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The Exception Proves the Rule: The American Example in the Recasting of Social Strategies in Europe between the Wars*

At least since the 1880s, successive generations in the European left have been challenged to explain the imperviousness of the United States to all efforts to sustain a mass socialist party (Laslett & Lipset, eds., 1974; Lipset 1977). Werner Sombart's formulation of the question « Why is there no socialism in the United States? » is doubtless the best known response to this challenge: and it did indeed sum up the state of the art at a moment when marxian socialism was still a largely unified doctrine, the European left a cohesive and seemingly invincible force, and Europe, rather than America, the center of world capitalist empire (Sombart 1976; Moore 1970). By comparison, the discussions of American « exceptionalism » which occurred within the European left after World War I are less known. Less focused and conclusive than the orthodox certainties of Sombart's generation, this effort of analysis nevertheless raised far more interesting questions: about the new trends in world capitalism resulting from the prodigious expansion of American empire and the implications of these for devising effective strategies of social transformation in 20th-century Europe.

After World War I, European Left Looks to America

When, in fact, the European left looked to America after World War I, the context was quite unlike the comparatively placid circumstances of the turn of the century. The unity of the international labor movement had been shattered in the war, and its divisions institutionalized in the wake of the Bolshevik Revolution. Everywhere, socialism was either on the defensive or, as in Germany, badly disoriented by having had to assume power under awesomely difficult conditions. Moreover, the United States' own socialist movement, whose progress the European left had welcomed in the first decade of the century, had been wrecked in the post-war red scare; in America's « tribal twenties, » it was the astonishing restoration of capitalist normalcy, rather than the resilience of opposition which merited pondering. More importantly, the United States had emerged as the world's premier industrial power. Whereas

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formerly it had been treated at a distance, as exporter of cyclical crisis and home of the big business trust (as analyzed for example in Hilferding's 1910 study, *Finance Capitalism*), now it had become Europe's leading creditor, and an exigent one at that. With its newly acquired political influence and its expansive mass culture, America, the « capitalist wonderland, » exercised an ever more significant influence over the conduct of European foreign and domestic affairs. [1] Like other sectors of European society in the 1920s, the left was thus confronted for the first time with what was later to be called the American « empire without frontiers, » an empire that offered a compelling model to emulate and exercised an equally compelling pressure to conform. From that time down to the present, the left in Europe found itself in Ernest Mandel's phrase, between the « devil of American capital » and the « deep blue sea of Americanization. » (Julien 1968 : 40 ff. ; Mandel 1970 : 154.)

Accordingly, the European left was challenged to shift its terms of inquiry. From an often abstract dispute, revolving around appraisals of American socialism's virtues and weaknesses, there emerged a broad, if sometimes confused discourse on the nature of what Antonio Gramsci, along with many others, loosely called « Americanism, » a discourse focusing on what the phenomenally new productive power of US capitalism meant at home and what it boded for societies elsewhere. This discourse, which was inextricably bound up with the United States' increasing material presence abroad, moved on various levels. On one level, the left sought to understand the United States' role in the international arena : whether it intended to isolate itself or actively engage in European affairs ; and whether, in the long run, its conspicuous force would be wielded to promote or block social transformation. On another level, the left had to reflect on the American economic system — on its prodigious natural resources, unsurpassed economic skills, and seemingly unlimited capital supplies. What implications did this economic system have for European developments ? Could American production techniques be appropriated and, if so, with what effects upon the working class standard of living and on labor organizing ? These questions were complicated ones ; and in movements in which political know-how did not usually go hand in hand with technical expertise, in which — as the then young neo-socialist André Philip observed at the time — « doctrine without practice contended with practice without doctrine, » the immediate effect was « intellectual chaos. » (Philip 1929 : 20.)

Ultimately, the left also had to consider whether the American model of development was simply more advanced than Europe's, or altogether different. In either case, the American model presented

Europeans with a new set of references. Not only did it appear to challenge any purely mechanistic conception of the rapport between the development of the forces of production and socialism, but it also established new terms of debate about the relationship between democracy and economic growth and the bearing of technological innovation on human liberation. In referring to the example of the United States, the left thus debated internally and with European elites the question of how democracy was related to prosperity, consensus to mass consumption, and standardized production to social rationalization. It also saw precedents for practicing reformist politics and could discern some possible effects of mass society and culture on class relations and consciousness. In the last analysis then, the ability to decipher what H. G. Wells (1906) had called the « future in America, » and Sombart (1976 : 24-25, 35) « the land of our future, » was understood to be crucial to developing a realistic strategy of social transformation in Europe.

Although the American model of liberal developmentalism was a common reference point for the left as a whole, there were deep divisions over how to interpret it and appraise its implications for Europe's own future. Some differences were basically of emphasis, and determined by national origin. For example, the combination of exaggerated enthusiasm for American production methods and acute apprehension about the effects of American mass culture were typically French : in France the socialist left too was influenced by a certain Cartesian rationalism, as well as by the traditionalist anti-Americanism of conservative intellectuals. By the same token, French communists carried their concern about an emerging Anglo-American hegemony into Comintern debates, echoing a more nationally pervasive worry over the eclipse of French power. [2] German social democracy was exceptionally well informed about the US economy. It was also more uniformly positive about the American experience, because of its democratic aspects, but especially because the SPD and the trade unions were involved in a corporatist politics that was exceptionally conditioned by American investment and business practices. The question of American mass culture was little discussed, however. [3] In Italy, the response to the promise of American technology was equally strong, as was the tendency for movement intellectuals having prevalently humanistic backgrounds to confuse its economic potential with its modernist cultural implications (Sapelli 1978 : esp. 15-55).

However, the overriding interpretative differences stemmed from more basic conflicts over the analysis of capitalism and the strategies of transition to socialism ; in 1920s Europe, these corresponded to the lines of the great schism between the Second and the Third International

labor movements. Generally speaking, European social democracy was strongly receptive to the American model. For theoreticians such as Kautsky or Hilferding, for prominent functionaries of the international labor movement like Albert Thomas, for a social-democratic party and trade-union spokesmen, prosperity paved the way to socialism. (Sturmthal 1943; Salvadori 1979; White 1981). A *pax americana* promised the respite from conflict Europe needed in order to rebuild. Moreover, the American economic system offered a future of automated factories and mass production for consumer-oriented markets, of higher wages and leisure time, and, finally, of political and civic egalitarianism. For the communist movement, by contrast, the road to revolution moved through mounting economic crises and imperialist war. In the international arena, the United States was both exporter of economic crisis and bulwark of political reaction. Yet spokesmen for the international communist movement were not unambivalent about American industrialism, for as the American example showed very clearly, political power was bound up with economic strength. At the very least, as Trotsky put it, « bolshevism had to be shod with American nails. »[4] Like the social democrats, the communists thus endorsed the adoption of US business techniques for socialist consumption. To a much greater degree than the socialists, they also subscribed to the process of social rationalization which appeared both to underly and legitimize the good functioning of America's mighty machine of production.

Within this overall framework, there were a number of party leaders, theoreticians, and political intellectuals who, if not perhaps properly representative of either tradition, stood out both for the sharpness of their perceptions of change within the United States and their insights into its implications for Europe. Often, they started with conventional understandings of the United States, to then rethink or elaborate on their initial assumptions in the process of reflecting more generally on the impasse of European socialism and the failure of traditional categories to explain the enormously rapid changes in social life since the outstart of the war. The reference to America was not evidently a disinterested one; they used it to support reinterpretations of marxism or to revise obsolescent political strategies.

De Man and Gramsci Rethink America

On the social-democratic side, one such figure was André Philip, then a Christian socialist and author in 1927 of *Le problème ouvrier aux Etats-Unis*, and more recently, a major force behind the European

Community. Charlotte Lütkens, the German sociologist and a frequent contributor to *Vorwärts*, was another: her *Staat und Gesellschaft in Amerika* (1929) was unusual for its attention to American politics. Here too we must place the revisionist theoretician Henrik de Man, whose account of his first visit to the « land of taylorism » in 1918 was among the earliest published by a socialist after the war (de Man 1919a). Note should also be taken here of British socialists, such as Harold Laski, the leading socialist expert on the United States. We might add that members of the British left generally had closer cultural and political affinities with the United States than their continental counterparts; and although they saw themselves working within a marxist framework, based their views on the looser generalizing conceptions of Fabian socialism (Pelling 1956). On the communist side, there was Trotsky; while polemicizing against the social-democratic notion of a peaceable American-led « super-imperialism » (and at the same time arguing for the presence of the conditions for « permanent revolution » in the USSR), he first grappled with the strategic implications of the global shift of financial and industrial power from England and the Continent to the United States. Bukharin too, while Comintern head from 1926 to 1929, was just starting to weigh the US's role in capitalist stabilization when he was ousted from power by Stalin.[5] The truly outstanding figure was of course Antonio Gramsci who, picking up on Trotsky's analysis, proceeded alone among the communists in the post-1925 decade, to reflect systematically on the problem of Americanism.

The process of rethinking America, in the course of revising marxian socialism in Europe, is especially well illustrated in the works of Henrik de Man and Antonio Gramsci. The iconoclastic Belgian, in the process of breaking with marxism altogether, and the revolutionary leader become heterodox communist theoretician, are of course notably different figures — Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks* testify on his side to his running polemic with de Man. The one feature they could be said to share in common was that each, in challenging orthodox marxist assumptions about the development and organization of social movements, understood that the problem of hegemony was more complicated than was conventionally held; each, accordingly, developed an interest in the question of culture in mass society which was rather exceptional in the arch of experiences of inter-war socialism. This concern, with all due attention to differences of interpretation and treatment, was reflected in their interest in the American experience.

Of the two, de Man was by far the more knowledgeable about the United States, both because he had visited it — which Gramsci never did — and because, at least in his youth, he had strong personal and political affinities with American radicalism. De Man was in fact the

European neo-socialist par excellence. Traditionalist in his faith in evolutionary change, he was at the same time modernist in his espousal of the new sciences of social reform, alternating periods of intense political engagement with years of withdrawal for study.[6] De Man discussed the United States from within an exceptionally cosmopolitan, distinctively North European frame of reference, as might be expected from a man of cultivated bourgeois family, born in a country mixing German, French and Flemish, as well as British cultural traditions, and belonging from his early youth to a party — the Belgian Workers' Party (POB) — which was influenced both by solid German orthodoxy and French voluntarist social philosophies. In his writings, some of which were in English — which, like several other languages, he wrote as well as spoke fluently — the American example ran like a leitmotiv. Its significance changed as de Man himself passed from being the Young Turk of Belgian social democracy in the early 1920s and director of the POB's « Ecole ouvrière supérieure » to becoming the leading theorist of voluntary socialism in the late 1920s ; from being major promoter of the POB's bold « Plan du Travail » in 1933 and the party's president in the late 1930s, to becoming at the outbreak of World War II, with his endorsement of Hitler's « new order, » the great renegade of international socialism (Dodge, ed., 1966 ; de Man 1919a-b ; 1928 ; 1929 ; 1935 ; 1933 ; 1954).

De Man's recurrent citation of the United States echoed his more fundamental beliefs about socialism and society. True to his origins as a reform socialist, de Man located civilization within the work process. He sought, as systematically as possible, to use the new social sciences to identify those areas of production and social life suited to reform and thus to engage the expertise of an emerging « new » middle class in constituting a new social order. From this perspective, the reference to the United States served a twofold function. First, it demonstrated conclusively that socialism was not inevitable in capitalist societies ; that, rather, it had to be inspired by a higher vision of the ethical, not just the economic, content of social relations. In the second place, the American example offered advanced models of economic reform and civic culture ; he saw not just taylorism and fordism, but also the labor schools and cooperatives he had visited in the United States far west, as institutions that would reinforce the skills required of the socialist movement to administer complex societies.

Gramsci, by contrast, was first and foremost a political activist, as participant and leader of the insurrectionary upheavals of 1919-20, and then founder and head of the Communist Party of Italy ; he was forced by his imprisonment under the fascist dictatorship to become the Italian « philosopher of praxis. »[7] Gramsci's frame of reference was equally

internationalist ; but it was constructed along an « East-West, » rather than a northern axis. Unlike de Man, however, whose cultural world might be said to reflect the broad and integrated perspective of a highly evolved capitalist world, Gramsci's cosmopolitanism was the effect of contrasts, manifested in Italy itself between rapid development and desolate backwardness, and in Europe generally between Russia and the West. Equally, it was born of the will to understand a rapidly changing world, one which had suddenly become wide open and novel with the promise of revolution after 1917, only to be rendered abruptly suffocatingly provincial by the Italian labor movement's political defeat in 1922. In this sense, Gramsci's acute perception of the global nature of capitalist relations and the role the United States seemed to be playing in transforming them might be called derivative : America was understood by its effects, interpreted through the filter of the conservative commentary that he was permitted to study while immured in a fascist jail,[8] rather than, as in de Man's case, from first-hand observation of its origins and concrete forms in the United States itself. In Gramsci, the reference to America crops up first in his *Ordine nuovo* writings, in comments on Lenin's treatment of taylorism and on the worker's response to scientific management at the Fiat Motor Works (Telò 1976). He came back to this subject in a sustained way only in the late 1920s. In the forty-odd pages of notes entitled « Americanism and Fordism, » which he finally concluded in 1934, he condensed several years' reflection on a decade and a half of experience that had encompassed not only the tumultuous council years and the consolidation of the fascist dictatorship, but also the advent of the first Five-Year Plan in the USSR and the arrival of the Great Depression in Italy. In Gramsci, by contrast to de Man, there is a more typically marxist effort to develop a global view of transformations in the forces of production : in particular, of the changes which underlay and accompanied them, and how the working-class movement might shape these. Reformist expertise was never ignored. But unquestionably the key to revolutionizing the process of reproduction was political activism — the new civilization of labor could be built on that basis alone. For Gramsci, America was a model, offering a new standard by which to measure European trends, to assess the strengths of the dominant classes, to plot the rise of fresh contradictions, and, ultimately, to predict the character and course of emerging oppositional forces. He turned to it in an attempt to understand why the revolution had failed in western Europe, at least according to conventional Leninist notions of revolutionism. What this failure implied raised yet other questions : What then was the relationship between liberal democracy and fascist authoritarianism ? How was an eastern socialist model of development

identified with the Soviet Union related to a western capitalist model exemplified by the United States ?

America's Capitalist Purity and Europe's Future

Both de Man and Gramsci began with the conventional view that the United States represented capitalism in its purest form. In other words, it differed from European development by having had no feudal past. On this issue, they were in essential agreement with earlier European commentators, liberal and socialist alike, who, in common with the older Wilhelm Liebknecht had looked admiringly across the Atlantic to a land where, ostensibly, there were « no traditions, no rubbish of handed-down prejudices. » (In Moore 1970 : 29.)

This notion of America's capitalist purity had several implications. From a methodological view, it meant that trends which in Europe were obscured by the « detritus of the past » could be better observed in the United States. In moral terms, it led to the belief best summed up in Goethe's often cited phrase that America was « better than the old continent, » and the American people happier and freer for not having to dwell amidst « tumble-down castles » and « fossil outcroppings. » From an economic viewpoint this capitalist purity had meant rapid and smooth development. And in terms of politics ? The problems of analysis began there. How was the absence of a feudal past related to the present configuration of politics ? If, according to Sombart and others, politics reflected economic development, why was it that with the accelerated tempo of rationalization, the political system did not conform by becoming more simplified ? Nobody in the 1920s left seemed to want to dwell on this question. That there was no mass socialist movement in the United States was attributed to various contingent factors : factors such as precocious democratization, machine politics, or labor racketeering, or else to an eccentric backwardness which even a commentator as sophisticated as the social democrat Fritz Naphtali ascribed to America's youth, « its colonial character. » All of these, it was implied, were features that as the country matured would finally disappear (Sombart 1968 ; F. Naphtali, in Beck 1968 : 115).

Typically, neither Gramsci nor de Man addressed this very basic problem, at least not directly. Rather, both worked their way around the obstacle of conventional assumptions about the relationship between economic developments and politics in the United States by establishing a new mode of comparing the Old World and the New. They did this in two ways : first, by questioning the assumption that the movement toward socialism was inexorable, and inevitably bound to take the path

of the previous decades ; second, by underscoring the social-cultural, and in de Man's case, psychological determinants of collective action.

The novelty of their views thus emerges when, rather than taking Europe's past as the measure of American progress, they turn the problem around, asking whether the example of a more or less pure capitalism can cast light on Europe's current predicament. Accordingly, de Man in effect switched around Sombart's question by asking : « Why *is* there socialism in Europe ? » [9] whereas Gramsci raised a two-part question : Has the United States, having had no feudal past to drag it down, entered first into a new phase of capitalism, one of such significance as to open a new historical epoch ? Will not this new mode of capitalist organization affect Europe as well in the near future ?

Responding to these queries, both men reinterpreted the significance of Europe's feudal heritage for contemporary events. Having determined that present levels of economic development could not explain either the presence or absence of socialist movements, de Man looked back into the « deep » historical structure of national development. In the legacy of the transition from feudalism to capitalism, he identified the peculiar economic and socio-psychological complexion which lent each country or region its special character, and which subsequently conditioned the nature of oppositional movements arising within it. By contrast, Gramsci attributed the impasse of the socialist movement in Europe at least partly to Europe's complex feudal heritage. In Europe, trends which in America appeared to have simplified and reduced superstructural complexity might lift the dead hand of the past, so to speak. When such socio-psychological and economic impediments had been removed — when, in effect, the bourgeois revolution had been completed from above — the way would open for a renewal of the social movement. Thus, in very different ways, each man perceived the American model of development as establishing a new set of rules. For de Man who was breaking with economic determinism in all of its forms, Europe, rather than America, should now be treated as the exception. For Gramsci, who was revising the developmental models of 19th-century marxism, substituting the United States for Great Britain, Old Europe was a slow learner, which by the example and under the pressure of a more advanced capitalism would perhaps be compelled to catch up with the world leader.

In de Man's analysis, Europe's uniqueness thus began when the capitalist order was established on the « ruin of an absolutist and feudal regime, » thereby perpetuating the inequalities of the old order in off-the-job social hierarchies and cultural discrimination of all kinds. Consequently, the « joy of work, » which de Man treated as a fundamental value of all western civilization, as well as the motor force

behind early capitalism, was stifled : in a first moment by a bourgeoisie which imitated the pre-capitalist aristocracy's disdain for work ; and only later by the de-skilling process of automation. In the US by contrast, where capitalism was ostensibly pure of any feudal past, the social and economic inequities of the new system were patently functional rather than inherited ; this was evidenced by the pervasiveness of the work ethic, worker-boss camaraderie on the job, the absence of status-bound dress codes, and the generally democratic manner of the civic culture (de Man 1929 : 207 ff., also Dodge, ed., 1966 : 91 ff. ; de Man 1928 : 43 ff., Dodge, ed., 1966 : 239-240). In America, one could speak of the *exploitation* of the workers by capitalism — in Europe, capitalism *oppressed* them as well, fostering what de Man once characterized as a gigantic « social inferiority complex » compounded of humiliation and rancor. Where initially successful, socialism was thus more than a movement against capital, determined by economic necessity or interest. Such interests were not, in fact lacking in the US where, as de Man observed, economic class identity was strong and workers organized in pursuit of economic goals were as militant as, if not more aggressive and uncompromising than, their European counterparts (de Man 1929 : 216 ; 1928 : 57). The determining factor was the social-psychological perception of economic equality ; where a democratic public life guaranteed self-respect and social dignity, particularist social movements failed to aggregate in mass political struggles on the European model (« Kapitalismus und Sozialismus », in Dodge, ed., 1966 : 241).

Would advanced technology fundamentally change this picture by eliminating major differences in development and standards of living ? De Man thought not. For one thing, the great technological leap which Europe had begun to experience in the twenties following the American lead, merely demonstrated that the causes of the worker's hatred for work might be done way with without eliminating the profit-making economy. And vice versa, for de Man, the Soviet example testified clearly that the overthrow of capitalism did not necessarily bring joy back to work. Aside from that, the coming of a more advanced capitalism exposed the weaknesses of a movement that hitherto had defined itself primarily in terms of economic justice. True, automation might alleviate onerous tasks and shorten working hours ; higher wages might enhance compensation ; and applied science might improve wealth and safety measures. But this neo-capitalist reformism, whether premised on nationalist politics, or promoted at the expense of consumers, risked transforming socialism into a movement of the disgruntled, gratified by the petty concessions of corporatist politics and the shards of bourgeois culture.

By concentrating on economic grievances, the movement failed moreover to understand the more diverse social constituency created for socialism by advanced capitalism. In other words, it ignored what de Man characterized as « the class of intellectuals [which] is a not less characteristic and important product of the industrial epoch than the proletariat, » and whose « moral distress » was no less grave than the « physical distress » of manual laborers (de Man 1928 : 228). This was, after all, the constituency from which the socialist movement could draw the expertise it needed to challenge the capitalist control of the forces of production. To make that appeal effective, as well as to address the deeper psycho-cultural grievances of the working class, the socialist movement had to revitalize itself with a non-materialist content. As André Philip wrote introducing de Man to French readers, it had « to lift the class struggle from the economic to the ethical plane. » (Quoted in Philip 1929 : 21.)

In his assessment of the pre-histories of capitalism in Europe and America, Gramsci was interested in a more fundamental comparison : that, which throughout the *Quaderni* he develops in the contrast between East and West : namely between the society in which socialist revolution had apparently succeeded in the 20th century, and that in which it had evidently failed, at least for the time being, using the methods employed by the Bolsheviks to seize power in Russia. Elsewhere in the *Prison Notebooks*, Gramsci had characterized the conditions under which revolution occurred in the East and West respectively, and the strategic approaches appropriate to each : thus in the East, civil society was fluid and impoverished, whereas in the West, society was highly articulated ; in the East there was an authoritarian though weak state, in contrast to the West where the state was well-rooted ; in the East social revolution called for a « strategy of maneuver, » or a rapid war of movement ; as compared to the West where the need to map out, march through, and capture the myriad institutions of civil society called for a protracted « war of position. » (*Q* III : 1614-1616, 865-866 ; *Q* II : 763-764 ; *SPN* : 234-236 ; 263, 170.)

Gramsci : The Implications for the Class Struggle

To understand how Gramsci used the American example to develop his model, let us take the military analogy a step further. The problem that was foremost in Gramsci's reflections was how to determine the precise strategies for the war of position. Ideally, the working-class movement would itself scout the terrain. But what if, as a result of rout, it totally lost its bearings ? And what if, while seeking to regroup its forces, the

terrain of battle underwent a veritable seachange, such as to make it no longer practicable using the old trail guides and compasses ? In a very real sense, what Gramsci was attempting with his model of the workings of United States capitalism was to map out this new terrain. The American example showed how entrepreneurial elites, which Gramsci like other Europeans identified with the figure of Henry Ford, had gone on the offensive. The United States also demonstrated how the application of advanced technologies, together with a highly rationalistic recasting of social and cultural relations, could permit an intensified economic exploitation, while closing off strategic choices previously open to the working-class movement. Under these circumstances, traditional strategies of defense and attack, along with traditional forms of worker resistance against capitalism, were rendered obsolescent. Ultimately, the labor movement had to understand the nature of what Gramsci elsewhere called « passive revolution, » by which he meant an historical period in which the dominant class had taken the initiative in modifying the forces of production (Buci-Glucksmann 1980 : 291-324 ; De Giovanni 1981 ; *SPN* : 106-114, 279-280). In the United States, this kind of « revolution » was most advanced ; moreover, there was every indication that in post-war Europe the United States would play the part that other great states had played in previous epochs of « passive revolution » : thus Napoleon's France during the Continental system, and Great Britain in the age of the Restoration. To the degree that the United States was promoter of such an epochal change in the capitalist system, the symmetry between East and West was complete : America was to the West and to capitalist industrialism what the Soviet Union was to the East and socialist industrialism.

But what more precisely were the implications of this epochal change for Europe ? Or, more concretely, what were its implications for the class struggle ? Gramsci was primarily concerned about whether Italian elites would accept or resist Americanism, and, in particular, whether, in a context in which resistances to a thoroughly modern capitalism were so numerous, the more advanced sectors of the bourgeoisie might not use the state apparatus to clear away the detritus of the past (*Q* III : 2178-79, 2153-58 ; *SPN* : 292-294). If this effort succeeded, the presumption — based on the American experience — was that European society eventually would be completely recast in terms of the advanced sectors of economy. In that event, what would be the situation of the working class ? How would it go about breaking the new hegemony of a rationalized capitalism ? In orthodox style, Gramsci surmised that non-conformist thought would arise spontaneously, in the freedom, so to speak, of the highly automated, mass factory. Less conventionally, he also argued that the discipline of capitalist production

was inherently contradictory, so that a social-cultural opposition would eventually grow out of conflicts within the superstructure itself as, for example, between working-class puritanism and the libertine behavior of elites (*Q* III : 2147-50, 2160-69 ; *SPN* : 294-301). He made no predictions about the future of socialism in either America or Europe. But his conclusions that an Americanized capitalism had established a more complicated terrain of struggle, revealed a new problem : how might the working class develop new forms of counter-hegemony under these circumstances.

Did the example of American mass culture teach anything about building such counter-hegemonies ? Yes, but far less than might be expected — indeed de Man and Gramsci were among the very few socialists or communists in Europe to refer to it to help define a new cultural politics. [10] This was because American mass culture created a double predicament for the left. The most trenchant critiques of cultural Americanism were conservative, cast as defences of European traditions against a menacing civilization devoted exclusively to the cause of material growth. [11] However, to accept such positions would have meant sanctioning the idealism of the conservative elites, upholding the universalistic presentations of bourgeois culture, and legitimizing the anti-modernism and hierarchical institutions of old elites. At the same time, the left had issues of its own : for example, how to prevent this new culture of abundance from « bourgeoisifying » the proletariat ; how to prepare cadres to deal with the specialized technologies of advanced capitalism ; finally, how to free the working class from the harsh cultural conformity imposed by standardized production methods, while upholding the social discipline which virtually all labor leaders maintained was indispensable for socialism's ultimate victory. Dealing with such issues was naturally made more difficult by the objectively confounding features of capitalist mass culture, with its liberatory messages and covert repressions. These difficulties were compounded by the fact that the experience of the United States offered no examples of the politically engaged or, in Gramsci's phrase, « organic intellectual » who might conceivably respond to the myriad needs which an Americanized culture created in the European labor movement.

De Man : Toward a New Intellectual Leadership

De Man, who was more familiar with the complexity of American society, was initially of two minds about American mass culture. His appreciation of American civic culture was, at least in the early 1920s, Tocquevillian : in this view, a social movement that combined the

egalitarianism, high cultural level, and technical know-how of the United States' associational life with European politics, would yield the best of possible worlds.[12] However, he always distrusted the consumerist materialism of mass society. In the process of reassessing the relations between bourgeois culture and working-class values on the one hand, and between socialism and the intellectuals on the other, he gradually lost sight of the democratic individualism of American mass culture : more and more, he identified the United States with the emergence of a stifling, conformist mass culture. Ultimately, overcome by cultural pessimism, he rejected Americanism for the reactionary Europeanism of Hitler's « new order » (Dodge 1974 : 70 ff.).

This outcome was not illogical in light of de Man's notion of the process by which working-class culture was formed. On the basis of his very ample experience as a cultural organizer, as well as various studies he conducted on work satisfaction, he concluded that the very sense of social inferiority which, in his view, had led workers to espouse socialism also caused them to subscribe to an imitative « culture of substitutes. » (De Man 1928 : 257, 268.) In other words, the proletariat « bought up » in order to affirm its equality with the dominant classes. And so it would continue to do so long as the bourgeoisie was the dominant class. This discovery, which de Man called « one of the most dreadful of [his] life, » (*ibid. :* 266) was made a little less grim by some related considerations, the first being that workers' desire for material well-being did not necessarily conflict with the goals of socialism. Workers joined the movement to become happier ; that a reformist socialism could improve workers' lives, might make them support the movement all the more strongly. But the real point was that socialism did not ultimately depend on materialist demands. Indeed, a truly ethical socialism could take root only in an affluent society. Short of achieving a decent standard of living, workers would never « cease believing that wealth and happiness are synonymous, » deluding themselves that « the road to socialism set out from proletarian poverty, and passed by way of petty bourgeois mediocrity. » (*Ibid. :* 477.)

In the more affluent society, that Europe appeared headed to be by the late 1920s, where capitalism's functions as a social-cultural oppressor appeared ever more blatant, the socialist intellectual was destined to play a more substantial role. Lifting itself above the « instinctual impulse of the struggle of interests, » summoning up all of its « imaginative power, » the new intellectual leadership would forge a new social ethic, inspired by what de Man characterized as a « sentiment of good and right. » (*Ibid. :* 235.) « More reformers, » not « more reformists, » that was how André Philip characterized de Man's call for a new-model socialist intellectual (Philip 1929 : 49). Indeed, the