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## Peter Marcuse: Missing Marx. A Personal and Political Journal of a Year in East Germany, 1989-1990

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Zeugnis ab von dem reichen, aber auch leidvollen Leben eines kritischen, dennoch der sozialistischen Sache bis zuletzt treu ergebenen und kenntnisreichen Zeitzeugen, der für das Verständnis der DDR, vor allem der fünfziger Jahre, unumgänglich ist.

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Marcuse, Peter. *Missing Marx. A Personal and Political Journal of a Year in East Germany, 1989-1990*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1991. 302 pp.

Peter Marcuse is a professor of city planning at Columbia whose Fulbright sabbatical in East Germany (August 1989 - July 1990) coincided with some rather momentous events in German history. (He also happens to be the son of Herbert Marcuse, the "spiritual father" of the New Left.) During his stay, initially at the Hochschule für Architektur und Bauwesen in Weimar and later at Humboldt University in Berlin, he kept a journal recording some of these events, experienced indirectly through television or conversations and directly through actual participation. The result is *Missing Marx*, which takes us through the three phases of the DDR's *Wende*; the period of mass euphoria culminating in the November 4 rally in Berlin sponsored by the artists and writers and calling for a socialism with a more human face; the period of nationalistic revival precipitated by the coming down of the Wall; and the period of capitalistic seduction climaxing in the practical takeover of East by West Germany when the D-mark became the official currency in the DDR on July 1, shortly before the author returned to the States. The title is a clever allusion to these phases--phase one was dominated by those who missed Marx, i.e., a humanistic socialism; the subsequent phases came to be dominated by those who missed the D-mark, who were allured by capitalist consumption and wealth.

The journal is no substitute for an historical account of the disappearance of the DDR nor does it pretend to be--hence the helpful glossary of events. But it conveys a feeling of what it was like to be there on a day-to-day basis and it is replete with interesting facts, perspicacious comments, and numerous revealing jokes the East Germans came up with to make their system less unbearable. For me the funniest witticism has to do with the lack of trust in the media: "Honecker and Kohl agree to have a race, to see whose system produces the better runner. Kohl wins. The headlines in *Neues Deutschland* read: 'A great victory for socialism! Honecker wins a glorious second place! Kohl comes in next to last!'" (212) The most interesting fact, something only an urban developer like the author would be likely to dig up: the Politburo's policy, never fully implemented, that every city had to have at least one high-rise and "symbolically it had to be taller than the tallest church." (244) The wisest observation: shortly after the invasion of the D-mark the author

notices the sale of croissants from a booth at the U-Bahnhof Alexanderplatz, a first for East Berlin, and comments, "And they try to serve them German-style: neatly cut open and buttered. Ever try to cut open a croissant neatly? French culture defeats German order!" (261)

The author's diary is interspersed with six short analytic essays dubbed *excursus*, the intellectual meat of the book. The perspective is from the left--Marcuse readily admits that no more than 2 percent of all Americans would in all likelihood see things as he does, and he dedicates the book to Bernd Grönwald, a courageous and utterly decent SED official who bucked the establishment but kept its respect and who restored the Bauhaus to an important institution. Blackballed by the West Germans because of his party affiliations after the *Wende*, Grönwald committed suicide in despair, which the reader does not learn until the very last page of the book.

In the first *excursus* Marcuse tells us why he felt more comfortable working in the DDR than in the BRD, where he had spent his previous sabbatical. He stresses 5 positive aspects of life in the former: non-competitive role of work, the ethos of solidarity, social security, especially health care, a humane perspective on consumption, and a certain egalitarianism in salaries and social status. In the second *excursus* he deplors the fact that, after the rejection of the direction of the *Wende* toward the reform of socialism, discussion centered fallaciously on the two extremes of a profit-driven private market system and a non-market system as the only alternatives open to the DDR, ignoring totally a third option, a democratic public or social system. The third *excursus* deals with the successes and failures of DDR urban housing policies (one of the reasons the demonstrations of the *Wende* began and gained such strength in Leipzig was the bad housing conditions there). The fourth *excursus* asks whether the *Wende* was a real revolution. Marcuse's answer: in its first phase it was an abortive revolution--the existing power structure was destroyed but no viable alternative was created; the unification process was a counterrevolution, certainly in terms of class relations, since it restored those that existed prior to 1933. *Excursus* five pleads for the seemingly unthinkable, a "modest" rather than a "mighty" Berlin, a city that is "resident-oriented, user-controlled, historically conscious, ecologically sensitive, and speculation-free." (206) In *excursus* six Marcuse sums up the best and the worst features of the DDR, its socialist and its Stalinist side; he maintains that the draft constitution completed by

the Round Table on April 4, 1990 and ignored by the Volkskammer in its rush to incorporate the DDR into the BRD, was the fullest expression of the social ideals of the failed revolutionists; had it been adopted, "it would have been the most humane fundamental document on earth for the governance of a state." Marcuse quotes in full the preamble to the draft constitution, written by Christa Wolf.

Unprovocative books are not really books, Heinrich Böll once implied. If he is right, then this is a "real" book.

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