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L. H. Morgan, Mechanistic Materialism and the Contradictions of the Capitalist System: The Soviet Response to Leslie White, c. 1932

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should be afforded in England for the study of the native races. It has been realised by Germany that a knowledge of the customs of native races is necessary in dealing with them in the way either of government or of trade. This does not, of course, apply to Australia as it does to Africa or India. But the scientist does not concern himself with practical results. He simply inquires along the lines of the theories which suggest themselves to him. Practical results may, of course, follow. Hertz, in his experiments, for instance, was not trying to invent wireless telegraphy. Still it was his studies in electricity which led the way to the discovery of wireless telegraphy."

Mr. Brown expects to begin practical research work in about three weeks. The results would be published in England, but Mr. Brown hopes to be able to give to Western Australia some information regarding the outcome of the expedition.

[cf. Stocking, "Dr. Durkheim and Mr. Brown: Comparative Sociology at Cambridge in 1910" and "Radcliffe-Brown and British Social Anthropology," in History of Anthropology 2 (1984):106-91; After Tylor: British Social Anthropology, 1888-1951 (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1995)]

CLIO'S FANCY: DOCUMENTS TO PIQUE THE HISTORICAL IMAGINATION

L. H. Morgan, *Mechanistic Materialism and the Contradictions of the Capitalist System: The Soviet Response to Leslie White*, c. 1932.

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The following is a translation of the editorial introduction (pp. 52-54) to an article by Leslie White, which appeared in 1932 in the premier Soviet journal of anthropology, Sovetskaia Etnografiia, entitled "Evolutsiia Kul'tury i Amerikanskaia Shkola Istoricheskoi Etnologii" (The Evolution of Culture and the American School of Historical Ethnology), pp. 54-86. Though it is one of the earliest formal statements by White of his theoretical position, it has, to my knowledge, been left out of discussions of White's theories. It is omitted in the obituary of White by Robert L. Carneiro in the International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences (vol 18, 1979), though mentioned by Beth Dillingham in her bibliographic contribution to White's obituary in the American Anthropologist (1976, vol. 78:620-629). And White himself does not appear to have referred to it in his own work.

The article--which grew out of a paper White gave at the 1931 meetings of the A.A.A.--is prototypical White: a critique of Boasian anthropology and of the attacks on cultural evolutionism by such figures as Boas, Lowie, and Goldenweiser; a eulogy of Morgan; a sketch of the evolutionary development of culture as a function of the growth of technology; a discussion of the need for a social system to be congruent with its technology; and, finally, a brief foray into the nature of the contemporary class contradictions and the inevitability of their resolution through the victory of the working class. It should certainly be looked at by connoisseurs of White.

The editorial introduction reflects the perception of White by official Soviet Marxist anthropology and it may shed some light on why White never became a Marxist in a formal sense, given the history of American Marxism in the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s and the largely non-materialist trajectory of Western Marxism in the post-1960s. As the editorial's criticism of White suggests, White's historical materialism was too simplistic (or robust, or schematic--choose your term) to be assimilated into the mainstream Marxism of the time. This reinforces one's feeling that the roots of White's intellectual outlook must be sought in American frontier materialism and not in European Hegelianism. The editorial's finely balanced combination of criticism and welcome must also be understood in the context of 1932. The Stalinist grip on Soviet scholarship had by then been established and the publication of a theoretical article by a non-Marxist foreigner necessitated, for editors, the insurance provided by comments about its theoretical inadequacies. As to the welcoming portions of the editorial, one must also remember that this was also the beginning of the Soviet drive to enlist the sympathies of non-communist intellectuals abroad.

ETHNOGRAPHY ABROAD

From the Editorial Board

Recently, a half-century had elapsed since the death of the great American scientist Lewis Morgan. This year marks fifty years since the appearance of his work of genius "Ancient Society." We have already given space on the pages of this journal to a biographical article devoted to Morgan. The present article, from the pen of the contemporary American scientist Leslie White, is also in large measure connected with the evaluation of Morgan's epoch-making discoveries in relation to the present fate of his theory in the United States.

In 1931, there took place in Cleveland a congress of American anthropologists--in the United States this term means anthropology in our sense as well as archeology, ethnography, and sociology, that is, anthropology refers to a whole complex of social sciences, "the sciences of Man." At the congress appeared a young scientist, L. White, who attacked the anti-evolutionary and anti-Morganistic position of the Californian anthropologist and sociologist Lowie, protested against naked empiricism of all American ethnography and called for conclusions about the future of civilization on the basis of already assembled scientific data. White announced his sympathy for the work of the Soviets, which produced a new type of socialist state emerging logically and forcibly from the laws of social development. An exposition of L. White's speech in Cleveland was reprinted in the northern press and became known to scientific workers--ethnographers--parenthetically, this speech was analyzed at a scientific meeting of the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR.

The editorial board of "Soviet Ethnography," intrigued by the originality of L. White's views in the context of American science, invited him to write for the journal a more extensive article on this question. Today, this article stands before the Soviet reader as real proof of the strengthening of our international scientific relations on a new basis. In offering this article to the attention of Soviet ethnographers, the editorial board find it necessary to note that White's presentation marks the beginning of a revision of values in a certain circle of overseas scientists,

analogous in its character and meaning to that movement of interest and feeling for the USSR that keeps on growing among the Western European and American intelligentsia. Proof of this are the open letters to the public of such people as Romain Rolland, Henri Barbusse, U. Sinclair, and Theodore Dreiser, the clear fact of the profound interest in northern science at the London Congress on the history of science and technology in 1931; the personal good wishes of people such as Franz Boas or--in a totally different sphere--Albert Einstein. Among young American scientists, there is a growing interest in the achievements of Soviet researchers, guided by the Marxist-Leninist method, and a growing desire to work in the Soviet Union in order to enlarge their qualifications. The Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR is receiving for the first time within its walls American PhD candidates, among them even one of [American] Indian nationality, A. Phinney--which cannot but be regarded as a significant event.

Mr. L. White's article that we print here speaks of the longing of young American scientists for the worldview of historical materialism. Of course, in the expositions of L. White himself, there are still remnants of the old evolutionism, with its lingering overevaluation of the biological factor ("the history of peoples is the history of their struggle for food"); there is still much mechanistic simplification, an inability to understand the unity of productive forces and relations of production (the separation of the "technological" and the "social" systems), a lack of understanding of the principle of national culture with socialist content, a global understanding of "anthropology" as a science substituting for world history; and there are also concrete statements of an erroneous nature, for example, about the domestication of the reindeer by northern peoples under the influence of the experience of the southern nomads of Central Asia. The lawful regularity in the birth of socialist society is also drawn by L. White in a mechanistic-materialistic manner. But all this cannot hide from us the fact that by starting with Morgan as the great American sociologist, Leslie White came to an understanding of both the total historical process and the modern contradictions of the capitalist system. We do not doubt that, in future, our cooperation with Leslie White will acquire a systematic character, and that in his person we will have an ally and a friend, consciously taking the path of learning the Marxist-Leninist method in the study of the development of human society.

[translated by I. Kopytoff]

SOURCES FOR THE HISTORY OF ANTHROPOLOGY

I. Preserving the Anthropological Record--The Wenner-Gren Foundation announces the publication of the second edition of Preserving the Anthropological Record. The book presents essays on the nature and use of anthropological records, the need for preservation, the issues confronting different subfields, and guidelines for individual anthropologists and associations. The expanded second edition contains six new chapters, including reports on ongoing efforts to preserve the record. Interested scholars and information specialists may receive a complimentary copy by writing The Wenner-Gren Foundation, 220 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10001-7708 or calling (212) 683-5000. (Limit one book per order; please allow 6-8 weeks for delivery).