Paul Mattick

8 Reviews in *Western Socialist*

(1955-1956)

(Sweezy – Kropotkin - *Monopoly in America* – Marcuse - The “new look” in economics – Fromm – Barghoorn - Toynbee)
Review of Paul Sweezy’s *The Present As History*


*The Present As History*. By Paul M. Sweezy. Monthly Review Press (376 pp., $5.00);

Mr. Sweezy, an editor of *Monthly Review* and author of a highly regarded but quite muddled *Theory of Capitalist Development*, presents in this book a collection of book reviews and essays written firing the last fifteen years. Aside from three short and insignificant papers, all the reprinted material is still available in its original publication in various magazines. Its reappearance in book form is difficult to understand, particularly because the review, the editorial, and even the space-restricted essay are not the best media for the consideration of comprehensive theories. To review the reviews of books, of which many are no longer of real interest, is an awkward affair. It may be said, however, that within the limits of his media, Sweezy’s comments on works written by Toynbee, Burnham, Hallgarten, Sternberg, Veblen, Hansen, Pigou, and so forth, are interesting and justified not only from his own point of view but also from any other realistic and honest social attitude. Wherever Sweezy applies Marxian criticism to capitalist theories and ideologies he is quite successful, but where he tries to square his Marxism with the realities of Russian society he remains unconvincing. It should be noted, moreover, that what is particularly good in the book is not so much due to his Marxism as to his technical training as an economist. His researches in the structure of the American economy, though of interest to Marxists, are nevertheless more in the spirit of the *New Deal* economics. Issues such as the centralization of American capital, the changing role of the investment banker, interest groups within the economy, etc., may have emerged as well from any depression-period Congressional investigation of concentration and monopoly. In fact some of this research was undertaken on behalf of the New Deal government. But Sweezy’s rather conciliatory attitude towards the Keynesian brand of economics and his apparent lack of the specific dogmatism of the party-communist, does not alter the essentially apologetic nature of his work.
Review of Kropotkin’s *Mutual Aid*

*MUTUAL AID.* By Peter Kropotkin, with Foreword by Ashley Montague, and including “The Struggle for Existence” by T. H. Huxley. Extending Horizons Press, Boston, 1955, pp. 362, $3.00

Originally published in the January-February 1956 issue of the Western Socialist, Boston, USA

This new issue of Kropotkin’s work on Mutual Aid, first published at the turn of the century, not only satisfies the need for its continued availability but — in some measure — also helps to combat the current neo-Malthusianism and the renewed, though futile, attempts to present capitalist competition as a “law of nature.” Provoked by Huxley’s belief that in nature and society the struggle for existence is one of all against all, Kropotkin demonstrated that both in the animal world and human society it is rather mutual aid which secures existence and makes for progress.

What Huxley proclaimed passes under the name of Social Darwinism — “the survival of the fittest.” The successful in society are such by way of “natural selection.” Nothing can be done about it, and no apology is needed, as nature is neither “moral” nor “immoral,” but “non-moral.” Of course, attempts are made to defy “natural law” through the establishment of social order designed to mitigate the struggle of all against all. Yet this promises little for the future because population tends to outrun the means of subsistence, and thus the struggle for survival continues to destroy the weak.

Kropotkin did not answer Huxley’s Malthusian argument, even though it is the only one Huxley advanced in support of his views. Instead, he described forms of mutual aid observed in the animal world and various types of social collaboration throughout man’s history. This he did excellently, so that the book — quite apart from its special intent — is an important study of animal behavior and of the evolution of human sociality. Himself under the spell of Darwinism, Kropotkin wished to correct its capitalistically-determined one-sided interpretation, which saw only competition and not the far more important factor of mutual aid as the instrument of survival. He did not take up the Malthusian argument because he thought that existing “natural checks to over-multiplication” made it irrelevant.

This plays into the hands of the “social Darwinists,” who do not distinguish between society and nature, and see in all social misery manifestations of “natural laws.” They would insist that, even though the struggle for existence may not be characterized by the ever-present bitter struggle for the means of subsistence, nevertheless pauperism and starvation, as also famine and pestilence, must be regarded as “natural checks to over-population.” In their views, the alleviation of human suffering, caused by whatever reason, opposes the necessary “natural checks to over-population.”

Kropotkin did not answer the Malthusian argument because he, too, did not clearly enough distinguish between society and nature. Just as to the social Darwinists competition is instinctive to both men and
beast, so to Kropotkin mutual aid is a “moral instinct” of “prehuman origin” and a “law of nature.” This did not hinder him, however, from making the “watchword, mutual aid,” which comes to us “from the bush, the forest, the river, the ocean,” into the foundation of our “ethical conceptions” so as to secure “a still loftier evolution of our race.” It seems, then, that “natural laws” to be really effective require the support or neglect of men.

Observation reveals that there is both competition and mutual aid within and between the different species. Mutual aid is, of course, the best way for survival for those species whose survival depends on mutual aid, as competition. For a long time, however, survival in the animal world has not depended upon the practice of either mutual aid or competition but has been determined by the decision of men as to which species should live and thrive and which should be exterminated. Whatever “natural law” may mean with regard to animal behavior, it is overruled by man-made “laws” that shape “nature” to their own needs or whims. “Nature in the raw,” so to speak, where “natural laws” could rule is now in need of preservation and protection by national and international law. Wherever man rules, the “laws of nature” with respect to animal life cease to exist.

If this is true for the animal world, how much more must this be true for man himself. Although also a great admirer of Darwin, Marx drew attention to the fact that “nature” is continuously changed by the activities of men, and (against Malthusianism specifically) that no “natural law” governs the growth of population. The changing social structure, not “natural law,” determines whether there is “over-population” or not, and whether in consequence thereof, or independently of it, mutual aid or competition characterizes social relationships. “Over-population” and the hunger and misery associated with it, are not products of nature but products of men, or rather of social relationships which preclude such a social organization of production and of life generally as would abolish with the problem of hunger that of “over-population.” The “over-population” of which Huxley spoke was not one relative to the means of subsistence, but relative to the needs of capital accumulation; it was a product of the capitalist mode of production not of “natural law.”

To be sure, “over-population” seems to exist in large parts of the world where people are subjected to famines, floods and backward methods of production. While this condition may not be man-made, it is at any rate maintained by men, so as to secure privileged positions within existing social relations, or international power relations, or both simultaneously. “Over-population” is not the cause but the result of these attempts to arrest social development, as may be seen by the fact that wherever hunger is eliminated population tends to decline. But even if it would not do so, there exist for a very long time ample opportunities for an increased production able to feed a world population many times its present size.

It is not really “over-population” which worries the ruling classes. Rather the opposite is true; as is made clear by frantic efforts to increase population at the first sign of its tendential decline, by the fact that birth-control is made a crime, and by the maintenance of conditions that foster a vast increase of the impoverished masses. Conditions of misery for the masses are a prerequisite to the wealth and special social position of the ruling classes.

Although it is good to know that there is just as much, or more, mutual aid as competition in nature and society, this is not enough to make men change their ways and to alter social relationships. For
those who profit by conditions it does not matter whether it is “natural” or “unnatural,” the “best” or the “worst” method for survival of the species. Mankind’s none of their concern. For those who create the profits it may be nice to know that the mutual aid practised in their own circles attests to their high ethical concepts and natural behavior, but it does not stop their exploitation. The whole controversy between Huxley and Kropotkin is somewhat beside the point — it does not touch upon the relevant issues of society, namely that “mutual aid” in human society presupposes the abolition of class relations.
**Review of *Monopoly in America***


This latest addition of the enormous literature on monopoly and competition brings the story up to date without adding anything essential to the problem and its “solution” save the warning that monopoly will lead to totalitarianism unless stopped by government intervention. Like most authors in this field, Adams and Gray see nothing wrong with capitalism but condemn alleged violations of “proper” capitalist practices. In their view, monopoly is bad because with competition it destroys our democratic way of life and the economic freedom associated with it. They only deal with that aspect of monopoly which controls markets and production to the detriment of small enterprise which had not succeeded in securing its competitive position by monopolistic practices. They fail to see that competition implies monopoly, and monopoly competition; and, of course, they favor the capitalist monopoly over the means of production as against property-less workers so as to secure the economic freedom of exploitation. In short, they like to have a capitalist system which is such in one respect but not in another, and which suspends the capitalist development trend in the interest of small business.

In distinction to other “trust-busters,” however, Adams and Gray do not stress the element of “restriction” in monopoly; its alleged “sabotage” of “economic progress.” After all, the American economy expanded despite monopolistic rule. They merely complain that too much of the socially-created profit flows to big enterprise at the expense of small business and the “consumer” generally. And it is the government, they point out, which strengthens monopoly by tax and spending programs favoring big business. Why it should favor anything else is hard to see, in view of the fact that government is the government of big business.

However, Adams and Gray wish to see this situation altered; people must be made aware of the danger of monopoly and to this end they devote their book. This implies of course, that they have to demolish arguments in favor of monopoly and big business. Adams and Gray deal mainly with one argument, namely, that technological development requires large enterprise and thus necessitates monopoly. They point out that technology is not a material force beyond human control determining the character of the economy, but is “one of many interrelated forces which, operating in conjunction and unidirectionally, have made economic concentration possible, not necessary, or inevitable.” Yet, this controversy about the meaning of technology is quite beside the point, for capital concentration, though incorporating technological development, is a matter of capital accumulation under conditions of capitalist competition. One cannot ask for competition and capital expansion without getting the concentration and centralization of capital. The argument was brought into the discussion in the first place to distract from the real problem of capital formation. To disprove it, leaves the problem where it was before the argument was raised.
Though illogical and contradictory in its suggestion to use the power of government to revive “public confidence in old-fashioned competition,” in face of the recognition that “the nature of existing technology, economic organization and social demand precludes general reliance on free competition,” the book is worth reading nevertheless, if only because of its description of the ways and means that unite business and government. Examples given are taken from current occurrences associated with the defense procurement and surplus-disposal programs, from tax and amortization incentives supporting big business, and from the privatization policies of the atomic energy program now in progress.
Marcuse's book renews the endeavor to read Marx into Freud. Previous attempts, by Reich and Osborn for instance, failed miserably. Instead of overcoming a bewailed inertia, Reich's theories hardly sufficed to sustain a ridiculous private racket. Osborn's work, a product of the Stalinist popular-front period, designed to attract the petty bourgeois, was soon forgotten by both the Western petty-bourgeoisie and the bolshevik regime. Psychoanalysis did not become part of, or a new basis for, a radical doctrine but merely a way of transferring money from the analyzed many to the analyzing few. By providing a new terminology for the various social “ills,” the ideological inertia, as part of the general inertia of capital stagnation, could at least verbally be ended. The re-interpretation in psychoanalytical terms affected all and everything; literature, the arts, the social sciences and politics. Psychoanalysis, moreover, became an independent branch of social activity developing vested interests of its own. Once installed, it perpetuated itself in competition with other ideological instrumentalities by continuously re-creating “demand” for its services through the discovery of new and more “ills” falling into its domain. It is now part and parcel of the prevailing social structure which commercializes all ideas and makes a business out of tangibles and intangibles alike.

Psychoanalysis as business is of no interest to Marcuse. Like Freud, but more consistently, he distinguishes between Freud's philosophy and his science. In Marcuse's opinion analytical therapy may be successful even though it has no connection, or has lost its connection, with Freud's “metapsychology.” He thinks that “the critical insights of psychoanalysis gain their full force in the field of theory, and perhaps particularly where theory is farthest removed from therapy.” Not being an analyst, Marcuse is undisturbed by the Freudian discrepancy between philosophy and science, undisturbed that psychoanalysis recognizes the source of individual sickness in the sickness of society and yet tries to cure individual sicknesses without curing that of society. The analysts, however, must talk this discrepancy away, which then constitutes Freudian “revisionism” — the sacrifice of theory to business.

Marcuse wants to resurrect the “explosive” revolutionary content of Freud's theories. The “revisionists,” in his view, betrayed psychoanalysis by giving up Freud's interpretation of concepts such as the death-instinct, the killing of the primal father, the function of the unconsciousness, the scope and significance of sexuality, the depth dimension of the conflict between individual and society, and so forth. In this way they returned to traditional pre-Freudian consciousness psychology which turns biological-material forces into ethical-moral issues and finds solutions in adjustments instead of oppositions. And Marcuse is right; the theory and practice of Freudian “revisionism” is reformist or non-revolutionary, which, under present conditions, means (as it often actively is) “counter-revolutionary.” But this must not be
taken too seriously, for despite its widespread ideological application, psychoanalysis and the competitive struggles within its realm remain a tempest in a teapot.

“Explosive” theories have little cash value. With the rejection of the radicalism in Marxian terms, goes the rejection of Marxism in psychoanalytical terms. The flowering of psychoanalysis was possible only in its “revised” forms. In its “orthodox” form it tended toward sectarian dogmatism and became increasingly more untenable because of anthropological, sociological and psychological research that contradicted many of its assumptions. Aside from schisms due to ordinary competition within the field, psychoanalysis, in order to be widely acceptable, had to stress its therapeutic value. There is no market in despair; whereas the market in hope and health becomes the larger the greater the despair. And if behavior, hitherto considered “normal” and thus not considered at all, is suddenly declared an illness of the soul, there will be as many imaginary sicknesses as there are imaginary cures. Psychoanalysis is both a fashion and the expression of an increasing bewilderment within the growing social chaos of a society in transition.

Marcuse’s interpretation, too, is not strictly Freudian. What he reads into Freud would have surprised the latter. To be sure, the voluminous writings of Freud, the tentative character of many of his hypotheses, and the not infrequent retractions and contradictions that characterize the development of his theories, make it possible to find Freudian text for many different views. That Marcuse sees more in Freud than Freud saw himself is, of course, no argument against Marcuse, as people often say more than they are aware of and Freud, though unconscious of the specific revolutionary implications of his theories fathered them nevertheless. However, to regard Freud as a “revolutionist” is to regard him as a belated bourgeois revolutionist, who carried mechanical materialism over into psychology. With respect to the state of “psychology” from which Freud departed, he could consider himself a revolutionary innovator. Yet, from a position that demands abolition of present-day society, he appears no more than a disillusioned bourgeois. He did not see beyond his society, which simply was “society” to him and nothing could be done about it — according to his theories.

As in Hobbes’ perpetual war of each against all, to be held in check only through the intervention of state-authority, so in Freud’s theory, a full satisfaction of man’s instinctual needs is incompatible with the existence of civilized society. Instinct gratification must be subordinate to the requirements of the social system; culture is the methodical and rigidly enforced deflection of instinctual drives to socially useful ends. One can have either complete satisfaction of instinctive drives, but chaos, or civilization and therewith repressions of instinctive needs, but not both simultaneously. As people generally like to eat their cake and have it too, they are bound to be unhappy. Some are more so than others and should see an analyst. But the situation cannot be altered.

In Marcuse’s view, this pessimism is quite unwarranted and does not necessarily follow from Freud’s theory. Moreover, the theory itself implies a possible solution to the dilemma. The solution is Marx’s solution, even though Marcuse never mentions Marx. Capitalism appears in his writings either as “industrial civilization,” or simply as “domination”; exploitation as “constraints,” and so forth. Yet, his whole description of “society” is a politely veiled Marxian description of capitalism, its development tendencies, and its contradictions, which must be overcome to make a happier life possible. Although Marxian theory forms Marcuse’s unmentioned “starting point,” he tries to invoke the impression that
because “psychological categories have become political categories” (whatever that means) it is now necessary to “develop the political and sociological substance of the psychological notions.” What is developed, however, has been there all along in the far less ambiguous language of Marxian theory.

However, it is only to the good when two different theories yield the desired single result, when, as here, psychoanalysis and dialectical materialism are both made to indicate the direction of social development toward a better life. Until recently, according to Marcuse, “scarcity” demanded and supported “repressions” in the interest of productive development. What is true in Marxian thought, namely, that socialism presupposes a high level of production, holds true also for psychoanalysis. The ending, or rather diminishing, of the unfortunate discrepancy between the gratification of instinctual drives and social order, presupposes a level of production and productivity which grants more time to the “libido,” allows for more play and less work. Exploitation, or rather “constraint,” is no longer justified. Yet, the social class-structure, or society’s “dominative” character, prevents the “sublimation” of excessive, i.e. natural libidinal forces, in libidinal activities in the form of more sociality and less-restricted sexual mores, which would eliminate or decrease the need for “sublimation” in the Freudian sense.

Whereas to Marx the history of society is a history of class struggles, Freud’s theory, according to Marcuse, is the history of man as the history of his repression. “Culture,” he says, “constrains not only man’s societal but also his biological existence, not only parts of the human being but his instinctual structure itself.” In Marcuse’s view, then, Freud takes in more than Marx, his “biologism” is “sociology” in a deeper and more comprehending sense. As such it does not contradict but verifies Marx’s radical social analysis.

It is conceivable, of course, to picture Marx a “Freudian,” just as Marx was a Darwinist without however accepting “social Darwinism.” And this would be so, even if Marx would have rejected the specific Freudian explanation of the repression mechanism. For he could surely have agreed that exploitation and oppression affect the whole of man and cripples him in every respect, including the gratification of his instinctual needs. But while there seems to be room for Marcuse’s “Marxism” in Freud’s philosophy, there is none for Freud’s classless socio-biology in Marx’s system. Man, for Marx, is an abstract term just as nature and society per se. What we have to deal with, in his view is historical man, and there again with classes of men according to the changing social structure, in a nature transforming itself and being transformed by the activities of men. To speculate about man, society and nature in a very general way has meaning only with respect to concrete situations in actually existing societies at particular historical periods, where such speculations, as researches into the past and future, may serve as media for the understanding and the solution of actually existing problems.

Where there is oppression there must be oppressors, not merely a “social need” to repress instinctual drives in the interests of civilization. If instincts are the same for all biological men, the degree, or the lack, of their gratification will still be diversified relative to positions in the social class structure. If this is not the case, as in Freudian theory, if the “tragical implications of civilization” hold equally true for everybody, this implies a large degree of “self-repression” on the part of the oppressing members of society. And they may, in fact, cause and suffer repression simultaneously but not because of a special concern for civilization but because they see in it an instrument of political rule or of capital accumulation.
In distinction to Freud, to be sure, Marcuse speaks of present-day society as susceptible to social change, and of social change that will relegate Freudian psychology to the past. Yet, by remaining in Freud’s “deepest biological layers” his call to opposition to present-day conditions remains a mere philosophical exercise without applicability to social actions. The sterility of “revisionism” is fully matched by the sterility of Freudian “orthodoxy,” even if it incorporates social class issues in its general theory of man as a contradiction between society and nature. What can be acted upon are only social class issues.
The “new look” in economics

in *Western Socialist*, (Boston), No. May-June 1956. Transcribed by Adam Buick.

Reviews of:


According to Keynes, depressions are no longer necessary. And, in fact, instead of depression there was the second world war and the upswing of economy activity based on the probability of a new war. Government manipulations and expenditures kept unemployment at a low level; a greatly increased productivity maintained the profitability of capital, and the American economy experienced further expansion despite contracting markets. Government interventions in the economy have lost their temporary character and are now regarded as permanent “built-in-stabilizers.” Although the full-employment mechanism of the Keynesian system are now recognized as inadequate, because they had been based on a rather naïve simplification of the problem of economic control, in spirit and terminology the newer “new economics” are still Keynesian, even though the master is now rarely mentioned.

In *Policies to Combat Depression*, fourteen economists discuss the question whether or not depressions may still arise despite the existence of “stabilizers.” The result of the discussion is nil, of course, as it is impossible to predict the further course of economic development on the assumption that there is no further economic development. And because of this assumption, these economists do not concern themselves with the equally disturbing question of the consequences of a possible depressionless development with respect to the future of the private enterprise system, that is, with the socio-economic meaning of the further growth of “built-in stabilizers.”

For all these economists, government intervention must serve private capital, even though “government expenditures are considerably greater than gross private investment” and will not “fall below the level of private investment in the near-term future.” Government spending, including deficit-financing if necessary, is seen as the only effective means to combat depression. Beyond this, however, depressed industries should be helped along with special credit facilities, easy money policies should induce bankers to help business firms maintain larger inventories, special tax and financial inducements should be offered to private builders of houses for low and middle income groups, public works should be constructed with an eye to the needs of private capital — roads for the automobile industry, airports for the aircraft industry, and so forth. It is the function of the “public sector” of the economy to secure the existence of private enterprise.

The “mixed” economy thus supported does not stop tottering, however, as is indicated by recent so-called “recessions,” the one of 1948-49 serving as a “case study” to evaluate the effectiveness of various
antidepression policies. The lesson derived is that as yet there is no way of finding out whether or not
the new economy is less susceptible to severe fluctuations than the old, for it is not possible to say that
government actions would have been adequate if the 1948 downturn would have been more severe than
it was.

The question is raised whether under present conditions the association between war and full-
employment is an accident or as necessity, and it is said that though not a necessity it is by no means
accidental. One economist points out that a large government budget “is likely to yield full employment
and inflation, whether it is spent on the means of death or on the means of life,” but he thinks the latter
remedy unacceptable because of the special needs of private capital. He suggests the expansion of state
and local government expenditures; more public works instead of more armaments, so as not to expand
the powers of the Federal government and not to contract markets any further.

Some economists deal at great length with the stabilizing effectiveness of budget flexibility, that is, they
speculate about alterations of economic activity under various assumed conditions when government
expenditures increase or decrease. This innocent and non-committal game looks as impressive on paper
as it is meaningless in reality. Others concentrate on tax policies during recessions and in general, that is,
on ways and means to reduce or increase personal income for purposes of economic stabilization.
Corporate income taxes are considered, and rapid amortization schemes are proposed to raise incentives
for private investments.

With the inducement to invest through a preferential treatment of new investment there goes — in true
Keynesian fashion — the increase of the propensity to consume, or rather “social security” as an
instrument of economic stability. And with this goes a beneficial housing policy, slum clearance and
urban redevelopment and the wonderful anti-depression power of self-liquidating public works. Farm
price supports are also seen as fostering stability; in fact, nothing seems to be going on in the economy
which is not of a stabilizing nature. Ni wonder the system totters under so much stabilization.

It totters mainly, as the economists point out, because of the precariousness of international relations. At
the very beginning of this collection of papers it is said that even if it were possible to make the

economy, qua economy, harder and more shock-resistant, we live in a world where international
developments have and will continue to have major repercussions on the economy. As the policies of
1948-1949 were significantly influenced by the international tensions of the cold war, future policy
remains unpredictable for the same reason.

The last paper deals then with international trade and payments policies in the post-war world. Here it
is said that the hopeful plans of Bretton Woods have all been given up. Instead of free trade and general
currency convertibility, “recovery” of the international trade and payments situation restricted itself to
the formation of the European Payments Union and the maintenance of the Sterling area. The
expansion of American production and American aid brought some degree of trade liberalization and
intra-European convertibility, which, however, may disappear again in a new depression. To combat this
possibility requires international anti-depression policies and therewith continued American interest in
the welfare of the European economies.
This is also the opinion of the nine economists who wrote *The Political Economy of American Foreign Policy*, a review of the concepts, strategy, and limits of America’s foreign economic policy. Their book is divided into a diagnostic and a prescriptive part. The diagnostic half is a highly recommendable description of the development and decay of nineteenth century world economy. The disintegration of the world trading system is viewed as a process of “nationalization.” Independent national states “intervene anarchically in the international economy, each trying to achieve its own ends with little regard for the interests of other countries and with slight concern for the efficiency of the system as a whole.” In the past this has not been possible to present-day degrees because of England’s monopolistic and controlling position in world economy. The *Pax Britannica* secured efficiency for “the system as a whole.” England’s place is now taken by the United States which, however, is “only partially integrated into the world economy, with which it is also partly competitive, and whose accustomed mode and pace of functioning it tends periodically to disturb.”

This is as it is, however, and nothing can be done about it. Although the West European countries and Japan depend upon the expansion of foreign trade, and though their economies have outgrown their base of natural resources, they now live in an economic environment which has been increasingly uncongenial to the rapid expansion of their industrial exports. They cannot compete successfully with the productively superior American industry and could not do so even if all American tariffs would be removed. Neither can they enjoy an adequately growing exchange of manufacturers for primary products with Asia, Latin America and Oceania, at favorable terms of trade, because of limitations on the growth of agricultural output in those areas due to their own industrialization process. The “dollar-problem” for Western Europe and Japan is then not a mere balance-of-payments problem but a “structural trading problem with North America.” The dollar shortage is mainly the financial reflection or symptom of the structural dollar problem.

These few remarks can only indicate the trend of the book’s argument. It is substantiated with a wealth of material useful to any reader whether he agrees with the author’s interpretation of the material or not. Even the prescriptive and therefore necessarily weaker part of the book incorporates so much factual knowledge as to turn it into a quite comprehensive and valuable handbook of international affairs. The prescriptive part is determined by the authors’ convictions that only the West-European nations are reliable allies and able to contribute to the defense of American capitalism. Although the underdeveloped regions should find some consideration, Western Europe and Japan are America’s first concern. The underdeveloped nations still within the frame of the “free world” should not only be helped but should be induced to integrate their developing economies with those of the West. In other words, although the past cannot be resurrected as a whole, it should be revived to some extent. Even though the world market of the nineteenth century is lost for good international trade may be carried on under modified conditions that allow for some degree of industrialization of primary-producing countries without impairing their trade relations with the industrially highly developed Western nations.

Because a universal trading system is “not a historic possibility in our time,” the authors plead for a wholehearted acceptance of regional solutions, such as exemplified by the Sterling area and the European Payments Union, even though they do discriminate against American interests. They see an adequate alternatives to economic nationalism not in economic internationalism but in economic
supra-nationalism. The progressive unification of the Western Community and its economic integration with the extra-American free world depends, however, not only on their own intentions in this direction, but more so on “the progressive extension of American influence, power and responsibility within and on behalf of the Atlantic Community.” America must not only secure her own prosperity but follow a policy which secures prosperous conditions to the rest of the free world; it must not compete but collaborate.

This, of course, is quite a tall order and its execution would violate the principles both of capital production and of national expansionism. The authors themselves point out that their program lies “beyond political economy,” and is solely determined by the theoretical recognition that nations must “transcend their accustomed conception of national interest in order to go on having a national interest to protect.” They fear that short of a serious attempt to unify the Western world without regard to particular national interests, there is only the road to imperialistic control, or defeat through “world communism.” The implementation of their program, meager a it is in itself, they leave to those who decide practical policies, that is, to people defending nothing but particularistic interests.
According to Fromm, and in distinction to orthodox Freudianism, man’s “basic passions are not rooted in his instinctive needs, but in the specific conditions of human existence.” These are now the conditions of capitalism. In the light of the requirements of mental health, as seen by Fromm, the prevailing society may be regarded as “insane.” Although some people are more affected than others, all behave irrationally in this irrational world. In order to change this situation, Fromm suggests the transformation of capitalism into some sort of “socialism,” into a “sane society,” — the precondition for the individual’s mental health and happiness. He calls his approach to the problem of mental health and society “humanistic psychoanalysis” which appears largely as an elaboration of Marx’s concept of commodity-fetishism. It is here generalized as the phenomenon of “alienation” and, in Fromm’s view, is as old a problem as the “idolatry” against which the prophets of the Old Testament raised their voices.

In Marx’s system alienation refers to social class relations based on the divorce of the workers from the means of production in a market economy of capital accumulation. The goal of production is profit. As capital, the products of man’s past and present labor take on an “independent” character, determining both the volume and direction of social production, depression and prosperity, peace and war, therewith the condition of human existence. And thus, even though man makes history, he is not master of his destiny. He lives under the compulsion of socio-economic circumstances which circumscribe his attitudes and actions. Neither the capitalists, nor the workers, nor any other group, determine their existence but allow themselves to be determined by the dynamics of capital accumulation; in other words, by things of their own making, as if they had a separate power over them. Those, however, who own or control capital, constitute a privileged ruling class just because of this sad state of affairs. And in the interest of their exploitative class position they try to perpetuate this attitude by means of force, fraud, and ideological manipulations.

The fetishistic relationship between men and their production embraces social consciousness and dominates general behavior. With labor-power a commodity like any other, men are dealt with as if they were things, and are compared to things; the materials of production include the “human material.” With exploitation based on the possession of things, i.e. capital, survival in capitalist competition implies the increasing appropriation of capital. Social relations are thus not relations between men but relations between things; commodity-relations, at once hiding and enabling the exploitation of men by men.
II

Fromm’s “revision” of Freud with the help of Marx retains the terminology of Freudian psychology, which pretends to concern itself with biological man and his frustration in society per se. Though the concept of commodity fetishism is applied to the culture as a whole, the emphasis rests on its ideological and psychological aspects. This enables Fromm to speak of society as “we.” However, although the ruling ideology and characterology are those of the ruling classes and their retainers, responsibility for the capitalist barbarism cannot be that widely distributed. After all, there are controllers and controlled, manipulators and manipulated, which forbids the “we” when speaking of society. Precisely by being a severe criticism of “society,” of “us,” Fromm’s book turns out a rather lame criticism of capitalism.

Although a bad habit, this not too serious an error, for despite all the “we” in literature, people generally refer to “society” as “they,” to opposing interests and different modes of existence, which give society its class character. But with Fromm’s society as “we” goes the individual as “man”; not as capitalist, worker, or something else, but as “man,” whose “nature” and “history” comprises both “creation and destruction; love and hate.” And although the class-determined man remains man even if approached as a commodity, or if not approached at all as untouchable, the “common humanity” of all men tells us little as regards their attitudes and behavior under varying social and historical circumstances in a class-divided society.

III

According to Fromm, only “faith in man” allows for a sane society. He explains Lenin’s “failure,” for example, by the latter’s lacking faith in man. Lenin, however, had very much faith in some men, himself included; in people dedicated to the seizure of power for his party. He had no faith, it is true, in the Czarist ruling class, nor in the middle-class hoping for liberal capitalism, nor in the peasants striving for land and private property, nor in the mass of workers destined to work harder without living better, so as to accumulate the necessary capital for Russia’s industrialization and national existence. Though Lenin had no faith in man, he excelled in faith in minority rule, which constitutes the “faith in man” in class societies. To speak of Lenin’s “failure” is to speak of his “success,” when more than individual attentions or pretensions are considered; in this case, the existence of a Russian proletariat as yet unable to abolish with its own class position all social class relations.

Moreover, to refer to the individual leader, whose “failure” or “success” determines the direction of social development, is to speak from the position of minority-rule, of class relations, modified by a desire for leadership and control in the “interest” of the led and controlled. “Faith in man” includes faith in the leader. Self-determination, however, implies the absence of a leadership in the Leninist or capitalist sense, and would make Fromm’s “faith in man” superfluous. With Fromm’s “faith in man,” Lenin would not have been Lenin, and with this “faith in man” workers will never be able to escape the consequences of their leaders lacking “faith.” The abolition of exploitation can be actualized only by the exploited; the emphasis must be on class, not on man. It is not even “faith in the working class,” but just the working class itself, which may be able through its own emancipation to change class-society into society.
To be sure, Fromm distinguishes between rational and inhibiting, or irrational, leadership. He is for the first and rejects the second form of authority, that is, prefers the authoritative relationship between “teacher and pupil” to that between “slave-owner” and “slave,” even though both are based on the superiority of the one over the other. In Fromm’s view, the teacher’s authority is altruistic and serves the student who welcomes it, as against the antagonistic irrational authority over the slave. Rational authoritative relationships, furthermore, tend to dissolve themselves with the pupils becoming as smart as the teachers. Each of these authority situations creates a different psychological situation; one assuring sanity, the other tending towards insanity. However, neither of these situations has anything to do with the authority problem in capitalism of either the liberal, the mixed, or the bolshevik brand. Fromm’s idealized teacher-pupil relationship does not exist; what does exist is an educational market coupled to force, where the relationships between teacher and student — though possibly in subtler fashion — are as antagonistic as the social relations in general. Moreover, capitalism employs all forms of authoritative relationships, the “irrational” and the “rational,” which are intertwined in such a way that none of them can be fostered, or eliminated short of the abolition of capitalism itself.

IV

However, in Fromm’s view, capitalism abolishes itself and in so doing creates the conditions wherein it becomes possible to choose between one or another form of authoritative relationships on ethical grounds. In order to escape destruction and achieve happiness, people must be made aware of what makes for sanity and what makes for insanity. Fromm’s consistent use of the “we” with respect to society is also based on the illusion that the class-society underlying Marx’s theories has largely ceased to exist. His description of Western capitalism, for instance, repeats all the current clichés of the most ardent apologists of the “American way of life”; from the “miracle of production” to the “miracle of consumption.” Fromm asserts that the workers’ “social and economic power” has increased to a fantastic degree, “not only with regard to salary and social benefits, but also to his human and social role in the factory.”

This is sheer nonsense, of course, and does not even apply to that small minority of privileged workers whose exceptional position presupposes the most ruthless exploitation of the vast majority. The “American way of life,” which is not that of Western capitalism but the result of America’s domination of Western capitalism, finds its counterpart in the growing misery of the bulk of the world’s population, suffering under both the imperialist-capitalist controls and their own attempts to escape these controls. This situation, which transforms civil strife into international war, and international competition into civil war, may indicate the decline of capitalism but not its self-transformation through the disappearance of class frictions and class differentiations in the wake of an achieved general abundance. To be sure, Fromm recognizes the existence of under-privileged areas and under-developed countries and advocates reforms and foreign aid to alleviate this misery, as if this misery and the co-existing well-being of other areas and social layers were not the two sides of the same coin. The state of relative abundance does not make for general well-being and “sanity” but leads production into destructive channels, so as to maintain the social class structure and control over the means of production.
In Fromm’s society of abundance, the workers’ problems are no longer related to the control of capital but merely to its co-determination. He sees them hunger for a voice in the production process. Not, however, to improve their social and economic position still further but to secure their “sanity.” Fromm assumes that the workers (of all descriptions) are unhappy not so much because they are exploited and in want, but because they cannot “relate themselves to the concrete product as a whole.” They suffer on account of the specialization and abstraction of their functions. It is true that Marx, among other things, also mentioned the dehumanization of labor in capitalist production through its specialization, as against former modes of production with a less-developed division of labor. Yet, socialization of production implies the division of labor, which, by itself, need not be a dehumanizing factor. It is such under the exploitative capital-labor relationship. In a socialist society it becomes possible to choose between a further extension of the social division of labor, or its reduction by means such as interchangeability of functions. And it may turn out that interchangeability is more productive than specialization; but, then, the principle of productivity may itself give way to some manner of organizing social production which might make it more attractive.

Fromm’s emphasis on this rather minor aspect of alienation at the expense of the real problem, i.e. the class-control of the means of production, turns his “social criticism” into a media of capitalist manipulation. For what he suggests in the line of social security and co-determination is now in process of being actualized by capitalist reforms, supposed to stabilize the system. His proposed “roads to sanity” are already travelled, and even some of the by-roads he likes to see populated such as various small communal enterprises producing for (and being at the mercy of) the capitalist market, do not endanger the capitalist system but merely support the illusion of its growing humanization. If Fromm is against “bigness” and for “decentralization,” so are all those capitalists who face still bigger and more centralized competitors. And if Fromm likes to see the “instinct of workmanship” more fully satisfied, so do the capitalists now engaged in eliminating simple labor processes by way of automatization.

Frommm’s “roads to sanity” in the sphere of production are not supported in the sphere of consumption, where the growing abundance leads to cultural decay. For “man,” Fromm says, is “fascinated by the possibility of buying more, better, and especially, new things. He is consumption hungry. The act of buying and consuming has become a compulsive, irrational aim, because it is an end itself, with little relation to the use of, or pleasure in the things bought and consumed.” And it is this alienated attitude toward consumption which determines the employment of leisure time and the character of the industries devoted to it. A large part of Fromm’s book describes the emptiness and shallowness of popular culture at the expense of real art and human sensitivity — a popular culture which finds its reflection in the desire for conformity and the denial of real human relationships.

VI

Here Fromm is in his element, bewailing the “lonely crowd” of the sociology of consumption, for which leisure, not work, is the great problem. With the ending of the problem of production ends that of exploitation, of course; yet, there is still, says Fromm, so much to do for the sociologists, and
relational leaders to make life meaningful despite the absence of compelling social problems. Fromm’s particular suggestion is to consume less and to work more, if only for therapeutic reasons. Idle hands and idle minds are dangerous and even to do nothing must become a kind of work, of meditation, and recreation. The mentally healthy person, in his view, “is the productive and unalienated person ... who relates to the world lovingly, and who uses his reason to grasp reality objectively; who expresses himself as a unique individual entity, and at the same time feels one with his fellow man” — etc., etc. — as one can hear from any pulpit Sunday mornings. As the striving for mental health is “inherent in every human being . . . Not born a moral idiot,” society must be such as to offer him a chance to assert his moral nature. The chance, as seen before, is offered by “socialism,” i.e. the mixed, co-determined and politically democratic welfare economy; provided, of course, it sheds itself of such qualities as “greed, competitiveness, possessiveness, narcissism,” and lets conscience rule. As “no change must be brought about by force,” and as it must be “simultaneous change in the economic, political and cultural spheres,” it must be brought about by moral education of the inherent morality, and is thus clearly the function of “humanistic psychoanalysis,” which, then, takes its place besides the great ethical and religious systems, asserting the supremacy of the spiritual over material values, and devoted to the dignity of men, so that we may — some day — sing, walk, and dance together.
Capitalism, although it is an international mode of production, developed within the frame of the modern nation-state. Its “internationalism” assumes the form of aggressive “nationalism.” The imperialistic expansion of nationally-organized capitalism needs such extra-nationalist ideologies as “the civilizing mission” of colonialism, or “the defense of democracy” against fascist national movements and their imperialist aspirations. The vested interests of the national state and the power of nationalist ideologies oppose socialism because it would put an end to the private-enterprise system with its nationalist and imperialist requirements. The “nationalism” as well as the “internationalism” of capitalism, as world-wide systems of production and exchange, are necessarily ambiguous; or rather, since the goal of capital production is capital, both its nationalism and its internationalism are means to this end. The internal contradictions of capital production explain both its concrete contradictions and those between world-wide capital expansion and the specific profit-interests of nationally-organized capital structures. The contradiction between private capital interests and social needs reappears in the contradiction between national interests and the requirements of a social world system of production and distribution based on the actual needs and possibilities of its inhabitants.

Capital concentration and the centralization of political and economic power on an international scale gave rise to national movements in underdeveloped, imperialistically-controlled and exploited countries. The capitalization of these countries took on an exaggerated national form in opposition to imperialist nations and often in opposition to their own ruling classes, which held control by virtue of an imperially-maintained backwardness. National revolutions took on an “anti-capitalist,” anti-imperialist character, even though their goal was capitalization and modernization under government control.

The nationalism and internationalism of these countries were less ambiguous, however, than that of imperialist nations because their main concern was, at first, the establishment of national existence and security as a presupposition for the possible development of imperialist tendencies. Their immediate needs, furthermore, demanded the support of all the anti-imperialist forces of the world. Soviet Russian nationalism, with which Barghoorn concerns himself, was for a considerable time subordinated to the programmatic internationalism of bolshevism. Nationalism was stressed internally only when a need for it arose, that is, when the existence of the Soviet Union demanded an appeal to traditional Russian nationalism. The right of national self-determination was propagated to support national movements where these would embarrass and weaken the ruling imperialist powers and thus strengthen Russia’s world position. Basically, however, and aside from whatever else the bolshevik revolution represented, it was a national attempt to keep the Russian empire from disintegrating or becoming dismembered in an era of world-wars.
According to Barghoorn, “the Soviet Union is in fact the most highly integrated and centralized nation-state that has yet existed in the world. Like all extreme forms of nationalism, that of the Soviet Union is imperialistic. It is expansionist and its horizon of ambition is bounded only by the realities of geography and counterbalancing power.” The Russian type of nationalism, “is appropriate to an order in which the ruling class is the collective owner of the means of production and the collective exploiter of the masses.” It is a state-capitalist system bent on getting as much control of the world as possible. In this respect, of course, it does not differ from other capitalist-imperialist powers. But because the Russian “state bourgeoisie” is both “more powerful as a class, and more insecure as individuals, than the elite strata of traditional monarchies or of capitalist democracy,” Barghoorn thinks that in Russia “social tensions are probably more acute than in constitutional states. To a much greater extent than in freer societies there is a compulsion to direct the aggression generated by these tendencies to out-groups.”

This brings us to the “message” of the book. Russian bolshevism was previously combated by upholding the values of nationalism and the efficiency of private enterprise. Now the apparent success of the Russian economy and her nationalist-imperialist inclinations are regarded as dangerous not only to the Western world but to all nations within the Russian orbit. The roles have been reversed. It is not the “internationalism” but the nationalism of Russia that is bad; not pseudo-socialist state-planning but imperialist expansions. In brief, now that it is extremely nationalistic, Russian imperialism is twice as bad as that of other powers. Adherence to the Western world appears to be the lesser evil because it is less intensely nationalistic and its imperialism is declining — with constitutional governments and democracy thrown into the bargain. Progress and well-being lie not in the reactionary nationalism of Russian bolshevism but in the enlightened nationalism and internationalism of Western capitalism. In other words, the bolsheviks are really vicious capitalists, whereas the Western bourgeoisie look more like old bolsheviks fending off imperialist aggression.

In addition to this message which is more implicitly than explicitly stated, Barghoorn gives a comprehensive description of bolshevik Russification within the Soviet Union with regard to traditional and revolutionary factors in Soviet Russian nationalism. The bolshevik’s use of national sentiments, as well as their discrimination against national minorities, are traced back to Lenin and are demonstrated by present-day Russian policies. These descriptions, often unnecessarily detailed and repetitious, are not as important as elements of Russian imperialism as Barghoorn imagines them to be. They show, however, that in their imperialistic nationalism, the bolsheviks have “reached and over-reached” their Western adversaries. Barghoorn, who likes the Western brand of nationalism better, pleads for its survival as the opposing force to Russia’s drive for world control.
Arnold Toynbee and History — Review


Toynbee and History. Critical Essays and Reviews. Edited by M. F. Ashley Montagu. Porter Sargent Publishers, Boston, 1956, pp. 285; $5.00

Thirty experts in fields related to A Study of History here give their critical appraisals of Toynbee's monumental work. They all admire Toynbee's great erudition and industry even though he is full of misinterpretations, factual errors and “proves exactly nothing.” For one reviewer, the Study is “a house of many mansions, all impressive, many beautiful, but built on sand.” Although Toynbee speaks in the name of science and empiricism, he bases his work “on values that are subjective and unverifiable.” Toynbee's depreciation of the material aspects of civilizations and his mystical orientation, it is said, deprive him of any set of objective criteria for judging the progress and decline of civilizations. The secret of his great popular success may lie in his being the “prophet” of a new cult; a kind of “Billy Graham of the eggheads.”

No Marxist is to be found among these experts. Their arguments against, as well as their reverence for Toynbee relate to philosophical and methodological differences within the camp of bourgeois history. They disagree on definitions, wonder about Toynbee's distinction between civilization and society and speculate on whether civilizations are the historian's proper field. Criticism is directed not so much at Toynbee's meaningless developmental scheme — “challenge and response,” which are carried on by “creative minorities” whose spiritual decline leads to the destruction of civilizations — as at Toynbee's distaste for the modern nation-state and his desire for a world civilization based on the major religions.

Although Toynbee's philosophy of history is ridiculous, national sovereignty is as obsolete as he regards it to be despite the apparent renaissance of nationalism. This is merely a sign of the decline of old, and the formation of new, empires — accompaniments of the further development and transformation of capitalism. Yet some of these critics attack Toynbee solely on the ground of his anti-nationalism. In contrast to Toynbee's insistence that “mankind must become one family or destroy itself,” they regard the nation-state, and Israel in particular, as “the greatest triumph of this epoch and the burial ground of broader associations and groupings.”

Compared with this kind of criticism, even Toynbee's mystical speculations toward a universal religious civilization — nonsensical as they are — appear to be more human and of greater relevance to the trend and the needs of the state. But just as a considerable part of the accumulated data in Toynbee's work may be read without regard to his subjective frame, so much of this criticism may serve to correct false impressions derived from an uncritical reading of this data. The theoretical constructions of both Toynbee and his critics, however, have no meaning for the Marxist student of history.