

"public ownership of industry," "democratic control of management," "educational initiatives" as well as the presence of "economically irrational" and "administratively ineffective" processes and procedures in the current economy.

The problem here, of course, is that these demands and conditions have existed (in one form or another) for at least the past half century without any indication that they are in fact leading to substantive social change. In other words, Feenberg's list only begs all the crucial questions by failing to suggest how or why these demands and conditions actually function as precursors to a new form of society.

There is a deeper concern as well. *Critical Theory of Technology* is representative of a contemporary trend in social theory (epitomized in the postmodern stance of Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau) which is at pains to deny the traditional Marxian explanatory emphasis on the primacy of the productive forces and the role of the working class in the process of change. Space precludes a detailed discussion of this issue in the present context. Suffice to say, however, that the simple rejection of the ontological basis of this theory in favor of a relativistic concern for social contexts and diverse agents of change is more problematic than its advocates assume. This is especially so when it is recognized that a thoughtful commitment to a theory of productive force determinism embraces a recognition of precisely the kind of range of technical practices and forms of resistance so eloquently argued for by Feenberg.<sup>1</sup>

Despite these reservations, it must be emphasized that *Critical Theory of Technology* is an important work. The issues it raises, along with the learning and erudition it displays, make it a significant contribution to current discussions about the role of technology in contemporary society.

#### NOTES

1. For an incisive discussion of the importance and nature of productive force determinism, see John McMurtry 1978. *The Structure of Marx's World-View* (Princeton: Princeton University Press). For a critique of Mouffe and Laclau from a similar perspective see the present author's 'New 'True' Socialism,' *Auslegung* Vol. 18 No.2. (Summer 1992).

**Abstract Labor: A Critique.** *Jean-Marie Vincent.* Preface by Stanley Aronowitz. Tr. by Jim Cohen. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991. xxi, 156 pp. \$45.

*Reviewed by* **MURRAY E.G. SMITH**  
*Brock University*

Jean-Marie Vincent's stated purpose in this collection of interconnected essays is "to trace as closely as possible the major problems of our times"

(1) by asserting the continuing salience of Marx's theory of value as a critique of the "value-form of social actors and social relations" (89) or "abstract labor." While scoring some insightful points against the orthodox Ricardian-Marxist "labor theory of value" (i.e., an "embodied labor" conception of value), Vincent makes few original contributions to Marxian value theory, confining himself to a largely philosophical discourse on what he regards as points of convergence and divergence between Marx and a number of 20th-century "critical" philosophers — principally Lukacs, Heidegger, Bloch, and Habermas. At the same time, his recurring and underlying theme is that the "Marxist tradition" has seriously misled the international labor movement by positing labor "as a kind of primary, supra-historical element of social organization" (95), thereby encouraging a "fetishism of labor" that constitutes a disarming ideological complement to commodity and capital fetishism. Accordingly, for Vincent, Marx's emancipatory program does not depend for its realization upon the exaltation of labor as the basis of material wealth; rather it depends upon a break from a production system which posits abstract labor as the measure of wealth and which thereby devalues all that does not contribute to the valorization of capital, including all forms of human interaction not centered on material production.

Vincent's critique of the "Marxist tradition" is problematic for at least two reasons. First, it is disconcertingly indiscriminate, failing to distinguish between those currents within "historical Marxism" that adhered, however inadequately, to a vision of socialism in which the law of labor-value no longer operates and those currents which, by dint of their reformist accommodation to capitalism, came to insist upon the effectively "eternal" status of this law (compare, for example, Rubin (1973) and even the young Hilferding (1975) with Althusser (1977) and Stalin (1972). Second, as is common among academic Marxists, Vincent implies that the bad practice of "Marxist"-led labor movements is primarily attributable to theoretical errors — in particular the failure of Social Democrats and Communists alike to break from an "interpretation" of Marx's theory which enjoins the labor movement to accept the social logic of abstract labor and capital accumulation. But such an "interpretation" could only occur to a "Marxist" who had already eschewed the practical-programmatic task of revolutionizing society and negating this "social logic."

Vincent reverses what is primary in the theory-practice dialectic. It was not Kautsky's or Stalin's incomplete grasp of Marx's thought that led to their bad practice; it was their break from Marxist programmatic principles that obliged them to vulgarize Marxist theory. Hence, when Vincent avers that "Marxism still identifies too strongly ... with the world it seeks to fight" (111), we are entitled to ask: whose "Marxism" and whose "fight"?

That said, Vincent is undoubtedly correct to argue that the "workers' movement is severely weakened by its inability to take initiatives because,

paradoxically, it refuses (contrary to its own belief) to grasp the full current dimensions of the "centrality" of abstract labor, and particularly the differentiation of its forms of appearance resulting from its penetration into new social layers" (142). This movement's fixation on the traditional industrial laborer and upon the latter's social promotion through state-centered action is the logical result of a fetishism of labor which erroneously posits (industrial) labor as ontologically indispensable to material production while failing to grasp the continuing centrality of the exploitation of living labor (in myriad forms) to the creation of new surplus value and hence to the reproduction of capitalism.

Vincent's "wake-up call" to organized labor is an important one, though much of his political counsel and judgment is at best highly arguable and at worst outlandish and dilettantish. But it is hard to see why Vincent believes that the medium for his message to the workers' movement should be a series of essays devoted to a critical articulation of Marx's value theory with the ideas of Heidegger, Habermas, Bloch, etc. Indeed, the extremely difficult and frequently obscure content and style of this book suggests that its intended audience is neither the labor movement nor misguided radical political economists, but rather those intellectuals who have been influenced by "the movement of retreat" associated with Heidegger and his postmodern progeny or by the critical theory of Bloch or Habermas. Since Vincent's insights pertaining to abstract labor and value are the stock in trade of what I have called "neo-orthodox" value theory (Smith 1991), available in far more accessible form elsewhere, and since the book's sole claim to originality rests on Vincent's frequently brilliant, if questionable, syntheses of Marxian and Blochian, Heideggerian or Habermasian themes, the book is best left to those with a serious interest in such syntheses and a considerable prior knowledge of both Western Marxism and Heideggerian phenomenology. As a survey of the "value controversy" and as a contribution to Marxian crisis theory (89-94), the book is not only theoretically deficient; it is seriously compromised by Vincent's desire to render Marx "relevant" to the celebrants of poststructuralism and postmodernism — whose own shibboleths are at least as remote from Marx's project as those of the labor-fetishistic (Ricardian or Lasallean) socialisms that Vincent excoriates.

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**The Legacy of Empire: Economic Decline and Class Polarization in the United States.** Berch: Berberoglu. New York: Praeger, 1992. 130 pp. + xiv. \$39.95.

Reviewed by **DAVID ROPER**  
*Indiana University*

A sociologist at the University of Nevada (Reno), Berch Berberoglu has written and edited several volumes on national and international economic affairs in the past decade. In *The Legacy of Empire*, he situates the United States' persistent economic difficulties in a global context, starting with a brief look at theories of empire. Dismissing the "liberal approach" of Paul Kennedy, as well as Immanuel Wallerstein's world systems theory, Berberoglu settles on traditional Marxist analysis as the most appropriate method for examining the waning of North American global dominance. After recounting the expansion of American economic power after World War II, as well as the growing monopolization of American capital at home, Berberoglu describes the challenges posed to U.S. hegemony by capitalist competitors in Europe and Asia. This leads Berberoglu into a discussion of the process of deindustrialization in the United States as manufacturers have moved production overseas. Facilitated by a pro-business state, this process has allowed employers to drive down real wages, producing declining living standards and a mounting homeless population in the United States.

*The Legacy of Empire* lacks fresh insights into the dynamics of economic change in the U.S., as the summary above indicates, but Berberoglu does not appear to be primarily concerned with developing original analysis. This short book provides a reasonable introduction to its topic, enhanced by some of the data Berberoglu presents. The book includes 27 tables and 11 figures, ranging from a list of the 25 largest commercial banks in the world in 1988 to a graph of businesses' inventories and backlogs from 1970 to 1990. The data Berberoglu presents are available in other places (much comes from the pages of *Dollars & Sense*), but it is useful to have it under one cover.

Berberoglu's substantive interpretations contain some serious problems and contradictory implications. He devotes much of the book to a somewhat polemical description of the inevitable decline of the American economy, and yet he offers an exceedingly hopeful vision of labor activism as a strategy for improving workers' standards of living and ultimately revitalizing the economy. Berberoglu means to condemn the capitalist system as a whole (he states this repeatedly), but the implications of his analysis are somewhat different. He portrays America's economic ills as the result of competition between capitalist rivals, not contradictions within world capitalism. One