

Scientistic Socialism: Notes on the New Afro-American Magic Marxism

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Three years ago, after the Black Panther Party had recanted and returned to the Baptist Church, the only self-styled 'Marxist' political tendency to be found on this side of the veil was that embodied in the Black Workers Congress which, according to its somewhat generous self-assessment, was not only 'Marxist-Leninist' but 'Maoist' as well. Every other tendency among black people was hostile to Marxism. The arguments scarcely need to be recalled: "Marx and Engels were Europeans; what can racist Europeans have to say that is useful to us?" "Why do you have to depend on the white man for your ideology; can't we develop something new of our own?" etc. Of course there was also a great deal of red-baiting going on and even more self-righteous posturing.

Then, not too much longer than a year and a half ago a detectable 'Marxist' embryo was formed within the African Liberation Support Committee. This embryo in its way quickly developed into a militant, hardcore 'Marxist' faction within ALSC, a faction engaged in heavy "ideological struggle" with a 'culturalist' faction perceived by the 'Marxists' as a right wing. This "ideological struggle" harkened images of the internecine Panther/US struggle for control of the UCLA black studies budget. However, perhaps partially because no money was involved, this more recent "ideological struggle" had not been as deadly. Still, battle lines were drawn sharply, and the levels of bombast and factional self-righteousness could not have been much more intense in a real war.

Just as the 'contradiction' sharpened to the point of rupture a major and unexpected blow fell on the 'cultural nationalists'. Their leader, Imamu Baraka, publicly defected at the ALSC national conference in Greensboro last winter.

Despite the joy exuded by the missionaries of "scientific socialism"¹ at his conversion, Baraka's reversal is significant only in a sense that has nothing to do with the likely effects of his action. It must be kept in mind that all of this "ideological struggle" has gone on in a vacuum of outreaching political practice; only Baraka was even alleged to have a popular base, and that allegation was shattered when he confronted Kenneth Gibson and lost ignominiously. So none of this "ideological struggle" has been of practical political consequence.

On the contrary, Baraka's conversion is significant in that it summarizes, as the most dramatic occurrence to date, the genesis of this new, magical Marxism. Beyond that the conversion illustrates a process that has been going on among black radicals since the dying gasps of the Civil Rights Movement -- what might be called a supermarket approach to social theory. What has happened is that the radicals have simply accepted and pushed one political line until some key personality or core group of personalities detects its inherent weaknesses and initiates a search for a new line. A key and classic statement of this process is Carmichael's call for a new 'ideology' just before everyone became Pan-Africanists. To date not one of the shifts of line has generated a systematic critique of the political and social world; at best the old line is denounced in the terminology of the new, a practice whose primary function is exposure of novitiates to the style and lexicon of the new idolatry. As a colleague has noted, black radical practice has not changed in essence since

the Civil Rights movement; only the ideological forms -- slogans, justifications, superficial behavior, etc. -- have shifted. The radicalism has been entirely restricted to posture; the roots of capitalist society have not been penetrated for all the ideological struggles. One simply resigns from the old theology and accepts the new. The magical Marxism presently in vogue is only the current manifestation of the process.

The assertions made here are certain to be denounced by the magicians of "scientific socialism" with charges of 'subjectivism' and 'negativeness' in addition to disputation of historical and analytical accuracy, so I may as well take this opportunity to rebut at the onset. Disputation of accuracy is of course perfectly normal, valid and necessary and should under all circumstances be welcome. The charges likely to be generated fall in another category; yet they are useful in that they are indicative of some of the intellectual grounding of the new Marxism. First of all, I plead guilty to a degree of 'subjectiveness'. To the extent that human beings are not only objects of history but its subjects as well, subjectivity is a natural component of the dialectic of materialist reality. To exclude subjectivity from an autonomous existence is to fetishize history or facticity, which is precisely what the magic Marxists in fact do. In so far as my specific subjectiveness is concerned, I admit to a bias against illusion and an extreme distaste for liberal ideology, especially those manifestations which pretend to be something else.

I also plead guilty in advance to 'negativeness' to the extent that I attempt to utilize a method based on critique. At the foundation of a materialist epistemology are two assumptions: that there is an independent reality which can be known only through removal of the layers of ideological illusion that conceal it and that human beings develop their

visions of what ought to exist primarily by renunciation of unpalatable aspects of actual existence. Each of those assumptions demands the use of negation as an indispensable tool for the understanding-through-transformation which is the essential principle of a materialist theory of knowledge. As far as the moral aspect of 'negativeness' is concerned, I admit to that also. In an objective historical situation in which there is no actually or foreseeably effective challenge to the bourgeoisie I see nothing about which to be positive. The real cynicism is that positive thinking which pretends the trite to be significant and makes up things to celebrate in the midst of an oppressive reality.

At any rate, now that I have admitted my sins, it is time to commit them.

There are three primary objectives at which this essay aims, each of which is largely polemical. One objective is, to use the phrase of another colleague, to "take the covers off" the magic Marxism to analyze its essential elements through critique. A secondary objective is the location of the magic Marxism in an historical context by means of illustration of certain dynamics which I propose have been operative over the last decade of black political thought, and the final objective -- which should give some satisfaction to the Norman Vincent Peales of scientistic socialism -- is some clarification of the general nature of the Marxist theory and method by means of statements about what a materialist dialectical theory is and should be. The key questions are: what is magic Marxism and how does it help to interpret and change the world? How and why did magic Marxism come to be what it is? How must Marxism operate as a critical social philosophy?

To begin with, it is necessary to consider what it is that makes this new black Marxism magical. Ironically, that element of the new

Marxism of which the adherents are most proud, that which they believe to be the qualitative advance over all magic, is in fact the essential kernel which defines this Marxism's fetish character. That element of course is its assumption of science as a suprahistorical category which passes judgement on all that exists within history. To be considered legitimate in the new Marxism, any formulation must be blessed with the label "scientific".²

To demonstrate the ways in which science is a fetish in the new Marxism it is necessary first to try to determine exactly what the 'Marxists' mean by science. This task is not that simple, unfortunately, because the 'scientific socialists' are so much in awe of their fetish that they do not bother to explain exactly what it is. But, then, it is always sacrilege for mortals to attempt to analyze God.

Put most broadly, of course, science is taken to mean that method and body of techniques whose careful utilization in analysis produces results which reflect -- accurately if not exactly -- a material reality which exists independently of its perception by human consciousness. The component of this science given most frequently is a certain kind of terminology which is intrinsically more capable than are other terminologies of reflecting 'reality' in a manner that is unencumbered by the subjectivity of the observer.³

In addition 'science' includes rigorous definitions which represent the real world with precision. Examples of such definitions are Lenin's stipulation of class⁴ with Stalin's definition of nationality.⁵ This brings us to our first major problem. It is necessary to ask what makes those definitions 'scientific'? The answer must be that the definitions are scientific because they identify characteristics which can be observed

in the empirical world. On this level, the new Marxism is in accord with the old empiricism, which is only natural since 'science' is the creation of empiricism.⁶

A problem arises immediately, however; those operational definitions given are, like all such definitions, stipulated. Why must a nation be "historically constituted", "stable", etc.? Only because Stalin, for whatever reason, stipulates that it must be. This is not to suggest that stipulated definitions cannot be valid; on the contrary, since they are tautological, they are neither valid nor invalid. Definitions are stipulated in order to facilitate performance of specific operations, systematic aggregation of data along lines determined by the human beings who perform the operations. On that basis such a definition can be neither true nor false, only more or less useful in the given context. If one chooses to commit himself to 'scientific method', then he must also commit himself to that amoral relativism, and it is impossible to appeal to scientific method to resolve disputes about anything that can not be measured.

Likewise, there is no intrinsically 'scientific' language. Words, in the last analysis, have no meanings other than those which specific human beings attach to them. To suggest otherwise is to fetishize language, to attribute an independent autonomous existence to a product of human social relations. The magic of the new Marxism lies precisely in the circumstance that the theory thrives on fetishes.⁷

The examples of language and definitions suggest that the magic Marxists are at least confused about what science is. At best they have succumbed to the popular misunderstanding which identifies all systematic production of knowledge as science. However, the misconception appears to be even more basic.

The adherents of scientistic socialism have taken 'science' as a pre-given category, a set of impartial techniques which might be put to use by either progressive or reactionary forces. In the former case utilization of scientific methods will yield progressive results; in the latter, reactionary ones. The problem is, though, that intellectual systems and frameworks are developed by human beings within society, and to that extent those frameworks and systems must reflect the class reality of the social order. Therefore, since scientism as an analytic frame of reference (rather than merely a number of research techniques) is the product of bourgeois society, the method itself must reflect the biases of bourgeois social organization.

There are only two other possibilities. Either science is the product of a suprahuman consciousness (or is invested with its own), or science already existed as a package and was merely discovered in the bourgeois epoch. In the first case science is mystified, in the latter it is reified. The effect of both possibilities is to make science fetish.⁸

Science cannot be absolutized if it is taken as the product of a given form of social organization. Therefore, science cannot be considered the form of knowledge but only a particular form of knowledge. Moreover, because this form reflects the ideology of an antagonistic social order, it must be partial and insufficient. Habermas⁹ notes the attempted separation in bourgeois scientism of the subjective and objective aspects of knowledge via the restriction of philosophy to a metaphysical, speculative ontology and the alleged elimination of values from science.¹⁰

As should be expected, the confusion of the new Marxists about the nature of science and knowledge is reproduced in their specific propositions about the bourgeois social order. These propositions are very interesting

in as much as they not only demonstrate the existence of the confusion but also expose its peculiar character.

In particular the treatment of the concept of class in scientistic socialism demonstrates clearly the wondrous effects of the magic of reification. Classes are perceived first of all as statistical aggregates whose components are classified and counted quite laboriously.¹¹ The classifications are then further subdivided (e.g. bourgeoisie national and comprador sectors) with the presumption that the political consciousness of these classes can somehow be inferred from their various positions in the social production process.

In fact, the somewhat overly meticulous relabeling provided by Alkalimat and Johnson of census data on black employment and income patterns turns out to be the prelude to identification of a "revolutionary class of Black workers" who must play an "heroic role" in the destruction of capitalism. This role flows from the scientific class analysis which determines that "only the working class is in an objective position to fundamentally destroy capitalist relations, defeat racism, and build a different society"¹²

Two problems arise immediately -- one empirical, the other epistemological. First, where is the referent in the real world for a "revolutionary class of black workers"? Presumably, so volatile an entity could not exist without giving off some hints of its existence. Yet there are no signs of even an impending upsurge among black workers, or anyone else for that matter. Certainly there are no indications of revolutionary confrontation between black workers and the capitalist social order unless we accept a conception of revolutionary struggle which would embrace every petty wage demand. If our conception is to be of that sort, then 'revolution'

for us would have about the same meaning as it does in soap powder advertisements.

Still, the magic Marxists project a revolutionary working class as a fait accompli, and there must be some basis for that projection. What the magic Marxists are actually saying is that given the behavior patterns ascribed a priori by 'scientific' class analysis to certain occupation and income aggregates, the black working class is supposed to be revolutionary. Somehow, because the black scientistic socialists apparently have not quite had the time yet to master even mechanical materialism, their claim to 'scientific' precision of analysis backs them into a corner.

The 'scientific analysis', actually little more than some fixed propositions memorized and applied indiscriminately, decrees that black workers due to their position in the production process are a revolutionary force. The data from the empirical world hardly supports such an assertion. Yet since this whole dialectical materialism thing is new to the magic Marxists, they are unable to face up to the data. The documents cited here from the Black Workers Congress and the African Liberation Support Committee refer time and again to the existence of a mass black movement led by black proletariat. One look at the world will confirm that no such phenomenon exists. Unfortunately, though, the scientistic socialists are not fluent enough in their mechanics yet to give the conventional responses about labor aristocracy, duping, etc. They simply refuse to admit to current reality.

However, it is not only at this point that the 'scientific class analysis' takes flight from reality; rather, at the onset with the initial assumption, it is already gone. This 'scientific' analysis proceeds from an assumption that there are inevitable connections between specific forms of concrete political consciousness and the aggregate stipulated as classes.

This assumption acquires a dogmatic character thanks to corollary assumptions about 'history' and 'laws' which we shall discuss a bit later. At any rate the wholly a priori assumption about the connections of the aggregates and patterns of consciousness not only reifies the aggregates -- in the sense that they are treated as organic, self-conscious things functioning in the world -- but it is also the basis of the second problem.

Put crudely, what is the process by which revolutionary ideas, leap from the wrench to the minds of the workers? That is, how does consciousness arise from class position? More abstractly, what is the relationship of objectivity and subjectivity in the production of ideas and events? Those questions have been among the most salient problems of Marxist theory in the twentieth century, especially since revolution has been vitiated in the Soviet Union and has failed to materialize at all in the industrial West. However, the adherents of magic Marxism seem oblivious to those problems; in fact, what they apparently see as the science in Marxism is dogma to which they try to mold the world, the rote formulae which explain everything. Ironically, for all the sloganeering about scientific materialism, the magic Marxism reveals itself to be the exact opposite.

The factor which appears most immediately responsible for the idealist conceptualizations of scientistic socialism is a general perception of science as a body of rigid, inexorable laws. In any notion of laws of social development or social interaction there is already posited some force which exists outside of and governs social relations. A law must have an origin somewhere; and if it is in fact a law which applies universally, then that origin cannot be sought in any specific social situation. These laws are therefore metaphysical in that their content does not change from one society to another or over time; the laws are also idealist in that they are nonmaterial forces

which exist and operate independently of human control.

How can this new Marxism, which wants so badly to be 'scientific', end up as the very antithesis of materialist science? An obvious reason is the mechanical materialism which the magic Marxists espouse. Their mechanical interpretation of social processes stems from a pedestrian reading of Marx's aphorism about being of consciousness, and that interpretation has profound implications for the likelihood of generating materialist theory and, for that matter, revolutionary practice.¹³ If the process of production is strictly determinate of attitudes and therefore actions, then that process becomes a force which directs events. In order to do that, the force must stand outside and above society. So it is that a mechanical materialist determinism gives rise to a network of axiomatic, suprasoietal laws which can appear as science in a culture whose popular ideology worships science as the really complete metaphysics (in the bourgeois sense).

This mechanical materialism, however, is only the methodological consequence and manifestation of a prior ontological assumption, one that was hinted at earlier. The magic Marxists read history from the conclusion to the beginning. That is to say, they see history as the inevitable unfolding of the specific present and, for that matter, the present as a stage in the inevitable unfolding of an already determined future. Feudalism inevitably generated capitalism, capitalism will inevitably generate socialism, and so on.¹⁴

What all this inevitability means of course is that the script of history has already been written; the end is pre-determined. Thus history is transformed into History, an unassailable force which leads us to some pre-arranged destination. This History, through its own machinations, has been revealing it will to us in gradual stages.¹⁵ So we finally come to the bottom of scientistic socialism -- the reification of history as an independent process whose motion cannot be altered.¹⁶

The fetish character of this new Marxism is therefore clearly revealed. At every turn there is an idealist formulation masquerading as its opposite. The magical ideology proceeds from all illusory, quasi-theological assumptions of those 'ideologies' with which the magicians imagine themselves at odds. Hence it is possible to say of this new scientistic socialism what Thomas Huxley said of its actual philosophical antecedent, Comtism, a century ago -- it is "Catholicism with Christianity".

Still, it is not sufficient merely to "take the covers off" the magic Marxism and expose it as just another pathetic intellectual paroxysm of the would-be 'radical' section of the black petit bourgeoisie. It is necessary to attempt to ferret out the origins of this aborted effort to break out of chains of bourgeois ideology. I submit that scientistic socialism is a product of a certain paradigm that began to develop in response to the self-immolation of Black Power radicalism.

In retrospect the 1960's appear as a period that held great political possibilities for black people in this country. The promise lay neither in a likelihood that realization of the amorphous goal of freedom was imminent nor in signs of theoretical coherence and self-conscious revolutionary praxis. On the one hand, serious prediction about "freedom" was precluded by the circumstance that no one had any idea what the condition of being free was actually supposed to entail, although most people probably felt that 'freedom' referred to something more than integrated water fountains. On the other hand, much of the élan experienced by those who lived the period was a function of -- and in turn reinforced -- the analytical muddle that was general to the 'movement'. Because each experience or action seemed independent of all others and absolutely brand new in the world, fervor was kept high during the decade through all the turns that the 'Movement' made.

In this environment, as the inadequacies of Black Power activism began to drain the elan that it had produced, an uninformed search was initiated for an equation that would keep the movement together and drive it forward. The character of the search, when reflected upon half a decade later, seemed generated at least in part by panic. The call for the search, as well as its nature, seems best summarized by Stokely Carmichael's call for a new 'ideology', defined essentially as a "belief system".

"Ideology" was conceived as a set of axioms -- eight points of Pan-Africanism, seven principles of Kawaïda, etc. -- which not only can explain the universe simply and quickly but also can give its particular ideologues something to believe in and a line with which to confront other ideologues. Since the search was eclectic, searchers would just cluster around whatever system came their way first. Then, when trend setters in a particular camp would become bored or dissatisfied and exchange their 'ideology' for a new one, their cluster of epigones would -- as is general in fads -- trail behind them, no questions asked. The old line is dropped; the new one is assumed. There is no discernible transition period, no radical critique of the old.

When that process is taken into account, scientistic socialism appears as no more than the momentary vogue acquisition in the department/store of 'ideology'.¹⁷ This view is reinforced by the circumstance that at no point has any one of the ideologues attempted a root level critique of the ontological and epistemological assumptions that drive bourgeois society. Until that kind of critique is made, our 'ideologues' still simply continue to reproduce in styles that are ever more bizarre and outlandishly confused the metaphysical idealism which constitutes the essential kernel of the bourgeois world view.¹⁸

There are a couple of final points that should be made about some key conceptions of Marxism. The relation of subjectivity and objectivity in the materialist world view has already been explicated, I think. So has the question of place and meaning of history; Marxism as a genuinely materialist philosophy can allow no reification of the historical process.

Nonetheless, since Marxism is basically a theory of practice and a political practice which aims at social revolution, a bit of attention should be given to clear up as much as possible the muddle about the nature and significance of class. In the first place classes are not things but relations abstracted for purpose of analytical focus from the totality of relations which exist in society.¹⁹

Class takes on political significance as a conception of "objective possibility"²⁰, as a potentially active political force; as a compilation of aggregate characteristics the conception of class has no political significance. Marx himself makes this distinction in his differentiation of class-in-itself and class-for-itself. The former is the bland, abstract aggregate in which the latter exists -- due to the role of the role of the aggregate in the production process --- as an element of latent possibility. Only when the class-for-itself emerges from the class-in-itself does class assume real political meaning.

Drawing on the United States for his example, Colletti²¹ suggests that a class can be said really to exist only if its members are conscious of themselves as a class. (On that basis he suggests that workers in this country are objectively no more than a cog of capital.) The times at which one can actually see classes in the empirical world are very rare; in fact only in periods of sharp antagonism and rupture, i.e. only in revolutionary situations.

Therefore, class cannot be treated by us as a "hard" empirical entity whose presence and impact can be rigorously assessed as would so many plants or molecules.²² Politically, we cannot view classes, particularly the proletariat, as given; our task is to create a revolutionary proletariat from the raw material of workers. Nor for that matter can we bind ourselves to the aggregates of industrial workers as the exclusive raw material from which the revolutionary force is to be built. Factory workers in England in the mid-nineteenth century were seen by Marx as the potential vanguard revolutionary class not simply because they were the majority of the population and gave up surplus value, but because specific relations which they had among themselves and with capitalists suggested the possibility that from the aggregates of factory workers would be most likely to come individuals amenable to making revolutionary social change. Since capitalist social relations have undergone extensive changes over the last century, there is no reason to believe that the mode of intervention of industrial workers in those relations has remained constant. Therefore, the question of revolutionary possibility -- always an empirically based question -- must be asked in light of the present data. Any other approach is theistic and anti-materialist.

Finally, if this essay has no other merit, it is my hope that it affirms the need to take theory to the roots of existence and to aim always for the removal of illusion from reality. Of course that aim entails also the need to be critical of our own assumptions and methods. Unless we press critical analysis to the roots we will only continue to run along the treadmill of fetishism and wish-fulfillment and will continue to be functional ideological agents of the bourgeoisie.

NOTES.

¹The term "scientific socialism" serves two important functions for the new Marxists. In the first place it is the method and network of beliefs which distinguishes them from the "idealists" and "metaphysicians". "Scientific socialism" is posited as the antithesis of astrology, religion and all antimaterialist ideologies. As such, of course, this "scientific socialism" becomes no more than a manifestation of the same juju but under a different form. This is not simply a formalist dialectical proposition; "science" in this new 'Marxism', as we shall see, is mystified even more than it is in other ideologies of the bourgeois epoch.

Secondly, 'scientific socialism' provides a fortunate appellation for those among the ranks who want no association with anything European except consumer goods; it would be too agonizing for them to have to declare themselves Marxists. This second function at some point dovetails with the first. In bourgeois society there is a certain awe surrounding affiliation with science, and it is with feelings of great fulfillment and a sense of arrival that one can proclaim, "I am a scientific socialist". Those unfamiliar with the proclamation need only compare it to others like: "I am a Christian", "I am a behaviorist", or among the less serious members, "I am a Kappa". The phrase "scientific socialism" which I use here seeks to identify this alleged Marxism by one of its central fetishes, 'science'.

²A few brief references from the theoretical work of the new Marxists illustrate the almost neurotic importance of 'science'. Ronald H. Bailey in the introduction to his paper "Imperialism and Black People in the 1970's" (unpublished) charges: "Let us not for a moment underestimate the importance of a precise and scientific analysis in our struggle for liberation," (p. 1.). Nelson Johnson and Abdul Alkalimat, Toward the Ideological Unity of the African Liberation Support Committee: A Response to Criticism of the ALSC Statement of Principles contend that the new Marxism constitutes a theoretical breakthrough partially because it utilizes "objective scientific language that analyzes objective material reality" (p. 6.). Abdul Alkalimat has subsequently published in pamphlet form an edited version of an earlier speech under the title A Scientific Approach to Black Liberation (Nashville: Peoples College, 1974) in which a clear attempt is made to legitimize the political positions of the new Marxism through appeals to their scientific nature. In the heady document produced by the Black Workers Congress, The Black Liberation Struggle: The Black Workers Congress and Proletarian Revolution (Detroit: BWC, 1974) appears the following assessment: "Today Marxism-Leninism and the Thought of Mao Tse Tung is the only true social science in the world...it is as objective as any of the other sciences like physics, chemistry, etc." (p. 7.).

³Alkalimat and Johnson, *op. cit.*, in counter attack against the self-conscious idealists in ALSC provide a list of words and phrases which the authors assert to be "precise and scientific" (p. 13.). Presumably, science also includes methods of procedure and an overarching framework; these probably are respectively historical and dialectical materialism. Within Marxism now there is a great deal of debate over those constructs and their

entailments; yet the scientistic socialists nowhere attempt to explicate thier position in this debate. Consequently, 'dialectical and historical materialism' are no more than words to magic Marxism.

⁴C.F. Alkalimat, op. cit., p. 3.; Alkalimat and Johnson, op. cit., p. 50.

⁵C.F. Black Workers Congress, op. cit., p. 12.; Alkalimat, op. cit., p. 4.; Alkalimat and Johnson, p. 50.

⁶C.F. Max Horkheimer, Critical Theory (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), particularly the essays "Notes on Science and the Crisis" and "The Latest Attack on Metaphysics."

⁷At times it appears that the scientistic socialists have managed to appropriate the most bizarre and idealistic elements of both empiricism and rationalism. On the one hand, they burn incense to the Great God Science; on the other hand, they continually prate about a certain Mr. History who demands this and will decide that.

⁸A critical look at the development of what has been considered scientific methodology removes these propositions from the realm of deductive logic and gives them a concrete reality. Horkheimer observes that in the early period, when bourgeois ideology was in battle against Scholasticism, the inceptionary scientific method was formulated as a device which would emancipate inquiry. "But by the second half of the nineteenth century this definition had already lost its progressive character, and showed itself to be ... a limiting of scientific activity to the description, classification, and generalization of phenomena, with no care to distinguish the unimportant f the essential." op. cit., p. 5.

Horkheimer notes the static, and thereby reactionary, biases inherent in positivism, the contemporary form of scientism: "Knowledge relates solely to what is and its recurrence. New forms of being, especially those arising from the historical activity of man, lie beyond empiricist theory...All historical tendencies that reach beyond what is present and recurrent, do not belong to the domain of science." Ibid., p. 144. Horkheimer contends that the ideological roots of the positivist style of scientism are to be found in the frightened petit bourgeoisie. Ibid., p. 140.

⁹C.F. Jurgen Habermas, Knowledge and Human Interests (Boston: Beacon, 1971).

¹⁰While objectivity and subjectivity are not considered antinomies in the epistemology of dialectical materialism to which the magic Marxists purport to adhere, (cf. Alkalimat, op. cit., p. 23.), the latter nowhere explicate what that dialectical materialism is to entail as a methodology. In the face of the reverence for 'science' as a transcendent arbiter of interpretation, however, as well as the recurring drivel about "historical laws", it is impossible to view this magic Marxism as either dialectical or materialist.

¹¹C.F. Alkalimat & Johnson, op. cit., pp. 33-49 and Ronald H. Bailey, op. cit., pp. 17-22.

¹²Ibid., p. 57. See also The Black Liberation Struggle, etc., op. cit., p. 6.

¹³C.F. Karl Korsch, Marxism and Philosophy (New York: Monthly Review, 1970), Korsch sees the mechanical, positivist interpretation of Marxism which subordinates human consciousness and action to so called "objective processes" as part of the central problem of Marxism in this century. He traces that interpretation to Plekhanov and contends that that positivist reading of Marxist theory is the root theoretical cause of the opportunism of the Second International. Interestingly, he sees Plekhanov at the foundation of Russian Marxism (through Lenin) and links the latter philosophically with the Second International. In so far as action and consciousness are seen as dependent on economic processes the door is clearly open to economism and pragmatism in general. Rather, objective conditions are themselves the product of a continuous dialectic between material forces and conscious action; hence all talk of waiting for contradictions to mature or imposing impersonal stages on development are no more than mealy-mouthed opportunism and mystification.

¹⁴One of the magic Marxists with whom I am familiar argued in a seminar at the time of the coup against Allende that the coup was a progressive development to the extent that it demonstrated to the Chilean left the futility of electoral revolution and would therefore--in the long run (the Judgement Day in mechanical materialism) -- facilitate the building of a stronger, more militant revolutionary movement. When asked how he could be so optimistic in light of the grim extirpation of leftists then in process in Chile, he demanded that the individuals be considered separately from the political tendency. The former could be destroyed, but the latter cannot! This anecdote should clear up whatever questions the reader might have had concerning why I have dubbed this peculiar, would-be Marxism "magic".

¹⁵Dressed up in mock materialist garb this proposition becomes something like: Human awareness of the motive forces in history always corresponds to the level of objective development of the mode of production; prior to the capitalist epoch it was impossible for any human being to think democracy, scientific socialism, or any of the ideologies of the bourgeois epoch. Each stage of development of the mode of production paves the way for the ensuing stage; this process is an inevitable product of the law of contradiction between the forces and relations of production in society."

¹⁶It is interesting to compare this view with that of Marx: "History does nothing, it possesses no immense wealth, fights no battles. It is rather man, real living man who does everything, who possesses and fights". Cited in E.H. Carr, What Is History? (New York: Random House, 1961), p. 61.

¹⁷It is instructive in this regard that less than three years ago most of the magic Marxists, at least in the ALSC wing, were Pan-Africanists of the most wildly mystical variety; moreover, they were just as self-righteous and dogmatic about that drivel as they now are about the current drivel. For the ex-Kawaida Nationalists the case is even more dramatic. Less than a year ago they were greater enemies of Marxism than J. Edgar Hoover or Little Orphan Annie.

18 That metaphysical idealism is at the base of this process is clear to the extent that the search was begun because we had to develop the ability to 'redefine' our history and condition. This 'redefinition' meant first and foremost the redefinition a la analytic philosophy--a hopelessly abstract and detached shuffling and reshuffling of words. The 'ideological struggle' has never been any more than that, as the battle over terminology in ALSC shows. However, the basic point is that no matter what form the popular 'ideology' has taken, it has been grounded at every turn on the same fundamentally idealist assumptions about humankind and history.

19 "The notion of class entails the notion of historical relationship. Like any other relationship, it is a fluency which evades analysis if we attempt to stop it dead at any given moment and anatomize its structure. The finest-meshed sociological net cannot give us a pure specimen of class... The relationship must always be embodied in real people and in a real content". E.P. Thompson; The Making of The English Working Class (New York: Random House, 1963), p. 9.

20 C.F. Georg Lukacs; History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics (Cambridge: MIT, 1971).

21 Lucio Colletti; From Rousseau to Lenin: Studies in Ideology and Society (New York: Monthly Review, 1972), p. 235.

22 C.F. Thompson; op. cit., pp. 9-11.