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REASON, SOCIAL MYTHS, AND DEMOCRACY. By Sidney Hook. John Day Company. $3.

NO ONE in America has expounded Marxist philosophy with greater authority and persuasiveness than Sidney Hook. For this reason a book by him in which practically all Marxist doctrines are subjected to some criticism and many completely rejected is something of an event. Taken in the context of the general mood of Marxist revisionism, it is not only an intellectual event but part of a political movement of real significance. Hook has of course always been a critical devotee of Marxist thought, and therefore cannot be accused of reversing himself. Nevertheless, he here extends previous criticisms so far beyond their earlier proportions that the progress of his thought may be described as moving from heresy to apostasy.

It is difficult to survey in brief space the havoc wrought upon Marxist doctrine by his critical onslaughts, but something of its dimensions may be indicated. The Marxist theory of class is termed "so vague that no matter what the evidence, it could be claimed as a vindication of the thesis." The Marxist faith in the working class as the fateful instrument of mankind's emancipation is found defective. The class has a fateful and significant position in modern society, but whether it can fulfill its destiny is another question: "Unfortunately, being in a position and being able to move from that position are two different things." The Marxist theory of the state as merely an instrument of class domination which will wither away with the abolition of classes is found too simple. Marxist economic determinism overemphasizes the economic factor in social life. The idea of an inevitable revolution is almost wholly rejected. A revolution "is something to be accomplished when economic conditions are ripe. But how? By men and not by economic forces." Marxist historical laws, which seek to reduce historical tendencies to "laws of motion," are found to lead to "an unscientific disregard of the specific factors in each historical situation."

The utopian overtones in all Marxist doctrine are subjected to an astute criticism which results in their virtual rejection. The idea of a classless society, if taken literally, is termed a "will-o'-the-wisp." The idea of equality is correctly valued as a transcendent principle of justice, as a "guiding principle to reduce differences in living conditions," but as incapable of full realization in history. The hope that a socialized economy will not only destroy class domination but eliminate "the struggle for individual existence" is termed "eschatological utopianism"; for "more important than the struggle for individual existence is the struggle for better individual existence." Human desires are infinitely extensible and include ends which transcend physical needs, though even these have no fixed limits.

Some of the most discriminating and profound reasoning in Hook's book is devoted to a critical analysis of the dialecti-
cal principle in Marxist thought, which is found to have many meanings, some of which are not clear while others reduce themselves to absurdity. Efforts of such scientists as Haldane, Levy, Needham, and Prenant to construct a Marxist mathematics and biology are found to be no more respectable than similar efforts to establish a Nazi science.

Since the book is primarily devoted to criticism, the constructive elements in its analysis are more frequently implicit than explicit, and, where explicit, they are devoted to specific doctrines rather than to the Marxist structure as a whole. It is therefore difficult to do justice to Hook if one seeks to discover how much of the original structure of Marxist thought is left standing in his system. He is convinced, I think rightly, that "stripped of the metaphysics of its value theory, the Marxist critique of capitalist economy still retains its validity." While he regards Stalinism as not so much a corruption of Leninism as its inevitable consequence he does not believe that Leninism flows inevitably from Marxism. Stalin's dictatorship over the party is an inevitable corruption of Lenin's doctrine of the dictatorship of the party, but the latter is not an inevitable fruit of Marx's doctrine of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

The corrosion of Marxist elements in Hook's thought increases the proportion of what may not unfairly be defined as the liberal element in his total system. After rejecting the Marxist doctrine of "ideology" as interpreting the interest which corrupts knowledge and truth in too narrowly economic terms, Hook seems to return to the liberal doctrine of scientific objectivity, appealing for the application of the spirit and the method of science "not merely to problems of physical control but to questions of human value." This idea breathes Professor Dewey's confidence in the possibility of achieving a position of transcendence over warring social creeds by a "free cooperative inquiry." Obviously it must be possible to achieve a degree of universally valid truth in social knowledge. If not, social life could not rise above the level to which Thomas Hobbes reduced it. But there is also an irreducible element of "ideological taint" in all social judgments, and this prevents us from achieving as much objectivity in judging issues in which our interests are involved as we have achieved in charting the stars. This whole problem is a very profound one and neither Marxist nor liberal theory has a fully adequate answer for it.

There are other sometimes rather surprising bits of "liberalism" in Hook's thought. He comes to the astonishing conclusion, for instance, that "the failure of socialist ideals to develop ... is in the main due to the failure of men. The débâcle of Marxism represents a colossal moral failure, a failure of intelligence and courage." One could hardly accuse Lenin of lacking either intelligence or courage unless one meant that he was not intelligent enough to detect the errors in the basic presuppositions of the faith by which he was bound or not courageous enough to admit known errors in his system. But in that sense one might with equal validity say that the only difficulty with capitalism is that its proponents are too stupid to understand that it approaches the complexities of economic life with false presuppositions or too cowardly to admit their false premises. The judgment is, in other words, true but irrelevant.

REINHOLD NEBUHR