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Ray Taras

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## I

## The concept of ideology and Western sociology

The great political and moral crisis that societies are now undergoing is shown by a rigid analysis to arise out of intellectual anarchy. Whilst stability in fundamental maxims is the first condition of genuine social order, we are suffering under an utter disagreement which may be called universal. Until a certain number of general ideas can be acknowledged as a rallying-point of social doctrine, nations will remain in a revolutionary state, whatever palliatives may be devised; and their institutions can be only provisional.

Auguste Comte, *Cours de philosophie positive*

A central element in Marx's theory of social formation is his structural model of society, said to consist of an economic base and a political and ideological superstructure. This model has inspired considerable research into economic relations, political systems, and their interdependence, both in capitalist societies and in those undergoing socialist transformation. Inexplicably, systematic research into the role of ideology, especially in socialist states, has lagged behind.

If we focus on ideology as the principal element in the base-superstructure model, we may follow a Marxist approach to determine the ideological importance of Marxism. If we conduct this analysis in a society attempting the construction of an advanced form of socialism, then we can suggest not only what the principal features of the dominant ideology are, but also what role this ideology itself plays in the process. When this analysis is carried out for a certain time span, then it is possible to discover not only how elements of the dominant ideology are operationalised and change over time in response to their dialectical relationship with the economic system but also what effect its prescriptive value has had in society generally. Thus it is not precluded that such a Marxist-based approach may

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reveal the inadequacies of Marxist ideology as it has been operationalised in a socialist state.

The definition of ideology as false consciousness, given by the young Marx in *The poverty of philosophy*, was the source of one of the first, and subsequently one of the most bitterly contested, controversies surrounding this concept. For Marx the definition was an attempt to relate ideology to class conflict in society, more specifically, to the way in which social consciousness could be deformed by such conflict. Later, for example, in his Preface to *A contribution to a critique of political economy*, he used the term to denote the whole range of legal, political, religious, artistic and philosophical values. The confusion which followed among Marxologists in trying to arrive at a 'correct' interpretation of his concept of ideology originated in the incorrect assumption that the two definitions must, or ought to, have something in common. In fact Marx knowingly used the term to describe two quite different phenomena. Initially he contended that ideology was the result of a 'limited material mode of activity' which produced contradictory relations and, simultaneously, distorted reproductions about them. Ideology unified consciousness and reality into one phenomenon.<sup>1</sup> In his later works he made it clear that his intention was to construct an ideology free of deformations and false consciousness, one which would constitute an influential force in a given historical epoch and in which social classes would internalise as well as express the world outlook, or set of beliefs about reality, which this ideology contained. As Engels noted in his Introduction to *The eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, Marx was the first to see all forms of struggle – whether political, religious, philosophical, or in other spheres of ideology – as examples of class conflict.<sup>2</sup> Whereas earlier Marx treated ideology as a passive element, deformed by this conflict, he later saw it as an active factor in this process, playing a constructive historical role. In this way the later Marxian concept of ideology is functional: social values and directives to action are stressed, not elements of deformation.

Western critics of Marxism rarely consider the latter use of the concept; it is more dominant in the approaches to ideology taken by scholars in socialist states. Western critics either attack the 'ideology as false consciousness' thesis, or they point to the general inconsistencies alleged to be found in the writings of Marx and Engels on the subject. Thus Gurvitch attributes to Marx eight different uses of the term 'ideology',<sup>3</sup> whilst Seliger concludes: 'Marx did not use "ideol-

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ogy” according to a uniform definition, and the term itself did not occupy a central position in his work. He used interchangeably *Ideologie*, *Ideen*, *Anschaungen* and *Doktrinen*.<sup>4</sup>

That the term was not used consistently throughout Marx’s writings is undeniable. What can be claimed is that a logical evolution occurred in his thought on the subject. This is most clearly seen when relating the notion of ideology to science. For ideology was identified with false consciousness so as to distinguish it from science – the objective analysis of the real world which excluded all forms of deformation. Historical materialism was initially regarded by Marx and Engels as a world outlook based on a scientific socialism. Thus it was not an ideology. Later they understood historical materialism in broader terms: it was a systematisation and rationalisation (but not necessarily an aggregation) of outlooks on morality, religion, law, politics, science and art.<sup>5</sup> The method it used was to treat these aspects of historical development in a philosophical way; its content consisted of the social and political values of social groups. With Lenin historical materialism came to be regarded as a ‘scientific ideology’ and as the ideology of the proletariat. Whereas other ideologies were still characterised by the false consciousness they expressed and the non-scientific method they employed to view the world, historical materialism presented an objective analysis of social development in all its aspects. Also, it was devoid of false consciousness. Thus, whereas for the young Marx historical materialism was a scientific discipline and could not, as a result, be considered an ideology, for Lenin it constituted a unique unity of scientific and ideological elements.

The confusion surrounding Marx’s use of the term also originated, according to Larrain, in his application of the concept of ideology within a double perspective. On the one hand he stressed the relationship between consciousness and practice; on the other he emphasised the relationship between base and superstructure. The logic and consequences of each perspective were not exactly the same:

Under the base–superstructure relationship, ideology appears as a secondary ideal structure which is directly determined by the economic structure. Under the practice–consciousness polarity, ideology appears as the free and conscious product of a subject, as a false consciousness which protects some class interests. While for the former ideology is necessary, for the latter it appears illusory. The emphasis upon the necessity of ideology under the first polarity produces a tendency to consider it, at least partially, as a positive fact of social life, as performing a necessary function for society. On the contrary,

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ideology, considered as a false consciousness or illusion, is always contingent and negative.<sup>6</sup>

A related dichotomy was described by Parekh. He imputed to Marx a view of ideology as a body of ideas systematically biased towards a particular social group. It displayed at one and the same time idealist and apologist features. The idealist strand was based on the Marxian assumption that consciousness could be detached from concrete socially situated subjects. The ideology which followed from such consciousness was, accordingly, also autonomous and self-sufficient. Such an idealist approach was, for Parekh, bound to view the interests and values of a particular social group as universally valid. Idealism always led, therefore, to an apologia for the pursuit of these interests and values (although not every apologia had to involve idealism).<sup>7</sup>

These are two general, seemingly contradictory tendencies characterising the Marxist approach to the concept of ideology. However, it would be a gross oversimplification to conclude that the use of the term by Marx was limited solely to two imputations. Indeed, given the absence of a precise definition, it may be deduced that for Marx ideology signified a philosophy, a political programme, a form of social consciousness, a set of norms or values, a political theory legitimising a particular type of social order, a 'spirit of the age' and a scientific discipline. Since most ideologies, historical materialism included, consist to a greater or lesser degree of all these aspects, such generality in Marxian thought is by no means unique. For Marxists his contribution lay not in his concept of ideology but in his being able to situate it in a historical context and to assign it a historical role. If ambiguity arises in usage of the term, less unclear is its place in the Marxist model of social formation. Ideology is a product of the economic relations of a given epoch; it may continue to exist after these relations have become outmoded or replaced; likewise it may exert a considerable influence on future social development.

Ideology has been very widely interpreted by non-Marxist thinkers as well. A long list of definitions of ideology current among social scientists was compiled by Naess and his associates as early as 1956.<sup>8</sup> Since then further entries could doubtless be added. As the Polish political scientist Wiatr wrote: 'There are few terms in the social sciences which are as equivocal and possess such different substantive and emotional associations as the term "ideology".'<sup>9</sup> But the non-Marxist approach to ideology is not only characterised by divergent

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definitional and conceptual views. It also lacks a consistent interpretation of the role and function performed by ideology in social development. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, largely in reaction to the views propounded by Marx and his followers, ideologists of the existing social order attempted to formulate a rival doctrine which could explain how capitalism arose and under what conditions it might prosper. English economists underlined the positive role which the ideology of *laissez-faire* was to perform in promoting the kind of social and human relations needed for capitalism to flourish. Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, various ideological offshoots and modifications of *laissez-faire* and the private economy (most notable of these being Keynesian economics and social democracy) continued to pose as alternative ideologies to historical materialism. The world was a place of ideological struggle in which rival ideologies sought 'to win over the minds of men'. Neither side denied the importance of winning this confrontation and imposing its own ideology, which would in turn determine in what direction society would evolve. But ideological victory over one's rival was not an end in itself. As Marx wrote in *The eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, just as in warfare one fights with the use of arms but not for these arms, so in the ideological struggle one fights with the help of an ideology but not for the ideology. The object of the battle was not to prove the validity of one's own ideology and the falsity of that of one's opponent but to implement an ideology with the view to achieving the desired social effect. It is in this sense, as Lenin noted, that economic interests are decisive in the class struggle, for they are the real object of the ideological confrontation, not ideology itself.<sup>10</sup>

Ideologies are generally based upon some objective truths about the real world. The fundamental weakness of many ideologies is their inability to consider these truths in a societal context. Also they are often unable to perceive the real significance of their role in history. Thus they may be blinded both by self-righteousness, which stresses the internal validity of their doctrines whilst ignoring their correspondence to reality and, more specifically, to the interests of social groups, and by self-consciousness, which exaggerates their importance in affecting social development. For the Polish philosopher Rainko, the superiority of Marxism as an ideology lies not only in the fact that its doctrines concerning the real world are correct but also in the fact that it has no illusions about itself or its function in history.<sup>11</sup> To adapt a well-worn phrase of Marx, whilst other philosophies were

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(and are) concerned with interpreting the world, the most important role of historical materialism understood as a philosophy is to change it.

This positive role taken upon itself by Marxism distinguished it from the purely 'explanatory' nature of its ideological rivals. Its praxeological thrust meant that Marxism was able to adapt itself and supply impetus to the objective forces it saw as governing historical development. Bourgeois ideologies were perceived as having an appeal in the cognitive sphere only, and even in this respect with major limitations. The Bolshevik Revolution gave Marxism the long-awaited political victory and secure geographical base which it needed in order to diffuse itself further, and up to the late 1920s considerable ideological creativity took place in this first socialist state. With the adoption of a forced industrialisation programme, however, the Soviet Union entered a barren 'doctrinaire' period in which few advances were recorded in furthering historical materialist philosophy. Bourgeois ideologues in the inter-war period were unable to capitalise on the inflexibility and petrification of the Soviet Marxism of the Stalin period: firstly because they, too, could not make their doctrines more fruitful; secondly because the objective conditions they were defending, those produced by capitalism, were marked by a severe economic depression; and thirdly because Marxist thinkers outside the Soviet Union (notably Lukács and Gramsci) proved more adept and constructive in enriching and promulgating historical materialism than anyone else. A relatively short but very intense ideological confrontation took place during the Cold War period; this indeed seemed bound to follow the temporary truce produced by the economic depression in the capitalist world and the industrialisation and collectivism priorities of the USSR in the 1930s, then by the Second World War. Partly as a result of the intensity of this confrontation (and also as a result of many other objective factors), by the late 1950s non-Marxist thinkers turned away from open ideological rivalry and reached for a more subtle 'neutral' doctrine expressing their outlook on the real world. Although many different versions of the doctrine arose in political and economic thought, the main principles of the 'neutral' end-of-ideology thesis were formulated by political sociologists, most prominently by Aron and Bell.<sup>12</sup> This current had its 1970s outgrowths (post-industrial society, technocratic society), and again the theorists of deideologisation were chiefly sociologists. According to the Polish

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sociologist Morawski, this was because social scientists, and sociologists in particular, now performed a role similar to that played earlier by classical political economists. They supplied information and formulated laws about social development and hoped, with the help of sociotechnics, to affect it.<sup>13</sup>

What follows from this is that much of the ideological debate between Marxists and non-Marxists has been conducted in recent times along a sociological dimension, whereas previously it centred primarily on economic aspects. There are many reasons for this shift of focus. Since Lenin, Marxist models of society have emphasised political and social factors as strongly as economic ones. Marxism's stress on the unity of theory and practice and on its own active role in history has been reflected in the attention paid by socialist states to the question of social engineering, that is to say, to a course which aims at implanting socialist values throughout society. Once again here sociologists must perforce play the leading role. Their importance becomes all the greater after the basic sectors of the economy of a country are transformed and socialised. The main task then becomes to socialise social entities as well, for example, to transform the consciousness of particular classes, to mobilise political support for the new course, and so on. An increasing number of sociologists have also been represented amongst the non-Marxist participants in the ideological debate. Economic attacks on the weaknesses of socialism and legitimations of the strength of the mixed capitalist economy were largely undermined by the actual performances of the rival system. Western sociologists have had to take up the slack and have sought to uncover the social fallibilities of the socialist system or, at the least, to discover the social characteristics both systems supposedly have in common. At the same time in the post-war period sociology as a discipline has generally been a more dynamic and innovative one than economics. It comes as no surprise to find that the most creative and systematic models of historical development constructed in the last two decades are the products of sociologists, especially those who to some degree had have some affiliation with Marxism, for example, the Frankfurt School, the American New Left and the French neo-Marxists. For these reasons, amongst others, it has been sociologists who have carried on the ideological debate dominated initially by political economists and later by philosophers.

The end-of-ideology thesis, like the associated theory of political convergence, belongs now to history.<sup>14</sup> But before becoming out-

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moded these theories were able to inspire much of later Western sociological thinking on the subject of ideology. The types of assumption contained in the models of post-industrial or technocratic societies derived in part from the end-of-ideology thesis include the views that ideology constitutes a phenomenon (a) which is withering away, having lost much of its historical importance in an increasingly 'rational' world; (b) which has been so greatly transformed by functional imperatives that it cannot be treated as possessing an autonomous existence, though this existence itself is not questioned; (c) which is so quickly and so repeatedly transformed in our technological civilisation that it represents, at most, a passive philosophical product of a society in much the same way as do artistic or literary movements.

Before we proceed to look for an adequate definition and model of ideology which could be applied and operationalised in an examination of a socialist society, it would prove valuable to consider several of the more important models of ideology which have been constructed by Western sociologists in recent years, that is, after the end of the end-of-ideology discussion. The types of assumption they contain, which generally are held to apply to all industrial societies, socialist and capitalist, will be relevant to the analysis of the role of ideology in a socialist state that we will adopt and strive to apply. Likewise their conceptual frameworks and tools of analysis may help us arrive at a suitable research design. We have selected four macro-analyses of ideology representing the main schools of thought in Western sociology in recent years: the Frankfurt School (Habermas), the structuralist current (Althusser), the materialist explanation (Therborn) and the American reflexive sociology approach (Gouldner). Obviously these do not exhaust all the recent thinking on ideology which has taken place in the West, but they do provide an insight into how this thinking has developed and where it is going.

For Habermas science and technology have become the most important variables in social development. They lead a quasi-autonomous existence and are in very great measure responsible for promoting economic growth. In technological societies most people are becoming depoliticised, a pattern which is fully sanctioned by the technocratic ideology. This technocratic ideology has a peculiar quality. On the one hand it is less 'ideological' than all previous ideologies because it does not instil the kind of false consciousness which makes people believe their interests are being pursued when



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they are not, a principle which governed the great nineteenth-century ideologies. On the other hand it is an ideology which has a more general dimension than previous ones. It is at the same time imperceptible (transparent) and programmatic (fetishism of science). Technocracy is, for Habermas, more than just an ideology: the type of consciousness it generates consists of eliminating the distinction between theory and practice. It reflects the new relationship between the now less-influential traditional institutional framework, composed of the socio-cultural environment which continues to enforce social rules and conventions, and new rational, goal-oriented systems of action which have become autonomous, that is, which apply instrumental or strategic models of action involving rational choice, technical rules based on empirical knowledge, and the like. A technocratic ideology produces, in short, rational and instrumental behaviour whilst diminishing the significance of generally accepted social behaviour.<sup>15</sup>

In addition to possessing these qualities, a technocratic ideology differs from older ideologies in two further respects. Firstly it posits that all class conflict produced by the existence of private capital will be resolved through a process involving compromise and adjustments within the economic system. Unlike older ideologies, it cannot legitimise the use of coercion in settling social strife. Secondly, and related to the first point, technocracy seeks to obtain the loyalty of the masses through a system of allocation of goods and services which ensures that everyone's private needs will be satisfied. That is to say, it wishes to buy the support of the masses by offering them the goods and services they desire. In this respect the achievements of a technological society are measured not by its political performance but by the way in which it succeeds in harmoniously distributing free time and money to its members.

A useful starting-point in a critical appraisal of a model of technological society such as that constructed by Habermas is Morawski's observation that 'due to their elasticity, novel phraseology and weighty subject matter, theories of post-industrial societies constitute an "export" version of capitalist ideology, intended for use in socialist countries amongst others'. This ideology can find particularly fertile ground, Western proponents of the model hold, in those socialist states which are combining a structural with a scientific-technological revolution. The latter is, of course, a policy stressed in party programmes (five-year plans, party Congress resolutions) in

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socialist countries from the late 1960s onwards. But the major methodological flaw in these theories, Morawski points out, is the way in which the scientific–technological revolution is treated in isolation from the social, economic and political conditions extant in a given country.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, they assume, as Habermas does, that science and technology will replace such traditional dynamic factors operating in societies as property relations, class structure, ideological conflict, and so on. The latter are considered to play only a secondary role in affecting the social development of technological societies.

The stress on efficiency, competence and scientific knowledge is converted into a new ideal of social justice which, in essence, is regarded by supporters of the technocratic model as neutral in relation to social classes. In practice these values, which represent the central principles of the technocratic ideology, serve only to maintain the existing economic and social order. In heuristically integrating the scientific and political spheres, technocracy assumes that the ruling elite can be treated as an independent variable which need not be affected by the social changes that technology brings. Where it is accepted that the scientific–technological revolution will indeed affect the structure of power in a society, it is in the limited sense that power will be based on knowledge, that is to say, that a meritocratic system of elite recruitment will result. Political conflict will no longer be relevant in such a society, it is argued. But it is obvious that the technocratic ideology seeks only to maintain the mixed capitalist system on the same point of the political continuum as it currently occupies. If Habermas considers depoliticisation to be an important phenomenon of this ideology, it is implicitly to argue that the political status quo will not be challenged. As to the alleged depoliticised nature of this ideology itself, it is held that the rational, fundamentally neutral qualities of scientific reasoning will replace political considerations. But what in fact happens is that science is made to serve political interests, in particular so as to camouflage class contradictions, and not that politics is now to serve scientific interests. One further criticism of technocracy's political character is that advanced by the ecological movements which sprang up in the 1970s: technological progress is a programme the main political priority of which is economic expansion, at the expense of the natural environment and of humanity's place in it. The development of science and technology is no more neutral a policy than are zero growth rate economic