

APPENDIX #2

Western Marxism at its Worst: Hal Draper's

Karl Marx's Theory of Revolution / State and Bureaucracy

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This fat first volume of Hal Draper's opus on Marx's political theory would have never hauled itself onto any bookstore shelf without a helping hand from a "good ol' boy" network of academic liberals. Robert Heilbroner, for example, a respected name in this New Left mutual admiration society, wrote in *The New York Review of Books* that Draper's work is "...extraordinarily stimulating...written in a fresh, open, often amusing style..." Paul Sweezy, another bearer of respected name, wrote: "This is a work of Marxology in the very best sense of the term..."

Despite the fact that Draper's book is extraordinarily un-stimulating, stale, narrow, and painfully un-amusing, Heilbroner and Sweezy are not actually lying. They simply know what they like. And one thing they particularly like is to promote and be promoted as serious, independent Marxist thinkers whose writings are well worth the cover price. Without such mutual congratulations, independent Marxists living in "the belly of the beast" would have a beastly time filling their own bellies. They might actually have to work. A collective ritual involving fraternal promotion, publishing agreements, favorable reviews, and secured sales through the use of the texts in the allied professors' classroom's thus drives off the specter of productive employment. A moderately successful book is, after all, money in the bank, and that in turn is freedom to do what one pleases while the rest of the world works itself into the ground.

This pleasant arrangement differs from the internal economies of the more partisan socialist and communist parties in the West only in that the market to which the independent Marxists appeal is peopled by buyers with an incredibly high degree of social indifference. Such intellectuals want to understand, sufficient for conversation purposes, the intricacies of Marxist theory, categorical minutiae and variations, interesting historical anecdotes or characters, etc., and that is all. The demands of revenue therefore require that the independent Marxists divest their writings of any prescriptions for real political activity, practical moral obligations or direct action. The saving grace here is that at least this "conversational Marxism" keeps these people off the streets.

By these criteria, Hal Draper has indeed done an outstanding job. By the time the reader gets through the six hundred-plus pages of the author's aimless prose, any action, let alone anything political, is the furthest thing from one's mind.

Draper's stated purpose in this volume is, as was Lenin's in *State and Revolution*, to present the totality of Marx's thinking on the state. But unlike Lenin, Draper takes no narrow view of this historical issue. The reader is enlightened by the fact that "... most of the states that Marx had occasion to discuss were **not** capitalist states...." This is, in Draper's mind, a good thing, since theory is enriched by the comparison of different phenomena. The existing works on Marx's theories are "...unfortunately full of statements about Marx's views which actually apply only to capitalism..." and this, Draper laments, "...is a form of ethnocentrism."

Impressive. Almost profound. This supra-objective posture, however, actually has a very narrow aim. By concentrating almost exclusively on Marx's analysis of non-capitalist states, Draper makes his whole exercise irrelevant to present political reality and even to the history of the socialist movement over the past century. With the question of the state thus reduced to an entirely academic matter, Draper can freely vent his spleen on Marx's long dead opponents, wax polemical in 19th century clichés, and titillate his clientele with tales of Bonaparte and Bismarck while remaining absolutely silent on what any of this has to do with the hundreds of millions of souls who are presently living under the practical expression of Marx's theory of the state. Score one for Draper's friends and admirers.

Draper rationalizes this reduction by arguing that for Marx there was no "norm" of the capitalist state, and that in fact "...a 'normal' state...must be as hard to find in reality as an 'average' person; and no planet follows Kepler's Laws even though they are 'true'." Further, where Marx was justified "...in *Capital* to posit a 'pure' or 'abstract' bourgeois economy for the purpose of analyzing its basic laws...", such a beginning analysis should not be taken as an end point. The same thus applies to the question of the state. And finally, Draper offers the very 'dialectical' observation that "...in the life course of states --arising, flourishing, and dying-- more time is spent in the first and last stages than in the more 'normal' middle: that is, the 'normal' is one of the more abnormal conditions encountered." In case this last point has somehow got by the reader, we will repeat: normal is abnormal; abnormal is normal. Keep this basic relationship in mind, and we will be a long way towards appreciating Draper's analytical ability.

If after considering these weighty arguments the curious reader should look up the term "eclectic" in any standard dictionary, he would no doubt find a picture of Hal Draper hard at work on his latest manuscript. Draper is no simple eclectic, however. He is an eclectic with a mission. The nature of his particular cause becomes clear when we examine his points individually.

First, Draper's reference to normality a la Kepler's Laws is pseudo-science in the very worst sense of the term. By referring to Kepler, Draper wishes to associate a respectable conclusion from real science with his own disreputable observations. It is precisely the task of the real sciences to abstract what is most essential to a category of phenomena and thus reveal to reasoning the basic laws by which they operate. The laws establish a norm, which, it should go without saying, has no one-to-one correspondence to every individual case. Draper's pseudo-science, however, attempts to turn this lack of direct correspondence against the norm itself. And why go to all this bother? Because Marx himself did not abstract a norm of the state structure in general, or of the bourgeois state in

particular. And in Draper's view, if Marx did not do that, it cannot be due to any failing on Marx's part. By not attempting to abstract the general, dare we say normal, features of state structures, Marx was simply being "scientific".

On the other hand, it occurs to Draper that Marx did in fact abstract a few general, normal laws from the phenomenon of capitalism in *Capital*. Draper is therefore driven to create a second apology. Marx's positing of a 'pure' or normal bourgeois economy for analysis is, according to Draper, a good way to begin in understanding concrete particulars. But "...in the case of the theory of the state, there is a tendency to end with the beginning...(thus) freezing the theory into a static formula." Draper knows we all hate static formulas, and by appealing to our prejudices hopes to get one by himself.

When Marx assumed an abstract capitalist economy in *Capital*, the concrete data he used for illustration purposes was drawn primarily from the example of English bourgeois economy. This figures out fairly simply for everyone except Draper. If you want to formulate the basic laws of capitalist economy, study truly capitalistic economies. Likewise, if you wish to formulate the basic features of the bourgeois state, study truly bourgeois states.

But this is something Marx did not want to do. Instead, he turned his attention to the peculiarities of his own home state, Germany, and the countries flanking it on either side, France and Russia. These were all countries in which the bourgeoisie was unable or unwilling to exercise control over the state apparatus. While Draper praises this "greater" concern as being a counter-balance to "ethnocentrism" on the question of the state, it is in fact only an expression of Marx's own ethnocentrism. After all, it is not as if Marx had pondered long and hard over the question of the bourgeois state, studied the examples of the U.S. and England in detail, abstracted the most essential features, etc., and on that basis analyzed transitional forms such as Bonapartism or Bismarckism. Not at all. He simply wrote, when so possessed, on particular aspects of German, French, etc. political life in scattered articles, addresses and correspondence. And although there is enough material in that to give Draper a fat book, it lacks the coherency and grand design that Draper attempts to impart to it.

Thus it is impossible to "freeze into a static formula" a theory that was never fully formulated in the first place. What Draper really means to say is that other Marxists have been satisfied with Marx's general observations on the bourgeois state, whereas Draper, following Marx's provincialism, fancies Marx's observations on the non-bourgeois state. But to make this academic exercise seem relevant, deep, profound, "dialectical", etc., Draper must portray himself as a champion of historical objectivity. In reality he is only juxtaposing the superficiality of other Marxist writers to his own.

The third device in Draper's anti-normality arsenal is his concern with "...the process of becoming, of change and interaction...". States in his view go through a life cycle, the shortest phase of which is the "normal". The bulk of the time is spent coming into being or dying off. Thus "normal is abnormal". And thus Marx was justified in concentrating on transitional state forms.

The reader, of course, is supposed to be astounded at this terrifically dialectical insight. Astounded enough, at least, not to notice that this tidbit of wisdom has a profoundly apologetic flavor.

In the first place, by referring to the life cycles of states in general, Draper is mixing apples (and rather bad apples at that) with oranges. The evolution of the French state, for example, involves not one but several cycles, since it passed from a strictly feudal state to a transitional one (Bonapartism), and finally to a strictly bourgeois form. So as not to slight dialectics, of course, there is an overlapping between these cycles, and the beginnings of the bourgeois form are rooted in the transitional one. It serves Draper's purpose to throw everything into one cycle, however, in order to minimize the importance of the strictly bourgeois form.

In the second place, unless one traces the evolution of all state forms back to the Big Bang, it is an absolute falsehood to assert that "... more time is spent in the first and last stages than in the more 'normal' middle. Even at the time Marx was writing, the bourgeois state form in England and the U.S. had been enjoying a "normal" phase of development for quite some time. Surely enough time to provide sufficient material for investigation had he been so inclined. In fact, English and American bourgeois parliamentary states are still historically successful, despite Draper's pseudo-scientific edict. Likewise, the longevity of the French and German bourgeois states now makes Bonapartism and Bismarckism seem like temporary historical episodes.

One can only wonder what would drive a man so far from such simple facts. In Draper's case, it is religious fervor. He must rationalize every stupid or shortsighted act Marx committed in order to elevate him to the status of a philosophical-revolutionary God. This accomplished, Draper can then set himself up as a high priest of Marxology and true interpreter of the holy word. In this case, Draper's faith gives him the self-confidence to completely falsify historical processes to his own liking. It would almost be amusing, in a quiet sort of way, were it not for the fact that all of this is done in the name of scientific reasoning and fidelity to historical fact.

This apologetic machinery, which Draper sets going early in the *Foreword* to his work, whines at a high pitch throughout the following six hundred pages. In every instance where Marx or Engels lean too far to the left or right of Draper's sensibilities, he quickly pulls them back to center with a flurry of compassionate understanding. Marx, for example, began his political career as a bourgeois democrat, i.e. a lean to the right. But, Draper cautions, that is only half of the picture. The other half is that Marx fought "...for complete, consistent democracy...", i.e. back to center. Likewise, when the young Engels denounced political liberty as "...sham-liberty, the worst possible servitude...", Draper apologizes for his leftism on the grounds that Engels was not yet a mature Marxist. And so on, page after miserable page.

By the time the reader gets to Draper's final conclusions, the suspense (and in fact life itself) has become nearly unbearable. Where could all these endless apologies possibly be

leading? But just as we are beginning to go under in a state of withering away, Draper's "General and Special Theories of the State" rescues us.

The "General Theory of the State," Draper's unique contribution to Marxism, holds that overall the state apparatus serves the exploitative class structure of society, regardless of whether a particular ruling class exercises direct control over it. This earth-shaking theory is the fruit of Draper's pondering over Marx's writings on non-bourgeois states. This "Special Theory," on the other hand, is the more familiar definition of the state, applicable in Draper's view to mere microseconds of history, as the direct political instrument of the ruling class.

This distinction may seem logical, but if and only if the parameters of one's thinking are set by Marx's preoccupations. Marx wrote mainly of non-bourgeois states = General Theory. Marx wrote not so much on strictly bourgeois states = Special Theory. In the real world, however, it turns out that this "special" case of the state as a direct instrument is actually a very generalized phenomenon, and that the "general" instance of the state as a more independent entity is found only in specialized conditions. That being the case, one can only remark that this General Theory is interesting, to be sure, but, very practically, what of it?

Draper's presentation of these Theories, with the qualifiers "General" and "Special" and reference to "warping away" of one from the other, is supposed to have a deeply profound, almost Einsteinian effect on the reader. Obviously, on Heilbroner, Sweezy and untold other intellectuals it did. But then, these people already live in a black hole of pretentious profundity and have an appetite for theoretical warps, categorical inversions, red-shifts (to the right) and other dialectical delights. It keeps their minds off the real world beyond. Having demonstrated his genius in fulfilling this need, Draper might just succeed in passing himself off as the Einstein of Western Marxology after all.