

game attractive, having enjoyed the “pleasures” of the Combined Cadet Force at public school. Initially, an advertising campaign was aimed at the corporate sector. The first players were business and financial executives. Now the appeal has spread across the social spectrum. Bankers mix with labourers, solicitors with car mechanics. Battle-sites are concentrated in the south, and applications for new ones are a constant headache for planning authorities. Recently there have been calls for tighter controls on the “War Games Syndrome” after it was discovered that ancient woodland in Essex had suffered severe ecological damage through too much use.

British organisers claim to run the cleanest games. “Blotted” participants in America, they say, are frequently zapped ten times over to prevent cheats rubbing the dye off clothes. Hayes Noel accepts this: “The British are much more straightforward than the Americans. They don’t play to win at all costs.” Combatants in the UK are mostly forbidden to use their own weapons, whereas players in the States often brandish splattering machine-guns. A Pitman SMG 60 will fire at the rate of 600 pellets a minute. In both countries no expense is spared to achieve a realistic war scenario. Mortars lob canisters of paint. There are even paint-firing tanks and field guns. The “dead” are ferried back to base by helicopter.

War games as corporate entertainment is the biggest growing sector within the market. Organisers claim a 92% return rate by first-time players. Recently, one company took over the island of Herm in the Channel Islands so its top executives could “paintball” in a massive 320 acres. Firms use war games to entertain clients or even to promote a new product. Kit Peters, who has been running corporate war games in the UK for more than five years, says people take it up for fun only to discover that it does teach survival skills useful in the boardroom, on the stock-market floor, even on the building-site. He denies that the game encourages players to seek out their killer instinct, but suggests that it allows people to let off pent-up aggression. Moreover, Kit Peters feels that war games are a novel form of self-identification. “It is a sexual experience . . . people discover themselves through physical contact with the great outdoors.”

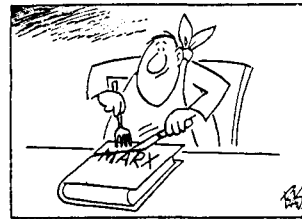
**W**AR GAMES are based on a concept as old as man: only the toughest and fittest survive. People participate to boost confidence, to bring the language of battle to bear on their everyday lives. The thrill of victory at war games is perhaps the same as success in life. Players think that if they can win on the battlefield it will help them secure an important contract, out-manoeuvre a bad-tempered foreman, even begin a love affair. War games purport to give players the clear-sightedness of a soldier with a mission. They encourage achievement of goals without self-doubt and slipshod procrastination. When there is no real war to fight, young men and women seek to learn leadership qualities through other means. In peacetime, it would seem that people need the excitement of an ersatz war to help run their lives.

It is possible to imagine Margaret Thatcher leading a be-draggled Cabinet through the undergrowth during a daring war-game assault. No doubt she would make an excellent job of it too. How far, though, could paintballers be relied on to fight in real combat? Participants think long and hard about their experiences and often reject the brutish instinct they have discovered within themselves. The conclusion many reach is that they would not really want to kill the enemy. Yet the recklessness displayed in today’s games, where failure does not mean death, indicates that there is still much paint to be spilled.

## Paris Notebook

*By Jean-François Revel*

### Marxism from a Proper Distance



**L**ESZEK KOLAKOWSKI is, of course, the Polish philosopher who lives in Oxford. Of his previous works written in Polish the extraordinary *Chrétiens sans Eglise* (*Christians without a Church*) was translated into

French and published by Gallimard in 1969; nowadays he usually writes and expresses himself in English, though I know that he also uses French on occasion.

Kolakowski is one of the greatest historians of ideas working today. The depth of his research, his capacity for organising information, and the meticulous way in which he examines his texts are equalled only by the clarity and sureness of synthesis with which he simplifies, identifies, and recovers what is authentic and essential. Moreover, his interpretations have one merit well worth mentioning in passing: they are precise.

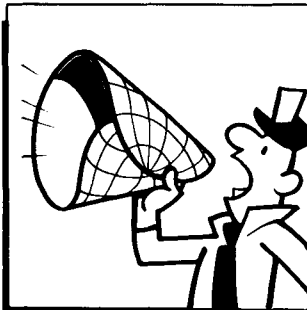
Kolakowski’s *Main Currents of Marxism*,<sup>1</sup> the three volumes of which run to some 2,000 pages, is the first not to have been itself a part of Marxism. I mean that it is the first to recount, analyse, reconstruct, expound, and elucidate Marxism as any historian of philosophy would do for Neo-Platonism or for the pre-Socratic Greek thinkers. Until now, everything original that has been written (I am not talking about the more or less scholarly summaries, most of which are very “approximate”) has seen itself as “continuing” or even “renewing” Marxism—or else it has attacked it, refuted it, or “superseded” it.

<sup>1</sup> *Histoire du Marxisme*. By LESZEK KOLAKOWSKI. Vol. 1, *Les fondateurs: Marx, Engels, et leurs prédécesseurs*; Vol. 2, *L’Âge d’or: de Kautsky à Lénine*. In English: *Main Currents of Marxism: Its Rise, Growth, and Dissolution*. Vol. 1, *The Founders*; Vol. 2, *The Golden Age*; Vol. 3, *The Breakdown* (Oxford University Press, 1981).

Kolakowski has put an end to all that. At last we have a historian who no longer seeks by whatever slant to be the reviser, the reformer, the continuer, the new Messiah, or the destroyer of the school of thought with which he is dealing. Why should Marx, together with his predecessors, companions, heirs, and opponents, not come in for the same sort of objective historical treatment that we unhesitatingly bestow on every other tribulation of the human mind? The great 19th-century historian Jules Michelet once began a lecture at the Collège de France with the words "*Messieurs, l'Angleterre est une île*"; Kolakowski opens his work thus: "Karl Marx was a German philosopher." It is high time we remembered that and discussed him as such.

I can do no more in this brief note than register an important event: the appearance in French of the first two volumes of this historical study. It needs now, after its Polish underground edition gave a certain intellectual sovereignty to *Solidarity* dissidence, to be translated into Russian with all speed. But will Gorbachov's *glasnost* stand the test of such philosophical openness? Even a *samizdat* edition will serve the *perestroika* of ossified Soviet ideology.

## Render Unto History . . .



THE REBELLION of the Chinese has given a fillip to one of our favourite intellectual pastimes: drawing historical comparisons.

President Mitterrand sees China through bicentennial spectacles. The Chinese in 1989, he said in Montreal, equal the French in 1789.

Rather hard on the French 18th century! To compare the *dix-huitième* to the dark tunnel of the Maoist period, when two operas by Mao's wife and the drivel of *The Little Red Book* constituted the sum total of Chinese culture, is not exactly to do it justice. Where are the Watteaus, the Fragonards, the Montesquieus, the Voltaires of the Maoist years? Maoism was an era of cultural and social desertification.

Others have likened Beijing '89 to May '68. Again, no comparison. The societies of the 1960s were the most democratic and the most affluent that mankind have ever known. The May '68 rebellion was fathered by freedom and prosperity. The rupture occurred because the evolution of manners had failed to keep pace with the evolution of structures. It was the opposite of a rebellion against a totalitarian system. Its protagonists took themselves for disciples of Mao. How-

ever, like Christopher Columbus thinking he had discovered China, what they too were really discovering was America—the source, for them, of "the wind of revolution".

In a further false comparison, there was talk of "the Beijing Commune". Born of the humiliation of defeat by Prussia and of the Parisian working-class tradition of the "*jour-nées*" of July 1830, the French Commune set its sights (oddly enough) not against the Empire, which had already been overthrown, but against the Republic which had been proclaimed on 4 September 1870 and the National Assembly elected in February of the following year. The rest of France, not understanding the *communards*, was afraid of them. Isolated, they were slaughtered in their thousands during the hideous massacres of 21–28 May 1871, "the week of blood". One day the file on this episode of French history is going to have to be opened. Meanwhile, it seemed a curious way of rooting for the Beijing students to liken them to the unfortunate *communards*.

The totalitarian dictatorships of Communism are a totally new historical phenomenon. They must be studied in their own terms. We have no precedents that might help us to understand them.

And even less to understand what may come after them. Indeed, one of the fundamental characteristics of such régimes is to work, from the very moment they are put in place, towards eradicating all forces capable of ousting them. In the cases of the Greek colonels, Franco, Salazar, Louis XIV, Napoleon, Mussolini, Hitler, and Marcos—not to mention the crises experienced by the democracies, too—there were alternative solutions to hand.

With Communist régimes there are not. Communist régimes have always been at great pains to destroy the very possibility of alternative solutions. It is now clear that such régimes no longer work at all. But it is equally clear that they have no exit route planned and are having no success in cobbling one together. That goes particularly for the two dinosaurs of the Communist world and their counterparts in the Third World. Tentative solutions are beginning to emerge in Poland and Hungary, where totalitarianism had not destroyed everything.

Nevertheless, up until now (with all due respect to those who mistake the illness for the cure) no process of total substitution of a democratic régime for a Communist régime has yet run its full course. My belief and hope is that one day that will happen. But how? All we can do is note that such systems are currently jolted by convulsions and appear to be in their death throes. How ironic that the promulgators of so many Plans have no plan of retreat. They find themselves, like the rest of us, face to face with the unknown. It is that unknown that we must now learn to imagine.

J.-F.R.

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# Politics & World Affairs

## Colonel Isobé's Secret

*The Japanese Formula—By SYDNEY GIFFARD*



THE LAST TIME I met Colonel Isobé, perhaps twenty years ago, he seemed just as jaunty as he had twenty years before that, in those otherwise drab, early post-War Tokyo days. As jaunty, that is, as he had always seemed on arrival for a working session. After twenty minutes or so, he had had a tendency to drift into sleep, to be woken immediately by the crash of *First Lessons in Japanese* as the book fell from his lap on to the study floor. When this happened, he had always returned, without any explanation, to the beginning of the lesson which we had been attacking. This gave one the opportunity to repeat faultlessly what had been rehearsed so very recently, before the momentary interruption. Such opportunities were one's best hope of earning commendation.

To be sprightly, yet to succumb easily to sleep, was a natural combination in those days, for a gentleman long retired but obliged to make his way through the giant, rattling skeletons of Tokyo and Yokohama, to attend to his students. They were indeed trying times for the elderly, but a smile over some difficulty encountered by his wife was the nearest Colonel Isobé ever came to a complaint. And sprightliness was his usual mode, rather than weariness. He was quicker to spring from his chair and move to stand under the door lintel, whenever there was an earth-tremor, than most of his young pupils. He contrived, without a word, to convey the idea that it was everyone's duty to move sharply into position to withstand any shock which might occur. There was no question of false politeness over seniority or precedence: it was a matter of battle-drill.

I believe that Colonel Isobé never discussed World War II, its causes, its course, or its consequences, with his students, unless strictly in the context, say, of an editorial or item of news under study. Preference for avoiding the subject was perhaps partly why the career of his son had limited

value only, for conversational purposes. Colonel Isobé's own direct experience of active hostilities—occasionally recalled to illustrate briefly some general thesis about the Meiji period—had been of the fighting round Port Arthur in 1904, his rank at that time perhaps Lieutenant, probably in the Imperial Guards. Later, there had been liaison with the British Army, and the gradual establishment of a connection with language students from the British government service and from industry.

This connection had served as a bridge into retirement, and now far beyond. His success as a teacher was based firmly on his refusal to cultivate, certainly to display, any knowledge of the English language beyond what might be necessary in order to arrange the time and place with a beginner, for the initiation of a course of study of uncertain duration.

We never learned his age. He did once disclose to me, with a kind of parade-ground giggle which was one of his characteristic expressions, that the practice adopted in disrespect of unpopular contemporaries, in the days when he was an officer cadet, had been to cut off their top-knots. This might have been the equivalent of *de-bagging* in the British social lexicon of some period not so long before our own time, or of setting fire to the shirt-tails where a future Field Marshal was engaged in the business. But it might be wrong to draw conclusions as to Colonel Isobé's age from the consideration that the style of hairdressing which involved top-knots was made illegal in Japan in 1871.

AT THE TIME of my tutorials with him, Colonel Isobé regarded a student as being ready for whatever examination might be deemed a suitable substitute for a passing-out parade as soon as he could enunciate with confidence the Japanese phrases for hydro-electric power (*suiryoku denki*) and what we should now call inward capital investment (*tōshi dōnyū*). Many years afterwards, still haunted by these phrases, I came to see that they were the names of the two things in all the world most needed by Japan at the time of the Occupation; energy, and funds, for the new take-off.

The current catchphrase has retained its extraordinary influence in Japanese society. It is therefore appropriate that