

Adam Haig responds to Alex Steiner's burst of outrage

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Adam Haig's essay "Steiner, Brenner and Neo-Marxism: The Marcusean Component" provoked an angry response from Steiner and Brenner. We post here Haig's reply.

On the day of publication of my article "Steiner, Brenner and Neo-Marxism: The Marcusean Component," Alex Steiner published a hasty and angry denunciation of the piece and my person on his *Permanent Revolution* web site (permanent-revolution.org). Steiner's "brief note" consisted of a "few quick points" laying out several outrageous charges. The opponent of the ICFI said I "misrepresented" his and Frank Brenner's attitude to the Frankfurt School, that I padded the article with "completely extraneous material on Erich Fromm and Slavoj Zizek," and that I am trained in "setting up straw men, cooked-up amalgams and smear campaigns."

There will be no satisfying Steiner and Brenner, both of whom are intent on discrediting the ICFI. Steiner's charges, however, should not go unanswered. Steiner asks, "Why is it 'beside the point' to claim that 'not everything by the critical theorists is worthless'?" Haig is simply dodging the substance of our position and replacing it with a different view, i.e. 'that Frankfurt School critical theory is Marxism.' This is what is called setting up a straw man, and Haig then spends 17 pages knocking him down, arguing against something that we never claimed."

Steiner, in his hysteria, has constructed his own personal narrative in the text and employs a deceitful use of quotation marks. I never said his and Brenner's position is "that Frankfurt School critical theory is Marxism." On the contrary, my words were, "One of the arguments Steiner and Brenner make is that despite the incompatibilities of the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory with orthodox Marxism, not everything by the

critical theorists is worthless. That is beside the point. The question is whether or not Frankfurt School critical theory is Marxism." I will put this another way for Steiner.

Even if one were to accept that not all the work of the Frankfurt School and Marcuse is "worthless," and that scattered among their voluminous writings are various interesting observations, that does not begin to justify Steiner and Brenner's effort to revise, if not replace, modern Marxism (i.e., Trotskyism) with the pseudo-Marxist Frankfurt School. As Brenner declared, "Marxism in the 21st century is neither conceivable nor viable without assimilating the best insights of these thinkers," his "notable example" being the reactionary neo-Marxist Herbert Marcuse.

Steiner and Brenner's enchantment with Marcuse's libidinal fairy tales in *Eros and Civilization* prompted me to write "Steiner, Brenner and Neo-Marxism: The Marcusean Component." Steiner, who has no capacity for logical argumentation, brushes off this descriptive title as "pretentious," when it highlights a key figure Steiner and Brenner themselves reveal—through citation and adulation—as a decisive influence in their turn to psychology, sexuality, and Utopia. My paper later addressed Erich Fromm, since Steiner and Brenner also appropriate his ideas. I then touched on the psychoanalyst Slavoj Zizek to illustrate the continuity of neo-Marxism and post-Marxism. Steiner exploded:

"[I]n the manner of a clever graduate student, Haig pads his essay with several pages of completely extraneous material on Erich Fromm and Slavoj Zizek. We have never cited the latter's views in any of our polemical material and our few references to Fromm are confined to his writings from the early 1930s, long before his politics (and psychology) lost their revolutionary edge. Haig has clearly been trained by North in the 'art' of cooking up amalgams: Marcuse

leads him to Fromm (even though their differences on psychoanalytic theory were of a fundamental nature) and Fromm then allows Haig to throw in 'socialistic humanism', left-liberalism, Eugene McCarthy and the proverbial kitchen sink."

The material is not extraneous. Firstly, if Steiner had read the section on Fromm, he would have seen that I cited "The Alleged Radicalism of Herbert Marcuse." After quoting Fromm's appraisal of himself and Marcuse, I drew the following conclusion: "Their differences were real, but not decisive enough to render their views philosophically and politically incompatible. Fromm may have been disowned by the family of neo-Marxism, but he was still related to it." Fromm, incidentally, was not a revolutionary (i.e., a Trotskyist) in the 1930s. Secondly, I did not say Steiner and Brenner appeal to the post-Marxist Zizek. I said, "Zizek, who is not unlike Steiner and Brenner in their Utopian project to synthesize Marcusean psychoanalysis and Marxism, combines Lacanian psychoanalysis and something that passes for Marxism."

There are obvious lines of intellectual descent from neo-Marxism to post-Marxism. "This does not mean neo-Marxism and post-Marxism are synonyms," I said. Fromm, Marcuse, and Zizek represent distinctive but still related experiments by middle-class radical intellectuals to synthesize psychoanalysis and Marxism. Fromm, a practicing psychoanalyst, laid the foundation for Freudo-Marxism at the Frankfurt School. Marcuse, a left-Heideggerian philosopher with no training in psychoanalysis, adopted Freudo-Marxism in opposition to Fromm's rejection of libido/drive theory. Zizek, who has links to Heidegger and Marcuse, is a philosopher in the Freudo-Marxist tradition, specifically, Lacanian-Marxism. What is notable in all three cases is the degeneration of the experiment to synthesize psychoanalysis and Marxism, and its collapse into forms of subjectivism.

Even more significant is the political expression the Freudo-Marxist experiment took with these representative figures. Fromm rejected the working class and became a petty-bourgeois liberal. Marcuse rejected the working class and became an advocate of "third-world" guerrillaism and terrorism. Zizek rejects the working class and occasionally echoes the views of the post-Maoist French philosopher Alain Badiou, who

espouses the empty concept of "politics without party." All of them reject Lenin's conception of the revolutionary party, the leader of the socialist movement and political training center of the international working class. None of them were ever members of the ICFI and its affiliated sections.

As for Steiner's sarcastic and taunting reference to me as a "clever graduate student," this sort of name-calling only confirms that I have the advantage of having read with considerable care the writings of Marcuse, Fromm, and various other representatives of the Frankfurt School. I find it nothing less than amazing that Steiner and Brenner can claim these writings—which exhibit deep political disorientation and are rooted in a philosophical tradition clearly opposed to historical materialism—as an essential supplement and even an alternative to the Marxist foundations of the ICFI.

Alex Steiner will no doubt be even more outraged when he reads this response. The fact remains that he and Frank Brenner have embraced Herbert Marcuse, Freudo-Marxism, and Utopia. Having done so, it is fairly clear where they will end up. "Marxism," Trotsky said, "is not an academic science, but a lever of revolutionary action." The *World Socialist Web Site*, the online organ of the world Marxist party, the ICFI, is not the province to entertain the anti-Marxist political views of its bourgeois and petty-bourgeois detractors, but to expose them with the tools of Marxist criticism. That is a necessary task in the socialist political education of workers, intellectuals, students, and youth in the struggle for workers' government and social equality.

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