

THE
MARXIST No:50

RELIGION -
THE ALTERNATIVE

DRUGS

COMMENT:

CHINA

UNITED NATIONS

WELFARE STATE

PARTY POLITICAL
FUNDING

60p

The
MARXIST

EDITORIAL CORRESPONDENCE.

T.HILL.

11 BARRATT AVENUE

WOOD GREEN.

LONDON. N.22. 4.E.Z

SUBSCRIPTIONS.

F.HUSCROFT.

116 WOODHALL LANE.

SOUTH OXHEY

HERTS. WD1 6EY

SUBSCRIPTION RATES, (4 Issues).

BRITISH ISLES, £3. 00

EUROPE, £4. 00

OUTSIDE EUROPE. (SURFACE MAIL). £4. 00
(AIR MAIL). £6. 00.

PLEASE MAKE CHEQUES PAYABLE TO MARXIST PUBLICATIONS.

THE MARXIST. ISSN 0140-7856. Printed and published by Marxist Publications, 11 Barratt Avenue, Wood Green, London. N22 4 EZ.

July 1993

RELIGION

When Marx wrote, "When an idea grips the masses, it becomes a material force", he probably did not have religious ideas in mind, but the thesis holds true for all ideas, irrespective of whether they spring from materialist or idealist philosophies, therefore Marxists must pay attention to the impact of religious beliefs on contemporary society.

Over-emphasis on Marx's statement about religion being the opium of the people has tended to narrow discussion of the subject to the question of whether or not it has been a retarding influence on social development.

In our view this is a mechanistic, not a dialectical approach.

There is abundant evidence that belief in supernatural forces or beings has been a feature of human thought ever since homo sapiens first emerged in the evolutionary process. Although it is only a hypothesis, it makes sense to assume that it represented the earliest attempt by humans to come to terms conceptually with their natural environment. It marked the very first beginnings of philosophy.

What we now call superstition has two main aspects; one is to seek means of propitiating the 'gods', (sacrifices, etc.), the other, to influence the external world by 'magic'. What we now call science developed out of the observation and recording of seasonal changes and the migrational movement of animals, the development of tools, etc. Both are perceived as means of making nature serve human ends, and it is easy to appreciate how they would be regarded as being complementary rather than antagonistic to each other. The distinction between the two only becomes clearer as science develops in tandem with the growth in the productive forces, but it is conceivable that that distinction will never be universally accepted because human knowledge can never be absolute.

THE PERSONAL ASPECT

People in difficult situations use anything that comes to hand in the attempt to solve their problems, and if there is the remotest possibility that something may produce the desired effect, then it will be used, so that even today, many, perhaps a majority of people want to keep both options open, 'just in case'.

When science is perceived as being unable to provide an

answer there is a tendency to seek supernatural explanations for happenings that are not understood.

This is in evidence today, even in technologically advanced societies. In times of crisis, when things seem to be out of control, there is an increasing tendency to turn to 'god'. It is interesting to note that this 'turn' happens not only when nature seems to be vengeful, but also when societies themselves are in crisis.

This sometimes expresses itself in the rise of new religious sects, or the resurgence of old ones, but it goes far deeper than organized religion. This is revealed when people who are not religious in the sense of being regular churchgoers are asked if they are atheists. Very few people will commit themselves.

This kind of religiosity must be taken fully into account when dealing with people, as distinct from institutions, because some individuals can, at this time, find satisfaction for their psychological needs only in religious belief, and attempts to 'knock it out of them' will, as Engels remarked, only end up by 'knocking it further in'. In any case, religious belief is closely tied up with the acceptance of certain moral codes. There is no point in destroying one belief without replacing it with a better one, otherwise there is a complete lack of any moral code whatsoever, a recipe for complete social disintegration.

The need to believe in something greater than oneself is deeply ingrained in humans. Marxists recognize this as a reflection in the mind of the need to work together as a condition of continued existence. The fact that it is often expressed in mystical terms is less important than that it psychologically reinforces a social need.

It does not matter whether any particular idea stems from a materialist or an idealist philosophy. It is its social and political effects that are the most important.

A MEANING TO LIFE

Religion gives people the feeling that life has a purpose and that they are part of it. It helps them to overcome feelings of loneliness - that no-one cares. This is sometimes described as a crutch and some people become unnecessarily dependent upon crutches, but, on the other hand, no one likes to feel entirely alone. The need to 'belong' is part of our evolutionary and social inheritance. There is nothing mystical about it. The fact that it has become clouded in mysticism is no excuse for denying its existence.

As scientific knowledge whittles away at religious belief it undermines the sense of common purpose that was based upon it, and also the fear of divine retribution that was the iron fist behind it.

Nowadays, as ever larger numbers of people are feeling alienated from society, there is a coincidental decline in the influence of religion, and an increase in crime and decline in previously accepted moral standards.

Many religious people reckon that the answer to the problem is to strengthen religious indoctrination in the young, and, as is to be expected, religious bodies are intent on grasping the opportunity to regain some of their lost influence.

There is a tendency for each religion and sect to think that it alone has the answer. At the extreme, this leads to the intolerance currently expressed by fundamentalists, the Muslim ones being the most obvious example.

RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE

Tolerance is indispensable in any civilized society but, taken too far, it can lead to retrogression and even social disintegration.

If, for instance, Roman Catholics choose to refrain from eating meat on certain days, or from using artificial methods of birth control, or Muslims and Jews consider animals with cloven hooves as being unfit for human consumption, that is entirely their own affair. But when, for instance, (some) Muslims demand that certain books shall not be published because they offend against their religion, then they are expecting us to be tolerant of their intolerance.

Making any concession to such a reactionary demand would negate two hundred years of struggle by the people of Britain to prevent government decisions being dictated by religious dogma.

We cannot allow the situation to continue where Salman Rushdie is forced to live in a 'safe' house under police protection because he wrote that book. The bigots who comprise the 'Muslim Parliament' boast about it, but they seem to get away with it because someone in authority is concerned about 'religious susceptibilities'. Some leaders of the Christian churches infer that they would not object to that and other anti-religious books being banned when they place great emphasis on the avoidance of anything which may prove hurtful to people who hold strong religious beliefs. It is those very same people who object to the blasphemy law being taken off the statute book.

Many of those who preach religious tolerance really mean

tolerance for religious ideologies only. The struggle to gain tolerance for materialist interpretations of the world has been a long and bitter one, and it is far from over yet.

It will mark a decisive step in the right direction when Britain abolishes the blasphemy laws.

RELIGIOUS DISCRIMINATION

Muslims are quite correct when they claim that they are discriminated against because the state funding that is available to schools run by the C.of E., R.C., and Jewish schools is not available to them, but the answer is to abolish state funding for schools of any religion. To extend it, as some Muslims want, would be to perpetuate state funded religious indoctrination of our children. If parents desire their children to be indoctrinated, they should arrange for it to be done outside normal school hours, and that should apply to parents of all religions.

Objections to this come from a wide spectrum of people who recognize the social necessity of children being indoctrinated with some kind of ideology, so that they adopt or conform to certain moral codes and standards of behaviour and, because religion has traditionally performed that function, they still expect it to do so, even though it is less and less effective.

What is, as yet, only dimly recognized is that religion is failing to perform this task because it is intent on making people conform to the morality of the capitalist system instead of campaigning to change the system.

What is not clearly recognized is that organized religion serves class purposes and that the interests of the class it now serves no longer corresponds with the interests of the mass of the people.

RELIGION IN CLASS SOCIETY

The invention of agriculture and the corresponding growth in settled societies hastened the division of labour, and hence the division of society into classes, and superstition developed into organized religion. Priests were the first ideologists. The ideologies which they concocted reflected the interests of the ideologists themselves and gained credence because of the widespread belief that they were divinely inspired, so allowing themselves, and every other ruling class that followed, to keep the masses in ideological subjection, thus, to the extent that it was successful, making physical repression unnecessary. In that sense, religion is, indeed, the 'opium of the people'.

But there is another side to it. Engels' appreciation of the role played by Christian philosophy in the transformation of the Roman state shows that he understood that religious belief can also play a revolutionary role.

Many individuals are moved to make great sacrifices and endure great privations in the course of fighting for progressive causes, because the belief that god is on their side gives them the spiritual strength to carry on.

In Britain, John Ball, Oliver Cromwell, Gerard Winstanly, the Tolpuddle Martyrs, and many others, challenged the ideology of the then established authorities on the basis of different interpretations of Christian philosophy.

Over three centuries ago, Jesuits sent by the Spanish to indoctrinate the natives of part of South America in order to make them submissive to Spanish rule, placed themselves on the side of the native people in their opposition to Spanish planters. A similar thing is going on today among the poor of the South American continent. In South Africa, priests such as Trevor Huddleston stood out against apartheid on the basis of their Christian beliefs at a time when that opposition was frowned upon by church leaders in Britain and received little sympathy from the British public. To be sure, the main function of religion has been to keep the masses in ideological subjection to their rulers but, as new classes came to the fore, that ideological bondage had to be broken, and the fact that the ideological struggle was conducted in theological terms is unimportant in terms of class struggle.

The argument between the believers in predestination and free will was conducted on the basis of theology, but that does not detract from its importance in liberating people's minds from the 'rich man in his castle, poor man at his gate' attitude.

Traditionally, Marxists have concentrated almost entirely on the negative effect of religious belief on social activity - on both its 'other worldly' aspect and its teaching of submission to higher authority, both temporal and spiritual, but religious belief has also been used to reinforce opposition to authority and to demand a better life here and now. Ideologies which serve the interests of particular classes have historically been expressed in religious terms, and it is still true today. Politically, it does not matter whether an idea is expressed in religious terminology, or whether individuals are motivated to fight for a better social system by secular or religious beliefs, as long as it brings about the same result.

Religion is an opiate only to the extent that it induces people to accept the status quo, but when it stimulates people to fight for a better life here and now it can become part of a revolutionary force.

The contradictions between and within human societies, and between humans as a species and the natural environment are now so acute that there is a very wide perception that something is drastically wrong, and confidence in the future is not much in evidence.

What people need is something to believe in, and as belief in an after life has weakened, that 'something' can only be a belief that it is possible to construct a better social system.

The 'ideal' society exists in some forms of religious thought, but with reconciliation being the dominant theme at the moment, the religious-inspired fight against social evils stops short when it comes up against the limits imposed by the capitalist system. But, as the contradictions within the system grow sharper, so will the divisions among the ranks of the religious, between those whose class interests push them in the direction of supporting the status quo, and those whose interests place them on the side of change. The latter will express themselves in religious terminology and may even reject the theory of class struggle, but in practice, they will find themselves engaged in it, and that is what matters most because their ideas, like those of everyone else, will change during the course of the struggle, and, given correct ideological leadership, religious people of all denominations will come to see that class differences are more important than religious ones.

The main rational objection to withdrawing state support for all forms of religious indoctrination is that it would leave a moral vacuum because religion has always been the chief means of inculcating behavioural patterns in children so that they mature into socially conscious adults.

Now, more than ever, this raises the question of what kind of behavioural pattern? Left to itself, each religion will instill its own standards of behaviour in the children of its followers, and if many of the religious leaders get their way, society will be divided, not only by belief, but by conflicting codes of conduct, a sure recipe for social conflict along religious lines.

The only way of preventing this is to inculcate behaviour patterns that are based on a common code of conduct that is determined by the needs of society as a whole.

THE ALTERNATIVE

SENSE OF PURPOSE

The most positive thing about religion is that it gives believers a sense of participating in a purpose that is divinely inspired, of being part of a greater whole.

Marxists do not believe in gods, but we do appreciate the existence of a deep-seated emotional need, present in all humans, to feel part of something that is greater than oneself, and the need to feel that life has a purpose. It can be said that 'having purpose', engaging in purposeful activity, distinguishes us from all other animals.

As life itself has no purpose other than to replicate itself, this need to 'belong', to have a sense of common purpose, must have its origins in human culture and, as Marxists, we believe that culture is an entirely human product which developed as a result of the need to work together to master nature. It was during the course of that struggle that the development of a sense of common purpose, which reinforced the need of people to work together, became a cultural necessity, i.e. necessary for survival of the species.

By 'culture' we mean the entire gamut of human activity.

That is what gives humans a purpose.

The contradiction between humans and their natural environment is the fundamental contradiction as far as humans are concerned because whether our species survived or not depended upon whether we could resolve that contradiction to our own advantage.

We have, up to now, been able to do so as the result of our ability to develop the productive forces of society, but that very success has created the illusion that we are masters of nature, that we can make it serve human will, but, as Engels correctly pointed out, we are part of nature and therefore subject to its laws. He used the phrase, 'the freedom of necessity', to describe this relationship. Lenin had this to say:

'Engels takes the knowledge and the will of man, on the one hand, and the necessity of nature on the other, and instead of giving definitions, simply says that the necessity of nature is primary, and human will and mind secondary. The latter must necessarily and inevitably adapt themselves to the former.' (Materialism and Empirio-Criticism, page 220).

The depletion of the ozone layer, the threat of global

warming, increasing pollution of air, water, and soil, are signs that the laws of nature are now being violated to such an extent that the contradiction between humans and nature is becoming antagonistic and in that circumstance nature is bound to prevail.

The question thus arises whether the contradictions between humans and nature can be resolved within the context of the existing economic system.

CAPITALISM

Before capitalism, all production was on the basis of supplying a human need. Under capitalism the imperative is not to satisfy human need, it is production for production's sake. The absolute need of the capitalist to continually augment his stock of capital means that production must be continually expanded, irrespective of whether there is a need for it, therefore artificial 'wants' must be created. Hence the importance to capitalism of advertising, whose purpose is to make people discontented with the particular car, washing machine, etc. that they have, even though it is functioning perfectly well, so that they will be prepared to work longer hours, or beg, borrow or steal to get them.

For those who cannot stand the pace, those same market forces provide means of solace in drugs of all kinds.

Marxists find a purpose in life by working to change this state of affairs, but we do it, not in order to reap some reward in a supposed after life, but in order to ensure the continued survival of our species, (more immediately, the welfare of the next few generations).

This willingness, (more of a compulsion) on the part of avowed materialists, to devote time and energy to the pursuit of an ideal, is an apparent contradiction in terms, and one that religious people find inexplicable, but is perfectly explicable in terms of dialectical materialism.

It is a matter of scientific fact that inanimate matter existed before animate matter, and that nature existed before humans came onto the scene. That being so, it is safe to conclude that matter is primary and that thought, consciousness, are products of matter organized in a specific way, i.e. in the brain which is capable of reflecting upon impressions of the external world which it receives through our senses.

THINKING AND BEING

Understanding of the relationship between the material and

the mental is crucial to an understanding of Marxism.

"It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being out, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness".

Karl Marx, Selected Works, Vol.1, p.356.

This statement has been taken to mean that consciousness is nothing more than a mental reflection of the objective world out, if that were so, it would mean that it was some external force which brought about change.

But, for Marx, 'being' is related to activity, to the actual life of people, which requires both the individual and the collective in activity, indeed, in a whole succession of activities.

It is in activity that the external object is translated into a subjective image, an ideal. It is also in activity that the transition is achieved from the ideal into the material result. It is a reciprocal process.

For example, if we decide to make, say, a table, we know from experience what a table looks like in a general sort of way, but to build a particular one which we make 'out of our head', we construct a mental image of what it should look like when we have made it. If the result of our activity does not correspond with what was intended, then we must repeat the process until we get it right.

Social consciousness is different from individual consciousness in that it represents the collective experience of many generations rather than many repeated experiences of individuals. It represents the collective wisdom derived from many generations of collective activity and it is expressed in social 'norms', rules of conduct, and moral codes. It also includes ideal representations of what society 'should be like'.

But as society is divided into classes, the kind, (not the level), of social consciousness varies from class to class, and so, generally speaking, do our ideals. We assimilate these things in the course of our education and upbringing, and accept them as our own, even though they took shape long before we were born.

In the present era, the ideals cherished by the poor and downtrodden throughout history are embraced by Marxists who believe that the vehicle for the realization of those ideals is the modern working class.

Those ideals have traditionally been expressed in religious terminology such as:

'When Adam delved and Eve span, who was then the

gentleman?' John Ball.

'Things shall not go well in England until all things are held in common'. Gerard Winstanley, a pamphleteer at the time of Cromwell.

More recently in the Methodist hymn:

'These things shall be, a loftier race than ere the world has known shall rise, with flame of freedom in their hearts and light of knowledge in their eyes.

Man shall love man with heart so pure, and mightier music fill the skies, and every life shall be a song, when all the earth is paradise.'

Marxists are just as much the heirs to these ideals as are the religious people who also count them as part of their tradition.

As long as we jointly fight for their realization we can agree to disagree about their origin.

+++

"The idea of unlimited expansion has no place in Marxist theory; it is a product of capitalism. It expresses the needs of the system, not the needs of the people."

The Marxist No 43 March 1985.

" We oppose any arrangement within the EEC which subverts national independence and sovereignty of member countries to one or more groups of imperialists. In order to maintain the maximum independence a country must aim to possess an economic base that is capable of satisfying as many of the needs of its people as possible."

The Marxist, No 38 February 1982.

DRUGS

One of the great social evils of our time is drug abuse, both of the legal and illegal kind.

All drugs have a therapeutic value, but if used injudiciously they can be extremely harmful.

Society chooses to classify drugs into three categories: those which are freely available, (caffeine, nicotine, alcohol, aspirin, codeine, for example); others are available only if they are prescribed by a member of the medical profession, but possession of them is not an offence; others, such as hashish, opium, morphine, and their derivatives, are illegal, and possession is an offence.

Drug abuse is endemic in modern society and not all of it is illegal. Pharmaceutical companies push doctors into prescribing their particular brand, but it is called 'sales promotion'. A number of factors have come together over the past thirty years or so which has created what could be called 'the pill syndrome'. There is a fairly widespread notion that there is a pill to cure every ailment, real and imaginary, and that one does not need to make any personal effort to change one's lifestyle or mental attitude, simply carry on as usual and take the prescription regularly.

Given that kind of ethos among older people it should not be surprising that some young people have absorbed it. Combine this with the social, and sometimes family pressures on young people to become 'achievers' with high expectations, and it is easy to understand why they resort to more potent stimulants than their parents are, or were wont to do, either to 'sharpen up their responses' in order to 'achieve', or find solace in when life offers no prospects, hence the severe and increasing drug problem among the young.

THE ENTERPRISE CULTURE

The enterprise culture and the drug culture go hand in hand.

The role model propagated by the apostles of the market economy is the individual who uses his talents for the purpose of making money and yet more money.

It is considered to be good business for companies to promote products that are of dubious value, if not downright dangerous. There are many thousands of people who are hooked on tranquilisers which it is known have deleterious long term side

effects. Pharmaceutical companies sell drugs to people in the Third World that have been banned in Britain and Europe, thalidomide, for example. Where is the morality in that? Yet this same class of people inveigh against the drug barons who do exactly the same thing, are moved by the same motives, and abide by the same moral codes. No wonder that some young people regard it all as a carve up and decide to 'get a piece of the action'.

Although there are those who claim that hard drugs are not as dangerous as they are made out to be, the balance of evidence is that, apart from the need to keep increasing the dose in order to achieve the same effect, brain damage does result from prolonged usage. Moreover, there is no doubt that the majority of hard drugs induce a stupor in which normal activity is impossible. Artists and writers who claim their creative imagination has been enhanced by mind blowing drugs represent an insignificant minority of drug abusers. In any case, arguments which play down the deleterious effects of drug abuse are even more reprehensible than those which overstate the dangers, in that they encourage people to experiment with them during which time they may become addicted. Addiction can change people so much that the quest for drugs can blot out everything else in the addict's life. Nothing else matters than the next fix. In the inner cities most offences of theft, robbery, burglary, and other dishonesties are probably committed to feed the 'habit'. Eventually the addict will steal from his own family.

The argument that "smoking and excessive alcohol intake cause death and disablement, so why ban other drugs which do the same thing?" is an attempt to justify drug abuse, whereas the aim should be to eliminate drug abuse of any kind.

Drunkenness is responsible for many cases of injury to the person, drunken driving, battered wives and children, and sometimes, robbery with violence, but there is no link between it and organised crime such as there is with hard drugs.

The difference is obvious - drugs that are banned have a higher retail value than those that can be purchased through legal channels.

The link between banned drugs and organised crime is also obvious. For example, the initial steep rise in organised crime in the United States took place during the period when the production and sale of alcohol was prohibited by law. It did not reduce the consumption of alcohol, but it elevated bootleggers to

the status of public heroes.

The repeal of the Prohibition Act was welcomed by teetotallers as well as drinkers because, by making the production and sale of alcohol illegal, it had, at the same time, made it more profitable.

That combination is a certain recipe for the creation of criminal gangs.

The same thing applies to the banning of hard drugs.

Given the street value of these drugs, the financial gains to be made from providing an illegal supply of them are so great that the gangsters who arrange the supplies can afford to employ highly skilled organisers and accountants who are highly respectable on the surface, but who know those individuals in the world of banking and finance who are, (for a consideration), prepared to bend the rules to facilitate money laundering.

(Given the huge amounts of money involved, it is gratifying that so many people in the law enforcement agencies, in Britain at least, must be dedicated to the job).

Demoralized youngsters who, without being consciously aware of it, have adopted the capitalist principle that the main, or even sole purpose of life is to make money, are recruited as pushers, and what is more, the age of those engaged in this activity is steadily falling. School playgrounds are now a venue for the sale of drugs.

When drug related crime is taken into account the picture is frightening.

Reading between the lines of the official statements about the 'drugs war', the consensus of opinion seems to be that the struggle to prevent the drugs getting onto the streets is a losing battle, and furthermore, drug related crime is the most difficult to combat because the financial rewards are so high that high risks are also accepted as part of the game. Most of the shootings in Moss Side, Manchester, and in London are drug related.

DECRIMINALISE DRUGS

The concern is becoming so strong that elements within the police are making public their opinion that the drug schedule must be altered so that it is no longer a criminal offence to possess hashish, opium, morphine, and their derivatives, and the new 'designer' drugs..

As far as public opinion goes, this is unthinkable and the cry is raised that this amounts to giving in to the drug traffickers.

But is it?

If we take as the benchmark the number of lives being lost or ruined in the present situation, measured against what will conceivably be the toll if the law is changed, we must also take into account that those who take these drugs do so of their own free will.

Initially it will probably give rise to an increase in the number of people taking those kind of drugs, and some of them will become addicts, but, even if the number of addicts doubled, it would be a price well worth paying.

If those drugs were made readily available, (complete with health warning), at a price calculated to make drug trafficking uneconomic, then, at one stroke, the whole edifice erected around it would begin to crumble because it is built on the prospect of superprofits, and they would not be forthcoming if the government sold the drug on a non-profit basis through pharmacists. The evidence is that laboratory production of morphine and opium derivatives is cheap, so vast resources need not be ploughed into it.

The vast amount of money now being used in prosecuting the present war on drugs could be used to finance an education campaign aimed at reducing all kinds of drug dependency, (including the legal kind), and promoting healthier lifestyles. Controlled production would also eliminate adulterated drugs and the increased health hazards they can cause.

The chances of getting a British government to adopt such a policy in the immediate future are pretty remote, but sooner or later it will be seen that there is no other way of combating the evil, and the fight to get it adopted should start now.

The policy would obviously restrict drug acquisition to personal consumption and Britain would have to ensure that drugs were not exported abroad. Ideally, all countries would adopt similar policies but we have no right to impose ours on others by default of policing, as it were.

In the meantime, we should beware of getting linked with movements such as the 'Legalise Cannabis' campaign, because they start from the proposition that there is something to be gained by smoking it, therefore implying that the spread of the practice should be welcomed.

We start from the proposition that drugs should be used for clearly defined medicinal purposes only.

Neither should we be seen to be in favour of letting up on

the campaign to stamp out drug trafficking. We should be demanding that investigations must be made into every financial organisation where there is the least suspicion that money laundering is taking place.

When it comes down to popular action at street level, the group we should be looking to are those in the 20 to 50 age bracket as the core. The reason for this is that some will perhaps have themselves come through the drug taking phase, most will have children and be concerned about them getting involved either in drug taking, or in supplying it.

Those in the under twenty age bracket will initially be reluctant to get involved in any anti-drug activity because they are either afraid of reprisals from others of their age group who are involved in drugs, or don't want to lay themselves open to accusations of 'grassing'.

There are cases where residents have either worked with the police to drive out drug traffickers from their immediate locality, or relied entirely on their own strengths to intimidate traffickers to the extent that they move on. The I.R.A have shown the way in both Northern and Southern Ireland.

In our view, it is always preferable that people should rely on their own efforts as far as possible, and it is politically important that the Left should give assistance where possible and appropriate in order to begin to discard its ultra liberal image.

Drug abuse is not confined to one class but it is most destructive among the people at the bottom of the social pile who are worst affected by the inadequacies of capitalism and, consequently, the most alienated.

The effects of this can already be seen in America where the process of social disintegration is more advanced than in Britain. There are whole areas where the law of the jungle prevails and civilized life is impossible, largely due to drug related crime.

That picture will be repeated here unless drastic action is taken now.

COMMENT

Welfare State

The proposals for drastic cuts in the Health Service and Social Security benefits, that are being 'leaked' to the media are obviously part of the softening up process which is preparing the ground for actual cuts that will be made later on in the year. The intention is to lure people into the trap of limiting their protests to the size of the cuts and getting deeply involved in arguing the advantages or disadvantages of making cuts in one area in preference to another, whilst tacitly accepting that some reductions are inevitable.

The old ploy of the Left, 'cut the arms budget', carries little force now that the present government, has, for its own reasons, implemented that demand.

The Labour Party leadership fudges the issue. When questioned by the Tories about how they would tackle the problem they give the reply that they would fund it out of economic growth, which begs the question, what if this economic growth does not materialize, or is insufficient to allow the government to reduce the £50 billion or so that it owes to the banks.?

For a working class government the answer would be clear, increase tax on the rich and put a stop to tax avoidance schemes, but, for the Labour Party, whose politics are solely those of the parliamentary kind, that is never mentioned even as a possibility because it would lose votes..

Further evidence of the Labour Party's shift to the right is the complete absence of any proposals from its 'left wing' for extra parliamentary activity to bring pressure on M.Ps to oppose cuts in the N.H.S and social security benefits.

Mass action in the form of demonstrations is, at the moment, the only alternative to passivity, or, as the Labour leadership would put it 'preparing for the next election, but what are the chances?. Not very high. And why?. Because the 'Left' in Britain knows, in general terms, what it is against, Imperialism, racism, the capitalist system, but the public at large do not know what it stands for, chiefly because this 'Left', has not yet made up its collective mind on the subject.

Working folk, of whatever colour, are more concerned about the basic issues of jobs, housing, health, and education than they are about minority rights. In the 1980's concentration by the Left on so-called minority rights, particularly at Town Hall level, often

blinded people to what interests they had in common.

Racial discrimination and incitement to race hatred must be stamped on as reprehensible and repugnant, and must remain illegal. But laws and exhortations will not eliminate racism, as events in Germany show. All experience shows that joint action by the working class in the common interest is the best way of overcoming division and prejudice.

GREEN SHOOTS.

Those shoots are being nurtured on the basis of already achieved reductions in living standards which, on the Government's own admission, give Britain the lowest labour costs of the major industrial states of Europe.

British workers are now undercutting the wages of their comrades in Western Europe. How the mighty have fallen.

This is the basis on which foreign firms are opening factories in Britain. Things have come to a pretty pass when a Taiwan company finds it more profitable to open a factory in Wales than to expand production on its home ground.

The lesson that the Tories would have us draw from the closure of the Timex factory in Greenock, is that it is all the worker's fault because they would not accept lower wages 'in order for the factory's products to remain competitive'. The same story is being told to the workers employed by 'our competitors'.

That story is familiar to those whose working lives began before the Second World War, but it will take a little time for the present generation to realize that the present situation is not an aberration, but a return to capitalist normalcy in which the successful businessman is the one who can consistently reduce real wages at a faster rate than his competitors.

The Parliamentary Labour Party deplors this situation, but its solution?, an attempt to recreate the Frank Cousins, Jack Jones, Len Murray illusion that higher real wages are an automatic consequence of higher productivity.

Its illusory nature is now more readily obvious than it was then, so what is the Labour Party doing other than to demonstrate its political bankruptcy.

Neither is simple militancy the answer. greater militancy will, in many cases result, (as in the case of Timex), in the employer moving production elsewhere.

INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY?

To rely on working class international solidarity as a counter

United Nations

to this is to dwell in the realms of cloud cuckoo land. Workers in Spain, Portugal, or wherever the employer has a mind to move production, are not likely to deny themselves a job on the basis of some (to them) abstract principle, any more than are British workers when the move is in their favour.

What workers need is the political power to prevent capitalists from shifting their capital about according to their will. When, and only when, the workers in each country have acquired that political power will they be in a position to tackle the problems of unemployment and poverty in their own country.

All else is an illusion.

HUMAN RIGHTS.

This is probably the most hypocritical thing that the U.N is involved in. Everybody is concerned about upholding them, but who is to decide exactly what they are?. 'Right' is a class question. The right of an employer to shift investment to where the capital will get a bigger return is a bourgeois right, but, as in the case of Timex, it abrogation the 'right' of workers to a job.

The Campaign for Human Rights is a campaign to get bourgeois right accepted as the international norm as a condition for the expansion of capitalism into countries where it is not yet established.

At an international level, 'Human Rights' has, from an imperialist standpoint, been a winner. Endorsement of the slogan has been made a precondition for the granting of loans to Third World countries, and the acceptance by Gorbachov of bourgeois right as standard, helped to strengthen the pro capitalist forces within the old Soviet Union

Human rights, as far as the the mass of people are concerned start with the right to a job, a sanitary place to live, to medical treatment when sick. and to security in old age.

None of the main protagonists provide those things for all their citizens, and loans to Third world countries are definitely not made conditional on the recipient government providing those things, indeed, quite the opposite. When loans cannot be repaid, the donor countries insist that the debtor government pursues policies which worsen the conditions of the mass of the people

When it is necessary to curtail the 'rights' of the rich in order to create the conditions in which the mass of the people can provide for their own needs, so be it. That is what human rights should be all about. It is for the people of each country to decide to determine what is right for them. No one else.

When the Soviet bloc collapsed the Western powers saw this as an opportunity to make the United Nations Organization do their bidding to a degree that was formerly impossible. With China bought off by loans and favourable trade deals, the only opposition would come from Cuba, and a few other small countries. 'Troublemakers', like Iraq and Libya were threatened with military action on one pretext or another, so everything in the garden seemed lovely. The United Nations was, henceforth, to become the world's policeman taking orders from Western Imperialism.

As everyone now knows, the dream has become a nightmare. It has 'peacekeeping forces in twelve countries which are costing a total of over three billion U.S Dollars per year, but, up to the middle of this year those who are supposed to foot the bill are behind with their payments so that only two thirds has been collected. (U.N figures). In the vast majority of cases it is an open ended committment, and the costs are more likely to grow than diminish.

In the U.S, Clinton, like Bush and Reagan before him, tries to distract public attention from social disintegration at home by talking big about foreign affairs. But his ability to act is circumscribed, not only by public memories of the losses incurred in the vain attempt to defeat the Vietnamese people, but also by the lessons learned from that debacle by the U.S military, who are opposed to the deployment of U.S ground troops in foreign wars unless they know in advance how they can disengage them, hence the U.S preference for air strikes as a way of demonstrating its role as the leading Imperialist.

Both in Somalia and the latest missile attack on Iraq, the U.S acted without prior agreement with the U.N thus demonstrating its contempt for that organization and for the principle of upholding international law which that organization is supposed to stand for.

The U.S took a unilateral action to invade Somalia and then the U.N meekly agreed to make it a U.N operation when U.S troops withdrew. The missile attack on Iraq in June of this year did not receive prior, nor subsequent sanction by the Security Council, but no member of that Council has demanded the U.S be called to account for those actions.

The rule of law? What law?

China

In the 1960s when those of us who had formerly been strong supporters of the Soviet Union, supported Mao tse tung's criticism of the Khrushchev regime, we did so with a heavy heart. Now, with the same regret, we look at what has happened to the People's Republic of China since the death of Mao.

Mao Tse Tung, being aware of the danger of capitalist restoration in China, initiated the Proletarian Cultural Revolution which had the aim of overthrowing the capitalist roaders who had acquired a great deal of power in the party and state machine, and enhancing the power of the people. It was described as the chosen method of continuing the revolution under the conditions of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Mao recognized that even after the old state power has been overthrown and the old ruling classes consigned to oblivion, new classes are bound to arise during the construction of socialist society, therefore class struggle must be continued for a very long period of time if non-proletarian classes are to be prevented from seizing control of the Party and the state.

Mao's untimely death, coupled with leftist errors committed by some of his supporters, resulted in the capitalist roaders making a comeback, with the result that the Communist Party of China is now dominated by bourgeois elements and Deng's slogan 'It is good to become rich' has come to be adopted as state policy, with Mao's guiding dictum, 'Serve the people', being discarded.

The evidence is that a proportion of the Chinese people have become better off in material terms as a result of the high rate of economic growth brought about as the result of the 'reforms' but the negative consequences are such that they can no longer be ignored.

It will be remembered that visitors to China in the sixties came back with personal experiences to relate of examples of honesty, and the complete absence of crime. Mao's policy of 'cure the sickness to save the patient' was well known and highly respected. Judicial execution was absolutely the last resort.

Now, according to an article in The Economist, there are about one million out of work peasants who flock to the towns in search of work, and it is reported that at any urban railway station there are hundreds of peasants who come to seek work, sleeping on the floor of the station.

As occurred in the last few years of the Soviet Union,

doctors and nurses are demanding bribes to carry out what is supposed to be free medical treatment.

Even the authorities now admit that crime is out of control despite mass public executions of offenders, (which, incidentally, were/are never raised as violations of human rights by the U.N.)

In June of this year, a Shanghai newspaper, Wenhui bao, had this to say about the situation:

'Once people are at the lowest level of society, it is easy for them to become anti-society, and become a factor for instability. The floating population, which exists without the normal controls, is fertile soil for the growth of secret societies. If they get together and form organizations, then the large group of people without a steady income will be a great threat to stability. If they join with the millions of unemployed in the cities, then the results will be even more unimaginable.'

Soon after Mao's death, the capitalist roaders, like their counterparts in the Soviet Union, announced that the time for mass (class) struggles had passed and that the sole concern must be to expand the productive forces, and any manifestation of class struggle, (disruptive activity), was stamped on.

The major difference between the situation in China and that in the former Soviet Union is that, whereas Stalin used his authority to dismiss class struggle as unnecessary in the Soviet Union, Mao was insistent that class struggle must be a feature of every society for a very long time to come, i.e. until class differences had been finally eliminated.

Mao once said that if a capitalist restoration did take place in China, he would begin the guerrilla struggle all over again.

The ideological work conducted during Mao's lifetime must have left its imprint on Chinese society, so that, unlike the Soviet Union where the whole system collapsed into chaos, the possibility is that in China, and before very long, there will be massive class struggles fought along clearer ideological lines.

What happened in the Soviet Union, and what is now happening in China, should serve as a warning to those who regard the principles of democratic centralism and the dictatorship of the proletariat as some kind of magic incantation which, if repeated often enough, will bring about the desired result. They are fundamental concepts that cannot be dispensed with, but, like all theories, they must be amended in the light of practice.

Party Political Funding

With the major political parties deeply in debt at a time when the costs of running them are increasing, questions of Party finance are bound to make the headlines because, in capitalist society, money equals influence.

Tory legislation lays down that trade union donations must be made only from special political funds, and trade union members must 'contract in' if they wish to pay the political levy.

In the case of companies, it is the directors who decide the amount and to whom the donations will be made.

From a purely class angle the demand should be that the Companies Act should be amended so that the same conditions which apply to trade unions should also apply to companies.

The Tory claim is that that its T.U. legislation gives the individual trade unionist the freedom of choice. Quite so. Individuals should not be forced to make political contributions, therefore shareholders should not be denied that right any more than trade unionists.

Companies wishing to make political contributions should be made to set up a separate political fund to which each shareholder can, if he/she so wishes, subscribe. When donations are made they should be made public in the same way as donations from trade unions. After all, we live in a democracy. Don't we?

Publication of the names of big donors will make it more difficult for those who want to exchange money for influence, but that cannot be a bad thing.

The Labour Party has not pressed the issue to the extent of demanding that appropriate legislation be enacted. The probable reason is that it may want that to be included in another proposal, namely, that political parties should receive state funding.

Not every political party, mind you; only those who have a certain number of M.Ps.

This is presented by its advocates as an extension of democracy because it puts all parties on an equal footing. In reality it favours the parties which have most seats, but more importantly, it draws political parties further into the state machine, makes them more state dependent and less dependent upon grass roots support - the very opposite of democracy.