

HENDRIK DE MAN

A Documentary
Study of Hendrik De
Man, Socialist Critic
of Marxism



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Socialist Critic of Marxism

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largely translated
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Introduction

In June 1973 an International Colloquium on the Works of Hendrik de Man, sponsored by the law faculty of the University of Geneva,¹ broke the conspiracy of silence that had surrounded this Belgian socialist heretic, a figure who since his break with orthodox Marxism during World War I had been subject to the reproach addressed in earlier days to the revisionist Bernstein: "Eduard, you're a fool! One does these things, but one does not say them!"² But in de Man's case doctrinal heresy went far beyond revisionism to a critique of the philosophical presuppositions that Marxism shared with the utilitarian tradition of social analysis as a whole; during the interwar period his efforts at ideological regeneration of the socialist movement lost in cogency with the growing threat of annihilation from the totalitarian Right; and in the end his entire credibility, his authority, was destroyed by his participation in the *Munichois* policy of King Leopold even after the occupation of Belgium in 1940. Earlier ostracism was now followed by exile and by moral obliteration, especially by those most sympathetic to his ideas and therefore most vulnerable to guilt by association. From being regarded as a figure comparable to Marx himself, he became a nonperson, as was most strikingly demonstrated at the colloquium itself, where despite sustained efforts it was possible to attract only one participant from Germany, the country in which he had made his intel-

¹ "Sur l'oeuvre d'Henri de Man," Rapports au Colloque international organisé par la Faculté de droit de l'Université de Genève, les 18, 19 et 20 juin 1974, sous la présidence du professeur Ivo Rens, *Revue européenne des sciences sociales et Cahiers Vilfredo Pareto* (listed by the Library of Congress as *Cahiers Vilfredo Pareto: Revue européenne des sciences sociales*), vol. 12, no. 31, 1974; and "Sur l'oeuvre d'Henri de Man," *Actes du Colloque international* . . . , 3 vols., Faculté de droit de l'Université de Genève, 1974.

² Henry de Man, *Psychology of Socialism*, London: Allen & Unwin, 1928, p. 165.

lectual home for many years and where also the ideological issues that he had so brilliantly analyzed have now found a de Manian solution without de Man.³ A figure whose intellectual contribution certainly ranks him among the leading theoreticians of the socialist movement, a pioneer sociologist of labor and industry, in his personal biography a valiant and tragic exemplar of the traumata of the West, he has simply disappeared from the history books. In this volume, we hope to correct this historical omission and, what is even more urgent, to convince the reader of the far-ranging significance of de Man's intellectual contributions to the understanding of our world today.

Born 1885 in Antwerp to a cultivated and prosperous family of the Flemish bourgeoisie, Hendrik de Man was brought up in the expectation of fulfilling his father's frustrated ambition of pursuing a military career in an elite corps. A spartan regimen, an absolute rectitude, and an unswerving devotion to duty were to be the characteristics by which he came to be known in the sphere of activity in which he chose to make his career, the burgeoning socialist movement of industrial workers, which promised to overthrow the comfortable world of capitalist prosperity in which he had been nurtured. Indeed Emile Vandervelde, for many years leader of both the Belgian Labor party and the Socialist International, once remarked that "socialism is attached to de Man just as the tonsure is to a priest,"⁴ and as the man of the cloth experiences tension in reconciling himself to the everyday world by which he is surrounded, so de Man, pursuing his own vocation, experienced chagrin and disappointment in reconciling himself to the world of utilitarian calculation, political maneuver, and material self-seeking that he encountered during the

³ An effort by the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung in November 1977 to organize a conference to consider de Man in the German context likewise had to be canceled for lack of German participants.

⁴ Henri de Man, *Après Coup: Mémoires*, Brussels-Paris: Toison d'Or, 1941, p. 309.

course of his career. "Rather Prussian, a bit *scharf* for our tastes,"⁵ in another of Vandervelde's characterizations, de Man was either adored or detested by his associates, and from his uneasy relationship with the movement to which he devoted his life he derived a critical appreciation of both its glories and its deficiencies, expressed in a never ending series of newspaper articles, pamphlets, essays, and books.

Certainly the site of his birth carried other implications for his outlook. By heritage he was a polyglot internationalist, though with a firm and deep-rooted identification with the Flemings—in both their golden age of the fifteenth century and their mute and downtrodden condition at the turn of the twentieth century. At ease both in Flemish and in French, the language of cultivated discourse in his homeland, he was brought up in the expectation of using English and German as well, and in the course of his life he acquired sufficient mastery of these languages through residence abroad to write with nearly equal facility in all four. But it was not only his linguistic facility that distinguished his outlook but also an appreciation of the irrefragable significance of nationality, a stubborn and irreducible fact that ill accorded with the tenets of that Marxism to which he became an early convert. As a translator at innumerable trade-union and socialist congresses in his twenties, he was virtually unique among his compeers in his cosmopolitan background, and the depth of his international experience is revealed by his later remark that he had as many homelands as languages. The ability to participate fully in the life of a variety of cultures while preserving a unique personal autonomy, and the specific combination of a Continental passion for ideological ratiocination together with his own experience of the disparate social reality of Britain and America, contributed to the distinctive perspective that he was to express in his social and socialist theory.

⁵ Emile Vandervelde et al., *Le Cinquenaire du Parti Ouvrier Belge 1885-1935*, Brussels: L'Eglantine, 1936, p. 307.

His family background was important in yet another way, for de Man exemplified the bourgeois renegade, the Oedipal rebel, who triumphantly turned the moral weapons of the paternal oppressors against the older generation by demonstrating the bourgeois origins of the socialist critique of capitalist society. As a recruit to class-based socialism, as an idealistic intellectual, he was convinced of the necessity of taking into consideration not only the existing material interests of the proletariat but also the impetus from the cultural heritage of the past in order to explain the historical emergence of the socialist movement and enable it to maintain its mission of constructing a just society. Indeed, a principal thesis that he was to expound held that, while the conventional Marxist reliance on the pursuit of proletarian self-interest to bring about the revolution and a socialist society had made sense in the conditions of mid-nineteenth-century capitalism in which it had been developed, it was disastrously incomplete both in understanding the actual historical genesis of the socialist movement and in providing guidance in the unanticipated conditions of twentieth-century capitalism. Comparative analysis would reveal that it was only the coincidence of social and economic stratification that had made interpretation in terms of historical materialism plausible, and in fact behind the façade of the class struggle for interests was the assertion of man's human dignity, a moral demand that was the precipitate of Western history that perhaps reached its fullest expression in the bourgeois humanism of the thirteenth century. Viewed from this angle, the participation of disaffected elements from the bourgeoisie in the workers' socialist movement was to be regarded not so much as an inconvenient and mildly embarrassing appendage to an otherwise unambiguous providential instrument of history but rather as a component integral to the preservation of the potential historical mission of a class-bound movement. Moreover, this transcendence of class interests was indispensable in the contemporary world since the structure of

capitalism was, contrary to expectations, not bringing about a numerical preponderance of the proletariat, and, furthermore, the implementation of a socialist society would require far, far more than the workers' conquest of power and the dislodgment of the old order. Thus the participation of extraproletarian elements in the past, present, and future of the socialist movement was, in de Man's eyes, to be exalted rather than minimized.

But the discovery of these ideological ramifications was delayed for many years, since de Man at first exhibited a convert's zeal by immolating himself in the workers' cause. His initial reaction to awareness of social injustice was to embrace philosophical anarchism, a doctrine that in its intransigence and its distrust for authority was particularly suited to a young rebel and a citizen of Belgium, with its memories of centuries of oppression by foreign-dominated government and with its primordial linguistic communities. In fact, however, it was sympathetic participation in a strike of the Antwerp dockworkers—a strike that began in economic grievances, but was converted by the Belgian Labor party into a general strike aimed at abolishing the plural vote—that led de Man to become a member of the party's Socialist Young Guard on May Day, 1902. But with regard to the issue of political action he repudiated those who, like Alexandre Millerand in France or the Bavarian wing of the German Social Democratic party, showed by their accession to office or by their support of a governmental budget their implicit legitimization of the bourgeois state; his viewpoint was rather represented by Wilhelm Liebknecht's *Kein Kompromiss, kein Wahlbündnis*,⁶ in which electoral politics was recommended only to the extent that it contributed to raising the class consciousness of the proletariat. He now gave his unreserved allegiance to this radical Marxism, which by its disabused political insight, scientific plausibility, and historical inevitability legitimated his own repudiation of the bourgeois world.

⁶ Berlin: Vorwärts, 1899.

His dedication to this cause and his rapid rise to a position of leadership of the Antwerp Young Guards whereby he edited the Flemish monthly youth organ, served on the Antwerp council of the socialist organizations, was a representative of the Flemish movement to the national youth organization, and contributed to the dissemination of antimilitarist tracts, which led to brushes with the law, were of course hardly applauded by his family, and it was agreed not to talk about the abrasive subject of politics at home. To his family's horror his studies, first at the University of Brussels, subsequently at the Polytechnical Institute in Ghent, suffered as a consequence of his political engagement, and when he was sacked from Ghent for participation in a demonstration occasioned by the news of "Bloody Sunday" in St. Petersburg in January 1905, it was with mutual relief that it was agreed he should depart to Leipzig, the Mecca of radical Marxism, to make his own way in the world.

The years that followed were of decisive importance in consolidating the intellectual basis with which de Man was to make his reputation. In the first place, he managed to secure a position on the leading organ of the radical left of the Social Democratic party, the *Leipziger Volkszeitung*. Not only did this position allow him to maintain a precarious existence, it catapulted him into full participation in the vigorous battles waged against revisionism, and acquainted him with luminaries of the international socialist world, such as Karl Kautsky, Rosa Luxemburg, Franz Mehring, Karl Liebknecht (with whom he collaborated in founding the Socialist Youth International), and even Trotsky. But at the same time he came to the realization that a university education could be highly relevant to a revolutionary socialist, and he was fortunate enough to study under leading German academics at the University of Leipzig, including the psychologist Wilhelm Wundt, the cultural historian Karl Lamprecht, and the economic historian Karl Bücher. He wrote his dissertation on the "Cloth Industry of Ghent

in the Middle Ages," presenting a Marxist analysis that formally contradicted the schema of economic development by which Bücher had made his professional reputation—nevertheless de Man was recommended for graduation *summa cum laude*.

Following this success he spent the better part of a year in England, living a hand-to-mouth existence as a translator and occasional correspondent for the German socialist press. He had the chance to become personally acquainted with the operation of a distinctive political system, and despite his deep-set reservations he could not help but be impressed with certain aspects of the operation of bourgeois democracy. His sojourn abroad was ended in 1910 by an invitation from the rising Belgian socialist leader Emile Vandervelde to head the newly created Centrale d'Education Ouvrière, which had just been set up to provide training for the administration of the intricate and growing socialist conglomerate of mutual insurance societies, cooperatives, and trade unions that formed a counterpart to the political movement. During the next four years he threw himself into the work of the Belgian Labor party not only by providing vigorous leadership in the training of socialist cadres, but also by collaborating with the Walloon Louis de Brouckère in an attempt to win the party over to a radical-Marxist position, particularly to repudiate its current policy of electoral cooperation with the Liberals against the Catholic party. In this attempt and in his approach to his pupils as well, his effort was to keep the party and its class from the mere pursuit of interests, to transmute everyday activities into the fulfillment of the historical destiny that fell to the socialist workers' movement. Although he managed to stir up as much opposition as support, and the party remained true to its alliance with the Liberals, there certainly was momentum in the direction of a radicalization of policy, and it seemed only a matter of time, organization, and effort to bring about the Day of Revolution.

All these certainties of outlook were drastically and forever changed by the outbreak of World War I. As a convinced internationalist with years of experience in Germany, as a socialist armed with the interpretation of war as a matter of capitalistic rivalries, and as a militant who in the role of interpreter accompanied Hermann Müller and Camille Huysmans in their ill-fated mission to Paris in behalf of the Second International, de Man was overwhelmingly committed to the socialist repudiation of war; yet war came nevertheless, and to Belgium as the hapless victim of unprovoked aggression on the part of a militaristic and autocratic government. Under these bewildering circumstances he found himself a volunteer in the Belgian army, one who participated fully in the horrors of trench warfare as a common soldier and soon, as an officer, commanding a battery of mortars. But it was agonizing for him to rationalize the carnage in which he took part, especially in view of his knowledge of the humanity of those on the other side, and it required a severe reexamination of the ideological presuppositions in terms of which he had hitherto constructed his behavior. First of all, in explicit opposition to the thesis enunciated at Zimmerwald by the socialists of the neutral nations and to the position he had vigorously espoused in former days, he now came to insist upon the crucial significance of the existence of political democracy to the socialist. Without democracy, it was possible for autocratic and ruthless governments effectively to suppress and cow a strong socialist movement, as the example of the Central Powers showed; with political democracy, despite its manifold imperfections, the ultimate victory of socialism was ineluctable. Of course this argument was embarrassed by the presence of autocratic Russia on the Allied side, a fact that made the February Revolution of 1917 all the more welcome, as did Wilson's Fourteen Points; doubts as to the rightness of his course of action and the terrible sacrifice of a generation were now set at rest. As it happened, he was sent along with Vander-

velde and de Brouckère on an official mission to the Kerensky government with the aim of persuading the Russians to keep in the war, and this experience was of profound significance for his ideological development. As a Belgian combatant he opposed Bolshevik "revolutionary defeatism," and his experience of the chaos of Russia and of the ruthlessness of its politics permanently disabused him of any enthusiasm for the Communist model. Directly after his Russian experience he was sent by the Belgian government to the United States for some six months, an experience that was to have an equally marked impression on him. For if the United States was disappointing to a socialist because it lacked any significant socialist movement, the reason for this anomaly was important: America's realization of social as well as political democracy. The virtual absence of class consciousness in this bastion of capitalism threw the greatest doubt on the adequacy of Marxist interpretation, although of course it was possible to argue the exceptional circumstances, and therefore the temporary nature, of the American phenomenon.

Participation in the war, then, together with the contrasting examples of Russia and the United States, drove de Man to an appreciation of both the instrumental and the integral significance of democratic organization for the attainment of socialism and cast doubt upon the cogency of his Marxist ideology. Indeed, in his reaction to Versailles, a cruel mockery of Wilsonian idealism, he invested his hopes now in the New World with which he had become familiar—but the postwar America of "normalcy," with Palmer raids, isolationist withdrawal, and political reaction proved most disappointing. He himself was the object of attack at the University of Washington, where he had been offered a position in social psychology, for his participation in the political campaign against the "Lumber Trust" and for his association of some months with the Wobblies—the Industrial Workers of the World—on an island in Puget Sound. He was glad to return to Belgium in the fall of 1920

to take up a new position as head of an *Ecole Ouvrière Supérieure* that was designed to prepare a workers' elite for the implementation of industrial democracy. But the Belgian Labor party was still supportive of the *revanchiste* policy of France's Poincaré, and after a series of incidents in which he felt he could not remain silent despite the party position, he once again left his native land for the Germany against which he had fought for so many years.

The next decade in de Man's life was the most fruitful, establishing him as a figure of international import in socialist and intellectual circles with the publication in 1926 of his full-scale critique of Marxism, the *Psychology of Socialism*.⁷ At first he remained involved in workers' education, teaching at the Frankfurt Labor College, but in 1929 he was appointed to a newly created chair in social psychology at the University of Frankfurt. In addition to a countless series of articles and brochures he published during this period two other major studies, *Joy in Work*⁸ in 1927, a pioneer study in industrial sociology, and, in early 1933, a long volume designed to be the positive statement of an ideological alternative to Marxism, *Die sozialistische Idee*.⁹

The basic problem with which he struggled was to understand the reasons, and therefore the cure, for the debacle of the socialist movement, equally visible in reformist accommodation to a decadent capitalist system in the West and in the triumph of a decadent revolutionary socialism in the Soviet Union. In both cases, he argued, a decisive portion of the blame must be assigned to the Marxist ideology by which the movements had been guided. Operating in terms of a nineteenth-century model of social reality and human behavior, this ideology had supposed that the utilitarian analysis of classical economics would suffice to

⁷ London: Allen & Unwin, 1928; first published as *Zur Psychologie des Sozialismus*, Jena: Diederichs, 1926.

⁸ London: Allen & Unwin, 1929; first published as *Der Kampf um die Arbeitsfreude*, Jena: Diederichs, 1927.

⁹ Jena: Diederichs, 1933; the book was never translated into English.

explain the ineluctable evolution of capitalism and to guide the postrevolutionary jump into freedom. But in fact history had its own cunning, and the evolution of capitalism had proceeded in terms unforeseen by Marx, notably in the failure of the proletariat to become an overwhelming numerical mass of the population—a fact that cast into doubt his assumption of the democratic nature of a socialist revolution. Moreover, generalizing to the nature of human action from essentially the European experience, Marx had attributed class consciousness to the distribution of economic variables. In fact, its virtual absence in the American case demonstrated that class consciousness was rather the consequence of the distribution of social variables, namely, the system of invidious distinction based on ownership which had luxuriated in the European capitalism that had been superimposed on the historical estate society. Thereby the dignity of the individual, sanctified by both the religious and the secular traditions of the West, was attainted, and it was thus the experience of social injustice, not the fact of economic deprivation itself, that had led the European proletariat to exhibit the behavior that Marx had attributed solely to the pursuit of interests. Encouragement of the pursuit of interests would be fatal to the vitality of the socialist movement above all because it was evident that capitalism could supply the material needs of the proletariat; thus it was the success rather than the failure of capitalism that de Man most feared, for it sapped the movement through the embourgeoisement of the proletariat, through covert reformist accommodation to the existing order, which was only veiled by revolutionary rhetoric.

As for the responsibility of Marxist doctrine for the imbroglio in Russia, de Man was less explicit, largely because he was primarily concerned with galvanizing the Western socialist parties and felt that the Communist model was an unlikely candidate for Western imitation. Of course the backward and autocratic historical heritage of Russia had

set the stage for the disasters that beset that unhappy land. But even in the case of Western countries de Man was distrustful of simplistic formulas for socialization of the means of production; nationalization without the imposition of effective, local workers' control meant bureaucratization. And effective workers' control required the participation of an alert, educated, and responsible proletariat in the determination of policy. Thus the Marxist presupposition that the implementation of socialism was guaranteed by the proletarian conquest of power was most doubtful, and its insistence upon defining socialism in essentially economic terms had in fact sanctified the erection of the brutal Soviet tyranny.

Living in Weimar Germany, de Man was witness to the Nazi seizure of power. One reason that *Die sozialistische Idee* did not match the *Psychology of Socialism* in its impact on the intellectual world was that it was seized upon publication and received (an indifferent) French translation only in 1935; further, the coming of the depression and the threat from the totalitarian Right created a new political atmosphere in which niceties of ideological justification appeared trivial compared to the question of which side one was on. In fact, however, the *Plan du Travail*¹⁰ drawn up by de Man and enthusiastically adopted as a program by the Belgian Labor party at Christmas 1933 was in large part a pragmatic application of the ideological reformulation with which he had been concerned. Distinguishing his *Plan* from the conventional minimal-maximalist programmatic distinction practiced by socialists was the conception that it was indispensable to realize a complex of "structural" reforms of the economy immediately if the system as a whole was not to collapse under the impact of the depression; moreover, such a program offered the political possibility

¹⁰ Henri de Man, rapporteur, *Le Plan du Travail*, Forty-eighth Congress of the Belgian Labor Party, Brussels, 24 and 25 December 1933; Brussels: Lucifer, 1933.

of rallying the immense majority of the population, equally the victims of monopoly capitalism. In fact the *Plan* served to revive the élan of the Labor party, of which de Man had become a leader rivaling the aging Vandervelde, and when in 1935 opportunity was offered to enter into a tripartite Government of National Renovation, which promised to reverse the disastrous deflationary policies of the previous administrations, the *Plan* was essentially sacrificed. De Man became, first, minister of public works, and then in succeeding governments during the next three years, minister of finances.

His official experience was significant for the development of his ideological outlook, for it confirmed the intense distaste that he had always exhibited for the give-and-take of political life. By temperament utterly devoted to his cause, he was intolerant of the professional politicians of any party, most of all his own, and saw in opposition to his programs only the machinations of the capitalist opponent. While the program of public works and other efforts of the successive governments were moderately successful in reducing the rate of unemployment, he felt increasingly frustrated by the reluctance of these governments to undertake structural reforms and by the financial community's extraparlimentary opposition to his policies. In the apocalyptic atmosphere of the late thirties he felt, generalizing from his own experiences, that perhaps the last opportunity for the realization of socialism was being foreclosed by capitalist manipulation of the parliamentary process, and that, hence, the operation of bourgeois democracy might now impede rather than make possible the coming of socialism. On the basis of these convictions he called for a fundamental constitutional revision that would strengthen the stability and power of the executive and give legitimate representation to various interests through the organization of a corporatist economic council.

At the same time the late thirties revived another major

and fateful issue for de Man, that of the legitimacy of warfare in an age of mass destruction. Just as he had been a bitter-ender in World War I in order to validate his emergent faith that it was only through the victorious prosecution of the war that socialism might be attained, so now with a pacifist commitment refired by the disastrous outcome of that conflict, he remained true to a policy of appeasement even after Munich. And this decision was to have fearful political consequences, since he had become titular leader of the Labor party and also remained the only important Belgian political leader to support Leopold II in his decision to surrender to the invading German army. With characteristic candor and fervor he now issued a "Manifesto"¹¹ in which he celebrated the cessation of the parliamentary regime of the capitalist plutocracy and looked forward to the achievement of socialism within a newly united Europe. In articles in a revamped socialist newspaper and in other publications for some months he preached the same message, but a series of incidents demonstrated the impossibility of carrying through an autonomous policy, above all after the invasion of Russia. In November 1941 de Man effectively retired from public life and left Belgium to lead a solitary existence in an Alpine hut on Mont Blanc, where he devoted himself to reflection and to writing. At the end of the war he managed to escape to Switzerland, from where he was soon to hear of his conviction in absentia for treason by a Belgian military court, an act that added humiliation and bitterness to the last years of exile. Nevertheless his fulfillment in a new marriage, the reworking of his autobiography, the writing of a volume of somber reflections on the future of the world bore witness to the continued vitality of this extraordinary figure. In the end, he concluded that the socialist movement unavoidably participated in the decadence of the capitalist world order, and that the best the responsible individual could do was to cultivate his own garden in the

¹¹ "Manifeste aux membres du P.O.B.," *Gazette de Charleroi*, 3 July 1940.

hope that something of the patrimony of the ages would be thus preserved.

De Man died in an automobile accident in 1953.

No treatment, however cursory, of this rich and variegated life can avoid the question of the extent to which the ideological innovations with which de Man was associated had in fact led to his last-minute attempt to construe Nazism in the image of socialism.¹² His ideological opponents, above all the unreconstructed Marxists, have tended to argue that his actions demonstrated the untenability of "voluntaristic socialism"; and, leaving aside the embarrassing Communist justification of the Nazi-Soviet Pact in Marxist terms, certainly it is true that the many socialists who resisted de Man's ideological innovations experienced little ambivalence in opposing Hitler. There undoubtedly were certain aspects of de Man's ideology that permitted him to rationalize a reconciliation with Nazi doctrine. In the first place, his attempts to broaden the class basis of socialism, to reach out to those outside the proletariat and to transmute the class struggle into something more than a competitive struggle for interests, certainly gave him a stand to appreciate the idea of the *Volksgemeinschaft* that was prohibited to his more orthodox socialist colleagues. Second, his denigration of procedural democracy, logically compatible with though not demanded by the tenets of a Marxist outlook, was of course a prominent theme in Nazi propaganda. Thirdly, there gradually emerged in de Man's thought an elitist emphasis that contrasted sharply with the more prosaic politicalism of others. In his search for means to overcome the contamination of the bourgeois world, he turned at first to an idealized proletariat, but his experience in workers' education provided him with an unsurpassed realistic if sympathetic knowledge of the lim-

¹² For a fuller treatment of this issue, see my "Voluntaristic Socialism: An Examination of the Implications of Hendrik de Man's Ideology," *International Review of Social History*, vol. 3, part 3, 1958, pp. 385-417.

ited mentality of the proletariat; alarmed by its embourgeoisement, he then turned to the presence of disinterested intellectuals as the saving grace within the party. Although he explicitly repudiated a superior role for intellectuals within the movement,¹³ as in the concluding passage of chapter 7 below, he believed political leaders should take an active, creative role,¹⁴ and it is not without significance that he characterized himself as sharing the attitude toward the masses of Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*: "I had rather be their servant in my way than sway with them in theirs."¹⁵ Yet another strand of ideological development that is suggestive is the parallelism between his own call for the recognition of authority, nationality, and order and that of certain of the French neosocialists, most notably Marcel Déat, who in fact became a notorious collaborator.

But it should be emphasized that there was, so to speak, a conspiracy of historical circumstances that drove de Man in the direction of what can perhaps best be described as an uneasy acceptance of the fact of Nazi hegemony, and that others subscribing to his ideology, such as the Belgian *équipe planiste*, not burdened with the personal dilemmas that we have described, utterly repudiated the policy he chose in those days. Moreover, despite his provocative borrowing from a fascist vocabulary, in fact the governmental reorganization that he urged in the late thirties was largely modeled after the successful democratic examples of the Anglo-American world. His glee at the collapse of the old order soon changed into a policy of trying to make the best of a bad job, an attempt that proved hopeless. His fateful, disastrous decision to essay a policy of neutralism was in fact the product of the personal experiences that had driven him to construct his ideological innovations, rather than being the logical consequence of the latter. Rather

¹³ See his *Intellectuel en het Socialisme*, Brussels: De Wilde Roos, n.d. [1926].

¹⁴ See his *Massen und Führer*, Potsdam: Alfred Protte, 1932.

¹⁵ Henri de Man, *Cavalier seul*, Geneva: Cheval Ailé, 1948, p. 298; "Coriolanus," II, i, 200-201.

paradoxically, we can say that the same ascetic intensity of moral convictions that brought de Man to the personal and ideological dilemmas we have indicated also brought him to the formulation of an ideological system whose most general import can perhaps be best suggested by saying that it explores the implications of the collapse of the Left's chiliastic expectations that a socialist society would come about as a corollary to the political triumph of the proletariat. We are left with an instrument that by its recognition of extraeconomic dimensions in the analysis of human action permits the adequate guidance of a socialist movement within the rules of the game of a pluralistic society—an ideology that legitimizes precisely the give-and-take of legislative politics that its author found intolerable, and which also furnishes a logically based criterion for the rejection of totalitarianisms of both Right and Left.

The implication of these conclusions is that de Man's writings are by no means of historical interest only and that it is desirable to rescue his consideration as a social thinker from the folly of the war years.¹⁶ The continued fascination of dissident Western intellectuals with the beguiling certainties of an attenuated Marxism underscores the importance of one who, largely accepting the Marxist analysis of the operation of capitalist society, nevertheless called attention to the grave limitations of its nineteenth-century mode of analysis. And the positive implications of his voluntaristic mode of analysis are equally far-reaching, furnishing grounds for understanding the limited efficacy of that erstwhile panacea of socialism, the nationalization of the means of production; the extension of the meaning of socialism from the economic realm to an all-pervasive cultural transformation; the implementation of socialism as an immediate if partial accomplishment even within the capitalist order; and, as we have noted, the repudiation of

¹⁶ For a fuller treatment of this issue, see my "Ideological Preconceptions and Sociology: Reflections on the Contemporary Significance of Hendrik de Man," *Sociologia Internationalis*, vol. 12, no. 1/2, 1974, pp. 5-23.

totalitarianism whatever the name in which it may speak. De Man's observations on the class order of capitalist society, on the difficulties of establishing effective industrial democracy, on the nature of industrial society, anticipated conclusions that others, decades afterward, have painfully won and triumphantly proclaimed.¹⁷ In terms of the inherent significance of his ideas, he deserves to regain the outstanding place in social thought he once held. It is hoped that this volume will allow the reader to judge the soundness of these observations.

In making the selection from the seventeen books, forty-odd brochures, and some four hundred articles that comprise the works of Hendrik de Man, two criteria have been foremost. The first has been to choose passages of central and continued significance for the analysis of social phenomena. Both as socialist and sociologist, de Man had much to say of relevance to the world of today, with regard not only to the philosophical issues that have just been treated but also to their implications for application to the institutions of the industrial order. Thus in a bureaucratized world uneasily Communist or capitalist, his analysis of the problematics of socialization has a profound and disturbing salience, and his insistence upon the extra-economic dimensions of institutional reform has a relevance that is more obvious in the world of high gross national product than at the time of writing. The second major criterion of selection has been to permit the reader to understand the circumstances, both historical and, to a lesser degree, personal, that led de Man to develop his ideas and to pursue his rather spectacular career. To aid

¹⁷ See, e.g., Anthony Giddens, whose *Class Structure of the Advanced Societies* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1973) extracts from a sophisticated analysis of divergent conceptualizations of social class the conclusion that there may be inextinguishable differences among societies in similar stages of economic development. In another context, note the growing acknowledgment in the practice (if only sporadically in the ideology) of socialist parties of the irrelevance of nationalization to the problems of equality and self-determination within industrial society.

the reader's understanding, each selection has been introduced by passages that serve to identify its significance in terms of his life and his contribution to social analysis. The intention has been thereby to construct a volume that can be understood in terms of its content alone—but at the same time, it is to be hoped that the reader will be led to make further investigations, both of the works of de Man himself and of commentary upon his lifework. To this end a selective bibliography is provided of both primary and secondary material.

It should be noted that certain passages in the headnotes below have appeared in my biographical study, *Beyond Marxism: The Faith and Works of Hendrik de Man* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1966), and in "Le socialisme: du mouvement social au groupement d'intérêt," *Revue européenne des sciences sociales et Cahiers Vilfredo Pareto*, vol. 12, no. 31, 1974, pp. 63-74.

All citations are to works by de Man, and all notes are by the editor, unless otherwise specified. Similarly, the editor is responsible for the translation of all the selections but three. In the two cases where previous translations have been used, the texts have been Americanized in spelling and annotation has been provided. The last chapter gives the reader an opportunity to read de Man's own English.

It is a pleasure to acknowledge the generosity of Jan de Man and Elisa Lecocq-de Man, who have permitted me to reproduce the texts below; as well as the willing aid of Michel Brélaz of Geneva, secretary-general of the Association for the Study of the Works of Hendrik de Man; Robert Abs, librarian of the Institut Emile Vandervelde of Brussels; Frits de Jong, director of the International Institute of Social History of Amsterdam; Nathanael Greene of Wesleyan University, who provided a thoughtful critique to my efforts; the Central University Research Fund as well as the library of the University of New Hampshire; and Louis Hudon, Grover Marshall, and Marron Fort at the same institution, whom I badgered about fine points of translation. I have endeavored to rise above the compelling

rhythms of the original texts in putting them into English, but have not had the flexibility that de Man himself enjoyed in freely rewriting his own works in accordance with the stylistic demands implicit in each of the four languages he commanded. Hence for a work of scholarship, fidelity to the original text won over felicity of expression when imagination failed—but I trust that the contest is only occasionally visible, and that the result in general is worthy of the original author, whose mastery of expression as a scholar and as a polemicist is evident in whatever language he wrote.

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The Era of Democracy

In 1907, a twenty-two-year-old postulant at the Mecca of radical Marxism in Leipzig, where he contributed to the *Leipziger Volkszeitung* and attended the university as a doctoral student, de Man still maintained his contacts with the Flemish socialist youth organization in which he had already played a significant role. The pamphlet excerpted below, a fuller version of talks that he had recently given back in Flanders, is illustrative of his pre-World War I, unreconstructed faith. A number of issues that were to play a crucial role both in the history of the socialist movement in the decades to come, and in his own later efforts to reconstitute the ideological basis of the movement, are evident in its pages. Here, however, their resolution is unself-consciously within the orthodox Marxist tradition, although with hindsight it is now possible to detect foreshadowings of the ideological innovations that de Man was to develop.

Perhaps the most fundamental issue is that of man's "voluntaristic" response to his historical circumstances; in the present text the moral and explanatory basis for the struggle of the proletariat is assumed to be self-evident from the fact of capitalist exploitation. The pursuit of interests then is identical with the struggle for self-preservation and calls for as little justification; the only problem is to direct the energies of this struggle in the historically effective, organized form of the class-conscious socialist movement. A second theme, in later works to receive far-ranging elaboration, concerns the appropriate deployment of forces until the day of revolution has arrived; here the question is disposed of through the implicit assumptions that (a) that day is not far off; (b) class struggle will have as

its most notable effect the growing consciousness on the part of the proletariat of its class-bound, underdog position; and (c) nevertheless there are at least some short-term gains to be wrested from the enemy.

Third, while the bulk of the pamphlet is directed at a knowledgeable analysis of the balance of political forces within particular countries—an analysis that we have not reproduced, in line with de Man's acknowledgment that the details were only of transitory significance—the underlying assumption is that ultimately the power and numbers of the proletariat will be sufficient to bring about the conquest of power on a mass-democratic basis through exploiting the political and legal rights of the bourgeois order. Last, however—and this is the polemical basis for the whole pamphlet—the proletariat is not to be taken in by the snares of formal, bourgeois democracy, which can and will serve as a buttress and disguise for the interests of the bourgeoisie threatened by the rising proletariat rather than as an open road to the realization of socialism.

While the author makes no pretense of originality—in the preface to the pamphlet he refers the interested reader to Karl Kautsky and Anton Pannekoek for further guidance¹—in a sense that is the point of its inclusion here, to form the baseline for the later ideological developments with which de Man is identified. Nevertheless even in this early work it is possible to note beyond the clichés of orthodox Marxism the vigor and knowledge the author brings to his analysis, the assurance and deftness of his capacity to pamphleteer, and at the same time his ability to bring an intellectual's familiarity with the European cultural heritage to bear on mundane questions of political tactics. These same qualities were to serve him well in his

¹ Kautsky, 1854-1938, the mentor of (German) social democracy, with whom de Man was later to break decisively; Pannekoek, 1873-1960, Dutch astronomer and socialist theoretician (dates supplied by the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam); at this point both leaders in radical-Marxist rejection of the revisionism associated particularly with Eduard Bernstein's *Evolutionary Socialism*, first published in 1899.

later, heterodox, and original work of ideological reformulation.

HET TIJDVAK DER DEMOKRATIE²

The [1905] revolution in Russia with its immediate goal of a democratization of the state, the introduction of universal suffrage in Austria and Hungary, the overthrow of the Conservative government in England, the spreading and flowering of radical democracy in France, the progress of the "liberal" parties during the last Reichstag election in Germany, the fall of the Kuyper government in the Netherlands, the revival of a "democratized" liberalism in Belgium—these are the essential events in the history of the last few years that have originated and confirmed the belief of many socialists in the onset of an era of democracy in Europe, from which socialism should gradually but directly emerge. Indeed, the catchword "democracy" has become so accepted in the Belgian socialist press that day after day it is used as inseparable from, even synonymous with, socialism. However, what is meant by the term "democracy" is usually not easy to discern. To the remark of the apprentice in Goethe's *Faust*:

But an idea is bound to the word,

Mephistopheles replies:

Quite so! Only one shouldn't be too troubled,
For precisely where ideas fall short,
A word can be readily supplied.
Using words, it is easy to dispute,
Using words, it is easy to build up theories,
Using words, it is easy to believe . . .

Nowadays there are indeed few words used with better effect to disguise their lack of a determinate and clear

² Ghent: *Germinal*, 1907, pp. 11-19, 86-88.

meaning than "democracy." The French political economist Le Play³ once said: "What one strives in vain to attain through an ever so skillful association of clearly defined words is rendered easy with unclear expressions which, according to the outlook of those who read and understand them, can be used in the most different, even contradictory, senses. Many words lend themselves to such use at present, but four are particularly prone to cover up thought: the words freedom, progress, equality, and democracy." In his frankness, the good Le Play seems not to have noticed that these are precisely the chosen catchwords of bourgeois democracy, the pillars of liberal ideology. All too often the word "democracy" is uncritically taken from the conceptual arsenal of this liberal ideology to add to our own supply, which however has enough intellectual weaponry not to have need of enriching itself by the acquisition of wooden swords.

Democracy as a Goal and as a Movement

But what does this word "democracy" mean?

In the many cases where use hides a lack of a clear conceptualization, it, of course, means nothing at all.

But insofar as there is actually a meaning, in general this can be regarded from two points of view: as absolute and relative, or, if one wishes, as a goal and as a movement.

From its Greek origin, it means the same as rule of the people. The absolute meaning then appears as a constitutional or governmental form on the basis of the realization of political rule by free and equal citizens, in opposition to the forms (autocracy, aristocracy, plutocracy, oligarchy, etc.) in which this rule is exercised only by one or a few individuals. When one thinks through to the ultimate logical implications of this "democratic principle," one can outline with considerable assurance the political institutions that are appropriate to democracy as a goal: a republic (swept

³ 1806-1882.

clean from the residues of a monarchical system) with universal and equal suffrage and the utmost practicable direct legislation, with guarantees of the freedom of the individual, of thought and of publication, of assembly and of association, independent of all religious bodies, with universal and equal obligations to the military, like eligibility and accountability of all government officials, including the judiciary. There can be dispute about details, but there is no doubt that these are the general features of ideal democracy, those that are summed up under the rubric of political reforms in the Erfurt Program⁴ and (although not so clearly, succinctly, or precisely) in the Program of the Belgian Labor party.⁵ Social policy (labor legislation, welfare policy, etc.), as well as taxation policy, are not here treated, since in general they will be determined by economic considerations that are in themselves entirely independent of the form of government.

So much for the sketching of democracy as a goal. That in this respect it is bound up with the goal of social democracy necessarily and in the closest way as the only possible form of government for a socialist society needs no further emphasis. If, on the basis of analysis of the term "social democracy," one wishes to speak of a political and an economic principle in socialism, then one can say that the political principle is none other than democracy as a goal. But we shall later demonstrate that the realization of a fully democratic form of government is unthinkable without the realization of integral socialism.

Nevertheless, this democracy is in its nature not at all socialistic. Completely aside from the great role that democratic forms of government and ideals played in antiquity, it was not the proletariat that was the first to have made a democratic political order as its political ideal.

The bourgeoisie had done that long before.

⁴ Adopted by the German Social Democratic party in 1891.

⁵ The *Déclaration de Quaregnon* of 1894.

The development in medieval society of the means of production gave rise to new relations of production, new classes, new class differentiations, new class struggles. Capitalism was born, the bourgeoisie was born. But the bourgeoisie, the newest, growing class, was oppressed; it felt held down and confined by the restrictions of a political organization that was adapted to the needs and interests of other classes, which had conquered their political hegemony under other, outgrown economic conditions. This bourgeoisie was thus forced into a political class struggle in which it figured as a revolutionary class, with the goal of seizing state power in its own hands in order to institute a form of government after its own model. An ideal form of government was for them that which assured unlimited freedom of exploitation and of competition, and which guaranteed the unhindered development of capital; it was the political fulfillment of the ideas of freedom and equality—the doctrinal expression of their material life conditions so as to form the spiritual foundations of the capitalist way of production and exchange—a state without despotism, with no other bond among men than naked self-interest, as the *Communist Manifesto* has expressed it, with all the freedoms and rights of the individual which they proclaim as immortal, inalienable “rights of man”: in a word, democracy. This was the political ideal of the bourgeoisie in their revolutionary struggle against feudal despotism, against aristocratic magnates, against clericalism.

By now this struggle is in most countries largely, if not completely, finished. As the ideal of a democratic form of government is nowhere fully carried out, the industrial, and especially the commercial, bourgeoisie more or less continue to fight for it. This striving of nonproletarian elements for democracy (as goal) we call the democratic movement.

Nowadays, this democratic movement does not have entirely the same mark of unity of revolutionary energy as

when for the bourgeoisie it was a question of being or not being, a matter of the conquest of the most vital conditions of their existence and development. The bourgeoisie are no longer an oppressed class but have become an oppressing class. The capitalistic way of production, which has been able to develop freely thanks to the political triumph of the bourgeoisie, has formed a proletariat, in turn an exploited class, which to the degree that it becomes more conscious and more determined in its struggle for political power against all the classes that now possess this power (bourgeoisie, landowners, petty bourgeoisie, etc.), has totally changed the nature of the struggle.

In time the proletarian class struggle became the pivot and main point of all politics, and pushed all other questions into the background; or rather, shall this help or hinder social democracy? is either the only question asked or is asked before anything else, by those on both sides. Now the bourgeoisie have the proletariat use against them the laws and freedoms that they had conquered for themselves, the freedom of assembly and association, freedom of the press, universal suffrage; they are fought with the weapons that they have forged themselves, which they themselves in part still need.

Whether and to what degree they will now abandon these laws and freedoms, their democratic ideal, depends in the first place on the extent they feel threatened, on the one hand by the proletariat, on the other hand by the aristocracy and clericalism—on which side and in which struggle they have more to gain or to lose. Under the influence of psychological factors, such as the power of revolutionary traditions, religious or national loyalties, or simply through deliberate judgment, they will also divide themselves into opposing factions inclining more or less toward one of two poles of the opposition to socialism: to the tactic of outright reaction, with violation of political rights, systematic stupefaction, boundless exploitation, which in the end leads to the bloodbath; or to the tactic of bandages and ointments,

of "class reconciliation" and "social peace," of reforms . . . giving rise to the illusion that one can expect from a democratic political order the abolition of all conflict of economic interests.

These are indeed the broad strokes in terms of which bourgeois policy in all the capitalistically developed countries is formed; a closer characterization, however, cannot be entertained, since the conditions that determine the attitude of nonproletarian classes and parties differ from country to country, and since, in addition, general observations, if they are not to lose their applicability, must be so loosely drawn that they can no longer explain any given phenomenon, while on the other hand, if they wish to take account of all the idiosyncracies of reality and be applicable to all exceptions, they lose in the end their general meaningfulness. Accordingly, the elaboration of the universal, that is, theory, is to be dropped, and we must attend to the level of specific phenomena. If we wish to investigate what is the role of the democratic ideal in the policies of bourgeois parties, we must observe the circumstances in each country, ascertain the movements and inclinations of classes and parties, search out their causes, and then draw up the possible general conclusions.

With a pre-cut ready-made recipe, with a formula that tries to establish the direction of the evolution of the bourgeois parties a priori, one is thus not well served. From the undeniable fact that, just as in natural phenomena reaction follows action, the growth of the socialist workers' movement then brings about a growing reactionary conviction among the ruling classes and weakens the political divisions among them, one may not conclude that all the bourgeois parties must always become more reactionary, to the point of fusion into "one reactionary mass." Whoever believes that this evolution toward reaction must take place necessarily, constantly, generally, always uniformly and in the same direction; that the bourgeoisie, just like the sun and with the same natural necessity, must move from left