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## Do Not Dump on the Unoites

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## **Comments**

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## DO NOT DUMP ON THE UNOITES

In the April 1987 issue of *Monthly Review*, John Lie has some very sharp criticisms of a distinctly Japanese school of Marxism known as Uno Marxists ("Reactionary Marxism: The End of Ideology in Japan?"). While inside the article Lie admits that not all Uno Marxists are reactionary, they are nonetheless asserted to be very dogmatic, and "Uno Marxism qua science lacks the theoretical apparatus to penetrate beyond the obvious reality of the [Japanese] economic miracle, and to grasp connections to the seamier side of the 'successful' capitalist development." (P. 49)

Lie's methodological approach to reach this conclusion is as follows. First, he has a short discussion containing harsh criticisms of Hiroji Baba's *Mass Enrichment and Finance Capital*. Then Lie points out that Baba has been a prominent member of the Unoite school of Marxism, upon which Lie makes blanket condemnations of the Uno school of Marxist thought.

Several points need to be made. From Lie's description of Baba's book, Baba's analysis does not appear to be a very good one, nor a particularly Marxist, nor particularly Unoian analysis. Baba's poor analysis of Japan and the world economy does not thereby discredit all of Marxist or Uno Marxist theory. A Marxist in general, or a Uno Marxist in particular, can make a poor analysis of a situation without necessarily meaning that his or her entire theoretical apparatus is faulty. Hence, one poor so-called Unoite analysis does not mean that all Uno Marxism is necessarily flawed.

Moreover, as far as I know, there are only three major Unoite works available in English. These are Uno's *Principles of Political Economy* (Sussex: Harvester, 1980), Thomas Sekine's two-volume *The Dialectic of Capital* (Tokyo: Yushindo Press, 1984, 1986), and Robert Albritton's *A Japanese Reconstruction of Marxist Theory* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986). Since I, like most people whose first language is English, do not know Japanese, it is very difficult for me, or most people in the English-speaking world to say a whole lot or to make definitive statements about the Uno school of Marxists until more of their work becomes available in English. Yet, from what is currently available, it is clear that the Unoites have some very different, unusual, and hence controversial ideas concerning various aspects of Marxist thought. As their work becomes available in English, the Unoites deserve a sympathetic and thorough reading and reception from Marxists; this is especially true with Uno's work itself. Those Marxists who study Uno's *Principles of Political Economy*, which is significantly subtitled *Theory of a Purely Capitalist Society*, will be impressed by the clarity, compactness, and, yes, elegance, of his reworking of Marx's *Capital*. Whether they think it is "correct" (whatever that means), is of course another issue; yet, Uno's *Principles* deserves a wide reading in the English-speaking world.

This brings me to my final point. It is possible to receive the mistaken impression from Lie's article that the level of Marxist analysis in the United States is sufficiently rich, diverse, mature, and sophisticated that people in the United States can afford to write off an entire school of Japanese Marxists with such broad generalizations that in practice the Unoites have a tendency to be reactionary and dogmatic. Yet, this is not the case now, nor has it been in the past (see e.g., "Interview with Paul Sweezy," *Monthly Review*, April, 1987, pp. 12-13). Rather, the situation is this: American Marxism is not so immature that it needs to be protected from foreign strands of Marxism with the prophylactic device of bandying around such terms as reactionary Marxism, dogmatic Marxism, etc. Neither is American Marxism anywhere near strong enough, rich enough, nor diverse enough that it can afford to ignore these schools, and to dismiss them with the same pejorative devices.

Hence, given the level of maturity of American Marxism, the lack of availability of Uno Marxist work in English, and the lack of serious critical analysis and dissection of their work in the English-speaking world, I think Lie does a

disservice to Monthly Review readers to indiscriminately brand the entire Unoite school in the manner in which he does. The entire Uno school does not deserve to be flogged in the pages of Monthly Review and I urge that we refrain from cavalierly dumping on the Unoites.

#### JOHN LIE REPLIES

My criticism of Baba was intended as a cautionary moral tale underpinned by a theoretical criticism of Uno Marxism. Given the latter-day "enrichment" of Japan and the displacement of capitalist contradictions to the third world and oppressed groups within Japan, any analytical framework that does not take these considerations into account will exhibit "reactionary" tendencies, spouting something akin to the ideology of "Japan as number one." Two of the central tenets of Uno Marxism contribute to this state of affairs. First, Uno Marxism provides no "theoretical" bridge from the theory of purely capitalist society to a concrete analysis of contemporary capitalism, while championing the primacy of pure theory. Second, the separation of science from ideology justifies Uno Marxists' neglect of concrete analysis as well as their disengagement from progressive political movements and ideologies that might raise issues that Uno Marxists consistently neglect. Uno Marxism contains no emancipatory interest in its theoretical structure, while its methodology shields it from infusion of any progressive agenda. Indeed, Uno Marxists have been churning out endless exegetical tomes on Marxist classics. Baba's contribution was to produce one of the first serious Uno Marxist analyses of contemporary Japan. The result was a cata-strophic failure, and I think this is no accident (see also my review of Robert Albritton's book, *A Japanese Reconstruction of Marxist Theory*, in a forthcoming issue of *Review of Radical Political Economics*).

Closure, whether to new ideas or to changing reality, usually leads to dogmatism and irrelevance. Therefore, I welcome more translations of Uno, or any other schools of Marxism. Nonetheless, I hope that this does not come at the expense of neglecting to analyze the present in order to change it.

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