

Materialism

Ezra Pound

1,064 words

Ezra Pound's Radio Broadcast #102, June 26, 1943

An idea is colored by what it is dipped in. Take for example the more or less Teutonic idea of materialism. Marx and Engels get to foolin' 'round with Hegel's philosophy, or something, and evolve or devolve what is called Marxian materialism, and it gets toted off into Russia. And after 25 years, what do we have? We have these howlin' Slavs: gone off on a purely metaphysical, typically Russian crusade. As crazy as any excess of the middle ages. Utterly OB/liv/i/ous of the material facts. That is to say, I suppose anyone will admit that the German workman is MATERIALLY better off than the Russian opposite number. Materially speakin', the factory reforms proposed by Robert Owen and the ideas of Hobhouse that Marx so approved of in fact all the British aims that caused Marx to write his Xth chapter Best chapter in *Das Kapital* so far as I am concerned. Well all that AIM, to get the workin' man decently fed, and clothed, and housed, and given decent livin conditions and hours of labor has we believe gone further in Germany than in Russia. Despite labels and programs.

I have heard it said that Germany has gone communist but nobody can accuse Europe of havin' gone RUSSIAN, or Germany of havin' gone Russian. Marx looked at England, and thought about Germany, and something got set loose in Russia into which country inspection has long been denied. For years nobody was supposed to LOOK at what actually happened. It was all metaphysical. Nice programs and dire results. And Russians certainly in ignorance of living conditions of working men elsewhere. What causes that? Maybe it is the material nature of the Slavic animal or of the Tartar fanatic.

However look back at some of the words in the program Materialism: what does it mean? Are you for it? Are you for WHATEVER it means? Or do you on occasion like to know what you mean, or what you are shouting for? Are you a materialist WHATEVER it means, or are you a materialist only on condition that it means something in particular, something rather than something else?

George Santayana calls himself a materialist. It rather shocked old William James. Ole William told young George, he was younger at that stage of world history, that his, Santayana's philosophy was organized rottenness. I can not agree with fuzzy old James. It appears to me that George Santayana rather agrees with Thomas Aquinas. I mean the materialist Santayana ends up by writin' a book called *The Realm of Spirit*. I occasionally plunge into the work to calm my heated mind. I mean when I am not up to Confucius and Mencius. And Thomas Aquinas says somewhere that the soul is the first ACT of an organic body. Well, I ask George Santayana what THAT means. And he says entelechy, which seems to me to be dodgin' behind a Greek word. But anyhow, a materialist definition of the soul seems to be that it is the first act, or first action, or first condition of an organic body. Don't ASK me. I am merely trying to show how far the word or idea materialist can be stretched by people who play with abstractions. Marx's theory of value always seemed to me metaphysical.

But to get down to brass material tacks. Does a Marxian materialist prefer human conditions for labor to inhuman conditions? Do the actual material advances in the conditions of German working men count for anything in a material universe? Or does the Marxian materialist prefer the Russian enwarped

and metaphysical state, wherein no one has a room of her own?

I think it matters. I think it is a question of administration, material administration. I am all for local control. The principle of local control has made some advances during the past weeks. I mean on paper, and in the aerial discussion. On paper, or in the air, the comintern has declared for local control or administration. But is that material or metaphysical? I think it matters very much WHO administers. I think the future of any party, communist or other, in the U.S.A. depends very greatly on the men, on the personality of the men who CONTROL it. I am all for responsibility, personal responsibility. I fail to see what PRINCIPLE of materialism or metaphysicality has to do with the machine gunning of three year old kids. I fail to see where the invasion of one country by another hitches up to the program of any set of idealists, whether Moscovite or Democratic, i.e., plutocratic. Does the dissolution of the Comintern mean that Moscow proposes that every nation should be administered by members OF that nation or race? That would be an interesting line of inquiry. The suppression for all material and practical purposes of nearly all South American government seems rather out of line, with this dissolution of international aspirations on the part of the comintern.

The nipping, not in the bud, but in the decayed and gangrenous remnants on London's usurocratic grasp on large parts of most continents is of course a spectacular play against the economic oppression (past tense of economic aggression) of the London plutocracy. That might be all to the good, if the U.S. hadn't decayed into something very like, or possibly worse than the British methods of the late 18th century, impression of seamen included. But in the oedeniatous decomposition of the U.S. plutocracy and usurocracy, what assurance has anyone, or what assurance is anyone in the U.S. trying to get, that the New Steal in the U.S.A. will be under local control?

There is really so much to say that I find it difficult to divide it up into ten minute samples. Are you heading for a RUSSIAN control of the U.S., the U.S. of A., or the U.S. of Europe? What assurance is anyone in the U.S. trying to obtain that Kansas and Illinois will be controlled in ANY way by denizens of those geographic parts of the American union?

Yes, I know, people are being sent out FROM the U.S. to take over control in ex-Persia, now labeled Iran, etc. and vast tracts of the ex-British oppressed dominions are fallin' under Wall St. control. But what is it MATERIALLY to the folks who have mortgaged their farms to the Milk Trust?