Fourth International

A JOURNAL OF INTERNATIONAL MARXISM PUBLISHED BY THE INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE FOURTH INTERNATIONAL

Volume 4 No. 2
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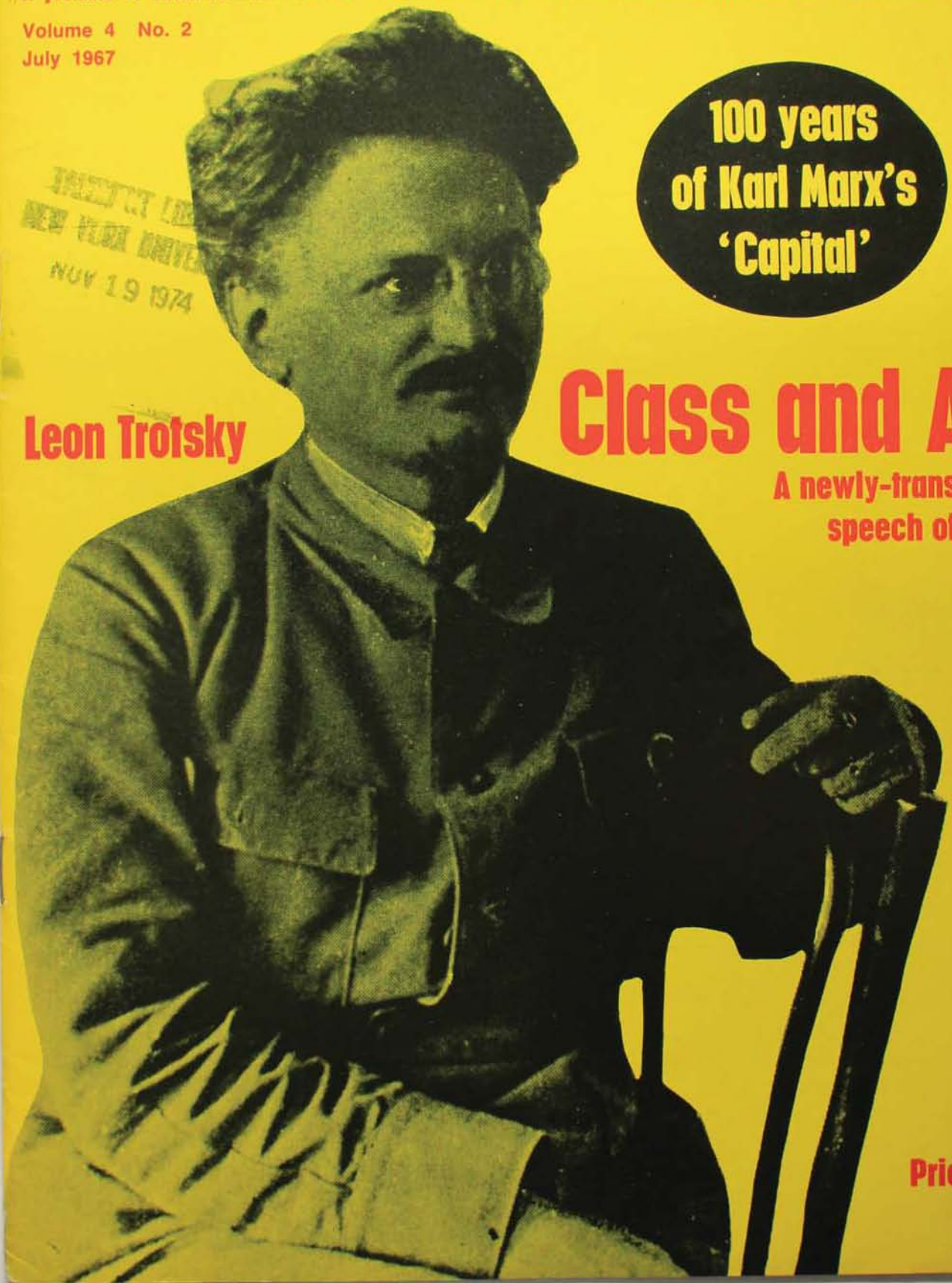
100 years of Karl Marx's 'Capital'

Leon Trotsky

Class and Art

A newly-translated speech of 1924



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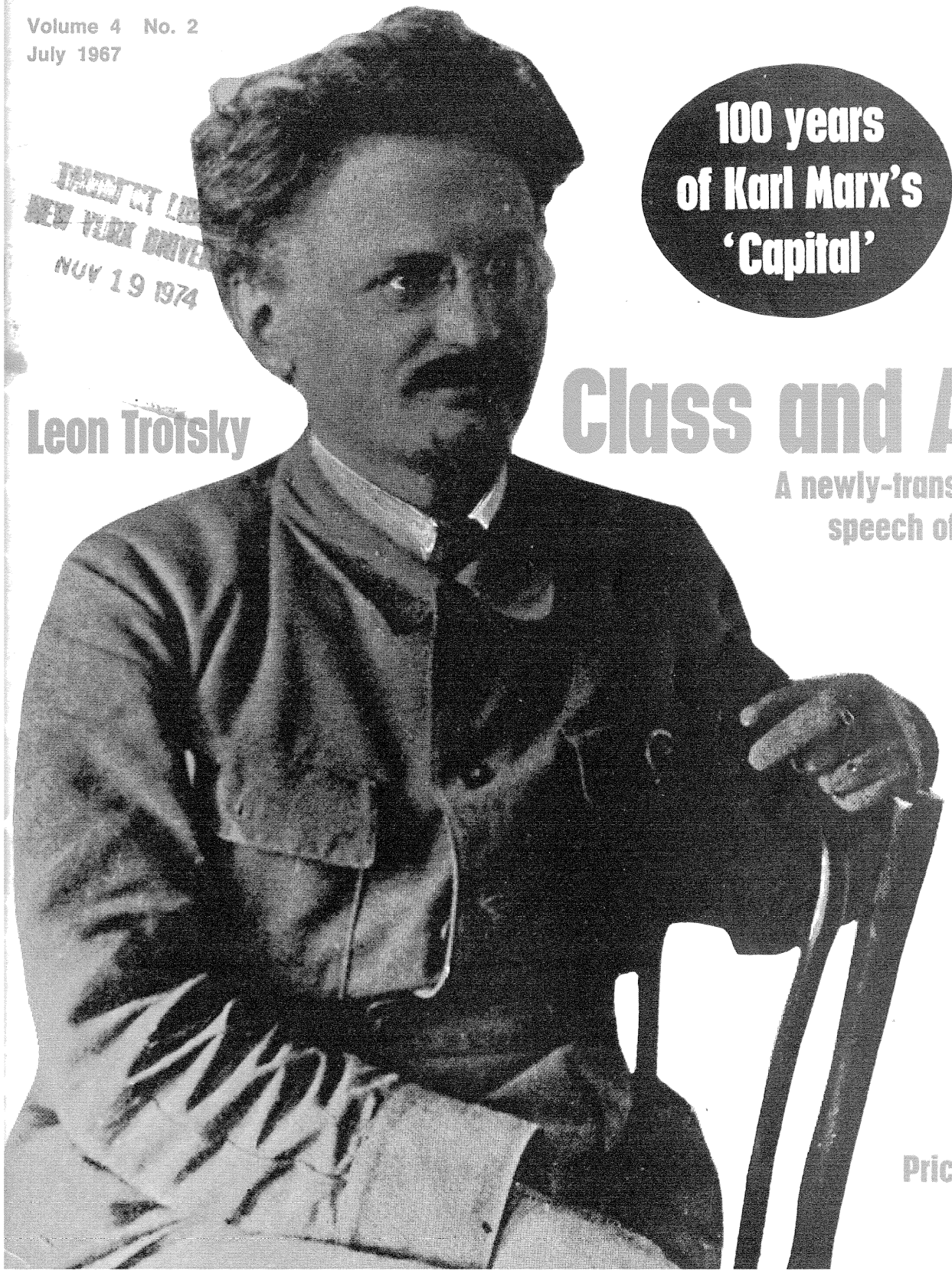

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Fourth International

A Journal of International Marxism

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Editorial

TROTSKY pointed out many times that, whereas the Third International had been founded on the basis of the successful October Revolution and the subsequent revolutionary wave which swept through Europe, the decision to found the Fourth International in 1938 was made necessary precisely by massive defeats of the working class and the coming World War, which the proletariat had no way of preventing because of the betrayals of Stalinism. Above all the victory of Hitler in Germany in 1933, carried through in the face of a working class with the most powerful Communist Party outside the Soviet Union, made necessary this step. It came in the wake of the defeats of the General Strike of 1926 in Britain and the Second Chinese Revolution in 1927, and was followed by the Franco victory in Spain. There were in the Labour movement many professed revolutionaries and 'lefts' who were ready enough to endorse Trotsky's criticisms of the results of Stalinism, but could not accept the responsibility of proletarian revolutionaries. They blamed the defeats of the workers' movement on the workers themselves, as soon as it came to the question of constructing an independent leadership. All sorts of arguments about the immaturity of the proletariat were advanced, and many centrists 'rediscovered' the old argument that every class gets the leadership it deserves.

After a preparatory period (1933-37) during which he expected the crisis within the existing working-class parties to produce the best prospects for adherents to the new International, Trotsky proceeded to break with these elements, and to build the new movement around those cadres who undertook fully to continue the theory, programme and organisation of Bolshevism. Now, thirty years later, it is essential to understand two different sides of the struggle to build the International if our work is to succeed. In the first place, the working class is no longer the defeated working class of the 1930's: the attacks of imperialism now encounter a proletariat strong and without major political defeats of an international order for a considerable period, and this working class has now considerable experience of the betrayals of Stalinism as well as Social-Democracy. Secondly, it is absolutely vital to fight against every and any tendency to bow to the 'spontaneous' ability of this working-class radicalization to produce the leadership which is required. *Only* on the basis of parties of the Bolshevik type, built around a cadre trained in Marxist theory through the struggle against every enemy of the movement, can this task be carried out. As always in the history of the Marxist movement, the attack on these fundamental principles comes in 'new' forms, some of them having the appearance of the most 'revolutionary' outlook..

The revisions which have attacked the Fourth International from within have all been liquidationist in character, i.e., they have led to the abandonment of the construction of independent revolutionary parties. This has always been based on an argument that the pressure of objective forces towards socialism was so strong that the historical tasks of Marxists had changed: they must now stay close to those forces (the bureaucratic apparatus) which would be forced to carry out revolutionary tasks. Those who insisted on the programme and perspectives of Trotsky were denounced as sectarians and adventurists, doomed to isolation. This method and liquidationist practice were most thoroughly worked out in the revisions of Michel Pablo. But his ideas were fundamentally those of the original opponents of the foundation of the Fourth International: other organized forces could carry out the current historical tasks; and Marxists must base themselves on the given level of working-class consciousness, adapting to it. In both cases it was a capitulation to the existing leaderships and a rejection of independent revolutionary leadership.

Since 1953 the followers of Pablo have shown the consequences of these revisions, and have been responsible for one betrayal after another,

particularly in Ceylon and in the Belgian General Strike. But in a period of working-class radicalization the Marxist movement will face the danger of the same basic revision from another direction. There will be a tendency to adapt to the possibilities of grouping together class-conscious workers on the basis of the greatest area of common agreement rather than in a struggle for our independent programme against all varieties of opportunism and syndicalism. Once again the cry of 'sectarianism' will go up against those who put first the struggle for political leadership through the building of a revolutionary party against all other tendencies. This is the meaning of the recent onslaught against the Socialist Labour League from the so-called United Secretariat in Paris. After the debacle of their provocations in the 'Tate affair' (see Editorial, Fourth International, Vol. 4, Number 1) they have now published, under the hand of Ernest Germain, a 100-page book devoted entirely to attacking the 'sectarianism' and 'ultra-leftism' of the Socialist Labour League. These revisionists tell us continually that it is necessary to be close to the 'mainstream', i.e., to the control of the bureaucratic apparatuses, and that we commit the paramount crime of ceaselessly merely proclaiming the need to build revolutionary parties. In fact of course it is the actual growth of the sections of the International Committee which provokes their wrath, rather than our declared intentions. In particular, the Liege demonstration of October 1966 and the prodigious steps forward in the building of an international revolutionary youth movement are playing havoc with the forces of the revisionists everywhere. They can nowhere any longer put forward the claim to be representatives of Trotskyism because of the growth of this real movement.

Those who accuse us of sectarianism are in fact active opponents of every advance by the revolutionary vanguard. They act deliberately to prevent, so far as they can, every new coming together of the Trotskyist forces with the struggle of the working class. They are very concerned to isolate us. They are part of those centrist tendencies who play the definite role of diverting the struggles of the class along the paths decided by the bureaucracy. With their phrases about the 'ultra-leftism' of the Socialist Labour League and the International Committee they cement their own relationships with pacifists and 'left' bureaucrats of every stripe. It was in this way that Trotsky answered the centrists like Pivert who complained of the sectarianism of the Fourth International (they considered its very existence an act of sectarianism!), and we should carefully scrutinize every such accusation from this standpoint: it will tell us more about the politics of the accuser than about ourselves.

In the editorial of our last issue (April 1967) we emphasised the remarkable way in which the perspectives of the 1966 International Committee's Conference had been confirmed by the objective course of the class struggle. Since then, of course, the deepening crisis of imperialism has manifested itself even more directly, and particularly in Greece and in the Middle East war. In Greece a parasitic and divided bourgeoisie was able to impose a dictatorial military regime upon a working class which in the past two years had shown extraordinary combativity, from massive political demonstrations over a whole month to a flood of bitter strike struggles. The responsibility for this reverse rests directly on the Stalinists, who lulled the masses to sleep with the preparations for a General Election. But it is necessary also to estimate the damage caused to the preparation of the Trotskyist vanguard by the liquidationism of Pablo, Frank, Hansen, Germain and Co. since the early 1950's. Their message that the Stalinists had become incapable of historical betrayals was one of the important elements in their attack on the programme of Trotskyism. The Greek section of the Fourth International, affiliated to the International Committee, is being forged only in struggle against this revisionism.

The more and more open role of the Stalinists as counter-revolutionary, classically demonstrated in Greece, was manifested on the international level by the actions of the Kremlin bureaucracy in the conflict between Egypt and the imperialist puppet Israel. Kosygin's concern only to protect the privileges of the bureaucracy through a 'special relationship' with Johnson became clear to millions of peasants and workers in struggle against imperialism during and after the six-day war; thus the characterization of this bureaucracy made by the Fourth International in the period of isolation resulting from defeats now becomes the property of millions, just as the struggle against bureaucracy is forced into the experience of millions of workers and peasants in China, Eastern Europe and the USSR. In this situation the greatest error would be to assume that the greater degree of

collusion between the Stalinist bureaucracy and the imperialists represents an ability on their part to now control and set the limits of the class conflicts which continually erupt in various parts of the world as a result of imperialism's deepening crisis. In the first place, the Kremlin bureaucrats gave an enormous amount of ground to the imperialists by their refusal to support the Arab states in the conflict. Having gained this advantage, the imperialists are now encouraged on every front to fresh provocations—in Germany as well as in South East Asia. What Kosygin presents as the most 'realistic' way to defend the USSR turns out to bring as its consequence the gravest threat to the security of the gains of October; his actions were in fact only to preserve the privileges of his own bureaucratic caste, and no longer do these actions appear as coinciding with the actual defence of the USSR. Only those who consistently oppose Stalinism and build the Fourth International can lead the way to a defence of the USSR by class methods.

Trotsky characterized our period as one in which the crisis of humanity was concentrated into the crisis of working-class leadership. For the adequate understanding of such a period and to prepare revolutionary work in it, it has been necessary to analyse and present the bitter reality of the Stalinist and Social-Democratic betrayals of leadership. But Marxists are not hypnotized or paralyzed by the recognition of these betrayals; on the contrary, they base themselves on the strength of the working class against which these betrayals have become necessary because of the weakness of the capitalist system. In the period of radicalization we have now entered, contrasted with the crushing defeats of the thirties, it becomes necessary to stress this side of our characterization of the epoch against all those who in various ways exclude the actions of the working class from history, instead presenting history as the work of bureaucrats and ruling classes. 'The laws of history are stronger than the bureaucratic apparatus', says the Transitional Programme. This does not mean, as Pablo tried to interpret it, that 'the Stalinists can no longer betray', but that the conscious preparation of revolutionary Marxists must fight its way to head the working class in its historic role of settling accounts with imperialism and its agents in the bureaucracy.

Das Kapital.

Kritik der politischen Oekonomie.

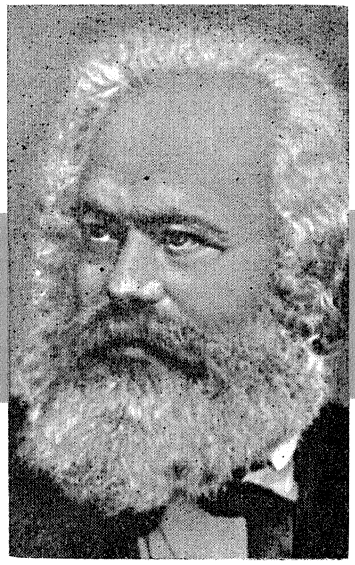
Von

Karl Marx.

Erster Band.

Buch I: Der Produktionsprocess des Kapitals.

Hamburg
Verlag von Otto Meissner.
1867
New-York: L. W. Schmidt, 24 Barclay-Street.



CAPITAL:

A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF CAPITALIST PRODUCTION

By KARL MARX

TRANSLATED FROM THE THIRD GERMAN EDITION, BY SAMUEL MOORE AND EDWARD AVELING

AND EDITED BY
FREDERICK ENGELS

VOL. I.

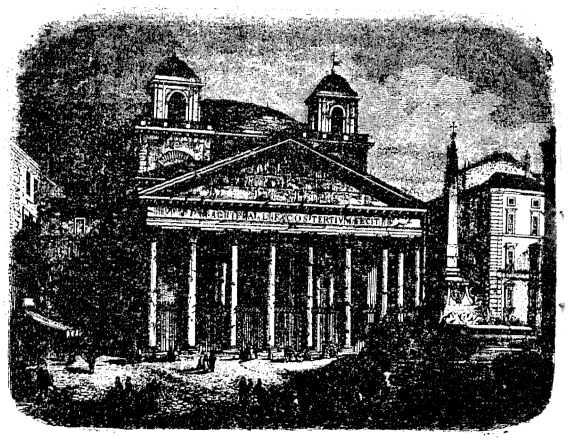
LONDON:
SWAN SONNENSCHEIN, LOWREY, & CO.,
PATERNOSTER SQUARE.
1887.

LE CAPITAL

PAR

KARL MARX

TRADUCTION DE M. J. ROY, ENTIÈREMENT REVISÉE PAR L'AUTEUR



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1867 1967

КАПИТАЛЪ.

КРИТИКА ПОЛИТИЧЕСКОЙ ЭКОНОМІИ.

СОЧИНЕНІЕ

КАРЛА МАРКСА.

ПЕРЕВОДЪ СЪ НѢМЕЦКАГО.

ТОМЪ ПЕРВЫЙ.

КНИГА I. ПРОЦЕССЪ ПРОИЗВОДСТВА КАПИТАЛА.

С.-ПЕТЕРБУРГЪ.
ИЗДАНІЕ Н. П. ПОЛЯКОВА.
1872

We must be clear about what it is we celebrate after 100 years of *Capital.* We do not pay homage or tribute to particular aspects of Marx's findings in the field of political economy; nor to *Capital's* 'brilliant predictions' or its 'strong points'. We mark the centenary of Marx's major contribution to political economy not as followers or admirers of Karl Marx but as Marxists. That is, we see this work not as an *academic* work but as a weapon in the present struggles of the working class. It is not, in any case, a question of 'refuting' Marx, but of developing his work as part of the struggle of the working class for Socialism. In particular it is necessary to defend Marx from his 'friends' who wish in fact to separate him out from the movement he struggled to build and for which he 'sacrificed health, happiness and family'. There can be no ideological co-existence between the working class and the petty bourgeoisie no matter how 'sympathetic' they may be towards the proletariat or even towards Marxism as they conceive of it.

In celebration of Das Kapital

(Part 1)

by Peter Jeffries

Two-fold legacy

The legacy Marx left in the shape of *Capital* was in reality twofold. He in the first place provides a scientific examination of the laws which govern production and distribution under capitalism. The 'laying bare' of these laws of motion was, in his own opinion, his major task. Secondly he demonstrates that these laws are not 'accidental' but bound up with and contingent upon the social relations of production established under capitalism. He establishes in *Capital* that the capitalist system of production develops not smoothly and evenly but through contradictions which tend to ever greater sharpness. In so doing he proves that the bourgeois system is not 'eternal', not 'natural', but on the contrary is but one phase through which mankind has had to pass in its struggle against nature. Mankind can only go forward to new conquests under a new system, socialism. The only vehicle for this task is the working class.

In defending and celebrating the centenary of *Capital,* therefore, we defend and struggle to enrich the method which enabled Marx to achieve this historic task.

Marx's turn to the study of economic material in the 1830s and '40s, a turn which finds its completion in *Capital,* can only be understood as part of his intellectual development, as part of the emergence of a new world outlook, dialectical materialism. Marx, initially a member of the school of 'left Hegelians', was forced increasingly to question the adequacy of Hegelianism and its ability to explain developments in the real world. He has summed up the course of this development in the famous passage in the Preface to the *Critique of Political Economy* (1859).

Marx sees legal relations, forms of State, ideas,

etc., not as things 'in themselves', but as rooted in the material conditions of life. But this transition in Marx to a new conception of history, a materialist conception, should not be seen as a completed 'dogma'; it was only a 'general conclusion' which served as but a 'guiding thread' for further studies. It was a hypothesis which had to be tested by the examination and analysis of a mass of empirical data. In particular it had to be tested against the bourgeois, the 'modern' mode of production. This is the main task of *Capital.* It is in fact a testing out of the materialist conception of history and a demonstration of its power.

The dialectical method is however central to *Capital.* The dialectic was the 'kernel' which was 'preserved' from Hegel. It was preserved, but 'reworked' from the standpoint of materialism. Hegel was 'stood on his head, or rather on his feet'. It is inadequate merely to stress or lay emphasis upon the dialectical *aspects* of the work of Marx and Engels. We are not here talking of an 'aspect' but of the core, the essence. Nor are we merely drawing a distinction between 'static' and 'dynamic' in the manner of the modern bourgeois economist. Certainly the dialectical method is concerned with the study of processes, with phenomena in motion. However this movement takes place not evenly, not steadily, not in a planned way, but violently, unevenly, with breaks and leaps in development, with changes from quality to quantity and *vice versa.* Development occurs only through the struggle of opposite forces in the material world. Marx, in *Capital,* is penetrating to the roots, the material foundations, of the struggle of the 'opposites' in capitalist society, the working class and the bourgeoisie.

Two main aspects

It is necessary to focus attention on two main aspects which underlie the method and the structure of Marx's *Capital*—firstly the *historical* nature of this method and secondly its *'specificity'*, to adopt the term employed by several writers. Marx is not concerned with society 'in general' or with the laws which might apply to all the stages of social evolution. As Engels later pointed out, the main task was in the first place to discover those specific laws which operated at each stage; only then might it be possible to say anything about those comparatively few laws which were of universal application. It must be said that this approach, which is an expression of the method of historical materialism, stands in the sharpest opposition to that of all modern 'social science' with its search for abstract, timeless and general laws, nowhere more clearly exposed than in the shallowness of subjective economics, a matter to which we shall later return.

Secondly, Marx's method is *historical.* He treats the capitalist mode of production specifically, that is abstracted from all the features which this society holds in common with all former societies. At the same time this social formation, capitalism, is always seen historically. Marx sees always the historical connections between feudalism and capitalism, he traces the growth of capitalism out of feudalism, in violent struggle against it. Marx establishes political economy as a social science (as distinct from a 'natural' science) because he treats it as an aspect of the science of history. It is in this conception that the science of political economy is unified as the central part of his new world outlook. Political economy cannot and must not be separated from the rest of Marx's thought in the manner of bourgeois writers, one of whose chief preoccupations is the destruction of this unity, often in the guise of paying lavish 'compliments' to particular features of his work. These two features, the specific and the historical in Marx's work, will form the basis of our appreciation of *Capital.*

Examination of the commodity

Marx starts his analysis of capitalism with an examination of the commodity. 'The wealth of those societies in which the capitalist mode of production prevails, presents itself as "an immense accumulation of commodities" '. He starts from the simplest form in which the product of labour in the present form of society presents itself. Starting from the commodity Marx is able to proceed to uncover the 'laws of motion' of the capitalist system. He establishes the dual nature of the commodity. The commodity has a 'use value' and also an 'exchange value' (or 'value' as Marx always refers to this latter term). The use value of a commodity is its usefulness to others.

Marx is able to abstract from 'use value' at this stage of his analysis: for a good to be sold as a commodity presupposes that it has a use value: use value is the depository of exchange value. In Vol. III, when considering the capitalist system of production and circulation as a whole, Marx reincorporates use value on a social scale into his analysis, giving it a central role in his examination of crises. It must be pointed out (and this in opposition to Sweezy) that 'use value' and 'utility' are not synonymous, as he

assumes. Use value is the utility of the commodity: that is the usefulness of a good *for others*. Utility is usefulness in general and is without social significance: it merely expresses the relationship between 'man' and 'goods' and has therefore no part to play in political economy: it is properly the subject for natural science, as Marx points out. Marx always stresses that capitalism involves the production of goods for the market, the production of commodities, not production for each individual's own consumption.

This relationship between 'goods' and 'human beings' is present in all societies. It implies no change and such a 'starting point'—which is the starting point for bourgeois economics—must renounce all attempts to discover the laws of movement, the developmental tendencies of the capitalist system.

Labour theory of value

In this analysis of the commodity, Marx's 'starting point', he is interested in what Hilferding and others have referred to as the qualitative aspects of the question. The commodity is seen, or rather the relationship between commodities is seen, as an expression of the connections, the relationships between producers. In the act of exchanging commodities men are in fact exchanging their labour. It is this consideration, the study of political economy as one concerned with the relations established by men in the course of production and independent of their will and consciousness, that governs Marx's choice of labour as the determinant of exchange value, the relationship between commodities which in fact expresses the social relations between the producers. That is, the labour theory is not chosen from the point of view of its ability to 'solve the problem of distribution' of social labour time in a merely quantitative sense. Nor was it chosen by Marx on the basis of an elimination of all possible contenders, as Böhm-Bawerk in his polemic against Marx suggested and Maurice Dobb implies. The labour theory of value must be seen as an expression of Marx's method, of historical materialism. To deal with only the purely quantitative aspects of the question, the exchange of commodities based upon their relative labour content, is in fact to adopt the method of the bourgeois economist. If the problem is posed in this narrow way the question then arises whether the categories developed by Marx correspond to the 'real' categories in the world, or whether the law of value is subject to empirical verification. This implies an acceptance of the bourgeois assumption that only that which is subject to quantification is 'real', all other phenomena are 'metaphysical'. Marx was not interested in the categories of the 'real' (capitalist) world. He had to explain the origin of those forces which in the capitalist system produce and sustain these categories. To start from them would have involved starting from precisely the opposite point of view to the one demanded by scientific investigation.

Quantitative and qualitative aspects

Marx therefore takes the commodity as the 'cell form' of capitalist society, as the most abstract expression of wealth in bourgeois society. It is the cell form in two respects. Capitalist production implies the ultimate dominance of commodity production and the driving out of all pre-commodity forms of production. Implicit in the commodity, that is to say, is the full potentiality of the modern mode of production. It is the starting point in this historical sense. But theoretically (logically) it also provides the starting point for an examination of the social relations of the capitalist system. It is theoretically possible to infer, from the relationship between two commodities, the totality of relations of the whole system. It is from this that the commodity derives its 'concreteness'. This gives to political economy the possibility of coherence and regularity and provides the basis for the construction of 'laws' which express in abstract form the main driving forces at work in the capitalist system. It was Marx's great tribute to Ricardo that the latter, in his *Principles*, was able, postulating only the commodity, to penetrate all the forms of wealth in bourgeois society and establish political economy as a science.

It is from his investigation of the nature of the commodity, viewed both qualitatively and quantitatively, carried out in the opening chapter of *Capital*, that Marx derives his conception of value. He does not *start* with this conception of value, the labour theory of value. It is an expression of the fact that under commodity production men exchange their labour only through the exchange of commodities. As Marx insists, it is not a question of 'proving' the labour theory of value, nor of dealing with it as a separate question disembodied from the rest of the work. Social labour must be distributed in definite proportions in *all* forms of society: this is in the nature of a 'natural law' which cannot be dispensed with. The task of political economy is to establish precisely how this task is accomplished

under the capitalist mode of production; 'the task of science consists in demonstrating *how* the law of value asserts itself'.

Two-fold character of 'labour'

The next stage in Marx's analysis is the examination of 'labour', an examination of its two-fold character, that is as a use value and a value, which parallels his treatment of the commodity. The distinction which Marx is able to draw between 'concrete' and 'abstract' labour was, in his own opinion, one of the 'two best points' of *Capital* and the pivot on which a proper understanding of political economy turns. This crucial distinction between abstract and concrete labour flows from the nature of the commodity; concrete, specific labour produces use values, while labour in the abstract, general labour, produces values.

This distinction between use value and value of labour enables Marx to solve one of the great mysteries on which classical political economy had long foundered. 'If labour is the sole source of exchange value, what determines the value of labour?' was the question which remained unanswered, even for Ricardo, who at least was aware of the problem. This failure was essentially, in Marx's view, rooted in the misconception of the nature of value on Ricardo's part. Ricardo saw labour as the *measure* of value, rather than its *substance,* as Marx was able to do. Marx saw value in terms of crystallized abstract labour. Thus Ricardo tended to use the term 'value' to mean the 'costs of production' which included a rate of profit on the capital advanced. This led him into hopeless tangles about the impact of wage movements between the branches of industry where capital was combined in different 'proportions' or 'durabilities'. He was unable to solve these problems and was forced, implicity, to abandon a consistent theory of value, as Marx noted.

Labour power

Under capitalism the capitalists sell the commodities produced by the labour of the working class. But it is not their *labour* (their work) that they sell. The working class sells its *labour power,* that is, its *ability* to work. It was the 'discovery' of this category which was to solve the mystery which had for a long time gripped the bourgeois economists. As Marx pointed out the seller of labour power, like the seller of any commodity, realises the exchange value of this commodity and parts with its use value. The fact that he sells it means that he has no use for it. Thus the use value of labour power (labour) no longer belongs to the seller; it now belongs to the purchaser, the owner of capital. The use value of labour no more belongs to the worker than does the use value of oil belong to a dealer when he has sold it. Flowing from his analysis of the contradictory nature of the commodity Marx is thus able to establish why a surplus should arise in a system where 'equality and Mr. Bentham' apparently reign. He is able to *reconcile* the emergence and continued existence of a surplus under capitalism; he does not *derive* his analysis of this surplus, surplus value, from his analysis of the commodity. Ricardo had realized that what Marx was later to achieve was the main task facing political economy. It was however a task which he was unable to accomplish, for reasons we shall presently establish.

David Ricardo

The categories which we have so far dealt with: 'commodity', 'value', 'labour' as opposed to 'labour power', are the key abstractions for Marxist political economy. These were logical, theoretical abstractions. But as Marx insists, they were, at the same time, historical abstractions, they all bore the stamp of history. Commodity production can arise only in definite historical circumstances. The product must not be produced for the immediate needs of the producer.

'Value' thus arises given these specific historical conditions which imply a certain stage in the development of the productive forces, the possibility of producing a surplus above subsistence level, etc.

Similary the category 'abstract labour' arose only in a society in which labour was losing its concreteness, its specific qualities. It reflected a society in which the organic connection between an individual and his labour was ruptured. As Marx points out Adam Smith's indifference to the type of labour when considering value implied the existence of highly developed varieties of concrete labour, none of which was predominant, a society where individuals could and were required to move from one type of work to another. Smith implicity sees this and recognizes that the leap forward in productivity comes when labour is transformed into wage labour.

David Ricardo

Adam Smith

A new epoch

The fact that the categories which form the starting point for the analysis of capitalism on the part of classical political economy are fully developed only in capitalist society is seen above all in the category 'labour power'. For it to emerge as a commodity the worker had to be in a position freely to dispose of his labour power as his own commodity and secondly he had to be placed in a position of complete dependence on the sale of this one commodity for his livelihood. But there was nothing 'natural' in such a situation. Nor was it, Marx insists, a feature or situation common to all modes of production. The starting point for Smith and Ricardo was the product of a whole series of revolutions, a series of revolutions which had eliminated or were in the process of rapidly eliminating all older pre-capitalist forms of production. Thus Marx's chapters on the emergence of capitalism, on primitive accumulation and the smashing of the English peasantry under the impact of the Enclosure Acts, were not mere 'appendages' to his central theme. On the contrary, they are part of the whole in the sense that they establish the objective-historical basis of his categories. The historical process which produced these categories was not a smooth and even one. It involved the violent overthrow and destruction of feudal society, a revolution in agricultural production and technique and the creation of a new town-based proletariat in the horrific conditions of the Industrial Revolution. Marx's categories are the product of the historical development of the struggle of antagonistic classes. They are not merely part of a 'model' which may be able to answer certain questions more adequately than models constructed by bourgeois thinkers. As Marx points out, the emergence of the category 'capital' was of epochal significance. It occurs only when the means of production monopolized by a separate class face free labour selling its ability to work as its only means of living. 'This one historical condition comprises a world's history'. A new epoch in the process of social production is born.

Theories of Surplus Value

The writing of *Capital* was inseparably bound to the study of classical political economy made by Marx. The results of this brilliant investigation are to be seen in the scattered comments throughout the three volumes of *Capital,* but above all in *Theories of Surplus Value,* which Marx intended to be an integral part of the final work, Vol. IV in fact, but a work which Engels was unable to edit within his lifetime. Contained in the *Theories* is an exhaustive examination of the 'pith' of political economy, the history of the categories 'value' and 'surplus value' reflected in the work of leading French and English economists in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. But this work is not a 'history' in the usual sense in which the word is employed. Marx is not concerned merely to describe the evolution of political economy, nor merely point out the 'errors' of his predecessors, nor merely to trace his intellectual antecedents. The *Theories* was intended, as Engels notes, to provide 'a detailed critical history of the pith and marrow of political economy, the theory of surplus value, and develops parallel with it, in polemics against predecessors, most of the points later investigated separately and in their logical connection in the manuscript for Books II and III'. Marx's approach, it is clear from Engels' comment, has nothing in common with the teleological approach normally adopted by writers in this field. He writes critically, from the vantage point of his own theory, and its relationship to a developed capitalist system. As Marx noted in the *Critique,* when discussing the general problem of method, it would seem 'natural' to start from an examination of the categories as they have evolved in the historical process; to start, that is, from rent of land, finally dealing with profit on capital. Such a method was 'erroneous' in that the real problem was to understand the categories, not in their historical evolution, but in their organic relation to capital, which is seen as the all-dominant power in modern society. Similarly in the 'history of the theory', all categories must be understood critically from the vantage point of a scientific analysis of the categories developed in bourgeois society. His work in this field is 'critical' in the sense that Marx is interested in probing the contradictions in the thought and method of his predecessors. He does not see these weaknesses as flowing from mere intellectual deficiences. On the contrary he

Adam Smith

reveals that they flow from an insufficient power of abstraction and, crucially, from an a-historical outlook.

The source of all the weaknesses in the classical school Marx sees as rooted in this one basic defect: that the capitalist system is never viewed as an historical entity, with a past and a future. Smith, Ricardo, etc., see it as the 'natural' and 'inevitable' form of society. Marx was to comment of Ricardo, the outstanding figure of the School, that he was unable to conceive of any order outside the bourgeois 'apart from the parallelograms of Mr. Owen'. The emergence of the bourgeois order is never seriously examined by these writers, they display a similarly contemptuous attitude to pre-capitalist formations as the early Christians did to pre-Christian religion.

The Physiocratic school

The decisive turning point in the development of political economy came in the eighteenth century with the foundation of the Physiocratic school of political economy in France. The seventeenth century had seen some attempts to establish political economy on an objective basis with the work of individuals such as Petty, with a striving towards a scientific conception of 'value'. But Physiocracy was the first true School; for the first time 'value' was seen as arising in production. This was a decisive leap forward from the conception of Mercantilism, which had conceived of value as arising 'upon alienation' that is, from trade. Value and the accumulation of riches came from foreign trade. In particular Mercantilism held to the naïve view that gold and silver were wealth in themselves and considered nothing more urgent, in the field of practical policy at least, than the prohibition of the export of precious metals and the provision of the largest possible surplus on foreign trade.

Such conceptions, based on theories of trade and circulation, could never approach the real source of value. Physiocracy represented a decisive turning point in that value is now seen as arising from the sphere of production, albeit conceived of in a limited sense. That is, the forms of production were seen as physiological forms of society, as arising out of the necessities of production and independent of will or politics. Seeing value in production this School went on to attempt to trace the connections between production and circulation. In this they made a historic contribution to the future analysis of capitalism; Smith, in this sphere at least, merely makes more systematic their categories and gives them more exact definitions. The Physiocrats took a minimal level of wages as their pivotal point and saw surplus labour as that which produces a surplus over this *strict nécessaire*.

Marx is able, in his investigations of Physiocracy, to establish why this school was able to see only labour on the land as productive and why it condemned the manufacturing class as 'sterile'. He points out that in the first place the surplus produced in the sphere of agriculture is much more 'tangible' and 'material' in form. In addition the number of workers in industry, the 'free hands', depends upon the development of agriculture. That is, the 'independence' of manufacturing as a sector is contingent upon a certain level of development in the agricultural sector. This is so if labour is taken in its concreteness and not in its abstractness, that is if it is seen as producing only 'use values'. Finally, the surplus produced in agriculture appears *independent* of all circulation, arising directly from production.

It was understandable that the initial advance in political economy should occur in France, largely an agricultural society, rather than in England, predominantly a trading and seafaring nation. In the latter country profit from trade appeared 'natural' whereas in France value appeared to arise from agriculture independently of all considerations of exchange. The discussion of production could then be undertaken logically (theoretically) prior to circulation. The fundamental weakness of Physiocracy was its confusion of 'value' and 'use value' (that is, value in its outward material form) and its failure to see surplus labour as surplus labour in its general form. Value arose, not out of the social relations established by men in the course of production, but out of land. 'Rent arises from the soil' is an illusion which has ever since dominated bourgeois economics.

These weaknesses in Physiocracy Marx sees not as 'accidental'. They derive from the place of the school historically as a reflection of the process of transition from feudalism to the capitalist mode of production. The tensions and contradictions in French economics Marx sees as arising from its attempt to explain feudalism from a more consistently bourgeois point of view. These theoretical confusions find their reflection in the domain of policy: as rent was seen as the only real form of surplus this led to proposals for its greater taxation, and as the surplus which accrues from manufacturing was seen as a mere transfer from agriculture free competition was

advocated to remove all constraints to this transfer process. This explains why a mass of feudal lords were won for these doctrines while at the same time Physiocracy in fact heralds the rise of bourgeois wealth and the demise of the old feudal ruling class.

Adam Smith's 'Wealth of Nations'

The advance of Adam Smith in his *Wealth of Nations* is to see 'labour in general' as value creating. That is, his conception is not limited to labour in any one particular sphere. This was a major, qualitative advance. Political economy, as a generalization of production relations under capitalism could now be established on a much firmer basis. This advance by Smith was not a smooth process. In the *Wealth of Nations* he constantly relapses into Physiocratic conceptions: he does not consistently differentiate between 'value' and 'use value' and his conception of 'productive' as opposed to 'unproductive' labour is confused. This is perhaps best seen in his brief comments on the Physiocrats: he realizes that, with the rejection of the notion that wealth resided in money, a big advance had been made. But he is far from clear about the historical place of the school; it is here that he quotes the famous proverb about the stick—'If the rod be bent too much one way, in order to make it straight you must bend it as much the other'. He sees Physiocracy, that is, as an over-reaction to the doctrine of Colbert in which 'the industry of the town was certainly over-valued', whereas in the work of the Physiocrats it was 'as certainly under-valued'. This of course ignores the fact that this school saw the sole source of value as residing in the land, but that in so far as it looked upon agriculture from the standpoint of bourgeois social relations it in fact assisted in the development of industry and the towns. Smith is unable to achieve a full understanding of the work of his predecessors because of his basic confusions: his failure to clarify the use of terms 'value' and 'surplus value', leading to a confusion over the categories 'productive' and 'unproductive' labour. At points he sees productive labour (correctly) as that which, when exchanged against capital, produces a surplus value and at other points (wrongly) as labour which is embodied in a vendible commodity. Thus he attacks the Physiocratic conception of the 'sterility' of the manufacturing sector by pointing out the 'usefulness' of this branch of the economy. In other words he has no consistent conception of 'value' and 'use value' which for Marx was to be his starting point in the analysis of the commodity.

The advance which Smith's work marks was its movement (never wholly consistent) towards the view of 'labour in the abstract' as the source of all value. This development was itself a reflection of the categories being produced by capitalism, above all in Britain. The concreteness of labour was broken up, with labour power, the ability to work, becoming itself a commodity for sale and purchase on the market. Smith's genius lay in this: he was able to anticipate and conceptualise these developments in a more consistent manner than his predecessors and establish political economy upon a more 'objective' basis. Thus in his famous phrase 'It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer or the baker that we expect our dinner but from their regard to their own interest' is summed up a conception of capitalism as operating through objective laws which are independent of will or initiative. Smith's weakness, along with all the classical school, was to see these laws as the embodiment of eternal verities, to see capitalism as the only possible mode of production.

Ricardo's 'Theories'

It is important to establish the precise nature of the advances which are seen in the work of Ricardo compared to that of Smith. Marx saw Ricardo as reaching the high point in the classical school; for this reason most attention is devoted to Ricardo in the *Theories*. Marx saw the advances involved in Ricardo's work, whatever their particular features, as essentially ones of method. Marx saw Smith's work as marking a transitional phase between political economy as a descriptive subject and as a truly theoretical study. Smith's *Wealth of Nations* contains an admixture of both these elements, and necessarily so. Thus Marx points to the naïvety of this work with its continual movement from an attempt in places to establish the inner connections between the economic categories of bourgeois production on the one hand and on the other a study of these connections as they manifest themselves on the surface of the capitalist mode of production. This approach was, from one point of view, 'justified in that it was Smith's historical role to carry out this dual task. Smith was the first systematically to attempt to penetrate to the roots, the 'inner physiology' of the capitalist system, but he also had the pioneering task of cataloguing, describing and bringing under classifying definitions the outward forms of this inner structure. But if this approach was 'necessary'

—if Smith had to combine what Marx calls the 'esoteric' and the 'exoteric', the theoretical and the practical—it also makes the whole work difficult to comprehend in that Smith was unaware of this duality in his approach, not conscious of his 'strong' and 'weak' sides. Because of this approach, 'everything can be found in Adam Smith' and all future writers in this field are able to claim him as their intellectual antecedent.

Ricardo's essential task was to bring order to political economy and to end the duality which lies at the heart of Smith's work. Ricardo in his *Principles* attempts to unify and bring order to all the surface phenomena in capitalist society, to make them answerable to the basic 'starting point', the law of value. In the opening chapter of the *Principles* Ricardo starts with value as determined by labour time and then proceeds to ask whether it is possible to reconcile all the other categories of bourgeois society with this basic category. That is, he attempts to establish the relationship between 'essence' and 'appearance' and demonstrates that the contradictions between the classes are rooted in the relations of the capitalist system of production. It is in his appreciation of the tasks facing political economy that Ricardo's true genius lies. Thus the praise of Marx for the opening chapter of Ricardo's work '. . . in this chapter not only commodities are postulated—and nothing else has to be postulated in considering value as such—but also wages, capital, profit, and even the general rate of profit'. Ricardo examines in turn each of the categories of political economy and asks whether they overthrow or call for the modification of the law of value. Thus he takes in turn 'wages' and asks whether wage movements alter the exchange value of commodities; whether the existence of 'constant capital' (not a term in fact employed by Ricardo) which is combined with differing magnitudes of other forms of capital invalidates the law of value; finally whether the existence of capital of differing 'durabilities' in the branches of industry, together with wage fluctuations, overthrows the law of value. Thus in Marx's words, the 'high theoretical pleasure' to be derived from a study of the opening of the *Principles,* where the 'quintessence of the scattered and manifold phenomena' is examined with great 'simplicity, concreteness, depth, novelty and comprehensive conciseness'.

That Ricardo saw this as the central task facing the subject was his great strength and represents his real advance on Smith. That he was unable to carry out the task which he had set for himself reflects the weakness of his method. The method he adopts was scientifically 'necessary' in the history of political economy but also scientifically 'inadequate'. Ricardo attempts to explain all phenomena in terms of the law of value—a reflection of the inner structure of bourgeois society—but is in fact unable to do this. Finding himself unable to carry through the task he is necessarily obliged implicitly to overthrow the law of value.

Ricardo's inefficiency

Ricardo's failure was, in Marx's opinion, rooted in his too-concrete approach to the problems which he tackled. His basic fault was that, after postulating all the phenomena which apparently contradict the law of value, he tries to reconcile all these phenomena directly and immediately with each other instead of tracing their manifold interconnections with the basic law. Marx refutes the charge against Ricardo that his work was too abstract. On the contrary, Marx shows that his work suffered from an insufficient power of abstraction. Although starting with the law of value Ricardo is unable to keep from his mind, to abstract from, all the phenomena which could invalidate it. Thus in his discussion of profit: he *starts* with an average rate of profit and asks whether the existence of this average undermines the law of value, instead of explaining, reconciling, the existence of a surplus with the operation of the law of value. Instead of *postulating* profit, Ricardo should have worked from value through all the intermediary stages to profit.

In a similar way, when dealing with the relationship of 'prices of production' to 'values', Ricardo is forced to admit that prices are determined by influences other than labour time, that the law of value is here or there abrogated. He is is in this sense implicitly forced in the direction of Smith's position, which sees the law of value as operative only in the early or rudimentary stages of society. The contradictions in his position allowed Malthus and others to seize on Ricardo's 'weak' sides, whereas in *Capital* Marx, much to the annoyance of many critics, focuses attention on Ricardo's achievements, his 'strong' points.

Ricardo was in fact over-impressed by the *forms* of bourgeois society, which are treated in a static manner. Thus he continually allows 'competition' and the 'rate of profit' to intrude into his analysis and disrupt its unity. As we shall see this method was in fundamental opposition to that of Marx and the way in which he develops

the categories of *Capital*. As Marx in several places puts it: Ricardo's method involved an attempt to explain the science before the science. It is not possible immediately to reconcile all appearances with the essence, the determining forces. If this *were* possible, as Marx asks, why the need for any science?

Ricardo and the rate of profit

The a-historical roots of Ricardo's method can be seen in his treatment of crises, of breaks in the accumulation process. In fact this section of his work is 'externalized', added on to the main structure of his work. Ricardo, seeing capitalism as the final and most rational system of production, is unable and unwilling to recognise any tendency towards crisis inherent within it. He was of course aware of the tendency for the rate of profit to decline. He saw in the rate of profit not merely a mechanism for the distribution of resources in the capitalist economy but also the motor force of accumulation. Hence the great attention which Ricardo devoted to the tendency which he detected for the rate of profit to fall with the development of the capitalist mode of production.

However, Ricardo is forced to explain this tendency from forces imported from *outside* the system, from the sphere of agriculture. Having defined the rate of profit as uniquely determined by the rate of surplus value to wages ($p' = \frac{s}{v}$ Ricardo was then able to confine his discussion of changes in the rate of profit to a debate about changes in the value of labour power (labour). Assuming with Malthus that the supply of labour was infinitely elastic (real wages, that is, being constant at subsistence level) he was able to show that the value of labour power was uniquely related to changes in the productivity of society. Accepting that productivity in agriculture would decline with the progress of society (that is accepting the infamous 'law' of diminishing returns) he was led to the view that the interest of the landlord was always necessarily in opposition to that of all other classes in the community and that the tendency for the rate of profit to fall could only be checked given an unremitting struggle against the landed interest. This, in outline, is the Ricardian view of changes in the rate of profit.

Ricardo is thus unable to relate movements in the rate of profit to the law of value: the unity of his work is once more disrupted. Further, he is forced to a view which sees agriculture and the landlord as responsible for the rate of profit and its changes in the manufacturing sector. This was of course an inversion of the real economic and political power structure of British society as it was evolving in the course of the Industrial Revolution. In other words, Ricardo fails to relate each source of income in its organic connection with the developed bourgeois system of production, a method which Marx insists can be the only truly scientific one.

Constant capital and variable capital

In opposition to this method, Marx is able to demonstrate that crises, breaks in the process of accumulation, arise inevitably from forces generated from within the system. In addition he is able to explain these forces and to reconcile them with the law of value—in terms, that is, of the social relations of capitalist production. 'Crises' are not treated as a separate entity, but are integrated into the science of political economy. In order to uncover the real forces which lead to periodic crises under capitalism, Marx is obliged, in *Capital*, to abandon certain of Ricardo's key categories. In particular Marx shows that Ricardo's acceptance of the traditional division of capital into 'fixed' and 'circulating' capital was a distinction based solely upon *form*. Marx's division of total capital into 'constant' capital (dead labour) and 'variable' capital (equivalent to the wage bill) enables him not only to explain the accumulation of capital *historically* and point to a basic feature of the bourgeois mode of production, *viz.* the dominance of dead over living labour, but also to show that crises arise from forces produced *within* this mode of production. In his formula $p' = \frac{s}{c+v}$ Marx shows that the very process of accumulation could lower the rate of profit through an increase in the organic composition of capital.

Secondly, as a result of his rejection of the Malthusian 'principle of population', he was able to show that accumulation, by reducing the 'reserve army of labour' (unemployed) could lower the rate of profit and precipitate a crisis. This redivision of the component parts of capital was not merely a pedagogical device or a technique of exposition but results from Marx's basic aim throughout *Capital*: to penetrate beneath the appearances of the capitalist system and uncover the features which were specific to it. 'Constant capital' as a definite and distinct category was historically produced by this new system of production, implying as it did the concentration of the ownership of the means of production in the hands of a separate class as capital with the

alienation of the mass of the population from these means of production. In this sense, Marx's treatment of the Ricardian categories parallels his distinction between 'labour' and 'labour power' noted above. The concept of 'labour' is itself a-historical, bearing no relationship to any specific mode of production.

Nature of rent

In attacking Ricardo's misconception of crisis Marx is forced to analyse the nature of rent. We need deal with this question only in outline. Like all the discussion in *Capital* this question is approached from the historical point of view. Marx examines the category rent and assumes it to be a branch of capitalist economy. He shows that this assumption is tenable only with definite historically produced conditions, namely the expropriation of rural labour and the separation out of the ownership of the land from those working on it. Marx points out that when Ricardo, trying to demonstrate the impossibility of the existence of absolute rent (that is rent independent of the productivity of different pieces of land) quotes examples, he always presupposes conditions in which there is either no capitalist production or no landed property. As Marx insists, the basic task was to explain the existence of rent given precisely these conditions, to explain the theoretical possibility of rent without violating the law of value. In the second place, Marx shows the real connection between the landlord and the capitalist mode of production. Landed property has nothing to do with the productive process: its role is merely one of transfering surplus value from the pockets of the capitalist to those of its own. The landlord plays a role in capitalist economy because of his *historical* connection with production: it was only through the concentration of land ownership consequent upon enclosure that the proletariat came into existence. Marx's treatment of rent also highlights another aspect of his method. He sees the theoretical dispute about rent (whether absolute rent could exist) not as a conflict of pure dogma but as an expression of the struggle between tenant and farmer about the level at which rents were to be fixed and the basis on which this level was to be established.

Marx's tribute to the Classical School

Marx on many occasions paid the warmest tribute to the Classical School and fully acknowledges his indebtedness to its leading members. Marx also recognises the role which Ricardian economics played in the struggle between the classes: Ricardo's teachings reflected, in theoretic form, the interests of the rising class of industrialists and manufacturers against the class of land owners. Yet in many places Marx praises Ricardo's 'objectivity' and contrasts him favourably with Malthus, that 'shameless sycophant of the ruling classes'. In fact Marx is always careful to draw a clear distinction between the achievements of the Classical School and the 'vulgar' writers who follow Ricardo: they are castigated because of their slavish confinement within the 'appearances' of the capitalist system and because of the increasingly apologetic nature of their work.

Wherein lay the 'objectivity' of Ricardo? Marx sees his achievements as the result not of the fact that his theories reflected the needs and interests of capital (which they did) but rather because Ricardo displays 'inconsiderateness' to all classes. Ricardo's *Principles* achieves the highest point (in the classical school) in the search for the laws which govern the production and distribution of wealth under the bourgeois mode of production. It was only in so far as the industrial capitalist was himself interested in the fastest possible expansion of wealth and the elimination of all barriers to its growth that Ricardian political economy coincided with his needs. As Marx notes, where the interests of the capitalist conflict with those of production Ricardo comes out just as 'inconsiderately' against the bourgeoisie. This is in the sharpest contrast to Malthus. Although the lattter shares Ricardo's opposition to the interests of the working class (Ricardo was the most stoical opponent of the working class in Marx's view), Malthus was unable objectively to examine the position and interests of the landed classes. Marx dismisses him as a 'bought advocate' and a 'special pleader' on behalf of the enemies of the working class. It is necessary to underscore this point in so far as Marx is often dismissed by bourgeois writers as a mere ideologue of the working class. *Capital* and its conclusions meet the needs and historical interests of the working class only to the extent that they provide a sufficient and scientific understanding of the bourgeois mode of production as an historical formation, in all its aspects, and the contradictions which impel it forward. *Capital* demonstrates the transient nature and contradictions of 'modern' society: only because the working class must in practice struggle against this system, struggle in practice to go beyond it, does it 'correspond' to the needs of the proletariat.

Class and Art

Problems of Culture under the Dictatorship of the Proletariat

Speech by Trotsky during discussion, May 9, 1924, at a meeting convened by the Press Department of the Central Committee of the RCP(B) on Party Policy in the Field of Imaginative Literature.

Translated by Brian Pearce from Voprosy Kul'tury Pri Diktatura Proletariata [Problems of Culture under the Dictatorship of the Proletariat] (1925), pp. 93-110.

Denyan Byedny as seen by Soviet cartoonist Denii with Martov on his pitchfork.

L. TROTSKY: It seems to me that it is Comrade Raskolnikov who has given most distinctive expression here to the point of view of the *Na Postu* group—you can't get away from that, comrades of the *Na Postu* group! After a long absence, Raskolnikov spoke here with all the freshness of Afghanistan,[1] whereas the other *Na Postu* people, having tasted a little of the tree of knowledge, tried to cover their nakedness—except Comrade Vardin, however, who goes on living the way he was born. (Vardin: 'Why, you didn't hear what I said here!') True, I arrived late. But, first, I read your article in the last issue of *Na Postu*; secondly, I have just glanced through the verbatim record of your speech; and, thirdly, it must be said that one can tell beforehand, without listening to you, what you are going to say. (Laughter.)

But to return to Comrade Raskolnikov. He says: they recommend the 'fellow-travellers' to us, but did the old, pre-war *Pravda* or *Zvezda* print the words of Artsybashev, Leonid Andreyev and others whom now they would certainly call 'fellow-travellers'? There is an example of a fresh approach to the question, not spoilt by any reflections. What are Artsybashev and Andreyev doing here? So far as I know, nobody has called them 'fellow-travellers'. Leonid Andreyev died in a state of epileptic hatred of Soviet Russia. Artsybashev was not so long ago simply pushed over the frontier. One can't muddle things up in such a shameless way! What is a 'fellow-traveller'? In literature as in politics we call by this name someone who, stumbling and staggering, goes up to a certain point along the same road which we we shall follow much further. Whoever goes *against* us is not a fellow-traveller but an enemy, whom if necessary we will deport, for the well-being of the revolution is our highest law. How can you mix up Leonid Andreyev in this question of 'fellow-travellers'? (Raskolnikov: 'Well, but what about Pilnyak?') If you are going to talk about Artsybashev when you mean Pilnyak, there's no arguing with you. (Laughter. A shout: 'But aren't they the same thing?') What do you mean: aren't they the same thing? If you name names, you must stick to them. Pilnyak may be good or bad, in this way or that he may be good or he may be bad—but Pilnyak is Pilnyak, and you must talk about him as Pilnyak, and not as Leonid Andreyev. Knowledge in general begins with distinguishing between things and appearances, and not with chaotic confusion. . . . Raskolnikov says: 'We didn't invite "fellow-travellers" into

1 Raskolnikov had been on a diplomatic mission to Afghanistan, and so out of the way during earlier phases of this discussion.

the pages of *Zvezda* and *Pravda,* but sought and found poets and writers in the depths of the proletariat.' Sought and found! In the depths of the proletariat! But what did you do with them? Why have you hidden them from us? (Raskolnikov: There is, for instance, Demyan Byedny.') Oh, well now, that I didn't know, I must confess —that we discovered Demyan Byedny in the depths of the proletariat. (General laughter.) You see with what methods we are approaching the problem of literature: we speak of Leonid Andreyev, and we mean Pilnyak, we boast that we have found writers and poets in the depths of the proletariat, and then when we call the roll, out of these 'depths' there answers only Demyan Byedny. (Laughter.) This won't do. This is frivolity. Much more seriousness is needed in considering this matter.

Let us try, indeed, to look more seriously at those pre-revolutionary workers' publications, newspapers and periodicals, which have been mentioned here. We all remember that they used to carry some verses devoted to the struggle, to May Day, and so on. All these verses, such as they were, constituted very important and significant documents in the history of culture. They expressed the revolutionary awakening and political growth of the working class. In this cultural-historical sense their importance was no less than that of the works of all the Shakespeares, Molières and Pushkins in the world. In these feeble verses was the pledge of a new and higher human culture which the awakened masses will create when they have mastered the elements of the old culture. But, all the same, the workers' verses in *Zvezda* and *Pravda* do not at all signify the rise of a new, proletarian literature. Inartistic doggerel in the Derzhavin (or pre-Derzhavin) [2] style cannot be regarded as a new literature, although those thoughts and feelings which sought expression in these verses also belong to a writer who is beginning to appear from the working-class milieu. It is wrong to suppose that the development of literature is an unbroken chain, in which the naïve, though sincere, doggerel of young workers at the beginning of this century is the first link in the coming 'proletarian literature'. In reality, these revolutionary verses were a political event, not a literary one. They contributed not to the growth of literature but to the growth of the revolution. The revolution led to the victory of the proletariat, the victory of the proletariat is leading to the transformation of the economy. The transformation of the economy is in process of changing the cultural state of the working masses. And the cultural growth of the working people will create the real basis for a new art. 'But it is impossible to permit duality', Comrade Raskolnikov tells us. 'It is necessary that in our publications political writing and poetry should form one whole; Bolshevism is distinguished by monolithicity,' and so on. At first sight this reasoning seems irrefutable. Actually, it is an empty abstraction. At best it is a pious but unreal wish for something good. Of course it would be splendid if we had, to supplement our Communist political writing, the Bolshevik world-outlook expressed in artistic form. But we haven't, and that is not accidental. The heart of the matter is that artistic creativity, by its very nature, lags behind the other modes of expression of a man's spirit, and still more of the spirit of a class. It is one thing to understand something and express it logically, and quite another thing to assimilate it organically, reconstructing the whole system of one's feelings, and to find a new kind of artistic expression for this new entity. The latter process is more organic, slower, more difficult to subject to conscious influence—and in the end it will always lag behind. The political writing of a class hastens ahead on stilts, while its artistic creativity hobbles along behind on crutches. Marx and Engels were great political writers of the proletariat in the period when the class was still not really awakened. (From the meeting: 'Yes, you're right there.') I am very grateful to you. (Laughter.) But take the trouble to draw the necessary conclusions from this, and understand why there is not this monolithicity between political writing and poetry, and this will in turn help you to understand why in the old legal Marxist periodicals we always found ourselves in a bloc, or semi-bloc, with artistic 'fellow-travellers', sometimes very dubious and even plainly false ones. You remember, of course, *Novoye Slovo,* the best of the old legal Marxist periodicals, in which many Marxists of the older generation collaborated, including Vladimir Ilyich. This periodical, as everyone knows, was friendly with the Decadents. What was the reason for that? It was because the Decadents were then a young and persecuted tendency in bourgeois literature. And this persecuted situation of theirs impelled them to take sides with our attitude of opposition, though the latter, of course, was quite different in character, in spite of which the Decadents were temporarily fellow-travellers with us. And later Marxist periodicals

2 Derzhavin was a Russian poet of the late 18th century—before Pushkin, regarded as the creator of modern literary Russian.

Feodor Raskolnikov

(and the semi-Marxist ones, it goes without saying), right down to *Prosveshchenie,* had no sort of 'monolithic' fiction section, but set aside considerable space for the 'fellow-travellers'. Some might be either more severe or more indulgent in this respect, but it was impossible to carry on a 'monolithic' policy in the field of art, because the artistic elements needed for such a policy were lacking.

But Raskolnikov at bottom doesn't want this. In works of art he ignores that which makes them works of art. This was most vividly shown in his remarkable judgment on Dante's 'Divine Comedy', which in his opinion is valuable to us just because it enables us to understand the psychology of a certain class at a certain time. To put the matter that way means simply to strike out the 'Divine Comedy' from the realm of art. Perhaps the time has come to do that, but if so we must understand the essence of the question and not shrink from the conclusions. If I say that the importance of the 'Divine Comedy' lies in the fact that it gives me an understanding of the state of mind of certain classes in a certain epoch, this means that I transform it into a mere historical document, for, as a work of art, the 'Divine Comedy' must speak in some way to my feelings and moods. Dante's work may act on me in a depressing way, fostering pessimism and despondency in me, or, on the contrary, it may rouse, inspire, encourage me. . . This is the fundamental relationship between a reader and a work of art. Nobody, of course, forbids a reader to assume the role of a researcher and approach the 'Divine Comedy' as merely an historical document. It is clear, though, that these two approaches are on two different levels, which, though connected, do not overlap. How is it thinkable that there should be not an historical but a directly aesthetic relationship between us and a mediaeval Italian book? This is explained by the fact that in class society, in spite of all its changeability, there are certain common features. Works of art developed in a mediaeval Italian city can, we find, affect us too. What does this require? A small thing: it requires that these feelings and moods shall have received such broad, intense, powerful expression as to have raised them above the limitations of the life of those days. Dante was, of course, the product of a certain social milieu. But Dante was a genius. He raised the experience of his epoch to a tremendous artistic height. And if we, while today approaching other works of mediaeval literature merely as objects of study, approach the 'Divine Comedy' as a source of artistic perception, this happens not because Dante was a Florentine petty bourgeois of the 13th century but, to a considerable extent, in spite of that circumstance. Let us take, for instance, such an elementary psychological feeling as fear of death. This feeling is characteristic not only of man but also of animals. In man it first found simple articulate expression, and later also artistic expression. In different ages, in different social milieux, this expression has changed, that is to say, men have feared death in different ways. And nevertheless what was said on this score not only by Shakespeare, Byron, Goethe, but also by the Psalmist, can move us. (Exclamation by Comrade Libedinsky.) Yes, yes, I came in at the very moment when you, Comrade Libedinsky, were explaining to Comrade Voronsky in the terms of elementary political instruction (you yourself put it like that) about the variation in feelings and states of mind in different classes. In that general form it is indisputable. However, for all that, you won't deny that Shakespeare and Byron somehow speak to your soul and mine. (Libedinsky: 'They will soon stop speaking.') Whether it will be soon, I don't know, but undoubtedly a time will come when people will approach the works of Shakespeare and Byron in the same way as we approach most poets of the Middle Ages, that is, exclusively from the standpoint of scientific-historical analysis. Even sooner, however, will come the time when people will stop seeking in Marx's *Capital* for precepts for their practical activity, and *Capital* will have become merely an historical document, together with the programme of our Party. But at present we do not yet intend to put Shakespeare, Byron, Pushkin in the archives, and we will continue to recommend them to the workers. Comrade Sosnovsky, for instance, strongly recommends Pushkin declaring that he will undoubtedly last

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another fifty years. Let us not speak of periods of time. But in what sense can we recommend Pushkin to a worker? There is no proletarian class viewpoint in Pushkin, not to speak of a monolithic expression of Communist feelings. Of course, Pushkin's language is magnificent—that cannot be denied—but, after all, this language is used by him for expressing the world-outlook of the nobility. Shall we say to the worker: read Pushkin in order to understand how a nobleman, a serfowner and gentleman of the bedchamber, encountered Spring and experienced Autumn? This element is, of course, present in Pushkin, for Pushkin grew up on a particular social basis. But the expression that Pushkin gave his feelings is so saturated with the artistic, and generally with the psychological, experience of centuries, is so crystallized, that it has lasted down to our times and, according to Comrade Sosnovsky, will last another fifty years. And when people tell me that the artistic significance of Dante for us consists in his expressing the way of life of a certain epoch, that only makes one spread one's hands in helplessness. I am sure that many, like me, would, after reading Dante, have to strain their memories to remember the date and place of his birth, and yet none the less, this would not have prevented us from getting artistic delight, if not from the whole of the 'Divine Comedy' then at least from some parts of it. Since I am not a historian of the Middle Ages, my attitude to Dante is predominantly artistic. (Ryazanov: 'That's an exaggeration. "To read Dante is to take a bath in the sea", said Shevyryev, who was also against history, replying to Byelinsky'.) I don't doubt that Shevyryev did express himself as Comrade Ryazanov says, but I am not against history—that's pointless. Of course the historical approach to Dante is legitimate and necessary and affects our aesthetic attitude to him, but one can't substitute one for the other. I remember what Kareyev wrote on this point, in a polemic with the Marxists: let them, the Marxides (that was how they ironically spoke of the Marxists in those days) tell us, for instance, what class interests dictated the 'Divine Comedy'. And from the other side, the Italian Marxist, old Antonio Labriola, wrote something like this: 'Only fools could try to interpret the text of the "Divine Comedy" as though it were made of the cloth that Florentine merchants provided for their customers.' I remember this expression almost word for word because in the polemic with the subjectivists I had occasion to quote these words more than once, in the old days. I think that Comrade Raskolnikov's attitude not only to Dante

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but to art in general proceeds not from the Marxist criterion but from that of the late Shulyatikov, who provided a caricature of Marxism in this connexion. Antonio Labriola also made his vigorous comment on this sort of caricature.*

'By proletarian literature I understand literature which looks at the world with the eyes of the vanguard,' and so on, and so on. This is the opinion of Comrade Lelevich. Splendid, we are ready to accept his definition. Give us though, not only the definition but also the literature. Where is it? Show us it! (Lelevich: '*Komsomolia* —there is the best of recent times.') What times? (A voice: 'The last year.') Well, all right, the last year. I don't want to speak polemically. My attitude to Bezymensky has nothing in it that can be called negative, I hope. I praised *Komsomolia* highly when I read it in manuscript. But regardless of whether we can on this account proclaim the appearance of proletarian literature, I can say that Bezymensky would not exist as an artist if we did not have Mayakovsky, Pasternak and even

* Let us here quote verbatim Antonio Labriola's sharp rebuke to those simplifiers who transform Marx's theory into a sort of stencil and master-key to everything: 'Lazy minds,' wrote the best Italian Marxist philosopher, 'are readily satisfied with such crude statements. What a holiday and what gladness for all light-minded and unfastidious people: to obtain, at last, in a small summary, composed of a few propositions, the whole of knowledge and to be able to penetrate by means of just one key into all the secrets of life! To reduce all problems of ethics, aesthetics, philology, historical criticism and philosophy to a single problem, and in this way save oneself all difficulties! By this method fools could reduce the whole of history to the level of commercial arithmetic and, finally, a new, original interpretation of Dante's work could show us the "Divine Comedy" in the light of calculations regarding pieces of cloth which crafty Florentine merchants sold for their maximum profit.' There's one in the eye for certain people!

Boris Pasternak

Pilnyak. (A voice: 'That proves nothing.') This does prove, at least, that the artistic creativity of a given epoch is a very complex web which is not woven automatically, by discussion groups and seminars, but comes into being through complex inter-relations, in the first place with the different fellow-travelling groups. You can't get away from that; Bezymensky doesn't try to, and he does well not to. In some of his works, the influence of 'fellow-travellers' is even too noticeable. But this is an unavoidable phenomenon of youth and growth. And here we have Comrade Libedinsky, the enemy of 'fellow-travellers', and himself an imitator of Pilnyak and even Byely. Yes, yes, Comrade Averbach must excuse me; I see him shaking his head, though without much conviction. Libedinsky's last story, *Zavtra* [Tomorrow] is like the diagonal of a parallelogram, one side of which is Pilnyak and the other Andrei Byely. In itself that's no misfortune—Libedinsky can't be born in the land of *Na Postu* as a ready-made writer. (Voice: 'It's a very barren[3] land.') I have already spoken about Libedinsky, after the first appearance of his *Nedelya* [The Week]. Bukharin then, as you will recall, fervently praised it, out of the expansiveness and kindness of his nature, and this praise alarmed me. Meanwhile I was obliged to observe the extreme dependence of Comrade Libedinsky on those very writers—'fellow-travellers' and semi-fellow-travellers—whom he and his co-thinkers all curse in *Na Postu*. You see once more that art and political writing are not always monolithic. I have no intention of giving up Comrade Libedinsky as a bad job on that account. I think that it is clear to all of us that our common duty is to show the greatest concern for every young artistic talent ideologically close to us, and all the more when it is a matter of someone who is our brother-in-arms. The first condition of such an attentive and considerate attitude is not to give premature praise, killing the young writer's self-criticism; the second condition is not to wash one's hands of the man at once if he stumbles. Comrade Libedinsky is still very young. He needs to learn and to grow. And in this connexion it turns out that Pilnyak fulfils a need. (A voice: 'For Libedinsky or for us?') First of all, for Libedinsky. (Libedinsky: 'But this means that I've been poisoned by Pilnyak.') Alas, the human organism can be nourished only by taking poison and producing internal resources that combat the poison. That's life. If you let yourself go dry, like a Caspian roach, that won't mean you're poisoned, but you won't be nourished either; indeed, it will mean nothing at all will happen. (Laughter.)

Nikolai Bukharin

Comrade Pletnev, speaking here in defence of his abstractions about proletarian culture and its constituent part, proletarian literature, quoted Vladimir Ilyich against me. Now there's something that's really to the point! We must give that proper consideration. Not long ago an entire booklet appeared, written by Pletnev, Tretyakov and Sizov, in which proletarian literature was defended by means of quotations from Lenin against Trotsky. This method is very fashionable nowadays. Vardin could write write a whole thesis on the subject. But the fact is, Comrade Pletnev, that *you* know very well how matters stood, because you yourself appealed to me to save you from the thunders of Vladimir Ilych, who was going, you thought, on account of this very 'proletarian culture' of yours, to close down *Proletkult* altogether. And I promised you that I would defend the continued existence of *Proletkult*, on certain grounds, but that as regards Bogdanov's abstractions about proletarian culture I was entirely opposed to you and your protector Bukharin, and entirely in agreement with Vladimir Ilyich.

Comrade Vardin, who speaks here as nothing less than the living embodiment of Party tradition, does not shrink from trampling in the crudest way on what Lenin wrote about proletarian culture. As we know, there is plenty of empty piety around: people 'firmly agree' with Lenin and then preach the absolute opposite to his views. In terms that leave room for no other interpretation, Lenin mercilessly condemned 'chatter about proletarian

3 There is a pun in the Russian: the word I have translated as 'barren', postnaya, begins in the same way as *Postu* in *Na Postu* [At Our Post].

Nikolai Bukharin

culture'. However, there is nothing simpler than getting away from this evidence: why, of course, Lenin condemned chatter about proletarian culture, but, don't you see, it was only chatter that he condemned, and we are not chattering but seriously getting down to work, and even standing with our arms akimbo. . . .They only forget that Lenin's sharp condemnation was aimed precisely at those who are now referring to him. Empty piety, I repeat, is available in plenty: refer to Lenin and do the contrary.

The comrades who have spoken here under the sign of proletarian culture approach different ideas according to the attitude of the authors of those ideas to their *Proletkult* groups. I have tested this and found it true as regards my own fate. My book on literature, which caused so much alarm among certain comrades, appeared originally, as some of you may perhaps recall, in the form of articles in *Pravda.* I wrote this book over a period of two years, during two summer breaks. This circumstance, as we see to-day, is of importance in relation to the question that interests us. When it appeared, in the form of newspaper articles, the first part of the book, dealing with 'non-October' literature, with the 'fellow-travellers', with the 'peasant-singers', and exposing the limitedness and contradictions of the ideological-artistic position of the fellow-travellers, the *Na Postu* comrades hailed me with enthusiasm—everywhere you cared to look you found quotations from my articles on the fellow-travellers. At one stage I was quite depressed by it. (Laughter.) My estimation of the 'fellow-travellers', I repeat, was regarded as practically faultlett; even Vardin made no objections to it. (Vardin: 'And I don't object to it now.') That is just what I say. But why then do you now obliquely and insinuatingly argue against me about the 'fellow-travellers'? What is going on here? At first sight it's quite incomprehensible. But the solution is a simple one: my crime is not that I incorrectly defined the social nature of the fellow-travellers or their artistic significance—no, Comrade Vardin even now, as we heard, 'does not object' to that—my crime is that I did not bow before the manifestos of *Oktyabr* or *Kuznitsa,* that I did not acknowledge these groups as the monopolist representatives of the artistic interests of the proletariat—in short, that I did not identify the cultural-historical interests and tasks of the class with the intentions, plans and pretensions of certain literary groups. That was where I went wrong. And when this became clear, then there arose the howl, unexpected by its belatedness: Trotsky is on the side of the petty-bourgeois 'fellow-travellers'! Am I for the 'fellow-travellers', or against them? In what sense am I against them? You knew that nearly two years ago, from my articles on the 'fellow-travellers'. But then you agreed, you praised, you quoted, you gave your approval. And when, a year later, it turned out that my criticism of the 'fellow-travellers' was not at all just an approach to the glorification of some amateurish literary group or other, then the writers and defenders of this group, or rather of these groups, began to bring forward philosophical arguments against my allegedly incorrect attitude to the 'fellow-travellers'. Oh, strategists! My offence was not that I estimated incorrectly Pilnyak or Mayakovsky —the *Na Postu* group added nothing to what I had said, but merely repeated it in vulgarized form— my offence was that I knocked their own literary factory! In the whole of their peevish criticism there is not the shadow of a class approach. What we find is the attitude of one literary group engaged in competition with others, and that's all.

Boris Pilnyak

I mentioned the 'peasant-singers', and we have heard here that the *Na Postu* group especially approved of that chapter. It's not enough to approve, you should understand. What is the point here regarding the 'peasant-singing' fellow-travellers? It is that this is a phenomenon which is not accidental, is not of minor importance and is not ephemeral. In our country, please don't forget, we have the dictatorship of the proletariat in a country which is inhabited mainly by peasants. The intelligentsia is placed between these two classes as between two millstones, is ground up little by little and arises anew, and cannot be ground up completely, that is, it will remain as an 'intelligentsia' for a long time yet, until the full development of socialism and a very considerable rise in the cultural level of the entire population of the country. The intelligentsia serves the workers' and peasants' state and subordinates itself to the proletariat, partly from fear,

partly from conviction; it wavers and will continue to waver in accordance with the course of events, and it will seek ideological support for its waverings in the peasantry—this is the source of the Soviet literature of the 'peasant-singers'. What are the prospects of this school? Is it basically hostile to us? Does its path lead towards us or away from us? And this depends on the general course of events. The task of the proletariat consists in retaining all-round hegemony over the peasantry and leading it to socialism. If we were to suffer a setback on this road, that is, if there were to be a break between the proletariat and the peasantry, then the 'peasant-singing' intelligentsia, or, more correctly, 99 per cent of the entire intelligentsia, would turn against the proletariat. But this eventuality is not at all inevitable. We are, on the contrary, following a course aimed at bringing the peasantry, under the leadership of the proletariat, to socialism. This is a very, very long road. In the course of this process both the proletariat and the peasantry will bring forward their own intelligentsia. It need not be supposed that the intelligentsia arising from the proletariat will be a hundred per cent proletarian intelligentsia. The very fact that the proletariat is obliged to promote from its ranks a special stratum of 'cultural workers' inevitably means a more or less considerable cultural disconnexion between the remainder of the class as a whole and the proletarians promoted from it. This applies even more in the case of the peasant intelligentsia. The peasants' road to socialism is not at all the same as the proletariat's. And in so far as the intelligentsia, even an arch-Soviet intelligentsia, is unable to merge its road with the road of the proletarian vanguard, to that degree it tries to find a political, ideological, artistic support for itself in the peasant, whether real or imagined. This appears all the more in the sphere of fiction, where we have an old Populist tradition. Is this for us or against us? I repeat: the answer entirely depends on the entire future course of development. If we draw the peasant, towed by the proletariat, to socialism—and we confidently believe that we shall draw him—then the creative work of the 'peasant-singers' will evolve by complex and tortuous paths into the socialist art of the future.* This complexity of the problems involved, and at the same time their reality and concreteness, is completely beyond the understanding of the *Na Postu* group, and not only of them. This is their fundamental mistake. Talking about the 'fellow-travellers' regardless of this social basis and prospect means simply wagging one's tongue.

Allow me, comrades, to say a little more about Comrade Vardin's tactics in the field of literature, in relation to his last article in *Na Postu*. In my view this is not tactics but a disgrace! An amazingly supercilious tone, but deadly little knowledge or understanding. No understanding of art as art, that is, as a particular, specific field of human creativity; nor any Marxist understanding of the conditions and ways of development of art. Instead, an unworthy juggling of quotations from White-Guard publications abroad which, do you see, have praised Comrade Voronsky for publishing the works of Pilnyak, or ought to have praised him, or said something against Vardin and, maybe, for Voronsky, and so on, and so on—in that spirit of 'circumstantial evidence' which has to make up for the lack of knowledge and understanding. Comrade Vardin's last article is built on the idea that a White-Guard newspaper supported Voronsky against Vardin, writing that the whole conflict came down to the point that Voronsky approached literature from the literary point of view. 'Comrade Voronsky, by his political behaviour,' says Vardin, 'has fully deserved this White-Guard kiss.' But this is an insinuation, not an analysis of the question! If Vardin disagrees with the multiplication table, while Voronsky finds himself in this matter on the same side as a White Guard who knows arithmetic, Voronsky's political reputation has nothing to fear from that. Yes, art has to be approached as art, literature as literature, that is, as a quite specific field of human endeavour. Of course we have a class criterion in art too, but this class criterion must be refracted artistically, that is, in conformity with the quite specific peculiarities of that field of creativity to which we are applying our criterion. The bourgeoisie knows this very well, it likewise approaches art from its class point of view, it knows how to get from art what it needs, but only because it approaches art as art. What is there to wonder at if an artistically-literate bourgeois has a disrespectful attitude to Vardin, who

* Besides this basic class inter-relationship, we now have, in connexion with the growth of the bourgeoisie on the basis of NEP, the reappearance, along old, well-trodden tracks, of bourgeois ideology which, of course, overflows into artistic creation. It was in this very sense that I wrote in my book that, alongside a flexible and far-seeing policy in the field of art we need a resolute and severe, but of course not petty, censorship. This means that, besides the constant ideological struggle for influence over the best creative elements of the petty-bourgeois peasant or 'peasant-singing' intelligentsia, we need a severe political struggle against all attempts made by restorationists to bring the new Soviet art under bourgeois influence.

approaches art from the standpoint of political 'circumstantial evidence', and not with a class-artistic criterion? And if there is anything that makes me feel ashamed it is not that in this dispute I may find myself formally in the same boat with some White Guard who understands art, but that, before the eyes of this White Guard I am obliged to explain the first letters in the alphabet of art to a Party publicist who writes articles about art. What a cheapening of Marxism this is: instead of making a Marxist analysis of the question, one finds a quotation from *Rul* or *Dyen*[4] and around it piles up abuse and insinuations!

One cannot approach art as one can politics, not because artistic creation is a religious rite or something mystical, as somebody here ironically said, but because it has its own laws of development, and above all because in artistic creation an enormous role is played by sub-conscious processes—slower, more idle and less subjected to management and guidance, just because they are sub-conscious. It has been said here that those writings of Pilnyak's which are closer to Communism are feebler than those which are politically farther away from us. What is the explanation? Why, just this, that on the rationalistic plane Pilnyak is ahead of himself as an artist. To consciously swing himself round on his own axis even only a few degrees is a very difficult task for an artist, often connected with a profound, sometimes fatal crisis. And what we are considering is not an individual or group change in creative endeavour, but such a change on the class, social scale. This is a long and very complicated process. When we speak of proletarian literature not in the sense of particular more or less successful verses or stories, but in the incomparably more weighty sense in which we speak of bourgeois literature, we have no right to forget for one moment the extraordinary cultural backwardness of the overwhelming majority of the proletariat. Art is created on the basis of a continual everyday, cultural, ideological inter-relationship between a class and its artists. Between the aristocracy or the bourgeoisie and their artists there was no split in daily life. The artists lived, and still live, in a bourgeois milieu, breathing the air of bourgeois salons, they received and are receiving hypodermic inspirations from their class. This nourishes the sub-conscious processes of their creativity. Does the proletariat of today offer such a cultural-ideological milieu, in which the new artist may obtain, without leaving it in his day-to-day existence, all the inspiration he needs while at the same time mastering the procedures

Vladimir Mayakovsky

of his craft? No, the working masses are culturally extremely backward; the illiteracy or low level of literacy of the majority of the workers presents in itself a very great obstacle to this. And above all, the proletariat, in so far as it remains a proletariat, is compelled to expend its best forces in political struggle, in restoring the economy, and in meeting elementary cultural needs, fighting against illiteracy, lousiness, syphilis, etc. Of course, the political methods and revolutionary customs of the proletariat can also be called its culture; but this, in any case, is a sort of culture which is destined to die out as a new, real culture develops. And this new culture will be culture all the more to the extent that the proletariat has ceased to be a proletariat, that is, the more successfully and completely socialist society develops.

Mayakovsky wrote a very powerful piece called *The Thirteen Apostles,* the revolutionariness of which was still rather cloudy and formless. And when this same Mayakovsky decided to swing himself round to the proletarian line, and wrote *150 Million,* he suffered a most frightful rationalistic downfall. This means that in his logic he had outrun his real creative condition. With Pilnyak, as we have said already, a similar disparity is to be observed between his conscious striving and the unconscious processes of creation. To this must be added merely this, that arch-proletarian works also do not in themselves provide the writer in present-day conditions with any guarantees that his creativity will prove to be organically linked with the class. Nor do groupings of proletarian writers provide this guarantee, precisely because the writer, by devoting himself to artistic work, is compelled, in existing conditions, to separate himself from the milieu of his own class and breathe an atmosphere which, after all, is the same as that breathed by the 'fellow-travellers'.

4 *Rul, Dnya,* White-Guard papers.

Vladimir Mayakovsky

This is just one literary circle among other literary circles.

And as regards future prospects, as they are called, I wanted to say something, but my time is long since up. (Voices: 'Please go on!') 'Give us, at least, some view of the way ahead,' comrades come back at me. What does this mean? The *Na Postu* comrades and their allied groups are steering towards a proletarian literature created by the circle method, in a laboratory, so to speak. This way forward I reject absolutely. I repeat once more that it is not possible to put in one historical category feudal, bourgeois and proletarian literature. Such a historical classification is radically false. I spoke about this in my book, and all the objections I have heard seem to me unconvincing and frivolous. Those who talk about proletarian literature seriously and over a long period, who make a platform of proletarian culture, are thinking, where this question is concerned, along the line of a formal analogy with bourgeois culture. The bourgeoisie took power and created its own culture; the proletariat, they think, having taken power, will create proletarian culture. But the bourgeoisie is a rich and therefore educated class. Bourgeois culture existed already before the bourgeoisie had formally taken power. Tht bourgeoisie took power in order to perpetuate its rule. The proletariat in bourgeois society is a propertyless and deprived class, and so it cannot create a culture of its own. Only after taking power does it really become aware of its own frightful cultural backwardness. In order to overcome this it needs to abolish those conditions which keep it in the position of a class, the proletariat. The more we can speak of a new culture in being, the less this will possess a class character. This is the fundamental problem and the principal difference, in so far as we are arguing about the way forward. Some, starting from the principle of proletarian culture, say: we have in mind only the epoch of transition to socialism—those twenty, thirty, fifty years during which the bourgeois world will be transformed. Can the literature, intended and suitable for the proletariat, which will be created in this period, be called proletarian literature? In any case, we are giving this term 'proletarian literature' a totally different meaning from the first, broad meaning we spoke of. But this is not the main problem. The basic feature of the transition period, taken on the international scale, is intense class struggle. Those twenty to thirty years of which we speak will be first and foremost a period of open civil war. And civil war, though preparing the way for the great culture of the future, is in itself extremely unfavourable in its effect on contemporary culture. In its immediate effect October more or less killed literature. Poets and artists fell silent. Was this an accident? No. Long ago it was said: when the sound of weapons is heard, the Muses fall silent. A breathing-space was needed if literature was to revive. It began to revive in our country at the same time as NEP began. Reviving, it at once took on the colouring of the fellow-travellers. It is impossible not to reckon with the facts. The tensest moments, that is, those in which our revolutionary epoch finds its highest expression, are unfavourable for literary, and in general for artistic creation. If revolution begins tomorrow in Germany or in all Europe, will this bring an immediate flowering of proletarian literature? Certainly not. It will weaken and destroy, not expand, artistic creation, for we shall again have to mobilize and arm, one and all. And amid the clash of arms, the Muses are silent. (Cries: 'Demyan wasn't silent.') Yes, you keep harping on Demyan, but it won't do. You begin by proclaiming a new era of proletarian literature, you create circles, associations, groups for this literature, you again and again refer to Demyan. But Demyan is a product of the old, pre-October literature. He has not founded any school, nor will he found any. He was brought up on Krylov, Gogol and Nekrassov. In this sense he is the revolutionary last-born child of our old literature. The very fact of your referring to him is a refutation of your theory.

What is the way forward? Fundamentally, it is the growth of literacy, education, special courses for workers, the cinema, the gradual reconstruction of everyday life, the further advance in the cultural level. This is the fundamental process, intersecting with new intensifications of civil war, on an all-European and world scale. On this basis, the line of purely literary creation will be an extremely zig-zag one. *Kuznitsa, Oktyabr* and other such groups are in no sense landmarks along the road of the cultural class creativity of the proletariat, but merely episodes of a superficial nature. If from these groups a few good young poets or writers emerge, this won't give us proletarian literature, but it will be useful. But if you try to transform MAPP and VAPP into factories of proletarian literature, you will certainly fail, just as you have failed up to now. A member of one of these associations regards himself as, in one way, a representative of the proletariat in the world of art, in another way as a representative of art in the world of the proletariat. Membership of VAPP confers a sort of title. It is objected that VAPP

is only a Communist circle in which a young poet obtains the necessary inspiration, and so on. Well, and what about the Party? If he is a real poet and a genuine Communist, the Party in all its work will give him incomparably more inspiration than MAPP and VAPP. Of course, the Party must and will pay very great attention to every young artistic talent that is akin or ideologically close to it. But its fundamental task in relation to literature and culture is raising the level of literacy —simple literacy, political literacy, scientific literacy—of the working masses, and thereby laying the foundation for a new art.

I know that this prospect does not satisfy you. It seems insufficiently definite. Why? Because you envisage the further development of culture in too regular, too evolutionary a way: the present shoots of proletarian literature will, you think, grow and develop, becoming continually richer, and so genuine proletarian literature will be created, which later will change into socialist literature. No, things won't develop like that. After the present breathing-space, when a literature strongly coloured by the 'fellow-travellers' is being created—not by the Party, not by the State —there will come a period of new, terrible spasms of civil war. We shall inevitably be drawn into it. It is quite possible that revolutionary poets will give us martial verses, but the continuity of literary development will nevertheless be sharply broken. All forces will be concentrated on the direct struggle. Shall we then have a second breathing-space? I do not know. But the result of this new, much mightier period of civil war, if we are victorious, will be the complete securing and consolidation of the socialist basis of our economy. We shall receive fresh technical and organizational help. Our development will go forward at a different rate. And on that basis, after the zigzags and upheavals of civil war, only then will begin a real building of culture, and, consequently, also the creation of a new literature. But this will be socialist culture, built entirely on constant intercourse between the artist and the masses who will have come of age culturally, linked by ties of solidarity. You do not proceed in your thinking from *this* vision of the future: you have your own, the vision of a group. You want our Party, in the name of the proletariat, to officially adopt your little artistic factory. You think that, having planted a kidney-bean in a flower pot, you are capable of raising the tree of proletarian literature. That is not the way. No tree can be grown from a kidney-bean.

Marxism and Stalinism in Britain 1920-26

by M. Woodhouse

Part 1

L. J. MACFARLANE, in his work on the Communist Party of Great Britain*, has performed a valuable task for British Marxists in that he has brought together in one book the great bulk of material relevant to the history of Communism in Britain in the 1920s. What is debatable, however, is whether he has written a history of the CPGB that in itself elucidates this vital period in British working-class history when, for a few years, there was a real attempt to create a revolutionary party, and whether lessons can be drawn from the book as it stands that will enable the failures of the CPGB to be understood and help in the reconstruction of a revolutionary party in the present epoch.

The central point of interest in Macfarlane's book lies in his account of the role of the CPGB in the General Strike. The history of the party up to 1926 is the history of its preparation for such a development (which had been foreshadowed in the strike movements of 1919-21 and in the growing working-class confidence which attended the election of the first Labour Government, and led on to Red Friday); yet in this struggle, which was crucial for the emergence of the party as a mass revolutionary organisation, capable of assuming leadership in opposition to the right-wing and centrist tendencies, the party appeared virtually *en bloc* with the General Council of the TUC and of account only as a militant and industrious 'ginger group' at local level.

It is a wasted labour to look to Macfarlane for an explanation of why the CPGB failed in its first decisive test as a revolutionary organisation, for the whole of his book is permeated with the assumption that the CPGB could be no more than a 'ginger group', a militant and valuable addition to the post-1920 Labour movement but essentially unable to break the leadership of the Labour Party and TUC bureaucracies. This assumption is based very largely on Macfarlane's statement, for which he offers no substantiation, that 'The history of the Communist Party of Great Britain in the nineteen-twenties is the story of the struggle to forge a revolutionary party in a non-revolutionary situation'.[1] This being the case, the struggles of the British working class in the 1920s to defend wages and conditions against the employers' attacks, the latter often backed by the power of the state, did not involve the question of political power and so defensive struggles only were possible. In these circumstances the role

* L. J. Macfarlane, *The British Communist Party—Its Origin and Development until 1929.*

1 Macfarlane, p. 275.

of the CPGB could only be that of agitating among the rank and file to hold the leadership of the Labour movement to its defensive policies, above all at the time of the General Strike. Essentially this is the meaning of Macfarlane's statement: 'Stalin's policy of working for a united Trade Union International through a concerted joint British-Russian trade union campaign was one which fitted in well with the British party's conception of trade union work. It also assisted the growth of the British party. This happy period ended with the General Strike'.[2] (i.e. when the right-wing ruptured the united front).

1926: a complete reversal

This statement, and the analysis on which it is based, wholly ignore the fact that the CPGB's position in 1926 represented a complete reversal of its policy towards the official leadership of the Labour movement up to 1925, and it can be shown (see below, section 3) that Macfarlane ignores important material in arguing his case. Equally important, his analysis ignores the real development of the British working class up to 1926 and the relationship of this to the sharp changes in post-war British capitalism. From the end of the post-war boom it became clear that British capitalism could support itself, with its out-dated industries and weakened position as world financier, only by severe deflation, a level of unemployment that never fell below one million, a whole series of wage cuts, particularly in the 'unsheltered trades'—mining, engineering, etc. —and rationalisation programmes which worsened conditions further. Initially British capitalism could stabilize itself in this way, heading off direct confrontation in 1919 by making judicious concessions, and then by choosing its time to decontrol the mines, relying on the leaders of the Triple Alliance to make no challenge to the state. Black Friday and the defeat of the miners in the lock-out of 1921 destroyed any hope of joint working-class resistance, and in the mood of demoralization after 1921 the working class turned to parliamentary action and the hope of reform via a Labour Government. Behind the disappointment of these hopes during the first Labour government lay the fact that the Conservatives, under Baldwin, had used the Labour interlude as a breathing space in which to consolidate their forces, in particular to deal with the disruptive efforts of the Liberals which threatened to distract attention from the need for a further, united capitalist offensive against the working class. During the period of the Labour government it became clear that a whole series of further attacks on working-class conditions and wages were required to 'stabilize' British capitalism, particularly after the implementation of the Dawes Plan.[3] Associated with this was the growing demand for the recapture of Britain's pre-eminence in international finance by a return to the gold standard, which required deflating at home and further downward pressure on wages to counteract the fact that at the pre-war parity sterling was over-valued, thus handicapping exports.

At the same time the mood of the working class was quite different from the 1922-23 period. Disillusionment with the Labour government prompted a move back to direct industrial action, but at a higher level of consciousness because of the experience of Black Friday. Amongst important sections of the working class the conviction developed of the inevitability of an all-out struggle against the Baldwin government and a determination that no retreats by the leadership, as in 1921, would be tolerated. Citrine, the acting secretary of the TUC General Council, who was at the centre of the activities of the TUC during Red Friday and the developments that led up to the General Strike, recorded how anxiety at the mood of the rank and file forced the General Council to act. 'We had visions of Black Friday, 1921, in our minds. On the present occasion the miners had expressly handed their powers over to the General Council, but it would not do to force a decision upon them.'[4] It was because of the experience of the working class over the previous six years that there was enthusiasm for the General Strike and a readiness to fight it through to a decisive conclusion. Far from their being in a non-revolutionary situation, the working class looked for a leadership that would give conscious expression to their objectively revolutionary aspirations. It was with this sort of development in mind—a sharp change in consciousness in rela-

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2 Macfarlane, p. 277.

3 The Dawes Plan was imposed on Germany after the French occupation of the Ruhr and the failure of the attempted revolution in Germany in the autumn of 1923. Designed to ensure the regular payment of reparations, it involved a severe attack on the wages and conditions of German workers and consequently, in the conditions of severe international competition in the 1920's, led to similar attacks elsewhere, notably in Britain, to restore competitiveness. Thus the Dawes Plan, which 'stabilized' the German economy, helped lay the basis for major conflicts in Britain.

4 Lord Citrine, *Men and Work*, p. 167. Citrine here refers to the attempt of the General Council on the eve off the General Strike to get the MFGB to accept the proposals of the Samuel Commission, involving wage cuts, as a basis for negotiations.

tion to the permanent crisis in the economic basis —that Trotsky wrote:

> 'Today . . . every new sharp change in the political situation to the left places the decision in the hands of the revolutionary party. Should it miss the critical situation, the latter veers round to its opposite. Under these circumstances, the role of the party leadership acquires exceptional importance. . . .'[5]

Given Macfarlane's premise, however, that the CPGB was operating in a non-revolutionary situation, he is not concerned to study the party's history from the point of view of a revolutionary leadership for the working class in the process of development. Nowhere does he examine the party's role in the various struggles of the working class between 1920 and 1926 and indicate how far the party assimilated the lessons of these struggles and corrected its mistakes in its effort to develop a revolutionary leadership. Similarly, Macfarlane never really considers to what degree the party's campaigns changed working-class consciousness and prepared the way for mass revolutionary action. Consequently, the party's history is presented almost wholly in organizational terms and its activities as a series of discrete events bearing little relationship to each other or to the overall development of the party. It follows from this that little attempt is made to understand the nature of the tendencies which gave birth to the CPGB or to appreciate the struggle of the CPGB to escape from its sectarian and syndicalist inheritance while at the same time differentiating itself from centrist tendencies in the Labour movement in the 1920s. In conformity with his presentation of the CPGB as a mere agitational group within the British Labour movement, moreover, Macfarlane is very little interested in the party's relationship to the Communist International except in the crucial period at the end of the twenties during the struggle for the ultra-left line. But what is of vital importance is to understand the process whereby the CPGB became 'Stalinized' by the mid-1920s and a willing tool of Stalin's policy of rapprochement with imperialism in this period, from which flowed the failure to prepare for revolutionary struggle in the General Strike. This is a question, along with others of equal importance, that Macfarlane totally fails to consider. Some of them will be taken up in the course of this review.

Radical changes

Essential in understanding the early history of the CPGB is an appreciation of the radical changes in British capitalism in the two to three decades preceding the formation of the party and the revolutionary tendencies to which these changes gave birth. In fact, the twenty years before the CPGB came into existence had seen successive attempts to establish revolutionary groups and parties, and in the process strong tendencies were created which both formed the basis for the later CPGB, yet, at the same time, passed on to the CPGB an inheritance of sectarian, syndicalist and propagandist methods of work derived from a one-sided analysis of the needs of a revolutionary party and an adaptation to particular features of capitalism in this period. The first part of Macfarlane's book concerns itself with these groupings—the British Socialist Party (BSP), the Socialist Labour Party (SLP) and the Syndicalist movement—but only in an organizational sense and with no real attempt to characterize the tendencies they represented and their relationship to the specific conditions of British capitalism in the period before 1920.

Peak of British Imperialism

The period up to 1914 represented the peak of the expansion of British imperialism; it was followed by the full employment of the war period and the brief inflationary post-war boom. This, then, was a period in which the working class was in an increasingly powerful bargaining position, a period when the objective conditions for extracting reforms were ripe. Yet the history of the period revealed that such reforms could be achieved only through the medium of an increasingly class-conscious and organised working class. Following a brief attempt by the Liberals after the 1906 election to check the move to independent working-class politics by posing as a rejuvenated and adequate vehicle for social reform, the antagonism of the propertied basis of the Liberal party towards the growing militancy of Labour (both in Parliament and in the constituencies) put an end to effective concessions to the Parliamentary Labour Party from around 1909. The Miners' Minimum Wage Act of 1912 was scarcely an exception to this; conceding the principle rather than the substance it was received with indignation by wide sections of the rank and file, and even Enoch Edwards, President of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain and prominent Lib-Lab MP, was forced to bemoan the fact that the Liberal Government had given nothing away '. . . because we did expect at any rate that a Liberal Government would have taken their courage in their hands and accepted the 5s. and 2s. . . ..' (i.e. the minima demanded by the

[5] Trotsky, *The Third International After Lenin*, p. 83.

MFGB). The fact was, of course, that even the limited recognition given by the Liberal government to the concept of the minimum wage had been made only as the result of struggles outside Parliament, beginning with the Cambrian Combine strike and proceeding through to the national miners' strike of 1912. To a considerable extent the 1912 strike, a major factor in which had been the syndicalist-inspired South Wales rank-and-file movement, exemplified the mood of advanced, well-organized sections of workers in the pre-war period. Among them was to be found a growing rejection of the amicable relations of the older generation of trade union officials with the employers and the state and of the parliamentary collaboration of the Labour Party with the Liberals. It was in relation to these developments, in a period when a determined struggle to link immediate demands for reform to socialist politics could have created a general socialist consciousness among wide sections of workers, that the revolutionary tendencies which came together to form the CPGB crystallized.

Two processes

The upsurge in working-class activity and organization from around 1900 was derived from two interrelated processes: accelerating changes in the structure of British capitalism and a continuation of the struggles of the 1880s—for independent working-class politics and industrial unionism—at a higher level. In 1885 Engels had drawn attention to the implications of the 'Great Depression' and the loss of Britain's economic predominance for the development of socialism in Britain:

> '. . . during the period of England's industrial monopoly the English working class have, to a certain extent, shared in the benefits of the monopoly . . . With the breakdown of that monopoly the English working class will lose that privileged position; it will find itself generally—*the privileged and leading minority not excepted*—on a level with its fellow workers abroad. And that is the reason why there will be Socialism again in England.' [My emphasis—MW.][6]

The implication of Engels' statement, particularly the emphasized section, became increasingly clear in the ensuing decades. To meet the loss of its privileged position in world markets and the growth of modern technology in Germany and the USA, British industry was forced, despite its entrenched conservatism, to undertake a series of technological and structural changes whose tempo accelerated with the turn of the century. The drive towards the concentration of ownership and the rationalization of production techniques meant that important sections of the working class, not least the skilled 'aristocrats' of the metal-working trades, came under increasing attack as traditionally established working conditions were eroded and swept away. These changes can be most clearly illustrated from two industries, engineering and mining; in the first there were considerable technological changes, in the other there were few. In both industries there was a marked move, from the 1890s, towards concentration of ownership. In engineering this provided the basis for the introduction of mass production techniques which hit directly at the established craft position of the engineer, based as it was on limited techniques, high levels of personal skill and considerable control over job and workshop practice by the engineer. As the experience of the erosion of privileged status became general, it produced, in less than two decades, a reversal, generally speaking, of the trade union outlook of the engineers. For important sections of the engineers the methods of the 'model' trade unionism of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, established in the boom years of mid-Victorian capitalism, appeared out-dated; pressure developed from the early 1890s for a centralised union based on class, not craft, interests. This pressure was greatly increased after the experience of the 1898 lock-out of the engineers, when it became clear that employers were determined to break the established practices on which craft unionism rested. A series of powerful unofficial strikes coupled with a mounting reform agitation produced the rules revision of 1912 and the decision to bring unskilled workers into the ASE.[7]

Significant development

This was a most significant development. What had been a relatively conservative section of the working class had moved towards a realization of the need for a direct confrontation with the powerful national organization of the employers. Moreover, sections of the engineers, particularly the generation coming into the industry from the turn of the century, looked for forms of revolutionary organization which would permit a direct struggle to be waged against capitalism. For many, the Labour Party appeared irrelevant to the immediate, serious questions on the shop floor, which could only be solved by powerful

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6 Engels, quoting from his article in *The Commonweal*, March 1, 1885, in the Preface to the English edition of *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (1892).

7 J. B. Jeffreys, *The Story of the Engineers*, chapter 7, passim.

trade union organization. Thus, at the same time as the Labour Party became increasingly subservient to Liberalism in Parliament, the complementary idea developed of the use of industrial organization for direct political action. A member of the ASE summed up this growing idea when he stated, in 1909:

> 'The most charitable thing that can be said about political action (i.e. the Parliamentary Labour Party) is that it is slow, so slow that it breaks men's hearts.' [8]

For a number of the younger generation of of engineers the campaign against the employers' offensive and for the reform of the ASE on industrial unionist lines was seen in revolutionary terms, as a struggle that could lead on by a natural progression to the establishment of workers' control. It was in such terms that the Amalgamation Committee Movement (an offshoot of Tom Mann's Syndicalist movement) was established in the engineering industry in England in 1912 to work for industrial unionism, and this was one of the organizations from which the Shop Stewards' Movement crystallized during the war. In Scotland the SLP, through its campaigns to establish alternative revolutionary trade unions (the Industrial Workers of Great Britain) attracted a number of the younger generation of engineers who initially organized the Singer works and later became prominent in the Clyde Workers' Committee. [9] Yet this development was essentially contradictory. While the changes in the engineering industry created the conditions for the emergence of revolutionary tendencies, the preoccupation of most advanced engineers was not really with the question of working-class power, except in a very formal sense, but with preservation of their own power within the engineering workshops. In so far as the Syndicalist movement in engineering reflected this particular preoccupation alone it remained a limited and, in some senses, retrogressive movement. On the eve of the war J. T. Murphy recorded that this was very much the situation in the Amalgamation Committee Movement. In Sheffield he noted that

> '. . . the questions under discussion were very practical—the encroachment of unskilled workers on to skilled workers' jobs; the new machine processes and the division of labour that was going on apace in the workshops; the wages question; the hours of labour, overtime and the speed-ups and our organizational weaknesses.'[10]

Russian revolution

Despite the greater influence and revolutionary potential of the Shop Stewards' Movement during the war, much the same could be said of this organization, and it was only under the stimulus of the Russian Revolution that the interests of the shop stewards began to embrace the question of revolutionary action as well as the defence of their immediate workshop conditions.

In the mining industry a similar process of radicalization occurred among the generation coming into mining from the turn of the century. Unlike engineering the mining industry experienced no significant technological change before the first world war. In the face of intense conservatism, lack of capital and the difficulties of introducing mechanization, the industry remained technologically stagnant. Yet this same period witnessed a drive towards centralization of ownership, particularly in the exporting areas (notably South Wales) which felt the sharpest effects of world competition. In South Wales, for example, the Powell Duffryn Combine or the Cambrian Combine of D. A. Thomas typified the methods of advanced coalowners, to concentrate productive units to allow the full exploitation of existing techniques and to extend vertically at the same time into by-products, docks, railways and shipping. In an industry where the labour costs represented around 70 per cent of the whole, rationalization without technological innovation meant a drive to cut wages and speed up production at the expense of greater physical exertion. This was marked throughout the coalfields from the turn of the century, particularly after the introduction of the Eight Hours Act in 1909. Against the disinclination of the local and national leadership of the Miners' Federation to put up any effective resistance to this process, which involved widespread attacks on customarily established conditions, notably payment for 'dead work', powerful rank-and-file opposition developed which was canalized by the campaigns of the South Wales Unofficial Reform Committee into the demand for the minimum wage. Under the pressure of this campaign the 1912 strike was fought and the minimum partially won.

'Direct action'

Here, as in engineering, the response of numbers of young miners to changing conditions in the industry and the attendant sharpening of class antagonisms had been to see the struggle against the coalowners in revolutionary terms and to look for a direct form of revolutionary struggle through 'direct action'. For the Syndicalists of

8 Ibid, p. 161.

9 Tom Bell, *Pioneering Days*, pp. 72-75 & 99.

10 J. T. Murphy, *New Horizons*, p. 35.

the South Wales Unofficial Reform Committee the campaign for the minimum had been coupled with a repudiation of parliamentary action, and for many miners the mutilation of their demands in the 1912 Minimum Wage Act convinced them of the futility of the Labour Party as a reformist annexe of Liberalism.

The examples of engineering and mining indicate that the change in consciousness of the working class that produced the 'labour unrest' of the pre-1914 period was a reaction not merely to the decline in real wages, as argued by historians of this period, but to deep-going changes in the organization of capitalism, particularly to the increasingly powerful organizations of employers and their growing reliance on the state power. This was the experience of wide sections of workers from the 1890s, skilled and unskilled alike. The newly organized general unions, the engineers and the miners all came into conflict with nationally organized, powerful employers' federations from the 1890s; at the same time the state, through the medium of the law courts and repressive agencies, police and military, fully backed the moves of the employers to break the new unions and humble the miners and engineers.[11] In fact, even before the Taff Vale judgment workers had evidence of a whole series of court rulings directed against the power of the trade unions, and exploiting the ambiguities of the trade union legislation of the 1870s.

New unionism

The impetus these developments gave to independent working-class politics and the formation of the Labour Representation Committee was only one of the results of the experiences of the 1890s. As the 'Great Depression' passed away and the bargaining power of the working class increased there was a rapid growth of the understanding of the need for a movement outside Parliament to meet the employers on their own terms. The second wave of new unionism developed on this basis and from the earlier experiences of this form of organization in the 1880s and '90s. The new upsurge was marked by more definite and developed aims and a tenacity and determination to win that often went far beyond the union leadership, a fact that applied as much to the London dock strike of 1911, where Tillett represented 'advanced' trade union leadership, as it did to the rail strike of the same year.[12] The recurring strikes which preceded the First World War were not in themselves revolutionary; they arose from immediate aims—wages, better trade union organization, the enforcement of collective bargaining—yet they led to direct clashes with the state power (e.g. in the Cambrian Combine strike, 1910, and the rail strike and Liverpool dock strike of 1911) and revealed that even in a peak period of prosperity for British imperialism reforms could be obtained only through powerful and determined working-class organization. This in itself represented a marked change in the decade since 1900. The propaganda work for working-class political independence, the campaign for working-class representation on local government bodies, School Boards, Boards of Guardians, etc., the formation of the Labour Representation Committee itself, had all helped to create, through molecular processes within the working class, a sense of class identity and the growth of political understanding. Superficially, this appeared to be a slow, hesitating process in the period up to the election of the 1906 Liberal Government, yet within the course of a few years it was revealed that this preparatory work had evoked a readiness to fight which went far beyond the Lib-Lab pressure-group politics of the Parliamentary Labour Party. These struggles indicated the emergence of an objective basis for revolutionary politics in Britain, though in themselves they did not, of course, represent any form of spontaneous revolutionary activity. The highest form of organization to emerge from them was the Triple Alliance (negotiations for the formation of which began in 1913) and this, as the negotiations to form it revealed, was seen by the leaders of the unions involved largely as a pressure group for obtaining better trade union legislation, a glorified form of TUC Parliamentary Committee.[13]

Role of young workers

An important factor in the development towards the assertion of independent working-class power was the role assumed by young workers. Writing of the widespread strikes of 1910, most of them carried out in opposition to the trade union leaders, Askwith, head of the Labour Department of the Board of Trade, recorded that they were 'largely due to the action of young men'.[14] In a whole number of industries under-

11 See J. Saville, 'The Trade Unions and Free Labour: the Background to the Taff Vale Decision', in A. Briggs and J. Saville, *Essays in Labour History*.

12 See Sires, 'Labour Unrest in England', 1910-1914, *Journal of Economic History*, 1955.

13 As revealed in the statements of trade union leaders, particularly Robert Smillie, at the joint conferences of the MFGB, NUR and TWF, April 23, 1914, and December 9, 1915.

14 Sir G. Askwith, *Industrial Problems and Disputes*, p. 134.

going radical change in this period the new generation of workers was confronted with major changes in industrial organization and, largely free from the past ingrained traditions of working-class organization, eagerly sought new forms of organization that would allow a direct struggle against the employers and their state. Marxism supplied them with an explanation of the basic reason for the class war with which they were so starkly confronted, and on the main tenets of Marxism they sought to establish a movement which would contend with the bourgeoisie for power. The youth were forced to this position by the logic of events from the turn of the century. The period up to 1914 saw the relatively widespread and rapid attack in key industries on the established customs and privileges built up during the boom years of Victorian capitalism. These attacks rendered the old forms of organization increasingly obsolete and rendered ineffective the established methods of defence. It was the younger generation of workers who were forced to take up the fight for new methods of working-class organization, and in conditions when the movement for working-class political independence was accelerating, the tendency was to turn to aggressive forms of organization transcending the defensive mentality associated with earlier forms of trade union organization. Such a movement was clear among the new generation of workers in engineering, the railways and transport industries who played such a key role in the strike movements after 1900. It was particularly clear among the miners, above all in South Wales.

Religious non-conformity

In South Wales the struggles which culminated in the Cambrian Combine strike were led for the most part by young miners who were in revolt against the dominance of the chapel and the permeation of the leadership of the South Wales Miners Federation with the philosophy of religious non-conformity, with its emphasis on industrial peace and conciliation. The chapel itself, which hitherto had embraced a large section of miners, local tradesmen, coalowners and their officials, was increasingly split on class lines in this period as the drive of the South Wales owners to rationalize production intensified after the 1898 lockout. Inevitably in these circumstances nonconformity, especially Methodism, was forced to reveal the nature of its allegiance to capitalism, to whose interests in South Wales it gave ideological expression. To the young miner, groping his way towards a materialist explanation of the world and towards an effective form of organization against the attacks of the local coalowners, the chapel appeared increasingly as a barrier to social progress. Based fundamentally on the vested interests of property, the chapel denounced militant trade unionism; as the organizational expression of the Liberal Party in South Wales it denounced movements towards independent working-class politics. For the new generation of miners it was therefore seen as a hostile force, a survival of the past history of the miners when the chapel had served to help in the adjustment to industrial life and had played a limited part in developing trade unionism but now was rendered obsolete by the new problems facing the miners.

The movement of the new generation towards a materialist outlook was not straightforward, however. Rejection of the chapel did not necessarily mean the rejection of religion. The great religious revival of 1904-5, started by a young ex-miner, was a last desperate attempt to find a solution, in religious terms and within its past ideological traditions, to the increasing insecurity in the mining community. The revival, significantly, took place outside the chapel and quite spontaneously. The nonconformist establishment had little to do with it and it attracted a considerable number of young miners who were looking for a new social philosophy. Ablett, later the most prominent of the South Wales Syndicalists, took up training for the chapel as a result of the revival, as did Horner, who became a Baptist preacher during the war when he was, at the same time, a member of the Unofficial Reform Committee.[15] The effect of the revival was necessarily ephemeral. It could provide no answers to the problems which gave birth to it and a substantial number of miners attracted by it went on to seek a direct solution to their problems through political action. The Independent Labour Party (ILP) expanded in South Wales with the passing of the revival (taking over, incidentally, a large part of the religious outlook of nonconformity) while a significant number went beyond this to Marxism. Ablett abandoned his chapel training to become the leader of this tendency, which found its expression in the Plebs League, established in 1909. For the Plebs members in South Wales the main question was the creation of a revolutionary trade union which would be able to check the owners' attacks and eventually be able to seize control of the mines.

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[15] A. Horner, *Incorrigible Rebel.*

A major part of their propaganda was for 'militant materialism' against the chapel and its ideological hold over the Welsh miners.

Revolutionary tendency

The developments sketched above provided the basis for the emergence of revolutionary tendencies in the period before 1914. The attempts in this period to establish revolutionary leaderships were characterized, however, by a one-sided reaction to the mounting class struggle in industry and the growing propensity for independent working-class action via the Labour Party. In many ways these one-sided reactions were the immediate response of young workers to the developments sketched above, and the generation of young militants who came to the fore in the working-class movement after 1900 were to provide the leadership for the CPGB which emerged in 1920. The tendencies they represented were carried over into the CPGB and their interrelationship must be understood if the forces shaping the party at its birth are to be appreciated. Although he describes the main phases in the development of these tendencies—the BSP, the SLP, the Syndicalist movements—Macfarlane makes no real attempt to relate them to the specific developments in the working class which gave rise to them or to understand their political significance in relation to the later practice of the CPGB.

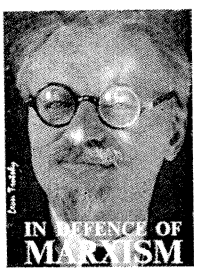
(To be continued)

Writings of Leon Trotsky

The New Course By Leon Trotsky

A collection of articles written in 1923 during the lull before the great storm of persecution which was later to overwhelm Russian Bolshevism. Here Trotsky, analyses the incipient stages of the degeneration of the Communist Party, uncovers its causes and proposes measures for combating its further decline. He here analyses the party in a historical, that is dialectical way, the relationships between generations, social strata, groups, factional formations, tradition and the multitude of factors that go to make a revolutionary party.

111 *pages*, 3/6



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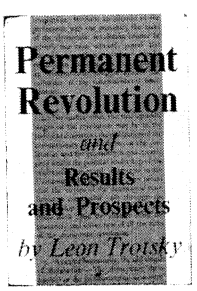

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