

Editors' Note

This is the first issue of *Left History* to be published out of York University, but long-time readers will see that we are continuing to focus on the debates and issues which have characterized the journal since its inception in 1993. One of the recurring debates dealt with in *Left History* is the relationship between historical materialism and post-structuralism. Are the concerns of Marxist historians (oppression and class conflict) still relevant in a world of queer theory, discourse analysis, and identity politics? Even outside the pages of *Left History*, this problem has been much debated in academia, often alas in polemics dominated by hair-splitting and name-calling. In this issue, Victoria Heftler and Peter Ives each makes a much needed intervention into this debate by showing both how theoretical arguments can be more effectively grounded in history, and how the practice of historians can benefit from theoretical criticism.

Like everything else, the debate between Marxism and post-structuralism has a history of its own. In his article on the dissident left group *Socialism ou Barbarie*, Marcel van der Linden notes that in addition to influencing the events of May 1968 this group also published the early work of the post-modern philosopher Jean Lyotard. Indeed, many of the political and theoretical issues that continue to concern us were first aired by the group *Socialism ou Barbarie*.

Of course, the political ideas of non-Leftists are also rooted in history. As Lynn MacKay amply documents in her article on London's Mendicity Society, contemporary attempts to link aid to the poor with moral reform echo some of the worst elements of nineteenth-century society. Further, MacKay's article shows the continuing necessity of recovering the voices of the submerged for understanding both the past and present. "History from below" remains one of the finest intellectual achievements of the left, and also a continuing challenge to contemporary historians.

Producing a journal, too, is a challenge, and one we could not have met without the sustained generosity of York University. For their financial backing, we owe a debt of gratitude to the Office of the Vice-President (Academic), the Graduate Students' Association, and the Faculty of Graduate Studies. The Graduate History Students' Association has also been instrumental in our success by allowing the journal to benefit from a legacy left by the late Professor Peter R. Knights. Finally, we must thank the Department of History at York. Not only have they provided us with monetary, material, and moral support, they have given us a home and in so doing ensured that *Left History* has a future. It is the Department of History, and the encouragement, enthusiasm, and support of its faculty and graduate students, that makes what follows possible.