

OBITUARY



Feted by Hugo Chávez

A Marxist philosopher

István Mészáros, December 19 1930 - October 1 2017

István Mészáros was born and educated in Hungary, where he studied under György Lukács, becoming a close friend and follower. He left for the UK in 1956 at the time of the Hungarian uprising. He lectured at St Andrews University, Scotland, then went to York University in Toronto. The Canadian government saw him as a dangerous Marxist and raised the question of his immigration, but the minister concerned had to back down. István left, however, after four years in Toronto, and then settled down as professor of philosophy at Sussex University. After retirement, he lived near London.

Politically, István was associated with *Monthly Review*, particularly in the last two decades, but also with a remnant of the former Workers Revolutionary Party associated with Cliff Slaughter and Terry Brotherstone, who revered him. However, his theory and viewpoints were his own - clearly derived from his experience in Hungary and association with Lukács. In recent years he supported Hugo Chávez and the Cuban leadership. He was not uncritical, but nonetheless was part of that section of the left which gave support to them.

István was a very courteous and decent man, who had a profound understanding of the present. Unfortunately in my view he lacked a theoretically developed view of Stalinism. His 1970 book, *Marx's theory of alienation*, if read in that context, does not provide a basis for such a view. It was never clear to me why he made no attempt at theorising the political economy of Stalinism.

István was obviously not uncritical. Indeed when he came to Glasgow and stayed with me we had a series of discussions and, when Lukács came up, he mentioned the latter's antagonism to Trotsky, which "showed the limits of the man", he thought. However, he encouraged me to read Lukács in spite of that remark.

His work is prodigious - it is listed in his Wikipedia entry.¹ A good introduction is provided by *Monthly*

Review, which has reprinted an essay by John Bellamy Foster originally written as an introduction in one of Mészáros's books.²

István occupied a very particular position among Marxists, in both political and theoretical terms. He was not a Trotskyist and did not belong to any party. On the other hand, he was not a sectarian or a Stalinist. He wrote on the nature of contemporary capitalism from the perspective of a Marxist philosopher, but since the crisis of 2006-07 he wrote and spoke extensively on the political-economic crisis.

He argued that the present crisis is not "conjunctural", but "structural" - something with which many agree. It is reasonably clear to many Marxists that the present downturn is part of the reversal of bourgeois policy from the 1970s. Mészáros insisted that this is all part of a world in transition, and he used 'transition' as the basis of his understanding of that world. This does not mean that there will be an immediate collapse, but that there is no capitalist way out of the global economic impasse. His lectures on this subject are available on YouTube.³

It was Trotsky who introduced the idea that the world was in a transition to socialism, as a result of the Russian Revolution and the failure of the Social Democrats in Germany to take power. Of course, one can argue the point, ignoring Trotsky and the history of the concept, because it is clear that there is a process of transition from the forms of the market towards greater society-wide forms of integration. Some might use the word 'control', because it is equally clear that greater integration with control from above has also been part of the history of the world since 1917. For István the future socialist society was exercising its influence on the contemporary world, while the capitalist world was in the process of disintegration.

This, of course, is elementary contemporary Marxism, but István was distinguished by the fact that he continued to maintain that viewpoint

throughout. Many Marxists had given up the idea of socialism or a process of movement to socialism in our lifetime. For them, the crisis was a surprise and they expect it to be dealt with over time. István remained within classical Marxism in arguing that crises would come and could not be overcome without a process of movement to socialism. Humanity is going through a process of progressive socialisation.

István was no sectarian. At the same time, he did not write articles on the contradictions of Stalinist-type societies. He did not try to analyse the nature of the Soviet Union in the transitional epoch. He received the Deutscher Prize for his book on alienation, and an honour from Hugo Chávez. All this gives one the

impression that he saw these countries in a more positive way than many more critical Marxists. For example, he did not analyse in terms of the importance of real control from below, except in a somewhat arcane way.

The passing of István Mészáros is a loss to the left and to humanity. He dedicated his life to enlightening people on the nature of the movement to socialism. He will be long remembered ●

Hillel Ticktin

Notes

- [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Istv%C3%A1n_M%C3%A9sz%C3%A1ros_\(professor\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Istv%C3%A1n_M%C3%A9sz%C3%A1ros_(professor)).
- <https://monthlyreview.org/2010/02/01/Istvan-Meszáros-pathfinder-of-socialism>.
- See, for example, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ORR18SkIy0>.

Fighting fund

Not complaining

First things first. A big thank you to the three comrades who helped take us over our £1,750 fighting fund target for September - especially RK, who transferred a fantastic £100 straight into our bank account. Well done, comrade! Then there was IJ (£20) and SR (£10), who both clicked on our PayPal button with just a few hours to go before the end of the month!

So we ended September on £1,846 - not eating into the 2017 shortfall by quite as much as I'd hoped, but I'm hardly complaining about the extra £96. Thanks to everyone who contributed.

Now for October. We benefited, of course, from the usual standing orders that come in at the very start of each month - they accounted for £272 this time. Deserving a special mention from among the 19 SO donors are SW, AC and CG (£30 each), FK (£25), plus DL and II (£20). Then we had two nice

cheques from GR (£50) and ST, whose note accompanying his £20 contribution read: "Thanks for the brilliant reports from Brighton!" We do our best, comrade!

Finally comrades FG and FP used PayPal to donate £10 each - they were among the 3,193 online readers last week (no doubt many of them, like ST, were keen to read our coverage of the Labour conference).

So, all in all, that's £362 in the coffers after only four days. But that's a bit misleading, of course, because, as I've already said, we're always a bit 'top-heavy', compared to later in the month. But let's build on it and see if we can at least match September's total ●

Robbie Rix

Fill in a standing order form (back page), donate via our website, or send cheques, payable to *Weekly Worker*

What we fight for

■ Without organisation the working class is nothing; with the highest form of organisation it is everything.

■ There exists no real Communist Party today. There are many so-called 'parties' on the left. In reality they are confessional sects. Members who disagree with the prescribed 'line' are expected to gag themselves in public. Either that or face expulsion.

■ Communists operate according to the principles of democratic centralism. Through ongoing debate we seek to achieve unity in action and a common world outlook. As long as they support agreed actions, members should have the right to speak openly and form temporary or permanent factions.

■ Communists oppose all imperialist wars and occupations but constantly strive to bring to the fore the fundamental question—ending war is bound up with ending capitalism.

■ Communists are internationalists. Everywhere we strive for the closest unity and agreement of working class and progressive parties of all countries. We oppose every manifestation of national sectionalism. It is an internationalist duty to uphold the principle, 'One state, one party'.

■ The working class must be organised globally. Without a global Communist Party, a Communist International, the struggle against capital is weakened and lacks coordination.

■ Communists have no interest apart from the working class as a whole. They differ only in recognising the importance of Marxism as a guide to practice. That theory is no dogma, but must be constantly added to and enriched.

■ Capitalism in its ceaseless search for profit puts the future of humanity at risk. Capitalism is synonymous with war, pollution, exploitation and crisis. As a global system capitalism can only be superseded globally.

■ The capitalist class will never willingly allow their wealth and power to be taken away by a parliamentary vote.

■ We will use the most militant methods objective circumstances allow to achieve a federal republic of England, Scotland and Wales, a united, federal Ireland and a United States of Europe.

■ Communists favour industrial unions. Bureaucracy and class compromise must be fought and the trade unions transformed into schools for communism.

■ Communists are champions of the oppressed. Women's oppression, combating racism and chauvinism, and the struggle for peace and ecological sustainability are just as much working class questions as pay, trade union rights and demands for high-quality health, housing and education.

■ Socialism represents victory in the battle for democracy. It is the rule of the working class. Socialism is either democratic or, as with Stalin's Soviet Union, it turns into its opposite.

■ Socialism is the first stage of the worldwide transition to communism—a system which knows neither wars, exploitation, money, classes, states nor nations. Communism is general freedom and the real beginning of human history.

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