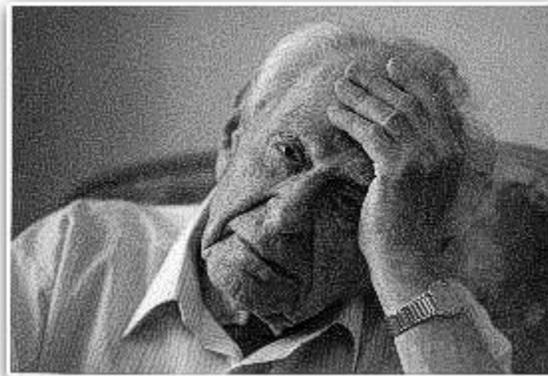


The Shocking Truth about Soros Mentor Karl Popper's "Open Society" Philosophy

by Cliff Kincaid on 19 Oct 2011 Copyright ©

George Soros claims as his mentor the philosopher Karl Popper, author of *The Open Society and its Enemies*. "He influenced me with his writings and his thinking," Soros says in his book *Soros on Soros*. Popper is portrayed by Soros and others as opposed to threats to democracy and even opposed to Marxism and communism. But Popper's anti-communist record is weak – so weak that it practically disappears under the weight of his own work. Popper had been a communist in his youth.



Popper

The most authoritative analysis of Popper can be found in Malachi Haim Hacohen's book, *Karl Popper: The Formative Years 1902-1945*. He reports on page 396:

Prior to 1945, Popper did not use totalitarianism to describe communism even once. Like many liberals and socialists, he withheld judgment on Soviet Russia.

On Page 397 of the chapter, "The Open Society, 1940-1943," he notes:

The great purge trials coincided with the Popular Front, and with Russia assuming, after 1935, the leading role in resisting fascism. The Nazi-Soviet pact was a shock, but within two years, Russia was again on the Allies' side, carrying the brunt of the war. Popper's mute criticism of the Soviet Union in *The Open Society* reflected his wish not to damage the war effort, but such considerations

would not explain his warm rhetoric about Soviet social engineering. He had still not made up his mind about the Soviet experiment.

The book goes on to claim that Popper adopted an anti-communist position later, during the Cold War.

One can find conservative praise for Popper and he had conservative friends and associates. The *Hoover Digest* published an article by Piers Norris Turner hailing him for “articulating the inherent threat of Marxism.” ¹ Popper had been a former Hoover fellow.

The article said:

Popper’s Open Society has always had a wide readership and influential champions on both the left and the right. Isaiah Berlin wrote in 1963 that Popper’s Open Society contained ‘the most scrupulous and formidable criticism of the philosophical and historical doctrines of Marxism by any living writer.’ National Review recently ranked the book number six on its list of the hundred most important nonfiction works of the century. George Soros, who first encountered The Open Society as Popper’s student at the London School of Economics, founded the Open Society Institute to propagate Popper’s ideas, particularly in Eastern Europe.

But since Soros has come to be associated with financing what is called the “progressive” movement, which includes Marxist and even pro-communist groups, could it be the case that conservative praise for Popper has been misplaced – and that some conservatives do not understand what Popper was really saying?

The Hoover writer seems to allude to the possibility that conservatives may have been hoodwinked when he writes that, “Despite Popper’s strong criticisms of Marxism’s historicism and tendency toward totalitarianism, he was sympathetic to Marx’s moral impulse.” He quotes Popper as saying:

If there could be such a thing as socialism combined with individual liberty, I would be a socialist still. For nothing could be better than living a modest, simple and free life in an egalitarian society. It took some time before I recognized this as no more than a beautiful dream; that freedom is more important than equality; that the attempt to realize equality endangers freedom; and that, if freedom is lost, there will not even be equality among the unfree.

This sounds like a broadside against socialism. But it is apparent that an alleged combination of socialism and liberty is precisely what Popper advocated and which attracts Soros to this day. It justifies his funding of progressive groups dedicated to a large federal role in the affairs of the American people.

The Hacoen book puts it this way:

Postwar liberals provided the intellectual core of the Social Democratic consensus prevailing in European politics until 1968. They overcame traditional apprehensions about a state-regulated economy, and accepted a measure of socialization. Some were enthusiastic about social legislation and unsympathetic – at least until the 1970s – to libertarian litanies. Popper’s political philosophy articulated their social vision. He presented piecemeal social engineering as an alternative to revolutionary socialism. No revolutionary transformation was necessary because unrestrained capitalism was gone, *The Communist Manifesto*’s major goals were achieved, and a framework for reforms existed. Marxism was superfluous.

One of the best treatments of this subject can be found in Professor Dante Germino’s essay, “Karl Popper’s Open Society,” published in *The Political Science Reviewer*, Volume 8, Number 1, Fall, 1978.² Interestingly, this publication is published by the Intercollegiate Institute, a conservative group. Germino, who served as a professor of government and foreign affairs at the University of Virginia, was the author of *Political Philosophy and the Open Society*.³

This important essay makes the following points:

- Popper was a young Marxist.
- He opposed organized religion, including Judaism and Christianity, which he considered examples of “closed” thinking. He thought “institutional Christianity” such as the “Church of the Popes” had totalitarian impulses.
- He advocated a “protectionist” theory of justice to protect the weak from the strong on the national and even global levels, even being open to the concept of a world government.
- Popper recognized the “sincerity” of Marx, noting his “open-mindedness, his sense of facts, his distrust of verbiage...” and his “burning desire to help the oppressed.”
- Popper attacked Marx because of his belief in “historical determinism” and “philosophy of history,” which held that communism would follow from “the dialectic” struggle of opposing forces.
- Popper, in his book, *The Open Society and its Enemies*, Volume 2, explicitly endorses the Keynesian theory “in favor of government intervention in the economy...”
- Popper favored “piecemeal social engineering,” rather than utopian or “holistic” government intervention.

Professor Dante Germino goes on to say:

It should be emphasized that, although he expresses concern about the dangers of dramatically increasing governmental power through an activist interventionist policy, Popper is totally confident that the ‘dangers’ can be ‘mastered’ by ‘social technology’ and ‘social piecemeal engineering.’

Germino concludes that Popper is more of a secular liberal in outlook. He also states:

Karl Popper claims to be open, but in his writing he is closed to most of reality outside the world of the pragmatic, secular-liberal humanist...

He is closed, for example, “to revelation as the self-disclosure of the divine through the ‘flash of eternity into time’...” Hence, Popper rejects the authority of the New and Old Testaments and the possibility that God has intervened in human affairs through the figure of Jesus Christ and has a plan that is unfolding in human history.

It is interesting and significant that Professor Germino also wrote the book, *Antonio Gramsci: Architect of a New Politics*, about the Italian communist.

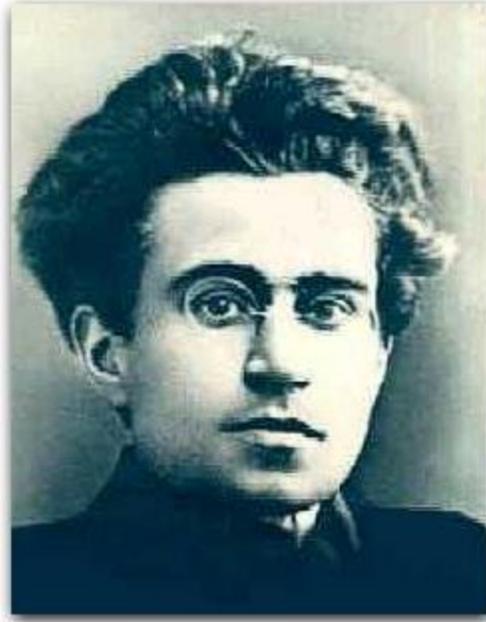
A description of this book says:

Gramsci’s new politics of inclusion anticipated by well over a half-century the recent epoch-making developments in the USSR and in Eastern Europe. His antiauthoritarian leadership style as secretary of the Italian Communist party in the 1920s prefigured Gorbachev’s policies of perestroika and glasnost. Gramsci’s insistence on the international Communist movement’s openness to new social formations at the grass roots is supremely relevant to developments in Romania, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, and Poland, where forces hitherto kept at the margins of political life by ossified Communist-party structures have burst on the scene with unprecedented vitality.4

The suggestion is that the “epoch-making” changes in the USSR and Eastern Europe constitute what some have called a “new Marxism.” Robert Chandler, author of *Shadow World*, said the following about the Gramsci approach:

The key to Gramsci’s formula for revolution centered on the idea of breaking what he called the “hegemony” or mind-control exercised by the ruling capitalists over the masses. Bourgeois societies were ruled, Gramsci believed, by educating the citizenry that their accommodation of the moral, political, and cultural values defined by the governing system was in their best interests. Hence, Gramsci designed a “reversal strategy” that would silently challenge the existing culture and value-systems that dominated bourgeois governance. That is to say, his formula was based on an ideological struggle that would transform a whole range of activities in civil society, including Judeo-Christian values, the family, schools, unions, and politics and popular trust in the existing government.5

Like Popper, Gramsci rejected the Marxist view of historical inevitability or stages in the dialectic of history. Instead, he argued for mobilizing an alliance of social forces in the cause of Marxist revolution. These are the same forces being funded by George Soros in the name of creating an “open society” in the U.S.



Gramsci

An atheist or secular humanist, Popper did not believe in God-given rights or self-evident truths. "...[It] is inherent in Popper's view that what we call our knowledge is of its nature provisional, and permanently so," notes Bryan Magee in his book, *Philosophy and the Real World: An Introduction to Karl Popper*.

"Hence," notes Chandler, "America's founding documents are disposable in what Soros believes is our godless society."

But Chandler isn't the only observer who sees such a trend in Soros's giving

"I am a democratic socialist," Magee declares, "and I believe that the young Popper worked out, as no one else has ever done, what the philosophical foundations of democratic socialism should be."

According to Dr. Spencer Davis, author of a major paper on Popper,⁶ the following is known about Soros's mentor:

- Born in 1902, "Popper in 1918 joined the Free Association of Socialist High School Students. In 1991 its leaders became Communists, and Popper, though he may not have joined the Communist Party in Austria, began working at its headquarters as an office boy."
- Popper "left the party because he concluded that its leaders treated party members from the working class as pawns to maneuver and showed little concern when workers died in a conflict the leaders orchestrated."
- Popper's "first publications in the 1920s were attempts to clarify the basis for socialist school reforms. Popper was for several years committed to that movement and taught in a progressive school."

- While Popper was writing his single work in political philosophy, *The Open Society and its Enemies*, and “while the manuscript grew and the outcome of World War Two was in still in doubt, Popper refused to attack Stalin and Stalinist totalitarianism...”
- “Popper pictured the Open Society as the liberal interventionist democracy that is usually described as the democratic welfare state.” He recommended “piecemeal social engineering.”

One notices that both Germino and Davis find the same evidence of Popper’s bias in favor of government control of the people in the name of giving them freedom or rights. But they are not alone in this judgment.

Magee, the author of *Philosophy and the Real World: An Introduction to Karl Popper*, says, “In his early and middle teens he was a Marxist, and then became an enthusiastic Social Democrat.” [8](#)

Although some have tried to distance Popper from socialism, his embrace by Soros and his funding of the modern-day progressive movement seem to demonstrate that those committed to make the “open society” a reality see no problem with combining the two.

An article about Gara LaMarche, who was Vice President and Director of U.S. Programs for the Open Society Institute (OSI), explains how this self-styled progressive appreciates and understands the “open society” concept:

With the money and vision of philanthropist George Soros, the Open Society Institute implements a wide range of initiatives aimed at promoting open societies by shaping government policy and supporting education, media, public health, and human and women’s rights, as well as social, legal and economic reform. It’s a tall order, but philosophically LaMarche is completely in accord with Soros’ philosophy.

One of these issues for LaMarche is opposition to the death penalty. He calls its use a “continuing crisis.” However, the founders of the United States supported it and wrote its acceptance into the Constitution. George Washington authorized the death penalty for deserters from the Revolutionary Army. [9](#)

Another is “homosexual rights.” The founders of the U.S. opposed any such rights. General George Washington himself authorized the expulsion of a soldier from the army for sodomy.

1 <http://www.hoover.org/publications/hoover-digest/article/8018>

2 <http://www.firstprinciplesjournal.com/journal/issue.aspx?id=b86f1bac-df96-442c-a0be-b04911913928>

3 <http://lsupress.org/books/detail/political-philosophy-and-the-open-society/>

4 <http://lsupress.org/books/detail/antonio-gramsci/>

5 <http://www.aim.org/aim-report/how-obama-revolution-came-to-america/>

6 http://www.unomaha.edu/esc/2006Proceedings/Davis_OpenSociety.pdf

7 <http://www.socsci.uci.edu/development/journal/features%20-%20LaMarche.html>

8 *Philosophy and the Real World: An Introduction to Karl Popper*, page 5.

9 *George Washington: Ordinary man, Extraordinary Leader*, by Robert Francis Jones, page 87.