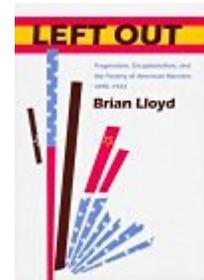


**Brian Lloyd.** *Left Out: Pragmatism, Exceptionalism, and the Poverty of American Marxism, 1890-1922.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997. 472 pp. \$45.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8018-5541-2.



**Reviewed by** John Pettegrew

**Published on** H-SHGAPE (May, 1999)

Brian Lloyd's excellent book bears an ambiguous relationship to the current revival of pragmatism among American intellectual historians. In keeping with pragmatist history, *Left Out* keys on William James and John Dewey and the successor generation of young public intellectuals who contributed a fervent socialist edge to progressive era politics; what's more, in examining these thinkers, Lloyd resists poststructuralist theories regarding the indeterminacy of language and instead adopts a contextualist approach to intellectual history that measures the incremental difference of ideas in relation to the material needs of specific time and place. It's what he has to say about these ideas, however, that separates Lloyd from many of his colleagues. In sharp contrast to privileging pragmatism as a flexible foundation for social democracy, Lloyd sees the philosophy as an ideological drain upon modern American radical thought, insidiously distracting would-be revolutionaries from the analytic logic of Marxism and thereby frustrating any political economic change more fundamental than liberal reform.

*Left Out* is a bold polemical work, unabashed in its embrace of Marxist science. Anticipating

charges that his orthodoxy is grossly anachronistic after the fall of the Soviet Union, Lloyd counters that it is so only if one adopts a narrow time frame: "I presume that we are witnessing, not the death of Marxism, but the end of the first period during which Marxists managed to seize and, for a time, wield state power" (p. 3). With this perspective in mind, *Left Out* takes on a visionary purpose. Lloyd could have been more attentive to convincing us of the inevitable unfolding of the Marxist dialectic or at least why this historical view is superior and more certain than others; but his book is nevertheless valuable for its sustained criticism of late-nineteenth early-twentieth century leftist thought and for delineating the close convergence between American socialism and pragmatism.

Organized chronologically, *Left Out* begins with James' and Dewey's "dual tradition" of pragmatism and ends with World War I era pacifists and rebel intellectuals, with each part fixing on particular infidelities to the "Marxism of Marx." While favoring Dewey's modern scientific project to James's pre-industrial ideal of individual autonomy, Lloyd believes that

both were corrupted by a Darwinian-based social psychology incompatible with Marxist historical materialism. Roughly the same problem hindered Thorstein Veblen and E.R.A. Seligman, who otherwise offered the most fruitful economic interpretations of social structure and change. Daniel De Leon and Louis Fraina, usually identified as the most doctrinaire American Marxists of the pre-World War I period, also erred in their revolutionary industrial unionism and criticism of Lenin. A climactic point of Lloyd's study is his treatment of William English Walling, Walter Lippmann, Max Eastman, and Randolph Bourne—the group of talented pre-war intellectuals who most fully synthesized pragmatist philosophy with socialist intentions, effectively locking the two together until the Cold War. *Left Out* ends with the diffusion of American responses to the Great War and the Bolshevik Revolution; these dramatic events brought hope for the seizure of power in the United States; but the distinctiveness of Marxist revolution remained lost to radicals brought up on pragmatism.

*Left Out* can be slow going in places—Lloyd overuses labels and other abstractions that tend to muddle his otherwise beautiful writing—but the most serious problem is his un-self reflexive reliance on the verity of Marxist science. Marxism, Lloyd writes in the beginning of the book, is "the only trustworthy weapon for analyzing and transforming complex, and seemingly well defended, systems of oppression" (p. 2). Rather than going on to explicate in history and theory why this has been so, though, the statement remains a presupposition, a matter of faith that nevertheless accounts for his thoughts and positions throughout the study. Leftist alternatives such as the pre-Marxist socialist-communitarian tradition, radical trade unionism, and parliamentary socialism are dismissed out of hand as naive, reactionary, or generally misinformed. For all his stylistic sophistication and complex reading, Lloyd rather routinely pours out the value of a certain thinker after having concluded that he or she strayed from

the Marxist-Leninist model. The unfortunate result is that even as Lloyd infuses a new urgency into the study of American socialism, his goal of explaining how progressive-era radicals missed an anti-capitalist moment and how that moment can still be seized remains unfulfilled.

Copyright (c) 1999 by H-Net, all rights reserved. This work may be copied for non-profit educational use if proper credit is given to the author and the list. For other permission, please contact H-Net@h-net.msu.edu.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at <https://networks.h-net.org/h-shgape>

**Citation:** John Pettegrew. Review of Lloyd, Brian. *Left Out: Pragmatism, Exceptionalism, and the Poverty of American Marxism, 1890-1922*. H-SHGAPPE, H-Net Reviews. May, 1999.

**URL:** <https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=3090>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.