

ON THE RESPONSIBILITY OF INTELLECTUALS *

by
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During the second world war many people hoped that the annihilation of the Hitler regime would simultaneously result in the end of the fascist ideology. Events in West Germany since the end of the war, however, show that even the economic and political basis for the revival of a Hitlerian fascism is being maintained and broadened by the Anglo-Saxon reaction. The effects of this extend into the ideological realm, making the ideology of Hitlerism today still a very real question, and not just an historical one.

When we look back to the rise of fascism, we see what a crucial responsibility the intelligentsia bear for the development of that ideology. Unfortunately there are only too few famous exceptions in this regard.

I hope the so-called man of practical matters will not under-rate the question of a *Weltanschauung*. I will give only one example. It is well known how Hitler's politics led with iron necessity to the horrors of Auschwitz and Maidanek. Yet it should not be overlooked that the systematic shattering of the conviction of the *equality of all men* belonged to the moments which made this abomination possible. The organized bestiality of

* Lukács wrote the following article in 1948. It appears with other essays and letters of recognition on his 70th birthday in *Georg Lukács: Zum siebzigsten Geburtstag* (Berlin: Aufbau Verlag), 1955. It is obviously deeply bound up with the much larger work, *Die Zerstörung der Vernunft (The Destruction of Reason)*, which was published in 1955. In it he traces the course of irrationalism from Schelling to Heidegger, showing how the anti-rational tendencies of the philosophers discussed paved the theoretical path for the rise of Hitler. He explicitly states (*Preface*) that the book is intended to serve as a warning for all « honest intellectuals, » that they become cognizant of the social consequences of their teachings and intellectually prepared to fight the anti-humanistic, irrational, life-threatening social forces struggling for domination today. The *Postscript*, primarily devoted to such tendencies in post-war America, clearly shows which group of intellectuals he would like to see most affected by his warning. Such a *Postscript* is scheduled to appear in English for the first time in a future issue of Telos. The following essay is meant to fall most heavily on the same ears.

fascism implicating millions of people would have been much more difficult to accomplish, had Hitler not succeeded in maintaining in the broadest spectrum of the German masses the conviction that anyone who was not of « pure blood » (*Rasserein*) was « actually » not human.

This is just one of several examples. It indicates that there can be no *innocent* reactionary *Weltanschauung*. The older generation can still quite clearly remember « refined » academic criticism, in the best essay form, of the « vulgar » belief in the equality of man, as well as similar criticism of progress, reason, democracy, etc. The majority of the intelligentsia participated in this movement either actively or receptively. At the beginning, only esoteric books and scholarly essays appeared concerning these themes -but from them came newspaper articles, brochures, radio lectures, etc., which were directed toward a public of tens of thousands. Finally Hitler took from them -from the reactionary content of these *Salon- and Kaffeehaus* conversations, university lectures and essays- what was usable for his street demagoguery. One cannot find in Hitler one word which had not already stated by Nietzsche or Bergson, Spengler or Ortega y Gasset (« on a high niveau »). The so-called opposition of individuals, seen historically, is irrelevant. What significance can a lame, half-hearted protest from Spengler or George have against such a world-fire, when their own cigarettes were involved in igniting it?

It is, therefore, absolutely necessary and a great task of the progressive intelligentsia to unmask this entire ideology, even in its « most refined » representatives; to show how the fascist ideology grew by historical necessity from these premises; to show that from Nietzsche to Simmel, Spengler and Heidegger, *et.al.*, a *straight* path leads to Hitler; that Bergson and Pareto, the pragmatist and semanticist, Berdyayev and Ortega, have similarly created an intellectual atmosphere from which the fascicization of the *Weltanschauung* could draw rich nourishment. It is not to their credit that up to now fascism has not arisen in France, England, or the U.S.A.

Thus, we must emphasize -ideologically- the leading role of Germany in the previous development of the reactionary ideology; however, the life-and-death struggle against the imperialist ideology in Germany should never be allowed to continue a par-

doning of the irrationalists, the enemies of progress and the aristocrats of the *Weltanschauung* in other lands.

It would be false and dangerous today, however, to limit ourselves to this struggle. We would have to be very closed-minded to believe that the new reaction developing now is following exactly the same ideological path as the old reaction and working with exactly the same intellectual tools.

Naturally, the general essence of each reaction in our period, the period of imperialism, is the same: the attempt at domination by monopoly capitalism, and the consequent and constant danger of fascist dictators and world wars. Naturally, both fascist dictatorship and war are carried out with at least the same brutality of suppression and destruction as was experienced under Hitler.

However, it by no means follows from this that the new fascism, especially ideologically, will necessarily attempt to operate with an exact copy of Hitler's methods. On the contrary, more or less opposing ideological currents can already be seen in the division of the world. Today the aggression threatens from a mighty imperialism which wants to extend its domination from half the world to the whole. This imperialism carries in its wake imperialists who see their old world domain as problematic and threatened, who support the U.S.A. in the (objectively futile) hope of being able to maintain, develop, and consolidate their present possessions.

Of course, the general tendencies of imperialism remain the same; its aspirations are just as much today as before in opposition to the interests of its own masses and to those of the peoples defending their freedom. This opposition is the necessity which the aggressive imperialists see confronting them for oppressing their own and foreign peoples. At the same time, they acknowledge the necessity for demagogically mobilizing their own masses for the new division of the world, revealing the inner compulsion of the fascist domestic and foreign policy, the broader lines of which are already clearly visible.

This new stage in the development of imperialism will quite probably not be called fascism. And concealed behind the new nomenclature lies a new ideological problem: the « hungry » imperialism of the Germans brought forth a *nihilistic cynicism* which *openly* broke with all traditions of humanity. The fascist

tendencies arising today in the U.S.A. work with the method of a *nihilistic hypocrisy*. They carry out the suppression and exploitation of the masses in the name of humanity and culture.

Let us look at an example. It was necessary for Hitler, supported by Gobineau and Chamberlain, to formulate a special theory of races in order to mobilize demagogically his masses for the extermination of democracy and progress, humanism and culture. The imperialists of the U.S.A. have it easier. They need only *universalize* and *systematize* their old practices concerning the Negroes. And since these practices have up to now been « reconcilable » with the ideology portraying the U.S.A. as a champion of democracy and humanism, there can be no reason why such a *Weltanschauung* of nihilistic hypocrisy could not arise there, which, by demagogic means, could become dominant. That this universalization and systematization is rapidly advancing can be seen by anyone who follows the fates of the best progressive members of the intelligentsia in the U.S.A, or who reads Gerhart Eisler or Howard Fast. How these methods have been on the way for a long time toward universalization has been strikingly shown long ago by such a moderate author as Sinclair Lewis in *Elmer Gantry*.

Of course, we do not have the pure, abstract form of the new fascism before us here. Its actual development occasionally follows more complicated paths, especially in France and England where the inner situation of the imperialist reaction is in a much worse condition. But one need only consider existentialism -to come back to ideological problems- and it will easily be seen that the attempt to bring the frank nihilism of the pre-fascist Heidegger into accord with problems of today, turns cynicism into sham.

Or take Toynbee, for example. His book is the greatest success in the philosophy of history since Spengler. He investigates the growth and decline of all known cultures and comes to the conclusion that neither the control of natural forces, nor the control of social conditions is capable of influencing this process; he also attempts to prove that all efforts to influence the course of development through the use of force (i.e., all revolutions) are *a priori* condemned to failure. Twenty-one cultures have already perished. One solitary culture, the West European, has continually grown up to now because, at its inception, Jesus

discovered this new, non-violent path of renewal. And today? Toynbee summarizes his first six volumes to the effect that God—whose nature is just as constant as man's—will not deny us a new deliverance if only we ask for it with sufficient humility.

It seems to me that the most fanatic exponent of atomic war in the U.S.A. could desire nothing better than for the progressive intellectuals to do nothing more than pray for such a favor, while he himself can organize the atomic war undisturbed.

Granted: this fatalistic-pacifist tendency of Toynbee shows that at present we are only in the beginning stages of the ideological development of the new fascism (consider Spengler's fatalism in contrast with the nihilistic-cynical activism of Hitler.) Realizing this, however, does not make the task and responsibility of the intelligentsia smaller, but rather makes it greater. There is still time to give the ideological development of the leading cultural nations a new turn, or at least to attempt to halt the current, growing reactionary development.

For this, however, clarity in the ideological sphere is above all necessary. And what is meant by clarity here?—by no means the formally clear, stylistically perfect expression of thoughts (this is richly present among the intelligentsia), but the clear knowledge of *where* we stand, *in what direction* the path of development is going, and *what* we can do to *influence* its direction.

In this regard the intellectuals of the imperialist period are in sorry straits. Since it is never objectively possible for the intelligentsia to be equally competent in all spheres of knowledge, every epoch puts certain sciences, certain branches of knowledge, certain authors who are considered classical, in the forefront of interest. Thus, Newtonian physics played a progressive role of much consequence in the liberation of the French intelligentsia from the old theological constraints, that transmitted the monarchistic-absolutist ideology. In the France of that period, it was a motor of ideological preparation for the great revolution.

It is crucially necessary that *political economy* occupy this position among the intellectuals, economy the Marxian sense, as a science of the primary « forms of existence » (*Daseinsformen*) of the « existential determinations » (*Existenzbestimmungen*) of man, as the science of the real relations of men to one another, of the laws and tendencies of the development of these

relations. In reality, however, precisely the opposite tendencies can be seen. Philosophy, psychology, history, etc., in the imperialist period, are all equally concerned with playing down economic insights, with discrediting them as « superficial », « unessential », and unworthy of a « deeper » *Weltanschauung*.

What is the result? The intelligentsia, since they do not see through to the objective foundations of their own social existence, in growing measure become victims of the *fetishization* of social problems, and consequently helpless victims of a free-wheeling *social demagoguery*.

Examples of this can easily be given. I will discuss only some of the most essential ones. Above all there is the *fetishization of democracy*. That is, democracy *for* whom and *excluding* whom is never investigated. It is never asked what the real social content of a concrete democracy is, and this failure to question is one of the main supports of the neo-fascism now readying itself. Then there is the *fetishization of the longing for peace by the people*, generally in the form of an abstract pacifism, whereby the desire for peace degenerates not only into passivity, but even becomes a slogan for the amnesty of the fascist war criminals, thus facilitating the pre-conditions for a new war. Next is the *fetishization of the nation*. Behind this facade disappears the distinction between the just, national life-interests of a people, and the aggressive tendencies of imperialist chauvinism. It can easily be brought to mind how this fetishization was directly effective in Hitler's national demagoguery. It is effective today, too, in its direct form, but along with it there is a no less dangerous indirect use of this fetishization: the ideology of a so-called supra-nationalism, of a world government above nations, especially in the U.S.A. Just as Hitler's direct form sought a *pax germanica* for the world, the indirect form is moving in the direction of a *pax americana*. Both, if they realized themselves, would mean the annihilation of all national self-determination, of all social progress.

Finally, there is the *fetishization of culture*. Since Gobineau, Nietzsche, and Spengler, it has become fashionable to deny the unity of the culture of humanity. As I took part (after the liberation from Hitler) in an international conference at the *Rencontres Internationales* in Geneva in 1946, Denis de Rougemont and others came forth with ideas for the defense of the European

culture which had at their base a sharp separation of West European culture thus signifying a warding off the Russian culture (as in Toynbee). That this theory, viewed objectively, is completely worthless, that the present West European culture is deeply impregnated with Russian ideological influences (and precisely in its most outstanding achievements) can be seen by the most superficial glance at today's cultural situation. How can one imagine, to give but a few names, the literature from Shaw to Roger Martin du Gard, from Romain Rolland to Thomas Mann, without Leo Tolstoi? These theories demagogically use the fact that Russian culture (for the most part, Soviet culture) appears alien at first glance to the West European intellect. But every knowledgeable *littérateur* would confirm that the reception of Shakespeare in France faced more difficulties than that of Tolstoi, and M. de Rougemont and his friends still do not erect a Chinese Wall of cultural separation between France and England.

However, it is even more important to see clearly what such theories signify in the social realm. Russian cultural development, climaxing with Soviet culture, today embodies the *future* arising from our culture, just as the year 1793 did for all progressive Europeans in the 19th century. The fetishization of culture here masks the protest of what is dying, especially in their *own* culture, against what is pregnant with the future. Rougemont and Toynbee want to erect a cultural *cordón sanitair* around Russia, around the Soviet Union, with their theories, and consequently, whether they are aware of it or not, become helpers in the ideological preparation for war.

I have seemingly deviated far from the topic of economy. In reality I have uninterruptedly and exclusively spoken about it. For what does fetishization mean here? It means that a given historical phenomenon is detached from its real social and historical basis, that its abstract concept (in most cases only some aspects of this abstract concept) is fetishized into purportedly independent being, into its own peculiar entity. The great achievement of genuine economy consists precisely in removing this fetishization, in concretely demonstrating the meaning of a given historical phenomenon in the total process of development: what its past and future are.

Thus, the reactionary bourgeoisie knows quite well why it

seeks to discredit genuine economy through its ideologues, just as those participating in the Church reaction of the 16th to 18th centuries knew exactly why they fought against the new physics. Today it is in the life-interests of the imperialist bourgeoisie to annihilate the *capability for social-historical orientation* among the intelligentsia. Even if a considerable number of the intelligentsia cannot be made into absolute adherents of the imperialist reaction, they should at least be made to wander helplessly about in an incomprehensible world without the ability for orientation in it.

We must admit with shame that this manoeuvre of the reactionary bourgeoisie has largely succeeded. They have enticed and misled large numbers of the best intellects. Many good representatives of today's intelligentsia, in unconscious support of this striving by the imperialist reaction, have even created a philosophy which attempts to prove that it is *philosophically impossible* to orient oneself socially. This line runs from the social agnosticism of Marx Weber to existentialism.

Is this not an *unworthy* condition for the intellectuals? Have they attained their abilities, their knowledge, their spiritual and moral culture -during a turning point in the history of the world in which the fate of humanity will be decided, during which freedom and barbaric oppression will fight out their deciding struggle- only in order to ask with Pilatus: what is reality? And is it not unworthy of them to pass off this unknowing, this not wanting to know, as particular philosophical depth?

We have attained our knowledge, our spiritual culture, in order to understand the world better than the average man. In reality, however, we find a contrary picture. Arnold Zweig depicts quite rightly an honest intellectual who for years is taken in by every demagoguery of German imperialism, only to admit at the end that simple workers had clearly and correctly seen through these situations years before.

Already many intellectuals today feel *from where* freedom and culture are really threatened. Man, with strong moral pathos, turns against imperialism and against preparation for war. But our integrity as representatives of the intelligentsia demands from us that we create *knowledge* from this *feeling*. And this can only be accomplished through the science of political economy,

through the economy of Marxism.

The intelligentsia stands at a dividing point. Should we, like the intellectuals of France in the 18th century, or those in Russia in the 19th, become path-breakers and champions of a progressive turn in world history; or, like the German intellectuals of the first half of the 20th century, should we become helpless victims, will-less helpers of a barbaric reaction? It is obvious which course is worthy of the essence, knowledge, and culture of intellectuals and which is unworthy.