

'Science and Society' And Marxist Theory

This is the second of two articles by Sam Darcy on the Spring and Summer issues of "Science and Society." The first article appeared in the Sunday Worker. Darcy wrote the articles in the San Francisco County Jail.—Editor's Note.

By Sam Darcy

Sam Putnam—as always—makes an excellent and original contribution to the understanding of the situation in Brazil. The article is slightly marred by an unclear sentence in his conclusion. After very ably explaining the constant jockeying of the Vargas regime in its relations with the great imperialist powers, he says:

"Another characteristic of semi-colonial fascism, distinguishing it from that in a finance-capital country is its essential instability."

There is no such distinction. One is instable in definite ratio to the other.

Dimitrov in his brilliant Seventh Comintern Congress analysis of German fascism (one of the chief finance capital factors in Brazil), gave as one of its essential factors, its instability. It is an "unstable power" he declared. It is very important to understand that in all its economic and political detail, for without it Dimitrov could not have so clearly perceived the course that German fascism was to take, nor can anyone understand its history since.

I have re-read Samuel Bernstein's article on the Paris Commune. It is a good re-statement of the main features. But it was rather spoiled for me by a rather pretentious footnote introducing it as "an attempt at a revaluation." Marx and Lenin and other close observers and participants wrote so much and so penetratingly on the Paris Commune that we should not undertake revaluations except if, as is very unlikely, some astounding new fact appears. In truth, this article by Bernstein contributes nothing new.

Excellent Contributions

Herbert Aptheker has a fine contribution which discusses some little known facts on the Negro in the Abolitionist movement. Two articles by Bernhard J. Stern are uniformly worth reading — one on income and health and one on racial theory. Two articles, one by Dorothy Brewster and one by Edwin Berry Burgum on literature and literary criticism are splendid, well thought out and original contributions. No creative writer or critic should write another line until he or she has read both these papers.

A rather good article by Eva Metraux on "French Thought During the Third Republic" is weakened by her excessively sympathetic estimate of the ruling French bourgeoisie of 1870. She calls this class led by Thiers "hard - saving, realistic," and again "a dynamic class," also "a rising and triumphant force." She then traces the course of France's Third Republic as the evolution from that splendor to betrayal by the Petain Government. This estimate is considerably less than accurate. They might be fitting words to describe a ruling capitalist class on their accession to power as at the end of the Eighteenth Century, or during the hey-day of their power. But that is not true of the Thiers bourgeoisie after 1870. Wasn't it this "rising and triumphant force" which had just been defeated by the Prussians and eclipsed on the continent by Bismarck? Was it "realism" or just plain national treachery that gave Thiers himself the role of mobilizer at Versailles of a counter-revolutionary anti - French army which with the help of the German army engaged in the bloody butchery of the Paris Communards? "Science and Society" writers ought to be "Science and Society" readers. In the previous issue to that in which Eva Metraux writes, Bernstein's article cites Marx's characterization of the treacherous bourgeoisie as an "assembly of the ghosts of all defunct regimes" led by "a senile mountebank." Marx showed that Bismarck aided Thiers because "he wished to see France sunk still lower so that he might be able to exact the more." Aloof intellectuals of the "Nation" or New Republic school can permit themselves to call this "realism" and dynamism." To a "Science and Society" writer it should be nothing but what it actually is — the treachery of a ruling class which is at least at the beginning of its decadence.

Marxism and Psychoanalysis

France's Third Republic was in truth born in treachery and has died in treachery. And that is quite characteristic of the epoch of imperialism for which the 1870s were the ripening and preparatory period.

I especially liked Lewis Feuer's article on Logical Empiricism. It deals with modern currents of thought and makes a contribution toward examining those currents which animate American philosophic discussion. This trend should be encouraged in all writers.

The article by Jack Rapoport,

"Marxism and Psychoanalysis a Critique of Bartlett's Position," deserves special discussion and will no doubt receive it since the editors announce that "Mr. Bartlett has been asked to reply to this communication in the next issue." Rapoport is clearly wrong. He begins by comparing Marx and Freud saying that "Marxists can appreciate what a serious limitation would be imposed on Marxism if it were solely limited to Marx" and urges that the work of "Freud's collaborators" be considered in this light. The difference between the two is obvious. Marx was never revised by any but the anti-Marxists in and out of the Socialist movement. All the basic principles of Marxism have remained — his followers needed to develop them further and apply them concretely to succeeding periods. "Leninism," said Stalin, "is the Marxism of the epoch of imperialism." That was possible because Marx was a dialectical-materialist. His philosophy was sound and his methodology truly scientific. That is not true of Freud. His is no truly scientific methodology. Freud's theory and practice is eclectic and Idealist. A materialist approach to psychology does not mean that we must look for all source points for stimuli only in economic conditions. That would be a vulgar oversimplification. From what Rapoport says I can only conclude that that is his idea. He uses the words "Materialist" and "economic explanations" as synonymous.

Pavlov's work is one line along which the materialist basis of psychology is being searched. The further study of anthropology and the history of biologic phenomena, the urge to survive and to reproduce is another. It is to this phase that Freud made a considerable contribution despite the basic error of his generalizations. The materialist basis for psychology will also be provided by understanding of class and national and social relations; also the history of the people, which history influenced individual thinking and into which geographic and other factors must be included. The U. S. army is making interesting experiments on the effect of vitamins in food and their effect on psychology which may be productive of relevant material. A correlation of all these and similar factors is necessary, since all these and similar factors are contributory to the psychology of a people or of an individual.

The study of the human mind is not yet a developed science. It is in its first stages. To some phases of these studies Freud has, by shrewd observation, rather than scientific approach, made good contributions. But, both he and his followers claim too much, so much as to become a problem in the further development of this science—especially by their dogmatism.

Some Suggestions Are Offered

Freud himself was fully conscious of his anti-Marxism. In Austria it was not possible to evade the issue. His analysis and solution of the problem of war, for example, are on a level with the Greek dialecticians, not with modern science and philosophy.

We are eagerly looking forward to Bartlett's article. That gives you an idea how interesting the discussions in "Science and Society" are. If I may be permitted a personal note, I hope that all the hundreds of students who crowded mine and other dialectical materialism courses will continue their studies via "Science and Society"—possibly in the form of Science and Society discussion groups.

Also, I would like to see several improvements in the magazine: The authors ought to be identified for the readers. The editors, having a matured reading public, ought to publish an Editor's Guide to Writers suggesting articles it is seeking of problems which ought to be searched, or even books that need to be written.

A department reviewing and commenting on articles appearing in other journals, of the universities, academies or other publications in the same field.

And finally, and most important of all, greater attention ought to be given to all phenomena connected with the war. The academic aloofness of the magazine in this respect is disturbing. Certainly there is no better field for fruitful thinking now than all political, military, ideological, geographic and other war aspects.

STEINER SPEAKS

Ralph Steiner, who edits the photography column in Sunday PM, will talk on "What Makes Good Photograph" at the Photo League, 31 East 21st St., on Friday, September 26th at 8:30 P. M. The public is invited.