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# **The Vietnamese Revolution and the Fourth International**

**Marxism**

**Karl Marx**

**and Stalinism**

**and**

**in Britain**

**Das Kapital**

**'Socialism in one country'**

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*Editors: Tom Kemp, Cliff Slaughter*

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# Editorial

## The Vietnamese Revolution and the Fourth International

AFTER TWO DECADES of valiant sacrifice and ruthless struggle the Vietnamese people, led by Ho Chi Minh, today stand on the threshold of what certainly promises to be one of the most outstanding and crucial victories of the anti-imperialist and socialist revolution.

No Marxist worthy of the name can refuse to support unreservedly the Vietnamese people in securing this well-deserved and unprecedented triumph of arms. 'Tis a consummation devoutly to be wished' and fought for.

Members and supporters of the International Committee of the Fourth International in particular can take a special and justifiable pride in the achievements of the Vietnamese resistance and the North Vietnamese Army since the sections of the International Committee were—and are—in the forefront of all those who fight uncompromisingly for the complete and unconditional independence and victory of the Vietnamese people and the utter defeat of US imperialism.

In contrast to the Stalinists and their revisionist allies in the United Secretariat as well as the State Capitalist groups, the international Trotskyist movement does not hesitate to advance the slogan 'Victory to the Vietnamese workers and peasants!' because such a victory will constitute an irreparable blow to the *whole* of world Imperialism and will thus facilitate the construction of the Fourth International and the overthrow of Imperialism in its metropolitan centres.

Vietnam today demonstrates clearly and tangibly the utter fallacy of the revisionist method and perspective. Their division of the capitalist world into independent and unrelated sectors and their attempts to impose factitious 'epi-centres' of struggle based solely on the national liberation movements in the colonial countries is

being revealed, more and more as a criminal evasion of responsibility for revolutionary leadership in the advanced countries. What is worse, such a schema is a distortion of the unity and interdependence of *all* sectors of world economy as well as a denial of the *universality* of the crisis of world imperialism. It is but a slightly refurbished version of the epigone theory of 'Socialism in a single country' which constitutes the greatest obstacle to the political advance of the working class.

That is why both Stalinism and revisionism collide headlong with the real historic interests of the Vietnamese and European workers at a time like this. And that, incidentally, is the reason for the crisis and decline of the revisionist anti-war movement in the United States and in Europe as we saw recently in the collapse of the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign, an offshoot of the Russell War Crimes Tribunal.

Of course the revisionists today—after months of sterile pacifistic agitation—unashamedly flaunt NLF badges and carry Vietnamese flags around the streets and they will on occasion even shout 'Victory to the NLF'. This however should not blind us to their inherent opportunism and unconscionable treachery to the working class.

If today they jump on the Vietnam bandwagon and frighten all Bohemia with their revolutionary slogans it is only because they wish to prevent workers in the West from learning and generalizing the *real* lessons of the Vietnam Revolution; because they hope to drown the voice of revolutionary Marxism in an orgy of pacifistic moralizing and sentimental slobbering.

But they shall not pass.

Trotskyists must consider it their revolutionary duty to expose, to combat and to hurl back and destroy the malicious distortions of Marxism and the worthless fallacies put out by these

insidious agencies of imperialism, whether they come from Moscow, Havana or Brussels.

One of the most dangerous and spurious 'theories' now being circulated by this rotten alliance is the thesis of Havana: that Vietnam and Cuba prove the validity of armed struggle and the irrelevance of a scientific theory of class struggle and a party based on such a theory.

This has rapidly become the stock-in-trade, the ultimate rationalization of every petty-bourgeois adventurer and intellectual carpet-bagger in Western Europe. The Robin Blackburns, the Millibands, the Hobsbawms, the Mandels and even the Monty Johnsons not to mention an entire regiment of fellow travellers who don't know a flat trajectory from a safety catch have all discovered the historic importance of 'armed struggle'. Thanks to Fidel Castro they have discovered the light after groping in the dark for so many years!

For these worshippers of the *fait accompli* the 'guerrilleros', the elite in the jungle, the 'dirty dozen' of the Sierra, have displaced the non-revolutionary proletariat (à la Franz Fanon) as the most revolutionary force in the world, as the protagonist of history. A truly remarkable discovery! There has been nothing like it since the Russian Narodniks!

Vietnam however is a powerful and irrefutable example of something totally different and completely opposed to this specious theorizing. It demonstrates the transcendental power and resilience of a *protracted people's war* led and organized by a party based on the working class and the poor peasantry and inspired by the example of the October Revolution.

No other movement, no other kind of war could have survived twenty years of bitter and bloody struggle against an enemy whose firepower and logistics was vastly superior to that of the Vietnamese. In this sense there is no comparison between the Cuban rebellion of 1959 and the titanic struggle going on in Vietnam. Vietnam is the revolution in permanence: Cuba is the revolution aborted.

That is why, right up to the moment of writing, US imperialism continues to maintain a strategic foothold in Guantanamo naval base—in the so-called free territory of Cuba—with impunity while in Vietnam every US base is under attack from the NLF.

It is indeed a revealing contrast.

For those, like Mandel, who place armed struggle above party and programme Guantanamo should prove an exciting paradox and a real test of their skill at apologetics.

The leadership of the Vietnam Communist Party, as anyone who has bothered to read the history of the party knows, did not begin its revolutionary activities by accumulating arsenals of weapons, even though they understood the value of arms. On the contrary they placed their greatest reliance on the doubly exploited workers and dispossessed peasants of Tonkin, Annam and Cochin China whom they rigorously indoctrinated and trained for political struggle in the early thirties.

Even today ideas and politics come first and foremost as a recent capitalist survey of the NLF attests:

Mao did not conceive of guerrilla operations as an independent form of warfare but simply as one aspect of the revolutionary struggle. There were, he said, three types of political activities: those toward the enemy (largely efforts of proselyte), those toward the people (agit-prop work), and those toward the guerrilla forces and supporters (organizational and indoctrinational). Within this framework came his three stages of revolutionary warfare. It can be argued that Giap outlined five stages rather than three, or that he used the three stages but preceded them with two preliminary ones. In the first, which might be called the psychological warfare stage, a base is established among the people, using propaganda and political warfare; discontent among the people is converted into channelled activity; cells are formed; most activity is on the individual level and of course is clandestine. In the second preparatory phase, which might be called the small-unit phase, comes the basic organizational work: the formation of vertical and horizontal associations and

the creation of armed propaganda guerrilla companies, agit-prop teams with guns who fight only to defend themselves and whose chief tasks are organization and agit-prop work; Giap said these companies prepared the ground, and only when their work was well done could the three stages actually begin. Basically developmental, the three stages are categories expressed mainly in offence-defence, static-dynamic, military-political terms with respect to both the revolutionary and his enemy.\*

Without a party, without centralized organization and firm discipline, without a programme and policy to meet the needs of the masses and without the organs of popular power and control there could be no protracted war. Only defeat and extermination.

It is indisputably true to say that, on the basis of the Vietnam experience, guns combined with the courage and endurance of individual guerrillas would have meant little or nothing if Ho Chi Minh and the other leaders were unable to analyse the principal and secondary contradictions within Vietnam as well as between Vietnam and imperialism and on that basis outline a strategy for the conquest of power. As Lenin once wrote: 'Without a revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement'.

The idea of the revolutionary party was not Ho Chi Minh's creation. It was derived from the example of Lenin's Bolshevik Party after it had been frightfully mutilated by Stalin. The theory of the 'Protracted War' on the other hand was not a unique contribution of General Giap. It too was derived, after some modification, from the works of Mao Tse Tung and the experiences of the Chinese Red Army in fighting Chiang Kai Shek and the Japanese.

Only hopeless idealists and incurable pedants would attribute the successes of the Vietnamese to the organizing skill of a Ho or the intuitive genius of a Giap.

Marxists who value the role of individual leaders, however, see this victory as the *collective* effort and struggle of an entire class and its leading organs to assimilate and apply revolu-

tionary theory and enrich revolutionary practice. It is only in this context that we can understand and appreciate the role of individual leaders.

It is no accident that Castro has not yet written an original and scientific treatise on the laws of guerrilla war as applied to Latin America. The only attempt so far has been that of Regis Debray. And that is so full of contradictions, plagiarisms and platitudes as to be worthless. The fact that its author and his patron fell into the hands of the Bolivian military is sufficient reason for skepticism on that score.

Theoretically speaking, the Castroite movement is bankrupt because it is a middle-class movement which has not been able to raise itself above the provincialism and Philistinism of the colonial middle-class. Consequently it gravitates between opportunism and adventurism. It is a movement without any future. It is hardly surprising that in such a movement leaders are exalted and ideas and theories and the struggle for a higher level of consciousness is belittled.

The foremost exponent of 'guerrilla struggle' today is not Castro or Che Guevara but Mao Tse Tung who led the longest and most extensive revolutionary war in modern times. In his most important work on war—'Protracted War'—Mao characteristically devotes a whole chapter to the role of consciousness.

For the benefit of the starry-eyed lyricists of Castro as well as those who still imagine that a gun is better than a theory it is worth repeating:

'Conscious activity is man's characteristic. This characteristic is most strongly manifested in man at war. Victory or defeat in a war of course is decided by the military, political, economic and geographical conditions, by the character of the war and of the international support on both sides, but not by these alone; these alone constitute only the possibility of victory and defeat, and do not in themselves

\* Vietcong by Douglas Pike, MIT Press, USA, 1966.

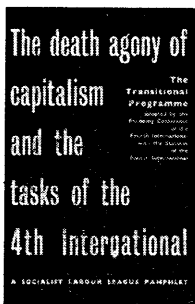
decide the issue. To decide the issue, efforts must be added, efforts in directing and waging the war, i.e., man's conscious activity in war.'

Hence what arises from a study of any revolutionary war is the indispensable necessity to enrich and develop class consciousness through a struggle to develop the theory and practice of the revolutionary movement.

This cannot be done except through the

struggle to build the party and the International which Lenin once described as 'consciousness at its highest level'.

Thus the Vietnam Revolution, far from uniting all tendencies in a welter of confusion, is in fact laying the basis for a decisive onslaught upon revisionism in all its forms and a major step forward of the International Committee of the Fourth International.

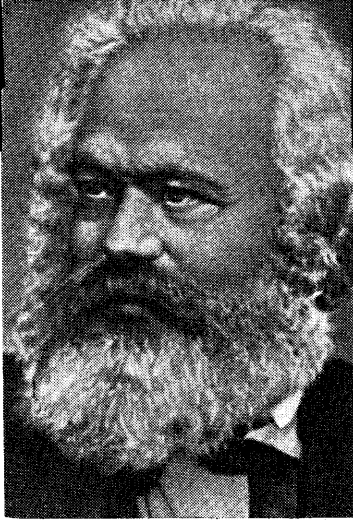


This is the basic programmatic document of the world movement founded by Leon Trotsky and his comrades. By 1938 the revolutionary Marxists had found it necessary to lay the foundations of the *Fourth* International in order to restore working-class leadership after the defeats prepared by the Stalinist bureaucracy in control of the Third (Communist) International. The defeat of the German Revolution in 1923, of the British General Strike in 1926, and of the Chinese Revolution in 1927, followed by Hitler's victory over the German working class in 1933, finally ruled out the perspective of transforming the Communist International by internal opposition.

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

## In celebration of Das Kapital

(Part 2)

by Geoff Pilling

IN THE FIRST part of this article we examined the relationship of Marx's work in political economy to the Classical School of Economics. In *Capital*, Marx is able to tackle and solve the problems posed by the leading representative of this school, Ricardo. Marx is able to explain all the surface phenomena of the capitalist system in terms of his 'starting point', the commodity, on which is based his value theory, the labour theory. Marx is able to do this because he realizes that Ricardo saw this as too simple a problem. Marx shows that it is not adequate merely to counter-

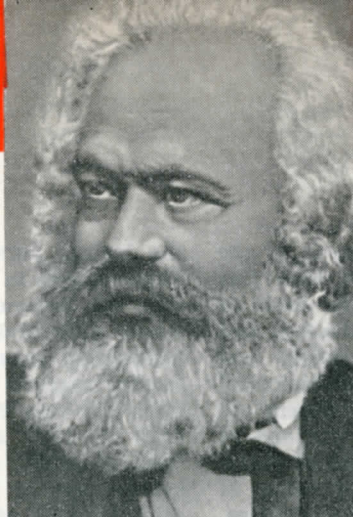
pose the appearance and the essence of the phenomena of the capitalist system, nor merely to demonstrate the inter-relatedness of the categories of political economy. What is required of political economy is a tracing of the manifold and complex connections between these categories.

Thus whereas Ricardo, starting from the commodity, tries to explain all the phenomena of the bourgeois mode of production at the commencement of his work, Marx only deals with these surface manifestations at the very end of Volume III. He is able, postulating even the commodity,



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Thus whereas Ricardo, starting from the commodity, tries to explain all the phenomena of the bourgeois mode of production at the commencement of his work, Marx only deals with these surface manifestations at the very end of Volume III. He is able, postulating even the commodity,

to understand the totality and movement of the entire system. But he does not start with this totality. He understands it only on the basis of the social relations established in production and is therefore able to establish the power and validity of the method of dialectical and historical materialism. All the categories of the system are traced back to their essence in the relations of production. This is why the corner-stone of Marxist political economy is the theory of value. It is no accident that the strongest critics of Marx, perhaps most notably Böhm-Bawerk, have attacked the theory of value head on.

### A law upheld in divergence

Marx's treatment of his value theory also illustrates the process of concretization which underlies *Capital*. In Volume I Marx assumes that commodities exchange at prices determined directly by their embodied labour ratios. But in Volume III he deals with the complex connections between price, that is the form which value takes in capitalist economy, its outward appearance, and value. He shows that, given varying organic compositions of capital in the different branches (a product of the tendency towards uneven development in the economy) on the one hand, with a tendency for an average rate of profit to establish itself in the economy on the other, commodities cannot exchange directly at their values. Having stated the problem it would appear as though the theory of value were in irreconcilable opposition to the real phenomena of the capitalist system. We appear to be left with the choice of either overthrowing the labour theory of value, and with it the whole of Marx's work in this field or with renouncing the attempt to understand the dynamics of the system. But this was not a 'dilemma' for Marx as some of his readers imagine. No! Marx shows that the law of value is upheld precisely through a divergence of prices from values, but a divergence which is explicable in terms of the law itself, which is 'law governed', that is.

Marx justifies this treatment of value (that is a movement from value to price) not only theoretically but also historically. In his important 'Appendix' to Volume III, Engels is concerned to refute those followers of Marx who saw value as a necessary starting point, theoretically, but nonetheless a fictitious one. As he notes of these people 'they do not make sufficient allowance for the fact that we are dealing here not only with a purely logical process, but with a historical process and its explanatory reflection in thought,

the logical pursuance of its inner connections'. Engels shows in his sketch of the history of value that the assumed equality of 'price' and 'value' which underpins the analysis of Volume I, was *historically speaking* a correct starting point. He further suggests that this relationship holds good from the very beginning of exchange right down until the 15th century. He also indicates that the 'rate of profit' emerges as a result of the guild system, one of the chief aims of which was the establishment of an equal rate of return for all the guild members. He further shows how this rate of profit developed in relation to merchant and then industrial capital, with the emergence of each new category involving the destruction of the old relationships. He insists that the transformation of 'value' into 'price' must not be seen *formally* but as a real historical process, a question ignored by many writers.

Thereby the conversion of values into production prices is accomplished for exchange as a whole. The conversion therefore proceeds according to objective laws, without the consciousness or the intent of the participants.

### A blindly-working average

It was certainly not a question of Marx having to overcome 'problems' in his analysis of value, to 'explain' why price should deviate from value or price of production. He shows that the capitalist system *demands* this very divergence as part of its very functioning. This once more serves to illustrate the dialectical method of *Capital* and also establishes the unity of the theory of value with the theory of accumulation and crisis. Briefly, Marx sees capitalism as based upon anarchy, a system which while incapable of conscious social regulation, is 'planned', but only through the assertion of the law of value. Each branch of the economy produces commodities, with each firm struggling to increase its share of total surplus value. But at the same time the total social demand remains an unknown magnitude. Competition depreciates below value those commodities which in kind or amount are not useful for immediate social requirement. In other words only through the continual deviation of values from prices can the value of commodities be established. Price must necessarily have a different aspect from value, which it represents, just as 'the King usually looks quite different from the monarchy which he represents'. Thus the law of value asserts itself precisely through a series of crises of over- and under-production, as a 'blindly working average'.

It was because of the impossibility of any conscious *a priori* regulation of production, because the law of value operates 'behind the back of the participants in the productive process', that Marx was unable to make concrete predictions about the exact course of capitalist development in all its details. The equalization of the rate of profit in the different branches of the economy with varying organic compositions of capital proceeds only through a struggle between the branches in which the relationship between values, prices, and prices of production is established as a result of this process.

It is important to establish the *unity* of Marx's work in *Capital*. This is true especially of the relationship between the law of value and the 'law of motion' of the system. Most commentators on Marx, even those 'sympathetic' to him have failed to do this. These writers normally provide an exposition of the theory of value on the one hand and a separate theory of crisis on the other. In fact this amounts to little more than an 'extension' of the Classical conceptions. Marxism is not Ricardian economics with a theory of crisis tacked on the end. The key to understanding the unity of *Capital* is to understand the importance of the distinction between the 'use value' and 'value' of the commodity. As Marx points out in relation to Ricardo, the Classics, while often drawing a formal distinction between these two sides of value, did not develop this side of their work or realize its true implications. For Marx, 'use value' is not merely an *aspect* of value, nor merely a *pre-requisite* for value. A commodity unites, in itself, use value and exchange value (value).

### Surplus value as the *differentia specifica*

Marx shows, in Chapter 7, Volume 1, that the very driving forces of the capitalist system disrupt this unity. 'Use value, is, by no means, the thing *quó on aime pour lui-même* in the production of commodities.' Use values are produced by the capitalist only *incidentally*: to the extent that they are the depositories, the material substance of exchange value. The driving aim of the capitalist is to produce not merely use values, or even values, but *surplus value*. The incessant drive to produce surplus value is the *differentia specifica* of the labour process under capitalism.

Capital has not invented surplus labour. . . . It is, however, clear that in any given economic formation of society, where not the exchange value but the use value of the product predominates, surplus labour will be limited by a

given set of social wants which may be greater or less and here no incessant thirst for surplus labour arises from the nature of production itself.

### Production for profit

The general aim of production (as it appears in all social systems) is, under capitalism, overridden and dominated by the particular aim of production, production for profit, which is the motor force and regulator of the accumulation process. This is the importance, after he has dealt with the role of money, of the schema M-C-M' as an expression of this process of accumulation. Marx shows that crises arise because the aim of production is governed not by use values but by surplus values, that capitalism is a system of production not for use but for profit.

On the other hand, as we have noted, this 'social demand' cannot be ascertained beforehand by the producers of commodities. The law of value is only established after continual processes of trial and error in which production is brought into line with demand. This process necessarily involves periods of 'over production' in response to previous phases of 'under production' in which the division of social labour time, between the branches of the economy, reflected in the law of value, operates as this unconscious and uncontrolled process. Planning takes place via the law of value and not through human agency.

It is equally necessary to insist upon the unity of Marx' work in political economy with his view of the class struggle. Volume III opens with an important passage in which Marx explains this unity. In Volume I he has dealt with the basic and immediate processes of production without regard to any secondary effects or outside influences. In Volume II he develops this analysis by dealing with the effects associated with the rate of turnover of capital and their implications for the analysis outline in Volume I. In Volume III Marx makes clear that it is not now a question merely of providing a synthesis of this earlier analysis. His work

. . . must locate and describe the concrete forms which grow out of the *movements of capital as a whole*. In this actual movement capitals confront each other in such concrete shape, for which the form of capital in the immediate process of production, just as its form in the process of circulation, appears only as special instances. The various forms of capital, as evolved in this book, thus approach step by step the form which they assume on the surface of society, in the action of different capitals upon one another, in competition, and in

the ordinary consciousness of the agents of production themselves.

## Land, Labour and Capital

Marx shows in Volume III that the form taken by capital in society is that of the three 'factors of production', land, labour and 'capital', with their corresponding revenues, 'rent', 'wages' and 'interest' (taking 'profit' as the 'wages of superintendence'). He shows that these alleged sources of annually available wealth belong to widely different spheres. 'Capital' is not a 'thing', not the sum of material and produced means of subsistence; it is the means of production, *but* the means of production monopolized by a separate class in society, confronting living labour power as products and working conditions rendered independent of this labour power.

On the other hand 'land' is not a source of value, nor of surplus value. Similarly 'labour' in the abstract is divested of all relations to any specific mode of production. The famous 'formula' (that is land, labour and capital as the three 'factors of production') embraces 'capital' which is historically and socially determined with 'land' and 'labour', both of which are elements of the real productive process which, in their material form, are common to all modes of production.

We can usefully contrast the method of treatment of these questions at the opening of Volume III with that at the start of the whole work. In Volume I Marx is concerned with the mystifying character of social relations under commodity production. He returns to these questions at the end of the work, but now deals with them specifically from the point of view of conditions of developed *capitalist* commodity production. He shows that more complex questions have to be dealt with at this stage.

The emergence of capitalism involved an enormous development in the production of relative surplus value through a great increase in the productive power of social labour. But these powers now appear to be transferred from labour to capital. For the capitalist himself surplus value appears to arise from the very process of circulation rather than production. This illusion is in turn reinforced by two other factors. The capitalist sees his profit as contingent upon his selling (and cheating) ability in the sphere of circulation and secondly, 'added on' to his costs is the time which his resources are tied up in circulation, this appears as an 'independent' factor which arises from the very nature of capital.

The treatment of circulation in Volume III also illustrates the same method. In Volume II Marx demonstrates that circulation cannot be the source of value; it can only act as a negative barrier to the formation of value and surplus value. He at this point also examines the history of the theories of the circulation process in the literature of Classical economics. But when considered in Volume III from the point of view of the consciousness of the capitalist—that is not 'objectively' as in Volume II—it appears quite differently. The 'laws' of circulation appear to be regulated by chance and accident and Marx shows that the capitalist, from his individualist point of view, is unable to grasp them objectively.

The conversion of the general category 'surplus value' into its component parts and the formation of a general rate of profit further obscures the real relations underlying the forms taken by wealth in bourgeois society. Surplus value in the form of profit is no longer related back directly to that portion of capital invested in the purchase of labour power from which it arose, but is related to the total social capital. Marx also stresses at this point (which flows from his analysis earlier in the work) that the rate of profit is regulated by laws of its own which permit, and indeed require it, to change while the rate of surplus value remains unaltered. Further, with the formation of an average rate of profit, profit is divorced from the actual exploitation of labour in the different spheres of production.

## Two levels of abstraction

This illustrates one of the great achievements of Marx, an aspect of his work which he himself considered one of the strongest points of the *Critique* and *Capital*: the treatment of surplus value independent of its forms as profit, interest, ground rent, etc. Having dealt with the law governing the formation of surplus value in Volume I he is later able to examine the laws which regulate the division of the mass of surplus value into its component parts. In Volume III, that is, he is able to concentrate on the laws which produce and sustain the appearance of wealth in bourgeois society. He is able to show that the 'regular hash' in which the Classical School found itself when dealing with these questions stemmed from a failure to work at these two levels of abstraction.

Marx is therefore able, at the end of Volume III, which we must remember was never completed, to establish the relationship between his critique of the bourgeois political economy and

the class struggle. Volume III ends, in other words, with the real relationships of production, but as they appear in bourgeois society. But these appearances, the starting point for the vulgar economist, are understood in a new way. The movement of 'appearances'—part of the 'super-structure' are explained in terms of the 'base' (the social relations of production). Having traced the real sources of revenue of the three great classes back to the real relations of production established under the capitalist mode, Marx is able to establish the connection between these revenues and the classes who depend upon them. This is why *Capital* ends with the famous but incomplete chapter 'Classes'.

The owners merely of labour power, owners of capital and landowners, constitute the three big classes of modern society based upon the capitalist mode of production

The general structure of *Capital*, as examined above is perhaps best summarized by a quotation from one of Marx's letters to Engels (April 30, 1868):

At last we have arrived at the forms of *appearances* which serve as the *starting point* in the vulgar conception. . . . But from our point of view the thing is now seen differently. The apparent movement is explained. . . . Then the whole movement takes this form of appearances. Finally since these three (wages, ground rent, profit (interest)) constitute the respective sources of the income of the three classes of landowners, capitalists and wage labourers, we have, in conclusion, the *class struggle* into which the movement and the smash up of the whole business resolves itself.

### Progress of class struggle and 'special pleading'

It is now possible to see why *Capital* was Marx's most important single work. *Capital* was a *critique* of political economy. This is not to be taken as synonymous with a 'criticism'. All earlier writers, from the time of the Physiocrats, had 'criticized' their predecessors, just as Smith had criticized the French School and was, at a later stage, to be criticized by Ricardo. All these 'criticisms' had been directed towards the establishment of a more consistently bourgeois view of the law which governed the production and distribution of wealth in capitalist society. This work was increasingly 'objective' only to the extent that the development of capitalism was synonymous with 'progress', with the growth and expansion of the productive forces. Marx shows, in *Theories of Surplus Value* that this phase comes to an end in the 1820s, when the objective aspects

of the Classical economists are increasingly replaced by special pleading. These developments were intimately related to the progress of the class struggle and the emergence of the working class as a coherent and independent force ranged against the whole of bourgeois society.

*Capital* is not, therefore, a criticism of bourgeois economics 'from within'. It represents an attack on the most fundamental premises of Classical economics. Hence Marx's opposition to those 'Ricardian Socialists' of the 1820s who used Ricardo's teachings as a basis for their attack upon the capitalist economy. Marx stands opposed to the idea that an economic science, inherited from the bourgeoisie, can be an adequate weapon to arm the working class in its struggle to overthrow the capitalist order. It was not a question merely of eliminating the bias and error in Ricardo, taking over his labour theory of value and adapting this for the purposes of socialist propaganda. Such notions rapidly paved the way to idealism and utopian conceptions of socialism, as Marx shows with greatest clarity in his criticism of Gray.

Marx insists that the 'appearances' of the bourgeois order do not stem from mere illusion. Under capitalism the working class is alienated from the fruits of its labour which stand opposed to it and dominate over it as a 'second nature'. These are appearances, but necessary appearances, which do not disappear merely by uncovering their roots in the antagonistic relationships in production. As Marx notes about the 'discovery' of the law of value as the starting point for the understanding of price: this 'discovery', while removing all appearances of 'accident' in the process of value and price formation does not alter the *mode* in which this law asserts itself. 'The relations connecting the labour of one individual with that of the rest appear, not as direct social relations between individuals at work, but as *what they really are*, material relations between persons and social relations between things.' (Emphasis added.) In Volume III the same point is returned to, this time in conditions of fully developed capitalist commodity production. Marx shows how capital appears to the capitalist, land to the landowner and labour to the labourer as three and distinct sources of their individual revenues, but he adds:

They really are so in the sense that capital is a perennial pumping machine of surplus labour for the capitalist, land a perennial magnet for landlord, attracting a portion of surplus value pumped out by the capital. . . .

'Capital' is productive because it is coercive against labour, because it expresses the antagonism between the monopolization of the means of production in the hands of a single class confronting wage labour. The production of surplus value rests not on 'economic facts' but upon the institutional and class structure of the bourgeois system of production.

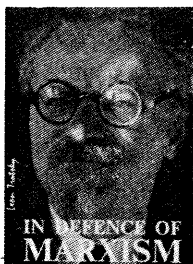
### Conclusion

Thus *Capital* is not a treatise about the exploitation of the working class. This is not the kernel of Marx's work: neither he nor capital invented surplus labour. Exploitation is a necessary part of capitalism as the last antagonistic form of social production. It is not a question of 'criticizing' the laws of bourgeois political

economy as summed up by Ricardo. Rather it is a matter of overthrowing these laws through the revolutionary overthrow of the bourgeois order. Marx's conclusions in *Capital* are united with his critique of Feuerbach as the highest expression of contemplative materialism.

*Capital* is therefore truly critical of capitalist production in that Marx goes beyond the categories of this mode of production, establishing that it is a historically limited and transient social system. It is because in *Capital* Marx overthrows the starting point of bourgeois political economy and arrives at a new theoretical starting point that this work was and is the weapon of the working class, the class which is forced, as a necessary part of its existence, to strive, in practice, to advance itself and humanity beyond the confines imposed by the capitalist order.

## In Defence of Marxism by Leon Trotsky



In the course of building the Fourth International, Trotsky played a leading part in the early years of the Socialist Workers' Party (SWP) of the USA. Almost from the very beginning in the SWP, there developed factions and platforms responding in their own impressionist, non-Marxist way to the many changes in world politics and the class struggle in America in the epoch of imperialism and Stalinism. 'In Defence of Marxism', written between September 1939 and August 1940, now published for the first time in Britain, is the record of Trotsky's struggle against the first great wave of reaction of the petty-bourgeois intellectuals who had joined the SWP. Price: Soft cover 10s. 6d. Hard cover 21s.

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# Marxism and Stalinism in Britain 1920-26

by M. Woodhouse

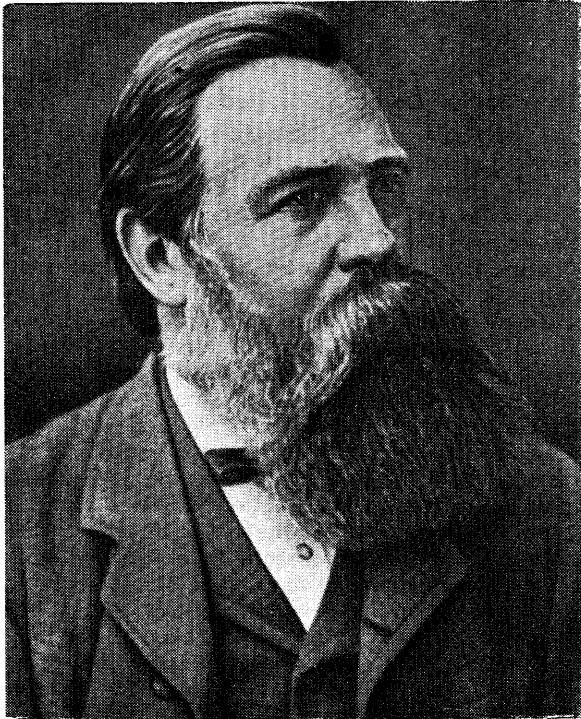
Part 2

## The Social Democratic Federation

THE MARXIST tendencies which existed in the period immediately prior to the formation of the CPGB stemmed from the Social Democratic Federation (SDF), the only Marxist party which existed in 1900. The Marxism of the SDF was an extreme form of the essentially arid and dogmatic Marxism of the main parties of the Second International in this period, most notably the German Social Democrats and their ideologue, Kautsky. In Britain the adherence of the SDF to formal aspects of Marxism, rather than to its use as a method for understanding society in order to actively intervene in its transformation, was more clearly revealed than in Germany, where the SPD had a mass following. In Britain the SDF was able, to a limited extent, to play the role of awakening the class consciousness of sections of the working class and of helping to develop the understanding of the need for independent political action, but this was hampered by the sectarianism of the SDF leadership. Work was undertaken by the party rank-and-file often quite spontaneously at local level and irrespective of the attitude of the party leadership. Such work was often carried out in close co-operation with non-Marxist 'reformist' organizations, e.g. the ILP and the Clarion Scouts, and in many areas the SDF, in organization and political outlook, closely resembled the ILP.

Activities of this sort could be very fruitful in creating the conditions for the emergence of independent political consciousness among workers; the actions of SDF branches in relation to the London County Council and parliamentary constituencies in the East End of London were very significant in this respect.<sup>1</sup> But such activities were undertaken largely intuitively in response to the growing feeling of the need for an independent working-class party. In the absence of any guidance from the leadership of the SDF the party's local branches were not acting upon a political estimation of the role Marxists could play in the formation of a mass working-class party that would initially be purely reformist and 'labourite' in consciousness. Such a party, as Engels clearly realised, was a necessary first step for the development of revolutionary consciousness, but to transcend this stage a creative application of Marxist theory to the question of changing reformist to revolutionary practice was required. The work of the local SDF branches met the first of these requirements but to meet the

<sup>1</sup> See P. Thompson, *Liberals, Radicals and Labour in London, Past and Present*, 1964.



FREDERICK ENGELS

second the dogmas of the SDF leadership and the sectarian methods flowing from them had to be overcome: as Engels noted, writing in the early 1890s on the position of the SDF and Fabian Society:

... both in the SDF and in the Fabian Society the provincial members were better than the central body. But that is of no avail as long as the attitude of the central body determines that of the Society.<sup>2</sup>

### Sectarianism

To a large extent, the leadership of the SDF was drawn from a section of the bourgeoisie and upper reaches of the petty-bourgeoisie who were disorientated by the collapse of the mid-Victorian boom, the 'Great Depression' and the relative economic decline of Britain, and who derived from Marxism a series of formulae which predicted the imminent collapse of capitalism and indicated salvation through the revolutionary action of the working class, suitably led by these converts to Socialism from the privileged classes. For a number of advanced workers, particularly in London, who were moving under the impact of the depression from Liberal-Radicalism to Socialism, the theories of Hyndman, with their emphasis on the need for a revolutionary party for the working

class, completely separate from the two established bourgeois parties, were distinctly attractive. For some of these workers, Harry Quelch is the best example, the strategy established by Hyndman for the SDF in the 1880s became almost a religion, an immutable expression of the absolute truths of Marxism; as Engels expressed it, writing to Sorge in America:

The Social Democratic Federation here shares with your German-American Socialists the distinction of being the only parties who have contrived to reduce the Marxist theory of development to a rigid orthodoxy. This theory is to be forced down the throats of the workers at once and without development as articles of faith, instead of making the workers raise themselves to its level by dint of their own class instinct. That is why both remain mere sects...<sup>3</sup>

### Inevitability and automatism

Holding that the collapse of capitalism was an inevitable and automatic process, the leaders of the SDF adopted for themselves the role of the ultimate inheritors of state power when the collapse occurred. To play its revolutionary role correctly, therefore, it had to remain doctrinally 'pure' and free from compromise with reformist tendencies in the Labour movement.

In a period when significant sections of the working class were beginning to move towards political action independent of the two bourgeois parties as well as towards a major extension of trade unionism, the leadership of the SDF stood aside from such developments. Work in the trade unions was at best self-defeating, if not irrelevant; they could play no part in the transition to Socialism in that, by bargaining for better wages, they supported the wages system and thus capitalism. Partly under pressure from the membership of the SDF and partly in the hope of playing the chief role in the formation of a united Socialist party, Hyndman and the leaders of the SDF participated in the negotiations leading to the establishment of the Labour Representation Committee (LRC), but within a year, when it was found impossible to convert the trade union-dominated LRC to a specifically Socialist programme, the SDF withdrew from the LRC. There was much to justify Engel's assertion, as far as the leaders were concerned, that '... the SDF is purely a sect. It has ossified Marxism into a dogma and, by rejecting every labour movement which is not orthodox Marxism... it renders itself incapable of ever

2 Marx and Engels; *On Britain*, p. 576.

3 *Ibid.* p. 582.



becoming anything else but a sect . . .'<sup>4</sup>

The chief responsibility for the sectarianism of the SDF devolved upon the small clique of founder members who dominated the executive by the turn of the century; Hyndman, Belfort Bax, Burrows and Quelch. The maintenance of their hegemony depended not only on their operation of a fairly tight bureaucracy but also on the fact that no alternative to their political theories was seriously advanced within the SDF. The period after 1900 was to see increasing opposition to the leading clique, from those who broke away to form the Socialist Labour Party (SLP) and the Socialist Party of Great Britain (1903-4) and from those who wanted a return to 'ginger group' activities within the Labour Party, but there was never any theoretical understanding of the political significance of the 'Marxism' of Hyndman; the approach to Marxism which the opposition groups adopted was very much of the type evolved by the SDF over the previous period.

The political manifestations of the 'Marxism' of Hyndman and his colleagues in fact produced among their opponents in the SDF membership reactions that were wholly empirical in character. Hyndman's theories 'did not work'; better ways had to be found. Such attitudes derived very largely from the practical experience of the SDF's sectarianism. Treating Marxism as a set of dogmas, the leadership were unable to apply Marxism as a method to the day-to-day needs of the party in its work among the working class. The SDF consequently tended to vacillate between ultra-revolutionary and purely reformist policies and appeared thoroughly opportunist in practice. After the disappearance of the expectation of cataclysmic revolutionary upheavals in the 1880s, the SDF's revolutionary strategy rested wholly upon the concept of a peaceful, parliamentary transition to Socialism. The work of the SDF came to be based almost wholly upon parliamentary and local electioneering. Vital though this was as part of a general strategy for awakening working-class political consciousness, so far as the SDF leadership was concerned it represented the totality of their activities. In its day-to-day practice, therefore, the SDF appeared as reformist as the ILP, but, because of its sectarian approach to the unions, far less influential. Moreover, in the absence of any theoretical understanding of the connection between participation in local government (where the SDF did obtain successes) and the creation of working-class political consciousness, the SDF members elected to public positions tended to become wholly involved in the routine

of local government, trapped within its limitations, and their political outlook increasingly moulded by this limiting experience.

### **The Socialist Labour Party**

The Socialist Labour Party was formed as a breakaway of several Scottish branches of the SDF (with a few in Southern England) in opposition to the growing opportunism of the SDF leadership. The break was of significance not only in that it represented the outcome of mounting opposition to the Bax-Hyndman group by young working-class militants, but in its association with the current struggle within the Second International against revisionist and opportunist tendencies. The issues involved in the debate at the International's 1900 Congress on the entry of Millerand, the French Socialist, into the French government at the height of the Dreyfus crisis were brought directly into the struggle within the SDF which culminated in the formation of the SLP in 1903. The support given by the SDF delegation at the Paris Congress to Kautsky's resolution allowing participation in bourgeois governments in specific circumstances (the 'indiarubber' resolution) was strongly attacked by militants at the 1901 Annual Conference of the SDF, particularly by the Scottish delegates soon to take the lead in forming the SLP. The support of the SDF leadership for Kautsky's resolution was clearly considered support for opportunism, and was coupled with the growing evidence of the opportunist practice of the SDF in Britain.<sup>5</sup> Opposition to revisionism, therefore, or, more accurately, to its practical aspects, was an integral part of the movement of working-class militants in the SDF to a revolutionary position.

### **Empiricism**

However, the reaction against the SDF was purely empirical. It was attended by none of the theoretical investigation of the roots and nature of revisionism currently being carried out by Rosa Luxemburg. The SLP looked instead for a form of organization which would permit more direct access to the working class, which would lead to a more direct confrontation with capitalism than the 'parliamentarianism' of the SDF and which would permit the preservation of the revolutionary purity that had attended the struggles of the SDF

4 Marx and Engels, *On Britain*, p. 574.

5 For details of the formation of the SLP, see Tsuzuki, *The 'Impossible' Revolt in Britain*, *International Review of Social History*, 1956.

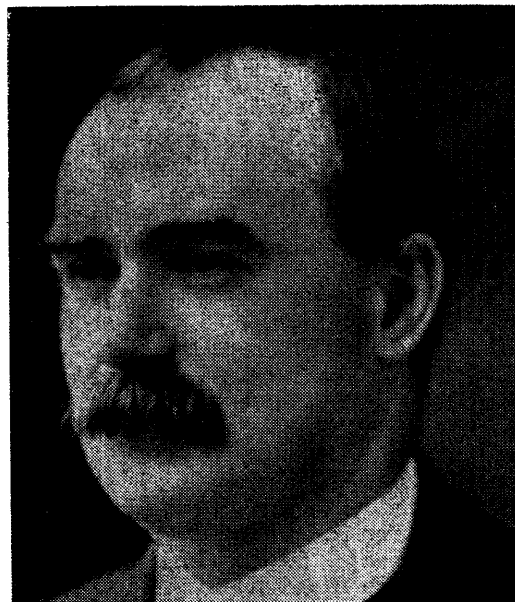
in its early years. In its policies the SLP carried over from the SDF an adherence to Marxism as a set of formulae, not a guide to action, to be safeguarded from reformist corruption by a rejection of all forms of tactical alliance with reformist organizations within the Labour movement, trade unions and political parties alike. The SLP thus represented what was really an intuitive reaction against that process whereby organized sections of the working class were being adapted to capitalism via the medium of trade union and political bureaucracies, and with its ideas of revolutionary action through the establishment of industrial unions the SLP sought to by-pass this growing bureaucracy. At the same time, the reaction against bureaucracy in the Labour movement was accompanied by a hostility to the permeation of the movement by Fabian ideas, particularly to the ultimate goal of Fabianism, collectivist bureaucratic capitalism. Against the 'state socialist' ideas of the leaders of the ILP and Labour Party, which the SLP saw as the vehicle for this form of collectivism, was posed the conception of a Socialist system based upon the direct control of production by the working class through their industrial unions. Connolly (who was intimately connected with the formation and early development of the SLP) clearly characterized this system and the process whereby it would be created:

. . . In the light of this principle of Industrial Unionism every fresh shop or factory organized under its banner is a fort wrenched from the capitalist class and manned with the soldiers of the revolution to be held by them for the workers.

On the day that the political and economic forces of labour finally break with capitalist society and proclaim the Workers' Republic these shops and factories so manned by Industrial Unionists will be taken charge of by the workers there employed and force and effectiveness given to that proclamation . . .<sup>6</sup>

### Connolly, positivism and idealism

The concept of Socialist revolution set out by Connolly, as J. T. Murphy noted<sup>7</sup>, powerfully influenced every revolutionary movement in Britain up to the formation of the CPGB, and Connolly's schema was very characteristic of the Marxism of these movements. Such Marxism was permeated with positivist and idealist assumptions. It saw in Marx's writings the best description of the capitalist system and drew from this description the clear fact of the class struggle between workers and employers, based on industrial exploitation. The state, government and



JAMES CONNOLLY

political parties were mere reflexes of this basic fact of the industrial class war, and although both Connolly and the SLP stressed the need for political (i.e. parliamentary) action in order to awaken working-class political consciousness, the emphasis was placed on the primacy of industrial organization for both immediate and eventual revolutionary ends. As a general perspective for working-class action there was nothing here with which a Marxist could disagree, but in the practice of the SLP this perspective was reduced to an ideal scheme which was inextricably linked to the mechanical approach of the SLP to Marxism. The movement of the working class towards a revolutionary position was seen as an automatic reflex to the development of capitalism from an individualistic to a monopoly form. As ownership became concentrated and employers nationally organized, so the working class would see the need for the establishment of industrial unions, embracing all the workers in an industry, in place of the old, narrow, craft unions. As the quotation from Connolly indicates, the very process of constructing such unions would lead the working class towards the conquest of power; the process was automatic, and the transition to Socialism would occur, through an undefined cataclysmic upheaval, when the working class was fully organized in industrial unions. The role of the party in this process was necessarily limited and

6 Connolly, *Socialism Made Easy*.

7 J. T. Murphy, *Preparing for Power*, p. 90.

essentially propagandist. It existed to make clear to the working class the nature of capitalism and the need for class, not craft, industrial organization to confront the bourgeoisie. The SLP existed, in fact, like the SDF, not to give leadership on day-to-day issues as an expression of a fully considered Marxist position on current problems, but to awaken in the minds of workers the idea of revolutionary socialism and the idea of how to organize to achieve it.

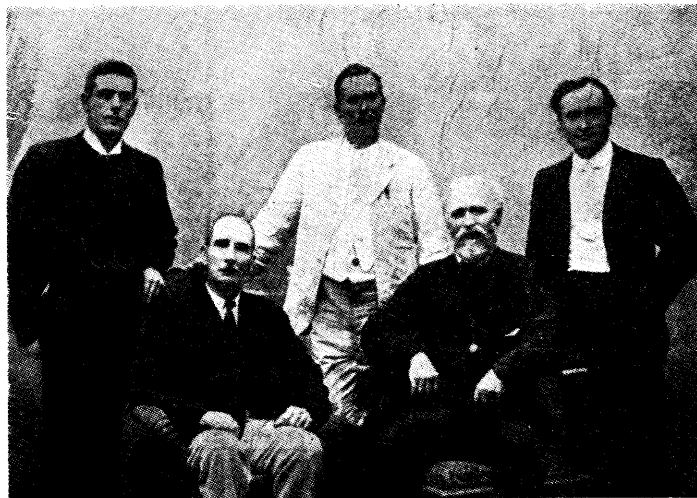
### Spontaneity and propagandism

The expectation was that, if instructed sufficiently well, the working class would spontaneously move towards a revolutionary position through the adoption of the ideal organization, the industrial union. The description given by T. A. Jackson of the working of an SDF branch in this period equally well applied, with a few minor changes, to that of an SLP branch and indicated the purely propaganda role of the party:

The normal SDF branch numbered something between a score and fifty—the regular attenders at a branch meeting being somewhat better than a dozen. The customary routine was, after the minutes and correspondence, to fix arrangements for the Sunday propaganda meetings, and for any weekday meetings there might be. The life activity of the branch centred around these propaganda meetings. . . . The speeches at these open air meetings usually took the form of a general statement of socialist aspirations, a general criticism of capitalism and its evils, and a special application to current happenings—particularly the doings of the local Borough or Town Council . . .<sup>8</sup>

### Syndicalism

Inevitably, so brief a characterization of the theory of the SLP is over-rigid, but essentially it was this theory that the SLP developed in the years before 1914 in its attempt to find a direct, revolutionary road to the working class. Moreover, the importance of the contribution of the SLP to the theory and practice of the revolutionary movement in Britain should not be underestimated. Despite the minuscule size of the party itself, the propaganda of the SLP had considerable influence in shaping the outlook of the leaders of the industrial ferment of the immediate pre-war period. In a period of deepening class struggle, when young militants were looking for new forms of organization, the theories of the SLP, widely circulated in a series of excellently produced pamphlets by the Socialist Labour Press, had considerable attraction and played no small part in



*A group of syndicalist labour leaders, amongst them Tom Mann in the company of Keir Hardie (seated left).*

the shaping of the amorphous body of ideas that became known as Syndicalism around 1910. At the time when Tom Mann began interpreting French anarcho-syndicalist methods in terms of the British working-class experience in 1910, SLP ideas were already influential among advanced workers. Among the railworkers, miners and engineers of the pre-1914 period particularly SLP ideas took root; the theories of the SLP, developed in opposition to the growing bureaucracy in the Labour movement, were a major factor in the Ruskin strike in 1909 which led to the establishment of the Plebs League and the Labour College movement. Students from the mining and railway unions were prominent in this development, and the *Miners' Next Step*, produced by members of the Plebs League, displayed definite signs of the influence of SLP ideas.

The significant fact about the theories of the SLP, however, was that although they became an integral part of the theoretical equipment of advanced workers in this period, they did not lay the basis for the construction of a mass revolutionary party. The fact was that in reducing Marxism to a few basic postulates on the nature of capitalism and presenting the movement of the working class towards Socialism as an automatic process, the SLP had obscured both the role of the party and the need for the working class to destroy the existing bourgeois state in order to effect the Socialist revolution. In the last analysis the SLP's theories could be reduced to the purely practical premise of the need for effective trade union organization, and it was in this sense that

<sup>8</sup> T. A. Jackson, *Solo Trumpet*, pp. 54-55.

the SLP prepared the way theoretically for the growth of Syndicalism in Britain.

### The British Socialist Party

The development of the SLP was not the only reaction to the growing bureaucratic control and sterile formulae of the SDF leadership. From the turn of the century there was a parallel movement to the SLP within the SDF, in this case to turn the SDF away from its sectarianism and towards affiliation with the Labour Party. This tendency was, in effect, the obverse of that represented in the SLP; it originated from the same reaction against the SDF leadership but sought to orientate the SDF towards the mass Labour movement via the LRC and, later, the Labour Party. Thus while the SLP looked for a direct revolutionary route to the working class through its theories of industrial unionism, the opposition that remained inside the SDF looked for a similar route to the working-class masses through the LRC which, it held, could be converted by the SDF to Socialism. Objectively, these two tendencies represented in a fragmented way an important reaction against the methods established by the SDF by the turn of the century. Both were an intuitive recognition of the need for mass work at a time when the working class was only beginning to develop an awareness of its separate class interests, but because the two tendencies were completely separated, the one in the SLP, the other in what became the BSP by 1911, the two aspects of mass work, in the Labour Party and trade unions, were not to be united in an overall revolutionary perspective until the formation of the CPGB. As a result of this, both tendencies suffered from the weaknesses attendant upon their one-sided reaction to the leadership of the SDF and the particular stage reached by the British working class in the 1900s.

The major question before Marxists in Britain from the 1880s was the creation of an independent working-class party in conditions where the working class as a whole were only beginning to awake to their antagonism to capital. The immediate issues raised in this process were the extension of the trade unions and the mounting demand for social reform; as Engels appreciated, a movement for working-class political independence would have to concentrate on these immediate issues and through the process of agitating on them develop a Socialist consciousness among the working class.<sup>9</sup> The relevance of Engels' suggestions for British Marxists was increasingly appreciated by rank-and-file members

of the SDF. In the 1890s there was a significant degree of local co-operation between the members of the SDF and the ILP over immediate issues, while from 1901, when the SDF decided to withdraw from the non-Socialist, trade union-dominated LRC, this experience of the 1890s produced, in areas where the SDF had a significant working-class membership (as in Lancashire) a growing demand for the repudiation of the sectarian SDF leadership and re-affiliation with the LRC. It was only in this way, the supporters of this tendency agreed, that the SDF could play an effective role in converting the working class to socialism; to reject affiliation meant isolating the LRC from Marxism and leaving its supporters at the mercy of the vague, petty-bourgeois ideology of the ILP. 'Are we', asked a Lancashire delegate at the 1905 Annual Conference of the SDF, 'going to leave the moulding of the working-class movement to the leaders of the ILP?' and it was the Lancashire delegate at this conference who stressed in a principled way the need for affiliation to the LRC—A. Greenwood of Blackburn, speaking on the Lancashire resolution for affiliation, stated the position held by this tendency up to the founding of the BSP, and beyond, to the affiliation to the Labour Party in 1916:

The LRC represents the beginning of the last and greatest struggle for the political machinery of the country by the most intelligent and best organized of the workers. This does not seem to be appreciated by the SDF . . . the LRC movement is a semi-conscious recognition of the conflict of interests between the proletariat and the master class; it is better in character than its leaders in the House of Commons. . . . We want to make it a Socialist movement, and must establish sympathetic relations with it.

Harry Quelch's reply for the Executive made clear the rigidity of thought of the SDF leaders against which the supporters of the Lancashire resolution struggled:

Not a single new reason has been placed before us for adopting the course recommended. . . . If we rejoin the LRC we shall have no voice in the selection of candidates but will be called on to support them no matter whom they are. . . . We cannot have Socialist unity, he added, under the LRC, which contains anti-Socialists.

### Erroneous concepts built-in

The movement against the positions represented by Quelch gathered impetus during the course of

<sup>9</sup> See Engels' articles in the *Labour Standard* for 1881, reprinted in *The British Labour Movement*.

the 1906 Liberal Government and led eventually to the formation of the BSP in 1911 (a merger of the SDF with a number of ILP branches and Clarion Scout groups), and to the decision to affiliate to the Labour Party in 1914. This development was, however, very much an empirical reaction to the previous sectarianism of the SDF. In the same way that the SLP made no overall analysis and Marxist evaluation of the SDF and its defects, so the tendency which pressed for affiliation to the Labour Party did so not from the standpoint of a developed theoretical position but from a purely practical standpoint. The specific role of a revolutionary party in relation to the Labour Party and to the overall development of the Labour movement was never considered and the 'conversion' of the Labour Party to Socialism was throughout conceived in the very general terms set out by Greenwood in 1905, and wholly in the context of 'parliamentary Socialism'.

The processes that led to the formation of the BSP and its affiliation to the Labour Party were, in fact, not only the product of a long-drawn-out struggle in the SDF but a reaction to the 'labour unrest' of the immediate pre-war period which served to crystallize dissatisfaction with the Lib-Lab policies of the Parliamentary Labour Party and awaken the feeling in the ILP and SDF of the need for a more determined struggle for Socialist objectives. There was, consequently, the growth of a significant centrist tendency in the Labour Party and ILP at the very time when the BSP decided to affiliate to the former, and, in fact, the actual formation of the BSP and the terms in which it anticipated affiliation made it clear that it was part of this centrist current. The BSP entered the Labour Party essentially as a 'ginger group' whose role could be considered analogous to that of the ILP. On the question of the war it displayed, along with a large section of the ILP, an opposition that was, in the last analysis, pacifist<sup>10</sup>; practical action against the war was seen in terms of exerting pressure on the wartime coalition to conclude a 'democratic peace' in line with the majority at the Zimmerwald conference, and there was no evidence that the BSP considered intervening in the industrial struggles during the war in an attempt to give them an anti-war character. Again, the immediate effect of the Russian Revolution on the BSP was similar to the effect on the ILP; there was enthusiasm for the Revolution, a large amount of activity in opposition to Allied intervention in Russia and a general desire to emulate the success of the Bolsheviks. Yet all this did not essentially change

the character of the BSP; given its Marxist commitment it took up, from 1919, the idea of forming a Communist Party in Britain, but the nature of the party that was envisaged was an enlarged and more effective version of the BSP. The methods of work associated with the party's 'ginger group' activities within the Labour Party had become deeply ingrained, and while it moved towards the creation of a Communist Party, the BSP essentially anticipated a continuation of its role on the extreme left wing of social democracy. This attitude towards the formation of the CP and its relations with the Labour Party was reinforced by the strong vested interest built up by sections of the BSP in the local government and parliamentary work of the Labour Party, whence a strong opportunist current emanated. This was to remain influential in the CP during its early years, a point strongly stressed by Tom Bell in his autobiography.<sup>11</sup>

### **BSP not the CPGB in embryo**

Because of its revolutionary traditions, extending back to the 1880s, and because it was the largest of the Marxist groups in Britain, the BSP inevitably played a major part in the formation of the CPGB. But Macfarlane is incorrect in his implicit suggestion that the BSP was in some ways an embryo Communist Party. The fact that it began to consider industrial action in addition to parliamentary agitation before the First World War did not in any way anticipate the relationship between industrial and political activity which the CPGB was later to attempt to establish, as Macfarlane seems to argue.<sup>12</sup> The consideration of industrial agitation by the BSP was a direct response to the syndicalist upsurge after 1910, but although the BSP had a correct appreciation of the weaknesses of syndicalism, its leaders made no attempt to establish the relationship which industrial could have to political action. The nature of the imperialist state was ignored and the significance of direct revolutionary struggle in the factories for the establishment of alternative working-class power was wholly neglected. Thus Fred Knee, a leading BSP militant on the London Trades Council, wrote very correctly of syndicalism that:

You cannot get very far by mere 'industrial action'. So long as the Capitalist state remains, with its army, navy, and police, and its hand on the

10 i.e. after the small chauvinist group led by Hyndman had left the BSP in 1916.

11 Tom Bell, *op. cit.*, pp. 190-191.

12 Macfarlane, *op. cit.*

machine of administration, so long will it be possible for this capitalist state, when thoroughly awake to any danger, to throttle any strike, however big. . . .<sup>13</sup>

But the policy offered by Knee and the BSP generally was parliamentary action to take over the existing state as a vehicle for socialist legislation. The role of trade unionism, in this context, was limited to the fight for immediate improvements in wages etc. To this end the BSP adopted an 'industrial policy' that had for its aim the support of such trade union actions and the development of strong trade union organization, but this differed very clearly from the later trade union work of the CPGB, which was conceived in a wholly revolutionary context.

### **Syndicalism in both BSP and ILP**

The taking up of industrial organization by the BSP leadership before 1914 was, moreover, largely an attempt to head off the growing opposition in the party to pure parliamentary activity, and the growing support for syndicalism. But the fact that the BSP (like the ILP, where similar developments occurred) was unable to provide a revolutionary political lead in the trade unions, as part of a general attempt to take up the class struggle on all fronts, left the field wide open for syndicalism. This did not apply just to the 1910-1914 years of 'labour unrest'. The feeling among rank-and-file members of both the BSP and the ILP that the struggles against capitalism on the industrial front was somehow primary, and parliamentary struggle secondary, deepened during the war and under the impact of the Russian Revolution. Indication of the mood was provided by the resolution adopted by the ILP Divisional Conference in South Wales in 1918 that:

The time is ripe for the ILP to extend its activities to the Economic, in addition to the Political Field, seeing that it is in the field, factory, workshop, and mine that the real issue with the capitalist class is met, and that only by the workers organizing industrially as well as politically will the overthrow of Capitalism be brought about.<sup>14</sup>

It was because neither the BSP nor the ILP were capable of conducting their political work in the manner suggested by this resolution that many of the rank-and-file of both parties, before, during, and immediately after the war were swept into the syndicalist movement in its various forms. On the whole they remained members of their respective parties, but as industrial militants they sought expression for their conviction of the need for

revolutionary struggle outside Parliament, which, in the absence of a lead from their parties, could only be provided by syndicalism. In treating all the revolutionary groups of the pre-1920 period in clinical isolation, Macfarlane is guilty of excessive formalism. He describes the evolution of organizations, not the way these groups were related to the real problems and aims of workers. The fact was, that in the 1919-1920 period members of the revolutionary groupings, including sections of the ILP, came to share a basically syndicalist outlook despite the formal policy difference of the groups and parties to which they belonged, and because they could not connect theoretically and politically these syndicalist tendencies, the BSP and SLP in particular played an essentially syndicalist role in the industrial field up to the founding of the CPGB.

Syndicalism as a consciously organised force existed for a relatively brief period in the British labour movement, from 1910 to 1914; but in the absence of any viable alternative linking revolutionary activity in the trade unions to that in Parliament and elsewhere it exerted a powerful influence on young militants, and established methods of organization and revolutionary action which persisted among advanced workers up to and beyond the formation of the CPGB. Two ideological influences were at work in the creation of British syndicalism; the theories and methods of French anarcho-syndicalism, which represented the past petty-bourgeois anarchism of the French artisans carried over into the modern factory-based working class of France, and the theories of the SLP on industrial unionism, discussed above. The former were brought to Britain by Tom Mann, and with their emphasis on violent, direct struggle against the industrial bourgeoisie they found a response in a working class which was entering a period of unprecedented industrial struggles. The latter were even more influential, in that they offered an elaborated scheme for revolutionary action which proceeded from the immediate aims of the working class for strong trade unionism and showed how this could be associated with the eventual revolutionary overthrow of capitalism. These ideas of the SLP were taken over and incorporated into the general philosophy of syndicalism, while the SLP itself tended to remain uninvolved in the syndicalist struggles of the period. Its sectarianism and unwillingness to work with any tendency that did not completely accept

13 *British Socialist*, June 1912.

14 *Merthyr Pioneer*, January 19, 1918.

its policies meant that the SLP did not effectively participate in the industrial struggles of the pre-1914 period or attempt to bring theoretical clarity to their leadership. When SLP-ers did begin to participate in such struggles, notably during the war in the Shop Stewards' Movement, it was on a wholly 'practical' trade union basis. For a while the SLP's sectarianism succumbed to purely syndicalist practice.

### **The growth of state intervention**

Syndicalism provided an organized expression for the revolt of rank-and-file militants, particularly in the rail, mining and engineering unions, against the domination of the union by the old Lib-Lab leaderships, the expression of whose industrial outlook was found in the industrial relations established since the 1890s. Close relations with the employers and, increasingly, the state had been built up via conciliation machinery, the Board of Trade, etc. Such leaders looked to the state, particularly after 1906 when it was administered by a Liberal government, to intervene in and adjust industrial disputes, notably in industries which were nationally organized, or in which unions were struggling for nationally-organized collective bargaining—mining, railways, engineering, etc. The period after 1906 in particular saw this developing relationship between the state and unions expanded and institutionalized by the movement of trade union officials into full- or part-time posts in government departments to administer the embryonic welfare services of the Liberal Government, the Labour Exchanges, the Trade Board Acts, and to act as Labour Advisers to the Board of Trade. By 1913, 117 places had been provided at the Board of Trade for trade union officials, 124 in the National Insurance Department, 48 at the Home Office (where, for example, Tom Richards, secretary of the South Wales miners, was an assistant official) and 85 in other departments.<sup>15</sup> In quantitative terms this development represented only a small beginning compared with developments during and after the First World War, but in qualitative terms it represented an important advance from the position hitherto occupied by Lib-Lab trade unionists in their relations with the state and served to consolidate and give an institutional form to the previous disposition of such trade unionists to class peace. In rebelling against the domination of such officials in the mining, railway and engineering unions in particular, young militants were rebelling, in part at least, against a significant new stage in the evolution of the

imperialist state and its relation with the working class; the need of the state in a period of mass trade unionism to bring the leaders of the unions into an institutionalized relationship with it and to subject them more effectively to the requirements of capitalism as a whole. Thus the pattern was established that was to become of particular significance after the war. The unions and employers were brought into organized contact with the state for the purpose of settling crucial disputes in key industries and the result of their joint effort imposed upon rank-and-file trade unionists. In the event of resistance from below to the terms so concluded, the repressive powers of the state were deployed to coerce the rank and file into acquiescence. Even before the war this sort of development became apparent in the great industrial disputes between 1910 and 1914. In South Wales, for example, the Cambrian Combine strikers had to struggle not only against the employers but against the efforts of the SWMF and Board of Trade officials to impose a compromise settlement on the one hand, and the massive detachments of police and troops dispatched by Churchill on the other. After the war, the dual procedure of coupling repression by the state with reliance on the trade union bureaucracy to come to terms became most marked, notably in the 1921 struggle and the General Strike. The syndicalism of the 1910-1914 period, and indeed the syndicalist manifestations of the whole period up to the General Strike, were an intuitive and empirical reaction to these developments, but, lacking an overall understanding of them, produced no permanent revolutionary opposition, only a propensity among advanced workers towards specific forms of militant but essentially limited rank-and-file activism.

### **Industrial unionism as antidote**

As a way round the growing bureaucracy in the unions and the conciliation machinery, etc., on which this was based, Syndicalists proposed the building of mass industrial unions controlled by rank-and-file executives who would be wholly responsible in the most direct manner to the membership. The abolition of sectional craft unions which such a development would bring would allow effective industry-wide action against the employers (who in this period were grouping themselves in trade federations) and would pave the way for the eventual seizure of industry by

15 Halévy: *History of the English People*, vol. 6, pp. 446-7.

the unions. *The Miners' Next Step*, dealing with the new problems posed by the growing centralization of ownership in the mines, set out clearly the attitude held by advanced rank and file militants:

A rapidity of industrial development is forcing the (Miners') Federation to take action along lines for which there exists no machinery to properly carry out.

The control of the organization by the rank and file is far too indirect. The system of long agreements, with their elaborate precautions against direct action, cramp the free expression of the might of the workmen and prevent the securing of improved conditions, often when the mere exhibition of their strength would allow of it. The sectional character of the organization in the mining industry renders concerted action almost impossible, and thus every section helps to hinder and often defeat the other . . .<sup>16</sup>

The answer lay in the construction of a revolutionary industrial union the very logic of whose militancy would lead to the eventual seizure of power: as a policy for such a union the authors of *The Miners' Next Step* proposed:

. . . that a continual agitation be carried on in favour of increasing the minimum wage and shortening the hours of work until we have extracted the whole of the employers' profits. . . . That our objective be, to build up an organization that will ultimately take over the mining industry and carry it on in the interests of the workers.<sup>17</sup>

It is readily apparent that the real concern of such a policy was with the immediate, day-to-day issues confronting rank-and-file miners. Certainly, it expressed in a general way the growing feeling of the need for revolutionary change, but by totally ignoring the state and the political questions raised by revolutionary trade union action, the syndicalism of *The Miners' Next Step* could offer no more, and no less, than a series of proposals for fighting the mine owners on the industrial front on something like an equal footing.

### The Leadership factor

An essential part of the syndicalist philosophy, moreover, was its rejection of leadership and its development of something approaching a mystique from the concept of rank-and-file spontaneity. The rejection of the need for an alternative leadership within the trade unions stemmed originally, at least in the practical form which it took from 1910, from the South Wales syndicalist movement, and was enshrined in the proposals of *The Miners' Next Step*: but the rejection of leadership characterized the movement generally, both

before and during the war. The failures of the Trade Union and Labour Party leaderships were blamed not merely on misleadership and wrong policies but on the institution of leadership itself.

'Leadership implies power held by the Leader. Without power the leader is inept. The possession of power inevitably leads to corruption. All leaders become corrupt, in spite of their own good intentions. No man was ever good enough, brave enough or strong enough, to have such power at his disposal, as real leadership implies.'<sup>18</sup>

So wrote the authors of *The Miners' Next Step*, who described their movement as a 'no leader movement'. Essentially, the aim of such a movement was to encourage the rank-and-file to assert control over the apparatus of the union and direct it to their own ends. The official leaders would become subordinate to an 'unofficial executive' of rank-and-file members from whom the policies of the union would flow in accord with the wishes of the membership, expressed at regularly held conferences. In practice, this form of syndicalism was, in the last analysis, the purest 'rank-and-filism'; it confined its attention to agitation among the rank and file, on a 'ginger group' basis, on immediate issues, with the aim of pressurizing the existing union leaders into the adoption of specific policies. A number of supporters of the unofficial movement in South Wales clearly expressed such an aim when they wrote that:

. . . we ought to be a 'ginger group' constantly attempting to galvanize the executive committee into life and focussing their efforts in the direction of our programme . . .<sup>19</sup>

Because of this, the syndicalist movement, in South Wales and elsewhere, was marked by its weak organization and diffuse character; its ability to unite a wide range of tendencies around immediate objectives (as in South Wales over the minimum wage issue or during the war over dilution in the engineering industry) and its failure to develop any permanent revolutionary tendency out of such agitations.

### Loose association v. organization

In a sense, this neglect of leadership was bound up with the syndicalist theory of the automatic movement of workers towards the seizure of industry. The very spontaneity of the movement

16 *The Miners' Next Step*, pp. 16-17.

17 *Ibid.* p. 26.

18 *The Miners' Next Step*, p. 13.

19 *Merthyr Pioneer*, July 13, 1918.



made powerful organization unnecessary; all that was needed was a loose association of propagandists to stimulate the thinking of the rank and file along the right lines. This became very apparent in the proposals brought forward shortly before the war for the development of a national syndicalist movement:

The ISEL [Industrial Syndicalist Education of the movement—wr.] consists at present of a small number of loosely organized groups and a large number of individuals scattered all over the country. The time is now ripe for the formation of strong Syndicalist organization, on national lines, whose function shall be the spread of Syndicalism throughout the length and breadth of the land. This could be done by means of autonomous local groups of Syndicalists federated into a national body, without, if possible, an Executive Committee, for Executives are always caucuses.<sup>20</sup>

This was written in 1913 by the Northern Organizer of the ISEL, and although his proposals never came into operation as far as the ISEL was concerned, as the League was in a state of disintegration by the end of 1913, they indicated the general lines of syndicalist thinking on organization and accurately reflected the outlook of leading elements in the South Wales unofficial movement, the Amalgamation Committees in the engineering industry and the Vigilance Committees on the railways, and anticipated the weak, decentralized form that the Shop Stewards' Movement was to assume during the war.

### The price for syndicalism

The antipathy to leadership and the predilection for pressure group tactics from below were thus given theoretical form in the years of 'labour unrest' before 1914 and became deeply ingrained in the consciousness of leading militants. The experiences of this period were to be of major importance in shaping the outlook of the Shop Stewards' and Workers' Control Movement (SS & WCM) in particular, from which emerged the industrial basis of the CPGB in 1920-1921. Despite its militancy and strength under the peculiar wartime conditions in the engineering industry, the SS & WCM was never much more than the federation of autonomous groups of militants envisaged by *The Syndicalist*. Its National Administrative Committee (NAC) had no executive powers and it could not direct national campaigns. This was to make for the loss of initiative by the SS & WCM in crucial struggles, most notably that for the 40-hour week on the Clyde in 1919. The lack of power of the NAC was a concrete expression of the strong feeling against leadership that found

expression equally in the failure of the SS & WCM to make any effort to win leading positions in the engineering unions. As J. T. Murphy commented:

It is quite certain that had the leading shop stewards of that period, when the workers were supporting them, really made a planful effort to win the leadership of the engineering unions, they could have succeeded in the course of a few years.<sup>21</sup>

A similar state of affairs prevailed in the unofficial movement in South Wales, which was, as Macfarlane notes, to become an important basis of support for the CPGB in 1920-1921. Here there was no dogmatic opposition to the election of supporters of the movement to official positions, but such elections were never conceived in relation to the overall strategy of the movement. Supporters were elected to the EC of the SWMF as individuals, not representatives of the unofficial movement, and in no sense under the discipline of the latter. Indeed, such a movement could have no disciplined expression and those of its supporters who did become union officials tended to reveal themselves as quite orthodox trade unionists within a very short time. On the eve of the war, some of the leaders of the unofficial movement were attacking their 'spokesmen' on the union EC, notably the former protagonist of the movement, Noah Ablett:

They were pledged to abstain from supporting reactionary policies, wrote C. L. Gibbons, one of the authors of *The Miners' Next Step*, . . . they were to keep revolutionary policies and militant policies to the fore; they were to force the EC to take action along lines laid down by the militant section in the coalfield. Have they done this? Unhesitatingly we answer 'No'. They have ceased to be revolutionary except in words. In the matter of deeds they are not to be distinguished from members of the openly reactionary majority on the EC. . . .<sup>22</sup>

The lesson drawn from this, however, was not the need to elaborate a form of organization that could work as a disciplined body against the 'reactionary majority on the EC', but the futility of contesting the leadership of the union at all. What was needed was more effective 'rank and file', more pressure from below, and in the subsequent period, culminating in the lock-out of 1921, the unofficial movement concentrated on the development of 'ginger groups' at local level. The question of supplanting the leaders of the SWMF by an

20 *The Syndicalist*, January 1913.

22 *South Wales Worker*, June 13, 1914.

21 J. T. Murphy, *New Horizons*, p. 81.

alternative was ignored, with disastrous consequences in 1921.

### Central Labour College and the Plebs League

It is important to note that the syndicalism characterized above did not arise solely from the purely practical problems confronting rank-and-file trade unionists before and during the war. Syndicalism arose from specific theoretical premises that were closely associated with the level of understanding of Marxism that existed in this period, not only among Syndicalists but among members of the BSP and SLP. It was the theoretical postulates of Syndicalism that gave the very specific and necessarily transitory rank-and-file struggles of the period a definite revolutionary orientation and won from such struggles numbers of advanced militants whose syndicalist inclinations were to persist after the immediate struggles had died away and who continued to represent a definite tendency in the areas where they worked, ready to give syndicalist leadership to whatever new struggle developed. A degree of permanency was given to the syndicalist tendencies established before the war by the Central Labour College and its classes in the localities. The College evolved from the students who broke away from Ruskin College in 1909 in opposition to the indoctrination of the potential trade union leaders at the College with bourgeois theory and values. The 1909 strike and the subsequent establishment of the CLC were an integral part of the reaction of young militants to the growing bureaucratization of the unions and their development of organized ties with the employers and the state. Ruskin was understood by these militants, many of whom were from unions like the SWMF and the ASRS (the most important of the rail unions) where rank-and-file unrest was strongest, as an institution for the training of trade unionists in their new role as associates of the employers and state in the development of peaceful industrial relations. In opposition to this, the Ruskin strikers wanted training in Marxist theory to prepare trade unionists for a revolutionary role. Not only would the CLC train trade unionists to confront the employers as educated militants, it would create, in the person of every trade unionist who attended the College, a potential local revolutionary leader who would return to his locality to organize classes in Marxism and thus help develop an informed rank and file who could consciously assert their control over union affairs and direct the course of the unions towards the

seizure of industry. The Plebs League was the embodiment of this concept. Its branches acted as the local units of the CLC, organizing classes in Marxist economics and industrial history, and drawing around them advanced rank-and-file militants who opposed the conciliatory policies of their union leaders. The role of such branches and class leaders was clearly expressed by Ablett, who suggested that:

In the present loose democracy of the trade unions individuals count for much. Such a body of men, scientifically trained to adapt themselves to the needs of the workers, with a knowledge of the economics of Labour, coupled with the ability of speech and pen would naturally be expected to wield a great influence in their respective localities . . .<sup>23</sup>

His prognosis proved very apt in relation to the Cambrian Combine strike where the Rhondda Plebs played a major role in canalizing the struggle into a general movement for the minimum wage; in fact, the Plebs League and the CLC were to be very closely connected with the South Wales unofficial movement up to and beyond the formation of the CPGB. Elsewhere, too, the Plebs and CLC played an important part in developing rank-and-file consciousness. Indicative of their influence among the miners and railworkers was the agreement in 1914 by the SWMF and the NUR to assume joint sponsorship of the CLC.<sup>24</sup> Elsewhere the ties with the unions were less close, but there is little doubt, from an examination of the reports in *Plebs Magazine* over the period 1910-1920, that the movement established itself firmly in a number of important industrial areas, London, Lancashire, North-East England and the West of Scotland included, and exercised considerable influence in forming the outlook of some thousands of militants.<sup>25</sup>

### Role and Influence of the College

The widespread influence of the Labour College movement is worth emphasizing, for it meant that, more than the BSP and SLP, it acted as the main institution for the propagation of Marxism

23 *Plebs Magazine*, February 1909.

24 This sponsorship was, it might be noted, indicative of the fact that the 'Marxism' of the CLC did not fundamentally conflict with the outlook of the orthodox trade union leaders on the ECs of the NUR and SWMF.

25 E.g. in South Wales by 1917 the CLC classes were attended by 500 miners.

among advanced workers.<sup>26</sup> The Marxism of this movement was highly abstract and formal in character. Marxism was presented by the CLC and Plebs as the best means of explaining the world and attention was confined to education in Marxism in the purest sense. Marxist method was employed to explain the working of the economic system and the evolution of class society; the *fact* of the class struggle was made clear but no attempt made to relate such education to the immediate and long-term ends of the workers' movement, except in the most general and formal sense. Such Marxism was very much under the influence of positivism and ideas of mechanical evolution inherited from the later decades of the nineteenth century. It explained the necessary evolution of capitalism from an individualistic to a monopoly stage and held that the development of the class struggle to a consequently higher stage was an automatic reflex of this process. Once workers had been taught the elementary facts of the class struggle and had learnt the nature of their exploitation, they would automatically develop strong organization to confront the employers and eventually contend with them for power. Such an approach to Marxism was clearly related to the propagandist character of the revolutionary movement of the period. More important, it essentially denied the need for any organized party and placed the emphasis merely on the propaganda work of small groups of activists, as in the Plebs League. As such, it was quite in line with the current ideas and methods of the BSP and SLP, as set out above. J. T. Murphy pointed to these characteristics of the CLC movement when formulating a critique of it in the early 1920's:

What 'certain fundamental elementary principles' do you propose to get across? he asked the CLC, referring to a recent statement of aims, merely the fact of the class struggle and never a single suggestion as to *how* the workers are to wage the struggle? No mention of what are the fundamental and elementary requirements of victory in the struggle? Shall we spend months unravelling the Theory of Value and never mention the elementary fact that the workers must have a revolutionary workers' party—lest we be accused of party politics? <sup>27</sup>

### The disenchantment of 1921

Murphy was correct in his characterization of the education activities of the movement; he was wrong, however, in suggesting that no practical, political activity flowed from them. The presentation of Marxism in mechanical terms provided

the theoretical basis for the advocacy of spontaneity and the opposition to leadership in the practice of the Syndicalist movement, which was so closely linked to the CLC. At its worst, this educational movement provided the training for left opportunists in the trade unions, men who could address correctly formulated rhetoric to the rank-and-file but who had no lead to offer except within the context of orthodox trade unionism. When such trade unionism was fundamentally challenged in the post-war period of political-industrial struggles such leaders were reduced to impotence, like Robert Williams, or moved very rapidly to the right, like Frank Hodges. At its best, the CLC took advanced militants part of the way towards an understanding of the class struggle but because it could establish little connection between Marxist theory and the day-to-day problems of the Labour movement the CLC left such militants leaderless and prone to purely localized forms of struggle on immediate trade union objects.<sup>28</sup> The experiences of 1919-1921 were to be of fundamental importance in revealing to such militants the inadequacies of this form of Marxism. J. T. Murphy's critique, quoted above, was one example of the reaction of a leading militant to his experience of the Marxism of the CLC. At the same time, the CLC and Plebs had formed very close links with organized workers in a number of areas, and in these cases the reaction against the theory of the movement and its practical expression in Syndicalism came only as a result of the bitter experiences of 1921, when the inadequacy of syndicalist forms of organization was experienced in practice. This was particularly so in South Wales where the CLC had become very firmly entrenched in the indigenous Syndicalist movement. It was here that Syndicalist organization achieved its full expression in the months before the lock-out in 1921 and there was the clearest evidence that the loose, highly parochial organization that existed was felt to be entirely adequate to provide leadership for the rank and file. Towards the end of 1920 Will Hewlett, a leading member of the unofficial movement, expressed this feeling in

26 Of course, a large number of CLC local organizers and Plebs members were also members of the BSP, SLP or ILP. They all tended to share a common approach to Marxist theory.

27 *Plebs Magazine*, April 1923.

28 A. J. Cook, an active member of the Plebs League and lecturer at numerous CLC classes, represented one of the best products of this movement.

an article explaining how the South Wales rank and file were organized; it is worth quoting at some length for the evidence it provides of Syndicalism in its most advanced form on the eve of the massive industrial struggles of the 1920s:

I know there is an idea abroad that South Wales is covered by a network of Unofficial Committees. This is not so. In fact there is no permanent unofficial organization in the coalfield. What does happen when it is necessary is that the advanced or rebel element does meet and discuss matters . . . then go back to their respective Pit Committees and Lodges, put their views forward . . . and if their opinions are accepted the delegates to the Councils and Conferences are instructed to act accordingly. Thus we are enabled to carry out our advanced policy in a constitutional manner. . . . It is fair to claim that the major portion, if not the whole of the advanced reforms in the coalfield is attributable to the unofficial or rebel element. This element is generated and developed through the 'Central Labour College Evening Classes' owned and controlled by the NUR and the SWMF. This again is provided for in the constitution. . . .

Hewlett then went on to advise the emulation of this movement; correct organization would flow from education on CLC lines. He urged

Comrades . . . to form up their evening classes for the study of Industrial History and Economics (Marxian) this winter, develop them to their fullest capacity, impart to the rank and file all the knowledge possible, then I do not fear the result . . .<sup>29</sup>

### Historic basis of syndicalism

To a very large extent, the attachment to spontaneity, the opposition to strong leadership, the avoidance of questions of political action and the role of the state, and the purely mechanical approach to Marxism were inextricably bound up with the character of British capitalism in the period up to 1921. In a period of expansion, with booming profits and full employment, capitalism could afford to meet the demands of organized workers, if pressed in a sufficiently firm and militant manner. In these conditions, it seemed to rank-and-file militants that they did not need to look beyond the forms of trade union activity advocated by syndicalism, nor question the Marxism that gave theoretical justification to this syndicalism. The methods of 'direct action', the theories of the CLC, were all acceptable to advanced militants because in the specific conditions up to 1921 they were empirically viable; they worked. There was no apparent need to look for

higher forms of organization or policy. This was borne out by the successes achieved by 'direct action' before the war, by the partial successes of the SS & WCM in controlling workshop conditions during the war and by the South Wales miners' successful resistance to the Government's attempted imposition of the Munitions Act in 1915. But, militant as these struggles were, they remained, it must be emphasized, wholly concerned with trade union issues, and while they were political in that they had the effect of prompting the intervention of the state and limiting the scope of governmental action to some extent, they had no consciously political aim, even during the war. Murphy stressed that none of the actions of the SS & WCM during the war had any anti-war intention:

None of the strikes that took place during the course of the war were anti-war strikes. They were frequently led by men such as myself who wanted to stop the war, but that was not the actual motive. Had the question of stopping the war been put to any strikers' meeting it would have been overwhelmingly defeated. The stoppages had a different origin and a different motive. They arose out of a growing conviction that the workers at home were the custodians of the conditions of labour for those in the armed forces, as well as themselves . . .<sup>30</sup>

### Syndicalism obstructs the Clydeside movement

Implicit in Murphy's estimate of the movement during the war was an acceptance of its purely Syndicalist, non-political character. Murphy, a member of the SLP, along with other leading shop stewards, members of the BSP, ILP or SLP, submerged themselves in syndicalist activity during the war and made no real attempt to give the SS & WCM any definite revolutionary purpose until the post-war years. Indeed, in certain critical periods, notably during the ferment on the Clyde early in the war, the movement was a definite block to the development of political understanding. The Clyde Workers' Committee (CWC) was wholly concerned with defending workshop conditions and laying the basis for a new industrial union for the metal-working trades. Despite the prominence of people like Gallacher (BSP), Macmanus (SLP) and Kirkwood (ILP) in its leadership, the CWC failed, in fact refused, to link its workshop activities to a struggle against the war, despite the objectively favourable conditions.

29 *The Worker*, September 4, 1920.

30 J. T. Murphy, *New Horizons*, p. 44.

This came out most clearly over the deportation from Glasgow of Macmanus, Kirkwood and four other leading shop stewards early in 1916. Opposition to the Government's action was intense throughout the Clyde and there was a wave of demands from the workshops for a strike, but a report of a meeting of the CWC to consider this demand indicated how steeped the leaders of the Committee were in their syndicalist theories:

At this meeting it was quite evident that the members were very indignant against the action of the Government. So keen was the indignation that a motion was submitted that the CWC should declare a strike in the Clyde District. The chairman, William Gallacher, ruled this motion out of order as it was against the accepted aims of the CWC. This aim was the building of one industrial organization in the engineering industry. The members of the committee could inform their fellow workers in the shop where they worked as to what happened at the Forge (i.e. Parkhead Forge) but beyond that the CWC had no jurisdiction . . .<sup>31</sup>

Concomitant with the syndicalist attitudes of the leaders of the SS & WCM (whatever their formal political affiliations) was the organizational weakness of the movement, noted above, which prevented effective concerted action and produced dismal failure in the possibly revolutionary situation at the end of the war. In brief, the war saw a strengthening of syndicalism because of the singularly favourable bargaining position of workers, the abnegation of leadership by the trade union signatories of the Treasury Agreements and the desperate need of the Government to keep the war effort in top gear.

### **The South Wales strikes of 1915 and an anticipation**

Developments similar to those among the Shop Stewards occurred in South Wales, although there was no organized contact. South Wales saw a high level of industrial militancy during the war, notably in the 1915 strike in defiance of the Munitions Act. Like engineering, the coal industry was absolutely essential to the war effort and the bargaining position of the miners was consequently enhanced, despite the firm support for the war given by the leaders of the Miners' Federation. In these circumstances the syndicalism that had developed in the area before the war was reinforced even though the formal organizational structure of the unofficial movement disappeared with the outbreak of the war. The success of the miners in 1915 seemed to provide a complete vindication for

the methods of syndicalism and greatly increased the propensity to this type of action in the period up to 1921. The full effect of the 1915 struggle on leading South Wales syndicalists was indicated in a controversy in the *Plebs Magazine* on the question of the nature and role of the state and the need for a working-class revolutionary party to oppose the bourgeois state. The contribution of the protagonist of a revolutionary party, Will Craik, is worth quoting in some detail in order to bring out the full significance of the opposition to it from syndicalist sources:

Since Imperialism set in, wrote Craik, the State has come to acquire a new significance. It becomes the driving force for the expansion of national capital over the face of the earth. . . . The organs and operations of the State are changed and augmented to meet the needs of this Imperialist phase of capitalism and especially to meet the need for war which henceforth becomes *the* means for capitalist expansion . . . The State that requires war without needs peace within. It has, therefore, to adapt itself to maintaining the latter as well as for the conduct of the former. It must become, directly, an economic power. Less than ever, then, can the industrial organization (of the working class) expand and the area of its activities extend without political consequences, without State intervention. The working class cannot attack the economic power of capitalism without attacking the political organization of that power . . .<sup>32</sup>

This argument of Craik's was, in a formal way, an anticipation of the understanding that was to grow amongst advanced workers after the war of the need for a revolutionary party. However, the counter-arguments of Ablett to Craik in the *Plebs Magazine* showed a complete inability to comprehend the theoretical objections raised by the latter to syndicalism. Ablett's arguments were, in fact, an indication of the way syndicalism was deeply rooted in the empirist traditions of the Labour movement, to which Marxism was adapted; they indicated also the degree to which syndicalism was intensified by the specific conditions of British capitalism in the years before the post-war depression. It was only when this new economic phase began and the state intervened to support the coalowners in making the savage wage reductions of 1921 that the failings of Ablett and his co-thinkers were revealed. In opposing Craik, Ablett based his arguments on the specific,

31 Quoted by J. T. Murphy, *Preparing for Power*, p. 123.

32 *Plebs Magazine*, March, 1917.

limited experiences in South Wales between 1910 and 1915:

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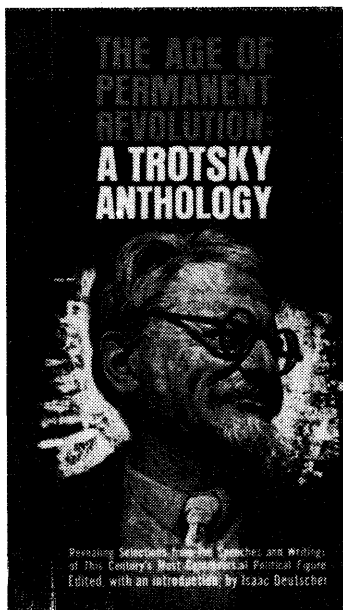
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# THE AGE OF PERMANENT REVOLUTION

## A TROTSKY ANTHOLOGY



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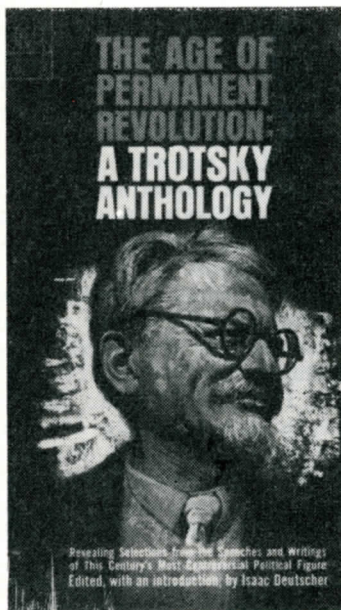
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# The economics of 'socialism in one country'

by Tom Kemp

**We print below notes on a lecture on the above subject delivered on the occasion of the 50th Anniversary celebrations of the October Revolution, held at the Assembly Rooms, The Town Hall, St. Pancras, London, on November 5, 1967.**

SOVIET ECONOMIC development in the half century since the Revolution of October has to be seen as a profoundly distorted and contradictory historical process in which are expressed the critical problems of the epoch.

When the Bolsheviks took power they assumed that their success would be followed more or less rapidly by the workers of the more advanced countries. This would have enabled the planned advance to socialism to take place by bringing together the highly industrialized countries with the mainly agrarian regions. Although it was not unexpected that imperialism should break at its weakest link it was not imagined that a single workers' state would remain isolated for a whole generation and without the overthrow of capitalism in the advanced countries.

Within a year or so the land and most of industry and trade had been nationalized and a monopoly of foreign trade established. The first years of the Revolution, in the aftermath of war and with a bitter civil war raging, saw the economy organized on the lines of a beleaguered fortress. War Communism was based upon the need to hold out until the revolutionary wave advanced into the industrial countries.

When that wave receded it became necessary to take steps to revive industry, re-establish links between the town and the countryside and consider on what lines the economy should be developed for a number of years ahead. The New Economic Policy adopted in 1920 made concessions to private traders and permitted the accumulation of capital and the employment of wage labour by petty capitalists, mainly in agri-

culture and in trade. Industry remained nationalized but more scope was left to the 'trusts' into which it was divided to work out their own policies. The era of planning, properly speaking, did not begin until 1928.

## The New Economic Policy

The period of NEP saw a vigorous debate on the subject of economic policy. It concerned such central issues as how to find the resources to make possible industrial investment, what tempo of growth should be aimed at, what should be done about peasant farming and the encouragement of petty capitalism in agriculture which had followed upon the NEP. The dominant faction had already determined its general strategy, politically speaking, in the policy of 'Socialism in One Country', by 1924.

The choice of this policy and its triumph over the alternative policy put forward by the Left Opposition did not necessarily commit its adherents to a particular economic course. Just as this policy itself represented a revision of Marxism arrived at empirically to advance the interests of the Stalinist bureaucracy, so its economic measures involved the same method.

Stalin could thus appear to acquiesce in the Bukharin line of 'socialism at a snail's pace' at one moment and, equally apparently, adopt some of the measures proposed by the Opposition at another. Principle was not involved; it was a question of adapting to circumstances. These circumstances were set partly by the conditions which prevailed inside Russia, particularly the growing importance of the kulaks and the Nepmen, partly



by the continued isolation of Russia in a hostile world with a still weak and backward economy.

These dangers, internal and external, were not, of course, merely accidental. They had been made more acute by the practice of 'Socialism in One Country', as Trotsky and the Opposition had persistently warned, and by the growth of bureaucracy in Russia.

### **Policies of the Left Opposition**

The Opposition presented a considered alternative to the political course and the economic temporizing of the leadership which was based upon a consistent application of Marxism. But it was impossible to separate the economic part of the programme from its international political perspective without doing violence to it.

The Opposition called for more rapid industrialization, the establishment of national planning, moves towards the substitution of large collective farms for small-scale peasant holdings and so on. It put forward concrete proposals, backed up by worked-out theoretical considerations, to be carried out as part of a general change in policy for the Soviet state and the Comintern.

The Stalinist alternative, as actually followed, was an empirical response. Superficially it included some of the Opposition's proposals but in ways which made them a dangerous caricature. Industrialization plans were to be carried through at an entirely unrealistic pace. The drive against the kulaks assumed the character of a military operation. Immense hardships were inflicted on the working class. While admittedly considerable enthusiasm was generated for the Five Year Plans, this period also saw the massive growth of the bureaucracy and a reign of terror directed against the Oppositionists and real or imaginary critics and enemies of the regime in an atmosphere of veritable hysteria.

### **Historic 'inevitability'**

Yes, some will say, but all this was historically necessary. It was the only way in which a great modern industry could have been built in backward Russia. The liquidation of the kulaks and the oppression of many other peasants who were not kulaks at all was the only way in which agriculture could be transformed and a surplus collected to feed the workers who were building the new power plants and factories. Living standards had to be held down, there was bound to be suffering and hardship; even the police terror was part of the price which had to be paid to industrialize a backward country.

With some apologies for the way in which Stalin carried things too far, this remains the staple theme of the supporters of the bureaucracy to this day. It is echoed by quite a few bourgeois historians and economists anxious as ever to worship the accomplished fact.

Russia did industrialize and withstand the onslaught of the most highly advanced industrial state in Europe in 1941, contrary to many predictions in the West. On the basis laid by the Plans in the 1930s the second largest industry in the world has been built in once-backward Russia. Russia has produced scientific and technological achievements second to none.

In all this there is a great deal of truth, but some important qualifications have to be added before the picture is really completed. We have already seen that an alternative economic policy had been put forward for a number of years before 1928. In the sharp about-turn of that year Stalin merely lifted parts of this policy and applied them in a distorted form. The result was that the country was brought to the brink of disaster. Stalin's policy meanwhile led to disastrous defeats for the working class in a number of other countries, thus prolonging Russia's isolation and making it more dangerous.

'Capitalist encirclement' was not something which was inevitable; the policy of 'Socialism in One Country' made it certain. The forced-draught industrialization of the thirties was thus carried through without aid from abroad which the bourgeoisie would not and the proletariat could not give.

### **Industrialization**

Industrialization in a country which had disposed of its bourgeoisie and landlords but was still predominantly peasant, and which had to depend on its own resources, was something new in history. It meant, in any case, tremendous sacrifices and hardships for the masses. Stalin's methods, as the representative of the bureaucracy, made them infinitely harsher and more capricious than they need have been. The question was that the unavoidable difficulties of industrialization under such conditions were intensified by the repression of all opponents and critics of the bureaucracy and the police measures which this usurping caste employed to maintain its rule and ensure its privileges at a time when the majority were condemned to a life of material penury.

It is, therefore, a mistake to blame the purges on to the industrialization policy as such. It was the way in which it was carried out and the social

and political conflicts generated by the rule of the bureaucracy which were most to blame. Admitting that a measure like collectivization would have encountered resistance, it is still true that Stalin's sharp about-face, after a period of encouraging the *kulak*, and the sudden and repressive manner in which it was carried out, immeasurably increased the social antagonisms and did almost irreparable harm to the economy. The peasants slaughtered their animals by the million and a whole apparatus of military and police repression was brought into play against them. Millions of peasants were imprisoned and deported, many of whom were to die in the camps.

The economic results of enforced collectivization were almost entirely negative. The loss of animal manure was appreciable and the chemical industry was simply not equipped to make good the loss. The much-vaunted tractors of the Plans were, to a very large extent, making up for the horses killed by the peasants and not adding to the productive forces of agriculture. In any case, the farm machinery industry was not sufficiently developed to enable the collective farms, as a whole, to start off at a higher level of technique than the small peasant holdings which they replaced. The state was able, it is true, to scoop up the peasants' surplus more readily than before, but the net gain was probably small. For over a quarter of a century, by official admission, farm statistics were carefully falsified to conceal the big decline in farm output and the continuing agrarian crisis which followed collectivization.

### **Permanent Agrarian crisis**

Moreover, the Stalinist method did not win the peasants over to understand collectivization. Stalin himself, in fact, in a famous speech, *Dizzy With Success*, had to call a halt to the reckless pace of collectivization. But the damage was done. By an unhappy irony much of the food supply for the towns (apart from cereals) had to come, and still does, from the tiny dwarf holdings, the 'private plots', of the collective farm peasantry. These plots, the stronghold of peasant individualism, are cultivated with a care seldom matched on the collective farm lands. Far from being solved, therefore, the agrarian problem remains an urgent one to this day.

Far too high a proportion of the population of the Soviet Union is still engaged in food production. Productivity in all branches of agriculture is a long way behind that in the United States. Krushchev's boastful promises of catching up with the USA in the consumption of meat,

butter, eggs and so on are still far from being realised. Instead there have, in recent years, been heavy imports of cereals from the capitalist countries without which famine would have swept large areas of Russia as it did in the time of the Tsar.

Bureaucratic management of the collectives helps to account for the poor response of the peasantry, whose standards of living, housing, opportunities for education, pensions and welfare benefits lagged a long way behind those of city workers. The antithesis between town and country is thus far from having been overcome. At times, too, the bureaucracy tries to play the peasants off against the working class or vice versa. But if the village remains backward the reason is to be found in the continued weaknesses of Soviet industry.

In the aggregate, it is true, Soviet industry stands second in the world, if still a very long way behind the USA. However, despite the rapid rates of growth attained since planning began, in terms of productivity the gap is much wider and adverse comparisons have to be made not only with the USA but also with the other advanced capitalist countries. The structure of Soviet industry reflects the fact that it has been determined by the exceptionally rapid construction of the basic industries of a country which began at a low level of per capita output. In other words, a high proportion of Soviet industry incorporates the kind of technology which reflects the early stages of industrialization. This is shown both in that industries based on the most modern developments in technology are under-represented and also in the fact that much of the equipment in industries such as textiles is long in the tooth. What Marx called 'moral obsolescence' is thus quite a problem in Soviet industry.

### **The Liberman controversy**

As Trotsky pointed out, bureaucratic methods of planning which may enable the basic industries to be laid down with speed in a backward country—with all sorts of wastes and inefficiencies—reveal their weaknesses when the need is to satisfy the more sophisticated wants of the consumer. Rising purchasing power in the hands of the masses has thus resulted in the searchlight of criticism being turned on the established planning methods inherited from the Stalin era. This is the basis of the Liberman controversy of recent years. It is widely recognised that the old methods were crude and arbitrary and needed to be changed. Hence a turn to the market and the reform now in progress which places greater initiative in the

hands of plant managements in deciding what inputs to employ and encourages them to produce more closely to the specifications of the selling agencies.

These changes, although they emphasize the profitability of the enterprise, do not mark any fundamental differences from the old planning system. As before, the general conception of the plan is determined by the bureaucracy and, as before, the plant management, as part of the bureaucracy, is responsible to its superiors in the hierarchy, not to the workers in the enterprise or to the working class as a whole. The working class plays no part in the drawing up of the plan nor does it exercise any control over the way in which it is carried out at any level. To make the enterprise more responsive to market price does not change this in any way since the composition of the market, whether for means of production or means of consumption, results also from decisions taken by the bureaucracy regarding wages, salaries, payments for agricultural produce and social expenditure.

Profit, in the Soviet economy, does not designate a category of income accruing to the owners of means of production but remains an accounting concept, at least at present. It is not so much in this field that the bureaucracy manifests restorationist tendencies but rather in the manner in which it seeks to safeguard its privileges and pass them on to members of its families. Thus private property in housing, a tendency for hereditary position to determine opportunities for education, higher posts in the state and the army, privileged access to goods which are in short supply, income differentials as great if not greater than those in capitalist countries, are probably much more significant. The emphasis on so-called material incentives perpetuates social differences and poses individual possessiveness against the interests of the collective. The soil is thus prepared for a trend back to private ownership and individual enterprise. The occasional revelation of large scale private trading, and even the existence of illicit manufacture for profit of goods otherwise unobtainable or in short supply, is an indication that there is still a breeding ground for capitalism.

In agriculture, for instance, it would not take

### **Dangerous trend in agriculture**

long to carve up the collective farms, with the present farm management getting the lion's share of the land and other peasants becoming wage workers. In agriculture private plots and a private market already exist. Some peasants already ship

their produce long distances, even travelling by air to dispose of it in urban markets. After all, decollectivization was carried out, after 1956, in all the East European countries. In retail trade, too, it is possible to envisage a trend back to private trading. In industry it would be technically more difficult to split up the vast industrial complexes and form private trusts and it would be necessary to break the opposition of the workers which any such moves would evoke. The introduction of foreign capital into Russia in industries which are particularly backward by comparison with the West is a development which has to be watched very closely.

On the whole, it is still true that the bureaucracy has to defend nationalized property, although by its own methods, because its own social existence is bound up with the social relations established by the October Revolution. To move towards capitalism, whether on the basis of giant trusts—there is no other form of capitalism possible in an industrial country today—or as some form of 'state capitalism' is out of the question without a counter-revolution. There is no evidence that such a counter-revolution has taken place or is beginning. However, the announcement that a counter-revolution has actually taken place and has succeeded has often been made by those who mistake the counter-revolutionary role and policy of the bureaucracy as played out on the international scene for the defeat of the Soviet working class and the overthrow of the conquests of October.

### **The basic contribution**

In defending the October conquests in its own way, the bureaucracy seeks primarily to safeguard its own privileges. By doing so it sets itself against revolution anywhere else and pursues the policy of 'peaceful co-existence', which is the complement of 'Socialism in One Country'. These policies, in practice, not only lead to betrayals of the working class but they jeopardize the conquests of the Revolution of 1917. This is the basic contradiction in the policy of the bureaucracy which leads it to a narrow national outlook, a constant endeavour to reach a permanent *modus vivendi* with capitalism and, in the last resort, dependence on military power, not the international working class, to defend the workers' state.

The consequences of this policy are written in the history of the workers' movement in the last few decades: a history of lost opportunities, defeats and confusion. Because the policies of the

bureaucracy have prevented the spread of revolution into the advanced countries of Europe and North America its own position has been weakened. On the other hand, its very survival has been an outcome of the failure of the revolution to spread into these areas.

More specifically, the survival of capitalism and its continued expansion has placed a great pressure on the Soviet economy. In the first place, this takes the form of the arms race which obliges great resources, which could otherwise have been used to raise living standards, to be devoted to means of destruction. Secondly, it still imposes on the Soviet economy a permanent and unrealizable goal—to catch up with and outstrip the major capitalist countries. It is permanent because as long as the Soviet Union remains economically inferior it is unable to face up to competition on the world market or to provide for its population a standard of living equal or superior to that in the advanced capitalist countries. It is unrealizable not primarily because the bureaucracy wastes resources or distorts the economy, but because it is impossible for the Russian economy, still in enforced isolation, and despite large underutilized resources, to measure up, in an all-round way, to the productivity of US capitalism.

From time to time the bureaucracy shows that it is clearly counting on a renewed depression in the US to assist it to catch up. It has long ceased to think in terms of an extension of the revolution to make possible the achievement of a socialist planned economy which would leave the norms of American capitalism far behind and open up a goal of abundance and real communism; it deals principally in broken promises.

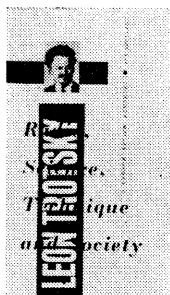
At the same time even the existence of the

bureaucracy does not prevent the nationalized property relations and planned economy from having to their credit enormous achievements. A gigantic programme of industrialization has been carried through at an unprecedented tempo which has lifted Russia to the rank of second industrial power in the world. A country which was once the tributary of foreign capitalism, without an advanced engineering or machine-making industry of its own, now leads the way in many fields. A country of ignorant *moujiks* has been transformed into a land of educated proletarians. Regions once plunged into primeval backwardness and superstition now have modern power plants, factories, scientific institutes and universities. The possibilities of planned economic growth have been demonstrated for all to see. No one can now say that a planned economy cannot work.

But Russian economy gives only a foretaste of what socialist planning on an international scale could achieve, really only a small and poor sample at that. Often the methods of Stalinism are taken to be integral to such planning in a backward country instead of something alien to it. The application of the lessons of Soviet economic development over the past fifty years, both negative and positive, will enable mankind to advance by centuries in a matter of a few decades.

The economic questions can thus not be separated from the internationally posed political questions of the epoch. The fate of the first workers' state has not yet been settled nor will it be determined by what happens in Russia alone or purely by developments in the economic arena.

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# Books

## Meek's ideology

### Economics and Ideology and other Essays

by Ronald L. Meek

Chapman & Hall, London. 40s.

THE EVOLUTION of R. L. Meek, as demonstrated in this book of essays, is typical of the path pursued by many intellectuals of his generation who, in breaking with Marxism in its deformed Stalinist guise, moved several steps towards a compromise with bourgeois ideology.

It is true that Meek has not explicitly broken with Marxism and makes some show of defending aspects of Marx's method and analysis from his critics. He shows, as well he might, some distaste for an open and complete espousal of orthodox academic theories whose ideological elements have not escaped him. At the same time he has assumed the role of the accomplished emasculator who has stripped Marxism of any offence which it might give to his academic friends and has made it no more than an ideology for advanced reformism.

Of course, this is not a surprising evolution but one for which Stalinism had prepared the ground over many years. Marxist political economy was always taught in relation to the needs of the Communist Party as determined by the Soviet bureaucracy. At times, therefore, Party economists were able to find some grounds for agreement with progressive Keynesians. Meek himself undertook the task of writing about Malthus in the light of Soviet policy on population and birth control at a particular period. He also found himself writing a learned commentary on the absurd and purportedly new 'economic law of capitalism' as discovered by the late-lamented Joseph Stalin—a piece of writing mercifully excluded from this volume.

Meek, of course, does not settle accounts with this past and seems

unable to explain it, although one would think that in a volume entitled *Economics and Ideology* it would merit at least a mention. After all, the fate of Marxist economics in the hands of the epigones is an important theoretical problem of our time, but one which cannot be investigated without reference to the development of the Soviet Union and the international Communist movement. As it is, Meek not only does not mention the actual fate of Marxist theory in Stalinist hands, but nothing in this book could give offence in King Street or Moscow even today. It is all, in fact, in line with *The British Road to Socialism*.



Meek is a very erudite writer on past economists and his academic contemporaries. He has, over most of the latter, the considerable advantage of genuine familiarity with Marx's writings and an ability to understand much of Marx's meaning; thus he does not distort Marx but emasculates him. He has become, in fact, a Marxologist; that is, not a Marxist, but one learned in Marx's writings who does not derive from them a class position or a connection with any living movement. Even his attitude to Marx has undergone a subtle change. Marx's theories are no longer 'individual' but 'idiosyncratic': the man who leant over backwards to put the best possible interpretation on the theories attributed to Stalin is stern and severe in scrutinizing the statements of Marx today.

If a position can be gleaned from Meek's essays it is clearly one of academic detachment and, for all his disclaimers, the ground is prepared for a reconciliation with bour-

geois 'science'.

What Meek has abandoned is the lesson that the laws of motion of capitalism operate through contradiction and crisis and that knowledge of them offers to the working class the opportunity to replace it by a socialist planned economy. As he puts it, plainly and frankly:

'It is obvious that the particular 'laws of motion' developed by Marx can no longer be used as a guide to what is actually going to happen as capitalism develops further. This does not mean, however, that they may not still be useful, even as they stand, for other and more modest purposes. They may still be useful in some of the less advanced countries as a guide to the actual situation there. And even in the more advanced countries . . . they may still be useful as a sort of awful warning of what might happen if the tempo of social legislation and trade union activity were allowed to slacken . . . all that really remains of Marxian economics today is the body of general methods and tools of analysis which Marx employed to analyse the facts of his time.' (pp. 109-110.)

With this approach it is obvious that the erstwhile 'Marxist' comes to the feasts offered by bourgeois economic science with a renewed appetite. Either nothing has been learned about the behaviour of capitalism by anyone, or it has been learned, presumably, by Schumpeter, Keynes and company (but what about Joseph Stalin's new economic laws, Professor Meek?). Of course, Meek does conclude that bourgeois theory has made a definite objective advance in the understanding of capitalism, that it now contains non-ideological elements.

These include what is known as micro-economics — because Meek now attaches some importance to the determination of prices through the operation of the forces of supply and demand. What use, after all, is the labour theory of value to the manufacturer who wants to sell his soap? But it includes, also, questions of macro-economics

which concern the behaviour of the large aggregates of the system, where the influence of Keynes, the monopoly theorists, the econometricians and the mathematical economists has created a feeling of theoretical achievement and a certain prestige.

It is true that Marxist economics, subject overwhelmingly to the dead hand of Stalinism, has, by comparison, undergone a process of sterility and degeneration and that little fresh or independent work has been done. But Meek's recipe for those who have turned away from this past must be decisively rejected. It is true that there is no objection to 'a new Marxian model of modern capitalism', but it must be based upon a proper appreciation of Marxist dialectics which Meek obviously does not possess, and it certainly must not resign itself, in the period while such a job is being done, to the position he adopts: 'all we can really do is to attempt to introduce certain basic Marxian ideas into orthodox economic theory' (p. 110). This seems to be the Fabian adventure upon which Professor Meek is now embarked: the infiltration of some methods and techniques of Marxian derivation into academic economics which employs quite different concepts and sets an opposing aim.

But what now is Professor Meek's aim? At various points he suggests that in the last thirty years capitalism has not behaved as Marxism would have led us to believe (although it is still 'not so very different' from the capitalism Marx knew). Therefore a number of Marx's laws have to be abandoned or radically revised. When we look for what has changed the list seems to be broadly as follows:

(i) 'The general laws which Marx himself formulated concerning long-term trends in wages have been largely invalidated by the unexpected concurrence and increase in intensity of certain "counteracting influences"';

(ii) Mass unemployment has been eradicated under capitalism contrary to Marxist expectations (p. 128, footnote 38);

(iii) By implication, the 'contradictions of capitalism' can be overcome through economic management or social engineering (e.g. p. 184, p. 223);

(iv) The rate of profit has shown no discernible tendency to decline in practice (see below);

(v) Economic crises have not become progressively more severe;

(vi) 'Social legislation, trade union activity and State intervention' (p. 125) can produce a tolerable capitalism (though with the saving phrase—'it is clearly not enough').

★

All this adds up to a remarkable apology for present-day revisionism (complete with the pressure of 'the socialist sector of the world' on capitalism) and a surrender of Marxist combativity to a reconciliation with 'ideology-free economics'. It is a long time since Professor Meek, in writing about Keynes in the original version of the essay now reprinted, concluded with the words 'The controversy over the place of Keynes in the history of economic thought will not be finally settled in the study and the lecture room. The issues at stake will be fought out, as part of a broader struggle, in a much less comfortable environment'. From the heights of his professorial chair he is now able to claim that 'We are living in an age in which the whole nature and function of economics is undergoing a profound revolution'. He means by this that it is becoming at once more objective and more competent to deal with problems of policy formerly ruled by autonomous processes designated in the Meekian terminology 'the economic machine'. The conclusion to the revised article marks the revolution in his own thought: 'By making interference with the operation of the machine respectable, and putting it on something like a scientific basis, Keynes helped to pave the way for a new type of economic thinking which may well transcend all previous economic systems including his own'. It is

into this refurbished bourgeois economics that the valid bits and pieces of the Marxian method and analysis will be fed by Professor Meek, who will be able to claim, at the same time, that he remains some kind of a Marxist while he assists those of his colleagues still in the grip of 'neo-Classicism' towards the light.

To fathom out the real depths of this profound thinker has required a piecing together of remarks, asides, footnotes, 'inarticulate major premises', revealing omissions and changes made in his essays as well as hard and explicit conclusions to which he has signed his name. It is only in this way, of course, that the ideological loading in theoretical writing which purports to be scientific can be measured. So just as Professor Meek modestly claims to be using Marx's method to show up the ideological content in his own 'laws', so we have done no more than to turn the Marxist method upon Professor Meek himself. If he feels this has been unfairly done, that ideas have been attributed to him that he does not hold, and especially if he genuinely desires to make a contribution to Marxist theory and not to map out a reconciliation between his version of Marxist economics and that developed by the 'hired prize-fighters of the bourgeoisie', the columns of this journal are open to him to reply in his own way and at whatever length he chooses. It is evident enough that Professor Meek is extremely learned in Marxism, on political economy, and that he brings to the history of economic thought, because of his training in historical materialism, a more vital grasp of the relationship of economic thinkers to the social and class structures of their time than is usual in the case of writers not so trained. No doubt much is to be learned by a perusal of these essays as well as of Professor Meek's earlier writings, even those written in line with the needs of the Communist Party. In his own way he is one of those few economists competent to speak from real knowledge of Marx's writings who can meet the growing interest in Marx-

ist economics in evidence today. Many may indeed take Professor Meek for an authoritative Marxist, though we are sure that he makes no such pretension. All the more reason, therefore, to deal critically with what he has to say, because so much of it is dangerous and misleading if taken to be in any sense in accord with even the method of Marxism properly understood.

Marx, in Meek's hands, is converted into a harmless precursor of the more enlightened members of the economics profession today. As a sophisticated professional Meek indulges in what, after all, remains a process of collating and comparing texts, exegesis and commentary-writing which is Talmudic in nature, just as sterile as the Stalinism he has put behind him and the new theories he appears to have embraced. Finding that capitalism has not confirmed, by some automatic process of the working out of eternal laws, the 'predictions' which Marx is alleged to have made, he really abandons Marxism as having any creative application to the problems of world capitalism today. To base himself on a few surface phenomena over a relatively short historical period is to run away from the problems which Marx posed, beginning with the point that capitalism is not eternal but prepares the way for its own destruction and replacement.

There is lacking in Meek any sense of a real confrontation between Marxism and rival theories: on the contrary, he is seeking all the time for points of similarity and reconciliation. That is why, 'ideologically', it is necessary to assume (because it is never really proved or even argued convincingly) that a non-ideological economics is appearing, however difficult it may be. At the most he admits that differences represent conflicting political ideologies—by which is obviously meant those of the bourgeoisie and those of the Soviet bureaucracy. He is reluctant, despite his talk about 'social relations of production', to introduce the question of class and discuss whether, under conditions of modern capitalism, a non-ideological, non-class theory is at

all possible. Nor does he discuss the social roots of the Stalinist economic theory of which he was once a persuasive propagandist. It is fair, then, to enquire about the social basis of Professor Meek's ideology, as has been implicit in what has been written here. What section of society, in other words, ignores class-determined differences where they exist and, in a class-divided society seeks salvation in a theory which rises above classes? Only, if course, that which occupies an intermediate position and fails to see, or avoids, the choices which are open to it. To place Professor Meek with the petty bourgeois intelligentsia would, we feel sure, give him no offence; as an erstwhile 'Marxist' the fact cannot have failed to draw itself to his attention. In fact, in itself, it is not a matter of great significance if it did not also define Professor Meek's ideological position—and we would add that it was just as true of him and his co-thinkers in the Stalinist phase as it is now. Two possible courses would, it seem, lay before Professor Meek. Either he erects a full-scale intellectual defence of the position which he has chosen, or has been forced into by the circumstances in which he has lived these past thirty years, or he goes back to Marx and forward to real effort to develop his method and apply his analysis to the development of present-day capitalism. For the moment the first of these options would seem the most likely as there are ample indications that, at least unconsciously, the direction has already been taken.

★

In fact it seems that Professor Meek has a perverse desire not to understand Marx. He has read all the books, he knows all the quotations and all the arguments and yet he comes up with positions which he gives ample reasons of his own for not taking; instead he adopts a position which will not give offence to his bourgeois colleagues and can just as well be held by any common-or-garden Marx-detractor. Thus he holds that Marx

did have a 'doctrine of increasing misery'. that it meant a long-run tendency for the general conditions of the working class to get worse, that it was a definite 'prediction' and that it has been falsified by facts. On the other hand, he agrees 'that there is absolutely no evidence in his economic writings—at any rate in those of his maturity—of a belief that real wages per head would show a long-run tendency to decline'. What he claims is, then, that real wages have risen more than Marx would have expected and that 'the average worker in the advanced countries today (is) getting a real wage substantially higher than the value of his labour power' (p. 119). There is no attempt to substantiate this statistically or to show how substantially wages have eaten into surplus value. And if they have, then it is difficult at the same time to hold that there has been a relative deterioration in wages compared with other (property) incomes. He gives scant attention to the view that wages contain an important social or historical element and dismisses one argument of this nature in a few lines. Yet it is a recurrent point made by Marx in his discussion of wages. The labour-power of workers in modern advanced capitalist societies is of a different and higher average quality than that available when Marx was writing *Capital*. Its value is actually higher, not because the worker gets a higher proportion of the product but because the conditions of modern industry require a labourer who is better educated, better fed and has more time to recuperate from the strains and tensions of work performed under modern technological conditions. It is obvious enough and it probably occurred to Professor Meek: why, therefore, does he pile up the evidence for Marx holding to increasing misery as an inflexible law and not point out that what has happened both to the real wages and to other elements in the workers' living standards is fully compatible with Marx's model of capitalist reproduction? No attempt is made, in any case, to see where, how long

or under what conditions workers have enjoyed the generally higher standards which he assumes.

Many items would surely have to be thrown into the balance sheet before the extent, if any, of the workers' improvement can be gauged. Those of a non-material nature, arising from insecurity, nervous strain, the risk of war or the actual effects of wars are difficult to assess. To speak of them is to indicate merely that capitalism has by no means had a history of smooth uninterrupted progress even in the advanced countries and that to base a generalization for a whole historical period on the past two decades is, to say the least, to allow ideological considerations to outweigh a respect for historical truth. It would, of course, be equally fallacious to argue for the supposed law of pauperization in the form in which it has been put forward by Communist Party theorists in the USSR and elsewhere who have definitely specified a deterioration in actual material conditions at a given time compared with the past. For instance, in the 1950s Maurice Thorez and the French Communist Party maintained, in the face of evidence to the contrary, that the material conditions of French workers were worse than they had been (presumably in the 1930s, during or just after the war). Meek seems to have been able to stomach this when he was a member of the Communist Party and to be relieving himself now by really assuming that Marx held inflexibly to the theory in the form in which Communist Party dogmatists maintained he did.

What Meek ought to have shown is how the tendencies of which Marx spoke, many of them, in interaction, have given certain results. In fact Marx as well as Meek believed that workers would not permit the tendency for wages to be driven down to operate if they could help it—the difference is

that Marx used it as a basis for the development of working-class consciousness to struggle against capitalism while Meek takes it as an argument for reformism, that is that state intervention has succeeded in making capitalism yield a higher real wage than Marx would have expected.

★

Of course, Meek is also well aware that if he splits Marx's analysis of capitalism up into discrete bits separated from the whole and then demolishes them one by one nothing much is going to remain. Every Marx-critic does this, and at one time Meek would have been the first to point it out. Now he makes it a professional duty to do likewise—in this volume with pauperization and the declining rate of profit. Having written a whole book on the Labour Theory of Value he can hardly throw that out too—although he makes in passing a reference to his 'more heretical moods' when he comes near to doing that (p. 108). But if the theory of pauperization plays such a key role in Marx's system, and the falling rate of profit (also open to revision) does the same, when these have been disposed of as no longer being in accord with the actual development of capitalism one may ask why Meek sees anything worth conserving in the 'method and analysis' of a thinker who had been so wrong about these vital matters. And yet Meek is insistent that Marx has a great deal to offer — to the bourgeois economist.

Weakness or inconsistency? A half-way house towards abandoning Marxism altogether? It is impossible to say when Marxism, in Meek's hands, has been reduced to such an innocuous concoction of truisms and platitudes.

For instance, the discussion of the declining rate of profit also partly answers its own objections

to Marx's presentation of the law. Meek deals with those critics who argued that Marx overlooked the effect of the increasing organic composition of capital upon the productivity of labour and took the rate of surplus value to be constant. What he conspicuously fails to do is to understand the method with which Marx was operating; instead he takes the law out of its context and even apart from the counteracting influences as though it is separable from all the laws and counter-tendencies operating within the model capitalism which he was building up in *Capital*. The fact that the law may not have revealed itself in an observable tendency for the rate of profit to fall over the long period (if this is indeed the case) has to be seen in the light of all the tendencies operating in the history of capitalism. The drive to monopoly, imperialism, the uneven development of different areas participating in the world market, state intervention and militarization, the destruction of values in slumps and wars would have to be seen, at least in part, as the result of efforts by the capitalists to evade the operation of this law which, far from being an abstraction, presses upon them as a daily and dangerous fact of existence. To keep capitalism going means, in a sense, to have been able to ward off the operation of the declining rate of profit, to prevent the self-destruction of the system: but, although Professor Meek has not yet got round to theories of economic breakdown (though he refers to crises not having become more violent) no automatic collapse of capitalism, such as he appears to have been looking for in the past, can be read off from Marx either. No doubt, however, he will some day show that Marx did have such a theory—which he will duly reject on the grounds that he is still writing under capitalism!

T.K.



# The Doctrine of Bertram Wolfe

## Marxism. One Hundred Years in the Life of a Doctrine

by Bertram D. Wolfe.

Chapman & Hall, 1967. 45s.

WHILE THE one-time leader of the Communist Party USA, Jay Lovestone, has become, in his old age, a go-between with the 'free' trade unions in different parts of the world, his one-time supporter Bertram Wolfe is now a skilled denigrator of Marxism aiming at the intellectuals. Both, of course, were always firmly anti-Trotskyist. Bertram Wolfe is already widely known for his book *Three Who Made a Revolution* which, amongst other deformations, pays Stalin the unwarranted and unhistorical complement of including him, along with Lenin and Trotsky, in its title.

The present book is entirely in character. Well-informed and familiar with the relevant literature, provided with facilities and finance by research institutes in the USA, Wolfe dredges through it to find whatever might be considered contradictory, inconsistent or discreditable in the writings, actions and policies of Marx, Engels and Lenin. By judicious choice of quotations he sets Engels against Marx, Lenin against Engels and Marx against himself. Anyone who develops scientific socialism in relation to experience and changing reality is considered to be a 'revisionist'. Needless to say, for Wolfe, the Stalinists are considered, as they like to believe, the legitimate heirs of Marx and the crimes of Stalin are regarded as an inevitable outcome of Bolshevism, if not of Marx's own policies. After all, did not Marx drive the anarchists out of the First International?

Confronted by such an array of misrepresentation and unhistorical appraisal a reviewer can do no more than point to a few of the

more blatant flaws in Wolfe's method. Such a one-sided and thoroughly prejudiced treatment of Marxism cannot be regarded as a serious critique and the matter is only made worse by the fact that Mr. Wolfe is well aware of what he is doing. For instance, as though the validity of a theory depends upon its propounders being saints, he dwells on passages in the personal correspondence of Marx and Engels in which they deal rather harshly with some of their contemporaries and fellow-workers in the movement. Does it matter that Marx was at times bad-tempered or that, in a letter he once referred to Lassalle as a 'Jew Nigger'? In the latter case, for example, it is well-known that despite their serious differences with the German socialist leader they greatly esteemed his talents and his devotion.

Even where Wolfe raises interesting questions he does so in a manner which prevents a real historical appraisal. For example, he makes a great deal of Marx's position on foreign policy, particularly his hostility towards Russia, his alleged German nationalism and opposition to the national claims of the Slav peoples and various statements about war, nationality and colonialism which appear to be in contradiction to the generally accepted Marxist view of these questions.

In the Stalin era, and even today in the Soviet Union, frank and full discussion of some of these matters has, it is true, been impossible. But there is, in fact, no reason why a present-day Marxist has to defend, say, Marx's support for England and France in the Crimean War. At least his stand-

point has to be understood in its historical context and in the light of Marx's position that such questions require an estimation of how the cause of the working class as an international force can best be advanced. This meant that, in the nineteenth century, Marx took sides in wars to create nation-states and in wars between states. Already in the later years of Engels' life, and more definitely as the world moved into the epoch of imperialism, it became clear that this position was being outpaced by events. Consistently with Marx's principles, therefore, Lenin and other Marxists developed a new position on war, positions which were to be put to the test in 1914.

Wolfe's own position, which throws light on the way in which he considers the history of Marxism, is revealed by one of his chapter headings: 'The Workman rejects his "Mission"'. Here, while handing to *Capital* a few condescending compliments, he claims that capitalism has not behaved as Marx expected. Instead we have the usual picture of a society in which workers have acquired status, social security and material improvement, in other words an apology for reformism. The changes introduced into the 'free market' economy by the state have rendered Marx's projections obsolete. Marx was 'Utopian' because many of the characteristics which he thought were specific to capitalism and which produced 'alienation' are, claims Wolfe, inevitable in any industrial society. To deal with these and similar simplifications and distortions would require nothing less than a book. All that needs to be said really is that Mr. Wolfe, from being a supporter of Bukharin in the 1920s, has become an apologist for capitalism. Not surprisingly he still retains a little sympathy for those Soviet economists who, whether they recognize it or not, are in the Bukharinite tradition.

Why, if capitalism has been proved successful while, in the Soviet Union, the 'command economy' heads for crisis, does Marxism survive? According to Wolfe, only because it 'is a creed

to be clung to when the intellect questions and rejects'. For him it is an emotional faith which has lost contact with science. Of course, in the Soviet Union Marxism has hardened into a dogmatic ideology: in doing so, however, it has ceased to be the Marxism of Marx, Engels and Lenin. It is because Wolfe identifies Marxism with Stalinism that he is able to write it off with such facile phrases and with quotations from Albert Camus and Norman Cohn. It is appropriate and

ironic that he should conclude his argument that Marxism is nihilistic, dogmatic and immoral with a quotation from *Their Morals and Ours*. Readers who seek a clue to Mr. Wolfe's position and its implications would be well advised to read the whole of that pamphlet.

In conclusion it must be said that Mr. Wolfe is not devoid of literary ability and polemical skill. His book will no doubt serve well the cause he now serves. As an early American adherent of the

Communist movement in the United States he, and many other talented and enthusiastic young men anxious at first to serve the working class, were used and destroyed by Stalinism; repelled by its ugliness and oppression they joined the enemy camp. It is not least among the crimes of Stalinism that such people now use their abilities to denigrate Marxism, to serve, consciously or unconsciously, the same purposes as the Central Intelligence Agency.

## Twelve jurors, twelve judges

**Lenin, the Man, the Theorist, the Leader. A Re-appraisal**

Edited by Leonard Schapiro and Peter Reddaway

Pall Mall Press, London 1967. 45s.

AS THE Russian Revolution recedes further into the past and its historical significance becomes clearer the stature of Lenin increases and bourgeois scholarship is obliged to come to terms with his personality and his ideas. The shelf of biographies extends year by year, and specialized studies, once almost non-existent, are being added to at a rapid rate. The twelve scholars whose seminar papers make up this volume try to avoid the polemical tone which inspires some recent biographies but remain distinctly critical and in some cases hostile towards their subject.

Many of the points made against Lenin have been heard before and are presented here only in a more sophisticated guise. Schapiro, it is true, sets the tone by an ostensible impartiality, but it is impartiality with a sting. 'Lenin's complete dedication to revolution' was balanced by his undeveloped tastes in art and literature. Evidently he was not the complete man of bourgeois mythology. His kindness was coupled with ruthlessness, his 'complete lack of personal vanity and ambition'

with 'an unwavering conviction that he alone was capable of leading his party; and that in any matter in dispute he alone had the right answer'. The verdict of Schapiro, as of Keep, is that Lenin was not 'a statesman'. It is true that there was nothing in common between Lenin and the 'statesmen' who led their countries into the first great blood-letting of the twentieth century and, at Versailles, sowed the seeds for the second. Lenin was, of course, a successful revolutionary leader who opposed these men and the system which they represented, believing that all means were good which rid humanity of exploitation, mass slaughter and oppression.

Placed in his time and compared with his contemporaries Lenin appears as humane, cultured and even scholarly. There is nothing to write about Lloyd George's contribution to philosophy or Clemenceau's to economics and if the number of human lives involved is totted up Lenin's use of violence was moderate compared with that of the great 'statesmen' of his time.

It is difficult to forgive Lenin

for having led a revolution which those who opposed him then and still do regarded as doing violence to Marxism as well as to history. The animus survives in Schapiro's defence of the Mensheviks and his imputation that Lenin's attacks on them in 1922 were 'hysterical' and may have been the 'symptom of an insane obsession'. It remains to Katkov to imply that Lenin was insane in an essay on philosophy which treats Lenin with contempt.

The other contributors are, on the whole, more balanced and at times enlightening but a number of them cannot resist the temptation to apply a little amateur psychology. Thus Frank speaks of Lenin's choleric disposition (i.e., he did not suffer fools gladly) and puts this down to the fact that 'the great love, religious in its origin though secular in appearance' which animated the Russian intelligentsia 'degenerated in Lenin's mind into hatred and lust for power and destruction'. Reddaway suggests that Lenin suppressed his own literary and artistic inclinations and that from his 'self-castigation' came an intolerant, fanatical attitude towards literature and the arts. Mercifully, most of the other contributors, though hardly less critical of Lenin, are able to make their point without accusations of hysteria, fanaticism or mental disorder.

Although the approach to Lenin varies from one chapter to another, producing different, not to say mutually incompatible judgements, none of the authors make a genuine attempt to understand Lenin's position. Some write with evident distaste for their subject,

others make a more reasonable assessment but feel obliged in one way or another to present him in an unfavourable light. Even in the fairer treatments, such as that by Rees, Lenin is counterposed to Marx and to what is taken to be classical Marxism, to his detriment. Obviously here vital questions of the interpretation of Marxism are involved which would have to be examined at length.

In Keep's chapter on Lenin's tactics we find the sort of criticism to be expected from one who has no sympathy for his aims or achievements. His main thesis is that Lenin knew how to win power but not how to use it. Lenin's problems after 1917 arose precisely from the fact that the other leaders of the Second International had abandoned the struggle for power even before 1914 and new leaders were

not developed in time to seize the opportunities presented by the war and the post-war crisis of capitalism. Of course, 'October had not sparked off the international socialist revolution', which Keep seems to blame Lenin for not recognizing. The point is that revolutions, and proletarian revolutions in particular, if they are to be successful, have to be made and for this task a leadership and a party is the indispensable pre-requisite. Lenin's very real contempt for 'mensheviks' (a term he sometimes applied generally to the Social Democrats of the Second International) arose from their deep-rooted opposition to such a party.

The whole question of Lenin's tactics, his role in the building of the Bolshevik Party, his intervention in April 1917 and his struggle against those tendencies in the party

which rejected in practice the tasks of revolutionary leadership requires study from an angle which the contributors to this volume could not adopt. If they do something to expose the absurdities of Soviet hagiography—against which they are, after all, mainly arguing—their own reappraisal remains, as it must in view of their political and philosophical premises, equally one-sided, prejudiced and at times absurd. That is not to dismiss this volume as useless; it is simply that an unbiased historical verdict cannot be expected from a dozen such jurors. The material they present and the views which they express should be taken into account by the serious student of Lenin and the bibliographical information is of value. A full-scale portrait and a Marxist assessment of Lenin, his personality and role in history, is surely overdue.

## Two Mensheviks

### Martov, a Political Biography of a Russian Social Democrat

by Israel Getzler  
Oxford University Press. 70s.

### Eva Broido: Memoirs of a Revolutionary

Translated and edited by Vera Broido  
Cambridge University Press. 25s.

BOURGEOIS historians have studied at great length (if rarely in depth) the history of Bolshevism, while Menshevism has been almost totally ignored. Dr. Getzler's biography of Martov, while limited in scope, and intended for the reader with a basic knowledge of the history of the CPSU, is a welcome contribution to our knowledge of Menshevism.

Trotsky's characterization of Martov as the Hamlet of Russian social democracy is brilliant and accurate. Martov was the eternal centrist, limited on one side by his refusal to revise his conception of Marxism, and on the other by his inability to break away from a conception of ethics which ran counter to his class understanding of society. Like most Russian Marx-

ists of his generation he moved towards Marxism from Populism as the industrial boom of the 1890's put Russian capitalism on the map and made it clear that in Russia, as in Western Europe, the proletariat was the only revolutionary class. With Lenin and Plekhanov he fought in *Iskra* for the establishment of a revolutionary workers' party, against the 'Economists', who considered that the political education of the working class could be achieved only when their consciousness had been developed organically by a period of pure trade-unionism. While *Iskra* united the party on questions of tactics, the Second Congress, where its line was formally adopted, split on the question of party organization. Martov, at this period the outstand-

ing leader of the congress minority (Mensheviks) saw the split largely in ethical terms. Dr. Getzler makes this point clearly, but he fails to understand Lenin's position, which was that the minority were trying to continue the movement in circle-like organizations, and were substituting a petty bourgeois fear of discipline for the proletarian principle of organization.

The 1905 revolution saw the detailed re-working of abstract conceptions of revolution in the light of real political developments, and it was in this period that the theoretical differences between Bolshevism and Menshevism were elaborated. Lenin, basing himself on the weakness and cowardice of bourgeois liberalism, took the line of a revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry as the only form of power which could overthrow Tsarism and open the way for a socialist revolution. With this perspective he fought for the practical preparation of an insurrection. Martov and the Mensheviks, clinging to the formal proposition that a bourgeois revolution must precede a socialist one, expected a classic transfer of power to the bourgeoisie, and limited themselves to support for the liber-

als, and a wide proletarian movement to assist them and to press the interests of the proletariat in the anticipated bourgeois state.

Even after the defeat of the revolutionary upsurge, Martov clung to the hope that the minimal concessions offered to liberalism by the Tsar's October Manifesto would open the way to a compromise form of bourgeois state and, while he did not support the extreme liquidationist trend in Menshevism, favoured the development of forms of legal trade union and educational work at the expense of the underground party. In the years of war and revolution, Martov repeatedly took a centrist line—for pacifism against defencism and revolutionary defeatism; against the moves of Dan and Tsereteli for coalition with

the liberals, but also against a decisive seizure of power by the proletariat. After the October Revolution he defended it against counter-revolutionary moves, while pressing for a coalition government of all socialist parties, and the replacement of the Soviet electoral system, weighted to ensure the predominance of the proletariat over unstable petty-bourgeois elements in the peasantry, by universal suffrage. He was correct in seeing, in the early 20's, the bureaucratization of the Soviet system: but both before and especially after the collapse of the revolutionary upsurge in Western Europe, his solution to this problem was not proletarian democracy but the restoration of capitalism in Russia.

Dr. Getzler's book, while not a

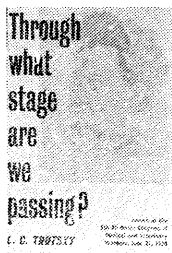
Marxist work, is an interesting and scholarly study, illuminating areas of party history. Eva Broido's *Memoirs*, by contrast, are the account of the work of an individual revolutionary, and while she provides an insight into the life of exiles in Siberia, and the 1905 revolution in the Caucasus, her almost total disregard of Menshevik theory and relations with the Bolsheviks is disappointing, especially since she was one of the leaders of Menshevik practical work, and a member of the 1912 Organizing Commission (the Menshevik Central Committee). The book is nevertheless interesting both to students and to the general reader, as an account of the heroic life of one of thousands of Russian revolutionaries.

## Two pamphlets by Leon Trotsky

### Through what stage are we passing?

This is the text of a speech made by L. D. Trotsky to the 5th All-Union Congress of Medical and Veterinary Workers in the summer of 1924. Of particular interest to our readers in view of the specific references to Britain and metropolitan Europe.

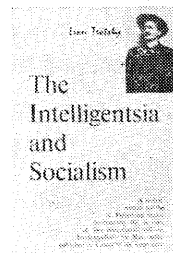
Price: Two shillings



### The Intelligentsia and Socialism

A review written for the St. Petersburg review *Sovremenny Mir* in 1910, of *Der Sozialismus und die Intellektuellen*, by Max Adler published in Vienna in the same year.

Price: One shilling



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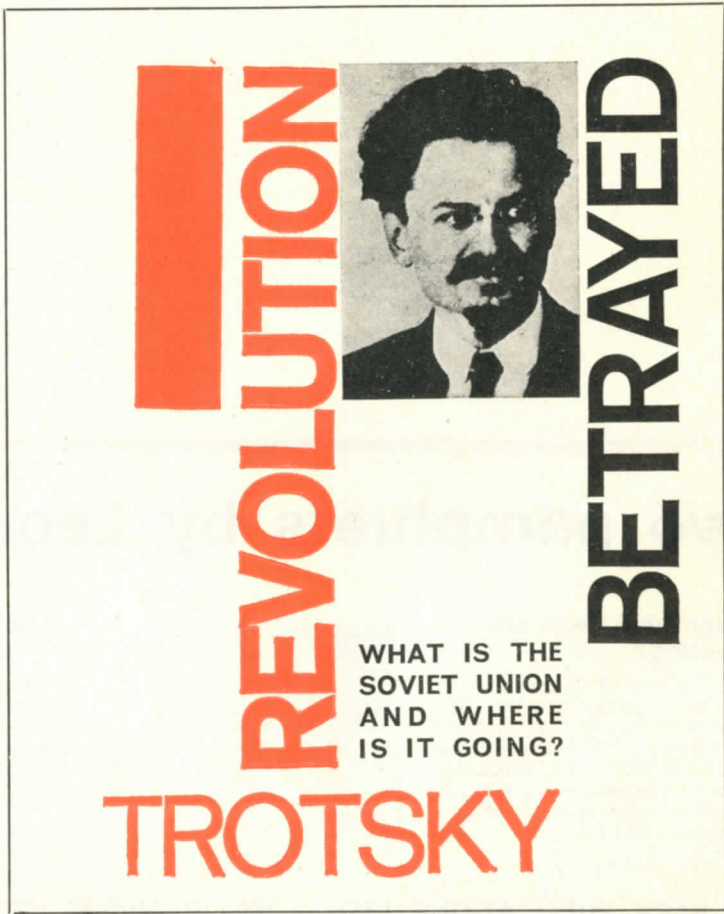
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The book cover features a central black and white portrait of Leonid Brezhnev. To the left of the portrait, the word 'REVOLUTION' is written vertically in large, bold, red capital letters. To the right of the portrait, the word 'BETRAYED' is written vertically in large, bold, black capital letters. Below the portrait, the text 'WHAT IS THE SOVIET UNION AND WHERE IS IT GOING?' is written in smaller, black capital letters. At the bottom of the cover, the name 'TROTSKY' is written in large, bold, red capital letters.

# Essential Marxist Reading

## The New Course By Leon Trotsky

A collection of articles written in 1923 during the lull before the great storm of persecution which was later to overwhelm Russian Bolshevism. Here Trotsky analyses the incipient stages of the degeneration of the Communist Party, uncovers its causes and proposes measures for combating its further decline. He here analyses the party in a historical, that is dialectical way, the relationships between generations, social strata, groups, factional formations, tradition and the multitude of factors that go to make a revolutionary party. 111 pages, 3/6

Most timely reading for British socialists, this book places the development of British politics in correct historic perspective. Here Trotsky, writing on the eve of the General Strike of 1926, employs his great revolutionary experience to analyse and explain the ideological and moral concepts of the ruling classes and their servants in the Labour bureaucracy.

136 pages, 7/6



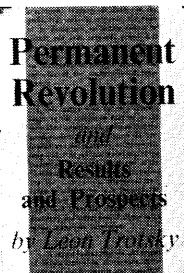
## The Draft Programme of the Communist International by Leon Trotsky

This is part of the author's criticism of the draft programme submitted by the Executive Committee of the Third (Communist) International to the 6th Congress of the Comintern which was held in July 1928. The manuscript of that criticism was written by Trotsky during his exile in Alma-Ata (Central Asia). It was sent to the Congress in Moscow together with an appeal for reinstatement into the party from which he had been expelled a few months before by the Stalinist faction in 1927. Stalin and his supporters had invented the theory of 'Socialism in one country', which was made party policy in 1925 and converted into an article of faith to be defended by the world institutions of Stalinism. It is this theory which Trotsky criticises in these pages.

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