



# Marxist Sociology Section

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## Thinking Back and Looking Forward by Rich Hogan

### Inside this issue:

As part of our continuing effort to reflect back on the history of the section while looking forward to our anniversary celebrations, Scott McNall, our fifteenth chair, has agreed to offer his reflections on our past, present, and future. We hope to continue this series with more contributions like this one.

<i>Thinking Back and Looking Forward</i>	1
<i>"I Am Not a Marxist" Essay by Scott G. McNall</i>	1-2, 16-24
<i>Call for Papers and Award Nominations</i>	3-5
<i>2013 Marx Section Award Winners</i>	6
<i>Dorothy E. Smith and Marx, Essay by Roslyn Wallach Bologh</i>	7-8
<i>Book Review: Duna-yevskaya-Marcuse-Fromm Correspondence, by Daniel Auerbach</i>	9-10
<i>Publications</i>	11-14
<i>Reflections on the TNC, by Ryan Thomson</i>	14-15

## "Of one thing I am certain and that is I am not a Marxist." by Scott G. McNall

Marx once said, "Of one thing I am certain and that is I am not a Marxist." His remarks in 1880 stemmed from what has always been a central issue for Marxists—the tension between theory and praxis and how revolutionary change unfolds. Marx understood that a social democratic party could successfully implement demands of workers' movements, e.g., a limited work week, equal pay for equal work, and so forth. And he favored reform movements provided those involved did not lose sight of the goal—the disappearance of private property, classes, and the withering away of the state.<sup>1</sup> Of any political effort he asked, "What is the goal and who benefits?"

Marx might have posed the same question about the goals of the Marxist Sociology Section of the ASA in 1977, because those who signed up represented a very diverse group, in terms of how they understood Marx, how they thought his ideas could be used to understand the issues they confronted, and how his ideas could be used to transform society. This diversity of views and intentions among members is still true. As the ASA site for the Marxist section notes, "The Section on Marxist Sociology is not a narrowly focused group that mechanically applies Marxist rhetoric to complex sociological issues." In fact, "You don't have to 'be a Marxist' to be a member of the Marxist Section." One of the underlying questions I pose in this essay is what it means to be a member of the Section.

I will explore why the Section was formed, highlight the importance of the 1967, 1968, and 1969 ASA conventions for the Sociology Liberation Movement, and then examine the job market faced by those radical students who became radical professors in the 1970s. Then I note some of the many ways people tried to make theoretical sense of the 1960s and 1970s. Next, I turn to the formation of the section, the Balkanization of the larger profession of sociology, and offer some suggestions for the future.

### A Confluence of Events: 1960s and 1970s

It is worth remembering the context within which the section was formed and why Marxism in its many manifestations served to bring people together in the mid-1970s. Sociology was originally, at least in its American incarnation, a liberal and progressive discipline. And it was assumed that sociological knowledge and "laws" could be used both to address and to *solve* problems such as injustice, social and economic inequality, and racial discrimination. Those who began graduate school in the early 1960s had a significant sociological tradition on which to draw, even if they were not Marxists. They could and did gain inspiration from C. Wright Mills's early work, e.g., *The Power Elite* (1956) and *The Sociological Imagination* (1956). Mills was a liberal pragmatist who stood for social justice and equality.<sup>11</sup> Sociology was a popular and growing

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## Review of, *The Dunayevskaya-Marcuse-Fromm Correspondence*

by Daniel Auerbach

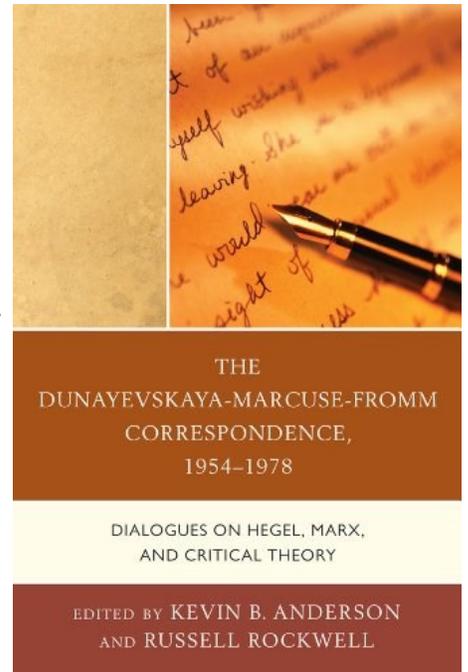
Kevin Anderson and Russell Rockwell's edited volume, *The Dunayevskaya-Marcuse-Fromm Correspondence, 1954-1978: Dialogues on Hegel, Marx, and Critical Theory*, provides an interesting insight into the development of particular aspects of Marxian thought. In the introduction, the editors illuminate the development of thought through the tensions between Raya Dunayevskaya and both Herbert Marcuse and Erich Fromm. Furthermore, through the reprinting of letters between important Marxian intellectuals this edition serves to demystify the often alienated (and alienating) process of developing thoughts and ideas by highlighting its dialectical development.

Anderson and Rockwell organize their book into two major parts: Raya Dunayevskaya's correspondence with Herbert Marcuse and her correspondence with Erich Fromm. From these reprinted letters we see a unique insight into the development of thought (it is of particular interest to people interested in the overlaps and tensions between Critical Theory and Marxist-Humanism). On a purely intellectual level we are given a glimpse into the thought processes of Marcuse as he endeavors to write *One-Dimensional Man*. For example, Anderson and Rockwell's well written and thoughtful introduction help capture the tension that existed between Marcuse and Dunayevskaya around the issue of automation. Marcuse, while writing about the dangers of restricted and partial automation endemic within the capitalist mode of production, claims that only true, genuine automation will bring about the full development of human capabilities. Drawing references from Marx's *Capital* and *Grundrisse*, Marcuse makes the claim that the realm of true freedom lies in a world beyond necessity. Dunayevskaya, however, disagrees with this sentiment. As a representative of *News & Letters* (a Marxist-Humanist newspaper representing the voice of workers), Dunayevskaya writes that one of the realms of freedom is completely connected to *how* labor is performed in addition to who has control over it. For her, and fairly representative of the Marxist-Humanist perspective, in order to be truly liberated, labor (in its non-alienated form) must be tied up with life. Whereas Marcuse sees true automation as a means of moving us beyond a world of necessity, Dunayevskaya sees this process completely intertwined with how labor is performed. In other words, for Dunayevskaya, the struggle for liberation and substantive human development is connected to labor. Furthermore, this conflict also highlighted the tension between the limited viewpoint of the intellectual and the more privileged standpoint of workers for understanding Hegelian dialectics.

As Dunayevskaya's correspondence with Marcuse deteriorated, she began communicating with Fromm. From this exchange, we are given insight into the development of the feminist component of Marxist thought. Their correspondence helps provide an insight into the development of her thinking which led to the publication of her book on Rosa Luxemburg (which Fromm did not live to see). Additionally, from this correspondence we learn about the depth and breadth of Fromm's intellectual interests. Reading these "backstage" exchanges gives us a greater understanding of Fromm's larger intellectual project and his sympathies and connection with Marxist-Humanism

For this reviewer, one of the most major contributions of this book—which is not to take away from seeing a glimpse of the intellectual development and contributions of Marxist-Humanism, Critical Theory, and Marxian Psychoanalysis—is that it provides a key insight into the dialectical development of thought.

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## Book Review (continued)

Anderson and Rockwell, in their introduction and through how they organized these correspondences, illuminate the tensions and contradictions that led to the intellectual development of three prominent Marxist scholars. The dominant economic system, its historically specific set of social relations, and the differing standpoints of each writer gave rise to varying perspectives. While each perspective builds off of the insights of Marx, they reach somewhat different conclusions as to what represents the path to genuine human development and freedom. The point of this book is not necessarily to elevate one position over another. Rather, it helps highlight the incompleteness of each perspective and shows how thought can move towards completeness through dialectical relations with other views. By highlighting these tensions, the readers see that the development of thought is not a monolithic march towards perfection. Thought, rather, develops dialectically.

Anderson and Rockwell's edited volume addresses much more than what was covered in this brief review. I chose these themes as a means of contextualizing this book within the development of Marxian thought throughout that period of time. This book is a fantastic representation of the great work produced by members of this section.

### István Mészáros on radical social transformation

*We must bear in mind that moving from one social formation—i.e., in our case from capital's mode of social metabolic reproduction—to its radical alternative (which appeared in practical terms on our historical horizon a little over eight decades ago) is an immensely complicated and troubled social process, not only with moves forward but also suffering major relapses. But no relapses, no matter how great and tragic, can extinguish the human aspirations and forces pressing for a qualitative transformation.*

-István Mészáros, "The Need for Radical Alternative: Interview with István Mészáros," conducted by Elias Kanellis.

### Herbert Marcuse on the consumer society

*The so-called consumer society and the politics of corporate capitalism have created a second nature of man which ties him libidinally and aggressively to the commodity form. The need for possessing, consuming, handling and constantly renewing gadgets, devices, instruments, engines, offered to and imposed upon the people, for using these wares even at the danger of one's own destructions, has become a 'biological' need.*

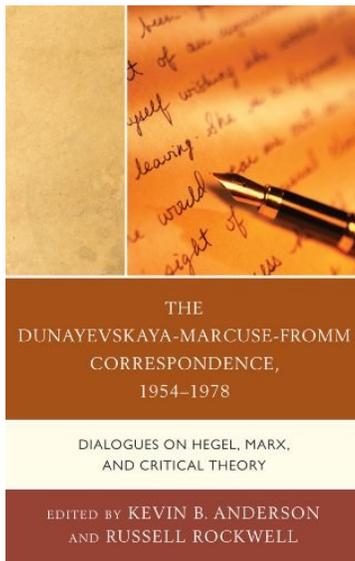
-Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*

## Publications

### Books

***The Dunayevskaya-Marcuse-Fromm Correspondence, 1954-1978: Dialogues on Hegel, Marx, and Critical Theory.***

Kevin B. Anderson and Russell Rockwell (eds.)  
Lexington Books (2012)  
<https://rowman.com/Lexington>



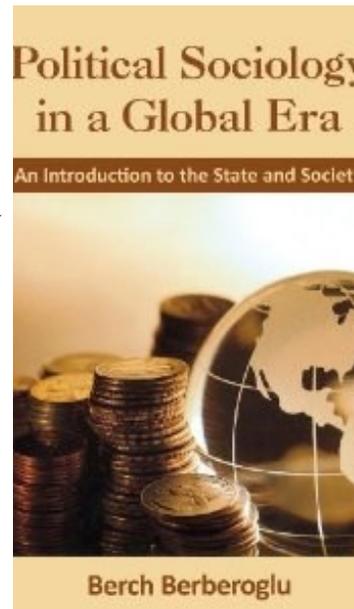
This book presents for the first time the correspondence during the years 1954 to 1978 between the Marxist-Humanist and feminist philosopher Raya Dunayevskaya (1910-87) and two other noted thinkers, the Hegelian Marxist philosopher and social theorist Herbert Marcuse (1898-1979) and the psychologist and social critic Erich Fromm (1900-80), both of the latter members of the

Frankfurt School of Critical Theory. In their introduction, editors Kevin B. Anderson and Russell Rockwell focus on the theoretical and political dialogues in these letters, which cover topics such as dialectical social theory, Marxist economics, socialist humanism, the structure and contradictions of modern capitalism, the history of Marxism and of the Frankfurt School, feminism and revolution, developments in the USSR, Cuba, and China, and emergence of the New Left of the 1960s. The editors' extensive explanatory notes offer helpful background information, definitions of theoretical concepts, and source references.

***Political Sociology in a Global Era: An Introduction to the State and Society.***

Berch Berberoglu

Paradigm Publishers (2013)  
[www.paradigmpublishers.com](http://www.paradigmpublishers.com)



*Political Sociology in a Global Era* provides a critical analysis of the origins, nature, development, and transformation of the state and society historically and today, examining the class nature and social basis of politics and the state in different societal settings. It examines in detail the major political issues and events of our time, and makes them relevant to the study of power and politics today.