

# INTERNATIONAL

**THEORETICAL JOURNAL OF THE  
INTERNATIONAL MARXIST GROUP**  
(BRITISH SECTION OF THE FOURTH INTERNATIONAL)

**DAVE BAILEY**

**The enigma of  
workers' control**

**PERRY ANDERSON**

**Theses on English  
class society**

**LEON TROTSKY**

**Britain and Russia**

**BEATRIX CAMPBELL, CELIA PUGH,  
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**The women's movement  
and the party**

**'FROM THE ARCHIVES'**

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**Vol.5 No.1 Autumn 1979 75p/\$1.85**



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# To our readers

This issue of 'International' is intended to break new ground. Its contents, together with that of the issues that will follow it, will be devoted to one central theme: how to develop a strategy adequate to the needs of a socialist revolution in Britain. All the contributions relate to this theme, albeit in varying ways. One indispensable component in the process of elaborating a revolutionary strategy for the present must be a consideration of previous analyses of British society advanced by Marxists. These analyses, whether 'classical' or contemporary, provide a point of departure for future work. Conclusions previously reached may be accepted, rejected, or modified; but they cannot safely be ignored. 'International' will therefore regularly bring together and examine instances of these analyses

Two of the contributions in this issue are of this order. The first, by Perry Anderson, is an excerpt from his article 'Origins of the Present Crisis', which originally appeared in 1964. In it Anderson presents an analysis of the specific character of English society, examining some of the key formative moments in its development. His conclusion is that one of the prime traits of the English industrial bourgeoisie and working class has been their extensive economic development but relative political weakness

A look at the historic development of British society from another angle is contained in Trotsky's 'Through What Stage are We Passing?', a section of which is excerpted in this issue. Starting with the apparent paradox that the capitalist country that was, at the time of writing, the oldest and most advanced economically of any capitalist country in Europe possessed the weakest Communist Party, Trotsky proceeds to sketch a graphic contrast between the course of development of the British and Russian workers' movements.

Future issues of 'International' will continue exploration of previous analyses of British society with a consideration of the writings of Marx and Engels on the subject.

The elaboration of a revolutionary strategy for Britain, of course, requires far more than studies of British society itself. What is the specific relevance of the experience of proletarian struggles elsewhere in the world, and how can the strategic

conclusions of those struggles be re-fashioned to suit the needs of the British workers' movement? This will be another of our regular themes. In this issue we present a discussion article on one strategic topic on which there has been considerable debate: workers' control. Here, of course, the activity of the Institute for Workers' Control has had a wide impact. In his study of the experience and theory of workers' control, Dave Bailey enumerates some key weaknesses in the approach of the IWC, examining instances of workers' control in the Russian, German, and Spanish revolutions, as well as in some of the most advanced trade-union struggles of recent years, both in Britain and internationally. He argues that the IWC, by ignoring the real role of workers' control in the most intense class struggles of European history, places the issue in a reformist context that impedes achievement even of the goals set by the IWC itself, let alone a more fundamental socialist transformation of society.

Perhaps even more controversial than the issue of workers' control has been the debate over the place of the women's liberation movement in socialist revolution, and more particularly the relation between the organization of women and the revolutionary party. In this issue we offer an edited transcript of the discussion on 'The Women's Movement and the Party' held at the autumn 1978 Marxist Symposium organized by 'International' and 'Socialist Challenge'. Celia Pugh, Sheila Rowbotham, Beatrix Campbell, and Joan Smith present widely differing views on the subject. In future issues we intend to continue to present organized debate on the major subjects facing Marxists today. Moreover, the questions raised in this particular debate will surely be considered again in subsequent issues.

Two additional regular features of 'International' will be reviews and currently unavailable material on the history of the worker's movement. Here again, the focus will be revolutionary strategy. In this issue we present reviews of Rudolf Bahro's 'The Alternative in Eastern Europe', which has been called the most important theoretical work to come out of the workers' states since Leon Trotsky's 'The Revolution Betrayed', and of Ernesto Laclau's influential analysis of fascism. In 'From the Archives' we offer a detailed account, including previously untranslated material, of the first debates on freedom of the press to break out after the October Revolution.



## Revolutionary Strategy

DAVE BAILEY

# The enigma of workers' control

Recent years have seen a revival of interest on the European left in the subject of workers' control of production. For decades socialism has suffered grievously from its identification with Stalinism, and the re-discovery of slogans which, in one way or another, embody the theme of worker's democracy, has served to re-assert the connection between socialism and the liberation of the working class. The Stalinist model of state power is surely one of the greatest impediments to the advance of socialism in the West and it is vitally important that socialists be able to demonstrate that proletarian power can and does require that the institutions of a workers' state, both political and industrial, be run by the workers themselves. The current international discussion of one such slogan, workers' control of production, is therefore to be welcomed.

In Britain this revival has been animated to a large extent by the Institute for Workers Control (IWC), which has done some valuable work in the labour movement, promoting demands for the abolition of commercial secrecy ('open the books') and for some form of control by the workers over managerial decisions. These two themes have now become an established part of socialist thinking in Britain and a significant component of trade-union demands. Politically, the IWC has encouraged the development of a new left-wing in the Labour Party that links the time-honoured theme of nationalization and a planned economy to workers' democracy in industry. (In the popular mind, of course, this new Labour left is associated principally with the figure of Tony Benn.) In this and other ways, the IWC has made a modest contribution to overcoming the idea, unfortunately prevalent among most workers today, that socialism automatically implies bureaucracy.

On the other hand, there are serious political weaknesses in the work of the IWC. We shall discuss these later on. Let us simply note that nowhere in the entire literary output of the IWC is there any examination of the *chief historical experiences* of workers' control of industry. The literature is not only doggedly Anglocentric — and workers' control of production, properly speaking, has hardly ever been established in Britain — but also resolutely avoids discussing the great revolutionary upheavals of the past, in which abundant examples of workers' control can be found. The IWC has conducted no analysis, for example, of the Russian, German, and Spanish revolutions, the Liberation of 1944-45, or the Paris Commune of 1871, and has written little on the more recent experiences in Chile and Portugal.<sup>1</sup> The various schemes for workers' control in British industry drawn up by IWC supporter-groups and the proposals of individual contributors have remained divorced from any comprehensive debate over the sort of conditions that might be required to put them into practice. Despite the revival of interest in the subject, workers' control remains an enigma to the British left. A study of the significance of workers' control

in several strategic struggles of the European working class may help to dispel some of the mists of confusion that surround the issue. Its importance and application in Britain can then also be clarified.

### I

In the early days of the Communist International, workers' control was not used as a synonym for workers' self-management of industry in a socialist society, as is often done today. On the contrary, a sharp distinction was drawn between workers' management and workers' control, the latter term being reserved for a particular phase of *transition* from capitalism to a planned economy. During this transitional phase, the proletariat, rather than move directly to the management of production, might simply exercise control over the capitalists. This presupposes the continued existence of the capitalists and their administrators for a temporary period. Some of the confusion which surrounds the subject of workers' control is terminological in origin, for in the Communist tradition, the term workers' management is used to refer to the administration of things (after the bourgeoisie has been removed), while control is used to refer to the administration of persons (the bourgeoisie). Confusion is compounded in the English-speaking world by the fact that the words 'control' and 'management' are frequently interchangeable in common English usage. Other languages draw a finer distinction between the two ideas: *contrôle* and *gestion* in French, *control* and *gerencia* in Spanish, *kontrolia* and *upravleniye* in Russian. In English, many people innocently use the term 'control' to refer indifferently to all forms of workers' sovereignty in industry, thus obscuring the distinctions made in the Communist tradition. Nevertheless, in all countries, the slogan of 'workers' control' has been an object of political contention. The reason is that to many people, the idea that the working-class movement should not nationalize private property and substitute worker-administrators for the capitalists and bourgeois managers at the first opportunity, represents an unacceptable compromise with capitalism. Anarcho-syndicalist writers, for example, consciously refuse to employ the term control as anything but a synonym for workers' management of socialized property. (In this article,

1. It is significant, for example, that the large collection of source materials on workers' control assembled by Ken Coates and Tony Topham are exclusively British; see *Workers Control: A Book of Readings & Witnesses for Workers Control*, London, 1970. The associated Spokesman imprint has published some material on May '68, notably Andrée Hoyles, *Imagination in Power*, Nottingham, 1973, and on Portugal: Audrey Wise, *Eyewitness in Revolutionary Portugal*, Nottingham, 1975.



we shall be using the term workers' control in the narrow, Communist sense.)

Many may therefore be surprised to learn that by workers' control the Bolsheviks meant something less than the complete socialization of industry. But Lenin, who wrote and spoke a great deal on the subject during the Russian revolution, was quite unambiguous on this point. In his 'April Theses', he stated: 'It is not our *immediate* task to "introduce" socialism, but only to bring social production and the distribution of products at once under the *control* of the Soviet of Workers Deputies.' In his pamphlet, *Can the Bolsheviks Retain State Power?*, written on the eve of the October Revolution, Lenin stated: 'The important thing will not be even the confiscation of the capitalists' property, but country-wide, all-embracing workers' control over the capitalists and their possible supporters.' Another important pamphlet, *The Impending Catastrophe and How to Combat It*, a comprehensive statement of Bolshevik economic policy published in October 1917, speaks repeatedly of 'control over' and 'supervision of' the capitalists and not their immediate elimination. On coming to power, the Bolsheviks pursued no other policy. Before the escalation of the Civil War in May 1918, nationalization (of whole industries) on government orders went no further than the banks and the sugar syndicate, and although local soviets often confiscated factories on their own initiative, a large part of industry remained in private hands.\*

Why did the Bolsheviks adopt such policies? Trotsky's explanation ran as follows: 'The very idea of this slogan [workers' control] was the outgrowth of the transitional regime in industry when the capitalist and his administrators could no longer take a step without the consent of the workers; but on the other hand, when the workers had not as yet provided the political prerequisites for nationalization, nor yet seized the technical management, nor yet created the organs essential for this.' Furthermore: 'The proletariat... is interested in seeing to it that the transition from the private capitalist to the state capitalist and then to the socialist method of production be accomplished with the least economic convulsions and the least drain upon the national wealth. That is why, while nearing power and even after seizing power by way of the boldest and most decisive struggle, the proletariat will demonstrate complete readiness to establish a transitional regime in the factories, plants, and banks.'<sup>2</sup> The foundations of this reasoning are partly political, partly technical. Let us examine the technical aspect first.

The employers in Russia sabotaged production extensively during the months prior to the revolution and for some time afterward, hoarding goods, fostering monstrous inflation, and so on. Indeed, the bourgeoisie invariably embarks on economic sabotage during periods of revolutionary upheaval, partly out of fear for the future of private property, partly in a spirit of mischievous obstruction. The means of production, distribution, and exchange are turned into political weapons. The Russian proletariat therefore had to take far-reaching measures to avert complete economic and political catastrophe. During the revolution itself, however, the proletariat lacked the 'political prerequisites' and 'organs of technical management' needed to run industry. The bourgeoisie, like any other ruling class in history, is not a mere excrescence on society, but performs a specific role in the social division of labour, in this case organizing and administering production. The revolutionary class does not come to power fully equipped with the skills and institutions needed to assume that role immediately.

The Bolsheviks had considerable difficulty in organizing a nation-wide apparatus for running industry. In December 1917, for example, the group around Bukharin and Radek, which disagreed with Lenin's policy and favoured immediate nationalization of all major industry, secured the creation of Vesenkha, the Supreme Council of the National Economy. But even they did not find it practical to proceed immediately to sweeping nationalization. In practice, Vesenkha's authority did not extend much beyond Petrograd itself. It had no plan of production and no network of trained personnel — communist administrators, statisticians, or even clerks — able to coordinate and manage production throughout Russia. The

civil service boycotted the Bolshevik government. These problems were exacerbated by the material state of the country at the time. Communications between Petrograd and the provinces were in disarray, the railways in chaos, the transportation system as a whole in ruins after three years of war. Vesenkha found it difficult to requisition a few sticks of furniture for its own headquarters, let alone coordinate the economic activities of 150 million people. In *The Bolshevik Revolution*, E.H. Carr reports that in some towns workers who had driven employers away were forced to seek their return. He cites the case of one factory that had to close because the workers' committees proved unable to run it.<sup>3</sup> Speaking of the capitalists and their administrators, Lenin said bluntly: 'We must learn from them, and there is something to learn, for the party of the proletariat and its vanguard have *no experience* of independent work in organizing giant enterprises which serve the needs of scores of millions of people.'<sup>4</sup>

The policy of workers' control was designed to respond to bourgeois economic sabotage while taking due account of the difficulties of the proletariat in managing the entire economy directly without relying on the expertise of the capitalists and their agents. The aim was to expose the activities of the employers and merchants to public gaze, to prevent them from sabotaging production, and to persuade them, by force where necessary, to remain at their posts. If some could be compelled to continue productive activities, subject to strict accounting and invigilation by the workers, that would be all to the good. At the same time, the new regime would gain a breathing space during which to form new institutions, train a cadre of communist administrators, and repair the infrastructure so as to draw the workers into the management of industry at all levels of the state. Workers' control, therefore, an interim policy designed to see the revolution through its most arduous period, would serve a twofold purpose: to restrict and gradually suppress the social power of the bourgeoisie while simultaneously enabling the proletariat to train itself to manage industry. It would express a dialectical process of suppression and apprenticeship. Even during War Communism, when the exigencies of the Civil War obliged the Bolsheviks to nationalize the bulk of the industrial economy, which was 'transferred to the management of the republic', as the official formula put it, the Bolsheviks still sought technical assistance from former capitalists and their administrators, offering them posts in industry as ordinary state employees.

In terms of its economic objectives, the policy of workers' control was not a great success. A large number of employers either fled their enterprises or were driven off by local soviets after being convicted of sabotage. Under War Communism, bourgeois experts boycotted the regime wholesale, joining the Whites wherever they could despite the Bolsheviks' offer of special remuneration and other privileges. This was a serious material blow to the workers' state.

The political aims of the workers' control policy were explained by Trotsky this way: 'By its readiness to establish transitional forms of workers' control, the proletarian vanguard wins over to its side the more conservative strata of

2. Thesis 8, 'The Tasks of the Proletariat in the Present Revolution', in *Selected Works*, Moscow, 1970, Volume 2, p. 45.

3. *Selected Works*, Volume 2, p. 410.

4. E.H. Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution*, Volume 2, Harmondsworth, 1971, pp. 87-104. In the early 1930s, Trotsky reproached a group of German communists for using the slogan of control to mean 'the management of the industries by the workers'. Why, he protests, 'designate management as *control*? In the language of all mankind control is understood to mean the surveillance and checking of one institution over the work of another. Control may be active, dominant, and all-embracing. But it remains control.' Leon Trotsky, *The Struggle Against Fascism in Germany*, New York, 1971, p. 243. Trotsky not only supported Lenin's industrial policy in 1917, despite their previous differences over the tasks facing the revolution in Russia, but continued Lenin's usage of 'workers' control' long after the degeneration of the Communist movement.

5. *The Struggle Against Fascism in Germany*, p. 243.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 245.

7. Lenin, *Selected Works*, Volume 2, p. 76.

8. 'Left Wing' Childishness and the Petty-Bourgeois Mentality', *Selected Works*, Vol. 2, p. 703.



the proletariat, and neutralizes certain groups of the petty bourgeoisie, especially the technical, administrative, and banking staffs. Should the capitalists and the entire upper layer of the administration demonstrate an utter irreconcilability by resorting to methods of economic sabotage, the responsibility for the severe measures that follow therefrom will fall, in the eyes of the nation, not upon the workers but upon the hostile classes.<sup>9</sup> Such, he added, is the 'political import' of the slogan of workers' control. This was of particular importance in Russia, where the petty bourgeoisie (in this case the peasantry) constituted an outright majority of the population. Most of the nationalizations carried out after October, whether locally or nationally, were described as 'punitive' — retribution for sabotage or non-cooperation by the owners.<sup>10</sup> To the peasants, attached as they were to the idol of private property, socialism appeared as just punishment of the bourgeoisie for ruining the people. Although workers' control in Russia was cut short, it seems reasonable to conclude that the political import of the policy played its part in the Bolshevik success. As Trotsky wrote, the slogan of workers' control 'retains an enormous [political] significance independently of the degree to which it will be realized in reality, if realized at all'.<sup>11</sup>

The controls exercised by various proletarian institutions during the revolution were quite comprehensive. No doubt many readers familiar only with present-day discussions in Britain about workers' control will be surprised to hear just what the measures taken entailed. One of the earliest decrees, issued in April 1917 by the 'exploratory conference of factory committees of the Petrograd War Industries', stated: 'From the Factory Committee should emanate all instructions concerning internal factory organization (i.e. instructions concerning such matters as hours of work, wages, hiring and firing, holidays, etc.). The factory manager to be kept notified.'<sup>12</sup> At the First Full Congress of Petrograd Factory Committees, which met in May 1917, Lenin's resolution, which passed overwhelmingly, stated that to establish control 'it is necessary, first, to make certain that in all the basic institutions there is a majority of workers, not less than three-fourths of all the votes, and that all owners who have not deserted their business, as well as the scientifically and technically trained personnel, are compelled to participate'. Furthermore, all commercial and bank accounts were ordered open to inspection by any shop or factory committee, central or local soviet, or trade union, with management 'compelled to supply them with all the data'.<sup>13</sup>

The Second Conference of Factory Committees declared that the committees had 'the right to dismiss all those who could not guarantee normal relations with the workers' and that 'administrative factory personnel can only enter into service with the consent of the Factory Committee'.<sup>14</sup> All these powers were codified at the First All-Russian Conference of Factory Committees, which met on the eve of October. This conference accorded the factory committees the power to 'exclude from participation in the discussion any member of the factory administration' and to confiscate the enterprise in the event of 'illegal acts'.<sup>15</sup>

In other words, workers' control meant that the workers would have veto power over the decisions of the employers and administrators. It was 'passive' and 'observational'<sup>16</sup> only in the sense that its aim was to ensure continuation of existing patterns of output and supply, but the methods used to achieve this were, as Trotsky put it, 'all-embracing'. Have no fear, said Lenin, the workers 'would institute such supervision that every Tit Titych will be surrounded as the French were at Sedan'.<sup>17</sup> The workers would be sovereign. In his *History of the Russian Revolution*, Trotsky tells us that during the summer of 1917, when workers' control was first put into effect, the workers in various parts of the country were subjecting individual employers 'now to enforced appearance before the soviet, now to house arrest...no wonder that the workers' militia became an object of special hatred to the possessing classes'.<sup>18</sup> In other words, as conceived by the Bolsheviks workers' control implied that the working class would hold effective state power. The February insurrection, after which the soviets formed, had delivered nearly all real power to the armed proletariat and soldiers (with the exception of the governmental apex); in this sense, Trotsky was able to say that

'the dictatorship of the workers and soldiers had already been a fact ever since 27 February',<sup>19</sup> and Lenin frequently spoke of the possibility of the 'peaceful development' of the revolution. Naturally, this state of affairs — proletarian power — did not altogether exclude agreements with the industrialists. Nevertheless, such 'agreement' occurred under the massive weight of organized proletarian domination. This reflected an alignment of forces opposite to that of trade unionism, where workers are permitted to bargain and come to agreements, but only under the organized weight of bourgeois domination. With the proletariat holding state power, workers' control, which leaves the capitalists and their administrators nominally in possession of the enterprise, is not necessarily a compromise with capital. On the contrary, it can lay the basis for its effective suppression.

## II

In the Communist tradition then, workers' control belongs to the period of the revolutionary overturn. It can be 'imposed' on the bourgeoisie, Trotsky wrote, 'only by force' and 'can correspond only to the period of the convulsing of the bourgeois state, the proletarian offensive, and the falling back of the bourgeoisie, that is, to the period of the proletarian revolution in the fullest sense of the word'.<sup>20</sup> Experiences of workers' control, and indeed of workers' management, are to be found during all the great proletarian revolutions of twentieth century Europe, whether victorious or not. Despite the currently fashionable allegations of Eurocommunists, the main features of the Russian revolution were by no means unique or peculiar to Russia. The revolutionary experiences of the Western proletariat have been as rich as those of the Russian, though ultimately less successful. The paths taken by the revolution in the industrial field, however, vary considerably. A brief look at two other proletarian revolutions, in which different industrial policies were pursued, will clarify further the real meaning of workers' control.

The German revolution of November 1918 was more powerful, comprehensive, and politically advanced than the February revolution in Russia. The armed insurrection of 4-9 November, which overthrew the Kaiser's government and all the political institutions of the Kaiserreich throughout Germany, resulted in the formation of a coalition government of the two Socialist parties, the SPD (Social Democratic Party of Germany) and the USPD (Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany). This government was formally independent of the bourgeoisie and responsible to the workers' and soldiers' councils that had seized power during the victorious uprising. At the time, November 1918 was widely taken to be the German version of the Russian October. As one historian put it, all the social classes in Germany 'knew, or thought they knew, that they could not resist the councils. They resigned themselves to, or welcomed, the fact that Germany was to be socialist'.<sup>21</sup> The day after the uprising in Berlin, some 2,000 delegates elected from the factories and barracks of the capital met at the Circus Busch hall and constituted the Berlin Workers' and Soldiers' Council. This body declared itself the supreme organ of power in the Reich, proclaimed Germany a socialist republic, and resolved to oversee the actions of the new government, which was instructed to socialize German industry, draft a constitution based on the principles of

9. *The Struggle Against Fascism in Germany*, p. 245.

10. *The Bolshevik Revolution*, Volume 2, p. 87.

11. *The Struggle Against Fascism in Germany*, p. 245.

12. Quoted in Maurice Brinton, *The Bolsheviks and Workers Control, 1917-1921*, London, 1970, p. 2.

13. *The Bolshevik Revolution*, Volume 2, p. 67.

14. *The Bolsheviks and Workers Control, 1917-1921*, p. 9.

15. Full text in John Reed, *Ten Days That Shook the World*, Harmondsworth, 1977, p. 297.

16. *The Bolsheviks and Workers Control, 1917-1921*, p. 20.

17. *Selected Works*, Volume 2, p. 410.

18. *History of the Russian Revolution*, Sphere edition in three volumes, 1967, Volume 1, p. 393.

19. *Ibid.*, Volume 3, p. 300.

20. *The Struggle Against Fascism in Germany*, p. 78.

21. Rudolf Coper, *Failure of a Revolution*, Cambridge, 1955, p. 99.



proletarian democracy, conclude peace with the Entente powers, and establish relations with Soviet Russia. As one historian put it: 'Theoretically, this conference established the dictatorship of the proletariat.'<sup>22</sup>

The German revolution, like the Russian, had its origin in the intense class hatred generated by the horror and privations of the First World War. But the Russian workers were swamped in the petty-bourgeois milieu of the peasants and peasant-soldiers, while the German proletariat was numerically and socially powerful. While there were serious shortages of food and other essentials in Germany at the time of the revolution, mainly because of the blockade imposed by US imperialism in 1917, industry in Germany had suffered far less dislocation than in Russia. Germany was a modern industrial country, with a powerful, well-organized, and culturally advanced proletariat. All the economic and social conditions existed for the rapid socialization of industry. As Lenin was fond of saying, Russia possessed the 'political half' of socialism, Germany the economic. Many of the November insurgents were convinced that the new government of 'People's Commissars' in Berlin had no reason to hesitate before nationalizing industry and reorganizing it under a socialist plan. The bourgeoisie, overwhelmed by the November events, seemed at first resigned to its fate, having little choice but to obey the instructions issued by the workers' and soldiers' councils meeting beneath the red flag in city halls throughout Germany. Workers' control, it was widely assumed, had no special political or economic function, and would be but a way station in the itinerary of the revolution.

But the measures the workers anticipated from the 'socialist' government were not forthcoming. The revolution had been organized by the cadres of the USPD, a party that led the industrial workers and whose rank and file, together with a significant part of its leadership, admired the Bolsheviks. But by joining a coalition on equal terms with the SPD, the USPD made a serious error. Lending its own prestige to Ebert and Scheidemann, the USPD allowed the SPD leaders to present themselves as revolutionaries while curbing the revolution. The Circus Busch resolutions were never translated into government decrees. This was not for want of an apparatus, economic plan, or material possibilities, but for want of political will. Ebert, who was engaged in a plot with the High Command of the military, devoted most of his energies to securing general elections to a Constituent Assembly, which occurred in January 1919. By this device, Ebert sabotaged the revolution, for the two socialist parties, having taken no decisive measures in the interim, failed to gain a majority at the polls. Then, in February 1919, Ebert gratefully formed a coalition government with the two major bourgeois parties and repudiated the workers' and soldiers' councils. Between January and June 1919, the workers fought for the sovereignty of their councils, but their struggle was drowned in blood by Noske's Freikorps soldiers during the ferocious civil war that raged in all the industrial districts of the country during those months. Throughout this period, Ebert continued to promise that 'socialization is on the way'. But socialization never came. In reality, then, Ebert's policy of halting the revolution at control was a case of prevarication designed to buy time to prepare the counter-revolution against the working class.

Socialization was buried by the defeat of the workers in the civil war. It is instructive, however, to examine the measures of workers' control taken by the councils during the weeks and months prior to this tragedy, as the councils toiled in hopeful anticipation of rapid social transformation. Remarkable descriptions of this work have survived in the memoirs of two leading participants in the revolution. Albert Grzesinski was a top-ranking member of the SPD. In his book, *Inside Germany*, he describes how the workers' and soldiers' councils ran the city of Kassel. Such bodies, Grzesinski writes, 'were in full power throughout Germany'.<sup>23</sup> The Council of Kassel, which had 600 representatives, about half of them soldiers, took a variety of economic and commercial decisions. It imposed the eight-hour day, confiscated all local food supplies, and arranged a system of rationing. It also attempted to secure employment for returning soldiers. In a remarkable passage

which concludes on an amusing note, Grzesinski tells us: 'One of the first acts of my administration was the immediate shutdown of the great munitions factory established in Kassel during the war and employing approximately twelve thousand men and women. The workers were discharged with two weeks notice and sent back to their home towns. Those who were residents of Kassel were re-employed for the purpose of conducting the necessary inventory. Immense quantities of food were stored in the factory warehouse — among them a large number of cattle requisitioned by the management for its own use, which had caused considerable ill-feeling — were turned over to the local relief organizations. The factory was used as a storage place for military equipment. An order forbidding all work in the barber shops of Kassel on Sundays was also issued by me. This measure was later generally adopted throughout Prussia.'<sup>24</sup> This touch of civic pride suggests that Grzesinski was a church-going socialist. He became chief of police of Berlin in the 1920s.

Meanwhile, Toni Sender, the young USPD member who led the workers' and soldiers' administration in Frankfurt, relates in her autobiography that the employers wanted to continue munitions production. (We know from Hindenburg that the High Command viewed the armistice as a breathing space that would permit Germany to resume the war later.) 'We opposed this idea', writes Sender. All war production was stopped. Moreover, she adds, 'we would collaborate in the shift to peace production, but would permit no discharge of workers. The working day was to be not longer than eight hours, and we reduced it to four when necessary to make place for the homecoming soldiers'.<sup>25</sup> Several million German soldiers were demobilized and seeking jobs in late 1918. The imposition of a sliding scale of hours as decreed by the workers' and soldiers' councils made it possible to re-employ them. A joke doing the round of salon society in Berlin at the time had it that German labour had discovered a new slogan to replace the time-honoured demand for the eight-hour day: the 'no hour day'. Neither Toni Sender nor Albert Grzesinski describes any cases of confiscation and socialization during their period of office. Nevertheless, the workers were clearly growing impatient with the government. A number of Berlin enterprises were confiscated by the workers, and the councils in Saxony and in the Ruhr attempted to take over administration of the mines in February 1919. The government, however, refused to recognize them, and the general strikes that broke out to defend these and other proletarian actions formed part of the civil war that consumed so many lives.

A rather different pattern emerged in the Spanish revolution of 1936-1937. The *pronunciamento* of 17 July 1936, when Franco rallied his generals for the overthrow of the Republican authorities, was answered by a fierce revolutionary uprising of the proletariat throughout Spain. The workers' insurrection of 18-21 July not only defeated Franco, leaving his military forces divided and without air or naval support, but also inaugurated one of the most profound social upheavals in European history. The beginning was exceptionally bitter. Towns captured by Franco in the early days of the rising were subjected to the most ghastly massacres, while in other cities the counter-insurrection of the workers took a heavy toll, particularly where the rising found the workers unarmed at the critical moment.<sup>26</sup> This bitter beginning, during which thousands died, followed immediately by a full-scale civil war, dictated proletarian policy in industry. The Workers' Committees, which temporarily became the de facto public power in most places in the Republic (only in Aragon did they formally remove the republican civilian authorities), rounded up and imprisoned a large number of bourgeois who were not quick

22. Ralph H. Lutz, *The German Revolution: 1918-1919*, Stanford, California, 1922, p. 80.

23. Albert Grzesinski, *Inside Germany*, London, 1939, p. 50.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 53.

25. Toni Sender, *Autobiography of a Rebel*, New York, 1939, p. 107.

26. For a description of the uprising, see A.H. Landis, *Spain: The Unfinished Revolution*, New York, 1975.





German revolutionary sailors (above). Ebert (below) preferred the company of generals





enough to make their escape. July and August 1936 were the months of 'red terror'. Each party and union in nearly every town and city had its own tribunal, prison, and place of execution. Many tens of thousands were executed as fascists during the first months of the war, among them many clergymen. It has even been said that in parts of Spain an upper-class manner of speech alone was sufficient to condemn a person to death.<sup>27</sup>

Generally, the outrage and fury of the masses left little room for workers' control. Even those workers who were not anarcho-syndicalists, to whom full workers' management of each and every enterprise was a matter of high principle, wanted to remove the bourgeoisie promptly. The picture that emerged in the first weeks of the revolution in republican Spain was, of course, uneven, but there was a notable trend towards confiscation and workers' management of factories. In some areas, Asturias and Aragon for example, collectivization was nearly complete, the factories being run by the CNT or UGT, the two Spanish trade unions. In Catalonia, industrial heartland of republican Spain, some 70 per cent of industry was collectivized, and the Central Committee of Anti-Fascist Militias worked miracles in building chemical and metal industries from scratch. The Mediterranean ports were managed by the unions. Elsewhere, a lower proportion of industry was confiscated. In Valencia, it was about 50 per cent, in Madrid as low as 30 per cent. Franz Borkenau has reported that the UGT in Madrid even concluded profit-sharing agreements with employers in place of expropriation,<sup>28</sup> which seems an unnecessary compromise.

In areas in which confiscation was widespread, it was not at all confined to large enterprises. In some cases, the owners of small and medium-sized enterprises were simply controlled by the local committees and urged to convert to war production whenever possible. In other cases — especially in Catalonia, though the practice was not unknown in Madrid — thousands of these small businesses were expropriated, something that infuriated the Stalinists, who, historians agree, formed the far right wing of Spanish labour. Erstwhile owners found themselves working alongside their former employees for the same wages. Small businesses considered backward, uneconomic, unhygienic, or inefficient were candidates for such treatment, which often included entire trades, such as dressmaking, tailoring, cabinet making, metal and leather goods, restaurants, and so on. The enterprises seized in this manner were declared the property of the CNT or UGT. In some cases the machinery was collected and put into a single building. Many buildings which fell vacant during the revolution or the 'terror', particularly churches and convents, were turned into warehouses, stores, markets, public kitchens, and barns. In the countryside, the CNT, and later the UGT, took over and ran the large estates as collectives. Many peasants, however, elected to go no further than the formation of cooperatives, although the hiring of agricultural labour was abolished.<sup>29</sup>

From the outset, the workers faced the need for centralized management of industry, especially because of the pressing demands of the civil war. The workers' parties, however, failed to remove the republican government in July, despite its conciliatory attitude toward Franco. By September, the major workers' parties could afford no further dallying, but instead of seizing power, they joined the Republicans in a coalition under Largo Caballero. The bourgeois republic and its institutions were preserved. The Workers' Committees were curbed, and the old republican administrations were deemed the only legitimate public authorities. The traditional leaders of the proletariat assured their followers that the revolution was only being placed in cold storage until after victory over Franco, arguing principally that Britain, France, and even the Soviet Union would not supply arms to a 'red republic'. The revolution therefore had to be 'camouflaged'. In practice, the unions and workers' parties held real power in industry, for the government could not conduct the war without the aid and active involvement of millions of workers. But the failure to create a workers' and peasants' government had serious consequences, both immediately and in the long term, not least in the factories and on the land.

Caballero's defence of republican legality (on which basis the police and courts were restored, and the armed forces regularized under bourgeois officers) entailed refusal to legalize the confiscation of factories. Only the confiscation of land was ratified, and then only if the land were seized from 'known fascists'. As a result, bourgeois owners eventually returned and began reclaiming their property under government protection. The banks were never nationalized, nor was a monopoly of foreign trade ever enacted. The banks were subjected only to a mild form of workers' control that prevented disbursement of funds to fascists, but they remained free to deny credit to collectivized firms.

The pressure of credit deprivation helped to dissuade workers from extending confiscations. Later, the Stalinists, together with Negrin, demanded the surrender of many existing collectives to insistent owners. Without title to the factories and land, the workers were at the mercy of this constant erosion of their gains. Under the Negrin government (Caballero fell after the armed assault on Catalonia by the Stalinists in May 1937) force was openly applied. In 1936, the government of autonomous Catalonia (the Generalitat) had legalized the collectivization of enterprises with more than 200 employees, though it had permitted compensation to shareholders, which meant that former owners in exile continued to draw revenue and thereby kept one foot in the door. But the Negrin government revoked even this decree. In Aragon and parts of rural Catalonia, some of the former *caciques* (bosses) were reinstated when collective farms were forcibly broken up in the summer and autumn of 1937. Other openly destructive measures included the de-collectivization of trade in Catalonia, which led to notorious speculation and inflation by private middlemen during the winter of 1936.<sup>30</sup>

The war against Franco was lost not in industry, but on the political and military fronts. The first republican government, the Giral ministry, proved unable or unwilling to defeat Franco in the first critical weeks because it was a government of the bourgeoisie. The republican navy, for example, was withdrawn from the straits of Gibraltar for fear of offending Britain and France, thus permitting Franco to land troops from Morocco. Instead of launching an offensive against Franco's initially weak forces, the government drew in troops for the 'defence of Madrid' — whether from Franco or the social revolution was not entirely clear. Antipathy to the revolution dictated the militarily suicidal policy of depriving revolutionary Aragon of arms, and prevented encouragement of a workers' uprising in the key industrial areas of the Basque country. Bourgeois interests and Anglo-French alliances prevented the government from declaring independence for Morocco, Franco's home base.<sup>31</sup> In addition, the capitulation of the workers' leaders to the bourgeoisie inevitably unleashed counter-revolutionary developments behind the lines — the suppression of the Barcelona commune, the persecution of the POUM, censorship, the humiliation of Caballero by the Stalinists. All these actions spread doubt, suspicion, and pessimism, all of which inevitably helped to undermine the war effort, which depended on popular revolutionary enthusiasm. Although the erosion of the economic and industrial gains made by the workers within the Republic contributed to the defeat of the workers, the political and military factors were ultimately decisive. One of the lessons of the Spanish events is that in the face of political treachery, even the radical solution to the industrial question adopted by the Spanish workers — a direct move to management without passing through a phase of control — gives no automatic guarantee of victory.

27. For an account of the 'red terror' see Hugh Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War*, Harmondsworth, 1968, pp. 268-281.

28. Franz Borkenau, *The Spanish Cockpit*, Michigan, 1963, p. 140.

29. For a detailed account, see Burnett Bolloten, *The Grand Camouflage: the Communist Conspiracy in the Spanish Civil War*, London, 1961, pp. 48-52. See also Pierre Broué and Emile Témime, *The Revolution and the Civil War in Spain*, 1972, chapter 6.

30. Felix Morrow, *Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Spain*, New York, 1974, pp. 181-3, 198-208.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 209-225.



To summarize, then. When workers today express an ambition to 'control' or 'run' industry, they mean that they want to be 'in charge' of production. They want to be sovereign. For the Communist movement, the working class could acquire real power in industry only under revolutionary conditions, which meant when workers were actually bidding for state power. Yet, once the workers take hold of state power, their sovereignty in industry may take various forms, depending on the circumstances. On some occasions, workers' power may be expressed in industry in the form of a transitional regime of control over the bourgeois administration; on others, by means of outright workers' management. Workers' control, then, has been an optional phase historically. In some cases, it may represent a step forward, in others a step back; even where the more 'radical' solution — workers' management — is adopted in preference to control, the revolution is by no means sure of success, for whatever form of sovereignty in industry circumstances may dictate, the working class must lay its hands on state power — and this it must do uncompromisingly — in order to establish it.

### III

Britain today, of course, is a long way from experiencing anything resembling the events in Russia, Germany, or Spain. There is no indication that we are living on the verge of a revolution. Nevertheless, the relatively placid traditions of English politics, at least since the nineteenth century, should not be taken to imply that such experiences will prove irrelevant to the future transition to socialism in Britain. The three countries considered above, after all, had very different political traditions and forms of regime before the outbreak of the revolution. Today, however, the left faces tasks of a different order: fighting to win the workers to socialism. The vocabulary of workers' control can prove extremely valuable for this purpose. We agree with Ken Coates and Tony Topham when they say, in *The New Unionism*, that in raising the question of control we should not begin with the abstract or the remote. On the other hand, without studying the great revolutions of the past, the workers' control ideas available to socialists will inevitably be meagre, and the use of such themes by socialists in the present struggle to raise the class consciousness of the workers will be far less effective than it could otherwise be. This is precisely the difficulty with the IWC and the work of Coates and Topham, whose ideas we shall now examine in some detail.

Coates and Topham are well aware of the classical distinction between management and control. They reserve the term self-management for the socialized industry of the future. Workers' control, on the other hand, presupposes the existence of the property-owning class. As they put it: 'until the question of ownership is solved — that is, so long as employer authority is still a separate thing based on property rights — workers' control will continue to be asserted as a countervailing element in a dual power, existing alongside and contesting the established power of capital and its agents.'<sup>32</sup> We shall examine the particular question of dual power later, a topic over which Coates and Topham fall into considerable confusion. For the moment, let us simply note that workers' control assumes the existence of the capitalist administration. Consequently, argue Coates and Topham, the powers the workers require in order to control the capitalist, avoiding the pitfalls of consultation and participation,<sup>33</sup> 'may be summed up in four words: power to obtain information, to establish supervision over management activity, to impose a veto on arbitrary decisions, and to obtain representation for workers to carry out these functions. The areas of decision-making to which these powers should apply include literally the whole field of industrial activity'.<sup>34</sup>

Because of their failure to study the full history of their subject, however, Coates and Topham too often depict workers' control as an instance of militant trade-unionism that, on closer examination, fails to measure up to the promise of their own delineation of control. Militant trade-unionism undoubtedly can help to draw the workers' attention to socialism, and so can the demand for workers' control. But if workers' control is reduced to a synonym for militant

trade-unionism, then we deprive ourselves of a valuable weapon. Worse still, the horizons of the labour movement could even be lowered rather than raised. Let us look at some examples.

In recent years, the Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers has been fighting for what it calls 'status quo' agreements. These stipulate that management shall not make changes in working conditions and arrangements until both sides have discussed them in the negotiating procedure. Coates and Topham comment that this 'implies that the workers would have the right to veto the unilateral and arbitrary decisions of management over a wide range of issues — dismissals, redundancies, discipline, alterations in speed and content of work, manning arrangements, etc.'<sup>35</sup> This, however, is an exaggeration. Granted, management decisions are no longer 'unilateral and arbitrary' in that status-quo agreements compel negotiations. If 'unilateral and arbitrary' decisions are defined as those implemented without negotiation or consultation, then status-quo agreements do indeed give the workers veto power over such decisions. In no way, however, are the workers given the right to veto any decisions of management in the meaningful sense of actually ordering management to suspend objectionable decisions. On the contrary, at the end of the negotiating process, management can order implementation of its decisions, and the workers then face the choice of accepting the decisions or combating them through industrial action. This, however, is merely trade unionism, be it of a militant variety: Thus, by a terminological device — insertion of the expression 'unilateral and arbitrary' — Coates and Topham have blurred the distinction between trade unionism and workers' control.

Another example: many unions, faced with job evaluation, have demanded 'mutuality'. Coates and Topham also include this under the rubric of 'workers' control'.<sup>36</sup> Mutuality is the right to contest work evaluations made by the scientific 'experts' appointed by management. Here again, however, the unions are demanding nothing more than the right to negotiate, not the right to veto. To extend the compass of collective bargaining is quite important, of course. But the distinction between collective bargaining and the right to veto is none the less real. It is clearly evident in the contrast between these trade-union practices and the various powers claimed, for example, by the Russian factory committees. By blurring the distinction, Coates and Topham fail to raise ambition and risk promoting contentment with the very situation they are striving to overcome.

Similar ambiguities arise in industries in which workers have imposed a degree of de facto independence of management prerogatives. In cases in which shop stewards operate their own overtime roster, informally regulate the speed of work, determine their own tea-break, and so on, *The New Unionism* informs us that 'workers control is being exercised'.<sup>37</sup> Coates and Topham, however, fail to examine critically the ways in which these 'controls' have been achieved. Some good examples, often quoted by Coates and Topham, are to be found in Huw Beynon's book, *Working For Ford*. One steward explained to Beynon: 'I'd set him up [the supervisor] for cases, and destroy him in the office. Everytime I was in the office I'd say something about him. That's what we had to do. We had to do it. We had to destroy the foremen. We've got it pretty easy now. The blokes are told what has to be done at the beginning of the shift and they work out the speeds, and the times when they're going to take their breaks for tea and cards.'<sup>38</sup> In other words, by discrediting the lower supervisors

32. Ken Coates and Tony Topham, *The New Unionism*, Harmondsworth, 1974, p. 62.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 51-60.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 72.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 87.

36. *Ibid.*, p. 85.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 60.

38. Huw Beynon, *Working For Ford*, Harmondsworth, 1973, p. 132.



in the eyes of management, the workers were able to keep management ignorant of the real situation on the shop floor. Nevertheless, declines in output were eventually spotted by higher management, even when supervisors had lost confidence in themselves. The same steward admitted: 'We're going to have to give way on manning on this section soon. We've just been fortunate with the change in the fascia panels.'<sup>39</sup> Another, discussing the illicit practice of paying each worker to take one Friday night off in every eight, explained that it 'became too regular, too open and was noticed by management...so management intervened with threats and the pool was abandoned'.<sup>40</sup>

In other words, the workers had no actual right to veto. On the contrary, their 'controls' operated only so long as they were concealed from top management. Such 'controls' are 'covert', accomplished by evasion in the face of managerial omnipotence rather than confrontation. It seems to be the case that workers, especially skilled workers, are often able to conceal some of their activities from management because of their familiarity with the job. It is, of course, important to defend these limited areas of freedom. In some cases, especially where management may not discover what is happening for a period of years, workers may come to regard what they got by stealth as theirs by right. Dockers, for example, used to operate the 'welt' — working half-an-hour-on and half-an-hour-off — and even achieved a kind of retroactive recognition of this right when they 'sold' it back to the management. In general, however, workers in such situations are unlikely to conclude that they are 'in control' in any meaningful sense of the term.

By contrast, when workers veto management arrangements openly, the conditions are usually exceptional and ephemeral. For example, when the 5,000 workers at the Pirelli tyre factory at Turin established new speeds without any 'help' from technicians and ran the plant at various speeds, they did so as a demonstration, the aim being to show that piece rates were nonsense. When public transport workers in France and Japan stopped collecting fares, it was an ingenious form of strike (a 'reverse strike') to win public support while simultaneously hitting the employer and not hurting the workers financially. To establish this kind of open control permanently or semi-permanently, to be able to feel the right to do it at will, would be tantamount to conquering power from management. Since this is unattainable in 'normal' times, the strategy of negotiation combined with evasion is more attractive and common. The right to veto is a very advanced demand, and few workers have adopted it in recent years.<sup>41</sup>

When we leave the shop floor and turn to broader questions of enterprise management, we find that the ambiguities in Coates and Topham's work become more dangerous. It is extremely important that British trade unions have turned their attention in recent years to the boardrooms. The most interesting response to this by the bourgeoisie has been the Bullock Report. Under Bullock's recommendations, the law would provide for managerial boards of companies to be composed of representatives, half of whom would be appointed by unions, half by employers. To avoid deadlock, Bullock recommended a '2x + y' formula, according to which a third group of 'independents', always consisting of an uneven number, could be called in by appeal to an Industrial Democracy Commission. As Coates and Topham point out in their *Guide to the Bullock Report*, the 'y' component would inevitably be composed of people hostile to the workers.<sup>42</sup> The aim of the Bullock Report, like the co-determination schemes in Germany on which it is based, is to accord the unions 'responsibility without power' and thereby implicate them in capitalist decisions, particularly the more unpopular ones. These and many other criticisms of Bullock are made effectively by Coates and Topham, and show why socialists should give no support to Bullock. What is missing from their presentation, however, is any effective means of exposing the aims and deficiencies of Bullock in such a way as to point the workers towards struggles for real powers.

Coates and Topham advise workers to counter the '2x + y'

formula by insisting on the original TUC suggestion of equal employer-worker representation, 'which would naturally produce deadlock, as Coates and Topham admit.'<sup>43</sup> Indeed, it turns out that this is precisely what they have in mind: The board would be unable to take any disputed decisions at all. 'Votes' would normally be either 100% or 50-50.<sup>44</sup> What, then, is the purpose of such a 'managerial' board? Ultimately, it is nothing but a new forum for — collective bargaining. 'Collective bargaining can enter the boardroom', they tell us.<sup>45</sup> The trade-union side would remain 'purely oppositional'.<sup>46</sup> For Coates and Topham, the 50-50 proposal would impose 'prior consultation' at boardroom level, or, in other words, 'extend the principle of status quo' into the boardroom.<sup>47</sup> As in the case of status quo on the shop floor, the final say — in other words, sovereignty — would inevitably rest with management. Despite this evident fact, Coates and Topham declare that parity would amount to 'outright workers' control'.<sup>48</sup>

It may be wondered why Coates and Topham never demand that the workers be given an outright majority on the board, which would amount to genuine veto power. As they explain elsewhere, the workers want to 'participate' in the affairs of the company; life continuously drives them to seek access to the inner sanctum of management, but they do not want to 'participate' in the sense of accepting 'responsibility without power'.<sup>49</sup> In that case, we ask, why not give them power? And power would require a working majority at the very least. In none of their work, however, do Coates and Topham discuss this idea. In *The New Unionism* they dismiss the subject as unimportant.<sup>50</sup> They call for workers' majorities only in the public sector, where, they argue, workers should insist on self-management, which involves 'at a minimum, the direct election of at least half the members of all governing boards, and the right of veto over all appointments, including that of the Chairman'.<sup>51</sup> In the private sector, on the other hand, the workers should remain 'purely oppositional'.<sup>52</sup>

We agree wholeheartedly that workers should have majorities in public industry. The workers' control movement in the mines and railways at the time of the First World War demanded this. More recently, the IWC group in steel drew up a similar plan, which was adopted as policy by the craftsmen's co-ordinating committee in the industry.<sup>53</sup> Such a state of affairs would no doubt transform the policies of the nationalized industries, and certainly enhance the popularity of nationalization among those still working in private industry. But what are the objections to extending it to private industry? It was the extension of workers' majorities to private industry that constituted workers' control in other times and places. As we have seen, it was among the measures Lenin demanded in private enterprise in Russia. Circumstances may well arise in future that compel the workers to place themselves in charge of the private sector before they command the legal and technical prerequisites for socialization. Indeed, in so doing they may hasten the transfer of ownership. The Coates-Topham approach excludes this possibility.<sup>54</sup>

39. *Ibid.*, p. 132.

40. *Ibid.*, p. 148.

41. It is significant that, faced with productivity deals in the period since the late 1960s, workers have elected to follow the example of the dockers rather than demand the right to veto. Workers at Fiat demanded the right to veto in 1969. See *The Red Mole*, 13 March 1972.

42. Ken Coates and Tony Topham, *Guide to the Bullock Report*, Nottingham, 1977, p. 79-81.

43. *Ibid.*, pp. 77-78.

44. *Ibid.*, p. 79.

45. *Ibid.*, p. 78.

46. *Ibid.*, p. 78.

47. *Ibid.*, p. 58.

48. *Ibid.*, p. 78.

49. *Ibid.*, p. 97.

50. *The New Unionism*, p. 56.

51. *Ibid.*, p. 256.

52. *Ibid.*, p. 258.

53. *Can the Workers Run Industry?* Ed., Ken Coates and Tony Topham, London, 1968, p. 154.

54. The position of Coates and Topham is similar to that of the Communist Party, except that the CP, which favours majorities in the public sector and collective bargaining in the private, repudiates the



Thus we find that Coates and Topham have a strong tendency to assimilate workers' control to militant trade-unionism. One writer for the IWC, Ernie Roberts, has written a book that explicitly identifies any form of working-class struggle as workers' control.<sup>55</sup> In the vision of Coates and Topham, the proletariat may inhabit one of two worlds: that of the present, where workers fight capital in private industry through the most advanced forms of trade unionism, and that of the future, where industry is socialized and the workers exercise self-management. There is no concept of *transition*, of conditions under which the workers exercise less than self-management, but go well beyond the mere expression of opposition.

Their indifference to the problem of transition is expressed in their confusion about the question of 'dual power'. According to the revolutionary view, dual power is not a situation in which there is merely opposition, conflict, and struggle. It is a very special situation in which *state power* is no longer monopolized by a single social class, in which the institutions of the state apparatus of the ruling class are challenged by new institutions expressing the power of the exploited classes. It can arise only as the result of a revolutionary upheaval. If we are to believe that dual power exists wherever there is class struggle, then dual power is as old and continuous as the existence of classes. The need for a special concept of dual power — and with it, workers' control — then disappears altogether. Coates and Topham, however, are silent on the question of revolution. This is the origin of their difficulties over workers' control.<sup>56</sup>

#### IV

It may be objected that veto power, voting majorities, and so on, are generally unattainable, whereas the extension of collective bargaining is. If that is true, however, then the distinction between the two should be preserved. Workers' control can generally be realized only by the revolution. But the revolution has to be prepared. Insofar as workers' control has a role to play in this preparation, two things are vital: first, a sustained effort of agitation and propaganda around demands for workers' control; second, the experience of episodes of workers' control, or even self-management in individual enterprises, no matter how fleeting or episodic they may be. Let us consider these first.

The past decade has seen a number of important incidents of workers' control and even self-management in a number of individual enterprises, particularly in the fight against redundancy. All such incidents, even the most wide-ranging, illustrate the limitations bourgeois society places on the freedom of the workers. Indeed, they bring the shape of bourgeois power into sharp relief, and for that very reason enable many workers to draw revolutionary conclusions from them. Although they fall short of the revolution, these struggles have served to unmask bourgeois claims that the capitalists are able to run production competently and in the interests of all. By their example, they point to a new social order. It has been said that the right to sack is among the most sacred rights of the employing class, the very basis of labour discipline. But even before the revolution removes this right and abolishes the private property on which it is based, the employers and their governments be made to pay, by means of these partial struggles, an enormous *political price* for whatever economies they seek to make by sacking workers. This may deter them from declaring further redundancies; it will certainly hasten on the revolution.

One of the most popular tactics in the fight against redundancy in recent years has been the factory occupation. There are many practical advantages to occupying a factory, even in disputes over issues other than redundancy. Occupation prevents the movement of supplies and the sale of machinery, plant and other property, as well as serving to hold the work force together. But it has seldom proved possible for the workers to re-start production in a single occupied factory, whether under workers' control or management. For this raises questions of credit, markets, and coercion, which the workers are rarely in a position to solve. Usually, the workers tend to sit

tight in the factory. We shall call this 'simple occupation'. The workers are not able simply to negate the right of the employer to sack them, but simple occupation radically alters the relationship of forces during the bargaining process, because the workers then bargain with the employers' own possessions. In effect the workers trade capitalist assets for jobs. This process can be extremely costly for the employer in economic terms, but is also a political blow at the ruling class, since the workers are acting in complete defiance of the property rights that society normally takes for granted.

A good example of a successful simple occupation occurred in Scotland in 1971, when Plessey attempted to sack the 700 workers at its factory in Alexandria. Plessey had bought the factory from the Royal Navy in order to sell some of its valuable torpedo-making machinery, transferring the remainder of the factory to southern England, South Africa, and Portugal. The workers occupied and barricaded the plant. Several thousand workers were alerted at local labour exchanges in case of attack by the police. It took five months to defeat Plessey, but the workers retained their jobs.<sup>57</sup> Other such occupations have met with varying degrees of success. Some have been defeated.

If occupation of a factory attracts extensive mass support it can easily become part of a broader movement which may begin to raise the question of political power. The best two recent examples are the struggles that took place at Upper Clyde Shipbuilders in 1971 and the Lip watch-making factory in France in 1973. In both cases, the workers went beyond simple occupation and restarted production, in one case under workers' control, in the other workers' management. This was not the only, or even major, reason why these struggles became major foci for the workers' movement. UCS was at the heart of the Scottish economy, and its occupation was a dramatic event. In the case of Lip, the very advanced form of workers' self-management adopted was more critical in attracting support. The most important point, however, is that both these struggles set off movements that threatened to put the question of political power on the agenda.

UCS was a consortium of five shipyards on the Clyde which the Heath Government tried to break up, closing down two of the yards and hiving off the others to private enterprise. The workers responded by taking over the yards and staging what they called a 'work-in'. The political situation was favourable to the UCS workers, and they took full advantage of it. The Tory government was pushing through the Industrial Relations Act, allowing loss-making firms like UCS ('lame ducks') to go to the wall and pursuing a tough incomes policy that had already crushed the postal workers strike in 1971. The action of the UCS workers suddenly placed them at the head of a national movement against the Tory government and its

rhetoric of workers' control, demanding only a mandatory provision of all relevant information to the unions. *Morning Star*, 3 February 1977.

55. Ernie Roberts, *Workers Control*, London, 1973. In their first major work on workers' control Coates and Topham say: 'Workers' control exists wherever trade union practice, shop stewards sanctions and collective power constrain employers' (*Can the Workers Run Industry?*, p. 235). In a later book, they are more cautious: '...the germs of workers' control exist, in greater or lesser degree, wherever strong independent trade union and shop floor powers act to restrain employers in the exercise of their so called "prerogatives".' (*The New Unionism*, p. 60, our emphasis). The addition of this caveat hardly clarifies matters.

56. Ernest Mandel has written most extensively on the subject of dual power. However, his particular treatment lends itself to the confusions of Coates and Topham. Mandel believes that dual power — or at least lengthy periods of it — precedes a revolutionary situation and a revolutionary uprising, whereas, in point of historical fact, it more commonly follows them. The classical periods of dual power signified the betrayal of the workers' revolution by the reformist and centrist leaders. For Mandel's views, see his book, *Revolutionary Marxism Today*, London, 1979. We shall argue this view and deal with its implications on another occasion.

57. For reasons of space, the following section deals largely with struggles over redundancy. For workers' control in relation to the media, see my article in *Media, Politics and Culture*, Ed., Carl Gardner, Macmillan, 1979.

58. *Red Male*, 20 October 1971.



policies, UCS discredited the Tories politically and aroused the whole working class against them. Jimmy Reid, one of the UCS leaders, put it this way: 'Let it be known by Mr Heath that if he doesn't satisfy our demands, this explosion will submerge his government and sweep him out of power.' Here was the core of the workers' strategy.

In the event, Heath did fall in 1974 following his defeat by a movement stimulated in part by the courage of the UCS workers. But Heath could have been brought down much earlier if the TUC had seized on his political predicament to launch a determined, across-the-board attack at the time of the work-in. Had the Labour Party and TUC simultaneously drawn up an economic plan for resolving unemployment (then becoming a major problem), to be implemented by an incoming Labour government under workers' supervision, they could have won the support of a majority of the people for a struggle to bring down Heath and replace him with a workers' government. But the TUC refused to launch any struggle at all at the time of UCS and even came to Heath's rescue after his defeat at the hands of the miners in 1972. The TUC leaders were thus able to prevent the UCS workers from winning their full demands, though they ultimately proved unable to block the overthrow of Heath in 1974.

The work-in itself involved a series of measures taken by the workers in the yards. The discharged workers turned up for work and were paid out of a fighting fund; the stewards controlled the gates to prevent the movement of machinery; the liquidator was barred from the yards; ships under construction were completed under the overall supervision of the shop stewards. These were modest moves, but in a very real sense they represent an example of workers' control. The lower managerial staff effectively functioned under the vigilant eye of the workers. Indeed, some of the lower managers grew sympathetic to the workers' cause, for their own jobs were also in jeopardy.

By its nature the work-in could be of only limited duration, lasting as long as the existing contracts (though there were threats to hold completed ships hostage in the yards). Nevertheless, before the problem of new orders had to be faced the UCS struggle had caught the popular imagination. The work-in tactic certainly played a role in this. It was not simply a demonstration of the workers' determination to retain their jobs, or an affirmation of their belief in the social value of their labour. Workers had actually taken charge of production for the first time in living memory. For many people this had a deeply symbolic significance, and tens of thousands showed it by gathering at the gates of UCS in solidarity.<sup>59</sup>

The other great struggle of the period, in some ways even more daring than UCS, was at Lip, a Swiss-owned watch factory at Besançon in France. In 1973, the owners resolved to dismantle the plant, sack the workers, and cart the equipment off to Switzerland. At first the workers not only seized the factory but 'sequestered' the employer himself. After the riot-police had freed him, the workers appropriated a consignment of watches and stores as a guarantee against payment of wages. Later, they set the factory in motion, producing watches under their own self-management and selling them — illegally — throughout France with the aid of sympathizers in the workers' movement.

The Lip workers ran the factory for several months entirely under their own management committees, which were democratically elected. The workers themselves were reluctant to call their action 'self-management', because they were anxious not to give the impression that Lip could be permanently administered in the interests of the workers under capitalism. Nevertheless, they did give workers everywhere a practical demonstration that workers are able to run production collectively. It was a precious experience, but doomed to be no more than temporary, for the action was completely illegal under bourgeois law, amounting to confiscation of the employers' property through consumption of his assets and stock. It was sustained only because of the massive solidarity of the French working class. The Paris Chamber of Commerce summed up its concern this way: 'Lip is the most serious of social conflicts... because starting the factory after what is essentially robbery of the shareholders

challenges the principles of authority, responsibility, and respect for commercial agreements, which constitute the very basis of our economic system and our commercial right.' No Marxist could have put it better.<sup>60</sup>

The Lip workers had the advantage that their action raised the spectre of another May '68. Had other workers occupied their factories in solidarity with Lip, putting forward their own demands, the bourgeois government might have been faced once again with the prospect of overthrow. But the leaders of the national union federations and the traditional workers' parties were not anxious to find themselves in a new revolutionary crisis. They did less than they could have done to help the Lip workers, and certainly failed to make their struggle a component of a general challenge to the government. Even so, the Lip workers were still able to save a number of their jobs under the settlement eventually arrived at.

After the UCS struggle, several groups of workers in Britain faced with redundancy believed they should aim to create cooperatives. It is not difficult to understand the attraction of this idea. Workers occupying a factory taste a new freedom and feel a collective power, and it seems a great pity to relinquish these with the return of the employer. In addition, workers do not always believe that the market is incapable of supporting the product they produce. The employer might be closing his factory for reasons unconnected with the market for the product. There may, for example, be an element of land speculation involved. The prospect of a favourable government might lead workers to believe that credit will be available on the basis of political and social criteria, even though an enterprise might be running at a loss in strictly economic terms. The political situation can always change, not least as a consequence of one's own actions. All these considerations can lead workers to fight for a cooperative. But this means buying up the company from the employer and setting it in motion as private property within the market economy. This is the decisive disadvantage of the cooperative.

In September 1973, the Meriden works of Norton-Villiers Triumph was faced with closure. The company intended to close the Meriden site in Coventry, sell the land, and shift production to the former BSA factory at Small Heath, Birmingham, and the Norton works in Wolverhampton. All 1,750 workers would be sacked and the factory site sold for £18 million. The workers, sure that the famous motorcycle had a future on the US market, discussed the idea of a cooperative. The impact of the market need not automatically reproduce all the effects of the capitalist system within a self-managed plant, but to run Meriden so as to supply a legitimate market raised immediately the problem of ownership. After all, the average retailer will not buy 'stolen' motorcycles; no bank will supply credit to a company operating with confiscated assets. This led the workers to propose purchase, a decision that not only forced them to draw on their life-savings, but also made them dangerously dependent on the Tory government, the only other available source of money. The Meriden workers scraped together some of the necessary cash, but the Tories spun out the negotiations in the hope that the workers would tire and relinquish their physical hold on the company's property. In February 1974, however, the incoming Labour administration decided, after some persuasion, to grant loans to various cooperative schemes that had sprung up. In the spring of 1974 Fisher-Bendix workers on Merseyside and Beaverbrook workers in Glasgow were granted financial aid for co-ops together with Meriden.

Most of these co-ops proved ill-fated, though Meriden is still operating. A co-op can be a challenge to capitalist ideas in spite of its commercial respectability, for it still shows convincingly that the workers are capable of running a factory, that they are able to acquire the necessary skills, given the time and opportunity to do so. Wholly new forms of collective organization of labour can be introduced and publicly displayed, becoming a pole of attraction for workers still toiling

59. The most concise account of the UCS struggle is to be found in Hart, Finlay, and Thompson, *The UCS Work-In*, London, 1972.

60. The information on which this account is based is from articles that appeared in *Red Weekly* at the time, mostly by Martin Meteyard.



under the autarchy of private enterprise. Perhaps it was for this very reason that the Labour government strove to discourage factory seizures or co-ops by a policy of financial stringency. While doling out millions of pounds to private enterprise, sometimes with no controls of any kind, Labour made loans to the co-ops, thereby saddling them with debts and leaving them to the mercies of the Exchequer and future governments.<sup>61</sup> Nor did Labour consider expropriating the owners of Meriden outright, despite the history of financial speculation. Labour remained the dutiful servant of the banks and the state machine, doing all it could to avoid encouraging other workers to follow the Meriden example. Dealing with redundancy and unemployment was less important than the rights of capital and private property.

The co-ops did not become the focus of a broad mass movement. Perhaps the rest of the working-class movement did not regard purchasing their factories as a useful tactic for fighting the bourgeoisie. To some extent, the Meriden workers (though not those at Fisher-Bendix or the *Scottish Daily News*) were marked by a sectoral spirit. (With characteristic craftsmen's pride, they demanded separation from the conglomerate, angering the less skilled workers at Small Heath, whose future was not especially secure). Nevertheless, these cooperatives, like the more spectacular and insolent struggles at Lip and UCS, contain some of the seeds of the new social order. An effective socialist government in 1974 would have undertaken a large-scale programme of public works, nationalization, and planning, within which co-ops might well have played a limited role, probably losing their private character. But Labour did none of that, for revolution is not in its programme.<sup>62</sup>

Redundancy struggles are not the only circumstances under which workers' control or management might appear in a single enterprise, industry, or firm, though naturally only temporarily and under conditions of extreme class tension. Nationalization of individual firms and industries holds an honoured place in the lexicon of the British left. In its Fabian way, the Labour left likes to depict a handful of nationalizations as a stepping stone to a more distant general offensive, considering this half-way house approach a wise strategy. We are not implying that it is unimportant for such nationalizations to take place. It is important, and socialists should demand that the workers run the nationalized industries. However, occasions arise in which the bourgeoisie seeks to sabotage even the mere dribble of nationalization adopted by Labour governments. A case in point is the nationalization of steel under Atlee's Labour government. In 1950, over employer objections, parliament set up the Iron and Steel Board (ISB) to run the industry. But although it was perfectly able to acquire the shares of the industry and assume formal proprietorship, the ISB was prevented from running it by a well-orchestrated campaign of sabotage. The employers unofficially barred all technical and managerial personnel from collaborating with the ISB, which remained impotent. This campaign, encouraged by Churchill and the Tory Party (even though it was in flagrant violation of the constitution), finally was one factor in bringing down the government itself. The Tories denationalized steel in 1951.

A fight for workers' control might have been effective here. The steel unions should have occupied the mills and locked out all managerial personnel, letting them return to work only if they agreed to hand over all necessary data to workers' committees and the ISB. This would have not merely broken the sabotage, but also put the workers in a stronger position to fight for a decisive say in the running of the industry. It would have inflicted a major political defeat on the bourgeoisie. Unfortunately, this example is speculative. Neither Labour nor the unions had the will for such a fight. But the lesson for the future is evident.

So far we have examined factory occupations, together with workers' control and workers' management of production, in single enterprises. If the working class were to seize all the enterprises at once, then the question of power would be posed point blank; even more so if they aspired to re-initiate production. As Gramsci once explained, it is impossible for the workers to retain the factories for long unless the workers'

parties seize power and form a revolutionary government. Writing during the great Italian factory occupations of September 1920, he said: 'The pure and simple occupation of the factories by the working class, though it indicates the extent of the proletariat's power, does not in and of itself produce any new, definitive position. Power remains in the hands of capital; armed force remains the property of the bourgeois state; public administration, the distribution of the basic necessities, the agencies disposing of credit, the still intact commercial apparatus, all remain under the control of the bourgeois class. The proletariat has no coercive means to break the sabotage of the technicians and white-collar workers, it cannot secure its own supplies of raw materials. It cannot sell the objects it produces.'<sup>63</sup> Lenin sent a telegram to the Italian Socialist Party (PSI) demanding a 'national action', a diplomatic euphemism for armed overthrow of the government and seizure of power. A PSI congress narrowly voted down this idea, shirking its responsibilities and dooming the Italian workers to defeat.<sup>64</sup>

It is perhaps because of the internal logic of general strikes and factory seizures on a national scale, that they rarely occur except on the eve of revolution, after much political preparation of the workers' movement. The Italian proletariat, for example, had already passed through eight years of revolutionary struggle against the wars being waged by the Italian bourgeoisie, first in Libya, then in Europe. There had already been two armed uprisings, one in Ancona in 1914, one in Turin in 1917. The Italian workers viewed the occupations of 1920 as the springboard towards the final struggle for power. In France, where the workers took possession of many factories during the strikes of June 1936, their action occurred after two years of battle with the military forces of the fascists, following the attempted fascist coup d'état of February 1934. The struggle against fascism in France coincided with armed uprising and civil war in several neighbouring countries: Portugal (1933-34), Austria (February 1934), and Spain (October 1934). By contrast, the general strike of May 1968, in which many factories were temporarily seized, was preceded by no visible revolutionary radicalization of the working class. The workers discovered the connection between the strike and the question of power only after joining the strike, when de Gaulle threatened civil war. Upon this discovery and finding no lead from the chiefs of the mass reformist organizations, who preferred to opt for de Gaulle's promise of future elections, the workers' movement retreated. In general, history appears to demonstrate that seizure of the productive apparatus on a mass scale usually occurs at the peak of the class war, on the eve or the morrow of the revolution, which is usually preceded by several months, sometimes several years, of political and psychological preparation for the struggle for power. The seizure of industry is a symptom of the rise of revolution, which generally has its roots and origins elsewhere.

Writers on workers' control sometimes imply that control is an intermediate state of affairs prior to the outbreak of the revolution. Ernest Mandel's re-christening of transitional demands as 'anti-capitalist structural reforms' can easily give rise to this misleading impression.<sup>65</sup> We must rather anticipate that transitional demands such as workers' control will not be actually implemented until the revolution begins, even in many cases until after the definite seizure of power by the working class. But the value of such demands does not depend on their realization before the revolution. Confusion on this

61. At the time of writing, the Tory government is refusing to waive interest payments on this loan, thus threatening the future of the co-operative.

62. A good account of the Meriden struggle has been written by Ken Fleet, in *The New Workers Co-operatives*, ed., Ken Coates, Nottingham, 1976.

63. Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from Political Writings, 1910-1920*, London, 1977, p. 327.

64. The story is told in Paolo Spriano, *The Occupation of the Factories: Italy 1920*, London, 1975.

65. *A Socialist Strategy for Western Europe*, IWC pamphlet No. 10, Nottingham.



point is particularly apparent in the works of Coates and Topham, who suggest that workers' control either already exists or can be achieved in the future with no revolutionary upsurge. The purpose of raising the demand for control today, like the objective function of factory occupations and other such episodic struggles, is primarily to expose the bourgeoisie and to prepare the workers for a struggle to overthrow it. To this end, every opportunity must be used to promote the idea that the labour movement can and should take the place of the employing class at the head of society.

This means that socialists must constantly question the existing order. Why shouldn't the labour movement have unconditional access to all company information? A community, for example, has an absolute right to know if a company is planning to close a plant upon which many thousands depend for their livelihood. Again, it is unnecessary to know a company's financial condition before formulating a wage claim, but the demand that the books be opened will often silence a recalcitrant employer who rejects a claim. Furthermore, workers should get into the habit of demanding the right to invigilate company finances. Is it not a well known fact, for example, that the decline in profits is stimulating a rise in embezzlement, financial double-dealing in board rooms, and fraud upon the public authorities? The unions should be the first to 'offer their services' to investigate this corruption, especially at a time when the workers are being told to tighten their belts.

And why shouldn't the labour movement have the right to veto managerial decisions? The Bullock Commission formally endorsed the idea of 'industrial democracy'. Perhaps some employers, aware of their mounting unpopularity, are keen to appear as 'industrial democrats'. But what is democracy if not the rule of the majority? Since the workers are indisputably the majority in industry, they should have nothing less than a majority on every management board in industry, and certainly on every commission ostensibly set up to 'control' private entrepreneurs. If the employers will not grant the workers 'industrial suffrage' they had better stop chattering about industrial democracy and confess that 'democracy' does not extend beyond the bounds of Westminster.

The labour movement should constantly seek to establish the justice and rationality of the claim for 'industrial democracy' — that is to say, workers' control. To demand workers' control is to maintain that society should entrust the stewardship of industry to the organized labour movement and not to the employing class. This argument is relatively distinct from that which contests ownership itself. Many people may come to question ownership through understanding the reasons behind resistance to control. The demand for control is an explosive one regardless of the extent to which a phase of workers'

control may actually materialize during the transition to socialism.

Workers' plans for industry are a good example of proposals for working-class stewardship of production. In war-time conditions, even capitalist governments place production under some kind of 'control' within the framework of a rudimentary plan. Is not the decay of areas like Liverpool and the northeast today a 'national emergency'? The labour movement should draw up a plan for the reconversion of industry in these and other areas, and announce its willingness to supervise its implementation. The basic principle is illustrated by the example of the Lucas Aerospace Plan.<sup>66</sup> By drawing up a plan for alternative products and the expansion of existing ones on the criterion of social need (the best known item in which was kidney machines), the Lucas Combine Committee stiffened the resistance of the workers to redundancies. While perfectly rational from the capitalist point of view, redundancies at Lucas thus appeared totally irrational and outrageous from a social standpoint, and the company suffered considerable political embarrassment over its refusal even to consider the workers' proposals and was forced to hold back on the redundancies. What is needed today is a similar plan on a national scale.

The elements of such a plan already exist: the Lucas plan, the Vickers plan, the demands of the building unions for an expansion of public sector programmes to absorb men off the dole, and so on. All these proposals should be drawn together into a single workers' plan for the economy as soon as possible. If the labour movement campaigned around such a plan it would not only acquire a political advantage in all its dealings with capital, but would also arouse the deepest layers of the oppressed. It would alleviate the demoralization and feeling of inevitability among the victims of mass unemployment, expose the mystifications through which the perpetrators of this social crime seek to justify themselves, and place responsibility for the situation where it really belongs. It would help the people to see why the capitalists deserve to be expropriated, and it would prepare the struggle to remove the present Tory government and replace it with a socialist one. If the leaders of the labour movement were to display such impudence, if they were able to free their desire to be practical and reasonable from their superstitious respect for the rights of the rich, we could begin to see the beginning of a real socialist movement in this country.

There can be no socialist revolution unless the workers are convinced that it is necessary, possible, and just to deprive the employing class of its commanding role in industry and to expropriate its property. The demand for workers' control can play an important role in convincing them.

66. *The Right to Useful Work*, ed., Ken Coates, Nottingham, 1978, chapters 8 and 9.



PERRY ANDERSON

# Theses on English class society

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### *History and Class Structure: Trajectory*

Capitalist hegemony in England has been the most powerful, the most durable and the most continuous anywhere in the world. The reasons for this lie in the *cumulative constellation* of the fundamental moments of modern English history.

1. *England had the first, most mediated, and least pure bourgeois revolution of any major European country.* The Civil War of 1640-49 remains the most obscure and controversial of the great upheavals which led to the creation of a modern, capitalist Europe. Never was the ultimate effect of revolution more transparent, and its immediate agents more enigmatic. The view that the conflict of the 1640s was a simple struggle between a rising bourgeoisie and a declining aristocracy is clearly untenable. The current alternatives — that the Civil War was the work of a *fronde* of discontented squires or that it was a sudden, transcendent condensation of 'faith and freedom' (puritan and constitutional) in the clear air of Stuart England — are still less convincing; the one is trivial, the other naïve. Who made the Revolution? What kind of a Revolution was it? It can, perhaps, be said that it was a clash between two segments of a land owning class, neither of which were *direct* crystallizations of opposed economic interests, but rather were *partially* contingent but *predominantly* intelligible lenses into which wider, more radically antagonistic social forces came into temporary and distorted focus. Furthermore, the ideological terms in which the struggle was conducted were largely religious, and hence still more dissociated from economic aspirations than political idioms normally are. Thus, although its outcome was a typically bourgeois rationalization of state and economy, and its major direct beneficiary was a true bourgeoisie, it was a 'bourgeois revolution' only by proxy. The main protagonists on both sides were a rural, not an urban class. The conflict between them revolved round the economic, political and religious role of the monarchy. It is clear that the inefficient, would-be feudal Stuart monarchy was threatening by its economic exactions to cripple the expansion of the rationalized agrarian and commercial capitalism which had been maturing in England for a century before 1640. It is probable, but not proved that a majority of those landowners who were dynamic and investment-oriented sided with Parliament, and that a majority of routine and rentier landlords sided with the King; it is, however, certain that the most economically progressive regions of England were Parliamentary, and the most backward Royalist. At the same time, the nature of the allies flanking each side magnified and

clarified the logic of the division between them. Taking extremes — on the one side, the archaic clan society of northern Scotland, on the other mercantile capital, particularly in the City of London; this last formed a crucial component in the bloc which finally won the Civil War, providing the indispensable financial reserves for the victory. The Revolution, once under way, followed a classic course of radicalization. When military victory was won, the artisans and yeomen recruited to the New Model Army increasingly intervened to deflect the Army to the left, thus effectively severing it from the Parliamentary Right; but when their pressure began to threaten the franchise privileges of the landowning class itself, the landed officer elite crushed them. The military apparatus was thereafter alone in a void. The Revolution had overshot the political intentions of its agrarian initiators (execution of the King, etc.) but had been halted immediately it threatened their economic interests. It was in this ambiguous vacuum that mercantile capital, the only truly bourgeois kernel of the Revolution, inherited the fruits of victory. The economic policy of the Commonwealth did more for its interests than for that of any other group. This anomalous outcome was the culminating product of the complexly refracted and mediated character of the Revolution. Because it was primarily fought *within* and not *between* classes, while it could and did destroy the numerous institutional and juridical obstacles of feudalism to economic development, it could not alter the basic property statute in England. (There was not even a serious attempt at 'political' confiscation of Royalist estates.) But it could do so — decisively — abroad. The immense, rationalizing 'charge' of the Revolution was detonated overseas. The decisive economic legacy of the Commonwealth was imperialism (Navigation Acts, Dutch and Spanish Wars, seizure of Jamaica, etc.). Mercantile capital was its beneficiary. When political anarchy threatened after Cromwell's death, it was the City that triggered the Restoration — and a general settlement that confirmed it in its enhanced position.

The six decades from 1640 through 1688 to the end of the century saw the stabilization and progressive consolidation of the gains of the Revolution: essentially, the development of a dynamic capitalist agriculture and the rise of a mercantile imperialism, in a period of great economic boom.

Thus the three crucial idiosyncrasies of the English Revolution, which have determined the whole of our subsequent history, can be summed up as follows. First, the Revolution shattered the juridical and constitutional obstacles to rationalized capitalist development in town and country: monopolies, arbitrary taxation, wardships, purveyance, restraints on enclosure, etc. The immediate effect of this was a dramatic quickening of the whole economy, from 1650 onwards. In this sense, it was a supremely successful *capitalist*



revolution. At the same time, however, it left almost the entire social structure intact.

Second, it achieved this by profoundly transforming the *roles* but not the *personnel* of the ruling class. No social group was evicted or displaced by the Revolution;<sup>1</sup> rather one section of a class fought another and by its victory converted the whole class to a new type of production. For the next hundred years the British aristocracy proceeded to perfect the ruthless and richly rewarding triad system of capitalist landlord, tenant farmer and landless agricultural labourer, which destroyed the English peasantry and made Britain the most agriculturally efficient country in the world. But no career open to talents, no enlarged franchise, no weakening of the principles of heredity and hierarchy, followed this. Landed aristocrats, large and small, continued to rule England.<sup>2</sup>

At the same time, mercantile capital expanded on a new, imperial basis. It had not been the main military or political force in the Revolution; it was its main economic inheritor. But it was never subsequently able to constitute itself as an internally compact and autarchic political force. Despite their rapidly increasing wealth, bankers and merchants remained a subaltern group within the ruling system, an 'interest' and not a class. There was a constant haemorrhage of its profit and pioneers towards the countryside, as successful merchants abandoned their background, investing in estates and becoming members of the landed class. Conversely, landowners had from the outset of the Revolution (and earlier) participated in colonial and trading ventures (Pym, Hampden). There was thus a *permanent partial interpenetration* of the 'moneyed' and 'landed' interests, which simultaneously maintained the political and social subordination of merchant capital, and gave the City the aristocratic coloration it has retained to this day.

Finally, the ideological legacy of the Revolution was almost nil. Its most militant creed, radical Puritanism, was the great loser from the Restoration Settlement. Henceforth it went into a profound spiritual recession, losing its fiery intramundane activism and becoming the repressed private creed of a dis-established minority. The religious beliefs which had seen divine intervention justifying Rebellion when it was successful, saw it also — and irrevocably — condemning it when the Revolution collapsed and the monarchy was restored. Because of its 'primitive', pre-Enlightenment character, the ideology of the Revolution founded no universal tradition in Britain. Never was a major revolutionary ideology neutralized and absorbed so completely. Politically, Puritanism was a useless passion.

The eighteenth century sailed forward into an era of unparalleled stability. The landed aristocracy had, after a bitter internecine struggle, become its own capitalist class. The mercantile bourgeoisie was contained and decanted into an honourable ancillary status. No ferment of ideas or memories remained. By a classic process of psychological suppression, the Civil War was forgotten and its decorous epilogue, the Glorious Revolution of 1688, became the official, radiant myth of creation in the collective memory of the propertied class.

2. *England experienced the first industrial revolution, in a period of international counter-revolutionary war, producing the earliest proletariat when socialist theory was least formed and available, and an industrial bourgeoisie polarized from the start towards the aristocracy.* The Revolution of 1640 had made possible the transformation of the body of landowners into a basically capitalist class with powerful mercantile auxiliaries. It was precisely this 'mix' which, after a hundred years of maturation, set off the industrial revolution: agrarian capitalism provided the economic and human surplus for industrialization, depopulating the countryside to provide investment and labour for the towns. Mercantile imperialism, dominating Asia, Africa and Latin America, provided the markets and raw materials. The cotton industry, based squarely on control of the world market, from India (calico) to West Africa (slaves) to the Caribbean (raw cotton), launched the take-off. The colossal industrial concatenation which followed inevitably produced its own, new bourgeoisie — the manufacturing middle class of Manchester and the North. Yet

*the condition of its appearance in England was the prior existence of a class which was also capitalist in its mode of exploitation. There was thus from the start no fundamental, antagonistic contradiction between the old aristocracy and the new bourgeoisie.* English capitalism embraced and included both. The most important single key to modern English history lies in this fact.

A period of intense political conflict between the nascent industrial bourgeoisie and the agrarian elite was, of course, inevitable once the manufacturers began to aspire towards political representation and power. But this clash itself was profoundly affected, and attenuated, by the context in which it occurred. The French Revolution and Napoleonic expansion froze propertied Europe with terror. For twenty panic-stricken years the new English manufacturing class rallied to the aristocracy; in that time it developed habits and attitudes it has never lost. A whole era of war against the French abroad and repression against the working class at home marked the years of its maturation. Two decades after the fall of the Bastille, it celebrated its entry into history by cutting down working-class demonstrators at Peterloo.

When the fear of the early years of the nineteenth century finally receded, the industrial bourgeoisie at last began to mass its strength to secure incorporation into the political system. It was almost overtaken by a radicalized working class which had developed in isolation from it during the pitiless years of reaction. But with considerable belated skill, it forced an extension of the franchise which nakedly demarcated the new ruling bloc, including itself and excluding the proletariat. By the same stroke, the Reform Bill of 1832 secured precisely that change which the merchants and bankers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries had never managed — or needed — to effect. The traditional mercantile bourgeoisie had never achieved direct political representation in Parliament; because of its peculiar situation and composition it had always been content to delegate its 'interest' to a section of the (Whig) aristocracy. It now entered Parliament for the first time, behind its industrial successor, in the breach the latter had made.

The next — and last — victory of the new middle class was the Repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846. Convinced that cereal protection favoured landowners at its expense by contracting both internal and external markets for manufacturers, the industrial bourgeoisie mounted a second triumphant campaign for its abolition. This sectional conflict was the last moment at which the industrial middle class played an independent role in British history. It was its — brief and inglorious — high-water mark. The aftermath was illuminating. Fired by the success of the Anti-Corn Law League, its greatest spokesman, Cobden, launched a campaign against 'the eleventh commandment', primogeniture, the basic device securing aristocratic control of the land. The call for 'free trade not only in corn but in land' aimed directly at the root power position of the aristocracy. The bourgeoisie refused to follow it. Its courage had gone. Henceforth it was bent exclusively on integrating itself into the aristocracy, not collectively as a class, but by individual vertical ascent.

Even after 1832, it was noticeable that the new middle-class used its vote to elect members of Parliament not from among its own ranks, but from those of the aristocracy, thus reproducing the exact relationship between its predecessor and the landed elite even after it had won the power to do otherwise: as late as 1865, over 50 per cent of the House of Commons formed a single, intricately extended kinship group. Thus for a period one can speak of a delegation of power by one distinct social class to another. But this phase was relatively short. It was followed by a *deliberate, systematized symbiosis of the two classes*. This unique fusion was effected, above all, by creating a common educational institution, the new public schools,

1. A section of the smaller Royalist landowners, who did not regain their estates after the Restoration, forms the only exception.

2. Throughout this essay, the term 'aristocracy' is used to designate, not the nobility, but the landowning class as a whole. This use blurs the important distinction between the large agrarian magnates and the gentry, but space precludes discussion of this secondary division here.



which were designed to socialize the sons of the — new or old — rich in a distinctive, uniform pattern, which henceforth became the fetishized criterion of the 'gentleman'. The reforms of the universities, and more particularly, of the Civil Service (1854), instituting a rationalized but rigidly hierarchic recruitment based on prior induction into the public schools, complemented this central mechanism of assimilation. Meanwhile, as industrial accumulation proceeded and the relative weight of the agrarian sector declined, an increasing horizontal imbrication of landed, commercial and industrial capital took place. Agrarian magnates opened up mines and invested in railways, manufacturing tycoons purchased estates and formed special relationships with merchant bankers. The end result of these convergent mutations was the eventual creation of a *hegemonic class, distinguished by a perpetually recreated virtual homogeneity and actual — determinate — porousness.* The second generation of any parvenu bourgeois family could henceforward automatically enter the 'upper class' via the regulating institutions of assimilation. Thus it was that by a unique paradox, in the supremely capitalist society of Victorian England, the aristocracy became — and remained — the vanguard of the bourgeoisie.

For the first five decades of the century — the heroic age of the English proletariat — the working class evolved in a diametrically opposite direction to that of the middle class. Counter-revolutionary war abroad was accompanied by social siege at home (more troops mobilized to suppress the Luddites than to fight the concurrent Peninsular War, etc.). Repression circumscribed the working class and cut it off from the rest of society. Plunged in its own racked and famished world, it fought bitterly for an alternative human order for itself. It was the first proletariat ever to suffer industrialization: it had to invent everything — tactics, strategy, ideas, values, organization — from the start. It achieved no victories, but its defeats were astonishing. In 1819 it organized the first national political campaign of the post-war period, so scaring both the bourgeoisie and aristocracy that it provoked a massacre and exceptional legislation. In 1831-2 it formed the great heaving swell of the Reform Movement, constantly threatening to capsize the bourgeois groupings adroitly navigating on its surface. From 1829-34 it produced in Owenism the first, mass socialist movement of the century. When this was crushed by 1836, it rose again in an independent working-class movement for Reform: Chartism, its final, supreme effort, lasted for a decade. Wrecked by its pitifully weak leadership and strategy, in the end it collapsed without a fight. With it disappeared for thirty years the *élan* and combativity of the class. A profound caesura in English working-class history supervened.

The tragedy of the first proletariat was not, as has so often been said, that it was immature; it was rather that it was in a crucial sense *premature*. Its maximum ardour and insurgency coincided with the minimum availability of socialism as a structured ideology. Consequently it paid the price of the forerunner. For simple technical-educational reasons, the development of socialist thought in the nineteenth century had to be overwhelmingly the work of non-working-class intellectuals. (The utopian socialism of Owen was, of course, just this). Thus, everywhere, it came to the proletariat from outside. But it took fifty years of the experience of industrialization over a whole continent for it properly to form, and the timing of its impact has been crucial. It is no accident that the youngest proletariats, of Italy and Japan, have been the most thoroughly won to Marxism; or that the oldest, those of England and Belgium, have rather similar political parties and consciousness. In England, in contrast to countries that industrialized afterwards, Marxism came too late: the *Communist Manifesto* was written just two months before the collapse of Chartism.

3. *By the end of the nineteenth century, Britain had seized the largest empire in history, an empire qualitatively distinct in its imperialism from all its rivals, which saturated and 'set' British society in a matrix it has retained to this day.* Late nineteenth-century imperialism was the intoxicated climax of three centuries of plunder and annexation. It was the most

self-conscious and belligerent phase of British imperialism; but it was not the most profoundly formative for British society. The mercantile imperialism of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which provided the pre-conditions for the economic take-off of the early nineteenth century, and the diplomatic-industrial imperialism of the mid-nineteenth century, whose enforcement of international Free Trade had created British world economic supremacy, were both more decisive. The lasting contours of British society were already visible before the rise of the military-industrial imperialism of the 1880s. Yet it was this apparent apotheosis of British capitalism which gave its characteristic *style* to a whole society, consecrating and fossilizing to this day its interior space, its ideological horizons, its diffused and intimate sensibility. It is, above all, from this period that the suffocating 'traditionalism' of English life dates.

The multiform impact of militant imperialism on the economy and society of Britain can only be suggested here. It is clear that the existence, maintenance and constant celebration of the Empire affected all classes and institutions in Britain; it could not have done otherwise. Equally obviously, its effects varied enormously in kind from group to group. The main single effect of the new imperialism in the period from 1880-1914 was probably the definitive consolidation of the *praeternaturally hierarchical character of the total social order and in particular of its typical model of leadership.* It has been argued that the imperialist expansion of this epoch (scramble for Africa, partition of China, etc.) was an 'atavistic' phenomenon, the product of 'pre-capitalist', aristocratic, agrarian and military residues in the industrialized states of Europe. This view is manifestly inadequate; imperialism was, of course, the inevitable climax of pre-Keynesian capitalism, the product of a massive investment surplus and a limited internal market. But Schumpeter's imaginary cause was a true effect. The reflux of imperialism at home not merely preserved but reinforced and sanctified the already pronounced personality type of the governing class: aristocratic, amateur, and 'normatively' agrarian. Originally this metaphysic was naturally secreted by an agrarian aristocratic class. But by the second half of the nineteenth century the English aristocracy was rapidly becoming as factually 'bourgeois' as the English bourgeoisie was becoming 'aristocratic'. Moreover, with the agrarian depression of the 1870s, the traditional economic base of the landowning class collapsed. Thus, just at the moment when the 'atavistic' values of the landed aristocracy appeared mortally threatened, imperialism rescued and reinforced them. In doing so, it bequeathed to twentieth-century England the governing class which has at length found its final, surreal embodiment in the fourteenth Earl of Home.

The major impact of imperialism was almost certainly on the character and ethos of the ruling bloc. But its feed-back was not limited to this. A general internalization of the prestations and motifs of Empire undoubtedly occurred. Its most

3. i.e. exactly what Sartre calls a 'detotalized totality'. The dominant bloc in England can be envisaged as a narrow, highly-structured hegemonic class, with, beneath it, a large, diffuse, polymorphous reservoir — the entrepreneurial, professional and salaried 'middle classes'. The rigorous structure of the one radically de-structures the other, as access is always open to the select few from the 'middle' to the 'upper' class: thus the middle classes in England have never produced institutions and culture of anything like a comparable distinctiveness and density to those of the 'upper' or for that matter, working class. The device of the two-party system has, of course, also powerfully acted to inhibit the emergence of a clear, corporate identity in the middle class, by denying it expression at the political level. It is striking that England has never known an independent political movement of the petty-bourgeoisie of any serious dimensions, in contrast to all other major West European countries. The special nature of the dominant bloc in England has undoubtedly contributed to preventing this.

4. By 'diplomatic-industrial imperialism' is meant the economic subjugation of other nations, usually secured by the threat of force, rather than by outright annexation. 'Military-industrial imperialism' proceeded by straight conquest; it was a product of the fear of rival European imperialisms, in particular of Germany, whose shadow haunted the extreme patriots of the period. It thus marks the moment at which British world supremacy was no longer unquestioned.



prominent manifestation was, of course, the new supercharged religion of monarchy which marked the late Victorian era — inaugurated, inevitably, by the creation for the Queen of the title of Empress of India. The Durbar, and its domestic derivative the Jubilee, became the symbol of a whole society present to itself, celebrating its own plenitude. The 'manifest' function of the monarchy was (by assertion) to unify the nation; its 'latent' function was (by example) to stratify it. The two were equally important. Probably at no period in peacetime history was English society so suffused with chauvinism and so glutted with rank.

These implicit normative patterns were probably the lasting imprint of imperialism on English life. Its explicit ideological expressions, although extremely virulent at the time, were ultimately more transient. Their omnipresence in this period merely serves to suggest how deeply acclimatized English culture became to the ambience of empire. All political groups — Conservatives, Liberals and Fabians — were militantly imperialist in aims; each differed only in its programme of implementation. The nascent socialist movement shared in the general jingoism. Webb, Hyndman, and Blatchford — Fabian, 'Marxist' and I.L.P. supporter — respectively the most influential, the most 'advanced' and the most popular spokesmen of the Left, were all in their different ways vocal imperialists. This did not necessarily mean that the working class became in any direct sense committed to imperialism. To start with it is very doubtful whether the working class of this period benefitted materially from colonial exploitation, although it did indirectly, of course, from the difference in productivity between the British economy and its overseas possessions. Politically, colonial emigration, which drained off many of the most vigorous and independent members of the working class and forestalled an explosive population pressure, was probably a more important safety-valve for English capitalism than its colonial super-profits. However, the primary impact of imperialism on the working class — as throughout English society — was at the level of consciousness. The British working class was not in any profound sense mobilized for imperialism; to this extent, the options of many of its leaders were ineffective and insignificant. But it was, undeniably, deflected from undistracted confrontation with the class exploiting it. This was the real — negative — achievement of social-imperialism. It created a powerful 'national' framework for social contradictions which at normal periods insensibly mitigated them and at moments of crisis transcended them altogether. The enthusiastic participation of most of the Left in the holocaust of the First World War was only the most spectacular product of decades of national-imperial mystification.

However, for the working class too, the zenith of imperialism saw in essence only a consolidation of morphological changes which had occurred long before it.

The shattering fiasco of Chartism finally broke the morale of the early proletariat; a period of intense shock and retreat followed. For thirty years the English working-class movement went through a kind of prolonged catatonic withdrawal. The most insurgent working class in Europe became the most numbed and docile. Ambitious attempts to create single national unions, audacious schemes for an autarkic co-operative economy, mass campaigns for universal suffrage — gave way to cautious, *bien-pensant* insurance clubs and wavering support for the Liberal Party. The formal goal of Chartism, votes for the working man, was partially granted by a Conservative Government in 1867. But far from being an autonomous victory of the working class, this tactical manoeuvre of Disraeli's in a sense only revealed its absorption and defeat. The vote was granted to the working class precisely because there was no longer any danger that it would use it as some of the Chartists had threatened to — for the transformation of the entire social system. The Conservative Government's attention was almost purely devoted to outflanking the Liberal opposition; it cared so little about the substance of its bill that it let it be amended indefinitely by a handful of radicals in Parliament.

No significant change followed the 1867 Reform Bill. The working class continued for well over another decade to play an

innocuous and subordinate role in the British political system. Artisans and home-industry workers increasingly gave way to a factory proletariat. The rapidly increasing surplus of the economy, after the first period of capital accumulation, allowed substantial increases in wage-levels to be granted by employers; this provided the economic basis of the reformism of the period. It was not until the 1880s that the working class really began to recover from the traumatic defeat of the 1840s. By then the world had moved on. In consciousness and combativity, the English working class had been overtaken by almost all its continental opposites. Marxism had missed it. Mature social theory was developed in precisely the years of the British proletariat's amnesia and withdrawal. In France, in Germany, in Italy, Marxism took root in the working class. In England, everything was against it: the wounds of the past, the diffidence of the present, the national culture of past and present. In 1869 the German Social Democratic Party was founded; in 1876 the Parti Ouvrier in France; in 1884 the Socialist Party in Italy; in 1889 the Social Democratic Party in Sweden. In England, the first socialist sect, the Social Democratic Federation, was only formed in 1884 — and the first working-class party, the Labour Representation Committee, only in 1900; over twenty years later than in France or Germany. The S.D.F. did not succeed in making a major lasting ideological impact on the labour movement. The Labour Party, itself created primarily as a defensive measure to reverse the effects of the Taff Vale decision, included no major Marxist component from its early years onwards. The remarkable lateness of its formation was a striking index of the degree of subordination of the working-class movement within British capitalist society. It was, then, in this sense that the crescendo of imperialism which coincided with the rise of the modern labour movement only confirmed changes which had preceded it.

A. Alone of major European nations, England emerged undefeated and unoccupied from Two World Wars, its social structure uniquely untouched by external shocks or discontinuities. The victories of 1918 and 1945 were the last of the special graces granted by history to English bourgeois society. War and invasion have been perhaps the greatest single catalysts of change in modern Europe — even the only armed revolution modern England has ever known was precipitated by the Scottish invasion of 1640. Collapse on the Eastern Front in 1917 set in motion the Russian Revolution; defeat and invasion in 1918 produced the Spartakist rising in Germany, the Bavarian Communist Government, and Social-Democratic dominance in the Weimar Republic; the occupation of France in 1940 and the military campaigns in Italy from 1943-5 produced politicized resistance movements (of a mass character in Italy) with pronounced socialist-communist majorities. In each case the advance of the Left was checked or reversed — by Fascism after 1930, and by Anti-Communism after 1947. But at some point the whole social order had been radically fissured and challenged, and the re-stabilization which followed, brought about by the world cataclysms of the Depression and the Cold War rather than by internal changes, was qualitatively different from the *status quo ante*.

No comparable crisis of disruption or transformation disturbed the placid waters of British social history. Even won, however, the two World Wars were the only serious forcing-period of social change in English history in the twentieth century. The outbreak of the 1914-18 war providently aborted a potentially explosive situation in Britain, when the propertied class was deeply split (on an imperial issue, Ireland) and working-class militancy threatened to escape the control of a faltering and reactionary trade-union leadership. The long-term effect of the war, however, was to increase the weight and strength of working-class organizations. Between 1914 and 1919 T.U.C. membership doubled and the Labour vote quintupled. The Labour Party, previously a small pressure group on the flank of the Liberal Party, emerged after the war as the main opposition party and five years later as a (minority) government. Simultaneously, the classical political formations of amalgamated ruling bloc underwent a permanent mutation. The vortex of the war smashed the flimsy barriers between





The reverse side of 'The Great Seal of England 1651' (above) shows the republican House of Commons in session. Below, the execution of Charles I.





Conservative and Liberal Parties, temporarily producing a fluctuating disorder, out of which eventually emerged the unified political organization of the Right — the Conservative Party. The survival of the Conservative rather than the Liberal Party was conditioned both by factional divisions within the Liberal Party and by the obvious desuetude of Free Trade doctrines in the Depression years. But in a more important sense, it revealed the continuing ascendancy of the aristocratic segment within the dominant social bloc. It was in the logic of the previous fifty years. Neither party had ever been a simple crystallization of distinct strata within this bloc — precisely because its nature precluded sharply differentiated levels or layers within it. But the Liberal Party had always tended towards a greater proportionate bourgeois, and the Conservative Party a greater proportionate aristocratic, admixture. The ideologies of the two parties had usually, although not always, over-expressed this difference. The eclipse of the one and the triumph of the other signified the final 'feudalization' of the ideology and internal protocol of the dominant bloc.<sup>1</sup> The Liberal Party, despite the initial advantage of a greater proximity to the centre of gravity of future parliamentary politics, lost because its identity was finally so much weaker. Necessarily so: when real danger threatened and a single party of the Right became imperative, proto-reformist velleities were no match for centuries of aureoled tradition.

By the twenties, the parliamentary system had for the first time in its long and *trompe l'oeil* history become the arena of a genuine class confrontation. Under post-war conditions the Labour Party swiftly rose in strength and attractive power. Its seats in the House of Commons increased from 60 in 1919 to 191 in 1924, when it formed its short-lived first minority government, and then — after losses in the election of that year — to 287 in 1929, when it formed its second government, also a minority but this time as the strongest party. Within two years this Labour Government collapsed — more completely and ignominiously than any other Social Democratic government has ever done. Vast Conservative majorities dominated the whole of the next decade. The first cycle of the Labour Party's history was brought to an end by the outbreak of the Second World War.

The 1939-45 War opened the second cycle, which reproduced with remarkable similarity the timing and movement of the first. Again the tremendous pressures of the war effected a sudden, qualitative leap forward in British history. For the first

and only time in this century, an appreciable redistribution of income took place, secondary education was generalized, and the foundations of the Welfare State were laid. The 1945 election confirmed these changes, when the Labour Party won a large absolute majority. This time, both its electoral strength and its legislative achievements (creation of the National Health Service, socialization of fuel and transport, etc.) were much greater than those of its ephemeral governments after the First World War. Its development was thus more accurately spiral, rather than truly cyclical. But at a higher level, almost exactly the same sequence was repeated. The period of upsurge was brief and rapidly dissipated. The Labour Government fell in 1951, on the twentieth anniversary of the disaster of 1931, in analogous circumstances of economic crisis, political division and ideological demoralization. The result was, once again, an uninterrupted decade of Conservative rule. In fifty years, such was the total change since the advent of political democracy, in a country where the manual working class constitutes an overwhelming sociological majority of the population.

*The distinctive facets of English class structure, as it has evolved over three centuries, can thus be summed up as follows. After a bitter, cathartic revolution, which transformed the structure but not the superstructures of English society, a landed aristocracy, underpinned by a powerful mercantile affinal group, became the first dominant capitalist class in Britain. This dynamic agrarian capitalism expelled the English peasantry from history. Its success was economically the 'floor' and sociologically the 'ceiling' of the rise of the industrial bourgeoisie. Undisturbed by a feudal state, terrified of the French Revolution and its own proletariat, mesmerized by the prestige and authority of the landed class, the bourgeoisie won two modest victories, lost its nerve and ended by losing its identity. The late Victorian era and the high noon of imperialism welded aristocracy and bourgeoisie together in a single social bloc. The working class fought passionately and unaided against the advent of industrial capitalism; its extreme exhaustion after successive defeats was the measure of its efforts. Henceforward it evolved, separate but subordinate, within the apparently unshakeable structure of British capitalism, unable, despite its great numerical superiority, to transform the fundamental nature of British society.*

5. 'Feudal' only metaphorically, of course.



## Britain

### LEON TROTSKY

# Britain and Russia

[The article below is part of a speech entitled 'Through What Stage Are We Passing', delivered by Trotsky on 21 June 1924 and reprinted in the collection *Zapad i Vostok (West and East)*, Moscow, 1924. The translation, by Brian Pearce, first appeared in *Fourth International*, summer 1964. It is reprinted by kind permission of the translator.]

#### The Strength of the Communist Party and the Level of Culture in a Country

When I spoke recently at Sokolniki, at the jubilee gathering of educational workers, I was asked a question of great importance in relation to principles, a question closely connected both with the international situation, in the widest sense of the word, and with the Fifth Congress of the Communist International which is now taking place. And instead of making a hundred-and-first or thousand-and-first attempt to describe comprehensively the so-called 'international situation', I am going to give, even though only in broad outline, an answer to that question of principle which was put to me at Sokolniki and which I will now tell you about. The note I received is in my pocket — here it is: 'Comrade Trotsky, please explain why the most advanced capitalist countries have the weakest Communist parties (USA, Britain) and are furthest from the social revolution. This problem worries me very much and I request you to explain it.' That is the question.

The answer to it is the key to the international question, broadly understood, that is, both from the standpoint of the relations between the various states and the relations between the capitalist states and the Soviet Republic and from the standpoint of the development of the revolution throughout the world. In the last analysis these are, after all, two aspects of one and the same problem...

How then can it be explained that the most advanced and cultured countries have weak Communist parties, while, on the contrary, our country, which cannot, unfortunately, be called the most cultured in Europe, has a very strong Communist party, which rules the state? The writer of the note says that this problem worries him. And that is quite understandable. We know that international Menshevism, starting with our own Russian Mensheviks, builds upon this contradiction its chief 'accusation' against international communism and against the Soviet Republic. You see, if this contradiction be taken in a simple way, so to speak logically, mechanically, then you are not far from the conclusion that Communism is an expression of...backwardness and barbarism. The more backward a country is, you deduce from your first glance at the problem, the stronger is Communism in that country, whereas super-civilized countries like Britain and America have very weak Communist parties, in proportion, as

it were, to the small amount of survivals of barbarism in those countries. On this idea is built up the entire philosophy of international Menshevism. Allow me to deal, even though only in very general terms, with this question, which is of the highest importance.

At the congress of the Communist International one of the weakest of the European parties is certainly the British Communist Party. The American party is even weaker, true, but we are talking for the moment only about Europe. The strongest party is our party. Then comes the German party, and then the French. What in reality explains the fact that in such a powerful, cultured, educated, civilized, etc., country as Britain, the Communist party still exists as a mere propagandist society, not yet possessing the power to play an active part in politics? In order to answer in a radical way the explanation — at first glance so simple and fitting — that Communism is directly proportionate to backwardness and barbarism, an explanation which expresses the whole wisdom of Menshevism, I will recall a few other phenomena and institutions in the life of Great Britain. In Britain, there is — I ask you not to forget it — a monarchy, whereas there is none here or in France or in Germany. Now, a monarchy cannot be depicted from any point of view as an expression of the highest culture, as one of the highest attainments of mankind — even MacDonald doesn't do that, he keeps quiet about it, politely and diplomatically holds his tongue, and doesn't say that a sign of the high cultural level of Britain is that there, in contrast to barbarous Russia, they have a monarchy. In Britain there is still to this day an aristocracy enjoying distinctions of rank. There is a House of Lords. In Britain, finally, the church, or rather the churches, wield tremendous influence in all spheres of life. There is no country in Europe where church influence in political, social and family life is so great as in Great Britain. Over there, for a man to say that he does not belong to a church, does not go to church, and even more, that he does not believe in God, requires quite exceptional personal courage.

So it is difficult there, in each separate case, to break through the old, dense web of hypocrisy and clerical prejudices and the worldly customs which are based on this hypocrisy and these prejudices. None of you will say, I hope, that the influence of the church or of the churches on social consciousness is an expression of human progress. Thus it turns out that in Britain, alongside of the fact that the Communist party is exceptionally weak, there are to be found such other facts, not matters of indifference for us, as the existence of a monarchy, an aristocracy, a House of Lords and a tremendous influence of religion in politics, in social life, and in everyday affairs. And if you approach Britain one-sidedly from this aspect, that is, from the aspect of the monarchy, the House of Lords, the aristocracy, landlordism and church influence, then you would doubtless say that the most barbarous and backward country in Europe is Britain. That would be as true as the statement of the



Mensheviks that Communism is a product of backwardness; that is to say, it would be as untrue, as one-sided, as false.

Can one really agree that Britain is the most backward country in Europe? No, this idea cannot at all be fitted into the framework of our general picture of Britain. In Britain technique is at a very high level, and technique is decisive in human life. America, true, has outstripped Britain in the field of technique: the daughter of British culture has raced ahead of her mother along the line of technique. Before the war Germany was rivalling Britain more and more sharply, threatening to outstrip and in certain branches of industry actually outstripping Britain. But today, after the defeat of Germany, Britain leads Europe economically. British science, literature and art have played and are playing a role of the first order in the development of human thought and human creative achievement. How can one find one's way out of this contradiction? For a contradiction stares us in the face: on the one hand, high technique, science, etc.; on the other, monarchy, aristocracy, House of Lords, power of religious prejudices over people's minds.

What conclusion can be drawn? This conclusion, that there is no *single* yardstick with which one can measure the development of a country in every sphere, and on the basis of that measurement make a uniform evaluation covering all aspects of social life. Development is contradictory. In certain spheres a country achieves tremendous successes, but it happens quite often that by these very successes that country holds back its own development in other spheres.

Let me speak concretely about this matter. Britain was the first country to take the road of capitalist development and won, thanks to that fact, the hegemony of the world market in the nineteenth century. The British bourgeoisie became, again thanks to this fact, the richest, strongest and most enlightened of the bourgeoisies. These conditions enabled it, as we know, to create a privileged position for the upper strata of the British working class and thereby to blunt class antagonisms. The British working class is becoming conscious of itself as an independent class hostile to the bourgeoisie much more slowly than the working class of other countries with less powerful bourgeoisies.

Thus it turns out that the growth of the British bourgeoisie, the most advanced bourgeoisie in Europe, having taken place in exceptionally favourable conditions, has for a long time held back the development of the British proletariat. The slow and 'organic' growth of technique in England, and the fact that the Reformation and the bourgeois revolution happened close together in time, held back the work of critical thought in relation to the church. The British bourgeoisie developed under the protection of ancient institutions, on the one hand adapting itself to them and on the other subjecting them to itself, gradually, organically, 'in an evolutionary way'. The revolutionary upheavals of the seventeenth century were profoundly forgotten. In this consists what is called the British tradition. Its basic feature is conservatism. More than anything else the British bourgeoisie is proud that it has not destroyed old buildings and old beliefs, but has gradually adapted the old royal and noble castle to the requirements of the business firm. In this castle, in the corners of it, there were its ikons, its symbols, its fetishes, and the bourgeoisie did not remove them. It made use of them to consecrate its own rule. And it laid down from above upon its proletariat the heavy lid of cultural conservatism.

### The British Proletariat and our Proletariat

The British working class has developed quite differently from ours. Our young proletariat was formed in a period of some 50 years, mainly from peasants and handicraftsmen who had lived in the countryside, along with their fathers and grandfathers, in ancient surroundings, in economic backwardness, amid ignorance and religious prejudices. Capital ruthlessly seized the peasant lad or youth by the scruff of the neck and at once flung him into the cauldron of factory life. The change in his conditions took place catastrophically. When the young

peasant felt the blast of the factory's steam, he at once began to think about who he was and where he was. It gained ascendancy over him all the more easily because he had no conservative ideas; the old village notions did not fit at all; he needed a complete and radical change in his whole outlook on the world.

With the British worker things went quite differently. His father and his grandfather were workers, and his great-grandfathers and remoter ancestors were small artisans. The British worker has a family tree, he knows who his ancestors were, he has a family tradition. This is also a kind of 'culture', but it is expressed in the fact that in his consciousness he drags around with him many of the prejudices of his ancestors. For him, the British worker, there was not this sudden, sharp, catastrophic transition from the closed little world of the village to modern industry; he has developed organically from his remote ancestors into gradually changing conditions of factory life and urban culture. In his mind there still to this day sit old, medieval craft ideas and prejudices, only modified in form and adapted to the conditions of capitalism. The life of the crafts and the craft festivals — celebration of the birth of a son, his entry into apprenticeship, graduation to the independent position of master-craftsman, and so on — were shot through and through with religiosity, and this religiosity passed over into trade unionism, which has a heavy conservative tail stretching back into the Middle Ages...

British technique is a fundamentally capitalist technique. It was not brought in from outside, destroying national economic forms, but has developed on the basis of these national forms. The consciousness of the working class reflects this 'organic' growth of technique, while lagging very much behind it. It must not be forgotten that human consciousness, taken on the scale of society, is fearfully conservative and slow-moving. Only idealists imagine that the world is moved forward through the free initiative of human thought. In actual fact the thought of society or of a class does not take a single step forward except when there is extreme need to do so. Where it is at all possible, old familiar ideas are adapted to new facts. We speak frankly if we say that classes and peoples have hitherto not shown decisive initiative except when history has thrashed them with its heavy crop. Had things been different, would people have allowed the imperialist war to happen? After all, the war drew nearer under the eyes of everyone, like two trains hurtling towards each other along a single track. But the peoples remained silent, watched, waited, and went on living their familiar, everyday, conservative lives. The fearful upheavals of the imperialist war were needed for certain changes to be introduced into consciousness and into social life. The working people of Russia overthrew Romanov, drove out the bourgeoisie and took power. In Germany they got rid of Hohenzollern but stopped half-way... The war was needed for these changes to take place, the war with its tens of millions of dead, wounded and maimed... What a clear proof this is of how conservative and slow to move is human thought, how stubbornly it clings to the past, to everything that is known, familiar, ancestral — until the next blow of the scourge.

Such blows have occurred in Britain too, of course. Thus, after the rapid industrialization there developed in the second third of the last century the stormy movement of the working class which is known as Chartism. But bourgeois society stood sufficiently firm and the Chartist movement came to nothing. The strength of the British bourgeoisie lay in its maturity, its wealth, its world power, crumbs from which it shared with the upper strata of the working class, thereby demoralizing also the weakened masses.

Think over this process to the extent necessary to understand the profound difference from our development, which was extremely delayed and therefore extremely contradictory. Take our metal-working and coal-mining South: boundless expanses of steppe, thinly populated; steppe settlements with deep mud around them in spring and autumn... and suddenly huge metal-working enterprises arise in these steppes. They did not, of course, develop out of our own economy but broke in upon us thanks to foreign capital. From the backward and scattered villages, European (and sometimes American) capital



assembled fresh cadres of workers, tearing them from the conditions which Marx once called 'the idiocy of rural life'. And there you had these fresh proletarians of the Donets basin, of Krivoi Rog and so on, not bringing with them into the pits and the factories any hereditary traditions, any craft conservatism, any fixed and firm beliefs. On the contrary, it was in these new, unfamiliar and stern conditions that they only for the first time properly felt the need for firm beliefs, which would give them moral support. To their aid came Social Democracy, which taught them to break with all their old prejudices and so gave a revolutionary consciousness to this class which had been born in a revolutionary way. This, in broad outline, is the answer to the question which was put to me and which I, in my turn, have set before you.

It is possible to put the matter like this: the richer, stronger, mightier, cleverer, firmer a bourgeoisie has proved to be, the more it has succeeded in holding back the ideological and consequently the revolutionary development of the proletariat. Here is another expression of the same idea. The British bourgeoisie has got used to the servility of the so-called workers' leaders whom it has educated. Let me interrupt myself to introduce a very interesting quotation from the British newspaper the *Sunday Times*. The newspaper complains because in Britain today, under the MacDonal Government, stormy strikes are taking place, and it says:

'We have in Great Britain the finest body of Labour leaders in the world, men of experience and patriotism, with a real sense of responsibility and a wide knowledge of economics. But they are rapidly being thrust aside by the avowed revolutionaries, whose influence is increased every time the Government capitulates to them.' That's what it says, word for word. As to the statement that they are being 'thrust aside by the avowed revolutionaries', that, alas, is as yet an exaggeration. Of course, revolutionaries are increasing in number in Britain too, but unfortunately they have still far from sufficiently 'thrust aside' those leaders whom the *Sunday Times* calls wise politicians, filled to the brim with wisdom and patriotism.

How has this come about? In our country there have never been leaders who won such praise from the bourgeoisie, even if we bear in mind that at a certain period the Socialist Revolutionaries and the Mensheviks played a considerable role, because our bourgeoisie — discounting the sharpest and most decisive moments, when things were at their most critical — was dissatisfied even with the Socialist Revolutionaries and the Mensheviks. What is the cause of such satisfaction with the workers' leaders on the part of the bourgeoisie over there in Britain? It is due to the fact that the British bourgeoisie themselves have trained these leaders. How did they get the opportunity of training 'labour' leaders? This was due to the circumstance that they were powerful and cultured, being the ruling class of an advanced capitalist country. As fast as the working class advanced young leaders from its ranks, all sorts of political 'specialists' in the service of the British bourgeoisie at once settled on them, won them over, brought to bear on them all that could be imagined by a powerful bourgeois culture.

Among us the average petty-bourgeois, the philistine, the member of the intelligentsia of liberal and even radical views, has considered from time immemorial that since Britain is a highly civilized country therefore everything which exists in Britain or comes from Britain is superior, good, progressive and so on. In this we see expressed the petty-bourgeois incapacity for thinking dialectically, analysing phenomena, grasping a problem in its historical concreteness. There is something which is really good, British technique, and that we are trying to transfer to our country in exchange for grain, timber and other valuable commodities. The British monarchy, hypocritical British conservatism, religiosity, servility, sanctimoniousness — all this is old rags, rubbish, the refuse of centuries, which we have no need for whatsoever. (Applause)

If British culture has affected our average philistine in this way from afar, by correspondence so to speak, evoking in him a blind infatuation, how much more strongly, directly and concretely does it affect the British petty-bourgeoisie and the

semi-petty-bourgeois representative of the British working class.

What the British bourgeoisie has been able to achieve is a sort of hypnotic fascination for its culture, its world-historical importance. By means of this skilfully-organized hypnosis it has influenced the workers' leaders, whom it has known how to keep always surrounded by its reporters, photographers, sportsmen, clergymen, lecturers and so forth, all cunningly turned on to each newcomer among the workers' leaders. The newcomer in this way finds himself in a bourgeois milieu. They praise him to the skies if he nibbles at the bait, and they give him a good brushing the wrong way if he takes the slightest step against the bourgeoisie. And this does not just happen once, but day by day, week by week, and year in and year out. And the young leader going out into society begins to feel ashamed because his Sunday suit is not sufficiently well-cut; he dreams of a top-hat to wear when he goes out on a Sunday, so as not to be any different from a real gentleman. These may seem trifles, but, after all, they make up a man's life. And in this hypnosis of a way of life lies the art of a ruling class, a powerful, cultured, hypocritical, base, greedy class — an art which consists in exercising an everyday influence whereby to work upon and subject to itself everyone who comes forward from among the working class, everyone who stands a head taller than the other in every factory, in every ward and borough, in every town and throughout the country.

Probably a lot of you have seen the *Times*. It comes out every day in dozens of pages of splendid fine print, with a variety of illustrations and an endless range of sections, so that everything has its place in the paper, from questions of high politics to all kinds of sport, and including the affairs of the churches and of the world of fashion. And from what point of view is everything presented? Naturally, from the point of view of the interests of the bourgeoisie.

Other British bourgeois newspapers are not so solid as the *Times*, but they are built on the same model, so as to capture the reader's attention from every direction and lead him to genuflect before the British national tradition, that is, before the bourgeoisie. And the workers' press is very weak; besides which, with the exception of the Communist publications, it is permeated through and through with the same hypnosis of bourgeois culture. This hypnosis is supplemented by direct terrorism. To belong to a church is in Britain the same as covering your nakedness with clothes, or paying what you owe in a shop. May one walk down the street naked? May one not belong to a church? To declare that one does not belong to a church, and still more that one does not believe in God, requires in Britain the same sort of extraordinary courage as to go naked in public. The so-called Labour Government headed by MacDonal is also a product of the age-long education of the workers' leaders in this way. That is the reason, in the last analysis, why British Menshevism is so strong and Communism weak.

#### **There Is no Abstract Yardstick for Civilization**

Now let us repeat our question: is the weakness of Communism in Britain a symptom of the country's high level of civilization, or is it a symptom of backwardness? After our analysis we have no grounds for falling into the trap of such a mechanical presentation of the question. We say: it is at one and the same time a symptom of very early development and of great backwardness, because history operates not mechanically, but dialectically: it combines during long periods advanced tendencies in one sphere with monstrous backwardness in another. If we compare, from the standpoint of world-historical development, the 'Labour' government of MacDonal and the bourgeois-nationalist government of Turkey, the conclusion we draw is not in MacDonal's favour. You recall that the 'great' Liberal leader Gladstone — in reality he was a liberal philistine, and Marx had a most highly concentrated hatred of him — the 'great' Gladstone once delivered a tremendous speech against the blood-stained Sultan, the representative of fanatical, barbarous Islam, and so on.

If you take the average philistine and say to him: Britain and





MacDonald (above) and Trotsky (right) in 1924

Turkey — well, of course, Britain means civilization and progress, Turkey means backwardness and barbarism. But see what is happening. There is now in Britain a government of Mensheviks and in Turkey a bourgeois-nationalist government. And this bourgeois-nationalist government of Turkey has found it necessary to abolish the Caliphate. The Caliphate is the central institution of Pan-Islamism, that is, one of the most reactionary trends in the entire world. But the Menshevik government of Britain has re-established the Caliphate in the Hejaz, in order to uphold the rule of the bourgeoisie over its Moslem slaves. History's conclusion is that the Menshevik government of Britain, in spite of British civilization, etc., is playing in this conjuncture of forces a reactionary role, whereas the bourgeois-nationalist government of backward Turkey, as of a nationally-oppressed country, is playing a progressive role. Such is the dialectic of history!

Of course, from the standpoint of the development of technique, science and art, Britain is immeasurably superior to Turkey. The accumulated wealth of Britain is beyond comparison with what Turkey possesses in this respect. But we see that it turns out that, precisely in order to protect this wealth and its whole national 'civilization' in general, the British bourgeoisie has been obliged to follow an ultra-conservative policy, so that a Labour Government becomes in its hands an

instrument for re-establishing the Caliphate. There is no abstract yardstick applicable to all spheres of life. It is necessary to take living facts in their living historical inter-action. If we master this dialectical approach to the question, the latter becomes much clearer to us. Germany, for example, is placed not by accident, as regards this question of the relationship between the forces of the Communist Party and of Social Democracy, between Russia and Britain. This is to be understood by the course of development of capitalism in Germany. It is necessary, of course, to investigate concretely the history of each separate country, in order to discover more exactly the causes of the delayed or hastened growth of the Communist Party. In a general way, however, we can draw the following conclusion: the conquest of power by the proletariat in countries which have entered the path of capitalism very late in the day, like our country, is easier than in countries with an extensive previous bourgeois history and a higher level of culture. But this is only one side of the matter. A second conclusion, no less important, declares: socialist construction after the conquest of power will be easier in countries with a higher capitalist civilization than in countries which are economically backward, like ours. This means that for the British working class to break through to real proletarian power, to dictatorship, will be incomparably harder than it was for us. But once having broken through to power, it will advance to socialism much quicker and much more easily than





ourselves. And it is even uncertain, history has spoken with a double tongue on this question, who will build socialism earlier, we or the British. If the British working class takes power in the next ten years — I speak approximately, and give this figure not in order to prophesy but merely as an arithmetical example — it will then within another ten years have a real socialist economy, very highly developed, while we in twenty years' time will probably still have, not only somewhere in Yakutia but also nearer here, very many survivals of peasant backwardness...

Decades will be needed to transform our North and our South into a centralized socialist economy, based on a high level of technique, with our great expanses of territory still only thinly populated. And I think that in twenty or twenty-five years' time the British workers, turning to us, will say: 'Don't be annoyed, but I've got a bit ahead of you.' Naturally, we shan't be annoyed — those of us, that is, who survive till then. Get ahead, comrades British workers, do us the favour of getting ahead, please, we beg you, we've been waiting a long time for this (laughter). Such is the dialectic of history. Politics has held the British worker back, has for a long time, so to speak, hobbled him, and he is advancing with such timid, pitiful, MacDonaldite little steps. But when he frees himself from his political trammels, the British racehorse will outstrip our peasant nag.

To generalize theoretically what I have said, in the Marxist

terminology which is familiar to us, I should say that the question itself boils down to the inter-relation between the basis and the superstructure and to the inter-relation of bases and superstructures of different countries one with another. We know that superstructures — state, law, politics, parties and so on — arise on an economic basis, are nourished and determined by this basis. Consequently, basis and superstructure have to correspond. And this happens in fact, only not simply but in a very complicated way. A powerful development of one superstructure (the bourgeois state, bourgeois parties, bourgeois culture) sometimes holds back for a long time the development of other superstructures (the revolutionary proletarian party), but in the last analysis — in the *last* analysis, not immediately — the basis reveals itself nevertheless as the decisive force. We have shown this by the example of Britain. If we approach the problem in a formal way, it may appear that the weakness of the British Communist Party *contradicts* the Marxist law of the relationship between basis and superstructure. But this is certainly not the case. Dialectically, the basis, as we have seen, will, in spite of everything, secure its victory. In other words: a high level of technique, even through the barrier of ultra-conservative politics, nevertheless will manifest its preponderance and will lead to socialism sooner than in countries with a low level of technique.

That, comrades, is what I conceive the fundamental answer to be to the question which was put to me at Sokolniki.





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**BEATRIX CAMPBELL, CELIA PUGH,  
SHEILA ROWBOTHAM, JOAN SMITH**

# The women's movement and the party

[The following articles are edited transcripts of a discussion held at the Marxist Symposium organized by International and Socialist Challenge in London, September 1978. An extended version of the arguments presented in Sheila Rowbotham's contribution may be found in *Beyond the Fragments*, by Sheila Rowbotham, Lynne Segal, and Hilary Wainright, published by the Newcastle Socialist Centre and Islington Community Press, 1979.]

## Celia Pugh (IMG)

The attitude we take to the relationship between the party and the women's movement must flow from our strategic conception of how women's liberation will be achieved. In the short time I have I can only rehearse some of the basic outlines of this strategy.

Our starting point must be the reassertion of the essential basis of a Marxist approach: that the oppression of women is rooted in the material conditions of their existence — it does not spring from some accident of biology, from alleged natural divisions between men and women or differences in their psychological drives. Women's oppression results from social relations within class society as a whole. From this we conclude that a pre-condition for a lasting liberation of women is a challenge to these class relations and the means by which they are maintained. Today this means the destruction of capitalist power and domination over our lives.

Now, that is not to say that the oppression of women has existed only under capitalism. The oppression of women is a feature of all class societies. It is simply to assert that the liberation of women is impossible without a challenge to relations of power and domination in capitalist society, for these will always distort all forms of human life in the interests of the capitalist class. This relationship between an anti-capitalist and women's liberation struggle isn't only one way. The fight for women's liberation can achieve success only with the destruction of capitalism. But it works the other way as well. The challenge to capitalism cannot achieve success without a fundamental assault on the oppression of women. By definition, the revolutionary struggle involves the eradication of all the oppression and exploitation that festers in capitalist society. No revolutionary process deserves its name if it can't take up all aspects of oppression. Secondly, no fundamental challenge to capitalist domination will occur whilst there are mechanisms that make this domination acceptable and inevitable in the eyes of the oppressed and exploited. In class society, women are subordinate and the divisions between men and women are considered natural. As long as this remains unchallenged, the anti-capitalist struggle will be weakened. Women will continue to be scapegoats and will be expected to find personal solutions to crises and problems which are actually social. As long as the mass of women are isolated and

as long as the privatized concerns of men and women in the family act as a barrier to collective struggle against capitalism, we cannot generate a united opposition to capitalist domination.

These barriers between the privatized family and the collective interests of the working class are often cynically used by the ruling class to whip up support for its particular reactionary positions and projects.

So, we can see that the fight against capitalism is inseparable from the fight for women's liberation. We must have a strategy that reflects this connection. This then raises the question of how we can combine the struggle for socialism and women's liberation. Here we must look at how the present conditions of oppression are maintained. Oppressive divisions between men and women are structured into all social relations in our society. This situation is regulated, controlled and supervised by the state in its governmental, legal, and repressive forms. For example, we have recognized how laws in our society operate to perpetuate the dependence of women on men, how the right to control our own fertility is denied us by the state. The repressive fist is also used to deny us the right to determine our own sexuality. The way laws and the state institutions operate to regulate sexuality is evident in the particularly harsh treatment of gays. So, like all aspects of oppression and exploitation, the oppression of women is most centralized and consolidated through the institution of the state. No strategy is adequate unless it severs this centralized state control and domination.

It is not enough to take up oppression as we experience it in our daily lives, by redefining our relationships with men and the other social, cultural, and economic relationships which grind us down every day. Whilst this is important, it is not sufficient. We cannot construct non-oppressive social, personal, and economic relations in a society where relations and structures of power and control deny these possibilities. A generalized reconstruction of our lives is not possible within the conditions of capitalist domination. To fully control our lives we must challenge the centralized way in which the capitalist state denies us this control. We must oppose capitalist state power and create forms of state organization capable of securing the right of all to control their lives free from exploitation and oppression. Only in this way can we create the political conditions for constructing new economic relationships, new personal relationships, and replacing present family forms.

Now, this is not to suggest, as Sheila has in some of her articles, that Leninists and Marxists ignore personal aspects of liberation. In fact, if you look at some of the things Lenin wrote against the Economists at the beginning of the century, we find him arguing for the need to tackle all aspects of oppression in society. He talked of industrial oppression, civic oppression, personal oppression, family, religious, scientific aspects of life. All these are features of society that revolutionaries need to change. I think that the women's liberation movement has



reminded the left that these personal aspects of oppression are a necessary focus for struggle. It has also given us a deeper understanding of what this personal liberation will entail. But it is not enough to recognize this. We have to find adequate political means for fighting for this personal liberation. For this we must challenge the organized political power of the ruling class over our lives.

What are the implications of this strategic approach for the party and the women's movement? Let's look first at the women's movement itself. As revolutionary socialists, we understand the importance of the organized working class in challenging bourgeois domination. But it would be wrong to interpret this to mean we dismiss the organization of women against their specific oppression, as some socialists have done. We have seen historically, this activity of women does not always or necessarily occur at the point of production or involve proletarian women narrowly defined.

Why are these movements important? First, ideological notions of women's position in society permeate all layers of society, including the labour movement. It is therefore necessary for women to take the lead in challenging their oppression. Who would tell the Irish people fighting for self-determination, 'wait until the labour movement is prepared to take up your struggle before you take up the fight against British imperialism'? Who would tell those struggling against apartheid in South Africa, 'wait until the labour movement is prepared to take up your struggle before you do so'? The women's movement is acting as a spearhead in the fight against sexism in society.

A movement of women against oppression begins to establish the need to challenge all fundamental relations of oppression and domination in society. It reminds us that it is not sufficient to take up only economic exploitation at the point of production. The struggles of women against their oppression indicate the inadequacy of economistic and syndicalist outlooks on the struggle for liberation.

Movements of women also give all women confidence to challenge their oppression. Women are used to having their interests dismissed and characterized as irrelevant. Collective struggle and discussion of women allow them to challenge this isolation and pursue their specific needs in a forceful way. Also, women experience their oppression in very personal ways. Collective discussion and activity allow us to see that the problems we face are not ones of personal inadequacy, but of society. So, the women's movement gives women confidence to pursue their demands and struggles and to resist reactionary attempts to play on their isolation. Through the women's movement, we are beginning to redefine our images of ourselves and the role we play in society and struggle. We are more confidently asserting an independence free from sexist constraints.

Fundamental to this movement is its autonomy, or independence. This involves autonomy and independence from the state. It also involves an autonomy from men in struggle. This does not always mean women-only structures, but women must be able to govern and develop a lead in their own struggles. This allows them to free themselves from constraints imposed by men as agents of oppression.

Before explaining the important autonomy of the women's movement from the party, I want to indicate how the independence of the women's movement can go only so far. As I have already indicated, the struggles against capitalism and for liberation are indissolubly linked. These links must be made forcefully. Those who don't do this either offer an inadequate strategy, like revolutionary and radical feminists, or make the wrong sort of alliances in struggle, which derail and divert them. The position of bourgeois feminists who subordinated the struggle for the vote to defence of the imperialists in the First World War is the most obvious example — although we shouldn't use this to dismiss the impact and importance of the suffrage movement as a whole, many components of which fought against this perspective. Another example is the Italian Communist Party, which in order to cement alliances with bourgeois forces in parliament, held back the struggle for abortion rights. So in the perspectives and demands we outline it is necessary to draw the links between the liberation of women

and the anti-capitalist struggle. This must be reflected in the sort of alliances we argue that the women's movement should make — these must be with the working class and other people fighting against oppression. The women's movement cannot isolate itself, or be independent from these other struggles and interests.

It is here that the revolutionary party becomes extremely important. We have to be able to derive a strategy which can draw these links between the fight for power and liberation. This strategy cannot flow from sectoral or immediate experiences. As I have indicated, capitalist domination is centralized, and so must be our counter-offensive. An adequate strategy will come from an understanding of all the class relationships, at every level of society — economic, political, social. We must draw on a recognition of the centralized domination of the state. This 'global consciousness' of all the integrated aspects of capitalist domination will not spring spontaneously from any one particular experience of oppression or a particular experience of struggle. These partial experiences need to be drawn together and synthesized, drawing on historical and international experience. The party is the instrument with which we can analyse society and synthesize the experience of struggles against oppression. The party aims to draw together a programme of action and demands capable of challenging capitalist power and laying the foundations for liberation. It fights for this programme to become a part of the partial struggles against economic, sexual, and social oppression. This will ensure that the underlying unity of interest among all the oppressed and exploited is recognized and that there is a conscious challenge to bourgeois domination and power.

It is necessary at this stage to clear away some caricatures of the role of the party, which have been sadly reflected in the positions expressed today. Firstly, this conception of the party does not involve it substituting itself for the independent activity of the masses themselves. It was with Stalinism that these distinctions between the party and the organizations of mass struggle became blurred. The independent struggle of the oppressed became subordinated to the direct concerns of the Communist Party leadership. Lenin and Trotsky, on the other hand, stressed the organizational independence of these mass movements. In discussing the trade-union movement, for instance, they both stressed that it had to be a truly mass and broad movement uniting all those prepared to fight against their oppression. However partially, the united action of this mass movement of workers weakens capitalist domination. Many will learn from the experience of struggle within this broad movement that a socialist perspective is essential for success. Acceptance of a socialist programme is not set up as a precondition for support of the mass trade-union movement. Our attitude to a mass women's movement should be no different.

Essential to this is an understanding that revolution and liberation will be won and developed by the masses themselves. The party cannot substitute for the mass struggle, be it of trade unionists, anti-imperialist fighters, or the women's movement. This is expressed in the independence of these organizations of mass struggle from the party itself. The party will fight for its own revolutionary positions within these movements, but the masses will be free to accept or reject them.

So, the party and the mass movement have distinct and complementary tasks on the struggle for liberation, a struggle which will be an ongoing one even after the seizure of state power. Even after capitalist domination has been overthrown, a women's movement will be needed to fight for real liberation. It will be organized through democratic mass institutions and not by the party itself.

The relationship between the party and the mass movements is not seen as a one-way process, with the party dictating a programme to such a movement. Revolutionary demands and strategy are not concocted by some great thinker, a great Marxist intellectual just sitting and scribbling. No, strategy is drawn from real experience of struggle, from the historic backlog of debate and experience of the workers' movement and the movements fighting oppression, including the women's movement.



There must be an interrelationship between a party and the mass of workers and fighters for liberation if an adequate programme for revolutionary change is to develop. Such a programme is not fixed. It must constantly change and be strengthened in the light of new experience and understanding. We don't have all the answers now, and that is why revolutionary organizations must be able to learn from the developing and ever growing women's liberation movement.

## Sheila Rowbotham

After I got Celia's letter asking me to speak here I had a dream that I did talk at this meeting and that it was absolutely terrible. And, after waking up, I realized that I had been far too concerned about protecting myself, that I was worried about whether I knew everything Lenin had said and all that sort of thing. I wasn't trying to think about what it was that related to other people rather than what would protect me. In the dream a stern voice told me that I would now re-sit history and Latin O levels and would have no time to revise. History was the O level I cared about most and Latin the one I was most frightened of. And I thought: what I must do is to try to tackle the sources of my fears, because I felt that they were also the fears of a lot of people in the socialist movement. I think there are many people both within and outside any political organization who are worried about the dominant assumptions on the left about how to organize.

The women's movement has tackled so many ideas; but there has been a point where we have stopped: the question of organization. Partly this is because the question is difficult, but some very real obstacles have been created by the way the question has been posed. So I tried to think back to what it was like in late 1968, at the very beginning of the women's movement. It was incredibly hard then to think in ways that differed from the ways the socialist movement said you had to conceive of something called the 'woman question', something that did not really relate to your feelings.

The first important thing was that we felt it was absolutely necessary for everyone to think. There was nobody who couldn't think. There were so few of us that everyone had to think to the utmost. Secondly, we were grappling with certain questions that were really unanswered. And thirdly, we had a kind of protection right from the start: no single woman was expected to produce a total theory like a rabbit out of a hat. No one expected that any individual could produce a complete alternative, because that is something that has to be created by groups of people in struggle. The ideas were really part of a process, and no one woman spoke for the movement. Nobody could actually take that responsibility or be inviolate. We were not cut off and removed from other people. Every person was speaking from the experience of her own existence and trying to speak with as much honesty as she could. You were not speaking on behalf of other people in order to raise them to some point of view. You were speaking from what actually happened to you. I know there are limitations in talking only about what happened to you. As time went on we realized this: On the other hand, these were important starting points.

I think that the first two conditions are now present in a quite different context. It is becoming possible to talk about the question of left organizations in significantly different ways. Issues raised by feminism and the gay movements, like the family and sexuality and the issue of autonomy, have made this need very obvious. Also there are openings in the discussion on the left about regroupment and ideas about how to organize. But I don't think we have the third. We do not have the protection. I think those of us who are concerned, whether we are in left groups or not, about really re-thinking how we organize, that we really need to create that kind of protective atmosphere which the emergence of the women's movement did manage to do. This is something we have to think about quite consciously.

I want to talk about the hold of certain assumptions on the left which really block this and which have to be tackled. For without it we cannot realize our own strength as people who are

socialists; we don't really have much chance of creating a mass socialist movement. I don't see this as a sort of plot, but I think that the *tendency* of the way people hold ideas on the left means that the particular intuitive understandings of particular circumstances is constantly being viewed as against 'theory'. People's particular experiences are continually going against the grain. It is very easy to be daunted and awed by apparently cohesive concepts of organizing that are more prevalent.

I think that the women's movement has practically created ways of thinking and speaking and ways of organizing which can contribute a lot to socialism. I do not want to create a false idealization of the women's movement as some kind of idealized alternative. For example, how do we think about ourselves in relation to the past. Within the Trotskyist groups there is an implicit view of history as kind of ascension towards 1917 and the Bolshevik moment. I think this is most marked amongst Trotskyists, because within the Communist Party, until very recently, the history of the socialist movement has been an embarrassment, and the CP has not really explored history; because of the grip of Stalinism the past is too gruesome. I think it is not very surprising, given the origins of Trotskyism, that it should be important to Trotskyism to patrol the entrances to the past. They were combatting the ways Stalinism really distorted that past. But I think there is a lack of self-consciousness among Trotskyists about the particular ways certain types of questions determine what kind of answers you get about the past. The question Trotskyists usually bring up about the past is, who was successful in taking power? You therefore come up with the answer: The Bolsheviks were successful in taking power.

I think that the socialist feminists are asking questions which begin to cut through this approach. It's not that socialist feminists don't think that taking power is important — many socialist feminists do — but there are many other issues that have to be dealt with along the way, like: what kind of sexual division of labour existed; how have socialist groups seen these divisions of labour. We need to inquire, what were socialists' attitudes to masculinity and femininity, which socialist groups have seen this as an important issue; what kind of socialist movements have involved large numbers of women and children and how did they do this.

It is not a question of coming up with complete models and alternatives. In fact, I think this is one of the problems of the anarchist and libertarian alternatives. In response to the Bolsheviks, they present another complete model — council communism or anarchism from Spain, Kronstadt, or whatever — and they are therefore preoccupied with how power is contaminated at certain moments. Socialist feminists are not just looking at the moments but are taking the moments as part of the long process in which everyday struggle is really crucial.

Bound up with this approach of left groups to history there is a kind of slide rule — particularly amongst Trotskyists — in which political education amounts to learning rules about how to organize. There are certain 'rules' and a particular language that you learn. The naming carries a kind of control, and then you don't have to think about them. If you have a name for somebody, you can dismiss them. This is usually notoriously connected to Stalinists in the 1930s, particularly their branding people as social fascists. But I think that Trotskyists have their own names. If somebody talks about the question of leadership, for instance, that immediately means anarchism, and you can't possibly learn from anarchists; so thought stops. Also, ideas are tarnished by association; if somebody has said something Bernstein used to say, well that means thought stops again, since Bernstein cannot possibly have said anything anybody can learn from.

The power in these names holds a fascination. All those kinds of words — centrism, voluntarism — you always have to look behind them, because they do not mean what they appear to mean. People who have come to the left have to learn that kind of jargon. It is not only extremely offputting. It distances and protects. It is never a language in which the person speaking is involved themselves.

There are not only arguments about how we think and speak but about how we act prevailing on the left. I do not have the time to go into these. I am just going to outline them. One is the



idea that there are levels of activity, some of which are more important than others. I think that the women's movement has really attacked those kinds of levels as universal rules because the stress on the levels of economic and political exclude women.

Second, the idea that we need change now. I think there is a lot of confusion about this, because as soon as you say we need change now, it is customary for Marxists, and particularly for Leninists, to attack that, because people say you cannot have change now because the revolutionary organization is not in a position to carry an alternative. Well, I think the important distinction to be made is that we cannot carry the whole future. We do not know what the socialist future is going to be. But what we can carry is alternative ways in which it is possible for us to act now. The women's liberation movement insists on change now, partly because of the material situation of women demands this.

Third, the idea that the revolutionary party knows better, which makes the issue of the party versus autonomous movements so stormy. Now I know that the official thing to say is that the revolutionary party always learns from outside, but secretly I do feel that most people in revolutionary groups feel that they do know better because they would not be there if they did not know better. Even when you learn from outside you can end up active as if you have the leasehold on autonomous movements.

Fourth, bound up with this assumption of the Leninist left, is the notion of training militants in the correct ideas who can then insert, infect these ideas in agitation. This reduces consciousness to knowledge. It follows that you train people to be a certain type of leader. I think that the women's movement has really challenged these views of consciousness and leadership. I am not setting up a polarization. I am not saying people do not lead at all. I do think people lead. But in the women's movement the way in which women lead is so dispersed. For example, it is inconceivable that the capacity to lead could be seen as somebody who says something coherent about the revolutionary party or even acts as a shop steward. The area of experience in everyday life raised by feminist politics is so much wider. People who take action in their own lives with fantastic courage in contesting the personal power relations in the family are leading. The person who can speak or write like me putting these things together may be momentarily 'leading' in one sense. I can do it because I have had that sort of experience over fifteen years and been forced to think in this way. But in another sense I should be seen as a particularly backward person. For after ten years of feminism, I still cannot mend a fuse. When you extend your ideas of politics into everyday life, new areas of leadership and initiative are evident. You are talking about the courage, resolution, needed for transforming the situation in which you have been put. These are so varied and complex that they involve a quite different area of consciousness which is not included in the concept of training.

Finally, this is not my idea, but comes more from the situation of men. It is something somebody said who is in a men's group — you are not just talking about the personal being political, but are also insisting that the existing areas of political activity are also personal, and that the relationships with the revolutionary organization are not removed from personal relations. I think that even organizations which claim that they have no personal vision as to what it is to be a socialist do have an implicit personal vision, which is a lonely militant without any domestic ties who is hard, erect, self-contained, controlled, and carries the burden of a higher consciousness. You may say that is a caricature, but by the way you are laughing, you recognize something. This is a very limited and unattractive vision and has been challenged by the practice of the women's movement. I think we have to talk about the personal ways in which people are in fact making assumptions about what it is to be a socialist, even while they deny these are important. In bringing these out into the open and beginning to imagine alternatives we can see how sexual politics raises more than sex-gender relationships but touches all aspects of power relationships in our society and the possibility of imagining how we might relate differently in a socialist world.

## Beatrix Campbell (CP)

What I want to do is go through three things: One is to look at the impact of women's politics, in the form of the women's liberation movement (wlm). Secondly, to look at some of the typical approaches of the left; and thirdly, to analyse some of the discussion of the relationship between autonomous movements and the party.

I think the first important thing, which is self-evident but has to be re-said again and again, is that the wlm is based on the sexual contradiction that exists in both private life and the public spheres of economics and politics. And what the wlm has done is to assert that there is a reciprocal relationship between patriarchal relations and capitalist relations of dominance and that these systems are neither reducible to each other nor autonomous of each other. Now I would argue that socialist feminism is, in fact, the mainstream of the wlm. Despite all the vicissitudes of its internal movement, socialist feminism is actually the spine of women's liberation. It has unearthed the sexual contradiction and reasserted it into socialist politics, arguing that the sexual contradiction is structured by the capitalist formation and also structures it.

Now, in that respect socialist feminism represents a drastic break with the antecedents of feminism. It is also a drastic break with radical feminism, which resorts to biological reductionism in its assertion of the absolute primacy of the sexual contradiction, and with socialism, which asserts that the sole determinant is class. (An example of this can be found in a whole host of socialist literature that reduces women's oppression and the family to class determination, which means that in the end sex oppression is inexplicable analytically.)

This socialist feminist mainstream has been concerned to locate and explore all the dimensions of the marriage — I suppose you might call it the historic compromise — between patriarchal and capitalist relations. Its innovation in contemporary politics has been to assert the autonomy of women as a political group; in practice, this assertion of autonomy has faced socialism with something new, since it has only had to cope with the autonomy of economic forms of struggle, which are subordinate to the political party and are always orchestrated by it. The form of autonomy upheld by the wlm is very different, and I will discuss it in a bit.

A classic tenet of Marxism is that the mode of production is a system involving the production of things and of social relations, ideas and culture that make up the capitalist social formation, which continually recreates and reconstitutes itself. Now, that process involves not just economic appropriation but also the appropriation of the subjectivity of the masses, the denial of the historic potential of the masses. That potential is, of course, created by capitalism's very socialization of production. Now, women's liberation has taken that core of Marxism and insisted on a practice that gives it expression.

These things have introduced politics of a new type, not simply an increment in socialist politics, but politics of a radically new type. And these politics insists first of all that there is a contradiction within the working class, and secondly that political movements are not simply agents, but also subjects. It proposes forms of mass participation as opposed to a vanguard elite separated from the masses of the people, and it proposes autonomy in the form of separation from men, whereas in the past vanguard parties have always insisted that women follow men, and have denied the need for political programmes specific to women — which surely follows from apprehension of a gender contradiction within the working class. An anecdotal example: the Communist League in which Marx and Engels were involved. On Saturday evenings the Communist League used to gather to talk about politics, and a book by Franz Mehring reveals: 'after that, the gathering became a social one, and women were present'. Meaning that women were absent from the politics.

In a sense, socialist politics has changed in that women are now present, but it's an open question whether women's politics is present in socialist politics. Part of the process of autonomy is to achieve a necessary distance that enables the production of awareness, of otherness, in men and women and facilitates the organization of rebellion against ways of being in



relation to the other. In the case of women, ways of being, the whole process of feminization, and our relation to men. It is thus anti-economistic because what it is criticizing is the assumption that the capitalist social formation somehow derives automatically and spontaneously from the labour process. What women's liberation, along with other sections of left politics today, is asserting is that in fact there is a complex system of producing and reconstituting capitalist social relations and that we have to intervene in those systems.

Now, one of the things implied by this is a massive expansion of the spectrum of politics. Not simply an increment, but a qualitative expansion, in other words a transformation of the nature and levels of intervention of socialist politics. Now, in the face of these innovations, what has been the response of socialism?

I think it could be said that whatever the differences between Trotskyism, Leninism, and Stalinism, there is a remarkable symmetry among these three tendencies of revolutionary politics as far as women are concerned. I'd like to go through some key areas where the women's movement differentiates itself from the left and criticizes the left, raising points that the left is going to have to come to terms with.

First is the issue of the family. Socialists tend to discuss the family either as institutionalized drudgery or simply as an institution that is functional for capital. Of course, this is largely derived from classical Marxism, which assumed that the entry (or re-entry) of women into social production would dissolve women's inequality, and effect women's liberation. Socialists have accepted that it is not as simple as that. The trouble is that talking about the family as institutionalized drudgery, or as an institution without internal contradictions, means that you cannot inquire into the social relationship between men and women. All sorts of glib assumptions have been made about what sort of social provisions are required in order to relieve women of their responsibilities within the family. It is clear from the evidence of the so-called socialist societies that women's burden may be relieved, but in relation to men it is not what's resolved. The sexual contradiction remains, and more it can't be explained away by easy accusations of Stalinism. This approach also leaves no room for an analysis of the way the relationship between men and women in the family is mirrored throughout the social formation — in the economy, in politics, in culture. That form of analysis of the family also detaches the family from the power structure of society in general and very often involves talking about women's oppression as rooted in the family in such a way that women are detached from the operational power structures of society, and often reduces it to a superstructural problem. Another consequence of this attitude is that it encourages a denial of the specificity of struggles within the family itself and the effect of struggles within the family and the sexual division of labour. An example of this was an article in one issue of *Socialist Challenge* — criticizing as it happens, feminists within the CP — which tended, in my view, to absorb the family into class, which again reduced the particularities of women's oppression to class oppression and to resolve it within class terms. This article said that the wlm should direct its action to making the labour movement fight for women. Now in one sense that is obviously correct. But in another sense it dissolves the autonomous function of the wlm and specific struggles around the sexual division of labour within the family, culture, and the economy. It left the wlm with the supplementary task of prodding the labour movement to do the real work.

Now as it happens the SWP goes even further in this, and I assume that the recent article in *Socialist Review* is symptomatic of their position. Presumably, you would not have something in *Socialist Review* that contravened the party position. In effect, this article specifically rejects struggles within those domains, because it argues that women's liberation ends up struggling amongst the weak and pathetic rather than those who are strong, who have got muscle, who have social effect, because they are in trade unions. Now, effectively what that does is to dismiss those domains of struggle that the wlm has insisted are critical to the social formation. It drags all our experience back into reductionism:

economistic struggle within the sphere of wage labour.

What is important about these kind of positions is that they have *no way* of theorizing either women's relationship to class or the reciprocal relationship between patriarchal and capitalist contradictions and relations. The SWP's only strategy is to orientate the women's struggle to the labour movement, which expresses their variant rank and filism as a strategy. Of course, it's not a strategy but simply a tactical approach and is based purely and simply on the kinds of tactics revolutionaries have historically adopted: to orchestrate the 'autonomous' trade unions, which are always subordinate to the party in reality.

One of the other things I would like to pick up on in the SWP article is that this form of analysis constantly reduces women to some kind of lesser version of men. The SWP article still referred to women as *inferior*. I'd like to know whether the SWP tells its *black* comrades that they are *inferior*. There is a difference between being oppressed and being inferior. One of the imperatives of the sort of political organization fostered by the wlm is that it dismisses that kind of association which still assumes that the model of militant humanity is male. In other words, the approach to the autonomous wlm is essentially moralistic and pragmatic. We can have our autonomous wlm to improve the calibre of women, to hold remedial classes for the backward; but what this does not do is identify what the specific practical, ongoing, continual, and necessary autonomy of the wlm is. It still assumes that political brawn is where it's really at, and that we need to direct our energy to capturing political brawn within the labour movement.

Now I want to briefly discuss the party and its relationship to autonomous movements. The first thing that should be said about the Communist Parties is that over the past twenty years they have had to confront their own history — to have a dialogue with their own history in a sense — which has involved a critical reassessment of the relationship between the party and popular movements, and, for example, more or less successful attempts to assimilate the effects of women's liberation.

The distinction between the CP and the Trotskyist movement today is that CPs are committed both to a mass party and mass politics. In that sense they are truly becoming non-Leninist, because they are rejecting a model of revolutionary practice that places revolutionary initiative within the care of a minority, who are agents of revolutionary innovation. The CPs have not got it right yet, but at least they are preoccupied with the problem of how to democratize the cause of revolutionary struggle and how, in a sense, to deprivilege the CPs precisely by engaging *en masse* and envisaging a mass party as against an elite corps. That is an important distinction between current communism and Trotskyism, because Trotskyism is still reclaiming that aspect of Leninism which conceives of the party as a minority elite vanguard. This derives from Lenin's formulations, when there were primitive manifestly authoritarian, non-representative states and when the working-class was *absent* from politics. The situation now is very different. The working class is *present* in politics on a mass scale and that, in the end, is what all revolutionaries have to come to terms with; that really questions your relationship to the mass, because you are beginning to conceive of a relationship which is no longer about being in a leadership relation to the mass. It is here that the whole question about the relationship between autonomy and the party really becomes critical.

What the theory of autonomy proposes is that autonomous groups must determine their own subjective possibility. In other words, they must define and realize their historic promise, created by the existence of the capitalist formation. What the Leninist model proposes instead is a minority thrust that assumes the passivity of the masses. A feminist conception of autonomy actually envisages that particular social groups, through separation, define and determine their own historic role and begin to construct alliances with other special groups.

Simple and obvious as that is, it nevertheless questions our assumptions about the status of a revolutionary party — the commando group — which exists among slumbering, docile, indoctrinated masses who will need the crucial intervention of the revolutionary party at the crucial moment because, of course, as Ernest Mandel says, the working class will not know







what to do because the working class is fickle and tends to retreat into private life, which for Mandel is not a sphere of struggle.

In that sense, although I appreciate Celia's attempts to come to terms with the question of autonomy, she is wrong on one crucial point, when she says there are limits to autonomy. The function and range of autonomous movements is necessarily constrained by her model of the revolutionary party, which takes to itself the role of orchestrating what are regarded as subsidiary groups. There is no future for Marxist parties if they do not assimilate the implications of autonomy — there are no limits.

## Joan Smith (SWP/Women's Voice)

Today the typical working woman in Britain is married and has children. This is more true in Britain than in any other European country and it is a new experience for the British working class. It is impossible to think, as many socialists once did, that women are oppressed as 'housewives' and men are exploited as 'workers'. The question of the relationship between women's oppression and women's exploitation is at the heart of the argument on the relationship of women and the revolutionary party. As is the question of the nature of the revolutionary party itself.

The question of the relationship between the party and the women's movement is not a new one. Both Kollontai and Zetkin addressed it and I would wish to see Women's Voice in their tradition — developing their tradition and building a communist women's movement.

When I joined IS fifteen years ago I thought it was merely a historical accident that its leadership, like the leadership of other revolutionary organizations, was nearly entirely male and that the important work did not include specific campaigns on women's issues. I thought this would change as the student movement and the women's movement developed. But as time passed it was the women in IS/SWP who raised the specific issues of women — although no engineer had to raise the specific problems of engineering.

Some women in IS worked in the women's movement. Some in local groups, in various women's campaigns. Some produced the IS women's newsletter and some set up IS women's groups themselves. There was no common policy. It is just not true that the IS thought that the women's movement was a remedial class for backward women. One of our women members was active in setting up the first 1970 women's liberation conference and many of us arrived under our own steam. There was simply no common policy.

Eventually the newsletter turned into Women's Voice, first as a magazine, then as a newspaper, and then as a magazine again. Finally we discovered that it was actually possible to use the WV paper to organize for the National Abortion Campaign (NAC). We did factory gate meetings and street meetings and took the paper to our workplaces and used it to explain the issues. This made us realize how little we had used it before and what a vast potential there was for organizing women which was still untapped five years after the first Women's Liberation Conference. Why didn't we bump into other women from the movement when we were selling outside factories and workplaces and getting signatures for the NAC petition? What was different about our strategy for building a women's movement?

What happened then was that some WV groups were set up and we began to develop an organization which included both IS/SWP women and non-IS/SWP women around the politics of Women's Voice. As the organization of different groups developed we had to look at the relationship between WV organization and the SWP. This obviously raised certain fundamental questions — why didn't a revolutionary party automatically carry the women's question? Was a new organizational form necessary?

Last June it was decided that WV should be independent of the SWP organizationally. But this in no way means that it is simply part of the 'autonomous' women's movement that Celia spoke of (and Beatrix and Sheila). Some of us would want to

build a women's organization that is an independent socialist, working class, women's organization. Others still want to retain Women's Voice as the women's paper of the SWP. Others are for building a broader independent organization.

The debate about the nature of Women's Voice is still going on amongst us but I amongst others would argue strongly for the building of a revolutionary feminist organization. This is a new form of organization — although it is in the tradition of Kollontai and Zetkin — and there are two major arguments which underlie it: (a) the relationship of exploitation and oppression, (b) the theory of the revolutionary party.

Firstly, I wouldn't disagree with anything Celia said about the centrality of the state to women's oppression and of the capitalist mode of production to women's exploitation. But what must also be stressed is that women's oppression and women's exploitation are totally interlocked. Women are not oppressed at home by the family and the state, and then exploited at work as workers. On the contrary, their *pattern* of exploitation is determined by their oppression. One-third of women workers are part-time workers; the majority of women workers work not in manufacturing but in the public sector or inservices; full time women workers earn two-thirds of the male wage.

Similarly, although all women do stand in a particular relationship to the state — abortion is the only medical operation which has a law attached to it — that doesn't mean that the oppression of a ruling-class woman is equal to the oppression of a working-class woman. The ruling-class woman does not have to have a back-street abortion, nor is she harassed by the welfare laws of the Social Security. Women are not outside the class system; ruling-class women participate in the exploitation of working-class women.

It is therefore impossible to separate women's oppression from women's exploitation in the way that Celia does with her argument that the revolutionary party combats the exploitation of the entire class and the women's movement combats the oppression of women. There must be an organizational form which reflects the fact that women's oppression and exploitation cannot be separated nor reduced to each other.

Similarly, Bea's analysis, which completely separates the oppression of women from any analysis of exploitation, does not hold. 'Patriarchy' cannot be separated from capitalism. Women's oppression is material — it has to be located in the real relationship of women to a capitalist family and a capitalist state. Bea argues for an 'autonomous' women's movement on the one hand, and a reformist working-class movement on the other, but these two separated 'practices' could not solve the problems of women.

It is not a question of patriarchy here and capitalism there. For us (as for Marx) the family system is dominated by the capitalist mode of production. I would agree that the family is not an optional extra for capitalism. There is no possibility of a capitalism without some form of nucleated family — whether individuals grouped in private communes, 'normal' families, or single parent families — who reproduce privately the next generation of free wage-labourers. But equally women are also free wage-labourers themselves. They are doubly determined by both their class and their role as women.

An 'autonomous' women's movement for *all* women ignores the class divisions amongst women and the necessity for building a socialist women's organization. It assumes that oppression can be dealt with over here (in the women's movement) and exploitation over there (in the broad mass movement, trade unions, communist party, etc). Similarly, the argument put by Celia that revolutionary women members of a revolutionary party should work within the women's movement, prove themselves as the best leaders and recruit other women to the party, also *assumes* that we can separate our struggles against oppression and our struggles against oppression in real life. It assumes that one big women's movement can be built on women's oppression (i.e. that class divisions do not exist amongst that movement) and that it is merely the task of the revolutionary party to guide the strategy.

The question for us is whether the struggle against women's oppression can be won through working in the autonomous



movement, or through working in the autonomous movement or through working in the autonomous movement and in the revolutionary party. Or is there a *third* way — of building a socialist women's movement which is independent of men but not of revolutionary socialism — sister organisation of a revolutionary party. Here we come to the question of the revolutionary party.

I disagree with most of the statements that have been made here about Leninist theory of the party. Lenin's theory was not a 'big bang' theory: i.e. we need a party to make the insurrection. That was part of his theory but it derived from a much wider understanding of the tasks of a revolutionary party given the tasks of the proletarian revolution and the problems of creating a revolutionary class consciousness.

Lenin's argument on the tasks of the revolutionary party was twofold. On the one hand it had to mediate all the differences between sections of the working class — whether the difference between factory worker and artisan, male and female workers, black and white workers, advanced centres of struggle and backward areas etc. etc. On the other hand it also had to represent to the working class the tasks of the working class revolution which was the liberation of *all* the oppressed and all the exploited. That is why Lenin argued that a revolutionary had to be a Tribune of the people taking up every 'tiny' issue of oppression and exploitation. In particular in Russia the Russian proletariat must accept the rights of self determination by the national minorities and they must accept their hegemonic rule vis-à-vis the peasantry.

Gramsci accepted Lenin's theory and developed it. In working class 'commonsense' consciousness, he argued, there are many bits and pieces of ideas. There are bits of old proverbs, there are bits of racist history, there are bits of the new future, etc. The task of the revolutionary party is to organise and develop a consistent revolutionary position — to eradicate all traces of racism in consciousness for example, or all traces of anti-woman sentiment. In other words, it is an attempt in a sea of counter-vailing reactionary ideologies, to forge an organisational form in which revolutionary consciousness can develop and which can intervene in working-class struggles.

I accept all this theory. My problem is that it does not take account of oppression within the working class. Workers do not oppress black workers, or female workers. They might be racist or sexist but they are not the source of oppression. But the relationship of blacks and women to the capitalist mode of production and the capitalist state is a different one as well as being the same one. Therefore we need blacks and women in the revolutionary party, but we also need independent socialist organization of blacks and women.

Just as Trotsky developed an understanding of the oppression of blacks in the USA and tried (unsuccessfully) to develop a consequent theory of black organization, so some of us tried to grasp the oppression of women and develop a consequent theory of communist women's organization. The way to transform a revolutionary party is not merely to have a women's caucus inside the party and then to operate within the women's movement outside and separately. The way to transform it is to lock into the revolutionary party another organizational form — independent organization of blacks, or independent organization of women — which overlaps with the party.

I would argue such organizations create the possibility of a genuine mediation of all sections of the working-class within the revolutionary party. The hegemonic task of any revolutionary party in Britain is not just support for national liberation struggles elsewhere but is also support for those sectors of the

class whose entire pattern of exploitation is determined by their oppression, and whose oppression is also determined by the entire system of capitalism organization. Such struggles cannot be separated from the working-class party but they cannot be totally subsumed under it.

For the revolutionary party the existence of an independent 'sister' organization of revolutionary women is vital. Such an organization can intervene in the struggles of the oppressed on the basis of revolutionary politics. At the same time a large number of the members of these organizations will be members of the party — not 'token' women but women who are leading other women.

But equally, for an independent organization of women it is vital that a revolutionary party exists. It is only in a revolutionary party that you can demand that all men take around the National Abortion petition and get signatures in their factory. Bea has argued that the key difference is between a 'broad' mass movement (around the CP) and a tiny and narrow revolutionary party. That isn't the difference. The essential difference is between an unprincipled disunited party and a principled disciplined party. She is a member of an organization (CP) whose male members in my union speak against 'a woman's right to choose' and vote us down. We wouldn't allow that.

We support the women's movement, and the demands of the women's movement. We also support the black movement and the demands of the black movement. But that can't blind us to the fact that there are strategic divisions within those movements based on class divisions and the acceptance of ruling-class ideas. Look what happened to Huey Newton of the Black Panthers — how he was incorporated into the state. Look what happened to the women leaders in America who were incorporated into the capitalist system. There is always the possibility of the incorporation of 'movement' leaders. On the other hand, there are George Jacksons. We must build a consistent independent organization that is revolutionary feminist and that is a sister organization of a revolutionary party.

We now have WV groups that have women members who are not in the SWP. We want to set up WV groups up and down the country, using the magazine, which now has a circulation of about 8,000. If we start off building in and around hospitals, at the workplaces, in the streets and we manage to develop the nucleus of a women's organization with socialist politics then we will have achieved something. Celia has raised the question — how do you turn non-socialist women away? But the same question is true of any revolutionary organization. People come to you because they agree with what you write (we have Women's Voice) and they agree with what you do (we have the groups) and then you talk to each other. Nobody joins the SWP on a 'full programme' — we talk to people about immigration controls, workers power, etc. Similarly in Women's Voice we have some points on the back of the card. Even if women don't want to join WV they can still come to meetings and take part in those meetings.

The mass of women in this country are, of course, not revolutionaries. But we think we can actually create a new form of organization which can lock into the struggles of those women — which can generalize a dispute like the Trico Equal Pay dispute. The way forward in women's struggles is to avoid the split between the autonomous women's movement and the revolutionary party and find a third way — an organizationally independent organization of women which is sister to a revolutionary party. The only way to find out whether this is a genuine third way is to put it to the test, and to build such an organization.



## The Bolsheviks and freedom of the press

The victory of the October Revolution opened the way for a new type of debate in the workers' movement on freedom of the press. The existence of a 'Commune-type' state, directed and controlled by the mass of the producers, meant that for the first time in history there was an alternative to the traditional counterposition: 'either private ownership of the press or a state monopoly of information'.

Between February and October 1917, Lenin drafted two articles in which he elaborated the major elements of Bolshevik policy on the press. The first article, 'How to Fight Counter-Revolution', appeared immediately before the July Days; the second, 'How to Guarantee the Success of the Constituent Assembly', was written from Finland and published on the day the Bolshevik Central Committee discussed Lenin's theses on 'Marxism and Insurrection'. It is scarcely surprising that in the whirlwind of these events, few socialists had time to absorb the full import of Lenin's writings and of the radical solution he had found to the problem of eliminating private ownership whilst avoiding bureaucratic domination.

In a situation of indescribable chaos and crisis, the Military Revolutionary Committee decided in the first days of Bolshevik government to suppress Milyukov's paper *Ryech'* for inciting armed resistance to soviet power. A violent reaction ensued to this infringement of 'free speech' — not least from Milyukov, whose paper immediately reappeared under another name. Thus on 27 October the Council of People's Commissars issued a decree on the press (a document much misunderstood in the English-speaking world due to the heavily distorted and edited translation of it which appeared in Kerensky's *The Russian Provisional Government*).

Questions of press freedom immediately became interwoven with the other crucial issues of the day: the convening of the Constituent Assembly and the formation of a coalition government. At the meeting of the Central Executive Committee of 4 November the suppression of 'press freedom' became the focus for all the debates between the Bolsheviks and their opponents. We are lucky to have a wonderful description of this debate by John Reed, which we reproduce here together with the speeches actually made by the Bolshevik leaders in the debate.

Following the debate, the Bolshevik resolution was easily passed. (Liebman follows Broué in mistaking the number who voted against the resolution and then attempting to use this to reveal supposed deep divisions within the Bolshevik party, but he is simply mistaken as to the voting figures — see *Leninism under Lenin*, pp. 259-261.) In the following days the Bolsheviks supplemented this resolution with a Decree on Advertising; yet still the working class was suspicious of any infringements of civil liberties and Trotsky had to address the Grenadier Guards on 27 November to reiterate the Bolsheviks' position on press freedom. Here we reprint for the first time all the major

documents of the debate — the Bolshevik resolutions, Lenin's draft resolutions, the eyewitness account by John Reed, the judgement of Victor Serge, and the speeches of Lenin and Trotsky. Trotsky's speeches appear in English for the first time; they are taken from 'October to Brest', the second part of Volume II of his *Collected Works* (Moscow 1925; translation from the Russian by Val Graham).

This debate is particularly valuable today. Not merely does it reveal how far removed the first Soviet government was from that of Stalin, but it also establishes the practical measures that a workers' government must take to deal with the inevitable resistance of the press barons whilst attempting to guarantee a real freedom of the press for the first time in history.

Moreover, the debate clarifies many popular misconceptions about the Russian revolution. It shows that the Eurocommunist counterposition of the 'primitive Russian' to the 'sophisticated capitalist' revolutionary strategy merely distorts the real nature of the Russian revolution itself. Isaac Deutscher argued many years ago (in the *New Cambridge Modern History*) that the Bolsheviks triumphed in October primarily because they were associated with the most thoroughgoing *democracy*. The discussion on press freedom certainly bears out this view and reveals that the irreconcilable conflict between bourgeois property rights and the rights of the mass of producers was not specifically Russian but expressed an inherent contradiction of proletarian revolution wherever it occurs.

Finally, the debate is valuable because it took place in the main before the realities of civil war compelled the Bolsheviks to impose restrictions on civil liberties. It is true that in 1921 Miasnikov was first silenced within and then expelled from the Bolshevik party for demanding freedom of the press. It is also true that Lenin attempted to justify this, and that the first expulsion of a prominent Bolshevik from the Russian Communist Party was used to tighten the grip of the Central Committee over local freedom of discussion. Yet historians like Schapiro and Daniels, who cry out for us to observe the relationship between press freedom and the degeneration of the Bolshevik party, would do well to study this first debate, which took place before a score of foreign armies had set foot on Soviet territory.

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*Lenin's first thoughts on the press were printed in Pravda on 17 June 1917 as part of the article 'How to Fight Counter-Revolution' (Collected Works, Vol. 25, pp. 97-98):*

*Rabochaya Gazeta* later points out that the counter-revolution's chief instrument is the press, which is fomenting anti-semitism, inciting the masses against the Jews.



That is correct. But what is the conclusion?

You are a ministerial party, gentlemen, aren't you? What have you done to curb the infamous counter-revolutionary press? Do you think you can, while calling yourselves 'revolutionary democrats', refuse to take revolutionary measures against the unbridled, blatantly counter-revolutionary press? And then why don't you start a government organ that would publish advertisements and deprive the infamous counter-revolutionary press of its chief source of income and hence of its main chance to deceive the people? What evidence is there, indeed, that thousands upon thousands of people must now be kept away from productive labour in order to publish *Novoye Vremya*, *Malenka Gazeta*, *Russkaya Volya* and other reptiles?

*Three months later he gave much more systematic consideration to the question in the article 'How to Guarantee the Success of the Constituent Assembly', published in Rabochy Put on 15 September 1917:*

The capitalists (followed either from stupidity or from inertia by many SRs and Mensheviks) call 'freedom of the press' a situation in which censorship has been abolished and all parties freely publish all kinds of papers.

In reality it is not the freedom of the press, but freedom for the rich, for the bourgeoisie, to deceive the oppressed and exploited mass of the people.

Indeed, take, say, the Petrograd and Moscow newspapers. You will see at once that it is the bourgeois papers — *Rech*, *Birzhevka*, *Novoye Vremya*, *Russkoye Slovo*, and so on and so forth (for there are a great many papers of this sort) — that have by far the largest circulation. What makes for this prevalence? Not at all the will of the majority, for the elections have shown that in both capitals the majority (a gigantic majority, too) favours the democrats, i.e. the SRs, Mensheviks, and Bolsheviks. These three parties command from three-quarters to four-fifths of the votes, while the circulation of the newspapers they publish is certainly less than a quarter, or even less than one-fifth, that of the whole bourgeois press (which, as we know and see now, supported the Kornilov affair directly and indirectly).

Why is that so?

Everyone knows very well why. Because the publication of a newspaper is a big and profitable capitalist undertaking in which the rich invest millions upon millions of rubles. 'Freedom of the press' in bourgeois society means freedom for the rich systematically, unremittingly, daily, in millions of copies, to deceive, corrupt and fool the exploited and oppressed mass of the people, the poor.

This is the simple, generally known, obvious truth which everyone sees and realizes but which 'almost everyone' 'bashfully' passes over in silence, timidly evades.

The question is whether and how this crying evil can be fought.

First of all, there is a very simple, good and lawful means which I pointed out in *Pravda* long ago, which it is particularly opportune to recall now, before 12 September [the date on which the Democratic Conference was to meet], and which workers should always bear in mind, for they will hardly be able to do without it when they have won political power.

That means a state monopoly on private press advertising.

Look at *Russkoye Slovo*, *Novoye Vremya*, *Birzhevka*, *Rech*, etc. — you will see a multitude of private advertisements, which yield a tremendous income to their capitalist publishers. This is how bourgeois publishers hold sway, how they get rich, and how they deal in poison for the people all over the world.

In Europe there are newspapers which have a circulation as large as one-third the number of inhabitants of the town (for instance, 12,000 copies in a town with a population of 40,000) and are delivered free to every home, and yet yield their owners a sizeable income. These papers live by advertisements paid by private people, while the free delivery of the paper to every home ensures the best circulation of the advertisements.

Then why cannot democrats who call themselves revolutionary carry out a measure like declaring private press

advertising a state monopoly, or banning advertisements anywhere *outside* the newspapers published by the Soviets in the provincial towns and cities and by the *Central Soviet* in Petrograd for the whole of Russia? Why must 'revolutionary' democrats tolerate such a thing as enrichment, through private advertising, of rich men, Kornilov backers, and spreaders of lies and slander against the Soviets?

Such a measure would be absolutely just. It would greatly benefit those who published private advertisements and the whole people, particularly the most oppressed and ignorant class, the peasants, who would be able to have *Soviet* papers, with supplements for the peasants, at a very low price or even free of charge.

Why not do that? Only because private property and hereditary rights (to profits from advertising) are sacred to the capitalist gentlemen. But how can anyone calling himself a revolutionary democrat in the twentieth century, in the second Russian revolution, recognize such rights as 'sacred'?

Some may say it would mean infringing on freedom of the press.

That is not true. It would mean extending and restoring freedom of the press, for freedom of the press means that all opinions of *all* citizens may be freely published.

What do we have now? Now, the rich alone have this monopoly, and also the big parties. Yet if large *Soviet* newspapers were to be published, with all advertisements, it would be perfectly feasible to guarantee the expression of their opinion to a much greater number of citizens — say, to every group having collected a certain number of signatures. Freedom of the press would *in practice* become much more democratic, would be incomparably more complete as a result.

But some may ask: where would we get printing presses and newsprint?

There we have it!!! The issue is not 'freedom of the press' but the exploiters' sacrosanct ownership of the printing presses and stocks of newsprint they have seized!

Just why should we workers and peasants recognise that sacred right? How is that 'right' to publish false information better than the 'right' to own serfs?

Why is that in war-time all sorts of requisitioning — of houses, flats, vehicles, horses, grain and metals — are allowed and practised everywhere, while the requisitioning of printing presses and newsprint is impermissible?

The workers and peasants may in fact be deceived for a while, if such measures are made out to be unjust or hard to realize, but the truth will win through in the end.

State power in the shape of the Soviets takes *all* the printing presses and *all* the newsprint and distributes them *equitably*: the state should come first — in the interests of the majority of the people, the majority of the poor, particularly the majority of the peasants, who for centuries have been tormented, crushed and stultified by the landowners and capitalists.

The big parties should come second — say those who have polled one or two hundred thousand votes in both capitals.

The smaller parties should come third, and then any group of citizens which has a certain number of members or has collected a certain number of signatures.

This is the distribution of newsprint and printing presses that would be just and, with the Soviets in power, could be effected easily enough.

*Then came the October Revolution. Victor Serge describes the actual course of events:*

The proletarian dictatorship hesitated a long time before suppressing the enemy press. Immediately after the insurrection, the only bourgeois papers to be suppressed were those openly advocating armed resistance to 'the Bolshevik usurper', 'bloodthirsty anarchy' and 'the *coup d'état* of the Kaiser's agents'. It was only in July 1918 that the last organs of the bourgeoisie and petty-bourgeoisie were closed down. The legal press of the Mensheviks only disappeared in 1919; the press of the anarchists hostile to the regime, and the Maximalists, appeared down to 1921; that of the Left Social Revolutionaries, later still.



*Thus the press of the Mensheviks did not disappear until terror and assassination had combined with foreign invasion to threaten the very existence of soviet power. However, the suppression of Milyukov's Rech the day after the insurrection had already raised the spectre of censorship. Hence the carefully worded 'Decree on the Press' issued by the Council of People's Commissars on 27 October:*

In the trying critical period of the revolution and the days immediately following it, the Provisional Revolutionary Government was compelled to take a number of measures against the counter-revolutionary press of different shades.

Immediately outcries were heard from all sides that the new, socialist power had violated a fundamental principle of its programme by encroaching on the freedom of the press.

The workers' and peasants' Government calls the attention of the population to the fact that what this liberal facade actually conceals is freedom for the propertied classes, having taken hold of the lion's share of the entire press, to poison the minds and obscure the consciousness of the masses unhindered.

Everyone knows that the bourgeois press is one of the most powerful weapons of the bourgeoisie. Especially at the crucial moment when the new power, the power of workers and peasants, is only affirming itself, it was impossible to leave this weapon wholly in the hands of the enemy, for in such moments it is no less dangerous than bombs and machine guns. That is why temporary extraordinary measures were taken to stem the torrent of filth and slander in which the yellow and green press would be only too glad to drown the recent victory of the people.

As soon as the new order becomes consolidated, all administrative pressure on the press will be terminated and it will be granted complete freedom within the bounds of legal responsibility, in keeping with a law that will be broadest and most progressive in this respect.

However, being aware that a restriction of the press, even at critical moments, is permissible only within limits of what is absolutely necessary, the Council of People's Commissars resolves:

1. Only those publications can be suppressed which (i) call for open resistance or insubordination to the Workers' and Peasants' Government; (ii) sow sedition through demonstrably slanderous distortion of facts; (iii) instigate actions of an obviously criminal, i.e. criminally punishable, nature.
2. Publications can be proscribed, temporarily or permanently, only by decision of the Council of People's Commissars.
3. The present ordinance is of a temporary nature and will be repealed by a special decree as soon as normal conditions of social life set in.

*For the meeting of the Central Executive Committee of 4 November, Lenin drafted a resolution on press freedom, which he then withdrew in favour of Trotsky's resolution (Collected Works, Vol. 26, p. 283):*

For the bourgeoisie, freedom of the press meant freedom for the rich to publish and for the capitalists to control the newspapers, a practice which in all countries, including even the freest, produced a corrupt press.

For the workers' and peasants' government, freedom of the press means liberation of the press from capitalist oppression, and public ownership of paper mills and printing presses; equal right for public groups of a certain size (say, numbering 10,000) to a fair share of newsprint stocks and a corresponding quantity of printers' labour.

As a first step towards this goal, which is bound up with the working people's liberation from capitalist oppression, the Provisional Workers' and Peasants' Government has appointed a Commission of Inquiry to look into the ties between capital and periodicals, the sources of their funds and revenues, the list of their donors, covers for their deficits, and every other aspect of the newspaper business in general. Concealment of books, accounts, or any other documents from the Commission of Inquiry, or the giving of any evidence known to be false, shall be punishable by a revolutionary court.

All newspaper owners, shareholders, and all members of their staffs shall be under obligation to immediately submit written reports and information on the said questions to the Commission of Inquiry probing ties between capital and the press, and its dependence on capital, at Smolny Institute, Petrograd.

The Commission shall have the power to co-opt members, call experts, subpoena witnesses, order the presentation of all accounts, etc.

*John Reed describes the scene when the CEC (Tsay-ee-Kah) met:*

At Smolny itself, in the ranks of the Bolshevik party, a formidable opposition to Lenin's policy was growing. On the night of 4 November, the great hall was packed and ominous for the meeting of the *Tsay-ee-kah*.

Larin, Bolshevik, declared that the moment of elections to the Constituent Assembly approached, and it was time to do away with 'political terrorism'.

'The measures taken against the freedom of the press should be modified. They had their reason during the struggle, but now they have no further excuse. The press should be free, except for appeals to riot and insurrection.'

In a storm of hisses and hoots from his own party, Larin offered the following resolution:

'The decree of the Council of People's Commissars concerning the press is herewith repealed. Measures of political repression can only be employed subject to decision of a special tribunal, elected by the *Tsay-ee-kah*, proportionately to the strength of the different parties represented; and this tribunal shall have the right also to reconsider measures of repression already taken.'

This was met by a thunder of applause, not only from the Left Socialist Revolutionaries, but also from a part of the Bolsheviks.

Avanessov, for the Leninites, hastily proposed that the question of the press be postponed until after some compromise between the Socialist parties had been reached. Overwhelmingly voted down.

'The revolution which is now being accomplished', went on Avanessov, 'has not hesitated to attack private property; and it is as private property that we must examine the question of the press...'

Thereupon he read the official Bolshevik resolution, drafted by Trotsky:

'The suppression of the bourgeois press was dictated not only by purely military needs in the course of the insurrection, and for the checking of counter-revolutionary action, but it is also necessary as a measure of transition toward the establishment of a new regime with regard to the press — a regime under which the capitalist owners of printing presses and of paper cannot be the all-powerful and exclusive manufacturers of opinion.

'We must further proceed to the confiscation of private printing plants and supplies of paper, which should become the property of the Soviets, both in the capital and in the provinces, so that the political parties and groups can make use of the facilities of printing in proportion to the actual strength of the ideas they represent — in other words, proportionally to the number of their constituents.

'The re-establishment of the so-called "freedom of the press", the simple return of the printing presses and paper to the capitalists — poisoners of the minds of the people — this would be an inadmissible surrender to the will of capital; a giving up of one of the most important conquests of the revolution; in other words, it would be a measure of unquestionably counter-revolutionary character.

'Proceeding from the above, the *Tsay-ee-kah* categorically rejects all propositions aiming at the re-establishment of the old regime in the domain of the press, and unequivocally supports the point of view of the Council of People's Commissars on this question against pretensions and ultimatums dictated by petty-bourgeois prejudices, or by evident surrender to the interests of the counter-revolutionary bourgeoisie.'



The reading of this resolution was interrupted by ironical shouts from the Left Socialist Revolutionaries, and bursts of indignation from the insurgent Bolsheviks. Karelín was on his feet protesting. "Three weeks ago the Bolsheviks were the most ardent defenders of the freedom of the press.... The arguments in this resolution suggest singularly the point of view of the old Black Hundreds and the censors of the Tsarist regime — for they also talked of "poisoners of the mind of the people"."

*Kolagayer intervened, and then:*

Trotsky spoke at length in favour of the resolution. He distinguished between the press during the civil war, and the press after the victory. "During civil war the right to use violence belongs only to the oppressed..." (Cries of "Who's the oppressed now? Cannibal!")

"There are two related questions here: (1) repression in general, and (2) the press. The demand for an end to all repressive measures during civil war amounts to a demand that we end the civil war itself. Such a demand can come either from the enemies of the proletariat or from their lackeys. Our adversaries, who provoked the civil war, have not sued for peace and I would swear that no one here can give us any guarantees for Kornilov. In conditions of civil war the suppression of hostile newspapers is an entirely legitimate measure. Of course we must move towards a new press regime and we have every intention of doing so. In our party press, well before the insurrection, we ceased to look at freedom of the press from the point of view of the press barons. If we can use certain measures to remove various individuals, then surely we can apply such measures to the press. We must confiscate the printing plants and the paper supplies and turn them over to the people." (Heckling, "You mean to the Bolsheviks!")

"Yes, our task is to nationalize all the supplies and machinery. All the groups — all the soldiers and peasants — may requisition paper and plants. Each and every soldier, worker and peasant will understand that we have not seized power only to leave control of the press in the hands of the old rulers. We say that *Novoye Vremya*, which had no supporters in the elections, should not have a single piece of type nor a single sheet of paper, and that *Russkaya Volga*, as long as it remains a purely financial journal, has no right to exist. This isn't a permanent step, but we can't allow a return of the old capitalist order. The transfer of power to the Soviets is the decisive step from bourgeois rule to the socialist order. Why was Suvorin able to publish an ostentatious newspaper? Because he had the money. Can we allow the Suvorins to peddle their poison during the elections to the Constituent Assembly? Is it conceivable that we should allow financial journals to exist which serve the banks and not the people? All the printing plants must be put into the hands of the Soviet power." (Cries, "Confiscate the printing shop of *Pravda!*")

"You say that we demanded freedom of the press for *Pravda*. But then we were in conditions where we had to apply the demands of the minimum programme — now we demand the maximum! I have no doubt that the representatives of the workers and of the peasants are with me!" (Applause)

"The soldiers will return to their units. The peasants will return to their villages. And they will report that there are two points of view — either freedom of the press for bourgeois newspapers, or the requisitioning of paper and plants and their transfer into the hands of the workers and peasants."

Karelín declared the *Tsay-ee-kah* had no right to pass upon this important question, which should be left to a special committee. Again, passionately, he demanded that the press be free... "Comrade Trotsky says that we argue from the viewpoint of capital. I say that anyone who poses the question thus argues from the point of view of his own personal power."

Then Lenin, calm, unemotional, his forehead wrinkled, as he spoke slowly, choosing his words; each sentence falling like a hammer-blow.

"Comrade Karelín assured us that the way he was talking led to socialism, but I am afraid this would be marching to socialism backwards. Trotsky was right: the officer cadets staged their uprising, and war was declared in Petrograd and

Moscow for freedom of the press. This time the Socialist-Revolutionaries did not act at all like socialists or revolutionaries. This week all the telegraph offices were in Kerensky's hands. The *Vikzhel* was on their side. But they had no troops. It turned out that the army was on our side. The civil war was started by a handful of men. It is not over. Kaledin's troops are approaching Petrograd. We do not want a civil war. Our troops have shown great restraint. They held their fire, and it all began when three of our men were killed. Krasnov was given soft treatment. He was only placed under house arrest. We are against civil war. But if it nevertheless goes on what are we to do? Trotsky was right in asking on whose behalf you spoke? We asked Krasnov whether he could sign on behalf of Kaledin that the latter would not continue the war. He naturally replied that he could not. How can we stop retaliative measures against an enemy who has not stopped his hostile operations?

"We shall negotiate when peace terms are offered to us. But so far peace is being offered to us by those on whom it does not depend. These are only fine words. After all, *Rech* is an organ of the Kaledinites. We can well allow that the Socialist-Revolutionaries are sincere, but it is, after all, a fact that Kaledin and Milyukov are behind them."

"The firmer your stand, soldiers and workers, the more we shall gain. Otherwise they will say to us: "If they've let out Milyukov, they can't be strong." Earlier on we said that if we took power, we intended to close down the bourgeois newspapers. To tolerate the existence of these papers is to cease being a socialist. Those who say: "Open the bourgeois newspapers", fail to understand that we are moving at full speed to socialism. After all, tsarist newspapers were closed down after the overthrow of tsarism. Now we have thrown off the bourgeois yoke. We did not invent the social revolution: it was proclaimed by the Congress of the Soviets — no one protested, all adopted the decree proclaiming it. The bourgeoisie proclaimed liberty, equality and fraternity. The workers say: "We want something else." We are told that we are retreating. No, comrades, it is the Socialist-Revolutionaries who are returning to Kerensky. We are told that there are new elements in our resolution. Of course there are, because we are advancing to socialism. When the Socialist-Revolutionaries made speeches in the First and the Second Duma, they were also ridiculed for saying something new."

"There should be a monopoly of private advertisements. The members of the printers' union look at them from the point of view of income. They will get it, but in another form. We cannot provide the bourgeoisie with an opportunity for slandering us. We must appoint a commission right away to probe the ties between the banks and the bourgeois newspapers. What kind of freedom do these newspapers want? Isn't it freedom to buy rolls of newsprint and hire crowds of penpushers? We must escape from the freedom of a press dependent on capital. This is a matter of principle. If we are to advance to socialism we cannot allow Kaledin's bombs to be reinforced by the bombs of falsehood."

"Of course, our draft law is not perfect. But it will be applied everywhere by the Soviets in accordance with their local conditions. We are not bureaucrats and do not want to insist on the letter of the law everywhere, as was the practice in the government offices. I recall the Socialist-Revolutionaries saying that people in the countryside know so very little. They were getting their information from *Russkoye Slovo*. We should blame ourselves for leaving the newspapers in the hands of the bourgeoisie. We must go forward, to a new society, and take the same attitude to the bourgeois newspapers as we did to the ultra-reactionary papers in February and March."

Then the vote. The resolution of Larin and the Left Socialist-Revolutionaries was defeated by 31 to 22; the Lenin motion was carried by 34 to 24. Among the minority were the Bolsheviks Riazanov and Luzvsky, who declared that it was impossible for them to vote for any restriction on the freedom of the press.

Upon this the Left Socialist Revolutionaries declared they could no longer be responsible for what was being done, and withdrew from the Military Revolutionary Committee and all other positions of executive responsibility.

Five Bolsheviks — Nogin, Rykov, Miliutin, Teodorovitch



## From the War-Revolutionary Committee of the Petrograd Soviet of Workmen and Soldiers Deputies.

# To the Citizens of Russia:

**The Provisional Government is deposed. The State power has passed into the hands of the organ of the Petrograd Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies, the Military Revolutionary Committee, which stands at the head of the Petrograd proletariat and garrison.**

**The aims for which the people were fighting—immediate proposal of a democratic peace, abolition of landlord property-rights in the land, labor control over production, creation of a Soviet Government, — these aims have been achieved.**

**LONG LIVE THE REVOLUTION OF WORKMEN, SOLDIERS AND PEASANTS!**

**Military-Revolutionary Committee  
of the Petrograd Soviet of  
Workers and Soldier's Deputies.**

**NOVEMBER 7, 1917**

*[Reproduction in English of the Russian text.]*



and Shliapnikov — resigned from the Council of People's Commissars.

*Three weeks later, Trotsky appeared before the Genadler Guards to make the most eloquent of all the pleas for the Bolshevik position:*

One of the main accusations levelled against us by bourgeois spokesmen, politicians and press barons concerns our policy towards the bourgeois press. They say that we are muzzling free expression. This accusation melts the hearts of the so-called democratic intelligentsia, the shallow petty-bourgeois who are incapable of penetrating beneath the surface of events. Freedom of the press! What do the ideologues of the bourgeoisie mean by this? Exactly the same as they mean by freedom of trade. Every man who has the capital has the right because he has the means to open a factory, a shop, a brothel ... or a newspaper, according to his personal predilections. By publishing a newspaper he makes his profits. That's his freedom of the press.

But do the millions of peasants, workers and soldiers enjoy this freedom of the press? No! They do not possess the essential prerequisites of freedom, the real, actual and genuine means of publishing a newspaper. They have no printing plants, no stocks of paper, no money. So bourgeois freedom of the press means in practice a capitalist monopoly to disseminate the ideas of the capitalist class, to poison people's minds and pollute their consciousness with the garbage of bourgeois thought. For the toiling masses, bourgeois freedom of the press boils down to enforced consumption of the contents of bourgeois newspapers and all their lies, slanders, hypocrisy, chauvinism and witch-hunts.

Where does press freedom begin for the people? It begins when the masses themselves take over the weapon of print; when they possess typesetting machines, printing presses and stocks of paper. We, the Soviet power, look on freedom of the press in the following way; above all, we consider ourselves obliged to deprive the bourgeoisie of its monopoly of the means of printing and to transfer all resources to the people as a whole, on the basis of proportional allocation. This means that all privately owned plants and stocks of paper must and will be taken into public ownership. In this way citizens can be allocated use of them in proportion to the real strength of the different classes, parties and ideological currents.

*Novoye Vremya* was once one of Russia's most powerful newspapers. Why? Certainly not because *Novoye Vremya* represented a powerful popular current. On the contrary, throughout all the elections before the revolution we never witnessed the appearance of a party called *Novoye Vremya*. But just as Suvorin-père received fat subsidies from the state for ten years, so in turn Suvorin-fils received a powerful weapon of lies and slander; and they demand that they should be given uninterrupted access to this machine as a right. That's their freedom of the press. And even people like Gorky or Korolenko, undoubtedly honest but riddled with the narrow, vulgar prejudices of a petty-bourgeois milieu, are ready to weep copious tears in the cause of freedom for *Novoye Vremya*.

A powerful weapon in the hands of the capitalist press is

advertising, which as a matter of fact has little to do with publishing as such but serves as a means of levying tribute from the people in the interests of the press barons. We cannot free publishing from the absolute dictatorship of capital without first establishing a monopoly over newspaper advertisements. These advertisements are a kind of tax, and the right to raise taxes must be entirely in the hands of the state and other organs of power, i.e. the Soviets. Only Soviet publications have the right, by decree of the Council of People's Commissars, to accept paid advertisements and the revenue thus gained must from now on be used exclusively for the benefit of the people.

The capitalist press entrepreneurs will never agree to this. They see in this new law a violation of their sacred freedom of enterprise. 'You are trampling all our freedoms underfoot, you are violating the laws of god and man', they howl. When, in reply to their violations of the decree of the monopoly of advertising, the Red Guards or the sailors close down their newspapers as the decree demands, who should come along but the Gorkys and Korolenkos howling about suppression of free expression. However, all these complaints and slanderous accusations leave the broad mass of workers, peasants, and soldiers quite unmoved. Not at all because the masses are philistine and cannot appreciate the lofty sentiments entertained by bourgeois intellectuals for freedom of the press, but because the toiling masses newly awakened to spiritual life and to their higher interests feel a million times more fiercely the awful deprivations they were subjected to by capitalist control of the press. If in the allocation of newspapers the bourgeoisie were to have at its disposal only such resources as corresponded to its support, the vast majority of existing publications would soon be in the hands of the people. And this would be freedom of the press in the highest sense. It is our task to create the conditions for such a transformation.

Of course this is not an easy task. The possessing classes will not hand over what they have without a struggle. They know full well what a powerful weapon their press is. They have in their pay a significant number of proprietors of both sexes who, by upholding freedom of the press, uphold their means of profit and the source of their cheap popularity. All these people will fight by every means possible against our policies on press freedom. They will continue to take advertisements, to flout the decree, to lie, slander, wail and curse....

Our struggle against the bourgeois press barons, against the capitalist monopoly of publishing, is perceived by the petty-bourgeois school of thought as a struggle against free expression. But the broad masses, the millions on whom the Soviets and Soviet power rest, understand perfectly that it is a matter of creating the basic, elementary conditions for a broad, popular freedom of the press. Every printing plant created by the people's labour and stolen from them by capital, every press we take from the bourgeoisie and place in the hands of the Council of Workers', Peasants' and Soldiers' Deputies, is a stone in the edifice of real press freedom. We will stand firm against all slanders and sabotage and carry this task through to the end. And in place of those literary brothels created by the power of capital in the name of free enterprise, we will establish organs of free, unfettered human thought.



# Reviews

Book review sections in socialist journals usually differ from those in bourgeois publications only in the selection of books reviewed. To some extent, this is inevitable, since the common aim is to call attention to new publications of interest and to provide critical appraisal of their approach and argument.

While reviews of individual new books or selections of books on similar topics will be prominently featured in this section of *International*, we will aim for a broader coverage of intellectual and cultural life and of the development of socialist, feminist, and 'alternative' publishing and book-selling.

As the editorial in this issue of *International* explains, our central objective in re-launching the journal is to provide a forum for debate designed to elaborate a revolutionary socialist programme for Britain. The book section will be integral to this, publishing extended review articles (by supporters of Trotskyism and the Fourth International and by representatives of other viewpoints as well) on important new books about British social, political, and cultural life and on major new theoretical contributions to our understanding of capitalism, socialism, and the revolutionary process.

At the same time, we believe that the review section must complement this focus with a broader appraisal of

matters of concern to our readers not covered in the other parts of the journal: literature, art, natural science, sexuality, developments in other parts of the world — to cite but five examples.

Regular features will include a preview of books scheduled for publication in the three or four months following the appearance of each issue; articles introducing theoretical debates and controversies, assessing the various contributions and providing an overview of how they fit together; and a bibliography. We intend also to publish articles on the publishing industry, the evolution of intellectual and academic life, the problems and successes of left bookshops, and so on. A news section in each future issue will announce events and activities.

In the first issues we hope to publish a directory of alternative bookshops, an assessment of the scope and significance of developments of feminist publishing, and a review of the policies of the various socialist publishers.

We welcome any information or contributions from booksellers or publishers as well as offers to review books or contribute articles from all socialist and labour sources.

Ric Sissons and Ron Ward

## Rudolf Bahro's Alternative

*The Alternative in Eastern Europe*, by Rudolf Bahro, New Left Books, London, 463 pp., £9.50.

Ernst Thälmann, the leader of the German Communist Party in the twenties and early thirties, used to insist that the acid test for all communists was their attitude to the Soviet Union. For Thälmann, to pass the test meant to manifest unconditional fealty to the dictates emanating from the Stalin leadership in Moscow; but there is a very different sense in which his motto holds true for revolutionary Marxists today. The acid test for communism today is its ability to regain its credibility as a true movement of emancipation, for the working masses, East and West, have for the most part ceased to regard scientific socialism as a science of liberation, as a result precisely of the depredations of the Stalins and Thälmanns. Unless the problem is clearly stated in these fundamental terms, the immensity of the task cannot be properly understood.

It is easy for Trotskyists to adopt a dangerously smug attitude towards the past and present crimes committed in the name of Marxism, which are responsible for the ideological demoralization of the international communist movement — a demoralization that leads Eurocommunists and East European dissidents alike to seek salvation in the virtues of bourgeois democracy. Did we not sound the alarm as early as 1923? Do the documents of our movement not present a consistent and coherent alternative to Stalinism? Will history not work in our favour, as the empirical lessons of the class struggle in the West and the anti-bureaucratic movement in the East sooner or later force people to assimilate the rich heritage of the *Transitional Programme* and *The Revolution Betrayed*?

For the small but growing number of Marxist dissidents in Eastern Europe, however, the problem is posed differently. The true history of the October Revolution, the Soviet Union, and the world communist movement is still largely inaccessible to them; they live in an ambience of popular hostility to 'Marxism-Leninism' as the language of oppression. This has tended to divide the dissidents into two currents: those who continue broadly to accept the official doctrine and concentrate on demanding democratic reforms, and those who seek the roots of the system's degeneration in the doctrine itself. The former course is that of the 'reform communists' (the Dubcek current in Czechoslovakia, Medvedev in the USSR, Havemann in East Germany); Rudolf Bahro's *The Alternative in Eastern Europe* represents the most systematic attempt to apply the latter.

In no way does Bahro shirk the possible consequences of his endeavour, be they imprisonment or accusations of theoretical revisionism. He writes: 'The conception of politics and history expressed in the method of argument as to "what Marx really said" is completely

unfruitful; it always leads to distortions in the presentation of the "doctrine" that are easily assailable, and thus shifts the ground of dispute to the level of scholastic battles of quotations' (p. 21). The problem, he argues, is rather that 'it is no longer sufficient to be a "Marxist" in the traditional sense. We must rather raise to a higher level Marx's own legacy, the most developed theory and method of social science that we have, and transform it into the communism of the present' (p. 31).

It would therefore be wholly inappropriate to discuss *The Alternative in Eastern Europe* by exhibiting Bahro's breaks with orthodox Marxism on many important questions, contrasting his views with those of Marx, Engels, Lenin, or Trotsky. Instead, we must accept that there is nothing wrong in principle with questioning even the most central elements of the traditional canon, and must attempt to assess Bahro's theoretical innovations on their merit.

### The Division of Labour and General Emancipation

'Overall social organization on the basis of the traditional division of labour can only be overall state organization, it can only be socialization in this alienated form' (p. 141). The central categories of Bahro's analysis are the social division of labour (arising prior to private property) as the real historic source of class division and domination, and the need for its abolition on the road to communism. 'If the classes bound up with private property are destroyed and rendered impotent', he writes, 'then the earlier element of the division of mental and manual labour emerges once again as an autonomous factor of class formation, and does so long as this division of labour is at all reproduced' (p. 77). Thus, while capitalism furnishes the material preconditions for the transition to socialism and communism, the abolition of capitalist private property by no means automatically or necessarily eradicates all forms of social domination, of social and political inequality. The state, in particular, survives as an instrument of oppression, even if it is an instrument of the proletarian dictatorship.

For Bahro, the history of class society is the history of the division of labour. The term 'class' is itself subject to redefinition, for his analysis of the East European societies leads him to a theoretical model of social stratification that lacks definable class barriers, in which 'the historical task which I have in mind' is not the traditional one of abolishing class barriers, but 'the overcoming of subalternity, the form of existence and mode of thought of "little people"' (p. 271). Bahro's method of analysing history in terms of the rise, development, and eventual abolition of the social division of labour has both strengths and weaknesses. Its greatest strength is undoubtedly that it enables him to focus sharply on the forms of social inequality and oppression and to explain theoretically why they persist, and sometimes even reach new heights of absurdity, in societies that claim to have eliminated them along with private property in the means of production: 'The exploita-



tion and oppression of women, in the overall patriarchal family structure with which this is connected... the dominance of the town over the country ..., the exploitation and oppression of the manual worker (whoever has to perform physical, schematic, executive work) by the mental worker (whoever performs predominantly intellectual, creative, planning and managerial activity)' (pp. 46-47).

The relevance of this approach is by no means restricted to 'actually existing socialism with its cultivation of social inequalities that go far beyond the spectrum of money incomes; with its perpetuation of wage-labour, commodity production, and money; with its rationalisation of the traditional division of labour; with its almost clerical family and sexual policy; with its high official dignitaries, its standing army and police, who are all responsible only to those above them; with its official corporations for the organization and tutelage of the population; with its duplication of the unwieldy state machine into a state and party apparatus; with its isolation within the national frontiers' (p. 37). Bahro's approach will be welcomed as a breath of fresh air by anyone familiar with the extent to which 'nationalization of the means of production' and 'a centrally planned economy' have become the ideological surrogate of socialism (not only for 'reformists' but also for 'revolutionary' socialist militants), and the extent to which crude economic determinism and, on a more sophisticated plane, Althusserian 'science', have been counterposed to the allegedly 'pre-scientific' emancipatory humanism of Marx's early philosophy.

Equally relevant for socialists both East and West is Bahro's questioning of the primacy of quantitative economic growth. In his otherwise fair and sympathetic review in the *Morning Star* (8 December 1978), Monty Johnstone charges Bahro with failure to 'take account of the actual levels of development and the international position of the Socialist countries, all of which are still necessarily a very long way from communism', and alleges that 'instead of recognising with Marx that the highest development of the productive forces is "an absolutely necessary premise" for superseding the old social relations, he argues for "a slow evolution of technology" and defends "renunciation of economic growth"'. This criticism is mistaken on two counts. To begin with, Bahro does not at all deny the need for continued economic growth in the post-capitalist societies both today and in the foreseeable future. Indeed he explicitly states that 'a strategic decision against continuing the policy of economic growth so far pursued ... can of course not be put into practice immediately' (p. 395), because quantitative growth will be needed to aid the development of the poorer regions of the world. Second, and more important, Johnstone has failed to understand Bahro's completely 'orthodox' assertion that the 'productive forces' do not consist merely of dead, objectified labour, and that the development of the decisive productive force, human labour, is actually fettered by the fetish of quantitative growth targets. For Bahro, as for Marx, it is the development of labour productivity in the sense of a reduction of socially necessary labour-time that is central to communist policy, and not the growth in the volume of production per se. This 'does not mean making a new law of "zero growth", but rather displacing the criterion of quantity from its dominant position' (p. 405).

But Bahro's achievement — his firm re-establishment of the primacy of politics over economics, his demolition of the artificial wall erected by a vulgar materialist orthodoxy between the 'utopian' aspects of Marxism and a communist *realpolitik* — comes at a price. His one-sided emphasis on the social division of labour as the axis of human history is accompanied by an underestimation of the specific role of capitalism in that history. This point may be highlighted by contrasting two passages from Bahro's book. At one point (p. 43), he claims that 'the Hegelian tradition, and a Eurocentrism that was scarcely avoidable, may have been responsible for the way that Marx focused his attention too one-sidedly on capitalist private property and saw the entire past and future historical process as passing through this nodal period'. Subsequently, however (p. 127), Bahro himself concedes that 'the industrial civilization that has changed European life beyond recognition in the last two centuries leaves other nations no alternative; whether they had already reached the threshold of capitalism and industrialization in their own evolution, or whether it encountered them epochs removed from it — they must go through this crucible'. Thus, while all societies must reach the European level of industrialization as a precondition for communism they need not go through the stage of capitalist private property. The alternative to capitalist industrialization, the non-capitalist road of 'despotic industrialization', is the concept with which Bahro explains the history of the Russian revolution. The weaknesses in his method can best be illustrated in that context.

As Bahro sees it, the 'decisive objective fact' in the genesis of Stalinism 'was the absence of a bourgeois development of the productive forces, the absence of capitalist work habits, discipline and skill in the broadest sense' (p. 99). Since Russia was basically pre-capitalist when the Bolsheviks took power in 1917, the only alternative to the economic compulsion through which capitalism had instilled 'work habits, discipline and skill' in the workers was the despotism of the state — in

other words, terror. The specifically 'Asiatic' features of Russian society — omnipotence of a centralized state bureaucracy as the only cohesive force in a country dominated by more or less isolated peasant communities — re-asserted themselves after the revolution in the Bolshevik Party itself, which now constituted a new all-powerful bureaucracy 'as a substitute for an exploiting class, as the labour lord of Soviet society' (p. 141). The prospect facing the 'Lenin-Stalin apparatus' (p. 322) was thus 'not yet ... socialism, no matter how resolutely the Bolsheviks believed in this, but rather the rapid industrial development of Russia on a non-capitalist road. Only now, when this task is by and large completed, is the struggle for socialism on the agenda in the Soviet Union' (p. 50). Bahro thus defines the Stalinist system as an 'industrial despotism' historically analogous to the 'agricultural despotism' of the Asiatic mode of production.

The two most striking features of this analysis are the degree to which Bahro isolates this 'Asiatic' road to industrialization from the development of capitalism and the historical fatalism that flows from it concerning the inevitability of the bureaucratic degeneration of Bolshevism. It is strange that Bahro, who proves himself thoroughly familiar with Lenin's writings on many other matters, seems wholly unaware of the essential international dimension of the October Revolution as seen by the Bolshevik leaders, including Lenin. (In 1920, for example, Lenin wrote: 'When three years ago we raised the question of the tasks and the conditions of the proletarian revolution's victory in Russia, we always stated emphatically that victory could not be permanent unless it was followed by a proletarian revolution in the West, and that a correct appraisal of our revolution was possible only from the international point of view'.) Indeed, the Bolshevik leadership did not expect the Russian revolution to survive as a socialist transformation if it remained confined within the borders of the former Tsarist empire.

The October Revolution was conceived on the basis of a theoretical analysis of imperialism, the system through which capital dominated even those parts of the world it had not yet fully penetrated economically and culturally. In that context, the evident strategic choice was to overcome Russia's 'Asiatic' backwardness in a revolutionary alliance with the proletariat of one or more of the advanced capitalist countries, and not to retreat to the isolationist road of 'socialism in one country', which indeed could lead only to despotic modernization controlled by the bureaucracy whose ideology it expressed. But Bahro dismisses the alternatives espoused by the Left Opposition as irrelevant. These alternatives consisted not merely in a set of proposals for economic policy, but also, and more importantly, in an orientation to the proletarian revolution in the West, seen as essential to the socialist development of the Soviet Union itself. It was the cynical betrayal of the world revolution by the Stalinist bureaucracy that set the stage for the 'despotic industrialization' of the USSR, a bureaucracy which Bahro claims 'was rarely completely unjustified' in appealing to the Leninist tradition.

Bahro's rejection of the original Bolshevik project of linking their revolution to the fate of the revolution in the West is based on this line of argument: 'With the revolutions in Russia and China, with the revolutionary process in Latin America, in Africa and in India, humanity is taking the shortest route to socialism. There, in the "East", the real wretched of this earth have awakened. The role of the working class, who gave the decisive impulse to the Russian revolution and who obviously have a task in Europe, must be seen afresh in this context. Moreover, even their revolution in Europe would not have led directly to the socialism for which Marx hoped, but far more probably to the phenomenal form so familiar to us ... Time and again, our bureaucratic centralism is explained in terms of Russian backwardness, though in fact this is responsible only for certain excesses. In so far as the hierarchical apparatus of functionaries of the workers' organizations is the potential state machine, what this is preparing is not a new Paris Commune, but rather a state monopoly freed from capitalism' (p. 61). In other words since Stalinism was not rooted exclusively in Russia's backwardness, any more developed country undergoing a proletarian revolution would have suffered a similar fate. 'The entire perspective under which we have seen the transition to communism stands in need of correction, and in no way just with respect to the time factor. The dissolution of private property in the means of production on the one hand, and universal human emancipation on the other, are separated by an entire epoch' (p. 21).

The key to an understanding of the new perspective, Bahro argues, lies in consideration of the role of the state: 'The transition stage between communism and developed class society, which was initially crossed "forwards", and is now to be crossed "backwards", is characterized in both cases by a specific function of the state which arises directly from the social division of labour and cooperation. Productive forces which belong to the state, which are either no longer social or are not yet so, are what provide the specific characteristic of both epochs' (p. 67). The state, both as the agent of social reproduction so long as the division of labour persists and as an instrument of political domination, will continue to exist for an entire epoch



following the abolition of capitalism. Those who hold state power — the new ruling 'class' — will be the bureaucrats spawned in the hierarchy of the old labour movement.

### The Working Class and 'Subalternity'

'It was probably necessary to be both an anarchist and a Russian to perceive behind the authority of Marx and his doctrine, in the year 1873, the shadow of Stalin.' Thus Bahro, writing of Bakunin's warnings that in practice Marx's 'dictatorship of the proletariat' would mean the dictatorship of a new privileged class of socialist intellectuals. Because of the division of labour, the de-humanization of the immediate producers by their alienated, repetitive, and schematic activity, the emancipation of the proletariat can lead only 'to the satisfaction of a few of its pent-up compensatory needs' (p. 199). For the working masses, then, the revolution produces little in the way of immediate progress, for they are called upon to sacrifice their immediate for their long-term interests: 'Gramsci's idea, therefore, formulated with Russia and Italy particularly in mind, according to which the proletariat can only remain the ruling class by giving up its present vital interests in favour of its hegemony, and placing itself in the service of a scientifically proven interest of humanity, simply boils down to the fact that has since become quite evident enough, that the proletariat cannot be a ruling class' (p. 197). What Bahro calls the 'core of the ruling party, state and economic bureaucracy' is composed of the socialist intellectuals; their genesis lies in the conflict between the immediate interests of the workers and the historic interests of humanity.

Therefore, not only does the abolition of capitalist private property not lead directly to 'general emancipation', but the revolutionary class that represents the negation of private property, the proletariat, is also unable to accomplish the historic task ascribed to it by Marx and the Marxist tradition. In any event, the abolition of capitalism is also the abolition of the working class as a class (see chapter 7, entitled 'The Working Class as an Inapplicable Concept in Proto-Socialist Society'), so that the revolutionary subject must now be defined in entirely new terms.

The key to Bahro's definition of the 'subject of the emancipatory movement' as 'the energetic and creative elements of all strata and spheres of society' (p. 326) is: 'surplus consciousness... an energetic mental capacity that is no longer absorbed by the immediate necessities and dangers of human existence and can thus orient itself to more distant problems' (p. 257). The concept of 'surplus consciousness' is not as novel as it may sound at first. Trotsky wrote that 'the improvement of the material situation of the workers does not reconcile them with the authorities; on the contrary, by increasing their self-respect and freeing their thought for general problems of politics, it prepares the way for an open conflict with the bureaucracy'. Trotsky, however, applied this concept to an objectively definable *collective*, namely the working class, whereas for Bahro, the 'cultural-revolutionary movement' is the sum total of the *individuals* who represent the 'emancipatory' against the 'compensatory interests'. The concept of 'subalternity' (defined as the dominance of compensatory over emancipatory needs) is, of course, itself a category of *individual* psychology. It is this transplantation of social conflict from the objective class struggle to the personality structure of the individual that accounts for Bahro's inability to formulate a concrete political strategy.

### Bahro in Perspective

It is doubtless true that in the last instance Marxism is concerned with the emancipation of the individual and that the social division of labour is incompatible with that emancipation. This conflict, however, though it is present throughout human history, has always been mediated through the particular social formations of each epoch, their modes of production, class antagonisms, and political institutions. Marx held that capitalism would be the last of class societies because:

1. The unprecedented expansion of the productive forces under capitalism creates the material preconditions for the abolition of social inequality;
2. Capitalism forges a unified world market, which is a pre-condition for the abolition of national inequalities;
3. Capitalism creates a particular social class, the proletariat, whose objective interests conflict directly with the maintenance of private property, privilege, and the division of labour; this class therefore has interests that may be considered universal in that they are identical to the long-term interests of the human species itself. Hence, although the state, the social division of labour, money, and so on, will persist during the transitional period, the 'dictatorship of the proletariat', conceived in Marx's sense, must by nature lead to a classless society in which the social division of labour has itself vanished: communism.

As we have seen, Bahro parts company with Marx in designating not

capitalism, but *industrialism* as the universal stage through which all societies must pass on the road to communism; Russia, China, and the other 'socialist countries' have reached this stage, this industrialism, through a non-capitalist road, thus demonstrating that European capitalism was the first, but not the only, road to industrialization. But by severing the historical connection between capitalism and socialism, Bahro has lost sight of the revolutionary subject, the proletariat, and the new type of state that can be realized through its rule: the direct democracy of the working masses. The antagonism between the state and society exists in a 'pure form', so to speak, in Bahro's alternative scenario: an alien apparatus confronts all individuals, embodied in the 'collective worker'. His definition of the revolutionary subject is therefore necessarily vague, and he thus has little to say about the form *state power* will assume after the political expropriation of the 'politbureaucracy'. The method that enables him both to describe so accurately how 'actually existing socialism' is alien to the socialism of Marx and Engels and to outline some of the measures needed to revolutionize it (particularly in the domain of the abolition of all bureaucratic privilege, the need for a new 'economy of time', and education — see especially the excellent chapters 14 and 15) fails him when it comes to the central questions of political strategy.

To some extent, of course, this is a reflection of Bahro's personal situation. The tragedy of the isolated Marxist 'dissident' deprived of access to many indispensable sources about the real history of the Russian revolution and the world communist movement and confronted with an atomized working class seemingly preoccupied with 'compensatory interests' is sharply reflected in many aspects of Bahro's 'alternative'. But there can be no doubt that despite these weaknesses, his book is a landmark in the resurgence of a new generation of East European Marxists. Rudolf Bahro is not only a thinker of exceptional force (a quality to which this review, focusing on one aspect of the book, and emphasizing its weaknesses at that, cannot possibly do justice); he is also a true revolutionary in spirit, as his conclusion makes clear: 'Communism is not only necessary, it is also possible. Whether it becomes a reality or not must be decided in the struggle for its conditions of existence.' If the emergence of a creative but somewhat less than orthodox 'East European Marxism' is indeed a necessary stage through which the rediscovery of the rich Bolshevik tradition by the new generation of East European revolutionaries will have to pass, then Bahro's book has helped to lay foundations which cannot be ignored, East or West, in the debates to come. There can be no better reason for reading, studying, and criticizing it.

Gunther Minnerup

## Laclau on Fascism

*Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory*, by Ernesto Laclau, Verso paperback, London, 203 pp., £3.00.

Several new books on fascism have appeared during the past few years. The reasons for the new rise of interest in the subject are not difficult to find. The re-emergence of fascist groups in a number of European countries (and their international coordination) is one obvious cause. Another is that with the growth of Eurocommunism many communists feel it necessary to settle accounts for good and all not only with the ultra-leftism of Stalin's 'Third Period' but also with Trotsky, who had opposed the Communist International's theories of 'social fascism' when it mattered.

In the good old days, there was a standard method of dealing with Trotsky: simply denounce him as the agent of 'democratic' imperialism or of fascism itself, depending on the current line of the Soviet leadership. Nowadays, when such outright slander has fallen into disrepute as a result of Eurocommunism's 'reconsideration' of the past, a new technique has been discovered. Today's author handles the problem more or less this way: 'Let's be honest and face facts. Trotsky foresaw the events in Germany in the early thirties with astonishing clarity. But...' It is then discovered that the old prophet actually made a series of errors that vitiated his analysis of fascism at bottom and require his relegation to the museum — in an honoured room, of course. In his *Fascism and Dictatorship*, for example, Nicos Poulantzas has discovered that Trotsky shared the 'economism' of the Comintern, failing to understand that the imposition of a fascist regime comes after the working class has suffered serious defeats! According to Vajda (*Fascism As a Mass Movement*), Trotsky's error was to have counterposed the socialist revolution to fascism, failing to fight for the restoration of democracy.

The latest attempt at a new analysis of fascism has been produced by Ernesto Laclau in *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory*, a collection of essays on capitalism, fascism, and populism, originally published by New Left Books and now re-issued as a paperback by Verso. Laclau begins his argument by acknowledging that there has been a lack of theoretical development in the analysis of fascism since the Second World War, the reason being that the policy of the Popular Front 'led to the incorporation of broader and broader sections of the bourgeoisie



into the anti-fascist struggle, with the result that fascism tended to be presented as the political expression of an increasingly reduced sector of interests'. Coming forward to take up the neglected task, Laclau rejects the view that fascist ideology consists in a series of heterogeneous elements whose function is to cement the varying social groups that make up the fascist bloc. He holds that it is not possible to decompose an ideology into component parts and then to label them as bourgeois or proletarian, for these elements can be understood only in terms of an overall ideology. Otherwise, for example, 'nationalism' will be described as bourgeois and 'socialist nationalism' will be seen as thoroughly contradictory. Writes Laclau: 'Ideological "elements" taken in isolation have no necessary class connotation, and... this connotation is only the result of those elements in a concrete ideological discourse.'

Once he has established this point, Laclau goes on to argue that not all contradictions in politics are class contradictions. It is possible, for example, to have alliances of the petty bourgeoisie, the peasantry, the working class and certain sections of the bourgeoisie against a ruling bloc, if contradictions exist at the level of the 'popular democratic' struggle and between the ruling bloc and the 'people'. Once this simple point is grasped, the arena of the class struggle is immensely broadened. Indeed, it becomes possible to integrate into revolutionary ideology 'a multitude of elements and interpellations which have up to now appeared constitutive of bourgeois ideological discourse'.

The failure of revolutionaries to grasp this broadened arena of class struggle, Laclau argues, has led to the domination of the workers' movement by a narrow class perspective and a consequent lack of will to establish hegemony over the exploited classes as a whole. This 'class reductionism' has led on the one hand to opportunism, as reformists have sought to use the bourgeois state to obtain increasing benefits, and on the other hand to sectarianism, as revolutionaries have attempted to make a proletarian revolution and establish a soviet regime. 'In both cases', Laclau maintains, 'exclusively class policies were pursued, which totally ignored the problem of popular democratic struggles'.

One prime example of 'class reductionism' cited by Laclau is Trotsky's criticism of the 'national communist' line of the Communist Party of Germany (KPD) in 1931, when the party blocked with the Nazis in an attempt to bring down the Social Democratic government in Prussia through participation in the 'Red Referendum'. Trotsky's 'class reductionist' criticism ran as follows: 'It is understood that every great revolution is a people's or national revolution, in the sense that it unites around the revolutionary class all the virile and creative forces of the nation and reconstructs the nation around a new core... In order that the nation should indeed be able to reconstruct itself around a new class core, it must be reconstructed ideologically and this be achieved only if the proletariat does not dissolve itself into the "people", into the "nation", but on the contrary develops a programme of its proletarian revolution and compels the petty bourgeoisie to choose between two regimes. The slogan of the people's revolution lulls the petty bourgeoisie as well as the broad mass of workers, reconciles them to the bourgeois hierarchical structure of the "people" and retards their liberation. But under present conditions in Germany, the slogan of a "people's revolution" wipes away the ideological demarcation between Marxism and fascism and reconciles part of the workers and petty bourgeoisie to the ideology of fascism, allowing them to think that they are not compelled to make a choice, because in both camps it is all a matter of people's revolution.'

This brings us to the centre of Laclau's thesis. According to him, fascism rose and triumphed in Germany by virtue of two factors: the crisis of the ruling power bloc, which rendered it unable to absorb discontent through the traditional channels; and the failure of the working class to win hegemony over popular struggles and to fuse popular democratic ideology into its programme. The working class should have appealed to all popular sectors 'to fight for a national renaissance which could have condensed in common ideological symbols: Nationalism, Socialism and Democracy'. It was here, Laclau maintains, that Trotsky came to grief, as evidenced in the quotation above. Trotsky's contribution was limited to the formulation of a correct defensive line, when in all essentials, fascism had already won the battle for the allegiance of the petty bourgeoisie: 'The idea that in Germany any advance towards socialism was dependent on the alliance between the working class and the middle class, and that such an alliance required the ideological fusion of Nationalism, Socialism, and Democracy, is not only alien but antagonistic to the basis of Trotsky's feeling.'

Laclau argues that a Trotskyist leadership of the KPD would have been impotent, due to a lack of understanding of the importance of the popular-democratic struggle in halting the Nazi advance. He also maintains, however, that the KPD had occasionally glimpsed aspects of the correct strategy. In 1923, for example, during the period of the 'Schlageter line' — 'one of the few moments in which the German Communist movement sensed the necessity to carry out national and democratic agitation'. There were opportunist elements in this line, Laclau acknowledges, but only because it was not deepened and carried

to its logical conclusion: the abandonment of class reductionism.

A second occasion when the KPD was on the right track was the 'nationalism' of 1931 against which Trotsky polemicized. Here Laclau assures us that he is not at all uncritical of KPD policy, which was 'doubtless mistaken, in so far as it reduced a *fundamental long-term strategic line*, such as the fusion between socialism and popular-democratic ideology, to a *mere circumstantial tactic* to win the electoral support of the petty bourgeoisie'.

The third occasion came in 1935, when the Seventh Congress of the Comintern adopted the Popular Front position. Again, Laclau notes sadly that this attempt to overcome class reductionism was imperfect, marred by zigzags. There is no reason to dwell on this third occasion, for its results are well known. The most perfect fruit of the Popular Front policy was the victory of fascism in Spain, as the attempt to separate the struggle for a proletarian victory from the struggle against fascism led first to a strangulation of workers' democracy and then to the defeat of bourgeois democracy. Here it is sufficient to note that Laclau criticizes the policy of the Popular Front from the *right*, since he alleges that it still asserted that democracy was bourgeois and to that extent was still class reductionist. More central to Laclau's argument, however, and far less familiar to today's militants, are the two other instances he cites, the Schlageter line and national communism. In fact, Laclau fails to explain in any real detail just what the KPD did on these two occasions. His theses on how the workers' movement should fight fascism can be better evaluated in the light of a brief discussion of what was actually entailed in these two episodes.

### The 'Schlageter Line'

In January 1923 the French army occupied the Ruhr, thus triggering a deep crisis in Germany. The nationalist and fascist groups immediately began agitating against the French intervention, which was also denounced, quite correctly, by the KPD. But Ernst Thalheimer, the central leader of the Communist Party at the time, went beyond mere denunciation, arguing that the French and German bourgeoisies could no longer be placed on the same footing, since the German bourgeoisie had played 'an objectively revolutionary role...in spite of itself' ever since its defeat in 1918. Hence, although 'the defeat of French imperialism in the World War was not a communist aim, its defeat in the war in the Ruhr is a communist aim'. Other sections of the Communist International, the Czechoslovak Communist Party, for example, denounced the new line as a repetition of 'national Bolshevism', the term coined to describe the views of some Hamburg communists in 1919 who had proposed an alliance with anti-French nationalists in order to exploit the differences between the German and Entente bourgeoisies. Lenin attacked national Bolshevism bitterly, describing as 'philistine nationalism' any attempt to lend liberation from the Versailles Treaty priority over liberation of the countries oppressed by imperialism.

In February 1923, *Die Internationale*, the organ of the KPD, described both fascism and national Bolshevism as movements against German and foreign capital. It rejected them both, but argued for a new type of propaganda to overcome them. Later, the KPD began to argue that there were two kinds of fascists, those directly sold to capital and those merely misled petty-bourgeois nationalists who had to be convinced that Germany could be defended only through an alliance with the proletariat.

It was in that setting, in May 1923, that an ex-Freikorps member named Schlageter tried to blow up a railway line and was shot by French soldiers. The nationalists and fascists proclaimed him a martyr and made a major political event of his funeral. In June, at a meeting of the Comintern, Radek announced that he no longer rejected the label national Bolshevik, which now meant, he claimed, 'that everyone is imbued with the feeling that salvation can be found only with the communists. We are today the only way out. The strong emphasis on the nation in Germany is a revolutionary act, like the emphasis on the nation in the colonies'. These remarks, not surprisingly, stirred some criticism. Radek's reply was the so-called Schlageter speech, in which he said: 'Schlageter, a courageous soldier of the counter-revolution, deserves to be sincerely honoured by us, the soldiers of the revolution... If those German Fascists who honestly thought to serve the German people fail to understand the significance of Schlageter's fate, then he will have died in vain.'

Soon after, the KPD launched a campaign against the French occupation of the Ruhr with the clear aim of splitting the far right. This campaign amounted to a de facto united front with nationalists and fascists, understanding united front in the sense of a combination of unity and struggle. The Communist Party, for example, produced a pamphlet consisting of three essays: one by Radek, one by a German nationalist, and one by a Nazi. Joint meetings were held with the



nationalists and Nazis to denounce the Entente powers and the Versailles Treaty. One KPD release even contained this ringing 'anti-capitalist' assertion: 'Jewish capitalists grow fat on the exploitation of the German people'.<sup>2</sup> Ruth Fischer, a leader of the KPD identified with its left wing, declared: 'he who denounces Jewish capital... is already a warrior in the class war, even though he does not know it.' This campaign abruptly ceased in August 1923 when what was later to be called the Autumn Crisis broke out, a crisis that ended with a significant defeat for the working class.

The balance-sheet of the 'Schlageter line' was clearly negative. It failed to attract the petty bourgeoisie, which could not be convinced that support to the Communist Party was the best way to foster German nationalism, despite the KPD's best efforts. It alienated sections of the workers under reformist leadership, and did nothing to prepare the party ranks for the Autumn Crisis. It must be admitted, however, that the party press at the time did combine these joint efforts with nationalists and Nazis with a steady barrage of anti-fascist propaganda, and that even Radek reiterated many times that the centre of the strategy was the workers' united front and that only a workers' state could resolve the problems of Germany. It is perhaps this 'struggle' aspect of the line that Laclau has in mind when he complains that the KPD was not entirely free of 'class reductionism' even during the period of the 'Schlageter line'.<sup>3</sup>

### National Communism

The 'national communist' turn of 1930 was a caricature of the 'Schlageter line' and possessed no redeeming features whatever. The KPD virtually ignored the danger posed by the Nazis and concentrated instead on combating 'creeping fascism' or the gradual 'fascisization' of the state and government. The main enemy was said to be the 'accomplices' of this process, the conservatives and Social Democrats. The more notorious adjuncts of this theory — such as Stalin's characterization of the Social Democrats as 'social fascists' — need not be considered in detail here, except to note that Laclau gives no indication that he grasps that the failure to weld the unity of the working class by winning over the reformist workers and isolating the reformist leagues was the crucial factor in allowing the Nazi rise and in failing to neutralize or win over sections of the middle class. Trotsky continually pointed out that the middle class would be won to the side of the workers only if the proletariat appeared unified, capable of imposing its own solution to the country's crisis. The central requirement was to unify the divided working class; that alone would have been sufficient to begin to roll back the Nazi tide, which in turn would erode the support of the desperate petty bourgeoisie for the Nazis.

The line of the KPD, however, pointed in a completely different direction. The Social Democratic Party (SPD) and the trade unions led by it were characterized as moving more and more rapidly towards fascism by virtue of their increasing integration into the bourgeois state, allegedly in process of 'fascisization'. Red unions were set up by the KPD, and demands were inserted into the platforms of union caucuses deliberately designed to keep out left reformist workers. The Communist Party denounced the Socialists as agents of French and Polish imperialism, which was precisely the Nazi characterization of the SPD.

The other side of this policy, however, was the KPD line on 'national and social liberation'. It is this that Laclau considers fundamentally correct in its strategic aspect. Its aim was to wage a vigorous campaign against the Young Plan (the war reparations scheme that also prevented Germany from having colonies) and, more generally, to 'expose' the nationalism of the Nazis as fraudulent by appearing as more consistently nationalist than the Nazis. The *Communist International* of September 1930, for example, wrote: 'The basic task consists in tearing from the fascists the mask of struggle for national independence and for the social emancipation of the German people, and in countering their empty demagoguery with a real revolutionary programme of salvation for the toiling masses of Germany.'

The tactics that flowed from this strategy were disastrous. Goebbels and Gregor Strasser were invited to write for the party press. A KPD pamphlet against the Young Plan illustrated the patriotism of the party by boasting that not a single member of the Central Committee was Jewish.<sup>4</sup> The KPD joined with the Nazis in the 'Red Referendum', the aim of which was to destroy the Prussian 'social-fascist' coalition and, in Thälmann's words, to expose 'Nazi and German nationalist office hunting and demagoguery. The more the parties of the Right sabotage the referendum, the more deeply we shall force a breach in the ranks of the Nazis' followers'. The breach, however, was forced not among the Nazis but in the ranks of the working class. One of the worst examples of this 'socialist' nationalism was evinced in the KPD bulletin *Fanfaren*, when a KPD member wrote: 'Whoever opposes the people's revolution and the revolutionary war of liberation betrays the cause of the fallen who gave their lives in the last war for a free Germany.'

The simple fact is that in these two cases cited by Laclau as representing

instances of the KPD's ability to free itself partially of 'class reductionism', the Communist Party gravely compromised itself by trying to appropriate important aspects of fascist ideology itself. The reason these tactics were unsuccessful was not that they were badly applied, but that the working class has no objective interest in championing them. Contrary to Laclau, aspects of ideologies do have class characters, and the proletariat cannot successfully make itself the herald of ideas that are better expressed by another class. There was no way for the German proletariat to win over the rank-and-file and mass base of Nazism by appearing as more consistently nationalist than Hitler. Similarly, the main reason the most powerful workers' movement in Western Europe was annihilated so disastrously by the Nazis was that it was hopelessly divided, the Communist and Socialist leaderships concentrating their fire on each other rather than on the fascist threat. A united workers' movement could have dealt crippling blows to the Nazis, and this in turn would have undermined a good part of the Nazis' appeal for petty bourgeois, who were attracted, more than anything else, by the very success and audacity of Hitler's storm troopers. This was the heart of Trotsky's message at the time, and no amount of high-sounding rhetoric about 'class reductionism' and 'democratic interpellations' can obscure the truth of the matter.

In practice, the analysis of fascism presented by Laclau accords with the needs of Eurocommunism in its most right-wing form. Implicit in his approach is the notion that the workers should not try to do 'too much too fast' and thereby alarm the bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie. In the last instance, Laclau's concern to combat 'class reductionism' fails to note what is perhaps the most striking feature of fascism: that it represents a final, and desperate, defence of the capitalist order. A fascist regime is not a comfortable one for the capitalist class, which finds itself to a large extent politically expropriated by a gang of thugs and adventurers. The capitalists therefore opt for such a state form only to avert the even more serious danger of economic expropriation. Laclau argues that a precondition for the rise of fascism is the failure of the working class to win hegemony over popular struggles and introduce democratic demands into its programme. Historical experience, however, rather tends to demonstrate that the real precondition for the success of fascism is the

2. E.H. Carr, *The Interregnum 1923-24*, London, 1954, p. 190.

3. *Ibid.* There is some controversy over the Fischer quote. It was reported in the 22 August 1923 edition of *Vorwärts*, which also quoted her as saying: 'Yes, hang the Jewish capitalists from the street lamps, (but)...what do you think of the big capitalists like Stinnes?'. Some twenty-five years later, Fischer claimed to have been traduced by the Social Democratic editors of *Vorwärts*, declaring that she had merely said that both Jewish and non-Jewish capitalists had to be attacked. (Ruth Fischer, *Stalin and German Communism*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1948, p. 283.). Her 1948 explanation is not very convincing, however, since she had commented on the *Vorwärts* report at the time, in *Der Rote Fahne* of 30 August 1923. There she complained of a minor point, saying that *Vorwärts* had got some words out of place; but she made no political attack on the report. For a discussion of this incident, see Pierre Broué, *Révolution en Allemagne*, Paris, 1971, p. 695.

4. Another effect of the 'Schlageter line' that bears mentioning is that it undermined the campaign against the occupation of the Ruhr among the French working class. The French Socialist Party used the nationalist rhetoric of the KPD to propagate the myth that a deal had been struck between the German Communists and fascists. This isolated the French Communist Party in its attempts to organize a campaign of solidarity with the German workers and even caused doubts in the French party itself. In *Lenin's Moscow* (London, 1971, p. 198), Alfred Rosmer wrote: 'Radek's unbelievable declaration was not designed to ease the task of worker militants who had given their activity a carefully judged orientation. On the other hand, it was of great value to the Social Democratic leaders, who were remaining passive in the face of the advances of the national socialists and were glad to have a pretext — which seemed excellent — to denounce the "collusion of the communist and fascist leaders".' This, of course, is an aspect of the problem that is consistently overlooked by such theorists as Laclau. Quite apart from the effects in Germany of the KPD's adaptation to German nationalism, this sort of line makes it absolutely impossible to engage in any real internationalist activity. Presumably, Laclau would hold that the French Communists also should have avoided class reductionism by appropriating aspects of the nationalism that could appeal to the middle class potential base of French fascism. Having himself opted for the bourgeois ideology of nationalism, Laclau looks at the problem in purely national terms, forgetting that French nationalism among the French workers and German nationalism among the German workers *rules out proletarian internationalism*. The workers' movement had some experience with this sort of effort to avoid 'class reductionism' between 1914 and 1918.

5. Robert Black, *Fascism in Germany*, London, 1975, p. 766.



persistent failure of the working class to unite, defend itself, and impose its own political solutions to the crisis of the bourgeois order. It is true, of course, that democratic demands and the more general defence of democratic rights is a major component of such an effort at the proletarian seizure of power (and not only when there is an imminent danger of fascism). On this Trotsky, for example, was quite unambiguous. But the important point is that once the social and political crisis reaches a certain pitch, it is only the working class that can effectively defend democracy, and it can do so only by stepping beyond the confines of bourgeois democracy and challenging the state institutions upon which it rests. No amount of appeal to such ideologies as nationalism is of avail in such a struggle in an advanced capitalist country.

## Eleanor Marx

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*Eleanor Marx*, by Yvonne Kapp, Virago, London, Volume I *Family Life*, 352 pp., £3.85; Volume II *The Crowded Years*, 800 pp., £4.95.

Eleanor Marx devoted all her skills to the revolutionary workers' movement. Her organizing abilities, painstaking research, translations, agitational speeches, theatrical talent, and her small body of literary work were devoted to advancing the socialist cause. Above all, she brought to the movement her revolutionary internationalist perspective.

The youngest daughter of Jenny and Karl Marx, she was accurately described at the age of seventeen by her mother as 'a politician from top to bottom'.

Yvonne Kapp's two-volume biography is a vivid portrait of this socialist leader of the late nineteenth century. *Eleanor Marx* is also a cameo of the Marx household and a sprawling canvas that traces the growth of the Marxist movement against the historical events of the nineteenth century — from the American Civil War and the Paris Commune to the attempts to organize trade unions in the early 1890s in England.

No one can really understand Eleanor Marx's warm, generous, and complex personality, nor the depth of her commitment to the working class and revolutionary socialism, without grasping the passionate commitment to ending injustice that the founders of scientific socialism — Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels — infused into their daily lives. Kapp brings to life for readers the combination of deep parental love, chronic economic hardship, and intense political and intellectual activity that characterized the Marx household and shaped Eleanor's early years.

### A Stimulating Environment

Born in 1855, Eleanor was one of seven children but the only one of three daughters who survived childhood.

Throughout her childhood, her father was not only following and participating in the major political developments of the day, but was involved in helping to establish the International Workingmen's Association — the First International. While participating in the debates of this organization, Karl Marx was also hard at work on the first volume of *Capital*.

In this atmosphere of intense theoretical and political study and discussion — in which Eleanor soon became a full participant — she became a partisan of the North in the American Civil War. She wrote — or perhaps dictated — long letters to Abraham Lincoln, advising him to conduct a war against slavery. She also championed the struggles of the Poles to liberate their country from Russia.

But the political event that most shaped her outlook was the Paris Commune of 1871. The workers and artisans of Paris revolted against the government of Louis Bonaparte in the wake of its defeat in the Franco-Prussian war. They took over the defence of the city. Dismantling the old state apparatus, they established a workers' government — the first in history. But surrounded by the French and German armies, the Paris Commune was isolated from the rest of France. Within two

months it was drowned in blood by bourgeois forces.

Many communards — including old friends of the Marx family — were brutally killed in the reactionary massacres that followed the fall of the Commune.

Eleanor plunged into the task of aiding the Commune refugees who settled in England. For nearly a decade, she campaigned for the right of the communards to return to France. She exposed the phony stories of the communards' 'terror' that had been broadcast, first to prepare and then to cover up, the terror of the reaction.

She was inspired by the heroism of the communards — who stormed the heavens, as Karl Marx put it — as well as by the vision of socialism to which their democratic and equalitarian government pointed. And she learned about how brutally the ruling class dealt with their victims. Eleanor commented to a meeting on the anniversary of the Commune:

'To many of you it will seem strange when I remind you that it was proposed — quite seriously — that the communards who had taken refuge in England should be handed over to the doctors and the hospitals for purposes of vivisection. Perhaps exceptionally brutal in form, this proposition nevertheless expressed the feelings of the whole of respectable society.'

Eleanor Marx defended the entire spectrum of the working-class movement against any attack. In 1886, while on a lecture tour of the United States, she repeatedly denounced the conviction of the eight anarchists who had led the eight-hour-day movement in Chicago. After her return to England, she and her companion Edward Aveling worked to publicize the case there, writing articles and organizing a massive petition campaign. At the same time, she polemicized against anarchism as a grossly incorrect theory.

### International Solidarity

Eleanor Marx was, above all else, an internationalist. She sided with the oppressed and exploited everywhere. She knew that English workers, living in the imperialist stronghold of that time, had a life-and-death stake in supporting the political and economic struggles of workers and peasants in other countries. They would come to this realization, she was convinced, just as they had been won to the cause of amnesty for Irish political prisoners in the late 1860s — one of the first struggles Eleanor joined.

She saw how the ruling class in Britain tried to conservatize a highly skilled section of the working class by making concessions on wages. Again and again she pointed out that a divided working class, whose leaders practised class collaboration, would never win its own liberation. In fact it stood to lose everything that it had gained unless that policy was reversed. From that standpoint she favoured the formation of a labour party as a step toward class independence for the British workers.

The uncompromising internationalist perspective that guided Eleanor Marx's political life was reflected in her writings and translations. As a journalist she contributed columns on the international movement to various left-wing English newspapers.

Through translations she made available to English workers key revolutionary writings. In an age of stilted translations, she attempted more than just a literal rendition. She took as her goal the task of making translation 'sound' so authentic that the reader would not be constantly aware that it was a translation at all.

Among her political translations are Lissagaray's classic *History of the Paris Commune* (1886), articles by the Russian revolutionary Stepanik (1884, 1885), and Plekhanov's *Anarchism and Socialism* (1895).

### The Second International

Eleanor Marx knew that a revolutionary must be part of an organized social group. Unable to overcome the small and fragmented character of the socialist movement in England, she worked with all groups and urged them to join together in action wherever possible.

Additionally, she saw the need to organize socialists of



various national groups into one international party, where they could hammer out a programme with the benefit of international collaboration and coordinate campaigns such as the fight for the eight-hour workday.

Thus Eleanor Marx played an important organizing role in the congresses of the Second International. Her biographer summarizes her fight against the delaying tactics, disorganization, and political disorientation of the organizing committee for the founding congress of the Second International, held in 1889. Convinced that the International must have a revolutionary socialist programme, she opposed those socialists who believed that it could include such divergent trends as the anarchists.

At the founding congress in Paris as well as at its subsequent ones in Brussels (1891) and London (1896), Eleanor Marx played an essential role as a translator. As the German socialist Eduard Bernstein recounted:

'She was ceaselessly busy, from morning till evening, generally interpreting in three languages. She gave herself no respite, missed no session. Despite the oppressive heat in the hall she stayed the course of the whole Congress doing this thankless, grueling work...'

Eleanor Marx also translated many of the reports of the Second International. She participated in the organization of the congresses, in the political discussions, and in the technical preparations. She delivered one of the main national reports, 'Report from Great Britain and Ireland', at the 1891 Brussels Congress.

### Fighter for Union Rights

As a revolutionary internationalist, Eleanor Marx threw herself into building and strengthening the British contingent of the international workers' movement. And the second volume of Kapp's biography details the explosive growth of the English trade-union movement, beginning with the organizing drive launched by the gas workers in 1889.

The victory of the gas workers' strike inspired a dock workers' strike, which at its peak involved 100,000 workers from eleven London docks. The fact that these poorly paid workers — who had to compete with each other every morning at shape up — could carry out such a united and effective fight was inspiring to all workers.

Eleanor Marx participated at every level in these strike battles — from handling administrative details at the union headquarters, to international fund-raising and explaining the issues to foreign workers so that they would refuse to be used as strikebreakers. She helped organize the first women's branch of the gas workers union and became its secretary.

Two of the largest trade unions in Britain today, numbering almost 3 million workers between them — the Transport and General Workers Union and Municipal Workers — originated in the struggle of the gas workers and dock workers.

### A Pioneer of Women's Rights

An extraordinarily politically aware and well-read woman, Eleanor Marx always felt the pinch of poverty. In an age when educated women acquired only a superficial 'culture' in order to be better equipped for marriage, Eleanor Marx longed for economic independence. She became a researcher, a teacher, a translator, an actress, and a typist out of that tremendous need to open wider the limited range of opportunities available.

As a working woman, she saw the central problem of women's secondary position as an economic one. In reviewing August Bebel's *Women and Socialism* in 1885, she wrote, 'We must seek the real cause of woman's enslaved position in her economic dependence upon man, and that her 'emancipation' means nothing but 'economic freedom'.

That year the English editor William Thomas Stead exposed the practice of child prostitution. In the course of the ensuing discussion, Eleanor Marx commented:

'Nearly all women obliged to earn a living have to choose between starvation and prostitution, and this must go on so long as one class can buy the bodies of another, whether in the form of labour power or sexual embraces.'

It is clear that Eleanor Marx stood with the most advanced socialists of her age in understanding how the vast majority of women suffered. Some 'socialists' of that time called for banning women from the work force. They claimed this was necessary because women were hired at a cheaper rate of pay and forced to work harder than males, thus lowering standards for all workers. But their underlying concern was to uphold class society's definition of a woman's place.

In contrast, Eleanor Marx asserted the right of women to work, and called upon them to organize into unions. Additionally, she pierced the sexist romanticization of housework as 'woman's natural role' and labeled it endless 'drudgery'.

Inspired by the pioneering work of Bebel and by Engels' *Origins of the Family, Private Property, and the State*, Eleanor Marx expanded her initial review of Bebel's *Women and Socialism* into a commercially produced pamphlet, *The Woman Question*, co-authored by Edward Aveling.

Her interest in the most socially progressive writers of her day underscored her awareness of the constricting roles society imposed on women. Thus Marx was drawn to writers such as Ibsen and Flaubert, who portrayed the varied forms of women's oppression and the conscious and unconscious expressions of women's resistance. She translated some of their works into English.

While it would be a mistake to regard Eleanor Marx as a modern-day feminist she fought for every democratic right denied women — including the right to vote. Above all, she spotlighted the class roots of women's oppression and the socialist solution to it.

### A Professional Revolutionist

On everything she did, Eleanor Marx left a stamp of revolutionary professionalism. She was considered one of the most memorable socialist agitators of her generation. A popular lecturer, she was equally at ease discussing the social significance of the poet Shelley, the conditions of English factories and the loopholes in existing health and safety legislation, or popularizing the ideas of socialism.

She was attentive to what others might consider minor details. Her careful research and her willingness to acquire new skills — ranging from typing and shorthand to Yiddish — were always at the disposal of the workers movement. And she willingly shared her knowledge and skills with others.

She taught Will Thorne, a leader of the gas workers union, how to read and write. She encouraged youthful socialists to develop their writing styles, taking time to go over their first attempts, showing them how to be more concise.

Eleanor Marx's circle of friends included not only political collaborators such as Friedrich Engels and Wilhelm Liebknecht, but trade unionists, writers, and actors.

In the midst of all this fruitful work Eleanor Marx committed suicide in 1898. For nearly fifteen years she had lived with Edward Aveling. Most of her friends intensely disliked him and many blamed him for her suicide at the age of forty-three.

Kapp attempts to present fairly the complex personality of Aveling, sifting through contradictory accounts. Aveling was incapable of an intense emotional relationship and seemed cold next to the vivacious Eleanor Marx, but he was an intellectually stimulating companion. He did not demand subservience but encouraged Eleanor Marx's drive to develop in her own right. Both were intensely involved in building the socialist movement, and they shared an interest in the theatre as well.

Their relationship was a collaborative one. Together they produced numerous articles and four pamphlets: *The Factory Hell*, *Shelley's Socialism*, *The Woman Question*, and *The Working Class Movement in America*.

Accepting the emotional limitations of her relationship with Aveling, Eleanor Marx managed to live for fifteen years with the inner tensions this generated. These were the most fruitful years of her life.

At the time of her suicide, her relationship with Aveling had come to the breaking point. At the same time it had become clear that he was dying (his death following hers by only two



months). Kapp notes, 'Aveling alone could not have destroyed Eleanor, though his cold heart, incapable of love, undoubtedly froze her eager hold on life...The dire resolve to kill herself must surely have been taken because she believed she was no longer needed by anyone or anything.' It is possible that a downturn in the international class struggle reinforced that ill-founded belief.

The working class movement *did* need Eleanor Marx. Had she lived, she would have been able to play an important role in combating the degeneration of the Second International, the bulk of whose leaders succumbed to the very chauvinism and class collaboration against which she had always fought. The revolutionary socialists in the Second International would have been significantly strengthened with Eleanor Marx on their side.

In summarizing Eleanor Marx's distinctive contribution,

Kapp writes:

'She was zealous to work for any and every practical reform without for a moment losing sight of the revolutionary aim; to agitate for the total overthrow of the system without brushing aside a single immediate demand for which the working class is prepared to fight...She saw organized working men and women as possessed of the strength of a sleeping giant...'

She devoted her life to raising the consciousness and organization of the working class, the social force destined to end oppression and exploitation and open a new era of progress and equality for all humanity. That she was able to accomplish so much in this cause in her short life is both remarkable and inspiring. And Yvonne Kapp has performed a great service by providing this richly detailed and sympathetic portrait of this fighting woman and her historic life's work.

**Diane Feeley**

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