

Fighting Words on the Humanity of Marxism

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Thousands of participants in the Black Hills International Survival Gathering last summer heard American Indian Movement leader Russell Means issue a twofold denunciation. In a speech titled "Fighting Words on the Future of the Earth," he denounced corporate America's establishment of "national sacrifice areas" for uranium mining on Indian land. And in the same breath, he blistered Marxism for a single-minded interest in "material gain."

Marxism, he said, is a European doctrine which "despises the American Indian spiritual tradition and culture" and advocates "national sacrifice of our homelands."

"Those who advocate and defend the realities of European culture and its industrialization are my enemies," he said. Capitalists only rape the earth "at the rate at which they can show a profit," but Marxists do it because it's "efficient," and this is due to the European, materialist origins of Marxism.

Said Means, "I do not believe that capitalism is responsible for American Indians having been declared a national sacrifice. No, it is the European tradition. . . Marxism is just the latest continuation of this tradition, not a solution to it."

Marxism is universal

The charge that Marxists are only interested in "material gain" echoes the capitalist class itself and the anti-naturalist,

idealist philosophers who deliberately confuse materialism with greed, insensitivity and disdain for “higher” values.

Nothing could be further from the truth.

Marxism, above all, is a creed of humanism, a call for sharing and caring, and a product of love for people, beauty and truth.

Yes, Marxism comes from Europe—and also from classical Greece, and Mideast and Arabic science, and African tribalism.

It reveres the ancient social forms and lifestyle of American Indians (Engels wrote a whole book about it: *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*). Marxists have never advocated sacrifice of Indian homelands but have always endorsed tribal sovereignty.

Marxists do not rape the earth and do not worship efficiency at the expense of people and nature.

It is not European tradition, whatever that is, but *U.S. capitalism* that commits genocide against Native Americans, Means’ apologetics for Wall Street notwithstanding.

And “Indian spiritual tradition” can mean many things to different tribes. Indeed, many Indians are Christians, yet Christianity has nothing in common with the ancient culture. Too much of the original culture has been twisted and degraded and lost in the maelstrom of 400 years of capitalist oppression and the imposition of bourgeois culture. Indians, for example, were once matriarchal; descent was reckoned in the female line. Yet today sexism, and anti-gay bigotry, are often called Indian traditions!

The only universal and absolute feature of tribal culture was economic communism. It was the basis for political democracy; the high status of women, elders and youth; the advanced level of the natural sciences; and the nature-based, *materialist* outlook. *The same features that identify Marxism!*

These bold ideas make Marxism the anathema of the ruling class. It has become the powerful tool of the oppressed

in the struggle to overthrow capitalism—first in Europe, where the modern industrial working class first emerged, and later around the globe, in Asia, Africa, and Latin and North America.

Beloved enemies

Means' wholesale labeling of European thought as "genocidal" is an untrue abstraction.

He seems unaware of the actual history of Europe, with its eventual division into two warring classes. Hence, he misunderstands and distorts the struggle of antagonistic ideas which reflects the class struggle.

Surely, Means must know that it is not industrialization per se, but *privately owned and controlled* technology that destroys the earth, the working class, and indigenous peoples.

And he must know that Marxism is not a "continuation" of "European imperialism" but its sworn antithesis, with a long and honorable record of negating and expropriating the capitalist expropriator.

As for "Marxist imperialism," there is no such thing. Even the Stalinist Soviet bureaucracy is not "imperialist" because it doesn't represent finance capital, permit private investments, inherit wealth, or enrich anyone personally through its foreign or domestic policy. There is no capitalism and no capitalist class in the USSR; "imperialism" is the expansionist policy of *finance capital*, which doesn't exist in the USSR.

Means should not make identities out of differences, and buddies out of mortal enemies. This could spell disaster for AIM.

Cultural nationalist pitfalls

The great dividing line in capitalist America is not between "spiritual" Indian and "anti-spiritual" European-Marxists, or between Indians and Europeans.

The real battle line lies between capitalists (of all colors)

and the oppressed (of all colors).

By adopting the reactionary, cultural-nationalist line that secondary, “porkchop” traditions are more important than class issues, and that everything Indian is good and everything European is bad, Means seriously deflects his struggle away from the corporations and the government, and opens fire instead on his actual and natural allies, the radicals.

By trading-in revolutionary politics for narrow cultural nationalism, Means turns away from the struggle for real national sovereignty. The banks and giant industries have made it abundantly clear that only the total destruction of Indian nations will satisfy their hunger for the wealth on Indian lands. Only Marxists hold to the principle of the Native American right to self-determination—to total autonomy or alliance with other nations, as they so decide.

Only Marxists will fight to defend Indian nationalism and internationalism. Means’ ill-tempered speech undermines the very international solidarity so crucial to winning political self-determination for Indian nations.

What Marxism means

The philosophy of Marxism is called dialectical materialism. It is easy to understand. It is an ideology that knows its enemies and takes sides.

There are two paramount disputes in philosophy.

The first deals with the *nature of reality*. Is it fundamentally material or non-material? Which comes first? Which is causal?

Philosophical materialists say that basic reality is physical and natural. Philosophical idealists say it is supernatural, intangible, religious.

The second dispute is in the field of logic, the laws of thinking: are things static and separate, or are they fluid, changeable and connected?

If you believe in fixed and rigid categories, you belong to

the school of *formal logic*. If you are an evolutionist, your logic is *dialectical*.

Some materialists adhere to the formal school, some to the dialectical. Idealists, similarly, may be mechanical or dialectical.

Marxists are dialectical materialists. Means erroneously thinks they are formal, mechanical materialists.

Means places his own philosophy in the camp of formal idealism. And as we have seen, formal idealism actually contradicts Indian traditional culture, which grew out of a deep reverence for and understanding of the real, natural, ever-changing, material world.

In the beginning

Why do Marxists call matter basic? Because it was first in time, and is the first cause of all non-material effects. Matter is *prior* to mind; existence *precedes* consciousness. Science, history and life prove this.

Matter-energy is the stuff out of which all else grows, determining in the final analysis how human beings think, feel, relate, produce, marry, create art, and so on. Marxism never dismisses the human spirit, but does place mind-feelings-ideas in their physical and historical context as effects, not as basic causes. Yes, ideas and feelings can change the world, but people must still have bodies before their minds and emotions can function.

Matter in motion

Means decries materialists who “despiritualized the universe” and saw nature in a “mechanical mode.” But Marx broke sharply from the vulgar, pre-dialectical materialists who saw nature as a giant piece of machinery.

Marx and Engels’ genius was to infuse materialism with the laws of development and the dynamic of contradictions which had been so brilliantly grasped by the early Greeks and

Hegel.

Matter itself can neither be created nor destroyed, but all matter—in nature, society and the human mind—changes constantly through tension and contradiction. All things are interdependent and in a continual process of coming into being, changing and passing away.

The capitalist system itself was born, matured and will die, because of its inherently contradictory nature—*social* production (by large groups of workers assembled in one plant) on the one hand, and *private*, capitalist ownership and appropriation of profit on the other.

Means, unfortunately, pretends to see no difference between capitalism and socialism. But the two irreconcilable systems spell the difference between life and death for his people.

Historical materialism

The application of the materialist dialectic to *history* is called historical materialism—a revolutionary science of society. It is the sociology of institutional changes caused by the interplay and conflict between the developing productive forces and the kind of world created by this technology.

Historical materialism teaches that all social life is evolutionary and revolutionary, and that human beings can learn to understand nature, production and social relations, and change them in a rational manner.

The kind of economy we live in determines the nature and level of our laws, government, culture, ideas, feelings and ethics. The competitive, jungle warfare system of capitalist production produces a destructive, anti-human science and culture. The traditional culture of Native Americans, on the other hand, came from a system of tribal communism, and is therefore infused with equality, fraternity and liberty.

Marxism is the only modern philosophy to espouse the re-creation of the pre-class and pro-human Indian world on a

contemporary level of advanced science, technology and knowledge achieved by later societies.

Historical materialism promotes the synthesis of ecological balance, social harmony, personal freedom and material comfort that is the human birthright.

The real future of the earth

The only alternative to socialist revolution that Means offers is a bleak defeatism. “I don’t care if it’s only a handful living high in the Andes,” he announces, “American Indian people will survive [a nuclear war]. . .that’s revolution.”

To passively accept the inevitability of imperialist holocaust is not revolution. And nothing can be more ethnocentric or impossible than the goal of self-survival on a ruined planet.

This is defeatism, the grandiosity of despair. It is mystical pie-in-the-sky for the saved or the chosen. It is nationalism turned to acid.

But scarcity and privation need not be the Indian future. There is a better way for suffering humanity—to go forward together to reestablish the democratic collective ownership of the means of producing life’s necessities.

Russell Means is not ready for this. The warrior is weary and scornful—even of his own leadership. So he bitterly lashes out at Marxists and Europeans as conventional scapegoats for his problems. Blinded by all-too-commonplace prejudices, and mistaken in his theoretical and historical analysis, he reaches a philosophical, political and spiritual blind alley.

But fresh and unsoured Indian militants, male and female, will not be hampered by retreat into a bunker mentality. They will embrace an alliance with their revolutionary comrades across racial and national lines. Means’ isolationism is suicidal, but the great Indian nations, as always, will seek to live and flourish along with liberated humanity as a whole.

