

MODERN AGE

A QUARTERLY REVIEW



On the Future of Socialism

• *A Symposium* •

*More than today perhaps never
On our palms we have experienced
That warmth of calloused hands
Which were bringing us liberty.*

*It hasn't died down yet, and still it rings,
The clatter of their weaponry,
And the embrace of people in our streets
Continues to be open.*

*And tears on faces, all too true, sincere,
When our country was accepting
Their fallen men, continue burning us,
This I tell you, one and all!*

*And passionately I call, with all my strength:
Don't allow this love to go to waste!
To bear disappointment would be difficult
In this so often disappointed land.**

— Jaroslav Seifert, *Literarni Listy*,
July 26, 1968

A Prefatory Note

Recognizing with some astonishment and satisfaction, or at least hopefulness, the seismic changes unfolding in the Communist sphere, if not in the Communist psyche — changes radically affecting the course of human history and

the fate of nations and peoples — the editors of *Modern Age* believe that an assessment of these changes and their effects, both immediate and long-range, should be presented in these pages. The following symposium “On the Future of

*Translated into English for exclusive publication in *Modern Age* by M. J. Hanak, the Nobel Laureate's poem appeared in Czechoslovakia on the eve of the Soviet 1968 invasion.

Socialism” contains expository responses to and views of the crisis that the Communist mind, and ideology, is presently experiencing. What that crisis, in its total dimensions, means to the Western world and, indeed, to the entire world, is a central question that the distinguished symposiasts in this special issue of *Modern Age* explore in detail and measure with keen insight.

In some ways, in fact, this symposium continues and enlarges not only the thirtieth anniversary issue of *Modern Age* (Summer/Fall 1987), which focused on “The Crisis of Modernity,” but also an earlier special issue (Fall 1985) on “The Anatomy of Terror and Revolution.” In one sense, it can also be said, the following symposium updates the essays in the precedent issues — updates, too, the ideological battles that this journal has been diligently examining since its founding in 1957. Clearly, the twin crises of modernity and Marxism are manifestly connected and inclusive. The issue on “The Crisis of Modernity” provides the kind of background, in breadth and depth, that attains epochal specificity in this symposium “On the Future of Socialism.” And in particular the larger issues of the crisis of modernity help to clarify, define, and perhaps even explain the immediate and emergent consequences of the crisis of Marxism and Socialism, as any careful reading of all these special issues of *Modern Age* will readily confirm. It would be advantageous for a reader, then, to study the issues of *Modern Age*, as cited, in their continuity of critical theme and concern, as well as for their diagnostic and prescriptive approaches.

For Simone Weil, “the only great spirit of our time,” as Albert Camus described her, it is worth recalling here, the whole of Marxism is embodied in Plato’s Great Beast — the Great Beast of social idolatry, “the only *ersatz* of God,” “the false God.” Has that Great Beast, to judge by some of the happenings in the Com-

munist hegemony (when even, for instance, Italy’s Communist Party, seeing itself as something of a relic and its relevance impaired, has changed its name to the Democratic Party of the Left) — has that Great Beast now been finally caught, driven somehow from its lair into open ground, its weakness exposed, its rapacity contained, its dangers reduced? This is still another major question with which the symposiasts wrestle here. In this connection, Simone Weil’s unfinished essay, written in London in 1943, “Is There a Marxist Doctrine?”, has rich and remarkable pertinence, and is well worth consulting in the course of reading the essays in this symposium. The central and most memorable argument of her critique, and it is one that is too often and too conveniently ignored, stresses the fact that in modern times the certitude that once rested in God has evaporated and has been replaced by faith in matter.

“Man cannot bear for more than a moment,” Simone Weil goes on to write, “to be alone in willing the good. He needs an all-powerful ally. If you do not believe in the remote, silent, secret omnipotence of a spirit, there remains only the manifest omnipotence of matter.” In this phenomenon she finds the inevitable absurdity of all materialism. She adds that if the materialist could set aside all concern for the good, he would then be consistent; but the materialist is unable to attain such a goal. Her remarks are filled with the wisdom and insight that so many modern social thinkers (and leaders) either lack or betray, and the implicit truths of which are irrefutable, no matter how much her antagonists mock her witness as “the categorical imperative in skirts.”

Readers will find neither critical irresponsibility nor invective in this symposium, and indeed will be especially grateful to the contributors of the various essays for reflecting patiently and

discriminatingly on the ultimate moral significance of Simone Weil's indictment of Marx's "messianic illusion" and Marxism's revolutionary materialism in three trenchant sentences that are at the very heart of her view of Marxist doctrine: "The very being of man is nothing else but a perpetual straining after an unknown good. And the materialist is a man. That is why he cannot prevent himself from ultimately regarding matter as a machine for manufacturing the good."

The editors of *Modern Age*, it should not go unsaid, are deeply grateful to Professor Stephen Tonsor for composing the prospectus of the symposium "On the Future of Socialism" that serves as the operative basis for the contributors' responses. The full text of this prospectus reads as follows:

"As all of us are aware as a result of the stirring events of recent months, Marxism and its pale brother, Socialism, are passing through a major crisis. In a certain sense this crisis is the political phase of the even larger crisis which marks the passing of modernity, for ideology, Right and Left, was the manifestation of modernity in politics. By the end of World War II the cultural dimensions of modernity were already showing signs of disruption and advanced decay. Politics, because of its instantiation in the state, was the last thing to go. Even here the crisis is not unexpected as increasingly planned economics and Socialist direction have been giving way to the market in West-European states in the course of the last decade.

"The debate aroused by the collapse of Marxism has been especially acute in Germany in part because Socialism stands in the way of German unity and the economic recovery of East Germany. It is, however, a major European problem which has implications well beyond the economic.

"The sorts of questions I would like to see discussed begin with a discus-

sion of the relationship of Marxism and Socialism to modernity. This is a vexed question, especially in the realm of culture. Is there such a direct relationship between Marxism and modernity that the post-modern age of necessity challenges Marxism?

"The second major question has been raised by Joachim Fest, editor of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, who asked why West German intellectuals were so indifferent to the efforts of the population of East Germany to disenthral itself from the trammels of Marxism. Clearly many West German intellectuals would like to keep Marxism in place no matter what the cost in terms of freedom and economic progress. What is the attraction of Marxism for intellectuals? Raymond Aron observed archly that 'Marxism is the opium of the intellectuals.' Are intellectuals hopelessly Utopian? Does the detachment of the intellectual from traditional religion drive him to a belief in the secular transformation of the individual and the society? Why does the intellectual, as Arthur Koestler observed, prefer the beautiful error to the messy and imperfect truth? The second topic then poses the question, 'The Intellectual and Marxism: can the link be broken?'

"The third question is a variant of the second, 'Can mankind survive if Utopia is abandoned?' Is an orientation to the future a necessary dimension to a dynamic society? I have always argued that I have managed to live quite well without a belief in Utopia; indeed, my hope is not in this world but in a transcendent realm. If Utopia is lopped off, will we bring an end to history?

"The fourth question is a crucial one: 'Are Marxism and Socialism coterminous?' Can Socialism, even social democracy, survive in the absence of theoretical and practical Marxism? I myself believe it is most unlikely but I should like to see the matter discussed.

“Some western intellectuals have, with the collapse of Central-European and Soviet Marxism, called for ‘Socialism with a human face’ to replace it. It is argued that the Marxism which has gone down in rains is ‘Stalinist-Socialism,’ a ‘bad’ heretical Socialism and that it should now be replaced by a ‘humane, democratic Socialism.’ Is it not true, however, that ‘there is only one Socialism’ which in all of its manifestations is coercive, the degree of coercion and tyranny depending on the completeness of any particular Socialism’s commitment to the achievement of equality and directed economy? Is Socialism multiple or unitary?

“The discussion of the above question raises the issue of whether or not Swedish social democracy is a Socialist system or simply an advanced welfare state with a market economy. When does the welfare state shade into Socialism?

“Some West-German intellectuals have argued that the survival of Socialism is necessary in order to prevent ‘pure capitalism’ with its ‘greed,’ ‘dehumanization and ruthless exploitation’ from showing its ugly face. The argument is that, once Socialism is removed, capitalism will retreat atavistically to the era of the robber barons, the sweatshop, and child labor. In short, Socialism forces capitalism to be good. This argument

neglects the fact that standards of welfare in a society are related to social consensus, and moral, cultural, and economic development rather than structural economic forms as a single determinant.

“Finally, what does the end of Socialism portend for world peace and freedom? Will the breakdown of Socialism as an integrative international movement portend international disintegration, an increase in warfare, and an intensification of international competition? Can the market as an integrative force replace Socialism — or indeed was Socialism ever much of an integrative force? Can religious reawakenings and fundamentalism provide a new social cement?

“What are the implications for freedom and the full humanistic development of the individual? Was the total record of Socialism ever very good in this respect?”

In presenting this symposium to the readers of *Modern Age*, the editors want to re-confirm their undaunted commitment to the original intent of the founders of *Modern Age* to help identify, in Henry Regnery’s words, “the forces and influences that have determined the history of our time, together with the illusions and the stupidities that play their own peculiar role in the destiny of nations, including our own.”

— G.A.P.