

## MONSIEUR POLIAKOV'S RECENT ATTACK UPON LAMARCK

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Monsieur Poliakov, historian and professor at the Sorbonne, in his recent book, *Aryan Myth* (1974), labels Jean Lamarck (1744-1829), the French biologist and philosopher, as a forerunner and popularizer of racial and totalitarian theories. Professor Poliakov cites as evidence a passage from Lamarck's famous book, *Zoological Philosophy*. This writer finds that Professor Poliakov has extracted a quotation out of context from that section heading, "Some Observations with Regard to Man."

Historical facts indicate that Napoleon identified Lamarck with the leaders of the recent French Revolution and rejected both his work and philosophy. Monsieur Poliakov suggests that Lamarck's biological writings served as a social paradigm for the expanding Napoleonic empire. Monsieur Poliakov's thoughts may have been influenced by the prolific writings of a small faction of conservative social neo-Lamarckians. The Professor may have also extrapolated from his research a belief that this group represents Lamarckian theory.

In examining Lamarck's *Zoological Philosophy* this writer finds his governing thoughts and conduct functioned as a precursor for the majority of the social neo-Lamarckians who championed equalitarian rights for the world's citizenry as well as advocating popular education for the poor.

Unfortunately, in the latter part of the nineteenth century and early part of the twentieth century, the social Darwinists, eugenicists, nativists, and racial haters dominated the political and economic environments of Europe and the Americas. The Professor should correctly place his major focus for sources of racist and totalitarian influences on Comte Joseph Arthur de Gobineau's (1816-82) four-volume *Essai sur l'inegalite des races humaines* (1853-55) and Madison Grant's (1865-1937) *The Passing of the Great Race* (1918) as the hubs and light houses for future antidemocratic actions.

Professor Leon Poliakov (1910-), Maitre de Recherche at the Centre de La Recherche Scientifique in Paris in his book, *Aryan Myth* (1974), links Jean Lamarck (1744-1829), French naturalist and philosopher, as an early exponent of racial and nationalistic supremacy. This writer for the past twenty years has researched Lamarck's life and writings, and finds no evidence to support this purported link.

Poliakov writes:

Bertrand Russell has pointed out that Darwin's theory was, in substance, the extension of the doctrine of *laissez-faire* to the animal and vegetable worlds.

In an altogether different political context, nearly half a century earlier in 1809, the other great herald of evolution, Lamarck, put forward the following hypothesis in his *Philosophie zoologique* :

If we should now suppose that a race...thus perfected had acquired, by the force of constant habit among all its individual members, such a configuration as I have described above...then it may be granted:

1. That such a race, so perfected in its faculties that it was able at last to dominate all others, would have gained possession of all the places in the world which it desired;
2. That this race would have driven out all the others...and forced them to take refuge in those regions which it did not occupy;
3. That...by keeping other races confined to forests or deserts it would have impeded them in the process of perfecting their faculties while itself... developing new needs which would stimulate its industry and gradually improve its resources and its faculties;
4. Finally, that this pre-eminent race would have achieved absolute supremacy over all the others....

The superior race here described was not, however, specifically the European or white race. Lamarck, under the heading of "Quelques observations relative à l'homme", contrasted the role of the Bimanal with that of the Quadrumanal beings, of men with monkeys.

Nevertheless, from the way in which his theory was formulated, the vision of a conquering race is easily identifiable with French expansion in Europe at that time.<sup>1</sup>

This paper examines the writings of Lamarck and some neo-Lamarckians to demonstrate other possible interpretations.

He labels Lamarck as the biological theoretician for Napoleon's grand plan of expansion throughout Europe. What are the facts? Jean Lamarck was born into a poor but noble family. He survived the French Revolution and supported its equalitarian principles. Lamarck was born a Catholic, studied at the Jesuit School at Amiens. His scientific writings reflected an anti-vitalistic attitude. Lamarck regarded the origin and formation of life as a material-physical phenomenon. Lamarck continued to teach during Napoleon's sensitive negotiations with the Vatican to conclude a Concordat. Strong elements in government and the army vigorously opposed the Concordat. Napoleon was aware of the remaining anti-Catholic feelings in the general population that was implanted by the recent Revolution. Napoleon, connecting Lamarck with the radical forces of the Revolution, chose to abruptly dismiss Lamarck's attendance when he attempted to present to the Emperor his great work, *Zoological Philosophy*. The Emperor

apparently neither read nor utilized Lamarck's theories as guidelines for his impressive design for European conquest.

Is Monsieur Poliakov confusing the essence of social Darwinism and social neo-Lamarckism and using them interchangeably? The writer refers the reader for a comprehensive definition of social Darwinism to The Editor's Quarter of "Jewish Spectator" (Summer, 1976) which states:

Medieval Rationalism was superseded in "the century of Darwin" when evolution was enthroned supreme. Although Darwin's theory of evolution pertains only to biology, the implications of Darwinism led to a complete reorientation in the humanities as well with historians and sociologists adducing data providing the "evolution" of cultures and societies...<sup>2</sup>

Further elaboration of this definition can be found in Frederick Busi's article, "Gobineau and Racialism," in "Jewish Spectator" (May, 1972)<sup>3</sup>.

Social neo-Lamarckism suggests the importance of natural selection as well as environmental influences on the inheritance of acquired characteristics. Monsieur Poliakov identifies some of the theories of a few conservative social neo-Lamarckians with those of Lamarck. He places Ernst Heinrich Haeckel, German biologist, writer, and Lamarckian, in the social Darwinian camp and accuses him of being the antecedent authority of Nazi biology (p.284).<sup>4</sup> Stephen Jay Gould of Harvard University in his book, *Ontogeny and Phylogeny*, points out, "Though Haeckel acclaimed Darwin, he ranked Goethe and Lamarck as his equals in the origination of evolutionary theory (Vol. 2 of *Generelle Morphologie* is dedicated to them jointly). Haeckel's own view of evolution is a curious and inseparable mixture of all three, each in about the same proportion."<sup>5</sup> Although Haeckel was anti-socialistic in his politics, some of his social neo-Lamarckian contemporaries made use of his biogenetic law to champion socialism.

Through scientific inquiry and investigation, Frederick Engels in his important essay, "The Part Played by Labor in the Transition from Ape to Man", describes the stages of growth of man's superior mental powers in the following passage:

For, just as the developmental history of the human embryo in the mother's womb is only an abbreviated repetition of the history, extending over millions of years, of the bodily evolution of our animal ancestors, starting from the worm, so the mental development of the human child is only a still more abbreviated repetition of the intellectual development of these same ancestors, at least of the later ones.<sup>6</sup>

Further, in 1895, Enrico Ferri, the noted Marxist, explains in *Socialism And Modern Science* the theory of environmental influences on the germplasm.

He observes:

The situation is the same in the social sciences and the natural sciences. In embryology the celebrated law of Haeckel tells us that the development of the individual embryo reproduces in miniature the various forms of development of the animal species which have preceded it in the zoological series. But the biologist, by studying a human embryo of a few days' or a few weeks' growth, can not tell whether it will be male or female, and still less whether it will be a strong or a weak individual, phelgmatic or nervous, intelligent or not.

He can only tell the general lines of the future evolution of that individual, and must leave it to time to show the exact character of all the particular details of its personality, which will be developed naturally and spontaneously, in conformity with the hereditary organic conditions and the conditions of the environment in which it will live.<sup>7</sup>

Across the Atlantic Ocean in the American socialist cluster, Robert Rives LaMonte, editor of the "Socialist Call", wrote a study of scientific inquiry and investigation of the social application of the biogenetic law. He demonstrates in this book, *Socialism: Positive and Negative* (1907) through the use of the biogenetic law the development of socialism. LaMonte interprets Engel's *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* (Introduction to First German Edition, 1882) as the classical illustration of this law by tracing the growth of socialism from Utopia toward Science.<sup>8</sup>

The American main stream of social neo-Lamarckism is represented by Lester Frank Ward and Frederick Jackson Turner. They utilized Haeckel's belief that ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny in their call for universal education and the spreading of democratic principles.

Ward was the great advocator of popular education and he believed that social progress could be achieved through universal education. Universal education should develop a genetic predisposition for education in the general population and eventually would become a world-wide inherited social characteristic. In his magnum opus, *Dynamic Sociology*, he goes on to insist that

If, by the term education, there can be constantly implied the two adjuncts, scientific and popular; if the word can be made to embrace the notion of imparting a knowledge of the materials and forces of nature to all the members of society, there can be no objection to the employment of this word education as the embodiment of all that is progressive.<sup>9</sup>

Turner, an authority on the subject of the Far West expansion, was an expositor of the biogenetic law concerning the inheritance of democratic principles. According to the experience of Turner, the acceptance and practice of the principle of equality of rights, opportunity, and treatment was occurring in the new settled lands from the Tidewater to the Rocky Mountains as well as imbuing this residual spirit in the older settlements of the United States. As Turner put it in his book,

*The Significance Of Sections In American History* the following: "The frontier did not proceed on the principle of tabula rasa; it modified older forms, and infused into them the spirit of democracy."<sup>10</sup> One of his students, Harvey Wish, in his research, *The American Historian* adds, "Frontier traits would evolve in the Lamarckian way in response to environmental stimulus, but surviving remnants would remain even after the frontier was gone."<sup>11</sup> Another follower of the Turnerian thesis, Ray Allen Billington, strengthened this evidence in *Westward Expansion* and is quite right in saying that "The story of westward expansion was one of the continuous rebirth of society, a repeated 'beginning over again' in the West, with the results the same on every frontier, although with essential differences due to time, place, and the manner of men who peopled each area."<sup>12</sup>

The smaller conservative but vociferous social neo-Lamarckians represented the expanding school of American nativism and anti-libertarians. Two of the leaders of this faction were Henry Fairfield Osborn, paleontologist and G. Stanley Hall, educator and psychologist.

Osborn's views on public education were totally opposed to those of the traditional neo-Lamarckians. Osborn, an elitist, voiced his opinions regarding public education in his book, *Creative Education*. He stated in his book:

Take the struggle for existence out of education and you paralyze the student. In our American eagerness for education we make far too easy for the average American parent as well as for the average boy and girl. Nine parents out of ten get education for their children with little or no effort on their part because there is no direct tax for education.<sup>13</sup>

Osborn agreed with the implied racial thoughts of his personal friend and eugenicist Madison Grant, a leading spokesman for various groups advocating the control of hereditary factors. They viewed his book, *The Passing of the Great Race* as an academic milestone for the pseudo-science called *Eugenics*. Osborn and Grant shared and expressed the fear that the newly arrived aliens from southeastern Europe would soon push the rooted English speaking distinguished families out of Yankeedom. In order to prevent the recent immigrants and various other impoverished people from reproducing in large numbers, their physical and mental capacities were declared inferior and a suggested remedy was to sterilize this valueless stock.

G. Stanley Hall presented his interpretation of Haeckel's biogenetic law by declaring in his manuscript, *Adolescence*, that those races who have little evolved from early ancestral type were characterized by a relative absence of progress in the phylogenetic cycle. Therefore, aboriginal people should be treated as a flock to be cared for and ruled by Anglo-Saxons.

#### CONCLUSION

Monsieur Poliakov is professor of history at the Sorbonne and author of *Harvest of Hate* and the three-volume *History of Anti-Semitism*. This well qualifying

academic background should enable Professor Poliakov to further investigate the history of France during the period of 1776-1820 and offer proof whether Lamarck made any derogatory comments concerning any race or religion of man. It is interesting to note that Lamarck spent his long professional career in the fields of botany, zoology, and evolutionary theory and not in anthropology and/or sociology.

Since Lamarck stressed the action of habits as acting as a precursor for the inheritance of a specific characteristic, it becomes obvious that Professor Poliakov has taken out of text a few sentences from the section titled, "Some Observations with regard to Man." The writer calls the reader's attention to the last pages of Lamarck's masterpiece in which he summarizes his respect for man by maintaining:

Men who strive in their works to push back the limits of human knowledge know well that it is not enough to discover and prove a useful truth previously unknown, but that it is necessary also to be able to propagate it and get it recognised; now both individual and public reason, when they find themselves exposed to any alteration, usually set up so great an obstacle to it, that it is often harder to secure the recognition of a truth than it is to discover it.<sup>14</sup>

These words can aid us in understanding that Lamarck considered knowledge objectively. There is no proof that he was ever a propagandist for the aryan myth.

#### REFERENCES

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- <sup>2</sup> The Editor's Quarter, *Jewish Spectator*, Vol. 41, No. 2., Summer, 1976, p. 8.
- <sup>3</sup> Busi, Frederick. "Gobineau and Racialism," *Jewish Spectator*, vol. 37, No. 5, May, 1972, pp. 22-24.
- <sup>4</sup> Poliakov, Leon. *op. cit.*, p. 284.
- <sup>5</sup> Gould, Stephen Jay. *Ontogeny and Phylogeny*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1977, p. 80.
- <sup>6</sup> Engels, Frederick. *The Part Played by Labor in the Transition from Ape to Man*. International Publishers Co., Inc., New York, 1950, p. 18.
- <sup>7</sup> Ferri, Enrico. *Socialism And Modern Science*. Trans. Robert Rives LaMonte. New York: The International Library Publishing Co., 1900, p. 133.
- <sup>8</sup> LaMonte, Robert Rives. *Socialism: Positive and Negative*. Charles H. Kerr & Company, Chicago, 1907, pp. 131-142.
- <sup>9</sup> Ward, Lester F. *Dynamic Sociology*. D. Appleton and Company, New York, 1883, p. 26.
- <sup>10</sup> Turner, Frederick Jackson. *The Significance of Sections In American History*. Henry Holt And Company, Inc., New York, 1932, p. 136.
- <sup>11</sup> Wish, Harvey. *The American Historian*. Oxford University Press, New York, 1960, p. 194.
- <sup>12</sup> Billington, Ray Allen. *Westward Expansion*. The Macmillan Company, New York, 1949, p.2.
- <sup>13</sup> Osborn, Henry Fairfield. *Creative Education*. Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1927, pp.28-29.
- <sup>14</sup> Lamarck, J. B. *Zoological Philosophy*. Trans. Hugh Elliot. Hafner Publishing Co., Inc., New York, 1963, p. 404.