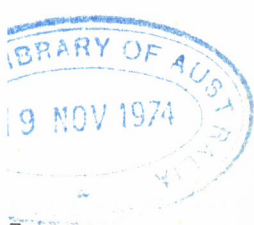


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# Labour History

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clearly and generously as I can, the social evaluate their claims and assumptions com- sks he does thoroughly and lucidly, in four Mill, which skilfully blend criticism with s's intentions (making the world a better derstanding it better). Duncan carefully ntion of establishing the credentials of one ing off the doctrines of communism and r. But the second of his stated intentions assumptions comparatively, and it is the is mainly done implicitly.

ie final 30 pages are devoted to a bringing ven then, mainly in the context of their an in a sense refuses to come clean in his out the descriptive chapters are that Mill's Marx's closed system approach. But this n opportunity for this could have been ring the two thinkers' insights on the one on, the 1848 revolutions. But Duncan te on this issue, or reluctant to raise it was the more perceptive and accurate of the radical bourgeoisie would split from ighly believed that the imperatives of the

Marx and Mill propounded rival doctrines ts of the realities of capitalism—and the ng chapter is conducted largely in these namic factors at work in the world and ok to be the forces that held men together see the future differently and hence offer thus far, and no further, reluctant to oughout—that Mill was a much subtler developing and changing, whereas Marx but essentially stopped critical thinking y.

LEONIE SANDERCOCK.

*Analysis in Contemporary Social Thought: laude Levi-Strauss and Louis Althusser.* . £4.50 hardcover.

Marx's mature writing, highlighting the and clarifying the analytical distinctions ical and theoretical practices as com- ld be of great interest to anyone writing commend Glucksmann's book as a dis- t her arguments are so muddled, and her ous that to offer this book as a com- riter would be a mischievous act of v to deal with all the misreadings and

nd promise of intellectual rigour by

elucidating the notion of 'problematic', or the 'defined theoretical structure or conceptual framework which determines the forms of the posing of all problems and what is seen as relevant to the problem' (p. 3). All social theories can be characterised by their problematic, and in Althusser's arguments, theorists as dissimilar as Lukacs and Sartre can be seen to be enclosed by the same theoretical boundaries to what they can and cannot 'know' in their theories. Glucksmann's basic argument is that Althusser and Levi-Strauss share the structuralist problematic, as she defines it, in the course of the book. However, her use of this most important concept is extremely loose. In her hands it becomes synonymous with certain 'morphological' similarities between the two theories. 'Both seek structured totalities composed of pre-given elements and maintain that these are to be discovered at a theoretical level. This is not to deny that the philosophies to which their theoretical postulates ultimately turn are very different; indeed, if one were to conduct a philosophical comparison of the two, the conclusion would have to be that they have very little in common' (p. 166). The relative importance of the morphological parallels and philosophical differences, is a matter of individual preference she confesses. 'It all depends on the perspective from which one examines them!' (p. 167). Yet it was this personal arbitrariness and eclecticism which the concept of problematic was supposed to banish.

There are historical questions which can be neither asked nor answered by Levi-Strauss. His concern is to find the basic structure of all cultures. The direction of his argument is to reduce the structure of culture to a basic binary principle, which is then attributed to an inherent binary facility in the human intellect. Althusser's argument has been precisely with this kind of reduction of the historical process to the activity of theoretical subjects, whether it be the young Marx's species-capacity-for-labour, Lukacs's proletariat-as-universal-class, or Hegel's Absolute Idea. These conceptions of history are all enclosed within 'the problematic of the subject'. The later Marx, Althusser argues, developed concepts such as 'mode of production' which abolished any commitment to a theoretical subject and allowed us to conceive the social formation, as a constellation of different practices: economic, political and ideological. Although the economic is determinant in the last instance, this is only so in the obvious sense that humanity's most basic task is to reproduce the material conditions of its existence; it does so in specific social arrangements in which the activities of political and ideological struggle have an immediate causal significance of their own. So the historical process is not conceived as the expression of some essential principle, class, or idea, but 'a process without a subject', in which each of the three practices may be out of phase with each of the others. Althusser, in my opinion, has rescued Marxist historiography from some of its simplistic traducers, and made it capable of constituting history as a process which is complex, full of discontinuities and unpredictable conjunctures, and yet at the same time intelligible, as class struggle.

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TIM ROWSE.

Maurice Dobb: *Theories of value and distribution since Adam Smith.* Cambridge University Press, 1973. pp. 295. £3.60 hardcover.

While labour historians munch contentedly on their safe pastures, a controversy rages which, if they were able to cope with anything more demanding than the intricacies of footnoting, should excite them to new tasks and

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entirely different questions. The controversy concerns 'capital theory' and its storm centres are Cambridge in England and Cambridge in Massachusetts. Dobb's new book cannot be understood outside this controversy because it is intended to approach the central issue from a retelling of the ways in which economists have considered it during the last 200 years.

The point at issue is this: what is capital? Or, as Joan Robinson put it over twenty years ago:

The student of economic theory is taught to write  $O = f(L, C)$  where L is a quantity of labour, C a quantity of capital and O a rate of output of commodities. He is instructed to assume all workers alike, and to measure L in man-hours of labour; he is told something about the index-number problem involved in choosing a unit of output; and then he is hurried on to the next question, in the hope that he will forget to ask in what units C is measured. Before ever he does ask, he has become a professor, and so sloppy habits of thought are handed on from one generation to the next.

If capital is not quantifiable and if it is not confused with capital equipment, then the Marxist definition that it is a social relationship re-enters the debate. But there are strong ideological reasons why such a definition has to be resisted by academic economists. If capital is a social relation then profit is a product of that relationship, of the class struggle. The rate of profit ceases to be an algebraic problem and is determined by the relative strength of the contending classes. If this had to be taught in universities, it would not be long before some rude longhair eventually asked the lecturer which side of the class struggle he was on, and that would be the end of value-free positive economics.

The implications of 'capital theory' do not stop with economists and their ilk, but break right through the centre of the practice of history, making 'labour history' an impossibility, intellectually bankrupt and completely misleading in its formulation of problems. Its impact on 'social history' will be no less immediate and devastating. In both cases, 'capital theory' directs attention onto the social relationships between capital and labour and ends the one-sidedness of 'labour history' and the chitty-chattedness of 'social history'. For this to have its maximum effect it must be allied to the work of modern French Marxists who have stressed the centrality of the mode of production to a science of history.

For anyone totally unacquainted with 'capital theory', this book is not the place to begin. Instead, an earlier book of Dobb's, *Political Economy and Capitalism*, should be read. If this is difficult to obtain, its core has been reprinted in a Penguin book of readings, *A Critique of Economic Theory*, edited by E. K. Hunt and Jesse G. Schwartz. Step two in a reading programme should be G. Harcourt's article in a 1969 issue of the *Journal of Economic Literature*. From there on it is largely a matter of following one's nose through the footnote references, although the brilliantly witty chapter VII of volume one of *Capital* should be included about here.

Even outside the 'capital theory' controversy, Dobb's present work will be of use to teachers. There is an introductory chapter on ideology which needs to be read by everyone in every so-called discipline. Chapters on Smith, Ricardo, the anti-Ricardians, Mill, Marx and the Jevonians are all masterly expositions, notable for their sparse precision and ease of argument, and would be wonderful additions to tutorial reading guides on the history of economic thought. One important criticism of Dobb's present book is that, unlike *Political and Economy and Capitalism*, it makes no attempt to relate changes in economic theory to changes in the political economy of capitalism itself.

Despite his communist past, Dobb is no longer a Marxist, but his work,

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along with that of the other Cambridge neo-Ricardians, *et al.*, has brought Marxism back to the centre of academic debate. The task of carrying it forward into the study of society remains for others, especially the working class in their practices. Academic works will require empirical investigations employing the rediscovered reality of Marx's early dictum that 'History is the history of class struggle'.

Canberra

HUMPHREY MCQUEEN.

Louis Chevalier: *Labouring Classes and Dangerous Classes in Paris During the First Half of the Nineteenth Century*. Translated from the French by Frank Jellinek. Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1973. pp. 505. £5.95 hardcover.

L. Chevalier's *Labouring Classes and Dangerous Classes* is not concerned with political events or crises, but what he calls the pathological condition of a city under particular circumstances. The city is Paris, the particular circumstances are its rapid rise in population and the 'disease' fostered in a city whose numbers outrun its resources; the theme is the fusion of crime from being an abnormal feature of society to its becoming seen as a natural aspect of poverty, that is to say the merging of the dangerous, or criminal classes, and the labouring, or poorer classes. Chevalier sees the problem he is dealing with emerging in the last years of the Restoration and ending by the early 1850s when Haussmann's reconstructions wrecked the Old Paris and the crimes it both spawned and protected. It is significant in this regard that Chevalier is more concerned to show what historians have failed to learn from the mortality figures for the cholera epidemics of 1832 and 1849 than what the workers themselves learned about the nature of bourgeois governments in this time. (For instance, he does not mention either the Lyons revolt or the June 'days'.) It might be argued that it was the growth of the workers' movement, the recognition of their strength as a class, and the struggle for their own emancipation, together with the goal that this implied, that converted their crime into what eventually became acceptable pursuits. Crime, of course, does not disappear, but it returns to the abnormal or the 'picturesque'. Despite a bewildering bombardment of figures, Chevalier clearly presents his argument that the class struggle in this period 'was carried on by means of a struggle which its contemporaries themselves described as a struggle of race; a conflict between two population groups differing wholly from each other, but above all in body; a difference not merely social but biological' (p. 433). Nevertheless, those of us who accept the gravity of the problem posed by an unassimilated group of migrants from the provinces, who recognise that a deplorable physical environment can have marked biological effects and that a moral deterioration could be the result of the physical deterioration, might balk at the use of the word 'race' to characterise the nature of this struggle.

Use of statistics is only one side of Chevalier's methodology—the quantitative side. There is also the qualitative side; the novels of Balzac, Hugo and Sue. Chevalier shows how Hugo and Sue kept so closely to the official statistics that the historian might just as well go straight to the statistics themselves. Their import for Chevalier is that they bring together fact and opinion, and in so doing unconsciously demonstrate the transition from the older abnormal crime associated with criminal elements to the crimes of poverty suffered by a class condemned to the work aspects of urban living in an exceptional growth period.

Chevalier's *Classes laborieuses et classes dangereuses* was first published