

EDITORIAL

Marxism as a theory and as a movement is in crisis. Radical theory has become completely indiscriminating. In the movements and parties there are blockages, perhaps decay, but little advance. In the turn of Anglo-American Marxism away from the project of importing Continental theory there is a danger that theory will be allowed to lapse altogether. There is a need for a new "theoretical" journal attaching a specifically political understanding to "theory".

The fundamental tenet of the original Marxian project and its echoes and refractions through the principal representatives of western marxism is that theory and politics must find their necessary articulation in each other. The struggle for socialism depends on the politicization of theory and the theorization of politics. Neither of the dominant tendencies within Marxist theory — those which propagate more theory or more history in isolation from each other — can be adequate to this task. Within the left this division is maintained between activists who carry out the everyday organizing and theorists who stand back and survey the general tendencies. Marxist politics can only have meaning if it can begin to bridge this gap.

The intention of *Thesis Eleven* is to provide the framework in which these themes, problematics and struggles might be unified as politics. Marxists have always exaggerated their claims to the workers movement, typically by denying the actuality of the movement or speaking to its mythical representation. We deny both these theoretical fictions and the accompanying political claims which confuse the particular dominant forms of the movement (party, unions etc) with the movement itself. Marxism can only *earn* its political authority through the study of and participation in real struggles. The time for the mere *assertion* of this authority is over.

Yet what bourgeois society has sundered is not easily reunited. Marxism now exists within a severe fragmentation of knowledges: knowledge is not only separated from practice, but also internally compartmentalized. As the product of and the response to bourgeois society marxism can hardly be unaffected by the extreme specialization which is functional to it. Marxism now involves at least philosophy: epistemology, method, ethics; political economy, history, labour history; class and world-systems analysis; theories of and studies in ideology and culture: hermeneutics, psychoanalysis, semiology; anthropology, modes of production, philosophy of history; critique of "actu-

ally existing" socialism. Within radical politics itself traditional economic struggles must now be moderated by and combined with new forms of struggle epitomized in feminism.

The emphasis on politics in *Thesis Eleven* accompanies a central theme of the journal; everyday life. Politics takes as its point of departure everyday struggles and commonsense understandings in order that they might be worked up into critical conceptual levels. The generalized communication of theoretically informed good sense is a central prerequisite for the cultural formation of a new order. Failure to address everyday life, the basic unit of bourgeois reproduction, means political failure. A necessary corollary of the everyday is the cultural specificity of marxisms. Despite the internationalization of capitalist relations, the site of political and social reproduction is still national which, of course, means that struggle starts at home, or not at all. Feminism, the anti-nuclear movement, the recently proliferating disarmament movement, to mention but a few, are struggles which marxists cannot ignore.

If marxism is to escape the clutches and constraints of the "scientificity" which so many of its acolytes claim for it then its discourse must allow the possibility of self-reflexiveness; and if marxism is to be turned onto itself, then other radical critiques should also be taken up. Marxism cannot claim privilege in a situation in which it has lagged behind radical struggles and in which much authoritative critique has been instigated by non-marxist socialists and substantive contributions to marxist studies made by "uncommitted" scholars. *It is the process of political discourse and struggle which establishes the adequacy of positions* and not some fundamentalist determination by the marxist classics.

*Thesis Eleven* seeks to promote open honest and principled debate which considers everything to be the object of critique. We seek a broad diversity. The unity of the materials carried in *Thesis Eleven* will be reflected in their shared commitment to understanding the world with a view to changing it. *Thesis Eleven* is not alone in these aims; it finds certain affinities with other projects aimed at a radical rethinking of marxist orthodoxies. These include the British *Hegemony* group, working further along the lines of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, developing the Gramscian problematic on the theme of popular radicalization in this present period of reaction. In the U.S. it takes heart from the appearance of a new journal *Social Text*, the manifesto of which (if less the contents of) expresses positions close to *Thesis Eleven*. The new openness which has entered *New Left Review* and Anderson's *Arguments Within English Marxism* as well as the radical rethinking evident in the three volume *Issues in Marxist Philosophy* signal a growing acceptance that radical critique is overdue and can only be conducted in the form of debate and not assertion.

If marxism is neither history nor theory, politics nor economics it is also neither art nor science. Rather, it is *all* these unified by a central commitment to changing the world. "*The philosophers have only interpreted the world in different ways; the point is to change it.*" Marx's eleventh thesis on Feuerbach, so often misunderstood as mere licence for mindless activism, implies much more. The importance of this pithy little aphorism is as the driving imperative towards a unity of marxist theory and practice. In the context of the preceding theses on Feuerbach, the *interpretative* attitude refers to the discourse of crude materialism; the contemplative attitude which it shares with idealist ontologies. Taken as the basis for social change, its results are all too often the tragic authoritarian forms of organization all too often witnessed, (and anticipated in Thesis Three). If Marx was aware of the material force of ideas then we, today – confronted with ideas in the practices of reproduction, consent, consumption, acceptance and incorporation in the circumscription of possibilities, theories of "human nature", technological necessity – should need even less to confirm their real and coercive power. The point is not that theory needs to be obliterated, only that it needs to be constituted politically.

We invite you to participate as writers and as readers in the spirit of the eleventh thesis.

\* \* \* \* \*

The first issue contains a number of papers which relate to the crisis of marxism. It is our intention to have in each issue a theme or themes as well as other papers, notes and reviews. Themes will attempt to stimulate debate: we anticipate not only detailed replies to papers but also shorter letters and comments. For this number we have collected a range of materials in order to avoid the in-house connotations that go with excessive editorial participation in contributions.

Our commitment to the raising of fundamental questions is opened up by Alastair Davidson's morphology of marxisms presented as an archaeological recovery, a vintage piece dating from 1974 which demonstrates that it is less *theory* than *some theorists* who lag. It is in fact one of several papers written against the structuralist current in these years which, being ahead of their time, were not taken up. Its arguments will fall on more sensitive ears now than then, for the time is yet more ripe for the development of the project of a marxist analysis of marxism.

Agnes Heller's considerations, following it, take up problems of a radical philosophy which might be capable of mediating the existing movements with the oft-forgotten goals of a concrete radical utopia. Radical philosophy here articulates the basic values of the end-goal crucial to particular movements and struggles if the latter are not to be integrated

into the existing structures. The main task of radical philosophy is seen as the criticism of the movements against capital, and not of capitalism itself, the latter being a separate object and therefore the scene of a separate critique.

Johann Arnason's paper examines the ground of the crisis of marxism in Marx's own work. His is not an argument for an "original marxian sin", but rather a plea for present disputes to be understood with reference to the tensions and contradictions in the original project of Marx. Explicitly and implicitly, as Arnason shows, recent debates are not particularly new; the examination of more fundamental original tensions is in this regard a central priority for the reconstruction of marxism. The necessity of rethinking Marx is no academic claim for a "return" to the pure source, but a fundamental questioning: because nothing can be taken for granted, and also because recent debates so often have their roots in the older, more sophisticated yet unresolved problems.

With our interest in theoretical recovery goes a dedication to historical recovery. Steve Wright's paper on left communism in Australia recovers a lost chapter of theory and practice. Throughout the forties the publications of the Workers' Literature Bureau represented one veteran's attempt to offer an alternative to the dominant marxisms in the local labour movement. Jim Dawson's project, culminating in the *Southern Advocate for Workers' Councils* and the first publication of Pannekoek's major relevant study, is located within the context of his life-long search for the society of "free and associated producers". Dawson's conciliar perspectives are located within the specificity of the experience of syndicalism, his proposed solutions being understood as predicated on the existence of a type of proletarian no longer prevalent in capitalism. *Thesis Eleven* takes Wright's paper to be a major contribution to the project of doing history theoretically or theory historically, for it not only fills an important gap in the archive but also draws out specific political implications.

The current enthusiasm for political economy has not generally been accompanied by an examination of political economy or its critique, or of Marx's *Capital* in general. George Markus' paper pursues questions of, and approaches to, political economy in Marx's work. Careful philology reveals striking shifts in the attitude to political economy and its critique. We are very pleased to present this paper, particularly because it gives some indication of the lines of argument in the enigmatic but not-to-be-translated collective work which stalks through footnotes here and there, *Is Critical Economy Possible?*

*Thesis Eleven* then presents the seminal essay of Hans-Georg Backhaus for the first time in English. The pervasive influence of Frankfurt and Althusserian marxisms has had the effect of polarizing interest and

denying the existence of alternatives. Within capital-analysis the revived Sraffian position has accentuated this tendency. The most important characteristic of the value-form argument is that it seeks the combination of a rare conceptual rigour with political interests. It disappears neither into empiricism nor into the genuflections of philosophical hierarchy, but seeks theoretical sophistication with substantial political meaning. Later contributions by the translators will take up the political dimensions of value-form theory.

The vulnerability of marxism to fads and commodifications has its effects in history-writing as well. Spain, politics, history, Vietnam are taken up in an interview with just such a neglected historian, N.W. Saffin. Apart from its historiographical dimensions the interview takes up issues, politicization and radicalization. *Thesis Eleven* regards these as central issues and welcomes contributions on new forms of struggle. Subsequent numbers will include some of Saffin's immense labour of historical research, drawing especially from an enormous manuscript on the Victorian working class. It should be added that we see this interview as indicating a general enthusiasm for interviews as a neglected form of discourse which, if raised above hagiography and abuse, can open up new and accessible arenas of dialogue.

Eurocommunism, if dead, is not forgotten. A first translation of a 1924 Communist document is presented not innocently but as a provocation: for in it, Gramsci argues for a transitional programme not unlike the principle (if not the actuality) of "historic compromise". Some of the issues raised here will be taken up in future numbers in a general debate on Eurocommunism and its Leninist sparring partner. Our second issue, focussing on marxism and history, will also take up some of the problems opened by the *Annales* school and by the recent developments in British Marxism. Conflicting views on the relationships between empirical material and political struggles will be provided by Michael Eldred and Mino Vianello; case-studies of particular strikes will provide a discussion point not only for problems of marxist history but also for the examination of the relation between economic and political forms of struggle. The projected third issue, reassessing western marxism, will present conflicting views on Habermas and Gramsci and assessments of Trotsky, Lukacs and Korsch; the fourth will take up problems of ideology and culture. We welcome in this regard papers on social reproduction and everyday life: musical forms, their relation to subcultures and resistance; struggles around technology, the technologization of leisure and its effects on dole-life; cultural phenomena like McDonalds: the peculiar problems of regions and country towns advertising and especially television as ideological forces in social reproduction; the commodification of sport, sexuality and so on. The interrelationship of these cultural dimensions of crisis with more general political and economic crises will also be broached.