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RADICAL CHAINS

‹COMMUNIST ANTICIPATIONS›

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"...the formation of a class with **radical chains**...a class which is the dissolution of all classes, a sphere which has a universal character because of its universal suffering and which lays claim to no particular right because the wrong it suffers is not a particular wrong but wrong in general...and finally a sphere which cannot emancipate itself without emancipating itself from - and thereby emancipating - all the other spheres of society, which is, in a word, the total loss of humanity and which can therefore redeem itself only through the total redemption of humanity. This dissolution of society as a particular class is the proletariat."

KARL MARX

STATEMENT OF INTENT

The working class is bound by radical chains: it experiences suffering and dehumanisation of global significance, yet - because of this - develops capacities and needs which call for the supersession of class society. This "greatest of all the productive forces" demands conditions adequate to itself, and is self-driven to bring them into being, ie to abolish itself as the working class. Communism is thus not merely an idea. It is a human need, embodied in the historical presence of combined propertyless labour power.

Communism is freely associating people creating themselves through conscious social planning. Communism is the living potential against which the alienated categories and experiences of the present make human sense.

The world in which we live is riven by a contradiction between the latent law of planning and the law of value. Within the transitional epoch as a whole these correspond to the needs of the proletariat and those of capital, which remain the polarities of class relationships across the earth.

Yet this characterisation can only be a starting point. The unresolved contradiction between the law of value and the law of planning concerns relationships within the material world. The law of planning has not superseded the law of value, and is not doing so. Administration, by bureaucracies and elites, functions in a variety of forms as a surrogate for planning in the absence of the real thing. These centralised, top-down attempts to coordinate the activities of the direct producers and adjacent social strata must fail, even on their own terms, for they are properly subject neither to the discipline of the market nor to that of the consciously associating society. In the presence of combined labour, containment and external coordination of an administrative nature can only be partial, unstable, and unsuccessful. There cannot be planning except by the producers.

Marx's method was developed in the period of ascendant capitalism. It remains the foundation of revolutionary thought and action in the current epoch. Yet marxism's potential remains unrealised: the containment of October was primarily achieved before October, internationally, through bourgeois administrative responses to the proletariat in Britain, Germany, and elsewhere. The USSR was transformed into a centre of reaction penetrating theworld labour movement.

For more than half a century stalinism has partnered social democracy as the main obstacles to proletarian self-transformation on a world scale. In fact, the bogus claims made for Soviet "planning" gave social democracy a new lease of life by appearing to vindicate the rationality and viability of centralised administration. By virtue of its origins in the destruction of October, stalinism has been able to bring marxism into disrepute. It is corrupted marxism which has become something else whilst seeking communist credentials, and being granted them by the political representatives of capital.

The problem today is even more serious than that of the years following 1848 when the revolutionary party, as Marx observed, was "driven from the field" by the industrial and commercial recovery. Not only are we surrounded by the debris of October. The working corollary of this is that in different national locations the working class is obstructed by often symbiotic mass stalinist and social democratic "workers parties" and social structures which are barriers to proletarian self-development. Even worse, there exist small but politically significant groupings which have internalised - with whatever reservations - key aspects of the stalinist ideological legacy: notably the crippling assertion that the USSR and similar entities are transitional societies. Stalinism is too often narrowly and misleadingly seen as a primarily political degeneration.

The core of historical materialism is the analysis of social forms of surplus extraction and labour process control from the standpoint of communism. Stalinism may for a time suspend the law of value as a means of economic regulation, but without bringing about a move towards planning, which can only be conscious, democratic and global. Social democracy does the same in more partial ways, where capital remains the direct form of surplus extraction. Imposing limits upon the law of value only preserves it. During an entire historical period the prevention of communism has been, and remains, for capital, the pressing requirement, even where the resulting social forms are barriers to the self-expansion of capital.

Radical Chains exists in order to develop revolutionary critique. The task which we have set ourselves is both prosaic and difficult. Radical Chains seeks to carve out a theoretical space within which the need for and movement towards human emancipation can be explored. Our work involves no more and no less than the mapping out of the contours of the theory which, as communists, we know to be essential for the regeneration of a conscious movement for communism.

This objective requires the re-evaluation of key categories and concepts which have previously been debased. This does not simply necessitate a project of recovery, but an attempt to forge new categories and concepts appropriate to our own period. As such this statement of intent constitutes a common point of departure rather than a collective conclusion.

We are not a party, nor even the nucleus of one. Our immediate concern is with a milieu, not a party, though we aim to develop as a contributing strand towards a future formation: we take politics too seriously to chain ourselves to a grandiose set of initials. The revolutionary party of the proletariat will not come into being without a revolutionary movement in the working class. In the meantime, the closest available approximation to such a party necessarily takes the form of dispersed individuals and groups, of which Radical Chains is one. To declare a premature political party nucleus without undertaking a clear and uncompromising struggle to recognise the complexity of the prevention of communism is to create yet another barrier against proletarian self-formation, and to perpetuate the dispersal.

A period of deepening decay and disruption is beginning and the only "new realism" worth considering is one which takes its bearings from the need for free association and the potential for abundance. It is necessary to ruthlessly confront the failure of all limiting "feasible socialisms".Both past and future as well as the agony of the present demand this.

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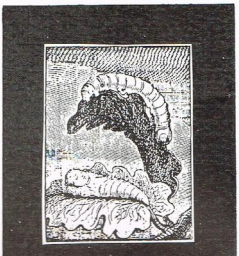

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We invite contributions addressing themes outlined in the statement of intent. Radical Chains will include articles with which we are not in full agreement and welcomes debate.

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EDITORIAL

We are confronted by the reality of collapse - of the post-war welfare consensus, of the soviet bloc, of the cold war. All the systems that had assured stability for accumulation; all collapsing. Collapse also of the left itself, a left which has in one way or another been implicated in the various forms, especially administrative, set up over the working class. As that world changes, the left falls apart, its purpose questioned.

The gulf crisis appears to offer the left salvation through submersion in a classic issue: opposition to war. The issues seem clear enough; the usual analysis stands on some form of anti-imperialism. Capitalism, it can be argued, has declined into an imperialist system of rivalrous powers compelled by falling profits ultimately to go to war over the division of the world. These imperialist powers are the reactionary custodians of decline and their defeat would weaken the forces opposing the proletariat. Anti-imperialism can thus recognise and support progressive forces that are not necessarily the proletariat, in so far as they weaken imperialism. All this amounts to a powerful argument which should not be dropped without serious debate.

The logic of the argument should lead to the slogan "Victory to Iraq!" This latter power, distinguished by its subordinate role, becomes the objectively progressive power that helps to crack imperialism. The position is implicit in the left's response but it has preferred the less contentious anti-war position of "Hands of the Gulf!", etc.

There is no question about opposing war. The real question is whether the old arguments are adequate or need to be re-examined. This is particularly important in light of changes since 1916. The most vital of these, and one which has been inadequately theorised, is the development of the working class in areas carelessly referred to as the "third world". Solidarity of workers internationally has a considerably wider basis than in Lenin's day. In Iraq itself, the 1958 revolution marked a decisive appearance of the proletariat quite impossible in Lenin's time. Despite apparent ideological differences, Iraq and Iran have much in common: they are founded on the containment of proletarian revolution. This in itself gives us reason to doubt whether an Iraqi victory would constitute a weakening of the imperialist system.

Military victory, eg by the USA, does not directly translate into social victory. It may solve one set of problems by dragging the USA deeper into others. Defeat of Hussein may in fact provoke a yet more radical opposition within the regime.

Saddam Hussein has played an important role for the USA, in a way similar to other rulers. Victory over Hussein would simply require another USA slogan "Long Live Saddam Hussein!" The USA needs somehow to engineer limited gains for Hussein compatible with the USA appearing to remain the boss power

The situation is complicated by the collapse of the cold war. Its role as protector of the West having gone, the USA finds in the Gulf crisis the chance to reassert its supremacy. This becomes more important given the uncertainty of economic news and the potential for breakdown into trade wars hinted at in the faltering world trade talks (the GATT Uruguay round).

The crisis might appear to offer the USA an opportunity to resolve conflicts between the major nations in its own favour. This, however, is to ignore the power of the Hussein regime. Iraq is no push-over and war would have a devastating impact on the USA (as the USA itself recognises). Even if working class opposition does not prevent war, it will certainly react to its results, whether this means victory of defeat. A further complicating factor in this, is increasingly ideological uncertainty. We are approaching the "Age of the Two Headless Chickens": a right losing its ideological thread, and a left that either pushes out the old lies or accommodates to the market.

It cannot be predicted whether the USA will go to war. It needs an escalation of threats to convince Hussein that it does mean war, in order to get his peaceful withdrawal. But their is little reason to believe that Hussein will come to the rescue. He must by now be aware that the expected military and domestic political costs are so great that force as an option is scarcely even a last resort. This leaves the USA in a near impossible situation.

In analysing crises of this nature the left has tended, since at least the 1930s, to have been paralysed at the political level. Disclosed by a linear notion of transition, this paralysis has allowed a blurring of the distinction between the communist project and "progress". In the name of "progress" the left has supported one repressive regime after another. From the early years of the Comintern, support for "progressive" forces has continually subordinated the proletariat to alien interests. For the working class, typically, the results have been murderous.

This perspective found its highest expression in the characterisation of the USSR as some variety of workers' state despite the total absence of any collective forms of the working class. Thus the left has held up an objectivity separated from and actually opposed to the historical subjectivity of the working class.

The ruling class has everywhere preferred progress to communism. Progress itself is a project that has evolved from the need of the bourgeoisie to delay communism. The left, for its part, after years of popular frontism and accommodation to administrative control, has lost the perspective of communism and recognition of the practical need for the supersession of exchange mediation.

The wider context of the fate of the left must affect our attitude to the gulf. The crisis helps submerge the crisis of the left. It offers the left a spectacular diversion, one that can solidarise its members by pressing upon them the urgency of the immediate situation. A whole train of immediate situations have, in favour of organisational priorities, subverted themes of greater relevance. Regeneration of the left requires retrieval of the communist perspective.

Towards this aim Radical Chains welcomes its first article in this issue, by David Gorman. This takes up an apparent contradiction between commodity fetishism and proletarian emancipation. Gorman identifies an element in left thinking that has been replicated unchallenged, and often unstated: the assumption of the passivity of the working class. Failing to advance its political economy to the present period, the left has collapsed commodity fetishism and What Is To Be Done? into a surrogate for analysis. Against this crucial aspect of the left's loss of a communist perspective, Gorman poses the material process of class formation.

Our second article, by Bob Shepherd, on Anton Pannekoek's theory of transition, also contributes to this project of retrieval. Pannekoek, Shepherd argues, founded his analysis on the point of view of the class as it emerged within the developing social situation of Germany pre- and post-WW I. Pannekoek could thus observe that the workers' own struggle needed continuously to break down regimes and forms resulting from previous struggles. This gave him a powerful analysis of opportunism and enabled him to perceive the dangers of mere representation of the working class. His understanding of communism as rupture allowed him to comprehend the period of transition as one of discontinuity. This is usefully contrasted with Lenin's belief that it was enough to "cross out" the words "Junker-bourgeois imperialism" from his description of German large-scale engineering and planned economy and replace it with a soviet state. This latter has helped foster linear notions of transition.

As usual we also present features covering aspects of the history of the left. We welcome a report by Baruch Hirson on a conference called on the 50th anniversary of the murder of Leon Trotsky by a GPU agent. Here Hirson wryly records the different uses to which Trotsky is being put. In addition we have as our reprint an article by Guy Aldred on trade unions and the class struggle. This first appeared in 1911 at the height of labour discontent, dominated by syndicalism, but takes a critical attitude to trade unions, seeing them as having evolved into a bulwark of the system. We must also remember the sad death of Walter Benjamin. David Officer on 'Our Back Pages' gives us a summary of Benjamin's life as he struggled intellectually to become a marxist, and records his tragic suicide in nazi occupied Europe.

William Dixon.

The Myth of Working Class Passivity :

Commodity Fetishism, Class Formation and Proletarian Self-Emancipation.

In the enchanted world of capital the emancipation of the working class can only be won by the working class itself. To say this, however, is to make assumptions and raise questions about the relations between consciousness and ideology, theory and practice, class and party, and about the nature of the transition to communism itself. These questions have often been approached through the theory of fetishism and, at its most extreme, this theory has been appropriated in such a way as to be posited as an absolute barrier to consciousness and so, by implication, to self-emancipation. This form of its appropriation is however erroneous. There is, in fact, no inconsistency between the theory of fetishism and the principles of proletarian self-emancipation.

To show this, however, it is first necessary to outline the nature of the assumptions underlying the notion that fetishism is an absolute barrier to consciousness. These assumptions, it will be argued, involve the abstraction of consciousness from the rest of social reality and more fundamentally, the assumption of working class passivity. This is followed by a close reading of Marx which attempts to specify the wider context of which the theory of fetishism is a part. This matrix, it is argued, includes not just the law of value but the embryonic law of planning and the self-formation of the working class through the conscious determination of needs. Finally, it is necessary to look at the events since the death of Marx which appear to contradict this analysis. By locating these phenomena within the political economy of the prevention of communism (David Binns & William Dixon, Radical Chains 1:1) it is possible to avoid the conclusion of working class passivity in the face of bourgeois ideology.

It should be stressed that what follows is not offered as a definitive answer to these questions. For one thing, it fails to take up the phenomenon of credit and inflation discussed by Lipietz for example (see his The Enchanted World: Inflation, Credit and World Crisis, Verso 1985). For another, although the analysis outlined here has implications for questions of organisation these are not drawn out. Finally, litle is said about the evolution of Marx's own thought on the subject. It is hoped that these issues will be taken up at a later date.

Abstraction and Passivity

The core of the theory of fetishism - to give an initial characterisation - is that under capitalism social labour cannot appear as social labour but only in the form of the exchange of objects as equivalents. This has implications for the nature of bourgeois ideology. Contemporary discussions of fetishism tend to draw out these implications. The focus is on two interrelated features of bourgeois ideological forms. First, in such economies, social relations appear in the form of (or are confused with) things. Second, what is social and historical appears to be (or is taken to be) natural and eternal. It is because social relations appear in the form of things (or are taken to be things), that capitalist social relations appear to be (or are taken to be) natural. Commodity fetishism is then, presented as the basis of ideological mystification in bourgeois society.

It can hardly be said that there has been an extensive debate on the subject. However, in contemporary discussions of fetishism two apparently opposed interpretations can be discerned which might be thought to imply very different political strategies. On the one hand, "objectivists" such as Slaughter stress that fetishism can be removed only in the practical solution of the material conditions which give rise to it. On the other hand, "subjectivists" such as Ollman suggest that fetishism is an intellectual error amenable to correction by intellectual means alone. In fact, these apparently opposed positions converge and their convergence can be traced back to shared assumptions about the nature of the working class. Slaughter and Ollman are cited only as 'representatives' of two apparently opposed understandings of fetishism common on the left.

An example of the "objectivist" account can be found in Slaughter, according to whom: "By 'commodity fetishism' Marx means the 'objective appearances of the social characteristics of labour'. In other words, men's own mutual relations appear to them in the form of the set characteristics of material objects, the products of their own labour" (Cliff Slaughter, Marxism and the Class Struggle, New Park, 1975). This conception of fetishism, Slaughter argues, stresses "the actual oppression of the producers by the system of capitalist production, and not just the distortion of their class consciousness" (ibid). Fetishism is for Slaughter, a question of domination as well as of mystification. But the question of mystification is important too, for Slaughter holds that it is the objective appearances of bourgeois society which trap workers within the limitations of "trade union consciousness" (ibid). Class struggle, in this conception becomes reduced to a struggle between bourgeois ideology and marxist theory for hegemony over the consciousness of the working class : "even though the mass of workers experience exploitation, it is necessary for a struggle to take place between their existing consciousness on the one hand, and Marxism on the other" (ibid). "Consciousness", in the form of marxist theory, must, Slaughter argues, therefore be brought to the workers "from outside".

An example of the apparently opposed view - the "subjectivist" account - can be found in Ollman. The theory of commodity fetishism here "refers to people's misconception of the products of labour once they enter exchange, a misconception which accords these forms of value leading roles in what is still a human drama" (Bertell Ollman, Alienation, Cambridge 1971). Workers experience exploitation, but in the course of this experience, "are prone to confuse the means with the people who direct them, and to attribute to inanimate objects the social character of an exploiting agency" (ibid). By conceiving of means of production as means of exploitation, Ollman argues, workers grant them the power to exploit. Workers find their inclinations in conflict with the demands of a particular situation but "they consistently misunderstand and are incapable of responding to it in ways that would promote their interests"(ibid).

Elsewhere Ollman spells out the political implications more fully, although he makes no explicit reference to the theory of fetishism. Conditions have been ripe for communism since 1848: "If it was not conditions which failed Marx, it must have been the working class" (Bertell Ollman, Social and Sexual Revolution, Pluto, 1979). The task for socialists is, therefore education. Workers aged much over forty are effectively lost for revolution and socialists must focus their efforts on "teenage and even younger members of the working class" (ibid). The task is "to help alter the character structure of the next generation of workers" (ibid). Ollman's strategy for social revolution finds its highest expression in his board game Class Struggle.

"Objectivists" and "subjectivists" tend to converge in abstracting consciousness from, and counterposing it to, the rest of social reality. This necessarily creates the need to deliver "consciousness" to the workers. The project must, however, strike a reef. If fetishism is a barrier to workers' consciousness, it must also be a barrier to the consciousness of the revolutionary intelligentsia. The educators must themselves

be educated. Two possibilities follow. Either there is no need to bring consciousness to the workers or it is impossible. The "solution" to the problem is a pseudo-solution and this is because the problem, as set up, is insoluble.

In fact the problem is itself a pseudo-problem. Underlying the abstraction of consciousness from the rest of social reality is the assumption- not necessarily consciously held - that the working class is essentially passive. While workers may struggle against this or that aspect of capitalism, it is assumed they never struggle against the whole. Their struggles therefore have no impact upon the social structure and so have no tendency towards communism. This supposed passivity has to be explained and the explanation has been in terms of ideology or commodity fetishism. Fetishism is an objective aspect of the social production of commodities but when the working class is assumed to be passive the question of whether fetishism is "objective" or "subjective" loses its significance. Whether fetishism is understood to be "objective" or "subjective" is secondary to the assumption of working class passivity.

The Fascination of "What is to be Done?"

It is necessary to understand the terms of reference within which such a conclusion might be reached. The principle work to be examined in this context is What Is To Be Done? This text, written in 1902, provides a particular "model" of the relations between class and party and between consciousness and ideology to which the assumption of working class passivity is central. Even those who reject or oppose "leninism" have often taken on board the assumption of working class passivity. What Is To Be Done? has become a perennial source of fascination for the left. This is because it appears to address contemporary concerns. Some of its assumptions have become a taken-for-granted frame of reference within which the left moves; they have indeed passed into the "common-sense" of the left.

The central concern of What is to be Done? is the supposed containment of the working class within the "economic struggle", through which, with the help of socialist agitation, workers learn to "sell their commodity on better terms and to fight their employers over a purely commercial deal" (WTBD). This "containment" is attributed to the influence of bourgeois ideology : "The working class spontaneously gravitates towards socialism, but the more widespread (and continually revived in the most diverse forms) bourgeois ideology nevertheless, spontaneously imposes itself still more" (Ibid).

To be freed of the influence of bourgeois ideology workers must acquire knowledge of the totality of bourgeois social relations: "Class political consciousness can be brought to the workers only from without, that is only from outside of the economic struggle, from outside of the sphere of relations between workers and employers. The sphere from which alone it is possible to obtain this knowledge is the sphere of relationships between all the classes and strata and the state and the government, the sphere of the inter-relations between all the classes" (Ibid).

Because the influence of bourgeois ideology is so strong, the knowledge necessary for revolutionary change and indeed socialist consciousness itself, can only be "brought to" the working class "from without". "The history of all countries shows that the working class, exclusively by its own efforts, is able to develop only trade union consciousness, ie the conviction that it is necessary to combine in unions, fight the employers and strive to compel the government to pass necessary labour legislation, etc. The theory of socialism, however, grew out of the philosophic, historical and economic theories that were elaborated by the educated representatives of the propertied classes, the intellectuals" (Ibid).

they are often read into Marx's discussion of commodity fetishism. In turn, the theory of fetishism is used to explain the phenomena observed in What Is To Be Done? One commentator has put it; "The classical expression of the Marxist theory of revolutionary organisation, Lenin's What Is To Be Done?, was not written primarily as a theory of ideology as such, and Lenin does not explicitly account for the dominance of bourgeois ideology in trade-union consciousness in terms of the political economy of capitalist society. Nevertheless, his conception of a trained organisation of revolutionaries capable of maintaining the energy, stability and continuity of the revolutionary struggle, derives its rationale from the 'fetishism of commodities' in capitalist society" (David Binns, Beyond the Sociology of Conflict, Macmillan 1977). It is

A number of criticisms can be made. First, the category of the "economic struggle" corresponds to no known social reality. Even the struggle over the length of the working day in the nineteenth century threw capital into crisis, necessitating the transition to another form of capital accumulation . Secondly, if history "shows" anything, it is that workers are quite capable of going beyond "trade union consciousness". 1848 and 1871 are examples - ones of which Lenin should have been aware. Indeed the experience of 1905 led Lenin to distance himself, if ambiguously, from some of his formulations about working class consciousness. Finally, if the strength of bourgeois ideology is such that it "spontaneously" imposes itself on the working class, it must "spontaneously" impose itself on the educators too. Again, the project of bringing consciousness to the workers "from the outside" is either unnecessary or impossible.

The most important point, however, concerns the abstraction of consciousness and ideology from political economy. What is to be Done? might be a response to a real problem. Although it effectively deals with only the surface phenomena, it deals with them in such a way that it has been able to pass into the common sense of the left as a set of taken-for-granted assumptions. These assumptions have become so ingrained that assumed that in the discussion of fetishism in 'Capital' and elsewhere Marx is concerned to understand the supposed passivity of the working class. Commodity fetishism then becomes the explanation for this supposed passivity. In fact, however, Marx is not concerned with working class passivity but with its self-activity.

Standing Marx on his Feet: Class Consciousness and Class Formation

This concern with the self-activity of the working class is brought out clearly in Marx's analysis of the process of class formation. This is the process by which living labour overcomes the its social atomisation and constitutes itself as a social force capable of organising production in accordance with consciously determined need. It is a process of political economy with an inherent tendency towards communism. It is out of this process that class consciousness develops. The analysis of class formation first appears in the Poverty of Philosophy (1847) and The Communist Manifesto (1848). It re-appears in Marx's "later" writings in a more developed form.

For Marx, the subordination of living labour to capital is not given, but is conditioned by the struggle of the working class. In the

course of this struggle, which is at once economic and political - as in the Chartist movement, for example - the working class develops itself as a social force. The atomisation resulting from the competition over the sale of labour power and from the power of capital forces workers to combine to maintain their wages. In so doing they both eliminate competition among themselves and unite against their employers. In time, and especially with the experience of capitalist repression, the maintenance of combination becomes more important than the maintenance of wages. Combinations then became permanent associations, towards the preservation of which wages might often be sacrificed.

A form of self organisation developed for one purpose takes on new functions. Indeed for Marx the formation of combinations is part of the process of the formation of the class itself - not merely something workers do, but an active expression of the developing social being of the proletariat. In the place of a multitude of atomised individuals, stand networks of conscious association. Hence Marx speaks of "strikes, combinations and other forms in which the proletarians carry out before their own eyes their organisation as a class" (Poverty of Philosophy).

Consciousness grows out of the struggles of the workers themselves. In the course of this struggle the proletariat is joined by intellectuals "who have raised themselves to the level of comprehending theoretically the historical movement as a whole" (Communist Manifesto). The "theoretical conclusions" of these intellectuals "are in no way based on ideas or principles invented, or discovered by, this or that would-be reformer. They merely express, in general terms, actual relations springing from an existing class struggle, from an historical movement going on under their very eyes" (Ibid). Theory is descriptive and explanatory rather than prescriptive. It draws out, generalises or makes explicit what is already implied by the conscious struggle and organisation of workers themselves. The emphasis is on the self-activity of the working class. Indeed, in contrast to What is to be Done?, in which the working class is activated from the outside, Marx argues that revolutionary intellectuals join the working class only "in times when the class struggle nears the decisive hour" (Ibid).

Reading Marx Carefully: Class Formation and Commodity Fetishism

Marx's concern with the self-activity of the working class and the process of class formation is not restricted to the Poverty of Philosophy and The Communist Manifesto; it runs through the discussions of fetishism in Capital and elsewhere. This, however, has been obscured by the influence of the assumptions embodied in What Is To Be Done? The best accounts of fetishism have pointed to the organic connection between fetishism and the law of value. In doing so, they have specified only one part of the matrix within which the theory of fetishism is embedded. The theory of fetishism constitutes part of a totality which includes not only the law of value but also the law of planning. The law of planning is the basis for working class self-formation and it is this process of class formation which undermines the material basis of commodity fetishism: the law of value. In Marx, the theory of fetishism is developed in connection with an account of class formation. Commodity fetishism is not the explanation of working class "passivity", but is actively undermined in the process of working class self-formation. Capital has been read, re-read, and read politically, and yet this point remains unacknowledged.

The theory of commodity fetishism refers to the inverted appearances of the social forms and relations of bourgeois commodity production and of the forces and relations of its dissolution and supervision. For Marx, fetishism is not static or unchanging but

intensifies with the development of the capital form itself. Capital, however, is the social relation between capital and wage labour. It is, therefore, a relation of exploitation and of struggle. It develops through different forms and, as it changes, its fetishised forms of appearance change also. In changing, they are both intensified and suspended. This is both the result of the process of class formation and a ground of its possibility.

This side of Marx's account is easily missed. Often the key points are implied rather than stated explicitly and have therefore to be drawn out. Sometimes they take the form of apparently off-the-cuff remarks and throw-away statements, the real significance of which is unclear. This may seem odd, but this is to forget two things : First, Marx could take class struggle and class formation for granted and could not have foreseen its being deflected by the forms of the prevention of communism. Second, he could not have foreseen the ways in which the theory of fetishism would be re-interpreted in light of the prevention of communism.

Under conditions of commodity production, Marx argues, commodities exchange at their values, ie, in accordance with the labour socially necessary for their production. The production of commodities presupposes an atomised society of independent producers who produce solely for exchange, their activities being regulated neither by custom nor by conscious planning, but by the requirement that no more labour than is socially necessary shall be expended in production. The law of value regulates the social existence of the producers through competition, but this appears to the participants only in the form of the movement of prices. Social relations are not fixed but created anew with every act of exchange. The social existence of individuals is precarious because they cannot know in advance whether their labour is socially necessary.

Through money the social connections between atomised individuals are facilitated. Labour power, abstracted from and indifferent to, any specific end, becomes measurable and its measurability exists in the form of money as universal equivalent. This abstract labour is the substance of value yet value appears as a property of things. Products appear to exchange on the market in accordance with natural laws. The social basis of exchange, abstract labour, does not appear. Because individual labour is mediated by exchange, "the relations connecting the labour of one individual with that of the rest appear, not as direct social relations, between people at work, but as what they really are, material relations between persons and social relations between things" (Capital vol I).

Universal exchange requires the existence of the universal equivalent: money. Because of its physical divisibility, gold is well suited for this function. Its money-form is not an intrinsic property of gold, "but is merely the form under which certain social relations manifest themselves" (Capital vol I). Gold becomes money because all other commodities have come to express their values in it. But the actual process appears in inverted form : it appears that "all other commodities express their values in gold, because it is money" (Ibid). In money, "a social relation, a definite relation between individuals, here appears as a metal, a stone, a purely physical, external thing, which can be found, as such, in nature, and whom is indistinguishable from its natural existence" (Grundrisse,1858, p 234). This is what Marx calls "the magic of money" (Capital vol I).

Because of their essential role in mediating social relations, things take on a life of their own, and this, Marx argues, is best understood by analogy with religion. (This analogy is, however, generally misunderstood). In the religious world, "the productions of the human brain appear as independent beings endowed with life, and entering into relations both with one another and with the human race. So it is in the world of commodities with the products of men's hands" (Capital vol I). In religion, ideas appear as independent, living beings. In ancient Greek religion and mythology, for example, the concept of "wisdom" becomes personified by the goddess Athena and in this form enters into relations with other such beings, Zeus, for example, and with human beings, such as Odysseus. In the world of commodities, Marx argues, the products of human labour appear as autonomous entities with a life and will of their own, and which enter into relations with each other and with humanity. Commodities exchange in quantities which vary independently of the will of their producers. To the producers therefore, "their own social action takes the form of the action of objects, which rules the producers instead of being ruled by them" (Capital vol I).

Commodity fetishism is "inseparable from the production of commodities" (ibid). Society, moreover, "does not strip off its mystical veil until it is treated as production by freely associated men, and is consciously regulated by them in accordance with a settled plan" (ibid). But fetishism is not static but intensifies with the development of the capital form itself. Thus, Marx argues, the fetishes associated with the commodity and money are common in all societies in which these forms appear, but with the emergence of the capital form as the dominant form of production, "this perverted and enchanted world develops still more" (Capital vol III, 1894).

In pre-capitalist societies fetishism developed only in relation to money and "interest-bearing capital" (Capital vol III). The basic relations of pre-capitalist society were not, however, subject to fetishism. These relations were direct, based on production for use, not exchange. Under relations of "personal dependence" (Grundrisse, p158) the fact of exploitation is evident; the reality of unpaid surplus labour being entirely visible. In the transition to capitalism, however, relations of personal dependence come to be increasingly suspended by relations of personal independence "founded on objective (sachlicher) dependence" (ibid p158). Abstract labour, which existed only in embryo in previous societies, is, in the course of this transition, developed to its fullest form through the forced separation of labour from the conditions of labour. Through the creation of absolute poverty in which money exists in opposition to labour power as a commodity, the universalisation of the commodity form becomes possible. With this universalisation of commodity production, fetishism is universalised and intensified.

In the early stages of capitalist production, however, where the extraction of absolute surplus value predominates, the capital-labour relationship is "still very simple and the actual connection impresses itself upon the bearers of this process, the capitalists themselves, and remains in their consciousness. The violent struggle over the working day demonstrated this strikingly" (Capital vol III). In this period, while the historically contingent nature of capitalism might be obscured, the fact of exploitation is not. The magnitude of surplus value is increased by extending the length of the working day and labour power thus appears as the source of surplus value. It is only with the transition to the extraction of relative surplus value, in response to the success of the working class in shortening the working day, that capital, "becomes a very mystic being since all of labour's social productive forces appear to be due to capital, rather than labour as such, and seem to issue from the forms of capital" (Capital vol III).

The developed capitalist economy is organised around a unified process of production in which capital pumps out of the direct producers unpaid surplus labour in the form of surplus value. Surplus value itself does not however appear except as profit, interest or rent. The product of a unified process is differentiated into categories according to function in the process of production, but these differentiated portions of surplus value appear as independent revenues (profit, interest, rent). The reality of exploitation is hidden : in appearance three distinct categories of producers draw three distinct kinds of revenue from these distinct sources.

The separation of capital into "industrial" and "interest-bearing" capital results in the differentiation of surplus value into "profit of enterprise" and "interest". Profit of enterprise appears to be generated by the capitalist working with the means of production independently of the capital relation. Interest, on the other hand, appears to result from mere ownership of capital independently of the process of production. To the industrial capitalist profit of enterprise appears not as the unpaid labour of others, but as the fruit of his own labour : he creates profit not because he exploits, "but because he also works .." (Capital vol III). Appearing as a better paid worker (earning "wages of the labour of superintendence") his interests appear identical to those of "other" workers in opposition to those of interest-bearing capital.

At the same time, in interest, the connection between surplus value and labour vanishes, and, with it, the antithesis between capital and labour. Interest bearing capital appears to produce money out of money and is thus "the most complete fetish" or the "consummate automatic fetish" (Theories of Surplus Value vol 3 1861-3). The inner connections of surplus value disappear: conflict over the division of the product appears to be accidental rather than essential to the relationship.

The class relationship appears, moreover, to be a necessary condition of production. It appears that labour must take the form of wage labour and that access to life must be mediated by the wage. The conditions of wage labour appear as the conditions of labour in general and capital comes to be identified with "produced means of production" (Capital vol III p 824), ie as a thing and not a social relation. Absolute poverty appears as a natural condition of production and not one of social or historical origin. Production appears to be, necessarily, capitalist production.

Exploitation is further obscured with the development of the wage form. This gives the relation between capital and wage labour the appearance of an exchange relation. The value of labour power is in fact paid and this obscures the extortion of unpaid surplus labour in the form of surplus value. Even the repeated exchange of living labour for dead "is in fact only apparent" (Grundrisse p 294). Absolute poverty entails wage slavery : separated from the conditions of labour, living labour must sell itself to capital. But, obscured by the wage form, slavery appears as freedom : "In reality the labourer belongs to capital before he has sold himself to capital. His economic bondage is both brought about and concealed by his periodic sale of himself by his change of masters, and by the oscillations of the market price of his labour power" (Capital vol I).

Yet the same relationship, Marx argues, "introduces the apparent form of barter, of exchange, so that when competition permits the worker to bargain and so to argue with the capitalists, he measures his demands against the capitalists' profits and demands a certain share of the surplus value created by him; so that the proportion itself becomes a real moment of economic life itself" (Grundrisse p 597). In fighting for higher wages, workers do not merely "fight their employers over a purely commercial deal" as Lenin believed. In the course of this struggle and in the course of capitalist development "even the semblance is suspended that capital exchanges for labour capacity anything other than the latter's own objectified labour, ie that it exchanges anything at all for it" (Grundrisse p 674). It becomes clear that, in the wage, workers receive from capital only a part of their own labour. This "also enters the consciousness of the workers as well as the capitalists" (ibid p 597). The mystifications of the wage form are undermined by the struggle of the workers themselves. The development of this consciousness marks a phase in the process of class formation.

We have seen that the separation of capital into industrial and interest-bearing forms obscures the extortion of unpaid surplus labour. But this is only one side of the phenomenon. The appearance of "profits of enterprise" in the form of "wages of the labour of superintendence" initiates a process which leads to the questioning of the need for profit itself. As Marx points out, socialists came to demand that if profits are only a particular kind of wage, capitalists should "only draw the wages usually paid to managers" (TSV vol 3). The apologetics intended to defend profit thus "boomerang on the apologists themselves" (ibid).

This tendency intensifies with the emergence of workers' co-operative factories and capitalist joint-stock companies. In both forms the function of supervision is "entirely divorced from the ownership of capital" (Capital vol III). With the development of these forms "profit appeared also in practice as it undeniably appeared in theory, as mere surplus value, a value for which no equivalent was paid, as realised unpaid surplus labour" (ibid). Again the development of the capital form reaches the stage where it can no longer hide behind appearances.

Earlier we noted that exploitation becomes increasingly obscured with the transition to the extraction of relative surplus value. This transition both develops the power of combined labour and obscures it. The powers of living labour appear transferred to capital as an activity of capital. The forms of socially developed labour - cooperation, manufacture, the factory, machinery and science - confront individual workers as powers of capital. Labour appears powerless as an independent force :"In machinery, objectified labour confronts living labour within the labour process as a power which rules it, a power which, as the appropriation of living labour, is the form of capital" (Grundrisse p 693). The totality of the powers of social labour exist, under capitalism, only when organised by capital : Social labour appears not as social labour but as the power of capital over atomised and isolated individual labourers: "this elevation of direct labour into social labour appears as a reduction of independent labour to helplessness in the face of the communality (Gemeinsamkeit) represented by and concentrated in capital." (Grundrisse p700). Thus is obscured capital's real dependence on labour.

What is veiled is "one of the civilising aspects of capital" (Capital vol III) - its propensity to create, through the development of the forces of production, the conditions and forces of its own dissolution. In developing the productive forces, capital brings into being combined labour. This appears initially as an "alien combination" forced upon the workers against their will and "subservient to and led by an alien will and intelligence" (Grundrisse p470). But, in time, it becomes a social force with the capacity for and tending towards planning.

The development of the productive forces under capital proceeds through the reduction of necessary labour time and the conversion of disposable time into surplus labour time: " Capital itself is the moving contradiction, [in] that it presses to reduce labour time to a minimum, while it posits labour time, on the other side, as sole measure and source of wealth" (Grundrisse p706). The contradiction between the creation of disposable time and its conversion into surplus labour time is the basis for the transition to communism: "The more this contradiction developed the more does it become evident that the growth of the forces of production can no longer be bound up with the appropriation of alien labour, but that the mass of the workers must themselves appropriate their own surplus labour" (Grundrisse p708).

The development of combined labour as a social force manifests itself in the "transitional" forms of workers co-operatives and bourgeois joint stock companies. These forms, Marx argues, point beyond bourgeois economy. The co-operative factories of the workers "are proof that the capitalist as a functionary of production has become as superfluous to the workers as the landlord appears to the capitalist with regard bourgeois production" (TSV vol 3). They are, in other words, proof that working class self-formation has reached the point at which the specifically capitalist organisation of the immediate process of production at least has become unnecessary. In the joint stock company, moreover, a product of the same process, capital " is here directly endowed with the form of social capital (capital of directly associated individuals) as distinct from private capital, and its undertakings" (Capital vol III). The point of the joint stock company is to spread "risk", but as Marx observes, the shareholder is taking risks not with his own property but with social property. In this form, the opposition of class interests becomes more evident as social force confronts social force.

In the course of working class self-formation, the fetishes attached to production itself seem to become progressively undermined. On the other hand, those relating to the sphere of circulation and especially finance capital have been left untouched and have even begun to intensify as finance capital begins to emerge as an (apparently) dominant form. The development of finance capital is itself a response of capital to the formation of the workers into a class - it is a tragic attempt by capital to liberate itself from its dependence upon the working class. (Hillel H. Ticktin, Critique 16, 1983)

It is from this understanding of political economy that Marx's politics follows. As we shall see, with his development of the theory of fetishism, his understanding of the relation of class consciousness to class formation did not undergo substantial alteration. He presents co-operatives and trade unions as embryonic organs of class power (in conjunction with an independent party of the proletariat). Marx's assessment of this potential is inseparable from his assessment of their role within the political economy of capitalism as forms of expression of the developing "political economy of the working class".

The political economy of the working class is counterposed to that of the middle class. Marx refers to "the great contest between the blind rule of supply and demand laws which form the political economy of the middle class, and the social production controlled by foresight, which forms the political economy of the working class." (Inaugural Address). In essence, Marx is speaking of the conflict between the law of planning and the law of value. The law of value supposes a tendency for all commodities to exchange at their values; the law of planning by contrast requires the conscious regulation of production in accordance with need. The law of value and the law of planning express the two sides of the moving contradiction that is capital. The development of the law of planning is the basis of working class self formation. The greater the development of the law of planning, the greater the ability of the working class to organise production consciously and collectively to meet needs. The law of planning is inherently subversive of the role of exchange in mediating between capacities and need. In its fullest expression it is the dissolution of capital and the self abolition of the working class : communism.

The workers' co-operative factories are an appearance of the embryonic form of planning within the immediate process of production. In themselves however, the co-operatives do not challenge capital within circulation. In so far as they continue to presuppose the market, they contribute to the illusion that labour can emancipate itself within commodity production. Marx was, however, aware that the existing co-operatives could never undermine capitalism. For that to be possible, "co-operative labour ought to be developed to national dimensions and, consequently, to be fostered by national means" (ibid).

Trade unions too are presented as embryonic class organisations and as late as 1873 Marx speaks of the "combinations that constitute the working class as a class antagonistic to the respectable category of masters. entrepeneurs, and bourgeois" (Political Indifferentism). Although they had their origins in spontaneous efforts by workers to defend themselves from capital, "unconsciously to themselves, the trade unions were forming centres of organisation of the working class .... If trade unions are required for the guerilla fights between capital and labour, they are still more important as organised agencies for superseding the very system of wage labour and capital rule" (Instructions for Delegates to the Geneva Congress). The unions have tended to concentrate on local and immediate struggles with capital and held aloof from general social and political movements. They had now, Marx argued in 1866, to "learn to act deliberately as organising centres of the working class in the broad interest of its complete emancipation" (ibid).

To defeat the "collective power of the propertied classes", Marx argued in 1871, the working class had to constitute itself as "a political party, distinct from, and opposed to, all old parties formed by the propertied classes" (Speech to the London Conference on Working Class Political Action). This party - the International - is not conceived to be external to the working class and bringing consciousness to it "from without", for the International "was established by the working men themselves and for themselves" (ibid). It works in conjunction with the co-operatives and the trade unions, which are conceived to be embryonic organs of working class power because of their effects on the political economy of capitalism, namely their ability to subvert the law of value. In the Provisional Rules of the International Working Men's Association (1866) Marx claims that "the emancipation of the working classes must be conquered by the working classes themselves"

Commodity Fetishism and the Prevention of Communism

In Marx, commodity fetishism is not introduced to explain the supposed passivity of the working class because this supposition is not made. The theory of commodity fetishism does not contradict the principle of proletarian self-emancipation.

Events since Marx's death, however, might be taken as grounds for doubt. The 20th century has witnessed the apparent de-politicisation of the workers' movement, the growing incorporation of the trades unions, the repeated accommodation to reformism, the outbreak of two world wars, the rise of fascism, the sustained failure of proletarian revolution and the emergence of monstrous bureaucratic regimes claiming to represent the interests of the world proletariat. These developments weigh like a nightmare on the minds of aspiring revolutionaries. This nightmare appears to justify the assumption of working class passivity which lies at the heart of 20th century socialist ideology.

Actually it is possible to acknowledge the reality of this nightmare without also accepting the purported conclusion. The political economy of the world has changed since Marx and the political effects of these changes - or, at least some of them - are registered in 'What Is To Be Done?' But because the underlying political economy is not also analysed, the necessity of working class passivity seems to be implied. When, however, these phenomena are located in terms of the political economy of the epoch, it becomes possible to resist this implication.

Proletarian self-emancipation presupposes abundance. It also, and crucially, presupposes that the power of combined labour has developed to the point where its existence is incompatible with the continued rule of capital. This incompatibility does not immediately result in revolution but rather signals the beginning of an epoch - long and tortuous - of transition, punctuated at various points by revolutions. The power of combined labour ensures that the development of the productive forces can no longer proceed on the basis of unimpeded operation of the law of value; development takes place through the decay of the capital form itself. "As soon as it [capital] begins to sense itself and become conscious of itself as a barrier to development it seeks refuge in forms which, by restricting free competition, seem to make the rule of capital more perfect, but are at the same time heralds of its dissolution and of the dissolution of the mode of production resting on it."(Grundrisse p651).

Capital is in potential and in tendency, a global phenomenon. To be able to supersede the capital form, the working class must therefore form itself as a class globally. At the very least absolute poverty and abstract labour must exist globally if workers are to assert themselves as the universal class. To the extent that further proletarianisation is possible, to that extent capital can cheat the grave.

In the late 19th century the growth of combined labour threatened capital accumulation in its heartlands of western Europe but only in its heartlands. Because combined labour could not yet form itself as a class globally, its tendency towards communism could be checked. This prevention of communism involved the conscious intervention of the bourgeoisie into its own political economy. The Paris Commune, the "new unionism" in Britain, and the growth of the SPD in Germany allowed the bourgeoisie a glimpse of the potential power of combined labour. This power was incompatible with the unimpeded functioning of the law of value. The latter was consciously limited through the acceptance of trades unions as representatives of labour within capitalism and through the beginnings of a welfare programme which softened the effects of absolute poverty. The law of value came increasingly to rest upon, while the law of planning was strangled by, bureaucratic administration. With the formal and bureaucratic recognition of needs and the self-limitation of capital, space opened up for the representation of the working class within bourgeois society.

Social democracy at home rested upon imperialism abroad, their unifying principle being finance capital. By transferring capital investment to areas where little or no proletarianisation had yet taken place finance capital was able to temporarily outflank the development of the working class. By conceding locally capital was able to preserve accumulation globally. Ultimately, however, this process results in a global working class from which capital can do little to free itself. The prevention of communism obstructs the process of class formation only to bring about the conditions for its further development.

The prevention of communism intensifies with the development of stalinism . This grew out of the October revolution: the working class seized power under adverse circumstances and lost it, but to avoid globalising the revolution, capital was forced to avoid reasserting its dominance. As a result capital had to accept the absence of the capital-form - and therefore the presence of bureaucratic administration - within a whole national economy. This in turn forced it to accept the further intensification of the prevention of communism outside the USSR: the extension of social democratic nationalisation and the welfare state, the acceptance of "full employment" and central economic organisation. These forms preserve capitalism by checking the tendency towards communism but at the same time restrict the sphere of operation of the law of value and so act as a barrier to capital accumulation.

With the development of the prevention of communism the working class struggles within and against a new social reality. As apparent alternatives to capitalism, the forms of the prevention of communism appear to obviate the need for the workers themselves to take power directly. The formal recognition of needs appears to obviate the need for proletarian self-organisation. By mitigating the effects of absolute poverty, social democracy and stalinism create a barrier to proletarian self-formation in the form of the representation of the working class. The working class can now struggle for concessions within bourgeois society and its struggles lose their political edge - space opens up for the representation of the working class but at the same time the limits of that space are carefully policed.

On the other hand, especially with the passing of time, it becomes increasingly clear that social democracy and stalinism have failed from the perspective of working class needs. This fact enters workers' consciousness. But social democracy and stalinism are the outcomes of struggles waged by workers themselves and this fact

too enters working class consciousness. Workers are aware that they are exploited under capitalism but they are also aware that the historically existing "alternatives" do not solve the problem. In so far as the forms of the prevention of communism appear as alternatives, by appearing to be the only possible alternatives, they seem to indicate that there is in fact no alternative.

The prevention of communism permits the nationalised recognition of needs within the wider context of a world market economy, this nationalised recognition of needs being the basis for the global preservation of capital. The law of value is suspended to different degrees within specific national locations in order for it to be preserved globally through finance capital. International finance capital thus becomes the source of external discipline which is transmitted to the working class within specific national locations, through the forms of the prevention of communism. Through the movements of financial capital, absolute poverty and abstract labour are constantly re-created globally. Workers organise nationally only to find that the problem is international. Finance capital appears to be beyond the reach of working class action.

There is a sense in which social production has become increasingly "de-fetishised". To the extent that the law of value decays into bureaucratic administration social relations become more "transparent". Nationalisation, government subsidisation of industries inefficient from the standpoint of value, the welfare state, "full employment" etc indicate that the distribution of social labour can no longer be achieved through the law of value alone, but increasingly requires direct forms of social control. Thus, for example, the government intervenes in the "economy" to influence "demand", interest rates and inflation, to set up relatively permanent institutions of industrial arbitration, to adjust rents and to maintain of undermine "full" employment. With this intensification of direct forms of social control, however, it becomes clearer that it is people and not things which are the source of the problem. On the other hand, these non-value forms of control themselves are subordinate to value globally and function to preserve it. Social democracy and stalinism thus combine with finance capital to sustain the illusion of the eternality of the value form.

The problem is further complicated by the fact that much of the left has tended to present the forms of the prevention of communism as being transitional to communism. This is true not only of orthodox stalinist organisations but also of certain strands of trotskyism. For some of the latter: "The Soviet experience, despite its very specific character, was nevertheless a great laboratory for establishing the superiority of planning over the anarchic market economy of capitalism, and for learning from the gross mistakes and miscalculations perpetrated by the Stalinist bureaucracy" (Anonymous "Forward" to the New Park edition of Trotsky's Towards Capitalism or Socialism, 1978,p70). By presenting stalinism as being with whatever critical reservations, an advance on capitalism, such statements only obstruct the movement towards communism. Worse still, when the working class begins to move against the social forms within which it has been partially contained, it finds itself being urged back into line by the self-proclaimed enemies of the existing order: not only by the social democrats and the stalinists but also by those who claim to have developed the revolutionary critique. Workers rejection of the forms of the prevention of communism is then taken as evidence of continued passivity in the face of bourgeois ideology. The active intervention of these organisations into the communist movement of the working class itself obstructs that movement.

Communism has thus become identified with the prevention of communism. Disillusionment with the prevention of communism takes the form of disillusionment with communism itself. This does not imply a simple ideological victory for value. Consciousness can be understood only in its relation to political economy and the political economy of the working class is conscious determination of needs. Having been forced to recognise needs, even if only formally and bureaucratically, capital cannot institute their derecognition when the need arises. While it has been possible, with the unwitting aid of the left, to discredit communism, it is impossible to discredit needs. The political economy of the working class has not been - and cannot be - dislodged.

Inherited Ideology and Practical Needs

Communism is not an ethical ideal to be realised by means of proletarian revolution. As the society of the freely associating producers, communism is a practical need and can emerge only out of the struggles of the workers themselves. Proletarian revolution is not one possible means amongst others by which to bring into being a desired end, but the necessary outcome of a real social process.

This process is the process of self-formation of the working class. Marx observed it at the moments of the (partial) victory of the political economy of the working class over the political economy of the bourgeoisie, and recognised it as a process tending towards communism. Since Marx, however, the intervention of the bourgeoisie into its own political economy has appeared to undermine the possibility of proletarian self-emancipation. The results of this intervention have been understood in terms of consciousness and ideology alone and thus the communist perspective has been lost.

If we are to retrieve this perspective we must re-found our analysis on the movement of the working class itself. The critique of social democracy and stalinism cannot be developed in terms of consciousness alone but must begin form the standpoint of working class needs. Our task is not to apportion blame but to re-found marxism on the basis of an analysis of class composition and class formation within the political economy of the epoch as a whole. Failing to do this, the left has been unable to free itself from the inherited ideology of working class passivity. Losing contact with the political economy of the working class, the left is reduced to making assertion about consciousness, which assertions must degenerate into sectarianism.

It is unfortunate that many of those who have stressed the reality of proletarian self-activity have done so in a rather crude fashion. This is true of certain strands of autonomism. Thus Cleaver, for example, sometimes - but not always - presents the struggle of the working class as a process without end (Harry Cleaver, Reading Capital Politically, Harvester, 1979) If, however, the working class can continue to transform the social forms of capital accumulation indefinitely, the struggle of the working class has no tendency towards communism. Failing to analyse the fate of the law of value under the impact of the self-formation of the proletariat, the critique of "leninism" and "leninism" itself become polar opposites which eternally reproduce each other.

The crucial thing is to recognise the problem. Included in this is the unbridgeable gap between the project outlined in What Is To Be Done? and the principle of proletarian self-emancipation which formed the bedrock of the International Working Men's Association. We must return to Marx. More importantly, however, we must return to the developing political economy of the working class. Crucially, we must examine the conditions which are the outcome of working class struggle but against which the working class is forced to struggle again, if we are to understand the full complexity and difficulty of the situation. To begin to characterise this complexity we can use the words of William Morris, bearing in mind the different context in which they were written and discounting their gender specificity, reflecting on " ... **how men fight and lose the battle and the thing that they fought for comes about In spite of their defeat, and when it comes about turns out not to be what they meant, and other men have to fight for what they meant under another name**" (A Dream of John Ball). But this, it should be stressed, can only be our starting point.

David Gorman

From Justice - Organ of Social Democracy, no 1 vol 1, 19.1.1884

Here is what an American Socialist, writing in the Chicago Radical Review, has to say on the merits of the diverse means by which various persons and organisations propose to cure the evils of society:- "All those who seek to improve existing social conditions under the name of Trade Unionists, knights of labour, self-styled individualists, Henry George "burden shifters," free- soilers, anti-monopolists, etc., are in the same dilemma as the committee who were appointed in one of our western States to devise ways and means to erect a new jail. After a careful deliberation they passed three resolves:- 1st, That we erect a new jail, 2nd, That the new jail be built out of the material of the old one, 3rd, That the old jail stand until the new one is built. Finding upon reflection that this was impossible to accomplish they passed a fourth - Resolved, that we unanimously recommend that the old jail be whitewashed.

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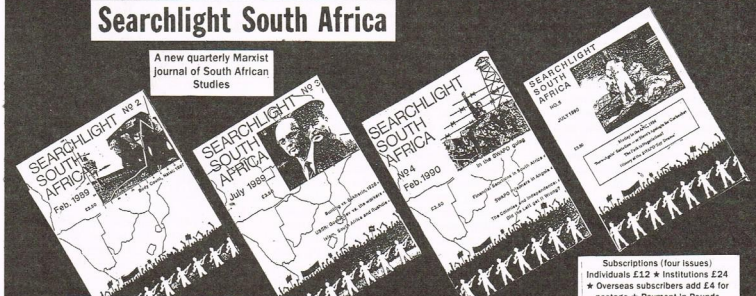

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Anton Pannekoek and the Theory of the Transition

Pantheon building is poor historical materialism and leads to an impoverished history and yet it has been the essence of the bolshevik tradition's historiography. Linked to this is a scholasticim that refers to the writings of the pantheon to resolve all questions and disputes rather in the manner that fundamentalist christians refer to the Old Testament. It severely reduces the range of marxist analysis of historical events, even of the events around which the pantheon has been built. While Stalin and Trotsky are of course mutually exclusive the pantheon is otherwise common to all wings of the tradition and apart from Luxemburg (whose actual views are ignored) is restricted to the Bolshevik revolution. This freezes understanding of the dynamics of capitalist society to the point of view of men from an economically backward country, who despite extensive exiles played little or no part in the workers movement in advanced capitalism but concentrated on building an effective revolutionary organisation in a country numerically dominated by the peasantry with an antiquated and autocratic regime.

Lenin's blanket condemnation of the Second International and all its works has led to a neglect of its history and its theorists. And yet it is the organisation that grew with modern capitalism and the working class itself and in so many ways moulded the politics of the modern world. It is also the organisation that nurtured the members of the bolshevik pantheon and the one from which they never really escaped. They upended its outlook and methods but in the end remained locked in its categories and world view. The world we live in today is the world created by the practices of the Second International and its interaction with the ruling class and capitalist state.

Anton Pannekoek is one of the most important revolutionaries missing from the bolshevik tradition's pantheon (there were many others). The reason for this should be obvious. Pannekoek was the Karl Horner of Left-wing Communism, an Infantile Disorder and a leading theorist of western European communism and in particular for the Communist Workers Party of Germany (KAPD) whose separate organisation from the German Communist Party and tactics generally were the chief cause of Lenin writing against the "infantile disorder".

There was nothing infantile about European left communism. Pannekoek and his friend and collaborator Herman Gorter were both veterans of the bitter Dutch and German workers struggles that were characteristic of the international cycles of struggle beginning at the turn of the century and culminating with the "breaking of the weakest link" in 1917. Their support for striking workers against their unions and the party hierarchy split Dutch Social-democracy in 1909. Pannekoek was one of the most innovatory theorists of the Second International, overturning many accepted theoretical categories, discounting others, giving new content to still more. He was widely, internationally, published and well known across the western world. He was virtually the only leading theorist to analyse, accept and champion the changing activity of the changing European working class.

Social-Democracy

The dominating influence on the Second International was its German section, the SPD. It is difficult now to imagine the size and range of this mighty institution. It is the closest we have ever come to the working class organised as the party (even if not quite as Marx had envisaged). On the other hand its structure, activity and theory were as much shaped by Bismarck and his autocratic state socialism as by marxist theory or autonomous working class activity. Bismarck's Exceptional Law had effectively banned revolutionary activity during the state-led growth of German industrial capital while at the same time allowing electoral activity and permitting social-democrats to sit in the structurally gerrymandered parliament, thus "opening up the possibility that it could act as the sole legal opposition" (Bricianer). Robert Michels pointed out in his sociological study of bureaucratisation and the party in the 1910s , that "the struggle carried on by socialists against the parties of the dominant classes is no longer one of principle, but simply one of competition". At the same time the SPD was growing into a state within the state in which it was possible to live from cradle to grave. It (or the unions which were part of it) organised strike- pay, unemployment benefit, sick pay, pensions, death grants, legal aid, nurseries, clinics, sports facilities and clubs, choirs, schools, women's and youth organisations, holiday facilities and much more. It published daily and weekly, national and local newspapers. And despite the growth of both openly revisionist and radical wings nobody thought to leave or split it until near the end of the first world war.

The almost schizophrenic nature of the SPD is best illustrated by its Erfurt Programme (adopted in 1891) which fell clearly and neatly into two parts. The first part was written by Kautsky and covered the final aims and "marxist" principles, the second by Bernstein and outlined immediate tactics and desired reforms. When Engels died Bernstein began a series of articles in the party paper that later became the bible of revisionism (published later in English as Evolutionary Socialism). Nobody payed much attention at first and it was the Englishman Belfort Bax (on whom see the last issue of Radical Chains) who first reacted in print and ignited the well known debate which degenerated into the "breakdown controversy". By 1906 the sociologist Weber was able to say of the SPD congress; "these gentlemen no longer frighten anyone".

The SPD had resolutely refused to recognise its illegality during the period of the Exceptional Law but behaved completely legally in every other respect. It continued in the same vein when the law was repealed. But by the turn of the century the steady growth of the German economy was beginning to be disrupted by international competition. This put the same sort of strains on class relations as had the vicious cyclical swings of early capitalism. Unskilled and unorganised workers were beginning to outflank the staid and defensive skilled craftsmen who formed the bulk of social-democracy, both party and trade unions (and even they were reacting to the new

uncertainties). International competition led to technical innovation and the concomitant changes in the labour process and class composition were creating a more militant and innovative working class that neither the state nor social democracy could contain.

Origins of a Revolutionary Theorist

Pannekoek had begun studying marxism in 1898 and rapidly became dissatisfied with the positivistic slant of orthodox marxian economics. In 1900 he commenced a study of the philosophical roots and discovered the work of Joseph Dietzgen, the man Marx hailed as "our philosopher". In Dietzgen's work, Pannekoek found "a clear, systematic elaboration of a theory of knowledge and an analysis of the nature of concepts and abstractions ... I was able to completely clarify my conception of the underlying relationship between Marxism and epistemology and develop it into a unified whole". His first thoughts on the party were contained in a letter to an early Dutch marxist, Frank van der Goes. He felt that the growth of class consciousness could be accelerated by an organised socialist movement, education and propaganda, channelling of activity, and waging of intense ideological struggles. Propaganda should be an "amplification and explanation" of what workers already see and perceive rather than something directed at them. The objective should be to develop a "social ideal" or "mental picture" of the subsequent, more highly developed social system, "since everything which man does must first exist as a more or less adequate conscious ideal". Pannekoek ruled out a sharp distinction between evolution and revolution, both being part of change by human action, only the external appearance being different. The critical link between economics and revolution was not crisis but the understanding and activity of the revolutionary class brought about by material conditions (this in reference to the continuing "breakdown controversy" started by Bernstein).

In 1901, in his first major work as a marxist, De Filosofie van Kant en het Marxisme, Pannekoek pointed out that Marx had left open the question of the exact content of consciousness and what its real relation to the material world was, and that this was the main reason for erroneous understandings of marxism. His 'Introduction' to the 1902 reprint of Dietzgen's The Positive Outcome of Philosophy, announced the key note for Pannekoek's entire development. As Gerber paraphrases it, echoing Marx's comment on man as architect not bee; "the material world and the world of consciousness reciprocally condition each other. Without changing the structure of society one could not change the structure of consciousness. But the converse also remains true; a revolutionary upheaval in the economic and social structure is impossible without a revolution of the society's forms of consciousness. Proletarian revolution must develop simultaneously in both the economic and the 'spiritual' spheres ... Men must therefore think change before they can accomplish change" (Gerber 1978). For Pannekoek, Dietzgen answers the question that Marx left open. He "raised philosophy to the position of a natural science, the same as Marx did with history". In his 'Introduction' Pannekoek traces the history of philosophy, tying it to material conditions. Finally, Dietzgen created the basis for a dialectical and materialistic understanding and "completes the work of Kant, just as Marx completed the work of Adam Smith". Philosophy remained important for the workers revolution, "as never since the first advent of production of commodities has there ever been such a fundamental revolution ... the new understanding gains ground step by step, waging a relentless battle against the traditional ideas to which the ruling class are clinging, this struggle is the mental companion of the social struggle"'(compare this with Pannekoek's theory for a later stage when the working class had burst the confines of capitalist society and he placed the key theoretical struggle within the working class movement. See below).

Pannekoek was one of the few professional scientists to join the Second International (he was an astronomer/astro-physicist) and in 1904 began to clarify the relationship between science and marxism. "Thinkers can only work with the pre-existing conceptual materials of their era. The form in which new problems are posed often creates a consciousness of the insufficiency of the traditional views and new 'truths' are then put forward as an improvement of the traditional views" (Klassenwissenschaft und Philosophie). Technology relied on science which was part of the productive apparatus. Science represented its particular epoch; "a new ruling class is able to understand through its particular class situation the new 'truths' that serve its interests. These new 'truths' then become a powerful weapon in the struggle against the rulers of the declining order, who have neither interest in nor understanding of, the new doctrines and perceive them only as a threat ... So it is with the natural sciences that accompanied the rise of the bourgeoisie; so it is too with political economy, which is, the science of the proletariat ... a certain form of science can become an object and a weapon of class struggle ... a class has an interest only in the investigation and diffusion of those truths that directly advance its own living conditions". Historical materialism was the "class science of the proletariat", and Marx and Engels were representatives of that rising class, the "first class scientists of the new class". The proletariat "has every interest in discovering the inner laws of society and the sources of their endless torment. Because the working class is the only class which has nothing to conceal, and, therefore, can look at social phenomena in an unbiased manner, it alone is in a position to discover the truth about society".

Pannekoek interrupted his university career as an astronomer in 1906 when he was invited to teach political economy at the SPD party school in Berlin. He described the purpose of the school as follows; "We must clearly understand the nature of capitalism, not just to incite the workers to fight it but also to discover the best methods of combat. Where this understanding is lacking, tactics are governed by established traditions or

Joseph Dietzgen

Joseph Dietzgen (1828-1886) was a tanner and self-taught philosopher from Germany. He participated in the events of 1848 and was forced to flee to the United States. Thereafter he recrossed the Atlantic several times and travelled widely in America, often on foot. He was active in the workers' movement on both sides of the Atlantic. He also worked in Russia for several years. Toward the end of his life he took over the editorship of several anarchist newspapers in Chicago in the aftermath of the Haymarket demonstration and the mass arrests that followed. He corresponded with Marx, who personally introduced him at a meeting of the International and visited him during a journey to Germany. His first and best book is The Nature of Human Brainwork which presents an inductive theory of knowledge and bypassed Hume's dilemma by simply accepting that all theories are relative and contingent. As thoughts and theories derived from brainwork, a labour process, they were as material as physical objects. Pannekoek described Dietzgen's theory of knowledge as; "primarily materialistic ... it starts from concrete, materialist being. Not that it regards mere physical matter as its basis; it is rather opposed to crude bourgeois materialism, and matter to it means everything that exists and furnishes material for thought, including thoughts and imaginations. Its foundation is the unity of all concrete being". Engels credited Dietzgen with the independent discovery of dialectical materialism but in Dietzgen's dialectics there were no absolute opposites or contradictions but a mental separation of the particular from the general, giving rise to contradictory categories, together with generalisation from the particular. Like Pannekoek, Dietzgen has been considerably better known worldwide than he is now. In Britain Dietzgen's works provided the background to the working class educationalists such as Fred Casey (see Capital and Class 7) and Noah Ablett (see the last issue of Radical Chains) working in the Plebs League and Labour College movement.

superficial empiricism. When one merely takes account of the present, the immediate, appearances inevitably prove deceptive and coherence upon solid foundations is neglected." This sort of thinking upset Kautsky considerably. However, together with Rudolph Hilferding, Pannekoek was prevented from teaching at the school by the Prussian authorities on pain of deportation. Instead, he became a salaried journalist/propagandist and travelling lecturer for the party. Luxemburg took over Pannekoek's post, continuing the unsettling of Kautsky.

Mass Action and the Departure from Orthodoxy

It is possible that Pannekoek was prompted to leave academe by the 1905 Russian revolution. The reception of these events in Europe then was different to our perception of them today. Mass strikes had taken place all over Europe, and continued to take place regularly until the outbreak of war, and all discussion of the Russian events took place in the context of a debate on "mass action" and the "mass strike". The revolution as such was not even discussed at the meeting of the International. In Germany the debate signified the hardening of a division in the party no longer between revisionists and the rest but between radicals and the rest. Orthodoxy, verbally anti-revisionist but dedicated to organisation, discipline and "practical" activity, ruled at the centre but locally and particularly in the industrial regions a more radical politics was gaining ground.

From 1907 to 1909 Germany suffered a general economic crisis, and in 1908 a campaign was launched for universal suffrage in Prussia. Political strikes were organised but to begin with at least, social-democratic discipline was maintained. Pannekoek was beginning to have doubts about the utility of traditional working class organisations and parliamentarism. In a factional document in the Dutch Social-democratic Party he questioned the standard strategy of revolutionary parliamentarism for subjective effects on the basis that "Dietzgen teaches us not to doubt the truth but to have doubts about the absolute validity of a truth". "This truth is not absolute" he said of parliamentarism "it has its limitations. The labour movement has adapted itself to the strategy of parliamentarism more than is really necessary and it is impossible to attain our goals through these methods alone. A revolutionary struggle with more powerful mediums is necessary".

The general debate on "Massenaktion" and the "Massenstreik", followed by the highly disciplined but unsuccessful Prussian suffrage campaign seems to have prompted Pannekoek to reconsider the whole social-democratic project during 1909 (this was also the year of the split in the Dutch party). He published Social Democratic Non-commissioned Officers in the Bremen Burgerzeitung. In this article he went beyond the parameters of the mass strike debate to call into question the whole basis of the existing organisation because there was an "irreconcilable opposition between revolution and authority, between subversion and order". In the suffrage campaign, "the social-democratic non- commissioned officers do what the Prussian non-commissioned officers cannot do, they quiet the unruly masses, accustom them to discipline, and divert them from revolution". The "corruption of the movement" was "the main hope of the bourgeoisie".

In another attack on orthodoxy in 1909, Massenaktion und Revolution, Pannekoek argued that the subjugation of the working class was not entirely due to economics and force but also to the "spiritual superiority of the ruling minority" which controlled schools, churches, press and "presides over all spiritual development, all science". The main cause of the weakness of the proletariat" was the "spiritual dependence of the proletariat on the bourgeoisie". Invoking "organisational spirit" as a way of breaking this dependence, Pannekoek insisted, against Kautsky's earlier accusation of mysticism, that this was "not something abstract, put forward in place of the 'real concrete organisation' of the existing organisational forms, but it is in fact something just as real and concrete as these forms. It binds individuals just as firmly together as any principles and statutes could ever do so that even if the external bond of principles and statutes were removed these individuals would no longer be loose atoms competing against each other."

Pannekoek's most important development of his theory of geist (collective consciousness) also came in 1909 in Tactical Differences Within the Labour Movement (see box for extract). In this long and closely argued work he discusses the material and social origins, mediated through human thought, of revisionism, giving rise to reformism and anarchism (the new and growing anarcho-syndicalism) giving rise to purist revolutionism. Both had their roots in historically superseded middle class attitudes dating from the time of the bourgeois revolution and entered the working class movement by a variety of routes; the parliamentary deputies and trade union bureaucrats anxious for their jobs, the new proletariat forming in small manufacture as capitalism developed in country regions and the lower middle class anxious for its position in a world increasingly dominated by large capital. To adopt one of these positions to the exclusion of the other was an ideological error. But the dominant proletariat of the large factories and heavily industrialised regions were capable of seeing them both as necessary to development and as stages of that development due to their dialectical and materialist outlook. Nonetheless one or other would always predominate in the movement depending on the development of capitalism; in times of growth reforms would be worked for, when crisis hit revolutionism would come to the fore. Pannekoek defined reforms as positions of power for the class rather than as factors of power, the strength gained in fighting for and winning reform being more important than the reform itself. There was no linear path through reform to socialism as reforms, such as the limitation of working hours, would be of no practical use in post-capitalist society where workers ran production. Finally he noted that because socialism as an ideology rather than as a science could be adopted by virtually anybody and given content derived from their own experience, it was gaining ground amongst the middle classes of the colonised countries as a response to the bankruptcy of liberal ideology. Lenin described all this as "deductions whose complete correctness cannot be denied" even though the geist theory on which it was based completely contradicted his own theory of consciousness as represented in, for instance, Materialism and Empirio-criticism.

Organic Connection

In April 1910 Pannekoek settled in Bremen. He had first visited the town in 1905 to support local radicals in a debate over education. This debate revolved around the suggestion for joint work with the Liberals (a parliamentary alliance had been proposed by the SPD deputies in 1903). The radicals defeated this suggestion, a victory that heralded their coming domination of the area. This prompted Ebert, until then leader in Bremen (later known locally as "the Stalin of Social-democracy") to leave for Berlin, where he effectively took over the leadership of the national party from August Bebel in 1912. During Pannekoek's brief period at the Berlin party school he had remet one of the Bremen radicals, Heinrich Schulz, and from then on his articles were regularly published in the local party newspaper, the Burgerzeitung. By this time the radicals controlled not only the newspaper, but the newly formed local secretariat, party education and recruitment as well. Bremen as a town was a model of what was happening all over industrial Germany. Once a commercial town of the Hanseatic League it had been heavily industrialised in the period from 1890, the working population growing from 8,463 to 33,825 in 1907 becoming a mass workers town. By that time 66% of the workforce worked in factories of more than 200 employees and 57% of the workforce had been born elsewhere.

Factional struggle had broken out in the SPD in the context of street fighting during the renewed suffrage campaign in Prussia. Despite violent brawling and pitched battles the SPD leadership re-exerted its control and discipline. The organisation was by all accounts impressive. On one occasion the venue for a demonstration in Berlin was changed at the last moment to evade the police and enabling 100,000 people to go on a "suffrage stroll". Kautsky published his defence of orthodoxy and the primacy of party discipline The Road to Power in this context, but Luxemburg was at last allowed to criticise the tactics of the party via a critique of Kautsky. Faith in the orthodox tactic of "revolutionary parliamentarism" was beginning to break down as the party apparatus and its deputies became ever more involved with "practical matters". In Die Organisation im Kampfe Pannekoek began to

see the question of organisation in a new way due to "new experiences in the class struggle" - mass actions, exemplified by the 1905 revolution. It was no longer a problem of leadership for conscious revolution but rather of direct organisation for revolution by the class itself; "It is not merely a question of the labouring masses simply acquiring consciousness of this task, but of them grasping it firmly and decisively. The movement will never be able to take its proper course as long as they sit around waiting for their leaders to give the word. An acceleration of our struggle is possible only when the masses themselves seize the initiative, leading and pushing their organisations forward". At this stage however, Pannekoek in common with the rest of social democracy had not seen the importance of the 1905 soviets or workers councils.

From: Tactical Differences Within the Labour Movement (1909, reprinted in Bricianer)

The proletariat have their own dialectical idea of necessary social development, whose stages can be grasped only in terms of antagonistic notions - for example, revolution and evolution, theory and practice, final objective and movement. Especially proletarian is the idea that all apparently opposed situations are simply movements in a major process of development. The proletariat does not reason along logical either/or lines - for example, either revolution or evolution - but sees in two such elements simply two aspects of the same development ... The middle class, non-dialectical way of thinking takes account only of the accidental, which for the most part is merely a passing phenomenon, and so it swings from one extreme to the other. It notices contradictions only in the form of "on the one hand ... on the other hand," but without seeing in them the driving force of development; in its view, a development is to be seen as a slow evolution which, while no doubt ends by effecting some change, leaves the essential quality intact.

This first opposition is closely connected with the second. While the proletarian outlook is materialist, the middle class outlook is ideological; dialectic and materialism go hand in hand, as do ideology and non-dialectic. For the proletariat, it is material forces that govern the world, forces outside the scope of the individual; for the middle class, development depend on the creative force of the human mind. The material reality is dialectical; that is, it can be truly grasped only as a unit made up of opposed ideas. By contrast, in the notions and ideas which, according to the middle class way of thinking, constitute the driving force of development, the terms of the contradiction mutually exclude one another as notions; for example, evolution and revolution, liberty and organisation. We are concerned in the middle class context with abstract ideas, with incompatible essences, no account being taken of the underlying material reality; either revolution or evolution, without the possibility of a third term. So, when revolution is regarded as the only true principle, minor reforms are automatically declared anathema; or, vice versa, the minor reforms are alone considered valid. Socialism is the ideology of the modern proletariat. Ideology signifies a system of ideas, conceptions and plans, a spiritual expression of the conditions of material life and of class interests. But these spiritual expressions do not exactly correspond to the reality of their context. The ideas and conceptions are expressed in an abstract manner in which the concrete reality whence the ideology has been derived does not always appear, or appears with a variety of different aspects. So the idea of freedom, as a political watchword, derives from middle class interest in free enterprise and free competition; but each class that uses it gives the idea a meaning of its own...

... Every class can shape its ideas only on the elements of reality it knows directly; it does not understand, and therefore ignores, whatever is foreign to its own experience. So it is that it projects upon the ideas and ideals it has adopted experiences and desires associated with its particular situation...

... The ideas and conceptions of the proletariat have as their basis a science of society that enables them to foresee the consequences of their actions and the reactions of the other classes. Up to the present, ideologies, lacking awareness of concrete reality, were simply an extravagant reflection of the economic situation, whereas socialism constitutes a clear scientific theory; Ideology and science are both abstract, general expressions of concrete reality; but the basic difference between them is that an ideology constitutes an unconscious generalisation, one in which awareness of the corresponding concrete reality is lost, whereas science is a conscious generalisation whose conclusions make it possible to discern precisely the concrete reality from which they have been drawn. Hence, therefore, ideology is above all a matter of sentiment, while science is a matter of intellection.

... The role of theory in the workers' movement is to deflect the will from direct, instinctive, powerful impulses, and to render it responsive to conscious and rational knowledge. Theoretical knowledge enables the worker to escape from the influence of immediate and limited interests, to the great benefit of the general class interest of the proletariat; it enables him to bring his activity into line with the long-term interest of socialism.... It is the implementation of theory, the scientific basis of socialism, that will contribute most effectively to both securing for the movement a tranquil and sure course, and to the transformation of unconscious instinct into conscious human action.

In the autumn of 1910 Pannekoek's doubts about the efficacy of social-democratic organisation for the self-liberation of the working class seemed vindicated. A lockout in the Hamburg docks prompted a walkout in Bremen despite every effort by the trade union leadership to prevent it. For several years wages and conditions had been deteriorating, the employers response to the increasing international competition, especially in shipbuilding. No real support was forthcoming from the leadership. For three months they attempted to force a return to work and a meeting called to sell this to the membership was broken up by workers. Despite this a return to work was enforced. This left a legacy of discontent among the workers but forged strong links between them and the Bremen radicals who had given their full support. In an attempt to defend their action the union leadership claimed that the masses were "capricious, unreliable and incapable of making important decisions". Pannekoek responded that a split between the leaders and the masses was an "inevitable and necessary" step in revolutionary development.

It was increasingly evident to some that both war and revolution were approaching. The International had adopted a hard line resolution against war preparations from Lenin and Luxemburg in 1907 and after the Agadir incident in 1911 called on the SPD to start practical anti-war agitation. The SPD refused on the grounds that this would distract people from domestic issues in the forthcoming elections(!).

Debating Kautsky

Kautsky continued his defense of the orthodox position in a series of articles in Die Neue Zeit, Mass Action and in 1912 Pannekoek took over the continuing polemic with him from Luxemburg. This is the controversy cited by Lenin in State and Revolution. Pannekoek forced from Kautsky explicit statements of his policy of "actionless waiting". Pannekoek now saw revolutionary mass action as a continuous and expanding series of actions ranging from ordinary street demonstrations through to general strike. The rationale was not to be the attainment of the objective aims but the subjective effect, building "organisational spirit" and effecting "the whole transformation of the proletarian mentality". He also stressed the necessity of the "autonomy" of mass action rather than it being turned on and off like a tap by the party functionaries; "when we speak of mass actions and their necessity, we mean by this an extra-parliamentary political intervention of organised workers, the latter acting at the political level instead of leaving this completely to their delegates". Lenin's marginal notes here state "neverno" - not true. But Pannekoek was working from the concrete conditions of the time: "Imperialism and mass action are new phenomena ... ", and a genuinely revolutionary standpoint "the social revolution involves the gradual dissolution of all the power instruments of the ruling class, particularly the state, while simultaneously building up proletarian power to its fullness". This seems to have been his

first overt thinking on the transition period, an area totally neglected by theorists of the Second International.

Pannekoek was always aware of the importance of the tactics developed by the working class in struggle and the necessity of incorporating anything new into his theory of development towards revolution. The official party seemed less and less willing or able to support the workers' struggle. 1913 saw more militant activity in the docks. Again it spread from Hamburg. This time the union leadership refused to recognise the action at all. Shop stewards' committees were formed (a new development) and 9,000 walked out. Without strike pay the workers were eventually forced back to work. The enforced settlement blacklisted several thousands. On this occasion the radicals attempted to mediate in conjunction with the union leadership. A consciously revolutionary group separated themselves and coalesced around Pannekoek. This would be the nucleus of the ISD (see below). In the Bremen party paper, Pannekoek again drew the lessons; "the wildcat strike with its violation of that discipline which has hitherto been the ideal of a developed trade union shows how impossible it is to maintain perfect trade union discipline against the intense oppression exerted by capital. Success of mass movements depends on their capacity for autonomous action ... but it is precisely these qualities, the primary condition of the struggle for freedom, that are repressed and annihilated by trade union discipline". Pannekoek was by now aware that this would lead the masses to "take different paths" and was able to face this with equanimity.

War and Revolution

At the outbreak of war in 1914 Pannekoek was expelled from Bremen back to Holland. The SPD Reichstag deputies, having already voted for a massive arms budget in 1913 on the basis that it would be funded from a property tax, voted for war credits. In 1915 the Dutch Tribunists including Pannekoek were instrumental in setting up the Zimmerwald conference. Pannekoek and Henriette Roland-Holst were nominated to edit Vorbote, the conference journal.

In a 1916 article in Vorbote, Der Imperialismus und die Aufgaben des Proletariats, Pannekoek gave his explanation of the collapse of German social-democracy. It was not a question of purely crude material (physical) force but rather "a general inability to struggle, a lack of will for class struggle". A "long drawn out process of spiritual renewal" would be necessary to form a new International. Another article in Vorbote points out "the wartime experience gained during state control over industry and commerce has developed, in a large part of the bourgeoisie, the idea of state 'socialism' ... this state socialism can only aggravate the proletarian condition and strengthen oppression. Nationalisation of enterprises is not socialism; socialism is the force of the proletariat".

In December of 1916 the Bremen group, by then calling itself the International Socialists (ISD), broke all connections with the two wings of social-democracy that were later to become the SPD-M and the USPD (see below). Its organ, Arbeiterpolitik, was open to outsiders such Radek, Zinoviev and Pannekoek. Describing its political line, it stated; "one must choose the tactics of mass action unfettered by leaders, or one must keep the leadership structure, as the Spartacus League is doing, and thereby renounce a proletarian policy". Similarly in Holland the group around Gorter and Roland-Holst split from the Tribunists. In August 1917 Pannekoek noted that in Russia "the revolutionary masses are forming a powerful organisation. As in 1905, the delegates of factories and revolutionary regiments are building in the form of workers' and soldiers councils, a peoples representation which speaks out vigorously against bourgeois government and exploiters". He noted that "some quasi-marxists" maintained that Russia was not ripe for socialism, because of its huge peasantry and limited capitalist development, failing to recognise that "socialism can only result from a long process in which the maturity of a society is measured by the proletariat's ability to struggle for power". In October, unlike Luxemburg, he approved of the dissolution of the Russian Constituent Assembly by the Bolsheviks; "What we have been hoping for has just been realised".

Common knowledge of the German revolution is often limited to the "Spartacist" uprising, the failure of which saw the murder of Luxemburg and Liebknecht. But the revolution neither started nor ended there.

Despite the action of the SPD deputies in voting for war credits in 1914 the SPD did not actually split until 1917 when the anti-war opposition was expelled. This was despite the attendance of Luxemburg and Kautsky at the Zimmerwald conference. Lenin had been unable to persuade Luxemburg to split Social-democracy at that stage. When they were excluded Luxemburg's group, the Spartakusbund, met with Kautsky's group, also expelled, and against the wishes of both leaders, formed the United SPD (USPD). With the example of Russia before them the ISD condemned this as a return to the "old leader politics".

As the German economy and war effort began to collapse, strikes broke out in the munitions industry. The USPD reaction was to mediate and they were soon brought to a halt. Luxemburg was of the opinion that the German proletariat was not ready for revolution. As the German regime itself collapsed Ludendorff brought the SPD into the government and sued for peace. As in Russia, the soldiers had already made this decision for themselves. So had the naval ratings, who, sensing that the admirals were planning a last ditch battle against the Entente powers, first seized their ships and barracks and then spread across the country encouraging the workers to set up their own councils.

The SPD was still strong enough in the working class to dominate these councils while remaining in government thus straddling a very peculiar dual power situation. Under the leadership of Noske and Ebert the SPD performance was one of the coolest counter-revolutionary of all time. Within ten days they had arranged the Stinnes-Legien agreement: the trade unions and councils were consolidated in the factories with a provision for a "co-operative commonwealth" of workers and employers (!). The National Congress of Councils consented to early elections to a National Assembly. At this point the ISD, newly renamed the International Communists (IKD), declared these councils not to be revolutionary organs and one region, East Saxony, led by Otto Rühle, left the councils completely. Meanwhile the SPD government, biding its time, began to build the Freikorps - proto-fascist volunteer militias.

By christmas of 1918 the USPD has fallen apart into its constituent factions and Karl Radek, newly returned from Moscow, urged unification between the Spartacists and the IKD. At the subsequent founding conference of the German Communist Party (KPD) Luxemburg and the rest of the leadership of the Spartacists found themselves isolated and defeated on the questions of hierarchical organisation, restarting parliamentary activity and only avoided losing on the question of leaving the trade unions by moving the establishment of a special commission.

Within days, in January 1919, under provocation, Berlin KPD called for massive street demonstrations. This escalated rapidly into a general uprising. In Bremen the predominantly ex-IKD KPD and the workers' councils seized power. Similar events took place all over Germany. But in Berlin the ex-Spartacist leadership failed to lead and the workers were defeated. For Luxemburg this was further proof that the German workers were not ready for revolution; her comments were later paraphrased as "the leaders were in conference, in conference, in conference. No, these masses were not ready for the seizure of power, or their initiative would have discovered others to stand at their head, and their first revolutionary act would have been to compel the leaders to stop their interminable conferences in the Polizeipraesidium" (cited by Victor Serge in Year One of the Russian Revolution). The SPD government finally set the Freikorps to work. Revolutionary workers' councils were bloodily suppressed region by region. The Bremen workers republic held out for three weeks. Luxemburg and Liebknecht were killed "while trying to escape". The KPD was banned. The workers were not beaten however. A strike wave starting in the Ruhr mining region spread rapidly, with workers forming unions opposed to the old SPD-dominated trades unions. These looked to the experience of the American IWW or the older French syndicalist tradition. Anti-parliamentarism and support for the new workers' unions split the KPD. A programme written by Pannekoek along these lines and supported by the Bremen group was discussed throughout the party. In August Levi, who had taken over from Luxemburg as leader, was beaten in a debate on Pannekoek's paper at the KPD national conference. In October, Levi organised a secret and packed conference and contrived to expel all those who would not conform to a new platform of tactical principles. This included a return to parliamentary activity and the trade unions and support for the institutionalised factory councils. Half the delegates were expelled and eventually 80% of the membership left. The communist left were particularly taken aback as Gorter had just made the first translation of Lenin's State and Revolution which appeared to give Lenin's imprimatur to their tactics.

The workers' unions had formed into the General Workers' Union of Germany (AAUD) in February with statutes drawn up by the Bremen group. This revolutionary federation attained a membership high of 200,000 and saw itself as the embryo of revolutionary workers' councils. Now the extreme right took a hand. The Versailles treaty required the disbandment of the Freikorps. In response the Berlin Erhardt brigade launched a putsch which scared the SPD ministry from Berlin. The rump KPD stated that it would not lift a finger to protect the bourgeois government but the old trade union confederation immediately launched a general strike. In the Ruhr, by now a left communist stronghold, a red army formed with 80,000 workers under arms. The strike was total and brought the junta to its knees within days. The SPD government on its return to Berlin set the army on the Ruhr. The KPD declared itself a loyal opposition to the SPD government. After these experiences the left communists, who had so far refused to accept their exclusion from the KPD, reformed as the Communist Workers Party (KAPD) and agreed to send delegates to the second congress of the Third International in Moscow. In preparation Pannekoek wrote World Revolution and Communist Tactics which was published in various communist journals in Europe and Russia. It remains with its 'Afterword' and Gorter's Open Letter to Comrade Lenin the definitive statement of left communist analysis of the period.

The purge of the KPD by Levi had been against the advice of Radek, representing the International, and was the first move in the international movement against the anti-parliamentary current. The KAPD, unaware of any change in Lenin's thinking, expected to receive his support against Levi. The invitation issued by the Bolsheviks to the first congress of the International had specifically excluded social-democrats of the right and centre and specifically included revolutionary elements who had not necessarily belonged to the parliamentary parties of the Second International. Many of these groups had always taken anti-parliamentary positions "on principle" and others, noting the Bolsheviks' dispersal of the Constituent Assembly, had moved to the advocacy of a workers' council system in opposition to bourgeois parliaments as Lenin had done in his April Theses.Invited to the second congress were, amongst others, the centrist the USPD, whose members included both Kautsky and Bernstein.

Lenin did disapprove of the split in German communism, apparently hoping to bring the anti-parliamentarian fraction round to his new position, and the KAPD were not excluded from the congress, the International not having,in any case, any mechanism for exclusion at that time. However, the KAPD's representative Otto Rühle, who had travelled slowly through Russia on his way to the congress, returned immediately to Germany after having been shown Lenin's theses on conditions of membership of the International. In the light of what he had seen in Russia Rühle denounced the regime as "soviet in name only". The KAPD excluded him. Thus the KAPD was unrepresented at the congress and one of the most important documents of European communism was not discussed.

What was presented to the second Congress was Lenin's Left-wing Communism: an Infantile Disorder. It is this assessment of European left communism that sits on every socialists bookshelf while Pannekoek is absent. Thus it is not apparent that Left-wing Communism was a contribution to a debate that was of major importance in the world communist movement, for while Lenin admits that anti-parliamentarism was geographically widespread he does not make clear the size of the forces ranged against what was after all a change of policy nor does he admit the intellectual rigour of their arguments.

Geist and Communist Tactics

It should be stressed that WR&CT was not an anti-Lenin or anti-Bolshevik text but rather theoretical support for an appeal to Lenin and the International to intercede against opportunism in the German and international communist movement. It does this by presenting a theory of transition to a communist society. Although Pannekoek was later fiercely to attack both Lenin's philosophy and the Bolshevik's running of the "soviet" state, his target here is opportunism in western Europe and especially in Germany and Britain, because of its effects not only on the working class of Europe but also on Russia and the Bolsheviks themselves via the agency of the International.

While WR&CT is more than a council communist manifesto, workers' councils, soviets, were for Pannekoek the major

breakthrough of the current phase of development towards communism. In a slightly earlier article in the journal of the International's Vienna Centre, Kommunissmus, he described the workers' councils as: "the organ of the dictatorship of the proletariat in which the bourgeoisie cannot participate. The bourgeoisie will not be excluded in any artificial way from government, for instance, by losing its right to vote; quite simply, it will be barred from this organisation, which is based not on people but on labour ... All these councils remain in close,permanent contact with the masses, their membership constantly renewed and replaced. The formation of a new bureaucracy is thus prevented, and a monopoly in administrative skills is broken." (Bolshevismus und Demokratie 1919, Bricianer 1978 pp150-151)

Pannekoek was not much given to quoting chapter and verse from Marx, leaving that to his pedantically orthodox opponents such as Kautsky, although he paraphrased Marx without attribution frequently. He prefaced WR&CT, however, with an epigram from Marx's Introduction to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right (the same source as the cover quotation of Radical Chains); "Theory itself becomes a material force once it takes hold on the masses ... once it becomes radical." Thereafter Pannekoek's first two sentences reveal the foundation of his marxism; "The transformation of capitalism into communism is brought about by two forces, one material and the other mental, the latter having its origins in the former. The material development of the economy generates consciousness, and this activates the will to revolution." "Marxist science" which arises from "the general tendencies of capitalist development" provides the revolutionary movement with intellectual unity. On the one side this theory is gradually penetrating the working masses while on the other side their own experience begins to convince them that capitalism is no longer viable. But, "world war and rapid economic collapse now makes revolution objectively necessary before the masses have grasped communism intellectually; and this contradiction is at the root of the contradictions, hesitations and setbacks which make the revolution a long and painful process". The core of Pannekoek's argument is here; a communist revolution requires not only crude material objective circumstances but also an aware, consciously communist proletariat. Communist society requires communist individuals, united through conscious social organisation. For Pannekoek communist consciousness and organisation were inextricably and dialectically linked.

Pannekoek believed that "as far as western Europe is concerned, the development of revolution is mainly determined by two forces; the collapse of the capitalist economy and the example of Soviet Russia". In Russia, proletarian organisation (meaning the councils and what Pannekoek took to be the council state). had been relatively easy to attain. And so therefore had the revolution. Capitalism was relatively recent, the ruling classes were divided and the bourgeoisie proper were weak (plus the peasant revolution paralleled the proletarian revolution). In western Europe, on the other hand, capitalism was long-established, the ruling class was united (by and against the working class) and the bourgeoisie very strong. In addition the peasantry, by virtue of its economic position, was both small and anti-working class.

The long history of capitalism in western Europe explained the geist of the masses which in turn explained the course of events of the German revolution. "Because the proletarian masses were still completely governed by a bourgeois mentality, they restored the hegemony of the bourgeoisie with their own hands after it had collapsed". Economic collapse had in fact happened; not the indefinitely future, much theorised collapse of the "breakdown" controversy, but an actual complete social breakdown. It was possible to starve in Germany in 1920. "Economic collapse is the most powerful spur to revolution". But given the geist of the working masses, "the revolution in western Europe will be a slow, arduous process". Unlike Russia "power will not fall into the hands of the unprepared masses as a result of politico-economic collapse; the proletariat will have to fight hard for it, and will thus have attained a higher degree of maturity when it is won".

The example of Soviet Russia was important, the soviet state existed as a model; "the existence of a state in which working people are the rulers, where they have abolished capitalism and are engaged in building communism, could not but make a great impression upon the proletariat of the whole world" but this was not enough on its own, "the human mind is most strongly influenced by the effects of its own environment".

The environment of the German proletariat was one where capital was attempting to re-impose its rule after social collapse and the proletariat was engaged in a struggle against impoverishment. This was seen by Pannekoek as turning into a conscious revolutionary struggle but even that in itself did not automatically imply a conviction of communism.

Pannekoek did not believe that the bourgeoisie were capable of the social reconstruction that was necessary after the war. The bourgeoisie "or rather each individual bourgeois acted in a characteristically bourgeois manner; each of them thought only of making as much profit as possible" meanwhile, and as a consequence, there is "an increase in the frequency of strikes and a strong aversion to work among the proletariat". The bourgeoisie may have, individually, been incapable of reconstruction, but Pannekoek believed that they had learned more from the Russia revolution than the workers had; the bourgeoisie "decked itself out in red ... (and) immediatelybegan to rebuild the organs of its power", giving the only party that had any chance of disciplining the working class, the SPD, the chance to do so in the name of the bourgeois state. In effect, the reformist party had to defeat the revolutionary working class in order to bring about reform for the (supposed) benefit of that class.

But the bourgeoisie was only forced to rely on the SPD because of the strength of the working class. The revolution was not over yet. It evidently was going to be a long process. Under the circumstances the SPD could only rule with the consent of the working class. It was in effect a government of workers' bureaucracy. Pannekoek foresaw a chaotic series of these workers' bureaucracies, not necessarily parliamentary, as the class learnt that it itself had to take over the running of the economy. "Each new phase of the revolution brings a new layer of as yet unused leaders to the surface as the representatives of particular forms of organisation, and the overthrow of each of these in turn represents a higher stage in the proletariat's self-emancipation". It would take time; "it will take decades to overcome the infectious, paralysing influence of the bourgeois culture upon the proletariat in the old capitalist countries" because "revolution requires social reconstruction to be undertaken, difficult decisions to be made, the whole proletariat involved in creative action ... this is difficult and laborious, thus, so long as the working class thinks it sees an easier way out through others acting on its behalf ... the old habits of thought will make it hesitate and remain passive". Thus both the objective circumstances and subjective perceptions affect progress towards communism; "a revolution simultaneously involves a profound upheaval in the masses thinking, it creates the conditions for this, and is itself conditioned by it".

A revolution in the geist of the working class was obviously necessary. Where else did the power of the bourgeoisie lie? It could not reside in their numbers, the proletariat was far more numerous. Their control of the "whole of economic life" was important but fading (under the influence of even the existing councils and working class resistance). Their "control of the state, with all its means of coercion" was important but it had collapsed in 1918 and the workers had been unable to prevent its re-imposition. The workers were imbued with bourgeois ideology, they believed that the bourgeois interest constituted the general interest. This ideology was inculcated by the intelligentsia. The press, schools and the church all played their part; "priests, teachers, literati, journalists, artists, politicians - form a numerous class, the function of which is to foster, develop and propagate bourgeois culture ... the hegemony of capital is rooted in this group's intellectual leadership of the masses". These groups constantly reinforce bourgeois culture which "exists in the proletariat primarily as a traditional cast of thought". Tradition in itself was a problem, even the workers' own, inextricably linked with bourgeois society as it was; "the proletariat has in every period had to build up methods, forms and aids to struggle corresponding to the contemporary stage of capitalist development ... they have subsequently become fetters upon development which had to be broken", "every stage of the development of the class struggle must overcome the tradition of the previous stages".

With temporary victory turned to temporary defeat in the German revolution, Pannekoek could see that it was the workers' movement's own traditions that now embodied "the hegemony of bourgeois conceptions". The problems in part derived from the belief in leaders, and especially parliamentary leaders. During the long development of the working class these beliefs united the class; "social democracy originally sought to realise this class unity" but "the firm solidarity and discipline which developed in the often acute class struggle of half a century did not bury capitalism, for it represented the power of leadership and organisation over the masses". This power took the concrete form of "reverence for abstract slogans like 'democracy' ... old habits of thought and programme points, such as the realisation of socialism through parliamentary leaders and a socialist government ... the lack of proletarian self-confidence ... lack of faith in their own power; but above all in their trust in the party, in the organisation and in the leaders who for decades had incarnated their struggles, their revolutionary goals, their idealism". The leaders and the parties, "these enormous machines painstakingly created by the masses themselves ... now crushed all the revolutionary tendencies once more flaring up in the masses".

Dependency on the party was the problem. Not this party or that, but all parties; "a revolution can no more be made by a big party or a coalition of parties than by a small radical party. It breaks out spontaneously among the masses; action instigated by a party can sometimes trigger it off (a rare occurrence), but the determining forces lie elsewhere, in the psychological forces deep in the unconscious of the masses and in the great events of world politics". "No 'resolute minority' can resolve the problems which can only be resolved by the action of the class as a whole". This was a direct criticism of the KPD and the International's representative in Germany, Radek, at that time looking for a rapprochement with the centrist mass party the USPD.

Opportunism Again

Precisely because there was a long process to go through in the west European revolution there was time for this sort of tactical difference to appear. Rapid revolutionary development clarified issues but when a period of relative stagnation set in, "when the masses let anything pass without protest and revolutionary slogans no longer seem to catch the imagination" and especially when the communist party itself remains weak, different perspectives emerge. Pannekoek identifies two main tendencies; "one current seeks to revolutionise and clarify peoples minds by word and deed, and to this end tries to pose the new principles in the sharpest possible contrast to the old, received conceptions. The other current attempts to draw the masses still on the sidelines into practical activity, and therefore emphasises points of agreement rather than points of difference in an attempt to avoid as far as is possible anything that might deter them. The first strives for a clear, sharp separation among the masses, the second for unity; the first current may be termed the radical tendency, the second the opportunist one". Opportunism did not mean mere quietism however; "on the contrary, lack of clear, principled tactics is too often concealed in rabidly strident language; and indeed, in revolutionary situations, it is characteristic of opportunism to suddenly set all its hopes on the great revolutionary deed".

The real problem with opportunism was its concentration on immediate success, defined in an unprincipled way, at the expense of lasting achievement and the final victory. Pannekoek describes opportunist tactics in terms reminiscent of the behaviour of the SPD before the outbreak of the war; it sought alliances with other "progressive" groups, hoping to split the ruling class. But this merely confused the working class and any power gained was illusory as the bourgeoisie was "inwardly united" against the working class.

The reason for opportunism in the period of the Second International was historically explicable. But it was now making an appearance in the Third, Communist, International. With the expulsion of the anti-parliamentarian and anti-trade union left from the KPD, the KPD had approached, at the prompting of Radek and Lenin, the USPD. At the same time, under the stress of the crisis, radical workers still tied to the USPD were pushing it towards the Third International. The gap that had opened up between conscious communist organisations and the rest was closing again. The specifically communist nature of the International movement was being diluted, even abandoned, for the sake of membership numbers. Where many communists "tend to see only the increased strength accruing", Pannekoek saw "an increase in vulnerability". Firmness of principle was vital, for despite the Russian example, revolution was "an extremely complex and arduous process". New, radical, practice was essential but "opportunism in the Third International relies as far as possible upon the forms of struggle taken over from the Second International". It had to be combatted, "the revolution thus develops through the process of internal struggle. It is within the proletariat itself that the resistances develop which must be overcome; and in overcoming them, the proletariat overcomes its own limitations and matures towards communism."

For Pannekoek the party had a very specific role based on the fact that "the contradiction between the rapid economic collapse of capitalism and the immaturity of spirit represented by the power of bourgeois tradition over the proletariat - a contradiction which has not come about by accident, in that the proletariat cannot achieve the maturity of spirit required for hegemony and freedom within a flourishing capitalism - can only be resolved by the process of revolutionary development, in which spontaneous uprisings and seizures of power alternate with setbacks". Given that "a transition period of social and political chaos becomes inevitable", "it cannot be the task of the Communist Party to act the schoolmaster in this upheaval and make vain attempts to truss it in a strait-jacket of traditional forms; its task is to support the forces of the proletarian movement everywhere, to connect the spontaneous actions together, to give them a broad idea of how they are related to one another, and therefore prepare the unification of the disparate actions and thus put itself at the head of the movement as a whole". Although it was possible that the communist party would be forced to take power prematurely and then lose it again (as in Bremen), "the reconstruction of the economy, inordinately difficult as it will be, is not the main problem for the Communist party. When the proletarian masses develop their intellectual and moral potential to the full, they will resolve it themselves. The prime duty of the Communist Party is to arouse and foster this potential". It had also to "conduct a strong and principled fight" against any transitional form, any government of socialist party leaders or workers' bureaucracy. "The function of a revolutionary party lies in propagating clear understanding in advance, so that throughout the masses there will be elements who know what must be done and who are capable of judging the situation for themselves".

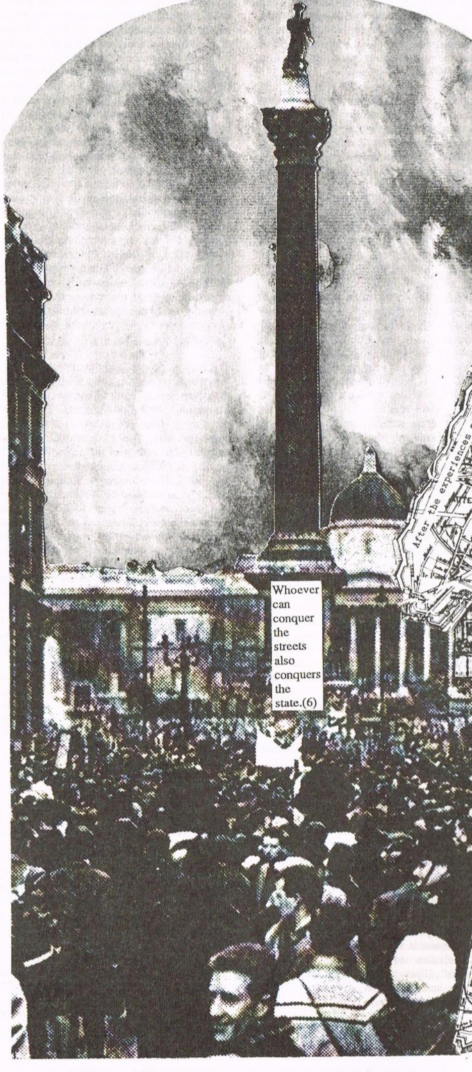
The party comes to lead the struggle because its propaganda, slogans, programme and directives are recognised by the masses as expressing their own aims. Pannekoek recognised that propaganda could be a thankless task during a period of mass inactivity but clarity of principle then would count powerfully in the inevitable periods of struggle. Opportunism watered down principles at such times. It makes no attempt to revolutionise ideas which is the prerequisite for gaining power. "If the most important element of the revolution consists in the masses taking their own affairs - the management of society and production - in hand themselves, then any form of organisation which does not permit control and direction by the masses themselves is counter-revolutionary and harmful". There is no place for ideas of taking over existing, traditional, organisations or even of working within them, "it was recently argued in Germany that communists must go into parliament to convince the workers that parliamentary struggle is useless - but you don't take a wrong turning to show other people that it is wrong, you go the right way from the outset!"

Exclusion of the Communists

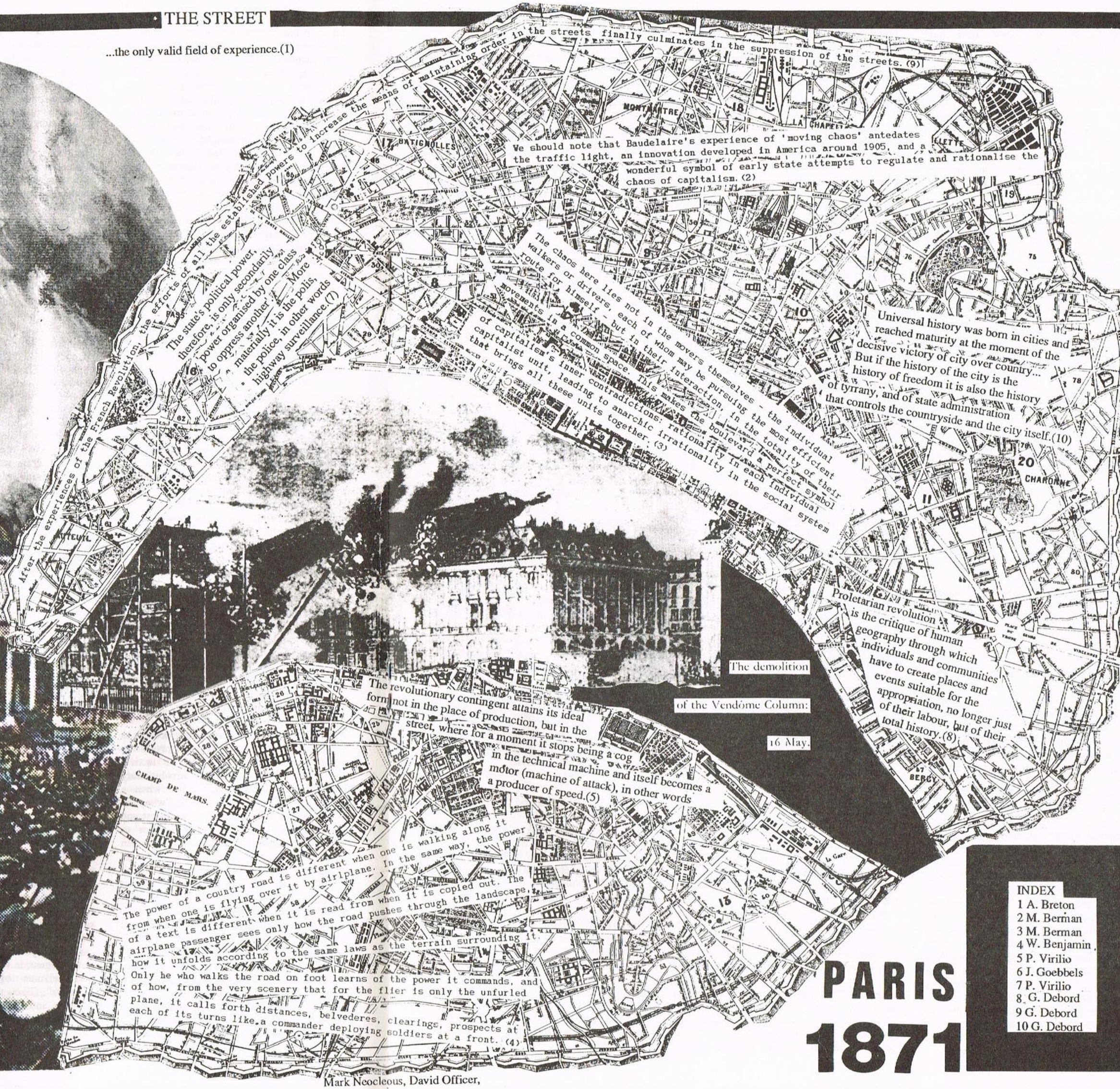
The KAPD was formally excluded from the Third International in September 1921 having already suffered its first serious split. By the time Hitler came to power it barely existed. Pannekoek returned to Holland to take up his astronomical career. He was still important enough to head the Nazis' death list when they invaded. He survived the war in hiding, using his time to write his last lengthy work, Workers' Councils.

Paul Levi, having himself split the KPD, opposed the splitting of the Italian Socialist Party by the International in January 1921 and resigned from the KPD Central Committee. The International pushed the KPD into the "March Action" in 1921. It was

...the only valid field of experience.(1)



Whoever can conquer the streets also conquers the state.(6)



After the experiences of the French Revolution, the efforts of all the established powers to increase the means of maintaining order in the streets finally culminates in the suppression of the streets.(9)

We should note that Baudelaire's experience of 'moving chaos' antedates the traffic light, an innovation developed in America around 1905, and a wonderful symbol of early state attempts to regulate and rationalise the chaos of capitalism.(2)

The state's political power, therefore, is only secondarily power organised by one class to oppress another. More materially it is the polis, the police, in other words highway surveillance.(7)

The chaos here lies not in the movers themselves - the individual walkers or drivers, each of whom may be pursuing the most efficient route for himself - but in their interaction, in the totality of their movements in a common space. This makes the boulevard a perfect symbol of capitalism's inner contradictions: rationality in each individual capitalist unit, leading to anarchic irrationality in the social system that brings all these units together.(3)

Universal history was born in cities and reached maturity at the moment of the decisive victory of city over country... But if the history of the city is the history of freedom it is also the history of tyrrany, and of state administration that controls the countryside and the city itself.(10)

The demolition of the Vendôme Column: 16 May.

Proletarian revolution is the critique of human geography through which individuals and communities have to create places and events suitable for the appropriation, no longer just of their labour, but of their total history.(8)

The revolutionary contingent attains its ideal form not in the place of production, but in the street, where for a moment it stops being a cog in the technical machine and itself becomes a motor (machine of attack), in other words a producer of speed.(5)

The power of a country road is different when one is walking along it from when one is flying over it by airlplane. In the same way, the power of a text is different when it is read from when it is copied out. The airplane passenger sees only how the road pushes through the landscape, how it unfolds according to the same laws as the terrain surrounding it. Only he who walks the road on foot learns of the power it commands, and of how, from the very scenery that for the flier is only the unfurled plane, it calls forth distances, belvederes, clearings, prospects at each of its turns like a commander deploying soldiers at a front.(4)

PARIS 1871

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Mark Neocleous, David Officer,

a shambles, unsupported by the workers and all but destroying the party. Levi was expelled, complaining that the Russians did not understand European conditions. The leadership that had replaced him, Brandler and Thalheimer, was purged after the next debacle, the German "October" of 1923, similarly disorganised by the International (now completely dominated by the Bolsheviks). Fischer and Maslow, who took over, witch-hunted the left from the party but were in their turn purged for the "western European" deviation at the prompting of Zinoviev in late 1925.

The Bolshevik-dominated International conformed completely to Pannekoek's characterisation of opportunism: lack of clear principled tactics, rabidly strident language, setting all its hopes on the "great revolutionary deed". This was not Stalin's Comintern, it was the International of the old Bolsheviks, of Lenin and Trotsky. The charitable might detect a hint of embarrassment in Lenin's attack on his old comrades. Nobody could accuse Trotsky of any such emotion after reading the despicable personal attack, riddled with inaccuracies and deliberate misrepresentation, that he made on Gorter at the Executive Committee of the International in November 1920.

Communist Revolution - A Historical Process and Project

History is difficult stuff. The validity of theory in history is even more difficult to judge. As Pannekoek (after Dietzgen) might have said, the truth of all theory is historically contingent. The temptation is to ask "what if?". What if Lenin had supported the KAPD? Even without the KAPD as a combat organisation the German bourgeoisie never really gained control of German society on their own terms until 1945. What if the 1921 or 1923 KPD uprisings had not been tiny, absurd acts of opportunism but had been properly prepared for, using Pannekoek's insights, KAPD methods? Alas, the only reality is the one that happened. Farce turned to tragedy. The Second International had been unable to prevent the First World War. The Third International was unable to prevent the Second or foment the European revolution. Those who will not learn from history are condemned to repeat it.

By discounting the marxian economics of his time, Pannekoek developed political economy, concentrating on the formation, activity and changes of classes through the historical process. It has been said that it is not Dietzgen himself who is important but what Pannekoek (and the other Dutch marxists) made of him. His understanding of Dietzgen put geist at the centre of Pannekoek's analysis. It is a concept missing from the Bolshevik tradition but without it the working class remain the object not the subject of theory and history. Equipped as he was with the philosophically and scientifically crude "reflection theory" of consciousness, Lenin believed that it was only necessary to change crude material circumstances, the economy, to have this passively reflected by men and women, bringing about communism. In this he was at one with Kautsky (insofar as Kautsky ever thought about the matter at all). Lenin's great breakthrough and break with Kautsky remained on a political level. He realised the necessity of the complete overthrow of the state and seized the time when the opportunity presented itself. In that he was a great revolutionary. But he wished to build "socialism" with consciousness as it then existed (as he said in State and Revolution) and retained a simplistic undialectical and linear conception of the transition period, losing sight of communism in the process.

Pannekoek denied any such possibility in western Europe and there are hints in WR&CT where he discusses the bureaucratisation of the new system that he had doubts about the situation even in Russia though the bourgeois influence on the geist of the proletariat there had been slight (but not slight on the party leadership). Certainly in Europe, existing consciousness could not build communism; "the proletariat cannot achieve the maturity of spirit for hegemony and freedom within a flourishing capitalism". From 1917 Pannekoek abandoned "socialism" and identified it as a barrier to be overcome on the road to communism. Between capitalism and communism lies a transition period identified by the dictatorship of the proletariat. In the immediate aftermath of bourgeois domination with the geist formed under that domination, that dictatorship will be embodied in a variety of forms, in a person, clique, a committee, a party, a government. That is not communism (although it may be socialism) although it may be a necessary stage. Pannekoek's theory of consciousness was far more complex than Lenin's, richer, and thus so was his theory of the transition. He understood that men and women learn through experience and experience takes time even when aided by the propagation of communist theory. Each person's and the class's working theory of society, conscious or not will only be revolutionised by being found wanting, by not meeting the needs of objective circumstances. The transition covers the period when the class learns that while it may not make history in conditions of its own choosing it does make history and by consciously making history it can achieve communism. The emancipation of the working class is the task of the working class itself.

Pannekoek made many important theoretical advances. The bureaucratisation of the bolshevised International and of the Bolsheviks themselves and the dominance of their tradition meant that those advances were lost. He realised that imperialism, while not an objective necessity for capital but a result of choices made by human representatives of capital because it was profitable - brought about an objective internationalisation of the working class, just as mass activity, general strike and civil war did, in opposition to the national politics of parliaments. The crisis that resulted from imperialism, a result of a social not an automatic, economic breakdown, brought about the objective necessity for autonomous proletarian activity, so that "the proletariat ceases to be a member of capitalist society and becomes its destroyer". He realised that once the working class had broken free the bourgeoisie could never rule again in the old way, "nor can the proletariat again be brought into a state of dependence". He realised that the transition began at that point and would not be a linear process; "a simple schema of conquering political power, introducing the council system and then abolishing private commerce, even though this represents the broad outline of development", for this "would only be possible if one could undertake reconstruction in some sort of void". He was no utopian (as some council communists became) for while he believed that some general sort of mental picture of the new society was necessary he was also aware that consciousness did not float in the heads of workers unattached to objective reality, that organisation was necessary and because organisation was based on previous reality and tradition, then the "new form of organisation can itself only be set up in the process of revolution, by workers making a revolutionary intervention".

To repeat the point: in Pannekoek's dialectical theory of the transition no regime between capitalism and communism is, in itself, progressive. Progress is made by the class overthrowing each bureaucratic regime in succession as it fails to reflect the development of the class and this is not going to be a smooth process. Development is by a series of radical ruptures. Near the end of WR&CT Pannekoek again breaks with his usual practice and quotes Marx (from the Eighteenth Brumaire):

"Proletarian revolutions constantly criticise themselves, continually interrupt themselves in the course of their own development, come back to the seemingly complete in order to start it all over again, treat the inadequacies of their own first attempts with cruelly radical contempt, seem only to throw their adversaries down to enable them to draw new strength from the earth and rise up again to face them all the more gigantic."

Bob Shepherd

I am immensely indebted, almost to the point of plagiarism at times, to messrs Bricianer, Smart, and Gerber and their works listed below. They are not however responsible for precise points of the analysis.

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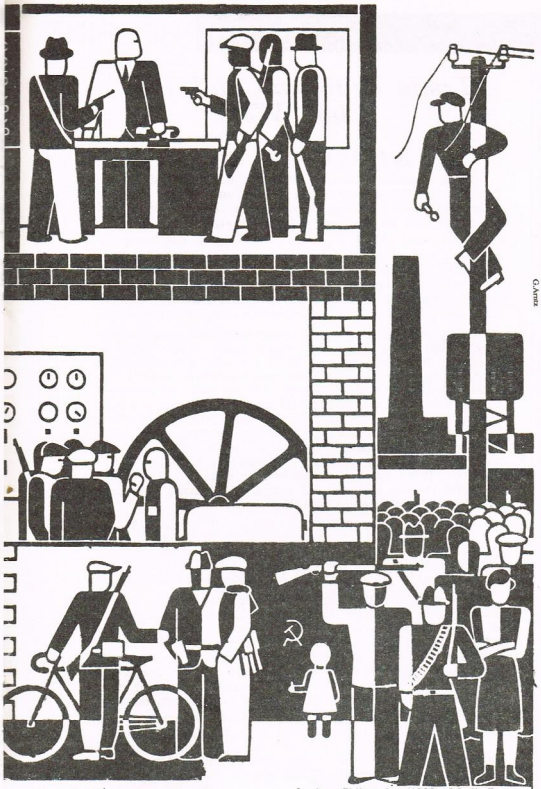

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Open Letter to Comrade Lenin: An Answer to Lenin's Pamphlet "Left-wing Communism, An Infantile Disorder, Herman Gorter (Wildcat, London 1989)

Other writing by Pannekoek available in English:

"The Theory of the Collapse of Capitalism"(1934), (Capital and Class 1, Spring 1977)

"On Organisation" (1938) (Capital and Class 9, Autumn 1979)

Lenin as Philosopher (1938), (Merlin Press 1975)

Workers Councils (Southern Advocate for Workers Councils, Melbourne 1950).

see also:

"Class Composition and the Theory of the Party at the Origins of the Workers' Council Movement", Sergio Bologna (Telos 13, Fall 1972)

The Bolshevik Revolution 1917-1923 Vol 3, E. H. Carr (Penguin 1966)

The Forming of the Communist International, James W. Hulse (Stanford 1964)

Dialectic of Defeat: Contours of Western Marxism, Russell Jacoby (Cambridge U.P.

Herman Gorter's
"Open Letter to Comrade Lenin"
is now available in English for the first time since 1921!

The current period is one in which communism is supposed to be bankrupt. The recent events in China and the open acceptance of market economics and political democracy by most of Eastern Europe are used by the Western media to convince us that the epoch of communism, which they say began with the Russian revolution of October 1917, is coming to an end.

Yet, shortly after that event critics had already begun to doubt the communist credentials of the new rulers of Russia. From 1921 especially, tendencies emerged which saw the social systems of Russia, and later the rest of Eastern Europe, China etc., as another form of capitalism. Herman Gorter belonged to one such tendency, the German Communist Left.

Gorter's methodical destruction of Lenin's arguments in Left-Wing Communism, An Infantile Disorder, has languished in near-total obscurity, at least to the English-speaking world, for nearly seventy years.

Herman Gorter's Open Letter to Comrade Lenin has now been republished by Wildcat in the form of an A4 pamphlet (44 pages including a 4 page introduction) which will have a cover price of £3.00. Individual copies can be purchased direct from us at £2.50 or £1.50 each if you order more than 10 copies. Overseas rates are $US 5 (or equivalent), $US 3 for orders of more than 10.
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When Guy Aldred heard the news of the 1917 October revolution he was in Brixton prison, a conscientious objector to the capitalist war. Having rejected the February revolution as bourgeois he supported October as proletarian. Aldred's story captures the problems for the communist perspective in the 20th century. It spans the periods firstly when communism could be grasped as a real hope and social possibility, then the triumph of October, and finally the difficulties following the defeat of the revolution. The evident eccentricities in his story should be seen in the light of the disastrous isolation of the communist perspective by the bureaucratised communist parties. Unlike so much of the marxist left in Britain, Aldred maintained an independent intelligence within the perspective of communism. His immediate influence was the SDF and in particular William Morris and Belfort Bax. This independence and his refusal to abandon it for the sake of any revolutionary icon is what makes Aldred's story so interesting. It can be seen in the pamphlet we reprint here where he attempts to come to terms with the phenomenon of trades unionism in the early 20th century. It can also be seen in his later attempts to come to terms with the Soviet Union. In this task he inevitably fails in our terms as he rightly, for the times, rejects the notion of a "workers state" in favour of the characterisation "state capitalist". He had little choice but to come to what is an essentially political conclusion in the absence of an adequate political economy.

Trade Unionism and the Class War (first published 1911) takes up the issue of trades unions from a revolutionary perspective. Its historical interest lies in Aldred's identification of an important change in the role of unions within the capitalist system from "illegal conspiracy" to "bulwark" of that system. The crucial point is that trades unions cannot raise the standard of living of all workers as they are unable to overcome the law of supply and demand overall and their attempts to control supply simply "manufactures" blacklegs.

Aldred's argument is characteristically for the class as a whole. He argues that trades unions certainly do halt the operation of supply and demand in discrete areas, but in favouring some workers make blacklegs of others and cannot encompass the reserve army of labour.

It is significant that Aldred concentrated on the supply/demand approach. This is not due to any esoteric interest in economics on his part but a necessary critique of a widespread ideology in the labour movement. Through the University Extension Movement, the University Settlements (eg Toynbee Hall), Ruskin College and the Workers Educational Association (WEA) a considerable effort was put into the teaching of supply and demand economics to the working class. This was alluded to in Radical Chains 1:1 where we introduced a reprint of an article by Noah Ablett which deliberately compared the WEA view - Marshall's marginal economics, with

Trade Unionism and The Class War

AUTHOR'S NOTE (1919 Edition).

Trade Unionism and The Class War was published first in 1911. It met with a great deal of criticism and received one complimentary notice. This was from "Dangle" in the *Clarion*! It was reprinted in 1914 in the *Herald of Revolt*.

The present edition is revised. The introductory section is expanded into a chapter. The third section of the original pamphlet—which would have been the fourth as the essay now stands—treating with the question of representation is omitted. This properly belongs to the companion essay, *Representation and the State*, and will be embodied in it when that pamphlet is revised.

Many persons object to the reasoning of this essay because they consider its logic fatal to all idea of action. This criticism is based on a misunderstanding. I do not deny that men and women must function under capitalism and engage constantly in petty disputes. I only insist that such disputes are not vital. By preaching up dissatisfaction, I am removing the tendency to engage in worthless palliative effort, and hastening the crisis. After all, action which accomplishes nothing, is not of much moment. And trade unionism has accomplished nothing so far as the well-being of the *entire* working-class is concerned. The plea for revolution is not pedantry. It is a simple statement of stern necessity. The second and third chapters are unaltered, except for a passing word here and there, from the original pamphlet.

London, W., June, 1919. G. A. A.

I.—TRADE UNIONISM AND REVOLUTION.

The struggle of the Tolpuddle Martyrs for the right of combination under the Reform Ministry of 1832, marks the beginnings of British Trade Unionism. The glamour of romance which belongs to its origin has contributed to its successful development as a social institution. Eight years after the Repeal of the Combination laws, Trade Unionism was deemed an illegal conspiracy. To-day, it is a bulwark of the capitalist system. Something more than tradition is necessary to explain this passage from outlawry to respectability. The explanation is an economic one. Trade Unionism has conquered social power and commanded influence in so far as it satisfied and arose from the social necessities of the capitalist epoch. Because it has answered capitalist needs, the Trade Union has qualified for its modern position as the sign manual of skilled labour.

But the growth in social and political importance of the Trade Union leader has not menaced the foundations of capitalist society. He has been cited more and more as the friend of reform and the enemy of revolution. It has been urged that he is a sober and responsible member of capitalist society. Consequently, capitalist apologists have been obliged to acknowledge that he discharged useful and important functions in society.

This admission has forced them to assert that the law of supply and demand does *not* determine, with exactness, the nominal—or even the actual—price of the commodity, labour power. Hence it has been allowed that Trade Unions enable their members to increase the amount of the price received for their labour-power, without being hurtful to the interests of the commonwealth—*i.e.*, the capitalist class—when conducted with moderation and fairness.

Modern Trade Unionism enjoys this respectable reputation to a very large extent because it has sacrificed its original vitality. This was inevitable, since, in its very origin, it was reformist and not revolutionary. Trade Unionism has sacrificed no economic principle during its century's development. It has surrendered no industrial or political consistency. But it has not maintained its

early earnestness or sentiment of solidarity. Had it done so, it would have been compelled to have evolved socially and politically. Instead of stagnating in reform, it would have had to progress towards revolution.

The Trade Union apologist, consistently with his reformist outlook, has had to defend the restrictive tendencies of sectional organisation. He has had to deny the revolutionary solidarity of labour in order to defend the Union manufacture of blacklegs. He has rejoiced in a craft organisation that materially injures the interests of labour as a whole, without even benefiting it sectionally. He has shown no qualms about supporting a representative system of administration which betrays the worker to capitalist interests.

All this activity proceeds inevitably from the belief that Trade Unionism benefits the worker economically. It follows naturally from the notion that the worker can improve his social and economic status under capitalism.

Trade Unionism, therefore, is intelligible only on the ground that reform is possible and revolution unnecessary. Industrial palliation, like political palliation, is based on the understanding that no epoch ever attains to a crisis. This is the best that can be said for the necessity of Trade Unionism.

But suppose that the law of supply and demand *does* determine, with exactness, the nominal as well as the actual price of the commodity, labour power?

Then the best that can be said for the necessity of Trade Unionism as opposed to revolutionary communist organisation and action has ceased to possess any meaning.

To develop this economic argument in favour of the social revolution, and against Trade Union reform, is my purpose in writing the present brochure.

II.—THE CASE FOR TRADE UNIONISM.

Nominal wages are actually received in cash, irrespective of the conditions of employment. Actual wages are nominal wages, plus the conditions of employment, hours of labour, etc.

What is the basis of wages?

Marx has asked us to suppose that an average hour of labour be realised in a value equal to sixpence, or twelve average hours of labour realised in six shillings. If, then, in the raw material, machinery and so forth, used up in a commodity, twenty-four hours of average labour were realised, its value would amount to twelve shillings. If, moreover, the workman employed by the capitalist added twelve hours of labour to these means of production these twelve hours would be realised in an additional value of six shillings. The total value of the production would, therefore, amount to thirty-six hours of realised labour-power, and be equal to eighteen shillings. But as the value of labour-power, or the wages paid to the workman, would be three shillings only, no equivalent would have been paid by the capitalist for the six hours of surplus value worked by the workman and realised in the value of the commodity. By selling this commodity at its value for eighteen shillings, the capitalist would, therefore, realise a value of three shillings for which he had paid no equivalent. These three shillings would constitute the surplus value or profit pocketed by him. Any increase in the wages of the workers must reduce the amount of his surplus value, since that is the only fund out of which such increase could be obtained. It is possible for the wages of the workman to rise so high as not only approximately to equal the value of his product, but *actually* to equal it. In a word, if the law of supply and demand works with the inexactness assumed by the Trade Unionist to be the case, palliation is not merely justifiable on the grounds of expediency; it is the direct path to emancipation.

Is it true that the law of supply and demand fixes the price with so little exactness, that supply and demand become equal not at an exact point of price? May it be that several prices, or a range of prices, will satisfy the requirements of the law? That the marxist labour theory of value of the Plebs League. The importance of "educating" the working class was such that bourgeois ideologues of the calibre of Alfred Marshall, H.Llewellyn-Smith and J.A.Hobson, amongst many others, were involved.

While Aldred's analysis, founded on the independent viewpoint of the working class itself, has a general validity its conclusions cannot be wholly accepted today. Aldred was writing in 1911 when the idea of revolutionary solidarity was very real. Today we have to look back on many decades of trades union activity within state bounds. The overall success of this strategy from the point of view of the bourgeoisie derives from the ability of the trades unions to achieve a degree of coordination between accumulation and the regime of needs.They ensure that the necessary wage is not reduced to the level of penury.

The publication of this article in 1911 was almost certainly a contribution to the debate on the role of trades unions stimulated by the (anarcho-) syndicalist hopes for industrial unions. Aldred's views parallels that of European marxists such as Pannekoek in the same period expressed in the Massenaktion Debate out of which developed the communist perspectives of the European revolutionary period. Aldred broadly shared those perspectives and was certainly in contact with the European revolutionary left when he decided to reprint his article in 1919. Whether he was aware of European developments and the positions of the various factions when he originally wrote it we cannot say but with or without direct cross-fertilisation it is obvious that the concerns were international in scope even if bourgeois state responses to the working class took different forms in that period.

Guy Alfred Aldred was born in Clerkenwell, London on 5th November 1886. His father, a naval officer, had deserted his mother immediately after the marriage ceremony and Guy was brought up in the house of his maternal grandfather, Charles Holdsworth, a bookbinder and Victorian radical. Although Charles was an atheist, his wife Emma was a High Church Anglican, and Aldred was given a religious upbringing.

At the age of 10, Aldred formed an Anti-nicotine League among his classmates and later induced them to sign a pledge not to indulge in strong drink. His grandfather opposed the Boer War and took Guy to political meetings carrying placards. His religious connections led Guy to become the "Holloway Boy Preacher". He opposed war from a religious standpoint, producing in June 1902, the pamphlet: The Last Days: War or Peace?. This pamphlet was produced after the end of the Boer War in anticipation of a new war breaking out.

Over the next four years he progressed from High Church conformity, through theism, agnosticism, Free-thought, to atheistic socialism. Friends included George Martin, an ordained Anglican priest, who worked as a porter in Borough Market and advanced Guy's education in theology and philosophy,

and Charles Voysey, the former vicar of Healaugh who had been indicted before the Privy council in 1871 on a charge of heresy. Aldred attended various Institutions including the Sunday Morning Adult School meetings at the Peel Institute where he read Blatchford's Clarion! and met John Burns of the SDF (travelling at that time in the opposite political direction). In 1904 he heard Daniel DeLeon speak on industrial unionism on Clerkenwell Green and while this interested him enough to seek out the London branch of the Socialist Labour Party, his primary interest was still Free-thought.

In March 1905 Aldred joined the SDF, becoming the parliamentary correspondent for Justice in January 1906. He resigned this post in May, having decided that parliament was a farce. He announced his conversion to anti-parliamentarianism in a letter to Justice on the 26th of May (in For Communism, published in 1935, he noted "Anti-parliamentarianism as distinct from Anarchism, was pioneered in Britain by William Morris. He was seconded by Belfort Bax"). He was unpopular with the party elders and split with the SDF in June of the same year over the question of propagating atheism from SDF platforms. The party leaders were opposed to this, and only Belfort Bax defended his position.

Aldred went on to write for The Voice of Labour, the journal of the Freedom Group. This introduced him to the anarchist club in Jubilee Street where Kropotkin sometimes spoke. At the invitation of Rudolf Rocker, Aldred deputised for Kropotkin when the latter was unavailable. At this time Aldred sympathised with Proudhon's contention that universal suffrage was reactionary and tended to argue that differences between Marx and Bakunin had been exaggerated. Despite his disagreement with Bakunin's conception of the state, when he set up his own press, Aldred called it the Bakunin Press. In 1906 he wrote two articles for Freedom on the philosophy of anarcho-communism. The prevailing influence on the Freedom group

there is, or may be, a kind of table-land within which the law does not operate? Let us take the Trade Union political economists' typical example. A hundredweight of fish is sold by Dutch Auction, *i.e.*, the seller bidding down instead of the buyers bidding up. One buyer may be willing to give 20s. for the lot, and no other buyer willing to give more than 18s., and the man who is willing to give 20s. will get the fish at 18s. or a fraction over it. So that in the same market, with the same quantity of fish for sale, and with customers in number and every other respect the same, the same lot of fish might fetch two very different prices, the law of supply and demand being equally and completely fulfilled by either of these prices. Within a limit of 2s. the law is inoperative.

It is claimed, that in a case such as this, much depends on who has the initiative in bargaining. In the instance given, the possessor of the initiative gives to the seller a distinct gain of 2s., not accounted for by the law of supply and demand. Supposing the price of labour-power to fall within a similarly excepted category, the same principle as operated against the buyer in the case of the Dutch Auction will now operate against the seller in the labour market. It is the buyer who has the initiative in fixing the price. The employer, the purchaser of labour-power, makes the offer of wages. The dealer or seller, *i.e.*, the labourer, accepts or refuses. The advantage of the initiative is with the employer therefore. This can only be modified by a close combination among the employed, whereby they may place a reserve price on their labour. Under these circumstances Organised Labour may secure a larger positive amount of the produce of its labour-power, within the limits not covered by the law of supply and demand. It may, therefore, secure the economic equivalent of culture by virtue of its organised status.

Outside of this table-land the law of supply and demand remains intact. The more numerous the competitors for employment the lower will the wages be, other things being equal. This fact forces on the attention of the Trade Unionists the necessity for restrictive rules, forbidding the employment of non-unionists and limiting the number of apprentices. Such rules are indispensable to the complete efficacy of Trade Unionism. They make the Trade Unionist the apologist for an aristocracy of skilled labour.

Trade Unionism's final refuge is Malthusianism. Its specious pretence is that the ignorant and untrained part of the proletariat will people up to the point that will keep their wages at that miserable rate which the low scale of their ideas and habits makes endurable to them. As long as their minds remain in such a state, the Unionist claims that he does them no real injury in preventing them from competing with him for employment. He only saves himself from being brought down to their level. He does no wrong by entrenching himself behind a barrier to exclude those whose competition would bring down his wages, without more than momentarily raising theirs.

Again, even were it to be shown that Trade Unionism did not increase the nominal rate of wages, it has to be admitted (says the Unionist) that it is able to do much by raising the actual rate of wages. Its least accomplishment is to successfully resist irritating, arbitrary, and oppressive conditions of employment.

But the power of the organisation of labour in this direction turns upon its recognition. In times of dispute there may be room for negotiations between employers and employed upon the question of maximum or minimum demands. For the Trade Union to be effectual there can be no room for compromise on the question of recognising the Union and receiving the Union official representatives. This limits all need or apprehension of a strike to such recognition. So that the right of combination recognised, the men's demands become a matter of amicable arrangement.

Such is the case for Trade Unionism. We now propose to expose its fallacies, and lay bare its hypocrisies.

III.—THE WORKERS' CASE AGAINST TRADE UNIONISM.

The reply to the argument which I have developed in defence of Trade Unionism in the foregoing section, naturally divides itself into the following division:—

(1) *The operation of the economic law against the possibility of palliation, so far as the entire working-class is concerned*:—Although it is true that the law of supply and demand does not fix the terms of any particular bargain, the operation of that law does not finish with the conclusion of that particular bargain. This has been clearly demonstrated by Cree in his reply to Mill. According to whether buyer or seller secures what is termed "a bargain," demand or supply is checked or stimulated. This applies to the Dutch Auction Fish Sale. A sale of 20s. would tend to stimulate future supply and check demand. The consequent tendency would be towards a fall in price. A sale of 18s. would tend to bring out more buyers and reduce the inducement to go to sea. The consequent tendency would be towards a rise in price. This would bring out more sellers and reduce the number of buyers once more. This is true also of the wages of labour. Higher wages bring out more workers but reduce the employer's profits. So that the employer becomes less anxious to secure workers. A lower wage has the reverse effect. The worker now becomes less anxious to be employed. But the employer is more willing to employ. Once more there is repetition. Working by tendency only, the economic law approaches exactitude over a multiplicity of cases, but not in any particular case. The means of the oscillations of price is now an exact point, not a range of prices. The terms of any particular bargain are, consequently, only of the most transient importance even to those immediately concerned. But they are of little or no importance to the workers or employers as a class, since they are constantly being brought back to their true economical point. The compensating influences being inevitable and automatic, it will be seen that, in its position as a class, the working-class has nothing to gain from Trade Union Palliative activity. Its only practical hope, as well as its beautiful day-dream, is, first, last, and all-the-time, Socialism — the Communal Individualism of which Oscar Wilde made himself the prophet in that magnificent book, *The Soul of Man*.

(2) *The impossibility of raising actual wages without regard to nominal wages*:—Mavor has put the case in a nutshell. If a reduction of the hours of labour results in decreased production, wages will fall, other things being equal. If reduction of hours results in maintenance of production per man there will be no additional employment, other things being equal. The equality of other things turn upon the law of supply and demand which palliative combination does not effect. Consequently, Trade Unionism can neither effect wages nor yet the question of employment.

(3) *The impossibility of organising the whole of labour on the basis of Trade Unionism*:—The Trade Unionist, when excluding the blackleg and manufacturing him, pretends to look forward to a complete federation of labour. But if all labour stands upon the platform of palliative combination — a very different thing from revolutionary solidarity—the effect will be nil, in view of the operations of the law of supply and demand. A union of all labour is as good as no union at all from the palliationist viewpoint. Even a "minimum wage" of higher rate than at present established means only the decreased purchasing power of money. Between labour-power as a commodity and other commodities there exists a definite ratio of exchange. So that a "minimum wage" is meaningless. But a union of all labour on the basis of Trade Unionism is impossible. With all trades organised on a restricted basis it would be impossible for any trade to rid itself of its surplus by causing them to be absorbed into any other trade. But for Trade Unionism to succeed — with the increasing use of machinery and the consequent reduction of skilled to unskilled labour—it must also organise unskilled labour. Such organisation to succeed must be even more restrictive than in the case of skilled labour. Unskilled labour cannot, therefore, absorb the surplus from all the skilled trades. Not only so, but to this surplus it would add an enormous surplus of its own. So that restrictive Unionism can only result in first deluding the working-class, then betraying it, and finally reducing the greater portion of it to blackleg in the present and future.

(4) *The menace of Trade Union Representation; A question of Labour Leading*:—Trade Unionism embodies the menace of the representative system in its constitution no less certainly than the legislative machine. Its elected leaders conclude strikes and dis-

was still Kropotkin, who Aldred held had abandoned revolutionary Bakuninism and become the patron of "drawing-room anarchism".

In 1907 Aldred, together with John Turner and other associates on the Voice of Labour, formed the Industrial Union of Direct Action. The aims of the IUDA was to operate in the interests of social revolution in order to bring in to being a decentralised federation of communes. Its weapon was to be the general strike and violence was to be used only in self-defence. However Aldred quarrelled with Turner, accusing him of promoting ordinary trades-unionism. He simultaneously attacked the Freedom group on similar grounds.

While involved with the IUDA Aldred was also busy promoting another organisation, the Communist Propaganda Group (CPG). This was the first organisation in Britain to use the word "communist" in its title. In later years Aldred was to reflect:"the reader will understand that the author termed himself 'a communist' in 1906. He uses the term in the sense he employed it, in the sense that William Morris employed it, the sense of world harmony, social love, and commonweal" (Forward to Studies in Communism). The CPG published a 21 point programme which rejected palliative industrial action as being as reactionary as palliative political action, both equally diverting the workers from communism. Rejecting both industrial action and parliamentarism, the CPG called for "the organisation of the workers into one INTERNATIONAL COMMUNIST PARTY within, but antagonistic to, the capitalistic states".In a pamphlet published in 1909, Bourgeois Sectarianism Aldred also called for a "New Communist International". In another pamphlet published in 1909, Organisation, he again called for a new International, arguing that following the fall of the First International, marxist communism had been supplanted internationally by Lassalean social-democracy.

From his grandfather Aldred had gained an awareness of the early 19th century struggle of libertarians for freedom to organise, and to speak and write critically of the powers that be. The influence of this liberal-radical tradition led Aldred to publish in 1909 The Indian Sociologist the organ of the Free India Society, after it had been suppressed when the Indian student, Mardalal Dhingra assassinated Sir Carson Wilde to further Indian freedom. While Aldred opposed political assassinations, nationalism and its concomitant statism, he also opposed the suppression of opinion. He gained no support from the socialist movement and only Rudolf Rocker defended him against allegations about his motives. He did however win the support of Sir Walter Strickland, an opponent of imperialism. This publication cost Aldred 12 months imprisonment.

On his release from prison in 1910, Aldred published a new paper, The Herald of Revolt: An Organ of the Coming Socialist Revolution. The first issue appeared in

December. In 1912 he spoke in Glasgow to various audiences, including the Anarchist Group, who had emerged from the collapse of William Morris's Socialist League in 1895. Under Aldred's influence, a split from the anarchists set itself up as the Glasgow Communist Group.

In May of 1914 the Herald of Revolt changed its name to The Spur, "because the workers need a spur". This took an anti-war position. Aldred even opposed the Clyde Workers' Committee on the grounds that it sought only to improve the workers' economic position, and did not develop any kind of class opposition to the war. He was arrested on April 14th 1916 for failing to report for military service (although he had not in fact been called-up). He spent most of the war in prison, some of it under "open arrest" at a labour camp at Dyce near Aberdeen. Here, together with Bonar Thompson and E.T.Jope, he set up a Men's Committee to try to change hours of work and published the Granite Echo as the "organ of the Dyce C.O.s". Aldred managed to speak at public meetings and his paper was sold not only in the camp but in Aberdeen, Glasgow and London. He was in Brixton prison when the news of the October Revolution arrived. Here he met Tchicherin, soon to be appointed Russian representative in England. Tchicherin explained that the revolution was not an anarchist-communist uprising but the work of an organisation called "the Bolsheviks" who had a leader named Lenin.

On his release from prison in January 1919 (after a six-day hunger strike), Aldred toured the country with Henry Sara calling for a union of anti-parliamentary groups and the left of the ILP to form a British Communist Party affiliated to the Third International. He fully agreed with "the dictatorship of the proletariat" as a temporary expedient and supported "war communism". He read Lenin's State and Revolution at this time (December 1919). Reviewing it, he wrote

putes by consenting to terms of compromise offered by Capitalistic Ministers for Labour, and Presidents of the Board of Trade. To pretend that such terms of agreement are antagonistic to capitalist interests, is to be disturbed by a bogey. On the other hand, for what does the strike-leader generally strive? To get his authority recognised. This is the first step to position and power. It is pretended that the greater the support given to the labour-leader the greater the concession he can wring from the capitalist class. It is forgotten that the greater the confidence reposed in him, the more effectually he can betray that confidence. Consequently, your "official" strike-leader is always for "enthusiasm and earnestness" of the "slow and sure" variety. His plea is for caution, which means that he is to be allowed to do the bargaining but not to be submitted to criticism. Criticism he regards as a menace to his authority. It certainly reduces his selling-out value.

(5) *The Initiative Absurdity*:—The Trade Unionist argument that the unorganised worker suffers from not having the initiative is nonsense. Rather—if it really counted, which it does not—one's sympathy should be with the employer who uses it against the unorganised worker. In the case of the *organised* Trade Unionist, it should be with the worker who is menaced by having it used on his behalf by the labour leader who generally succeeds in misrepresenting him. Everyone knows that employers often throw the onus of initiative on the worker. In a bargain both buyer and seller are anxious only to avoid it. "What do you want?" says the buyer. "That is not the question, what will you give?" replies the seller. Both parties are desirous of securing a bargain, and consequently avoid the initiative. It has no advantages although it operates very little one way or the other in the labour market. So that Trade Unionism has nothing to offer the worker in this respect.

On these counts, therefore, and for these reasons, Trade Unionism must go. The only hope of the workers on the industrial, as on the political field, is Revolutionary Socialism.

IV.

THE QUESTION OF REPRESENTATION.

Much that has been urged in the present brochure has tended to negate the idea of majority rule, as also the representation principle. Like most rebels—and, for that matter, most students of history—I have no faith in the majority, less unbelief in the minority, and most reliance in the individual. Thomas Paine regarded Government as being, like dress, a badge of lost innocence. He also looked upon the abolition of formal government as the beginning of true association. This seems to me to be incontrovertible. Consequently, if my opinion be correct, representation, as an expression of formal government, can have no weight, and must necessarily play a small part in the revolutionary birth-struggle of the proletarian commonweal.

To bring this theory down to the realm of the practical, I want the reader to consider the following case which has often been put to me in the course of debates and discussions in which I have played the part of principal. It has been said that if a certain individual was working in a shop where sixty men were employed, and fifty wished to come out on strike whilst ten wished to remain in, the author of this hypothetical case was in favour of coercing the ten and making them come out, whilst the fifty fought the "boss." Such coercion, it is urged, alone will rid the proletariat of their subjection to the capitalist and Capitalism.

From this opinion I venture to differ. Indeed, I repeat in print what I have often urged on the platform, in reply to the hypothetical case already enunciated that the majority have no more right to coerce a minority than the minority have to coerce a majority. The fifty have no more right to coerce the ten, than the ten have to coerce the fifty, since in relation to society, the hypothetical fifty strikers are but a small minority, and if it be true that many are right where few are wrong, then the presence of seventy strike-breakers in the neighbourhood of the strike plus seventy soldiers, would entitle the "majority" of 150 men, as opposed to the minority of fifty, to "coerce them" out of the neighbourhood. Herein lies the capitalist apology for Mitchelstown, Featherstone, Homestead, Belfast, and every other scene of the patriotic murder of the working-class by the hired assassins of profit mongers. For it must be remembered, that we are not treating of the ethics of

coercion in relation to oppressed minorities, but of the economics of apparent majorities' rights to coerce a minority.

If we were to consent to deal with probabilities rather than with fact, it would be urged that the one hundred and fifty men do not represent society, nor the whole working-class, for it is probable that the latter would stand by the fifty. Yet every worker, as also every employer, knows that the news of the strike could be flashed throughout the length and breadth of the land, without the official scoundrelism which imported blacklegs being denounced to the extent of all the workers striking in sympathy and thus threatening to coerce the blacklegs who were in a minority. With all their feelings of sympathy and faithful devotion to the cause of united endeavour it would be impossible for the whole working-class organisations to exhibit industrial solidarity.

If all the workers were willing to strike, they need only stay in work and take over the means and instruments of production for their own use. Revolution would replace a mere industrial struggle. The workers would not be concerned with craft or industrial divisional organisation, nor with the local coercion of blacklegs, nor with the propaganda-strike even, but with the emancipation of their class only. The struggle would be constructive, not negative. There would be no necessity for "physical force" coercion of blacklegs, since the economic existence of gentlemen of this fraternity would be impossible under such circumstances. If all the workers were educated up to that stage of economic solidarity, that they were willing to strike in sympathy and massacre blacklegs according to Union-laid regulations, the working-class revolution would be international and spontaneous. There would be no strike for higher nominal, or for higher actual, wages; only the coming together of the workers internationally for the political and industrial overthrow of the bourgeoisie, and the taking of whatever united industrial and political activity the Class War demanded by way of its culminating expression.

If the workers declined to strike in sympathy, it would be because they did not sympathise industrially with the revolting fifty. Yet, as consumers and fellow wage slaves, by the logic of economic production and distribution, they would be affected alike by the existence of the strike and its termination. The question as to whether they were right in passively siding with the employees does not enter into the problem as stated by the psuedo-proletarian defender of representation. The only question is the right of the majority.

By refusal, the majority have shown that they are opposed to this gentleman and his forty-nine imaginary colleagues. His position is altered slightly, and the manifesto of the resolute fifty now is addressed to the whole of the rest of the working-class, which is engaged not in striking in sympathy, but in passively siding with local minority of blacklegs and the Capitalist class. The manifesto, therefore, should run: "Being in a shop where sixty men are at work, and fifty of us want to strike, and ten do not, I am in favour of coercing the ten and making them come out, while we fifty fight the 'boss.' As the rest of the working-class and the whole of the Capitalist class side with the 'boss' and the ten non-strikers, I am in favour of coercing the majority of my own class and the whole of the Capitalist class also."

What would be society's answer? Why, that of the Trade Union-apologist-or-strike-believer-in-majority righteousness! Thus, a worker who was not in favour of the striker would say:—"If I am in a society where a vast majority of the proletariat can have their present ill-being intensified, and poverty added to their poverty, by fifty men going on strike, I am in favour of coercing the fifty and making them go back to work, whilst we, the majority of the workers, meet the 'boss' through our representatives on arbitration and conciliation boards, and through peaceful agencies, secure higher wages and better conditions."

Maybe the revolting strike defender would turn aside, with his sturdy band of followers, numbering forty-nine all told, and, sighing somewhat critically, relieve his feelings by giving utterance to the following piece of philosophy: "The majority have no more right to coerce a minority than the minority have to coerce a majority. The fifty have no more right to coerce the ten than the ten have to coerce the fifty. Society has no more right to coerce the fifty strikers than the fifty strikers have to coerce society. But

that Lenin "in showing the revolutionary oneness of all that is essential in Marx with all that counts in Bakunin, has accomplished a wonderful work" (Worker 13.12.19). In 1920, in the Spur, he added "no man can be really and truly an Anarchist without becoming a Bolshevist ... no man can be really and truly be a Bolshevist without standing boldly and firmly on the Anarchist platform". However, he opposed Lenin's "revolutionary parliamentarism" and refused to take part in unity talks with organisations who adhered to this tactic. Aldred settled in Glasgow in 1920. In October of that year the Glasgow Communist Group, with which he was involved, suspended its support for the Comintern on the question of parliamentarism and criticised those, like Pankhurst (and the WSF) who thought it was possible to work inside the Third International and push it to the left. Aldred was instrumental in forming the Anti-parliamentary Communist Federation (A-PCF) in 1921 as a direct challenge to the Moscow supporting and supported CPGB.

Aldred, unlike Pankhurst and unlike the European, especially German and Dutch, left communists, still regarded "revolutionary parliamentarism" merely as a tactical error forced on Lenin by circumstances, rather than as a tactic complementary to NEP and what Pankhurst called "the reversion to capitalism" in the USSR. It was not until November 1925 that he accepted that anarchists were being persecuted in Russia and stopped slandering those, like Emma Goldman, who drew attention to the fact. He then adopted the WSF's characterisation of the USSR as "state capitalist" and the Comintern as an agent of "Russian capitalism".

By the mid-1920s it had become clear that revolution was not an immediate possibility. The WSF's Workers Dreadnought ceased publication leaving the A-PCF the only representative of anti-parliamentarism. Aldred spent much of the 1920s and early '30s campaigning for free speech on Glasgow Green. With the rise of Fascism in Germany Aldred restricted his attacks on parliamentarism. He quit the A-PCF in 1933, briefly joining the ILP before setting up the Workers' Open Forum and the United Socialist Movement (USM). In a Socialist May Special in 1934, he declared "the attack on parliamentarism must give place to the attack on the anti-parliamentarian product of parliamentarism: Fascism! Today our cry must be: Division is dangerous!" He began to argue that the question of parliamentarism or anti-parliamentarism was secondary to the attacks on the working class as a whole, hence his slogan: "The proletariat parliamentary or the proletariat anti-parliamentary but the proletariat united!"

Aldred spent the 1930s trying to forge socialist unity, both nationally between the USM and the A-PCF, and internationally. In 1935 he tried to bring together the Communist Workers' International based in Amsterdam, Paul Mattick's United Workers' Party (UWP) and the trotskyist Communist League of Struggle (CLS). He believed the last was evolving towards anti-parliamentarism. However the UWP refused

to work with the CLS, criticised Aldred for being "incapable of seeing the real differences between these groups" and declared its intention to "have nothing to do with people of Aldred's stamp". His attitude to Trotskyism was unstable. In the 20s he had declared that the trotskyist opposition stood "on the same platform as Stalin". At the same time he supported Trotsky's right to engage in political activity wherever he chose and to return to Russia (because of what Aldred viewed as his heroic role in the Russian revolution). At one point he stated his agreement with Trotsky on the nature of the USSR when he mistakenly thought that Trotsky held a state-capitalist view.

In 1934 he published two articles on the USSR by Trotsky; as The Soviet Union and the Fourth International. For a while he adopted the "workers' state" position, denying that the bureaucracy was a class, but by the end of 1934 he was again saying that it was nonsense to deny that Russia was capitalist. In For Communism (1935) Aldred criticised Trotsky's belief that degeneration had set in only with the death of Lenin, tracing it back to the NEP in 1921.

The outbreak of the Spanish civil war threw the anti-parliamentarians into confusion. Both the A-PCF and Aldred's USM initially called for support for the republican government, criticizing the British government for its neutrality in the struggle between democracy and fascism. It was not until Ethel MacDonald and Jane Patrick went to Spain on behalf of the USM, that the USM's line changed. Impressed by the autonomous struggles of the working class against fascism, MacDonald spole of the civil war as "the living demonstration of the power of the proletariat, the living truth of the force of direct action." (News From Spain 1 May 1937). Taking up this line, Aldred urged workers to "face Fascism with determination, industrial solidarity, and the Social General Strike" (Regeneration 21 February 1937).

In the early stages of the struggle, Aldred quarrelled with the APCF and with Emma Goldman over who should be the British representatives of the CNT-FAI. However, in May 1937 the USM and the A-PCF cooperated in producing the Barcelona Bulletin, one of the first publications in Britain to discuss the "May Days" in Barcelona from a non-stalinist viewpoint. Further, when MacDonald was imprisoned by the Generalitat for possession of revolutionary literature and an out of date residence permit, the A-PCF took the initiative in forming an Ethel MacDonald Defence Committee, in which the USM also participated. After MacDonald's release the committee folded, but campaigns in support of the CNT-FAI and POUM prisoners and refugees were continued even after the end of the civil war.

His attitude to the show trials was hard-line. When at the end of 1937 a Socialist Anti-Terror Committee was formed in Glasgow, the USM participated (along with the A-PCF,ILF, and the Revolutionary Socialist Party). On the other hand in The Word, May 1938, he said "the Stalinist conspiracies are law of social evolution, I believe in conserving all the principles of past progress in the direction of liberty. And freedom, so far as economic tendencies permit, I hold to be such a principle. Indeed, the fact that I have to so qualify it, means that the right of freedom is admitted, with rare, if any, exceptions, so long as the economic *status quo* is not disturbed.

Though the expression of the Class struggle will be political, its basis will be economic, so that it can no longer be willed into a physical force one. It does not require that the reader should agree with me on this point for him to realise that no prerogative to murder, boycott, or coerce is specially invested in the majority, because the deity of abstract rights has decided that the majority is the majority. If coercion be right, its successfulness must decide its employment. Successful or otherwise, it is no more right for the minority than the majority to coerce, and neither more nor less obligatory upon it not to do so.

This is my position—as a Socialist—of equal rights for majority and minority, which, being recognised, would not lead to the hopeless confusion that majority rule does. It is a confusion of bourgeois begetting, leading to the experiences of Motherwell, Hull, Grimsby, Featherstone, Penrhyn, Mitchelstown, and Belfast. The negation of the alleged right of majority violence is based upon the economics of the Class War.

Our Trade Unionist friend, with his loose revolutionary violence and threatening, as opposed to a sound revolutionary activity, finding himself either consciously or unconsciously on the side of bourgeois society, will insist that there must be representation and delegation of authority.

To this I reply with the statement of Marxian philosophy, that every industrial epoch has its own system of representation. The fact that minority and majority rule find their harmonious expression in the political bureaucratic autocracy of capitalism signifies that its negation in the terms of Socialism shall embody a counter affirmative which embody the principle of true organisation and freedom of the individual idiosyncrasy. What the details of that organisation will be shall be made the subject of discussion in another essay. That it will not be "a Socialist majority" can be seen from the fact that democracy usually signifies the surrender of majority incompetence and mis-education to the interests of minority expertism and bourgeois concentration of its power over the lives and destinies of the exploited proletarians, no less through the medium of the worker's Trade and Industrial Union, than through that of the Capitalist State.

Marx truly conceived of the bourgeois State as being but an executive committee for administering the affairs of the whole bourgeois class, which has stripped of its halo every profession previously venerated and regarded as honourable, and thus turned the minority has as much right to coerce the majority as the majority has to coerce the minority. Ten strikers have as much right to coerce fifty non-strikers as fifty strikers have to coerce ten non-strikers. And society *has as much right, and no more,* to coerce fifty strikers as fifty strikers have to coerce society. Where might reigns rights do not exist. Where the political reflex of industrial complexity is centralization of control and administration, individual autonomy is impossible. The only question is: Seeing that the emancipation of the working-class means the emancipation of the world, and that we base our argument on logic and reason; that by quiet and resolute activity the workers can be brought together in one revolutionary 'Impossiblist' movement to tie up the workshops of the world, amid the anathemas and violence of impotent Capitalism struggling in its death-throes; that violence *against our own class* can never atone for the violence of the capitalist against us, but only make for an orgie of bloodshed which will delay the sure and certain overthrow of parasitism; seeing, in fact, that Socialism is inevitable and that the very oppression of the working-class constitutes its final economic and political strength, is extraneous violence, *i.e.,* an interference with the liberty of the strike-breaker by virtue of physical force above and beyond the law of economic effect in production, distribution, and consumption, advisable in the interests of the workers to-day, and the securement of the commonweal for which they are striving?"

This, I repeat, is the question which our physical force constitutional palliationist, supposing he understood the situation, would ask himself.

My reply — since I own no arsenals, have no monopoly of gatling or Maxim guns, and am not a Nonconformist Cabinet Minister—would be "no." especially since, in accordance with the doctor, lawyer, priest, poet, philosopher, and labour leader into its paid wage workers. The Trade Union becomes daily more and more an essential department or expression of the bourgeois State.

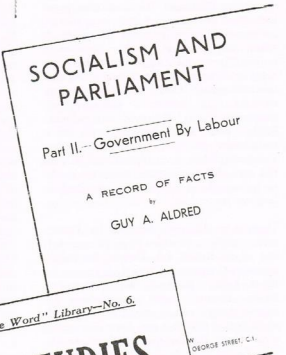
Out of the class or property social system there cannot emerge a "representation" which signifies an honest attempt to secure just exposition of principles and expressions of antagonistic interests. Where there is no social or economic equality, there can be no democracy and no representation. The barren wilderness of money-juggling "freedom" cannot secure real personal liberty of being to any citizen. True organisation like true liberty belongs to the future — and the Socialist Commonwealth; or, as I have termed it elsewhere, the Anarchist Republic.

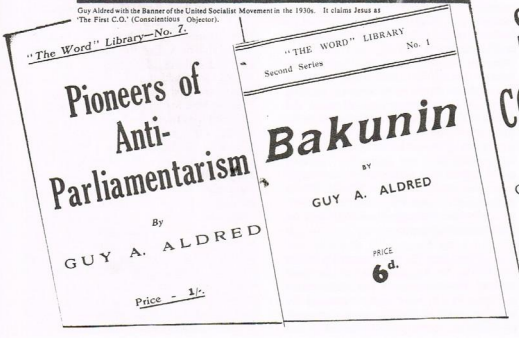
Guy Aldred with the Banner of the United Socialist Movement in the 1930s. It claims Jesus as 'The First C.O.' (Conscientious Objector).

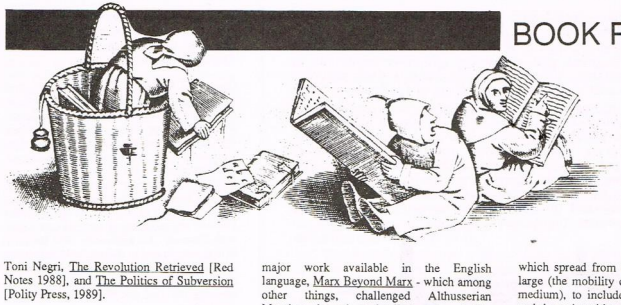
but the continuation of methods used in Trotsky's time. Zinoviev, and those who were parties to the Kronstadt massacre, reaped what they helped to sow."

During the Second World War, as editor of The Word, Aldred allowed space to labour movement politicians such as Creech Jones, John McGovern, Rhys Davies and Fred Jowett, who opposed the war. His commitment to free speech and professed anti-sectarianism led him to open his columns to Alexander Ratcliffe, secretary of the anti-semitic Scottish Protestant League, and to the Duke of Bedford, an apologist for Fascism and advocate of a negotiated peace with Germany. He apparently held Bedford in high esteem and in August 1941 suggested a socialist-pacifist coalition with Bedford at its head. He responded to criticism by stressing the need for free speech and anti-sectarianism.

Aldred continued to edit The Word and stand in local and general elections as an anti-parliamentary candidate until his death in October 1962.







Toni Negri, The Revolution Retrieved [Red Notes 1988], and The Politics of Subversion [Polity Press, 1989].

The recent publication of two collections of the writing of Toni Negri constitutes an important contribution to communist literature available in the English language. Negri's work develops out of the workerist-autonomist milieu which developed in Italy during the 1960s and '70s as an attempt to understand the nature of class struggles in contemporary capitalism and the potential which they revealed for the communist project. Those same struggles which have led many to abandon marxism, communism, and the concept of class, served, in Italian conditions, to initiate a rethinking of communist theory. This was done without falling back into dogmatic and arid reassertions of "orthodoxy" but avoided abandoning Marx or revolution, and it is in this sense that Negri's work, primarily, needs to be considered seriously by an English language readership.

There is a difference between the Italian marxist tradition to which Negri belongs and that of the British left. Despite the (often convoluted) attempts of New Left Review to inject British marxism with innovative theory, Britain's major contributions to marxist thought remain principally empirical and historical (which is not, given its context, a bad thing). The fact that, of Marx's works, it is Capital with its close reference to the Parliamentary blue books, which is regarded as the most informative and important is symptomatic of British communist culture.

One reason for the empirical tendency of the best British marxism is the nature of capitalist development in Britain, and the early formation of a working class, which has rarely considered marxist theory to be an essential weapon in its struggles. Italian marxism has historically been more explicitly theoretical than its British counterpart, and this is in part explicable in terms of the more rapid and recent development of the Italian working class, who have consequently demanded more of marxist theory than has been the case in Britain. Hence, while Capital remains the essential marxist text in this country, it is to The Grundrisse which Italian marxism has turned for its most important methodological insights. Negri has been central to this appropriation of The Grundrisse, which was the subject of his first major work available in the English language, Marx Beyond Marx - which among other things, challenged Althusserian Marxism through a detailed study of The Grundrisse.

The influence of The Grundrisse on Western Marxism in general, and on Negri in particular, is discussed by Yann Moulier in a useful introduction to The Politics of Subversion. This, combined with a reading of John Merrington's notes to The Revolution Retrieved, and the essays by Harry Cleaver and Michael Ryan in Marx Beyond Marx, go some way to helping readers situate Negri and understand the broad outlines of his approach. A reading of Negri himself however, provides the best insight, particularly the later essays, ("Archaeology and Project" in The Revolution Retrieved, and part one of The Politics of Subversion) where he reflects on the development of workerism and autonomy and the relevance of the categories which they developed in relation to struggles within Italian society during the '60s and '70s, in the light of the early 1980s.

The essential concept, necessary for an understanding of Negri, is that of "class composition". This was developed by Italian Marxists in the 1960s as a means of avoiding the crude and misleading notion of class which reduces the possibility of revolution to a problem of "consciousness". As a practitioner of the methodology of class composition, Negri sees a distinction between, on the one hand, labour power and on the other, the working class seen as a "dynamic subject" and an "antagonistic force". Through an examination of labour power, the method is to discover the working class, "as a determinate level of needs and desires" which tends toward an assertion of an identity independent of its existence as labour power. As such, the theorist of class composition does not define the "working class" and proceed to observe it in order to pass judgement on its failures. Class composition observes labour power, discovers the working class and seeks to understand its dynamic.

The methodology of class composition led, in the 1960s, to the discovery of the"mass worker". The mass worker was characterised by "the refusal of work", which involved the rejection of all attempts to increase productivity, planning, and hierarchy, and which spread from the factory to society at large (the mobility of labour being a crucial medium), to include the factory, the home, and the universities. Capital's response to the mass worker was a radical restructuration of social relations, and Negri's later work seeks to come to an understanding of that restructuration. Negri considers that the mass worker has been surpassed by a new class composition, that of the "social worker". The fragmentation of the mass worker was the aim of capitalist restructuration during the 1970s, which diffused the large scale factory into society at large, encouraging small plants, the use of new technologies, subcontracts and so on, in order to increase exploitation through decentralisation. This however, also created the conditions for the emergence of the "social worker", new social subjects whose struggles took place outside of the factory, and which included a range of groups regarded by orthodox marxism as "marginals".

The methodology of Negri's discussion of the movement from mass worker to social worker, is based upon that of Marx in The Grundrisse. Negri devotes much attention to Marx's analysis of the role of money as mediator of the division of labour and the significance of these categories to an understanding of class formation. It is to this end that he focusses upon the development of social labour, the nature of State forms, the relationship between the division of labour and organisation, and the overall movement of communism. These themes are expounded throughout both The Revolution Retrieved, and The Politics of Subversion, but three essays, read together, provide an overview of Negri's analysis : "Keynes and The Capitalist Theory of the State Post 1929", considers the relationship between the Keynesian State, the Bolshevik revolution, and the Mass Worker; "Crisis of the Planner State : Communism and Revolutionary Organisation", gives an analysis of the breakdown of Keynsianism in the context of new class composition, and provides an important insight into Negri's analysis of the nature of social antagonism and class formation; "The Crisis of the Crisis State", meanwhile, considers the post-Keynesian State - a State which, in order to impose its command over labour is intensely more coercive than hitherto, both nationally and globally - and presents Negri's analysis of the transition to communism in the context of real class antagonisms.

All three essays appear in The Revolution Retrieved, which also includes discussions of Marx, Keynes and Schumpeter on the nature of capitalist crises (Marx on Cycle and Crisis) and the relevance of The Grundrisse to contemporary capitalism, among other pieces. The Politics of Subversion closely relates to Negri's odyssey from mass worker to social worker and the possibilities of a new class composition beyond that. It considers the possibilities for communism presented, towards the mid-1980s, in the context of global crisis and uncertainty - and is in this sense a development of the new relationship of class forces outlined in "The Crisis of the Crisis State".

Negri's knowledge of Marx, the classical marxist tradition and contemporary "post-marxist" writing, is wide ranging and his work is both provocative and well informed as a consequence. This is not to say, however, that there is no room for criticisms of Negri and readers will doubtlessly find bones of contention. Two common objections, are that there is no concept of capitalist "decay" in his work, and that working class struggle appears as heroic or too subjective. Readers must make up their own minds after reading the works reviewed here. The point is that, in the present situation, when the fashion (given impetus by events in Eastern Europe) is to consign both Marx and communism to the dustbin of history, and when marxism has no relationship with the working class, Negri and the tradition from which he comes, are too important to be marginalised or excluded from serious debate.

Alun Francis

William Connolly: Political Theory and Modernity (Blackwell 1989)

Attacks on Marx have come in varying forms throughout the twentieth century, their quantity far outweighing their quality. This is particularly true of the 1970's and 1980's, which saw the development of post-structuralism into post-modernism and finally into post-marxism by many writers some of whom still consider themselves Marxist. There has in recent years however been a growing trend towards criticising Marx by categorising him with other 'classical' political theorists and rejecting the entire tradition of their thought from a particular perspective. The influence behind this perspective has often been Nietzsche. Connolly's work is a perfect example of such an approach.

In this work Connolly seeks to "privilege an Nietzschean perspective" in order to "call modernity into question without either lapsing into nostalgia for one of the worlds it has lost or postulating a future utopia where we could finally reach a 'home in the world'"(p.6). For it is precisely a 'home in the world' that both Nietzsche and Connolly believe political theory, including Marx, has sought. In his attempt to show how this is so Connolly rejects Marx along with traditional theory in favour of a post-modernist liberalism.

Connolly seeks to reject Marx and Hegel on the same grounds. To do this he focuses on Marx's essay Critical Notes on the Article "The King of Prussia and Social Reform", in which Marx criticises the call for a political response to pauperism. Marx argues that a political response would not be the remedy, for England, which is the most politically developed country, is also the home of pauperism. Moreover, the political response to pauperism in England has always merely resulted in arguments between political parties. "The Whig regards the Tory and the Tory regards the Whig as the cause of pauperism" (quoted in Connolly p.126). Pauperism is thus seen as a defect of administration; its solution the remedying of this defect.

In this essay Marx offers an outline of a revolutionary critique of modern political administration and bourgeois politics. Instead of being involved in a party political argument about the relative defects of different policies Marx steps outside this debate in order to criticise "politics in general" and therefore to suggest that the remedy lies in the revolutionary transformation of politics along with society.

Connolly however reads this essay in an entirely different way. Hegel sought to remedy the contradictions within society through specific administrative and political measures. A particular organisation of the state would be the solution. Marx does not seek the remedy in the state. "His answer is to eliminate civil society itself and to fold individuality into communal life" (p.127). For Connolly not only is this "idealism", it also suggests that the "debate between Hegel and Marx moves within the same sort of circle Marx discerned in the debate between the Whigs and Tories. Each party, in opposing its adversary, first blames observed difficulties on practices or principles celebrated by the adversary and then responds by inflating a principle deflated by the opponent" (p.128). Actually, the debate between Hegel and Marx is nothing of the sort. Just as the Whigs and Tories were convinced that remedying administration could be the solution to pauperism, so Hegel was convinced that political organisations working within and through the state could overcome the contradictions of civil society. Neither the Whigs and Tories nor Hegel could see that the state was actually part of the problem. Marx could. In this sense Marx's dispute with Hegel is precisely the opposite of the dispute between Whigs and Tories for Marx criticises the very premises of Hegel's thought.

For Connolly's argument however, Marx and Hegel need to be enclosed within the same circle for he wishes to reject them both on the same grounds. Connolly believes that both Hegel and Marx offer "depoliticised visions of life". They both "depreciate the importance of politics in the realised society because each has too much faith in the possibility of transparency and harmony in the realised state" (p.130). Marx rejects Spirit but replaces it with a notion of the susceptibility of nature to human mastery: 'plasticity in nature'. Both Hegel and Marx insist that the world be for us, either through the realisation of Spirit or the mastery of nature. Marx's insistence that the world be formed by us instead of for us by Spirit is in fact Hegelianism by other means. "It is the conversion of Hegelianism into a set of presumptions more credible and amenable to modern sensibilities" (p.132).

Most readers will recognise this as a dubious argument. Connolly has to place Marx and Hegel within the same circle because he wants to reject them both as theories which involve suppression and containment of disruptive elements. 'Otherness', that which is different, will be interpreted as irrational, irresponsible or perverse and subjugated accordingly. Thus both theories contain an authoritarian impulse which is rooted in their ontological assumptions. It is in contrast to such theories that Connolly suggests a Nietzschean political position is more productive for it involves less constrictions on 'otherness'.

In Thus Spake Zarathustra Zarathustra meets a hunchback and faces the problem of how to treat someone who is 'different'. Such 'difference' in a society based on Hegelian or Marxist principles would be "depreciated, regulated and helped in the name of a true norm". Zarathustra, epitomising Nietzschean ethics, treats the hunchback 'in a hunchbacked way'. Thus the phenomenon of otherness is recognised without being either subjugated or treated.

Connolly's reading of Nietzsche's treatment of 'otherness' represents for him the perfect example of the distinction between Nietzsche and traditional political theory. Nietzsche recognises the phenomenon of otherness as

an essential part of the ambiguity of modernity; traditional political theory, following Western culture in general, seeks ways of restraining and containing ambiguity. Traditional political theory has been driven by the desire to found a society in which we can be at one with ourselves and the world. Nietzsche considers this to be the politics of homesickness.

Nietzsche gives a list of German philosophers, Leibnitz, Kant, Hegel and Schoepenhauer, to which Connolly adds Marx, who represent "the most fundamental form of romanticism and homesickness there has ever been...One is no longer at home anywhere; at last one longs back for that place in which alone one can be at home: the Greek world" (quoted in Connolly p.135). In political theory homesickness is the demand that one attempts to realise what one yearns for most in life but which modernity necessarily denies us. Thus Marxist political theory is a combination of modern man's ambiguous and uncertain position in the world and Marx's ontological assumptions regarding nature and mans domination of it.

Connolly therefore uses Nietzsche in order to reject traditional political theory. His effort to place Marx firmly within this tradition, despite Marx's clear distance from it, is an attempt to completely clear the grounds for his own post-modernist politics which he feels is more pertinent to the late-twentieth century. This politics has its origins in Nietzsche. Nietzsche's acceptance of the ambiguities and uncertainties of modernity, characterised in his treatment of 'otherness', is expected to convince us of the essential differences within human beings (as if we needed convincing) and to therefore seek ways of enabling those differences to be. For Nietzsche this involves "giving style to one's character", which Connolly sees in the late-twentieth century as involving adjustments in diet, exercise, reading, habits and relationships (p.163). This, Connolly believes, is the basis for a "reconstituted, radicalised liberalism" (p.174). It would be a liberal radicalism in its sensitivity to the rights of difference against the weight of mastery and normality, and it would be a radical liberalism because of its dissent from the settled frame in which contemporary issues are debated.

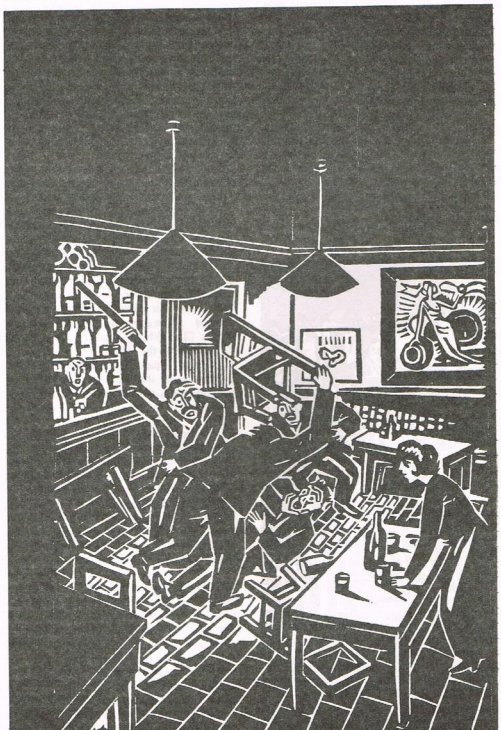
With conclusions such as these one recognises precisely the objective behind Connolly's work. We have arrived at yet another form of reformism. Revolutionary transformation is out of court because it implies domination and mastery. Instead each individual is to develop and alter various characteristics of his/her own style in a society which gives free reign to these individual nuances. This would involve rethinking our notions of law, gender, race etc.

The originality of Connolly lies in the route he has taken to arrive at his post-modernist reformism. He rejects the tradition of political theory, Marx included, by explicitly privileging a Nietzschean perspective. Nietzsche, who remained a shadowy figure behind much of post-modernist thought, has finally been dragged out of the shadows to constitute the basis of yet another form of liberalism.

It is pertinent to point out, however, that Connolly completely ignores the other aspect of Nietzsche's work, such as his concept of the aristocracy as a historical force and the implications of this, and his disparaging remarks about the working class, women and Jews. Also, it would perhaps be wise for Connolly to examine an alternative current way of reading Nietzsche. For this I would refer him to the summer and fall 1980 issues of National Socialist, an American neo-Nazi journal, where a Nietzschean perspective is privileged not for a radical liberalism but as the philosophical basis for racism and Nazism. Whilst they state that Nietzsche was not a National Socialist, they do believe that "only those who are born National Socialists...will be able to recognise the vital truths which were revealed for the first time by Friedrich Nietzsche". And they suggest that liberal intellectuals only select "those parts...that seem to be in line with their personal wishes and prejudices". It would therefore seem wise for Connolly to address these issues, as they are conspicuous by their absence from his book.

But for our purposes Connolly's book is useful as yet another variation on the rejection of Marxism through the 'guilt by association theme'. To reject Marxism most writers have had to either place it within the same circle as Hegel or hold it responsible for stalinism, thereby leaving them free to conclude that Marxism can offer us nothing in the late-twentieth century and that we need new forms of political thinking. Even with a different route the destination remains the same: bourgeois thought for bourgeois society.

Mark Neocleous



OBITUARY

Louis Althusser

Louis Althusser was one of the most important stalinist theologians of the post-war period. Bringing a set of meticulously vague and scrupulously corrupt categories - "overdetermination", "ideological interpelation", etc - to bear upon the problem of stalinist ideological legitimation, his impact was immense. The world wide dissemination of his thought obstructed critical thought and discussion on the left for almost two decades.

Stated in political terms, Althusser's aim was to destroy the intellectual resources necessary for the critique of stalinism. His great achievement was to consign to an intellectual gulag the minds of many aspiring revolutionaries. His writings were of such labyrinthine complexity and gratuitous obscurity that merely to enter into dialogue with them was to risk losing one's bearings entirely. Many of those who did so have never re-emerged.

Updating the discredited "histmat" and "diamat" of his political masters through copious injections of vulgarised structuralist misanthropy - his "scientific anti-humanism" - Althusser provided a justification of stalinism in the guise of a theoretical critique.

It is clear now that Althusser's writings have contributed to the ideological collapse of stalinism, by demonstrating ultimately what he had endeavoured to hide: the absolute opposition of stalinism to the project of human emancipation, many of his followers were left no option but to embrace the postmodernist celebration of fragmentation as the increasingly dominant ideological form of the prevention of communism. Althusser's thought, marked above all by a wilful dishonesty - note, for example, his claim that "in 1965 ... I was already writing about Stalin" - is thus of interest to all who seek to understand the destruction of reason by the categories of bureaucratic administration and terror.

A taste of the full horror of Althusser's project can be gained from his claim that "ideology (as a system of mass representation) is indispensable in any society if men are to be formed, transformed and equipped to respond to the demands of their conditions of existence. If, as Marx said, history is a perpetual transformation of men's conditions of existence, and if this is equally true of socialist society, then men must be consciously transformed so as to adapt them to these conditions; if this 'adaption' cannot be left to spontaneity but must be constantly assumed, dominated and controlled, it is in ideology that this demand is expressed, that this distance is measured, that this contradiction is lived and its resolution is 'activated'. It is in ideology that the classless society lives the inadequacy/adequacy of the relation between it and the world, it is in it and by it that it transforms men's 'consciousness', that is, their attitudes and behaviour so as to raise them to the level of their tasks and the conditions of their existence." (For Marx, p235). What is this but a legitimation of the gulag?

Louis Althusser, the last high priest of stalinism, died on October 22nd 1990, aged 72.

David Gorman

CONFERENCE REVIEWS

A Response to the Critique conference 'The Disintegration of Stalinism and the Revival of Socialism', LSE 23-4 February 1990

This conference proclaimed the end of the long epoch when all socialist tendencies orientated themselves by competing definitions of the attractive and repulsive force field of the Soviet Union. The platform speakers hailed the end of that trotskyist tradition of producing ever more epicyclic explanations of the USSR: "degenerate workers' state", "partially regenerated workers' state", "state capitalist" ..... What was remarkable about this proclamation was that its social form could have occurred at any time during the epoch of stalinist/trotskyist apologetics and that its form could have carried these apologetics without strain.

Plenary sessions occurred in a lecture theatre with rows of seats rising up from a platform. Platform speakers gave presentations to the audience. After a few such speeches there were questions and statements from the audience. After several of these a speaker would reply in a single declamation which parcelled up several contributions. These performances were impressive - impressive as performances, as theatre, as sport.

The political culture reproduced in these "exchanges" had more in common with the multi-game demonstrations of a chess master than with nurturing a culture of subversion. There was some use of the word "dialectics" in these discussions; there was little dialecticity in these exchanges which partnered the etiquette of the academic conference with that of the student union debate.

The architecture of the hall was a perfect embodiment of the social relations in the conference. It will be said, of course, that such a venue was the best available, that the tiered arrangement of the seating in no way expressed any intentionality on the organisers' part. In a sense such a response is valid: the decision to use such a structure would have simply appeared as natural and obvious from the common-sense of the intellectual worker in the academy. This choice would not have appeared to be a choice. The actual choice was not operative at the individual level but at the collective level of left-academic culture. Nonetheless, it was a choice.

There was no sense whatever in the plenaries that the hall's architecture had any relationship with the political-cultural work being produced in it. Far less was there any sense that there was a tension between the theoretical content of that culture and the social forms that articulated that content.

Between this theoretical content and the institutional origin of the modern lecture theatre there played a mix of resonance and dissonance. The lecture theatre derives from the Renaissance medical schools, it carries on the pattern of tiers of spectator seats rising from a table on which the dissection of a corpse was demonstrated. The operating theatre was itself modelled on the dramatic theatre. The three theatres share the structure of performers and spectators (see Michel Foucault, Cadaveric Discourses and the Discourse of the Cadaver, Tulane University Press Occasional Papers no 81).

Whose corpse lies on the table?

David Murray.

In August 1990 men and women gathered to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the murder of Leon Trotsky. They must have met in many towns and there were at least four conferences, in Wuppertal, Harrogate, Aberdeen and Mexico City, to discuss the life and works of Leon Trotsky. Some came to praise, others came to damn with faint praise, and others again would have liked to bury the name with the man.

The conferences were not large - and that was partly because the convenors had decided that a restricted group would allow for more fruitful discussion. But they were also small because the number of persons who might have something to contribute to an evaluation of the work of Trotsky was limited. Indeed, at the one gathering which I attended there was far too little original thought and an insufficiency of ideas on the career of a man who at one stage stood almost alone in analysing and condemning fascism on the one hand and Stalinism on the other.

The Stalin era had a profound effect on all of us, preventing the development of Marxist ideas. It had an effect on the cadre attracted to the socialist movement - some of them miseducated in the Stalinist parties and bringing with them the corrupted influence of that movement. GPU terror had reached deep into the ranks of the socialist movement. This had weakened or even destroyed a cadre inside and outside the USSR. No one was spared. Trotsky, too, had been deeply affected during his life by the agents of the GPU, through the death of his children and his closest political associates. When we come to assess his work in those last days in exile we will have to take into consideration the effects of the all-pervading terror unleashed by Stalin.

Now, with the collapse of the Stalinist regimes in eastern Europe, there must be new hope that some of that terror has been removed. And a renewed hope that new ideas will be allowed to blossom. This seems to have been foreshadowed at these conferences. For the first time in almost seven decades there were academics (if not political activists) from the USSR and eastern Europe and from the west and, I have heard from China as well. Indeed, it was the purpose of many of the convenors to invite scholars from behind the "iron" and "bamboo" curtains so that there could be a widening of the discourse on Marxist theory.

There were representatives from the USSR and eastern Europe at Aberdeen and it was this that aroused my interest. Without deprecating anything said by the British or north American speakers, I knew much of what they had to say. Their writings, some fascinating, others fairly mundane, had been available in print over many decades. But there had been a deadening silence from eastern Europe on the question of Trotsky for so long that this seemed to offer the hope that something really new might be forthcoming. Yet, it is too soon to expect a great revival. The academics from eastern Europe brought some new factual material, and some analytical insights, but much of what they produced was little more than run-of-the-mill papers, little different from the usual contributions to annual conferences of "learned" or not so learned societies. Some delegates were probably invited because they had delivered papers, or had published some work on Trotsky. Their contributions varied from the good to the awful. Some had read widely and this included manuscripts found in the archives, others seemed to have only a patchy knowledge of the subject. This is the pattern at all conferences and needs little comment - except for the fact that these men and women had all expenses paid, and some did little to justify the cost.

There was also a hidden agenda in some of the papers and this was obvious in what some said aloud. In other cases the objective could be guessed. It was generally taken as read that Stalin was beyond the pale and did not need discussion - consequently the focus could rest on Trotsky with no need to apologise for discussing his theories and activities. In so doing the delegates were by no means committed to adopting a "Trotskyist orientation". Some used Trotsky to denounce bureaucracy (this was said explicitly by a Czech who maintained that bureaucracy was the only aspect of Trotsky that interested him); or praised Trotsky to justify claims that culture had declined in Soviet society because pop-singers had been allowed to perform. There were quite obviously differences between those who supported Ligachev (or his faction) and the followers of Gorbachev; others came to plead for a "free market" economy. But the influences were not always obvious. One Soviet professor gave a paper in which he argued that there was no difference between Lenin and Trotsky. In fact they marched together in all issues. This is quite obviously not the case and I could not understand his reasoning... Later, I was told the intention was to condemn Lenin and Trotsky equally.

Yet, there were some speakers who had obviously read Trotsky quite differently. The speaker from east Germany (who had studied in the USSR) provided an account of Trotsky's writings in German during the years 1904-7 in Kautsky's paper, Neue Zeit. He contrasted the views of the Mensheviks and Lenin on the nature of Revolution, drawn in their case from an analysis of the French Revolution (1789-1794), and then proceeded to show that Trotsky had taken a different view because he drew his lessons from the events of 1848. The differences between Lenin and the Mensheviks were over the nature of the bourgeois revolution: while Trotsky's perspective related to the coming socialist revolution.

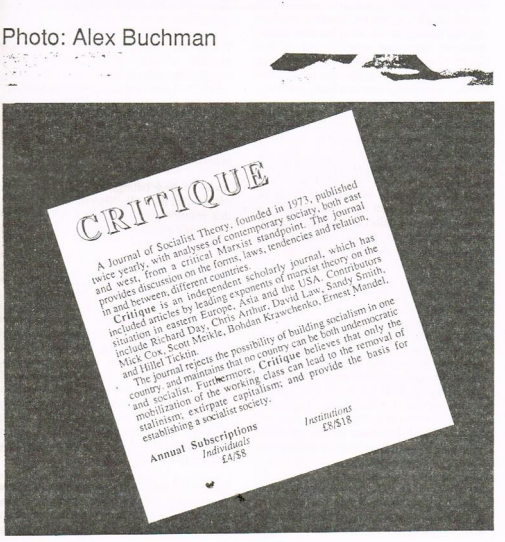
Another paper, discussing Trotsky's attitude to the second world war was perceptive. This speaker, criticising Trotsky's prediction that the war would end with the sweeping away of Stalinism said this was falsified by Trotsky's failure to realise that Stalinism did not exist in the superstructure of society, but was deeply entrenched in the Soviet economy. Consequently, Trotsky's agenda for the revitalisation of Soviet society through a political revolution did not eventuate. Unfortunately this point was not elaborated. The audience was left to their own conclusions: namely that this was a plea for the market - or alternatively (following the journal, Critique) that the Soviet economy was based on massive waste and had to be completely transformed before socialism could be built.

There is as yet only limited access to the Trotsky papers but there were snippets confirming some of Trotsky's claims in his writings published in the west. But there were also some writings on the pre-revolutionary period that were not available to us. I asked whether there were any documents of the Mezhrayonka, the Petrograd Inter-borough Committee to which Trotsky adhered before he joined the Bolsheviks in 1917, and was told that there were one or two papers written on the organisation. These is was promised, would be sent from the USSR when the delegates returned.

If this was a detailed report of the one conference I attended it would have to include comments on Greg Benton's paper on the Chinese Trotskyists (far and away the most important of the groups formed on the 1930s), Richard Day's discussion of the Hegel roots of Trotsky's thoughts, of Hillel Ticktin's paper on Trotsky's theory of the long wave of capitalist development and so on. But summaries can do no justice to detailed studies: readers will have to wait for their publication. But the potential that was demonstrated by these commemorative meetings lay far beyond the papers that were presented. What was really significant was the possibility of opening up discussions on Marxism across geographical boundaries and of clearing out the crudities of the Stalin era. As yet it is only a possibility and it might be premature to celebrate such co-operation. It is the prospect that is so exiting and challenging. Much hard work will be needed to transform it into reality.

Baruch Hirson

Photo: Alex Buchman



12th Radical Philosophy Conference, London, 17th November 1990

The subject of the conference - "Values, Resistance and Social Change" - seemed to offer a range of themes and issues crucial in the aftermath of the events of 1989 in Eastern Europe. The reality was, however, different.

The proceedings were marked by an atmosphere of disorientation in which contributions tended to be vague and unfocussed, often failing to engage with the subjects they purported to address. Central questions - the historical significance of stalinism, the future of socialism, the nature of postmodernism, the radical right's proclamation of the "end of history" - were trivialised and rendered banal. Occasionally, a potentially interesting idea was floated and ... floated away. The result was an opportunity lost.

Philosophy made only a guarded appearance. Key categories - class, alienation, dialectics and exploitation, for example - simply failed to attend. The nature of many contributions suggested an often ???? capitulation to the postmodernist assault on human social reality.

Jarring with this self-referenced discourse of professional abstractions was Istvan Mészáros reference to surplus extraction in the USSR and the involvement of human beings in the momentous events in eastern Europe and their aftermath.

These events themselves constitute the real problem. The collapse of stalinism in eastern Europe has thrown much of the left into confusion. Despite the maintenance of a critical orientation towards stalinism, failure to develop a theoretical critique in terms of political economy has led to bewilderment in the face of change. Lacking a full comprehension of what had been rejected, anti-stalinism effectively legitimised aquiescence to stalinism as a transitional form by accepting its deeper presupposition as a permanent necessity. This expressed itself at the conference through an ambivalent attitude towards local authority socialism, a fear that rejection of the welfare state bureaucracy means a return to "primitive communism" and a belief that the non-capitalist future requires the market plus state limitations.

The root of this confusion is a view of the proletariat as a passive, directionless object. In accord with this misconception was one participant's call - endorsed by others - for a "culture of active citizenship" under which individuals would be "expected" to participate in "community work". This was presented as a necessary conditoin for the development of "socialist consciousness". Bureaucracy, in one form or another, is thus still concieved of either as a transitional form or an end in itself. For a left still implicated in these forms, the removal of bureaucracy can be experienced only as a loss.

Socialism has no future from the standpoint of working class needs, nor has it had any since, in 1914, it entered into terminal contradiction with that most recaltricant of social realities: combined labour. The task is not to socialise the market, but to participate in the self-emancipatory movement of the proletariat towards the society of freely associating producers. In the context of the need for communism, the concern with "ethics", "morality" and "values" constitutes an evasion of social reality. A future of bureaucratic administration tempered with moral concern is no future. It is more of the same.

David Gorman & Bob Shepherd.

from p 40

a general crisis exemplified by rampant inflation. Wages fell, the working day lengthened, unemployment rose. Hitler's disbandment of the Trade Unions in 1933 - his first piece of major social legislation - was yet another expression of a process decisively set in motion a decade earlier. It was both through these unfolding conditions and as a consequence of them that Benjamin, like so many of his generation, became progressively radicalised and receptive to revolutionary praxis. His own intellectual development during this period continued to be influenced by his friendship with Bloch and Scholem and his increasing interest in marxism focussed on Lukacs' History and Class Consciousness, and the consequent debates following its publication. A further and perhaps decisive influence was a developing relationship with the young Bolshevik theatre producer, Asja Lacis, an assistant to Brecht and Piscator, which rapidly progressed from assignation to a tempestuous love affair.

During the rest of the 1930s, and until Hitler's rise to power, he managed to secure enough funds through employment and parental generosity to allow him to make extended trips to Paris, the Mediterranean, and afford a lengthy stay in Moscow in the winter of 1926-7.

His trip to the U.S.S.R. had a twofold purpose. To visit the hospitalised Asja Lacis and to reach a decisive conclusion as to whether to join the German Communist Party (K.P.D.), a matter which he had frequently considered. A range of factors were taken into account in this deliberation: Pragmatically the K.P.D. could offer him paid employment - an attractive proposition as his academic career had all but stalled. Secondly, and rather naively, he saw the party as an environment in which he could fruitfully intervene, since it was "organised and guaranteed contact with the people". He never joined, concluding that his main area of competence was "overspecialised". Instead he gravitated towards influential circles orbiting around Adorno, Horkheimer, and most fruitfully for Benjamin, Brecht. At this point, he construed his own project as working in "an illegal incognito among the bourgeois authors", pursuing a destructive project from within.

Driven into exile for the second time in his life, along with so many of the same milieu, his primary source of support from 1934 onwards was a small but regular stipend, paid by the relocated Frankfurt Institute of Social Research. In return for this support he supplied one major essay every year and an irregular series of reviews. This at least provided for his basic needs, supplementing this income by writing for a variety of emigré journals.

These mature years of his life were his most productive. However he never saw the publication of a full length book under his own name. What has been bequeathed in the form of a collection of aphorisms - One Way Street, (1928), reviews of contemporary literary production, monographic presentations of particular movements or individuals, or his better known theoretical work in essay form - for example, The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction (1935) - nonetheless represents a prolific intellectual activity. Yet despite this productivity, Benjamin never completed the most enduring of his work, the suggestive Arcades project which he was to work on from the late 1920s until his death. Intended to represent a panoramic disclosure of 19th century Paris, the project encompassed architecture, literature, and the character of the life of the city.

A refugee in Paris since 1935, living a financially precarious and isolated existence, he was incarcerated in an internment camp in the autumn of 1939. Through the efforts of influential friends he was soon released and eventually secured a U.S. entry permit.

However, the last few months of his life were desperately tortuous. In his final letter to Adorno, Benjamin vividly expressed the sense of being encircled and overcome by the forces of destructive reaction who could clearly identify him as both a jew and a communist: "The total uncertainty as to what the next days, the next hours will bring has dominated my existence for many weeks. I am condemned to read every newspaper (they appear here on only one page) as a writ published against me and to hear every radio report the voice of bad tidings." His apartment, containing the expansive library - the tools of his labour - which he had painstakingly assembled was eventually confiscated by the Gestapo. He was unsure of the fate of the manuscripts abandoned to the care of Parisian friends. Besides, he was not drawn by the prospect of settling in the United States, where he assumed he was destined to be carted up and down the country, exhibited as the "last European".

His repute as a polymathic critic of intellectual and cultural production is entirely posthumous. During his own life he was known only in small, albeit influential circles of friends and associates in France and Germany. Benjamin's wider reception can be dated from 1955 when Adorno undertook the task of editing a selection of his essays. It was not until the 1970s that his major writings appeared in English under the title Illuminations (1973).

The disparate reception of this work after his death is indicative of a genuinely original thinker who's legacy requires thoughtful appropriation. He has largely remained a hostage to those of his contemporaries who reduce the scope of his thought to one of its many determinants, alternatively to those archaeologists of the aesthetic who call him to their service in wilfully arcane academic dispute. For example, both Susan Sontag and Hannah Arendt lay claim to aspects of his writings whilst simultaneously detaching him from the marxist tradition.

In post-War Europe Benjamin's influence became widely assimilated in theoretical and academic dispute and, less conspicuously, in a wider arena. John Berger's influential television series Ways of Seeing originally broadcast in the early 1970s was directly influenced by Benjamin. While the particular content of his work remains vigorously contested his insightfulness is beyond doubt, the originality of which is attested to by the difficulty with which it has been appropriated in the anglo-saxon world.

To approach Benjamin's legacy is to approach a body of work that does not lend itself to casual reading. His sentences are concentrated, his writing style is simultaneously opaque and concise. There is the non-appearance of immediate consistency where motifs, which ordinarily run at cross purposes are brought together but never unified. His thought is perhaps best apprehended as allegorical, he was the master of the extended metaphor, which sought to find both past and future location in order to illuminate the present moment. The anglo-saxon habit of reading in a literal manner fails to make any effective connection with the metaphorical intent of his paradoxically couched word formations.

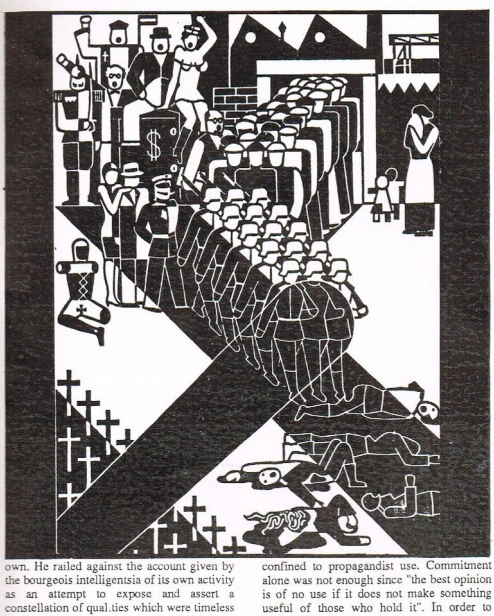
Within his work there is an attempt to seek and disclose the contiguous relationships of a range of exploratory strands of 19th and 20th century intellectual and artistic production. This process focussed on movements such as Surrealism or Dada, or individual producers, for example, Baudelaire, Fourier, Bergson, or Proust. Receptive to so much and so many he remained outside established orthodoxy and beyond consignment to a single location within the division of intellectual labour.He was never simply a literary critic or sociologist of art, a philosopher or aesthetician.

The pivotal point in Benjamin's development occured around about 1925 in his engagement with the marxism of the period. It followed from the completion of his book manuscript on German Tragic drama, which itself was concerned with the political nature of cultural practice, a manuscript which he later recognised as being dialectical but not materialist in orientation.

Aware of these failings, his attention became focussed on the multiplicity of ways in which that practice was conditioned and mediated by changing forms of technology and social organisation.

The key category that he developed in this context, was Technik, a word which in German means both "technology" and "technique", an ambiguity which he retained in order to emphasise the realm of practical material intervention as the integration of theory and practice. For Benjamin, Technik expressed the unity of theory and practice, of human relations of production and the means of production, of technique and technology. This implied a decisive rejection of the positivist separation of these realms, or the supercession of one by the other as in Hegel's triumph of the spirit.

Benjamin located intellectual activity within the context of Technik echoing Marx's rejection of assigning it the capacity for an independent and distinct development of its



own. He railed against the account given by the bourgeois intelligentsia of its own activity as an attempt to expose and assert a constellation of qual.ties which were timeless in nature, rather than recognising a continuous process of change and movement which demanded purposive understanding rather than introverted contemplation.

The bourgeoisie was not the only object of attack. He took issue with those on the left who asserted that adherence to the 'correct' political line absolved the work of art from having to measure up to any 'bourgeois' standards of quality. Benjamin saw political tendency and quality unified in what he called 'literary tendency'. In his view, "This literary tendency, which is implicitly or explicitly included in every **correct** political tendency, this and nothing else constitutes the quality of a work. The correct political tendency of a work includes its literary quality **because** it includes its literary tendency." (his emphasis). The unification of political tendency and literary quality is ensured by the use of progressive literary tendencies.

For Benjamin, these tendencies included the attempt to break from private speculation and in Brecht's words, "break into other people's heads", awakening "deliberation and action". Consequently the ability of this form of production to effect change could be judged on its ability to organise and reorganise political groupings, formation and party. He was careful to stress that the organisational usefulness of writing ought not to be confined to propagandist use. Commitment alone was not enough since "the best opinion is of no use if it does not make something useful of those who hold it". In order to subvert this possibility, progressive writing had to be simultaneously a model to instruct others in production, and secondly, to place an improved apparatus in their hands: An apparatus that would be the better "the more consumers it brings into contact with the production process- in short the more readers and spectators it turns into collaborators".

An exemplification of the use of a progressive literary technique was where the effect was to intervene in and aid the forging of class organisation out of a responsive and collaborative proletariat. Antithetical to this was a conception of addressing the public as a passive consumer of products originating from an individual creator. The public was a corrupt and alienated condition of the mass as much as was the conception of an individual creative personality. To proceed otherwise was to reproduce the opposition of theory to practice, producer to consumer and the active to the passive - in short the very antinomies of bourgeois society.

It was Benjamin's contention that the writer must be transformed from being a "supplier of the production apparatus, into an engineer who seeks his task in adapting that apparatus to the ends of the proletarian revolution". This conception was predicated upon the "functioning transformation" of various aspects of mass culture, specifically those developed through techniques of mechanical reproduction which already served to dissipate the aura surrounding the previously unique and distanced work of art embedded in tradition and ritual. This auratic quality induced concentration, empathy, absorbtion and identification on the part of the reader or audience. These conditions of aesthetic and political passivity were seen to be undermined by the development of photography, film, radio and mass circulation newspapers which served to destroy the unique and harmonious work of art. The progressive consequence of this was the emergence of an estrangement on the part of the audience, which created the possibility for a critical attitude towards that being experienced. This apprehension consciously intersected with Brecht's theatrical technique of alienating the audience from what was being performed on the stage. This strategy sought to transform the passive consumer into the active creator through the use of episodic play structure, direct addresses to the audience and open-endedness of conclusion.

It was never satisfactorily ascertained where the body of the refugee was laid to rest. Hannah Arendt, who had known Benjamin during his stay in Paris, arrived in Port Bou a few months after his death but sought his grave in vain. As the years passed by others came in search, this time to be greeted by cemetary attendants who directed the curious towards a wooden enclosure upon which his name had been scrawled. This apocryphal location owed its existence to the shrewd perception of the attendants who recognised that the satisfied visitor was more likely to be generous when dispensing a tip.

Even in death it is strikingly apposite that Benjamin remains enigmatic, subject to the curious enquirer in search of what is then willed into existence, ably assisted by an overseer of the relic who is in a position to exploit apparent ambiguity for a self-interested purpose.

For too long the written trace of Benjamin has been subject to an analogous fate. His image splintered by arcane factional dispute, elevated as a creative if obscure individual genius and consigned to one or other area of an increasingly detailed location in the division of intellectual labour.

Benjamin advanced beyond the confines of the dominant debates on artistic, literary and intellectual production in the 1930s. He was one of only a handful of theoreticians who not only rejected the sterility of stalinist diamat, but who also tried to both broaden and deepen marxist theory. To undertake this in isolation and exile, in the face of fascism's advance was to undertake a herculean task.

Walter Benjamin inaugurated a project that demands recovery; a recovery that is perhaps only now possible. As stalinism enters a period of terminal decline so the possibilities to successfully appropriate what was denounced as heretical unfold

David Officer

Walter Benjamin

It has been frequently noted that 1990 marks the fiftieth anniversary of the fall of continental Europe to Fascism. In the midst of this remembrance the mass displacement of the civilian population and the flight of the refugee has served as little more than a footnote to the formal drama of diplomatic intrigue and military maneouvre. Yet it did not require the declaration of national war to create a German diaspora comprised of jews, communists, liberals and others. Many oppositionists had already departed their native country during the 1930s, seeking, among other places, shelter on French soil. By June 1940, the relative security afforded by this locaation was violently disturbed by the armistice signed between the Third Reich and the Vichy Government. Thousands hurriedly decamped once again and trecked along an established escape route to North America, via the Iberian Peninsula.

On the 25th September 1940, a small group of refugees approached the Spanish town of Port Bou by an unguarded route, across mountainous terrain. Their journey was thwarted by Spanish guards who had closed the border earlier that day and who intended to return them to France the next morning. That night, one among the refugees, Walter Benjamin, took his own life. The following day, disturbed by what had happened during the night, the guards relented and his companions proceeded to Portugal.

On hearing of his death, Bertolt Brecht, himself having just reached the safety of the United States, was reported to have said of Benjamin that German literature had suffered its first real loss to Hitler.

Benjamin was born in Berlin in 1892, the son of affluent Jewish parents. The family lived in a substantial house in Grunewald, the patrician quarter of the German capital. By his own account he grew up in a materially comfortable and secure environment, surrounded by the objects of his father's trade in antiques and valuable oriental carpets. Here he absorbed the extravagant habits of the compulsive bibliophile and collector of objects of beauty.

Prior to the outbreak of the Great War, he developed precocious talents as a writer within the broad and diverse German Youth Movement. This mass organisation drew its support from all sections of German society and acted as a conduit for the expression of protest against the decaying values of the previous generation. This tended to take an atavistic form evoking nature and tradition rooted in Teutonic myth, purity and heritage. Benjamin never subscribed to this dominant perspective but gravitated towards a milieu guided by the rationalistic humanism of the educational reformer Gustav Wyneken. He

On the Suicide of the Refugee W.B.

I'm told you raised your hand against yourself
Anticipating the butcher
After eight years in exile, observing the rise of the enemy
Then at last, brought up against an impassable barrier
You passed, they say, a passable one.

Empires collapse. Gang leaders
Are strutting about like statesmen. The People
Can no longer be seen under all these armaments

So the future lies in darkness and the forces of right
Are weak. All this was plain to you
When you destroyed a torturable body.

Bertolt Brecht,

subsequently observed that this movement comprised, in large part, the radical borgeoisie, which was both incapable of either superceding its subjectivist or individualist orientation. While actively interested in Jewish theology and counting Gershom Scholem - a leading scholar of Jewish mysticism and authority on the Kabbalah - as one of his earliest and closest friends, he was never drawn towards Zionism. Nevertheless judaic conceptions of a future transfigurative moment remained important for Benjamin's development, selectively appropriated on his own terms and for his own purpose.

He remained an active member of the Youth Movement only until the declaration of war. The enthusiastic endorsement of the national call to arms by its leading members only served to crystallise his prognosis that it was an essentially reactionary force. Benjamin avoided military conscription by feigning sciatica, and soon departed Germany. Exiled and isolated in a Europe traumatised by total war, he developed a romantic anti-capitalism, a trajectory encouraged through his association with Ernst Bloch. He apprehended the modern world as souless, dispirited and prosaic, a condition that demanded apocolyptic transcendence. In this context it is understandable that Benjamin, like both Lukacs and Bloch, turned towards the realm of art in pursuit of this theme. It was here that the most developed and unambiguous utopian impulse to transcendence was thought to be expressed in the authentic work of art. By 1919 he had completed a doctoral thesis at Berne University, Switzerland on The Concept of Art Criticism in German Romanticism, a distillation of themes developed in the war years.

By then, Benjamin had been married for two years, and despite his attempts to find work, was forced in 1923 to return with his young wife and son to his parental home. Although he failed to secure himself a university post, he had begun to establish his reputation as a "man of letters". By 1925 he had translated and seen published a selection from the work of the 19th century poet, Baudelaire and completed a major study of the German poet, Goethe.

The immediate post world-war period may have been personally disordered for Benjamin, but they were inordinately tumultuous years for German society. In Russia the question of power had been forcefully posed by significant sections of the working class, but in Germany, the bourgeoisie was able to meet that challenge with an effective and ruthless opposition that swept the workers' movement from the streets. By 1923, Germany was experiencing

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