



Sex-Pol: Essays 1929-1934

Wilhelm Reich , Lee Baxandall (Editor)

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This volume contains the first complete translations of Wilhelm Reich's writings from his Marxist period. Reich, who died in 1957, had a career with a single goal: to find ways of relieving human suffering. And the same curiosity and courage that led him from medical school to join the early pioneers of Freudian psychoanalysis, and then to some of the most controversial work of this century—his development of the theory of the orgone—led him also, at one period of his life, to become a radical socialist.

The renewed interest in Reich's Marxist writings, and particularly in his notions about sexual and political liberation, follows the radical critiques of Herbert Marcuse, Frantz Fanon and Paul Goodman, the political protest movements toward personal liberation in the present decade.

Sex-Pol: Essays 1929-1934 Details

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Miquixote says

Some say this is sexually deterministic, some say Wilhelm Reich was crazy when he wrote this. I say they are both wrong. He understood that we would move from sexual repression to a different kind of repression-fetishism or objectification. A must read for psychology majors that are not pure status-quo, and are open to less mainstream views. Especially important read for understanding class consciousness. There are few psychologists that can claim to have both psychological and sociological backgrounds. Reich can and is therefore essential reading.

Tim Pendry says

This is one largely for political antiquarians but it has its moments. Wilhelm Reich should need no introduction. These works, from 1929 to 1934, represent the culmination of his socialist experiment in exploring working class sexuality as a means to class liberation.

Reich was a Freudian and a Communist but found his views incompatible with closed and increasingly sclerotic systems of thought. His criticisms of both struck home and he was thrown out of both Party and profession in 1933/34.

The National Socialists had embedded themselves in Germany - the Freudians seeking a fruitless accommodation with Hitler and the Communists in denial about the reasons for their crushing defeat. Reich's critique were to the point but too inconvenient.

Reich had tried to do the impossible in those five years - to merge the scientific materialism of Marxism with the attempt at a scientific psychology by the psychoanalysts. The futility, of course, lay in the fact that neither was open-minded and so truly scientific.

Rather than explain one of the most fertile, unusual and ultimately influential minds in twentieth century thought, I must refer you to the full Wikipedia entry - <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wilhelm...> - and allow you to put what follows into its full context.

The book is certainly not an entertainment. The pamphlets, essays, provocations and the book that takes up the bulk of the text [*The Imposition of Sexual Morality*] are out-of-date intellectually and filled with jargon and theory from worlds long since discredited.

It is hard-going at times - especially in the 1932 book where the central section is an extensive review of anthropological research long since superseded in the academy and so unreliable as to both analysis and findings.

Having said that, there are insights into the gathering storm inside the Communist Party as it bureaucratized under Stalin and as the free thought of the 1920s began to collapse. Party discipline became enforced under the twin threats of economic breakdown and Hitler.

This aspect alone would not be worth the reading but in the final three pamphlets we have inklings of what would be Reich's more profound contribution to human liberation and its link to politics.

In 1932, he is still fighting his corner but by 1934 he can do little but burn his bridges with a coruscating and accurate critique of the failure of socialism in the face of fascism - a critique as pertinent today of left-liberalism in the face of national populism.

There are powerful insights to be derived from his practical work about what really matters to working class people and why, given the weight of history, they 'rationally' will walk away from socialism and choose fascism unless socialists change their tune.

It is the weight of history that matters - personal and private life, 'patriarchalism' (in its correct sense rather than the propagandistic light weight nonsense of modern post-Marxists) and sexual repression combine to push people to the devil they think they know.

His psychoanalysis is an investigation of the primal drives that express themselves as political choices - expressed more fully in his 1933 master work *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*. The Marxism is just the liberatory framework in which he wants to frame the findings.

His insights are, in fact, much 'bigger' than either of the two closed systems of the day. They survive formal abandonment of Freudianism and Marxism. What he has found are important correlations between sexuality and social and political attitudes.

His programme of liberation, started as the Sex-Pol movement in Berlin in 1927, was aborted by fascism, Stalinist bureaucratism, the paradoxical sexual conservatism of the Left (a quality in it to be found as much today as then) and war.

Nevertheless we should not forget that in the end it was liberal Americans, over-reacting to his late mental problems, who jailed him and burned his books. He was uncomfortable not just to conservative psychotherapists and sexually repressed Communists ...

Reich himself must be counted a failure of sorts - much like Leary - one who possibly did the cause of responsible sexual liberation no long term service (any more than did Leary responsible psychedelic use) but, without him, we might not even be discussing the subject.

A strange man, he was also intellectually brave and (I suggest) was limited only by his need to try and justify within sets of ideology (Science, Marxism, Freudianism) what, in fact, needs no such justification and which many of us now see as simply intuitively true.

Beyond the sexual aspects of the case, the final essays have other and often staggeringly to-the-point insights into political mobilisation - even if one can quibble with this or that suggestion or conclusion.

If the soi-disant Left ever came close to understanding some of what Reich, in his sometimes clumsy way, tries to tell them (and us) about engaging with the masses, with full respect for their own perspective, then it would not be in the mess it is in today.

Just as Communists' and Social Democrats' high seriousness, bureaucratism and talking-down to the masses were trounced by more emotionally canny Nazis with some real flair, so the same mistakes are being repeated today by left-liberal intellectuals and civil society.

As I write, the liberal-left is probably congratulating itself on the 'win' against liberal governments in getting migrants accepted into Europe. It appears to control the media agenda. But the larger mass has not yet spoken and come election time, it will.

Reich would have seen the potential for disaster here because the liberal-left has picked and chosen the

identities that we are to privilege and yet has neglected to respect the identity (objective condition) of the indigenous working and lower middle classes.

There has been no strategy of engagement and political education, just an attitude of patronising self-righteousness about theoretically self-evident moral propositions. The liberal-left witters on about empathy but fails to enter into a dialogue on values with the masses.

Although 'rationally' the interests of the masses might be one with those of the migrants against the neo-liberal system, left-liberals have actually not explained why this should be so. The resentments of the masses may be primal and, if so, will out at some stage.

Reich's *Politicising the Sexual Problem of Youth* (1932), his long pamphlet *What is Class Consciousness* of 1934 and his short paper *Reforming the Labour Movement* all deserve careful study as relevant to current conditions.

There is also (in this edition) a rather worthy but inconsequential 1972 Introduction by Bertell Ollman which reminds one that the Marxists of the early 1970s, like the Bourbons, had learned nothing and forgotten nothing.

B. Jay says

Fans of Reich's controversial views on orgone machines and other sexual themes will be disappointed in this largely straightforward take on how sexuality fits into society, specifically within socialism and the communist movement. While views such as female independence and sexual freedom for youth (as well as his criticism of the CP and Hitler as well) may have sparked outrage in the thirties, it comes across as common sense now. Perhaps the greatest value of this tome, outside of its importance in a historical context, is to illuminate how ahead of his time Reich is. But I recommend this book to students of psychiatry and socialism only- casual readers (like me) will find themselves skimming ahead looking for interesting bits.
