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The Bureaucratization of the World

By Bruno Rizzi

Trans. and with an Introduction by

Adam Westoby

New York: Free Press, 1985

Since the end of the thirties, when Leon Trotsky first mentioned the book in the course of a debate with his dissident American followers, Bruno Rizzi's *La Bureaucratization du Monde* has led a sort of shadow existence in this country, untranslated, virtually unobtainable, and hence more often cited than read. The somewhat precocious product of a travelling shoe salesman and part-time radical activist, *La Bureaucratization du Monde* was published in Paris in September of 1939 and soon confiscated by French authorities, though not before Rizzi (apparently in the habit of addressing personal letters to Hitler, Stalin, Mussolini, et al.) was able to send a copy to Trotsky, who not only read it but commented extensively on its arguments in print. This first edition of the book, which had been written in Italian during the fast moving political events of 1938-39 and quickly translated into French, was published under the partial pseudonym of "Bruno R."; and for many years it was only by this rather Kafkaesque *nom de guerre* that American intellectuals were to know one of the first Marxist critics to put forward the argument that the Soviet Union, far from developing into a genuinely socialist society, had in fact seen the rise of a hitherto unknown exploitative class and a new form of social organization, which Rizzi termed "bureaucratic collectivism."

Rizzi's Marxism was, however, more a matter of analytical habit and intellectual style than anything else; for the polemical thrust of his book was directed against precisely those attempts by Trotsky and others to explain the apparent "degeneration" of Soviet society within some version of the Marxist historical scheme. Briefly, the debate cen-

tered on the concept of class, which Rizzi insisted on using to characterize the emergent Soviet bureaucracy, but which Trotsky argued was inappropriate for a social group that enjoyed none of the privileges of inheritance. For Trotsky, the bureaucrats were rather to be seen as an unfortunately regressive "social stratum" or caste. Yet behind this apparently minor terminological dispute lay significant differences, for what was ultimately at stake in the argument was the possibility of further radical social change and above all the question of whether the proletariat could be expected to overcome this new group of exploiters and thus eventually fulfill the historical role assigned to it in Marxist theory. In Trotsky's opinion, the thesis that the bureaucrats constituted a new and established class implied that the fate of the workers was sealed; and this was an implication that he could not accept, amounting as it did to an acknowledgment that the revolutionary project to which he had dedicated his life was a failure.

Rizzi's own position on the matter was somewhat less well defined. Though critical of contemplative or apologetic attitudes toward history, which with characteristic eccentricity he labelled "Buddhism," his zeal for organized political action was coupled with a tendency to theorize in terms of historical necessity about large-scale social movements. No doubt the most grandiose example of this inclination is represented by the three parts of *La Bureaucratization du Monde* (only the first part, dealing with the USSR, has been translated), in which he argues not only that the means of production in Soviet society has fallen into the hands of a new class of bureaucrats, but also that this development is part of an inevitable and worldwide phenomenon, apparent in fascist Italy and Germany as well as in the America of the New Deal. The conclusions he drew from this analysis were, however, somewhat more erratic. Since

capitalism was no doubt doomed, he reasoned, the logical course of action was to encourage its eclipse by the more "progressive" fascist regimes and thus accelerate the movement of western nations toward an expected convergence with the USSR in bureaucratic collectivism; for the latter, in spite of its inequalities, was clearly the more efficient form of social organization and therefore more likely to lead to socialism. Although this line of thought was perhaps less disagreeable to Rizzi (who shared with the fascists a deeply seated anti-Semitism) than it was to many others, it should be noted that such opinions were by no means unheard of on the Left in the era of the Hitler-Stalin pact; the most appropriate example in this context is James Burnham's *The Managerial Revolution* (1941), a book often thought to have been influenced by *La Bureaucratization du Monde*. Nevertheless, Rizzi soon repudiated his support of fascism, leaving his political allegiances in a state of uncertainty.

Certainly the complexities of European history in the thirties are easier to grasp in retrospect than they were at the time; however, one need not have any great insight into the period to recognize what even a novice rhetorician can identify as a pair of false alternatives—aggravated by a commitment to oversimplified teleological thinking on both sides—in the difference of opinion between Trotsky and Rizzi. Although it is clear that Rizzi's willingness to break with orthodox dogma was justified and prescient, his grasp of twentieth-century history has proven to be no surer than anyone else's; and the relative crudeness of his analysis does not repay close attention. It is, however, revealing to look into how his book has been received over the years, as Adam Westoby does in his superb introduction to *The Bureaucratization of the World*, and in particular to examine the interest in Rizzi evinced by such latter-day "Buddhists" as Daniel Bell and Bettino Craxi, whose shame-

lessly expropriating preface adorns the most recent Italian edition. It is here, rather than in the confused intricacies of Rizzi's own politics or the direct influence his obscure tract might have had, that one encounters the most pressing political legacy of what Westoby correctly identifies as an interesting but ultimately minor piece of sociological folklore.

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***L'enigma della mente;
il "mind-body problem"
nel pensiero contemporaneo***

By Sergio Moravia
Bari: Laterza, 1986

Merleau-Ponty once remarked, with his usual concise effectiveness, that a smile is not a simple muscular contraction. It is that *also*, obviously, otherwise no smile would be possible. But could it be that it is something *else*? something *more*?

Framed in this fashion, the question triggers a conceptual trap. The contraction of the muscles is taken as the real, true base, and the smile is understood as an extra which may or may not be there. Without realizing it, we have fallen into a double metaphysic: we have monism if we consider the smile the direct expression of the muscular contraction, and we have dualism if we consider it something *else*. Despite the fact that monism can take on different forms, such as physicalism or (a more or less popular) materialism, the end result is the same: the emphasis is on the primacy of the visible, or that which can be empirically or "scientifically" demonstrated. Against monism there stands, as its *pendant* or reactive formation, spiritualistic dualism with its emphasis on the primacy of the invisible and the inevitable concomitant notion