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What's Left?

Platypus

international journal of critical letters and emancipatory politics

publications

What is a platypus?

On surviving the extinction of the Left | A short history of the Left
(June - July, 2006)

Introducing *Platypus*

Report and bibliography for an attempt
at reformulating the Marxian Left in Chicago in 2006

Originally published in *AREA Chicago* magazine #3, Summer/Fall 2006
(September 11, 2006)

"The Left is Dead! — Long Live the Left!"

Vicissitudes of historical consciousness
and possibilities for emancipatory social politics today
(May 1, 2007)

forthcoming

Platypus pre-issue manifesto:

What's Left?

A History of the Left, pre-1689 - post-2001
(projected November, 2007)

What is a platypus?

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Report and bibliography

September, 2006

The *Platypus* Affiliated Society

Statement of purpose

April, 2007

"The Left is Dead! — Long Live the Left!"

Platypus, Chicago

May, 2007

Platypus Marxist reading group Chicago 2006-07

"Origin is the goal." — Karl Kraus

"History is the subject of a structure whose site is not homogenous, empty time, but time filled by the presence of the now. Thus, to Robespierre ancient Rome was a past charged with the time of the now which he blasted out of the continuum of history. The French Revolution viewed itself as Rome incarnate. It evoked ancient Rome the way fashion evokes costumes of the past. Fashion has a flair for the topical, no matter where it stirs in the thickets of long ago; it is a tiger's leap into the past. This jump, however, takes place in an arena where the ruling class gives the commands. The same leap in the open air of history is the dialectical one, which is how Marx understood the revolution."

— Walter Benjamin
Theses on the Philosophy of History (1940)

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Published by the Platypus Affiliated Society Organizational Committee

June, 2007

series and authors

Theory and Practice

4 sessions, April - June, 2006

Max Horkheimer, Hebert Marcuse, Theodor W. Adorno, Karl Korsch, Marx, et al.

Reading the New Left

11 sessions, June - October, 2006

Martin Nicolaus, Moishe Postone, Juliet Mitchell, Marcuse, Louis Althusser, Carl Oglesby, Cliff Slaughter, SWP (U.S.) Revolutionary Tendency/Spartacist League, Richard Fraser, Malcolm X, Huey Newton, C. Wright Mills, Leszek Kolakowski, André Gorz, Fidel Castro, Che Guevara, Rudi Dutschke, Daniel Cohn-Bendit, et al.

After the New Left, "the thought of the outside" Foucault and the Iranian Revolution

5 sessions, October - December, 2006

Frantz Fanon, Ervand Abrahamian, Fred Halliday, David Greason, Janet Afary and Kevin Anderson, Foucault, Nietzsche, et al.

"Imperialism" — What is it? Why should we be against it?

3 sessions, January, 2007

Lenin, Postone, Iraqi Communist Party, David Harvey, Tariq Ali, Samir Amin, Habermas and Derrida, Spartacist League, et al.

Marx after Marxism

11 sessions, February - July, 2007

Marx, Georg Lukács, Postone, Horkheimer, Wilhelm Reich, Siegfried Kracauer, Adorno, Korsch, et al.

A history of the Left, pre-1689 - post-2001

11 sessions, July - October, 2007

Marx, Lenin, Trotsky, Edmund Wilson, Eric Hobsbawm, Carl Schorske, James Joll, J. P. Nettl, Isaac Deutscher, Sebastian Haffner, Irwin Unger, Postone, et al.

Platypus 2004-07

December 15, 2004

Platypus journal prospective editorial board (seven members) meeting in Chicago: Chris Cutrone commissioned to write editorial/mission statement.

April 15, 2006

Platypus Marxist reading group first meeting, University of Chicago.

May 29, 2006

Platypus reading group and affiliated society email discussion list established.

June 11 and July 6, 2006

"What is a *platypus*? On surviving the extinction of the Left" statement and supplemental "short history of the Left" written by Chris Cutrone.

August 5, 2006

Platypus flyer of "What is a platypus?" and "A short history of the Left" produced.

September 11, 2006

"Introducing *Platypus*" report and bibliography written by Chris Cutrone.

October 5 and 12, 2006

Platypus flyer distribution at Iraq anti-war demonstrations in Chicago.

December 3, 2006

Platypus Affiliated Society organization established.

January 30, 2007

Platypus Affiliated Society public forum, "Imperialism" and the Left, in Chicago.

February 23 - May 16, 2007

Platypus Affiliated Society film screening discussions: *Rosa Luxemburg* (dir. Margarethe von Trotta, 1985); subsequent screenings on 4/6, 4/18, 4/20, 5/2, 5/4, 5/11, 5/16: *Rosa Luxemburg*, *Man with a Movie Camera* (dir. Dziga Vertov, 1928), *The Handmaid's Tale* (dir. Volker Schlöndorff, 1990), *The Conformist* (dir. Bernardo Bertolucci, 1970), and *Glory* (dir. Edward Zwick, 1989).

February 24, 2007

Platypus workshop "What's Left in Iraq?" at new SDS conference in Chicago.

April 8, 2007

Platypus Affiliated Society statement of purpose, membership criteria and organizational rules adopted.

May 1, 2007

"The Left is Dead! — Long Live the Left!" *Platypus* report written by Chris Cutrone.



What is a platypus?

On surviving the extinction of the Left

A story is told about Karl Marx's collaborator and friend Friedrich Engels, who, in his youth, as a good Hegelian Idealist, sure about the purposeful, rational evolution of nature and of the place of human reason in it, became indignant when reading about a platypus, which he supposed to be a fraud perpetrated by English taxidermists. For Engels, the platypus made no sense in natural history.

Later, Engels saw a living platypus at a British zoo and was chagrined. Like Marx a good materialist, and a thinker receptive to Darwin's theory of evolution, which dethroned a human-centered view of nature, Engels came to respect that "reason" in history, natural or otherwise, must not necessarily accord with present standards of human reason.

This is a parable we find salutary to understanding the condition of the Left today.

In light of the history of the present, we might ask, what right does the Left have to exist?

Every right — as much as the platypus has, however difficult it might be to categorize!

We maintain that past and present history need not indicate the future. Past and present failures and losses on the Left should educate and warn, but not spellbind and enthrall us.

Hence, to free ourselves, we declare that the Left is *dead*. — Or, more precisely, that we are all that is left of it.

This is less a statement of fact than of intent.

— The intent that the Left should live, but the recognition that it can, *only* by overcoming itself. And we are that overcoming!

So, then, *what* are we?

We are thinkers on the Left educated and warned by the history of the 20th Century — but *not* terrorized by it! "Let the dead bury the dead." Our actions might redeem their suffering yet.

We are motivated, after failed and betrayed attempts at emancipation, and in light of their inadequate self-understanding, to re-appropriate this history in service of possibilities for emancipatory struggle in the present — and the future.

Towards such ends, we might begin (perhaps provocatively) with the list of names that indicate the thoughts and problems issuing from events that, reading history against the grain (with Benjamin), still speak to us in the present: Marx, Lenin, Luxemburg, Trotsky, Adorno. — Not much more than what is represented by these figures, but absolutely nothing less.

We will overcome any easy and false recognition of such names, and all received wisdom about the thoughts and actions identified with them, to better possible *critical* recognition and development of *our* purpose.

In the history of the Left, the dates 1848 and 1917, but less 1968, and *not* 1989: the aftermath of ambiguous defeats and victories; but, more, the insights yielded by defeats, and the recognition of a present and a history that need not have been, for a future that need not yet be. The restive spirits of 1848 and 1917, in their unfulfilled possibilities, will continue to speak to an unredeemed future.

The history of modernity is not finished yet, nor will it be, short of redeeming its promise. Therefore, we do not share the (mis)laid feelings of exhaustion with the modern, but we recognize a certain abdication of its emancipatory transformation, which haunts us with its necessity.

We recognize *our* necessity.

We agree with the young Marx in "the ruthless criticism of everything existing." Unlike Hegel in his struggle against Romantic despair after 1789, we recognize the necessity of our present only as "bad." Our present does not deserve affirmation or even respect, for we recognize it only for what came to be when the Left was destroyed and liquidated itself.

And so, with the story of Engels and the platypus, let us begin to address the improbable but not impossible tasks and project of the *next* Left.

June, 2006

The *Platypus* Affiliated Society

The *Platypus* Affiliated Society, established in December 2006, organizes reading groups, public fora, research and journalism focused on problems and tasks inherited from the "Old" (1920s-30s), "New" (1960s-70s) and post-political (1980s-90s) Left for the possibilities of emancipatory politics today.

Statement of purpose

Platypus is a project for the self-criticism, self-education, and, ultimately, the practical reconstitution of a Marxian Left. At present the Marxist Left appears as a historical ruin. The received wisdom of today dictates that past, failed attempts at emancipation stand not as moments full of potential yet to be redeemed, but rather as "what was" — utopianism that was bound to end in tragedy. As critical inheritors of a vanquished tradition, Platypus contends that — after the failure of the 1960s New Left, and the dismantlement of the welfare state and the destruction of the Soviet Union in the 1980s-90s — the present disorientation of the Left means we can hardly claim to know the tasks and goals of social emancipation better than the "utopians" of the past did.

Our task is critique and education towards the reconstitution of a Marxian Left. Platypus contends that the ruin of the Marxist Left as it stands today is of a tradition whose defeat was largely self-inflicted, hence at present the Marxist Left is *historical*, and in such a grave state of decomposition that it has become exceedingly difficult to draft coherently programmatic social-political demands. In the face of the catastrophic past and present, the first task for the reconstitution of a Marxian Left as an emancipatory force is to recognize the reasons for the historical failure of Marxism and to clarify the necessity of a Marxian Left for the present and future. — *If the Left is to change the world, it must first transform itself!*

The improbable — but not impossible — reconstitution of an emancipatory Left is an urgent task; we believe that the future of humanity depends on it. While the devastating forces unleashed by modern society — capitalism — remain, the unfulfilled promise of social emancipation still calls for redemption. To abdicate this or to obscure the gravity of past defeats and failures by looking to "resistance" from "outside" the dynamics of modern society is to affirm its present and guarantee its future destructive reality.

Platypus asks the questions: How is the thought of critical theorists of modern society such as Marx, Lukács, Benjamin and Adorno relevant for the struggle for social emancipation today? How can we make sense of the long history of impoverished politics on the Left leading to the present — after the international Marxist Left of Lenin, Luxemburg and Trotsky, to the barrenness of today — without being terrorized or discouraged by this history? — How might the answers to such questions help the urgent task of reconstituting the Left at its most fundamental levels of theory and practice? How might we help effect escape from the dead-end the Left has become?

We hope to re-invigorate a conversation on the Left that has long since fallen into senility or silence, in order to help found anew an emancipatory political practice that is presently absent.

What has the Left been, and what can it yet become? — Platypus exists because the answer to such a question, even its basic formulation, has long ceased to be self-evident.

April, 2007

As Adorno wrote, in *Negative Dialectics* (1966):

“The liquidation of theory by dogmatization and thought taboos contributed to the bad practice. . . . The interrelation of both moments [of theory and practice] is not settled once and for all but fluctuates historically. . . . Those who chide theory [for being] anachronistic obey the *topos* of dismissing, as obsolete, what remains painful [because it was] thwarted. . . . The fact that history has rolled over certain positions will be respected as a verdict on their truth content only by those who agree with Schiller that ‘world history is the world tribunal’. What has been cast aside but not absorbed theoretically will often yield its truth content only later. It festers as a sore on the prevailing health; this will lead back to it in changed situations.” [T. W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* (Continuum: New York, 1983), 143-144]

Platypus is concerned with exploring the improbable but not impossible tasks and project of the reemergence of a critical Left with emancipatory social intent. We look forward to making a critical but vital contribution towards a possible “return to Marx” for the potential reinvigoration of the Left in coming years. We invite and welcome those who wish to share in and contribute to this project.

Chicago
May 1, 2007

A short history of the Left

Marx and 1848

Marx was not the author but the brilliant critical participant of the Left in the 19th Century. Socialism and communism were not invented by Marx, Engels and their collaborators (and opponents) on the Left, but issued from the contradictions of modern society itself, as expressed in the French Revolution of 1789 and in the modern labor movement that emerged with the Industrial Revolution in the early 19th Century. Marx’s great insight was to regard the Left itself as symptomatic of capitalism that does not oppose it from without but from within, *immanently*. Nevertheless Marx endorsed the Left, the modern socialist workers movement, and sought to push it further and provoke recognition of how it pointed beyond itself.

Marx’s thought originated in the immanent critique of emancipatory politics after 1789, in French socialism, German Idealist philosophy, and British political economy. By 1848, the time of Marx and Engels’s *Communist Manifesto* and the revolutionary uprisings in France, Germany, and other parts of Europe (triggered by the global economic depression of 1847), the politics of social equality and democracy had become more complicated and profound than a Rousseauian civilizational critique of modern society (Proudhon’s slogan “property is theft”) could comprehend — or hope to overcome. By 1848, radical democracy, in forms of revolt by the “bourgeois” (urban) “third estate” (including workers) had come to grief: capital was threatened by social democracy, for it pushed beyond its forms of social reproduction. The aftermath of failed revolution in 1848 saw the advent of emphatic forms of “mass” politics and the modern national parliamentary-Bonapartist state with which we still live today.

After the post-1848 crisis on the Left, Marx engaged the critical-dialectical conception of capitalism, recognizing it as a form of emancipation that (re)constitutes a specific form of domination over society: the imperative to produce “surplus value” and thus capitalize on labor in forms mediated and measured in labor-time. Capital became a form of wealth measurable as an investment of social labor, a form of preservation and stake of value on the future, but one in which “dead” labor dominates the living.

After 1917, Lukács recovered Marx’s grasp of the contradictory but constitutive identity and non-identity of social exploitation and domination under capitalism that gives rise to forms of discontent and agency — *ideologies*, including on the “Left” — that reproduce and perpetuate a society dominated by capital, a contradiction of social being *and* consciousness for subjects of the commodity form.

For Marx, capitalism itself sets the stage for and provokes emancipatory social potential that it also constrains. As social form, capital points beyond itself.

Lenin, Luxemburg and 1917

At the turn of the 20th Century, the younger generation of radicals in Second International Social Democracy took for granted the revolutionary character of their Marxist forebears (Kautsky, Plekhanov), but uneasily came up against problems in the movement they so enthusiastically championed. The standard bearers of the revolutionary Marxist mandate found themselves shockingly

isolated on the Left with the outbreak of World War in 1914. Russia proved to be the "weakest link" in the world system of capitalism, becoming the epicenter of revolutionary political struggle, but with the paradoxical outcome of what Lenin called a "deformed workers' state" administering "state capitalism" on the frontier-backwater of global capital, which too soon "recovered" from the crisis of the war. Luxemburg and her comrades in Germany supported the Bolsheviks, but as Marxists remained critical, knowing that October 1917 advanced the necessity of global revolution, posing a "problem" in Russia that could not be "solved" there. Struggling to remain true to the principles of Marxism, actually Lenin, Luxemburg and their cohort transformed the Marxist movement, but in very uneven ways that, with the ultimate failure and betrayal of the anticapitalist revolution opened in 1917-19, set the stage for the later degeneration of the Left — not least in its self-understanding.

Trotsky

When Stalin announced the policy of "socialism in one country" he was not thereby explicitly overthrowing a revolutionary Marxist perspective but rather accommodating circumstances of the Russian Revolution by 1924. Even those revolutionaries less cynical than Stalin and the Bolsheviks he manipulated and murdered did not countenance that only the risky politics of worldwide Communism had any hope of preserving, let alone furthering, the very modest gains of 1917. In the absence of this, the exigencies of "preserving the revolution" demanded ever higher sacrifices, an unfolding catastrophe for humanity.

Adorno

The disintegration of revolutionary Marxism by the 1930s presented an acute problem for critical consciousness on the Left. The radical crisis of war and social revolution 1914-19 produced its reactionary complement, the virulent movement of fascism and a resumption of world war that by 1945 had devastated the Left. In the wake of counterrevolution and reaction after 1919 emerged the "authoritarian character" structure of social and political subjectivity that was expressed pervasively, not only in black- and brown-shirt rallies, but also in the Popular Front and, later, "nationalism" in the "Third World." The "authoritarian personality," with its characteristic wounded narcissism and sado-masochism, evinced a regressive "fear of freedom."

"Marxism" became part of the ideology of the reactionary social reality of "advanced" capitalism, but one which yet, smoldering with history, pointed beyond the terms of the "bourgeois" ideology whose vacancy it had come to occupy. In the period of triumphant counter-revolution that characterized the high 20th Century, the question and problem of critical social consciousness re-emerged. Recovering the critical intent of Marxian theory and practice proved an obscure issue by the 1960s, but one that haunted the Left in the social-political disorientation and occultation of the tasks and project of emancipation that is the most profound legacy of defeated and failed revolution.

Kolakowski put it (in his 1968 essay "The Concept of the Left") the Left must be defined ideologically and not sociologically; thought, not society, is divided into Right and Left: the Left is defined by its utopianism, the Right by its opportunism. — Or, as Robert Pippin has put it, the problem with critical theory today is that it is not critical (*Critical Inquiry*, 2003).

Platypus is dedicated to re-opening various historical questions of the Left in order to read that history "against the grain" (as Benjamin put it, in his "Theses on the Philosophy of History," 1940), attempting to grasp past moments of defeat and failure on the Left not as given but rather in their unfulfilled potential, regarding the present as the product not of historical necessity, but rather of what happened that need not have been. We struggle to escape the dead hand of at least two preceding generations of problematic action and thinking on the Left, the 1920s-30s and the 1960s-70s. More proximally, we suffer the effects of the depoliticization — the deliberate "postmodernist" abandonment of any "grand narratives" of social emancipation — on the Left in the 1980s-90s.

But the "tradition" of the "dead generation" that "weighs" most heavily as a "nightmare" on our minds is that of the 1960s New Left, especially in its history of anti-Bolshevism — expressed by both the complementary bad alternatives of Stalinophobic anti-Communism (of Cold War liberalism and social democracy) and Stalinophilic "militancy" (e.g., Maoism, Guevarism, etc.) — that led to the naturalization of the degeneration of the Left into resignation and abdication, originating in the inadequate response by the 1960s "New" Left to the problems of the post-1920s-30s "Old" Left. In our estimation, the 1960s New Left remained beholden to Stalinism — including the lie that Lenin led to Stalin — to the great detriment of possibilities for emancipatory politics up to today.

In attempting to read this history of the accelerated demise and self-liquidation of the Left after the 1960s "against the grain," we face a problem discussed by Nietzsche in his essay "On the Use and Abuse of History for Life" (1873):

"A person must have the power and from time to time use it to break a past and to dissolve it, in order to be able to live. . . . People or ages serving life in this way, by judging and destroying a past, are always dangerous and in danger. . . . It is an attempt to give oneself, as it were, a past after the fact, out of which we may be descended in opposition to the one from which we are descended."

[Nietzsche translation by Ian Johnston at:

<http://www.mala.bc.ca/~johnstoi/Nietzsche/history.htm>]

However, as Karl Korsch wrote, in "Marxism and Philosophy" (1923):

"[Marx wrote that] '[Humanity] always sets itself only such problems as it can solve; since, looking at the matter more closely it will always be found that the problem itself arises only when the material conditions for its solution are already present or are at least understood to be in the process of emergence' [Marx, Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859)]. This dictum is not affected by the fact that a problem which supersedes present relations may have been formulated in an anterior epoch." [Karl Korsch, "Marxism and Philosophy," *Marxism and Philosophy* (NLB: New York and London, 1970), 58]

Platypus began in December, 2004 as a project for an international journal of critical letters and emancipatory politics, envisioned by a core group of students of University of Chicago professor Moishe Postone, who has studied and written on Marx's mature critical theory in the *Grundrisse* and *Capital* towards the imagination of postcapitalist society since the 1960s.

Platypus developed and grew in Spring 2006 into a reading group of our students interested in pursuing the continued purchase of Marxian critical theory. The *Platypus* Affiliated Society is a recently established (in December, 2006) political organization seeking to investigate possibilities for reconstituting a Marxian Left after the demise of the historical Marxist Left.

We take our namesake from the platypus, which suffered at its moment of zoological discovery from its unclassifiability according to prevailing science. We think that an authentic emancipatory Left today would suffer from a similar problem of (mis)recognition, in part because the tasks and project of social emancipation have disintegrated and so exist for us only in fragments and shards.

We have grown from at first about a dozen graduate students and teachers to over thirty undergraduate and graduate students and teachers and others from the greater Chicago community and beyond (for instance, developing corresponding members in New York and Toronto).

We have worked with various other groups on the Left in Chicago and beyond, for instance giving a workshop on the Iraqi Left for the new SDS conference on the Iraq occupation in Chicago in February. In January, we held the first of a series of Platypus public fora in Chicago, on the topic of "imperialism" and the Left, including panelists Kevin Anderson from *News and Letters* (Marxist Humanists), Nick Kreitman from the newly refounded Students for a Democratic Society, Danny Postel from *OpenDemocracy.net*, and Adam Turl from the International Socialist Organization.

We have organized our critical investigation of the history of the Left in order to help discern emancipatory social possibilities in the present, a present that has been determined by the history of defeat and failure on the Left. As seekers after a highly problematic legacy from which we are separated by a definite historical distance, we are dedicated to approaching the history of thought and action on the Left from which we must learn in a deliberately non-dogmatic manner, taking nothing as given.

Why Marx? Why now? We find Marx's thought to be the focal point and vital nerve center for the fundamental critique of the modern world in which we still live that emerged in Marx's time with the Industrial Revolution of the 19th Century. We take Marx's thought in relation both to the preceding history of critical social thought, including the philosophy of Kant and Hegel, as well as the work by those inspired later to follow Marx in the critique of social modernity, most prominently Georg Lukács, Walter Benjamin, and Theodor W. Adorno. Hence, Platypus is committed to the reconsideration of the entire critical theoretical tradition spanning the 19th and 20th Centuries. As Leszek

From '68 — and '89 — to today

By the 1960s, the "Left" increasingly denied the rights and responsibilities of strategically placed populations at the heart of global capital to change the course of history. — As Susan Sontag succinctly expressed it in 1967, "the white race is the cancer of human history." — Embraced was a passive expectation of the crowding onto the historical stage by "subalterns," with no critical regard for the actual political forms this takes. — As Adorno put it at the advent of decolonization: "Savages are not more noble" (1944). — Such abdication took diverse forms of self-abnegation — including racist enthusiasms for "cultural difference" — evacuating politics.

The revolutionary Left, already in a state of deep decomposition after 1945, received the last nail in its coffin with the abdication of the role of critical social consciousness in the wake of the "New" Left — but prepared long before. The post-'60s disenchantment of the Left cast a long shadow across the 1970s-80s, and culminated in 1989-92 with the destruction of the Soviet Union and the "end of history" — an end to any ("grand") projects of emancipatory social transformation. The "New Left" got the world it deserved; attempts to sustain its pseudo-radical anti-Marxism are efforts to resuscitate a ghost.

Adorno's observation that "wrong life cannot be lived rightly" (1944) has been mistaken to be an existential and not a political problem. But the problem of practice is not ethical but concerns opening actual social-political possibilities for emancipation.

An emancipated world in which the freedom of each would be a precondition for the freedom of all, achieved through social solidarity that provides "from each according to his ability, to each according to his need" (Marx), whose vision motivated the historical Left, seems scarcely conceivable today.

But, just as it is quite possible, manifestly, to be oppressed without realizing the reasons for it — the meaning of "alienation" — unfulfilled potential can yet persist despite lack of awareness of it: a non-identity of subject and object. The possibility of critical consciousness of emancipation survives its apparent demise, however unconsciously it tasks us today. The role of consciousness is vital for any possible social emancipation.

July, 2006



Only if the extremes come together

"The producers are more than ever thrown back on theory . . . by virtue of insistent self-criticism. . . . Following the schematic division of physical and mental labour, they split themselves up into workers and intellectuals. This division cripples the practice which is called for. . . . The growing opacity of capitalist mass society makes an association between intellectuals who still are such, with workers who still know themselves to be such, more timely. . . . [In the past] such unity was compromised by free-wheeling bourgeois of the liberal professions, who were shut out by industry and tried to gain influence by left-wing bustlings. . . . Today, when the concept of the proletariat, unshaken in its economic essence, is so occluded that in the greatest industrial country there can be no question of proletarian class-consciousness, the role of intellectuals would no longer be to alert the torpid to their most obvious interests, but to strip the veil from the eyes of the wise-guys, the illusion that capitalism, which makes them its temporary beneficiaries, is based on anything other than their exploitation and oppression. The deluded workers are directly dependent on those who can still just see and tell of their delusion. Their hatred of intellectuals has changed accordingly. . . . The masses no longer mistrust intellectuals because they betray the revolution, but because they might want it, and thereby reveal how great is their own need of intellectuals. Only if the extremes come together will humanity survive."

— Theodor W. Adorno, "Imaginative Excesses"
("Messages in a Bottle" orphaned from *Minima Moralia* 1944-47)

"The Left is Dead! — Long Live the Left!"

***Vicissitudes of historical consciousness
and possibilities for emancipatory social politics today***

Chris Cutrone, for Platypus

"The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living."

— Karl Marx, *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Napoleon* (1852)

"The theorist who intervenes in practical controversies nowadays discovers on a regular basis and to his shame that whatever ideas he might contribute were expressed long ago — and usually better the first time around."

— Theodor W. Adorno, "Sexual Taboos and the Law Today" (1963)

According to Lenin, the greatest contribution of the German Marxist radical Rosa Luxemburg (1871-1919) to the fight for socialism was the statement that her Social Democratic Party of Germany had become a "stinking corpse" as a result of voting for war credits on August 4, 1914. Lenin wrote this about Luxemburg in 1922, at the close of the period of war, revolution, counterrevolution and reaction in which Luxemburg was murdered. Lenin remarked that Luxemburg would be remembered well for her incisive critique at a crucial moment of crisis in the movement to which she had dedicated and ultimately gave her life. Instead, ironically, Luxemburg has been remembered — for her occasional criticisms of Lenin and the Bolsheviks!

Two lessons can be drawn from this story: that the Left suffers, as a result of the accumulated wreckage of intervening defeats and failures, from a very partial and distorted memory of its own history; and that at crucial moments the best work on the Left is its own critique, motivated by the attempt to escape this history and its outcomes. At certain times, the most necessary contribution one can make is to declare that the Left is dead.

Hence, Platypus makes the proclamation, for our time: "The Left is dead! — Long live the Left!" — We say this so that the future possibility of the Left might live.

Introducing *Platypus*

***A report and bibliography for an attempt
at reformulating the Marxian Left in Chicago in 2006
The problem of theory and practice in political solidarity
and critical consciousness on the Left today***

Chris Cutrone, for Platypus

*"We need history, but not the way a spoiled
loafer in the garden of knowledge needs it."*

— *Nietzsche*

On the Use and Abuse of History for Life

"Not man or men but the struggling, oppressed class itself is the depository of historical knowledge. In Marx it appears as the last enslaved class, as the avenger that completes the task of liberation in the name of generations of the downtrodden. This conviction, which had a brief resurgence in the Spartacist group [led by Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, from 1914-19], has always been objectionable to Social Democrats. Within three decades they managed virtually to erase the name of Blanqui, though it had been the rallying sound that had reverberated through the preceding century. Social Democracy thought fit to assign to the working class the role of the redeemer of future generations, in this way cutting the sinews of its greatest strength. This training made the working class forget both its hatred and its spirit of sacrifice, for both are nourished by the image of enslaved ancestors rather than that of liberated grandchildren."

— Walter Benjamin

Theses on the Philosophy of History (1940)

Platypus is an idea for a journal project on the Marxian Left several of us have had for a number of years, starting with two of us with a long political background on the Trotskyist Left, going back to our undergraduate years (1989-92) at Hampshire College in Amherst, Massachusetts. The journal idea has been grounded in our shared commitments to challenging post-New Left politics. In recent years, the initial two of us were joined by a few University of Chicago students of the critical social theorist and Marx scholar Moishe Postone. We have been motivated by questioning what a Leftist politics today might be — we are struck by the decline if not total demise of the Left, and by the certain absence of Leftist politics informing the world. So our project involves radically interrogating the self-declared "Left," taking nothing for granted in our sense of the necessity for reformulating a Leftist politics and re-appropriating the history of the Left towards the present.

The idea for taking our namesake from the platypus comes from the history of the creature's discovery and difficulties being categorized and recognized for what it is, which we take to be emblematic for the state of any possible Left — of any social-emancipatory politics — today. Just as the platypus symbolizes the challenge to traditional understandings of the order of the natural world, our intent is to challenge the received understanding of the Left, both "Old" (of the 1920s-30s-40s, i.e., post-1917) and "New" (1960s-70s) — as well as "post-" (1980s-present). We find present and historical self-understandings on the Left to manifest great confusions that remain confounding and defeating for emancipatory politics today. Because our focus is on ideological problems of the Left, we consider ourselves to be revolutionary intellectuals and identify as such.

Our approach to the history of the Left is characterized by going "against the grain" of historical events, exemplified by Walter Benjamin's philosophy of history. For us, past moments in the history of the Left are charged with emancipatory potential that went unrealized but nonetheless continues to task us in the present. It is in this sense that we understand Benjamin's injunction that "even the dead are not safe." Past struggles that failed or were betrayed can be failed and betrayed again, and needless suffering in the present and future that could have been averted will not be. For us, any possible future emancipation is tied to honoring — learning from — past efforts and sacrifices. Our first meetings of the *Platypus* Marxist reading group in Chicago grew out of the course I teach at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC) on Theodor W. Adorno, and

addressed Adorno's 1969 correspondence with Herbert Marcuse concerning the New Left: we recognized the history for problems of our present in Adorno's critical prognosis on the 1960s.

The principal influences for *Platypus* are the Marxist political tradition exemplified by Marx, Lenin, Luxemburg, and Trotsky, and the critical theoretical tradition of the Frankfurt School, exemplified first and foremost by the works of Adorno, but also by important works by Lukács, Benjamin, Horkheimer, Marcuse, et al. However, we are also concerned with the complex legacy of 20th Century thought and politics that has developed in response to — and reaction against — Marxism, both politically and intellectually: existentialism, post-structuralism, and other tendencies leading to "post"-modernism — as well as neo-conservatism — which we regard as products of the regression and disintegration of the Left to the present.

These first years of my teaching at SAIC and the University of Chicago have been characterized politically by the conditions of the post-9/11/01 world: the various policies of the George W. Bush administration, and the Afghanistan and Iraq invasions and occupations. So my teaching Marxist critical theory in this context has always involved certain caveats about the (in)adequacy of the present "Left" response, and how the historical critical-theoretical tradition (of Adorno, Benjamin, et al.) might speak to the state of the Left today.

The actual determining impetus to form the *Platypus* reading group was provided by a few of my graduate students from SAIC classes last year (2005-06), who raised the issue of an extra-curricular forum that could address the purchase of historical critical theory for the tasks and problems of the Left today. Thus the reading group was formed in Spring 2006, at first including the core *Platypus* group of long-term participants, and expanding to include my fellow teacher colleagues and graduate students from University of Chicago and my graduate students from SAIC (about a dozen people altogether), and growing by June to include a group of undergraduate students from SAIC and University of Chicago, with whom we doubled our numbers.

At the meeting that saw the undergraduate students join the group in numbers, I presented the short editorial/mission statement, "What is a platypus? On surviving the extinction of the Left," which I had drafted at the request of my long-term colleagues on the *Platypus* project for a planned intervention at the Marxism 2006 "Festival of Resistance" Conference of the British Socialist Workers Party (once affiliated with the International Socialist Organization in the U.S.). I proposed a "syllabus" of readings for the group to discuss for Summer and Fall 2006, centered around readings from *The New Left Reader* anthology (1969) edited by former Students for a Democratic Society President (1965-66) Carl Oglesby. The core members of the prospective editorial collective regard the reading group as a place for expanding the editorial collective and cultivating writing contributors for the journal, which we intend to launch in 2007. The *Platypus* editorial statement and supplemental short history of the Left can be found at:

http://home.comcast.net/~platypus1917/platypus_statement.html

The New Left: Aftermath: The coup against Allende in Chile

- Spartacist League, "Chilean Popular Front" (in *Spartacist*, 1970)
- Costa Gavras, dir., *Missing* (film, 1982, 122 min.)
- Patricio Guzmán, dir., *Salvador Allende* (film, 2004, 100 min.)

Foucault and the Iranian Revolution

- Ervand Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions* (1982)
- Fred Halliday, "The Iranian Revolution: Uneven Development and Religious Populism" (1982/86, in Halliday and Hamza Alavi, ed., *State and Ideology in the Middle East and Pakistan*, 1988), and "The Iranian Revolution and its Implications" (interview in *New Left Review*, 1987)
- Michel Foucault, "Polemics, Politics and Problematizations" (interview with Paul Rabinow, 1984)
- David Greason, "Embracing Death: the Western Left and the Iranian Revolution, 1978-83" (in *Economy and Society*, 2005)
- Janet Afary and Kevin Anderson, *Foucault and Iranian Revolution: Gender and the Seductions of Islamism* (2005, including Foucault's writings on Iran and contemporary criticisms of Foucault)

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- Revolutionary Tendency of the Socialist Workers Party (U.S.) / Spartacist League, "In Defense of a Revolutionary Perspective" (1962)
- Adorno, "Those Twenties" (1962) (in *Critical Models*, 1998)
- Nicolas Krassó, "Trotsky's Marxism" (in *New Left Review*, 1967, and in Krassó, *Trotsky: The Great Debate Renewed*, 1972)
- Sebastian Haffner, *Failure of a Revolution: Germany 1918-19* (1969/73/86)
- Spartacist League, "Genesis of Pabloism" (in *Spartacist*, 1972)
- Spartacist League, *Lenin and the Vanguard Party* (pamphlet, 1978)
- Richard Appignanesi and Oscar Zarate / A&Z, *Introducing Lenin and the Russian Revolution / Lenin for Beginners* (1977)
- Tariq Ali and Phil Evans, *Introducing Trotsky and Marxism / Trotsky for Beginners* (1980)
- Carl E. Schorske, *German Social Democracy, 1905-1917: The Development of the Great Schism* (1983)
- Margaretha von Trotta, dir., *Rosa Luxemburg* (film, 1986, 122 min.)

The New Left

- Stuart Hall, "Introducing *New Left Review*" (in *New Left Review*, 1960)
- C. Wright Mills, "Letter to the New Left" (in *New Left Review*, 1960, and excerpted in "The Politics of Responsibility," in Oglesby, ed., *New Left Reader*, 1969)
- Students for a Democratic Society, *The Port Huron Statement* (1962)
- André Gorz, from *Strategy for Labor* (1964/67) (in Oglesby, ed., *New Left Reader*, 1969)
- Marcuse, "The End of Utopia" and "The Problem of Violence" (1967, in *Five Lectures*, 1970), and "The Question of Revolution" (interview in *New Left Review*, 1967)
- Carl Oglesby, ed., *The New Left Reader* (1969)
- Adorno and Marcuse, "Correspondence on the German New Left" (1969, with historical introduction by translator Esther Leslie, in *New Left Review*, 1999)
- *Finally Got the News* (film, 1970, 55 min.; dir. Stewart Bird, Rene Lichtman and Peter Gessner; produced in association with the League of Revolutionary Black Workers)
- Spartacist League, "Soul Power or Workers Power: The Rise and Fall of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers" (in *Workers Vanguard*, 1974)
- Irwin Unger, *The Movement: A History of the American New Left 1959-1972* (1974)
- Tariq Ali, *Street-Fighting Years: An Autobiography of the Sixties* (1987)
- Paul Berman, "The Passion of Joschka Fischer: from the radicalism of the '60s to the interventionism of the '90s" (2001), and *Power and the Idealists: or, the passion of Joschka Fischer, and its aftermath* (2005)

The *Platypus* Marxist reading group in Chicago presently consists of about two dozen regularly attending participants, of which approximately three-fourths come to any particular meeting. We have held bi-weekly meetings since April, with some discussions spawning extra meetings and many continuing onto our e-mail discussion list.

Events that groups of several of us have attended that have informed our progress in the reading group and the *Platypus* journal project, allowing for our growing familiarity and critical awareness of the present state of the "Left," have been the following: Talks given in Chicago by David Harvey on cosmopolitanism and the "new" imperialism, Brian Holmes on emergent "continental" identities and geopolitics, the Retort Collective on their book *Afflicted Powers: Capital and Spectacle in a New Age of War*, Fredric Jameson on dialectic and historical meaning, and Richard Wolin on his book *The Frankfurt School Revisited*; the Chicago Social Forum this past May; and the re-founded Students for a Democratic Society First National Conference in August. In September, most of us attended the Chicago screenings of Patricio Guzmán's film *Salvador Allende* (2004), which provided a good frame for our discussion of classic historical issues on the Marxist Left concerning the state, political parties and social revolution. — These events have informed our sense of possibilities for a re-founded Left mostly in a negative sense, allowing us to grasp what any future Left will have to combat and overcome (and illustrating for us the manifold legacy of the preceding Left of the 1960s that has been our critical focus thus far). Positively, the massive immigrants' rights protests in the first half of 2006, which happened to coincide with the emergence of our group efforts, have remained signal events for our thinking about emerging possibilities for the Left in North America.

Up to this point, our discussions in the *Platypus* reading group in Chicago have been concerned primarily with issues of theory and practice, specifically in considering the history of the 1960s "New" Left in terms of its multiple origins and concerns, such as the Civil Rights movement, the student Free Speech movement, solidarity with the Cuban Revolution, protest against the Vietnam War and imperialism, and women's liberation, and how these had challenged the Left.

One important discussion, which was carried over the course of several weeks, concerned the historical struggle against racism and for social equality; the roles played by the Civil Rights movement, organized labor and the Marxist Left; the emergence of Black Nationalism (Malcolm X) and the Black Power turn of the late 1960s; the relation of these developments to the self-understanding of the Left; and its legacy for ostensibly Leftist politics today. We consider the Black Power turn to have been highly destructive of the Left, for it was predicated on the idea of such a thing as a "white" Left, where political solidarity — and consciousness — should not be so racialized. Our sense of the present dearth of blacks on the Left indicates this to us, for we do not regard victims of oppression as thereby having inherently more emancipatory politics, and we regard "identity" politics as symptomatic of the decline of the Left. An important point in our discussion of the late-1960s Black Power turn was to question whether Malcolm X and the Black Panthers really had been to the "Left" of — had more social-emancipatory politics than — Martin Luther King, Jr., Bayard Rustin, et al.

On the issue of identity politics, we also addressed the issue of women's liberation from gender and sexual oppression versus feminism, primarily through our reading of a seminal essay by the psychoanalytically informed socialist-feminist theorist Juliet Mitchell, "Women: the Longest Revolution" (1966: a work first published in *The New Left Review* but inexplicably omitted from Oglesby's *New Left Reader*), her subsequent debate with Marxist scholar Quintin Hoare, and a constellation of related texts, including Marcuse's essay "Marxism and Feminism," which contains theses that Mitchell explicitly critiqued. As in the case of the Black Power turn, we discussed the emergence of so-called "second-wave" feminism (of the 1960s-80s) and its explicit anti-Marxism as having been disastrous for clarity about social-emancipatory politics on the Left to the present. Like other substantial essays from the 1960s we have considered, we took Mitchell's work as indicative of a path not taken that we must necessarily revisit, rather than accepting its subsequent historical eclipse.

In neither case of the historical struggles for social equality, against racism or for women's and sexual liberation, do we accept that the 1960s "New" Left "knew better" than previous Marxist politics had *done*. Rather, our point is to recover the actual social-emancipatory content of the history of the Left and recognize that perhaps the perceived failures of the "Old" Left had come to seem so only because of subsequent historical defeats and disintegration that set the stage for the 1960s, and not due to inherent deficiencies or blindness in the Marxist revolutionary socialist tradition. Perhaps the fault was in the (1960s) present and not a past too hastily liquidated. The questions that remain to be answered include: How does a working class-struggle perspective point beyond itself? What, for Marxists, is the social-emancipatory content of the struggle of "labor against capital," beyond the empirical struggles of workers under capitalism?

The Leftist tendencies that have been important as influences for our past and present activities towards *Platypus* include various currents in the (post-) Trotskyist Left, including such groups as the Spartacist League and News and Letters (Marxist-Humanists). Beyond these, we have had contact with several other groups in Chicago. A few participants in the reading group during Summer 2006 came to us from the 49th St. Underground, an extremely broad-based and all-inclusive Chicago group whose lead organizers are also University of Chicago graduate students.

In mid-summer (July), the reading group came to touch upon the issue of the significance of the October 1917 Bolshevik Revolution and subsequent international Communism, in the context of discussing the troubled legacy of "Leninism" for the New Left, after 1956 (the crises of the Khrushchev "revelations" of Stalin's crimes, the split between the Soviet Union and Mao's China, and the Soviet invasion of Hungary) and after 1968 (when the New Left became predominantly "Marxist-Leninist," i.e., Maoist). Our discussion of Communism began with reading French Communist Party theorist Louis Althusser's essay on "Contradiction and Overdetermination" (1962), addressing the issue of problems in Marxism regarding the Hegelian dialectical "logic" of history and the role of critical consciousness and agency in revolutionary possibilities. This was followed by our reading of contemporary (circa 1960) Trotskyist writings on the problem of Marxism and revolutionary "leadership" (including the issue of the 1959 Cuban Revolution).

- Lenin, *The State and Revolution* (1917)
- Luxemburg, "The Russian Tragedy" (1918)
- Luxemburg, "What is Bolshevism?" (1919)
- John Reed, *Ten Days that Shook the World* (1919)
- Clara Zetkin and Lenin, "My Recollections of Lenin: an interview on the woman question" (interview 1920)
- Communist International, "Organizational Guidelines for Communist Parties" (1921)
- Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness* (1923)
- Lukács, "Lenin — theoretician of practice," and *Lenin: a study in the unity of his thought* (1924)
- Korsch, "The Marxism of the First International" (1924) (in *Marxism and Philosophy*, 1970)
- Leon Trotsky, *The Lessons of October* (1924)
- Trotsky, "Proletarian Culture and Proletarian Art," "Communist Policy Towards Art," and "Revolutionary and Socialist Art," Ch. 6, 7, and 8 of *Literature and Revolution* (1924)
- Max Horkheimer, *Dawn/Dämmerung* (1926-31) (especially "The Little Man and the Philosophy of Freedom," "A Discussion about Revolution," "Indications," "Socialism and Resentment," "Progress," "Idealism of the Revolutionary," "Change of Thought," and "Skepsis and Morality," in *Dawn and Decline: Notes 1926-31 and 1950-69*, 1978)
- Trotsky, *The History of the Russian Revolution* (1930)
- Wilhelm Reich, "Ideology as Material Power" (1933/46) (in *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*)
- Trotsky, "If America Should Go Communist" (1934/35)
- Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed* (1936)
- Trotsky, "Stalinism and Bolshevism" (1937)
- Trotsky, *The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International* (AKA *Transitional Programme for Socialist Revolution*, 1938)
- Trotsky, "Art and Politics in Our Epoch" (1938)
- Horkheimer and Adorno, "Elements of Anti-Semitism" (1944-47) (in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*)
- Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (1949)
- Adorno, "Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda" (1951?) (in *The Culture Industry*, 1991)
- E. H. Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution 1917-23* (3 vols., 1953); or, *The Russian Revolution: from Lenin to Stalin 1917-29* (1 vol., 1979)
- Isaac Deutscher, *The Prophet Armed*, *The Prophet Unarmed*, and *The Prophet Outcast* (3 vol. biography of Trotsky, 1954-63)

- Theodor W. Adorno, "Reflections on Class Theory" (1942) (in Adorno, *Can One Live After Auschwitz?*, 2003)
- Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952)
- Richard Fraser, "Two Lectures [on the "black question" and revolutionary integrationism in America]" (1953)
- Herbert Marcuse, "A Note on Dialectic" (preface to Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution: Hegel and the Rise of Social Theory*, 1960)
- Cliff Slaughter, "What is Revolutionary Leadership?" (1960)
- Louis Althusser, "Contradiction and Overdetermination" (1962), and "Marxism and Humanism" (1963/65) (in Althusser, *For Marx*, 1965)
- Juliet Mitchell, "Women: the Longest Revolution" (in *New Left Review*, 1966; and debate with Quintin Hoare, *New Left Review*, 1967; revised version in Mitchell, *Women's Estate*, 1971)
- Leszek Kolakowski, "The Concept of the Left" (1968) (in Oglesby, ed., *New Left Reader*, 1969)
- Martin Nicolaus, "The Unknown Marx" (1968) (in Oglesby, ed., *New Left Reader*, 1969)
- Adorno, "Late Capitalism or Industrial Society?" (AKA "Is Marx Obsolete?," in *Diogenes*, 1968) (in *Can One Live After Auschwitz?*, 2003)
- Adorno, "Resignation" (1969) (in Adorno, *Critical Models*, 1998)
- Adorno, "Marginalia to Theory and Praxis" (1969) (in *Critical Models*, 1998)
- Moishe Postone, "Necessity, Labor and Time" (in *Social Research*, 1978)
- Postone, *Time, Labor and Social Domination: A Reinterpretation of Marx's Critical Theory* (1993)
- Postone, "Rethinking Marx (in a Post-Marxist World)" (1995)
- Slavoj Žižek, "A Plea for Leninist Intolerance" (2002) (AKA "Repeating Lenin," 1997)
- Robert Pippin, "On Critical Theory: A Short History of Non-Being" (in *Critical Inquiry*, 2003)

History: The Old Left

- Marx, *The Class Struggles in France, 1848-50* (1850)
- Marx, *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852)
- Marx, *The Civil War in France: The Paris Commune* (1871)
- Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, *What is to be Done? Burning questions of our movement* (1902)
- Rosa Luxemburg, *Reform or Revolution* (1900/08)
- Luxemburg, *The Junius Pamphlet, or, The Crisis of German Social Democracy* (1915)
- Lenin, *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1916)

However, this discussion of historic Bolshevism and international Communism in the 20th Century was the occasion of a precipitous and unfortunate development for *Platypus*. Rather than trying to think through and reconsider the meaning of the importance of the Russian Revolution for 20th Century Marxism, two reading group participants from the University of Chicago balked and left the group, bringing about the first major controversy that *Platypus* has experienced. (This was a "shake-out" that only involved those leaving who had not been full participants in the group but had maintained an ambivalent distance for political reasons.)

The frame through which the dissenters chose to attack Bolshevism was the issue of the Bolshevik suppression of the Kronstadt garrison mutiny in 1921 (which the Bolsheviks themselves had not glorified but had regarded as a "tragic necessity," and on which the principal historian of the event, Paul Avrich — an anarchist — had concluded [in his 1970 book], despite his stated sympathies for the mutineers, that the Bolsheviks had been "justified"). We maintained that the suppression of the Kronstadt mutiny was a greatly misleading frame for evaluating the merits of historical Bolshevism, and is not good for explaining the subsequent problems of the Left in the 20th Century; rather, Kronstadt as an issue is a well-worn hobby-horse for a very specific politics: post-1917 anarchism. In the e-mail debates on Kronstadt that ensued, the dissenters refused to engage the very difficult but important issue of the meaning of the Russian Revolution for 20th Century Marxism: What, precisely, was the nature and character of the October 1917 Bolshevik Revolution that at once had seemed to confirm and challenge Marxism (Gramsci had called it the "Revolution Against [Marx's] *Capital*")? For our consideration of the 1960s "New" Left, this difficulty took the form of the 1960s failures to avoid the twin, complementary pitfalls of Stalinophobia and Stalinophilia in regarding both the Soviet Union and international Communism: What would it mean to adopt a critical attitude towards the Russian Revolution and the history of the Soviet Union and international Communism without abandoning everything we might learn and re-appropriate from it (and treating 20th Century Communism merely, as the title of the recent book by apostate Communist and *In These Times* editor James Weinstein [1926-2005] called it, *The Long Detour* [2003])?

If, as was asserted by the dissenters, Lenin and the Bolsheviks (including Trotsky) and the influence of the Russian Revolution and subsequent Soviet realities had "destroyed" Marxism for the Left, then what are we to make of the fact that all the problems of Stalinism raised by the dissenters seemed to confirm 19th and 20th Century anarchist critiques of Marx (e.g., by Bakunin, et al.), which forecast that Marxism could only lead to a totalitarian state? What remains of Marxism if the history of Bolshevism is denied root and branch? If, according to the dissenters, the anarchist critiques of Marx are not good, but only Rosa Luxemburg's critiques of Lenin, then what are we to make of Luxemburg's and her Polish and German organizations' long history of political collaboration with Lenin and the Bolsheviks, her solidarity with the Bolshevik Revolution and identification of her own politics with "Bolshevism," and her membership in the Bolshevik-led Third (Communist) International after the Russian Revolution up to her murder by German counterrevolutionaries in 1919? — These are the kinds of issues to which we are committed to (re)thinking through, and for which we do not accept *prima facie* received "wisdom" of any kind.

Towards the end of Fall 2006, we look forward to addressing the aftermath of the 1960s New Left and the crisis of progressive politics in the 1970s-80s through a few meetings on the case study of Michel Foucault and his response to the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran, through the recent book *Foucault and the Iranian Revolution: Gender and the Seductions of Islamism* (including Foucault's writings on Iran) written by Chicago-based authors Janet Afary and Kevin Anderson. Starting in Winter 2007 and extending through the Spring, we project embarking on a series of lectures and discussions on the history of the Left, pre-1789 to post-2001.

We anticipate that *Platypus* could be part of a potentially much broader renaissance on the Left in coming years, one which might occasion yet another "return to Marx" (as had occurred in the 1920s-30s and 1960s-70s) for grappling with capitalism as the fundamental context for social politics. Our goal is to develop a cohort of like-minded thinkers around a publishing vehicle to help inform to best effect such a reconsideration of the critical-theoretical tradition in light of the history of the Left, and thus help open possibilities for actual — eminently realizable — emancipation from an oppressive and highly destructive present and future that need not have been and need not yet be.

As C. Wright Mills put it at the dawn of the last, "New" Left (1960), we must "try to be realistic in our utopianism."

Chicago
September 11, 2006

Thanks to the participants and correspondents of Platypus in Chicago and beyond.

Originally published in AREA Chicago magazine #3, Summer/Fall 2006

Bibliography

The bibliography/reading list encompasses several different registers in which our discussions have been thematized. These readings have been important in our discussions less for interest in the authors and their particular political biographies and more in the issues raised by the texts themselves. They are listed in chronological order of writing. For the order and themes in which the *Platypus* group has read and discussed these texts at our meetings, please refer to our web page for the reading group at:

http://home.comcast.net/~platypus1917/platypus_chicagoreadings2006.htm

The Present: Crisis on the Left

- Moishe Postone, "History and Helplessness: Mass Mobilization and Contemporary Forms of Anticapitalism" (in *Public Culture*, 2006)
- Spartacist League, "The Senile Dementia of Post-Marxism [on Hardt and Negri's *Empire* and *Multitude*, and John Holloway's *Change the World Without Taking Power*]" (in *Spartacist*, 2006)

Iraq invasion and occupation and the "Left"

- Spartacist League, "The Left and the Occupation" (in *Workers Vanguard*, 2005)
- Fred Halliday, "Who is Responsible?" (interview with Danny Postel in Chicago, 2005, in *Salmagundi*, 2006)
- Iraqi Communist Party, "Letter to Fraternal and Friendly Parties About the Situation in Iraq and the Position of the Iraqi Communist Party" (January, 2006)
- Chris Cutrone and Spartacist League, "Exchange on Iraq Occupation" (in *Workers Vanguard*, 2006)

Hurricane Katrina and aftermath

- Adolph Reed, "The Real Divide" (in *The Progressive*, 2005)

Marxist theory

- Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*
- Marx and Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (1848)
- Marx, *The Grundrisse* (1857-61)
- Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Programme* (1875), and Karl Korsch, "Introduction to Marx's *Critique of the Gotha Programme*" (1922) (in Korsch, *Marxism and Philosophy*, ed. and trans. Fred Halliday, 1970)
- Paul Lafargue, *The Right to be Lazy* (1883)
- Georg Lukács, "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat" (in *History and Class Consciousness*, 1923)
- Karl Korsch, "Marxism and Philosophy" (1923) (in *Marxism and Philosophy*, 1970)