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The Immanent Utopia: From Marxism on the State to the State of Marxism

Axel van den Berg

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The spectacular growth in the 1970s and 1980s of the Marxist literature on politics and the state in capitalist society was hailed at the time as cumulative proof of Marxism's success in producing an effective theory of the political superstructure. More generally, it was seen as confirmation of the health and vigor of Marxist theory. Axel van den Berg questions both of these claims. Through comprehensive analysis of Marxist thought on bourgeois politics and the state, from that produced by Marx himself on, van den Berg radically challenges the viability of a distinctly Marxist theory of the state and of recent Marxist theorizing in general.

In an exhaustive review of the literature, van den Berg shows that neo-Marxist theories are, for the most part, not empirically testable. To the extent that it is possible to draw any empirical implications from these theories at all, such implications are virtually indistinguishable from those of "bourgeois" theories. Van den Berg proceeds to lay bare the contradiction at the heart of Marxist theory in general: it presupposes the viability and desirability of some ideal socialist society yet its "anti-utopian" insistence that all criticisms of capitalism must rest on foundations immanent in capitalism itself prohibits any open discussion of such a utopia. Now available in paperback, this is a fundamental work for political and social theorists.

"This work is brilliant in its polemical courage, its originality, and its detailed and revealing examination of texts. Van den Berg demonstrates that postwar Marxist political theory and sociology is not only vague and contradictory but that it actually makes critical concessions to the bourgeois thought' it claims to surpass. Appearing in the midst of afar-reaching reconsideration of the Marxism project in Europe, this volume crystallizes these issues for North American social science..."--Jeffrey Alexander, University of California, Los Angeles.

"Van den Berg has made a major contribution to the long overdue relegation of Marxism to the museum of nineteenth-century ideological antiquities."--Dennis Wrong, *Contemporary Sociology*.

Axel van den Berg is a Dutch-Canadian professor of sociology at McGill University in Montreal. His most recent work is *The Social Sciences and Rationality*.

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