

# Marxism and Secular Humanism: An Excavation and Reappraisal

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## *Introduction*

The special issue of *Nature, Society and Thought (NST)*, “Religion and Freethought” (volume 9, no. 2 [1996]), is a commendable contribution to a dialogue long overdue within progressive intellectual circles. As a longtime active member of the skeptical and secular humanist community, on the one hand, and at the same time a proponent of dialectics and historical materialism on the other, I have often been frustrated by the lack of engagement between the two traditions. In my experience, a general disrespect exists among secularists for Marxism, which often is dismissed as a dogmatic or outmoded belief system similar to religion.<sup>1</sup> I have also witnessed a general disinterest on the part of Marxists for secularism, which often is seen as providing nothing new or interesting to their own perspectives. In many ways both of these attitudes are the result of misunderstandings about what these two traditions actually stand for, and I believe that a more active dialogue between the two schools is necessary.<sup>2</sup>

As a first step in this direction, the contributions in the *NST* special issue are quite encouraging. Two important articles are Norm R. Allen Jr.’s critical intervention into the important topic of religion and Black intellectuals and Lotz and Gold’s discussion of religion and the new physics (1996). As an African American, I appreciate Allen’s comments on Stephen Carter and

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Louis Farrakhan, which are insightful and long overdue in this context. Also commendable is his sharp analysis of the vacuity and confusion in the theology espoused by many Black intellectuals. Lotz and Gold's review essay on the new "God-seeking" in cosmology and physics is important because it deals with an issue of pressing concern to many skeptics and humanists—irrationalism within science itself. Their essay helps to show that such irrationalism cannot be fought simply by reference to extreme doubt or pure empiricism. Lotz and Gold make a good case for the claim that only a critical methodology like dialectics can enlighten us on how contradictory patterns of stability and disequilibrium can coexist in nature without encouraging irrationalist speculation.

The most important essay in the collection is "The Challenge of Explanation" by Fred Whitehead (1996). It is stimulating, informed, and thoughtful on many levels, and sets a tone indicative of the direction I believe this debate should take. As an attempt to establish a firm groundwork for a Marxist engagement with the issue of religion and freethought, however, his discussion is lacking or incomplete, I believe, in crucial areas.

I propose to continue this discussion by addressing some of the important weaknesses, points of contention, and possible areas of convergence existing between Marxism and secular humanism. In what follows, I shall excavate much valuable but largely forgotten or overlooked material concerning this issue, and reappraise the chances of developing a better understanding among adherents of both schools.

Four areas need greater investigation in order to advance our understanding of the relationship between Marxism and secular humanism. The first is the critical analysis of scientific explanations of religious phenomena. The second is a more thorough evaluation of specifically Marxist studies and critiques of religion. The third concerns the clarification of the role atheism plays in understanding the ontological, epistemological, and historical status of religion. The fourth is the reevaluation of the history of humanist and Marxist encounters, with a focus on the reasons why a convergence between these two essentially progressive intellectual trends has, to this point, proved so illusive.

*The problem of explanation—redirected*

Whitehead attempts in his essay to address the paradox of how Marxists can be so successful in advancing a scientific theory of society and history and yet have so much difficulty in developing a similar theory of religion. The subtext of this question is the notion that this problem relates to a general inability to overcome religion as a practice within a scientific (Enlightenment), civilization (Whitehead 1996, 135–6). Although I do not think it necessarily follows that if one can explain a phenomenon, one can overcome it, I think that, even with the added factors of need, desire, and the will to do so, it is impossible to overcome a thing that has been poorly explained or misunderstood.

Given this premise, it is important for any scientific outlook such as Marxism, which seeks not only to understand events, but to resolve social and historical contradictions within them, to confront and overcome anomalies such as the one to which Whitehead points. I would also stipulate, however, that such an analysis cannot be limited to religion, but must consist of a unified theory to explain the persistence of all forms of irrational, pseudoscientific, and antiscientific thinking and belief. Here I find both the examples cited by Whitehead inadequate. He cites Guthrie and Schumaker's studies as possible places where Marxists might begin to build a more complex understanding of religion, yet both works are too narrowly focused on an essentially psychological concept of religion. The idea that religion is essentially related either to anthropomorphism (that is, projection of personal need or drive to supernatural belief) or dissociation is too individually and therapeutically oriented to be of much use in a Marxist theory of religion, as I think Whitehead realizes (147).

As a more fruitful alternative for a Marxist engagement with a contemporary secular humanist theory of religion, I suggest Paul Kurtz's magisterial *Transcendental Temptation* (1991). Kurtz, an emeritus professor of philosophy at SUNY/Buffalo, is a leading figure in the contemporary humanist movement. His book, which attempts a unified critique of both religion and the paranormal, deals with an impressive range of topics from both a

historical and philosophical perspective. It includes critiques of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, as well as such phenomena as spiritualism, extrasensory perception, reincarnation, astrology, and UFOs.

Kurtz's thesis is that a human propensity for delusion exists, manifested in a twofold process in which conjurors and phoney prophets first seek to delude an already gullible public into accepting their (false) claims to have tapped into the powers of some otherworldly realm. Then, Kurtz argues, on another level, these claims are effective because humans desire to accept forms of "magical thinking" that promise transcendence from ordinary reality (Kurtz 1991, 23–5). The effect of this process is to undermine people's ability to develop and use critical reasoning skills. Thus, he maintains, the struggle against the transcendental temptation is crucial in a society based on reason and independent judgment (xii–xiii).

In support of his thesis, Kurtz provides some fascinating evidence drawn from both historical and religious sources indicating that, given modern knowledge, the prophets of the three great world religions—Jesus, Moses, and Muhammad—all behaved (or were said to have behaved), in a manner akin to magicians, or what we today would recognize as flimflam artists or showmen (130–5, 177–8, 211–15). This, together with the highly irrational and even demagogic nature of their messages, Kurtz argues, must have exerted a powerful appeal on their followers (168, 193, 217). Kurtz sees this power to fool, combined with the ability and willingness of many to be fooled, as dangerous and in need of criticism, not only in religion, but in pseudoscientific beliefs such as ESP and UFO-abduction stories.

Kurtz's work in this area is outstanding as a historical and logical refutation of religious and paranormal beliefs. Nevertheless, I see within it room for improvement in a specifically Marxist direction. Kurtz believes that the transcendental temptation can be confronted by educating people in a combination of skepticism, the scientific method, and what he calls "critical intelligence." Commendable as this is, his understanding of what it entails is not concrete enough. We cannot assume that by increasing quantitatively people's thinking skills and abilities we

change the qualitative content and sources of their information. Real critical intelligence needs direction and purpose; it is not just a tool, but a weapon. Often even those who know how to use it refuse to do so, because they do not understand the ends to which they are being asked to employ it.

On the question of the scientific stance itself, we need to ask what we think science reveals about the world. Influenced by pragmatism, Kurtz's presentation of the scientific method vacillates between historicist theories, such as Thomas Kuhn's concept of scientific paradigms, and various positivist conceptions of verifiability and falsifiability, like those of Hume and Karl Popper. Each, he claims, shows the advantage of a scientific approach (Kurtz 1991, 45–7). This claim ignores the fact that these theories are not only contradictory, but exist in conscious opposition to each other. Fundamentally, based on the epistemic core of their claims, if Kuhn is correct, then Popper is wrong. One of them is therefore presenting an ideology of science just as corrupting of our understanding of reality as any other false belief. These types of conflicts are regularly seized upon by irrationalists as proof of the indeterminacy of scientific theory, and thus should be avoided in favor of concrete and specific methodological principles.

Recent Marxist theory provides an example, I believe, of a conception of the scientific method that surpasses the defects inherent in both the historicist or positivist views of science. The theory is called "dialectical critical realism," and is developed by the British Marxist philosopher Roy Bhaskar. It is not necessary for the purposes of this essay to summarize the entire theory, which is highly complex.<sup>3</sup> What is relevant is to extract one of its central tenants, a concept that Bhaskar calls "transcendental realism." I believe this concept not only can help to illuminate the nature of Kurtz's transcendental temptation, but also can point to solutions not conceived of in Kurtz's own analysis.

Bhaskar argues that it is actually a necessary part of reality that we use our intelligence in an attempt to overcome (transcend) it. He claims this is so because even our most limited attempts to comprehend events reveal how transfactual tendencies exist within relatively enduring structures (1989, 91–92).

Hence, no matter how normal or stable things appear, we realize, once we reflect on them, that they do change, and are in fact changing all the time. Yet all of our understanding is predicated on the reality of events being as we currently perceive them. It is therefore in the overcoming of the contradictions between what we have been conditioned to know (ideology), and what our thinking reveals about the limits of what we know (criticism), that true understanding and hence positive action (making history), become possible (184–88).

This type of dialectical perspective reveals that two types of mystification operate in human thought. One believes too much of what it perceives, and reflects too little on what it believes (irrationalism). The other believes too little about what it perceives, and conceives too narrowly based on what is believable (positivism). What is missing in both perspectives is a clear understanding of the dialectic between the acceptance of a false belief and the reality that encourages this belief.

Kurtz's transcendental temptation is too narrowly defined. People have always sought to transcend to a new reality; the problem is in not understanding that this new reality must be rooted in the concrete potential of people to reshape their actual lives in the world. When our imagination or understanding is limited by perspectives that teach us that such transcendence is impossible or is itself an irrational impulse (the function of all dominant ideologies), it encourages the seeking of transcendence in ever more fantastic and otherworldly ways. It is only a critical methodology focused on not just understanding reality, but on changing it, that will prove effective in dealing with this paradox.

Another area dealt with by Kurtz in which Marxists might be able to improve on his insights into the nature of religion concerns the status of the critique of religious belief as a form of truth or means of understanding the world. Kurtz claims that his stance as a humanist is influenced by Socrates, Marx, Dewey, William James, and Sidney Hook (Kurtz 1991, 6). With the exception of James, these figures are united in their definitive atheism. Yet the character of their atheism differs considerably. Dewey even argues that we can refute the content of religious

beliefs while keeping alive the term “God,” as a symbol of cultural solidarity (Dewey 1934). Given such dynamics, the question remains: in moving from a transcendental idealism (religion) to a transcendental realism (Marxism/humanism), must one develop an active atheistic consciousness? Or will a more rational approach to belief necessarily follow from learning an accurate sociohistorical account of the nature of religion? These issues will be addressed in the next two sections.

### ***Confrontations between Marxism and religion***

One of the missing elements in Whitehead’s discussion is an analysis of the wider Marxist tradition of studying religion, beyond the work of Marx and Engels. The critical study of religion has played a large role within all tendencies in Marxist theory almost from the beginning. For example, one of the most widely read and influential works of classical Marxism was Karl Kautsky’s 1908 *Foundations of Christianity* (1953). A useful and ambitious overview of this subject is David McLellan’s *Marxism and Religion* (1987). Focused on Christianity, McLellan’s work is an attempt to summarize and assess nearly every major Marxist theory of religion from Marx to liberation theology. The book presents informative factual summaries of the works of particular figures and schools of thought, but suffers from some major analytic weaknesses. In an attempt to build links between Marxism and Christianity, McLellan ventures a number of questionable claims aimed at downgrading the qualitative elements of Marxism’s historical and theoretical critique of religion. Such claims cannot stand up to critical scrutiny.

McLellan shows that Marxists’ studies of religion have generally taken two forms: descriptive, in which religion is studied as a variable within a dominant mode of production; and evaluative, in which religion is judged to be a form of alienation, to be overcome by the emergence of a new form of society that has itself overcome the roots of religious alienation (McLellan 1987, 166). In assessing these positions, McLellan claims that Marxism’s evaluative critique of religion is highly questionable, while the descriptive studies of most Marxists, when critical of religion, are tentative at best, and at worst out of date. As a

practicing Catholic, McLellan clearly objects to the view that religion is an illusory phenomenon rooted in human alienation, and thus destined to pass away in the transition to an unalienated society. Against this view, he maintains that no adequate political or social theory can exclude a role for religion in its view of the future of humanity. This is because, according to McLellan, "in one way or another religion has been a deep and enduring aspect of human activity" (5).

To this argument one could respond that there have existed many enduring elements of human activity, including negative ones, such as cruelty, murder, and self-delusion. This does not mean we should either accept them as natural, or resign ourselves to them as everlasting aspects of the human condition. For example, if it were possible to show that a specific mode of social or political life is more conducive to the spreading of a practice such as cruelty, then it would be perfectly legitimate to argue that the negation of that form of society, or politics, might also negate the intensity and or duration of that practice. This is the logical essence of the Marxist conjecture about the possible disappearance of religion in an unalienated society, and McLellan's claim does not refute it.

Most of McLellan's criticisms are directed at the descriptive element of Marxist theories of religion. Still, even here he argues again that Marxists have ignored the positive role of religion in human history specifically as a shaper of human communities. On this subject, he recommends that Marxists might learn more about the nature of religion if they adopted the perspectives of classical sociologists, such as Durkheim or Weber. Both saw religion as a necessary aspect of human consciousness, either because it helps promote social solidarity (Durkheim) or because it rationalizes modes of social legitimacy (Weber) (McLellan 1987, 162). However, the defense McLellan provides for this claim is weak and evasive in that he attempts to argue that both the Durkheimian and Weberian theories of religion are compatible with historical materialism while providing evidence that this may not be necessary. For example, in weighing the merits of Marxist historical studies of religion, he admits that the empirical evidence is quite good, and points to two famous Marxist studies



of Calvinism and Methodism that give “considerable support to the general Marxist thesis about the nature and function of religion historically and politically” (McLellan 1987, 167–68). In fact, McLellan’s only strong indictment of Marxists is that they have had difficulty in explaining millennialist Christianity (168). Yet given the unique nature and minority status of such beliefs, this hardly counts as a general indictment of Marxism’s descriptive account of religion.

The real failure of McLellan’s approach to this subject is revealed in one of his concluding remarks. Marxism needs religion, as a supplement, he argues, because while Marxism is addressed to the victors and winners of history, movements like Christianity focus “on the defeated, the maimed and even the dead” (171). Although itself questionable, this claim seems to confirm the essence of one of Marx’s most famous remarks. For an outlook whose main purpose is to console the dead and defeated of history is clearly revealed to be *the opium of the people*. McLellan might respond that if his attempts to build links between Marxism and religion are questionable, what then is revealed by focusing on the confrontation between the two? The answer is that if one is concerned with the logical accuracy and historical integrity of their theories, then Marxism should be able to forge much more fruitful connections with secular humanists than with proponents of any type of theism.

The missing element in McLellan’s study is an analysis of the confrontation between Marxists and theologians over the content of their respective ontological and epistemological claims. In fact, this element seems to be missing from all contemporary debates on this subject. There was a time, however, when such confrontations were more prominent; the 1930s was such a period. An example taken from that decade shows how productive such confrontations can be and why they ought to be reexamined in any attempt to build understanding between Marxism and secular humanism.

*The Modern Monthly*, a prominent progressive interdisciplinary journal of the time, published in 1935 a series of debates on “Marxism and Religion.” The debates featured the critic V. F. Calverton and the philosopher Sidney Hook,

representing Marxism, against the theologians Reinhold Niebuhr and R. L. Calhoun, defending religion. The fact that this debate pitted one of the most influential theologians of this century (Niebuhr) against one of the most noted U.S. Marxists of the time (Hook) makes it noteworthy in any discussion of the topic.<sup>4</sup> Even more important, both sides made contributions that remain relevant to this day toward our understanding of what separates these two perspectives.

Niebuhr and Calhoun employ three arguments in defense of their position: first, that Marxism cannot be seen as separate from (and therefore superior to), religion, because its own faith and dogmas reveal it to be itself a religious doctrine. Second, they argue that Marxism and religion need not be opposed, because they have common ground on several defining issues, and thus can help each other. Third, there are areas where religion is clearly superior to Marxism as an explanation of the human condition, and therefore Marxists should seek the help of theologians in addressing these areas (Niebuhr 1935; Calhoun 1935).

In beginning their arguments, both men are quick to point out that the religion they are defending is not what Calhoun called “institutional or organized religion,” but a “prophetic religion” (Calhoun 1935, 24). Niebuhr defines prophetic religion as an attitude toward reality rooted in social purpose and pious reverence (1935, 714). To this definition Calhoun adds, “this is done so that the world conforms with God’s will” (1935, 25). Anticipating those who would label this a defense of theological dogmatism, Calhoun argues that “dependence on God’s will is no more dogmatic than a scientist acting in respect to the laws of gravity.” How this can be so is not clear, since one is comparing an unanalyzable abstraction (God’s will), with a perceptible analyzable force of nature. Yet however dubious Calhoun’s analogy, it was indicative of the level at which both men approached the subject matter.<sup>5</sup>

In defending his principal claims against Marxism, Niebuhr argues that Marxism is really a religious rather than a scientific system, because its philosophy (dialectical materialism) provides guarantees that allow Marxists to believe that the world has

meaning and life a purpose (1935, 713). At the same time, he claims that Marxism is inferior to religion in being utopian, because it supports the idea of perfectibility on earth, which for Niebuhr, “ignores the fallen imperfect nature of man” (714). Calhoun, while making in essence the same arguments, claims that Marxism’s principal weakness is its naturalistic perspective, “which does not allow it to balance human effort with respect for God’s plan” (1935, 24). He gives as a primary example of this the failure among Marxists to accept absolutist moral and ethical standards. Thus, he explains, “Marxists are willing to accept such things as brutality in pursuit of their ends, because they recognize no absolute sanctions against such behavior” (27). That Calhoun (a professor of historical theology at Yale), could ignore the history of religion in using its absolutist moral principles to justify violence, murder, and torture in pursuit of its ends is intellectual blindness quite representative, unfortunately, of both his and Niebuhr’s contributions.

Calverton and Hook, although taking different approaches to the issue, both display such weaknesses in their arguments. Calverton’s approach is historical, while Hook makes a logical critique. They converge on two points: first, that Niebuhr and Calhoun define both religion and Marxism in a conceptually inadequate way; and second, that nothing they argue affects in any way the integrity and superiority of Marxism as a method, philosophy, or science of society (Calverton 1935; Hook 1935). On the first point, Calverton quotes the humanist philosopher Corliss Lamont, who points out that Niebuhr’s definition of religion is so loose and unintelligible that it could not only apply to Marxism, “but to football, trade unionism and even poetry societies” (Calverton 1934, 716). As to the second point, Hook maintains that the Marxism these men speak of is a dogmatic and emasculated doctrine, inconsistent with Marx’s own life and works. Dialectical materialism, according to Hook, is not a philosophy that provides guarantees to the direction of history, but a method that guides concrete social action (Hook 1935, 20–21). In making a similar point, Calverton adds that even dogmatic Marxists “who defend the inevitability of communism and the infallibility of the party,” have been able to make sound

scientific judgments on other matters based on Marxist theory. "The same," he continues, "cannot be said for religious dogmatists of any persuasion" (1935, 716).

In the main, Calverton argues that Marxist theory is in no need of religion to advance itself. Defending this position, he outlines an original theory of religion based on historical-materialist principles that he had developed at length elsewhere.<sup>6</sup> Rejecting the idea that religion and Marxism are compatible projects, Calverton claims that time has stamped religion, in form and content, with the defense of reaction, which only intensifies in periods of class stratification and scientific advance. Whatever exceptions to this there might be, Calverton explains, "have always faced the wrath of the majority within the religious community and been suppressed" (1935, 720).

Hook also argues that religion and Marxism are at variance on a number of critical fronts, and that religion's own war against attempts to understand nature, society, and humanity through the empirical, historical, and experimental standards of science are irreconcilable with Marxism (1935, 30).<sup>7</sup> For the most part, Hook's essay concentrates on exploring three areas where Marxism and religion are in conflict—philosophy, ethics, and politics. Without going over this analysis in its entirety, we may identify two of Hook's points as important examples of the power of his case and thus worth repeating.

First, Hook argues that Marxism does indeed have faith in its values and principles, but he adds, faith does not equal religious faith. "The ways and means of realizing a thing can give us a right to believe our judgments are probably true." This, he pointed out, is an act of faith, but not in itself a religious act, "because it need not involve cosmic certainty or the idea that one's dogma is superior to experience or common sense" (Hook 1935, 31). The important point here is the need to avoid the common fallacy of equating a religious interpretation of a human experience with its actual meaning. That humans hope, dream, and believe in what has not yet come to pass does not mean they either accept or need accept that a supernatural force or ideal can bring these things to fruition.

On the question of ethics, and the supposed superiority of religious morality, Hook declares that “piety and absolute reverence for one’s moral standards more often than not leads to indifference and conservatism” (32). Opposed to this, he defends basing human behavior on conditional-relational situations, calling for intelligent reflection on how and why standards can and should be changed. “Frozen dogmatic moral principles,” says Hook, “do not open our minds toward helping us have *courage* in the face of what is unattainable, nor to have the *intelligence* to know how to change what we can change.” Hook’s argument is important because it shows the strength of the critical naturalist outlook advocated by Marxism in just those areas where religious apologists have always claimed superiority—in defending belief in human potential and in guiding moral judgement.

Hook makes one of his finest points in defining what role Marxism would view for religion in a world where its dogmas have been definitively refuted and its power checked. He argues that Marxists should *not* seek the eradication of religion, but only its reduction to a private matter. There it could not be used to halt or endanger the democratization of social, political, or economic life, and importantly it could not impede the movement toward the widest possible education in critical thinking (34). This argument is not unique; it was also the official position of the pre-1914 Second International. Still, Hook’s defense of it is an important reminder and clarification of the nature of Marxism’s own secularism.

One of the most fertile elements of this debate is its exposure of the appalling nature of religious apologetics as a mode of intellectual engagement. Niebuhr and Calhoun (while making essentially the same points), show skill and intelligence, but their claims for religion are imbued with fallacious reasoning; dependent on question begging, logic twisting, and vulgar mystifications; and based more on wish fulfillment than the advance of any cognitively accessible truth claims. Both men show that they are capable of criticizing the world in realistic terms, but any claims they make along these lines have only the vaguest connection to religious doctrines or practices. When they do clarify this connection, as in their reliance on the dogma of the

imperfection of man, it shows that they cannot envision religious criticism as having any qualitative effect on the world. We may conclude that religious dogma, given its conceptual and historical limitations, cannot be seen as helpful in advancing the revolutionary, scientific, or humanistic criticism of reality advocated by Marxism. This is why Marxism remains in principle committed to the criticism and overcoming of religion.

### ***Marxism and the question of atheism***

As a secular outlook, Marxism has approached the question of disbelief in at least two distinctive ways. There are those who argue that Marxism must take the stance of aggressive and vigorous atheism and attempt to stamp out all traces of religious influence. This stance is most identified with Soviet Marxism, with its authority going back to Lenin and his polemics against god-building philosophers and reactionary clericalists (McLellan 1987, 95–98). At the other extreme, there is the claim that Marxism has no need for an active atheism, since as a civilization advances all traditional modes of expression become enveloped into the practical needs of that civilization. Thus, under capitalism religion becomes more and more a veil for exchange relations, and hence a more or less unconscious atheism encompasses our lives. This latter position represents the views expressed by Marx himself about the future of religion in the first volume of *Capital* (1967, 171).

It may seem that these two positions negate each other, but on a more complex level one can argue that an active critique of theism complements an understanding that the power of theistic claims is in a natural state of decline, regardless of the level of opposition these claims face.

The complexities and contradictions of Western culture over the past three hundred years provide ample evidence that much of what Marx thought about religion has come to pass. The question is what has become of our ability to comprehend events when we live in a culture that has effectively negated religious belief, even as it obscures this fact by encouraging religious practices.

An important attempt to help to understand this dynamic is a largely overlooked work by the late Michael Harrington, *The Politics at God's Funeral* (1983). The title, echoing a poem by Heinrich Heine, refers to the widely argued claim that since the seventeenth century, Western societies and those shaped by them have been ruled by the logic of a political atheism. *God*, as unifier and legitimizer of power and authority, has been killed, and according to Harrington, piously buried by his still reverent, but now agnostic, followers (1983, 3–5). Among the effects of our not understanding what Harrington calls “God’s Christian burial” are a crisis of motivated noncoerced obedience, a compulsory hedonism, and the emergence of totalitarianism as a substitute for religious certainty and solidarity (8). As theologians labor to build a new faith without an actual ontological God, they leave behind to address the great questions of existence only those able to comprehend the world as an inverted reality: what was once certain (God) is now uncertain, and what was once irrelevant (the world) is now central.

The core of Harrington’s study is a survey of the entire history of Western thought, including philosophy, political theory, psychology, sociology, history, and theology, from Kant to Habermas. This survey is both learned and eloquent, and although one might quibble with interpretations here and there, his central theme—that the history of all modern Western thought addresses, in one way or another, the death of the political God—is well supported. His conclusion is that only the emergence of a new universalist political morality unifying both nonbelievers and believers can settle the politics at God’s funeral. Harrington’s candidate for this new morality is a renewed, Marxist-influenced, democratic socialism (210).

Another version of this thesis is given, from a different point of view, by the neo-Aristotelian philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre. In a review of the state of modern theology, MacIntyre argues that it is dangerous for religious thinkers to assume that atheism is some minority creed that can be safely ignored as an eccentricity. Instead, he argues, it is the express basis for most people’s lives—although, he adds, this is not a simple thing to understand. “The problem’s difficulty,” says MacIntyre, “lies in a

combination of atheism in the practice and life of the vast majority, with the profession of either superstition or theism by the same majority” (MacIntyre 1971, 26). The real issue is not in exposing and denouncing this atheism, which few are aware of, or can comprehend, but in trying “to find out why the creed of the English is that there is no God and that it is wise to pray to him from time to time.” Whatever this implies, it is not a theological question.

If we take MacIntyre’s question, and replace the word *English* with the term *modernist*, we can identify the fundamental contradiction that Marxists should be attempting to address in understanding the role of atheism in contemporary civilization. This is not just a question of analyzing sloppy thinking or willful blindness; it is more an issue of what Jürgen Habermas has termed “communicative irrationality.” This involves the deliberate distortion of rational modes of understanding in favor of an obscurantism that enables us to unify our acceptance of the system in which we live with the rejection of the values it seems to support (Habermas 1989, 227–28). Through this type of distortion, many are able to see themselves as spiritual, heaven-centered beings while acting in a very earthly, material-centered way. (This is especially evident within the nondenominational Protestant clergy of the United States).

The roots of our understanding of this dynamic and bourgeois civilization’s need for it lie in Marx and Engels’s critique of the state of German philosophy in the 1840s. They argue (contrary to the young Hegelians) that the rational criticism of a mystification or delusion is not enough to overcome it. This is so because, just as certain concepts arise as a result of their being conducive to supporting certain modes of social development, entirely different sets of concepts are necessary to hold those relations in place. When the antinomies of existence begin to expose the weaknesses of these concepts, ultimate contradictions in this process force them to become more and more removed from actual social realities. The irony of this process is that as concepts begin to obscure our comprehension of underlying realities, they become more effective in holding social relations in place, thus



impeding our ability to change them without conscious struggle (Marx and Engels 1976).

Understanding this helps to clarify the meaning behind Marx's statement that religion is "the opium of the people." Religion, Marx was arguing, becomes so effective in combating the symptoms of real suffering in bourgeois society such as alienation, anomie, and helplessness that it convinces its followers that no actual cure for the real underlying causes of their suffering is necessary, or in some cases, even possible. Modifying this perspective somewhat, I would argue that knowing this, one should not focus directly on the underlying causes of mystifications, as if they were apparent to all seeing eyes. Instead, one should deal directly with the power of abstractions to capture and shape our lives. Those mystified usually see themselves as thinking quite clearly, because their vision and the mystification have become unified in their minds. This unity must be undone, but one cannot simply point in the right direction and say, "you are cured!" To overcome a false vision, one must understand and negate it.

To paraphrase Marx, the struggle against illusions requires the critique of heaven *within* (not instead of) the critique of the earth. Therefore, if ours is an atheistic reality within a mystified theistic shell, it is necessary for Marxists to become involved in using their tools to advance criticism and evaluation of the nature and history of this mystification. In order to accomplish this, it will be essential to combine the analysis of religion as a social phenomenon with a critique of the content of theistic beliefs as historical and philosophical truth claims. This is the essence of the dual nature of Marxism's relation to atheism.<sup>8</sup>

### ***Marxism and the freethought tradition***

Freethought has been one the most attractive areas of convergence for radical and secular thinkers in U.S. history. Among the giants of this tradition who were also major figures of the Left are Thomas Paine, Frederick Douglass, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Clarence Darrow and (too often overlooked), Robert Ingersoll.<sup>9</sup> Although their freethought took many forms, from deism to atheism, today this tradition is venerated and studied almost

exclusively by secularists. For our purposes, there are two reasons for mentioning the relations between the progressivism of these individuals and their commitment to freethought. First, they were all outstanding public intellectuals, whose criticisms of religious dogmas are well known. The ability to be a successful public dissenter in such a sensitive area is something well worth respect and study. Second, none of them was associated with socialist or Marxist thinking in any significant way. A possible reason for this is that the great freethinkers in general were very individualistic in orientation, and thus identified with the outer reaches of liberalism. Their own difficult breaks with pious upbringings made them very weary of the mass or systematic belief systems that they often associated with religion.

An important negative aspect of the individualism of the great freethinkers is that its legacy has left many modern exponents of freethought too susceptible to the association of Marxism with dogmatic and discredited offshoots that resemble religions in form and content, such as Stalinism. In addition, many humanists, in rejecting Marxism, have embraced instead a narrow empiricism and vulgar positivism as the only philosophical systems compatible with a scientific outlook. These systems encourage modes of thinking so antithetical to Marxism's own methods that misunderstanding is almost inevitable. All this notwithstanding, I would argue that the results of these great misunderstandings can be overcome by a more healthy dialogue between the two traditions.

The actual record of attempted convergences of Marxism and secular humanism, however, has not been encouraging. For example, two of the most influential and well-known American humanists of this century—Corliss Lamont and Sidney Hook—had very tenuous relationships with Marxism. Although these men traveled down very divergent paths, they had much in common; both were students of John Dewey, for example, and both became exponents of pragmatic naturalism. Neither can be said to have advanced the connection between Marxism and their pragmatist-influenced humanism in any lasting manner. Yet their cases tell us much about what has gone wrong in the many encounters between the two traditions thus far.

Lamont wrote on humanism from a point of view in line with the main currents of Anglo-American thought. At the same time, he called himself a socialist, as defined by Soviet standards, and made common cause financially and intellectually with Marxists, although not necessarily with Marxism (Lamont 1974, xii). In fact, Lamont shows little respect for integral aspects of Marxist theory, such as dialectical logic, which he often attacked as incoherent. Lamont seems never to have understood the unity of elements within Marxist thought. For example, in a critique of the Marxist philosopher Howard Selsam, Lamont claims that while Marxist economic and social theory had made unique and important contributions to modern thought, we may dismiss dialectics as offering nothing of originality ontologically or epistemologically (86). This ignores the question of whether Marxist dialectics is primarily involved in such areas, and, more importantly, it misunderstands that Marxism has only been able to make unique contributions in other areas with the aid of the dialectical methodology by which it arrives at its conclusions.

An example of why this method is important can be taken from Lamont's own writings on the subject of religion and Marxism. In the late 1930s, Lamont engaged in an interesting exchange with the British Marxist scientist Joseph Needham over the way to attract religious people to socialism. At one point in his discussion, Lamont argues that the matter is complicated by a problem of language. The difficulty lies in Marxism's insistence on using the term *materialist* to describe its worldview. Lamont calls this term objectionable to religious-minded persons because "in the English speaking world the term materialism is associated with the crass worship of material objects" (Lamont 1937, 497). As a solution, he suggests that Marxists use the more pleasant sounding "socialist humanism" to describe their outlook.

This may seem like a harmless quibble, but it is indicative of a very *undialectical* approach to this problem. We cannot raise consciousness by deception. There is a qualitative difference between what is connoted by the term *materialist* and the term *humanist*, and thus they are not interchangeable. This is not the main point, however, and the problem of language that Lamont

identifies is much more complex than his suggestion implies. A central contradiction of bourgeois society is exposed here: in a society ruled by the fetishism of commodities, many still seek consolation in a spiritualist ideology that renounces the very ideals essential to the nature of that society.

The real confusion in this discussion lies with those who would reject the idea of worshiping objects, but who are then willing to do nothing to change the reality that underlies this worship, except in the comforting spirituality of their own minds. This contradiction embodies the very dialectical logic of the unity of opposites that Lamont dismisses as useless for furthering our understanding. As a result of his methodological blindness, Lamont ventures a cure for a problem he has not yet properly diagnosed.

In terms of his practical political commitments, Lamont did represent one of the most advanced attempts by a secular humanist thinker at a convergence with Marxism. Nonetheless, his disregard of the methodological integrity of Marxist theory was, I believe, counterproductive in not allowing him to advance the philosophical unity of the two traditions. Hook's case is even more problematic. In the period of his most significant philosophical output, from the early 1930s to the mid 1940s, Hook made original and suggestive contributions to both Marxism and humanism. Yet his originality and usefulness in both areas seemed to collapse as he became preoccupied with renouncing his former political and philosophical commitments to Marxism.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, leaving aside Hook's famous attempt to connect Marxism with Deweyian pragmatism, if we look at his work from this period, his analysis of religion remains interesting.

In a series of essays in the early 1940s, Hook sought to refute the idea promoted by a growing number of intellectuals that the great crises of the modern world (war, poverty, totalitarianism), called for a renewal of religious conviction. Hook calls this "a failure of nerve" on the part of otherwise intelligent persons to defend modern knowledge. He refutes the idea that religious dogma advances ethical, philosophical, or scientific concepts in any positive manner, by showing that the same religious

doctrines have been used with equal certainty the world over to defend fascism, democracy, or theocratic authoritarianism (Hook 1961, 82–83). As to the actual integrity of religion itself, Hook argues that by the most exacting logical standards, the existence of God is a hypothesis of exceptionally low probability. In addition he shows that most of the leading theologians of our time, such as Reinhold Niebuhr and Paul Tillich, are virtual atheists defending a generally fallacious concept of religious truth that reduces the idea of God to a moral imperative or a psychological need (133). Hook calls for a renewed commitment to scientific knowledge, critical intelligence, and democratic socialism as the only means of dealing with the dilemmas of our age (101–2).

In his later years, however, Hook abandoned such insights in favor of a forty-year career as an apologist for the Cold War and U.S. imperialism. In the decade before his death in 1989, Hook was making common cause with such proponents of political reaction as Ronald Reagan and William F. Buckley Jr.—men whose religious and political views Hook (still a secular humanist) should have viewed as absurd and dangerous. Hook did make occasional asides against the religious Right, and continued to call himself a social democrat, but his writings in this period lack the vigor, persistence, and originality of his works when his humanist commitments were linked with Marxism.<sup>11</sup>

### *Conclusion*

It is against this record of lost engagements, misunderstandings, and promises unfulfilled that both Marxists and secular humanists should continue to work. Our historical period is increasingly becoming one of heightened political reaction and rampant irrationalism, with the growth of Kurtz's "transcendental temptation" daily evident in all our popular media. What is needed is the emergence of significant public intellectuals who can combine the most sophisticated elements of Marxist and humanist theory with a persuasive and popular appeal that replicates the success of the best figures of the freethought tradition. The overview presented here is intended to provide the necessary arguments to show why this should be so. That such a convergence has not yet become prominent remains a major gap in our

social, philosophical, and political life, but with the revival of discussions in this area perhaps we need not think of this convergence as being very far off.

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#### NOTES

1. It is interesting, given this opinion, to point out that two of the most respected figures in contemporary skepticism and humanism, the late astronomer Carl Sagan and the biologist Stephen Jay Gould, both have expressed positive attitudes toward Marxism. However, Sagan's position was more implicit, as in his naming of Trotsky's *History of the Russian Revolution* (1932) as a pivotal book in shaping his politics. See Sagan 1995, 414–15. Gould, on the other hand, has made quiet explicit defenses of Marxism, including defenses of Engels's stature as a scientific thinker and of the usefulness of dialectical categories in scientific analysis. See Gould 1977, 210–11 and 1987, 153–54.

2. It should be pointed out that misunderstanding cannot account for all opposition between secular humanists and Marxists, for many humanists approach secularism from a libertarian perspective that is incompatible with Marxism.

3. Bhaskar's method has evolved over the years from a simple defense of scientific realism, to a growing convergence with Marxism, to a full embrace of the dialectical tradition, of which he argues Marxism is the most advanced representative. In its simplest form, dialectical critical realism argues that scientific knowledge is not dependent on the accumulation of facts that either verify or falsify hypotheses. Nor is it simply based on the successful justification of recognized paradigms; instead, it is the successful overcoming of socially imposed limits on understanding through the mastery of the reality of the nonsocial world that makes knowledge scientific. Critical realist science is associated with Marxism because it is ontologically *transformational*, rather than reificationist (as in positivism), or voluntarist (as in historicism), and epistemologically *relationalist*, rather than individualist (empiricism), or collectivist (idealism). Bhaskar is a difficult technical philosopher, and this summary, taken from his magnum opus, *Dialectic: The Pulse of Freedom* (1993), cannot do justice to this mentally exhausting work. Andrew Collier has made a valiant attempt at simplifying this project (1994).

4. Hook's reputation as a Marxist thinker has been obscured by his long career as a Cold War crusader. The chief contemporary defender of the importance of the young Marxist Hook is Christopher Phelps, with a full-scale reevaluation (1997). For a more critical, but still sympathetic view, see Alan Wald 1987. Wald is especially insightful in exploring the lack of candor and intellectual rigor that went into Hook's break with Marxism.

5. An excellent critique of Niebuhr's theology, focusing on his theory of religious truth, is found in Walter Kaufmann's *Critique of Religion and Philosophy* (1958). Kaufmann argues that rather than a fulfillment, Niebuhr's prophetic religion is the outright antithesis of the ethic of Jesus in being aggressive and unprudential (298). He concludes that Niebuhr's theology is a contrived, erudite rationalization in which his convictions come first and his scholarship second (303). Thus, for Niebuhr, religion becomes amazingly flexible in being able to adapt to whatever shifting (secular) position he happens to be defending.

6. Calverton's theory of religion is presented in full in his 1934 *Passing of the Gods*. This work is an ambitious example in the field of Marxist studies of religion. Though, empirically the book shows the limits of its time, it combines a sociological and psychological theory of religion with a political critique of the practices of religious groups that is still of interest.

7. A useful summary of the opposition religion has advanced against scientific progress is Bertrand Russell's *Religion and Science* (1934). In the introduction to a recent reissue of this work, Michael Ruse reminds readers that positions such as Russell's violent opposition to religion, should be distinguished from those who would merely separate religion and science as different realms of knowledge (Ruse 1997). I would argue that Marxism takes neither position, but seeks to overcome religion by scientifically studying the roots of religious consciousness, while at the same time addressing their manifestations in contemporary society. This can only be done by taking the ontological and ethical questions religion claims to answer seriously, a point many positivists like Russell seem to ignore (see for example, chapter 9 in *Religion and Science*).

8. Interestingly, one of the leading contemporary atheist thinkers, the philosopher Kai Nielson, is also a Marxist. However, his work in both fields seems separate and it cannot be said he has advanced any specifically Marxist theory of atheism. This perhaps might be due to his commitment to analytic philosophy. Compare, for example, his 1990 *Ethics Without God* with his 1988 *Marxism and the Moral Point of View*.

9. Robert Ingersoll (1833–1899) remains one of the great forgotten figures of the American past. Known as a powerful voice against religious dogma, he was also a champion of racial justice, women's equality, and civil liberties. A good selection of his nearly intoxicating eloquence is found in a volume edited by Roger E. Greeley (1990).

10. Hook's posthumous collection of essays, *Convictions* (1990), is dominated by antileft polemics against affirmative action, multiculturalism, and radical critiques of U.S. history. Yet, Hook's own stated "convictions" in favor of social democracy and secular humanism are (notably) nearly imperceptible.

11. Those interested in Hook's drift to the right, as well as his comradely relations with the icons of modern reaction, can read his own defense of these actions in his autobiography, *Out of Step* (1987). In many ways, Hook condemns himself. For example, in a section where he defends his votes for Ronald Reagan, Hook claims that he had no trouble with this (as a socialist),

because, with no real expertise in economic theory, he had no specific critique of Reaganomics (590)! Such galling disingenuousness seems hardly worth the effort.

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### Another View of Chomsky

Michael Parenti

In the April 1999 *Monthly Review* (50, no. 11:40–47), Robert McChesney gives what amounts to an encomium to Noam Chomsky. McChesney credits the MIT professor with (a) leading the battle for democracy against neoliberalism, (b) demonstrating “the absurdity of equating capitalism with democracy” (44), and (c) being the first to expose the media’s complicity with the ruling class. I would suggest that in these several areas credit for leading the way goes to the generations of Marxist writers and other progressive thinkers who fought the good fight well before Chomsky made his substantial and much appreciated contributions.

More important is the question of Chomsky’s politics. McChesney says that Chomsky can be “characterized as an anarchist or, perhaps more accurately, a libertarian socialist” (43). “Libertarian socialist” is a sweeping designation, safely covering both sides of the street. Of course, the ambiguity is not McChesney’s but Chomsky’s. As far as I know, Chomsky has never offered a clear explication of his anarcho-libertarian-socialist ideology. That is to say, he has never explained to us how it would manifest itself in organized political struggle or actual social construction.

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McChesney says that Noam Chomsky has been a persistent “opponent and critic of Communist and Leninist political states and parties” (43). I would add that, as a “critic,” Chomsky has yet to offer a systematic critique of existing Communist parties and states. (Not that many others have.) Here is a sampling of Chomsky’s views on Communism and Leninism:

In an interview in *Perception* (March/April 1996), Chomsky tells us: “The rise of corporations was in fact a manifestation of the same phenomena that led to Fascism and Bolshevism, which sprang out of the same totalitarian soil.” Like Orwell and most bourgeois opinion makers and academics, Chomsky treats Communism and fascism as totalitarian twins, offering no class analysis of either, except to assert that they are both rooted in some unspecified way to today’s corporate domination.

In *Z Magazine* (October 1995), four years after the Soviet Union had been overthrown, Chomsky warns us of “left intellectuals” who try to “rise to power on the backs of mass popular movements” and “then beat the people into submission. . . . You start off as basically a Leninist who is going to be part of the Red bureaucracy. You see later that power doesn’t lie that way, and you very quickly become an ideologist of the Right. . . . We’re seeing it right now in the Soviet Union [sic]. The same guys who were communist thugs two years back, are now running banks and [are] enthusiastic free marketeers and praising America.”

In its choice of words and ahistorical crudity, this statement is rather breathtaking. The Leninist “communist thugs” did not “very quickly” switch to the right after rising to power. For more than seventy years, they struggled in the face of momentous Western capitalist and Nazi onslaughts to keep the Soviet system alive. To be sure, in the USSR’s waning days, many like Boris Yeltsin crossed over to capitalism’s ranks, but other Reds continued to resist free-market incursions at great cost to themselves, many meeting their deaths during Yeltsin’s violent repression of the Russian parliament in 1993.

In the same *Perception* interview cited above, Chomsky offers another embarrassingly ill-informed comment about Leninism: “Western and also Third World intellectuals were attracted to the Bolshevik counterrevolution [sic] because

Leninism is, after all, a doctrine that says that the radical intelligentsia have a right to take state power and to run their countries by force, and that is an idea which is rather appealing to intellectuals.” Here Chomsky fashions a cartoon image of ruthless intellectuals to go along with his cartoon image of ruthless Leninists. They do not want the power to end hunger, they merely hunger for power.

In his book *Powers and Prospects* (1996, 83), Chomsky begins to sound like Ronald Reagan when he announces that Communism “was a monstrosity,” and “the collapse of tyranny” in Eastern Europe and Russia is “an occasion for rejoicing for anyone who values freedom and human dignity.” Tell that to the hungry pensioners and child prostitutes in Gorky Park. I treasure freedom and human dignity as much as anyone, yet I find no occasion for rejoicing. The post-Communist societies do not represent a net gain for such values. If anything, what we are witnessing is a colossal victory for gangster capitalism in the former Soviet Union, the strengthening of the most retrograde forms of global capitalism and economic inequality around the world, a heartless and unrestrained increase in imperialistic aggression, and a serious setback for revolutionary liberation struggles everywhere.

We should keep in mind that Chomsky’s political underdevelopment is shared by many on the left whose critical views of “corporate America” represent their full ideological grasp of the political world. Be he an anarcho-libertarian or libertarian-socialist or anarcho-syndicalist-socialist or just an anarchist, Chomsky appeals to many of the young and not so young. For he can evade all the hard questions about organized struggle, the search for a revolutionary path, the need to develop and sustain a mass resistance, the necessity of developing armed socialist state power that can defend itself against the capitalist counterrevolutionary onslaught, and all the attendant problems, abuses, mistakes, victories, defeats, and crimes of Communist revolutionary countries and their allies.

What we used to say about the Trotskyites can apply to the Chomskyites: they support every revolution except those that succeed. (Cuba might be the exception. Chomsky usually leaves

that country unmentioned in his sideswipes at existing or once-existing Communist countries.) Most often, organized working-class struggles and vanguard parties are written off by many on the left (including Chomsky) as “Stalinist,” a favorite, obsessional pejorative made all the more useful by remaining forever undefined; or “Leninist,” which is Chomsky’s code word for Communist governments and movements that have actually gained state power and fought against the west to stay in power. Through all this label-slinging, no recognition is given to the horrendous battering such countries and movements endure from the Western imperialists. No thought is given to the enormously distorting impact of capitalist counterrevolutionary power upon the development of existing and once-existing Communist governments, nor the evils of international capitalism that the Communists and their allies were able to hold back, evils that are becoming more and more apparent to us today.

Bereft of a dialectical grasp of class power and class struggle, Chomsky and others have no critical defense against the ideological anti-Communism that inundates the Western world, especially the United States. This is why, when talking about the corporations, Chomsky can sound as good as Ralph Nader, and when talking about existing Communist movements and society, he can sound as bad as any right-wing pundit.

In sum, I cannot join McChesney in heaping unqualified praise upon Noam Chomsky’s views. When Chomsky departs from his well-paved road of anticorporate exposé and holds forth on Communism and Leninism, he shoots from the hip with disappointingly facile and sometimes incomprehensible pronouncements. We should expect something better from our “leading icon of the Left.”

*Berkeley, California*

Michael Parenti’s most recent books are *Dirty Truths*, *Blackshirts and Reds* and *America Besieged*, all published by City Lights, San Francisco.

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## **MARXIST FORUM**

*Nature, Society, and Thought* initiated with vol. 6, no. 1 a special section called “Marxist Forum” to publish programmatic materials from political parties throughout the world that are inspired by the communist idea. This section makes available to our readers (insofar as space restrictions permit) a representative cross section of approaches by these parties and their members to contemporary problems, domestic and international. Our hope is to stimulate thought and discussion of the issues raised by these documents, and we invite comments and responses from readers.



# **An Appeal for Protest against Biohazard in Tokyo and “Science without Conscience”**

**Shingo Shibata**

## ***Background***

In a previous paper entitled “Toward Prevention of Biohazards: For Human Rights in the Age of Emerging New Pathogens and Biotechnology” (1997a), I explained the background of the issues considered in this paper. They might be outlined as follows: The origin and history of the Japanese National Institute of Health (JNIH), originally established in 1947, and its successor, the National Institute of Infectious Diseases (NIID), renamed in 1997.

The theoretical background of the civil rights campaign against the choice of site for the JINH-NIID. Located at a small site in one of the most populated residential areas in Tokyo, the JNIH-NIID deals with various kinds of dangerous pathogens, genetically modified organisms (GMOs), and a large quantity of organic solvents and radioisotopes, as well as tens of thousands of laboratory animals. The site is adjacent to many dwellings and housing complexes, two welfare facilities for handicapped persons; Waseda University with tens of thousands of students; a major hospital; and the legally designated sites for refugees in case of emergency, major earthquakes, or fires.

The JNIH made public its plan to move to this site in July 1986. Since January 1987, together with my colleagues and friends, I have continued to raise many questions and related issues about the safety and location of the JNIH with its directors

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and have requested them to reply. To our surprise, they did not reply. Moreover, the JNIH took a strong position against us—residents, handicapped people, and Waseda University—virtually telling us to “shut up!” Meanwhile, the mayor and the city assembly of Shinjuku-ku, a ward with a population of about 270,000, have continued to urge the JNIH to refrain from constructing the laboratory. In spite of all these protests and appeals, in December 1988, the JNIH dared to mobilize the riot police and to begin its construction backed by force.

In response, I, together with two hundred colleagues, residents, and thirty Waseda University professors, brought a lawsuit against the JNIH, seeking to have its construction transferred out of our residential area and its experiments in this area halted.

At the Tokyo District Court, the JNIH contended that it was “completely safe” because its biosafety conditions were in compliance with the regulations recommended by the World Health Organization’s *Laboratory Biosafety Manual* (1983, 1993). We completely refuted such arguments and proved that the JNIH was dangerous to the residents, handicapped persons, and students and staff of Waseda University, as well as the public. Since our suit began, almost ten years have passed. Our arguments have convinced the public of the justice of our cause. As a result, the mayor and the City Assembly of Shinjuku-ku, Tokyo, have continued to ask the JNIH halt its experiments. Even the Minister of the Environment Agency told the Diet that he did not think that the location of the JNIH was “appropriate.”

In 1995–1996 the misdeeds of the JNIH were under fire from the public and mass media (Shibata 1997a). One such misdeed was the infection of many hemophiliacs with HIV through JNIH-approved blood products. Nevertheless, its director general, Shudo Yamazaki, openly declared that he would never apologize to the victims and nation for these misdeeds. In the face of the public denunciation, however, the Ministry of Health and Welfare could not but rename “the JNIH” as “the NIID” on 1 April 1997.

In 1997 we proposed that the court invite a British microbiologist of international repute, Dr. C. H. Collins, the coordinating editor of the WHO biosafety manual and another WHO

publication (1997), to submit his inspection report to the court. As a result, the NIID could not but reluctantly accept our proposal, with the condition that it invite two U.S. scientists, V. R. Oviatt and Dr. J. Y. Richmond. Mr. Oviatt was the Head of the Environmental Health and Safety Division at the National Institute of Health (NIH) in Bethesda, Maryland, and is retired in Scotland. Dr. Richmond is Director, Office of Health and Safety, the Center for Disease Control (CDC), in Atlanta. In order to make the inspection fair and balanced, Dr. Collins recommended to us that his colleague, Dr. David A. Kennedy, be another member of the British inspection team. Dr. Kennedy was a principal technology officer at the Medical Devices Agency, Department of Health, in the United Kingdom, from 1968 to 1996, as well as a WHO advisor on medical devices. He is Visiting Fellow at the Cranfield Biomedical Centre, Cranfield University, U.K.

The NIID insisted that Drs. Collins and Kennedy be allowed to enter the laboratory on only one day, 18 June 1997, that the number of our interpreters be restricted to one, and that the facilities available for the inspection by Drs. Collins and Kennedy would also be restricted. The NIID went further, forbidding the tape recording of all oral explanations given during the inspection, as well as any photography on the site. Essentially, the NIID wanted to conduct its own inspection, rejecting that of Drs. Collins and Kennedy. Thus, the NIID dictated nearly all the conditions of the inspection, rudely rejecting what should have been a free inspection by Drs. Collins and Kennedy. *Nevertheless, under such restrictions, the international inspection by the two groups of scientists took place on 18 June 1997.*

The deadline for the plaintiffs and the defendant to submit each report of their invited inspectors to the court was 29 August 1997. On 28 August, we submitted to the court the report by Drs. Collins and Kennedy (hereafter, C/K) along with its Japanese translation (Collins and Kennedy 1997). The NIID received them from the court the next day. But it was twelve days later than the deadline, on 10 September, that the NIID submitted to the court the report by Oviatt and Richmond (hereafter O/R) and its Japanese translation (Oviatt and Richmond 1997a).

This suggested that there was a possibility for the leading staff of the NIID to have faxed the C/K report to Oviatt and Richmond so that they would have the opportunity of modifying their original report to counteract statements in the C/K report.

It was also strange that the O/R report was undated. In my opinion, O/R may have omitted the date intentionally.

Our civil rights campaign against the JNIH-NIID site has been widely reported in Japan. There have been over one thousand articles reported in the mass media as well as over three hundred articles published in many leading journals. There have been more than ten books, apart from my own three books, that warned the public of the danger of the relocated JNIH-NIID. Almost all of them were critical of the JNIH-NIID, while very few favored it. Moreover, leading overseas scientific journals, including *Nature* and *Science*, paid appropriate attention to our campaign (Hesse 1992; Heim 1992; Swinbanks 1992; Shibata 1993; Normile 1998; Collins and Kennedy 1998). It can therefore be said that the hazardous location issue of the JNIH-NIID has been brought before the world court of the scientific community and public opinion.

***Accusation of NIID's forgery; denunciation  
of the conspiracy of the two U.S. inspectors***

Several months after the deadline—that is, in March 1998—we had an opportunity to compare the signatures of Oviatt and Richmond with those in the O/R report. They seemed to be quite different.

You are asked to examine the signatures on the opposite page. The signatures O-1 and R-1 are copies of the signatures in the letters of Oviatt (8 November 1995) and of Richmond (9 November 1995), each of which was addressed to Dr. Shudo Yamazaki, Director General of the NIID. We had the copies of these letters made from the originals that were submitted to the court as the defendant's documentary evidences No. 43 and No. 45.

In contrast, the signatures O-2 and R-2 are copies of the signatures from their report.

I think that the signatures O-1 and R-1 must be genuine, because they are each from letters of Oviatt and Richmond. But it did not seem even to the eyes of untrained observers that each of signatures O-1 and O-2, as well as each of signatures R-1 and R-2, was signed by the same person. The signatures are copies of the signatures in the letters of Oviatt (8 November 1995) and of Richmond (9 November 1995), each of which was addressed to Dr. Shudo Yamazaki, Director General of the NIID. We had the copies of these letters made from the originals that were submitted to the court as the defendant's documentary evidences No. 43 and No. 45.

Therefore, we asked a leading expert on handwriting analysis to give us an expert opinion on the signatures. He was Mr. Kazuyoshi Ichikawa, a former chief researcher of handwriting analysis at the Institute of Police Science attached to the National Police Agency and then a lecturer of forensic medicine at the Nippon University. *He carefully examined the signatures in question and reported that they were surely forged by another person.*

On this basis, on 19 June 1998, *we accused some leading staff of the NIID of the crime of forgery of an important legal*

document before the Tokyo Prosecutors' Office. At this stage, the Japanese mass media generally did not give much coverage to the case. Only after the police have arrested an accused or the prosecutors' office has brought an accusation against the accused does the mass media give big coverage to such an accusation.

But in this case, the daily *Tokyo Shimbun* (20 June 1998) gave major coverage to our accusation. According to the newspaper article, the NIID reportedly refused to answer questions raised by its reporter. A few months later, the 7 September 1998 issue of *AERA*, one of *Asahi Shimbun's* most prestigious weeklies in Japan, published a detailed report under the title "The NIID forged the signatures of two U.S. scientists."

On 2 July 1998, the Tokyo Prosecutors' Office officially accepted our accusation. As the crime was committed behind closed doors at the NIID, we could not identify the name(s) of the criminal(s), but we suggested that Dr. Shudo Yamazaki, Director General of the NIID and/or Dr. Takeshi Kurata, Director of the Department of Pathology of the NIID, were surely involved in the crime.

There is no doubt that such a forgery should be considered not only as one of the most serious crimes committed against the court by a governmental scientific institute, but also as one of the most shameful crimes against all scientists here and abroad. *It should be regarded not only as one of the most infamous scandals in the Japanese history of jurisprudence and science but of the world as well.*

Immediately after the disclosure of the crime of forgery committed by the NIID, we sent a fax message of inquiry about the signatures to both Mr. Oviatt and Dr. Richmond. We only asked them whether or not the signatures in question were their own. They never replied.

A few weeks later, we called Oviatt and Richmond and asked their opinion on the forgery. *To our amazement, they replied without flinching that they had, in fact, allowed the leading staff of the NIID to sign their names.* Oviatt said that he was writing to the Tokyo District Court (TDC) to testify that he certainly had allowed the NIID to sign his name. Richmond also said that the

same report, this time with their “genuine signatures and new dates,” would be submitted to the TDC.

On the 2 October 1998, having been forced to respond to our accusation, the NIID could not but submit to the TDC a copy of the “new” report of its inspection, this time with what it called “true” signatures of O/R, together with copies of Oviatt’s letter of 30 June and of Richmond’s letter of 1 July 1998, both of which were addressed to Dr. Kurata. *By virtue of these submissions, O/R confessed that the crime of forgery had been committed by Kurata with their approval.*

As to the newly submitted report, the signatures in question seemed to be “true,” but it was strange that, again, neither of the two signatures was dated. (Oviatt is retired in Scotland, while Richmond lives in Georgia, in the United States.) I have already suggested the reason why the previous and undated version of the O/R report was submitted to the TDC 12 days later than the deadline.

Richmond, in his above letter, called their report “the report dated June 18, 1997.” Such a date is nothing but a fiction, because it is the date that the inspections by the two different groups of the inspectors—that is, the British group on behalf of us, the plaintiffs as well as the U.S. one on behalf of the NIID, the defendant—took place at the laboratories of the NIID. The fact that there were still no dates of the signatures in the new version of the O/R report suggested that it was impossible for O/R to date the report. This fact again cast doubt on the so-called “true” signatures of O/R.

In the forged version of the report, Richmond titled himself as “Director, Office of Health and Safety, WHO Collaborating Centre for Applied Biosafety Programmes and Training[,] Centres for Disease Control and Prevention.” But in the new version, he deleted these titles. This means that he intentionally assumed that the official and prestigious title used in the forged version would deceive the TDC, the plaintiffs, the public, and the scientific community here and abroad. Nevertheless, he neither gave the reasons for nor apologized for his deception about the title to the TDC and others.

The letter of Oviatt deserves to be cited: “This letter affirms that I asked and authorized you to *reproduce my signature* and *affix* it to the report” (emphasis added).

The letter of Richmond also deserves to be cited: “I gave you *permission to ‘sign my name’ to the final* report. . . . I understand at the time that there was a need to file the report *in a timely manner* and that there was not *time to get our signatures*” (emphasis added).

It is noteworthy that the word “final” report suggests that there was a prior report, and that *the final one was completed by Kurata. It was finally printed using an NIID printer.* So it appears that Oviatt honestly wrote that he asked Kurata to “affix” his reproduced signature to the final report.

In a similar way, Richmond also confessed, “there was not *time to get our signatures.*” If the final one was completed and printed by O/R themselves, they would have never written in such a way, “there was not *time to get our signatures.*”

So the letters of O/R themselves confessed that the *final* text was completed and printed by the NIID, and that Kurata, who had to “*get our (O/R) signatures,*” asked *permission* to “*reproduce my (Oviatt’s) signature*” or to “*sign my (Richmond’s) name*” from O/R, and that *then*, O/R gave him “*permission.*” In this case, there is no doubt that *Kurata initiated the request “to get their signatures.”* Responding to the request, then, O/R gave him the “*permission.*” If not, O/R should have never used the word “*permission.*”

Richmond confirmed, “there was a need to file the report *in a timely manner*” and “there was *not time* to get our signatures.” Nevertheless, the O/R report was submitted to the TDC twelve days later than the deadline, that is, not in a timely manner. O/R did not explain why, how, and when “there was not time.” I have already explained how the wantonly secretive behavior was conspiratorially aided by O/R after the NIID had received the C/K report, which was filed in a timely manner. Why didn’t O/R and the NIID explain why “there was not time to get O/R signatures” to the TDC and the public?

*I believe it is clear how O/R were completely and miserably caught in their own trap. Is there any value to scientific and*



*documentary evidence in such an undated report containing the so-called “true” signatures of O/R, accompanied with so unreasonably argued letters written by such self-styled coauthors?*

***Two principles of modern civil society: Juridical considerations on the case of forgery by the NIID and two U.S. inspectors***

Several well-known important juridical principles are accepted in modern civil society. The U.S. Declaration of Independence asserts that we are endowed with the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, as well as the right and duty of revolution (Shibata 1977, 1987, and 1997b). In connection with the subject of this paper, here I would like to draw attention to *two other important juridical principles of our society* in regard to world-wide accepted practice for the proper identification and submission of legal documentation. One is *the correct identification of the individual*. Another is *the proper dating of documentation by the individual submitter*.

As for the first principle, there should be no need to explain its juridical implication. Modern civil society is based on mutual respect for the dignity and identity of individual parties in any legal proceeding. Without such a principle, modern civil jurisprudence in society could not exist. But how is it possible for any person to express his or her own dignity and identify oneself an individual personality to another person? How is it possible in the legal process for each person to recognize and/or identify another person as an individual personality? As I understand it, it is possible *only with and/or through signature of his/her own name* upon any documentation submitted to a court as part of any legal procedure.

As for the second principle, as a matter of fact, Americans, Europeans, Japanese, and many other people always date any documents and letters when they sign their names on them, especially if these writings are to serve a legal purpose. Why? The reason is that by doing so, they want and/or are asked to confirm the legal validity of their signatures for the purposes of establishing their legal rights, duties, and responsibilities. Therefore, it would be no exaggeration to say that *any undated signature is*

*legally invalid in modern civil society.* Indeed, there is, in the modern world, very little official or legal documentation upon which signature(s) of the submitting parties/party remain(s) undated. In fact, modern civil society is nothing but *a society controlled and registered with references to and indications of time.* Therefore, from a legal point of view, to intentionally omit either of these two principles undermines the universally accepted documentary content essential to the conduct of proper legal procedure in our modern civil society.

Accordingly, *an act of forgery of signature(s)* on any official or private document as well as *an act of its use* in the legal process should be considered as a serious crime and punished severely by the criminal law. In Japan, the act of forgery of private documentation and an act of its use are indictable offenses, carrying a maximum five years imprisonment according to Articles 160 and 161 of the Criminal Law.

To my knowledge, however, there are very few juridical studies on the implications of forged signatures and dating as these pertain to the accepted juridical principles of the modern civil society. I submit that this scarcity exists due to the overwhelmingly accepted practice of signing and dating documentation involved in the legal process.

In light of these principles, what are the juridical implications of the forgery acts on the part of Dr. Kurata, Mr. Oviatt, and Dr. Richmond?

Of course, Kurata would justify his behavior by simply insisting that he is not guilty of the forgery because he was “permitted” to “reproduce their signatures” by O/R, while O/R would reply that they also should not be denounced for the conspiracy either because they, too, had “permitted” Kurata to “reproduce their signatures.”

In reply to such arguments, I would like to remind them of the principles explained above—that in our modern civil society, it is only an independent citizen who is qualified to sign *his or her own name.* No citizen is allowed to sign the name of another person without following proper legal procedure.

Furthermore, I believe it is essential to have answers to the following questions:

Why did not Oviatt ask Kurata to “sign the name of Kurata on behalf of Mr. Oviatt”? *Doing so represents the common sense and morals of any citizen, including scientists, who follows proper legal procedure in any modern civil society.* Nevertheless, Oviatt, *ignoring common procedure*, authorized Kurata to “reproduce my signature.” Why did O/R allow Kurata to sign “Vinson R. Oviatt and Jonathan Y. Richmond,” not “Takeshi Kurata on behalf of Oviatt and Richmond”? By letting Kurata sign the signatures “Vinson R. Oviatt and Jonathan Y. Richmond,” O/R submitted the conspiratorially produced report to the court in order to pretend that it was a “genuine” report written only by O/R.

Even if O/R had allowed Kurata to reproduce their signatures, that does not justify the latter signing “Vinson R. Oviatt and Jonathan Y. Richmond,” because it is clear that Kurata is not Oviatt and Richmond. Whether O/R permitted it or not, it was a crime of forgery for Kurata to sign the signatures of O/R, because by doing so, he intentionally deceived the court, the plaintiffs, lawyers, scientists, and the public into taking the bogus report as a genuine one.

Thus, the TDC had been deceived into accepting the bogus report as genuine documentary evidence. We ourselves had been deceived into believing that it was a genuine one. So, we made many copies of it and distributed them among scientists and editors of scientific journals, here and abroad, asking for their comments. Therefore, not only we, but also many scientists here and abroad, including Drs. Collins and Kennedy, have been deceived into reading it as a genuine one.

To refute the arguments of Kurata and C/R, it would be enough to offer the following example:

Suppose a buyer A bought a valuable thing from C and paid for it with a check with a forged signature of his friend B with the approval of B, and in such a way that A and B together committed the crime of fraud against C. One year later, C found the signature forged and the check voided, and accused A of a crime of fraud before a prosecutors’ office.

As a result, only after having been forced by the accusation, A asked B to give him a check with “true” signature of B but

without a date, and then A submitted the check to C, along with a letter from B which says: "At that time I gave A permission to reproduce my signature" because "there was not time for A to get my signature." And, without any apology, A asks C to accept the check, shouting to C and the concerned prosecutor, "You are wrong. I am not guilty of the crime of forgery!" Do you think that C should accept such a check?

I am sure that nobody would support A's argument. Anybody would certainly contend that A and B must be accused of the crimes of fraud and conspiracy which were committed against C.

Is there any difference between the crime committed by A and B and the crime of forgery committed by Kurata aided by O/R? Nobody would dare to say that A and B as well as Kurata and O/R are not guilty of the crime. Furthermore, anybody would surely say that *the crime committed by Kurata and O/R is more serious and dangerous to the public and humankind as a whole* than the one committed by A and B. The reasons are as follows:

In this case, "A" is not only an institution of the government of Japan, but also the governmental laboratory which deals with emerging new pathogens and unknown genetically modified organisms (GMOs), the danger and risk of which can only be recognized through an infection among residents and the public. Kurata, as the institute's Director of the Department of Pathology, committed the crime of forgery of the institute's safety and environmental impact inspection report in order to deceive the TDC, the plaintiffs, the public, and the scientific community.

"B" represents the two U.S. scientists. To repeat the above description, one of them was the prestigious Head of the Environmental Health & Safety Division at the NIH, Bethesda, and the other assumed the official and prestigious title as "Director, Office of Health and Safety, WHO Collaborating Centre for Applied Biosafety Programmes and Training [,] Centres for Disease Control and Prevention." They conspired with Kurata against "C," that is, the TDC, the plaintiffs, the public, and the scientific community in Japan, pretending "NIID poses no biosafety threat to the outside surrounding community as a

consequence of its work with infectious diseases” in one of the most populated residential areas in the very center of Tokyo. Of course, the O/R report did not submit any scientific proof for such a pretension (Collins and Kennedy 1997a, Shibata 1997b).

***Implications of the forgery for morals, science of safety, public health, and human rights***

As to the conspiracy of O/R, it is incredible that the two U.S. scientists, who were asked by the court to submit an experts’ report on the inspection of the so-called “safety” condition in and around the NIID, allowed the inspected laboratory to “reproduce their signatures.” It is nothing but a shameful corruption among scientists in the light of morals, science of safety, public health, and human rights in our civil society.

It is again unbelievable that such well-reputed scientists as Mr. Oviatt and Dr. Richmond could be implicated in these forgeries. Such behavior seriously harms the reputation of the U.S. scientific community.

The conspiracy of Mr. Oviatt and Dr. Richmond, in conjunction with the NIID, leads one to wonder whether further phenomena of such shameful behavior exists elsewhere among U.S. and Japanese laboratory scientists involved in the fields of infectious diseases, biotechnology, and science of safety.

The poor arguments in the letters of O/R reminded me of the term “colonial science.” This term was used to characterize the attitude of U.S. scientists to atomic survivors in Hiroshima and Nagasaki by a U.S. science historian (Lindee 1994). Lindee, now Professor of History of Science at the University of Pennsylvania, studied the Atomic Bomb Casualty Commission (ABCC) as one of the Occupational Agencies of the U.S. Army. She also studied the Japanese National Institute of Health (JNIH), the Hiroshima and Nagasaki branches of which were set up in the same rooms in the same buildings as the ABCC. The JNIH intimately cooperated with the ABCC in loyally following the U.S. Army’s nontreatment policy toward survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The ABCC was a typical example of “colonial science” institute. It was helped by the JNIH, the institute of

“persons of a relatively inferior caliber” (Lindee 1994), in dealing with the Hiroshima and Nagasaki survivors as human guinea pigs. The ABCC tried to collect information about the aftereffect of the atomic radiation on these survivors in order to contribute further toward the development of nuclear weaponry (Shibata 1996).

Do not the O/R reports with the forged signatures and the so-called “true” signatures of O/R, together with their two letters, smell like “colonial science”? Does not the submission of forged documentation display contempt for our judges, residents, the public, and the scientific community while simultaneously revealing O/R’s racist attitude of “colonial science”? How can these scientists so arrogantly and unlawfully justify their crimes of forgery and conspiracy before our court, public, and scientific community?

Why did Dr. Kurata, as one of the leading staff of the NIID, commit such a grave crime of forgery?

In this respect, it is necessary to understand the origin and history of the JNIIH-NIID. It was established on 21 May 1947 by the order of the U.S. Occupation Forces. It was staffed with many medical scientists who cooperated with the biological warfare (BW) crime committed by the Japanese Imperial Army during the period of its invasion of Asian and Pacific countries. All directors general and almost all vice-directors general of the JNIIH, during the period from its establishment to the beginning of the 1980s, were BW scientists. Thus, the JNIIH inherited the legacy of the BW forgery corps of medical scientists. The principle of their forgery morals has always been that “the end justifies the means” (Williams and Wallace 1989; Shibata 1990, and 1997a; Gold 1996; Harris 1994 and 1995—the critique in Harris 1995 of the human experiments committed by the JNIIH deserves to be noted).

To cite from Lindee, the JNIIH remained “an emphatic Occupation agency” throughout the Occupation. Not only that. The JNIIH continued to provide services to the ABCC from 1947 through 1975, and together they intimately cooperated to infringe on the human rights of atomic survivors (Shibata 1996).

Another of the hidden aims of the U.S. Occupation Forces, which ordered the establishment of the JNIH, was to have it cooperate with the U.S. Army's 406th Medical Laboratory, an Asian unit of the U.S. Army's center of BW research institutes at Fort Detrick, Frederick, Maryland. Unit 406 supervised and controlled the JNIH from its establishment through the middle of the 1960s. Many cooperative research projects between the JNIH and the U.S. Army's institutes can be documented from its establishment until the end of the 1980s. As a matter of fact, Dr. Kurata himself was reportedly financed by one of these U.S. Army's institutes (Shibata 1997a).

In 1997, in face of wide public denunciation of its many misdeeds, the JNIH could not but change its tarnished name to the NIID. But the unscientific, unethical, and inhumane tradition of the BW scientists in the JNIH was not reformed, but simply and directly inherited by the leading staff, including Dr. Kurata, of the renamed NIID.

The NIID and Dr. Kurata have never apologized to the TDC and the public for their crime of forgery. Not only that. In spite of public denunciation, the NIID, in appreciation of the misdeeds of Dr. Kurata, arrogantly promoted him to the post of its Vice-Director General on 1 April 1999! He is expected to become its Director-General in a few years! Such is typical of the morals, the science of safety, and the bioethics of the NIID.

As a proverb says, "Birds of a feather flock together." Thus it would be no exaggeration to say that O/R were purposely invited by their colleagues in Japan to deliberately reveal their "colonial science" before the eyes of our court, public, and scientists who, alternatively and passionately, speak out for "independent science." In this respect, the conspiracy of O/R and the NIID was no accident. It deserves to be carefully studied as a textbook on "colonial science" and as a blatant case of how science and scientists can both become corrupted.

What would occur if our court should happen to favor the report conspiratorially produced by the NIID and O/R and to ignore the scientific warning expressed by the Collins/Kennedy report? Although it seems to be unlikely, it would predictably encourage every development adverse not only to the new

regulations on the locations of laboratories of pathogens (WHO 1997) with which we can agree, but also the expected promotion of the public health and improvement of biosafety in the NIID. It would also disastrously encourage almost all other laboratories of pathogens and GMOs to ignore legislative regulations against the potential misconducts of these laboratories. Finally, it would seriously undermine efforts to maintain strong environmental protection in the age of emerging new pathogens and biotechnology. We should never allow our courts to make these terrible mistakes.

In the case of such an adverse ruling, we cannot deny that there is a possibility that an outbreak of infectious disease with an unknown new emerging pathogen and GMOs may occur. Should this terrible event take place among residents around the NIID at the very center of Tokyo and other laboratories, it is not alarmist to predict that such an outbreak could possibly immediately cross borders and spread to all the corners of the world. As previously experienced in the case of the HIV, E. coli O-157, and so on, such scenarios have already occurred. Is there a more serious threat to humankind in our age of newly emerging pathogens?

As we saw in the BW crimes of Japanese medical scientists and the cover-up of the crimes by their U.S. colleagues (Williams and Wallace 1989; Shibata 1990 and 1996; Harris 1994 and 1995), *science without conscience is nothing but the corruption and destruction of science itself. We have just witnessed the phantom of their second generation in the JNIIH-NIID and O/R.* It is a grave warning for all people and the public who are concerned about the future of humankind in our age.

We have to redouble our energy to promote the science of safety and biosafety, as well as morals, bioethics, public health, and human rights in our age. Your kind help and expression of deep concern would be greatly appreciated.

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1356; E-mail: <sshibata @mb.infoweb.ne.jp>. More detailed information about the JNIIH-NIID and our civil rights campaign against it is be available through our website <<http://village.infoweb.ne.jp/~yoken/>>.

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