

Letters on “The Frankfurt School vs. Marxism”

8 November 2008

On "The Frankfurt School vs. Marxism: The Political and Intellectual Odyssey of Alex Steiner"

Thank you for this militant and very understandable defense of dialectical materialism. For too long Marxism has been at the mercy of the college professors and their incomprehensible Marxist cultural criticism, which usually boils down to rationalizations for giving up on finding a way to communicate with proletarians because of how backward and stupid they claim the working class is. I am fed up with these "professors" and their students dismissing the "proletariat," saying the problem is that workers are lazy and like to be couch potatoes and watch TV instead of struggling. There is no science and no dialectic to that kind of sour grapes.

JR

Lakewood, Ohio, USA

23 October 2008

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I have read with considerable interest your three-part account of the political evolution and subsequent degeneration of Alex Steiner. I also read your *Marxism, History and Social Consciousness*. I then visited the blog operated by him and Frank Brenner, which is almost exclusively devoted to attacking the ICFI, the SEP, the WSWS, and yourself.

On this blog there is a piece claiming that the ICFI (under your leadership) openly supported the Iraqi cleric, Sadr, thereby identifying itself with a section of the Iraqi bourgeoisie. I have read and re-read many of the articles on the WSWS dealing with the Sadrist phenomenon, but I am struggling to find any evidence that the ICFI at any instance gave Sadr its blessing. The accusation that Steiner makes is a grave one, but also ultimately mischievous, considering the ICFI's consistent rejection of various bourgeois radicals from Castro to Chavez. Brenner and Steiner seem to reserve

a lot of their venom for you exclusively, whom they cast as a diabolical mastermind that has somehow hijacked the ICFI and holds the entire editorial board and membership under his sway.

As a longtime reader and sometimes contributor to the WSWS, and as someone who considers himself a supporter of the ICFI, I am concerned that especially young people who are attracted to the thought and writings of Leon Trotsky will come across Steiner and Brenner and be influenced by their vituperative articles. Perhaps some of their more outrageous allegations (such as the one that I have mentioned above) need to be countered with the objective facts concerning the ICFI's position on such matters.

Yours fraternally,

EG

24 October 2008

On "Marxism and Science: An addendum to 'The Frankfurt School vs. Marxism'"

Your trouncing of Steiner's posturing in science is precise, convincing and timely. Steiner's seeming adulation of mathematics apparently shrouds a quite casual acquaintance with the philosophical reflection of actual developments in mathematics and no genuine attempt to understand what the subject is about or how it actually relates to the other sciences. Given the time required to grasp specialties within the sciences and especially mathematics, it is at least to some extent excusable when someone who has mastered some new and startling scientific development sets the cart before the horse and lectures to the other sciences on how a break from old concepts in mathematics (or physics, etc.) necessitates a rewriting *ab ovo* of the whole of philosophy.

For one well-known example, Ernst Mach bowing to idealism via his imagined discovery of the identity of

sensation and matter and [not undermining] his work in physics. In fact, were this an isolated sophistical venture, Lenin may not have taken the time to comment. The penetration of the many related concepts into the vanguard party in the form of a concerted attack on materialism within sections of the leadership of the proletariat, in Russia and internationally did, however, necessitate action. It showed that the imagined middle-ground of the empiro-critics, far from a mere response to new science, bore the ideological content of the class penetration of the proletarian movement by bankrupt bourgeois philosophical phraseology and content....

Little as one would relish the prospect of reading Steiner's material, an even more mathematically oriented critique sounds like it is in order. In particular it sounds as if the latest mathematics with which he is acquainted comes from the latter half of the 19th century. He also seems to confuse String Theory (in physics) with n-dimensional analysis in mathematics. One hesitates to guess what he would do with a proper understanding of Godel's Second Theorem, or if he had stumbled across any of the many works that argue for post-modernist conclusion in response to this. Steiner's casual approach resembles the irksome confusion in the popularly projected picture of experimental science with its mathematical elaboration, developments in pure mathematics, and the connection of all of these.

For one more example, he apparently does not understand that String Theory remains a theory mainly within physics and utterly dependent on experiment; that the elaboration of the mathematical support for this field is, so far, a highly incomplete special form of noncommutative geometry. Impetus for its further mathematical development will derive for some time from its further empirical success.

All of this brings out that mathematics itself is not the pure non-empirical science that Steiner and others like him seem to be after. The notion of mathematics, for instance, as a game—a view held by the fine aristocrat of 20th century mathematics and patron of Ramanujan, G.F. Hardy—is today the conceit of a minority of mathematicians. What Godel's Completeness and Incompleteness Theorems actually indicate is that proof is the great experiment at the heart of mathematics. The ability to prove is a replicable test of a mathematical statement. Moreover, the confidence necessary to move

forward via proof is given by the adoption of conceptual starting-points which mathematics relies upon the other sciences to test and re-test for adequacy. And thus its starting-points, or axioms and definitions, satisfy such a test, in the final analysis, in their relation to the development of the productive capacity of mankind and the ability to see to the heart of the movement of matter in the various forms brought in to social consciousness.

DK

6 November 2008



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