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Aspects of International Socialism, 1871–1914

Essays by GEORGES HAUPT
Studies in modern capitalism - Études sur le capitalisme moderne

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Aspects of International Socialism 1871–1914

Essays by GEORGES HAUPT

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with a Preface by ERIC HOBSBAWM
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Preface
by Eric Hobsbawm

Georges Haupt (1928–78) was born in a corner of Carpathian Europe, in Szatmar, officially known as Satu Mare since it was ceded by Hungary to Rumania after the First World War. He died, barely fifty years old, of a sudden and massive heart attack at Rome airport. His was a life of doubly shifting landscapes: of states and political systems moving in on people, of people travelling, or being moved, through, between and from countries, cultures and regimes. It was a twentieth-century life, and, more specifically, a life of those characteristic products of that century, the ‘displaced person’ and the exiled people.

He was a man whom this century had deprived of any country he could call his own, almost of any language, for he came from a multilingual region and spoke and wrote its languages fluently, as well as several others. When asked what his mother-tongue was, he would hesitate before answering: ‘Hungarian, I expect. I dream in Hungarian sometimes.’ His Jewish parents disappeared in the Holocaust. He was transported to Auschwitz at the age of sixteen and survived, with a sense of guilt for the death of others, since he knew that the life of every survivor was bought at the price of others’ death. He did not speak much about his experiences. We were friends for six or seven years before he even mentioned them. Nobody would have suspected this tragic background to his apparently unforced gaiety and enthusiasm.

In 1945 he returned to finish secondary school in his native Rumania. He took the baccalaureate in 1946, and went for six years’ higher study in Leningrad – in the last years of Stalinism – where he acquired a higher degree with a thesis on ‘Russo-Rumanian revolutionary relations in the second half of the nineteenth century’. Haupt then returned to Rumania for what promised to be a distinguished career in the official world of his country’s historical science. For he
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was not only, and evidently, a brilliant scholar, but also a Communist. He had learned his first lessons in radical politics as a boy while listening (like so many before him) to the discussions in a provincial shoemaker’s workshop, and he had been active in the illegal communist movement at an early age. It is not surprising that he immediately found a post at Bucharest University, directed the modern and contemporary section of the Institute of History of the national Academy of Sciences, and, from 1955 to 1958, was deputy-editor of the Academy’s historical journal. He published extensively – twenty-one titles in Rumanian between 1949 and 1958, one each in Hungarian and Russian. In 1958 he left Rumania and moved to Paris. Though he evidently disliked Stalinism, he does not, then or later, appear to have explained or justified his decision to emigrate, nor did he later comment on Rumanian affairs or join in anti-Soviet polemics. Unlike many other emigrants from eastern Europe, he remained a convinced and passionate Marxist socialist. Indeed, if he had no country, he was a survivor of another world which has almost, but not quite, passed into history: the world of international socialism.

To the history of this world Georges Haupt devoted the remainder of his short life. Paris was good to him. He soon found a home in Fernand Braudel’s ‘Sixth Section’, now the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, and an academic supporter more directly involved in his subject in Ernest Labrousse. He became Directeur d’Études at this institution and, for most of his career there, was also director of its ‘Centre d’Études sur l’URSS et l’Europe Orientale’. Paris remained his base, though he travelled much and enthusiastically in two continents. The new era of the wandering, or rather the airborne, scholar suited him, for he was in his element in the colloquium or seminar, such as the international Round Tables on social history organised in the 1970s by the Maison des Sciences de l’Homme of Fernand Braudel and Clemens Heller. He was the most fertile and unselfish of contributors and collaborators. It was impossible to meet him without taking away from the meeting some illumination, some suggestion or idea which one would not otherwise have had. He gave them to his colleagues, students and friends – the categories overlapped – not out of generosity, though he was a generous man, but because it was in his nature to spurt ideas and enthusiasm in discussion like a fountain: alternatively tense and relaxed, quizzical, and patently enjoying himself. So he moved, among friends, through
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the global village of intellectuals in which, even in Paris, he passed his cosmopolitan life.

Virtually all his early work had been on the history of socialism and revolutionary ideology. From 1958 on most of it was on the history of socialism in the period of the Second International (1889–1914) and he became the most authoritative expert on the international movement of this period. Apart from more specialised articles, he published, alone or in collaboration, no less than nine volumes on subjects connected with the International in the last fifteen years of his life. At the time of his death he was preparing the volume on Marxism in ‘his’ period for the co-operative multi-volume Storia del Marxismo (5 vols., Giulio Einaudi, Turin 1978–82), of which he, with a small group of friends from Britain, Austria and Italy, had been co-planner and co-editor. The articles in the present volume represent a selection from the work in his main fields of interest.

Haupt’s work is easy to underestimate, partly because it is extremely scattered, although the sheer mass of primary and bibliographic material he made available is impressive. At first sight he looks like the most traditional kind of labour and socialist historian, applying enormous erudition to the study of organisations, constitutions, programmes, congresses and the debates of political leaders: a conventional narrative or institutional political historian of somewhat specialised interests. And indeed, the only book of his published in English, his Socialism and the Great War: The Collapse of the Second International (Clarendon Press, 1972), was even given a rather more general title in order to broaden its appeal to readers who might not have flocked to a book which began as a lengthy introduction to a collection of documents on an aborted congress of the International in 1914. And yet, as readers of the present volume will confirm, no impression could be more misleading.

Haupt was primarily and passionately interested in what lay behind the formal facade of organisations, in analysing and generalising rather than recording. Only he preferred to approach his generalisations obliquely rather than head-on, through the careful and subtle analysis of texts and documents, preferably in chronological sequence, from which, as it were, they would naturally emerge. His technique of enquiry was the highly traditional one of what the Italians (whose best historians share the same scholarly tradition and convention) like to call erudizione filologica. Doubtless he acquired it, like his subject, during
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his years of youthful scholastic study in Eastern Europe. As might be
expected from a contributor to the Annales, he was quite aware of other
approaches. Indeed, he constantly advocated the need to abandon a
‘one-dimensional’ history and ‘to adapt research in the history of the
labour movement to the general currents of progressive and advanced
historiography’. And yet he maintained his own mode of scholarly
procedure, because what he wanted to say called for something like it.

For while his object was clearly a ‘social history’ of the interna-
tional labour movement, that is to say ‘a symbiosis of the specific
methods of history and sociology’, he was keenly aware that ‘the
history of labour and socialism is not a mere by-product of social
history. Its specificity has to be seen as a function of its own internal
mechanisms and compelling forces, and this requires us to pay attention
to the significance of theory and the role of ideology.’ Socialism was
the aspiration to change the world through theory. And this raised
what for Haupt was the crucial problem of the changing relations
between – to cite the title of one of his books – ‘Programme and
Reality’.

So the comparative social analyses of the organisational and
electoral composition and strength of labour movements, or of their
geographical distribution, which Haupt pioneered, inspired or wel-
comed, do not form the core of his work. The structural analysis of
organisations and cadre-groups, in the manner of a later and less
polemical Michels, was closer to his central interest, which concerned
ideologically motivated minorities. For though he was convinced that
socialism as movement and ideology could not be separated from the
collective actions of the proletariat in whose name it claimed to act,
including those who escaped the influence of ideology, neither could it
be simply identified with that class. And the history of (international)
socialism was his primary concern.

The socialism of the Second International was a particularly
suitable subject for such a study, and Haupt was uniquely well
qualified to undertake it, by language, learning, knowledge and
experience of labour movements and their history in numerous coun-
tries, notably of central and eastern Europe. Who else could have
written chapter 3 of this volume? For he could not only see the problem
of international socialism from the perspective of the International
itself, but also from the point of view of the individual member-parties
or would-be parties. And both commitment and a migratory life
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allowed him to understand those activists, moving between countries or simultaneously active in several, always devoted to a cause greater than the national, who played so significant a role in the socialist history of his period: Kautsky and Kuliscioff, Luxemburg, Ryazanoff, Radek, Dobrogeanu-Gherea, Rappoport, Rakovsky and the rest. He wrote about several of them and the edition of Rosa Luxemburg’s letters which he directed was his last completed major work.

There is no better guide to the complexities of the relation between nationally and internationally focussed socialists – for instance to the puzzlement of the International when confronted with the quarrelling sections and currents of the Russian movement, complicated by the sapping and counter-mining of rival Russian and Polish groups (chapter 5). Haupt can remind us of subtle links and divergences which are easily overlooked: of the preference among Hungarian socialists for looking to German rather than Austro-Marxism while the Habsburg empire remained in being; of the inability of French socialism to make much impact in so culturally franco-centric a country as Rumania; or of the surprising absence of friction between German and Russian ideological influence in the Balkans. At the same time, few historians give us a sharper sense of socialism as a genuine international community – not so much a band of brothers or even of friends as a body of men and women conscious of being engaged on the same historical task, across national and political differences. Camille Huysmans, secretary of the International Bureau, in 1906 accepted the deposit by Litvinov of sums of money acquired by the (highly controversial) Bolshevik ‘expropriations’ – i.e. robberies – and, on his instructions, arranged for arms purchases and transfers of money to illegal revolutionaries in Russia, including the young Stalin (ch. 5, p. 109). This in itself is not surprising. In those days one did not have to be even a moderate socialist to do such services for any enemy of Tsarism. More striking, as Haupt shows, is Huysmans’ total discretion about the affair, even later, when he came under attack from the Bolsheviks. It is Haupt’s sense of the international dimension of the movement that makes him so perceptive and penetrating a historian of the collapse of the International in 1914.

The contents of the present volume have been chosen with Haupt’s preoccupations in mind. They do not cover the full range of the work of a man whose interests extended to virtually every aspect of the organized labour movement from the biographical to the linguistic.
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They are primarily about the groups of leaders and activists who formed labour and socialist parties and stamped them with the character of the ideas which led them to form or join such parties; mainly ideas derived from, or influenced by, Marx. Why parties of workers which often became, within a few years, the largest political bodies in their countries, chose to accept these ideas, and why working classes chose to identify themselves with them, are questions he did not overlook, but to which he did not devote himself. His main concern was with the officers and NGOs of the army of labour rather than its rank and file.

Haupt’s chapter on ‘international leading groups’ is a brilliant exploration of one such type of cadres and leaders, and of what determined their selection and acceptance, and ‘what were the dynamics of their functioning as it underwent change and transformation according to the various periods and institutions the groups represented’ (ch. 4, p. 84). The exploration was, as so often, tentative, not only because it was Haupt’s taste and talent to suggest new questions rather than to answer old ones, but also because – in spite of his own contributions, in this instance to the prosopography of labour activists – the evidence was often not yet sufficient for firm answers.

Such groups formed the actual territory for theoretical and political debate, in short for the development of ideology, which is the second of the main themes of Haupt’s work displayed here. The chapters ‘From Marx to Marxism’ and ‘The Commune as symbol and example’, display his technique and intellectual gifts at their most characteristic. These studies of the appearance and transformation in the use of certain political terms, or the unceasing process of revaluation of certain historical experiences, are obviously erudite, subtle and sensitive to the modes of argument and feeling of socialist movements. (Has any other historian of socialist theory recognised, as lucidly as he, the interplay between ‘history-as-praxis’ and ‘history-as-tradition’ in such movements? See ch. 3, p. 46.) They not only place the development of ideas into the essentially political context in which they were generated among socialists. They proceed through what appears at first sight a modest and reticent exercise in intellectual chronology, even lexicography, to new and illuminating conclusions.

The essence of intellectual debate lay in the constant need to adapt theory and doctrine to changing reality, which is the third theme of this volume. One need hardly add that for socialists, particularly in the
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Marxian versions which became the base of ideology in the movement, doctrinal debate was implicit in political action, because the everyday political struggle itself was based on a theoretical analysis of capitalist society and its development which claimed for revolutionary conclusions and predictions, the prestige and confidence of ‘science’. Darwin and Galileo (‘And yet it moves’ was frequently quoted) were as readily mobilised as Karl Marx to give young movements confidence in the workers’ ultimate but certain triumph. Debate about doctrine and programme was thus far more specific and significant in socialist movements than the habitual friction between ‘principles’ and ‘expediency’ which is found in all ideologically legitimised forms of modern politics.

For theory not only determined what the true socialist should believe, as it were the elements of the lay catechism; nor only the nature of the ultimate programme, about which, incidentally, even the movement’s theorists remained surprisingly vague. It was also a guide to political action. The real split between Marx and Bakunin and their respective followers, did not in practice concern the role of the state after the revolution, since there had as yet been no successful revolution anywhere. In any case Marx’s and Bakunin’s views about the only possible claimant to the status of ‘proletarian revolution’, the Paris Commune, did not differ all that greatly, and both Marxists and anarchists shared the belief in a stateless communism. The real issue was whether to take part in politics at all, as Marx insisted against the passionate opposition of Bakunin. The Second International refused a place to the anarchists for this reason. It had no difficulty in accommodating conflicting philosophical and theoretical tendencies in other respects.

As Haupt sees, it is quite illegitimate to read the rigid doctrinal orthodoxy resting upon textual authority, which became so characteristic of Leninist Marxism, back into the Second International. It was too obvious, after 1889, that a great deal of what ‘the classics’ had said and written was obsolete, or did not take account of developments which had arisen since, or even (as in the case of Engels’ views on various nationalities) that it was plainly wrong. Engels himself, in his last years, had gone about the task of bringing Marx and his writings up to date with a will, as in the much-to-be-debated 1895 introduction to the Class Struggles in France. It was equally obvious that the corpus of Marx’s thought was incomplete; Engels himself had made the point in
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his introduction to Capital vol. 3.9 The Marxists of the Second
International were indeed obliged by political as well as theoretical
necessity to develop their own analysis on matters left in the dark by
Marx, or even Engels: ‘the agrarian question’, ‘the national question’,
imperialism and the new phase of capitalism.

It will be clear to readers of this volume how readily even figures on
the left – and notably the Austro-Marxists – accepted the need to revise
and add to Marx, (‘Nowadays, of course, the critique of militarism
should take account of considerations other than those formulated by
Friedrich Engels’, ch. 6, pp. 138). Revision became ‘Revisionism’ only
when, as with Bernstein, it appeared to challenge the fundamental
concept of a socialist revolution, i.e. at the historical moment towards
the very end of the century, when ‘the revolution’ ceased to be the
imminent event universally expected by socialists, and the nature of
the revolutionary expectation became much more problematic in some
countries. This turning-point has been discussed elsewhere by Haupt.
Indeed, the significance of this, the first ‘crisis of Marxism’, lay not
only in pluralising Marxism – generally into various polemical pairs of
binary opposites, ‘true’ and ‘false’, ‘narrow’ and ‘broad’,
‘orthodox’ and ‘revolutionary’, ‘dogmatic’ and ‘creative’ (ch. 1,
p. 21), some of which are still familiar. It also lay in the bifurcation of
the socialist movement – even that part which remained unshakeably
revolutionary in its theoretical expectations – into a group of parties
which did not really expect proletarian revolution in any real sense,
and another for which the imminent revolution was the central
political reality. Kautsky’s embarrassed redefinition of the SPD as ‘a
party which, while revolutionary, does not make revolution’,10 could
not but be meaningless for Lenin or any other Russian socialist.

Lenin himself is the subject of the last two papers in this volume
which, by this choice, bring the history of socialist ideological debate
into the world of major historical events. For polemics and discussions
which might otherwise interest mainly intellectual historians or
amateurs of secular theological disputat, became forces of major
practical significance in 1917. It was, after all, Lenin’s reading of the
collapse of the Second International in 1914 which determined the
creation of a Third International, which was to divide the major labour
and socialist movements into two rival camps, with damaging results
for each. The point here is not that Lenin’s expectation of widespread
revolution after 1917 was unrealistic, or his distrust of the revolution-
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ary intentions of the leaders of social democracy was unjustified. Both were quite reasonable assessments. It is that the form the split took under Bolshevik auspices, and which was after 1921 to jeopardise both the prospects of maintaining or creating mass communist movements and the task of restoring unity of action with other socialists (the ‘united front’), was largely derived from his conclusions of what had ‘gone wrong’ in the international movement before 1914. These papers thus bridge the gap between political ideas and effective political practice.

A great deal has been written about Lenin, and yet readers will find Haupt’s delicate and precise tracking of the development of his thinking about the International, war and revolution, unusually revealing. As is now clear, Lenin was not particularly discontented, until the very last pre-war years, either with the International or with its chief theoretical authority, Kautsky, whom he was also later to execrate. As late as 1909 he regarded Kautsky’s *The Road to Power* as ‘a most complete exposition of the tasks of our time’ which expressed ‘the indisputable opinion held by all revolutionary Social Democrats’ (ch.6, p. 140). As Haupt shows, this faith in a Marxist orthodoxy embodied in the German party was also held by the Balkan revolutionaries, though their disenchantment was more gradual than Lenin’s.

Lenin’s frictions with the International developed in part because he clearly wished to use it to strengthen the hand of his Bolsheviks in the Russian factional struggle. But, as Haupt sees, they were primarily due to the fact that Lenin’s international colleagues west of Poland simply did not live in the same political universe as he. The issues at stake were more than factional, let alone personal. They concerned the prospects of revolution in Russia.

How to bring about the revolution was Lenin’s only concern. Anything else was secondary to it. Even his excursions into apparently remote regions of academic enquiry, such as the philosophy of the natural sciences, were invariably aimed at dealing with some specific political problem which had arisen at a particular conjuncture of the movement’s progress. Lenin’s was a powerful and acute theoretical intelligence exclusively focussed on the political matter in hand, and which hardly ever ranged beyond it. It may be argued that even his apparent belief in a strict Marxist theoretical orthodoxy based on the classic texts was pragmatic, insofar as it was evident that any doubt, revision and reinterpretation in the period after the mid 90s was more
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likely than not to weaken the revolutionary character of Marx’s doctrine. At all events Lenin’s defence of the founders’ texts did not interfere with that capacity for an utterly realistic appraisal of the prospects and tasks of the revolutionaries, and that ruthless determination to draw the practical conclusions from his assessments, which constituted his extraordinary strength. He would invariably deny that new developments and new situations, however unpredicted, called for any change, however slight, in the fundamental truth of the texts of Marx and Engels; but he would never for a moment hesitate to adapt his politics to these changes.

The merit of Haupt’s account is not merely that he makes us understand the lack of rapport between a Lenin, convinced of the imminence of revolution and, especially after 1912, that a revolutionary situation could once again be drawing near in Russia, and an International with other political priorities – for instance, in the summer of 1914, war and peace. It lies in the perceptiveness with which he analyses the shifting, but always open-ended relation between Lenin’s unchanging strategic objective and his constantly revised and fluid assessment of the situation and its potentialities. Few, even among experts, will be able to read the brilliant essay on ‘War and Revolution in Lenin’ without illumination; and nobody who wants to understand the crucial significance of the war years in the evolution of Leninist theory and the subsequent formation of international Comintern strategy, can do without it. Here political theory and political practice are situated in their historical context.

It should be clear that the writer of this preface was not only a friend of Georges Haupt, but is an admirer of his work. It is safe to say that three categories of readers will share this admiration: those who were stimulated by intellectual contact with him, whether or not they worked in his special field; anyone who has worked on the history of socialism; and anyone who has tried to liberate that history from what Haupt himself called ‘the doctrinaire vision’ which, for obvious reasons, has dominated so much of it for so long. Scholarly, committed but non-partisan, he hoped to write history which would tactfully interpret ancient myth and dogma without destroying the possibility of co-operation and dialogue between scholars of different ideological views, including those operating under ideological constraints. And, I think, he succeeded.

But what will readers think of these essays who did not know Haupt, or for whom the historical context in which he wrote, has faded into the
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background? It is difficult to say. He was always primarily a historians’
historian. He seemed to write, as he talked, primarily for the real or
imagined members of a research seminar of colleagues and expert
students: opening or continuing discussion rather than lecturing or
formulating definitive conclusions and judgements. Unlike the public
orators of the historiographical world, he wrote to be overheard rather
than to be listened to. He inspired collaboration and felt at home in it:
thirteen of his titles were such joint ventures. He wrote and spoke
much, but so far as we can tell, he planned no single-handed major
work of narrative history or historical synthesis on the period and
subject he had made his own. He certainly produced none. Instead, he
generously scattered his writings, sometimes in variant versions,
across the international field of specialist journals and publications,
often rather obscure, in a manner which has not made the task of
compiling an adequate bibliography of his work, or a selection of his
papers, at all easy.

And yet, it is impossible to conceive of any reader interested in the
history of socialism, twentieth-century politics, or indeed in history
and political theory, who could fail to admire, and be excited, by these
essays. But they have to be read. Haupt was not one of those writers
whose papers lend themselves to the compilers of abstracts, i.e. whose
first and last pages contain all they really want to say. Nor, in spite of
his justified belief in the convergence between history and the social
sciences, would he have been satisfied with a history in which the space
between the first and last pages is filled with equations and statistics.
He believed, with Michelle Perrot, that history was ‘a shared disci-
pline, uncertain, torn between many languages, approached by differ-
ent methods, engaged in the diabolical pursuit of a reality which
haunts it and escapes from it’.11

For such a historian the journey he undertakes is not like the route of a
jet-plane, the most direct and expeditious way of arriving at a predeter-
mined destination. Destination and journey are one, for the voyage
itself allows both author and reader to recognise the landscape, the time
and season which give sense to the place of arrival. They enable both to
discover the direction of further travel. Such a mode of travel also allows
the attentive reader of this volume to admire, and perhaps to learn from,
the mastery with which a notable historian once moved through time,
place and the mass of sources and literature he knew so well, to link
social analysis and historical situation, ideas and events.

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Sources

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