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**George Bernard  
SHAW**

A memoir  
by R. Palme Dutt

*and*

*“The dictatorship of the  
proletariat”*

The famous 1921 article by  
GEORGE BERNARD SHAW

**1/-**

LABOUR MONTHLY PAMPHLET : 1951 SERIES : No. 1



G. B. Shaw in China with Lu-hsun at his right hand, and another Chinese author. The late Lu-hsun, whose residence in Peking has recently been presented by his widow to the nation, was China's greatest figure in art and letters.

# George Bernard SHAW

A memoir  
by R. Palme Dutt  
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## *“The dictatorship of the proletariat”*

The famous 1921 article by  
GEORGE BERNARD SHAW

*This pamphlet is an off-print of the Editorial Article in 'Labour Monthly', Vol. XXXII, No. 12 (with the addition of a few lines) and of the famous article signed 'G.B.S.' of Vol. I, No. 4, of the 'Labour Monthly' in October, 1921.*

## GEORGE BERNARD SHAW

### A MEMOIR

**When you carry your experiment to its final triumph, and I know that you will, we in the West, we who are still playing at Socialism, will have to follow your steps whether we like it or no.**

George Bernard Shaw, Address to the Soviet people in 1931.\*

THE *Labour Monthly* pays tribute to George Bernard Shaw, an old friend, subscriber and contributor of our journal from its earliest issues. It was in our fourth number, in October, 1921, that appeared Shaw's famous 7,000 word article on *The Dictatorship of the Proletariat*, which was written on the request and commission of our then very fledgling magazine newly arrived into the world of socialist periodicals, and which was Shaw's first major written declaration of support (in his own highly individual fashion) for Communism against Reformism, not only in Russia, but in Britain. His last contribution appeared in our pages twenty-eight years later, in 1949.

With his characteristic generosity of outlook and sympathy Shaw always took a lively and helpful interest in the *Labour Monthly*, recognising the significance, in the existing publishing conditions in Britain, of the successful uninterrupted publication for over a quarter of a century of an outspoken socialist periodical on a self-supporting basis, despite deprivation from the advertisements which its circulation would warrant. On the occasion of our Twentieth Anniversary Shaw wrote:

I forget the name of the Frenchman who, on being asked what part he had taken in the French Revolution, replied that he had survived it. The survival of the *Labour Monthly* for twenty years is a feat no less remarkable. The fact that its circulation runs into five figures, making it a lucrative vehicle of advertisement for books and other articles appealing to its special clientèle (if only advertisers could escape from their well-worn grooves), is part of the prodigy; for I have never seen the *Labour Monthly* exhibited for sale on a bookstall or otherwise pushed on the public. The five figures seem insignificant contrasted with a population figure of forty millions; but if you subtract from the forty millions the children, the aged, the adults old enough to be hopelessly set in their opinions, the people who get along with their fathers' politics and think what their Party newspaper

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\*Quoted in *Pravda* on his eightieth birthday, and reprinted in the *Daily Worker* on July 29, 1936.

tells them to think, the mental defectives who may be classed politically as idiots and could not understand a line of the *Labour Monthly* if the wind blew it into their hands, leaving only, say, five per cent. of the population between 16 and 30 years old (for on these alone can the *Labour Monthly* produce any considerable effect), and you will see the five figures in quite a different light, and understand why a propaganda that counts so few disciples can produce Renaissance, Reformations and Revolutions.

In the same message, after detailing the Decline and Fall of the Labour Party from the early hopes placed in it to the subsequent surrender of its leadership to capitalism, he added with kindly exaggeration:

When the Plan of Campaign for Labour thus killed the Socialist revival of the eighties, to which I belonged, the *Labour Monthly* stepped in and kept the red flag flying whilst the Labour Party was waving a tattered old Union Jack. That is why I congratulate it heartily on its twentieth birthday.

With respect and affection the *Labour Monthly* lowers its flag in honour of a pioneer and a veteran, who raised the red flag three-quarters of a century ago, travelled a long road between, with many by-paths, but throughout, according to his lights, held aloft the red flag, and above all in his final years, when so many of his former colleagues ran away and joined the enemy, 'kept the red flag flying'.

\* \* \* \*

'If the world goes along the old path, I shall have to leave this world with sorrow'. Shaw spoke these words in the Soviet Union in 1931, when he greeted with joy the victory of socialism in Russia, foresaw its victory over the rest of the world, and proclaimed that 'the future lies with Lenin and Stalin'. The aged traveller, in his seventy-fifth year, still looked forward with eager impatience to the victory of the world socialist revolution, and felt keen 'sorrow' if he should not live to see it. The change that Shaw looked forward to in Britain and the Western world did not yet take place in the nineteen years of life that were left to him. Many cruel ordeals had still to be passed through, and have still to be passed through by the world. But changes enough have taken place in those nineteen years to show unerringly the path of the future, as one third of humanity has moved over to the leadership of Communism. Shaw did not need to die sorrowful. 'The future lies with Lenin and Stalin'.

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Shaw was an artist. He should not be judged primarily as a thinker, despite his prodigious mental energy and vigour. All the

contradictions in the world can be found jostling one another in the ocean of his output. Greatness and pettiness of ideas rubbed shoulders, all illumined and immortalised in the alembic of a transcendent style and wit. He was a Marxist and an anti-Marxist, a revolutionary and a reformist, a Fabian and a despiser of Fabianism, a Communist and a crusader against super-tax. Only the dull would seek to construct an abstract intellectual system out of the myriad crossing strands and currents, of Ibsen and Marx, of Henry George and Jevons, of Nietzsche and Samuel Butler, of Lamarck and Bergson (but not of Freud—he never fell for that), of Plato and Thomas Aquinas, that weaved and interweaved and were transformed in the furnace of his thought and his imagination.

Therefore the theatre provided his best medium. His Plays will outlive his Prefaces. Through the creatures of his imagination he laid bare with unequalled power and human insight, with comic inspiration hovering on the tragic, all the contradictions of modern society, even where he could not provide the solution. His plays have been called plays 'only' of talk, of discussion, of debate. It is true that some of his plays, especially the later plays, correspond in considerable part to this description. It is true also that he was a superb debater and pamphleteer. But through all his most memorable plays, and above all through the plays of his greatest period before 1914 and *Heartbreak House*, it is his creative genius as an artist, his broad humanity which expressed itself equally in his life and in his every utterance, his human sympathy and imagination, and his concern with the fate of humanity, that gives to them their power. He loved human beings. Therefore he was a socialist.

Beneath all the superficial contradictions and vagaries of his theories and day-to-day politics, his integrity as an artist, an integrity based on his broad humanity and social feeling, never wavered and never weakened.

He hated capitalist society. He hated all shams, cant, humbug, hypocrisy, servility, pompousness, cruelty, self-glorification, everything that debased mankind. He delighted to tear down all the polite fictions that concealed the rotting scrofulous ulcers of class oppression, parasitism and degradation. He exposed capitalist society with a passionate intensity that has never been equalled by any writer of English.

Modern English polite society, my native sphere, seems to me as corrupt as consciousness of culture and absence of honesty can make it. A canting, lie-loving, fact-hating, scribbling, chattering, wealth-hunting, pleasure-hunting, celebrity-hunting mob, that, having lost the fear of hell,

and not replaced it by the love of justice, cares for nothing but the lion's share of the wealth wrung by threat of starvation from the hands of the classes that create it.

And in one agonising sentence in his *Revolutionist's Handbook* he reveals alike the intensity of his feeling and the weakness of his intellectual construction.

The world will not bear thinking of to those who know what it is.

He loved socialism. He worked for socialism. He slaved for socialism. He devoted all his mighty powers to the tireless propagation of socialism. There was no drudgery too petty that he would not undertake to help the cause of socialism or to help socialists.

\* \* \* \*

There is another element which must be borne in mind to sift the gold from the husks and chaff of the prodigal exuberance of his utterance, from which the pigmies can draw at pleasure to prove a pettifogging case, blacken greatness or seek to diminish the stature of the man.

Here a trifling personal record from thirty-one years ago may be forgiven, because it helped the present writer to illumine understanding and learn a certain tolerance.

It was in 1919, on the day when the Treaty of Versailles was published. Walking with Shaw, I asked him his opinion of it. He said: 'The Germans are prodigiously lucky; they are freed from the burden of armaments, and will forge ahead commercially, while we shall be ruined with an intolerable arms expenditure'. With all the impetuous crudity of youth I set out to teach my grandfather the elements of politics and declared: 'That may be witty, but it is not true', and argued that the Versailles Treaty placed heavy burdens upon the German nation, against which they would sooner or later revolt. Shaw looked at me compassionately, as at a neophyte, and said: 'That may be true, but it is not witty; and if you only speak the truth in England, however brilliantly, nobody will listen to you; you will be ignored'. He then proceeded to read me a long lecture of avuncular advice. He explained from his own experience that a young socialist writer must choose between two alternatives: either to write the truth to his own satisfaction in a few minute journals of infinitesimal circulation for a handful of an audience who would all violently disagree with you and abuse you for your pains; or to reach out to the millions by mixing up the truth with a fantastic amount of nonsense and conventional fictions, which would enable them to swallow the truth without knowing it. I remember that I

obstinately answered back that there was in my opinion a third alternative: to tell the truth and also to reach the masses, that the Marxists in a certain number of countries had already solved this, and that, although it was more difficult in England, we should eventually solve it here also.

This episode has always remained in my memory, when confronted with some of the more absurd and exasperating of Shaw's occasional utterances which might at any moment erupt from him. Not all that bore the signature of Shaw reflected the true mettle of the man. Much that he wrote may be happily forgotten. It is necessary to separate the grain from the chaff, the pure gold from an inordinate amount of dross.

But this episode also threw a light on his weakness, no less than on his strength. His strength was that, armed with the dazzling rapier of his incomparable style and wit, he consciously set out to reach the many-millioned public through all the clogged channels of publicity of imperialist Britain, and used without stint all the powers of his genius to awaken them from their slumbers ('I should always write on the assumption', he advised in the *Labour Monthly* of July, 1941, 'that the English are brain-lazy, fatheaded and politically ignorant in the lump'), and to inculcate a sane, civilised socialist outlook. He brilliantly accomplished this task, as much as any one man could accomplish it. He transformed the ideas of politics into the language of life. Challenging capitalism to single combat in a world of capitalist publicity, he reached the top levels of public showmanship, so that the very avenues of capitalist publicity became his highroad—except for his most serious utterances.

But he had also to pay a price. The truths in Shaw always come forth in a twisted shape. The Shakespearean King's Fool could say so much, but not more; and the agony in his heart remains finally unresolved. Fighting alone in splendid isolation, with no contact with the mass movement, and with no confidence in the masses, he could only be a lonely preacher, an iconoclast, a heretic—never a leader. The bitterness breaks out from him in an occasional outcry, as in the Preface to *Major Barbara*:

I, who have preached and pamphleteered like any Encyclopædist, have to confess that my methods are no use.

This sense of impotence of idealist isolation became more and more underlined in later years, as the victory of the realists, of the Marxists, of the mass movement which he had denied and despised, was demonstrated with the Russian Revolution and with the whole

course of world history. His heart leaped out to them in their victory; his mental construction had led him along a different path.

The evil went deeper than the sense of individualist helplessness before the ruling powers of Mammon, of the Undershafths and the Horseback Halls, even while he exposed without mercy their bankruptcy. It twisted his philosophy. Fighting in isolation, he had to make terms with his adversary, even while he fought him. The final conclusion is always missing in Shaw. The ruthless revolutionary diagnosis and analysis leads to no conclusion, because the only conclusion would be action, the action of the masses, and this Shaw had renounced from the outset as impossible. The soaring revolutionary analysis ends in a lame and impotent Fabian conclusion. The rocket of his thought shoots up into the sky to illuminate and dazzle the whole landscape and finally descends as a Fabian Blue Book or a Sub-Committee's Minority Report for Administrative Reform. The mental construction of the Fabian chokes and clouds the revolutionary insight of the artist. This is the conflict which Alick West has brilliantly analysed, on the basis of the novels and plays, in his recently published study, *A Good Man Fallen Among Fabians*.

\* \* \* \*

Shaw derived his Socialism from Marx. He became a Socialist by reading Marx's *Capital*. He wrote:

Marx opened my eyes to the facts of history and civilisation, gave me an entirely fresh conception of the universe, provided me with a purpose and a mission in life.

And again in 1943:

There are now only two orders of statesmen: the pre-Marx fossils and the post-Marx live wires. (*Daily Herald*, March 10, 1943.)

He loved to proclaim himself a Marxist and a Communist, even while he freely mocked at Marxists and Communists, and displayed a most monumental innocence of what Marx wrote.

But it was the artist in Shaw which responded to the artist in Marx, to the mighty power and passion of the Titan and the Prometheus, to the immortal style of Marx, the encyclopædic knowledge, the sweeping vision which illumined the whole panorama of history and human existence. Shaw wrote to Hyndman in 1900:

I find Marx as old as Amos—*Das Kapital* a wrathful Old Testament (with New Blue Books) and nothing else.

The science of Marx was a closed book to Shaw. Shaw knew no science of history, of classes, of economics, of the strategy and

tactics of class warfare; he knew only heroes and the helpless ignorant duped masses; patient all-wise Cæsars and many-headed fools; prophets and scoundrels; rulers and rebels; artists and philistines; Fabians and romantic impossibilists; heaven and hell. Even the Russian Revolution was only comprehensible to him in terms of Lenin. The triumph of Socialism in Russia meant for him Stalin.

Without the firm foundation of materialist dialectics there can be no theory, but only ethical passion, empirical discovery and the scintillating play of ideas. Without the firm foundation of materialist economics, there can be no social theory and no navigation in the shoals and currents of the modern world.

Shaw boggled at the first schoolboy's elementary conundrum over the theory of value, gave up the attempt to think a little further and master the key which unlocked the secrets of the laws of locomotion of capitalist society, and preferred to settle down with the tenth rate platitudinous commonplaces of a Jevons or a Marshall, without realising that he had thereby theoretically capitulated to the capitalism which his emotions detested. He looked at the visible picture of the working class movement in late nineteenth century England, and wrote off the working class as incapable of playing any rôle. He looked at the little socialist sects and wrote off the conception of a socialist revolution as a romantic illusion. He retired into the dismal company of educated English ladies and gentlemen, horrified and repelled equally by what he saw there, but unable to conceive any alternative. In the intervals of dreary Fabian pettifogging, which he mistook for political activity, he sought relief from its horrors in mystical stimulants, which left him at the mercy of every vitalist charlatan and god-building religious mania, until he died in the arms (metaphorically speaking, let us hasten to add) of Lady Astor babbling to him of Mrs. Eddy.

\* \* \* \*

But his heart remained true to the dreams of the socialist revolution, which his head rejected. If he abandoned the conception of the socialist revolution as an illusion, until 1917 began to open his eyes, he abandoned it, not with the self-satisfaction of the renegade, but with the tears of one disinherited. Again and again his revolutionary desire beat against the stifling limitations of his narrow empirical Fabian theoretical equipment.

In the very first Fabian Manifesto which he wrote in 1884 (the famous Tract No. 2, which was withdrawn) he concluded:

That we had rather face a Civil War than such another century of suffering as the present one has been.

In 1904 he wrote to protest against the notion 'that there are two courses open to us: Parliamentary action and physical force, each of which excludes the other', and continued:

This is not so. Parliamentary action is usually the first stage of civil war.

It is of course possible that capitalism will go under without a fight but I should regard any statesman who calculated on that as an extremely sanguine man.

The mistake made by our wildcat barricaders is not in believing that the revolution will be effected by force, but in putting the fighting at the wrong end of the process. (*Clarion*, October, 1904.)

'The bitter tragedy of Shaw's life', commented T. A. Jackson recently in quoting this passage, 'is that these wise words (which could be matched over and over again by equivalent citations from Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin) were nullified by his verbalisings against Marx and Marxism, which helped to exalt these 'extremely sanguine men' into the official leadership of Labour-Socialism in Britain'.

In 1914, after the outbreak of the first world war, Shaw wrote:

No doubt the heroic remedy . . . is that both armies should shoot their officers and go home to gather in their harvests in the villages and make revolutions in the towns.

For a momentary flash of insight the Leninist slogan of 'Transform the imperialist war into civil war' sprang to life independently in the imagination of Shaw. But it remained a fantasy, a 'heroic remedy' to be mentioned in a literary exercise and abandoned, not a political directive. It was beyond the bounds of his horizon that it could ever be fulfilled in practice, still less that a revolutionary mass party of a new type, unknown to Clements' Inn and Tothill Street, was already working patiently, consistently and with final success to fulfil it.

Prior to 1917 he still remained helplessly bound in the shackles of the impotent conclusion of his unfortunately named *Revolutionist's Handbook*:

Are we then to repudiate Fabian methods, and return to those of the barricader, or adopt those of the dynamitard and the assassin? On the contrary, we are to recognise that both are fundamentally futile.

\* \* \* \*

The Russian Revolution saved Shaw and finally resolved his contradiction. From the outset Shaw welcomed the Bolshevik

Revolution. When others turned aside, and even a Kautsky, for all his previous pompous pedantry of Marxism, turned to denunciation, Shaw, the old Fabian, testified to the sterling truth that was in him, and declared with magnificent simplicity:

We are Socialists. The Russian side is our side.

He loved to boast that

the two old hyperfabian Fabians, Webb and Shaw, have stuck to their guns like Fox (in his support of the French Revolution), whilst the sentimental Socialists have been bolting in all directions from Stalin, screaming like St. Peter, 'I know not the man'.

Yes; the Old Fabian leaders, the Webbs and Shaw—in contrast to the pitiful younger progeny of Fabianism today—redeemed themselves in their last years by their open support of Bolshevism and the Russian Revolution after its triumph had been achieved.

Shaw, like the Webbs, was no theorist. They reached to the Russian Revolution, and to the final recognition of its democratic and socialist achievement, by the traditional English empirical road. They could not foresee theoretically the possibility of a serious Marxist revolutionary party (they still to the last pooh-pooed it in the countries where it had not yet won power) or of a successful socialist revolution; they had long ago dismissed such a conception as romantic fiddlesticks. But once the solid achievement was there, they had the courage and the honesty to recognise it publicly, and to build all their later thinking upon it, even though it upset all their previous conceptions. Therein lay their greatness.

Even as late as 1928, in his *Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism and Capitalism*, Shaw was still retailing the conventional newspaper nonsense about the failure of socialism in Russia and the return to capitalism.

But in 1931 Shaw went to the Soviet Union and met Stalin ('I never met a man who could talk so well'). Thereafter the change came. Shaw may have been no theorist to understand Bolshevik theory, but he was a sensitive, perceptive, imaginative, sharp-witted artist to respond to human reality. He was an honourable socialist to respond to socialism. He was an honest man with the quality of greatness. The visit to the Soviet Union in 1931 was the turning point (and it was after that visit that Shaw guided also the Webbs, fresh from the bitter disillusionment of the Second Labour Government, to turn to the Socialist Union for the solution). He came. He saw. Bolshevism conquered.

Shaw stuck his colours to the mast. He stood by the Soviet Union.

He never wavered. Even in the critical testing time of 1939-40, when all the rats ran to cover, Shaw stood by Stalin and the Soviet Union. For that he was never forgiven.

\* \* \* \*

In vain all the sycophants of the existing order seek to conceal, pass over in silence, deny or distort the deep significance of the conversion of Shaw and the Webbs to Soviet Communism in their final phase, and to treat it as a regrettable vagary of ageing years. They seek to vilify Shaw's support of Soviet Communism as a worship of dictatorship, and to spread the legend that he was equally enthusiastic for Fascism as for Communism. This is false. It was not Shaw, but the Leader of the Labour Party, Lansbury, who made the pilgrimage to Hitler. Shaw may have let loose plenty of squibs in gay exuberance. But he understood very well that Fascism was merely a variant form of the Monopoly Capitalism which rules in Britain or the United States, and equally bankrupt. He wrote in 1937 (in the *American Story* magazine for October, 1937):

We have only to compare the development of Russia since the slump of 1929 with the utmost that fascism has been able to accomplish in double that period to see that fascism is subject to all the limitations and vices of capitalism, and can no more save civilisation than it could save all the earlier civilisations it has wrecked.

And again:

There is no remedy in fascism, but there is in Communism, and Communism is precisely what fascism teaches to abhor.

Shaw's support of the Soviet Union and Communism in his final years was based on full economic, political, moral and intellectual conviction. He wrote in December, 1937:

Russia is an example to all the world of the enormous superiority of Socialism to capitalism, economically, socially and politically.

He welcomed in the Soviet Union the triumph of real freedom on the indispensable basis of Socialism:

The Russian statesmen have discovered that in a really free country—that is to say, a country which belongs to its people, and in which any group of public-spirited and able men can organise any public service they like without running to Parliament for Private Bills or paying monstrous sums to landlords and lawyers—the response to this freedom is so far greater than could have been conceived without practical demonstration that Russia has been able to effect social transformations in ten years that under our system would take a hundred.

(*Stalin-Wells Talk*, 'New Statesman and Nation', December, 1934.)

And Stalin he described sixteen years ago as a statesman of unique experience compared to whom the rulers of the Western Powers, hanging on to an automatic and evil system with an equipment of empty phrases, fictitious histories and obsolete routines, seem like rows of rickety figures in a worn-out waxworks.

He recognised without hesitation, after his visit to the Soviet Union, the failure and bankruptcy of the ideas and methods of Fabianism and Labour Party Reformism in England ('Fabian Socialism has been an ignominious flop in England', *Daily Herald*, March 10, 1943)—even though he mischievously tried to claim in recompense that his 'Fabian' ideas had triumphed in Russia.

The supposed conversion of Britain to constitutional Socialism by the Fabian Society made even less change than the conversion of the Roman Empire to Christianity by Constantine.

(*Everybody's Political What's What*, 1944, p. 262.)

He recognised that William Morris, the revolutionary Marxist, had been proved right by the event against Fabianism and the Labour Party Reformists:

The truth is that though Morris died long before the foundation of the Labour Party, and its acceptance as the official Opposition and finally as the Government under a Socialist Prime Minister, had brought the Fabian policy to the test of experience and smashed it, Morris knew by instinct that the Westminster Parliament would sterilise the socialists, corrupt or seduce them, and change them from intransigent revolutionists into intriguers for Cabinet rank as Yesmen and bunk merchants in the service of the governing class, claiming all the time to represent the interests of the proletariat.

(Reply to Hesketh Pearson on the relations of William Morris and Fabianism, in Hesketh Pearson's *Bernard Shaw*, 1942, p. 96.)

He castigated without mercy the Labour Party reformist and imperialist leadership, and the successive Labour Governments, until by the time of the present disastrous Attlee Labour Government he was even writing in the *Daily Herald* of May 13, 1948:

Our Labour Front Bench oratory is reaching a point at which it will be impossible for any Socialist who knows what he or she is talking about to endorse it, or even to remain in the Labour Party.

In the same article he uttered a sentiment of timely significance for the Sheffield Peace Congress:

The Church of England has just betrayed Christianity by giving the atomic bomb its blessing.

\* \* \* \*

And in one of his last press interviews, in *Reynold's News* of August 6, 1950, he replied to the question: 'Are you a Communist, Mr. Shaw?':



Yes, of course I am. A war on communism is ignorant, blazing nonsense. . . The future is to the country which carries communism farthest and fastest.

In the same interview he exposed the war of Western aggression against Korea and referred to

. . . the so-called United Nations disunitedly making war on North Korea in support of South Korea, and calling it a war on communism as a transparent disguise for a war on Russia.

\* \* \* \*

Yes, Shaw remained a fighter to the end. In moments of crisis, at the outbreak of war in 1914, and again in 1939, he had the courage to take an unpopular stand. For this he earned the hatred of the authorities, which they tried vainly to conceal in the later years behind their efforts to canonise him.

We salute in Shaw a great humanist and a great artist, a true fighter in the liberation struggle of humanity, a pioneer of socialist and communist ideas, the man whom Maxim Gorki acclaimed as 'one of the most courageous thinkers in Europe'.

November 11, 1950.

R.P.D.

## THE DICTATORSHIP OF THE PROLETARIAT

BERNARD SHAW

THE proletariat is the vast body of persons who have no other means of living except their labor.

A dictatorship is the office of an individual whom the people, made desperate by the absence of government, and unable to govern themselves, have invited or allowed to dictate a political constitution for their country, and control its administration, and who has the necessary will and conscience to use that power from his own point of view, to the complete disfranchisement of every hostile point of view. At present the term is extended from an individual to an oligarchy formed of an energetic minority of political doctrinaires. Where the doctrine is that the point of view must be that of the proletariat, and that the proprietariat (the people who live by owning instead of by working) must be disfranchised, expropriated, and in fact exterminated (by conversion or slaughter), then we call such an oligarchy, or allow it to call itself, the Dictatorship of the Proletariat.

As the proletariat is necessarily always in an overwhelming majority in modern industrial States, and cannot be finally and physically coerced except by itself, nothing can stand long between it and such a dictatorship but its own refusal to support it. The proletariat is not oppressed because its oppressors despise it and mistrust it, but because it despises and mistrusts itself. The proletariat is not robbed by persons whom it regards as thieves, but by persons whom it respects and privileges as specially honorable, and whom it would itself rob with the entire approval of its conscience if their positions were reversed. When it falls on itself and slaughters itself in heaps, tearing down its own cities, wrecking its own churches, blowing its own children to fragments, or leaving them to starve in millions, it does so, not because diplomatists and generals have any power in themselves to force it to commit such atrocities, but because it thinks it is behaving heroically and patriotically instead of suicidally. It obeys its rulers, and compels malcontents to submit to them, because its conscience is the same as that of its rulers.

As long as this sympathy exists between the proletariat and its rulers, no extension of the franchise will produce any change, much less that aimed at by the so-called Dictatorship of the Proletariat. On the contrary, adult suffrage will make all change impossible. Revolutionary changes are usually the work of autocrats. Peter the Great, personally a frightful blackguard who would have been tortured to death if he had been a peasant or a laborer, was able to make radical changes in the condition of Russia. Cromwell turned the realm of England into a Republican Commonwealth sword in hand after throwing his parliamentary opponents neck and crop into the street, a method copied by Bismarck two centuries later. Richelieu reduced the powerful and turbulent feudal barons of old France to the condition of mere court flunkies without consulting the proletariat. A modern democratic electorate would have swept all three out of power and replaced them by men who, even if they had wanted to, would not have dared to suggest any vital change in the established social order. Napoleon, because his mandate was revolutionary, was much more afraid of the French people than of the armies of the Old Order. There was a good deal of truth in the contention of the early French Syndicalists that aggrieved sections of the people had more power of obtaining redress under the old autocratic form of government, when they could interfere in politics only as a riotous mob, than under modern democratic parliamentary forms, when they interfere only as voters, mostly on the wrong side.

Accordingly, a real dictatorship of the proletariat cannot be advocated as leading necessarily to better results than the present dictatorship of the Proprietariat. It might easily lead to worse. It would almost certainly do so in certain respects at first. It is advocated because certain changes which Socialists desire to bring about cannot be effected whilst the Proprietors, politically called the Capitalists, are predominant, and could not be maintained unless the Proletariat were permanently predominant. Consequently we have on the one hand the fear that the proletariat in power would play the very devil with the whole business of the country and provoke a reaction into oligarchy or Napoleonism, and, on the other, the belief that Capitalism will wreck civilization, as it has often done before, unless it can be forced to give way to Communism.

Fundamentally it is a question of conscience. So long as the average Englishman holds it to be self-evident, not that he has a

natural right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, but that Lord Curzon is a superior being, and Nicolas Lenin a dirty scoundrel and no gentleman—so long as an ordinary British coroner's jury can be depended on to bring in a verdict expressly and gratuitously exonerating the prison authorities from all blame when they admittedly kill a Conscientious Objector by forcing food into his lungs under pretence of feeding him, so long will the political power of the proletariat, whether it come to them as the spoil of a revolution, or be thrown to them by their masters as a move in the parliamentary game, do nothing to change the existing system except by lopping off from it the few safeguards against tyranny won by energetic minorities in the past.

It follows that the task of the advocates of a change-over to Socialism, whether they call themselves Labor leaders, Socialists, Communists, Bolsheviks, or what not, is to create a Socialist conscience. (The task of the Capitalist and Imperialist is much easier: it is simply to trade on a conscience that already exists, and feed it by suitable incitements administered to children in nursery and school lessons, and to adults in newspapers and speeches.) And when this task is accomplished, there is still the very arduous one of devising a new constitution to carry out the new ethic of the new conscience. For there is all the difference in the world between driving an old locomotive (a Government is essentially a locomotive) and inventing and constructing an aeroplane. And there is the same difference between operating the established Capitalist system, and devising, setting up, and administering the political, legal, and industrial machinery proper to Socialism. Until this is done, no admission of Labor leaders, Socialists, Communists, or Bolsheviks into Parliament or even into the Cabinet can establish Socialism or abolish Capitalism. Mr. Henderson and Mr. Clynes may be just as anti-capitalist as Messrs. Trotsky and Lenin; but they can no more make our political machine produce Socialism than they can make a sewing machine produce fried eggs. It was not made for that purpose, and those who work it, though they may stand out for better wages and treatment for the workers, and perhaps get them, are still working the Capitalist machine, which will not produce anything else but Capitalism. The notion that we have in the British constitution a wonderful contrivance, infinitely adaptable to every variation in the temper of the British people, is a delusion. You might as well say that the feudal system was an

exquisite contrivance adaptable to the subtlest nuances of the cotton exchange of Manchester.

What, exactly, does making a new constitution mean? It means altering the conditions on which men are permitted to live in society. When the alteration reverses the relation between the governing class and the governed, it is a revolution. Its advocates must therefore, if they succeed, undertake the government of the country under the new conditions, or make way for men who will and can. The new rulers will then be faced with a responsibility from which all humane men recoil with intense repugnance and dread. Not only must they, like all rulers, order the killing of their fellow creatures on certain provocations; but they must determine afresh what those provocations are to be. Further, they have to see that in every school a morality shall be inculcated which will reconcile the consciences of their executive officers to the carrying out of such grim orders. That is why reformers cling so desperately to gradual modifications of existing systems rather than face revolutionary changes. It is quite easy to sign a death warrant or order the troops to fire on the mob as part of an old-established routine as to which there is no controversy, and for which the doomsday has no personal responsibility. But to take a man and kill him for something a man has never been killed for before; nay, for which he has been honored and idolized before, or to fire on a body of men for exercising rights which have for centuries been regarded as the most sacred guarantees of popular liberty: that is a new departure that calls for iron nerve and fanatical conviction. As a matter of fact it cannot become a permanently established and unquestioned part of public order unless and until the conscience of the people has been so changed that the conduct they formerly admired seems criminal, and the rights they formerly exercised seem monstrous.

There are several points at which Socialism involves this revolutionary change in our constitution; but I need only deal with the fundamental one which would carry all the rest with it. That one is the ruthless extirpation of parasitic idleness. Compulsory labor, with death as the final penalty (as curtly stipulated by St. Paul), is the keystone of Socialism. 'If a man will not work, neither shall he eat' is now evasively interpreted as 'If a man has no money to buy food with, let him starve'. But a Socialist State would make a millionaire work without the slightest regard to his money exactly as our late war tribunals made him fight. To clear our minds on

this point, we must get down to the common morality of Socialism, which, like all common moralities, must be founded on a religion: that is, on a common belief binding all men together through their instinctive acceptance of the fundamental dogma that we must at all costs not only keep the world going but increase our power and our knowledge in spite of the demonstration (any Rationalist can make it) that the game, as far as the individual is concerned, is not worth the candle except for its own sake.

What, then, is the common morality of Socialism? Let us begin with the unquestionable facts on which it is based. The moment a child is conceived, it begins to exploit its mother, and indirectly the community which feeds its mother (to exploit people meaning to live parasitically on them). It is absolutely necessary to the existence of the community that this exploitation be not only permitted, but encouraged by making the support of the child as generous as possible. The child is in due time born; after which for several years it has to be fed, clothed, lodged, minded, educated and so forth on credit. Consequently, when the child grows up to productive capacity, it is inevitably in debt for all it has consumed from the moment of its conception; and a Socialist State would present it with the bill accordingly. It would then have not only to support itself by its productive work, but to produce a sinking fund by which its debt would finally be liquidated. But age has its debt as well as youth; and this must be provided for beforehand. The producer must therefore during his working years pay off the debt of his nonage; pay his way as he goes; and provide for his retirement when he is past work, or at whatever earlier age the community may be able to release him.

Now these are not new facts: they are natural necessities, and cannot be changed by Capitalism, Communism, Anarchism or any other ism. What can be changed, and drastically changed, is the common morality of the community concerning them.

The Socialist morality on the subject is quite simple. It regards the man who evades his debt to the community, which is really his debt to Nature, as a sneak thief to be disfranchised, disowned, disbanded, unfrocked, cashiered, struck off the registers, and, since he cannot, as Shakespear suggested in the case of Parolles, be transported to some island where there were women that had suffered as much shame as he, that he might begin an impudent nation (for Socialists do not desire to begin impudent nations, but to end them) subjected to all the penalties of a criminal and all the disabilities

of a bankrupt. Every child in a Socialist State would be taught from its earliest understanding to feel a far deeper horror of a social parasite than anyone can now pretend to feel for the outcasts of the Capitalist system. There would be no concealment of the fact that the parasite inflicts on the community exactly the same injury as the burglar and pickpocket, and that only in a community where the laws were made by parasites for parasites would any form of parasitism be privileged.

Our Capitalist morality is flatly contrary. It does not regard the burden of labor as a debt of honour, but as a disgracefully vulgar necessity which everyone is justified in evading if he can, its ideal of the happy and honorable career being a life freed from all obligation and provided gratuitously with every luxury. In its language, success means success in attaining this condition, and failure a life of labor. This grotesque view is made practicable by the fact that labor is so productive that a laborer can not only pay the debt of his childhood, meet the expenses of his prime, and provide for his old age, but also support other persons in complete unproductiveness. If nine men combine to do this, they can support a tenth in outrageous waste and extravagance; and the more poorly the nine live, short of disabling themselves as producers, the richer the tenth man will be. All slave systems are founded on this fact, and have for their object the compulsion of nine-tenths of the population to maintain the 'upper ten' by producing as much as possible, and allowing themselves to be despoiled of everything they produce over and above what is needed to support and reproduce themselves on the cheapest scale compatible with their efficiency.

The two moralities have only to be plainly stated to make it clear that a change from one to the other must be revolutionary. The Capitalist system admits of so much apparent progress that superficial thinkers easily persuade themselves that it will finally progress into Socialism; but it can never do so without making a complete *volte face*. Slavery is always improving itself as a system. It begins by working its slaves to premature death. Then it finds out that badly treated slaves do not, except when they are so plentiful that they can be replaced very cheaply, produce so much booty for their masters as well-treated ones. Accordingly, much humanitarian progress is effected. Later, when modern industrial methods of exploitation are discovered and developed competitively, it is found that continuous employment under the same master cannot be

provided for the slave. When this point is reached the master wants to be free to get rid of the slave when he has no work for him to do, and to pick him up again when trade revives, besides having no responsibility for him when he is old and not worth employing. Immediately a fervent enthusiasm for liberty pervades the Capitalist State, and after an agitation consecrated by the loftiest strains of poetry and the most splendid eloquence of rhetoric, the slave is set free to hire himself out to anyone who wants him; to starve when nobody wants him; to die in the workhouse; and to be told that it is all his own fault. When it is presently discovered that this triumph of progress has been, in fact, a retrogression, the Progressive reformers are again set to work to mitigate its worst effects by Factory Acts, Old-Age Pensions, Insurance against Unemployment ('ninepence for fourpence'), Wages Boards, Whitley Councils, and what not, all producing the impression that 'we live in a progressive age'. But this progress is only allowed whilst the workers are gaining in efficiency as slaves, and their masters consequently gaining in riches as exploiters.

A further comparison of the two moralities will shew that whereas the Socialist morality is fit for publication, the Capitalist morality is so questionable that every possible device has to be employed to reconcile the workers to it by disguising its real nature. As a reasoned system it has never been tolerated by public opinion. Although it has been set forth with perfect frankness by a succession of able political economists and professors of jurisprudence, notably (in point of uncompromising lucidity) by De Quincey and Austin, and justified as on the whole the best system human nature is capable of, the only effect has been to make 'political economy', as the demonstration was called, abhorred. The Capitalist system has not been preserved by its merits as an economic system, but by a systematic glorification and idolization of the rich, and a vilification and debasement of the poor. Yet as it gives to every poor man a gambling chance, at odds of a million to one or thereabouts, of becoming a rich one (as Napoleon said, the careers are open to the talents, and every soldier has a field marshal's baton in his knapsack), no one is condemned by it to utter despair. In England especially, where the system of primogeniture, and the descent of the younger son into the commonalty with a family standard of expenditure so far beyond his income that his progeny follow him rapidly into chronic pecuniary embarrassment and finally into wretched poverty, a sense of belonging to the privileged

class is to be found in all ranks; and a docker who does not regard himself as a gentleman under a cloud rather than as one of the proletariat is likely to be a man with too little self-respect to be of any use as a revolutionary recruit. Ferocious laws are made against those who steal in any but the legalised Capitalist way; so that though a woman may have the produce of sixteen hours of her work sold for ten shillings and receive only a shilling of it, and no man may buy anything without paying in addition to its cost of production a tribute for the landlord and capitalist, yet any attempt on the part of the proletarian to perform an operation of the same character on a proprietor is suppressed by the prison, the lash, the rifle, the gallows, and the whole moral armory of ostracism and loss of reputation and employment.

But it is not by its hypocrisies and its coercions, potent as these are, that Capitalism retains its main grip on the proletariat. After all, few of the hypocrisies impose on those who do not wish to be imposed on by them; and the coercions are applied by the proletarians themselves. The really effective lure is the defiance of Nature in the name of liberty: the apparent freedom to be idle. It is useless to demonstrate that no such freedom is possible for all: that if Adolphus survives in idleness, Bill and Jack and the rest must be doing his share and having their liberty correspondingly curtailed. What does that matter to Adolphus? And who does not hope to be Adolphus, if only for a day or a week occasionally? The moment Socialism comes to the point and hints at compulsory industrial and civil service for all, the difference between Dean Inge and the Labor Party vanishes: they will stand anything, even Capitalism at its worst, rather than give up the right to down tools and amuse themselves at any moment. Thus their devotion to liberty keeps them in slavery; and after the most formidable combinations to better their conditions they go back to defeat and drudgery under the unofficial but irresistible compulsion of starvation.

There is ghastly comedy in the fact that this right to idle which keeps the proletarians enslaved is cherished by them, not only as a privilege, but actually as a weapon. They call it the right to strike, and do not perceive that it is only a form of the right to commit suicide or to starve on their enemy's doorstep. This folly reaches its climax in the panacea of the general strike, the only sort of strike that could not possibly succeed even temporarily, because just in proportion to its completeness would be the suddenness and ignominy of its collapse. The ideal strike is a lightning strike of the

waiters in a fashionable restaurant, hurting nobody but the enemy, and putting him for the moment in a corner from which he will extricate himself by any reasonable sacrifice. A general strike is a general suicide. A Napoleon who proposed to take his commissariat out of the kitchens and throw them into the trenches would be sent to a lunatic asylum. But the French General Confederation of Labor, though torn by dissensions between Communists, Syndicalists, Trade Unionists and heaven knows what other Ists, is solid in adherence to an idiotic welter of phrases called the Charter of Amiens, out of which nothing intelligible emerges except the proclamation that the salvation of labor is to be achieved by the general strike.

A Socialist State would not tolerate such an attack on the community as a strike for a moment. If a Trade Union attempted such a thing, the old Capitalist law against Trade Unions as conspiracies would be re-enacted within twenty-four hours and put ruthlessly into execution. Such a monstrosity as the recent coal strike, during which the coal-miners spent all their savings in damaging their neighbors and wrecking national industries, would be impossible under Socialism. It was miserably defeated, as it deserved to be. But if it had been conducted from the Socialist point of view instead of from the Trade Union point of view (which is essentially a commercial point of view) the strike might have been worth while. In that case, the leaders of Labor in Parliament would simply have challenged the Government to stop the strike by introducing compulsory service, and promised to vote for it themselves. This would have at once put them right with public opinion, and effected an epoch-making advance in Labor policy. And it would have put the Government into a very difficult position. All the Coalitionists of the extreme right, understanding their own Capitalism as little as they understand Socialism, and having no other idea but to smash these damned Trade Unions and bring the working class to heel, would have rallied to the proposal with enthusiasm. But the Government would have seen, or would soon have been shewn, that if the right to strike—that is, the right to be idle—were abolished, the Capitalist system would go with it. It is one thing to take a coal-miner by the scruff of the neck and thrust him down a mine with an intimation that if he does not hew his regulation number of tons in the week he will be handled as the conscientious objectors were handled during the war. It is quite another to lay violent hands on the Honourable Reginald Highcastle and his friend Tommy Briggs,

the son of the Bradford wool millionaire, and yank them out of their hotel in Monte Carlo or their flat in St. James's in the same uncompromising manner, with no ladies to taunt them into consenting to the operation by presenting them with white feathers and calling them slackers. To exempt Reggie and Tommy, even if any satisfactory line could be drawn between them and their fellow creatures, would be a revolution of the proprietary classes against free contract and a return to open slavery. To conscribe them would be to attempt to carry on the Capitalist system without the lure that has hitherto persuaded its victims to tolerate it, and with its boasted Incentive to Labor side-tracked. In such a dilemma the Government, instead of encouraging the owners to fight, would probably have told them that they must settle with the men at any cost.

The opportunity was lost, and lost solely because Trade Unionism, instead of leading to the solution of the problem, led nowhere. As the leaders were either not willing to face compulsory service or were convinced that their followers would desert them at once if they hinted at such a thing, they had nothing to say except that the men objected to have their wages reduced. The coalowners replied that they could not and would not pay the same wages as before; and as the owners were in a position to starve the miners into submission, they did so, leaving Labor in a condition of humiliation and servitude, and Labor policy in a condition of exposed futility which has given Capitalism all the courage of success without giving Labor any of the courage of despair.

Labor won its way into Parliament as an independent party fifteen years ago; and its leaders made their way into the Cabinet. And this is the result. The Anarchists and Syndicalists smile, and say 'We told you so'. But they take care to add that however disillusioned they may be with Parliament and Government and Thrones and Churches and all the other superstitions of the bourgeoisie, they remain unalterably devoted to the Charter of Amiens and the general strike. Is it to be wondered at that prosaic men cry 'A plague on your rights and lefts, your Reds and Whites and pale pinks, your first and second and third Internationals, your phrases that only differ from Lloyd George's in being translated from foreign languages: we shall vote for the Anti-Waste candidate, whom we can at least understand, and who has not sold us yet'?

There is nothing more to be said at present. There is nothing more to be done until Labor recognises that there can be no life until the task imposed by Nature is performed, and no freedom

until the burden of that task is impartially distributed and sternly enforced. The debt to Nature must cease to be regarded as a commercial debt which one man can accept for another like a bill of exchange. It is a personal debt which must be defrayed by the individual who has incurred it. If he says 'My grandfather worked for six', the reply must be 'Then go one better than your grandfather, and work for seven. In that way the world will be the better for your having lived, as it is for your grandfather having lived; and you shall not undo the good he did by wasting it in idleness'. And as to the man who should say 'My grandfather owned for a thousand', it is difficult to say what could be done for so hopeless a fool except to lead him to the nearest wall and ask him to look carefully down the barrels of half-a-dozen levelled rifles and consider whether he seriously proposed to follow his grandfather's example. At all events that is something like what will happen to him if the so-called Dictatorship of the Proletariat ever becomes an accomplished fact here as it is in Russia.

With compulsory social service imposed on every one, the resistance to the other measures involved with Socialism would not only become pointless but injurious to the resisters. Just as a poor landlord is a bad landlord, and a poor employer the worst of employers, an embarrassed, imperfect, poorly financed, struggling Socialist State would make things far less pleasant for its members than a powerful and prosperous one. At present the position of a rich proprietor is by no means free from care: his servants, his houses, his investments, his tenants all worry him a good deal; but he puts up with it, partly because he can no more help his riches than a poor man can help his poverty, but largely, of course, because he has luxury and attendance and sports and fashionable society, and can, up to a certain point, do what he likes, even if what he likes is doing nothing. But if his servants were conscribed for social service, and himself with them, of what use to him would his title deeds and his share certificates be? The possibility of keeping a big establishment vanishes with the servants; and even if the State employed him to manage his own estate, as it probably would if he had managed it capably before and not handed it over to bailiffs, stewards, agents and solicitors, he would be no better off as its legal owner than as a Commissioner of Woods and Forests or any other state official of the managing grade. It would not be worth his while to offer a moment's resistance to the transfer of his property rights to the State: on the contrary, as the richer the State was the

larger would be the income to be distributed to its members, and the shorter that part of his life compulsorily devoted to its service, he would regard individual property rights as an attempt to fix on him responsibilities and duties from which his fellow-workers were happily exempt, without any equivalent advantage. Under such circumstances men would cling to and covet title, rank, renown and any sort of immaterial distinction, as well as cherished personal possessions; but they certainly would not cling to property; and as the Socialist State would be liberal in the matter of moral distinctions and the glorification of good citizenship, and would enable its citizens to multiply choice personal possessions, their ambition and acquisitiveness would have ample satisfaction. There would still be a privilege for gentility. A man overpaying his debt to Nature, and thereby making his country better by every hour of his activity, would be distinguished as a gentleman, being thus exactly the opposite of the so-called gentleman of Capitalism, who leaves his country poorer than he found it and is proud of the depredation.

Such a change as this, however little its full scope may be understood at first, is far too revolutionary to make itself effective by a simple majority of votes in a Parliamentary division under normal circumstances. The civil service would not administer it in good faith; the tribunals would not enforce it; the citizens would not obey it in the present state of the public conscience. The press would strain all its powers of comminatory rhetoric to make it infamous. Therefore, if circumstances remain normal, several years of explicit propaganda will be necessary to create even a nuclear social conscience in its favor, and the first step must be to convert the leaders of Labor and the official Socialists themselves. Trade Unionism must be turned inside out and must deny, instead of affirming, that right to idle and slack and ca'canny, which makes the social parasitism of the proprietariat legal. The 'weapon of the strike' must be discarded as the charter of the idle rich, who are on permanent strike, and are the real Weary Willies and able-bodied paupers of our society. The Marxists must cease their intolerable swallowings and regurgitations of Marxian phrases which they do not understand (not having read Marx), and cease boring and disgusting the public with orations at pompously quarrelsome Congresses ending in Amiens Charters calling for that quintessence of anti-Socialism the general strike. If they have nothing better than that to recommend, they had better go home to bed, where they will bore and mislead nobody but themselves. They must at last begin to tell the public precisely what Socialism means in practice.

But the circumstances may not remain normal. The proprietary class, when it sees that the normal course of events is leading to the abolition of property, can and will produce abnormal conditions favorable to itself by Catherine the Second's expedient of a little war to amuse the people. The Labor movement may itself upset the apple cart by further attempts at a general strike by Triple Alliances and the like. It is important to remember that it was in Russia, the most backward first class Power in Europe, that the ground was cleared for Communism, not by the Communists, but by the Imperialists, who in mere thriftless ignorance and incompetence, ditched their car, and left themselves at the mercy of an energetic section of Realist Communists, who no sooner took the country in hand than they were led by the irresistible logic of facts and of real responsibility, to compulsory social service on pain of death as the first condition not merely of Communism, but of bare survival. They shot men not only for shirking and slacking, but for drinking at their work. Now it is clear that in point of ignorance, incompetence, social myopia, class prejudice, and everything that can disqualify statesmen and wreck their countries, the sort of people who can get returned to Parliament at khaki elections in the west of Europe and in the United States of America can hold their own with anybody the Tsardom ever put into power in Russia. Capitalism is much stronger in the west than in Russia, where it was relatively undeveloped; but though it had not reached its climax there and was in its infancy, it has passed its climax here, and is getting unsteady on its feet of clay. It also may ditch its car, and leave the most capable realists to save the situation.

In that case, we may have the Dictatorship of the Proletariat in the sense in which the phrase is being used by the Russian Communist statesmen. To them dictatorship means overriding democracy. For example, though there are elected Soviets everywhere in Russia, and it sometimes happens that on some vital question the voting is 20 for the Government and 22 against it (the opposition consisting of Social Revolutionaries, Mensheviks, Syndicalists and other persons quite as abhorrent to the *Morning Post* as the reigning Communists), the Government does not thereupon say 'Your will be done: the voice of the majority is the voice of God'. It very promptly dissolves that Soviet, and intimates to its constituents that until they elect a preponderantly Bolshevik Soviet they shall have no Soviet at all. It may even treat the majority as rebels. The British democrat is scandalized by this; and even those who are too cynical

or indifferent to be scandalized say 'What is the use of having a Soviet at all under such conditions?' But the rulers of Russia reply that the use of it is that they know where they are. They find out from it how public opinion is tending, and what districts are backward and need to be educated. The British democrat, dazed, asks whether it is cricket to exclude the Opposition from the governing bodies. The Russian statesmen reply that they are fighting a class war, and that during a war an Opposition is the enemy. They are asked further whether they have any right to impose new institutions on their country until they have persuaded a majority of the inhabitants to demand it. They reply that if no political measure had ever been passed until the majority of the inhabitants understood it and demanded it, no political measure would ever have been passed at all. They add that any party, however revolutionary in theory, which refuses in a highminded manner to take any action until it is supported by a constitutional majority, is clearly led by *fainéants* (not to say cowards and incapables) who are making their democratic principles an excuse for keeping out of trouble.

Now I am not here concerned to refute or justify these retorts. I simply point out that they have been made and always will be made, by Governments when they are accused of acting without democratic constitutional mandates, or of excluding from the franchise persons and classes on whose support they cannot rely. If what is quite incorrectly called the class struggle (for a large section of the proletariat is as parasitic as its propertied employers, and will vote and fight for them) is brought to a head in England by the mismanagement of the Government or by some catastrophe beyond its control, let no one imagine that either side will have any more regard for democracy than the Russian Communists, the Irish Republican Army, the British occupation of Egypt, Dublin Castle, or any Government in time of war. The democrats, as in Europe, will be inert: they will hold meetings and denounce both combatants as tyrants and murderers; and both sides will imprison or kill them when they are too troublesome to be ignored. They will have to console themselves as best they may by the reflection that in the long run no Government can stand without a certain minimum of public approval, were it only a melancholy admission that all the available alternatives are worse.

It must not be supposed that Capitalism has any more advocates than Communism if an advocate means one who understands his case. People are accustomed to it; that is all; and so it has plenty of adherents. When Capitalism is forgotten, and people have become

accustomed to Communism, it, too, will have plenty of adherents. Meanwhile, the groups who do understand, and who desire the change with sufficient intensity to devote themselves to its accomplishment, will do what such men have always done: that is, strive for power to impose the realization of their desire on the world. But their craving will include a need for sympathy and countenance: there is little satisfaction in imposing what you conceive to be a millennial boon on the reluctant body of a neighbor who loathes you and your detested Communism. Until you can impose it on his soul by persuading him to desire it as ardently as you do yourself, you are not only not happy, but not secure. That is why the Russian Communists are insistent in their propaganda and inculcation of Communism, although the military forces and civil persecution which they employ against the counter-revolution are objectively undistinguishable from the forcible imposition of Communism on the bodies of their subjects, whether their subjects like it or not. Just as the English officer will tell you that if England gave back India to the Indians India would instantly be devastated by civil war ending in chaos, so the Red officers of Russia will tell you that if Russia were abandoned by the Bolsheviki to the hardfisted doers of the counter-revolution and the futile doctrinaire phrasemongers of the Constitutional Democrats, she would relapse into the Tsarism (so deeply regretted by the Grand Duchesses and Princesses in Constantinople and London), under which women spent years in dungeons for teaching children to read (lest they should read Marx), laborers lived in cellars and earned one pound four a month, and the dear princesses could hire a droschky to take them to the Opera for fourpence. They can drive their lesson home by pointing to counter-revolutionary Vladivostock in the far east, and to the great republic of Capitalist freedom in the far west, both of them sentencing girls of eighteen to fifteen years' imprisonment for distributing leaflets uncomplimentary to Capitalism. I do not here pass judgment either on the White British officer or on the Red Russian officer: I merely say that when the so-called class war comes to blows in England (and I am afraid our proprietary Whites will not give in without a fight even if the Labor Party in Parliament comes in 600 strong) the Whites and the Reds will argue in exactly the same way; and the muddled man in the street, without knowledge or conviction either way, will cast his reactionary ballot in vain.

However, the Capitalists may very well take heart for the present. They have on their side the colossal inertia of established institu-



tions; and the souls of the children in the schools are in their hands. They have the *soi-disant* brain workers on their side: has not Trotsky, when foolishly reproached for employing them handsomely (as if Communism meant organising industry without brains or training), replied 'Yes; but we had to give them a good hiding first'. Even our university engineers, receiving less than the wage of a common fitter, dread the Communism that would raise their incomes to the level of a common fitter's. This straightforward exposition of mine, which might be dangerous (except that it would be superfluous) if men were politically intelligent and the working classes had not been commercialized to the bone by two centuries of wage slavery, will drop into the sea of Labor politics as a pebble drops into the sea when a boy throws it from the cliff. Labor leaders will still brandish the weapon of the strike: indeed already the Trade Unions, having found the Triple Alliance a failure, are organising alliances of still higher numerical powers, so as to achieve the nearest possible approximation to the General Strike and make failure quite certain. Many of them believe that the Triple Alliance might have succeeded if its organizers had dared to fire the gun they had so carefully loaded. A word in favor of Compulsory service, or of any compulsion except the compulsion of starvation and the miserable eyes of hungry children, would send any Labor leader back to the bench or down the mine, a cashiered and never-to-be-pardoned traitor to freedom. Our rulers do not sing 'Curzon's at the Foreign Office; and there's lots of money for somebody in the coming war with America for the command of the seas'; but that is what they mean when they sing, as they occasionally do, 'God's in his heaven: all's right with the world'. Perhaps it is. It may be that the reason our civilisations always break down and send us back to the fields is that we were never meant to be civilized animals, and that the collapses of empires are not catastrophes but triumphs of sanity, blessed awakenings from fevered dreams. If so, it looks as if we were in for another triumph presently; and then we—or at any rate, the handful of survivors—will enjoy a respite from both Capitalism and Communism until the fever breaks out again. But personally I am no Arcadian; and I should very much like to see Communism tried for awhile before we give up civilization as a purely pathological phenomenon. At any rate, it can hardly produce worse results than Capitalism.

G.B.S.

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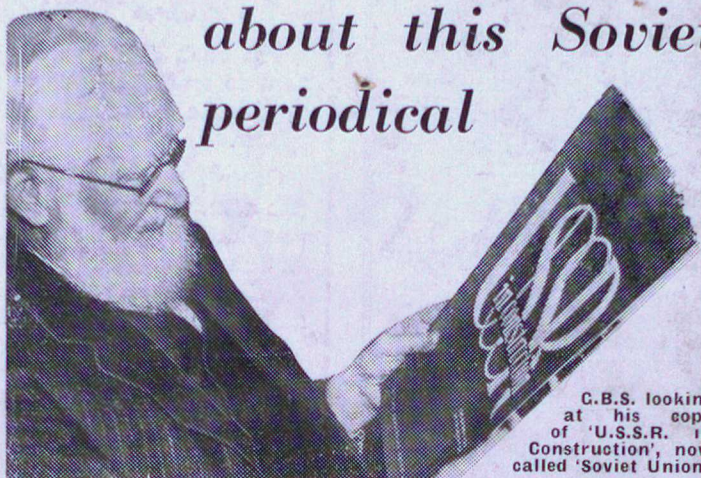
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