

SCIENCE AND SUPERSTITION

There has been steady pressure to secure the resignation or expulsion from the Party of those who criticise the Object and D of P, in part or in whole. This has culminated in the decision of the E.C. to call a Party poll on the subject —

“Shall members of the Party who do not accept its Object and Declaration of Principles be called upon to resign, and if they refuse to do so, their membership be terminated.”

This position has only arisen since the members concerned explicitly questioned the D of P. Exactly the same arguments, when previously put without mentioning the D of P, aroused hardly any serious protest. But as soon as the D of P was actually mentioned, angry cries arose.

To an ordinary observer, this would strongly suggest that the D of P was an emotive symbol, dear to members in exactly the same way as the flag is dear to patriots, and the cross is dear to Christians. We in the Party, however, know that this is not true: the D of P is simply a rational statement of aims, facts and suggestions for action. It is a very fine statement and shows clearly the development of Socialist ideas which had been reached in 1904.

Already in 1904 Socialist ideas had developed beyond the views put forward by Marx and Engels. Quite a number of things which Marx and Engels originally stated, such as the position on war, we disowned, because the Party represented a further stage of development. This happened not so much because there had been great changes in capitalism since Marx's time, but rather because the particular ideas in question could now be seen to be inadequate, as a result of the development in Socialist ideas themselves.

This development is still going on. It is going on in the heads of members of the Party. Up till recently, it was generally felt that the modifications of view which had so far appeared could be squared with the D of P, by giving certain phrases a particular interpretation. Now, however, several members have begun to take the view that the D of P is acting as a fetter on the further development of Socialist ideas and want to bring the whole question of a D of P under the arc-light of discussion.

They point out that this urge to bring the whole D of P under discussion is something new in the Party. It represents a revolutionary change in Party attitudes. For that reason alone, it would seem to be wisest to let the dissenters continue to elaborate and clarify their views, until all members can have an opportunity to hear the full story and make up their own minds on the actual differences involved.

The attitude has been, however, “Let them get outside the Party. Then I'll discuss points of difference with them.” To say this is to say that Socialist ideas cannot be further developed. Yet we know that they can, because our ideas are different in some respects from Marx's ideas. There seems to be a contradiction here.

If the Socialist Party is to develop Socialist ideas—and one would have thought that this was one of its most important jobs—it must permit discussion, even of the D of P. To put dissension outside is to refuse to learn from it; because it is shallow hypocrisy to say “Get outside; then I'll consider your views.” The SPGB as at present constituted only considers the views of outsiders in order to bash them.

To refuse to discuss the D of P with other members is to say that the D of P must be accepted without question. Yet how we

should jeer at any other organisation which required unquestioning acceptance of its creed!

The D of P is not handed down from God; it is the work of men like ourselves, blinkered and confined in a capitalist world. Like all other things, it is good within certain limits and under certain conditions. If this is so, it must be legitimate to discuss whether those limits have been reached, and whether those conditions have changed.

Yet *unquestioning acceptance* is what this Poll asks us to vote for. It asks us to vote for a Party consisting exclusively of men and women who have pledged themselves never to question their Declaration of Principles. Christians can—and do—criticise the Bible: but the Socialist Party must never criticise its Declaration of Principles. Communists can—and do—discuss the works of Stalin: but the Socialist Party must never discuss its Declaration of Principles. Scientists can—and do—question the Law of Gravity, the Law of Causation, and Newton's Fourth Law of Hydrodynamics: but the Socialist Party must never question its Declaration of Principles.

Many of us joined this party because we believed it stood for Scientific Socialism. If this Poll were carried, it would put an almost unbearable strain on our loyalty; for if it passes this resolution, the party stops being scientific. It becomes a religious organisation, complete with infallible texts, sacred founders, and all that follows. In fact, it becomes worse than many of the existing religions. Nearly all of them permit discussion of their sacred texts and dogmas.

The Party was founded on the basis of mass understanding. In all the Party's propaganda down the years, there has always been one keynote. *The workers must understand, we said, before Socialism can be*

The opinions expressed in this journal are those of the individual contributors, and are not to be taken as the official views of the party

achieved. But this resolution doesn't mention understanding. It only speaks of acceptance. That's something new in the Party. And it's something none of us can feel proud of.

Talk about understanding, and you're on the side of science; talk about acceptance and you're right in the territory of superstition. Understanding can develop — acceptance can't. You can understand more and more as time goes on—but you either accept or you don't accept.

And if the development of understanding brings one to question the D of P, the cure for that is not to refuse to develop—to throw out all chance of over developing—but to meet the arguments on their own ground, at the next conference.

J. C. ROWAN.

EDITORIAL

This issue represents quite well the various functions of FORUM—internal matters, hints for new speakers, questions of organisation, information about new developments in society, and theoretical discussion. These are the things which FORUM was founded to contain.

We feel that FORUM is doing a good job in the Party. If it has sometimes seemed unbalanced, that is the fault of members themselves, for not writing the letters and articles which would have corrected any such faults. Today, new writers are contributing more and more, and the balance is noticeably improving. What is needed now is for branches to help boost circulation.

Members and branches have, in the past, often discontinued their subscriptions when a succession of articles have displeased them for some reason. This is not fair. The standard of FORUM, and the type of articles included, must vary a good deal from time to time. If branches and members support it loyally, there is some hope of it improving, and eventually becoming all that we may desire of it. If they withdraw their support, FORUM will be less and less likely to be of use or value to the Party.

We therefore call on all branches to take the maximum number of copies which they possibly can, and to push them in every way to their branch membership. We call on Central Branch, and individuals and branches abroad and in the Companion Parties, to place regular orders, so that a solid Party circulation is ensured.

And we call on writers—particularly writers who have not yet contributed—to keep contributing more and more articles, so that we can make every issue a balanced expression of the life of the Party.

THE ELECTRONIC ORACLE

At an indoor meeting last year (1953) the view was expressed that the organisation of the socialist world would be complicated. For this reason it would be necessary to elect the most suitable people to be the senior organisers or executives. As this view appeared to be held by a number of the members present, a few brief comments here will not be out of place.

Firstly, why should it be necessary to elect such people? Is it thought that there will be some fiddling? Will their friends get two jars of jam, instead of one everyone else will get? It should be obvious that the most suitable person, man or woman, will do the work, and a ballot will be unnecessary. In class society it is necessary to vote for Presidents etc., because there are groups with conflicting interests, and the vote measures the support of the different sections and groups. In this way a divided society is made to be as an harmonious unit. I see no future of socialist society that resembles this, and so voting will not be necessary.

Although people realise that their own jobs in capitalist society are quite straightforward, administration, which does not seem to be the occupation of a large number of socialists, is thought to be extremely complex, and to require genius, to say the least. This is also thought to apply to socialist society, despite the fact that they know that the socialist world will be much less complex than the present class society, capitalism. To arrange to send tea from India to the thirsty millions in England, or Alaska, in these days of high speed communication and transport, does not require originality, or even brains. If there are good harvests all over the world (and a blue moon, because that is just as likely) some of the produce may not be used, and we will all have worked two minutes too long that year. It will be sad!

To some, it is so much more difficult to work out a railway timetable, than to make a good table and chair. But is it really? Just as machines can be built to make things, such as chairs, so they can be made to do calculations. In "The Human Use of Human Beings" a book by Norbert Wiener, we learn that these sorts of calculations are child's play to an electronic brain. An example of a fairly recent use of an electronic brain on a more complex problem, in the field of politics, or military strategy, shows vividly the potentialities of these new machines. For according to Robert Jungk, a journalist,

when General MacArthur was dismissed from his command in the Far East a few years ago, a deciding factor in the matter was the calculations of an electronic brain called SEAC. He has described the situation as follows, in a recent book.

"The General stood for a strategy which would have led our country on to the brink, or even into the middle of a world war. Here in Washington there were many adherents of the strong policy. The President might perhaps have had to bow before them in the end if SEAC had not delivered an objective argument. We ran calculations on the thinking machine for several days which we formerly would not have attempted to do at all because it would have taken years. We had to work out how American economy in all its sectors would react to a sudden entry into war at this moment. SEAC gave the answer in clear, unambiguous numbers; even the intensification of aggressive action demanded by the General would cause a considerable shock to our economic system; an outbreak of war at this moment would be premature and might easily be unfavourable to us. Every proposal advanced, every strategic variant was figured out by SEAC down to its final consequences."

Tomorrow is Already Here. by Robert Jungk. (Pages 228 & 9).

Even if this report is somewhat exaggerated, it does show "The Shape of Things to Come."

Incidentally other examples are given in the same chapter explaining how electronic brains are being used to forecast economic trends, and test and develop methods of military strategy, which should be understood by any man of ordinary intelligence and education.

As all the applications of such calculations, to be of any use, require action at a national level, nationalisation or government control (call it what you will) spreads steadily day by day in the "Bulwark of Private Enterprise". This is an interesting example of a new technique transforming a society, in a matter of detail, without being (or at any rate winning) a political issue. Science is often making previous arguments on the nature of socialist society nonsensical.

In conclusion, the writer apologises for this brief treatment of such important themes. A detailed study is needed, and if this contribution provokes someone to make it, this space will not have been wasted.

ROBERT.

HEREDITY AND ABILITY

Comrade Bott originally proposed to deal with my view that innate individual variation cannot be dismissed without dismissing the basis of biological evolution. He now at any rate accepts natural selection as "one factor" in it, so I gladly leave it at that—bar catching up on some of the misrepresentations which have had twelve months start.

It is common ground and common knowledge that organic evolution proceeds by creation and elimination of species, not by the gradual modification of one species into another. A species remains virtually unchanged until it becomes extinct. The human species is a product of organic evolution, and it does not cease to be an animal because it has a special capacity for social labour, nor does the evolution of that labour make him a different *animal*. Being an animal, he has the qualities of organism, inherent in which is the innate individual variation without which organic evolution would not have been possible. And these variations could not be the raw material of natural selection, could not have survival value, if they did not affect performance. They affect performance whether a species is pushed around by environment or whether (as with man) he pushes his environment around. There seems to be no practicable way of knowing how much or how little specific performances are affected by innate endowment, and no point in knowing, for it has no bearing on our "naive" case against leadership.

The dismissal of hereditary influence on differences in men's abilities seems to be part of the new absolute idealism which dismisses social or historical laws, and affirms the absolute equality of individuals, thus discrediting the Party and the effort to discuss Socialist society (which establishes the social equality of unequal individuals). Whether in mistaken fear of some geneticists' crackpot views on leadership, or for any other reason, no useful purpose is served by refusing to acknowledge a fact of nature—hereditary variation and its effect on performance. Like the human hand, the very range of human variation in detail assists economic evolution, as a magnification of opposable thumbs—a simile lost on Comrade Bott, who seems to

think my statement that the special structure of the human animal makes history *possible* must mean that history is a biological process.

So he prefers to use the "valuable space" saved by refusing to say where I have misrepresented him to insist again that I hold a biological interpretation of history, in spite of what I have stated and repeated in repudiation of it. Nothing I have said justifies his "assuming that Evans regards natural selection as a force in the evolution of civilised man". Nowhere have I suggested "that there is in general any selecting of human types in the evolution of civilised man". No one has more unequivocally held to what is sometimes called "economic determinism". To speak (as I do) of natural selection as the mechanism which has produced the human species, is one thing, but to speak (as he does) of natural selection as a force in the evolution of civilised man, is quite another: in the first case the thing evolved in an animal (man); in the second case the thing evolved is civilisation (society). But having thus made one unobtrusive change in the terms, he then makes another by replacing the more demure phrase "a considerable force" by the bold "selecting of human types". The operation of imputing a biological interpretation of history is thus completed by successive verbal changes each of which is hardly noticeable like the game of changing, say, the word "white" into "black" one letter at a time in as few moves as possible: white, whine, chine, chink, clink, clank, clack, black.

It is this sort of verbal play which is the quality of his latest rash of science as it was of the earlier ones, and when he asks if there is a sense which transcends common sense it invites the answer: yes, transcendental nonsense. It is the combination of ambiguousness and verbal sleight-of-hand which makes rejoinder at length impracticable—even the dissection of a few samples is a painfully wordy business. For instance, he justifies the carelessness which permits him to say in one breath that man thinks with words, and in the next that he thinks with his tools (i.e., hammer and chisel, not words) by a quotation in which "words are

tools" (of the mind—i.e., not hammer and chisel). From the passage I called careless he repeats the sentence: "Thinking in man almost exclusively involves the use of words . . .", but only Bott knows what this means. No one else knows whether he means to exclude most other creatures (i.e., "thinking in man, almost alone, involves the use of words") or whether it excludes kinds of human thinking which don't involve words (i.e., "thinking in man almost always involves the use of words"). Of comrade Bott's "good company" only one offers something more than platitude, and all combined say less on the matter of thinking, words and labour than was already said in Forum No. 4, p. 3. We have a world to win and nothing to lose but our dependence on quotation.

It is only a half truth, anyway, that thinking depends on having words to think with. The converse is also true, that clear expression depends on clear thinking. "Careless" was felt to be a term kinder than was deserved. Never kick a gift horse in the teeth. It happens that with no other writer do I have to read every other sentence so many times to see that he doesn't mean what he says, and to these must be added those in which he has shifted the issue. Comrade Bott was allowed to start off, no doubt in good faith, on a note of preliminary personal disparagement (which is known to be used sometimes as a debating trick). No doubt in good faith, having chased his red herrings back to where they started, he has left a trail of confusion and misrepresentation, imputing silly notions which can only prejudice what I have nearly finished saying in criticism of the Party position. He no doubt suspects my adhering to the single term "variation" as signifying an ignorance of contemporary evolutionary theory which he must correct—not suspecting that approximation may assist the creative use of knowledge as distinct from its simple display (which also has its uses). He seems to have become all too soon tuned in to the Party wave-length—our assumption of superior knowledge vis a vis the world, and therefore in practice (because we really have no other audience) as between ourselves. We are an incorrigible bunch.

MY CHALLENGE TO THE M.C.H.

The word "History" itself, apart from man, is a mere abstraction that can have no meaning. History is with man, and for man alone; outside of man there can be no "History", no "Time", no "Destiny". Furthermore, all history is willed history, as there never was, and never will be History that is not willed by man.

To Comrade Evans, who accepts the statement—"History is governed by laws independent of the will of man"—and who has given us much of his time, explaining in his own particular manner what the MCH is, what it means, how it achieves its ends, its results, and its destiny, I ask him these four questions: (1) What could history do without the will of man? (2) What does it fight without the will of man? (3) What does it possess? (4) What meaning can it have independent of the will of man? I would be ever so pleased to have these four questions answered by Comrade Evans, or any other member and supporter of the MCH, who is quite openly prepared to defend the MCH in writing, and not only by mere lip service, and complete ignorance of what it really implies. For I have very little doubt that a great number of the members have given the MCH very little (if any) thought, and that also goes for the men on the Executive and Editorial Committees, and the FORUM Committee. However, I shall try to prove to you in this article my reasons for thinking so; of course, if I am answered by any one of you in a satisfactory manner, I shall discard my method of thinking, and become a disciple of the "Materialistic Conception of History."

But if you now, the "Materialist", ask me, why I think History is willed, I answer: "Because production is willed." Why, you may ask, is production willed? Answer: "Because survival of life is willed, and this because propagation of the species is willed despite the shortness of the individual span of life", and here we get a motive for life and history. *Man willed life prior to knowing and understanding what it was; he produced prior to having any knowledge of production; he killed, murdered and destroyed prior to having any complete idea of what he was doing.* (Therefore, here I also disagree with S.R.P. who puts forward the primacy of the "idea" in the development of man. I claim, on the contrary, that the "idea" is a secondary factor in production and reproduction, and that the "will" is primary, in that the "deed"

was prior to the word. But then again, as it is the "Materialists" I am dealing with here, I shall not go into S.R.P.'s viewpoints.)

It is possible that a great many "Materialists" will not, as yet, be fully satisfied with what I have said, in order to disprove the MCH. For I will certainly be asked by the "Materialists": "Why did man will Chattel Slavery, Feudalism and Capitalism?" Answer: "Because he wanted these systems; if he did not want them they certainly would not have been there." Again, I will be asked: "Why did he want these particular systems at certain periods and not in others?" Answer: "Because they served his ends, his arts, his spirit at that particular period." Again I will be asked: "Why did they satisfy his ends, arts and spirit, at that particular period and not in others?" Answer: "Because the ends, arts and spirit, had meaning only in that particular period, and could not flourish fully in other periods or cultures than the spirit and soil from which they sprung."

For instance, take ancient civilisations like the Mexican, Indian, Egyptian, Chinese, Greek and Roman; they had much similar methods of production, but their methods of architecture, arts, sense of "Time", of "Space", of "Mathematics", differed in many ways. But, then again the "Materialist" might well come again and say to me—"Look you here my dear friend, there is a slight possibility you have something there, and there may be a little truth in what you say, but that is certainly not the 'real' issue, and all you have been saying up to now proves very little, for there could have been no Mexican, Indian, Egyptian, Chinese, Greek and Roman cultures and civilizations if there were no labour and production, and that's where the MCH comes in and your 'will' goes out." Yes, I agree with you my friend to a certain extent, in that all cultures and civilizations rest on labour and production, but let me again remind you what I have already asserted, "that production is willed", and so my friend if my "will" goes out, then so does "Production". For without the will to produce for the "now" and the "future" there would be no societies at all, socialist or otherwise, as there would be no life.

We certainly will not be wise men if we do not at least consider these realities, especially when they are all staring us in the face; on

the contrary, we must face up to them, but not as mere dreamers, not as Utopia-builders, and not as men that look into the future with arrogant optimism. Such men will never understand the real meaning of what existence implies; it is men who understand what is going on under their noses, and who are prepared to base their thought and action on the "now" instead of day-dreaming of the "Never-Never Land" that will never come into existence; that is the sort of men we must have, and need badly. Man wills to live; it is his most powerful urge, all other urges are secondary; his ideas, dreams and fancies and knowledge, are only a cloak for the will, for beneath this cloak of knowledge, he is practically on a par with the lower animals, if not in many respects worse than them. In no age, in no civilisation, has man ever produced such destructive weapons, for the intent not only to kill and maim, but for a complete destruction that would vanquish for ever all the progress that man has ever made in his long and wearisome journey through social evolution.

The Mass Will

I do not drift away from the criticism of the MCH when I deal with such possibilities, in fact, it is just these possibilities which give more power to my case against the MCH. However, as the "Materialist" does not accept the "will" as a factor in History, and thinks that everything will turn out all right, independent of any willing, I cannot see where he has a case at all, or even a leg to stand on, unless it be a wooden one.

Of course the "Materialist" may well ask me—"How do you account for children born into capitalist society, and would you say that they willed that society?" Answer: "No, not consciously; but in that he or she willed life, they did, partly, and unconsciously will the system that they were born in to, as their forbears willed to bring them into that society, and also willed to have and maintain that society"; for if they did not will it, and will to bring children into it, it certainly would not have existed.

However, I hope it will be understood that I am not just dealing with individual wills, for I am quite well aware that there are individuals who do not will fully to support any particular society, although they all

partly will to maintain them to a certain extent; it is the mass will of society I mean, for that is what holds society together. That a man did not ask to be born into any particular culture, civilisation or society is no doubt true, but nevertheless his forbears willed them, and willed to bring him into them, therefore he must bear the brunt of that willing of which he is a product. To say that he is entirely innocent is to miss the mark, and evade the "real" issue that is at stake. For this would also mean that their forebears were innocent as well of the system they lived in, and that they never willed it more than the newborn babe.

The "Materialist" is still not satisfied with what I have said, and begins shaking his head, and tries to tell me that the will is not a factor at all, and all I have been saying does not refute the MCH. I say to the "Materialist", "then why my friend does the society exist if it is not willed?"

Are we to believe that a society exists independent of any will at all, any desire to maintain it and keep it functioning, whether it be in the interests of Feudal Barons or the Capitalist Class or any other Class?

Are we also to believe that exploitation is not willed, revolution is not willed, and War is not willed, and that it all just happens independent of human will?

Then I say this to the "Materialist": "You do not understand the world, nor do you understand History; go and read your fairy-story books where everything turns out all right at the end of the book, but do not try to convince me that this is true." If he tells me that I should not be in the Party, because I do not accept the MCH, I answer: "I am in the Party because I am a Socialist, and also because the Party is based upon principles which I accept—that is, *Socialism will not come into existence until the majority of people in society will to have it*, and not independent of this will, as you my "Materialistic" friend point out." Here also is a glaring contradiction for the "Materialists" in the Party, in that the D. of P. contradicts the MCH, which they claim is essential for socialists to understand. In my opinion the MCH does not hold water and should be scrapped.

R. SMITH (Dundee)
Central Branch

SOCIALIST ORGANISATION TECHNIQUE

The behaviour of the Paddington Branch in questioning the value of the Object and D of P may reflect a dissatisfaction with the progress made during the past fifty years. The Paddington Branch would probably contend that the main cause is the inadequacy of this very old Object and D of P to fit the circumstances of the modern political world: we must abolish it, or adapt it to the present day trends.

NEW TECHNIQUES REQUIRED

1. Propaganda

Interest in political events to-day is admitted on all sides, at least so far as this country is concerned, luke warm. We shall not, however, go into this phase of the matter at the moment.

Down the years out speakers have endeavoured to interpret world political, economic and social events in the light of our Object and D of P. The style which this interpretation has taken necessarily differs with the talents of the speakers. They have been agitatorial, provocative, virulent and educational, tempered by the nature of the audience and the particular circumstances of the occasion. These efforts have been supplemented with the printed word—Socialist literature. But what does it all add up to?

A membership which is still microscopically small; because it is so small is the obvious reason why our activities are restricted. Further we are living in, what is often styled, a "speed age". Scientific methods are being used which have opened up a vast range of possibilities for the outlet of man's energy and ingenuity. The whole tempo of life has been literally revolutionised over the past fifty years. The social atmosphere is now of a world wide nature or complexion; the most remote hamlet as well as the towns and cities being coloured through the universal use of radio augmented by the fast moving motor bus and coach.

If our case, therefore, has been difficult to put over before, it is multiplied ten-fold today. Notwithstanding these factors the public meeting places are valuable opportunities for our representatives to make more widely known the socialist message and to feel the political pulse of the people. They are in short display occasions and a training ground for speakers. But as a means of winning membership, these methods have shown themselves to be practically useless. Even the collections taken and the sales of literature are but small recognition for the work involved, notwithstanding the fact that our

speakers have invariably been able to attract large and interested audiences. The fact has to be faced, therefore, that propaganda technique which we have used, whatever else it may have done, has not brought us new members. To win these the branch lecture room and our Head Office must be the place of the future, an aspect which we will now consider.

2. Internal—administrative and Branch functioning.

If we recognise the importance of winning new blood to build up the Party membership we must provide opportunities for discussing and debating the implications of our Object and D of P in relation to world events. This is vital for the membership as well as the sympathiser whom we must make every effort to interest and win for membership. This task has been more or less overlooked in the past, or at the most given only secondary consideration. The reason for this has been primarily due to the practice of circulating E.C. reports. In a Party of our size this practice is not justified. Little of importance occurs week by week to warrant the time involved. Also in the absence of the pro and con discussion, the reports are for all practical purposes worthless. Besides the periodical Delegate Meetings and Conferences there are sufficient occasions to review the work of the Party.

Secondly, the Branches should be encouraged to attempt to function until they had a qualified numerical strength, i.e. a number of members able to represent the Party and the necessary funds to meet the expenses of hall hire and pay for Branch premises independent from H.Q. assistance.

THE SOCIALIST FRATERNITY GROUPS

These will be indispensable for the future well being of the Party. We should no longer ignore what a vitally important factor in the life of the Party such groups can be. It must be remembered that as well as being political, the majority of us are, social animals as well. This is a fact we should seriously consider, if we desire to build up a Socialist Party on rational and sane lines. Members and sympathisers need more opportunities to enjoy one another's company in an atmosphere of Socialist fraternity where the philosophical temperament may be cultivated. This would materially assist the membership of the Party to react favourably to the day to day struggle which all of them have to face, constituting a valuable contribution to the spirit of bonhomie within the Party. It would attract and encourage

what we have found from experience to be, that shy and diffident sympathiser to make a serious effort to join our ranks. It would be an important help to persuade them to come amongst us, leading eventually to their serious interest in the work we are doing. It takes all sorts to make up a world, so it must take all sorts to make the Socialist Party—from each according to his abilities &c. With these few ruminating tit-bits I can think of nothing better than to conclude with the following lines, written by F. J. Webb during the first world war:

“If at this time of brute force paramount,
When death itself is made the creed of men;

When love itself is held of small or no account,

And beauty scorned alike of voice and pen;

There yet should be, hidden amidst the crowd.

Some finer spirits, shrinking and alone,

Who hear the voice of wisdom cry aloud,

Before life's temples stricken, overthrown;

Now should they lift above the noise and strife

Their song of hope, of confidence supreme.

In love and beauty; now indeed should scan

The wide horizon of a boundless life,

Wherein the poet's song, the dreamer's dream

Shall stem the mad brutality of man”.

O.C.A.

IMPROVING THE SOCIALIST CASE

3—The Position of a Socialist Organisation

The two previous articles examined the Declaration of Principles in detail. Now we go on to consider it more generally in relation to the Party and to Socialism.

Nominally, the D. of P. is the existing basis of membership. Applicants “are expected to satisfy the branch before which their application comes that they understand and accept the principles”. In practice, however, greater attention is paid to the applicant's attitude to the wider socialist case (e.g., Central Branch applicants are asked questions on reforms, Russia, trade unionism, religion, etc.). This indicates that being a socialist means much more than just agreeing with the D. of P. Part of being a socialist is, I suggest, to put the D. of P. in perspective as the *most socialist* basis of membership that a group of socialists could formulate 50 years ago.

In the first article it was noted that one official Party explanation of why the working class will turn to Socialism is that their position relative to the capitalist class will worsen. It is this line of thought that leads members to assert that they are socialists because they are workers. Against this, it should be realised that socialists want a new system of society from the point of view of people who are to live in that society. This point is important and deserves further explanation.

We want more wages—as workers. We want more wages not as socialists, because when we get them it will still leave our desire for Socialism unsatisfied—we are still workers. No amount of making the workers better off adds up to Socialism, even if the

former is the policy of a party that combines propagating Socialism with wanting political power for the workers. Whatever we want as workers we want within the framework of Capitalism. As soon as we have as our object something that no longer involves our being workers, we are doing so *not as workers*. We are doing so from the standpoint of people who want to live in classless society.

The adoption of any class-interested standpoint can at best only be regarded as preparatory to this socialist one. The means employed determine the nature of the end (object) achieved. The socialist objective is incompatible with a pro-working class attitude that involves thinking and acting on the basis of a class movement. The socialist movement is a unity—it is not divisible, as Belfort Bax supposed, into militant (identified with class) and triumphant (with Humanity).

Although the S.P.G.B. does not *act* as if it were a class movement, its thinking is very much coloured by a desire to identify itself with the working class. Occasionally this desire produces a gesture such as a Party message to workers on strike, but such gestures are not taken seriously and are of no consequence. They cannot be regarded as part of the work of a socialist organisation.

CLASS INTERESTS

Now let us consider the reasons given by members in justification of the Party's pro-working class attitude. Many of these reasons are derived from the D. of P. and its explanation, and were touched upon in the first article.

Capitalists are supposed to have an interest to retain Capitalism, while workers are supposed not to have such an interest. A class interest is concerned with promoting the well-being of that class, and therefore the interests of both classes strictly require the continuation of classes, i.e., of Capitalism. We have, however, to consider a looser use of the term “class interest” to mean “promoting the well-being of members of that class as human beings”.

Using “class interest” in the last sense, members assert that capitalists stand on balance to lose by Socialism and that workers stand to gain. These are purely subjective estimates, and are in line with “increasing misery” and its modification, “increasing seeing - how - big - the - difference - is between - them - and - us”. Accordingly, Socialism is supposed to have a special appeal for workers, an appeal to which capitalists will turn a deaf ear. We must recognise the element of truth in this argument: a capitalist is unlikely to be interested in “a workers' society”. The greater tragedy is that a worker who is interested in “a workers' society” is not yet interested in Socialism.

In order that a comparison may be made, the things compared must have common factors. It is only in those aspects of their lives that are common to Capitalism and Socialism—the satisfaction of their needs as human beings—that people can make comparisons. No amount of money can equal free access; that is why there is not a level of income or capital below which Socialism is felt to be a gain and above which a loss. In any case, it is of the very essence of Socialism that it seeks to achieve better living for all. “What is there in it for my class (group, nation, sex, etc.)?” is a question one asks from a property-society standpoint, not a socialist one.

Another justification for the working-class appeal is the tactical one. It consists in seeking to gain the interest of people with a meaty dish of working-class partiality and prejudice, and then introducing Socialism as a kind of dessert. There are two main objections to this procedure: it encourages working-class issues to be confused with socialist ones, and it does not avoid the difficulties of getting socialist ideas accepted.

For too long the Party has had a foot in both camps: the working class (economic, fighting the class struggle, dominated by the values and institutions of Capitalism), and the socialist (allegedly only political, but also developing and propagating the ideas of production solely for use, etc.). A socialist organisation is something more than a mere political party, since it cannot enter politics

with the object of governing (though it may contest elections as a means of propaganda) The S.P.G.B. is the only organisation calling itself a political party that is concerned with spreading the ideas of a new society.

Why think of it as a socialist *organisation* rather than a political party? Because the change we desire to effect in society is not one that will proceed, like the changes envisaged by earlier forms of revolution, through the agency of a political party. The change we call Socialism is multi-dimensional, becoming effective in every sphere, the vision of its advocates encompassing the whole of society. It is not just socialist productive base—it is socialist work, socialist art, socialist sex, morality, architecture . . . “the lot”.

History and Socialism

Two other aspects of a socialist organisation must be considered—its view of history, and its conception of how Socialism will come. History is not merely a succession of class struggles; class struggle itself should be seen as one phase in the process of development of control over the conditions of life. Thus we cannot take a static, undifferentiated view of Capitalism—that it is *basically* the same today as when it started and will remain the same until we get Socialism. A socialist view of history needs to be one that, above all, recognises continuous growth and change to be more intelligible than discrete systems and institutions.

The S.P.G.B. is in this dilemma: it denies that Capitalism can evolve into Socialism, yet it cannot ignore the continuity of society. It therefore posits a transition period beginning when Socialism is “established” (by working-class capture of political power) and ending when the state machine has withered away or been disbanded. This means that the S.P.G.B.

conceives its object to be something that *at first* is not Socialism. My argument is that socialists have only the new social relationships as an object—not a transition period involving authoritarian property institutions like the state and the armed forces. There is an apparent confusion about what revolution is: it is the *ending* of institutions, not the beginning of a new phase of them which sets in only after a revolutionary act has been taken.

We say that socialists must oppose gradualism as a policy. But we must not forget that our criticism of gradualism is that it *aims* at insignificant changes unrelated to any clear conception and pursuit of a comprehensive goal. To deny that imperceptible changes do take place is to deny that society evolves. We make “the day of revolution” ludicrous by taking it too literally. Revolutionaries see the total change called socialist society as the consolidation of limited revolutionary changes going on today. For example, it is a revolutionary change when people drop the ideas of racial inequality and think in terms of one human race. The actions accompanying such thinking change social institutions in the direction of equality and play their part in the transformation of society as a whole. Socialism emerges from the concurrent growth of socialist ideas and incipient practice within Capitalism.

The Party's view of Socialism, like its view of history, is far too static. Its propaganda must be more dynamic, more conscious of its Socialism-creative role. It must be ready to grow, to adapt itself to change, to cast off accumulated waste-products—and to feed on the produce of society at large.

My concluding article will continue the discussion of what further developments are indicated in the S.P.G.B. and how best to encourage them.

S.R.P.

(To be concluded)

speech—what socialism can do, for each and every one of them, regardless of colour and age. Show them, at once, that the world productivity can be theirs. The results of it can be theirs. Each can be comfortable, secure. But show them at the beginning. Lead up to the disquisitions. Don't bring the cart first.

When attempting to get on with children: get to their level. When attempting to get an audience interested, get to its level, then bring it up with you.

Many people are confused with socialists. They see them as repudiating socialism itself. Because socialists damn all parties purporting to be socialist—and, in the minds of many of the individuals in the audience, are socialist—they are confused and overwhelmed. They believe the labour parties are socialist. It must be pointed out to these people why they are not socialist—because they have not produced the results which socialism can produce.

When one learns to write, one is told to instantly hold the reader's attention. The same rules for writing a story apply to holding an audience. It must be shown what happens, and how it happens.

Socialist speakers will say to themselves: What more can I do? I have reached to the bottom of the barrel of Marxist philosophy and economics and handed it to them.

He has not appealed to them on their own level of understanding. They are not preconceived socialists. They are people without wits, so abysmal is their ignorance of socialism. There will be only a handful of socialists in any meeting. He is not speaking to them. They do not need him. He is speaking to those who have come to learn what this other brand of socialism is, for it is another brand to them. He is there to show them that equality is theirs. This sounds good. Show them how it can be achieved. Give them a simple example: a group of people, by their co-operation, have everything they want: clothes, food, shelter, television, car, and of their desired types. This achievement is multiplied. World-wide. After that, the socialist speaker has their attention. He can go on to show them how it can be achieved and what must be done to achieve this state of the world.

How frustrating can be the efforts of the learnedness of the socialist speakers when it falls on deaf ears. It will fall on deaf ears until the socialist speaker first learns to present the promise of socialism—what it can do—in the beginning, the first words of his speech.

KATHLEEN ASH.
(Canada.)

THE APPROACH TO PUBLIC SPEAKING

There is one lesson to be learned by socialist speakers: their audience is not arriving at the hall with the same degree of intelligence (or any intelligence at all) on the subject as they are. They have got to get this over to themselves before they commence to speak. A socialist speaker has got to say to himself: here is an audience with little,

or no conception of the matter of which I am about to speak. They are not alert. They are not animated. They are flaccid. I have got to do something about this.

And what must he do? He must first show them why they came—the promise. He must show them this very simply. Make an example. Show them—at the outset of the

WHY PICK ON TURNER?

A Central Branch visitor to the Delegate Conference who was not too conversant with the "pros and cons" of the meeting would have experienced an awkward set-back to his enthusiasm. The high-light of the conference was undoubtedly to be "the Turner question," and all other things took a secondary place to this.

The fact that Forum contained a front page statement of Turner's views was by no means just coincidence. The statement did not reveal anything in the nature of a good Roman Catholic who had committed blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, but rather a

mild analysis of Clause 6.

Just what do other members think of the clause—*"turning an agent of oppression into an agent of emancipation"*? Unfortunately even at the delegate meeting it remained unexplained. Suppose a majority of SPGB candidates are elected to Parliament, a cabinet composed of the SPGB executive would take over as a temporary measure, and issue some instructions to the machinery of government, including the armed forces. The present make-up of machinery which functions to-day is dependent on instructions of how to act under any new set of circum-

stances. If there was any opposition it would be chaos; socialism must be harmony. The political leaders of the opposing parties would have to be arrested; this could be done by the police, but the more dangerous would require the army.

The arrested men would have to get a chance to defend themselves, this is called democracy. The victorious allies even allowed this to Goering, Goebbels and Hess, so the whole legal circus would get going. It would be a nice chance for Sir David Maxwell Fyfe to earn another £27,000 as chief prosecutor and the verdict would soon arrive; after all, those who pay the piper can call the tune.

The question now arises, what to do with them. They could go to gaol, or be brain washed (Russian style) or shot. (This is where the clause,—*"including these forces"*—*"converted into an agent of emancipation,"*—would come in useful.)

Now, fellow members, this is the logical conclusion: Either everyone will attempt to establish socialism or there will be opposition; Comrade Turner thinks there will be no opposition, but a majority of delegates beg to differ. Some of the opposition that Comrade Turner had to contend with at the meeting was pathetic; it ranged from quibbling to clowning, all kinds of charges about breaking up the party, "not believing in the class struggle," whatever that means. If anyone puts a lot of hope in the class struggle via the trade unions, they had better read the splendid article: *"The Studebaker Story"* in the current *'Western Socialist.'* Apparently Karl Frederick doesn't think the workers will get far along class struggle lines and he supplies quite a lot of evidence. One SPGB member who was very active in 1937, could not remember much about the Spanish Civil War and the SPGB. There were many anxious to speak but no concrete criticism of the lucid statement in the first two pages of Forum. Another member, opposing Turner, made the queer statement that he was the best ever, exponent of the SPGB case; another didn't like *"Sin and Sex."*

Turner has had quite a lot of success as a speaker during the past 15 years and like popular people he must contend with the jealousy of others who wish but do not hit the limelight; and that might explain why Parker, who can write much better than he can speak, did not get anything like the criticism that fell on Turner at the meeting. Now comrades, "Come off it," let's get back to sanity.

DAVID BOYD,
Central Branch.

E. ROSE.

THE NEW CASE

From reading in the columns of FORUM it seems to me that the whole basis of the Party's case is being challenged, but what is not clear, either to me or to many other members, is the precise nature of this challenge. Until this is clearly understood, it is impossible to answer; so in an endeavour to clarify the position, I am stating here what I have gathered from listening to various members and through the columns of FORUM, and what seems to be the nature of the case against the Party.

1. We are not a political party but rather an organization for studying, discussing and propagating the idea of a socialist society; therefore we do not need a D of P.

2. Socialism will not be achieved through the ballot box, but will arise out of the changing nature of Capitalism, as follows: Capitalists today are indistinguishable from workers; we all wear similar clothes, drive around in cars, go abroad for holidays, have all the health services we need, assured incomes in our old age, as much of the essential food, entertainment, etc., as is necessary for our well-being; and where these leave something to be desired, they will improve as the standard of living improves.

3. Owing to the growing expense of running Capitalism, machinery, taxation, etc., the burden of running Capitalism falls more and more to the lot of the State, until there is no more difference between capital and worker than between coloured people and white,

Jew and Gentile, men and women, social status etc., Russian and American—in other words, the class struggle disappears. From here onwards I am in some difficulty to understand how the change-over will take place; I can only assume that, as economic differences disappear, everybody will see wages and profits becoming unnecessary, and as socialist understanding will have been growing as the changes have been taking place, everyone will all see it to be in our mutual interest to establish a Socialist society, and "Hey Presto!" the revolution has been achieved.

The only need for the Socialist organization is to continue to collect recruits to its membership, in order to spread Socialist ideas through propaganda, literature, etc.; and when we have all agreed to be good, conscientious Socialists we shall see it is no longer necessary to fight over surplus goods and the markets for them, and all will be well with the world.

I have no doubt this will be called a classic case of oversimplification. I can only beg the members who object to the D of P and the over-stressing of the class struggle to correct me where I am wrong. My endeavour has simply been to clarify the position, in order that the opposition to the Party's case may be clearly understood, and a position reached where Party members can carry on the Party's propaganda without fear that their case may be contradicted or challenged by members of their own organization.