

January 21, 1965

With the perceptivity and historic sweep characteristic of his study of Marx, George Lichtheim's review of Wilfrid Dezan's The Marxism of Jean-Paul Sartre (1/28/65) (Review) has covered considerable ground beyond both Sartre's and Dezan's realms of reference. We are, in the end, led to "a perfectly genuine, and very interesting, three-cornered debate among Marxists, Catholics, and Existentialists in France." This writer is familiar with the three-cornered debate which has, in its own fashion, become as closed an intellectual milieu as is the Communist Party in its domain. It has become fashionable, and not only in France, to consider only those who are not Marxists by conviction to be the true exponents of Marxism. Your journal, I trust, will allow a Marxist-Humanist to express her views, especially as one of the themes in Mr. Lichtheim's present review is but a variation of the one he made in his review of my Marxism and Freedom in the issue of December 17, where he accused me of an inclination "to overrate his (Lenin's) intellectual accomplishments (notably his rather amateurish Hegel commentaries..." It doesn't help matters when Lichtheim, in his present review of Dezan's book on Sartre, uses such expressions as "Marxist-Leninist" and "Leninist school" in the manner in which Communists refer to "Marxism-Leninism" as if that body of thought were synonymous with the Communist perversion of these Humanist and revolutionary philosophies. This only permits Sartre to get away with intellectual mayhem on Marxian philosophy. Yet Lichtheim generously offers Sartre's followers a free gift by drawing for them a conclusion Sartre "might" have made, to wit: "The French intellectuals expected the coming of the Revolution, and got instead the Communist Party." Unfortunately, the humour also serves to hide the reason why Sartre couldn't have come to any such conclusion since he has always pronounced the Communist Party to be "the only revolutionary party", and not only for bourgeois France, but also for revolutionary Hungary in 1956, trying to free itself from Communist tyranny. His mild criticisms of "Russian interference" as failing to enhance "the security of socialism" was pallid indeed as compared to his high indignation against Marxists who resorted to the defense of the Workers' Councils struggling against the Communist counter-revolution. All this, and a great deal more, is well known to Mr. Lichtheim. The question

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therefore arises: why does Mr. Lichtheim credit Sartre with "an interpretation of Marx far above the level of the crudities of the Leninist school?" One need not look far to find his predilection for accepting everything and anything with which to fight "the Leninist school", by which Mr. Lichtheim means, as his review of my work showed, not only Communism (which I consider only a euphemism for state-capitalism), but Lenin as philosopher.

Now, there is an undeniable duality in Lenin's philosophic heritage between his Materialism and Empirio-Criticism (1908), which gave the green light to vulgar materialism, and his Philosophic Notebooks (1914), which broke new ground in the Marxist interpretation of Hegel's Science of Logic. But this should not give any one license to dismiss the historic break from Lenin's own philosophic past that his Notebooks bear witness to. I am not aware of any particularly brilliant refutations of those either in the U.S., or in Europe, or anywhere else. To me, the "Western" attitude is only the opposite side of the coin of the Communist attitude which presents the refreshing idealism of the Notebooks as a mere "continuation" of the vulgar materialism of Empirio-Criticism. Both attitudes are evasions of a very much needed intellectual confrontation with Hegel's "Doctrine of the Notion" and its last chapter, "The Absolute Idea", which has a relevance for our age of absolutes in which revolution and counter-revolution are so interlocked. I have yet to see any of "today's Marxists" and here I do mean those who "objectively" study Marxism as well as those who are Marxists by conviction--grappling with Hegelian dialectics in as bold a manner as the "amateurish" Lenin who wrote exhilaratingly: "Subjectivity = Freedom...since Man's cognition not only reflects the objective world, but creates it." The minute Mr. Lichtheim can name any who do not shy away from Hegel's relevance for our day, I shall instantly prick up my ears, and meet respectfully at that. Until that day, can't we live by rules other than those of the jungle where all is fair in war (and love?) and which, for purposes of downgrading Lenin, ^{(upgrading of the} permit the/argumentation of Sartre "far above the crudities of the Leninist school," in the very same article in which Mr. Lichtheim himself cogently describes Sartre's "libertarian posturing in the service of totalitarianism?"

cc: George Lichtheim

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