

The Resumption of History *(After a Marxist Detour)*

WILL MARXISM SURVIVE and continue to exert a strong influence in the post-Communist world? Will Socialism, in one form or another, play an important role in it? Or will the future mankind not only abandon Socialism and Marxism, but also lose all interest in any sort of Utopia? These are the three key questions which I have distilled from the many more that Professor Stephen Tonsor has posed before the symposiasts.

He has asked the right questions at the right time. He is right in suggesting that the ongoing collapse of Communism (he chooses to say "Socialism") in Central Europe and the Soviet Union as part of "the even larger crisis" involving a number of fundamental intellectual assumptions on which the present era of world history, particularly of the West, is based. Calling it "the crisis of modernity," Tonsor foresees its eventual outcome in the emergence of a post-modern era. He is optimistic about the post-modern world because, even though the two "modern" isms—Marxism and Socialism—might survive, their role will then be negligible. As to utopias in general, he sees no use for them at all, either at present or in the future.

I agree with Tonsor on the crucial issue: that the collapse of Communism in the East will have a profound effect in the West, and everywhere in the world. I share his cautious optimism about the post-modern world. I am ready to accept the terms he proposes for denoting the two historical eras, the age of modernity and the post-modern age, on the threshold of which—I agree again—we presently stand. However, I can hardly re-

spond to his questions without using two additional terms, communism and totalitarianism, which he somehow failed to use in his otherwise cogent and provocative prospectus. I find the two missing isms indispensable in any discussion of modernity.

What is wrong with modernity is not its gravitation toward socialism *per se*, as Tonsor seems to suggest, but that it has given birth to socialism of the worst kind—Communism, which I define as a totalitarian Socialism. As such, it is a political and economic manifestation of the larger cultural phenomenon of left totalitarianism, which has been the prevalent intellectual fashion of the twentieth century. With its roots reaching back to the Jacobine extremism of the French revolution, left totalitarianism (Talmon calls it "totalitarian democracy")¹ has produced in the twentieth century a monster, the first and foremost totalitarian state in the world, the U.S.S.R., the demise of which we now witness.

In brief, my reply to Tonsor's three questions is this: Neither Communism nor any other form of totalitarian Socialism will survive into the twenty-first century. Marxism, as the ideological foundation of totalitarian Socialism, will not survive either. On the other hand, non-totalitarian forms of Socialism (as espoused by French socialists, German and Swedish social-democrats, British laborists and some members of the Democratic Party in the United States) may not only survive, but also might even become re-invigorated, if their proponents would be clever enough to disassociate themselves from Marxism. As to utopias,

the propensity to dream them up is probably inherent in human nature, and I see no harm in them as long as their inventors do not impose them on mankind by force and guile.

Let me now elaborate on my response by connecting it to some of the more specific questions that Tonsor has asked. "Is there such a direct relationship between Marxism and modernity that the post-modern age of necessity challenges Marxism?" asks Tonsor. The reply is an unequivocal and emphatic "yes." Moreover, I think that the removal of Marxism from its present position as the prevalent intellectual force in the West is a precondition for a peaceful transition of mankind to the post-modern age.

Having begun in 1789 with the bloody French Revolution, the age of modernity has ended exactly two hundred years later with a peaceful uprising in Central Europe against Communism, the founding fathers of which have derived their inspiration from the French Revolution and, in particular, from its Jacobine stage. One might say that from 1789 to the present, the intellectual flagman of modernity has been careening to the left; and, from 1848 (when *The Communist Manifesto* was proclaimed) to the present, Marx's followers have actually been trying to overturn it. If the West wants to sail into the post-modern era smoothly, it must restore its intellectual balance. This cannot be accomplished unless Marx's true role in the modern era is clarified.

Marx was the true progenitor of Communist totalitarianism. If Lenin, Trotsky, and Stalin were its fathers, Marx was its godfather. He became so the moment he proclaimed that the "abolition of private property" was the essence of his Communist theory. He was thus to lay the intellectual foundation for the ineffectual Soviet economic system of totalitarian Socialism (now euphemistically called the "administrative command system").

For, whatever their deviations from the "true" Marx may have been, Soviet leaders, until Gorbachev, never dared to disobey Marx's injunction against private property. As a result, not only was the Soviet economy doomed from the start (because the incentive for owning property and caring for it was eliminated by a nearly total nationalization), but also the entire nation became dependent on the dictators' mercy. That dependence made a mockery of human rights and, under Stalin, paralyzed all resistance to state-sponsored terror.

Some other aspects of Marx's teaching were just as totalitarian. The Bolsheviks certainly took a notice of his intolerance of intellectual heterodoxy. "The charges against Communism made from a religious, a philosophical, and, generally, from an ideological standpoint, are not deserving of serious examination," reads *The Communist Manifesto*. Pronouncements like this were used to justify the establishment of Marxist-Leninist ideological monopoly in clear violation of freedom of conscience. That monopoly largely remained intact until the advent of *glasnost*.

Then there was Marx's extravagant claim that his teaching was strictly scientific. Unlike religion, Marx's "science" was supposed to have universal and "total" validity. It purported to explain everything on heaven and earth. It called for a world revolution. It promised a final solution — the establishment of a paradise on earth. Contrary to his dialectical premises, Marx aimed at reaching a happy end of history. In short, the whole structure of Marx's thinking was both utopian and totalitarian. Although he failed during his life time to implement his ideas, his call for class-struggle violence as "the mid-wife of history" was answered, in the twentieth century, by a series of violent revolutions in the shadows of which we still live.

While the Bolsheviks succeeded in

establishing a Left totalitarian regime in Russia, their comrades in Central Europe managed only to provoke the Fascists and the Nazis to create totalitarian states of their own. For a while the ship of the West suddenly took a sharp tilt to the right. Although the Right totalitarians were defeated, the victory of Western democracies was bought at the cost of concessions to Left totalitarianism. The ship of Europe was split in two. While the Eastern half was swallowed entirely by Left totalitarianism (under Soviet tutelage), the Western half assumed—under the pressure of the Soviets and the home-grown Marxists—a permanent tilt to the left. That tilt remains to the present day. The flagman of Western modernity has yet to regain its intellectual balance.

But what about the Eastern half? With its flagmen, the U.S.S.R. and China, now dead in the water and its Central European ships defecting from Communism, this fleet has no hope to catch up with the West. It is about to sink. But can the West celebrate a “victory”? Hardly. First of all, the Communist flagmen, the U.S.S.R. and China, have become unseaworthy in spite of Western efforts to keep them afloat. Besides, not only was their Marxist blueprint of Western origin, but also the West’s own intellectual captains have for decades advocated Marxism as the means of universal salvation.

Some of Tonsor’s questions are revealing of the extent to which, he believes, intellectual captains of the West were influenced by Marxism. Quoting Raymond Aron’s observation that “Marxism is the opium of the intellectuals,” Tonsor virtually equates Western Marxists with the intellectual establishment of the West. “The Intellectual and Marxism; can the link be broken?” asks Tonsor dramatically.

I would not deny that Marxists have exerted great influence in the West.² But to equate Marxists with intellectuals

seems unfair to the latter. Such equation denigrates the intelligence of non-Marxists. And yet it has a merit. Though superior in numbers, non-Marxist intellectuals have too often allowed their Marxist antagonists to speak for the entire intellectual community. However, this is not because they lacked intelligence or knowledge. No, what they lacked was the courage to express their views loudly and clearly. Lacking that courage (for fear of being accused of “McCarthyism,” “war mongering” etc.), they failed to put Marxists in their place. Thus they have imperceptibly become infected by Marxism through osmosis, that is, a steady seepage into intellectual life of the ideas and terms which they did not dare to reject.

Tonsor suggests that a transition to the post-modern era might require that “the link” between the intellectual and Marxism be broken. However, breaking “the link” can hardly start without breaking, first, the “spell” that the Marxists have managed to cast over the entire Western intellectual establishment. According to that “spell,” Communism might not be the best choice for “us,” the civilized Western folks “steeped in democratic traditions,” but it is a blessing for the “lesser breeds of mankind”—the Russians and the Chinese, the Africans and the Latins — who, we are told, have never known anything better. Whatever “excessive” crimes the Communists may have committed, so the “spell” goes in regard to the U.S.S.R., they were due to neither Marx nor “true” Marxism, but to the “despotic” traditions of the Russian people who just cannot live without a Stalin. Therefore — and here the “spell” reaches its pitch — the true enemies of the West are not the Communists, but the Russians who are said to be congenitally “anti-democratic,” “expansionist,” “chauvinistic,” and “anti-Semitic” people.³

Perhaps nobody has shown better the falsity of this spell, as far as Westerners

are concerned, than Paul Hollander. His book, *Political Pilgrims: Travels of Western Intellectuals to the Soviet Union, China, and Cuba*, contains an extensive, albeit incomplete, record of how “the best and the brightest” of the West have indulged in worshipping Stalin and other Communist dictators.⁴ He aptly calls them “political pilgrims,” for no amount of empirical evidence could disabuse them from their worship of Communism. Alas, most of the “pilgrims” never thought of themselves as Communists, nor were known as such. Among them there were many outstanding Western writers, artists, conservative politicians, and even clergymen. In fact, Hollander’s “scroll of pilgrims” reads like “Who’s Who” of the Western cultural establishment.⁵ Faced with the tragic failure of Communism in one country after another, they have been merely changing the destination of pilgrimage from the U.S.S.R. in the 1930s to Mao’s China in the 1960s, Cuba in the 1970s, Albania, Angola and Nicaragua in the 1980s.

These “pilgrims” (and many others who were not listed) actually went for a “ride.” All enjoyed it. All sang songs to Communist “Drivers” — from Stalin and Mao to Ho Chi Minh, Enver Hoxha, Kim Il Sung, and Fidel Castro. Some of them saw the light later in their career. But very few have ever admitted their participation in the spreading of Communist lies. Since they represented *la crème de la crème* of the Western establishment, they are chiefly responsible for our skewed perception of Communism. One of the chief reasons that the Communist utopia has stayed in power for so long, and with such a devastating effect on the East, was precisely the fact that so many leading intellectuals of the West have lent their talents, names, and authority for sustaining it.

Julien Benda has called it “the treason of the intellectuals.” Jean-Francois Revel has called it “the totalitarian temptation.”

Peter Collier and David Horowitz have shown, in their book *The Destructive Generation: Second Thoughts About the Sixties*, how that treason was committed and how that temptation was indulged in — by themselves and their New Left comrades in a not so remote past:

The Red Terror is the terror that “idealist Communists” (like our parents) and “anti-Stalinist” Leftists (like ourselves) have helped to spread around the world. You and I and our parents were totalitarians in democratic America. The democratic fact of America prevented us from committing atrocities willed by our faith. Impotence was our only innocence. In struggles all over the world, we pledged our faith and gave our support to the perpetrators of the totalitarian deed.⁶

This admission largely dispells the “spell” that Western Marxists are somehow morally and intellectually superior to their “Eastern” comrades, to say nothing of uneducated Russian and Chinese masses. For instance, they would never have allowed such totalitarian “excesses” as a Stalinist terror or a Maoist “Cultural” revolution, if they had come to power. But Collier and Horowitz’s testimony tells a different story. It cannot be dismissed as “kid stuff” of the sixties. The authors remind us that by 1989 those “kids” who had caused our defeat in Vietnam have metamorphosed themselves into pundits of the establishment. “They never talk about the evil they have done,” except in “a mock admission of guilt, which is actually self-exculpation in disguise.” They have hardly changed their radical aims, but they have changed their tactic. In the guise of “progressivism,” they now infiltrate their radical ideas into the very establishment they had vowed to destroy: “the Democratic Party, the church, the universities, and various liberal institutions.”⁷

As to Tonsor’s question—“What is the attraction of Marxism for intellectuals?”—few could answer it better than Horowitz

who has portrayed his own “romance” with Marxism as typical of a rather large pool from which both Marxists and intellectuals have been drawn: secular Jews. A Jew himself, Horowitz describes how he and his parents were attracted to Marxism precisely to the degree that they had alienated themselves from the traditions of Judaism, the Jewish community around them, and, ultimately, from America itself. Hence their obsession with Marxism to the point of idolatry. What attracted them most in the “progressive Idea” was its totalitarian essence. Explains Horowitz:

Totalitarianism is the possession of reality by a political Idea — the Idea of the socialist kingdom on earth, the redemption of humanity by political force. To radical believers, this Idea is so beautiful it is like God Himself. It provides the meaning of a radical life. It is the solution that makes everything possible; it is the end that justifies every regrettable means. Belief in the kingdom of socialist lies into truth, evil into good. For the revolutionary religion, the Way, the Truth, and the Life, of Salvation lie not with God above but with men below — ruthless, brutal, venal men — on whom the faith confers the power of gods.⁸

The above explanation also answers Tonsor’s next question—“Does the detachment of the intellectual from traditional religion drive him to a belief in the secular transformation of the individual and the society?” It does. In fact, it drives him much further — to a total alienation from reality. Horowitz’s experience with this alienation in America in the 1960s was essentially similar to that of the Russians and Russian Jews at the dawn of the century, or the Chinese intellectuals mid-century. However, these three avant garde groups in the spread of Communism around the world had felt an additional pressure to discard their national and religious heritage (Russian Christianity, Orthodox Judaism, and Confucian-

ism, respectively). Suffering from an inferiority complex toward everything Western, they felt ashamed of their “ancient backwardness,” which, they believed, prevented their countries from catching up with the Western flagman of modernity.

The pro-Western Russian intelligentsia, in particular, forsook “the messy and imperfect truth” of Russia’s historical reality for the “beautiful error” of Russia’s utopia, lending its support for the 1905 revolution. When the “beautiful error” turned both bloody and ugly, the most perceptive of them had their “second thoughts” about it. Disenchanted with Marxism and radicalism, they published in 1909 the collection *Vekhi* (“Signposts”). Pointing out an alienation of the “progressive” intellectuals from Russia’s own heritage, they condemned their infatuation with both the Marxist utopia and the violent means to achieve it. Tragically, these “signposts,” spelling out a clear warning against the impending catastrophe, were ignored by the left-leaning Russian intellectual establishment of the time. The totalitarian detour of the twentieth century history then began.

One cannot help thinking that, had the Russian intelligentsia followed the signposts of 1909, there would have been no revolution. Russia would have reformed itself into a dynamic, prosperous, and free nation. Instead, Russia had to learn the lesson the hard way. Waking up from its 70-year-long nightmare, it finally retrieved *Vekhi* from a memory hole.⁹ The worst brutalities of the twentieth century occurred during this hiatus in history. For Russia it was an especially devastating black hole. It devoured a multitude of lives, books, ideas, and institutions. Was it Russia’s dead-end or a tortuous detour? It was the price Russia had to pay for losing faith in herself and for choosing what she thought was an historical short-cut to modernity — the fateful path of Marxism.

The West, too, had its early warning against yielding to a totalitarian temptation. It came in the form of Mary Shelley's novel, *Frankenstein; or The Modern Prometheus* (1818). There is hardly a work of literature that has been so much popularized and so little understood. It encapsulates the driving force of modernity with such clarity and foresight that it may be called the myth of modernity.¹⁰ In it Mary Shelley captured the *Zeitgeist* that has inspired the Western intellectual elite from her time to the present. That *Zeitgeist* is theomachic Prometheanism, that is, a rivalry with God (or gods) as a benefactor of humanity. It was in that spirit that Dr. Victor Frankenstein created his monster, an artificial human being that, he thought, would surpass God's creation. And it was in the same spirit that Dr. Karl Marx invented his theory of constructing a "perfectly scientific" human society which turned out to be just as artificial a monster.

As I have previously argued in the pages of *Modern Age*,¹¹ Marx is as responsible for the crimes committed by the "monsters" of totalitarian states as Frankenstein was for those committed by his. But there is a difference: Frankenstein not only came to regret his "scientific" endeavor to surpass God, but also devoted the rest of his life to undoing the monster he created. After it slayed his best friend and his bride, Frankenstein pursued the monster from the heart of Europe to the Black Sea. And then says Frankenstein, "Amidst the wilds of Tartary and Russia, although he still evaded me, I have ever followed in his track." Failing to undo his creature, Frankenstein bequeathed, on his deathbed, the task to his friend.

Marx, on the other hand, had died well before his "monsters" came to being. It is gainless to speculate what his attitude to their crimes might have been. But it is clear enough that those of his heirs, who

see him as a "Western humanist" rather than a totalitarian, have done little to restrain the "monsters" created in his name from wreaking destruction on "the wilds of Tartary and Russia." At any rate, more is heard from the other group of heirs who, until recently, took pride in adding to and abetting any monster as long as it claimed a Marxist origin.

Alas, many in the latter group call themselves socialists and social-democrats. Although they have "revised" Marxism by cleansing it from a number of totalitarian features (insistence on violence, total nationalization, etc.), they have applied the "revised" version only to their own countries (Sweden, West Germany). However, in global politics they have too often given succor to the forces of Left Totalitarians—in the U.S.S.R., China, Vietnam, Cuba, and Nicaragua (under Ortega).

Together with Joachim Fest of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, Tonsor wonders why West German intellectuals were "so indifferent to the efforts of the population of East Germany to disenthral itself from the trammels of Marxism." In my opinion, this "indifference" amounts to an intellectual treason, that is, siding, consciously or not, with the totalitarians. It has to do with the fact that Western intellectuals in general have been too eager to blame the failures of Communism on the peoples under its rule, while remaining blind to the totalitarian essence of the Marxist blueprint itself.

Now, to prove their commitment to social justice, international peace, and human rights, the left-leaning Western intellectuals – be they Socialists, social-democrats, or even Marxists, if they are really concerned with the poor and downtrodden—would have to disassociate themselves from Marxism, Communism, and totalitarianism in no uncertain terms. By so doing they may yet assure the survival of socialism, not as a universally

imposed system of governance and production, but as an ideal of social justice, national harmony, and global cooperation.

Regardless of what they do, history is ready to resume its course beyond the totalitarian detour of modernity — toward an ecologically and politically balanced global symbiosis. There will be, no doubt, new utopias dreamt up, but mankind will be better prepared to resist the temptation of accepting “gifts” from those god-fighting “Prometheans” who want to force themselves on the world through intellectual scheming and violence.

— Vladislav Krasnov

¹J. L. Talmon, *The Origin of Totalitarian Democracy* (New York, 1960). ²While the influence of Marxists in the West has been great, it has nothing to do with the quality of their product. It is mainly due to the unfair tactics they use in propagating their ideas. The avowed enemies of the free market, they are no friends of free intellectual exchange either. Although they fail to establish a complete ideological monopoly in the West (as their comrades did in the East), they have largely succeeded in subverting, manipulating, and “cornering the market.” They

have done so by employing “divide-and-conquer” and “progressive front” tactics, by bullying, intimidating, and labelling their opponents as “reactionaries,” “McCarthyists,” and worse. ³In an updated version of this spell, “Reform Communists” are substituted for Communists. Headed by Gorbachev, they are portrayed as the West’s last hope against “the Russians.” Even some conservative sovietologists have fallen for this “spell.” ⁴New York, 1981. ⁵Among them there are Gerhart Hauptmann, Lion Feuchtwanger, Heinrich and Thomas Mann, and Berthold Brecht of Germany; Anatole France, Henri Barbusse, Romain Rolland, Andre Maurois, Louis Aragon, Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre of France; G. B. Shaw, H. G. Wells, Beatrice and Sidney Webb, and Hewlett Johnson (Dean of Canterbury!) of Britain; Theodore Dreiser, John Dos Passos, Upton Sinclair, Anna Louise Strong, Albert Rys Williams, Walter Duranty (*The New York Times’s* Pulitzer prize winner for reporting on the U.S.S.R.), Maurice Hindus, Jerome Davis, Ambassador Joseph Davies (*Mission to Moscow*), I. F. Stone, W. E. B. Du Bois, Susan Sontag, Norman Mailer, and Jane Fonda of the United States; Pablo Picasso of Spain; Octavio Paz of Mexico; Pablo Neruda of Chile; Martin Andersen Nexø of Denmark; and Jan Myrdal of Sweden. ⁶New York, 1989, p. 289. ⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 218-19. ⁸*Ibid.*, p. 287. ⁹*Vekhi* were reprinted in the U.S.S.R. in 1990. ¹⁰The word “myth” is used here in the Greek sense of a condensed truth about a longer historical period rather than in the modern sense as something false or falsified. ¹¹“Karl Marx as Frankenstein: Toward a Genealogy of Communism,” *Modern Age*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (Winter 1978), 72-82.