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**AUTUMN, 1948**

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TWO SHILLINGS & SIXPENCE

THE MODERN QUARTERLY

LAWRENCE AND WISHART

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## *Biology and Marxism*

BY J. B. S. HALDANE

**A** BIOLOGIST who is also a Marxist must be prepared to answer several different questions. Among others are these. Are Marxism and biology compatible, or are some biological facts contrary to Marxist theory? If they are compatible, how does Marxism help in understanding biological facts at present known, and in discovering new ones? How does the application of biology to the social sciences agree or disagree with the Marxist point of view? And, finally, how does the Marxist see biology as a human activity among others? None of these questions can be answered without at least partially answering the others, and it would be undialectical to try to do so. For example, we shall find that some authors, often Catholics, deny evolution in whole or in part; others accept Darwinism, and use it to support imperialism and class society. Both groups have a social function in defending capitalism and its associated ideologies.

The large majority of biologists believe that animals and plants are material systems. They are not idealists who regard matter as a mere appearance, the reality being spiritual, or dualists who regard living organisms as matter temporarily animated by a soul which has a supernatural origin and destiny. And believing, as they do, in evolution, they apply similar notions to mankind, with more or less reservations. On the other hand, while some of them are mechanistic materialists of the type which flourished in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, others see the difficulties of this position, and take refuge either in a suspension of judgment or in some semi-vitalistic theory such as "organicism" or the postulation of "entelechy" which, without committing them to belief in a supernatural soul, enables them to avoid extreme mechanism. The idea of a soul, while plausible in the case of a man or a dog, ceases to be so in the case of a plant or a worm, which can be divided into two parts, both of which live. A closer study of reproduction in higher animals leads to similar conclusions. There is a continuity of life which overrides individuality. One cannot say when an individual begins.

Among the younger generation of biologists two tendencies are to be noted. They find it much easier to accept a thorough-going materialism because chemistry and physics have already moved

## *Biology and Marxism*

on beyond the mechanistic account of matter in terms of eternal and indivisible atoms. And in America a small group, including Wiener, Macculloch and Pitts, is founding a new mechanistic biology and psychology, in which living things are described in terms of machines of a type almost unknown twenty years ago, such as the self-steering aeroplane or torpedo, which are provided, not only with receptor or sense organs which enable them to approach a goal such as an airport or a hostile ship, but with proprioceptive organs which enable them to correct faulty performances. While I do not say that this school has discovered the nature of life, I think that it would be wholly incorrect for Marxists to condemn it out of hand as mechanistic. The plain fact is that machines are no longer what they were when mechanism was condemned by Marxists forty years ago, and it would be most undialectical not to recognise this fact. This neo-mechanism will almost certainly make important contributions to biology, especially to neurology, and even if, as I expect, it develops its own internal contradictions, it will have served a most valuable purpose.

An increasing number of biologists have become more or less completely Marxists, and are no longer condemned to oscillate between a mechanistic and a vitalistic standpoint. Let us see in rather more detail how Marxism may help them.

Supposing we cool down a simple animal, such as a sea anemone or a worm, or deprive it of oxygen, its activities gradually slow down, and it sinks into a state of torpor which leads to death unless it is warmed up again or supplied with oxygen within a certain time. This is what one would expect if the animal is a chemical mechanism whose changes, like other chemical changes, slow down when the temperature is lowered, and depend on a supply of oxygen. But if we do the same experiment on a higher animal, such as a rabbit or a man, the result is very different. It responds to cold by shivering and a variety of muscular movements which serve to keep up its temperature. It responds to oxygen want by panting and an increased heart beat, which serve to keep up the supply of oxygen to its tissues. Only if these responses are unsuccessful does it sink into torpor.

Even in the simplest organisms we can always find some such self-preserving and self-regulating activities. Even in the highest we can find pieces of thoroughly mechanistic behaviour. A man, for example, does not protect himself against carbon monoxide

poisoning as he protects himself against oxygen want. He absorbs the gas just as an inert fluid would, until he ceases to breathe, though even here he can acquire a measure of immunity by practice. Every living thing is at once a mechanism and an organism. But, as Marxists might expect, its most characteristic properties are best displayed when an attempt is made to change it. This is a commonplace of science. Physicists agree that the most fundamental property of a body is its mass, not for example its bulk or its shape. Its mass is simply a measure of the difficulty of changing its state of rest or uniform motion. Marx and Engels made their fundamental discoveries as to the nature of society as the result of their unsuccessful attempts to change German society in the years before and including 1848.

It is striking that the results in some fields of biological investigation are much more compatible with a mechanistic interpretation than those in others. Thus the optician treats the eye as a mechanism with faults to be corrected by means of spectacles, or even by an operation such as the removal of a lens which has become opaque through cataract. The treatment of diseases such as retinitis pigmentosa or glaucoma, which cannot be regarded as mechanical defects, is much less satisfactory. One reason is that it is easy and safe to experiment on the eye with spectacles, and difficult and dangerous to do so with surgical operations or local chemical treatments. Similarly genetics have inevitably a rather mechanistic outlook, because although we can build up all kinds of combinations of different genes, we cannot yet influence a given gene. Hence the genes can be regarded as atom-like units without this leading to false conclusions in many problems of practical breeding. On the other hand, it is important that geneticists should realise that the nature of their material gives them a somewhat mechanistic bias.

Similarly, an embryologist will tend to start with a bias in the direction of vitalism once he has discovered that development is not a mere unfolding of previously existing structure, as early embryologists believed when they thought they saw a little man sitting in a spermatozoön. Not merely does a fertilised egg usually develop into an adult if adequately protected, but it will often develop into two adults if divided in two, which would not be the case if each part had a destiny, as in the construction of a machine. We are now gradually finding out that development depends on very complicated interactions between the different parts of the

embryo, and constructing a more balanced, or dialectical, theory of development.

My own work has been largely in the field of genetics and evolution, and it seems worth showing in some detail how Marxism has helped me there. In the experimental field, I have found (at first rather to my surprise) that the principles formulated by Mendel, and by Morgan and his school, work in a variety of organisms ranging from primroses and snapdragons to flies, hens, mice, cats and men. I further calculated how natural selection would act on a mixed population, causing some genes to spread at the expense of others. My outlook was, I suppose, essentially mechanistic, like that of a physician who regards the eye as a camera, the heart as a pump, a joint as a hinge, and so on. But twenty-five years ago I was only considering one type of conflict—the conflict between individuals of the same species, which Darwin described as the struggle for existence. Gradually at first, and more rapidly after reading Lenin on dialectics, I came to see that evolution depends on conflict at many different levels, and is only explicable in terms of these various conflicts.

If every gene always reproduced its like, the possibilities of evolution would be limited to picking out favoured combinations of genes existing in a species. At most nuclear divisions a gene reproduces its like. We may call this copying process "heredity." Occasionally it fails to do so. For example, two normal human parents produce a dwarf baby. The new gene, or false copy, is reproduced. The dwarf, if he lives to be adult, will hand on the gene for dwarfism to about half his children. The negation has been negated. This process is called mutation. The conflict between heredity and mutation is essential for evolution. Unless heredity were the rule, there would be no species. Unless mutation occasionally occurred there would be no novelty. Nevertheless I believe it to be quite wrong to suppose, with Yule, that mutation will account for evolution.

The next conflict to be considered is that between mutation and selection. Most mutations are harmful. The majority of dwarf human babies die in their first year, to follow up the example given before. But, owing to mutation, every species is much more variable than would otherwise be the case. It is also more adaptable, for mutations which may be harmful in one environment can be useful in another. For example, a mutant barley produced by artificial mutation in southern Sweden gave considerably less

seed per acre than its parent at its place of origin, but much more on the Arctic Circle. It was preadapted to continuous daylight.

In the rare cases where a single mutation produces a type which is fitter (in the sense defined later) than its ancestors, the gene responsible will spread through the population in a good Darwinian manner, though unless the homozygote—that is to say, the type with two mutant genes, one from each parent, is also fitter, it will not replace the original type completely. Generally the two antagonistic processes will yield an uneasy balance. I first investigated this conflict with a view to the study of evolution. Penrose and I found that it also shed considerable light on the possibility of “race purification.” Harmful genes, such as those for various hereditary types of blindness and paralysis, are constantly arising in man by mutation, and being wiped out by natural selection. The processes balance, and enable one to calculate the frequency of mutation. But since new genes constantly arise by mutation, it is quite impossible to eliminate them and “purify a race” by sterilisation or murder, as Hitler tried to do. At best one could diminish the frequency of some abnormalities, but the process would have to be repeated in every generation.

When the environment changes rapidly a gene which was formerly harmful may become advantageous, and be selected. A number of moths have become black in industrial areas by this simple process. But a real evolutionary change generally demands alterations in a number of genes, each of which, by itself, would be harmful. This is only likely to take place in fairly small communities, where a chance process which Dubinin calls the genetical-automatic process and Wright calls drift can lead to the combination of various different sets of genes. The combination can happen in one individual of a large community, but there is no appreciable chance of its holding together in later generations. In a small community this is quite possible.

Wright therefore thinks that the ideal condition for evolution is for a species to be split up into a number of small inbreeding populations with only occasional interchange of individuals between them. The different populations are small enough to become fairly homogeneous, so that a number of different gene combinations can be tried out, and new races or species formed. This has, of course, been the condition of the human race throughout its whole history until the last seven thousand years or so.

This at once gives rise to a new conflict, for a sufficiently

successful species will form a fairly continuous population through an area, and thus natural selection is always tending to negate the conditions for its own success. The essentially dialectical nature of Wright's thought may be gauged from the fact that in one of his fundamental papers<sup>1</sup> he lists no less than nine antagonistic processes in the “mechanism” of evolution. He is probably wholly unaware that he is a good Marxist, and would deny it with a clear conscience.

Here then is an example of how an initially mechanistic branch of biology becomes dialectical when worked on in detail. Genetics is also becoming dialectical at the other end, for we know now that some genes, at least, are not indivisible units. On the other hand, many, probably most, are large chemical molecules, and we must be fairly mechanistic in our dealings with them.

Recent writers on dialectics have perhaps neglected Engels's very fundamental remarks on classification. Classification is an important part of biology, and it is just becoming this-sided, as we escape from scholasticism. We say that a cart-horse and a Shetland pony belong to the same species, and a donkey to a different one, not because they embody different eternal ideas, nor because the pony and the cart-horse had a common ancestor much more recently than either and the donkey. I have no doubt that they did, but no one can prove it. The reason is that the horse and pony give fertile hybrids, the donkey giving sterile ones with either. Such a barrier is a sufficient criterion for the difference between species, though all systematists separate certain species which can give fertile hybrids under artificial conditions, but rarely if ever do so in Nature. The important point is that classification is more and more based on barriers of this kind, which are biological facts, rather than on any criterion which would have satisfied Aristotle or St. Thomas. For example, the mosquito species *Anopheles maculipennis* has now been split into six new species which are indistinguishable as adults. But they have different habitats, different eggs, do not give fertile hybrids, and most important of all, differ in their capacity for carrying malaria.

Contrary to what Darwin believed, we now know that some differences between species have not arisen gradually, but by a single leap, especially by a sudden change in the chromosome number. It is almost certain that species can arise gradually as well, and that the sudden type of origin is commoner in plants

<sup>1</sup> *Genetics*, Vol. 16, p. 143.



than in animals. All evolution involves mutations, which are leaps, but only a few of them are large enough to establish an interspecific gap. Darwin's problem has been split in two. We are concerned with the origin of species in the sense that a species may change, often gradually, in the course of geological time, so that anyone would regard it as different from its ancestor. But it may not have split into two species. We are also concerned with the origin of interspecific barriers, which may arise slowly, by a change of quantity into quality, or in a single generation.

Just as species must be separated on a basis of biological fact rather than on metaphysical principles, so must individuals. Individual men or rabbits are sharply separated. But many plants are not. Just as a man is an individual, a geranium, or even a flat worm, is a dividual. If it is divided in a suitable way, both parts will live. Individuality is a product of evolution. The simplest organisms, bacteria, are very far indeed from individual. You can kill bacteria, and obtain a soluble extract which permanently alters the character of other bacteria. In fact, bacteria are like machines with interchangeable parts, and being alive one "individual" may copy the parts taken from another.

In fact, we have got to think dialectically about individuality, as about other aspects of life.

Biology can be distorted in two different ways in the interests of reactionary thought. On the one hand, one can pick out the difficult points in evolutionary theory, the points where rapid change must have occurred, and say that such change was impossible. This is the Catholic point of view. If you accept the metaphysical notion of a species, it is clear that there can be no change from one species to another, except perhaps by a miracle. Such opponents point to gaps in the fossil record at critical points. The reason why such gaps are frequent, though not universal, is, of course, very simple. An organism undergoing a great change—for example, from fish to amphibian—is living under difficult conditions, subjected to intense natural selection which makes it change rapidly; and for that very reason is rare, and likely to leave few fossils.

The other distortion of biology, sometimes called social-Darwinism, is actually less logical. The argument is somewhat as follows. Evolution has occurred because the fittest have survived and the less fit have been ruthlessly weeded out. By preserving the weak—for example, by giving milk to the children of the poor

—we negate natural selection, and ensure the degeneration of humanity. The correct answer would seem to be, "Start on your own children." By giving them milk, warm clothes, and the like, not to mention medical services for which you pay privately, you are preserving weaklings, and promoting the degeneration of the "upper classes." Again, in many countries the poor breed much quicker than the rich, even when allowance is made for their higher death-rate. Thus the valuable genes making for ability, which bring economic success to their possessors, are getting rarer, and the average intelligence of the nation is declining. It may be so. If it is, the obvious remedy is to make the poor richer and the rich poorer, thus equalising the birth-rates. These misconceptions of biology largely arise from a confusion with regard to fitness. Darwin used fitness simply as a measure of net fertility—that is to say, fertility when allowance is made for selective deaths. Eugenists are apt to use it to mean fitness for various activities, including money-making, which they admire, and to forget the fact that on Darwin's criterion the poor are fitter than the rich in most capitalist countries.

Hitler managed to combine both these points of view. On the one hand, he held as metaphysical a view of human races as any Thomist has held of animal species. On the other, he tried to purify the German race by sterilising or murdering those whom he regarded as unfit. The net result of his activities has been that some millions of the "fittest" Germans were killed, while the remainder have to live in a considerably restricted *Lebensraum*.

Some Marxists have reacted too strongly against the application of biological notions to mankind, and assumed that all differences between human beings are due to differences of environment. In a sense they are due to differences of ancestral environment. And with sufficient knowledge they could often be altered. But they cannot, as a matter of fact, be altered in many cases, nor can we undo the past. One cannot in general make a congenitally blind man see, nor a congenitally tone-deaf man into a musician. What we can do is to build a society in which every individual will have the best possible chance of finding a useful and congenial job. More than 99 per cent. of people could do something worth while. This includes many of the so-called feeble-minded, who are often well fitted for tasks which most people find monotonous.

But we know in practice, and should, I think, admit more fully in theory, that different people have very different abilities, that

some are capable of making greater contributions to society than others, and that this would be true even had they had equal opportunities. This does not mean that society ought to be divided into classes, nor that wages should differ greatly in different professions. If our aim is a society to which each contributes according to his ability and receives according to his needs, we are certainly not postulating that either abilities or needs are equal.

Finally, the Marxist must consider the function of biology in society. Its function should be to enable men to understand the nature of living things, including themselves, and by so doing to control them. It should, and could, be part of general culture. The countryman should understand the phenomena which he sees every day, from the blossoming of trees to the excavation of mole tunnels, and will certainly be a better agriculturalist if he does so. The town-dweller should have a chance of keeping a few living animals and plants, and of studying them scientifically. If anyone thinks that this is out of the scope of workers at present, he would be well advised to attend a meeting of his local aquarium society. To take an example from my immediate neighbourhood, one of the waitresses in our canteen at University College has just succeeded in breeding a tropical fish which is not very common in England.

Man is an animal, and can only understand himself against a background of other animals. He is something more than an animal, as an animal is something more than a machine. But he shares birth, love and death, not to mention health and sickness, with other animals, and will meet them best if they are familiar to him. We have hardly begun to apply biology. Our agriculture is partially mechanised, but its essential processes have changed little in three thousand years. A Neolithic agriculturalist would understand the main processes of our agriculture, as a Neolithic weaver would not understand a textile factory. An agricultural revolution is, I believe, entirely possible which would quadruple the yield of our land and render Britain self-supporting as regards food. This would, however, entail radical changes in our plants and animals. They will only be achieved when the average agricultural worker is able to think and act as a biologist.

Our health is far below what it might be, and will remain so until the average man and woman have learned to look after themselves at least as scientifically as they can look after a bicycle or a sewing machine. Of course, we need more scientific knowledge. But knowledge "at the top" is not enough. With our

present resources, we could abolish venereal diseases in a fortnight if the public were educated. To be accurate, we could ensure that no further cases of infection occurred. Unfortunately, the type of education needed is materialistic. So we shall not get it for the present. When people are prepared to think as objectively about their bodies as about their bicycles, and not till then, will it be possible to build up a really scientific medicine with 100 per cent. human efficiency as its goal.

The opposition to such an attitude comes from a variety of sources. Perhaps the most powerful are religion, the patent medicine industry, and a section of the medical profession which seeks to preserve the intellectual gulf between doctor and patient. But few of us can escape some blame. Marxists should analyse the forces which prevent the spread of a biological point of view. If they do so they will, I think, find that they are mostly, though not quite all, forces tending to preserve the existing structure of society. For the application of biology, when it is made, will be even more revolutionary in its effects than was the application of physics and chemistry which gave us the industrial revolution. Our opponents, however obscurely, are aware of this fact. We should be aware of it also.

## The Soviet Discussions

BY EMILE BURNS

### I

THE whole range of subjects that make up the intellectual equipment of modern society has been under discussion in the Soviet Union in the last two years. Conferences, some with hundreds participating and lasting for weeks at a time, have critically examined the work of leading Soviet specialists, and discussed the application of the fundamental principles of Marxism in the fields of philosophy, economics, history, the natural sciences, art, literature, music, architecture, philology and law. In certain cases there have been resolutions of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union; full reports of all discussions and the conclusions reached have been printed in Soviet journals and summarised in the daily Press. In the Western Press generally, note has been taken of the proceedings only when criticism and condemnation of individual Soviet workers has given new occasion for anti-Soviet propaganda, especially on the theme of interference with the liberty of the creative artist. It is doubtful if even those who are not hostile to Soviet developments have fully grasped the vast sweep of the ideological overhaul that is in progress.

In an electoral speech on February 9th, 1946, Stalin put before the Soviet people the task of "organising a new mighty advance of Soviet economy" such as would safeguard the country against accidents of any kind, and particularly called on Soviet scientists "within the shortest possible time not only to attain but to surpass the achievements of science in other countries." The practical tasks of reconstruction and of the "new mighty advance" were laid down in the post-war Five Year Plan; alongside this, the *theoretical* tasks were outlined in the call for a renewed study of Marxism-Leninism in its application to the contemporary problems of the Soviet Union and of the new stage in world history. This involved a general and systematic overhaul of Soviet work in every ideological field; and this overhaul was closely linked with the practical, material tasks of the new Five Year Plan and the further advance to Communism.

Communism, however, is not conceived as merely the better organisation of the material life of society. To raise production in

## The Soviet Discussions

such a way that it meets the needs—and constantly expanding needs—of everyone only lays the foundation of Communist society. The process of building this foundation is at the same time a process towards ending the one-sidedness in the division of labour within society, ending the antagonism between mental and physical labour, and developing individuals in an all-round way. Out of this process—material, intellectual, moral—comes Communist society, with its men and women fully developed, with a higher culture than any previously known. Thus the ideological overhaul, helping to speed up the fulfilment of the material tasks of the Five Year Plan, also contributes directly towards the change in man, raising man's appreciation and creative capacity in the field of culture.

In *Dialectical and Historical Materialism*, Stalin shows that Marxism regards ideas, the spiritual life of society, as originating in the conditions of its material life. But ideas, originating in the conditions of material life, then have significance and importance in the life of society; they influence practical action.

"There are old ideas and theories which have outlived their day and which serve the interests of the moribund forces of society. Their significance lies in the fact that they hamper the development, the progress of society. Then there are new and advanced ideas and theories which serve the interests of the advanced forces of society. Their significance lies in the fact that they facilitate the development, the progress of society; and their significance is the greater the more accurately they reflect the needs of development of the material life of society."

These ideas have "tremendous organising, mobilising and transforming value"; and "it is *impossible* to carry out the urgent tasks of development of the material life of society without their organising, mobilising and transforming action."

While ideas reflect, originate in, the material life of society and its development, it by no means follows that a change in material conditions is immediately accompanied by a change in ideas. Marx pointed out in the *Critique of the Gotha Programme* that a Socialist society necessarily emerges from a capitalist society, and "is thus in every respect, economically, morally and intellectually, still stamped with the birthmarks of the old society from whose womb it comes." These "birthmarks" have to be removed before it is possible to reach the final stage of Communism; and they have to be removed by conscious action, in the moral and

intellectual field no less than in the economic. Moreover, there are not three parallel processes—economic, moral, intellectual—in separate compartments. The individualist outlook characteristic of small-scale agriculture could not be altered, for example, without the building of a tractor industry and providing other needs of large-scale agriculture, on the basis of which collective farms and a collective outlook could be developed. But the development of that outlook was not an automatic consequence of the material change; it had to be consciously fought for in the moral and intellectual field, against the morality and ignorance associated with the old outlook.

Moreover, in a Socialist country surrounded by a capitalist world, there are not only the birthmarks of the old society which have to be overcome; it is also necessary to prevent their constant renewal through the pressure of the old ideas still flourishing in other countries. Thus the conscious ideological task before the Communist Party and the Soviet Government, side by side with the material tasks of the Five Year Plan, is to organise in every field that influences men's minds, and therefore men's practical activities, a new thinking out of the application of Marxist principles, in order that the new ideas can overcome the relics of the old and become effective mobilisers and transformers of the outlook and practical activity of the Soviet people. This, and not any kind of "witch-hunt" against the unorthodox, is the significance of the ideological overhaul.

The theoretical premises from which the whole discussion proceeds can be summarised in the statements (1) there are urgent tasks before the Soviet people in the material field, conditioning the advance to Communism; (2) it is impossible to fulfil these tasks without the mobilising power of new ideas; (3) these ideas are essentially *partisan*, fighting against the ideas of moribund capitalism; (4) therefore there can be no toleration, no "liberal" attitude to the old ideas; (5) this applies to the whole ideological field: including the philosophical and æsthetic.

### II

While it is impossible to give any adequate summary of the discussions even in a single field, there are many points of outstanding interest which illustrate the approach to each subject and are embodied in the conclusions reached.

The discussion on philosophy was based on G. Alexandrov's recently published *History of Western European Philosophy*. The principal criticism, running particularly through Zhdanov's contribution, was that Alexandrov's approach was passive, falsely "objective," merely recording a succession of philosophies; whereas "the scientific history of philosophy is the history of the origin, rise, and development of the scientific materialist world outlook and its laws" and therefore necessarily "the history of the struggle of materialism with idealism." Further, scientific materialism could only develop "on the granite foundation of the achievements of modern natural science"; but Alexandrov, in the introduction expounding the main premises of his book, "fails to mention the interrelation of philosophy and the natural sciences." This leads to the point that such a work as a textbook on the history of philosophy is beyond the capacity of any one man: it could only be tackled by a wide circle of authors—dialectical materialists, historical materialists, historians, natural scientists and economists.

Just as the history of philosophy should be the history of the struggle of materialism with idealism, so current philosophical work should be of a partisan character, an irreconcilable struggle against all enemies of materialism. Not only Alexandrov, but other leading Soviet philosophers, were reproached with a "lack of militancy and fighting spirit" and neglect of present-day themes. Talk of the "philosophical front" suggests an organised detachment of militant philosophers "waging a determined offensive against hostile ideology abroad and against the survivals of bourgeois ideology in the consciousness of Soviet people." But "our philosophical front," Zhdanov said, "resembles rather a bivouac at some distance from the battlefield. . . . For the most part contact has not been established with the enemy, there is no reconnaissance, the weapons are rusting."

Of very special interest in Zhdanov's contribution was his presentation of the role of criticism and self-criticism in Socialist society. Pointing out that a fundamental concept in dialectics is that development takes place through the struggle of opposites, he posed the question: how does this operate in Socialist society? Antagonistic classes do not exist; yet there are contradictions within Socialist society which must be solved in order to ensure development. Such contradictions, as distinct from the irreconcilable antagonisms between classes in capitalist society, are solved by criticism and self-criticism, which is the motive force in the

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struggle between the old and the new in Soviet society; "this is, incontestably, a new aspect of movement, a new type of development, a new dialectical law." In a broad sense, the whole of the ideological discussions which have been in progress in the Soviet Union can be taken as the conscious application of this new dialectical law in order to speed up development in every sphere.

In the discussions on literature the most merciless battle was waged against the idea that it did not matter what writers wrote, against the "art for art's sake" argument which defended any and every expression of a writer's ability to write. Zoschenko was condemned for "scratching about amidst the lowest and pettiest sides of life," and not being at all concerned with the efforts and heroism of Soviet people. Akhmatova's poems, "mainly emphasizing erotic love themes, interwoven with notes of sadness, yearning, death, mysticism and fatality," could do young people nothing but harm—"they can only sow gloom, low spirits, pessimism, the desire to escape from the vital problems of social life." Apart from these criticisms, the bearing of which on the practical problems facing the Soviet people is self-evident ("Had this spirit of despondency prevailed, we would not have won the war"), it is in connection with literature that the concept of "Socialist realism" has been made most clear.

Socialist realism was first put forward by Stalin as the essential basis for Soviet literature; it was much discussed at the Congress of the Union of Soviet Writers in 1934, especially in the contributions of Zhdanov and Gorki; and it has recently been used in conferences and Press discussions in connection, not only with literature, but with music, painting and other creative work.

Realism is taken as the truthful portrayal of reality; the starting point for the writer must be observation of life, of the social struggle. But his work must not be a mere photographic record of the material observed; it must be creative, artistic. Thus realism does not exclude romanticism; but Socialist realism is necessarily a break with the kind of romanticism that deals with unreal life and unreal heroes. Soviet life—the life of a society that is building Socialism and advancing to Communism—combines the most matter-of-fact practical work with the greatest heroism and most magnificent perspectives; revolutionary romanticism has to express this.

The realism of the best writers in the past is also based on observation of life, handled in a creative, artistic way; but it

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differs from Socialist realism in a number of essential features, because of the unavoidable limitations of a class society. Thus the outstanding Russian writers of the past could not faithfully portray the role of the masses in the historical process; their typical heroes were members of the ruling class or intelligentsia, in the main approached from the standpoint of family relations or personal love affairs; their heroes are treated either as the helpless playthings of Fate, or at the other extreme as personally deciding the course of history. Thus social activity in its fullness is not presented; productive labour, the basis of social life, is outside their range. Hence their work, though in its time and place realistic, is necessarily limited, not fully corresponding with reality.

Soviet writers, living in a society in which the exploiting classes no longer exist, and in which productive labour is seen as the basis of social life, strive to overcome these limitations of the past. Socialist realism shows the masses, the people, as the makers of history. The individual hero is not separated from the masses, is not in opposition to them; he is the most complete expression of their life, their aspirations and their hopes. Hence Socialist realism, though heir to all that is best in the realism of the past, is a higher realism, a new qualitative stage.

Moreover, Socialist realism is *partisan*. It stresses the progressive features in social life, the work of the masses in building Communism, while particularly bringing out, helping to raise and develop, the contribution of the separate national groupings within the Soviet Union. Its romanticism is revolutionary: it portrays the heroism of the Soviet people in their struggle for Communism; it presents the morrow on the basis of correctly interpreting the essence of the people's life to-day. Such romanticism does not contradict realism. To the writers of the past a happy future for humanity could only be a dream, in conflict with the reality of contemporary life; but the faith of Soviet writers in the future is founded on the most advanced science, Marxism-Leninism, which is consciously used in Soviet society for the transformation of social life. In presenting in romantic form the heroism of the daily life of the people, in asserting in romantic form the nature of future society, Soviet writers are not departing from realism, from truth, but rather delving more deeply into reality, presenting its essential features, carrying them forward beyond the limits of the present day. Socialist realism, in fact, requires more than



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correspondence with current life; it must present life in its movement, its development, its dynamic; and within this, the struggle of the new with the old, of Communism against the relics of capitalist society.

In the discussions on other cultural spheres the conception of Socialist realism provides the basis of the positive approach, although it is not so easy to see its application to music, for example, as to literature. But in the resolution of the Central Committee of the Communist Party on music, dealing particularly with Muradelli's opera, *Great Friendship*, several negative points are brought out which in a sense clear the ground for the positive working out of Socialist realism in this field. Muradelli's opera is roundly condemned: "bad as regards both music and subject, a non-artistic work . . . a product of the formalistic trend current among Soviet composers." Here the concept of formalism appears; it is a concept which also runs through the discussions, for example, on painting and architecture. As dealt with in the Central Committee's resolution on music, "formalistic perversions" involve:

"Rejection of the fundamental principles of classical music, advocacy of atonality, dissonance and disharmony, allegedly expressing 'progress' and 'new trends' in the development of musical form; renunciation of such highly important foundations of musical creation as melody; the fad for nonsensical, neuro-pathic combinations which transform music into cacophony, a chaotic maze of sound."

These formalistic perversions not only represent "survivals of bourgeois ideology not yet lived down, but are fed by the influence of present-day, decadent West European and American music" which reflects "the decay of bourgeois culture, the complete denial of musical art, the blind alley into which it has run." It should be noted that what is condemned is not foreign music in general, but *decadent* music.

The social significance of the formalistic trend was shown as the separation of music from the people. Some Soviet composers, the Central Committee's resolution states, even put forward the "theory" that the people's failure to understand their music was due to the fact that the people had not "developed" far enough to understand their complicated music; that perhaps they might reach this height in a hundred years, and meanwhile there was

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nothing to be worried about if no one listened. As against this formalism run riot, separating music from the people and bringing music itself into a blind alley, is set the realistic tendency in Soviet music, the essentials of which are defined as—

"recognition of the immense progressive role of the classical heritage, especially the traditions of the Russian musical school, the use of this heritage and its utmost development, the combination in music of a lofty content with artistic perfection of musical form, the truthfulness and realism of music, its deep organic connection with the people and with its creative genius in music and song, high professional skill linked with simplicity and accessibility."

In the discussions on architecture, the condemnation of formalistic tendencies relates to "theoretically designed buildings, often contrary to the realistic demands of life"; the ignoring of the true functions of buildings, and of the tastes and artistic needs of the people. Stress is laid on the necessity to build on the heritage of the past, and particularly on the forms developed by the separate Soviet national groupings; on the other hand, there is the sharpest condemnation of the "strange endeavour to squeeze a Soviet theatre into the shape of an ancient Greek temple," and of the "screaming contradiction" involved in the attempt to use ancient architectural forms for the surface building of a Moscow Metro station. Aesthetic mannerisms, such as intentional displacements of features, are equally strongly condemned. There is also a polemic against the belief in "canons of beauty not related to historical and social conditions."

Building on the heritage of the past is an idea stressed in every field; the "formalistic tendency" contradicts this, seeking novelty which not only alienates the artistic work from the people, but leads art itself into a blind alley.

### III

Difficult as it is to present the content of the Soviet discussions in abstract form, away from the concrete details of particular works that gave clarity to the arguments, there are nevertheless certain ideas which are clear enough to convey the general approach in every field. Among these ideas can be noted:

First, the conception of the positive aim of all cultural activity

in its widest sense—embracing science and art in all their forms—as the helping forward of the movement of society towards a higher stage, Communism. This involves the rejection of the notion of “art for art’s sake,” of the cultured man in isolation, either passively enjoying his culture or elaborating form without content—that is, without relation to the actual movement of society. Such “culture” inevitably loses contact with the masses, is unable to move the masses; it ceases to be culture expressing and in turn inspiring the forward movement of society, and is therefore unreal, untrue. It “leads into a blind alley” for art itself. The necessary relation between the artist and the people does not imply any lack of creative initiative, originality and personal vision in the artist; on the contrary, the vision that misses that connection means a turning inwards that inevitably kills creative initiative. Nor can the deepest grasp of historical materialism be a substitute for creative ability, craft knowledge and skill in artistic presentation.

This leads on to the second conception: that all cultural activity, whatever the form, in order to correspond with reality in its fullness, must necessarily express man’s limitless power not only to understand, perceive and feel, but also to *create*. This means that cultural activity must express the dignity and power of man, his ability to overcome all obstacles; it must have a positive, confident, *heroic* approach. Only such an approach helps society forward, and is therefore in harmony with reality, with the actual forward movement of society. On the other hand, the cultural approach which is either passive, or depends on petty themes which are divorced from the real social movement, or, still more, the approach which is despondent and defeatist, distorts reality, deprives man of dignity and of his power to create.

A third conception in the Soviet approach is the value of man’s cultural heritage, of his past cultural achievements as the necessary foundation for all further cultural advance which is permanent, which leads further forward and not into a blind alley. This does not mean slavishly copying the past, whether in literature, music, painting or architecture—this slavish copying is rejected and ridiculed. But it does mean the rejection of would-be “revolutionary” tendencies in each cultural field—the chase after new forms which reject the fundamental laws discovered in the past, inevitably resulting in the cultivation of form for its own sake, the exaggeration of form at the expense of content, and therefore in remoteness

from reality. The cultural heritage is in its essence national, not in the sense of excluding the influence of foreign art as such, but in being based on the cultural experience of a particular national group, and therefore being necessarily involved in creative work which is to keep touch with that group, to influence it.

The fourth essential idea in the Soviet approach, Socialist realism, in a sense sums up all the others. It implies the conscious use of cultural activity to express and inspire the actual movement now going on in the Soviet Union, stressing the forward movement, stressing man’s power to create, while also stressing the fact that what he creates is only soundly built if it rests on the achievements of the past—particularly, in their case, of the Russian past, or rather the past of the peoples of the Soviet Union, because it is they who are creating the new society. Such Socialist realism is opposed to, and actively fights against, formalism which can neither express nor help forward the actual movement of society, and “bourgeois decadence,” expressing the defeatism, despair, escapism and remoteness from real social problems of a society which is in decay.

There can be no doubt that these are powerful ideas, reflecting “the needs of development of the material life of society,” which will exercise tremendous organising, mobilising and transforming influence on the Soviet people, helping them on the way towards Communist society. With a perspective of such vast sweep and significance, the role of cultural activity acquires a new importance, which, however, is merely the working out, in the conditions of a Socialist society, of the principles of historical materialism in their application to the field of culture. It is this fact which gives the Soviet discussions their international significance. True, the discussions relate directly to the work of Soviet specialists, and the criticisms of their work are closely linked with the actual conditions in the Soviet Union, the actual stage reached in the advance to a Communist society. But that means merely that it is not possible to transfer detailed conclusions to other countries. On the other hand, the essentials of the Soviet approach are universal, because it is the approach of historical materialism to human culture in general. Perhaps it is necessary to repeat that this approach can do no more than point the way; the actual achievement of a worker in the cultural field depends on artistic, creative ability, which no formula can provide.

The most difficult idea for people living in our society to accept is the necessary integration of creative work with the life of society. In the field of science, in spite of the concept of "pure" as opposed to "applied" science, the link between the specialist's work and the life of society is in general so obvious that any objection raised to the principle of integration is no more than a defence of research—a defence that is necessary against the importunate demands of the big monopolies, but is certainly not needed against Marxism. But in the field of "the arts" the necessary connection with social life is not so readily accepted. "Art for art's sake" dies hard. The Marxist outlook is regarded as the subordination of art to "propaganda." The artist, it is claimed, must be "free" to express himself, or his creative ability is restricted, crushed. His art expresses his own personal reaction to life; anything else, we are told, is not art. This outlook goes to its most extreme point in the formulation: "Art is a lie."

The answer to this argument is, in the first place, that it contradicts the historical development of creative art. Not only in its origin, as shown, for example, by Christopher Caudwell in *Illusion and Reality*, but also in its subsequent development, creative art is in fact closely linked with the material life of society, and, in class society, with the social struggle. It necessarily arises from social life, and equally necessarily reacts upon social life. The attempted assertion of the independence of art from society is a product of a certain stage in the development of society. It in part expresses the "individuality" in capitalist society, the denial of social responsibility which is characteristic of capitalist society; and in part the struggle of the artist for independence from the influence of capital. Thus in capitalist society the demand for artistic freedom can express a certain progressive tendency; but even this is inseparably linked with the false position of the creative worker in capitalist society. Society separates him out from the people, sets him up as a member of an élite caste, and shapes his mental outlook accordingly. It is in these conditions that he tends to express his actual isolation from the people as essential to his art, his irresponsibility to society as the necessary condition for creative work.

In fact, no creative work—unless kept from the public—is without influence on the outlook of people, and therefore on their

activities. All cultural work makes some impact on the minds of people, helps forward or holds back their cultural development, and rouses emotions that influence action—even if it is only that form of action which is inactivity in relation to a surrounding society which is in motion. What Marxism asks of the artist is to be conscious of that influence, to reflect and present in inspiring form the forward movement of society, the struggle of the new against the old. That is the necessary basis of artistic work which is to play a positive part in social advance; but because he is working in the artistic field, Marxism asks of the artist also that he should master his medium, his craft, in order the better to rouse the emotions, to inspire confident action. Marxism calls also for the fight against the use of artistic forms to express themes that are petty, futile, degrading, harmful to society. And it does this not in the name of politics, of propaganda, but in the name of art itself: it claims that art rises to its full height when it expresses the nobility of man, his struggle to rise higher, to master the forces of Nature, his power to create; in other words, when it expresses the truth of social advance and of man's heroic struggle, the fundamental truth of human life. But the creative worker in any medium must express reality in the form which historical conditions make accessible to the people; he selects the essence of reality, and generalises it in the form which makes people not only grasp the truth, but be moved by it, be inspired to act to "make that dream come true." In the present stage of human society, that dream is Communism. The beauty, the truth, of all creative work is also its power to move man to struggle for that goal. And this is true even in our society, though we cannot feel the pulse of two hundred million people advancing to Communism under the banner of Marxism.

The significance of the Soviet discussions for us is therefore more than giving us an insight into their problems and their method of solving those problems. The discussions help us to a new understanding and a new approach in our own cultural work. They bring out the tendencies that restrict both the material and the cultural life of the society in which we live; and they show the meaning of cultural activity, its positive value and aim. In so doing they help workers in the various cultural fields to have a clearer perspective, and therefore greater confidence in their work.

It is true that our task in the cultural field must perhaps be in greater measure the fight against bourgeois ideas which in the

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Soviet Union are only vestiges or smuggled imports, but here are dominant in the minds of men. Nevertheless, this fight can only be fought successfully to the extent that we too overhaul our intellectual equipment, rid our own minds of the ideas against which we fight. We too, therefore, need to deepen our study of Marxism, our understanding of historical materialism especially in its bearing on creative work. We too need to study our history, our traditions in every field, as the base from which we operate. And this means that alongside the essential polemical work, the fight against capitalist ideas even when concealed in cultural forms, must go the positive work of research and original creation—which itself, in the last resort, is polemical, *partisan*.

To-day history is moving at a pace known only in periods of transition from one social order to another. Our ideological front needs a tempo of activity that matches the speed of events, the pace of the struggle. Our forces exist, and they are strong because they are equipped, or can be equipped if they will, with the weapons of Marxism. But “contact has not been established with the enemy, there is no reconnaissance, the weapons are rusting.” The Soviet discussions must help us to end this passive attitude, to get to grips with the enemy ideas and defeat them in polemical struggle, as well as to tackle our positive work with greater boldness.

## Letters of Camille Pissarro

BY MILLICENT ROSE

TO the young person setting out on the adventure of becoming acquainted with painting, there is no school more immediately attractive than the later nineteenth-century French. In the light, spacious galleries of the Tate, so much the best in London for seeing, the walls are brilliant with the primary colours—Van Gogh's yellow, Monet's blue and Gauguin's red—and with scenes of everyday life. Among the other schools of painting the adventurer finds art on a pedestal: unfamiliar ways of looking at far-off times and unknown saints and legends. But the Impressionists show us men in trousers, women whose hair styles are the models for to-day's most elegant fashions. Street, park, ballet, garden, seaside, though different, are all recognisably akin to our own experience, and the countryside is in hedged fields, not in the feudal expanses of Rubens' *Château de Steen*.

The Impressionist palette, the use of bold, direct colours which so shocked the taste of the eighteen-seventies, does not surprise us; on the contrary, we have all been taught at school to see red and blue in a shadow rather than muddy brown, and vulgarised Impressionist colour is a commonplace on every hoarding. It is with steady pleasure that we look at the familiar colour convention in its originals. And to the young inquirer the Impressionists are straightforward, the last straightforward art. The first reaction to most of Picasso is still puzzlement, and perhaps it always will be, like the first reaction to El Greco. But Monet's *Lily Pond*, Van Gogh's *Chair* attract immediately, and create in anyone who responds to painting an appetite for seeing and knowing more of this school.

Pissarro is not, to the beginner, the most striking of the Impressionists. We come to know him with the rest—with Sisley and Monet in particular—and gradually, as our knowledge of the school increases, he separates himself; one good example of his work suddenly individualises him and he becomes of the greatest interest.

The life of Camille Pissarro, as revealed in the *Letters to Lucien*, the *Catalogue raisonnée* compiled by Lionello Venturi with the painter's fourth son, was one of unceasing work and unceasing

financial strain. There is no more characteristic example of the struggles of the artist in capitalist society.

Pissarro was born in the West Indies, the son of a Jewish business man, in 1830. At twenty-two, after five years in his father's business, he gave up commerce for painting. He did not become self-supporting till the age of forty, and fortunately for him his mother was able until this time to allow him a small income, the barest pittance compared with the fortunes inherited by Degas and Cézanne, yet just enough to live on. He married in his early thirties and became the father of five sons and two daughters; his wife, peasant-like, kept her family alive on the produce of their garden. It was not till the eighteen-nineties that Pissarro's work began to sell for reasonably good prices; he was over sixty at the time of his first successful one-man show.

The very first works of Pissarro were West Indian in subject-matter and exotic in treatment, but, coming to France in 1855, he soon found in Corot an inspiration and a master more in keeping with his temperament. A little later he became friendly with Manet, two years his junior, and with the young lad Monet. This friendship was the beginning of Impressionism, of open-air painting with the true, fresh colours of Nature. But Pissarro was still sufficiently Corot-like to be admitted to most of the Salons of the 'sixties. He was never a favourite with the critics, who found his palette-knife technique, his uncompromising simplicity "bare," "heavy," "common"; there were neither nymphs nor pious gleaners to add anecdotal sweetness to his pictures. When Zola praised him in his Salon review of 1868 he pointed out that Pissarro had "none of the little accomplishments of his companions . . . among all these dolled-up canvases, the pictures of Camille Pissarro appear distressingly bare . . . the artist has cared only for truth and integrity."

Pissarro's of before the Franco-Prussian War are not very common; of the fifteen hundred unsold canvases that were in his home in 1870, all but forty were destroyed by the invaders. The Tate Gallery *Road to Louveciennes*, painted in the spring of 1870, shows his style before he had completely developed the Impressionist vision. This canvas is luminous as an early Corot is luminous, without division of colours. But Corot would have chosen a more dramatic view; Pissarro's is asymmetrical and subtle, while his girl on the road, though as gracefully upright as one of Watteau's ladies, is at the same time inimitably a peasant. This is

not a painting to astonish the world, yet as one returns to it its serenity and evocation of a season grow ever more satisfying.

During the war Pissarro took refuge in England; he was by birth a Danish subject, and his character was in any case the reverse of warlike. He was miserable here, finding in us a nation whose exclusive interest was commerce; but he and his fellow refugee Monet found our skies as sympathetic as our society was repellent. Pissarro returned to France with several canvases of the South London suburbs, and with an extension of knowledge which was to have a great influence upon him: a close acquaintance with the work of Crome, Constable, Turner. The colour of Turner enriches all the work of the 'seventies; in the Tate *Côte des Bœufs, Pontoise*, of 1877, there is a characteristic echo of this artist's loved reds, his atmospheric sunniness.

The 'seventies was the flowering time of Impressionism; it was during this decade that the painters of the new movement banded themselves together for co-operative exhibitions of works which would display their new scientific theory of colour. With Pissarro, Monet, Berthe Morisot, Sisley, Guillaumin, other painters showed who were not properly a part of the movement: Degas; Cézanne, who was at this time painting in daily contact with Pissarro at Pontoise, but who deserted the co-operative and all other artists' organisations after only one exhibition.

The public of the years after the war and the Commune was nervously hostile to anything new. The Impressionists' work was received with terrified distaste; a co-operative would have been bad enough without all those dreadful bright colours. This reception had been foreseen by the friends of the artists; the collector and critic Duret wrote to Pissarro even before the first exhibition, begging him not to take part, but to send instead to the Salon "some pictures with a subject, with something that resembles composition, pictures not too freshly painted and just a little finished." Pissarro obstinately refused to take this advice; perhaps he remembered how Constable used to paint all the life out of his Academy pictures when he finished them according to the taste of the public and not after his own sensation.

Besides being a demonstration of a new vision, the co-operative was also an attempt to free the painters from their double dependence on the Salon and on dealers. Durand-Ruel, the dealer who had begun to sell the work of Pissarro and his friends, retaliated by dropping the new artists abruptly. To Pissarro this meant



economic disaster, and though a few of his amateurs, such as Caillebotte and the *restaurateur* Eugène Murer, continued to make small purchases, his condition became absolutely desperate. He describes his situation in 1878 (aged forty-eight) in a letter to Murer:

“Want, even destitution, has gripped my house and threatens our home every moment. I can stand it no longer . . . my studies are made without joy, because I am obsessed with the idea that I shall have to abandon art and try to do something else, if it's possible for me to make a fresh start.”

The family crept somehow from rent-day to rent-day; their father managed to bring a little money into the home by the sale, not of his big pictures, but of *gouaches* and decorated fans, for which he could find some market at prices lower than those he must demand for his oils if he was not to sink irretrievably to a pauperising price-level.

During the 'eighties, Monet and Renoir were already beginning to find a good market—and to make certain concessions to public taste. Pissarro, on the other hand, became less than ever a dealers' favourite, for with the young Seurat he was working out the development of Impressionism known as Pointillism. Researching as to how to make their canvases ever more luminous, Pissarro and Seurat came to the conclusion that the division of colours into their constituent primaries and secondaries, and painting by minute, calculated dots of these constituents was the only absolutely scientific and cleanly way of painting. Besides greater luminosity, the method had a second advantage; it gave a purity of design and form which counteracted that tendency in Impressionism described by Pissarro (writing of work by Guillaumin) as “no drawing . . . a flurry of colours, but no modelling. . . .”

Pissarro eventually turned against Pointillism, but not because his Pointillist works would not sell! On the contrary, he persevered in the style several years, and only abandoned it because he decided that it “interfered with spontaneity of sensation.” After 1889 his work shows a return to the Impressionist way, but enriched by Pointillist experience with even an added sparkle; compare, in the Tate, the trees of *Côte des Bœufs* (1877), of an enclosed, monotonous green-grey, with the marvellously air-surrounded branches of the *Lowre in Winter* (1903).

In 1892 Pissarro held, at Durand-Ruel's gallery, the first of a series of successful one-man shows, and from this time the old painter began to come into his own; began to see his canvases in demand, and to receive good prices for them; began to see them bought by the public galleries of his own and other countries.

During these last years, eye trouble obliged him to avoid the risk of wind or dust by working mainly indoors; he began the series of paintings from windows in Paris, Rouen, Dieppe, Le Havre. He who had been all his life a Nature painter, and who in the opinion of Cézanne excelled all the other Impressionists in this field, found in the necessity which now confined him to hotel rooms a new inspiration. “I am delighted,” he writes to Lucien in 1897, “to be able to paint these Paris streets that people have come to call ugly, but which are so silvery, so luminous and vital.” Each of these dozens of views has a lovely completeness of impression (see, for example, the Tate *Boulevard: effet de nuit* of 1897). The last summer of his life, 1903, passed largely in Le Havre, was one of the most successfully productive that he ever spent.

Pissarro summed up the position of the artist in modern times when he wrote: “All those who work with their hands or brains, who create, become proletarians when they depend on middlemen—proletarians with or without overalls.” Pissarro was an anarchist, his reading, not Marx, but Proudhon and Kropotkin, but because he did not accept the common beliefs of capitalist society he could see the position more clearly than any of his artist contemporaries. He regarded Durand-Ruel, the middleman through whom he carried on a lifetime of trade as a picture maker, as an adversary. He lacked in his business dealings the pleasant little ways of Monet, Renoir and Degas, because, unlike them, he realised that the class struggle is as much a reality for the artist as for the miner. Degas came of a family of New Orleans cotton traders; the income from his art was useful, not as it bought him necessities, but as a means of collecting pictures, drawings and fine prints. His gentlemanly relation with Durand-Ruel may be seen in the numerous nonchalant little letters which have been preserved. Pissarro, on the other hand, came on business to Paris as to a battlefield; a yearly visit was necessary, and he came if possible in the worst months of the year, when there was neither weather nor light for painting. Tramping everywhere to save fares, he always carried a canvas or portfolio under either arm; his long

white beard streamed over his breast. It is easy to imagine who gets the better reception in the rue Lafitte, or in the rue de la Boétie or Bond Street: an elegant neatly-shod Degas or a rugged old Pissarro stumping in with muddy boots. Degas, who did not need the money, was a four-figure customer; Pissarro, family and all, a queer old chap to whom 60 francs for a *gouache* would be a godsend; an old fellow of undoubted gifts, who must not be totally rebuffed, but who need not be too delicately handled.

Tired, anxious, living while in Paris with his mother, who had never wholly approved his giving up business for painting, Pissarro would write of his progress to the son in London (provided he had the money for the stamp, which was not always the case). As late as 1891 he has nothing but disappointments to relate:

"This is a bad moment for me. Durand doesn't take my paintings. Miss Cassatt was much surprised to hear that he no longer buys my work; it seems he sells a great deal. But for the moment people want nothing but Monets; apparently he can't paint enough pictures to meet the demand. Worst of all, they all want *Sheaves in the Setting Sun*! Always the same story, everything he does goes to America at prices of four, five and six thousand francs. All this comes, as Durand remarked to me, from not shocking the collectors! True enough! What do you want? I replied; one has to be built that way."

He met Sisley during this visit—Sisley, whose lack of private means, whose family responsibilities and whose admirable integrity in the face of difficulties were not unlike Pissarro's own. He writes of their conversation:

"Since Durand is unable to support all the Impressionists, it is entirely to his interest to let them fall by the wayside after he has obtained enough of their work, for he knows their pictures will not sell until much later. The lower the prices, the better for him—he can leave our canvases to his children. He behaves like a modern speculator for all his angelic soft-spokenness. Sisley can't forgive his lack of good faith, for we were all naïve and believed his promises."

The one dealer whom Pissarro found trustworthy was Theo Van Gogh, who was in any case an employee, not an *entrepreneur*. During his years in Paris, Van Gogh made the firm he worked for, Boussod and Valladon, a support to all the Impressionists—the

very support which enabled Monet, for one, to achieve the independence of success. Pissarro, always benign and open to his fellow artists, repaid the dealer-brother by helping the painter-brother to that understanding of colour which transformed him from a brown Dutchman into the painter of Arles. But the friendly relation with the dealer "who understood" came to a sudden and tragic end; the suicide of Vincent Van Gogh was followed by the breakdown and, within a few months, the death of his brother.

Pissarro was compelled to continue with Durand-Ruel, and it was in his gallery that all the successful shows of the 'nineties were held. But he never trusted him, and the letters of the very last year still express the greatest animosity towards him. In 1902 he had made a series of paintings in Dieppe, and, finding Durand still disposed, in spite of the great demand for Pissarros, to haggle and beat down prices, he accepted another dealer's offer for the series. He writes to Lucien triumphantly:

"What motivated me especially was that here was an opportunity to escape from Durand-Ruel, who not only had a monopoly of my work from which he profited, but even forced his prices on me under the pretext that my works couldn't be sold."

The relation of artist to dealer (and only through him to the public) has produced in the artist a peculiar mentality, from which Pissarro is unusually free. I am not thinking of the "long hair, dandyism and noise" against which he occasionally warned his sons, but of that deeper eccentricity which characterises such a high proportion of modern painters, great or small. Cézanne is the classic example. The old recluse of Aix, as portrayed by Emile Bernard in his account of a visit paid in 1904, was a confirmed neurotic, living in perpetual dread of his fellow creatures. Like many neurotic people, he invited the troubles he dreaded; his queer manners and paint-stained clothes were an incitement to the urchins of Aix to throw pebbles at him. His greatest horror was of having his methods of painting filched, and, second to this, a horror of being *touched* by another human being; the two dreads seem to have been somehow identified, for he would mutter the same phrase about each: "They shan't get their hooks into me." When once he was convinced that the Bernards had no designs on him, he showed them a warm friendship, but a friendship

which was almost ruined one day when Bernard, not knowing the Master's peculiarities, put out a hand to help him when he tripped on the studio stairs. Cézanne's suspicious, antagonistic, ultra-individualist attitude towards his fellow creatures is highly characteristic of the artist of our time.

In Pissarro, by contrast, we encounter the warm humanity of the normal man. To any but the middleman, he was generosity itself, and in all his struggles, sane. Referring to Seurat, whose fear that people would steal his methods was as strong as that of Cézanne himself, Pissarro writes: "I recognise no *secret* in painting other than that of the artist's own sentiment, which is not easily swiped." This is the perfect comment on Cézanne's "They shan't get their hooks into me."

No painting is freer of any element of sermonising than Pissarro's. While Millet's peasants have always a literary significance—his *Angelus* drew floods of tears from the sentimental public during its first showing in Paris—the figures in Pissarro's landscapes are simply there, as much a part of the fields as the crops they tend. Yet Pissarro himself said that his work had a content which expressed his philosophy of life: "I frankly believe that something of our ideas, born as they are of the anarchist philosophy, passes into our work."

Art for art's sake was never his goal. When Lucien first went to London in 1883, he sent his father an account of the æsthetic movement, then in full flow. Pissarro replied:

"*Æstheticism* is a kind of romanticism more or less combined with trickery; it means breaking for oneself a crooked road. They would have liked to make something like that out of Impressionism, which really should be nothing more than a theory of observation, without entailing the loss of fantasy, freedom, grandeur, all that makes for great art. But not *eccentricity* to make sensitive people swoon."

Much of the advice to his son is designed to encourage him to imitate his father's application to art: "It is only by drawing often, drawing everything, drawing incessantly, that one fine day you will discover to your surprise that you have rendered something *in its true character*." Cézanne, who for thirty years worked as hard at painting as any man well could, gave us an idea of Pissarro's powers of application when he told Bernard that as

a young man he himself had been no more than a Bohemian dabbler. "It wasn't till later, when I came to know Pissarro, who was tireless, that I acquired the taste for hard work."

The purpose with which Pissarro worked throughout his life with such determination is suggested by many a hint in the letters; it is never accurately defined, and probably it is impossible to define entirely in words. There is a hint in this passage on Daumier:

"To give you an idea of what I mean by *done*, I sent you those Daumier lithographs. . . . Daumier was the man his drawings show him to be, a convinced, a true republican. And you feel in his drawings the sweep of a great artist who marched towards his goal, but did not cease to be an artist in the most profound sense, so that even without legends and explanations his drawings are beautiful."

With captions or without, the social content of a Daumier is never hard to see. And one can say certain things about the content of a Pissarro landscape. It is not grandiose like a Claude; it is not escapist romanticism like much modern English landscape (Hodgkins, Sutherland, Hichens, to give three examples that are, superficially, very dissimilar); it is most emphatically not the art of a tourist (Whistler). The painter, one can see, is humble, simple, at home in his country, devoid of snobbism and other intellectual vices; the same honesty which illuminates Pissarro's letters is apparent in every canvas he painted. No doubt this honesty must be uplifting to all who see his work! but there is no compulsion upon us to take any particular action, in the way that a Daumier drawing of a washerwoman, lawyer or black marketeer may stir us to political activity.

Pissarro himself, like Cézanne and the other painters of his circle, described what he was after by the word "sensation," a word taken up in a rather arty-crafty spirit by Roger Fry and recently misunderstood and decried by the author of *Marxism and Modern Art*.

In ages earlier than our own, conditions were far simpler for the artist, emotionally just as much as economically. Sensation, which I take to mean the artist's excitement at perceiving the *true character* of the visible world, could become, with Giotto or Giovanni Bellini, part of a *Story of Joachim and Anna* or a *Transfiguration*. Religion provided at once the primary inspiration and

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the public for the artists of the Middle Ages and early Renaissance. But for the painter working in the isolation of modern conditions, the *sensation* has come to be its own justification.

This state of affairs will continue until new relations between artist and public are evolved. We must not succumb to the arguments of such bourgeois critics as Read or Goldscheider and regard it as a fundamental and unchanging law, but the twentieth-century artist, working in the light loneliness of his studio, is bound to be largely preoccupied with the expression of his own visual awareness.

The paintings and letters of Pissarro give us the example of an artist who has faced modern conditions with perfect integrity. This great painter held to his principles, as artist and man, never currying favour with the cliques by flattery, mysticism, fashionableness, self-advertisement; always keeping strictly to visual terms, instead of borrowing attractions from the parallel yet separate art of literature.

We live in a time when the power of visual joy is in danger of becoming completely atrophied; when the people as a whole have fallen into the habit of using their eyes for information only. Sensation, in Pissarro's meaning, is not just a dilettante's amusement; the study of his paintings stirs us to a larger vision that increases our ardour for life.

## Educational Theory and Practice

BY JOAN SIMON

### I

**E**DUCATION is a social function which takes place in the course of social living. In the widest sense, the term "education" comprehends the whole history of man's development from savagery to civilisation. The individual's education comprehends the experience accumulated at home, at work, and in the course of the multifarious activities of daily life.

The rise of the civilised states of the ancient world, the development of the division of labour, marked the first appearance of an organised system of education, as opposed to the haphazard or primitive accumulation of knowledge in the family or tribal setting. The handing on of acquired techniques, of a growing body of knowledge, of social attitudes necessitated a system of schools working to clearly defined ends.

But in the slave-based societies of the ancient world schooling was limited to an aristocracy. The educational philosophy of the Greeks, the first to be formulated, reflects the divorce between theoretical knowledge and technical skill and achievement characteristic of the Greek city-state and leading eventually to the collapse of Greek science. While great advances in knowledge followed the freeing of human resources from the mere struggle for existence, a fatal dichotomy arose between the world of the spirit and the world of material things, a dichotomy reflected in the content of education. Though schooling was consciously directed to certain defined social ends and forms of social training had an important place, a sharp line was drawn between the liberal and illiberal arts.

Aristotle even places the practice of the fine arts in the menial category, as opposed to pure appreciation which is proper to a liberal education. The more purely mental an activity, the less it has to do with material things or physical action, the higher its value. The more it is confined to the mind, the more independent and self-sufficing it becomes.

To-day, in a technical and scientific age, when organised mass education has become one of the most important social necessities, when the school has assumed many of the functions formerly the

province of other agencies—the Church, the court, the family, industry—a strong school of thought affirms anew that there is a segregation of educational values which is intrinsic and absolute. The highest good is the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake, all other forms of education are necessarily inferior. And “education, from its own nature, must ultimately be concerned with values which are independent of time or particular environment.”<sup>1</sup>

While Aristotle was describing straightforwardly the way of life he saw around him, the modern exponents of absolute values in education are entangled in a web of mental confusion, hypocrisy and falsification of scientific findings. Aristotle started from the supposition that the mass of men and all women were unfree from their very nature; there is at least no hypocrisy in the suggestion that they deserve only a training for mechanical pursuits, while only the few can cultivate the mind. The modern idealistic theory of education, as exemplified in the Norwood Report, postulates that all men and women are free and have the right to education, but it also postulates a divorce between significant knowledge and practical achievement. In order to reconcile the two, it has to fly in the face of history, deny the findings of psychology, and question the validity of its own “liberal democratic” creed, by asserting that only a few have the innate qualities to approach the higher good while the majority are fit only for practical activity. Man’s nature is, in fact, unchanging, and it is the task of education to minister to the unchanging needs of different types of mind. There are three such types; the academic, the technical, the barely conscious.

It is unnecessary to enumerate the multitude of minor confusions and evasions which follow—in particular, the equivocal attitude towards science and the emphasis laid on teaching the “limitations” of scientific method. Nor is it surprising to find that religious indoctrination is a central theme.

The social roots of this theory can be plainly discerned. Its exponents would have it that the cumulative experience of Western civilisation has shaped their thought. And it is true that from Plato to modern times all organised education has been planned and undertaken within the confines of class society; education beyond the elementary stage has been available only to those free from the prospect of common toil. But the theory that knowledge is only really valuable when studied for its own sake, has only

<sup>1</sup> Norwood Report (“Curriculum and Examinations in Secondary Schools,” 1943).

recently been revived in the modern world. In the nineteenth century a liberal education was recognised and consciously planned as a vocational education for the job of ruling, just as religious training and drill in the alphabet were planned as a means to restrain popular understanding and action while making the worker more useful in the sphere to which God had assigned him.

It is only since the pressure of economic needs and the political pressure of the working-class movement have secured advances in the whole educational field, and in particular have put secondary education for all on the order of the day, that a ruling class educational philosophy has become an urgent necessity. And it accurately reflects, not only the decline of the system it would perpetuate, but also its negative and amoral character.

Sir Fred Clarke, quoting Professor MacMurray, has suggested its defensive position and theoretical bankruptcy:

“The cult of ‘knowledge for its own sake’ tends to arise in a society which is quite ready to accept the techniques of a new order, but not ready to accept any essential change in the structure of an existing order, nor to allow the displacement of a standard culture in which it has a vested interest by one which would transfer the social advantages to another class. If that is so, then the plea for knowledge for its own sake becomes socially suspect as the dress of an interested ideology. Just as the freely-contracting ‘individual’ of nineteenth-century liberalism—so it may be argued—was the expression of a *bourgeois* interest, so the ideal of a disinterested student pursuing knowledge ‘for its own sake’ may express the interest of a régime which has the strongest reasons for not wishing to see new knowledge used *instrumentally* all along the line—that is, in social and political reconstruction as well as in the provision of scientific techniques. If . . . so fine-sounding an ideal should be in reality just a decorative cloak to cover a not disinterested timidity, some explanation is afforded of the devitalising of curricula. In such conditions studies are the material of a defensive façade, rather than the source of instruments of positive social action. They come more and more to lack *direct relevancy*, a lack which cannot wholly be concealed by modernistic changes in the spirit in which they are taught.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Education and Social Change.



It is certainly true that the secondary school curriculum is devitalised, that its abstract and over-verbalised studies are anything but the source of instruments of positive social action. But the distortion is not, of course, purely an ideological one. Men's capacities and attitudes are determined by the scope and nature of the activities they undertake. In a class society, where the division of labour has attained unprecedented proportions, few are able to develop their full capacity, to see the world directly and to see it whole. Men of all classes become dehumanised.

"This state of affairs must exist so far as society is organised on the basis of division between labouring classes and leisure classes. The intelligence of those who do things becomes hard in the unremitting struggle with things; that of those freed from the discipline of occupation becomes luxurious and effeminate. Moreover, the majority of human beings still lack economic freedom. Their pursuits are fixed by accident and necessity of circumstance; they are not the normal expression of their own powers interacting with the needs and resources of the environment. Our economic conditions still relegate many men to servile status. As a consequence, the intelligence of those in control of the practical situation is not liberal. Instead of playing freely upon the subjugation of the world for human ends, it is devoted to the manipulation of other men for ends which are non-human in so far as they are exclusive."<sup>1</sup>

The richness and variety of social life, the infinite variability of individuals, of individual tendencies and capacities, are hidden and suppressed. Men are confined to limited objectives, their abilities canalised in narrow grooves. Specialisation of function, as dictated by the requirements of a class society, means for most the divorce of knowledge and technique from its social background and human application, an absence of free and creative interest in work. Ideals therefore stand out as transcendental. Moral and cultural values appear to be on a different plane from science and technical achievement. Art is for art's sake, culture for culture's sake, knowledge is valuable for its own sake. The less opportunity there is to apply knowledge for socially useful ends, the more knowledge appears to be a thing in itself, above and beyond the sordid affairs of daily life. Under these conditions, knowledge itself begins to fail

<sup>1</sup> Dewey, *Democracy and Education*.

as knowledge because it is not transmitted consciously for use. It becomes one-sided, over-specialised and dead.

Against this social background, any educational system which treats the differences between men as fixed and absolute is retrogressive. Any form of education which concentrates on the mere inculcation of current values, of knowledge as an end in itself, as opposed to the release of latent capacity and the free exercise of thought as a guide to practice, is inevitably anti-humanist, since it serves the non-human ends of a ruling class and not real human needs. It bolsters up the *status quo* and retards social progress. It becomes confined to mere juggling with words and passive reception of ideas. It is shot through with hypocrisy and moral insincerity. The self-styled humanists who would maintain present aims and methods in secondary and higher education are in fact the chief enemies of humanism.

Forms of education which exclude ideas and methods of thought, and concentrate on mere technique are equally non-humanist. Neither form of education meets the social needs of a technical and scientific age, an age in which the constant and fruitful interaction of theory and practice is a necessity for social advance, in which men must take conscious control of their destiny if humanity is to survive.

This has been increasingly recognised. In opposition to the arch-defenders of the *status quo*, the exponents of absolute values, there stand a number of socially conscious educationists. To take a recent example, *School and Life*, the first report of the Central Advisory Council for England and Wales, affirms that education has always "been to a high degree vocational, lending itself to the progressive needs of society," and recognises to-day the "disappearance . . . of a generally accepted standard by which to test views and conduct" due to the confusion caused by conflicting ideologies and the gulf between religious and moral theory and current practice. It emphasises the importance of taking the child's experience as a starting point in education, of providing contacts with the real world and an understanding of simple social relations.

The findings of modern psychology have had an important influence in shaping this approach. For instance:

"Until about 30 years ago it was commonly assumed . . . that the salient feature in mental development was the successive emergence of specific intellectual faculties—sensation, movement,

speech, memory, imagination, reasoning—each appearing at fairly definite periods in the child's life. It was held that all these faculties could, and should, be trained as they emerged. . . . Inasmuch as reason and imagination were not supposed to mature until adolescence the special function of the Secondary (grammar) School was to train the rational and imaginative faculties through literature, languages and mathematics. It was supposed that at this stage the mind could be best developed by a basic education of the humanistic type providing a general foundation of culture, applicable to every child without regard to individual differences or to subsequent specialisation of careers. The theory that the mind is composed of distinct intellectual faculties . . . has now been generally abandoned. Moreover, careful research has thrown a good deal of doubt on the view that the mind as a whole and its several faculties can be trained by merely exercising them. Education rather consists in developing specific habits, memories, ideas, forms of manual and mental skill, intellectual interest, moral ideals, and a knowledge, not merely of facts and conclusions, but also of methods."<sup>1</sup>

These advances in educational psychology and the new social approach to the curriculum have brought to light the basic contradictions inherent in any system of universal education in capitalist society. The child is beginning to be regarded as a person instead of as a unit; the social attributes of knowledge are beginning to be recognised. Yet beyond the school the only prospect for the majority of children is that of becoming a cog in the machine, of doing a job devoid of interest and fulfilment. It is this concrete problem that leads to the discussions about separate methods of "educating for work" and "educating for leisure," or alternatively to fruitless attempts to reconcile vocational training and general education. Those who accept the divisions of capitalist society as final and absolute must search in vain for a final "integration" of the various aspects of human knowledge, experience and emotion.

The kernel of the whole matter is that the practical necessities of modern social living and economic production impose an ever-narrowing gap between theory and practice and an ever wider and broader knowledge among the workers. But the social relations of capitalism, the nature of the division of labour under capitalism prevent this development.

<sup>1</sup> *Spens Report*, p. 122 ("Report of the Consultative Committee on Secondary Education," 1938).

"Modern industry, indeed, compels society, under penalty of death, to replace the detail worker of to-day, crippled by life-long repetition of one and the same operation and thus reduced to a mere fragment of a man, by the fully developed individual, fit for a variety of labours, ready to face any change of production and to whom the different social functions he performs are so many modes of giving scope to his natural and acquired powers."<sup>1</sup>

The conflict between productive forces and social relations is inevitably reflected in the schools. Any consideration of education as a social function leads to the demand that the swotting of isolated subjects for examinations, the one-sided vocational or intellectual training, should be replaced by an education of the whole man designed to produce an individual conscious of his own powers and of his place in the social process.

And within the educational system new methods have begun to appear. The present content of education is not a mere mechanical reflection of capitalist ideology. It reflects the total situation, the advancing power of the people moving towards the Socialist solution as well as the needs and contradictions of capitalism. It would no longer be true to describe all elementary education as narrowly utilitarian. It is, in fact, in the former senior departments of elementary schools that new methods of education have primarily been introduced, tested, and found good.

The elementary schools have educated the vast majority, the children of the working class, the immediate producers in society, who are in constant contact in their daily life with material reality, who have, in Lenin's words, assimilated the whole culture of urban, industrial, large-scale capitalism. Where such schools—free from the academic bonds which constrict the rest of the system from university through secondary to junior school—have based their programmes on the children's experience, have attempted to provide a richer environment, and have tested theory in practice in the study of their surroundings, they have evolved new forms of educational content in tune with the time.

These methods constitute a challenge to the existing educational order, especially now that secondary education for all has been established. The theorists of the Norwood Committee denigrate their value by relegating them to the sphere of a type of education

<sup>1</sup> Engels, *Anti-Dühring*.

suitable to a particular type of mind, that low type that is unable to assimilate the higher good. But their influence continues to spread and has even reached some grammar schools.

The conflict between the old order and the new is now to be discerned on every educational issue, whether it be the establishment of the multilateral or comprehensive school, the reform of methods of selection for secondary education, the abolition of the School Certificate Examination, or autocratic methods within the school as opposed to social discipline.

### II

What are the real issues underlying educational controversy? They are, of course, the same as those in every field of social life. Are we to advance or to return to barbarism?

The present educational system is a capitalist agency in a capitalist society. It is one of those agencies—to-day the Press, the cinema, the wireless, are other and very powerful ones—which continuously transmit the ideas and values of the ruling order. In the main, therefore, it exerts a conservative influence, it is class-divided, it works to stabilise social relations in the interests of capitalism. But by its very existence it puts new weapons in the hands of the people which they can use to transform social relations. It is therefore a focal point in the struggle for social advance, and at a time of social collapse it quickly reflects the contradictions of a period.

To-day secondary education for all is the law of the land, but the law has yet to be put fully into practice. Sustained efforts are being made to maintain the class system of education as rigidly as ever at the new secondary level by dividing schools into different types and severely restricting the numbers in the grammar school which alone leads directly to the university.

The attempt to maintain divisions and differences of subject matter as between the curricula of different schools is in effect an attempt to counteract the effects of the increased dose of enlightenment. It is also noteworthy in this connection that the 1944 Education Act makes religious teaching and observance a statutory duty on all schools for the first time.

There is to-day a widespread disillusionment among teachers and educationists. Paradoxically, the very improvements in educational practice have accentuated frustration by bringing the

contrast between human needs and capitalist social relations more clearly to light. With the delay in educational reconstruction and in the improvement of material conditions, tasks become more difficult and disillusionment spreads.

At the same time, the schools are frequently saddled with the responsibility for current social ills—the increase in juvenile delinquency, the low level of public taste, the lack of technical proficiency, or even the falling off in religious profession. And the burden of redressing these ills is laid at their door. A constant barrage of propaganda endeavours to convince the teacher that the world is rushing headlong to disaster because scientific knowledge has outstripped human morality, that it is the primary task of education to develop moral qualities in the individual, that this is the only way to social regeneration.

But bourgeois educational theory is bankrupt. All that it can offer is retrogression; it can only put up a smoke screen in the attempt to cloud the issues. And the socially conscious educationist is frequently caught up in the trammels of capitalist divisions; his vain search for a final “synthesis” within the framework of capitalist social relations ends in the arms of the Church or peters out in sentimental trivialities. *School and Life* is notable as the first public pronouncement which honestly recognises the “disappearance . . . of a generally accepted standard by which to test . . . conduct,” and the immediate and strongly worded attacks which followed this challenge bear witness to the consternation it aroused.

There are some who have recognised the dangers inherent in this situation, and who are already charting the next steps. Karl Mannheim, whose writings have considerable influence in the educational world, put forward in *Diagnosis of Our Time* a planned democratic way of educational advance as opposed to *laissez-faire* or totalitarianism (Marxist or otherwise):

“In a society where the value controls were traffic lights directly appealing either to conditioned responses or to the emotions and the unconscious mind, one could bring about social action without strengthening the intellectual powers of the ego. But in a society in which the main changes are to be brought about through collective deliberation and consent, a completely new system of education would be necessary, one which would focus its main energies on the development of our intellectual powers and bring about a frame of mind which can bear

the burden of scepticism and which does not panic when many of the thought habits are doomed to vanish. On the other hand, if our present-day democracy comes to the conclusion that this frame of mind is undesirable, or that it is impracticable, or not yet feasible where great masses are concerned, we ought to have the courage to build this fact into our educational strategy. In this case we ought, in certain spheres, to admit and foster those values which appeal directly to the emotions and irrational powers in man, and at the same time to concentrate our efforts on education for rational insight where this is already within our reach."

This middle way leads in the same direction as do all other middle of the road policies.

What theory of education does the Labour movement support? The London County Council Education Committee criticised the Norwood Report in no uncertain terms. The Labour Party Congress outvoted the platform on the issue of the three-type division of secondary education *versus* the comprehensive school, but no change was made in the Government's educational policy which accepts the assumptions of the Norwood Report. Labour policy on education has always been mainly confined to organisational questions; in this field, as in others, theory has been neglected.

After the last war the Labour Party embarked on a campaign for "Secondary Education for All." The position to-day is fundamentally much the same as when R. H. Tawney wrote in an official publication:

"For the Labour movement itself the issue is vital. The organisation of education on lines of class, which, though qualified in the last twenty years, has characterised the English system of public education since its very inception, has been at once a symptom, an effect and a cause of the control of the lives of the mass of men and women by a privileged minority. The very assumption on which it is based, that all the child of the workers needs is 'elementary education'—as though the mass of the people, like anthropoid apes, had fewer convolutions in their brains than the rich—is in itself a piece of insolence. It has been maintained . . . because those who have hitherto governed the nation, believing, and believing with justice, that ignorance and docility go hand in hand, have taken care to ration the education

of the workers in doses small enough to be innocuous to the established order. Organised Labour has fought many ringing battles against that odious doctrine of class domination in the world of industry. . . . But, if it is to liberate the lives of the rising generation, it must also emancipate their minds. It must lay the foundations of a democratic society not only in the workshop and in Parliament, but in the schools."<sup>1</sup>

Yet, for all this divine discontent, social democratic policy has never envisaged more than an extension of facilities, an improvement of what is weak and maintenance of what is good in capitalist educational practice. In the philosophy of gradualism, increased social mobility through extension of educational opportunity is one of the keystones. There is no room for belief in a complete transformation of the educational process, just as there is no room for belief in the transformation of society and the remaking of man. And to-day the call to action of twenty years ago is not repeated. A Labour Government is itself responsible for organising secondary education in such a way as to suggest that the mass of the workers are as anthropoid apes by comparison with the privileged minority.

This restrictive policy can only lead in one direction. There can to-day be no standing still. Either scientific principles must be applied to the whole practice of education or the way is open for a wholesale perversion of the educational process. As the contradictions of capitalism increase, the tendency is inevitably "to admit and foster those values which appeal directly to the emotional and irrational powers in man," to prevent at all costs an understanding among the workers of the laws of history, to denigrate science and replace it by mysticism. The Nazi educational system clearly illustrated the process. Capitalism, whose birth and development has depended so materially on science, in its decline is forced to rebel against science.

The only true heirs of humanism to-day are those who consistently defend science against obscurantism and disseminate scientific enlightenment among the masses. There is an urgent need to pursue this task more thoroughly in the field of formal education, to illuminate and advance the practice of sound educational methods, to ensure that the issues at stake are understood.

<sup>1</sup> *Secondary Education for All.*

To look back in history is to see that the primary educative factor in the development of social man is improvements in material technique and the changes of environment they have produced. New ways of living and working have prepared the way for new methods of thought and new discoveries, which in their turn have reacted upon the uses and development of technique and helped to mould history and further human knowledge.

The distinctive mark of modern society is that this interaction, hitherto largely fortuitous, can now be consciously promoted by scientific means. Human affairs can for the first time be consciously directed in accordance with human interests.

This central fact can be demonstrated by reference to the growth of the working-class movement, in itself a stage of major importance in the development of social man. It is from modern technological development and economic relationships that both the class struggle of the proletariat and the theory of socialism have emerged. But each has arisen from different premises. For the proletariat the changing environment has encouraged and given the opportunity to revolt against conditions which have made life a burden and a degradation. But these conditions did not automatically give rise to socialist consciousness. Socialist consciousness, on the contrary, first arose through the application of scientific principles to society by the bourgeois intelligentsia. When scientific socialism was consciously communicated to the advanced proletariat to be injected by them into the class struggle, theory and practice were brought into effective relationship.

The socialist aim is not merely to engineer a change in the economic foundations of society in order that men may be transformed. This is the materialistic doctrine which "forgets that circumstances are changed by men and that the educator himself must be educated." It is a primary socialist aim to bring to the workers an understanding of their position and their tasks and, in Lenin's words, to "raise the level of the consciousness of the workers generally" so that they may be the more able "to acquire the knowledge of their age and advance that knowledge." This aim applies as much in the sphere of formal education as in the political sphere. The field of experience and activity is the environment, the agency science.

To the Marxist, education is a dialectical process, a constant

interaction between man and his environment in the course of which man's nature itself changes to the extent that he is free to use his faculties in reacting upon that environment. This freedom "does not consist in the dream of independence of natural laws, but in the knowledge of these laws, and in the possibility that gives of systematically making them work towards definite ends. . . . Freedom of the will . . . means nothing but the capacity to make decisions with real knowledge of the subject."

The progress of science has demonstrated that men can grasp, analyse and reproduce the hitherto unknowable in nature. The extension of scientific inquiry and application can ensure an equally rapid advance on the territory of the unknowable in history and human affairs. There are no fixed limits to men's achievements. The possibilities of advance in human knowledge and capacity are limitless. "The real intellectual wealth of the individual depends entirely on the wealth of his real connections." It is present social relationships that cripple and confine both the educator and the educated. With the abolition of private property and the transformation of social relationships, men can be brought into free association with the whole richness of their environment and can control it to their own ends. Then separate individuals will—

"be liberated from the various national and local barriers, be brought into practical connection with the material and intellectual production of the whole world, and be put in a position to acquire the capacity to enjoy the all-sided production of the whole world (the creations of man)."<sup>1</sup>

This is the perspective.

The present time is a period of transition, a moment in the development of our culture when capitalism is in a final stage of decline and the transition to Socialism is imminent. Educational issues therefore reflect both the manifestations of social collapse and of immense new social opportunity.

Traditional educational principles and methods have atrophied; the life and virtue has gone out of them. But at the same time there are new and wider prospects than ever before in the educational field. Traditional philosophies and religions have lost their power to hold, have become suspect. On the other hand, there is abroad among the masses a growing consciousness of human

<sup>1</sup> Engels, *Anti-Dühring*.



powers and social potentialities. The pessimists have set themselves too great a task in attempting to father all the world's ills on science. Teachers therefore have great opportunities. In spite of inevitable limitations they have the perspective of teaching the right thing, of enabling children to understand what science offers, how society develops, what human culture consists in. This is not utopianism. This is not merely the end of a dying age; it is also the threshold of the new.

But, if the educational aim is to raise the level of consciousness of the new generation so that they realise the possibility and necessity and gain the knowledge and capacity to control their own destiny, education must take into account the distortions and divisions which a class society fosters. There is a tendency when discussing the content of the curriculum to take the "needs of society" in the abstract and certain absolute "needs of the child" as the point of departure, to continue the perennial weighing of claims as between the individual and the social in the educational process. But there is no fundamental divergence between individual and social needs. It is only by assessing the real nature and direction of the society in which his education takes place that the child's real human needs can be defined.

The child is not an isolated being; he is the child of his surroundings, of his century, his locality, his social class. His needs can only be defined in relation to the social needs of the age. He is an individual in and of society and his interests coincide with those of the society of which he is a member. Education is not a static process; it is a dynamic one. Every child gains experience through his social activities, and as an individual of developing potentialities must work out his own salvation within the confines of society.

To-day children absorb a culture full of inequalities, contradiction and mystification. They absorb it at home, in the street, in the cinema, whose formative influence is usually much greater than that of the school. But the forces of the new age are also at work. The child's first need is the opportunity to observe and experiment freely, to understand the realities which lie behind appearances. Only so can he gain social knowledge and that measure of true self-consciousness without which the flowering of personality is impossible.

The school must provide as rich and varied an environment and range of activities as possible, and a genuine form of community

life. It is not by "freeing" the child from social pressure, in the progressive school sense, that his capacities can be enlarged. He must be helped to realise that it is only through full participation in the activity of his social milieu that both he and the group can achieve maximum development.

Mastery of the essential tools of social living—the use of language and technique—is a central educational aim. But if the child is to be aided to grow to full stature, he must also be equipped to understand the society in which he lives and his relation to it, so that he may mobilise his abilities and energies for clearly understood objectives. His education must be scientifically based, relating knowledge to its true end—the transformation of the world and the remaking of man.

Education must begin with the discovery of the material and the concrete, with human sensuous activity. It was in inventing tools that man invented speech, and study of infant development shows clearly that it is by the use of the senses, the discovery of the material objective world, that intellectual powers are developed. The hand creates the brain, and the brain then directs the hand. This interaction of activity and thought, the active analysis and synthesis of real experience, is fundamental to the learning process. The starting point must be the experience of the child, the aim an enriching, and an ever-widening understanding of, experience, and mastery of the skills and powers to express it.

At the secondary stage education must present things and ideas, not as ready-made and immutable under all conditions, but as having infinite variability and interconnection. In the words of Professor Langevin, it must "connect systematically all ideas to their human origins, . . . rid them of their abstract or specialised character, . . . show them as human events corresponding to human needs." This is the only way to further general education while at the same time allowing for the needs of specialisation.

"In practice, education . . . is general, in the degree in which it takes account of social relationships. A person may become expert in technical philosophy, or philology, or mathematics, or engineering, or financiering, and be inept and ill-advised in his action and judgment outside of his specialty. If however his concern with these technical subject matters has been connected with human activities having social breadth, the range of active responses called into play and flexibly integrated is much wider.

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Isolation of subject matter from a social context is the chief obstruction in current practice to securing a general training of mind. Literature, art, religion, when thus dissociated, are just as narrowing as the technical things which the professional upholders of general education strenuously oppose."<sup>1</sup>

The great advances in knowledge and technique provide an opportunity for transcending the narrow limitations of present educational practice. In the complex world of to-day the investigation of almost any single social issue involves a number of related techniques and the boundaries between different subjects have become progressively less clearly defined. It is more and more difficult to obscure the social relevance of knowledge and the interrelations of its different branches. There are also a variety of new media at the teacher's disposal whereby experience can be widened and deepened. The great resources of radio and cinema screen have hardly begun to be exploited educationally.

It is therefore possible to begin to apply scientific theories of human development and of knowledge to the whole practice of education. Knowledge then ceases to be a fixed ideal to be endlessly pursued though never possible of achievement. It becomes a statement of the particular relationship between the knower and the known in which the efforts of the knower play a primary part. The urge is therefore to further study and experiment and reflection.

For instance, if science is presented, not merely as a vast body of scientific facts to be memorised and recorded in the course of the search for truth, but as an ever-developing and increasingly significant branch of human activity where theories are only postulated as the result of experiment and further experiments guided by formulated hypotheses, the whole sense and direction and the pivotal position of the learner and active worker becomes clear. Emphasis is put on reasoning power as opposed to memory, on the use of knowledge rather than the mere acquiring of facts. Similarly, literature can take on a new meaning. The child, instead of being introduced to a series of classics and taught to evaluate these according to this or that school of literary criticism, can learn to enjoy reading and to see literature as the expression of that changing world of nature and man that he discovers through social and natural science.

<sup>1</sup> Dewey, *Democracy and Education*.

## Educational Theory and Practice

There begins to emerge an organic view of culture as the sum total of human experience and endeavour. The child of to-day can see himself, not only as heir to the past, but also as capable of adding his contribution in the present. Closer links can be forged between the school and society, whose development and present direction it has become the main task of the school to study and understand.

Instead of turning inwards upon itself, fostering narrow loyalties, the school can turn outwards to the world. There should be

“an organic liaison between the school and its surroundings. . . . The school should unite with nature and with life, often leaving the walls of the classroom to return laden with experience and with observations, to enrich itself with reflexion and meditation, to learn how to record the expression and the representation of things seen, lived or felt. It should feel itself constantly part and parcel of the outside world. . . . Thus the child's field of vision will widen progressively along with his discovery of his immediate world. This will enable him to find his place there, as well as in an ever-widening circle. He will follow the true way of culture which goes from the near to the far, from the particular to the general, from the concrete to the abstract, from individuality to generality, from egocentric to altruistic interest. This is as true of his contact with men as it is of his contact with things.”<sup>1</sup>

Along such lines education can become truly humanist—reflecting human experience, enriching human potentialities, advancing human interests.

<sup>1</sup> Langevin, *La Pensée*, Vol. I. No. 1.

## The New Humanism in Education

BY K. D. SOTIRIOU

*This is a speech delivered to the Greco-Soviet League of Youth in September, 1946, and printed in Antaios, April-May, 1947. It has been slightly abridged in translation. It is of interest, because it states clearly and correctly the Marxist view of humanism, and also because the future of the "humanities," discussed here from the standpoint of contemporary Greece, is a problem that concerns us too. The spirit of the speech may be contrasted with that of Professor Gilbert Murray's Presidential Address to the Hellenic Society in the same year.—G. T.*

ONE of the great problems for education in general and secondary education in particular is the question, what value are we to attach to humanistic studies in the new world "whose announcement has been heard and fills our hearts with longing"? Do they constitute the indispensable foundation for a general education? The development of the multilateral system of secondary education, which we all desire, is making the problem more acute. What place will there be for the humanities in our different types of school—agricultural, industrial, technical, nautical—which must provide a general education as well as specialised instruction? Students leaving these schools with a scientific knowledge of the natural world and a correct understanding of society, but without being acquainted with the ancient writers, even in translation—though, of course, they will have learnt about ancient Greek civilisation, as about other civilisations, in the course of their historical studies—will such people be regarded as uncultured and be incapable of developing their creative activities? Again, is the classical school an inseparable part of the multilateral system of secondary education—not, of course, in its present form, but in some form, and for how long?

It is true that many people, while they insist on the agricultural and technical aspects of modern life as the most important—that is why they want the multilateral system of secondary education—attach at the same time great importance to the humanities and apparently accept the standpoint of contemporary neo-classicism as distinct from the purely scientific understanding of the ancient world.

## The New Humanism in Education

The correct answer to our question turns on what we mean, or should mean, when we speak of humanism and the humanist ideal. What do we mean to-day when we speak of humanism? It has two principal characteristics.

First, recognition of the value and dignity of man. Its chief point is man's right to be free. Man has value as man. He stands on the topmost step of the evolutionary scale. In him evolution, to which he has contributed so much, reaches its highest consummation. But no recognition of his value is intelligible without respect for his dignity, without his right to freedom and his emancipation from all economic, social and spiritual oppression. Only then is his human nature fully realised.

Secondly, recognition of the value of human life. The chief point is the pursuit of happiness on earth. Human life is not a penance or a mistake of creation to be redeemed with pain and deprivation, as the ascetic ideal proclaims. Man deserves to enjoy his life in all its many-sided variety, to enjoy beauty and the joy of creation, and with his creative labour to build a paradise on earth.

The humanist ideal first appeared in a progressive form in the age of the Renaissance in Western Europe. It was then a really living ideal. It expressed the desires and aspirations of the rising bourgeoisie. The bourgeoisie was striving to break the bonds of feudalism, to win its economic and political freedom, to enjoy life, to enjoy the material and spiritual goods which it was accumulating, to build its own paradise. And so it demanded recognition for the value of man and the value of human life, and put forward, in opposition to the obstructive, repressive ideal of medieval asceticism, its own progressive, humanist ideal, with its two distinctive features of individual liberty and the joy of life.

For this ideal it found a valuable support in ancient Greek civilisation, especially that of Athens in the fifth and fourth centuries B.C. This culture, created out of the economic conditions of that period, contained rich, fertile elements, which furnished the bourgeoisie with a precious weapon in its ideological struggle. The most important of these elements were four. First, the political and economic liberty of the individual—the Athenian citizen—within the democratic community. Second, the overthrow of authority, deliverance of the individual from intellectual darkness and his liberation through the light of reason, philosophy and free scientific enquiry. Third, enjoyment of life and beauty, including

superb works of art. And fourth, the harmonious cultivation of body and soul, of physical and mental faculties, enabling the individual to enjoy life to the full.

As one of the sources for our knowledge of ancient Greek civilisation, the ancient classical writers were studied with enthusiasm in the time of the Renaissance, and so came to foster the growth of the humanist ideal. The study of the classics became the foundation of a general humanist education, illuminating the fundamental problems of life, and an effective instrument in the ideological equipment of the bourgeoisie. In this period, therefore, the study of ancient Greek civilisation was a progressive force.

Since then, in keeping with the different courses pursued by the bourgeoisie in different countries, the humanist ideal has taken on various forms, ranging from the most progressive, briefly analysed above, to the most conservative, which resulted in empty formalism and slavish imitation of the external features of ancient Greek civilisation, especially the language—the sterile, philological, pseudo-classical ideal. In our country, where, owing to its compromise with feudal elements and servile dependence on foreign capital, the bourgeoisie has remained tied to reaction, the humanist ideal appeared, especially after the revolution of 1821, in its most conservative form, and so became one of the chief obstacles to our country's progress. It was used by the ruling class to support their policy of selling our country under cover of the *Grande Idée*—the ideal of restoring the Byzantine Empire in the name of recovering our glorious ancestral heritage. It was claimed that we had the right to reconquer from the barbarians all those regions which our ancestors had civilised, that it was our duty to civilise them over again, and that in order to do that we had to revive the immortal language of ancient Greece.

Thus, when and where the bourgeoisie has been leading the progressive forces in the struggle to seize power, the humanist ideal has been a valuable weapon in its hands; but, when and where it has gone over to reaction, that ideal has degenerated into a means of deceiving the people and obstructing their advancement. And even in its most progressive form it has always reflected the class interests of the bourgeoisie, concealing within its concept of individual liberty and happiness the bourgeois demand for unrestricted freedom of private enterprise, which meant the right of the individual to enrich himself through the exploitation of others.

Even in its most progressive form, therefore, bourgeois humanism

has always been individualistic. Its roots are idealistic, anti-popular. It is now obsolete. The mistake made by our advocates of the "popular" language, as opposed to the "purist" language, is that they offered this bourgeois individualist humanism to the Greek people after it had become out of date. That is one of the reasons why they received no mass response. Bourgeois humanism is incapable of expressing the aspirations of the masses of the people, who long for their deliverance from economic exploitation and all social and spiritual oppression. Misled by philosophical idealism, these belated bourgeois visionaries failed to see that the problem of the language, and of cultural development in general, is dependent on the whole question of social progress in modern Greece, and that, in the present epoch of the struggle for democracy and socialism, their humanism, even in the most favourable conditions, can only be a check on the popular movement, serving the interests of the ruling class and the exploitation of the people.

To-day, in opposition to this bourgeois individualist humanism, there arises the new, true, socialist humanism, engendered by the struggle of the subject classes, voicing the aspirations of all those who are oppressed under the capitalist system and are struggling to throw off their economic, social and spiritual slavery.

Formally, individualist humanism and socialist humanism have the same fundamental characteristics, but they differ in their content, in their scope, and in the sources from which they are nourished.

There can be no real recognition of the value of man and of human life, no real freedom or happiness on earth, so long as man continues to be exploited by man. Wherever there is exploitation, initiative is stifled, inward freedom is enchained, creative joy is mortified. In these conditions there is only material and spiritual misery, slavery and oppression and the soul's decay: man is unable to realise his humanity and sinks to the level of the beasts. Whereas individualist humanism conceals beneath its concept of liberty and happiness individual self-seeking and exploitation of the masses, socialist humanism seeks the abolition of exploitation and the material and spiritual elevation of all those whose productive labour can build a paradise on earth. It declares that freedom and happiness must not remain privileges of the few and asks of each that he shall devote freely his whole creative activity to the happiness of all. Then, and then only, man is raised up to true, inward liberty; through free, creative labour, his personality is

enlarged and perfected; in the happiness of all the individual finds his own happiness and joy.

Again, whereas individualist humanism, caught in its own contradictions and capitalist conflicts, has been used to support wars of imperialist aggression waged under the pretext of civilising the "inferior" races, and has given rise in our day to the ideal of fascism, socialist humanism embraces all peoples, all humanity. It declares that freedom and happiness must not remain privileges of a few so-called "superior" races, but are the common right of all peoples, and that it is the duty of the civilised peoples of the present day to assist the others in raising the level of their material and spiritual culture.

There is also a third significant difference, which explains the others. Bourgeois humanism is naturally steeped in bourgeois idealist philosophy, which makes it at best utopian and delusory, an obstacle to the people's progress; for at best it aims at improving man's lot by moral suasion and education without first delivering him from exploitation, from economic and social slavery. Socialist humanism, on the other hand, born and bred out of dialectical materialism, is realistic, radically progressive, and declares that only socialism creates the conditions in which man can become truly man. Bourgeois humanism is obsolete, because the economic and social conditions which gave rise to it are obsolete, and hence its exponents are deliberate or deluded agents of reaction. It must be replaced by socialist humanism. Man must become socialist man. Then he will rise to true liberty and creative joy.

What then should we mean to-day when we speak of humanism? Socialist humanism. It embraces all humanity and strives for man's material and spiritual wellbeing, based on creative labour. This is the humanism we must uphold as our educational ideal. We shall find in it a precious incentive to creative activity in our youth, because it contains the seeds of life, the desires and aspirations of the new world we have begun to build.

Bourgeois humanism was fostered, as I have said, by classical studies. Accordingly, just as bourgeois humanism has taken on many forms, progressive or conservative, there is a corresponding diversity in the form and content of classical studies, ranging from study of the real nature of ancient Greek civilisation to slavish imitation of its external features. They still constitute the foundation of a general education, especially in our country. Can they be used to foster the growth of socialist humanism? Will they

constitute the foundation of a general education in the new world "whose announcement has been heard"?

In answering this question, three points must be borne in mind. First, when we speak of classical studies, we mean the study of ancient Greek civilisation through the medium of the ancient classics either in the original or in translation.

Secondly, we must distinguish between the purely scientific approach to the subject—scientific research into ancient Greek civilisation—and school study of the classics. They are different things. A correct view of the ancient world is impossible without profound study of the classics. But scientific research on the classics is not school-work. It is not part of education, but a function of science in general—especially philosophy, sociology, biology, history. In this connection, it is undoubtedly a matter of national importance that a fully-endowed institute of research, covering every aspect of ancient Greek civilisation, should be set up without delay. We Greeks have a special aptitude and a special responsibility for such work. It should be our most precious contribution to the common treasury of human culture. And the results obtained from all these fields of research will be conveyed through the appropriate school courses to our students, who will thus be taught the real value of ancient Greek civilisation and its place in the history of human progress.

Thirdly, this scientific research will have the further object of determining what elements in ancient Greek civilisation are fertile and therefore capable of being actively used in the building of our new civilisation. The attitude of passive admiration, which accepts whatever our ancestors created as a pattern of perfection for us to copy, is one of the means whereby the ruling class blunts the initiative of the people and holds them up in their advance by turning their attention to the past. It is a national disaster that we remain shut up in the shell of our past, however glorious, with the world as it is to-day. We have no use for what is dead and gone, no matter how much it appeals to the romantic imagination of antiquarians. "Tombs may be great, but they are tombs all the same." Life opens out before us in new forms. In building our new civilisation we must take over and assimilate, not only from ancient Greek culture, but from medieval and modern Greece, and from all other cultures, whatever is useful, whatever is fertile, whatever carries the seeds of life. Then we shall really be honouring our ancestors.

One aim of our scientific research must therefore be to determine which elements in ancient Greek civilisation will prove fertile for the new world we wish to build, with special attention to those elements which may be embodied in our new socialist humanism. Research of this kind, which is only just beginning, will show that some elements in ancient Greek civilisation, which proved fertile for bourgeois humanism and were used as ideological weapons by the bourgeoisie, are now obsolete, obstructive, useless and harmful to socialist humanism. It will also show that other elements can only be refertilised by using them in an entirely different way. But all this, as I have said, is for our Institute of Hellenic Antiquities. It is not school-work. The fertile elements will be passed on to the schools after they have been extracted and purified, ready to be used for forming the minds of the young.

What then of the school study of the classics in our new socialist educational system? Will they continue to be the foundation of a general education? I think the answer is now easy.

We must distinguish general education from special education. By general education we mean instruction for all children irrespective of economic position or social status. This is the necessary basis for all special, vocational training. Its content is twofold. It must equip the children with the fundamental scientific knowledge necessary for life and provide for the harmonious development of their bodily and mental faculties.

The knowledge necessary for life, which human society has accumulated in the course of its long upward struggle out of savagery into civilisation, must be acquired, used and adapted by all, boys and girls alike, in order that they may develop their creative faculties to the full in childhood, youth and adult life. It will be drawn from three spheres.

First, the physical sphere. Man lives and moves in nature, in his natural environment. He is continuously subjected to the action of his environment and reacts upon it. From it he draws his means of subsistence; in it he wrestles with so many enemies, so many blind forces. Everyone must have a sound knowledge of nature and its laws. Only then will he cease to be a slave of necessity and become its master. So the first requisite for a general education is the knowledge of nature and its laws.

Secondly, the social sphere. Man lives in a social world. He is an inseparable constituent of society. He must therefore have knowledge of society too, of its internal evolution, in order to understand

its laws of motion. Only then will he understand the real form and content of social problems, their origin and development, and his own contribution through the unfolding of his creative activity to their correct, progressive solution. So the second requisite for a general education is knowledge of society and its laws.

Thirdly, the physiological sphere. Man needs also to know himself. He must understand what the human organism is, how it develops and functions, its laws of life. Only then will he be able to regulate his life and preserve bodily and mental health. So the third requisite for a general education is knowledge of the human organism and its laws.

The sciences from which this knowledge will be drawn are philosophy, the natural sciences, sociology, political economy, history, biology, and psychology. In view of the tremendous progress made in these sciences during recent times, and even more at the present day, with the application of the dialectical method, it is obvious that they can no longer be taught, as they were in the Middle Ages, through the classics. Study of the classics for this purpose in our schools is positively harmful. Apart from everything else, it interferes with the simultaneous pursuit of the requisite subjects and wastes precious time. The brilliant contribution made by the ancient Greeks to the start of scientific investigation will be available for our schools, as I said, in its pure form. Our teachers will use it and stress its importance whenever necessary, especially in the teaching of history, in which the study of ancient society will be given the scope it deserves.

The fourth requisite for a general education is the harmonious development of the child's physical and mental faculties. If they are to make a creative contribution to the building of civilisation, our children must have robust bodies and happy minds. Every facility must be available for this purpose. I do not think anyone would maintain that they must study the classics in order to find the appropriate means of physical training. Whatever fertile elements ancient civilisation may have to offer for this purpose will be made available by scientific research, to be used by the teachers in the light of the latest results of educational science.

It is also the task of education to take charge of the child's intellectual training so as to foster the harmonious development of his mental faculties; and here valuable guidance is already available from contemporary child psychology and sociology. Yet the pseudo-classicists still clamour for maintaining classical studies



at school as an intellectual discipline, on the ground that the intricate grammar and complex but marvellously constructed syntax of ancient Greek quickens the understanding and sharpens the judgment. Their real motive in putting forward this claim is a futile endeavour to justify their own infatuation with the past. They are a century behind the times. They accept the antiquated notion of metaphysical psychology, that the mental functions are separate, independent faculties of an immortal soul, which can be trained by exercises divorced from the actual needs of life. They will not understand the simple truth that the human brain is a material organism, the most precious instrument that nature has bestowed on man, which can only work properly and be developed or refined when the child or man is using it for the purpose for which nature gave it him—that is, for the solution of the living problems that confront him, whatever they may be, and for the satisfaction of his needs. It is a heavy sacrifice our youth have been forced to offer on the altar of pseudo-classicism, subjected to interminable hours of torment, during which pedantry sears their fresh minds and dries up their inner springs of life.

Besides mental faculties man has feelings and instincts. These are not fixed or static. They too are in motion. They change, sometimes collapsing, sometimes rising to a higher level. These too must be trained, cultivated, elevated, transformed into incentives to richer activity for the common good. The cultivation of social sensibility, affection, solidarity, collective labour, responsibility for the common happiness—all this will be provided within the framework of our new socialist humanism. But it does not require the maintenance of classical studies in the schools. Whatever fertile elements they may have to offer will be made available and put to use.

There remains æsthetic training, cultivation of the sense of beauty. Here the ancient classical masterpieces of prose and poetry, especially poetry, have a major contribution to make. They form an indispensable part of literary training. In the teaching of literature, therefore, a special place must be given to the ancient classical writers along with other works of modern Greek and world literature. But, of course, not in the original. It would be an educational crime to sacrifice more important elements of a general education in order to put our children to the torture of learning a dead language like ancient Greek simply for the purpose of deriving deeper æsthetic satisfaction from reading the classics

in the original. They will be studied in select literary translations. In this way, with our system of general education well organised at each stage, our children will be delivered from the bondage of antiquarianism and pseudo-classicism and fully equipped for enjoying life and beauty and unfolding their creative activity in the service of society.

To sum up, our conclusions are as follows:

First, in place of the obsolete ideal of bourgeois humanism we must put forward the ideal of socialist humanism. Since it expresses the desires of the new world we are beginning to build, it will become a valuable incentive to the creative activity of youth.

Secondly, ancient Greek civilisation, which served as the source of bourgeois humanism, cannot, for all its value, do the same for socialist humanism, but it contains certain elements which, after being purified by scientific research, will be employed within the framework of socialist humanism.

Thirdly, classical studies cannot constitute the foundation of a general education under socialism. The classics will be studied in translation in the courses on literature: that is all.

Fourthly, in building the new civilisation we shall avail ourselves of the fertile elements in the whole of our national culture, and in the teaching of history, in particular, the study of ancient civilisation will be given the scope it deserves.

Lastly, what of the classical school? It arose out of bourgeois humanism and served its interests. It is therefore obsolete. It will persist, freed of soul-destroying pseudo-classicism, until the people's state is ready for the radical reconstruction of our education. Then, with the expansion of the multilateral system, it will disappear.

## The Poetic Instant

BY OSCAR THOMSON

EVERY art that tells a story must deal chiefly in particularities. A story is concerned with individuals and with particularised events and circumstances. This is true in varying degrees, for example, of Homeric poetry and Greek tragedy, of Shakespeare's plays and Milton's epics, of operatic art, and of the novel and the film. But in works of this kind—at any rate in those on a larger scale—there takes place from time to time a departure from the particularities and therefore from the realism of the story. At certain moments the story halts and the particular characters or events or circumstances take on a more general meaning—a meaning that is more dim and nearer to the infinite, so that they cease to be the particularities of one isolated story and become endowed with a universal significance. A poetic instant occurs as we gaze for a moment into the still waters that lie beneath the flowing narrative. The art has a double organisation. Critics have long been aware of this dual aspect of art, but it remained for Christopher Caudwell to give the conception its definitive form:

“The play or epic halts. There is a poetic instant and as time vanishes, space enters; the horizon expands and becomes boundless. The art reveals itself as double.”<sup>1</sup>

There is a continuous interplay of this kind in many of Shakespeare's plays. The drama halts and there is a “purple passage”; lost in the misty perspectives which the music of the words brings into being, we grow unmindful of the narrative.

To examine the different ways in which Shakespeare effects the transition from dramatic narrative to poetic instant is a study in itself. Here is one example:

“*Mecænas*. She's a most triumphant lady, if report be square to her.

“*Enobarbus*. When she first met Mark Antony, she pursed up his heart upon the river of Cydnus.

“*Agrippa*. There she appeared indeed; or my reporter devised well for her.

<sup>1</sup> *Illusion and Reality*, Chapter XI.

## The Poetic Instant

“*Enobarbus*. I will tell you.

“The barge she sat in, like a burnish'd throne,  
Burnt on the water: the poop was beaten gold;  
Purple the sails, and so perfumed that  
The winds were lovesick with them: the oars were silver,  
Which to the tune of flutes kept stroke, and made  
The water which they beat to follow faster,  
As amorous of their strokes. . . .”

In this case a comparison with opera will make the process clear. For the present purpose we may say that in opera the story is the recitative, and the poetic instant the aria. The recitative comes to a close and the story halts; a transitional chord is sounded by the orchestra (perhaps the dominant seventh of a new key) in order to prepare the audience for the change of mood, and the aria begins. Now in the passage quoted above, the words “I will tell you” perform precisely the same function as the transitional chord. In fact, this line is like a transitional chord in words—we can almost “feel” a change of key. One has only to read the passage omitting these four words to realise what an important effect they have on the structure of the whole. The voice should be made to linger over them so as to bring out their effect in full. In a passage containing some of the most beautiful lines ever written, this line, consisting of nothing more than four simple monosyllables, is perhaps the most beautiful of all.

In novels, too, the general is always there beneath the surface. Sometimes it lies so far beneath that we are scarcely aware of its presence. Sometimes it rises so near that the particularities of the story begin to stir with a new and cloudy significance. And sometimes it breaks out into the open so that the whole relationship is overturned, and a poetic instant occurs. This may happen at any point during the course of the story. Many novels end with a poetic instant. Here, for example, are the last two sentences of *Wuthering Heights*:

“I sought, and soon discovered, the three headstones on the slope next the moor—the middle one grey, and half buried in heath; Edgar Linton's only harmonised by the turf creeping up its foot; Heathcliff's still bare.

“I lingered round them under that benign sky; watched the moths fluttering among the heath and harebells, listened to

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the soft wind breathing through the grass, and wondered how anyone could ever imagine unquiet slumbers for the sleepers in that quiet earth."

This beautiful closing sentence has a significance which reaches out far beyond the limited confines of realism. The problems of Catherine and Heathcliff and Linton are no longer theirs alone: they have become the problems of all humanity. They are lifted into the realms of the universal, and there, in the timelessness of human love, they find their solution. The passage is almost like music. As we read we seem to hear, rising up behind the words, the closing strains of some great symphony.

What is the function of background music in the film? Like other forms of art which tell a story, the film makes use of the poetic instant. A great film, like a great novel, has its periods of stasis—moments when the particularities of the story are suddenly transfigured, revealed in the light of their general emotional significance. Now during a static moment of this kind there is, as we have explained, a departure from realism. This is the time for music—for music will lessen the realistic significance of the visual images and enhance their more generalised emotional content, their "poetry." The music can prepare the audience gradually for the departure from reality, leading them away from it by subtle and imperceptible stages; or at other times it may be used to bring them abruptly face to face with the universal so that the meaning flashes out with all the force of a sudden revelation. This is the chief function of music in the film.

Hitherto few artists have appreciated that music should be held in reserve for this purpose, and examples of its correct usage are hard to find. André Malraux's film *Espoir* provides one. The closing scenes, representing the funeral of a group of Spanish Republican fighters, are accompanied continuously by background music—the solemn strains of a funeral march. As the peasants bear the mutilated bodies down the mountain side, the music makes us feel that this funeral is something more than the funeral of just these few individual fighters. It becomes something infinitely more vast and more enduring and for that very reason more misty and indistinct: it becomes the funeral of all that is good in humanity, of all that is noble in life—an eschatology of human suffering in all its beauty and sadness and hope. This masterly

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transition from the particular to the general has a place among the great things of art.

What can the stage do which the film cannot? Looking at the "picture-frame" stage of modern realistic drama one might be tempted to answer, nothing. In this kind of drama we watch the events on the stage from the outside as spectators—in the same way, in fact, as we watch the events on a cinema screen or follow the narrative of a novel. But realistic drama is not the whole of drama. Elizabethan drama, for example, was not like this. Its bare unrealistic stage projected far out into the auditorium, and the words which the actors declaimed contained as much music as realism. Even the realistic passages, where the interest centres mainly on the course of the narrative, were usually cast in poetical form. When the poetry of a Shakespearean tragedy comes forward, and the drama halts, the audience ceases to be a group of mere spectators gazing objectively at what is going on. It begins to see with the actor's (or poet's) vision, and to feel with his feelings. In this way audience and actors become united; in the wide realms of poetry they forget the division that exists between them and live together through a simultaneous emotional experience.<sup>1</sup>

This the stage can do and the film cannot. The stage can provide the room for poetry's noble declarations—its universal and unchanging truths—to come forward and expand until they fill the whole theatre, obliterating the dividing-line between actors and audience. For the stage-actor belongs to the same world as his audience—he is a living human being; and so integration is possible. The modern realistic stage neglects this unique power; it has no use for poetry. Yet this power is one of the most important advantages that the stage has over the screen. For although the universal quality of near-poetical emotions has a place in the film, this place is only an occasional one—a temporary departure from the main interest, which is the movement of the story. In Elizabethan drama the music of poetry is continually coming to the fore. It is continually bubbling over like a fresh spring, obscuring for a moment the steady course of the narrative. In the film—as in the novel—the poetry is still there beneath the flowing stream of realism, but it never quite reaches the surface. In the sense of

<sup>1</sup> The conditions of the modern theatre—the interposition of footlights and so on—hinder the full achievement of this unity. The conditions of the Elizabethan theatre facilitated it.

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metre and rhyme it does not appear at all. The metre and rhyme of poetry have no place in film dialogue because it is impossible for the celluloid actors of the screen to come forward and unite themselves completely with their living audience—they can never fully establish that common emotional viewpoint which poetry requires. The division between audience and screen is nearer to the absolute than the division between audience and stage. The film can only approach the poetic instant of the stage—it can never achieve it. In the same way the stage can never achieve the realism of the film. It is always reaching out towards this realism just as the film is always reaching out towards the poetry of the stage. But the two arts can never join hands. They exist side by side—divided because each has its own sphere of activity, united because they both belong to the wider system of art as a whole.

## How One Writes Poems

BY VLADIMIR MAYAKOVSKY

Translated by ALAN MORAY WILLIAMS

*This essay by the famous Russian poet Vladimir Mayakovsky (1893–1930) was first published in the Soviet monthly magazine, Novy Mir, in 1926.*

*The extracts given here comprise about a quarter of the whole. The complete essay, translated by Alan Moray Williams, will shortly be published in book form.*

I THOUGHT to write something on this theme. In literary discussions, in conversations with young worker-members of the various word-producing associations (Rap, Tap, Pap and so forth<sup>1</sup>), and in quarrels with critics, I have often found it necessary to speak somewhat slightly of the old, classical, theories of poetics. With the classics themselves I have been little concerned, of course. If my friends and I have sometimes attacked them also, we have only done so when champions of traditionalism have been hiding themselves behind the classics' bottoms from anything that was new.

In point of fact, by pushing the classics off their pedestals, and giving them a good shaking, and turning them about, we have been able to show them to readers in an entirely new and previously unstudied light.

Children (and young literary schools resemble them) always want to know what is inside their cardboard toys. After the work of the Formalist School of criticism, the insides of our various literary toys have been exposed to everybody's view. If some of the toys have got a bit damaged in the process—well, that's just too bad. But it's not for us poets to abuse the classics; they are the material that we have to learn from.

Much has been written and spoken on this subject. Audiences at our meetings have always expressed loud approval of our point of view. But in addition to the approval, sceptical voices have been raised:

“You only destroy; you do not create anything. Granted, the old guides to versification were bad. But where are your new ones? Give us *rules* for your poetics. Give us *new* guides to versification.”

Mention of the fact that “classical” poetics have existed for

<sup>1</sup> Play on the initials of various contemporary Soviet literary associations.

something like fifteen hundred years and our own for barely thirty, is of little avail as an excuse.

You want to write and you want to know how it is done and why it is that something of yours, written in conformity with all the rules, and complete with rhymes, iambs, trochees and all the rest of it, still doesn't "get away with it" as poetry. You rightly demand that poets should not carry the secrets of their craft to the grave with them.

I am going to write about poetry, not merely as a theorist, but as one who puts his theories into practice. My essay won't have any scientific value at all. I am merely going to write about my own work, which I believe, however, from personal observation, differs very little, in essentials, from that of other professional poets.

Let me repeat: I am not going to give any rules for becoming a poet or writing poetry. There *are* no such rules. A poet is, by definition, a man who creates such rules for himself. Let me, yet again, have recourse to a favourite analogy of mine:

A mathematician, in the proper sense of the word, is a man who creates, completes or develops mathematical laws, a man who adds something new to our knowledge of mathematics. The first man who formulated that two plus two equals four would have been a great mathematician, even if he'd arrived at this truth by adding four cigarette stubs together. Any subsequent people who added four things together—even if they were incomparably bigger things—railway engines, for example—were not mathematicians.

This statement doesn't detract in any way from the industry of the man who added the engines together. His work, in these days of traffic disorganisation, might have been a thousand times more valuable than the bare mathematical truth! But there is no need now, in order to get an estimate for repairs to railway engines, to send to the Society of Mathematicians and expect them to treat the matter on the same footing as Lobachevsky's Geometry. That would merely infuriate the Planning Commission, perplex the mathematicians and baffle the fare calculators.

You will tell me that I am knocking at open doors, that all this is obvious. It is nothing of the sort.

Eighty per cent. of the rubbishy poetry published to-day only gets published because editors either have no knowledge of previous poetry or don't know what poetry is *for*.

Editors simply say, "I like this" or "I don't like this," and forget that taste itself is something that can—and must—be

developed. Nearly all the editors I've known have lamented to me that they don't know how to return poems submitted to them, never know what to say when they return them.

A properly educated editor ought to be able to say to a poet: "Your verses are very correct verses. They fulfil all the requirements of the Guides to Versification; your rhymes are all well-trying rhymes, long to be found in Rhyming Dictionaries. Since I haven't any good *new* poems at the moment, I shall be pleased to accept your *old* ones, and pay you at the usual rate for professional copying—thirty kopecks a thousand."

What would a poet do in such a case? He would either chuck writing altogether, or start regarding it as a vocation, as a craft—a craft that requires a great deal of pains to master. And in either case he would stop looking down his nose at the work of newspaper reporters, whose writings at least have something *new* in them—and bring them in three roubles a paragraph!

A reporter, mind you, has to sweat his guts out running after fires and scandals and the like; whereas the only expenditure a poet of the above kind has is to use up spittle turning over pages!

The Revolution has thrown upon the streets the raw speech of the masses. The jargon of the East End has flowed through the central thoroughfares. The debilitated vocabulary of the Intelligentsia is over and done with. A new language has arisen with elemental force.

How can this language be made poetical? The old kind of poetry with its "dreams and roses" and its Alexandrine verses is obsolete. How can conversational language be introduced into poetry and poetry be deduced from conversation?

By spitting at the Revolution in elegant iambs?

*My stàli zlymi i pokòrnymi,  
Nam ne witi.  
Ùzhe razvòjol rukàmi chòrnymi  
Vikzhel puti.*

ZINAIDA HIPPIUS.

*(We've become sullenly submissive. There's no way out. The Railway Union with its dirty hands has torn up all the lines.)*

No!

By cramming its ear-splitting thunder into four-beat amphibrachs, only suited for whispering?

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*Geroi, skitáltsy mòrei, albatròsy,  
Zastòlniye gòsti gròmovykh piròv,  
Orlìnoe plèmya, matròsy, matròsy,  
Vam pyèsn ognévàya rubinovykh slòv.*

KIRILLOV.

*(Heroes, rovers of the seas, albatrosses, table-guests of storm-feasts,  
eagle-race, sailors, sailors, to you a fiery song of ruby words!)*

No!

What we have to do is: immediately to give full rights of citizenship to the new language—a language of shouts instead of refrains, drum-beats instead of cradle-songs:

*Revolutsiónny derzhìte shàg!*

BLOK.

*(Keep the revolutionary step!)*

*Ràzvorachivàites v màrshè!*

MAYAKOVSKY.

*(Deploy in march!)*

But it isn't enough just to give examples of the new kind of poetry, or to make up rules about the effect of words on the masses. We've got to calculate how to make that effect of the greatest possible assistance to the revolutionary cause.

It isn't enough just to write, "*Ceaselessly watchful lurks the foe*" (Blok). We've got to indicate that foe—to paint an unmistakable picture of him.

It isn't enough for people to "deploy in march" either. They have got to deploy in accordance with all the rules of street warfare: to seize the telegraph offices, banks and arsenals for the uprisen proletariat.

Hence:

*Yèsh ananàsy,  
ryàbchikov jùì,  
dyèn tvoi poslèdnì prihòdit burzhùì . . .*

MAYAKOVSKY.

*(Guzzle your pineapples! Hazel-hens chew! Bourgeois, your last day is coming for you! . . .)*

Verses such as the above would scarcely have been recognised as poetry by classical standards! The famous critic Grech, in 1820,

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did not know *chastushki*, but, if he had, he would probably have written about them as contemptuously as he did about other forms of "popular versifying": "The aforesaid verses have neither metre nor harmony. . . ."

But these lines of mine were taken to their hearts by the St. Petersburg masses. Let critics analyse as they will by what poetic "rules" they were composed.

In writing poetry originality is essential. A poet must sift and re-sift all the words and combinations of words that occur to him. If he has to make use of the débris of *old* words in writing a poem, he must make sure of keeping a just proportion between his old and his new material. It will depend on the quantity and the quality of the new, whether the alloy that results can be used.

Originality doesn't mean to say that you must never write anything but unprecedented truths, of course; and new metres, verse-forms, alliterations, assonances, etc., can't be invented every day. But you can work at adapting and developing them too.

The words "twice two are four" do not, and cannot, live by themselves. A poet must know how to make use of such truths: how to make them memorable and how to prove their validity by a series of examples.

From the above it is clear that for mere description, reflection of reality, there is no intrinsic place in poetry. Such poetry has to be written, of course, but it is only on the level of the work of a secretary at a meeting. It is simply a report of proceedings—"Motion was read" . . . "Motion was approved."

In this lay the tragedy of the Fellow Travellers.<sup>1</sup> They only "read" about the revolution five years after it, and only "approved" it when everybody else had put it into practice.

Poetry begins where there is tendentiousness.

To my mind, a poem like *Vyhozhu odin ya na dorogu* (*I walk alone along the road*) is a tendentious poem—a poem agitating for girls to go for walks with poets! Ah, if only somebody would give us poems of equal forcefulness to urge people to join the co-operatives!

The old guides to versification aren't really guides at all. They are just catalogues of historical methods of writing. Such books should properly be entitled, not "How to write," but "How people used to write."

<sup>1</sup> Writers who sympathised with the Revolution, but refused to subject their work to political ends.



Frankly, I myself know nothing about iambs and trochees and the rest, never have been, and never shall be, able to distinguish between them. Not because it's difficult to do so, but because, in practice, I've never needed to use all these what-you-may-call-'ems. If such metres are to be found in my poems, they have got there simply by ear, since these time-worn metres can very frequently be heard, e.g. in songs like "Vniz po matushke po Volge."

I've often set about studying these things, found out how they worked and then forgotten again. Such matters, which occupy ninety per cent. of the space in "Guides to Versification," in my own practical work occupy less than three.

What are the essential factors for beginning a poetic work?  
They are:

1. The existence in society of a problem, a problem which you can only help to solve by means of poetry.

2. An exact knowledge, or rather awareness, of the requirements of your class (of the group you represent) with regard to this problem. That is to say: a precise objective.

3. Materials. Words. A continual replenishment of the barns and granaries of your brains with useful, expressive, rare, coined, revived, derived and other kinds of words.

4. Equipment and tools. Pen, pencil, typewriter; telephone; clothes for visiting doss-houses; a bicycle for visiting editors; a well-arranged writing desk; an umbrella for working in the rain; a room permitting a certain number of strides up and down it (indispensable for writers); connection with a Press agent who can supply you with cuttings about questions that are agitating the provinces; and so on and so on—not forgetting a pipe and cigarettes.

5. Habits and methods (acquired only after years of practice) of using words of all kinds: mastery of rhyme, rhythm, alliteration, imagery, style, stress, endings, titles, lay-outs, etc., etc.

For example: Social Command: to write words for songs for Red Army men going to the front. Objective: to defeat Yudenich. Material: soldiers' slang. Equipment and tools: a stump of pencil. Method: a rhymed *chastushka*.

Result:

*Mil'koi mne v podàrok bürka  
i noski podàreny  
Mchit Yudènich s Peterbùrga,  
kak naskipidàrenny.*

(My sweetheart gave me as a present a mountain coat and cap.  
Yudenich flees from Petersburg like a scalded cat!)

The originality in this quatrain, which justified its production, lay in the rhyming of *noski podàreny* and *naskipidàrenny*. This originality made the verses vital, poetic, "typical."

For a *chastushka* to be effective, it must have an unexpected rhyme and complete incongruity between its first two and last two lines. The first two lines, in fact, may really be called "auxiliary" lines.

The object of this essay is not to make judgments about particular examples or methods of writing, but to try to show the process of writing itself.

How are poems written?

Your work begins long before you receive, or become aware of, a social command.

Your preparatory work has to be carried on the whole time.

It is only possible to write a good poem in a set time if you already possess a big store of poetic "reserves." At this moment, for instance, my head is buzzing with an amusing surname, "Gospodin Glitseron," which was suggested to me by a muddled-up conversation about glycerine.

Then I have some good rhymes "in reserve," e.g.:

(*I v nebe tsveta*) *krem*  
(*vstaval surovy*) *Kreml.*

(*V Rim stupajte, k frantsuzam,*) *k nemtsam,*  
(*tam ischite priyut dlya*) *bogemtsa.*

(*Okrasheny*) *nagusto*  
(*i dni i nochi*) *avgusta.*

There is a neat bit of alliteration, suggested by a poster I saw in America, advertising the name "Nita Joe":

*Gdye jivet Nita Joe?*  
*Nita nizhe etazhom.*

I have this couplet about the Lyamina dye-works:

*Kraska—delo mamino.*  
*Moya mama Lyamina.*

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And then there are the following themes, some more clearly thought out than others:

1. Rain in New York.

2. A prostitute on the Boulevard des Capucines in Paris. (It is considered particularly *chic* to make love to her, because she has only one leg—the other was run over by a tram or something!)

3. An old lavatory attendant at the Gessler Restaurant in Berlin.

4. A vast poem about the October Revolution, which I could only finish if I were living in the country.

And so on and so on.

All such "reserves" are stored up in my mind, and the more complicated ones written down.

Just in what way I shall use them, I don't know, but I certainly *shall* find a use for them—all of them.

Collecting "reserves" takes up all my time. I give ten to eighteen hours a day to it, and am nearly always muttering something to myself. It is concentration on this that accounts for poets' proverbial absent-mindedness.

I work with such intensity at my "reserves" that in nine cases out of ten I could tell you the exact place where, in the course of fifteen years' writing, I put the finishing touch to this or that rhyme, alliteration, image, etc.

For example:

*Ulitsa,  
Litsa u . . .*

(On a tram travelling from Sukhareva Tower to the Sretensky Gates, 1913.)

*Ugriumy dozhd skosil glaza,  
A za . . .*

(Strastnoy monastery, 1912.)

*Leyevoi  
Levoi.*

(Cab on the quay-side, 1917.)

*Sukin syn Dantes.*

(In a train near Mitischa, 1924.)

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Etc., etc.

This notebook is one of the essentials for writing real poetry.

Usually it is not written about until after a poet's death. It lies neglected for years and is only published posthumously and after the "Collected Works." Yet for a poet it is—everything.

Beginners do not possess such notebooks, of course. They lack practice and experience. Previously composed lines are rare in their work, and consequently their poems seem watery and long-winded.

A beginner never writes anything of real value, however talented he may be. On the other hand, a poet's first work has an attractive freshness about it, since the "reserves" of the whole of his youth have gone into it.

It is only the possession of these carefully-thought-out "reserves" that enables me to finish poems in a given time, for my norm of production, so far as the actual writing is concerned, is only eight to ten lines a day.

A poet must regard everything he sees or hears as potential material for writing.

In the old days I used to get so deeply immersed in my writing that I was even afraid of using words and expressions in conversation which might be useful for future poems. I became moody and taciturn.

In 1913, returning from Saratov to Moscow, and wishing to assure a young woman I'd met in the train of the purity of my intentions, I told her that I was "not a man, but a cloud in trousers." The words were no sooner out of my mouth than it occurred to me that this expression could be used in a poem—and now it might be passed on and wasted! Terribly worried, I spent the whole of the next half-hour trying to find out, by indirect questions, whether she'd remembered what I'd said, and only regained my composure when I felt quite certain that my words had flown out of her other ear.

Two years later, "The Cloud in Trousers" came in useful as a title for a long poem.

I spent two days thinking out how to express a lonely man's feelings about his one and only sweetheart.

How would he cherish and love her?

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On the evening of the second day I went to bed with a headache, still not having thought of anything. But suddenly, in the middle of the night, the right words came:

*Telo tvoe  
budu berech i lyubit,  
kak soldat, obrublenny voynoyu,  
nenuzhny, nichey,  
berzhet  
svoyu edinstvennuyu nogu.*

*(Thy body I shall cherish and love, as a soldier, mutilated by the war, useless, unwanted, cherishes his one remaining leg.)*

I jumped out of bed, only half awake, and in the darkness wrote with a match-stump on a cigarette-box the words "only leg," and then fell asleep. In the morning it was several hours before I could remember what this "only leg" on the cigarette-box meant and how it had got there!

A rhyme that you can't quite catch by the tail can poison your whole existence. You speak without knowing what you're saying, eat without knowing what you're eating, are unable to sleep, and almost seem to see rhymes buzzing before your eyes.

Thanks to Professor Shengel<sup>1</sup> and his kind, some people have started regarding poetry writing as the easiest of occupations. We even have young prodigies who outstrip the Professor himself.

For example, the following advertisement appeared in a Kharkov newspaper recently:

*"How to be a Poet. Details for 50 kopecks in stamps."*

What more could you desire?

Incidentally, that sort of thing is a pre-revolutionary product. *Razvlecheniya* used to publish, as a supplement, a small brochure entitled *"How to be a Poet. In five lessons."*

I think even the few examples I give here will have shown poetry for what it really is: one of the most complicated and difficult forms of human activity.

A poet's attitude to every line of his verse should be like that of the writer towards the woman in Pasternak's brilliant quatrain:

<sup>1</sup> Author of a well-known Russian *Guide to Versification*.

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*V tot dyen tebyà ot grebyònok do nòg  
Kak tràgik v provintsii dràmú shakespirovu,  
Taskàl za sobòi i znàl na-zubòk,  
Shatàlsya po gòrodu i repètroval.*

*(On that day, like a provincial actor with a play of Shakespeare, I dragged you about with me wherever I went; knew you by heart from your combs to your feet, and staggered around the town rehearsing you.)*

## Review

### *The U.S.S.R.—Information and Misinformation*

BY ANDREW ROTHSTEIN

AT the end of the Second World War a unique opportunity for the peaceful future development of Europe presented itself. The policy of setting Germany on to the U.S.S.R., pursued by successive British and French governments since the Locarno Pact of 1925, and particularly since Hitler's coming into power in 1933, had borne fruit—but in a form even more disastrous for capitalist economy than it was for the U.S.S.R. In the course of the war, the decisions of successive inter-Allied conferences—at Moscow and Teheran in 1943, at Yalta and Potsdam in 1945—and the terms of the Anglo-Soviet Treaty of Alliance in 1942, laid foundations for constructive co-operation between the Soviet Union and the capitalist Powers which had not been dreamed of before. In particular, the Potsdam decisions, had they been applied conscientiously, would have destroyed the material basis on which modern German militarism had been built for half a century—overgrown heavy industry, controlled by great monopolies and expanded to a degree explicable only by the purpose of making war and keeping less developed countries in economic subjection.

This was of great importance. On the one hand, the Potsdam decisions shattered in principle the structure of monopoly capitalism in Germany, with its specifically Prussian admixture of big Junker (semi-feudal) landowning. To that extent they opened the door to a socialist development of Germany, which would not need excessive war industries. The use of Germany as a battering-ram against the Soviet Union, and against any other states which might take the socialist road, would become impossible. This gave the Soviet Union a guarantee which it had not had since 1917.

On the other hand, the Potsdam decisions nowhere laid down that socialism must be the only direction in which Germany could develop. On the contrary, they explicitly provided that private undertakings could continue—on the understanding that “all members of the Nazi Party who have been more than nominal participants in its activities, and all other persons hostile to Allied purposes,” would be removed from positions of responsibility in them. No qualification of public ownership was laid down for the expansion of agriculture and peaceful domestic industries. Only *monopolistic* organisations were to be eliminated, not capitalist factories. Thus the Potsdam decisions kept the door open also for a non-socialist development of Germany, such as the British and United States Governments might be expected to favour.

The Potsdam Agreement, in short, was a genuine compromise between

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the two worlds of capitalism and socialism. It left the German people free to decide their own road of economic and political development. It left German workers and German capitalists free to strive for their respective class aims, without the issue being prejudiced as it was when arms were deliberately left to German capitalists and Junkers in 1918–19. Above all, it left the door wide open for *peaceful* “emulation” by example between the two worlds of capitalism and socialism outside Germany: an “emulation” which threatened no one except aggressors, and which did not prevent collaboration, on wide fields of world trade and economic reconstruction, between the U.S.S.R. and the great capitalist Powers.

The Soviet Union had no misgivings about the outcome of such peaceful economic “emulation,” combined with collaboration on the international arena. Molotov had said so explicitly in his speech on the third Five Year Plan at the Eighteenth Congress of the C.P.S.U. in March, 1939:

“We think it is time on the arena of international economic emulation also to make way for the young but already vigorous Soviet forces. Of course this is not a threat, and no one could be injured by such a peaceable emulation. Yet nevertheless it is a trial of strength on a great scale. . . . In appropriate cases we have undertaken collaboration with bourgeois countries, and we consider it entirely desirable. We have no intention of renouncing it for the future either, but will strive for the greatest possible expansion of such collaboration with our neighbours and with all other states. But we are going our road, and the capitalists theirs. History has put before the U.S.S.R. not only the question of collaboration with the capitalist states but also the question of an emulation of economic systems—the new and the old—of emulation between the U.S.S.R. and the chief capitalist countries in the economic sense. We enter upon such emulation convinced of our internal strength, confident of victory.”

Soviet confidence in the outcome of such emulation had shown itself even before Potsdam. In its handling of conquered Rumania, Bulgaria and Finland, i.e. from September, 1944, onwards, the Soviet Union had shown that it was prepared to refrain from any interference with the puny capitalist or backward agrarian structure of those countries—provided the native Quislings, the direct organisers of aggression against the U.S.S.R. under Nazi guidance, were eliminated. The Soviet Union had shown that it was ready even to tolerate governments in these countries which included politicians guilty, from 1941 to 1944, of supporting the war against the U.S.S.R., such as Maniu and Bratianu in Rumania or Petkov in Bulgaria—provided they fulfilled the armistice agreements honestly and loyally. In its application of the Potsdam

decisions to Germany, any honest record by outside observers shows that the Soviet Union has carried out its obligations. Reference to the valuable collections of Soviet policy documents published by *Soviet News* will show that, from July, 1945, onwards, the Soviet Government took every possible opportunity of pressing for urgent steps to set up the German central administration promised at Potsdam, and to implement the other decisions about the denazifying and demilitarising of Germany and the break-up of its industrial monopolies.

Stalin more than once declared his belief in the possibility of friendly and lasting co-operation between the Soviet Union and the Western Powers, and of "friendly competition" between the socialist and capitalist states. He was asked this very question by Alexander Werth on September 24th, 1946, and replied: "I believe in it absolutely." When Werth asked him whether the further progress of the Soviet Union towards communism might not bring a change, Stalin replied: "I do not doubt that the possibilities of peaceful co-operation, far from decreasing, may even grow." Peaceable co-existence and co-operation between the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R. were not only possible, he told Elliott Roosevelt on December 21st, 1946, but "wise and entirely within the bounds of realisation." He repeated this very emphatically in a conversation with Harold E. Stassen, the U.S. Republican politician, on April 9th, 1947, saying: "I take the same views as Lenin on the possibility and desirability of co-operation between the two economic systems." Both the U.S.S.R. as a State and the Party, he said, wished for such co-operation, and at no time had he asserted (as Stassen had suggested) that co-operation between the two systems was impossible—although there might be reluctance to co-operate on the capitalist side, and even capitalist encirclement of the U.S.S.R. with the desire to attack it. "The possibility of co-operation always exists."

But it turned out that the British and American governments were most decidedly afraid of the compromise arrived at in Potsdam, and of the peaceable "emulation" and co-operation which it assumed. They, too, had already given notice of their attitude in December, 1944, when the British Government, including and supported by the leaders of the Labour Party, intervened with fire and sword in Greece to crush the E.A.M.—the main force of the resistance movement—and to reinstate substantially the same royal fascist régime of merchants, bankers, manufacturers and military chiefs that had controlled Greece from 1936 onwards under the Metaxas dictatorship. A further earnest of their fear of the people was given after February, 1945, when the wholesale violation by the puppet Government (set up in Greece under the protection of British armed forces) of its agreement with the E.A.M. forces at Varkiza was ignored—which means encouraged.

These were unmistakable signs that British Toryism and right wing Labour leaders, supported by Wall Street, were afraid of the principles

of Yalta and Potsdam. Sooner than allow the overthrow of monopoly capitalism in any part of the world—even when it had co-operated with the Nazis—they were prepared to shoot the workers and peasants, and to enter into coalitions with their oppressors. It was a bad sign. Nor was it any better omen that the British armed forces had openly intervened in December, 1944, against the Belgian resistance movement—intervention which saved the Belgian large banks and industrial corporations, easily the biggest and most organised Nazi collaborators in Europe, from nationalisation and drastic penalties.

The fate of the Potsdam Agreement showed that these omens were true. Wall Street and the Labour Government have preferred to build up German large-scale landowning and monopoly capital again, rather than run the risk that the German people—if the Allies kept the ring—might choose the path of socialism.

History will no doubt pass a severe and well-deserved judgment on this deliberate putting aside of a great opportunity to ease the path of suffering Europe, this *gran rifiuto*.

Before the trend of policy was openly revealed, however, a great many minds in all countries were naturally concerned with its outcome. In this country, the reactionaries installed in such institutions as the War Office, the B.B.C., Chatham House, sections of the Ministry of Information, etc., showed by their surreptitious anti-Soviet propaganda even at the height of the war what they wanted the outcome to be. But this was not the view of the mass of the British people, as expressed at innumerable meetings and conferences, in the Press and in private: and some writers on political and economic subjects were affected accordingly.

It is with these facts in mind that one can most usefully turn to consider the four books here under review, and in the first place that of Professor E. H. Carr.<sup>1</sup> His six lectures delivered at Oxford in the early months of 1946 reflect the ideas of a man with a Conservative and Imperialist background (Professor Carr was a member of the British delegation at the Versailles Peace Conference) who was conscientiously trying to find a broad general basis on which to justify co-operation between the great capitalist Powers and the Soviet Union. Indeed, the measure of its conscientiousness was the tepid reception given to the book by the capitalist Press.

None of the collections of banalities and half-truths which politicians and dons have published in recent years to justify what are called "Western values," "Western ways of life" and the like have had the courage to treat their subject concretely and historically, as Carr does in his first chapter on "the political impact" of the U.S.S.R. He, too, has his illusions, chiefly because he forgets that even the limited tolerance of capitalist democracy reposes upon a vast substructure of

<sup>1</sup> *The Soviet Impact on the Western World*, pp. ix, 116. Macmillan, 1946, 5s.

autocratic rule over colonial and dependent peoples (as Lenin foresaw long ago, the much-vaunted "Western Union" is composed of *colonial Powers* above all). But at least he does attempt to show in detail the positive achievements of Soviet democracy, especially in the sphere of mass participation in public affairs, and advises Western democrats to ponder over them.

Similarly, with his chapters on "the economic impact" (the history and repercussions of Soviet planning) and "the social impact" (the history of labour organisation and of the Soviet trade unions), Carr does less than justice to the degree to which planning as an integral feature of Socialist society was anticipated, not only by Marx (e.g. in *Capital*, Vol. II, p. 546, or *The Civil War in France*) and Engels (e.g. in *Anti-Dühring*) but also by their Utopian predecessors, like Saint-Simon and, particularly, Cabet. His history of Soviet economy has its lapses—as, for example, when he says that the first Five Year Plan was "the final liquidation of N.E.P."; or when he equates the workers' control of 1917–18 with the first form of nationalisation. But the great merit of Carr's treatment of these subjects is that it presents them as the subject of real human endeavour for "collective social purposes," not of arbitrary and irrational tyranny, as the Hayeks and their like among bourgeois politicians and economists make out. And the details he gives to illustrate his points are abundance itself, compared with the unbelievable illiteracy about elementary facts of Soviet life displayed by the high priests of "Western civilisation."

Quite apart from many interesting things he has to say on international relations, Carr's quiet but effective remarks on the "exceedingly adroit and subtle instrument" by which the Foreign Office, unknown to the vast mass of citizens, wields "an enormous power to mould opinion," have permanent value—not least in these days of deliberately fostered anti-Soviet hysteria. The section on ideology, although it contains much that Marxists would criticise, nevertheless strikes a heavy blow at the idea that Marxism denies the role of the individual in history, or that Soviet society does not recognise its obligations to him. And when he urges, in his concluding section, a serious effort at reform in the capitalist countries, he has the courage to remind the reader that "Bolshevism itself has Western origins. . . . It lies, not less than the French Revolution, in the main stream of European history."

Professor Carr's book was obviously inspired by the very real possibilities of friendly co-operation between the Great Powers which closer contact and mass sympathy with the U.S.S.R. had brought into existence during the Second World War. The same is true of Dr. Alexander Baykov's valuable account of Soviet economic legislation, forms of organisation, problems and statistical results.<sup>1</sup> The author emigrated

<sup>1</sup> *Development of the Soviet Economic System*, pp. xv, 514. Cambridge University Press, 1946, 30s.

from Russia as an enemy of the Soviet Government in 1920, and worked for many years at the Prague "Russian Economic Study Centre"—an institution which searched the Soviet Press for materials with which to feed anti-Soviet propagandists. Dr. Baykov's work, however, gradually forced conclusions on him which took him out of his "White" environment, and he has honestly endeavoured to embody these conclusions in his book, which is a solid addition to the literature available in English on the economic development of the U.S.S.R.

It treats this in four periods—1917 to 1920, 1921 to 1929, then to 1932, and subsequently—adding a section on the machinery of planning. In each of the historical sections there are chapters on agriculture, industry, labour, finance and trade. There is an immense bibliography, which the author has used very conscientiously, believing as he does—and it takes some courage to make the admission in a country where the overwhelming majority of official economists are not only ignorant of Soviet economy, but proud of it—that Soviet statistics and other sources are no less reliable than others, and "can be used to analyse the economic processes and the economic system of the U.S.S.R. with the same degree of confidence as similar sources published in other countries."

Dr. Baykov's book is not a history, although its form is necessarily historical; and this explains many inaccuracies. The worst are in the first section, where he seems to have retained most of his White prejudices—perhaps because he spent the years from 1917 to 1920 as an "internal emigrant" in the U.S.S.R. He does not understand the immense positive part played by workers' control during the first months of the Revolution in saving industrial property from sabotage and theft, and in training many workers in the first elements of factory management. Nor does he seem to understand the decisive part played by the Second Congress of Soviets in November, 1917, and the All-Russian Peasant Congress in December (followed by county soviet congresses all over the country) in launching and guiding the peasant division of the land: or indeed the methods by which the peasantry distributed it. It is quite incorrect that all the labour laws adopted in the first months of the revolution "remained mere aspiration." Dr. Baykov omits any reference to the great part played by the trade unions in organising economy between 1917 and 1920. More serious is the fact that he does not make any real distinction between the breathing-space of November, 1917, to May, 1918, and the subsequent war for the defence of the Revolution. Yet this distinction is essential: for in the first period the rough outlines of economic policy which a working-class State should pursue in a peasant country, on the road to socialism, were already sketched out by Lenin (notably in his address of April 29th, 1918, which developed ideas he had set forth in August and September, 1917). That policy was only beginning to be applied



when foreign invasion began; it was put fully into operation only in 1921, under the name of "New Economic Policy." Dr. Baykov regards N.E.P. as having ended in 1929 (p. 153); whereas Molotov pointed out in January, 1933, that it was "still far from ended," although it was in its last stage. In November, 1936, Stalin again referred to this last stage as still in existence. There is no reason for surprise at this, if we remember that the *essence* of N.E.P. was a certain freedom of trade, within limits fixed by the State, and that the collective farm market, which in 1940 accounted for 19 per cent. of all retail turnover, and prices which are not directly regulated by the State, answers to that description still.

However, provided one does not go to Dr. Baykov for theory, and treats his history in the early years with caution, his book can be recommended to the reader unacquainted with Russian as a valuable work of reference. Above all, it will convey to him a sense of the immense internal strength of a socialist society, able to learn through many mistakes how to overcome difficulties which still baffle wealthier capitalist Powers. For that very reason it was a particularly important contribution to knowledge in the immediate post-war period.

Dr. Rudolf Schlesinger's first book<sup>1</sup> can be read with advantage, section by section, parallel with Dr. Baykov's. It follows the same periods as the latter, except that it makes an attempt to distinguish between the first months after the Revolution and the period of War Communism—not entirely successful, since the author does not appear to take any account of Lenin's programme speech mentioned above, and seems to date War Communism from March, 1918. But it does provide a background of theoretical discussion to the somewhat disconnected accounts given by Dr. Baykov—all the more because it attempts to show the progress of Soviet legal ideas in the setting of the main political and economic events of the period concerned.

It is difficult for a layman to give an adequate appreciation of Dr. Schlesinger's *specialist* work in this book. The account he gives of the process of Soviet justice immediately after the Revolution, for example (pp. 64-73), seems to be competent and lucid; and throughout the book he provides a series of useful summaries of important Soviet laws, with brief comments and cross-references, which would make his work an important handbook in any case.

But what does arouse doubts as to Dr. Schlesinger's full understanding of Soviet theory is the frequency with which he throws in totally misleading remarks on subjects outside his speciality—often where they appear unnecessary for his main theme. Such, for example, is the statement that "the classical Marxian approach" regarded the Socialist revolution and the State it set up as "the ultimate consummation of the original ideals of the bourgeois democratic revolutions"

<sup>1</sup> *Soviet Legal Theory*, pp. viii, 299. Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1945, 16s.

(p. 25), a suggestion flatly contradicted by *The Communist Manifesto* itself; or the misleading, because inadequately qualified, assertions that "for a Marxist the dictatorship of his party is the dictatorship of the proletariat" (p. 33)—contrary to the well-known examination of this very question by Stalin—and that the Bolsheviks in November, 1917 "avoided any sharing of actual power" (p. 39), although a coalition with the Left Socialist-Revolutionaries existed from November, 1917, to March, 1918. Equally groundless is the assertion that "attempts at wholesale nationalisation of industry had proved a failure" (by 1921)—a strange failure, indeed, which made possible victory in the Civil War; the suggestion (p. 135) that the development of agricultural co-operatives in the years before collectivisation took place spontaneously, and not as the result of direct encouragement and aid by the State—which Stalin many times indicated was done in order to prepare the peasantry psychologically for collective farming; the suggestion (p. 174), again in defiance of plain evidence to the contrary in Stalin's *Dizzy with Success*, that the Central Committee of the Party had "provided for complete collectivisation of grain production rather earlier than 1931"; and much else.

Here and there Dr. Schlesinger's writing suggests that he feels himself standing on a pinnacle, far above both the well-meaning but rather stupid Bolshevik leaders and their conscientious critics, who are barking up the wrong tree. Such is the remark (p. 209), in connection with discussions about a new Criminal Code, that "in the atmosphere of 1930 there was not yet sufficient place for common sense"; or his chiding of the Bolsheviks for not having declared in 1921 that "trusteeship would take the place of property in means of production"—trusteeship which "society" could terminate at will (p. 267). "Had this been clearly stated at the beginning of the N.E.P. to merchants and *kulaks*" Dr. Schlesinger explains, "instead of playing with an alleged 'freedom of trade' which the Soviet could never seriously accept, much human tragedy would have been avoided." He does not vouchsafe any evidence for the charge that freedom of trade from 1921 to 1928 was only "alleged," and that several congresses of the C.P.S.U. were only "playing" with it. He ignores the full and plain explanations which Lenin made publicly, more than once, about the *purpose* of free trade—to prepare for a new advance to Socialism. And he does not explain why the town middlemen and commercial agents who came into being during the first phase of N.E.P., and still more the *kulaks*, or petty village capitalists, would have been more reconciled to being squeezed out of existence or expropriated, when large-scale Socialist planning began in 1929, if they had been told they were only "trustees," not owners.

However, Dr. Schlesinger's book attempts an honest account of the social background and development of Soviet legal theory, written by a specialist; and that redeems some of its shortcomings. More, it was

important, at the time it appeared, for the same reason as Dr. Baykov's book.

The same cannot be said, unfortunately, of Dr. Schlesinger's later work.<sup>1</sup> He tells us that the first draft was written in 1942, but that he read the proofs four years later, when the Anglo-Soviet alliance "was undergoing a most serious crisis."

At such a time those who cherished "some sympathy with the trend that tries to face the need" for "transition from a capitalist to a Socialist form of society"—Dr. Schlesinger's own description of himself in the preface—could be expected not to add to the confusion and misunderstanding of Soviet policy and Soviet society which the Churchills and the Cummings, the Attlees and the Bevins, each in their own way, were spreading. On the contrary—and particularly when, as he tells us of himself, they had spent some time in the U.S.S.R. before the war—they had all their work cut out, by plain speaking and exposure of prevailing lies about Soviet life, to sweep away some at least of those misunderstandings.

But in order to do so, they had to be partisan, unmistakably in substance, if not violently so in form: and Dr. Schlesinger doesn't want to be that. In his book his inclination to lecture the Russians, while presenting them to other countries as worthy of commendation, which showed itself occasionally in *Soviet Legal Theory*, takes the bit between its teeth and runs away with him altogether. As a result, he spoils a book which, in its wide range of subjects, could have been a most valuable weapon of combat against the enemies of peace. It treats of Soviet history, of classes in Soviet society, of private life in the U.S.S.R., of the functioning of the Stalin Constitution, of socialism in one country and patriotism, of history, art, literature and philosophy in the Soviet Union. On all these subjects we are sure Dr. Schlesinger could have written much that was informative and useful.

But he seems to have chosen a different path. His irrepressible desire to rise superior both to the Russians' claim to be true Marxists and to their enemies' abuse of them for being that very thing leads Dr. Schlesinger insensibly into a position when he not only distorts both Soviet history and Marxism but—in the actual balance of forces in Great Britain—helps the enemies of Marxism more than he hinders them.

This may seem a hard saying about a writer who obviously wanted to help the cause of friendship with the U.S.S.R.: but it needs to be said, because the method which he has adopted is fundamentally tainted, yet superficially attractive. As to the evidence, one could fill a book with it; but unfortunately one section will provide enough.

Take Chapter I. It begins by suggesting that the Bolshevik Party

<sup>1</sup> *The Spirit of Post-War Russia: Soviet Ideology, 1917-1946*, p. 187. Dobson, 1947, Ss. 6d.

"did its best to demonstrate its essential identity of outlook" since 1917, but that this is only because the same group have been in power all the time, and need to maintain "the prestige of the dominant ideology": in reality, since 1917 "there has been a quite natural change, *not only of policy*, but even of dominating ideas" (pp. 9-10). This language is vague, but the contrast between "policy" and "dominating ideas" is clear enough, and a further reference to admitting "the fallibility of classical Marxist teachings" makes it clearer. Dr. Schlesinger wants to suggest that the Bolsheviks have not merely *developed* "classical" Marxism, but *departed* from it.

An analogy which he gives, by way of illustration—of what would have happened if the French Jacobins had stayed on in power until 1820, instead of being guillotined in 1794—makes this suggestion unmistakable. For the Jacobins were middle-class revolutionaries, leading the people against the feudal State and feudal survivals in the interests of *bourgeois* property. Even in what Dr. Schlesinger calls "the Utopian days" of 1793-4 they never forgot their support of property and their fear of measures dictated solely by the interests of the poor. Consequently, to stay on in power they would have had to serve the interests of budding French capitalism at the expense of the lives and interests of the masses, as the Directory and Napoleon later did. To speak of their developing, or even "maintaining," the revolutionary ideology of 1792-3, in such circumstances, would have been of course in flat contradiction to their daily practice.

But Dr. Schlesinger's comparison is vitiated from the start. The Soviet leaders took power as the vanguard of the *proletariat*—that proletariat which, having raised itself to the position of ruling class, proceeded to wrest, by degrees, all capital from the bourgeoisie and to sweep away by force the old conditions of production—thereby sweeping away the conditions for the existence of class antagonisms and of classes generally. This conception of their aims had been known all over the world since *The Communist Manifesto* of 1848, even though it had nowhere previously been put into practice. It was the very foundation of Bolshevik ideology. The more the Soviet leaders put it into effect, the more it was confirmed. New experiences did not force them—as they would have forced bourgeois revolutionaries—to turn against the class which had put them in power, or disappear altogether; on the contrary, they reinforced both the proletariat and its leaders. As a consequence, the Soviet leaders were not obliged to jettison their ideology, as the Directory or Napoleon jettisoned that of 1792-3: on the contrary, experience brought new discoveries, revealed new facets of Marxist theory, which the Soviet leaders were able therefore to *develop*. For them there was no contradiction between theory and practice.

Dr. Schlesinger then takes us through the economic history of the U.S.S.R., and right at the outset (pp. 11-12) manages to create utter

confusion about the history of nationalisation of industry. Immediate "wholesale nationalisation," he rightly asserts, was not part of the Bolshevik plans. The capitalists were invited to continue as organisers, under State control, through nationalised syndicates (trading organisations) and under workers' supervision exercised through elected "workers' control" committees. Then, he says, capitalist sabotage "forced the State to attempt wholesale nationalisation" (when?) and "the Workers' Committees were made the essential organs of State control, certainly at the beginning" (beginning of what?). This led "some Russians" (which?) "to think of socialism in syndicalist terms: Communism was identified" (by whom?) "with the control of a given enterprise by those employed in it, with some collaboration from the State." Later in 1918, under war conditions, Soviet economics became "as centralised and unequalitarian as possible," and in 1919 the revolution began to pass victoriously "from the Utopian to the realistic stage."

These loose and woolly expressions (and especially the final remark) can only throw more darkness on what really happened, and gives the maximum assistance to those Labour leaders who, *in capitalist society*, are doing their utmost to dishearten the British workers by telling them they are incapable of running industry (e.g. by the Transport House pamphlet, *Industrial Democracy*). Workers' control was throughout intended to protect the Soviet State against employers' sabotage and *prepare the way* for nationalisation. In fact, sabotage forced the Soviet State from November, 1917, to May, 1918, into a number of measures of partial nationalisation—mainly of individual factories, but also of some industries. Their management, and State control over them, were *not* left to "Workers' Committees," but to collegiate bodies of six or nine in each factory (two-thirds representing the State, one-third the workers): *real* State control (in the sense of supervision) was exercised through the nationalised "syndicates," or special committees (as Lenin had indicated in 1917) operating under a Government body—the Supreme Economic Council. It was not the Bolsheviks, but the Mensheviks or those under their influence, who had shown "a silly, schoolboy application of 'Marxism'" in interpreting workers' control as syndicalism: Lenin had made this clear in *Will the Bolsheviks Maintain Power?* (September, 1917), and the fight against such syndicalist tendencies after the Revolution went on precisely where the Bolsheviks were *weakest*—the railways, river fleet, some factories, etc. When wholesale nationalisation was at last decreed (June 28th, 1918), it was accelerated by the fear of German claims under the treaty of Brest-Litovsk, but nevertheless was a stage long foreseen and aimed at.

Again, in presenting the aims and the difficulties of the period of the socialist offensive—the first Five Year Plan (1929–32)—Dr. Schlesinger presents the issue essentially as one between "Stalin's State" and the

Trotskyists, just as the worst enemies of the U.S.S.R. do. He omits from his picture altogether the decisive fact: the immense and enthusiastic support of the policy of building socialism given by millions of industrial workers and many millions of the poorest peasants—a support expressed, for example, in the shock-brigade movement and socialist emulation, and in the mass formation of collective farms. He forgets entirely, moreover, that Trotsky when still a Menshevik, for years before the Revolution, and his subsequent right-wing associate, Bukharin, when still a "left Communist" in 1918, had denied any possibility of Russia building socialism without direct aid from the West. Overlooking all this, Dr. Schlesinger yet speaks of "fundamental communist views" as having inspired the Trotskyist plans for overthrowing the Soviet State by provoking external war. In other words, he slides insensibly into presenting fundamentally anti-socialist, Menshevik views—views which led directly to the restoration of capitalism—as a variety (perhaps wrongheaded) of socialism! He is betrayed into talking of the Soviet State doing daily, "in a hundred places," things that "under normal conditions" would have justified strikes. Evidently "normal conditions" for Dr. Schlesinger are *capitalist* conditions; evidently also he does not suspect that the Soviet State was only able to do these things because of the conscious assent of the working class, for whom "normal conditions" had become those in which capitalism had been *liquidated*.

Dr. Schlesinger describes as an "evolution of Soviet ideology" the statement of 1939 (in the *History of the C.P.S.U.*) that collectivisation of agriculture was "revolution from above," on the initiative of the Soviet State, with support from below. Such revolution, he says, "had hitherto not been exactly popular with Marxist opinion," and tells us interesting things about Bismarck's policy in Germany.

But what has "Marxist opinion" on revolution from above, *as practised by a proletarian State*, been ever since 1848? It was set out quite plainly in *The Communist Manifesto* itself, in the passage cited a little earlier, which spoke of the policy of the ruling proletariat, and which added that this necessarily involved "despotic inroads on the rights of property and on the conditions of bourgeois production." Isn't that revolution from above? Doesn't it describe precisely what the Russian proletariat did, first in 1918 and then in 1929–33, with the support from below of the mass of the peasantry? And what does Dr. Schlesinger suppose the authors of *The Communist Manifesto* meant when they wrote that the mission of the proletarians, in becoming masters of the productive forces of society, "is to destroy all previous securities for, and insurances of, individual property"? Perhaps he will say that 1848, too, was the "Utopian" period of Marxism. But in October, 1890, Engels was still writing to K. Schmidt: "Why do we fight for the political dictatorship of the proletariat if political power is economically

impotent?" (i.e. if it cannot effect "revolutions from above"). "Force (that is, State power) is also an economic power."

Much else could be quoted in Marxist writings both without and within Russia to show that Dr. Schlesinger's picture of "Marxist opinion" on this question is far from the truth. But he is also wrong, or he is failing to see beyond externals, when he suggests that the idea of "revolution from above," as applied to the Russian countryside, was something new in Soviet literature in 1939, and that previously "hardly anyone had dared to express [it] openly." What else (for example) did Stalin mean, at the end of 1929, in his address on agrarian policy, when he said that "we, the Party and the Soviet Government, have developed an offensive on the whole front against the capitalist elements in the countryside . . . we have passed . . . to the policy of *eliminating* the *kulaks* as a class," substituting for their capitalist production "Socialist production in the shape of the collective farms and State farms"?

Surely it must be obvious that this declaration, which received immense publicity, was precisely the proclamation of "revolution from above" (supported, as Stalin pointed out in the same address, by "the masses of poor and middle peasants themselves"). Dr. Schlesinger has discovered a mare's nest: but one which helps to intensify the impression he has already created—that for Russian Marxists, "Utopia had fallen back before reality."

Equally at variance with the facts is his conclusion that, according to Stalin in 1938, the State "evidently . . . was not, as Lenin had thought all his life, the mere ephemeral instrument of the victorious working classes, destined to 'wither away' and to make room for a free community based on personal freedom," etc. It is flagrantly in contradiction to the facts because (i) there is no evidence whatever that Lenin had "thought all his life" that the working-class State would be a "mere ephemeral instrument": on the contrary, he wrote explicitly that its withering away "must obviously be a rather lengthy process" (*State and Revolution*, Chapter V, Section 1); and (ii) there is no evidence whatever that Stalin considered in 1938 that the working-class State was *not* "destined to wither away" when the job of ending class society was completed: on the contrary, his speech at the Party Congress in 1939 specified precisely under what conditions it *would* wither away.

In the same way, Dr. Schlesinger manages to present a complete caricature of "Soviet ideology" during the first Five Year Plan, asserting that from the enthusiasm of many collective farmers, from factory canteens and crèches for women workers, it "*tended* to build . . . a conception of the coming socialist society without any private interests or private life at all. *If possible*, even the pullets in the collective farm had to be collectivised. Any personal care of the parents for their children was regarded as *very nearly* a reactionary prejudice." The italics are

mine: and the words thus emphasised are evidence that Dr. Schlesinger knows that he is generalising from the excesses of a handful of irresponsibles, and drawing a grotesque caricature of the way in which the vast majority of the Party, and still more of the Soviet people, really regarded the future socialist society.

He tells us, again, that "200,000 collective farms were organised out of a semi-illiterate peasantry, without the people who accomplished these things expecting any other reward than the consciousness of having helped to build a better life for the community." This again is a fantastic picture. The figure of 200,000 collective farms was reached in the summer of 1931. The previous year (Molotov reported at the Sixth Soviet Congress in March, 1931), the average yield per hectare was 8.4 quintals of rye and 9.6 quintals of wheat on individual peasants' farms, 9.1 quintals and 10.6 quintals respectively in the collective farms. In 1931 the direct expenditure of labour per hectare under grain in the collective farms was from 30 to 50 per cent. less than that expended on individual peasant holdings (*Fulfilment of the First Five Year Plan*, 1933, p. 192). Were these results not rewards? Were they nothing but "the consciousness," etc., etc.?

Speaking of the change in emphasis from the first to the second Five Year Plans, Dr. Schlesinger says: "One had somehow to stop the pace of 'assault.' What was needed was a normal economy and a normal society, whose work, generally speaking, was not building new factories, but producing goods. . . ." Why "somehow"? Why the suggestion that the Bolsheviks had not all along been planning the new factories *in order* to begin "producing goods"? Because Dr. Schlesinger has to deepen if possible the impression of vast, elemental forces, galloping on unplanned and uncontrolled, with the Bolshevik leaders scampering in desperation after them, shedding their "Utopian" Marxist principles as they run.

These are but a few of the absurdities, taken from one out of nine sections, into which the author, for all his good intentions, is led by his method. They could be multiplied beyond number. Most of the familiar attacks of the Trotskyists and Social Democrats on the Soviet Union find their echo in Dr. Schlesinger's book, repeated in a half-condescending, half-forgiving tone that would be ludicrous if in fact it did not bring grist to the mill of ordinary mundane capitalist propaganda against the U.S.S.R. In his chapter of conclusions, for example, he contrives (i) to correct Lenin, who asserted in 1923 that Socialism in the U.S.S.R. would not be "the realm of peasant limitedness" (Trotsky's accusation), by explaining that "it is the peasant . . . whose voice is most clearly in evidence wherever Stalin has departed from original Marxist ideology"; (ii) to correct Marx, who, we are told, "thought that socialism was, for the next few centuries, essentially a problem for Western Europe and the U.S.A."—contrary to his

famous letter of 1877 to the Editor of *Otechestvennyye Zapiski* (Correspondence, pp. 352-5); (iii) to repeat the old, hackneyed jeer at those mythical friends of the U.S.S.R. "who attempted to describe its present state as a realisation of all conceivable ideals"—and so on, *ad nauseam*.

These are extraordinary aberrations in one who evidently believes himself to be a friend of the U.S.S.R. They are all the more deplorable when we remember at what time they occur and the contrast which they present with the efforts of Professor Carr and Dr. Baykov to present facts about the U.S.S.R. as two formerly active enemies see them. But the truth must be faced: distortion and false history presented in the name of friendship are more dangerous than errors which still survive in the work of people like Carr and Baykov.

Moreover, there is a melancholy precedent for the kind of approach practised by Dr. Schlesinger: it used to be called "Austro-Marxism," from the country where it reached its highest and most destructive development. Austro-Marxism was a special variety of sham left Social-Democracy, highly skilled in prostituting the terminology of Marxism, and specialising in verbal balancing tricks, in order to distract attention from its denial of Marxism's revolutionary content.

Dr. Schlesinger has strayed into the Austro-Marxist camp, perhaps unwittingly. The best thing one can wish him is a determined effort to get out again before it is too late.

THE SCIENCE AND ART OF MUSIC

MR. RUTLAND BOUGHTON'S "The Science and Art of Music" is an important examination of the relation of music to society. We have long needed such a study, and although Mr. Boughton no doubt suffers from a lack of space and is thus unable to expand a good many of his subsidiary themes, he does most creditably, and his exposition of musical history up to the time of Beethoven, showing the gradual increase in social expression, is masterly. But he does not himself seem to have realised the importance of Beethoven's "Be embraced, O ye millions." Beethoven was, of course, a rebel, musically and politically, and in the finale of his *Choral Symphony* he threw out not only a *political* challenge (and one that was to an extent being enacted in the world outside), but a *musical* challenge also. The whole history of music since 1824 can be summed up in terms of (a) neglect of, (b) revolt against and (c) evasion of Beethoven's challenge. Music is as accurate a textbook as those written by many of our historians, and society has by no means succeeded where music has failed. In history, as in music, we have seen exactly the same reactionary forces in operation against democratic progress.

Most of the composers mentioned by Mr. Boughton in the latter pages of his paper may be easily catalogued within the bounds of my rough divisions. Weber, Rossini, Schumann and Mendelssohn, for instance, all come under (c) above. They were indeed masters of their art, but they only dabbled in the lesser tributaries of the mighty flood initiated by Beethoven—it was too much for them to swim against, and they had not the courage to take the plunge and swim with the tide. But Mr. Boughton is quite mistaken in implying that Schubert did little other than develop the folk-song "in *petit bourgeois* terms." Schubert's songs, written at the time when the system of patronage was decaying, were not dedicated to any select aristocratic group, but, as Sydney Harrison has it, were "the love-songs of any anonymous youth and any unknown maid." Music, in fact, written for a wider and ever-growing public—the common people. Surely no one who listens to the C major Symphony can fail to recognise that here is the one composer who inherited something of Beethoven's "social will."

More astonishing still is Mr. Boughton's championship of Wagner, who comes under my category (b)—revolt *against* the Beethoven tradition. This may, for some, make Wagner a revolutionary; but it is revolution in reverse, reaction against progress. It may well be that Wagner took part in the Dresden upheaval of 1848, but it appears that he was later somewhat ashamed of his youthful ardour, and there is

more than one opinion as to just how "actively involved" Wagner was in the rising. Mr. Boughton quotes fine words from a Wagner essay, but *Das Judentum in der Musik* makes less agreeable reading, and the influence of the pessimistic Schopenhauer was hardly a beneficial one. Wagner's music-dramas were merely another method of refusing to accept the political implications of Beethoven's musical challenge. Wagner's experiments with harmony were certainly new and of value, but they were always subordinate to his peculiar ideology which dictated a complete divorce from society. Our admiration of the means he employed must be coloured by a dislike for the end which he held as his goal. Bayreuth was to be a world within a world; behind the closed doors of that theatre we were to imbibe Wagner's own brand of nationalism and mysticism. We have only to look at *Parsifal*—the musical acme of muddled idealism and declining creative power—to see where his steps led him. None of Mr. Boughton's special pleading that Wagner's dissonance was dramatically justified can disguise the fact that Wagner was primarily an anti-social composer. Mr. Boughton claims that his "increased and adventurous use of dissonance" was due to "a need to express more subtle differences in human character." The absurdity of this statement is apparent if we consider for a moment Wagner's librettos. Could anything more *inhuman* be discovered than these epics, with their love-potions, gods, Teutonic legends, hocus-pocus of magicians and wizards and Sacred Grails? As a conclusion, Wagner offers us *Parsifal*—a resurrection of the religious myth. A curious Phoenix this to rise from "revolutionary" ashes. Apart from *The Mastersingers*, there is hardly a human figure to be found in Wagner, and that opera was by no means a favourite of *Der Meister* himself. It is a little far-fetched of Mr. Boughton to view the contrapuntal music of its last act as "the natural musical expression of the objective association of burghers, apprentices and the mastersinger himself." Half the charm of *The Mastersingers* (the best of Wagner's operas because closest to earth) is its eighteenth-century flavour which is deliberately suggested by Wagner's use of counterpoint and the Handelian echoes that occur again and again throughout the score.

In his views on dissonance, Mr. Boughton is perfectly correct; dissonance should be dramatically justified by the human situation, and dissonance to-day has indeed run amok and plunged music into a long run downhill. But Wagner is no illustration for the case he makes out. Wagner may have achieved a "synthesis" between subjective and objective, but it was a synthesis gained at the expense of humanity.

Mr. Boughton has failed in so far as he has not interpreted music since Beethoven in terms of reaction *against* Beethoven's revolutionary challenge. We have temporarily lost sight of the torrent released by Beethoven, but rivers that have run underground have a disconcerting habit of reappearing in spite of the efforts of a Wagner to suppress

them or guide them into non-productive channels. As in politics, the reactionary forces will inevitably be swept aside and the "widening gap between composer and public," of which Mr. Boughton rightly complains, will be bridged.

DONALD MITCHELL.

[Owing to the very short interval between the appearance of *The Modern Quarterly* and the next issue going to press, it is not always possible for critics to prepare their communications in time for publication. We have received several interesting comments on Rutland Boughton's article too late for publication, but, in view of the fact that the article was intended to provoke discussion, we hope to include some of these in the December issue. Communications dealing with articles in the present number should reach the Editor during the first week in October.]

We should like to bring before our readers an opportunity of rendering a considerable service to potential readers of *The Modern Quarterly* in Germany. The ban on trading makes it impossible for would-be readers to pay for subscriptions, and it has been suggested that English readers might volunteer to pass on their copies as a temporary arrangement until the ban is lifted.

There is a most urgent need for literature of this kind, and a very wide public able and eager to read it. The vacuum left after the long years of sterility and repression is difficult for us to imagine. We are in touch with a friend in Germany who is in a position to secure the wise and businesslike distribution of any copies of *The Modern Quarterly* which our readers feel disposed to pass on to him. Please send copies to Willi Barth, Berlin-Friedrichsfelde, Miquelstrasse, 3 d, Germany. Willi Barth regrets that at present it is still difficult to send literature from Germany in exchange, but those who would like to see any available German periodicals or newspapers might enclose their requests with their copies.



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