

Richard Gilman-Opalsky. *The Communism of Love: An Inquiry into the Poverty of Exchange Value.* AK Press 2020. 336 pp. \$22.00 USD (Paperback ISBN 9781849353915).

In *The Communism of Love*, Richard Gilman-Opalsky expands on the findings of the critical psychoanalyst Erich Fromm to explain how interpersonal love challenges capitalism, namely by rejecting the place of ownership and hierarchy in social life. 'Love is communism within capitalism,' assert Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Bernsheim (87). As such, the experience of love is a unifying, disruptive, and enlivening one connected with affection, hope, and revolt. For Gilman-Opalsky (G-O), it corresponds to a *Gemeinwesen*, or communal sensibility, and a *Gemeingeist*, or collective spirit. We humans yearn for humanizing loving connections, and the erotic movement from self to Other functions as 'connective tissue' which ensures social reproduction and wards off dehumanization, instrumentalization, and death (197).

Despite having a promising premise, G-O relies on rhetorical manipulation, marring it with conceit. For example, without evidence or argument, he conveys his disagreement with Jacques Camatte's dystopian insistence on the subjection of all life to capitalist domination, 'even in the face of more recent ecological catastrophe[s]' (47). Such a perspective would block out the ongoing melting and burning of the Arctic and Siberia. Likewise, there is a glaring absence in this book of an internalization of Fromm's principled critique of Stalinism. Instead of discussing the anarcho-feminist Emma Goldman, G-O centers the Bolshevik Alexandra Kollontai and the Maoist Alain Badiou. Notably, G-O belittles Fromm, who criticized Marx's centralism and dogmatism in the International Workingmen's Association (IWMA), as an 'anemic social democra[t]' (*The Sane Society*, Routledge 1956, 251), while he portrays Marx—who expelled the anarchists Mikhail Bakunin and James Guillaume from the IWMA in 1872 on baseless charges, and arguably wrecked the organization in so doing—as wholesome (8).

Unconsciously undermining the very *raison d'être* for his book, G-O asserts that 'Fromm's concept of socialism has been long outstripped in the years after the Cold War and is no longer useful to communist philosophy' (11). In light of the dire need for the application of Fromm's anti-bureaucratic politics and anarchistic psychosocial concepts, the social character above all, in the face of Trumpism and global conservative-authoritarian reaction, such a dismissive attitude remains untenable. G-O reproduces the living past, channeling Theodor W. Adorno's unease about the ideological threat that Fromm's 'sentimental ... blend of social democracy and anarchism' might pose to the Marxist-Leninist affirmation of the authority principle.

Considering Adorno's point, which is not rhetorically far-removed from the stark Leninist dismissal and purge of 'utopian socialists' who were, in fact, true revolutionaries, taken together with Fromm's view of the continuities between Marx and Lenin, it is odd to choose this economist as a source on love. Through his rejection of idealism and psychology, Marx ended up envisioning a totalitarian overcoming of moral and emotional reasoning in the historical process (117-8). Accordingly, the Russian science-fiction writer Evgeny Zamyatin, author of *We* (Avon 1920), which inspired George Orwell's *1984*, implicitly criticized not only Lenin—being a premonition of Stalin—but also Marx in his dystopian portrayal of a mechanized-centralized future (Stites, R., *Revolutionary Dreams: Utopian Vision and Experimental Life in the Russian Revolution*, Oxford University Press 1989, 187-8). In parallel, Fromm rejected Marx's 'inattention to emotions, morality, and human nature,' such that his theory improves upon that of his predecessor (Maccoby, M. and N. McLaughlin, 'Sociopschoanalysis and Radical Humanism: A Fromm-Bourdieu Synthesis,' in *Erich Fromm's Critical Theory: Hope, Humanism, and the Future*, ed. Durkin, Joan Braune, Bloomsbury

2020, 115).

G-O neither mentions that Marx rejected the anarchist call for gender equality and the abolition of the family, nor considers Marx and Engels' own homophobia, and precisely how their anti-gay animus influenced the decision to summarily expel Bakunin from the IWMA in 1872. Whereas G-O is right to condemn the misogyny exhibited by many queer men toward women throughout history, he does queerness a disservice by implying that male homosexuality tends as through compulsion to be sexist and lesbophobic (66-71). It is also questionable whether sex-love necessarily promotes isolation and privatization, as G-O implies. His own consideration of the love-bonds in war between Socrates and Alcibiades and Spartacus and his newly unearthed female partner contradict such a view.

Despite leaning heavily on Kollontai's avowal of love as comradeship, G-O admits that this Bolshevik's approach was 'too bound up with statist initiatives' (11). Though Kollontai was a leader of the Workers' Opposition, such a concession to anarchist readers is unconvincing, in light of the book's pallid critiques of Leninism, Stalinism, and the Soviet Union. The Russian Civil War ended with the Red Army victorious over the White reactionaries *and* the 'Green' partisans and Makhnovist anarchist peasants; the Kronstadt Commune was suppressed in March 1921, the very day before the Reds publicly celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of the Paris Commune in Petrograd. Despite being a far more principled critic than either Kollontai or G-O of Marxism-Leninism, as well as a champion of feminism and free love, Emma Goldman does not appear once in the text. While G-O's brief integration of bell hooks' sex-positive 'anarchism of love' into the study is welcome, it is significant that Goldman, eyewitness to the Kronstadt massacre, is entirely missing. Other than for one mention on the book's last page, Stalin, the homophobic patriarchal despot and ally of Hitler, is similarly conspicuous in his absence.

Perhaps, rather than *The Communism of Love*, this volume might have been entitled 'The Love of Marxism.' G-O betrays his biases when he recognizes bell hooks as an anarchist-communist, but then immediately describes her as 'never [having been] committed to any kind of communism' (216). Here, we must differentiate between Marxism and communism, for communism is a form of life that originates in our individual and collective development and evolution as a species. It was not invented in modernity, and certainly not by Marx. Indeed, Marxism can be viewed as a problematic theory for the communist goals it proposes. Despite this, in *The Communism of Love*, Marx often appears as a *Deus ex Machina*. G-O wants to reinterpret Marxism as anti-state communism, but his account is suspect, for he too easily elides the catastrophes of Stalinism and the Soviet Union, and the obvious links between Marxism and Marxism-Leninism as bureaucratic ideologies. G-O promotes distrust when he implies that Kollontai's 1923 letter to the Soviet *Komsomol* (Communist Youth League) was written during the 'revolutionary period in Russia' (131). In reality, a reconstituted Tsarist Empire whose survival was secured through the Bolsheviks' destruction of the *Makhnovshchina* and the Kronstadt and Tambov Communes, and the forcible reincorporation of Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Ukraine, Siberia, and Turkestan, cannot be revolutionary.

In his book, G-O examines familial love, friendship, compassion, and Eros from an anti-Freudian and sex-negative vantage point that is consistent with Marxism's Victorianism. Accordingly, G-O reproduces the puritanical sexual taboo of early Soviet utopian science-fiction writers. Having teased readers by introducing Rosa Luxemburg's love-bond with Leo Jogiches, G-O writes: 'If you would like to pursue that story, you will have to do it elsewhere' (128). Along these same lines, G-O inconceivably argues that love is fundamentally communist, just as he 'caution[s] against any romanticization of the power of Eros,' all the while glossing over Freud's hypothesis that all love is either libidinally based, or a sublimated libidinality, except in passing (10, 91, 155, 286-7). In this

sense, if Fromm improved on Marx and Freud, G-O's text represents a regression to second- International Marxism and a 'desexualized psychoanalysis,' rather than a creative application of the Freudo-Marxism of Critical Theory.

In his zeal to combat 'romantic individualism,' 'romantic utopias,' and the reduction of partnership to shopping and investment, G-O overcompensates by dismissing free love as 'bourgeois.' Making such arguments, he reproduces Fromm's error in de-emphasizing erotic satisfaction as an important component of human happiness (175, 225, 286). Both thinkers thus miss 'the indivisibility of love [Eros], friendship and comradeship' (Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams*, 214). Likewise, G-O does not consider the essentially maternal aspects of love, a point which is emphasized by Freud, Fromm, John Bowlby, and Jessica Benjamin. Rather, he idealizes the patriarchal Marx family as instituting maternal values by somehow not having been governed by exchange relations (110). The author praises Karl's wife Jenny as an 'unrecognized coauthor of Marx's work,' and mentions Helene Dumuth, the Marxes' live-in servant, whom Karl may have exploited sexually (112-5). G-O does not pause to question whether this feudal vestige within the Marx household—much less the unit's maintenance through the profits extracted from the workers employed by Engels' father—might not challenge his designation of the family as a 'little commune' (112).

In summary, G-O's study on love combines fruitful and thought-provoking scholarship with revisionist, fantastical history. Presumably, this dialectical mosaic seeks to rehabilitate Marxism by simultaneously appropriating its anarchist rival, reinterpreting its own meaning as anti-statist, denying and repressing strong historical and theoretical evidence to the contrary, and transposing it as the sole meaning of communism and love. Undoubtedly, those who live and seek love, especially in the alien globe transformed by COVID-19, also seek a different and better world (271). Yet above all, in the struggle to find meaning and connection in this life by changing the world, we lovers and friends must recognize the revolutionary virtue of truth when confronting history, the present, and the future.

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