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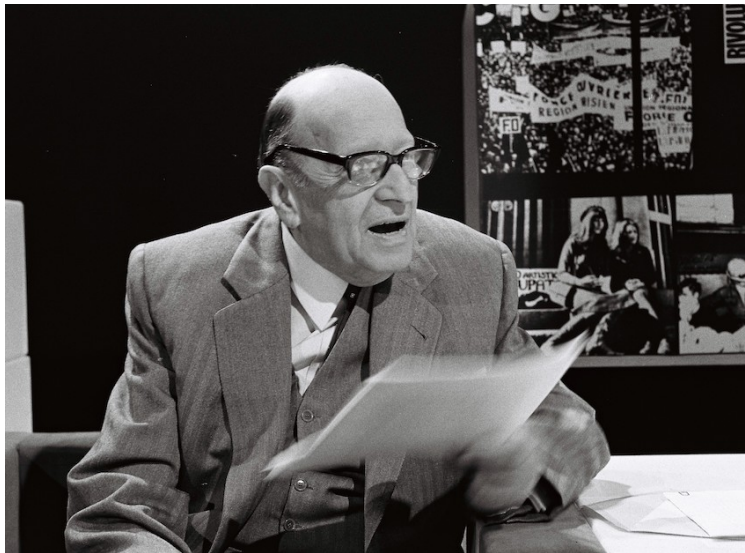
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زبانهای اروپایی

By Gabriel Rockhill

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## *The CIA and the Anti-Communism of the Frankfurt School*



Sources: Rebellion [Image: Max Horkheimer]

*The critical theory of The Frankfurt School has been—along with French theory—one of the most coveted commodities in global theoretical industry.*

Together, they serve as a common source for many of the intellectual fads that influence the types of critical theory that currently dominate the academic market in the capitalist world, from postcolonial and decolonial theory to *queer theory*, Afro-pessimism, and beyond. The political orientation of The Frankfurt School has resulted in a foundational effect on the globalized *intelligentsia* of the Western world.

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The luminaries of the first generation of the Institute of Social Studies—particularly Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, who will be the focus of this short essay—are pivotal figures in what is known as Western, or cultural, Marxism. For those familiar with Jürgen Habermas' reorientation away from historical materialism in the second and third generations of The Frankfurt School, this early work frequently represents an indisputable golden age of critical theory, when it was still—albeit passively or pessimistically—somehow devoted to a form of radical politics. If there is a grain of truth in this presumption, it exists only to the extent that the early Frankfurt School is compared to later generations who reinvented critical theory as a radical liberal ideology—or even, simply and openly, as a liberal ideology. In any case, this point of comparison sets the bar very low, something that happens when one reduces the political to the politics of the academic world. After all, the first generation of the Frankfurt School experienced some of the most cataclysmic clashes in the global class struggle of the 20th century, a period in which a veritable intellectual world war was being fought over the meaning and value of communism.

To avoid becoming the useful fools of history, or falling into the provincialism of Western academia, it is therefore important to re-contextualize the work of the Institute of Social Studies in relation to the international class struggle. One of the most significant features in this context was the desperate attempt, on the part of the ruling capitalist class, its state administrators and ideologues, to redefine the Left—in the words of Thomas Braden, a CIA agent and Cold War soldier—as "compatible," understood as the non-communist left. As Braden and others involved have explained in detail, an important facet of this struggle consisted of using money from foundations and front-organizations linked to the Agency such as the Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF) to promote anti-communism and attract leftists to take positions against existing socialisms in the world.

Horkheimer participated in at least one of the events organized by the CCF in Hamburg. Adorno published in a CIA-funded newspaper, *Der Monat*, the largest magazine of its kind in Europe and a model for many other CIA publications. His articles also appeared in two other CIA magazines: *Encounter* and *Tempo Presente*. He also invited home, had correspondence and collaborated with the CIA operator who could be considered the main figure in the German anti-communist movement Kulturkampf: Melvin Lasky. Founder and editor-in-chief of *Der Monat*, as well as a member of the CIA's original CCF steering

committee, Lasky told Adorno that he was open to any form of collaboration with the Institute for Social Research, including the publication of its articles and any other statements as soon as possible on its pages. Adorno accepted his offer and sent him four manuscripts that had not been published, including Horkheimer's *Eclipse of Reason* in 1949.

Horkheimer's lifelong collaborator was thus connected to CCF networks in West Germany, and his name appears in a document, probably from 1958/59, outlining plans for an exclusively German CCF committee. Moreover, even after it was revealed in 1966 that this international propaganda organization was a CIA front, Adorno continued to be "included in the expansion plans of the [CCF] headquarters in Paris," which was "business-wise" on the part of Germany under U.S. surveillance. This is just the tip of the iceberg, as we will see, but by no means surprising since Adorno and Horkheimer rose and acquired prestige globally within the privileged networks of the anti-communist left.

### **A dialectical analysis of theoretical production**

The analysis below is based on a dialectical explanation of the social totality that situates the subjective theoretical practices of these two founding fathers of critical theory within the objective world of the international class struggle. This analysis does not accept the arbitrary dividing line that many petty-bourgeois scholars desperately try to erect between intellectual production and the broad socioeconomic world, as if someone's "thoughts" could—and should—be separated from their "lives," or from the material system of theoretical production, circulation, and reception, which I will refer to here as the intellectual apparatus. This kind of non-dialectical assumption, after all, is not much more than the symptom of an idealistic approach to theoretical work that presumes the existence of a spiritual and conceptual realm that functions completely independent of material reality and the economic policy of knowledge.

This presupposition perpetuates the intellectual fetishism of commodities, understood as the idolatry of the sacred products of theoretical industry that prevents us from placing them within the widest space of social relations of production and class struggle. It also serves the interests of those who have or aspire to be part of some particular franchise within the global theoretical industry, be it the "critical theory of the Frankfurt School" or

any other, because it protects the image of the franchise itself (which remains immaculate from the existing social relations of production). While the intellectual fetishism of commodities is a major feature of consumption within theoretical industry, brand image management is the hallmark of production.

For this kind of dialectical analysis, it is important to recognize that Adorno and Horkheimer did indeed mobilize their subjective activity in formulating meaningful critiques of capitalism, consumer society, and the culture industry. Far from denying this, I would simply like to situate these critiques within the objective social world, which requires asking a very simple and practical question that is rarely heard within academic circles: if we recognize that capitalism has negative effects, what should we do about it? The deeper we delve into their lives and their work, filtering the deliberate obscurantism of their discourse, their answers become more obvious, and the easier it becomes to understand the primary social function of their collective intellectual project. As critical as they are at times of capitalism, they regularly claim that there are no alternatives, and nothing can or ultimately should be done about it. Moreover, as we shall see, his critique of capitalism pales in comparison to his categorical condemnation of socialism. His brand of critical theory ultimately leads to an acceptance of the capitalist order since in his view socialism is much worse. Similar to most of the academic discourses fashionable in capitalist academia, they propose a critical theory that we might call ABS Theory (Anything But Socialism): Anything But Socialism.

In this regard, it is not in the least surprising that Adorno and Horkheimer have been supported and promoted so extensively within the capitalist world. To prop up the compatible non-communist Left above and against the danger of really existing socialisms, what better tactic than to praise academics of this kind as if they were the most important, or even the most radical Marxist thinkers of the 20th century? "Marxism," in this way, can be redefined as a kind of anti-communist critical theory that is not directly connected to the class struggle from below but rather to a type of theory that freely criticizes all forms of "domination," and that ultimately sides with capitalist control of societies over and against the supposed "fascist" horrors of powerful socialist states.

Following the fact that this ignorant form of anti-communism has been widely promoted within capitalist culture, this attempt to redefine Marxism may not be immediately

recognizable to some readers as reactionary and socially chauvinistic (in the sense that it ultimately elevates bourgeois society above any alternative). Unfortunately, large segments of the population in the capitalist world have been indoctrinated by this form of mechanical response based on uninformed slander, rather than rigorous analysis, when it comes to the actually existing socialisms. Since the material history of these projects—rather than the mythological horror stories propagandistically constructed around the communist cuckoo—will be essential to understanding the argument that follows, I have taken the liberty of referring the reader to the profound and fruitful work of historians such as Annie Lacroix-Riz, Domenico Losurdo, Carlos Martinez, Michael Parenti, Albert Szymanski, Jacques Pauwels, and Walter Rodney, among others. I also invite the reader to examine the important quantitative comparisons between capitalism and socialism carried out by demanding analysts such as Minqi Li, Vicente Navarro, and Tricontinental: (Institute for Social Research) Institute of Social Studies. This kind of work is analogous to the dominant ideology, and with good reason: it scientifically examines the evidence, rather than relying on worn-out caricatures and uninformed ideological reflexes. It is the kind of historical and materialistic work, moreover, that has been mostly obscured by the speculative forms of critical theory promoted by the global theoretical industry.

### **Intellectuals in the Era of Revolution and the Global Class Struggle**

Although their early lives were marked by the world-historical events of the Russian Revolution and the attempted revolution in Germany, Adorno and Horkheimer were aesthetes who distrusted the supposed chaos of mass politics. While his interest in Marxism was stoked by these incidents, it was primarily an interest of an intellectual nature. Horkheimer became marginally involved in activities related to the Munich Republic Council after World War II, particularly through support for some participants after the council was brutally repressed. If anything, he—the same is true a fortiori de Adorno—"continued to keep his distance from the explosive social events of his time and to devote himself primarily to his personal concerns."

Their class status is far from insignificant in this respect as it positions them, and their political vision, within the wider objective world of social relations of production. Both theorists of the Frankfurt School came from well-to-do families. Adorno's father was a "wealthy wine merchant" and Horkheimer's was a "millionaire" who "owned several

textile factories." Adorno "had no relation whatsoever to socialist political life" and maintained all his life "a deep aversion to the formal militancy of any party of the working class." Similarly, Horkheimer was never "openly a member of any working class party." The same is generally true of the other figures involved in the early years of the Frankfurt School: "none of those who belonged to Horkheimer's circle were politically active; none of them had their origin in the workers' movement or marxism."

In the words of John Abromeit, Horkheimer sought to preserve the supposed independence of theory and "rejected the position of Lenin, Lukács, and the Bolsheviks that critical theory must be 'rooted'" in the working class, or more specifically in the parties of the working class. He promoted critical theorists to operate as intellectual free agents instead of landing their research on the proletariat, which he saw as a type of work he denigrated as "totalitarian propaganda." As a whole, Adorno's position, like that of Herbert Marcuse, was summed up by Marie-Josée Levallée as follows: "the Bolshevik party, which Lenin transformed into the vanguard of the October Revolution, was a repressive and centralized institution that would shape the Soviet Union in its own image by transforming the dictatorship of the proletariat into its own dictatorship."

When Horkheimer took the reins of the board of the Institute of Social Studies in 1930, his tenure was characterized by speculative concerns about culture and authority rather than a rigorous materialist historical analysis of capitalism, class struggle, and imperialism. In the words of Gillian Rose, "instead of politicizing academia," the Institute under Horkheimer "academized politics." This was seen perhaps nowhere more clearly than "in the constant policy of the Institute under the direction of Horkheimer," which "continued to promote abstinence, not only from any activity that was considered remotely political, but also from any organized or collective effort to make public the situation in Germany or to support emigrants." With the emergence of Nazism, Adorno attempted to enter a stage of hibernation, assuming that the regime would only persecute "pro-Soviet Orthodox Bolsheviks and Communists who had drawn attention to themselves politically" (they would certainly be the first to be locked up in concentration camps)." He "avoids making any kind of public criticism of the Nazis and their 'great power' policies."

### **American-style critical theory**

This refusal to openly engage in forms of progressive politics intensified when the Institute's leaders traveled to the United States in the early 1930s. The Frankfurt School adapted "to the local bourgeois order, censoring its own work, past and present, to please local academic or corporate sensitivities." Horkheimer exposed words like *Marxism*, *revolution*, and *communism* from his publications to avoid offending his sponsors in the U.S. Moreover, any kind of political activity was strictly prohibited, as Herbert Marcuse would later explain. Horkheimer put his energy into securing state and corporate funding for the Institute, and even hired a public relations agency to promote his work in the United States. Another emigrant from Germany, Bertolt Brecht, was not completely unjustified when he critically described Frankfurt scholars as—in the words of Stuart Jeffries—"prostitutes seeking support from foundations during their American exile, selling their skills and opinions as commodities to support the dominant ideology of oppressive American society." They were effectively free intellectual agents, without restrictions from any organization linked to the working class; free in your search for corporate or state sponsorships for your trademark theory critical to the taste of the market.

Brecht's close friend, Walter Benjamin, was one of the most important Marxist thinkers of the Frankfurt School of that era. He was unable to join the rest of the scholars in the United States because he tragically committed suicide in 1940 on the French-Spanish border, the night before he had to face what would be his nearly assured capture by the Nazis. According to Adorno, he "killed himself after he had been saved" because he had already "been appointed a permanent member of the Institute and he knew it." He had "more than enough funds" for his trip, in the words of the famous philosopher, and knew "that he could fully count on us with regard to the material." This version of the story, which presents Benjamin's suicide as an incomprehensible decision given the circumstances, was an exercise in mendacity with the aim of achieving personal and institutional exoneration, according to a detailed analysis recently published by Ulrich Fries. The leading figures of the Frankfurt School were not only unwilling to assist Benjamin financially in his fight against the Nazis, Fries argues, but also hypocritically carried out extensive cover-up campaigns to present themselves as his benevolent benefactors.

Benjamin was financially dependent on a monthly stipend from the Institute. However, Frankfurt scholars abhorred the influence of Brecht and revolutionary Marxism in his

work. Adorno had no compunction in describing Brecht with the anti-communist epithet of "savage" when he explained to Horkheimer that Benjamin should be "definitely" freed from his influence. It is not surprising, therefore, that Benjamin was afraid of losing his monthly payment in part because of Adorno's criticism of his work and his rejection of the publication of a section of his study on Baudelaire in 1938. Horkheimer explicitly told Benjamin around the same time, as fascist forces closed their encirclement around him, that he must prepare for the discontinuation of the only source of income he had had since 1934. Moreover, he argued, his hands were "unfortunately tied" when he had refused to fund Benjamin's voyage into safe territory through the purchase of a steamship passage to the United States that would have cost less than \$200. This occurred literally "one month after he transferred an extra \$50,000 to an account under his exclusive disposition," which represented the "second time in eight months" that he had insured an additional \$50,000 (the equivalent of just over \$1 million in 2022). In July 1939, Friedrich Pollock also obtained an additional \$130,000 for the Institute from Felix Weil, the wealthy son of a millionaire capitalist whose profits from real estate speculation, the meat market, and a grain company in Argentina financed the Frankfurt School.

It was political will, not money, that was lacking. Indeed, Fries agrees with Rolf Wiggerhaus that Horkheimer's cruel decision to abandon Benjamin was part of a larger pattern in which directors "systematically put the realization of the goals of their private lives above the interests of everyone else," while propagating the false appearance of having an "unblemished commitment to those who were persecuted by the Nazi regime." As if they were putting the final nail in Benjamin's coffin, the most explicit Marxist elements were removed from his literary heritage. According to Helmut Heißenbüttel: "In everything Adorno did for Benjamin's work, the Marxist-materialist side continues to be erased. [...] The work appears in a reinterpretation in which the controversial correspondent who survives imposes his vision."

Todd Cronan argues that there was a palpable change in the totality of the Frankfurt School's political orientation around 1940—the year Pollock wrote "State Capitalism"—as he turned his back on class analysis in favor of privileging race, culture, and identity. "It often seems to me," Adorno wrote to Horkheimer that year, "that everything we used to see from the point of view of the proletariat has today been concentrated with dark force on the Jews." According to Cronan, Adorno and Horkheimer "opened up the possibility



from within Marxism of seeing the class problem as a matter of power, of domination, rather than seeing it as an economic problem (the Jews were not a category defined by economic exploitation). And once that possibility emerged, it became the dominant mode of analysis of the left in general. In other words, the Frankfurt theorists helped set the stage for a more universal shift away from historical materialist analysis rooted in political economy to culturalism and identity politics, which would be consolidated in the neoliberal era.

It is profoundly revealing in this regard that the Institute embarked on a massive study of "Anti-Semitism in American Trade Unions" in 1944-45, under Pollock's tutelage. Fascism had come to power with extensive financial support from the ruling capitalist class, and continued on the path of war around the world. Still, the Frankfurt academics were hired to focus on the supposed anti-Semitism of U.S. workers rather than focusing on the capitalist founders of fascism or the existing Nazis who were fighting a war against the Soviets. They thus came to the extraordinary conclusion that "the unions run by the communists were the worst of all, and that these, consequently, had 'fascist' tendencies: "The members of these unions have a more fascist than communist mentality." The study in question was commissioned by the Jewish Labor Committee (JLC). One of the leaders of the JLC, David Dubinsky, had several connections to the Central Intelligence Agency and was involved, with the likes of CIA operatives Irving Brown and Jay Lovestone, in The Company's extensive campaign to appropriate organized unions and drive out the Communists. By identifying the communist unions as the most anti-Semitic, or even "fascist," the Frankfurt School apparently provided some of the ideological justification for destroying the communist labor movement.

Some might consider the Social Studies Institute's collaboration with U.S. authorities and justifiable self-censorship given the anti-communist, and sometimes proto-fascist, attitudes of the ruling elite in the United States, not to mention the alien enemy act. Certainly, based on a detailed look at the history and activities of the Institute on January 21, 1944, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) mobilized numerous snitches to spy on academics for about ten years out of concern that the Institute might be functioning as a communist front. The informants included associates close to the Institute such as Karl Wittfogel, other professional colleagues and even neighbors. The FBI found little or no evidence of suspicious behavior, if at all, and its officers apparently felt confident when some of their

spies, who were personally close to the Frankfurt academics, explained to them that critical theorists "believed there was no difference between Hitler and Stalin in terms of purpose and tactics." Certainly, as we will see later, they would make similar statements in some of their writings, including settling permanently in West Germany when they were no longer under direct threat of FBI surveillance or potential detention or deportation.

### **Defame the East, defend the West (and receive its money)**

In 1949-50, the intellectuals at the head of the Frankfurt School moved the Institute back to West Germany, one of the epicenters of the intellectual world war against communism. "In this environment," writes Perry Anderson, "in which the KPD [Communist Party of Germany] was to be outlawed and the SPD [Social Democratic Party of Germany] formally abandoned any connection to Marxism, the depoliticization of the Institute was completed." None other than Jürgen Habermas—who occasionally stood to the left of Adorno and Horkheimer in the early years—accused the latter of "opportunist conformism in contradiction to the critical tradition." Indeed, Horkheimer had continued to censor the work of the Institute, refusing to publish two articles by Habermas that criticized liberal democracy and spoke of "revolution," daring to suggest the possibility of an emancipation from "the chains of bourgeois society." In his private correspondence, Horkheimer openly commented to Adorno that "it is simply not possible to admit articles of this kind in the research report of an Institute that exists thanks to the public funds of this chaining society." This is, it seems, a direct confession that the economic base of the Frankfurt School was the dominant force behind its ideology, or at least its public discourse.

In this regard, it is important to remember that five of the eight members of Horkheimer's circle had worked as analysts and propagandists for the U.S. government and its national security state, which "had an established interest in the continued loyalty of the Frankfurt School as several of its members were working on sensitive government research projects." While Horkheimer and Adorno were not among them, as they received further support through the Institute, the latter of the two had originally immigrated to the United States to work for Paul Lazarsfeld's Bureau of Radio Research, one of the "de facto annexes of government psychological warfare programs." This center for communication studies received a substantial endowment of \$67,000 from the Rockefeller Foundation and worked closely with the national security state (government money constituted more than

75 percent of its annual budget). The Rockefeller Foundation also funded Horkheimer's first return to Germany in April 1948, when he accepted a guest lecture at the University of Frankfurt.

It is important to remember that the Rockefellers are one of the largest families of gangsters in the history of U.S. capitalism, and that they use their foundation as a tax haven that allows them to mobilize a portion of their wealth embezzled "in the corruption of intellectual and cultural activity." Moreover, they were directly involved in the national security state during the time they sponsored the Frankfurt School. After serving as director of the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs (a federal propaganda agency whose work was similar to that of the Office of Strategic Services and that of the CIA), Nelson Rockefeller became, in 1954, the "super-coordinator" of clandestine intelligence operations, with the title of Special Assistant to the President for Cold War Strategy." He also allowed the Rockefeller Fund to be used as a conduit for CIA money, much like what a large number of capitalist foundations that have an extensive history of working hand-in-hand with The Company did (as revealed by the Church Committee and other sources).

With all these links to the capitalist ruling class and the U.S. empire, it is by no means surprising that the U.S. government supported the Institute's return to West Germany in 1950 with a significant contribution of DM 435,000 (\$103,695, or the equivalent of \$1,195,926 in 2022). These funds were managed by John McCloy, the U.S. High Commissioner to Germany. McCloy was a central member of the U.S. power elite, who had worked as a jurist and banker for IG Farben and Big Oil, and had granted extensive pardons and commutations to Nazi war criminals. He went on and became not only the chairman of the Chase Manhattan Bank, the Council on Foreign Relations, and the Ford Foundation, but also—in a professional play that shows the intimate relationship between the capitalist ruling class and the national security state—the Director of the CIA. In addition to the funds provided by McCloy, the Institute also received support from private donors, the Society for Social Research, and the City of Frankfurt. In 1954, he even signed a research contract with the Mannesmann corporation, which "had been a founding member of the Anti-Bolshevik League and had funded the Nazi Party." During World War II, Mannesmann used slave labor, and the Chairman of the Junta was nazi Wilhelm Zangen, War Economic Leader of the Third Reich. The Post-War contract of the Frankfurt

School with this company was for a sociological study on the views of workers, with the explicit implication that such a study would help managers to prevent or delay socialist organization activities.

Perhaps the clearest explanation for why capitalist governments and corporatocracy would be willing to support the Institute of Social Studies is found in the words of Shepard Stone. The latter, we have to point out, had a background in journalism and military intelligence before moving on to work as Director of International Affairs at the Ford Foundation, where he interacted very closely with the CIA in funding cultural projects around the world (Stone was even the President of the International Association for Cultural Freedom, the new name given to congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF) in an effort to rebrand after its CIA-linked origins were revealed). When Stone was the director of public affairs for the High Commission of Occupied Germany in the 1940s, he sent a personal note to the U.S. State Department urging it to extend Adorno's passport: "The Frankfurt Institute is helping to train German leaders who will know about democratic techniques. I think it is important in relation to our overall democratic goals in Germany that men like Professor Adorno have an opportunity to work in that country." The Institute was carrying out the kind of ideological work that the U.S. state and the ruling capitalist class wanted to support, and supported.

Having achieved, and even surpassed, the ideological dictates of conformity of "the chaining society" that financed the Institute, Horkheimer openly expressed his unrestricted support for the U.S.-controlled puppet anti-communist west German government, whose intelligence services had been provisioned with former Nazis, as well as for the U.S. imperial project in Vietnam (which he deemed necessary to stop the Chinese). Speaking at one of the Amerika-Häuser in Germany, which were anti-communist outpost centers of the Kulturkampf, he solemnly declared in May 1967 that "in the United States, when it is necessary to wage a war, - and listen to me well [ ... this is not so much a problem related to the defense of the homeland, but it is essentially a matter of the defense of the constitution, of the defense of the rights of man." The great priest of critical theory describes here a country that was founded as a settler settlement, whose genocidal elimination of the indigenous population merged perfectly with a project of imperialist expansion that, it could be argued, has left the bloodiest mark – as MLK Jr. proposed in April 1967 – in the history of the modern world (including 37 military and CIA

interventions between the end of World War II). and 1967, when Horkheimer published this ignominious advertisement through a US propaganda platform).

Although Adorno frequently indulged in practicing the petty-bourgeois politics of passivity, avoiding public pronouncements on major political events, the few statements he did make were extraordinarily reactionary. For example, in 1956, he wrote with Horkheimer an article in defense of the imperialist invasion of Egypt by Israel, Britain and France, whose objective was to seize the Suez Canal and overthrow Nasser (an action condemned by the United Nations). Referring to Nasser, one of the prominent anti-colonial leaders of the non-aligned movement, as "a fascist boss [...] that conspires with Moscow," exclaiming that: "No one dares to point out that these thieving Arab states have been looking for years for an opportunity to attack Israel and to massacre the Jews who have found refuge there." According to this pseudo-dialectical inversion, it is the Arab states that are "thieves," not the settler settlements working alongside countries of the axis of imperialism to infringe on the self-determination of the Arabs. It would be useful to recall Lenin's severe rejection of this kind of sophistication, characteristic of much of what passes for "dialectics" in the global industry of theory: "Dialectics has often served [...] as a bridge to sophistry. But we remain dialectical and combat sophistry not by denying the possibility of all transformations in general, but by analyzing the given phenomenon in its context and concrete development." This concrete mode of materialistic analysis is precisely what is absent in the idealistic inversions à la Adorno and Horkheimer.

The official leaders of the Frankfurt School published one of their most overtly political texts that same year. Instead of supporting the global movement for anti-colonial liberation and for the construction of a socialist world, they celebrate—with only a couple of minor exceptions—the superiority of the West, while repeatedly discrediting the Soviet Union and China. Invoking standard racist descriptions of "the barbarians" in the West, whom they describe openly using the sub-humanization vocabulary of "beasts" and "hordes," they openly call them "fascists" who have chosen "slavery." Adorno even rebukes Germans who mistakenly think that "Russians defend socialism," reminding them that Russians are indeed "fascists," adding that the "industrialists and bankers" – with whom he identifies here – already know this.

"Everything the Russians write becomes ideology, naked, stupid antics," Adorno shamelessly asserts in his text, as if he had read everything they wrote, even though, as usual, he does not cite a single source (as far as I know, he did not read Russian either). Claiming that "there is an element of re-barbarization" in his thought, which is found according to him also in Marx and Engels, he blatantly succeeds that "it is more reified than in the most advanced forms of bourgeois thought." As if this were not false grandstanding enough, Adorno has the audacity to describe this joint writing project with Horkheimer as a "strictly Leninist manifesto." This is a discussion in which they claim that "they are not calling anyone to act," and Adorno explicitly elevates bourgeois thought and what he refers to as "culture at its most advanced" above the supposed barbarism of socialist thought. Moreover, it is in this context that Horkheimer doubles his commitment to social chauvinism by declaring, in a conclusion of a historical-global character that was not refuted by his "Leninist" collaborator: "I believe that Europe and the United States are probably the best civilizations that history has produced so far in terms of prosperity and justice. The central point now is to ensure the preservation of these achievements." This was in 1956, when the US was still mostly segregated, embroiled in anti-communist witch hunts and destabilization campaigns around the world, and when it had recently extended its imperial rule by overthrowing democratically elected governments in Iran (1953) and Guatemala (1954), while European powers carried out violent campaigns to cling to their colonies or turn them into neo-colonies.

### **"Fascism and communism are the same"**

One of the most consistent political claims put forward by Adorno and Horkheimer is that of the existence of a "totalitarian" equivalence between fascism and communism, manifested in socialist state-building projects, anti-colonial movements in the "Third World," or even in Mobilizations of the New Left in the Western world. In these three cases, those who think they are escaping the "chaining society" are only contributing to making things worse. The verifiable fact that the Western capitalist countries have not offered significant resistance against fascism, which emerged from within the capitalist world, and that it was precisely the Soviet Union that ultimately defeated it, seems not to have caused them the desire to reflect on the viability of this simplistic and ignorant thesis (not to mention the importance of socialism for the anti-colonial movements and uprisings of the 1960s). Indeed, despite his moralizing views on the horrors of Auschwitz, Adorno

seems to have forgotten who liberated the infamous concentration camp (the Red Army) into the real world.

Horkheimer had formulated his version of the horseshoe theory with particular clarity in a limited-circulation pamphlet published in 1942, which broke with Aesop's style of fable language that characterized many of the Institute's other publications. Directly accusing Friedrich Engels of utopianism, he professed that the socialization of the means of production had led to an increase in repression, and ultimately to the formation of an authoritarian state. "The bourgeoisie at first kept the government under control through its property," according to this millionaire's son, while in new societies socialism simply "did not work," except to produce the erroneous belief that one was – through the party, the honorable leader, or the supposed march of history – "acting in the name of something greater than oneself." Horkheimer's position in this article aligns perfectly with anarcho-anti-communism, a highly disseminated ideology within the Western left: a "classless democracy" is supposed to spontaneously emerge from people through "free agreements," without the supposed pernicious influence of parties or states. As Domenico Losurdo has insightfully pointed out, the Nazi war machine was devastating the Soviet Union during the early 1940's, and Horkheimer's call for socialists to abandon the state and party centralization was consequently tantamount to nothing less than a demand for capitulation to the rampant genocide of the Nazis.

While there are vague suggestions at the end of Horkheimer's 1942 pamphlet hinting that there might be something desirable in socialism, later texts fully highlight his unequivocal rejection of it. For example, when Adorno and Horkheimer were considering making a public statement about their relationship with the Soviet Union, Adorno sent the following draft of a planned co-authored article to Horkheimer: "Our philosophy, as a dialectical critique of the widespread social tendency of the time, constitutes the sharpest opposition to the policies and doctrine emanating from the Soviet Union. We are not able to see in the practice of military dictatorships disguised as people's democracies nothing more than a new form of repression." It is worth noting regarding this, taking into account the overwhelming lack of materialist analysis of existing socialisms in practice on the part of Adorno and Horkheimer, that even the CIA recognized that the Soviet Union was not a dictatorship.

In a report dated March 2, 1955, the Agency clearly states: "Even during the Stalin era

there was a collective leadership. The Western idea of a dictator within the communist infrastructure is exaggerated. Misunderstandings in this regard are caused by a lack of understanding about the true nature and organization of the Communist power structure."

In 1959, Adorno published a text entitled "The Meaning of Working Through the Past" in which he recycled the "shameful truth" of "Philistine wisdom" referred to in this first draft, namely that — in complete conformity with the dominant Cold War ideology in the West — fascism and communism are the same because they are two forms of "totalitarianism." Openly dismissing the advantage of the "political-economic ideology" viewpoint, which obviously distinguishes these two warring factions, Adorno claimed to have privileged access to a deeper sociopsychological dynamic that unites the two. As "authoritarian personalities," he said, fascists and communists "possess weak egos" and compensate by identifying themselves with "the really existing power" and "the great collectives." The mere notion of an "authoritarian personality" is thus a deceptive hook aimed at synthesizing opposing forces through a psychologized pseudo-dialectic. Moreover, it brings to hand the question of why psychology, and certain particular forms of thought seem to have, at least here, a more central role in terms of historical explanation than material forces and class struggle.

Despite this attempt to identify fascists and communists psychologically, Adorno goes further and suggests, in the same text, that the Nazi assault on the Soviet Union might be retrospectively justified given the fact that the Bolsheviks were—as Hitler himself had claimed—a threat to Western civilization. "The threat from the East surrounding the hills of Western Europe is obvious," Adorno was right, "and whoever falters in resisting it is literally guilty of repeating Chamberlain's appeasement." The analogy is revealing because, in this case, not fighting them would mean appeasing the "fascist" communists. In other words, despite the twisted darkness of his phraseology, this seems to be a target that invites military opposition to the advance of communism (which coincides perfectly with Horkheimer's support for the U.S. imperialist war in Vietnam).

Adorno's fierce rejection of existing real-world socialisms is in plain sight in his exchange with Alfred Sohn-Rethel. The latter asked him if *The Negative Dialectic* had anything to say about changing the world, and if the Chinese Cultural Revolution was part of the 'affirmative tradition that he condemned.' Adorno replied that he condemned the "moral



pressure" of "official Marxism" to put philosophy into practice. "Nothing but hopelessness can save us," he proclaimed with his trademark of petty-bourgeois melancholy. Adding, to emphasize the point, that events in Communist China were not a cause for hope, he explained with memorable insistence that his entire life as a thinker had been devoted to rejecting this form—and presumably others—of socialism: "I would have to deny everything I have thought my entire life if I admitted to feeling nothing but horror in the face of its presence." Adorno's open indulgence in hopelessness and his simultaneous contempt for socialisms existing in the real world are not simply idiosyncratic and personal reactions but affectations that emerge from a class position. "The representatives of the modern workers' movement," Lenin wrote in 1910, "realize that they have much to fight against, but nothing to be hopeless about." In a description that anticipated Adorno's petty-bourgeois pessimism, the leader of the world's first successful socialist revolution proceeded to explain that "hopelessness is typical of those who do not understand the causes of evil, see no way out, and are unable to fight."

Adorno also followed this line of thought, or rather sentiment, in his critiques of anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist student activism against the 1960s war. He agreed with Habermas—who had been a member of the Hitler Youth and studied for four years under the "Nazi philosopher" (his own description of Heidegger)—on the idea that this kind of activism was a form of "Left fascism." He defended West Germany by calling it a functioning democracy rather than a "fascist" state, as some of the students argued. At the same time, he quarreled with Marcuse over what he considered the latter's misguided support for students and the anti-war movement, explicitly arguing that the answer to the question "What should be done?", for a good practitioner of dialectics, is nothing at all: "the goal of a real praxis should be its own abolition." In this way he inverted, through dialectical sophistication, one of the central foundations of Marxism, namely the primacy of practice. It is in this context of turning Marx upside down that he repeated, once again, the ideological mantra of the capitalist world: "fascism and communism are the same." Although he alluded to this slogan as "a petty-bourgeois truism," apparently acknowledging its ideological status, he embraced it without shame.

Idealism is the trademark of Adorno and Horkheimer's reflections on socialisms existing in the real world and, more generally, on progressive social movements. Instead of studying the projects they denigrate with the same level of rigor and seriousness with

which they sometimes approach other issues, they take refuge in cartoonish depictions and anti-communist slanders absent from a concrete analysis (although they occasionally refer to anti-communist publications, such as those of the rabid Cold War soldier Arthur Koestler, which were generously financed and supported by imperialist states and their intelligence services). This is particularly true in the case of his demonization of socialist state-building projects. His writings on the subject are not only remarkably devoid of references to any academic study on the subject, but operate as if that kind of serious research were not even necessary. These texts carry out a genuflection in the face of the dominant ideology, stubbornly insisting on the anti-Stalinist bona fides of their authors, without worrying about any of the details, nuances or complexities.

One cannot but wonder, then, whether the students were not right when, in the late 1960s, pamphlets were circulating claiming that these Frankfurt academics were "left-wing idiots of the authoritarian state" who were "critical in theory, conformist in practice." Hans-Jürgen Krahl, one of Teodoro Adorno's doctoral students, went so far as to publicly affront his mentor and the rest of the Frankfurt professors as "Scheißkritische Theoretiker [shitty theoretical critics]." He gave voice to this lapidary critique of these loyal defenders of abs [Anything But Socialism] Theory while he was being arrested, at Adorno's request, for an occupation of the university related to his participation in the German League of Socialist Students. The fact that the author of *The Negative Dialectic* called the police to arrest his own students is a standard reference point for his political detractors. As we have seen, if anything, this is just the tip of the iceberg. Not only is it not an aberrant anomaly, but it is consistent with its policies, its social function within the intellectual apparatus, its class status, and its generalized orientation within the global class struggle.

### **The Tuis of Western "Marxism"**

Brecht proposed the neologism "Tuis" to refer to intellectuals (Intellektuellen) who, as subjects of a commodified culture, understand everything backwards (for that reason Tellekt-uellen-in). He had shared his ideas for a Novel-Tui with Benjamin in the 1930s, and later wrote a play that emerged from his original notes, entitled *Turandot* or *The Congress of the Bleachers*. Having returned to the German Democratic Republic after World War II to contribute to the socialist state-building project, unlike the Frankfurt

academics who settled in West Germany with funding from the ruling capitalist class, Turandot was written in part as a satirical critique of these Western "Marxists."

In the play, the Tuis are presented as professional bleachers who receive a generous salary for making things appear to be the opposite of what they really are. "The whole country is governed by injustice," Sen says in Turandot, before providing a concise summary of the ABS Theory: "and at Tui Academy everything one learns is because it has to be this way." Tui training, like the work of the Institute of Social Studies, teaches us that there is no alternative to the dominant order, and thus closes the possibility of systemic change. In one of the most shocking scenes, the Tuis are shown preparing for the congress of bleachers. Nu Shan, one of the Academy's teachers, operates a pulley system that can lower or raise a basket of bread in front of the presenter's face. In the process of training a young man named Shi Me to become a Tui, he tells him to talk about the topic "Because Kai Ho's position is false" (Kai Ho is a revolutionary who resembles Mao Zedong). Nu Shan explains that he will lift the basket with bread over his head if Shi Me says something wrong and that he will lower it in front of his face if what he says is correct. After much raising and lowering the basket in relation to Shi Me's ability to conform to the dominant ideology, his arguments go in crescendo to the point of becoming an anti-communist defamatory squeal absent from any rational argumentation: "Kai Ho is no philosopher, but a simple word - the basket goes down - an insubordinate, a miser for good-for-nothing power, an irresponsible gambler, a slanderer, a rapist, an atheist, a bandit and a criminal. The basket now floats right in front of the presenter's mouth. A tyrant!" This scene presents, in a microcosm, the relationship between professional intellectuals and their financial sponsors within class societies: the former earn their bread as academic free agents by supplying the best possible ideology for the latter. Thoughts to feed the mind.

What the Frankfurt School could offer the bread suppliers of "the chaining society" is by no means insignificant. Mobilizing pseudo-dialectical sophistication, they defended in pretentious academic language the State Department's idea that communism is indistinguishable from fascism, even though 27 million Soviets had given their lives to defeat the Nazi war machine in World War II (to mention just one of the most obvious forms of opposition between communism and fascism, although of course there are many others given the fact that they are mortal enemies). Further, by shifting the class struggle

in favor of an idealistic critical theory amputated from any practical political participation, they moved away from the very foundations of analysis by moving them from dialectical materialism to a generalized theory of domination, power, and identity thinking.

In this way, Adorno and Horkheimer ultimately played the role of radical recuperators. Cultivating a semblance of radicalism, they regained the very activity of criticism using a pro-Western, anti-communist ideology. Like other members of the petty-bourgeois intelligentsia in Europe and the United States, which formed the basis of Western Marxism, they publicly expressed their chauvinist-social repudiation with what they described as the savage barbarians of the East, who dared to take into their hands the weapon of Marxist-Lenin theory and use it to act under the principle of self-determination of peoples. From the relative comfort of their academic citadel in the West financed by capitalism, they defended the superiority of the Euro-American world which they promoted by contrasting it with what they designated as the flattening project of the Bolshevized barbarians in the uncivilized periphery.

Moreover, his widespread theory of domination is part of a broader adoption of anti-party and anti-state ideology, which ultimately leaves the Left orphaned from the tools of disciplined organization that is necessary to carry out successful struggles against the widely funded political, military, and cultural apparatus of the ruling capitalist class. This coincides perfectly with his widespread policy of defeat, which Adorno explicitly adopted through his anti-Marxist defense of inaction as the highest form of praxis. The leaders of the Tui Academy in Frankfurt, generously funded and supported by the ruling capitalist class and imperialist states, including the US national security state, were thus the promoters of the anti-communist policies of accommodation to capitalism. Wringing their hands in the face of the miseries of the consumer society, which they sometimes described in stunning detail, yet they refused to do anything practical about it because of their primal understanding that the socialist cure to these misfortunes is worse than the disease itself. **Translated from English by Emiliano Silva Izquierdo.**

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