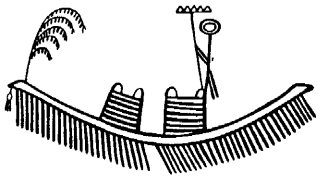
# EDITORIAL



The break-up of the Soviet bloc and the breakdown of the consensus about Western welfare capitalism have, each in their turn, prompted debates about the alignments that can be drawn between various forms of marxism and contemporary political standpoints. This issue of *Radical Philosophy* focuses on these debates as they have emerged from both East and West European perspectives. The East European perspective is represented, in this case, by Slavoj Žižek's article *Why Should A Dialectician Learn To Count To Four?*, and in an interview between Žižek and his colleague, Renata Salecl, and members of the Radical Philosophy Editorial Collective. Tony Skillen's *Active Citizenship as Political Obligation* and the reply *Community as Compulsion?* by Gregory Elliot and Peter Osborne, consider what should be the Left's response to the declining commitment to state welfare provision in Western market economies.

Finally, we include two review articles in this issue. Andrew Bowie offers an assessment of Manfred Frank's reevaluation of early-Romantic aesthetics, and Sean Sayers examines Andre Gorz's latest arguments about the future of the work ethic.

In *Why Should A Dialectician Learn To Count To Four?*, Slavoj Žižek offers a reading of the Hegelian dialectic which reinstates a moment of indeterminacy in the movement from cognition to its negation, a moment Žižek describes, following Frederic Jameson, as 'the vanishing mediator'. Žižek's project is to go beyond 'exasperating abstract reflections on "dialectical method"' in order to theorise concrete historical moments from the point of departure of this 'vanishing mediator'. Using Protestantism and Jacobinism as historically specific examples, Žižek argues that these represent moments of 'excess' which are at the same time realisations at the level of form of already constituted practices. These are moments when 'ideology takes itself literally', and Žižek cites the emergence of new social movements in Eastern Europe as one such moment. These moments which, in retrospect, are placed within a deterministic account of historical development are, in fact, characterised by openness and contingency. Interpreted through the lens of Lacanianism, they represent the emergence of repressed truths which have not yet encountered the censoring mechanism of reality.

In the interview 'Lacan in Slovenia', Peter Osborne and Peter Dews question Žižek and Salecl about current political developments in Yugoslavia, their support of the Slovenian Liberal Party, and the connections they make between their theoretical and political standpoints.

Tony Skillen shares Žižek's concerns about the powers of entrenched local and state bureaucracies, but believes that the pluralist definition of rights as freedom from compulsion leads to a situation, particularly in regard to the provision of welfare in Western market economies, where the welfare state 'leaves us free to neglect each other while it makes a mess of caring for us'. Against conservative (and, in Skillen's view, elitist) ideas that volunteers should be encouraged to form the core of an 'active citizenry', Skillen proposes what he describes as 'a pacific version' of community service. With proper safeguards and some (non-wage) form of financial recognition, he believes a sense of 'active citizenship' could be developed which would extend collective participation in community affairs.

In their reply to Skillen, Gregory Elliot and Peter Osborne point to the authoritarian implications of 'enforced citizenship', and suggest that an historically informed assessment of 'active citizenship' would reveal it to be part of the New Right's assault on welfare provision. Furthermore, they suggest that the tension between state welfare schemes and capitalist economic principles was inscribed in the post-war settlement. They argue that T.H. Marshall, the architect of the idea of citizenship, accepted this tension as the inevitable consequence of any attempt to socialise citizenship while leaving the privatised nature of the economic infrastructure unchallenged and unchanged.

Despite Tony Skillen's acknowledgement that the provision of care in the community is a highly gendered activity, with women, for the most part unpaid, performing the role of carer, the concept of 'citizenship' which informs this debate has not been subject to the kind of feminist scrutiny which has characterised Nancy Fraser's assessment of American systems of welfare (Nancy Fraser, *Unruly Practices: Power, Discourse and Gender in Contemporary Social Theory*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 1989). *Radical Philosophy* would welcome further contributions on this topic, particularly those whigh highlight the gendered nature of philosophies of welfare provision.

The two review articles we include in this issue consider, in turn, Andre Gorz's view that liberation from work should be a socialist aim and Manfred Frank's theorisation of the epistemic value of art.

In his review of Gorz's *Critique of Economic Reason*, Sean Sayers detects a shift in position. Gorz has now recognised that work can possess human as well as economic significance. However, this recognition is tied to a distinction Gorz now makes between those areas of work which are under the sway of market rationality, and those which are oriented towards the satisfaction of needs generated within the 'private' sphere of family and child care. Sayers maintains that this dualism of caring and economic work is a false one, since it romanticises the former and underemphasises the human significance of the latter. Any attempt to limit the sphere of the market, in order to preserve a private enclave in which human qualities can flourish, is characteristic of liberal individualism. This must be sharply distinguished from a socialist project, according to Sayers, because that project seeks not to limit but to socialise economic production.

The Romantics' belief in the privileged epistemological status of art is given a philosophical reassessment by Manfred Frank in his book *Einfüring in die frühromantische Ästhetik*. As Andrew Bowie's careful review points out, Frank's arguments have a wider relevance in that they 'shed new light on the increasingly arid debate about relativism'. For Frank, the transformative nature of artistic production provides a precarious but necessary grounding for the claim that a unified consciousness of self is possible. However, as Bowie cautions, the distance between this ideal and most contemporary manifestations of art should lead us to reflect on why it is that the dominant Western philosophical tradition has abandoned all hope of epistemological certainty.

**Anne Beezer**