

*Marcuse, Marxism and the Monolith*

'Why, they're people just like us!' This is the cry with which the popular press warn their readers not to believe everything else they have told them about the Russians. One of the few occasions on which this naive and usually dishonest slogan needs to be brought out again is on reading Dr. Herbert Marcuse's tough book about Soviet Marxism. The toughness comes partly from Marcuse's stiff, academic style. But it comes also from the sheer difficulty of what he is trying to do - to present Soviet Marxism as an ideology, a mask worn by Soviet society. The rulers can use it to present their policies and to justify them; at the same time it does really express a good deal of what is going on in Soviet society.

So, for instance, the priority assigned to the growth of heavy industry is justified in terms of the shortening of the working day and other such advances and is, at the same time, an expression of the structure and interests of the established bureaucracy. The interests of the workers and the interests of the bureaucracy are made to seem to coincide by a liberal use of redefinitions of traditional Marxist vocabulary. So far the most striking, perhaps, of these - it is too recent for Marcuse to notice it - is Khrushchev's assertion that the economic competition between East and West is a contemporary form of the class struggle. Anyone who has wondered how in a country where Marx's writings circulate freely so vulgar an error could be published will learn a lot from Marcuse.

Marcuse relies on Soviet official sources almost entirely both on matters of doctrine and on matters of fact. He sees Soviet society as built on 'repressive production relations', which perpetuate ways of thinking and living which are themselves liable to reproduce regimentation and oppression. Soviet ideology mirrors the determinism of Soviet society in its neglect of the dialectic and of the creative role of consciousness. He quotes for example from an article in *Voprosy Filosofii* for 1955 the assertion that 'under socialism, too, the laws of the social development are objective ones, operating independently of the consciousness and will of human beings ...'

I do not doubt that everything Marcuse says is true. But in an odd way he is trapped by his own method and it is at this point we need to be reminded that Russian Socialism is human beings, not just theory and power stations. For Marcuse, by retelling the official tale, connives at the denigration by Soviet officialdom of the U.S.S.R. The evidence here comes from a mass of personal reports, from novels such as Dudintsev's *Not By Bread Alone* (not because it is oppositional - for it is not; but for the sense of the texture of everyday life which it gives) and films like *The Cranes are Flying*. What these make clear is the way life itself does break through. And one gets no sense of this in Marcuse. He reproduces without any sense of irony the voice of the Monolith desperately asserting that it is a monolith. Whereas the multifarious voices of living Russian socialist consciousness and will suggest that the objective laws are in for a pretty thin time.

What Marcuse really provides is a source book for Soviet theory and this is valuable enough. He may help us to avoid taking the path of too many non-Stalinist Marxists and looking for some too easy formula to explain what happened in Russia. 'State Capitalism' is one much over-worked candidate. What we have to do is to trace in detail the role of the Stalinist bureaucracy interposing itself between the socialist foundations in the original revolutionary drive, and the new life of the Soviet people. In doing this we have to avoid Marcuse's error of taking too seriously the self-appraisal of the bureaucrats. But Marcuse helps all the time by suggesting approaches which he doesn't follow through.

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