THESES ON THE SYNCRETIC SOCIETY

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Editor's Note: This paper was purportedly written under a pseudonym by a fairly prominent official in one of the East European countries. We are asked to believe that this East European is conversant with Parsons's structural-functionalism, and with Althusser's analysis of socialism as a syncretism of capitalism and communism. We do not authenticate its East European origins; rather, we are publishing this piece solely because of its intrinsic interest for Western scholars. The manuscript was written in French and was incomplete. In order for the paper to conform to Theory and Society conventions, we have somewhat modified the translated version.

The Syncretic Society

1. One cannot isolate the evolution of premature socialism from the conditions of its birth. These conditions emerged around the international collision between underdevelopment and imperialism. The historical evidence presents three different responses to imperialism as an obstacle to industrialization: a) resignation, signifying the reproduction of underdevelopment in various forms; b) opposition to imperialism through the formation of new imperialisms. Germany, Japan, and Italy are not underdeveloped countries, but are belated industrializers. This became manifest in world wars which the neo-imperialisms lost militarily, but won economically. c) Leninist revolution, which combines anti-imperialism and anti-capitalism, thus becoming an historical instrument of dual utility. Thus the Leninist revolution, contrary to the militarist solution, does not oppose imperialism by imitating it, but rather by negating its very essence, the principle of the private ownership of the means of production. Imperialist war and Leninist revolution have both shown themselves to be effective paths to industrialization. Both are political routes, which prove that the non-economic oppression exercised by imperialism cannot be destroyed by exclusively economic means. But while the wars have meant the territorial extension of the imperialist model, the Leninist
revolution, despite its serious subsequent deformations, continues to be tangible proof of a possible alternative to the imperialist organization of the world. This, however, only to the extent that these deformations may be corrected in time for countries of Leninist stock to avoid passing from the negation of imperialism to its imitation.

2. The underdeveloped countries, where a capitalism (itself underdeveloped) prevails, have little chance of avoiding their subordination to imperialism and of industrializing. Thanks to the very imperialism which they oppose politically, their own national capitalism is able to expand, in the short run. At the beginning of this century, there was an economic convergence between national capitalism and foreign imperialism largely independent of political relationships. Under those circumstances, the Leninist strategy, seeking essentially to unite the anti-imperialist revolution with the anti-capitalist revolution, was a perfectly logical, if not the only, alternative to the perpetuation of underdevelopment. History has subsequently proven the foundations of this strategy to be sound. It has promoted the lasting elimination of external imperialist domination and of internal capitalist domination; it has promoted an accelerated industrialization; but it has not promoted the effective transition to a socialist organization of society.

3. Premature socialism thus turns out to be an effective organization for industrialization in the period of imperialism. The opposition of imperialism to all industrialization except its own is the first source of the present contradiction between socialism and industrialization. This means that anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist industrialization is not socialist industrialization (a contradiction in terms); rather, this reductive view of socialism is the fundamental ideological illusion of premature socialism, whose essential syncretism it expresses. From a functional point of view, the deepest roots of this syncretism consist precisely in the inability of adding social affirmation (socialism) to economic affirmation (industrialization). The forced implantation of a revolutionary class structure into an underdeveloped economy presupposes the forced preservation of that class articulation. But it is precisely the absence of a natural articulation which perpetuates the incompatibility of these classes, and thus the syncretism of the whole.

4. This dysarticulation stems from the abolition of private ownership of the means of production. The social character of these means of production thus contradict their technological character. The social structure, challenged by the economic reality, takes on an ideological legitimacy.