

"Socialist" Pluralism?

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The march of sophistry is devious: the march of power is one. Its means, its tools, its pretexts are various, and borrowed like the hues of the chameleon from any object that happens to be at hand: its object is ever the same, and deadly as the serpent's fang. It moves on to its end with crested majesty: erect, silent, with eyes sunk and fixed, undiverted by fear, unabashed by shame; and puny orators and patriot mountebanks play tricks before it to amuse the crowd, till it crushes the world in its monstrous folds.

— William Hazlitt

When Communists more fully assess the various means, tools and pretexts used by the capitalist class to crush the socialist countries and to splinter the Communist movement in recent years, a special place will undoubtedly be reserved for the concept of *pluralism*. Perhaps there is no better example of how an unscientific, anti-Marxist concept can quietly seep into the ranks of the working-class revolutionary movement than in the case of the pluralist idea. The results have been catastrophic.

Unscientific? Anti-Marxist? Pluralism as the cause of catastrophe? How can this be?

Admittedly, at first glance, the pluralist idea seems quite harmless, if not wholly positive. Pluralism in its broadest, "common sense" usage is widely regarded as a synonym for diversity, freedom, mutual toleration and friendly contest. It's viewed as the antipode of sectarianism, dogmatism, intolerance and dictatorship. This common sense usage carries a positive connotation among democrats of all types.

Yet pluralism is one of those words that has many meanings to many people. At least one of its philosophical critics has called it a "metaphor," a concept that is constantly being stretched and "displaced" in a variety of contexts.¹ Its definition is

very elastic having both common sense and more hidden, specialized meanings. It has different connotations in different contexts – in philosophy, politics, economics, and in the theory and practice of the revolutionary working-class Party.

It is precisely these more specialized meanings and connotations that contain the greatest perils to the interests of the working class.

The use of the word pluralism is not as simple as it seems – it is a loaded term that inevitably entails the taking on of some extra, hidden ideological baggage. Very often the contents of this baggage are carried along unbeknownst to the carrier. The hidden ideological connotations simply come along as part of the bargain, whether the person using the word is conscious of them or not.

Viewed in this way the word pluralism is very much like the word *freedom*: a fine word that enjoys near-universal approbation, but a word that can easily be abused. This concept can become a snare and a deception, and can be twisted into the opposite of its common sense meaning. Everything hinges on the context in which it is used and, more specifically, on its *class* context. As Lenin once remarked, "'Freedom' is a grand word, but under the banner of freedom for industry the most predatory wars were waged, under the banner of freedom of labor, the working people were robbed."²

It is incumbent on any serious working-class fighter to study the various meanings of this popular term. It is no exaggeration to say that pluralism has emerged in the 1980s and 1990s as the pre-eminent ideological Trojan Horse that the ruling, capitalist class has used for the aggressive penetration and crippling of the working-class revolutionary movement. It has become the main battle cry of those who would destroy socialism and push the revolutionary parties off their working-class course.

A PHOENIX FROM THE ASHES ■ The prevalence of the pluralist idea in the working-class movement is all the more remarkable given its patently bourgeois origins, its notorious role in previous counter-revolutionary efforts (Czechoslovakia in 1968, for example, or Eurocommunism in the 1970s), and its theo-

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retical barrenness. More than once the pluralist idea has been cogently refuted by Marxist scholars.³

Yet, phoenix-like, the previously "defeated" idea of pluralism has risen from the ideological ashes to wreak new havoc on a monstrous scale.

Why? What accounts for its staying power and seemingly universal hegemony?

In this writer's opinion close scrutiny will reveal that the success of the pluralist idea can be attributed to (1) the loss of vigilance – the theoretical lassitude and softening-up – of the Communist parties, (2) the continuing influences of the petty bourgeoisie on the working-class movement, and (3) the incessant propaganda of the capitalist class.

Pluralism's triumph constitutes a dramatic case study of how a lie repeated long enough becomes "truth." A brief history of the pluralist idea will help illustrate this point.

PHILOSOPHICAL PLURALISM ■ In its earliest, most narrow and philosophical usage, pluralism refers to a world outlook that describes the nature of being or reality as consisting of many independent essences rather than a single essence. It claims that you can't reduce reality to a single principle or substance. One writer calls it "the philosophical doctrine of the diversity of existence."⁴

Echoes of this idea can be traced back to classical antiquity. Its best known "modern" exponent was the German philosopher and mathematician G.W. Leibniz (1646-1716), who spoke of reality as being made up of discrete, independently existing "monads" that had no integral inter-connection. Even though he never used the expression pluralism, Leibniz's conception could be viewed as a kind of philosophical precursor to the pluralist world view.

Along the same lines, the dualism associated with the writings of Rene Descartes (1596-1650) – the view that the world is made up of two independent substances, mind and matter – can be interpreted as a special case of the pluralist idea. Like Leibniz's concept, reality is made up of more than one basic substance without any internal links. Dualism suggests that there are two such substances. Pluralism suggests even more than two.

Right off the bat it's important to see how these ideas pit themselves against a "monist," or "one-substance" view – like the viewpoint of philosophical materialism. Philosophical materialism seeks to interpret the world in terms of one basic substance – matter and forms of matter. Materialism says that

the real unity of the world consists in its materiality. It explains consciousness, for example, as a product of the brain. Matter is primary, consciousness is secondary. The dialectical materialism of Marx and Engels is the most consistent materialist philosophy of this type.

Despite the implicit, all-embracing catholicism of the pluralist world view, pluralist ideas in philosophy consistently oppose this kind of monism, particularly dialectical materialism, with a vengeance. Pluralists insist on the irreducibility of all things to a single explanatory principle or essence. Everything goes, they seem to say, but consistent monism.

The Soviet philosopher I. Narsky characterizes the pluralist viewpoint thusly:

Pluralism is a view according to which there are several or a multitude of substantial principles or kinds of being independent of each other. Pluralism is opposed to monism...In its nature it is an idealist trend, which made its appearance in history as a modification of dualism.⁵

Along similar lines, Manfred Buhr writes that philosophical pluralism:

designat(es) a kind of idealistic world view which rejects the unity of the world and instead proclaims diversity as a fundamental principle of reality. This diversity is conceived by pluralism as a multitude of independent essences or layers (components) of being, without any inner link and not subordinated to any laws of mutual transformation.⁶

Pluralism is fundamentally opposed to the consistent, monist materialism associated with the Marxist world outlook. But rather than come out squarely against materialism, pluralism deftly pleads its case for "diversity." Yes, the pluralist will argue, the materialists have a point, but so do the idealists. The net effect of philosophical pluralism is to obscure what Engels termed the great basic question of all philosophy, the relation of thinking and being. "The answer which the philosophers gave to this question split them into two great camps," Engels wrote. "Those who asserted the primacy of spirit to nature...comprised the camp of idealism. The others, who regarded nature as primary, belong to the various schools of materialism."⁷

By avoiding a clear-cut stand for either materialism (the world consists of matter) or idealism (the world consists of consciousness or spirit), pluralism seeks to carve out a "third way," an intermediate

place in the great philosophical struggle between materialism and idealism. Seeking to wriggle out of taking a clear-cut position, it takes a middle path banking on an *eclectic* approach. In so doing it stakes out a position that corresponds to the viewpoint of the principal intermediate class in capitalist society, the petty bourgeoisie, which vacillates between the viewpoints of the capitalist class and the working class.

PHILOSOPHICAL PLURALISTS ■ Philosophical pluralism in its strictest usage is generally reserved for the theories of the 19th and 20th century philosophers who gave it the name we know it by today. These figures have each left their own imprint on the theoretical elaboration of the pluralist idea.

Some took their lead from their British counterparts whose pluralist conceptions were conceived as a means for countering the sovereign, absolutist state. They fought against the remnants of feudalism and autocracy, and took sharp issue with what they regarded as their philosophical apologists, like G.W.F. Hegel. They stressed the worthiness of a social order that allowed for a multiplicity of forces: voluntary, competitive, non-hierarchically ordered, and self-determined.

Their U.S. counterparts, who took the concept and ran with it, instead stressed its ontological ("nature of being") implications: the idea that there are "many realities," "many truths," that each person or group has their "own truth," or that (in the case of the pragmatism and instrumentalism of Dewey and Peirce) that truth is simply what is useful at the time – i.e., "whatever works." If ideas about the supernatural help you out in your life, if they "work" for you, they're "true."⁸

Some members of this school suggest that it is impossible to make a clear determination of what is real and what is not, and they tend to admit the validity of virtually all perspectives. "Everyone's viewpoint is valid," they say in effect. Here the pluralists place themselves in alliance with the long-standing philosophical trends of subjective idealism (i.e., those who say the only truth is my sensation), skepticism (those who advocate the abstention from judgement), agnosticism (those who declare the ultimate unknowability of reality), positivism and radical empiricism (those who say that immediate sensations and practice are the only true guides to truth.)

These views dovetail nicely with the conception of "liberal tolerance," the principle of "live and let

live," and with an attitude of "ecumenism" and non-partisanship in philosophical matters. In fact these notions have become universal hallmarks of the bourgeois conception of "civil society" that we know today.

Looking more deeply at these ideas should give rise to some troubling concerns, however.

First, the denial of humankind's ability to determine what is objectively true – to make a judgement as to objective truth and the nature of reality – leads down a dangerous, slippery slope toward abandoning rationality altogether. If there can be no collective agreement as to what is true and what is false, the door is wide open to error and irrationalism.

The pluralist view of reality and truth serves to conveniently justify a multitude of mutually contradictory schools of thought, of trends and "isms," and explicitly or implicitly confers legitimacy on all types of non-scientific and obscurantist ideas. It thereby allows the smuggling in of ideas that have long since been proven false and injurious to the forward march of humankind. Its great "service," therefore, is to provide the theoretical justification for a hodge-podge of views that work to sustain the capitalist order by throwing dust in the eyes of the workers.

Keep in mind that, in a "crunch," so to speak, pluralists invariably side with those who oppose a scientific, integral, materialist world outlook. When their mask of non-partisanship is pulled off its true, consistent class colors show.

For example, for many years now, advocates of the so-called "creationist" view of the origins of humankind have been consistently fighting against the teaching of Darwin's theory of evolution in the public schools. This campaign has been led by right-wing, religious fundamentalists. Their first line of attack was to ban Darwin altogether, which they sought to do by way of the famous Scopes trial, inter alia. Failing that, in the intervening years the advocates of "creationism" have sought to win a place for their "theory" in school curricula on the basis of "equal time."

"Let's take a pluralist approach," they say in effect, "and allow the teaching of creationism side by side with Darwin's theory. Who's to decide which theory is correct?⁹ Let the students decide which is right." By the same reasoning, one supposes, the Flat Earth Society should be invited to lecture to grammar school students alongside those who teach that the earth is spherical.¹⁰

Humorous? Perhaps. But the point is deadly

serious. Pluralism provides a cover for the propagation of all kinds of irrationalist ideas. It moves in the direction of saying that every viewpoint has equal standing, the scientific and the non-scientific. In effect, pluralism declares itself in favor of the "peaceful coexistence of ideas" in the sphere of ideology.

For philosophical pluralism, truth is as changeable as the colors of the chameleon. It's a convenient world-view for the oppressor class, a class that seeks to conceal the basic contradictions of society by imposing a veil that suggests equal, competing, unconnected interests.

Using this argument, opportunists in the revolutionary working-class Party seek to import all sorts of non-working-class, generally liberal ideas into its ranks. The effect is to ideologically soften-up and disarm the Marxist-Leninist parties.

PLURALISM AND NON-PARTISANSHIP ■ Marxists have always viewed the struggle of ideologies in the context of the class struggle, taking a partisan approach to the fight for the truth. They have never been indifferent to the fight against bourgeois ideology, a fight for the supremacy of the working-class outlook.

In the context of the struggle against feudalism, the slogan of "impartiality" served the cause of the rising bourgeoisie in its struggle against the "partiality" of the feudal lords. Even here, the slogan of impartiality masked the very specific "partial" interests of the bourgeoisie. At the time, however, this advocacy of pluralism played a certain progressive role.

In bourgeois society, however, the slogan of non-partisanship or of pluralism only masks the nature of exploitation and power. Writing about an analogous situation, Lenin said:

In a society based upon class divisions, the struggle between hostile classes is bound, at a certain stage of its development, to become a political struggle...The non-party [or non-partisan, or pluralist - M.A.] principle means indifference to the struggle of parties. But this indifference is not equivalent to neutrality, to abstention from the struggle, for in the class struggle there can be no neutrals..Hence in practice, indifference to the struggle does not at all mean standing aloof from the struggle, abstaining from it, or being neutral. Indifference is tacit support of the strong, of those who rule. ¹¹

The concept of the non-partisanship of philoso-

phy had been particularly prevalent in the writings of the former right opportunist trend in the CPUSA (and now in the CoC). Its chief form was to emphatically deny that "we have all the answers," and to deny that Marxism has any special place in the explanation of phenomena.

Mikhail Gorbachev echoed the same theme during his last tour through the United States, when he declared in Fulton, Missouri, that "days are long gone when orthodox Marxists could claim to be know-it-alls [which by the way, they never have MA]." Gorbachev ridicules, in effect, the claims of Marxist-Leninist science and the working-class outlook.

A variation on this theme is the idea that all ideologies are basically the same, that contradictory ideologies can peacefully co-exist, that Marxism is only one aspect or facet of a more comprehensive, "progressive" world view.

Browderism

PLURALIZING MARXISM ■ Efforts to use the idea of pluralism to undermine the scientific integrity of Marxist theory and working-class ideology began as soon as the expression was conceived, and arguably even before then. Noting that by the late 1890s the victory of Marxism in the ranks of the working-class movement "was in the main completed," Lenin observed that,

...after Marxism had ousted all the more or less integral doctrines hostile to it, the tendencies expressed in those doctrines began to seek other channels...And the second half-century of the existence of Marxism began (in the nineties) with the struggle of a trend hostile to Marxism within Marxism itself. ¹²

The "revision" of Marxism at that time - a new "variety" as it were - was associated with the name of Eduard Bernstein, a one-time orthodox Marxist in the German Social Democratic Party. Bernstein sought to "amend" Marx's views on philosophy (to excise revolutionary dialectics), economics (to deny the inevitability of a breakdown in the capitalist system and to "modify" the labor theory of value), and politics (to argue that the class struggle had been surpassed or superseded by parliamentary politics).

Lenin argued that the social base for this trend, which he called *revisionism*, stemmed from the influence of the capitalist class and the petty bourgeoisie. Wherein lies the inevitability of this revisionist, opportunist trend? he asked, "Because in every capitalist country, side by side with the proletariat, there

are always broad strata of the petty bourgeoisie, small proprietors... It is quite natural that the petty bourgeois outlook should again and again crop up in the ranks of the broad workers parties."¹³

Hence very early on the capitalist class enemies of the working-class movement sought to weaken scientific socialism by encouraging the existence of different schools or "varieties" of Marxism - particularly those that revise the main teachings of the Marxist outlook. In Lenin's time, one of the main slogans for "pluralizing" Marxism was the advocacy - within the Party - of "freedom of criticism" of the Marxist Party's program. Accompanied by vociferous denunciations of "dogmatism, doctrinairism, the violent strait-lacing of thought," and the like, the calls for "freedom of criticism" were coupled with condescending calls for workers to engage in limited, trade union struggle (the viewpoint of Economism). When pressed to define their own positions, the advocates of "freedom of criticism" were evasive or silent. Lenin said at the time:

attack on dogmatism
Thus, we see that high-sounding phrases against the ossification of thought, etc., conceal unconcern and helplessness with regard to the development of theoretical thought. The case of the Russian Social Democrats manifestly illustrates the general European phenomenon (long ago noted also by the German Marxists) that the much vaunted freedom of criticism does not imply substitution of one theory for another, but freedom from all integral and pondered theory; it implies eclecticism and lack of principle.¹⁴

Still later, in the wake of the defeat of the 1905 revolution in Russia, Lenin observed that the pressure to retreat from a consistent, Marxist position was enormous. Concessions to bourgeois ideology crept into the ranks of the Party in a multiplicity of forms:

The years of reaction (1907-1910). Tsarism was victorious. All the revolutionary and opposition parties were smashed. Depression, demoralization, splits, discord, defection, and pornography took the place of politics. There was an ever greater drift toward philosophical idealism; mysticism became the garb of counter-revolutionary sentiments.¹⁵

In the intervening years we've seen efforts by the capitalist class and its learned professors to promote a veritable "Heinz 57 varieties" of Marxism: some based on personality (Marx's "humanistic"

Marxism, Engels' "vulgar mechanistic" Marxism, Lenin's "autocratic and conspiratorial Marxism," Stalinism, Trotskyism, Maoism, etc.); others on region (Western Marxism, Soviet Marxism, Chinese Marxism, Eurocommunism, and the related concept of "polycentrism in the world Communist movement").

While some of these expressions may have a certain descriptive value, all of them move in the direction of denying the existence of authentic Marxism-Leninism: a single, integrated and universal scientific theory, tested by practice and developing through time.

COC
Yet another tendency in the drive to gut Marxism of its integral, revolutionary essence has been the advocacy of various "hybrids" of Marxism, of amalgamating Marxism with anarchist doctrines, with marginal utility theory, or with various religious beliefs.

Let there be no mistake: within Marxism there is plenty of room for diversity of opinion and differing approaches. Ideas, in fact, do contend here as they do elsewhere. Lenin's approach was to acknowledge that there would always be various "shades" and opinions within the broad framework of Marxist science and the Party program, and that the nature of life was that it could not be otherwise. The guide to determining what is consistently Marxist and what is not, Lenin said, has been traditionally been shaped by the classic works of Marx and Engels, the program of the revolutionary Party, and the entire experience of the international working class movement.

POLITICAL PLURALISM ■ "An historian of political ideas might well speculate on the rapid success of the theory called Pluralism," writes Frank Cunningham. "Appearing as an important movement in U.S. universities in the 1950s, it now dominates the North American political-scientific scene."¹⁶

And not only the North American political-scientific scene, we might add. "It is safe to say that the idea of pluralism, in all its diverse expressions and aspects, constitutes a kind of core, the center round which all of the bourgeois philosophical and socio-political thinking nowadays revolves," writes Pyotr Fedoseyev.¹⁷

Pluralism in the realm of politics lends itself to a slightly less precise definition than in the case of its philosophical counterpart. Zbigniew Brzezinski defines it as "the acceptance of an open political life based on the principle of dialogue and contesta-

tion."¹⁸

V.O. Key characterizes it as follows:

A...characteristic of democratic [read: pluralistic] orders – or at least of the American democratic order – is a wide dispersion of power....Actual authority tends to be dispersed and exercised not solely by government officials but also by private individuals and groups within the society. Moreover, the power structure tends to be segmented: authority over one question rests here and over another there. All this contrasts with the model of a clear and rigid hierarchical pattern of power.¹⁹

Pluralists like Robert Dahl, Seymour Martin Lipset, and others would have us believe that the United States (and all "Western democracies") are pluralistic in this "dispersal of power," in that (1) political power is shared among key representative sectors of the population, (2) public policy is shaped through the inputs of competing social groups on a more or less equal footing which compete on agreed-up "rules of the game," (3) no one group or class enjoys permanent dominance or suffers permanent defeat, and (4) the distribution of benefits is roughly equitable – certainly not consistently exploitative.²⁰

Michael Parenti, who provides the summary above, also quotes Rolf Dahrendorf along the same lines: "Instead of a battlefield, the scene of group conflict has become a kind of market in which relatively autonomous forces contend according to certain rules of the game, by virtue of which nobody is a permanent winner or loser."²¹

If we were to understand by the term "pluralism" that every society has a multiplicity of interests, regions, ethnic groups, and the like, we would have to say yes, such a society is "pluralistic." In this sense, pluralism is synonymous with diversity.

But, as we see above, pluralists say something more – they specifically deny the existence of any more or less permanent hierarchy of power, suggesting instead a society made up of interest groups in continual flux. They deny any determinative role for a single group or player, or any single principle – say, for example, the dominance of a ruling class, or the determining role of the mode of production.

There are descriptive, or normative characterizations of pluralism too. In keeping with this vision, pluralistic societies are generally viewed as having parliaments; they are "representative democracies." The U.S. would be cited as a good example, as would El Salvador. A related feature is their lack of

clearly defined social classes, particularly the two basic classes of capitalist society, the capitalist class and the working class. Instead, the pluralists suggest there are a multiplicity of interest groups. In fact, one of political pluralism's greatest services to the capitalist class is its masking and obfuscation of the class struggle.

IS CAPITALIST SOCIETY PLURALISTIC? ■ But isn't capitalist society rent by all sorts of contradictory and antagonistic forces – including ideological forces? Don't the pluralists have a point?

We would have to admit that there is a grain of truth in the idea of many factors shaping social development, but Marxists are guided by several basic principles in this regard. First, they see beneath the surface events of every epoch the rivalry of certain basic classes, and, even more fundamentally, they see the determinative role of the economic mode of production.

Marxism...recognizes the action of many factors, but graduates them and examines them in a unified system....Marxist monism consists not in a rejection of the presence of many factors which influences social development, but in establishing the determinative role of the mode of production, and more particularly of the economic basis – production relations.²²

Thus, power within capitalist society flows from its class structure. Parenti, for example, points out that in capitalist society "public" policies consistently favor corporate interests, that government consistently favors the wealthy and corporate monopolies, and that the dispersal of power is largely an illusion. Under these circumstances, pluralism covers up the effective domination of big business.²³

Ralph Miliband, in his *The State in Capitalist Society*, eloquently debunks the myth of the neutrality of the "democratic state," the myth of "countervailing powers" in capitalist politics and economics, the myth of "managerialism" that allegedly separates ownership and control and thereby converts private interest into public interest. In sum, Miliband says that "the pluralist-democratic view of society, of politics, and of the state in regard to the countries of advanced capitalism, is in all essentials wrong."²⁴

In the ideological sphere, it is true that in capitalist society there is a multiplicity of theories, programs, parties, etc. Yet all of these are basically reducible to two main viewpoints: the viewpoint of the ruling, capitalist class, and the viewpoint of the

revolutionary working class.

In the case of the former viewpoint – those in the broad category of bourgeois ideology – there are many contending and variegated points of view vying for dominance. Nonetheless all of them basically defend the interests of the capitalist class. Furthermore, under capitalist conditions, there is no such thing as pluralistic, “equal conditions” for expressing viewpoints. Despite claims about freedom of the press, freedom of expression, and freedom of association, working people know that their viewpoint is rarely heard or expressed in the media. Whatever means they have to propagate their ideas have been fought for with great effort, and are invariably dwarfed by the media resources of the capitalist class. Despite the veil of a pluralistic “free marketplace of ideas,” some ideas – i.e., the bosses’ ideas – have more money behind them than others, thereby making a mockery of “democratic dialogue and contention.”

But promoting the idea of pluralism serves definite class ends. Cunningham writes:

It is clear that [pluralism's] role is to attempt ideologically to shore up capitalism in its period of decline....As the position of the bourgeoisie becomes weaker in the remaining capitalist countries, perpetuating the system of capitalism more than ever depends on divisions among the people. Pluralism plays a role in this struggle by promoting the ideology of what might be called ‘me-firstism,’ the view that everybody is out only for himself and joins interest groups merely to promote his selfish ends. To the extent that this view is believed, it inhibits the mutual understanding and trust so essential for mobilization against bourgeois domination. Pluralism, who needs it? Who indeed! ²⁵

PLURALISM IN WORLD POLITICS ■ Nowhere is the pro-imperialist character of the pluralist idea more apparent than in the theory and practice of world capitalist politics.

Zbigniew Brzezinski, a life-long advocate of pluralist theory, noted with undisguised joy the Jaruzelski government's acceptance of the notion of “socialist pluralism” in Poland in the mid-1980s. He saw it as but a prelude to what he called:

democratic pluralism [my emphasis here and below],” whereby “society sought not merely the right to criticize and to offer suggestions to the ruling party, but the right to share in the political decisions and eventually even the right to make basic political choices [e.g., to return to capi-

talism – my note].²⁶

Talking about the economic and social bind that Poland had been placed in by the Cold War and an onerous legacy of debt to Western banks, Brzezinski noted that “Jaruzelski faced a much starker choice: either continued socioeconomic stagnation, with the risk of an eventual political explosion, or a wide-ranging political and economic pluralization, with its inevitably deleterious consequences for the Communist monopoly of power.”²⁷

During the watch of Brzezinski we witnessed the various manifestations of this pluralistic policy: The assault on the leading role of the Communist Party in Czechoslovakia in 1968; the promotion of pluralism in the world Communist movement under the banner of “polycentrism” and various national and regional “communisms” – Eurocommunism, Chinese communism, etc.; the use of the pluralist concept to help oust the Sandinistas from power in Nicaragua; the advocacy and use of pluralism to oust Communist Parties from power in Eastern Europe in the 1980s and 1990s, with the direct connivance of elements like Mikhail Gorbachev,

The limits of the Brzezinski's concept of pluralism is best symbolized, perhaps, by the destruction of bourgeois democracy in Chile in 1973, where the working-class's use of the electoral struggle – its exercise of “multi-party democracy” and pluralism, if you will – overstepped the acceptable bounds of capitalist rule and was therefore destroyed. Tens of thousands of Chilean workers and democrats were killed, tortured and driven into exile as a result.

PLURALISM AND NATIONALISM ■ Another facet of pluralism's expediency in world politics has been its close relationship to nationalism. On a global scale, pluralism promotes the concept of “me-firstism” for each and every nation, ethnic or religious grouping, thereby undermining the concept of the essential unity of all working people. It's a direct assault on proletarian internationalism. By breaking nations into smaller parts, imperialism more easily dominates whole regions. The tragic and bitter fruit of this policy is evident today in Bosnia, Azerbaijan, and innumerable other areas of the formerly socialist lands.

Lenin always fought nationalism and national exclusiveness and consistently advocated the unity of all workers. He noted that nationalism served a useful role in the fight against imperialist domination of smaller, colonized countries, for example, but

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easily passed into a reactionary form once freedom was won.

He mercilessly combatted nationalist tendencies in the revolutionary working-class movement – including those that appeared in the most refined form, under titles like “cultural-national autonomy,” etc. Even as he advocated the right of all nations and ethnic groups to secede from Russia, for example, he consistently fought for the amalgamation of workers of all nationalities into one union (or, in the case of the Party, into one Party).

Interestingly, one of the hallmarks of present-day opportunists, like the CoC leaders, is to also retreat from internationalist positions, whether it be defense of socialist Cuba or in the organizational principles of their own group (allowing organization along national and ethnic lines, for example).

PLURALISM IN ECONOMIC THEORY ■ Economists presiding over the destruction of the socialist countries invariably speak of their help in bringing about a “pluralistic, market economy.” Experience has now proved beyond a shadow of a doubt that this is merely a euphemism for capitalism (Brzezinski let the cat out of the bag when he spoke about “pluralistic and free enterprise democracy”).²⁸

This was not always so clear, at least in the recent period. Gorbachev, for example, spoke of maintaining the socialist character of the Soviet economy, yet advocated a multiplicity of forms of ownership – private, cooperative, state, and “mixed” – saying that no one form should necessarily be predominant or valued more highly than the other.

The effect, however, was to destroy some of the main pillars of the socialist economy – e.g., central planning. The chaos that ensued set the stage for the next assault – full-scale privatization, a process that is now underway in all of the former socialist countries, and which is also making heavy inroads in the People’s Republic of China.

SOCIAL ROOTS ■ Pluralism exists in a certain social framework. As we have seen, it draws on certain trends in human thought. At the same time, it can’t be properly understood outside of its class context. Emerging on the soil of capitalist society, pluralism reflects two things at one and the same time: (1) a philosophical cover for the rivalry of competing capitalist interests, rival theories that seek to better serve the ruling, capitalist class, and (2) the vacillatory, intermediate position of the petty bourgeoisie.

Pluralism’s puny orators have done their share of damage in the recent period, most dramatically in the overthrow of many socialist states and the splintering of revolutionary parties. They’ve worked side by side with the Cold Warriors who waged an unrelenting battle on other fronts – the economic front and political fronts.

Nor can we afford to speak yet in the past tense, as if the insidious influence of this idea were no longer a problem: the concept of pluralism continues to enjoy wide currency, world-wide, even to this day. “Puny orators and patriot mountebanks” continue to dangle their pretty, pluralistic baubles before the working-class movement, hawking their multi-hued “theories” and beckoning the workers to abandon their Marxist outlook at every turn.

Not a day goes by without a State Department call for “greater political pluralism” in Cuba, People’s China, or North Korea.

Still worse, pluralism continues to have an influence in the Communist movement and the everyday discourse of left-wing politics. It continues to provide a quasi-theoretical underpinning for division, splintering, factionalism, national exclusiveness and obscurantism in the Communist movement. It’s an ideological Trojan Horse in the working-class movement.

Not that it’s been the only game in town, mind you. There have been other ideological “tricks,” other ideological weapons in the bourgeoisie’s arsenal during this period, too, of course. Prominent among these have been the “convergence theory,” the concept of the “de-ideologization” of society and the idea of the abatement or the “withering away” of the class struggle.

And the old, reliable ideological stand-bys of the capitalist class – racism, nationalism, and anti-Communism – have continued to give yeoman’s service in the propping up of the capitalist order, as they have for centuries. New wrinkles (for example, the so-called theories of “reverse discrimination” or the “criminalization of poverty”) have only further refined these time-worn, pernicious tools for dividing and weakening the working class.

But in the realm of class ideological warfare in the latter part of the 20th century, the concept of pluralism has indeed earned a special place.

“We are recommended pluralism within the Party in order to undermine its unity and solidarity,” wrote Kurt Hagh of the Socialist Unity Party of the German Democratic Republic in 1968:

[We are recommended] pluralism in the state in order to eliminate the leading role of the Party of the working class, pluralism in the economy in order to put an end to concentration and coordination of production, pluralism in ideology in order to hamper the effect of the scientific philosophy of Marxism-Leninism.²⁹

Pluralism, he would no doubt add today, in order to mercilessly pulverize the socialist camp and the historic gains of the working-class movement, pluralism in order to set nations and ethnic groups at loggerheads in bloody spectacles of ferocious fratricide and war, and pluralism in order to give imperialism the ideological initiative world-wide, a fitting herald to the New World Order.

Pluralism has indeed come highly recommended, and with a deadly purpose. It has an unmistakable capitalist-class pedigree. Workers and revolutionaries must learn to recognize it.

"Defeated armies learn well," Lenin said. The fraud of pluralism will eventually become evident, and working-class power will once again be triumphant. Part of the fight, however, involves greater ideological vigilance and the study and creative development of Marxist-Leninist theory. □

REFERENCE NOTES

1. See Susan Gross Solomon's discussion of Donald Schon's theory of metaphor and "masked displacement" in *Pluralism in the Soviet Union*, ed. by Solomon, (New York, 1983), p. 6.
2. V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works* (Moscow, 1972), Vol. 5, p. 355.
- 3 See, for example, Assen Kozharov, *Monism and Pluralism in Ideology and Politics* (Sofia, 1975); Y.D. Modrzhinskaya, et al., *Right-Wing Revisionism Today* (Moscow, 1976); Michael Parenti, *Democracy for the Few* (New York, 1974); Frank Cunningham, "Pluralism and Class Struggle," in *Science & Society*, Vol. 39, No. 4 (Winter, 1975-76); Pyotr Fedoseyev, "Philosophy, World View, Science," in *World Marxist Review*, Vol. 21, No. 12 (December 1978). Also of considerable interest is the series of articles grouped under the rubric "Revolution and Democracy" in the August, Sept., and Oct. 1979 issues of *World Marxist Review*, especially the discussion of political pluralism in the September issue (pp. 21-30). For a very useful, non-Marxist survey of the influences of pluralist ideology in the Communist movement, see "Why do Communist parties advocate pluralism?" by Peter Hardi in *World Politics*, Vol. 32, No. 4 (July 1980), pp. 531-552.
4. Rupert Breitling, "The concept of pluralism," in *Three Faces of Pluralism: Political, Ethnic and Religious*, ed. by Staislaw Ehrlich and Graham Wooten (Westmead Farborough, Hants. UK, 1980), p. 2.
5. Kozharov, p. 16.
6. Ibid, p. 16.
7. Frederick Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach and the Outcome of Classical German Philosophy* (New York, 1941), p. 21.
8. Lenin's classic work, *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, is an extended argument against philosophical idealism and its

many manifestations. Here he comments on pragmatism: "Perhaps the 'latest fashion' in the latest American philosophy is 'pragmatism' (from the Greek word 'pragma'—action; that is, a philosophy of action). The philosophical journals speak perhaps more of pragmatism than of anything else. Pragmatism ridicules the metaphysics both of materialism and idealism, acclaims experience and only experience, recognizes practice as the only criterion, refers to the positive movement in general, especially turns for support to Ostwald, Mach, Pearson, Poincare and Duhem for the belief that science is not an 'absolute copy of reality' and...successfully deduces from all this a God for practical purposes, and only for practical purposes, without any metaphysics, and without transcending the bounds of experience." *Collected Works*, Vol. 14, p. 342n.

9. The hypocrisy of this argument is plainly evident in cases where fundamentalists have come to power. Take, for example, the counter-revolution in Poland. After years of urging "pluralism" in the socialist public school system – i.e., asking for state funding of private, Catholic schools – the newly empowered clerics have launched a fierce crusade throughout the educational system to ban scientific education on birth control, on evolution, Marxist-Leninist theory, and the like. Pluralism, it seems, is useful as a device to win capitalist power; after that, it is readily discarded in the name of renewing the nation's moral fiber.
10. In his better days, Herbert Aptheker spoke with eloquent sarcasm on this point: "Are these [claims of women's inferior intelligence, the anti-Semitic Protocols of the Elders of Zion, the divine theory of creation] matters of debate? Are these questions for scientific inquiry now as the 20th century comes to a close? Or are these not historical curiosities, testimonials to human ingenuity in the service of exploitative, rotten and obsolete social systems?" Aptheker, "Racism, Shockley, and Free Speech," *Political Affairs*, Aug., 1974, pp. 52-53.
11. V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 10, p. 79.
12. V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 15, p. 32.
13. Ibid., p. 39.
14. V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 5, pp. 368-369.
15. V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 31, p. 27.
16. Cunningham, p. 385.
17. Fedoseyev, p. 72.
18. Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Grand Failure: the Birth and Death of Communism in the 20th Century* (New York, 1989), p. 126
19. V.O. Key, *Politics, Parties and Pressure Groups* (New York, 1985), p. 9.
20. Parenti, pp. 271-272.
21. Ibid., p. 272.
22. Kozharov, p. 48.
23. Parenti, pp. 272-277.
24. As cited in Isaac Balbus, "Ruling Elite Theory vs. Marxist Class Analysis," *Monthly Review* (May, 1971), p. 37.
25. Cunningham, pp. 415-416.
26. Brzezinski, pp. 127-128.
27. Ibid., p. 126.
28. Ibid., p. 257.
29. Y.D. Modrzhinskaya, p. 292.