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Subscription Rates for 1997-1998:

Individuals: $30
Institutions: $50

Subscriptions for addresses outside of USA add $10 for postage. All payments should be made to Social Thought and Research.

Back issues of STR (Vol. 20, No. 1/2) are available for $30 each

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Social Thought & Research (ISSN 1094-5830) is published twice yearly (Spring and Fall). You may contact the journal at: Editors, The University of Kansas, Social Thought & Research, Department of Sociology, 716 Fraser Hall, Lawrence, KS 66045-2172.
E-mail: mars@eagle.cc.ukans.edu
The formal conceptualization of the idea of authoritarianism sprang from reflection, by Erich Fromm and others, about the resistance of German workers to the notoriously authoritarian powers of state and boss in the years before Hitler’s rise to power in 1933. The tragic irony of Fromm’s finding, however, as the discovery that the worker’s war against authority was often authoritarian itself. This is plainly visible, for example, in the stark dramatic lines of Hugo Gellert’s “socialist realist” rendering of proletarian revolt (1934). In Gellert’s surreal vision, the workers are pure romantic ideal-types, both leaders and led—all muscle, all men, all militancy, class warriors from shaved head to grimy toe. These workers, it seems plain, would take orders even in the revolt against authority.

This, Fromm posited, is authoritarianism; and although, in reality, most workers in Germany in 1933 were nothing like this ideal-type, there were in fact strong enough authoritarian impulses among workers to cripple effective working-class resistance to Hitler’s dictatorship. So many workers were either predisposed to submit to authority, or, even more commonly, ambivalent about authority, that Fromm saw little hope for a united and determined resistance to Nazism. Gellert’s idealized “class warriors” were, in reality, as eager to submit as they were to fight.

David Smith
Social Thought & Research is a thirty-year old interdisciplinary journal published by the University of Kansas Sociology Department. Volume 21 represents the partial fulfillment of the journal’s vision of an interdisciplinary periodical devoted to the comprehension of modern society. We thought that the problem of authoritarianism was a good place to start. Hence, we have solicited the help of political psychologists, historians, sociologists, and other knowledgeable individuals to help us tackle an enduring phenomenon of broad theoretical and intellectual interest.

When the Frankfurt theorists first undertook their inquiry into authoritarianism during the early and mid 1930s, their approach combined sociology, psychology, economics, history, and philosophy, among other things. Since the early 1950s however, the symphonic approach to authoritarianism research was pursued narrowly and was characterized by positivistic survey research that advanced little in the way of new theory or insights into the problem. The limits of that research strategy became painfully evident by the early 1980s. Potentially, authoritarianism research is now situated at a crossroads of converging interests. Once again a small but growing body of scholars outside psychology have taken a new interest in the Frankfurt School’s early research program and have turned back to some of the early classic texts for inspiration. One manifestation of this new interest is the minor renaissance in Frommian-styled analyses of politics and society.

With the next issue’s special section on American social thought in the works, our larger goal will be one step closer to realization, and, we are excited about its content. In addition to an original research report by Herbert Blumer, we will be publishing a previously unseen piece by George Herbert Mead – thanks to the generosity of our friend and colleague Harold L. Orbach.

Additionally, a number of pieces will be included that deal with the various stages of American ideas: Communitarianism and political thought of the founding period; several articles on pragmatism, critical theory, and aesthetics; leftist sociology during the 60s a la Alvin Gouldner. This upcoming issue will demonstrate how this journal may contribute to the usefulness of unconventional and interdisciplinary inquiry.
Psychoanalytic Marxism is responsible for developing the notion of the "authoritarian personality." Recognizing that Marx's theory of revolution contained limitations, the members of the Institute of Social Research or "Frankfurt School" (along with other kindred but unaffiliated spirits such as Wilhelm Reich) revised traditional theories of society and psyche during the early part of this century in an effort to account for the failure of revolutionary political practice amongst segments of the German working class and, relatedly, the rise of fascism.

Characteristically disenchanted with orthodoxies and dogma, Reich echoed sentiments common to Institute members when he complained that "The theoretical thinking of the Comintern leaders, in whose hands lies the fate of world revolution, has degenerated, becoming economist and mechanical; as a result, the Comintern has been regularly overtaken by events" ([1934] 1972, p.30). In the case of the Frankfurt School, the product of revisionist synthesizing and jettisoning of dogma was a unique set of theoretical optics that gathered together, inter alia, Hegelian philosophy, Marx's theory of capitalism, and Freudian psychoanalytic theory into what we may now call classical critical theory.\footnote{Not widely acknowledged by the Institute was its debt to the interpretive sociology of Max Weber. Along with Marx and Freud, Weber is undoubtedly the unadvertised but powerful influence we feel in the writings of many of the institute members (cf. Kellner 1985) as well as many other varieties of "Western Marxism" (Dahms 1997). It might also be recalled that Erich Fromm was a sociology student at the University of Heidelberg and earned his doctorate under the guidance of Max Weber's brother, Alfred (Burston 1991, p.15). The title of Fromm's Ph.D. dissertation was "Das jüdische Gesetz. Ein Beitrag zur Soziologie des Diasporajudentums" (1922).}

\footnote{My use of the phrase "classical critical theory" is virtually synonymous with what Wolfgang Bonss calls "early critical theory": the period between 1929 and 1936. In the early period of the Frankfurt School, Max Horkheimer outlined an interdisciplinary research program in which analytic social psychology