx," "Contradiction and Overdetermination," "On the Materialist Dialectic," and "Marxism and Humanism." Collected in Althusser's second book *For Marx*,⁹ these essays signalled an important change in the level of debate within the PCF. "For the first time, a major theoretical *system* was articulated within the organizational framework of French Communism, whose power and originality were conceded even by its most determined opponents."¹⁰ Althusser's purpose in writing these essays was, as he himself expressed it, to "intervene" on two fronts, drawing lines of demarcation between marxist theory and ideological tendencies foreign to it.¹¹

The first front was the debate over the relationship between Marx and Hegel. The purpose of Althusser's intervention on this front was to defend marxism against hostile political and philosophical positions such as empiricism, pragmatism, voluntarism and historicism.

His defense consisted of upholding the importance of marxist theory in the class struggle, defending the specificity of theoretical practice, and drawing a radical distinction between the idealist dialectic of Hegel and the materialist dialectic of Marx.

The second front was the debate over the relationship between Marx's early works and the works of his maturity. Here, the purpose of Althusser's intervention was to defend the marxist science of history and marxist philosophy from the "pre-marxist" ideologies from which Marx's mature work emerged. Althusser's defense in this area consisted of demonstrating an 'epistemological break' in the development of Marx's thought, "a basic difference between the ideological 'problematic' of the Early Works and the scientific 'problematic' of *Capital*."¹² These basic themes on both fronts, first articulated in *For Marx*, were to run like a 'red thread' through all of Althusser's later work.

The crucial role played by Althusser in the theoretical and philosophical debates following 1956 must be seen in its political context. On the one hand, he provided a powerful defense of fundamental aspects of revolutionary marxism. And while his published work is presented at a theoretical level not easily accessible, the implications of his work transcend that level and take on significant political effects beyond the class struggle in theory.

For, Althusser's work in this period was essential in two areas. He provided a left-wing critique of the Stalin era, openly in opposition to the 'right' revisionist critiques ushered in by Khrushchev and his supporters. And he developed a left-wing explanation, and rigorous affirmation of the scientific character of marxism, in opposition to those who would deny the discontinuity of Marx's mature works with the work of preceding bourgeois political economists and philosophers, and those who would claim that historical materialism is not a science at all. In this process Althusser articulated certain fundamental aspects of historical materialism and revolutionary political practice that weigh in the balance of the 'break' between the young and old Marx.

Another aspect that made Althusser's positions such a radical challenge to the leaders of the PCF was the fact that he found inspiration in the Chinese polemics against Soviet revisionism; "while internationally the PCF distinguished itself by the degree of its hostility towards China and espousal of Russian positions in the Sino-Soviet conflict."¹³ Texts such as "Contradiction and Overdetermination" and "On the Materialist Dialectic," both written in 1962, clearly drew inspiration from the Chinese broadside against revisionism, *Long Live Leninism*, issued in the Spring of 1960. In fact, "Althusser was, in 1962 one of the first Europeans to read Mao tse tung as an important dialectician."¹⁴

But in spite of the importance of these works for the defense and development of revolutionary marxism, the constraints of Party membership and Althusser's long term commitment to remain within its ranks, justifiable or not, compelled him to deal openly only with the theoretical and ideological aspects of these questions, while their political implications could only be read between the lines. It was not until the crisis of the PCF after the 1978 elections that Althusser, under his own

name, began to speak out on Party politics and strategy.¹⁵

Reading *Capital*

In the same period that *For Marx* was published, ending in 1965, Althusser issued some of his most important, and certainly most difficult and controversial essays. His work in *Reading Capital*¹⁶ was originally presented as a series of papers to a seminar on Marx's *Capital* at the *Ecole Normale*, along with papers by Etienne Balibar, Jacques Ranciere and several others. Setting himself the project of outlining the problems encountered in reading *Capital*, Althusser worked to thoroughly distinguish the scientific character of Marx's initiation of the practice of *historical materialism*, and the distinct role of *dialectical materialism* in defending the revolutionary elements of the science.

In other words, in *Reading Capital* Althusser addressed himself to *defining* the nature of both marxist science and the marxist philosophy as distinct disciplines. As Althusser himself put it, he posed two questions to be discussed in reading *Capital*:

both the question of the specificity of its *object*, and the specificity of its *relation* to that object, i.e., the question of the nature of the type of discourse set to work to handle this object, the question of scientific discourse.¹⁷

It was to decipher the difference between Marx's scientific work and the pre-scientific work of his predecessors that Althusser embarked on the journey recorded in *Reading Capital*.

While we will return to these general issues in considerable detail in a moment, for now it is necessary to outline Althusser's specific positions at the time. Concerning the marxist science, *Reading Capital* sought to define its central concept as 'structural causality', that is, the effects of a whole structure on its various parts. Concerning marxist philosophy Althusser sought to define it as the 'theory of theoretical practice', that is, the theory which would guarantee to the marxist science its objective scientific character. As we shall see later, Althusser was to recognize, on the basis of political and theoretical developments, the contradictions and limitations in both of these definitions.

But in spite of the problems with *Reading Capital*, in the process of laying out his defense of Marx's revolutionary and scientific discoveries represented in this volume, Althusser made a number of contributions to the revitalization of marxist theory. He constructed and situated within revolutionary marxism certain new key concepts of *overdetermination*, *differential historical time*, and 'epistemological break' and the *symptomatic reading*, at the same time shedding new light on such basic concepts of historical materialism as social formation, mode of production, and relations and forces of production. In these discussions Althusser presented trenchant critiques of 'empiricism' and 'historicism' as deviations within marxism, as well as critiques of certain theories of Lucio Colletti, Georgy Lukacs, Jean-Paul Sartre, Claude Levi-Strauss, and the philosophical writings of Antonio Gramsci.

The *d'Ulm* Circle

During this period, Althusser's work was certainly not limited to theoretical debates and the publication of articles. His second major intervention in the crisis of marxism was to help in the organization of a broad based study circle which was to develop into a significant political force in the French Left. As early as 1964 a group of students under Althusser's influence, called simply the *d'Ulm* Circle of the *Union des etudiants communistes* (UEC) (the PCF student group) had begun a comprehensive study of Marx's *Capital* and other basic texts of marxism and leninism. (The *Ecole Normale Superieure* is located on the *Rue d'Ulm* in Paris.)

This circle was initially quite diverse in its political constituents, including strict marxist-leninists, as well as those influenced by various other Left ideologies. Unity and cooperation in this group centered around agreement in four basic areas: a recognition of the importance of theoretical work and training, including systematic study of basic writings of Marx and Lenin; a critical view of the general absence of theoretical work in the PCF which had led to its "ideological deterioration"; a common struggle against "eclectic, humanist, and revisionist ideologies" in French Communist organizations; and an acceptance of certain conceptions of dialectical materialism and concepts in *Capital*.

Within the circle a "Marxist-Leninist nucleus" carefully studied developments in the Chinese and Cuban revolutionary processes, and eventually succeeded in having a group work-project accepted which provided for "investigations of workers' and peasants' struggles in France, active participation on the part of the group in political fights in the UEC, orientation of its ideological work toward concrete analyses, documented study of the class struggle in France," and the continuation of study for the theoretical training of Communist militants.¹⁸

In May of 1965 the diversity of the *d'Ulm* Circle was resolved in favor of marxism-leninism, many participants withdrew, and a new journal *Les Cahiers marxistes-leninistes* was created in the autumn of that year. The journal began to reflect a lively interest in the revolutionary upheavals in China and elsewhere, and soon began to enjoy a broad audience in Left circles. An important step toward the creation of a new, anti-revisionist marxist-leninist movement had been taken.

In the period between 1965 and 1968, Althusser anonymously published several articles in *Cahiers marxistes-leninistes*. Significantly, a sympathetic analysis of the Chinese Cultural Revolution that appeared in three issues of the publication is believed to have been written entirely by Althusser himself.¹⁹

The year 1966 saw the "marxist-leninist nucleus" of the *d'Ulm* Circle realize that its future development was not compatible with membership in an organization sponsored by the Communist Party, and they initiated the *Union des jeunes communistes (marxiste-leniniste)* (Union of young communists, M-L), one of the first new pro-Chinese marxist-leninist groups in France. At this point many of the militants abandoned school and took jobs in factories, effectively severing their ties with Althusser, who continued to uphold the policy of struggling with the Party from within. The titles of the

group's publications—*Servir le peuple*, *La Cause du peuple*—reflected the new direction of their politics. "By putting ourselves under the leadership of the broad working masses we can learn what their fighting needs are and try to respond to them: we will learn from them, they will be our professors."²⁰ Such passionate subordination to working people was no substitute for strategy based on scientific theory, but it did not lead to wide support for wildcat strikes of workers and community activism. Later, the group produced a self-criticism for sectarian forms of ideological struggle. And with the May events of 1968, when millions of French workers and students rose against the government spontaneously and without the support of any major political party, this group played a role carrying out broad support activities for the factories and putting forward its own conception of the PCF "popular front" line of 1934-36. But these militants were extremely antagonistic toward the French Socialist and Communist Parties—denouncing both with equal venom. In the fall of 1968, *La Cause du Peuple* became the paper of *Gauche Proletarienne* (Proletarian Left). Interestingly enough, Jean-Paul Sartre circulated, and ultimately became an editor of the paper when it was banned by the French government.

Regis Debray

Althusser's third major intervention in this period was his political correspondence and collaboration with revolutionary militants abroad. Here we will only discuss two of these: Regis Debray and Maria Antonietta Macciocchi.

Althusser's relation to Debray began when the latter studied under Althusser at the *Ecole Normale* in Paris.²¹ In 1967 Debray achieved international notoriety for his book *Revolution in the Revolution?*,²² published after a careful study of the Cuban revolutionary experience and in close collaboration with Fidel Castro and Che Guevara.

When the book first appeared, Paul Sweezy and Leo Huberman hailed it as a "profound account of the thinking of the leaders of the Cuban Revolution" on revolutionary theory and practice.²³ Based on his studies and conversations, Debray not only convincingly critiqued various erroneous political lines, such as Trotskyism and 'armed propaganda', but he also presented the concern of the Cuban leaders that the revolution in Latin America could not follow the same path as the Russian or Chinese experiences. Needless to say, Debray's book did not receive a warm welcome from the dominant Communist parties in Latin America.

In an extended letter written in March of 1967, Althusser praised his former student's reasoned criticisms of other revolutionary theories—concentrating on "their own internal contradictions," while at the same time he criticized certain key weaknesses in Debray's text. In particular, Althusser expressed concern with Debray's overly critical approach to the revolutionary processes in China and Vietnam, as well as the lack of much more than an outline presentation of Debray's own *foco* theory of guerrilla war. Althusser also raised the criticism that the book did not sufficiently document the actual

historical reality of the Cuban revolutionary process. Debray considered this critique important enough to be published in his own volume of self-criticism, *A Critique of Arms*, which appeared in 1977.²⁴

It is a testament to the comradely style of criticism and self-criticism, and the relationship between Althusser and Debray, that the latter continued to hold his teacher in high esteem, even when they both strongly disagreed on certain political issues. Yet it is not surprising. For Debray was quite clear on what Althusser had passed on to him when he wrote that he was indebted to his former teacher—"an intellectual in the full sense of the word, who unites scientific rigor and natural gifts, who has made the greatest contribution to Marxism-Leninism in the last few years..."²⁵ Debray himself applied certain of the concepts he learned from Althusser to the political struggles of Latin America, claiming that "Contradiction and Overdetermination" was a "remarkably useful" text which explained "better than anyone" the dialectical structure of history, while at the same time criticizing Althusser for "a certain mistaken passion for theorizing."²⁶

Electoral Politics in Italy

One of Althusser's most intriguing collaborations of this period was undertaken with Maria Antonietta Macciocchi, author of the book *Daily Life in Revolutionary China*, as well as *Pour Gramsci* (For Gramsci).²⁷ Macciocchi had been the Paris correspondent of the Italian Communist Party's daily paper *l'Unita* for five years before the Party asked her to return to Italy to participate as a Party candidate for Naples in the 1968 Parliamentary elections. Before she left France, Macciocchi and Althusser agreed to attempt to plan for organizing the campaign in a revolutionary manner, and to correspond regularly regarding the problems of revolutionary electoral work and mass based political practice.

The correspondence that developed between Macciocchi and Althusser, and his wife Helene, has been collected in the book *Letters from Inside the Italian Communist Party to Louis Althusser*.²⁸ It includes explicit references to the importance of Mao's admonitions to learn from the masses and to understand the revolutionary class alliance that is "the people." This book is most important for its documentation of the political and intellectual friendship that insightfully addressed questions pertaining to Macciocchi's heated, and successful electoral campaign. The issues involved covered a wide range: birth control, the condition of women in southern Italy, the practical ideological struggle, child labor, housing problems and the leading role of the working class. That a sincere revolutionary is hindered as much by the entrenched Party bureaucracy as by backward ideas among the proletariat and subproletariat in such a campaign, is witness to the importance of the struggle for the "mass line" in the process of generating correct strategy and tactics in work toward socialism in advanced capitalist countries.

This point is further deepened by Macciocchi and Althusser in their comments on the workers' and

students' revolt in May '68 in France. Althusser took strong exception to the way the PCF had handled its intervention in the May events, and its opposition to the workers' and students' revolt. For this reason, and because of his theoretical work, he was one of the few prominent Party intellectuals who continued to be respected by the students.

Reconsiderations and Self-Criticisms

Although the combination of such events as the Chinese Cultural Revolution and May '68 in France spurred Althusser to reconsider some of the positions put forward in his earlier writings, already in 1967, in the Forward to the Italian edition of *Reading Capital*, Althusser indicated the new direction his work was to take. As he was later to sum it up: "What was essentially lacking in my first essays was the class struggle and its effects in theory. . ."²⁹ The immediate impact of this recognition was Althusser's redefinition of philosophy and a critique of his previous position as 'theoreticist'.

The new definition of philosophy and its implications, were first drawn out in two works: "Philosophy as a Revolutionary Weapon (Interview with Maria A. Macciocchi)," and "Lenin and Philosophy," both of which appeared in February of 1968. They were later collected, together with a number of other writings in a volume that bore the title *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*.³⁰

Briefly summarized, Althusser criticized himself for unilaterally defining philosophy as the "theory of theoretical practice." This definition considered philosophy to be the science of sciences, and linked philosophy only to science, and not to politics. Althusser came to recognize that in "theoretically overestimating philosophy," that is, only seeing its role in theory, he "underestimated it politically," because such an approach was lacking an understanding of the articulation of marxist theory to the concrete struggles of working and oppressed people in their struggles for liberation.

In his new definition, Althusser characterized philosophy as "class struggle in theory," and marxist philosophy as the representation of "proletarian class positions" in the struggle for scientific knowledge. In this sense philosophy is now defined as a double relationship: representing not just class struggle in theory, but also science in politics. The full implications of this new definition will be addressed in a following section on Revolutionary marxist philosophy. In any case, it led Althusser to recognize that dialectical materialism was not a new philosophy of 'praxis', but instead, a new *practice of philosophy*.

At the same time that Althusser was rethinking his understanding of the marxist philosophy, he was also doing work in the realm of historical materialism as well. In a text entitled "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," the influence of which can hardly be overestimated, Althusser turned his attention to one of the most underdeveloped areas of the marxist science of history. In a brilliant synthesis of Freud's discoveries of the operations of the unconscious mind, as further advanced and corrected by Jacques Lacan, Althusser

transformed the study of ideology from the examination of mere *ideas*, to the study of material social practices, the institutions in which they are inscribed, and the individual subjects which they produce. More on this below.

While Althusser was later to recognize that his concept of 'ideological State apparatuses' unnecessarily reduced all ideology to the place of an unmediated expression of the State,³¹ his discussion of the constitution ('interpellation') of subjects has been the basis for much subsequent work in this critical area for the development of marxist theory.

By 1971 Althusser's major works had appeared in English translations, in no small part due to the efforts of forces grouped around the English journal *New Left Review (NLR)*.³² In 1966 *NLR* had published a translation of Althusser's essay "Contradiction and Overdetermination." English translations of *For Marx*, *Reading Capital* and *Lenin and Philosophy* appeared in 1969, 1970 and 1971. The response of the English speaking Left, in both Great Britain and the United States, was overwhelmingly unfavorable. The sterile Stalinian dogmatism of the orthodox Communist Parties joined forces with the liberal academic marxism and neo-anarchist humanism of the New Left, against Althusser's revolutionary Leninism.

The perspective of academic New Leftism was set forth in works such as Bertell Ollman's *Alienation*,³³ which attempted to uphold Marx's youthful, pre-scientific writings in the face of the genuinely marxist texts of his maturity. The response of the official Communist Parties was best expressed in a two part series by the distinguished British Communist philosopher John Lewis, in the Communist Party of Britain's (CPGB) theoretical journal *Marxism Today*.³⁴

Althusser's "Reply to John Lewis" was a trenchant critique of Lewis and a pointed defense of his own previous work, at the same time that it clarified and corrected his new understandings of the marxist disciplines of science and philosophy. When it was published in book form shortly thereafter, the "Reply to John Lewis" contained a number of appendices, including one on the Stalinian deviation, which was his most important—indeed, his most explicit and open political intervention to date. In it he explicitly criticized the development of Stalinian marxism in the Soviet Union, at the same time that he publicly affirmed the revolutionary significance of the Chinese experience.

If we look back over our whole history of the last fifty years or more, it seems to me that . . . the only *historically existing* (left) 'critique' of the fundamentals of the 'Stalinian deviation' to be found . . . is in the line, in the practices, their principles and their forms, of the Chinese Revolution . . . from the Long March to the Cultural Revolution and its results.³⁵

After this forthright political intervention, Althusser was to become increasingly outspoken.

At the 22nd Congress of the PCF in January of 1976, amidst heated debate over the Party's retention of the political conception of the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' and the 'eurocommunist' challenge to its applicability in modern industrial states, Althusser delivered an

assessment of the historical significance of the Congress. Situated among speeches that ranged from dogmatic regurgitations of age-old defenses of the "fundamental" political concept of marxist-leninist thought; and 'right eurocommunist' capitulations to abstract moralism and obscurantism; to creative elaborations of the fundamental aspects of *mass democracy* and the transformation of social relations in the socialist transition period, Althusser addressed the "crisis of the International Communist movement." He exclaimed the emergence of a new socialism in certain areas of the world, a socialism that tended to represent a new "mass democratic socialism" that stands in contrast to those attempts to build socialism with force and repression. He also discussed Left unity in France and the relativity and dialectical balance necessary in most strategic political conceptions and practice, including democratic centralism and the approach to the State apparatus, as well as criticizing his own previous misconception of the socialist transition period between capitalism and communism, in which he had held that a separate *socialist mode of production* occupied that transitional space. Calling for new forms of unity, communication, open discussion and debate within and without the PCF, Althusser concluded that what was needed was "a more lively, freer and more daring party, released from the clumsy controls" of the existing party hierarchy.³⁶

At the same time Althusser and his student Etienne Balibar vigorously intervened in the debates of the 22nd Congress on whether or not the PCF should drop the concept of the 'dictatorship of the proletariat'. The context of the debate and the specific interventions of these two men are carefully documented and situated in Balibar's book, *On The Dictatorship of the Proletariat*.³⁷ Theirs was a two-sided intervention. On the one hand, they were utterly opposed to the Stalinian conception of the dictatorship of the proletariat, which they defined as antithetical to revolutionary marxism and workers' power. On the other hand, they steadfastly opposed, not so much the PCF's abandonment of the phrase 'dictatorship of the proletariat', but more importantly what they saw as its revolutionary content, namely: mass proletarian democracy, the organizations and institutions of proletarian power, and the withering away of the state.

With the collapse of the French Union of the Left, due in no small part to the attempts of the PCF leadership to manipulate the situation in their narrow interest, Althusser was not alone in lambasting the Party bureaucracy for dogmatic sectarianism toward other sections of the Left, as well as the Party's uncritical support of the Soviet Union.³⁸ This sweeping and bold challenge to the entrenched leaders of the PCF was soon followed by a confrontation of the leaders of the CPSU.

In the preface to a book written by his student Dominique Lecourt, *Proletarian Science? The Case of Lysenko*,³⁹ Althusser penned a slashing denunciation of the Stalinian deviation and its paralyzing impact on science and philosophy in the Soviet Union. Not only that, Althusser went further to criticize the current Soviet leadership for its continuing silence on the causes of the Stalinian deviation, and the refusal to rectify them.

Speaking directly to the issue and the individuals involved, Althusser wrote that,

I am not talking about the silence or half-silence of the moment, but about a silence which has lasted twenty years. It is clear that the Soviet leaders have refused *and are still refusing* to undertake a Marxist analysis of this gigantic error, buried, like its millions of victims, in official silence.⁴⁰

For Althusser this refusal was no accident. The line and the substance of the practices of the Stalin period, Althusser declared, continue in the USSR and elsewhere, dangerously crippling the international struggle for a true "democratic socialism." He even suggested that a reason the leaders of the CPSU have an interest in the current existence of the silence is to "ensure it continues—in order to reap the ensuing political benefits."⁴¹

The Crisis of Marxism

While certain political constraints on the assessment of the communist movement under Stalin had been lifted in 1956, the open acknowledgement of an all encompassing 'crisis of marxism', so often repeated by those disillusioned with Communism altogether, was seldom addressed by actual members of the major Communist Party, let alone one so staid and wedded to Moscow as was the PCF. Thus, Althusser's open confrontation of the crisis and his subsequent challenge to the leaders of both the PCF and the CPSU could hardly be ignored. And again at the international level, Althusser was not alone in boldly asserting new and hopeful conceptions of the path ahead. In fact, the question of differing 'roads to socialism', and the character of the existing Soviet and Eastern European societies became the cutting edge for debates on the Left, particularly within the context of what had come to be known as 'eurocommunism'.

In an attempt to shed light on these debates, the Italian extra-parliamentary political formation *Il Manifesto* organized a conference in Venice in early November, 1977.⁴²

The topic of the conference, "Power and Opposition in Post-Revolutionary Societies," generated a broad based discussion, with contributions from East European exiles and a wide range of West European marxists, including Bruno Trentin, prominent Italian trade unionist, Daniel Singer, Lucio Magri, Fernando Claudin, Rossana Rossanda, Charles Bettelheim and Louis Althusser.

Althusser's speech, entitled "The Crisis of Marxism," was a dynamic thrust intended to shift the terrain on which the crisis could be discussed—from the emphasis of the apologists of capital on the 'collapse and death of marxism', to an open assessment of the past in anticipation of the arduous struggle ahead. For Althusser, the current crisis of marxism (with striking similarities to the crisis of the 2nd International at the advent of World War I) emerged in the thirties, but was suppressed with the imposition of Stalinian 'solutions', preventing any real resolution of the problems involved. According to Althusser, the crisis exploded with the revelations of the 20th Congress of the CPSU and the Sino-Soviet split. And while the assessment of the crisis necessarily involves a rigorous critique of the incorrect

practices of marxism and their tragic results, Althusser here pointed to a source of hope in resolving the crisis. "In order to understand the conditions which led to the 'explosion' of the crisis, to its becoming a living force, we must also look at the other side of the matter: not only what is dying off, but what is emerging to take its place: the power of an unprecedented mass movement of the workers and of the people, which has at its disposal new historical forces and potentialities. If today we are able to refer to the crisis of marxism in terms of possible liberation and renewal, it is because of the strength and capacity to make history inherent in this mass movement."⁴³ Certainly, Althusser had in mind the tremendous upheavals of the Cultural Revolution, May '68, and the Union of the French People, when he wrote this, and his words were in anticipation of the emergence of Solidarity and the crisis of the Polish state, as well as the Socialist victories in France and Greece in 1981.

However, Althusser was not unaware of the contradictory responses to the crisis, and he cited three major reactions to it, all of which have found their counterparts in North American circles as well as in Europe. First, claimed Althusser, there are those who would deny the crisis of marxism altogether. For these people the crisis "is an invention of the enemies of Marxism." Today there are far fewer people who can maintain this myth than there were five years ago, though the slanderous attacks on the Polish working class are examples that cannot be ignored.

Second, there are those who recognize the crisis with varying degrees of clarity, but who prefer to lose themselves in the immediate struggles of the workers and the oppressed, rather than confront the crisis head-on. And finally, Althusser points to those who have initiated attempts to reconstruct revolutionary marxism through the process of directly confronting the crisis and overcoming it by a solid theoretical foundation for creative theoretical and political struggles.

In exploring the heritage of marxist and leninist theory, Althusser commented on the contradictory 'co-existence' within it of a body of revolutionary marxism and elements of an 'ideological', or non-scientific character, hostile to the former. As with so much of Althusser's work, this article cites the never-ending struggle to confront such hostile and alien elements—to identify them and expel them from marxist theory and practice, and replace them with genuine revolutionary scientific concepts. It is not insignificant that in this call, Althusser returned to the initiatives of the working masses as inspiration for this theoretical and political struggle.

A Fundamental Critique of the PCF

Still more recently, Althusser again joined with Balibar, and several other PCF intellectuals to sign a political declaration concerning the Union of the Left and the debates within the Party. The declaration appeared in the 6 April 1978 *Le Monde*, an independent Paris daily newspaper, because the Party press refused to publish letters and articles critical of the line presented by the PCF Political Bureau. The authors

raised strong concerns over inner party democracy, authoritarian manipulation on the part of the leadership, and the alienation of the Party's mass base. The document stated that "Communist militants can clearly see that, ultimately, it is the very existence and influence of the Party which is at stake, especially within the working class."⁴⁴ The declaration went on to say that the only way a correct strategy for Party work could be developed would be to engender "complete information for militants, total freedom of discussion and circulation of ideas within the Party, and systematic development of initiatives at the base of the Party in direct contact with the workers." But this critique, as well as the programmatic proposals to facilitate democratic party debate were ignored by the Party leadership, and a more drastic intervention became necessary.

In the April 25-28 issues of *Le Monde* Althusser confronted the PCF bureaucracy head-on with "What must change in the Communist Party," a fundamental critique that Perry Anderson characterized as "the most violent oppositional charter ever published within a party in the post-war history of Western Communism."⁴⁶ These articles present an historical analysis of the contemporary electoral defeat of the French Union of the Left and the electoral alliance strategy of the PCF, as well as a biting critique of the organizational-political practice of the PCF. Althusser also discussed the reduction of marxist-leninist theory and ideology in the PCF to a caricature of itself, and presented his own conclusions and proposals for the solution of the crisis of the French Party.

This document was particularly important in the way that it targeted the common origins of the crisis of international communism in the failure of communists, past and present, to constantly rectify and advance theory and practice in accordance with changing national and international conditions. Althusser's own conceptions of theory, political practice, the 'mass line', and the correct handling of errors, are all outlined in such a way as to point to the usefulness of his ideas for building, assessing and rectifying any revolutionary organization or movement. While Althusser failed to discuss the degree to which the genuine rectification to which he pointed was possible within the existing PCF, his powerful critique provided substantial tools with which others could address such questions.

In fact, the groundwork laid by Althusser in his more recent political interventions—interventions both more explicit and dramatic than his earliest political works on philosophy, provided a firm foundation for his students and followers in the French Party. While the tragedy that befell Althusser and his wife Helene in 1980 has prevented them from personally intervening further in the political debates within the PCF,⁴⁷ Etienne Balibar in particular continued to play a leading role within the Party on the fight against revisionism and bureaucracy, until his expulsion in March, 1981. For an outline political biography of Balibar see the appendix below.

In contrast to earlier periods when internal debates were kept secret, the current political struggles of the PCF have exploded into the open for all to see. And certainly the world communist movement is more

fragmented and ineffective as a cohesive and consistently revolutionary force than it has been in years. We have tried to show how Althusser's patient and relentless work helped lay the basis for the current challenge to the source of such fragmentation, the established Party dogmas both in France and around the world. The political challenges were never completely absent from Althusser's earliest work, they were merely cloaked in a more appropriate guise for actually intervening in contemporary struggles within the PCF, and thereby maximizing his impact in the world communist movement. And while the work required to extract the political implications of his earlier work is often difficult, we have tried to show that the rewards are well worth the effort, and his most recent work has brought a new dimension to marxist political practice.

But to understand *how* to approach a great theoretician is perhaps as important as the dedication to do so. It is in this light that we will discuss the critical use of Althusser's insights by a number of diverse theoretical and political militants throughout Europe and Latin America. But first we must discuss the role of individuals in history.

"Not Great Men"

History . . .

It's not made by great men.

"Not Great Men" by the Gang of Four
(post punk' British socialist rock band)⁴⁸

With the considerable emphasis we place on the crucial part played by the work of Louis Althusser in the process of the revitalization of revolutionary marxism, it is only fair to demand an answer to the question, "What is the role of individuals in history?" How do we assess the contributions of the great marxist theoreticians? Though the purpose of these articles is to elaborate the contributions of Louis Althusser to the science and politics of revolutionary marxism, it must be clear from the start that we are not attempting to substitute an 'Althusserian' orthodoxy, a new 'cult of the personality', for the old. Rather, we are attempting to construct an open-ended perspective that can incorporate *all* elements of revolutionary marxism in the service of working and oppressed people, such that the genuine contributions of individual men and women can be appropriated, their contradictions pin-pointed, and their weaknesses and errors critiqued and struggled against.

One thing that should be clear from a careful reading of all the great marxist thinkers is that even the greatest—Marx, Lenin, Mao—have contradicted themselves (and each other), and have incorporated incorrect formulations and negative practices alongside their brilliant insights and strategies for the revolutionary transformation of society.

We may all recognize the value of the works of these individuals as both extending concrete knowledge of concrete political situations and in the extent to which they have influenced and inspired the thinking and knowledge of millions of other people, today and yesterday, theoretically, politically and practically. But

there are numerous other marxists whose value as theoretical innovators and truth-sayers has not been as widely recognized. Acknowledging the importance of the greatest revolutionaries does not absolve us from the responsibility to go beyond their work to seek out those who helped them develop their theories or who were able to contribute to the body of revolutionary marxism in specific areas on their own. Relying too heavily on only a few "most important" texts and "great" men is what personality cults and stagnant theoretical systems are built on. Revolutionary theory must liberate and acknowledge the greatness and creativity of all progressive forces. Further, a successful revolutionary strategy cannot rely simply on the texts of a few men who were able to work in particular significant areas (often doing so with astounding perception and with such far-reaching implications). It is essential to connect *all* the parts of the complex process of making revolution *by and for* the masses.

The focus of our own work and study should not be the individual writings of these various figures simply strung together in a seamless tapestry of ever developing knowledge, but rather the contradictory and unevenly developing theoretical system or 'problematic' of marxism, within which each strove to operate with greater or lesser success, and to which each contributed.

We must seek to extract all the valuable contributions of all revolutionaries, even if their insights are not as easily understood, or are hidden from us in work that is not as accessible or considered as insightful as that of Marx, Lenin or Mao. We must undertake the extended task of searching out all contributions to the body of scientific knowledge that is revolutionary marxism—if it is to become a truly living and revolutionary science. In this task we must address the work of marxists as diverse as Nikolai Bukharin, Alexandra Kollantai, Antonio Gramsci, Rosa Luxemburg, Clara Zetkin, Lucio Colletti, Christine Buci-Glucksmann and Louis Althusser, who can be seen as more controversial subjects, but deserving of careful attention just the same.

In assessing the specific contributions of any individual it can be useful to follow Gramsci's two-step test of 'theoretical truth':

The problem arises of whether a theoretical truth, whose discovery corresponded to a specific practice, can be generalised and considered as universal for a historical epoch. The proof of its universality consists precisely (1) in its becoming a stimulus to know better the concrete reality of a situation that is different from that in which it was discovered (this is the principal measure of its fecundity); (2) when it has stimulated and helped this better understanding of concrete reality in its capacity to incorporate itself in that same reality as if it were originally an expression of it.⁴⁹

This points to a serious concern of the greatest revolutionaries. To what extent, and in what manner can militants appropriate the contributions of revolutionary marxism made by a broad range of individuals who may have quite divergent political conclusions based on a similar theoretical framework? One example of this problem can be found in the great respect that Lenin had for Plekhanov, while violently disagreeing with him on political conclusions.

Such a dialectical attitude has been noticeably lacking in most marxist-leninist theory in the US, where Stalin's technique of reading particular political errors back into a comrade's earlier work has been taken up so vigorously and with such dogmatic zeal.⁵⁰

An individual's political practice and political conclusions are definitely based on a determinant place held in the class struggle. But this must be understood as a highly complex process, with history and subjective concerns playing a major part, but not the decisive one. Such practice is ultimately based on a theoretical and political framework and perspective; but it is also affected by the material conditions that permeate the *application* of that framework and perspective. Therefore, two individuals can start with essentially the same theoretical framework and come to quite divergent political conclusions, depending on their own application of the framework based on their past practice and the conditions to which, and in which they apply it. The process of putting together a revolutionary marxist theoretical approach should be seen in many ways as a distinct process from its actual political application, though generally they are *simultaneous* processes that are indispensable to each other.

There are two basic mechanisms at work affecting these processes:

(1) Althusser explained in "Theoretical Work: Difficulties and Resources" that there are times when the political practice of communist parties "can contain, in the practical state, new theoretical elements of effects which they can 'realize' and therefore produce *principles* still absent in theory itself. It is thus necessary to seek these new theoretical elements, not only in analyses, decisions and political discourses or activities, but also in the forms of organization and in the methods of leadership of the class struggle."⁵¹ Such advances can only be understood if there exists a genuine revolutionary organization, and if it is engaged in practice organically linked to the working class and based on scientific and democratic principles. Such an organization must not be afraid to critically examine both its own theory and practice, nor fear openly rectifying either one in light of developments in the other. Unfortunately, the practice of the world communist movement for the past five decades has generally not been based on correct practice of marxist and leninist politics, and another, opposite mechanism has become dominant.

(2) The 'crisis of marxism' has been all-sided. On the one hand it has led to the ossification of theory; its failure to develop and produce new knowledge, and its reduction to a series of sterile, abstract and ahistorical dogmas. In this form theory has been rendered incapable of guiding practice, and has instead been reduced to the apologetic justification, after the fact, of every twist and turn in political practice, however opportunist or unjustified. Further, practice itself was increasingly narrowed to crudely economic demands in periods of revolutionary ebb, and voluntarist fantasies in periods of crisis and upheaval. The communist movement, dominated by the Stalin group in the CPSU, increasingly sought to substitute its own activity for the activity of the masses, conceiving its role, not as one helping the

masses to liberate themselves, but as *the* liberating agency itself, from which the masses were merely to take orders.

It is this mechanism, shared to one degree or another by Stalinian marxism, Trotskyism, and Chinese marxism, which must be overcome if marxism is to regain its revolutionary role in the liberation of humanity.

Althusser sought to contribute to the struggle against this second mechanism—the block to the further development of revolutionary marxism, primarily in the domain of theory. This was not simply because he was trained as a philosopher. Althusser has always taken very seriously Lenin's dictum: "without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement."⁵² For Althusser, theory shapes the revolutionary movement's orientation and development in four basic ways.

1. *Questions:* Theory defines the range of possible questions that can be asked in any investigation, and can have tendencies to exclude certain questions, which are then "unaskable."

2. *Concepts:* Theories provide the conceptual categories used to answer a given question. Different theoretical frameworks, necessarily give different meanings to concepts that function within them.

3. *Expectations:* Theories contain specific types of expectations about the alternative possible answers to given questions.

4. *Answers:* To the extent that a theoretical framework has posed questions with specific concepts, implying specific sets of expectations, that framework shapes the kind of answers which will be produced.⁵³

Althusser's work has pointed to a number of the specific problems involved in the development of marxist theory and its application in political practice. One is the limitations of language and discourse, such that there exists a use of old terms to describe new concepts that are necessary to understand a reality that is constantly changing. A major task that confronts revolutionary marxists is the need to rethink such new concepts and develop new terms sufficient to the task of learning new lessons. A failure to separate new concepts from outmoded language can be fatal to the growth of any science, and can have disastrous political effects for marxist science.

Another problem is that the incorrect application of correct theory does not mean that the theory is wrong simply because it did not work in a specific application; but rather, that extreme care must be taken in translating the theory into political practice. While this thesis is often utilized by dogmatists to blindly adhere to notions that have been proven totally inadequate time and again; when utilized in conjunction with a scientific problematic, valuable lessons of a particular practice can be deciphered. Central to all scientific practice are control mechanisms for accounting for variables, observation and/or experimentation (of varying types) that provide elements for revising and developing that practice. Dedication to scientific theory, even in the face of repeated failures (and generally drawing the ridicule of established disciplines), has been key to the development of all science. In this marxism is no exception.

This last approach must be balanced with its necessary corollary; that of the need to revise or reject incorrect or

inadequate theory, while expanding what is correct, based on concrete theoretical practice (which must include certain elements of experimentation, observation and a gathering of empirical data). This process includes a constant need to apply the most developed concepts of the science to the least developed, based on the historical development of the other practices (political, ideological and economic) and the practice of the workers' movement. Without these understandings revolutionary marxism would be unable to advance, and there would be no possible link to concrete reality.

With all this in mind we can begin to concretely assess the value of the contributions to revolutionary marxism which have developed in the wake of Louis Althusser's theoretical and political practice. To assist in such an assessment we have included an annotated bibliography documenting Althusser's influence in an Appendix.

Althusser's Political Impact

This brief outline of Althusser's political career and the following Appendix should be sufficient to begin to assess the degree to which discoveries that Althusser made in his specific investigations into dialectical and historical materialism during the sixties and seventies are of more than passing interest. The best of Althusser's followers have based their work, not on an uncritical regurgitation of Althusser's ideas, but on active critiques of his writings, utilizing his own technique of a symptomatic reading to take what is most developed in his work and applying it to lesser developed areas—taking what is correct in his writings to critique what is incorrect, and to move to a higher level of understanding and action. Certainly the correctness of this or that conclusion is debatable. Althusser himself openly critiqued and modified what he had written, challenged by other theorists, as well as the concrete class struggles of the French and international workers' and communist movements. But we have attempted to demonstrate that the areas opened up for marxist theoreticians and political the immense influence he has had on a diverse and prolific segment of marxist theoreticians and political militants is sufficient to render his contributions invaluable to the revitalization of marxist theory in the past two decades.

Recognizing the crisis of marxism is not enough. Only if that recognition stimulates the work necessary to overcome the incredible brake on the movements toward socialism and the liberation of all oppressed people imposed by the legacy of the Stalin era, can such a recognition be judged worthy of the legacy of Marx and Engels' intent—"the point is not simply to interpret the world, but to change it." (Theses on Feuerbach.)

The legacy of decades of stagnant theory is found in the sterile and ineffective political strategies that have led the workers', women's and liberation movements to repeated failures and tragedies. While we must not denigrate the significance of the concrete successes of revolutionaries in such places as Angola, Nicaragua and Vietnam, the lessons of their struggles cannot be found in simply extolling their defeat of imperialist armies. The struggles continue. And if we are to be able to help

consolidate such victories, and win victories of our own, we must take up the challenge to produce theories that take into account new understandings of the world, as well as the political and theoretical legacy of the practical successes, tragic defeats and unlearned lessons of the past.⁵⁴ The work of Louis Althusser can help to situate our knowledge in a synthesis of historical and contemporary contributions to the theory and politics of revolutionary marxism because of the critical, yet open ended approach he pursues. It is the purpose of the following sections of this article to outline how this can be done.

Appendix

Althusser's Influence

What follows is a brief annotated bibliography of Althusserian marxism available in English. While this survey is short, cursory and by no means exhaustive, we hope it will stimulate our readers to investigate texts and authors for themselves, as well as provide documentation of the wide applicability of Althusserian concepts and methods.

It would be difficult to deny that the overall balance-sheet of Althusser's impact has . . . been positive for the real development of historical materialism.⁵⁵

Perry Anderson has noted that the vitality of Althusserian marxism "as an intellectual force capable of stimulating and informing concrete inquiry among economists, political scientists, historians, sociologists and anthropologists alike," is "incontestably" indicated with an overview of the various works available in English, not to mention works in other languages.⁵⁶

If we return to our previous quote from Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks*, we can begin to assess this claim. When we attempt to judge Althusser's influence in the development of revolutionary marxism we must first assess his work itself on various levels, its usefulness in understanding the specifics addressed; and secondly, assess the work of those who have built upon his contributions, and to the degree to which his discoveries have become a part of a continuing dialogue. Assessing Althusser's contributions requires understanding the theoretical and philosophical areas into which he consciously, politically intervened, and the degree to which he has been able to influence those who have continued the struggle to overcome the crisis of marxism from *within* marxism itself. And while a simple list of Althusser's followers can be a problematic affair, we will dwell on this at some length because of their importance.

While Althusser worked to present his theories in the context of Communist politics, by no means have all of his students carried out their own work within the confines of strictly leninist theses. In fact, certain of his students who have acknowledged their debt to his instruction have pursued quite different directions. And though we can count among these such a prominent figure as Michel Foucault (whose work in the realm of sexuality, discourse and power relations has fundamental importance for marxism), we will concentrate in this essay on those who have continued in the context of revolutionary marxist theory.

Perhaps the most important vehicle for the dissemination of Althusserian ideas in the English speaking world was the British journal *Theoretical Practice*. This publication emerged in Britain in 1971, when various intellectuals came together to discuss the usefulness of the *Reading Capital* symposium. Similar to *New Left Review*, this journal, too, made works

available by Althusser and his students, including Jacques Ranciere, one of the contributors to the original two volume French edition of *Reading Capital*.

Founded on an emphasis on the "irreducibility of theoretical work to political or economic struggle,"⁵⁷ the journal undertook to build toward a genuinely revolutionary marxist-leninist party. "And by stressing the specificity of theoretical work as a practice," the editors of *Theoretical Practice* intended to exclude "contemplative academicism."⁵⁸ But where *NLR* held to an eclectic approach to marxism, and harbored strong affinities for Trotsky, in the pages of *TP* such students and militants as Ben Brewster (the translator of *For Marx* and *Reading Capital*), Antony Cutler and Michael Gane declared that "no development of scientific Marxism is possible which does not start from what Althusser has achieved."⁵⁹ At the same time they published works from other marxist schools they felt deserved attention.

Unfortunately, this publication had an extremely short life. In 1972, after only seven numbers, the editors of *Theoretical Practice* split over Althusser's own self-criticism of his definition of philosophy and the implications for political practice. Those who saw the necessity of conscious political intervention in mass struggles, such as Paul Hirst and Barry Hindess were active in the British Communist Party and other projects, such as the (self-described) "feminist" journal *Power & Politics*,⁶⁰ as well as more academic pursuits. Both Hirst and Hindess also went on to edit the prestigious (and often extremely dense and obscure) *Economy and Society*, which continues to present certain important contributions to marxist theory, while politically generally maintaining the British Party line.

Originally 'orthodox' Althusserians, Hirst and Hindess did much to defend the relevance of Althusser's contributions for marxist investigations. Hirst's "Althusser's Philosophy" in *Theoretical Practice* 3/4 is indispensable for understanding the evolution of Althusser's philosophical and epistemological positions. The two men collaborated in 1975 to utilize concepts developed by Althusser to shed new light on transitional societies. Their work *Precapitalist Modes of Production*⁶¹ provides some important insights into the strengths and weaknesses of other marxist theories in this area, and is invaluable in providing a systematic and rigorous definition of various non-capitalist modes of production in modern capitalist social formations. Further, their critique of Etienne Balibar's contribution to *Reading Capital* (which is found at the end of *Precapitalist Modes*) is an insightful and widely applicable discussion of the 'essentialist' deviation from marxist practice.

In the years since the publication of their first volume, Hirst and Hindess have produced an expansive body of work, which has become increasingly more controversial, as well as increasingly departing from their Althusserian past. Their auto-critique of *Precapitalist Modes*, entitled *Mode of Production and Social Formation*,⁶² provided a careful, if critical, summary of some of Althusser's contributions to historical materialism, while at the same time providing a jumping off point for their own *unique* direction of development.

Unfortunately, the work of these two British theorists and their supporters has tended to diverge from marxism in direct proportion to their divergence from the Althusserian system, to the point where they currently reject the applicability of the concepts of Marx's *Capital* to modern capitalism all together.⁶³ And though we can still glean useful concepts and analyses from their later work, extreme care is necessary concerning how we appropriate such elements. Part of the reason for such an extreme development of 'academic marxism' as that of Hirst and Hindess is the flourishing neo-marxist academic community in Britain and Europe, that is essentially divorced from the workers movement. Without a sense of the concrete historical struggles of the working class constantly informing

and challenging ones work, a theoretical system can easily justify its own existence on the basis of academic issues rather than scientific political practice.

Though Hirst and Hindess effectively criticized Etienne Balibar for certain 'essentialist' errors in his contribution to *Reading Capital*, this error has by no means rendered his political practice as unorthodox as the two British theoreticians. Born in 1942, Balibar received his degree in philosophy at the *Ecole Normale Supérieure*, where he studied with, and became the associate of Louis Althusser. He joined the PCF as a student, in 1961, during the last part of the Algerian revolutionary struggle for independence from France. In addition to his essay, "The Basic Concepts of Historical Materialism" contained in *Reading Capital*, he has also published several other essays in French on the marxist science.

But to date, Balibar's most important translated theoretical interventions have been in the realm of politics rather than science. We have previously discussed his book *On the Dictatorship of the Proletariat*, which is certainly one of the most enlightening texts produced on that particular element of leninist politics. More recently Balibar continued to play a leading role in the struggles within the PCF against the dominant dogmatic and pro-Soviet (mis)leadership, up until his expulsion in March of 1981. The issues central to this expulsion, and the connection to the interventions initiated by Althusser himself, justify a brief historical background.

Since October, 1979, the embattled PCF has undergone challenges from the "right," but also from the "left." Key leaders and historians claimed that the Party had made grave errors and had become "an empty shell since the abandonment of the Union of the Left" in 1978.⁶⁴ A number of communists in France, however, continued to uphold the strategy of remaining in the Party to facilitate effective struggle for unity on the Left.

In late 1980 and early 1981 certain incidents of overt racism were perpetrated by French Communist officials, including the Christmas bull-doing of the housing of immigrants from Mali by the Communist mayor of a working class suburb. This stimulated a number of Party leaders and militants to denounce the Party's general attitudes toward immigrant workers. This dissent was combined with "dissatisfaction within the *Confederation Generale du Travail* (CGT), France's largest labor confederation, closely tied to the PCF."⁶⁵ CGT activists joined with Socialists in forging a 'Union of Struggle' initiative to overcome the restrictions imposed by their respective bureaucracies. Further dissent within the PCF centered around the Party's approval of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and its attitudes toward the struggles in Poland, and the continued lack of internal Party democracy.

Balibar's prominence as a Party philosopher and historian gave added weight to his publication of an anti-racist article entitled "The PCF: From Charonne to Vitry." Much of the power of Balibar's critique stemmed from its historical grounding in Party history. The mention of Charonne refers to the 1962 police murders of PCF members demanding an end to French colonialism in Algeria (long a symbol of the Party's dedication to anti-colonialism), and Vitry is the "red belt" suburb where the Party leaders fueled particular racist and anti-immigrant working class prejudices (tending to blame immigrants as the cause of unemployment).

Balibar's article, published in the *le Nouvel Observateur*, developed a strong critique of the Party's ambiguous strategies to combat racism and colonialism, and cited national chauvinism as a particularly dangerous element in the Party's positions. He also cited various reasons for support of the PCF by its mass base being at its lowest point (which has since been dramatically verified by the relatively poor showing of the PCF in the Spring national elections in 1981). Balibar was also highly critical of the Party for failing to attract young workers

who are particularly antagonistic to the "amazing cult of personality of Georges Marchais."⁶⁶ The publication of this article resulted in Balibar's immediate expulsion from the Party.

The December 24, 1981, *Le Monde* reported that Balibar and several other ex-members of the PCF signed a declaration in opposition to the imposition of "military socialism" in Poland, and in support of the Polish workers. A short article by Balibar on this theme will appear in the pages of this journal in the future.

The most prominent and distinguished individual to openly utilize the contributions of Louis Althusser to revolutionary marxist theory is also one of the most controversial. For not only has Charles Bettelheim acted as a technical and economic advisor in many countries, including Algeria, Nasser's Egypt and Cuba, as well as having studied and lectured in China, Poland, Mexico, the Soviet Union and Vietnam; he also for many years has held the opinion that the Soviet Union is a capitalist country with a new capitalist class in power.

What is so important about Bettelheim's work, and what is his debt to Althusser? While Bettelheim is most well-known for his historical/political texts on the development of the Soviet Union (and the significance of his volumes cannot be overestimated), his most important theoretical/practical work can be found in *Economic Calculation and Form of Property*, *On the Transition to Socialism* with Paul Sweezy, and *The Transition to Socialist Economy*.⁶⁷ It is on the basis of these latter texts that Bettelheim has constructed his concrete analyses of existing social formations. And it is on such texts that we can rely to develop our own analyses and critically assess Bettelheim's conclusions.

In the way that Althusser has encouraged us to read all of Marx's work in light of Marx's own most advanced conceptions and formulations, we must study Bettelheim's contradictory works utilizing the most advanced concepts and formulations that he has contributed to the analysis of the socialist transition period.

In *Economic Calculations and Forms of Property* Bettelheim maintains that until socialist relations of production are developed, there will be an intermingling of forms of property, and there will especially be a coexistence of commodity categories and economic planning. The dangers and instability of such a coexistence should be obvious, and the trajectory that led Bettelheim to his current conclusions is clearly based on the possibility of moving backward to capitalism in such a transition period.

Bettelheim's work is important because of his groundbreaking efforts to construct a coherent and consistent theoretical framework and conceptual system with which to analyze the transition period. With such tools the possibilities for affecting substantial change, as opposed to simply reacting spontaneously to changing realities, are greatly facilitated.

Bettelheim has repeatedly acknowledged his debt to Althusser's theoretical/political critiques of economism and mechanical materialism in enabling him to make the advances in theory that he has achieved. In *The Transition to Socialist Economy* Bettelheim declared that in certain texts, "Althusser formulates some positions which are of the greatest importance" for the analysis of the socialist transition period in which Bettelheim was involved.⁶⁸ In fact, prior to the emergence of Althusser's systematic critiques of the dominant communist theories, Bettelheim was a rather conventional, pro-Soviet marxist economist, if in fact a quite distinguished one just the same. And while we feel that the work of Charles Bettelheim is among the most important economic and historical theoretical practice in the body of revolutionary marxism in the past 25 years, we feel that his political conclusions are not necessarily inherent in his theoretical framework. In fact, they seem to stem from international

political considerations (especially the Chinese anti-revisionist polemics) rather than from a concrete analysis of Soviet social processes, and therefore can be seen as somewhat inorganic and detrimental to his analysis of the Soviet Union. It does appear, however, that this problem is being corrected in his more recent writings.⁶⁹

Political Theory and the State

One of the areas of study most profoundly affected by the work of Althusser is that of political theory and the State. Interestingly enough, Althusser himself has rarely taken up the issue of the State, with certain notable exceptions; and it is in the work of the Swedish communist sociologist Goran Therborn and Althusser's student Nicos Poulantzas that his influence is most keenly felt.

Goran Therborn has been one of the most consistent defenders of Althusser's marxism outside of France. He is certainly the most prominent to continue to take up Althusser's admonition to actively challenge capitalist hegemony in the realm of the social sciences.⁷⁰ In addition to a number of works on class analysis published in Swedish, Therborn has produced a series of important books available in English that engage in dialogue, debate and criticism of various traditional sociological disciplines. Within the context of Althusser's interpretation of historical materialism, Therborn works to rigorously apply a framework, concepts and methodology in fields that have been dominated by disciplines that tend to obscure more than they reveal of the workings of social relations in modern capitalism.

*Science, Class and Society*⁷¹ is a comparative analysis of the rise of historical materialism and that of classical sociology, providing a strong critique of the latter from the perspective of the former.

*What does the ruling class do when it rules?*⁷² published in 1978, is primarily a systematic effort to establish an analytical framework for discussing state apparatuses and state power under feudalism, capitalism and socialism. Secondly, this book is a critique of some of the various approaches that have dominated the discussion of these questions in the past. Thirdly, the text explicitly addresses, if not conclusively, political problems in socialist theory, notably the dictatorship of the proletariat and the relationship between socialism and democracy in advanced capitalist countries.

In his most recent book *The Ideology of Power and the Power of Ideology*⁷³ Therborn moves away from the realm of state power and 'legitimation' to systematically address a new realm: ideology and the constitution of subjects. In this text we see a consolidation of a string of various theses on ideology into a popularly presented, comprehensive whole. And while one might quarrel with Therborn's tendency to uncritically embrace certain sociological theories, and at times mechanically separate various aspects of ideology, this work is a decisive contribution to the current debate on ideology. Starting with a critical assessment of Althusser's writings on ideology in the late sixties, Therborn develops a theory of the formation of human subjects through the dual ideological processes of 'subjection' and 'qualification', outlines various ideological functions, and relates these elements to ideological formations and class and popular struggles.

Another important theoretician in the realm of the State influenced by Althusser was Nicos Poulantzas. Poulantzas was born in Athens, Greece in 1936, and he studied in Athens, Heidelberg and Paris. A member of the "eurocommunist" Communist Party of Greece (Interior)—in opposition to the Soviet apologists of the Communist Party of the Exterior—until his death in 1979, he spent most of his recent years teaching sociology in Vincennes.

Poulantzas first book, *Political Power and Social Classes*⁷⁴ begins with an introduction that outlines Althusser's work concerning dialectical and historical materialism, theoretical production and their application to modes of production and concrete social formations. Poulantzas goes on to criticize contemporary definitions of power, social class and the capitalist state. Not only does he rely on the work of Marx, Lenin and Gramsci to work toward the development of a systematic political theory, he uses this theory to confront prominent exponents of Western sociology. His discussion of political 'power blocs' and class 'fractions', as well as the social roles of ideology and bureaucracy, and the location of class struggle within the capitalist mode of production, are indispensable for a comprehensive understanding of advanced capitalist states.

Poulantzas' second major work, *Fascism and Dictatorship*⁷⁵ is a monumental study of German and Italian fascism, containing at the same time a sustained and well-documented critique of official Comintern attitudes and strategies concerning fascism in the period between the two world wars. This book "carefully distinguishes between fascism as a mass movement before the seizure of power and fascism as an entrenched machinery of dictatorship. It compares the distinct class components of the counter-revolutionary blocs mobilized by fascism in Germany and Italy; analyzes the changing relations between the petty bourgeoisie and big capital in the evolution of fascism; [and] discusses the structure of the fascist State itself."⁷⁶ But while this work is crucial for any further study of fascism, it has been criticized from both within and without Althusserian marxism. The most sustained and insightful critique is provided by Ernesto Laclau, who builds on Poulantzas' contributions while pointing to the inadequacy of Poulantzas' understanding of ideology, and his tendency toward a 'workerist' approach (see below).

The usefulness of Poulantzas' theories of fascism for contemporary studies, as well as historical ones, is witnessed in his short volume *The Crisis of the Dictatorships: Portugal, Spain, Greece*.⁷⁷ Written in 1975 when the authoritarian and reactionary regimes of southern Europe were either collapsing or being actively overthrown, the insights gained by the application of Poulantzas' theories and categories to the international environment and the internal dynamic of class conflicts in these countries are strikingly similar to the insights produced 100 years earlier by Marx in his classic text on political power, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*.

Quite significantly, the Chilean Movement of the Revolutionary Left (MIR) utilizes Poulantzas' conception of fascism and exceptional states in its revolutionary analysis of the military dictatorship in Chile.⁷⁸

It is in his third book, *Classes in Contemporary Capitalism*⁷⁹ that Poulantzas develops some of his most controversial theories. For while this is a pioneering discussion of some of the most fundamental aspects of the class structure of advanced capitalist societies, it also contains problematic presentations that have been vigorously critiqued from within the realm of marxist theory. Addressing the specificity of capitalist relations of production, as well as problems of the 'nation state', the internationalization of capital and the internal contradictions of the capitalist class itself; Poulantzas also presents a challenging analysis of the concept of the 'petty bourgeoisie'. There has been a great deal of debate over his assessment of the unity of a 'new' and 'old' petty bourgeoisie, and of his definitions of 'productive' and 'unproductive' labor and the working class.⁸⁰ Nonetheless, this work stands as a reminder of the vast amount of labor involved in producing theories and a strategy sufficient to secure class alliances in the struggle for socialism that could avoid the tragedies of the Chilean experience.

Finally, in his last major work before his untimely death, *State, Power, Socialism*,⁸¹ Poulantzas deepened his treatment

of themes he developed previously, and provides a vigorous critique of certain marxist theories of the State. Pointing to the contemporary development of new forms of 'authoritarian statism', he also argues that the state plays an active role in the formation of classes, while class conflict is located not only in society at large, but within the very apparatuses of the state itself. Finally, while the facts are lost on his numerous detractors, the proposals for a strategy for socialism in the developed capitalist countries that Poulantzas presents are clearly distinguishable from 'right' eurocommunist policies and dogmatic notions of 'dual power' in such a way as to challenge contemporary revolutionary marxists to reassess the realities of the movements of women, workers and oppressed people around the world, and their relationship to the organized communist movement.

But depression due to personal crises and failure to secure a stable teaching position led Poulantzas to take his own life, long before the full implications of his work could be assessed by contemporary marxists.

As we mentioned above, Ernesto Laclau has worked on the marxist theory of politics and ideology, by not only building on Poulantzas theories of the State and fascism, but also providing lucid critiques of them in certain specific instances. Born in Buenos Aires, Argentina, and currently studying and lecturing in Britain, Laclau has published a collection of essays in his book *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory: Capitalism, Fascism, Populism*.⁸² Interestingly enough, Laclau has moved from a political space where he at one time uncritically accepted the theories of Leon Trotsky, to a strong and crucial critique of Trotsky's theories of politics, ideology, and fascism. He also provides useful critiques of the theories of Andre Gunder Frank and Ralph Milliband, while leveling the above mentioned thoughtful criticism at some of the weaknesses of Poulantzas' theories. Contending that marxists have generally neglected or minimized the specific nature and mechanisms of the ideological appeal of fascism because of a tendency toward 'class reductionism' (or 'workerism'), Laclau applies an innovative use of Althusser's conception of ideological 'interpellation' (address) to overcome the necessary political errors inherent in 'class reductionist' theories. And while the general focus of his book is Latin America, certain of Laclau's essays take on a significance and applicability that far exceeds the immediate topic of discussion.

Another European who has significantly contributed to the recent political debates is Christine Buci-Glucksmann. Buci-Glucksmann's *Gramsci and the State*⁸³ is a major study of the position of Antonio Gramsci's political and philosophical contributions to revolutionary theory and practice. In fact, she has participated with other writers in further development of marxist theory, building on a fusion of Gramscian and Althusserian theory. Reading Gramsci in light of Althusser's contributions (and then rereading Althusser in light of this symptomatic reading of Gramsci), Buci-Glucksmann discusses the cultural and ideological spheres as decisive areas of revolutionary struggle, and addresses the search for an 'effective' and viable road to socialism in the advanced capitalist countries. Commenting on the concomitant crises of capitalism and the classic social democratic parties, she offers a critique of 'right' eurocommunism that can be useful in the development of socialist strategy.

Ideology and Culture

Althusser's work in the area of ideology is some of his most controversial, and yet some of his most fruitful. This is as much for Althusser's own contributions as it is for his process of drawing on advances in other disciplines. This has been a central area for study and discussion in the social sciences,

particularly in the work of Roland Barthes, Claude Levi-Strauss, Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray, and Christian Metz in the areas of linguistics, semiology, structuralism and psychoanalysis. At the intersection of all these disciplines are ideology and discourse theory. Althusser attempted to draw on the most important advances in these areas and to transform them with, and in the marxist problematic. He provided a bridge between marxism and all these disciplines which never existed before; and he also provided marxism with elements hitherto absent from it, but which were necessary for it to release its potential for understanding ideology. Althusser's writings have generated an enormous amount of debate in this area, much of which is available in the English language. In 1976 Paul Hirst published a pair of essays on ideology that not only built on Althusser's ideas, but also leveled a critique at certain of the limitations of his work. In "Althusser and the Theory of Ideology" and "Problems and Advances in the Theory of Ideology"⁸⁴ Hirst acknowledges the immense debt owed to Althusser for transforming the existing marxist theory of ideology, while going on to challenge Althusser's theses concerning the reproduction of the relations of production.

In 1977 Rosalind Coward and John Ellis wrote *Language and Materialism*⁸⁵ in which they assessed the recent radical innovations in semiology,⁸⁶ Althusserian marxism and Lacanian psychoanalysis. In this volume Coward and Ellis considered the impact of these systems on theories of language and artistic practice. Their discussions of psychoanalysis and semiology are useful for understanding these disciplines in relation to marxism, and their essay "Marxism, Language, and Ideology" provides clear insights into the marxist conceptions of the 'materiality of ideology' and the 'constitution of subjects'. While the book is at times densely steeped in obscurantist language and abstract discussion, sections of it provide a helpful framework for the development of the marxist concepts of ideology and the theory of the subject.

The most recent work on ideology to base itself on the ideas of Althusser, has been produced by John Urry, a Briton lecturing in sociology at the University of Lancaster. In *The Anatomy of Capitalist Societies: The Economy, Civil Society and the State*,⁸⁷ Urry draws heavily on the work of Gramsci to critique certain conceptions of ideology, including that of Nicos Poulantzas. Situating Gramsci's conception of Civil Society between the economic and state structures, Urry argues that "much of what is customarily taken as ideology is properly to be viewed as part of civil society." Instead of seeing ideology as a specific instance in a social formation, like politics and economics, Urry views ideology as an "effect" produced by the multiplicity of practices of civil society. More specifically, the term ideology should be reserved for "a fairly specific kind of effect which is present within practices of very different sorts, in which the causes or consequences of that practice or of some other practice are concealed." Challenging the conventional marxist usage of such conceptions as base and superstructure, politics and ideology as inadequate to understand contemporary societies, this work stands as a useful polemic against functionalism and vulgar marxism and as a creative synthesis of the writings of Althusser and Gramsci.

Closely tied with the many theories that have blossomed concerning ideology is the field of cultural theory and criticism. The most prominent French contributor in this area influenced by Althusser is Pierre Macherey, whose analyses concerning the nature of literature and how it is produced include discussions of Jules Vern and Lenin's writings on Tolstoy. In his book *For a Theory of Literary Production*,⁸⁸ Macherey relies on Althusser's conception of social practice and production, as well as that of ideology, to construct a theory of literary production that situates authors as producers who work up "certain given materials into a new product": art, which he sees as part of the ideological level of society. Authors do not

make the materials with which they work: forms, values, myths, symbols and ideologies come to them already "worked upon," similar to workers in automobile assembly plants.⁸⁹

For Macherey, 'fiction' gives ideology a determinate form, revealing that ideology's limits, and thereby contributing to the process of freeing us from ideological illusions. In this, "a work is tied to ideology not so much by what it says as by what it does not say."⁹⁰ It is the "significant silences" of a text, its gaps and absences, that the literary critic must make 'speak'. Since the limits of ideology keep it, and those who work within it from saying certain things, the critic must seek out the principles of the conflict and contradictions of the meanings of a text, in order to analyze its significance in relation to the ideology and reality it represents. Needless to say, such theories of literary production and criticism, attempting to develop a scientific analysis of the 'de-centered' totality of a literary work, have little in common with those theories that search to find the central, or unifying principle ('essence') of creative production.

Terry Eagleton is one of the more prominent English contributors in this area of literary criticism. Eagleton has worked to define the crucial link between literature and historical conditions, explaining in his preface to *Marxism and Literary Criticism*⁹¹ that, "Marxist criticism is part of a larger body of theoretical analysis which aims to understand ideologies—the ideas, values and feelings by which [people] experience their societies at various times . . . [some of which] are available to us only in literature." Eagleton integrated certain semiological conceptions, as well as insights of Walter Benjamin and Bertolt Brecht, into his analysis of the relations between literary text and ideology; and posed certain questions concerning the 'scientific character of criticism' in his book, *Criticism and Ideology*.⁹² And while he has subsequently tended to let his work degenerate into excessively partisan Trotskyist polemics,⁹³ Eagleton's earlier works provide important contributions to cultural analysis and cultural practice on many levels, and are not limited in their value to an understanding of literary criticism alone.

In the field of culture and the arts, Althusser's writings had an impact on cultural practitioners as well as theorists. His early works, and his journal *Cahiers Marxist-Leninistes* were widely read and discussed, even by such figures as the popular French film director Jean-Luc Godard. In fact, Godard was so influenced by Althusser's approach to reading capital that he tried to copy it in his cinematic practice, attempting to teach his audience "reading cinema." One of the results was his film *La Chinoise* (The Chinese). This movie was a penetrating look at the contradictions encountered when young political militants in France took up the challenge of the Chinese Red Guard to 'live' marxism-leninism. Filmed in the summer of 1967, and set in a middle-class apartment in Paris, *La Chinoise* views the interaction of five people—a student, an actor, a "country girl," a scientist and a painter. The actions and choices of these individuals, in relation to the PCF, as well as to China and the Soviet Union generate a tension that Godard utilized to criticize a certain isolation from real life and real problems. In Godard's own words, "it's the Third World that gives the others a lesson. It seems to me that the only balanced person in the film is the young Negro. That's why I assigned him the discourse that he delivers during the course of the film—a discourse marked by continuity. . . ."⁹⁴ In the source of the delivery of this discourse extracts from Mao and the Red Guards are combined with the words of Louis Althusser—assessing the meaning of the end of Stalinian dominance within marxism.

What the end of dogmatism has restored to us is the right to assess exactly what we have, to give both our wealth and our poverty their true names, to think and

pose our problems in the open, and to undertake in rigour a true investigation.⁹⁵

Far less dramatic, yet clearly of significance in the arena of culture, is the influence of Althusser's theories on British cultural writers. The cultural journal of the British CP, *Red Letters* has been notable in this regard. But far more influential in this area has been the journal *Working Papers in Cultural Studies*, published by the British Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies. Issue No. 10 of this journal was dedicated to theories of ideology, with particularly useful essays on the conceptions of Althusser and Gramsci. The journal has also dealt with problems of social democracy, subjectivity and individuality, among many other things. In a 1975 special issue, which was later to be published in book form as *Resistance Through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain*, the contributors concentrated on punk rock, reggae and Rastafarian culture. Of further interest is the fact that Dick Hebdige, one of the contributors to the special issue on subcultures, published a book which has found its way into certain currents of mainstream rock criticism in the US and Britain, entitled *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*.⁹⁶

Still further, the journals *Screen* and *Screen Education* have attempted to apply advanced marxist concepts, including certain of those developed by Althusser, and relying on the body of theory centered around semiology, to discussions of cinema, rock and roll music, pornography and television.⁹⁷

A clear indication of the immense impact that Althusser's work has had in the realm of ideology and culture is witnessed in the special issue of the cultural journal *Praxis* dedicated to Art and Ideology,⁹⁸ which contains a lengthy bibliography of Althusserian cultural criticism.

Women's Situation

One of the first in the English speaking world to grasp the importance of Althusser's work for the situation of women in contemporary capitalism was Juliet Mitchell, another editor of *New Left Review*, who has written and lectured extensively on English literature, women and women's liberation in the US and Britain. In her 1965 essay in *NLR*, "Women: The Longest Revolution," she drew on Althusser's conceptions of social structures, the articulation of economics, politics and ideology, as well as overdetermination and 'ruptural unity'. She also traced the treatment of women's situation in socialist theory historically, and targeted four major structures that form the complex unity of women's condition under capitalism: production, reproduction, sex, and the socialization of children.

Mitchell went on to publish *Women's Estate* and *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*,⁹⁹ and extended analysis of Freud's scientific discoveries in the realm of psychoanalysis and the unconscious, essentially a popularized Lacanian reading of Freud, which works to appropriate for feminism that of scientific value in Freud's work, in opposition to the popular applications of his work that have been so destructive to women and their mental health. In this book Mitchell utilizes Althusser's approach to Marx, to discuss Freud, and 'reads' Freud's earlier works in light of his later works,¹⁰⁰ pointing out the contradictions and isolating the aspects of value in understanding patriarchal culture, while rejecting the notion that existing relations are all that is possible.

Heleith Saffioti, the Brazilian professor of philosophy, science and letters who has written extensively on the issues of women and class in Latin America, also drew early inspiration from Althusser's work on ideology, as well as the work of Nicos Poulantzas on social classes. In her essay, "Women, Mode of Production and Social Formations,"¹⁰¹ Saffioti examined the specific problems of women within social

formations where the capitalist mode of production is dominant, working to utilize certain conceptual elaborations developed by Althusser and Poulantzas in a critical manner. Pointing to the need to develop the analytical concept "sex category" for assessing the situation of women in relation to men, and outlining the incorporation of pre-capitalist work relations—vestiges of pre-capitalist modes of production such as the domestic mode of production—into capitalist social formations, Saffioti by no means develops a completed theory of women's situation in this short essay, but she does open important areas for debate.¹⁰²

Similarly concerned with a theoretical and historical understanding of women's situation in modern society, and tending to engage in debate from an understanding of Althusser's discussions of ideology, is Annette Kuhn and Ann Marie Wolpe's *Feminism and Materialism*.¹⁰³ This collection of essays covers a wide range of issues concerning women in addition to its emphasis on patriarchy, including paid and unpaid labor and the state, while it also poses the centrality of the family and the labor process in the situation of women in the structures of production and reproduction under capitalism. For Roisin McDonough and Rachel Harrison in their essay "Patriarchy and Relations of Production," "the way forward for an analysis of patriarchy necessitates an engagement with historical materialism,"¹⁰⁴ in spite of the fundamental historical limitations of the marxist science in this area. In particular, these women address the importance of Althusser's conceptions of the constitution of subjects and the material existence of ideology in relation to women's situation.

Not only does this book carefully address the theoretical issues of patriarchal ideology and domestic labor, it also provides concrete analysis of specific divisions of labor and women's situation in Italy and Oaxaca, Mexico, including a critique of Juliet Mitchell's theses, as well as certain sociological theories of women and the role of the state.

Althusser and Anthropology

In France, Althusser's writings had a significant impact on the development of the newly emerging Marxist anthropology, which had first appeared in the early 1960s with the work of Claude Meillassoux and Maurice Godelier. Although both of these figures were themselves influenced by Althusser, it was only the second generation of French Marxist anthropologists who seriously took up the Althusserian system.

The most important of these were Emmanuel Terray and Pierre Philip Rey. Terray, in his *Marxism and "Primitive" Societies*,¹⁰⁵ demonstrated the fruitfulness of the basic concepts of historical materialism as defined by Althusser for pre-capitalist societies. Terray also provided a critical assessment of the writings of Louis Henry Morgan and Meillassoux based on the Althusserian framework.

Pierre Philip Rey also was decisively influenced by his encounter with Althusser's work. In his case this transformation occurred while Rey was in the field, studying Congolese society. The result was a further development of the Althusserian conceptual framework, as well as an enrichment of anthropology through the examination of the concrete revolutionary elements in Congolese society in their conjunction. Rey's later work turned on a number of key elements of historical materialism as interpreted by Althusser, including the articulation of modes of production in pre-capitalist societies, and the question of class alliances. In the English speaking world the work of these theorists has had a notable impact, particularly in journals such as *Economy and Society* and *Critique of Anthropology*. A good introduction to some of the debates among Marxist anthropologists and the impact of Althusser's work and that of his followers can be

found in *The Anthropology of Pre-Capitalist Societies*, edited by Joel S. Kahn and Joseph R. Llobera¹⁰⁶ and Stephen Katz's *Marxism, Africa and Social Class*.¹⁰⁷

Of interest in the realm of contemporary studies and economics are two prominent authors influenced to one degree or another by Althusser. Thomas Aglietta has written *A Theory of Capitalist Regulation: The US Experience*¹⁰⁸ concerning the development of the current situation in the US economy; and Manuel Castells has written *The Urban Question and City, Class and Power* which have delved into current community and local political struggles. Castell's *The Economic Crisis and American Society*¹⁰⁹ not only proposes new concepts toward a theory of economic crisis, but also pin-points the contradictory nature of the class relations of contemporary capitalism, especially as they relate to sexual and racial inequality, unemployment and underemployment.

Finally, for those interested in a popular presentation of many of Althusser's views on science and philosophy, there are the writings of Marta Harnecker, a Chilean marxist who studied with him, and who currently lives in Cuba. In contrast to Balibar's dense and at times overly abstract discussion of marxist science, Harnecker's *Elementary Concepts of Historical Materialism* is a very readable and concise presentation. This book has made some of the key concepts of marxism accessible and comprehensible to a much broader audience, particularly throughout the Americas.¹¹⁰ And while there are at times certain tendencies toward an oversimplification, and a reliance on older conceptions of marxist theory, Harnecker's popularized discussion of the elementary concepts of historical materialism generally achieved a solid advancement over previous attempts to produce a similar introduction to marxist science, primarily through her reliance on the work of Althusser.

¹ Bernard-Henri Levy, *Barbarism with a Human Face*, Harper and Row, 1979, p. 185.

² See especially Paul Costello's "Leninist Politics and the Struggle Against Economism," *Theoretical Review (TR)*, No. 15, March-April, 1980; and Louis Althusser's "The Crisis of Marxism," *TR*, Sept.-Oct., 1978.

³ This is not to say that the marxism of the 1920s was not contradictory. On this point see Charles Bettelheim, *Class Struggles in the USSR Second Period: 1923-30*, Monthly Review (MR), New York, 1978, especially pp. 500-89.

⁴ Goran Therborn, *Science, Class and Society*, New Left Books (NLB), London, 1976, p. 53.

⁵ Marta Harnecker, "The Class Struggle," *TR* NO. 21, March-April, 1981.

⁶ Mao zedong, "On Practice," *Selected Readings*, Foreign Languages Press, Peking, 1971, p. 76.

⁷ On the productive forces see Marta Harnecker, "Productive Forces," *TR* No. 10, May-June, 1979, and Costello, *TR*, No. 13; on instrumentalism see Costello, "Racism and Black Oppression in the US: A Beginning Analysis," *TR* No. 24, Sept.-Oct., 1981, especially Part II, 'The Ideology of Racism'; on centralism and democracy see Bettelheim, 1978, pp. 500-89.

⁸ Louis Althusser, *Montesquieu: la politique et l'histoire*, Maspero, Paris, 1959, as well as *Politics and History*, NLB, 1972. Althusser also translated Ludwig Feuerbach's *Manifestes Philosophiques*, Paris, 1960.

⁹ Louis Althusser, *For Marx*, Maspero, Paris, 1965, NLB, 1969, all citations from Vintage/Random House edition, 1970. Hereafter *FM*.

¹⁰ Perry Anderson, *Considerations on Western Marxism*, NLB, 1976, p. 38.

continued on 34

ideologies and thus the equally overdetermined material matrix through which they are sustained and modified.

In a subsequent section theoretical development of the ideological constitution of classes is centered on the minimum subjection-qualification necessary for a given class of persons to perform their economic roles. Therborn then outlines class ego (dominant) ideologies and alter (secondary) ideologies for selected social classes. There is some elaboration of the discursive order and material apparatuses which regulate the formation and change of class ideologies.

Next Therborn turns to problems of ideological domination and state power. He identifies six types of ideological domination, defined as mechanisms of subjection which ensure that the ruled obey the rulers: accommodation, sense of inevitability, sense of representation, deference, fear, and resignation. This fascinating schema of ideological domination is both a critique of, and an alternative to the usual problematics of force/consent, legitimacy/illegitimacy, and true (revolutionary)/false consciousness.

Finally, in an account of ideological mobilization for political transformation, Therborn examines the complexity of these processes which are never reducible to revolutionary class consciousness. In all successful revolutions that have changed the class nature of the state elements of class ideologies have fused with other ideological mobilizations, such as national or religious mobilizations.

This book is a jewel; it is a work of incredibly succinct brilliance, but with a range and depth that will be a cutting edge in the study of ideology for many years. Therborn does not provide systematic answers to many present concerns about the operation and the promise of ideological discourse in any concrete society. Rather his accomplishment is to provide us with some tools to ask relevant questions, and more importantly, to discriminate among normative versus historical material determinants in ideological struggles through which we reconstitute and transfigure our selves.

Barbara A. Kohl

continued from 8

his concept of the party) entail regarding the true nature of Capitalist crisis and proletarian revolutionary strategy. Novel among these implications is, of course, Gramsci's emphasis on the need for the proletariat to gain the loyalty and support of other social classes in an advanced Capitalist context and, in order to do so, the need to overcome class dogmatism and interest-based corporatism. No longer has the cataclysmic notion of Capitalist crisis a place in truly revolutionary Marxist theory, as Gramsci's concepts have brought a more realistic picture of the class struggle to our eyes. Indeed, Gramsci deserves much recognition in rectifying Marxist theory after its temporary degeneration at the hands of the mechanistic Marxists of the Stalin period and the revisionist "Marxists" of the Second International. In the dialectical materialist tradition of Marx and Engels,

Gramsci's "philosophy of praxis" (despite any historicism) has re-delivered to the working class a more powerful theoretical weapon with which it is well equipped against the capitalist class in the class struggle. There remains only the conscious making of history in the hands of the proletariat.

¹ Chantal Mouffe, *Gramsci and Marxist Theory* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), p. 186.

² John M. Cammett, *Antonio Gramsci and the Origins of Italian Communism* (California: Stanford University Press, 1967), p. 204.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 205.

⁴ *Ibidem.*

⁵ *Ibidem.*

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 206.

⁷ Chantal Mouffe, *Gramsci and Marxist Theory*, p. 180.

⁸ *Ibidem.*

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 197.

¹⁰ John M. Cammett, *Antonio Gramsci and the Origins of Italian Communism*, p. 202.

¹¹ Chantal Mouffe, *Gramsci and Marxist Theory*, p. 197.

¹² John M. Cammett, *Antonio Gramsci and the Origins of Italian Communism*, p. 202.

¹³ *Ibidem.*

¹⁴ *Ibidem.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 204.

¹⁶ Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (New York: International Publishers, 1971), p. 10.

¹⁷ John M. Cammett, *Antonio Gramsci and the Origins of Italian Communism*, p. 203.

Bibliography

Althusser, Louis. *For Marx*. London: New Left Books, 1977.

Althusser, Louis. *Lenin and Philosophy*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971.

Bukharin, Nikolai. *Historical Materialism*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1969.

Cammett, John W. *Antonio Gramsci and the Origins of Italian Communism*. California: Stanford University Press, 1967.

Gramsci, Antonio. *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. New York: International Publishers, 1971.

Laclau, Ernesto. *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory*. London: New Left Books/Verso Editions, 1977.

Luckacs, Georg. *History and Class Consciousness*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1971.

Mouffe, Chantal, ed. *Gramsci & Marxist Theory*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979.

continued from 26

¹¹ *FM*, pp. 12-13.

¹² *FM*, p. 13.

¹³ Anderson, 1976, p. 39.

¹⁴ Therborn, 1976, p. 51.

¹⁵ This raises the question of why communists would consent to such constraints and remain in such a party, if they have substantial disagreements with its dominant line. Hasn't the long history of defections from the CPUSA, and the relative

insignificance of its influence among working people in the US, shown the correctness of leaving a bankrupt party? Here we are confronted with the deplorable reality that, inspite of a loud and vigorous anti-revisionism in the US, it was not able to forge a political movement to challenge the nearly insignificant influence of the CPUSA, let alone provide concrete leadership to working and oppressed people.

In Europe, where the communist parties have been genuine mass parties, in no small part due to the record of unflinching self-sacrifice by dedicated communist militants in the struggle against fascism, the situation is quite different. When literally millions of working people are members of communist led unions, or actually members of the parties themselves, when "organic" links are present between the working class and the communist movement, it is possible to conceive of abandoning the Party prematurely and turning ones back on these workers, and not attempting to struggle *within* the Party for a correct political and theoretical orientation. Both in the US and Europe the trend has been for those who remain outside a 'mass party' to be isolated in tiny sects without any significant concrete connections to the working classes.

This argument should in no way be seen as an attempt to justify the positions of those who fatalistically remain in the Party, claiming that all "true" communists must do all required to remain within its ranks, no matter how bankrupt; and who opportunistically capitulate to the dominant line. But it is to provide an explanation of the calculated process of those who remain within the party precisely for the reason of providing a strong challenge to the bureaucratic leadership once ones credentials as a contributing member of the Party are validated in the eyes of party members by long years of dedicated work toward the revitalization of the organization from within, a policy Althusser and several of his followers have pursued until recently.

¹⁶Louis Althusser, *Reading Capital*, Maspero, Paris, 1965; NLB, London, 1970. Hereafter RC.

¹⁷RC, p. 14.

¹⁸Alain Schnapp and Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *The French Student Uprising: November 1967-June 1968: An Analytical Record*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1971, p. 267.

¹⁹Robin Blackburn and Gareth Stedman Jones, "Louis Althusser and the Struggle for Marxism," in Karl Klare and Dick Howard, eds., *The Unknown Dimension: European Marxism Since Lenin*, Basic Books, New York, 1972, p. 368.

²⁰Schapp and Vidal-Naquet, 1971, p. 261.

²¹Debray was also a close confidant of Salvador Allende, in addition to his relationship with Fidel Castro and Che Guevara. Soon after he received Althusser's letter he was imprisoned by the Bolivian military for several years and threatened with execution, an experience that will certainly have serious implications in his position as a Minister in Mitterand's Socialist government.

²²Regis Debray, *Revolution in the Revolution?* Grove Press, New York, 1967, Forward by Leo Huberman and Paul Sweezy.

²³Debray, 1967, p. 7.

²⁴Regis Debray, *A Critique of Arms*, Penguin Press, London, 1977, Appendix 2: "Letter from Louis Althusser," pp. 258-68.

²⁵Regis Debray, *Strategy for Revolution*, "The Role of the Intellectual," MR, 1970, p. 158.

²⁶Regis Debray, *Prison Writings*, 1973, Vintage/Random House, "Time and Politics" (May, 1969), p. 108.

²⁷Maria Antonietta Macciocchi, *Daily Life in Revolutionary China*, MR, 1972; *Pour Gramsci* untranslated.

²⁸Maria Antonietta Macciocchi, *Letters from Inside the Italian Communist Party to Louis Althusser*, NLB, 1973; Milano, Feltrinelli, 1969.

²⁹Louis Althusser, *Essays in Self-Criticism*, NLB, 1976, p. 148. Hereafter ESC.

³⁰Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, MR, 1971. Hereafter L&P.

³¹See page 85 and note 36 in Goran Therborn, *The Ideology of*

Power and the Power of Ideology, NLB/Verso, 1980.

³²*New Left Review* (NLR) emerged in Britain in December, 1959 from a fusion of *The New Reasoner* (which began as an opposition journal inside the British CP, originally edited by E. P. Thompson and John Saville) and *Universities and Left Review* (which originally brought together writers in economics and cultural analysis, including Stuart Hall, Raymond Williams and Peter Townsend). Stuart Hall was the first editor of *New Left Review*. At the time, informally organized New Left Clubs across Britain focused centrally on the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, and represented a left and socialist orientation within the Labour Party. After several years of crisis and reconstruction, NLB achieved stability under the editorship of Perry Anderson, Tom Nairn, and Robin Blackburn, and began to consolidate the general political orientation that it continues to present to this day. Combining a recognition of the crisis of British marxism, critical assessments of the British economy, a respect for the emerging European theoreticians who were challenging the established theory and practice of the 'Old Left', and interest in the work of Gramsci and Mao, with an (unfortunate) affinity for the work of Leon Trotsky (a vestige of their specific struggles against the dogmas of the Stalin era), NLB published a wide range of theoretical and political texts that have served to widen and deepen the debate over revolutionary political strategy.

³³Bertell Ollman, *Alienation: Marx's Conception of Man in Capitalist Society*, Cambridge, 1971. In France the most well-known advocate of a similar perspective is Roger Garaudy, who was a Party leader until recently.

³⁴John Lewis, "The Althusser Case," *Marxism Today* (MT), Jan.-Feb., 1972; Maurice Cornforth also contributed to this debate, "The Althusser-Lewis Debate," MT, May, 1973.

³⁵ESC, p. 92.

³⁶Etienne Balibar, *On the Dictatorship of the Proletariat*, 1977, NLB, p. 211. Althusser's speech was entitled "The Historic Significance of the 22nd Congress."

³⁷Balibar, 1977.

³⁸About this time Althusser signed a declaration demanding the post-humous political "rehabilitation" of Nikolai Bukharin.

³⁹Dominique Lecourt, *Proletarian Science? The Case of Lysenko*, NLB, 1976; see also, "Lysenko: Unfinished History," MT, February, 1977, for the text of Althusser's preface.

⁴⁰Althusser, MT, 1977, p. 55.

⁴¹*Ibid.*

⁴²In 1969 the founders of the newspaper *Il Manifesto* were expelled from the Italian Communist Party. Some of these revolutionaries, including Rossana Rossanda had been in the Party since the Resistance. Rossana Rossanda had been a member of the Central Committee of the PCI since 1959, and Lucio Magri had been a PCI theoretician.

⁴³*Power and Opposition in Post-Revolutionary Societies*, *Il Manifesto*, Inlinks, London, 1979, pp. 230-31; see also TR No. 7, Sept.-Oct., 1978.

⁴⁴"On the Debate Inside the PCF," Louis Althusser, Etienne Balibar, Guy Bois, George Labica, Jean-Paul Lefebvre and Maurice Moissiovier, *Eurored*, No. 7, April, 1978, pp. 15-16.

⁴⁵Louis Althusser, translated as "A Fundamental Critique of the Communist Party of France," in TR No. 6, July-August, 1978. See also "What Must Change in the Party," NLR, No. 109, May-June, 1978.

⁴⁶Perry Anderson, *Arguments within English Marxism*, NLB/Verso, 1980, p. 113.

⁴⁷In November of 1980, Althusser had been suffering for 18 years with a grave psychological disorder which sent him into periodic depressions wherein he lost his identity and at times became obsessed with suicide. It was only with the help of his wife Helene, an active sociologist and a key figure in bringing Althusser to communist politics, that he was able to pull himself together and work again. On November 16, 1980, Helene Althusser was found dead in their Paris apartment. Althusser, in a state of delirium accused himself of strangling

her, and he was committed to a hospital for the mentally ill. The tragedy of this turn of events, extinguishing the life of a dedicated revolutionary and signalling the internal torture and incapacity of another is immeasurable. See "The tragedy of the Althusser," by K. S. Karol, *TR* No. 21, March-April, 1981, also *NLR*, Jan.-Feb., 1981.

⁴⁸Gang of Four, "Not Great Men," on *Entertainment!*, Warner Brothers Records, 1980.

⁴⁹Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 1971, International, New York, p. 201.

⁵⁰Such as those who denounce those who have left the Party by saying "They never were marxists anyway," while they search for examples of those individuals' "true" petty bourgeois essence. Perhaps the most shocking example of this technique was seen in Enver Hoxha's denunciations of Mao.

⁵¹Louis Althusser, "Theoretical Work: Difficulties and Resources," unpublished translation by Paul Costello, p. 17.

⁵²V. I. Lenin, *What is to be done?* International, 1929, p. 28.

⁵³Eric Olin Wright, "The Value Controversy and Social Research," *The Value Controversy*, Verso, 1981, pp. 58-9.

⁵⁴In fact, many of the victories of working and oppressed people around the world have come in spite of, and not because of the dominant theories in revolutionary organizations, including Lenin's struggles within the Bolshevik party and the challenge of Mao and the Chinese communists to the Comintern.

⁵⁵Anderson, 1980, p. 127.

⁵⁶*Ibid.*

⁵⁷*Theoretical Practice*, No. 1, Editorial, p. 1.

⁵⁸*Ibid.*

⁵⁹*Ibid.*

⁶⁰*Power and Politics*, Routledge and Kegan Paul (RKP), London and Boston, 1981.

⁶¹Barry Hindess and Paul Q. Hirst, *Pre-capitalist Modes of Production*, 1975, RKP.

⁶²Barry Hindess and Paul Q. Hirst, *Mode of Production and Social Formation: An Auto-Critique*, Humanities Press, Atlantic Highlands, N. J., 1977.

⁶³Antony Cutler, Barry Hindess, Paul Hirst and Athar Hussain, *Marx's Capital and Capitalism Today*, 2 volumes, 1977 and 1978, RKP.

⁶⁴"French Elections: Dissent Rocks Communist Party," *Newsfront International*, No. 249, May 1-15, 1981, p. 10.

⁶⁵*Ibid.*

⁶⁶*Ibid.*

⁶⁷Charles Bettelheim, *Economic Calculations and Forms of Property*, 1975a, MR; Paris, Maspero, 1970. With Paul Sweezy, *On the Transition to Socialism*, MR, 1971. *The Transition to Socialist Economy*, 1975b, Harvester Press, Sussex, Maspero, 1968.

⁶⁸Bettelheim, 1975b, p. 14.

⁶⁹Charles Bettelheim and Neil Burton, *China Since Mao*, MR, July-August, 1978, vol. 30, No. 3.

⁷⁰Louis Althusser, "Interview on Philosophy," *L&P*, 1971, p. 17.

⁷¹Goran Therborn, *Science, Class and Society*, NLB, 1976.

⁷²Goran Therborn, *What Does the Ruling Class Do When It Rules?* NLB, 1978.

⁷³Therborn, 1980.

⁷⁴Nicos Poulantzas, *Political Power and Social Classes*, NLB, 1973, Maspero, 1968.

⁷⁵Nicos Poulantzas, *Fascism and Dictatorship*, NLB, 1974, Maspero, 1970.

⁷⁶Poulantzas, 1974, Frontispiece.

⁷⁷Nicos Poulantzas, *The Crisis of the Dictatorships: Portugal, Spain, Greece*, NLB, 1975.

⁷⁸See, for example, *Chile: The MIR and the Tasks of the Resistance*, Resistance Courier Special edition, No. 1, 1976, as well as various other MIR publications.

⁷⁹Nicos Poulantzas, *Classes in Contemporary Capitalism*, NLB, 1975.

⁸⁰See Eric Olin Wright, "Class Boundaries in Advanced Capitalist Societies," *NLR*, No. 98, July-August, 1976; Wright's dialogue with Althusserian marxism is very important, yet his own trajectory can hardly be considered Althusserian itself; see for example his books *Class Structure and Income Determination*, N.Y., 1979, and *Class, Crisis and the State*, NLB/Verso, 1978.

⁸¹Nicos Poulantzas, *State, Power, Socialism*, NLB, 1978.

⁸²Ernesto Laclau, *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory: Capitalism, Fascism, Populism*, NLB, 1977.

⁸³Christine Buci-Glucksmann, *Gramsci and the State*, 1980, Lawrence and Wishart, London. See also her article "State, Transition and Passive Revolution," in Chantal Mouffe's *Gramsci and Marxist Theory*, RKP, 1979.

⁸⁴Paul Q. Hirst, "Althusser and the Theory of Ideology," *Economy and Society*, vol. 5, No. 4, 1976, and "Problems and Advances in the Theory of Ideology," both collected with other essays in his *On Law and Ideology*, Macmillan, 1979, London.

⁸⁵Rosalind Coward and John Ellis, *Language and Materialism*, 1977, RKP.

⁸⁶Semiology is the "science of signs." Its primary focus is the structure and meanings of languages, and its vocabulary is based on various disciplines, including Freudian psychoanalysis, classical rhetoric, structural anthropology and structural linguistics. Within semiology the linguistic model is used to describe the range of cultural phenomena, "from fashion and advertising through literature, music and painting. What unifies semiology as a general cultural discipline is its emphasis upon the sign." (Craig Owen, "Glossary of Semiological Terms," in Jean Clay, *From Impression to Modern Art*, 1978, Chartwell Books, Secaucus, N.J.)

⁸⁷John Urry, *The Anatomy of Capitalist Societies: The Economy, Civil Society and the State*, Humanities Press, 1981.

⁸⁸Pierre Macherey, *A Theory of Literary Production*, 1966, Paris; 1981, RKP, Boston.

⁸⁹Terry Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism*, 1976a, University of California Press, Berkeley, p. 69.

⁹⁰Eagleton, 1976a, p. 34.

⁹¹Eagleton, 1976a.

⁹²Terry Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology*, 1976b, NLB/Verso.

⁹³See Terry Eagleton, *Walter Benjamin or Towards a Revolutionary Criticism*, 1981, NLB/Verso.

⁹⁴Jean Collet, *Jean-Luc Godard: An Investigation into his Films and Philosophy*, 1968, Paris, Translation 1970 by Crown, N.Y., p. 105.

⁹⁵*FM*, "Introduction Today," p. 30.

⁹⁶Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, Methuen, 1979, London.

⁹⁷*Screen* and *Screen Education* are published by the Society for Education in Film and Television, 29 Old Compton Street, London, W1V 5PL, Great Britain. Ben Brewster, an early editor of *NLR* and *TP*, translator of Althusser's works and an ardent supporter of the Chinese Revolution, left *NLR* in 1972 and was one of the forces involved in establishing *Screen*. After a few years of publication, half of the editorial board of *Screen* decried the fact that even they could not understand most of what was being published in the journal and set up *Screen Education*, a far more readable magazine.

⁹⁸*Praxis*, No. 5, 1981, P.O. Box 1280, Santa Monica, CA. 90406.

⁹⁹Juliet Mitchell, *Woman's Estate*, 1971, Vintage/Random House; *Psychoanalysis and Feminism: Freud, Reich, Laing and Women*, 1974, Vintage/Random House.

¹⁰⁰In fact, it is Freud's concept of the 'symptomatic reading' of dreams and dream language which Althusser appropriated for his study of Marx, that Mitchell in turn applies back onto Freud's writings themselves.

¹⁰¹Heleieth Saffioti, "Women, Mode of Production and Social Formations," *Latin American Perspectives*, Winter-Spring, 1977, No. 12/13.

¹⁰²Saffioti's book *Women in Class Society* (MR, 1978) is a theoretical and historical work that includes discussions of women's labor in relation to levels of consciousness (especially as developed by Georgy Lukacs in *History and Class Consciousness*), the status of women under capitalism and an analysis of the situation of Brazilian women; and in this text she relies more on French Structuralism and Luckacs than Althusserian marxism.

¹⁰³Annette Kuhn and Ann Marie Wolpe, *Feminism and Materialism: Women and Modes of Production*, 1978, RKP.

¹⁰⁴Kuhn and Wolpe, 1978, p. 25.

¹⁰⁵Emmanuel Terray, *Marxism and 'Primitive' Societies*, 1972, MR.

¹⁰⁶Joel S. Kahn and Josep R. Llobera, *The Anthropology of Pre-Capitalist Societies*, 1981, Macmillan, London.

¹⁰⁷Stephen Katz, *Marxism, Africa and Social Classes*, 1980, McGill University Press, Montreal. Katz provides useful critiques of Frank, Wallerstein and Amin, as well as an overview of various other theories in this area, and sums up elements of historical materialism quite succinctly.

¹⁰⁸Thomas Aglietta, *A Theory of Capitalist Regulation: The US Experience*, 1979, NLB.

¹⁰⁹Manuel Castells, *The Urban Question*, 1977, MIT, Cambridge (Maspero, Paris, 1972). *City, Class and Power*, 1978, Macmillan. *The Economic Crisis and American Society*, 1980, Princeton.

¹¹⁰The bulk of this book has been translated into English by Paul Costello, and has been serialized in the pages of this journal. Harnecker's book *Cuba: Democracy or Dictatorship?* (Lawrence Hill, 1980) provides a well-documented defense of that revolution, though it hardly presents an all-sided analysis.

PSYCHOLOGY & SOCIAL THEORY

We welcome manuscripts which treat issues in psychology from a critical social perspective. No.1, Spring 81: the positivist dispute, critique of ideology, student protest, time and aging. No. 2, Fall 81: antipsychiatry, intimacy, narcissism, the missing subject, the unconscious. Rates: Individual, \$10; Institutional, \$20; Foreign, \$3 additional postage. Address: *Psychology and Social Theory*, East Hill Branch, Box 2740, Ithaca, NY 14850.

Third World Film

JUMP CUT, No. 27 \$2.00

Overview of films on El Salvador and Nicaragua. Work of Ousmane Sembene. BOTTLE BABIES. Revolutionary Turkish Cinema - Yilmaz Guney. US TV Censorship. DECISION TO WIN.

BACK ISSUES. US with sub, \$2; abroad with sub, \$2.50; US with no sub, \$2.50; abroad with no sub, \$3. Institutions higher.

No. 20. Cuban Film: ONE WAY OR ANOTHER, THE NEW SCHOOL, WITH THE CUBAN WOMEN, Films of Manuel Octavio Gomez, "For an Imperfect Cinema" (Julio Garcia Espinosa), JUAN QUIN QUIN. No. 21. Brazilian Cinema: Beyond Cinema Novo -- Overview, Censorship, TENT OF MIRACLES. Also, BLACKS BRITANNICA, BATTLE OF CHILE, THE RISING TIDE, Namibia Films, US Alternative Cinema. No. 22. Brazil: XICA DA SILVA, THE FALL, Glauber Rocha's music, Filmography. Cuba: Joris Ivens, DEATH OF A BUREAUCRAT, PORTRAIT OF TERESA, TV Film Criticism, Bibliography. Also, Alternative Cinema Conference, WNET Censorship, Quebec Film.



DOUBLE ISSUE SPECIAL -- Nos. 10/11 & 12/13 \$5 (US); \$6.50 (abroad). THE OTHER HALF OF THE SKY. HOW YUKONG MOVED THE MOUNTAINS. LAND IN ANGUISH. MACUNAIMA. PRINCIPAL EMEY. Cinema Novo. SALT OF THE EARTH. Film Theory.

JUMPCUT

PO Box 865
Berkeley CA 94701

Subs: \$6/4 issues, US; \$8, abroad. Institutions higher. Payment only in US dollars.

Socialist Review

“ In the 1970s no journal made as important a contribution to American socialist theory as SR. It directed attention to the fiscal crisis of the state before anyone had ever heard of a property tax initiative. It synthesized modern feminism and Marxism. It developed a socialist politics that was fully democratic . . . It remains a beacon of light for socialists. ” JOHN JUDIS, IN THESE TIMES

\$18 One year subscription (6 issues)

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

\$20 Outside of USA

CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____

4228 TELEGRAPH OAKLAND, CA 94609