

### MARXISM AS A HISTORICAL PHENOMENON

What is Marxism? That depends on your perspective. Those hostile to Marxism try and reduce it to the reduplication of some fundamental sin committed by Marx, such as economic determinism, class reductionism, functionalism, immorality wrapped up in the guise of science, utopianism, teleology etc. Thus, the accusers of "reductionism" often prove to be reductionist themselves in understanding Marxism's history. Others try to reduce Marxism to external forces -- the interests of a radical intelligentsia, the fortunes of the working class, the interests of an imperialist Soviet Union. In belittling Marxism by revealing "dark" interests behind its propagation, they carry out a Marxist analysis of ideology. Be that as it may, both approaches deny Marxism its own history, its own logic of development -- either it never develops or the development is governed by external forces.

While Marxism does possess continuity and while it is sensitive to the context in which it is produced, as a Marxist I do not believe that it can be reduced to either of these factors. I give priority to Marxism's "internal" history, viewing it as an intellectual and political tradition which unfolds according to a distinctive logic under the stimulus of external forces. But what is this logic, this rationality? It is the hypothesis of this course that Marxism's rationality is the rationality of science -- but science understood hermeneutically. Because it seeks to comprehend a changing world and because it regards itself as a vehicle for further transforming that world, Marxism neither stands still nor approaches some final correspondence with reality. We adopt Lakatos' Hegelian conception of a scientific research programme as the basis for our definition of scientific rationality. According to Lakatos, research programmes are defined by a hard core of assumptions which by virtue of what he calls the "negative heuristic" cannot be abandoned. When the empirical world violates these assumptions, they are not abandoned but protected by creating auxiliary theories, which absorb anomalies, that is turn them into facts consistent with the hard core. The generation of these auxiliary theories follows models and exemplars laid down in the "positive heuristic" of the research programme. Any research programme faces an ocean of anomalies and the positive heuristic points to the most important ones, i.e. those which should be tackled with the greatest urgency and determination. These new theories, of course, should be consistent with the assumptions of the hard core, otherwise they would simply be ad hoc.

Lakatos distinguishes between progressive and degenerating research programmes. Progressive programmes generate an expanding belt of theories which not only absorb or "normalize" key anomalies but also predict new facts or events. Moreover, some of those predictions should prove correct. Theories of degenerate programmes tend to follow the facts, patching up anomalies as they emerge but without making new discoveries. According to Lakatos scientists abandon degenerating research programmes for progressive ones. That is science has a rationality which is internal to each programme and a meta-rationality which governs the transition from one programme to another. For Lakatos, Marxism is the prototype of a degenerating programme.

Has, for instance, Marxism ever predicted a stunning novel fact successfully? Never! It has some famous unsuccessful predictions. It predicted the absolute impoverishment of the working class. It predicted that the first socialist revolution would take place in the industrially most developed society. It predicted that socialist society would be free of revolutions. It predicted that there will be no conflict of interests between socialist countries. Thus the early predictions of Marxism were bold and stunning but they failed. Marxists explained all their failures: they explained the rising living standards of the working class by devising a theory of imperialism; they even explained why the first socialist revolution occurred in industrially backward Russia. They 'explained' Berlin 1953, Budapest, 1956, Prague, 1968. They 'explained' the Russian-Chinese conflict. But their auxiliary hypotheses were all cooked up after the event to protect Marxian theory from the facts. The Newtonian programme led to novel facts; the Marxian lagged behind the facts and has been running fast to catch up with them. (The Methodology of Scientific Research Programmes, pp.5-6)

Although, throughout his writings, Lakatos holds up Marxism as the degenerate programme par excellence he never goes beyond this statement to substantiate such a view of Marxism. We shall examine Lakatos' claim empirically. It will involve a critical elaboration of the theory of research programmes as well as of the history of Marxism. We shall pose five general questions.

### 1. Does Marxism have a hard core?

It would be difficult to claim that all Marxisms share the same set of hard core postulates. Different traditions clearly share different sets of elements. So I propose to argue that there is a family of hard core elements, which combine into subgroups to define different branches of the Marxist tradition. I tentatively propose the following elements: (1) an anthropology, according to which human beings have a potential to develop rich and varied talents, including the practical capacity to creatively make things and the moral capacity to treat others as ends; (2) a politics based on the possibility of a society known as communism where individual creativity will be realized through association with others; (3) an epistemology which regards knowledge as rooted in and reflecting the social relations through which the material world is transformed; (4) a periodization of history based on modes of producing the material means of existence, each "mode" being considered from the point of view of its capacity to transform nature (forces of production) and its property relations (relations of production) which also define class relations; and finally, (5) a metatheory of social change based on the internal dynamics distinctive to each mode of production and on class struggle which propels the transition from one mode of production to another. Communism is a classless society where collective ownership of the means of production not only liberates individuals but, for the first time, allows history to be made consciously.

### 2. Has Marxism a Positive Heuristic?

The positive heuristic is composed of models and exemplars which are used to develop theories which normalize anomalies and support new predictions. I think there are two sets of exemplars in Marx's writings, namely his economic writings, particularly the three volumes of Capital, and his political

writings, particularly the Communist Manifesto, Class Struggles in France, and The Eighteenth Brumaire. These models of theory construction entail certain definite predictions, e.g. the collapse of capitalism through worsening crises, the escalation of class struggle, the transition to socialism taking place first in the most advanced capitalist countries. To the extent that history invalidates these claims so they become key anomalies, addressed by subsequent belts of theory.

While Lakatos emphasizes "anomalies" as driving a research programme forward, Marxism is also driven forward by virtue of its "internal contradictions". Gouldner, for example, draws attention to the lives of Marx and Engels and asks how it is that two such bourgeois individuals could produce a theory that appears to violate their class interest. He resolves the contradiction by developing the theory of Marxism as the ideology of a radical intelligentsia. As another example of an internal contradiction, many Marxisms have tried to come to terms with Marx's dual theory of history -- as unfolding according to laws and at the same time being propelled by class struggle.

### 3. Is Marxism a Progressive or Degenerating Research Programme?

To decide whether Marxism as a whole is progressive or degenerating we must first examine Marxism's individual branches. Accordingly we will study German Marxism (Bernstein and Luxemburg), Russian Marxism (Trotsky and Lenin), Critical Theory (Lukacs, Horkheimer) and Gramsci. [For reasons of time we have to omit Third World Marxism.] We will examine their "hard core", the anomalies or contradictions they seek to normalize, the theories they generate, as well as their anticipations of the future. In choosing these particular works I will be casting the most favorable light on the Marxist research programme.

### 4. What determines the development of Marxism?

My hypothesis is that Marxism has both progressive and degenerate branches and that Lakatos reduces Marxism to its most degenerate form -- official Soviet Marxism. If this hypothesis is correct, then it is important to ask what are the conditions that foster progressive as opposed to degenerate branches. Too often the sociology of knowledge is only concerned to explain "irrationality" as if "rationality" does not require explanation. Lakatos himself invokes external history only to explain deviations from his model of rationality. However, in my view, in order to understand the conditions of degeneracy one has to compare them with the conditions of progress. The degeneration of Soviet Marxism is more easily understood when compared with, for example, the progress of Russian Marxism, German Marxism, and Western Marxism.

Thus a "class analysis" of the conditions of development of Marxism might examine the relations between Marxists and workers, Marxists and other intellectuals, and Marxists and the ruling class. But such a Marxism of Marxism can only proceed after we have established what it is that has to be explained, namely degenerate or progressive branches of Marxism. That is to say, internal history takes priority over external history.

### 5. When Should We give up on Marxism?

Lakatos argues that scientists should and do abandon degenerate research programmes for progressive ones. This is perhaps the most problematic part of his framework for the following reasons. First, there are no clear criteria which would establish one programme as being more progressive than another. Compare say neo-classical economics, Marxism, structural functionalism and

feminism! Second, it is quite possible that a degenerating programme can make recovery and become progressive. Lakatos is not prepared to adopt the conservative view that programmes successful in the past are more likely to be successful in the future. Nor is he prepared to say that some heuristics are more powerful than others. Progressiveness or degeneracy is at best a guide.

So when do we abandon a research programme, Marxism in particular? The first exodus were communists who saw Marxism as "the illusion of the epoch", "The God that failed," "The greatest fantasy of the twentieth century." They left after one or other atrocity committed by the Communist Party: Kronstadt, the slaughter of the Soviet peasantry, the show trials, the invasion of Hungary or Czechoslovakia. Here Marxism was closely identified with the party, and communists became ex-communists and anti-communists. They often came to embrace democracy and the freedoms of capitalism. One might say that they were responding to that grand anomaly they called communism which violated all that it had promised. The second and present exodus is composed of Marxists who had little faith in actually existing socialism and the communist party. Nevertheless, they did have hopes for the possibility if not inevitability of some other socialism, and for potential bases of struggles against capitalism. Disillusionment in both respects led them beyond Marxism, retaining part of its hard core, particularly its critique of capitalism. They have become post-Marxist. Since they had fewer illusions their exodus was less dramatic and hasn't for the most part led them to embrace capitalism. Both exoduses sprung from the violation of expectations -- anomalies which couldn't be normalized by a new body of Marxist theory. It required, they thought, theories that could not be made compatible with the Marxist core -- liberal theory, feminism, neo-classical economics, etc.

### Course Requirements

Accordingly, the course proceeds as follows. We first examine two understandings of the history of Marxism which differ from the one suggested above. We then turn to the writings of Marx and Engels and ask what might constitute the elements of a hard core and a positive heuristic. We follow this with an examination of successive belts of Marxism, designed to resolve contradictions or normalize anomalies, namely German and Russian Marxism, Critical theory and finally Gramsci and his successors.

I have provided background readings for each section but as far as discussions in class are concerned I only expect you to have studied the assigned readings.

I expect everyone to attend and participate in the seminar discussions. as well as partake in two group presentations. Asterisks indicate days for group presentation.

A final paper, no longer than thirty pages, will be due no later than 5p.m. on December 11th. I would like to see proposals no later than November 1st. Papers must be related to the course.

There will be no auditors or incompletes.

My office hours are 2.15-4.00 p.m, Mondays and Wednesdays.

## SCHEDULE

### I. MARXISM OF MARXISM

What should we mean by Marxism, by the Marxist tradition? What might a Marxist theory of Marxism look like? We examine two candidates for a Marxism of Marxism. Of each we ask what is the relationship between the "internal" and "external" history of Marxism?

8/28 Introduction

8/30 \*Alvin Gouldner, The Two Marxisms (chapter 2 and Appendix II)

9/4 Holiday

9/6 \*Anderson, Considerations on Western Marxism

#### BACKGROUND READING

George Lichteim, Marxism (Introduction, Part VI, chapter 4, Conclusion).

Russell Jacoby, Dialectic of Defeat, Introduction, chapters 1-4

Karl Korsch, Marxism and Philosophy

Fernando Claudin, The Communist Movement, especially, Introduction and Epilogue.

Alvin Gouldner, Against Fragmentation, especially Part I.

Edward Thompson, "An Open Letter to Leszek Kolakowski" in The Poverty of Theory.

Leszek Kolakowski, "My Correct Views On Everything," Socialist Register, 1974.

Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, Hegemony and Socialist Strategy.

### II: THE HARD CORE

What is in the Marxist hard core? I suggest the following: a theory of human nature, a theory of knowledge, a theory of history, a theory of emancipation. Different Marxisms are defined by different combinations of these elements.

9/11 Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts (pp.67-93)

9/13 Theses on Feuerbach (pp.143-5)

9/18 The German Ideology (pp.147-75; 189-200)

9/20 "Preface" to The Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy (pp.4-5)

## BACKGROUND READING

Shlomo Avineri, The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx

Agnes Heller, The Theory of Need in Marx

Allen Wood, Karl Marx

G.A. Cohen, Karl Marx's Theory of History

Carol Gould, Marx's Social Ontology

Leszek Kolakowski, Main Currents of Marxism, Volume I.

Leszek Kolakowski, "Karl Marx and the Classical Definition of Truth."

Louis Althusser, For Marx

## III. THE POSITIVE HEURISTIC

The stance adopted here is that Marx's writings form an integral whole, without any epistemological break, or division into mature and immature writings. Instead I have divided them into writings which elaborate hard core postulates and writings which constitute exemplars for the Marxist research programme. There are two sets of exemplars: theories of politics and theories of the capitalist mode of production. They also generate the anomalies that animate subsequent belts of theories. What is Marx's theory of capitalist politics, of the capitalist mode of production and of their connection?

9/25 The Communist Manifesto (pp.469-483)  
The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte (pp.594-617)

9/27 Wage Labor and Capital (pp.203-17)  
Socialism: Utopian and Scientific (p.700-717)

## IV. GERMAN MARXISM

The originality of German Marxism lies in its response to the twin anomalies: a capitalist economy capable of absorbing crises and a labor movement largely committed to reforms. Engels modified orthodoxy in 1895 with his famous new introduction to Class Struggles in France which seeks to come to terms with the expansion of electoral democracy and the possibility of a parliamentary road to socialism. No sooner had Engels died than Bernstein published his theory of evolutionary socialism, the theory that capitalism would slowly evolve into socialism. Luxemburg countered with her theory of the necessity of a revolutionary transformation of capitalism. We must ask whether the two theories, particularly Bernstein's, are still Marxist and if so to what extent they form a progressive belt protecting a Marxist hard core from refutation.

10/2 Engels, "The Tactics of Social Democracy" (pp.556-73)

10/4 \*Bernstein, Evolutionary Socialism

10/9 \*Luxemburg, Reform and Revolution

10/11 Continued.

## BACKGROUND READING

Karl Schorske, German Social Democracy

James Joll, The Second International

Massimo Salvadori, Karl Kautsky

Karl Kautsky, The Class Struggle

Peter Gay, The Dilemma of Democratic Socialism

Norman Geras, The Legacy of Rosa Luxemburg

Paul Frolich, Rosa Luxemburg: Her Life and Work

Lucio Colletti, "Bernstein and the Second International," in From Rousseau to Lenin.

George Lichteim, Marxism

Leszek Kolakowski, Main Currents of Marxism, volume 2.

## V. RUSSIAN MARXISM

According to orthodox Marxism, socialist revolution will first break out in the most advanced capitalist country. In 1906 Trotsky first wrote his theories of permanent revolution and the combined and uneven development of capitalism, anticipating both the outbreak and trajectory of the Russian revolution. Lenin's theory of imperialism (prepared in 1915-16), on the other hand, developed a conception of the international order to explain why the postponement of revolution in advanced capitalist countries would be only temporary. State and Revolution (1917) -- the first full blown Marxist theory of the state -- attempts to grapple with contradictory perspectives on bourgeois democracy and the transition to socialism.

10/16 \*Leon Trotsky, Results and Prospects

10/18 Continued

10/23 \*Lenin, Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism

10/25 Continued

10/30 \*Lenin, State and Revolution

11/1 Continued

## BACKGROUND READING

Isaac Deutscher, The Prophet Armed

Trotsky, The Revolution Betrayed

Neil Harding, Lenin's Political Thought

A.J. Polan, Lenin and the End of Politics

Fernando Claudin, The Communist Movement (Part I, chapter 2).

Stephen Cohen, Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution

## VI. CRITICAL THEORY

Inspired by revolutionary optimism, Lukacs returns to some of the more Hegelian tendencies in Marx -- the analysis of alienation and class consciousness. The influence of Weber's analysis of rationalization is very visible in Lukacs development of reification. In History and Class Consciousness, written between 1919 and 1922, class organization with the aid of the party overcomes reification whereas in the work of the Frankfurt School reification subjugates and atomizes the working class. Facing what they saw as the defeat of the German working class and later the rise of fascism, critical theorists turned to Weber and Freud to augment their analysis of subjectivity and subjugation.

11/6 \*Georg Lukacs, History and Class Consciousness (Chapters 1, 2 and 3).

11/8 Continued

11/13 \*Max Horkheimer, Eclipse of Reason

11/15 Continued

### BACKGROUND READING

Andrew Arato and Paul Breines, The Young Lukacs and the Origins of Western Marxism.

Martin Jay, The Dialectical Imagination

David Held, Introduction to Critical Theory

Max Horkheimer, "Traditional and Critical Theory," "Authority and the Family," in Critical Theory.

Herbert Marcuse, Eros and Civilization

Leszek Kolakowski, Main Currents of Marxism, Volume III.

Jurgen Habermas, The Theory of Communicative Action, chapter 4.

## VII. GRAMSCI

Gramsci's prison writings attempt to come to terms with the collapse of the workers' movement in Turin and the fluctuating fortunes of the Italian Communist Party as fascism gained strength. From there he sought to understand both why there had been a revolution in the East and none in the West. In developing a new approach to politics, involving theories of the state, of the party, of ideology, and of intellectuals, Gramsci was led to revamp the foundations of Marxism.

11/20 The Philosophy of Praxis (pp.321-377)

11/22 Continued

11/27 Brief Notes on Machiavelli's Politics (pp.123-133)

11/29 Analysis of Situations, Relations of Force. (pp.175-185)

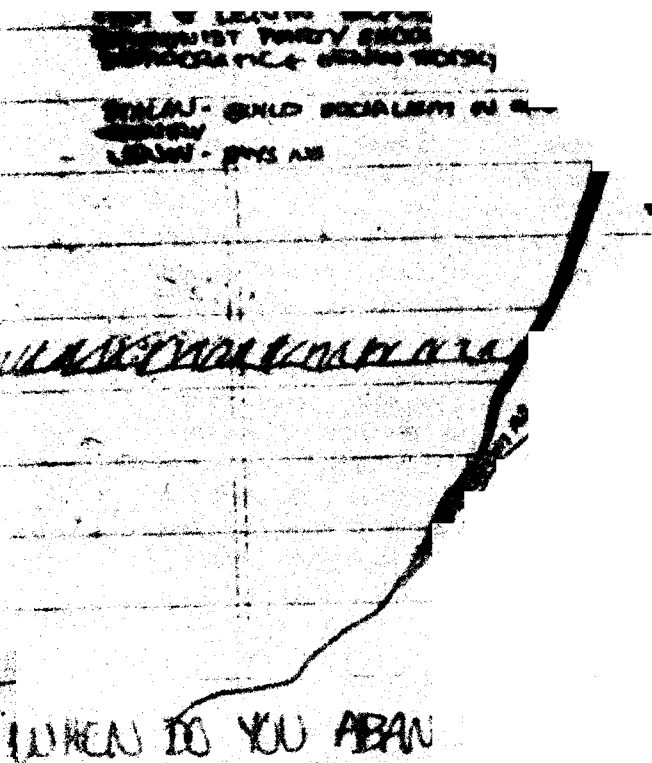


12/4 Political Struggle and Military War, The Transition from the War of Manoeuvre to the War of Position, Politics and Military Science, Sociology and Political Science (pp.229-245)

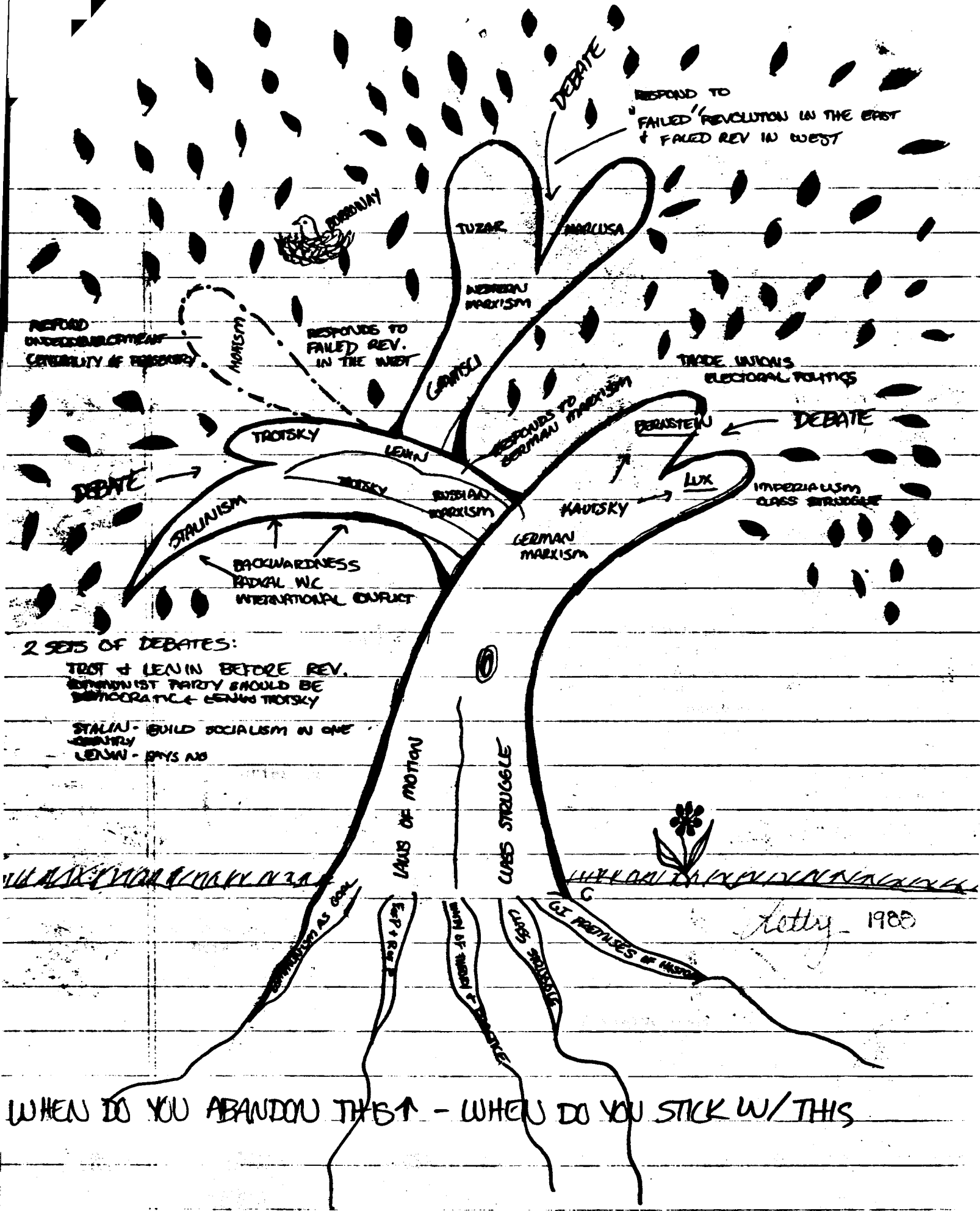
12/6 Conclusion

BACKGROUND READING

- Giuseppe Fiori, Antonio Gramsci
- Christine Buci-Glucksmann, Gramsci and the State
- Chantal Mouffe (ed.), Gramsci and Marxist Theory
- Walter Adamson, Hegemony and Revolution
- Nicos Poulantzas, Political Power and Social Classes
- Adam Przeworski, Capitalism and Social Democracy



/ THIS



RECORD UNDESIRABLE  
CREDIBILITY OF HISTORY

RESPOND TO  
"FAILED" REVOLUTION IN THE EAST  
& FAILED REV IN WEST



TUDOR

MARCUSA

RUSSIAN  
MARXISM

RESPONDS TO  
FAILED REV.  
IN THE WEST

MORISM

TRADE UNIONS  
ELECTORAL POLITICS

TROTSKY

LENIN

GANDHI

RESPONDS TO  
GERMAN MARXISM

BERNSTEIN

DEBATE

DEBATE

STALINISM

BACKWARDNESS  
RADICAL WC  
INTERNATIONAL CONFLICT

TROTSKY

RUSSIAN  
MARXISM

HAUTSKY

LUX

IMPERIALISM  
CLASS STRUGGLE

GERMAN  
MARXISM

2 SETS OF DEBATES:

TROT & LENIN BEFORE REV.  
COMMUNIST PARTY SHOULD BE  
DEMOCRATIC & LENIN TROTSKY

STALIN - BUILD SOCIALISM IN ONE  
COUNTRY  
LENIN - PHYS AND

LAW OF MOTION

CLASS STRUGGLE

~~WHEN DO YOU ABANDON THIS - WHEN DO YOU STICK W/ THIS~~

~~WHEN DO YOU ABANDON THIS - WHEN DO YOU STICK W/ THIS~~

WHEN DO YOU ABANDON THIS - WHEN DO YOU STICK W/ THIS

Totly - 1980

