

The Question of Revolution

First Question : It is said that Marx's concept of revolution, will not stand up to the new facts of industrial society. It has become an anachronism; it no longer has any constituency. The working class, in Marx's opinion the historical subject of all future social upheavals, has dissolved itself *as a class*; the desire to establish a qualitatively different social order has given way to the need for better working conditions, more leisure time and more material goods. In these circumstances, the old theory of revolution, which articulated the economic misery of one class and taught the oppressed to speak, has become impotent and unrealistic; it has turned its back on reality. Anyone talking of revolution nowadays is surely contributing to a mystification?

Marcuse : The idea of revolution is in fact never a 'mystification'. As a whole the existing situation has always been bad: a force resisting the real possibilities of overcoming misery and inhumanity. The fact that revolution no longer has any identifiable 'constituency' and no organized movement on which it could depend does not remove its necessity. But does it really have no 'constituency' today? Neither the ideological veil of pluralist democracy nor the material veil

of extravagant productivity alters the fact that in the realm of advanced capitalism the fate of man is determined by the aggressive and expansive apparatus of exploitation and the policies interwoven with it. The civic rights that are permitted and administered in this system of domination do not diminish the violence of an oppression which has made the world a hell. At the moment hell is concentrated on the battlefields of Vietnam and the other sacrificial lands of neo-colonialism. Of course humanity is concentrated there too: not immediately, in the guerrilla struggles, which meet the horror of the conqueror with the horror of defence, but, via many mediations, in the opportunity to define the inner limit of the system given to those who in their extreme poverty and weakness have for years now kept the richest and technologically most developed destructive machine of all time in check. I say 'inner' limit because there is no longer any outer limit to the global system of advanced capitalism; because even the development of the socialist countries, despite all the contrast in their relations of production, responds to the pressure of world competition and the needs of coexistence. But any romantic idea of the liberation front is incorrect. Guerrilla struggle as such does not present any mortal threat to the system: in the long run it cannot resist a technological 'Final Solution'. The system reserves for itself the right to decree whether and when it will achieve 'victory' by burning and poisoning everything. The 'Final Solution' in Vietnam would be the final consolidation of the power of capital, which would further extend its interests with the help of dictatorships of the military and of property, and would force the socialist countries into an increasingly debilitating defence (or into powerless neutrality).

This tendency can only be broken if the resistance of the victims of neo-colonialism finds support in the 'affluent society' itself, in the metropolis of advanced capitalism and in the weaker capitalist countries whose independence is threatened by the metropolis. (I will come back to the opposition in the metropolis in my answer to question 4.) In any case, in the capitalist countries of the European continent the precondition for the efficacy of a serious opposition remains the political revitalization of the working-class movement on an international scale.

Second Question : One of the striking aspects of our time is the gradual mutual convergence of capitalism and socialism. In both systems advanced industrialization has altered the social process and the methods of production. To the extent that technology determines the course of things and the social relationships of men, relations of domination can still be defined only in technological terms. Power lies with the apparatus which administers social labour and organizes its adaptation: domination, translated into manipulation, can hardly be recognized any more as political and economic domination. Each person acts in good faith, from his own desire to act in response to general pressures. The conception of freedom, by which revolutionaries and revolutions were inspired, has, so it seems, been taken out of circulation in modern capitalist *and* socialist states. Has the concept of freedom finally lost its revolutionary force in the 'managed mass society'?

Marcuse : The 'gradual mutual convergence of capitalism and social-

ism' has found its expression in the cliché concept of the 'technological society' or the 'developed industrial society'. The usual indignant criticism of this concept is itself ideological. It should no longer be necessary to emphasize that it is not technique, but the social organization of the productive forces that determines the difference between social systems. But it appears necessary to repeat that the abolition of private ownership of the means of production and collective control of them does not finalize this difference, particularly when this control is exercised by a working class whose needs and aspirations are dominated by imitation of and adaptation to needs engendered by the capitalist system. Coexistence with advanced capitalism is driving the socialist societies into a life and death competition—into a competition in which the development of the productive forces and of social needs is to a large extent subordinated to politico-diplomatic and military exigencies. Thus, here as well as there, technique is becoming a means of oppression built into the process of production. As such, technique, which has not yet been turned into a means of liberation, prescribes definite modes of conduct within and in relation to the apparatus of domination—here as well as there. Nevertheless, it remains the case that the opportunity for liberation lies where the means of production have been socialized. The political economy of the socialist countries needs peace, not aggressive expansion.

But technological and political competition in the development of the forces of production produces yet another tendency which appears still more pernicious for the future. The present international constellation is leading to an opposition of interests between the 'old' stabilized, technologically advanced and industrialized socialist countries on the one hand and the 'new' and poorer ones on the other. The former are moving into the category of possessors; the revolutionary communism of the poor on the other side of the border may well appear to them as a new 'revolution from below' and thus as a danger. Not to them alone, of course. For the 'affluent society' also senses danger here: for a long time the American 'struggle against Communism' has become a struggle against the Communism of the poorest.

If it is the case that the 'conception of freedom, by which revolutionaries and revolutions were inspired', is suppressed in the developed industrial countries with their rising standard of living, then it is all the more acute and open where the suppressed are rebelling against the system. It is here that the revolutionary concept of freedom coincides with the necessity to defend naked existence: in Vietnam as much as in the slums and ghettos of the rich countries.

Third Question : In contemporary industrial society the economy is no longer the basis of political decisions, but is itself a function of politics. Economic processes are more obviously under political control now than 50 years ago. In this a new, and long unfamiliar, form of totalitarianism is emerging. Social theory seems not to have adapted to this state of affairs: it slavishly adheres to its own categories and leaves the facts to themselves. It seems that practice has broken with ideas. Can the contemporary development of society still be interpreted with

concepts like 'alienation', 'reification', 'exploitation', 'minimum subsistence level' and 'pauperization'?

Marcuse : It is not correct to say that 'in contemporary industrial society the economy is *no longer* the basis of political decisions, but is itself a function of politics'. In the *narrow* 'economic' sense, the economy was never the basis. Today too it is 'political economy': the process of production and distribution is largely determined by politics and is itself a determinant of a politics which is dominated by the great oligopolistic interests (they are by no means always in harmony). And the political opinion and position of producers and consumers is more than ever an economic factor: it is an element in the process of exchange, in the buying and selling of labour power, in the marketing of commodities. One must be 'all right' politically to be able to compete in business, in the office and in the factory. Political propaganda and commercial advertisements coincide. The political economy of advanced capitalism is also a 'psychological economy': it produces and administers the needs demanded by the system—even the instinctive needs. It is this introjection of domination combined with the increasing satisfaction of needs that casts doubt on concepts like alienation, reification and exploitation. Is the beneficiary of the 'affluent society' not in fact 'fulfilling' himself in his alienated being? Does he not, in fact, find himself again in his gadgets, his car and television set? But on the other hand, does false subjectivity dispose of the objective state of affairs?

Fourth Question : In an essay in 1965 you put forward the thesis that capitalism has succeeded in bringing its contradictions into a 'manipulable form'; it has absorbed the 'revolutionary potential'. Does this mean that under the given conditions it is impossible to combine critical theory and political practice? In other words, what does 'revolutionary' mean in the context of a society that has, without violence, suppressed the thought of revolution and the need for it?

Marcuse : The manipulation of the contradictions of advanced capitalism has its own dynamic, whose explosive force is today active in the escalation of the war in Vietnam and in the expansion of American capital into Europe, South America and Asia. It is senseless to see in this tendency the seeds of an armed conflict between the capitalist powers: common interest *vis-à-vis* the common enemy forces the rivals together. But within the nations particular interests are insisting on resistance to American capital; national independence is again becoming a progressive factor. A retreat by American capital—combined with the unemployment created by increasing automation—could lead to serious shocks; it would undermine the unification of antagonistic forces in the USA. It is possible that neo-fascist tendencies would then triumph and that the majority of the organized workers would follow them or remain neutral; it is, however, also possible that opposition would grow and organize itself.

In this situation the opposition of American youth could have a political effect. This opposition is free from ideology or permeated with a deep distrust of all ideology (including socialist ideology); it is sexual, moral, intellectual and political rebellion all in one. In this sense it is

total, directed against the system as a whole: it is disgust at the 'affluent society', it is the vital need to break the rules of a deceitful and bloody game—to stop co-operating any more. If these young people detest the prevailing system of needs and its ever increasing mass of goods, this is because they observe and know how much sacrifice, how much cruelty and stupidity contribute every day to the reproduction of the system. These young people no longer share the repressive need for the blessings and security of domination—in them perhaps a new consciousness is appearing, a new type of person with another instinct for reality, life and happiness; they have a feeling for a freedom that has nothing to do with, and wants nothing to do with, the freedom practised in senile society. In short, here is the 'determinate negation' of the prevailing system, but it is without effective organization and is in itself incapable of exercising decisive political pressure. Only in alliance with the forces who are resisting the system 'from without' can such an opposition become a new avant-garde; if it remains isolated it runs the risk of falling victim to inoculation and thus to the system itself.

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