

it is "the militant class philosophy of the proletariat".

It was precisely the advent of this philosophy—growing out of Marx and Engels's painstaking examination of the laws governing the development of society, of the internal working of the class struggle and, deriving from this, of the necessary strategy and tactics of the working class movement—that gave birth to Communism; eventually to organised Communist Parties, accepting the Marxist outlook as a guide to action, with a corresponding form of organisation which cements theory and practice in the hard and constant struggle to spread scientific socialist thinking and make concrete advances along the road to socialism.

The Communist Party uses Marxism as a guide to action from the standpoint of those in the forefront of the class struggle. It is the application of

Marxism to practice in this way that is the essential guarantee both of the development of the working class movement and of Marxism itself.

"Marxism", as Cornforth has said (in the article already referred to), "means above all confidence in our struggle and in the future of humanity—confidence based on science, on casting off illusions, on the fight against reactionary ideologies, on scientific socialism. The liberating force of Marxist philosophy lies in the fact that it bestows and develops this confidence, and that armed with Marxism the people's movement is invincible."

The people's movement is armed with Marxism in this sense, not by philosophers who enunciate guiding principles from above the battle, but in the thick of the struggle by the Communist Party. To extend active and collective participation in the class struggle in this way is the key both to creative Marxism and human progress.

Discussion on Marxism and the British Labour Movement

The Revival of British Socialism

Desmond Greaves

WE should feel some community with the men of the eighteen-eighties. What happened then is being enacted today on a vaster canvas and with an inevitably different outcome. The British Empire is being demolished before our eyes, and the ideas it gave rise to cannot long survive. A younger generation, which shows even if somewhat anarchically its impatience with empiricism, hardheaded practicalism and the parochialism of the metropolis, is already on the way up. Traditional British "contempt for theory" may in the next decade turn into its opposite, and they will be hard days for the educational cranks who think it is possible to learn without thinking and studying.

Theory of some sort is, of course, as inescapable as the famous Hound of Heaven. Your "sound practical man" may not realise it, but his contempt for socialist theory merely denotes imprisonment within capitalist theory, too scrappy to be recognised as such. Without theory a joiner cannot drive

a nail into a coffin, or a musician blow a flea out of a trumpet. But so much of the past lives in the minds of this oldest working class that the British would almost need to become the most theoretical nation on earth, in order to get the outworn lumber away.

For these reasons pay tribute to the initiative of Lionel Munby. His enquiry is valuable and important. To enter the lists in criticism is to pay him the compliment of imitation. A clear estimation of the role of scientific socialist ideas in the second great crisis of British capitalism is a necessary part of the preparation for the supreme class battles which many of us believe will fall in the nineteen-sixties.

Such an estimation cannot be arrived at hastily. Betty Grant rightly demands the study of primary sources and not books "about" things. Through *Our History* she has made much useful matter available. Fact, date and circumstance are indispensable and cannot be taken for granted. But

attempts at constructing an orderly picture, even with inadequate data, are also useful, provided nobody mistakes the scaffolding for the building. The question of how to approach the assembled material is inseparable from the choice of what material to assemble. From biology to astrophysics (but most of all in history) judgment of data proceeds alongside its accumulation. Comrade Munby's essay gives practical expression to this principle.

To Marx and Engels thinking was but a part of action. Theory and practice only became distinct (historically) in so far as they represented a social division of labour. Despite the special laws under which theory enjoyed individual development, its great importance, and the vital influence it exerted on the social process as a whole, its ultimate dependence remained. By the same token the head is dependent on the body. The way man lives determines how he thinks. The fundamental law of dependence was indeed a *condition* of the influence of theory. It reasserted itself spectacularly in major revolutions when the entire superstructure of law, philosophy etc. was "more or less rapidly transformed".

Thinking and Action

The self-consciousness of a class (as distinct from the class-consciousness of an individual member of a class) is thus unattainable except through action. While the British working class fought the bourgeoisie there was socialism. When it acted with the bourgeoisie there was no socialism. When it was no longer possible to act with the bourgeoisie the British workers would no longer accept its thought, struggled against it, and there was socialism again.

Munby is therefore quite right to start with the "revival of socialism" in the eighties, and to cast a glance backwards over the "long sleep" of the British proletariat since 1848. But whether it is so sound to accept as inevitable the development through the Social Democratic Federation (S.D.F.) and the Independent Labour Party (I.L.P.); and to counterpose these organisations in a kind of historical post-mortem, is dubious. A current cannot be known through its eddies. The estimation of the Labour movement cannot proceed from the analysis of its divisions. Primary must precede secondary and it is necessary to follow the main factor of growth through its entire development. To extend the parallel from physics, the study of turbulence is a part of the study of flow, and not vice versa.

Perhaps therefore he invited Betty Grant's highly unhistorical defence of the S.D.F. as "our very own", which incidentally reduces the Communist Party of today to the level of a sect. We must not end like the two farmers who came to blows over

whether the oak or the bog-myrtle was the finest tree. The development of class-consciousness has not in fact proceeded down one channel only. Therefore retrospect cannot block any of them up.

Views of Marx and Engels

A serious lack in our literature is a detailed study of Marx's and Engels's practical work in the British movement. But it is clear from what has been published that Engels expected a revival of socialism as a result of the destruction of Britain's industrial monopoly. But he did not expect a mass Marxist party to spring fully clothed from the debris. He seems to have envisaged a movement comparable to Chartism in extent, and to German Social Democracy in political development. The first stage would be the growth of a "Workingman's Party" separate from the Liberal and Conservative parties. The aims of this party would be democratic (i.e. leading to the realisation of the dictatorship of the proletariat) and the duty of the Communists within it would be to enable the workers to raise themselves to the level of Marxist understanding in the course of their struggles. It must not therefore be confined to "Marxists".

The decline and subsequent revival of the British working class movement would thus be a magnified example of the process described in the *Manifesto*:

"The organisation of the proletarians into a class, and consequently into a political party, is continually being upset by the competition between the workers themselves. But it ever rises up again, stronger, firmer, mightier."

Engels rested his hopes on the movement of the masses. The impetus was to come from the masses. Their needs were to be translated into consciousness by the Communists, themselves part of the movement, and this consciousness was in turn to be imparted to the masses so as to raise them progressively to the level of higher tasks.

But when Britain's industrial monopoly fell, the unexpected, though perfectly understandable, happened. The ideological reflex preceded the political. A section of the radical intelligentsia whose education gave them access to European experience grasped the relevance of Marx's theory to Britain's new situation more quickly than the workers who bore the economic brunt of it. But their class position and bourgeois-radical background clouded their understanding. Hence their leader, Hyndman, both plagiarised and distorted Marx. Both plagiarism and distortion were an accommodation to radical prejudices. Those parts of *England for All* that are not popularised extracts from chapters of *Capital* reek with complacency and chauvinism which glowers unashamedly even through the most purple passages on Ireland and India.

The S.D.F.

The words "sectarianism" and "opportunism" will not serve us well if they are regarded as polar opposites. Hyndman's sectarianism (elevation of the point of difference) was a part of his opportunism (accommodation to radicalism). He had accomplished an intellectuals' palace-revolution, and slowly recognised his dependence on the power in the streets. Sectarianism is a form of opportunism, not its antithesis. It would have been one thing for Marx and Engels to hail with pleasurable surprise a rebirth of socialism in the form of a group of young disciples, anxious to learn and propagate their teachings. It was another to hail its rebirth as revisionism, not the proclaimed revisionism of Bernstein but a fair prototype. Hence the gravamen of Engels's charge against the S.D.F. (years afterwards when Hyndman's influence was less) that it was "pursuing the exact opposite of the policy recommended in the *Manifesto*". Its formula for socialist activity was Party—masses—Party, instead of masses—Party—masses.

The reasons given for the secession of the Socialist League do not include Engels's motives for encouraging the break. Hyndman's individualism was objected to as a barrier to a transition to the Marxist position. Engels quickly recognised the S.D.F. as a product of the crisis, though not the one he relied on. For a time he had hopes of Bax. But the Socialist League proved only capable of opposing the sectarianism of the S.D.F. with a sectarianism of its own. To point to the participation of both organisations in the mass struggles which took place does not affect this judgment. The question is whether such participation "brought to the front the common interests of the entire proletariat" and "everywhere represented the interests of the movement as a whole".

It was when the long-delayed response of the masses to the changed conditions took place (roughly from 1889)—that is, when the peculiar circumstances of the earlier years of the crisis had passed away—that the time of test and opportunity came. Already the elements of the imperialist solution had appeared, and along with them the easily generated ideas of Fabianism. It is a historical fact, not belied by the tremendous energy of S.D.F. and Socialist League members and branches (the two bodies were reunited in Scotland), that neither they nor the Fabians could lead or accommodate the great upsurge of the masses. Read through the local newspapers in any obscure town you please and compare 1887 with 1890 when section after section of the unskilled workers clamoured for organisation, and strikes were on a scale not equalled till 1911-13. Workers flocked into the S.D.F. and out again. Outside its doors were thousands who shared the new mood but could

not understand its shibboleths. The mass movement broke through the restrictions imposed by existing organisations, and an entirely new organisation, the I.L.P., was founded in the north and rapidly spread till it exceeded the combined strength of the S.D.F. and the Fabians.

The I.L.P. was established under conditions of mass activity on a gigantic scale, and for a time more exactly corresponded to the general needs of the situation—the organisation of the proletariat as a class. But what Engels hoped for was not that it should supplant and destroy the S.D.F. or the Fabians but that the masses, *through its agency*, should *compel* the unification of all three bodies into one and thus close the epoch of sects and sectarianism.

Effects of Imperialism

This desirable end was not achieved, because the development of imperialism was creating the basis for a period of Liberal-Labour (ideologically Fabian) dominion of the working class movement, with results still apparent today. But after the 1889-94 struggles the workers did not go into another sleep. The action of the masses continually strove to impose unity (for fear any reader imagines I insert the word "consciously" let me remark that it is *in the nature of* the masses to impose unity to the degree that they are brought into action) and the S.D.F. and the I.L.P. constantly improved each other. The S.D.F. of the turn of the century was not that of 1884. Some of its radical intellectuals had (to use Engels's phrase) fermented themselves clear. Fresh blood had been infused by the mass movement. But elements of a new revisionism had grafted themselves on to the old; sectarianism remained while it took new forms. The majority of the Marxists were in the S.D.F., though some were in the I.L.P. In conditions of developing imperialism both organisations developed an internal stratification between leaders and rank and file. The struggle against opportunism in the S.D.F. was not won until the upsurge against the imperialist war in 1916, and there were many intervening vicissitudes. The I.L.P. membership never fell completely under the control of reformism, but instead of the amalgamations which seemed possible in 1893 and 1902, there were a series of defections which finally transferred all its good elements into the Communist Party. This was only possible because of the defeat of opportunism within the S.D.F. (or more precisely its lineal successor the B.S.P. which had already attracted many from the I.L.P.) in 1916.

In every upsurge of the mass struggle the issue of unity has been raised once more. It is usual to blame the progress of imperialist ideology for the outcome which has dominated the period now closing. In a

sense (and only in a sense) the masses had their way. The result was a huge imposing Labour Party dominated by Fabian ideas. But might the masses not have imposed unity in some superior form but for the self-denial of the Marxists in keeping too far away from them? Most Marxists today would admit the two factors. The British Labour movement was badly bitten by Fabianism, but it need scarcely have been *so* badly bitten.

It remains to ask how far these considerations apply to the "Crisis of Empire" which dominates our days. Imperialist ideas are now meeting their practical refutation. The collapse of empire is being translated into a Tory offensive, and any new period of mass action by the British working class will take place under most advanced conditions, where it is nationally at the pinnacle of its organisational strength, and in the most favourable international situation so far known. The prospects for sweeping away bans and proscriptions and at last achieving the "Organisation of the workers as a class"—one political party increasingly led and guided by the Communists—may strikingly improve in the near future. In so far as we see the masses as the factor of unity, we will be enabled to "represent the interests of the whole" and thereby progressively imbue the majority with the necessary socialist consciousness.

Unity of Marxism and the Mass Movement

In his contribution Frank Jackson refers to the two neo-Lassalleian sects, the S.P.G.B. and the S.L.P. These represented a form of revisionism which (like anarchism) had a momentary appeal. They are of purely historical interest today except in so far as detached items from their ideological stock-in-trade form part of the junk-pile of

"Trotskyism". But at one time the ideas they imported from Germany and America (ideas then largely discarded in Germany but flourishing in America) held wide currency though their following was very restricted. It would be interesting on some occasion to trace how Lassalleianism was rescued from extinction by De Leon, passed off as a left-wing antidote to reformism by his admirers, and thus distributed round the English-speaking world. Most quack arguments fired today are drawn from its armoury of confusion. But apart from 1911-1914 this is largely an American question, and absorption of the S.L.P. in the Communist Party finished its history. The S.P.G.B. has survived as a petit-bourgeois sect by resolutely declining any action which would test its views in practice, and has had as little influence, or is likely to have, as the Anti-division League. Therefore I doubt whether it is possible to regard these parties as embodying the "real split" in the working class, even at their inception.

The over-all growth has been of unity. But it has proceeded through divisions. The final unification still awaits achievement. It is no longer a unification of sects. It is the unification of Marxism, physically embodied in a Communist Party, with the working class masses now largely organised in the Labour, trade union and Co-operative movements. This will be as complex as the process which preceded it, and will be the work of years. But like the founders of communism we can now discern the conditions for success maturing every day. Unlike them we require less strength of character to act upon our convictions. It is a matter of significance that *The British Road to Socialism* has approached nearer to Engels's views on the development of the movement in Britain than any preceding manifesto of British Marxists.

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Marxism and the Moral Law

George Burgher

IN the February issue of *Marxism Today*, Dr. Lewis has succeeded in dealing with a very complicated subject in the compass of one short article. Where such compression has been achieved without sacrificing his usual lucidity it would be wrong to cavil at individual turns of phrase. However, several points he raises seem worth further consideration.

He suggests at the beginning of his analysis of ethical imperatives that we should draw "a distinction between what is good, valuable, desirable and what is morally right"; and then, somewhat illogically, goes on to argue that the first kind of obligation a man has is a duty to himself. He ought to fight for those goods to which he has a right. Since men have in any case so natural a propensity to satisfy their own desires, ethical terms can only be introduced into such a context at the cost of distorting their usual meaning. Then, at a subsequent stage of his argument, Dr. Lewis is faced with the problem of raising on this subjective base of human wants an objective structure of moral responsibility.

The Good and the Right

The difficulty could have been obviated by recognising from the start not the distinction between what is good and what is right but the connection. In calling upon auxiliary disciplines like psychology and anthropology to help elucidate questions of moral philosophy no Marxist can afford to overlook the assistance of economics itself—particularly since such concepts as "value" and "goods" are common to both studies. "There can be," as Dr. Lewis says, "no other basis for human activity and social organisation than the satisfaction of human needs." What is good is simply whatever is produced by common industry to meet certain desires; and these goods change as society develops and new satisfactions become possible. But from the moment men organise themselves to make anything at all they are involved in relations of production and it is here that duties and rights arise. The obligations they acknowledge also change from one stage of economic development to another, just as the productive relations themselves vary. Now these relations of

production refer primarily to questions of distribution and the whole purpose of production is, of course, consumption; but production, distribution and consumption are all merely different aspects of one and the same process. Therefore these two concepts of good and right must also be seen as simply reflecting two sides of the same human activity which includes both desiring and, because those desires can only be realised through social co-operation, responsibilities to others.

This dialectical relationship is also to be seen in Marx's analysis of the commodity which is the form goods take in all more or less advanced societies. It has to be recognised as at once a useful thing and also as a value—that is, as an embodiment of human labour. If our subjective judgments are concerned with the former aspect, the perfectly objective labour theory of value refers to the latter; and so here, again, we get the same polarisation between the good, as satisfaction of demands, and the right, as respect for the efforts of others in achieving their satisfaction as well. They represent a distinction within a social whole and their intimate connection is brought out by our assumption that price and value ought to equal each other. Surely this is one way of apprehending that dialectical interplay of subjective and objective which is suggested in the article as a resolution of the differences between Selsam and Loeser.

Class Morality

Near the end of his discussion Dr. Lewis says: ". . . Marxists are well aware that such general principles as the sacredness of human life, truthfulness, pity are of enormous importance; if one *has* to set them partially and temporarily aside there will be a real diminution of the good secured . . ." and he adds: "if the course he (the Marxist) adopts is *not* followed because of fidelity to these moral laws, then these moral laws themselves will be violated to a greater degree than is required by the class struggle. . . ." Now this is a very romantic notion of the Marxist jeopardising his own soul to save others, acting against his true beliefs in the name of those very beliefs themselves; but will it really do? These "general principles" and "moral laws" over and above the class struggle have a