

LABOUR REVIEW

Vol. 4

APRIL - MAY 1959

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CHALLENGE OF THE SOCIALIST LABOUR LEAGUE

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Some Past Rank-and-File Movements	13
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The Challenge of the Socialist Labour League

LABOUR REVIEW welcomes the decision to set up, in the shape of the Socialist Labour League, an organization of Marxists within the Labour Party and trade unions. For over two years this journal has striven to defend and develop the revolutionary theory without which no revolutionary movement is possible. In a very real sense, all our work has been a preparation for this new 'step forward of the real movement', a step forward which in present-day circumstances in Britain is indeed worth 'a dozen programmes'. Not that there is any programmatic ambiguity about the new revolutionary organization. Together with the more immediate reporting of and commentary upon the class struggle carried out with increasing assurance by *The Newsletter*, the efforts of LABOUR REVIEW to secure theoretical clarity have helped to lay quite substantial foundations for the emergent League.

Now comes the task of erecting a firm and balanced structure on these foundations. Our journal has an indispensable part to play. Our allotted share of the task is enormous: no less than the education of a generation of working-class fighters and leaders, to whom it will be given to seize and hold State power, to accomplish the British Revolution. Henceforward LABOUR REVIEW will appear as the theoretical organ of the Socialist Labour League. This implies no change whatever in our policy of admitting non-Marxist and even anti-Marxist contributors to our columns, in the belief that the clash of ideas is the best way to educate people, the best way to demonstrate the validity of

Marxism and the falsity of the ideas which in one way or another are engendered by obsolete social relations. It does imply, however, that LABOUR REVIEW itself will speak as the voice of a movement, unequivocally and firmly; that it exists to serve that movement and thereby serve the working class. The closer our review gets to the living movement; the more it is seen by militant workers as one of their best weapons; the more it can at once stimulate and satisfy their taste for that theory which is linked with practice and illuminates practice—the more adequately shall we be fulfilling our function.

* * *

To readers who are unaware of the difficulties which of late have beset the print-shop where this journal is produced we owe a word of explanation for the non-appearance of an issue in January. For several months work in the print-shop has been hampered by building operations whose object has been the expansion, re-equipment and reorganization of the press on the most up-to-date lines, so that it can adequately serve the needs of the Socialist Labour League in the fields of propaganda, agitation and education for many years to come. At times it has been only just possible, in the midst of this work, to set up and print *The Newsletter*. The present issue of LABOUR REVIEW is now so late that we thought it better to redate it and aim to give readers another four issues in the course of 1959. We would add that ours are the difficulties of a workers' Press, deprived by its very nature of the resources enjoyed by millionaire press-owners. Our problems have been ones of growth and development. Such problems are vexatious, but exciting.

I. *Who Shall Have the Whip Hand?*

WHAT is the situation in which the Socialist Labour League is born, to inherit and carry forward the best traditions of four international associations of working men? If we were to choose one word to sum up the salient features of this period, on a world scale, that word would be 'crisis'. Either actually or potentially, the profoundest crisis faces the three main actors on the world stage: the bourgeoisie and the two bureaucracies, reformist and Stalinist, that

have substituted manoeuvres for battles, accommodations for leadership. Informing all the work of the League is the conviction that only when a fourth actor, the working class, steps once again on to the stage of history will these crises be resolved in a lasting—though for some, perhaps, painful—way.

Even as the self-satisfied prophets of a new capitalist millennium, of doubled living standards, of expansion, full employment and the disappearance of the trade

cycle, were waiting for the ink to dry on their lucubrations—lo! the bubble labelled 'expansion' burst in their faces. In the USA—unemployment passes the 4 million mark again. In Britain—over 550,000 unemployed according to official figures, but in reality a million out of work, according to reputable economists. Do Labour Party electioneers tell their audiences that this is the fault of the wicked Tories? Their own lack of any adequate policy for restoring full employment gives the game away: the tendency to slump and unemployment is inherent in the capitalist system. It expresses that system's crisis. That the Tories encourage, within certain limits, the growth of the dole queue in British cities, serves merely to indicate the depth of this crisis, as do all other measures they have taken to put the workers' backs instead of their own under the economic lash. Their offensive is a far more conscious and co-ordinated attempt than many suppose to impose a ruling-class 'solution'.

In Moscow and in Cyprus the British bourgeoisie has been engaged in freeing its hands, or trying to. Why? Is it disinterested love of peace? Is Christian practice measuring up to Christian precept for the first time in 2,000 years? Or does Macmillan just want to sell books to the Russians? We do not think so. But we do not believe, either, that the approaching General Election is the prime consideration. To be sure, the white fur hat and the rest of the ballyhoo are part of the Tory party's election effort. But the fundamental reason for disengagement abroad is to be seen at Ford's and Morris's. The bourgeoisie has to be free to intensify its offensive at home. The experiences of the past two years have hammered home to the Tories this lesson: that the British workers are in no mood to accept without a fight cuts in their living standards or attacks on their organization.

A cartoon appeared recently in the *Daily Mail* show-

ing the shop steward as a grinning lion, a whip in its paw, making its tamer (labelled 'TUC') perform circus tricks, while a crowd of *Daily Mail* readers—at least one supposes that the maiden aunts, stockbrokers' clerks and retired colonels would readily identify themselves with those vacant faces—gape through the bars in consternation. An ideal caption would have been: 'This animal is wicked: when you attack it, it defends itself.' The cartoonist drew better than he knew. For reasons set forth in our last issue, the struggle in industry is indeed a struggle about who shall have the whip hand. Who is to dictate to whom in the factories? Are workers to lose their livelihood, or are bosses to be compelled to share the work and maintain in 'hard times' those who have for years by their labour been making fat dividends for the shareholders? In this struggle, the employers mean business. Read the engineering employers' frank avowal that they wish they had had a show-down with the engineering workers in 1957. Read the *Economist* reiterating almost weekly its belief that from the employers' point of view strikes are better than shop stewards' organization. Throughout industry a testing-time is coming such as has not been seen in this country for a generation. The crisis of capitalism is focusing on an assault against the workers' elected representatives at workshop level. No slander will be too vile, no trick too mean, no mass dismissal too costly, if 'discipline'—i.e., the annihilation of workshop organization—is likely to be achieved thereby. And the crisis of working-class leadership is expressed most sharply in this fact: that the present leaders, 'communists' and 'Lefts' included, are not preparing or mobilizing their members for the fight. What is more, these would-be lion-tamers are doing their utmost to witch-hunt into silence all those who *are* trying, as best they can, to carry out this task of preparation and mobilization.

II. Central Africa and the Hypocrisy of Centrism

BUT before discussing the Labour leaders' ultimate confession of bankruptcy in face of their members' demands for a fighting socialist policy, let us glance at yet another expression of both the crisis of the capitalist system and the crisis of working-class leadership: the events in central Africa. No sooner is a phoney 'settlement' arrived at in Cyprus than the colonial revolution bursts forth at another point. The leader-writers reach wearily for their pens and their clichés about 'responsibility', 'order', 'partnership', 'constructive efforts' and 'constitutional settlements'. Lennox-Boyd comes to their aid in the House of Commons with a tale, unsupported by a shred of evidence, about a plot to 'massacre' Europeans. Then the real massacre—of forty Africans at the hands of 'security' police whose

pastimes are shooting black prisoners in the knee and burning down Africans' huts. And when areas do rise in revolt, not a single white person is killed. The real plot, against which the victims had been demonstrating, was a plan to impose *apartheid* on millions more Africans, to consolidate the rule of a handful of white landowners (it is romantic and misleading to call them 'settlers'), to exploit still more brutally the labour of copper-miners and labourers whose land has been stolen from them, to turn Nyasaland into a second Kenya in order to fulfil these aims. When will the imperialists learn? Bastion after bastion of their empire has crumbled; government spokesman after government spokesman has threatened and blustered, only to eat his words in some subsequent statement, much to the

confusion of the die-hards and would-be book-burners of Bournemouth. And still the tide of colonial liberation rolls on. It will not cease to roll till 'labour in a black skin' has finally cast off its chains and the flowers of spurious 'self-government' that decorate them.

Yet, recalling the massacre at Enugu under a Labour government, the exploits of John Strachey in the Malayan jungle, and other episodes between 1945 and 1951, we are entitled to ask whether the Labour leaders, however fierce their cries of 'Resign!', would in fact act very differently from the Tories in this matter if they were in power. Certain aspects of Mr John Stonehouse's behaviour add point to this question. He was called 'white Kaffir' and otherwise insulted by a crowd of racialists; yet a correspondent of the *Manchester Guardian* described his deportation from the Central African Federation in these terms:

For about fifteen yards he struggled and kicked while Press photographers took pictures. He then ceased and turned to the Pressmen with the question: 'Have you got all you want?' He then walked quietly to the aircraft, chatted with immigration and police officials, offered them cigarettes, and shook hands with them before the plane took off. . . . Mr Stonehouse said: 'I put up a token resistance.'

Token resistance! And that very same day thirty Africans were murdered. Neither the British Labour movement nor the oppressed peoples of Africa are helped by this peculiarly repulsive combination of cynicism, play-acting and weakness. Stonehouse followed his 'token resistance' by demanding that the British government should fly in British troops. Where from? From Cyprus, perhaps, where a coroner not long ago indicted them for their brutality at Fama-gusta? Stonehouse's politics show Centrism at its most hypocritical. There are no anti-imperialist heroes among Labour MPs. Not one of them would give open and unqualified support to the colonial revolution. Not one of them would tell the Africans the truth: that only organization and a resolute struggle will win them independence. Not one of them would tell the British workers the truth: that independence is not a gift to be bestowed on colonial peoples, but a goal for which these peoples will fight—and that it is in the interests of the British workers to fight alongside them against a common enemy.

The colonial revolution is the acid test for the Labour Party leaders, and for Labour MPs. They fail, because they give the African workers platitudes and counterfeit tokens, while betraying them in deeds.

III. *The Emperor Is Naked—and a Witch-hunter*

ON the colonial question, as on other questions, the Marxists in the Labour Party are in the position of the boy who blurted out: 'But the Emperor has no clothes on.' They are saying what everyone knows to be true, but by common consent is not to be spoken of until after the General Election: that the glossy programme *The Future Labour Offers YOU* is not a socialist programme; that the Labour leaders are abandoning socialist principles in the hope of attracting middle-class voters; that they have no effective policy for ending unemployment; that if there is to be any hope of mobilizing the workers to meet and beat back the employers' offensive, a fight must be waged against these leaders. To mention the unmentionable is a crime in the eyes of the bureaucrats who lead the Labour Party. It is a crime that merits expulsion, under a kangaroo closure procedure quite contrary to normal democratic practice. The way in which Councillors Finch and Taylor were expelled fixes on a microscope slide the leaders' fear of putting the real political issues before their members.

These two Birmingham councillors were given twenty-four hours' notice of the meeting at which they were to be expelled. They had to answer there and then charges made verbally. They were refused a month's adjournment to enable them to prepare their case. They were refused the charges in writing to

enable them to prepare their appeal. Much of the 'evidence' seems to have been provided by a man who on his own admission had a disordered mind at the time he made allegations against Finch and Taylor. The meeting was packed with Right-wingers, some of whom are rarely seen at meetings. And Morgan Phillips, commenting on the expelled members' right of appeal, made it clear that he for one had already judged the issue.

There is only one word for this crooked procedure: it is a witch-hunt. The picture is completed by Birmingham Labour Party's proscription of a small, *ad hoc* industrial movement, an informal group of shop stewards, to which Finch and Taylor belong. Henceforth it is a crime in the Labour Party to advocate, as they did, that local parties support workers in dispute or campaign on their behalf. (No criticism of Lady Attlee's fawning on a bus conductress who scabbed in the London bus strike, though a picture of this charming scene was displayed in the *Daily Mail*.)

In such a situation it behoves the Marxists in the Labour Party to say quite openly that the party is in the hands of middle-class people and of trade union bureaucrats with middle-class ideology; that the only hope for the Labour Party is for the industrial struggle to become the motive force of any Leftward develop-

ment; that it is idle to wait for *Tribune* or Victory for Socialism to begin such a development, so tight are the election shackles they have tied on themselves. The Marxists must intensify the struggle for socialist principles. They must answer the witch-hunt by showing their fellow-members what are the real political issues at stake. They must bring the working-class struggle

into the heart of the Labour Party and mobilize the rank and file of the trade unions to participate actively in the local Labour Parties for this purpose. To do all this an organization of active fighters for socialist policies is needed, an organization that will lead the opposition within the Labour and trade union movement to the present policies of class betrayal.

IV. *A Living Vindication of Marxism*

THIS is the situation in which the Socialist Labour League comes into being, as a living vindication of Marxism, as a decisive challenge to all open defenders of capitalism and to all purveyors of quack remedies inside the Labour movement. Events are moving swiftly, and they are moving in the Marxists' favour. Our journal's warning, over the past two years, has been essentially a simple one: mistrust all who put forward any alternative to the class struggle as a way of fighting capitalism and war. On all sides the cry of 'To the summit!' has resounded. Mikoyan has been to the USA. The *Daily Worker's* 'MacMoscow' has been to Russia. Khrushchev has been to Leipzig, where he proposed a toast to the health of Alfred Krupp the war criminal, saying: 'Please convey my best wishes to Herr Krupp.' Despite these movements of statesmen, despite this all-but-a-summit-meeting, the arms race continues, the H-bomb tests go on, the botulinus toxin and God knows what other horrors are still manufactured at Porton. Pacifism and summitolatry are bankrupt. On all sides the 'peaceful' road to socialism has been extolled. At South Bank police by the hundred tore a gap through the picket-line for the scabs and Brian Behan was sent to jail for defending his fellow-workers against police brutality. Fabianism and Stalinism are

bankrupt. Only the method of the class struggle, fought right through to the end, can advance the cause of the working class. And only the Marxists tell the workers to place confidence, not in remote and well-paid leaders, but in their own strength.

And the workers are listening and are judging for themselves. It moves. Hardly a week goes by now without some newspaper or journal referring with ill-concealed irritation to the mysterious phenomenon of the recrudescence of 'Trotskyism' in Britain. Our native Philistines fancy that ideas, like men, can be killed with the hired assassin's pickaxe. So much the worse for the Philistines. Next year, which sees the twentieth anniversary of the murder of the greatest upholder of Marxism against the crimes and theoretical decay of Stalinism, will see that anniversary commemorated in the most fitting way of all: by the growth in power and influence of a movement that is the living embodiment of the ideas for which he lived and died; a movement that is destined to lead the class struggle of the British workers to victory; a movement that will seek to aid the theoretical clarification of Marxists in other countries and their assembly into an international organization.

V. *Postscript*

AND now, just as this issue of LABOUR REVIEW is printed, comes the proscription of the Socialist Labour League and *The Newsletter* for advocating socialist policies—on the same day, be it noted, that the leaders of the hosiery workers' union accept without a murmur a second savage wage cut for their members. Two decisions: two precedents. If the attack on wages is not resisted, and if sectional differences prevent any concerted fight on this year's claims, the employing class will redouble its attack. If the 'Lefts' on the Labour Party national executive vote for the proscription of the Marxists today—as they did—then tomorrow they themselves will be correspondingly the weaker under the blows of the Right wing. Both the industrial struggle and the witch-hunt have their own implacable logic. Once let a position go by default, once fail to resist reaction, and you are baring a further victim's neck, perhaps your own, for the knife. Let the union leaders be warned. The defeat of the hosiery workers without so much as a shot being fired

only postpones the eventual reckoning, and ensures that it will be all the more bitter when it comes. And let those 'Left' heroes Silverman and Mikardo be warned. They can protect themselves for a time by joining in the witch-hunt. But they should watch out; Watson and Matthews have old scores to pay off. No matter how much they posture, or how many doors they knock on in the General Election, their complicity in these latest proscriptions cannot shield them for long.

All these gentlemen—hosiery employers and union leaders, witch-hunters of 'Left' and Right, and those who, themselves politically paralysed, write in *Tribune* about 'mindless militancy'—all of them have left out of account the decisive factor: the class struggle. 1959 is not 1954, when *Socialist Outlook* could be strangled. The tempo of the class struggle is quickening. The tide is turning. This is why the challenge of the Socialist Labour League is a formidable one.

Revolution and Class Consciousness

Cliff Slaughter

In the last two years many Marxists have had to re-examine their basic assumptions, and have realized that their understanding of Marxist theory was perhaps distorted by their allegiance to latter-day 'communism', which for want of a better term will be referred to here as 'Stalinism'. The aim of this article is to go to the root of the concept which is the principal target of all revisionists of Marxism: the concept of the working-class revolution and working-class power. In one form or another, all 'new thinkers' in the socialist movement, as well as critics on the outside, challenge Marx's hypothesis that the working class is the only revolutionary force in the capitalist system, and that it will inevitably establish its own dictatorship as the first step to a classless society. Some people say that capitalism has changed in such a way that revolution is no longer possible or necessary for the working class. Others say that when revolution did occur, in Russia in November 1917, experience proved that the working class could not prevent the rise of an oppressive and brutal dictatorship, the very negation of socialism.

These attacks on Marxism (and they are often expressed with laudatory phrases about 'the great contributions of Marx') arise from a lack of knowledge of Marx's theory of the revolutionary working class. Consequently their interpretation of the experience of the working class since 1848 is superficial and non-dialectical. This article attempts to present briefly the basic approach of Marxism to the problem of working-class revolutionary consciousness. The reader would be helped if he reread the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (1848).

THE METAPHYSICAL DILEMMA

If the development of society is seen from the point of view of old-fashioned 'mechanistic' materialism, then conscious revolutionary activity can have no place, since human beings are expected to behave in a manner strictly determined by their environment, whether social or natural. Philosophical idealism is no better basis for political action, neglecting as it does the dependence of consciousness upon social reality and proceeding from the assumption that society can be transformed according to what the human will finds most reasonable or desirable. In the years immediately preceding 1848, Marx and Engels solved the dilemma of metaphysics, a dilemma which made reformers, 'socialists' and 'communists' ask: 'If man is indeed the product of his social environment, a fact that becomes increasingly evident once we are liberated from religious dogma, how will it be possible for the products of capitalism—an evil society—to be the creators of a new socialist society?' This contradiction bedevilled the social and political thinkers of the Enlightenment in eighteenth-century France, who showed the dependence of men's thought on their material existence but, at the same time, acted politically as though pure reason, once injected into the heads of society's rulers, would put the world right.

The Utopian socialists of Marx's day were victims

of the same dilemma. Owen thought that Queen Victoria would support his socialist co-operative schemes because they were so transparently reasonable. Fourier, although a great thinker, waited many years for rich men to answer his advertisement for support for similar schemes. Certain modern socialist sects (e.g., the Socialist Party of Great Britain) devote themselves to pure propaganda, believing that the people must be converted to socialism before we overthrow capitalism. They are another variety of the same species. We also have large numbers of people at the other extreme, as it were, who feel they have been knocking their heads against a brick wall in politics and that capitalism has so corrupted the working class and its leadership that there is no hope for the socialist movement.

Marxism is often accused of nourishing a similar contradiction at its heart. The American scholar Crane Brinton, for example, while acknowledging that the conception of class struggle is a scientific one, helping the analysis of historical development and based on objective evidence, states that the idea of proletarian dictatorship is a compound of propaganda and guesswork and the classless society is pure theology—or more properly eschatology.¹ Another renowned historian, E. H. Carr, makes a similar criticism of Marxism when he discusses the differences between Lenin and the Mensheviks in pre-revolutionary Russia.

The teaching of Marx, from the 'Communist Manifesto' onwards, contained both evolutionary or scientific or objective elements and revolutionary or propagandist or subjective elements. Marxism was at one and the same time a statement of the laws of social and economic development and an exhortation to resort both to non-violent and to violent action in order to further the fulfilment of those laws. The two aspects of Marxism could be reconciled on the view that human affairs are subject to a process of continuous evolution which, none the less, does not dispense with occasional discontinuous acts of revolution forming an essential part of the process.²

According to Carr the Mensheviks stressed the evolutionary, and the Bolsheviks the revolutionary side of Marxism. In fact Carr's own 'common sense', non-dialectical approach leads him to miss the whole point of Marx's historical materialism; and this in turn gives rise to the implication that Lenin was above all an organizer and brilliant conspirator rather than a theorist. Carr's own history shows clearly that the difference between Lenin and Mensheviks like Dan, Axelrod and, later, Plekhanov was one of understanding dialectically (rather than mechanically) the social and economic development of Russia, particularly of its peasantry and proletariat.

Carr 'reconciles' the objective and subjective aspects of Marxism by a neat formula about continuity and discontinuity. Yet the actual reconciliation is not in

¹ Crane Brinton, *The Anatomy of Revolution* (New York, 1952), Appendix. Eschatology is the doctrine of death, judgment, heaven and hell.

² E. H. Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution*, vol. i (1950), pp. 38-44.

Carr's head but in social practice, in the class struggle, just as the reconciliation of objective and subjective aspects in natural science is practical. No one ever supposes that there is a problem in chemistry of reconciling the objective and active sides of the science, because the essence of the whole thing is practice, grappling with the real problems of the material universe. What Carr has missed is the great advance made by Marx from mechanistic materialism and Utopian socialism to scientific socialism. The vital link between an objective science of society and revolutionary activity is the objective, practical role of human consciousness in history. Marx showed that the evolution of society, that which 'makes men what they are', is not something outside of man, but is itself the product of human activity.

The world of human affairs, then, is not simply a part of 'matter', alien to man. Nor is it the work of men's minds, not even the externalized 'essence of man' as some of the more advanced thinkers of Marx's time thought. History, said Marx, is made by men; not by 'Man', abstract 'Man', but by real, living active men. And men make history under definite, historically-evolved conditions which are not of their own choosing. The processes through which these conditions come about are law-governed and can be scientifically investigated. Men can begin to understand the processes of development of which their lives are a part. They will then understand the significance of their own social experiences and by this means become actors of a different kind in the historical process. From this point their actions will not be based on blind ignorance and complete unawareness of the changes taking place in social life. Nor will they be chained to the illusion of absolute free will. They will then attempt to analyse scientifically their own experience and the experience of other men.

THE ROLE OF CLASS STRUGGLE

Marx's greatest discovery after he had learned to view human consciousness as itself an objective force in history was the central role of class struggle in the process of social change. History could now be seen in its broad outlines as a series of transformations from lower to higher forms of social and economic organization. Men differentiated themselves from the animal world by becoming producers. As opposed to the mere food-gathering of other animals, human production implies the systematic use and manufacture of implements or tools, i.e., utilizing one part of nature refashioned by man to appropriate energy from the rest of nature. Throughout his history man has constantly improved the efficiency of these tools.

This active, creative adaptation to the environment is what distinguishes man historically and functionally from the rest of the animal kingdom. However this form of adaptation has a very important corollary. The standardization and use of these implements requires that men establish certain definite production relations among themselves. These relations—the cooperation of men to do certain jobs and the division of labour—have to be adapted to the tools of production, otherwise the economy will break down.

At a certain stage of cultural development the relations of production are characterized by division into classes, groups within the same economy, but with different interests and sources of income in the products of labour, different 'rights' to these products—with

exploitation (i.e., some men living on the fruits of other men's labour) as a necessary adjunct. During critical or revolutionary periods the forces of production develop to a point where existing class divisions become a barrier to their further advance. There ensues a period of conflict, often prolonged, during which the classes become conscious enough of their own interests to fight out the issue. In the process of these class struggles men remake the structure of society and lay the basis for renewed advance.

Very often the results of social conflict are not those intended by the participants. Moreover, the slogans of the contending classes are often clothed in religious and other ideological disguises. Yet it is along class lines that the basic alignments are made in all large-scale social conflicts.

The analysis of this active relationship between a class and its environment, an environment which includes its enemies, is a fundamental aspect of Marxism. From this point of view it is easy to see what was the crux of the opposition of Lenin and the Bolsheviks to the Mensheviks. The Mensheviks took an 'objective' view of the development of Russia's economy, but one which excluded a dynamic analysis of class relationships in Russia, of the retarded development of classes there. The Menshevik analysis did not begin to examine the special problems of the working class in a backward country after the emergence of the proletariat internationally as a threat to capitalism. This is why the Mensheviks failed to see the opportunity for the proletariat of such a backward country as Russia to combine its struggle against capital with the emancipation of the peasantry—a task which in earlier periods was performed by the bourgeoisie in overthrowing feudalism.

The Russian Mensheviks were not alone in using Marxist phrases and formulas to cover up their rejection of the revolutionary role of the working class. Throughout European social democracy the so-called 'orthodox Marxists' tended to become embroiled in the day-to-day processes of the parliamentary system and the trade union struggle. Lenin's struggle against the ideas of Menshevism was only a prelude to his struggle against the ideas of the Second International. Against their own declared programmes, the various social-democratic parties in the Second International supported their own 'fatherlands', thus laying bare its theoretical decay. The German Social-Democratic Party, from being the outstanding example of proletarian political organization, became the home of the most conservative Labour bureaucracy, capable of the bloodiest counter-revolutionary actions in 1918 and 1919. This transition took place without any departure from the profession of 'Marxism' by the social-democratic leaders. Had it been possible for Rosa Luxemburg and her comrades to struggle against the ideas of Bebel, David and the other leaders of the German party as early and as successfully as Lenin began a parallel struggle in Russia, then the tragic defeat of the Spartacus League in 1918-19 and the destruction of the German soviets might never have happened—and the Russian Revolution of 1917 would have had that revolutionary support from the west whose absence was finally the cause of the Revolution's degeneration.

The Mensheviks failed in Russia because they did not base their politics on the real position of the working class as part of an international revolutionary

movement. Instead they saw Russia's future as a schematic series of inevitable economic stages through which she must 'inevitably' pass. On this line of reasoning the next stage was the bourgeois revolution, and it was no good the socialists trying to by-pass it. Bourgeois revolution therefore must be encouraged, and in the ensuing period of bourgeois democracy the working class would learn how to act as a political unit and then the socialist revolution would take its proper place on the time-table. Lenin and Trotsky, and to a great extent Rosa Luxemburg, realized that in the necessary period of parliamentary and trade union action within the bourgeois State (necessary for the purpose of forging links between Marxists and the masses of the people) there had taken place a certain degeneration and corruption of the working-class parties. The fundamental revolutionary lessons of the revolutions of 1848, reinforced and enriched in the Paris Commune in 1871, had been pushed into the background. If, as Marx said, 'the emancipation of the working class is the task of the workers themselves', then revolutionaries must have a clear and firm understanding of the process by which the working class becomes a revolutionary force. As an economic grouping, based on the exploitation of its labour through the system, the working class is potentially a revolutionary force. Its experience of capitalism creates its consciousness of its class interests. The first part of the *Communist Manifesto* is devoted to a demonstration of the necessary concentration and solidification of the working class as a social force by the development of capital itself.

THE NEED FOR SOCIALIST CONSCIOUSNESS

But the historical task of the working class is to effect the greatest transformation which has ever taken place in human history. To this task corresponds man's highest level of consciousness—the scientific understanding of the development of society. Thus Marxism is a theory in which man's subjective and objective existence are united. The experience of an individual worker is sufficient to make him conscious of the need to fight his immediate enemy, the employer, but it is such that he is excluded from the possibility of independently arriving at scientific socialism. For the comprehension of the total processes of the capitalist system and of the interrelations of its parts, the highest development of natural and historical science was required. Only with these weapons, expressed at their highest and most general in materialist dialectics, can the total experience of the working class, and the system of which it is part, be comprehended. The working-class party, a fusion of scientific theory and working-class practice and experience, is the means for the development of socialist consciousness. The revolutionary party is the necessary, logical outcome of Marx's teaching on the nature of human consciousness. Democratic centralism is the method by which the practice and experience of the working class is worked over, scientifically checked and analysed, and thrown back into the furnace of the class struggle. Without such an organization the experience of the workers is largely wasted; defeats are bitter blows and victories are illusory; theory becomes sterile formalism.

Marx and Engels made several errors in their great work, the *Communist Manifesto*. Their mistake in

thinking that the working class was more or less ready to play its decisive revolutionary role, and that capitalism was very near its final collapse, was very soon corrected. It became necessary to stress the need for patient mass work and participation in political activities which were not directly revolutionary, but which reflected the consciousness of the working class at its given stage of development. Marx himself turned to a thorough, scientific study of the system whose overthrow he had forecast. The results of this study were embodied in *Capital*, where he put to the test his hypothesis that the contradiction between the forces of production and the relations of production led to the overthrow of any class system.

In the period between 1850 and 1905 the European Marxists absorbed and developed these two sides of Marx's work: the creation of working-class political parties (with especially good results in Germany) and the application of historical materialism to problems of social development. Somewhere in the process, however, the essential content of Marx's theory—proletarian revolution and proletarian dictatorship—was more and more pushed into the background. It was Lenin and Trotsky in Russia, and Rosa Luxemburg in Germany, who rediscovered the fundamental revolutionary ideas contained in the *Communist Manifesto*. *Capital* was only a massive theoretical verification of the revolutionary message of 1848. Similarly, the turn to new forms of political work in the First International was likewise only a particular historical application of the same dialectical method which is so brilliantly used in the *Communist Manifesto*.

In this document, which is without parallel in historical significance, the ideas of class struggle, the economic structure of society, the revolutionary role of the working class, the necessary self-destruction of capitalism and the dialectical method itself are startling in their simplicity and maturity. Many people read the *Manifesto* when they first discover socialism, and think of it as just one more pamphlet. Yet it is perhaps the most complete work of Marx and Engels, in the context of which all their later work should be interpreted.

The revolutions of 1848 showed that society was not as ripe for the socialist revolution as Marx and Engels had thought: indeed another half-century elapsed before the contradictions reached the intensity necessary for revolution. Although remaining an active revolutionary, Marx devoted the rest of his life principally to the scientific demonstration of the laws of capitalist development, showing the inevitability of its collapse when it seemed to be expanding endlessly, and when the revolutionary elements in the working class seemed to be defeated and broken in will and organization. So much for those who say that if Marx and Engels were alive today they would not be revolutionaries! In the nineteenth century, these people tell us, it was 'natural' to be a revolutionary. Yet the truth is that the prevailing mood among nineteenth-century economists, philosophers and social theorists was one of optimism for capitalism's future and belief in automatic progress. The contradictions of capitalism were much more concealed than they are today—after two world wars, the depression of the thirties, the collapse of colonialism, and the Russian and Chinese revolutions.

If the *Communist Manifesto* is seen as a statement of Marx's general theory, the framework for *Capital*

and the other works of Marx and Engels, the remark, 'How "out of date" it is', is seen to be superficial. The accuracy of the *Manifesto's* predictions ceases to be a mechanical matter of adding up correct and incorrect prophecies. It is the mature expression, in terms of an analysis of the classes within capitalism, of Marx's philosophical rejection of idealism and mechanistic materialism, a rejection already brilliantly stated more abstractly in the *Theses on Feuerbach* (1844). It is also the harbinger of the world proletarian revolution. Henceforth anyone who tried to separate social science and the revolution would be unable to develop the one or achieve the other.

THE METHOD OF MARXIST ANALYSIS

In examining any phenomenon, Marx's method is to look for the basic internal contradiction which determines the movement of the whole. He shows how the working out of this contradiction provides the key to the relationships between particular events in particular places and periods. It does so in spite of the fact that some of these particular events have an appearance exactly opposite to that mechanically 'expected' from the basic law. In the study of the revolutionary socialist movement the key question is the contradictory relationship between the objective development of the material basis of capitalist society and the consciousness and organization of the working class in struggle. Both of these, of course, contain their own internal contradictions. But it must be remembered that these two are not separate abstract things, developing independently and acting upon one another as external forces, like billiard balls in collision or like an electricity power-station and the machines which it drives. They develop as aspects of one unified social system. Marx showed in the *Manifesto* that the development of capitalism implies the inevitable development of the working class, but not in a simple, mechanical way. Particular stages and characteristics of capitalism bring big but temporary differences between different sections of the working class. Today, for instance, Labour Party theorists do not see Britain's Welfare State, as a transitory chance phenomenon in the whole world revolutionary development, a combination of particular historical characteristics, an essentially accidental formation. These 'new thinkers' see it as a basically new type of society and a refutation of Marxism. Others look at the USSR and again fail to see it historically as the particular product of a specific stage of the world revolution, whose forward movement was arrested in 1923 and distorted by its political isolation ever since, and whose regeneration has been retarded by hundreds of unique features of world economics and political development in addition to the special problems of tsarist Russia's backward economy. Instead of this, they consider it as a special and unique phenomenon, an independent process.

For example, the Webbs talked about 'the Soviet experiment'; the Stalinists of the British Communist Party discuss Russia as an 'example' of the socialist type of society, and then engage in endless sterile discussions about whether this is a 'model' for others. The whole point of Trotsky's critique of Stalinism was not to nag at Stalin's political deficiencies or even his 'cult of the individual', but to keep discussion of the USSR in the context of the basic process of which it is a part—the world revolution against capitalism. Only in this

way can the dual role of the Stalinist bureaucracy be grasped. People brought up on Stalinist ideas find Trotsky's ideas on Russia hard to understand and even wholly negative because this whole difference of method is involved. They take particular criticisms of the USSR, of Gollan, of the French Communist Party, and reject them or rationalize them away because they retain a general static, one-sided picture of the USSR as the great bastion of socialism, and of the communist parties as the working-class vanguard, isolated and untouched by the rest of the world; therefore criticism of them is to be regarded as reactionary. Unless the historical method of Marx is grasped it is difficult to avoid a 'common-sense' impressionism, the logical end of which is either the conviction that 'despite its negative sides' Stalinism is the answer to the needs of the working class, or the conviction that history has proved Marx wrong in thinking the working class capable of revolution.

From the Marxist analysis of revolution the USSR appears in a very different light from the 'either-or' of the Stalinist method and of bourgeois eclecticism. Marxism sees Russia first as a living example of the collapse and crisis of capitalism (both by its break from the world capitalist system and by its threat to the economy and political stability of the capitalist powers). At the same time the existence of the USSR within the framework of world capitalism, and on the restricted socio-economic basis of old Russia from which it developed, has a particular historical effect on the international working class. Today the point has been reached when, for the working class to achieve full consciousness of its revolutionary role in society, all the illusions about the nature of the USSR have to be dispelled—and, in particular, socialists all over the world have to understand the origins and function of the Soviet bureaucracy which now rules Russia.

To state the point more generally, the working class can only achieve the degree of consciousness and organization necessary for victory if it has a leadership able to grasp the totality of social development in all the richness of its contradictory processes. Each new feature in the evolution of capitalism (e.g., its economic expansion after 1850, the emergence of imperialism, the rise of fascism, the breakdown of colonialism, the overwhelming economic superiority of the USA) places new and complex problems of theory and practice before the working-class movement. Imperialism not only creates new, knotty problems for economic and sociological research workers, Marxist or otherwise, to analyse; it also produces whole areas of social-structural distortion in which the achievement of class consciousness is for long periods very difficult. Imperialism has erected a barrier between European and black workers in southern Africa, where white workers organize to protect jobs from the Africans. Marxists must be able to explain to workers the real meaning of their position in society, no matter what the chance determinants and special features. Only with the grasp of the world-historical character of their role can these contradictory processes be integrated with the consciousness of the working class.

The present leaders of the working-class movements in many countries operate on the basis not of such a total view of the situation of their class, but of the special, superficial interests of particular (usually national) sections in special periods. This is not to say

that these leaders cannot construct great organizations and disseminate widely their own special ideas throughout society. Indeed, such organizations and ideologies have often been able to give the impression of impregnability and durability. But such phases always last for relatively brief periods. At a given moment they collapse in face of the deeper currents of the basic struggle between the classes. It is enough to cite only three examples: craft unionism in Britain during the period 1851-89; the German Social-Democratic Party of the turn of the century; and the Stalin dictatorship.

THE NATURE OF PROLETARIAN REVOLUTION

It has been suggested that in criticizing the *Communist Manifesto* as 'out of date' the opponents of Marxism misunderstand Marx's version of the revolutionary role of the working class and hence misinterpret the subsequent experience of the working-class movement.

A revolution is the seizure of power by a class in order to effect, in its own interests, the overthrow of the existing social structure. In all previous revolutions the victorious class has not overthrown the whole of the existing social conditions. For classes like the bourgeoisie, the aim of political revolution was to substitute for the previously dominant mode of appropriation their own, already developed, mode of appropriation. But the inevitable tendency of capitalism is to sweep aside all modes of appropriation other than the capitalist exploitation of wage-labour, so that only two basic classes confront each other. This is the key to the unique role of the working class in history. It cannot substitute its own mode of appropriation for that of the capitalist class, since by abolishing capital it abolishes its necessary opposite—wage-labour. The interests of the proletariat are directed towards a society without a proletariat, without exploitation, without a State.³

The historical appearance of such a class, whose aim is not to replace one form of exploitation by another, is the basis in reality for the proof of Marx's theories of consciousness and social development. Such a class does not need to create illusions with which to cover up differences with its allies, as the French bourgeoisie did when they coined the slogan, 'Liberty, Equality, Fraternity', to rally the masses whose assistance was required to defeat the old régime. The proletariat is a class whose experience and tasks compel it to com-

³ 'When the proletariat is victorious, it by no means becomes the absolute side of society, for it is victorious only by abolishing itself and its opposite. Then the proletariat disappears as well as the opposite which determines it, private property' (Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The Holy Family*, 1956, p. 52). Elsewhere in his early works, Marx characterized the working class thus: 'A class in civil society, which is not a class of civil society, a class which is the dissolution of all classes, a sphere of society which has a universal character because its sufferings are universal, and which does not claim a particular redress because the wrong which is done to it is not a particular wrong but wrong in general. . . which claims no traditional status but only a human status . . . a sphere, finally, which cannot emancipate itself without emancipating itself from all the other spheres of society, without therefore emancipating all these other spheres' (Karl Marx, *Introduction to a Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law*, in *Marx and Engels on Religion*, 1957, p. 56).

prehend the world scientifically, and to which illusions and self-deception are anathema. What Marx and Engels did in 1848 was to break out of the 'socialism' which argued from sentiment and 'pure reason', and to insist that communists must base their politics on things as they are. This means seeing things in their real development, and not suspended in an imaginary historical vacuum. Communists must not erect beautiful Utopias on the principles of freedom and justice, but first 'observe what was going on under their very eyes'. If this is the starting point, then 'the communists have no interests other than those of the working class as a whole'.

Thus the revolutionary party of the working class must not be 'just another political party', seeking to take over the State machine and distribute offices and privileges among its own élite and faithful followers. It stands not above but in front of its class, with the aim of arming that class theoretically and practically for the struggle against capitalism. 'The emancipation of the working class is the task of the working class itself.' By 1846 Marx had already begun to approach the work of the Communist League in this spirit.⁴ Writing of his work in that year, he said:

We issued a series of pamphlets, some of them printed, others lithographed, mercilessly criticizing the mixture of Anglo-French socialism or communism and German philosophy which represented the secret teachings of the League, and putting forward instead a scientific insight into the economic structure of bourgeois society as the only tenable basis, explaining this in a popular form and pointing out that the task was not to work out a Utopian system but to participate consciously in the historical process of social transformation taking place before our eyes.⁵

The depth of Marx's insight into the character of the proletariat in the 1840s is remarkable. Even in Great Britain, the most advanced centre of capitalism, large factories were very rare and remained so for many years after 1848, whereas in France and Germany the Industrial Revolution had hardly begun. In the USA the frontier was still expanding, and the slave system of the South still flourished. Socialist and communist organizations were minute in Europe and non-existent elsewhere. The developing revolutionary movements in Europe were national or bourgeois in character. Only the dynamic synthesis made by Marx of German dialectical philosophy, British political economy and French socialism could have burrowed so far and so accurately under the surface of European society and politics.

With the advantage of seventy years of hindsight, Mehring could say in his classic biography that events proceeded differently and certainly less rapidly than expected by Marx and Engels in 1848. He also made a valuable criticism of the *Communist Manifesto's* limitations.

Marx and Engels underestimated the importance of wage-struggles and of the trade union organizations of the workers, which were regarded primarily as training schools to prepare them for the political class struggle. . . . The 'Manifesto' therefore regarded the reaction of the proletariat to the impoverishing tendencies of the capitalist mode of

⁴ The Communist League, an international organization, had only 300 members.

⁵ Quoted in F. Mehring, *Karl Marx* (1936), p. 150.

production too one-sidedly in the light of a political revolution. It based its conclusions on the English and French revolutions, and expected several decades of civil war and national wars in whose hectic atmosphere the proletariat would quickly ripen into political maturity.⁶

In the much debated Introduction to *The Class Struggles in France*, Engels stressed the same points in evaluating the views which he and Marx held in 1848:

History has proved us, and all who thought like us, wrong. It has made it clear that the state of economic development on the Continent at that time was not, by a long way, ripe for the removal of capitalist production; it has proved this by the economic revolution which, since 1848, has seized the whole of the Continent. . . . At that time the masses, sundered and differing according to locality and nationality, linked only by a feeling of common suffering, undeveloped, tossed to and fro in their perplexity from enthusiasm to despair.⁷

Yet these brief statements may be misinterpreted if we do not look a little deeper. It was to Germany that the *Manifesto* directed the immediate attention of its readers, and it was only a matter of weeks before that country gave an astounding confirmation of the prophecy that a bourgeois revolution would break out there. What also emerged from the 1848 events in Germany was that, given the appearance of an international proletariat even remotely conscious of its independent interests, the bourgeoisie was incapable of carrying out the classical democratic tasks of the bourgeois revolution.⁸ Henceforth to talk about revolution and political struggle except on a basis of classes and their relationships would be a relapse into theology. In this sense the main lines of the *Manifesto* received immediate confirmation. The proletariat appeared on the political scene, and its appearance shaped European politics for the future. From now on no national bourgeoisie could attempt to attack feudal régimes or their remnants without looking over its shoulder at a class no longer content only to 'fight the enemies of its enemies'.

Now Marx's picture of the working class in relation to capitalist development was a generalization from British and French experience. In the period following 1848, given the further expansion of capitalism and its spread to every corner of the globe, there were to arise enormous differences in the conditions and stages of development of the working class in different countries and continents. Even in the nineteenth century Marx and Engels did not mechanically look to Britain, the most advanced capitalist country, for the greatest advances in working-class struggle, nor to France with its turbulent revolutionary tradition. It was a question rather of the dialectics of class struggle in the specific conditions, and Germany continued until the end of the century to be the main focus of working-class and Marxist development, with the temporary though important exception of the Paris Commune of 1871.⁹

⁶ *Ibid.* p. 150.

⁷ Karl Marx, *Selected Works*, vol. ii (1943), pp. 76-7.

⁸ 'To be sure, the German bourgeoisie was frightened not so much by the German as by the French proletariat. The June battle in Paris, in 1848, showed the bourgeoisie what it had to expect' (Engels, Preface to the second German edition, *The Peasant War in Germany*, 1956 ed., p. 22).

⁹ It is not simply a matter of 'uneven development' in the separate countries, but of the total revolutionary process being

Indeed the special results of Britain's being first in the field of capitalist development were already evident in the nineteenth century, so that Engels spoke of the 'bourgeois proletariat' which was growing up in the form of a labour aristocracy. British capitalism could give comparatively high standards to considerable numbers of skilled tradesmen, and these, the most highly organized, influenced strongly the ideology of the Labour movement in this country.¹⁰

Characteristics which are at one stage an advantage are quickly transformed into their opposite, of course, and it is dangerous to talk about 'the privilege of backwardness'. The first countries to see the defeat of capitalism were those without such a long-standing tradition of conservative trade unionism, so that they have often been described as having had 'the privilege of backwardness'. However, this can be a misleading generalization: what is a privilege at one stage becomes under other circumstances a great handicap. What is decisive is the total configuration of class relationships rather than any particular characteristics such as 'backwardness'. Trotsky brings out this point very well:

One might say that the richer the history of a country, and, at the same time, of its working class, the greater within it the accumulation of memories, traditions, habits, the larger the number of old groupings—the harder it is to achieve a revolutionary unity of the working class. The Russian proletariat is poor in class history and class traditions. This has undoubtedly facilitated its revolutionary education leading up to October. It causes, on the other hand, the difficulty of constructive work after October. The Russian workman—except the very top of the class—usually lacks the most elementary habits and notions of culture (in regard to tidiness, instruction, punctuality, etc.). The west European worker possesses these habits. He has acquired them, by a long and slow process, under the bourgeois régime. This explains why in the west of Europe the working class—its superior elements at any rate—is so strongly attracted to the bourgeois régime with its democracy, freedom of the capitalist Press, and all the other blessings.¹¹

expressed most sharply now in one area, now in another. Since the turn of the century this international character of capitalism, already decisive for the ideas of the *Manifesto*, is the basis without which the strategy of the Bolshevik revolution would have been unthinkable. The Bolsheviks saw Russia not just as a particular example of a national capitalism with its own 'national peculiarities', but above all as the weakest link in the chain of imperialism. Since the 1930s there is no doubt that the focus of capitalism's death struggle has passed to the colonial areas. But here again this is a temporary phenomenon. The metropolitan countries, with their economy and social structure founded upon privileged foreign trade and imperialist exploitation, find themselves faced with insoluble difficulties as the empires crumble away. Now the surface calm of social relations in the western countries will be broken by violent class struggles. Only a leadership able to comprehend and react to these rapid changes, to see the industrial struggles here as part of this world process, and to profit from the crises of Stalinism and social democracy, will be able to lead these struggles politically.

¹⁰ For some typical expressions of the conservatism and class collaboration of the craft unions of the second half of the nineteenth century, see the selection *Labour's Formative Years* (1948), edited by James B. Jefferys.

¹¹ L. Trotsky, *Problems of Life* (1924), p. 11.

National differences and the ebb and flow of class conflicts, often with long periods of calm in particular countries, together with the appearance of privileged groupings among the working class, were a great obstacle to the achievement of revolutionary consciousness and a true revolutionary leadership. What was a correct strategy for many years, work through Parliament, an open party and the creation of strong trade unions, proved eventually to have its own dangers when it persisted into the monopoly phase of capitalist development—a phase when the parliamentary and trade union machines gradually became incorporated into the bourgeois State.¹² Not only a 'labour aristocracy' but a labour bureaucracy encrusted itself on the working class, acting as a buffer between the classes, wanting at all costs to prevent an open clash between the workers and their enemies.

But to the problem of lack of homogeneity in the working class was added another which more than once bedevilled Marxist theory and the revolutionary mobilization of the working class. This was the fact that, although after 1848 capitalism extended its economic tentacles to every part of the world, the social and political tasks of the bourgeois-democratic revolution remained unsolved everywhere except in Britain, France, and, to a certain extent, the USA and the Low Countries. In the political struggle to defeat autocracy, the real revolutionary role of the working class was played down, and this was justified by appeals to Marx's theory of history which, it was alleged, insisted that each nation must first win democracy and on this battlefield the working class would learn to win power. As we saw, the Mensheviks denied the leading role of the working class in Russia on these grounds.¹³ Even in Germany in 1918, there were 'Marxists' who argued that until the democratic revolution was completed the working class could not be prepared to take power.

From 1848 onwards the political experience of the working class, in revolutionary as well as in peaceful periods, has been a struggle to break through and defeat the false theories, false leaders and false strategies which have followed from a lack of understanding of the above phenomena. In the interests of particular sections of the working class, or in the search for middle-class 'allies' against feudalism or imperialist powers, Labour leaders have spoken and acted as though the revolutionary role of the workers was not on the agenda. Lip-service to 'Marxism' has not interfered with these betrayals; neither that of European social democracy in 1914; nor that of the Stalinists in the period of the 'popular front' and 'parliamentary roads'; nor the betrayal of the Chinese workers into the hands of Chiang Kai-shek in 1927.

If the history of the role of the working class and its leaders is examined, it becomes apparent that none of these questions is new, and that today's opportunists of all varieties are in direct line from the influence of petty-bourgeois and bourgeois 'socialism' in the earliest stages of the socialist movement.

¹² Again Britain is a good example. The Labour Party is now either Her Majesty's Government or Her Majesty's Opposition and the trade unions are regarded as 'one of the institutions of democratic society'.

¹³ For a detailed discussion see L. H. Haimson, *The Russian Marxists and the Origins of Bolshevism* (Harvard, 1955).

Only a few months after the *Manifesto's* characterization of bourgeois and petty-bourgeois socialism came the great events of 1848, which had vital lessons for the working class. Two other world-shaking events, the Commune of 1871 and the Russian revolution of 1905, were to add their own lessons, no less decisive, before there was achieved in 1917 the first workers' revolution after the *Manifesto*. It might be useful to give a preliminary summary of ground which should be covered by a Marxist analysis of this experience.¹⁴

I. 1848

France: An immature working-class revolt in Paris. No independent political leadership of the working class, but many demands calling for a solution of 'social' as well as political questions. This revolt is staged in the context of a bourgeois revolution at a late stage of its retarded completion. The workers fight alongside successive sections of the bourgeoisie and the petty bourgeoisie.¹⁵

Germany and Austria: Here begin bourgeois revolutions, which prove incapable of victory largely because of their lack of initiative and revolutionary drive, caused primarily by fear of the urban proletariat.¹⁶

Lessons of 1848: The bourgeoisie is no longer capable of carrying through a democratic revolution. Working-class strategy and tactics must take account of the fact that the bourgeoisie will sell out to autocracy rather than give scope for the political development of the working class. Only independent working-class leadership and working-class demands can avoid the Bonapartism which settles over both France and Germany. Bonapartism is a régime in which the State authority takes on a certain independence in its rule, an autonomy deriving from the weakness of the ruling class, but possible only if the working class is not mobilized to the full, is not independently led, and has sustained defeats. Although Bonapartism is often unpleasant for large sections of the ruling class it is necessary because of their inability to rule by 'normal' methods. For a bourgeoisie to rule through parliamentary democracy it must have strong bases of support in the middle classes and also among the workers.¹⁷

II. 1871

The Paris Commune: Wearied by the Franco-Prussian war and enraged by the national betrayal of the French bourgeoisie, the workers of Paris take up arms against the State, expelling the government from

¹⁴ This is done rather more generally in Trotsky's 1905: *Results and Prospects*.

¹⁵ Karl Marx, *The Class Struggles in France and The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*.

¹⁶ Marx and Engels, *Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Germany*, Engels, Preface to the second German edition of *The Peasant War in Germany*. A good history of the period is Priscilla Robertson's *Revolutions of 1848: A Social History* (Princeton, 1952).

¹⁷ The lessons of 1848 are brilliantly summarized by Marx in his *Address of the Central Committee to the Central Council of the Communist League*.

Paris. But in the events which follow, the leadership fails to free itself from 'democratic' politics, basing itself on the classical figures of the 1789 revolution and abstract principles of justice rather than upon the class struggle.¹⁸

Lessons of 1871: The proletariat cannot simply 'seize hold of the existing machinery of State' but must smash the old State machine and develop independent organs of power for the working class. Revolution requires relentless pursuit and defeat of the enemy, not a perfection of democratic principles. The working class requires a disciplined, centralized leadership based on revolutionary theory and able to advance a strategy of demands drawing in other sections of the population, particularly the peasantry in countries with large agricultural populations.¹⁹

III. 1905

The Russian Revolution: A proletarian revolution in a country without a bourgeois revolution. Here the bourgeoisie does not even take the first steps against the autocracy in 1905. Rosa Luxemburg called it: 'A collision of two epochs . . . a result of the delayed development of class relations in Russia and of their over-ripe development in western Europe.'²⁰

Lessons of 1905: The Russian bourgeoisie was not a revolutionary class within Russian tsardom. Only an independent working-class movement could overthrow

¹⁸ Karl Marx, *The Civil War in France*; Tales, *La Commune de 1871* (Paris, 1924); Lissagaray, *History of the Commune of 1871* (1902).

¹⁹ See especially L. Trotsky, *The Defence of Terrorism* (1921) and V. I. Lenin, *The Paris Commune* (1931).

²⁰ Rosa Luxemburg, *Juniusbroschiüre* (Berlin, 1916), quoted in P. Frölich, *Rosa Luxemburg* (1940), p. 142.

the autocracy. In the soviets the workers had evolved a form of action and power suited to their revolution, but they required: first, a party of a new type, highly centralized and disciplined; secondly, links with the peasantry which would enable the working class to solve the peasantry's first problems, elsewhere a task of the bourgeois revolution; thirdly, a strategy based on the international struggles of the working class. These lessons are summed up in Trotsky's *Permanent Revolution* and Lenin's *Imperialism*. Not only was the working class of a country like Russia left with the tasks normally falling to the bourgeoisie, but its social demands would make it impossible for the revolution to stop short at the foundation of democratic political institutions and the ending of landlordism. The logic of events would push the working class into the larger process of international proletarian revolution; this world revolution would decide the tempo and quality of the development of the proletarian dictatorship in Russia.

* * *

Both social democracy and Stalinism are cut adrift from the central ideas of Marxism, which are confirmed in the revolutionary experience of the working class. Both deny the essential class basis of all serious political issues and of all fundamental institutions in society. Both reject the view that the bourgeois State, including Parliament, must be smashed and workers' organs of power set up in its place. Both have departed from true working-class internationalism. Both fear more than anything else the action and initiative of the masses of the people themselves, and therefore erect bureaucratic party machines or State systems which act 'on behalf of' the workers. Each one of these departures from Marxism was already condemned by Marx in the *Manifesto* and in his writings on the revolutions of 1848.

Some Past Rank-and-file Movements

Brian Pearce

'The trade unions of our time can either serve as secondary instruments of imperialist capitalism for the subordination and disciplining of workers and for obstructing the revolution, or, on the contrary, the trade unions can become the instruments of the revolutionary movement of the proletariat' (L. D. Trotsky, *Trade Unions in the Epoch of Imperialist Decay*, 1940).

'All sections of the Fourth International should always strive not only to renew the top leadership of the trade unions, boldly and resolutely in critical moments advancing new militant leaders in place of routine functionaries and careerists; but also to create in all possible instances

THE source of rank-and-file movements is the conflict between the struggle of the working class for better conditions and a new social order, and the increasing reconciliation between the leaders of the trade unions and the capitalist class, their growing integration into the upper reaches of bourgeois society. In Great Britain we find the first appearance of such movements in the years shortly before the first world war, and it is significant that this phenomenon was preceded and accompanied by a good deal of comment on the declassing of trade union officials.

In 1892 the 'civil service' of British trade unionism numbered between 600 and 700. After the Reform Act of 1867 and the Ballot Act of 1872 had created an important working-class electorate largely immune to older forms of pressure, the ruling class began to pay special attention to trade union leaders. Engels observed in 1874 that 'the chairmen and secretaries of trade unions... had overnight become important people. They were visited by MPs, by lords and other well-born rabble, and sympathetic inquiry was suddenly made into the wishes and needs of the working class'.¹ On the advice of the Liberal politician Mundella, the Trades Union Congress held at Nottingham in 1872 was officially welcomed by the city corporation, the delegates were banqueted and invited to the homes of leading citizens, and so forth—the first time such things had happened. Trade union leaders were pressed to accept seats on Royal Commissions, and in 1886 the general secretary of one of the most important unions stepped into a job in the Labour Bureau formed by Mundella as President of the Board of Trade, an organization from which the Ministry of Labour later developed. During the 1880s outstanding trade union leaders were more than once entertained by the Prince of Wales (later Edward VII) at Sandringham. In 1890 Broadhurst, secretary to the Trades Union Congress, was exposed as having accepted a gift of shares from Brunner, the chemicals industrialist, in return for political support at an election.

The years of comparative industrial peace, between the 1850s and 1880s, had seen 'a shifting of leadership in the trade union world', as the Webbs put it, 'from the casual enthusiast and irresponsible agitator to a

independent militant organizations corresponding more closely to the problems of mass struggle in bourgeois society; not stopping, if necessary, even in the face of a direct break with the conservative apparatus of the trade unions. If it be criminal to turn one's back to mass organizations for the sake of fostering sectarian fictions, it is no less so to passively tolerate subordination of the revolutionary mass movement to the control of openly reactionary or disguised conservative ("progressive") bureaucratic cliques. Trade unions are not ends in themselves; they are but means along the road to proletarian revolution' (L. D. Trotsky, *The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Working Class*, 1938).

class of permanent salaried officials expressly chosen from out of the rank and file of trade unionists for their superior business capacity'.² To the epoch of 'defence, not defiance', corresponded the emergence of a generation of trade union leaders of a different type from those who had laid the foundations in the bitter days of the Combination Acts and Tolpuddle. It was between these 'sober, business-like' men and sections of the capitalist class 'that the political alliance was forged which, in different forms and phases, has been with us ever since—"the bourgeoisie cannot rule alone". The system which J. H. Thomas admired for "making me what I am" was fairly launched'.³

These trade union leaders saw their task as essentially one of peaceful negotiation with the employers, and this gave rise to a whole network of social relations separating them off from their original class. Assured of a permanent position with a secure income, the trade union officials—'a closely combined and practically irresistible bureaucracy', as the Webbs called them in their book *Industrial Democracy*⁴ which Lenin translated while in exile in Siberia—soon found their different life-experience reflected in a different outlook on the class struggle. In the Webbs' *History of Trade Unionism* the account of the career of a typical official given to the authors in 1893 by a member of one of the great craft unions is quoted:

Whilst the points at issue no longer affect his own earnings or conditions of employment, any disputes between his members and their employers increase his work and add to his worry. The former vivid sense of the privations and subjection of the artisan's life gradually fades from his mind; and he begins more and more to regard all complaints as perverse and unreasonable.

With this intellectual change may come a more invidious transformation. Nowadays the salaried officer of a great union is courted and flattered by the middle class [i.e., in the language of those days, the capitalists]. He is asked to dine with them, and will admire their well-appointed houses, their fine carpets, the ease and luxury of their lives . . . He goes to live in a little villa in a lower-middle-class suburb. The move leads to dropping his workmen friends; and his wife changes her acquaintances. With the habits of his new neighbours he insensibly adopts

¹ F. Engels, 'The English Elections' (February 22, 1874), *Marx and Engels on Britain* (1953), p. 467.

² Sidney and Beatrice Webb, *History of Trade Unionism* (1920 edition), p. 204.

³ Dona Torr, *Tom Mann* (1941 edition), p. 12.

⁴ 1920 edition, p. 28.

more and more their ideas . . . His manner to his members . . . undergoes a change . . . A great strike threatens to involve the Society in desperate war. Unconsciously biased by distaste for the hard and unthankful work which a strike entails, he finds himself in small sympathy with the men's demands, and eventually arranges a compromise, on terms distasteful to a large section of his members.⁵

Brought constantly into friendly intercourse with well-to-do business men, civil servants and capitalist politicians, trade union leaders, the Webbs observed, were tempted to bring their spending power up to the same level as that of their associates by making 'unduly liberal charges' for their travelling expenses, and even 'to accept from employers or from the government those hidden bribes that are decorously veiled as allowances for expenses or temporary salaries for special posts'.⁶

This situation, thus already recognizable in the 1890s, is still with us today. The authors of a sociological study of a Yorkshire mining area, published in 1956, write of the trade union bureaucracy: 'These officials exist on salaries and with expense accounts which must be comparable with those of people with whom they have to deal from day to day;⁷ they grow used, of necessity, to the same kind of life and entertainment as other executives in bureaucratic organizations.' Men who as miners had virtually no prospect of 'social mobility' find themselves very differently placed as trade union officials:

Not only is there the possibility of promotion in the union itself, with at each level the various conferences and meetings in very pleasant places and good hotels, the chance, for those of such inclination, of coming into the public eye through public meetings, the Press, and even the radio and television. In addition, men with trade union administrative experience are more and more thought suitable for posts in management, particularly in the nationalized coal-mines. Here are real prospects of individual success.

As between the National Coal Board and the officials of the National Union of Mineworkers, 'the personnel of the two sides becomes over a period similar to a greater degree than there is similarity between the interests of the officials of the union and its basic rank and file'.⁸

Parallel with the rise of the corps of permanent officials was the weakening, during the years of 'the servile generation',⁹ in trade union democracy. Such institu-

⁵ *History of Trade Unionism* (1920 edition), pp. 466-70.

⁶ *Ibid.* pp. 589-90. The authors, of course, saw this as a problem arising from the inadequacy of trade union officials' salaries, with the remedy to be found in increasing them!

⁷ According to B. C. Roberts, *Trade Union Government and Administration* (1956), the total number of full-time officials of the eighteen large unions was in 1952 about 1,600. Roberts states that the commonest level of general secretaries' salaries was between £800 and just over £1,200 a year, while the general secretary of the Trades Union Congress got £2,000 a year. Average annual payments to executive council members in attendance fees, hotel expenses, etc., ranged from such figures as £200 in the National Union of General and Municipal Workers to £1,172 in the National Union of Railwaymen (pp. 288, 306, 367, 443).

⁸ N. Dennis, F. Henriques, C. Slaughter, *Coal Is Our Life* (1956), pp. 114-16.

⁹ Raymond Postgate's phrase, in *The Builders' History* (1923). He uses it in the sense that in the period between the 1850s and 1880s the British workers in the main accepted the capitalist order and merely sought to protect or at most improve a little their position within it.

tions as the referendum and the initiative 'withered away'. The shifting of the basis of the branch in many unions from the place of work to the place of residence helped to atomize the membership and increase their dependence on the officials. The Trades Union Congress of 1895 saw a conscious and open move by the officials to cut away a possible line of rank-and-file control over their doings, by excluding the representatives of the trades councils, the very bodies which, less than thirty years earlier, had summoned the TUC into existence.

The trades councils were in fact shut out partly in order to exclude 'agitators' whom the trade union leaders regarded as irresponsible busybodies, and partly in pursuance of a definite policy of centralizing industrial control in the hands of the national trade union executives. Obviously a Congress in which two or three million votes might have been cast by the delegates of local bodies would have been a great deal more difficult for the platform to manage than a Congress in which a very small number of national trade unions would cast, under a system of block voting, a majority of total votes. The TUC might have been a very different body if the trades councils had retained their original place in it. That, of course, is precisely why they were not allowed to retain it.¹⁰

Just as the emergence of a caste of privileged officials, cosily coexisting with capitalism, was reaching completion, a new phase of history opened, that of imperialism, passing into that of the general crisis of capitalism. The conditions characteristic of the second and third quarters of the nineteenth century were swept away for ever, and the workers found themselves under steady and intense attack, at first especially by means of rising prices. Round about 1909, when E. J. B. Allen published his pamphlet *Revolutionary Unionism*, wide sections of the workers became aware that the militant policy their new circumstances urgently demanded was being sabotaged by their officials. Allen listed a number of examples of what he called the 'treachery of officials' in preventing necessary strikes on various pretexts. He wrote:

This kind of business is notably on the increase, particularly since the workers have been fools enough to pay this kind of official £200 and more per year [1909 money!] to do nothing in Parliament except betray their interests and run around after different capitalist politicians . . . in order to be remembered when there are some government jobs going.

Fred Knee, of the London Society of Compositors, remarked bitterly in 1910 that 'there are some trade union leaders who are so prosperous that they at any rate have in their own persons achieved the harmony of the classes'.¹¹

THE 'LABOUR UNREST', 1910-14

Growing dissatisfaction with trade union officialdom was coupled from about 1910 with a mood of disillusionment with parliamentary politics. This was caused by the functioning of the Labour group in the House of Commons as a mere adjunct to the Liberal Party, all other considerations being subordinated to keeping the Liberals in and the Tories out. Syndicalist ideas from America and France found fertile soil among British

¹⁰ G. D. H. Cole, *British Trade Unionism Today* (1945), p. 192.

¹¹ In the *Social-Democrat*, November 15, 1910; reprinted in *Labour Monthly*, June 1950.

trade unionists, and such bodies as the Socialist Labour Party, the Syndicalist Education League and the Plebs League came into being and began developing rank-and-file sentiment for militant industrial policies in an organized way. Tom Mann, James Connolly, Noah Ablett, Richard Coppock, A. A. Purcell and A. J. Cook were among the leaders of the new trend. It was on the initiative of these men that the wave of great strikes began which shook Britain on the eve of the first world war.

The movement began with the unofficial strike of the Northumberland and Durham miners in the early months of 1910. These miners were bitter against their officials for having accepted a change from a two-shift to a three-shift system. The summer saw a similarly unofficial stoppage on the North-Eastern Railway, provoked by a case of victimization. Then, in the autumn, came the Cambrian Combine strike, begun against the will of the South Wales Miners' Federation executive. Of the 1911 strike in the docks, Sir George Askwith, the government's conciliation officer, observed: 'The Labour leaders were taken by surprise. Some quickly headed the movement and tried to regain their lost authority. Others frankly expressed astonishment, and could not understand the outbreak.'¹² The railway strike of 1911 began under unofficial leadership in Liverpool, 'in spite of the fact that the executives of the railwaymen's unions were opposed to any railwaymen leaving work or making demands, the officials arguing that they were tied down by the decisions of the conciliation boards, which they had accepted.'¹³ Finally, the general miners' strike of 1912 began as an unofficial movement—and one of its results was the ousting from the South Wales miners' executive of the leaders who had opposed the strike, and their replacement by syndicalists.

A number of economic gains resulted from these strikes, but the outcome fell far short of what might have been. 'The vague shadow of revolution hovered over Britain in those days. The leaders exerted all their strength in order to paralyse the movement . . . strengthening the bourgeoisie and thus preparing the way for the imperialist slaughter.'¹⁴ Ralph Fox, writing during one of Stalinism's Left zigzags, summed up the experience thus:

Practically every one of the great strikes from 1911 to 1914 was begun as an unofficial, spontaneous movement of the workers, rapidly spreading throughout the industry concerned. Only then did the reformist trade union bureaucrats lend the strike the official support of the union, while their swift acceptance in every case of the 'mediation' of the Liberal Government doomed the strike at once to semi-failure.¹⁵

Among the most important achievements of the 'Labour unrest', as the capitalist Press called it, were two moves towards the unification of the workers' forces: the amalgamation of three railway organizations in the National Union of Railwaymen, and the

formation of the Transport Workers' Federation, the germ of the Transport and General Workers' Union of today. Amalgamation was one of the chief demands of the militants, who wanted all craft and sectional interests to be subordinated to the needs of the working class as a whole, and had one union for each industry as their ideal. A metal, engineering and shipbuilding amalgamation committee was set up in 1912, to carry on 'propaganda in the workshops and trade union branches with a view to bringing pressure to bear from below on the national executives',¹⁶ in favour of fusing the unions catering for workers in the industries named. Similar movements sprang up in other industries. This amalgamationist trend 'was for the most part a "rank-and-file" movement of a Left-wing character, keenly critical of the attitude and conduct of the permanent trade union officials'.¹⁷ Nowadays the concentration of the bulk of trade union membership into a few great, powerful amalgamations is taken for granted, and it is worth recalling that the struggle to bring this about was at first an affair of 'Left-wingers' and 'unofficial movements'.

Coupled with the fight for amalgamation was the fight for workshop organization. In the early stages of trade unionism the branch had largely coincided with the place of work, but with the expansion of the unions a territorial basis for branch membership had been established in many unions. The militants believed that organization on the basis of the workshop made for greater effectiveness of the unions as fighting machines—and less 'atomization' of the rank and file in relation to that compact bureaucracy at the top which they had learnt to distrust. Before the first world war, the shop stewards in a number of centres had already begun to come forward as leaders of their members in conflict with the employers, and shop stewards for different unions had begun to come together informally, constituting an 'amalgamated' leadership at local level. The tremendous class battles of 1910-14 inevitably fostered this development, by revealing the inadequacy of the type of trade union structure which had set hard in the decades of relative social peace.

Linked with amalgamation of the unions and the building up of workshop organization was the aim of limiting the power of officials to go against the will of the rank and file, and subjecting these officials to more effective control from below. A comparatively moderate expression of this idea was given by a writer in Tom Mann's journal the *Industrial Syndicalist*:

Our leaders must be elected by a ballot of the membership by direct vote, elected for a definite period with definite instructions, **and they must prove their competency by being successful . . .** We can afford no more lasting failures, even in high places. The only test of competency in this connexion is success.¹⁸

Much more advanced views than this were widespread in the Labour movement at this time. A definitely anti-official, anti-leadership outlook was reflected in one of the rules of the Socialist Labour Party, which wielded great influence among Clydeside militants, that its members must not occupy any official position in a trade union. The most finished formulation of the extreme view is found in the famous pam-

¹² G. R. Askwith, *Industrial Problems and Disputes* (1920), p. 177. For a good general survey of this period see G. Dangerfield, *The Strange Death of Liberal England* (1936); see also Tom Mann, *Memoirs* (1923).

¹³ Tom Mann, *From Single Tax to Syndicalism* (1913), ch. vi.

¹⁴ L. D. Trotsky, *Where Is Britain Going?* (1926), p. 3.

¹⁵ Ralph Fox, *The Class Struggle in Britain, 1880-1914* (1932), p. 71.

¹⁶ W. A. Orton, *Labour in Transition* (1921), pp. 93-4.

¹⁷ G. D. H. Cole, *Workshop Organisation* (1923), p. 17.

¹⁸ W. F. Hay, in the *Industrial Syndicalist*, November 1910.

phlet *The Miners' Next Step*, brought out in 1912 by the Unofficial Reform Committee active among the South Wales miners. Trade union officials, it was claimed, were wedded to the policy of industrial conciliation regardless of their members' interests. They were opposed to any increase in rank-and-file control over themselves, because their possession of arbitrary power gave them social prestige and ensured the 'respect' of the employers, with all that that implied. When the Cambrian Combine men had demanded a ballot on the agreement accepted in their name in 1910 the leaders had talked of a 'growing spirit of anarchy'. The remedy was not to be found in a mere change of leaders, for former agitators who became leaders went the same way as those they supplanted. (The element of truth in this was to be seen in the later career of A. J. Cook, one of the co-authors of this pamphlet!) 'Leadership implies power held by the Leader . . . All leaders become corrupt, in spite of their own good intentions. No man was ever good enough, brave enough or strong enough to have such power at his disposal as real leadership implies.' Consistently with this view, the authors demanded a reorganization of their union so that 'all the initiative for new proposals, policies and tactics remains with the lodge', and the executive (from which officials should be excluded) was to be reduced to merely administrative functions.¹⁹

THE FIRST WORLD WAR AND THE SHOP STEWARDS

With the outbreak of the imperialist war, which their braking of the 1910-14 struggles had helped to make inevitable, the trade union officials entered into an agreement with the government which virtually abolished trade unionism 'for the duration'. In exchange for this they were taken on to all sorts of committees and given such social recognition as they had never enjoyed before. The war years were a period, wrote the Webbs, of 'revolutionary [they mean, of course, counter-revolutionary] transformation of the social and political standing of the official representatives of the trade union world', when the trade union machine was recognized as 'part of the social machinery of the State'.²⁰ While prices rose steeply, wages were kept down and employers were allowed to chisel away at hard-won rights and safeguards on the plea that the 'war effort' necessitated sacrifices.

What the Judases of trade unionism, enjoying their statesmanlike status, looked like at close quarters we see in Beatrice Webb's notes on the Trades Union Congress of 1915:

The Congress is no better, in fact less hopeful, than in old days, if we assume it to be representative of advanced working-class opinion. The leading men have grown fatter in body and more dully complacent in mind than they were twenty years ago; the delegates have lost their keenness, the rebels of today don't get elected to Congress and the 'old hands' know, from long experience, that it is more of an 'outing' than a gathering for the transaction of working-affairs. What the delegates enjoy is a joke, it matters not what sort of joke so long as it excites laughter. Indignation,

¹⁹ Cf. James P. Cannon, Introduction (1931) to L. D. Trotsky, *Communism and Syndicalism*: 'The slogan of "no leaders" —that slogan of demagogues who themselves aspire to leadership without qualifications.'

²⁰ Sidney and Beatrice Webb, *History of Trade Unionism* (1920 edition), p. 635.

righteous or unrighteous, is felt to be out of place. There is no anti-government feeling, no determination to get evils righted . . . I listened to two officials over their big cigars in the hotel lounge this afternoon. 'The wages are cruel,' said one to the other, 'perfectly scandalous.' It was the largeness of the [workers'] earnings, it appeared, they were complaining of! . . . In so far as there is any feeling, it is reserved for jealousy between leaders or for the disputes between the unions.²¹

The workers' impatience with the situation created by their traitor leaders broke through into direct action first on the Clyde in February 1915. 'Amalgamationists' among the engineers, together with members of the various Marxist groupings in Glasgow, took the lead in getting an unofficial ban on overtime imposed until the employers agreed to a wage increase that would meet the rise in the cost of living. When the union leaders opposed them, the workers concerned set up a Central Withdrawal of Labour Committee on which all the unions in the engineering trade were represented by their shop stewards, and called a strike. This lasted eighteen days before the combined pressure of the government and the union leaders forced the men back. The committee resolved to remain in being as the Clyde Workers' Committee and its members actively promoted the formation in each workshop in the area of a shop stewards' committee covering all sections. The success of this movement caused tremendous alarm in capitalist circles, and pretexts were found to arrest the chief 'agitators' and deport them from Cydeside, and also to suppress the shop stewards' paper the *Worker*.²²

Hardly had the noise of battle died down on the Clyde, however, when it broke out in Sheffield. The calling up to the army of an engineering worker belonging to an exempt category was taken as a test case by the engineers of that city. Shop stewards improvised a local organization which brought 10,000 men out on strike in November 1916, and sent delegates to other engineering centres to have the strike extended. The War Office hastily released their victim in order to get the men back to work in the munitions factories. Out of this struggle emerged a network of permanent workshop committees in Sheffield, and a trend towards the unification of these into factory committees and into a workers' committee covering the entire district. The struggle for amalgamation became primarily concerned with building up unity from below at the point of production: 'Make the amalgamation of unions incidental, the amalgamation of the workers fundamental.'²³

All through the years 1916-18 there was a succession of strikes in one centre after another, particularly in engineering but also in other industries, notably in the South Wales coal-field, in every case led by unofficial groups. But there was little co-ordination between these actions. Thus, the engineers' strike which began at Rochdale in May 1917 and spread rapidly, did not affect such important centres as Clydeside and Tyneside. The unofficial leaders faced enormous difficulties, every possible obstacle being put in their way by the govern-

²¹ Beatrice Webb, *Diaries 1912-1924* (1952), pp. 44-5.

²² The best accounts of this and other industrial struggles of 1914-18 are given in W. Hannington, *Industrial History in Wartime* (1940), and J. T. Murphy, *Preparing for Power* (1934). See also W. Gallacher, *Revolt on the Clyde* (1949) and T. Bell, *Pioneering Days* (1941).

²³ J. T. Murphy, quoted in W. A. Orton, *Labour in Transition* (1921), p. 96.

ment, the employers and the union officials. As they began to overcome them and to hold successful national conferences of shop stewards—and as news of the February revolution in Russia and its consequences began to come in, along with news of mutinies in the French army and other signs of the times—the official leaders of the Labour movement started to vary their tactics. Union officials intervened with the authorities to get arrested shop stewards released and concessions granted to various sections of the workers. The charade of the Leeds Convention took place, at which men like MacDonald and Snowden talked of setting up councils of workmen's and soldiers' delegates in every locality to work for peace and the emancipation of Labour. The unions of the miners, the railwaymen and the transport workers formed a Triple Alliance and made vigorous-sounding pronouncements about 'conscription of wealth', so that many workers looked to the leaders of this new official grouping of unions as the advance-guard in the war on capitalism, making unofficial, rank-and-file organization unnecessary.²⁴

When a national leadership of the various shop stewards' committees and amalgamation movements at last came into being, in August 1917, it was hamstrung by the syndicalist prejudice against any kind of effective leadership which their experience of corrupt officialdom had fostered in so many rank-and-file trade unionists. What was set up was a merely administrative council without any executive powers: all decisions had to be referred back to the rank and file before action could be initiated, and the council functioned as little more than a reporting centre for the local committees.

By allowing the official leaders of the working-class movement to make some 'Left' gestures, and by granting some real concessions, British imperialism was able, aided also by confused ideas in the workers' ranks, to survive the war intact. But what would happen after the war, when the 'patriotic' considerations which had held back many workers during the hostilities with Germany ceased to apply, and the demobilized soldiers demanded that 'land fit for heroes to live in' which they had been promised? 'With the coming of the Armistice in November 1918 organized Labour was left in what was probably the strongest position it had ever occupied . . . Moreover, for a halcyon breathing-space of eighteen months Labour was in a much stronger position than it had dared to hope.'²⁵

The 'full-employment' period which lasted until the slump began in the latter part of 1920 presented a wonderful opportunity to the militants, and the capitalists were hard put to it to fend them off. Though the opportunity was taken, with the 'rephasing' of the munitions industry, to get rid of as many shop stewards as possible and thereby break up the movement in its war-time strongholds, it continued to advance on a

number of sectors of the industrial front and its ideas were widely discussed. The shop stewards' movement, wrote a contemporary observer, 'is at once the demand for greater autonomy for the rank-and-file workers as against the control of the central official, and for more effective organization against the power of the employer'—demands which 'are not easily separated for the second may depend largely on the first'.²⁶ In those days 'it looked as though some fundamentally new form of trade union structure was going to replace the established forms'.²⁷ J. T. Murphy's pamphlet *The Workers' Committee* (1918) sold 150,000 copies. Its central idea was the election of workshop committees cutting across the boundaries between unions, but given official recognition by the unions; committees which should link up into district workers' committees which 'should not usurp the functions of the local trade union committees but attend to the larger questions embracing all the trade unions in the industry'. These committees would be 'similar in form to a trades council, with this essential difference—the trades council is only indirectly related to the workshops, whereas the workers' committee is directly related'. The formation of these committees, it was argued, would render the union machinery more responsive to the needs of the members 'at the point of production', and would facilitate the desired trend towards amalgamation.²⁸

After the head-on clashes which occurred in Glasgow and Belfast early in 1919 the main method followed by the capitalists, together with the government and the trade union bureaucrats, was the method of concessions, both real and apparent, to tide over the awkward period pending the slump. Railwaymen were given the 48-hour week, engineers and shipbuilders the same. A commission to investigate the possibilities of nationalizing the coal industry appeased the miners. Substantial wage increases raised the general level of real wages above that of 1914. An 'Industrial Conference' of representatives of trade unions and employers' federations agreed upon an imposing programme of social legislation. The Amalgamated Society of Engineers made an agreement with the employers which accorded a definite status to that union's shop stewards in the works.²⁹ The amalgamation of the ASE with other unions into the Amalgamated Engineering Union seemed to give promise of reorganization for battle on one important sector, while the Triple Alliance could be trusted to look after most of the others. Much of the workers' confidence in the official machinery and

²⁶ C. M. Lloyd, *Trade Unionism* (1921), p. 244.

²⁷ J. I. Roper, *Trade Unionism and the New Social Order* (1949).

²⁸ Typical of the many committees formed unofficially in this period was the River Thames Shop Stewards' Movement, which embraced all trades and grades engaged in shipyard work. It had a membership card, and formed local committees in each shipyard. The organizer was a boiler-maker, the secretary an electrician, the editor of the movement's paper a woodworker (H. Pollitt, *Serving My Time*, 1940, pp. 92-3).

²⁹ 'The recognized shop stewards were representatives only of a particular union, and were precluded from acting with representatives of other unions, except with the consent of the union's district committee. The shop stewards' movement, where it survived, became officialized; it lost its revolutionary character, and its inclusiveness as a class movement' (G. D. H. Cole, *British Trade Unionism Today*, 1945, p. 169).

²⁴ One workers' leader who saw the fallacy of relying on the Triple Alliance—a mere pact between top officials—was James Connolly, who wrote in the *Workers' Republic*, February 12, 1916: 'The frequent rebellion against stupid and spiritless leadership and the call of the rank and file for true industrial unity seems to have spurred the leaders on, not to respond to new spirit but to evolve a method whereby under the forms of unity [it] could be trammelled and fettered . . . a scheme to prevent united action rather than facilitate it.'

²⁵ M. H. Dobb, *Trade Union Experience and Policy, 1914-18* (1940), p. 24.

leadership was restored.

Among the militants themselves the confusion of ideas continued. The National Guilds movement enjoyed a brief but deadly vogue, and led important groups of building workers into costly, fruitless and discouraging attempts to take over their industry by setting up in business in rivalry with private builders. Similar notions were widespread in other industries, diverting workers' minds from the need for political struggle against the capitalist State. As regards the attitude to be adopted towards the trade unions, on the one hand there was the tendency, especially marked in the unions of the Triple Alliance, to confine oneself to 'vigilance' work, making propaganda for militant policies and warning against the danger of sell-out, while on the other, the prejudice against 'leaders' caused many outstanding shop stewards voluntarily to hold back from contesting union elections and fighting to win footholds within the official machine.³⁰ The principal Marxist groups did not come together into a united Communist Party until January 1921, and then remained very much under the influence of their sectarian traditions and did not try systematically to become rooted in industry until the reorganization of 1922-23 got under way. By then the slump had set in, unemployment existed on a mass scale, and a succession of industrial defeats (especially 'Black Friday' in 1921 when the Triple Alliance showed its true worth, and the engineering lock-out of 1922) had smashed what remained of the war-time shop stewards' movement and compelled the militants to start painfully building up again almost from scratch.

THE MINORITY MOVEMENT

The regrouping of the militant forces took place under the guidance of the Communist Party, working mainly through what was called the British Bureau of the Red International of Labour Unions, headed by Tom Mann.³¹ The RILU fully understood at this time that there could be no question of forming new unions in Britain, nor was there much to be gained by campaigning for affiliation of existing unions to the RILU. The South Wales Miners' Federation, where the 'Reform Committee' elements were strong, declared for affiliation in 1921, but retracted when threatened with expulsion from the Trades Union Congress. Under the guidance of the RILU communists began working, industry by industry, to rally the workers on the basis of specific programmes related both to the problems of the given industry and to the actual structure of the trade union machine. In sharp contrast to the attitude taken up in a later phase (1929-31), the fact that many workers had left the unions, either through fear of victimization in a period of slump or out of disgust with the betrayals by the bureaucrats, or for other reasons, was not seen as the end of the trade

union epoch, justifying militants in turning their backs on the unions. On the contrary 'Back to the unions!' was one of the slogans of the British Bureau of the RILU, coupled with 'Stop the retreat!' which was a call to end the policy of surrender to the employers' offensive. *All Power*, the Bureau's paper, had a circulation by the end of 1922 of 12,000. Rank-and-file organizations, known as 'minority movements'—from a complaint by some bureaucrat regarding 'the minority of troublemakers'—were brought into being anew among the miners, the engineers, the transport workers and other sections, and these were eventually, in 1924, gathered together into the National Minority Movement.

I have discussed elsewhere³² this movement's record in 1924-27 and here wish only to draw attention to certain of its features. In the early phase great stress was laid on the need to make trades councils directly representative of the workshops instead of merely consisting of delegates from trade union branches which were often remote and unrepresentative, to secure the restoration of the trades councils' representation in the Trades Union Congress, and in every way to strengthen the element of rank-and-file control in trade union structure, so as to ensure that the unions functioned for the purpose they had originally been formed to serve.

The task of the Minority Movement was to make the unity of the trade union movement a real one, to build up the shop and local organization which should be able to control from below this great mass machine, to fight at every step the apostles of 'civil peace', and uniting the workers, organized and unorganized, on the widest possible front in their everyday economic struggles, build up such a rank-and-file movement as should make impossible a repetition of 'Black Friday'.³³

Unfortunately, although the Minority Movement became an influential centre of propaganda and a ginger group which injected new life into many trade union branches and trades councils, and thereby forced the trade union leaders to put themselves at the head of strikes and to make various 'Left' gestures, as in 1917-20, it did little in practice to establish the workshop and factory committees of which so much was said. In the main it proved able only to spread the idea and urge it upon the official leadership. The root of the trouble here was probably that the transformation of the Communist Party on to a factory-group basis 'was only begun in earnest towards the end of 1924' and by May 1, 1925, there were only sixty-eight communist factory groups, embracing a mere 10 per cent. of the party membership.³⁴ By the time that the political driving force in the Minority Movement had organized itself sufficiently to begin setting up new kinds of mass organizations in the factories, the Anglo-Russian Unity Committee had come into existence, and the Stalinist leadership of the world communist movement had decreed that nothing be done that might disturb the goodwill of the 'Left' bureaucrats. At the party congress

³⁰ 'The Workers' Committee elements were in opposition to trade unionism! They saw the trade unions as centres of Labour corruption, and were obsessed by the enormous growth of the unofficial movement during the war and the power it had been able to wield. Lenin here insisted on the necessity of combating the corrupt leaders of the trade unions but also stressed the importance of work in the trade unions and recognition of the trade unions as the mass organizations of the working class' (T. Bell, *The British Communist Party*, 1937, pp. 58-9).

³¹ A. J. Cook and Richard Coppock were among the members of this Bureau.

³² 'Joseph Redman' [Brian Pearce], 'The Early Years of the CPGB', *Labour Review*, vol. iii, no. 1, pp. 11-22, January-February 1958. See also 'Joseph Redman', 'British Communist History', *ibid.* vol. ii, no. 4, pp. 106-10, July-August 1957.

³³ Ralph Fox, *The Class Struggle in Britain, 1914-1923* (1933), p. 82.

³⁴ *Report of the Seventh Congress (1925) of the Communist Party of Great Britain*, pp. 148, 201.

in May 1925 a Sheffield delegate observed:

A. J. Cook's speech at the recent miners' conference was completely out of tone with the speeches he had previously been making [i.e., before he had been elected to the secretaryship of the Miners' Federation, with Minority Movement support]. After we have praised and said nice things about these Left-wing leaders, what will the masses say about the Communist Party when these leaders fail them? We must give the necessary qualifications to our support of these Left-wingers.'

A Glasgow delegate warned of the need to be suspicious of certain trade union leaders who were acquiring an easy reputation for 'Leftness' through prominence in the movement for international trade union unity. Pollitt replied that there was 'just a little danger of overstressing this point . . . The Russian trade union leaders are interested, leaders who have proved their worth to the working-class movement and in whom we have complete confidence'.³⁵

The end of this road was the betrayal of the General Strike, with the Communist Party and the Minority Movement unable to do anything against it but protest and call upon the traitor leaders to mend their ways. It revealed 'the weakness of a Left which could only make propaganda, and which was not so firmly organized in the factories and localities that it could take the lead in action'.³⁶ A hint of realization that the movement had been shunted on to the wrong path in 1925-26 appeared in Wal Hannington's pamphlet *What's Wrong in the Engineering Industry?*, published by the National Minority Movement in 1927, where he wrote, after urging the need for a change of leaders in the unions:

To those who say 'We have seen leaders turn before and what guarantee is there that they will not continue to do so?' we reply, the Minority Movement must be strong enough inside the unions not only to make leaders, but also to break them, if and when they reject the policy upon which they were elected.

But Stalinist policy remained unchanged right down to the end of 1927, and the decision not to resist the TUC General Council's ultimatum to trades councils to disaffiliate from the Minority Movement virtually killed it.

So died the Minority Movement, much as the General Strike had died. Ernest Bevin and his colleagues had called off the General Strike to avoid open warfare with the government; Harry Pollitt called off the Minority Movement to avoid open warfare with the TUC and many executives of trade unions.³⁷

THE 'THIRD PERIOD'

Thanks to the policy imposed upon it by Moscow from the spring of 1925 onwards, the Minority Movement had done just enough to incur the resentment of the bureaucracy without acquiring the power to fight back effectively. The bureaucracy was able very thoroughly to combine its proscription and bans with

the employers' victimization of militants in that black period of the British working-class movement which followed the General Strike, and so to stamp out the Minority Movement for most practical purposes. For all its weaknesses and opportunist errors, the Minority Movement of 1924-27 had been a genuine expression of a trend in the working class, with real roots in the masses and a relationship to the traditional organizations of British Labour. Between the end of 1927 (Fifteenth Congress of the Soviet Communist Party) and the middle of 1929 (Tenth Plenum of the executive committee of the Communist International) a change of policy was put through in the international communist movement which caused British Stalinists in their industrial work to take off into realms of fantasy and adventure, not to mention crime and treason to the working class.³⁸ This episode is largely responsible for the attitude of reserve and suspicion towards anything calling itself a 'rank-and-file movement' which is sometimes met among old trade unionists who are by no means bureaucrats.

The original Minority Movement based itself on affiliation by trade union branches, district committees, etc.; individual membership was treated as transitional until the individual concerned had won his branch to affiliate. It was careful to emphasize that it was not an anti-union movement but on the contrary expected its supporters to work for 100 per cent. trade unionism wherever they had influence, and could point to many an achievement in this respect. One of the last expositions of the movement's purpose before the entry into what Stalinist jargon called 'the third period' is found in a pamphlet by Fred Thompson called *Maintenance for Dockers*, published by the Transport Workers' Minority Movement in 1928.

The Minority Movement is an organization of militant trade unionists who, realizing the extent to which the present leadership have committed themselves and the unions unreservedly to class collaboration, have banded themselves together to restore the original purpose and fighting spirit on which the trade unions were founded, to secure a new leadership with a policy based upon a realization of the class struggle, and a complete reorganization of the trade unions on lines that will admit of this policy being given effect to.

From mid-1929 onward for a period of over two years, this approach was replaced by a totally different one. Not merely was the Minority Movement in its new guise uninterested in winning 100 per cent. trade unionism, it declared the trade unions to be cracking up and on their way out, and a good thing too. Not merely did it turn away from the task of winning trade union branches for militant policies, it deliberately sought to *exclude* branch officers from strike committees and rank-and-file *ad hoc* committees of all kinds. Special 'red' trade unions were created and then launched by their communist leaders into 'prestige' strikes, the need for which was not understood by the members (though these affairs looked impressive in the periodical reports to Moscow), so that militancy was discredited among those sections of the workers closest to the Minority Movement.

³⁵ *Ibid.* pp. 29, 73-4.

³⁶ John Mahon, *Trade Unionism* (1938), p. 53.

³⁷ J. T. Murphy, *Labour's Big Three* (1948), p. 137. The national executive committee of the movement reported to the fifth annual conference, in 1928, that 'it has become increasingly clear that we made a grave mistake last year in recommending the trades councils to withdraw their affiliation from the Minority Movement'.

³⁸ For some account of the ultra-Left phase of Stalinism in Britain at the end of the 1920s and the beginning of the 1930s, see 'Joseph Redman', *The Communist Party and the Labour Left, 1925-29* (Reasoner pamphlet, Hull, 1957), and Henry Pelling, *The British Communist Party* (1958).

It was of this period in Stalinist industrial policy that Trotsky wrote (in *Communism and Syndicalism*, 1929) that

the struggle for the party's influence in the trade unions finds its objective verification in whether or not the unions thrive, whether or not the number of their members increases, as well as in their relations with the broadest masses. If the party buys its influence in the trade unions only at the price of a narrowing-down and factionalizing of the latter—converting them into auxiliaries of the party for momentary aims and preventing them from becoming genuine mass organizations—then the relations between the party and the class are wrong.

The Communist Party was showing 'an adolescent tendency to make itself master of the working class in the briefest time, by means of stage-play, inventions, superficial agitation, etc.:' nothing good would come of 'political hysteria which does not take conditions into account, which confuses today with yesterday or with tomorrow'.

Characteristic of the 1929-31 period was a growing disparity between slogans and achievements. During the Bradford woollen strike of 1930, for instance, the Minority Movement shouted to bewildered workers about 'the struggle for power'—but proved incapable of setting up a single independent mill committee. While the Red International of Labour Unions demanded that the movement become 'a real mass organization based on dues-paying collective and individual membership', setting itself up as an alternative trade union centre to the TUC, the tactics of frenzy were in fact resulting in the isolation and even expulsion of those groups which had retained some mass influence from the General Strike period (e.g., the expulsion of the Mardy lodge from the South Wales Miners' Federation). Arthur Horner himself eventually spoke out within the party against what was happening: 'Artificial strike committees, really Minority Movement groups, were set up as alternatives to the lodges, without mass contact, resulting only in our isolation . . . The revolutionary movement was effectively bankrupt from every angle.'³⁹ For this statement he was, of course, reprimanded and removed from the leadership of the Miners' Minority Movement. The shouting to the workers to come and be led, with a general strike as 'the next step', grew louder and shriller, especially as the international Stalinist leadership kept impatiently contrasting the poor showing of the Minority Movement with what was happening in Germany (where the Nazis were now a substantial and growing force)—there, forsooth, 'all mass movements are conducted under the leadership of the party'.

Those who criticized the suicidal tactics of the 'third period' were dismissed as 'Trotskyist yellow-bellies', just as those who had criticized the opportunist errors of the previous phase had been 'Trotskyist wild men'. After the damage had been done, and without, of course, any acknowledgement to those who had been right at the time, Wilhelm Pieck admitted on behalf of the executive committee of the Communist International, in his speech of July 26, 1935, at the Seventh Congress of the CI, the justice of these criticisms:

The most glaring example of sectarianism in the trade union movement was provided in Great Britain, where in the face of the sharp attacks of the Right members of the General

Council and the vacillations of the Left trade union leaders the communists adopted [in fact had pressed upon them by the executive committee of the CI—B.P.] such clumsy and sectarian tactics that the Minority Movement actually fell to pieces. Adopting the course of independently leading the economic struggles, the communists, as a result of former Right mistakes and the inadequate organizational consolidation of the Minority Movement, transferred their main work from the trade union groups to individual members and from the trade unions to the unorganized workers, and set up their scanty forces against the whole trade union movement. These mistakes were aggravated by the fact that the communists regarded the Minority Movement as the nucleus of new trade unions and discontinued recruiting workers to the trade unions, issuing appeals to join the ranks of the Minority Movement. It must be borne in mind that these mistakes were committed by our comrades in a country where the reformist trade unions possess the oldest traditions. Under such circumstances the communists were found to become entirely isolated from the trade union movement, and the Minority Movement collapsed. It is only with great difficulty that our British comrades, having realized their mistakes and correspondingly altered their trade union policy, are managing to regain their influence in the trade union movement.

THE JANUARY RESOLUTION AND AFTER

It was the outcome of the government crisis of 1931 that gave a salutary jolt to the Communist Party and to its mentors in Moscow, inducing some new thinking on industrial policy. The collapse of the Labour government provided a model opportunity for communist advance, but the actual development of events merely served to highlight the isolation and impotence of the communists.

Meanwhile, the fact had to be faced that, independently of the surviving Minority Movement groups, now left high and dry, workers in a number of industries were forming unofficial organizations and carrying on the struggle in their own way—regardless both of the top officials of their unions and of the theories of the Communist Party. In South Wales the big strike against the 'Schiller Award' was led by the militant Llwynypia lodge of the union. A Builders' Forward Movement arose, based on thirty-two London trade union branches. An unofficial movement in the British Iron and Steel and Kindred Trades Federation held a conference at which sixty-one branches were represented, drew up a programme for democratizing the union, reducing officials' salaries etc., and issued its own duplicated news-sheet. A Members' Rights Movement appeared in the Amalgamated Engineering Union, a Reorganization Committee among the boilermakers, and a Rules Revision Committee among the furniture workers. All these development began in the latter part of 1931, before any change was made in Communist Party policy; they were in no sense created by the Communist Party, as was later alleged by the Right wing and implied in communist propaganda. On the contrary, not only were they largely ignored by the communists but in some cases they were resisted and opposed as rivals to the Minority Movement!⁴⁰

On the initiative of the Red International of Labour Unions, the British Communist Party now undertook an important modification of its industrial policy. This was expressed in what came to be known as 'the Janu-

³⁹ Quoted in *Communist Review*, April 1931.

⁴⁰ See articles in *Daily Worker*, May 26, 1932, and *Communist International*, August 15, 1932.

ary Resolution', adopted by the central committee in January 1932. This decision called for a turn towards the real movements going on among the workers, with abandonment of notions and forms of organization that constituted a barrier between the communists and these movements. The communists must cease to appear as a self-appointed leadership coming from outside, usually rather late in the day, and trying to impose programmes they had invented independently of the workers concerned. They must cease, too, to seem to wish to weaken and even to destroy the trade unions. In British conditions strike struggles, to be successful, must involve trade union branches, and the party should strive to win influence in the branches and among branch officers—who should no longer be put on the same level as the head-office bureaucrats. The trade union branches must be transformed 'from organs of class collaboration into organs of class struggle'. One of the tasks of Communist Party members must be to win unorganized workers to join the unions, as part of a general line of strengthening organization for struggle.

This change of outlook on major problems naturally produced much discussion in the party. It was during this discussion that the Balham group of the Communist Party was expelled, to become the original nucleus of the Left Opposition in Britain. In a series of thoughtful contributions to the *Daily Worker* (April 14, May 27, June 10), mild in tone though perhaps somewhat abstract and rigid in presentation, these comrades explained that while they welcomed the January Resolution as a step in the right direction of a critical examination of the party's policy and methods, they were worried about the way the resolution put the unions and workplaces on the same footing as fields of work. 'We recognize the great value of work in the trade unions and realize that we should make use of every opportunity afforded to us inside the trade union branches. We see the possibilities for work in the unions as well as the limitations.' The structure and constitution of the trade unions made them unsuitable as organs of class struggle; these must be built directly in the workshops and factories. 'We do not deny . . . that the branches can be of great value in building the job organizations, but the emphasis in the resolution is upon the unions.'

King Street had been worried about the Balham group for some time, being aware that a number of its members were studying Trotsky's criticisms and counter-proposals regarding Comintern policy, and was happy to seize the opportunity of expelling the group on an issue where it could be made to look like a centre of Left-sectarian resistance to necessary changes in party work. The Balham comrades were in fact far from being alone in warning against the danger that the correction of Left errors might, unless very carefully understood and explained, open the way to Right ones. No less an authority than R. P. Dutt himself noted, in contributions to the *Daily Worker* of September 14 and 19, 1932, that

under cover of the absolute and agreed necessity of strengthening a hundredfold our work in the reformist trade unions there has begun to appear increasingly a very different tendency—a tendency to preach confidence in the reformist trade unions and in the reformist trade union machine as organs of working-class struggle.

He stressed that 'we stand for a powerful united revo-

lutionary trade union opposition, firmly based on the trade union membership, on the lower trade union organs, and on factory organization, which will break the power of the reformist trade union bureaucracy and lead the way to the future powerful united revolutionary trade unionism'. Not surprisingly, J. Shields pointed out in the *Daily Worker* of September 30 that 'Comrade Dutt objectively comes out on the side of the Balham group'.⁴¹

For a considerable period after the January Resolution the Communist Party's industrial work made little progress, and may even, on balance, have declined. A process of 'falling between two stools' was going on. On the one hand, the Minority Movement, which had become a caricature of its former self, was dropped by many militants to whom it had become an embarrassment. ('Following upon this resolution, group after group of the MM that still existed went out of existence, the comrades claiming that they understood it now to be the line of the party that the MM should be liquidated', wrote W. Allan in *Communist Review*, October 1932.) On the other, the persistence of sectarian habits—and of the workers' distrust of the communists arising from these—meant that the successful implementation of new methods of work did not come easily.

All the party activities in the big weavers' strike in 1932 were **outside** the union. The 'Solidarity Movement' formed out of the strike had no real roots in the lower organizations of the union, and was mainly composed of individual communists. It was inevitable that such a movement could not live long.

So wrote Idris Cox three years afterwards.⁴² So late as October 1932 it was still necessary for the leadership of the Metal Trades Minority Movement to pass a resolution calling on all its members to 'link up with and actively work amongst' the Members' Rights Movement, which had the support of 120 trade union branches and four area councils of the AEU and published its own monthly paper the *Monkey Wrench*, with a circulation of 5,000.⁴³ John Mahon reported in the same period that a number of the unofficial movements in the trade unions had been allowed to decline or to go out of existence and that 'one tendency regarded these movements as dangerous competitors with the Minority Movement, and in pursuance of this theory the Builders' Forward Movement was liquidated'.⁴⁴ At the Twelfth Congress of the Communist Party, held in November 1932, it emerged that virtually no progress had been made in striking roots in the factories. 'Most of the new members who joined are unemployed; most of the members who left are unemployed.'

⁴¹ To correct any anti-trade-union tendency in their ranks, the British Left Oppositionists published in their paper the *Communist*, September 1932, part of a reply written by Trotsky in the previous year to a letter from British friends. The latter had expressed the view that the trade unions were falling to pieces. Trotsky sharply disagreed and went on to demand: 'How can the revolutionization of the working class take place outside of the trade unions, without changing their physiognomy and failing to call forth a selection of new leaders?'

⁴² *Communist International*, February 5, 1935.

⁴³ *Weekly Worker*, October 22, 1932; *Communist International*, October 1, 1932.

⁴⁴ *Daily Worker*, October 20, 1932; *Weekly Worker*, November 19, 1932.

There was an outstanding exception, however, amid the disappointments in the field of rank-and-file work. This was the work carried out among the London busmen, which became a 'model' for successful unofficial organization. The London Busmen's Rank-and-File Movement arose in August 1932 out of dissatisfaction with the trade union officials' attitude to the employers' proposals, and by November it was issuing a printed monthly paper the *Busman's Punch*. Pollitt wrote in the *Labour Monthly* of January 1933:

The experience of the London Busmen's Rank-and-File Movement should be carefully studied by the militant workers in every industry. The determination of the mass of London's busmen (shown in a four-to-one majority ballot vote to resist the company's terms) was expressed through the setting up of a rank-and-file committee consisting of branch representatives who reported back to the branches and secured confirmation of the committee's decisions. Funds to carry out a propaganda campaign were raised through the branches; leaflets, pamphlets, and the *Busman's Punch* were sold through the branches; speakers from the rank-and-file committees addressed the branches . . . And all this work was carried out by a committee drawing its authority from the garages and branches, who looked to it to lead the fight against the company **independently of the trade union officials**, but with the full force of the trade union branches and garages behind it.

In the case of the busmen, the branch coincided with the place of work, the garage, so that the problem whether to work mainly through the branches or mainly on the job itself, whether to try to transform the branch or to set up a special 'factory committee', hardly existed. The busmen were, moreover, all members of one union. Another favourable circumstance was the existence as part of the official set-up of the Central Bus Committee, composed of representatives of the branches; through their success in the branches the militants automatically obtained a majority on this committee, which then became a powerful instrument for extending their influence and providing leadership to the London busmen as a whole. V. L. Allen notes, in his *Trade Union Leadership: Based on a Study of Arthur Deakin* (1957):

The National Minority Movement was based on an individual membership of trade unionists; it was a body outside of the trade union movement and, as such, it could be proscribed by unions, and trade unionists who belonged to it could be disciplined. This was not so easily done in the case of the Rank-and-File Movement, for it was based on the support of trade union branches and shop stewards' organizations and had no individual membership. The communists concentrated on getting powerful lay trade union committees to affiliate to the Movement. In the Central London Area Bus Committee they found one such committee which fairly quickly came under the control of the London Busmen's Rank-and-File Movement. From then onwards its policy ran counter to that of the union executive and there was no way in which the executive could change it except by suspending the machinery, declaring the movement subversive, and taking disciplinary action against its leading members (pp. 64-5).

George Renshaw, analysing the success of the busmen's movement in the *RILU Magazine* (February 1, 1933), described how it had all grown from the work of militants in one branch who had got this branch to pass a resolution and then to circulate it to all the garages and call a mass meeting, through which they made new contacts and launched the *Busman's Punch*

—at first as a duplicated sheet.⁴⁵

Inspired by the example of the London busmen's movement, the 'Vigilance' movement on the railways made considerable progress in the early months of 1933 and was expected to prove as viable, but it was soon dragged down by difficulties which did not exist for the London busmen—inter-union rivalries and the problems connected with setting up an organization cutting across union membership, and the absence of an official leading centre which could be 'captured' as the Central Bus Committee had been. Nevertheless, the agitation carried on by the 'Vigilance' movement, especially through its widely-circulated paper the *Railway Vigilant*, forced the railway National Wages Board, for the first time since 1921, to reject a demand made by the railway companies, and the movement led numerous successful local strikes.

As the militancy of the workers revived, with signs of recovery from the depths of the depression, during 1933, and as the communists began seriously to apply themselves to work on the new lines, the trade union bureaucracy started to crack down on rank-and-file activities with greater determination than for several years. They recognized that a serious threat to their position was developing. Twelve London members of the Amalgamated Society of Woodworkers who organized, through a committee representing thirty branches, a rank-and-file conference in June 1933 for the purpose of working out a fighting programme for building workers, were expelled from the union. Ernest Bevin began to introduce amendments to the rule-book to trip up lower officials of his union who associated with unofficial movements. In union after union the clash grew sharper, culminating in the Black Circulars issued by the Trades Union Congress General Council in March 1935, attempting to make affiliated unions and trades councils deprive their communist members of delegation rights.⁴⁶ It was widely remarked that the 'reds' whom the union leaders were persecuting were among the best workers for 100 per cent. trade unionism. Bert Papworth, who as secretary of Chelverton Road branch initiated the London busmen's movement, had just been decorated with his union's silver medal for recruiting 170 new members. Communists were to the fore in a series of strikes in unorganized factories in the Birmingham area and elsewhere (notably Firestone's, Brentford, and Pressed Steel, Oxford) which resulted in trade unionism getting footholds in pre-

⁴⁵ For a detailed account of the history of the London Busmen's Rank-and-File Movement, see H. A. Clegg, *Labour Relations in London Transport* (1950).

⁴⁶ It was in the 1935 Birthday Honours that Pugh, of the Steelworkers, and Citrine, general secretary of the TUC, received knighthoods. They were not the first trade-union knights; but what was new was that they were knighted specifically for their trade union work, that Citrine had many years of such work ahead of him, and that the honours were bestowed by an anti-Labour government. Indicative of the strong position which the communists had built up between 1933 and 1935 was the narrowness of the General Council's majority when the Black Circulars came up for approval at the Trades Union Congress in September 1935: voting was 1,869,000 to 1,274,000. Peter Kerrigan could correctly claim, at the Seventh World Congress of the Communist International, that 'the change in our trade union work . . . has entirely altered the attitude of the majority of trade unionists to the party'.

viously black spots. The aircraft section of the engineering industry was practically unorganized in 1934 but within three years every important factory was over 90 per cent. organized, an achievement mainly due to the Aircraft Shop Stewards' Movement, which issued its own paper the *New Propellor*, and in twelve months conducted fourteen important unofficial strikes, most of which were successful.

When the Thirteenth Congress of the British Communist Party took place, in February 1935, both the general situation in industry and the position of the communists in the trade unions were markedly different from what had obtained at the previous congress. Trade union membership had begun to increase for the first time for many years. The militancy of the workers caused *The Times* to write of 'the spirit of 1926' showing itself again. Of the 294 delegates to congress, 205 were employed: 234 were trade unionists, and of these nearly two-thirds held positions at some level in their unions. Not long afterwards, speaking on August 20, 1935, at the Seventh World Congress of the Communist International, J. R. Campbell could with reason depict Britain as being on the eve of great mass struggles, with the workers increasingly impatient of the restrictions imposed on them by the bureaucracy, and substantial prospects for a broad militant movement in industry.

CONSEQUENCES OF THE 'PEOPLE'S FRONT' LINE

It is hard to reconcile the position that had actually come about by the eve of the war, in 1938-39, with the prospects confidently discussed in 1935. The rank-and-file movements which had been surging up again and again in industry in spite of official repression and intimidation, and causing panic among the bureaucrats, had either disappeared or become unrecognizably tame and respectable. The expected major class conflicts had not occurred. G. D. H. Cole writes in his *Short History of the British Working-Class Movement* (1948):

In the early months of 1937 there were all the symptoms of developing Labour unrest . . . The workers were beginning to feel that, unless they took action immediately to secure improved wages and shorter working hours, their opportunity would very likely be gone; for already economists were beginning to speak of the imminence of a new recession, as soon as the intensive building of new factories for purposes of rearmament had passed its peak. Actually, there was a recession after the relatively high industrial activity of 1937, and even increased rearmament activity in 1938-39 did not quite restore conditions to the level reached in 1937. Thanks, however, to these activities, the recession was much less severe than it would otherwise have been, and the recovery of trade unionism continued at a slow pace up to the outbreak of war in 1939. Right through these years the trade union movement retained its essentially pacific policy. Strikes and lockouts were few and for the most part small, and the trade union leaders gave them little encouragement.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Cole, *op. cit.* p. 444. Cf. Arthur Horner, *Trade Unions and Unity* (April 1937): 'The trade union movement is in the throes of a great revival. Tens of thousands of workers are joining the unions every week. Branch meetings were never better attended. There is hardly a section of organized workers which has not received some slight increase in wages, and most sections are beginning to ask for more . . . The workers feel that they have a golden opportunity in the next two years and they intend to use it.'

When all due allowance has been made for objective factors, it seems clear that decisive significance attaches to a change in 1935-36 in the political 'line' of the Communist Party, which had by then got itself and its fellow-travellers widely accepted as the leaders of the militant movements in industry. As things turned out, the Stalinists headed these movements only to behead them at a crucial stage, because in accordance with Stalin's disastrous diplomacy they assumed the task of seeking alliances with 'progressive capitalists' and holding back the working-class struggle within strict and strangling limits.

Characteristic was the line of development in South Wales. October 1935 saw a tremendous struggle against company unionism, led by the Ocean Combine Committee, which culminated in the 'stay-down' strike at Nine Mile Point for removal of the blacklegs imported during a recent dispute. Several other collieries came out in sympathy, and so also did the railwaymen at Merthyr. An attempt by the SWMF officials to close the struggle down was rebuffed and it was brought to a successful conclusion. On the basis of this and previous militant movements in the coalfield, Arthur Horner was elected president of the SWMF in 1936. A splendid opportunity for combining the efforts of communists in official positions with the fight of the rank and file seemed to have been created. Yet, after 1936, rank-and-file activity died down in South Wales. As John Mahon put it, in the *Labour Monthly* of July 1937, 'the Left' was now 'in control' there: 'The union machine is used to express the workers' demands.'

A bitter struggle in the Nottinghamshire coal-field, the other major stronghold of company unionism, ended with a compromise between the Miners' Federation and the company union. According to the communist pamphlet *Notts United* (June 1937) 'this agreement is, it is true, a compromise, but if we examine it soberly and refuse to allow ourselves to be led away by talk of "sell-outs" and "betrayals", it is obvious that it represents a tremendous step forward'. Mick Kane and other leaders of the Nottinghamshire miners had been arrested at Harworth and given harsh sentences under the new Public Order Act, allegedly passed to restrain the Blackshirts. These arrests roused intense indignation throughout the working-class movement, which was canalized by the Stalinists into a petition campaign. (Kane, sentenced to two years' hard labour, was eventually released in August 1938.)

The rank-and-file movement on the London buses, which appeared to be so firmly based, was outmanoeuvred and smashed by Bevin in the 'coronation strike' of 1937. He deliberately allowed the rank-and-file-controlled Central Bus Committee to take over direction of the strike in order that they might discredit themselves. Similar rank-and-file success to that achieved among the London busmen had not been won among the tram and trolley men, nor among the provincial busmen,⁴⁸ and all these groups were effectively held back by Bevin, making the defeat of the strike inevitable. The leaders of the rank-and-file movement could then be ousted from office and their organization broken

⁴⁸ Pollitt had pointed out so far back as 1933, in an article in the *Communist International* of November 1 of that year, that the Achilles' heel of the London busmen's movement was that it was confined to busmen and to London, and indicated the need to extend it to other passenger-transport workers in London and to the provinces.

up. All this was accepted with surprising resignation by the Communist Party, and the *Busman's Punch* closed down after the October-November issue. Non-communist leading figures of the rank-and-file movement, bewildered and frustrated, followed the call of W. J. Brown to form a breakaway union.

Study of the literature of the other rank-and-file movements of this period, notably those among the aircraft workers and building workers, shows increasingly narrow concentration on recruitment to the unions and propaganda for amalgamation of the unions. Exposures of the officials and campaigning for democratization of the unions both faded away. Nothing more was heard after 1935 of the need to work towards a linking-up of all the rank-and-file movement on a national scale, which had frequently been indicated as the goal to be kept in view when communist leaders discussed these movements in 1933-34.⁴⁹ The articles about Britain in *International Press Correspondence* from 1936 onwards contain little about the industrial front, and the same is true of the *Communist International*. The British Communist Party monthly *Discussion* ran articles in its issues of June and July 1936 pouring cold water on the conception of rank-and-file movements: maximum use of the facilities provided by the trade union machinery was the thing, and unofficial movements must never be conceived as permanent in character. At the party congress in May 1937, J. R. Campbell, reporting on the industrial front, said:

We insist that the trade union leaders stop fighting their own militants and start mobilizing the working class to storm the Bastille of unorganized labour . . . Our demand is for the calling of a conference of trade union executives . . . A growing number of comrades are being elected to trade union executives and to paid official positions.

One looks in vain in the communist publications of this period for any echo of an idea which had been commonplace not long before and which can be illus-

trated by two quotations from the *Communist Review*:

It is clear from experience . . . that many militants still believe that we can force the leaders to head a real fight. In actual practice mass pressure forces the leaders to manoeuvre and to head strikes in order to retain negotiating authority and to betray the strike (October 1933).

If we can take the reformist unions out of the hands of the reformist leaders, then there is no need for independent organs of struggle and for building a revolutionary trade union opposition . . . We need a Minority Movement because we stand as much chance of capturing the trade union machine and using it for our own ends as we do the capitalist State (October 1932).

At the 1938 Congress of the British Communist Party no report was given on industrial and trade union work as such. J. R. Campbell, who had usually given this report, devoted his time to explaining the menace of 'Trotskyism'. In the report of the central committee prepared for the next congress, which was to have been held in October 1939 but never took place owing to the outbreak of war, we read:

The preoccupation on questions concerning war or peace may seem at first to have led to a dampening down of the struggle against capitalism at home . . . It is not possible to record any big mass movements on the industrial field . . . In the main there has been no real advance made in raising the standards of workers as a whole . . . In many districts there has been serious neglect of this work.

The story of the years immediately preceding the war is a cautionary tale for industrial workers today, with two morals: the need for rank-and-file movements, and the fatal consequences of allowing the Communist Party to get control of such movements. For just as the trade union bureaucracy came closer and closer to monopoly capitalism, so the Soviet bureaucracy, whose agent the Communist Party is, not only lost all interest in promoting workers' revolution but from the mid-1930s onward became more and more actively opposed to it.

⁴⁹ E.g., J. R. Campbell, 'The Future of Rank and File Movements', *Labour Monthly*, March 1933, and Pollitt in *Communist International*, January 15, 1933 and December 5, 1934.

Communications

'The Origins of Sectarianism'

IT is very helpful, as Peter Cadogan has undertaken to do, to rescue such a good, serious Marxist term as 'sectarianism' from its degraded status as a gutter-word. But I would like to take up one or two points, because some readers got the idea that Cadogan thinks sectarianism is an inevitable disease, and others that he is trying to be cleverer than Marx and Engels.

'Sectarianism' does not just mean mouthing 'Left' formulas to an unheeding world. Cadogan could enrich his concept of it, I think, if he looked back in the history of Chartism even before the 'Communist Manifesto' was published—for Place in the 1820s and Lovett in the 1830s had quite definite, dogmatic ideas which they sought to impose on the movement: those of 'moral force'. They certainly wanted to create a sectarian leadership, from London, over the northern Chartists.

Even before 1847 Utopian political movements could and did combine sectarianism with opportunism (just as evolution had been taking place even before Darwin explained it). In Britain we are not likely ever to come across 'pure' sectarianism, because everything that even the purest of the pure may do to involve themselves in real activity confronts them with situations to which the 'creed' has no answers, and for which therefore they have to improvise, though without too openly 'compromising the dogma—at least at first.



Cadogan probably knows that the British Communist Party was cutting its teeth on 'anti-war' movements with parsons and other progressives even in 1932-33, when it was at the top of the scale denouncing the Labour Party as 'social-fascist' and breaking up its meetings. I do not think that John Saville has thoroughly grasped this point, which helps to make clear the underlying continuity from the 'third period' through the popular front to today, combining at all stages sectarianism with opportunism.

I think Cadogan is quite right to regard Jones's sectarianism after 1848 as a snatching after the disappearing coat-tails of Chartism. But it is a bit hard on Marx and Engels to blame it on them. What authority had they over him or any other Chartist leader? There is no strong reason to believe that even if they had backed Harney there could have been in that whole period a fruitful interpenetration of scientific socialism with the new forms of class movement in the trade unions and retail co-operatives.

The leaders of the successful movements of the fifties, the broad-clothed and side-whiskered preachers of temperance and thrift, may have included a few individuals who could project their minds forward to an independent Labour Party. John Stuart Mill, their ideologist-in-chief, glimpsed a long way further than his own day. But the movements as a whole were not yet large, and their leaders and ranks alike were for ten years at least generally in the mood to accept and co-operate with parliamentary radicalism. Whatever Marx, Engels or Harney had done, the idea of independent Labour politics as a vehicle for socialism had to germinate for a generation.

Marx recognized the counter-revolutionary character of this period throughout Europe, and with less short-run optimism than Engels. Mehring's 'Karl Marx: His Life and Work' (p. 194) and Mayer's 'Friedrich Engels' (p. 133) explain the

context of the 'notorious' letter: 'I am very well pleased with the genuine and public isolation in which we two are now situated.' Marx and Engels had had to draw a line sharply between themselves and the petty-bourgeois émigrés from the Continent, by dismissing (rightly as the events showed) the dreams of the 'governments in partibus infidelium'¹ of an early return home to new democratic upheavals in France and Germany, Italy, Poland or Hungary.

Basic economic analysis led to the hard conclusion that the exiles had three choices. They could go home, which at best meant the political capitulation that eventually led some of them into jobs under the Prussian autocracy. They could settle down in prolonged exile in Britain. Or they could emigrate to the undeveloped parts of the world, particularly America, where many of them turned up in history later on.

Accordingly Marx and Engels doubted the soundness of Harney's political judgment when, as Mayer says (p. 133), he 'accepted contributions from their enemies to the broadsheets which he published'. For the differences between Marx and Engels and the democratic exiles were not at all superficial, personal or episodic, but arose from a profound difference of method in evaluating the whole of society, its character and method of development.

'Marx was really a sectarian' has long been the stock-in-trade of opportunists against scientific socialism: you find this kind of reference in the literature of the early ILP. In the 1920s the Communist Party dealt correctly and firmly with chatter of this kind from the Brailsfords in the New Leader. Surely it is not necessary to repeat today that Marx was not on principle opposed to trade unions and the struggle for immediate demands. The pamphlet 'Wage Labour and Capital' quite clearly shows the role of trade unions, even though they may be unconscious of it, as organs of class struggle mobilizing the workers as a class and influencing the rate of exploitation.

Our historical researches are not for the purpose of 'catching out' our teachers, but to recognize the pressures working upon them where they made mistakes, so that we can recognize pressures of the same kind when they work upon us. Marxists are people who work for the future. We do not despise a movement merely because today it may be small. From this episode we can at least learn that in an unfavourable period the first task is to defend principles, even when defending principles does not make you many friends. Labour Review itself and The Newsletter, and the whole body of Marxist ideas of today, could not have been available for this generation by any other process.

J.A.

¹'In a heretical country'—i.e., governments in exile.

'Marxists in the Second World War'

WILLIAM HUNTER'S article in the December Labour Review is a most valuable contribution to the literature of his subject. Nevertheless I think it needs to be supplemented if the reader is to understand clearly the difference between the Marxist line and that of the 'Communist' Party in the period before June 22, 1941, when Hitler attacked Russia; and between the Marxist line and the line of, say, the Independent Labour Party in the period after that historic date. It is also

important to show that the Marxists did not mechanically repeat Lenin's slogans of 1914-17 in the war of 1939-45.

The British Stalinists, after their initial blunder of proclaiming support for the war (and calling for an allied offensive from the Maginot Line into Germany), turned, not to Lenin's line of 'turn the imperialist war into civil war', but to demanding that peace be made on the basis of the Soviet-German declaration of September 28, 1939 ('Poland's done for, so what is there to fight about?'). The pamphlet 'Why This War?', by R. P. Dutt, issued at the beginning of November, stated: 'The government must be compelled to make peace. We demand an immediate Armistice and the calling of a peace Conference' (p. 18), and did not shrink from changing the wording of Karl Liebknecht's slogan from 'the main enemy is at home' into 'the enemy is at home' (p. 23). During the entire period up to the fall of France the British Communist Party functioned as a propaganda agency for Hitler. Typical was the editorial in the *Daily Worker* of February 1, 1940, commenting on a speech by the Führer: 'Hitler repeated once again his claim that the war was thrust upon him by Britain. Against this historic fact there is no reply. Britain declared war, not Germany. Attempts were made to end this war, but the Soviet-German peace overtures were rejected by Britain.' Already in this period the Marxists had to differentiate their approach from that of the Stalinists: 'The Militant wants peace, but it does not want an imperialist peace . . . The peace which the *Daily Worker* now demands on behalf of Hitler and Stalin is an imperialist peace,' declared the *London Militant* in its issue of October 1939.

Hitler's onslaught on the Low Countries and France, the sell-out by the French ruling class headed by Pétain, the immediate menace of invasion of Britain, and the repercussions of all this among the capitalists and the workers of this country respectively, drew from the British Communist Party a remarkable manifesto, published on June 22, 1940. This warned against the Churchill government, which not only contained 'men of Munich' but also compromised the defence of the people by identifying it with 'the maintenance of Empire possessions and the dominance of the ruling class'. If the workers were to 'defeat all their enemies within and without Britain', a new government must come to power, 'really representative of the working people, a government in which there shall be no representative of imperialism or friend of fascism'. All responsible for the situation must be cleared out of commanding positions, in the services and in the economy; the key industries nationalized; workers' control committees take over in the enterprises; the workers armed, on a factory basis; the class system in the appointment of officers broken down; complete freedom for the working-class movement ensured; the subject people of the Empire liberated.

What is particularly interesting about this manifesto is that it substantially coincided with the line indicated by Trotsky in his last writings (he was murdered in August 1940). Thus in his reply to some questions from American friends he wrote:

'The American workers do not want to be conquered by Hitler, and to those who say "Let us have a peace programme", the workers will reply "But Hitler does not want a peace programme". Therefore we say: We will defend the United States with a workers' army, with workers' officers, with a workers' government etc. . . . It would be doubly stupid to present a purely abstract pacifist position today: the feeling the masses have is that it is necessary to defend themselves. We must say: "Roosevelt (or Willkie) says it is necessary to defend the country; good! Only it must be our country, not that of the Sixty Families and their Wall Street. The army must be under our own command; we must have our own officers, who will be loyal to us." In this way we can find an approach to the masses that will not push them away from us,

and thus prepare them for the second step—a more revolutionary one. We must use the example of France to the very end . . .'

Again, in a memorandum commenting on a 'very pretentious, very muddled and stupid article' in the *Partisan Review* for July-August 1940, Trotsky warned against a mechanical resuscitation of Lenin's slogans:

'The present war, as we have stated on more than one occasion, is a continuation of the last war. But a continuation does not signify a repetition. As a general rule, a continuation signifies a development, a deepening, a sharpening. Our policy, the policy of the revolutionary proletariat towards the second imperialist war is a continuation of the policy elaborated during the last imperialist war, primarily under Lenin's leadership. But a continuation does not signify a repetition. . . In 1915 Lenin referred in his writings to revolutionary wars which the victorious proletariat would have to wage. But it was a question of an indefinite historical prospect, and not of the task for the next day . . . The second world war poses the question of change of régimes more imperiously, more urgently, than did the first war. It is first and foremost a question of the political régime. The workers are aware that democracy is suffering shipwreck everywhere, and that they are threatened by fascism even in those countries where fascism is as yet non-existent . . .'

The implications of Trotsky's ideas were fully worked out, after his death, at a special conference of the Socialist Workers' Party of the USA held at Chicago in September 1940, which adopted what was called 'the military policy', a policy for proletarianizing the armed forces. Speaking on this occasion, James P. Cannon said:

'Our fight against war under conditions of peace was correct as far as it went. But it was not adequate. It must be extended. The old principles, which remain unchanged, must be applied concretely to the new conditions of permanent war and universal militarism. We didn't visualize, a world situation in which whole countries would be conquered by fascist armies. The workers don't want to be conquered by foreign invaders, above all by fascists. They require a programme of military struggle against foreign invaders which assures their class independence. That is the gist of the problem.

'Many times in the past we were put to a certain disadvantage: the demagogy of the social democrats against us was effective to a certain extent. They said: "You have no answer to the question of how to fight against Hitler, how to prevent Hitler from conquering France, Belgium etc." (Of course, their programme was very simple—the suspension of the class struggle and complete subordination of the workers to the bourgeoisie. We have seen the results of this treacherous policy.) Well, we answered in a general way, the workers will first overthrow the bourgeoisie at home, and then they will take care of invaders. That was a good programme, but the workers did not make the revolution in time. Now the two tasks must be telescoped and carried out simultaneously . . .

'We are willing to fight Hitler. No worker wants to see that gang of fascist barbarians overrun this country or any country. But we want to fight fascism under a leadership we can trust . . . We will never let anything happen as it did in France . . . The workers themselves must take charge of this fight against Hitler, and anybody else who invades their rights . . .

'The contradiction between the patriotism of the bourgeoisie and that of the masses must be the point of departure of our revolutionary activity . . . We must base ourselves upon the reality of war and upon the reaction of the masses towards the events of the war . . .'

This policy became the policy of the Marxists in Britain in the months following the fall of France. Thus, for

example, in the December 1940 issue of *Youth for Socialism*, an article 'The War Extends' concluded:

'No worker in this country wants to come under the bloody tyranny of Hitler. On the contrary he will fight against this with all his strength. But he cannot do this while Britain is capitalist; while India is in bondage; while the capitalist class controls the Army and the workers are unarmed.

'The defeat of Hitler, the defence of Britain, the ending of the war—these are not simply a matter of superior arms or more numerous arms. More important is—who wields the arms and for what? If it is exploited workers fighting for capitalism, their "victory" will not be so very different from "defeat". But if it is militant workers fighting for socialism they will, besides the weapons they take out of the hands of the capitalists, have one supreme weapon against which Hitler cannot fight—the fact that the German worker can now join them in the fight against Hitler, free from the fear of British capitalism waiting to pounce on them.'

A policy decision of the Marxist 'Workers' International League' pointed out that it would be wrong to lump the 'defencist' feeling of the masses with that of the capitalist class or the Labour leadership. 'The defencism of the masses stems largely from entirely progressive motives of preserving their own class organizations and democratic rights from destruction at the hands of fascism and from a foreign invader'; and it was accompanied by 'a deep-seated suspicion of the aims and slogans of the ruling class'. The Marxists' task was to find ways of separating the workers from the capitalists and their lackeys, following out the indication given by Trotsky, in the 'Transitional Programme' (1938), that in the patriotism of the masses there are 'elements which we must know how to seize upon in order to draw the requisite conclusions'. *Youth for Socialism* of February 1941 carried an article on the approach once more of the campaigning season, under the headlines: 'Arm the Workers: The Only Guarantee against Hitler's Invasion' ('Not by curtailing the power of the workers in the factory and the Army—but by organizing workers' control of industry and arms can there be a guarantee of victory not only over Hitler but over the Fifth Column gang of capitalists at home.')

Now this policy, which the British Communist Party had in essence proclaimed as its own in the manifesto of June 22, 1940, was abandoned by that party within a few weeks. Ivor Montagu's book 'The Traitor Class', an expansion of the manifesto's central idea, was formally repudiated by William Rust in a review in the *Labour Monthly* of November 1940. The Stalinists had embarked in August—following the dispatch by the Churchill government of the Cripps mission to Moscow—on a new line which concentrated on calling for a 'People's Government' which should strengthen 'friendship with the USSR'. At the People's Convention assembled in January 1941 under Stalinist guidance the following five amendments, moved by the Southall branch of the National Union of Railwaymen, on Marxist inspiration, were all turned down by the Standing Orders Committee: 'The arming of the working class under the control of the trade unions and workers' committees'; 'nationalization of banks, land, transport and large industries without compensation'; 'unconditional defence of the USSR against capitalist attack'; 'the immediate ending of the party truce with the insistence on a campaign for Labour to take full power on the basis of this programme as the first step to the overthrow of the capitalist system and the seizure of power by the working class'; and 'a socialist appeal to the German and European workers for the overthrow of their own capitalist class simultaneously with the struggle against British capitalism and the establishment of a United States of Socialist Europe.'

The Marxist line in this period was succinctly put by the *New York Militant*: 'The real solution is to transform the imperialist war into a war against fascism' (March 15, 1941).

When the attack on the Soviet Union took place, the immediate reaction of the British Communist Party was to call for a new government and a purge of reactionary elements in controlling positions, as the only guarantee of a genuine alliance with Russia. But after diplomatic talks in Moscow had convinced the panic-stricken Soviet bureaucracy that the British imperialists were now their good friends, the line changed abruptly—as may be seen by comparing *World News and Views* of June 28 with the same paper of July 12. From then on till 1945 the British Stalinists were for full support to the Churchill Government and the war which it was conducting. Suggestions that aid to the Soviet Union was not incompatible with, and even perhaps required, a fight against Churchill, were denounced as 'treachery'—this in spite of the view expressed by J. R. Campbell in his 'recantation' statement published in *World News and Views*, December 2, 1939, that 'the policy of the fight on two fronts . . . would have been a correct policy (in peace or in war) with regard to an imperialist government in alliance with the Soviet Union'.

Similarly rebuffed as 'criminal nonsense' were suggestions that because the Red Army was fighting a just war that did not necessarily and automatically change the character of the war being waged by British imperialism. War was 'indivisible', it was proclaimed; like peace in Litvinov's day. Conveniently forgotten was the document circulated within the party, under date April 24, 1941, on 'The Situation in the Balkans', at the time when Stalin was flirting with Yugoslav and Greek resistance to Hitler's aggression (in May he dropped the countries in question like hot bricks, expelling their ambassadors from Moscow, in frantic appeasement of his Nazi ally). In this document it had been affirmed that 'the fact that British forces, fighting for the aims of British imperialism, were fighting alongside the Greek forces, does not alter the main character of the Greek struggle, any more than the supply of arms and munitions by the United States (in pursuit of the aims of American imperialism) alters the main character of the Chinese war of defence against conquest and enslavement by Japan'.

In the new phase of the war the Marxists continued the main trend of their policy unchanged. Thus, the Socialist Appeal for April 1942 published an open letter to the national conference of the ILP, whose attitude was abstractly 'anti-war', in which the Workers' International League declared: 'We cannot merely denounce the war as an imperialist war and say, as the pacifists do, that we shall have nothing to do with this foul thing . . . Only a working-class policy for war which would separate the workers from the capitalists and at the same time guarantee success against all foreign capitalist aggression could mobilize the masses for the struggle for power.'

A new feature in the Marxist policy, however, was the call for sending all possible aid to the Soviet Union in the form of arms supplies, **under supervision by the trade unions**. The significance of this demand will be appreciated by readers of Evelyn Waugh's novel 'Officers and Gentlemen' (1955), in which a couple of reactionaries discuss tank production and one remarks that the workers are allowed to chalk 'Greetings to Uncle Joe', and so forth, on the tanks they turn out, as this encourages them to work hard and produce tanks faster—but the tanks are sent where they will be most useful from the British imperialist standpoint . . .

When the campaign for the Second Front began, the Socialist Appeal pointed out (November 1941) that the Stalinists were cynically exploiting the earnest desire of the workers to help Russia. Following the fall of France the British Communist Party had correctly hammered away at the unreliability of the officer caste as anti-fascists—yet now they were demanding an invasion of the Continent under the leadership

of those same officers. The workers must take control of industry and of the armed forces. The effect of this on the Continent, including Germany, would be revolutionary; and then a British expeditionary force, if needed, would be welcomed by the European workers. Only workers' power could transform the imperialist war into a genuine war in defence of the Soviet Union and against fascism. Trafalgar Square demonstrations notwithstanding, unless and until the effective control of the armed forces was taken out of their hands, the British ruling class would not open a second front except for their own purposes.

'It will not be a front to aid Russia but a front to take advantage of Russian resistance. It will not be a front to smash fascism but only to establish the domination of "democratic" imperialism. It will liberate Europe from its present tyranny but will only establish a new tyranny' (Socialist Appeal, June 1942).

The truth of this estimation of what an imperialist 'second front' would mean had been seen clearly enough by R. P. Dutt when he wrote, in the Labour Monthly of February 1941, about the role for which the British Army was already then being prepared:

'In such a situation of general disorder [following a hypothetical breakdown of the Nazi régime], with spreading civil war, and with the popular forces still poorly armed

and only partially organized, a trained and disciplined army of one million in the field could do a great deal to take over from Hitler the task of holding down the peoples of Europe and strangling the socialist revolution—just as the British forces in 1918 took over directly from the waning German imperialist forces in the Baltic States.'

And it had been equally clearly explained to Franco's Foreign Minister, frightened about the approaching defeat of Hitler by the Red Army, when British ambassador Sir Samuel Hoare talked to him in Madrid in February 1943: 'There will then undoubtedly be great British and American armies on the Continent. These armies will be equipped with the finest modern munitions. They will be composed of fresh-line troops, whose ranks have not been previously devastated by years of exhausting war on the Russian front' (quoted in Spain, March 22, 1948).

The outcome of the second world war and the history of the subsequent period eloquently condemn the misleadership of the workers by the Stalinists in those critical years, guided by a disastrously false conception of the interests of the Soviet Union. And they justify those who carried the banner of Marxism, amid conditions of extraordinary difficulty, avoiding both the Scylla of opportunism and the Charybdis of sectarianism.

B. Farnborough

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THE NEWSLETTER

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Book Reviews

The Crucial Years

The Third International After Lenin, by Leon Trotsky
(Second edition. New York, Pioneer Publishers. London,
New Park Publications, cloth 28s., paper 18s.)

THERE are many people in Britain today who say: 'What we need is a Marxist analysis of what went wrong in Russia and the international communist movement.' Some of them resigned from the Communist Party after Hungary. Some, out of loyalty to the October Revolution, have mistakenly remained inside the party despite the severe shaking they have received from the events of the last three years. They want a Marxist explanation—an explanation in terms of class struggle—of the Stalinist terror, of Hungary, of the failure of communist parties in the west to achieve power, of the reformist political revisionism of such programmes as 'The British Road to Socialism', and of such acts of treachery as that of the French Communist Party when it voted to send troops to quell the Algerian revolution.

What some of these people appear not to know—and there are some who seem not to want to know—is that this very Marxist analysis was begun, brilliantly and incisively, not in 1956 but thirty years ago, by Lenin's comrade in arms Trotsky. The Stalinist bureaucratic machine—the very social phenomenon whose explanation is being sought—remains to this day the means whereby members of the Communist Party are prevented from studying and developing that analysis. 'Dangerous' books are still officially banned. But it is a ban that is now often 'more honoured in the breach than the observance'. Once perhaps there was some excuse for refusing to believe that Trotsky's theoretical works have some significance. Today there is none.

Without more fuss or pleading let it be said plainly, bluntly: those people who seriously want to be Marxists and communists in Britain today will find themselves increasingly adrift, playthings alternately of Left sectarianism and Right opportunism, defenders of the indefensible, cogs in a party machine, pawns in Khrushchev's secret diplomacy, and absolutely isolated from the Labour movement, unless they make the effort, consciously and deliberately, to study the writings of Leon Trotsky.

'The Third International After Lenin' is made up of two major polemical works written by Trotsky when he was in exile in Alma Ata in 1928. They are 'The Draft Programme of the Communist International' and 'What Now?'. The former has three main sections. First, 'The Programme of International Revolution or a Programme of Socialism in One Country?'; secondly, 'Strategy and Tactics in the Imperialist Epoch'; and thirdly, 'Summary and Perspectives of the Chinese Revolution'.

In 1924 Trotsky had been unanimously re-elected to the executive committee of the Communist International. In 1927 Stalin, with the aid of the police régime he had established inside the party, had manoeuvred the expulsion of Trotsky from the CPSU and had exiled him to Alma Ata. Trotsky had the right to appeal against his expulsion to the forthcoming Sixth World Congress of the Third International. Accompanying his appeal, Trotsky submitted the two documents forming this book.

James P. Cannon has described in detail in his 'History

of American Trotskyism' (1944) the treatment these documents received at the hands of the 'machine' which stage-managed the Sixth Congress. By an administrative accident Cannon got hold of a copy. Later he smuggled it out to America and published it there. But the vast majority of the Congress delegates never saw the documents or even heard of them. They were referred to a 'select' committee, which merely 'noted' them without debate. In this way, temporarily at least, the purpose of the documents, which was to stimulate a discussion in the Communist International on the political and social origins of Stalinism, was frustrated. The Sixth Congress, and the suppression of the legal existence of the Left Opposition inside the International, were followed by the reign of terror against the Russian people and political workers, the horrors of which were outlined—and then only faintly—in the famous Khrushchev report to the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU. The internal crisis of the Stalinist régime which Trotsky had forecast in 1928 became obvious to one and all in 1956. The events of the last three years have been, often in detail, brilliant confirmations of Trotsky's diagnosis.



This book is one of the most important basic works of Trotsky's gigantic contribution to modern Marxism. It takes its place alongside 'The History of the Russian Revolution', 'In Defence of Marxism', 'The Revolution Betrayed', 'Literature and Revolution', 'Their Morals and Ours', 'The New Course' and 'Where is Britain Going?' as a classic which remains a guide to the future.

JOHN DANIELS

Workers and Liberals

The Anti-Corn Law League, 1838-1846, by Norman McCord
(Allen and Unwin, 25s.)

The Advent of the Labour Party, by Philip P. Poirier
(Allen and Unwin, 25s.)

THOUGH one of these books deals with events in the second quarter of the nineteenth century and the other with events in the opening years of the twentieth, both throw light upon the struggle to form an independent class party of the British workers. The first book is laid in the period of Chartism, that great anticipation; the second shows the working class, after the long period of tailing behind the bourgeois parties, mainly the Liberals, that followed the fall of Chartism, taking its first tentative steps towards reassertion of political independence.

I recall an incident at a Communist Party summer school during the popular front period when a lecturer on the history of the working-class movement was a little embarrassed by being asked whether it was not terribly sectarian of the Chartists to fight the Anti-Corn Law League. Would it not have been wiser for them to have formed a broad alliance with this progressive bourgeois movement, seeking maximum unity behind the demand—of common concern to workers and manufacturers—for abolishing the tariffs on food imports? Norman McCord's book shows clearly the high degree of class-consciousness of the leaders of the Anti-Corn Law League, in relation both to the landed interest and to the workers, and the fierce struggle that raged between them and the Chartists.

Fear of the workers seriously inhibited League propaganda. In 1840 Bowring criticized a speech by James Acland in which the latter spoke of 'the right of the people to eat', as this 'could easily be construed into a recommendation to help themselves'. In 1840-41 the League made use of Irish workers, deluded followers of the reactionary Daniel O'Connell, as strong-arm men against the 'red' Chartists.

Norman McCord has used the papers of the League's president, George Wilson, which were rediscovered only in 1955. He is able to make out a case for the view that the League was *not* responsible for the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846, and certainly demonstrates how strong the resistance to it was. Repeal, he argues, could never have been carried against a united landed interest. Besides the violent hostility of the farmers, there was the indifference of the London bourgeoisie. Unlike the Manchester men, these had no special interest in expanding the export market or in cheapening labour. Being largely, moreover, beneficiaries of various monopoly privileges themselves, they were 'somewhat fearful of loosening the wedge that holds all the rotten rubbish of corruption together'.



Philip Poirier's book shows the working class re-emerging as an independent force in politics, primarily as a result of the changing attitude of the capitalists themselves. In the 1890s the comparative willingness of the ruling class to make concessions to the aristocracy of labour and accord them a certain recognized though lowly status, which had prevailed since the 1850s, gave way to a new harshness, consequent on the weakening of British capitalism's domination of the world market. The engineers suffered defeat in 1897 and the miners in 1898, at the hands of employers better organized and tougher than themselves. By 1900 it was clear that local Liberal associations were markedly less ready than they had been to accept working-men candidates. The need for independent political action was being forced upon the working class, and the propaganda in this sense which had been carried on by the small socialist groups at last bore fruit in the Labour Representation Committee, which developed within a few years into the Labour Party.

'The Advent of the Labour Party' soundly debunks the exaggerated claims of the Fabian Society regarding their role in the formation of the independent working-class party based on the trade unions. The Fabians entirely underestimated the trade unions—'Fabian Essays' (1888) hardly alludes to them—and until very late they were concentrating on the 'permeation' of the Liberals. They saw the creation of the Independent Labour Party not as a step in the right direction but as the emergence of a 'wrecking party' of 'irreconcilables': the epithets, which are Beatrice Webb's, have an oddly familiar ring in 1959. It was the Boer War, and more particularly the defeats suffered by the British Army in that war, that gave a decisive jolt forward to socialism and class feeling generally—and the Fabians, who supported the war, were isolated from this development.



The papers of Herbert Gladstone, the Liberal Chief Whip, are the most interesting source used by Philip Poirier. They reveal how James Ramsay MacDonald and his associates secretly intrigued to keep Labour's independence merely nominal while continuing in reality the traditional enslavement to Liberalism. 'Sensitive' to criticism by the socialists within the Labour ranks of their electoral bargaining with the Liberals, MacDonald and Co. 'did much of their work behind the scenes, so that very often only a dim line separated their opportunism from deception'. As for the capitalist partner in this bargaining, 'such strength and prominence had the Labour Representation Committee gained in the eyes of key men in the Liberal machine, even at this

early date, that they not only welcomed its friendly gestures; they believed in and feared its power to destroy them at the polls'. When Henderson in 1903 beat both Liberal and Tory at Barnard Castle, MacDonald, while welcoming the result as strengthening his hand in bargaining with Herbert Gladstone, nervously hoped that it would not result in a big increase in Labour candidates! This was already in essence the same MacDonald whom Strachey described as getting more and more worried as 'Labour gain' followed 'Labour gain' in the 1929 general election and showing anxiety that the Liberals should 'do well'.

B.P.

Room for Rebellion

A Room in Moscow, by Sally Belfrage (André Deutsch, 15s.)

THERE has rarely been a book of descriptive reportage about Russia of such interest as this. The author, who wrote it immediately upon her return to Britain, was scarcely 21 when she arrived in Moscow full of the insatiable curiosity of youth. Her preoccupation was to see for herself and form her own conclusions, in defiance of her elders in every political camp. This is an attitude common to her generation. What is uncommon about Sally Belfrage is her intelligence, perception and humanity as well as a natural talent for putting down her observations in a lively and readable form.

The daughter of progressive parents—her father was deported from the USA to Britain—she had the advantages of harsh political experience in her own life. On the other hand, as she says at the start, she was also in revolt against her elders and by no means willing to accept their views without question. It was this very rebelliousness which enabled her to spend several months in Russia. Defying all advice and warnings that she was attempting the impossible, she managed to stay behind in Moscow after the Youth Festival in 1957, got herself work permit, job and accommodation and proceeded to explore. The Festival and her visit to China on a delegation immediately afterwards had immunized her against official spectacles. Her concern now was to live like an ordinary Russian and meet ordinary Russians of her own age.



This she achieved to a remarkable extent. That she did not altogether succeed is hardly surprising. Her job was editing English translations for a publishing house. This meant that she would in the first instance meet intellectuals and white-collar workers. The language difficulty meant that her acquaintances and friends would be those who had the opportunity of learning English. Very few appear to have been ordinary factory workers. In other words she seems to have mixed, in the main, with the sons and daughters of the Soviet bureaucracy and intelligentsia. But her account of their lives is extraordinarily revealing.

The cynicism and antics of the 'stiliagi' in their constant search for excitement are all here. There is also the disillusionment and confusion of those who have suffered persecution. The 'aggressively pro-Soviet', she says, were of little value to her. 'They felt compelled to push their beliefs strenuously at any opportunity, becoming defensive about things I hadn't even mentioned. They were for everything, everything was wonderful, and I can't believe anyone who is for everything.'

The book is full of comic accounts of the subterfuges and disguises forced upon her by young Russians, eager to show off their prized acquaintanceship with a real live American girl, but fearful of official disapproval. One of her strongest impressions was the prevalence of fear and suspicion, even among the sons and daughters of the influential. But she herself, she believes, was not followed and she concludes that

the fears of her friends were usually groundless. On the Jewish question she found 'the general individual attitude of prejudice was often terribly discouraging. . . . As bad as anti-Semitic attitudes can be elsewhere, they seemed to me often worse in Russia'. In her descriptions of the ordinary routine of daily life Miss Belfrage is full of humour and insight. Hilarious rides on crowded Moscow buses; vain searches in shops which seldom stocked what she wanted; the human consequences of the appallingly overcrowded housing conditions—all these are described with a warm affection for the Russians. Her admiration for the rapidly expanding Soviet economy is undisguised. Her own healthy bias on the side of humanity and peace is revealed on every page. No pretence is made of inquiring into the political background of what she saw, nor does she reach any political conclusions.

It is clear to the reader, however, that this is a completely truthful account of the way of life of the more fortunate in a society which is not socialist, but where a vast bureaucracy appropriates a very large share of the benefits arising from a planned economy. 'A Room in Moscow' will please neither those who hate nor those who whitewash all things Soviet.

P. MCGOWAN

Fairy-tale Queen

Is The Monarchy Perfect? by Lord Altrincham and Others
(John Calder, 12s. 6d.)

FROM the sustained campaign of press vituperation, anonymous letters, lurid threats and vicious personal abuse to which they were subjected you might have supposed Lord Altrincham and Malcolm Muggeridge had been caught trying to plant an atom bomb in the cellars of Buckingham Palace.

What they had actually done—very nearly as mischievous, some thought—was to venture into print with a few critical observations on the current state of the monarchy. The articles they wrote are reprinted in this volume together with some notes on the subsequent rumpus and some make-weight essays by other hands. Both Altrincham and Muggeridge, it will be remembered, let some welcome fresh air into a notoriously stuffy subject. Altrincham offered some candid strictures on the Queen's mode of speaking; Muggeridge quoted criticisms of her style of dressing. Both stressed the vacuity of her tweedy court circle and the almost comic ineptitude of some of her advisers.

The fact that the royal circle is drawn exclusively from among one small class of wealthy idlers neither surprises nor particularly worries a socialist. If you have an hierarchical social system with working people at the bottom and tweedy nitwits at the top it is inevitable that the court, being at the top, shall consist of tweedy nitwits. Once get rid of this class structure, as socialists mean to do, and courts and courtiers are no longer a problem. Altrincham and Muggeridge, however, both feel that the crown has a valid function, which it could perform efficiently and to everyone's satisfaction if only the Queen were more effectively advised and her social circle included a few non-tweedy types.

This is surely an illusion. The whole point of royalty, in the first place, is that it represents a sort of fairy-tale life as lived by the best people on a splendid scale unimaginable to lowly mortals, where nobody works or is bothered by the mundane trials of everyday existence. The thrill of shaking hands with royalty, for those to whom it is a thrill, is that one is touching briefly a dream made real. Thus faith is fortified in everyday life as a laying on of hands may fortify it in church. Having the Queen trotting round shaking hands accompanied by a miner or a shop assistant would destroy the illusion. It is necessary for those around the Queen to be fairy-tale folk, out of this world.

On the other hand, if you take an honest engine-driver, dress him up in top hat and tails, give him a title and money to waste and turn him loose in court circles you have not got a democratic element who is going to help make the court a cross-section of national life. You have simply got another wealthy idler. If you don't give him money to waste and he has to earn his living, he'll be too busy on the railway to put in much time at Ascot or Windsor giving court life the trade union touch. No, like it or not, the Queen is stuck with her tweedy people. In a country where royalty is the apex of a class hierarchy, she must inevitably dwell among the best people at the top, where the air is thin and the intellectual resources few.

P.G.

Radiation Hazards

Atomic Radiation Dangers and What They Mean to You,
by H. W. Heckstall-Smith (Dent, 7s. 6d.)

IN fewer than 100 pages, the author of this book soberly and systematically reports the main facts about the dangers to health inherent in atomic radiation. His exposition is clear, concise and extremely informative. The text can readily be followed by anyone with an elementary knowledge of natural science, the technical terms used from time to time all being clearly explained.

The author analyses the nature of atomic radiation and lists the various sources from which it may arise: cosmic radiation from outer space, the natural radiation of our earthly surroundings, the radiation derived from our activities in relation to industry, medicine and scientific research, and (since that fateful day in 1945) the radiation derived from A-bombs, H-bombs and atomic plants. The genetic and cancer dangers are discussed dispassionately and all statements are rigorously documented from official sources. One is left, at the end of all this, with the unpleasant impression that the ills we know, fearful though they be, may be nothing compared to others we do not yet know anything about.



Most people wanting to read this book will naturally be concerned about the effects of test explosions. The author repeatedly and explicitly acknowledges that atomic radiation derived from this source accounts for only a certain proportion of the total radiation to which men and women are today exposed. He constantly discusses the problem of the tests against this broader background. So do government officials. But whereas the yes-men of the scientific Establishment claim that seen in this light the dangers of nuclear tests will appear less, the author thinks otherwise. For radiation derived from nuclear tests has neither the justification of being 'inevitable' nor the sanction of some social usefulness. The fight for sanity appears quite clearly as the fight against all superfluous forms of radiation. The author's approach takes the issue right on to the doorstep of the official dispensers of scientific soothing syrup.

Mr Heckstall-Smith knows that his subject matter is dynamite, in a metaphorical as well as in a more literal sense. 'Very influential people,' he tells us, 'passionately want the facts to suit their policies.' Because of this, 'observations often reach us in a biased form, when they should, scientifically, be straight'. He is to be complimented on his attempt to rectify at least part of the record.

This excellent book is a bold endeavour to throw light in corners that certain people would prefer kept permanently dark. It not only fulfils an urgent need, but in its modest way takes up the cudgels on behalf of scientific objectivity—for if truth be the first casualty in war, scientific objectivity

is undoubtedly one of the chronic victims of the prolonged periods of armed 'peace' we now seem to enjoy. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the author's caustic comments on the systematization of the 'harmless' semi-truth. 'In the old days', he tells us, 'the Public Relations Officers could distract public attention from a horrible truth long enough for the situation to cure itself and for the truth to pass into the history books. This can no longer happen. . . . When you are dealing with radio-activity you are dealing with something inexorable. What you have done cannot be undone. This is a situation wholly new to Public Relations Officers.' One might add that it is new to their masters, too, and that it may well contribute to the latter's undoing.

The state of affairs created by atomic hazards is a challenge to all mankind. Clear thinking is essential on many fundamental issues. Mr Heckstall-Smith, an honest physicist, has done his share. It is for others, setting themselves broader terms of reference, to examine the odious society in which such terrible dangers could arise and find means of urgently and radically reshaping it so that mankind may survive.

GRACCHUS

World of Plenty?

World Without War, by J. D. Bernal (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 25s.)

THE major industrial countries of the world are spending on an average 10 per cent. of their respective national incomes for military purposes. Two-thirds of the world population (some 1,500 million people) live in conditions considerably worse than those of nineteenth-century capitalism. High estimates of population growth put the world total at 10,000 million by the year 2000.

Given these three assessments as the major premises, Professor Bernal has written a book that is impressive in its collation and organization of data and the lucidity and logic of its exposition. The work is a high tribute to his intelligence and his guiding humanitarianism as a scientist. He has taken the two major problems of our time—those of nuclear warfare and of the underdeveloped countries—and tried to relate them in a 'non-political' approach. I say 'non-political', because the book is written in a manner to appeal to the non-communist. So important are these problems that men must offer their solutions regardless of political beliefs—'there is little time left for stopping the waste of the world's resources and manpower in preparing for war'.

But terminological concessions are most frequently the tacit reminder or unconscious prelude of doctrinal ones. Although Bernal nowhere suggests it directly, it seems that the class struggle has been raised to the world scale—it is no longer class against class within one State, but simply proletarian State against bourgeois State. It is here, at a point which is a travesty of Marxism, that the argument becomes curious. The majority of nations fall within neither group; their status is unspecified. It is in the interest of the bourgeoisie to raise the economic level of these countries to its own on both ethical and comparative advantage criteria. Professor Bernal presumably holds this possible, otherwise he would not have written this book. His aim is vitally important, but can a Marxist regard it as ever remotely feasible?

The argument from 'interest' is shaky nowadays. Apart from difficulties in defining 'interest' clearly, it still carries some of its utilitarian and laissez-faire flavour, implying that a rational harmony is possible within the world if all men follow their 'interest' consistently. Certainly Bernal does not discuss whether 'all sane men could get together' without there being some prior fundamental transformation in the economic approach of the western countries to the world, but surely, for a Marxist, this is the important matter. In fact the fundamental transformation is taken by Bernal as almost a mere by-product of the hypothetical process he describes, and receives mention on page 231: 'Capitalist economies may have disappeared at this stage.' The proletarian revolution is, as it were, slipped in to make final fact conform to initial assumptions.

It would seem however, in Marxist terms, that the revolution was a prior condition of the ultimate development, not just a possibility. Can the underdeveloped countries be helped to the degree suggested while we have the present western economic system with us? Professor Bernal suggests that 'rational men' in seeing 'the truth' and so following their 'interest' can so help regardless of the economy, or, in his words, if we live in 'a benevolent or at least rational world where countries can see the advantage to themselves in helping each other'. Perhaps he intends that we shall see he proposes an impossible task within the given context, and so impels us all to try to change that context (so flocking dutifully to King Street with our pennies)—but the revolutionary cry is so muted that he must forgive us if we miss it completely and are led to assume that there are no contradictions here and now preventing just the plan he suggests.

However, the doctrinal oddities must not obscure the fact that this is an excellent book of its kind—beautifully rational in a world irrational. When we grow used to the arbitrary inhibitions in thinking that seem to govern naturally our attitude to the world, Bernal's constant stream of fascinating hypotheses in so many different fields of science serve as a very valuable relaxing force that broadens our vision to the limitless. He moves from improving textiles, providing food substitutes, planning gigantic new industrial bases to experiments in physical immortality. Too many socialists in Britain have only a fragmented view of issues. The problems are demarcated in narrow empirical areas, scarcely and obscurely linked only by some assumed 'basic moral axioms'. Bernal's is a laudable attempt to unify, to interrelate what is only methodologically separable, and guided by his overwhelming 'need to persuade people that they have to live together in peace for the simple reason that, if they do not, none of them will be able to live at all'.

In simplifying as he has done, it is inevitable he will be accused of naivety. Indeed many of the matters on which he speaks are impossible to assess unless one is an expert in a particular field. The ordinary reader, while understanding, never knows how much is practical possibility and how much mere wishful thinking. Crossman's charge that 'a purely scientific training leaves the social conscience sensitive but silly—and very easy to capture' would be very unjust. Bernal is perhaps one of the most brilliant scientists in this country, not in depth but in breadth of intellectual scope. If he says 'the Soviet Union has realized in practice the ideal socialism', and if we suspend disbelief and grant him our temporary trust, then his book is worth reading as a mine of useful factual and statistical information, if no more.

NIGEL HARRIS

Two Events That Will Interest Our Readers

A MEETING *of university lecturers, students, teachers and research workers to discuss*

THE UNIVERSITIES AND THE LABOUR MOVEMENT

Speakers: GERRY HEALY, provisional national secretary of the Socialist Labour League; JOHN DANIELS, editor of Labour Review

This meeting will be held at the Holborn Hall, London, W.C. 1, on Monday, April 13, from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m.



A SUMMER SCHOOL *at a camp in the New Forest*

The subjects will be:

**THE MARXIST METHOD IN POLITICS
THE MARXIST MOVEMENT IN BRITAIN
IMPERIALISM**

The school will be held from July 26 to August 8, and the cost will be £5 per week per adult (children half price)

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