

REVIEW AND COMMENT

Antagonism or harmony between Marx and Freud?—The Negro people—Planning our society

A REVIEW is, unfortunately, not possible to be other than summary; and being summary, in turn, runs the risk of seeming dogmatic. So, since a detailed criticism of a work of this kind* would require at least as much space as the book itself, we shall here concern ourselves only with those central issues which bring out clearly the radical antagonism and incompatibility between the world-outlooks of Marxism and Freudism.

Central to Marxism is the conception of "human nature" (otherwise "psychology") as essentially fluid and transformable. The very pivot of Marx's dialectical materialism in general, and his dialectical sociology in particular, is the concept that "in the beginning was the deed"—that "men make their circumstances as much as their circumstances make men"—that "in transforming nature, men progressively transform themselves"—that the revolutionary triumph of the proletariat is not possible without a "prolonged struggle transforming circumstances and men."

Central to Freudism is the notion of a fixed, inescapable "psychology"—an apparatus of subconscious and subjective forces which remains almost wholly beyond all hope of modification or transformation by any human activity whatsoever. Right at the outset the opposition between Marx and Freud is clear.

This opposition grows increasingly the more absolute the further we proceed. For Marx the individual consciousness—all that Freud comprises under the categories of "ego," and "super-ego"—presupposes human society and is its historically conditioned outcome. For Freud, the self-contained individual is logically and historically prior to, and the presupposition of, human society; in fact, for Freud human society is not a positive, but a purely relative descriptive category.

That is to say: For Marx "psychology" is the product of society. For Freud society is the product of psychology—only so far as men by means of their super-ego "identify" themselves with social institutions is society possible at all.

The radical incompatibility between the sociology explicit in Marx and implicit in Freud is brought out most clearly in their respective attitudes to revolution, feminism, and religion.

Freud, taking the ordinary bourgeois view that a revolution is a mere interruption of normal order without objectively progressive significance (taking, that is to say, the conventional bourgeois view that the bourgeois-individualist form of society is the only possible social form, past, present, and to come, so that history shows nothing but superficial alterations of no fundamental significance) pours out his scorn upon bolshevism as only another sort of religion. He sees in it only

another example of the "mob" following enthusiastically a group of deluding and deluded "leaders" who are "obliged to compensate believers for the sufferings and deprivations of the present life by promising them a better life in future."

To Freud, government in general is possible only so far as the governors can secure the emotional relation of "fathers" to their "children"—the "mob" aforesaid. That is to say, carrying the implications of this argument to their logical conclusion, the mass and ruck of mankind are forever incapable of rational behavior. Hence it follows that as they are bound to be deluded anyway (either by their own "repressions," "complexes," "rationalizations" or "wish-fulfillments"), all that a would-be governor has to do is to hit upon the most effective delusion he can find to exploit to his advantage the child-like emotions of the mob. In other words (those of Bernard Shaw), "the art of government is the art of organizing idolatry."

And Osborn, with disarming simplicity, invites the Communist Party to act accordingly:

And if psychology tells us that no movement will win the support of the masses which does not offer a leader who arouses adequately the emotional attitudes which . . . relate to the child-parent situation, then a movement which boasts of its scientific outlook must hasten to provide such a leader.

So! In the name of "science" (Freudian brand) the Communist Party of the U. S. A. must turn itself into a cult for the adoration of Earl Browder!

This notion of the basic and ineradicable significance of the child-parent relation runs all through Freudism, by implication in its pseudo-psychology (notably in its Oedipus-complex mythology) and explicitly in its sociology. But always it is a bourgeois family, one based upon the all-but-absolute dominion of the male parent (with the corresponding subjection of the female), which is envisaged. This with Freud is open and un concealed. With Osborn, faced with the devastating assault delivered by Marx and Engels upon the bourgeois conception of the family, and the bourgeois notion of its absolute necessity and finality, the same end is reached by an amazing succession of distortions of the

plain sense and meaning of the Marx-Engels criticism.

Engels, in his *Origin of the Family*—a work largely based upon Marx's own notes upon Morgan's *Ancient Society*—gave a brilliant demonstration of the general process whereby the bourgeois family had been evolved, one which showed that, being the product of history, this form of the family was bound to be transitory. Osborn, who, apparently, has no notion that this is the plain sense of Engels's work, used this very essay to "prove" all the things which Engels denied.

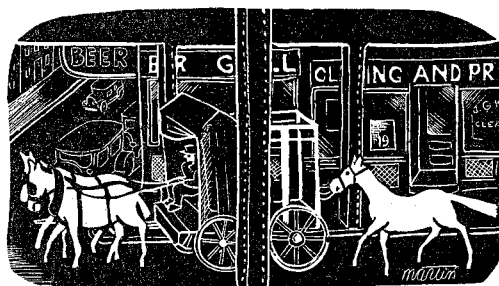
For instance, and outstandingly, Freud avowedly builds his theory of the Oedipus complex on the supposition that "in the beginning" human society existed in the form of "small communities" in which a man possessed "a single wife, or if powerful, several, whom he jealously defended against all other men." This, says Osborn,

Freud developed into the theory that the primal horde was ruled over by a powerful male, who kept all the females for himself, and compelled the younger males, under threat of castration, to restrain their sexual desires.

Now on the face of it, this theory already projects into primitive society relations and notions compatible only with bourgeois conditions of existence. Why, for instance, should the women allow themselves to be monopolized by any one man? Why, in these circumstances, should the "horde" submit to rule at all? Why should the younger males cower in submission before the simple threat of castration? Why, in such circumstances, should there be any horde at all? Was there not all the world to run away into?

Engels, in fact, shatters the notion completely. He shows in the first place that it was a false deduction from the alleged "natural instincts" of apes and gorillas. He suggests, shrewdly, that the few cases of observed gorilla behavior from which it was deduced were cases of species *on the road to extinction*. And he argues that the alleged "instinct of jealousy" upon which the whole theory rests—and with it the theory of the natural necessity of bourgeois marriage—is demonstrably a myth. The central fact to grasp, Engels argues, is that the survival, and still more the historical development of human society, presupposes a relatively large and, in any case, a *permanent* group, and "the mutual tolerance of the grown males, freedom from jealousy, was the first condition for the formation of such large and permanent groups, within which alone the transformation from beast to man could be accomplished."

Will it be believed that Osborn cites this very sentence as a "proof" that Engels's view was substantially identical with Freud's? Will it be believed that John Strachey is so impressed that he cites that very sentence as one



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* *Freud and Marx*, by Reuben Osborn. Equinox Coöperative Press. \$2.50.

that might have come from Freud? Yet such is the case. It is clear that neither Osborn nor (alas!) John Strachey has grasped the first essential of the problem as it was apparent to Frederick Engels.

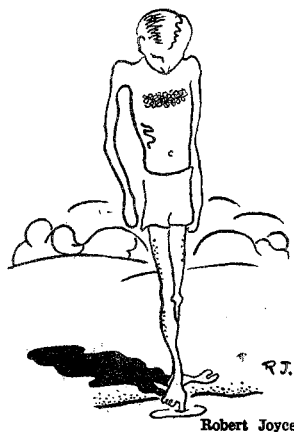
As Engels saw the matter, the history of the family was only that of the progressive social qualification of the range of free choice in copulation. Following broadly the line of Morgan, he argued that intercourse was first prohibited between age classifications, all of generation A being debarred from copulating with the preceding generation B and the succeeding generation C. Later, a vertical line of prohibition was added by the division of the "horde" into two halves, copulation being barred within the "home" moiety. Further subdivision begot a complex of "gens" subdivisions, and finally, in the appropriate economic conditions, emerged the patriarchal household, the starting-point for the patriarchal clan, and the male-dominated form of the family.

Freud sees in this process nothing but the prohibition—which for him gains its whole significance from his supposition that every man's lust is primarily directed towards his nearest female kin. He projects into the most primitive society the relations of the patriarchal family—which, based upon cattle-breeding, might, at times, produce a situation in which all the women in sight were "monopolized" by the patriarch and denied to the young men, his sons. But even in these conditions no such situation as Freud imagines could endure for long. The patriarchal household needed children as no other household ever did. While the patriarch would, no doubt, for precautionary reasons, keep his sons from meddling with his own wives (and also see no reason for abstaining from meddling with their wives), it was to his interest to see that they did have wives, and sons, and grandsons.

Thus the Freudian theory of a family in which the young men are faced with a permanent fear of castration is, in the first place, based upon a perversion of the patriarchal conception of the family, and is in the second place utterly inconceivable in primitive society; indeed, in any sort of society.

Freud not only argues that because of the original composition of the family—the monopoly of women by the jealous gorilla-like father—all boys are born with a sexual appetite for their own mothers, and a concomitant desire to strangle their own fathers (of which Oedipus-desire, by the way, Freud thinks that revolutionary enthusiasm is an expression), but he goes further and argues that the fear of castration, born of this relation, is an ingrained hereditary impulse in the whole human race.

"I believe these primal phantasies are a phylogenetic possession. It seems to me quite possible that castration itself was in prehistoric periods of the human family a reality." So Osborn quotes Freud as saying. But neither Freud nor Osborn tackles the obvious difficulty that if castration ever was a general habit, it could not possibly have been trans-



mitted as a "phylogenetic possession," since those castrated would have no progeny, and those with progeny would have no castration experience to pass on.

Yet, despite this obvious objection, Freud supposes that the Oedipus-complex and its derivative, the castration-complex, are the chief determinants not only of male, but of female character today.

The girl, he argues, is so disgusted on discovering that she hasn't a penis like her brother that she hates her mother for "depriving" her of this adornment. Says Freud:

The girl remains in the Oedipus situation for an indefinite period; she only abandons it late in life and then incompletely. The formation of the super-ego must suffer in these circumstances.

A more preposterous mode of reaching an excuse for a reactionary-philistine attitude towards women and feminism was never invented.

The Oedipus-complex provides Freud, too, with his theory of religion which, according to him, is simply a projection of the father-emotion innate in every individual.

Here again the conflict between Marx and Freud is absolute. For Marx religion is a historically conditioned social-reflex phenomenon which arises in certain social relations and will disappear when these relations have ceased to be. For Freud it is an inescapable projection of man's basic psychology which can, in special cases, be cured by psychoanalysis, but is otherwise chronic and permanent.

And at this point we touch the fundamentally irrational idealism of the Freudian mythology; since here we have naked and unashamed the bifurcation of human society into the crude, irrational, repression- and complex-ridden "mob," and the lordly, aristocratic few, the psychoanalysts.

I challenge the whole of this position on every ground. Whatever worth there may be in psychoanalysis as a technique in cases of neurosis, there is less than no use at all in Freudism as a psychology. And when Freudism is offered as a substitute for all the genuine work which has been done in psychology, alike on its speculative side by the philosophers from Hobbes to Hegel, and by the physiologists up to and including Pavlov—to say nothing of the work of the behaviorists and the Gestalt psychologists—it is time, and high time, that in the interests of the science a protest should

be made against the upholders of this pretentious ballyhoo.

Most of all must we direct the challenge against the attempt to adulterate Marx with this spurious, eclectic compost of metaphysics, mythological guesswork, and idealistic epistemology which is adored as "Freud."

If Freud is right, no such thing as a rational theory of the universe is possible. All our theories are, according to Freud, "rationalizations"—that is to say, myths invented by our subconsciousness to excuse ourselves for doing what we are going to do anyway.

Osborn, for instance, quotes with approval (what seems to be a favorite example with Freudians) Bernard Hart's story of the Sunday-school teacher who turned atheist because his best girl ran off with a fellow-Sunday-school teacher. Although the man in question had, admittedly, acquired quite a wide knowledge of the relevant literature, Hart insists, with Osborn's approval, that what was really responsible for his atheism was the fact that he had been jilted.

If this means anything at all, it means that atheism is a delusion requiring psycho-therapeutical treatment. In fact, carried to its logical conclusion, it means that any rational theory about anything, save, and save only, the theory of Freud, must be in like manner a "complex," a "repression," a "rationalization," or one or another of the Freudian categories of delusional insanity. In fact, Freudism, which began as a practice for the treatment of neurosis, becomes a theory only by taking it for granted that all men are insane.

It is a thousand pities that John Strachey should have given his blessing to this exposition of a theory which is totally incompatible with Marxism.

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An Oppressed Nation

THE NEGRO GENIUS, by Benjamin Brawley. Dodd, Mead & Co. \$2.50.

THE BRONZE BOOKLETS, published by The Associates in Negro Folk Education, Washington, D. C., 25 cents each. No. 1—Adult Education Among Negroes, by Ira De A. Reid. No. 2—The Negro and His Music, by Alain Locke. No. 3—Negro Art: Past and Present, by Alain Locke. No. 4—A World View of Race, by Ralph J. Bunche.

THE current year has witnessed many events significant for the Negro people in their struggle for equality and liberation, and important also, therefore, for the white working class, which cannot free itself while the Negro people are oppressed. Outstanding in various respects are: the freeing of Angelo Herndon, and the C.I.O. drive to organize Negro and white workers into the same unions. On the other side of the ledger one may record the appalling sale of millions of copies of Margaret Mitchell's *Gone With the Wind*, as vicious a piece of historic misrepresentation and slander of the Negro people as has come out of the South. The popularity of this book shows the need for vast public education on