

A problem for the left

The attempt by a handful of adventurists to take political control of the Guardian by physically assaulting our office in New York City cannot be separated from the multitude of problems plaguing the left movement as a whole these days.

In a sense the invasion of our work place is a microcosm of what is happening in the left in general.

At issue, we believe, are two distinct developing lines within the left, especially what used to be called the new left. Within each of these lines, of course, there are a tremendous number of differences—almost as much, in some cases, as the differences between the two lines themselves. Even so, two lines are apparent.

The Guardian is developing politically along one of these lines: Marxism. It has, in the last year or two, cast off many of the criticisms of Marxism current in the new left during part of the 1960s. Much of the movement is taking this course, though, again, there are big differences among those heading in a Marxist direction. This newspaper has been critical of certain of these differences, both among the new left and the traditional left and has been criticized in return, at times quite justly.

The other line is much harder to define. It is a conglomerate of several different kinds of politics, drawn together in temporary unity by a general agreement on tactics, particularly: almost exclusive reliance on confrontation and direct action; the belief that small groups of revolutionaries are capable of dealing significant blows against the American empire. There is a strong anarchist trend throughout much of this line, but not exclusively.

Because of tactical unity, much of the ultra-left can be considered within this camp, even though it might refer to itself as "Marxist." Included within this trend also are those who might be defined as "cultural" revolutionaries (or "life-style" revolutionaries), basically interested, we believe, in personal or small group liberation now with or without reference to the mass of humanity suffering exploitation and oppression from capitalist imperialism.

Both lines are anti-capitalist. Both claim to be communist.

Perhaps the major difference between the two at this point is the understanding by Marxists of the necessity of involving masses of people in revolutionary struggle—and of the enormous problems to be overcome in this process—as opposed to the lack of this understanding by those who hold the alternate line.

Marxists seek an American variant of the kind of societies being developed in the socialist countries. This variant, the American form of socialism, could be quite significant considering the great differences that exist between productive forces and social relations in the U.S. and those which existed in the socialist countries at the time each of them overthrew capitalism.

We have learned from history that it takes vast movements of masses of people in struggle against their oppressors to bring about such a change, and that there is no alternate or short-cut route to social revolution. Those taking the alternate line do not deal with the question of how one changes a social system, how one reorganizes society in the interests and for the benefit of all the people. Their own activity—without respect to mass participation or support—is for them the central thrust, and the

changes wrought in their own individual lives, their goal.

The differences between those who consider themselves within the mainstream of Marxist thought and those who do not, including those who are anti-Marxist, stem from fundamentally different methods of analysis and of interpreting data. From this derives differences over strategic and tactical approach.

In the Guardian's case, for instance, the non-Marxists did not elect to struggle against the primary political contradiction—the differences between Marxian analysis and doctrine and non-Marxian thought. Instead they fought against the internal structure of the Guardian, perhaps not fully understanding, in some cases, that this generally democratic centralist structure is a logical by-product of Marxian beliefs carried out in the practical realm of organization. Stimulating this struggle was the understanding that the Guardian was being critical of some of the strategic and tactical approaches to revolution put forth by this group.

Many non-Marxists simply could not tolerate our opposition to individual terrorism; our warnings against adventurism; our criticism of some groups for "substituting themselves for the people"; our insistence on the necessity for building a mass revolutionary movement even if this entails a great deal of patience, self-control, discipline and the deferment of immediate personal gratification. To some of these people and groups the Guardian is "liberal" or "authoritarian" or—and it has been said—"counter-revolutionary."

Compounding this argument against the Guardian—the same argument used against many of those who have come to embrace Marxism—is the sense that the Guardian has become a "renegade" against the movement, that it has left the movement family, so to speak. This can only be true if one defines the movement in the narrow, arrogant and exclusivist terms used by our present day super-militants. The movement of the 1960's has of course changed, and that portion represented by the Guardian "strikers" (which defines itself as the movement) has simply failed to move with the times and with the developing understanding of the need for a Marxist road to revolution.

Lacking an historical approach to social phenomena, this section of the movement cannot understand why the Guardian takes its positions on matters relating to the American left. And, they have become impatient and frustrated with the seeming inability to effect social change. It has, in the last year or so drawn inward upon itself in a very tight circle which is almost coming to be an "us against them" syndrome—with the "them" extending, in cases, to independents such as the Guardian, to the masses of people in other cases, depending on the individuals or groups within the movement who hold this view.

Thus, without an historical perspective or method of analysis for dealing with contemporary problems, imbued with a sense of isolation—not only from the masses but from others on the left—and heavily infiltrated by notions that can only be defined as remnants of bourgeois individualism and idealism, this part of the movement (by which we mean those from the new left who appear not to have learned anything from history) seems to be pursuing a dead end.

In despair over the difficulties of mounting a revolution in this country, this section of the left movement is attempting to leap over those vital stages of education, propaganda and agitation necessary to engage the masses, substituting themselves and their ideology for the people through "revolutionary" tactics which are historically unable to bear fruit. At the same time and for the same reasons, some within the movement believe it is necessary (and possible) to create in small groups a replica of the kind of society they seek as a strategic goal, as though individual change or the creation of tiny utopias has ever or will ever be able to change society as a whole. This is called "living the revolution," based on the most idealistic of social notions. They do not understand that society and social productive forces shape man and that present oppressive and exploitative forces and the social relations they engender must be destroyed by concerted revolutionary struggle of the masses of people before man, the individual, becomes totally changed. Nor do they fully understand that this process of change, after the transfer of power from the capitalist class to the working class and its allies, will not happen automatically. It will result from a dictatorship of the working people over their former oppressors which will last as long as necessary until bourgeois values are replaced by those of the new society.

In brief, we believe the clash between these two lines is a major contradiction facing the U.S. left today—Marxism or what? On the tactical level this contradiction manifests itself in increasingly sharp clashes within the left; in adventurist actions by one portion of the left directed not only against capitalist society but—as in the case of the attack on the Guardian—against other sections of the left; in contempt not only toward capitalism but against opposition forces on the left and even, in some instances, against the masses of people, who also are perceived to be the "enemy."

This section of the movement has fallen into the trap Mao warned against when he said that to treat friends like enemies is to go over to the side of the enemy. Who actually would benefit if the "enemy" Guardian were destroyed? Who, in fact, benefits when an antiwar demonstration is disrupted by the ultra-left? (This is not to support liberalism within the antiwar movement but to point out that the radical left's response to it must be to struggle politically within the movement or to mount demonstrations of its own around its own slogans but not to disrupt that which objectively adds to the antiwar fight, even if in a small way.) Who benefits from individual terrorism? Who benefits from "revolutionary" action separated from a mass base? Unless the satisfaction of a few individual egos can be interpreted as a "benefit" for the masses of oppressed people throughout the world, we venture that no one benefits.

The political climate which resulted in the attack on the Guardian is a climate which affects the entire left. It is the byproduct of two developing lines. The Guardian will survive, though the going will be rough. Our concern is with the left and whether the developing revolutionary forces in this country can survive an increasing tendency by one portion of the left to "off" its political opponents within the left with the same methods it uses (or rather, would like to use but cannot) to fight the class enemy.