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EDITORIAL

## Theory and Social Action

BRIAN MARTIN

Over the years I have known quite a number of dedicated social activists. One thing that has amazed me about many of them is how little attention they seem to pay to social theory.

Joan, for example, is an environmental activist who is intelligent, hard working and often extremely astute. She reads a lot, but it is usually practical material about the issues that she deals with day to day. She is continually rushing about attending meetings, preparing submissions and media releases, calling supporters, attending to requests, planning demonstrations and so forth. It is a hectic, stimulating, usually satisfying but sometimes very draining life. There is little opportunity to relax and ponder over volumes by Habermas or Foucault.

What would be the point anyway? Habermas and Foucault, and most other theorists, seem to have nothing practical to say to Joan or most other activists. Or do they?

That is something that has intrigued me for a long time. While I have been a social activist some of the time, I have also read a fair bit of theory, and *sometimes* there seem to be insights to be gained from the theory. Unfortunately there is usually a lot of "translation" required. It is no good giving a busy activist an issue of *Sociological Review* or *Telos*. Most academic Journals are simply unintelligible to all but academics.

There is an additional problem. Even lots of the material that seems like it might be relevant to activists turns out to be nothing special—either obvious points or irrelevant observations. At least that was my impression back in the 1970s of the academic writings about the anti-nuclear power movement. But, here and there, a few insights appear. The difficulty is passing these insights on to the activists.

In this context, my colleague Richard Sylvan refers to the "trickle-down" theory. High-level theorists produce abstruse writings, decipherable by only a few. Somehow this theory needs to get down to the activists at

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the grassroots. This requires "interpreters", who help to popularise the theory, for example by using it in more accessible lectures, articles or textbooks. Other interpreters may give talks to or even be members of activist groups. Gradually, the key ideas—often in altered form—trickle down to activists.

"Trickle-down" theory in economics does not have a promising record. Helping the rich to get richer, in the hope that prosperity will trickle down to the poor, seems simply an excuse for inequality. Why should activists expect that high-level theory would be relevant to them anyway? Wouldn't it be more appropriate to develop theory out of day-to-day experiences?

Clearly there is much to be discussed on these questions. At this point it is appropriate to turn to the contributions to this issue of *Philosophy and Social Action*. Chris Rootes deals with the central issues of the usefulness of theory for social action. His insights are many and far-ranging. What he has to say will not be easy reading for many, but his text is worthy of careful study, especially by activist.

One of the theories that has been long linked to radical social action in the West is Marxism. The debates about Marxism are extensive, to say the least. Although the theory has many documented limitations, it can still provide insight. Maduabuchi Dukor tackles the issue of the relevance of Marxism to Nigeria today. His assessment deserves to be supplemented by assessments of many other theoretical perspectives applied to Third World countries.

David Orton writes on a more practical level. He tells a story, with rich detail, of how a particular concept—the concept of informed consent or informed rejection of pesticide use—can be used in environmental campaigning. A concept by itself is not a theory, but incorporates an implicit theoretical perspective; in this case, a commitment to public participation is part of this perspective. Many more analyses like Orton's are needed, including examination of concepts that did *not* serve the goals of social action.

Yet another approach to social action is to look at the assumptions underlying our behaviours and beliefs—what Timothy Doyle calls "myths". As well as exposing a number of the myths that he thinks underlie current ecological problems, Doyle proposes an alternative myth: the pot at the end of the rainbow. He thus raises the issue of whether activists have to work within the dominant social myths, or whether it is possible to propagate more appropriate myths.

These articles are a contribution to the important task of linking theory and social action. That task will continue to be important and, as both theory and social action develop, to require new developments. Dealing with these issues, in the widest sense, is one of the central goals of this journal, *Philosophy and Social Action*. □

## Theory of Social Movements: Theory *for* Social Movements?

C. A. ROOTES

Activists sometimes argue that sociological theories of social movements are mere academic parasitism and that what is needed, if theory is needed at all, is theory *for* social movements, theory fashioned by people committed to social movements and designed to be useful to movement activists rather than to further the careers of theorists. There is, however, no inherent conflict between an interest in understanding the world and a determination to change it; it is merely that whereas theory may be comfortably remote from action, action which is not informed by theoretical understanding will often be counterproductive. The problem for the activist is to decide which of the variety of available theories is most likely to sustain effective action. The type of theory that has given theory a bad name with activists is, in general, theory that is as unhelpful to social scientific understanding as it is to action. But there are other theories, other *kinds* of theory, that are more useful on both counts.

### Is theory necessary?

Theorists tend, understandably, to believe in the utility of theory. They are, for the most part, true children of the Enlightenment: they believe in Reason and, believing in Reason, they believe that theoretical knowledge is the precondition of effective action to achieve desired results. Accordingly, theory has generally been the justification of formal political organisation.

Activists have usually been impatient with theory and suspicious of theorists. Explicitly or implicitly, theorists lay claim to power on the basis of their superior command of theoretical knowledge, knowledge they have often themselves created. Not surprisingly, activists often suspect that

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theorists have created theoretical knowledge partly or wholly in order to bolster their own claims to power. In any event, the effect of giving prominence to theory is to give power to theorists and to others with intellectual skills necessary to the interpretation of theory. At the very least, a movement which gives a high priority to theory is almost bound to be stratified between the highly educated few and the less-well-educated many. If the theory which guides the movement is elaborate and complex, movement organisations are likely to be formal, hierarchical and bureaucratic simply in order systematically to inhibit error, error, that is, in the form of action inconsistent with theoretical prescription.<sup>1</sup>

But does such formal organisation best serve the interests of those whose lives the movement exists to change? Some recent work on social movements in the United States suggests that it does not. Indeed it has been suggested that those people who have most need of political action to alleviate their condition and least likelihood of achieving results by conventional political means are also ill-served by formally organised political movements. Thus Piven and Cloward (1979) concluded, on the basis of their study of poor people's movements in the United States, that, for the poorest sections of the population, the costs of formal organisation were insupportably high. Where poor people's movements *were* formally organised, all available energy and resources tended to be channelled into sustaining the organisation rather than into the effective pursuit of its ostensible objectives. Poor people appeared to achieve most where they took the less predictable path of spontaneous protest and riot rather than the more calculated one of a campaign.<sup>2</sup>

Piven and Cloward drew from their findings the implication that poor people would do better to avoid organisation (and the intellectuals and theorists who promote and often staff movement organisations) and to rely upon their own powers of spontaneous and sporadic protest. That way the poor would be spared the burdens of futile attempts to organise themselves or to be organised, they would avoid the dangers of being dominated by theorists and they might yet achieve by spontaneous protest whatever they were ever destined to gain.

### **Theory, action and structure**

The argument is similar to the 'structural' theory of revolution recently popularised by Theda Skocpol. Skocpol (1979) argued, on the basis of a comparative study of the French, Russian and Chinese revolutions, that revolutions are not made by revolutionary theorists or by dedicated bands of revolutionaries, but rather are the outcomes of complex interactions between social and political structural conditions. In Wendell Phillip's words, 'Revolutions are not made; they come'. Other students of modern revolutions have, however, come to rather different conclusions. John Dunn (1972), for example, without denying the importance of structural conditions to the

creation of revolutionary situations, quite reasonably insists that successful twentieth century revolutions cannot be understood except as complex performances by imaginative and committed actors. Just possibly, revolutionary actors may create revolutionary situations out of unpromising structural conditions; more certainly, structural conditions may provide revolutionary opportunities which go begging for want of suitably talented and energetic actors. Moreover, each successful revolution changes the political repertoire available to all revolutionaries who come after it. In sum, the record of the twentieth century tends to confirm the Leninist theory of revolution as a triumph of political will and organisation rather than the Marxist one which sees revolutions as the dark deliveries of historical necessity and social structural conditions.

It must, therefore, be doubted whether it is safe to generalise from Piven and Cloward's conclusions about the experience of poor people's movements in the United States. It needs to be remembered that their study covered a limited period of history in just one country. At the very least it must be considered whether the pattern they found is a product of the peculiarities of United States 'political culture: Castells' account (1977, ch. 14) of urban protests in Paris came to the contrary conclusion that unruly protests were unsuccessful and that the most orderly were the most productive of desired results<sup>3</sup>. The decentralised political system of the United States provides many openings for political access but imposes severe institutionalised limitations on effective policy implementation. This, together with a political culture dominated by the ideology of democratic pluralism, generates grievances, legitimises their expression and relatively easily (if incompletely and often ineffectively) accedes to protestors' demands. Strongly centralised states with fewer points of access and more effective mechanisms of policy implementation may be more resistant to disorderly protests but more hospitable to more institutionalised forms of participation by the poor. Certainly, Western European countries have generally been more accommodative to trade union organisation and have presented fewer obstacles to voter registration or voting itself than have many of the United States. The costs of political organisation to the poor in relation to the benefits derived from it have, as a result, generally been lower in Western Europe and Australasia than they have in the United States.

### **The changing conditions of success**

It would, however, be wrong to imagine that such patterns are permanently fixed. States change and political climates change more often and more abruptly. What was true of a country in one year or decade may be much less true in another. Indeed, there is abundant evidence that it is the political will of the authorities, a factor much more temporally variable than a country's political institutional structure or political culture, that is the key factor in determining the success or otherwise of mass protests: the

United States which, during the Democratic administrations of the 1960s, had been relatively responsive even to violent protests became, in the later years of Nixon's presidency, altogether more resistant (Castells, 1978: 149; Jenkins, 1981); in Spain protests were rigorously repressed in the 1950s and 1960s but, by the mid 1970s, were tolerated, chiefly because modernizing technocrats were progressively displacing hard-line Phalangists in government (Castells, 1983); in the Soviet Union protest movements scarcely imaginable a decade ago seem to be transforming political culture and promising the transformation of political institutions.

A strategy effective in one place and at one time may be relatively ineffective or even counterproductive in another place or at another time. This should encourage us to be cautious in any generalisations about the utility for social movements of violence, of formal organisation or, indeed, of theory.

### **The usefulness of theory**

Nevertheless it is rather more than mere rationalist superstition to believe that appropriately reflective, calculated action, based on sound knowledge of the situation and an appreciation of the likely consequences of possible alternative forms of action, will, other things being equal, usually produce better results than action which is entirely unreflective. On balance, it is most likely that the costs of action will be minimised and the benefits maximised if action is strategic. Strategy, of course, is necessarily based on knowledge and all knowledge is rooted in and laden with theory. It follows that theory may be useful to movements and not merely to their more personally ambitious members.

Activists who imagine that the action they take is entirely spontaneous and therefore safe from the corrupting influence of theory and theorists delude themselves. The social scientific study of riots has amply demonstrated that even in the most anarchic protest there are 'leaders' who retain a consciousness of themselves apart from the action and who are, for that reason, capable of calculating and 'directing' action. These 'leaders', who may well be 'leaders' in only a single protest event, as well as the 'opinion leaders' who mould opinion in all kinds of communities, operate on the basis of understandings of the situation that depend upon knowledge which is itself shaped by theory. That theory may be—indeed, usually is—inchoate: it is not usually formalised as theory, but theory it is nonetheless. A major purpose of the social theorist is to make explicit and to subject to critical scrutiny theories that are otherwise unreflective and unreflected upon. Such theories may be powerful but they may also contain unconsidered contradictions and inconsistencies which, when acted upon, may ultimately have consequences quite different from those which were desired and intended. Much apparently pathological political action is in fact the product of pathologies of theory. The exposure of such pathologies is, accordingly, a useful service which social scientific analysis might render to social movements.



### What kind of theory ?

But *what* theory, indeed, what *kinds* of theory are likely to be most useful to social movements ? If precedent and, in particular the perennial appeal of marxism, is any guide, it is theory at its grandest, theory that purports to explain the causes and direction of social change, that has greatest appeal to activists. For many theorists, too, such theory is the summit of ambition, the standard by which all else is measured and found wanting. Their striving for all-encompassing systematic theory is understandable, even admirable, even though it is often coloured by the vanity, conceit and snobbery that attends intellectual elitism. Yet none of these attempts to construct a total theoretical system has been entirely successful and all, to the extent that they have been adopted, have produced, in the second generation if not in the master theorists themselves, closed intellectual systems more often characterised by dogmatism than by creative reinterpretation and adaptation to changing circumstances. Where they have been taken as guides to practice, they have generally led to authoritarian, sometimes even totalitarian, regimes.

Activists and theorists alike tend to have too grand and exclusive a conception of theory. Not all social theory is grand theory. Indeed, what Robert Merton (1957) recommended to sociologists as an escape from the paralyzing impasse of the confrontation between marxism and functionalism is no less good advice for social movement activists: focus attention instead upon theories of the middle range.

Most theories of or about social movements are, in fact, middle-range theories: they may have connections with larger theoretical and conceptual systems and certainly they have connections with middle-range theories of other social phenomena, but they are usually developed and can often be employed as means of understanding aspects of social movements and their milieux without presupposing the existence of any all-encompassing theory of social and political change. Most recently-produced middle-range theory of social movements is not especially abstract and can be translated into terms intelligible to intelligent lay persons including, especially, social movement activists themselves. Accordingly, it has the considerable advantage for popular, democratic social movements that, unlike grand theory, it does not require the elevation or importation of a virtual priesthood of intellectuals to act as translators and guides.

### A general theory of social movements ? The work of Alain Touraine

Amongst recent contributions to the theory of social movements, the one that has the highest aspirations to being a general theory of social and political change is also the one that makes the strongest claims to be useful to social movements themselves. I refer to the work of Alain Touraine, the most general, programmatic statement of which appeared in English as *The Voice and the Eye* (1981). His project demonstrates many of the pitfalls of

such grand ambition.<sup>4</sup>

Touraine's sociology and his approach to the theory of social movements has immediate appeal because of the centrality it assigns to the problem of action. Touraine conceives of society not as a set of institutions so much as a complex web of social relationships. The central task of sociology is, accordingly, the elucidation of the social action by which such relationships are produced and transformed. The sociology of action which Touraine proposes is opposed both to functionalism and to marxist economism; neither functionalism (which assigns centrality to the problem of order and interprets all social action in terms of norms and roles) nor structuralist marxism (which sees action as the working out of economic laws) copes adequately with the analysis of social action. Yet, Touraine believes, we have arrived at a great turning point in social development: the emergence from the shell of industrial society of a new 'programmed' society in which the centrality of manufacture is supplanted by the generation and deployment of knowledge.

Touraine's aim is no less than to do for the 'programmed' society of the late twentieth century what Karl Marx had attempted to do for industrial society more than a century earlier: to expose the dynamics of societal development and to identify the emergent social movement capable of transcending the contradictions of existing social formations and ushering in a new epoch in which men and women may actively and deliberately create their own history. What most strongly distinguishes Touraine's theory from marxism is that, although he has clearly been influenced by historical materialism, his theory is concerned less with the location of structural shifts than with 'the reconstruction of frameworks of action and identity which may evolve during social conflict' (Eyerman, 1984 : 80). It is a corollary of this that theory is not accorded cognitive privilege over the perspectives of rank-and-file activists. Touraine's theory proposes no immanent laws of development, nor does it prescribe correct modes of action.

There is, to put it mildly, a tension between the modesty of such programmatic statements and Touraine's claim to have identified an epochal historical transition from industrial society to a post-industrial 'programmed' society as well as his assertion that there can be but one transformative social movement at any stage of societal development. The succession of studies of French protest movements undertaken by Touraine and his research group amounts to a quite explicit quest for the protest which contains within itself the embryo of the universal social movement which will open the way to the future. In other words, the researchers are not mere disinterested scholars but believers in search of the prophetic movement which might perform the miracle of salvation that they have ordained for it.

Although Touraine insists that in studying social movements he and his colleagues are analysts rather than activists, their method ensures that their higher purpose is not concealed from their subjects. The method Touraine advocates and has practised is that of a 'sociological intervention'

In the course of such an intervention the sociologist assembles a group of rank-and-file activists representing a diversity of viewpoints within a protest movement, introduces it to 'interlocutors' (critics and opponents who, in discussing the movement with its activists, enhance the activists' self-awareness by helping them to see themselves as others see them), records the group's own discussion, confronts it with the record of its interactions, seeks to promote the group's own self-analysis and, finally, encourages the group to accept its own 'conversion' by conceiving of its struggle at its highest level of generality—the level of the transformative movement which the analyst believes, on the basis of Touraine's theory, to be necessary to fulfil the potential for social change present in prevailing social conflicts.

Many activists and the groups to which they belong would undoubtedly benefit from the process of systematic discussion, reflection and confrontation with different viewpoints which Touraine's method employs. Many would certainly benefit from the intervention of a skilled and knowledgeable analyst. Nevertheless it seems at best naive to suppose that such a process does not put the analyst in a privileged position with respect to the activists and it is implausible to claim that the analyst who, overtly or covertly, brings Touraine's theory to the group does not pretend to at least some measure of cognitive privilege.

The practice Touraine recommends to the sociologist is in some ways analogous to that of the psychoanalyst: the sociologist, in undertaking a sociological intervention, seeks to assist the optimal self-actualisation of the group much as the psychoanalyst seeks to promote the self-actualisation of the individual. However much (or little) the psychoanalyst succeeds in helping the individual, it would be absurd to claim that the analyst did not assume a position of cognitive privilege, not because of his or her desire to dominate the patient but simply because it is the analyst (and not the patient) who has learned and deploys the theory and the techniques of analysis. Indeed very often the success of the analysis is determined by how fully the patient adopts the theoretical world-view of the analyst.

Touraine and his colleagues seem scarcely more circumspect in their enthusiasm to achieve the 'conversion' of the groups with which they intervene. One does not need to doubt Touraine's integrity, or even the utility of his method for activists themselves, to remain sceptical of his claim that his method entails no presumption of the cognitive privilege of the theorist. Even without intending to impose theory upon the activists, the method of sociological intervention, especially where it is conducted by a theorist of Touraine's established eminence and widely published views, appears inevitably to entail an asymmetrical power relationship which many activists will understandably resent. At its worst, in less scrupulous hands, it might provide the rationale for a new version of intellectual bolshevism.

Most recent theorising about social movements is both more modest in its intellectual ambition and more circumspect in its relations with social

movement practice. To that extent it is content to be theory of social movements and to leave the question of whether it is actually useful for social movements to the activists themselves. Nevertheless, many, perhaps most, social movement theorists are or have been social movement activists and their theorising bears the marks of their affective involvement with movements.

### **Resource mobilisation Theory**

Perhaps the most widely employed approach to the study of social movements today, at least in the English-speaking world, is what has come to be called 'resource mobilisation theory'.<sup>5</sup> At its most general, this theory starts from the very straightforward observation that all political action is socially structured and that the resources available to activists are patterned accordingly. It makes the assumption that movement activists are at least as calculatively rational as are more conventional political actors and that they will, accordingly, devise strategies of action which make best use of the resources they have and which minimize the requirement for resources they do not have.<sup>6</sup>

This stress on the instrumental rationality of social movements has been criticised for exaggerating the 'normality' of social movements and neglecting the extent to which they are extraordinary, oppositional and even utopian; many movements seek, after all, not merely to operate effectively within the parameters of the existing political system but to extend or even to overthrow those parameters. The fact that so much emphasis has been placed on the instrumental rationality of social movements is both an intellectual reaction against a previous generation of theory which regarded social movements as essentially non-rational instances of 'collective behaviour' and a political reaction to the dismissal of social movements as irrational and so irrelevant to or subversive of legitimate democratic politics. To that extent, resource mobilisation theory too has been theory both of and for social movements.

Much of the early work on resource mobilisation theory focussed on questions of organisation and leadership. It was criticised for being overly concerned with processes internal to social movements themselves and for neglecting factors arguably more crucial to the success or even survival of social movements—the actions and reactions of other, more powerful political actors among which the state itself is the most important. More recently, attention has shifted to the interaction between social movements and political systems and the term 'political opportunity structures'<sup>7</sup> has increasingly been employed as a short-hand for the range of political factors, conjunctural as well as institutional, which bear on the development and outcomes of social movements.

Thus attention has been focussed upon the degree of openness of political systems to access by non-elite actors, new political movements or new parties; the degree of effectiveness of political systems in decision-

marking and the implementation of decisions; and, latterly, more strictly conjunctural factors such as the prevailing state of political competition within a polity. A number of studies have demonstrated the importance of these considerations to the development and outcomes of movements as diverse as anti-nuclear movements (Kitschelt, 1986), student movements (Rootes, 1990) and environmentalist parties (Rootes, forthcoming).

Resource mobilisation theory, then, focusses upon the patterning of resources for action and of opportunities for and constraints upon successful action, emphasises the problem of organisation, and stresses the calculative rationality of movements. It is resolutely focussed upon *how* it is that movements are organised and succeed or fail rather than *why* they exist at all. As theory for the classroom, this is a serious limitation but it in no way compromises the utility of resource mobilisation theory for movements themselves; even revolutionary movements need to be calculative, to make best use of their resources and opportunities.

If resource mobilisation theory often seems to be no more than a formalisation of strategic commonsense it may yet serve as a reminder to veteran activists and as a surrogate for direct experience for those who are new to the politics of social movements. For movement activists, then, resource mobilisation theory has at least modest pedagogic value and because of its modesty it is both relatively free of ideological freight and presents little risk of legitimating the domination of the theorist as expert.

### **Knowledge and Social movements**

If much attention has been paid to the way social situations structure the resources available to social movements, less has been invested in elucidating the way knowledge and perceptions are structured. Yet a major factor in social conflict is the fact that people who are differently situated in social structures see the same events differently, their vision variously clarified or obscured by perspectives rooted in their social situations. This structuring of knowledge and perspective affects equally movements and their opponents and it tends to exacerbate conflicts of interest because it obstructs the identification of common ground necessary to negotiation, to the optimisation of the benefits of negotiation, and to the minimisation of mutually destructive hostility (Rootes, 1983).

For activists in most movements total victory and the utter destruction of opponents is neither feasible nor attempted. What they seek by their action is to improve their leverage and bargaining position in order that the outcome of negotiation and compromise may be most favourable to their constituencies. If they are to achieve such optimal results, activists need to develop the ability to see the situation from the perspective of their opponents in order to avoid action which will increase resistance rather than weaken it. An understanding of the rudiments of the sociology of knowledge may accordingly be as useful to movement activists as it is to conciliators.

Another development of the sociology of knowledge as applied to social movements is perhaps more indigestible for movements. Bouchier (1978) has shown how different political ideas and principles or political 'ideologies' serve movements more or less well in the pursuit of effectiveness. Radical movements must, if they are to be successful in attracting and retaining commitment, accomplish the processes of de-legitimation (the identification of areas of stress and the attack upon the legitimating mechanisms associated therewith), dis-alienation (the presentation of an alternative cognitive universe and an explanation of the means by which desired changes might be produced) and commutation (the communication to an audience of a realistic alternative interpretation of the world sufficiently flexible to encompass changing circumstances). The management of these processes in a task for theory itself and the success or failure of a movement may in large measure be attributed to the properties of the political theory it embraces.

Such an approach is a useful addition to the armoury of the academic analyst of social movements but it is less obviously useful to movements themselves since, even where its truth is accepted, acting on it involves tinkering with political theories close to the heart of the movement's reason for existing. Nevertheless, movements can revise their political theories and some do: Levitas (1977), for instance, has documented the way the Christian Socialist movement redefined its goals in response to changing conditions.

It is obviously difficult for activists to amend or abandon theories central to a movement's identity but it should be possible to distinguish the central elements of theory from those which are more peripheral, just as strategy may be distinguished from tactics. Peripheral elements of theory, like tactics, might then be retained or jettisoned according to their utility in contributing to the achievement of movement goals.

### **Theorists and activists**

Relations between those who are active in social and political movements and those who write about them have always been awkward. To some extent this merely reflects the tension between those whose personal taste is for action and those who are most given to reflection but it is, ultimately, rooted in the nature of theory and theorising. The awkwardness is bound to remain because, ultimately, the purposes of theory and of activism are different: whereas theory is the attempt to understand the world, activism is the attempt to change it.

Theorising requires a degree of detachment from action and that detachment often feeds the suspicion by activists, especially those in movements whose rationale is popular and democratic, that theorists are arrogant and elitist. As a result, movement activists are sometimes tempted to reject theorists and theory alike, especially when the theorists come from and frequently retreat to what are still imagined to be the ivory towers of academe. There, it seems, theorists fashion careers that are in large part

parasitic upon the lives of movement activists.

Theory is necessarily produced by elites—but that is not to say that theory is necessarily elitist, that it can only be appropriated by elites, or that its employment can only lead to elitist results. Certainly, there is the danger that theorists will seek to set themselves up as experts and that they will use their mastery of theory to assert their right to make decisions for others in the movement. There is the corresponding danger that others in the movement will be excessively deferential to theorists and so encourage the development of an intellectual vanguardism which leads ultimately to despotism, whether of theorists or, more usually, of opportunists who assume the legitimacy mantle of theory. There is a fine balance to be struck between deference to theorists and (a usually) damaging scorn for all theory.

Activists may more gladly suffer theorists if they believe them to be sympathetic to the struggle. That is entirely understandable especially in view of the fact that much bad or, from the point of view of activists, unhelpful theory has come from the pens of writers motivated by hostility to movements which they saw as a form of political action menacing to liberal democracy.

Many present-day theorists of social movements are sympathetic to the movements they study but it would be a mistake to attribute recent advances in the theory of social movements entirely to that sympathy; it is not necessarily the case that better theory of social movements is constructed by theorists with strong pro-movement sympathies. Opponents have just as strong an interest as sympathisers in correctly understanding a movement and sympathy is as likely as hostility to distort the perspective and compromise the judgement of the theorist or analyst. Just as those hostile to movements are indefatigable in their search for damning evidence, so researchers sympathetic to movements will seek to portray the movement in a favourable light and may even suppress inconvenient truths. Not only does this compromise their status as social scientists but, in the long run, it may not serve the movement well either. A myth or even a lie may sometimes inspire or sustain a movement (for example, the belief that the movement is stronger and its opponents weaker than in fact they are), but more often movement activists need clear-headed knowledge of their movement and its opponents. Such knowledge may sometimes discourage them from audacious action which may have had an outside chance of success but it will more often protect the movement from the disastrous consequences of misdirected effort.

Movement activists should not, therefore, be too quick to demand that theorists of social movements declare and demonstrate their sympathy for the movements they study. The greatest service theory can render to social movements is to attempt to present the unvarnished truth in language accessible to the intelligent lay person. Good theory is no panacea but it is better suited than ignorance or wishful thinking to enabling activists better

to understand the nature of their action, the obstacles to it and the positions of their adversaries. It is in this way that theory of social movements, even without being theory for social movements, may yet be useful to social movements. □

### Notes

- (1) The Communist movement is a case in point: its bureaucratism stemmed, ultimately; from the centrality to the movement of an elaborate, formal theory—marxism-leninism.
- (2) Piven and Cloward's finding is consistent with Gamson's (1975) conclusion that, even among formally organised protest movements in the United States, it was the most unruly which were the most successful. It should, however, be noted that others who have examined Gamson's data have come to rather different conclusions.
- (3) It must be said that the more obvious reason for the lack of success of unruly protests in Paris—indeed, for the recourse to unruly protest at all—was the social profile of the protesters: the most unruly and least successful were the socially marginal immigrants, students and single people. More 'respectable' and better socially integrated people were more restrained (perhaps because they were more constrained?) and more successful. It should, however, be noted that no urban protests in Paris were more than very modestly successful; the structure of government and the attitudes of officials - dimensions of the political institutions and culture of a country—appear to be important factors in determining the success or otherwise of protest movements. (See Castells (1978), ch. 6.).
- (4) Eyerman (1982, 1984) and Hannigan (1985) offer accounts of Touraine's project and situate it in the context of other theories of social movements. See also Pakulski (1990), ch. 1. Probably the most systematic critical appreciation in English of Touraine's work is Rucht (1990).
- (5) The most useful overview of resource mobilisation theory is Jenkins (1983), also Jenkins (1985).
- (6) For an application of a resource mobilisation approach to the explanation of radical student movements, see Rootes (1978).
- (7) The term appears first to have been used by Peter Eisinger and elaborated by Sidney Tarrow but more readily available exposition and application of it is to be found in Kitschelt (1986). To the extent that it is increasingly used to refer to processes that are more strictly conjunctural than properly structural, the term has become over-extended; to avoid linguistic and conceptual confusion it would seem better to restrict it to refer to the properties of political systems.



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## **IIInd World Congress on Violence and Human Coexistence**

**Montreal Congress Centre, July 13-17,1992**

The Organizing Committee invites all persons concerned with the growing problems of violence in contemporary society and more particularly specialists and practitioners in the various social and human sciences (sociology, psychology, economics, political science, history, philosophy, religions, science policy, criminology, social work, law, ecology, medicine, psychiatry, education etc.) to take part in a multidisciplinary international forum on the nature of violence, its diverse forms, personal as well as social and on the means and solutions to be worked out and applied towards alleviating or countering its manifestations and effects. As the millennium draws to a close, the organizers aim to bring together, under the auspices of the International Association for Scientific Exchange on Violence and Human Coexistence (ASEVICO) people from all parts of the world to reflect on violence in its many forms, on what violence tells us about ourselves and about the directions in which we are to develop as persons and societies to ensure a future for humanity.

The program will take place over a period of five days. Five plenary sessions will feature world leaders in the various disciplines : I On the nature and forms of violence; II On social violence; III On violence against persons: women, children, the elderly, the sick ; IV On violence against the environment and against future generations; V On solutions and remedies: education, research, heightened awareness...Participants are invited to submit contributed papers for a variety of sections.

Groups and societies may propose round table and special section projects on aspects of the main theme. Such projects will be included in the official program after approval by the Program Committee.

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# Marxism and Social Action in Nigeria

MADUABUCHI DUKOR

**Marxist theory, as it relates to explanation of crisis, social upheavals, wars, violence and so on, is highly relevant to Nigerian situation. Marxism provides insight into Nigerian contemporary economic and social problems. On the other hand, although a revolutionary situation has been in existence in Nigeria, its concomitant factor, the subjective condition, is problematic. A limitation of Marxism is that the doctrines of the proletariat, the proletarian revolution and dictatorship are highly problematic, especially in the Nigerian situation.**

First of all, I shall examine Marxism as a theory of social action. Secondly I shall examine Marxism and the current socio-economic formation in Nigeria. And finally, I shall examine class struggle and the problem of proletarian revolution in Nigeria.

For Marx, social action, resistance and revolution are subject to the laws of the development of human society. "Socialism or communism is not merely desirable, merely an objective for social action. It is historically, inevitably made so by the forces of social order, by the dialectic of history. Social action including force, violence, wars, and bloodshed, is necessary, given the effort of the old to maintain itself; but these, however passionately mobilised and supported by the courage and aims of the workers, are destined to utter failure unless the historical moment is a propitious one"<sup>1</sup>. For Marx, therefore, social action in societies is necessary and historical. The working class and its demands "are a necessary outcome of the present economic system, which together with bourgeoisie inevitably creates and organises the proletariat"<sup>2</sup>. Secondly, "all recorded history hitherto has been a history of class struggle, of the succession of the rule and victory of certain social classes over there"<sup>3</sup>. Thirdly, "the interests of proletariat demand the destruction of these foundations and therefore the conscious class struggle of organised workers must be directed against them"<sup>4</sup>. Marx provided a comprehensive theory and explanation of economic and social problems in

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industrial capitalist society. The issue here is to what extent this is applicable to Nigerian situation.

Marxism not only revealed the reasons for colonialism, imperialism, lopsidedness in the world economic order and disparity in incomes among individuals, societies, and nations; it also provided the colonised and third world countries and the less-privileged (or the proletariat) in all societies with the theory and consciousness for revolution and social action. Nineteenth Century marxism provided an effective weapon for the rapid decolonisation of the colonised world. Various leaders, writers and intellectuals of different nationalities adapted marxism to their local situations to explain the prevailing injustice. For example, Kwame Nkrumah's *Consciencism* Franz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* and Walter Rodney's *How Europe under developed Africa* are all crudely marxist oriented to promote the rapid decolonization and transformation of Africa and the third world generally. In all these books, Marxism is extrapolated to reveal the false beliefs of capitalism, colonialism and imperialism which be cloud the mechanism of exploitation, regression and subjugation of the third world countries, and to expound the virtues of self-consciousness, freedom, and justice among individuals and nations. Marxism, therefore, gave impetus to the nationalistic struggle. It is not by accident that all nationalist leaders in Africa, Asia and Latin America came to be marxists; it is because marxism seemed to be unequivocally on the side of the poor and the developing nations. For example, Marxism and Leninism gave impetus to the Cuban revolution, the decolonization of Zimbabwe, Namibia, Mozambique and the current struggle in South Africa, among others.

Within nations and societies like Nigeria, Marxism has been an inspiration and weapon for radicals and progressives who could not stand aloof to watch the spate of injustices and human degradation in the societies. Some of these Marxist radicals and progressives have led various revolts and resistances against their various governments, and more often than not, these actions have landed them in jails or detentions. In addition, there have been cases of intimidation of marxist-oriented radicals in Kenya, Tanzania, Congo, Liberia and so on. In Nigeria organizations like the Nigerian Labour Congress and Academic Staff of Nigerian Universities and always, Marxist oriented and they always criticise the governments and make proposals based on a marxist developmental framework.

Marxist theory postulated that society follows a progression: slave-holding society feudalism, capitalism, and then the final stages socialism and communism. Communism would be the end of this evolution as well as the most advanced form of human society. But events all over the globe in modern times have not proved the postulate that communism would emerge from the contradictions in capitalism. Political and economic changes in Eastern Europe, and the introduction of 'Perestroika' and Glasnost in Soviet Union are an admission of the limits of marxism. While these changes in socialist countries could be an appreciation of the complexity of human

nature and the problem of a proletarian revolution, one must appreciate the ingenuity of marxism in explaining the causes of social action, violence, wars and crisis in modern capitalist societies.

**Marxism And The Post-Colonial Nigerian Socio-economic Formation.**

The current capitalist socio-economic formation of Nigeria is a transition from a society (primitive communal system) which did not have classes to a society which had them. The transition from a communal system to capitalism is considered to be a social revolution because it involved a fundamental change of social relations. The post and neo-colonial socio-economic structure of Nigeria is at an imperialist stage which Lenin called the highest stage of capitalism. The socio-economic formation of modern Nigeria provides what Lenin would call a revolutionary situation. This is seen in a number of objective conditions such as the ever-widening gap between the rich and the poor, exploitation of the working class and the peasant, inflation and the increasing external debt. The ingenuity of Marxist theory lies in predicating these social problems on the material productive forces and relations of production of a definite historical epoch. It could be recalled that Marx described capitalism as a stage when there would be upheavals and crisis that can lead to revolution. Nigerian capitalist socio-economic conditions and the associated student and mass social actions are a vindication of Marxist theory's correspondence with its object.

In his economic theory, Marx lays bare the economic laws of motion of modern society in which he sees the introduction of money as exacerbating the exploitation of the masses by the capitalists. As the highest product of the development of exchange and commodity production, money conceals the social character of all individual labour, the social link between individual producers united by their labour. In the present day Nigerian capitalist society, 'money' has not only abetted corruption but has also encouraged exploitation of workers by the employers.

While acknowledging that the pre-modern Nigerian communal system was crude and less sophisticated, it must also be admitted that the present socio-economic formation has sophisticated arsenals and mechanisms of exploitation unprecedented in history.

There are thousands of companies and industries owned by individuals, governments and expatriates which thrive from surplus value accrued from underpayments of the labourers and workers. United African Companies (UAC), Lever Brothers, PZ industries, Nigerian Breweries, to name but a few, have numerous workers of lower and middle classes that are underpaid monthly.

On critical reflection, it must be appreciated that Marxist theory on the problem of capitalism corresponds to the realities of the present Nigerian socio-economic formation. Nigerian society is at best ultra-capitalist in view

of the fact that surplus value going into the purse of the capitalists comes from both the lengthening of the working day and the introduction of division of labour and machinery.

The current retrenchment exercise going on in Nigerian industries shows the intensity of Nigerian capitalism and testifies to Marx's prediction of the problems and contradictions inherent in capitalism, money exchange and form of value. Apart from the anti-social nature of capitalist exploitation, there are again the evils of primitive accumulation, the divorce of workers from the means of production, the driving of peasants off the land and the stealing of communal lands by the capitalists. According to Marx, "primitive accumulation creates the free proletariat at one extreme, and the owner of money, the capitalist at the other"<sup>5</sup>. These evils of capitalism obviously exist in Nigerian society today as can be seen in the ever-widening gap between the rich and the poor, differences in life-style and housing accommodation, corruption, riots, crisis, social upheaval and so on.

The capitalist socio-economic system of Nigeria today confirms Marxist theory to the effect that under such conditions, life is miserable for the common person. In Nigeria, the level of the exploitation of the working class is rising. The aggravation of contradictions between labour and capital increases the class struggle and the strike movements. Workers in the lower and middle classes are left with little or no money for the sustenance of their life after paying taxes and house rents. Class differences are also obvious in the life-styles of the Nigerian populace. For example, people in the higher echelon of the society live in magnificent, western-styled buildings located in different places in Lagos like Ikeja, Victoria Island, Festac Town, Ikoyi, and may own three or more cars. Their children go to private schools, government colleges and university secondary schools. On the other hand, the peasants, the working class and petty traders live in slums and dirty villages like Amukoko, Maroko, Mushin and Ajegunle and their children either go to public schools or stay at home. Since few of them have cars, they face the excruciating pain of struggle on buses popularly known as "Molue", a name that depicts the inhuman and class significance of those who enter them.

The acquisition of rural agricultural lands in the present socio-economic formation of Nigeria is another dimension in the process of creating an army of unemployed and exploited labour in the country. The Federal Government decree on Land in 1978 offered the privileged and the capitalist the opportunity to steal these lands from the rural populace for their personal ends. Stipends worth less than the value of the land are paid to these peasants. According to Marx "The expropriation and eviction of a part of the agricultural population not only set free for industrial capital, the labourers, their means of subsistence and material for labour; it also created the home market..."<sup>6</sup> As in France in the 18th and 19th centuries, the Nigerian capitalists "exploit the individual peasants through mortgages and usury; the capitalist class exploits the peasants class through the state taxes"<sup>7</sup>. In Nigeria the

peasant cedes parts of his or her wages to the capitalist class and so becomes more *marginalised*. In the system, the prices of agricultural products are low because the peasant hands over to the capitalist society part of his or her surplus product.

The current capitalist socio-economic formation of Nigeria has dispersed a great population to the urban towns and cities to take up menial jobs privately or in companies. The few that remained in rural areas operate and till the soil at a high cost. The Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), a form of economic imperialism, was instituted in Nigeria in 1986. Since then, instead of the envisaged benefits of conservation of foreign exchange and the mobilization of local human and material resources, there have been capital outflows through the flamboyant life styles of those Marx would call the bourgeoisie and the equivalent strangulation and marginalization of peasant farmers and workers. The costs of textbooks and food in the universities have become outrageously expensive. The prices of staple foods like gari, cassava and yam have gone beyond the reach of most Nigeria including the farmers themselves. Paradoxically, the farmers of gari, yam, cassava and other agricultural products, cannot sell their commodities, and even when they sell them, they cannot afford to buy other necessities of life. *Newswatch* revealed that "In 1987, the real worth of the N125 minimum wage was N35, at a time when four naira was equal to one dollar. Since that time, the value of the naira has deteriorated further and most economic experts think the N 125 of 1987 is probably less than N15 today."<sup>8</sup> The situation in Nigeria today, especially with the introduction of SAP, is one which, according to Marx, generates conflict and contradictions that will lead to social action, violence, war and revolution. It makes the poor poorer and the rich richer. Commenting on SAP, Dr. Patrick Wilmot, a former lecturer at Ahmadu Bello University, says, "How can it be possible for a man in Lagos or Manila earning the equivalent of 20 dollars per month to reproduce himself and his family in order to continue the cycle of exploitation? The answer is that he cannot, which is why SAP says that he should be sacked, reduced further in pay, or sent back to the countryside to work on the plantations of the rich who have already appropriated most of the land the peasant fled from in the first place."<sup>9</sup>

SAP could be described as the highest stage of capitalism which definitely led to the mass riot in May 1989. For Marx, the May riot, among others, indicates the contradictions inherent in capitalism. The May riot is testimony that the material conditions of life of the people explain every event in the society and that at a certain stage in capitalist development, the material productive forces of society come in conflict with the existing relations of production or with property relations. This engenders social actions that will probably lead to revolution. Marxist theory has been able to explain the cause of social action, resistance and crisis in capitalist societies, but whether these actions by people and groups outside of government can lead to a

revolution is highly problematic.

*Class Struggle and the Problem of Proletarian Revolution in Nigeria.*

Marx postulated that in every given society the strivings of some of its members conflict with the strivings of others and that social life is full of contradiction. His historiography reveals a struggle between nations and societies as well as within nations and societies. According to him the conflicting strivings stem from the difference in the position and mode of life of the classes into which each society is divided. Nigerian society was transformed from a communal system to a capitalist socio-economic formation as a result of the colonialism and imperialism of the west. The present socio-economic formation is characterised by class wars and conflicts. Adewale Ademoyega, while writing on events that preceded the 1966 coup, observed that "socially, we realised that the society was split into two broad divisions, the privileged class that were housed in Government Reserved Areas (GRA) and the masses who lived in slums ..."<sup>10</sup>. Unfortunately successive military regimes, after the 1966 coup, conservative as they were, constituted the military with their bourgeois civilian compradors as a class conflicting with the rest of civil society. President Ibrahim Babangida acknowledged the existence of classes in Nigeria, in his inaugural session of the Armed Forces Consultative Assembly. According to *African Concord*. "The President had identified groups joined by the desire to pull down the military, cause trouble, undermine the government and humiliate it out of power. The groups so identified by the president are the business community and professional commission agents who had been decreed out of making quick money; the political class, whose members allegedly plunged the country into external debts; professional politicians who want to hold the nation to ransom for ever and extremists who must have been offended at being prevented from exploiting religious and ethnic sentiments to further their private selfish interests"<sup>11</sup>. When the president identified a class distinct from the military as exploiters of the masses, he is at best identifying another class competing with the military class for the exploitation of the masses. So in the present Nigerian socio-economic dispensation, the masses, instead of being alienated and exploited by a particular class, are being doubtly alienated and exploited by the military and political class.

In Marxist theory, the proletariat is a motive force in the revolutionary transformation of the capitalist society.

This analysis will show that the Nigerian proletariat is not revolutionary.

The political tactics and methods of the masses in the May 1989 riot in Nigeria were far from revolutionary, although the social action was potentially revolutionary. During the riot, most of the rioters among the peasants, the unemployed, working class and students were opportunists who were not really committed to any revolutionary tactics but wanted a better life by joining the band-wagon of the bourgeoisie. In the miasma and confusion,



some demonstrators forcefully extracted money from motorists. At Benin, the demonstrators "looted prison, stores of gari, rice, tomatoes and beans"<sup>12</sup> In Lagos, at the headquarters of International Telephone and Telegraphs, "assorted equipment were carted away from the block of offices. At James Robertson Street in Surulere, the Leventis Stores situated along the road was ransacked and emptied of foodstuffs and other items"<sup>13</sup> And at "Agege district, motorist paid up to N50 each before they could leave the area. Those who could not, had their windcreens smashed"<sup>14</sup> Even before and after the riot the so called members of the working class took bribes at various points in the discharge of their duties. A security man takes a bribe from a visitor who wants to enter the industrial house. A clerk takes a bribe from whoever needs his file for official transactions. The fact is that the labourers, the peasants, all want to join the higher class, that is, to move to the next stratum of the society. One can see that the potential proletariat in Nigeria is not willing to carry out any revolution. In fact, the masses are opportunists and bourgeoisified. Marx foresaw this problem of the proletariat when he was writing about the British labour movement in 18th century. According to him, at this period "industrial prosperity leads to attempts to buy the proletariat to divert them from the struggle"<sup>15</sup>. He observed that industrial prosperity at that time demoralised the workers and bourgeoisified them.

In Nigeria, the nature and tactics of the May 1989 riot portray them as bourgeois proletariats (as Marx would argue). They were demoralised by the quantity of money in circulation and by the life-style of those in upper classes and so wished to join them. They were interested to maintain the status quo. It would be possible that if the rioters had overthrown the government, instead of establishing the dictatorship of the proletariat, they would have established themselves as a class and the former ruling class would have become the ruled class. Marx argued in his *camera obscura* that bourgeois ideology is constituted in such a way that the masses who are the exploited only perceive the phenomenal forms in the relations of production without clearly perceiving the categories like the real social relations of legality, religion, domination and exploitation. This is what Marx calls false consciousness or the opacity of ideology. But it is highly problematic whether a change of consciousness will lead to a proletarian revolution. In the Nigerian context, a change of consciousness could lead to the overthrow of those in power without necessarily establishing the dictatorship of the proletariat. Marx would also argue that the historical period or the objective conditions for the revolution have not been reached. But the widening gap between the rich and the poor, corruption, social and political instability in the country today are objective enough condition for the proletarian revolution. It seems to me that the revolution and the dictatorship doctrine is a myth. The doctrine of the revolution and dictatorship of the proletariat is just like the doctrine of the second coming of Jesus Christ. As marxists are continuing to hope for the dictatorship of the proletariat without seeing it

reality, so also some Christians are waiting for the second coming of Jesus Christ indefinitely. The doctrine of the proletariat is an ideal which can be appropriated and which may not be realised. Jesus Christ has come and gone leaving behind a legacy.

Again, Marx saw capitalism as a moral evil just as Christianity described paganism as evil. But metaphysically speaking, good and evil are necessary in life. Neither can exist without the other. "Subjectively, the evils of capitalism are foremost in the subjective consciousness of Marx, just as the evils of paganism in the late Roman Empire were foremost in the subjective christian thought. Objectively, however, it is possible to see these evils as necessary and therefore historically good, a step towards ultimate redemption of man and society".<sup>16</sup> If the evil of capitalism is necessary and the proletarian dictatorship is problematic, then we should be thinking of a meeting point between socialism and communism. The doctrine of the revolution and dictatorship of the proletariat is at best a doctrine to show that there are usually underdogs and suffering masses in society. Marxist theory is therefore limited by the fact that even in societies of actually existing socialism, the interest of the critical class, the proletariat or the working class has not been adequately represented and articulated by the vanguard classes or communist parties. It is also a fact that there have been economic and political changes in Soviet Union and other member countries of the Warsaw pact in eastern Europe. It is also a fact that Mikhail Gorbachev, since he came to be the president of the Soviet Union in 1985, has introduced political changes which include Perestroika (restructuring), glasnost (openness) and a multiparty system. All this shows the difficulty of marxist theory of the proletariat. It is not a retreat from socialism as such, but an appreciation of the limit and difficulty of a proletarian state or communism. Nor can it be a transition to capitalism, instead it should be a transition to democratic socialism.

Again, the problem of the proletarian revolution in Nigeria is compounded by the factors of religion and ethnicity. Religion and ethnic considerations are so deep rooted in the consciousness of Nigeria that leaders use them as a means of divide and rule. In using religion as an instrument of divide and rule, the so called common people are brainwashed with the dogma of their religion to the exclusion of other religions. And using ethnicity as an instrument against social action, the common person is made to see Nigeria as a nation with many nations under it. Because of these factors, the masses, peasant, working class and so on may never be united in concerted action against injustice in the society. Suffice it to say that social action is effective if and only if there is little or no difference among the people in terms of religion and ethnicity. Political struggle is therefore limited by ethnic and religious considerations in African politics. Low literacy levels also inhibit social action in Nigeria. As Marx would argue, religion and ethnicity are elements in bourgeois ideology which obscure

reality. The people need a change of consciousness to observe the real underlying material conditions of life as against the phenomenal with which the capitalist exploits them. But it is difficult to predict whether the change of consciousness will lead to a revolution.

The fact that it is difficult to reverse history, the fact that tradition dies hard, and the social consciousness of the Africans, especially their love of prestige and wealth, create obstacles to social action and proletarian revolution in Nigeria. African culture has a pre-capitalist origin and, following colonialism, neo-colonialism and imperialism, is being transformed to ultra-capitalism. In African society, success is exalted while poverty is considered to be a symptom of laziness. That is why most African leaders are either social democrats or capitalists. Democratic socialism as an ideology is widely accepted in Africa because it best fits the pre-capitalist and socialist nature of African culture. The tendency to acquire wealth and prestige by the African is shown by their mad quest for prestigious titles like Chief, Dr. Professor, Alhaji and various traditional titles.

The workability of any theory, especially a revolutionary one like marxism, depends very much on the state of consciousness of the people. Theory as an explanation of facts, events and ideals therefore has ideological functions. It aims at guiding, connecting and uniting the political and social actions of people towards specific and definite goals. A theory expresses the ideology of a particular people. It seeks to bring a specific order into the total life of the society. It is also a means of articulating the ideology and belief system of a society. Nkrumah observes in *Consciencism* that "the ideology of a society displays itself in political theory, social theory and moral theory, and uses these as instruments. It establishes a particular range of political, social and moral behaviour, such that unless behaviour of this sort fell within the established range, it would be incompatible with the ideology"<sup>17</sup> Marxism and Leninism have guided marxists in their political and social actions. Nigeria needs a theory as an ideology to give it direction and purpose in social and political actions. A situation where a fraction of the society is theoretically conscious is ineffective. "Thought without practice is empty and practise without thought is blind",<sup>18</sup> Nkrumah argues. It has often been said that Nigeria has no ideology and that ideology might not be necessary for Nigeria. This kind of talk is unfortunate. What it means to say that a country X does not have ideology is that the country does not have a coherent and consistent theory governing the social and political behaviour of individuals, groups and governments. It might not be legitimate to say that Nigeria does not have ideology; the point is that the ideology of capitalism that it has embraced instinctively and unconsciously without having any bearing on the culture, values and goals of the people. It should be the function of theory to express the culture, values and goals of the people in form of ideology thereby giving their lives a sense of direction. The absence of coherent theory of actions makes a people

flounder in darkness.

Theory is always definitive; it makes a distinction between what is good and bad. It expresses a particular ideology. If it is a theory that, given the culture and values of the people, is pro-socialist ideology, then capitalism will be incompatible with it. On the contrary, given a capitalist ideology, in the U. S. A. for example, a socialist ideology will be incompatible with it.

A theory of social and political order is born out of the philosophy of the society. Philosophy is therefore the theoretical basis of a proposed social order. This means that philosophy has an ideological function. Philosophy as the theoretical basis of a society throws light upon the nature of moral principles and judgements on social and political actions. Nigeria and other developing countries should have a philosophy that guides them in their social actions. This philosophy must be a dynamic one based on critical reflection on the people's values and traditions. In that direction, marxism or Nkrumah's 'consciencism', 'Nyarere Ujameah' or 'Humanistic Theism'<sup>19</sup> could be the answer.

But theory as a means of guiding a people in their social and political behaviour is replete with certain problems, especially in a heterogeneous society with diverse individuals like Nigeria. A theory is a kind of commitment to ideological beliefs. But people often disagree in their degrees of commitment to ideological beliefs or moral commitment, Peter Bodunrin argues. Two persons Y and Z may both agree that capitalism is evil; which means that they agree in their moral belief. Y and Z can be said to agree in moral belief when they would pass the same moral judgement on an action, situation or state of affairs. "They disagree in moral belief when they do not give the same moral evaluation to the same situation"<sup>20</sup>, Peter Bodunrin again argues. In that context, therefore Y and Z may both agree that capitalism is evil and both may in fact believe that something ought to be done to abolish it, but they may disagree as to the degree of commitment they feel about acting on their belief. That is why though there are many marxists in Nigeria, only a few can be Marx or Lenin, or have the commitment to proletarian revolution. And that is also why only about 10% of Nigerian proletariat can be revolutionary. There are many factors which could account for the limitations of theory in Nigeria. These include corruption, poverty; illiteracy and ethnicity.

### Conclusion

Marx's analysis of the history of European societies of his time is an ingenious work unsurpassed in his time. One point that was valid and is still valid today is his materialistic explanation of class struggle in the societies. That working class demands, war, violence, social action and resistance are a necessary outcome of the present economic system is a reality today in many countries. Marxism also shows that all recorded history in Europe hitherto has been a history of class struggle, of the succession of the rule and victory of certain social classes over others. But when it comes to

the doctrine of the proletariat as the revolutionary class that will abolish all classes as well as the state, marxism becomes doubtful, especially in the Nigerian context. □

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- 9 Wilmot, Patrick, "Suffer The Little Children" *African Concord*, July 17, 1989. Vol. 4, No. 12, P. 8.
- 10 Ademoyega, Adewale, *Why We Struck, The Story of The First Nigerian Coup* (Nigerian, Evans Borthers, 1981), P. 44.
- 11 Bayo, Onanuga. "Uneasy Times", *African Concord*, 17 July, 1989, Vol. 4, No. 12, Page 11.
- 12 Akinramide *op, cit.*
- 13 *Ibid.*, P. 11.
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- 15 Marx And Engels quoted by Lenin, *op.cit* , P. 44.
- 16 Nisbet, *op. cit.*
- 17 Nkrumah, Kwame, *Conscieicsm* (London, Monthly Review Press, 1970), P. 59.
- 18 *Ib:d* , P. 78.
- 19 'Humanistic Theism' or Theistic Humanism is what I believe to be a good description of African religious, social and political philosophy. Theistic Humanism is the summation of what had been the ideology for social and political action before the inroads of western culture into Black Africa.
- 20 P. O. Bodunrin, "The Issues of Relevanee And Commitment In The Emergence of African Philosophy," a paper presented at An International Workshop *On African Philosophy In Scientific and Technological Age*, 13th-'6th June, 1990 at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, P. 16.

## The Angry Balladeer of India

When Gaddar (The Rebel) sings, to the accompaniment of a lone *dholak* or even just the jangling of his anklets, people say they feel blood rushing to their head, pride welling in their hearts and anger rising in their breasts. He sings their hurt, their agony and their hopes with a passion that is incandescent, an idiom that is earthy, a voice that is compelling and words that are scorching.

This man's song can inflame a crowd that knows the meaning of hunger, poverty and exploitation.

It is not what that entity called the "government" or the "state" wants.

Which explains why Gaddar is repeatedly extradited or banned from towns, cities and states. The Karnataka government packed him off mid-way through a countryside tour in August this year. The Madhya Pradesh government rusticated him last month. Gaddar spelled trouble to them.

But the 42-year-old balladeer is familiar with such an approach. His dark, brooding eyes sparkle when he talks about the reaction of the state: "The longer they perpetuate this, the more people will long to see me. And one day it will burst."

He gave them a taste of it last month with a public appearance in Hyderabad's Nizam College grounds after more than a decade. An estimated 150,000 people turned up to see him perform. Many cried.

It wasn't like that when Gummadi Vittal Rao (his real name) started off on a career as a bard and a balladeer in 1972 after an aborted engineering career—he could not afford a T-square. After a brief stint as a bank employee, he started the Jana Natya Mandali (People's Theatre Group) the cultural front of Kondapalli Seetharamaiah's radical People's War Group (PWG).

Came the Emergency (1975-77) and he was clapped in prison. Out of jail, he ran into Chenna Reddy's repressive regime and was implicated in the Ramnagaram conspiracy case. Any hope of the Telugu Desam government, which came to power in 1983, being more understanding towards the radicals, was belied quickly.

For the next five years, Gaddar remained under ground. It was a period, he says, which taught him more about life than any other. Moving from town to village far beyond the boundaries of the state like a wandering mendicant, wearing his *gochi* (a thick wollen blanket) and a bamboo staff, he composed over 50 songs and 30 poems in this period of exile, capturing the anger of the poor.

When the Chenna Reddy government announced early this year that it had relaxed its policy towards the radicals, Gaddar surfaced—and discovered that he had become a legend during his absence. In a score of public appearances since his return to centrestage in January this year, thousands have come to see and hear him. Gaddar's tapes and poems are now a rage across the towns of Andhra Pradesh, but the man himself remains modest. "It reflects the anxiety and restlessness of our times," he says.

CHIDANAND RAJGHATTA

(Courtesy : The Sunday Times, December 9, 1990)

# Informed Consent or Informed Rejection of Pesticide Use: A Concept for Environmental Action

DAVID ORTON

This paper describes a concept which arose from the experiences of environmentalists in Nova Scotia, Canada, who were organizing against forest spraying using the herbicide Roundup<sup>1</sup> (active ingredient glyphosate) and the insecticide Bt (*Bacillus thuringiensis* variety *kurstaki*). The type of forestry which uses pesticides has been characterized as "pulpwood forestry"<sup>2</sup> and has certain features such as clearcutting; the reduction of biodiversity through replacing the existing natural forest with a few selected softwood pulp species like balsam fir, black, white and red spruce; the elimination of hardwoods; even-aged management; use of pesticides to "protect" the pulpwood tree plantations; and use of industrial machinery for harvesting. Every year extensive forest spraying takes place in Nova Scotia and every year environmentalists and the public living close to forest spray sites engage in battle to try to stop or seriously impede the spraying.

## Introduction : Genesis of A Concept

In September of 1986, a report appeared in a local newspaper in Nova Scotia<sup>3</sup>, outlining concerns held by some East Hants county councillors regarding forest herbicide spraying being carried out by Scott Maritimes Limited, an American owned multinational pulp and paper company operating a kraft pulp mill in the province. Scott, which is one of three multinational pulp and paper companies in Nova Scotia, operates in about 20 countries around the world. In Nova Scotia, Scott owns over one million acres of land, has a long term lease over 200,000 acres of public land and

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"manages" quite a number of private landholdings for pulpwood forestry purposes. This company annually carries out a forest spraying program. The report mentioned that Scott had been asked to address Council on their spraying program and to deal with various concerns that a number of councillors had. One of the councillors was quoted as saying: "There should be 'no spray in East Hants unless council votes' for the program."<sup>4</sup> Two members of the environmental group to which at the time I belonged, the North Shore Environmental Web (NSEW)<sup>5</sup>, decided to attend the East Hants Council meeting, to which Scott was invited to speak on October 14, 1986.

### Scott's presentation

Three people from Scott addressed Council and used a slide show as part of their presentation. Representatives from "supervising" provincial government agencies—like the Departments of the Environment, and Lands and Forests—were present in the audience. A spokesperson for the Environment Department intervened forcefully in the discussions in support of the Scott position. It is the Department of the Environment which is the primary authority for signing the spraying permits, giving legal approval to spray the forests.

An "information package" had been given to all the councillors by Scott. This was the same package given to rural residents living in the immediate vicinity of forest spray sites, where Roundup was to be sprayed using helicopters. In 1986 the following documents made up the package:

*Roundup Herbicide Bulletin*, January 1984, published by Monsanto, the manufacturer of Roundup.

*Roundup Q & A*, July 1984, published by Monsanto.

*Roundup In Forestry*, no date, published by Monsanto.

"Dear Resident" letter from Scott, dated August 21, 1986.

*Herbicides In Forest Management*, no date and no authorship, but a provincial government Lands and Forests document.

*A Matter of Safety : The Story of Forest Pesticide Regulation*, no date, published by the Canadian Pulp and Paper Association.

The letter from Scott noted that the herbicide "treatment" was necessary for "weeding", that is, eliminating competing vegetation in seedling plantations and naturally regenerated forestry sites; and also for "site preparation", that is, eliminating vegetation before planting nursery-grown seedlings. Scott's letter stated that:

Roundup is registered by the Federal Government for use in forestry and agriculture and is considered safe to human health and the environment by Federal and Provincial Departments of Health and Environment when applied according to prescribed guidelines.

For any technical information on herbicides used in forestry, Scott's letter gave a toll-free telephone number for the public to call. This number



was to the federal Department of Agriculture in Ottawa. This is the federal agency which "registers" pesticides, and also promotes their use in Canada. So all the information in the information package was promotional of the use of the herbicide Roundup. The collusion between governments, the chemical companies (Monsanto), and the pulp and paper industry, is nakedly apparent.

Detailed notes were taken of the presentation by the Scott personnel to the East Hants Council. While a number of questions were asked of Scott by the councillors, it became apparent that, apart from their own personal experience, and despite the evident skepticism, the councillors did not have the concrete information to counter the claims made by Scott. There was a short break after Scott had given his talk. I spoke with the councillor who had been the most critical and asked if he thought Council would be willing to hear me, as a representative of an environmental group, speak against the forest spraying program. When Council reconvened, they voted to let me speak at the next council meeting on November 17, 1986.

#### **Environmental group presentation**

For our talk to East Hants Council against forest spraying, it was necessary to analyze the essence of Scott's performance. It was from this consideration that the concept of "informed consent or informed rejection"<sup>6</sup> became clear as the counter to the Scott presentation. The information provided to council by Scott was strictly promotional and no critical information was given on the herbicide Roundup. In addition, and most importantly, there was no right to refuse the forest spraying either by residents living close to spray sites or by council itself, concerning the spraying being carried out in the municipality of East Hants. The decision on whether to spray or not, after a pesticide had been approved for use in Canada by the federal government, was a decision made by the provincial government, not by the council. Yet it was the county council to which rural residents were turning to complain about forest spraying. So the question of the lack of consent seemed crucial. The title of our presentation therefore became "Informed Consent.....Or Informed Rejection: The Basic Issue In Forest Spraying Programs."

A four-page document was prepared to concretely address and refute the various claims made by Scott. I spoke to this document in addressing council. The concept of informed consent or informed rejection was introduced as follows:

The North Shore Environmental Web, an environmental group with members and supporters in Pictou, Colchester and Cumberland counties lives in the shadow of Scott. We believe that it should be a fundamental right that rural residents, subject to forest pesticide (insecticide and herbicide) spraying, should give an informed consent or informed rejection on all spraying programs which can

affect the environment in which they live, or their own personal health.

The Web would like to see municipal councils, like East Hants, facilitate a genuine discussion in the rural communities on chemical forestry, which recognizes that at the present time basically all the information which is readily available to the interested public from industry or government sources, is uncritical and promotional in nature of the existing pulpwood forestry policy and the pesticide use on which it rests. We would also like to see this council formally support the position that the people directly affected by forest spraying programs have the basic right to give an informed consent or rejection of such programs, and that the forest industry be bound by this.

Our document, which the councillors had in front of them, gave an overview of the forestry situation in Nova Scotia, before outlining and answering in considerable detail five claims which we had identified Scott as making. For example, the "strictness" of the federal pesticide registration process and the "safety" of Roundup had been asserted.

Yet dissenting environmental toxicologists, like Canadian Ross Hall, had a different view of the registration process, it was pointed out to the councillors :

If Environment Canada were to apply rigorous criteria to the assessment of the environmental toxicity of pesticides, few if any of the 405 currently registered ones would be likely to pass. In addition, it is unlikely that any new chemical pesticides would be registered.<sup>7</sup>

Regarding safety claims, the distinction was made for the councillors between the active ingredient of Roundup, glyphosate, and the unknown inert ingredients;<sup>8</sup> that most of the information Monsanto presents only concerns the active ingredient; that inert ingredients—or contaminants<sup>9</sup> which may be part of the production process—are not identified in the information supplied by Monsanto on Roundup. Inert ingredients can be chemically or biologically active.<sup>10</sup> The last point made on safety was to mention that Lasso (alachlor), a chemical herbicide made by Monsanto, had now been withdrawn from the Canadian market as an animal carcinogen and groundwater contaminant, after being declared officially safe for many years.<sup>11</sup> In general, Monsanto considers the actual studies it has done, on which it bases its safety claims, as confidential information.

An animated discussion followed our presentation. There was a lot of support from a number of council speakers. Only one of the councillors seemed to be in any way critical of the position that had been put forward. There were four of us present from the environmental group and it was hard for us to believe the support from the councillors. One of the councillors said "This puts balance to the picture from Scott and the government" and

council should go on record supporting informed consent.<sup>12</sup> A motion was then put before council and it passed unanimously. The following was sent to me from the Council, as representing the content of the motion:

To Whom It May Concern:

This is to advise that the Council of the Municipality of East Hants have gone on record as supporting an Informed Consent or Informed Rejection policy, as it relates to the Chemical Spraying of the Forest Lands in the Province of Nova Scotia, but more importantly, the Forest Lands within the Municipality of East Hants.<sup>13</sup>

## POPULARIZATION AND CONCEPT DEVELOPMENT

Local media, and sometimes provincial media, cover county council meetings in Nova Scotia. The media response to the East Hants Council decision was favorable. The *Truro Daily News* (November 19/86), in Colchester County, carried an extensive article covering the presentation, the responses by councillors and the content of the resolution passed. An editorial accompanied the article and was headed "Getting all the Facts". It opened with the following paragraph:

David Orton is rather pleased with himself. He should be. As spokesman for the North Shore Environmental Web, Mr. Orton has convinced East Hants Municipal Council that landowners should be fully informed before theirs or neighboring lands are sprayed with herbicides, pesticides or insecticides.

In Hants County, *The Hants Journal* (December 10/86), carried a sympathetic article on the front page, "Right to forest spraying should be by 'informed' consent".

In December of 1986, the NSEW put out a press release, sent throughout Nova Scotia to media outlets, pointing out the position taken by the East Hants Council. The release concluded:

The North Shore Environmental Web urges the general public to adopt the above position as their own and to work to see that this is implemented as policy in the province. Also, the Web asks other municipal councils to follow the example set by East Hants Council on the forest spraying issue.

The Web, which seeks a permanent ban on all forest spraying in Nova Scotia, is willing to assist members of the public, and speak before municipal councils on the issue of informed consent, or informed rejection of forest spraying programs

There was extensive newspaper coverage of this release. East Hants Council has maintained its position of opposing Scott's forest herbicide spray program in the county, during the 1989 spraying season.<sup>14</sup>

Seeing the extent of the initial response to the formulation of the concept of informed consent or informed rejection, it was decided that this concept should be further promoted within Nova Scotia.

### **Preparations, some considerations**

One important factor influencing the conduct of a campaign to promote the concept of informed consent or informed rejection was the situation within the NSEW, which was one of internal weakness. This affected the amount of organizing that could be undertaken. There were only a small number of people prepared to do work and only a small number prepared to speak publicly or do the required preparation to address public meetings. All this meant that the organizational base for a widescale campaign throughout Nova Scotia was absent. Given this situation, it was decided to speak before several county councils, as this could be carried through. Such a program would, because of media coverage, raise for public discussion informed consent or informed rejection.

The objectives of the various talks before the councils were to explain informed consent or informed rejection; to have the individual council discuss and vote on a resolution; finally, to have the media covering the meeting present our point of view publicly and thus help create a basis of support in the wider society for this concept. We took the public position that a councillor could support an informed consent or informed rejection resolution, even if one favored pesticide use.

The NSEW had a written philosophy that environmentalists should not work with corporations or governments<sup>15</sup>. This was a minority view within the environmental movement in Nova Scotia. Going to speak before a number of county councils, to ask them to adopt a position on informed consent or informed rejection, could seem a betrayal of the position of not working with governments. Yet, given the weakness of the environmental movement in Nova Scotia, with a few dedicated activists scattered throughout the province and a larger number of people willing to support but not initiate environmental struggles, and the absence of a mass movement of opposition to environmental atrocities, it was argued that the raising of ideas within society is a crucial step in building an environmental resistance movement. It was also seen that the *content* of the position taken before a council was decisive in conveying an attitude towards governments.

County councils are a level of government closer democratic influence. Councillors live in the communities they represent and there are no major economic rewards for being elected. From a green or bioregional viewpoint, this is the level of government closest nature for rural residents.

Informed consent or informed rejection puts a veto power in ordinary people's hands. This makes this concept quite different from the "right to know" legislation which, in Canada and the United States, governs the use of toxic chemicals in many workplace situations. Right to know legislation is also being passed in many communities to require, say, the posting of notices advising the application of pesticides to parks or garden lawns. While such legislation is in general a step forward, as pesticide users do not like the spotlight of publicity which can lead to public mobilization, informed

consent or informed rejection says pesticide spraying can be stopped—if people in the immediate area do not give their permission to pesticide use.

### **The general resolution**

It was decided to develop a general resolution on informed consent or informed rejection which could be taken before county councils or other organizations. However, in February of 1987 another Nova Scotia environmental group, the Cape Breton-based Coalitions for Alternatives to Pesticides (CAP), inspired by the East Hants Council decision, went before the Victoria County Council to present an informed consent or informed rejection position. The Victoria resolution starts to make more concrete a definition which can be used to better organize around:

Be it resolved

Due to concerns expressed by many residents of Victoria County regarding the potential hazardous effects associated with pesticide treatments such as chemical spray drift, runoff, and accidental exposure of persons and property to pesticides, this duly elected council requests of the Nova Scotia Department of Environment that residents living within one kilometer of an area proposed for pesticide treatment be notified in person, or in writing, thirty days prior to the date of the proposed treatment, and that residents be granted the right of informed approval or rejection in regard to the issuing of the pesticide permit.

This resolution was passed by council. It reflects the philosophy of CAP of working with various government "regulatory" agencies, like the provincial Department of the Environment.

For the general resolution, it was decided to include not only forestry but herbicide use on power transmission lines, roadside spraying and railway line spraying. While in principle opposing pesticide use in farming, some members of the NSEW did not want this to be part of the general resolution. The reasons given by such members, dealt with the knowledge required to understand the large numbers of pesticides being used in farming; the desire try to keep forestry as the main focus; and an effort to stop agricultural interests, well represented on county councils, from mobilizing against informed consent or informed rejection. The following is the text of the resolution taken before the Halifax, Cumberland, Colchester and Pictou county councils in 1987:

**RESOLUTION CALLING FOR "INFORMED CONSENT" OR "INFORMED REJECTION" GOVERNING ALL PESTICIDE SPRAYING ON FORESTS, POWER TRANSMISSION LINES, ROADWAYS AND RAILWAY LINES IN THE COUNTY.**  
WHEREAS many hazards associated with the use of chemical sprays like herbicides and insecticides are often found about only after they have been used a long time and have caused obvious

damage to humans, wildlife and the environment.

WHEREAS alternatives to these various chemical sprays must be sought out, so that we do not continue to pollute and destroy our environment which sustains all life.

WHEREAS at the present time, all the information which is readily available to the interested public comes from industry or government sources and is uncritical and promotional in nature of pesticide use.

WHEREAS in the spring and summer of 1987, it is planned that forests, power transmission lines, roadways and railway lines will be sprayed with an assortment of chemical poisons in — — — — County. On forests: the herbicide Roundup and the bacterial poison B. t.—which also contains chemical additives: On power transmission lines: the herbicide Tordon 101, also known as Picloram. Tordon mixtures contain 2,4-D; On roadways: the herbicides 2,4-D and Dicamba or substitutes; On railway lines: Spike 80W, also known as Tebuthiuron.

BE IT RESOLVED that this meeting of the — — — — —, formally support the position that:

- 1) The people directly affected by forest, power line, roadway and railway spraying programs have the basic democratic right to give their "informed consent" or "informed rejection" to such spraying programs, which can directly impact upon personal health and the immediate environment; and — — — — —
- 2) Residents of County living within one kilometer of proposed forest spray blocs (B. t. or Roundup), must be notified 30 days prior to the proposed spraying, and such residents have the right and responsibility to give an "informed consent" or "informed rejection", by signature, in regard to the issuing of the particular pesticide permit, which then becomes binding upon the government and forest industry.

In May of 1987, the above general resolution, in its entirety, was passed by Halifax County Council. The vote was unanimous. A Petition, with 638 names opposing pesticide spraying for the areas covered in the general resolution, was presented to council, by a supporter of NSEW, who actually lived in Halifax County, and who had organized obtaining the signatures in the county. This person spoke to council, and so did I.

The general resolution was not voted upon at the Colchester and Pictou council meetings. At the Cumberland meeting, nine councillors voted to reject the motion and four abstained from voting. The center of the opposition in Cumberland was a large commercial strawberry grower:

Councillor Henry Knol said he would not support the resolution because Mr. Orton was giving a one-side story. He said billions of dollars have been spent studying the chemicals and that it would

hurt the county's basic industries, forestry and agriculture, if the resolution was adopted.<sup>16</sup>

A number of councillors at the Colchester, Pictou and Cumberland council meetings, saw the general resolution as a threat to forestry and agriculture.

The Women's Health Education Network (WHEN), an information sharing network of mainly rural women in Nova Scotia, adopted the general resolution at their Annual General Meeting in May of 1987, after a presentation from a woman member of the NSEW. The resolution was published in the WHEN Quarterly *Vitality*.

All of the above decisions were reported in the capitalist media. A number of environmentalists not associated with the NSEW wrote letters in various publications expressing support for informed consent or informed rejection, or expressed their support in other ways. Anti-spray agitational leaflets produced by the NSEW incorporated this concept. Generally it can be said that informed consent or informed rejection was adopted by the environmental movement in Nova Scotia, as something that could be supported. This support is ongoing. Currently the Tusket River Environmental Protection Association, based in Tusket, Yarmouth County, has a general resolution, similar to the Victoria County statement, before various elected bodies in Shelburne, Yarmouth and Digby counties during winter 1989 to spring 1990. The Protection Association has had their resolution adopted by Argyle Municipality.<sup>17</sup>

### **Popularization outside Nova Scotia**

Information on informed consent or informed rejection has been sent to a network of contacts in the environmental and green movements across Canada and in the United States. While this article is the first systematic account of the theory, information about informed consent or informed rejection has appeared in the Canadian journals *Alternatives*<sup>18</sup> and *The New Catalyst*.<sup>19</sup> United States publications like the *Journal of Pesticide Reform*<sup>20</sup> and *Earth First!*<sup>21</sup> have also had information. *Green Web*<sup>22</sup> Bulletins, produced by the environmental group I am now associated with, have incorporated the concept, e.g. "Blueberry Spraying: A Chemical Horror Story", "Christmas Tree Cultivation: Open Season On Pesticides", and "Opposing Forest Spraying". These Bulletins have been distributed nationally and internationally, to a network of activist contacts and green movement publications.

### **The industry response**

Based on information that has become available, it can be said that the forest and agricultural industries in Nova Scotia saw the concept of informed consent or informed rejection as a direct threat to their use of pesticides in the province. The provincial government, which plays the obsequious role

of hand servant to the two industries, was also opposed to any restrictions on the right to spray, coming from the county council level.

We received, anonymously, a copy of a statement which had originated from a group called "Forestry & Agriculture For Nova Scotians" (FANS), dated May 4, 1987 and signed by Mike Brown, FANS Co-Chairman Forestry, and Robert Eaton, FANS Co-Chairman Agriculture. This statement concerned "Recent resolutions passed by Victoria and East Hants County Councils." It is reproduced below:

Please find enclosed copies of two (2) resolutions that have been passed by the Victoria and East Hants County Councils, as well as other related information. The material is self-explanatory.

From our contacts with other Municipal Councils in various parts of the province, it appears as if the anti-spray lobby is mounting an organized campaign to have similar resolutions adopted by many other Councils. Of course, if the Councils do not hear our side of the issue, they may believe the propaganda presented by the anti-pesticide groups.

As an initial, quick response to this situation, it is suggested that each of us contact 2-3 members of our respective Associations and ask them to call 1 or 2 local Municipal Counsellors to discuss this issue, and to emphasize the importance of proper pesticide use to our industries. If it is found that an anti-pesticide lobby group plans to make a presentation to any particular council, equal time should be requested for a local group of pesticide users to outline the importance of pesticides, and to clarify any false or misleading information presented by the anti-group.

Please call either one of us if you have any questions. Your prompt action on the above, could save us all a lot of difficulties in the future.

Mike Brown has a degree in forestry and is involved with a company called "Precision Vegetation Management Inc", which carries out contract spraying of forest sites. He also has a history in Nova Scotia of opposing environmental groups concerned about forestry and pesticide issues. For example, in 1983 Brown was the Chairman of a "Truth in Forestry" group, closely tied to the forest industry. I know nothing about Robert Eaton,

We received two independent reports of a meeting held in Halifax, the provincial capital, of people from the forest industry and representatives from government agencies, where the discussion was on how to neutralize the concept of informed consent or informed rejection and the people seen as directly linked to its promotion. Information was also sent to us concerning the lobbying efforts of the Forestry Sector of the Nova Scotia Voluntary Planning Board,<sup>23</sup> who in late 1987 were contacting councils, for example New Waterford In Cape Breton, to urge them not to pass resolutions relating to spraying.



The Executive of the Nova Scotia Federation of Agriculture held a meeting in September of 1987, a report of which was carried in the farm publication *Farm Focus*.<sup>24</sup> The report noted the passing of resolutions by county councils requiring 30 days notice prior to chemical spraying and that the Executive had notified all county branches of the resolutions and requested that delegates be sent to any council meeting where spraying was being discussed.

In May of 1988, I wrote a letter to many newspapers in Nova Scotia concerning the concept of informed consent or informed rejection. The main newspaper in the province, *The Chronicle Herald*, published this letter<sup>25</sup> and also a response in June from a person who identified himself as a "forest technician", strongly disagreeing with the concept. The technician's letter stated:

Informed consent is just a way of ensuring very few plantations will be protected in our province.<sup>26</sup>

The pesticide-using industries—whether forestry or agriculture—and their corporate suppliers are not prepared to give up the use of pesticides without a fight. The fight can be quite dirty. Back in October of 1984, an "Educational Seminar" was held in Halifax, Nova Scotia, hosted by the Atlantic Vegetation Management Association.<sup>27</sup> The theme of the seminar seems to have been how to undermine environmental movements, and three experts in this field were invited to speak.<sup>28</sup> One of the speakers made the point that "It takes a movement to fight a movement". Recent articles in *The New Catalyst* and *Wilderness Alberta* have discussed how "the forestry companies have begun to set up front organizations to carry their story to the public"<sup>29</sup>. It is from such an interventionist perspective that we perhaps should look at the opposition to informed consent or informed rejection.

## EVALUATION AND CONCLUSION

Forest herbicide spraying is increasing each year in Nova Scotia, as the naturally existing forest becomes increasingly "legally" turned into a gigantic pulp farm. Yet there is increasing resistance to pulpwood forestry and all that it represents. The fight against pesticide use in the forests is part of this. Yet the basic consciousness that it is we who must adjust to the forest, and not the forest to us, is still a very minority view. The theory of informed consent or informed rejection has not stopped forest spraying. Yet I believe that this concept can serve a valuable role in helping to unmask the realities of power. For this reason it should be supported. Moreover, it can have application to many urban and rural spraying situations.

The users of pesticides, whether forestry or agricultural interests, the chemical corporations which make and sell these pesticides, or the government "regulatory agencies", all maintain the fiction that these chemical poisons are "safe". These groups, particularly government agencies, insist

that they are concerned about educating people about pesticide use. The attempt to bring before county councils the theory of informed consent or informed rejection can bring about a wide ranging and potentially subversive discussion. Namely:

—The pesticide literature made available by governments, chemical companies, and pulp and paper companies, is promotional of pesticide use. This literature is not critical and does not consider alternatives to the use of pesticides. The small amount of critical literature that is available is not part of any information supplied by the pesticide pushers. For radical environmentalists, the lack of an extensive critical pesticide literature shows the necessity of the green and environmental movements having an independent scientific capacity. This is quite opposed to the mainstream conventional environmental wisdom of relying on the government promoters of pesticides to supply educational material and regulate pesticide use.

—Pesticide users and their government "regulators" do not care whether people living close to spray sites agree or not with the spraying. People have no right to refuse. Hence the government is not protecting but oppressing the people.

—For people living in the countryside, the closest level of government—the county councils—have essentially no say in whether or not pesticides should be applied in their counties.

—Therefore, people have to rely on their own mobilization to stop pesticide use, even if their particular county council has adopted an informed consent or informed rejection position as governing the county. So this concept can liberate the personal initiative of people to take the need for a toxic-free environment into their own hands and change their local situation.

Of course, the use made of informed consent or informed rejection, for example the draft of a resolution offered to a county council, will reflect the philosophy of the particular environmental group. If the group sees such a resolution in a reductionist manner, as simply being a veto over the use of pesticides and as not including access to critical literature on pesticides and alternatives to pesticide use, the potentiality of resolution will remain limited. Another problem is in addressing pleas for help to the very government agencies which are approving and encouraging pesticide use.

One aspect of informed consent or informed rejection is that it is essentially a human-centered theory. This means that a biocentric perspective—an equal concern for other life forms and their ecosystems—cannot be said to be part of this concept as so far developed. However, even biocentric organizers on pesticide issues usually have to start with human-centered concerns—effect on personal health, groundwater contamination, spray drift, etc.—and then try to expand this into the effects of pesticides on forest ecosystems and wildlife. A more inclusive conception of informed consent or informed rejection, where animals, trees and mountains have standing<sup>30</sup>, needs to be developed.

The support for pesticide use has a relatively small social base, yet it is organized and has access to class power. It is foolish for environmental groups to mainly rely on the capitalist media to carry a message on anything which significantly challenges the existing power relationships. Putting aside personal connections, for Canadian newspapers, the Kent *Royal Commission on Newspapers* has shown that about eighty percent of newspaper revenue comes from advertising. The environmental movement has a potentially much broader base, yet in Nova Scotia it is fragmented, lacks a critical self consciousness, and does not coordinate its efforts on a province-wide scale. Even given the very limited nature of the effort to popularize informed consent or informed rejection, there was a momentum for this concept in late 1986 and 1987, but it was not sustained. While the focus for organizers for stopping forest spraying remains the communities closest to forest spray sites, a measure like informed consent or informed rejection can help. It can help in that it is one method for creating public opinion that people, to stop forest spraying, must look to themselves. It will mean, ultimately, "illegally" putting their bodies on the line.

Despite the negative view of the enforcement capacity of the county councils in this paper, one should still strive to have such councils adopt an informed consent or informed rejection position on pesticide use in the same way that peace activists have urged the adoption by municipalities of the designation "nuclear free zone". Such actions help to delegitimize nuclear weapons, even though it is the federal Canadian government which is legally responsible for defence and security. Also, Greenpeace has confronted American warships in Vancouver Harbour, using the fact that Vancouver was declared a nuclear free zone in 1983<sup>31</sup>. Similarly, if a county council declares itself as supporting an informed consent or informed rejection position on pesticides then, *with a sufficient mass mobilization*, such a theoretical stand could be made enforceable against the interests of the pesticide pushers.

Informed consent or informed rejection should be a basic democratic right. The positive response to this concept in Nova Scotia shows that it taps into a deep unease about chemical spraying. It also taps into a growing consciousness about a world-wide problem of toxic contamination and the contribution of a forestry policy—pulpwood forestry—which contributes to this by deliberately introducing chemical poisons (pesticides) into the forest environment. Yet informed consent or informed rejection, given capitalist society's reliance on chemicals to reduce labor costs, cannot be granted, unless a different set of priorities and values are put in place. This concept can help to strip away the authority of the users and promoters of pesticides and in this sense it is a reform which can assist to undermine the existing system. Informed consent or informed rejection is also a green concept because it is congruent with a green philosophy which believes that environmental, economic political and social decisions have to be made by those who will suffer the

consequences of such decisions. Environmental activists should support informed consent or informed rejection.

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Dr. Tugwell is director of the Centre for Conflict Studies at U. N. B. and an expert on the use of propaganda in so-called 'low level' conflicts. Ron Arnold is a journalist and consultant from Seattle, Washington, who has extensive knowledge of environmental movements in the U. S. A. Dave Dietz is a lawyer/lobbyist whose firm has been employed for the past four years to organize a grass-roots organization called Oregonians for Food and Shelter which has been successful in reversing some of the 'anti-pesticide' momentum in Oregon. (p. 1)

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*Managing Editor*  
*Philosophy and Social Action*

## The Pot at the end of the Rainbow : Political Myth and the Ecological Crisis

TIMOTHY DOYLE

**A constant theme of discussion which attempts to overcome the environmental crisis on this planet revolves around the necessity for both changes to the structure of political processes and individual or group attitudes. Both of these are important. Attitudes and politics will not change, however, if the bedrock of unassailable truths—myths—remain unquestioned. It is this bedrock of ideas which constantly legitimates both social and political structures and compatible attitudes, values and goals. In short, myth is the basis for ideology and political organisation.**

First, this paper investigates the concept of political myth. It contends that it is not the purpose of the student of myth to 'uncover' and then to present an ultimate 'scientific', 'ecological' 'truth' to overcome the crisis. Instead, myth appears to be a necessary thread of history.

This research, then, attempts to seek out myths which have outlived their social and political context and, secondly, replace these myths with a new one, more appropriate to a new age.

As a consequence, three myths which may be contributing to the ecological crisis are singled out: 'History Always Repeats'; 'The Universe is Infinite'; and 'You Can't Stop Progress'.

After the historical processes are investigated which have elevated these maxims to the status of myth, a new myth will be presented: 'The Myth of the Pot at the End of the Rainbow'. This myth, when inculcated into the youth of the late Second Millennium, will help avert the ecological crisis.

### **Ideology and Political Myth**

Martin Seliger, in his comprehensive work on ideology and politics,

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divides ideology into two separate categories: restrictive and inclusive. Restrictive ideology is based around the traditional Marxian definition, which limits the use of the term to 'specific belief systems'<sup>1</sup>. Marx described as 'ideological' any 'set of political *illusions* that have been produced by the social experience of a class'. To Marx, ideologies were illusions fed by the owners of the modes of production to the masses in efforts to keep the latter deluded, 'content with a difficult if not intolerable condition'.<sup>2</sup>

This restrictive view of ideology has been widely used in the social sciences when interpreting diverse social phenomena. Basically, it views ideology as strictly serving the interests of the ruling elite. In a recent example of literature aimed at understanding the sociology of the mass media, ideology was defined in the following fashion:

It stated that the ideas that were dominant in any historical period would always be those of the ruling class. This was not a matter of deliberately hoodwinking people; rather, the bourgeoisie would naturally expect other social classes to view society in the same way that they did and had the power and influence to promote this kind of influence.<sup>3</sup>

The second category of ideology—inclusive—is far broader in its interpretation. Ideology is not the exclusive domain of the dominant class; instead, it includes belief systems, values, symbols, myths, goals, motivations, and the like, found in all social systems. Ideology is the intellectual baggage of all persons regardless of position, prestige, and power.

I see strengths in both views of ideology. Ideology is inclusive in the sense that it can be generated by members of all classes and all groupings. On occasions it is also restrictive: the ideology of dominant groupings is often stronger than that of others, resulting in political activity which necessarily serves dominant interests.

Myths are defined here as a sub-set of a political entity's ideology. Whether one has a restrictive or inclusive view of ideology also determines what type of definition is given to 'myth'. For example, numerous Marxian interpretations of political myth are often restrictive, myth being determined solely by the bourgeoisie and utilised as a tool with which to repress the proletariat. Inclusive theories of myth, as with likewise definitions of ideology, are similarly broad.

One of the earliest available references to restrictive political myth occurs in the pages of Plato's *Republic*. In Book Three, Plato discusses his three classes of Athenian society and their mutual relations. He writes of his idea to subdivide the Guardian class into Guardian proper, or Rulers, and Auxiliaries. The Rulers are the supreme commanders of the State, whereas the latter, as close as can be translated, are the administrators: the bureaucrats. Plato wrote of a society relatively free of nepotism: a society with mobility amongst the classes based solely on merit. In short, the very 'best' individuals would become Rulers and others would be distributed



between the lesser classes, regardless of ancestral position. The following, lengthy quotation is taken from *The Republic*, as Plato unravels his 'magnificent myth' to his alter ego. It reads:

'Now I wonder if we could contrive one of those convenient stories we were talking about a few minutes ago', I asked, 'some magnificent myth that would in itself carry conviction to our whole community, including, if possible, the Guardians themselves?'

'What sort of story?'

'Nothing new—a fairy story like those the poets tell about the sort of thing that often happened "one upon a time", but never does now: indeed, if it did, I doubt if people would believe it without a lot of persuasion, though they believe the poets.'

'And seem to be hesitating to tell us more', he said.

'And when I do you will understand my hesitation,' I assured him.

'Never mind,' he replied, 'tell us'.

'I will,' I said, 'though I don't know how I'm to find the courage or the words to do so. I shall try to persuade first the Rulers and Soldiers (i.e. the Auxiliaries), and then the rest of the community that the upbringing and education we have given them was all something that happened only in a dream. In reality they were fashioned and reared, and their arms and equipment manufactured, in the depths of the earth, and Earth herself, their mother, brought them up, when they were complete, into the light of day; so now they must think of the land in which they live as their mother and protect her if she is attacked, while their fellow citizens they must regard as brothers born of the same mother earth.'

'No wonder you were ashamed to tell your story', he commented. I agreed it was indeed no wonder, but asked him to listen to the rest of the story.

'We shall,' I said, 'address our citizens as follows:

'You are, all of you in this land, brothers. But when God fashioned you, he added gold in the composition of those of you who are qualified to be Rulers; he put silver in the Auxiliaries, and iron and bronze in the farmers and the rest. Now since you are all of the same stock, though children will commonly resemble their parents, occasionally a silver child will be born of golden parents, and so on. Therefore the first and most important of God's commandments to the Rulers is that they must exercise their function as Guardians with particular care in watching the mixture of metals in the characters of the children. If one of their own children has bronze or iron in his make-up they must harden their hearts, and degrade it to the ranks of the industrial and agricultural class where it properly belongs: similarly, if a child of this class is born with gold or silver in its nature, they will promote it appropriately to be a

Guardian or Auxiliary. For they know that there is a prophecy that the State will be ruined when it has Guardians of silver or bronze.' 'That is the story. Do you think there is any way of making them believe it?'

'Not in the first generation', he said, 'but you might succeed with the second and later generations.'

'Even so it should serve to increase their loyalty to the state and to each other. For I think that's what you mean.'<sup>4</sup>

According to the translator of *The Republic*, H.P.D. Lee, Plato's 'magnificent myth' has been criticised in the past as it is evidence that Plato 'countenances political propaganda of the most unscrupulous kind'.<sup>5</sup> The term 'propaganda', like myth and ideology, has numerous definitions. Usually; however, the term presupposes that the persuasive action will be more advantageous to the persuader than the persuadee.<sup>6</sup>

It is evident that Plato perceived that a myth is a story which has been created with conscious aforethought. To Plato, it seems that political systems require supernatural stories to justify them. These stories are an integral part of societal tradition providing an intellectual and spiritual bedrock where ambiguities and inconsistencies remain clouded and distorted. A Platonian definition of the Christian Bible, for example, would be that it was thought up by a number of clever men who consciously tried to impose a particular order onto a given society, using a collection of stories. They pretended these stories were sent to them by some supernatural force who knew all. This factor of conscious and deliberate aforethought separates Plato's utilisation of the term myth from a number of more recent definitions which will be discussed later.

Although the 'magnificent myth' is designed to replace the traditions of all three classes, without favour to any, the myth itself is developed by Plato a member of the Academy, an Athenian school for statesmen; part of, no doubt, the class of Guardians Proper. The question must be asked, therefore, 'Are members of the elite class—the Guardians Proper—capable of developing a political myth which does not favour their own class?' Some structuralist arguments would suggest not. This restrictive quality of Plato's 'magnificent myth' shares significant traits with Marxian definitions.

Although not a Marxist himself, Murray Edelman shares this restrictive, structural view of myth. Edelman explains that a myth is 'a collective belief that is built up in response to the wishes of the group rather than an analysis of the wishes'.<sup>7</sup> Myths, therefore, are based on what people want. Edelman would argue that they inevitably reflect what the ruling class wants and in turn, these are diffused throughout the community. Edelman does not suggest that 'elites consciously mould political myths to serve their own ends'. Instead, he would say that myths having evolved from a specific political system, reinforce what is already established, while at the same time denounce alternative idea systems.<sup>8</sup>

### Nineteenth Century Myths

The 'common sense', Western definition of myth still used in the latter part of the twentieth century is largely derived from the previous century, when myth was interpreted as 'fable', 'invention', or 'fiction'.<sup>9</sup> This 19th Century definition differs from archaic usage of the term. For example, although Plato may have consciously created a story, in no way did this story constitute an 'untruth' in the Judaeo-Christian sease. The myth, to Plato, remained a most precious story due to its 'sacred, exemplary, significant' nature. Indeed, it was the dominance of Judaeo-Christianity, coupled with the global power of the British Empire at this point in history, which 'put the stamp of "falsehood" and "illusion" on whatever was not justified or validated by the two testaments'.<sup>10</sup>

In this sense, then, myths included many tales and stories evolving from all cultures which were not part of industrial Europe. The industrial revolution, wrote Durkheim, had atomised society into a mass of individuals.<sup>11</sup> Durkheim wrote of 'anomie': the dissolution of longstanding societal structures which did not fit in with the industrial regime. One hastens to add that at this time much folklore and myth would have been replaced by a new mechanised, highly rationalised society which did not tolerate as 'truth' any idea which did not fit in neatly with its new designs.

This common sense definition of myth began to alter in academic circles—according to Eliade—in the first or second decade of this century. It was soon discovered that industrial Europe also had its own myths which were not necessarily any closer to a metaphysical truth than myths of another culture or time. 'Myth' began to be used in a way which was similar to its archaic origins; as a 'true story'. Eliade writes:

Myth narrates a sacred history; it relates an event that took place in primordial Time, the fabled time of the "beginnings". In other words, myth tells how, through the deeds of Supernatural Beings, a reality came into existence, be it the whole reality, the Cosmos, or only a fragment of reality—an island, a species of plant, a particular kind of human behaviour, an institution. Myth, then, is always an account of a "creation"; it relates how something was produced, began to *be*. Myth tells only of that which *rally* happened, which manifested itself completely.<sup>12</sup>

Myth, in this sense, is a sacred story and a 'true history', as it only deals with 'realities'.

The development of myth as a definition and a concept has come one step further since Eliade's writings in the early 'sixties. Whereas Eliade argues 'that modern man preserves at least some residues of "mythological behaviour"; writers such as Roland Barthes take this point much further by insisting that modern humanity has created complex systems and languages which harbour a multitude of myths.<sup>13</sup>

Three points must be drawn from Barthes' definition of myth. First, in a

comparative sense, myths are quite different from the Marxist idea of 'false consciousness'. Briefly, Marx wrote that a proper understanding of history would 'give the proletariat a guide for the future'.<sup>14</sup> Through the establishment of a science which was truly proletarian, the masses would find a way out of their 'false consciousness' which resulted—amongst other things—from the alienation between themselves and their produce. Drucker writes :

One prerequisite of this science is an "unmasking of human self-alienation"—the task which Marx's theory of ideology is supposed to accomplish. Given this unmasking, all will be clear: "It is the task of history, therefore, once the other world of truth has vanished to establish the truth of this world".<sup>15</sup>

Marx believed that his own writings did not constitute ideology, but rather an historical, immovable truth. As myth has so far been utilised as a sub-set of ideology (though this relationship is defined differently by others), Marx would also argue that the *Communist Manifesto* was also removed from myth. In comparison to false consciousness, and although myth does comprise sacred truths, these truths change depending on the social context at a given time and place.

Perhaps Barthes' view of myth is more like Mannheim's interpretation of false consciousness? Mannheim held in high regard Marx's ideas on the subject, but felt Marx had failed to view his own work in a similar fashion.<sup>16</sup> In the sceptical traditions of the Sophists, Mannheim discouraged the belief in ultimate, static truths. Instead, Mannheim expressed the opinion that 'no idea... is strictly congruent with reality, nor is there any such thing as disinterested or abstract thought; all ideas are a more or less pathological expression of social discontent'.<sup>17</sup>

As mythical truth is a relative concept, only existing at any given time, it cannot hide 'real' truth, as Marx's false consciousness does. Barthes suggests that myths do not hide anything. Instead, they distort and legitimise a current truth. Myth must always exist in all societies; it is not something which Barthes would want to rid of altogether; as Marx does false consciousness. Myth only may become dangerous, as I later contend, when it outlives its usefulness in its everchanging social context. In this case, the myth—instead of being the result of societal intercourse begins to demand conformity to its own sacred story, although society is no longer able to comfortably function within its confines.

The second point which needs to be explored in Barthes' writings on myth centres on the relationship which myth characterises between history and nature. The primary reason given by Barthes for writing his work relates to his resentment of 'newspapers, art and common sense' confusing historical reality and nature. He summarises :

What the world supplies to myth is an historical reality, defined, even if this goes back quite a while, by the way in which men have produced or used it and what myth gives in return is a *natural* image

of this reality .... Myth does not deny things. on the contrary. its function is to talk about them; simply, it purifies them, it makes them innocent, it gives them a natural and eternal justification, it gives them a clarity which is not that of an explanation but that of a statement of fact.<sup>18</sup>

Myth is the lowest common denominator in any dialogue. Myths are the answer to life's foremost riddles; for they are riddles in themselves which no-one seeks an answer to. Amongst this strange form of riddle lies many ambiguities and conflicting ideas; but within the myth, these ideas seem clean, coherent and simple: they are the 'truths' of our time. The author is reminded here of a typical discussion between a parent and a child which supports the myth. It reads as follows:

Child : Why are humans more important than animals ?

Parent : Because God made them so.

Child : Why do people make war between themselves ?

Parent : It's just human nature.

Child : Why?

Parent : It goes without saying.

Child : Why ?

Parent : It's just a fact of life.

This brings the discussion to the third characteristic of myth which Barthes elucidates: myth is superbly economical. Complexities are reduced to one line principles.

In passing from history to nature, myth acts economically: it abolishes the complexity of human acts, it gives them the simplicity of essences, it does away with all dialects, with any going back beyond what is immediately visible, it organizes a world without contradictions because it is without depth, a world wide open and wallowing in the evident, it establishes a blissful clarity: things appear to mean something by themselves.<sup>19</sup>

### **Characteristics of Myth**

As illustrated, there are numerous different works on myth, and each of these works has its own unique interpretation of the term. Nine characteristics taken from these works and others are combined in this section to provide my working definition of myth for the purposes of later investigation.

1. Myths can be both inclusive and restrictive depending on circumstances. All societies and all groupings within these societies may have their own myths. The myths of the powerful often dominate.
2. Myths are economical. In their shortest sense, they are best expressed as a maxim or a cliché.
3. Myths connect cultural history with what is 'natural'. Myths relate to what is 'beyond knowing'.
4. Myths can be both deliberately perpetrated in an instrumentalist

- fashion and, also, myths can be established unconsciously.
5. Myths, following on from the last point, 'express unconscious wishes which are somehow inconsistent with conscious experience'.<sup>20</sup>
  6. Myths are widely understood.
  7. Myths are rarely questioned.
  8. A myth usually has consequences, 'but not the ones it literally proclaims'.<sup>21</sup>
  9. Myths exist as a necessary part of life: the purpose is not to get rid of them altogether, as if to uncover a scientific 'reality': but when they outlive their usefulness to the activist, they must be uncovered and replaced with stories which are more fitting. A myth which is unsuitable to a given historical period may severely limit political and social action.

### **Myth and the Ecological Crisis**

The existence of the ecological crisis is perceived by some as the *raison d'être* of the conservation movement. Within this particularly relevant context of this crisis the discussion of myth will continue.

The final characteristic of myths—point nine—is crucial to the understanding of the remaining discussion. This point claims that it should not be the purpose of the theorist and the activist to first of all uncover and then to present an overt truth. Instead, myth appears to be a necessary thread of history. The student of political myth must attempt to seek out myths which have outlived their social context and, secondly, propose new myths more appropriate to a new age.

The first part of the process—identifying myths—is extremely difficult. The student of myth operates within a society which is often inseparable from the myths upon which it is based. In fact, I would contend that a myth which is truly harmonious with a given time and place is highly impossible to identify by a dweller of that same socio-spatial dimension. Again, it must be stressed, it is only when myths continue to exist beyond their time of meaning that they begin to emerge not as eternal truths, but as truths established by an historical process. Even so, their identification remains quite difficult.

I have identified three myths which, by their resilient and anachronistic nature, may be contributing to the ecological crisis which faces the Earth in the latter years of the second millennium.

A constant theme of discussion which attempts to halt environmental degradation of this planet revolves around the necessity for both changes to the structure of political processes and individual or group attitudes. Both of these areas are important. These will rarely change, however, if the bedrock of unassailable truths—myths—are rarely questioned. It is this bedrock which constantly legitimates both political structures and compatible attitudes, values and goals. In short, myth is the basis for ideology and political organisation.

### Myth 1 : 'History Always Repeats'

The myth of an ever-repeating history was first taught to me at secondary school, as the prime justification for the learning of history. Each year, the first class would invariably begin as follows:

Teacher : Today we will learn why the study of history is relevant to our everyday lives.

Following this cue, the teacher would scribble on the blackboard: 'History Always Repeats.'

This seemed, at the time, to be an unassailable and irreproachable fact: an utter fact. The logic followed on from this 'fact'. If we could learn lessons from the past, then, we could gain far more control over our destiny.

There is no doubt that some present day experiences share similar characteristics with ones in the past. Indeed, some lessons can be learned from the past. But it was the all-consuming nature of this adage which was impressed upon our young minds. Nothing new would evolve. Aristotle's *Politics* was recited to us in an interpreted fashion: '...all ideas of any value have already been discovered and tried'.<sup>22</sup>

Even Aristotle, however, did not have any logical basis for his assumption. He repeated this idea in passing, 'as if it was so generally accepted that it needed no support'.<sup>23</sup> Already, historical repeatability had reached the magnitude of myth.

These 'cyclical' theories of history have even more ancient origins. The idea that all events occur in cycles which are more or less alike existed in some form in ancient India, in Babylonia, and in Greece. Boas makes the conjecture;

The notion of the rhythmical recurrence of cosmic events may well have developed out of the characteristics of the solar year, the periodicity of the lunar phases, the round of the seasons in regular order, the life cycle of the individual human being. That the idea of birth, maturation, senility, and death followed by rebirth, maturation, senility, and death followed by rebirth interested the ancients is shown by the many myths and rites in which this series of events is figured.<sup>24</sup>

This view of existence has been utilised by philosophers and thinkers right up to the present day. The concept of an ever-repeating cosmic and human history has been utilised in the writings of Hegel, Marx and Michels, among others. In the case of Marx there is a rather popular quotation taken, often unknowingly, from *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon*.

Hegel says somewhere that all great events and personalities in world history reappear in one fashion or another. He forgot to add: the first time as tragedy, and the second as farce.<sup>25</sup>

The repetitious view of history is often presented hand in hand with pessimistic theories of existence. The elite theories of Robert Michels are

excellent examples. His idea that democracy was futile and that elitism was inevitable was grounded in his empirical view of human history. In *Political Parties*, the following words are found:

The democratic currents of history resemble successive waves. They break ever on the same shoal. They are ever renewed.<sup>26</sup>

The problem with the myth of the 'eternal recurrence' is that it breeds pessimism such as Michels'. If history always repeats, then the future is severely limited. Arnold Toynbee argues that there have been twenty-six civilisations so far in human history. All have failed to overcome major stimuli, which he terms 'challenges', and have ceased to exist because of this.<sup>27</sup>

The ecological crisis may be the challenge which confronts the survival of this civilisation; but how can the ecological crisis be averted if the die of history has already been cast? This view of human struggle limits certain ecopolitical initiatives; simply because these initiatives have either not worked in the past, or they have not been tried and tested. Anyway, as the myth goes, history always repeats, that's just the way it is.

Those who attempt to break out of the confines of the myth suffer criticism from the pragmatists, the realists, the incrementalists, and the proponents of 'common sense' who remain firmly entrenched within the myth.

The myth of ever-repeating human history has become quite dangerous. It has outgrown its social and political context. Historical shackles may have to be unleashed if the ecological crisis is to be survived. At the conclusion of this chapter a myth which is suitable for these new times will be introduced.

## Myth 2 : The Universe is Infinite

At that moment another dismal scream rent the air and Zaphod shuddered.

"What can do that to a guy?" he breathed.

"The Universe," said Gargravarr simply, "the whole infinite Universe. The infinite suns, the infinite distances between them and yourself an invisible dot on an invisible dot, infinitely small."

"Hey, I'm Zaphod Beeblebrox, man, you know," muttered Zaphod trying to flap the last remnants of his ego.<sup>28</sup>

In mathematics, infinity is a concept which explains increasing without bounds. But the common sense, mythical notion of an infinite universe has its roots in modern theology rather than mathematics. The infinite, perfect God of the Theists is the source of the idea in its modern usage. In this interpretation, God's infinity is formless and incomprehensible to finite beings such as humans. Despite the fact that we cannot imagine an infinite God and its universe we 'know' it exists, for, as the saying goes, 'if the universe is finite, then what exists beyond it? there must be something!'



How does this myth relate to the ecological crisis? If the universe is limitless, then - given the appropriate technology resources - are also limitless. 'If we mess up here, then we can always move onto the next place.' For so long in western history, resources have been seen as an eternal cornucopia. Most modern views of capitalism remain firmly entrenched in the Lockean premises of property and abundance constructed in the late 17th Century.<sup>29</sup>

Probably one of the earliest references to limits to growth after the scientific revolution came from Thomas Hobbes. Although Hobbes did regard the natural environment as limited, this was only due to the human incapacity to exploit resources. To Hobbes, nature, as an idea removed from human endeavour, was still limitless.<sup>30</sup> It was not until Malthus' theories revolving around mathematical constraints on population growth that the finite nature of the environment was recognised.<sup>31</sup> Of course, in many primitive cultures, these ideas of limits to growth have existed for millennia.

The fact remains, however, that in western post-industrial society the myth of an infinite universe with its infinite resources still reigns supreme. As with the previous myth, this idea, by outsurviving the necessarily defunct social context of infinite plentitude, may be further promoting the environmental crisis.

"What do you think will happen to them all?" he said after a while.

"In an infinite Universe anything can happen." said Ford. "Even survival. Strange but true."<sup>32</sup>

### Myth 3 : You Can't Stop Progress

The history of the Human Species as a whole may be regarded as the unravelling of a hidden Plan of Nature for accomplishing a perfect state of Civil Constitution for Society.. as the sole State of Society in which the tendency of human nature can be all and fully developed.<sup>33</sup>

Poetic imagination has put the Golden Age in the cradle of the human race, amid the ignorance and brutishness of primitive times; it is rather the Iron Age which should be put there. The Golden Age of the human race is not behind us but before us; it lies in the perfection of the social order. Our ancestors never saw it; our children will one day arrive there; it is for us to clear the way.<sup>34</sup>

Towards the end of the seventeenth century there was much debate about the position of a 'golden age' in human history. The scholars of ancient times had previously dominated philosophical discussion. An integral part of this discussion had been a strong yearning of a past, noble age, where society had reached ultimate fulfilment. As J. B. Bury writes in his work *The Idea of Progress* philosophers such as Kant and Saint-Simon led the 'moderns' to a victory over the 'ancients'.<sup>35</sup> For them, the 'golden age' existed in humanity's distant future: a future which humanity must strive towards, ever, onwards,

Krishan Kumar writes:

Mankind could now be seen as advancing, slowly perhaps but inevitably and indefinitely, in a desirable direction. In a sense, it was illogical to try to determine the happy endpoint of this progression; but the attraction to do so proved irresistible.<sup>37</sup>

The scientific revolution had convinced certain intellectuals that new ideas and new tools had given humanity a chance to fulfill itself beyond past expectation. Modern humanity had reason, liberty and science. What were those primitive and social wealth? Humanity was now more 'complex' than ever before.

In the present day, the idea of progress is extremely powerful. Also, it is mythical in every sense. It is seen as something which is beyond human control. Progress is inevitable; one cannot stop it. To a believer of the myth, progress always existed; it just happens to be part of the natural forces.

Progress, as a concept, became a dangerous myth in the context of the environmental crisis when, as Bury writes, it was joined with the Baconian idea that knowledge should be applied to human manipulation of the natural environment.<sup>37</sup> Progress became seen as intrinsically tied to the changing, taming, and controlling of the non-human world. Of course, as part of this idea was the premise that nature could be improved upon. Many environmentally degrading acts are now carried out under the mythical banner of 'Progress'. The question remains: progress in what, to what?<sup>38</sup>

The future beckoned urgently, and the promise it held out could only adequately be gauged by the chaos that might result if the forces of progress were not all combined in the task of bringing the new society into being. Of those forces the most important were science, the men of science, and all those who could see in the achievements of the scientific method the highest fulfillment of the Enlightenment, and the key to the future direction and organisation of society.<sup>39</sup>

### **Conclusions: in Search of a new Myth for a new Millennium: 'The Pot at the end of the Rainbow'**

Myths which band together with other ideas to make up an ideology are not always complementary. In fact, most often, related myths are ambiguous. For example, the progress myth ties neatly in with the concept of infinity and a never-ending pool of possible knowledge. But it directly conflicts with the unidimensional, cyclical view of History included in myth number one. This must be another characteristic of myths: they are often illogical when bound together in one particular value system. This makes sense, as myths are rarely questioned. Their logical inconsistencies, therefore also remain unseen. Perhaps this increased confusion contributes even more power to the myth. Life becomes an unsolvable riddle with its answer

found somewhere far removed from logic and reason, residing again in the supernatural.

So far the discussion has traced the historical roots of these myths in an attempt to demystify them. As mentioned earlier, this is not part of an effort to remove myth altogether, but rather to replace outdated myths which could currently be perceived as perpetuating the environmental crisis.

The content of ideologies which gather under the broad banners of 'environmentalism', 'conservation', 'green' or 'ecology' are remarkably diverse. These include reformist, revolutionary and practical approaches to overcoming the environmental crisis and other goals pursued by the conservation movement. All of these ideological approaches are based on myths.

As far as reformist doctrine goes, a rather tidy attempt at creating new ecological myths came from Barry Commoner in 1972. Commoner's 'Four Laws of Ecology' are not much more than four neat little maxims based on a new scientific interpretation of ecology: (1) 'everything is connected to everything else'; (2) 'everything must go somewhere'; (3) 'nature knows best'; and (4) 'there is no such thing as a free lunch'.<sup>40</sup> These are myths which, by their existence, are alternatives to ones which perpetuate the degradation of the earth.

Commoner differed from Plato on several obvious grounds. The most important difference was that Commoner did not comprehend that he was attempting to create a new series of myths, whereas Plato consciously contrived his. Myth-making itself is a process which often takes place unnoticed by the mythmaker. Most myth-makers are simply in the search for a new ultimate truth which would explain the riddle. Plato knew that the riddle would never be solved, but the riddle could be made to operate more effectively if its premises were appropriate to their time. Hence, he created his own, more relevant and constructive myth.

Despite the adamant cries of ecologists, Commoner's clichés are not logical truths or 'laws' at all, but leaps of faith: myths. The first two and the fourth laws are really part of one idea: inter-connectedness. Although this concept is a vital premise upon which the science of ecology is based it is no more a universal, ephemeral truth than the maxim. 'Everything is an individual separate event'. Indeed, perhaps the latter will become a catch-cry of some future age with dominant ideas similar to nineteenth century liberalism.

The third law constitutes a myth in every sense as it gives ultimate knowledge to a powerful force which is beyond human perception: Plato's Gods have been replaced by Nature with a capital 'N'. Drysek criticises the logic of Commoner's third law:

One should not, though, accept Commoner's third law absolutely.

To do so is to adopt a fairly dismal outlook on the prospects for human intelligence, and to cast man in a distinctly inferior role.

The third law is actually overstated. Clearly man can create and

sustain ecosystems, as well as destroy them. One suspects, though, that viable man-made ecosystems are the product of slow and incremental human intervention. The point is surely that man should not be either nature's master or nature's slave; rather, he should work in cooperation with nature as part of an intelligent system.<sup>41</sup>

Despite obvious logical flaws and the fact that Commoner does not perceive his 'truths' as myths, his maxims are far more appropriate to their time than those which were alluded to in the previous sections. As myths, interconnectedness and a Nature god may help us to prolong our time on this planet.

Couple these ideas with a finite universe, an undefined future, and a world where progress is not a final truth, and a more suitable mythology may evolve: one which may be capable of withstanding the environmental crisis.

If Plato were here now—with his tongue firmly planted in his cheek—and his primary interest were no longer the creation of an ideal state in which justice is to be maximised but the survival of humanity and the Earth, he might come up with the following myth:

You are, all of you in this land, brothers and sisters (sisters have become relevant since Plato's day). Nature fashioned you all out of the same clay; for Nature is not a carpenter (as was the son of the Christian god), but a potter. You are all connected, for you all exist in this one Pot.

The Pot is a confined space, with limited potential; it is finite. There is nothing beyond the Pot but the hands of Nature and the wheel on which the Pot was spun.

Your future, past and present are also all part of the same Pot. But the colour of the Pot can always be changed by you, as you have been given a palette with unlimited rainbows (it does rain inside the Pot).

The purpose (Nature believed in goal-setting) of your existence is to discover which colour, which shade you are all happiest with. It may be the first colour you mix, or it may be the last. You must stop searching when you find it. For then, you will know that there is a prophecy that the Pot will be ruined if Nature doesn't put it into the kiln to fire.

□

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