

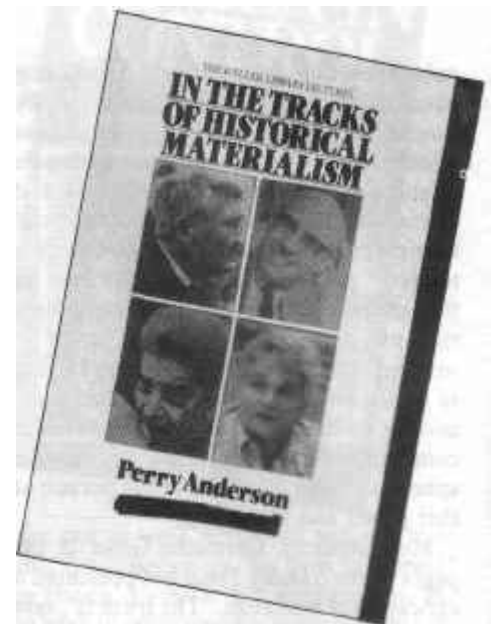
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fornia at Irvine. Its cerebral character and presentation is tuned to an elite rather than the wider spectrum of those interested in Marxism. While not an easy read, a journey through it is rewarding, especially because the investigation encompasses both the historical background to trends in Marxism and the inner tensions and problems within Marxism which have influenced its development.

The book is in part a retrospective assessment of the conclusions and predictions of his *Considerations on Western Marxism*, but is primarily concerned with changes in the political and geographical landscape of Marxism in the Western world from the mid-70s to the present day. Commenting on his past conclusions he indicates that in the main they have been borne out by events and that, indeed, 'the grand Western Marxist tradition — with its epistemological or aesthetic, sombre or esoteric tonalities — has effectively come to an end and in its stead there has emerged, with remarkable celerity and confidence, another kind of Marxist culture. . . .' What then are some of the salient features of the changes in the landscape of Marxism? An overall feature is an appetite for the concrete, expressed in confronting questions of contemporary capitalism — of economics and of social and political structures, thus advancing theoretical work in previously neglected areas, such as the state.

Geographically, Anderson points to a shift in the centre of gravity of Marxist culture from Latin-speaking Europe, particularly France, to the English-speaking countries of Britain and, in a more restricted way, North America. In this context he highlights the contribution of Marxist historians in Britain, already formidable in the 50s and consolidated in the past ten years, both in the range of important works and in the bridging of the gap between historiography and philosophy. He observes that since the publication of Edward Thompson's *Poverty of Theory* it is impossible for Marxists to proceed as if 'their history and their theory were two separate mental worlds.'

To discover why Marxism, which had dominated the French intellectual scene since the Liberation, was usurped by structuralism, Perry Anderson embarks on an excursion into structuralism and post-structuralism, which he dissects trenchantly. In the course of this, some observations are made about Althusserianism which, even in its zenith, 'was always



constituted in an intimate and fatal dependence on a structuralism that both preceded it and would survive it'. He concludes that the limitations of structuralism and its inability to make the connection between structure and subject in the historical process is not a serious challenge to a confident historical materialism and could not alone account for the recession in Marxism's influence in France.

He locates the main reason for the decline in its fortunes in the impact of the vicissitudes of the international communist movement and the consequent tensions and trends — the trauma resulting from the Soviet Union's intervention in Czechoslovakia, the disastrous outcome of the Cultural Revolution in China, the high hopes of Eurocommunism and the failure to realise them.

In his view the impact on Marxism was sharpest in those countries of Latin Europe where the mass Communist Parties presented a formidable threat to the existing system, and he terms the crisis of Marxism a 'regional crisis'. In other capitalist countries, like Britain, the situation was different, since there had never been mass Communist Parties to attract the same hopes.

While there is considerable substance in what Perry Anderson has to say about the shock of events affecting the international communist movement and its internal schisms, it is doubtful if his explanation of the differences in the state of Marxism is adequate. Furthermore, the vigour and influence of Marxism cannot be viewed solely from within an academic circuit. If placed in a nation-wide terrain, the picture takes on a somewhat different colour. For

IN THE TRACKS OF HISTORICAL MATERIALISM

Perry Anderson

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Amidst the proliferation of books orientated on Marxism and relating to specific disciplines, there is the danger of not seeing the Marxist wood for the trees. It is, therefore, important and useful to have a panoramic view of recent developments in Marxism which reveals trends and problems.

Perry Anderson in *In the Tracks of Historical Materialism* undertakes just such an examination. The book is based on lectures he gave on the theme of Critical Theory at the University of Cali-

despite setbacks in countries like Italy, the mass influence of Marxism contrasts sharply with its restricted impact on Britain, and even more so with North America.

When he pursues his analysis of Eurocommunism and its strategy he opens himself up to challenge and criticism. Eurocommunism is treated as if it is a monolithic phenomenon. Hence there is no delineation of its development which reveals specific features and actual differences in policy and approach of the Communist Parties concerned. He dates its real genesis from the invasion of Czechoslovakia. There is no doubt that 1968 had its influence, but the historical roots of what has come to be known as Eurocommunism strike much further back into the past. There is the heritage of Gramsci and, since Gramsci, the writings of Togliatti and others.

The strategies adopted by a number of West European Communist Parties are the outcome of a process. The problem they have confronted has been how to achieve the hegemony of the working class under conditions of advanced capitalism and make possible a fundamental change in the

power relationship. Perry Anderson's characterisation of the trajectory of these strategies is also disputable. He says that while Eurocommunism presented itself as a third road between Stalinism and Social Democracy, its 'actual practice came to seem merely a repetition of the mournful route back into capitalism of the Second International'.

That there have been failures and setbacks is not in question, but these do not of themselves render a strategy incorrect. My comments do not in any way discount the need for a critique, but any such critique should surely be engaged in the context of the actual conditions within each country, the class relationships and the problems of the struggle. Perry Anderson's schematic treatment seems to be out of joint with his own adherence to and championship of historical materialism and its methodology.

While the thrust of his criticism is directed at the strategies of Communist Parties, he also criticises, in a lower key, the failure of the Trotskyist movement to realise the 'the alternative tradition of revolutionary Marxism', citing Portugal as an illustration. He, himself, does not


project an alternative strategy and he concludes his considerations of strategy by saying that it is the sphinx facing Marxism in the West.

His book is rounded off by some interesting and thought-provoking points about the shape of challenges to the further development of historical materialism as we see out the 20th century, and with some ideas about the relationship between Marxism and Socialism. He predicts that the relation between human society and nature will be a growing challenge. And, indeed, the development of the women's, peace and ecological movements are all in their particular ways, placing the problem on the theoretical agenda. In discussing briefly the question of Marxist theory and socialism he outlines areas for research and debate, which include the political structure of a socialist democracy and the problem of abolishing class and gender inequalities.

Whatever reservations and criticisms one may have of parts of the book, as a whole it is a valuable and stimulating contribution to the ongoing debate about the development of Marxism.

Betty Matthews

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