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INTERNATIONAL

1 Indo-China

2 British Reformism
The Origins of British Reformism

3 Guns & Money
The Permanent Arms Economy

4 Spain ???
Spain: The Weak Link of Europe?

5 Ireland
Marx & Engels on Ireland

INTERNATIONAL



Contents

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EDITORIAL

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CONTENTS

- Editorial: Indochina, Solidarity Till Victory.....P.2
- Spain: the weak link of Europe?.....P.5
- The Origins of British Reformism.....P.17
- Permanent Arms Economy: A critique.....P.54
- Book Reviews.....P.67

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Editorial Indo-China: Solidarity till the final victory

The barbarism exhibited by American imperialism in the latest wave of bombing attacks on the Democratic Republic of Vietnam brings home even more strongly a point which has become increasingly obvious since 1968. It is a fact which many revolutionaries in Western Europe and North America reflecting the strength and power of bourgeois control of the means of communication, often tend to underestimate or ignore. It can be stated in the following way: the struggle waged by the Indochinese peoples against U.S. imperialism for the last decade is without doubt the most heroic struggle ever waged by an oppressed peoples against their oppressors since the advent of modern capitalism. The whole history of imperialist butchery and tyranny has not known anything like what the most powerful, industrialised capitalist nation has inflicted on a largely agrarian society for the last twelve years in order to prevent the success of a social revolution.

The Russian masses led by Lenin, Trotsky and the Bolshevik Party did not have to contend with such heavy odds either before, during or after the Russian Revolution. The war of imperialist intervention against the Russian Revolution took place at a time when the imperialist world had weakened itself by a viciously contested inter-imperialist war and where its military apparatus was completely underdeveloped technologically. In addition the upsurge of working class struggles and insurrections in Western Europe further helped to shield the Russian Revolution. The Yugoslav Revolution took place during the "anti-fascist struggles" and Tito and his partisans exploited fully the conflict between German and British imperialism. Of course the Nazis committed many atrocities against the partisans, but they do not compare in scale or in effect to the practices of U.S. imperialism in Vietnam today. The Chinese revolution certainly had to face the power of Japanese imperialism, but again in conditions of heightened inter-imperialist conflict which were reflected in the local bourgeoisie represented by the Koumintang being forced to participate reluctantly in a United Front with the Chinese Communist Party against the Japanese intervention. Even if we leave that aside, the bombing by the Japanese of Shanghai and Canton was a relatively mild affair in comparison to what Hanoi and Haiphong have had to suffer, in one week alone in December '72. The Cuban revolutionaries were successful in overthrowing Batista and unleashing a process of permanent revolution without any foreign intervention. The Bay of Pigs fiasco can hardly be regarded as a serious intervention by imperialism when compared

even to the invasion of Santo Domingo, leave alone Indochina. Only if we view the struggle of the Indochinese revolutionaries in a broad historical perspective can we really appreciate the epic character of the struggle the Vietnamese have carried out and the importance of this process for the world revolution.

Resistance to American imperialism over the last ten years did not develop out of thin air. It was organised — both militarily and politically — and led by the Vietnamese Communist Party. To believe otherwise would be to fall prey to spontaneist illusions. It has been the strategy and tactics adopted by this party and its fighting organisations such as the NLF which have prevented an imperialist victory in Indochina. We do not intend to discuss the origins, history and development of this party in this article, but will do so in a future issue of *International*. What is worth stressing, however, is that the conduct of the war both militarily and politically reveals quite clearly that the Vietnamese have learnt some lessons from the Geneva Agreements and the role played by both the imperialists and by the Soviet Union and China at that time. That is why we see that the North Vietnamese press has in recent months been critical, though, of course in its own allegorical style of the role played by Peking and Moscow in recent months. In addition one of the leading theoreticians of the Vietnamese C.P., the General Secretary, Le Duan has constantly since the beginning of the 60's used formulations in his writings which have totally rejected the Menshevik theory of "revolution by stages" and analysed differences inside the international communist movement as being "different attitudes towards the question whether or not to make the revolution, whether or not to struggle for the interests of the toiling people and the oppressed and exploited masses, and whether or not to be determined to liquidate imperialism and capitalism." (Le Duan, *Some Problems Concerning the International Tasks of Our Party*, Hanoi, 1963, authors emphasis).

It would appear that the Vietnamese have been forced to make some concessions at the negotiating table. This fact reflects not on them, but on their two major allies, Russia and China, who used the Vietnamese struggle to engage in diplomatic games with Nixon and ended up by enormously strengthening the latter's hand inside Indochina by allowing him to blockade Haiphong and carry out the heaviest bombing attacks in the history of mankind against a "fraternal, socialist, country." No revolutionist can on principle be opposed to negotiations. They are determined by the national and international relationship of forces. The Vietnamese militants are therefore perfectly entitled both to negotiate and to make concessions in order to gain a breathing space. The task of revolutionaries in imperialist countries, while fully supporting and engaging in solidarity actions with the Vietnamese, is nevertheless not to accept the right of imperialism to demand or gain these concessions. That is why the British section of the Fourth International has been opposed to the solidarity movement making demands related to the negotiations such as "Sign Now" the main focus of the anti-imperialist struggle. This is not based on any iron principles, but on an analysis of the negotiating terms. If we study the position of the NLF over the last twelve years we can see that they have changed their positions from "The NLF is obviously the sole genuine representative of the South Vietnamese people: it must have a decisive voice and a decisive role in any settlement of the Vietnam question," (1960), through the 19 point programme of 1960, to the 5 point declaration of the NLF in 1965, via the "Program of Action of the Provisional Revolutionary Government"

of 1969 which pledged itself to "abolish the disguised colonial regime established by the US imperialists in South Viet Nam; to overthrow the entire structure of the puppet administration;" to the present negotiating position which accepts participation in a coalition government with the same puppet regime. Concessions have been made on paper and that is precisely the reason why we are not in favour of tying down the solidarity movement to a piece of paper the Vietnamese comrades feel compelled to sign. Why? Because unless the PRG decided to disarm the NLF and lay down its arms (an extremely unlikely variant) a situation of dual power will continue in Southern Vietnam. Two armed forces will continue to confront each other. Moreover a ceasefire is very likely to bring about a new rise of the mass movement in the cities which the Thieu puppet regime will not be able to tolerate. To imagine therefore that there can be a stable or semi-permanent situation even if a "peace treaty" is ultimately signed is to live in a world of illusions. Hence we have to engage in solidarity actions (and today even more so than in '67 - '68) based on the understanding that the war will continue albeit in a different form. Therefore anti-imperialist militants have to be prepared to explain the process of permanent or uninterrupted revolution which will begin to take shape in the event of an American withdrawal and a ceasefire.

We have commented many times on the insufficient support provided to the Indochinese revolution by both Peking and Moscow. The Soviet leadership has supplied more military aid to the wretched regime of Sadat in Egypt over the last year (worth \$350,000,000) than it has to Vietnam (\$100,000,000). China has given Nixon important political support which has enabled the latter to both defuse the antiwar movement and get himself re-elected. The latter occasion being welcomed by Chou en Lai "because he played a role in improving relations between the United States and China." During the Xmas bombing of '72 it was Swedish social-democracy which reacted more vigorously to the terror bombing (comparing them to Nazi crimes and atrocities!) than the bureaucrats in Moscow and Peking. It has been the attitude of the two principal allies of the Vietnamese people which enabled Nixon to escalate the war in the first place, starting with the blockade of Haiphong. That is why solidarity is needed more urgently today than ever before to break the international isolation of the revolution which Nixon has achieved in collusion with Messrs Brezhnev and Chou en Lai.

The Fourth International and all its sections throughout the world have made solidarity with the Indochinese struggle a key plank of their programme of action for many years now. Today it is even more vital than ever before. The seamen of Australia, the dockers of Genoa, the workers in Sweden have put to shame large sections of the "revolutionary" left in Britain, which boycotted the Indochina Solidarity Conference held in the first week of December '72. Even British social-democracy, trying to forget its ignominious role when in government, has begun to make noises of protest. We once again appeal to the International Socialists and the Socialist Labour League to discard their Anglocentric economism and to participate in united actions of solidarity in the coming months. These comrades should remember that any major defeat suffered by the Indochinese revolutionaries will be a setback for the entire world revolutionary process and will modify the international relationship of forces in favour of imperialism.

1 January 1973.

Spain: the weak link of Europe?

At present the weakest link in the chain of European capitalism lies in Spain. In a real sense the political situation in Europe in the 1970's will revolve around the simultaneous gravitation of the Italian bourgeoisie towards a fascist solution to that country's internal crises and the movement of the Spanish bourgeoisie towards a decisive clash with the Franco regime. The relative tempo of these developments will decisively alter the political pattern of Europe.

I

In 1971 the Fourth International noted in *Quatrième Internationale* that "The present contradictions of Spanish society are created by the fact that despite the accelerated economic growth of the 1960's, a by-product of the expansion of Western European imperialist economy, the Spanish bourgeoisie has been essentially unable to eliminate from Spanish society disequilibria that produce the most explosive social contradictions in Europe: the proletariat's low standard of living, the permanent crisis of the poorest agricultural regions, Spanish industry's inability to compete in the international capitalist market, the crying underdevelopment of social services, etc.

"Objectively, the economic growth has served to postpone the social explosion, but at the same time has rejuvenated the proletariat, significantly expanded its numbers, and increased its capacity to overcome, little by little, the trauma of its defeat in the bloody civil war. This growth has also resulted in the development of valuable allies of the working class among the masses of students in ferment and among layers of technicians

and intellectual workers, who are progressively radicalizing.

"The combination of the above two factors means that the Spanish bourgeoisie cannot afford the luxury of a democratic parliamentary - or even a Gaullist - regime. Any democratic rights won by the labouring masses would lead to struggles of explosive intensity and revolutionary breadth. Hence the basic failure of all attempts to gradually 'liberalize' the Francoist regime, including under the form of a constitutional monarchy - an illusion that even the daily that by some mockery entitles itself *Pravda* (Truth) has just recently repeated for the n-th time.

"Under these conditions, the orientation of Spanish capitalism could have but one aim: fragmenting and channeling all workers' struggles toward purely economic and immediate goals. For a whole period, the traditional leaders of the Spanish proletariat, and above all the leaders of the Communist party, have objectively helped the bourgeoisie achieve this aim. The appearance of more resolute, politicized, and general forms of struggle, despite the intensified repression, marks the failure of this strategy. All the Spanish bourgeoisie's roads seem to lead to a ripening of the revolutionary upsurge"

The principal features of economic, social, and political development in Spain during the sixteen months since January 1971 completely confirm this analysis.

The year 1971 saw a pronounced slowdown of the Spanish economy. At the same time the rise in the cost of living shattered all previous records. Banking circles calculate that price increases in 1971 averaged more than 15 percent. The fact that a country like Spain experiences in its turn simultaneous stagnation and inflation says a lot about the weakness of its economic institutions.

Countries with a relatively marginal economy like Spain, will be hit especially hard by the deterioration of the international capitalist economic satellites are threatened with unemployment by the recession gripping those countries. Now, in Spain itself, unemployment is on the rise.

The third 'development plan' (1972-1975) projects only a 1 percent annual increase in the number of jobs - less than the annual population growth and much less than the annual increase in the size of the work force, which is swelled not only by population increase, but also by the rural exodus, the ruin of the petty artisans, and the rationalization measures that are now beginning to spread throughout industry. It must also be stressed that in the area of new employment the objectives of the second 'development plan' were not achieved. Even according to official statistics, the annual increase in the number employed reached only 0.9% during 1968-1971, as opposed to the projected 1.3%. Concretely, this means that in 1971 there were 150,000 fewer jobs than had been planned.

The agricultural crisis in poor regions, the crisis of the *minifundia*, continues unchecked, accentuating the concentration of landholdings, the proletarianization of small farmers, and the rural exodus. It is sufficient to point out that in 1970 the peasantry, which still constitutes 30% of the working population, accounted for only 14% of the national income. If one subtracts from the 14% the incomes of the large landed proprietors and the new kulaks, one gets an idea of the miserable incomes to which the mass of the small peasantry is condemned.

The absence of any political 'liberalization' has become more and more obvious. Instead of 'modest progress' toward a 'European' regime, about which every Spanish reformist dreams, there has been a regression toward the most rigid dictatorship. This is especially marked by the adoption of the 'public security' law, Franco's blunt rejection of establishing the right of political association, the intensification of censorship, and the extension of 'exceptional laws.' Juan Carlos has to guarantee the permanence of Francoism, but without Franco. Only the voluntarily blind can fail to see in the overtly fascist and *integriste* agitation of Blas Pinar's 'Christ the King' groups the hardening of the regime itself. This is most clearly expressed by the standing order to shoot strikers. After the shooting in Granada after the construction striker killed in Madrid, after the SEAT worker killed in Barcelona, it was two shipyard workers in El Ferrol who were shot down by the dictatorship.

This hardening of the repression comes in answer to mass struggle, and especially to workers' struggle. The most striking, most important element in the understanding of the basic tendencies of Spanish development is that the working class is no longer allowing itself to be intimidated by this intensified repression, and has not let itself be lulled by economic concessions or promises of 'liberalization' as in the past. To the hardening of the repression the workers respond, and will respond more and more, with an increasing hardening, intensification, and politicization of their fight. In this way, the upsurge of objectively revolutionary struggles develops in Spain.

11

The major events that mark the rise of the mass movement in Spain between January 1971 and March 1972 are well known: the movement to boycott the union elections; the national strike of bank employees; the Asturias strike; the very bitter strikes in Pamplona and in Vittoria (Michelin), the latter lasting forty-two days; the strike and occupation of the SEAT factories in Barcelona and the solidarity strike of 100,000 Catalonian workers after a SEAT worker was murdered during the re-taking of the factory; the national student actions centered around the medical students' strike which culminated in Madrid; the workers movement around the renewal of many collective bargaining contracts during the first quarter of 1972; the explosive strike of the shipyard

workers in El Ferrol, Galicia, which produced a real street battle between the workers and the repressive forces.

Simply listing these fights shows their tendency both to expand to a countrywide scale and to reach all sectors of the labouring masses. The participation of layers of the 'new middle class', already discernable last year, was shown by the young doctors' activity in the student revolt against the 'education law'. On this same occasion, and especially on February 14, 1972 - the day of national demonstrations against this law - high-school students, for the first time in Spain, took to the streets in massive numbers.

In the rest of imperialist Europe the capitalists have succeeded in uniting faster than the working class. But in Spain, the mass struggle more rapidly borrows from the advanced forms of struggle of other parts of Europe, while the bourgeoisie has not succeeded in borrowing the prevailing industrial technique and organization.

Aside from their politicization and their tendency to extend themselves, the 1971-1972 struggles of the Spanish workers had three basic characteristics that bring them still more into line with those of the European proletariat.

The goals and limits fixed not only by the Francoist regime but also by the whole employing class have been generally overturned wherever the workers opted for direct action instead of the 'arbitration' of the state 'unions'.

Although the steelworkers of Altos Hornos in Bilbao had to settle for a nominal wage hike of 11 percent over three years while the Banco de Madrid published figures putting the rise in the cost of living at 35 percent just for the years 1970-1971, wherever the workers were able to bring to bear their growing combativity, the wage policies of the regime suffered partial setbacks.

The workers spontaneously opted for unitary demands that the revolutionary groups have vigorously projected: equal wage rises for all: 450 pesetas (about U S dls 7.00) a day minimum wage, etc. In the same spirt, the strengthening of class solidarity and the slogan of rehiring all fired workers played an increasingly important role in workers' actions.

Closely tied to this rise in the level of class consciousness was the adoption of more militant forms of action increasingly centered around workers' democracy. Strikes and actions were marked by the formation of workers' general assemblies; during the strikes the limited, permanent workers' commissions were replaced by larger committees responsible to the entire assembly.

Already there are examples in which the revolutionary Marxist demand for the formation of real strike committees responsible to, and therefore recallable by, the broader general assemblies have been put into practice by the workers. Furthermore, we must call attention to the emergence of mass pickets to extend the strikes - pickets that go to neighbouring factories or other factories in the same branch of industry to generalize the struggle.

It was at El Ferrol that the hardening of workers' struggle reached a really qualitatively new level. Passive submission to the dictatorship's repression, which became more ferocious with the order to shoot demonstrators and strikers, had become increasingly unacceptable to the Spanish proletariat. Nevertheless, in 1971 it was only the revolutionary vanguard groups, and especially our comrades of the Revolutionary Communist League (Liga Comunista Revolucionaria - LCR), that raised the call for defense pickets and then began to apply this tactic, in a necessarily limited way, during the 'lightning demonstrations'.

When the Civil Guards retook the Barcelona SEAT factories, there were reflexes of self-defense, but the mass of workers hesitated to fight on the hardly favourable terrain of a single plant surrounded by the enemy.

On the other hand, when repressive violence was unleashed in the streets of El Ferrol against the striking shipyard workers, they not only responded but passed to the counter-offensive and even managed to clear the repressive forces out of part of the city. Two workers were killed, but many cops were sent to the hospital. The strikers cut off the electricity, gas, and water, and the struggle took on the appearance of a citywide general strike.

The best past traditions of the Spanish working class, the most revolutionary in Europe, were suddenly thrust to the surface again, reinforced and enriched by the bitter lessons of past defeats - and above all marked by a profound mistrust of the bureaucratic apparatus and a stronger sense of class solidarity and independence.

III

A hardening of the dictatorship on the one hand, and a harder and harder response from the labouring masses on the other. The basic policy of the CP - seeking collaboration with the bourgeoisie, the monarchists and even a fraction of the army so as to overturn the Francoist regime peacefully, without a revolution - has been robbed of all credibility by these lines of force in Spanish social and political development.

In an interview in the French CP magazine *Nouvelle Critique*, Santiago Carrillo, general secretary of the Spanish CP, described his party's policy with a cynicism bordering on naivete. The Spanish bourgeoisie, he says, no longer has any political force with which it could collaborate in the framework of a parliamentary regime. In the past, social democracy played this role; today, the CP offers itself as a replacement.

This whole orientation was founded on the hope of transforming the Francoist regime - without a revolution, solely through mass 'pressure' - into a bourgeois parliamentary democracy by collaborating with the bourgeoisie, all the while solemnly promising to protect the latter's property and profits. The objective role of this policy, independent of the

calculations and designs of the CP leaders, was to channel the new rise of workers' struggle toward goals compatible with the survival of the capitalist regime - most notably by choosing forms of action and organization that fostered the reformist and gradualist illusions propagated by a wing of the dictatorship.

The failure of this policy is demonstrated on two levels. The masses increasingly came to realize the illusory character of the notion that the Franco regime could be brought down without a revolution. In real life they unleashed harder and harder struggles with a clear anticapitalist dynamic. A vanguard began to emerge in the factories and in the universities which, having assimilated the essential lessons of the CP's neoreformism succeeded in consciously drawing sectors of the mass movement toward demands and forms of action destined to set in motion a process of permanent revolution.

The most striking example of this change in the relationship of forces in the mass movement, of the CP's loss of the absolute hegemony it had wielded for fifteen years, was the remarkable success of the far left's campaign for a boycott of the state 'trade-union' elections. The fact that in Catalonia and in the Basque country more than 50 percent of the workers followed the boycott slogan, and that even in the Madrid industrial complex - the bastion of the CP - substantial minorities of the working class boycotted the elections, reflected the maturation of class consciousness among a significant sector of the Spanish proletariat.

Since cases of the workers breaking with the CP's line on the factory level are spreading not only in the newly industrialized areas, but also in the old bastions, even in Madrid - at the Castellon factory - we are seeing for the first time a similar phenomenon.

The emergence of a broad vanguard independent of the traditional apparatuses and beginning to have a mass character and a mass influence is obviously not a development restricted to Spain. The same phenomenon has occurred, or is in the process of occurring, in three other important imperialist countries in Europe - France, Italy, and Great Britain.

For reasons peculiar to Spain, the relationship of forces between this vanguard and the CP is without doubt more favourable to the revolutionists in Spain than is the relationship between the revolutionists and the French or Italian CP, or, in the case of Great Britain, the relationship of forces between this vanguard and the Labour party. The more explosive character of the social contradictions, the much greater objective difficulty in limiting the mass movement or channeling it toward reformist goals will tend to accentuate still more this reversal in the relationship of forces.

The CP leadership thus finds itself confronted by a new task - that of maneuvering within the mass movement so as to limit its loss of influence and to hold back the crisis in its own ranks that could not help

but be triggered by the successive breaks with its line by workers and students. The Santiago Carrillo team must also defend itself against the repeated attempts of the Soviet bureaucracy to replace it with one that would support Kremlin policies more unconditionally.

All these factors explain several things; the Carrillo team's greater flexibility toward other tendencies in the workers' movement, including the revolutionary groups; Carrillo's trip to Peking; the occasional united fronts the CP concludes with far-left groups, including, at the University of Madrid, our comrades of the LCR; and the CP's pronounced insistence on nonexclusive unity in action.

While attaining this unity in action in a favourable conjuncture can lead local CP groups to shift their orientation to the left, that is, to adapt to the line of the revolutionists, it would be false to conclude that this is a possible line of development for the CP as a whole. On the contrary, the greater 'liberalization' of this party and its evincing a clearer respect for workers' democracy fit in perfectly with its accentuated social-democratic evolution and its increasingly rightist political orientation.

Does this mean that a decline in the mass influence of the CP is in the sight? We do not think so. Progressively, as wider and wider layers of the masses enter into action, as still newer layers of the proletariat and the youth begin to become politicized, the most likely variant is that the CP's influence within the vanguard will decline, but its influence among inexperienced and relatively less politicized masses freshly entering into action will expand.

Numerically, the total effect of these two tendencies will mean a strengthening rather than a weakening of the CP. This must be carefully taken into account by the revolutionists in formulating a correct tactical orientation toward building a revolutionary party within the mass movement.

IV

The historical perspective revolutionary Marxists in Spain defend is that of the permanent revolution. They reject both the possibility of liquidating the Francoist regime without a revolution and the notion that the mass movement can content itself with extracting democratic freedoms and thus peacefully institute a traditional bourgeois-democratic parliamentary regime. *Franco and the Francoist regime (with or without Franco himself) can be overthrown only by a revolutionary mobilization of the masses that challenges the bourgeois state, dissolves and destroys its repressive apparatus, occupies the factories and the land, and threatens capitalist property.* The revolutionary process leading to the overthrow of the dictatorship will immediately place on the agenda the victory of the socialist revolution without having to first go through an intermediate

historical stage of bourgeois-parliamentary democracy.

But to speak of permanent revolution does not at all mean to defend the caricature of this concept that says a revolution will be immediately defeated if it does not result in the institution of the dictatorship of the proletariat after the first battle.

The Spanish bourgeoisie does not want to liquidate the dictatorship because it fears that granting democratic freedoms to the masses would accelerate anticapitalist struggles rather than allow them to be channeled toward reformist ends. But if the bourgeoisie is confronted by a revolutionary movement so tumultuous that it increasingly takes on insurrectionary forms, it would no longer have anything to lose, and would have precious time to gain, in throwing the workers the bone of democratic freedoms.

This is why the perspective of permanent revolution in Spain does not exclude, but on the contrary includes, the possibility of temporarily establishing democratic freedoms as a by-product of a revolutionary proletarian upsurge. This process will *begin* by the labouring masses winning these freedoms.

During such a period, the bourgeoisie would be feverishly preparing the means to overturn the relationship of forces and crush the mass movement by force. The proletarian vanguard would utilize this breathing spell to perfect the organization of the masses into organs of dual power (workers' councils, workers' militia) and to strengthen its influence among the masses so as to enter the inevitable confrontation with maximum chance of victory, to accelerate the construction of the revolutionary party.

The difference between such a perspective and that of European-style 'normalization' - a repetition of what happened at the end of the second world war in France and Italy as a result of the betrayals of the Communist and the Socialist parties in the context of an accelerated capitalist economic growth made possible by those very betrayals - is strikingly obvious.

To put this perspective into practice, Spanish revolutionary Marxists must from now on apply a revolutionary strategy that has as its essential goal preventing, or making more difficult, all maneuvers aimed at diverting the revolutionary energy of the masses toward purely reformist ends - maneuvers which, in the concrete conditions prevailing in Spain, would not lead to a more or less stable bourgeois-parliamentary democracy but to the crushing in blood of the new generations of Spanish workers and students.

The essential elements of such a strategy are as follows:

*Encourage all efforts to prevent struggles from being fragmented, scattered, or isolated, and try, on the contrary, to coordinate various struggles, not only by sector, but also on a local, regional, and national scale; and this not only for workers' struggles properly so called, but for all workers' struggles, as well as for struggles by students, high-school

students, the labouring layers of the 'new middle-classes,' and the poor peasants. Great attention must be paid to developing techniques for extending and generalizing strikes, as well as to the emergence and strengthening of organs for coordinating struggles, which prefigure the future soviets.

*Support all attempts to go beyond purely economic struggles and demands, to politicize strikes and workers' action campaigns. Democratic demands, including those relating to the national question, today play a key role in this process. The attempts of the regime and the employing class to restrict workers' struggles to the framework of simple wage negotiations that are thoroughly unfair - the workers do not even have legal trade unions on their side in such negotiations - are best thwarted by advancing systematically in the lists of demands the following : unconditional rehiring at full pay of all fired workers; immediate release of all political prisoners; expulsion of the private police and the public repressive forces from the factories, universities, and the high schools; recognition of the right to strike; recognition of the right to form trade unions ; recognition of freedom of association, of the press, of assembly, and of demonstrating.

* Push demands and forms of action that are clearly anticapitalist: no speed-ups; no firings; struggle for workers' control; occupation of factories, etc.

* Propagandize for and organize adequate and increasingly advanced forms of self-defense for strikes and demonstrations against the repressive violence of the dictatorship, its direct and indirect agents, the defenders of capitalist rule in Spain.

* Assure the greater and greater proliferation of united organs for preparing struggles - expanded and really united workers' commissions - and their replacement, during peaks of struggle, by representative organs democratically elected by the masses. That is, prepare for the emergence of real organs of dual power at the moment when the mass movement reaches its culminating point.

* Prepare for a revolutionary intervention among the agricultural workers and poor peasants.

This entire strategy can be summed up in a single slogan' *Propagandize, prepare, and organize for the revolutionary general strike to overthrow the dictatorship, murderer of workers.*

V

With the formation and strengthening of the LCR a first step has been taken on the road to constructing a revolutionary party of the Spanish proletariat, a party than can only be based on the programme of revolutionary Marxism. Propagandizing for the programme, the LCR is today the initial nucleus of such a party. But to achieve its construction it will not be sufficient merely to strengthen the LCR through intensive

individual recruitment. Regroupments, fusions with other revolutionary currents, and recruitment of the best vanguard worker militants still remaining in the CP will be necessary.

The centralizing role the LCR played on a national scale during the struggle to boycott CNS elections, its catalytic role in the immediate national response to the SEAT events, its exemplary role during the student actions in Madrid made the organization known and respected among wide circles of the vanguard and made it a pole of attraction for revolutionary militants even in regions where the organization does not yet have any base.

The Fourth International is proud of the fact that militants of such temper and courage have on their own decided to join it. It sees in this a confirmation of the process the International is now experiencing: its transformation from limited numbers of small Trotskyist propaganda groups into a world revolutionary movement, already able to initiate actions that visibly alter the relationship of forces between the vanguard and the bureaucratic apparatuses within the mass movement, and at the same time able to begin to alter the evolutionist tendencies of the mass movement itself.

The immediate problem that must be dealt with is the new growth stage of the LCR. This problem involves both that of relations with centrist and ultraleftist groups within the vanguard and that of relations with the traditional organizations of the workers' movement, essentially the Communist party. Systematic programmatic delineation, theoretical polemics, both political and propagandist, must be combined with the ability to propose and to conclude occasional agreements for united action around specific goals that correspond to the interests of all the labouring masses.

There is no contradiction between these two aspects of revolutionary politics and organization. On the contrary, they logically complement one another. Each attains its full value only through combination with the other.

The process of constructing a revolutionary party could also enter a new stage around the question of the workers' commissions. The CP's effort to transform these bodies into semilegal trade-unions under the control of its own apparatus has failed.

This failure comes as a result of the bankruptcy of the CP's whole gradualist and neoreformist orientation. The workers' commissions were compelled by the force of circumstance to expand their activities toward clearly political questions; and this made any semilegal existence incompatible with the very nature of the dictatorship. The failure equally resulted from the CP's loss of hegemony over the workers' vanguard, and from the process of growing political differentiation, which often even led to the commissions' fragmenting into grouplets. And finally, the CP's failure reflected the widening and hardening of struggle, which led to the

emergence, on the eve of or during strikes, of much broader organs than the workers' commissions to prepare and conduct the workers' struggle.

From all this derives the impossibility of mechanically applying the traditional attitude of revolutionists toward trade-union work to the attitude Spanish revolutionists must take toward the workers' commissions. But this in no way means that we are dealing with an organizational form considered henceforth to be outmoded and for which the revolutionists must substitute a combination of factory political groups and strike committees (or committees to prepare for strikes) issuing from general assemblies.

The workers' commissions often represent the organizational form of permanent confrontation and collaboration of all the militant elements of a factory that is best adapted to conditions of clandestinity (that is, a situation in which it is impossible to organize mass trade unions) and of the increasingly turbulent upsurge of the mass movement (a situation in which the number of active militants in a factory may vary, even doubling or tripling during periods of action).

The workers' commissions have the double advantage of being both unified and flexible, and this at the very moment when events and the relationship of forces permit the breaking of the CP's claim to political control or to exclusive representation within the commissions.

Spanish revolutionists must therefore make themselves the most confirmed advocates of this unified character of the workers' commissions, which implies the greatest respect for workers' democracy and for the right of representation and organization of all tendencies of the workers' movement within them, all the while taking account of the concrete reality, without making a fetish of any specific form of united action. The fight for this principle today corresponds to a real development of consciousness in the ranks of the CP itself. Far from opposing the task of constructing a new revolutionary leadership of the Spanish proletariat, it allows for the concretization of this task for the first time before such a broad workers' vanguard.

Francoist Spain is today the weakest link in the European imperialist chain. The outbreak of a revolutionary general strike, the outbreak of a new Spanish revolution, would have incalculable repercussions on the alignment of social and political forces on the entire continent. For this reason, revolutionary Marxists and the Fourth International have a special obligation to solidarize with the Spanish proletariat and with their comrades of the LCR.

The crucial place of the Spanish proletariat today in the context of European workers' struggle and the decisive importance the outbreak of the Spanish socialist revolution would have for the proletariat

revolution in all capitalist Europe impose on the revolutionary Marxist organizations not only a special obligation to aid their comrades of the LCR, but also imply the necessity of understanding that in numerous European countries Spanish immigrant workers act today as an especially militant vanguard force. It is therefore urgent to develop systematic work in this area and to orient toward organizing Spanish groups abroad sympathizing with the LCR wherever that proves possible.

To aid the maturation of the revolutionary process in Spain; to aid in the construction of a new revolutionary leadership for the Spanish proletariat; to contribute to the strengthening of the LCR - these are the most direct means revolutionary Marxist command in accelerating the transformation of the new rise of European workers' struggle since May 1968 into a new revolutionary upsurge on a continental scale.

FROM THE EDITORIAL BOARD

We would like to apologise to all our readers and subscribers for the lengthy gap between this issue of the journal and the previous one. The reasons for this were beyond our control, but the problems have now been resolved and we shall continue regular production after this issue.

From this issue of INTERNATIONAL we will be moving to a regular quarterly journal. The new quarterly will be much larger in size and will carry regular material on the theoretical problems confronting the revolutionary left in Britain, the activities (and in particular the theoretical advances) of other sections of the Fourth International and an enlarged book reviews section.

The first issue of the new, re-vamped INTERNATIONAL will be available in March 1973. Regular orders and subscriptions should be sent to 182 Pentonville Road, London N.1. All written material for publication should be sent to Q. Hoare, 32 Belitha Villas, London N.1

The origins of British reformism

INTRODUCTION

For some time now a series of articles in *The Red Mole* have been trying to spell out an analysis of the British Labour Party. The essence of this position is that the ideology of Social Democracy in its Labourite version must be understood as something far more than a simple 'reformism' which will 'betray'. In fact it represents a whole series of organisations which correspond to, or 'embody' a particular consciousness (i.e. ordered relation to circumstances) and that these organisations fundamentally determine the entire character of the British working class movement. The essence of this particular Social Democratic position is a distinction between trade unionism and politics drawn not on the basis of the consciousness of those involved in a struggle, but drawn on the basis of where the activity takes place, so that the struggle within the factory is by definition a trade union struggle, and the struggle outside, in particular round elections, is by definition a political struggle. In this the ideology of Labourism fundamentally differs from that of, for example, Stalinism.

Stated at this level of abstraction of course this point is neither right nor wrong, as Hegel would have said the interest lies not in the aim but in the way in which the whole is worked out in detail. The interest in this particular point is that it allows us to explain with extreme simplicity both the way in which the specific domination of the British ruling class has been maintained, and the way in which the main elements of the Labour movement—parliamentary leadership, parliamentary left, trade union bureaucracy, rank and file trade unionists, CPGB—all interact in such a way as to maintain that hegemony.

The key to the whole situation is understanding how the ideology of Labourism affects the organisational form of the Labour Party. The point is that once politics has been defined as occurring around elections, then there is no rationale for a political party to organise directly at the point of production. The struggle in the factory is the trade union struggle

which it is obviously the job of the trade unions to deal with. This is accepted logically by even the constituency left and at most the local parties give passive support to trade union struggles, collect money etc. but in no way intervene directly to attempt to alter the course of the struggle. The way in which the Labour Party is structurally linked to the working class is not via organisation at the point of production, but via local geographical units which are the most suitable form to correspond to electoral needs. However, as the Labour Party cannot afford to be completely cut-off from the working class at the point of its most acute and continuous struggle (if it were it would be soon reduced to irrelevance) the Labour party ensures an indirect relation to the working class via the trade union bureaucracy. This bureaucracy is of course more directly linked to the working class at the point of production. (Although even here as we shall see it is necessary to make important reservations.) The essential feature of the structure of the Labour Party, which then determines the structure of the entire working class movement, is therefore a direct relation to the working class in local units, and an indirect relation via the trade union bureaucracy. There is however no direct link between the Labour party and the working class organised at the point of production and, of course, given its initial ideology there is no need for such a link.

Once this structure is grasped then the fundamental characteristics of the British working class movement can also be understood. The first essential key to its stability is the division of labour between the leadership of the Parliamentary Labour Party and the leadership of the Trade Unions. The essential feature here is the fact that the trade unions used their vote to *"keep the right wing in control in the Labour Party, in return for which the Labour Party will keep out of the affairs of the trade unions. The old right wing union cry of "Keep politics out of the trade unions", therefore has its counterpart in the Labour Party leadership's cry of "Keep the trade unions out of politics" (i.e. support the right wing).*

"This arrangement within the Labour Party has historically worked to the advantage both of the union bureaucrats and of the Parliamentary leaders. It prevents any left challenge to the L.P. leadership succeeding and it enables the T.U. leaders to avoid facing any political challenge within their unions. In the struggles of the 1930's it was always the trade union leaders who used their votes to defeat the Socialist League and its followers 'In 1935 the 75 amendments of the Socialist League to the NEC policy document were all defeated by the union vote 'In the struggle against the Bevanites and union bureaucrats never wavered in their support for the right and they never hesitated to use any means they thought necessary. When faced with a hostile audience of Bevanites at the 1952 conference Deakin head of the TGWU at that time, declared that "You know that you would listen if you wanted to get money from the trade unions". At the 1954 conference it is probably that Deakin was instrumental in applying pressure to the Woodworkers Union Executive to reverse the democratically taken decision of its conference to oppose German rearmament by threatening to use the bloc vote to have a representative of the Woodworkers thrown off the NEC. The unions were also instrumental in seeing that in 1954 Gaitskell was elected Party Treasurer against Bevan and from there went on to be Party Leader The importance of this union bureaucracy wheeling and dealing was fully recognised and appreciated by the Labour Party leadership. Shinwell at the 1952 conference openly declared "Thank heaven for the trade union movement at this time. Thank heaven for what is called the bloc vote". (The Red Mole 7th February, 1972).

Once this situation is understood then the historical dilemma and powerlessness of the Labour left can be understood. "To achieve any real results in the Labour Party it would have had to have been able to challenge the positions within the unions of the bureaucrats. That would have meant organising politically directly inside the trade unions. But once the left tried to do that it would have been forced by the logic of its positions to take up political positions on all the struggles within the factory. It would have had to have broken with the very idea that politics is concerned with elections that is at the heart of the ideas of the Labour Party. If it had been forced to admit that the extra-parliamentary struggle could be a political struggle then the door would have been opened for the break up of every idea of a specifically Labour left. It would also have meant that the leadership of any such movement could very easily have passed out of the control of the handful of Parliamentarians who have always considered it their 'right' to lead the working class. From this prospect the left naturally shied away like the Devil from holy water.

From this picture we can now see clearly the reasons for the complete helplessness of any specifically Labour left. The constituency left could never challenge the Labour leadership without first challenging the trade union bureaucracy, and it could not organise to challenge the trade union bureaucracy without breaking with the very ideas of the separation of trade unionism and politics which are at the very heart of the Labour Party. Even the best of the socialist militants of the Labour left were completely trapped in this dilemma and it rendered useless and futile all their activities. It is in this fundamental dilemma that the complete powerlessness of the constituency left must be sought and not in some theory of 'conscious betrayal' on the part of the many deeply committed socialists which the 'left' has attracted over the years." (Ibid.).

At "the base" perhaps the most important effect of this entire structural situation has been how it has allowed a tiny and hopelessly reformist Communist Party such as the CPGB to survive as a significant force within the working class. Because the Labour left has been unable, because of its whole set of ideas, to intervene directly in the Trade Unions, the C.P., because of the organisational reasons discussed earlier, has been organised directly at the point of production.

In consequence the Labour left, whenever it attempted to do anything at all, has attempted to make alliances with the CP. This "division of labour" suits both the Labour left and the leadership of the CPGB. It suits the 'left' because it allows them to avoid facing up to the fundamental question of whether or not to try to break out of their constituency ghetto at the expense of ceasing to become a specifically Labour left, and it suits the CPGB because it means that it never has had to face a challenge to its position as the only left wing political movement within the trade unions. With no organised left wing political challenge inside the unions, the CP can go on quietly burrowing away and build up a strong position based on a big organised network within the unions. Hence the phenomenon of a Communist Party whose political influence is nil, but whose position within the trade union movement is

extremely strong. We can now also begin to understand the fervour with which the "British Road to Socialism" is defended, and in particular its emphasis on 'left unity'. Certainly it is the reformism of Stalinism which produces the policy of the CPGB, but to explain the fervour of its position in those terms is too simple. The British road to Socialism's conception of left unity in fact corresponds to the political practice and habits of several generations of CP militants. The CP militant can pass himself off to the left Labourite as a force to be reckoned with, and hence enjoy popularity support in union elections and so on, because he knows if ever the Labour left wants to try to do something it is only the Communist Party, not the Labour left, which can produce the goods within the trade unions. The price which the Labourite in return exacts is of course that the CP make no attempt to enter and take over the Labour left. Thus is created the paradox that despite the fact that for considerable periods the CPGB has had far more active members than the Labour left, nevertheless there has never even been any serious pressure for it to attempt entry work inside the Labour Party where it could easily have become the dominant force on the left. Again the reformism in theory (the need for 'openness and honesty') in fact corresponds to a real social base. There is therefore another unwritten agreement between the Communist Party and the Labour left which parallels the one between the Parliamentary Labour leaders and the trade union bureaucracy. This particular agreement is that the Labour left keeps itself out of the trade unions as an organised group, in return for which the CP keeps itself out of the affairs of the Labour left. This arrangement is greatly liked by the leaders of the two sides as it creates a quiet life for both. Hence also the hysterical hatred of both for the Trotskyists who have tried to combine work inside the Labour Party with organised work in the trade unions.

We can now see how the entire framework of the British labour movement and political left has held itself together for nearly fifty years. It is based on two fundamental implicit understandings and unwritten agreements. The agreement on the right is that between the leadership of the Parliamentary Labour Party, and the trade union bureaucracy. This agreement is that the Labour leadership will keep out of the affairs of the trade unions, in return for which the trade union bureaucracy supports the Labour right against any threat from the constituencies. The 'agreement on the left' is that the Labour left does not intervene in an organised way inside the trade unions, and the CPGB does not intervene in an organised way inside the trade unions. The outcome of this whole situation is clear. It creates simultaneously the conditions for no real challenge to the Labour leadership or to the trade union bureaucracy while permitting the existence of a left which acts as a safety valve for discontent and a Communist Party which can maintain and even extend itself without ever becoming a serious political force and hence a challenge to the Labour left. A virtually perfect situation of frustration and powerlessness is created for the militant supporters of Socialism. The complete ideological hold of a senile reformist party over the working class has been perfectly maintained by this interrelation of roles.

Once the way in which this situation has supported itself historically is understood then we can understand both the conditions for its periods of stability and for its periods of decay and instability. The stability of the whole set up we have described "is based on the two conditions that the

political focus of the life of the working class remains within the constituency parties, and that the Labour Party keeps out of the affairs of the trade unions. If either of these two breaks down, then the whole structure becomes completely unstable. If the constituency parties cannot channel the political energies of the working class, then the trade union bureaucrats come under intense pressure from below and are forced for their own self protection, into conflict with the leaders of the Labour Party, thus breaking one of the agreements on which the stability of the political system is based. If, to take the other premise, the Labour Party leadership interferes in the affairs of the trade unions then again the political system breaks down. To defend themselves the trade union bureaucrats are forced to fight politically against the Labour leaders. In so doing however they create an alternative, and in fact far more powerful, focus for the political struggles of the working class than that to be found in the constituency Labour parties. Quite obviously even in terms of the struggle inside the Labour Party the weight of the unions is far greater than that of the constituency parties (as the experience of Bevanism showed only too clearly). In addition the trade unions can carry on the struggle in a period which extends outside the activity around elections. Once, however, the political struggle begins to flow through the trade unions then the Labour left finds itself isolated and helpless precisely because, as we discussed earlier, it is forced by its whole ideology of Labourism not to organise directly in the trade unions. What in fact characterises the present period is precisely the simultaneous ending for interrelated reasons of both the premises on which the old Labour political order was based. Firstly, and most obviously, the crisis of British capitalism, with its consequent need to clobber the trade unions, has led the Labour Party to be forced directly to attack the trade unions. This process began on a small scale in the 1945-51 Labour government, and developed into a full scale attack in Wilson's government. The wage freeze, the attack on the seamen, and 'In Place of Strife' anti-union proposals all directly affected the trade union bureaucrats. Slowly but surely, from being the main pillars of support of the Labour leadership, the trade union bureaucrats have been driven, usually against their will, into being the main enemy of the Labour leaders.

Secondly, the constituency parties have completely collapsed as a political focus for the political activities of the working class. We have already dealt with the extent of this collapse in a previous article so we do not need to recap again. It is sufficient to note that even according to the official figures one sixth (17 per cent) of the already depleted ranks of individual members of the Labour Party left between the years 1965 and 1969. The decline in membership of the largest parties in this period was a staggering 30 per cent. Furthermore, the drop in activities was even more marked, the fall was greatest in working class wards, and the wards in middle class areas increased in size ('The Decline in Working Class Politics' B. Hindess). This collapse is not accidental but is determined by the whole interaction of the decline in British capitalism since 1945 and the position of the labour left." (Ibid).

Under these conditions the old elements of the situation disintegrate. Even the CPGB is caught in the situation. As the old Labour left weakens there is no longer a force for a 'division-of-labour-unity-on-the-left'. Elements of the CPGB are forced to move out to fill the gap vacated by the Labour left. The extreme reformist tendencies of the "British Road" are

accented. Under this situation however a contradiction is set up with the Party's traditional structurally defined role in the working class movement. A situation of tension is set up between the old trade union based elements and those under the pressure of the collapse of the constituency left. A period of profound structural crisis therefore sets in at all levels.

The aim of this article is to provide the historical background to the above analysis by examining exactly what forces created the particular organisational and ideological forms described. It is therefore meant as an underpinning to the main articles in the *Red Mole* dealing with the Labour Party (16/2/71, 1/6/71, and 7/2/72). A brief survey of the analysis was drawn on by Tariq Ali in "The Coming British Revolution" Chapter 2 and much of the material is taken from a forthcoming book on the trade unions to be published by *New Left Review*. A second article on the development of the organisational forms of Labourism and the implications for the struggle of revolutionaries will be published in a subsequent issue of *International*.

THE EARLY DETERMINANTS OF TRADE UNION CONSCIOUSNESS AND STRUCTURE

The elementary necessity which creates the need for trade union organisation is of course the asymmetry of power which exists between the employer and the individual worker. It is not necessary to be a Marxist to understand this. Adam Smith wrote, for example, even before the rise of mass trade unions, and only just at the beginning of the rise of industrial capitalism: "the masters being fewer in numbers can combine more easily. . . the masters can hold out much longer. A landlord, a farmer, a master, manufacturer or merchant, though they did not employ a single workman, could generally live a year or two upon the stocks which they have already acquired. Many workmen could not subsist a week. In the long run, the workman may be as necessary to his master as his master is to him; but the necessity is not so immediate."⁽¹⁾ Put in more concrete terms, the ownership of the means of production gives the employer the power to try to alter working conditions, the speed of work, wages, hours of work and all other things affecting the life of the worker in the factory. An employer can sack a worker with no damage to his own production, he can change the whole working conditions of a factory, he can institute mass redundancies, and the individual worker is powerless to resist. Even at the simple level of relations inside the factory or in the buying and selling of labour power, and leaving aside the role of the state and other "incidentals", this asymmetry of power makes nonsense of any liberal theory of "free" or "equal" relations between worker and employer. Marx was quite right to treat with contempt such theories when he wrote: "This sphere . . . within whose boundaries the sale and purchase of labour-power goes on, is in fact a very Eden of the innate rights of man. There alone rule Freedom, Equality, Property and Bentham. Freedom, because both buyer and seller of a commodity, say of labour-power, are constrained only by their own free will. They contract as free agents, and the agreement they come to is but the form in which they give legal expression to their common will. Equality, because each enters into relation with the other, as with a simple owner of commodities, and they exchange equivalent for equivalent. Property, because each disposes only of what is his own. And Bentham, because each looks only to himself. . . . The one with an air of importance,

smirking, intent on business; the other timid and holding back, like one who is bringing his own hide to market and has nothing to expect but—a hiding.”(2)

Even earlier, in his work of 1844, “The Condition of the Working Class in England”, Engels had explained the situation clearly when he wrote that: “What gives these unions and strikes arising from them their real importance is this, that they constitute the first attempt of the workers to put an end to competition amongst themselves. They imply the recognition of the fact that the supremacy of the bourgeoisie is based wholly upon the competition between workers themselves—that is to say upon their want of solidarity and their internecine rivalries. And precisely because the unions direct themselves against the vital nerve of the present social order, however one-sidedly, they are so dangerous to this social order.”(3)

If however it is possible to explain the emergence of trade unionism in terms of features which are common to all examples of developed capitalist production, then this in one sense explains too much. The different features of various examples of trade unionism cannot be explained in terms of those elements which are common to them all. To explain the differences between for example, the reformist and large British trade union movement and the smaller but more revolutionary French trade unions, it is necessary to deal with the historical development of these different structures. For the rest of this section we will therefore concern ourselves with discovering the historical conjunctures which defined the most central characteristics of the British working class movement. There are in particular four separable but interrelated problems:

1. What were the reasons for the failure to emerge in Britain of any large scale revolutionary trade union tradition which would be comparable to that of revolutionary syndicalism in France, Spain or the United States?
2. What is the social base and historical origin of the insistence on the separation between trade unionism and politics which is characteristic of the traditions of the British working class and of labourism in particular?
3. In what terms is this separation made?
4. What are the effects of these combined ideologies on the structures of the working class movement, and how do these structures interrelate with and determine the dominant ideologies of the British working class?

THE ABSENCE OF A REVOLUTIONARY TRADITION

If we go back to the early pre-Marxist conceptions of trade unions, we find two quite clear and distinct trends corresponding to the confused social base from which trade unions developed. In particular, we find the reflection of the fact that both Jacobinism, the political expression of the petit-bourgeoisie, and trade unionism, one of the key organisational forms of the proletariat, have their social origins in sections of society—artisans, those engaged in petty commodity production, and wage labourers proper—which had by no means crystallised apart in the period of the early development of “combinations.” Indeed, as E.P. Thompson has demonstrated at great length, in their early periods the two political currents are inex-

trically intertwined.⁽⁴⁾ What begins to distinguish the two currents are the pressures exerted by the growing social polarisation of society.

Jacobinism, in its most extreme form, can be characterised as an ideology committed to the revolutionary restructuring of society in the direction of equality but on the basis of private property. It therefore can only correspond to the interests of social layers who either wish to institute individual private ownership, i.e., the pre-capitalist peasantry, or those who wish to assert equality so as to avoid being crushed by competition from larger (capitalist) producers, i.e., artisans/petite bourgeoisie. As these strata are crushed out of existence by the development of capitalism (the artisans), or turned into a counter-revolutionary force by the introduction of private ownership (the peasantry), so the social basis for Jacobinism and its accompanying organisational form of conspiracy disappears. Only in exceptional circumstances, e.g., Ireland, is this temporarily avoided.

The dynamic of trade unionism is, of course, completely different. Where as Jacobinism is destroyed by the introduction of large scale capitalist production, trade unionism thrives on it, and in so doing, its own specific character becomes clear. However, the social origins of trade unionism naturally mark its development and organisational form in a way that is relatively autonomous to the changing social base of the movement. The transition from associations of journeymen or men "on tramp" to organisations of proletarians proper, may demand entirely new forms of organisation, but, to paraphrase Marx, the forms of organisation of all dead generations weigh like a nightmare on the brain of the living. The traditions, inherited organisations and ingrained ideas of the working class are just as much a material force and element in the objective situation as the most basic facts of economic life. Thus, for example, the old "craft" tradition and forms of organisation of the old semi-artisan Friendly Societies, strengthened by the fact that trade unionism typically gained its first roots amongst those sections of the proletariat, skilled workers, whose conditions of existence and craft habits, were closest to those of the old journeymen, were later carried over into the organisations of the labour aristocracy and even, in a distorted way, into the forms of organisation of mass trade unionism. This occurred despite the fact that the most "natural" form of organisation for the industrial proletariat, considered as a class, is in industrial unions, (these being the strongest forms of organisation for defending the economic interests of the proletariat). This dialectic of the relation between organisational form and consciousness is one of the most complex problems of the theory of trade unions (and of the theory of Marxism as a whole). If we consider merely the organisational aspects of the problem, it may be objected that it is a fallacy, or a "historicist" deviation to explain the chaotic structure of the British trade union movement, and its determining effect on consciousness in terms of developments which occurred in periods considerably before the rise of mass trade unionism. However, to raise such an objection is fundamentally to misunderstand the way in which organisational form and ideology are related. In fact, theoretical positions, even "implicit" ones, can never be separated from forms of organisation. For example, the physical force ideology of classical Irish Republicanism leads it inevitably to an organisational form in which the military wing dominates. (See Jones, *International*, Vol. no.5) Once this structure is in existence then it reinforces the ideological aspects which gave rise to it in the first instance. Similarly, the organisational form of "craft unionism" as discussed below is both a product of and intensifies the sec-

tional rather than class consciousness of groups of workers organised in this particular form of union structure. Nevertheless, it would be fundamentally incorrect to conclude from this that at all periods revolutionaries must support and agitate for the creation of industrial unions. On the contrary, any particular slogan of this sort has to be determined by an analysis of how the general features of imperialist crisis are refracted through structures which have their origin in differing epochs of capitalism and that the last of these epochs, that of imperialism, exacerbates and intensifies the conflicts and contradictions inherent in the organisations created in the others. Thus for example now, in a period characterised by massive bureaucratisation of the unions and the beginning of their integration into the state, it is the reactionary bureaucrats and the bourgeoisie who raise the call for industrial unions.⁽⁵⁾ An industrial union now allows a much greater degree of vertical control to the bureaucrat than does the chaotic structure which exists at present. A real growth of industrial unions in the present period would almost certainly lead to a marked decrease in the power of the shop steward, and would therefore represent a reactionary trend. Marxists would therefore not support such a move.

As regards the actual dynamic of the growth of trade unions, it is roughly true that if trade unions develop late in the epoch of capitalism, then in order to survive they are virtually forced to adopt an industrial union form of organisation right from the beginning, but this stage had not been reached in Britain by the 1840s, or even by the 1870s or 1880s. The possibility existed either of development along industrial lines or for a more haphazard spontaneous development to take place which would still reflect the influence of the old explicitly class collaborationist unions. The degree to which either of these would occur would be determined by the degree of consciousness of those leading the struggle for unionisation. If the intervention of Marxists did not occur, the development of unions along craft lines, or at least a mixture of craft and industrial unions was relatively inevitable. In, for example, the United States however, unionisation of basic mass production industries occurred at a much later stage, and in order to gain any grip at all the unions were forced to adopt the most efficacious method of organisation—i.e., industrial unions.

As regards the organisational relation of trade unions and political parties the situation is yet more complicated. Here what is key to remember is that the decline of capitalism is not something which occurs independently of the capacity of the working class to destroy it, but on the contrary the form of decline, and hence one of the conditioning elements of the organisation and consciousness of the working class, is determined by that ability. Thus, for example, the existence of a strong trade union movement may be one of the objective causes of a capitalist decline which in turn forces the working class to develop its political organisations. (Britain may well prove to be an example of this.) On the other hand, in countries dominated by imperialism the economic conditions, mass unemployment, etc., may be of such a type that the formation of mass trade unions is virtually impossible and in this case trade unionism appears largely as an offshoot of political parties. Even more complex variants may be found. For example in Britain, although the dominating fact of trade union ideology is the insistence on the separation of trade unionism and politics, nevertheless, without exception every major union is affiliated to the Labour Party, and all the major

manual unions at least have explicitly political sections of their founding documents or rule books. (For example, one of the objects declared in the rule book of the A.E.U. was: "The control of industry in the interests of the community", and the objects of the T.G.W.U., stretch to including "... to endeavour to control the industries in which the members are engaged.") In general, and running the danger of sounding trite, all that can be said is that the transformation of the social structure by the growth of industrial capitalism produces both the objective prerequisites for the development of mass trade unions and of independent working class parties. How these actually come into existence however, depends on a whole series of other elements such as the general degree of concentration of industry, the degree of development of the super-structure of capitalism, the room for economic manoeuvre of the bourgeoisie, the possibility of the working class actually winning gains through trade union struggle, the development of the subjective factor, etc. However, the interrelation of these elements in determining the possibilities of revolutionary developments of working class consciousness is extremely contradictory. Hence, for example, a period of increased economic oppression may actually lead to a strengthening of the trade unions (e.g., 1900-14), or conversely to their decline (e.g. the 1930s). The converse case, that of a period in which it is easier to force concessions out of the employers, may lead to a massive strengthening of the trade unions, but also to a marked decline in political consciousness, e.g., the 1950s. In other words, the revolutionary potential of any conjuncture, and its organisational effects, are determined by, at least, the condition of the working class in terms of organisation and consciousness, just as much as by the seriousness of the economic situation of the bourgeoisie. However, naturally the determinants of this consciousness are not to be measured so much by some sort of psychological Gallup poll as by an understanding of the exact relations between organisation and ideology within the working class, and of an understanding of what are the weak links within and between both on which revolutionaries can operate. However, conversely this identity and uneven development of structure and ideology presupposes, as does any process of uneven and combined development, that the complexes of elements of both levels of analysis possess relative autonomy which is truly relative as well as autonomous.

ORGANISATIONAL FORM

This question of organisational form is by no means an academic one, at the level of the economic struggle itself, precisely because the working class's only weapon in the economic struggle is its organisation, any disunity, along craft lines, is almost certain to have fatal consequences. At the level of determinants of working class consciousness, the form of organisation can, at certain periods, correspond to great potentials for change in the entire outlook of certain sections of the working class.⁽⁶⁾ For example, the early Friendly Societies/Trade Unions did not see their exclusive, or even their main, role as relating to the struggle over wages and conditions. On the contrary, activities such as providing decent funerals for members, financially assisting unemployed members, supporting members' families, etc. were considered equally, if not more important than more obviously trade union activities. In performing this type of function, such organisations were performing a purely sectional and not class role, which in essence does not differ from that

of any "self-help" organisation of the bourgeoisie. Worse still, from the point of view of class solidarity, one of the main aims of these organisations, the regulation of apprenticeships, could only be successful if carried on with the employer against other workers. In other words in their functions outside the industrial fields, these early organisations did not have a specifically class character, and in at least some of their most important functions they were tied to the bourgeoisie, and actively opposed to the interests of other workers.

In opposition to this tradition is that of the organisation of all workers as workers, i.e. industrial or general unionism. This means in essence identifying the divisions in society between worker and employer as being more significant than the supposed divisions between different groups of workers. Thus, quite apart from its much greater efficacy in the economic struggle, organisation along industrial union lines can represent an important step forward in breaking up the system of relatively explicit class collaboration which marks the period of the emergence of trade unions and hence in the development of ideas of class conflict. For this reason there has historically been a close identification between revolutionary political currents and demands for industrial unionism.⁽⁷⁾ It is the conjuncture of this "all embracing" trade unionism, with the break-up of social conditions which would, in an earlier period, have given rise to Jacobinism, which constitutes the social base of syndicalism.⁽⁸⁾ In Britain, however, the period of the break-up of the old petty-commodity society, and the transition of capitalism, was spread over a considerable period of time, and in consequence it was possible for the bourgeoisie to avoid the fusing of rising trade unionism with any Jacobin tradition. This was despite the fact that, as noted above, in its early period, trade unionism and Jacobin agitation were virtually inseparable. Despite the massive repression of the early years of the century, the nearest Britain came to seeing the fusing of the revolutionary tradition with trade unionism was in the anaemic form of Owenite unionism. Much more important from a long term point of view was that as early as the 1820s sections of the industrial bourgeoisie spurred on simultaneously by fear of the growing proletariat and the desire to gain a mass base for a potential struggle against the sections of the old land-based ruling class, were seeking allies within the working class. In particular, the first social group which appeared suitable for the role of collaborator with the bourgeoisie was the skilled artisan. At the beginning of the 18th century these were a relatively numerous category—for example in London alone it was estimated that there were about 100,000 journeymen of all types in this period. (Thompson p.260) As regards this general social group, Thompson concludes that they were an "elite... who considered themselves as 'good as masters, shopkeepers or professional men.'" It was this group which the 1824 repeal of the Combination Acts was mainly aimed at (no-one at this time believed it was possible to organise the unskilled) and the artisans gained from it to the extent of creating a remarkable revival of trade unionism and the successive strike waves of 1824-25. However, from the point of view of its historical aims, the artisans could not be important as an ally for the bourgeoisie; firstly, they were a declining social category, forced out of existence by the process of industrialisation, and secondly they were also a very unstable ally in that historically the artisans have been one of the social bases of radical Jacobinism. It was the dominance of this class in London in fact that created the conditions for a secular radical

tradition in the working class which was much more thorough-going than elsewhere in Britain. For this reason the manoeuvres of 1824-25 were merely a short-lived episode between the repression of the early years of the century and that of the 1930s. For a really permanent servant inside the working class, the bourgeoisie was forced to wait until the late 1840s and the development of the classical labour aristocracy.

Although the repression of the British bourgeoisie against trade unionism did exist for a whole period, it is important to note that it came to an end far earlier than in any other country. In Germany for example the final decision to tolerate working class organisations was not finally taken until the end of the anti-Socialist laws and the dismissal of Bismarck. In France the reactionary "Le Chappelier" laws were not repealed until the 1880s. In virtually all other states therefore the stage of massive repression carried over into a period when the development of large scale capitalist industry, and with it the optimum social conditions for mass trade unionism, already existed. This inevitably produced more favourable conditions for the development of a revolutionary tradition inside the trade unions. In addition, the working class movement, because in Britain the decay of small scale production occurred so slowly, never really stood a chance of fusing its own ideology with that of revolutionary sections of the petite-bourgeoisie, peasantry or artisans. Instead of a fusion of Jacobinism and trade unionism what occurred was that the whole process, which in Russia, France and the United States was telescoped, in Britain was extended over a period of a century. First the base was knocked out of Jacobinism by the combination of facts that (a) the bourgeoisie already held economic power and therefore never needed to unleash a struggle against relics of the feudal elements which might have created a situation whereby the artisans and peasantry were let loose; (b) the early development of the factory system meant that, although numerous, the artisan had nothing like the same importance and social weight as he had ~~done~~ in France at the time of the revolution. Jacobinism having been socially destroyed this meant that when elements of mass trade unionism did appear they were not fused with an artisan revolutionary tradition, and in any case they developed so early that they had no steam behind them even when rarely they did. At the period when Jacobinism was a significant social force, i.e., in the very early 19th century, the transformation of the social structure had not occurred to the point to which it would have been anything other than utopian to conceive of trade unions embracing large sections of the working class. By the time the social conditions for mass trade unionism did exist, roughly speaking by the 1870s, the social transformation to a society based on large scale production had progressed to the point where no social base existed for Jacobin or neo-Jacobin (Proudhonist, Blanquist, etc.) movements. In Britain therefore by the onset of laissez-faire no revolutionary trade union tradition and consciousness had been created to combat the reformism and separation of politics and trade unionism inevitably created by that epoch. It is hardly surprising that the characteristic feature of social democracy as regards the trade unions, namely that politics and trade unionism are separated by the fields in which they occur, should have become a touchstone of British trade union Labourism thought and later of Labourism. As was noted above, there was not even the situation where the weakness of the bourgeoisie forced the state to play a leading role in the economy right from the beginning, and therefore not even an "etatist" political current, similar to that of the trend in

German trade unionism and socialism which finds its intellectual origin in Lassalle, was created.

This point is of particular importance as it tends to be forgotten that the classical "proletarian" revolutionary movements of the 19th and early 20th century were in fact virtually all movements in which petit-bourgeois and proletarian currents combined in various configurations. For example, the first example of the dictatorship of the proletariat, the Paris commune, represented the coming together of every conceivable Jacobin, utopian, socialist and Marxist tendency. It is for this reason that individuals such as Blanqui could assume such a tremendous role even although in any ideological sense they were hopeless anachronisms. The conjuncture which forced together the petite-bourgeoisie and the bourgeoisie was however a peculiar one. It represented, as we noted, the fact that although the proletariat proper had played little or no role in the French Revolution from then on, and with increasing rapidity after 1848, the bourgeoisie began to fear above all else that any revolutionary movement would inevitably lead to a proletarian uprising. As Engels states about 1848; "everywhere, there appeared behind the victorious bourgeoisie, the threatening shadow of the proletariat which had really won the victory."⁽⁹⁾ In 1848 the proletariat was too weak to take power and its intervention merely had the effect of throwing the bourgeoisie into the hands of reaction. However, the fears of the bourgeoisie were greatly strengthened by this experience, and of course, their speculations were entirely confirmed by the events of the Commune. From then on the issue of proletariat against bourgeoisie was well and truly joined. It was precisely because the bourgeoisie was forced into taking violent measures against any revolutionary movement, that the petite-bourgeoisie found its own revolutionary movements linked with those of the working class. An analogous, although not identical, process underlay the development of syndicalism in various countries. In Britain, for the reasons discussed earlier, the social conditions did not exist for such a meeting of Jacobinism and the political currents of the proletariat. Neither was there any foreign crisis comparable to say that of the Franco-Prussian war which disturbed the relative social calm created by the long industrial boom of 1849-73. The only foreign crisis which really deeply affected the consciousness of the working class was the American Civil War, but this was too distant to really break up bourgeois hegemony.⁽¹⁰⁾

In its task of preventing the fusing of revolutionary tradition and working class organisation the ruling class was also greatly helped by the particular timing of the change over from the varying types of exploitation which are characteristic of the varying epochs of capitalism; in particular, the transition between the periods of the rise of capitalism, the ascendancy of capitalism, and the epoch of imperialism. In terms of the characteristic structures and ideologies of these periods we can make a rough classification as follows: The period of capitalist rise structurally sees the dissolution of the feudal mode of production and the creation of a capitalist social structure, i.e., divorce of the working class from the means of production on the one hand and concentration of the workers in units of production based on the wages system on the other. In economic terms it is a period characterised by "primitive" extensive methods of exploitation such as wholesale swindling, enforced child labour, etc. This extreme oppression, which further dictates a policy of extreme state repression, is dictated by the necessity to generate sufficient surplus value for the initial capitalist expansion. In terms of the

organisation of the proletariat the extension of power production and the introduction of the factory system led to the early Friendly Societies becoming more and more involved with defending their members from hardships associated with low rates of pay, wage cuts, poor working conditions and unemployment. This transformation of function coincided with seething discontent on the land and general political ferment created by the French Revolution. In this situation: "Every meeting of workers was potentially a conspiracy. Public discussion contained the seeds of revolution," (Cited *R.M.*, 24.4.71). Faced with a potential revolutionary threat, and excited by fears of a spread of the French Revolution, from the 1790s onwards the bourgeoisie began to act more harshly against the embryonic trade unions. Records of prosecutions become more frequent. In 1798 London printers were sentenced to two years imprisonment for conspiracy for meeting together to discuss wages and conditions. The Combination Acts of 1799 and 1800 codified the whole process. Although at this period the economic and political threat from the trade unions was virtually non-existent except in the fevered minds of the bourgeoisie, nevertheless the fundamental fear of the solidarity and combination of workers was already present. It found a particularly fierce expression in the repressive years of the early 19th century. Here in a vestigial form was the fusion of features which later coalesced into syndicalism. There was a combination of an oppressed agricultural population, an artisan class which was being crushed by large scale factory production, a proletariat which was relatively new and not used to the "discipline" of factory production, all coupled with the beginning of a concentration of workers in industry which made possible the beginning of real trade union organisation. Of course, the fact that the factories themselves, and therefore the concentration of workers, was far less in the late 19th or early 20th centuries, the fact that the ideas of socialism had not yet been developed, the fact that feudalism had already been destroyed prevented this conjuncture of processes from having anything like the explosive potential it was to have later in, for example, Russia or the Asian Countries. But nevertheless, the situation, inflamed by the necessity of extreme repression in order to generate sufficient surplus value to continue the early processes of industrialisation, was quite bad enough to keep the bourgeoisie in a semi-permanent state of fear. The repression which this fear led to, of course, only inflamed the situation, but in the early decades of the century the social conditions for trade unionism, large scale production, concentration of the proletariat in large numbers, etc., did not exist to the extent whereby they made inevitable a trade union movement. The period to 1825 is therefore one of disjointed action rather than of systematic organisation. It is more accurate to say that there was political activity and occasional trade union organisation rather than the fusing of trade unionism with political activity. Throughout this entire period however the bourgeoisie's attitude to trade unions was far more characterised by the Tolpuddle Martyrs and the execution of a boy of 19 for knocking the hat off a member of the Baring family during the 1830 upsurge of agricultural labourers, than it was by the repeal of the Combination Laws in 1824. This type of repression produced a response by the working class which in the form of Chartism took it beyond the bounds of the interests of the bourgeoisie. Although Owen's Grand National Consolidated Trades Union developed too early to either achieve political clarity or even to last for any period of time, nevertheless it was quite big

enough to give the bourgeoisie sleepless nights, and to give a foretaste of the type of revolutionary syndicalism that would inevitably have arisen if the policy of repression had been maintained into the second half of the 19th century. An abandonment of mass political repression against trade unions could however not succeed unless there was also some let-up of the assaults on the working class in the economic sphere. A situation of decreased repression but of continued extreme barbarities for the entire working class in industry would have been a recipe for certain revolution. Therefore from circa 1850 onwards the bourgeoisie turned its attention from "extensive" methods of exploitation to more "intensive" ones. This change-over occurred far earlier in Britain than in any other state. It was another important element which worked in the bourgeoisie's favour in preventing a revolutionary development within the trade unions.

Having examined these characteristics of the period of the emergence of trade unionism, it is possible to see the beginnings of a particular early revolutionary dialectic. This is one between craft unionism and industrial unionism on the one hand, both, of course, characterised by union organisation of some sort, and traditions of Jacobinism and industrial unionism on the other, both characterised by concepts of social clashes or conflict. Where there is no point of contact at all, except in the period when any unionisation is in itself revolutionary, is between craft unionism with ideas of class collaboration and Jacobinism.

The precise dialectic of these elements, which of course have only so far been dealt with in a schematic way, depends on the precise development of the social structure and political struggle. If the social and political structure is such that it can develop in such a way as to avoid the coincidence of conditions for the creation of a Jacobin movement and the growth of trade unionism, then the main elements in the dialectic will be craft unionism, and class-based organisation. Here the class collaboration of the former inevitably affects the development of the latter. If, however, the conditions for the development of trade unionism are created in a period when the social base still exists for the maintenance of semi-Jacobin currents, then the social pressure tending to class-based organisation may become fused with the revolutionary tradition of the non-proletariat strata to create a syndicalist ideology. Alternatively, the trade union movement may split between a reformist and a revolutionary wing. This second type of development is precisely what occurred in, for example, France, with the rise of the C.G.T., and in the United States, with the split between the Knights of Labour and the A.F.L., and later between the I.W.W. and the A.F.L. In Britain, however, the whole tendency of social development — the symbiosis of the two sections of the ruling class rather than political revolution, the early break up of small scale production, the absence of foreign crisis — all created conditions whereby the bourgeoisie succeeded in almost completely cutting off the development of trade unionism from even an embryonic revolutionary movement. It was this that created the conditions for the complete ascendancy of the Labour aristocracy and later trade union bureaucracy.

For British capitalism, as noted above, the period after 1848 was, as Engels put it: "the dawn of a new industrial epoch."⁽¹⁴⁾ Through the next quarter century Britain basked in the warmth of its greatest period of industrial dominance. It was the period which marked the transition from a superiority based on textiles to one based on steam power and iron technology, and the one which saw the rapid develop-

ment of British imperialism.⁽¹⁵⁾ With an increased room for economic manoeuvre the bourgeoisie was in a stronger position from which to make concessions to the working class than it had ever enjoyed before. The ruling class was also quite conscious of the necessity to make these concessions. Sir Robert Peel, for example, noted that: "I do feel that the point at which all ought to strive is to improve the conditions and elevate the feelings of the great labouring class. I tell you it is not safe unless you do it."⁽¹⁶⁾

As regards the political needs of capital, this renewed period of expansion could not have come at a better time. The discontent within the working class had already produced one nasty shock with the Chartists, and the wave of revolutions which swept Europe in 1848 was another indicator of what might be in store. These events showed the desirability of a change towards a more flexible policy regarding the working class, while simultaneously the expansion of the proletariat made the likely consequences of unlimited repression even more disturbing than previously.⁽¹⁷⁾ The bourgeoisie now both had the opportunity, and the necessity, of winning to its side a section of the proletariat. As Engels put it: "... the manufacturing capitalists ... were learning more and more, that the middle class can never obtain full social and political power over the nation except by the help of the working class."⁽¹⁸⁾

At the crudest possible level, the classical aristocracy of the 19th century, particularly as found in the metal industries, were actual exploiters of labour. This system, termed "co-exploitation" by Hobsbawm, found its expressions in such things as the system of labour hiring by Boiler-makers in the shipyards, and the "Butty" system in the steel industry, which are both fairly recent examples of arrangements which approximate to this system.⁽¹⁹⁾ Less crudely, Hobsbawm gives at least six criteria for the labour aristocracy.⁽²⁰⁾ These are (i) level and regularity of earnings, (ii) conditions of work, (iii) prospects of social security, (iv) relations with other social strata, (v) general conditions of living, (vi) prospects of future advancement. It is not possible to go into the details of the development of the classical labour aristocracy here, but it is important to note how the divisions involved, and awareness of the divisions within the working class marked the consciousness of even revolutionary militants. Tom Mann, for example, describing John Burns, at the time when Burns was still a revolutionary socialist, notes that: "He looked well on a platform. He always wore a serge suit, a black tie and a bowler hat. He looked the engineer all over..."⁽²¹⁾ The differences between the labour aristocracy and other sections of the working class were even noticeable in terms of physical appearance as well as dress. Burns gave a description of the 1890 T.U.C. which showed the characteristics clearly: "Physically, the 'old' (aristocratic) unions were much bigger than the new... A great number of them looked like respectable city gentlemen; wore very good coats, large watch chains, and high hats, and in many cases were of such splendid build and proportions that they presented an aldermanic, not to say magisterial form and dignity."⁽²²⁾

By the time this labour aristocracy was becoming well established, the industrialists were beginning to understand the precise ways in which unions of skilled workers could be lived with. Indeed, for example, the 1860 report of the National Social Science Association noted that: "leaders of a strike, where there is no regularly organised (union) society,

are likely to prove more unreasonable and violent than where there is" (23) In addition, the increasing capital intensiveness of industry made wages a lower proportion of total costs, and therefore any stoppage or dispute more expensive. This gave employers a considerable incentive to secure "orderly" relations with their key workers. (24) Examples of this type of development had become very marked by the time of the middle 1860s when, for instance, some of the most pro-union evidence given to a Royal Commission set up to investigate trade unions came from A. J. Mundella, a Nottingham hosiery manufacturer, who also continued to emphatically push the unions' case after the report of the Commission. (25) An excellent example of the arrangements and accommodations made between employers and labour aristocracy in this period is that in the steel industry. In steel the real beginnings of trade unionism appeared in 1862 with the founding of the Associated Iron and Steel Workers of Britain. (26) This union existed in an industry where the puddlers, shinglers, furnacemen, rollers, etc., were in fact largely contractors paid at tonnage rates who themselves hired labour. (27) In this situation the trade unions of the "aristocrats" could quite plausibly see themselves as having just as much, if not more, in common with the employers than with the other sections of workers. It was heightened in this feeling by the nascent tension between the older established unions of Ironmen, who supported the contract system and John Hodges' British Steel Smelters Union which was formed in 1886 and which opposed the system. (28) This was just one symptom of the situation of: "the high proportions of skilled men in the industry who earn comparatively big wages and fear, more than anything else the invasion of the unskilled." (29) In this respect, the aristocracy of labour in the Iron and Steel industries were just one example of the general situation whereby the most important forms of union organisation "suited the artisans in industries where the competition of less-skilled labour was a constant threat, and where the employers had to be induced to respect a favoured section of the workers by accepting restrictions on apprenticeship or some other device to keep the 'non-society' or 'illegal' men at bay." (30)

In this situation explicit cooperation between unions and employers grew very rapidly. By 1869 this cooperation became formalised when John Kane, Secretary of the Amalgamated Malleable Ironworkers, joined an arbitration board for the Northern Iron trade set up by the employer D. Dale. This was merely one of a whole series of such boards which had been created after the founding of Mundella's Hosiery Board in 1860 and the Joint Committees in the Wolverhampton building trade in 1864. It marked a great change in policy by the bourgeoisie from that of the early 1850s when, for example, they had turned down flat a proposal for arbitration made by the A.S.E. (31) It was a turn to a quite explicit policy of collaborating with the skilled unions. The developments in the iron and steel industry were just particularly glaring examples of a common pattern.

The "logical" outcome of the arbitration boards was the institution of the sliding scale agreements. (32) These had a crippling effect on trade unionism, not merely in the sense that they accepted ideologically that somehow the workers were responsible for, or at least must suffer for, the problems of the capitalists, but in that they left the unions with virtually no functions. It was therefore no surprise to find that the Royal Commission on Labour noted that the great advantages claimed for the sliding scale system were that "(1) It obviates disputes about

wages, at any rate, during fixed periods; (2) that it promotes a feeling of co-partnership and common interest between employers and employed."⁽³³⁾ Even more explicit forms of class collaboration, of course, existed, —for example, the co-partnership schemes which developed in the 1890s in the gas industry,—but for a whole period it was the arbitration boards and the sliding scale agreements which provided the real focus for class collaboration.

While, of course, it would be totally wrong to base a theory on a "conspiracy" theory of capitalism, nevertheless there is no doubt that representatives of capital understood quite well the importance of cultivating the reliability of the leaders of the unions. Hence, for example, the champagne breakfasts given to Alexander MacDonald, the miners' leader, by coal owners.

The men who ran the unions that functioned in such explicit class collaboration were well suited to their role. For example, Broadhurst, secretary of the Parliamentary Committee of the T.U.C. from 1875, had as his assistant a man disposed of a private income.⁽³⁴⁾ Interchange between state and trade unions was established at an early date. Prior, of the carpenters, as early as the late 1870s could resign his post to become a government inspector. The policy of class collaboration of course continued into the sphere of politics. When Mundella was selected as a candidate for parliament, Applegarth, leader of the Amalgamated Engineers, declared that "The Sheffield workers have selected as a candidate for Parliament one in whom they have full confidence, and in whom they believe they have a faithful representative of their interests . . . he is an employer who . . . has won the position which he now occupies and is equally respected by his fellow manufacturers as he is by his workpeople."⁽³⁵⁾ MacDonald of the miners declared that "I think there is not a body of 600 men in which more kind-hearted men are to be found than are to be found in the House of Commons."⁽³⁶⁾

This relation between the labour aristocracy and employers was almost perfect as far as Capital was concerned. By the 1870s the bourgeoisie had successfully made the difficult transition between a rule based on oppression of the entire working class, to one where its rule was based on the support of a section of the working class itself. Having made this change it could afford to, and indeed it was expedient to, grant further nominal concessions such as the various Parliamentary reform acts of the late 1860s, 1870s, and early 1880s. Writing in 1885, Engels summarised the change that had been made by noting that "... the great Trade Unions . . . the engineers, the carpenters, the joiners, the bricklayers, are each of them a power, to that extent that, as in the case of the bricklayers and bricklayers' labourers', they can even successfully resist the introduction of machinery. That their conditioning has remarkably improved since 1848 there can be no doubt, and the best proof of this is in the fact that for more than fifteen years not only have their employers been with them, but they with their employers, upon exceedingly good terms. They form an aristocracy within the working class; they have succeeded in enforcing for themselves a relatively comfortable position, and they accept it as final. They are the model working-men of Messrs. Leone Levi and Giffen, and they are very nice people indeed nowadays to deal with, for any sensible capitalist in particular and the whole capitalist class in general."⁽³⁷⁾ It was against this rather uninspiring background that Marxists began to deal theoretically with the question of trade unionism.

THE PLACE OF THE TRADE UNIONS IN EARLY MARXIST THEORY

The earliest real discussion of trade unions in Marxist theory appears to be in Engels' "The Condition of the Working Class in England."⁽³⁸⁾ In 1844, however, the trade unions were of little significance, and Engels rightly pays far more attention to the activities of the Chartists and confines himself to a mere description of the activities of the embryonic trade unions. No special theoretical treatment would have appeared necessary at this time. Similarly, when Marx turned his theoretical attention to the subject he did so primarily in the context of a discussion of political economy, and his main aim was to destroy Proudhon's acceptance of the theory of the wage fund.⁽³⁹⁾ Marx's theoretical statements are confined to the famous, but hardly comprehensive statement that "Economic conditions had first transformed the mass of the people of the country into workers. The combination of capital has created for this mass a common situation, common interests. The mass is thus already a class against capital, but not yet for itself. In the struggle of which we have noted only a few phases, this mass becomes united and constitutes itself as a class for itself. The interests it defends become class interests. But the struggle of class against class is a political struggle."⁽⁴⁰⁾ The establishment of this point seems to have satisfied Marx, and in writing the Communist Manifesto he merely paraphrased his earlier remarks.⁽⁴¹⁾

While Marx clearly demonstrated theoretically the key role which trade unions could play in the economic struggle, he was well aware of the limited nature of their struggle.⁽⁴²⁾ He and Engels became even more so after the beginning of what Marx described as "the period of corruption since 1848."⁽⁴³⁾ Amongst the evil productions of this period, he noted that the working class followed "venal trade union leaders."⁽⁴⁴⁾ Nevertheless, Marx realised the importance of the emergence of relatively mass trade unions, and in the establishment of the First International he noted as a great triumph that: "We have succeeded in drawing into the movement the one really big workers' organisation, the English 'Trades Union'."⁽⁴⁵⁾ However, Marx and Engels had few illusions in the leaders of the British trade unions. Indeed in 1874 Engels noted that it had been a sign of the weakness of the principles of the International that "even the leaders of the English trade unions thought the programme laid down in the preamble to the Rules gave them a basis for entering the movement."⁽⁴⁶⁾ These feelings were strengthened by the long period of the domination of British trade unions by craft interests, and Engels in 1879 concluded that: "For a number of years past (and at the present time) the English working class movement has been hopelessly describing a narrow circle of strikes for higher wages, not, however, as an expedient of means of propaganda and organisation, but as the ultimate aim. The trade unions even bar all political action on principle and in their charters, and thereby also ban participation in any general activity of the working class as a class . . . One can speak here of a labour movement (proper) only in so far as strikes take place which, whether they are won or not, do not get the movement one step further. To inflate such strikes . . . into struggles of world importance, as is done for instance in the London 'Freiheit' can, in my opinion, only do harm."⁽⁴⁷⁾ A marked change in attitude occurred in 1889 however. The cause of this change was the emergence of trade unions amongst the unskilled. Now Engels, far from urging Bernstein to pay less attention to strikes, states that: "In your next issue you ought to take up the dock labourers' strike. It is a matter of paramount importance to us here."⁽⁴⁸⁾ He talks with the greatest enthusiasm of " . . . this gigantic strike of the lowest of the outcasts, the dock labourers . . . If this stratum can be organised

that is a fact of the greatest importance." The importance of this upsurge was that while "Formally the movement is at the moment a trade union movement", nevertheless it was "totally different from that of the old trade unions."⁽⁴⁹⁾ Engels insisted that his political supporters took the most active role possible in the new movement.⁽⁵⁰⁾ Yet even at this time he noted the "... bourgeois 'respectability' bred into the bones of the workers ... I am not at all sure, for instance, that John Burns is not secretly prouder of his popularity with Cardinal Manning, the Lord Mayor and the bourgeoisie in general than of his popularity with his own class, ... Even Tom Mann, whom I regard as the finest of them, is fond of mentioning that he will be lunching with the Lord Mayor."⁽⁵¹⁾ Nevertheless, Engels, sounding a slightly spontaneist note, concluded that "... it will not help the bourgeoisie much if they do succeed in enticing some of the leaders into their toils. By that time the movement will have become strong enough to overcome this sort of thing."⁽⁵²⁾ However, Engels soon overcame this feeling, noting that while things were definitely moving forward, the British working class was showing its customary conservatism.⁽⁵³⁾

Of all Engels' later writings on the trade unions, perhaps the most interesting is his 1885 article "England in 1845 and 1885."⁽⁵⁴⁾ This is of particular importance in that Engels attempts for the first time to give a structural periodisation of the development of trade unionism and the forms of oppression of the working class in terms of the development of capitalism itself. In terms of the later development of Marxist theory in this area this constitutes an important theoretical breakthrough.

SOCIAL DEMOCRACY AND SYNDICALISM

Underlying the degeneration of working class consciousness described by Marx and Engels and the apolitical nature of the trade unions was of course the long period of economic prosperity already described.⁽⁵⁵⁾ Under conditions where it was possible to win economic concessions without political action, and virtually the entire increase in wages in the second half of the 19th century was won without such action,⁽⁵⁶⁾ the direct pressures on the trade unions to undertake any other political action than of safe-guarding their own position was virtually nil. In addition, the period of *laissez-faire* was not even conducive to the formation of an *etatist* current within the working class comparable to that of Lassalle in Germany. Under these conditions trade union activity could be carried on with virtually no reference to politics at all. Hence, by 1879 Engels could note that "The Trade Unions even bar all political action on principle".⁽⁵⁷⁾ This represented, even in the trade union field, a retreat from the positions of the 1840s when both Marx and Engels had remarked that it was precisely the intertwining of trade union and political struggle which gave the movement for the 1-hour day its power.⁽⁵⁸⁾ Even the brief interlude when some of the British trade unions were involved with the First International did not really reflect any real change in attitude. In fact, Engels later thought it a sign of how vague the principles of the International had been that "... even the leaders of the English Trade-Unions thought the programme laid down in the pre-ambule to the rules gave them a basis for entering the movement."⁽⁵⁸⁾ Insofar as they had any political aspirations at all the British trade unions were merely concerned with extending the franchise. This is illustrated in, for example, the following "Address to the Trade Union," which was probably written by Applegarth, the Secretary of the Amalgamated Carpenters. It stated that they did not "... wish to turn

our trade societies into political organisations, to divert them from their social objects; but we must not forget that we are citizens, and as such should have citizens' rights. Recollect also, that by obtaining these rights we shall be able more effectually to secure our legitimate demands as Unionists." (59) This last point is particularly noteworthy as when at long last in 1900 the trade unions did take some political actions it was still only for the extremely limited purpose of defending themselves against laws against trade unionism. When the unions did periodically enter into a struggle for the extension of the franchise, for example in 1865 in the Reform League and at the end of 1866, they were always at great pains to declare that they were in no way becoming political organisations. Thus when, for example, the London Trades Council passed a resolution in favour of the extension of the franchise it also passed one stating that "While advising the great bodies of trade unionists thus to act, we have no desire to make our societies channels for political agitation." (60) Even in 1889, year of the most important union upsurge of the 19th century if not of British history, a miners' delegate to the T.U.C. received loud applause for declaring that the Socialists in paying attention to the trade unions merely "wanted a house that had been built by someone else." (61) Similarly the only real conception held by the trade unions of an International was in terms of international co-operation against scabbing in strikes, such as had been shown in the support organised in 1867 for the Paris bronze workers, the 1868 strike of Geneva building workers and the 1871 engineering strike in the North East of England. The English trade unions affiliated to the International took no real political action however. In the minutes of the International it can be noted that the contributions of the English delegates were almost always on the subject of organisation of trade union solidarity. (62) This tradition was carried over into the period after the collapse of the First International when representatives of the T.U.C. attended both conferences called by the Possibilists in Paris. In addition, the T.U.C. held its own international workers' congress in 1888. This excluded all representatives of socialist organisations, and delegates from the socialist parties of Belgium, Holland, Denmark and France were allowed in only as representatives of their trade unions and not of their parties. (63) The obverse of the view that politics should be kept out of trade unionism is, of course, that those engaging in politics should have nothing to do with trade unions. In other words, if you accept the basic problematic that politics is distinguished from trade unionism by the place in which it occurs (one being concerned with industrial struggle and the other with the ballot box), then there are two things that you can do: one is to abandon politics and the other is to abandon trade unionism. This latter is precisely what the West European parties of the Second International did. The effects of this in Britain are dealt with below, but it is important to realise that this was a generalized phenomenon of the Second International. Krupskaya notes, for example: "... living as an emigre in France, I observed how during the tremendous postal strike in Paris, the French Socialist Party stood completely aside, and did not intervene in the strike. It was the business of the Trade Unions they said." (64) Thus, we can see that from the point of view of the political parties of social democracy and from the point of view of the 19th century trade unions their entire problematic condensed on one point: the neutrality of the trade unions in the political struggle. This has, in fact, become the key note of the social democratic attitude towards the trade unions. (65) It is expressed in clear

terms in statements such as that of Frank Cousins to the 1956 Labour Party Conference when he declared that: "I told you last year not to tell the unions how to do their job, and I am certainly not going to tell the Labour Party how to do its job." (66) Thus when, for example, the T.U.C. declared, following the election of the 1951 Conservative government, that: "... we shall continue to examine every question solely in the light of its industrial and economic implications," (67) it was expressing one of the most deeply felt beliefs of every social democrat. This position was spelt out in its classical form at the Zurich Congress of the International when a resolution was passed, with all the weight of the support of Kautsky, Adler and Bebel behind it, which stated that: "By political action we mean that the workers' parties should make full use of political and legal rights in an attempt to capture the legislative machine and use it in the interests of the working class and for the capture of political power." (68) Here the basic problematic of social democracy on the question of the trade unions is fully set out. Political action is defined as such action by the type of activity, usually electoral, involved, i.e., "capturing" the legislature. Trade unions therefore are merely working within the system and their activity, because it occurs in the wrong place and is the wrong type of activity, cannot by definition be political. This theoretical conclusion was clearly spelt out in, for example, the documents of the German Social Democratic trade unions which talked of the "political activity carried on by the Workers' Party," in contrast to the unions which "being circumscribed by law are anchored in present day bourgeois society." (69) With their roles thus being defined as completely different, the scene was of course set for the complete growing apart of the trade union leadership and the political leadership within the social democratic parties. In the case of Germany, the long period of internecine warfare culminated in the 1906 Congress of the Party which declared that the trade unions were "of equal importance with", which in practice meant "were virtually autonomous of", the Party. (70) On this basis the totally autonomous trade union bureaucracy became legitimised. (71)

In Britain the entirely incorrect problematic of social democracy with regard to the trade unions combined with the backwardness of the working class and the general philistinism of British culture to produce a virtual caricature of the Second International's position. Hyndman, the leader of the S.D.F. and hence controller of the most significant Marxist organisation in Britain, was notorious for his positions on strikes. Before the development of the trade unions after 1889 he had allowed some liberty of agitation by members of the S.D.F., and even afterwards individual S.D.F. militants such as McLean did tremendous work within the trade unions. However, the S.D.F. as an organisation had its positions accurately reflected in statements such as Hyndman's that: "We are opposed to strikes altogether... They never were a powerful weapon, and now they are quite out of date." "We of the Social Democratic Party and 'Justice' are opposed to strikes on principle" and "Can anything be imagined, more foolish, more harmful, more in the widest sense of the word unsocial than a strike..." "I have never advocated a strike... I have never known... a successful strike." (72) This position was buttressed by a crude version of the "iron law of wages", a refusal to understand the difference between the nature of an organisation and the nature of its leadership (73) and a verbal ultra-radicalism. (74)

Once the basic problematic of social democracy with regard to the trade unions is understood, it can be seen that certain problems immediately become insoluble within that framework. In particular, it is impossible to grapple with the question of the General Strike. The social democratic argument can only run as follows: What is a political action? One concerned with the legislature. What is therefore a political General Strike? A strike which is connected with, or at least leads to, some action concerned with the legislature. It was therefore entirely within this framework that the social democracy discussed the General Strike⁽⁷⁵⁾ and in conclusion it could come up with no even plausible theoretical position regarding the question.⁽⁷⁶⁾ All this was of course despite the tremendous fierceness of the clashes involved in such strikes⁽⁷⁷⁾ which eventually led to the abandonment of the discussion as being too dangerous.⁽⁷⁸⁾ From then on the discussion on the General Strike became subsumed under more general questions such as that of the political neutrality of the trade unions in party terms,⁽⁷⁹⁾ the debate over whether reforms could alter the nature of capitalism⁽⁸⁰⁾ and the debate inside the Russian party over "economism". Equally importantly in several countries, notably France and the United States, the forces of social democracy were faced with a formidable rival in the form of syndicalism. This new challenge was both a result of the degeneration of the Second International and a tragic failure to break with its theoretical and effective problematic.

The theoretical origins of syndicalism varied from country to country. In France the influence of Proudhon was perhaps dominant.⁽⁸¹⁾ In Spain it was that of Bakunin.⁽⁸²⁾ In the United States it represented the coming together of a whole series of native strands which can probably be traced back to the early Labour parties and the Knights of Labour.⁽⁸³⁾ In Ireland it took its inspiration fairly directly from the I.W.W.⁽⁸⁴⁾ In all countries however certain fundamental features existed.

Most importantly, the essential problematic of the Second International concerning the relation between trade unionism and politics was not rejected but accepted. In other words, the division between political and trade union struggle on the basis of the area in which they occurred was actually emphatically affirmed by the syndicalists. Thus, for example, Vincent St. John, the I.W.W. leader, stated, in terms that would probably have been acceptable to any British trade union bureaucrat that: "To those who think the workers will have to be united in a political party, we say dig in and do so, but do not try to use the economic organisation to further the aims of the political party."⁽⁸⁵⁾ In order to reaffirm this attitude, the I.W.W. removed from its famous preamble the section which had originally dealt with political action.⁽⁸⁶⁾ An entirely similar attitude was expressed by the C.G.T. in the Charter of Amiens.⁽⁸⁷⁾ It was of course possible to eclectically combine trade union action with politics defined in the social democratic sense,⁽⁸⁸⁾ but this of course in no way indicated a change in basic problematic. In consequence, although syndicalism was undoubtedly a revolutionary trend within the workers' movement in a way that the reformist social democratic parties were not, and it was for this reason that organisations such as the I.W.W. were invited to join the Third International en bloc, nevertheless, its acceptance of the basic problematic of the Second International rendered it no more able to deal with the relation of trade unionism and political action than were the ideologies of social democracy. All the other weaknesses of syndicalism, for example its utopian conception of the General Strike, were se-

condary to this. (89) What aspects of syndicalism were of importance at the time, for example its tremendous development of the actual technique of industrial struggle, were elements which could be incorporated into the theories of Communism with relative ease. Syndicalism itself became a reactionary ideology after 1917.

As has already been noted, syndicalism developed most in countries or regions dominated by small scale production. In Britain the conditions for this hardly existed. In addition, by the time syndicalism became an important current within the international workers' movement, and the C.G. was not founded until 1895 and the I.W.W. until 1905, the traditional trade unions already had a considerable grip over the working class. To the extent that syndicalism meant anything in Britain, it therefore became a moment for amalgamation between the existing trade unions and the establishment of rank and file movements within them.⁽⁹⁰⁾ Syndicalism therefore never became a decisive force in Britain in the way that it did in France, and never shaped the consciousness of a whole generation of militants in the way it did in the United States.

What however did have a permanent effect in Britain was the mistakes made by the S.D.F. in pursuing to its logical conclusion the social democratic position on the trade unions. In the years before and during the great burst of unionisation in 1889-91 socialist militants had played a leading role in all the industrial struggles. Indeed, perhaps the ideological inspirer of the entire movement had been Tom Mann's 1886 pamphlet "What a Compulsory Eight-Hour Day Means to the Workers." This had roundly declared that "trade unionists, I desire to make a special appeal. How long, how long will you be content with the present half-hearted policy of your unions? I regard that good work has been done in the past by the unions, but, in Her Majesty's name, what good purpose are they serving now? All of them have large numbers out of employment even when their particular trade is busy. None of the important societies have any policy other than that of endeavouring to keep wages from falling. The true Unionist policy of aggression seems entirely lost sight of; in fact the average unionist of today is a man with a fossilized intellect, either hopelessly apathetic, or supporting a policy that plays directly into the hands of the capitalist exploiters."⁽⁹¹⁾ Furthermore no matter how distorted the S.D.F.'s version of Marxism might be, it still provided a clearer key to the understanding of the importance of the new mass trade unions than did the general commonsense nonsense prevailing in 1889, let alone the ideologies of craft unionism. In consequence, the initial upsurges in 1889 were led by members of the S.D.F. such as Tom Mann, George Evans, John Burns and Will Thorne. However, the absurd policies of the S.D.F. meant that these men remained isolated, and no revolutionary tendency was built within the trade unions and within the working class, and the combination of this with the repression which the new unions faced in the 1890s led to the new trade unions falling rapidly into the hands of men whose function was that of a bureaucrat, whose main abilities were administrative, and who modelled their methods on those of the old craft unions. This tendency was heightened by the way in which the original labourers' unions were driven back from organising the labourers to a concentration on workers in large established units of production and with some regularity of employment.⁽⁹²⁾ In union after union the original socialists were replaced by men whose real strength lay in administration or in control of finances. This is shown clearly in a union such as the Printers' Labourers' Union.

In 1889 its secretary had been a member of the S.D.F. Yet by 1900 the union had changed its name, sign of the times, to the Operative Printers' Assistants Society on the instigation of a protectionist Liberal, Eddie Smith, and as part of a move to change the "image" of the union. Smith's main contribution to the union was to operate a rational banking system for the society, the installation of a telephone, the hiring of an office clerk and a general tightening up of efficiency.⁽⁹³⁾ By 1907 he had decided that it was expedient to levy 2d a week on the membership to finance a new and relatively opulent headquarters.⁽⁹⁴⁾ He was succeeded in 1909 by George Isaacs, who was to remain General Secretary until 1948 and who was to preside as Minister of Labour during the attacks made on the working class by the 1945-51 Labour Government. He was, with Ernest Bevin, one of the first group of trade union bureaucrats to become properly integrated into the machine of the Labour Party, and then into that of the State. It is notable, however, that his initial claim to fame inside the union had been his handling of the financial affairs of the union.⁽⁹⁵⁾

A similar pattern can be seen if we take the example of the Workers Union. This had not been formed at the time of the great upsurge of 1889, but it expressed relatively perfectly the ideals of that period, and its original leading figure, Tom Mann, was of course one of the key figures of the period of the development of the new unions. Yet by 1901, only three years after foundation, this union had come to be led by Charles Duncan, who had very different ideas to the concentration on an idea of "... the ultimate realisation of an Industrial Commonwealth" which had been written into the union's founding documents by Mann. His emphasis was placed not on the rapid transformation of society but on persuading the union members to contribute to the various financial funds run by the union.⁽⁹⁶⁾ His position of dominance in the union was established by his ability to put the finances on a sound footing despite a fall in membership.⁽⁹⁷⁾ Duncan too naturally placed great emphasis on extending the union apparatus and his idea of union amalgamation, one of the declared aims of the Workers Union, was not that of a revolutionary union embracing all workers on a class basis, but of a financial manoeuvre to be carried out by administrative means.⁽⁹⁸⁾ Fairly naturally, when Mann returned from Australia, he did not bother to engage in anything other than informal contact with a union which he more than anyone else had helped to establish and of which he remained nominally vice-president until the 1920's.

This process of the formation of a leadership of the new unions which was based on administrative abilities and whose aims therefore became bound up with the existence of the administrative machine under their command, was a general phenomenon. In a survey of this period, Hobsbawm concludes that except for the case of the early leaders of NAUL, the Birmingham Gas Workers, and the National Amalgamated Labourers' Union, it was the revolutionary socialists who supplied the leaders of almost all the 1889 unions.⁽⁹⁹⁾ He contrasts the period of upsurge of 1889-92 with the "cautious, limited and conservative 'sectional' unionism of 1892-1910" and concludes that "The 'new unionism' of 1889 thus became uncomfortably like the 'old unionism' it had once fought; Ernest Bevin, not Tom Mann, was to dominate the dockers after their second expansion. The gas-workers, a very markedly 'party-dominated' organisation, whose leader was a protegee of Engels ... became the body of the Rt. Hon. J. R. Clynes."⁽¹⁰⁰⁾

The importance of the disastrous mistakes made in this period by the S.D.F. cannot be overrated. Certainly at a later period a mass reformist party along

something like the lines of the present Labour Party would have been established, and undoubtedly no matter how correct the S.D.F.'s policies were, it would have lost its pre-eminent position during the repression of the 1890s, but right from the beginning any mass reformist party would have been faced with a challenger with real roots in the working class. The Labour Party could never have established the absolutely complete political hegemony which it enjoyed for a whole historical period. During the period of trade union upsurge before 1914, which coincided with a period of extreme reaction inside the Labour Party itself, and even more during the war, a Marxist organisation could have developed which would have been a real force in shaping the consciousness of the working class. The ultimate development might have been that Britain would have enjoyed a mass Stalinist party instead of an insignificant one, but that in itself would have signified a qualitative change in the consciousness of the British working class. The period around 1889 was undoubtedly one which fitted perfectly Marx's dictum that "there may come days in which twenty years are embodied."⁽¹⁰¹⁾ By the 1880s the effects of the industrial revolution had worked themselves out to the point where the objective conditions for the modern labour movement — mass trade unions, independent political party existed, and where, for a unique moment in British history, a sufficiently large Marxist organisation with a good implantation in the decisive sector of intervention existed. The objective development could have been shaped by its intervention. It failed the test, and not twenty but eighty years later the effects are still being felt. If ever a confirmation of Lenin's famous thesis concerning the relation of revolutionary theory and practice were needed, then such a confirmation was given by the S.D.F.

The effect of the S.D.F.'s failure could also be seen, although admittedly in a much less decisive way, in the field of the actual organisational form of the trade unions. As mentioned earlier, the most effective form of trade union organisation for the economic struggle is that of the all-embracing or industrial union. By the late 1880s the ideological effects of the early period of trade unionism had declined somewhat, and even non-Marxists within the new union movement saw the need to break with the old craft structures and develop at least fairly comprehensive general unions.⁽¹⁰²⁾ The S.D.F. could easily have accentuated this trend, and a rational and effective trade union structure could have been established for at least the new unions. Instead, after the initial upsurge the unions developed in a "spontaneous" (i.e. chaotic) way. There was not even the same development of primitive theorising which characterised, for example, the rise of the C.I.O. in the United States. What in fact evolved was that curious melange of craft, industrial and general unions which has dominated British trade union structure to the present day. This confusion was in complete contradiction to the needs of the working class whose social position demands in the greatest possible organisation at the point of production. As the "official" trade union structure could not supply it, a powerful impetus was given towards organisation at a rank and file level. In consequence, in strongly organised parts of industry, in particular in engineering, the shop steward system grew rapidly. This in turn became a powerful and definite part of working class consciousness in the turbulent period during World War I.⁽¹⁰³⁾ In other words, in a certain sense we can say that the trade union structure which emerged from the key period 1889-92 was so manifestly unsuitable for the conditions of industrial struggle existing in the twentieth century that in time a parallel movement of trade union organisation developed. This defines the first great disjuncture within the or-

ganisations of the working class, that between the official and the "un-official" trade union movement. The dialectic of this disjuncture, and its implications, is one of the key themes running through the British trade unions. By creating a relative autonomy between two complexes of elements this development gives to the British working class movement certain characteristic features which are not matched elsewhere. These characteristics are increased by the fact that this first disjuncture within the trade union movement combines with, and develops in an uneven and combined way with, a particular type of disjuncture between the trade unions and the main political organisation of the working class, the Labour Party.

The trade unions stand in a very different structural relation to the working class than does any political party. A party can act in a sectarian fashion, it can act opportunistically and, most importantly, it can enter or become a government and attack the working class. If it does these things, then workers leave it or switch their allegiance to another party. The trade unions on the other hand remain a basic weapon against the economic attacks of the capitalist class, and while the workers can "escape" from a party they cannot escape from the economic attacks of the ruling class. In particular, in a period of intensified class struggle the internal life and authority of the trade unions can only increase.

Having said that the relation of political parties to the working class differs from the relation of trade unions to the working class, it would nevertheless be a mistake to believe that all political parties fall in the same category, in that they all have the same structural relation to the working class. That this is very obviously not the case can be seen by comparing, for example, a social democratic and a Stalinist party.

As was noted earlier, the characteristic feature of the social democratic distinction between trade unionism and politics is in terms of the areas in which they occur. For the social democrat, politics is defined as activity around the legislature and strikes, etc. therefore belong to the realm of trade unionism and not politics. The counterpart of the social democratic politician who consigns strikes to the realm of the economic struggle is of course the industrial militant who believes that "politics" must be kept out of trade unionism. The effect of this ideology does not show itself merely at the level of attitudes, beliefs, ideas, etc. It also shows itself at the level of organisation. If strikes, etc., are in the realm of trade unionism and not of politics, then of course it is not the job of the political party to intervene in strikes, to organise its militants at the point of production in order to intervene in the economic struggle, for the political organisation to determine the policy to be pursued in strikes, etc. In fact in the framework of ideas of the social democrat, it would in fact make no sense to do these things. As a result, a social democratic party does not logically base its local organisations on the point of production. Its direct link to the working class is via local constituency or similar organisations. At the same time, such a party, for example the Labour Party, has to tie itself to the trade unions in some way, so it does so by a direct relation with the heads and bureaucrats of the trade unions.

The situation for a Stalinist (and Bolshevik) party is different. One of the founding principles of Bolshevism was that although it saw a big difference between trade union and political consciousness, it saw no difference between political and economic struggle with regard to where they were carried out. Whether a strike was political or not was determined by the consciousness of the people involved, not by the fact that it was a

"trade union" affair. In fact, one of the basic principles of communism was the necessity to organise the struggle of the working class at the point of production as a political struggle.⁽¹⁰⁴⁾ (See Krupskaya's "Memoirs of Lenin" and the Resolution on Tactics of the Third Congress of the Comintern.) Given this basic principle, it follows at once both that the policy to be pursued within the trade unions is an affair for decision by the political organisation, and also that it is necessary for the party to be organised directly at the point of production so as to be able to fight for the carrying out of the decision. In other words, the structural relation between the working class and a Stalinist and a Bolshevik party is different from the relation between the working class and a social democratic party such as the Labour Party. This profoundly affects the political line of such organisations and determines to a considerable extent the dialectics of political struggle within them.

To take just one example, this different relation to the working class means that the policy of a Stalinist party is directly affected by the struggle at the point of production in a way that is not the case for a social democratic party. Thus, for example, during the recent Renault strike everyone thought it perfectly natural that the Central Committee of the P.C.F. should declare its position on the struggle and formulate a policy for the strike. It would never occur to, or fit in with, the Labour Party to discuss the policy of members of the Labour Party during a strike. In fact, even if the Labour Party decided on a position vis a vis industrial struggle, it would have no way of putting it into effect and no T.U. militant would take any notice.

The relation of a Stalinist party to the working class means that its politics can be drastically affected by the state of the struggle in the work place. The most dramatic example of this was in Renault in 1947 when the P.C.F. had to change its entire strategic line because it feared being outflanked to the left in the industrial struggles within the company.⁽¹⁰⁵⁾

Furthermore, the militants of a C.P. think the trade union policies of the party are an integral, or even the main, part of the party's politics. This means that they judge the party by its policies in the industrial struggle and can in fact leave or join the party because of them. If a C.P. militant were attacked for the policy of the party in some particular strike, he would naturally consider that this would be a valid point to discuss in a way that it would never appear to be so to a member of a social democratic party. There exists a whole layer of militants in a C.P. whose policies within the party are determined by the attitude of the various political currents to the industrial struggle. This, as we are seeing in the British C.P., affects the whole dynamic of the internal party struggle.

Because a C.P. is directly organised at the point of production, it also means that there is relatively little room for manoeuvre by a C.P. trade union leader in a Stalinist party. Because party policy in the trade union field is determined by the political organisations of the party and because the party can carry out its line at the point of production and therefore

potentially bypasses a trade union leader, the T.U. leaders of C.P.s have not nearly the same room for manoeuvre and acquiring an independent political role as T.U. leaders in a social democratic party. A good example of this would be what happened to the group around Hannington in the C.P. in the late 1920s.

The relation of T.U. leaders and those of the C.P. is of course slowly changing, and T.U. leaders in the C.P. are being able to play an independent role. But there still does not exist the possibility of T.U. leaders playing the independent role that they can in the L.P.

If we consider merely the case of the trade union leader, then we can see that his position is much more analogous to that of the Stalinist party than it is to the social democratic party. He is structurally connected to the working class at the point of production, and his organisation is more or less continuously involved in some type of struggle, he is continually having to deal with the working class in a situation where it is in struggle with the bourgeoisie. These features together create a situation where trade union leaders are directly under the pressure of the working class in struggle, and like the C.P.s he must frame his policies accordingly.

Given that, for historical reasons already discussed, the division between politics and economics is more accented inside the British Labour Party than inside any other social democratic party, it is obvious that the dialectic of trade union bureaucracy and labour leaders is one of extreme complexity. It is the second great disjuncture which runs through the structure of the British working class movement and will be analysed at length in a later article. One thing can however be noted at once. This is that precisely because the Labour Party, for profound historical and ideological reasons, is not rooted in the working class at the point of production, trade union struggles very frequently by-pass the Labour Party organisationally. However, this has a dual effect: the fact that the Labour Party is not rooted in the working class at the point of production means that the industrial struggles of the working class can develop a great depth and intensity in a way that could not be the case with such a right-wing party organised directly in the trade unions, but on the other hand the fact that the militants in these struggles can organisationally ignore the Labour Party also means that there is little incentive for them to break with Labour Party structure, and this in turn helps to prevent them breaking ideologically with Labourism. Thus, the very same structural features which allowed the industrial struggle to assume such an acute form also helped retain the ideological hold of social democracy over the working class. Such is the curious dialectic of the British working class movement. It has created, together with the shop stewards' movement and the consequent disjuncture within the trade union movement itself, a great tendency towards rank and file organisation. With the founding of the Communist Party, the C.P. could draw on these tendencies in order to build the Minority movement. While the nature of the Labour Party facilitated the creation of big autonomous organisations, it, however, meant that there was little incentive for workers to actually organisationally leave the Party. This helped to widen still further the gap in thought between "economic" and "political" struggle, and between "politics" and "trade unionism" which was in any case an integral part of Labourism. Due to the appalling theoretical backwardness of the C.P., even in its early periods, (106) the party did nothing to overcome this. There remained, therefore,

a tremendous gap in consciousness between trade unionism and politics which led to the situation which is so clearly the case now, where the organisational hold of the Labour Party over the working class, and its effects on their trade union actions, is virtually nil, but ideologically Labourism still dominates the working class. However, in order to be able to deal in detail with these later points, which are essentially concerned with changes in capitalism, and in particular the decline of British imperialism, it is necessary to analyse in detail the changing state of the economy itself and the way in which this has interacted with and determined the disjunctions which exist inside the working class movement. This we will do in a later article.

A. Jones

- (1) Cited *Red Mole*, 24.4.71.
- (2) Marx - *Capital*, Vol.1, p.176.
- (3) Engels - *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, in: *Marx & Engels on Britain*, p.254.
- (4) E.P. Thompson - *The Making of the English Working Class*, p.277f.
This is not to accept at all, of course, all of Thompson's conclusions, most of which are designed to recreate a justification for populism. (Hence, for example, the peculiarly progressive role assigned to Luddism.) Thompson however forgets that populism, with its dissolution of social class into the "people", the "oppressed", the "masses", etc., is, in advanced capitalist society, not an undeveloped and more "understandable" brand of socialism, but is in fact counter-revolutionary and the mainstay not of the working class ideologies, but of fascism and bonapartist demagogy of the Huey Long type. For a devastating critique of Thompson's populism see P. Anderson - *The Myths of Edward Thompson*, NLR, 35, especially p.32-39.
- (5) See J. Mortimer - "The Structure of the Trade Union Movement", *Socialist Register*, 1964.
- (6) J. P. Cannon - "The I.W.W.: The Great Anticipation".
- (8) The social base of the C.G.T. was amongst the small workshops of the relatively undeveloped French capitalist structure (see Ridley, op. cit., p.15). Similarly, the base of the I.W.W. was never in the developed industry of the Eastern States of the U.S.A. but always amongst the migratory workers of the West. (See Cannon, op. cit., p.20 and Kornbluh, op. cit., p.65). This whole problem of the relation of social base, ideology and organisational form is of extreme complexity. Although organisational form and theoretical positions have a certain relative autonomy from social base nevertheless that autonomy is precisely what it says, merely relative. We therefore have to examine three elements, at least, in any organisation; its organisational form, its theoretical positions (implicit or explicit) and its social base. An examination of the dialectic of these elements is necessary to get a first approximation to the laws of motion of any object of study. For example, the classical social base of a social democratic party is the privileged layers within the working class of capitalism, i.e., the labour aristocracy. The Labour Party differs from a classic Social Democratic Party however, in that it has contained, from the period of the decline of the Liberal Party at least, a considerable element of representation from layers outside the working class. The reason for this is primarily that the extreme social polarisation of the British social structure allows no real social base for a reformist party based on the petite-bourgeoisie and therefore these elements are forced, initially unwillingly, into a party whose social base is the working

- class. (See for example Hobsbawm on the Fabians.) Nevertheless while this wing of the Labour Party in practice exercised considerable influence it did not, at least until recently, ever succeed in replacing the representatives of Labour aristocracy or trade union bureaucracy, i.e., elements whose social base of support was inside the working class, as the real controllers of Labour Party policy. It is a complete myth that, for example, Fabianism ever exercised any determining role inside the Labour Party (Hobsbawm, *ibid.*), let alone that it was only the intervention of Sidney and Beatrice Webb, Bernard Shaw, et al., which prevented the Labour Party being captured by Marxism. In fact, the dominant ideology of the Labour Party, at least until the period of Wilsonism, was directly determined by the social position, and ideology corresponding to it, of privileged, in differing ways, sections of the working class. In the case of syndicalism, however, the relation of social base and ideology is fairly close. The relation of social base and organisational form is far more complex. The transitional steps can however be seen in some of the older "all embracing" trade union movements where, for example, in the *Knights of Labour*, the conspiratorial forms characteristic of the petite-bourgeoisie are clearly visible. In others the organisational character probably stemmed from the petite-bourgeoisie attraction to "cooperativism".
- (9) Engels - *The Role of Force in History*, p. 30.
- (10) This point is of considerable importance as it would be a fundamental error to believe that the focus for increasing economic oppression of the working class is always increased economic clashes between labour and capital. On the contrary, the focus is typically found in structures or ideologies possessing a high degree of relative autonomy from the struggle over surplus value. An increase in the militancy of the proletariat does not lead to a direct "averaged" increase of militancy, struggle or opposition to reformist leaderships. It is more typically some overtly political event, for example, a foreign war, which provides the focus for an explosion. The 1905 revolution in Russia is an excellent example of this. In other cases it may be a scandal, e.g. the Dreyfus affair, or actions in some other section of the population, e.g. students in May 1968 in France, which provides the political focus which creates the explosion.
- (11) E. P. Thompson, *ibid.*, p. 260.
- (12) *Ibid.*, p. 263.
- (13) See Hobsbawm, *op. cit.*, p. 232.
- (14) Engels, in *Marx and Engels*, *op. cit.*, p. 18.
- (15) In the field of industry its greatest expression was the railways, and the political preconditions were laid for this period of expansion when, in 1846, the industrial bourgeoisie drove one more nail into the coffin of its old allies, the landowners, by forcing the repeal of the corn laws. In trade some idea of British capitalist dominance can be gained from the fact that in the 1880s three quarters of all shipping using the Suez Canal was British owned. (D. Thompson, p. 140). The 19th century saw a phenomenal expansion of British trade. For example, in the period 1851-71 exports tripled. (*Ibid.*, p. 140.) By 1870 British trade per head of population was three times as great as that of Germany or France and four times that of the United States (Hobsbawm - *Industry and Empire*, p. 135). From the second decade of the 19th century to the ninth decade the average rate of growth of British industrial production was 33% per decade. (Hobsbawm, *op. cit.*, p. 68).
- (16) Cited 5.1.48.
- (17) Between 1851 and 1891 another 20% of the population moved to the towns (Hobsbawm, *op. cit.*, p. 13).
- (18) Engels, 1892 Preface to *The Condition of the Working Class in England*. Marx noted this development when he wrote in 1878 that: "The English working class had been gradually becoming more and more deeply demoralized by the period of corruption since 1848 and had at last got to the point when it was nothing more than the tail of the Great Liberal Party, i.e., of its oppressors the capitalists. Its direction had passed completely into the hands of the venal trade union leaders and professional agitators. These fellows

- shouted and howled behind the Gladstones, Brights, Mundells, Morleys, and the whole gang of factory owners . . ." (*Marx to Liebknecht*, 11.2.1878, my emphasis).
- (19) See B.F. Fennick – *The Contradictions of the Steel Industry*, in: *International*, Vol. 1, No.2. The "lump" is of course an example of the system as it still operates.
 - (20) Hobsbawm – *Labouring Men*, p. 273.
 - (21) T. Mann, *Memoirs*, p.26.
 - (22) Cited Pelling, *op. cit.*, p.104.
 - (23) *Ibid.*, p.58.
 - (24) Engels notes: ". . . the larger the concern, and with it the number of hands, the greater the loss and inconvenience caused by every conflict between master and men; and thus a new spirit came over the masters, especially the large ones, which taught them to avoid unnecessary squabbles, to acquiesce in the existence and power of trade unions . . . The largest manufacturers, formerly the leaders of the war against the working class, were now the foremost to preach peace and harmony." (*Engels, op. cit.*, p.19).
 - (25) S. and B. Webb, *op. cit.*, p.282.
 - (26) J. Banks – *Marxist Sociology in Action*, p. 70.
 - (27) Hobsbawm, *op. cit.*, p.299 and Banks, *op. cit.*, p.73.
 - (28) S. and B. Webb, *op. cit.*, p.491.
 - (29) Banks, *op. cit.*, p.92.
 - (30) Pelling, *op. cit.*, p.76.
 - (31) *Ibid.*, p.337.
 - (32) Agreements based on a sliding scale of wages based on prices, i.e., explicit class collaboration, must be distinguished from sliding scales based on the cost of living. These latter generally operate in the interests of the working class.
 - (33) Banks, *op. cit.*, p.91.
 - (34) Pelling, *op. cit.*, p.85.
 - (35) Cited *International Socialism*, 48.
 - (36) *Ibid.*
 - (37) Engels, in: *Marx & Engels, op. cit.*, p.28.
 - (38) See in particular the sections in *Marx & Engels on Britain*, p.250f.
 - (39) Marx – *The Poverty of Philosophy*, pp. 144-152. Despite his treatment of the subject here, Marx was still fighting against variants of the theory in 1865 and 1875. See for example: *Wages, Price and Profit*, and *Marx to Engels*, 20th May 1865 (*Selected Correspondence*, p. 211) for the polemic against Weston, as well as the famous condemnation of Lassalle's "Iron Law of Wages" in: *The Critique of the Gotha Programme*.
 - (40) Marx – *The Poverty of Philosophy*, p.150. Marx on several occasions made statements of the same type: "But with the development of industry the proletariat not only increases in number, it becomes concentrated in greater masses, its strength grows and it feels that strength more . . . Thereupon the workers begin to form combinations against the bourgeoisie, i.e. the real fruit of the battle lies not in the immediate result but in the expanding union of the workers" (M.E. 1., p.143) and "successively rising and falling wages, coupled with the resultant conflicts between industrialists and workers, fuse them into a united powerful force against the encroachments of the governing class and prevent them from becoming "pitiful more or less well nourished instruments of production". (M.E.1., p.150).
 - (41) "*Selected Works*", p. 43. It is interesting to note here however, that Marx alters considerably the theoretical emphasis placed by Engels in his original draft of the *Manifesto*. Engels simply states that the further the process of concentration of capital ". . . the greater is the pressure exercised by big industry on wages, which . . . sink to their minimum and therewith render the condition of the proletariat increasingly unbearable." (*Engels – Principles of Communism*" p.10). Marx, on the other hand, stresses that no matter how frequently defeated are the organisations of the proletariat ". . . it grows up again, stronger, firmer, mightier. It compels legislative recognition of particular interests of the workers by taking advantage of the divisions between the bourgeoisie itself. Thus the ten-hours bill in England was carried." (p.43).

- This may reflect some difference of opinion as Engels had earlier expressed rather similar views to those in the first draft of the Manifesto when he wrote that "The history of these unions is a long series of defeats of the working men, interrupted by a few isolated victories. All these efforts naturally cannot alter the economic law according to which wages are determined by the relation between supply and demand in the labour market". (*Marx and Engels on Britain*, p.252).
- (42) "They (trade unions) fail generally from limiting themselves to a guerilla war against the effects of the existing system, instead of simultaneously trying to change it, instead of using their organised forces as a lever for the final emancipation of the working class", (*Marx - Wages, Price and Profit - Selected Works*, p.229).
- (43) Marx to W. Liebknecht, February 11th, 1878 in *Marx and Engels on Britain*, p. 555.
- (44) *Ibid.*
- (45) Marx to Kugelmann, January 15th, 1866 - *Selected Correspondence*, p.213.
- (46) Engels to F.A. Sorge, 12th September, 1874 - *Selected Correspondence*, p.350.
- (47) Engels to E. Bernstein, June 17th, 1879 - *Marx and Engels on Britain*, p.556.
- (48) Engels to Bernstein, August, 1889 - *Marx and Engels on Britain*, p. 556.
- (49) Engels to F.A. Sorge, December 7th, 1889 - *ibid.*, p. 567. Indeed, Engels become rather euphoric and added that "... unlike the old trade unions, they greet every suggestion of the identity of interest between capital and labour with derision".
- (50) See below
- (51) Engels, *op. cit.*
- (52) *Ibid.*
- (53) In 1894 Engels noted that: "... things are moving, though slowly and in zigzags. Take for instance Mawdsley, the leader of the Lancashire textile workers. He's a Tory; in politics Conservative and in religion a devout believer. Three years ago these gentry were violently opposed to the eight hour day; today they vehemently demand it. In a quite recent manifesto Mawdsley, who last year was a fierce opponent of any separate polity for the working class, declared that the textile workers must take up the question of direct representation in Parliament. ... As you see, it is the trade union that will enter Parliament. It is the branch of industry and not the class that demands representation. Still, it is a step forward". Engels to G. V. Plekhanov - *Marx and Engels on Britain*, p. 583. In this letter Engels expresses an extremely crude view when he writes that: "As soon as a dozen branches of industry are represented (in Parliament) class consciousness will arise of itself".
- (54) Engels quotes from this extensively in his 1892 Preface to *Condition of the Working Class in England*.
- (55) Nairn concludes that: "This time of collapse and frustration, from the 1840s to the 1880s, was decisive for the whole later pattern of the class-struggle. ... The reason for the extraordinarily formative influence of this period is that in it the exhausted quiescence of the class struggle coincided with the maximum florescence of British society in the world outside. While at home the workers had been defeated and anaesthetised, and the bourgeoisie had settled into its heritage, abroad the power of Britain's economic system penetrated into every corner of the globe. ... In this unique conjuncture, the British economic revolution was carried outwards successfully while a social counter-revolution triumphed at its head and heart." T. Nairn - *The Fateful Meridian*, N.L.R.60, p.5.
- (56) In for example the period 1850-75 wages rose by approximately one third. (Cole & Postgate - *The Common People*, p.351.) This represents a considerable contrast to the period of the 1830s or 1840s when it appears that the standard of living of the working class rose practically not at all and may actually have fallen. (For a discussion see Hobsbawm, *op. cit.*, Ch. 5 & 7.) In political terms however more important than the absolute increase was the differential increase which accompanied the formation of the labour aristocracy.

- (57) Engels, in: *Marx and Engels*, op. cit., p.555. Such a tendency had appeared even earlier however. For example, a "no politics" rule was introduced into the Miners Association in 1842 (E.P. Thompson - "*The Peculiarities of the English*" in: *Socialist Register*, 1965.)
- (58) See Engels in: *Marx & Engels*, op. cit., p.204.
- (59) Cited Pelling, op. cit., p.62, my emphasis.
- (60) *Ibid.*, p.63.
- (61) *Ibid.*, p.119.
- (62) J. Braunthal - *History of the International*, Vol.1, pp.114-116.
- (63) *Ibid.*, p.198.
- (64) N. Krupskaya - *Memoirs of Lenin*, p.21.
- (65) The Communist International noted that: "Among the bourgeois ideas with which the ruling class has succeeded in inoculating the working masses is the idea of the neutrality of the trade unions, the idea of their a-political, non-party character." (*Theses on the Trade Unions adopted by the Third Congress of the Communist International*).
- (66) A. Flanders - *Trade Unions*, p.157.
- (67) Pelling, op. cit., p.234.
- (68) Braunthal, op. cit., p.251.
- (69) H. Greling, op. cit., p.63.
- (70) Nettl - *Rosa Luxemburg*, p. 154.
- (71) In Germany its incarnation was Karl Legien, the "architect" of German trade unionism and first chairman of the General Committee of German Trade Unions. Legien was notable for addressing 200 United States congressmen in a speech which did not mention socialism once and was picked out for special attack in Lenin's "*What should not be imitated in the German Labour Movement*". (Lenin - C. Vol.20,p.231). In the conditions of pre-1914 Germany, however, even the completely reformist policies of Legien were able to bring success in terms of members and wage increases. By 1913 the German trade unions were involved in over 13,000 wage negotiations annually. Wage increases totalled nearly 100% between 1885 and 1910 and a grateful membership paid up dues until by the beginning of the second decade of the twentieth century the funds of the trade unions totalled 20 times those of the party. Naturally, there was opposition to Legien's policies, but given boom conditions in Germany for most of this period, and given the enormous apparatus and prestige of the S.P.D., attempts to set up more political unions completely failed.
- (72) Cited in W. Kendall - *The British Revolutionary Movement, 1900-22*, p.29.
- (73) When Tom Mann raised in 1885 the question of the S.D.F. and the trade unions and the involvement in the agitation for the eight-hour day: "This brought Hyndman to his feet. He criticised me severely for my championship of the trade unions. What were these precious unions? By whom were they led? By the most stodgy-brained, dull-witted, and slow-going time-servers in the country." (Mann, op. cit., p.40).
- (74) "The next speaker was John Ward, the present Col. John Ward, M.P. . . . He was ready to take action for a physical force overthrow, and was certainly not going to spend time over anything so paltry as an eight-hour day." (*Ibid.* p.44).
- (75) There were, for example, General Strikes in support of the suffrage in Belgium in 1886, 1887, 1891, 1893 and 1902. A General Strike for universal franchise was held in Sweden in 1902. Interestingly enough historically the first context in which the General Strike was seriously posed was also concerned with the franchise. This was at the Chartist Convention in February 1839. This had been merely in the context of some rather wild talk concerning forms of action. However, the idea did begin to be seriously discussed and on the rejection of the second chartist petition calling for adult male suffrage a group of workers in Ashton-under-Lyne, who were on strike for a totally different reason, declared the necessity for a strike to implement the charter. They were at once supported by workers in Manchester, and the rest of Lancashire, the Potteries, areas of Yorkshire and Wales and by the Scottish miners. The strike was sabotaged by the middle class leaders of the Chartists, and as a result 1500 peo-

- ple were arrested and 79 transported to Australia. Nevertheless, the seeds of the thought of strike action for political ends had been sown.
- (76) Schmidt of the German delegates at the Amsterdam Congress of the International simply declared that the question of a General Strike was not even discussable. (Braunthal, op.cit., p.296).
- (77) For example, the following is a description of the 1886 Belgian General Strike:— "For some days the province of Hainaut presented the dramatic spectacle of a full-scale war. Martial law was proclaimed in the towns, town halls were occupied by the army, soldiers were camped in the yards of factories and around pit-heads, squadrons of cavalry patrolled the streets. The shots of the soldiers . . . put down the workers' rising in terror." (H. Pirenne — *Histoire de Belgique*, cited in Braunthal, op.cit., p.210). State repression was massive with leaders being given 20 years solitary confinement. In 1893 bloody clashes again broke out in another General Strike for the franchise. The climax in Belgium came in another General Strike of 1902. This had its origins in spontaneous uprisings arising from fury at the bourgeoisie's blocking of electoral reform. It was then made official by the party. The government was again well prepared and used over 60,000 troops in the struggle.
- (78) See: *La Lutte de Rosa Luxemburg contre la bureaucratie syndicale allemande* in: "de la bureaucratie", Cahiers Rouge, No.3).
- (79) See Lenin — *Trade Union Neutrality*, C. Works, Vol. 13, p.460.
- (80) See Rosa Luxemburg — *Social Reform or Revolution*, section on "Cooperatives, Unions, Democracy".
- (81) See F. F. Ridley — *Revolutionary Syndicalism in France*, p.25, and the review of the book by P. Frank in: *International*, Vol.1, No.4.
- (82) See F. Morrow — *Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Spain*, pp.31-47; Trotsky — *The Revolution in Spain*; and Trotsky — *The Lessons of Spain*.
- (83) See A. Whitman — *Labour Parties 1827-34*; J. Laslett — *Labour and the Left*, especially p.241-279; L. Wolff — *Lockout*, p. 14; J. L. Kornbluh — *Rebel Voices*, Chapt.1; and J.P. Cannon — *E. V. Debs — The Socialist Movement of his Time*.
- (84) See A. Jones — "Ireland before 1916" in: *International*, Vol.1, No.5, especially pp.38-46.
- (85) V. St. John — *Political Parties and the I. W. W.*, cited in Kornbluh, op.cit., p.43, c.f. Footnote 61 above. Haywood similarly went out of his way to deny that the I.W.W. was a political organisation — *ibid.*, p.50.
- (86) J.P. Cannon — *The First Ten Years of American Communism*, pp.288-292.
- (87) Ridley, op.cit., p.90.
- (88) For example, James Connolly defines a political party as "men and women who meet together to formulate a policy and a programme to vote upon" (*Socialism made Easy*, p.29), and states that he is opposed to this and instead looks "forward to the time when every economic organisation will have its Political Committee, just as it has its Organisation Committee or its Strike Committee." (*ibid.*, p.29). He shows the particular distinction he has in mind between politics and economic struggle when he states that: "IT IS THEREFORE ABSOLUTELY INDISPENSABLE FOR THE EFFICIENT TRAINING OF THE WORKING CLASS ALONG CORRECT LINES THAT ACTION AT THE BALLOT BOX SHOULD ACCOMPANY ACTION IN THE WORKSHOP." (*ibid.*, p.28). Here again, just as for the Social Democrats, politics and trade unionism are seen as parallel activities separated by the arena in which they occur. (See also D. R. O'Connor Lysaght — "The Unorthodoxy of James Connolly" in: *International*, Vol.1, No.3, especially pp.14-19). A similarly eclectic formulation can be found in Haywood in the following passage. When asked if the I.W.W. has the same attitude to politics as the A.F.L. the reply was: "The Industrial Workers of the World is an economic organisation without any affiliation with any political party or any non-political sect. I as an industrialist say that industrial unionism is the broadest possible political interpretation of the working-class political power, because by organising the workers industrially you at once enfranchise the workers in the shops, you at once give the black men who are disenfranchised politically a voice in the operation of the industries; and the same would extend

to every worker. That to my mind is the kind of political action that the working class wants. You must not be content to come to the ballot box on the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November, the ballot box erected by the capitalist class, guarded by the capitalist henchmen, and deposit your ballot to be counted by the black-minded thugs, and say, "That is political action". You must protect your ballot with an organisation that will enforce the mandates of your class. I want political action that counts. I want a working class that can hold an election every day if they want to." W. Haywood — *The General Strike* in: Kornbluh, op.cit., p.45. Here also, despite the confused formulations, Haywood accepts the definition of political action as concerned with voting. This is all the more important in that Haywood was probably politically one of the most clear of the I.W.W. leaders. He was, for example, one of the few to realise the importance of the Communist Party. (See J. P. Cannon — *The First Ten Years of American Communism*, p.303, and Haywood's autobiography Chapt. 24.)

- (89) An example of the completely utopian concepts of the General Strike prevalent amongst the syndicalists in the following description by Eugene Guillard. "In an attempt to defend factories, workshops and warehouses, the army would disperse its forces. The mere threat by the workers to destroy railway lines and signalling equipment would compel the government to spread its troops over 39,000 kilometers of the French railway system. An army of 300,000 men defending 39 million metres of railway track would mean one man to every 130 metres, with 130 metres separating each man from his neighbour. In these conditions the government would be unable to protect the warehouses and factories. The towns would be left undefended and the revolutionary workers in the towns would have the field to themselves." Cited Braunthal, op.cit., p.291.
- (90) In practice, even the doctrinaire de Leonite S.L.P. was forced in Britain to accept the existing union structure. (See Kendall, op.cit., Chapt.4). The Workers Union similarly was soon forced to drop its explicit fusing of economic and political organisation. (See Hyman, op.cit., Chapt.1).
- (91) Cited Pelling, op.cit., p.94.
- (92) See Hobsbawm — *Labouring Men*, p. 179.
- (93) J. Morran — *NATSOPA - Seventy-Five Years*, p.30.
- (94) *Ibid.*, p.34.
- (95) *Ibid.*, p.42.
- (96) R. Hyman — *The Workers Union*, p.96.
- (97) *Ibid.*, p.16.
- (98) *Ibid.*, p.73.
- (99) Hobsbawm, op.cit., p.182 and p.198.
- (100) *Ibid.*, p.191.
- (101) Marx to Engels, 9.4.1863, *Selected Correspondence*, p.171.
- (102) Hobsbawm, op. cit., p.179.
- (103) See Kendall, op. cit., Chapt. 142, and B. Pribecevic — *The Shop Stewards Movement and Workers Control 1910-22*, passim.
- (104) Krupskaya notes for example, that "Vladimir Ilyich was interested in the minutest detail describing the conditions and life of the workers. Taking the features separately he endeavoured to grasp the life of the worker as a whole—he tried to find what one could seize upon in order better to approach the worker with revolutionary propaganda. Most of the intellectuals of those days badly understood the workers. An intellectual would come to a circle and read the workers a kind of lecture. For a long time a manuscript of Engels' booklet, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State* was passed round the circles. Vladimir Ilyich read with the workers from Marx's *Capital* and explained it to them. The second half of the studies was devoted to the workers' questions about their work and labour conditions. He showed them how their life was linked up with the entire structure of society, and told them in what manner the existing order could be transformed. The combination of theory with practice was the particular feature of Vladimir Ilyich's work in the circles . . . The method of agitation on the basis of

the workers' every day needs became rooted deeply in our Party work." (Krupskaya, op.cit., p.21). She also criticises the French, and by implication other West European Socialist Parties because: "They thought the work of the Party was simply the political struggle. They had not the slightest notion as to the necessity for connecting up the economic and political struggles."

Ibid. See also *Resolution on Tactics* of the Third Congress of the Comintern.

(105) See P. Bois - *La greve Renault a avril-mai 1947*.

(106) See H. Wicks - *British Trotskyism in the '30s'* in: *International*, Vol.1, No.4.



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The Permanent Arms Economy

One of the by-products of the current resurgence in the class struggle has been an increasing concern to develop and criticise Marxist Theory. Consequently, many old dogmas fostered by the left are beginning to wane. But theoretical battles are not won automatically; an intensive and deliberate struggle for the development of Marxist Theory is a prime necessity.

The International Socialism group has proclaimed two major shibboleths; the theory of state capitalism and the theory of the permanent arms economy. During recent months the latter theory has faced criticism from inside, as well as outside, the IS group. As testimony to the level on which the dispute has been conducted by the IS leadership, so far they have continually delayed publishing D. Yaffe's important article on the subject in their theoretical journal. Yaffe raises a number of significant points, but on the whole our analysis differs in a number of important respects.

Analysis of the theory has not only been inhibited by censorship. The failure of the IS leadership to produce an adequate and rigorous statement of their theory for over a decade and a half, despite the fact that they have preached on the role of arms from many a pulpit, impairs any full debate on the nature of modern capitalism.

POSTULATES OF THE IS THEORY

About fifteen years ago T. Cliff produced a short article on the economic effects of arms production¹. His argument was clearly based upon the underconsumptionist notion of crisis, backed up by a quotation from Marx. According to Cliff, capitalist crises arise because a greater and greater proportion of the social income falls into the hands of the capitalist class, and this is devoted to the accumulation of capital. As this productive potential is amassed, after a period of time accumulation leads to the relative overproduction of consumer goods².

The effect of the arms budget is to generate a number of workers' incomes, partly from the arms industry itself, and partly from the consumer and service industries required to meet this increased demand. This increase in purchasing power, Cliff asserts, temporarily alleviates the crisis of "over-production" and prevents violent recessions in the economy.

Cliff provides a number of reasons why arms production, rather than any other government expenditure, is the most effective stabiliser of modern capitalism: it does not compete with private interests, it maintains the level of production of heavy industry which is otherwise more subject to severe fluctuations, it does not add to the productive capacity of capitalism or the output of mass consumer goods, it is an important factor in the defence and extension of capitalist markets, and finally all major countries are forced to enter the arms race and bear the economic disadvantages, as well as the advantages.

Having briefly expounded on the stabilising effects of arms production, Cliff proceeds to list the consequent economic and social difficulties. He suggests that arms production may stimulate an advance in production technique, which in turn would require a greater proportion of the national to be spent on armaments. In this situation the capitalist class would face the choice of either increasing arms expenditure and risking social unrest, or reducing it and falling into a slump. In addition Cliff suggests that the pressure of world competition could force the capitalist class to reduce arms expenditure.

Despite the fact that Cliff makes many sensible assertions, his theory is based upon the dubious notion of underconsumption; and it is not integrated into the tradition of Marxist economic theory. The rate of profit is not mentioned, or Marx's basic theory of capitalist crisis: "the law of the falling tendency of the rate of profit". It is not a Marxist approach that is evident from the work, it is permeated with J.M. Keynes' theory of effective demand. It was the latter economist, not Marx, who suggested that planned government expenditure could rid capitalism of severe slump and high unemployment.

Another statement of the theory was presented by M. Kidron only a few years ago³. Unlike Cliff, this writer tries to relate his theory to the rate of profit, although the underconsumptionist aspect still stands supreme.

The new argument that Kidron develops is concerned with the effect of arms production on the formation of the general rate of profit in the economy. (The general rate of profit is the Marxist term for the resultant rate of profit in the economy after it has been equalised in every sector.) In the third volume of *Capital* Marx argues that the general rate of profit is formed by considering the social capital as a whole, hence in Marx's model all sectors of production play a part in determining the general rate of profit. In contradistinction, Kidron adduces the arguments of L. von Bortkiewicz⁴ and P. Sraffa⁵ that the conditions of production in the "luxury" sector play no part in determining the general rate of profit, and as arms do not enter into the production of any other commodity, they can be considered as "luxuries". Kidron then asserts that the average organic composition of

capital in the economy can increase as a result of arms production, without any decline in the rate of profit. (For a discussion of the concept of the organic composition of capital, see Appendix I.) In this way arms production averts any crisis due to a rising organic composition of capital, which in other circumstances would cause a decline in the rate of profit, and capitalism is stabilised.

Kidron's theory is considerably confused, and as a result, a great deal of confusion has been perpetrated. Much of this stems from the inadequate development of Marxist economic theory, so we must devote considerable space to this aspect.

But first we shall deal with the real cornerstone of the theory—the notion of underconsumption.

THEORIES OF UNDERCONSUMPTION

Rosa Luxemburg was one of the first Marxists to develop a theory of underconsumption⁶. She argued that the capitalist system depends upon remnants of other non-capitalist forms of production for its survival. In particular these non-capitalist societies provide markets for goods produced in capitalist economies. As capitalism extends its own power and influence, especially through the use of militarism and war, it destroys the very elements upon which its survival depends. As all other forms of production are crushed, and capital gains universal power, the system breaks down as a result of its own inherent difficulties in the sphere of the circulation of commodities.

Her argument, however, has a dubious foundation. It is based upon her erroneous assertion that unadulterated capitalist reproduction is impossible, even in theory⁷. Her assertion flows from several serious mistakes: she makes some crucial arithmetic errors⁸, and, as Bukharin pointed out⁹, she misunderstands the process of expanded reproduction and assumes that an increase in the value of labour-power does not affect the basic condition of expanded reproduction.

The central thread running through Rosa Luxemburg's analysis is that she shifts attention from the process of *production* and concentrates on the problems of *circulation*. Unlike Marx, who thought that the crisis of the capitalist system was rooted in its relations of production, she argues that the process of circulation is decisive. And this is the central element in all theories of underconsumption; they break the connection between production and circulation and regard them as independent processes.

The error is displayed in the crude underconsumption theory, which suggests that since the workers receive as wages only part of the new value they produce, the development of the market always falls behind the scale of production. Such an argument is not uncommon on the Marxist left. Proponents of this theory forget that the surplus can be disposed of by other means. The capitalists can purchase goods for their own use, or accumulate (invest) the surplus. The crude underconsumptionist view serves to demonstrate the existence of *permanent overproduction* and the *impossibility* of capitalist reproduction.

Perhaps the most popular version of the theory, however, is that presented

by P. M. Sweezy¹⁰. He claims that the ratio

$$\frac{\text{rate of growth of output of consumption goods}}{\text{rate of growth of means of production}}$$

remains approximately stable, whereas the capitalists invest in such a manner that the ratio

$$\frac{\text{rate of growth of consumption}}{\text{rate of growth of means of production}}$$

steadily declines. It follows that there would be a tendency for consumption to lag behind the production of consumer goods, resulting in overproduction and crisis.

In addition, Sweezy produces a second, mathematical, argument for underconsumption, based on the work of Otto Bauer. His thesis rests on the assumptions that there is a steady increase in savings as a proportion of incomes, and that capitalists' income as a proportion of total income also increases.

What is the empirical justification for these assumptions?

Firstly, several sets of data indicate that the ratio

$$\frac{\text{rate of growth of output of consumption goods}}{\text{rate of growth of means of production}}$$

has not remained stable, on the contrary it has clearly declined¹¹. The output of means of production has grown at a much faster rate than the output of consumption goods. Sweezy's first formulation of a theory of underconsumption falls like a house of cards, as the first assumption is refuted by the facts.

Secondly, empirical evidence does not confirm the assumption that savings as a proportion of total income have increased¹². Furthermore, this is a highly unrealistic and rigid assumption.

Lack of empirical verification, however, is not the only fault of underconsumption theory. It is also completely unsound from the methodological point of view.

There is no doubt that the phenomenon of unsalable stocks of goods is evident in all serious capitalist crises. But is there a long term *trend* towards the accumulation of unsalable stocks? The question must be answered in the negative, since, during a boom most commodities are in short supply. Production and consumption interact during the trade cycle; in part, one determines the other, whereas Sweezy and the other underconsumptionists characteristically break the ties between production and consumption.

Thirdly, if overproduction is associated with crises, that does not prove that underconsumption is their cause. In reality it is largely a result. Marx asserts repeatedly throughout *Capital* that capitalist crises are rooted in the relations

of production that constitute the essence of capitalist production. The whole revolutionary content of *Capital* rests on the assertion that capitalism contains its own cause of crisis: "The real barrier of capitalist production is capital itself."¹⁴

In the Marxist sense, capital is a *social relation*, and as underconsumption theory is not rooted in this relation it must be discarded, for methodological reasons, as the essential cause of *capitalist* crisis.

THE RELEVANCE OF THE TRANSFORMATION PROBLEM

We shall now turn to Kidron's major argument: that the arms sector of production plays no part in forming the general rate of profit. To consider this we must deal with the transformation problem.

A great deal of the confusion over the transformation problem arises from the fact that different authors have different views of what the problem actually is. All authors agree that it deals with the issue of comparing values with prices in circumstances where they cannot be equal. They all agree that for the purposes of illustration it is permissible to assume that the rate of profit is equal in every firm. But they cannot agree if it is justifiable, or even necessary, to assume that the economy is in equilibrium, and if so precisely what type of equilibrium?

Let us first consider Marx's solution: In the third volume of *Capital* Marx presents us with examples of different sectors of production with different organic compositions of capital. The crucial assumption that Marx makes is to consider the whole economy as "a single total capital":¹⁵ This assumption seems reasonable, but Marx supplies no justification for it. In fact, elsewhere, Marx repeatedly asserts that capital cannot exist except in the form of a number of separate capitals. From Marx's assumption it follows the general rate of profit (the actual rate of profit formed after it has been equalised between sectors of the economy) is equal to the average rate of profit for the whole economy.

The prices of production are then formed by distributing the surplus value amongst the sectors of the economy in proportion to the size of their capitals, that is in proportion to the total constant and variable capital invested.

With these assumptions it follows that total value is equal to total price of all commodities. However, Marx supplies no reasons why this equality should hold. His assumptions must be regarded as being convenient, but not necessarily valid.

What is the snag in Marx's solution to the transformation problem? Let us consider the next production cycle, after prices and profits have been determined in the manner described above. The rate of profit, especially from the capitalists' point of view, will not be conceived of in terms of value but as a ratio between prices. Hence, during the next time period, the relative prices of production of different commodities will enter into the computation of the rate of profit. This refutes Marx's method of computing the rate of profit in terms of its average value composition. Marx's solution is not an equilibrium solution, for prices will change in a disproportional manner from one production period to the next.

E. Mandel¹⁶ has put forward an example of the transformation of values into prices, based upon Marx's solution, which suffers from all the forementioned defects. In addition, the solution imposes arbitrary changes in prices, and the organic composition of capital, in the different sectors. Mandel, in defending Marx, has failed to supply an equilibrium solution to the problem.

L. von Bortkiewicz presented his solution in 1907¹⁷. Despite several inadequacies, his solution is essentially an equilibrium solution, because the prices of each unit of embodied labour remain constant. It is not necessary to deal with his solution in detail, but the important advance he makes is to define the rate of profit in terms of prices, whilst the rate of exploitation and the organic composition of capital remain defined in terms of values. Bortkiewicz's solution thus expresses the dichotomy and contradiction between value and price, an essential aspect of the Marxist analysis of capitalism.

An important corollary follows from Bortkiewicz's solution: the general rate of profit is not directly determined by the conditions of production in those industries which do not directly or indirectly contribute to the make-up of the real wage. In other words the organic composition of capital in the luxury and armaments industries do not directly affect the general rate of profit. From this Kidron concludes that the organic composition of capital in the armaments industry can increase without any decrease in the general rate of profit, and without creating the conditions for a crisis.

Before we examine Kidron's assertion, we must continue to discuss the validity of Bortkiewicz's solution. There are two important objections to the latter. Firstly, Bortkiewicz assumes that the economy is in simple reproduction, and secondly he excludes the cost of constant capital stock from his definition of the rate of profit. In reality, capital stock, as opposed to used up capital, or capital flow, is the largest single component of investment, and the largest single element forming the rate of profit.

A third objection, that in this solution total price does not equal total value, is based upon the same unsubstantiated and unproved assertion made in *Capital*. This objection can be dismissed on the grounds that the definition of the price unit is an arbitrary matter, what concerns us is the ratio between the prices of different commodities of value one unit. Also, in the real world, this assertion denies the possibility of general price inflation, without a similar increase in values.

Other writers, such as Mandel, argue that a solution to the transformation problem should contain the phenomenon of changing prices. But unless the prices all rise or fall at the same rate, or remain static, such a haphazard phenomenon cannot be included in an illustrative solution to the transformation problem for a static or expanding economy in equilibrium. However, the dynamic interrelationship between prices and values, in a situation of disequilibrium, is an important area where empirical and theoretical research is needed. The transformation problem, as we have

interpreted it, covers the limited and abstract ground of economic equilibrium.

In 1948 J. Winternitz altered the Bortkiewicz transformation so that it also applied to expanded reproduction¹⁸ thus removing one of its deficiencies.

Yaffe, Dobb¹⁹, and May²⁰ have argued that none of the items in a reproduction scheme can be considered as independent of the others, and hence the conditions of production in all industries play a part in determining the general rate of profit. This is not true if constant capital stock is included in the scheme. The amount of constant capital stock in the luxury and arms sector is not dependent on the values in the other departments. In other words if the conditions of production in the other departments are defined, no feasible amount of constant capital stock in the luxury and arms sector will rule out the possibility of economic equilibrium. In general, the Bortkiewicz corollary is valid if his solution to the transformation problem is corrected.

Despite all this, Kidron's repetition of the corollary is completely irrelevant. If the general rate of profit is directly affected only by the conditions of production in those industries that are directly or indirectly involved in the production of the real wage, there is nothing to stop the organic composition of capital in those industries rising (or falling), independently of the conditions of production in the arms industry, thus causing a fall (or rise) in the rate of profit, even if an equilibrium state is maintained.

*Kidron has not shown that the existence of extensive armaments production can inhibit or postpone a fall in the general rate of profit. On the contrary, new techniques of production brought into the arms sector, associated with a high organic composition of capital, are likely to diffuse into other sectors, as Kidron himself asserts²¹ causing a more rapid decline in the rate of profit.*²²

ARMS PRODUCTION AND IMPERIALISM

The "Keynesian Revolution" in economic theory has been associated with a declared policy of successive British Governments since the Second World War to maintain unemployment at a low level by state expenditure. In practice, as in most of the developed capitalist countries, these expenditures have largely been devoted to armaments. For instance, in Britain 6.5 per cent, and in the USA 10 per cent, of the Gross National Product consists of military expenditures.

Cliff and Kidron offer no explanation of the motivation for this expenditure. This state of affairs can only be understood if we accept the view that since 1917, portion after portion of the world has been torn from the grip of capitalist imperialism. In these areas, non-capitalist states have been established without the scourge of capitalist overproduction and slump. The capitalist class feels threatened by the impending march of revolution which will purge these evils from more areas of the world. The maintenance of near full employment has become necessary, from the point of view of the capitalist class, to maintain their ideological dominance, and check the mass acceptance of socialist ideas.

The IS leaders suggest that the economic benefits of imperialism are expended, and that arms production has replaced imperialism as the new "stabiliser". Apart from the fact that their analysis of imperialism is not in accord with a critical analysis of the available data²³, the actual *motivation* for arms expenditure is ignored, instead they concentrate exclusively on the *function* of arms expenditure. Their methodology, therefore, bears a close resemblance to that of bourgeois social science.

Arms production is not unrelated to the historical development of imperialist capitalism, it is not a new twenty-year miracle cure for capitalism's problems. It is related to the desire to safeguard the world market from the challenge of the non-capitalist bloc and the colonial revolution. The dynamic of arms production is directly and inseparably related to imperialism.

In an attempt to bring Marxism 'up to date', Cliff and Kidron have erected a vulgar un-Marxist theory of underconsumption, and completely misunderstood the nature of the imperialist epoch in which they live. But if we reject their theory, the crucial role of arms production must not be ignored. This exposition would be inadequate if we did not examine the true role of arms in the development of modern capitalism.

ARMS PRODUCTION AND CRISIS

The recent phenomena of rapid price inflation, recurrent financial crises, and relatively high unemployment have led the IS leaders to understate the stabilizing effects of arms production. In 1968 Kidron regarded such elements of instability as a "smudge on the horizon"²⁴. In the lead article in *International Socialism* 49 (Autumn 1971) the "close of a prolonged period of stable and relatively peaceful conditions" is announced²⁵.

Furthermore, an interesting change in the theory takes place. Whereas Cliff in his 1957 article²⁶ suggests that arms "may encourage a big advance in general technique and with it increasing pressure towards a slump", in *International Socialism* 46 we are told that "inventions become relatively more specialised and less useful for non-military purposes". As a result "the expansionist effect of the permanent arms economy declines over time"²⁷. On one hand we are told that arms production brings technological advances, (and presumably a rising organic composition of capital and a declining rate of profit) thus preparing a slump. On the other hand we are told, more recently, that after an initial impetus given to technological advance the effect wears off, restraining increases in productivity and producing a lower rate of growth. The conclusion is the same, but the theory regarding the cause is completely different. In characteristic fashion, IS theory accomplishes another zigzag, but pretends that the truth has always been known.

We suggest two reasons for this change in the theory. Firstly, the complete inability of the IS leadership to use their theory to develop a perspective for western capitalism, (witness Kidron's "smudge on the horizon" statement) has meant that they have had to alter the theory to fit the facts. And secondly, the inadequate state of their theory has led them to borrow the notion of the expansionist effects of technological advance in the immediate post-war period, from other, more eminent, Marxist economists.

What in reality, has been the effect of post-war technological innovation on the rate of profit? Unfortunately only a little empirical and theoretical research has been done, and a final answer cannot be given. However, S. H. Mage has produced some statistics for the US Economy which show a number of clear trends. This data, which is in accord with data from other sources, is partly reproduced in Appendix 2. Inspection of this data shows that there has only been a slight increase in the organic composition of capital since the War, but the rate of exploitation has declined significantly. As a result, there has been a fall in the rate of profit, mainly due to the decrease in the rate of exploitation.

It is evident that the technological advances in recent years have only promoted a slight increase in the organic composition of capital. Marx assumes, without explanation, that the advance of mechanisation and technology will bring a large increase in the organic composition of capital. This was true for the USA, at least up to 1919²⁸, but it is true no longer. The reason for this, in bourgeois economic hargon, is that technical innovation has become more "capital-saving" and less "labour-saving".²⁹ In Marxist terms this means that the *value* of the constant capital involved in the production of one unit of a commodity decreases *more* than that of the variable capital. Hence "capital-saving" innovation can cause a *fall* in the organic composition of capital.

Despite many predictions and assertions, the increase in the productivity of labour has not enabled the capitalist class to increase the rate of exploitation. One thing above all has maintained this state of affairs: the existence of low unemployment levels.

There is no doubt that arms production has been the largest single direct cause of low unemployment. Furthermore, in providing a positive lower limit, or 'floor', to investment, arms production eliminated severe economic fluctuations in the past twenty years. The forces leading to depression have been checked by state expenditure: State financed incomes set a lower limit to consumption, and state promoted investment maintained a level of economic growth. By deliberate policy, an attempt was made to counterbalance any sudden reduction in private investment by an increase in investment in the state sector.

However, whilst reducing the severity of economic fluctuations, state intervention has not eliminated the trade cycle altogether, or much reduced the extent of the drop in production at the onset of a recession. Mandel has shown that in the first nine months of every periodic recession in the USA since the Second World War, industrial production dropped between 7.4 and 13.1 per cent, whereas in 1929, in the first nine months after the Great Crash, the drop in industrial production was 15.9 per cent.³⁰

The continued existence of the trade cycle is largely a result of the delay in processing and producing economic data for government use. For instance, it may be several weeks before the state perceives an important drop in private investment, by which time the crisis has already gathered momentum.

In preventing severe crises arms production has also reduced the extent of

the boom. For economic slump creates the very conditions for economic recovery, unemployment tends to inhibit the struggle of the working class for better wages and conditions, and it is usually associated with a rise in the rate of exploitation and a corresponding rise in the rate of profit. The unextensive use of constant capital stock during a recession tends to lower interest rates and eventually provide another spur to economic recovery and boom.

In addition, by lowering the rate of exploitation and restricting the amount of surplus value available for accumulation, state expenditure has lowered the upper limit, or ceiling, to the rate of growth. (See Appendix 1.) The truncation of boom and slump has reduced the difference between the maximum and minimum rates of economic growth.

Arms production has also given rise to sustained high rates of currency inflation. An increase in armaments expenditures can increase the amount of purchasing power, by employing more workers, without creating an additional supply of commodities on the open market. Total income increases without a corresponding rise in the number of goods. In such a situation prices are likely to rise.

Inflation is also encouraged when the production of means of production and consumer goods falls, whilst the level of arms production is maintained. In this situation prices tend to rise because total income is declining less rapidly than the output of goods destined for the open market. As government policy usually ensures that state investment will actually increase whilst production in general declines, the inflationary effects can be exacerbated.

A highly interdependent economic system, and low unemployment in the past, have oiled the wheels of inflation set in motion by the increase in arms expenditure. The recent recession, and the increasing militancy of the working class, have not allowed the wheels to stop.

In a situation where cyclical variations are not allowed to reach their full span, the existence of persistent inflation can only lead to economic stagnation, punctuated by frequent currency crises and recessions. High rates of investment are discouraged by high interest rates, rising prices, and economic uncertainty. Arms production can only be continued at the expense of the forces working towards the recovery from stagnation. The reduction of arms production would bring the system near the abyss of severe crisis.

Mandel writes: "The dilemma confronting the state in the age of declining capitalism is *the choice between crisis and inflation*. The former cannot be avoided without intensifying the latter."³¹

We can start to understand the nature of the current crisis if our analysis combines the following elements: Arms production, the continuance of muffled cyclical variations, unabating inflation, and the existence of a confident working class emerging from twenty years of economic boom.

Unlike the pronouncements of the IS leaders, such an analysis will not be used to cover every eventuality. In the 1950's the theory of the permanent arms economy was used to explain the boom, in the 1970's it is used to explain the recession. Without recourse to factual data, and a concrete exami-

nation of the development of modern capitalism, such a theory is a void, a sect-badge, and an impediment to the development of a Marxist understanding of the world in which we live.

G. Hodgson
March 1972.

APPENDIX I.

A Note on the Fundamental Quantitative Ratios

We shall let,

v = variable capital,

s = surplus value,

c = constant capital flow, i.e., used up constant capital,

k = constant capital stock.

The rate of exploitation is usually defined as s/v , but it is preferable, for mathematical reasons, to define it as $s/(s+v)$. We shall let

$$e = \frac{s}{s+v}$$

where e is the rate of exploitation.

Definitions of the organic composition of capital abound, such as k/v and $c/(c+v)$, but these are dependent on the real wage. If we interpret the organic composition of capital as 'stock of constant capital per man' in value terms, then

$$q = \frac{k}{s+v}$$

where q is the organic composition of capital. Another useful ratio would be

$$\frac{c}{s+v}$$

this we shall denote by the letter r .

The rate of profit, according to Marx's definition³² is given by the following equation

$$p = \frac{s}{k+c+v}$$

where p is the rate of profit, as long as we assume that the turnover period is unity. It follows that

$$p = \frac{e}{q+r+1-e}$$

Three more variables are defined as follows:

g = the rate of growth,

s_a = accumulated surplus value,

$a = \frac{s_a}{s} =$ the rate of accumulation.

Now $s_a = (k + c + v)g$. It follows that

$$g = ap.$$

As the maximum magnitude of the rate of accumulation is unity, when all the surplus value is accumulated, the maximum rate of growth is equal to the rate of profit in value terms.

APPENDIX II.

Data for the US Economy

The following data was prepared by S. H. Mage. The value definitions for e and q are the same as Appendix I. The rate of profit, p , is not the general and actual rate of profit, as it is computed in value terms, but it displays a close correspondence with the latter. The actual rate of profit is denoted by p' .

Year	e %	q	p %	p' %
1900	39.7	3.67	10.8	12.9
1905	37.9	3.16	12.0	13.9
1910	40.9	3.18	12.9	15.0
1915	37.9	3.51	11.1	12.7
1920	29.6	3.65	8.1	9.6
1925	29.9	3.95	7.6	9.4
1930	30.9	4.47	6.9	9.0
1935	22.7	4.92	4.5	6.5
1940	25.6	4.09	6.3	9.6
1945	23.0	2.64	8.7	11.1
1950	19.8	3.45	5.7	7.9
1955	21.2	3.64	5.8	8.6
1960	19.7	4.20	4.7	6.9

It is likely that the high values of the organic composition of capital in 1930, 1935, 1940, and 1960 are attributable to underutilisation of constant capital stock. On this basis the slight upward trend in q is even less significant.

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It is likely that the high values of the organic composition of capital in 1932, 1940, and 1960 are attributable to the overvaluation of constant capital.

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Reviews

MARX & ENGELS ON IRELAND, Lawrence & Wishart. £1.50 p.

It is pleasant to be able to congratulate the C.P.G.B. for something more than its republication of the late Mr. Jackson's masterpiece on Irish feudalism. During the past year, its publishing house has produced two works of greater relevance than his. Indeed they are books of absolute importance for any socialist student of Irish history: C. Desmond Greaves, *Liam Mellows & the Irish Revolution* and the collection of Marx & Engels' writings on the Irish question. A purist might remark that this rush of publications is prompted by the topical situation: that indeed the second one should have been published long ago; but he would be merely nit-picking. The books are well worth the waiting.

Mr. Greaves' book will be reviewed elsewhere. Of the Marx & Engels' collection, it must be said firstly, that every Irish Socialist with pretensions to Marxism must read it. If he can't afford the price, he should borrow it from the library. Here there is much that has been published before but given a new and revealing context,

some that has been published, but only in limited circulation and a lot, particularly on the period of the dominance of the Irish Parliamentary Party, that has not been published previously, in English. As a bonus, there are the famous letters of "J. Williams" (Jenny Marx) that played such a major role in the release of Jeremiah O'Donovan Rossa and of his fellow Fenian prisoners.

Through this work, the Dialectical Materialist method is used to its best effect. It is clear that had Ireland's home-grown Marxists had this work to hand, several long and time-destroying polemics would have been avoided: would have been seen to be pointless. Thus on the long argument as to the causes of Irish economic backwardness (native weakness or colonial oppression?), Friedrich Engels cuts the Gordian knot:

"... A country whose coal deposits are eroded, placed near a larger country rich in coal is condemned by nature to remain for a long time the farming country for the larger country when the latter is industrialised. That sentence pronounced millions of years ago, was carried out in this century. We shall see later, moreover, how the English assisted nature by crushing almost every seed of Irish industry as soon as it appeared"—"History of Ireland," p.174.

To the claims of certain Marxians who have, during the past decade, been stressing the internationally reactionary role of the Irish national struggle to 1778 (if not, indeed, later) Engels provides a useful corrective:—

"L'Irlande la Vendée de l'Angleterre (La Vendée was a centre of agrarian and clerical reaction in revolutionary France—Reviewer) Ireland was Catholic, Protestant England Republican, therefore Ireland-English Vendée. There is, however this little difference that the French Revolution intended to give the land to the people, the English Commonwealth intended, in Ireland, to take the land from the people.

"The whole Protestant reformation... apart from its dogmatical squabbles and quibbles was a vast plan for a confiscation of land. First the land was taken from the Church, then the Catholics, in

countries where Protestantism was in power, were declared rebels and their land confiscated.

"Now in Ireland the case was peculiar. ...

"The whole agrarian history of Ireland is a series of confiscations of Irish land to be handed over to English settlers. These settlers, in a very few generations, under the charm of the Celtic society, turned more Irish than the aborigines. Then a new confiscation and new colonisation took place, and so *in infinitum*.

"In the 17th century, the whole of Ireland, except the newly Scotchified North, was ripe for a fresh confiscation. So much so, that when the British (Puritan) Parliament accorded to Charles I, an army for the reduction of Ireland, it resolved that the money for this armament should be raised upon the security of 2,500,000 acres to be confiscated in Ireland. And the 'Adventurers' who advanced the money should also appoint the officers of that army. The land was to be divided amongst those adventurers: so that 1,000 acres should be given them, if in Ulster for £200—advanced, in Connaught for £300, in Munster for £450, in Leinster for £600. And if the people rose against the beneficent plan they are Vendeeans!" Letter to Jenny Longuet, 24th February 1881, pp. 327-328.

However, (and as was to be expected with the Stalinites) there are grounds for criticism as to the editing of this collection. In the Introduction, it is stated that Marx & Engels' "precis and notes on Irish history and economy are given in part only, since substantial sections of these preliminary summaries are still in process of deciphering. However, this book comprises their most pertinent statements on the subject at hand and presents a comprehensive picture of their views." All this may be true, but the treatment of the collection by its Stalinite compilers leads one to doubt it. The editorial distortions differ between those of the Russians (Golman) and the emigrant Irishman (Greaves). The first (in the Introduction) proclaims the revolutionary nature of his subject's views on Ireland. The second (in the Foreword), while not denying this, emphasises, in his brief mention of what Marx actually wrote the continuing relevance of the lat-

ter's specific economic view of Ireland in the 1860s. Thus (as will be shown) he castrates Marx's general political view considerably.

It is true as Lenin remarked that Marx & Engels came to support the Irish people's struggle for national liberation, as much in the interests of the British as of the Irish workers. But it is also true that Engels held out little hope for this bourgeois struggle without the aid of the English workers; thus Marx wrote:—

"The question now is, what shall we advise the English workers? In my opinion they must make the **Repeal of the Union** (in short, **the affair of 1783**, only democratised and adapted to the conditions of the time) an article of their **pronunziamento**. This is the only legal and therefore only possible form of Irish Emancipation which can be admitted in the programme of an English party"—letter to Engels, 30th November, 1867, p.148 (Emphases in the original).

"But since the English working class undoubtedly throws the decisive weight into the scale of social emancipation generally, the lever has to be applied here"—Letter to Ludwig Kugelmann, 29th November, 1869, p. 281.

And Engels:

"When the Fenian (Irish-republican) Rebellion of 1867 had been quelled and the military leaders of the Fenians had either gradually been caught or driven to emigrate to America, the remnants of the Fenian conspiracy soon lost all importance. Violent insurrection had no prospect of success for many years, at least until such time as England would again be involved in serious difficulties abroad. Hence a legal movement remained the only possibility . . . "The English Elections" p.311.

"On Ireland I shall only say the following: the people are much too clever not to know that a revolt would spell their ruin; it could have a chance only in the event of a war between England and America"—Letter to Edward Bernstein, 12th March, 1881, p.329.

"Many Fenians have doubtless now returned and restored the old armed organisation. They form an important element in the movement and force the Lib-

erals to more decisive action. But, apart from that, they cannot do anything but scare John Bull. Though he grows noticeably weaker on the outskirts of his Empire, he can still easily suppress any Irish rebellion so close to home. In the first place, in Ireland there are 14,000 men of the "Constabulary", gendarmes, who are armed with rifles and bayonets and have undergone military training. Besides there are about 30,000 regulars, who can easily be reinforced with an equal number of regulars and English militia. In addition, the Navy. And John Bull is known for his matchless brutality in suppressing rebellions. Without war or the threat of war from without, an Irish rebellion has not the slightest chance, and only two powers can become dangerous in this respect: France and, still far more, the United States. France is out of the question. . .

"However, if there should be danger of war with America, England would grant the Irish open-handedly everything they asked for—only not complete independence, which is not at all desirable owing to the geographical position.

"Therefore all that is left to Ireland is the constitutional way of gradually conquering one position after the other" . . . Letter to Bernstein, 26th June, 1882, pp.335-336. Emphases in the original.

This analysis was based on the concrete situation of the last century, however, in particular, there was an outstanding weakness in Ireland's position vis-a-vis Britain. This was the fact mentioned by Engels above, of British power in the world.

Marx analysed this situation deeply and agreed:—

"England cannot be treated simply as a country along with other countries. She must be treated as the **metropolis of capital**"—"Confidential Communication"—p.161. Emphasis in the original.

This was not the case even twenty years after Engels' death. The national struggle between 1916 and 1921 did not win all the gains possible, but this was probably because of petty bourgeois leadership rather than Britain's strength. And certainly that country's power to-day, when it had to sue for entry into the EEC, is even farther than previously from its power 100 years ago, when Marx was writing.

In fact, Marx and Engels were writing before capitalism had entered its highest stage: imperialism. As it began to so enter, a change began to take place in "the special mode of capital accumulation discerned by Marx over a hundred years ago" that, according to Mr. Greaves "is by no means defunct to-day" (Foreword, p.15.)

Engels described it thus:

"This American revolution in farming, together with the revolutionised means of transport as invented by the Americans, sends over to Europe wheat at such low prices that no European farmer can compete with it—at least not while he is expected to pay rent. Look at the year 1879, when this was first felt. The crop was bad in all Western Europe, it was a failure in England. Yet, thanks to American corn, prices remained about stationary. For the first time the British farmer had a bad crop and low prices of wheat at the same time. Then the farmers began to stir, the landlords felt alarmed. Next year, with a better crop, prices went lower still. The price of corn is now determined by the cost of production in America, plus the cost of transport. And this will be the case more and more every year, in proportion as new prairie land is put under the plough. The agricultural armies required for that operation—we find them ourselves in Europe by sending over emigrants.

"Now, formerly there was this consolation for the farmer and the landlord, that if corn did not pay meat would. The ploughland was turned into grass-land, and everything was pleasant again. But now that resource is cut off too. American meat and American cattle are sent over in ever-increasing quantities.

"It is a peculiar effect of this American competition that it renders not only large landed property, but also small landed property useless, by rendering both unprofitable. . .

"... Before this thing is exhausted it will have lived long enough to kill all the landlords of Europe, great and small, at least twice over". "American Food and the Land Question" pp.316-317.

Marx noted the first stage of the result of this:

"It is a very fine trick of Gladstone—only the 'stupid party' does not understand it—to offer at a moment when landed pro-

perty in Ireland (as in England) will be depreciated by the import of corn and cattle from the U.S.—to offer them at that very moment the public Exchequer where they can sell that property at a price it does no longer possess!" Letter to Jenny Longuet, 29th April, 1881, p. 331.

The ending of landlordism was not even half finished at Engels' death. Nonetheless, it meant eventually a change in the outlook of the Irish worker from that which he described in the *New Yorker Volkszeitung* interview:—

"A purely socialist movement cannot be expected in Ireland for a considerable time. People there want first of all to become peasants owning a plot of land. . . ." *New Yorker Volkszeitung*, 20th September, 1888, p. 343. Emphasis in the original.

Where Capitalism, rather than landlordism, is ruining the peasantry, the worker has little incentive to join its ranks. A loophole to avoid Socialism is blocked.

By their insistence on the continuing relevance and revolutionary significance of Marx and Engels' descriptions of the facts about Ireland rather than on the method used by the two great theorists, Messrs. Golman and Greaves are not necessarily being stupid. For, if Ireland cannot be liberated by armed struggle, then the fighting in Northern Ireland is pointless and the C.P.'s panacea "The Northern Irish Bill of Rights" is the only possible answer to the problem. If Socialism is not yet possible in Ireland, the two (or more) stage theory is of abiding relevance.

But despite the editing, this book is still vital reading.

D.R. O'Connor Lysaght

LIBERALISM WITHOUT THE POLICE

It is extremely difficult for a revolutionary to read anarchist literature of the present period without a feeling of distaste. To read a book like Kropotkin's *Memoirs of a Revolutionary* is to capture the flavour of a whole epoch. We may disagree violently with a man who finished up capitulating to Czarist nationalism but someone who spent half his life in exile at least had the spirit of a true revolutionary to recommend him. The prattlings of the 'new anarchists' of the Apter and Joll and Stansil and Mairowitz books on the other hand simply represent the spoilt children of a bourgeoisie which no longer even believes itself it has a mission in life. However, not content with dropping into the dustbin of history peacefully, they insist on parading their self conceit in public. The book Bann need not be dealt with at length. Presumably at some point in time it may become an interesting exhibit in a revolutionary museum marked 'death agony of capitalism'. The material covered ranges from the 'London Street Commune' which we are informed "was to have a big impact on London", a glorification of the most reactionary aspects of skinheads on the basis of the cult of action, to the "internal structure of the Crazies organization" which is apparently based on an interaction between the 'Gung Fu Assault' and 'Cultural Vibrations.'

The Apter and Joll book has more to offer, in particular a historical background to the most significant anarchist movements. Pride of place here must of course go to Spanish anarchism. However, this chapter unfortunately is politically curious to say the least. We are informed that "The attitude of the CN to the problem of collaboration with the state (i.e., refusing to admit its existence) and with bourgeois institutions inoculated it against bourgeois influence" (p.79). For

an organisation whose members entered a bourgeois government during the Spanish Civil War this is rather a remarkable statement to make !!! Equally revealing, in a completely different way, is Joll's final chapter. Here we have the classic anarchist statement in reference to Bakunin: "many contemporary revolutionaries share his belief that the revolution will be made possible by the action of a militant elite of people totally dedicated to the revolutionary cause. In adopting this attitude the revolutionary becomes an outlaw in practice as well as an outlaw emotionally. He identifies with the bandits, the robbers and the people who attack bourgeois society directly by stealing or destroying other people's property." Apart from the ridiculous politics of this statement (far from robbing = attacking bourgeois society, on the contrary it means working within it) here we have petit-bourgeois anarchism shown perfectly. By an individual act of will the anarchist will lift himself above the filth of capitalist society and roam in a classless realm only answerable to his own ego, meanwhile 'the people', whom the anarchist professes to love so dearly, will wallow around in filth waiting to be 'galvanised' by the 'exemplary acts' of the 'elite'. All this, of course, in the name of opposition to the 'substitutionist' Leninists!!!

To turn to the Kropotkin is a blessed relief. Here at least is the voice of someone capable of thought. The descriptive passages in the book are worth the price alone. Particularly notable are the accounts of relations with nihilists (p.296-300) and how many revolutionaries would have admitted to pouring avidly over Stanley's "How I discovered Livingstone". Also brilliantly captured is the immense confused elemental force of the peasantry. Indeed, this is in a sense the image which dominates the book. The following passage sums it up perfectly: "Sometimes Serghei, who knew the New Testament almost by heart, spoke to the peasants as a religious teacher, proving to them by quotations from the Bible that they ought to have a revolution. Sometimes he formed his arguments of quotations from the economists. The peasants listened to the two men as real apostles, took them from one house to another, and refused to be paid for food". (p.322). Anyone who wants to understand how Russia could produce in a short period men as unlike as Tolstoy, Kropotkin and Lenin could do no better than read this book.

R. Mossgeil

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