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# Socialist America

Editorial Offices:  
156 Fifth Ave. Suite 1003  
New York, New York 10010  
(212) 989-0164

Editor  
Ralph Schoenman

June 5, 1969

Professor Georg Lukács  
Beograd 2 V/5 Utsa  
Budapest,  
Hungary

Dear Professor Lukács:

I am writing to ask you to contribute an essay to the second issue of the theoretical publication, Socialist America, the first issue of which will appear in the autumn of this year. The second issue will consider the topic "Revolutionary Culture and Socialism."

There is much vague discussion about what socialist society should be like and, in particular, the nature of culture under such a new order of society. This problem reaches back to the debates during the early years of the Bolshevik Revolution, forward to the present controversies surrounding the "cultural revolution" in China, and includes the question of socialism in an advanced industrial society.

Socialist America will pursue various problems connected with this topic. In the minds of at least two generations, culture under socialism has been connected with the intrusion of doctrine and dogma into cultural work under the command of an autocratic party possessed of State power. This approach to social and natural science, complex and experimental fields of human endeavor - often in their initial phases of development-restricted them in the name of "proletarian advance" or "socialist construction." The decrees from the First Congress of Soviet Writers in 1934 provided a model for culture under the regime of Joseph Stalin which has lived on not only in the practice of those States which continue this species of "socialism" but in the minds of people with many different political orientations.

These people, whether social democrats, Marxists, or liberals, tend to associate culture under socialism with some measure of uniformity, orthodoxy, and hostility to formal experimentation and unfettered exploration in the arts.

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We believe that a socialist society should be more free than any previous society known to man. The sense of discovery and audacious achievement in revolutionary society should permit a cultural rebirth that will affect and involve the mass of human beings denied access to culture or debauched by counterfeit culture in bourgeois society. We are totally dissatisfied with the humiliating paucity of serious discussion by socialists about the nature of culture under socialism. It is difficult to believe that socialist revolution will be made unless the most mature, advanced and accomplished ideas and spokesmen of bourgeois culture are first met and mastered on their own ground. If this is not accomplished, then justified confidence in the intellectual power of socialist ideas and analysis will not be the basis of our discussion with others or ourselves. Socialist discourse will be a catechism of abstraction and half-digested formulas without the ability to convince and win over serious minds in this and future generations.

We want also to assimilate the best in bourgeois culture, the better to advance beyond it rather than to retreat from it in the name of "socialism." We hold that socialist society should make bourgeois culture at its best accessible to all before presuming to transcend its limitations.

We believe that socialists must examine advanced capitalist society in terms of its achievements. The ~~relation~~<sup>AND</sup> between present "avant-garde" culture ~~under~~ socialism needs careful study. We assume that the drastic changes in experiences, values and life style which a socialist revolution will achieve, will create the conditions for a culture unlike any we know today, particularly in advanced industrial society.

As there has never been an advanced industrial society with a high cultural level which underwent a socialist revolution, it is especially incumbent upon us to discuss now what kind of culture we conceive to be appropriate and possible under socialism. The industrial countries of Eastern Europe, which have entered a form of socialist organization, are subject to grotesque regimentation in the area of cultural work. Even the reaction to this amongst courageous socialist intellectuals has been burdened by the reality of freer, more advanced culture in bourgeois society. We hope, therefore, to speculate about a socialist culture which has already benefitted from and assimilated the best that bourgeois culture has to offer.

Socialists must also confront the fact that revolution in the world has occurred in culturally deprived countries suffering from over-exploitation and the backwardness of cultures denied the fruits of industrial advance. Illiteracy and pre-urban

patterns of life have characterized the countries in which revolution has triumphed, providing an impoverished indicator of what culture may be in more advanced society.

Over the next period Socialist America will relate these problems to various combat issues which the strategy and tactics of our struggle may embrace. This is the praxis which our journal advocates.

Those who have been asked to write on aspects of "Revolutionary Culture and Socialism" include Ernst Fischer, Herbert Marcuse, Peter Weiss, Louis Althusser, Karol Kosik, Jean-Paul Sartre, Alejo Carpentier, Alain Robbe-Grillet, Raymond Williams, John Berger, Mary McCarthy, Susan Sontag, Conor Cruise O'Brien, Erich Fromm, Aimé Césaire, Carlos Fuentes, Jiri Hajik, and Chinua Achebe. The number of Socialist America on this subject will be published in January, 1970. I should like your essay to be between 5,000 and 10,000 words in length, although if you wish to write something shorter, that would be acceptable. We should require it by the end of November.

Would you write an essay in which you discuss in what sense experimental literature and art can be components of a revolutionary culture? How can the cause of socialism be advanced in the capitalist countries by a revolutionary literature? How would you distinguish such revolutionary literature from avant-garde experimentation with form as, for example, in the case of Robbe-Grillet or William Burroughs? What are the circumstances which allow revolutionary art to transform social consciousness without compromising the complexity of such new art?

Why should artistic revolt against bourgeois forms of the novel, which were perfected in the nineteenth-century, necessarily embrace a socialist consciousness? Can they contribute to revolutionary culture without doing so? Why has the conception of socialist realism produced mediocre art and is there a connection between this and the proletcult debates of the 1920s?

As you know, there is very little serious Marxist cultural critique at this time and your own essay would have great importance for young Marxists and revolutionary socialists in the United States. I very much hope you will be able to write for us.

With good wishes,

Sincerely,

*Ralph Schoenman*

Ralph Schoenman

# Socialist America

June 19, 1969

Professor Georg Lukacs  
Beograd 2 v/5 Utsa  
Budapest, Hungary

Editorial Offices:  
156 Fifth Ave. Suite 1003  
New York, New York 10010  
(212) 989-0164

Editor  
Ralph Schoenman

Dear Georg Lukacs:

Further to my recent letter, I should wish to mention that Socialist America is not planning to pay for articles in our initial period. We hope we can do so later on.

There is today in North America no publication in which serious debate concerning socialism is published. In Europe, one can cite New Left Review or Les Temps Modernes. Neither is primarily concerned with North America nor with the task of examining Marxist theory to prepare a more excellent reconstruction of theory and program.

Literally then, there is nowhere to go today to publish sustained argument about socialist theory, ideas, strategy or debate on an intellectual level which is consistently high.

We aspire to answer this lack. We hope you will join us in creating a climate in which revolutionary ideas and programs are advanced and are taken seriously. We particularly need your help and commitment. This support would not be financial, except insofar as foregoing payment is financial help, but rather the contribution of ideas and of your conviction about the uniqueness and necessity of what we are determined to do.

I hope you will agree. We cannot achieve this otherwise.

*Ralph Schoenman*

Ralph Schoenman  
Editor

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(212) 989-0164

Editor

Ralph Schoenman

July 19, 1969

Professor Georg Lukács  
Beograd Utsa v/5  
Budapest  
Hungary

Dear Professor Lukács:

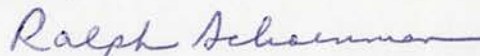
Thank you so much for your kind letter and for the generous offer of the English rights to Russian Revolution and Russian Literature. I have written immediately to Rowohlt Ausgabe in Hamburg and hope to obtain the book shortly and I am most grateful to you.

Since my last letter to you the journal has made considerable progress. A distinguished group of critics and writers have become Contributing Editors of Socialist America. They are Susan Sontag, the American novelist and critic; Noam Chomsky, Professor of Linguistics and cultural critic; Conor Cruise O'Brien, Irish critic, playwright and diplomat; Maxwell Geismar, the American critic; John Berger, novelist and Marxist critic of art; Jules Olitsky, American painter and critic; Hilda Gadea, social historian and widow of Che Guevara; Lucien Goldmann, Marxist philosopher and critic of culture.

I am emboldened to ask if you would accept to be a Contributing Editor of Socialist America. I cannot sufficiently emphasize the honor it would represent for the journal. We should ask little of your time and energy except to advise you of our plans for issues and to invite your comment and advice when you have time to send it. I am aware this is an imposing request, but the importance to the work encourages me to make it.

With kindest regards and thanks,

Yours,



Ralph Schoenman

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# Socialist America

2 Washington Square Village, # 8E  
982-9557

• New York, New York 10012  
• 989-0164

EDITOR: Ralph Schoenman

MANAGING EDITOR: Joan Mellen

## CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

John Berger • Noam Chomsky • Hilda Gadea • Maxwell Geismar

Lucien Goldmann • Conor Cruise O'Brien • Jules Olitsky • Susan Sontag

Truman Nelson/Eldridge Cleaver/Conrad Lynn/Carlos Fuentes/Arno Mayer/Jonah Raskin

November 4, 1969

Professor Georg Lukacs  
Budapest V.  
Belgrad rkp.2.

Dear Professor Lukacs:

Thank you very much for your letter of October 28. I entirely understand your feeling about the matter of being a Contributing Editor. I should point out that in the United States, the designation Contributing Editor is not the same as being a member of an editorial board. Members of an editorial board are usually people who work collectively in close proximity to each other. Contributing Editors are usually people who, in addition to writing articles, provide periodic opinions and suggestions on the development of the magazine. I thought I would like to make the distinction clear because otherwise it would be quite true that one is expected to do more than is possible from a great distance or to be simply decorative. This was not our intent. If what I have written above makes it possible for you to be listed, of course, we should be delighted, but if not, we would understand entirely.

I do not conceal the enormous prestige which we would gain by listing you as a Contributing Editor and this is certainly a consideration in our needs, but it was our hope that you would advise us from time to time as to the direction and quality of the journal, for we enormously value your judgment.

We have received your article and it is now in an advanced state of translation. We are delighted with the

Georg Lukacs

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November 4, 1969

article and I propose to send you the transcript as soon as it is completed so you may consider it and make any alterations you would wish to make in the English.

I send my warmest fraternal regards and thanks.

Yours,

*Ralph Schoenman*

Ralph Schoenman

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