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Historical-Critical Dictionary of Marxism

Edited by Wolfgang Fritz Haug, 15 Volumes in German, Hamburg: Argument-Verlag, Vol. 1, 1994, 801 pp., Vol. 2, 882 pp. plus a cumulative index. ISBN 3-88619-421-0 and 3-88619-432-9

Readers of the IGS Newsletter should be aware of an extraordinarily ambitious and important project currently beginning to see the light of day. Under the direction of Wolfgang Fritz Haug, editor of the influential left journal, *Das Argument*, the first two of 15 volumes of a comprehensive >dictionary< of Marxism have been published. Scare quotes are employed in this description because the work is really an encyclopedia rather than a dictionary. Moreover, while the work is useful as a reference to Marxist writings and writings about Marxism, the length and depth of its anticipated 1500 entries, prepared by over 800 authors, make it an unique and invaluable research tool beyond references.

For example, somebody doing work on Marxism and democracy would do well to begin his or her research by reading the entries on this topic in volume two of the Dictionary. In an initial article Hartmut Wagner follows a standard format for the publication. He starts by summarizing Marx's views on democracy beginning with his views on censorship and critique of Hegel in the early works and ending with the more political reflections in the Paris Commune and the dictatorship of the proletariat. In these sections contemporary reactions and criticism, such as by Ernst Lange and Jürgen Habermas are interwoven with the reports of Marx's and Engels' views. The subsequent history of Marxist concepts of democracy is then traced with special emphasis on the critiques of Lenin's deployment by Rosa Luxemburg and Ernst Bloch, whose alternative views are also summarized. The entry concludes with a bibliography and a list of key words referring to other entries.

Already a useful essay, this entry is complemented with four additional treatments: The Dictatorship of the Proletariat (prepared by Uwe-Jens Heuer); Democratic Psychiatry (Erich Wulff); Democratic Socialism (Robert Lederer); and Democratic Centralism (Monty Johnstone). These are also substantial articles, so that the entire >package< on democracy, not counting cognate entries such as the forthcoming ones on liberalism and liberal democracy, runs to over 20.000 words. Similarly full treatments are to be found of the over 200 entries in the first two volumes: anarchosyndicalism, antisemitism, aesthetics, Austromarxism, bourgeoisie, Chinese Revolution, dialectics, and so on, to list a few random. The dictionary is conceptually organized, thus excluding entries for individuals. However, as the summary above indicates, reference is made to significant classic and contemporary Marxists within entries, and these are listed to in a full name index. Also quasi name entries, such as >Della-Volpe School<, are allowed.

The history of this undertaking commenced with a plan to add supplementary material to Georges Labica's *Dictionnaire Critique du Marxisme*, the German translation of which started to appear in 1983. Sparked by enthusiasm for extending this project on the part of European left intellectuals (and also by hostility on the part





of Germany's Communist Parties, which, presumably, objected to the nonsectarian and critical dimensions already prominent in Labicas effort) a >Dictionary Workshop< was founded at the Free University of Berlin and an international board of editors was established under Haug's direction. The project swung into high gear after 1989 with the resulting volumes, which are to be followed at the rate of one volume every second year.

The timing of this venture could not be better. From a purely scholarly point of view, the demise of the Communist states make research into Marxist theory even more in vogue than previously: Marxism is now perceived in a >safe< scholarly topic, and 1989 marks an epochal year. Far more importantly, the Dictionary illustrates that Marxism may not be so safely put to rest after all. Entries to date illustrate that Marxism comprises continuing, critical, self-critical, and still developing orientations toward all topics of contemporary relevance. The very act of bringing together such a large group of contributors, widely representative internationally and in terms of disciplinary expertise and theoretical focus, and of making their treatment of the Dictionary's themes accessible can only contribute to ongoing and fruitful Marxist thinking.

While there is some prospect that the Dictionary will be translated into English, RPA members should not await this, but should begin making use of the publication in its original German. (Those with only elementary command on the language will be surprised to see how relatively easy it is to make sense of topics in an area where one already has expertise.) Most importantly, university libraries should be encouraged to order the Dictionary. Without doubt it will be the most comprehensive and authoritative compilation on Marxist thinking in existence.

