

LABOUR REVIEW

Vol. 2

SEPTEMBER - OCTOBER 1957

No. 5

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COMMUNICATIONS • BOOK REVIEWS

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A Letter to Readers

With this fifth number of the new series of Labour Review we are able to report that our circulation, from the first to the fourth issues, has continued to rise steadily. We are more than gratified that we have been able to satisfy an increasing number of customers. We know of many who bought their first copy in almost hostile curiosity and who have since been among our most eager subscribers. This steady growth, we believe, is due entirely to the fact that Labour Review writes seriously for the thousands of serious socialists inside and outside the Communist Party and the tens of thousands of rank-and-file socialists in the Labour Party. Labour Review honestly seeks to conduct from the standpoint of Marxism an inquiry into and debate upon the urgent problems of British socialism. We have no special axe to grind. Our sole aim is to seek the answers to the questions of how to build a strong Marxist movement in Britain, how to educate in the use of the Marxist method a new generation to lead, in the factories, mines, offices, schools and universities, the struggle for socialism.

We would like to remind all our readers that we are still more than anxious that they should let the Editors know what they think about Labour Review—what features they have criticisms of, what we have failed to do and what they particularly approve of in an issue. Please do continue to write to us. Moreover we are anxious for you to write for us—either for our correspondence columns (up to 400 words) or for our feature columns.

We are, however, far from becoming complacent about the circulation of Labour Review. Our successes are very modest ones when compared to the gigantic task of educating a Marxist leadership to play its part in the British Labour movement. If we could double our present circulation by next January, it would be possible to think about a series of far-reaching de-

velopments to improve the magazine. So we are asking our readers to make a special effort to help Labour Review in two ways:

(1) Reduced Subscription: We can now offer three consecutive issues for the reduced pre-paid subscription of 5s. Will those readers who buy their copies regularly, at meetings or on similar occasions, please send 5s. with their name and address to the Business Manager, or hand 5s. to their usual seller? In addition, will all readers who want to see Labour Review reaching wider circles of the socialist movement canvass for subscription at this new rate and send the money and names and addresses of subscribers to the Business Manager?

(2) Development Fund: We also need very much to extend our range of advertising: but advertising costs a good deal of money. Financially we are 'breaking even' on our present circulation, but we need some hard cash to conduct an intensive circulation and advertising campaign. £100, or 2,000 shillings, would satisfy our needs for the present. We are therefore, for the first time in our existence, asking our readers for donations. It is surprising how much can be collected in small gifts from friends at meetings and in informal discussions. Will you also, yourself, give that little bit extra over the 2s.? Our target of £100 would then easily be reached. And, of course, there are our 'professional friends' who, we know, could send us a fiver or so.

Please send donations and reduced three-for-5s. subscriptions to the Business Manager, E. R. Knight, Labour Review, New Park Publications, 256 Lavender Hill, London, S.W.11.

John Daniels Bob Shaw

LABOUR REVIEW

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Editorials

Soviet Reality

'Some people had come across young Russians who freely imparted the information that they had been meeting in private discussion groups to discuss the past and the future of the Soviet Union, in terms that would be scarcely approved of by the party and Government leadership ...

'During the meetings organized in factories and other places by the party to explain to the people the meaning of the recent party and Government dismissals, the official version of what had happened behind the closed doors of the Central Committee was not always readily accepted. On a number of occasions speakers from the floor demanded that the defeated leaders should be given an opportunity to explain publicly—on radio and television—the policies which they had advocated ...

'There was great interest, among the students as well as among the young industrial workers, in the development of Marxist ideas and socialist practices in the West, and an eagerness to try to relate these to Soviet experience of the past and to possible future developments in Russia ...

'Some visitors found evidence of increasing ferment among the workers on such issues as rates of pay and production norms, which are closely linked. There have been demands for pay increases and for the reduction of production norms, and although this may have little to do

with what is generally understood by ideological or political ferment, some of the more knowledgeable visitors regard it as, ultimately, more important. They discern the awakening of a working class conscious of its socialist, revolutionary traditions.'

Manchester Guardian, August 16, 1957, reporting the impressions of British visitors to the World Youth Festival in Moscow.

'Two students, separately and cautiously, asked innumerable questions about party history, about Mensheviks and SR's; they were astounded to hear of the memoirs published by all the great revolutionary figures, and hungry for details. Trotsky was of special interest; details of his political role, both before and after exile, were in demand, but of far the greatest interest was his biography of Stalin. Twice I was asked to go through it, chapter by chapter; most surprising, apparently, was that he continued to be a revolutionary and did not become a "mad dog of imperialism"; most pleasing, as one student remarked, "it seems he tried to write history, not just polemics" ...

'Marx and Lenin, it should be pointed out, are respected even by those who deride Soviet "Marxism".'

Kathryn Feuer, 'Russia's Young Intellectuals', Encounter, no. 41, February 1957.

THE CRISIS of the Soviet leadership has not lessened in the two months since Molotov, Kaganovich and Malenkov were disgraced. Khrushchev's discovery that Malenkov had become 'Beria's shadow', that he 'made use of Stalin's weaknesses in his last years' and prompted Stalin to 'acts worthy of stern denunciation' is a sign that the crisis has in fact deepened. In our last issue we suggested that the ultimate driving force of the changes, convulsions, fitful revelations and internecine strife among the rulers of Russia was the awakening of the Russian working class. One after another the theories of learned commentators and not-so-learned journalists are found inadequate to explain events and the exceedingly complex contradictions within Soviet society which lie behind them. Only Marxism can explain these events, unravel the tangled skein of contradictions and show what forces will shape the future course of Soviet society. Those who have mastered such an analysis as Trotsky's *The Revolution Betrayed*, which has just made a most welcome reappearance, are pos-

sessed, not of a ready reckoner or slide rule which will save them the trouble of a detailed, concrete analysis of Soviet reality, but of a guide, still remarkably fresh and powerful after twenty years, to how such a Marxist analysis should be undertaken today. Those who prefer to rely on their impressions are groping in the dark. Big surprises lie in store for them. But for Marxists the way to truth, and therefore to effective action, lies through an analysis of the movement and interrelationship of social forces.

In the Soviet Union the dominating social group at present is the bureaucracy. There are some socialists who do not care for this word; they think it is a label. They are mistaken. The capitalist class does not recognize itself as it is described in scientific literature; social scientists are nevertheless compelled to use precise terms. Similarly the word bureaucracy is a precise, scientific term for a specific social stratum. The Soviet bureaucracy is a caste of privileged officials, which safeguards its position and seeks to defend the nationalized pro-

perty relations that give it life by a series of accommodations to imperialism. If some anti-Stalinists shrink from recognizing the existence of a bureaucracy, the Soviet workers do not. They call them the 'boss men'. Little by little they are finding ways of expressing their resentment at the bureaucracy's privileges and arbitrary rule. Little by little an understanding of the bureaucracy's betrayal of the revolution and readiness to do a deal with imperialism is growing, first and foremost among the Soviet students, as that section of the people which has the best opportunity to piece together the truth about the past. This double pressure, industrial and intellectual, economic and ideological, is the decisive mainspring of all recent developments inside the Soviet Union. Awareness of this new combativeness and of this new thirst for knowledge and truth runs just below the surface of every one of Khrushchev's many pronouncements. The oscillation between concessions and threats, between 'deep regret' about past crimes and the shooting of a few party leaders in Azerbaijan or Albania; between a partial literary thaw and the frosty treatment of writers and historians who take the thaw seriously, is the hallmark of men who are forced to adopt rule-of-thumb methods to safeguard their power. They dig canals for the flood waters, but the waters obstinately refuse to be channelled; they plug the dikes with their fingers, or with Molotov's sacrificial 'stone bottom', but new fountains spurt forth at a hundred points. They build a wall labelled 'Beria-Malenkov'—needless to say without publishing a single syllable of the central committee records that would demonstrate Khrushchev's own dependence on the 'boss' in innumerable deeds of bloody and terrible revenge. They succeed only in dragging socialism through the mud and revealing themselves as implacable enemies of Marxism and of the Russian workers whom they try to deceive.

These are the weaknesses of the bureaucracy. But we must not overlook its strength. It controls the State power, the army, the secret police. It has jails and guns and spies. It has a vast army of officials. It has staunch supporters in the privileged: the army officers who speak to their subordinates only by microphone from another room, the local party bosses whose occasional publicized peculations or other abuses, whose contempt for the ordinary people, are merely the logical extension of this network of parasitism.

It would be idle to suppose that the degenerate excrescence which is the bureaucracy can be removed without a surgical operation. Those who write in terms of a self-liberalization of the bureaucracy, of the possibility of this caste or part of it beginning to act in the interests of the Russian workers, coming to terms with them, fulfilling their demands, are not merely the victims of illusions; they are guilty of vulgar and superficial thinking and of a crude revision of the Marxist conception of bureaucracy. The logic of their view is the disarming of the Russian workers just at a time when, with painful slowness, they are taking the first hesitant

steps for over three decades towards organization and independent action.

It is no accident that the more percipient travellers returning from Russia speak of a new interest in Marxism and in its application to Soviet history and Soviet problems. We can only guess at the number of young people who, frustrated by the intellectual and professional limitations imposed on them by the bureaucracy, or eager to know the truth about the heroic past of the USSR and its proletariat, are turning, as well as sealed libraries and practically inaccessible archives will allow, to a study of questions which Stalinism veiled beneath layer after layer of lies. Is it too soon to say that the construction of a genuine Marxist movement in the Soviet Union is beginning? No, the little circles of friends, often within the Communist Party and Young Communist League, discussing and studying and learning, are there already; can it be long before the imperative need to exchange ideas with like-minded people overcomes fear of imprisonment, exile and death and leads to tentative feelers stretching out between the groups? The solution of the objective contradiction between the bureaucracy and the workers demands the formation of a Marxist leadership. That Marxist leadership will inevitably come into being, just as it did in the days of Plekhanov, Lenin and Trotsky.

Much has changed since those days. Once the initial impetus is given, the tasks of education, organization and leadership will be fulfilled under far more favourable circumstances, and at an incomparably higher level, than was the case sixty years ago. Inertia, illiteracy, ignorance, backwardness, isolation, are no longer obstacles. An educated and cultured youth, largely drawn from the working class, is crying out for the new 'spark' that 'shall burst in burning flame'.

For socialists in the West the awakening of the Russian workers and the building of a new Marxist leadership, and not the gyrations of the bureaucracy, is the real hope. International solidarity imposes on us a number of elementary but urgent tasks if we are to fulfil our duty to the Russian workers who have suffered and sacrificed so much. We must defend the Soviet Union and its planned economy and the very real economic, scientific and technological achievements of the Soviet people against imperialism. We must redouble our efforts to arouse the workers of our own countries in the battle—economic, political and ideological—against capitalism and the various kinds of bureaucracy in the Labour movement which hinder the fight against capitalism. By fighting imperialism, showing the workers the way forward, building the Marxist vanguard without which the socialist revolution cannot be carried through, we will give real help to the Russian workers, we will act as true friends, class brothers and allies. No national barriers, no 'iron curtains', no witch-hunts or repression can prevent the spread of the liberating ideas of Marxism.

SOCIALISM, THE H-BOMB AND WAR

THE GREATEST single problem facing humanity today is how to avoid a new world war—a war which will be fought with weapons so frightful that it is not mere scaremongering, but a seriously debated scientific question, whether such a war would not eliminate all life from this planet. Such is the spate of information on H-bombs, radio-active poisonous dust and intercontinental guided missiles (with such horrors as germ warfare trailing behind as second-class weapons in the race to produce devices for humanity's suicide) that many socialists are now seriously asking whether the invention of modern techniques of waging war has not created a new world situation requiring an entirely new assessment of how socialists should participate in the struggle for peace. This is a fair question, one of deadly urgency, but one which needs to be investigated calmly, objectively and without panic. We should like to have a discussion about it in *Labour Review*. We have already arranged for a number of socialists—with widely differing opinions on some of the issues involved—to take part in this discussion in the next few issues. We hope our readers will join in.

The problem of how to fight against imperialist war was never, and is not today, a simple one. Time and time again Lenin stressed the fact that Marxists have always found this to be the most complex of all problems. One reason is that the preparation and outbreak of imperialist war is, for the ruling class, at once a great opportunity to enrich themselves and a period of mortal danger to their own rule. For this reason every propaganda device, the subtlest and the crudest, is brought out in a deliberate effort to bind the working class to their masters, to enlist the active help of the people in defending 'their' country from the 'foreign invader'. The narrowest prejudices, as old as the human race itself, are decked in high-sounding phrases—and to accomplish this deception the Press and pulpit, the politicians and professors, the radio and the rag-mags, the 'socialists' and the psychiatrists, all are pressed into active service. We may be sure that, this very day, every single one of these propaganda fakers is hard at work sowing confusion and playing upon every base emotion. Naturally every departmental office organizing this deadly work, in whatever country it is located, carries the hypocritical title over its door: 'Committee for Organizing the Fight for Peace and for the Unity of Nations'.

There are many people who echo the trite phrases of Khrushchev (they include Eden, Attlee and Eisenhower, Pollitt, Bernal and the Dean of Canterbury) asserting blandly the possibilities of what is called 'the peaceful coexistence of States with different social systems' without making any really scientific analysis of what is involved in this phrase. By obscuring with over-simple words the complexity of the real fight against war, they are succeeding only in lulling the working class into a petition-signing passivity which can do nothing but help the forces making for war.

Let us frankly admit (and we thank several readers who brought this to our attention) that *Labour Review* has, in at least two issues, been guilty of the error of substituting epithets for reasoned argument when, with-

out further detailed explanation of our attitude, we spoke in a scoffing, disparaging way about those who advocate the theory of 'peaceful coexistence'. This led some people to imagine that our criticism of the Russian government was that it had not sent the Soviet Army crusading over the world, H-bombs and all, setting up communist governments everywhere and so achieving the aim of world socialism. This, some people imagined, was the only alternative to rejection of the theory of 'peaceful coexistence'. *Nothing could be further from the truth.* *Labour Review* considers that the prime aim of every socialist at the present time is to work to ensure that the H-bombs are never dropped, that the guided missiles are never loaded, that no army shall move over any frontier. Where we differ from those who preach 'peaceful coexistence' is not *whether* war ought to be prevented but *how* it can be prevented.

Lenin, analysing the stage of capitalism reached before 1914, showed that as a result of the operation of its laws of development capitalism had reached a new phase. In a number of key branches of industry in the advanced countries free competition had been converted into its opposite—monopoly. The big banks had largely taken over financial control of industry and the State and great monopoly capitalists had become closely fused one with the other. Side by side with these developments the remaining countries of the world had been brought into the orbit of control of one or another of these large, advanced imperialist States and were being used to produce, at exceptionally low prices, primary raw materials for the industries of the metropolitan countries and as fields of capitalist investment with cheap labour and super-profits. The first world war was the result of the inevitable clash of the imperialist powers struggling, in accordance with the absolute need of capitalism to go on expanding, to redivide the world in favour of whichever State, or alliance of States, should be victorious. This struggle for the redivision of the world, in spite of a multitude of side issues, was the real cause of the first world war. War did not come because the wicked Germans had invaded tiny Belgium. The Kaiser's army did not march because the wicked British supported the reactionary Tsar. War was the inevitable result of objective forces at work in capitalism in its new monopolist phase. Therefore only the ending of imperialist domination of the world could have prevented war. The 'international general strike' of the Basle 1912 resolution was accordingly a correct socialist policy because this strike would have raised directly the question of *who should rule*—should the imperialists continue to rule and to fight out 'their' war or should the workers assume power and build a socialist society, which has no need for war?

These direct (though not simple) propositions of Lenin and his generation of Marxists will be familiar to most readers of *Labour Review*. Since 1914 the world has seen enormous changes. One third of the world's population, Russia, East Europe and China, has been torn from the orbit of imperialism. Millions of colonial people are actively resisting their retention within the field of colonial exploitation. Yet the productive capa-

city and need for expansion of the great imperialist powers have also continued to grow enormously. Is it not true, therefore, that the objective need of imperialism for a redivision of the world is also more pressing today than in 1914 or 1939? Is not imperialism an unstable agglomeration of predatory powers, more explosive today than ever before in its history? Add to this explosive situation the most explosive bomb the mind of man could ever conceive and we have a very explosive world indeed. No dialectical twist could produce 'peace' out of this mixture.

Surely then, the question of peace or war has become today, even more directly than in 1914, a problem of power. So long as power remains in the hands of the imperialists, the horror of war is immanent. Today, more surely than in 1914 or 1939, the fight for peace is the fight in every country of the world for workers' power and socialism. It is this basic Leninist teaching which Stalinism has consistently revised and perverted.

We sometimes hear repeated, even in pacifist and socialist circles, that with the 'ultimate weapon', the H-bomb, in the hands of the great powers no State will risk its very existence by launching war. From the world-wide possession of the H-bomb, the Great Deterrent, they say, will come peace. Are not the capitalists themselves and their families also in danger of atomic disintegration in a new war? No rational government, whatever its political colour (so the argument goes) would dare to launch atomic war today. This theory, we believe, is just one more subtle product set in circulation by the 'Committees for Organizing the Fight for Peace'.

In reply we ask: since when have capitalist governments started to act on the basis of 'rational' arguments of this sort? The only rational argument a Tory Government ever listened to was the rationality of greater profits and the rationality of the continued existence of the rule of the class it represents. We have often heard tell of some 'good, kind-hearted capitalists' who really do not like exploiting 'their' workers, but who have to continue to do so because not to do so would mean liquidating themselves as capitalists. In like manner there may be (though we have yet to discover them) 'good, peace-

loving imperialist governments' which do not like war, but which have to continue to prepare for, and even to fight, world wars, because not to do so would mean ceasing to be capitalists. It has yet to be shown that even the fear of the H-bomb is any match for the fact that no privileged class voluntarily leaves the scene of history. We believe it would be foolish for the working class to rely upon the 'rationality' of the ruling class to prevent war.

We cannot pretend that we have really discovered or written anything new here. But this restatement of the basic propositions of Marxism on imperialist war should be the starting point for a discussion on the fight for peace. It is a beginning, however, and not the end of the debate.

Can peace treaties signed between capitalist countries ever help to prevent war? Can treaties between Russia and China and the West help to prevent war? Can the people 'force' the capitalists to 'disarm'? Indeed, will capitalist governments ever disarm and are disarmament conferences any more than mere propaganda tricks? Can a 'people's movement', above party politics, force imperialist governments to take a peaceful path? Can the United Nations be fashioned into an organization which will impose peace upon its members? Is individual pacifism sufficient? Or is the question of peace or war in every country of the world still a question of which class rules—the workers or the imperialists? These are some of the questions with which the debate in *Labour Review* will deal. None of them can be given a slick, easy answer. There is no panacea for peace in this complex world. But, together, in an atmosphere not dominated by panic or pessimism, but rather in an atmosphere of calm, objective, confident appraisal of the facts as they really are, we believe it will be possible to devise for the working-class movement a strategy of winning peace and socialism. And a sound strategy guiding the Labour movement will be more powerful than a million of the largest 'Ban the Bomb' banners—because it can guide the movement to the central arena of the struggle for peace, where the decisive battles will be fought.

Labour and Nationalization

TWO QUESTIONS of major importance are to be debated at the annual conference of the Labour Party this year. Both questions concern the two great evils of capitalism, war and poverty. They are to be discussed under the headings of disarmament and nationalization. Disarmament and its related problems are touched on elsewhere in this issue. However the problem of peace is not so far removed from the problem of nationalization as would at first appear, for both hinge on the question of who owns the means of production.

Nationalization is not an abstract question, a matter of dogma. The Tory Press today is doing its best to foster this idea, helped from time to time by such people

as Winston Churchill and Sir Hartley Shawcross and Ted Leather. The capitalists no doubt have the view that it is their *right* to exploit labour, to accumulate vast wealth and power. These 'rights' they hold by virtue of some 160 years' ownership and control of the total productive apparatus of the nation, so why should they bother with a theory? Moreover it would obviously be to the capitalists' advantage if the ownership and control of the means of production, distribution and exchange could be dismissed as a matter of no practical interest to the working class and unrelated to their daily struggles. The capitalists are assisted in their anti-socialist propaganda by the ideas expressed in the official Labour Party document *Industry and Society*, around

which the struggle in the movement is likely to take place.

This pamphlet is an outline of Labour's policy for the movement in preparation for the next election. The Labour leadership have fired a cannon and shot out a pea. They begin with the quotation from the Labour Party constitution that the purpose of the party is to establish common ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange under popular administration and control of each industry. They end by advocating that a Labour government should become a purchaser of equity shares on the stock market. The argument differs from Sir Winston Churchill's and Mr. Leather's and the conclusions are of a kind which no true Tory would recognize. But the premise is the same. It is that nationalization is not necessary in the solution of the workers' immediate problems. Nothing could be further from the truth.

We agree one hundred per cent with the quotation from the Labour Party constitution. However it should be the axis of Labour's policy now and not something which is put in the shop window to attract customers. Some forty-five sections of the Labour movement have taken the trouble to draft and submit to this year's Labour Party conference resolutions on nationalization all of which agree with the attitude to nationalization summed up in the constitution. Moreover at nearly every trade union conference this year, including some which for long have been the main support of conservatism in the Labour Party, delegates and leaders too have strongly advocated nationalization. Obviously it is no abstract question.

When the Labour Government nationalized steel and when it proposed to take over sugar, cement and water supplies in its new term of office every legal device (and some not so legal) was used in an attempt to frustrate the purpose of the Labour movement. One recalls the unlimited supplies of cash which were poured out in the campaign around 'Mr. Cube', the advertisements of the road hauliers and the building rings, the refusal of the steel kings to serve on the board of the nationalized industry and the baying of the Tory pack in Parliament against nationalization measures. The attack was too much for the Labour leaders. They wilted and resigned, allowing the Tories to return to office to strip the British Transport Commission of road transport and to dismantle the public ownership of steel. The attempts of sections of the workers to fight against denationalization measures were frustrated by the leaders, who preached sermons on containing the struggle within 'constitutional' bounds.

Today the Right-wing leaders, on a new tack, foster the view that nationalization is not necessary, that such large combines as Imperial Chemical Industries and Unilever manage their affairs in a rational, efficient manner, ploughing back the greater part of the profit, re-equipping the industries, encouraging research. This argument parallels the attempts of Fabian theorists to prove that capitalism does not now necessarily lead to slump, that the workers are not 'increasingly impoverished' and that Labour has plenty of time in which to achieve an amicable compromise in the best British traditions. The workers, however, are not visibly impressed. The crisis in the car industry in 1956 destroyed much of the complacency they may have had about the possibility of unemployment. No Fabian theorist has yet

applied his theory to this event. The strikes in engineering and transport which followed were fought as though capital and Labour fully realized their antagonism. The fact that the Transport Commission owned some 60 per cent of the assets of provincial bus companies had not prevented the wages of busmen from being depressed. The engineers are now asking whether 10 per cent holdings in the British Motor Corporation would have adequately safeguarded the 6,000 workers who were fired last year. Or in Standard Motors? Certainly 10 per cent government shareholdings would inflate the value of industrial shares and some City gentlemen would make a fortune. But the workers cannot be expected to wax enthusiastic at the news that among those benefiting from the exploitation of his labour the State is included to the extent of 10 per cent, or that when he is sacked he is thanked for his services by a government department.

The National Executive's shareholding proposals are built on false foundations. In the document, of course, they refer to monopolies and to the domination of industry by the finance companies. These ideas were expressed far more clearly by Lenin in *Imperialism* forty years ago. However, whereas Lenin drew from his analysis the conclusion that the working class must struggle for political power and for ownership of the means of production, the NEC, like true liberals, conclude that what is necessary is not more class struggle but more class collaboration.

The NEC argue that capitalism has largely solved the question of slump, at least within the internal market. This leads to the assumption that the last seventeen or eighteen years of capital expansion are typical of *modern* capitalism and that therefore the rate of capital accumulation will continue to rise. There is also an oblique reference to a new form of society.

But the NEC's great new discovery is that the board rooms are no longer dominated by the profit motive. It declares that 'the influence of private ownership in the large firms, as far as management, production and growth are concerned, is small'. The managers' concern 'is with production as much as with profits and with expansion far more than with dividends'. 'Large firms as a whole are serving the nation well,' declares the NEC, and it repeats the tribute twice in the pamphlet. It is determined that benighted class-ridden rank and filers will be purged of all ideas that monopoly capitalism is an exploiting society. But let the workers place the claims to ownership in the board room and the directors will man the barricades. Never in the history of capitalism has any capitalist handed over ownership of a factory or mine or railway to the workers. On the contrary they have always fought bitterly against the idea of public ownership, seeing in it the gap through which can flow the revolutionary will of the working-class.

Industry and Society states: 'Roughly three per cent of the population enjoy at least 50 per cent of the capital gains.' This three per cent constitute the hard core of the capitalist class. Their control of the industrial wealth operates in the main through the banks and finance houses and in this way they direct policy. Not only does this sector determine the policy of the big combines; it also constitutes the real power behind the Tory government. Such people cannot be tricked out of their wealth by fancy formulas or by juggling around with stocks and shares. If the Labour Party constitution's aim

of social ownership is to be realized then the capitalist class must be fought.

The problems of the working class cannot be resolved by a simple stroke of the pen. The real struggle on the factory floor stubbornly refuses to be 'resolved' by comfortable Fabian formulas. Is not the fight for more nationalization part of the class struggle, an extension, in fact, of the fight which goes on in the factory? Contrary to the declarations of the Right wing, the capitalist is not inattentive to his ownership and control on the factory floor. Every militant shop steward knows that no matter how well organized the workers in the factory may be, there is a point beyond which militant industrial action is not enough. This is also understood by the capitalist class, which may give this or that concession, but will fight bitterly to maintain its ownership and control. For the working class, therefore, nationalization presents itself as a *political* act, the aim of which is to strengthen its own position in the *industrial* struggle. By this means the British workers seek to carry through the struggle against the evils of the system of exploitation and its attendant market chaos.

In the trade union movement, nationalization presents itself as a question of control—not abstractly, in the form of who owns most shares, but concretely, from the point of view of the class struggle. The workers argue that with the extension of nationalization to the rest of industry the trade union movement could demand a real plan of production and through this an end to threats of unemployment and, perhaps, a shorter working day. The trade union movement has noted the successes of even the limited planning achieved in those industries already

nationalized. It has however also noted the failure of the miners and the railwaymen to achieve any real control over their own production. The NEC brushes aside this question as syndicalist nonsense and substitutes in place of workers' control the hoary formula consultations—a word detested in every nationalized industry. Consultation places the worker in exactly the same relation to the boss as he was before, a mere adjunct to the machine, whereas the worker is aiming for control of the factory, control of the productive process and liberation from the bonds of wage labour. To this end nationalization is the political form through which the workers now seek to press the attack against capitalism.

There are of course doctrinaires who argue that nationalization is not socialism, that it is simply State capitalism, exploitation in another form. Strictly speaking they are right. The National Coal Board and British Railways are not yet socialism. Few in the Labour movement as yet are quite clear about what is meant by socialism. But what is of far greater importance than the sermonizing of the sectarians is that the Labour movement now pours into the demand for nationalization a class content which is clashing with the reformist policies of the Labour leaders. By this means, the workers are moving forward towards a decisive challenge to capitalism.

The tasks of Marxists today are, first, to strip the liberal mask from the programme of Fabianism and to expose it as one more form of class collaboration. Secondly, they must arm the movement with the programme of class struggle for the nationalization of all the major industries without compensation and with workers' control.

LEFT AGAINST RIGHT AT BRIGHTON

C. van Gelderen

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leadership which is supposed to be the main virtue of a public school education. But the role of Eton, Winchester and Harrow is not to produce socialists or dedicated leaders of the Labour movement. On the contrary! The British public schools make a point of imprinting on the minds of their scholars that they are 'top-drawer', born to rule. They teach them to treat the working class civilly, but at a distance. How can these scions of Society, enjoying all the privileges a class-ridden social order has to offer, have any other thought than that this is the best of all possible worlds? True, their social consciences may have been roused by the misery of the 'tween-war years. The hungry thirties tugged at their heart-strings and they were emotionally driven towards the Labour movement. War, with its horrors and suffering, emphasized the more obvious insanities of capitalism. The Labour Party not only offered them a balm for their consciences but also an opportunity for political advancement.

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In addition to the products of the public schools, the Right wing also draws its strength, and perhaps its main strength, from the conservative-minded trade union leadership. Although these men and women have a social background vastly different from that of the Gaitskells and the Daltons, they too have their roots deep in the soil of capitalism. The British trade union movement has battered on the super-profits which British capitalism derived from the exploitation of a world-wide empire. While some of the crumbs went to the more privileged section of the working class, the leadership of the movement received, not merely crumbs, but a portion of the cake itself. More and more they became divorced from those they were supposed to lead and from the class they sprang from. A vast bureaucracy grew up, determined to defend their own privileged positions and the social order which had made it possible for them to elevate themselves above their fellow-workers. They were prepared to reform some of the grosser abuses of the capitalist system and to pay lip service to socialism as a distant ideal, for only so could they retain their hold on the rank and file. But overthrow it? They echoed the thought of the German social-democrat Ebert: 'I hate the revolution like sin itself!'

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The history of the Labour movement over the past few years shows very well how the law of uneven and combined development works out in practice. As the impulse toward socialism given by the Labour victory in 1945 began to lose its momentum a sharp division arose within the Labour movement itself. The great mass of the working class, whose standard of living had been advanced in the post-war years, tended to forget the lessons of the past. The trade unions had greatly increased their power, and there was a tendency to look upon their massive strength as sufficient to safeguard the gains achieved. Labour's Right-wing leadership set the tone by talking about 'consolidation' and soft-pedalled any further advances towards socialism. Political action appeared to have had its day, and the apathy of the rank and file was demonstrated by the fall in the Labour Party membership and abstentionism on Polling Day. At the same time trade union membership continued to increase.

This sense of complacency was the basis for the hegemony of the Right-wing leadership both in the trade unions and in the Labour Party. The trade union bureaucracy, in fact, provided the hard core of the Right-wing leadership in the party and ensured its predominance at successive Labour Party conferences. Even the electoral victory of the Tories in 1951 did not immediately change this situation. Full employment appeared to be firmly established and the Government appeared to pay due deference to the powerful position of the trade unions. Everything seemed to be for the best in the best of all possible worlds.

But while the complacency within the trade union wing of the movement was propping up the Right-wing leadership, within the political wing of the movement the conscious socialists began to sound the alarm. In the last days of the Labour Government a Left wing began to emerge under the leadership of Nye Bevan, and it soon became apparent that this Left wing had the almost solid support of the constituency parties. Only the solidarity of the trade union bureaucracy saved the Right-wing leadership from defeat. At conference after conference the constituency parties voted for the Left-wing candidates to the National Executive, only to find themselves confronted by the almost solid phalanx of the trade union block votes.

At Brighton, however, Conference will meet in an entirely different situation. The full effect of Toryism in power is beginning to make itself felt. Full employment is no longer taken for granted; for the first time since the first world war the working-class tenant has lost the security of tenure of his home. On every front the capitalist class has launched its offensive against the working class, with the Tory Government spearheading the attack. Every worker can now see the truth of the Marxist dictum that the government is nothing else than the executive committee of the ruling class.

The drive against the workers is directed, first of all, against the trade unions. An all-out attempt to break the power of the unions is on the order of the day. All the organs of capitalism, the government, the pulpit, radio, television and Press, are thrown into the battle. Every strike is transformed into a minor battle. The capitalist newspapers vie with each other in vilification of strikers, in a vain effort to destroy the solidarity of labour and to prepare for State intervention. The days of industrial peace are over and the trade union movement, from being in the rear of the struggle against capitalism, is now in the van.

With their positions threatened, the trade unions fully realize that industrial action is not enough, and that political action against the Tories is part of the same fight which the busmen, the market porters and the dockers have been waging on the picket lines. All the union conferences which have been held in the last few months reflect this new mood of political militancy within the movement. While the Labour leadership, with its eyes on the past, produces perversions of the party's traditional policy such as *Industry and Society*, the union conferences reaffirm their faith in a policy of full-blooded nationalization as a necessary step towards socialism. The Executive's policy statements on future nationalization and on the running of the nationalized industries are likely to receive rough treatment at Brighton.

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of social ownership is to be realized then the capitalist class must be fought.

The problems of the working class cannot be resolved by a simple stroke of the pen. The real struggle on the factory floor stubbornly refuses to be 'resolved' by comfortable Fabian formulas. Is not the fight for more nationalization part of the class struggle, an extension, in fact, of the fight which goes on in the factory? Contrary to the declarations of the Right wing, the capitalist is not inattentive to his ownership and control on the factory floor. Every militant shop steward knows that no matter how well organized the workers in the factory may be, there is a point beyond which militant industrial action is not enough. This is also understood by the capitalist class, which may give this or that concession, but will fight bitterly to maintain its ownership and control. For the working class, therefore, nationalization presents itself as a *political* act, the aim of which is to strengthen its own position in the *industrial* struggle. By this means the British workers seek to carry through the struggle against the evils of the system of exploitation and its attendant market chaos.

In the trade union movement, nationalization presents itself as a question of control—not abstractly, in the form of who owns most shares, but concretely, from the point of view of the class struggle. The workers argue that with the extension of nationalization to the rest of industry the trade union movement could demand a real plan of production and through this an end to threats of unemployment and, perhaps, a shorter working day. The trade union movement has noted the successes of even the limited planning achieved in those industries already

nationalized. It has however also noted the failure of the miners and the railwaymen to achieve any real control over their own production. The NEC brushes aside this question as syndicalist nonsense and substitutes in place of workers' control the hoary formula consultations—a word detested in every nationalized industry. Consultation places the worker in exactly the same relation to the boss as he was before, a mere adjunct to the machine, whereas the worker is aiming for control of the factory, control of the productive process and liberation from the bonds of wage labour. To this end nationalization is the political form through which the workers now seek to press the attack against capitalism.

There are of course doctrinaires who argue that nationalization is not socialism, that it is simply State capitalism, exploitation in another form. Strictly speaking they are right. The National Coal Board and British Railways are not yet socialism. Few in the Labour movement as yet are quite clear about what is meant by socialism. But what is of far greater importance than the sermonizing of the sectarians is that the Labour movement now pours into the demand for nationalization a class content which is clashing with the reformist policies of the Labour leaders. By this means, the workers are moving forward towards a decisive challenge to capitalism.

The tasks of Marxists today are, first, to strip the liberal mask from the programme of Fabianism and to expose it as one more form of class collaboration. Secondly, they must arm the movement with the programme of class struggle for the nationalization of all the major industries without compensation and with workers' control.

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the rank and file, the Right-wing leadership has been able to depend on the support of the trade union bureaucracy, and especially on the leaderships of the three giants, the Transport and General Workers' Union, the National Union of General and Municipal Workers and the National Union of Mineworkers. Today the TGWU leaders are compelled to reflect the pressures of their rank and file and have moved sharply to the Left. The result is a complete transformation of the scene within the Labour Party. At Brighton the Left wing will emerge considerably strengthened and clearly in the ascendant, a warning to the leadership that the working class of Britain expects it to fight the next election on a socialist platform, and to put a socialist policy into practice when returned to power.

The fight of Labour's rank and file against its own bureaucracy has also been augmented by events on a world scale. The recent blows which have been dealt at the Stalinist bureaucracies in the Soviet Union, Hungary and Poland have also shaken the complacency of the social-democratic bureaucracies in the Western countries.

All over the world the working people are stirring as they prepare for the task of eliminating capitalism for ever and establishing a socialist society. Through its delegates at Brighton British labour has an opportunity to express its solidarity with that aim and set about ridding itself of the Tories as a first step on the road to socialism.

Lenin as Philosopher

Peter Fryer

IN THE first issue of *The New Reasoner* there is a discussion article by E. P. Thompson called 'Socialist Humanism: An Epistle to the Philistines'. One section of this article, entitled 'Questions of Theory'¹, includes a reference to Lenin's philosophical work *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*. The author seeks to show that several of the features of Stalinist ideology have their roots in Lenin's contribution to Marxist philosophy—that they can be traced to 'ambiguities in the thought of Marx and, even more, to mechanistic fallacies in Lenin's writings', these 'fallacies' being due to 'his concern with the first premise of materialism'. Lenin is accused in particular of holding a 'passive', 'automatic' theory of knowledge, of losing the concept of human agency in a 'grotesque' 'determinism', of transforming the Marxist view of the relationship of freedom and necessity into a theory whereby man's "freedom" becomes slavery to "necessity", and of being so 'absorbed in philosophical nuances' that he 'removed the cause of social change from the agency of man to the agency of economic necessity'. Thompson's attack is summarized in these words: 'Lenin's inspired political genius was not matched by an equal genius in the field of philosophy.'

In my opinion Thompson is here waging, under the cloak of correcting Lenin's 'mechanistic fallacies', an all-out assault on the philosophy of dialectical materialism. It is an assault on the dialectical materialist theory of knowledge, on historical materialism, on the Marxist conception of human freedom and how it is won, and, not least, on the dialectical method. Many such assaults have been made in the past, and one of the first duties of Marxists is to meet them. This is not an academic question of preserving the purity of an immutable doctrine, but a class duty, for dialectical materialism is above all else a tool in the hands of the working class for use in refashioning society, and whoever blunts the keen edge of this tool, no matter how slightly, is doing a disservice to the working-class movement. The work-

ing class needs a consistently materialist world outlook because only such an outlook can show it what its historical tasks are and how it can perform them. The entire history of the fight for materialism against idealism demonstrates that the slightest concession to idealism, under whatever fashionable and novel guise it presents itself—positivism, pragmatism, empirio-criticism, or even socialist humanism—has its own fatal and compelling logic, which leads inevitably into the swamp of subjectivism and solipsism. Between the various shades of idealism there are no impassable logical barriers: the only barrier is that between dialectical materialism and all other philosophical trends and schools, which in the last analysis serve the interests of exploiting classes by helping to justify, disguise and perpetuate their rule.

To E. P. Thompson, who has been waging a sturdy and admirable battle against Stalinism, these may sound 'hard' and dogmatic things to say. But when we are discussing materialism and idealism and their irreconcilability, we are in the realm of basic principles, where the requirements of the class struggle impose the need for complete clarity, firmness, consistency and partisanship. It would be in the highest degree improper to transfer eclectically methods which often have an important place in the political struggle—concessions, detours, alliances—to the philosophical field, for fear of being accused of 'dogmatism'. This would help neither the fight against Stalinism nor the fight against capitalism, both of which require the utmost firmness on principles and the utmost flexibility on other matters.

Besides that concern with the first and other premises of materialism which should animate every Marxist one further consideration has prompted the writing of this article. Not only must Marxist philosophy be defended from its revisers, but Lenin's immense and extraordinary contribution to it must be defended and fully appreciated, for Lenin the man of action cannot be properly understood in separation from Lenin the philosopher. How far some of Thompson's remarks spring

¹The New Reasoner, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 132-5, Summer 1957.

from the fact that there is as yet no English edition of Lenin's remarkable *Philosophical Notebooks* I do not know, but it is hard to see how he would have written in the way he did if he had been at all familiar with this fundamental work.

I. THE THEORY OF REFLECTION

According to Thompson, the first fallacy in Lenin's *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* is 'the repeated lumping together of ideas, consciousness, thought and sensations as "reflections" of material reality'. He adds in parentheses: 'But a sense-impression, which animals share with men, is not the same thing as an idea, which is the product of exceedingly complex cultural processes peculiar to men.'

It is important to understand that Thompson is here attacking not merely Lenin's views, but those of Marx and Engels too. This, of course, does not in itself make Lenin right and Thompson wrong, but it must be made clear that Lenin's theory of knowledge is no different from that of Marx and Engels, and that when Lenin writes that 'mind is secondary, a function of the brain, a reflection of the external world'¹, he is not adopting some new terminology.²

Levels of consciousness

Now Thompson, in the very act of accusing Lenin of 'lumping together' ideas, consciousness, thought and sensations as reflections of material reality, himself loosely 'lumps together' four disparate categories. Consciousness is a generic term for the relationship of animals (including men) with the external world that is brought about by the activity of the brain; it includes sensations, the elementary form of consciousness, perceptions (which Thompson unaccountably omits)—the fitting together of sensations into a complex but concrete representation of the complex relationships of complex objects—and ideas, which reproduce the properties and relations of things in abstraction, and which are, as Thompson says, specifically human.³ Thought is the name we give to this higher form of consciousness, where ideas are produced and manipulated.

Thompson's description of ideas as 'the product of exceedingly complicated cultural processes' is over-simplified and misleading. In comparison with the activity of animals many specifically human processes are undoubtedly complex. But there are manifold levels of complexity in human cultural (and other) processes, and corresponding to these there are a great many levels of abstraction in ideas (and hence in language), from elementary ideas (and words) that directly reflect the relationship of the thinker with other men and with objects and that relate to concrete activities and things directly perceptible by the senses, through concepts of varying degrees of abstraction, reflecting activities and things not directly perceptible by the senses, and their properties and relations, right up to such highly abstract and often far-fetched, illusory, mystifying, fan-

tastic and inverted reflections of men's social relations as religious, philosophical and political concepts and their elaboration in ideologies. But neither the abstract nature of ideas nor the apparent remoteness from reality and 'false consciousness' of ideological illusions make them any less reflections of material reality.

That ideas as well as sensations and perceptions are reflections of material reality is not a materialist dogma; though science has still much to find out about the brain all that it has found out so far serves to confirm the materialist theory of knowledge; and fresh proof is always being added. Anyone who wishes to show that ideas, as distinct from more elementary forms of consciousness, are *not* reflections of the objective universe, is not merely abandoning the materialist view of the relationship between object and subject; he is abandoning science. He is free to do so—but it is surely incumbent on him to explain in what sense ideas are *not* reflections of the objective world, how such ideas arise and what function they perform.

The contradictory nature of concepts

Thompson's confusion on the question of the relationship between the more advanced and the more elementary levels of consciousness tends in particular to blur one important aspect of their relationship, an aspect seemingly paradoxical but of great importance in understanding the nature of concepts and the genesis of philosophical idealism. At one and the same time concepts are closer to the objective reality they reflect and more remote from it than are sensations and perceptions. They are closer to objective reality because they reflect, with of course only approximate accuracy, the essential, internal relationships of phenomena, their laws of motion. Yet they are more remote because between nature and the abstract thought which reflects it there operates a series of mediations—language, technique, etc.—which, far from rendering concepts any less a reflection of reality, are indispensable for this reflection. These mediations express both the power of social practice and also its limitations, its relative lack of power at each given stage of social development. From this flows the dual, contradictory character of conceptual consciousness, in which are intermingled the true and the illusory, the scientific and the mystical, the known and the unknown (or rather yet to be known, and therefore guessed at, dreamed about), that which is tested and proved a million times a day and that which is fantastic and chimerical. Men's power to change their world progressively crystallizes out and perfects the scientific element in their concepts; their relative helplessness on the other hand gives rise to the tendency of abstract ideas to fly away from reality and weave themselves into marvellous, internally consistent systems of myth and illusion, from which the real world and real relationships of men to nature and men to men are then deduced. This mediation of human consciousness implies that the subject can never fully embrace the object, that concepts can never give a full, total, direct reflection of reality, can never contain the whole richness of the properties, qualities, relations and contradictions of the objective world. Theory need never be exactly 'grey'; but the most exact, splendid and exciting theory can never glow with the warmth, colour and immediacy of sensations and perceptions, whose content is the appearance, the phenomenon, not, as with concepts, the 'calm

¹Materialism and Empirio-Criticism (1952 edition), p. 85.

²See, e.g., Capital, vol. 1 (1946 edition), p. xxx; Dialectics of Nature (1954 edition), p. 271; Anti-Dühring (1954 edition), pp. 34, 467; Marx and Engels, Selected Works, vol. 2, p. 328.

³Nevertheless the 'uniqueness' of human thinking should not be exaggerated. At its more elementary levels of abstraction it is different only in degree from the mental processes of the higher animals.

reflection¹ of the phenomenon in its essence, in its laws.

The contradiction within concepts themselves between the element of knowledge and the element of fantasy and illusion runs through the history of human thinking, and will do as long as class or caste preconceptions require the maintenance of systematic deception and self-deception of people. It is a contradiction which is continually being reinforced by the gap between the subjective reflection of reality in concepts and the objective reality they reflect. If concepts were anything other than reflections of reality then this seed of the conflict between materialism and idealism that has dominated and shaped the entire history of philosophy could neither have existed nor germinated.

Consciousness as creator

The dialectical materialist view of the origin of ideas would indeed be mechanistic if it vouchsafed to ideas no active role in life. But dialectical materialism sharply opposes the view that ideas are a mere epiphenomenon, a useless froth on the surface of human activity, playing no more part in the direction of human affairs than the steam plays once it comes out of the locomotive funnel. When Thompson uses the words 'passive' and 'automatic'—'passive mirror-reflection of social reality', 'passive "reflection"', 'automatic "reflection"'—he is doing a grave injustice to the Leninist theory of knowledge, which places enormous stress on the active part played by ideas.²

Many quotations could be given to show that Lenin saw the process of the reflection of reality in the human brain, not as something 'passive' and 'automatic', but as a complex, contradictory, zigzag, dynamic process, in which a capital part is played by human practice; in which the mind passes from the reflection of the appearance of things to the reflection of their essence, their inner laws of motion; and in which knowledge tested and corrected in practice becomes more accurate and more profound. I will confine myself to five quotations.

Knowledge is the process by which thought endlessly and eternally draws nearer to the object. The reflection of nature in human thought must be understood, not in a 'dead', 'abstract' fashion, **not without movement, WITHOUT CONTRADICTIONS**, but in the eternal PROCESS of movement, of the birth and resolution of contradictions.³

In other words, consciousness is not a stereotype or mirror-image, but the dynamic reflection of a dynamic universe, which, if it were not reflected, would not be knowable. The dialectic of knowledge is

an endless process of the deepening of men's knowledge of things, phenomena, processes, etc., proceeding from appearance to essence and from essence less profound to essence more profound.⁴

When the (human) intelligence grapples with a particular thing, draws from it an image (= a concept), that is **not** a simple, direct, dead act, it is not a reflection in a mirror, but a complex, twofold, zigzag act. . .⁵

Knowledge is the reflection of nature by man. But it is

not a simple, direct, total reflection; this process consists of a whole series of abstractions, formulations, formations of concepts, of laws, etc.—and these concepts, laws, etc. . . . **embrace** relatively, approximately, the universal laws of an eternally moving and developing nature. Here there are **really**, objectively, **three** terms: (1) nature; (2) man's knowledge=man's **brain** (as the highest product of nature) and (3) the form in which nature is reflected in human knowledge; this form is the concepts, laws, categories, etc. Man cannot seize=reflect=reproduce nature in its **entirety**, in its 'direct totality'; all he can do is **eternally** draw closer to it by creating abstractions, concepts, laws, a scientific picture of the universe, etc., etc.¹

And lastly—and least 'mechanistic', 'passive' and 'automatic' of all!—"Human consciousness not only reflects the objective world but also creates it."² From Lenin the author of 'mechanistic fallacies' this may sound startling; but from the point of view of dialectical materialism it is as little an 'idealist fallacy' as Lenin's insistence on the secondary and derivative nature of ideas is a 'mechanistic fallacy'. There is no contradiction here. Lenin is calling attention to the part played by human practice in the development of knowledge—and by knowledge in the development of human practice.

Practice and knowledge

Social practice—production, experiment, industry, class struggle—is both the source and the criterion of knowledge. There is, according to Marxists, a sequence something like this. On the basis of their social practice, their immediate, direct experience in changing parts of material reality (and so changing themselves) men elaborate ideas, partly a true and accurate reflection of reality, partly a false and inaccurate or distorted reflection of it. On the basis of these ideas men then improve their practical activity, so testing and correcting their ideas, and sifting out truth from error, knowledge from illusion. This improved practice gives rise to further ideas, which approximate more closely to objective reality, to the essence of things—which are, in a word, more scientific. This is a never-ending process, in which consciousness develops through *acting on* the universe which gave rise to it, hence through *changing* the universe, hence in a sense through *creating* the universe.

It is social practice which enables men to pass from sensations and perceptions to ideas, since only our activity in changing material reality makes it possible for us to gain knowledge of it, to dig below the superficial aspect of things to their essence. It is ideas, thought, knowledge, which permit men so to shape and organize their practical activities as to change material reality more successfully and more fruitfully.

The word 'reflection', as used by Lenin of human consciousness, signifies *active* reflection, penetrating through social practice deeper and deeper into the inexhaustible vastness and richness of reality, and offering

¹Ibid. pp. 150-1.

¹Lenin, Cahiers philosophiques (Editions Sociales, 1955), p. 125.

²Thompson here—though he may not be aware of this—is not breaking new ground; his attack on the Marxist-Leninist theory of reflection was anticipated two years ago by M. Merleau-Ponty, professor at the Collège de France, in a book called *Les Aventures de la Dialectique*, in which he called this theory a 'return to naïve realism'.

³Cahiers philosophiques, p. 161.

⁴Ibid. p. 182.

⁵Ibid. p. 289.

²Ibid. p. 174. This and the dozens of similar quotations one could take from the Philosophical Notebooks seem to me to dispose of the second 'fallacy' Thompson finds: 'the repeated statement, in an emotive manner, that material reality is "primary" and "consciousness, thought, sensation" is "secondary", "derivative".' Thompson comments: 'Partially true; but we must guard against the emotional undertones that therefore thought is less important than material reality.' These are the words of a 'partial' materialist. The statement that consciousness is secondary and derivative implies nothing about its importance, but only says something about its origin.

to thinking men the possibility of bringing reality more and more (but never completely) under their conscious control.

It might be asked why such a theory is called by Marxists the 'theory of reflection', since this terminology gives critics the opportunity to talk about 'passive' and 'automatic' 'mirror-images', about 'the passive connotation sometimes attached by [Marx and Engels] to the concept of "reflection"'.¹

First, the word 'reflection' is the proper word because it draws attention to the most essential aspect of consciousness. Without an object to reflect there could be no reflection. Without a material universe there could be no consciousness.

Secondly, understood dialectically, the word 'reflection' as applied to consciousness signifies the specific form that the universal interaction and mutual dependence and determination of phenomena take in the case of organisms with a nervous system. Marxists mean by reflection in general not merely a subjective process in human consciousness, but first of all the unity and interdependence of every aspect of the infinite universe with every other aspect, the reciprocal interaction of everything with everything else. Every particle of matter is connected with the rest of the universe in manifold ways, at different levels of organization of matter, and reflects by its different forms of motion—mechanical, physical, chemical, etc.—and by its obedience to the laws of these different forms the whole of the universe which environs, conditions and determines it. With the transition to living matter, this property of 'reflection' takes qualitatively new forms, connected with the relationship of the living organism with its surroundings: new forms, which nevertheless continue on a higher plane, on the plane of consciousness, this universal interaction and interdependence. Where Lenin uses the word reflection he is using it in its deeper, dialectical sense.

II. SOCIAL BEING AND SOCIAL CONSCIOUSNESS

Thompson finds that 'Lenin slipped over from Marx's observation "social being determines social consciousness" to the quite different (and untrue) statement that "social consciousness reflects social being"'. The use of the term 'reflection' as an 'observation upon the way in which men's ideas have been determined by their "social being" in their history' does not, he says, 'follow from the first premise'—i.e., that 'sense-impressions "reflect" external material reality which exists independently of human consciousness'. 'Because a sense-impression may be described (metaphorically) as a "reflection" of material reality, it by no means follows that human culture is a passive mirror-reflection of social reality.'¹ Thompson suggests that Marx and Engels 'tended . . . to enquire very little into the problem of *how* men's ideas were formed, and wherein lay their field of *agency*'.²

¹Here again Thompson is following in the footsteps of . . . M. Merleau-Ponty, who caricatures historical materialism by writing of 'economic determinism', of the 'deduction of the whole of culture from the economy', of alleged Marxist demands that the history of culture must always be strictly 'parallel to political history' and that art must be judged by 'immediate political criteria' and by 'the political conformity of the author'.

²Even though 'the interaction between social environment and conscious agency . . . was central to their thought' and though Marx himself saw 'the neglect of agency' as 'the weakness of

This is rather confused. To begin with, Thompson seems far from sure whether he is criticizing Marx or attempting to play off 'partially true' Marx against 'untrue' Lenin. It must be said that the latter is not a very fruitful undertaking. The suggestion that Lenin 'slipped over' from an observation of Marx's—'social being determines social consciousness' (the actual quotation is: 'It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness'¹)—to the 'quite different' and 'untrue' observation of his own, that 'social consciousness reflects social being' is demolished instantly when we pick up the book from which Marx's observation is taken and read a little further. Soon we find Marx writing about the 'ideological forms in which men become conscious of [the] conflict [between forces of production and relations of production] and fight it out'. We cannot, Marx adds, judge of a period of social transformation by its own consciousness; 'on the contrary, this consciousness must be explained rather from the contradictions of material life'.²

Again, because Marx and Engels held the same opinion, and employed the same method of studying history, as Lenin, does not imply that they and Lenin were necessarily right and Thompson is necessarily wrong—but that Lenin 'slipped over' in good company.

Marxism and culture

While historical materialism views social consciousness as the reflection of social being, it should be pointed out that no Marxist has ever suggested that human culture is 'a passive mirror-reflection of social reality'. This is a caricature of Marxism. It is perfectly true that in a letter to Mehring in 1893 Engels made clear that he and Marx had been bound to lay the main emphasis on the derivation of ideology from basic economic facts and that in doing so 'we neglected the formal side—the way in which these notions come about—for the sake of the content'.³ But this is something quite different from their having suggested that art and literature passively mirrored social reality. On the contrary, Marx went out of his way to stress 'the unequal relation between the development of material production and art':

It is well known that certain periods of highest development of art stand in no direct connexion with the general development of society, nor with the material basis and the skeleton structure of its organization.⁴

Marx, Engels and Lenin did indeed see human culture as a reflection of material reality, but as a re-

mechanical materialism'. This apparent paradox Thompson makes no attempt to explain.

¹Marx and Engels, Selected Works, vol. 1, p. 329.

²Ibid. Cf. Capital, vol. 1, p. 51; The German Ideology, pp. 14, 39; T. B. Bottomore and Maximilien Rubel, Karl Marx: Selected Writings in Sociology and Social Philosophy (1956), p. 77; Marx and Engels, Selected Correspondence (1943 edition), p. 475; Marx and Engels, Selected Works, vol. 2, p. 105, etc., etc.

³Marx and Engels, Selected Correspondence, pp. 510-11. Cf. also p. 477: 'Marx and I are ourselves partly to blame for the fact that younger writers sometimes lay more stress on the economic side than is due to it. We had to emphasize this main principle in opposition to our adversaries, who denied it, and we had not always the time, the place or the opportunity to allow the other elements involved in the interaction to come into their rights.'

⁴A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, p. 309.

flection in the dialectical sense, not as a direct, immediate, mechanical, automatic, passive reflection. Certainly Lenin wrote an article called 'Leo Tolstoy as a Mirror of the Russian Revolution'—but almost every line is a refutation of the 'mechanical' and 'passive' view of artistic reflection and a striking affirmation of its profoundly contradictory nature.

Can you use the term mirror of something which obviously does not reflect phenomena correctly? . . . If it is a really great artist we have before us, his works are bound to have reflected at least some of the essential aspects of the revolution. . . . The contradictions in Tolstoy's works, views, teachings and school are glaring indeed. . . . On the one hand we have the brilliant artist who has produced not only incomparable pictures of Russian life but also first-class works of world literature. On the other hand we have a country squire acting the fool in Christ. . . . On the one hand we have a ruthless criticism of capitalist exploitation . . . on the other hand we have the fanatical preaching of 'non-resistance to evil'. . . . The contradictions in Tolstoy's views are really the mirror of those contradictory conditions in which the historical activity of the peasantry was placed in our revolution.¹

To Marxists there is in fact a constant and complex interaction among all the elements of the ideological superstructure, and, not least important, a constant and often extremely powerful reaction of men's ideas on the social and economic causes which give rise to them. The suggestion that because Marxists deny any independent historical development to ideological spheres they therefore deny them any effect on history was described by Engels as 'fatuous'.² He attributed this idea to a lack of understanding of dialectics, to a metaphysical conception of cause and effect as rigidly opposite poles, to a 'total disregarding of interaction'. It is equally fatuous to suggest that Marxists believe that works of art are no more than a reflection of economic needs and processes. If so they would surely have a higher regard—to take one obvious example—for Zola, the Left-wing writer, who believed that a good novel could be written by the methods of a journalist, who consciously carried realism to the point of naturalism, to the point of 'the direct, mechanical mirroring of the humdrum reality of capitalism',³ than for Balzac, the royalist, the legitimist, the reactionary. And Lenin would surely have had a higher regard, say, for Mayakovsky than for Pushkin. Marxism would indeed be an impoverished and sterile dogma if it had no more understanding of the process of artistic creation than Thompson gives it credit for.

The illusions of the epoch

Thompson's denial that social consciousness reflects social being prompts immediately the questions: what *does* social consciousness reflect if it does not reflect social being? What is the *content* of social consciousness, whence is it derived, what part does it play in life, if it is not essentially the expression in ideas of the social practice carried on by men in a given set of social relations? Or has the mind of the ideologist, the philosopher, theologian, legal theorist or artist, some special spring from which flow rich and wonderful ideas that do not reflect some real aspect of the objective world? Are ideologies spun out of ideologists' heads? If so, how? And how is their peculiar character to be explained?

Thompson makes no attempt to answer these ques-

¹Selected Works (twelve-volume edition), vol. 11, pp. 681-3.

²Marx and Engels, Selected Correspondence, p. 512.

³George Lukács, Studies in European Realism (1950), p. 93.

tions. Yet he does not hesitate to bring grist to the mill of all the many opponents of Marx and Lenin who oversimplify or vulgarize their views when he suggests that Lenin deduced the reflection of social being in social consciousness from the physiological fact that consciousness reflects being. Marxists have in fact made this generalization—the only consistently materialist generalization about the origin of ideologies—from a detailed, concrete study of social consciousness as it has evolved at widely different periods of history. If Marx's and Lenin's own writings are studied it will be seen that there are no 'ambiguities' in the thought of the one, or 'mechanical fallacies' in that of the other, on this question.

An examination of the history of human thinking shows that social practice, as determined by each specific set of social relations, is reflected in ideologies, not consciously, deliberately and accurately but spontaneously and often in an inverted fashion. Spontaneously, because ideological illusions constantly and irresistibly well up in men's minds out of the soil of their social relations. The ideologist seems to himself to be operating with 'pure' concepts; very often (and this is the more frequent, the more remote a particular ideological sphere is from the economic structure of society) the thought material with which he works contains little that is new, but is largely traditional material taken over from his predecessors; it is because its connexion with the real relationships in his own or earlier societies is unknown to the thinker that we speak of his 'false consciousness'. We do not thereby reproach him. He does not, generally speaking, set out to build a system of false ideas with which to deceive the exploited masses—or where he does he himself is just as profoundly deluded by fundamental preconceptions of whose real roots he has no inkling. Each generation of thinkers finds in existence a set of production relations without which society could not exist, which are independent of the will of the men who make up that society and of the ideas in the minds of the thinkers. These relations appear, not as historically determined and transitory, but as eternal and immutable. And again and again they colour the thought of the philosopher or artist, however original and brilliant he may be, stamp his work indelibly with the peculiar flavour of an epoch, seep into the remotest and most fantastic channels of thought. The characteristic illusions of each epoch¹ are at bottom the refraction of the social relations of that epoch through the prism of the ideologist's mind.

In this process of refraction reality is inverted. Men fancy that they have created their social relations in the image of their abstract ideas, and that their actions, institutions and conflicts are the practical expression of these abstract ideas. Social being seems to be the reflection of social consciousness. The harsh facts of class exploitation and class domination are disguised and sweetened by a vast body of illusory ideas which portray the existing state of affairs as just, heaven-decreed and permanent.

If it is 'untrue' that social consciousness reflects social being, then a long series of the most dramatic instances of correspondence between the development of ideology and the development of social relations is crying out for interpretation, explanation and analysis. To work, Comrade Thompson! Let us have your explana-

¹Cf. Marx and Engels, The German Ideology, p. 30.

tion of the philosophy of Heraclitus of Ephesus if it is not in essence the ideological reflection of new-born commodity production. Let us have your interpretation of the divine hierarchy of Thomas Aquinas, if it is not ultimately the reflection of the feudal hierarchy of his time. What is the mechanical materialist view of the world as a collection of discrete material particles interacting according to the laws of mechanics if it is not essentially a reflection of the need of the rising bourgeoisie for the smashing of feudal ties and the development of a free market? How are the materialism and humanism of Spinoza to be understood if not as the most logical and most profound expression of the interests of the revolutionary bourgeoisie of Europe's most advanced capitalist country in its struggle against feudal superstition and obscurantism—so logical and profound that the class for whom he spoke repudiated him? What was the basic content of Puritanism if not a reflection of a conflict in contemporary society in the minds of the revolutionary bourgeoisie of England?

Did Lenin neglect human agency?

But historical materialism does not stop there. It seeks to show, in each specific case, how these ideological reflections are functionally involved in the further development of the social structure which gave rise to them, often determining to a very great extent the *form* of a particular social transformation and the *speed* with which it takes place.

Thompson accuses Marx and Engels of tending to neglect the problem of the field of *agency* of men's ideas, and he implies that Lenin neglected it still more. This is a truly amazing charge. What on earth is *What is to be Done?* about if it is not a polemic against those who bowed to the spontaneity of the Labour movement and belittled the role of socialist ideas? Lenin took up arms precisely against those who said that the spontaneous movement of the workers gives rise to socialist ideology. On the contrary, he said, socialist consciousness must be brought to the working class from outside. 'Without a revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement.'¹ If Lenin 'lost' the concept of human agency and underestimated the role of human consciousness why did he spend his entire life building and educating a revolutionary party instead of sitting back and letting the revolution make itself? Perhaps Thompson is referring to some other Lenin: perhaps the Lenin he attacks for 'slipping' into the 'fallacy' that 'a passive "reflection" [can] initiate, plan, make revolutions' was a harmless fellow 'absorbed in philosophical nuances' and no relation to the man who spent thirty eventful years disproving in practice his namesake's alleged 'fallacies'.

A case of quotation-carving

In order to make some semblance of a case against Lenin, Thompson is not always careful in his use of quotations. In one passage in particular he not only quotes from Lenin's summary of an argument of Engels without making clear that the thought is Engels'; he follows this by carving up a quotation from *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* in such a way as to omit words which specifically take into account and answer the very objection which Thompson raises! Here is the passage from Thompson in full—in full (a) in order to be fair to

¹Lenin, Selected Works (twelve-volume edition), vol. 2, p. 47.

Thompson and (b) in order to demonstrate his technique of quotation-carving:

(4) From this [i.e., from the statement that 'social consciousness reflects social being'], he slipped over to the grotesque conclusion that 'social being is independent of the social consciousness of humanity'. (**How can conscious human beings, whose consciousness is employed in every act of labour, exist independently of their consciousness?**) (5) From this it was a small step to envisaging consciousness as a clumsy process of **adaptation** to independently-existing 'social being.' The necessity of nature is primary, and human will and mind secondary. The latter must necessarily and inevitably adapt themselves to the former.' (S.W.11, p. 248). 'The highest task of humanity is to comprehend the objective logic of economic evolution... so that it may be possible to adapt to it one's social consciousness... in as definite, clear and critical a fashion as possible.' (p. 376)

Two quotations, two examples of carving. The first quotation (S.W.11, p. 248) is from a passage in *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* where Lenin is summarizing an argument in *Anti-Dühring* and explaining its epistemological premises, and doing so quite fairly. The words immediately following the quotation chosen by Thompson are: 'Engels regards this as so obvious that he does not waste words explaining his view.'¹ Here is one of the 'grotesque', 'mechanical', 'clumsy', 'emotive' fallacies that Lenin 'slipped over' into—yet we find that, after all, it is only a paraphrase of something that Engels regarded as a commonplace of the materialist world outlook.

The second quotation, which Thompson splits into two without making clear he is doing so, leads him to ask a question, which I have emphasized above. Now here is the full passage from Lenin, with the words omitted by Thompson restored and emphasized:

Every individual producer in the world economic system realizes that he is introducing a certain change into the technique of production; every owner realizes that he exchanges certain products for others; but these producers and these owners do not realize that in doing so they are thereby changing social being. The sum-total of these changes in all their ramifications in the capitalist world economy could not be grasped even by seventy Marxes. The paramount thing is that the laws of these changes have been discovered, that the objective logic of these changes and their historical development have at bottom and in the main been disclosed—objective, not in the sense that a society of conscious beings, men, could exist and develop independently of the existence of conscious beings (and it is only such trifles that Bogdanov stresses by his "theory") but in the sense that social being is independent of the social consciousness of men. The fact that you live and conduct business, beget children, produce products and exchange them, gives rise to an objectively necessary chain of events, a chain of development, which is independent of your social consciousness, and is never grasped by the latter completely. The highest task of humanity is to comprehend this objective logic of economic evolution (the evolution of social life) in its general and fundamental features, so that it may be possible to adapt to it one's social consciousness and the consciousness of the advanced classes of all capitalist countries in as definite, clear and critical a fashion as possible.²

Note how Thompson's question is answered in the words he himself omits. Note how Lenin makes it absolutely clear that he is not talking about the crude idea, the 'trifle', that 'a society of conscious beings, men, could exist and develop independently of the existence of conscious beings', that 'conscious human beings, whose consciousness is employed in every act of labour [could] exist independently of their consciousness'—which is the way Thompson picks up and brandishes this 'trifle', for

¹Materialism and Empirio-Criticism, p. 191.

²Ibid. pp. 338-9.

all the world as if Lenin had never mentioned it.

If Lenin's philosophical writings have to be mutilated and tampered with in this way before his lack of philosophical genius and his 'fallacies' can be demonstrated, may this not indicate that the 'fallacies' exist only in the imagination of the critic? No one would wish to suggest that Thompson has deliberately falsified what Lenin wrote—but he seems to have reread a difficult text in haste in order to find confirmation in isolated sentences of his impression that this text contains the seeds of Stalinism. This impression has no real foundation, as Thompson himself would, one hopes, admit if he were to read *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* and the *Philosophical Notebooks* with the care they deserve.

The example Lenin gives here is one of great interest and dialectical beauty. Of course, he is saying, the men who produce and exchange are conscious. No one but a fool (or a 'trifler') would carry on the argument at that level. But they are conscious only of the *appearance* of the activities they are engaged in. The *essence*, the objective *laws* which govern the ultimate results of their productive and commercial efforts are hidden from them (precisely because human consciousness does not give an immediate mirror-reflection of reality!) and can only be brought to light through scientific research. It was this scientific research which Marx carried out in *Capital*. Here, through the 'force of abstraction', the essential laws of capitalist economy are revealed, the transition from appearance to essence, from phenomenon to law, is accomplished, and human consciousness is deepened, enriched and made more scientific as a result. No one but a fool or a 'trifler' would suggest that men are anything but conscious of the appearance of their economic activities; no one but a fool or a 'trifler' would suggest that, before science has probed below the surface, they are anything but unconscious—or at best conscious in the most rudimentary and sketchy way—of the essential 'social being' (value, surplus value, etc.) which exists independently of this limited consciousness. Whoever has not grasped the importance of this transition 'from appearance to essence and from essence less profound to essence more profound'¹ has not begun to appreciate the richness, complexity and scientific value of dialectical methodology—and is destined to be misled again and again by impressionism.

III. NECESSITY AND FREEDOM

The core of Thompson's attack on dialectical materialism is his attack on the Marxist conception of human freedom and how it is won. Once again, there is the attempt to separate Lenin's views from those of Marx and Engels. Marx is talking 'common sense'; Lenin "slips" into 'mystique':

Marx's common-sense view that man's freedom is enlarged by each enlargement of knowledge ('Freedom . . . consists in the control over ourselves and over external nature which is founded on knowledge of natural necessity,' Engels) is transformed into the mystique of man's freedom consisting in his recognizing and serving 'the objective logic of economic evolution': his 'freedom' becomes slavery to 'necessity'.

One or two preliminary points. First, we have already shown that one of the quotations from Lenin on which Thompson relies is in fact a paraphrase of Engels. But Engels 'slipped' a good deal, it seems. For, secondly,

here is a bit more of the quotation from *Anti-Dühring*, only the concluding sentence of which is given in parentheses by Thompson:

Freedom does not consist in the dream of independence from natural laws, but in the knowledge of these laws, and in the possibility this gives of systematically making them work towards definite ends. This holds good in relation both to the laws of external nature and to those which govern the bodily and mental existence of men themselves—two classes of laws which we can separate from each other at most only in thought but not in reality. Freedom of the will therefore means nothing but the capacity to make decisions with knowledge of the subject. Therefore the **freer** a man's judgment is in relation to a definite question, the greater is the **necessity** with which the content of this judgment will be determined.¹

Ponder that last sentence, Comrade Thompson. Here is 'common-sense' Engels calling us 'slaves to necessity'!

And thirdly, in the phrase 'his "freedom" becomes slavery to "necessity"', Thompson himself 'slips', alas, into the most blatant anthropomorphic superstition. His choice of words betrays the image in his mind: of human beings 'enslaved' to natural laws as if to laws of governments, and pining to be 'free' of them. To Thompson the path to freedom, it would appear, lies through ending this 'slavery': to Marxists the path to freedom lies through acknowledging the existence of objective laws, getting to know as much as possible about them, and adapting social practice accordingly. No amount of . . . 'emotive' talk about 'slavery' can alter Comrade Thompson's own dependence on, and the determination of his activities by, a range of objective laws: mechanical, physical, chemical, biological, physiological, social, etc. In practice he is bound by these laws twenty-four hours a day; he calls this 'slavery'. Well, let us be frank: Marxism does not admit the possibility of leaping outside the sphere of action of objective laws, of violating them or becoming 'free' from them. To Marxists such 'freedom' is neither possible nor has it meaning. Yet Marxism alone shows the way to the achievement of real human freedom. Let us try to see why.

Necessity

The category of necessity is closely bound up with those of essence and law. 'Law,' says Lenin, 'is the reflection of the essential in the movement of the universe.'² The law of a process of natural or social development states approximately the objective regularities, essential relationships and necessary connexions in that process. Scientific laws sum up more or less precisely the causal processes operating in events, tell us what characteristics a particular phenomenon is bound to manifest by its very nature and express the inevitability of its development in a particular way under particular conditions. The materialist recognition of the objectivity of being and its laws is, not yet freedom, but the requisite for all real freedom.

It is of course perfectly true that men act with conscious aims and intentions. But no attempt to explain human history in terms of the conscious aims and intentions, wills and desires of men will advance our understanding very far. Man's aims clash, and something happens which no one had intended, desired or foreseen. Therefore any scientific understanding of social develop-

¹Anti-Dühring, p. 158.

²Cahiers philosophiques, p. 126.

¹Cahiers philosophiques, p. 182.

ment has to start from the 'inner general laws'¹ which ultimately govern both the development of human society and the aims and intentions, ideas and theories, in people's heads.

People make their own history. But what determines the motives of people, of the mass of people, that is; what gives rise to the clash of conflicting ideas and strivings; what is the sum-total of all these clashes of the whole mass of human societies, what are the objective conditions of production of material life that form the basis of all historical activity of man; what is the law of development of these conditions—to all this Marx drew attention and pointed out the way to a scientific study of history as a uniform and law-governed process in all its immense variety and contradictoriness.²

To be free is not to violate the laws of nature and society, which is not possible. Men are no more the miracle-workers that idealists make them out to be (when they hold that freedom is really independence of the human will in relation to the laws of nature and society, or when they deny that there are any objective laws) than they are the puppets or robots that the mechanistic materialists take them for (when they hold that necessity is quite outside the reach of social practice, that human consciousness cannot take account of it and utilize it, that man is in effect a prisoner of objective laws).

To be free, according to dialectical materialism, is to act in accordance with objective laws. Every step forward in the knowledge of these laws is potentially a step forward in the conquest of freedom. Just as men enlarge their freedom in proportion to their knowledge of, and therefore their power over, nature, so men also enlarge their freedom in proportion to their knowledge of, and therefore their power over, their social life, as they foresee more and more precisely the effects of their social activity instead of being at the mercy of laws which, 'blind' and unreckoned with, lead to economic crises. To the extent that men plan their actions with knowledge of the factors involved, they are in a position to win real freedom.

The supreme example is the working-class struggle for socialism. Is the working class helped by ignorance of economic laws? Is it not rather by acquiring knowledge of its real situation that it becomes capable of revolutionizing society and so winning freedom, since by its very class position it is in itself objectively the dissolution of capitalist society?³ Is it, in other words, such a terrible thing to tell the working class that its highest responsibility is to adapt its consciousness to the objective realities of economic development 'in as definite, clear and critical fashion as possible'⁴—to equip itself, that is to say, with knowledge of the history and workings of the capitalist system and its own tasks in the struggle for that system's overthrow? A strange kind of humanism which, at the same time as it stresses the importance of human consciousness, turns its back on this fundamental requirement of any successful working

class struggle: that it should be consciously based on knowledge of the realities of society, on the laws of social change. A strange kind of humanism which would disarm the working class by advising it not to acquire such knowledge.

Lenin points to the road to freedom for the workers. Enrich your consciousness, he says, with as accurate knowledge as possible of the laws of social development. Don't listen to him, cries Comrade Thompson; he wants you to adapt yourselves clumsily to 'economic stimuli'; he is absorbed in philosophical nuances. . . .

Lenin knows full well that the level of consciousness of the working class does not depend automatically on its class position. He knows that the ideological superstructure of bourgeois society fosters all kinds of illusions to sap the workers' confidence in their strength, to make them think they cannot do very much to improve things, to make them support the capitalist system. He knows that socialist theory depends on knowledge of the essence of capitalism, not its appearance, and that this profound knowledge can only be brought to the working class from outside, by Marxists. Therefore he calls on communists to seek to 'adapt' the 'consciousness of the advanced classes' to the facts of historical development, i.e., to teach them, to educate them, to persuade them to 'adapt' their consciousness to . . . the truth. 'Such a pattern might be built within an electronic brain,' complains Comrade Thompson, professing, in the best tradition of English empiricism, his outrage at such a grotesque, mechanical fallacy, at such absorption in philosophical nuances. . . .

Freedom

To gain knowledge about things it is not enough to sit and contemplate them. We have to put them in the service of man, submit them to his needs and aims, work on them, change them. We get to know the laws of nature and society, not by divine inspiration, but by acting on them. And our knowledge of necessity, derived from our practical activity, applied, tested and made more accurate in further practical activity, is the indispensable premise and pre-condition of human freedom.

Of itself, knowledge of necessity is not enough automatically to confer freedom on us, as Thompson at one point seems to think ('Marx's common-sense view that man's freedom is enlarged by each enlargement of knowledge'). It is as yet only the *theoretical* expression of our relationship to necessity. When, however, we enter into *practical* relationships with necessity, when we *utilize* our knowledge in human practical activity, we win freedom thereby.

Until we know a law of nature, it, existing and acting independently and outside our mind, makes us slaves of 'blind necessity'. But once we come to know this law, which acts (as Marx pointed out a thousand times) **independently** of our will and our mind, we become the masters of nature. The mastery of nature manifested in human practice is a result of an objectively correct reflection within the human head of the phenomena and processes of nature, and is proof of the fact that this reflection (within the limits of what is revealed by practice) is objective, absolute and eternal truth.¹

Freedom is thus men's power to satisfy their needs and achieve their aims, based on knowledge of what their needs and aims are and how they can be satisfied and achieved. Men are unfree to the extent that they are

¹Marx and Engels, Selected Works, vol. 2, p. 354.

²Lenin, Marx Engels Marxism (1951 edition), p. 28.

³When the proletariat announces the dissolution of the existing social order, it only declares the secret of its own existence, for it constitutes the effective dissolution of this order—Marx, quoted Bottomore and Rubel, op. cit. pp. 182-3. Cf. also The Poverty of Philosophy (1956 edition), p.140: 'In the measure that history moves forward, and with it the struggle of the proletariat assumes clearer outlines. . . [the communists] have only to take note of what is happening before their eyes and to become its mouthpiece.'

⁴Materialism and Empirio-Criticism, p. 339.

¹Ibid. pp. 192-3.

ignorant of and therefore unable to control the factors which affect the satisfaction of their needs and the fulfilment of their aims. They are free to the extent that they know what these factors are and therefore in practice consciously control them.

Freedom is a specifically human attribute, which is won by men as social beings. In primitive times men faced natural forces blindly, and were therefore at the mercy of nature. They achieved freedom gradually in struggle, winning knowledge of necessity scrap by scrap and applying that knowledge in further struggle to win more knowledge, freedom and material progress.

Throughout class society men have faced their social relations rather as early man faced natural forces. For the most part social forces have appeared to be completely outside human control, and great social events, wars and revolutions and the collapse of empires, have presented themselves as catastrophes no less terrible and uncontrollable than natural calamities. Despite the tremendous increase in knowledge of natural laws in the past hundred years, bourgeois science has now for the most part despaired of foreseeing, explaining or controlling the wars and crises which periodically shake capitalist society to its foundations.

Again, men's progressive mastery over nature has been of only limited benefit to the masses of the people, because of their lack of social freedom. As long as society is dominated by successive exploiting classes it is possible neither to put forward in its full complexity nor to solve the problem of men's relationship with nature. An obsolete social system is hampering the proper application of human scientific and technical knowledge, utilizing advanced productive forces for profit and destruction and standing in the way of progress. The road to freedom lies through the overthrow of this system. It is the historical task of the working class, armed with the scientific knowledge of its real situation and tasks which is provided by Marxism, to end the social relations of capitalism which are acting as a fetter on the free development of the productive forces and as a barrier to their utilization for the free satisfaction of human needs. By carrying through the socialist revolution, establishing the dictatorship of the proletariat, building a socialist society and going forward to communism the working class wins social freedom—men's complete mastery over their own social organization—and makes possible gigantic strides forward in their conscious mastery over nature.

Thus, far from eliminating man and his activity, dialectical materialism shows how human society is necessarily developing; why men act as they do and think as they do; how freedom can be won; and which is the social force which, properly organized, equipped ideologically and led, can win it, so advancing the whole of humanity 'from the kingdom of necessity to the kingdom of freedom'.¹

IV. THE DIALECTICAL METHOD

In his reference to Lenin Thompson does not employ the word 'dialectic'. (Elsewhere he puts it in inverted commas, in a context where the meaning is equivocal, but where he seems to be equating dialectics with 'soul'.) His attack on the dialectical method is never

made explicit: but it is implicit in his whole attack on Lenin as philosopher. The theory of knowledge he opposes is a *dialectical* theory. The theory of ideologies he opposes is a *dialectical* theory. The theory of freedom he opposes is a *dialectical* theory. And since Lenin's outstanding contribution to philosophy was in the field of the dialectical method, Thompson's disparaging reference to 'philosophical nuances' can scarcely be interpreted as anything but a reproach to Lenin for his 'absorption' in *dialectics*. To Lenin, dialectics was 'the valuable fruit of the idealist systems . . . that pearl which those farmyard cocks, the Büchners, the Dührings and Co. (as well as Leclair, Mach, Avenarius and so forth), could not pick out from the dungheap of absolute idealism'.¹ Comrade Thompson, alas, does not recognize pearls when he sees them. But Lenin regarded dialectics as indispensable for the working-class movement if it was to understand and make use of the contradictions of capitalist society. It is not accidental that Lenin's central philosophical study was a long, almost page-by-page commentary on Hegel's *Science of Logic*, in which the method which Hegel enveloped in idealism is set right side up, worked through and digested from a materialist standpoint and revealed in all its intricacy, suppleness and above all precision, as the only method by which human thinking can fathom the complexity and many-sidedness of the eternal process of becoming.

It is not accidental that Lenin plunged into this study of Hegel in the autumn of 1914, at the very moment when the contradictions of capitalist society had come suddenly and explosively to the surface (and when the Second International had collapsed in opportunism and betrayal). Almost isolated in his opposition to the imperialist war, Lenin sought in the 'philosophical nuances' of Hegel the method by which events could be judged, not from their superficial aspects, but from their essential contradictions, leaps in development, revolutions, negations, transitions beyond the limit, transformations into the opposite. Lenin found in Hegel, understood materialistically, adequate philosophical justification for his judgment, to be so strikingly confirmed three years later, that the conditions for proletarian revolution had matured.

These notes on Hegel reveal, in a way that none other of Lenin's works reveals, the innermost workings of his mind as he chews over the thought of a profound and difficult thinker and extracts the vital juices.

The compass of the present article will not allow more than a sketchy and inadequate reference to the heart of the *Philosophical Notebooks*: the concept of contradiction. In the fight against Stalinism this concept, as elaborated by Lenin, has threefold importance. Stalin's well-known booklet *Dialectical and Historical Materialism* has more fundamental, and more serious, philosophical flaws than those Thompson discusses in his article (since Thompson concentrates on the section on historical materialism) and it needs, strangely enough, an acquaintance with Lenin's 'philosophical nuances' to understand and expose them. First, the section on the dialectical method stresses the struggle of opposites, but ignores their identity. This is of particular importance in considering the categories of dialectical logic which, despite their basic epistemological importance, are ig-

¹Anti-Dühring, p. 393.

¹Materialism and Empirio-Criticism, p. 250.

nored by Stalin: this is the booklet's second flaw.¹ And thirdly, there is no mention in it of the negation of negation, possibly because it might have been felt in 1938 to have awkward political implications (Zhdanov even invented in 1947 a new dialectical law, presumably to replace it—the 'law' of criticism and self-criticism).² The conception of contradiction set forth in the *Philosophical Notebooks* shows how essential to a proper understanding of the dialectical method are these three aspects of that method neglected by Stalin.

Identity of opposites

To Lenin dialectics was 'the theory which shows how opposites can be and habitually are (and become) identical—under what conditions they transform themselves into each other and become identical—why the human mind should not take these opposites as dead and rigid, but as living, conditional, mobile, changing into each other.'³ Applied subjectively, this suppleness, flexibility, elasticity of dialectical thinking became eclecticism and sophistry; applied objectively, i.e., reflecting the universality and unity of the material process of becoming, it was the precise, dialectical reflection of the eternal development of the universe.⁴ The identity of opposites was 'the recognition (discovery) of the contradictory, *mutually exclusive*, opposite tendencies in all phenomena and processes of nature (including mind and society)'.⁵ This side of dialectics, Lenin pointed out, usually received inadequate attention: the identity of opposites was not a sum-total of examples but a *law of knowledge* and of the objective world.⁶

The identity of opposites is of course an abstraction, and an abstraction of an exceedingly high level: one of the most general laws of universal becoming. The word 'identity' is here used not in the ordinary sense, but in a special, philosophical sense, which includes the notions of unity (or inseparability) in a single process, mutual penetration, mutual dependence, transformation of each into the other. The identity of opposites implies that the existence and development of each opposite is the condition for the existence and development of the other; that under certain conditions every property or aspect turns into its opposite; and that in the case of the categories both contradictory aspects are interwoven throughout the universe at every level of motion of matter. Lenin saw the identity of opposites as conditional, transitory and relative, the struggle of opposites as absolute, in the sense that development and motion

were absolute. Development was the struggle of opposites; this conception of development furnished the key to the self-movement of everything in existence, to the leaps, breaks in continuity and transformations into the opposite, to the destruction of the old and emergence of the new.

The categories of dialectical logic

There is before man a network of natural phenomena. The savage does not separate himself from nature. Conscious man does separate himself from it, and the categories are the degrees of this separation, i.e., of man's knowledge of the universe. They are nodal points in the network, which enable him to know it and assimilate it.¹

Thus does Lenin show that these most abstract of concepts, the categories of dialectical logic (i.e., of the dialectical materialist theory of knowledge) are derived from and linked with the whole of the concrete, material universe. Shamefully neglected by Stalinism, ostensibly because of their 'difficulty' but in reality because they expose the wooden schematism of Stalin's famous exegesis, the categories are indispensable for any genuine dialectical thought, investigation and research. We cannot think properly and precisely, we cannot grapple with changing reality, without them. And it was Lenin who more than any other Marxist developed this fundamental aspect of the dialectical method, and who left us indications drawn from his own experience as a student on the method of studying it in a way that discloses the elements of all the dialectical categories already present in any proposition or phenomenon.

To begin with the simplest, most ordinary, common, etc., with **any proposition**: the leaves of a tree are green; John is a man; Fido is a dog, etc. Here already we have **dialectics** . . . the **particular** is the **general** . . . Consequently, the opposites (the particular as opposed to the general) are identical: the particular exists only in the connexion that leads to the general. The general exists only in the particular and through the particular. Every particular is (in one way or another) a general. Every general is (a fragment, or a side, or the essence of) a particular. Every general only approximately comprises all the particular objects. Every particular enters into the general incompletely, etc., etc. Every particular is connected by thousands of transitions with other **kinds** of particulars (things, phenomena, processes), etc. **Here already** we have the elements, the germs, the concepts of **necessity**, of objective connexion in nature, etc. Here already we have the contingent and the necessary, the appearance and the essence; for when we say: John is a man, Fido is a dog, **this** is a leaf of a tree, etc., we disregard a number of attributes as **CONTINGENT**; we separate the essence from the appearance, and juxtapose the one to the other.

Thus in **any** given proposition we can (and must) disclose as in a 'nucleus' ('cell') the germs of **all** the elements of dialectics, and thereby show that dialectics is a property of all human knowledge in general.²

Of all the categories Lenin seems to have considered as most important, richest and most fruitful those of appearance and essence (with which are closely connected those of phenomenon and law). The identity and struggle of appearance and essence as two aspects (or 'moments') of material reality takes us at once right to the heart of the dialectical method, as a method of thinking about processes in a way that will give us more, and more precise, knowledge of their inner relationships and laws. The appearance at one and the same time hides the essence and reveals it, for 'the appearance is the essence in *one* of its determinations, in

¹After Stalin's death a certain 'rehabilitation' of the dialectical categories took place in Soviet philosophical writing. See, e.g., G. Gak, 'The Categories of Materialist Dialectics', *Kommunist*, 1954, no. 13, translated into French in *Recherches Sovietiques*, no. 1, pp. 35-57, 1956.

²These three flaws do not exhaust those to be found in the section on dialectics. For instance, the four so-called 'principal features of the Marxist dialectical method' are set forth schematically as if they were of equal methodological importance, and the question of the qualitative leap is put crudely and confusingly. For fifteen years this booklet gave millions of people their first—and often their only—account of Marxist philosophy, which is a great pity. Materialist dialectics is much more dialectical than Stalin's refurbishing of a series of newspaper articles written in 1906 makes it out to be.

³*Cahiers philosophiques*, p. 90.

⁴*Ibid.* p. 91.

⁵Marx Engels Marxism, pp. 332-3.

⁶*Ibid.* p. 332.

¹*Cahiers philosophiques*, p. 76.

²Marx Engels Marxism, pp. 334-5.

one of its aspects, in one of its moments'.¹

This thought is clear when we ponder over it a little. In analyzing any phenomenon we pass from superficial, perceptual knowledge, knowledge of its appearance, to knowledge of its essence; this in turn becomes for us an appearance which both hides and reveals a still deeper essence. Often the solution of a political or organizational problem—e.g., the analysis of a situation, the elaboration of a policy, the concentration of forces, etc.—turns on discovering concretely how and why at a given stage the essence of a particular process is manifested through certain events and masked by others. When we gain knowledge of the essence we can understand the appearance in a new light. Lenin gives an example: 'the movement of a river—the foam on top and the profound currents below. *But the foam also* is an expression of the essence.'² Each essence, each law, each necessity he discovers is for man a degree in the infinite process of acquiring more and more knowledge of the universal process of becoming in its unity, interconnection and interdependence.

It would be wrong to suppose that Lenin merely picked out from Hegel what was useful without *developing* his thought in a materialist fashion. The dialectic of appearance and essence, for instance, is more concrete and more dynamic, and hence more dialectical, in Lenin's hands than in Hegel's. To Hegel appearance and essence were in a state of logical coexistence. To Lenin they were in continuous dynamic interaction. At times the essential contradictions suddenly find expression—dramatically and explosively—in the appearance, as, for instance, when capitalist society is shaken by wars and revolutions. At other times the appearance is the arena of slow and gradual changes behind which the essence remains latent. Lack of understanding of this dialectical interaction is at the heart of much of the present confusion about events in the USSR in the minds of commentators and interpreters who see only the appearance of things, who misunderstand it, and who are therefore frequently thrown off balance by some new and unexpected turn of events.

The negation of negation

The law of negation of negation ('A development that seemingly repeats the stages already passed, but repeats them otherwise, on a higher basis... a development, so to speak, in spirals, not in a straight line'³) is fundamental to a correct understanding of the profoundly contradictory nature of development through stages, of the emergence of the new contradiction from the old, and of the subsumption, the transcendence, the 'overcoming and at the same time preservation'⁴ of the old in the new. 'Abolished' by Stalin, this law obstinately continues to operate in nature and society, even in the Soviet Union.

Lenin saw negation as the most important element in dialectics:

¹Cahiers philosophiques, p. 110. A 'moment' is an active determining factor in a process.

²Ibid. p. 108.

³Marx Engels Marxism, p.25.

⁴Cahiers philosophiques, p. 89. 'To transcend (aufheben) has this double meaning, that it signifies to keep or to preserve and also to make to cease, to finish.'—Hegel, Science of Logic, vol. 1, p. 119.

Neither barren negation, nor purposeless negation, nor sceptical negation, nor vacillation, nor doubt are characteristic or essential in dialectics—which of course contains, as its most important element even, the element of negation—no, negation as a moment of interconnection, as a moment of development which preserves the positive, i.e., without any vacillations, without any eclecticism.¹

Understood dialectically, negation is not mere empty negativity, the annihilation or destruction of something, but 'is equally positive... is something definite, possesses a determined content whose internal contradictions lead to the replacement of the old content by a new, higher content.'² The old is surpassed when it has produced the conditions for the new, when its internal contradictions have pushed it beyond itself, as it were, have driven it to its 'negation'; its own development leads to its negation; however the advance that has been made in the old stage is not destroyed but subsumed, 'transcended', overcome and preserved in the new.

The concept of negation is, so to say, the point where the dialectical laws of the identity and struggle of opposites and of the transformation of quantity into quality intersect. A process is said to be negated when the struggle of opposites within it drives it beyond its qualitative limit. It is often said that 'everything contains the seeds of that which will destroy it'. It is more accurate to say 'of that which will negate it'—and probably more accurate still to say 'everything contains its own negation'. For the negation is the new that grows within the womb of the old and finally supplants it.

But this is a never-ending process. Every new stage becomes in time an old stage; every negation is itself the arena of new contradictions, the soil of a new negation that leads inexorably forward to a new qualitative leap, to a still higher stage of development, carrying forward the advances made in the previous stages, often seeming to repeat—on a higher level, enriched by the intervening development—a stage already passed.

The negation of negation is thus a further 'transcendence', a further overcoming and preservation in the new of the stages already passed through. Frequently there is a return on a higher level to the original starting-point.

Too often the negation of negation has been presented as the 'sum-total of examples'—and often hackneyed examples at that. Examples have to be given, but the law is an abstraction, and its content is neither exhausted nor fully clarified by examples, for it is a universal law of nature, society and human knowledge.

The appearance of classes and the eventual destruction of the whole fabric of 'primitive' communist society was a negation of that society. Communism will be in many respects a return on a world scale to the human relationships and attitudes of 'primitive' society, enriched by all the scientific, technological and cultural discoveries and achievements of five thousand years of class society: in other words, the negation of class society, the negation of negation.

Old knowledge is continually being replaced—negated, not destroyed—by new knowledge. Hegel described the process rather well. 'Cognition', he wrote, 'rolls forward from content to content.' The concept

¹Cahiers philosophiques, p.185.

²Ibid. p. 79.

'raises to each next stage of determination the whole mass of its antecedent content, and by its dialectical progress not only loses nothing and leaves nothing behind, but carries with it all that it has acquired.'¹ 'This fragment,' commented Lenin, 'sums up dialectics rather well in its own way.'² But what Hegel saw as the self-development of the Idea, Lenin saw as the reflection in eternally deepening human knowledge of the development of material reality.

In every process of nature, society and thought we find in one form or another this 'repetition in the higher stage of certain features, properties, etc., of the lower and apparent return to the old'.³

Method

Lenin's 'absorption in philosophical nuances' twice led him to set forth tentatively, but highly suggestively, the elements of the dialectical method. In *Once Again on the Trade Unions, the Present Situation and the Mistakes of Comrades Trotsky and Bukharin* (1921) the requirements of dialectical logic are set forth under four headings. First, 'in order really to know an object we must embrace, study, all its sides, all connections and "mediations"'. Secondly, we should 'take an object in its development, its "self-movement" . . . in its changes'. Thirdly, 'the whole of human experience should enter the full "definition" of an object as a criterion of the truth and as a practical index of the object's connexion with what man requires'. Fourthly, 'dialectical logic teaches that "there is no abstract truth, truth is always concrete"'.⁴

In the *Philosophical Notebooks* the dialectical method is summarized from a different standpoint in sixteen points, which, though terse and unexemplified, constitute a highly dialectical presentation of this method:

- (1) **Objectivity** of investigation (not examples, not digressions, but the thing itself);
- (2) The totality of the manifold **relations** of each thing with others;
- (3) The **development** of the thing (or phenomenon), its own movement, its own life;
- (4) The internal contradictory **tendencies (and aspects)** in the thing;
- (5) The thing (phenomenon, etc.) as the sum and **unity of opposites**;
- (6) The struggle or unfolding of these opposites, the contradiction of the trends, etc.
- (7) The unity of analysis and synthesis—the analysis into separate elements and the totality, the sum, of these elements.
- (8) The relations of each thing (phenomenon, etc.) are not only manifold, but universal. Every thing (phenomenon, process, etc.) is connected with **everything** else.
- (9) Not only the unity of opposites, but the **transition of EACH** determination, quality, feature, aspect, property, into **every other** (into its opposite?);

(10) An infinite process of the discovery of new aspects, relationships;

(11) An infinite process of the deepening of human knowledge of things, phenomena, processes, etc., proceeding from appearance to essence and from essence less profound to essence more profound;

(12) From coexistence to causality and from one form of connexion and interdependence to another, deeper and more universal;

(13) The repetition in the higher stage of certain features, properties, etc. of the lower; and

(14) The apparent return to the old (negation of negation);

(15) Struggle of content with form and **vice versa**. Throwing off of the form, rearrangement of the content.

(16) Transition from quantity to quality and **vice versa**.

((15) and (16) are examples of (9))¹

Those to whom these sixteen 'philosophical nuances' appear too sententious will find practical examples of their concrete application throughout the whole of Lenin's political writings. 'Dialectics,' he wrote, 'can be briefly defined as the theory of the unity of opposites. The core of dialectics is thereby grasped, but explanation and development are needed.'² That explanation and development—materialist dialectics in action—are seen at their most concrete in the building of the Bolshevik Party, the carrying through of the October Revolution, the leadership of the Soviet State, and even in the campaign against bureaucracy which Lenin waged from his sick-bed until death silenced him. Those who study Lenin's approach to the problems which confronted him in the course of three decades of political activity are studying the masterly application of the dialectical method in the 'concrete analysis of concrete conditions'.

* * *

This article has merely touched the fringe of Lenin's creative work as a Marxist philosopher. Fields of great interest and topicality, such as his views on objectivity and partisanship and his theory of social-economic formations, have necessarily been omitted, since this is primarily a polemical and not an expository article. Conversely, only a very small part of 'Socialist Humanism' has been discussed: a mere couple of pages out of thirty-eight. There are many thought-provoking things (and many excellent things) in the other thirty-six. But the passage commented on here raises issues that are fundamental to Marxism, and 'a spoonful of tar spoils a barrel of honey'. Or, as somebody once remarked, 'to leave error unrefuted is to encourage intellectual immorality'.

¹Hegel, op.cit. vol. 2, pp. 482-3.

²Cahiers philosophiques, p. 189.

³Ibid. p. 185.

⁴Selected Works (twelve-volume edition), vol. 9, p. 66.

¹Cahiers philosophiques, pp. 181-2. English translations of these sixteen points appeared in the March 1932 Labour Monthly, in H. Levy, etc., *Aspects of Dialectical Materialism* (1934), pp. 14-16, and in David Guest, *A Text Book of Dialectical Materialism* (1939), pp. 47-9.

²Cahiers philosophiques, p. 182.

FROM 'SOCIAL-FASCISM' TO 'PEOPLE'S FRONT' *Joseph Redman*

'In essence the party continued its sectarian line of self-isolation—with special emphasis on denouncing the Left in the Labour movement, such as the ILP, as "the most dangerous enemies of the working class"—until Hitler's victory in 1933 gave a jolt to the entire world communist movement, and in Britain produced a certain thawing in relations with the ILP. A fairly clean break with the outlook of 1929 had to wait, however, until the Seventh World Congress, in 1935, with Dimitrov's speech on the united front against fascism.'

'The Communist Party and the Labour Left, 1925-1929' (Reasoner Pamphlet No. 1)

BETWEEN THE beginning of 1933 and the middle of 1936 the international communist movement underwent one of the most startling transformations of policy in all its history. From relegation of virtually all other political trends, and especially the social-democrats of all shades and grades, to the camp of fascism, it moved to a position of seeking a broad alliance inclusive of bourgeois and even extreme Right-wing groups. From abstract internationalism it swung over to the criticism of other parties for not being patriotic enough. From insistence on nothing short of a 'Revolutionary Workers' Government' it became the opponent of strikes and revolutions as inimical to the true interests of the working class. The purpose of this article is to trace briefly some of the stages in this evolution with particular reference to Britain, and to point out some of the factors responsible for it. The justification for such a study is that while there are many who appreciate the criminal folly of the Leftist phase of the communist parties, opened in 1928-29, with which my *Reasoner* pamphlet mainly deals, there are as yet comparatively few who have examined critically the succeeding phase, leading through the people's front and collective security campaigns to the world war of 1939 and the Nazi onslaught on the Soviet Union in 1941. The correction of 'Left' errors is grasped but not the commission of a fresh lot of 'Right' errors—and, what is most important, the underlying continuity of the decisive determining factors is not seen.

In view of the attempt sometimes made to show that the change of policy that began in 1933 was not a sudden one but the culmination of a gradual process with roots in earlier years and broadening down from precedent to precedent in traditional British fashion, it may be as well to begin with a quotation from Idris Cox's article in the *Communist Review* of July 1935, looking back over the previous few years: 'The campaign for the united front in Britain', he wrote, 'only commenced in real earnest after Hitler came to power, in March 1933. The manifesto of the Communist International proposing that approaches be made to the Labour Party and trade union organizations came as a surprise to the whole party, including the leadership.' This was understandable, as advocacy of the united front had been for the last three years one of the marks of the Trotskyite beast. Less than a year before, Harry Pollitt had denounced with fury the suggestion that as the capitalist crisis deepened so the gulf between the British communists and the Independent Labour Party

would be narrowed (*Which Way for the Workers?*). Now an appeal for unity had to be addressed to the ILP—and was accepted by them.

Concealed factors operating

Those who hoped that the Comintern had really learnt the lesson of Germany, so that a complete overhaul of communist thought and methods would now follow, were worried by the way the radical change of approach was combined with refusal to admit the disastrous consequences of the old policy. Heckert's report to the Comintern Executive in April presented a prospect of rising waves of struggle in Germany, with revolutionary battles in the offing, and this remained official Comintern theory right through to the Thirteenth Plenum in December, when Pyatnitsky made his notorious statement that 'in spite of the incredible terror, it is easier to work among the German proletariat now'. The ineffable R. F. Andrews (Andrew Rothstein) relayed this pernicious nonsense to British communists, assuring them that the German workers had 'retained their fighting forces still intact', that the German Communist Party had reorganized itself and was fighting better than ever before, etc.¹

The concern to play down the consequences of the old policy naturally hindered understanding of the need to go over to a new one. It also rendered perplexing the behaviour of the Soviet Government in this period. If Hitler's victory was so incomplete and his downfall so near, was it really necessary for the Russians to fall over themselves to renew the Soviet-German friendship treaty of 1926, which had been allowed to lapse some years earlier? Here the second concealed factor was operating. What determined international communist policy from 1933 onward was not only the utter collapse of the German Communist Party, along with all other working-class organizations in Germany, but also the extreme weakness of the USSR, caused by the economic, social and political crisis resulting from Stalin's 'complete collectivization in five years'. Neither of these factors could be publicly admitted—hence the new round of lies and prevarications which accompanied the change of policy, hindering and ultimately distorting it.

In the initial stages of the new policy there was no question of any bloc with sections of the capitalist class or of substituting 'anti-fascism' for socialism. Some of the communist leaders would doubtless have been astonished and indignant had they been told in 1933 what they were to say and write in 1936 and after! On the other hand, from the standpoint of 1936 some pretty ghastly Trotskyism was being put out in 1933 by, for example, R. P. Dutt ('Only the united working-class front can defeat the offensive of fascism. The victory of the united working-class front leads the way forward to the victory of the workers' revolution'—*Labour Monthly*,

¹Articles in *Labour Monthly*, April 1933, and *Communist Review*, May 1933.

May 1933. 'The fight against modern imperialist war can only be revolutionary civil war; any other supposed alternative can only mean in practice unity with imperialism.'—*ibid.*, August 1933). The idea being canvassed in Right-wing Labour circles that in view of Hitler's victory in Germany the traditional (and around this time strongly reaffirmed) attitude of British socialists towards war ought to be modified, met with particular scorn. Should a war break out between fascist Germany and fascist Poland, wrote J. R. Campbell (*Labour Monthly*, September 1933), the workers in each of these countries should fight against their own government, and workers elsewhere should oppose participation in the war. To talk of referring such a dispute to the League of Nations would be absurd, as this was dominated by Poland's allies. Communists must expose the attempt being made 'to convince the workers of France and Britain that their heavily-armed imperialist governments, because they have up to this moment preserved parliamentary institutions, are peace-loving and must be supported in any war waged against the countries of dictatorship.' It was all very well to howl at Hitler as a threat to peace, but were not French troops harrying Morocco and British aircraft bombing the North West Frontier tribesmen? (editorial, *Communist Review*, October 1933).¹

Of particular interest, in view of the emergence of the 'people's front' line not so long afterwards and the conflict with other sections of the working class movement to which it gave rise, is Dutt's critique (*Labour Monthly*, October 1933) of those social-democrats who, observing the substantial support won by fascists among the petty bourgeoisie, concluded from this the need to 'learn from fascism, that the workers' movement must adapt itself to the petty bourgeoisie, must drop the narrow working-class basis, broaden its basis, take on a "national" character, etc'. Against such views Dutt maintained that 'it is just the strong independent, fearless leadership and fight of the working class which is able to draw the petty bourgeoisie in its wake'.

At this point it should be mentioned that after the first panic reaction to Hitler's victory, the Comintern had recovered its old aplomb—once Hitler had shown that, for the time being at any rate, he was ready to remain on friendly terms with the USSR. (D. N. Pritt was later to argue, in *Light on Moscow* (1939), that 1933 was a year of close and growing friendship between Russia and Germany, which the former unselfishly sacrificed in order to make friends with the Western powers. This argument served Pritt's need of the moment, to furnish a 'justification' for the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact, but proved embarrassing later, when it was necessary to depict 1933 as a year of intensifying menace from Germany towards Russia, in order to provide thereby a 'safe' explanation of Stalin's alleged rise to dictatorial power in that year.) The old nonsense about 'social-fascism' was revived,² and nowhere except in Britain

¹Cf. R. F. Andrews: 'We may justifiably ask, is the Hitler dictatorship any worse than British rule in India?'—The Truth about Trotsky (February 1934), defending Soviet continuance of trade relations with Germany after Hitler's victory. (A typical Aunt Sally, incidentally, as Trotsky never called for a Soviet boycott of Germany in this period, pointing out that Stalin had so weakened the USSR that such a measure would probably harm Soviet interests more than Nazi Germany's).

²See, e.g., Whalley's article in *Labour Monthly*, February 1934, and Gallacher's pamphlet *Pensioners of Capitalism*.

was there any substantial progress in actually achieving a united front—while here it was confined to relations with the ILP, and the content of these relations increasingly became reduced to a struggle by King Street against 'Trotskyism' in the ILP. In particular, the anti-Labour Party line at elections continued unchanged. The West London Sub-District Congress denounced as Trotskyist a proposal by Chelsea communists to 'direct the party back into the situation of critical support' of the Labour Party.¹

Right moves for wrong reasons?

February 1934 saw the opening of a new phase with the attempted *coup d'état* in France. So late as January 24 the Central Committee of the French Communist Party had rejected the idea of offering a united front to the socialists, as this would only 'foster illusions' about the latter. At first the communist leadership in France tried to join in the fascist attack on the Radical Government (somewhat in the spirit of the 'Red-Brown Referendum' in Prussia in 1931),² but the spontaneous rallying of communist and socialist workers in unity against the fascist bands compelled them to manoeuvre. It was only a matter of manoeuvring however; though the communists officially supported the general strike against fascism, as soon as the immediate danger was past Thorez was once more fulminating against advocates of the united front (April 13, 1934).

Though not immediate as it had been in February, the danger of a fascist victory in France, perhaps leading to a Franco-German alliance, was now, however, always a possibility. The workers had been crushed in Austria and a Bonapartist type of régime installed which might well prove a mere transition to Nazi conquest. What seems to have finally decided Stalin to make a definite turn in the direction in which, since March 1933, only gestures and half-measures had been the rule, was Hitler's 'second *coup d'état*', on June 30, 1934, when the so-called Nazi Left (Roehm and the storm-troop leaders) were massacred. Trotsky had noted signs of Comintern wishful thinking about these people and their prospects as far back as June 1933 (*How Long Can Hitler Stay?*). Serious hope of conflict in the fascist camp had replaced the former denial of conflict between social-democracy and fascism. Ironically recalling a famous pronouncement of Stalin's, Trotsky commented: 'Reformists and fascists are twins; but a disappointed fascist and a fascist who has climbed into power are antipodes.' Nothing would come of this hope, he warned: Hitler would bribe or crush 'the refractory praetorians' and 'to expect an independent revolutionary initiative from this source [was] quite out of the question'. Following the Night of the Long Knives, Stalin appears to have decided that Hitler had come to stay and was growing dangerously powerful, and that it was necessary to proceed through the organization of 'pressure' upon Germany to induce Hitler to come to terms with him. To this Grand Design the tactics of the international communist movement were thenceforth increasingly subordinated.

The immediate effects seemed positive in so far as the task of forming a united front with the social-democrats was now taken up far more seriously than before. Thorez abandoned his April line, made a direct appeal

¹*Communist Review*, December 1933, January 1934.

²See, e.g., Jellinek's article in *Labour Monthly*, March 1934.

to the French socialists, and in July signed a pact with them. The Soviet Union's entry into the League of Nations, in September, marked the clearest expression yet of Stalin's departure from the traditional foreign policy of the October Revolution and move towards alignment with one imperialist combination against another. Shortly afterwards, in the last months of 1934, a bewilderingly rapid change came over British communist policy towards the Labour Party. The Right-wing leadership of that party had, during the first half of 1934, moved rapidly away from the anti-war position taken by the Labour Party conference in 1933, and in June had come out with a statement in favour of support for a British capitalist government in the event of war with fascist Germany. This had offered a most respectable pretext for intensified denunciation of the Labour Party by the communists. Now, however, without any inner-party discussion, on the very eve of the London municipal elections, Communist candidates were suddenly withdrawn from contests with Labour, and in the *Communist Review* for December Pollitt called for reconsideration of the party's approach to the question of 'a third Labour Government'.

Already at this time voices were heard saying that the Communist Party was doing the right thing (belatedly) for the wrong reasons, and that the practical implications of this would be seen in attempts by the communists, in objective alliance with the Right-wing Labour leaders, to break down Left Labour opposition to imperialist war. Just because of these warnings, communist publicists redoubled their assurances that this was not so at all. 'R. F. Andrews', in the *Labour Monthly* for November, attacked the view that peace could be ensured by co-operation between governments instead of workers' revolution, and sneered at those who put confidence in the League of Nations ('59 capitalist governments and one Soviet government'). 'The enemy is in our own country, we reply with Karl Liebknecht. . . . If we carry on a revolutionary struggle against imperialist war in Britain, we shall help the heroic German workers themselves to smash the brownshirts.' In his pamphlet (now rare) *The Labour Party and the Menace of War*, published about this time, the same writer insisted that if Germany were to attack Russia and then Britain attacked Germany, the British workers must oppose such a war and fight to overthrow their own government. This would be the best help they could render their Russian comrades. R. P. Dutt, in the *Labour Monthly* of January 1935, similarly warned against any refurbishing of imperialist 'national defence' under the guise of 'defence of democracy against fascism'. 'We need more than ever to warn the workers never to become entangled in the lines of imperialist policies, but to judge every question of war and peace solely from the standpoint of the working-class revolution.' Soviet participation in the League no more changed the League's character than communist participation in Parliament changed the character of Parliament. It was in 'the revolutionary struggle' that there lay 'the final decision of the issues of war and peace'. To support the British Government in conflict with Germany would 'confirm the nazi propaganda of the vanity of working-class internationalism'.

The month of February 1935 saw the British Communist Party at a high point in its fortunes—the highest since 1926. At the party congress held in that month it

was shown that membership had increased considerably and that members were no longer mostly unemployed, but on the contrary mostly held positions in their trade unions. During the second half of 1934 the party had raised its morale and enhanced its prestige by a successful campaign against the Mosley fascists. A detailed programme was adopted by the congress for socialist construction in a Britain ruled by workers' councils, following a revolution (*For Soviet Britain!*), and the congress resolution recognized the working-class united front as the way forward, leading to the defeat of the National Government and the election of a Labour Government, and so the provision of conditions for advance to workers' power. While it was recognized that broad sections of the petty bourgeoisie should be drawn into anti-fascist struggle behind the leadership of the working class, there were no illusions about any section of the capitalist class or any of the capitalist political groups; in his speech to the congress Pollitt singled out the Churchill trend in the Tory Party as a specially dangerous source of the danger of fascism. February 1935 saw the tremendous demonstrations against cuts in unemployed relief payments which forced the Government to restore these cuts and made *The Times* write of 'the spirit of 1926' being abroad again. In by-elections the Labour vote shot up above the record 1929 level. Trade union membership recorded the first increase since 1930. R. P. Dutt had every justification for writing in the *Labour Monthly* for March: 'The united front is advancing and we need already to be looking forward to the next stages of the fight.' His March 1935 preface to the second edition of his book *Fascism and Social Revolution* still put forward 'working-class revolution' as the answer to fascism: 'bourgeois democracy breeds fascism', and what is needed is 'revolution before fascism and preventing fascism'.

A year of 'might-have-been'

Like 1926 the year 1935 stands out as a year of 'might-have-been' in the history of the revolutionary workers' movement in Britain. To understand how the Communist Party helped the Right-wing Labour leaders to make 1935 end with a resounding election victory for the Tories it is necessary to look oversea again.

In the opening months of the year the French communists were vigorously campaigning along with Left socialists against the proposal to increase the military service period to two years. In April, however, a delegation from the Komsomol visited Paris. They held talks with the leadership of the French socialist youth which were later published by Fred Zeller, one of the participants (in *The Road for Revolutionary Socialists*). The Soviet spokesman Chemodanov explained that there was danger of a German attack on the USSR and that if it came French socialists must march against Germany. 'If, in this period, you make your revolution in France, you are traitors.' On May 2 France and the USSR signed a treaty of mutual assistance, and on May 15 Stalin and Laval issued a joint communiqué which read, in part: 'M. Stalin understands and fully approves the national defence policy of France in keeping her armed forces at the level required for security.' Commenting on this declaration, Trotsky wrote:

The French workers are forced every day to enter into agreements with the capitalists, so long as the latter continue to exist. A workers' State cannot renounce the right which every trade union has. But should a trade union leader, upon

signing a collective agreement, announce publicly that he recognizes and approves capitalist property, we would call such a leader a traitor. Stalin did not merely conclude a practical agreement, but on top and independent of that, he approved the growth of French militarism. Every class-conscious worker knows that the French army exists primarily to safeguard the property of a handful of exploiters, and to support the rule of bourgeois France over sixty million colonial slaves. Because of the just indignation aroused in the workers' ranks by Stalin's declaration, attempts are being made today . . . to explain that 'in practice' everything remains just as before. But we on our part do not put an iota of trust in them. The voluntary and demonstrative approval of French militarism by Stalin, one must suppose, was not intended to enlighten the French bourgeoisie, who did not at all need any urging and who met it quite ironically. Stalin's declaration could have had only one single aim: weakening the opposition of the French proletariat to its own imperialism in order to buy at this price the confidence of the French bourgeoisie in the stability of an alliance with Moscow.

When Lenin made his famous pact with the French military mission in 1918 he issued no declarations of solidarity with imperialist France, which would have disorientated the anti-war movement of the French workers—though Soviet Russia's position then was far more dangerous than in 1935. Now, however, 'for defence of the USSR the bureaucracy places its hopes in its political skill, in Litvinov's diplomacy, and in military alliances with France and Czechoslovakia, but not in the revolutionary proletariat. On the contrary, it fears that the French or Czech workers might, by inopportune action, frighten the new allies. It sets itself the task of putting the brake on the class struggle of the proletariat in "allied" countries.'

The consequences of the Stalin-Laval declaration soon made themselves felt in France. In the previous October, soon after Russia's entry into the League, Thorez had called for a broadening of the socialist-communist united front into a 'people's front' with the radicals, but the implications of this alliance with a capitalist party only now became fully obvious. Strikes which broke out in the summer of 1935 at the dockyards of Brest and Toulon were opposed by the communists as the work of 'fascist-Trotskyist provocateurs'. Within a few weeks the British communists adjusted their line in accordance with developments in France. At a conference called by the *Labour Monthly* in May George Allison was still saying:

We must be absolutely clear that under no circumstances can we support any kind of war that is waged by British imperialism. Even if circumstances force British imperialism into going into war alongside the Soviet Union, this would not alter the fact that British imperialism was waging a war to defend its Empire . . . We must make it clear that the working class can stage the fight against war, and in the process can actually stage the war against capitalism, which is actually the cause of all wars.

But in the August *Communist Review* J. R. Campbell was already raising the question: 'Can we argue that the proletariat's attitude to a war in which its bourgeoisie (for its own interests) is co-operating with the Soviet Union is the same as the attitude of the proletariat in a country which is attacking the Soviet Union?'—and answering it in the negative.

The Seventh (and last) World Congress of the Communist International, held in July and August 1935, had for its essential task the generalization on the world scale of the development which had taken place in France. 'The congress is important', wrote Trotsky, 'because it marks—after a period of vacillation and fumbling—the final entry of the Comintern into its "Fourth

Period",¹ which has for its slogan: "Power to Daladier!", for its banner the Tricolour and for its anthem the Marseillaise, drowning the *Internationale*.' From a means of struggle against capitalism the tactic of the united front had been perverted into a means of coalition with part of the bourgeoisie at the expense of the workers. The *Gleichschaltung* of the various Communist Parties followed rapidly in the weeks succeeding the world congress. Reporting on the congress in the October *Labour Monthly*, Pollitt affirmed that defence of the Soviet Union must mean support of 'everything that the Soviet Union does in its foreign policy'. If war should break out between Germany and Czechoslovakia, the communists must support the Czech ruling class. As regards the Italian attack on Abyssinia which had been in progress since early in the year, 'we must force economic and military sanctions if necessary'. (This was a particularly interesting development, as the communists had been opposing a campaign for an international trade union boycott of Italy—which would have involved the Soviet trade unions in stopping the flow of Russian oil to the fascists—and the Seventh World Congress had been strangely quiet on the Italo-Abyssinian War. Litvinov's attempts to woo Italy had apparently reached an impasse and there was need for a bit of pressure to be organized from Britain and France).

Pollitt's open call for 'military sanctions if necessary', i.e., for war with Italy, at once split the Left forces in the British working class movement. At the Labour Party conference in October the anti-war element, whose chief spokesman at that time was Cripps, found themselves confronted by a tacit alliance of the Right with those who took their line from the Communist Party. It was amid the confusion and mutual recrimination caused by the communist change of line that Baldwin held the General Election that gave Britain another spell of Tory Government, sufficient to take her into war and to the brink of disaster. What would have been unthinkable in February—a majority for the Tories—was accomplished in November. While the major responsibility for making this possible probably rests on the Right-wing Labour leaders, some share must certainly be borne by the Communist Party. The masses appear to have reasoned in the usual way: if both sides are advocating Tory policy, that's a sound argument for voting Tory.

In the period of the 1935 General Election the communists completed their return to their pre-1928 relationship with the Labour Party by withdrawing all of their own candidates (except two) and giving active help to Labour candidates, and by applying again for affiliation to the Labour Party. Left socialists who had regretted the self-isolation of the Communist Party after 1928 and worked to bring communists and Labour together again viewed this development with mixed feelings: in what sense would the admission of this pro-sanctions party strengthen the forces of revolutionary Marxism in the ranks of Labour? The degeneration of the communist leaders was indeed rapid in the early months of 1936. In the *Labour Monthly* for February we find Gallacher jeering at Cripps for "the usual "Left"

¹The reference is to the 'Third Period' announced by the Sixth World Congress in 1928 (and never explicitly wound up). This was to have been a period of the ending of capitalist stabilization, of a new round of wars and revolutions, with social-democracy fully transformed into social-fascism.

phrases, about war being inevitable under capitalism, that all capitalist States were the same, and until we got socialism we could not get out of war . . . this confused jumble which was all directed towards weakening support for the League of Nations and Collective Peace.

'Revolution in a single country'

Stalin's interview with Roy Howard (March 1, 1936) struck a new, even lower, keynote for the period now opening. In this interview Stalin abandoned all pretence of Marxist analysis of the international situation, substituting for class concepts those of 'the friends of peace' and 'the enemies of peace.' And when asked about the Soviet Union's 'plans and intentions for bringing about a world revolution', he replied that 'we never had such plans and intentions'—the idea that they had was 'a tragicomic misunderstanding'. This categorical repudiation of his own as well as Lenin's declarations regarding the Soviet State's attitude to the revolutionary movement abroad¹ dotted the I's and crossed the T's of the Stalin-Laval communiqué. Commenting on Stalin's declaration, Trotsky observed that while such a treaty as the Franco-Soviet alliance might well be inevitable, 'there is not the slightest need to call black white and to rebaptize bloody brigands as "friends of peace"'. The French bourgeoisie would not cease to criticize the Soviet Union from their own point of view just because they had signed a treaty with it, and their example ought to be copied. Such great actions of the Soviet people as the aid given to the Chinese revolution in 1924-27 and to the British strikers in 1926 could not be struck out of history by references to 'tragicomic misunderstandings'. The bourgeoisie would never forget them, though Stalin might succeed in making the world's workers forget them, to the peril of the Soviet Union. But it was full of sinister significance that the Soviet bureaucracy was coming out so openly as the opponent of revolution in the capitalist countries—'socialism in a single country' was being interpreted to imply 'revolution in a single country'. One might suppose that the Soviet leaders actually *feared* the rise of a mighty revolutionary movement in the capitalist world.

Stalin had included in his Howard interview a formal, vestigial reference to capitalism and imperialism, quite unconnected with the general line of his remarks. Even this was omitted from the address given by Ambassador Maisky to the Fabian Society a fortnight or so later.

The problem of peace in our time (he said) is primarily a problem of creating on the basis of collective security a firm and well-knit 'peace front' including all those powers which, for whatever motive (there is no need to analyse motives at the moment), desire peace and not war. If such a 'front' is really created, if in a short space of time it is transformed into a serious force, capable in case of extremity of talking to the aggressor in a language of tanks and machine guns, the peril of a new world war will be postponed for a very considerable period of time, maybe even for a whole generation.

¹E.g., in the original (April 1924) version of his Foundations of Leninism, Stalin had written that 'the fostering of revolution, the support of revolution, in other countries, is incumbent upon the countries where the revolution has triumphed'. This had merely confirmed Lenin's statement of 1915 that the proletariat of a country where the revolution had won would 'rise against the capitalist world, attracting the oppressed classes of other countries, raising among them revolts against the capitalists, launching, in the case of need, armed forces against the exploiting classes and their States.'

In April, in France, the 'classical' country of the people's front, Thorez made an election broadcast offering his hand to the fascist *Croix de Feu* on a 'patriotic', anti-German basis—a hint of what was to come later in Britain in relation to the Churchill Tories in whom Pollitt had not so long before seen one of the sources of the fascist danger. In June, when the French workers swept forward in a tremendous wave of stay-in strikes that recalled Italy in 1920, the communists called them back ('one must know when to end a strike') and settled for some wage increases which were soon cancelled out by the devaluation of the franc. This was the first instance of the people's front policy bringing the communists into opposition to the workers' revolutionary strivings on a nation-wide scale. (Soon afterward an even starker spectacle of the same order was to be seen in Spain, where in July and the succeeding months the communists prevented the carrying through of the workers' revolution and in effect ensured the ultimate triumph of Franco.)

Devoting his *Labour Monthly* notes of the month of June to the people's front, Dutt drew attention to the appearance of an English edition of Thorez's book on the subject. Cautiously, he still emphasized that in British conditions transforming the Labour Party was the key to achieving results comparable to those obtained by the people's front in France, and pointed out that the Liberal Party was 'a party of sections of the big bourgeoisie, not a party of the petty-bourgeoisie comparable to the French Radical Party'. (Trotsky had warned only shortly before that it would be fatal to identify the Radical Party with the middle classes, who were increasingly losing faith in it, and for good reason. 'The people's front, the conspiracy between the labour bureaucracy and the worst political exploiters of the middle classes, is capable only of killing the faith of the masses in the revolutionary road and of driving them into the arms of the fascist counter-revolution.') By the time the *Labour Monthly* for August was being put together, however, greater clarity had been achieved, or perhaps just greater boldness decided on, and William Rust wrote of the need to bring the liberals into the British people's front—this, incidentally, in an article regretting that the workers had shown little interest in the people's front idea and had even expressed concern lest propaganda for it should 'distract attention from the drive for the workers' united front'. The proposal to create a front embracing the liberals—and it will be remembered that the communists went so far as to call on the workers to vote liberal against Labour in the Aylesbury by-election in 1938—was indeed a strange one to make in British conditions and perhaps did more than anything else to confirm the suspicion in Left Labour circles that cynical motives quite remote from the interests of the working-class movement were at work in determining communist policy. (Trotsky, writing some years later, gave it as his view that 'the essence of the matter is that the Labour Party's policy is too radical for the Kremlin. An alliance of communists with Labour might bring in a certain nuance of anti-imperialism, which would hinder the *rapprochement* between Moscow and London. Having the liberals within the people's front means a direct and immediate veto by imperialism over the actions of the workers' parties.')

¹The 1936-39 period was to see the dismantling of communist-directed anti-imperialist organizations and a change in the

The middle months of 1936 close the period of transition with which this article is concerned, and open that in which the finished and hardened people's front policy was tested, so leading on inexorably to the next major historical period—that of the war of 1939-45. It is probably not coincidental that mid-1936 saw not only the

most open and thorough betrayal yet of the international workers' revolutionary movement but also the beginning of the wave of 'anti-Trotsky' frame-up trials in the Soviet Union. The foreign policy (including Comintern policy) of the Soviet bureaucracy and its home policy have always been closely interrelated.

NOTE

The nationalist propaganda and substitution of the 'people' concept for class concepts which the French, Czechoslovak and to some extent the British communists took up in 1935-36, on the basis of 'anti-fascism', had a curious precedent. In 1931-32 the German Communist Party, in a desperate attempt to compete with the nazis by some method other than the workers' united front, had gone in for German nationalism and the 'people's revolution'. The nazis were said to be preparing to sell out to French imperialism—seen as the chief danger to the German workers, (cf. R. P. Dutt in Labour Monthly, August 1931 and January 1932), and the German communists came forward as the 'true patriots' who would lead a struggle of the whole people to 'break the chains of Versailles'. The communist papers made a tremendous fuss of some officers who came over from the nazis to the Communist Party on a nationalist basis (see, e.g., the article by one of them, Lieutenant Scheringer, in Labour Monthly for May 1931). This only antagonized the genuine Left and internationalist elements among the social-democrats, while not in the long run weakening the nazis, who could always outbid the

communists at this game. One of the nationalist officers 'converted' to communism, Major Giesecke, is said to have handed over to Hitler a complete list of the personnel of the Communist Party's underground military organization, who were all arrested immediately after the nazis came to power, so paralysing any resistance that might have been made.

Trotsky's contemporary comment on this phase of German communist policy is interesting. 'These wretched revolutionists, in a conflict with any serious enemy, think first of all of how to imitate him, how to repaint themselves in his colours and how to win the masses by means of a smart trick and not by a revolutionary struggle. . . . Of course every great revolution is a people's or national revolution in the sense that it unites around the revolutionary class all the virile and creative forces of the nation and reconstructs the nation around a new core. But this is not a slogan, it is a sociological description of the revolution, which requires, moreover, precise and concrete definitions. But as a slogan, it is inane and charlatanish, market-competition with the fascists, paid for at the price of injecting confusion into the minds of the workers.'

Apartheid: the Class Basis

By a South African

Labour with a white skin cannot emancipate itself while labour with a black skin is branded.

KARL MARX.

THE 'COLOUR BAR' in South Africa is not something which was born after the advent to power of Dr. Malan and the Nationalist Party in 1946. It is inherent in the economic and political structure which has been built up in the centuries since the white man first set foot in the Cape of Good Hope.

All the white political parties have contributed their quota of legislation—legislation which had one basic theme—to drive deeper the wedge between workers with white skins and workers with dark skins. No matter what ideological arguments have been raised by the advocates of 'apartheid'—and South African politicians do not hesitate to invoke even the name of the Deity in support of the most vicious racial laws—the fundamental aims have been to create fissures between the various racial groups, the more effectively to subject them to capitalist exploitation.

The essential class character of colour bar legislation is evident from even a cursory examination of some of the laws enacted by the South African parliament. We need go no further back than 1910, the year in which the four British colonies—Cape Colony,

Transvaal, Orange Free State and Natal—came together in the Union of South Africa. The very Act of Union, passed into law by the British Parliament, ensured that the franchise should be the exclusive privilege of the whites. True, Africans in the Cape retained their voting rights (but not the right to sit as members of the Legislative Assembly) but the predomance of the white electorate guaranteed beforehand that, in time to come (as it came in 1936 with the Native Representation Act), the African voters would be removed from the Common Roll.¹ The same fate has now overtaken the coloured voters (people of mixed race).

Only a year after Union, at the instigation of the late General Smuts, the Mines and Works Act (1911) became law. This Act, which South Africans habitually refer to as the 'Colour Bar Act', reserves certain occupations in the mines for whites only. They are, of course, the skilled and supervisory jobs, the 'clean' work which brings in the biggest pay packets for the least possible outlay of energy. This Act was amended by the Nationalist Government in 1956 to make doubly sure that the African workers remain 'hewers of wood and drawers of water' and do not improve their industrial status. The Native Building Workers' Act of 1951 also established a legal colour bar by prohibiting African workers from competing with whites in areas reserved for white occupation.

party line on self-determination for the colonies which brought communists into sharp conflict with fighters for national independence (French North Africa providing the classic example).

¹The same process can now be seen at work in the Central African Federation.

But while these are the limits of the legal industrial colour bar, custom and convention have closed the doors of almost every skilled trade to African workers. This is in pursuance of the so-called civilized Labour policy which was long advocated by the South African Labour Party and which became Government policy when that party formed the Pact Government with the Nationalists under General Hertzog in 1924.¹ In Government and public departments preference is given to whites even for the more menial jobs, Africans being employed only because there are not enough white workers to go round. This ensures that there will be an adequate supply of cheap African labour for the mines and farms.

It is almost impossible for an African to become apprenticed to a trade.

Under the 'Industrial Conciliation Act', introduced by the Strydom Government last year, any trade or industry can be declared the preserve of any racial group. Thus the statutory colour bar is being extended.

As in industry, so in industrial relations, the colour bar impeded—and is designed to impede—the possible solidarity of white and black workers.

Up to now the white workers have enjoyed complete freedom to form trade unions and to engage in collective bargaining with the employers. They have had the right to strike or to sell their labour power where they will. But for Africans there was none of this. African trade unions are denied legal recognition. Strikes are prohibited. Freedom of movement is restricted under the various pass laws and the 'Natives (Urban Areas) Act'. Disputes with employers cannot be settled by direct negotiation but only through the intervention of Government officials.

The one thing all South African Governments have feared is the creation of a black, urbanized proletariat and, above all, an organized African working-class movement. This fear was expressed succinctly by the then Minister of Labour, Mr. B. J. Schoeman, speaking in the House of Assembly on August 4, 1953. He said: '... the stronger the Native trade union movement becomes, the more dangerous it would be to the Europeans of South Africa ... we would be committing race suicide if we give them that incentive.'

Here we have complete the synthesis between the European master race and the capitalist class. When Mr. Schoeman or Mr. Strydom talk of 'race suicide', they have in mind the overthrow of the whole system of capitalist economic relations, the defence of which is the determining aim of their apartheid policy.

'Apartheid', of course, is translated into English as 'separateness' and the ostensible aim of its advocates is to shut off each racial group into separate compartments with only the minimum of communication. But that is only the theoretical aim, bearing no relation at all to the practical realization.

The apartheid laws do not, in fact, separate black from white. In every South African factory and work-

shop, in every mine and commercial establishment, black and white workers are to be found side by side, taking part in the same work processes. All that the colour bar laws do is to impose severe restrictions upon the Africans in order to retard their progress and limit their earning powers. The Africans, who comprise 53 per cent of the labour force in South Africa¹, simply provide a vast reservoir of cheap, disciplined labour.

As a consequence of the racial policies of successive South African governments and especially since the Nationalists came to power and ruthlessly pursued that policy to its logical end (even if that end is 'Götterdämmerung'), the whole of the South African Labour movement has suffered grievously. In the political field the Labour Party is all but non-existent. Even its belated efforts to live down its own 'apartheid' past are in vain. The African, coloured and Asian workers have never had any faith in it; the English-speaking skilled workers, who formed its base, are being rapidly replaced by new recruits to industry from the countryside—African workers whose political allegiance is to the Nationalists and whose process of proletarianization is being delayed by their 'Herrenvolk' outlook.

In industrial organization, the Nationalist politicians have made skilful use of the prevailing racial prejudices to fragmentize the trade union movement. Today there are five separate trade union federations in South Africa, only one of which accepts the affiliation of African trade unions. Only one of the five federations is open to the workers of all races, the South African Congress of Trade Unions, whose affiliated unions are largely Africans.

Not satisfied with the voluntary (and often enthusiastic) apartheid of the white trade unions, the Government has now passed legislation compelling separate unions, not only for African workers but also for coloured and Asian workers.² And for the greater part the rank-and-file white trade unionists are not a bit concerned by this governmental interference with the internal affairs of the unions. Even if they wanted to the unions could not seek remedy by political action for they are now prohibited by law from affiliating to political parties or giving financial aid to political parties or candidates.

Thus the great South African trade unions, with many heroic fights to their credit, but never able to overcome their genetic weakness—white exclusiveness—are now paying the price which history inevitably demands from those who place self-interest before principles. As an effective force in the coming struggles in South Africa, the white trade unions will count for little.

It is to the African trade unions that the future belong. Apartheid has not kept the Africans out of the mines and factories. Economic laws are stronger, in the long run, than the laws enacted by parliaments and the development of South African industry demands an ever greater supply of labour. Only the African reserves and the surrounding territories can provide this. The industrial process itself teaches the need for organization and today there are 21 unions, with a membership

¹Today we are glad to see signs that the South African Labour Party regrets this shameful past and now consistently opposes the Government's apartheid policy. But it remains, essentially, the party of the skilled white (mainly English-speaking) workers and, thanks to its disgraceful history, is almost without influence in present-day South African politics.

¹White workers comprise 30 per cent, Coloured 13 per cent, Asians four per cent.

²Industrial Conciliation Act, 1956.

of 30,000, affiliated to the South African Congress of Trade Unions.

Despite prohibitive legislation and vicious punishments, there were 33 illegal strikes in 1954 and 73 in 1955. At every strike the police are called in and workers arrested. The odds against victory are tremendous and only rarely do the workers achieve their demands. But they have no other weapon and, until they forge a revolutionary party, no better one. Every strike, every defeat, prepares them for the next round of struggle and leaves them the better equipped to face the enemy. The famous Bus Strike was a tremendous demonstration of the African workers' capacity for organization

and to make sacrifices in the cause of solidarity.

The nightmare feared by the white 'Herrenvolk', the emergence of an African proletariat, is upon them. Mr. Schoeman and his friends are trembling in their boots as they see an African trade union movement being forged despite the repressive laws. They can hear the rumblings of the slaves rising in revolt against their chains. And their only answer is more arrests, more beatings, more shootings, more repressive racial laws. But nothing can stop the dark-skinned workers of South Africa joining their brothers in Central Africa, Ghana, Nigeria and Kenya as the 'Dark Continent' marches towards freedom and light.

An Open Letter to Professor Ostrovityanov

MARXISM, STALINISM AND POLITICAL ECONOMY

Tom Kemp

After an exceptionally long interval the textbook of political economy¹ which first appeared in Russian in 1954, and subsequently in a number of other languages, has now been made available in English. It is a heavy volume of some 850 pages, and its publication, well printed and bound, at the price of 21s. is no mean feat of 'political economy' in these times. The work has naturally evoked world-wide interest as a kind of summation of orthodox Soviet doctrine in the fields which it covers. The additions and emendations in the different editions have likewise been noted and commented upon as reflecting changes in the emphasis which leading Soviet circles have placed upon certain questions since the death of Stalin. By its nature, too, this work has been and will be accepted as authoritative by the Communist Parties of the world; in total circulation and mass influence it must rank well ahead of any similar publication. In the foreword the authors invite 'critical contributions and suggestions' and responding to this invitation, Tom Kemp, on behalf of Labour Review, sent the following letter:

**DEAR PROFESSOR OSTROVITYANOV
AND COLLEAGUES,**

I have taken part of my vacation to read thoroughly and ponder with care the work for which you are responsible and which has only recently been made available to English readers. Your invitation to readers to forward their comments on the book is welcome. What follows is my response to this invitation, in which I have selected a number of issues on which it seems to me that you deserve praise and—I am afraid, more often—somewhat sharp criticism. I would ask you to bear in mind that I am writing under conditions in which it is impossible for me to verify quotations and statistics or to consult or quote relevant works or data, including other language editions of the same work.

What strikes the reader in the first place is the unusual approach to the subject, compared with that current among most writers of what you would call 'bourgeois' economic textbooks. It is refreshing to find a text which approaches economic phenomena in a concrete, historical way; with an approach, that is to say, which derives directly from Marx. Moreover, when you follow more or less closely Marx's own economic

writing the exposition, though sometimes oversimplified after the manner of textbooks, is clear, concise and straightforward. All students will be able to consult these sections with profit, provided that they do not take them as substitutes for reading the originals.

These compliments having been paid, there remains the less pleasant problem of knowing where to begin with the host of unfavourable comments which I feel obliged to make. Because they are so numerous I will try to select those which appear to me to be most fundamental.

In the first part, dealing with pre-capitalist societies, there is much, I am sure, which anthropologists, prehistorians, sociologists and orientalist who also claim to work in the Marxist tradition will not be able fully to accept. The outline offered is schematic and dogmatic in fields where much is hypothetical and unsure.

THE ANALYSIS OF MODERN CAPITALISM

While many economists in this and other countries will be prepared to accept all, or most, of Marx's analysis of nineteenth century capitalism, they will be far from accepting your allegedly Marxist analysis of present-day capitalism. And this not through ill-will. 'Bourgeois economists' by no means form a homogeneous bloc of learned apologists and hangers-on of capitalist society. Many are sincerely worried about the inadequacies and sterilities of much non-Marxist economic thought—which is itself in a stage of protracted crisis—and would weigh seriously honest and thorough Marxist analysis of modern capitalist development. Such an analysis might well have won many new adherents to Marxism. It is to be feared that your textbook will do nothing of the kind and will have rather the contrary effect. I would go as far as to say that in dealing with modern capitalism you display a dogmatism and an ignorance of or disrespect for essential facts which, though diametrically opposed to the method of Marx and Lenin, will be taken by many as arising directly from it.

For the authors of the textbook the curve of capitalist development is always descending and the deterioration of the real wages and living conditions of the working class a continuous process, uninterrupted, it would seem, by plateaux or periods of improvement. You state as a law that 'as capitalism develops, a process of relative and absolute deterioration of the proletariat takes place' (p. 169). This is reiterated in a number of different forms—not merely as a tendency but as the expression of a real development. Free competition impoverishes the workers, the growth of monopoly impoverishes them still further. If the role of the State in economic life grows, this only leads to 'additional exploitation of the working

¹Political Economy. A Textbook issued by the Institute of Economics of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR. (Lawrence and Wishart, 21s.)

ple by way of a redistribution through the Budget of part of their incomes for the benefit of the bourgeoisie' (p. 247). The impoverishment of the working class and peasantry is both a cause and a result of crises. After the second world war had carried the process a stage further 'the bourgeoisie... restored the productive capacity of industry and to a considerable extent renewed it at the expense of intensified exploitation of the working people and lowering of their standard of living' (p. 360). For good measure we have Stalin's well-known 'basic economic law of monopoly capitalism', namely 'the securing of the maximum capitalist profit through the exploitation, ruin and impoverishment of the majority of the population of the given country...' and so on. The share of the national income received by the working class 'is so low that, as a rule, it does not guarantee them even the minimum needed for subsistence' (p. 244)—and, of course, is as a rule, declining. One is almost forced to believe that the working class is so hardy that over a period it has become possible for it to work harder and more intensively for less and less real income.

Flimsy statistical evidence

Lest it should be thought that these generalizations apply only to less fortunate capitalist countries, you are at pains to cite statistics applying to the USA, which is generally reckoned to be the richest capitalist country and the one in which the real income of the workers is highest. (I assume that you do accept this.) Thus we read on page 154 that the real wages of American workers fell by as much as 74 per cent between 1900 and 1938, and on page 151 that in the latter year the average wage of the employed industrial worker was less than half of the subsistence minimum. Lest we should assume that after all the thirties were years of depression we are later assured that 'real wages in the USA and Britain and especially in France and Italy have markedly declined as compared with pre-war' (p. 368). In other words we are asked to believe that American workers are worse off now than they were in the depression years.

It is noteworthy that these categorical assertions rest upon flimsy statistical evidence, taken mostly from undisclosed sources. Nothing is more difficult than to compare changes over time in living standards or real wages. There should be a place in your textbook for a full examination of this question, complete with reference to sources, and a whole chapter, not just a page or two, on those statistical techniques which play an increasing role in the investigation of economic problems.

Since it is clear that you do not exclude either the USA or Britain from your generalizations, one must believe that you are really in ignorance of economic developments in those countries over the past decade or so; or are deceiving yourself about them; or that you have deliberately painted developments in those countries in the blackest colours in order that Soviet citizens would bear more easily the painfully slow improvement in their own lot. It is no part of my intention to whitewash capitalism. I consider myself a Marxist. It would be as inaccurate to suppose that the recent history of changes in the conditions of the workers has been nothing but gain as to suggest that there has been no gain at all. Certainly this is the case as far as Britain is concerned (which has, for example, a virtually free, comprehensive medical service). British workers have experienced a decade and a half of full employment following a prolonged period of heavy employment. Not only has it enabled the trade unions to improve wage levels and win other concessions, but it has made an immeasurable difference to many working-class families. Regular work—even when it has meant overtime, long journeys, greater labour intensity, to put the worst possible case—will have enabled the family to buy, over the years, furniture and other durable consumer goods, to put by a little money, to have holidays and enjoy various amenities which twenty years ago would not have been within their reach. The British workers who read your book are bound to reject, from their own knowledge and experience, that part of it which purports to describe what is happening in their own particular sphere. That does not mean to say, of course, that they have necessarily become reconciled to capitalism or blindly follow Right-wing Labour leaders. Indeed in the last year or two they have shown a remarkable capacity to fight to defend their living standards from attack and to improve them in some cases.

Let me point out that I do not deny that there exists a **tendency** in capitalist society for workers' living standards to deteriorate. Even many revisionists, like John Strachey, do not deny the existence of such a tendency. Nor do I want to deny that the balance of gains and losses is difficult to strike and for

some categories may result in a negative quantity. For many workers conditions of work and housing are very low. The argument for deterioration is not clinched by pointing this out. Thus, I have before me an article by Maurice Thorez in which he takes issue with an Italian communist who had criticized the attitude of the French Communist Party on this question.¹ His refutation rests on extracts from an Italian Parliamentary report of an inquiry into poverty. But the whole crux of the argument depends on comparisons over time; in this case, was there more or less poverty under Mussolini? In order to establish a deterioration it does not suffice to show that conditions are bad but that they have become worse. This vital proof is lacking both in your textbook and in the writings of disciples such as Thorez.

It is not possible to accept your chapter on 'Crises' as anything but a superficial, confused and eclectic piece of writing, passages of which would do credit to a Keynesian. This chapter stands on the same theoretical level as the sections on capitalism since the second world war, which show little real understanding of the forces and factors at work in this period. 'War economy' has been a major factor, but what has been striking is that other sectors of the economy (motor cars, for instance) have also been running at a high level and that not worsening material conditions but rather the reverse has characterized the situation for the working class. Ready-made formulas, windy propaganda phrases, questionable statistics and wish-fulfillment are no substitute for the ample documentation and detailed analysis which distinguishes the work of Marx and Lenin.

Let us suppose, however, that your diagnosis of present-day capitalism is correct, i.e., that there has been a more or less unchecked deterioration of working-class living standards. You then state that this leads to discontent and the 'sharpening of the class struggle between proletariat and bourgeoisie' (p. 323). In reality it is hard to believe, however much one would like to, that as a result of 'the aggravation of the general crisis' the working class has been brought 'in real earnest to the socialist revolution' (same page) under the leadership of the Communist Parties. Either your diagnosis must be rejected or something has gone seriously wrong with the policy, tactics and leadership of these parties. No one can doubt that in most capitalist countries, including France and Italy, the Communist Parties are much weaker than they were ten years ago, and that their effectiveness in rousing and leading the people has considerably declined. How do you explain this fact? Even the Soviet reader who is not in close touch with conditions in those countries must be uneasily aware that the textbook does not conform to reality in these matters. Why not face facts and make a real, truthful explanation even though it may not prove a very comforting one?

THE ANALYSIS OF RUSSIAN ECONOMY

The second half of your book is given over to a detailed discussion of the economy of the USSR. I do not intend to raise every point on which it seems to me that you have twisted facts or substituted evasions or special pleadings for a full and frank analysis of things as they are—or were. There are, however, a number of questions which I should like to take up.

First of all, some events from the past. Is it still impossible in the Soviet Union to give an objective record of the past? Your account of collectivization is a highly idealized one which it is quite impossible to accept—like an account of the French Revolution that does not mention the guillotine. The treatment of the 'Trotskyists' is a masterpiece of hypocrisy and cynicism. Why not give the Left Opposition the credit they deserve for the far-sightedness of their platform and add some criticism of the wrong trails, followed by forced marches, unnecessary sacrifice of human life (including the wiping out of the Bolshevik Old Guard) and the intensification of police repression which was the price which Stalin exacted from the Russian people? How can we believe what you write about this period when in one sentence you tell us that the Trotskyists and Bukharinists 'defended the kulaks in every possible way, combated the creation of collective and State farms', and in the very next state blandly that 'the Communist Party routed the Trotskyist line of the exploitation and forcible expropriation of the peasantry by means of high prices for industrial goods and excessive taxes' (p. 470)? Could self-contradiction

¹Encore une fois la Pauperisation (reprint of article in Cahiers du Communisme, May 1957).

have been carried to further limits than this? Can we believe that the rapid collectivization of agriculture in 1929 was voluntary and that there was no exploitation of the peasantry? (Cf. chapter xxv passim.)

The central part of this section is the chapters on 'The Basic Economic Law of Socialism' and 'The Law of Planned Proportional Development'. It is here that the consequences of the assumption that the USSR represents fully achieved socialism are the most violent contradictions, despite your desperate attempts to prove otherwise. Because of your claim, any shortcomings in the USSR (and you do admit some) have to be attributed primarily not to objective factors but to 'survivals of capitalism in the consciousness of man [which] have not yet been fully overcome' (p. 541)—forty years after the October Revolution. And although 'contradictions' remain, you do not investigate them in detail, and they are of the kind which Mao Tse-tung prefers, i.e., they are of the 'non-antagonistic' variety. Can this claim be taken seriously?

Why this benign formula?

Let me question it from one aspect. You lay down as a general law of socialism 'the priority development of industries producing means of production'. Inevitably in the special conditions of the USSR—its backwardness and isolation—such priority had to find expression; but it is curious to make it part of a general law which would presumably apply also to advanced countries. The emphasis which you lay on this point can only be attributed to controversies arising inside the USSR—of which Stalin's Economic Problems gave some indications and which represented strains and tensions inside Soviet society. Their nature stands revealed in your own words. While on page 549 you state: 'Socialism [you mean the USSR—T.K.] has abolished the antagonistic contradiction between accumulation and consumption which is inherent in capitalism'—this does not at all square with statements on neighbouring pages. Those of us who have been following Soviet affairs with interest over the past years would say that such a contradiction has been basic to the changes in policy and top personnel which have been going on. The growth in the size and cultural and educational level of the Soviet people has made them clamour for more consumption goods (this is quite natural and nothing to do with capitalist mentality), while heavy emphasis has continued to be laid on the building up of means of production. You say yourselves: 'The level reached in the production of consumer goods and the rate of its growth are still not in accord with the increased needs of the population for these goods.' The reason is that the demands of consumption are in contradiction with those of accumulation. Why try to deny such an obvious economic reality with a benign formula?

Take another of your statements. Perhaps the translator has not been kind to you here, but I must make use of the English version: 'As a result of the considerable increase in recent years of the real wages of workers and other employees and also of the incomes of collective farmers, the demand of the working people for various commodities is developing much more rapidly than the increase in the output of mass consumer goods and food products' (p. 548). Perhaps you will be able to explain how **real wages** can increase considerably if the supply

of goods is increasing **less** rapidly than demand (do you mean monetary demand?) and how this can be squared with the alleged harmony of accumulation and consumption at that time. Or take the statement on the previous page that 'from 1940 to 1952... the gross output of agriculture in comparable prices increased overall by only 10 per cent—which clearly set sharp limits to the rate of increase in real income as far as food consumption is concerned. Allowing that the war had a good deal to do with this, does it not perhaps suggest that the method of agricultural collectivization was somewhat less successful than you claim and that the 'antithesis between town and country' was still an active force? Or perhaps agrarian policy was wrong; it has recently been admitted that Stalin was not a genius in this sphere. Perhaps later editions of your book will have to down-grade him in other connexions, too.

I would like to raise one final point. You find it necessary to defend at length, as good socialist practice, the payment of labour according to quantity and quality supplied, the need to appeal to the 'material interest' of the worker through differentials. I am not a defender of full income equality, but I should like a frank statement of just how far inequality has been carried under 'socialism' as practised in the USSR. Let us have in the chapter on national income a real break-down of the income by income groups so that we can see what share goes to, say, the 15 per cent of highest-paid officials, managers, technicians, 'working intelligentsia' and so on through the various 'income brackets'. Unless there is something to hide there seems no reason why this should not be done. And while you admit that there is still some way to go before the USSR catches up with and surpasses the level of productivity in the advanced industrial countries, why not admit too that absolute levels of income on a comparative basis are not yet on the side of the USSR, even as far as the working people are concerned?

I am ready to admit that the basic achievements of the October Revolution in certain spheres have proved themselves over the years. The nationalized property relations and planned economy which the Revolution made possible have proved themselves capable of exceptionally high rates of economic growth, establishing the USSR as the world's second industrial power. But the conquests of the revolution have been uneven and incomplete. The retention, under new names, of bourgeois norms of distribution, the existence of legalized and surreptitious forms of privilege (and thus of considerable inequalities of material conditions), the substitution of compulsion for persuasion (for example in the Labour Code), the absence of democracy in the factory and the trade union (except on paper), the scarcity of certain consumer goods and exceptionally low standards for many in such spheres as housing (side by side with luxury standards for a minority): all these show that a long road has to be travelled before the social structure in your country can claim the proud title of 'socialist'. Your textbook has not convinced me to the contrary, though such was the purpose of its pseudo-Marxist apologetics.

I hope that the sharpness of many of my criticisms will not prevent you from sending me a reply.

Yours in anticipation.

TOM KEMP

Communications

Three Speeches

I WOULD LIKE to express my disagreement with Michael Banda's analysis of three speeches made by three leading members of the Chinese Communist Party and the political conclusions he draws. Unfortunately many leading political commentators who do not readily take at their face value the utterances of Soviet leaders, particularly after the Twentieth Congress revelations, today fall easy prey to the statements and speeches of the present leaders of the New China. This is understandable in a way, as China has undergone a mighty

and progressive revolution which has shaken the old imperialist world to its foundations, while the Soviet Union has, at least on the political plane, departed farther and farther from the principles of the great October Revolution. And this is vividly in the memory of the present generation.

It is not surprising therefore that the Chinese leadership has escaped the same penetrating and searching critique that the Soviet leadership has been subjected to by socialists. Material on China, and the revolution in particular, is scanty. But this should not prevent a correct general appraisal of the present state of affairs in China.

The article 'Three Speeches' by Michael Banda [Labour Review, vol. 2, no. 4, pp. 103-6, July-August 1957] shows a marked and defined tendency to accept at face value the three speeches by Mao Tse-tung, Liu Shao-chi, and Chou En-lai. The distinct impression is left, for instance in his treatment of China's industrialization policy, that the Chinese communist leadership in its own empirical and blundering way has discovered that the Stalinist method of breakneck industrialization—itsself derived from the Stalinist theory of socialism in one country—just does not work. It is therefore forced willy-nilly, despite statements and pronouncements to the contrary by Mao and Chou, to 'depart from Soviet methods', that is, Stalinist methods. An illustration of this method of analysis is given in Michael Banda's treatment of the 'scissors crisis' (i.e. the growing discrepancy between agricultural and industrial prices leading to a rupture between the working class and the peasantry) as seen by Liu. He writes:

'The second blow to the utopian "theory" of Stalinism came when the régime modified its policy in relation to light industry. The point is made in Mao's speech, but is more fully elaborated in Liu's speech where he warns the party of what Trotsky once figuratively termed the "scissors crisis".' (p. 104)

* * *

He then quotes an extract from Liu's speech proving the point that Liu does, in fact, recognize the existence of the scissors crisis—but then he adds the following comment to it:

'This departure from Soviet methods will undoubtedly have repercussions in the Stalinist world—the assertions of Mao and Co. to the contrary notwithstanding.'

The mere fact that Liu recognizes the 'scissors crisis' does not automatically or necessarily imply that Liu and the Chinese Five Year Plan will now depart from 'Soviet' methods. Surely this is very impressionistic.

However this is by no means the central weakness of the analysis. The principal weakness is to be found in the author's comments on the Chinese bureaucracy. He makes the surprising comment that '**potentially** the most sinister and evil phenomenon in China today is the prolific growth of bureaucracy in the State and party apparatus'. (My emphasis—E.S.H.) If 'the most sinister and evil phenomenon in China today', 'the prolific growth of bureaucracy' is as yet only **potential**, then I find it difficult to explain why Mao Tse-tung is so alarmed about Hungary. Hungary was the extreme expression, not of a potential prolific growth of bureaucracy, but of the realization of this growth. If, as Michael Banda suggests, the growth of bureaucracy is still potential, then he is in fact comparing Mao's China with Lenin's Russia in the early heroic phase (1917-23). That this is the author's view is lent support by the sentences which follow. He writes:

'The further growth of this cancerous formation threatens [!] to separate the party and the State from the people. Such a state of affairs would inevitably lead to a new Hungary on a much vaster scale.'

* * *

The gist of the author's views on the 'new' course of the Chinese Communist Party is to be found here. At the present time the party and State are not separate from the people. His conclusion follows logically: Mao is not concerned about a Hungarian experience or repeat performance at this particular point in time, but as a future possibility.

I submit that these views do not at all correspond with the real situation in China today. Mao and his Stalinist leadership fear that the very real bureaucracy that grips the industrial development of China will precipitate a new Hungary on Chinese soil. Mao's speech is designed, not to adjust the leadership and bureaucracy to 'non-Soviet' methods (i.e., empirically adjust itself to the real needs of the Chinese revolution) but to protect this same bureaucracy from the fate that its Hungarian counterpart underwent last year. Surely this is the real point of these speeches.

London, S.W.

E. S. Hillman

Genuine Mistakes?

JOSEPH REDMAN is doing a useful service to the whole movement in digging out the facts about the General Strike period which the official 'historians' have for so long either neglected or hidden. We find this information of great help, in explaining to workers still in the Communist Party both that their troubles did not start just in the spring of 1956 and that they need not despair of finding out what has been wrong with the King Street clique.

But in these discussions we run up against a difficulty which so far Joseph Redman has not helped us to solve. The Communist Party members answer: 'All that you say may well be true, but perhaps these were just genuine mistakes.' If we want to explain how Stalinism got itself into the crisis of 1956 we have got to explain, in the same honest historical way, **why** the Communist Party leaders took a 'Right' turn just before the General Strike and **why** they turned to 'ultra-Leftism' in the 1928-33 period and then back again to seeking alliances with capitalists after 1933.

I would suggest to Joseph Redman that the leaders of the Communist Party have in reality always taken their lead from the Kremlin. That raises the question why the Kremlin should dictate to them in this country policies which have proved incapable of building a revolutionary party. These policies seem to me to be the consequence of the foreign policies of the Kremlin, and to spring from a general tendency to seek the defence of the USSR through alliances with forces in the world other than those of the working class itself. The struggle for peace in the period before the General Strike appears to have been seen by the Kremlin as a struggle to 'neutralize' the aggressive aims of British capitalism by seeking an alliance with the so-called 'Lefts' on the General Council of the Trades Union Congress. The struggle for peace in the next period (1928-34) appears to have been seen by them as a struggle to win the support of the German bourgeoisie against France and Britain, and against the Labour leaders whom they regarded as the main supporters of the League of Nations, the international committee of the powers that won the first world war and whose victory was expressed in the treaty of Versailles.

In 1933, Hitler's destruction of the German Communist Party and his anti-Soviet harangues gave the Kremlin a shock. Consequently, at the same time as Stalin was renewing the German-Soviet treaty of friendship after Hitler's accession to power, Radek wrote in Labour Monthly (June 1933), under the title of 'The Revision of the Versailles Treaty': 'The path of revision of the robbers' peace of Versailles is the path to the new world war.' This appears to me to be a complete reversal of the previous attitude of condemning the Versailles treaty and supporting the struggle of the German bourgeoisie for its revision. Two years later Stalin signed the pact with Laval and made the public statement that he understood and fully approved the rearmament of French capitalism under a reactionary government.

Redman could help us greatly if he could trace the deeper causes of the changes in policy for which he has produced the unassailable evidence.

Gloucester

T. Marshall

Joining the Labour Party

A. GREEN'S letter in the July-August Labour Review [p.ii of cover] shows once again that the new generation of socialists which is developing in the forum movement feels constantly the 'pull' towards joining the Labour Party as individual members. All but incurable dilettantes want to play their part in day-to-day political work and want to contribute their ideas as well. As the next General Election draws nearer, more, and more of us will doubtless get involved in helping with canvassing and such practical work to help put the Tories out and a Labour majority in; yet hardly anyone feels convinced by the Strachey line that the reformists can or will do the job of building socialism. Consequently those who plunge into the Labour Party may do so without any very clear idea of what they want to do when they get there, and those who have already spent part of their lives in arduous and unrewarding mass work under King Street leadership naturally do not want to squander more of their years.

A. Green indirectly points towards a solution, for his letter ends with the phrase 'I intend to remain in the Labour Party which is, at least, waging the class struggle'. The sectarians can seize on this loose phrase, for it is only too evident that the top leadership of the Labour Party, whose positions are owed to past class struggles and to the place of the workers in society, do not wage the class struggle and have no intention of doing so if they can avoid it. Further, they have no intention of letting anyone else wage it either, if they can help it. No one could claim that Transport House has taken any serious part in leading the widespread feeling against the Rents Act or the H-bomb tests. But in the ranks of the party it is different. Despite the passivity of the women's sections and the cliques of Right-wing councillors, there are in the Labour Party large numbers of militants who do their best to resist the trend of the official leadership. They usually have little theory to guide them, but they take up and carry forward in action many of the progressive phrases expressed by the Right wing, which the Right wing would like to remain as phrases.

These militants regard the Labour Party as **their** party; they have not developed any serious prospect of forming a new party.

In this sense the Labour Party offers to us all an opportunity to wage the class struggle and to fight from within, in alliance with a militant stratum, against the policies of the leaders. This seems to me to be a better chance to do our duty than exists outside the Labour Party, and I think that the General Election struggles will make the Left of the Labour Party an even stronger pole of attraction for working-class militants in the next year or so. But no one will listen to you in the Labour Party if you suddenly pop up from nowhere. We can earn the right to be heard in the coming struggles only if we start principled socialist work **now** among the Labour Party rank and file. The struggles to defend our working-class neighbours against the landlords offer an immediate chance to carry out joint work with the Labour Party militants.

Leicester

E. Stewart

Book Reviews

A Careerists' Textbook

The Fateful Years, by Hugh Dalton (London: Muller, 30s.)

THERE IS, so far as I know, no satisfactory textbook suitable for a young man who is about to embark on a Labour Party career. 'Getting on' is still a fumbling matter, learned by painful trial and error.

Dr Hugh Dalton, who has long been noted for his helpfulness to the young, has now done something towards filling this urgent need. He has published the second volume of his memoirs.

The book, which is written in the bluff, bouncing style of the real-life Dr Dalton, contains no list of do's or don't's. Yet it conveys more about what makes the Parliamentary Labour Party tick than any other work so far published. The service may be unintentional. But it is none the less a service.

At the top of the doctor's implicit list of qualifications is: a staggering personal conceit. Success will certainly elude a student politician who cannot honestly match utterances like this:

'I said that I was not a candidate for the leadership. I did not want it. This did not mean that, if at some later stage there was a strong demand that I should take it, I should necessarily refuse. But I had other desires.

'The Foreign Office was not a prize for which, in the present state of the world, one would hold out glad hands. But I believed that I could fill it better than anyone else in our party: And, if the external world was quiet, I would like to take over the Treasury and do something big on the home front.

'But, as for the leadership of our party, I thought that that should go to someone who had not had exceptional opportunities; to a man of working-class origin, who had not been to a public school or a university.'

This passage comes from a report of a conversation between Dalton and Herbert Morrison one Saturday morning in October 1935. It was Dalton's way of telling Morrison that he should run for the leadership—that he was the 'someone who had not had exceptional opportunities'.

Dalton records that Morrison was 'a good deal taken aback by this'. It does not seem to have crossed his mind why he was taken aback. But no wonder Herbert was surprised. Such naïve honesty must have shocked an old political warrior who had long been used to playing his cards very close to his chest.

Dalton follows up his account of this conversation with an enlightening record of the manoeuvres that preceded the election for the leadership. The comings and goings, the cosy dinner parties, the overt canvassing and the seedy little deceits—all are faithfully reported. But out of it emerges a second political qualification for our budding Labour leader: membership of the Freemasons.

For, having recorded the defeat of his candidate by Clem Attlee in a three-cornered contest, Dalton goes on to report an 'incident of some historical interest'.

The third candidate for the job was Arthur Greenwood. In a total first ballot of 135 he had polled 33 votes. And Dalton hints broadly where they came from: 'Four days before the party meeting there was held a meeting of a Masonic Lodge to which at that time a number of Labour MPs and some Transport House officials belonged. A list of members of this lodge was shown to me. No doubt voting at the party meeting was discussed, formally or informally, at their meeting. And Greenwood was the Masons' candidate.'

Dalton was not a Mason. Neither was Herbert. And Herbert lost. Would he have won if he had been a Mason? And who was the Masons' candidate when Herbert lost again, this time to Hugh Gaitskell?

But that is idle speculation. I return to our list of qualifications. A few sentences further on, a third stares us in the face: quick and disarming recovery from defeat.

Says Honest Hugh: 'Immediately after the party meeting I went to see Attlee. I said that, as no doubt he knew, I had backed Morrison and had worked pretty hard on his behalf. But now that the decision had been taken I accepted it. Now I should play in the team under his leadership.'

Poor Attlee (whose election Dalton described in his diary later that day as 'wretched and disheartening') seems to have been so stunned by this bald demand for a job that he promptly blurted out an invitation to be party spokesman on foreign affairs or finance—whichever bluff Hugh cared for most.

The next two items on our list of qualifications take us forward eight years—to the 1943 Party Conference at Central Hall, Westminster. Dalton's artless, knockabout account of the backstairs conduct of a fateful election for the party treasurer-ship illustrates the politician's urgent need for (1) a quick mind for figures, and (2) a remorseless capacity for ignoring the force of your opponent's case.

In a passage which could be swiftly and indetectably translated into Crossbencherese, the good doctor tells how he and a group which included Sam Watson and Morgan Phillips narrowly failed to get the luckless Herbert Morrison into the job which was ultimately filled by Arthur Greenwood.

The group met the night before Conference opened. Swiftly it totted up the block votes of the big trade unions, which were already committed among the three candidates (the third was Glenvil Hall).

They rightly came to the conclusion that Morrison would win only if there was a second ballot, when the National Union of Mineworkers could be expected to switch their vote from Hall to Morrison.

'How to get a second vote?' asks Dalton. 'There was no provision either way in Standing Orders. And the vote was to be taken next day. Some delegate must raise the question at the opening of the Conference.'

No sooner said than done. By means not detailed in the story, a Morrisonite persuaded a woman delegate to take the job on—even though she was herself voting for Greenwood and was therefore unwittingly assisting in the defeat of her own candidate.

Sadly, Dalton records that her intervention was not performed very effectively. The chairman of the Conference Arrangements Committee said it was not a matter for him.

So, with defeat staring him in the face, Dalton wrote urgent notes to the party chairman and secretary demanding a lunch-time meeting of the National Executive.

He got his way. But 'by now the Greenwoodites were in full force and full cry'. They 'sat together in the front row and tried to shout down everybody else'.

They argued that there was no precedent for a second vote, and that acceptance of one would mean that the whole method of electing the Executive would have to be changed too. Says the doctor: 'There was some force in this argument.'

But this was war. Undeterred by forceful argument, a second vote was moved, seconded—and carried by 11 votes to 10.

Victory? Oh no. 'When the figures were announced someone said to the chairman: "But you have got a vote too." Dobbs then gave his vote against the recommendation. It was "not carried".'

Even then, 'some of us considered whether, as a last resort, the Miners should not raise the question themselves at the opening of business next morning'. But the idea was dropped. It would cause a stony pro-Greenwood reaction—and in any case Lawther was no longer dead sure of the attitude of the miners' delegation.

So much for our list. One could go on endlessly picking illustrations from this book's breathtakingly frank record of the life and works of a rising socialist statesman. Its 483 pages should, indeed, be compulsory reading for every newcomer to a Labour Party conference.

Yet one qualification for success is missing from the present volume—though it may be included in the next. For Doctor Hugh Dalton, despite his sterling qualities, is now a political failure. And he failed for a tragically simple reason: his inability to control the tongue which has given us this splendid book.

The moral for our aspiring party leader: Don't blab.

JOHN LAUCLAN

The Iconoclast

The Theory of the Leisure Class, by Thorstein Veblen
(New York: The New American Library. A Mentor Reprint. 3s. 6d.)

THIS YEAR is the centenary of the birth of Thorstein Veblen, one of the most impudent iconoclasts of all time. The centenary is fittingly celebrated by the issue of a cheap edition of his most important work, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*.

Veblen was no friend of the Establishment, no conscience-stricken Fabian statistician and no sycophant of Stalin's. It is no accident that his work has received only perfunctory attention during the recent past from both bourgeois sociologists and 'Marxist' economic historians. Bourgeois scholars usually present Veblen as an eccentric cynic and discuss only the more amusing or startling of his views—or those which at first glance appear politically innocuous. They rarely state explicitly

that behind Veblen's ponderous prose, behind his tongue-in-the-cheek seriousness or even pomposity, there lies an incisive, merciless assault on all the values of the leisure class—an assault all the more telling for being delivered obliquely and in the involved vocabulary of the academician. The institutions and patterns of thoughts that have held Established Society together throughout the ages are submitted to an almost sadistic sifting. Nothing is sacred. Kings and gods, priests and professors, flag-wavers and flunkeys are exposed in all their nakedness. Everything is itemized, ironically inspected and dissected with ill-concealed delight: the affection of the ruling class for hunting and the design of their lawns, the pomp of their military ceremonial and the niceties of their table-manners, the consistency of their collars and the social graces of their wives, the behaviour expected of their servants and the education deemed apposite for their offspring. Veblen writes ironically on walking sticks, academic dress, pet poodles and grazing deer in the same manner as he derides both Popes and Caesars. There is an old French proverb 'ridicule kills'. No wonder our universities usually steer clear of Veblen.

The ambivalent attitude towards Veblen of those 'socialists' aware of his existence is a more interesting phenomenon. Veblen not only pointed out how the institutions and values of the 'leisure class' arose, but also described how these values tended to percolate 'from above downwards' throughout other strata of society—how they were most avidly accepted by those nearest to, but not of, the leisure class—and how they tended to be enthusiastically endorsed by those whose futile social aspiration it was to ape their 'betters.' In the process of dissemination, leisure-class values become somewhat modified if only to confirm the 'exigencies of economic necessity.' The whole mechanism is exposed whereby the values of those in power are transmitted into the ranks of the ruled, a mechanism involving the active and often conscious participation of men. Veblen's analysis illuminates the psychological attributes of labour bureaucracies from a new and most unusual angle. It is scarcely surprising therefore that a Labour leader, attending Court appropriately garbed, or performing some sacred ritual prior to receiving ribbons from 'his' Queen, should feel a trifle uneasy on reading Thorstein Veblen or that, dreaming of a Knighthood, some trade union leader about to call off a strike at the instigation of his 'conscience,' his church or his sense of 'fair play' should have little time for Veblen's socially subversive doctrines. For these are the very people whom Veblen was writing about.

Of greater interest still is the attitude to Veblen's classic of 'Marxists' brought up in the Stalin school. Following the October Revolution, Veblen was considered essential reading for communists, despite the fact that he rejected Marxist categories and terminology. The communists in the West, working for the overthrow of bourgeois society, were quite willing in those days to make use of Veblen's vitriol. But all this soon changed. As the Stalinist bureaucracy gradually crystallized into a new social formation it assumed, one by one, many of the attributes of previous leisure classes. The bureaucracy was rapidly to prove the most self-conscious and touchy of all parasitic social strata. It could not bear to look at itself in Veblen's merciless mirror! Veblen was dropped like a hot brick. To-day many Stalinist intellectuals have not even heard of his name.

It is Veblen's main contention that all class societies (irrespective of the specific property-relations on which they are based) are characterized by the existence of a 'leisure class.' By this term he denotes not a load of loafers—but a social group who do not participate in the productive process but enjoy what he calls 'industrial exemption'.

The emergence of this group coincides with the transition from primitive savagery to the lower stages of barbarism. It is the result of (a) the development of primitive technical skills, which ensures to the community a material surplus above the subsistence minimum and provides the material basis for 'industrial exemption'; (b) the division of labour, originally along lines of sex; and (c) an early invidious distinction between employments, according to which some employments are considered worthy and others unworthy. The worthy employments are in the nature of 'exploit,' and consist in coping with the animate environment. Industry, the coping with inert matter is unworthy and only fit for women . . . and later slaves. Labour became irksome because it was considered 'undignified'; it did not become 'undignified' because it was irksome.

With Veblen we enter a weird and fantastic world, a world moulded by the canons of conspicuous waste and populated by 'marginal gentlemen of leisure,' 'vicarious consumers,' envy-ridden emulators, exploit-obsessed monomaniacs, 'leisure-performing' priests, 'upper-class delinquents' and other such fancy fauna, all of them, without exception, allergic to productive work! It is Veblen's undoubted achievement to have shown irrefutably that this incredible set-up was in fact the world in which we live . . . and not the delusion of some misanthropic lunatic!

A reading of Veblen will provide for instance coherent and consistent answers to such startling and apparently unrelated queries as: Why do women wear high heels? Why are well pressed trousers aesthetically satisfying? Why should the butler be well groomed and speak impeccably? Why are Greek and Latin deemed essential requisites to a gentlemanly education? Why do certain houses have a tradesmen's entrance? Why are the drives of country mansions unnecessarily tortuous and why are their lawns clipped very short? Why should it be derogatory for the Queen to go fishing cod while she could with impunity indulge in a fox-hunt? But Veblen's theories also provide guidance in deeper waters. How, for instance, did the antithesis in class society between manual and intellectual labour arise? Why, psychologically, are war and patriotism so dear to the hearts of the ruling class? In consumption—or is emulation—the real motive force of acquisition and accumulation in a class society? And why, finally, do ruling-class values exert influences so far in excess of what the numerical strength of such strata would justify?

Any theory which claims to have the answers to such questions obviously deserves serious study by all who would change the structure of society. In regard to Veblen such a study will prove both entertaining and well worth while.

And yet for all the deftness with which he castigated the cultural pretensions of bourgeois society, Veblen was no Marxist. He was, it is true, influenced by the concept of historical materialism, but he remained a typical product of the left liberal economic school which flowered in America at the turn of the century, a school which sharpened the weapons of social criticism but refrained from wielding them in the interests of labour. Veblen was not, Mills tells us, 'what the nineteenth century called a decent man. He was a sure-footed old man who hated sham, realistically and romantically protesting against it in his manner of living as well as by his life work . . . one of those lean, masterless men, who are hated by plump flunkys.'

Although his ferocious wit punctured many a bubble, Veblen could not himself see beyond the horizons of the 'pecuniary culture.' He was aware of social inequality but saw no real struggle between the classes in society and no fundamental conflict in their interests. In fact it is doubtful whether he would have accepted the concept of 'class' in the Marxist sense. Within the limits of their means, the bourgeois and the proletariat of Veblen's world both indulged in conspicuous consumption. Both lived in the same society and both subscribed to its antiquated notions about 'prowess' and 'emulation.' Veblen saw the worker competing with his fellow-workers for 'pecuniary repute' and ceaselessly striving to attain unattainable ends, those ever-receding standards which would permit him to see himself as just a little better than his fellow-men. The ultimate proletarian objective, according to Veblen, was to enter the leisure class, not to abolish it! For Veblen failed to see that the working class would transcend the limits of 'pecuniary emulation' and through the abolition of classes give new values to society as a whole and direct human purpose along new and rational channels.

The 'Theory of the Leisure Class' is a work of considerable scope. It is far more than 'a criticism of the nouveau riche' in late nineteenth century America . . . which is most of what Wright Mills appears to have seen in the book. It is one of the foremost indictments of all societies based on private property, and a savage satire of the ludicrous effects this institution can have on human behaviour. As an interpretation of social inertia, of proletarian conservatism, of the transmission of ruling class ideas into the ranks of labour and of the ideology of privileged bureaucracies, it deserves a serious study by revolutionary socialists, a study it has not as yet received. As an adventure into the field of aesthetics and into the anatomy of snobbery it is interesting and amusing. But as a guide to political action Marx and Lenin undoubtedly had more to say.

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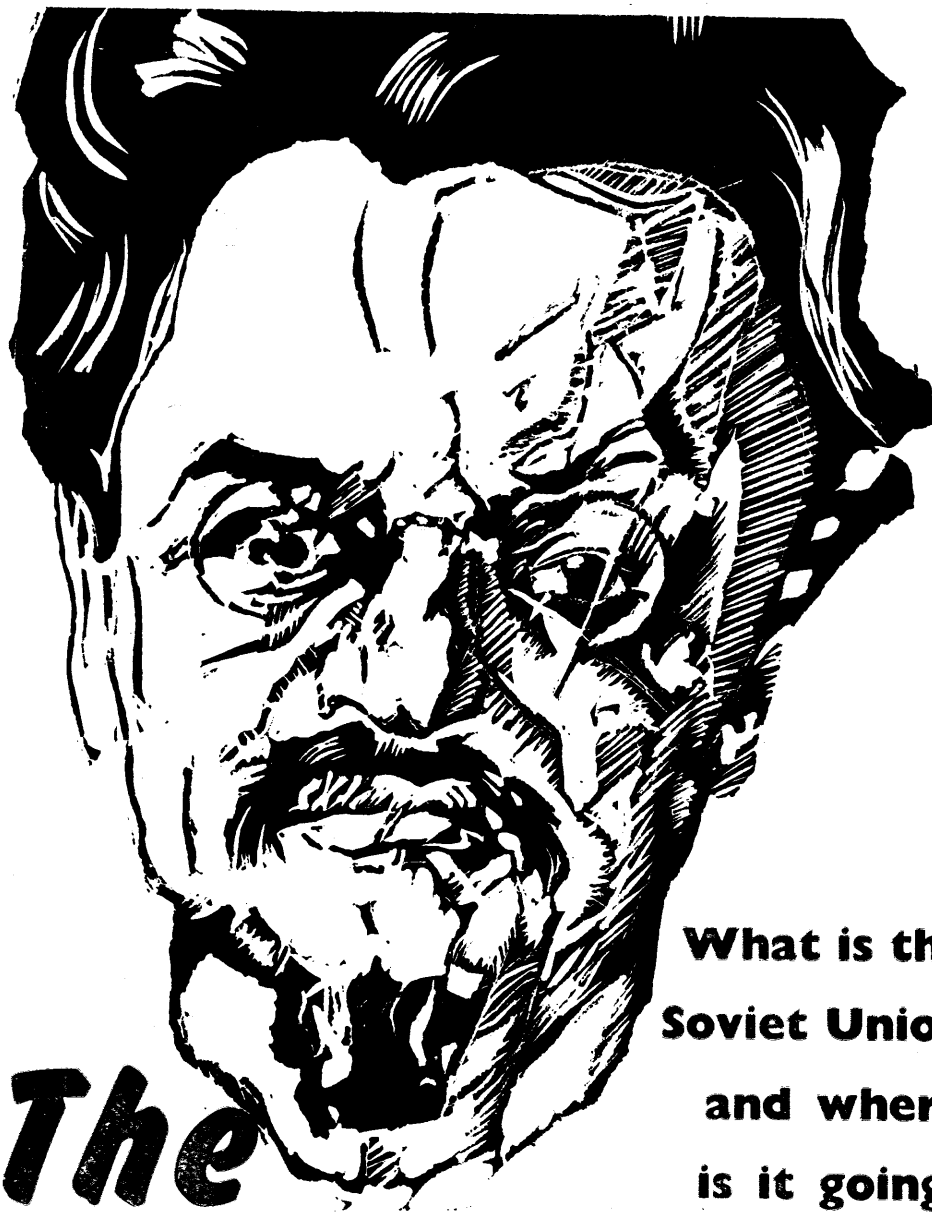
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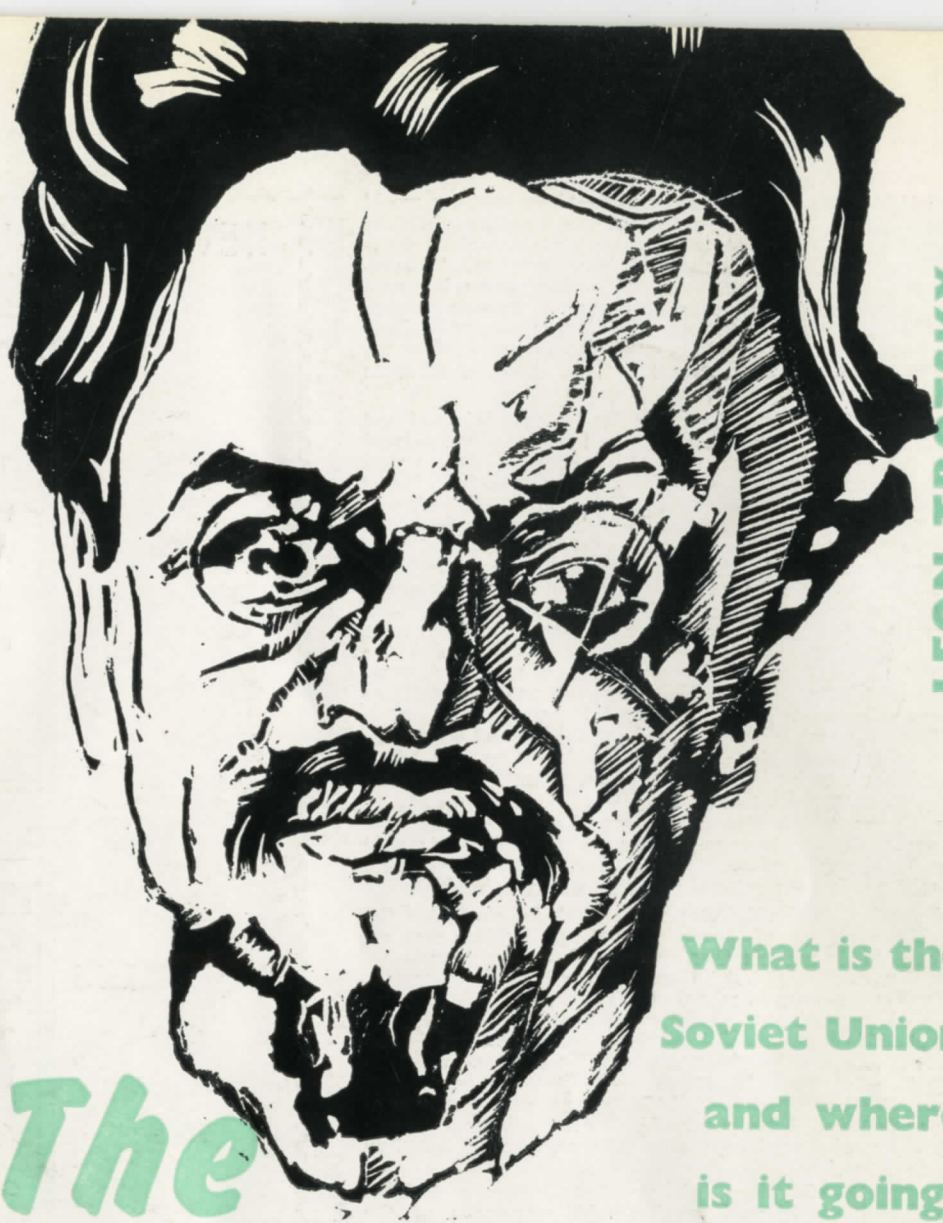
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