

From the Left

Winter 2002

The newsletter of the Marxist Section of the American Sociological Association

On Changing the Name of the Marxist Section

It was proposed at the Business Meeting of the Section of Marxist Sociology at the ASA Annual Meeting in August 2001, to change the name of the section to "Marxist and Critical Sociology." This was tabled for future discussion. Below are articles arguing for and against changing the name of the section. We invite you to continue this discussion on the Progressive Sociologists Network (psn@csf.colorado.edu). To subscribe, send a message reading "subscribe psn" to majordomo@csf.colorado.edu.

Against

We Should Remain the Section on Marxist Sociology

Steve Rosenthal, Hampton University

From the mid-19th through the mid-20th centuries, Marxism swept across the world and moved a majority of humanity to fight for a better world. Urban and rural workers, scientists and intellectuals, poets and composers embraced Marxism. During the 1960s internal and external revolts against U.S. imperialism produced a radicalization that led to the formation of the Section on Marxist Sociology (SMXS) in the U.S. Martin Nicolaus, my friend and fellow graduate student at Brandeis during those heady years, pointed out in his famous speech at the 1968 ASA meeting that "fat cat" sociologists owed their jobs to the people who have been fired, beaten up, and killed by the U.S. ruling class; so do Marxist sociologists. Notwithstanding the contradictions of academic Marxist sociology, the creation of the SMXS was an important achievement. Its continued existence today is also important.

While many around the world have either celebrated or bemoaned the death of Marxism, it is ludicrous to presuppose that capitalism has eradicated Marxism. Marxism, as a method, as an analysis, and as a stand on behalf of (cont. on p. 6)

For

What's in a Name?: Marxist and Critical Sociology Section

Lauren Langman and Talmadge Wright, Loyola University of Chicago

At last year's annual ASA meeting we raised the issue of whether or not to change the name of our section from the Marxist Sociology Section to the Marxist and Critical Sociology Section. We were surprised to find more than a little resistance to our suggestion. However, we would like you to consider the merits of this type of name change. We know that ASA has been losing section membership as the number of sections multiplied and conference attendance has dropped. We have had a difficult time in maintaining our own membership. Many of our members rarely attend our business meeting at ASA and are often enrolled in many other sections to which they give their time and energy. This raises the serious question of what we are doing to retain members and seek to new ones.

Signing up new members is not enough. We would argue that the very title of our section, while offering a sociological perspective of liberation and freedom from exploitation, may be perceived by other ASA members as limited to either a narrow political economic (continued on p. 7)

ASA Marxist Section

2001-2002 Section Officers

Chair: Lauren Langman, Loyola University of Chicago

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Marxist Section Homepage:

<http://csf.colorado.edu/marxist-sociology/index.html>

Call for Participation

The 2002 meetings of the **Association for Humanist Sociology** will be held October 10-13 in Madison, WI. The deadline is April 15, 2002. Theme: "Decaying Empire/ Exuberant Alternatives." Presentations do not need to be directly related to the conference theme. Various forms of participation are possible, including poster presentations, single presentations, organization of sessions, panel discussions, and presentations on teaching. Performance art, installation art and theater of the oppressed pieces are also welcome, as is simply moderating a session.

Send a three-sentence summary to Diane Schaefer, AHS Program Chair, Department of Sociology, Eastern Illinois University, Charleston, IL 61920; Phone: 217-581-7831; Fax: 217-581-7067; Email: cfd2@eiu.edu. Please include phone and fax numbers and e-mail address, if applicable. Please specify any a-v needs. At present we are not able to accommodate Powerpoint requests.

For more information about AHS or the annual meetings see the website at: <http://www.humanistsoc.org> or contact Steve McGuire at 740.826.8288.

Introducing "Global Marxism": The Meaning of Lumumba Today

John Foran, Smith College

This is the first of what I hope might be a series of pieces in From the Left under the rubric of "global Marxism." I should therefore start by explaining what I think this term could mean. That's not so easy. I think of it as a subject matter, as much as an approach to Marxism. I suppose it's an attempt to take the world, especially the Third World, as the subject of Marxism... "subject" both in the sense of what Marxism as an approach could be about, and in the sense of centering the agency of people in the Third World. The sorts of things I hope to talk about (and invite further discussion of) in coming issues of the Newsletter include, among others: the meaning of September 11, the future of revolutions, the anti-globalization movement, the emerging perspectives or fields we might call Third World cultural studies, or women, culture and development (WCD), the genealogy and significance of such terms as "Third World" and "development," new books such as Robert Brenner's Turbulence in the World Economy (Verso, January 2002), and others -- all things I think about and know something about due to my research and teaching interests. I hope that the meanings of global Marxism will emerge out of this process, and through ideas and contributions that readers might send in as well. So, if you are interested in this project, please let me know what you might like to do for it. (jforan@email.smith.edu)

I had planned to write this first column about September 11 or the future of revolutions, until I chanced to see Raoul Peck's new film, "Lumumba" in early January.¹ It is hard to convey the power of his film. It's like the best of novels, a political thriller/classical tragedy/revolutionary romance all rolled into one. Like Peck's earlier documentary, "Lumumba: Death of a Prophet" (1992, distributed by California

¹ There is a wonderful website at www.zeitgeistfilms.com that contains information about the film and its subject matter, which I have drawn upon freely for this essay. All quotes are from material found at the website.

Newsreel), it chronicles with a growing sense of dread twelve months in 1960. During this period, Patrice Lumumba emerged on June 30 as the first prime minister of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, newly independent from Belgium. He was unconstitutionally deposed on September 5 by moderate president Joseph Kasavubu, placed under house arrest on October 10, escaped on November 27 to join supporters, suffered re-arrest on December 5, and was murdered by the government at the behest of the CIA and Belgium on January 17, 1961. Various descriptions of Lumumba as “a giant, a prophet, a devil, a ‘mystic of freedom,’ and ‘the Elvis Presley of African politics,’” Lumumba has been long ignored if not quite forgotten, by much of the world, including Marxists. The film not only undoes this but shows why it is wrong to have done so.

It accomplishes this in a way as complex as it is rich, the result of considerable research and inspired artistic recreation, piling layer upon layer of subtle visual exposition. The deep knowledge possessed by Peck and co-writer Pascal Bonitzer of the larger context of Belgian imperialism, the city- and landscapes of the Congo (recreated in Zimbabwe, Mozambique, and Belgium), and the details of Lumumba’s life and milieu help them “extract the cinematic narrative from the reality by remaining as true to the facts as possible.” Many scenes are visceral, acutely painful depictions of imperialism in action, from the dismemberment and burying of Lumumba’s body by two drunken Belgian paramilitary men (brothers, one of whom was interviewed for the film; the other had, apparently, gone mad), to the brutally racist treatment of Lumumba in prison before his rise to power. But we also see equally transcendent scenes of resistance in action, from the triumphant moments of his remarks in front of Belgium’s King Baudouin at the independence ceremony, to his standing down of drunken Congolese soldiers who burst into a cabinet meeting a few days later. These scenes are superbly realized and are more powerfully dramatic than any

academic or political text could render.

The historical aftermath -- the rise to power of Joseph Mobutu (later Mobutu Sese Seko), the defiant secession of the mineral-rich Katanga province, the descent into a neocolonial relationship with the U.S., France, and Belgium -- is foreshadowed in the events which inexorably produce the tragic death of Patrice Lumumba. Again, complexity triumphs over reductionism. Mobutu starts as Lumumba’s friend and ally. Says Peck: “It was out of the question to make him the typical puppet dictator.... He wasn’t born a dictator. He made a choice and he was not alone in his decision. He’s neither a monster or a pathological ‘baddie.’” The alloy of internal authoritarianism and external meddling that produced Mobutu is deftly implied in a few quick scenes where representatives of the U.S. embassy approach the soldier Mobutu, arm his men, and then protest “We don’t interfere in the internal affairs of sovereign nations” at the meeting where the post-coup cabinet decides Lumumba’s fate. The personal hatred of Katangan premier Moise Tshombe toward Lumumba for standing up to his wish to privilege Katangan autonomy presages his taking the province out of the Congo twelve days after independence and the cruelty with which he tortures and kills Lumumba and his two comrades, Maurice Mpolo and Joseph Okito, when the Belgians deliver them to him there. Peck notes: “My main goal was neither to idealize Lumumba as a hero or denounce the CIA, the UN, and Belgium for their roles in his death. It was to make a film that would be of use to the future of Africa and the third world because it showed the mechanism of power. And for that, you have to put everything on the table, including the divisions among the Congolese themselves that allowed external influences to get power.” The film attests to the collusion of Tshombe, Kasavubu, Mobutu, Belgium, and the CIA (the stakes for the U.S. are the depressingly familiar cold war containment of the USSR, and access to the country’s copper, cobalt, uranium, zinc, cadmium, and other mineral riches). These were the “architects” of

Lumumba's death, as a recent book which has touched off an official investigation in Belgium reveals (Ludo De Witte, *The Assassination of Lumumba*, Verso, 2001). Peck is right to add the U.N. to this list, for it failed to protect Lumumba and indeed connived with western powers to destroy him.

It is true that Lumumba was not necessarily a socialist: "He was for a unitary Congo and against division of the country along tribal or regional lines. Like many other African leaders, he supported pan-Africanism and the liberation of colonial territories. He proclaimed his regime to be based on 'positive neutralism,' which he defined as a return to African values and rejection of any imported ideology, including that of the Soviet Union." But the alternative history that might have been forged had he lived and governed is revolutionary in prospect. Eriq Ebouaney, the actor who plays Lumumba, describes the premieres held in several West African countries: "I felt a very warm response, as if we were opening a door to what Africa might have been if Africans themselves had decided to take charge of their destiny. What I find sad is that things haven't changed. We still have a form of neocolonialism. The actors change but the situation remains the same."

The lessons of this magnificent film are many. That imperialism is alive and all too well. That Africa's situation, so often written off as a tale of mismanagement and incompetence, comes out of a past of remarkable leaders -- among them Lumumba, Nelson Mandela, Kwame Nkrumah, Julius Nyerere, Gamal Abdel Nasser, Ahmed Ben Bella, Leopold Sédar Senghor, Amilcar Cabral, Eduardo Mondlane, Samora Machel, Agostinho Neto, Ahmed Sekou Touré, Modibo Keita, Ken Saro-wiwa -- who all faced excruciatingly difficult circumstances, in addition to the internal divisions noted by Peck, to which we may add an occasional lack of radicalism (and sometimes an excess, showing how narrow is the path to success). The wrong lesson would be that the circumstances, that imperialism, always win

(as in the case of Allende's Chile, a lesson too easily and conveniently drawn). Lumumba's last letter, written to his wife just before his death, includes the lines: "We are not alone. Africa, Asia, and free and liberated people from every corner of the world will always be found at the side of the Congolese. They will not abandon the light until the day comes when there are no more colonizers and their mercenaries in our country.... Without dignity there is no liberty, without justice there is no dignity, and without independence there are no free men.... History will one day have its say, but it will not be the history that Brussels, Paris, Washington or the United Nations will teach, but that which they will teach in the countries emancipated from colonialism and its puppets. Africa will write its own history, and it will be, to the north and to the south of the Sahara, a history of glory and dignity."

Raoul Peck adds: "I sometimes think that this film also comes 50 years too early. Today, so many people are weary of politics, of Africa, of the third world, of the struggles.... Others don't want to think or argue, all they want is to kill and destroy, to be done with it, or better yet, to forget it all. When I was 12, I would have liked to see a film like this one, but none existed. The experience is difficult to share. Through the complexity of this story, my sincerest wish is that we will no longer be able to say 'I don't know.'" Now we, and the next generation, can know.

"A Democratic Initiative for Victory Over Want (VOW)."

James Cumes- Initiator of VOW

Website: <http://members.chello.at/schulte-baeuminghaus/VOW/Index2.html>

Discussion Group: <http://www.topica.com/lists/VOW/read>

"After Genoa and 9-11"

Socialist Scholars Conference, 2002

Cooper Union, Manhattan

April 12-14, 2002

Pre-registration deadline" April 1

<http://www.socialistscholar.org>

***And Then*, Vol. 10, 2001.**

George Snedeker
SUNY/College at Old Westbury

And Then is a radical literary magazine that has been edited for the past fourteen years by Robert Roth and Arnold Sachar. The publication of *And Then* is a labor of love for Roth, Sachar and several close friends. Shelley Haven does the artistic design of the magazine, and Marguerite Bunyan does the typesetting.

The most recent issue contains several different kinds of texts. There are poems, drawings and short prose narratives, as well as a letter written by a political prisoner and a reflection on Ellen Willis' *Don't think, Smile: Notes on a Decade of Denial*. The topics covered in this issue include class, race, gender and sexual orientation as well as some very interesting pieces on family violence, education and the role of historical memory. "Politics" is defined in a very broad way by the editors and contributors. They try to express the relationship between the personal and the political in the context of the objective character of capitalism. The poems and stories articulate the experiences of everyday life as these are transformed by the act of story telling.

One of my favorite pieces is a poem by Howard Pfanzer called "The Adjunct." Here are two stanzas of the poem:

Why are we
 in this rich country
 The envy of the world
 The students
 The teacher
 The growth of knowledge
 Stunted by a poisoned soil?

The colleges are to be cleansed
 Of what
 Of those who are different
 Darked skinned
 Un-American?
 The privilege to keep
 Their power and position
 They fear the dark invading hordes
 Swarming from unknown neighborhoods

Will overrun them
 Like a plague of rats.

The poem goes on to discuss both the plight of the adjunct, a kind of underpaid nomad, and the attitude of the ruling class toward our working class students in all their diversity. Perhaps I have a particular fondness for this poem because I worked for twenty years as an adjunct teaching the kind of students Pfanzer describes before finally getting a full-time position teaching the same students. He ends the poem by saying that he loves the students. I know that this may sound a little sentimental, but it is not.

As I read the poems and other pieces in *And Then*, I was reminded of the relationship between the metaphorical and referential functions of language. One can only represent the world by participating in a discourse. Poems and prose narratives tell stories while they connect with other poems and experiences, past and present. There is certainly something beyond the text, but we can only name this reality through discourse. The discourse of *And Then* is a discourse of desire, hope, pain and faith in the human project of liberation; humor and irony are central to this project.

I view *And Then* as part of a project of struggle, critique and reflection. It operates in the space of the political; it addresses the human condition under capitalism, and tries to give voice to our highest aspirations and desires for a truly human world.

Copies can be obtained for \$5 from Robert Roth at 210 West 10th Street, Apt. 3-D, New York, NY 10014 (make out checks to Robert Roth.)

From the Left seeks submissions for its Spring 2002 issue (maximum: roughly 1,000 words). Do you have ideas for future thematic issues? Would you like to write an article or make an announcement? Please send proposals or texts by e-mail to Warren Goldstein, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, University of Central Florida e-mail: wgoldste@mail.ucf.edu. Deadline May 1, 2002.

(Against, cont. from p. 1) the workers of the world is more relevant than ever, more needed than ever, and will sweep across the world again in the 21st century.

In the 1950s, C. Wright Mills and other radicals lamented (and Talcott Parsons championed) the complacency and absence of dissent in an ideologically cleansed post-McCarthy USA. Neither foresaw the great upsurge of popular struggle that began in the early 1960s. Although we should not underestimate the difficulties of rebuilding Marxist thought and practice in this period when the collapse of the old left has paved the way for global domination by a single superpower, neither should we throw in the towel. The call to change our section name so as to de-emphasize its Marxist character has been put forward at a time when major events call out for Marxist analysis. After a decade of local wars, ethnic cleansing, genocide, regional economic depression, and structural adjustment, the U.S. has now embarked on a long-term global war against "terrorism." Its strategic commitment to prevent the emergence of any significant rival - to maintain "full spectrum dominance" over the world's energy resources and the pipelines and shipping lanes that bring them to market- suggests that decades of war lie ahead. The steps toward further centralization and strengthening of the state apparatus threaten already severely compromised civil liberties. Neo-liberalism and structural adjustment have vastly increased economic inequality, hitting immigrant, minority, and women workers hardest. The collapse of the Argentine economy and of Enron, both of which were hailed as exemplars of the "new" economy until very recently, illustrate the instability of contemporary capitalism and the corruption and misery being inflicted on the working class. K-Mart's inability to force its global suppliers to manage their sweatshops as ruthlessly as Wal-Mart does has produced the biggest retail bankruptcy in U.S. history. Increased ethnic profiling, racism, religious bigotry, and patriotism are inciting more intense cultural repression.

Effective responses to this worldwide

crisis of capitalism have been severely constrained by the marginalization of Marxism. Throughout much of the world, anti-imperialism has been hijacked by religious fundamentalism and nationalism. The battle against racism and sexism has been compartmentalized by postmodernist identity politics, which has conquered much of sociology and other disciplines. Class has been reduced to just another identity or banished altogether by those who accuse Marxism of ignoring race and gender. In fact, Marxism offers what no other kind of sociology offers: a method, analysis, and standpoint that connect class, race, and gender, that connect the material and the cultural. Marxism has been a leading intellectual and political force in battling racism, sexism, nationalism, and religious fundamentalism.

Since September 11 there has been a campaign to portray opponents of U.S. imperialism as moral accomplices of terrorism. There has been an effort (led by Christopher Hitchens, Todd Gitlin, and others) to lead Vietnam generation anti-war activists back into the patriotic fold. Right-wingers have published a list of outspoken anti-war professors. As the U.S. prepares for decades of global military interventions, economic hardship, and political repression, it is striving to eradicate pockets of radical dissent that have endured since the 1960s. Each pocket contains potential sparks to ignite a firestorm of mass protest against future wars.

This is not a time to become defensive, discouraged, or embarrassed that we call ourselves the "Section on Marxist Sociology." We not only encourage a wide variety of "Marxisms," we also explicitly invite anyone who is interested in the exploration of Marxism to join the section. As Marxists, we are not infrequently accused of desiring to suppress all non-Marxist views. All of us would like to see the membership of the Section on Marxist Sociology grow rather than shrink, but none of us wishes to abolish the Section on Race, Gender, and Class, or the Section on Racial and Ethnic Minorities, or other ASA sections

that deal with aspects of oppression. None of us would oppose the formation of a section on critical sociology. In fact, we have worked to expand our interaction with members of other sections. Those who first advocated changing the name of our section to the Section on Critical Sociology, and who now advocate the compromise of changing it to the Section on Marxist and Critical Sociology, would eliminate the only section devoted to the exploration of Marxism's distinctive methods, analyses, and standpoints.

Given the direction in which the United States and the world are headed, the time will come- probably sooner than we think-when the ruling class will essentially outlaw even academic Marxist organizations, and we will have to work for a better world in organizations whose names do not reflect our outlook. I hope that members of the Section on Marxist Sociology are already involved in this vital activity. It is obvious that most of the leadership of the ASA helps the ruling class combat the influence of Marxism. We ourselves, however, should not help advance this process by changing our section name.

.....
(For, cont. from p. 1) perspective, or one that reduces capitalism to a simple functional logic of capital accumulation, class struggle and imperialism. These, moreover, are also people whose own interests, whether it be gender oppression, science and technology, environmental destruction, or community instability, identify with liberation and freedom from the oppression produced by the contemporary market economy. However, all too often they may be found drifting to other sections, more narrowly defined than our own, too specialized to give the necessary long view, and more concerned with those social networks that can lead to publishing opportunities or career advancement. What do we have to offer them? We suggest that our section, of all the ASA sections, offers a vision of liberation free of the narrow specialization and arbitrary academic disciplinary boundaries that defines current

knowledge in the university. Our continual work to link practical community struggles with global forces and a critique of the inhuman qualities of the market resonate in the best sociological tradition spanning material from Marx and Weber to C. Wright Mills, from Charlotte Perkins Gillman to Dorothy Smith, from W.E.B. DuBois to Joe Feagin. We are a section where community activists can be heard as well as academics. And we provide a place where new visions can emerge of liberation and freedom of exploitation. This is not something we see in other ASA sections, at least not in the vast majority of sections.

So why is this important? Why is our section the place to further explore the ramifications of Marx's insights and those insights from critical sociology, which have informed our understanding of the world for the past fifty years? Given that theory and empirical changes in the world are often moving in tandem, what can we do about them in the simple act of changing our name?

We argue the nature of capital in its globalized moment, as well as the state of social theory, speak to each other in much the same way as the "satanic mills" of Manchester or the French civil wars and coup d'etat of Louis Bonaparte informed Marx. Despite the many transformations of capital, as it changed from a mercantile to an industrial mode of production, and moved from the steam powered factories of England to a globalized system of transnational corporations, certain features are inherent to capital. It is a system defined by the nature of its class system in which the owners of the means of production appropriate the surplus value of workers, e.g. wage labor becomes the basis of private property just as it is the site where workers experience alienation and everyday exploitation. How these relationships have developed over time have been the source of much very good academic work - Erik Olin Wright's work on class fractions, Harry Braverman on deskilling of labor, Stanley Aronowitz's examination of the changing nature of work and science, on and on. But

there have been many transformations of the capitalist system. When official state religion waned as the legitimating ideology that mystified class relationships, the bourgeoisie fostered nationalism to secure loyalty to the state, and consumerism, of objects as well as cultural products, to obscure class relationships and assuage inequality. In the early 1900s, Fordist production would transform industrial organization. Beginning in the 1920s and flourishing in the 1950s was the growth of the managerial revolution and stimulated consumption, in which capitalist enterprises became regulated and controlled by a new class who were neither owners of capital nor sellers of labor. In face of capitalist contradictions, came the growth of the interventionist welfare state. More recently has come the growth of service sectors, especially those dependent on symbolic skills and/or interpersonal skills- including what Hochschild has called "emotion work."

As these changes took place, so too did the critiques of capital. We can trace the movements from Korsch to Lukács and in turn the different generations of the Frankfurt School. There are a number of Marxist traditions, analytical Marxism, structural Marxism, Humanist Marxism, and indeed as some like Manjuri would remind us, postmodern Marxisms. At the same time, there emerged a variety of critiques coming from other traditions, e.g. populism informed Walter Lippmann and more important for us, C. W. Mills. In view of the ever more rationalized world described by Weber, more recent Weberian critique has addressed the McDonaldization of society (George Ritzer). Still other critiques such as those of Stuart Hall, Raymond Williams and others question traditional consumption and symbolic representation, reconnecting the production of the symbolic to its material base, with implications for media analysis and popular cultural analysis. Given the nature of the times, the rise of Post-Fordist production and TQM, the growing hegemony of neo-liberal globalization, as well as alternative globalization movements, we think it is now the time to welcome back

a variety of other critical traditions to join us under a common tent. Thus various perspectives on the "world system," the environment, feminism, gender rights, populism, etc, have an inherent "elective affinity" with the Marxist section and *Critical Sociology* as its loosely kindred, "semi-official" journal. In the current Post-Fordist world, we see the effects of capital run amok, growing inequality, despoliation of the environment, a growing sex trade in which young children are bought and sold, homelessness, etc. It is not enough to state that such interests already have a common home within our section. In fact, our section may be perceived as narrow, sectarian and uninviting by outsiders who hold a critical but not a Marxist perspective on social change. To those who engage in such path breaking critical research the Marxist section may appear quaint and outdated, not suitable for their own research or political interests.

We would like to welcome those critical researchers back into the fold. In face of the nature of the present age, and the growing number of critical voices, that too often are dispersed, the section should officially recognize what has been a long-term trend; many folks affiliated with us have not come from the Marxist traditions. Yet we warmly welcome all those who critique exploitation and domination whether by class, gender, disability, age, sex or of nature. Thus we encourage all of us to recognize these realities and modify our section to include a variety of kindred, critical approaches by changing the name to "Marxist and Critical Sociology." This would make our linkages to Marx clear, yet attract many scholars who might otherwise think that our sole concern is proletarian revolution. We are and will remain the only section of ASA to clearly reject bourgeois "objectivity," but in this age of politics as entertainment, we need to strengthen our position as the conscience of ASA. To this end, we would encourage the addition of two words, "and Critical" to our name. Sociologists of ASA unite: You have nothing to lose except your marginality.