

vant to the author that this failure rested to a large extent upon the inability of any dictator from Diem to Thieu to eradicate basic liberties with the same finality as in the North.

Nor can the author claim that the Communists were less wedded to violence than the Saigon military governments. He prefers to stress Hanoi's pursuit of peace, but he makes it clear that North Vietnam was determined to carry on at any price until it achieved total victory. The Viet Cong guerrillas may have been tribunes of the people, as Porter implies, but they also routinely employed murder and terror against their opponents. With apparently unintended irony, Porter reprovingly contrasts the Thieu government's policy of jailing many of its opponents with the "much smaller" number of detentions in Communist-controlled areas. There, it seems, government officials who were not re-educable "and who were considered to have committed serious crimes were more often assassinated than imprisoned if they ignored warnings to desist."

The author's treatment of the post-Paris Agreement period in 1973-74 typifies his skewed viewpoint. It might seem undeniable to anyone who read a newspaper during this period that both sides systematically violated the Paris agreements. Porter, however, dwells extensively upon Saigon's transgressions while consistently representing accusations of Communist violations as ill-founded. He characterizes the Canadian truce observers, who were most critical of the Communists, as hopelessly biased, although he admits that their "findings of fact in particular investigations had been fair enough." The Polish and Hungarian observers, on the

other hand, receive gentle treatment, although the author concedes they were wholly committed to Hanoi and the Viet Cong. Porter appears to accept Communist arguments of military security as justification for blocking investigations of alleged truce violations, and he has no trouble with the Communist denial of adequate air corridors to control commission helicopters. His account is, in brief, a mirror image of the Canadian attitude that he condemns so strongly.

An author is entitled to a frame of reference, however one-dimensional. But *A Peace Denied* is being marketed as a work of scholarship, elaborately footnoted, and brought out by an academic publisher. It must therefore be evaluated as scholarship, not as an antiwar tract, and on this point Porter's ideology betrays his professed purpose. *A Peace Denied* is, quite frankly, very bad history. Its account of events is, to say the least, selective. The author uncritically accepts sources with which he agrees and is hypercritical of those with which he disagrees. He paints a tidy ideological landscape that bears little resemblance to the terrible, complicated reality that was Vietnam. Rejecting the premise that all parties to the conflict shared in the moral guilt that modern war brings in such ample quantities, he has written an advocacy history that will satisfy only those who already agree with him.

Of course, their numbers are not inconsiderable. It is a measure of the continuing intellectual malaise of the academic community that this book was accepted as a Ph.D. dissertation at Cornell and rushed into print by a leading university press.

The Conquest of Will: Information Processing in Human Affairs by Abbe Mowshowitz

(Addison-Wesley: 366 pp.; \$8.95)

Martin Green

The computer industry today looks in some ways like the textile industry at the beginning of the nineteenth century, because of its tremendous growth rate, because of its fundamental difference from earlier modes of production, and because of its enormous potential for changing our lives. And since we all wish we'd been there to do something about the industrial revolution—don't half our books imply that wish?—we are committed to doing something about the information revolution. We can date the latter, according to Professor Mowshowitz, from 1951, and can look forward, some predictions say, to compu-

ters becoming the largest industry in the world by 2000. Because that industry is so largely in the hands of one country, the USA, and indeed of one company, IBM, we must feel immediate political anxieties of a familiar kind. But more important are the less predictable consequences of an information utility, with terminals in every home, a network of computers, a national or world databank, and information of every sort about everybody immediately available to the authorities.

Computers are the major device by means of which society masters its accelerating complexity—complexity

here meaning diversification and specialization. The information the computers process for them enables the managers of our society—in the hospitals, prisons, armies, governments—to coordinate diversity and control disorder. But, as Professor Mowshowitz points out, by so doing, computers make possible further "complexity" and deliver more power into managerial hands. They are not merely means, to be used for no matter what ends. They are a dynamism that drives society in one particular direction.

Unfortunately, though this book alerts our attention vividly, it cannot

satisfy it. This is partly because it simply fails to communicate. "The problem-solving methodology associated with information-processing systems constitutes an analytical perspective...." After the two word-clots in the first part of the sentence we are not surprised that, instead of saying "is analytical," the writer says "constitutes an analytical perspective," and so fails to convey anything at all. Why will even experts in communication refuse to recognize the simple laws of language? And as usual this pseudo-specificity in the vocabulary brings in its train a lack of real specificity in the rhetoric. Concepts like "information" and "complexity" call for artful definition by example (implicit and explicit) over and over again in the first fifty pages. But Professor Mowshowitz leaves them inhumanly abstract, and so they soon become vague too.

Of course it is one of the tragicomedies of the intellectual life that the living ideas of each age are written about badly while they are living. The intellectual world devotes itself to the ideas of the past, or to the ideas that contradict popular thought. You can always find marvellously rich, full, exciting books about what is not going on. But what is going on is left to the journalists or the sociologists. Most formal occasions in the intellectual world rehearse the acts of imagination and understanding, while real acts take place elsewhere, in a disastrously unrehearsed fashion—such as, in this case, the cultic celebration of the computer as the sacred icon of our culture.

The computer, it seems, has replaced that dynamo which Henry Adams saw enshrined at the Paris Exhibition at the beginning of this century. What is the idea of a total statistical knowledge of human life, and also the idea of a simulation and replication of human intelligence—a trick the computer will soon master and pass beyond, leaving us to simulate it as best we may. Anatol Rapoport has suggested that there have been three successive phyla of machines that have fascinated men by their resemblance to living creatures: first, the clockwork mechanisms over which Descartes brooded; second, the heat-machines, considerably closer to us, because their transformation of fuel into energy is so similar; and now the information machines. But this puts the em-

phasis too much on purely intellectual curiosity. It is of course notable how intimately the history of computing machines is related to the history of philosophy. After all, the first adding and subtracting machine was built by Pascal in 1642, and the first to incorporate multiplication and division too by Leibnitz in 1694. But machines like the computer and the dynamo are worshipped not just by intellectuals but by the men of power, the managers and entrepreneurs of our society. The modes of action made possible by these machines

are irresistibly attractive to such men, just as is the fast driving made possible to a teenager by a powerful new car.

To his account of the computer industry and its threat to values like privacy and democracy Professor Mowshowitz has attached a large religious-cultural thesis. He sees computers serving, and extending, man's immemorial lust for power. He is certainly right to say that when we ask what they portend, we must consider them, not intrinsically, but in the context of the social interests they were developed to serve—

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administration, big business, the military. Other social interests, especially those connected with the contemplative life, need look for no profitable alliance with the computer. Indeed, I think Mowshowitz is right about the larger

things, too, about history and the lust for power. But in order to show history in that light, to show the meaning of technology and the way to resist the lust for power, we need another, quite different, book.

Politics and Class Formation in Uganda by Mahmood Mamdani

(Monthly Review Press; 339 pp.; \$16.50)

Anthony James Joes

The aim of the author is "to explain the politics of Uganda in the period between independence [1962] and the Asian expulsion of 1972." More specifically, the Amin coup and the expulsion are to be explained "in terms of the historically created contradiction and struggle between classes" and in an "attempt to trace, at the level of production, the process of the formation of some classes and the decline of others."

The plan of the book is historical: chapters on precolonial Uganda are followed by others dealing with the arrival of the British, the insertion of the Asians, the development of the economy and attendant social changes, the period of independence, and events leading to the Amin coup. Straight historical narrative is interrupted for digressions on the development of particular economic features of Ugandan society.

Mamdani starts out making some good points. "To understand ideology"—and this presumably includes Marxism—"we must know from whose point of view does it explain social reality?" He also makes a cogent criticism of modern growth economists who have (until perhaps very recent times) treated problems of economic growth as if they were purely technical and divorced from political and other conditions and considerations.

Despite the good start the book does not fulfill its promise. It is pedantic, provincial, old-fashioned, and just plain boring. It explains nothing, it just raises clouds of dust—old dust.

There is a great deal of attention to economic esoterica. We are informed, for example, that 20,000 bales of cotton were gathered in 1912-13, but 22,000

was gathered in 1916-17. One also learns that the 1916 meeting of the British Cotton Growing Association in Manchester was attended by, among others, "Bleachers' Association Ltd." In contrast, difficulties between Catholics and Protestants in Uganda receive the scantiest attention. No effort is made to explain why some tribes and regions opted for one religion rather than another, nor why the British Government fielded an army against the Buganda Catholics at one point (Battle of Mengo, 1892). Instead, we are informed that Catholics were displeased with the colonial regime because "the Catholic hierarchy was denied its share of access to the economic surplus."

In addition to these breathtaking imbalancing acts, there are numerous statements whose effect cannot be described; it must be sampled. Thus: "Also, precisely because territorially dominant capital possesses a monopoly base, the premise of its appropriation is not as much an expansion in the productive base as the exchange of unequal values made possible by the same monopoly base." Again: "The alliance with the Indian bourgeoisie isolated the petty bourgeoisie and allowed the governing bureaucracy greater room for maneuver. It [referring to what?] utilized this opportunity to create conditions that would give it greater political freedom in the long run." The Amin coup "represented the failure of the governing bureaucracy to transform itself into a bureaucratic petty bourgeoisie." In Uganda "the provider of arms is imperialism [*sic*]." Additionally, peasants are referred to as "kulaks," references to "comrades" run rampant through the pages, and

World War II was "the second imperialist war." The opacity of the prose is matched by the paucity of relevant data. Nor are key terms defined. The book calls to mind nothing so much as that musty smell arising when one opens those old works from the 1930's that "analyze" world events from the official Stalinist viewpoint. Mamdani has given us a Marxist study of Ugandan politics, but not a *good* Marxist study. His "objective historical analysis" is neither very objective, historical, nor analytical.

Ritualistic, as opposed to sophisticated, Marxist analysis suffers from certain weaknesses, which are magnified in this work. Informed that "the thrust of colonial policy was to keep Africans in the agricultural economy," are we to understand "thrust" as "effect" or "purpose"? The confusion of these two notions can cause many difficulties: If taxi drivers make a lot of money during rainstorms, then taxi drivers must make it rain.

It was Kenneth Stamp, I believe, who wanted to know why, whenever an economic motive can be discovered or even imputed, we immediately pounce on it as the "real" motive. Why is the desire for economic gain more powerful, more "real," than racial hatred, religious bigotry, the thirst for applause, the desire to punish? One could make a case that men are just as prone to disguise motives of personal or ethnic malice by draping economic robes over them, as the reverse.

Yet, for Mamdani, only "classes" act. To accept his thesis that the Amin coup and all that has come with it hinges upon the ups and downs of the Ugandan "petty bourgeoisie" certain assumptions must be made. First, everybody must identify himself primarily in economic terms; one is not a Catholic, a Bugandan, or an Indian; one is "petty bourgeoisie" or "bureaucratic bourgeoisie." Second, this self-identification must be "objectively" correct. Gracious, if members of one kind of bourgeoisie run around thinking they belong to some other kind of bourgeoisie, they won't be able to do what History demands of them. Third, members of a given class must agree on what *ends* that class must seek, and finally, on exactly what *means* are to be used to attain those ends. Since, of course, none of these assumptions can hold up under empirical examination,