

THE NATURE OF THE SOCIALIST REVOLUTION

8 — *The Revolutionary Act*

The view of history put forward in these articles is that social co-operative labour is the biological mode of existence of the human species; that society therefore is the organisation of the means of labour; and that the mainspring of social evolution is the specially creative character of that labour, which produces a surplus beyond what is necessary for mere survival and thus permits the creation of means of production, whose accumulation changes the organisation of the means of labour, that is, changes society.

Every act of labour creates history, and every product of labour modifies society. Social evolution is the procreation of artefacts. A productive act is mechanical, a displacement of matter, but social change has the kind of slow and integrated character which in the organic world we call growth. Out of accumulating products, society evolves slowly, continuously and wholly (simultaneously in all its parts).

We cannot deny this unity of society and continuity of history unless we abandon the labour theory of value which follows from it, but we may take exception to the more integrated form in which that view is expressed in these articles, and their application to our own times. We do not accept historical continuity, or organic unity, absolutely: history (we say) is punctuated by relative catastrophic changes (revolutions), and revolution is relatively a separate political act upon society. Thus for our own times it is urged that whatever the social changes that take place within capitalism the "fundamental" relationship of owner and non-owner, of worker and capitalist, remains

unchanged, that this relationship cannot grow into the relationship of common ownership, but must be removed by surgical operation.

What is "fundamental", however, is a matter of degree. It is useful and necessary to distinguish between what is more and what is less fundamental, and to accept that what is more fundamental changes more slowly than what is less. But a more fundamental relationship is only a larger aggregation of smaller component relationships, and the larger, more fundamental change is only the sum of the smaller changes. To exempt the "fundamental" relationship from continuous evolution is to abandon materialism in favour of the "decisive idea", to abandon unity and continuity in favour of discontinuity and separation of parts. The class relationships of the past, and the class struggle to-day, are facts, but the elevation of class struggle to the position of social dynamic, and the vehemence with which class relationships are held to be immune from evolution, only mean that socialist theory has not yet cleaned up its Communist afterbirth.

Political Parties

History (as I see it) is accumulation of products, its starting point the act of production itself, which continuously creates more wealth out of less labour, thus compelling more and more equal diffusion of wealth as certainly as creation of heat is followed by its equal diffusion. As I see it, all history (including, of course, what is called pre-history), has been the continuous expansion of social equality, accelerated by capitalism and

whose outcome (within our horizon) is "absolute" social equality, based on "absolute" common ownership of the means of production. The evolution of class (privilege) society is the evolution of "value" and of the "universal equivalent" (money), and the evolution of classless society is the dissolution of that universal equivalent and its replacement by "need". Where the Communist saw the State "withering away" only after the revolution I see it doing so now, as political parties and partisanship go the way of other forms of organised religion.

Society moves towards Socialism, and the socialist movement moves with it. Its last and most revolutionary act is the sloughing off of its Communism. The Party in 1904 did not abandon violence when it jettisoned the barricade and the Dictatorship, but translated physical violence into intellectual and emotional (ideological) violence. It raised the concept of violence to a more civilised level, prelude to the final elimination which is now taking place, as the growth of socialist society becomes recognised and the myth of political revolution loses its hold. The last revolutionary act of the socialist movement is the abandonment of the revolution as an act and its resurrection as a process. This last revolutionary act is itself a process although, as natural son of 1904, it momentarily repeats at its inception, in its attack upon the Party Principles, the violence of its ancestors. But neither this short-lived attack, nor any "opposition" to the Party, is the essence of this revolution. It recognises that whatever vestiges of Communism have been

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carried over into the D. of P., the social relationships which these principles summarise remain substantially with us. No statement, and no re-statement, can remain untarnished by time; no summary statement of history and society can be made which does not require interpretation, and which does not leave itself open to varieties of interpretation and to the development of its interpretation. Re-statement would be only a repetition of the old error—or rather, an anachronism turning into error what was in its time a work of social inspiration. If we accept without cavilling, for a moment, that the S.P.G.B. broadly represents the type of local socialist movement, then the D. of P. is the last of all manifestoes. The revolutionary act which follows fifty swift years on its heels signalises the beginning of the absorption of the movement by society, of its identification with society—which is also the beginning, for the movement, of membership by identification with the socialist aim (Socialism) instead of by card and number. That is why, in the revolutionary act now begun, there is no talk of “forming another party”, but on the contrary a recognition that revolutionary kinship is (or is becoming) independent of particular party membership. This revolutionary act signifies integration, not schism, issuing both from the Party’s own evolution and from the evolution of confluent tributaries outside the Party, as society itself becomes more socialist.

Socialist Action

This revolutionary act, as always, is a process, an orientation within and by the Party, continuing the outrageous bravado of those sketched in the September “Standard”, by which, as it grows, the Party exchanges identification with the working class for identification with society’s incipient socialism. In propaganda activity it exchanges the dead horses of poverty and politics for the study of the evolution of the socialism which it sees taking place, and therefore with the study of Socialist society as a concrete way of living—not simply as an economy but as a culture. It does not attach itself to reforms, for none of them are socialist, but by exchanging the analysis of Socialist society for the analysis of capitalism it reconciles the revolutionary socialist aim with the fact that reform is the mode of evolution of society. By exchanging, for exposure of the limitations of reforms, the clarification of their socialist direction, by seeking out and plugging their socialist-leaning element, it extends the horizon of men

and movements without slapping them down. By providing, in the analysis of Socialist society, a focal point which is valid in terms of the nature of society, the nature of history and the nature of men, it provides a magnetic current which draws the disparate partial aims of men towards the final issue which is “what no one wills”—Socialism. The revolutionary act is one which exchanges the nugatory policy of sympathetic opposition to reforms for the positive function of socialist participation in the ordinary affairs of ordinary men, catalysing and precipitating the Socialism which society necessarily generates.

While we cling to our kingship of a puddle, there are seven seas of socialist propaganda to be navigated, for which we have no compass, oceans of social research missing the socialist point by a hairsbreadth while, and because, we stay outside it. And because we stay outside society, in opposition to it, we provide an asylum for the political delinquent, for chips on shoulders, for the Communist who wants a better cosh, for the renegade Christian who threatens Hell-fire in increasing misery and imminent destruction. But it is rising standards which make possible the

vision of higher standards, and generates the moral indignation which is the driving force of men and movements. It is the socialist direction of past and present which makes Socialism conceivable. The minor, residual, power of propaganda to hasten its “completion” lies wholly in seeing and proclaiming the direction of history, which capitalism continues, and this depends on the study of socialist civilisation, which is the study of what makes men tick and history move.

The vigour and imagination of one member, particularly, has held our attention to the need for this discussion. One member, particularly, has justified it in terms of our own materialist and labour theory. But in these two cases, as in all the others, it is a Party product, a Party phenomenon; it is the Party becoming more socialist. It is Socialism growing. However right or wrong individual contributions may be, there is no going back. History is a sum: it moves only one way.

FRANK EVANS

THE END

THE RESPECTABLE IDEALIST

S.R.P.’s “Critique of Historical Materialism” brought to light two points. 1. That S.R.P. has never understood Historical Materialism. 2. That by virtue of his idealism, S.R.P. is not competent to criticise it.

That he has never understood it is obvious. He poses the “Which came first, the chicken or the egg?” problem in the guise of which came first, the idea or the material world. He prefers that the egg came first and imagines that the M.C.H. claimed that it was the chicken. He is the nebulous romantic looking for causes which are not also effects, and effects which are not also causes. In short he has started on the metaphysical road which leads to an ultimate cause . . . God.

Compare S.R.P.’s meaning, “In the beginning there was the idea.” with that of Genesis, “In the beginning was the word.”

It may not be clear to all that his meaning is this. Indeed very little is clear from his article.

But how many comrades have heard S.R.P.’s contention that “freedom” is an ultimate idea. He has claimed that socialism will mean “freedom” also for the capitalist.

Since the capitalist imagined that he had obtained freedom three hundred years ago, what can S.R.P. mean but that there is an ultimate thing called “freedom.”

Why not then an ultimate morality, an ultimate justice. Why not an ultimate everything irrespective of economic development and outside the stream of history. In short, why not . . . GOD?

It appears then that S.R.P. is himself an idealist despite his attempt to reconcile idealism with materialism. The conflict in his brain is but the conflict we all experienced while struggling to grasp the breadth of the Party case. Our ego demanded that we should adapt the logic of materialism to our own semi-capitalist ideas. As we understood more about dialectics, our ego diminished in the battle with this complete integrated philosophy. If S.R.P. continues reading, and I suggest an immediate need, Engels, “Notes on Dialectics of Nature,” he will perhaps become a socialist.

To see S.R.P.’s difficulty, note the following:—

“Why, in short, is the mode of production basic? I have heard the following

answers: because life is impossible without it: because it is the most permanent and stable feature of society, because it is linked directly with every other factor, and because it lends itself to scientific examination."

S.R.P. August 1954

If the above answers were received from socialists, then it is sad. The correct answer, often given by Engels, is as follows:—

There are no causes which are not also effects, no effects which are not causes. An integrated philosophy must contain arguments in a circle, for everything turns back to itself. We may commence our argument from any part of the circle, in short, make ANY part of our circle our starting point, our THEORETICAL basis. Socialists choose the mode of production as a THEORETICAL basis because it lends itself best to scientific examination.

This is dialectics in a nutshell. The Communists and Labourites pay lip service to the M.C.H. but it is the dialectical aspect of the philosophy which they and S.R.P. do not understand.

With the same idealism, S.R.P., in his last chapter called the "Socialist Revolution", propounds again his almighty belief in his almighty "Idea."

"... but our M.C.H. outlook forbids us to acknowledge that material conditions can become more like Socialism prior to the political dominance of the Socialist idea. It is inconceivable to me that the Socialist idea will grow without a correlative development of material conditions approximating to Socialism."

S.R.P. August 1954.

Here, S.R.P. joins with our erudite comrade F. Evans in advocating an "Inevitability of Gradualness" to socialism.

His argument is that conditions can approximate to socialism without an alteration in the ECONOMIC structure of society. He can conceive little bits of socialism, like the Vegans or other brotherhoods perhaps. He believes apparently that the threat and practice of war will gradually diminish, that the standard of living will continually rise, that unemployment become scarcer and scarcer, that the housing shortage will be overcome, that old age pensioners will gradually be allowed to live a little longer—all within capitalism. He believes that the Hydrogen bomb will gradually slip out of use, that capitalists will gradually reduce their number of servants. Is this not his argument? What are these things but "Material Conditions."

And all this comes from a MEMBER OF THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN!

CONTROVERSIES

My own belief about such party controversies as such is that workers are being allowed to join the party before they are ready. But again, there is a fantastic idea at the back of my brain which suggests the possibility of an ALIEN attempt to cause schisms. If the latter is true, it is an attempt doomed to failure and the solution lies in the branch to which the member belongs.

If there existed a member of Birmingham Branch whom I believed to be a non-socialist, whether from lack of study or ulterior motives, I would have no hesitation in moving that his membership be rescinded. If the motion were lost, I would feel that I had at least cleared my own conscience.

The lack of efficiency in dealing with applications for membership however, is more likely the trouble. The white collar worker will often intellectually accept the party case but finds the appeal to the working class emotionally distasteful.

The socialist will always be regarded as "a working class agitator." In the press,

stage and cinema he is laughed at. These are the things socialists must accept. The rationalisation of the white collar workers' distaste for such epithets is the cause of many of the so called controversies. Their ego tells them that they are not "working class agitators" but SOCIAL SCIENTISTS: that they are not pro working class, they are pro HUMANITY. It is the worst form of snobbery because it is working class snobbery.

There is no need or possibility of MacCarthyism in the Party. Since no member has power, he cannot abuse it. If a member believes there are non-socialists in his branch, there is adequate machinery within his branch to salve his conscience.

And there is nothing irrevocable about the decision to expel a member. He may criticise the declaration of principles alongside millions of other workers. He may attend meetings and if he finds a better solution than us to the problems of capitalism, or a better solution of history, then we will ALL RESIGN and join the NEW PARTY with the NEW PRINCIPLES.

P. J. McHALE

(Birmingham)

ALL CHANGE FOR PADDINGTON!

In December, 1951, Paddington Branch pupped a comical absurdity, conceived by a muddle-head—S. R. Parker. It was one of those schemes, or stunts, periodically suggested by immature members to solve the Party's problems, and put it quickly on the road to Jericho—or limbo. Experienced members have had a bellyfull of them.

The Plan to Use the Air, The Great National Publicity Campaign, the Concentrated Propaganda Drive, the Bristol-Vickery Plan, The New Head Office Plan, and the proposal to employ professional publicity experts, all have had their day.

The only result of these Plans is the resignation of the author from the Party, piqued at the obstinate refusal of the members to back his fancy.

Paddington Branch's "Questionnaire" was not essentially different from these "plans". It was a plausible fallacy, looking all right on the surface. The idea was a simple one. A Questionnaire was to be sent to all members asking them five questions:—

When did you become convinced? What were you before joining? What aspect of our propaganda most helped to make you a Socialist? What part of our case did you find most difficult to accept? What type of article do you want in the S.S.?

(To their credit, it should be said that the E.C. when asked for the Register of members for this lark, refused to play.) When all the members had answered all the questions, then the results could be "analysed", and tips worked out, just like Mass Observation, the Gallup Poll, Prince Monolulu and Gipsy Rose Lee.

Hey Presto! At last the Philosophers' Stone was discovered! Knowing what had made people join, which part of our case they liked—we could soft-pedal the nasty bits, and make converts like Billy Graham. And in their "analysis" (so "Scientific"!) of the results of their "research", this is exactly what they say:—

"We should not over-emphasise our criticism of other parties." FORUM No. 9

Why there had to be a special discussion in Paddington Branch, a "verbal quiz", and 200 reply-paid forms sent out to discover that anti-Socialist parties dislike Socialist criticism of their capitalist policies, no member of Paddington has yet explained. How the cause of Socialism is helped by watering it down into something its opponents like is not stated.

Wherein consists the mistake of Paddington Branch? They do not yet fully understand that you cannot cut Socialism into bits. You cannot accept parts of the Socialist case, and reject others. Socialism is all or nothing—there is no half-way house. The mere fact that Paddington Branch sat down and solemnly wrote letters to members asking them if they liked one aspect of the case, or which part "it is hard" to accept, proves that they are not yet clear on the Principles of Socialism.

The idea of Socialism arises out of the growth of Capitalism. It is workers' experience of the entire environment of Capitalism which makes them Socialists. Paddington Branch's attempts to divide up Socialism like the curate's egg (good in parts) are completely foreign to Socialist mentality, and stem from the methods of the advertising agent, or pill-pedlars, "market reasearch". To them, Socialism is not the outcome of social evolution, but a Utopian notion in some reformer's head. This case shows that many members of Paddington are still gullible simpletons, without the political knowledge which sharpens the critical faculty of the Socialist. Curiously enough, when the 55 replies were received and "analysed", they *did* show a certain result; but exactly the opposite of what Parker and Co. had intended them to do. To the question—"What aspect of our propaganda most helped to make you a Socialist?", 56 per cent. replied — "That explaining the economics of Capitalism", or in other words, attacking opponents. Only 11 per cent., or in Paddington's own words, "only 1 in 9", said that "what Socialism will be like" brought them into the Party. Incidentally, if Paddington will let me have the names and addresses of the six members who joined because they were told what Socialism will be like, I should be obliged. I can then ask them to tell me.

Therefore, the result of Paddington's "research" was that 1 in 2 (of 55 members) joined because they learned the economics of Capitalism. 1 in every 9 joined because they heard what Socialism

would be like. Surely, on their own showing, and by their own method, the case for explaining the economics of Capitalism is overwhelming—being at least four times better than telling them what Socialism will be like.

But is it? No! The above figures "proved" to Paddington Branch that:—"1 in 9 may seem a small proportion for those who were concerned with the Socialist future, but it is not so small when related to the amount of our propaganda devoted to this." FORUM No. 9.

Could there be a more obvious example of special pleading? If the facts don't fit the theory—you just dump the facts.

A further "conclusion" by Paddington Branch was (FORUM No. 9) on the "Socialist Standard".

"The preference appears to be for the positive aspect of explaining world events and our case in detail, at the expense of the negative one of attacking opponents."

"POSITIVE" PROPAGANDA

Readers will note that we are still on "aspects", which now acquire a new name. Attacking opponents is now "negative". Attacking the Party is therefore "positive". "Negative" and "Positive" propaganda are our old friends "the parts", or "aspects" of the case.

Thus, in FORUM No. 13, G. Hilbinger presented the Positive Case, a repetition of the same boring theme. The draft election address of Paddington states that our case does not rest on "mere criticism of them" (opponents). One may ask, what does it rest on, then? If you stop criticism—you throttle the Party. An analysis (Paddington style) shows that their conclusions, although pompously numbered 1 to 6 (not 1 to 25) are these:

- (1) That we should not attack opponents.
- (2) "We should talk more about the Socialist future." (p.48)

On the 5th May, 1952, A. Turner of Paddington sent a letter to the E.C. which the E.C. sent round the Branches (unfortunately without any critical comment) containing this statement:—

"Immediately our propaganda changes from just attacking Capitalism to describing Socialism it will meet discussion and arguments about work, sex, morals. This means members will have to sharpen their knowledge of economic theory and also enter the field of social anthropology."

In the January, 1953 FORUM, S. R. Parker kindly obliged. He "entered the field of social anthropology" in criticism

(Positive) of an article in the "Socialist Standard". As is usual in Paddington today, he did not attack the opponents—but the Party. In this article, the following statement occurs:—

"In Melanesian society it was customary that a man might approach a girl he fancied and demand to have sexual intercourse with her there and then. If she refused he could kill her, and his tribe would sanction the action."

Not being a member of Paddington Branch, or having concentrated my entire critical energies on demolishing the Party, on reading this, I smelt a rat. So would anybody else with the slightest notion of tribal society.

Firtsly, it is obvious that any tribe doing this would rapidly exterminate itself. Not merely animals, but not even the insects do this. In fact, in Nature, it is the other way round, as in the case of the Spider, Mantis and Scorpion.

Secondly, a moment's thought will show that the main reason for tribal (or family) society is to prevent such violent promiscuity. I thereupon toddled round to the local library and looked up "Melanesia" in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.

Here we read that "the vicissitudes of Melanesian history are totally hid from us". Here is a chance for S. R. Parker to collect an easy guinea from the publishers of the *Encyclopaedia* for correcting them. He knows the history—they don't. But if they don't know its history, they do know what Melanesian society is NOW. According to the *Encyclopaedia*,

"Melanesian society is matrilineal and exogamous." "It is a clan system regulated solely by kinship."

In other words, it is exactly the opposite of that described by Parker. So far from men killing women who refused them—the tribe prevents males marrying into their own gens—and descent is through the maternal line—just as described by Morgan 77 years ago with reference to society in general. Though Morgan himself stated that our knowledge of Papuan institutions was limited. It is scandalous and disgusting that any publication connected with the Socialist Party, which used to enjoy a high reputation for accuracy, could print such adolescent nonsense. Even more offensive is the pompous conceit which allows an ignoramus to parade his personal wish-thinking on these subjects as knowledge, without the slightest effort to check the facts.

S. R. Parker's weird ideas of the past are apparently about as useful as Turner's fanciful notions of the future. Is this a

sample of the lively, attractive and breezy stuff which Turner promised us in December, 1952, if we all changed for Paddington? I have never read anywhere, more dull, humourless, confused moans than those appearing over the names of Turner and Parker in the FORUM. I know no writer more impossible to understand than Parker,

except Frank Evans. I shudder with frozen horror at the prospect of a world where those who do not talk like A. Turner will write like S. Parker.

From Paddington Branch's "investigations" I draw these conclusions:—

- (1) That a Party which does not attack Capitalism cannot be Socialist.

(2) That those who reject parts of the Socialist case are not Socialists. Reference to the Party's publications will show that these have been the views of its members since 1904.

HARRY YOUNG.

MATERIALISM AND THE M.C.H.

In the introduction to his article "A Critique of Historical Materialism" appearing in your August issue, a contributor, S.R.P., complains of the difficulty in "selecting" a satisfactory brief statement of the M.C.H. from the writings of Marx and Engels. Better summaries of the M.C.H. than the one selected by S.R.P. however, can easily be found in the "Communist Manifesto"; "Socialism: Utopian and Scientific"; "Speech at the Graveside of Karl Marx" and "Karl Marx" and I should have imagined that a qualified critic of Marxism would have been aware of the existence of these works.

The second paragraph of the article in question states "the M.C.H. is essentially the complement of idealism rather than its opposite". This, surely, is something new and should have been substituted. I have never heard of idealism being completed by materialism or of materialism being completed by idealism as must be the case if they are complementary. Some evidence is certainly required from your contributor in support of his claim. I have always understood that materialism and idealism are opposites, i.e., that they are contrasted with each other as two OPPOSING ways of looking at the SAME set of facts.

In "Ludwig Feuerbach", Engels gives this description of materialism—"it was resolved to comprehend the real world—nature and history—just as it presents itself to everyone who approaches it free from pre-conceived idealist crochets. It was decided mercilessly to sacrifice every idealist crochet which could not be brought into harmony with the facts conceived in their own and not in a fantastic interconnection. And materialism means nothing more than this." (Sel. Wks. 11 pp. 349/50). This is the Marxist materialist outlook and if there is anything erroneous in conceiving the world as it actually is, perhaps S.R.P. could tell us how we should conceive the world. Your contributor also objects to Marx's statement that "the ideal is nothing more than the material world reflected by the human mind." If Marx is not correct, then what is the "ideal"?

For the purpose of his argument, your contributor postulates that the M.C.H. "perpetuates its (idealism's) fundamental error of separating ideas from material conditions". But to postulate is not to prove. Where is the evidence for this statement? It is pretended that the quotes given in the article document the charge, but do they? To my knowledge, the Leninists are the only "Marxists" whose writings would lend credence to S.R.P.'s view. But, since when has the S.P.G.B. recognised the Leninists as Marxists? There is on the other hand, however, abundant evidence that Marxists do not separate ideas from material conditions. Has S.R.P. not read Dietzgen's "Positive Outcome of Philosophy"? Let him read Venable's "Human Nature" which might almost have been written for his benefit, especially p. 197, where Venables says "they saw neither mind nor matter, neither man nor nature—'senseless dichotomies'—as dominating the other, neither as sole causes, neither as sole effects". Marx's first two Theses on Feuerbach, alone, are sufficient to give the lie to our critic's charge. But to further convince him, let him read "Dialectics of Nature" where, on pp 292-3, Engels says "the more will men not only feel, but also know, their unity with nature, and thus the more impossible will become the senseless and anti-natural idea of a contradiction between mind and matter, men and nature".

In the following stage of his argument your contributor indulges in what seems, at first sight, a quibble. He objects to Marx and Engels using the word "interaction", i.e., the process of parts acting on each other, instead of the word "integration", i.e., the process of making into a whole. However, Marx and Engels do not avoid the word "integration" because of the reasons S.R.P. cites. They avoid it for the very good reason that they are not idealists. For them, there is no question of making anything into a whole. For them the world already is an inter-connected, inter-acting whole, and the unity of this world is proved, not by verbal quibbles, but by the protracted development of science (See Engel's "Anti-Duhring").

To the question: Why should such a theory as the M.C.H. ever have been propounded?, S.R.P. gives several ingenious answers. Here, I will content myself, at present, in referring him to the 3rd Thesis on Feuerbach where Marx demonstrates the dilemma which the M.C.H. solves.

We are next informed that the "Critique" under review shows that "the theory itself possesses only relative validity". Of course, the M.C.H. possesses only relative validity (although your critic's demonstration does not prove that fact) and Marx and Engels cheerfully admit this. But they claim that, although it is only relatively true, it is, nevertheless, truly true, so far as it goes—and does S.R.P. deny this? If so, let us hear the evidence. By the way, what is this "Marxian theory that man has not yet made truly human history" to which reference is made? To my knowledge, the only mention of "truly human history" appears in Venable's "Human Nature" wherein he refers to a quote from p. 187 of Engel's "Dialectics of Nature", viz., "man is the sole animal capable of working his way out of the merely animal state—his normal state is one appropriate to his consciousness, one to be created by himself". I have never seen any other source mentioned by anyone. Could our critic enlighten us as to when this statement of Engels was elevated to a theory?

We are next told about our "old attitude to violence". Am I to understand that we have a NEW attitude to violence? If so, it is the first I have heard of it. Some facts are required here.

Finally, S.R.P.'s closing remarks on the Socialist revolution only demonstrates that he is as far from understanding the M.C.H. and "proper place for human agency in the M.C.H. scheme of things" as he was when he wrote his first article on "Let the People Unite".

Let us have criticism and discussion, by all means, but let it be informed criticism.

R. RUSSELL
(Glasgow)

WHEN IS A CHANGE FUNDAMENTAL?

Comrade Spencer—I would like to put this to you:— The D. of P. describes capitalism. Capitalism has changed since 1904; but the D. of P. has not changed. Therefore, the D. of P. must now be far less accurate than it was in 1904, and must need considerable revision.

Comrade Marks—That sounds very logical, on the face of it; but really it is based on a confusion. It is true that the D. of P. describes capitalism, but it does not describe the superficial details of capitalism; it describes the basic and essential features of capitalism, and these have not changed.

S—You would agree, then, that some things have changed since 1904?

M—Oh, yes, certainly they have. All sorts of details have altered, sometimes for the better, sometimes for the worse. But there have been no *fundamental* changes in capitalism since 1904.

S—You would say, then, that two kinds of changes can be distinguished; on the one hand, changes in superficial, unimportant surface details, and on the other hand, changes in the basic, essential fundamentals.

M—Well, you must understand that in a dialectical sense, of course; there are no rigid, watertight divisions to be found in the real world; but broadly speaking, that is so, yes.

S—I'm not quite sure that I understand your answer; perhaps you could give me some idea of what criterion you would use in distinguishing between fundamental changes and other changes?

M—Now then, Comrade Spencer, I don't want to start entering into any word-spinning contest. The distinction is quite an obvious one, and if you can't see it you must be more confused than I thought you were. Once we get tied up in definitions and verbal quibbles we shall never get anywhere.

S—All right, then. Let me give you one or two practical examples of changes which I think could be called fundamental, and see what you think about them. Then we shan't have to bother about formal definitions at all. Is that all right?

M—Yes, go ahead. I'm always ready to listen to other people's views.

S—Firstly, I think the organization of production has changed.

M—Oh, but—

S—Now, you promised to listen, Comrade Marks. Wait till I've finished. I am

talking about the rejection, in industrial theory today, of the old ideas of belt-systems, individual incentives, strong supervision and the like. The old idea of breaking down working groups and making each worker a separate atomised unit has been quite reversed. In fact, better ideas on *satisfying working conditions* are now appearing in capitalist literature than have ever appeared in socialist literature. Up till recently, the trend of capitalism seemed more and more to be in separating man from man, treating men more and more like machines or appendages to machines. Now that trend has been reversed, and the new trend is just the other way. This seems to me to be a fundamental change. What do you think?

M—All that has happened is that labour has become a bit short. Consequently employers, for the time being, have to butter the workers up a bit, pretend they're concerned over their welfare, and weep crocodile tears over their "mutual interests". Let the first cool breeze of unemployment come along, and you'll soon see the employers getting tough again. And another thing—how many factories are these bright new ideas really working in? None, that I know of, at any rate. The vast majority are still working in the old ways. I don't think they will ever be used over industry generally—full employment won't last that long.

S—Secondly, I think the methods of production have changed. New manufacturing methods have made a vast alteration in the sort of things which it is possible to produce and distribute to all and sundry. Mass-production, starting as just another way of doing something which could be done more slowly by other means, has now reached the stage of doing things which can only be done by that method.

Products are being designed now which can only be worked by automatic methods. An American firm was asked to produce a continuous-cracking oil plant for use in India. They were told to drop as many of the automatic devices, so as to permit more men to be employed; manpower is cheap in India. But it was found that practically none could be dropped, unless they went back to the old intermittent-cracking plant which produces far less refined oil, of lower quality. The new plant had very few human workers, was mostly controlled by robots, and could not

work in any other way. This seems to me to be a fundamental change. What do you think?

M—All you're saying is that the ratio of constant to variable capital is still increasing, as it has been for the past 100 years or more, and as Marx said it must. There is no fundamental change there; it's quite obviously a change of degree only, and not a change of kind. I just can't see what you're getting at.

S—Thirdly, I think that forms of ownership have changed. A partnership is one kind of common ownership; a joint-stock company is another; a limited company is another; a trust is another; a cartel is another; nationalization is another; and a supra-national authority is another. Then there are co-partnership, co-ownership, profit-sharing and participation schemes of various kinds, all of which modify the rights of ownership of the steelmaster, or whatever he may be. Here is a change—a series of changes—in one of the most fundamental features of society.

M—That alters nothing: comes trouble, the worker gets the sack, co-partnership and participation go by the board, and "co-ownership" is quietly forgotten. There's nothing here to answer. I'm still waiting to hear something new. I'm always willing to be convinced, if you've got a case; so far, I haven't heard any case.

S—Fourthly, I think that rights of access have changed. Today, many things are obtainable as of right, because of need, and are not dependent on size of pocket. The health service, education, public libraries, water, are examples which spring to mind at once. At one time, these things (and particularly education) were thought of as a charity, paid for by the well-off for the benefit of the needy. Today, it is recognised more and more that these and other things are due to every man, woman and child as of right, just because they are human beings and need these things as such. Isn't that a fundamental change?

M—These things only serve the particular momentary needs of the ruling class. They give free milk so that you can work harder, free education so that you can be exploited more extensively, free doctoring so that you are away from work as little as possible.

They'll do everything for you, except get off your back.

S—Fifthly, I think that methods of capital investment have changed. The bondholder is in a very different position from the stockholder. He cannot favour, or withdraw his support from, any particular branch of industry if he only has state bonds to play with. The position as regards unemployment and crises is therefore very different in a country where only one kind of investment can be made. This seems to me to be a fundamental change.

M—The capitalist system systematically produces crises, unemployment and wars. If crises fall into the background, war comes into the foreground, and so on. At the moment the danger of war is greater than the danger of crisis, at least as far as such countries as Russia are concerned. But if a disease has a number of symptoms, and one of them isn't to be found in a particular case, but all the others are, you still say that the patient has that disease. You don't say he has a *fundamentally different* disease. I don't see how you can entertain that viewpoint even for a moment.

S—Sixthly, I think that the attitudes of employer and employee have changed. In 1904, the relationship of employer and employee was still very largely that of master and slave. "I say HOP, and he hops!" In 1904, dogs still to a great extent led a dog's life. They were whipped to heel, fed on odd leavings, kicked out of the way; they fawned on the master who had just swiped them, and so on. "The only thing they respected" was a strong hand and a heavy boot. Servants were rather similar—a different breed of creature, who could live on starvation rations in unheated rooms.

Today, while these attitudes still persist here and there, the general outlook of society is quite different. Dogs, servants, children and employees are fellow beings who have characters of their own which must be respected. Every book now printed on personnel management emphasizes that the old attitudes of dominance and submission are to be avoided. All these symptoms show a fundamental change from 1904—a change

in the direction of the sort of attitudes which will be most common under Socialism.

M—Of course there are changes in ideas since then. We have always said so, and in fact it is implied in the D. of P. itself that it is the case. But you can hardly call it a fundamental change in the mode of production called capitalism when employers are a bit nicer to their employees. I've been listening very patiently, but that's stretching it a bit too far. What does it all add up to, now?

S—I have mentioned six kinds of changes which have actually been taking place since 1904, and are still taking place. To some extent, therefore, the full proof of what I am saying must lie in the future. But quite enough of it has already happened to make me pretty sure of my case.

M—But I've shown, with each thing you've brought up, that there's really nothing in it!

S—I don't think you have, you know. But let us grant, for the sake of argument, that you have demolished all my arguments. I have mentioned changes in (1) the organization of production, (2) the methods of production, (3) types of ownership, (4) access to what is produced, (5) types of investment and (6) social attitudes. *If none of these changes are fundamental, it becomes very difficult to see how any possible change could ever be fundamental.*

M—Don't start shifting your ground, now.

S—In fact, it starts to become obvious that the only change which you would recognise as a fundamental change in capitalism is the change from capitalism to Socialism.

But that can't be your final conclusion; because it is pure nonsense to say, as an answer to my original proposition, that the reason the D. or P. must be right is because Socialism has not yet come.

M—That's just word-spinning.

S—I think we should continue this discussion some other time, trying a different angle of attack.

M—Yes: all right; I'm always ready to learn something. I'm just waiting for you to convince me, that's all.

OPTIMUS

tion disguised as a rule is then held as a "guiding principle" in arriving at the conclusion that the emancipation of the working class must be its own work.

The important point here is that emancipation to a state of equality is not an economic interest. Nor is it an aspect of the class struggle, in which, to quote the pamphlet, "neither side can prosecute its own interest without detriment to the interest of the other". Even if it is insisted that the socialist aim is the emancipation of the working class, this cannot be interpreted as action of one class against another—unless the interpretation is completed by saying that the working class will take action against *classes*. It can then be claimed that the highest aim of the working class is its own abolition, although self-abolition is scarcely to be regarded as an interest, in any generally accepted sense of the word.

If working class emancipation involves that of all mankind, it is reasonable to suppose that it involves the work of all mankind. The only obstacle to taking this view is pro-working class prejudice, which features very largely in the D. of P. and the pamphlet's explanation. Once Socialism is firmly established as "the workers' cause" it follows that capitalists only take it up "in spite of their environment and their class interest"; "their outlook upon life is very different from that of the workers . . . few who *do* get some glimmering of the position are in most cases shut off by class arrogance and class prejudice. They generally feel themselves the superior ones, and *must* lead."

Do not workers also have a capitalist environment? There *are* factors which hinder capitalists from becoming socialists, but they are not exclusive to capitalists. Is the outlook of the two classes so different where Socialism is concerned? Surely there is no "capitalist class" objection to it that is not also held by workers. The arrogance and superior feelings of capitalists are balanced by the subservience and inferior feelings of workers, yet the pamphlet does not tell us that the latter are also barriers to socialist understanding.

Until the knowledge and experience of the working class are equal to the task of revolution there can be no emancipation for them. Hence they must control all individuals in their camp, no matter which class they may belong to . . . They (the working class) must control all individuals in their camp (including socialists who are not

IMPROVING THE SOCIALIST CASE

2—The Declaration of Principles (continued)

Clause 5

The pro-working class attitude to which the Party still clings is fully brought out in the fifth chapter of *Principles and Policy*.

On p. 20, for example, we read that "... economic interests govern actions, whatever may occur in exceptional, individual cases," i.e. except when they don't. This generalisa-

workers, and who are thereby formally excluded from being "controllers"). Fortunately, this is not the practice in the SPGB—no worker who is not a socialist is regarded as being in "our camp", which only socialists control.

Clause 6

"Each system that permits of class distinctions favours a given class, and that class naturally employs every means to prevent the system from falling.

It is for this purpose that the present ruling class maintain *their* navy, army, air force and police. *By means of these* they hold back social changes . . . It follows, therefore, that the revolutionary class must dispossess the capitalists of these armed forces before they can change the social basis." (p. 25, my italics)

A number of fallacies are apparent here.

1. It is not *their* navy, etc. It is correctly stated on p. 23 that the armed forces exist to protect the private property *institution*, not the private property of individual capitalists. 2. "They" do not hold back social changes, nor can armed forces be used to do so. To say otherwise is to imply that capitalists use the armed forces to prevent the majority from acting upon the socialist knowledge they possess or could possess but for those armed forces. This is not the case. 3. The question of dispossessing the capitalists of the armed forces does not arise, since they do not possess them.

There are two passages, one in this section and one in the conclusion, that are tantamount to advocating the Dictatorship of the Proletariat:

" . . . the working class must organise for the capture of Parliament. When they have possession of this instrument they will have control of the armed forces, and will be in a position to *proceed* to the abolition of private property in the means of living and the organisation of industry on the basis of common ownership of the machinery of production," (p. 26) and the conclusion.

"that the workers must organise consciously and politically, *firstly*, for the capture of this machinery of government, and *secondly*, *having done this*, to convert it into the agent of emancipation." (p. 31).

Capturing Power?

Here it is important to realise that it is not enough to distinguish ourselves from others seeking power if we just say that our object

in doing so is different. If the power situation is to be replaced by relations of equality then the conversion must be part of the capturing process.

This means in practice that when socialists have "captured political power" it will express the fact that capitalist institutions will have been transformed. To get control of the armed forces and then to "proceed to" the abolition of private property is to make a prime object of getting control of the armed forces. To make the conversion of the machinery of government follow its capture is to make a prime object of its capture. Neither the machinery of government nor the armed forces can further our object, and to speak of them as "the agent of emancipation" is to encourage the false belief that the SPGB is merely the least blatant of the power-seekers.

Also, note how narrowly the introduction of Socialism is interpreted in the first passage. It is true that private property in the means of living will be abolished—but so will all other forms of property. It is true that society will be concerned with the organisation of industry and the machinery of production—but there will be many more problems in other spheres, just as necessary to the sustenance of society, that will demand its attention. This is not to deny the prime importance of industry; it is only to emphasise that Socialism deals with more than just the industrial aspects of society.

Clause 7

This tells us that all political parties are but the expression of class interests. The SPGB is a political party. Therefore the SPGB expresses a class interest. The logic is sound, but the major premise false. Political parties do not express economic class interests. Of the various parties that support Capitalism it cannot be shown that any one is largely supported by (and therefore presumably expressing the interests of) capitalists. It is, however, fair to say that all parties except the SPGB express *capitalist* interests—the interests of those who want to retain Capitalism in some form. On the other hand, the SPGB expresses the interests of those who want classless society. It is in this sense that the SPGB is hostile to all other parties.

"The political struggle of the workers must of necessity be waged along class lines. It is on the political field that it is to be fought . . . for the enthroning of the

SOCIALIST IDEA in the seat of power." Now, a workers' struggle along class lines is one against capitalists and has nothing to do with Socialism. A struggle to enhance the socialist idea is one against the anti- or non-socialist idea. The SPGB, despite its principles, participates only in the latter struggle, and this is what makes it a socialist party.

Clause 8

The conclusion, in line with the other principles, is an appeal to the class feeling of the "members of the working class of this country." "We who know the class to which we belong, and build up all our hopes on the capacity of its intellect . . . know that the working class is capable of judging all things for itself . . ." Such rhetoric is meaningless. There is no real harm in the conclusion indulging in a bit of nonsense like mustering under a banner, but that should not stop it from bringing out what is most worthwhile in the whole message. The emphasis of No. 8 is on waging war on other parties and ending the system—negative aspects instead of the positive advocacy of Socialism.

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The criticism in this and the previous article aims to be indicative of the many further points that could be made. The cumulative impression is plain. In summary, the D. of P. represents the Party's object as the triumph of the working class instead of the triumph of socialist ideas, and this gives its concept of Socialism a capitalist tinge. The next article will consider how all this measures up to the nature of Socialism.

S.R.P.

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