

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

TO THE EDITOR:

The readers of Zoltán Tar's inept and insulting review of my *Marxism and Totality* (*Slavic Review* 45 [Summer 1986]) should have been forewarned that it was the product of undiluted *ressentiment*. Ever since I wrote unfavorably of his study of the Frankfurt School in 1979, he has availed himself of every opportunity to vent his spleen against me. It was therefore a foregone conclusion that he would find anything I write "conceptually muddled, poorly researched, and factually sloppy."

His actual review makes only the most perfunctory and pathetic attempt to substantiate these charges. By claiming that concepts like totality have no history but are merely "good or bad methodological tools," he cleverly spares himself the task of presenting to your readers the complicated historical argument of the book. Instead of analyzing the western Marxists' various attempts to generate a viable holism, he can disdainfully dismiss the whole endeavor as a pseudoproblem and move on to the real gravamen of his attack: my allegedly "total" confusion about the Budapest School. Groping for evidence to show how sloppy my research is, he fixates on five lines in a footnote in a book of 576 pages. And even then, he has to stoop to a willful distortion to make his case.

Tar makes three charges against my handling of the Budapest School: I think they were interested in totality, when in fact they were only talking about totalitarianism; I wrongfully include András Hegadüs in their ranks; I believe Hegadüs and Mihály Vajda are in exile, when in fact they are still in Hungary. To answer the first, I would point to the Budapest School collection of essays on their mentor (*Lukács Revalued*, ed. Agnes Heller [London, 1983]), whose index contains one isolated reference to totalitarianism and nine *lines* of references to totality. To respond to the second, I would refer to the article I cite in my footnote on p. 304, Serge Frankel and Daniel Martin's "The Budapest School," *Telos*, 17 (Fall 1973) and the article following it co-authored by Hegadüs and Mária Márkus, "Modernization and the Alternatives of Social Progress." It was this essay that provided the centerpiece of the official attack on the school at the 24–25 January 1973 meeting of the Regional Conference on Agitation, Propaganda, and Culture in Budapest. Tar may not think Hegadüs, who wrote many essays with Mária Márkus, was a member of the Budapest School; its enemies within Hungary thought otherwise.

As for his third charge, I would simply draw attention to the full reference in *Marxism and Totality*, which Tar has deliberately and maliciously misquoted. Instead of writing, as he falsely claims, of the school whose members were "forced into exile and for whom the concept of totality played a key role," I wrote "the members of which, in most cases, were forced into exile after [Lukács'] death. . . . As would be expected, the concept of totality often played a key role in their work" (p. 5). Later, on p. 304, the only other time I allude to the school, I also carefully say "most of whom ultimately migrated from Hungary." I never, therefore, stated that Hegadüs and Vajda were in exile, only that a majority of the school (Heller, Fehér, and the two Márkuses) were. Not only does Tar display an inability to read, he also apparently cannot count.

One final note concerning the Budapest School: if your readers want a genuine review of *Marxism and Totality*, let me recommend the long, thoughtful, constructively critical consideration by Ferenc Fehér in *Theory and Society* 14 (November 1985). Remarkably, considering the deep injustice Tar thinks I have done him and his colleagues, Fehér can conclude that "the extremely praiseworthy academic virtues of *Marxism and Totality* are clear"—except, that is, to reviewers motivated more by personal bile than scholarly objectivity.

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