

their eyes on me for years. I could have told you the names of those who would go.”³⁷

Shortly after the strike had ended, the Trades Council decided to open a general organising campaign in a joint effort with the Labour Party. It was decided that this campaign would have as its objectives, to increase the membership of trade unions to 100 per cent, to protest against the Government’s action in increasing working hours, and decreasing wages, and to urge the workers to organise politically as well as industrially. In the event this campaign seems to have been successful, and in November the Trades Council reported splendid victories for the Labour Party in the Municipal Elections. Labour had gained victories in five new seats in the town, and successfully retained three more. Bulwell too moved from Liberal to Labour after the strike, and had not the Liberal and Conservative organisations made common cause there is little doubt that Labour would have made more gains in the town.

Prior to the Labour Party’s electoral victory the town’s ruling group had allowed itself to relax into a welter of self-congratulation. After the strike the Chief Constable speaking to the town’s Rotary Club thanked members for their help during what he described as a “very trying time”. There was still a certain amount of trouble he explained but this was caused by a few misguided people. The trouble he claimed, was mainly the work of irresponsible youths and men coming from the “hooligan class”.

³⁷ George Hamilton: Tape Recording, Jan. 9, 1969.

This view of the strike, and the people who took part in it, was probably shared by most of the town’s industrialists and Establishment figures. That it amounts to a gross slander on the finest elements in the town’s labour movement and to the thousands of ordinary workers who had taken part in the greatest social upheaval in the town since the days of the Chartists never seems to have occurred to either the Chief Constable or his friends in the Chamber of Commerce and the Rotary Club.

Looked at with hindsight, it is possible to see the General Strike in Nottingham as being in the very best of the town’s working class traditions. Tragically the strike was a defeat for the workers of the town. The miners managed to stop out for some months, but in the end even they were forced to take Spencer’s advice and go back on the best available terms. Let down by the national leadership the town’s workers had no alternative but to return to work with the rest of the country. Jack Charlesworth sums up the whole experience well; “the workers were ready, there is no doubt that with proper leadership we would have gone over the top, the spirit was magnificent, magnificent.”³⁸ Certainly the eagerness and enthusiasm with which the workers answered the call were in the same tradition with which the great struggles of the nineteenth century had been fought, and those who took part in the strike can take their place alongside those who in earlier times had won for the town the title of the “banner town of progress.”

³⁸ Jack Charlesworth: Tape Recording, Jan. 12, 1969.

Louis Althusser: Philosophy and Leninism

Grahame Lock

A large part of the debate in the philosophy section of last year’s Communist University of London centred around the work of the French Communist philosopher Louis Althusser. *Marxism Today* has subsequently published a two-part article by John Lewis on the same subject in its January and February issues of this year. The theoretical debate which started in France some years ago had entered the British Party. Our comrades, like the British people as a whole, are sometimes a little wary of foreign imports. But if

styles differ from one land to another, the principles of Marxism remain the guiding force of the Communist movement the world over, and in our day, as half a century ago, we have much to learn from our comrades abroad.

For those who missed the Lewis article, a very brief outline of the context. Louis Althusser is a philosophy teacher at the Ecole Normale Supérieure in the University of Paris. He is a member of the French Communist Party, which he joined in 1948. His best known published works are *For*

Marx, Reading Capital and Lenin and Philosophy, all of which are now available in English translation¹.

Because Althusser is a professional philosopher, some of what he writes may be difficult at first for many comrades to understand. That does not mean that they have no right to enter the debate. It concerns all Communists. And if all of us have the duty to make an effort in the study of Marxism, the intellectuals have a duty too to write in such a way that their work becomes a tool in the hands of the Party, and does not remain the subject of sterile and academic discussion.

This point is linked to my first and general comment on some of the attacks which have been made against Althusser. It is not an adequate procedure to string together a few quotes from the many thousands of pages of Marx's work in order to "refute", just like that, the whole theoretical research of one of our comrades. This method, abstract and dogmatic, has little to do with that of Marx. What we need today are ideas capable of helping to solve contemporary political problems but which, at the same time, remain firmly based on Marxist science. And these cannot be produced without experiment.

Althusser and the Communist Movement

Why has Althusser's work caused such controversy, in France and elsewhere, and met with such hostile reaction (that of John Lewis being a rather mild example)? First, no doubt, because he has openly stated—and brought arguments to back his case—certain things which are often thought but left unsaid. In particular he claims that since the 20th Congress of the Soviet Communist Party in 1956 (when Khrushchev spoke against Stalin) a new "interpretation" of Marxism has been developed by many Communist intellectuals—let us call it the "humanist interpretation"—which is incompatible with the principles of Marxism-Leninism which have guided the work of the Communist Parties of the world. Let us immediately make a number of things clear.

First, the reference to the 20th Congress of the Soviet Party does not imply that Althusser is simply nostalgic for the pre-1956 days. That Congress is an irreversible fact which only romantics would ignore.

Second, Althusser does not say that all Communist intellectuals have fallen into revisionism! Far from it. They have in general carried on the fight for Marxist ideas with great courage and

tenacity. All the more reason to struggle against real dangers.

Third (and we shall return to this point), Althusser's attack on the "humanist" position does not imply that he thinks that Communists are not or ought not to be prompted by a concern for their fellow men. On the contrary. In his own words:

"Communists struggle for the suppression of classes and for a communist society, where, one day, all men will be free and brothers. However, the whole classical Marxist tradition has refused to say that Marxism is a *Humanism*. Why? Because *practically*, i.e. in *the facts*, the word Humanism is exploited by an ideology which uses it to fight, i.e. to kill, another, true word, and one vital to the proletariat: the *class struggle*".²

These points have to be made, however simple they might seem, because of the use which has been made of Althusser's work by leftist currents in France and elsewhere. Let us be quite clear. What count are public statements and public positions. If Althusser's opinions were those of certain ultra-left groups he would not hold his Party card or work in the Party as he does.

On this point it is interesting to take note of a comment made by Waldeck Rochet, General Secretary of the French Communist Party, at a Central Committee meeting in 1966. After a brief discussion of Althusser's book *Reading Capital*, he points out:

"If on the one hand it seems to me necessary to bring a critical appreciation to bear on the way in which comrade Althusser and other Communist philosophers treat certain crucial questions of Marxist-Leninist theory, that does not mean that we reject their work *en bloc* or that we condemn their research effort. On the contrary, our remarks are intended to help ensure that this effort is pursued on a more solid and fruitful basis".³

Althusser's response can be found in the interview-article *Philosophy as a Revolutionary Weapon*, in a section of the article which, unfortunately from this point of view, is not included in the English language version which appears in the collection *Lenin and Philosophy*. He explains that he and his collaborators do not pretend to have found all the answers:

"All that we write is evidently marked by our inexperience and lack of knowledge—one can find inexactitudes and errors in it. Our texts and formulae

¹ For *Marx* is published by Allen Lane The Penguin Press, *Reading Capital and Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* by New Left Books. The translations are by Ben Brewster.

² "Philosophy as a Revolutionary Weapon", in *Lenin and Philosophy*, p. 24.

³ Waldeck Rochet, *Le marxisme et les chemins de l'avenir*, p. 20.

are provisional and have to be rectified. In philosophy things are very much as in politics: without criticism there can be no rectification. We ask for criticism of a Marxist-Leninist kind".⁴

He adds, referring to the Central Committee meeting at which Waldeck Rochet spoke:

"We take the greatest possible account of criticism made by militants of the revolutionary class struggle. Certain criticisms for example addressed to us by certain militants during the session of the Central Committee at Argenteuil have been a great help. Others too. In philosophy one can do nothing outside of a proletarian class position. . . ."

True ideas and false ideas

The question of Althusser's inspiration is already answered. "My interest in philosophy", he says, "was aroused by materialism and its critical function for *scientific* knowledge. . . ." But "it was politics which decided everything. Not politics in general: Marxist-Leninist politics".⁵ What is the function of Marxist philosophy? Just as in class struggle we need to "draw a dividing line" between our class friends and our class enemies, so we need to draw a dividing line between true ideas and false ideas. The same kind of line. For "in principle, true ideas always serve the people; false ideas always serve the enemies of the people".⁶

Let us consider the implications of certain "false ideas", of the use of certain terms, and in particular of those "new interpretations" of Marxism which, says Althusser, have even begun to slip into the Communist movement. Some of these ideas look harmless enough. But we must consider not the appearance, but the reality in use. There is no room here for a thorough survey. But we can look at an example. Let us see how the ex-Communist, Roger Garaudy—long a philosophical opponent of Althusser—makes use of certain notions for a well-defined purpose. The emphases are mine.

Against the blind mechanisms of *industrial civilisation*, Garaudy says, what emerges with force is the *human subjectivity* of the epoch of the *scientific and technical revolution*. Only socialism can offer an alternative. But what model of socialism will permit its fundamental aims to be realised in the new historical conditions created by this revolution? Not that model, he tells us, which translates "collective property" of the means of production by "state property"—and of a centralised state,

disposing of the surplus-value of all social labour. On the contrary, socialist democracy can only exist when the working class itself has the power to dispose of this surplus-value. If this right remains the monopoly of a *centralised bureaucratic apparatus*, the working class in its mass remains in a situation of dependence and *alienation*.

The success of socialism, he argues, is not to be measured simply by the number of refrigerators or television sets, but by the *flowering of man*. Whatever that is, it is not apparently to be found, for example, in the Soviet Union. For there the central Party apparatus and its functionaries retain a bureaucratic, centralised and authoritarian conception of affairs, which remains the principal obstacle to the realisation of economic reform, political democratisation and cultural liberation. Luckily however a hope remains—Garaudy assures us that it is not impossible that one day, "the present Soviet rulers will be swept away, and that a new start will be made which will give back to the October revolution its real face and its radiant power".⁷

Garaudy, no doubt, is full of good intentions. No doubt too that there are real problems in the socialist world. What makes it possible to deal with these problems, however, is not good intentions but Marxism. The point is that Garaudy, precisely by playing on certain real problems with a theory which, at best, can be qualified as a sentimental pre-Marxist socialism, leaves the road open to anti-communism. What is the relation of this to Althusser's work? It is the following. Althusser's writing is precisely a call to vigilance "against the bourgeois and petty-bourgeois world outlook which always threatens Marxist theory, and which deeply impregnates it today".⁸

Garaudy has left the Communist movement. That does not mean that all non-Marxist ideas have departed with him. Which is normal, since Marxist answers to the problems of our time do not emerge, pure and ready-made, from the thought of Communists—they require constant struggle against the ever-present and often subtle effects of bourgeois ideology which surrounds us. Althusser has tried to make a contribution to that struggle, which is simply the class struggle in the domain of ideas. The philosophical fight over words is part of the political fight. That is why there is more to certain innocent-looking terms than meets the eye:

"The bourgeois ideological notions of *industrial society, neo-capitalism, new working class, affluent*

⁴ "La philosophie comme arme de la révolution", in *La Pensée*, April 1968, p. 34.

⁵ "Philosophy as a Revolutionary Weapon", in *Lenin and Philosophy*, p. 15.

⁶ *Op. cit.*, p. 24.

⁷ Roger Garaudy, *Le grand tournant du socialisme*, pp. 170-1. See also pp. 22, 46, 49, 134, 145, 191.

⁸ "Philosophy as a Revolutionary Weapon", in *Lenin and Philosophy*, p. 20.

society, alienation and tutti quanti are anti-scientific and anti-Marxist: built to fight revolutionaries".⁹

Whatever the intentions of those who use them.

Marx's early works: what is their status?

Certain comrades will object that, as far as some of these terms are concerned—at least that of *alienation*—it is the use rather than the notion itself which is anti-Marxist. To resolve this question is beyond the scope of a single article. Let us at least however make the historical point that the use as tools of anti-communism of certain terms which appear in early texts of Marx is not new. The Social-Democrats Landshut and Mayer pioneered this practice in their 1931 edition of those texts. It is interesting to look at some of their theoretical arguments.

They remark that the hypotheses on which *Capital* is based are precisely those contained in his pre-1847 work.

"For the author of *Capital* they by no means represent youthful errors from which he progressively liberated himself as his knowledge matured. . . . The principles of his economic analysis are directly derived from 'the true reality of man' ".¹⁰

As Althusser points out, the position is quite clearly stated. *Capital* is presented as a fundamentally *ethical* text, and though the ethical side is not explicit in the work itself it can be found in the early works, which thus supplement it.

It is this thesis, or something like it, which has recently re-appeared and gained popularity on the intellectual scene. It is what Althusser calls the "Young-Marx" revisionist current. We should note that when Althusser says that, in writing *Capital*, Marx effectively breaks with his early ideas and does not build on them, he is not suggesting that these ideas were anything but progressive at the time, theoretically and politically. The question simply is: why go back *now* and take them up again when we possess the scientific analysis contained in *Capital*? Why the eagerness to "re-discover" and propagate ideas with which, Marx himself writes, he already considered himself to have settled accounts in 1845?

The answer, in the end, can only be political. In the face of certain revelations and problems, and their personal effects, and unable to provide a scientific explanation and solution, some thinkers have abandoned the domain of Marxism-Leninism. But how much easier, consciously or unconsciously, when this abandonment does not have to be ex-

plicit! And so it is that they have turned to the early Marx—who after all is the same man as the author of *Capital*—for help. But the value of the most progressive ideas, when they do not stand on a scientific footing, depends heavily on time and place. They can so easily turn into their opposite. Isn't that, as we have seen, what has so often happened to these ideas taken from the early Marx? And isn't that what lies behind the unilateral adoption of "humanist" themes by anti-communist political currents from right to ultra-left?

What is anti-humanism?

Some readers may remain worried by the hostility to the term "humanism", as well as to the "ethical" interpretation of *Capital*, for which a "scientific" interpretation is to be substituted. Isn't Marxism the product of struggle and analysis, of reason and of passion? Precisely. But for Communists morality is not something abstract, but flows from class considerations. Marxism teaches us that the liberation of the people, of the working class and its allies, means the—albeit temporary—suppression, in one form or another, of the class of exploiters. That is the meaning of the Marxist concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Althusser's "anti-humanism" means nothing less and nothing more than the affirmation of the theoretical principles on which this concept, like the other concepts of Marxism, is based.

Very schematically, the point is that in his analysis of society Marx does not start from *man* the individual, but from *social* realities: classes, forces and relations of production, etc. So-called "human nature" (together with the moral ideas dominant at any given moment) is a product of these realities. Marxist science therefore cannot—as the "Young-Marxists" would like, as "theoretical humanism" asserts—take its departure from something called "the true reality of man". It is not at all some abstract "man" that makes history, nor any concrete individual, but the "masses"—"the classes allied in a single class struggle".¹¹

The whole debate on the question of humanism has been marked by considerable confusion and misunderstanding, with regard both to the nature of the arguments involved and to their point. We have already seen very briefly why Althusser considers that, from the point of view of its theoretical status, Marxism is not a humanism. As to the point of the argument, he says:

"The inflation of the themes of 'Marxist humanism' and their encroachment on Marxist theory should be interpreted as a possible historical symptom of a double inability and a double danger.

⁹ *Op. cit.*, p. 23.

¹⁰ Quoted in Althusser, *For Marx*, p. 52.

¹¹ *Lenin and Philosophy*, p. 67.

An inability to think the specificity of Marxist theory, and, correlatively, a revisionist danger of confusing it with pre-Marxist ideological interpretations. An inability to resolve the real (basically *political* and *economic*) problems posed by the Twentieth Congress, and a danger of masking these problems with the false 'solution' of some merely *ideological* formulae".¹²

The question should now be a little clearer. But let us repeat: Althusser says that Marxism, as a science, is not a humanism. He does not say that the work of Communists is not prompted by human feelings. Indeed, only a political struggle based on Marxism will see these human strivings fulfilled.

Marxism and the Party

When Althusser talks about Marxism as a science, he means that it has broken with the rough-and-ready, spontaneous conceptions of the world which can so often lead, among other things, to political errors. These conceptions remain at the *ideological* level. Let us consider one famous example of the application of this distinction: it is Lenin's. In his article *What Is To Be Done?* he argues that socialist theory must be based on deep scientific knowledge. Scientific socialism could not have arisen directly from the struggles of the working class:

"The history of all countries shows that the working class, exclusively by its own effort, is able to develop only trade union consciousness. . . . By their social status the founders of modern scientific socialism, Marx and Engels, themselves belonged to the bourgeois intelligentsia. In the very same way, in Russia, the theoretical doctrine of Social-Democracy arose altogether independently of the spontaneous growth of the working-class movement. . . ."¹³

This point is very important, the more so since Lenin is often misrepresented. Nothing that he says here—and nothing that Althusser says, who attempts to defend Lenin—in any way implies political *élitism*. The whole point, on the contrary, is that *scientific* ideas, to have any value, must penetrate the *working class*. For that task a new party is required, a party of a new type—a party of workers and other revolutionaries. A Communist Party.

Why is it a party of a new type? Because, for the first time in history, it makes politics based on scientific principles of theory and of organisation.

¹² *For Marx*, p. 12.

¹³ Lenin, *What Is To Be Done?*, in *Selected Works* in 3 volumes, Moscow 1967, vol. 1, p. 122.

What is the link between scientific theory and organisational structure? It is that if Marxism, as Lenin says, is indeed a system of ideas of a different kind from, say, trade union consciousness—which expresses the *spontaneous* reaction of the working class to its exploitation—then it follows that a Marxist party must be organised in a way that will allow the working class to lift its struggles above this spontaneous and disconnected level.

The party does not simply "express" the ideas, opinions and demands of the working class. It unites these with *scientific principles of action*. This is only possible when the party is one, united in its struggles. And that is why "the fusion of Marxist theory and the Workers' Movement is the most important event in the whole history of the class struggle, i.e. in practically the whole of human history. . . ."¹⁴

It ought to be possible now to understand something of the point of Althusser's work. He is concerned with the defence—at a theoretical level, for this is his job as a philosopher—of the fundamental principles of Marxism-Leninism, principles which, for the most part, are quite simple, but no less important for that—the more so since they are often denied. In defending Marxism against the distortions of the so-called "Young-Marxist" current and other revisionist interpretations, he is not simply engaged in an academic debate. For what is at stake here, in the last instance, is politics: the politics of the Communist movement.

Anti-Leninism and anti-communism

Anti-Leninism is not a new phenomenon. But it has found a new popularity in recent years. Certain ideological currents have flowered. Trotskyism and anarcho-syndicalism have found common cause in resurrecting once again the phantasm of Stalinism. Unilateral propaganda is made for "grass roots" socialism, for "workers' control", against "bureaucratism"—ignoring real problems of trade union and socialist democracy. However attractive these ideas may sound, their use, when not integrated into a properly Marxist perspective, has more often than not one end: anti-communism.

But the fight is not tit-for-tat. Our Party has a right to its existence. Its structure and principles are not arbitrary but founded on scientific analysis. "Marxism is all-powerful", said Lenin, "because it is true". To help show that it is true is Althusser's purpose.

There can in any case be no artificial distinction between theoretical and political work, and this was never more true. For the fact is that

¹⁴ "Philosophy as a Revolutionary Weapon", in *Lenin and Philosophy*, p. 18.

powerful ideological pressures are tending for the moment to push important numbers of young people into various kinds of leftism or political idealism. It is not easy to convince them of the Communist position. The bourgeois press, too, often plays a subtle role in this connection, together with television and the other mass media. Many other people, at the same time, become disillusioned with politics as they see it presented to them by these media, and refuse to take part in the struggle.

In this situation our Party finds itself in a difficult position, and things are similar in most of the advanced capitalist world. For ideologically we are to a certain extent swimming against the current. Isn't the Party "old-fashioned" and "conservative"? Don't we need a different kind of socialism from the one it presents as a model?

The point about Althusser's work is that it answers these questions. And it answers them unequivocally. Marxism-Leninism, let us repeat, is not a fashion to be picked up or left at will, but a science. Leninist organisation is not something out-dated, adapted to some long past historical period and now to be abandoned, but the only form of organisation based on Marxist principles. Only when Marxism guides the political struggles of the masses can the great problems of our time, including the real problems which exist in the socialist countries, be resolved.

It is, however, a question of proving it, and convincing others. And here real theoretical argument is indispensable. Althusser is one of those engaged in research whose aim is to give this theoretical argument, vital to the Communist movement, an ever deeper content. No wonder many ex-Communists and anti-Communists hate him! No wonder, for example, that the philosopher L. Kolakowski, late of the University of Warsaw and now apparently commuting between Britain and the USA, writes that Althusser's works give us "nothing but empty language"! No wonder that the Trotskyist review *International Socialism* congratulates Kolakowski for "effectively demolishing the pretensions of the Althusserians"¹⁵

Marx and Hegel

John Lewis has already commented in *Marxism Today* on certain specific points in Althusser's work. There is no room here to deal with all his arguments. But a few things need to be said, in particular on the question of Marx's relation to Hegel.

The point Althusser is making when he says that Marx breaks with Hegelian conceptions is that,

given a *system* like Hegel's, one can't take bits and pieces and paste them together with other elements. More specifically, Marx abandons the idea of alienation, in its Hegelian or any other form. The position is *very roughly* the following.

Alienation implies separation. Such a separation exists, in Hegel's theory of society, between the essence of the social totality and its concrete determinations. In Marx's early work another idea of separation exists—that which divides the so-called essence of man from the concrete forms of his labour (commodities, state, religion). Both conceptions rest on the same formal idea of *essence*. Marx had to give up this idea when he founded the science of historical materialism.

First, historical explanation begins with the analysis of the social formation, and not with an abstract idea of the essential qualities of man. But nor can one base an understanding of society on any other notion of essence, as if there were some simple principle around which all events revolve. The economy, it is true, is the base. But its relation to the other elements of society—politics, ideology etc.—is very complex. If everything were directly determined by the economy (or any other single principle, as in Hegel) history would be much simpler than it is.

Not that there are no connections between Hegel and Marx. The fact that Marx broke decisively with Hegel does not mean—this is obvious—that the latter did not influence him. Marx "borrowed" from Hegel, if you like (from the chapter on the Absolute Idea in his *Logic*), the idea of a "process without a subject". Three points in this connection.

First, Marx gives the idea a different content. Though he agrees that history is not the history of any subject whatsoever, he explains it, unlike Hegel, in materialist terms of class struggle.

Second, it is because history has no subject that the Marxist tradition was correct in returning to the thesis of the *dialectics of nature*. This thesis has the polemic meaning that, *in this respect*, history is no different from the object of physical science.

Third, this idea of process, "Hegelian" on its formal side, is as a matter of fact what enables Marx to break with his earlier use of the conception of the human essence. The ironies of intellectual history!

It is worth pointing out that the immense scholarly effort made by some experts who assure us that certain terms used by the young Marx—that of alienation, for example—re-appear a given number of times in rather late works (including the *Grundrisse der Kritik der politischen Oekonomie*) is unfortunately rather wasted. From the fact that the same word re-appears, one can hardly conclude without further ado that the sense is the same.

¹⁵ *International Socialism*, No. 50 (January-March 1972), p. 41.

But more important, no-one (Althusser included) ever suggested that the science of Marxism, or any other science for that matter, came into the world pure, free of the traces of other, pre-scientific ideas.

Science and class

Science, says Althusser, is always produced under difficult conditions, in struggle against old ideas. To use an image:

“The sciences we are familiar with have been installed in a number of great ‘continents’. Before Marx, two such continents had been opened up to scientific knowledge: the continent of Mathematics and the continent of Physics. The first by the Greeks (*Thales*), the second by *Galileo*. Marx opened up a third continent to scientific knowledge: the continent of History”.¹⁶

The science founded by Marx is therefore a new science, and one particularly hard to establish. Why does the establishment of a science always represent such a struggle? Because ideas do not come singly, but always in a system, a whole system. A scientific revolution therefore has to break with the old system which it replaces. But that system *exists for a reason*. An ideology fulfils a function, is linked to the practical requirements of life, or of some class or ruling group. Think of the struggle of scientific physics against religion at the time of *Galileo*. It was not simply a case of truth versus error, but of science in combat against a set of ideas whose strength was based on their precise social and class role.

It is not hard to imagine the pressures which exist against the establishment of Marxism. But these pressures, when explicit, take different forms. Opposition or—distortion. Western intellectuals, Althusser writes, are, with a few exceptions, “still ‘dabbling’ in political economy, sociology, ethnology, ‘anthropology’, ‘social psychology’, etc., etc. . . . even today, *one hundred years after Capital*, just as some *Aristotelian* physicists were still ‘dabbling’ in physics, *fifty years after Galileo*”.¹⁷ When they mention Marx “it is always, with extremely rare exceptions, to attack him, to condemn him, to ‘absorb’ him, to exploit him or to revise him”.

There are, in the universities and elsewhere, a certain number of academics with a certain idea of Marxism in their heads. Nine-tenths of these ideas, says Althusser, are false. But they have no trouble in winning a wide audience. This audience, however, is composed for the most part not of workers but of intellectuals since, “as Engels said,

even when proletarians have not grasped the most abstract demonstrations in *Capital*, they do not allow themselves to be ‘caught out’”.¹⁸

If scientific progress comes up against many obstacles—and the science of Marxism, for obvious reasons, has a particularly hard struggle—it has, as it were, certain resources at its disposal. One is the philosophy of materialism. The defence of materialism is the thread which runs through Althusser’s work. We shall see how he interprets it.

The function of Marxist philosophy

Let us first make a clear distinction between historical materialism, which is the *science*, and *philosophical* or dialectical materialism. The history of philosophy is a struggle between two tendencies, materialism and idealism. But this struggle in philosophy only has a meaning when related to the struggle for the development of the sciences. A philosophy is defined by its relation to scientific practice. Does it aid that practice or hinder it? The answer to this question, schematically, determines whether a philosophy plays a materialist or an idealist role.

Materialism, at the same time, changes in form with every great scientific discovery (Engels’ famous thesis). The struggle remains. That is why Lenin says:

“The genius of Marx and Engels lies precisely in the fact that during a very long period, *nearly half a century*, they developed materialism, further advanced one fundamental trend in philosophy . . . mercilessly brushing aside as rubbish all nonsense, pretentious hotchpotch, the innumerable attempts to ‘discover’ a ‘new’ line in philosophy, to invent a ‘new’ trend and so forth”.¹⁹

It is to Lenin that Althusser turns, in a work published in 1968, for an account of the function of Marxist philosophy.²⁰ It is Lenin who assigns to philosophy its own special domain. Philosophical categories are distinct from scientific concepts. But philosophy *intervenes* in the domain of science. It “draws a dividing line” between the scientific and the ideological. If it is a materialist philosophy it helps to repel ideological dangers. If it is idealist it sows confusion and hinders scientific advance.

The Marxist philosophy of materialism is able to go even further, for it can draw on historical materialism. And historical materialism tells us that

¹⁸ “Preface to *Capital*”, in *Lenin and Philosophy*, p. 78.

¹⁹ Lenin, *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, Moscow 1967, p. 325.

²⁰ The paper “Lenin and Philosophy” was originally read to the French Philosophy Society on February 24, 1968.

¹⁶ “Philosophy as a Revolutionary Weapon”, in *Lenin and Philosophy*, p. 18.

¹⁷ *Op. cit.*, p. 19.

ideological obstacles have real social roots, including roots in the class struggle. For if in general true ideas serve the people and false ideas serve its enemies, it is the working class and its allies who stand to gain from the development of Marxism. When dialectical materialism intervenes in the theoretical domain *for* science, *against* ideological deformations, it therefore represents, in that domain, the class struggle.

This is the meaning of Lenin's thesis of *partisanship* in philosophy. A thesis which shocked the bourgeois world—for didn't it imply something *disingenuous*, a *lack of intellectual honesty*? The answer is not what the bourgeois world thought, but it is perhaps equally shocking. It is that all philosophy is partisan, whether it likes it or not. Only the materialist however stands, in the last instance, on the side of truth. And the Marxist materialist most firmly of all, for he knows what his partisanship comes to.

All this Althusser explains. No wonder that some of his opponents are reduced to slander. For his arguments do not remain on a barren, abstract level where they could be ignored, but have a function in accordance with the thesis of Marx,

Lenin and Gramsci, "that philosophy is fundamentally political".²¹ We have seen how Althusser interprets this thesis, something of the use to which his work is put. That is not to say that no room remains for argument! Other philosophers, other Communists, who disagree on many points, are engaged in the same work. We look forward to the debate. The last word here, however, to Althusser. It is one of modesty for his profession. Works of theory are necessary, he says. But in order to understand them, something quite specific is required:

"One must directly experience oneself the two *realities* which determine them through and through: the reality of theoretical practice (science, philosophy) in its concrete life; the reality of the *practice of revolutionary class struggle* in its concrete life, in close contact with the masses. For if theory enables us to understand the laws of history, it is not intellectuals, nor even theoreticians, it is the *masses who make history*".²²

²¹ "Philosophy as a Revolutionary Weapon", in Lenin and Philosophy, p. 15.

²² *Op. cit.*, p. 23.

Georg Weerth—Friend of Marx and Engels

Uwe Zemke

This year marks the 150th anniversary of the birth of Georg Weerth whom his friend Friedrich Engels described as "the first and *most important* poet of the German proletariat". Because of this label, he was more or less completely ignored in Germany until Bruno Kaiser of the GDR published his Complete Works in 1956, exactly a hundred years after the poet's death. It is a remarkable and unique phenomenon in the history of German literature that one of the country's most interesting writers should have remained unknown for that length of time.

Admittedly, there were formidable difficulties in editing his work, much of which was either unpublished or not easily accessible, yet nothing was done in West Germany to remedy the situation, where 16 years after the publication of his Complete Works, Weerth has still not received the recognition he deserves. His name appears in hardly any of the standard histories of German literature, his work

is not studied at universities or schools, and his home town has only recently begun to show interest in him when it became obvious that he could no longer be passed over. All this compares very unfavourably with the reception Weerth has had in the Socialist countries, and notably in the USSR, the GDR and in Cuba, where he has rightly been acknowledged as probably *the* foremost German Socialist poet.

Who then was Georg Weerth and why is he so important? His acquaintances included Robert Owen, the Chartist leaders, continental revolutionaries like Mazzini, Ledru-Rollin and Kossuth, German socialists like Karl Grün and Moses Hess, Wilhelm Weitling, the advocate of a Christian Communism, Ferdinand Lassalle, the founder of the General German Working Class Association in 1863, and progressive poets like Heinrich Heine, Ferdinand Freiligrath and Georg Herwegh. Above all, however, he knew all the leading members of the Communist