Reviews:


The Budapest School, whose work is gradually becoming known in the West, is, along with the circle of intellectuals formed around the former Yugoslavian review Praxis, one of the few groups of intellectuals in Eastern Europe, who are developing Marxist thought in an authentic, original and independent direction. However, the importance of their work goes beyond the bounds of specifically Eastern European problems (the critique of Stalinist dogmatism and bureaucratic deformations) to attain a universal significance and import making this group one of the most interesting within contemporary Marxism.

Most members of the Budapest School are disciples and friends of the late Georg Lukács, and there is little doubt that the quality of their work owes much to his teaching and inspiration. In one sense, the existence and the theoretical production of the Budapest School is the best demonstration of the fecundity of the Lukácsian version of the Marxist method.

In a letter to the Times Literary Supplement of February 15, 1971, published as an introduction to the anthology Individuum und Praxis, Lukács identifies himself entirely with the problematic of what he himself calls “The Budapest School of Marxism.” He describes the principal works of Agnes Heller, György Markus, Mihaly Vajda and Ferenc Feher, emphasizing that they share with him a coherent ideological framework (Gedankenwelt). For Lukács, this current of thought bears the promise of the future because, in restoring the authentic method of Marx, it goes beyond “the neo-positivist spiritual manipulation of the 'American way of life'" and “the deformed Stalinist interpretation of Marxism” (p. 7). Lukács’ letter is a clear repudiation of all attempts to dissociate his work from that of his disciples, despite the differences which exist between them on a number of concrete theoretical and ideological questions.

Aside from their more recent work under Lukács' tutelage, the thinkers of the Budapest School have also drawn from his early work (The Theory of the Novel, History and Class-Consciousness, etc.) and have a much more just and lucid understanding of it than may be found in the severe judgments of the old philosopher himself. While sharing the same intellectual concerns as Lukács, their writings are characterized by a genuine originality and by openness towards present social problems.

Disregarding the formal differences in their disciplines—history of philosophy, social philosophy, sociology, political science, esthetics, literature—the works of the School are characterized by a unity of approach, a community of thought, an “elective affinity” sui generis. Among them the diverse branches of knowledge are linked like communicating vessels containing the same spiritual fluid. The theoretical and ethico-

1. See the special issue of Les Temps Modernes (August-September, 1974) and the articles published in the French journal L'Homme et la Société and in the American journal Telos.
social foundation of this unity is a common Weltanschauung, Marxist humanism—the implicit or explicit point of departure for all their writings.

To exemplify the “unity in diversity” of the School, let us focus on a theme which is found in the majority of essays published in Individuum und Praxis: the authentic human community. The opposition between the traditional pre-capitalist community (Gemeinschaft) and the modern industrial society (Gesellschaft) has been one of the leitmotifs of the social philosophy and sociology of Central Europe since the end of the 19th century. The thought of the young Lukács and of the Budapest School is at once a continuation and a critique of this problematic.

We know that the rejection of capitalist fetishism, alienation and reification by the pre-Marxist Lukács was accompanied by a romantic anti-capitalist nostalgia for the “organic communities” of the past. This is particularly noticeable in The Theory of the Novel (1916), which opposes the idyllic image of Homeric Greece to modern bourgeois society. In a remarkable essay in the philosophy of literature (“Is the Novel Problematic? A Contribution to the Theory of the Novel,” translated into English in Telos 15 [Spring 1973]), Ferenc Feher critically examines the nostalgic tendency in Lukács’ study. Proceeding from a discussion of the work of the young Lukács, this article (in reality a chapter of Feher’s book, still unknown in the West, on Dostoyevsky, which contains according to Lukács in his letter of 1971, “a passionate polemic against modern individualism”) develops a new vision of the novel and its socio-cultural significance. Feher rejects the traditional position, shared by Lukács in 1916, which regarded the classic epic, created by a homogenous Gemeinschaft, as the supreme literary and human form in opposition to the novel, the “problematical” product of the modern Gesellschaft. Rather, he emphasizes the illusory and romantic character of the nostalgia for the archaic community and the necessity of comprehending the novel as a new stage of human emancipation which breaks the passive harmony of the pre-capitalist community (and its rigid and monolithic scale of values) and thus opens the way for progress (pp. 151, 189). Thus, it is not a question of looking towards the past, but of incorporating and going beyond the ethico-social achievements of modern (bourgeois) society (the pluralism of values, the dynamic and changing nature of the moral order) and, at the same time, of advancing towards a new, authentically human society founded on the elimination of alienation and on the free development of the “generic forces” (Gattungskräfte) of man (pp. 150, 169-170).

A similar point of view beginning from an analysis of some texts of the young Marx and the Grundrisse is developed by György Markus in his penetrating anthropological essay “Man as Natural, Social, and Conscious Being.” He argues that historical development necessarily produces the dissolution of “narrow” and closed small communities and that the establishment of a world culture and society is a fundamental condition for a future expansion of individual capacities (pp. 83-84). This essay is actually a chapter of his book Marx und der Begriff des menschlichen

2. It is, of course, understood that this is only one of a number of theoretical problems dealt with in the different articles. It would be impossible to summarize the contents of all of them in the framework of a review.
Wesens.3

The problematic of the old and new Gemeinschaft is taken up in a particularly stimulating way by Agnes Heller, whose writings in social philosophy are inspired by both a renewed reading of the works of the young Marx and by the preoccupations of the New Left (especially in the United States and Germany). As Lukács emphasized in his letter, her early writings on the ethics of Aristotle and on Renaissance Man are not only historical essays, but attempts to comprehend the nature of the epochs where alienation was least developed and the gap between human essence and individual potentiality the most reduced.

The essay published in Individuum und Praxis ("Theory and Practice: Their Relation to Human Needs") also seems impregnated with a certain nostalgia for the organic Gemeinschaft of the pre-capitalist past, of which a Plato or a Thomas Aquinas were the spiritual expression (p. 23). However, Heller clearly stresses that, because it is based on the free decision of the individual participants, the new Gemeinschaft will be "organic" in a radically different way. The central idea of the essay, as well as that of the second article, "Family Structure and Communism" (again translated in English in Telos 6 [Fall 1970]), written by Heller and Mihaly Vajda is profoundly radical.4 Socialist revolution (at the level of political and economic structures) is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for a genuine "human emancipation" such as Marx conceived of it. There must also be a simultaneous revolutionizing of daily life and the emergence of a new structure of needs. Without this global transformation of the mode of life, and in particular of the forms of the family, the overthrow of the social structure cannot become irreversible (pp. 18, 127). Now this change of daily life can only be achieved by the development of free Gemeinschaften, the expression of qualitatively new needs and communities in which the traditional dualism between citizen and bourgeois, educator and educated, elites and masses, theory and practice is overcome.

It is tempting to compare this perspective with that of the ethico-communal socialism of a Martin Buber or Gustav Landauer; yet, nothing would be more superficial and false than to qualify it immediately as "utopian," since Agnes Heller explicitly recognizes the necessity of political revolution, of the seizure of power, as a moment of total social revolution (p. 18). Furthermore, her analysis refers explicitly to the attempts to transform social and family life which took place in the Soviet Union in the years immediately following the October Revolution—attempts which were, of course, abandoned after the Stalinist Thermidor which restored the bourgeois family

3. Referring to this work, Lukács wrote in his letter that, based as it is on a profound comprehension of the Marxist method, it represents much more than a philological study. Markus is also the author of an essay on the teleological structure of knowledge in Marxism whose profoundly original and creative character is again underlined by Lukács.

4. Mihal Vajda is the author of a monograph on Husserl which, according to Lukács, constitutes the first real Marxist critical discussion and analysis of phenomenology. He has also published another essay in Individuum und Praxis entitled "Marxism, Existentialism, Phenomenology: A Dialogue" (English translation in Telos 7 [Spring, 1971]).
structure. With bitter lucidity, Heller and Vajda show how the traditional family was left intact in the people's democracies after 1945, while the efforts toward a modification of human relationships assumed the **Aufklärer** character of a “socialist and moral education” from above (p. 119).

It may be thought that the significance that Heller attributes to the experimental communes of American and German youth is excessive, and that the hope in the movement to a new form of family life before a global transformation (p. 122) is not realistic, but the importance and the interest of her remarkable analysis of the dialectic between political revolution and the transformation of daily life and her attempt to define the role and nature of a new **Gemeinschaft** as the basic cell of a communist society are undeniable. One of the most engaging characteristics of her work and that of her colleagues is the capacity to combine the hard lessons of concrete experience in Eastern Europe with the revolutionary hopes and aspirations of the rebellious youth in the West. This capacity is undoubtedly one of the sources of the spiritual fecundity of the Budapest School and of its universal appeal.

Finally, the question of socialist communities is taken up in sociological and/or directly political terms in the essay “**Gemeinschaft und Individual**” by Andras Hegedus and Maria Markus. Hegedus is a former Hungarian prime minister from the Stalinist period who has become a sociologist and a critic of bureaucracy. His other essay published in this collection, “**Modernization and the Alternatives of Social Progress**” (for the English translation, see **Telos** 17 [Fall 1973]) still reveals some illusions about the Hungarian economic reform which are overcome in the second essay. It is probable that the majority of the Budapest School has undergone this same development in their thought.

For Hegedus and Markus, human emancipation, such as Marx understood it, implied the establishment of a network of communities which overcome the fixed opposition between the collective and the individual. This new **Gemeinschaft** is radically distinguished from traditional and pre-capitalist forms: “Here in this new socialist community, the dominant passivity of primitive communities—the unilateral subordination of men to communal norms—is replaced by the active participation of the individuals in the formation of social relations and social norms” (p. 101). It is not a question of unities enclosed in local particularism. The establishment of “humanizing communities” (**humanisierenden Gemeinschaften**) is integrated into a global, macro-structural movement of **social control of administration** by the workers themselves, at the level of the factory and the economy, and of society as a whole (p. 109). Thus, the socialist **Gemeinschaft** simultaneously appears as a genuine alternative to the Stalinist model—a pseudo-collectivity which only reinforces the individual isolation of its members—and to economic reform which implicitly abandons the communal idea and facilitates the development of “technocratic-managerial” ideologies (p. 100).

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*Translated by Dale Tomich*