

## INTRODUCTION: ORBITING WIENER WORLD

The bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionizing the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production, and with them the whole relations of society. . . . Constant revolutionizing of production, uninterrupted disturbances of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones. All fixed, fast-frozen relations . . . are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. -- *The Communist Manifesto*

My own studies of the activities of the Cybernetics project of the Josiah Macy, Jr. Foundation, dates from the very early 1950s, a study based, to a significant degree, on backtracking primary sources of the material reflected in the publications of that Foundation. -- Lyndon LaRouche.<sup>1</sup>

In early July 1966 Lyndon LaRouche (“Lyn Marcus”) began teaching his first class on “Elementary Marxist Economics” at the Free University of New York (“FUNY”) on 20 East 14<sup>th</sup> Street, just off Union Square.<sup>2</sup> If you had met LaRouche at FUNY you would have encountered a tall man with a thick Karl Marx beard and an upper-class New England accent. You would also realize that his class on Marx was like nothing traditionally offered before. Along with discussion of *Capital*, LaRouche explored the ideas of the “young Marx” in *The German Ideology* as well as Feuerbach’s *The Essence of Christianity* and Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Yet LaRouche didn’t stop there. He incorporated Emile Durkheim’s *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* and *Suicide: A Study in Sociology* into an examination of the social roots of alienation and personal identity; explored concepts like “negative entropy” and the mathematical ideas of Kurt Godel; and discussed the politics of creativity drawing from the writings of Erich Fromm as well as Lawrence Kubie’s book *Neurotic Distortions of the Creative Process* all as part of a course on Marxism. His intellectual eclecticism, however, also seemed very much in the spirit of the time.

LaRouche’s classes gradually attracted student radicals from Columbia and CUNY. As the “SDS Labor Committees” branched out to Philadelphia, LaRouche found new followers at Swarthmore and the University of Pennsylvania. This core group instinctively felt that LaRouche’s new conceptualization of Marxism was superior to both the antiquated “dialectical materialism” (“diamat”) version of Marx promoted by the old leftist sects and the forever-alienated “young Marx” heralded by the early New Left. Beyond all his specific arguments, however, there was also the core belief both that the LaRouche took ideas “seriously” and that ideas “really mattered.”

LaRouche’s brand of Marxism so different from the very beginning was his refusal to view the working class from the cultural and ideological prism of the 1930s. LaRouche saw the working class

as important strictly in terms of social reproduction of society as a whole. He did not deify workers per se as if they possessed some organic unique quality or were made noble victims by suffering. It was just this approach that alienated many on the Left who viewed him as an insufferable intellectual elitist who shamelessly “talked down to the masses.”

LaRouche, I will argue, tried to reinterpret Marxism from the prism created by Norbert Wiener’s vision of cybernetics. LaRouche “read Marx” not from the standpoint of the first industrial revolution but from the second one promised by cybernetics.<sup>3</sup> In so doing, LaRouche developed arguments remarkably similar to ones then being articulated in the post-Stalinist Soviet Union even as the CPUSA remained steeped in the “class struggle” paradigms of the 1930s.

LaRouche’s idiosyncratic interpretation of Marxism had been shaped by the intellectual world of Boston (and MIT in particular) of the late 1940s that was then dominated by mathematician Norbert Wiener’s famous 1948 book *Cybernetics*. Inspired by Wiener’s idea, a series of remarkable intellectual debates took place in the late 1940s and early 1950s that were sponsored by the Josiah Macy Foundation which, in turn, was intimately tied into the American military-industrial complex generally and the CIA in particular.

Now three basic points:

- I am not a mathematician, physicist, or expert on cybernetics or information theory and (unlike LaRouche) I don’t pretend to be. Fortunately I don’t have to. In the last two decades – starting with Steve Heims’ book *The Cybernetics Group* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991) -- the early history of cybernetics and information theory is finally becoming clear. With the publication of Slava Gerovitch’s book *From Newspeak to Cyberspeak* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press,

2002), we are now beginning to understand the role cybernetics played inside the USSR.

- Writing about LaRouche in the context of the cybernetics revolution is a bit like trying to discuss *Hamlet* by focusing on the role of one of the guards in the opening scene. I hope the reader will understand why I feel the need to paint a broader picture of “Wiener World” both in America and the Soviet Union in order to place LaRouche in a larger historical context.
- Another complicating factor is LaRouche himself. After the NCLC descended into a cult, LaRouche adopted an analysis of historical events that was both paranoid and clownish. His numerous attacks on Norbert Wiener in his writings obscure the obvious fact that LaRouche had been tremendously influenced by Wiener. What made LaRouche’s ideas so original and appealing to the New Left student intellectuals at FUNY was precisely his attempt to view Marxist theory in the wake of the thought revolution provoked by Wiener. Understanding “Wiener World,” however, also raises questions of LaRouche’s own personal biography and here he has frequently proved highly evasive.

LaRouche’s distortion and concealment of much of his past raises yet another flag. Given the massive role that U.S. intelligence played in the field of cybernetics and with the Macy Foundation specifically, it is legitimate to wonder if somehow Lyndon LaRouche may have been “recruited” as some kind of intelligence agent. As far as I can tell, LaRouche’s involvement in the heady world of the Macy Foundation strictly was limited to his careful reading into topics raised at Cybernetics Group conferences. Even his awareness of the world of cybernetics seems the result of quirks in his personal biography.<sup>4</sup>

LaRouche only discovered cybernetics because his own father made his living as a management consultant. When LaRouche decided to pursue a similar path, he tried to learn about the emerging technology of his day -- computers. Computers, however, were intimately related to the broader issue of "information theory" made famous at the time by both Wiener and Claude Shannon. The cybernetic revolution and its related technological and scientific practical applications directly affected a new generation of business consultants and industrial relations experts. The fact that LaRouche was trying to work as a consultant in the new computer industry combined with the simple reality that he lived in the Boston area led him to discover the Macy Foundation discussions without the need to conjure some "cloak and dagger"-inspired motivation.

Yet LaRouche's "spin" on cybernetics, automation, and "the Second Industrial Revolution" was itself highly creative. If LaRouche's ideas on Marxism in the summer of 1966 seemed a bit strange and off-kilter in New York and San Francisco, in both Moscow and Leningrad they would have been almost commonplace. The cybernetics vogue had an almost unimaginable impact in the post-Stalin Soviet Union.<sup>5</sup> Rather incredibly, the one and only (at least as far as I can tell) American radical who independently tried to "frame" cybernetic and related concepts in a Marxist world view similar to the one being advanced inside the USSR was none other than Lyndon LaRouche. Yet LaRouche tried to do much more than that. He actually set out to create a political movement around these very same ideas.

Although the relationship between innovations in production and the rise of political movements associated with such changes may seem a bit far fetched, it might be useful to recall two radicals from another era who built their own movement out of radical breakthroughs in production: Karl Marx and Frederick Engels. *The Communist Manifesto* is in part, after all, an encomium to the vast

power of capitalist industry to revolutionize the world. Nor was the idea of building a political movement around a radical notion of technocracy unique to Marxism as the strange saga of Howard Scott's Technocracy Inc. illustrates.<sup>6</sup>

More directly relevant to LaRouche, just two years before he began his first FUNY class, the political and cultural impact of cybernetics and related increased levels of automation crystallized around the once-famous "Triple Revolution" document written for the Kennedy administration but only presented to the White House in 1964 after Kennedy had been killed. *The Triple Revolution Statement* -- signed by a number of leading left liberals including some leaders of the very early SDS -- argued that automation in particular would trigger enormous social changes in America. *The Triple Revolution Statement* was even subtitled "Cybernation, Weaponry, Human Rights."

In a way, LaRouche's arguments were an overtly Marxist response to the left liberal theorists of the Triple Revolution, many of whom had been inspired by Wiener.<sup>7</sup> Lyndon LaRouche, however, would prove something like Norbert Wiener's own Golem/Frankenstein Monster; a role LaRouche first played to the hilt in a big room in a loft building just off Union Square in the early weeks of July 1966.

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<sup>1</sup> See footnote 7 of LaRouche's 13 April 2000 EIR article, "Information Society: A Doomed Empire of Evil," at [http://www.larouchepub.com/lar/2000/lar\\_information\\_soc\\_2717.html](http://www.larouchepub.com/lar/2000/lar_information_soc_2717.html).

<sup>2</sup> FUNY began as part of a broader SDS free university project. See Kirkpatrick Sale, *SDS* (New York: Random House, 1973), 264-69. FUNY's teachers included the Fugs Tuli Kupferberg, Stanley Aronowitz, James Weinstein, the anarchist poet Jackson MacLow, Paul Krassner, and Robert Anton Wilson among many others. For a brief description of FUNY, see Edward Grossman, "New York's Schoolhouse for the Left," in the April 1966 issue of *Harper's*. For FUNY teachers, see <http://www.antiqbook.com/boox/bibman/25388.shtml>. Also see the Old and New Mole Files available on LaRouche Planet for more on FUNY.

<sup>3</sup> In this sense one can see some vague similarities between LaRouche's approach and that of Guy Debord in *The Society of the Spectacle* as well as Herbert Marcuse in *One Dimensional Man* and even the French "new working class" and related "praxis" theorists inside SDS whom the early SDS Labor Committee would attack. All rejected the traditional "Old Left" image of the heroic working class. The fundamental difference was that LaRouche did not buy the argument that capitalism had overcome its tendency to severe economic crisis and he believed the working class would become radicalized once the general economic breakdown crisis finally arrived.

<sup>4</sup> Still, one obviously can't entirely rule out the possibility that LaRouche may have crossed paths with some intelligence agency -- East or West -- especially when the extent of intelligence agency interest in cybernetics becomes clearer.

<sup>5</sup> I provide an outline of Soviet interest in cybernetics and Marxism in "Machines of Communism."

<sup>6</sup> See the chapter of this study posted on LaRouche Planet entitled "Monad Man" on Howard Scott and Technocracy Inc. for more.

<sup>7</sup> For a copy of the *Triple Revolution* text and list of signers, see [http://www.educationanddemocracy.org/FSCfiles/C\\_CC2a\\_TripleRevolution.htm](http://www.educationanddemocracy.org/FSCfiles/C_CC2a_TripleRevolution.htm). SWP leader James Cannon's talk on the Triple Revolution even is available on You Tube. *The Triple Revolution Statement* is also cited in Sale, *SDS*, 100. Although Norbert Wiener died before the *Triple Revolution Statement* was published, I think it is safe to say he would have been very much in agreement with it, given Wiener's work with Walter Reuther's UAW. Also see Eric Fromm (ed.), *Socialist Humanism: An International Symposium* (Garden City, NJ: Doubleday, [1966, c 1965] which includes a reprint of the *Triple Revolution* statement.