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SOCIALIST DISCUSSION JOURNAL
TOWARDS BETTER UNDERSTANDING

FORUM

The Poverty of Philosophy

To say that history is an interaction between a subject-object relation does not formulate the proposition sharply enough to say anything definite about it. Often it is but a lazy cliché which sums up human history.

Marxists, however, are more specific as to the nature of this interaction between man and his environment. They contend that there is a reciprocal action between environment, with its humanly projected possibilities, and man's needs. This is the dynamic of history. If there is some other dynamic in the affairs of men it has never been cogently or coherently argued.

Man is the originating source of history and the initiator of its development. Not man as an undifferentiated unhistoric entity, but collective man who enters into definite organised relations with the external world and so makes the external world part of him and himself part of the external world.

Man's history being social history, his needs are social needs. True, different men will want different things from the same society, but what they want will be derived from the existing culture.

Human needs are not mysteriously or metaphysically grounded. They are not mere by-products of technical innovation although they may in part be influenced by it. Nor are they the outcome of inner "drives," "impulses" or "urges." That man is a biologically constituted creature living in a physical world provides the possibility of his having needs, but it does not explain the character and quality of those needs or why they change. Again such supra-sensible entities as Fichte's "self," Schopenhauer's "will" or Freud's "id" are worthless as historical explanations. Such concepts cannot explain the social structure peculiar to societies such as slavery, feudalism or capitalism, or why they should have appeared when they did and in the order they did. Neither can it explain the different class interests which prevailed and the class conflicts which, as a result, inevitably ensued.

Nor does any psychological theory of individual motivation provide any clue to social change. Such is the enormous range and complexity of human motives that it would be impossible to explain social processes in terms of personal behaviour. Not only are the motives of individuals often too obscure even for themselves to understand but even if they could be pinned down to their finest nuances many of them would be relatively unimportant for the understanding of social dynamics. Again, individual motives tend to cancel each other out, leaving a resultant effect. It is this resultant effect of innumerable motives in given objective conditions which gives human actions their historical significance and for that reason can be correlated and explained by reference to the important social factors in their environment.

Needs are not then the outcome of concepts or abstractions, but of the actual social circumstances which bring them forth. They are, said Marx, "the practical expression of necessity." They thus constitute the spur to man's activity. It is the needs of men which set them their tasks and engender the will for social accomplishment.

The gratification of man's needs can only take place in and through his social organisation. Whether such needs can or cannot be satisfied is at bottom a practical question.

Thus, the gratification of needs presupposes the discovery of instruments of production. Again, in the attempt to more adequately fulfill these needs, efforts are made to improve the productive tools. It is, however, in the process of seeking to satisfy old needs, *via* new techniques, that new needs develop as the outcome of productive changes set going to satisfy old needs more fully.

Man's needs include the whole of his culture. Science, art, music, literature, even philosophy, are all responses to social wants. To what extent men will be able emotionally and mentally to satisfy their needs will have its roots in the type of society in which they live and the social position they occupy in it. Again, whether men's lives are enriched or impoverished by the society they live in depends on what the possibilities of that society offer and how much or how little they are, in actuality, realised for them.

It is often argued that, because Marx held that food, clothing and shelter were prime needs for humans, such a statement provides no clue to social change. Such an objection completely misses the point. While these primary needs are a permanent condition for the production and reproduction of human life, nevertheless the character and quality of these needs have changed and will continue to change. In fact the very essence of Marxism is its recognition of man's needs as the centrepiece of the physical environment on one hand and material production on the other. It is the changing nature of man's needs with its associated changes in production which furnishes the key to the changes in social organisation and, as a result, changes in human beings. "In changing the world men change themselves."

Marxism, therefore, has no need of abstractions like mindless matter or matterless mind. It needs no "grand principle" to espouse its cause. No pale and privileged philosophical truth as its presupposition even when that pale and privileged truth styles itself dialectical materialism. The function of historical materialism is an empirical and factual one and can be vindicated by actual observation of the way humans have acted in the course of their history. "The presuppositions with which we begin," says Marx in *The German Ideology*, "are not arbitrary; they are not

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dogmas. They are real presuppositions from which we can abstract ourselves only in imagination. They are individuals as they actually are, their actions and material conditions of life. Those which they find at hand as well as those which their own activity produces. These presuppositions are observable in purely empirical fashion."

Neither does historical materialism need an abstract evolutionary concept to help it along. That is why it rejects the notion of some universal category called progress which allegedly pushes society forward in the way a boy pushes a hoop. Now one of the uncritical assumptions of Evans, it seems to me, is his acceptance of a universal law of progress which implies that all aspects of the social whole are part of and relevant to, the whole. If that is true then the term unprogressive has no intelligible meaning. For Evans the totality called capitalism is the realization of progress and thus all the categories of capitalism are an exemplification of it. That is why for him categories peculiar to capitalism—profits, wages, exploitation, capital, etc., are in reality aspects of progress. Just as war, preparation for war and the social services are merely the means through which progress realises its purpose. So it seems life is a masquerade hiding its real intent. Look, however, under the black mask of extant society and you will find the smiling face of progress.

Again, it might be asked if progress is the law of life then it is possible at least retrospectively to make a judgment on a given society before it has come into being. Thus capitalist society was destined to serve the inscrutable ends of progress. In fact, one can go further and say that, whatever forms human society has passed through, it has been only the progressive realisation of socialism. Such a view is essentially a religious one, for it assumes a moral law governs the universe—whether we call it a moral law, God, the first cause, or progress.

If Evans does not believe this, then, if he will pardon my saying so, it is the only logical interpretation one can give to his writings. What other meaning are we to attach to his statement of "socialism being a necessity outside of men's wishes"? If Evans holds that human society is the product of biological evolution, as he seems to suggest, and that thought is rooted in the mechanism of brain activity, then consciousness must have its origin and impetus outside of men and be read back into nature. This is a thorough-going idealist position.

If, however, he argues there is a dynamic urge in matter, he is in no better position. A dynamic urge or an activist principle of matter is still a universal category and as universal categories have no meaning without exemplification all life, including social life, is exemplified by the universal activist principle. Matter thus comes to possess attributes the religionist gives to God—it is holy matter.

It is true that social organisation is a material activity. It is not true to say that it is a material activity of the same kind as inertia, electrical charges or cell production

and reproduction. Because it is a material activity of a different generic order it can only be understood in terms of that order. Human society has then an irreducible quality which marks it off from all other kinds of existence and provides a developmental process unique in nature.

Social life cannot be reduced to the activity of electrons or atoms or to psychological or physiological causes. Neither does the mechanism of the brain provide the subject-matter of social dynamics. For Marxists the indissoluble yet antithetical unity of man and his environment is the starting point of investigation into all forms of social life. What a pity Evans did not first catch the Marxist facts as a preliminary to cooking them. Nowhere did Evans state the epistemological or methodological grounds of his beliefs; we are entitled to still cry out with Othello in despair—"Proof, give us proof!"

Again, for Marxists the nature and outcome of social activity is one of empirical investigation, not philosophic deductions. They do not set out to explain the essence of consciousness but deal with it as a sociological and historical process, not as an *a priori* assumption. Nor are they interested in the essence of matter, but only in the material continuum of man's active social life. Marxism as such constitutes a decisive break with Idealism on one hand and metaphysical materialism on the other. I stress this because there has been undoubtedly a lot of confusion in this respect about Marxism from friend and foe alike. Nor has the Party been at all clear on the question of what constitute the methodological grounds of historical materialism. Hence the muddled nature of Evans's own conception of Marxism is in part, I believe, traceable to the Party's thinking on the matter.

Again, in this connection I do not think it can be emphasised too much that for Marxists, human activity is always and inevitably part of the social situation. What is more, this activity itself is a redirective activity and for that reason the decisive factor in the reconstitution of social forces. It is because Evans thinks animistically by attributing human powers to things, *i.e.*, technical processes, that he caricatures Marxism to the point of absurdity. It is easy, of course, to tear certain of Marx's statements from their context and saddle him with a view which holds that society is governed by impersonal and automatic processes. It is true that historical materialism is much more implicit in Marx's economic writings where he is engaged on a highly detailed account of the mechanism of capitalist production. But one has only to read the *German Ideology*, *Class Struggles in France* and *The 18th Brumaire* to discover how Marx applied historical materialism.

If we can sum up by saying that the dynamic of social development is the interaction between the objective possibilities of a given stage of productive development and the needs of men, then it can be shown that since the passing of primitive society this interaction has been of a class character, and the impetus for social change in line

with the needs of men has gravitated round the possession of property; or, more specifically, the ownership of means and instruments of wealth production and the power which such ownership confers. Class needs have then been the spearhead of social activity and the class struggle the medium for social change.

History, then, has revealed a struggle between opposing elements in society. Those who have sought to maintain the type of social organisation on which their social and economic domination rests and those who have attempted to widen it in order to give more elbow room to the growth of new economic forms. What did happen was that the old social set-up based upon certain productive agencies was unable to make room for the new economic forces and gave way to another social organisation in line with the development and expansion of these new forces. This does not mean that men have merely been the necessary agents of a necessary process, but that they have energetically and consciously sought to actualize the human projected possibilities of a given social situation. In any social change Marxism presupposes human activity throughout.

Because the state has a function of potential and actual coercion, it can never be a neutral force in social and economic struggles. That is why all class struggles have involved political struggles and the obtaining of political power for their successful conclusion. It is therefore with amazement that one records Evans as saying "that politics are a mere rubber stamp activity." This is however, in line with his metaphysic of history which converts the actual and concrete into a phantasy and the phantasy into actualities. A metaphysic where the process is more real than the events it seeks to describe. In sober fact the modern state is a very real thing with its centralised power, and organs such as a standing army, police, bureaucracy and judicature, and is itself the tortuous outcome of a hierarchical sub-division of labour. The inception of the modern state goes back in England to early Tudor times. It was through the political instrumentality of the absolute Monarchy that the nascent bourgeoisie came to power and affluence.

Also, how can one explain the efforts to maintain seigniorial rights, municipal and guild monopolies, or the growing power of the great chartered corporations if they are divorced from political struggles? Or how can we explain the pelf, place and power with the booty that made possible primitive accumulation, without the backing and authority of the state? In short, every economic struggle is a political struggle and, since the passing of early society, every economic order a political order. Evans, who makes a hollow attempt to integrate (with a capital I) all aspects of society into a given whole, in actual fact separates political institutions from economic institutions and sees the state as the representative of the whole of society. In fact, a classless state. Not only does the state correct the abuses of capitalist

society but it will gradually abolish capitalism and introduce socialism. What he fails to realise is that the capitalist state, with its machinery of administrative and repressive forces, is an integral part of a particular mode of production.

To attempt to take away from Marxism the class character of the state and incidentally the class character of society, is like a theory of physics without gravitation, a logic without a premise or water without wetness. Evans is not a Marxist by any reckoning but a Bernsteinist. To Evans's anticipated retort that this is an attempt to label him, it is very obvious he has labelled himself. Bernstein's views of Socialism as an objective science of society, his views on "gradual revolution" and the nature of progress are in substance the standpoint of Evans—a standpoint which I believe he has neither the courage nor the competence to adequately defend.

E.W.

Thirty Years Ago

Extracts from the Final Agenda and Executive Committee's Report to the Annual Conference, 1926.

Twenty-second E.C.:

Adams, F., Adams, H., Banks, Brown, Buxey, Collinson, Elliott, Godfrey, Green, Higgs, Hutchins, Johns, Rolands, Iles, Fairbrother, Day.

Resolutions:

"That a mobile column of Literature sellers be organized... so that indoor and outdoor meetings of other organizations can be attended and the sale of our Literature better organized."

Party Organ.

The *Socialist Standard* has been published during the period under review prompt to time each month. Arrangements have been completed with the printer for the S.S. to be printed on better paper than heretofore, together with a decrease in the number per issue, from 5,000 to 4,500, at a cost of £20 7s. od.

Debates.

An attempt was made to arrange a debate with C.P.G.B., by the Tottenham Branch of the Party. The attempt failed, through the C.P. not accepting the conditions laid down by the Tottenham Branch.

An endeavour has also been made by the Battersea Branch of the Party with the same organization, as the result of certain statements made by S.N. Saklatvala, but without success.

Walthamstow Branch have been given permission to Debate with the Catholic Crusade, and arrangements are proceeding. *Central Branch and Postal Vote.*

After due consideration of this matter the E.C. passed the following resolution:—

"That the E.C. after considering the matter of a Postal Vote for Central Branch members, are of the opinion that such a course is impracticable at the present stage of the Party's affairs."

Quotation

THE QUALITIES OF LEADERSHIP

If a man is fluent, dextrous and ready on the platform, he possesses the one indispensable requisite for statesmanship; if in addition he has the gift of moving deeply the emotions of his hearers, his capacity for guiding the infinite complexities of national life becomes undeniable. Experience has shown that no exceptional degree of any other capacity is necessary to make a successful leader. There need be no specially arduous training, no great weight of knowledge either of affairs or the human heart, no receptiveness to new ideas, no outlook into reality. Indeed, the mere absence of such seems to be an advantage; for originality is apt to appear to the people as flightiness, scepticism as feeble-mindedness, caution as doubt of the great political principles that may happen at the moment to be immutable. The successful shepherd thinks like his sheep, and can lead his flock only if he keeps no more than the shortest distance in advance. He must remain, in fact, recognizable as one of the flock, magnified no doubt, louder, coarser, above all with more urgent wants and ways of expression than the common sheep, but in essence to their feeling of the same flesh with them. . . . A people at war feels the need of direction much more intensely than a people at peace, and as always they want some one who appeals to their instinctive feeling of being directed, comparatively regardless of whether he is able in fact to direct. This instinctive feeling inclines them to the choice of a man who presents at any rate the appearance and manners of authority and power rather than to one who possesses the substance of capacity but is denied the shadow. They have their conventional pictures of the desired type—the strong, silent, relentless, the bold, outspoken, hard and energetic—but at all costs he must be a "man," a leader who can lead," a shepherd, in fact, who, by his gesticulations and his shouts, leaves his flock in no doubt as to his presence and his activity.

W. TROTTER,

*Instincts of the Herd in
Peace and War.*

Contributions to "Forum" should be addressed to the Internal Party Journal Committee, at Head Office. If they cannot be typed, articles should be written in ink on one side of the paper only, and contributors are asked to give their addresses and the names of their Branches. Contributors intending series of articles should give an indication of the scope of their series, not send merely a first article.

Book Review

WOMEN IN ANTIQUITY

Pan Books have issued an interesting half-crowns-worth in *Women in Antiquity*, by Charles Seltman. In under two hundred pages, the author surveys the lives and status of women in Mesopotamia, Egypt and the Greek cities, rounds off with a swift traversal of their position in mediæval and Renaissance Europe and ends with an appraisal of the modern girl. Apart from the final pages, which are remarkably sententious and silly, this is a lively and informative little book.

Dr. Seltman has some hard things to say about Christianity, and says them with spirit. He makes sensible comments about ideals of beauty and the social functions of clothes. He takes up, too, the romantic idea of Greek society which was beloved of the Victorian upper class and is still taught in schools. The book's most controversial passages, however, are those dealing with the position of women in ancient Greece. Dr. Seltman flatly denies that they were subjugated, and jeers at another scholar—Professor Jebb—for saying so.

Certainly he disposes of Jebb's quotations from Greek plays without much difficulty. Nevertheless, historical evidence is against him; his own argument, that Athenian women listened to bawdy plays and were therefore emancipated, proves nothing except that morals were different then. In *Ancient Society* Lewis Henry Morgan gives a careful account of the condition of Greek women based on the researches of W. A. Becker. A condensed statement from Becker's *Charicles: or Illustrations of the Private Life of the Ancient Greeks* observes that "the only excellence of which a woman was thought capable differed but little from that of a faithful slave."

Other historians have confirmed that this was so, on much stronger evidence than Dr. Seltman quotes for refutation: for example, Sir James Donaldson in *Woman: her Position and Influence in Ancient Greece and Rome*. Dr. Seltman brushes off the question of the *hetairai* as by-products of the subjugation set-up by saying, in effect, that every society has them. It would have been more to the point, however, if he had dealt with homosexuality in Greece, since that was a far more significant effect of the subjugation of women.

Women in History is generally well documented, and has a good section of photogravure illustrations.

R. COSTER.

NINETEEN EIGHTY-FOUR

This film is a "free" adaptation of George Orwell's novel of the same name that created a considerable stir when published in 1949, and also when televised last year, but it seems very doubtful whether the film will do anything to enhance Orwell's reputation.

The novel is an account of a short period in the life of a misfit in society, Winston Smith, living in the year of the title. Society has become a nightmare world where "The Party," whose slogans are "War is Peace"; "Freedom is Slavery"; "Ignorance is Strength" and whose instruments are repression and destruction, has become the ruling class. The class division is into "the inner party", "the outer party" and "the proles." Society's organisation is purely oligarchical, with the probably mythical ruler "Big Brother" at the apex; the inner party or policy-making rulers beneath him; the outer party beneath them carrying out the actual work planned and supervised by the inner party; and the proles (who form 85% of the population) at the bottom of the pyramid carrying out the function of production.

The Party's discipline is enforced with the aid of the "thought police" who ferret out any disaffection or even questionable thoughts (known as "thoughtcrime"); sexual pleasure is made illegal ("sexcrime"); every room has a "telescreen" whereby the occupant may be watched and spoken to; all knowledge and even words of a dangerous nature are suppressed, and history is altered by the simple process of altering some records and destroying others—in the words of O'Brien, Winston's captor and interrogator—"Reality exists in the human mind and nowhere else. Not in the individual mind, which can make mistakes, and in any case soon perishes; only in the mind of the Party, which is collective and immortal. Whatever the Party holds to be truth, is truth."

The story deals with questioning of the Party's doctrines and ideas by Winston (who is a member of the outer party); his love-affair with Julia, a mechanic in the novel-writing department; their inevitable arrest and their eventual conversion and betrayal of each other. The end of the story has Winston, broken in mind and body, embracing all the Party's ideas and actually loving Big Brother, and even welcoming the thought of the bullet that will end his life, and implicitly, human society and relationships as we know them.

Superficially 1984, Orwell's last novel, is a work of despair, and indeed Orwell, who once said "every word I ever wrote was in the cause of democratic socialism," did in fact become, towards the end of his life, extremely cynical and disillusioned with the whole of the left-wing movement and the proletariat generally.

This novel, however, is not merely a defeatist picture of society's end—the "boot stamping on a human face—for ever"—but is also very much a warning for the present day, a cry in the wilderness. When viewed in this light, it becomes a fascinating attack on many present-day evils. Unlike other contemporary writers about "the golden future time," Orwell has in this book taken many tendencies that already exist in society and amplified them out of all proportion until they present a grotesque, but plausible, picture of horror, and this is perhaps the book's great value.

Much that appears so frightening in the story is already here with us in embryo:—the division of the world into three huge power blocs, Eurasia, Eastasia and Oceania; the unswerving acceptance of party doctrine, black becoming white and white black by the process of "doublethink"; the thought police with their brainwashing technique and obtaining of "confessions"; rubbishy newspapers, novelettes and films (known as "prolefeed"); the falsification of history; the Ministries of Love, Truth and Peace, who deal respectively in Hate, Lies and War; all these can be seen now if one looks closely enough.

Without detracting from the merit of the book, much valid criticism can be levelled at many of the ideas expressed in it; for instance, the suggested possibility of a permanent state of war and industrial stagnation; the halting of technical development except of war weapons; the proles' unquestioning acceptance of their lot; the suppression of human instincts; the dwindling importance of the class struggle, and so on. In fact, Orwell throughout the whole of his life was very much confused in his political thinking. Even in such works as *The Road to Wigan Pier* and *The Lion and the Unicorn* he made it obvious that he had an inadequate understanding of society's workings and, perhaps more important, he never became integrated into or accepted by the proletariat that he sought to befriend and champion. Probably to a great extent his disillusionment sprang from that fact. Although Orwell was able to see, very early on, the fraudulence of the Russian revolution and the Communist Party, he still put considerable faith in the Labour Party until they actually began to administer capitalism. He had sufficient insight to see then which way things were going, and the resultant disillusionment, coupled with his illness, resulted in this harrowing book.

When one reads O'Brien's words—"Power is not a means, it is an end. One does not establish a dictatorship in order to safeguard a revolution: one makes the revolution in order to establish the dictatorship"—one realises that the tragedy of Winston Smith is a reflection of the tragedy

of Orwell himself (and to a large extent, the tragedy of hundreds of other "left-wing" intellectuals and writers).

The film, unfortunately, bears little more than a coincidental resemblance to the book. The novel, full of power and conviction, with an extremely moving love-story, is distorted and watered down into a crude, sentimental, and miscast piece of science-fiction. Apparently the acknowledgment to Orwell that is given on the film circulars—"freely adapted from the novel 1984"—signifies that the producers considered it best to ignore or suppress all the valid points that Orwell makes, present a "streamlined" version leaving only the bare bones of the story with its "sensational" appeal, and make true love triumphant in true Hollywood style. The clear indication of the co-relation between the state of affairs described in the book and present-day trends has almost disappeared in the film, and the ideological argument between Winston and his captor (which provides perhaps the most fascinating part of the book) is pruned and altered until it becomes almost meaningless. In fact the divergencies from the point and content of the original are so considerable as to render it impossible to deal with them fully in these pages.

Apart from the question of distortion, the film as such is poor, lacking conviction, drama and plausibility. It is in their attempt to make the story plausible and "acceptable," that Wardour Street has lost both the value of the original and a golden opportunity to make an intelligent film on a political subject. (The television production did at least show that it can be done). Little more can be said about the film save that the production and direction are uninspiring. It altogether lacks impact, in spite of valiant attempts by such good actors as Michael Redgrave, Edmund O'Brien, and David Kossoff to invest their unsuitable parts with plausibility. The dialogue as "freely adapted" by William Templeton has become trite and colourless.

One can only hope that this dull film will not dissuade filmgoers from reading Orwell's works which are anything but dull, and indeed can be extremely rewarding, both from the point of view of the presentation of ideas and of readability.

A.W.I.

AND YOUR OPINION . . ?

It will be noticed that the estimate of Orwell's "1984" stated in this review is challenged by the review appearing in the April "Socialist Standard". Readers are invited to submit their opinions for publication in FORUM.

EARLY TRADE UNIONS

The traditional function of the trade union is to protect and improve the interests of its members in industry or their places of work, and also in times of sickness and legal difficulty. The foundations of modern trade unionism were laid largely by the Victorian trade unionists. In 1824 the Combination Laws of 1799 and 1800 were abolished. This was a result of the consistent efforts of Francis Place, who attempted to show that such laws stifled the natural play of economic forces which in themselves were the best stimulation of production and the best safeguard of society. The Combination Laws had been repressive, for they outlawed any attempt on the part of workmen to form associations. The laws had not, however, been completely successful in achieving their object, for in spite of the risks that they took and the severe treatment at the hands of magistrates that discovery meant, secretly and furtively many associations were formed, though they were largely ineffective.

Events immediately after the repeal of the Combination Laws were fast-moving. All over the country unions which had been underground emerged into the industrial scene, hosts of new unions were formed, and many were the wage demands backed up by strike action. From the employers, headed by the powerful shipping interests, a storm of protest descended upon Westminster. The employers demanded of Huskisson, the President of the Board of Trade, the introduction of a Bill drafted by themselves and designed to kill trade unionism.

A Parliamentary Committee was set up to enquire into what extent the repeal of the Combination Laws had damaged industrial interests. Francis Place, taking advantage of the loose terms of reference of the Committee, arranged for a few workmen to give evidence before it. This gave time also for some public support to be mobilized against the Combination Laws. The employers' draft Bill was abandoned, and the milder recommendations of the Committee proposed that while the prohibition of combinations should be restored, associations formed for the sole purpose of regulating wages or hours of labour should be exempt from it. It was unfairly left to individual magistrates to interpret phrases such as "molest" or "obstruct," and the weapon of prosecution for conspiracy was used with crushing severity.

One of the early Victorian trade unionists was John Doherty, a vigorous writer and speaker. For six months in 1829 he led a strike of cotton spinners in Manchester. The strike failed to gain the higher wages and improved working conditions that the spinners had demanded, and Doherty emerged from it convinced that what was needed to provide the cotton spinners with strength at the door of the employers was a national union. Doherty arranged a delegate meeting at which spinners from all over England, Scotland and Wales were represented, and out of this meeting emerged the

Grand Union of the United Kingdom, financed by a penny a week from every member. Shortly afterwards Doherty formed the National Association for the Protection of Labour.

The General Trades Union, formed at the same time, was a federation of the unions of the seven building trades. These unions adopted an aggressive policy of strike action; the employers replied with the "document" that workers, on defeat, were forced to sign, saying that they would never again join a union. The ambitions of these unions were too far in advance of their organizational powers and they suffered many setbacks. The General Trades Union was finally broken up, but retained some hold in the North among the textile workers.

In 1834, Robert Owen's idea of separate trade unions taking over the particular interests in which they were organized and establishing Producers' Co-operative Societies under workers' control, took concrete shape in the Grand National Consolidated Trades Union. This union rapidly built up a membership of over one million members. Hundreds of lodges, with secret oaths and initiation ceremonies, were established all over the country. Many new members were convinced that enrolment meant immediate wage increases, and found themselves involved in strikes which drained the funds of the union. Alarmed employers "locked out" many workers until those workers signed "the document." The union's funds ran out; the union itself was fast crumbling.

The Government seized upon a clause in an Act passed thirty-eight years previously that was never intended to apply to trade unions. Under this Act, heavy penalties could be imposed for the swearing of secret oaths. The Tolpuddle Martyrs were sentenced to seven years' transportation for such an oath. Though this sentence shocked public opinion, it had the intended effect of scaring many members away from the Grand National Consolidated Trades Union. More strikes and presentations of "the document" followed, and after a stormy existence of six months, the Union began to break up in disillusion. Robert Owen had diverted the aims of trade unionism away from self help and mutual improvement within an accepted social system to the abolition of that social system. This had proved to be utopian.

After the fall of the Chartist Movement in 1848, trade unionism took on a new respectable form. It withdrew from politics and turned instead to the task of protecting its members in their daily work. It considered strike action an extreme and undesirable weapon. The new models that organized the skilled tradesmen asked a high subscription rate and guaranteed high benefits. They were solid, respectable organizations of men who felt themselves solid, respectable citizens. In this new development three men led the way: Robert

Allen, Robert Applegarth and William Newton.

In 1851, due to the efforts of Robert Allen and William Newton, the existing widely-scattered and small engineering unions coalesced into the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, Machinists, Smiths, Wheelwrights and Patternmakers. The first aim of the new society was the secure continuity of work for its members and end redundancy of labour. Allen and Newton were convinced that this programme could be made effective without strike action. On the first of January, 1852, this well-organised society, with its centralization and full-time paid officials, placed a ban on overtime. The employers' reply was a lock-out which lasted five months until the engineers signed "the document." This did not effectively impair the development of the union, for within three years it regained its full membership and built up further funds to the unprecedented total of £35,695.

In 1860 the skilled carpenters formed the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners under the leadership of Robert Applegarth. This society was closely modelled on the constitution of the Engineers' Union. In 1859 twenty-four thousand building workers were locked out by their employers for a period of eight months, but the employers failed to enforce "the document" on these workers. After the lock-out it was considered necessary by prominent trade unionists, including Newton and Allen, to organize a central cabinet of trade unions to augment mutual assistance. This cabinet was named the London Trades Council; it was formed in 1860. Its chief function was to formulate political policy and decide whether those on strike should be given support by other unions. Allen and Applegarth were exponents of reasonableness, being loth to support the militant traditions of the past. "With regard to strikes," said Applegarth to Chester in 1866, "he would tell them at once, that he did not approve of that way of doing business, except in cases of absolute necessity." Now, in line with the general object of self-help and mutual improvement, they wanted manhood suffrage and the removal of such legal anomalies upon working men as those contained in the Master and Servants Act.

It was thus the contention of Allen and Applegarth that with propriety, decorum and reasonableness, the trade union movement would come to be accepted as a useful social body. What was now astir, not only among the skilled men of the new model unions but in almost every industry, was something much more fundamental than a temporary coming-together to fight for an immediate gain or resist a particular blow at standards of living; it was rather the consolidation of a trade union movement of national solidarity that could use its strength continually for collective bargaining.

In 1866, members of a trade union in Sheffield dropped gunpowder down the

chimney of a non-unionist to bring pressure to bear on him. This incident became the signal for a violent denunciation of trade unionism as a whole on the part of the employers. An immediate second blow hit the trade unions. In Bradford the local treasurer of the Boilermakers' Society was found to have embezzled twenty-four pounds of the union's funds. On being brought before the magistrates the man was cleared, on the grounds that trade union funds did not come within the protection of the law; this decision was upheld by the Court of Queen's Bench. In 1867 the Royal Commission on Trade Unions began its enquiries. Thomas Hughes and Frederic Harrison presented the trade union case to the Commission, and Robert Applegarth was allowed to sit as an observer. The outcome of the Commission represented both victory and defeat, for while the unions succeeded in legal status and protection for their funds, their right to peaceful picketing was taken away from them. The trade unions had been robbed of much of their industrial effectiveness.

In 1860, thirty-four delegates representing 118,000 trade unionists attended what was the first annual congress of trade unions. This congress was, however, by no means representative of the movement as a whole. It was composed mainly of provincial unions; the leaders of the London Trades Council, in whom the greatest concentration of trade union power was rested, stood aloof. The Government's decision of 1871 to use the report of the Royal Commission as an excuse for turning the most peaceful trade union actions during strikes into crimes altered all this. After prison sentences had been passed on many trade unionists for "conspiracy" and picketing, the leaders of the London Trades Council recognized that the annual conference of trade unions with its parliamentary committee was exactly the kind of weapon wanted to give continuity to working-class defence. They gave it their support and so was formed the Trade Union Congress; it represented at the outset 1,100,000 workers.

In 1874 the Liberal Government was swept out of office, two Lib-Lab candidates were elected, and a Tory government was returned. A year later, the Criminal Law Amendment Act was unconditionally repealed, as well as the law relating to breach of engagement and conspiracy. The trade unions had won their case.

In the succeeding years many new trade unions were formed, including unions for many unskilled workers. These unions differed from the craft unions in some respects. The National Agricultural Labourers' Union, formed in 1872 by Joseph Arch, asked twopence a week subscription from its members, and benefits as a consequence were much lower than those of the amalgamated societies. At the same time these unions, along with the now firmly established craft unions, had only "self help and mutual improvement" as their object.

P. K. LAWRENCE.

Cuttings

SOVIET DOUBLETHINK

BULGANIN ON TITO.

1949:

Judas Tito and his helpers—these malevolent deserters from the camp of socialism to the camp of imperialism and fascism—have converted Yugoslavia into a Gestapo prison where every expression of free thought and human rights is put down, where the advanced representatives of the working class, the toiling peasantry and the intelligentsia are brutally annihilated.

Pravda, September 10th, 1949.

1955:

From this platform we greet our Yugoslav friends and the President of Yugoslavia, Comrade Tito and will continue to make great efforts in the future to follow the jointly chosen path of friendship. . . .

Pravda, August 6th, 1955.

* * *

WHO LIBERATED BELGRADE?

1948:

At the moment when the people's liberation movement in Yugoslavia was passing through a serious crisis, the Soviet army came to the aid of the Yugoslav people, crushed the German invader, liberated Belgrade

Letter from the Central Committee of the CPSU to CPY, May 4th, 1948, reprinted in "The Soviet-Yugoslav Dispute" Royal Institute of International Affairs, London, 1948, p. 51.

1955:

Our peoples will preserve forever in their memory that here near Belgrade Yugoslav-Soviet servicemen jointly dealt blows to the enemy and liberated this ancient Slav town from the Hitlerite occupiers.

Khrushchev as reported by Yugoslav Home Service Radio, May 26th, 1955.

* * *

KHRUSHCHEV ON THE LONGEVITY OF TITO & CO.

1950:

The time will come when the peoples of Yugoslavia will make short shrift of Tito's clique, the despicable gang of traitors. . . .

Pravda, March 8th, 1950.

1955:

Comrade Khrushchev proclaimed wishes of long life to the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, to Comrade Tito. . . .

Pravda, June 1st, 1955.

(Reported in *Problems of Communism*, November-December, 1955).

* * *

GANDHI—The Rise of an "Outstanding Statesman."

1939: "Gandhism is . . . a reactionary force directed against the revolution of the popular masses." (1).

1950: "In a demagogical manner, Gandhi preached class-peace with landowners and capitalists to Indian workers and peasants Gandhism has become the avowed national ideology of the Indian capitalists and landowners." (2).

EDITORIAL

This issue of FORUM contains the final article in E.W.'s series criticizing Frank Evans's *Nature of the Socialist Revolution*. This has, we think, been an important contribution. It is to be succeeded by an equally vital one, in which the same writer makes a critical re-examination of Engels' work, with particular reference to the doctrine of dialectical materialism.

The first of these articles will appear in next month's FORUM, and we specially urge readers to draw others' attention to it. This is a world apart from the mud-slinging which sent down the circulation of FORUM a couple of years ago; it is valuable study and discussion of Socialist theory, and demands the attention of every member of the Socialist Party.

At least one contribution to this issue stands to provoke agreement or disagreement. That is the review of 1984. Many Socialists have been impressed by Orwell's gloomy prognostications, and the writer of our review summarizes their opinion when he says "all these can be seen now if one looks closely enough." The *Socialist Standard* review expresses the opposite view that Orwell's diagnosis was quite mistaken. We should be interested to hear, and publish, other people's opinions.

As for other contributions, we expect in the April FORUM to publish Jim D'Arcy's reply to P.P.'s criticism of his argument on "Food and Plenty." The *Marxism and Literature* series has two more to go, and then will be followed by a short series on education and society. All this, we suggest, is to the advantage of the Party. Classes may be difficult to attend, but everyone can read FORUM. Do your best to see that everyone does!

1952: "Actually, Gandhi, this bellman of the Indian landlords, manufacturers and bankers, was an adversary of factories and machines only in words. The Indian bourgeoisie needed this demagoguery in order to take over the mass movement." (3).

1954: "Gandhi never wanted India to gain full independence; his sole aim was to urge the imperialists to make concessions in favour of the exploited masses of India, to achieve the admission of the bourgeoisie and land-ocracy to the helm of power." (4). AND TO-DAY:

1955: "Mahatma Gandhi . . . is highly esteemed (in the Soviet Union) as a renowned patriot and friend of the people. We pay due respect to his memory. . . . We do not share the philosophical views of Gandhi, but we regard him as an outstanding statesman who made no mean contribution to the development of the peaceloving views of (the Indian) people and their struggle for independence." (5).

(Sources given on page 184)

MARXISM and LITERATURE: 7

"In every historical epoch, the prevailing mode of economic production and exchange, and the social organization necessarily following from it, form the basis upon which is built up, and from which alone can be explained, the political and intellectual history of that epoch."
MARX.

The secret of individualism, as is remarked in *Metropolitan Man*, "lies in its successful interference with the individualism of others." The literature of the early nineteenth century is permeated with individualism for just that reason—the few sitting broad-bottomed on the lives of the great many and making their virtue of the others' necessity. It is the great theme of the nineteenth-century novel: the rise and fortunes of an individual, the incidents surrounding him, the world through his eyes. And because his freedom—the freedom, that is, to commercialize and exploit and compete with other individuals for supremacy in their jungle—filled the air, the poets wrote about freedom. Stimulated by the cross-Channel cries of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity, they sang and shouted national and personal independence infectiously. Even glum Wordsworth was caught by it: even he, like many an ex-left-wing-intellectual of the present day, tried later to pretend it had never been so.

Thus, it is easy to get the wrong idea: about Byron, for instance. Byron was an aristocrat—that is, he came of a dying social class. He knew it, and so threw in his lot with the bourgeoisie, joining them in jeering at the effete ideals and unserviceable conventions of his own milieu. He was for national independence: that is, he believed fervently in the commercial nation-state. He hated slavery: so did the bourgeoisie, because free labour was their life-blood. He saw what made the nineteenth-century world go round:

"Yes! Ready money is Aladdin's lamp." And Byron's cry of freedom was, in fact, only the bourgeoisie's cry of new lamps for old.

Shelley is a somewhat different proposition. He is rebellion's favourite poet: the youthful atheistic scandal, advocate of natural diet, translator of Godwin's *Political Justice* into verse. The stock picture of Shelley as a po-faced dreamer ("beautiful ineffectual angel, beating his wings in the void") is his wife's; recent investigation has produced something quite different and much more in line with the real social criticism which, for all the libertarian claptrap, does run through his work. You have to largely separate Shelley the poet from Shelley the social critic, because very much of what he wrote in the latter capacity is near-doggerel, like "Hell is a city much like London—

A populous and smoky city;
There are all sorts of people undone,
And there is little or no fun done..."

Everyone knows the fiery *Masque of Anarchy*, but the substance of Shelley's thought is in *Queen Mab* and *Prometheus Unbound*. Here and there in other poems and prefaces are sparks of remarkable understanding, from his expostulation against paper money in *Peter Bell the Third* to his comment on the cause of poetic genius: "The mass of capabilities remains at every period materially the same; the circumstances which awaken it to action perpetually change." One imagines Marx would have appreciated that: indeed he did. "The real difference between Byron and Shelley lies in the following," he said: "Those who understand and cherish them consider it fortunate that Byron died in his thirty-sixth year, since if he had lived longer he would have become a reactionary bourgeois. On the other hand, they regret that Shelley died at twenty-nine, since he was a thorough-going revolutionary and would always have belonged to the Socialist vanguard."

Marx wrote appreciatively, too, of the early Victorian novelists. "The brilliant contemporary school of novelists in England, whose eloquent and graphic portrayals of the world have revealed more political and social truths than all the professional politicians, publicists and moralists put together, has described every section of the middle class of 'most respectable' pensioners and holders of business as something vulgar, down to the small shopkeepers and lawyers' clerks. How well Dickens, Thackeray, Charlotte Bronte, and Mrs. Gaskell have depicted them!"

Dickens has been analyzed by critics as far removed from one another as G. K. Chesterton and T. A. Jackson; celebrated for his jollity, his story-making, his gallery of characters, his reformism. Shaw acknowledged a debt to Dickens; Mr. Edmund Wilson (who has a weakness for Victorians) thinks him one of the greatest ever. One opinion more or less should not make much difference: this writer's view is that Dickens was not an outstanding writer, and that his real importance lies in his relationship with the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

He was a novelist of urban life, a product of the cleavage between town and country which was made definite in the early nineteenth century. As with every other novelist of his time, his approach was individualistic; the main outline of his stories followed the pattern set by Fielding, Smollett and Richardson—a collection of incident, as David Cecil says, "clustering round the

figure of a hero, bound together loosely or less loosely by an intrigue and ending with wedding bells." (*Early Victorian Novelists*). Whether Dickens is glorifying the good old pre-Victorian days of coaching, taverns and innocent jollity, or criticizing the imperfections of the world he knew, it is all done through highly individualized persons and never by direct reference to society.

Dickens's reformism was neither political nor sentimental. Pure and simple, it was fear of the masses. From the mob scenes of *Barnaby Rudge* and *A Tale of Two Cities* to the ghost's cry in *A Christmas Carol*—"I see that written which is Doom, unless the writing be erased"—Dickens begged the middle class to see that, unless better were provided for the poor, they would revolt. And bang would go the cosy middle-class dinners which were Dickens' favourite myth (and are still his devotees'). George Orwell has pointed out that Dickens never penned a decent picture of a working man, and his essay *The Ruffian* is a remarkably un-Dickensian piece of vindictiveness. Here it is, on what to do with criminals:

"Why is a notorious Thief and Ruffian ever left at large? He never turns his liberty to any account but violence and plunder, he never did a day's work out of gaol, he never will do a day's work out of gaol. As a proved notorious Thief he is always consignable to prison for three months. When he comes out, he is surely as notorious a Thief as when he went in. Then send him back again... I demand to have the Ruffian kept out of my way, and out of the way of all decent people."

Benevolence was Dickens's ideal: the benevolence of rosy-cheeked, cheery old gentlemen, generous with handouts, amiable to children, beloved of their employees. Beginning from simple dislike of Victorian mobs and institutions, his line of thought developed first to deploring institutional human behaviour and then to investigating human nature itself. His later work is a near-frenzied posing of the "good" against the "bad" in man, and the final unfinished novel, *Edwin Drood*, is imbued with that obsession—the same which went toward *Jekyll and Hyde* and *The Picture of Dorian Grey*.

What of the other novelists Marx mentioned? Mrs. Gaskell's public is small nowadays, yet she merits attention if only because she was typically the Victorian genteel woman. Her concerns were those of the readers who lapped up *Cranford* and

Wives and Daughters; her cameos of small-town spinsters are pictures from life of artless middle-class ladies—that is, her own life. “Mrs. Gaskell never had,” says Cecil, “a chance of seeing men as they are with other men . . . the submissive, super-feminine character of the Victorian woman impeded her view of them, even so far as they did come within her line of vision.”

The beginnings of “realism” are generally held to be found in Dickens and Thackeray; if a wider field is wanted, with Balzac and Stendhal as well. The realistic portrayal of character can be traced back much farther, until it is seen to be as old as competitive commodity-producing, and therefore individualistic, society. The nineteenth-century novelists added another ingredient: circumstance. Thus, Balzac’s work lives through its depiction of circumstance; it is not an exaggeration to speak of *The Human Comedy* as the mirror of an epoch. Thackeray’s work is less a mirror than a mosaic, in which innumerable contrasting fragments of character and circumstance are laid to form a sharply ordered pattern. Thackeray was, indeed, the first to use the novel as the medium for a rational, systematic criticism of life.

Finally, there are the Bronte sisters. The Bronte cult is a curious red herring concealing, for example, that Charlotte was no great shakes as a writer. *Jane Eyre* is a stock Victorian romance but for its creation of Rochester, that glorious gift to every repertory-company ham; and Rochester is only an oversize incarnation of the ideal Victorian romantic man. *Wuthering Heights*

is a different matter—different, in fact, from almost every other novel of its time because Emily Bronte’s theme goes beyond man’s circumstances to consideration of his destiny. A theory has lately been advanced by “left-wing” critics to the effect that *Wuthering Heights* is a drama of class-conflict, with—let us quote *The Modern Quarterly*—“Heathcliff as representing the rebellious working men and . . . and Catherine as that part of the educated class which feels compelled to identify itself with their cause.” It goes to show how one fool thought can lead to another.

The style as well as the content of prose writing changed under the compulsion of social and economic conditions in the nineteenth century. Few novelists before Dickens are read for pleasure nowadays; in the Victorian age, however, the manner of writing became that which is most familiar to present-day readers—so much so, in fact, that the eminent Victorians are considered the classics and models. The biggest factors were the growth of reading and the improvements in printing technology which fertilized and regularized a process which went on, by a dozen and one means, through the nineteenth century. While the well-to-do went to private schools, working people were hungry for knowledge: “self-help” was a prime mover in the formation of scores of working men’s associations, trade unions included.

Thus, periodical fiction made a new market. Popular novelists had now to provide for publication in instalment form, giving each episode a climax and a degree of finality—

often, too (like Dickens), to frame their work to match with illustrations. The growth of railway travel accentuated the trend: the first station bookstall opened in the eighteen-thirties, and “railway novels,” short and easily assimilable, became a new demand.

Novels generally became shorter. The three-volume convention, sign of a class to whom all time was leisure time, faded. Not that the leisure class had disappeared; but the reading public was more and more of people whose lives were sharply divided into work and leisure, to whom time was therefore valuable. Perhaps it can be added that the trend has gone on steadily intensifying, and is still doing so. Today’s novelist has to write for a public accustomed to the language and hardened to the sensations of tabloid newspapers, with little time to spare for discussion and meditation. The result is a literature which has for style the echo of the typewriters which pound it out.

One more of the famous Victorian novelists needs to be mentioned: George Eliot. As Dickens and Thackeray were writers of the town, she was a writer of the country; as with them, her view of the world was individualistic. It was, however, a different kind of individualism, which is best expressed if she is thought of as the first psychological novelist. She sought the mainsprings of behaviour in the individual personality as it was shaped by experience. “Our consciousness,” she says, “rarely registers the beginning of a growth within us any more than without us. There have been many circulations of the sap before we detect the smallest sign of the bud.”

You may, if you like, ascribe George Eliot’s concern with the inner man to her translation of Feuerbach and her associations with Spencer and G. H. Lewes. Undoubtedly it is so. Nevertheless it is worth considering also that she was involved in the capitalist society of the second half of the nineteenth century, when former communal life and morality were already disintegrating and man was discovering how lonely it is in a crowd.

R. COSTER.

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(From *Problems of Communism*, January-February, 1956).