

Marcuse: If that is true, I am very happy to hear it. But it's more a case of encounter than of direct influence . . . In my books, I have tried to make a critique of society – and not only of capitalist society – in terms that avoid all ideology. Even the socialist ideology, even the Marxist ideology. I have tried to show that contemporary society is a repressive society in all its aspects, that even the comfort, the prosperity, the alleged political and moral freedom are utilized for oppressive ends.

I have tried to show that any change would require a total rejection or, to speak the language of the students, a perpetual confrontation of this society. And that it is not merely a question of changing the institutions but rather, and this is more important, of totally changing human beings in their attitudes, their instincts, their goals, and their values.

This, I think, is the point of contact between my books and the worldwide student movement.

But you feel that they did not need you to arrive at these ideas, is that right?

Marcuse: One of the essential characteristics of the student movement is that the students apply to reality what has been taught them in the abstract through the work of the masters who have developed the great values of Western civilization. For example, the primacy of natural law over established law, the inalienable right to resist tyranny and all illegitimate authority . . . They simply cannot comprehend why these great principles should remain on the level of ideas instead of being put into practice. And that is exactly what they are doing.

Do you mean that fundamentally this is a humanist movement?

Marcuse: They object to that term because, according to them, humanism is a bourgeois, personal value. It is a philosophy which is inseparable from a destructive reality. But in their minds there is no point in worrying about the philosophy of a few persons; the point is to bring about a radical change in the society as a whole. So they want no part of the term "humanist."

You know, of course, that here in France we are very far from that "affluent society" whose destruction you propose and which for the moment exists, for better or worse, only in the United States.

Marcuse: I have been accused of concentrating my critique on American society, and this is quite true. I have said so myself. But this is not only because I know this country better than any other; it is because I believe or I am afraid that American society may become the model for the other capitalist countries, and maybe even for the Socialist countries. I also believe that this route can be avoided, but again, this would presuppose a fundamental change, a total break with the content of the needs and aspirations of people as they are conditioned today.

MARCUSE H, THE NEW LEFT + THE 1960'S,
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