
Book Reviews

Psychology and Psychiatry Today: A Marxist View

by Joseph Nahem, International Publishers, New York, 1981.

Psychology, psychiatry, their role in the perpetuation of the status quo in the United States, and the differences in the treatment of the mentally ill under capitalism and socialism—all this is a good subject for a book, but Joseph Nahem's volume is little more than a confused, outdated and pointless polemic.

Nahem's politics are clear enough. He identifies with revisionist Marxism. "Changes in society," he states, "are due to changes in the productive forces, which then lead to changes in the relations of production." (p. 13) Keen-eyed readers of *Theoretical Review* will note the omission of class struggle.

His views on psychology are less clear. At times, he sounds like an Adlerian; at other times, he appears to be a behaviorist. Sometimes, it seems as if he is rejecting the notion of psychology altogether. He argues, "We must not turn away from social reality and into ourselves." (p. 76). But are not we, ourselves, also part of social reality? If not, then there is no need for psychology, and the study of human beings can be left entirely to the social scientists.

Nahem praises what he calls the "scientific psychology" practiced in the Soviet Union. But is Soviet psychology really scientific? In his account of it, Nahem says that there are wide differences of opinion among Soviet psychologists about the causes and cure of mental illness—just as there are in the United States, where scores of psychological schools vie for recognition in the marketplace of ideas. Some of the mentally ill in the USSR are treated through reeducation; others are given drugs, behavior therapy, rest cures, hypnosis, sleep therapy, or even fasting cures. Most, if not all, of these techniques are also being used in the West, and some of them (particularly rest cures and hypnosis) go back long before Freud. Yet mental illness is still with us, and just as much of a puzzle as ever.

The problem is that Nahem blurs the distinction between *academic psychology*, which involves the systematic study of the brain, the nervous system, and human behavior, and *psychotherapy*, which is concerned with the healing of mentally ill people. The former is generally conducted on a scientific basis both in the West and the East; the latter is still as unscientific under socialism as it is under capitalism.

Have the Soviets been more successful than Americans in eliminating mental illness? Nahem admits that schizophrenia is equally common under both capitalism and socialism. (pp. 224-25.) While some Soviet psychologists (and at least one American psychiatrist, E. Fuller Torrey) speculate that schizophrenia is caused by a virus, the

offending organism has yet to be isolated, and it has yet to be explained why there are no epidemics of schizophrenia.

Neurosis, on the other hand, is supposedly less common in the USSR than in the USA. But this is probably caused by differing definitions of what constitutes a neurotic symptom. In the Soviet Union, a compulsive worker might be considered a model citizen; in America, Freudians would label him a neurotic with an Oedipus complex. In the Soviet Union, someone who refused to work would be called a "parasite"; American Freudians would call him a neurotic with an Oedipus complex. And so on.

Then, of course, there is the question of alcoholism, which Nahem admits is "a real psychiatric problem" in the USSR. (p. 229.) In fact, alcoholism is a far worse problem in the USSR than in the USA, despite the absence of massive unemployment, one factor with which it is generally linked.

Nahem's claims that Soviet psychotherapy has accomplished more than American psychotherapy are, in a nutshell, totally unsubstantiated. It is true, according to his account, that Soviet mental hospitals are more comfortable and well-staffed institutions than most of their American counterparts. But there is a big difference between curing someone and simply providing him with a pleasant environment in which to be sick.

Most of Nahem's book deals with psychology and psychotherapy as practiced in the United States. His chapters on women and Blacks merely rehash what has been said elsewhere. One wonders why he considers it important to demolish the already discredited racist theories of Arthur Jensen and William Shockley. The chapter on racial bias in IQ tests contains some useful material, but I am bothered by the tendency—not Nahem's alone—to focus on these tests while overlooking the even more widespread and pernicious bias in the educational system as a whole. There is certainly a more significant difference in the dropout rate of Black and white high school students than there is in their IQ scores.

Most unseemly is Nahem's critique of behaviorist guru B. F. Skinner. He skates on thin ice when he condemns Skinnerism as "fascism without tears." After all, Ivan Pavlov, founder of Soviet psychology, was also a behaviorist, and the differences between him and Skinner are not as profound as Nahem would have us believe. The Skinnerian utopia in which behavior is carefully controlled through the manipulation of rewards and punishments by a self-selected elite bears close resemblance to the Soviet revisionist notion of building socialism through material incentives under the leadership of a monolithic party.

As for the Freudians, Nahem incredibly rejects the whole notion of the unconscious as a motivating factor in human behavior. He even denies the existence of the sex instinct, (p. 27) which should please the bluenosed minions of the Moral Majority, startled though they may be to find a Marxist as their bedfellow. But if there are no unconscious forces working on us, how are we to explain the appeals of irrational beliefs such as religion, astrology, ultra-nationalism, or even the cruder variations of Freudianism itself? We can, as Marxists, show how religion or racism serve to confuse and divide the working class and help the ruling class. But what makes people believe these unscientific theories? Why do people die in the name of religion, or kill in the name of "race purity," or do both in the name of love of country? Here is where psychology comes in, and here is where Nahem, and his "scientific psychologists"

in the Soviet Union, have yet to provide us with any answers.

The worst section of the book deals with precisely that school of psychology which actually has been coming up with the answers over the last decade or so—Arthur Janov's Primal Therapy. Basing his information on a few articles, written ages ago by ill-informed critics, and published in such "scientific" journals as *Vogue* and *Psychology Today*, Nahem pronounced Primal Therapy a fraud. He dismisses claims of physical growth and lowered body temperatures in Primal Therapy patients as pure hokum. (p. 102.) Had he investigated, he would have found Janov's claims to be true. He would have also discovered that such neurotic symptoms as anxiety, depression, and inferiority feelings are cured in Primal Therapy, usually within six months to a year. They are cured, that is—not coped with, as in other forms of psychotherapy. Interestingly, one of the neurotic symptoms that disappears is racism.

"Janov is . . . unscientific," writes Nahem, summarizing his differences with all forms of depth psychology, "in attributing all neurosis to childhood psychic pain caused by parents. Most neuroses are essentially *socially-induced*." (p. 101; emphasis in original.) Here we come to the heart of the matter. If neurosis is caused by such factors as unemployment, poverty and bad housing, as Nahem asserts, we can assume that it will disappear after the revolution. Who could be anxious or depressed, according to Nahem, if he had enough to eat, a roof over his head, and a job?

But suppose the depth psychologists are right, and neurosis begins with childhood misery, repressed into unconsciousness, and dragged along through life by the unfortunate victim. In that case, social revolution will not automatically eliminate unhappiness, and people under stress may tend to shift into neurotic thought patterns: authoritarianism, idolization of leaders, paranoid suspicion of foreigners, national chauvinism, fear of new ideas, sexual puritanism, and even racism. Really, Dr. Nahem, have you learned nothing at all from the Stalin period?

Certainly, it is long overdue for Marxists to devote attention to the psychological, as well as the social, dimension of human beings. Nahem's book, far from filling this need, is not even a beginning. It is a travesty.

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Confronting Reality/Learning from the History of Our Movement by the Bay Area Socialist Organizing Committee (1981) \$3.00

The anti-revisionist movement has long been plagued by a variety of deviations and practices which have blocked both its political consolidation and intervention in the US social formation. Specific practices drawn from other countries in different conjunctures have been mechanically applied and even raised to the level of general 'principles' against which all other communist work is judged. Dogmatism and revisionism have blunted and channeled theoretical and political work into blind alleys from which exit has been

sought for more than a generation.

A welcome contribution toward understanding these obstacles to advanced communist practice is *Confronting Reality/Learning from the History of Our Movement*, by the Bay Area Socialist Organizing Committee (BASOC).

Begun in the fall of 1977 in the San Francisco Bay Area, BASOC identifies with the politics of the "anti-revisionist/anti-ultra left trend," although the experience of its members is far broader, ranging from work in formations such as the Progressive Labor Party and the Revolutionary Union, to the more generalized practice of the mass movements in the 1960s and '70s.

The value of this direct experience in the communist and mass movements is seen in BASOC's discussion of the problems surrounding the practice of democratic centralism and the influence of economism in shaping communist intervention.

Criticizing the mimicry of the organizational forms of the Communist International in the 1920s and '30s, the pamphlet states that "not only the imitators were at fault—the models themselves were flawed." The necessity for both democracy and centralism is recognized as is the tension between them, their dialectical opposition and **interpenetration**.

As requirements for making democratic centralism function correctly, BASOC outlines four basic areas: political unity, cadre development, political leadership and criticism/self-criticism.

Political unity is stressed over shallow organizational unity, a unity which "attempts to enforce organizational consolidation in the absence of political unity on basic tasks." Cadre development is seen as ensuring the possibility of democratic debate and decision-making, thereby bridging the gap "between members and leaders, base and center, party and masses." The crucial role of Leninist political leadership is recognized in its "ability to lead, not simply command" and criticism/self-criticism is understood as the method through which incorrect political lines and other mistakes can be discussed and rectified. Problems of monolithic unity, commandism and lack of leadership accountability are refreshingly addressed while the necessity of emphasizing the democratic aspects of democratic centralism is affirmed.

Like the section on democratic centralism, the BASOC discussion of economism is equally perceptive. The narrow emphasis of many communists on factory organizing to the exclusion of work at all levels of society is rightly criticized as is the shallow workerism which has often accompanied these interventions. Similarly, the economist myth of permanently favorable conditions for communist work and revolution is considered in light of the "fusion" approach to party building and its leading national center, the Organizing Committee for an Ideological Center (OC-IC).

The OC-IC's economism, BASOC contends, is "used as a justification for its emphasis on organizing the OC over the development of a general line," a further elaboration of BASOC's critique of organizational consolidation over politics, a critique shared by many forces in the "trend," and a practice well-represented in the OC-IC from the beginning. This criticism of the OC-IC's avoidance of political line struggle is well-taken and the recognition of a political line's importance is emphasized throughout.

"The principle contradiction in the party building

movement," states BASOC, "is the contradiction between the need for a general political line and the communist movement's lack of unity on such a general line." It is the development of a general line, they say, that will accelerate work in all areas. A realistic assessment of the difficulty in creating a general political line is noted, especially under conditions where communist forces are inexperienced and the questions which a line must address are so all-encompassing: conjunctural analysis, the relation of reform to revolution, the appropriate form of democratic centralism, etc.

There are, however, tendencies toward empiricist simplification in BASOC's critique which underestimate the degree to which advanced theoretical work will be necessary in overcoming certain obstacles facing communists in forging their own unity and intervening in the US social formation.

In this regard, BASOC notes that "ultra-leftists tend to discount objective factors as if the revolution can be planned and orchestrated solely on the basis of the desires of communists. Rightists tend to absolutize objective factors, as if communists and the masses cannot affect the direction of events significantly."

Empirical observation and experience in the communist and mass movements does correctly lead to a critique along this line but does not lead far enough for us to successfully alter the conditions which have led to such practices. The errors of ultra-leftism and rightism cannot be reduced to the voluntarist intent of the communists involved, their inexperience or the objective conditions which they face.

Rather, intent, inexperience and objective conditions must be seen in their *relation* to the *contradictory nature of Marxism* as it exists in this and any other period.

Marxism is not a single block of ideas of a homogenous nature. It is a contradictory combination of genuinely revolutionary theory, ideas alien to Marxism, and the fusion of both currents with social practice.

The Marxism of any period is the combination of these elements in a particular relation of domination and subordination to each other. It is objective conditions which make for the prominence of certain currents at certain times, for example, in the exacerbation of those elements alien to Marxism, displacing them from a subordinate position in the theory and practice of a communist formation to one of dominance.

While BASOC recognizes many of the objective conditions which give rise to ultra-leftism and rightism, it does not identify the contradictory aspects of Marxism in which these practices have found support and justification.

For instance, in the BASOC discussion of democratic centralism, the degeneration of this practice in the Soviet Union after the death of Lenin is attributed to an objective factor: the need for unity of thought and action in response to the dangers of civil war and foreign invasion. But those aspects of the Marxism of that period which might have theoretically justified and consolidated the tendencies to bureaucratic centralism are not discussed.

During this period, a dominant concept of dialectics which was forever codified in Stalin's *Dialectical and Historical Materialism* was that of the "principle of totality" in which unity takes precedence over contradiction. A precedent for the tendency toward monolithic unity in the CPSU(B) can be traced, at least in its theoretical roots, to

this concept and to the generally underdeveloped nature of dialectical materialism itself.

This is not to say that the theory of the principle of totality was the "cause" of the domination of bureaucratic centralism over democratic centralism. In fact, it was *objective conditions* which helped strengthen and consolidate the theoretical roots of the problem in the first place, displacing concepts of *democratic* centralism which had been dominant during Lenin's time to a subordinate place under Stalin's.

It is to say, however, that the very Marxism which all communists utilize must be constantly subjected to critical analysis so that those elements alien to Marxism which have crept into it, or those revolutionary elements which have been subordinated to them, can be clearly identified. This highlights the immensity of the theoretical tasks which face us, especially for a movement which contends that "without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement."

It should be noted, BASOC clearly recognizes the importance of Mao's emphasis on the universality of contradiction and rightly criticizes concepts of democratic centralism which deviate from this understanding. But of the idea that the origins of bureaucratic centralism can be traced back in part to the contradictory nature of Marxism itself, however, there is hardly a mention.

A greater clarity is found in BASOC's critique of the rectification movement and the OC-IC. "The rectification forces," they state, "have isolated international line (Three Worlds Theory) as the key position defining an ultra-left line, ignoring such questions as the relationship of reform to revolution, the relationship of the party to the masses, and the relationship of democracy to centralism in communist organization."

This narrowness, they feel, oversimplifies the history of the "trend" and leads to a shallow lumping together of diverse and contradictory views under the rubric of "Maoism." Without a change in their direction of development, BASOC warns, rectification forces "could consolidate around idealist, sectarian and ultra-left politics."

The OC-IC fares no better in their eyes. Criticized for placing organizational unity over political consolidation, the OC-IC's "undeclared fusion line," they note, "is part and parcel of its left-sectarian and left-economist approach." The fusion line, says BASOC, "emphasizes the subjective will of communists, perpetuating the myth of permanently favorable conditions."

Both rectification and the OC-IC are considered examples of BASOC's contention that ultra-leftism is the main danger within the party building movement.

The difficulty in questioning this view lies not so much in the view itself or the facts by which it is proved. Rather, having been conceived over six months ago (December 1980) so much has changed in the trend that one could just as well argue that revisionism is its main danger, at least in reference to the journal *Line of March* and the leading force in the OC-IC, the Philadelphia Workers Organizing Committee (PWOC).

With the contention of *Line of March* that Soviet revisionism is only an ideological problem and not one of

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is the way Marx read his sources; this is the way to read Marx and Lenin, Mao and Gramsci, Althusser and Bettelheim.

The ability to develop a critical approach to Marxist-Leninist theory is no easy task. It requires advanced, critical revolutionary Marxist-Leninist theoreticians, knowledgeable in revolutionary science and philosophy, and closely linked to revolutionary *political practice* (q.v.). This theoretical development is necessary for our political practice in order to scientifically take up the central political tasks of communists in the US. [Sources: Louis Althusser, *For Marx*, p. 254; "Toward a Genuine Communist Party," Ann Arbor Collective (M-L), p. 17; *Theoretical Review* Editorial Board, "An Introduction to Theoretical Practice," No. 4, p. 6; Louis Althusser, "The Crisis of Marxism," *TR* No. 7, p. 15.]

FUSION The *fusion* of Marxism-Leninism with the workers' movement is what we mean when we use the term fusion as a Marxist concept. Louis Althusser laid out three principles of this fusion.

The first major principle of this fusion was formulated by Marx, Engels and Lenin: it is the principle of the importation into the existing workers' movement of the scientific doctrine of Marxism-Leninism produced outside the working class. The working class could not, by its own spontaneous practice, break out of the circle of ideological representations of its ends and means of action. The ideological representations of the working class remained dominated by the dominant ideology, that of the capitalist class. The social democratic and trade union organizations have remained in this ideological, reformist tradition to this day. Lenin stated in *What Is To Be Done?*: "class political consciousness can be brought to the workers *only from without*, that is only from without the economic struggle, from outside the sphere of relations between workers and employers."

The second major principle concerns the nature of the historical fusion established between Marx's scientific theory and the workers' movement. There are two aspects to this. On the one hand, we have the workers' movement that existed before Marx developed his doctrine, therefore its existence did not depend on Marx. The workers' movement is an objective reality, produced by the very necessity of resistance and revolt—the economic and political struggle of the working class. It is generated, along with class exploitation, by the capitalist mode of production. On the other hand, we have the fact that Marx produced objective knowledge of capitalist society, he understood and demonstrated the fundamental role of *class struggle* (q.v.), the necessity and the revolutionary role of the workers' movement, and he supplied knowledge of the objective laws of its existence, its goals and its actions. The workers' movement adopted Marxist doctrine because it recognized in it the objective theory of its own existence and its action—because it recognized in Marxist theory that which would enable it to see clearly the reality of the capitalist mode of production, its own struggles, and the possibilities for its liberation.

The third major principle concerns the process by which the fusion was finally produced, as well as the means that are necessary to maintain, reinforce and extend it. If the 'importation' of Marxist theory into the workers' movement

demands a process of great length and effort, it is because a tremendous amount of education and the formation of Marxist theory is needed on the one hand, and at the same time a lengthy ideological struggle is required on the other. It was necessary for Marx and Engels to patiently convince the most conscious and sacrificing militant workers of the necessity of abandoning their existing ideological orientation and of the need to adopt the outlook of scientific socialism.

At the same time they were undertaking this work of education and the formation of scientific theory, Marx and Engels and their followers were obliged to develop a lengthy, patient and intense struggle against the ideologies which then dominated the workers' movement and its organizations, and against the religious, political, and moral ideology of the capitalist class as a whole. Theoretical formation, on the one hand, and ideological struggle on the other, are two tasks which remain vital to fusing communism with the workers' movement.

In the *economist* view of fusion, communists go out and get jobs in shops and factories. In the course of struggle they develop only that theory which serves a relatively narrow range of struggles (economic, trade union); they recruit some workers and they win recognition as leaders of the working class on this basis. The historical experience of the struggle against economism has shown that this definition of fusion does not require a qualitative transformation of the workers' movement; for the workers bring to this fusion only their presence in the economic struggle. Economist fusion does not produce a communist workers' movement; on the contrary, it produces a trade unionist communist movement. Clearly this conception of fusion has nothing in common with that which is held by Marxism-Leninism. [Sources: Tucson ML Collective, "Theory and Fusion," 1977, p. 19; Louis Althusser, "Toward Fusion: Theoretical Formation and Ideological Struggle," *TR* No. 2, p. 2; V. I. Lenin, *What Is To Be Done?*]

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politics, its economist support for the productive forces theory, and its tailing after Soviet leaders in regards to Poland, the anti-revisionist character of *Line of March* is quite open to question.

At the same time, the PWOC has shown strong tendencies toward a right revisionist drift of which their support for the CPUSA's Gus Hall in last year's election is a prime example.

As these tendencies become more consolidated (they presently show no signs of abatement) the ultra-left dangers once posed by these formations become subordinant to their revisionist orientation.

In this regard, BASOC appears to be developing the kind of lines and practice which help make the delineation of these tendencies a more clearly observable phenomenon—and easier to critique—one which will lend this pamphlet authority, and leave its readers in expectation of those which will follow.

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