

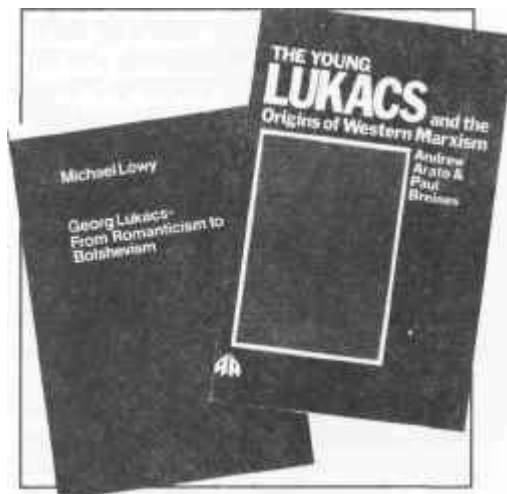
the heart of all the major revolutionary struggles of our century; on the other hand, equally real, just as turbulent, but rather less violent, was the movement of theory, the dialectic of ideas. In common with other men and women of his time, Lukacs was a bearer of momentous historical forces; but more than most others he was also the conscious agent of a theoretical development which struggled to grasp and even mould the history he was living. The drama and pathos of his life arise from the relations, and often the contradictions, between these two movements, movements.

The two works discussed here are both in their different ways political, and both base their theoretical concepts on Lukacs' own writings. Furthermore both select as what is valid in Lukacs' development the specific form of Marxism worked out by him in the renowned 'History and Class Consciousness' (HCC) written between 1919 and 1922. In other words, from the long drama of Lukacs' life our authors select a particular act, almost a particular scene, from the middle of the play and declare it to be the moment at which the hero formulated the truth. Why, then, the privilege attached to HCC?

Before the first world war Lukacs, who was born in 1885 into the ranks of the Hungarian big bourgeoisie, was deeply engaged in the intellectual milieu centred on the German universities and whose characteristic features were 'anti-capitalist romanticism' and the 'tragic vision' of modern culture. German capitalism underwent an immense development between 1875 and 1914. This change, containing within it strong tendencies towards monopoly, brought forth a powerful reaction from the intellectuals, on Lowy's argument partly at least as a result of their structural affinity with the petty bourgeoisie whose existence the new trend threatened.

The plaintive response of romantic thought to the soulless forms of advancing capitalism is still echoed in modern sociological discourse: one has only to think of Toennies' *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*. Undoubtedly the most powerful formulation of the tragic vision, however, was Max Weber's, with its deep despair before the irresistible march of rational calculation. And here we must note at once that the problem is staged within an idealist world view, on the neo-Kantian assumption of a social world constituted by the subjective meanings of actors for whom their subjectivity takes the form of an alien and overwhelming objectivity.

Lukacs waged intellectual war on this alienated culture, looking at various times to Platonism, Russian mysticism, Tolstoy and artistic creation as weapons with which to



break through it. What he did not consider, at least not before 1918, was Marxism; if only because for him Marxism was a science precisely of the objectified forms of capitalist society, not an ideology of the transcendence of those forms as such into a realm of freedom.

The first world war drove the tragic vision to its crisis; and the October Revolution showed that the crisis could be resolved. But how was the Bolshevik victory to be understood? Had not the neo-Kantians painted the modern world as the inevitable terminus of human subjectivity? Hence triumphant Bolshevism meant *either* a new principle of subjectivity (a subjectivist dialectic) *or else* that the real material forces of history had shown the tragic vision to be a mere ideological appearance now ruthlessly cast aside.

Lukacs joined the newly-formed Hungarian Communist Party in late 1918 and played a leading part in the brief Hungarian Soviet Republic of 1919. The overthrow of the Republic and the ensuing counter-revolutionary terror forced Lukacs into exile in Vienna, and it was there that he worked on HCC. Condemned by Zinoviev and the Comintern it continued to exercise an influence and was soon regarded as the foundation stone of what came to be called 'Western Marxism'. Despite the immense influence of HCC Lukacs — in the movement of whose thought it represented merely a passing if important moment — adopted many of the criticisms levelled at it. In 1967, four years before his death, he wrote that 'it is precisely those parts of the book that I regard as theoretically false that have been most influential'.

That HCC's Marxism is equivocal is suggested by the comment of Arato and Breines that it involves 'a powerful synthesis of dialectical theory with Max Weber's sociological analysis of "Western rationality"' (p. 114). In other words we have

### THE YOUNG LUKACS AND THE ORIGINS OF WESTERN MARXISM

Andrew Arato and Paul Breines  
Pluto Press 1979 228pp. Pb £4.95

### GEORG LUKACS — FROM ROMANTICISM TO BOLSHEVISM

Michael Lowy  
NLB 1979 224pp. £10.99

Georg Lukacs lived one of the most remarkable lives of our era, a dramatic life. As a drama it owed its power to the social contradictions lying at its root and to which it succeeded in giving a communicable form. Moreover, these were contradictions of world-historical significance. For in his life we find the confrontation of two movements: on the one hand the real, crude movement of history, a movement which grips each one of us but which in Lukacs' case threw him into

a theory which opposes essentially the reified forms of human consciousness, become alienated as a system of apparently 'natural' laws, to the dialectic of consciousness which opens up these objectified forms once more to the dissolving power of reason and transcends them in a new synthesis. Hence we have the emergence of a *politics* with the not inconsiderable merit of invariably stressing the active, revolutionary side of dialectic, the restlessness of thought itself pacing the cage of its own institutionalised, routinised, objective forms.

Both Lowy and Arato and Breines provide careful accounts of Lukacs' road to the communist movement and to 'History and Class Consciousness', Lowy's survey of German anti-capitalist romanticism and its impact on the Hungarian intellectuals being something of a masterpiece. The problems begin with their interpretations of Lukacs' subsequent career. For Lukacs gave his allegiance not merely to the Party as conceived in HCC as the bearer of the de-reifying world outlook to which the working class had potentially a privileged access but in actual empirical life to the Hungarian Communist Party and the Comintern. By doing so he clearly registered a widening breach with his earlier position: for just as in the 'tragic vision' one of the most character-

istic features of the fate of modern culture is rational bureaucracy, so too in the theory of 'reification' we find the same idea, though now, it is true, as a moment in a dialectic which ultimately will annul or smash the reified form. Yet it is just this category of bureaucracy which both the present works find incarnated in the actual organisations of our movement: hence the odium in which they hold 'bureaucratic' parties.

The older Lukacs could scarcely have more forcefully objected to certain basic concepts of HCC. For him the book lacked a 'genuinely materialist' account of the interaction between production and social relations. Hence for the 'resistance' of the specific material forms of history had been substituted a subjectivist notion of reified forms to be dissolved by an essentially ideological dialectic.

At the root of the perennial attraction exercised by HCC there therefore lies a conception of 'objective spirit' as itself the enemy, even those objective forms — such as parties and trade unions — which are weapons in our struggle. But whatever their theoretical bearings, the scholarly content of these works adds much to our understanding of the important issues involved in the debate on 'Western Marxism'.

**Roger Hallam**

## LENINGRAD £155

Aug 2-13 and Aug 16-27  
via Rostock (GDR), Stockholm,  
Helsinki

*Price includes:* Full board in hotel in city centre, superb sight-seeing programme, meeting with English-speaking Soviet citizens, and free theatre evening.

Full day in Moscow only £35 extra

## BERLIN, DRESDEN, LEIPZIG £135

Aug 16-24 and Aug 23-31  
Full board in five-star hotel

*The sight-seeing programme includes:* Meissen porcelain production, Zwinger Galleries, ISKRA printing press, and discussion with the Friendship Society, a visit to a kindergarten & Dimitrov Court House.

Phone or write

## YORKSHIRE TOURS

49 Thornton Lodge Road, Huddersfield HD1 3JQ  
Telephone: 0484 24269



## WORLD MARXIST REVIEW

### Lenin and Mankind's Progress

M. Suslov

### The Anti-Imperialist Tide in Iran

A. Khavari

### Goal: Left Unity

M. Costello

### The Historical Fortunes of Capitalism in Latin America

A. Delgado and A. Shulgovsky

### Workers' Commissions: A Militant Contingent of Spanish Labour

J. Ariza Rico

Single issue 40p Subscription (1 year) £6.00 for 12 issues

Apply to WMR, Central Books,

14 The Leathermarket, London SE1 3ER