

Between the 'Principle of Hope' and 'Spiritual Booze': An Analysis of Religious Themes in the Language Used by the Russian Marxists

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Abstract : In the mainstream academic spheres of thought, there is a tendency to associate the writings of Russian Marxists as being constantly against the practice of religion itself. Such arguments mainly stem from how the attitude of the Russian Marxists, specifically the Bolsheviks, towards the concept of religion supposedly originates from its own Marxist ideology. Although Marxism is critical of religion as an institution, the approach that Marxism would have on the question of religion is not as clear. Such aspect is specifically observed in the use of language of major leading Russian Marxist figures, such as Lenin and Trotsky, throughout the early 20th century, where the use of religious metaphors was widely used in their philosophical writings and speeches, as well as in propaganda posters of general left-wing movements in Russia as a whole. The methodology of the research will consist of a sociolinguistic and sociology of language approach within a sociohistorical framework of late Tsarist and early Soviet Russia, 1905-1926. The purpose of such approaches are not simply to point out the religious metaphors used in the writings and speeches of Marxists in Russia, but rather in order to analyse how the use of such metaphors represent an important socio-political connection with the context of Russia at the time. In other words, the use of religious metaphors was not only more akin to Russian culture at the time, but this also resonated and was more familiar with the conditions of the working class and peasantry. An example in this study can be observed in the writings of Lenin, where the theme of chudo (miracle) is often mentioned in his writings, and such a word is commonly associated with an idealist philosophy rather than a materialist one, which represents a common theme in Russian culture in regards to the principle of hope for a better life. A further and even more obvious example is Trotsky's writings about how the revolution of 1905 "would be revived", which not only resonates with the theme of resurrection, but also prophesises the "second coming" of a future revolution. Such metaphors are important in the writings of such authors, as they simultaneously contain Marxist ideas, as well as religious themes. In doing this research, this paper will demonstrate two aspects. Firstly, the paper will analyse the use of the metaphors by Russian Marxists as a whole in regards to a socio-political and ideological perspectives akin to those of Marxism. Secondly, it will also demonstrate the role that such metaphors have in regards to their impact on the left-wing movements within Russia itself, as well as their relation to the working class and peasantry of Russia within the historical context.

Keywords : language and politics, Marxism, Russian history, social history, sociology of language

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