

tote. He accuses Thompson of wanting to have his cake and eat It, but Hanson himself keeps on admitting weaknesses on his own part and then indulging in them; he also admits facts only to ignore them later, a practice that makes much of his discussion inconsistent and cancel itself out.

For example, he says, 'I am certainly not going to abandon this eminently sensible and humane path of adventure (in Britain today) until someone convinces me, or experience teaches me, that it inevitably leads to a cul-de-sac' But earlier in the same paragraph he talks of 'modern war which threatens us daily with extinction. Quite astoundingly he sees no connection between the war risk and the capitalist society he lives in.

Throughout, Hanson appears to be frantically anxious to disarm opposition. He is quick to excuse this lack of an alternative way forward, and then goes on to state one: 'we can go forward in comparative liberty . . . arguing with our opponents, compromising with our friends who are a little more to the left or right . . . making full use of those liberal institutions, etc. . . .' I should imagine that Thompson, incidentally, would endorse this.

Likewise, when discussing the Soviet Union, he apologises for possibly arguing like a mechanist and starts at once to do so with gusto. Communists in backward countries, he says, had no alternative to behaving the way they did; Stalinism and all its horrors were historically inevitable; industrialism could only have been pushed through at the pace it was by the

brutal subjection of several generations. But surely he should ask himself if this was really true, was there never any choice? — even if much of the repression, particularly in the early days after 1917, was inevitable. Weren't many of the Communists who ended up in Vorkuta guilty of the crime of suggesting that there was a choice, that the Stalinist means would destroy the Communist ends? In some ways Hanson's arguments may be an advance on Khrushchev's almost ahistorical approach at the Twentieth Congress, but at least Khrushchev left us in no doubt that there were choices, that Stalin's paranoia, Molotov's errors (and the Central Committee's decisions) were not the direct result of historical or social causes; that very often if the repressive measures had never been taken, the Soviet Union's progress would have been easier, not more difficult, the war would have been shorter and less costly, and so on.

Individual Russian Communists living and working under Stalin undoubtedly were faced with dilemmas similar to the one Hanson poses, and so of course were Communists in the West—at least in their attitudes — but the Russian Communist party as a whole and the men at the top were not faced with them to anything like the same extent. Even in backward Russia history offered alternatives which were easier, more efficient, and more in keeping with the ideals sketched by Marx and other early Socialists. Because Communist Party apologists explain away Stalinism this doesn't mean that Marxism does.

*From* JOHN ST. JOHN:

Answering Harry Hanson is not easy. Many of his arguments are of course irrefutable and many of his statements are true, but behind them cowers a despairing cynicism. If Hanson isn't wrong, I felt, then the outlook for Man is hopeless and I might just as well turn myself into an inside boy before it's too late, get my-

self a fat expenses account, double my gin intake, and stop worrying. But his letter is much harder to answer than his conclusions. It is like a Chinese puzzle slippery with polish. As soon as you pin him down in one paragraph, you discover him more or less admitting the opposite in another. He is like a bookie accepting bets with the

Surely there is evidence enough that Marxism has been turned into an unhappy joke by the self-styled vanguard, particularly where the Soviet Union is concerned, and others, Deutscher and Trotsky for example, have presented Marxist analyses which do the very opposite to excusing what has happened. But Hanson virtually ignores these.

Although Hanson states that, like Thompson, he could never become a Stalinist without undergoing a brain operation, he concludes by saying that 'if I was Middle Easterner or a South Eastern Asian I should almost certainly be a supporter of Communism' \_ which for him, we gather, is synonymous with Stalinism. Luckily for him, though, he lives

in industrialised Britain where, he says, the ends-means dilemma is at least muted. (I would agree with him though I hope I wouldn't sound quite so complacent about it). But if this is so, why hasn't Thompson's Socialist-Humanism \_ or something like it \_ a chance? With or without Hanson society will go on changing. Technical advances may not necessarily mean parallel social, aesthetic, and moral ones -- there can of course easily be regressions. But unless one is convinced of historical determinism or astrology, there is no room for not believing that we can steer society in the direction we want. After all, it's been done before. It may require having a modicum of faith in Man, but why not ?

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