

APPENDIX #1

The View From Inside: George Konrad and Ivan Szelenyi's

The Intellectuals on the Road to Class Power

(Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, NYC, 1979)

That intellectuals in the Eastern bloc are not completely oblivious to their class position under socialism is demonstrated by the working of these two Hungarian dissidents. Despite their reliance on subjective sociological categories, Konrad and Szelenyi present a revealing view of the inner workings of socialist opportunism, of the means by which intellectuals promote themselves, secure their privileged status, and foster middle class strivings among the more ambitious workers. It is not, however, a consistent self-criticism of the intelligentsia, since in their conclusions the authors still allow for a fraction of the intellectuals to provide ideological leadership to the working class.

The persistence of class prejudices is revealed by several major defects in the authors' analytical framework.

Although Konrad and Szelenyi acknowledge the class structure of socialist society and define the working class as an exploited stratum, they deny that the Soviet Union and Eastern European countries are a form of state capitalism. This denial is based on their belief that the concept of capitalism necessitates formal private ownership of the means of production and the free sale of wage labor on an open market. In place of state capitalism, the authors offer the less intimidating category of "rational redistributive systems." A ruling class and oppression still occur, but somehow the state is neither bourgeois nor proletarian.

Their substitution accomplishes several things. It dilutes the criticism of socialist states by removing them from the sphere of international monopoly capitalism. The actual development of the socialist movement and its state forms is thus obscured, since instead of being an integral consequence of advanced capitalism, they are viewed as a departure from it. Likewise, the class contradictions within socialist society are given a unique status, since if there is no real bourgeoisie, there is really no one to overthrow. As a consequence of this view, the authors ignore the issue of armed force and emphasize instead the development of "critical self-knowledge" within the intelligentsia as a means to reform the system.

Obviously what is needed here is a little more critical self-knowledge. If, as the authors state, formal ownership of the means of production is so central to the definition of capitalism, then every bankrupt enterprise, industry or utility in the West that is nationalized automatically falls into the category of socialist "rational redistribution." Likewise, any capitalist government (for instance, the Nixon administration during the early 1970's) which institutes wage-price controls, and thus artificially sets the price of labor power, automatically becomes to that extent a socialist "rational redistributive" government.

What is actually occurring in those instances, however, is the further integration of finance capital and the state power, an integration that is essential to the preservation of capitalist relations and which reaches its highest form in the socialist state. Capitalism does not cease to be capitalism on that account, but simply sheds those formal aspects peculiar to laissez-faire and adopts new ones more attuned to monopoly. Under monopoly conditions, it makes little difference whether a particular bourgeois holds a certificate of ownership over the means of production. What **is** essential is that the factories run, the workers work, surplus product be produced and appropriated, and that this entire process be directed by and for a ruling class. State capitalism facilitates this process by rationalizing the essential features of capitalist production, by combining economic and political power into a direct, unified authority, and by thus giving the bourgeoisie even greater dominion over the working class.

While it is true that class conflicts in the Eastern bloc countries do not assume traditional forms, i.e. capitalists versus workers, one should not confuse this change in form with a change in fundamental economic relations. Under socialism, the big bourgeoisie is maintained through the top strata of the party and state bureaucracy, the professions and labor aristocracy. The integration of the ruling strata gives them greater hegemony, but at the same time poses a greater hazard. Unlike traditional capitalist society, protesting workers do not confront a single company or industry, but the entire state apparatus. It is no small wonder that significant strike movements in socialist society have been so rare.

Since Konrad and Szelenyi do not view socialism as a variation of monopoly capitalism, their analysis of the socialist intelligentsia takes on a supra-class coloring that ultimately leads them to repeat in miniature the same fallacies they have set out to critique.

The intelligentsia, in the authors' view, took power in the socialist republics, but not as a class. By their analysis, in fact, the socialist intelligentsia is only in the process of consolidating its class status, and cannot really do so until it organizes to depose the ruling elite, i.e. the top party and state officials, and take power for itself.

The authors propose that this be done through an alliance of the technocracy (the "necessary" intelligentsia) and the working class. As could be expected, a vanguard role is reserved for the "marginal intellectuals," i.e. people like Konrad and Szelenyi themselves, who will serve as ideologists of the new movement. Having achieved critical self-knowledge, the intelligentsia will be able to restrain its own appetites, organize workers' self-management and thus set socialist society on a true non-exploitative course.

It is obvious that the authors never had to work for a living, and intend to keep things that way. The ruling elite (actually, big bourgeoisie), which presently frustrates the middling intelligentsia by its control over every channel of careerism and upward mobility, is to be removed. The working class, which constantly threatens the whole structure of class privileges by its pivotal economic position, is to be mollified by a steady diet of self-management and paternalism. And best of all, the intelligentsia is to remain an intelligentsia.

All that Konrad and Szelenyi have done by this scenario is to duplicate the one originally formulated by the founders of modern socialism.

In traditional capitalist society, it is the openly bourgeois class that dominates the system and frustrates the ambitions of the middle strata. In socialist society this position is taken

by the top party officialdom. Under ordinary capitalism, dissident intellectuals begin to formulate various critiques of the system and look for support in the only social class that has the means and position to overthrow it, i.e. the proletariat. Under socialism, the "marginal intellectuals" take the critical posture. In the old socialist movements, the intellectuals predominated in the party, originated the movement's aims and tactics, and rationalized their leading position on the grounds that they had abandoned their former narrow outlook and interests. In the new movement the authors propose, the intellectuals will do the same, rationalized on the basis of "critical self-knowledge." When the old socialist movements finally took power, the real class striving behind the intelligentsia's subjective good intentions was revealed: to secure and develop the social and economic privileges of the middle class. This inevitably gave rise to further stratification within the middle class, and thus to the emergence of a socialist bourgeoisie.

With Konrad and Szelenyi's proposals the entire farce has come full circle. Once again the middle strata finds itself between a rock and a hard spot, i.e. between the bourgeoisie and proletariat. To realize its full potential, that is, to become bourgeois itself, it must overthrow the existing bourgeoisie. And at the same time it must maintain the proletariat as a productive class so as to insure its own existence as a parasitic class. Critical self-knowledge is a very good thing, but as the authors inadvertently show, it may be something the intelligentsia will never really know.