

The Scourge of Cultural Marxism

The alienation factor is crucial to the leftist agenda.

by WILLIAM S. LIND

In previous columns I have used the term “cultural Marxism,” which may not be familiar to all readers. What is cultural Marxism? Is it Stalin leading the Moscow Symphony Orchestra or an exhibit of Walter Ulbricht’s watercolors?

Not exactly. Almost everyone knows cultural Marxism under a different name. As “political correctness” or “multiculturalism,” we have all had it shoved down our throats for too long. Though it seeks to disguise its real nature and goals, which are the destruction of Western culture and the Christian religion, it is in fact a full-blown ideology, Marxism translated from economic into cultural terms. As with most things, we can understand it best through its history.

Early 20th century Marxism said that if another big war broke out in Europe, the working class would join hands across national boundaries and overthrow capitalism. But when war broke out in 1914, that didn’t happen. In 1919, two Marxist intellectuals working independently, Antonio Gramsci in Italy and Georg Lukacs in Hungary, explained why. The Christian religion and Western culture had so blinded the working class to its class interests that communism was impossible until both were destroyed. When Lukacs became deputy commissar for culture in Hungary’s short-lived Bela Kun Bolshevik government, he proclaimed a program of “cultural terrorism.” He asked, “Who will save us from Western civilization?”

Lukacs went on to influence a Marxist think tank established at Frankfurt University in Germany in 1923, the Institute for Social Research. When a brilliant young Marxist intellectual named Max Horkheimer took over the Institute (today usually known as the Frankfurt School) in 1930, he picked up Lukacs’s work and expanded it into a new version of Marxism, very different from Moscow’s. That new version,

cultural Marxism, is what we now know as “political correctness.”

The task was intellectually difficult because the Institute had to argue against Marx on some points. Most critically, it posited that Marx was wrong in saying that culture was merely part of society’s “superstructure,” determined by ownership of the means of production. Horkheimer said that, on the contrary, it was an independent and highly important variable.

To assist in developing this new Marxism, Horkheimer brought in some additional Marxists who thought as he did. The most important was Theodor Adorno, whose influence remains vast today. Adorno argued that because capitalism is alienating, all art, to be “true,” also had to be alienating. That is why, all around us, we hear and see alienating music, art, and architecture. Adorno further said that anyone who defended traditional culture was both a “fascist” and mentally ill. His book *The Authoritarian Personality* is still a basic text for the left. It is also the source of much of the nonsense in education theory that has wrecked America’s public schools.

Two other Marxist thinkers, Wilhelm Reich and Erich Fromm, helped the institute cross Marx with Freud, another challenging task. They argued that in Western culture, everyone lived in a state of repression from which they must be “liberated.” The results began to become apparent in the 1960s.

Those results were in large part due to a young graduate student at the Frankfurt School shortly before it left Germany for the United States in 1933, after Hitler came to power. His name was **Herbert Marcuse**. In the 1950s and ’60s, Marcuse translated the highly abstruse work of the other Frankfurt School thinkers into books college students could easily read and understand, including *Eros and Civilization*, which became the New Left’s

bible. That book said that by replacing repression with “non-procreative eros” and substituting the “pleasure principle” for the “reality principle,” we could create a society of all play and no work. Marcuse also argued that the revolution would not come from the working class but from a coalition of blacks, gays, feminist women, young people, etc., the sacred “victim groups” of political correctness. These are the ideas that now dominate university campuses across America.

But how did those universities become so intolerant of any other viewpoint? Again, we have Marcuse to thank. In the 1960s he wrote a famous essay on what he called “liberating tolerance.” He defined it as tolerance for all ideas and movements coming from the left, and intolerance for all ideas and movement coming from the right. When the apostles of political correctness call for “tolerance,” Marcuse’s is the “tolerance” they are talking about.

Marcuse injected cultural Marxism into the Baby Boom generation when the Boomers were in college, and it remains their ideology today. Anyone who defies it becomes an “unperson.” It is propagated by much of the video screen media. Cultural Marxism relies for its power not on logical argument but on psychological conditioning, to which video screens lend themselves all too well.

Conservatives who want to fight cultural Marxism should begin by getting its conditioning mechanisms, especially the public schools and the television, out of their families’ lives. Beyond that, the best weapon is truth: exposing “political correctness” and multiculturalism for what they are: Marxism translated from economic into cultural terms. It tries to present itself as “just being nice to everyone.” There is nothing “nice” about it (one of the Institute’s heroes was the Marquis de Sade). Like the Marxism of the old Soviet Union, it is a totalitarian ideology, as evidenced by what it is doing on campuses today. And that’s precisely what it seeks to do nationwide. ■

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