

# FROM THE LEFT

## THE MARXIST SECTION NEWSLETTER of ASA

Fall, 1996: V 20 No 1  
T.R. Young, Senior Editor  
Lynda Ann Ewen, Co-  
Editor



Mmmm...Vas ist das Praxis fur ein  
Mensch in das Patriarchie??

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[Feminist Theory in a Marxist  
Perspective](#)

[Graduate Student Page](#)

[The Communist  
President](#)

[Web Sites](#)

[Capitalism:  
Pro/Con](#)

[From the Chair](#)

[Announcements](#)

[Report on the Annual  
Meetings](#)

[Join the Marxist  
Section](#)

[Top of Page](#)

**FEMINIST THEORY IN A MARXIST PERSPECTIVE:** I have always been nervous about labels-- especially those that get attached to complex academic categories, like "feminist" and "Marxist." At the same time I understand the importance of conceptualizing and theorizing about our political realities and have struggled to find workable ways to do that. I would like to think that I am guided by dialectical historical materialism. I shy away from "Marxism," because I think it has been dogmatized for too long. There has been too much change in the world for us to use the Marx we inherited from the 19th Century. But the method that Marx used continues to

make the most sense, to me. Likewise, I shy away from "feminist" because I am uncomfortable with the ownership of the word by practitioners with whom I have fundamental disagreements. But I do know that I am in favor of a revolutionary restructuring of gender relations. I am offering below an unorthodox collection of readings which have been enormously helpful to me. Citing those books which have shaped us is much like citing our favorite composers or artists--it is terribly personal. Nonetheless, it may be useful to some women who need more than Patriarchy to understand the lives of women...and to change them. But first, let us look at some contradictions which capitalism brings to the lived experience of women.

1. Capitalism permits women to establish a direct relationship to the means of production thus ending the ancient mediations of males to their economic life. At the same time, capitalism casts millions of women into the underclass by both wage and exploitations as well as limits upon occupations and mobility.
  2. Capitalism opens up the educational system for women and thus expands the range and reach of knowledge available. At the same time, educational institutions program women into lesser paid service jobs; nursing, teaching, clerical and domestic services.
  3. Capitalist technology offers, for the first time in human history, a safe and dependable means to control the birthing process. Yet, set in a market system, these technologies are withheld from women who cannot afford them.
  4. Capitalist drive for markets collapses traditional gender divisions but replaces them with acquisitive motivations which subverts the human project.
  5. Capitalism frees women everywhere and thus expands their social being but, at the same time creates a surplus population into which women are cast when profit considerations dictate.
  6. Capitalism transfers the costs of socializing children to the family and thus the mother while privatizing profits and resisting the collective costs of child-rearing.
  7. Capitalism tends to replace the ancient antagonisms between men and women with a competitive uni-sex society based upon possession of material goods rather than mutual aid, affirmative love and well-placed trust.
- Lynda Ann Ewen, Co-Editor.

\*\*\*\*\*References\*\*\*\*\*

Barbara Tuchman. *A Distant Mirror: The Calamitous 14th Century*. (NY: Ballantine, 1987). If one wants to understand the process of historical change today, this book is absolutely required. Pulitzer prize winner Tuchman unravels the disintegration of social structure as feudalism became capitalism. She is not a Marxist, per se--just an outstanding historian. Gender relations are an important part of her analysis.

Sandra Harding. *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge? Thinking from Women's Lives*. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1991) and *The Racial Economy of Science: Toward a Democratic Future* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1993). As a philosopher of science, Harding's analysis is terribly helpful for those of us raised on the empiricism of bourgeois science and the sexism of early Marxist interpretations.

Patricia Hill Collins. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. ((NY: Routledge, 1990.)) This is probably familiar to most sociologists. Collins deals with dialectics in her criticisms of either/ or categories. Also her handling of the tensions between race, class, and gender.

Alice Walker. *Possessing the Secret of Joy*. (NY: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1992) *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens*. (NY: Harvest/HBJ 1983). Anything by Alice Walker is thought-provoking, but these two pieces I found especially challenging.

Pearl Cleage. *Deals with the Devil, and Other Reasons to Riot*. (NY: Ballantine 1993). There is a militancy and stridency in Cleage's writing that is jarring--and healthy--for EuroAmerican women to consider. A different tone than that of Walker.

Ruth Hubbard. *The Politics of Women's Biology*. (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1990). Ruth's background is

natural science and she provides the "materialist" perspective--dialectically.

Laurie Garrett. *The Coming Plague: Newly Emerging Diseases in a World Out of Balance*. NY: Penguin 1994). Another materialist analysis. Although it is not focused on gender, as such, the relationships analyzed here have particular, and obvious, implications for women.

Karen Warren and Jim Cheny. *Ecological Feminism*. (Boulder, CO: Westview 1995). Gender analysis in light of ecological concerns. Helps provide an analytical framework for the discussion of Garrett, above.

Carol Hymowitz and Michaele Weissman. *A History of Women in America*. (NY: Bantam 1978). Although somewhat outdated, this little paperback is very well written and emotionally moving. It is impossible to understand "the woman's movement" without the background this book provides. Its weakness lies in the paucity of scholarship (at that time) of the roles played by minority women other than African American.

Ellen Carol DuBois and Vicki L. Ruiz, eds. *Unequal Sisters: A Multicultural Reader in U.S. Women's History*. (NY: Routledge, 1990); Annette M. James, ed. . *The State of Native America: Genocide, Colonization, and Resistance*. (Boston: South End 1992). These readers fill the gaps and provide some of the corrections to the Hymowitz and Weissman book above. For example, research has now uncovered female "warriors" among the plains tribes!

Jaqueline Jones. *The Dispossessed: America's Underclasses from the Civil War to the Present*. (NY Basic Books 1992); *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow*. (NY: Vintage 1986). Jones is a careful historian and weaves women into her analysis of class and ethnicity. (I particularly like her because she deals with the dialectics of poor whites, especially Appalachians. And also because she blows apart the BS of Wilson's "underclass theory.")

Valerie Anand. All of her novels on England, including *The Ruthless Yoeman*. (NY: St. Martin's Press 1991). Anand reconstructs women's (and lower class) resistance in a period of time where "lords" dominated the traditional history books.

Patricia Voydanoff and Linda C. Majkia, eds. *Families and Economic Distress: Coping Strategies and Social Policy*. (Newbury Park, CA: Sage 1988). One of the better collections of research pieces that place women in a working class context.

Lois Weis and Michelle Fine, eds. *Beyond Silenced Voices: Class, Race and Gender in United States Schools*. (Albany: State UP of NY 1993). Along with the AAUW report on gender in schools, this is essential for understanding how patriarchy is translated into not only formal education, but everyday relations in school. Compiled by Lynda Ann Ewen.

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[Feminist Theory in a Marxist Perspective](#)

[The Communist President](#)

[Capitolism: Pro/Con](#)

[Announcements](#)

[Join the Marxist Section](#)

[Graduate Student Page](#)

[Web Sites](#)

[From the Chair](#)

[Report on the Annual Meetings](#)

[Top of Page](#)

---



## GRADUATE STUDENT PAGE



ADDRESS FOR THE SOCGRAD NETWORK! Information about graduate programs in sociology as well as problems common to all grad students. INSTRUCTIONS: type: <LISTSPROC@CSF.COLORADO.EDU>  
Then type: SUB SOCGRAD YOUR\_NAME.

ATTEND the 1996 Meetings of the Association for Humanist Sociology. Oct. 31-Nov. 3, 1996 at the Holiday Inn in Hartford, Ct.. THEME: Social Equity, decentralization, and participation, East and West. Bases for a globally relevant sociology. JOHN LEGGETT, Rutgers, is Program Chair. Send ideas to him.

\*\*NEW Graduate Student Paper Award. The Conflict, Social Action and Change Division of SSSP has established an Award for a grad student paper that address issues of relevance to the Division. The focus of the Division this year

is peace and conflict, activist scholarship, social change, community activism and university/community relations. SEND papers to: NANCY A. NAPLES: Sociology, Ucal at Irvine, 92717. Fax: 714-824-7417.

\*\*ROBERT FUTRELL has been honored by the Red Feather Award for Progressive Scholarship. His paper, on the Political Economy of Toxic Waste, reflected a scholarship that compares most favorably with the best work in critical studies on the environment. Do send in your best work to the Red Feather Institute for consideration of the Award. Write: RFI, 8085 Essex, Weidman, Mi., 48893.

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[Feminist Theory in a Marxist Perspective](#)

[The Communist President](#)

[Capitalism: Pro/Con](#)

[Announcements](#)

[Join the Marxist Section](#)

[Graduate Student Page](#)

[Web Sites](#)

[From the Chair](#)

[Report on the Annual Meetings](#)

[Top of Page](#)

---

**Ike the Communist President.** In the early 50's, Dwight Eisenhower was vilified by the John Birch Society as a willing communist agent...along with most of Washington. The major crime of presidents then and presidents now was their liberal politics...never mind that they were trying to save/expand/defend capitalism from workers, 3rd world revolutionaries, soft-headed professors such as we, and faint-hearted warriors such as Adlai Stevenson [who came to such a bad end]. Never mind that...Ike and other 'liberals' did not protect/support/subsidize small business nor help transnational corporations based in the USA by a long chalk...according to the JB Society. The following quote from Ike, posted on the Progressive Sociology Network by Mark Weigand reveals the commie side of Ike...or the Christian side...if you like:

Every gun that is made; Every warship launched; Every rocket fired  
Signifies in the final sense a theft; from those who hunger and are not fed;  
From those who are cold and not clothed. This world-in-arms is not spending  
Money alone. It is spending the sweat of its laborers; the genius of its scientists;  
The hopes of its children. 4/16/53 [Way to go, Ike!]

---

[Feminist Theory in a Marxist Perspective](#)

[The Communist President](#)

[Capitalism: Pro/Con](#)

[Announcements](#)

[Join the Marxist Section](#)

[Graduate Student Page](#)

[Web Sites](#)

[From the Chair](#)

[Report on the Annual Meetings](#)

[Top of Page](#)

---

## LINKS TO THE WEB

**[RACE AND ETHNICITY](#)**: Great classroom potential.

**[THE MARXISM LIST](#)**: From the Spoon Collective.

**[INSTITUTE FOR TEACHING/RESEARCH ON WOMEN](#)**: Feminist action.

**[WWW Resources for Sociologists](#)**: Activist and feminist resources.

**[SOCIAL SCIENCE BULLETIN BOARDS](#)**: Sociology e-mail lists.

PROGRESSIVE SOCIOLOGY NETWORK: <listproc@colorado.edu> Subscribe PSN <your name>

**[MARX/ENGELS INTERNET ARCHIVE](#)**: Includes extensive collection of M&E's writings as well as a photo archive with lots and lots of pictures.

**[AHS Web site @PINKO EDU](#)**

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[Feminist Theory in a Marxist Perspective](#)

[The Communist President](#)

[Capitalism: Pro/Con](#)

[Announcements](#)

[Join the Marxist Section](#)

[Graduate Student Page](#)

[Web Sites](#)

[From the Chair](#)

[Report on the Annual Meetings](#)

[Top of Page](#)

---

## ADVANTAGES OF CAPITALISM

1. It is the most productive system in human history.
2. It is the most flexible system in human history.
3. It tends to base employment on merit.
4. It drives an ever-improving knowledge process.
5. It tends to destroy patriarchy and racism.
6. It is the most creative system in human history.

## DISADVANTAGES OF CAPITALISM

- A. It withholds essential goods and services for purposes of profit.
- B. It fosters change apart from human, social, collective values.
- C. It discards skilled workers when owners cannot make a profit.
- D. Knowledge becomes personal property and a tool for elites.
- E. It tends to promote or exploit women, minorities as convenient.
- F. It tends to capture and use the state to control dissent.

## Mini-quiz on Marx...

1. When was Marx born? When did he die?
2. Where is he buried?
3. How much did he leave undone?
4. Who is to do it?
5. How many people are buried in Marx' Tomb?
6. Who is Helen DeMuth?

...[answers](#)

[Feminist Theory in a Marxist Perspective](#)

[The Communist President](#)

[Capitalism: Pro/Con](#)

[Announcements](#)

[Join the Marxist Section](#)

[Graduate Student Page](#)

[Web Sites](#)

[From the Chair](#)

[Report on the Annual Meetings](#)

[Top of Page](#)

## FROM THE CHAIR: Alan Spector, Chair of the Marxist Section, reflects on the nature of Dialectic Materialism:

Marxism, like any theoretical framework, consists of a number of propositions (based on evidence/data). Like geometry, each proposition has implications that lead to further conclusions, and those conclusions lead to further conclusions. For many Marxists, certain milestones/anchors are: 1) (ontology/epistemology) dialectical-materialism as a description/analytical tool), 2) "From Each According to Ability, to Each According to Need" (true "egalitarian communism") as the best way to organize society; 3) (economics) labor theory of value-alienation-accumulation of capital-class struggle-centrality of working class-need to maximize profits; 4) crisis of overproduction-economic collapse, 5) imperialism/fascism and failure of reformism, 6) revolution, 7) need for an organized revolutionary political party in that process. others may disagree with some of those points.

Unlike geometry, each further set of conclusions depends on additional evidence. In other words, this is not a dogma, where specific conclusions are logically derived from one general principle. Rather, this is a science, which depends on evidence. Of course the term "science" has been used to defend narrow empiricism and other extreme, biased ways of perceiving and analyzing reality. In other words, the term "science" has itself been used to promote dogma. But the word "science" is here used to differentiate it from mysticism, from idealism which claims to explain natural and social processes without offering any evidence. What constitutes "evidence" is also a fair question, as critical theorists correctly assert. But that we need some kind of evidence is what differentiates "good science" from "mysticism-idealism", although again, the quality/quantity of evidence becomes a fair battleground as well.

The first set of propositions revolves around epistemology. Many Marxists find the language of "dialectical-materialism" (d-m) useful. To some people, it is just dogmatic pseudo-intellectualism. But to many, it is a useful way to describe processes. There are not "two parts" to d-m, as some people think--eg. dialectics and materialism. Rather, the material world is ever-changing--it is inherently dialectical, and dialectics has its fullest expression in the workings of the material world. They can be separated for purposes of discussion, as one can

separately examine oxygen and fuel in a fire. But they are not separate parts of the fire; in the fire, they are the fire. The usefulness in separating d-m out for purposes of discussion is primarily to explore how deemphasizing one aspect of it leads to one-sided, inaccurate explanations.

We live in a "material" world. To paraphrase Engels, those who want to deny the material reality still manage to find the door when the meeting is over, rather than repeatedly slam their heads into a wall. If the tree falls in the woods, to bring up that old philosophy problem, it does make a sound, even if nobody hears it. Well, sort of. That's where dialectics comes in. Maybe it doesn't make a sound, since sound is defined by ears, but it does something.

Narrow, empiricist, mechanical materialism overemphasizes the immediate physical presence of an object or process and underemphasizes that: (1) the reality is always changing and may only be "reality" within certain limits; and furthermore, (2) our perceptions are always partial. Denying the material world leads to subjective, inaccurate conclusions based usually on what makes someone feel good. Dogmatism. But seeing the material world as a flat, dead, unchanging thing, rather than a dynamic, seething, bubbling process (of which we only have a partial view!) also leads to dogmatism. Gouldner talked about the "two Marxisms". But there doesn't have to be a forced choice between the kind of so-called "materialist Marxism" that implies a totally determined reality based only on workers and bosses fighting over wages, and the kind of so-called "critical Marxism" that strips Marxism of its materialist core and seems to imply that nothing is connected. In the abstract, most "materialist Marxists" and most "critical Marxists" can agree with much of what was written above. But in concrete discussions we often find one-sidedness.

Advocating "materialism", I think that we should debate these issues in their "real world" context, rather than in nice abstractions. Advocating a "dialectical" approach, I think that we need to have more fights/struggles/debates within the section. If you have any comments on what was written above, please send them into the newsletter. Next time around I'll bring up some concrete issues; hopefully we can have some debates about them. In particular, the following propositions: Marxists should democracy, and peace. Anyone for controversy?

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[Feminist Theory in a Marxist Perspective](#)

[The Communist President](#)

[Capitolism: Pro/Con](#)

[Announcements](#)

[Join the Marxist Section](#)

[Graduate Student Page](#)

[Web Sites](#)

[From the Chair](#)

[Report on the Annual Meetings](#)

[Top of Page](#)

---

## ANNOUNCEMENTS:

\*\*MARTY OPPENHEIMER, Rutgers, writes to tell of the refusal of **Sociological Focus** to publish the rest of Jack Nusan Porter's Review of a book edited by Uta Gebhardt. The book, about Talcott Parsons and National Socialism, does not mention Parson's role in bringing alleged Nazi Collaborators to the USA. Ancient history to many but germane to the sociology of sociology which often gets lost in the effort to sanitize and depoliticize the very real politics of the Right while decrying the more open hence more honest politics of the Left.

\*\*The Section on Marxist Sociology announced the recipient of the Al Szymanski Dissertation Award for 1996: Author: Michelle Adato. Title: "Democratic Process, Mediated Models, and the Reconstitution of Meaning in Democratic Organizations: Trade Union Cooperatives in South Africa." Cornell University. Martin Murray, Chair of the Award Committee said it was a '...wonderful dissertation.'

The DISTINGUISHED SCHOLARSHIP AWARD of the Marxist Section has been given to Robert W. Hadden, St. Mary's University, Nova Scotia for his work, "On the Shoulders of Merchants: Exchange and the Mathematical Conception of Nature in Early Modern Europe" (1994, State University of New York Press).

\*\*CRITICAL SOCIAL POLICY is a Quarterly Journal which offers an International Forum for policy essays/articles on social welfare and social justice from socialist, feminist, anti-racist and other radical perspectives.  
CONTACT: <jonathan.carter@sagepub.c>



**\*\*CULTURAL DEMOCRACY.** A Journal Devoted to activism in cultural variety and integrity is available to progressive scholars. Its operative thesis is that culture is essential to the human estate and that each people has a right to the culture of their choice. In a complex nation-state, all people should have access to the material resources essential to the reproduction of their culture and the political freedom to embody that culture. No one culture has the right to dominate and exterminate any other culture. It is published by ACD; the Alliance for Cultural Democracy. Write ACD, Box 545, Tucson, Az, 85702. EMAIL: <CDemocracy@aol.com>.

**\*\*ANTI-MAGAZINE.** A new International Catalogue of Progressive Publications will soon be available as complement to the many internet resources available to the Left. It first appeared in 1972, during the dictatorship in Greece and was, of course, closed down by the Colonels. It will treat: 1) the rise of cultural chauvinism in nationalism, racism, religious, sexual and cultural enclaves, 2) the expanding monopolization of corporate media, 3) the fragmentation of Small and Emancipatory Media, 4) facilitation of cross-cultural and cross-national co:operation on projects, meetings, and the issues above. It will be published in English. It depends upon donations. WRITE: Anti-Magazine, 60 Dimoharous Str., 115 21 Athens, GREECE. EMAIL: <anti@compulink.gr>.

CONFERENCE on PROPERTY, COMMODITY, CULTURE: Manhattan, Kansas, March 6-8, 1997: Possible topics: \*Personal property/public responsibility\*visual rights \*Tenure \*Transnational capital, globalism, \*Mode of production, social formation, and deterritorialization and forms of property \*The revival of nationalism: cultural \*Education as consumer good and economic property \*Children: property or persons \*Virtual property and copyright \*Prostitution and sexwork \*Class and turf \*Marriage: history and future \*Enclosure and commons \*Slavery \*Property and crime \*Privatizing the Internet \*New populism and Wise Use \*Trademarking species: biotechnology \*Fetishism: ritual, commodity, sexuality \*Property and propriety \*Privatizing public schools \*Property and propriety \*Privatizing public schools \*Queer propriety&properties of gender \*Black markets \*White collar crime: property & penalty \*Nation and immigration \*Labor and global capital: GATT, NAFTA, \*Ownership, subjectivity, identity \*Property and performativity \*Native American land \*Collaboration, credit, and property \*Copying, copyright, copyhold. Abstracts for papers and panels: Limit proposals to one page, single spaced, per paper; proposals for non-standard format sessions welcome. Due date: October 4, 1996. Address proposals and queries to Tim Dayton, Department of English, Denison Hall, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS 66506. Phone: (913) 532-6716. FAX: (913) 532-7004. Email: TADAYTON@KSU.KSU.EDU

**\*\*CRITICAL CRIMINOLOGY:** The first issue of this new journal is out with articles by Ray Michalowski, Barbara Perry, Elliott Currie, Lorie Beanman-Hall and Lucie Lemonde. T.R. Young offers the first of a two-part set of essays which argues for social justice rather than criminal justice while David Friedrichs talks about how to gain strength from diversity. The Journal has four editors: Meda Chesney-Lind, Walter DeKeseredy, Brian MacLean and Dragan Milovanovic. Subscribe for \$20/year [\$15/year for low income]. Ask your library to get it! A valuable addition to radical criminology.

**\*\*MARXISM IN A POSTMODERN AGE: Confronting the New World Order.** Eds: Antonio Callari, Stephen Cullenberg and Carole Biewener. Published by Guilford Press. A Collection from the 1992 conference, RETHINKING MARXISM. A look at the creativity and variety in the marxist camp today.

**\*\*[JOURNAL OF WORLD SYSTEMS RESEARCH](#):** Volume 2 is available free on the internet. V. 2 contains articles by Daniel Whiteneck and by W. Warren Wagar. Chris Chase-Dunn urges the Wagar article on progressive scholars. Send articles for V.3 to Chase-Dunn at: Sociology, Johns Hopkins U., Balt., Md., 21218.

**\*\*RETHINKING MARXISM.** The Editors of Rethinking Marxism announce the 3rd International Conference around the theme, 'POLITICS AND LANGUAGES OF CONTEMPORARY MARXISM' at Umass, Amherst. During the four days of the Conference, Thurs., Dec. 5 to Sun., Dec 8, there will be concurrent sessions on issues which intersect with marxism; feminism, racism, queer theory, and post-colonial studies. Contact STEPHEN CULLENBERG, Econ, Ucal-Riverside, Ca. 92521 by AUGUST, 1996.

7th ANNUAL MIDWEST RADICAL SCHOLARS CONFERENCE at ROOSEVELT UNIVERSITY, Chicago. THEME: Prospects for a new Class Warfare: Rightist, Liberal and the Left. Contact LAUREN LANGMAN: <YLPSSLO@cpua.it.luc.edu> OR write NETWORKING FOR DEMOCRACY, 3411 W Diversey, Ste 1, Chicago, Il., 60647-1245.

## **[CAPITALISM, NATURE, SOCIALISM](#)**

[Feminist Theory in a Marxist Perspective](#)

[The Communist President](#)

[Capitolism: Pro/Con](#)

[Announcements](#)

[Join the Marxist Section](#)

[Graduate Student Page](#)

[Web Sites](#)

[From the Chair](#)

[Report on the Annual Meetings](#)

[Top of Page](#)

**REPORT ON THE ANNUAL MEETINGS in New York:**

1. LYNDA ANN EWEN took the Chair to open the Business Meeting. Then, as pre-arranged, Lynda turned the Chair over to ALAN SPECTOR. Lynda Ann resigned to turn her full attention to her new position.
2. JIM SALT had sat in on an ASA meeting for Chairs and reported three items; a) ASA Section dues were to be raised \$2/year; b) there was a proposal to require approval of all public statements from Sections. Write to ASA to oppose either or both.
3. Sessions for the 1997 Meetings were set: they include:
  - a) State Terrorism: contact STEPHANIE SHANKS-MEILE <sshanks@iunhaw1.iun.indiana.edu>
  - b) The New World Order: Globalization/Imperialism: contact MARTHA GIMENEZ <gimenez\_m@gold.colorado.edu>
  - d) Class Struggle and Identity Politics: contact LAUREN LANGMAN <YLPSLLO@cpua.it.luc.edu>
4. T.R. YOUNG agreed to organize Round Tables; Send suggestions/request to him <T.R.Young@Cmich.Edu>
5. MARTHA GIMENEZ agreed to Chair the Membership Committee.
6. Members Present agreed to again rent a Grad Student dorm in the amount of \$300.
7. Members Present agreed to fund the Radical Scholars Conference in Chicago at \$100. LAUREN LANGMAN will coordinate.
8. Members Present agreed to contribute \$200 for the new Marxist Section Home Page. Martha Gimenez and Don Roper continue to facilitate Internet resources for progressive sociologists everywhere.
9. Members Present established a new LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD. T.R. Young will Chair the new Committee.
10. Members Present voted to extend the term as Chair to two years to accommodate Ewen's decision. Alan Spector most graciously accepted the responsibility.

[Feminist Theory in a Marxist Perspective](#)

[The Communist President](#)

[Capitolism: Pro/Con](#)

[Announcements](#)

[Join the Marxist Section](#)

[Graduate Student Page](#)

[Web Sites](#)

[From the Chair](#)

[Report on the Annual Meetings](#)

[Top of Page](#)

\*\*\*\*\*Join the Marxist Section of the ASA\*\*\*\*\*

FROM:

\_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

TO:

The American Sociological Association  
 1722 N. St., N.W., Washington, D.C.,20036

\_\_\_ I am a member of ASA; enclosed is \$10 for Marxist Section Dues.



\_\_\_ I am not a member of ASA; send me membership forms at the address above.  
INTERNET ADDRESS: <MEMBERSHIP@ASANET.ORG>

(Make checks payable to ASA)

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[Feminist Theory in a Marxist  
Perspective](#)

[The Communist  
President](#)

[Capitalism:  
Pro/Con](#)

[Announcements](#)

[Join the Marxist  
Section](#)

[Graduate Student Page](#)

[Web Sites](#)

[From the Chair](#)

[Report on the Annual  
Meetings](#)

[Top of Page](#)

---

### Answers to Quiz:

1. Marx was born May, 12, 1818. Died 2 Dec., 1883.
2. Marx is buried in Highgate Cemetery [take the Northern Line from Picadilly Circus, London].
3. Marx left plenty for us to do; he wrote but one of six books he'd planned. They were published in three volumes.
5. There are six people buried in Marx' tomb: Marx himself, Jenny von Westphalen, his good wife; Harry Longuet, his grand-son, age 5; Helena Demuth, housekeeper to the Marx'; and Eleanor, Daughter of Jenny and Karl
6. Helen Demuth is mother of Marx' 'illegitimate' son. In the quaint language of patriarchy, the child was bastard...a legal term which makes sense only when property is private and must be transferred to the next generation by some legal rule. In a decent society, no child would ever be considered illegitimate.