
A Guide for the Ley Reader of Marxist Criticism*

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It is only fair and proper that David Ley be accorded an opportunity to respond to our criticisms of his article on "Liberal Ideology and the Post-Industrial City" (Ley, in this issue). We must admit to being disappointed by the result, however. While we are aware of numerous weaknesses in our analysis, few of these flaws are identified by Ley. He has unfortunately chosen to devote the major portion of his effort to a simplistic attack upon Marxism in general, rather than to a careful discussion of the issues at hand. This is discouraging, since we had thought that our approach, whatever its analytical weaknesses, was anything but dogmatic. Indeed, one reason for the length of our critique was that we wished to avoid charges of merely repeating the maxims of Marx in order to dismiss a non-Marxist, such as Ley, out of hand. We felt it important to develop at least a rudimentary alternative explanation of the phenomena under consideration and of the analytic method itself.

Our argument with David Ley concerns a set of fundamental issues about which there is a long tradition of debate between marxists and non-marxists (and among marxists!): class and the division of labor, reform versus revolution, continuity and change in history, structure and agency, theory and evidence. It is important for all of us to acknowledge the tenacity of certain problems of history, politics and social science despite the efforts of such great minds as those of Marx and Weber to resolve them.

There is more to be done, however, than merely rehearsing the traditional sides of the debates of Weber v. Marx, Popper v. Marx, etc. Great strides have been made in the last decade, particularly in the area of the philosophy of science, in overcoming sterile oppositions and advancing the debate to a new plane. The works of Giddens, Bourdieu and Bhaskar are notable in this regard, but even within geography there are a number of important contributors such as Harvey, Sayer, Pred and Gregory. We try to take their ideas to heart in our critique of David Ley and in this defense against Ley's summary dismissal of Marxism.

Unfortunately, Ley appears to be innocent of most of these developments, and so persists in evading or distorting our critique. Confronted by the difficulties of reconciling oppositions such as class versus division of labor or structure versus agency, Ley exhibits three strategies in his reply. The first and simplest is to beg the question, as illustrated by his silence on the issue of the service

economy. The second strategy is to create a straw opponent on the other side of a simple dualism. This is illustrated by the discussion on political reform, in which he calls us revolutionary purists. Third, and most frustrating, he comes face to face with the essential dilemma but is unable to pose the problem, let alone overcome it. This is the case in the treatment of scientific method, where he accuses us of jettisoning scientific verification because we reject the simplistic tenets of positivism and empiricism.

We can now take up the specific issues, retaining the same topic outline as before.

(1) THE POST-INDUSTRIALISM DEBATE

There are two principal aspects of any assessment of whether industrial capitalism has passed over to a post-industrial age: the increase of services over manufacturing activity in the economy and the increase of non-production relative to production workers. Both are questions of *qualitative* as well as *quantitative* change, involving what is done, how it is done and by whom, who control whom and for what purposes.

It is necessary at the outset to speak to Ley's principal accusation, that we are simply the champions of a static view of history whereas he recognizes change. This is nonsense. We well recognize the enormous changes that have come about over the last hundred years of development in the advanced capitalist countries. What we do is try to provide a way of *thinking about* change and continuity simultaneously. This goes beyond saying some things are constant and others are not, providing a list of each, and totting up both sides of the ledger to see if capitalism still exists or not. We argue that the constants of history are, in this case, more important than the change because they involve the fundamental relations of production, exchange and distribution that underpin so much of the activity of humanity in the contemporary world. The constants involve the driving forces of the economy, of which virtually all modern social institutions are profoundly affected.

In our critique of the "service economy" thesis, we tried to show that one could understand the change from manufacturing to services and realignments in the social division of labor by starting from the marxist presumption that this is a capitalist society and working through the logic of economic and class development on that basis. If one can successfully explain the changes to which the post-industrial theorists refer in terms of the operation of

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constant causal elements, then the case for a shift from capitalism to post-industrialism loses its force. This does not imply that there has not been a shift from classic industrial capitalism to "late" capitalism, or that this evolution involves trivial differences. We were probably too cavalier in using terms such "superficial changes" to refer to the growth of non-manufacturing activities. But there is no great difficulty to explaining the main contours of the so-called service economy as a product of capitalist development in Marxist terms.

It was necessary, moreover, to debunk the overinflated category of "services" of which post-industrial theorists make so much. To begin with, the concept "services" is a complete muddle and used in a most cavalier fashion. We tried to sort it out a bit. It was a crude piece of work and we hope to do a better job of it in the future. But the basic point still stands. That is, the principal business of modern capitalism is still the production and circulation of commodities, not the provision of labor services. The modern economy is not only still capitalist, it is still *industrial* capitalist.

Along with the growth of industrial production and non-manufacturing activities has come change in the occupational make-up of capitalism. This involves the kind of detailed work people do (e.g. writing memos instead of bending metal), the places they do it (offices or labs instead of factories), and the relations of one kind of work to another in a complex division of labor (technicians in the engineering department stand in a different relation to production workers than a welder does to a machinist). But the gulf between past and present is not necessarily vast. People are mostly still doing workaday tasks associated with developing, producing and selling commodities, transferring money and property, or managing organizational tasks and bossing each other around. And they still work under the direction and power of capitalist managers with one eye on their class prerogatives and the other on the bottom line. New occupations, but old stories. Both lab technicians and machinists are essentially skilled craftspeople, reasonably paid and relatively independent, while the clericals who carry files around offices and the hod-carriers who lug plaster around construction sites are both unskilled, poorly paid, and unlikely to move up. None of the workers remotely enjoy the independence, salary, and power of a true professional or high manager.

Certainly the number of scientific, technical and conceptual workers, far from the shop floor, has increased; so have the legions of bosses managing the complex division of labor; and so have the numbers of independent professionals in the interstices of the industrial system. These are significant changes and their impact on social practice and ideology has been considerable. As we noted in our critique, modern capitalist culture and politics cannot be explained without reference to the growth of the professional-managerial-technical stratas (PMTS). What we did not say, but should have, is that Max Weber should be given his due for seeing that the organization of a complex industrial system, capitalist or otherwise, necessarily demands the growth of certain types of technical workers and layers of management.

We nevertheless sought to undercut gross exaggerations of the post-industrial, "new class" theorists. The PMTS may have increased in numbers, but the economy still runs principally on the profit motive, not a technical interest in efficiency, a managerial interest in organizational survival, or a professional service-orientation. Marx cannot be supplanted by Weber. The former's recognition of the capitalist relation—the ownership and control of the means of production in private hands—as the principal axis around which power is organized in our societies is still correct. A more complex division of labor around this axis does not annul the underlying power relation or, as yet, give the PMTS a preeminent, independent base of power.

It was perhaps not clear enough in our previous discussion of this issue that class must be thought of as a *structuring relation* not as an observable, empirical category (Giddens, 1980). A crude analogy is the way iron filings arrange themselves in a magnetic field held under a sheet of paper. Magnetism is the underlying force at work, but the only "thing" we can observe is the pattern of the filings. Even though a magnet is bipolar, all the filings do not go to one pole or another, and their distribution depends on the intervening cause of their initial position as they were spilled on the paper. Take away the magnet and you cannot decide which filings belong in a box marked "North" and which in a box marked "south." Filings are not in themselves magnetic or polar. Classes, too, must not be thought of as boxes into which individuals can be neatly divided or the attributes of individuals, but as underlying relations in whose field of force people are caught, often in contradictory positions. It is quite alright if one wishes to subdivide the social hierarchy further on the basis of relative power, independence, pay or the like, and call those "subclasses" or "strata," these groupings complicate social reality but do not eliminate the underlying force of class relations. No doubt our discussion of the PMTS needs criticism and rethinking, but Ley has offered little in the way of a positive alternative, save as restatement of the Weberian criterion for class.

(2) POLITICS IN THE CITY

When it comes to analyzing the particulars of the TEAM movement in Vancouver, we must defer to Ley. Nonetheless, the thrust of our analysis is still valid.

Again, it is not sufficient for Ley to respond that both continuity and change are involved in the TEAM reform movement; that is clear enough. More important, there is no merit to his accusation that we are merely revolutionary purists who disdain reformist politics. Ley is boxing with the shadows of vulgar Marxists he sees dancing across our pages.

Ley misreads us on four fronts: that politics come only in a two-class model; that liberal reform interests are the same as business interests; that liberal ideology is the same as business ideology; and that the checkered achievements of liberal reform constitute no change at all.

First, it is pointless for Ley to quote Alvin Gouldner at us on the ambivalence of the "new class", "critical of the old [business] class but incompletely committed to fun-

damental change." This was exactly the point of our long discussion of the contradictory class position of the professional managerial-technical strata and their ambivalent ideology. The first leads—though imperfectly—to the second and thence to ambivalent political practice.

Second, we did not say that the TEAM movement's interests were identical with business interests. This would be impossible in the simple sense that we clearly distinguished between two different sets of business interests, those of the old merchants and manufacturers of the city and those of the new corporate and financial directors moving into the skyscrapers that are remaking the face of Vancouver. Furthermore, "business interests" and "class interests" are in general quite fragmented, complex and ill-formed at the level of everyday demands—a point we apparently did not make clear before. Therefore, any tidy conjuncture between TEAM politics and business interests would be mere happenstance. Indeed, expressed "interests" are not the main issue.

What we hoped to convey was that reform politics have to be understood in light of the *structural* forces (pressures and limits) exerted by the capitalist nature of the economy, of which the direct political power and interests of the business class in only one aspect. (Walker and Storper, 1978) Reform politics are ensnared in the web of capitalist class relations, political power, ideology and economic forces. It is therefore most unlikely that TEAM represented a fundamental break with the past, as was implied by Ley's rather glorified presentation of their efforts, all wrapped up in the trappings of post-industrialism, the new class and the new Vancouver. They do not appear, on the basis of the evidence provided, to have distanced themselves from business as much as they or David Ley seem to think, regardless of how progressive they hoped to be. And there was almost certainly a process of accommodation and cooptation over time, as so often happens to those who seek to swim against the tide.

This brings us to ideology, whose fine threads spun of everyday experience, partial truths, and class perspective are an essential part of the capitalist web. We spent some time trying to highlight the ambiguities and even conservatism of the ideology of the PMTS and of liberal political thought. Given our limited knowledge of Vancouver politics we may easily have underestimated the progressive stance of TEAM, as Ley is quick to point out. But on the basis of Ley's original article, there was every reason to suspect that what TEAM leaders saw as progressive, anti-business goals involved a misreading of the situation. That is, Vancouver was changing in ways they did not appreciate, so that what appeared to be an "anti-business" vision of urban development was really in line with much of what business itself was bringing about in that city. The decentralization of heavy industry and renewal of middle class residential areas in the city fall under this heading. Even if TEAM built townhouses instead of apartment towers, that hardly went against the grain of major shifts in the employment base and class character of the city. Ideology does not just consist of ruling class shibboleths, but involves a view of the world that rests on an inability to penetrate beneath appearances (or lesser circumstances) to deeper processes beneath. TEAM leaders suffered, it

seems, from a number of illusions about the nature of the problems with which they were wrestling and their own potential to solve them in the limited forum of city electoral politics.

A fourth issue is the degree of change actually achieved by TEAM. We are certainly not dyed-in-the-wool revolutionists arguing that anything less than the storming of the Winter Palace is bourgeois cooptation. We participate eagerly in a local brand of progressive electoral politics in Berkeley, in the firm belief that it is better than letting the businessmen and conservatives* control city government. We have perhaps been overly critical of the TEAM movement, stressing its internal limitations rather than external barriers to the achievement of worthwhile goals. But the fact remains that it is terribly hard to break out of the structural situation in which reform movements find themselves, as illustrated pretty clearly by the ideological blind-spots, ambiguous achievements, and short lifespan of the TEAM movement. We see this in our own local politics; although many of the progressive leaders are avowed socialists, Berkeley remains in many respects identical with other cities of its size. Witness, too, the apparent rediscovery of Wilson Laborism by the most touted French Socialist government under Mitterand.

Incremental change *does* matter, of course. Even standing still matters when the alternative is regression with Reagan or Thatcher. Ley is certainly correct that things would be worse without unions or the urban reform movement of the Progressive era, despite their checkered purposes and results. Incremental change can potentially lead to qualitative transformations over time, as Marx and Engels themselves noted. But incremental reform can also lead us in circles, take us down irrelevant side paths and leave us nowhere, thanks to misconceived liberal notions of what is to be done and the constant pressure of the forces conserving the status quo. Paradoxically, reform can even lead down the path most favorable to capital, despite both the noble purposes of progressive forces and enmity of short-sighted and mean-spirited businessfolk, who often do not know their own best long-term interests. Indeed, this is quite comprehensible within a "structuration" model of history, in which human agency (class struggle, political mobilization, etc.) is not merely allowed for, but is a necessary moment in the reproduction of structured social systems. But this sort of analysis raises a final question, that of appropriate method.

(3) PROBLEMS OF THEORY AND METHOD

In Ley's response to our critique, he cites approvingly such well-known Marxists as E.P. Thompson and Raymond Williams, and apparently endorses the viewpoint of a critical theorists with strong Marxian roots, Jurgen Habermas. From this we infer that Ley is not opposed to Marxist analysis *per se*, but rejects those variants which seek to attribute all historical phenomena to the inexorable workings of the "iron laws" of capital accumulation.

* Most of whom hail from the PMTS, contrary to Ley's optimistic association of this group inherently with liberalism.

Although reductionism is a danger in any attempt at systematic explanation—including “post-industrial” theory—we do not think ourselves unduly guilty of it. We have, certainly, suggested that capital accumulation is a powerful force driving the economy and society down certain likely paths rather than others. But we explicitly eschewed a narrow, “capital-logic” approach, acknowledged the multiplicity of factors which determine real historical events, and considered the intersubjective, meaningful nature of human social life. (cf. Greenberg, 1983) In order to dismiss our critique, however, Ley ignores what we actually say, and instead sets up a vulgar-Marxist straw man as the object of his reply. As a result, he avoids dealing seriously with most of the substantive issues of theory and method raised by our arguments.

One of Ley’s principal claims, for example, is that our “overpreoccupation with theory” as what he terms “total history” leads us to ignore the problem of empirical verification. Instead, he implies that we seek to bowdlerize the historical record, twisting and turning the facts to fit the procrustean bed of our “preconceived theoretical categories.” Such a charge is reminiscent of Karl Popper’s cold-war era attacks on Marxism as “historicism”, a claim which we had thought the richness and diversity of Marxian scholarship had relegated to the dust-bin of academic criticism. Such a sweeping indictment only diverts attention from the major issue to be confronted by us all: that what constitutes empirical “proof” of theoretical claims remains unresolved, not only for Marxists, but for the sciences as a whole. While Ley is correct that positivists have displayed a “commitment to establish a standardized and replicable procedure for the verification of its theoretical claims,” he is himself no positivist, and would surely agree that the epistemological foundations of positivism have been thoroughly undermined over the past several decades. Since Popper’s *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*, there has been general agreement among philosophers of science that theories are never verified. Lakatos’ subsequent work demonstrated that broader research programmes are rarely falsified either. Elaborating on Hansen’s claim that observation is inevitably theory-laden, Kuhn proceeded to establish that adherence to one rather than another set of theoretical principles is often a sociological, rather than a scientific, matter. Most recently, Harre and Bhaskar of the “Realist” school have argued convincingly that empirical “facts” are seldom congruent with their underlying causes; hence, a Humean “constant conjuncture” of observable events provides an inadequate basis for scientific explanation. (Williams, 1981).

In the wake of these developments, there have been few clear guidelines for the critical evaluation of empirical evidence or the acceptance or rejection of theories. To a great extent, what is considered to be “quality” research is a matter of consensus among scholars, the result of constant dialogue and mutual criticism. In other words, science is an eminently human—practical, social, and creative—activity, not a mechanical process of unveiling truth from the rigorous manipulation and observation of nature. What emerges from this process as “truth” (with a small “t”) is by no means as arbitrary as Feyerabend and other scientific anarchists would claim, however, since

there is indeed a “real world” which imposes practical limits on the variety of conceptual schemes which can plausibly be employed to explain it or act upon it. If within an ongoing academic dialogue, the concepts associated with Marx’s historical materialism remain viable a century after their initial development, it is, we believe, less attributable to the dogmatism of Marx’s followers than to the demonstrated power of Marxian concepts as tools for understanding the world.

Of course, the necessary disjuncture, identified by Marx, between the “facts of history” and their underlying causes means that a theoretical framework such as Marxism can be applied improperly, as critics such as Ley have suggested. Moreover, in the social sciences, controlled experiments—where contingencies are regulated so that underlying causes may be more clearly felt—are ordinarily out of the question. History cannot be stopped in its tracks, like a beam of electrons. Hopefully, however, the vigilance of a reflexive, critical community of scholars can put a stop to undue flights of theoretical fancy.

If our own answers to the difficult questions regarding evidence and verification are not satisfactory, may we hasten to add that on the issue on “verification” Ley himself is curiously vague. Surely he would not claim that his hypotheses regarding post-industrialism and liberal ideology have been “proven” through his single case study?

As for broader questions of theory and method, Ley’s forays into historical analysis stand or fall on the merits of his Weberian approach. While Weber’s contributions to social theory are not insignificant, he was by no means a systematic thinker, and his major methodological focus was not upon the macro-level phenomena Ley discusses in his article, but upon “the interpretive understanding and explanation of social action.” These lacunae in Weber’s thought place serious limitations upon its usefulness as a guide for historical research. As Anthony Giddens points out, “Weber’s methodological position, which ties understanding the meaning of conduct to a version of what has subsequently come to be called ‘methodological individualism,’ precluded him from systematically integrating a treatment of modern capitalistic activity, regarded as meaningful conduct, with the overall institutional character of capitalist society and its dynamics.” (Giddens, 1977, 205) Furthermore, Weber’s neo-Kantian focus upon “meanings” as a starting point for the analysis of “action” is indicative of a pervasive subjectivism, one which renders problematic attempts to locate the *sources* of values, motives, and other aspects of consciousness in patterned sets of social relations into which people enter “independent of their wills.”

Ley attempts to overcome this Weberian tendency toward voluntarism through an eclectic borrowing from Bell, Habermas, and Maslow, with the unfortunate results discussed in our critique. We do not claim that the alternative to Ley’s eclecticism is a reductionistic Marxism. Nonetheless, the fundamental relationships governing production, circulation, and distribution in North American societies may accurately be identified as capitalist (we challenge Ley to peruse the pages of any edition of *The Wall Street Journal* and deny that we live in economies

that are capitalist). As a result, the casual efficacy of the “generative structure” of capital—as a social relation and social process—described by Marx a century ago remain operative. In place of Ley’s eclectic theory we have argued that Marx’s insight into the logic of capital can be *extended* logically to explain phenomena such as “the service economy” which appear initially not to lend themselves to the marxian framework of analysis. A problem common to hasty critics of Marx and marxists alike is to jettison the theory of capital in light of seemingly contrary evidence before doing the hard work of developing it beyond a few rudimentary axioms about class and accumulation (cf. Harvey, 1982). Such development need not—indeed, tends not—to be an exercise in religious adherence to a faith without appeal to the fact, as Ley seems to fear.

Certainly, there are significant determining factors that are non-economic. This much is obvious. But we, along with Bhaskar, Sayer, Harvey and others, believe that Marx’s dissection of the capitalist mode of production continued to provide the skeleton on which can, in Thrift’s words, “be hung the flesh of other, more contingent determinations.” (Thrift, 1983) Having clearly adhered to what Bhaskar terms an “integrative pluralism,” we continue to be puzzled by Ley’s insistence that we are guilty of seeking “total history” in our efforts at explanation. Apparently, Ley believes that if one finds the properties of capital to be operative *at all*, then one must be claiming that such structures *by themselves* explain all the vagaries of history and features of contemporary society.

Ley seems unable to hold on to both ends of the dialectics of structure and agency, of underlying mechanisms and contingent causes, and of constancy and change, which are necessary to a non-reductionist explanatory method for the study of complex, self-reproducing social systems and their historical development. It is not a matter of continuity versus change, of individual action or social process, but of handling both at the same time. What is it that changes and what is it that does not, and how shall we rank their importance? How are individuals the creators of society and at the same time created by it? These are the crucial questions, but they can only be solved if one stops juxtaposing opposites and seeks to overcome false dichotomies. (Giddens, 1979)

The chief stumbling block for Ley, as for most humanists, is the role played by consciousness in history and the apparent non-regularity and creativity in all individual action, which seem to preclude any “law like” behavior on the part of social systems. People think about what they do, change their minds and choose among alternatives. At the same time, it is evident that individuals are rule-bound in some sense, given the conventions of culture and tradition and the way institutions such as the family, the corporation or the market system are organized. These rules are rarely formal, however, because they are the products of accumulated practices of large groups over time and of the selective enforcement by those people who hold power over others.

But the matter does not stop here. As Bourdieu (1977) points out, people never simply obey rules, they plot,

scheme and maneuver in order to use the rules to advantage in pursuit of their various individual purposes. They have active strategies for dealing with the particular circumstances in which they find themselves. Indeed, the rules of the game are not known or knowable explicitly as in chess; they only emerge through practical activity of individuals, who discover and internalize the limits and pressures of structuring forces such as power relations, traditional values or the functioning of markets. Not only is socialization a creative process, so is social reproduction and the maintenance of structure relations. Organized social systems cannot be reproduced without the energetic and unpredictable agency of individuals and groups pursuing seemingly atomistic ends. (Park, 1974) For example, “capital” does not accumulate of itself; it requires all the energy and resourcefulness of millions of competing capitalists and participating workers to function at all. The irony for the worker, as Marx points out, is that in the process of producing capital, s/he reproduces the conditions of his/her own continued exploitation. Thus social systems are necessarily both collective and individual, structured and active, abstract and eminently practical.

Similarly, social systems are both conservative (or conserving of certain relations) and innovative (subject to change, even structural transformation). Marx captured the conservative, or structure preserving, aspects of capitalism in the basic relations of production and the extraction of surplus value, even as he recognized that such things as commodities (use-values), production techniques, and business organization are changed by the process in which capitalists seek to gain competitive advantage and accumulate more capital. Indeed, change and development of these aspects of “capital” are essential to the preservation of individual capitals, and hence to the capitalist system. Of course, Marx also recognized the possibility of system contradictions developing along with the evolution of the capitalist economy, particularly between the increasingly social nature of production and the private basis of capitalist property. In the short run, these contradictions create barriers to accumulation that force adaptative changes. In the long run, Marx believed, such contradiction will overwhelm the functional, integrative capacities of capitalists and the capitalist system, making possible a structural transformation to a socialist mode of production.

One must learn to think in terms of these various dialectics—structure and agency, continuity and change, value and use-value, function and contradiction—and not succumb to simplistic dualisms and accusations based on them. The problems of historical analysis and good social science, of how one thinks, what theories one should hold to, and how one can verify his/her notions are not easy ones. Our answers are still imperfect and can be criticized for this. But at least we have faced up to the problems, stated them clearly and moved to overcome them. In the process we have not had to abandon the insights of Marx into the logic of capitalist societies. If David Ley cannot understand this, we fear it is because he does not have a very good understanding of either philosophy of science, Marxist theory or contemporary capitalism.

We would like to close this exchange of views on a conciliatory note. Let us emphasize that we chose to critique Ley's work as much because of its strengths as because of its weaknesses. To his credit, Ley has focussed attention upon important issues and phenomena to which, in some cases, Marxists have paid insufficient heed. He has, moreover, presented a reasonably detailed case study, a form of argumentation that we strongly support in lieu of excessive theory-building or generalizations about large aggregates. Moreover, we would like to restate the hopes expressed in our original critique that intellectual exchanges between ourselves and those with whom we disagree should continue, for only through such discussion and debate can geographical knowledge advance. We acknowledge our own rhetorical zeal at times. Our critique of Ley has not, however, been nearly as vituperous in tone as the anti-Marxist polemic that he and Duncan published recently in the *Annals*.^{*} (Duncan & Ley, 1982) In the chillingly conservative social atmosphere of the eighties, it is hardly comforting to find intelligent university scholars resorting to summary dismissal of their opponents through recitation of simplistic and outdated arguments against a caricatured Marxism. We would hope that Ley and his intellectual supporters would begin to take seriously the diversity and complexity of the Marxian literature. Perhaps then this conversation can continue.

^{*} The criticisms of Marxism expressed there are largely identical to those made by Ley in his arguments against us here.

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