

Letters on Steiner, Brenner and Neo-Marxism: The Marcusean Component

9 January 2009

The following is a selection of letters sent to the World Socialist Web Site on “Steiner, Brenner and Neo-Marxism: The Marcusean Component, an essay by Adam Haig.

Dear Mr. Adam Haig,

Very interesting and educative.

This article is one of the best I have read and touches on several important issues facing the movement in different parts of the world, and the common misconceptions that occur. It should be a “must read” for every worker, supporter, and activist associated with the people’s movements.

The explanation regarding “Bureaucratization” and what is “Dictatorship of Proletariat”—and what it is not (a party-state)—is a very important one and helps clear a common misconception used to discredit our movement.

The section on “third-world” guerrillaism is also very important, as many who want to contribute to the processes of social change get drawn into these types of romantic idealizations. Only much later do they realize what the “countryside-armed-squads” and their ‘leaders’ engage in.

The sections regarding Psychology and the creation of New Man are also very educative, and you have explained very nicely in a simple manner what our direction should be and what it should not be.

Hats off to you. Very well researched and very nicely explained. Keep it up—Great work.

Prashant B
Tripoli, Libya
3 January 2009

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This is a very salient article adding to the Marxist understanding of the intellectual substance of Marcuse and Fromm. It further exposes their admirers in the petty bourgeois Steiner-Brenner grouping. Within hours of its publication, it seems, the latter have rushed into the fray with a “brief note” complaining that this is all beside the point, that the SEP, if it is serious, must answer their hodge-podge of political accusations, complaining of violations of citation format, but otherwise retreating into the political mist without clarifying why and in what sense they mean that Marxists have something to learn from the pseudo-Marxist radicals of the 20th century.

It is hard to resist observing that, whereas Brenner (co-author of the “brief note”) expresses a concern for Comrade Haig, even as he insults the SEP membership by implying that they don’t know how to use Google—and I am sure everyone is touched by such concern for cadre-building—there is an earlier post on their site which invites a more sincere pity. For Steiner, it seems, although willing, he says, to vote for the SEP candidates in the November presidential election, could not do so. To be precise, he tried, but he encountered the stern resistance of a “middle-aged” poll worker, and, in the end, resigned himself to departing the premises without casting a vote.

In the aftermath of this debacle, Steiner apparently blames the SEP itself for his defeat; voting instructions

should have been part of the party's election platform apparently.

I mention this not simply because of the startling political disorientation it reveals in a man once a central contributor to the Trotskyist movement. For the event, in which the valorous Steiner tilts at the State in the person of poll workers, is very much a model of the compound of stray thoughts, components of traditional Marxism, antagonism towards the workers movement and the new forms of the class struggle reflected in the new developments of the party—in the end incapable of serving the working class in either the great things or the small.

The attempt to concoct an extra-party critique of Marxism seems to be the actual commonality between Steiner/Brenner and the radicals whose “neglect” they bemoan. The telling analysis of your article, the vacuousness of the “brief note,” and in the buffoonery of the events at the poll all reveal different aspects of the unseriousness and, indeed, political danger of this project.

David K
3 January 2009

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I wish to offer my most heartfelt thanks and congratulations for such an excellent paper. I have followed the material published on the WSWS about the Frankfurt School and Brenner/Steiner with great interest, and this latest piece is intensely interesting and informative. That said, a quick visit to and browse through permanent-revolution.org has informed me that both of them have continued to distort the reality of the situation concerning themselves and the SEP with every available trick in the book. This, and their downright hypocrisy and inanity, only deepens my great appreciation to the author and the editorial board for this and related postings on the WSWS. You have dealt with their views in a decisive and completely forthright manner. Keep up the good work.

Julian Q
2 January 2009

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The flames of anger still leap from my monitor. Marcuse and his ilk are nothing but ash now. Mr. Haig points out the error implicit in a pseudo-Trotskyist utopia and other harebrained dreams.

Larry L
2 January 2009
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I find it somewhat revealing that Steiner's web site, permanent-revolution.org, does not have any content dealing with the major crises and opportunities confronting socialists today, e.g., the global financial crisis, the eruption of American militarism, the attacks on the working class, current workers' struggles and the erosion of democratic norms. Its primary (and in fact only) theme is that of leveling accusations at the ICFI. While Steiner may not be indifferent to these events of world-historical significance, it is certainly hard to tell.

Eric C
South Africa
8 January 2008



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