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Introduction

The problem of alienation as a condition of modern man has nowadays become an almost obsessive concern in areas of cultural activity ranging from literature and the plastic arts to sociology and philosophy. The isolated individual, like the central figure in The Stranger by Albert Camus, estranged from other people and even from his own deepest self and emotions, is a familiar character in all branches of contemporary writing.

The same kind of loner or outsider, divorced from an uncaring world and pitted by malign fate against it, will be found as the hero, or antihero, of plays by Beckett, Ionesco, Genet and others of lesser talent and renown. The cinematic productions of such directors as Bergman and Fellini portray individuals with disintegrated personalities totally absorbed in themselves and tormented by an intense loneliness and inability to communicate with others.

The theme of alienation has filtered from vanguard circles into popular songs which have reached large segments of youth. Witness these lines from Simon and Garfunkel's I Am a Rock:

"... I have my books and my poetry to protect me; I am shielded in my armor, hiding in my room. Safe within my womb. I touch no one. And no one touches me. I am a rock, I am an island. And a rock can feel no pain. And an island never cries."*

Millions of less articulate folk share the sentiments of alienation portrayed by so many gifted writers and sen-

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sitive artists of our day. This is certified by the multitude of sociological studies made of the characteristics of the "lonely crowd," those aggregations of atomized city dwellers who feel crushed and benumbed by the weight of a social system in which they have neither significant purpose nor decision-making power.

The broad attention focused on the condition of alienation shows that we are confronted by the symptoms of a morbid and acute social sickness. The three essays in this book undertake to analyze that endemic condition of capitalism from the Marxist point of view.

Other philosophies also attempt to deal with the problem of alienation from their special standpoints. Existentialism, for example, teaches that alienation is built into the very nature of man as an enigmatic castaway on this planet. Whatever he may do to overcome that state, born of an awareness of the meaninglessness of existence, he can find no exit from his fate.

Marxism on the other hand does not believe in the eternity of alienation any more than it believes in eternal damnation. This state is not an inescapable and irremediable curse of mankind. Alienation is the outgrowth of specific historical conditions which have been brought into existence by man's unwitting activity and which can be changed at a higher stage of economic and social development by man's conscious collective action.

Marxism does agree with existentialism on one point: the tormenting forms of alienation suffered by men and women today disclose extremely significant aspects of their lives which call for a theoretical explanation and a realistic remedy. The method of explanation offered by Marxism for this calamitous condition and the course of action recommended to alleviate it are, however, squarely opposed to the premises and conclusions of either existentialism or any religious creed. Instead of a metaphysical or theological answer, Marxism gives a scientific, an historical materialist analysis of the origins and growth of alienation. It further presents a revolutionary political program for the working class to achieve its reduction and eventual abolition.

Many liberal thinkers view alienation as essentially a
psychological phenomenon. This is a superficial approach. Although alienation has its psychological side— and pathological effects, as Erich Fromm has pointed out in his book *The Sane Society*— it is not primarily or purely of psychic origin and location. Its roots go far back into human history; the causes of its current manifestations are embedded in the innermost constitution of class society.

Alienation is an historically created phenomenon. Its origin and continuing basis in civilized society arises from the alienation of labor which characterizes all systems of private property from slavery to capitalism. Alienation expresses the fact that the creations of men’s hands and minds turn against their creators and come to dominate their lives. Thus, instead of enlarging freedom, these uncontrollable powers increase human servitude and strip men of the capacities for self-determination and self-direction which have raised them above the animals.

For Marxism the forms of alienation are products of man’s impotence before the forces of nature and of society and his ignorance of the laws of their operation. They are not everlasting. They can diminish to the extent that man’s control over his habitat and his social relations and his scientific knowledge of their processes of development are amplified. They will wither away and cease entirely when his command over nature and social organization is consummated under socialism.

The causes of existing alienation are rooted in capitalism which was born and bred in the dispossession of the working masses from the means of production and the consequent alienation of wage labor. In the further course of development this system keeps reproducing the conditions of alienation more extensively on all levels of social existence. Contemporary monopoly capitalism has so intensified and universalized the conditions of alienation that its consequences have spread like an unfilterable virus throughout the whole social organism.

Since alienation in class society is based on the expropriation and exploitation of the labor force, the nature of this deep-seated disease points to the direction of its cure. It can only be eliminated if the unity of the workers
with the means of their labor is restored, not by reverting to any form of primitivism, but by incorporating the highest achievements of science, technology and industry into a collectivized mode of production.

This can only be done through a socialist revolution which will establish a regime based upon a nationalized economy operated under the democratic control of the workers themselves. The new world order issuing from such a fundamental reconstruction of human relations can create the conditions for eradicating the forms of alienation inherited from the barbarous past.

Now there are not only capitalist but also postcapitalist countries on this planet. Fourteen workers' states have been established between 1917 and 1973. If alienation is the outcome of capitalist conditions of life and labor, do the phenomena of alienation also exist in these noncapitalist societies? And if so, how are they to be accounted for? What factors are responsible for their recurrence?

For decades Stalin and his successors denied that any sort of alienations could be found in Soviet society; they permitted only "nonantagonistic contradictions" to exist. According to the official mythology, there were occasional frictions and incidental maladjustments, but no serious social tensions or irreconcilable conflicts were possible or observable. Since 1956 the outbursts of opposition in the Soviet bloc, and the assertion of antibureaucratic criticisms despite harsh censorship in the Soviet Union itself, have exposed the reality behind the ideological façade fabricated by the Stalinist apologists.

The problem of the contradictions within the postcapitalist regimes has now become the subject of intense and agonizing inquiry throughout the Communist world. A debate around the question of alienation has been unfolding within intellectual and political circles there for a decade and a half without arriving at any conclusive results.

The theoretical problem is posed in the following terms. Orthodox Marxism taught that alienation is the product of class society and capitalist exploitation. Stalinism asserted that alienation was impossible and absent in the countries which had overthrown capitalist rule. Yet, in
defiance of both these positions, malignant manifestations of alienation have cropped up and persist in the countries with a socialist economic base. Why has this happened? How is this discrepancy between the expectations of socialist theory and the facts of life to be explained?

It was logical that Yugoslav intellectuals should raise these questions first and most sharply, because their country was the first to break away from Moscow's monolithic grip. From Yugoslavia the controversy has spread throughout East Europe, except for Albania where the old Stalinist dogmatism—with the added stamp of Mao's endorsement—continues to reign unchallenged.

I shall limit my citations on this point to the foremost Communist philosophers: Georg Lukacs of Hungary, Adam Schaff of Poland, and Roger Garaudy of France. All three have acknowledged, not only that alienation is rife in the workers' states, but also that this fact poses a prime challenge to Marxist theory.

Lukacs has asserted, somewhat paradoxically, that alienation is the most promising of all subjects for Communist writers. This reversal of values which horrifies the guardians of "socialist realism" would have brought harsh penalties down upon him in Stalin's time. The Hungarian critic further advised Communist writers to look at the work of their Western counterparts. "They must learn how the best writers are fighting against alienation. In the end, we shall find political allies among them. It is the task of literature to paint a picture of the enormous alienation that was the product of the Stalinist era, and to help in overcoming it," he said.

Adam Schaff, the leading Polish Communist philosopher and a member of the party's central committee from 1959 until his expulsion from that body in 1968, published a highly controversial book on Marxism and the Individual in 1965. In it he propounded the thesis that the abolition of private property does not signify the end of all forms of alienation but only of some of them. "Socialism has not completely overcome any one of the known forms of alienation—not even the economic one," he wrote. Schaff even argues, quite wrongly, that a socialist society will retain certain kinds of alienation be-
cause of the complex tasks and extensive administra-
tive apparatus necessarily bound up with the specialization
of labor.

Roger Garaudy, long the philosophical bellwether of
the French CP and a member of its Politburo, set foot
on the road to unorthodoxy in 1963 at an international
conference on Franz Kafka held in Czechoslovakia: "What
does Kafka tell us today and what makes his work a liv­
ing thing?" he asked. "Kafka fought against alienation with­
out being able to overcome it. Therefore, Kafka's work
is of immediate interest for the capitalist world in which
people live in alienation. It is, however, also of imme­
diate interest for the socialist world, because socialism
is the beginning of the fight against alienation, for a to­
tal man, but it does not abolish all forms of estrange­
ment. As long as the communist society has not been
built up, roots of various forms of alienation continue
to exist in socialism." Garaudy was finally expelled from
the French CP in 1971.

It is understandable why all three of these heterodox
thinkers have come into open conflict with the neo-Stalinist
bureaucracies in their countries.

It must be considered a big step forward when ideo­
logues of such standing remove the blinders from their
eyes and look squarely at the actual alienations which
the peoples themselves know only too well. However,
up to now, none of the thinkers educated in the school
of Stalinism has gone very far in providing a correct
elucidation along Marxist lines of the origins and basis
of this state of affairs. The essays in this book do
undertake such a task of clarification. They indicate what
the sources of alienation in the deformed or degenerated
workers' states are, and also, in accord with the mandate
of Marxism as a guide to action, they point out the ways
and means by which these can be removed.

An autocratic political structure and a bureaucratic
management of the economy are the twin pillars of the
alienation inflicted on the working masses under the post­
capitalist regimes. The prescription for curing these evils
can be nothing less than complete democratic control of the
government and economy by the workers through their