

# Labour Review

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MONTHLY THEORETICAL ORGAN OF THE WORKERS REVOLUTIONARY PARTY  
BRITISH SECTION OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE FOURTH INTERNATIONAL

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**Comrade George Myers 1945-1980**

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**The early industrial working  
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*The Editorial Board welcomes articles and correspondence on matters arising from material in the journal.*

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## *Editorial*

# **Build community councils**

With unemployment clearly heading a great speed for the 2 million mark — the highest levels since the mid-1930s — Tory spokesmen headed by Prime Minister Thatcher have been hammering home the message that they will undertake no 'U-turn' from their all-out drive towards slump and industrial devastation. In speech after speech the Tory Cabinet have spelled out the clearest prospect of class confrontation ever known in Britain.

Asked to comment on the 1,896,634 jobless total recorded in July, Thatcher simply said: 'I fear it will be higher next month and I fear it will stay high for quite a time as it did on the last occasion when we had a sudden rise in unemployment. But I cannot give you a maximum figure' and she added: 'I know we are absolutely on the right course.'

The Tory government is devastating jobs at a rate of 40,000 a month, with five major factories closing their doors every week. Industrial output in manufacturing industry is running more than 8 per cent below the levels recorded this time last year when the slump was already beginning to manifest itself. All the appeals by small businessmen and industrialists for import and wage controls, pleas echoed by the Stalinists and the Tribunate Labour lefts who share with the businessmen a belief in the future of capitalism, have fallen on deaf ears.

The reason for this is quite simply that there is no future for British capitalism outside the build-up towards dictatorship and the destruction of the basic organisations of the working class. Hence the enormous expenditure on military preparations for counter-revolution, on which the Thatcher government spent so much in the first part of this year that it actually broke through its own much vaunted public spending targets to which the entire welfare state is being sacrificed.

The Minister of Defence was found to be overrunning its budget by an amazing £600-£700m. Even the 'Financial Times' was moved to comment that 'the spending habits of the Ministry of Defence are becoming a political embarrassment'. It pointed out that two successive pay increases for the armed forces have been financed by the Treasury to the tune of £300m over and above government cash limits and added: 'Nor is there any reason to believe that the Treasury will not be called on again as defence spending inexorably rises.'

Naturally the Thatcher government has no desire to cut 'waste' and reduce expense in this arm of the state machine at a time when the ruling class requires the all-out preparation of civil war against the working class. What was interesting, however, was the silence of the Labour leaders who allowed the military spending overrun to pass virtually without comment although much of the vast increase in funds is so clearly going to be spent on the direct preparation of counter-revolution.

At the same time the Tory anti-union laws have been stealthily pushed through to the Royal Assent ready for use against the pickets and the closed shop in the coming months of decisive confrontation when the Tories hope mass unemployment will have exposed the unions to a frontal attack. It is the preparation for this confrontation that dominates the Tory government's every move and for this they will sacrifice the proudest flagships of British capitalism to bankruptcy and break-up.

These moves appear to reformists as the result of an outbreak of lunacy among the top brass of the Tory Party. In reality it is the reformists' faith in bourgeois democracy and the possibilities of continued class compromise that constitute genuine lunacy. For Thatcher's calculated onslaught against the working class is not an isolated British phenomenon. Everywhere the capitalist class is turning more and more to the Chilean road as the only way to cling to its power and privilege in the developing international crisis.

This alone explains the rise of Ronald Reagan now surely the leading contender for the Presidency with the backing of much of the United States big business interest. Reagan is the favourite of these forces precisely because his programme is the US equivalent of Thatcherism, based on the destruction of workers' living standards, the restoration of 'sound money', anti-communism and preparation for war. Reagan simply spells out more consistently the policy for which the last four years under Carter have paved the way. These

developments are not accidental but completely related to the international crisis centring on the US dollar as it totters towards destruction. At the International Monetary Fund's annual meeting in Washington next month the world's bankers will confront the stark fact that world banking can no longer sustain the post-war financial system centred on the dollar and that they are drowning in a sea of bad debts and a flood of paper obligations to the oil producing countries which they cannot meet.

It is this that lies behind the belligerent stand of US imperialism in the Middle East and against the Soviet Union and the open preparations of the US military to seize the oilfields of the Gulf on the pretext of ensuring the 'security' of the region in the aftermath of the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan. This is why Carter, Thatcher and the other imperialist leaders pulled out all the stops to whip up the war atmosphere around the Olympic Games in Moscow.

The latest move which clearly shows the drift of thinking in the beleaguered White House, came with the issue from Washington of directive 59, shifting America's nuclear strategy from civilian to military targets. The directive was issued by a tiny group in the White House and the Pentagon, which did not even include the US Secretary of State, Edmund Muskie, who complained he had not been told about the change. Yet it fundamentally alters the nature of American nuclear war preparations because it formally inaugurates the idea of fighting a 'limited' nuclear war against the Soviet Union.

This change of policy coincides with a new and menacing build-up of war tension in the Middle East flowing directly from the US sponsored Camp David agreements between Israel and the Sadat regime in Egypt. The Israeli decision to annex east Jerusalem is a blatant provocation not only against the Palestinian people but against the entire Arab world. This is attested by the unanimous condemnation of the Zionist move by the Arab states. Once again as in the case of the condemnation of the Camp David accords the movement is being led by Iraq under the Arab Ba'ath Socialist Party which recently celebrated the 12th anniversary of the Iraqi revolution.

No wonder the Tory government is making revolutionary Iraq the target of vituperation and slander on a major scale. As Lord Carrington and his party of aristocrats and hangers-on toured the dictatorships of Latin America — with side-trips to Argentina and Chile by Trade Minister Cyril Parkinson — the Tories were campaigning to try and deny Iraq the right to peaceful nuclear development. The same

Tory government and its US allies are ready at any moment to plunge the world into 'limited' nuclear war in order to protect their system of exploitation and private profit. As Thatcher and her sinister cohorts systematically wage class war these are the forces that drive her and her state machine.

This situation requires a bold initiative on the part of all those engaged in the fight against the Tory government. The Workers Revolutionary Party has called on Labour Party controlled borough councils, trade union organisations and all those committees and action groups fighting aspects of the Tory onslaught to act at once. The call applies particularly to those communities which are facing immediate destruction at the hands of the Tory juggernaut. The party's call is for all these sections to close ranks together and form community councils in a common front against the class enemy.

In its statement of Saturday August 9, the WRP political committee spelled out the need for these councils to represent all the people affected by the Tory slump irrespective of their race, religion or past affiliations. It said: 'The community councils must incorporate existing local community bodies which have sprung up almost overnight in some areas — for example, community groups against police violence, against racism, against hospital and school closures, against cutbacks in local facilities such as playgrounds and libraries, against cuts in medical facilities and university education, and also tenants and ratepayers' organisations.' The purpose of the councils will be to alert and mobilise the masses to the dangers of Thatcher's militarist-monetarist dictatorship, especially the activities of the police and the armed forces. The need for the unity of all the forces involved in this struggle is particularly urgent because the Tory government is systematically attempting to sow disunity between the Labour controlled councils and the unions by cynically cutting the councils' grants and leaving it to them to implement cuts that destroy thousands of jobs.

The community councils would become the local and regional defence of living standards and basic rights of whole areas of the country bringing together trade unionists, industrial, commercial and service workers, the self-employed and small shopkeepers. They would become the central organisations of the masses in resisting the Tory national emergency and the use of the forces of the state machine. Labour Review underlines the urgency of this call and the necessity to act now against the catastrophe which is threatening the working class at the hands of the Tory enemy.

## **Comrade George Myers**

### **1945-1980**

George Myers was tragically killed in a motorcycle accident on Friday July 18. At the time of his death Comrade George was a member of the Central Committee of the Workers Revolutionary Party and a full-time party worker in the Yorkshire area. His memory will be cherished as an indefatigable struggler for the principles of Trotskyism and the task of building the Party.

He entered the Trotskyist movement 15 years ago while at Oxford University. At that time the right-wing Transport House bureaucrats were expelling supporters of 'Keep Left' (now the weekly 'Young Socialist') inside the Labour Party Young Socialists because they demanded Wilson fight on a socialist programme, and warned that a Labour government tied to capitalist policies would betray the working class. In the National Association of Labour Student Organisations (NALSO) George became a leading protagonist of the left-right split. It was then he joined the Socialist Labour League (forerunner of the WRP).

In the student movement he bitterly opposed the revisionist 'single issue' politics and theories that students were the new 'detonators' of revolution. He challenged the anti-Marxist theories of the revisionists and became the scourge of these imposters. He fought instead to establish a party branch of workers, especially car workers from the British Leyland Cowley plant, and students, and to expand the circulation of the party's daily paper, then 'Workers Press'. When the student radicalism of the 1960s fizzled out and its revisionist exponents sobered up and left the colleges for jobs in Fleet Street or on university campuses, George Myers stayed to build the Party.

When he left Oxford University he had established a strong branch of workers, youth and students in Oxford. Moving to Hull he worked

tirelessly to recruit trade unionists and circulate the paper. In the 1972 dock strike, the miners' struggles of that year and 1974 and most recently in the steelworkers' strike he won workers to the Trotskyist party. Comrade George had outstanding academic ability. He also had the great quality of tenaciousness and this enabled him to make the transition from a purely academic vocation into the struggle for leadership and party building.

His untimely death deprives the Party of a resourceful and vigorous fighter who had established in his practice his hatred for the Labour reformists and Stalinists and his contempt for their revisionist hangers on. He died known to thousands of workers as a Trotskyist fighter for revolutionary principles. The Editorial Board extends its deepest condolences to his family.



## Review Article

# Quantum Mechanics — proof of dialectics, denial of positivism

*Dialectics in Modern Physics*, by M.E. Omelyanovsky, Progress Publishers, 1979. £1.50

Engels' classic *Dialectics of Nature* was written at a time when most branches of science had only begun their development. Engels showed that it was dialectical Nature which was reflected in dialectical thought. He established the vital role of natural science in the development of a scientific world outlook — dialectical materialism.

The revolution in physics which took place at the turn of the century was grasped by Lenin in his *Materialism and Empirio-criticism*, written just as the shock waves of the discoveries in micro-physics were being felt. Lenin combatted trends of revisionism and reactionary philosophy that sought to distort the significance of these discoveries. He showed that natural science deepened and strengthened dialectical materialism.

The nationalised property relations established by the October Revolution unleashed enormous forces for natural scientific development guided by, and enriching Marxist philosophy. The early, extremely exciting developments arising from this were stifled and distorted by Stalinism. The Bolshevik scientists were liquidated during the period of the Moscow Trials. Internationally, the impact of Marxism on the sciences was poisoned by bureaucratic dogmatism. Despite this, the molecular developments taking place on the basis of the gains of the October Revolution, under conditions where several generations of young scientists were trained to begin from the methodology of dialectical materialism, have recently produced an outstanding series of books which must be compulsory reading for all revolutionaries.

*Dialectics in Modern Physics* by M.E. Omelyanovsky is the best of the series. This book continues the work of Engels' and Lenin's classics with 70 years of scientific development sublated into it. The powerful achievements of Soviet and bourgeois science over this period have made possible the clarification and concretisation of the concepts and principles of dialectical materialism, with all the rigour and discipline that Nature imposes on the natural sciences. *Dialectics in Modern Physics* brings together, in a coherent whole, the most significant conclusions of Soviet scientific philosophers. Subjects discussed include objective reality, cognition, relative and absolute, the emergence of a new theory out of the crisis of the old, probability and possibility as objective moments of the movement of matter, whole and part (system and element); also, initially more specifically natural scientific problems such as observability, visualisation, particle-wave duality, determinism, measurement and invariance principles and transformation.

Formal logic, the logic of relationships between fixed categories, guided the growth of natural science from its beginnings. During the period of the empirical gathering of sensuous knowledge, and analysis of this material on the basis of Newton's (classical) mechanics, formal logic was adequate, and, in distinction to the vague dialectics of the Greeks, played a necessary, progressive role. As Hegel's cutting critique of contemporary science, 150 years ago, showed however, this material had already revealed the higher, more flexible logic of dialectics.

Classical physics rested on three apparently unshakeable pillars — Newton's (particle) mechanics, Maxwell's electromagnetic (wave) theory, and the intuitive conceptions of space and time (Galileo's transformations, Euclid's geometry, Descartes' co-ordinate geometry). Classical mechanics contained the principle of 'relativity', since the laws of mechanics were independent of the motion of the frame of reference. Classical electrodynamics however, was not consistent with this principle, as it assumed an 'ether' with respect to which the velocity of light would be relative: Maxwell's equations changed with motion relative to this ether. In 1887, the Michelson-Morley experiment failed to measure the motion of the Earth through the ether. The velocity of light was shown to be the same for any frame of reference, calling into question the existence of the ether. Several attempts were made to modify Maxwell's equations, or the concept of the ether, to accommodate these observations, but this proved impossible. Einstein

postulated instead retaining Maxwell's equations and extending to them the principle of relativity, the velocity of light being independent of motion of the source. He resolved the resulting contradiction by a radical revision of the intuitive ideas of space and time, and consequently, Newton's mechanics.

The resulting integrated concept of space-time, which is, moreover, inseparable from matter itself, gave immeasurably greater depth and precision to the understanding of space, time and matter already known in general form to dialectical materialist philosophy. Einstein's analysis began from the material practice of the measurement of simultaneity at spatially separate places, by the transmission of electromagnetic waves. Classical theory, confirmed by generations of experience, was contained within the new theory as its limiting case. Conservation of momentum, for instance, was carried over from Newton's mechanics, through the relativisation of mass, compensating the relativisation of velocity. Science penetrated into the 'micro-world' through contradictions between classical mechanics, which assumed a continuum in energy, and thermodynamics. Measurements of thermal radiation were found to be explicable only through the adoption of Planck's hypothesis of discrete energy levels. The particle-wave duality which subsequently emerged defied formal logical analysis. Formal logic was thrown into such a crisis that even the spontaneous materialist outlook of most natural scientists was called into question. As Engels and Lenin pointed out, the crisis can only be resolved through materialism adopting Hegel's dialectical logic.

By tracing the development of the ideas of the fathers of Modern Physics – Einstein, Bohr, Heisenberg etc – Omelyanovsky proves that dialectical materialism is the methodology of modern natural science, emerging dialectically, as the objective general laws of the movement of matter, out of the striving of men to grasp nature. A whole spectrum of changing philosophical opinions is expressed by these great bourgeois scientists, the majority of them either ignorant of, or hostile to, dialectical materialism. Despite themselves, however, they have all contributed to the armoury of Marxist philosophy.

One of the important tasks of Lenin's *Materialism and Empirio-criticism* was to defend materialism against idealists who said that the new quantum physics of sub-atomic particles proved that matter did not exist. Sensation, they said, did not reflect an external, independently existing material world, but was the product of the mind; men ordered sensations in forms that reflected only their own subjective

activity. The same laws of cognition hold in relation to micro-physics as elsewhere. The question is not of the existence of matter, but of elaborating its laws of motion. Nevertheless, it is necessary to understand how the discovery of particle-wave duality was used by subjective idealism.

The early work of the physicists of the Copenhagen school, including Bohr, Born and Heisenberg, tended to support positivism. The principle of 'uncontrollability of interaction' and Heisenberg's 'uncertainty principle' were emphasised. It was said that since observation itself influenced the state of a micro-object in an uncontrollable way and since simultaneous determination of all a particle's properties was essentially impossible beyond a certain limit, then nature 'in-itself' was unknowable.

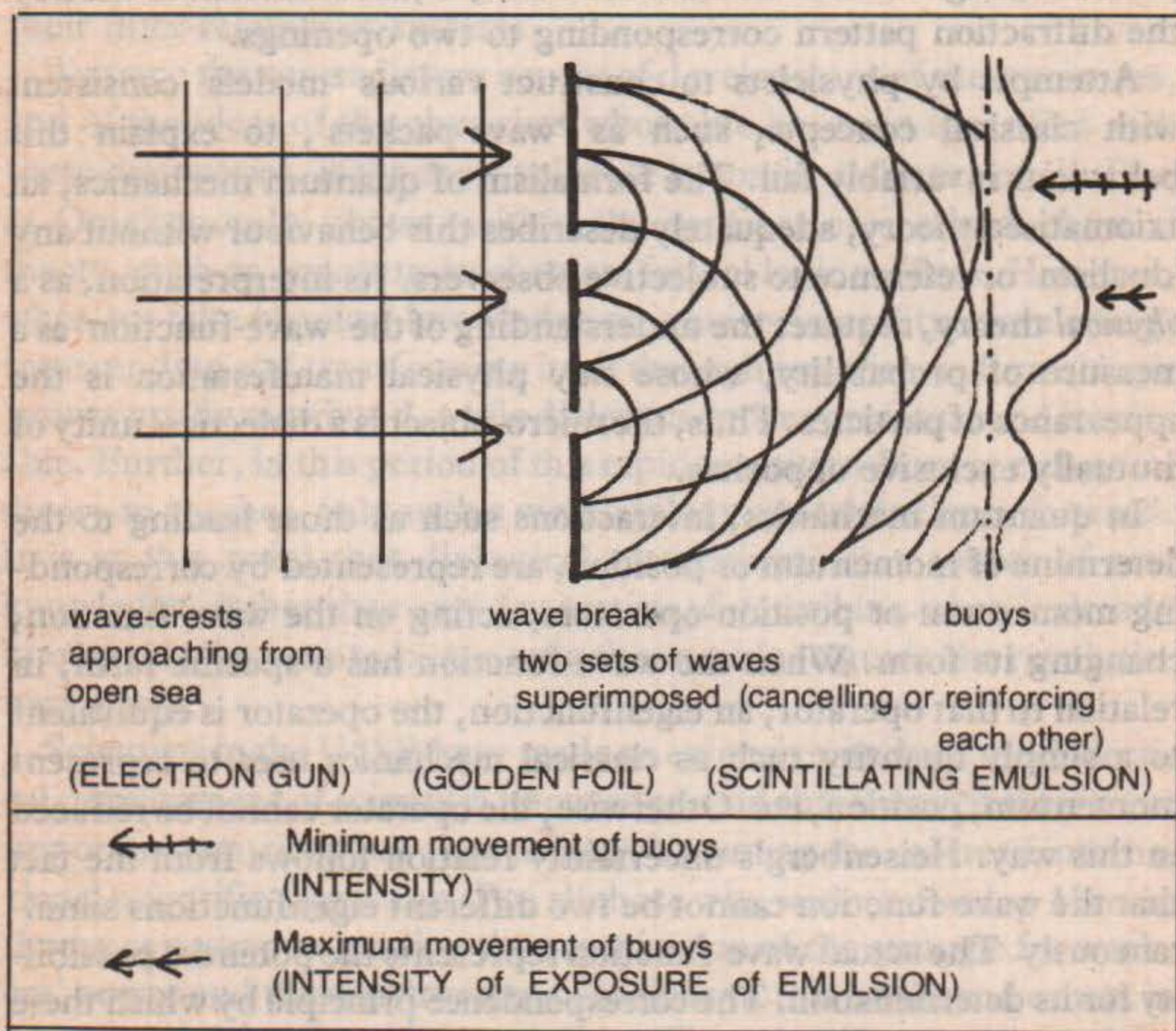
In fact, no revision of the concept of objective reality is necessary. The experimental set-up (means of observation) presupposes interactions of the micro-object which will allow (macroscopic) measurements to be made. Description of the micro-object necessitates relativity with respect to the means of observation, but makes no reference to the mind of any observer. The problem arises because human beings are macro-scopic beings and our sense organs necessarily allow us to perceive directly only macro-scopic events, such as instrument readings. The categories of wave and particle — mutually exclusive phenomena of the macro-world of classical physics — are known to intuitive understanding. The events of the micro-world then, reach our senses, and are cognised, mediated through macroscopic interactions as *either* wave *or* particle phenomena. This is the principle of 'complementarity', worked out by Bohr. Heisenberg's uncertainty relation indicates the limit of applicability of the classical wave and particle concepts.

The fact that the outcome of an observation is not the same under the same conditions, but contains possibility as an objective moment of its actualisation is consistent with the dialectical materialist outlook. Einstein, in his discussions with the founders of quantum physics, insisted that this position must reflect incompleteness in the theory. This has not been confirmed by subsequent developments however, and is a vestige of the mechanical conception of matter. Classical statistical thermodynamics accepted probability as an objective factor external to mechanics, and was acceptable to formal logic. The unity of statistical and dynamic law in the very essence of the micro-object was revolutionary however. Niels Bohr, founder of the

modern theory of the atom, over the course of his life, definitively broke from positivism and by developing the concepts of complementarity and relativity to means of observation was able to approach a consistently materialist viewpoint. Most of the other important figures also moved in this direction.

It may be helpful to illustrate particle-wave duality with a description of the electron diffraction experiment. (The set-up described is simplified, since the distances involved are extremely small and a practicable experiment would be more complex).

Diffraction of a plane wave through two openings in a barrier may be illustrated as below. Since waves are phenomena known to classical physics, the reader may intuitively understand this as sea waves passing through two openings in a wave-break, spreading into a harbour and disturbing a line of buoys.



The graph on the right represents light and dark bands on the emulsion after it has been exposed to a burst of electrons. This pattern can in no way be understood as simply the addition of the patterns due

to each of two streams of electrons. It can only be explained as the 'interference' of wave patterns from the two openings, in phase, due to having the same source. The reinforcement and cancellation of wave trains lead to the bands, whose width depends on the wavelength. Now if the intensity of the stream of electrons is reduced so that specks on the emulsion indicate the impact of individual particles, a paradox arises. The diffraction pattern is built up only by the accumulation of specks. It would appear that each electron passed through both slits and interfered with itself. No other classical explanation is possible. And yet it strikes the emulsion at one localised point.

If we were to place a 'detector' near one of the openings to determine which the electron passed through, the uncertainty principle tells us that exactly the impulse required to conclude that the electron passed through one slit and not the other, is just sufficient to destroy the diffraction pattern corresponding to two openings.

Attempts by physicists to construct various 'models' consistent with classical concepts, such as 'wave-packets', to explain this behaviour invariably fail. The formalism of quantum mechanics, an axiomatised theory, adequately describes this behaviour without any 'dualism' or reference to subjective observers. Its interpretation, as a *physical* theory, requires the understanding of the 'wave-function' as a measure of probability, whose *only* physical manifestation is the appearance of particles. Thus, the micro-object is a dialectical unity of mutually exclusive opposites.

In quantum mechanics, interactions such as those leading to the determine of momentum or position, are represented by corresponding momentum-or position-operators, acting on the wave function, changing its form. When the wave-function has a specific form, in relation to that operator, an eigenfunction, the operator is equivalent to a simply quantity such as classical mechanics uses to represent momentum, position, etc. Otherwise, the operator cannot be reduced in this way. Heisenberg's uncertainty relation follows from the fact that the wave-function cannot be two different eigenfunctions simultaneously. The actual wave-function represents the potential possibility for its determination. The correspondence principle by which these operators were developed holds that they bear the same relation to each other as do the corresponding quantities in classical mechanics, showing how Newton's mechanics was sublated into quantum mechanics.

Another topic given extensive treatment in *Dialectics in Modern*

*Physics* is the transformations between elementary particles. A whole epoch of classical science was devoted to analysis of substances into their parts, from the discovery of chemical compounds and their analysis into 90-odd elements, to the splitting of the atom into proton, neutron and electron. The discovery that these elementary particles were themselves systems lead to the conclusion that this process would proceed indefinitely, perhaps until a fundamental substance, or 'building-block' was found. Not so. These particles are both element and system. Due to the mass-defect, the parts may be, in every way, greater than the whole. It is said to be possible that one electron could contain a whole galaxy.

The problem is not one of an endless series of 'levels', but of the discovery of mutual laws of transformation, through corresponding principles of invariance, or symmetry, unity. The actual existence of these elementary particles can only be grasped from the ground of their inter-relation as systems.

To trace the contradictory course of development of these sciences, and of the ideas of the physicists whose life has been identified with these discoveries, is the most valuable lesson in dialectics of all. For, as Omelyanovsky shows, within the confines of a closed physical theory, such as quantum mechanics, formal logic suffices. However, when we take physical knowledge as it exists in reality, developing, transcending and transforming itself through experience, formal logic proves totally moribund, while dialectics proves profound and invaluable. Further, in this period of this rapid transition from one physical theory to another, only such a methodology can take science forward. It is at this point that dialectical materialism, as a source of *new* knowledge, rather than as a dry system of describing what is already known, can be seen to be the only theory able to guide the revolutionary party.

Scientists in the USSR have made an extensive study of the dialectical development of scientific knowledge, and this is one of their most important contributions, increasingly becoming the centre of international scientific discussion. For all those who wish to develop Marxist theory as a weapon guiding the organisation of the struggle for workers' power and the construction of socialism, this book, and others in the series, makes invaluable reading. The scientific precision of the theory that was necessary to split the atom, must be brought to bear by the revolutionary party in order to unleash the power of the mass movement for the destruction of capitalism. A. B.

## *Part II*

# **The French Revolution and the counter-revolution: 1789-95**

*By Geoff Hill*

When the French Revolution broke out in 1789 it inevitably signaled a counter-assault from what was still a profoundly conservative Europe. Defenders of this status-quo built literary and philosophic reputations writing articles and books attacking the revolutionaries who had seized power in June. But outraged Europe did not confine its hostility to the printing of pamphlets; within a short time her powers were dreaming of restoring Louis XVI with the use of military intervention. The flight of thousands of rich and influential opponents of the Revolution to the neighbouring hostile states added greatly to this external threat. Finally, those elements opposed to the Revolution who remained in France continued to stoke revolt and civil war during the early years of the young bourgeois state.

But the counter-revolution was not always such a clear-cut phenomenon. As we shall see the pressure of revolutionary events was to split the ranks of the bourgeois leadership time and time again, with several political groups moving from a position of apparent militancy to one of reaction in months. Beneath these tactical struggles there emerges one common bourgeois strategy — the fundamental aim to secure France as a home for the capitalist free market economy. In the turmoil of revolutionary events this aim does not always appear as obvious; sometimes it even appears contradicted, but closer examination of events always reveals its more or less conscious progress.

To achieve these ends the bourgeoisie showed itself capable of determined action and great flexibility. For years it maintained a ruthless attack on restorationism in all its forms. In 1793, in order to avoid total defeat, it was obliged, albeit reluctantly, to sacrifice those from within its own ranks who by their vacillation and timid conservatism threatened the success of the entire Revolution. For a



short time their most sacred principles of economic freedom were partially suspended and a controlled economy was introduced. However once the Revolution seemed secure, and when the internal and external threats had diminished, then they rapidly rid themselves of these expedients along with those powerful revolutionary figures who had emerged on the extreme left-wing of bourgeois politics. The attack launched against Robespierre and the deputies of the Mountain in the month of Thermidor is the key to the bourgeois character of the entire Revolution and it forms an important element in the movement of the counter-revolution.

Standing consistently to the left of the bourgeoisie during the Revolution were the wage workers and artisans of the Paris Faubourg's — the sans-cullottes. These men and women, along with their provincial counter-parts, were the 'main spring' of events from 1789-95. When Louis XVI threatened the newly formed National Assembly with armed force in June 1789 it was the insurrection of 14 July that forced him to accept the authority of the elected deputies of the Third Estate. It was the sans-culottes who forced the King to abandon Versailles and take up residence, with his ministers, in Paris under the watchful eye of the people; again it was they who, in alliance with the bourgeois left wing, forcibly deposed the king and then later ousted the Girondin deputies from the Convention. Finally, the 'Terror' campaign against counter-revolutionaries, food hoarders and commodity speculators derived its momentum and greatest supporters from among this class of poor workers.

Yet though the bourgeoisie were obliged to acquiesce to certain sans-cullottes demands it could not but help fearing and mistrusting them. Ultimately the aspirations of these two groups were to prove irreconcilable. The sans-culottes, driven by hunger and a militant political consciousness, demanded economic and political rights which their class would not have the organised strength to command for a hundred years. For all their admirable plebian courage and self-sacrifice the sans-culottes were not the legitimate heirs to power in 1789.<sup>1</sup> It was the bourgeoisie who came forward to take economic and political control of the country; during the course of which they acted to crush the attempts by the sans-culottes to push the Revolution 'too far'. This is what Marx meant when he said that in the bourgeois revolution, 'the word goes beyond the deed'.<sup>2</sup> It is the modern proletarian revolution that must realise the socialist dreams of the sans-culotte and carry 'the deed beyond the word'.

### COUNTER REVOLUTIONARY IDEOLOGY

The 'Age of Enlightenment' which had dominated French intellectual life for almost a century before 1789, had ushered in the great rationalist and democratic ideas of Voltaire, Diderot and Rousseau (though the latter expressed his thought in a deeply contradictory manner). These men articulated the revolutionary demands of their epoch with the call for individual freedoms and representative government. Central to their arguments were the concepts of natural rights: man as an atomistic being with inalienable rights of free speech, equality before the law and the right to acquire and possess private property. Upon the outbreak of the Revolution the young educated representatives of this repressed culture were the first to come forward and show themselves as supporters of the new society.

It was, therefore, to be expected that the first shots aimed against the Revolution should have come in the form of an anti-nationalist diatribe from the scribes of feudal Europe. First to get into print was the English Whig MP Edmund Burke, whose *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, was published in 1790. This work became the bible of the counter-revolution and it has remained one of the principal anti-revolutionary texts of the last 200 years. Burke's basic aim was to show that reason, i.e., all theoretical systems along the lines of those devised by the philosophers, are metaphysical schemes with no *practical* value. For him social institutions have validity only by reason of their existence — any attempts to introduce reforms based on abstract principles are dangerous and their results ephemeral. Here Burke reveals his attachment to the empiricist philosophy of the 'complacent' British bourgeoisie — or rather to its more conservative epistemological interpretations. All these anti-rationalist arguments allowed Burke to conclude with a thrust against the Revolution — 'Equality is contrary to nature, since historical development has not made it manifest'. Burke of course forgets that his own grandfathers had been obliged to execute Charles I of England because he maintained the 'inequality' of feudal England in the face of demands for bourgeois reforms. It is a measure of the development of the proletarian movement in England at the end of the eighteenth century that Burke's book was eagerly seized upon to initiate a campaign against the 'English Jacobins'.

After Burke perhaps the most famous ideologue of the counter-revolution was Joseph de Maistre. De Maistre argued for the reconstruction of French society on theocratic principles. He saw the Revolution as being a supernatural event, guided by the hand of the devil. Rationalist philosophy is considered to be the mortal enemy of Christianity and to be a threat to the mystical power of 'national reason' — the true basis of political stability. For Burke and de Maistre the Revolution had to be overcome because its success spelt doom to Christian civilisation. Little wonder then that their theories were quickly taken to the bosom of the rapidly growing emigré population and used to unite *ancien regime* Europe against France.

### EMIGRATION

During the great popular insurrection of the summer of 1789 many aristocrats and bourgeois left France in a great wave of emigration. Among these first emigrés was Louis XVI's brother the Comte D'Artois who was to play a leading role in organising attacks against the Revolution for at least the next six years. The incidence of emigration was directly tied to the leftward turns made by the Revolution, and these militant periods were themselves, in part, occasioned by the activities of the emigrés. For example, the years 1790-91 saw France staggering from one economic and political crisis to another as food shortages and high prices (due to rapid depreciation of the new currency — *the assignat*) spread agitation among the ranks of the sans-culottes and rural poor. Paris saw the emergence of the radical plebian group the *Enragé* (Madmen) who, under the leadership of Jean Varlet and the revolutionary priest Jacques Roux demanded stern measures to deal with the crisis. Every new surge in militancy such as this, spread panic amongst those conservative members of the Assembly who had been desperately working to effect a compromise between Louis' absolutism and bourgeois democracy, i.e. trying to bring forth a fully fledged constitutional monarchy. These deputies had the ground cut from beneath their feet when, in June 1791, Louis was caught while attempting to flee into the arms of the emigrés. Such treachery brought down the wrath of the people on the heads of the aristocracy and their bourgeois hangers-on. After news of Louis' escape attempt spread, a new 'fear' gripped the country and many more people were forced into exile.

But Louis' 'flight to Varennes' was to have much deeper repercus-

sions. In fact it was to become a turning point in the whole struggle between revolutionary and counter-revolutionary forces. To begin with it appeared as though the King's capture would force the European powers into finally forming a war coalition. Hitherto they had hesitated to take definite action against France, partly because they were preoccupied with the question of dividing up Poland and partly because the king had seemed to be in the safe hands of the moderate constitutionalists in the Paris Assembly. Now they were pushed into action. The immediate outcome was the vaguely worded *Declaration of Unity* signed in August 1791 by Leopold of Austria and Frederick William of Prussia. This document urged the heads of Europe to take action to restore order in France, and its contents were designed to intimidate the Paris radicals and strengthen the moderate constitutionalists.

But revolutionary fervour had now turned the mass of Frenchmen against the monarchy, and from now on the constitutionalists declined rapidly as the Revolution took a sharp left-turn. The first sign of this was the sudden surge of radical republican feeling that swept the country in 1791-92, and which found expression in the rise of the Girondin deputies. These men were intimately related to the commercial bourgeoisie of the south-west who were suffering adversely from the combined effects of monetary crisis and economic blockade of French ports. As a consequence the Girondin were inclined towards strong measures being adopted to deal with the threat to French domestic stability from the activities of counter-revolutionaries. As we shall see these measures were to include war, as a means of spreading the Revolution beyond French borders and placing lucrative military contracts, not to mention extended markets, in the hands of the Bordeaux merchants.

As part of this campaign the Girondin pressed decrees that were aimed at subduing those aristocrats, emigrés and clerics who continued to stir revolt. On November 27, 1791 it was decreed that all clerics should take an oath of loyalty to the Revolution and on April 8, 1792 the Legislative Assembly ordered confiscation of the property of those 'absent' since 1789 unless they return within one month. But more significantly the Girondin led by Brissot began to clamour increasingly for war. In the end, on April 20, 1792, after much opposition from the left wing led by Robespierre, France pre-empted the almost inevitable coalition attack and declared war. This move was welcomed by the right-wing who saw a French defeat as being a means of restoring Louis.

## WAR

The outbreak of hostilities in 1792 was greeted as being overdue by elements on both sides. In France many true patriots dreamt of using the war to spread the 'brotherhood of man', even if many others were more concerned with lining their purses. It was felt that the oppressed peoples of Europe would rise to join the French and sweep their own despotic rulers aside. Indeed, there was some truth in this belief and during the whole duration of the war with France the coalition powers were never able to give their military efforts a popular substance, since they feared their own peoples as much as they feared the French army. Even so, when war broke out the combined strength of half a dozen continental powers were ranged against the revolutionary army, with several others giving material and economic support.

The emigrés, whose headquarters had been in the Rhineland and Turin, eagerly anticipated a quick return to their homes and lands, and they prepared their mercenary armies for a march on Paris. For more than two years they had been urging the European powers to act to restore the ancien regime to France and now they sensed victory.

The summer of 1792 was to prove the most momentous of the entire Revolution, bringing to the surface the most aggressive and militant face of the bourgeoisie. To begin with the war began badly and the Austro-Prussian forces routed the French in several battles during the late spring and early summer. Meantime, a full scale political crisis developed when Louis, who still had considerable constitutional powers, refused to include the Girondin deputies in his cabinet and plotted to disperse the Assembly. The sans-culottes who had grown steadily more anti-monarchist since 1791 were stirred to fresh action by these crises and the Girondin used them to force Louis to yield to their will. In June the sans-culottes, urged on by the Girondin, stormed the Assembly and pre-empted Louis' plans. Eventually, on July 10, 1792, Louis capitulated and formed the 'Girondin cabinet'. But this appeal to the armed power of the people was to leave the demagogic Girondin dangerously exposed. Now that they had achieved their limited ambitions they balked at supporting the militant republicanism of the people and changed overnight to supporters of the throne. For this volte-face they were to pay with their lives.

With the retreat of the Girondins the great Maximilien Robespierre and the left wing of the Jacobins were pushed to the fore in the

Assembly. Fear of counter-revolutionaries was widespread, the war continued catastrophically and the economic situation was grave. Consequently republican feeling remained on the boil and Louis' position grew more untenable every hour. The future of the monarchy was finally settled when the commander of the coalition forces, the Duke of Brunswick; arrogantly issued a manifesto on August 1, 1792, threatening Paris with summary justice should any of her citizens be found bearing arms upon entry of the Prussian army. Robespierre understood that the hour for decisive action had arrived; only an Assembly untrammelled by the burden of venal deputies and a treacherous king could hope to save a revolution which was balancing on the edge of destruction. Thus Robespierre and the Mountain organised the sans-culottes to carry out insurrection of August 9-10, 1792, which overthrew Louis and laid the foundation for the declaration of Republic.

At this time the independent strength of the sans-culottes reached its highest point. With the fall of the monarchy there emerged a commune that joined together all the plebeian *sections populaires* of Paris. For six weeks the commune was to share power with the Assembly, after which the latter gradually regained political control. The main political struggle now took the form of a bitter battle between the Girondin deputies, fighting a rear-guard action, and the Mountain offensive. This struggle was to intensify during the winter of 1792-1793 with the Girondin opposing the trial and execution of the King and trying desperately to stem the tide of Jacobin popularity. In the end they opposed the centralised policy of the Jacobin and sans-culottes with a call to form a federalist state. This served the plans of restorationism and the Girondin were rapidly transformed into a front for royalist activity. To eliminate this serious threat the Jacobin, under Robespierre, mobilised the sans-culottes. In the revolution of May 31-June 2 the Assembly was stormed and the Girondin leadership arrested. In October 1793 the Girondin leadership were guillotined.

### THE VENDÉE AND LYONS

The Girondin had demanded war, when that war went against them and when domestic problems worsened they feared to take the extreme measures required to meet the situation, since these measures necessitated an alliance with the popular classes. The significance,

and historical stature of Robespierre, Saint-Just and the other Jacobin deputies who dominated the Committee of Public Safety in 1793-1794 was precisely that they did have the courage to take such measures no matter how it offended their bourgeois sensibilities.

In the summer of 1793 the Revolution stared defeat in the face. The outbreak of full scale anti-republican revolt in the western province of the Vendée and a series of reverses on the war front brought the Republic to the brink of disaster. The only reply the Jacobin had was to organise the 'Terror', which they now released over France in order to crush the counter-revolution and restore stability. In the struggle to preserve bourgeois power the war against the Vendéans had capital importance.

Ever since the outbreak of the Revolution the Vendée had been a centre for counter-revolutionary activity. Royalists there had established connections with the emigré leaders in Turin and had managed to construct a chain of committees throughout western France known as the 'Bretton Association'. This situation reflected the deep rooted economic and political backwardness of the Vendée region. The peasants and poor priests in the area had welcomed the reforms of 1789, pertaining to land tenure and clerics wages, but nationalisation of church lands and laws sequestrating emigré property and attacking refractory priests had turned many against Paris.<sup>3</sup> After 1790 the area had experienced a number of minor revolts, but in March 1793 the Vendée exploded.

The spark that blew western France asunder came in February 1793, when the Convention ordered a levy of 300,000 men to fight the coalition. The historian Godechot describes the succession of events:

The decree which ordered the levy of 300,000 men was dated February 24, 1793. It was made known in Angers on March 2 and published in the various communes of the western region on March 10. On March 11 the insurrection broke out on the entire left bank of the Loire to the cries: 'No drawing lots' — 'Down with the militia'<sup>4</sup>

With this revolt a period of military opposition to Paris was opened in the west which was to last, in one form or another, for almost ten years.

The critical condition of the Revolution and the consequent growth of the 'Terror' meant that the civil war in the Vendée was prosecuted with a savage zeal by both sides. The insurrection at first took the form of attacks by scattered bands of peasants and royalists against republican targets. Very soon however these groups were brought

together to form the 'Roman Catholic Army'. On June 9, 1793, this army took the important provincial town of Saumur and opened the road to the capital. But by now the Committee of Public Safety was organising a serious campaign. Already it had ordered the execution of all the captured Vendéan leaders as well as rebels caught bearing arms, on simple verification of their identity, and now on August 1, it went a step further and ordered 'total' war against the province.

Regular troops were brought in to replace the hastily collected volunteer armies and between October and December 1793 the Vendée rebels were attacked and defeated in several decisive battles before they were finally crushed at Savenay on December 23. With the defeat of the major rebel force the area was subjected to a programme of systematic devastation as the infamous 'Infernal columns' were unleashed across the area. Paradoxically it was this brutal repression that helped prolong the war, for now many rebels went underground and formed guerrilla bands (known as the Chouans) which persisted until the reign of Napoleon I.

The background to the second major civil war threat at this time had certain similarities with the Vendée. In Lyons the struggle between the Jacobin and Girondin in June had been decided in favour of the latter who were closely supported by royalist elements. Members of the Jacobin were arrested and on July 15 their leader Chalier was executed. With this, Paris declared the city of Lyons 'in a state of revolt'. Fouché, the fiercely republican and anti-clerical Jacobin, was appointed as *representative on mission* to the area and ordered to crush the revolt. Lyons was retaken in October 1793, after a bombardment of the city, and there followed a bloody settlement with the Girondin and royalists. Houses belonging to the bourgeoisie were destroyed and a sign was raised over the city — 'Lyons waged war on liberty, Lyons is no more.'

### THE THERMIDOR AND THE WHITE TERROR

The draconian measures adopted by the Jacobin 'dictatorship' gradually brought the social crisis under control. As well as dealing with the counter-revolution, the Committee of Public Safety took action to ensure supplies for the army and to provide it with more men, they placated the demands of the sans-culottes through the introduction of price controls and they cracked down hard on speculation. Such actions succeeded in reversing the defeats on the war front,



and by early 1794, a feeling of relative security was beginning to reappear amongst the conservative majority who made up the Convention. These deputies had always mistrusted the 'Terror', especially since it had claimed not a few from amongst their own ranks. (The Girondin, Danton etc). Most of all however, these members of the bourgeoisie hated the curbs imposed on the 'free economy' held so dear by developing capitalism. Thus there began to emerge calls for the dismantling of the machinery of 'Terror' *tolerance* became the order of the day.

Robespierre's temporary alliance with the sans-culottes had been the basis of the strength of the Committee of Public Safety, which effectively ruled the country from July 1793 onwards. Yet he himself was essentially a bourgeois democrat who never thought of seizing power from the Convention. This is witnessed by the fact that when he purged the Girondin in the June revolution he took great care to ensure that the armed sans-culottes respected the other deputies. Further, when in power Robespierre used his influence to curb the strength of the Paris *sections* and to denounce the revolutionary extremes of the masses.<sup>5</sup> Worse than this, — he struck down the popular leaders that emerged from the ranks of the poor — denouncing the likes of Roux, Varlet and Hébert as being counter-revolutionaries. These actions succeeded in alienating Robespierre from his only real powerbase. Sensing this breach the Convention prepared for the counter-attack.

On 9 Thermidor (July 27) 1794, Robespierre and Saint-Just, along with other deputies of the Mountain, were arrested in a planned coup by the Convention. The sans-culottes remained passive and on the following day the Robespierrists were executed.<sup>6</sup> The Thermidorians followed up their coup with a large-scale round-up of the Jacobin and those militants in the *sections*. They were determined to eliminate the threat from the popular movement as well as from within their own ranks.

The overthrow of Robespierre presaged a surge in anti-revolutionary activity. This 'White Terror' was facilitated by the Convention, who now proceeded to declare a general amnesty for enemies of the Republic and to release counter-revolutionaries from prison. Many emigrés returned and during the winter and spring of 1794-95 acts of violence were organised against republicans. Yet the desire to restore the throne had faded and the royalists, at first, contented themselves with settling old scores.

Meantime the Convention was preparing for a final settlement with the sans-culottes. A general decline in the real value of wages had once more spread agitation among the Paris crowds and in Germinal-Prairial (April-May) 1795, they embarked on their last struggle for a Convention that would be sensitive to their demands. These insurrections were mere shadows of the once great *journées*, the crowds being leaderless and disillusioned. On the other hand the Convention had learned from its past experiences and it had on hand 40,000 troops to deal with the expected trouble. The revolt was beaten back and the Faubourg Saint-Antoine surrounded and forced to surrender. Thousands were arrested and many were deported and imprisoned. The popular movement was never to be the same again and the Germinal-Prairial risings marked the end of the Revolution.

By encouraging these right-wing attacks on the republicans the Convention had, however, roused a hornets nest of royalism. The latter hoped to gain control of the Convention through the electoral process, and in order to prevent this the bourgeoisie were obliged to introduce legislation which in effect perpetuated the rule of their deputies. Seeing their hopes frustrated the royalists passed over to a plot for overthrowing the Convention.

Again, the Convention could only look to the army for salvation and it was the massed cannon of the young Bonaparte that dispersed the royalist uprising of 12 Vendémiaire (October 5) 1795. But a dangerous precedent had been established, in the future the Convention, and its successor the Directory, were to come to rely increasingly on military strength. In the end, in the month of Brumaire 1799, Napoleon Bonaparte carried out a coup d'état that overthrew the Directory and established a military dictatorship.

#### Notes:

- <sup>1</sup> Daniel Guérin's work *Class struggle in the First French Republic 1793-95* (London 1977) attempts to see the permanent Revolution in the struggle between the sans-culottes and the bourgeoisie. This must be considered spurious. The essence of Trotsky's theory, is surely, that *in the epoch of imperialist decay* the bourgeoisie cannot solve the crisis which beset individual nations. The bourgeois revolution of 1789 lifted the economic and cultural development of France on to a higher historical plane.
- <sup>2</sup> In line with the 'philosophy' of 'peaceful co-existence' the Stalinist historian Albert Soboul seeks to excuse the French bourgeoisie for their suppression of the popular movement. In the same way this political policy excuses the crimes of modern imperialism. Albert Saboul *The Parisian Sans-Culottes and the French Revolution 1793-4* (Oxford, 1964)

- <sup>3</sup> It has been calculated that 80 per cent of Vendée priests were refractory during this period. This is significant when it is remembered how powerful was the influence of the lower-clergy with the local peasants.
- <sup>4</sup> J Godechot *The Counter Revolution* (London 1972)
- <sup>5</sup> For example, during the autumn and winter of 1793-94 Robespierre came out strongly against the sans-culottes' *dechristianisation* campaign.
- <sup>6</sup> Of the 39 Paris sections sitting in permanent session on the night of 9-10 Thermidor, 35 declared for the Convention.

## Crisis in Eire

*by a Special Correspondent*

Fianna Fail was launched by De Valera on May 16, 1926, the name standing for 'Warriors of Fal' — which is a poetic name for Ireland. Central in the mind of De Valera was the need to stabilise the south as a capitalist state, to create a parliamentary opposition to the ruling, right wing Cumann na Gaedheal party, led by Cosgrave. Incidentally, although he was to lose power shortly, Cosgrave was to welcome this move by De Valera warmly. He knew that the facade of a two-party system was essential to the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie.

There was a strong emphasis on nationalism in the Fianna Fail founding programme. Irish language and Irish culture were given great prominence. De Valera had stated earlier 'The Ireland we dreamed of would be the home of a people who valued material wealth only as the basis of a right living, of a people who were satisfied with a frugal comfort and devoted their leisure to the things of the spirit'.<sup>1</sup>

The programme of Fianna Fail was initially in line with this philosophy. Putting heavy weight to the preservation of Irish culture and language, in the social field its emphasis was towards the small farmer. It called for 'the distribution of the land of Ireland so as to get the greatest number possible of Irish families rooted in the soil of Ireland', and for 'the making of Ireland an economic unit as self-contained and self-sufficient as possible with a proper balance between agriculture and other essential industries'. A far cry from that, to the present leadership of speculator Haughey! But of course it merely reflects the actual material changes which have taken place in Irish society, since 1945. The many hundreds of years of imperialist domination and looting of Ireland by her neighbour has left its indelible mark. The Irish capitalist class which founded the 'Free State' in 1922 was impoverished from the word go, to the extent that its leaders

did tours of America seeking funds. It was because of this impoverishment, and always fearing the revolutionary Irish proletariat, that when Fianna Fail came to power in 1932 home industry was protected by a wide range of tariffs. And because of the lack of capital and private investors, the state had to step in to create state-sponsored bodies. It was then that bodies such as the Electricity Supply Board, the Irish Sugar Company and Aer Lingus were set up.

The aim was industrial self-sufficiency, but not for the first time the Irish capitalists came unstuck. The laws of Trotsky's Theory of Permanent Revolution were just as valid for Ireland as anywhere, despite their romantic notions! In a period of slump from 1931 to 1938 industrial exports fell by one third, their industries were simply too small to compete against the imperialist giants. As well, still the plague of Irish bourgeois economists today, the Irish industrial economy was very dependent on imported fuel and basic raw materials.

### CAPITALIST ROAD

This austerity programme propounded by De Valera was only possible because the Irish working class had been betrayed, by the labour and trade union bureaucracy, and by Stalinism. With the 1950s, reflecting the resurgence of the working class in Britain and internationally, Irish workers grew more militant. Faced with this there was only one road the Irish capitalist class could take, they were forced to open up the Irish economy to the multi-national conglomerates, particularly British, American, Japanese and German. They struck a good bargain of course, being richly subsidised by the Irish tax-payer, and creaming off decades of tax-free profit under the agreements. In a world plunging into slump, this has at times taken very contradictory forms. But always underneath every spurt of growth (for a period in the 1970s Ireland was topping the European growth table) lay the cold reality, it remained a semi-developed country. A look at the Irish economy today shows a very lop-sided object indeed. Leading exports, for example, are computer components and electronic components, with telecommunications a growth area, yet the telephone system in the south is antiquated, a major source of complaint for industrialists. And being an open economy, very vulnerable to every change in the world economy, inflation has devastated the Irish economy. A quick look at a graph showing the annual

inflation rate in Ireland 1955-1959 shows that inflation is under 5 per cent until about 1970, and then it climbs very rapidly until it reaches the unheard of level of 20.9 per cent by 1975.

The two great inflationary factors in Ireland have been food and oil. Food prices shot up following Ireland's entry into the EEC as Irish agricultural prices were adjusted upwards to catch up with the European farm prices which were maintained high under the Common Agricultural Policy. Before Ireland entered the EEC it formed a mini 'common market' with Britain and a policy of cheap agricultural prices. This was the unstable basis for some sharp bursts of growth in the Irish economy. One of these was in 1977. In that year manufacturing industries achieved a growth in output of 7.9 per cent, engineering by 9.8 per cent, while the chemical industry increased by as much as 19.6 per cent. But, and this is the big weakness of Irish capitalism, such growth is the result of foreign investment in the country. Further, exports from this investment have always been more than offset by imports. To give one example, the Irish infra-structure is notoriously weak and if an industrialist is setting up a factory all the heavy industry to equip it has to be imported. Add to that the fact that all raw material has to be imported and the real picture emerges. Ireland has become one small link in the world-wide system of manufacturing conveyor belt.

This backwardness, or combined development, is expressed in another way. Much referred to by bourgeois economists is the low level of 'research and development' in Irish industry. There is a very simple reason for this. In the past 30 years, while the industrial manufacturing capacity of the south has increased, it has done so only by foreign industries setting up. They use cheap Irish labour, but in subsidiary form, keeping their research facilities at home. Meanwhile, especially since the end of World War II, more and more farmers have left the land, and many of these have become wage earners. There has been a remarkable tendency of farms to amalgamate in the Irish countryside due to international pressures, particularly from the economic pressures in the Common Market. The working class has grown proportionally in strength and organisation.

There has been a remarkable growth in the engineering industry. It now accounts for approximately 50,000 workers, which means that one in every four workers engaged in manufacturing works in engineering. Another factor is that much of this engineering is modern, there is little traditional industry like shipbuilding in the south.

In 1973 the newly-established industry's share of metals and engineering exports was 93.3 per cent, while new industry accounted for 42.5 per cent of employment and 41.4 per cent of output overall. One further illustration shows the backward nature of the Irish economy, despite those figures. Britain has 19 times Ireland's population but produces 28 times more. Denmark with only 1.6 times Ireland's population produces six times more. The similarity is as startling for France and Germany and other advanced countries.

This is an economy very vulnerable to the world crisis in the imperialist system! Trotsky's laws of Permanent Revolution have great relevance for this country. The crisis has already caused great contortions in the Irish capitalist class, the accession of Haughey being the latest. It is in its greatest ever crisis, much greater than that which forced it to establish its dictatorship in 1922, by means of British artillery and plentiful use of the hangman's rope.

#### LYNCH'S DREAMS FLATTENED

This is best shown by the contortions of Fianna Fail. Lynch had won the last election, but at what a price! He amazed every economist commentator from the start by his amazing claim that his government would wipe out unemployment in five years. According to Lynch the Irish economy had the potential to create 75,000 new jobs in the three years ending 1981 and the remaining jobs in the following two years. This was hard to swallow, with the capitalist system plunging into its deepest ever slump, added to the fact that unemployment has plagued the southern economy since the state was set up! Lynch was viewed with scepticism by bourgeois economists, it being looked on as the political equivalent of trying to break the bank at roulette.

Anyhow, the slump was to quickly flatten Lynch's dreams. Due to the effect of inflation, caused primarily by the slump in the American dollar, and combined with international recession cutting the ground from under Irish exports, the deficit soared. This has had the most dramatic effect on Irish politics, with vast implications for the working class. To meet the deficit, in common with many other colonial and semi-colonial countries, not only did the level of borrowing increase, but the level of short-term borrowing increased even faster. This in turn forced the government to step up taxation on the working class to service loans from the international banking system. The implications are clear, though obscured by the reformists who led the

recent 'tax' marches in the south, immediate bankruptcy by the state, or smash the working class in the biggest and most violent struggles in the history of the state.

The history of Irish governments in the past years is itself revealing. Two great problems have beset the Irish capitalist system. It has been unable to do anything about the cost of its main import, oil, and has been unable to stem to growth of workers wages, as they fought to keep abreast of inflation. The seventies have seen the most dramatic changes including the historic break between the Irish and British currencies. But the most decisive change of all has been in the area of government financing. Up to 1974 Ireland had never known a deficit budget. It was always a rule for the capitalist class, even when unemployment and emigration was very high, to turn in a small surplus with each budget. The change which came in 1974 under the impact of the oil crisis has the most revolutionary implications. Behind every move which the Irish capitalist governments made lay a deep fear of the revolutionary potential of the working class. The entry of Ireland into the EEC in 1974 brought down long-standing protective barriers and opened industry to the cold winds of foreign competition. This was particularly severe on traditional industries like footwear and textiles. Between 1973 and 1977 there were 55,000 jobs lost in manufacturing industry, a remarkable figure for a small country which only has 200,000 approximately, employed in manufacturing.

This was the beginning of the capitalist troubles. The working class in Ireland is a young working class, and is determined not to accept the poverty conditions experienced by their parents. To replace those jobs the Industrial Development Authority were forced to travel round the capitalist world, offering huge financial inducements to foreign firms to set up. It meant that in the seventies about half all industrial jobs were actually replaced, jobs which would be extraordinarily vulnerable to world recession, given the openness of the Irish economy. A crucial turning point came in 1974 when with a background of world oil crisis and militant working class, the Coalition government and Minister of Finance Ryan ran a deficit budget for the first time. This was repeated in the following two years, but it did not really take off until the Fianna Fail government of Lynch came into power in 1977.

In the 1973 election the Coalition of Fine Gael and Labour had fought chiefly on economic questions. Indeed the economy was largely ignored by Fianna Fail in that election, and they found to their



costs that because of inflation the working class was more sensitive than ever before to economic issues. The old verbal republicanism was cutting no ice with workers worried about jobs and conditions. No sooner however did the Coalition take power than it was clobbered by the oil crisis of 1974 from which it never recovered. With rising unemployment and prices it quickly earned the hostility of workers. The Coalition was also driven out of power by the working class because it took the most reactionary pro-imperialist stance on the north. This was expressed in its most nauseating form by the pompous spoutings of the Minister for Posts and Telegraphs, Conor Cruise O'Brien, now the 'Observer' newspaper's chief hack.

The amazing promises which Lynch made to get elected in 1977 must therefore be seen against that militancy of the working class. This has intensified the crisis enormously, shown most vividly by the gigantic growth in borrowing. Borrowing by the state at the end of 1979 was ten times what it had been in 1970. Put in another way the national debt had grown from £1,000m in 1970, to £6,000m in 1979. It now costs £546m to repay the interest on government borrowing, roughly the same amount that PAYE workers contribute in tax each year. Since January 1979 reducing this borrowing has been the main aim of the Fianna Fail government. But targets published then by Lynch have since been consigned to the bin! That same document had envisaged inflation figures of 5 per cent for 1979 and 1980, but in 1979 oil prices went up by 82 per cent, and inflation at present is close to 20 per cent and rising!

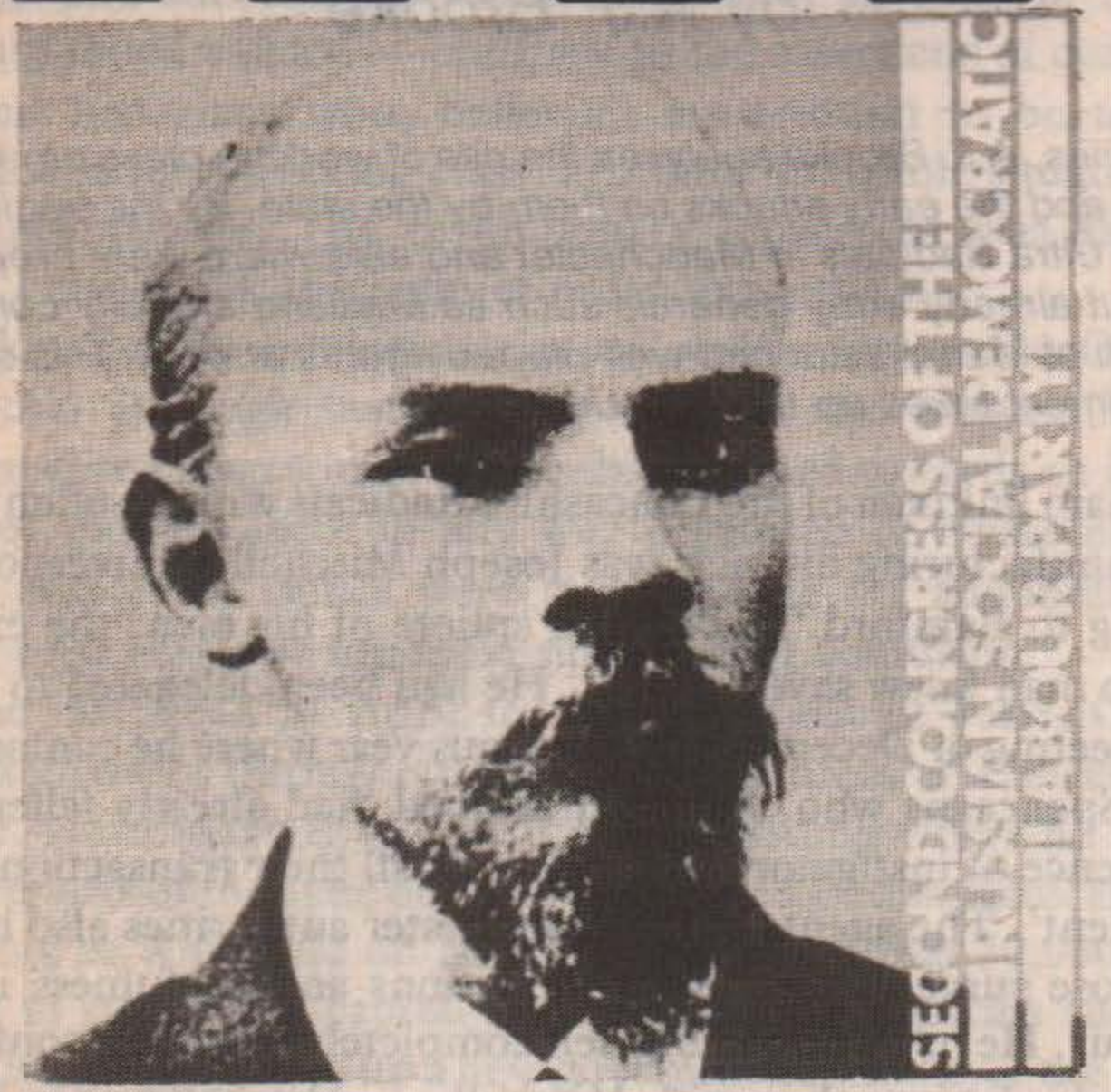
This is the background to the election of Haughey and the transition in the Fianna Fail party mentioned earlier. The election of this ruthless millionaire businessman and speculator is to create Thatcher's equivalent in the south of Ireland. For Irish capitalism to survive the most vital question is to smash the trade union organisation of this youthful militant working class, in order to drive down wages. No matter what Haughey says or feels about Irish unity, he knows that the days of the Irish capitalist class are numbered unless he links up in the closest way with Thatcher, and the most reactionary elements in the north. Haughey-Paisley-Thatcher is the most counter-revolutionary formation this century. His verbal 'republicanism' is the fig leaf for the most brutal repression, surpassing by far the bloody origins of the Irish Free State. The transition of Fianna Fail is dramatic, and Haughey stands now in the same trench as the bloody hangmen of 1922. These are the dangers, but the possibilities

for the working class are immense. Writing on the failure of the 1916 Rebellion, Trotsky said:

The undoubted personal courage, representing the hopes and methods of the past, is over. But the historical role of the Irish proletariat is only beginning. Already into this uprising — under an archaic banner — it has injected its class resentment against militarism and imperialism. That resentment from now on will not subside. On the contrary it will find an echo throughout Great Britain . . .

Following the Irish Rebellion, and the partition of the country by imperialism in 1920, Stalinism was to become the main counter-revolutionary force in the Irish workers' movement. The way forward is clear. The defeats caused by the betrayals of Stalinism must now be negated. Trotskyism must become the force which will lead the Irish working class to establish a united, secular and socialist Ireland. The days of the Irish bourgeoisie are surely numbered!

# 1903



## 1903: SECOND CONGRESS OF THE RUSSIAN SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC PARTY

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## Part Four

# The early industrial working class and the spy system

by A.J. Brooke

*In this series, A.J. Brooke analyses the rise of working class organisation in Britain and the early attacks on them by the state. By the beginning of 1817 the Ultra Radicals in Manchester and elsewhere were preparing a rising. But already army generals such as Maitland and city constables like Nadin of Manchester had well-placed agents at work. This concluding instalment takes up the account.*

The main linkman of the Lancashire Radicals with London and the other manufacturing districts was Joseph Mitchell of Liverpool who, according to Bamford 'moved in a sphere of his own, the extent of which no man knew save himself'. He had been delegated to the Spa Fields meeting of December the previous year where he contacted the leading Spenceans who, Bamford claimed 'had already fallen under the influence of instigators who betrayed all their transactions to the government'. The agents of the Manchester authorities also had him under close surveillance. 'No.2's exertions and usefulness increase every hour. He has wormed himself completely into their confidence. On Saturday he is to dine with Mitchell . . . Mitchell was in London . . . He is now in Manchester. He is a sort of chief for the whole of this part of the country.'<sup>45</sup> That one man was to be so responsible for liaison between the different areas proved the Achilles heel of the movement leading to the tragic events of that year.

In April 1817, Mitchell was introduced by the London Spencean Pendrill, to a man recently released from debtor's prison who according to Mitchell's own account 'told me that it was the desire of the London friends to form a connection with the country friends'. Impressed by his apparent zeal and sincerity, Mitchell not only allowed him to accompany him on his next tour of the provinces but also introduced him as a reliable contact to all the leading reformers in each area. In fact since March, William Oliver as he was known to the

Radicals, had been in contact with Lord Sidmouth of the Home Office offering information 'important for the welfare and justice of this country'.

From their first provincial meeting in Birmingham on April 25, Oliver reported back to his employers that the Radicals' plans were well advanced: 'only the date of the General Rise was to be fixed'. And in Derby his contact claimed 'they are all ready, only waiting for the Signal'. The evidence of other informers, the depositions of witnesses and suspects and subsequent events themselves all confirm that a revolutionary mood existed — contrary to the assertions of contemporaries and historians who, believing insurrection to be totally foreign to the British working class, attribute the whole situation to Oliver's machinations. The revolutionary movement was already under sail, Oliver took the helm in order to scuttle it.

The weakness of the revolutionaries was well understood by Oliver. He noted that although many of the workers and artisans in the Nottinghamshire villages were favourably inclined towards an insurrection 'they did not seem in any way organised or aware of any systematic plan'. His tactics were to encourage the adoption of a precipitate plan whilst at the same time sowing confusion.

From the last week of April to the first week of June, Oliver travelled extensively throughout the industrial areas of Lancashire, Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire and the West Riding where he made optimistic reports of the state of readiness of the London Radicals. At a key meeting at Wakefield on May 5th he claimed that 70,000 men were ready to rise in the capital and that leading Radicals such as Cartwright were ready to set up a new government. However the basic plan for the march on London, he reported 'long since determined' by the other delegates who he described as men of 'apparent moral and sober habits'. Michell's arrest near Huddersfield the day before this meeting was a mixed blessing for Oliver. Although it made communication with the authorities easier it left him with no one to hide behind in his relations with the radicals and he had to maintain his own image as a bona fide 'London delegate'. This does not make him the originator of the insurrection. He was now (whether by design of the Home Office or the interference of the local authorities who were still ignorant of 'O's mission) merely playing Mitchell's role which he himself assessed as 'their travelling agent' and 'the deepest in the plot', an act he had to sustain to succeed in his stated aim 'of Breeching all the Main Links'.

At the Wakefield meeting the insurrection had been fixed for the night of the 26/27th May but on the 14th, after meeting with a leading Sheffield Radical, Oliver pressed for its postponement. Whether this move was initiated by Oliver is not certain, but he was well aware of its effect: 'I thought it my duty to encourage the delay as much as possible by which means I thought they would expose each other.' The authorities knew of the postponement before some of the participants. Men left work early in Leeds to join the fight and consequently suffered severe disappointment. Leading delegates like Scholes of Wakefield were frustrated and suspicious. General Byng learned that the fear of informers and the indecisiveness had quashed the movement in Manchester '... the observation of the people was that they would not be brought into further scrapes'.

The insurrection suffered a further reverse when leading Radicals were arrested at a Sheffield meeting on the 29th May and at Thornhill Lees on the 6th June, where although all the West Yorkshire delegates were arrested Oliver (who through lack of liaison with the authorities was trapped at the meeting) engineered an escape. One radical, whose scepticism about Oliver's credentials and the feasibility of the uprising had saved him from the meeting, saw the agent later that day talking to the coachman of General Byng from whom he learnt of Oliver's interview with the General only two days before. Unfortunately the weak co-ordination of the Radicals prevented this revelation influencing the events of the next few days and many were only fully informed by its publication in the *Leeds Mercury* a week later.<sup>46</sup>

By the 7th Oliver was back in Nottingham where his departure for London was prevented by the Radicals who demanded a full report. Truthfully he told them that there had been some treachery in Yorkshire but, according to Stevens the Nottinghamshire leader, he also claimed 'all was ready in London, all would go on well if they did but remain to their promises at Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire'. Some were ready to kill him and were not convinced that he had valid reasons to return to the capital but after a heavy grilling the majority, including Stevens, accepted his account.

With the insurrection totally abandoned in Lancashire, delegates arrested in the West Riding and widespread disillusionment and suspicion in Nottinghamshire it is surprising that any attempt to put the plan into effect was made. For the bourgeois historians who consider the entire movement to be the creation of Sidmouth's ministry and its agents, primarily Oliver, only the explanation of the

middle-class reformers of the time can be repeated — that the revolutionists were naive dupes. If this was the case then Oliver must have concentrated his efforts on the villages of Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire and the West Riding because the workers and artisans there were particularly gullible, and not because of the level of political consciousness, organisation and revolutionary tradition which existed amongst them as a legacy from the Luddite movement! Castlereagh himself had a clearer view of social and political reality than some contemporary journalists and subsequent historians. 'As to charging upon him, Oliver, the insurrections at Derby and Huddersfield what must have been the state of the country that his appearance could do so much.'<sup>47</sup>

From the villages of the Holme Valley, between Holmfirth and Huddersfield, on the night of Sunday the 8th June a partially armed body of men (its numbers variously estimated at 80-400) marched on Huddersfield, exchanged a few shots with the Yeomanry, the mounted bourgeois militia, and then dispersed. The force was composed mainly of croppers and weavers along with other artisans and labourers — the very types of workers who only five years before had been involved in the Luddite conflicts although many of the participants on this occasion would have been too young to have been initiated into the earlier movement. The leader, George Taylor, who was reported to have met Oliver during his visit to Huddersfield in early May, might have been deceived about the actual strategy of the revolution but it was he and other local workers and artisans, not Oliver, who carried through the weeks of preparatory meetings and organisation and who coined the slogan on the night 'No my lads — all England is in arms — our liberties are secure — the rich will be poor and the poor will be rich.'

In the Derbyshire villages around Pentrich (also a scene of Luddite activity in 1812) where framework knitters, miners and various artisans rose under Jerry Brandreth, agitation had been conducted by a veteran republican, Thomas Bacon, who believed in the Spencean plan of the confiscation and distribution of the large estates. The insurrection itself was of Spencean inspiration as its initial co-ordinator, Mitchell, is known to have supported such measures and, already stigmatised by his association with Oliver, was denounced as a provocateur for advocating them at a meeting in 1819. By portraying the insurrection and the ideology of its leaders as a government scheme the bourgeois reformers such as Baines of the *Leeds Mercury*

sought to discredit any levelling policies which stepped to the left of their own restricted idea of parliamentary reform, and to isolate the independent working class leadership whose development they so feared. The bourgeoisie — the 'middle class' between the hammer of social and economic class conflicts with the working class and the anvil of aristocratic political predominance — sought to harness the working class to their own political machine. These attempts met with some success during the agitation for the Reform Bill in 1831/1832 (which did not enfranchise the working class) and with the Anti-Corn law League, which diverted many workers from Chartism. In 1817 the bourgeoisie could afford to be magnanimous. The Ultra-Radicals lacked the ideology or the organisation to lead a mass movement which once launched would sweep aside the merchants and manufacturers along with the landlords. Nevertheless the 1817 Pentridge and Holme Valley uprising represent an historical turning point: 'one of the first attempts in history to mount a wholly proletarian revolution without middle class support.'<sup>48</sup>

#### PETERLOO AND AFTER — THE RISE AND DECLINE OF THE MASS MOVEMENT

The Derbyshire rising resulted in three executions, eleven life transportations, three fourteen year transportations and several lesser sentences. In Yorkshire, the predominantly Whig administration was glad to use the revelations about Oliver to embarrass the government and generate a sympathetic atmosphere for not guilty verdicts against all the revolutionaries. However, there still remained the question of those imprisoned without trial since the suspension of Habeas Corpus and the subsequent Indemnity Act which made government unaccountable for illegalities against these victims. It was around this that the reform movement regrouped, linking the question of 'constitutional rights' with the necessity for parliamentary reform. The *Leeds Mercury* published accounts of the sufferings of the Radicals in gaol (one Huddersfield man having committed suicide in York Castle) as part of its policy to appear as the concerned advocate of the labouring classes. A report in the Tory *Leeds Intelligence* that delegates had gone from Huddersfield in March 1818 to re-establish links with London 'for the purpose of renewing the machinations of last year', were dismissed by the *Mercury* as alarmist. The *Mercury* also cautioned workers against the 'dangers' of combinations and the political conse-



quences that could ensue from the fierce industrial conflicts of that year:

. . . these feuds between masters and their workmen may serve as a pretence for those who have once maintained their places by suspending the constitutional liberties of their countrymen to try against the same manoeuvre.<sup>49</sup>

The worst fears of the bourgeoisie were to be realised. The working class was not prepared to sacrifice its own class interests in the economic arena or to tag politically behind the middle class. This was most apparent in the cotton manufacturing districts centred on Manchester.

Cotton spinners and weavers strike in 1818 resulted in mass demonstrations, widespread picketing and some riots but more than the sporadic violence the authorities were frightened by the efficient organisation of the workers. General Byng wrote to the Home Office:

The combination about wages has existed too long; the peaceable demeanour of so many unemployed men is not natural; their regular meeting and again dispersing shows a system of organisation of their actions which has some appearance of *previous tuition*.<sup>50</sup>

Particularly disturbing was the blatant contempt for the anti-combination laws expressed in attempts to found a Philanthropic Society or General Union of Trades which attracted support from towns as far as the Midlands — a sinister development which threatened to link the disputes of the cotton workers with those of colliers, shoemakers and others.

Fears were held that the strikers were coming under Radical control. The Home Office wrote to Hay:

Even if the views of the unemployed workmen were originally unmixed with politics it is too much to expect that they remain so, when they are daily and nightly exposed to the harangues of such men as Drummond, Bagguley etc.<sup>51</sup>

These two, who had organised the Blanketeers' proposed march to London in 1817, were reported in September, at a time when attacks on mills according to Justice Norris constituted a form of guerrilla warfare, to be inciting the weavers with 'Death or Liberty' speeches. One magistrate went so far as to conclude, again blaming Bagguley and Drummond:

I am convinced from what I see and hear in every direction that the lower

classes here are radically corrupted. An advance of wages . . . is a mere stalking horse . . . Their aim is revolution and to effect their object they have established a regular chain of connection . . . amongst all classes in a subordinate situation.<sup>52</sup>

Spies were at work throughout the area feeding their employers information on the temper of the working classes and the influence of the reformers. Fleming, who had been active in 1812, was ejected from a spinner's meeting at Bury which passed a resolution calling for the legal protection they were entitled to against such 'perjured villains'. Fletcher had agents at meetings who reported from one that 'the orators publically boasted the turn-out being their work', and it also appears that old adversaries were under special surveillance: 'The main actors of 1812 have been heard to say that their projects have again been botched — and they fear that the different trades cannot be roused to the assertion of the people's rights.'

Hunger, the arrest of strike committees and of some reform leaders brought the strike wave to an end. But the heightened combativity of the working class, the more sophisticated organisational structures formed in action transcending trade boundaries and a clearer understanding of the limitations of wage struggles provided the preconditions for the proliferation of working class radical reform Union Societies in late 1818 to early 1819. Fletcher reported: 'The turnout of the weavers has afforded to the designing Jacobins the means of organising that great portion of our Lancashire population.' With the invitation of the great reform orator Henry Hunt to the area in January, these societies became the base of a popular mass movement throughout the cotton country, especially amongst the village weavers, causing much greater apprehension to the middle classes and aristocracy than the strikes.

Fights between Radicals and Loyalists and the drilling of workers on the moors by Napoleonic War veterans, in one instance where spies were recognised and beaten up, increased the authorities' anticipation of 'a general Insurrection'. An Oldham magistrate reported in July: 'The minds of the lower orders in these parts are exclusively occupied with political discussions and an expectation of an approaching explosion which is to produce a complete change in the present order of things.' Thus when a meeting was announced for early August as the culmination of reform activity and as part of a series of national meetings, an atmosphere of fierce class hatred, fuelled by the Loyalist press had been generated.

The meeting, originally postponed while the reformers sought advice about its legality, took place on August 16 when at least 60,000 people marched under their banners to St Peter's Fields Manchester from the surrounding towns and villages. Although Hunt had publicly called upon his supporters to come 'armed with NO OTHER WEAPON but that of a self approving conscience', and not to yield to provocations, the authorities were determined on a show of strength, bringing in troops and artillery. The Manchester Yeomanry Cavalry, the mounted bourgeois militia composed of local capitalists from small traders to millowners were not only expecting but were eager for a confrontation. Their unblooded sabres had been sent for sharpening and they spent the morning getting drunk at the expense of their commander the cotton master, Hugo Birley, consequently a child was run down as they galloped to take up their position and many had difficulty in managing their horses. This is not simply indicative of inexperience which turned to panic with unfortunate results as those who still attempt to whitewash the massacre claim, but reflects in the course of events a deep hatred and contempt for the working class.

Whoever's the responsibility and whatever the motive for the order to arrest Hunt after the meeting had begun, when he was surrounded by a packed mass of men, women and children, the Yeomanry Cavalry executed it with enthusiasm, laying into the crowd with the edge of the sabre, spurring towards the hustings where they slashed and broke the radical flags in symbolic vengeance and then riding down the fleeing workers. The total indiscipline of the Yeomanry had led some of them into difficulties and the 15th Hussars were ordered to extricate them by methodically clearing the field, resulting in more casualties. The pursuit was pressed into the city streets where the Cheshire Yeomanry joined in. In less than half an hour at least 12 lay dead or fatally wounded and many hundreds of injured, some seriously, were being carried back to the villages.

Although relevant to the subsequent trials of the reformers and to demands for an enquiry, the question of the legality of the meeting and the magistrates' actions, or the responsibility of the government, has become an academic abstraction clouding the real significance of events. The state was not a distant body in Whitehall. The magistrates and the constables, the military and the yeomanry *were* the state in Manchester, and it was their actions, premeditated or not, which led to the repression of the reform movement. It is no accident that this area, where the productive forces were the most developed and the

factory system the most concentrated, with the most mature industrial working class and consequently the most acute class antagonisms, should produce men like Nadin and the Reverend Hay — zealous loyalists and defenders of the ruling class. In their careers is reflected the continuity of development of the state against all the changing forms of workers' struggles — Luddism, strike action, mass picketing and demonstrations, the aborted Blanketeers' march and the Radical Reform movement. The hysteria generated by Nadin, Hay and others in their attempts to repress the working class and destroy radicalism directly contributed to the Peterloo Massacre.

Even the Radicals, who were well aware of the repressive role of the military and judiciary and the frame-ups or 'Green Bag plots' of the provocateurs, which they constantly denounced in their speeches, were horrified at the brutal assault on a peaceful working-class demonstration. Adherents of the modern 'optimist school' of studies of the industrial revolution, which attempts to apologise for the barbarities of capitalist industrial development, have derided the term 'Peterloo Massacre' as a product of sensationalist propaganda on the grounds that the death toll does not warrant such a description. If history could be reduced to a balance sheet of deaths and mutilations then Peterloo must come very low on an account which includes the subsequent atrocities of imperialism. Instead we must see the event in the context of the class struggle and particularly the impact it had on working class forces at that time.<sup>53</sup>

The evening of the massacre, riots broke out in the working-class quarter of New Cross in Manchester in which one man was shot by troops and in the following days, emissaries were reported to be touring the West Riding calling the people to arms. Bamford, later imprisoned as one of the organisers of the Peterloo meeting, describes this spontaneous anger which workers in the villages exhibited in the making of makeshift weapons, but as a leader shows his own confusion by the admission 'no plan was defined — nothing was arranged, and the arms were afterwards reserved for any event that might occur'. The Huntite Radicals who had based their campaign on peaceful agitation, mass meetings, petitions and remonstrances, were completely devoid of any alternative strategy and amidst the demands for vengeance even the old tried methods threatened to result in bloodshed.

The main schism which took place in the reform movement took the form of a personal clash between Hunt and the old London

Spencean leadership — but this only masked a fundamental divergence of policy. While the Huntites looked to the middle classes for support in forcing an enquiry into the massacre, hoping for legal redress, the Spenceans, Watson, Thistlewood and others pressed for the holding of simultaneous reform meetings throughout the country as a demonstration of strength. Some Radical journals explicitly advocated that these should be armed demonstrations. An attempt to reconstruct an Ultra Radical organisation on the lines of 1817 for these ends was denounced by Hunt as the work of spies. An accusation which in the light of subsequent events may have had some basis as the societies in both London and the rest of the country suffered from infiltration. Even more it suffered from the fear of infiltration as radical workers were aware of the vulnerability of a London centred delegate organisation after the experiences of 1817. It was in precipitating this crisis of leadership in the reform movement that the historical significance of the state's action at the field of Peterloo lies.<sup>54</sup>

However the state did not rest on its laurels and rely on confusion within the reformers' ranks to do its work. The government was alarmed by mounting popular anger over Peterloo, increasing demands for radical reform and resistance to the Corn Laws and other taxes, expressed by threatening slogans like those on banners at a Huddersfield meeting in November: 'No Corn Laws: Death or Liberty: Arm Yourselves Against Tyrants: Unite and be Free,' and 'He that hath no sword let him sell his garment and buy one.'<sup>55</sup> In December six repressive acts were introduced against freedom of assembly, arming and drilling and the radical press. The *Mercury* condemned the government for creating the very conditions they claimed justified their reaction:

A succession of Tory administrations has contrived to destroy the prosperity of their country and now, while labouring to annihilate its liberties, the creatures have the affront to charge the general discontent upon their political opponents.<sup>56</sup>

As in the 1790s and 1817, the radical movement only remained viable in its clandestine forms.

The London Spenceans determined to lead what national network of Ultra Radical societies they had formed towards an uprising by a coup in the capital, which was to be sparked off by the assassination of the entire cabinet whilst at an official dinner. Thistlewood and several London artisans were seized in a room at Cato Street and charged with

high treason. Revelations at the trial that the scheme had been hatched by a certain Edwards in collusion with the authorities did not save the conspirators' necks and Thistlewood and four others went to the gallows in May 1820.

At the beginning of April, almost a month after Thistlewood's arrest, the authorities were taken almost totally by surprise by a series of local armed outbreaks. In marked contrast to 1817 the ignorance of the authorities indicates they were unsuccessful in penetrating the movement despite arrests in Lancashire and Glasgow under the Six Acts. This may have been because the movement was not centrally co-ordinated by itinerant delegates as in 1817 but organised by a number of local centres which loosely liaised, and any links with the London committees appear to have been indirect.

On March 31 several hundred men from the villages to the north of Huddersfield assembled under arms but dispersed when an awaited signal did not appear. Prisoners later claimed the plan had been to seize the barracks, arrest the authorities and stop the coaches as a signal to insurgents along their routes — a method used by the United Irishmen in 1798. In the next few days in the Glasgow area a general strike by about 60,000 people prefaced an uprising of small bands of radical weavers who stood their ground in a shoot-out with the military at Bonnymuir. According to captives a full scale rising was expected in England which would be confirmed by the non-arrival of the coach. Six days later on the 11th, ample time for them to be informed of the failure in Scotland if direct communication existed between them, possibly 300 weavers and miners from Barnsley marched to Grange Moor near Huddersfield, hoping to be joined by a great army from Scotland and the North for a march on London. Their battle flag bore a slogan referring to Peterloo: 'He that smiteth a man so that he die, shall surely be put to death.'<sup>57</sup>

Within a few months however these events were overshadowed by widespread popular agitation which united the middle and working classes in opposition to the king and his ministers over their handling of the Queen Caroline affair — the latter became a national heroine for her defiance of the crown and government who were attempting her removal. This and the defeats of 1819-1820 destroyed the independent working class reform movement, apart from a few groups around the surviving radical journals. With the economic revival resulting from the speculative boom which lasted until 1825 the organised workers devoted much of their resources to the campaign

for the repeal of the Combination Laws which was achieved in 1824.

The slump of the following year ended a spate of legal trade union activity and opened a period of severe depression which produced a revival of the Radical Reform movement. It was the frustration of demands of the working class Radicals caused by the 1832 Reform Act which gained parliamentary representation only for the middle classes, that led to the fusion of different strands of the class struggle — factory reform agitation, opposition to the New Poor Law, trade unionism, Owenite socialism, co-operativism and demands for working class suffrage — into the Chartist movement. Under this standard the forms of struggle waged over the previous two generations assumed a more formidable aspect in which a mass movement with a strong insurrectionist tendency, for a short period, posed a serious threat to the ruling class. A knowledge of the historical background of Chartism, of the early development of the working class and of the forces against which it contended under the impetus of the dynamics of the capitalist mode of production in the period of industrialisation, are essential to fulfil one task set by Trotsky:

An explanation of the historical significance of the revolution of the seventeenth century and of the revolutionary content of Chartism is one of the most important obligations laid upon British Marxists.<sup>58</sup>

### THE ROLE OF WORKING CLASS IN THE EARLY PHASE OF INDUSTRIAL CAPITALISM

Bourgeois historians of this period have often based their analyses on two antithetical, idealistic concepts — 'public order' and 'revolution'. The efficiency of the state is assessed by its ability to maintain 'public order' and the inevitable failure of revolutionaries by their inability to make revolutions which in fact exist only in the historians' preconceptions.<sup>59</sup>

The state on the one hand and working class political organisations on the other can not be considered as idealised abstractions, but only as part of the developing process of antagonistic class relations corresponding to the expansion of the capitalist productive forces. There existed specific objective reasons why a revolution did not occur in Britain in 1798, 1812 or 1817. To consider primarily the subjective factors as an explanation, to say that there was no revolution because the Jacobins or Radicals failed to make one, to separate subject and

object in history, obscures the real dynamics which govern the development of human consciousness and historical change.

The development of the capitalist mode of production was an uneven process — its effect of techniques, the different divisions of labour, the accumulation of capital, demography etc. — in short the social forces of production, varied greatly. In the sphere of the social relations of all classes and the political and ideological arena where social conflicts were fought out this unevenness was reflected.

It was this contradictory development which led workers and artisans in the old textile manufacturing communities to take the lead in the fight against capitalism even though they conceived of themselves as fighting to retain the old system of capitalist production. Political concepts were couched in terms of the regeneration of lost liberties (which in fact had never existed) whilst in reality they challenged the political hegemony of both aristocracy and bourgeoisie.

Working class knowledge of the nature of the emergent industrial capitalism was not born fully armed but striven towards through a process of struggle in the class war. It was a knowledge not defined by the direct relations between capitalists and workers or even reformers and state, but drew on the international revolutionary experiences, the philosophical doctrines and the rationalist social, economic and political theories thrust into the cauldron of world conflict by the French Revolution. Thus the French bourgeois revolution, itself a product of the laws of combined international development of capitalism, had an important formative effect on British proletarian consciousness.

Therefore the uneven development of the working class itself and of its cognition of the capitalist laws of development, corresponding to the uneven and still progressive development of the productive forces, precluded any possibility of proletarian social revolution in this period. The role of revolutionaries — Jacobins, Radicals or Chartists — must be assessed not from their ability to make a successful revolution but from their ability under the existing historical conditions, to materially advance working class interests and to deepen the class's cognition of its historical role. In this capacity they contributed to the sum total of human knowledge on which Marx and Engels drew for their analysis of the capitalist mode of production, and of historical development in general.

The creation of the working class as an agent of revolutionary change could not be achieved without the completion of certain



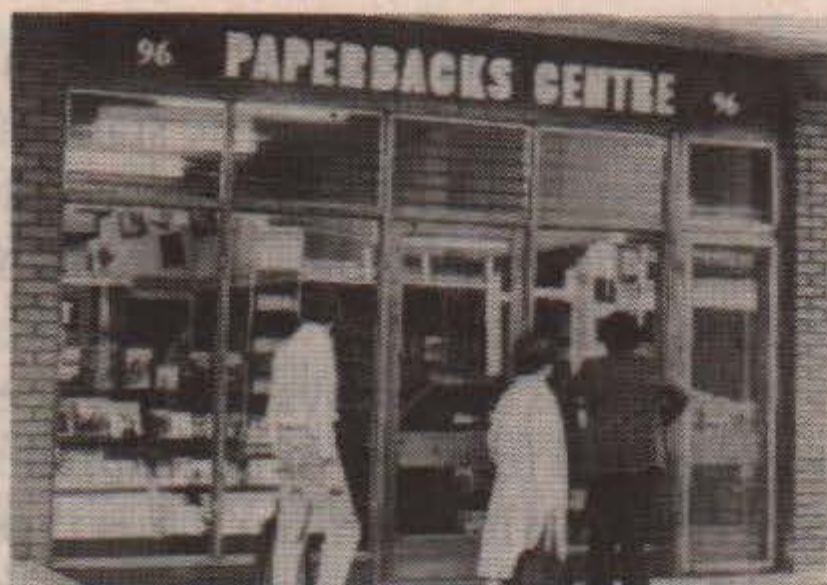
quantitative developments in the productive forces of capitalism nor without a qualitative leap in human consciousness. The former occurred with the transition of capitalism into a world imperialist system — the latter with Marx and Engels' discovery of the dialectical materialist world view.

But the ruling class was and is, developing its political cadres and weapons of class rule in the form of the state apparatus. The standing army, the professional police, the spy system and the battery of laws they attempt to enforce can no more be considered separately from the whole capitalist mode of production than can the working class movements they are intended to suppress. The spy system has been focused on in this essay as it constitutes the thin end of the capitalist state's wedge. As capitalism sinks deeper into its definitive crisis these wedges too are driven ever deeper. The ruling class seeks to tear the working class apart, so that the police-military machine, wielding the hammer, might smash the remnants of working class organisation and pave the road for imperialist war and barbarism.

#### Notes:

- 45 Davis, H.W.C. *Lancashire Reformers 1816-1817* Appendix (21)
- 46 LM Jun 14, 1817
- 47 LM Jun 21 1817
- 48 Thompson op.cit. This account is also based on material in Stevens *Engalnds Last Revolution* Hammon, op.cit.
- 49 LM Aug 1818
- 50 Asp (231)
- 51 Asp (235)
- 52 Asp (286)
- 53 This account is based on material in Foster J. *Class Struggle and the Industrial Revolution* Marlow, J. *The Peterloo Massacre*, Read, D. *Peterloo: The Massacre and its Background* Bamford. op.cit. Walmsley, P *Peterloo: The case re-opened*
- 54 Thompson op.cit., Read, D. op. cit.
- 55 LM Nov 13, 1819
- 56 LM Han 15, 1820
- 57 LM Mar-Jul, 1820 (according to LM Thistlewood's '... object was to avenge the death of those unhappy people who had been cut down and massacred at Manchester')
- 58 Trotsky *Where is Britian Going*
- 59 For an unashamed bourgeois view of this period see: Davell, F.O. *The Luddite Disturbances and the Machinery of Public Order*, Mather, *Public Ofer int he Age of the Chartists*, Thomis and Holt *Threats of Revolution in Britian 1789-1848*

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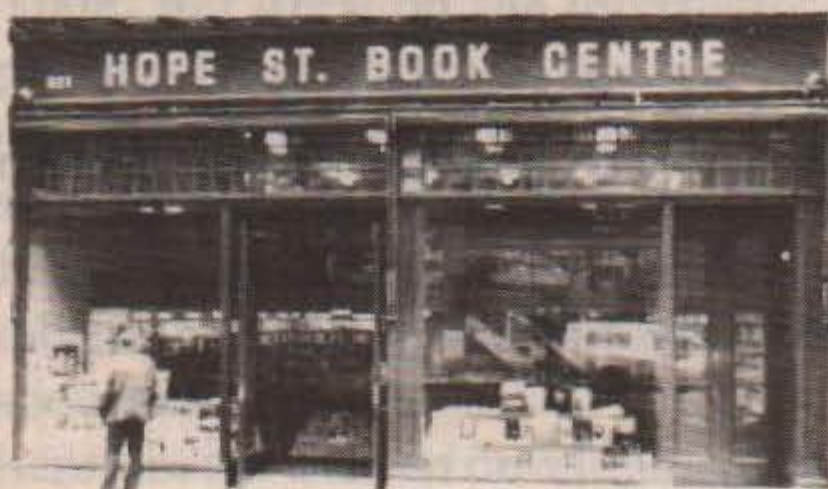
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## Trade unions since World War II

*Governments and Trade Unions. The British Experience 1964-79* by Denis Barnes and Eileen Reid. Heinemann. £12.50

Catastrophic changes in relations between governments and unions and within unions loom on the horizon. By itself, this survey will add nothing to an understanding of those changes. Its authors give us history as the setting down of one event following another.

Sir Denis Barnes is a former civil servant who was Permanent Secretary of the Department of Employment and Chairman of the Manpower Services Commission. We can see very clearly their lack of penetration beyond the surface of events in the way the writers of the book find difficulty in ending it with any conclusions.

'It could be, therefore, that the relationships between governments and the trade union movement in the eighties will continue much as in the past.' So they write. It 'could be' they believe this. However, in the very few sentences at the end of the book where they dare to look at the future they are adrift in confusion. After telling us they have to base their forecasts on the assumptions that relationships of the unions to the two political parties will not change, that the two party system itself will not change, that the essential characteristics of the trade union movement will remain the same, they end the book with: 'The continuation of the existing relationship between governments and the trade union movement in a situation of continuing economic failure could have unpredictable political consequences . . . The assumptions made at the beginning of these final pages seem unlikely to prevail through the 1980s.'

It is the 'sectional' view of history, in which things develop according to Newton's first law — a uniform motion until impressed by a

force from outside, in this case, 'continuing economic failure'. 'Continuing economic failure', however, — in other words, the decline of British imperialism — has determined the relations between governments and trade unions for a very long time.

It is impossible to take the smallest step toward an understanding of events sketched in this book without grasping the central contradiction of British capitalism. That is the contradiction between what necessity poses to British capitalism in the way of destroying the working class, and the very power of the working class itself. Dominating in the post war boom, that contradiction is being sharpened immeasurably in the slump.

The dilemma which the book describes of reconciling 'collective bargaining' with the need to curb wages struggle is one aspect of it. They describe how, immediately after the war — in 1947 — under a Labour Government: 'The problem for the government and union leaders was how to reconcile a policy for the restraint of wage increases — even members of the General Council accepted that wages should not continue to rise at the same rates as in 1945 and 1946 — with the freedom of unions to engage in collective bargaining.'

The foundation of post-war 'partnership', and of trade union power, is seen by the authors of this book as lying in the coalition of 1940-1945. Such a conclusion follows from skimming the surface of history without even a peep at the working class. The unions did not become powerful because their representatives were put into wartime Ministries in charge of workers, mobilising them, imprisoning and fining them for absenteeism and striking. The labour and trade union leaders were brought into the government because they alone could dragoon workers and exploit their hatred of fascism to bring them behind the imperialist war aims. It was from the ranks that there came the power as, among masses of workers, the conviction grew that they had strength to prevent a return to the thirties.

'We're not coming back to the same, Ernie,' shouted trade unionists among the troops which were reviewed by Ernest Bevin before the Normandy landings. It was in reaction to this feeling that the coalition government in 1943 produced the report of the Liberal peer Lord Beveridge. The Second Front was being planned and the report called for 'full employment' and a National Health Service. The radicalisation of workers swept the Labour leadership out of the coalition and into government in 1945 to become the saviours of British capitalism, just as the Stalinists saved capitalism on the Continent. One of the

conclusions Barnes and Reid draw about the period they deal with — 1964-1979 — is that Labour governments, in particular, looked longingly at the partnership that existed between unions and government under the Attlee government. Such a partnership was Wilson's hope, but Attlee's government, they declare: 'started with wide support in the country and a strong parliamentary position'.

They write that, 'the influence of trade union leaders over members was by 1964 much less than it had been in 1945-50. Strikes in breach of national agreements and unofficial strikes not supported, and at times opposed, by unions at the centre rather than the exercise of trade union power nationally had become the major issue of industrial relations'. A little obscure. But whether or not we accept that changes were in just the way posed by Barnes and Reid, there certainly were great changes. But shifts in the unions, including shifts in the leadership which they mention, were the result of deeper shifts in the working class, and the development of the central contradiction of British capitalism.

In the latter half of the sixties the Labour Government was carrying out the rationalisation and reorganisation of British capitalism. Together with that, spurred on by the international currency crisis it prepared to legally curb the unions. With the experience of unofficial movements in the previous decade, particularly that of the seamen and the fight for the 'blue union', left leaders, such as Cousins emerged. Their job was to contain members with left phrases. The trade union and Labour bureaucracy split at the end of the sixties because the Labour bureaucracy was attacking the very source of the trade union bureaucrats' power and privilege. Trade union leaders were forced to move with the protests of the ranks and resist 'In Place of Strife'.

Under the 1974-79 Labour Government, fearful of the movements previously unleashed against Heath, the trade union bureaucracy sought valiantly to uphold the 'Social Contract'. The book records its death in 1978/79.

The whole period since the war has left British capitalism with its major problem unresolved — how to smash the working class. No partnership of trade union bureaucracy and government can abolish the need for that. The ruling class knows very well that its only solution lies in confrontation. Hence the preparations of state forces to confront the working class have steadily increased over the past 16 years. One thing is clear from the relationship of government and trade unions. No blame attaches to the trade union and labour



## **Chartists and the General Strike**

*The General Strike of 1842* by Mick Jenkins (Lawrence and Wishart, London 1980)

No book could be more timely than this one when a general strike is again on the agenda for the British working class. Jenkins provides not only a readable description of the events and personalities of the strike, which should inspire and encourage all involved in today's class struggle, but also an analysis which goes some of the way towards refuting the dominant academic historians' view. He demonstrates that the strike was not simply a plot (either of the Chartists or of the capitalist Anti-Corn Law League) as contemporaries of all parties claimed, nor a purely spontaneous outbreak (which the Chartists attempted ineffectually to manipulate) as many historians still claim. The General Strike of 1842 can only be considered as an integral part of the social and political development of the working class.

1837 saw the beginnings of an economic recession which plunged in 1839 into a full-scale slump. By early 1842 there was massive unemployment, short-time working and wage-cutting throughout all sectors of industry. In July of that year Staffordshire miners struck against reductions and the truck system, spreading their action throughout the coalfield by means which were to characterise the general strike of the following month. Large bodies of strikers marched in order from pit to pit and town to town persuading other workers to join them and where necessary closing down collieries by stopping the steam engines. Even more significantly mass meetings at Hanley and Burslem passed resolutions in support of The People's Charter. From the beginning the demand for 'a fair day's wage for a fair day's work' was indissolubly linked with the Charter's programme for working-class political rights.

Threatened wage reductions in the cotton manufactories of Stalybridge and Ashton-under-Lyne also led to a series of meetings in which local Chartists played a prominent part and in some cases successfully proposed resolutions for the Charter. On August 5 the weavers of Baily Bros. of Stalybridge struck against wage cuts and marched in procession the following day around the neighbouring mills which turned out in their support. On the 7th, a Sunday, mass meetings on Mottram Moor called for an extension of the strike not only to restore wages but also for the Charter to become the law of the land. That Monday the spreading of the strike began in earnest.

Processions of strikers marched into neighbouring towns, Hyde, Stockport, Oldham, Manchester. Some mills were forcibly closed; fights occurred with police and troops. By the 12th the strike had extended to Preston and Rochdale and by the beginning of the second week it was established in the West Riding of Yorkshire. The authorities in some areas saw the movement as part of a general insurrection and troops opened fire on strikers in Preston, Blackburn and Halifax while in Huddersfield they were charged by cavalry.

The organisation of the workers astounded the ruling class. The strike appeared so co-ordinated that it was suspected that a pigeon post relayed such information as troop movements from area to area. Strike committees were set up in some localities and dealt with matters such as dispensation for masters to finish work in danger of spoiling. The Attorney General later stated: 'I have ever considered the existence of those committees as one of the most formidable evidences of the extent to which the "strike" as it is called, pervaded all classes of operatives.' He claimed moreover, that they had initially '... styled themselves a committee of public safety', a title reminiscent of the French Revolution.

Despite often thorough organisation and the political motivation of many workers, expressed at numerous meetings calling for the adoption of the Charter as an aim of the strike, the movement was crushed. Having emphasised the role of conscious political leadership in the strike as the main thesis of the book the author reveals his own political weakness in his failure to explain the relationship of this leadership to the defeat. He in fact absolves it completely. Comparing this strike to 1926 (in which Mr Jenkins participated as a Communist Party member) he states 'The General Strike of 1842 was not defeated by the treachery of its leaders. On the contrary, there was unity and harmony between the workers and the strike leaders. They were



defeated because of the superior strength of the ruling class.' (p.24) Although it may accord well with the CP version of the 1926 strike the failure of working class leadership is not simply reducible to the treachery or cowardice of the national leaders. In 1926 as in 1842 responsibility for defeat also lies with the most politically conscious, organisationally prepared and theoretically equipped party of the working class for not measuring up to its historic tasks.

In the second week of the strike a conference of delegates of different trades involved in the strike met at Manchester and declared themselves for the Charter and a further extension of the 'cessation from labour'. The Home Office considered that 'these delegates are the directing body; they form the link between the trades unions and the Chartists'. However on the arrest of several delegates including the chairman, a Chartist and 'socialist of long standing', the conference issued a concluding address expressing exceeding regrets at 'the occurrence of the late civil commotion, of which we had not the slightest anticipation', and describing their earlier resolution for a strike for the Charter as 'impractical'. They announced the intention to recommence the national strike for the Charter when their organisation was sufficient; 'we shall do so legally and constitutionally and we fear not but the result will crown our cause with victory'.

The National Charter Association Executive at a conference previously arranged to mark the anniversary of the Peterloo massacre on the 16th August, published a stirring proclamation committing themselves to support of the strike and its peaceful extension. It concluded with an inspiring but not very concrete evocation 'Strengthen our hands at this crisis. Support your leaders. Rally round our sacred cause, and leave the decision to the God of justice and of Battle.' The conference also counselled workers against the destruction of life and property: 'Let all your acts be strictly legal and constitutional, and ere long your enemies will discover that labour is in truth the source of wealth, and should be the only source of power.' This hardly supports Jenkins claim that 'The strike of 1842 was originally the project of a minority of Chartist leaders and opposed by the rest. Its objective was the most ambitious possible — state power — even though it had built into it subsidiary economic demands.' (p.250) He admits himself, in contradiction to his earlier praise of the leaders that the strike's '... architects could be accused of making totally inadequate preparations for sustaining an underground leadership for the strike once a direct challenge had been issued to the government'. Although he refers to

the deep divisions within the Chartist body, particularly in relation to the abortive plan for a 'sacred month' in 1839, he does not deal with the basic problem. What was the role of the Chartist movement as a whole and in all its conflicting tendencies in the strike wave of that year? Only by attempting to answer this can we begin to understand the nature of the 1842 strike, Chartism and the working class in this phase of its development.

The key can be found in the attitude of *The Northern Star*, the most widely read and influential of the Chartist newspapers especially in the counties most affected by the strike. As a weekly, it did not come off the press until Saturday 13th when the strike was escalating most rapidly with the marches of the Lancashire workers into the West Riding. Its editorial of that day did its utmost to dampen support for those strikers already on the roads by denouncing the wage reductions as a plot of the Anti-Corn Law employers to shut down the mills to pressurise the government. More ridiculously, *The Star* asserted that the masters used this tactic 'to prove that GENERAL DISTRESS exists'. To workers who were suffering actual economic distress and who traditionally were accustomed to bringing this to the attention of government themselves this must have appeared to be an unconvincing assertion. The masters' intention claimed *The Star* was '... directed to the end of raising CAPITAL upon the ruins of LABOUR!'

Having made this condemnation of the strike *The Star* held back from an equally strong condemnation of the strikers themselves: 'We offer no opinion as to the prudence or desirability of the TURN-OUT. That is a matter to be determined upon by the people themselves...' *The Star*, as the voice of the northern Chartists had totally dissociated the organisation from not only leadership but also participation in the strike movement. It also warned members involved in an individual capacity: 'All attempts therefore to mix Chartism and the Chartists up with the STRIKE and the proceedings consequent on it are either insanely foolish or desperately wicked.' This must have come as a great blow to those working class Chartists busy agitating amongst the strikers for the adoption of the Charter.

Some were not daunted by these insinuations and events in Huddersfield reveal divisions which were more widespread than a reading of Jenkins' book would have us believe. On Monday the 15th Lancashire strikers and those who had joined en route arrived in the town. At an open air meeting speakers stated their aims to be economic — a restoration of former wage levels — and disagreed with the demands

of some of the Huddersfield strikers of 'The Charter or nothing.' Huddersfield Chartists claimed it was useless to go for better wages as long as labour was unprotected and a resolution calling for the adoption of the Charter was proposed and passed. Such meetings and debates accompanied the whole progress of the strike with the economic aim predominating in some areas.

The Tory *Halifax Guardian* which described the strike as a 'Chartist insurrection' claimed that the most willing strikers in Huddersfield were Chartists but that the leaders 'were rather shy of exhibiting themselves during the commotions . . .'. This cannot be dismissed as a slur as the Huddersfield Chartists, meeting to elect a delegate to the Manchester conference, issued a statement condemning both the use of the military against the strikers the previous day and also the riots and disturbances which had led to the clash. At the end of the strike the local Council of the Charter Association sent a statement to *The Star* disclaiming any role in the Huddersfield riots as an organisation ' . . . whatever may have been the conduct of a few individuals bearing the name'. It also professed sympathy for those arrested but condemned 'every effort to connect us or the Association of which we are officers with either the acts themselves or their consequences'.

Despite the involvement of working class Chartists in the strike therefore the Huddersfield Association adhered to *The Star's* line of non-intervention. This would be justifiable if it only applied to acts of violence which might lay the Association open to legal action. But the constant appeals by *The Star* and its supporters to 'Keep Chartism distinct from "risings" and "rioting"' was orchestrated with both Whig and Tory outcries against the outrages of the strikers and by persistently dubbing the strike as an Anti-CornLaw plot it denied, along with those parties, that the strike was a legitimate response to genuine grievances.

On the 27th *The Star* greeted the collapse of the strike with optimism. It smugly congratulated the Manchester Trade delegates for having the courage to accept the futility of the strike and claimed that events had demonstrated to the trade societies the necessity for the Charter and legislative power to protect labour. More revealingly and in complete contrast to its attitude during the strike it claimed that the 'honest of the middle classes' had been convinced of the need for Chartist leadership in the working class by the lack of disturbance and anarchy in those areas where the 'strike received a Chartist character'. After condemning working class Chartists wholesale for

their participation in the strike, having left them out on a limb and undermined their support *The Star* was attempting to gain credit from their efforts.<sup>1</sup>

This crucial factor is not mentioned by Jenkins who portrays only the positive aspect of the strike; 'The turn-outs of 1842 were undefeated in spirit; they had asserted their independence as a class and had demonstrated their class solidarity. They had exposed the vicious and brutal character of the capitalist state . . . They had experienced a new form of class action: the blending (*sic*) of the mass trade union movement with Chartism. They had seen the potential of mass picketing. They had experienced some elements of the exercise of working-class power, such as the issue of work permits by strike committees. They had seen trades conferences in action and becoming authoritative centres of local leadership.' (p.24) These successes, which appear here as eulogy of pragmatism, obscure one vital development. Chartism as the authoritative leadership of the working class received a blow from which it never recovered.

Amongst the hundreds of arrests during and after the strike were many Chartists who had been involved enthusiastically and others who had just remained unequivocal — but this was not the main setback. The movement suffered from a wave of political disillusionment amongst its working class supporters due to its wavering during the strike. In *The Star* of July 29th the following year the Huddersfield district of the Association expressed hope that 'The *lull* caused by the strike-plot will soon again be succeeded by the healthy breeze of Legal Agitation . . . in the worst of times there are a gallant little few who cannot be *forced* to abandon the cause . . . ' The role of the National Association in the strike, the consequent 'lull' and the diversionary schemes such as land allotments and emigration which *The Star* encouraged from 1843 onwards reflect the fundamental lack of organisational and theoretical clarity which characterised Chartism.

The root of this problem is revealed in Engels' appraisal of the difference between Chartist democracy and all previous political bourgeois democracy. 'Chartism is of an essentially social nature, a class movement'.<sup>2</sup> Although this was realised by many of the Chartist leaders themselves they were unable to relate the political demands to the living reality of the class struggle. For them the Charter had to establish political rights as a *precondition* of social change and it had to do it through the existing political channels backed by the pressure of mass education and organisation for Chartism.

Chartist trade unionists, on the other hand, could not divorce politics from the daily struggle in which they were engaged. They could sensuously respond to the practical process of class struggle, the Charter was less an ideal and more a 'knife and fork question', a bread and butter question. This is why when the capitalists announced wage reductions the working class Chartists took the lead in the strike movement, attempting to politicise it by establishing the Charter amongst the worker's demands, without stopping to consider if the Anti-Corn Law League was pulling the strings. In this respect the theme of Jenkins' book is accurate — Chartism did provide the leadership of the strike. But it was also Chartism which did much to defuse the strike.

Without a scientific analysis of the social and economic system the Chartist leaders could not be aware that the capitalists of the League were as much victims of economic crisis as the working class, *in that their response to the threat of their economic interests was involuntary*. John Bright, a prominent Leaguer, in an address to Rochdale workers stated the immutable law of capitalism '... trade must yield a profit, or it will not long be carried on; and an advance in wages now would destroy profit ...' The workers were face to face with the enemy in this fundamental conflict of class interests — but the Chartists as a body were unprepared to lend their political leadership to a social struggle, the nature of which they did not understand.

This does not deny Engels' appraisal of Chartism as 'the first workingman's party of modern times . . . the first national working class movement . . .'<sup>3</sup> and it confirms Trotsky's observation: '... in the whole general movement and in its theoretic observations there is much that is immature, incomplete . . . one may say that the Chartist movement is like a prelude which gives in an undeveloped form the music of the whole opera. In this sense the British proletariat may and must see in Chartism not only its past, but also its future.'<sup>4</sup>

It was the historical conditions of the birth of 'the first workingman's party' which placed limitations on it it could not transcend. The 1842 general strike, as the most acute expression of class struggle under early industrial capitalism, epitomises all the contradictions of the political leadership of the working class in this period. No study of the strike can be adequate which ignores the practical and theoretical struggles waged within Chartism and the working class Radical movement in the previous and succeeding decades. These struggles are dominated by one fundamental historical factor — the rapid

progress of the capitalist mode of production. Integral to this was the growth of the working class, not only as part of the social forces of production but as an increasingly conscious agent of historical change.

This consciousness did not grow mechanically and spontaneously out of class struggle as Jenkins' book implies. The struggle against capitalist industrialism, landed capital and the relics of feudalism embodied elements of bourgeois and petit-bourgeois science and ideology — the legacy of classes who were the proletariat's erstwhile allies. Chartism, although the political champion and vanguard of the working class, was thoroughly pervaded by these elements.

It was nevertheless revolutionary in that out of this laboratory of practical and theoretical struggle emerged the prospect of political power guaranteed the working class not by virtue of a mythical constitution, or moral right, but through their role as producers of all wealth. It also posed before the working class for the first time, however embryonically, its task as the bearer of a new social order. 1842 was a vital leap in the understanding of this.

The following year *The Star* contributed to the course of future theoretical developments by running a series on French and German philosophies and movements including the Hegelians and Weitling. Other contacts with Europe were established by Engels' introduction of Chartist leaders to the League of the Just. By 1845, he says, Marx

had fully developed his materialist theory of history in its main features. Communism among the French and Germans, Chartism among the English now no longer appeared as something accidental, which could just as well not have occurred. These movements now presented themselves as a movement of the modern oppressed class, the proletariat, as the more or less developed forms of its highly historically necessary struggle against the ruling class, the bourgeoisie; . . .<sup>5</sup>

The foundations for the exploration of the dialectics of capitalism, the laws of motion and change of the mode of production which had produced the eruption of the working class in Britain in 1842, were being laid.

Jenkins concludes with the assessment that 'the General Strike of 1842 represented the climax of an already high level of class consciousness' which asserted itself and 'threatened a revolutionary situation . . .' (p257) By 'class consciousness' he means primarily unity and organisation, the ultimate in trade union solidarity. The test of working class conceptions of themselves as 'a class with a historical mis-

sion, is the degree to which the strike threw up and sustained organs for the specific purpose of a wider class organisation and the exercise of class power. *The most important feature of this development was the creation of local strike committees . . .* (p.181 our emphasis). Similarly the main advance in the 1926 strike 'was the brief reconstitution of class unity which the Left managed to embody in councils of action and strike committees.' (p.250) In 1842 as in 1926 political leadership entails intervention in these essentially spontaneously developed organs of class struggle to put forward the most advanced political demands. But demands for what?

In 1842 it was for the Charter. Today 'the left' may voice demands for nationalisation etc. But as in 1842 such demands are impotent without a revolutionary strategy for the seizure of state power. Nothing in Jenkins book supports his claim that the leaders of the 1842 strike had this as their objective or that the local operative committees had an 'anti-state inspiration' (p.251) Without evidence of a political leadership conscious of this he cannot substantiate his claim that 1842 'threatened a revolutionary situation'. This assertion appears even more unreal when it is considered that the bourgeoisie was still an ascending and self-confident class.

As Engels noted, 1842 demonstrated the courage and revolutionary potential of the British working class. It also demonstrated how this could be dissipated without political leadership. Jenkins' book vividly expresses the former and totally ignores the latter. The history of the strike and the role of Chartism still remains to be written.

#### Notes:

- <sup>1</sup> *Northern Star* 13th, 20th, 27th Aug. 1842
- <sup>2</sup> Engels, F. *Condition of the Working Class . . .* p.261 (Panther 1969)
- <sup>3</sup> Engels, *On Historical Materialism: Socialism, Utopian and Scientific* (Marx & Engels, Fontana 1971 pp 103 & 129)
- <sup>4</sup> Trotsky, L, *Where is Britain Going?* p.100 (New Park Publications 1970)
- <sup>5</sup> Engels, F, *History of the Communist League* (Fontana, p.503)

A.J.B

## Social Democracy and Stalinism revived

*Austro-Marxism* Collection of texts with introduction by Tom Bottomore.  
Oxford, 1978

The texts express what the introduction terms a 'place precisely between Bolshevism and reformism' (p.44): a theoretical variant of Social-Democracy which is now brought back to life, though 'war and revolution . . . dissolved the Austro-Marxist school'. It is not merely scholastic necrophily that presides at such an exhumation, since there is now a felt need for leftish variants of all the historically discredited methods and movements of the past. The only alternatives to Trotskyism which at least retain the radical terminology required by Bottomore's leftish milieu are Social Democracy and Stalinism; so words must be found to caulk these vessels in order that they may once again convey shivering class-strugglers away from the struggle, although that widening maelstrom will catch up to them yet.

The interaction of classes is producing currents which cannot be navigated without the entire political tradition of the Trotskyist movement, which contains the negation of the specific methodological inadequacies of the leaderships of the past. Now such a specific negating is not to be achieved by merely showing the door to the Austrian schoolmen on the grounds of their Centrism, though one regrets the fact that Bottomore did not dignify his readership with some assessment of just how this 'revolutionary' alternative to Bolshevism was dissolved by *revolution!*

Whereas there is the appearance of theoretical strength compared to Kautsky, we note that what this School believed separated it from him was its unwillingness 'to renounce Kant's Critique of Reason . . . It is able to protect us from the stream of scepticism unleashed by the enemies of the working class'. (p.84, Bauer) Indeed, as one speaks of



the Marburg and of the Heidelberg schools of Kantianism, so one might speak of this Austrian one, of which Hilferding was the economist, Renner the theoretician of the state and law, and Max Adler its philosopher'. (p.48, Bauer).

Now although Kant's critical achievement saves the reality of *natural* laws from the sceptical attacks of Hume, it is at the cost of denying the possibility of *knowledge* of any other realm — including that of the *social* — natural 'law of motion of modern society' presented by Marx. Truly, nothing could be more regressive than to 'renounce' Kant's Critiques — all *three* of them being needed by Hegel for the development and presentation of the *Science of Logic*. But only on the basis of the dialectical method deployed in the specific negating of Kant could Hegel provide Marx with the conceptual preconditions for articulating the objectivity of laws in the realm of society. Having renounced Hegel, this School's Economic Faculty produced Hilferding's ideology of Organised Capitalism, which faced grandiose vistas of economic progress . . . in 1928! After all, 'the law of value only holds in the last instance'. (p.100, Renner).

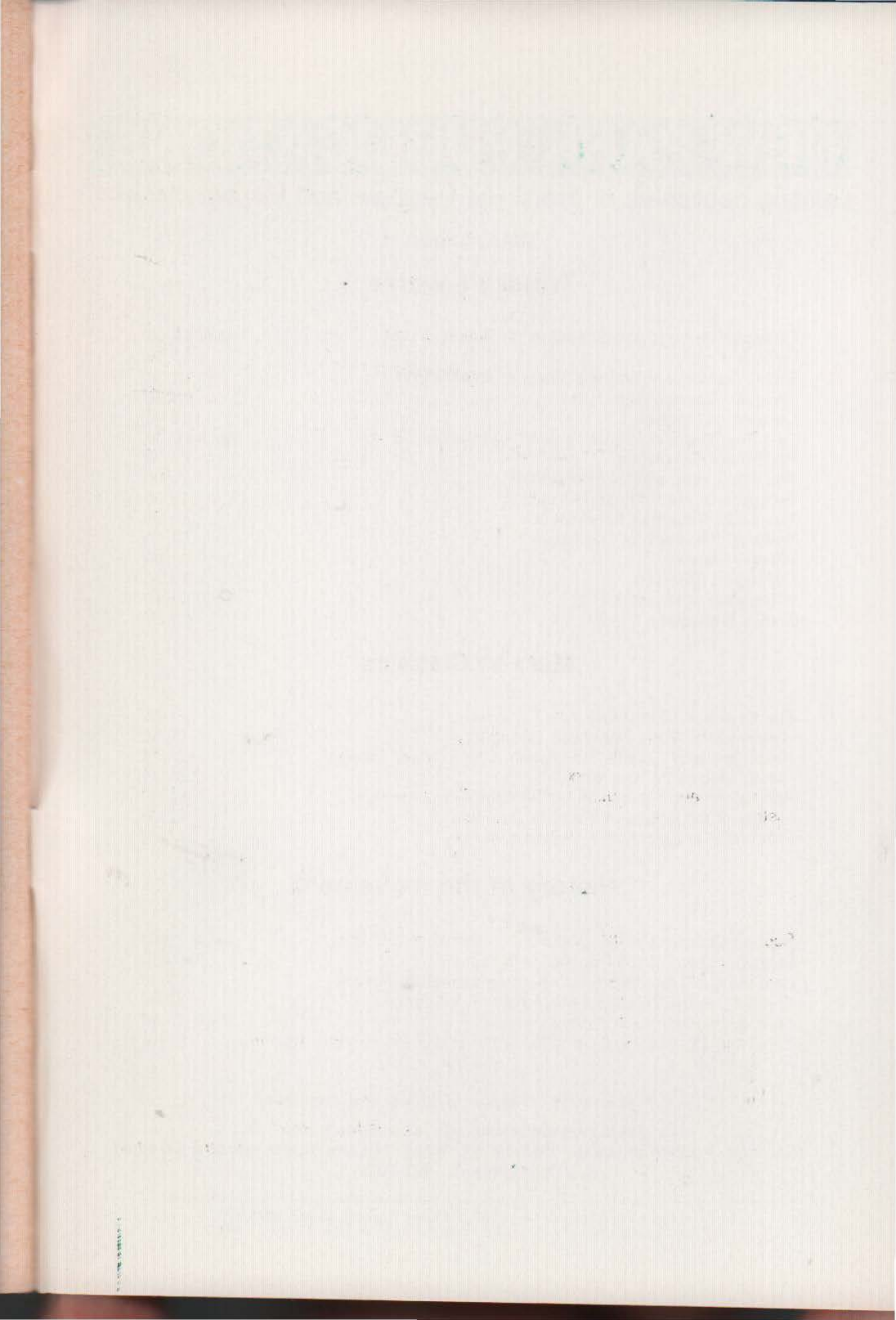
The School's strength is evidenced by the texts of Max Adler: 'Thus it is no longer the old urge to trade which now dominates Capitalism, but the new, much more violent desire for investment opportunities, for ever new sources of the production of surplus value to which it has to yield, and which has radically and brutally transformed its earlier peaceful nature.' (p.129) 'All the concepts belonging to the arsenal of traditional political idealism — the concepts of the state as a community of the people, and as the defender of the general interest and representative of the collectivity, as well as the concepts of democratic freedom and equality in the constitutional state, of the extension of democracy and the perfection of the constitutional state, etc. — are concepts entirely of the bourgeois world.' (p.144).

But this theoretical insight off in the Philosophy Faculty had nothing to do with the informing of the organisational reality of the Party, which was just as paralysed by the bourgeoisie's turn to Clerical Fascism and as unable to deploy the existent militancy of the Austrian workers as were the reformist parties in other countries. The Austrian Party 'preserved the unity' of the Austrian workers (elsewhere split into reformists and Stalinists), and 'the workers also feel that to maintain unity is the most important thing.' (pp.46, 48, Bauer). But 'unity' on what basis and to what purpose? To all bureaucrats one must be able to say that unity is the tool to be used for some end. There

is a kind of leadership which leads the workers around in a circle, and that is indeed a total unity.

But Bauer doesn't take leadership too seriously anyway, since for him 'explanations' of the Russian and German revolutions 'in terms of the qualities of the leaders and parties, their errors, weaknesses, illusions and the presence or absence or revolutionary committed socialist cadres, remain at a superficial level.' (p.156) It is precisely for Bauer that such 'explanations' remain superficial, since he lacks a method for grasping these forms of appearance of the class struggle. He can only just set them aside as he gropes for some 'essence' behind these appearances (and that always proves to be something 'inevitable': for bureaucrats, the apathy of the workers). Predictably, the Dictatorship of the Proletariat yields 'an all-powerful party bureaucracy . . . This development was inevitable.' (p.201) Such a method of *abstracting* from appearances in order to find some inevitability to snuggle in remains among us as the ideological tool for separating theory from practice. We can give the last word to Hegel, who is quite capable of avenging himself on his renouncers: 'Essence must appear.'

A.D.



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