

Statement of purpose

Platypus is a project for the self-criticism, self-education, and, ultimately, the practical reconstitution of a Marxian Left. At present the Marxist Left appears as a historical ruin. The received wisdom of today dictates that past, failed attempts at emancipation stand not as moments full of potential yet to be redeemed, but rather as "what was" — utopianism that was bound to end in tragedy. As critical inheritors of a vanquished tradition, Platypus contends that — after the failure of the 1960s New Left, and the dismantlement of the welfare state and the destruction of the Soviet Union in the 1980s-90s — the present disorientation of the Left means we can hardly claim to know the tasks and goals of social emancipation better than the "utopians" of the past did.

Our task is critique and education towards the reconstitution of a Marxian Left. Platypus contends that the ruin of the Marxist Left as it stands today is of a tradition whose defeat was largely self-inflicted, hence at present the Marxist Left is *historical*, and in such a grave state of decomposition that it has become exceedingly difficult to draft coherently programmatic social-political demands. In the face of the catastrophic past and present, the first task for the reconstitution of a Marxian Left as an emancipatory force is to recognize the reasons for the historical failure of Marxism and to clarify the necessity of a Marxian Left for the present and future. — *If the Left is to change the world, it must first transform itself!*

The improbable — but not impossible — reconstitution of an emancipatory Left is an urgent task; we believe that the future of humanity depends on it. While the devastating forces unleashed by modern society — capitalism — remain, the unfulfilled promise of social emancipation still calls for redemption. To abdicate this or to obscure the gravity of past defeats and failures by looking to "resistance" from "outside" the dynamics of modern society is to affirm its present and guarantee its future destructive reality.

Platypus asks the questions: How is the thought of critical theorists of modern society such as Marx, Lukács, Benjamin and Adorno relevant for the struggle for social emancipation today? How can we make sense of the long history of impoverished politics on the Left leading to the present — after the international Marxist Left of Lenin, Luxemburg and Trotsky, to the barrenness of today — without being terrorized or discouraged by this history? — How might the answers to such questions help the urgent task of reconstituting the Left at its most fundamental levels of theory and practice? How might we help effect escape from the dead-end the Left has become?

We hope to re-invigorate a conversation on the Left that has long since fallen into senility or silence, in order to help found anew an emancipatory political practice that is presently absent.

What has the Left been, and what can it yet become? — Platypus exists because the answer to such a question, even its basic formulation, has long ceased to be self-evident.

April, 2007

Marx | Lenin | Luxemburg | Trotsky | Lukács | Benjamin | Adorno

"For the ruthless critique of everything existing."

— Karl Marx
(1843)

"Humanity's interest lies in the Marxist clarification of the concept of freedom."

"The socialist order of society is not prevented by world history; it is historically possible. But it will not be realized by a logic that is immanent to history but by men trained in theory and determined to make things better. Otherwise, it will not be realized at all."

— Max Horkheimer
Dämmerung (Notes 1926-31)

"Intellectuals are at once beneficiaries of a bad society, and yet those on whose socially useless work it largely depends whether a society emancipated from utility is achieved. . . . Intelligence is a moral category."

"Wrong life cannot be lived rightly."

— Theodor W. Adorno
Minima Moralia (1944-47)

"We must be realistic in our utopianism."

— C. Wright Mills
"Letter to the New Left" (1960)

"The most important Marxian political manifesto remains to be written."

— Martin Nicolaus
"The Unknown Marx" (1968)

"The concept of the Left remains unclear to this day."

— Leszek Kolakowski
"The Concept of the Left" (1968)

The Platypus Review

campus monthly broadsheet publication

www.platypus1917.org/theplatypusreview

For event announcements sign up to **Platypus1917** on **Yahoo! Groups** and **Facebook**

For further information please visit

www.platypus1917.com



What is *Platypus*?

The *Platypus* Affiliated Society

Platypus is a forthcoming international journal of critical letters and emancipatory politics, dedicated to reconstituting the Marxian Left.

The *Platypus* Affiliated Society, established in December 2006, organizes reading groups, public fora, research and journalism focused on problems and tasks inherited from the "Old" (1920s-30s), "New" (1960s-70s) and post-political (1980s-90s) Left for the possibilities of emancipatory politics today.

We invite and welcome those who wish to participate to join us in organizing this effort.

Platypus Marxist reading group 2008-09

Meets Sundays at all of the following locations:

University of Chicago, School of the Art Institute, NYU and MIT

For various campus locations and specific times, and other related activities announcements, please check reading group listings at:

www.platypus1917.com

Reading discussion schedule

- *primary readings* - *secondary readings*

All readings available at:

http://home.comcast.net/~platypus1917/platypus_readings.html

NLR: New Left Reader (ed. Carl Oglesby, Grove Press, 1969)

October 5, 2008: The absence of the Left

- Moishe Postone "History and Helplessness" (2006)
- Fred Halliday interviewed by Danny Postel (2005)
- *Symptom*: Tariq Ali "Mid-Point in the Middle East" (2006)

October 19, 2008: What is the Left?

- *NLR*: Leszek Kolakowski "The Concept of the Left" (1968)

November 2, 2008: Marxism as theory and practice: the 1920s-30s

- Max Horkheimer selections from *Dämmerung* (Notes 1926-31)
- Theodor W. Adorno "Imaginative Excesses" from "Messages in a Bottle" orphaned from *Minima Moralia* (1944-47)
- Liza Featherstone, Doug Henwood and Christian Parenti "'Action will be taken': Left anti-intellectualism and its discontents" (2002)

November 16, 2008: Missed opportunity: the 1960s "New" Left

- *NLR*: C. Wright Mills "The Politics of Responsibility" (includes excerpts from "Letter to the New Left" 1960)
- *Symptom*: *NLR*: Carl Oglesby "Introduction: The Idea of the New Left" (1969)

November 30, 2008: 1960s paths not taken: Civil Rights

- Richard Fraser two lectures on the black question in America and revolutionary integrationism (1953)
- James Robertson and Shirley Stoute "For Black Trotskyism" (from SWP-U.S. internal debate on black nationalism, 1963)
- Spartacist League "Black and Red" (1966)
- *Symptom*: *NLR*: Malcolm X and Huey Newton articles
- screening**: *Brother Outsider: the Bayard Rustin Story* (2003)

December 7/14, 2008: 1960s paths not taken: "Black Power?"

- Adolph Reed "Paths to Critical Theory" (1984)
- Harold Cruse selections from *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual* (1967)

January 11, 2009: 1960s paths not taken: "Black Power?" (2)

- Bayard Rustin "From Protest to Politics" (1965)
- Bayard Rustin "The Failure of Black Separatism" (1970)
- Bayard Rustin "The Blacks and the Unions" (1971)
- Spartacist League "Soul Power or Workers Power?" (on the League of Revolutionary Black Workers, 1974)

Symptom: **screening**: *Finally Got the News* (on the LRBW, 1970)

January 18, 2009: 1960s paths not taken: gender, sexuality and revolution

- Juliet Mitchell "Women: the Longest Revolution" (1966)
- John D'Emilio "Capitalism and Gay Identity" (1973)
- Clara Zetkin and Vladimir Ilyich Lenin interview (1920)

January 25, 2009: What is "revolutionary leadership?"

- Cliff Slaughter "What is Revolutionary Leadership?" (1960)
- Rosa Luxemburg "The Crisis of German Social Democracy" Pt. 1 (AKA the *Junius* pamphlet 1915)

screening: Rosa Luxemburg (1986)

February 1, 2009: Revolutionary Marxism (1)

- J. P. Nettl "The SPD 1890-1914 as political model" (1965)

February 8, 2009: Revolutionary Marxism (2)

- Rosa Luxemburg *Reform or Revolution?* (1900/08)

February 15, 2009: Revolutionary Marxism (3)

- Karl Korsch "Marxism and Philosophy" (1923)

February 22, 2009: Revolutionary Marxism (4)

- V. I. Lenin *What is to be done?* (1902)

March 1, 2009: Revolutionary Marxism (5)

- Spartacist League *Lenin and the Vanguard Party* (1978)
- *Introducing Lenin / Lenin for Beginners*

March 8, 2009: Revolutionary Marxism (6)

- Georg Lukács "What is Orthodox Marxism?" and "Class Consciousness" in *History and Class Consciousness* (1923)

March 15, 2009: Revolutionary Marxism (7) 1905

- Leon Trotsky *Results and Prospects* (1906)
- *Introducing Trotsky and Marxism / Trotsky for Beginners*

March 22, 2009: Revolutionary Marxism (7) 1905 (continued)

- Rosa Luxemburg *The Mass Strike, the Political Party, and the Trade Unions* (1906)

March 29, 2009: Revolutionary Marxism (8)

- V. I. Lenin *The State and Revolution* (1917)

April 5, 2009: Revolutionary Marxism (9) 1917-19 (1)

- Rosa Luxemburg Spartacus writings (1918-19)
- Sebastian Haffner, *Failure of a Revolution: Germany 1918-19* (1968)

April 12, 2009: Revolutionary Marxism (10)

- V. I. Lenin "*Left-Wing*" *Communism: An Infantile Disorder* (1920)

April 19, 2009: Revolutionary Marxism (11)

- Georg Lukács "The Standpoint of the Proletariat" Pt. 3 of "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat" in *History and Class Consciousness* (1923)

April 26, 2009: Revolutionary Marxism (12) 1917-19 (2)

- Leon Trotsky *The Lessons of October* (1924)
- Rosa Luxemburg "The Russian Tragedy" (1918), and "Order Reigns in Berlin" (1919)

May 3, 2009: Revolutionary Marxism (13)

- Leon Trotsky *The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International* (AKA, The Transitional Programme for Socialist Revolution, 1938)

May 10, 2009: Theory and practice (1)

- Theodor W. Adorno "Reflections on Class Theory" (1942)
- Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (1848)

May 17, 2009: Theory and practice (2)

- Theodor W. Adorno "Marginalia to Theory and Praxis" (1969)
- Theodor W. Adorno "Resignation" (1969)
- Theodor W. Adorno and Herbert Marcuse correspondence (1969)