

This tired simplification is supported by summaries of Marxism and Leninism so willful that they must be described as caricatures. Marxism becomes nothing more than inverted Hegelianism, from which every subtlety has been eliminated. More important, Wagenlehner totally ignores the constant attention that Marx and Engels gave to problems of strategy, tactics, and organization, including military matters. He falsely blames them for not specifying the economic order of communism. What would have been correct to say is that they did not say much about the putative economic order in a postrevolutionary Russia.

Lenin is described as a Blanquist pure and simple, for whom the Marxist scheme of development was neither of use nor of interest, and who practically rejected the economic interpretation of history. Wagenlehner can assert this only by totally ignoring vast amounts of Lenin's writings, from early economic treatises to the works dealing with imperialism. Indeed, imperialism is not even mentioned in this book dealing with Lenin! Nor is there any treatment of the dialectics of consciousness and spontaneity and its implications for the relationship between leaders and masses. Despite this omission of themes which in my own work on Lenin I have treated as essential, I was struck by the large number of statements, including Lenin quotations, which could have been lifted straight from my *Leninism*.

Wagenlehner's summary of the history of the Soviet Union is a caricature as well. What shall we do with an account of "war communism" which mentions the Civil War only in passing, or a passage describing the elimination of the cultural influence of the old establishment as the "destruction of all moral principles" (p. 96)? I found the author's comments on the nationalization of the means of production and the discussion of Lenin's concept of "state capitalism" particularly inane. The summary ends by proving what the author set out to prove, that the Communist revolution brings about not the self-realization of man but a totally coercive state.

So what else is new?

Tracts of this kind were produced in the United States in the ten years following World War II. West Germany, which is twenty-five years behind America in the social sciences, seems to be similarly lagging in cold war rhetoric.

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SUR LE MODE DE PRODUCTION ASIATIQUE. By *Ferenc Tőkei*. Edited by *E. Pamlényi*. Translated by *György Bernát*. *Studia Historica, Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, 58. Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1966. 88 pp. \$6.00.

ZUR FRAGE DER ASIATISCHEN PRODUKTIONSWEISE. By *Ferenc Tőkei*. Edited by *Jürgen Hartmann*. Translated by *Ferenc Bródy* and *Agnes Vertes-Meller*. Neuwied and Berlin: Hermann Luchterhand Verlag, 1969. 128 pp. Paper.

Ferenc Tőkei wrote this book in 1960. Its three essays were first published as articles in the Hungarian journal *Valóság*, in 1962, 1963, and 1964 respectively, then together in book form in 1965 (*Az ázsiai termelési mód kérdéséhez*). The French edition of 1966 is a less than satisfactory translation, and some of the text and certain footnotes have been omitted. A better French translation of parts of the book was circulated in the spring of 1962, when Tőkei, then in Paris, became associated with the Centre d'Études et de Recherches Marxistes. Articles by Tőkei

and other members of the CERM on the Asiatic mode of production began appearing in the spring of 1964 in the pages of the journal *La Pensée*.

The major importance of Tökei's book is that it revived the debate of a subject that had been taboo in Communist Marxist circles since the "discussion concerning the Asiatic mode of production" held in Leningrad in 1931. This discussion was the outgrowth of debates in 1927 and 1928 to characterize Chinese society and history and thus to determine the character of the Chinese revolution. These debates were wide-ranging, but the principal participants—David Riazanov, Eugene Varga, Ludwig Madyar, Besso Lominadze, and S. M. Dubrovsky in the Soviet Union, and Karl August Wittfogel in Germany—were not Chinese. Even the resolution against the theory of the Asiatic mode of production which was adopted at the Sixth National Congress of the Chinese Communists, held in Moscow in 1928, was made under Soviet guidance. But the debates still continued among Soviet Marxists until their culmination in the Leningrad discussion.

The interest of the Soviet Communists in the issue of the Chinese revolution needs no underlining, but this was not their only reason for rejecting the theory of the Asiatic mode of production. Obviously it also had fundamental implications for Russian society. During the Leningrad discussion, M. Godes, who later edited the transcripts, stated that "in Lenin's works the term 'Asiatic' always serves as a synonym for an extreme form of feudalism and backwardness. No one will claim that Lenin classified Russia among countries with an Asiatic mode of production, but it was to Russia that he very frequently applied the term 'Asiatic.'"

Thus the Leningrad discussion was indirectly but definitely concerned with the character of Russian society and history—with reference specifically to the character of Russia's class structure and the meaning of the Russian revolution. Not only did the Soviet Communists reject the idea of an "Asiatic" China, they also rejected the idea of an "Asiatic" Russia. As a corollary, the participants in the Leningrad discussion concluded that "the concept of the Asiatic mode of production serves as a nourishing theoretical basis for Trotskyism." The charge of "Trotskyism" was not entirely beside the point, because Trotsky had spoken of Russia as "Asiatic," and those Chinese Marxists who continued to characterize Chinese society and history as "Asiatic" were by and large Trotskyists. Nevertheless, it was beside the point, because Lenin had also characterized Russia as "Asiatic" and by implication had gone far beyond Trotsky's statements. Moreover, the Soviet supporters of the theory were not Trotskyists but followers of Marx and Lenin.

The Marxist theory of Asiatic society did indeed include tsarist Russia as a variant of that social formation. The Stalinist leaders of the Leningrad discussion recognized the underlying issue, though negatively: they denied that a functional bureaucracy might be a ruling class. They avoided Marx's "Asiatic" interpretation of tsarist Russia, and they said nothing about Lenin's thesis that a degenerating Russian revolution might lead not to socialism in Marx's sense but to an "Asiatic restoration"—that is, to a restoration of Russia's old Asiatic despotism.

In 1931 the Stalinist theoreticians rejected the concept of the Asiatic mode of production, but without invoking Stalin as their authority. From 1938 they specifically quoted Stalin, who in chapter 4 of his *Short Course*, "Dialectical and Historical Materialism," had dropped Marx's Asiatic concept. Without mentioning this theory, Stalin denied the formative role of the natural (geographic) factor, which since 1845 had been included in the Marxist position and which was an essential element of Marx's "Asiatic" thesis. Also at this time Stalin replaced

Marx's concept of a multilinear development, which was part and parcel of his Asiatic thesis, by a unilinear scheme that eliminated Asiatic society as a separate formation and by implication his Asiatic interpretation of Russia.

There can be no doubt that the new debate, which began in France in 1962 and was carried on in the Soviet Union, East Germany, England, Czechoslovakia, Japan, and wherever Marxism has a role in intellectual life, has, like the Leningrad discussion, not lost its "political significance . . . during its entire course." And this is particularly true of the contributions made by Tökei. Also, like the Leningrad discussion, which began with a discussion of the Asiatic mode of production and developed into a controversy over social formations, Tökei, in 1968, wrote a book dealing with social formations (*A társadalmi formák elméletéhez*), and in 1969 he continued his discussion of this problem with special reference to antiquity and feudalism (*Antikvitás és feudalizmus*).

The German edition of Tökei's book on the Asiatic mode of production is not only the most accurate and complete translation of this work in a Western language, but it also contains an afterword that outlines the theses he presented in his book on social formations.

A major aim of this book, as well as of those that followed, is to combat the ideas of Wittfogel, who, since the publication of his *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft Chinas* in 1931 (shortly after the Leningrad discussion), has been the foremost proponent of the existence of "Oriental society" as a special formation related to a special mode of production (the Asiatic mode of production). Tökei leaves no doubt that this is a major aim: "I insist on the necessity of taking back from the hands of the revisionists and falsifiers of Marxism like Wittfogel, this tool which Marx created, namely, the concept of the Asiatic mode of production." Since he is himself a Marxist and a leading Sinologist at the Oriental Institute of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Tökei was the person to attempt this. The question remains: How successful has he been in "taking back" the concept from Wittfogel and "reclaiming" it for Marxism?

In the first of his three chapters Tökei attempts to define the Asiatic mode of production, in the second to discuss its economic, social, and political aspects, and in the third to examine Chinese history from these standpoints. The factor that unites them and forms the basis of his analysis here and also in his books on social formations is his claim that property and property relations are pre-eminently significant. It is true that Marx was ambivalent on the question of property, especially in the *Grundrisse* (1857–58), on which Tökei relies heavily. But in the main body of his work Marx's emphasis was on the mode of production and production relations, and it was the mode of production that was decisive in his distinguishing between social formations (the Asiatic, the ancient, the feudal, and the modern bourgeois) in his famous 1853 statement. Wittfogel has never wavered in his insistence on the central importance of the mode of production in defining social formations. He has also shown that a particular mode of production may be compatible with more than one form of property. By making property, and not the mode of production, the center of his argument Tökei in fact ignores Marx's concept of the Asiatic mode of production and distorts Wittfogel's reproduction of it.

Tökei's criticism of Wittfogel is complicated by his attempt to dissociate himself from Stalin's completely negative attitude toward Marx's Asiatic concept and, at the same time, to uphold two decisive features of Stalin's position which he (Tökei) uses against Wittfogel: the denial of the formative role of the natural factor, and the claim that the development of society was unilinear.

With respect to China, Tőkei asserts that there was no private property in land—that property there was communally owned. No serious Sinologist accepts this view. Marx, from 1853, recognized the possibility of private landownership in Asiatic society and, from the late 1850s, that this system of property prevailed in imperial China. Undaunted by the facts of history Tőkei contends that all social formations are based on property relations. To prove this he postulates a “triad” consisting of land, the individual, and the community. And quite contrary to the understanding of the mature Marx, he claims that the “Asiatic” mode of production did not constitute one of Marx’s “basic” formations, but was a “transitional” formation. His argument here is obviously an attempt to obscure Marx’s insistence on the “unchangeability” of Asiatic society. Because they deny significant features of Marx’s characterization of the Asiatic mode of production and follow, albeit deviously, the line taken by Stalin, it can be said that in the writings of Tőkei the spirit of the Leningrad discussion lives on.

In 1967, in his address to the Twenty-seventh Congress of Orientalists in Ann Arbor, Michigan, Wittfogel replied to arguments presented in Tőkei’s book on the Asiatic mode of production. In the leading Hungarian philosophical journal, *Magyar Filozófiai Szemle* (1970, no. 6), which he edits, Tőkei answered Wittfogel, attacking his hydraulic theory but most particularly his characterization of Russia as “Asiatic.” Although Tőkei fails to mention Wittfogel’s important analysis of “Asiatic” Russia, published in the *Slavic Review* under the title “Russia and the East” in 1963, he does use Wittfogel’s main source, Marx’s *The Secret Diplomatic History of the Eighteenth Century*, to prove that Marx did not really mean what Wittfogel says he meant. But here, as elsewhere, Tőkei is forced to argue as much against Marx as against Wittfogel.

Tőkei, in his book, categorically rejects any connection between the Asiatic mode of production and the class structure of “socialist” (read Communist) countries. Thus he attempts to make Wittfogel’s concept of a “bureaucracy as a ruling class” appear ridiculous, first by suggesting that Wittfogel, in *Oriental Despotism*, asserted that “socialist” societies are “hydraulic” (which, of course, Wittfogel never did) and then by lumping Wittfogel’s class concept together with Djilas’s very different “new class” concept. But the only argument Tőkei levels against them is that both are “strongly unhistorical”!

It may well be asked what exactly these arguments of Tőkei’s add to a realistic Sinology, to classical Marxism, and to the theory of the Asiatic mode of production. The answer, at least for this reviewer, is little indeed. A new debate on the Asiatic mode of production is certainly to be welcomed, and one not excluding a critique of Wittfogel’s relevant theories. But Tőkei’s publications have added more heat than light. And in this Tőkei is symptomatic of the whole “new debate.”

Perhaps there can be no scientifically rewarding “new debate” on the Asiatic mode of production until those who call themselves “Marxists” are willing to make a genuinely Marxist analysis of China and Russia and other countries that lived under Oriental despotism.

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