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LABOUR REVIEW

EDITORS: TOM KEMP, CLIFF SLAUGHTER
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Summer 1962

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Class, caste and state in the Soviet Union

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Need for developing revolutionary theory

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The theoretical front

(Lenin's Philosophical Notebooks)

Book reviews:

Lukacs, Spanish Revolution, Soviet affairs, Labour history

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Editorial: The Struggle Against Revisionism

THIS issue of the *LABOUR REVIEW* is devoted to the struggles against revision of Marxist theory.

The feverish preparations of the Tory Party to enter the Common Market, the tendency for the rate of profit to decline, the intensified growth of monopoly are world-wide indications that a new and severe crisis is maturing.

For the capitalists, there is only way to resolve this crisis and that is to attack the standards of living and conditions of the working class. If the more serious effects of the decline in profit are to be surmounted and fresh profits extracted, this is the only way it can be done.

We are now at the beginning of this conflict, and there is a noticeable tension between the classes which is more and more affecting events on the political field. The resistance to the pay pause and the determination of the working class to elect another Labour government are symptoms of this. The Right-wing Labour and trade union leaders will betray in the future as they have in the past. The Stalinists, through the pernicious theory of peaceful co-existence, are tied to the coat-tails of reformism. There is no alternative before the working class but the construction of revolutionary Marxist leadership and it is towards this end that the efforts of the Socialist Labour League are directed.

Small wonder, therefore, that the tension between the classes has created a political friction between the various groups and trends which exist on the periphery of Marxist ideology. In their own way each of these groups devotes considerable time and attention towards the struggle against the Socialist Labour League. Of course they are in good company. Most of the attention of the Labour Party Right wing is right now concentrated on rooting out alleged Trotskyists from the youth movement. Courts of inquiry, special investigations, round-the-clock watches on the headquarters of the League are all indications that Trotskyism is considered more seriously than the old gang of Stalinists in King Street.

The Socialist Labour League is an integral part of the working-class movement. It derives its strength and tenacity from the aspirations of the class. At a time when everything is turned in the direction of confusing the class and depriving it of leadership, we alone fight for the development of a leadership—a leadership which will be inside the Labour and trade union movement to provide the revolutionary way forward for the working class.

From Transport House and the Communist Party headquarters at King Street, down to the much smaller groups of Mr. Cliff and his so-called Socialist Review state capitalists and the tiny Pabloite fragment, there is unanimous agreement that the Socialist Labour League should be destroyed. Whilst these

tendencies may differ sharply from one another, they are united on this question.

It is therefore a duty on our part to direct our theoretical fire against them and to expose their revisionism before the newly-awakened working class, especially the youth.

This is not only the task of the Socialist Labour League. It assumes more and more importance on the international field. The revisionism of Pablo and his Paris clique has virtually destroyed the Fourth International founded by Trotsky in 1938. Their strongest section in Latin America has now split away into the wilderness.

At this point, others, whose proud boast it was that they were orthodox Trotskyists, are seeking ways and means to unify with Pablo. The parrot-cry goes up: 'Forget the past! Let us not discuss the political reasons for the split of 1953 with Pabloism.' In other words, allow the young cadres of the Fourth International to flounder in theoretical confusion because some of the older members of the movement have abandoned Marxist theory and capitulated to Pablo. They are frightened that a discussion will smoke them out.

This new group of revisionists would have us write history along these lines. In 1953 we had a deep-going split with Pablo, now all this is forgotten, it was, in fact, a nightmare; it never happened. Forget the past, look only to the 'new reality'. This shameful abandonment of Trotskyist theory constitutes the new spearhead of revisionism against the Marxist movement.

The crisis in the Fourth International, the decomposition of Pabloism are mirrors which reflect the crisis in the international working class.

At its conference last Whitsun, the Socialist Labour League unanimously decided to assist in the re-organization of the Fourth International provided the fullest discussion takes place on the problems of the movement in relation to the Pabloite desertion and the new tasks now facing the international working class.

One thing is certain from this discussion; it will show that there can be no unity between the Marxists and the revisionists. The Socialist Labour League will under no circumstances participate in such a political fraud. We stand ready to discuss and collaborate with all those who claim to be Trotskyists and who are willing to talk and collaborate with us. But we will never agree to unity on an organizational basis without adequate political clarification.

A new generation of Marxist cadres who will have to bear the brunt of the struggle to build the Fourth International and provide leadership in the great class battles ahead will be educated and prepared only along these lines.

Class, Caste and State in the Soviet Union

by

Tom Kemp

FOR those who wish to make a serious study of the Soviet Union and reach conclusions about its social character and the direction in which it is moving there are no sacred texts. Everything which has been written by Marxists and others must be checked and re-checked against the facts in their development. Such a study is not only important, it is also unavoidable, for it is impossible to operate in politics today without having in mind a definite conception of what the USSR is and where it is going—what form of society it is, what relation its leaders have to that society, what their real aims are and how they are related to their ideology, i.e., to what they say these aims are. Even among those who are critical of, or hostile towards, the Soviet Union there are wide divergences of opinion on these questions; but the need for an opinion of some kind, backed up by a coherent theory, is generally accepted to be inescapable. In the working-class movement insufficient independent thought is given to these questions, for understandable reasons. On the one hand there are the official or self-appointed apologists of the Soviet regime who claim that 'socialism' was achieved in about 1936 and that the present period is one of the threshold of communism. If such views are only accepted in full by Communist Party members and fellow-travellers, such is the power of the Russian Revolution that, at least in some part, and particularly at the rank-and-file level, they influence even many who, in other respects, are far from being on the Left. On the other hand, especially since the onset of the Cold War, the ranks of the Labour movement in Britain, America and the non-communist sections in the Western European countries, have been strongly receptive to the anti-Soviet theories current among the propagandists and ideologists of the capitalists. Given all the difficulties standing in the way of fathoming the 'Russian enigma', and the impact of the 'revelations' of the period since 1956, it is perhaps understandable that some people, even on the 'Left', should seek to wash their hands of these questions, claiming that they are irrelevant to the tasks of British socialists. Such a withdrawal into a perplexed insularity was characteristic of many of those who broke with the Communist Party in or after 1956 and subsequently presented themselves as 'the new Left'. In fact, unwillingness to pursue to the end the necessary discussion of Stalinism and its origins was a major source of the weakness of this trend and, paradoxically, a reason for its failure to establish a place in the politics of the Labour movement in Britain, since it meant that policies on a whole series of questions were left vague, hesitant, obscure and confusing.

We have today, then, the disarray of the apologists,

making the best of the achievements of the Soviet Union and vainly trying to evade the question of how Stalinism arose; at the other pole those who accept that the USSR is nothing but an oppressive and aggressive force bent on world conquest; there are all manner of other interpretations between these extremes. What has to be counted with, in particular, is the force of the revulsion against Stalinism found among many socialists and the pressure of 'public opinion' created by this, enhanced

by the Cold War and cleverly exploited in intellectual circles by such organs as the Congress for Cultural Freedom. We should not be surprised to find on the Left, then, a number of 'theories' of rejection of the Soviet Union with a certain degree of attractive power for young people and intellectuals, who are looking for correct explanations and yet, at the same time, are sensitive to the pressures in their own social milieu.

I

The theories which we are about to examine have in common that they discern in the set-up in the Soviet Union a new form of class-divided, exploiting society with its specific ruling class and political system. Apart from this they have secondary differences: some consider that this represents a form of capitalism—'state capitalism', 'bureaucratic capitalism'; others see in it something quite distinct from capitalist society and describe it as 'bureaucratic collectivism', 'managerial society' or 'state socialism'. Various other sub-classifications may be made: for example, there are several variants of the 'state capitalist' theory, which is of special interest both because it claims to analyse Soviet economy in the precise terms of Marx's *Capital* and because, in a looser way, many people today speak of the Soviet Union as 'state capitalist' without really having thought out the reasons for doing so. In addition, adherents of this theory represent a definite trend in the 'Left' in Britain and a number of other countries to a much greater extent than the adherents of the 'bureaucratic collectivist' theory.

All these theories can claim intellectual roots in discussions in Marxist circles which go back to before 1914, to the classic tenets of anarchism or anarcho-syndicalism and, more particularly, to the attempts made, first in Russia, then in the workers' movement internationally, to describe and account for the degeneration of the Soviet power from the early 1920s onwards. A full history of such trends would thus have to deal with the Bordigists and other groups which broke from the Communist International in this period, the Workers' Opposition in Russia, the rise of the Left Opposition and the discussions which arose within its ranks from its very inception. There is certainly little novelty in the principal ideas of the versions which have found currency more recently in the writings of James Burnham, Tony Cliff, the French review

Socialisme ou Barbarie,¹ Shachtman and his group in the U.S.A., Milovan Djilas and many others. What is important at this stage is less the

1. Burnham wrote his book, **The Managerial Revolution**, after his departure from the American Socialist Workers' Party following a lengthy factional discussion in 1939-40 over the nature of the USSR. It was, in the main, a working out, even to the point of absurdity, of themes which had been prominent in this discussion. The principal ideas had already found expression in writings by Laurat, Hilferding and Bruno Rizzi (the latter in a work entitled **La Bureaucratization du Monde**). Whether or not Burnham was directly inspired by Rizzi has been the cause of some controversy. See **Le Contrat Social**, Nov. 1958, Jan. and March 1959, **Arguments**, No. 17 and No. 20 with communications from Naville, H. Draper, Rizzi himself and others. Shachtman was co-leader of the SWP minority and developed, in the magazine **The New International**, the theory of 'bureaucratic collectivism'.

Socialisme ou Barbarie has been published in Paris since 1949. The fullest statement of its own 'state capitalist' theory is in No. 2, 'Les rapports de production en Russie' by P. Chaulieu.

Tony Cliff is the only consequential theorist of the 'state capitalist' tendency in Britain. His book **Stalinist Russia** appeared in 1955; the implications of the theory appear in the pages of the magazine **International Socialism**.

Djilas, former Yugoslav partisan leader and minister, developed a 'state capitalist' theory to explain Soviet society in the period after the break between Stalin and Tito. When he extended it to Yugoslavia as well he soon found himself in gaol. His book, **The New Class**, theoretically inferior to the former works, nevertheless became a best-seller. See my discussion in **Labour Review**, Vol. 3, No. 3, 1958.

Bordiga seems to have found no disciples in Britain, but his tendency continues to exist in Italy and France (where it publishes **Le Programme Communiste**).

The 'Johnson-Forrest' tendency in the USA developed a rather incoherent 'state capitalist' theory, an exposition of which, **State Capitalism and World Revolution**, was published in Britain in 1956.

More 'academic' versions of the same or similar trends of thinking are represented by Wittfogel, Seton-Watson, etc. (see Bell, D. 'Ten Theories in Search of Soviet Reality', **World Politics**, April 1958).

differences which undoubtedly exist between these theories than the common ground which they share. However, relatively more attention will be given to the theory of 'state capitalism' than to the others.

The problems presented by the development of the Soviet Union and the emergence of other states with a similar social system are undoubtedly difficult because of the unprecedented character and scale of the social transformation involved, as well as the deliberate policy of concealment and falsification of data pursued by the rulers of these states. In the years following the Russian Revolution, for example, features developed in Russia, owing to the isolation of the revolution in a backward country, very different from those which socialists had expected after the overthrow of capitalism. The process of degeneration which took place in the Bolshevik Party, which changed it out of all recognition; the altered relations between the party, the state and the working class; and the emergence of a politically dominant stratum enjoying economic privileges amid general hardship and poverty, strained the resources of description, theoretical perception and vocabulary. The search for a short-cut, the need for a simple key to the unravelling of complex and disheartening problems, soon brought suggestions that nothing had changed or that there had been a relapse into capitalism or into a new exploiting society. After all, the Mensheviks had argued that the revolution ought to have been a bourgeois revolution leading to the full establishment of capitalism in backward Russia; what was more natural than to see in the developments of the 20s the carrying out of capitalist tasks by capitalist methods leading to the installation of capitalism of a new type? Either the Russian Revolution had been a mistake or, presumably by a series of imperceptible stages, power had been taken from the workers and assumed by a new exploiting class corresponding to the bourgeoisie under capitalism.

In their earlier forms such theories were not worked out to their logical conclusion. That came later, and what it meant, in short, was that the categories of *Capital*, intended to apply to competitive private enterprise capitalism, could be affixed to Russian society in the Stalinist phase. Instead of many competing capitalists there was now a single capitalist, the state. The complete fusion of

economic with political power brought into being 'integral bureaucratic capitalism' which only 'applies to the whole of the economy and society the methods which private capitalism created and applied in each particular factory'. Far from being socialism, or anything resembling it, 'it is the most finished realisation of the spirit of capitalism, it pushes to the limit its most significant tendencies. Its essence consists, like that of capitalist production, in reducing the direct producers to the role of pure and simple executants of orders received'.² All that Marx wrote about the impoverishment, alienation and divorce from the means of production of the worker is regarded as strictly applicable to the USSR. If one enquires about the reason for the absence of periodical crises of over-production, or of problems arising from the tendency of the rate of profit to fall, these are held to be 'inessential' aspects of Marx's analysis of capitalism.³

Although some bourgeois observers have pointed out parallels, in fact superficial ones, between Soviet and capitalist societies, economists have not fallen into the error of establishing such an identity.⁴ The kind of economic theory accepted as orthodox in capitalist countries does not recognise the kinship of Soviet economy with that in these countries. This theory is, indeed, for the most part incapable of analysing Soviet economy in the same terms as that which it employs in relation to capitalist economy; the former it sees as a planned economy, the latter as economies which, in greater or lesser degree, are beholden to the laws of the market. It has been left to self-styled Marxists to turn superficial resemblances into the claim that Soviet 'state capitalism' is the 'most finished realisation of the spirit of capitalism', prefiguring in fact the situation towards which monopoly capitalism in America and Western Europe is tending.

2. 'The concrete development of the Russian economy under bureaucratic domination differs in no way, as far as its general orientation is concerned, from that of a capitalist country . . . the essential objectives and the fundamental means (the exploitation of the workers) are identical with those of capitalist economies.' (My emphasis—T.K.) *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, No. 2, p. 20.

3. *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, No. 2.

4. e.g., de Jouvenel, R. in *The Soviet Economy* (Congress for Cultural Freedom, 1956) 'Some Fundamental Similarities between the Soviet and Capitalist Economic Systems'.

A detailed theoretical refutation of these claims is not necessary; it cannot be made on a point-by-point basis. The theories are vitiated by the premises from which they start. Once one has made up one's

mind that, in a literal sense, the understanding of Soviet society can be read off from *Capital* it is only a question of finding the most convincing analogies, affixing the right labels and glibly discarding what

does not fit the thesis. Isolated aspects of Soviet experience are abstracted unhistorically and compared to equally isolated aspects of capitalist society. This method itself depends greatly on a display of 'Marxist' erudition and upon emotional reference to disagreeable sides of Stalinism. It is typical, for example, that it should hold up the ugly reality of Russian experience for comparison with some abstract model of a healthy workers' state, as though this clinched the argument about the social nature of the USSR. The reader does not realise that he is being gripped by his emotions and blinded by knowledge, but a moment's pause will show that the reasoning is entirely mechanical. It is based on the conception of some ideal type for a workers' state, torn out of all historical reference, and of the Soviet Union as a finished social formation, subject, at any rate according to the 'state capitalists', to the same laws of capitalism as were analysed by Marx, and with a new ruling class represented by the bureaucracy, the collective capitalist.

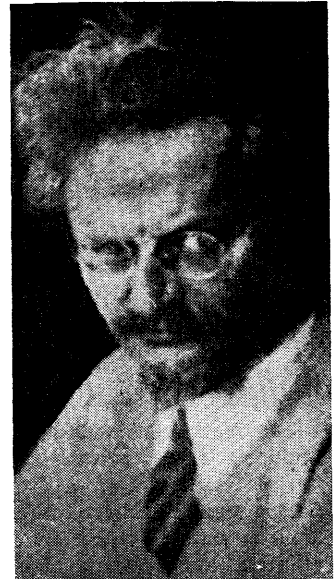
Adherents of the theories of 'state capitalism' and 'bureaucratic collectivism' want us to believe that in the USSR and Eastern Europe a functional bureaucracy has become a new ruling class. Thus we find assertions like the following: 'The bureaucracy does not individually own, it collectively controls—and hence prevents other strata from participation in decision-making. Individual members of the bureaucracy, like individual entrepreneurs, may run the risk of elimination from its ranks, but the bureaucracy as such is a self-perpetuating ruling class whose power is defined by its relation to the means of production, i.e., by its relation to the state. Far from being a parasitic excrescence on a healthy body it is an integral element in a corrupt social structure.'⁵

It was against theories of this kind, put forward inside the American Socialist Workers' Party in 1939-40, that Trotsky fought his last theoretical battle, as he had fought before against those who had maintained that the Soviet Union had become a new form of exploiting society.⁶ He fought to maintain a view which, in association with the Left Opposition, first in Russia, then outside, he had evolved over the previous ten years. This view finds its most complete expression in a book which, at the same time, is a major contribution to Marxist theory, *The Revolution Betrayed*. It takes the form, not of a snap definition, but of a sociological characterization too long to quote here. Trotsky does not accept the view that the question has been finally

5. Coser, L. and Howe, I., editors of the American review *Dissent*, a haven for ex-radicals of varied hues, in *Voices of Dissent*, p. 98. They were members of, or sympathetic towards, the Shachtman group of 'bureaucratic collectivists'.

6. See Trotsky, L. D. *In Defense of Marxism*.

Trotsky:
*he always defended
the property forms
of the Soviet Union,
against the imperial-
ists and against the
parasitic Stalinist
bureaucracy.*



settled by history but says that it 'will be decided by a struggle of living social forces, both on the national and the world arena'.⁷ Trotsky maintained that despite the usurpation of *political* power by the bureaucracy the essential conquests of the Revolution had been preserved: nationalized property and planned economy corresponded to the social basis of proletarian hegemony. In the special conditions of Russian development the bureaucracy had emerged from the working class and became 'the sole privileged and commanding stratum'. Trotsky was prepared to admit that 'the very fact of its appropriation of political power in a country where the principal means of production are in the hands of the state, creates a new and hitherto unknown relationship between the bureaucracy and the riches of the nation'.⁸ A real qualitative leap would, however, be required before the bureaucracy could legitimise its rule and make itself a new ruling class. In 1939, with the conclusion of the Hitler-Stalin pact—which blew sky-high the tacit pro-Sovietism of progressive petty-bourgeois and intellectual circles—the minority in the SWP argued that somewhere along the line such a change had taken

7. *The Revolution Betrayed*, p. 255. This comes at the end of an almost page-long definition of the transitional nature of the Soviet Union. 'Doctrinaires', Trotsky added, prophetically, 'will doubtless not be satisfied with this hypothetical definition. They would like categorical formulae: yes—yes, and no—no. Sociological problems would certainly be simpler, if social phenomena always had a finished character.'

8. *Ibid.*, p. 249. See also 'The USSR in War' in *In Defense of Marxism*.

place; they were not sure when, but they were anxious to find coherent theoretical reasons no longer to have to defend the Soviet Union at a time when this had become difficult and unpopular.



Hitler-Stalin Pact: the event which signalled 'Abandon Ship!' to so many 'progressives' and 'friends of the Soviet Union'.

In the course of the discussion which subsequently took place Trotsky, as it were, put into the mouths of his critics arguments which they accepted and built upon. We have already examined the basis of these arguments. In fact Trotsky did accept that a 'bureaucratic collectivist' society was a *theoretical* possibility. One of the leaders of the struggle against Trotsky, Max Shachtman, has recently argued that this marked a sharp change in Trotsky's thinking.⁹ In fact this was not so; perhaps less explicitly he had said much the same thing in his earlier polemic against Urbahns,¹⁰ as well as in *The Revolution Betrayed*. What Shachtman dare not face up to is that Trotsky set certain conditions for accepting that the corner had been turned and that a new exploiting society had been established in the USSR. It would have been necessary to accept that the definite defeat of the Russian working

9. In *Survey*, No. 41, April 1962: 'Having insisted that Russia remained a workers' state because the rule of the bourgeoisie had not been restored and nationalised property still prevailed, he—Trotsky—now conceded that the workers' state could be utterly destroyed even if the bourgeoisie did come to power and even if property remained nationalised,' p. 106. Note that Trotsky was speaking about Russia as a **degenerated** workers' state and traced out the processes of that degeneration. To concede the **theoretical** possibility, which Shachtman takes to be a change in Trotsky's thinking, is one thing; to establish its actuality is another. For what this would imply see the text of this article.

10. Urbahns, a German Communist leader, adopted a state capitalist position after breaking with the Comintern. Trotsky's polemic against him, first published as **The Soviet Union and the Fourth International**, but subsequently as **The Class Nature of the Soviet State**, dates from 1933, at a time when Shachtman had not yet discovered his differences. Trotsky then wrote: 'The bureaucracy is not a ruling class. But the further development of the bureaucratic regime can lead to the inception of a new ruling class: not organically through degeneration, but through counter-revolution'. Such a counter-revolution has not, in the intervening period, been in the bureaucracy's power to make; its defensive position in Soviet society has been increasingly evident since the death of Stalin in 1953.

class at the hands of the bureaucracy had taken place and that the social conquests of the Revolution of 1917 had been finally liquidated. The significance of this on the international plane would be correspondingly immense. The way would be open for the assumption of power by such a new ruling class on a world scale, as Bruno Rizzi and later Burnham argued was taking place. It would suggest that the working class was incapable of assuming power, or at least of holding it for any length of time. It would assume the indefinite continuance of capitalism, or its supersession, in decline, by something worse. The logic of this, too, was accepted by Burnham: the real theme of his *The Managerial Revolution* is the failure of the Russian revolution and abandonment of all confidence in the working class.¹¹ Burnham went logically, and rapidly, into the camp of reaction. The movement of Shachtman was slower: he wanted to accept part of the sociological analysis, without accepting all the political implications. Even so, he accepted the basic one in the situation of 1940: the abandonment of defence of the Soviet Union. This meant then, as it does now—as a direct derivation from the theory of 'bureaucratic collectivism', or, for that matter, of 'state capitalism'—that there was no difference between the USSR and a capitalist country: the defeat of the USSR was of no particular concern to the world working class. But, as Trotsky pointed out in the course of the controversy, 'the system of planned economy [despite the profound deformations introduced by the bureaucracy], on the foundation of state ownership of the means of production, has

11. Burnham claimed the support of the discoveries of modern bourgeois sociology for his view of the new 'managerial society'. Michels and others argue that administrative power as such gives rise to undemocratic and privileged rule, and since administration will always be required there will always be class divisions and class power. One of the assumptions behind this is the lack of initiative and interest on the part of the vast mass of mankind, who remain incompetent to take on the responsibility of rule. They, and Burnham along with them (see his book, **The Machiavellians**), fail to see that this characteristic which they claim to see in the masses is itself a product of the separation of mental and manual labour and the monopoly of education and culture in the class societies they know. Their own position in these societies prevents them from understanding the real initiative and ability of the masses. Some historical accounting by the founder of the 'managerial revolution' theory would not be out of place. In 1940 Burnham saw all the advanced countries and particularly the USSR as examples of the triumph or impending triumph of the managerial 'class'. But in which of these countries has the managerial 'class' been able to consolidate its rule as the leader of the new social order? German 'national socialism' is in ruins; the Soviet bureaucracy is experiencing a prolonged and bitter crisis because it stands in contradiction to the nationalized property forms; victories against the 'old' capitalism? (See P. Naville, in **Arguments**, No. 17.)

been preserved and continues to remain a colossal conquest of mankind. The defeat of the USSR in a war with imperialism would signify not solely the liquidation of the bureaucratic dictatorship, but the planned state economy; the dismemberment of the country into spheres of influence; a new stabilisation of imperialism; and a new weakening of the world proletariat'.¹² This remains as true in the era of Cold War as it was at the time when it was written. It is not true, as Shachtman argues, that Trotsky determined the nature of a social order (i.e., the USSR) by appraising the prospects for political success of its upholders and opponents. Trotsky tried to work out the dialectical relationship between them in the whole international context of the struggle between classes. Shachtman eventually tired of his ambiguous position; after many years he led his followers into the bosom of American Social Democracy which had long since come to terms with the State Department.¹³

12. In *Defense of Marxism*, p. 122.

13. Shachtman's 'Independent Socialist League', formerly 'The Workers' Party', ingloriously dissolved itself in 1958 and its members entered the SP-SDF. Its final statement stated: 'We do not subscribe to any creed known as Trotskyism or defined as such. . . . We are strongly in favour of a broad party with full party democracy for all, which does not demand creedal conformity on all questions, etc. . . .' The sudden demise of the journal *The New Internationalist* was a shock to the 'state capitalists' in Britain who had co-operated closely with it for some years.

In the course of this prolonged itinerary, during which Shachtman showed many flashes of polemical skill, he and his followers co-operated with the adherents of 'state capitalist' theories. This was typical of the unprincipled politics which followed from the position both had adopted on political questions. Because they temporarily drew similar political conclusions they were quite prepared not to raise the very different sociological paths which had led them to such conclusions. In the article already quoted he sums up his opposition to 'state capitalism'. 'A social order', he writes, 'in which there is no capitalist class, no capitalist private property, no capitalist profit, no production of commodities for the market, no working class more or less free to sell its labour power on the open market—can be described as capitalist no matter how modified by adjectives, only by arbitrary and meaningless definition'.¹⁴ One would hardly imagine that he co-operated with 'state capitalists' for many years; presumably no explanation ever took place between the two trends on such questions. Certainly Shachtman's arguments against 'state capitalism' are dealt with in all the expositions of the theory and dismissed as concerning the inessential attributes of capitalism, and the 'bureaucratic collectivist' theory remains weakest on its economic side.

14. *Survey*, No. 41, p. 104.

III

Before we can deal satisfactorily with these theories it is necessary to discuss, from a Marxist point of view, the meaning to be given to key terms in the controversy. We shall therefore need to say what we understand by 'class', 'ruling class', 'bureaucracy', 'capital' and 'capitalism' and shed light, as this is done, upon the issues which are in question. Of course, this can only be done very inadequately within the limits of a single article. In fact, Marxists need to give much more attention than they do to these questions. It is not surprising that those Marxists who owe allegiance to the official Communist Party line can offer little or no assistance in this field. It is notorious that Soviet sociologists do not dare to ask the most elementary questions about their own society. The ideological bankruptcy of the Stalin period was officially admitted at the 22nd Congress, and a great

theoretical void now exists in the world communist movement—which is temporarily filled by vacuous declarations and misquotations from Lenin. The inability and unwillingness to consider the social roots of Stalinist degeneration has made it necessary to attribute all the excesses to the personal characteristics of one man—a hair-raising disregard for the elements of Marxism. The few attempts which have been made to carry on a discussion in Marxist terms have been hastily scotched. When the basic questions have been raised the answers given have generally been puerile. In fact, however, there can be no development of Marxist analysis which does not consider carefully, in Marxist terms, the social and class nature of the Soviet state. The inability of the 'orthodox', i.e., Communist Party, Marxists, to reply to the theories of 'state capitalism', 'bureaucratic collectivism', etc., derives from the fact that

they cannot begin to do so without treading on dangerous ground.¹⁵ The great merit of Trotsky, and in this he developed Marxism in a creative way, was that he did carry forward such an analysis—pointing out much which even the apologists for the ruling clique had to admit, 20 years after—and drew the necessary political conclusions. No apology is necessary, therefore, for the fact that this exposition and polemic are made along the lines which he indicated. In fact, no one can venture into this field with any authority without having mastered *The Revolution Betrayed* and *In Defense of Marxism*. Nothing much of what the state capitalists and 'bureaucratic collectivists' claim as their own thought will not be found, duly refuted, in these works.

The existence of *classes* is determined by the fact that different social groups stand in different specific relationship to the means of production, and thus to the allocation of the social product.

It is often said that Marxists have never clearly defined their approach to the concept of class. Perhaps the following quotations may take the place of a full exposition:

'Classes are large groups of people which differ from each other by the place they occupy in a historically definite system of social production, by their relation (in most cases fixed and formulated in laws) to the means of production, by the dimensions and method of acquiring the share of social wealth

15. One may instance the discussions in the Italian Communist Party which, while aware of the incompatibility of the Khrushchev 'explanations' of the 'personality cult' with historical materialism, have not dared to go much further than to state this fact, and which have now been reined in by Togliatti in any case. As an example of theoretical banality we may quote from the book *Inside the Khrushchev Era* by G. Boffa, *L'Unita* correspondent in Moscow, which has enjoyed some vogue in Europe among fellow-travellers for its 'admissions', now part of the new apologetics—the starry-eyed, Dean of Canterbury type being *vieux jeu*. Daringly raising the question—'The social democrats, the Trotskyists, and later the Yugoslavs spoke of a "new class" emerging from the so-called "Stalinist bureaucracy"; he goes on to provide 'the answer'—'This concept of new class is completely invalid. At no time was the bureaucracy able to change the relations of production in its own favour. It never even approached this area. Not one of the fundamental principles of socialism was ever undermined (sic). Bureaucratic elements do tend to separate out and form distinct strata, detached and isolated from the people—this is the nature of bureaucracy, its outstanding characteristic. But such a tendency does not strengthen bureaucracy. Instead it brings it into open conflict with Soviet society.' The feebleness of this argument requires no demonstration. It is interesting, that Boffa, like all the orthodox, deliberately confuses the use of the term 'bureaucracy' as applied to a distinct social layer—whose existence is denied—with that of certain administrative vices, red tape, etc., which causes accidental divisions between some functionaries and the public at large.

that they obtain. Classes are groups of people one of which may appropriate the labour of another owing to the different places they occupy in the definite system of economy.'¹⁶

'A class is defined not by its participation in the distribution of the national income alone but by its independent roots in the economic foundation of society.'¹⁷

The ruling class is that class which, through its ownership of the main means of production, is able to appropriate the social surplus, i.e., that part of total output over and above what is received by the direct producers.

To a given ruling class, therefore, correspond particular property forms and specific relations between it and other classes in the society. Such a ruling class will itself be stratified; there may also be conflict between its different sections. The relation between political power, concentrated in the state, and the ruling class as a whole shows considerable variation. In complex, class-divided societies of the capitalist type, the actual exercise of state power may be in the hands of a stratum which enjoys some independence from the ruling class as such, though it is ultimately answerable to it. Indeed, there is room for considerable variation in the form of capitalist rule—parliamentary democracy, bonapartist dictatorship, presidential government, fascism. In any case, the actual authority of the state is vested not in capitalists as such, not in property owners, but in a hierarchy of salaried servants—the upper layers of which will have the closest ties with the economic ruling class—who form a functional bureaucracy. Even in business considerable powers, but not ultimate determining *power*, have, of necessity, to be vested in similar people. The relations between the ruling class and the bureaucracy which is an emanation of it are not fixed and constant; they vary with innumerable factors, some of which tend to increase the autonomy of the latter while others restrict it. There is no recorded case, however, in a capitalist society of such a bureaucracy (even taken in the widest sense, to include business executives, party bosses, etc.) establishing itself as a ruling class. The test of a state apparatus and those who occupy positions in it is whether their policies and exercise of power, internally and externally, have the function of preserving the social foundations, legal protections and ideological domination of the class which owns the main means of production. It would be a very foolhardy man who suggested that the political regime of the USSR had acted in any way to stabilize, strengthen and legitimize the power and privilege of the managers and technical intelligentsia

16. Lenin, 'A Great Beginning: the Heroism of the Workers in the Rear. On Communist Subbotniks', in *Selected Works*, Vol. IX, p. 432.

17. Trotsky in *The Class Nature of the Soviet State*.

since Burnham's book was written. In practice, as distinct from the manuals of speculative sociology of *The Managerial Revolution* type, the ruling class under capitalism has remained firmly based upon the ownership of the means of production, and the attempt to establish a distinction between this and 'control' has remained a fiction.

It is a mistake of many writers to use the term 'capitalism' with no discrimination. Eminent economic historians, for example, have been known to argue that capitalism began when primitive man began to use a digging stick, and have subsequently distinguished numerous varieties of capitalism from that day to this. Other non-Marxists refuse to use the term at all. Marx, however, was interested in precisely what distinguished what he called the 'capitalist mode of production' from all economic systems which preceded it. He recognised, of course, that it had certain features in common with its predecessors and, as though to anticipate the misuse of his own terms, he made it clear that a distinction had to be made between these and the essence of capitalist relations which defined that mode of production. Answering those who wished to blur the distinction between capitalism and other forms of economy he wrote: 'Because a form of production may . . . be brought into line with its forms of revenue—and to a certain extent not incorrectly—the illusion is strengthened so much the more that the capitalist conditions are the natural conditions of any mode of production.'¹⁸ As for the division of the product he went on to say 'if we deprive both wages and surplus labour of their specifically capitalist character, then we have not these forms, but merely their foundations, which are common to all social modes of production'.¹⁹ Nor does accumulation necessarily indicate the presence of capitalism. 'In economic forms of society of the most different kinds,' wrote Marx, 'there occurs not only simple reproduction, but, in varying degrees, reproduction in a progressively increasing scale. By degrees more is produced and more consumed, and consequently more products have to be converted into means of production. This process, however, does not present itself as accumulation of capital, nor as the function of a capitalist, so long as the labourer's means of production, and with them, his product and means of subsistence, do not confront him in the shape of capital.'²⁰

Anyone who wants to apply the term 'capitalist', however qualified, to the form of production which prevails in the Soviet Union has therefore to prove that the means of production are 'capital' and do

so confront the working class. Whether some of the 'forms' are similar to those in unquestionably capitalist countries: whether there are wages, surplus value or classes, are secondary matters. From the very first chapter of *Capital* Marx is concerned with social relations, relations between men, whose real character is hidden and deformed. Thus, under capitalism these relations take the form of the exchange of commodities, with labour power itself a commodity bought in the market by the owners of the means of production, the capitalists. When the means of production acquire the form of capital, that means that they—'dead labour'—have the power to extract a surplus from the living labourers which is appropriated by the owners of the means of production. The capitalists personify this relationship between the means of production and the working class, with nothing to sell but its labour power. The capitalists produce not for their own enjoyment, or to satisfy social needs, but in order that, from the surplus value extracted from the workers, they may accumulate. This they do, not from choice, but from necessity; not to accumulate is to fall behind in the race and eventually to perish. The standstill of accumulation is the decline of capitalism.

To the basic capitalist relationship in production correspond the intricate 'laws of motion' of the capitalist mode of production with which Marx was concerned. With this relationship, too, goes the allocation of social power to the class which owns the means of production and appropriates surplus labour: i.e., the predominance of the bourgeoisie and the various state forms by which this class preserves its hegemony. Correspondingly, the division of society into classes, determined by ownership or non-ownership as the basic criterion, gives rise to the struggle between classes in which the maintenance or winning of state power is, in the last analysis, at stake.

In the Soviet Union the means of production are not owned by the bureaucracy, they are nationalized, state property. The additions which are made to them from the surplus labour of the direct producers become part of the nationalized property and cannot be appropriated either individually or collectively by the bureaucracy. This inability to appropriate the means of production does not prevent the bureaucrats, as effective controllers of the means of production through their monopoly of political power, from according themselves excessive incomes either for services rendered, at their own valuation, or by illicit means. Yet if the bureaucracy controls the state, it is not avowedly in its own name but as the representative of the proletariat. The distribution of the social product is, in part, arbitrarily determined by those who possess the monopoly

18. Marx, K., *Capital*, Vol. III, p. 1021 (Kerr ed.); p. 853 (FLPH ed.).

19. *Ibid.*, p. 1022 (Kerr ed.); p. 854 (FLPH ed.).

20. *Capital*, Vol. I, p. 609-610. (Allen & Unwin ed.).

of political power. On the other hand the disposal of the surplus product, as part of the social product, is neither under the control of the bureaucracy to do as it likes with nor is it subject to the pressure of accumulation for accumulation's sake, as under capitalism, bringing into existence more 'capital' in the shape of means of production alienated from the workers.

Those who argue that the bureaucracy 'really' own the means of production through their control of the state have produced no *economic analysis* to explain the specific workings of this new exploiting system. Certainly the bureaucracy has great privileges in income, but even the greatest of these differentials can only lead to differences in *consumption*, whereas the surplus appropriated by capitalists plays a specific role in the whole productive mechanism, constantly consolidating the 'domination of dead labour over living labour'. The high incomes of the bureaucrats can in no way be used to build up their power over the direct producers. In many ways, the high income of the bureaucrats weakens rather than strengthens the base of their power: by exposing the parasitic role of the bureaucracy and contributing to the corruption and isolation of its members from the workers and peasants, it produces contradictions precisely in that sphere of the political and ideological superstructure where the bureaucracy's power is rooted. In this way the specific contradictions of the bureaucracy's rule necessitate the *political* revolution which began in the 1953 rising in Eastern Germany and in Hungary in 1956.

Nominally the means of production are the property of the whole people. Far from being able to renounce this conquest of the Revolution of 1917 and replace it by a frank assertion of supremacy, the ruling stratum is obliged, by propaganda and programme, by education and the distribution of the

works of Marx and Engels and Lenin, to conceal itself behind an ideological smokescreen. Even when the variance between the officially proclaimed theory and current practice is most glaring, nevertheless their consistency must be proclaimed or, by some subtle casuistry, an explanation must be offered for popular consumption.

This is not the behaviour of a ruling class. Nor does the individual insecurity of its members which, under Stalin could lead to instant physical elimination, find an easy explanation within the terms of state capitalist theory. More and more, on investigation, and in the light of actual developments since Stalin's death, does the view of the bureaucracy as a ruling class prove unacceptable. It has no necessary place as such in the circuit of exchange. The source and form of its incomes, leaving aside its illicit predations, however high, are precisely the same as those of the working class as a whole. The pressure of the working class and peasants for increased consumption, as well as the internationally-imposed need to build up and extend the means of production—always outside its ownership—provide objective limits to its distributive share.²¹ In those circumstances it is by no means free to use and abuse the means of production in its custody. Certainly the bureaucracy as a whole has to wage a struggle against such abuses getting out of hand on the part of individual members. Collectively it is increasingly sensitive to the fact that its continued political predominance depends upon delivering the goods and concealing its economic privileges. Its continued predominance is not made necessary by a specific form of property. The form of property corresponds already to the hegemony of the proletariat brought about through a social revolution. The bureaucracy was always an historical anomaly; its role was,

21. Any such objective limits are denied by Chaulieu, *op. cit.*

East Berlin uprising:
the first
great
stirring of
the workers
towards the
'political
revolution'.



and remains, parasitic.²² It cannot back up its political rule by establishing a new form of property, nor does it personify capital, as required by the state capitalist theory.²³

Of course, all this does not prevent the appearance in the Soviet Union of all sorts of abhorrent practices, but these horrors were tied up from the first with the parasitism of the bureaucracy. They followed precisely from its insecurity, from its anomalous position, from its usurpation, from the contradiction between theory and practice—which, in the special conditions of backward Russia's isolation in a period of capitalist decline, led to Stalinism. The bureaucracy, like Stalinism, did not spring from nowhere. Both had the same social roots and were interlaced for a whole era. The procedures of Stalinism were inescapable for the bureaucracy in a particular phase of Russian development. When those conditions changed it sought to rationalise those procedures as a way of maintaining its power, confronted as it was by a large, growing and increasingly self-conscious working class which wanted to enter fully into its legacy, the legacy of the October Revolution. For this to become effective there will be no need to change the property relations, which correspond fully to those of a workers' state. What must go is the usurping political function of the bureaucracy which it exercises, of course, already in the name of the working class. The way to put paid to the political degeneration which led to the rule of the bureaucracy lies in the political revolution which, through workers' councils and militias, enables the working class to rule in its own right.

The conclusion of this discussion must be that in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe what is called the bureaucracy does not form a new ruling class and that there is not to be found in these countries a new form of exploiting society. Appearances apart, the evidence of history and the conclusions of Marxist sociology are conclusive on these points. Traditional terminology, even that of

22. As Trotsky puts it, 'in so far as the bureaucracy robs the people (and this is done in various ways by every bureaucracy) we have to deal not with **class exploitation** in the scientific sense of the word, but with **social parasitism** although on a very large scale'. **The Class Nature of the Soviet State**, Ceylon ed., p. 13.

23. Needless to add, the formulations of the official sophists, as expressed, for example, in **The Political Economy Textbook** which claim to have 'abolished the antagonistic contradiction between accumulation and consumption' (p. 549) because the means of production are 'at the disposal of society for further production, serve the interest of the whole people and cannot provide the basis for exploitation' (p. 512) have no scientific value. They merely provide the verbal smoke-screen behind which the bureaucracy maintains its usurpation.

Marxists, is not always adequate to cope with the infinite variety of living social forms. Certainly what we call 'the bureaucracy' comprehends a social layer representing some 10 to 15 per cent of the population, larger in size and more varied in composition than those generally included in the term in orthodox sociology. There is no doubt that many of these people are carrying out functions which would be necessary in a healthy workers' state. Large sections, however, such as the secret police, or those concerned with industrial discipline, only exist because of the antagonisms which result from the privileged and usurping position of the stratum as a whole. It is this special and anomalous position which, while preventing the bureaucracy from being a class, makes necessary the use of some other term. When Trotsky hit on the term 'caste' he was aware that this, too, had its shortcomings. 'We frequently call the Soviet bureaucracy a caste, underscoring thereby its shut-in character, its arbitrary rule, and the haughtiness of the ruling stratum which considers that its progenitors issued from the divine lips of Brahma whereas the popular masses originated from the grosser parts of his anatomy. But even this definition does not of course possess a strictly scientific character. Its relative superiority lies in this, that the make-shift character of the term is clear to everybody, since it would enter nobody's mind to identify the Moscow oligarchy with the Hindu caste of Brahmins.'²⁴

An important point is that a caste is not defined by its relationship to the means of production; it is not economically necessary but is a product of superstructural forces—ideology, religion, war, conquest. Thus, in these states, the caste-like peculiarities of the bureaucracy arise from the political degeneration of the Stalin era, the isolation of the revolution in a backward country and the precautions which the bureaucracy has taken to preserve its anomalous position and social privileges. It performs no function in the course of production which justifies its de facto monopoly of political power. Its role is not made necessary by the form of property. Its existence is bound up with the preservation of the conquests of a working-class revolution, but is actually in conflict with the property forms. In fact no independent basis for its rule exists; in that respect it is not a class, independent of the working class of which it is, historically, an emanation and from which, in terms of source of income, it is not distinguished. If it absorbs a disproportionate share of the social product that is because it disposes of the social surplus—but still can do no other than deploy most of it in the building up of additional means of pro-

24. **In Defense of Marxism**, p. 6.

duction. In doing so, however, it does not create capital or behave as a capitalist class. It cannot alter the nationalized basis of the economy nor is it, as a specially privileged ruling stratum, necessary to it. It is best described, then, as a parasitic excrescence which arose in the course of the process of degeneration which went on in the USSR or, by transference, affected the East European countries. It can be removed by a political revolution which will not only leave intact the social-economic base but will enable the full flowering of the latter to take place. The road to socialism in these countries thus lies through the re-establishment of workers' power; the Hungarian Commune of 1956, based as it was on workers' councils, foreshadows the future line of development. Whatever adaptations the bureaucracy may make, it is confronted by an increasingly powerful and self-conscious working class which no attempt at self-reform will satisfy. The political monopoly of the bureaucracy is, indeed, the only basis for its social existence in these countries. The fragile and contingent nature of its rule, which now moves from crisis to crisis as the events since 1953 have demonstrated, removes any possibility that it can consolidate its position and create a new form of class rule. A product of international defeats for the working class and of hardship and penury in the USSR, it cannot survive a period of international working-class advance.

Trotsky, in all his writings on the social character of the Soviet Union, never lost sight of the international and political conditions of the domination and the overthrow of the Stalinist

bureaucracy. Succeeding in the period of exhaustion of the Russian masses, and contributing with its strategy of 'socialism in one country' to the international defeats which further isolated and discouraged the Russian workers in the 1920s, the bureaucracy came to stand between the Soviet proletariat and its true role beside the workers of the world in the struggle against imperialism. The basic class antagonisms remain the same: the struggle between the imperialists and the international proletariat, with the Russian workers having made a major breakthrough in 1917, but prevented from playing the necessary role of ally with the workers of the advanced and colonial countries by the political policy of the Stalinist bureaucracy. 'The bureaucracy upon which Stalin leans is materially bound up with the results of the consummated national revolution, but it has no point of contact with the developing international revolution.'²⁵ The combination of the struggles of the large and developed industrial working class in the USSR itself together with the solution of the 'crisis of leadership' in the labour movements of the advanced countries, is the death-knell of the bureaucracy. This perspective points clearly to the major responsibility of Marxists in relation to the USSR: defence of the conquests of October, together with implacable struggle against the Stalinist bureaucracy in the creation of a Marxist leadership, both in the capitalist countries and in the 'Soviet bloc'.

25. L. D. Trotsky. *The Workers' State and the Question of Thermidor* (1935), Socialist Labour League pamphlet.

IV

Something has already been said about the practical political conclusion which should be expected to follow from the type of theory now under consideration. In the light of events, while adherents of these trends have rejected defence of the Soviet Union, they have not always been able to resist being impressed by the economic, and even by the social, accomplishments of that country. Since they have decided that the bureaucracy is a new ruling class, moreover, it is difficult for them to deny it a valid place in history and thus to ascribe to it these very accomplishments, albeit achieved with the help of exploitation and ruthless oppression. Remarkably enough, therefore, a rapprochement takes place between the open apologists of the bureaucracy and the 'state capitalists' (the 'bureaucratic collectivists', strongest in the USA, are more consistently anti-Soviet): for both historical necessity and objec-

tive laws made Russian development what it was and justify, or legitimize, the rule of the bureaucracy, including at least some of its draconian measures. The position adopted on this question is not free from contradiction and is obscured by the weakness of the 'state capitalist' analysis of the post-Stalin developments in the Soviet Union. Thus, in one place, Cliff, writing of the bureaucracy, states: 'Unable to rely on the self-activity of the people, denying all working-class democracy, Khrushchev has to rely on bureaucrats to control other bureaucrats. The hydra of bureaucratic anarchy and its concomitant bureaucratic control, grows on the soil of worker's alienation from the means of production and exploitation of the labourer.'²⁶ But a page or so further on in the same article he says, '*The efforts and self-sacrifice of the people have raised Russia,*

26. *International Socialism*, No. 1, Summer 1958, p. 45.

despite bureaucratic mismanagement and waste, to the position of a great industrial power from being, in terms of industrial output, fourth in Europe and fifth in the world to being first in Europe and second in the world. She has stepped out of her sleepy backwardness to become a modern, powerful, industrially advanced country. *The bureaucracy has thus earned as much tribute as Marx and Engels paid to the bourgeoisie.* (My emphasis—T.K.)²⁷ Why, under the conditions of extreme exploitation described in his earlier book 'Stalinist Russia' the people should display such efforts and self-sacrifice is not explained; nor, in a study which lays heavy emphasis on bureaucratic mismanagement and waste, is it clear why he should wish to praise the bureaucracy, if only in the same terms as those used by Marx and Engels of the bourgeoisie. The only feasible explanation seems to be that the 'state capitalists' have become impressed by the indices of industrial production and by the scientific and technological achievements to which even the most hostile publicists are now obliged to pay tribute and are trying to integrate as best they can into their scheme of things. Since, according to them, all the conquests of the Revolution have been filched away by the new bureaucratic ruling class of state capitalists, inevitably a large share of the credit must go to them—in fact it is but a short step to accepting that they have earned, and deserve, the large incomes and extensive privileges which they indeed enjoy. The implication is already there.

Moreover, if the bureaucracy is responsible for these achievements in state capitalist Russia, where it has expropriated the workers and now exploits them, and if in the advanced capitalist countries the working class has not been able to shake off the ruling class and even displays a certain political apathy, well that may mean that capitalism has the upper hand and will itself be freer to move towards the 'state capitalist' model as the result of further defeats of the workers. Such a line of thought can lead, through rejection of the conquests of the Revolution of 1917, and acceptance of the inevitability of the defeat of the Russian working class by the new ruling class, to pessimism towards the whole prospect of socialism—unless some sharp and unexpected turn in the situation comes along, like a severe economic crisis or imminent threat of war. At least in the advanced countries the 'state capitalists' do not see very much hope for independent working class action, although they talk about 'autonomous and conscious action of the working masses' free from control of party organization and discipline. Indeed for some of its adherents all leadership is now rejected in a way which has become a positive

obsession removed not only from Marxism but from all practical possibility of effective intervention in the labour movement as it is today except as an element of confusion and division. One such 'theoretician', for example, even finds the 'effective essence of class relationship in production (in) the antagonistic division of those participating in production into two fixed and stable categories: those who give the orders and those who execute them'. 'The socialist revolution sets out,' he continues, 'from the very beginning to eliminate the distinction between directors and executors as fixed and stable categories in production as well as in all other fields of collective life; *because it is in this distinction that the division of societies into classes takes concrete form.*' (My emphasis—T.K.)²⁸ Although even *Socialisme ou Barbarie* has not been able to refrain from some form of organization to propagate its ideas, it emphasizes that 'The organization does not aim to lead the class and to impose itself on it, but will be an *instrument* of its struggle.'²⁹ Why a presumably spontaneous struggle should require any organization at all is not explained, nor what happens if the struggle employs methods, or seeks ends which are not those of the organization which wishes to be its instrument. But Marxists must seek to win leadership and to wrest it from the hands of the Social Democratic and Stalinist bureaucracies in whose hands it now resides, which can only be effected through organization.

The logic of the state capitalist position is drawn clearly enough by *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, less explicitly, perhaps, by its counterparts in Britain. Amongst other things it must be to oppose those who do seek to lead the working class and to unseat the existing leadership with cries about bureaucracy, substitutionism, dictatorship and so on. Meantime it means in practice knuckling down to the existing leaders, while waiting for the working class to get moving spontaneously, without benefit of organization. Hence the explanation of some of the curious combinations, alliances and manoeuvres which have taken place in recent years inside the Labour Party and the Young Socialists. No doubt many of these people have been acting in good faith: nonetheless they have been following out to its logical and disastrous end a wrong theory which has taken many out of the Labour movement altogether. If for no other reason the theories of 'state capitalism' and 'bureaucratic collectivism' must be understood, combated and exposed.

28. Cardan, P. Declarations of Principles of *Socialisme ou Barbarie* in *The Review* of the Imre Nagy Institute, No. 6.

29. Statement on back cover of *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, No. 33, 1962.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 52.

V

The appearance of varied theories of the Soviet Union as a new form of capitalist, or exploiting, society couched in purportedly Marxist terms represents a running away from the real issues presented by Stalinism and its aftermath, generally under the pressure of public opinion in the capitalist countries. That they can win some support from people who genuinely desire to be Marxists is, at the same time, partly the result of the abysmal theoretical level of Communist Party writing on the Soviet Union and the sheer lack of renewal in Marxist thinking in circles influenced by it. In this and other articles we try to fill this vacuum and contribute to the theoretical arming of the genuine Marxist movement. It would be stupid, however, to adopt a too facile

attitude to those who are led astray by theories like those of 'state capitalism' or 'bureaucratic collectivism'.³⁰ Not only do these raise real problems—often echoing bourgeois sociology—which require to be dealt with, but, as Trotsky's lengthy and patient rebuttals of such theories show, doing so is a real political task—a task not simply of hitting out, but of winning over those confused by such ideas. Some discussions of these theories by self-styled Trotskyists or Marxists show a desire to find a simple answer, or are simply unwilling to take up the real points raised by their adherents. We intend, in subsequent articles, to deal more fully with some of the problems involved in the analysis of modern advanced societies which have a bearing on this controversy.

30. For example, the treatment by Mandel, E. in *Traite d'Economie Marxiste*, Vol. 2, Ch. XV would hardly disturb any adherents of these theories. He merely asserts 'Contrary to what is affirmed by numerous sociologists who claim to utilise the Marxist method of analysis, the Soviet economy does not display any of the **fundamental** aspects of capitalist economy.' His main proof rests on the view that the accumulation of means of production is an accumulation of use values, that there is no profit and no anarchy of the market and that there is no bourgeoisie. According to him the adherents of the state capitalist theory are right when they say that the norms of distribution remain bourgeois and the adherents of the bureaucratic collectivist theory are right when they deny the capitalist character of Soviet production. Trying to keep purely within **economic** categories he says, 'In fact, the Soviet economy is characterised by the contradictory

combination of a non-capitalist mode of production and a mode of distribution which is still fundamentally bourgeois.' This is most inadequate and is no real answer to the theories of which he claims to have disposed.

Frank, P., on the other hand, in his preface to the recent reprint of the French translation of **The Revolution Betrayed**, argues that such theories all have their starting point 'in the strengthening of the extraordinary weight of the State in the whole of social life'. He draws attention to the increased importance of the 'new middle classes'. But apart from discussing various hypotheses, it must be said that he does not squarely meet the arguments of those whom he assumes that he has disposed of. See also 'The Soviet Union, What it is, Where it is Going', Edwards, W., **Bulletin of Marxist Studies**, No. 2, 1958.

The Need for Developing Revolutionary Theory

The Case of Alasdair MacIntyre

by James Baker

WITHOUT a continuous struggle to develop revolutionary socialist theory there can be no revolutionary socialist movement. This has always been true but there are special reasons which make the question of theory of exceptional importance for the Marxist movement in 1962. Without this struggle for theory the movement cannot grow but must remain as a number of separate sectarian groups, each attempting unsuccessfully to carry on new struggles with old and outworn slogans. 'Philosophy [theory] finds its *material* weapon in the proletariat, as the proletariat finds its spiritual [theoretical] weapons in philosophy.'¹

In the first place the Marxist movement is basically and essentially an international one. This means that all the turbulent experience in recent years of the proletariat in Russia, US, Germany, France, Italy, China, Japan, Cuba, Algeria, India and Africa has to be studied, criticized, assessed and what is important in it assimilated by the vanguard party of the international proletariat. Without a coherent and consistent theory this cannot be done. The international working class of today contains forces of immense strength; this strength will not be deployed successfully for the overthrow of the capitalist class until all that past experience has been grasped and understood. In the second place, the political situation in this country confronts the British section of the Marxist movement with formidable tasks. The crisis of capitalism on a world scale discredits increasingly the traditional leaders of the bourgeoisie in a declining capitalist state such as Britain. They depend more and more on the right-wing leaders of the Labour Party and the trade unions to control the proletariat. And these, too, in their turn are becoming exposed more clearly as the agents of

the bourgeoisie. The developing crisis of the bureaucratic caste in the Soviet Union makes it more difficult for the leaders of the Communist Party in Britain to pose as the party of the socialist revolution. The working class is left in a militant mood but without militant leadership. This is a situation which can be advantageous for the building of the Marxist movement, but only if there is a thorough grasp of Marxist theory and of the means of applying that theory. Finally, the Marxist movement in Britain is still small and is still engaged in a struggle for the leadership of the proletariat and against tendencies which would divert it from the path of revolution.

At a time when the large masses of the working class are still relatively quiescent the crisis of capitalist society has thrust large sections of the middle classes, and particularly of middle-class youth, into action. The Aldermaston marches, the anti-bomb sit-downs, the anti-ugly and anti-apartheid movements, the rise in the Liberal vote at recent by-elections, the threatened strikes of school and university teachers and nurses, these are all examples of this tendency. Another is the appearance of an angry and dissident intelligentsia, many of whom are of working class or lower middle class origin. They have begun to make names for themselves in drama, the novel, the cinema, painting and the arts generally (Wesker, Osborne, Sillitoe, Braine, Barstow, Richardson, Centre 42, The First Group, etc.). Some of them may join the Marxist movement and a few will make good revolutionaries. On the whole, however, this intelligentsia is characterized by its lack of confidence and even contempt for the working class, and by its rejection of 'politics' including the politics of class struggle. Nevertheless, it remains true that in a capitalist society, there can be no real mass movements until broad sections of the working class are involved; the proletariat is the only force capable of extending its struggles from

1. Karl Marx, Contribution to the Critique of Hegel, 'Philosophy of Right', in **On Religion**, Moscow 1957, p. 57.

a narrow sectional basis to a national and later to an international level, and of organizing itself in mass parties. As the crisis deepens and as the moment of revolutionary upsurge approaches it will be necessary for the vanguard party to be on its guard against democratic illusions, to establish and preserve the class independence of the Marxist party and to prevent class demands and slogans from being diluted with the opportunism of the petty-bourgeois intelligentsia. Here again theory will be of the greatest importance.

THE FOUR MAIN COMPONENTS OF REVOLUTIONARY MARXIST THEORY

Most of the prominent present-day bourgeois scholars and publicists—from Malcolm Muggeridge to Karl Popper—are agreed that Marxism has been refuted. Most do not even discuss it in their University courses or in their TV frolics. A few of the younger generation, however, members of the same angry intelligentsia referred to above, are permitted and even encouraged to develop existentialist or other idealist distortions of Marxism. The fact that they may have undergone some kind of battle inoculation in the Marxist movement may even tell in their favour and lead to fellowships in the ancient seats of learning, trips to the United States and other such perquisites. Because of the general theoretical weakness of the Marxist movement, resulting in part from the wide dissemination of the crude dogmas of the Stalinist clique, the 'new' Marxism which stresses the humanistic and moral aspects at the expense of the revolutionary content, and which praises the 'young idealist' Marx in order to discredit the 'old revolutionary' Marx, has acquired a certain amount of popularity.

It is difficult to deal adequately with complicated theoretical issues in the space of a short article. I begin, however, by asking: how is revolutionary theory created? It is, I suggest, the crystallization of the experience of the proletariat as the oppressed class in capitalist society. As capitalist society has evolved that experience has evolved, too, and continuous additions to the theory are needed to bring it up to date. Revolutionary theory, therefore, although associated with the name of certain exceptionally gifted individuals, Marx, Engels, Lenin, Trotsky and others, is the creation, not of those individuals, but of the class struggles of the proletariat. Because those individuals took a leading part in these struggles they were able to express in abstract and general terms for the whole proletariat the concrete and particular experience of particular sections of the proletariat. As Marx wrote:

The Young Marx:

*by the time
he was
30 years of
age, he had
completed
the ground-
work for
trans-
forming
Socialism
from a
utopia to a
science.*



'It is not a question of what this or that proletarian or even the entire proletariat envisages as the goal at any particular time. It is a question of what the proletariat is and of what it will have to do historically judged by the conditions of its existence.'² (My emphasis—J.B.)

Thus, to use a contemporary metaphor, revolutionary theory is an experimental missile, a weapon directed against the capitalist class, in which are embodied inventions derived from the experiments of past class struggles and to which new additions must continually be made in order to maintain the effectiveness of the missile in the present conditions of struggle. This weapon is the most precious possession of the proletariat and the only guarantee of its final victory over the bourgeoisie. It is a weapon, also, which must be tested continuously in action or it will fall to pieces. It is made up of a very large number of intricately interlocked parts, all of which are essential to its effective operation. For purposes of clear exposition, however, I shall concentrate attention on what I believe to be the four principal components of revolutionary theory today. These are: 'historical materialism', 'dialectics', 'democratic centralism' and 'The Fourth International'. Marx 'discovered' *historical materialism* by extending the materialist methods of the natural sciences to the study of history and social phenomena generally. He 'discovered' also how to make use in a materialist way of the methods of *dialectics* which Hegel had used previously in an idealist fashion. He and Engels together transformed socialism from a utopian dream into a materialist science; they laid out the foundations of this science and indicated the way in which its development would take place. They demonstrated its effectiveness both in 'practice'

2. Karl Marx, *The Holy Family*, 1845.

Book Reviews

Literature and Marxism

The Historical Novel. By George Lukacs, tr. from the German by Hannah and Stanley Mitchell. Merlin Press, 1962, 350 pp., 36s.

This is an important work of Marxist literary scholarship, perhaps the most important ever to have been written in this field. The author, Georg Lukacs, is acknowledged as the most important literary critic living. He has been at work on the problems of Marxism and literature for more than 60 years and is immensely erudite. He began his career as a follower of Hegel, but he soon became a Marxist and in 1919 he was Commissar for Culture in the Hungarian Soviet Republic headed by Bela Kun. After the defeat of the Revolution, Lukacs went into exile, first to Vienna, then to Berlin, and later to Moscow.

After the Second World War Lukacs returned to Hungary to take up an academic appointment as Professor of Aesthetics in the University of Budapest. In 1956 he joined the short-lived government of Imre Nagy at the time of the Hungarian Revolution as Minister of Culture. During the fighting he took refuge in the Yugoslav Embassy in Budapest; deported to somewhere outside of Hungary for six months, he returned to Budapest in the Spring of 1957 and now lives there in retirement.

Lukacs has been in trouble with the Stalinist 'revisers' of Marxism for the greater part of his life. He has frequently been accused of Hegelian idealism and of right-wing deviationism. He owes his physical survival to his willingness to pay the price of repeated acts of 'diplomatic' self-criticism: he has always bent to the prevailing wind, returning to his former path as soon as possible afterwards. Although he has been sub-

jected to political criticism, and held political office in two Hungarian governments, it is as a literary figure, and not as a politician, that he must be considered.

He enjoyed considerable prestige inside Hungary, particularly among the Party intellectuals, but he was not well known among the members of the Communist Party generally. He had been cut off from the Hungarian working class by his 30 years of exile and by the bureaucratic methods of the Communist Party. When he returned he was too old and too isolated to lead any political movement—even if he had wished to do so. His real interests were always in literature: all he wanted was to be left alone to pursue those interests, and to develop new ideas about the relationship of economic and social forces to literary creation.

It was these ideas which led to his conflicts with the Stalinist bureaucracy, both in Russia and Hungary. One of these is the so-called 'partisan theory' of the relationship between a poet and the Communist Party. Lukacs accepted it as natural that a poet should be a member of the Party and support its policies; where he clashed with the bureaucracy was on the form that this support should take. The poet, he maintained, was a militant of a special kind, fighting in his own way through the medium of his poetry. This is a problem which is not touched on directly in the present book.

Another of the literary problems which interested Lukacs was that of the 'realism' of the great writers. He tried to show that there was often a contradiction between a writers'

political outlook and the nature of the work he produced. A really great writer, he maintained, had the ability to portray reality in all its actuality; for this reason it did not matter whether or not he accepted reactionary political views. His work would in fact transcend political boundaries; his incapacity for falsehood as an artist would make it possible for him to write great works. The prime examples of this process, according to Lukacs, were Balzac and Scott, both of whom were reactionaries in their views, but whose work was progressive because they portrayed accurately the decline of feudal forces and the rise of the advancing bourgeoisie. This is a theme dealt with at some some length in the present book, and I will return to it later..

The absence of any serious Marxist examination of the problems of literature has long been a serious weakness in the development of the Marxist movement both in Britain and elsewhere. This has left the field open to all kinds of 'reformist' and 'revisionist' approaches to literature. The appearance in English of Lukacs' **The Historical Novel** provides an opportunity to begin an effort to overcome this weakness. Marx and Engels made frequent references to the application of the methods of materialism to literary themes in their works and in their letters; but they never had the occasion to concentrate their attention on this subject. In Lenin's **Philosophical Notebooks** are contained the markings and comments he made on books of philosophy and literary criticism, and they show the great stress he laid on the progressive, materialist tradition of

Russian thought, and in particular of Chernyshevsky. He was concerned, too, with the problem of the dialectical process of cognition and the dictum that the dialectical way of apprehending objective reality is in the transition from living perception to abstract thought and from this to practice.

In his book *Literature and Revolution* (written in 1923), in his article on Tolstoy, and in others of his works, Trotsky was concerned with similar problems. He demonstrated the falsity of the concept, 'proletarian culture and art'; and he outlined the policy of the Marxist party towards art and literature. This must be 'to help the various schools of art which have come over to the Revolution to grasp correctly the historic meaning of the Revolution, and to allow them complete freedom of self-determination in the field of art'. Nearly all of the themes contained in the work of previous Marxist scholars are taken up in Lukacs' study and there is a serious attempt made to advance new ideas. The circumstances under which the book was written—in Moscow in 1936—and Lukacs' 'diplomatic' turn of mind are responsible for certain weaknesses and faults of emphasis; but these should not be allowed to detract from the real merits of the study.

Because of the great richness of the material and the wealth of new ideas which are contained here, it is not yet possible to make a real critical assessment of the book. There is matter here for much research and hard thinking. I shall content myself for the present with outlining a few of the book's main arguments.

The historical novel's appearance in the early 19th century, first in England and later in France, was a consequence of the economic and social changes which had taken place in those countries. The 'social' and satirical novels of Lesage, Swift, Voltaire and Diderot were not set in any specific place or period, they were of 'never and nowhere'. Their authors grasped realistically some of the salient characteristics of their world, but they did not see things historically.

It required the overthrow of feudal society in the French Revolution of 1789 and the revolutionary wars which followed to break down the isolation of the European masses

from their rulers and to make history a 'mass experience'. England had already gone through the political revolution of the 17th century and was in the midst of great transformations laying the basis for the Industrial Revolution of the 19th century. The contrast between the relative stability of English society and the turbulent state of affairs in Europe generally, channelled Scott's historical feeling into what Lukacs calls 'a broad objective, epic form', the historical novel.

His objectivity was heightened by the fact that he stood in a 'middle' position in society; he was not directly involved, either in the rapid expansion of capitalist interests, or in the ruin which overtook tradition's pathetic supporters. He was an 'honest Tory' who sympathised with the people in their hardships but who was also a supporter of progress. Nevertheless he kept his gaze averted from the present and wrote only of the past. He 'discovered' a form for the novel which enabled him to portray realistically the clashes of the social forces of the past which had moulded history. He constructed plots which enabled him to display through the deployment of a number of characters the historical reality of the great crises in English history.

Scott's heroes are always 'middling' men, never very heroic or very aristocratic; they are the mediocre English gentlemen: the Waverleys, the Osbaldistones, the Mortons and so on. This corresponds with Scott's own position, it is also an artistic device which, since the mediocre hero himself enters into relationship with both camps, enables him to present both parties involved in the conflict, and to enlist the sympathy and interest of the reader. The great figures of history appear in Scott's novels, but none occupies a central place. They appear only to fulfil their historic missions in a crisis, the nature of which has already been made clear in detailed descriptions of smaller people. The lives of the leaders are directly interwoven in this way with the lives of the people. Scott's important figures do not make a sudden appearance miraculously wrapped in a Weberian charisma, they grow out of the conditions of their age and appear only to solve definite tasks in genuine historical crises.

Scott's achievement is not merely to relate the sequence of historical events, it is to bring to life the people who figure in those events so that his readers can re-experience the social pressures and individual motivations which led the men and women of a past age to behave as they did. He makes history live as a series of great crises. He shows how the progress which occurs in society—Scott is a defender of progress—is a process full of contradictions and antagonisms. These are the real antagonisms of classes and nations which Scott, without any of the theoretical equipment of Marxist historical materialism, recognised and accurately portrayed. The artistic intuition of the genius enables him to penetrate below the surface of reality and discover the objective forces which are really at work. As Lukacs writes: 'What in Morgan, Marx and Engels was worked out and proved with theoretical and historical clarity, lives, moves and has its being poetically in the historical novels of Scott.'

The impetus imparted to the novel by the work of Scott was felt in many countries of Europe. Only Balzac, however, carried forward Scott's work in a conscious way and created a hitherto unknown type of realistic novel. He was not content to portray **past history**, he went on to display the **present as history**. 'The only possible novel about the past was exhausted by Walter Scott', wrote Balzac. 'This is the struggle of the serf against the nobility; the nobility against the Church, of the nobility and Church against the monarchy.' The development of capitalism in France had created a new situation. 'Today equality in France has produced endless nuances. Formerly the caste gave every person his physiognomy which dominated his individuality; today the individual receives his physiognomy himself.' The direct causes for the extension of the historical novel into the present were not aesthetic but social and historical. Scott had grown up in a period of peaceful development in Britain's history; he could look back on the remote past with calm and objectivity. But Balzac's youth had been one in which the volcanic character of the social forces was clear. In Balzac's novels is presented the artistic history of the bourgeois society of France at that time.

One of the questions which Lukacs poses is: why did not the circumstances of the 18th and 19th centuries produce historical drama instead of novels? In order to answer this question he relates both of these artistic forms to their histories. Both historical tragedy and the novel portray the totality of all the life-processes occurring at a particular period. They do so in different ways, but in both cases it is through the creation of a specific artistic structure within which the most important features of objective reality can be mirrored and concentrated. This involves necessarily a selection, but it must give the appearance of totality. It is in the nature of artistic creation to make the incomplete image appear more real than life itself.

Lukacs quotes Hegel's distinction between the epic (i.e., the novel) and the drama. In the novel there is created a 'totality of objects'. (By this he means the totality of the stage of historical development in human society, in which all the objects and artefacts are displayed in their interactions with human activity.) The human society created in a novel is a complete one which contains all the features of the processes of life itself. To the 'totality of objects' of the novel, Lukacs counterposes the 'totality of movement' of the drama. The life that is reflected in the drama centres upon a great collision. Everything inessential is omitted; the portrayal is reduced to the minimum in order to represent only the most important and the most characteristic attitudes of men; only that which is required for the working out of the collision.

Lukacs cites as an example of this 'totality of movement', Shakespeare's *King Lear*. The totality represented there is that of the break-up of a family and a kingdom. All the possible and necessary human attitudes which make the collision inevitable are included. Any addition to them would be superfluous. The central theme of historical drama is the collision of social forces at their most extreme and acute point. The great periods of tragedy coincide with periods of great historical changes in human society.

There is no space here to elaborate these arguments of Lukacs, or to mention the numerous other themes on which he touches. All I have

tried to do here is to arouse the interest of the reader so that he goes to the book. It is perhaps, necessary to add a few words pointing out the importance of the understanding of literature for the working class at the present time.

There will be no rest or tranquility for the members of the present or of several succeeding generations. Great historical conflicts are preparing. We are entering a period of intensifying social crisis. The old constricting chains which hold together capitalist society must be snapped. All existing forms of exploitation must be ended. Those who are born during this tempestuous period of human history are indeed fortunate. They have the opportunity to display limitless creative ability, initiative, enthusiasm and heroism. Each can make an individual contribution to the greatest of all causes: the liberation of humanity from war, disease, poverty, ignorance and oppression, the creation of a socialist society. Some will contribute as members of the Marxist party, as militants, organisers and political leaders. Others will do so as artists, dramatists, poets and novelists.

The only force able to carry out the tasks outlined above is the working class, who form the overwhelming majority of society. This class is the sole heir to human progress. It must wrest its inheritance from the dead grip of the false claimant, the monopoly capitalists and their dismal supporters: policemen, parsons, priests, politicians, public-relations experts, property tycoons, and all the other parasites on society. The party which heads the working class has the task of raising the level of understanding of the whole class so that they shall take over power and abolish classes. This understanding can be acquired relatively quickly in a period of social upheaval, but it is necessary to prepare for this long in advance. Struggles of all kinds must be waged against the supporters of the bourgeoisie: theoretical, political, organisational and so on.

The struggles against reformism and revisionism in literature and in literary criticism must be waged together with all the other struggles. The great realist traditions of the poets, novelists and dramatists of the 19th century have been abandoned.

The bourgeoisie can no longer bear to face reality. Those who create literature today, the petty-bourgeoisie, are in general cut off from the working class, the source from which they might renew their art.

In recent years some of the literary petty-bourgeois artists have made an attempt to draw closer to the working class. The work of such writers as Wesker, Sillitoe, Doherty, Barstow, Braine, Lessing, Delaney and others is a part of this trend. In many cases this approach is based on a disgust for the bourgeoisie rather than on any real understanding of the working class. These writers resent the hypocrisy, the mental vacuity, the open commercialism and the false human relationships which they see as a part of capitalism. They have yet to discover that the working class movement can provide them with an insight into the problems of their art and introduce them to real situations which will enable them to be more effective as artists. For this to be possible the Marxist movement itself must become aware of the literary and philosophical problems with which Lenin, Trotsky and Lukacs dealt. **J.B.**

Spain: the unheeded warning

La Revolution et la Guerre d'Espagne.
By Broué, P. and Témime, E. Les Editions de Minuit, 1961, 30 NF.

Of the recent books on the Spanish Civil War, this one stands out for its explicit political dissection of the forces of revolution and counter-revolution which lay behind it. By comparison, Thomas's¹ involved narrative is politically naive and uncomprehending and Balloten's² study of the events of 1936, for all its invaluable documentation, provides only laborious corroboration.

This work measures the extent of social crisis which afflicted 20th century Spain, combining medieval backwardness uneasily with the disintegrative forces of developing capitalism. From this crisis issued the attempt to install a democratic

1. Thomas, H., **The Civil War in Spain.**

2. Balloten, B., **The Great Camouflage.**

republic in 1931 and the failure of those politicians who pinned their faith in parliamentary development to provide the conditions for its success. Indeed, the years of the Republic provide a history of dictatorship, instability, revolt, internal violence and civil strife which led inevitably to the showdown in 1936.

The electoral victory, by a narrow margin, of the parties of the Popular Front in February of that year was only an episode. Not only did the social camps behind the party leaders of Left and Right become increasingly irreconcilable, but the line-up in the Cortes soon ceased to represent the real line-up of forces. On the one hand, and long before 1936, the landed oligarchy, big business and the church had concluded that the ultimate hope of preserving the social order upon which their wealth and privileges depended lay in military dictatorship. The army thus took on a political role and its leaders prepared themselves for the day when it would become the saviour of a Spain swept clear of liberals, atheists and reds. On the other side, the social conditions of the country, with its politically conscious urban working class and large landless or semi-landless peasantry, sharpened the class struggle to revolutionary pitch. The weakness of Spanish Marxism—the Communist Party before 1936 was of no great weight among the workers—saw much of the revolutionary energies thus inspired turning to the anarchist movement, which made the breaking of the state power the beginning and the end of revolutionary strategy.

As Trotsky had shown from 1931 onwards, the great need of the Spanish workers was the forging of a new leadership and movement which could prepare for the coming struggle. The failure of Nin and Maurin, in particular, to grasp this point, and to understand the character of the developing struggle, meant that the workers entered the combat with immense courage and fervour, but politically with inadequate armament.

It was not only this kind of armament which was lacking in the July days when the military insurrection began. The popular response was a call for arms and resistance which took on a spontane-

ous revolutionary character. The government of the Popular Front, uneasy and vacillating through all the months of growing tension and violence, found itself pitched into a situation which it would dearly have liked to avoid. Between the contending social forces its main leaders represented that substantial section of the bourgeoisie and petty-bourgeoisie which hankered after a consolidation of the parliamentary system on the basis of social reforms which, while modernising the archaic structure of Spanish society, at the same time would leave intact the essential foundation of capitalist private property. This was the premise of the Popular Front, which thus contaminated and distorted the actions and policy of all those working class leaders and movements which joined it or, as did the anarchists, worked with it. It was a premise which led some of the Left republicans, even after the revolt had begun, to seek a reconciliation between the two camps, a tendency which found expression, here and there, right down to the final capitulation.

In the meantime, as this book shows irrefutably and in detail, a genuine revolution was taking place: a revolution made by the workers and peasants themselves. It came to life in the establishment of the militias and in the ubiquitous committees which, like the Soviets in 1917, took over the power which had fallen from the hands of the bourgeois state when its coercive organs—police and army—turned against it. The situation of dual power which resulted provided the basis for carrying forward the social revolution. The Popular Front government, for its part, took on the task of rebuilding the Republican state, with all the trappings of police, disciplined army and 'legality'. In this task it found its most willing and able co-operators in the now rapidly growing Communist Party. Following the line of the Seventh Congress of the Communist International, the struggle was held to be one between democracy and fascism in which the aim was the establishment of 'a new type of democratic republic' based on a union of classes which could solve the problems of the bourgeois-democratic revolution of Spanish soil.

This policy, which made the Communist Party the most eager support for the Popular Front and for the

restoration of the republican state, was determined essentially by the needs of Soviet foreign policy which had no interest in seeing a revolutionary regime established in the Iberian peninsula. With the Republic becoming increasingly dependent upon Soviet aid and arms, the republican and socialist politicians, as well as their governmental allies, the 'anti-state' anarchists, had to keep their mouths shut while the NKVD was installed in Spain for the express purpose of hunting down and liquidating the revolutionaries.

The ebb of the revolution from late 1936 (so well delineated by Orwell³ through the differences in the atmosphere in Barcelona over this period, in a book which is cavalierly dismissed by Thomas) leads on to the situation described by Hernandez,⁴ at that time a Communist Minister (in a book described by Thomas as 'unpleasant') which led to the assassination of Andreas Nin and the stifling of the revolution in Catalonia.

By the time when the CP had been able to get rid of the Caballero government, the embers of the revolution were burning dim. The conflict had become merely a military one: the republican state versus the military-fascist regime of Burgos. The differences between the two forms of state, as well as the situation at the front, are described in this book with, as far as can be seen, the care and impartiality which they deserve. Inevitably, the temper of the Spanish masses changes, the events themselves become intrinsically less interesting. It becomes a story of intrigue and personal friction—to be continued in the recriminations of exile—and the grinding forward of the Franco forces with their massive Italo-German support to the accompanying farce of the Non-Intervention Committee. The men who took leading parts in the heroic days of 1936 are within a year or so either dead (killed at the front, or perhaps by the NKVD) or in prison (half the Model Prison in Barcelona contained POUM and CNT supporters) or working or fighting according to the 'discipline' of the republican state. The revolution had

3. Orwell, G., *Homage to Catalonia*.

4. Hernandez, J., *La Grande Trahison*.

failed and without help from its fellow 'democracies' the Spanish Republic was fated for defeat. This book has not, perhaps, in deference to the general reading public, discussed in the requisite detail all the political lessons of the Spanish events, but it provides a most useful guide to further study. It is to be hoped that an English translation will soon be made available. **T.K.**

Missing the point

The Anatomy of Soviet Man. By Klaus Mehnert. Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1961, 30s.

Mr. Mehnert has many unique qualifications as a writer on the Soviet Union—he was born and spent his early childhood in Russia, he speaks Russian fluently, and he has lived for long spells in the Soviet Union both in the intimate circle of personal friends and as a correspondent for the German press.

Thirty years ago he published his book on Soviet youth (*Die Jugend in Sowjetrußland*, 1932), a useful contribution to our knowledge of an important phase in the development of the Soviet Union. Even today his earlier work still conveys the freshness of direct observation, of the author's 'thrill at the grand and exhilarating spectacle' of a society in the pangs of revolutionary change, and of the response of the first generation of Soviet citizens to this transformation.

In his new book, too, Mr. Mehnert has much to say that is interesting. He has caught—in his early chapters, at least—something of the real rhythm of Soviet life, of its mechanics and dynamics as reflected in the experience of his interlocutors. He is particularly good when he discusses and demonstrates reactions and attitudes to the aspirations of the managerial and professional elites to mould Soviet society in their own image. His personal impressions are judiciously augmented with pertinent references to the Soviet press and to literary sources.

Mr. Mehnert cannot be blamed for not being comprehensive; he has, indeed, covered many aspects of Soviet life but he has left many

significant gaps which tend to distort the picture he presents. One would have liked to hear something about, for instance, the Communist Labour Brigades which have incurred persistent official displeasure for their egalitarian practices. Altogether, it is just not good enough to deal with the Communist Party in a few trite monolithic commonplaces.

A more serious criticism of the book is that Mr. Mehnert has adopted rather questionable criteria for his evaluation of Soviet man:

'The traditional Russian of the nineteenth century is familiar to all of us through Russian literature. This book now attempts to establish which of the old Russian traits have disappeared during the last four decades, what new features have emerged, and what the result of this dual process is.' (p. 1.)

This thesis, to say the least, is neither as original nor as relevant as Mr. Mehnert suggests; and some of the conclusions he draws from it are plainly absurd, as e.g.:

'Readiness to submit to authority, then, must be considered one of the Russian traits; the people are by nature not inclined to be critical.' (p. 191.)

This betrays a perverse reading of the main trends of Russian 19th century literature: from Griboedov's Chatsky to Turgenev's Bazarov, from Dostoevsky's Raskolnikov to Gorky's Pavel Vlassov, the heroes of classical Russian literature are all rebels against authority. In any case, it is an odd statement to come from Mr. Mehnert who is at pains, throughout the book, to emphasise the Russian people's critical dislike of Bolshevik authority. (e.g., pp. 78, 81, 124, 261-274.)

Finally, Mr. Mehnert's 'thesis' belies the title of his book. He deals, in fact, not with Soviet man, but confines himself to the Soviet Russian population which, after all, forms only about 55 per cent of the total. He has nothing to say on the basic question as to what common features have emerged during the political and industrial revolutions of the last 45 years to modify national distinctions and traditions. This, surely, must be the starting point for any anatomy of Soviet man. **A.D.**

'Inevitability'

Stalin. By Isaac Deutscher. Oxford Paperbacks, 10s. 6d.

This is a paperback issue of the political biography of Stalin first published in 1949. It costs 10s. 6d. and is about the best value for money one could hope to get. The scholarship, scrupulous regard for the evidence, and meticulous attention to detail that have gone into this book all make for a work of the highest order. Add to this a mastery of the English language and a skilful use of metaphor and imagery, and there emerges a work in which the interest of the reader is always sustained—even through the long passage of events with which many are familiar. Underlying all this and enriching it is a profound sense of the sweep of events and historical continuity and the spirit of the Russian people.

The work deals with the period from the birth of Stalin in 1879 to the immediate post-war period. It was, of course, written before the well-known revelations made by Khrushchev at the 20th Congress of the CPSU and therefore before the first major breakthrough of the Stalinist ice-age; probably for this reason the work is informed by a sense of the inevitability of the triumph of Stalin and the ideology that goes with his name. In his introduction to the present edition, Deutscher deals with this criticism of 'inevitability' by arguing that from the historian's point of view (as opposed to the partisan's) the events leading to the triumph of Stalinism were irreversible.

This begs the question, all the same. Too little emphasis is placed on those crucial moments in history when a continuation of the revolutionary process might well have been possible and with it the earlier demise of Stalinism—for example the possibility of revolution in Germany in 1923, in China in 1927; the possibility of preventing Hitler's rise to power in 1933, and the mobilisation of powerful radical trends in the masses in Western Europe in the late 1930s which in fact was aborted in the Popular Front movement. Deutscher does not ignore these events, nor the revolutionary potential in them—it is simply a question of lack of

emphasis where emphasis is above all needed.

Significantly enough, in the introduction to the present edition the author acknowledges that if he were to write the book anew he would probably do it in somewhat different style, differently in detail and with shifts of emphasis; though on the whole he would stand by the interpretation of Stalin and Stalinism given in the work.

The development of Stalinism is traced predominantly from the angle of the backwardness and isolation of Russia, the weariness of the Russian masses, the failure of the European revolution and the pressure of world imperialism on Bolshevism. All this is well-authenticated and documented. There is very little of the other side of the Trotskyist critique of Stalinism, namely, the growth of a privileged bureaucratic caste which usurped the political power won by the masses after 1917, battering on their poverty, and for whom Stalin emerged first as spokesman, eventually as supreme tyrant—that is, the treatment of the social basis of Stalinism in Russia itself is, on the face of it, deficient in this regard.

The whole work is enriched by reference and allusions to the Great French Revolution and the lives and roles of Cromwell, Robespierre, Napoleon and the great Tzars of Russian history. This sense of historical continuity probably does a lot to commend the book to a wide audience and commands the respect of those who take a very different political standpoint to that of the author. Deutscher shows consummate skill in weaving Stalin's personal strengths and weaknesses into the Soviet body politic which in turn moulded his character, sapping the revolutionary strain, elevating minor tendencies and traits into dominant characteristics, setting his stamp on an entire generation.

The picture emerges of a man—with an iron will, sly, aloof, suspicious, self-sufficient, ruthless, essentially pragmatic with a profound contempt for revolutionary theory, possessed of a shrewd knowledge of the practical psychology of the ordinary people, supremely resilient, in a word well qualified as the most successful absolute despot of our time—the embodiment of Russian traditionalism

and yet the stern and terrible guardian of the essential fabric of the October revolution; but not without the final prognosis 'But in order to save it for the future and to give to it its full value, history may yet have to cleanse and reshape Stalin's work as sternly as it once cleansed and reshaped the work of the English revolution after Cromwell and of the French after Napoleon.' **R.S.**

Close type, open verdict

The Derbyshire Miners: A Study in Industrial and Social History. By J. E. Williams. Ailen & Unwin, 90s.

As part of a strategy to combat an unfavourable 'public image' trade unions, like business organisations, are now commissioning the writing of their official histories. By establishing lucrative fellowships in University departments of history (where the lack of further regimental histories to be undertaken assures ready acceptance) the unions concerned doubtless gain prestige of a sort. Moreover, money spent in this way can be justified before the membership as being both a 'saving' on income tax and a legitimate educational expense.

Serious students of labour history and responsible trade unionists will look for other justifications for such studies. To them the criteria by which such works will be measured are firstly the extent to which they show how the decisions of individuals and the activities of local groups have contributed to the successes and failures of past industrial struggles; secondly, in the clarity with which such facts are depicted for the benefit of the trade union member who has little time to spare for unnecessary reading. Additionally any study concerned with mining should attempt to show why the NUM has, over the last 50 years, declined from its position as one of the most militant unions to become perhaps the most reactionary and backward.

On the first of these criteria Mr. Williams' study succeeds admirably. The author has painstakingly and lucidly attempted to relate his local research to the wider aspects of national labour politics and to the general industrial struggle, and the

failure of leadership at all levels is the central theme of much of the work. He records, for instance, the pathetic attempts of A. J. Cook to enlist the co-operative societies as a 'victualling movement for the fighting forces of labour' during the General Strike. When Cook told a TUC meeting that his mother-in-law had been taking in a tin of salmon for weeks past, J. H. Thomas replied: 'By God! A British revolution based on a tin of salmon.'

The extent to which the aims and policies of the Derbyshire Miners' Union were influenced by the social background and personal attitudes of its leaders is again clearly depicted. The early leaders were mainly primitive Methodists who 'sought to uplift men morally and socially without recourse to violence or upheaval'. And throughout the succeeding years there is seen to be a continuous conflict between the men and their leaders on the question of strike action. Though in more recent years it has commonly been held that the Derbyshire coalfield has enjoyed a more militant leadership than most others, the late Area President is quoted as saying in 1946: 'Higher wages alone are not going to solve the problems of the mining industry. There are miners here from all over Britain. Our job is to go back into the coalfields carrying the spirit of Moral Rearmament. That spirit alone is the key to the coal problem.'

In terms of clarity this book has less to recommend it. A thousand pages of close type with half a dozen footnotes per page and a welter of trivial detail is fairly heavy going even for the keenest reader of history. But the book is worth borrowing—at this price few will want to buy it—for the chapters on the 1926 strike and on political activities 1918-39.

Although the key question indicated above—the decline of the NUM as a militant union—is not specifically examined by Williams, many possible contributory factors emerge from his study: the successive defeats in the industrial struggle, due largely to ineffective leadership; the increasing dominance of the union area council over the individual branches and, above all, the collaboration between the union and the employers which began during the Second World War and was so effectively exploited after nationalisation. **J.P.**

Princes and princelings

A History of Poland. By O. Halecki. Further revised edition. J. M. Dent & Sons, 1961. 30s.

The main purpose of Professor Halecki's book is to enlighten the foreign reader on the 'providential mission that Poland has . . . fulfilled in the general evolution of humanity'. Poland has made two great contributions: her rulers' experiment of the 'Royal Republic' and her defence, against Tartars and Muscovites, of the 'frontiers of Christendom'. This emerges from an ably written catalogue (it covers almost two-thirds of the book) of kings, princes and princelings, their strife and conflicts, their shuffling fortunes and dynastic pre-occupations.

Poland's ruin in the 18th century is ascribed to the decay of national morals and the loss of religious faith: 'Providence sent them a great ordeal—i.e., the Partisans—which was to purify the national soul and give their sons to behold in the humiliation of expiation a new historic mission, worthy of a great past' (p. 213). This new mission Poland accomplished, Professor Halecki seems to suggest, when in 1920 she 'saved the whole of central Europe from the Bolshevik inundation' (p. 286).

A.D.

Peasant utopia

Alexander Herzen and the Birth of Russian Socialism. By M. Malia. OUP/Harvard, 55s.

This attempt to produce a biography of Herzen, who together with Bakunin may be regarded as the founder of Russian Populism, has many shortcomings. Herzen was produced in the period that followed the defeat of the Decembrist Revolt in Russia. The Decembrists themselves had been split into a Right and Left wing, the former demanding little more than that the higher aristocracy should have a larger share in the power, the latter demanding a republic and the division of the estates amongst the peasantry.

The defeat of the Decembrists showed the impossibility of any social change being brought about by a 'limited movement' of the nobility and caused the radicals of the '30s, after passing through a period in which

they attempted to find some philosophical reconciliation with autocracy, to turn to peasant revolution as a solution.

Herzen in exile in Europe experienced the 1848 revolutions and the brutality of capitalism and this led him to believe that feudal Russia could avoid passing from one barbarous system to another, if a Socialist state based on peasant communes could be established by peasant revolution. He produced a utopian socialist scheme based on a blending of the ideas of western utopians with the peculiarities of Russia. Though the peasantry as a class could not overthrow feudalism, Herzen laid the foundations of the movement that was to produce the dynamic war against Tsarism, the most determined struggle possible until a proletariat had developed.

Malia's attempt to produce a biography of Herzen is marred by several factors. The most important perhaps is a failure to link Herzen's personal development with social conditions in Russia in a convincing way. Russia is seen as immutable almost, while Herzen does psychological gymnastics to find a solution to the problems; the result is a completely uncalled-for stress on Herzen's subjective development.

Moreover the author treats all socialist theories with condescension including Marxism, which he drags in to have a knock at now and then, and completely fails to make any distinction between utopian and scientific socialism. This, of course, seriously impairs his ability to understand how peasant Russia could produce no more highly developed movement than Populism.

The final chapter gives us to understand that Herzen towards the end of his life was having second thoughts about his socialism. Though it is true that he was meeting a new type of young Russian who could not quite understand the people who were to gather around Chernyshevski it is hardly correct to imply that he was beginning to reject the movement or a revolutionary perspective. Still one cannot help but sense that the author rather regrets Herzen's insistence on an active revolutionary life and feels that he might have developed into a University lecturer with a little caution and good fortune.

K.F.

Dogmatic Study

Marx Against the Peasant: A Study in Social Dogmatism. By D. Mitrany. Collier Books, 11s. 6d.

The 'dogma' against which Mitrany's book, here reprinted from the 1951 edition, is directed, is the Marxist theory that the peasantry cannot be a consistently revolutionary class in modern society. Marxists have insisted that the peasantry, based as it is on independent ownership of land, is not one of the fundamental forces of capitalist society, the whole tendency of which is to differentiate the peasantry, subordinate (peasant) farming to big business, and to drive more and more peasants into the proletariat, the only real revolutionary force.

Mitrany maintains that the experience of history since Marx has shown this to be entirely false. The particular requirements of agricultural production gave the small unit actual advantages in many cases, thus preserving the peasantry's independence: 'Experience would almost suggest that often it is the smallholder and not the capitalist farmer who could best satisfy the Marxist demand for scientific, prolific cultivation.' The coming together, in the imperialist epoch, of the mass struggle against feudal relations in backward countries on the one hand with the growth of the world proletarian revolution on the other, created special problems of tactics and strategy for Marxists. The 'feudal reaction' in Eastern Europe in the early 20th century, when the reactionary ruling classes made use of remaining serf-like relations to super-exploit the peasant in the production of grain for the world market, provoked peasant movements of revolt, as in Rumania when 10,000 were killed in the rising of 1907.

These special problems of the period of imperialism, problems requiring specific and detailed study by Marxists (of the kind made by Lenin on the agrarian question in Russia) must be seen in terms of the whole stage of capitalist development and the class struggle of which they are part. It is quite against the spirit of Marxism simply to read off the results of this strife against general statements by Marx and Engels. In each country, from this analysis of the real situation and real struggles of the peasantry, flow the

strategy and tactics of the Marxist party. Mitrany quotes Lenin's very clear statements:

'The proletariat said to the peasants (in 1917): we shall help you to reach "ideal" capitalism, for equal tenure is the idealising of capitalism from the point of view of small producers. At the same time we will prove to you its inadequacy and the necessity of passing to the cultivation of land on a social basis.'

Mitrany lays great stress on the extensive land distribution in Rumania and Bulgaria in the years following the First World War. In Rumania, for instance, the area owned by peasants rose from 58 per cent to 88 per cent of all arable land. These reforms were intended to stem revolt. In this they were successful. But surely this means that the peasantry was not able to carry through a revolution. Their 'land reform', in fact, perpetuated and intensified the backwardness of these countries. Only in the country where a successful proletarian revolution coincided with the peasant revolt was a great advance in the productive forces possible. That the peasantry under Stalinism suffered a fate for for many years as bad as those in Eastern Europe certainly does not help sustain Mitrany's thesis. In fact, of course, all this helps Mitrany to arrive at what is really a very hack-

neyed theme: 1917 in Russia was the counterpart of the bourgeois revolution in the West.

What we have seen since 1917 is really 'a vast peasant uprising over half of Europe and most of Asia. The Communist part in it was accidental and has remained artificial.' It is this fundamental strength of the peasants which has led to the need for repression against them in the USSR in order to preserve the dogma of proletarian revolution and Communism.

The Mensheviks said that there could only be a bourgeois-democratic revolution in Russia. This would have the support of the peasantry. Proletarian revolution was an adventure and would be swamped in Russian backwardness. Lenin and Trotsky rejected the idea of a bourgeois-led revolution in Russia in the imperialist epoch. The solution of the democratic tasks would lead to proletarian dictatorship; this would achieve its socialist aim alongside the international revolutionary proletariat. Instead of starting from the whole international character of imperialism and of the working class whose revolution against it began in 1917, Mitrany extends the Menshevik thesis on to a global scale.

The specific problems of betrayal of working-class leadership from 1918 onwards, the struggle against Stalinism for a new Marxist leadership, all this is disqualified by his

method of procedure: the revolutions that have occurred are in backward, peasant countries. Stalinism is Marxism (this is the favourite trick of anti-Marxists), and the behaviour of Stalinist governments shows that Marxism is nothing but a dogma which happens to be able to take advantage of peasant revolutions.

There are very strong connections between the trends of thought of the bourgeoisie and the development of revisionism within the Marxist movement itself. The revolutions in China, Yugoslavia and Cuba, as well as the course of the revolution in Russia, have produced revisionist ideas about the 'inevitability' of certain trends about a changed relation between the proletariat and other classes, about the relation between theory and the class struggle, about the relation between the revolutions in backward (peasant) and advanced countries, etc. Menshevism and other early revisionist trends in Marxism became necessary to bourgeois thought internationally, in order to 'explain' the world after 1917. Modern revisionist trends should be analysed in relation to these faithful servants of the bourgeoisie, of whom Mitrany is a good example. For this reason, his book should be read. The recent publication of Lenin's early works on the 'peasant' problem provides the best possible set of 'companion' volumes, if that is the right word.

C.S.

in class struggles, and in 'theory', in the analysis of concrete historical events. Lenin carried revolutionary socialist theory into the imperialist stage of capitalist society's evolution, and 'discovered' *democratic centralism*, the form of organization of the revolutionary party. It was this which enabled the proletariat in Russia to overthrow the bourgeoisie and to establish the first socialist state. Trotsky carried revolutionary theory into the stage of the 'death agony' of capitalist society and 'discovered' the *Fourth International*, the form of organization of the revolutionary party internationally through which the establishment of socialist society would be completed by the overthrow by the proletariat of the bourgeoisie and of the bureaucratic clique in the Soviet Union and in the other deformed workers' states.

These four main components of revolutionary theory are clearly 'discoveries' of different kinds. But all are essential parts of it. Revolutionary theory is strictly scientific, that it to say that it conforms more exactly to changing reality with each new 'discovery' that is made; it is also uncompromisingly revolutionary, that is to say that it is concerned with struggling with and changing that reality. It does not combine these characteristics fortuitously, but because at each stage in the evolution of capitalist society, the scientific socialists set themselves the task of disclosing all the existing forms of antagonism and exploitation in the society, of tracing the separate development of each of these and of enabling the proletariat by means of correct slogans and firm leadership to abolish all these forms of antagonism and exploitation. Thus scientific socialism, or Marxism, involves, not the passive contemplation of social phenomena, the so-called objective description of society which is carried out by the 'positivist' sociologists, but a continuous struggle for a better order of society.

AN EXISTENTIALIST REVISIONIST OR A REVOLUTIONARY SOCIALIST?

So far this article has been no more than an abstract explanation of revolutionary theory. But, as Lenin never tired of pointing out, the truth is always concrete. I shall try now to show this theory in action, to demonstrate its practical application to the present struggles of the Marxist movement. I shall examine the ideas and activities of one Alasdair MacIntyre, a professional philosopher and a former member of the Socialist Labour League, who is presently engaged in a campaign against the Socialist Labour League and against Marxism.

Talented though he may have been, Alasdair MacIntyre is an individual of no particular import-

ance in the Labour movement, and his attacks against Marxism are unlikely to be very effective. Nevertheless, the social group to which he belongs, the processes of development through which he went, the discipline in which he is trained, the methods he uses, all of these are of much wider significance than the individual. And it is with these that I shall be concerned. To leave error unrefuted, Marx told Hyndman, is to encourage intellectual immorality. To uncover the intellectual libertinism of Alasdair MacIntyre is to strike a blow for revolutionary theory and for intellectual morality.

During the time he was a member of the Socialist Labour League, for about 12 months until June 1960, MacIntyre wrote a number of political articles and pamphlets. Before joining the League he had already written some works of professional philosophy, and in addition had made some contributions to the writings of the New Left and the New Reasoner groups. Since leaving the League he has written a number of political articles also. I shall try to trace the course of his political development in these writings. And on this basis, too, I shall venture to predict his future path.

Shortly before the Second National Conference of the League in June 1960 MacIntyre joined the minority faction of which Behan was the leader. At the Conference MacIntyre spoke as one who 'adhered firmly' to the policy of this faction: 'the question confronting us in the League at the moment,' he said, 'is whether the perspectives of our political work should be laid down and limited by work inside the Labour Party, or whether . . . we confront the working class with a much more realistic political alternative.' The alternative for which he and the other members of the faction stood, was the setting up of an open revolutionary party. As another member of the faction expressed it: 'The Labour Party has become the left-arm of capitalism . . . it is a petty-bourgeois, anti-working class party.' This policy was defeated at the Conference, with only one delegate voting in favour. The Conference voted overwhelmingly for a resolution affirming that the Labour Party was a working-class party, on which a reactionary bureaucracy had been imposed through the pressures of imperialism.

Shortly after the Conference all the remaining members of the faction resigned from the League, presumably with the aim of pursuing their policy. It is worth recording what happened to these 'open revolutionaries'. In a very few weeks the group had dispersed: Behan attempted to set up a Syndicalist organization and has since left politics completely. MacIntyre is now the editor of *Socialist Review* and co-editor of *International Socialism*, both of which journals take the position that the Soviet Union is a 'state capitalist' society. 'Neither Washington

nor Moscow but International Socialism!' is their slogan. These are journals which have tiny circulations, but what is more interesting is to note the kind of 'socialism' for which their editor now stands. The former 'open revolutionary' is now the supporter of the mildest of reforms from *within* the Labour Party. Revolution is now out of date, he argues, because 'the character of British industry and with it the character of the British working class has changed . . .' He predicts the 'Americanisation' of the British political scene in the next decade, i.e., the complete disappearance of 'class' politics. Workers, instead of attempting to improve their conditions through political pressure on the state through strikes will get their representatives to negotiate directly with the employers. 'Many socialists do not realise the size and importance to workers of the welfare schemes operated by industry nowadays,' he states parenthetically. What strikes do take place will be led by people with no political commitments. And, finally, the clearest statement of his changed position: 'We of the left' (no longer 'of the the working class', or 'of the revolutionary movement', it may be noted, but merely a vague geographical location). 'We of the left . . . can fight in the same party [as the Labour Right] for such radical [*sic*.] reforms as Anthony Crosland's reforms for the educational system and proposals for really punishing redistributive taxation . . .' These, MacIntyre argues, are not 'milk and water proposals' they are real 'class war' measures.³ (But isn't the class war over already? Sh. . . don't ask awkward questions!)

What is one to conclude from such a remarkable somersault? Is the metamorphosis now complete? Has the revolutionary caterpillar of 1960 become the reformist butterfly of 1962? Is middle-aged respectability already overcoming youthful impetuosity?

There is, of course, no reason why MacIntyre should not have changed his views. And when he did, it was his plain duty to say so; truth must come first. But he still regards himself as a Marxist (he made this clear to readers of *Twentieth Century* recently). 'Was a Christian. Am not,' he explained. 'It is less misleading when asked if I am a Marxist to say "yes" rather than "no". But other Marxists have been known to say "no".'⁴ And whatever personal definition of the term 'Marxist' MacIntyre may have, it must surely include the duty of explaining to his former comrades, and to his present associates, how he came to change his mind so completely. As a professional philosopher he is well equipped to do this; but I fear that no such explanation will be made. For if there is one thing clear above all else, it is that Alasdair MacIntyre is *not*

and never has been a Marxist in any recognised sense of the word. He is and has been a petty-bourgeois subjectivist, a philosophical idealist, a Christian existentialist and a right-wing revisionist. He has in the past in some of his political writings made use of a few Marxist phrases and of a method of reasoning which bears some superficial resemblance to Marxist dialectics. During the time he was a member of the Socialist Labour League he made some tentative approaches towards a more revolutionary position. But for reasons which I shall try to explain he stopped far short of becoming a revolutionary Marxist. It is one of the signs of the weakness of the Marxist movement that his views although basically idealist were not criticised at the time. Had this been done it is possible that MacIntyre might have been able to change his outlook.

Criticism is not only a right but a duty which rests upon all members of the Marxist movement. This criticism must not be mere abuse and name calling, as has been the Stalinist practice—nor should it be conducted in a narrow sectarian and dogmatic spirit. There must be a willingness to examine fresh ideas while refusing to abandon any of the basic principles of Marxist theory. This means that there can be no lowering of standards to meet those in the movement who lack theoretical training. It is the duty of all revolutionaries to acquaint themselves with theory just as it is the duty of the movement to provide facilities for the education of members suited to their requirements.

Marx expressed his views on this question in a letter criticising the Gotha Programme of the German Workers' Party in 1875. 'It is my duty,' he wrote, 'not to give recognition even by diplomatic silence to what is in my opinion a thoroughly objectionable programme tending to democratise the party . . . if they [i.e., the Party's leaders who were followers of Lassalle] had been told from the beginning that there would be no bargaining on principles they would have *had* to be content with a programme of action or a plan of organisation for common action.'⁵ Lenin took up a similar attitude in his forthright criticism of Plekhanov's Draft of the Programme of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party in 1902. 'The *entire character* of the programme,' he wrote, 'is in my opinion the most general and basic defect of this draft, one that makes it unacceptable. Specifically it is not the programme of a party in a practical struggle, but a *prinzipienerklärung* (declaration of principles); it is a programme for students . . .'⁶

3. *Socialist Review*, April 1962, p. 8.

4. *Twentieth Century*, Vol. 170, No. 1011, Autumn 1961, p. 29.

5. Karl Marx, letter to Wilhelm Bracke, May 5, 1875, *Selected Works*, Vol. II, 1942, p. 553. Lawrence and Wishart.

6. V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. VI, Moscow, 1961, p. 58.

THE 'PHILOSOPHER' MACINTYRE

Although MacIntyre himself has remained an idealist and made no use of Marxist dialectics, his work and activity must be analyzed from a materialist standpoint and dialectically. In this way he can still help the Marxist movement to learn some important lessons. He has belonged to a number of different organizations: to the Anglican Church, the Communist Party, the New Left, the Socialist Labour League, and now to the state capitalist grouping. During these vicissitudes he has always made a clear distinction between his political and his professional writing. With changes in his political allegiances there have been some changes in the 'form' of his political writings; but he has never wavered in his allegiances to the school of idealist philosophy in Britain, which draws its inspiration from Wittgenstein and the Vienna Circle. For MacIntyre philosophy is 'the patient description and classification of all those ways of using language that are of logical importance'.⁷

This means that he has been concerned with descriptions of the language used by Christian theologians in talking about their beliefs. He accepts the 'fact' of the existence of religions without questioning the material basis of capitalist society in which religion acts as a part of the ideological superstructure. He discusses religion simply as a system of ideas without any reference to the forms of exploitation which it seeks to justify and maintain. Thus: 'the only apologia for a religion is to describe its content in detail: and then either a man will find himself brought to say "My Lord and my God" or he will not'.⁸

There is no reference to 'social classes', or to 'class struggles' in any of his 'philosophical' writing. Instead he is concerned with whether 'visions' provide a sufficient basis for believing in religion, or if they do not what is the place of 'visions' in religious thinking? In another place he discusses the 'problem' of survival of life after death and decides that this is still an open question because the evidence is not really adequate. But for those who wish to 'believe' MacIntyre advises that they should choose the Christian belief in bodily resurrection rather than the Platonic doctrine of immortality.⁹

He follows the same method in a discussion of Freudian psychoanalytic theory; here he is concerned not with the 'truth' of the theory, i.e., its correspondence with reality, but with a discussion of 'logical status' of the term 'unconscious'. And all that this implies is a comparison of the way the term is used in 'ordinary speech' and in 'Freudian theory'.¹⁰

7. 'The Logical Status of Religious Belief', in R. G. Smith (Ed.), *Metaphysical Beliefs*, 1957, p. 172.

8. *Op. cit.*, 1957, p. 205.

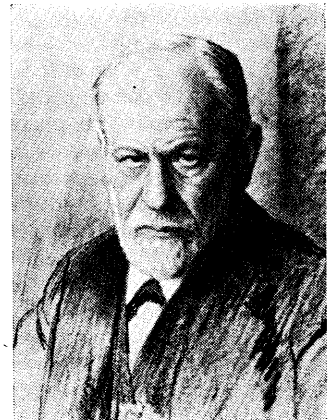
9. *Mind*, LXIV, 1955, p. 389.

10. *The Unconscious*, 1958, p. 93.

The method of logical positivism, the 'school' of philosophy to which MacIntyre adheres, is thus a doubly idealist one. They do not even maintain that consciousness determines being, as did the 19th Century philosophers whom Marx criticized in his preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*. Instead they ignore being completely, and attempt to explain consciousness in terms of consciousness. That is to say they do not attempt to explain theories such as those of the

Freud:

his work is analysed by MacIntyre not scientifically, in its class origins and place in the development of human knowledge, but in terms of the meanings of words.



theologians or of Freud, by reference to the real world in which these theories exist, as part of the ideology of the ruling class. Instead they try to explain them by reference to accepted meanings of words, i.e., to the ideology of the class which determines these meanings.

MacIntyre's own history epitomizes that of the class to which he belongs. He has tried to come to grips with the problems of the real world; but he is the prisoner of the idealist concepts of the petty-bourgeoisie. He has stretched his arms through the bars and succeeded in touching the real world from different sides. But all he has succeeded in doing finally is to define subjectively the limits of his existence as an idealist philosopher in an objectively capitalist world. Finally, he has resigned himself to being a prisoner. Good behaviour brings promotion to those who accept the limits of capitalism and work on its behalf. This does not mean, of course, that this is necessarily the fate of all intellectuals today.

THE 'NEW LEFT' MACINTYRE

From the Hungarian Revolution which exploded in 1956 shock tremors were sent out all over the world. In Britain it caused the defection of some of the Communist Party's intellectuals and drove them to an adulterous union with Christians, existentialists and film producers. Working together furiously they begot the New Left; like a flower growing on a dung heap this burst open suddenly into full maturity

and at once began to rot. Though claiming to be socialist theoreticians and internationalists the New Left were more interested in William Morris and Tom Mann than in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels; and they were more concerned with morality than materialism. These were the influences under which Alasdair MacIntyre, who had been wandering in a Christian morass for some years, came back into politics. This helps to explain his development.

His article 'Notes from the Moral Wilderness' expresses every possible kind of political confusion. It contains many pseudo-Marxist phrases, and even some pseudo-Marxist quotations. How can we make human actions and human desires intelligible, the author asks? By relating them to the existing class struggles? Oh no! That would be too banal and too jargonistic for MacIntyre. His answer is: 'by showing how they connect with characteristically human desires, needs and the like'. There is an example of how this idealist method works in a later passage: Stalinism and liberalism have this in common, he concludes, they both follow moral codes which are 'forms of alienation rather than moral guides'. Stalinists seek power, rationalizing this by the 'ultimate justifying end'. The liberals also seek power justifying it by the desire for 'immediate pleasure'.¹¹ This is the kind of superficial comment which looks clever but explains nothing; it provides the proletariat with no slogans for the overthrow of either the bourgeoisie (the 'liberals') or the bureaucracy (the 'Stalinists').

One may ask on the evidence of this article what led the author to join the Marxist movement even temporarily? It seems likely that the answer lies in his revulsion from the intellectual limitations and prejudiced blinkers of the New Left, rather than any understanding of class struggles and participation in them. Thompson and Saville had already declared Trotskyism and Stalinism to be opposites and equivalents: both stale, dogmatic, orthodox and stunted.¹² But MacIntyre was not satisfied, he was still looking for the answer to his problems. They were the wrong problems as it happened. By mistake he came to the right place.

THE 'MARXIST' MACINTYRE

Whatever the reasons may have been, MacIntyre joined the Socialist Labour League in 1959, and the work produced while he was a member must be examined more carefully. He was, at first, full of enthusiasm; he spoke at meetings, sold papers, wrote articles and pamphlets. Until he joined the minority

faction, which was shortly before he resigned, he appeared to have no basic disagreements with the theories or policies of the League. He has never really explained his position to this day: his speech at the Conference was a mere mechanical repetition of the statements of other members of the faction and it was quite out of character. It did not follow on from his previous positions in any way.

Neither then nor since has anything been written about MacIntyre's resignation and the views he expressed in his articles and pamphlets. Controversy is the life-blood of the Marxist movement. As has been stated already, criticism is both the right and duty of all Marxists. The fact that there has been no criticism of MacIntyre means that there is a whole page missing in the Marxist movement's education programme. Without an understanding of MacIntyre's deviations and the reasons for his resignation it will be impossible to come to grips with the layer of middle-class intelligentsia from which he came, or to advance socialist theory.

The main weakness of all his work was that he saw Marxist theory, not as a weapon of class struggle, but as an intellectual key which opened the way to the solving of otherwise baffling problems. Thus he never writes from the point of view of the working class itself, for whom class struggle is the essence of its existence, but from the point of view of an impotent outside observer advising the working class. The problems he is really concerned with are his own problems: or rather those of the class to which he belongs, and not those of the working class. Thus he writes:

'We can begin from the feeling of helplessness which many workers have . . . They feel that their lives are shaped and dominated by powers and forces far beyond their control . . . whereas in fact what happens in society is always the outcome of human intentions, decisions and actions.'¹³ (My emphasis—J.B.)

This is a quotation from a pamphlet he wrote which was supposed to be for the Marxist education of workers. In it what sets out to be no more than a paraphrase of Marx's views on historical materialism becomes an idealist revision of materialism. Where MacIntyre writes 'human' Marx had written 'men'. Where MacIntyre writes of 'intentions, decisions and actions' Marx had written that 'the material productive forces of society come into conflict with the existing relations of production . . . and the legal, political, religious, aesthetic or philosophic—in short ideological forms in which men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out'. Marx begins from the fighting, MacIntyre begins from the feeling of helplessness. MacIntyre does not write of the domination of the ruling class over the workers but of 'a power which takes shape as the power of

11. *New Reasoner* 8, Spring 1959, pp. 89-98.

12. J. Saville & E. P. Thompson, *The New Reasoner*, Vol. 1, No. 1, Summer 1957.

13. *What is Marxist Theory for?*, 1960, p. 6.

money, the power of ownership, the power of production'. He invariably prefers an abstract formulation to a concrete one. But truth, as has been said already, is not abstract but concrete.

Although it is important to make these points about the basic ideological weaknesses from which MacIntyre began in the Marxist movement, it is necessary also to examine the weaknesses of the movement into which he came. He was, as he wrote, 'ready to live and work in the working class movement and learn from it, revising his concepts all the time in the light of his and its experience'. This was probably true, he hoped to find in the Socialist Labour League the perfect organization in which he could do this. He wrote in the same pamphlet: 'as workers become increasingly guided by theory as intellectuals become increasingly close to the class struggle, so the two groups become one. This is our continual experience in the Socialist Labour League as it was in the experience of the Russian Bolsheviks'.¹⁴ This was what he had hoped to find in the Socialist Labour League and what he clearly after a time ceased to find. He had formed a romantic picture of the League, he failed to understand the processes of history and struggle through which it had emerged in its present form. He never succeeded in integrating himself completely into it. And he clearly began soon to have doubts both about himself and about the organization. These are expressed in another article written at about the same time:

'All of us will pass through phases in which both rightly and wrongly we sharpen the line between ourselves and others. This self-imposed isolation is a feature of every normal adolescence. It is also a normal experience in political organisations in which the first experience of membership and friendship gives way dialectically to a consciousness of distance between oneself and others.'¹⁵

This is clearly a subjective statement of his own reactions to being a member of the Socialist Labour League; there is no necessary dialectic in this process. This is what Hegel called the 'shallow misuse and the barrenness of modern so-called philosophic construction'¹⁶ which misuses dialectics for its own purposes. It is significant that not once in this pamphlet *What is Marxist Theory For?* is there any reference either to democratic centralism or to the Fourth International. The pamphlet sets out not to pose concrete problems and possibilities of struggle, but to 'explain' historical materialism and dialectics in simple non-technical terms. But his pamphlet succeeds only in presenting an abstract,

impractical, non-dialectical, idealist statement. This is what Lenin would have called a 'commentary' on Marxism and not a weapon to be used in practical struggles. If this pamphlet had been criticized at the time it appeared in a comradely fashion it is possible that MacIntyre might have come closer to a revolutionary point of view. The matter should certainly have been taken up, and all those who were in the League at the time are equally responsible. As it turned out, however, this pamphlet represented the high water mark of his Marxism; from then on he was racing out to sea on an ebb tide and with a following wind. It is doubtful whether he could have been diverted. In the article, 'Freedom and Revolution', which he contributed to *LABOUR REVIEW* at this time, there is clear evidence of the same misuse of dialectics to which reference was made above. He writes about 'freedom', not in the context of the proletariat struggling as a class to overthrow the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, but in that of the 'individual' (an abstraction) asserting himself against 'society' (another abstraction). The model he presents of the proletariat is not of a struggling class, but of a large number of separate individuals all moving along the same pre-destined 'grooves'; the processes of capitalist education are described, not as part of the ideology of the ruling class, but as a means by which a few lucky individuals climb a 'ladder' which takes them into another 'groove'.

MacIntyre had contributed an article on 'Determinism'¹⁷ some five years before to a journal of professional philosophy; and the 'method' is the same in both cases. There he had concluded that 'determinism' and 'consciousness' were opposed; rationality excluded any possible kind of causation in social phenomena, since a man who understands why he is acting in a particular way can change to act differently. In the earlier article ignorance of Marxism had, perhaps, led to his being unable to explain how human behaviour is both 'determined' (i.e., caused by certain laws) and at the same time 'free' (i.e., guided by a choice which is made realistic by a knowledge of the laws). The recognition of 'necessity', in other words, is the means of achieving 'freedom'. MacIntyre is concerned all the time, not with the concrete reality of social classes in struggle, but with the abstract fiction of individuals in isolation. His *LABOUR REVIEW* article contains the same kind of false, non-dialectical logic, although it is expressed in the latter case in some of the formal trappings of dialectics. This is, however, what Hegel called: 'nothing but the inane of the dialectically treated matter'.¹⁸ The method of dialectics used by Marx is that which examines capitalist society as

14. *Op. cit.*, p. 12.

15. *Freedom and Revolution*, *Labour Review*, Vol. 5, No. 1, Feb.-Mar. 1960, p. 22.

16. Cited by C. Slaughter in 'In the Workshop of the Revolution', *Labour Review*, Vol. 7, No. 1, Spring 1952, p. 34.

17. *Mind*, Vol. LXIV, 1957, p. 28.

18. Quoted by C. Slaughter, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

something which is changing and developing by reason of its internal contradictions and which has to be studied objectively. Marx himself maintained that one of the best descriptions of his method was that of the Russian professor whom he quoted in the afterword to the first German edition of *Capital*. 'Marx treats the social movement as a process of natural history, governed by laws not only independent of human will, consciousness and intelligence, but on the contrary determining that will, consciousness and intelligence . . . he proves at the same time both the necessity of the present order of things, and the necessity of another order into which the first must inevitably pass.'¹⁹ In other words this method requires capitalist society to be studied as if it were a living thing made up of inter-dependent parts. It requires men to be studied not as separate, abstract, suffering atoms, but as living, active and struggling social classes. As Engels wrote about this method: 'the Marxist method of history puts an end to philosophy [he meant what we could call "speculation"] in the realm of history . . . It is no longer a question anywhere of inventing interconnections out of our own brain, but of discovering them in the facts.'²⁰ Scientific socialists do not 'make up' the concepts of their science, all that they do is to take careful note of what is happening in the world before their eyes and express it in clear terms. This is not the method adopted by MacIntyre.

His idealism and his misuse of dialectics is nowhere more clearly demonstrated than in the article: 'Freedom and Revolution'. His concept of freedom is not in the concrete and historical struggles of the oppressed proletariat against their oppressors, the bourgeoisie. It is rather the Utopian concept of the absence of all the constraints which society imposes on the choices, intentions and desires of individuals. He discusses the meaning of the term a 'free man'. He is not simply the man who gets what he wants, MacIntyre argues, because he might be a drug addict, acting under physiological constraint. He is the man who has discovered the kind of life in which 'fundamental desires, intentions and choices are made most effective; in which is most agent and least victim'.²¹ But all of this is nothing but the most banal and narrow-minded humanitarian liberalism. It has nothing in common with Marxist scientific socialism. MacIntyre is not concerned with the 'necessity' of another order of society. Some of the most fundamental statements on 'freedom' are to be found in Lenin's discussion of the nature of the state and of the transition to communism (*State and Revolution*), and in Trotsky's

discussion of the nature of the state in the Soviet Union (*The Revolution Betrayed*). There is no reference to either of these. MacIntyre warns his readers against the use of 'false abstractions' while himself committing this error. He sets up such straw men of his own invention as 'the individual' and 'the collective' in order to knock them down again. But he leaves standing such 'solid' abstractions as 'substantial democracy', 'grooves', 'ladders' and 'expresso bars'. He writes about how 'we' can liberate 'ourselves', not how the proletariat can overthrow the capitalist state. He is concerned throughout with the dilemma of the individual, not the problems of the class. Although arguing for the existence of a vanguard party and the need for democratic centralism in it, he does so from idealist premises. These are required not to provide leadership for the class struggles of the proletariat, but to provide a sanctuary in which the individual revolutionaries find protection from 'alien class pressures',²² and so maintain their revolutionary principles pure and undefiled. This article might be compared with Hamlet without the ghost—and without the Prince, too. The 'necessity' of class struggle is omitted; and the 'need for the dictatorship of the proletariat as the precondition for the 'freedom' of Communism is forgotten.

Soon after this article was written, at some time in the Spring of 1960, although still formally a member of the League, and without ever having expressed open disagreements with its policy, MacIntyre's retreat from Marxism turned into a frantic scurry. The lonely long distance runner began to yearn for the company of his 'liberal' friends. The apostle of freedom began to find the cross of the revolution an intolerable burden to carry. He had begun to believe that the defeat of the revolution had already occurred; revolutionaries were really sectarians and fanatics. He looked for and soon found an 'honourable' passport to the outer world.

The article entitled 'Breaking the Chains of Freedom'²³ was written at this time. It earned him the displeasure of one of his former New Left companions, the ex-Stalinist Edward Thompson, for whom the epithet 'Trotskyite' was still a term of contempt.²⁴ But there was no longer any real disagreement between MacIntyre and the New Left. When he wrote the article he was still in the Socialist Labour League, but by the time it was published he had resigned. Here he is concerned with a subject much nearer to his own interests than the vanguard party of the proletariat; he sets out to scold the British university intellectuals for their

19. *Capital*, Vol I, Moscow, 1961, p. 18.

20. From 'Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy', in K. Marx and F. Engels, *On Religion*, Moscow, 1957, p. 205.

21. *Op. cit.*, p. 20.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 21.

23. In E. P. Thompson (Ed.), *Out of Apathy*, 1960, pp. 195-240.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 14.

political apathy. His use of an artificially constructed dialectic is even wilder than before: he leads an oddly assorted troupe of dancers in which are to be found Tom Paine, Engels, Cicero, Byron, Karl Popper, Wordsworth, Malraux, Pavlov, Lord Milner, Zhdanov and Uncle Tom Cobleigh, through the highly improbable steps of the MacIntyre reel. And at last when the whole company is in a state of confusion he organizes an impromptu game of 'Take your pick'. You must choose, he tells them, between Keynes and Trotsky. But he does not present the choice correctly: his Keynes is a solid figure, a man who made a fortune and was the 'intellectual guardian of the established order'. He is not for MacIntyre, the ideologist of right-wing reformism, a scoundrel and a hypocrite who made a fortune for himself on the Stock Exchange, but a 'man of attractive personality and great natural gifts'. And his Trotsky is a shadowy abstraction; he is presented as the defender of 'human activity, of the powers of conscious and rational human effort'; not as the tireless fighter against capitalist oppression and Stalinist vilification, the founder of the Fourth International, the upholder of the cause of international socialism, the leader of the international proletariat. But then MacIntyre had already decided on which number his choice would fall. A fellowship at Oxford University may not be quite the equivalent of a peerage; but it is least better than an ice-pick embedded in one's skull.²⁵

THE 'STATE-CAPITALIST' MACINTYRE

It is clear that Alasdair MacIntyre is still moving, and although the general direction of his movement can be seen quite clearly, his final destination is by no means so easily distinguished. At any rate his adherence temporarily to the minority faction in the Socialist Labour League, his espousal of the demand for an 'open revolutionary party' and his subsequent retreat to liberal reformism, should be more intelligible. By the Spring of 1960 he had ceased to accept the need for a vanguard party or for democratic centralism and the Fourth International. These were decisions expressed in his writing at the time, but which he had reached personally and without ever having discussed them. His problem now was: how to make an unobtrusive and 'honourable' departure from revolutionary politics. He had come to reject Marxism and so had no wish to establish a platform of his own from which to fight for his views within the revolutionary movement. Ever a believer in formal dialectics, however, he went through the motions of fighting. He used one of his famous 'ladders' to climb from one 'groove' to the next: out

of the 'groove' of revolution and material hardship, into the 'groove' of 'reformism' and personal advancement. He mounted the platform of the 'minority faction' because it provided him with an easy way out of the Marxist movement. As soon as he was out and 'free' from restraint, he jumped down to continue his journey alone. The last two years have been spent in finding a justification for his own personal position and a vantage point from which to attack the Marxist movement. The 'state capitalists' were happy to provide both. MacIntyre's editorship of *Socialist Review* and *International Socialism* provides him with a very congenial political position. The sponsors of these journals are able to give the maximum of individual freedom with the minimum of responsibility to their editors, since they have no policies to propound and no organizations to which they must report.

The form taken by MacIntyre's attack on Marxism could have been predicted from the beginning. It is an anthology of the views of every reformist from Kautsky, Plekhanov and Bernstein to Strachey and Anthony Crosland. The proletariat will reach spontaneously the consciousness necessary in order to change society through its experience in the existing mass organizations: Labour Party, trade unions, CND, etc. Thus the need for a party providing leadership and subjecting its members to revolutionary discipline is denied; the need for a consistent scientific theory, too, is abolished. This means that the 'elder Marx', the materialist and the revolutionary, must be rejected and replaced by an imaginary 'young Marx', idealist and Utopian. Lenin was both too practical and too theoretical for the fine visionaries and shameless empiricists of *International Socialism*. His conceptual categories, to quote MacIntyre, '... imprison thought and make effective action impossible'.²⁶ Trotsky, too, was a sterile theorist who 'attempted to substitute' 'an *a priori* scheme of things for the actual complex reality whenever he comes to a point made difficult by his own theory'.²⁷ In this way, having abandoned Marxist theory, the way is open for subjectivism and reformism, for the most opportunist concessions to the bourgeoisie to be made under the cover of empty but left sounding phrases. The working class is adjudged to be no longer 'revolutionary', when it is in fact these wordy charlatans themselves who have abandoned the revolution in favour of 'radical' politics and bourgeois prizes. The idealism of these 'philosophers' leads also to the acceptance of a fatalistic and defeatist attitude towards history. In 1924, in Russia, MacIntyre now maintains, there was no viable alternative to Stalin; the degeneration of the Russian Revolution was inevitable then, he

25. *Ibid.*, p. 240.

26. *International Socialism*, Vol. 8, Spring 1962, p. 33.
27. *Ibid.*

claims, just as his own capitulation to the Right wing is inevitable today.

Engels must have had similar characters in mind when he wrote: 'In philosophy and in all other historical sciences the old fearless zeal for theory has disappeared completely along with classical philosophy. Inane eclecticism and anxious concern for career and income, descending to the most vulgar job-hunting, occupy its place. The official representatives of these sciences have become the undisguised ideologists of the bourgeoisie and the existing state—but at a time when both stand in open antagonism to the working class.'²⁸

Alasdair MacIntyre's progress can be traced not only in the grandiloquently titled but obscure journals of minute political coteries, but also in the popular journals of the bourgeois intelligentsia. His articles appear from time to time in *The Listener* and he reviews books on religion and philosophy for *The Guardian* and *The New Statesman*; there may still be a career waiting for him as a television pundit and week-end philosopher. In a recent issue of *The Twentieth Century* he 'proved' that Marxism and Christianity had a great deal in common. Provided that Christians took up some of the 'radical' causes—poverty, peace, etc.—with which Marxists had been particularly associated in the past, there was, however, no need for the God-lovers to fear a take-over bid. 'From time to time', he writes, 'issues arise such as that of apartheid, or those raised by the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. Christians find themselves working side by side with Marxists and other non-Christians on a basis of deep agreement'. (My emphasis—J.B.)²⁹ What deep agreement can there be, one may ask, between those who stand for materialism and for the overthrow of the existing order on the one hand, and those who stand for class exploitation and provide the idealist disguise for this exploitation on the other? Our former revolutionary finds this agreement in the similarity of the Marxist concept of 'alienation' and the Christian concept of 'original sin'!

28. *Op. cit.*, p. 266.

29. *Op. cit.*, p. 36.

The purpose of this and similar articles is clear. It is to provide comfort and reassurance for the bourgeoisie. In a troubled world where Communism is no longer a 'spectre' but a tangible danger, the cathedral charlatans and the old parish witch-doctors can no longer provide this; a self-professed Marxist who is also a philosophy don at Oxford, is a much more effective tranquilizer. 'Marxists will remain few in number', he tells them. 'Christians are much more numerous and this fact alone makes it probable that the very small traffic between the two doctrines will be largely one way' (meaning that Marxists will be converted to Christianity, but not vice versa).

However it does not really matter very much what the bourgeoisie thinks—except of course to those who depend on them for commissions and promotions. There is an objective logic about the revolutionary process which ignores the incantations of priests and philosophy dons. The class struggle cannot be exorcised by the methods of the logical positivists; Wittgenstein has not 'explained' Marx. It is not the meaning of words that is being questioned, it is the reality of things that is being demonstrated. There comes a stage in the development of the revolutionary process when the proletariat is faced with these alternatives: either to take power in the state into its own hands, or to surrender once more to the oppression of a discredited ruling class. Marxists will place themselves at the head of all those fighting for the overthrow of the capitalist state and the ending of all exploitation. The yelping of the bourgeoisie's philosophical poodles will go unnoticed.

It is important, however, that the vanguard party of the proletariat should prepare itself in advance for the taking of power by the proletariat. It can do so only by paying the most meticulous attention to theory. As Trotsky wrote from his exile in Prinkipio in 1930: 'The most remote and it would seem abstract disagreements, if they are thought to the end will sooner or later be expressed in practice, and the latter allows not a single mistake to be made with impunity.'³⁰ There is no room for existentialist or other revisionism in the Marxist party.

30. *Permanent Revolution*, 1930, p. 1.

POSTSCRIPT: Unfortunately, MacIntyre's latest effort appeared as we were going to press. It is an article in the magazine *Socialist Review* of which MacIntyre is one of the editors. The title of this article 'The Sleepwalking Society' refers not to some new society being set up by MacIntyre and his friends, but to 'Britain in the Sixties'. If we could be sure that this journal was readily available to all our readers, we would rest content by recommending

it as the finest possible epilogue and conclusion to this analysis of MacIntyre's adventurous career on the Left, but things being what they are we feel bound to make some brief comment.

In this article MacIntyre waxes very enthusiastic over the strength and ability of the 'large class of top managers and executives whose influence extends from the Treasury to ICI, from the National Coal Board to the Insurance Companies'. These men

rule our lives and 'They are, compared with the old capitalist class, extremely well-informed and extremely able'. As against this, MacIntyre shows that he has looked with a very different eye at the working class: 'More than this, they have an extremely docile working class to deal with.' Just as the monopolies concentrate their power and draw the labour bureaucracy closer to their service, so does MacIntyre develop a healthy respect for their ability. Just as the class struggle takes inspiring turns in Spain, Germany and Portugal, alongside a critical phase for the French bourgeoisie, so does MacIntyre find it possible to refer to the workers as 'extremely docile'. What was the special type of docility which brought the capitulation of the dock employers? Are the motor car employers worried over profits because of the *docility* of their workers? Are the strikes and demonstrations on behalf of the nurses the actions of docile workers? And does not MacIntyre's rubbish provide a cover for the real facts, that the leaders of the workers' organizations are betraying the members and refusing to mobilize the strength of the working class?

MacIntyre goes further: 'The old Marxist view that capitalism could never provide consumer power sufficient to use up all that was produced is made completely obsolescent in a capitalism of continually expanding investment and continually expanding consumption.' Not only have the economic contradictions of capitalism been overcome, but the capitalist control of education and the mass media (an old friend) create 'an attitude of apathy and acceptance towards the political status quo'. Once again MacIntyre excuses his own capitulation and pessimism by attributing it to the working class, of which he knows nothing. His article concludes with an inspiring message for the socialists of 1962: 'And this means that no isolated political question can hope to impinge greatly on working class consciousness. Not even that of the Bomb. So we come back full circle (!) to Aldermaston '62, and the answer to our question of why demonstrations can make so little impact is that they are running counter to our whole way of life and not simply to official policy about the Bomb.' The fact that the issue of CND bids fair to provoke a major historical crisis in the Labour Party is presumably of no account, bears no relation to 'working class consciousness'.

The downright pessimism and fatalism of this article is the consequence of MacIntyre's whole method. Instead of finding a place in the proud struggles of the working class against the capitalist system, he has gone deeper and deeper into that 'moral wilderness' from which he temporarily and accidentally strayed ('sleepwalking' perhaps). Perhaps he will again find the good shepherd.

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'The Theoretical Front'

Lenin's Philosophical Notebooks

(Second Article)

By C. Slaughter

IN this second article on the lessons of Lenin's recently translated *Philosophical Notebooks*, only one aspect of that rich work is taken up. Lenin is always concerned with the development of theory in relation to the actual experience of man in society. Dialectics itself is the result of a struggle to understand reality through practice. In studying Hegel, Lenin sought to deepen his understanding of Marxist theory itself. Theory is a material force; like every other aspect of nature it must be understood in its development, in terms of the material conditions which give birth to it and act upon it. By understanding the struggles through which scientific theories have been discovered and developed, we can understand better the theories themselves and be better equipped to ourselves develop theory creatively. In the struggle of the working class to achieve consciousness of its role and its tasks in capitalist society, dialectical materialism has necessarily developed in conflict with ideologies which reflect the interests of the enemy class. Thus the struggle against revisionism which has preceded every great advance in the revolutionary process is not a doctrinal squabble but the necessary form through which theory is advanced. Engels once said that the struggle must be fought on the political, the economic *and* the theoretical fronts. The fight on the theoretical front involves problems which are at first sight abstract and obscure, concerned as they are with philosophical concepts and problems of method. Lenin's profound concern with Hegel's philosophy during the First World War should warn against going on these impressions. The purpose of this article is to indicate the relevance of some of the 'abstract' and 'philosophical' questions to which he turned.

Despite Hegel's insistence that the dialectic must take into account the constant state of change of all reality, his own philosophy became an adaptation to the existing political set-up in Germany. This came

about not because of the dialectical character of his thought, but because he remained an *idealist*, considering the activity of the mind, the movement of ideas, to be the essential reality, with the material world only its external passing form. As Marx said:

'In its mystified form, dialectic became the fashion in Germany, because it seemed to transfigure and to glorify the existing state of things. In its rational form it is a scandal and abomination to bourgeoisdom and its doctrinaire professors, because it includes in its comprehension and affirmative recognition of the existing state of things, at the same time, also, the recognition of the negation of that state, of its inevitable breaking up; because it regards every historically developed social form as in fluid movement and therefore takes into account its transient nature not less than its momentary existence; because it lets nothing impose upon it, and is in its essence critical and revolutionary.'¹

For Hegel the subject-matter of philosophy was thought itself and the history of thought. He did not realise that for philosophers to concentrate only on this aspect of man's conscious existence was itself a form of 'alienation', an expression of the class society which divides men into 'thinkers' and 'workers', obscuring the essential unity and interdependence of their various activities, distorting each individual to the needs of a class-dominated mode of production. For all his brilliance in analysing the forms of thought, and in criticising the rigidity of formal logic, Hegel remained imprisoned by philosophy itself. His life's work, a great feat of critical scholarship, exposed the limits, inter-relations and contradictions of previous philosophies and systems of logic, but the solution he offered was a false one: so long as he remained an idealist, his 'solution' was purely in the realm of ideas, of philosophy itself. The philosopher could be satisfied with his rational and dynamic picture of the evolution of notions—but the real social world which created these notions

1. Karl Marx, Preface to the Second Edition of *Das Kapital*.



Frederick Engels:

the class struggle, he said, must be fought not only on the economic and political fronts, but also on the theoretical front.

and their movement remained as solidly in existence as before. Because the activity of man is taken by Hegel to be purely mental activity, then the philosophical act of transcending existing concepts is a complete victory for reason and freedom; the conquest of alienation and false consciousness can be achieved purely in the realm of thought.

LENIN AND 'THE YOUNG MARX'

Already in his *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* (1844) the youthful Marx brilliantly exposed this fundamental weakness of the idealist dialectic: in his philosophy, said Marx, Hegel goes beyond ('supersedes' or 'transcends') the existing ideas of men; but he considers these ideas purely as thought-forms and not as part of human practice—'. . . Hegel *supersedes* in philosophy . . . therefore not *real* religion, the *real* state, or *real* nature, but religion itself already become an object of knowledge, i.e., Dogmatics; the same with Jurisprudence, Political Science and Natural Science.' In other words the Hegelian might develop a thoroughgoing critique of existing theories of say, the State,

developing out of their contradictions a more consistent theory. But if the process stops there, the real state remains unaltered, not superseded. Indeed, to *confine* theory to the successful criticism of other theories of the State amounts objectively to preventing the conscious action that is required to change the actual State.

In Hegel therefore all the laws of the dialectic remain locked within pure speculative philosophy. Marx, on the other hand, saw the history of man and his consciousness as the developing active force of labour, of the practice of social man in his necessary conquest of nature. In *production*, man expressed *his* nature as *part* of the objective world. Instead of speculating about what 'human nature' or 'the essence of man' might be, we should recognise that the history of human *industry* is 'an open book of the human faculties', a ready-made basis for a scientific psychology, as he wrote a little later. Instead of seeing history as the 'realisation' of some abstract 'self-consciousness' of man, it was necessary to study it as the creation and emergence of man's self-consciousness through his developing material practice. This was how Marx first criticised Hegel materialistically, in the same way that Lenin was to project a 'materialist reading' of Hegel's *Logic*:

'Hegel makes man the man of self-consciousness instead of making self-consciousness the self-consciousness of man, of the real man, and therefore of man living also in a real objective world and determined by that world.'²

Philosophy, appearing and flourishing in that phase of social evolution which brought the divorce of mental from manual labour, ignored the practical root of all thought and tried to examine thought as such. From this point of view, with pure thought seen as the essence of man, the objective world could only be 'understood' as an alienated form of self-consciousness. According to the idealists, once this alienated form has been grasped as Idea, then it has been mastered, the alienation has been overcome. The objective world is nothing but a 'negative' form of self-consciousness itself. Once this is grasped dialectically, the alienated form, the negation, returns to the essential self-consciousness of man. The negation is itself negated. A scientific view of society on the other hand, must see the active forces of real men in society as the means of changing reality. To change one's *ideas* about the reality can only be part of this process. As Marx summarised it: 'The weapon of criticism is replaced by the criticism of weapons'; by this he meant that existing institutions would be changed by social *forces* within the society producing them and not by the blows of philosophy, however 'critical'.

2. 'Critique of the Hegelian Dialectic' in *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* (1844). Lawrence & Wishart, 1960.

Here Marx, and Lenin after him, are not only counterposing a programme of action to the wordy criticism of philosophers. They are arguing from a whole view of the relation between thought and action, between men and nature. The science of society founded by Marx has no room for philosophy as such, for the idea of independently moving thoughts, with a subject-matter and development of its own, independent of reality but sometimes descending to impinge upon it. By Marx's day, the achievements of political economy, science and logic had laid the necessary basis upon which the development of humanity itself could be viewed as objectively as any natural process instead of being the subject of speculation. As Marx put it in *The German Ideology* (1847):

'Where speculation ends—in real life—there real, positive science begins: the representation of the practical activity, of the practical process of development of men. Empty talk about consciousness ceases, and real knowledge has to take its place. When reality is depicted, philosophy as an independent branch of activity loses its medium of existence.'³

From then on it was a question of grasping in consciousness the motive forces of the development of the material life of man.

'Men can be distinguished from animals by consciousness, by religion or anything else you like. They themselves begin to distinguish themselves from animals as soon as they begin to produce their means of subsistence, a step which is conditioned by their physical organisation. By producing their means of subsistence men are indirectly producing their actual material life.'⁴

The existence of the working class, in struggle against capitalism, is the basis of the possibility of ending that state of affairs where man's product dominates him through the power of the ruling class. 'Alienation' will be conquered by the overthrow of capitalism; in a socialist economy men will put to their own planned use all the products of human history. Contrast this with Hegel: his 'philosophical' conquest of alienation amounted to 're-appropriating' to man the objective world by destroying its objectivity, by seeing it as purely an expression of self-consciousness, by grasping it only in thought. Its objectivity had to be destroyed, because it was precisely in this respect that it failed to coincide with the 'essence' of man, subjectivity, self-consciousness. For Marx this 'essence' is only the historical practical activity of man himself.

A materialist dialectic, of the kind which Marx always wanted to find the time to write, and for which Lenin deliberately laid the groundwork in his Notes on Hegel, must therefore reverse the picture given by Hegel of the relation between the forms of

thought and the history of nature and society. The evolution of thought, the origin and development of logic and science, must be seen in their total context as the outgrowth and a vital part of the development of man's practice, his organization in society to develop and explore the techniques at his disposal for the conquest of nature. Not only the science of history, above all that economic history which was to all intents and purposes a closed book before Marx, but also a scientific psychology, will be necessary for the development and deepening of materialist dialectics:

The history of philosophy, ERGO:

Briefly, the history of cognition in general

The whole field of knowledge

Greek Philosophy indicated all these moments.

The history of the separate sciences
The history of the mental development of the child
(The history of) mental development of animals

These are the fields of knowledge from which the theory of dialectics should be built.⁵

(The history of) Language NB:
+ psychology
+ physiology of the sense organs

The dialectical materialist theory of knowledge, the science of human thought, is the scientific history of the material foundations, origins and development of the actual *thinking* of men, which goes on in the context of man's practice, first of all in production.

When Lenin, in the *Notebooks*, gives the bare outlines of a dialectical materialist theory of knowledge, he is expanding the ideas of the young Marx on practice, social labour, as the 'essence' of humanity. What man contemplates in philosophy (his own thought) is the reflection of an objective world partly produced by his own *labour*. Man duplicates himself not only, as in consciousness, intellectually, but also actively, in reality, and therefore he contemplates himself in a world that he has created'.⁶

Lenin could base himself not only upon the philosophical rejection of Hegel by the young Marx but more soundly upon the scientific economic and social study carried out by Marx in fulfilment of this turn to materialism. The 'objective world created

3. Karl Marx, *The German Ideology*. Lawrence & Wishart, 1942, p. 15.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

5. V. I. Lenin, *Philosophical Notebooks*, pp. 352-3.

6. *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* (1844), p. 76.

by man' amounted to a definite series of historically specific social-economic formations based on definite production-relations. These 'economic structures', the necessary relations into which men organized for the exploitation of the productive forces, skills and techniques built up by the whole of human experience, were the objective foundations of all men's activity and therefore of any scientific theory of that activity. With the end of speculative philosophy, the task of social science or historical materialism was to record the necessary connections and contradictions in social life, beginning from 'the mode of production in material life'. To make the working-class conscious of these contradictions the better to organize its struggle against capitalism—this was the life work of Marx, devoted largely to the scientific analysis of capitalist society and its contradictions. Marxists today have the responsibility and the opportunity of producing a further enriched account of the relations between the decline of capitalist society, the struggle of the proletariat and the consciousness or theory of the proletariat, at its highest point in the revolutionary party. The major contributions in this direction have been made by Lenin between 1896 and his death, and by Trotsky in his struggle to prevent the Stalinist degeneration of the international Communist movement and then to build a Fourth International in the period of violent disintegration of imperialism between 1922 and 1940.

MARXISM AND EMPIRICISM

Lenin's Notebooks on Hegel might appear obscure and a not very pressing pre-occupation, when big things are happening all over the world. However, it is exactly on the theoretical front that the sharpest and most uncompromising struggle must be waged. A mistaken conception here can mean a whole mistaken method, the relations between the facts becomes totally misunderstood, and disastrously wrong conclusions will be drawn. For example, some 'Marxists' assume that Marxist method has the same starting-point as empiricism: that is to say, it starts with '*the facts*'. It is difficult to understand why Lenin and others should have spent so much time on Hegel and the dialectical method if this were true. Of course every science is based on facts. However, the *definition* and *establishment* of 'the facts' is crucial to any science. Part of the creation of a science is precisely its delimitation and definition as a field of study with its own laws: the 'facts' are shown in experience to be objectively and lawfully interconnected in such a way that a science of these fact is a meaningful and useful basis for practice. Our 'empiricist' Marxists in the field of society and

politics are far from this state of affairs. Their procedure is to say: we had a programme, based on the facts as they were in 1848, or 1921, or 1938; now the facts are obviously different, so we need a different programme. For example, the spurious 'Fourth International' of Pablo's group decided some years ago that the Stalinist bureaucracy and its counterparts in various countries were forced to act differently because of changed objective circumstances ('facts'). New 'revolutionary currents' were abroad in the world, more recently particularly in the colonial revolution. The consequence of this 'mass pressure' would be to force the bureaucrats to act contrary to their wishes and to lead the workers to power. The great scope of the colonial revolution, the 'liberalization' of the Soviet régime, and the exposure of Stalin by Khrushchev, were taken as the 'facts' in this case. Then again, the revolution in Algeria, Guinea, and particularly Cuba are said to be yet a new kind of fact: *socialist* revolutions can follow 'organically' the democratic revolutions, even *without* the formation of revolutionary working-class parties.

Here is a type of revisionism based on the empiricist's 'facts' (other types, based on idealist methods of thought very close to this abstract empiricism, are analyzed in other articles in this issue of LABOUR REVIEW by Tom Kemp and James Baker). Those who refuse to abandon the Marxist programme of Permanent Revolution, the dictatorship of the proletariat, the decisive character of the victory of the workers in the advanced capitalist countries, the need to build revolutionary parties for the defeat of the false leaders of the working class in every country—these are said to be subjective and idealist in their method, refusing to accept the new facts or new reality which must form the basis of our politics. The Stalinist criticism of Trotskyism is similar: we are said to be dogmatic, failing to realise that permanent peace and parliamentary roads to Socialism are made possible by the 'new reality' of Soviet strength.

It is a false and non-Marxist view of 'the facts' which leads to these revisionist ideas. What our 'objectivists' are saying, with their message 'history is on our side', is this: look at the big struggles taking place, add them together without analysing them, go on your *impressions* of their significance, and add all these together—and you have 'the facts'. Colonial revolutions are successful here, and successful there, and in another place; then the success of the colonial revolution is a fact. Nationalist leaders like Nkrumah and Mboya and Nasser make 'anti-imperialist' speeches and even carry out nationalizations; this suggests that history is tending irreversibly and inexorably to force non-proletarian politicians in a socialist direction. But 'objectivism'

of this kind is a collection of impressions and not a rich dialectical analysis of the whole picture, with the parts related to one another. A truly objective analysis begins from the economic relations between classes on a world scale and within nations. It proceeds through an analysis of the relations between the needs of these classes and their consciousness and organization. On these it bases its programme for the working-class internationally and in each national sector. A list of the 'progressive forces' is not an objective analysis! It is the opposite, i.e., simply a collection of surface impressions, an acceptance of the *existing unscientific consciousness* of the contemporary class struggle as held by the participants, primarily by petty-bourgeois politicians who lead the national movements and bureaucratized labour movements. To overlay this theoretical blunder by suggesting that Castro and others are 'natural' Marxists serves only to confirm that the 'theorists' concerned are little aware of how far they have gone. They seem to suggest that the periods of maximum revolutionary tension are those when the participants in mass struggle arrive easily and spontaneously at revolutionary concepts. On the contrary, it is precisely at such times that there is a premium on scientific consciousness, on the theory and strategy developed in struggle over a long period.⁷

The essence of the history of the proletarian revolutionary movement is the conscious effort to develop scientific theory and a strategy conforming to that science. All talk about 'natural' developments towards Marxism are an attack on the necessity to carry on this process. The empiricist believes that he can study the various parts of the social process as they present themselves from day to day. Adding these together will then give a 'realistic' or 'objective' total picture and international perspective. Such an approach is, of course, very closely related to the so-called 'scientific' method which was so strongly attacked by Hegel and by Lenin (see preceding article to this one in Vol. 7, No. 1 LABOUR REVIEW). The task of the dialectical method is first to understand the basic (economic and class) contradictions in their development, and then to study the political and ideological manifestations as parts of a developing whole on this basis. Time and again in the *Notebooks*, Lenin refers to what Engels had called 'bad dialectics', those artificial instructions which abstractly approach every phenomenon, trying to impose on it some 'thesis, antithesis and synthesis' or 'two opposing sides'. As Engels said, a knowledge of the dialectical categories is no solution to *any* scientific problem. In every case it is a matter of systematic study of the actual subject-matter,

7. See 'What is Revolutionary Leadership?' in *Labour Review*, Vol. 5, No. 3.

analysis of the developing forces within it. To assume that 'the dialectical method' is a short cut which makes all this hard work unnecessary is the mistake of those who talk glibly about 'applying' dialectics. Lenin showed how thoroughly he had absorbed Marx's method in his trenchant criticisms of Trotsky and particularly Bukharin in the 'Trade Union Debate' of 1920. His remarks on dialectics in this controversy are necessary reading for anyone studying the *Notebooks*, for they are an expansion in clear terms of many of the points tentatively sketched in the rough notes on Hegel.⁸

DIALECTICS AND ECLECTICISM

In 1920, there took place in the Communist Party of the young Soviet Republic a vital controversy on the relations between the trade unions and the State. Lenin's speeches on this subject are the first blows in the battle against the dangers of bureaucracy in Soviet Russia, but for the moment we are more concerned with the deliberate points he made on the use of the dialectical method in his disagreements with Trotsky and especially with Bukharin. Trotsky, with his insistence that the trade unions must subordinate their independence to the workers' state, saying that only a 'shake-up' in the trade unions would shift the conservative and slow-moving union leaders, was proceeding, said Lenin, from *abstractions* about the proper relations between the organized workers and 'their' state. But the special problems here were *political* ones: the Soviet state was necessarily weakened by bureaucratic distortions. This fact had a specific political effect on the attitude of the workers, who had a need of trade unions to defend themselves against 'their' state. It was a mistake in method for Trotsky to 'start from the economic tasks' and condemn Lenin for being too 'political'; '. . . one must not approach a wide subject like this without pondering over the special features of the present situation from the political aspect . . . politics are the most concentrated expression of economics.' Trotsky's mistaken policy of 'shaking-up' the unions 'flowed from this wrong method', 'and if this mistake is not admitted and corrected, it will lead to the fall of the dictatorship of the proletariat', said Lenin.

To be noted here is Lenin's insistence on viewing each particular policy question from the point of view of the whole development of the revolution and the workers' dictatorship. In his 'Testament' he starts in similar manner, from the need to preserve the worker-peasant alliance as the basis of Soviet power; the criticisms of bureaucracy and of Stalin's personal characteristics are placed in this larger

8. Lenin, *Selected Works*, Vol. IX, pp. 54-80.

context. Seeing particular questions as part of this developing whole is the most *concrete* way of looking at them, even if it seems at first to be going a long way round to get to the point. Only if we start from the *specific* stage of development reached by the state and society as a whole will we have in mind the most urgent and specific aspects of the problem under discussion. 'Truth is always concrete'.

In dealing with Bukharin too, Lenin is very sharp. Bukharin went in for a very common species of 'dialectics' in his attempt to clear up the trade union controversy. He thought that Trotsky saw the unions too much from the point of view of the organization, the 'apparatus' aspect of trade unionism in the workers' state; Zinoviev on the other hand placed too much stress on the unions as a 'school of Communism'. Said Bukharin, one must realize that both are partly right: the unions are 'on the one hand' a school, etc., 'on the other hand' an apparatus, etc. In this case, Bukharin arrives at an equally *abstract* approach to the question; as always

Bukharin:
criticized
by Lenin,
who
recognized
his
undoubted
theoretical
talents, for
a tendency
to 'scholasticism' and
'eclecticism'.



he tended towards eclecticism rather than dialectics, i.e., trying to get at the truth by sticking together various partial views instead of making an independent scientific study of the whole. Lenin's characterization on this occasion is very clear:

'Why is this argument of Bukharin's lifeless and vapid eclecticism? Because Bukharin does not make the slightest attempt, independently, from his own point of view, to analyse the whole history of the present controversy (Marxism, i.e., dialectical logic, absolutely demands this) and the whole approach to the question, the whole presentation—or, if you will, the whole trend of the presentation—of the question at the present time, under the present concrete conditions. Bukharin does not make the slightest attempt to do this! He approaches the subject without the faintest attempt at a concrete study, with bare abstractions, and takes a little piece from

Zinoviev and a little piece from Trotsky. This is eclecticism.'⁹

Some 'Marxists' think that a dialectical approach is simply to arbitrarily decide on two opposite forces in any phenomenon and to describe the development of the phenomenon in terms of these 'opposites'. But which two 'sides' of the thing shall be taken?

'On the one hand the trade unions are a school, on the other hand they are an apparatus, thirdly, they are organisations of the toilers, fourthly, they are almost exclusively organisations of the industrial workers, fifthly, they are organisations according to industry, etc., etc. Bukharin gives no grounds whatever, he makes no independent analysis, does not produce a scrap of evidence to prove why the first two 'aspects' of the question, or subject, should be taken, and not the third, fourth, fifth, etc. That is why the theses of the Bukharin group are also just an eclectic squib. Bukharin puts the whole question of the relation between 'school' and 'apparatus' in a radically wrong, eclectic manner.'¹⁰

The point to be made here is that concern with dialectical method is no idle preoccupation; without it, Marxists are in danger of descending into empiricism, a narrow 'practicalism', a deadly routine manner of handling vital political questions. In the 'trade union controversy' Lenin demonstrated practically his mastery of the ideas which he had studied all his life, and particularly in the *Philosophical Notebooks*. To start from the all-sided, contradictory and developing *whole*, to understand its specific stage of development and the necessary expression of the inner contradictions at this stage, this is the essence of dialectical method. It is as opposed to empiricism as a method can possibly be.

Bernstein, the German Social Democrat, was the first of the deliberate and wholesale 'revisionists' of Marxism. He rejected revolution and founded modern reformism on the grounds that 'the facts' had turned out differently from Marx's predictions. The workers were *not* getting poorer and poorer and driven to revolt. Capitalism was *not* getting nearer and nearer to collapse, etc., etc., and therefore the best thing was to work *within* capitalism, gradually transforming it by partial changes. Rosa Luxemburg was Bernstein's most able opponent in the German Social-Democratic press. Her attack is a model of the dialectical method.¹¹ Bernstein's basic mistake, she pointed out, was to take his 'evidence' as isolated and independent 'facts' which are supposed to disprove Marx's theories. But these are only facts if you accept that they have independent and separate importance, and fail to see them as part of the capitalist *system*, of its general problems of development. Reforms, similarly, cannot be judged except historically. Only abstract comparison from the

9. Ibid, p. 67.

10. Ibid, pp. 67-8.

11. R. Luxemburg *Reform or Revolution*.

outside can pose reform as an *alternative* to revolution. If we start from the class struggle in its development, we see that specific reforms can only take place and have meaning *on the basis* of past revolutions, i.e., the two are not separate, alternative phenomena, but necessary sides of the same process



Rosa Luxemburg:

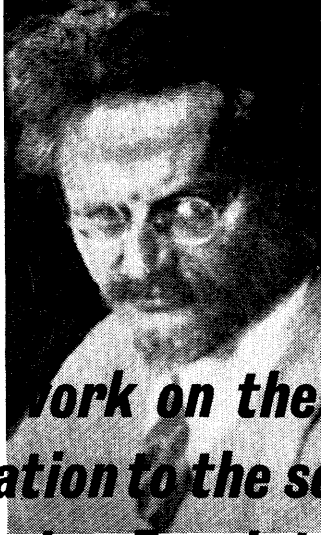
her 'Reform or Revolution' is a classical example of Marxist method against revisionism.

of struggle. Structural changes, changes in power, demand revolution, and the significance of reforms today can only be appreciated from the point of view of the construction of a revolutionary movement for the victory of the working class tomorrow, as well as in the framework of past revolutions.

We have seen that 'the facts' as they present themselves immediately are not sufficient for a Marxist analysis; more, the acceptance of the sum of these facts as reality can only bring about an opportunist adaptation to the existing society. The empiricist or 'impressionistic' observer thinks he approaches the facts in an unbiased way without preconceptions, without theory, and in this, is superior to the 'dogmatic' Marxist, with his 'fixed' theories. But no one starts without theories. The very *selection* of certain facts as the ones to add up (or to be impressed by) indicates the allocation of a certain significance to these as against the countless other 'facts' or 'sides' of reality. Those who claim to be objective, avoiding theory in the first place, in fact only use a muddled and less explicit theory; such a theory is, in fact, shaped by the dominant ideology of the society in which they live. Its every-day prejudices may go by the name of 'sound common sense', but they are the definite prejudices of a definite class society.

But Marxist theory and socialist politics are not fixed truths sent like manna from heaven. They are constantly developing like any science; born in struggle against bourgeois ideology, they have developed through the struggle of the working class and its organizations. For the proletariat to achieve consciousness of the full meaning of its international struggle against the power of capital, a vital and determined struggle for Marxist theory against every diversion is necessary. This is why the big strides

forward of the socialist movement have always been preceded by theoretical battles against revisionism as well as political class struggles. To base our socialist programme on the objective development of the class struggle, we must sharpen our theoretical weapons. Only scientific theory can penetrate to the essence of the international class struggle against imperialism. Our own ideas, i.e., our own political and theoretical development, has itself to be understood dialectically. The conscious activity of revolutionaries and of the working class are material factors in the transformation of society. To be uncritical of our own history and theoretical development is to fall into idealism. When a revisionist trend appears and even becomes strong in the Marxist movement, the task is not just to 'uphold Marxist principles', demonstrate on what points the revisionists have departed from them, and continue as before. In this way nothing is learned in the long run. It is through the *deepening* of the criticism of revisionism, in showing its historical roots, in showing the way it reflects the pressure of other classes on the proletariat, that the revolutionaries develop their own theory. When we confront reality, we do not start with a clean sheet, but with weapons (theories, consciously built forms of organization, slogans, plans) forged over the years in action on changing reality. The history and development of these weapons, the understanding of their relations to the whole reality, the way they have become what they are and must take a higher and more developed form, in struggle against opposed ideas; this is what must be grasped in a fight against revisionism. In other words, our own theory, our own consciousness (which must take the form of 'practical-revolutionary activity'), must be understood *dialectically*, just like anything else. The *Philosophical Notebooks* of Lenin provide the basic framework of an understanding of this problem, the dialectical nature of the development of consciousness. It is a problem to which the *Notebooks* constantly return. Dialectics *is* the theory of knowledge of Marxism, Lenin says many times, meaning that dialectics is a scientific theory of the emergence and development of human thinking. The reader himself will be able to follow Lenin's thoughts on the general aspects of this problem in his notes on Hegel's *Science of Logic*; all we have tried to indicate here is the continuity of Lenin's writings with the whole Marxist tradition of revolutionary thought, and to show the connection between apparently obscure 'philosophical' questions and issues of political urgency, not only in Lenin's day but our own.



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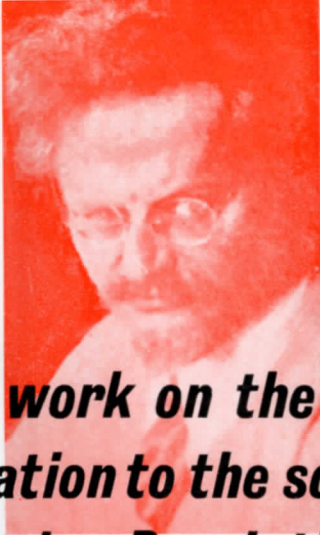


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