

## Discussion Article

# SOCIALIST HUMANISM

## An Epistle to the Philistines

by

E. P. Thompson

"The standpoint of the old materialism is 'civil society'; the standpoint of the new is human society or socialised humanity." — Marx, 10th Thesis on Feuerbach.

"The poet said to the bureaucrat: Man creates by the laws of beauty.  
The artist creates the heart's face: an image of all that's human.  
But he said: I've no time to argue—though it sounds like a deviation—  
Desk-deep in class war on the eighteenth floor I'm making the  
Revolution."  
—Tom McGrath.

**O**UR ISLAND is one of the very few provinces of Europe which has not in this century suffered from civil or international war upon its own soil; and which has escaped the consequences—gas chambers, "quisling" regimes, partisan movements, terror and counter-terror — which have coloured the outlook of whole nations, East and West. It is very easy for us to fall into insular, parochial attitudes, and therefore necessary that we should commence any discussion of the future of socialism by reminding ourselves of some of the larger facts of our time. For two hundred years the pace of technological and social change has accelerated to an unprecedented degree, and nuclear fission and automation promise an even more rapid acceleration. In the past few years several continents which—fifty years ago—were on the periphery of civilisation, have entered the arena of international politics. In the past fifty years more human beings have been killed in war than in any comparable period. The fact that, in the past ten, these wars have abated in extent, although not in intensity (Korea, Indo-China, Kenya, Algeria), indicates less any change of heart than mutual fear of the overwhelming killing power of atomic weapons. The only reasonable deduction from all these facts is that mankind is caught up in the throes of a revolutionary transition to an entirely new form of society—a transition which must certainly reach its climax during this century.

This is confirmed by the emergence upon one quarter of the earth's surface of a new society, with a new economic structure, new social relations, and new political institutions. The fact that British socialists do not like all the features of this society has no

bearing upon the fact of its existence. It was obviously only short-sightedness which ever led socialists to conceive of the new society stepping, pure and enlightened, out of the fires of the old. Who should be surprised, when we recall the tormented history of the past fifty years, that the new society has sprung from the fire, its features blackened and distorted by pain and oppression?

But the future of British socialism may be very much affected by the understanding of and feelings towards the new society of British socialists, since it has always been their faith that socialism was not only economically practicable but was also intensely **desirable**; that is, that socialist society would revolutionise human relationships, replacing respect for property by respect for man, and replacing the acquisitive society by the common weal. It was assumed that all forms of human oppression were rooted, ultimately, in the economic oppression arising from the private ownership of the means of production; and that once these were socialised, the ending of other oppressions would rapidly ensue. "So easily might men gette their living," wrote More, "if that same worthy princesse lady money did not alone stop up the waye betwene us and our lyving . . . Thys hellhounde creapeth into mens hartes: and plucketh them backe from entering the right pathe of life . . ."

If, then, British socialists find features of the new society in the East repugnant, and find in them evidence that new forms of oppression — economic, physical and psychological — can perfectly well take root in a socialist society, a number of consequences will follow. Some will cease to be socialists, or to desire to take any active part in working for the new society. Others will lose confidence in the revolutionary perspectives of socialism, take a more limited and humdrum view of human potentialities, and hence cease to struggle for that transformation in men's values and outlook which socialists once thought possible. If it is true that we are in a period of revolutionary transition, then such reactions are likely to strengthen capitalist society, prolong the transitional period, align the working-class movements in the West alongside the dying order and thus enflame international disagreements, and, as a consequence, harden and perpetuate the oppressive features of the new society. Moreover, it is evident that British socialists who see men who claim 'Marxism' as their guide, banner, and 'science' perpetrating vile crimes against their own comrades and gigantic injustices against many thousands of their fellow men, will assume — and have assumed — that the ideas of Marx and Engels are useless or even dangerous, that they leave out of account essential points, that they give a false view of 'human nature', and that, although Marxism may have imparted a fanatic fervour to Russian and Chinese communists, a sense of acting as the instruments of destiny, nevertheless the ideas of Marx and Engels give as

false a view of reality as did those of Calvin. But if this natural assumption is **wrong**, then British socialism is weakened at its weakest point. Pragmatism may take the British labour movement through another few years; but it will not prove adequate to dealing with the increasingly complex problems of this period of transition.

It is my contention that the revolt within the international Communist movement against 'Stalinism', will, if successful, confirm the revolutionary confidence of the founders of the socialist movement. And if this is so, it must be of the profoundest importance to British socialists, since it will restore confidence in our own revolutionary perspectives.

### STALINISM AS AN IDEOLOGY

'Stalinism' is, in a true sense, an ideology; that is, a form of false consciousness, deriving from a partial, partisan, view of reality; and, at a certain stage, establishing a **system** of false or partially false concepts with a mode of thought which — in the Marxist sense—is idealist. "Instead of commencing with facts, social reality, Stalinist theory starts with the idea, the text, the axiom: facts, institutions, people, must be brought to conform to the idea."

There is another approach to Stalinism, which sees, it not as an ideology so much as an hypocrisy"; that is, the largely (1) This is the general view of most Trotskyists: it would also appear to be the view of Kruschew, in his famous "revelations." hypocritical speeches and quite different practices of a bureaucratic caste in Russia, concerned with the maintainance and extension of their privileges and interests; and the similar speeches and actions of their "stooges," "dupes," etc. outside.

This is a mistaken view. First, it underestimates the strength, inner logic and consistency of Stalinism, a common feature in all mature ideologies. In doing so, it fails to present a serious theoretical confrontation, and instead (as one must with a hypocrisy) descends to personalities or to abuse of 'the personality.'

Second, it overlooks the fact that many features of 'Stalinism' ante-date J. V. Stalin by many years, ante-date the Russian Revolution and the emergence of the Russian bureaucracy. For example, the dogmatism which in the Soviet Union has taken on institutional form is kin to that with which Engels took issue in the British and American labour movement in the 1880's<sup>(2)</sup>: and anti-intellectualism finds its forerunner in the French (2) e.g. "People who pass as orthodox Marxists have turned our ideas of movement into a fixed dogma to be learnt by heart and appear as pure sects." (1891).

*ouvrierisme*. Third, it fails, to explain the way in which Stalinist concepts and practices have struck root in countries where—so far

from drawing nourishment from the privileges of bureaucracy—the Communists who espoused them have had to face only ostracism, hardship, imprisonment, or death for their pains. And this is confirmed, not only by the pattern of orthodoxy, but also by the marked similarities in the forms of revolt against that orthodoxy, appearing during 1956 in America and Poland, in Hungary, India, and in the Soviet Union itself. Fourth—and of most importance—such an approach tends to be infected by one of the cardinal falsehoods of Stalinism: the attempt to derive all analysis of political manifestations directly and in an over-simplified manner from economic causations, the belittling of the part played by men's ideas and moral attitudes in the making of history.

Thus we must view Stalinism as an ideology—a constellation of partisan attitudes and false, or partially false, ideas; and the Stalinist today acts or writes in certain ways, not because he is a fool or a hypocrite, but because he is the prisoner of false ideas. But this is not to suggest that Stalinism arose just because Stalin and his associates had certain wrong ideas. Stalinism is the ideology of a revolutionary elite which, within a particular historical context, degenerated into a bureaucracy. In understanding the central position of the Russian bureaucracy, first in developing and now in perpetuating, this ideology, we have a great deal to learn, from the analyses of Trotsky and even more from the flexible and undogmatic approach of Isaac Deutscher and others. Stalinism struck root within a particular social context, drawing nourishment from attitudes and ideas prevalent among the working-class and peasantry — exploited and culturally deprived classes; it was strengthened by Russian backwardness and by the hostility and active aggression of capitalist powers; out of these conditions there arose the bureaucracy which adapted the ideology to its own purposes and is interested in perpetuating it; and it is clear enough now to most people that the advance of world socialism is being blockaded by this bureaucracy, which controls the means by which it is attempting to prevent—not a new ideology—but a true consciousness from emerging. In Russia the struggle against Stalinism is at one and the same time a struggle against the bureaucracy, finding expression in the various pressures for de-centralisation, economic democracy, political liberty, which are becoming evident. But—important as this—we must not allow the particular forms which this revolt is taking in Russia and in Eastern Europe, to obscure the general character of the theoretical confrontation which is now taking place throughout the world communist movement. Stalinism did not develop just because certain economic and social conditions existed, but because these conditions provided a fertile climate within which false ideas took root, and these false ideas became in their turn a part of the social conditions. Stalinism has now outlived the social context within which it arose, and this

helps us to understand the character of the present revolt against it.

This is—quite simply—a revolt against the ideology, the false consciousness of the elite-into-bureaucracy, and a struggle to attain towards a true ("honest") self-consciousness; as such it is expressed in the revolt against dogmatism and the anti-intellectualism which feeds it. Second, it is a revolt against inhumanity—the equivalent of dogmatism in human relationships and moral conduct—against administrative, bureaucratic and twisted attitudes towards human beings. In both sense it represents a return to man: from abstractions and scholastic formulations to real men: from deceptions and myths to honest history: and so the positive content of this revolt may be described as "socialist humanism." It is humanist because it places once again real men and women at the centre of socialist theory and aspiration, instead of the resounding abstractions—the Party, Marxism-Leninism-Stalinism, the Two Camps, the Vanguard of the Working-Class—so dear to Stalinism. It is socialist because it re-affirms the revolutionary perspectives of Communism, faith in the revolutionary potentialities not only of the Human Race or of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat but of real men and women.

### THE 'DISEASE OF ORTHODOXY'

The revolt appeared first as a revolt against dogmatism. "Common meetings and political action of students and workers were the most outstanding feature of the October days in Poland." records Oscar Lange:

"The students had read the classical works of socialist theory, the works of Marx, Engels and Lenin. The reformers in the 16th century compared the reality of the Papal Church with the teaching of the Bible; in the same way, our students compared the reality of the Stalinist version of socialism with the teachings of Marxism and Leninism . . . That criticism was pretty devastating; the conclusion was the need for a new way of building socialism in our country." ("Monthly Review," Jan., 1957.)

Searching for the roots of dogmatism — the imposition of a system of authorised pre-conceptions upon reality rather than the derivation of ideas from the study of reality—the revolt (especially among the intellectuals) turned against institutional 'Zhdanovism.' The claims which reached their zenith in the period of Zhdanov's ascendancy can be recalled in the words of the "Modern Quarterly" (1947): "Zhdanov . . . speaks as a Marxist philosopher who has a world view embracing, not only politics and economics, but ethics, art, philosophy, and every phase of human activity." Since the Central Committee of the C.P.S.U.—or more accurately Stalin and Zhdanov—were the accredited masters of this "world view" it fell to them to exert a despotic authority upon the nation's intellectual and cultural life. The controlled intellectual life breeds dogmatic orthodoxy as a matter of course. "The establishment of an iron

control not only over works of art, but over the very process of creation., signifies a loss of confidence in the artistic intelligentsia" —so write two Soviet philosophers, in "Voprosy Filosofi," November, 1956:

"Even now . . . confidence has not been fully restored. As in the past, it is only the officials of government departments, among whom there are numerous time-servers, who enjoy full confidence. It is true that of late there has been a slight change—theatres have been given the right to draw up their own repertory plans . . . but unfortunately this still applies only to the classics and not to works on contemporary subjects."

Clearly a society which inhibits, the emergence of ideas in this way must find itself in increasing difficulties, economic, political, international. How does it come about that after forty years of 'Soviet power' the seats of knowledge (except technological and related sciences) should be filled by placemen, scholastics, and—

". . . the lofty, servile clown,

"Who with encroaching guile, keeps learning down."

Anti-intellectualism has deep roots within all working-class movements. It arises, first, from that intense loyalty to party or organisation (and consequent suspicion of the individualist or non-conformist) which is a necessary quality if the working-class is to be welded into an effective political force. Second, from the hostility of revolutionaries to the ideas prevailing in the ruling-class; and to those intellectuals who share its outlook and privileges and pervey its ideas. Moreover, in any socialist revolution there is bound to be a tension—and in a backward country like Russia an exceptionally acute tension—between the values of collectivism and individualism. Where the possibility for the free expression of the creative personality has existed only for the few, and has co-existed with the savage exploitation of the many, it is inevitable that the period of transition towards a fuller creative life for the many will at the same time limit the possibilities of life for the few. These tensions between individualist and social values, between collective discipline and that intellectual initiative which in the end must always arise from the individual, are inherent in the conflict between dying bourgeois and emergent socialist society. It is also to be expected that in any period of revolutionary change, the magnitude of the problems, the fervent inspiration of the times, will lead to the discouragement of speculative thought, to a literature of engagement, to a science with a practical utilitarian cast—such demands will inundate the socialist intellectual from outside, and he will feel the same promptings from within.

These tendencies, then, are to be expected in the phase of transition, although there are other, quite contrary, **tendencies both** within working-class life and within the socialist tradition. But

the tendencies are present, can be inflamed within certain historical and social contexts, and therefore can the more easily be expressed in the initial stages of building socialist society in both institutional and ideological forms. Stalinism found the institutional forms by eliminating opposition, imposing bureaucratic control over all intellectual activities, and destroying (both within and without Russia) democracy within the Communist Party, under the rigid structure of 'democratic centralism.' At the same time Stalinism congealed into rigid ideological form those very partisan or fragmentary concepts which express the outlook of a revolutionary elite leading classes both bitterly exploited and culturally deprived. Lenin, in the aftermath of revolution, foresaw the dangers:

"People dilate at too great length and too flippantly on 'proletarian culture.' We would be satisfied with real bourgeois culture for a start, and we would be glad, for a start, to be able to dispense with the cruder types of pre-bourgeois culture, i.e. bureaucratic or serf culture, &c. In matters of culture, haste and sweeping measures are the worst possible things."

But in the process of transforming Russia's backward peasantry into an advanced industrial society, Lenin's warning was swept aside. Stalinism glories in partisanship, and prefers the ideology, the false consciousness, to the true consciousness which Marx and Engels devoted their lives to free from the trammels of the false. The struggle to attain towards an objective understanding of social reality was denounced as "objectivism", a betrayal of revolutionary class commitment. As we shall see, Stalinism converted the concepts of "reflection" and of the "superstructure" into mechanical operations in a semi-automatic model. The, conscious processes of intellectual conflict were seen not as agencies in the making of history but as an irritating penumbra of illusions, or imperfect reflections, trailing behind economic forces. The ideas of critics or opponents were, and are, seen as symptoms of bourgeois conspiracy or penetration, targets for abuse, or fear, or suspicion. Hence it was easier to abolish the economic category from which the ideas arose—the old intelligentsia, the national minority—than to change their minds and their way of life. Hence, in the West, the intense self-distrust of the middle-class communist intellectual, the abasement before the "instinctive" lightness of working-class attitudes, which (commencing in a valid self-correction of attitudes arising from limited and partisan bourgeois experience) swings to its opposite and hangs like a smoke-pall of inhibitions preventing sturdy and confident intellectual growth. Hence also the most extreme, and almost pathological, forms of anti-intellectualism are found, not among militant proletarians, but among middle-class intellectuals who have become self-twisted into Stalinist apologists. Stalin at least "believed in" his own ideology. Stalinism, in the era of Kruschev, has lost all confidence in itself. Thus "Pravda" (December 26th, 1956):

"It would be a mistake to think that bourgeois propaganda does not influence the minds of Soviet people, notably those of the youth. Some comrades have misinterpreted the recent changes in the Party line . . . Imperialist reaction mobilises the whole arsenal of lies and **calumny** for a fresh crusade against the Marxist-Leninist world view. The reactionary press is full of lying phrases about so-called national Communism, with the sole aim of misleading the labouring masses. Under the influence of this propaganda, and from an unwillingness or inability correctly to analyse current events, some wavering elements are abandoning Marxism-Leninism or trying to revise it."

**But** Stalinism no longer knows what "it" is. How much easier if **the** people had no minds, if the "superstructure" was cut out and society was all "base": then this clumsy business of reflection could be done away with. Ideas are no longer seen as the medium; by which men apprehend the world, reason, argue, debate, and choose; they are like evil and wholesome smells arising from imperialist and proletarian cooking. One wonders whether the editors of "Pravda" ever speculate upon what Marx was **doing** all his life, in his gigantic effort to bring his concepts into rational order.

This economic automatism certainly is not Marxism. Over the years some Western Marxists have developed a kind of split mentality. On the one hand they have tried to develop creatively the flexible "ideas of movement" of Marx and Engels; on the other, they have failed to face the fact that Stalinism spoke in a different tongue. They have been aware (for example) that the Soviet Encyclopedia is full of the most blatant distortions of history and crass reductions of the ideas of outstanding thinkers and writers of the past into terms of their class origin, & c; but they have shrugged this off as the vulgarisation of a few hacks, and refused to concede that this flowed from the essential character of the dominant ideology in Soviet society. We should reflect that ideas are handled roughly by parties, institutions, social processes. The ideology of Victorian *laissez faire* millowners was not the same thing as the thought of Adam Smith and Bentham; the middle-class seized on certain ideas only—and these often imperfectly understood—and adapted them to their own interests. Much the same has been true of "Marxism" in Soviet society. The Soviet industrial manager is no more a disciple of Marx than was Mr. Bounderby a disciple of Adam Smith.

But this is not only a question of the vulgarisation of ideas. Economic automatism found increasing expression in Stalin's writings, and stands fully revealed in his "Concerning Marxism in Linguistics. Marx derived from the study of history the observation that "social being determines social consciousness." In class society men's consciousness of social reality, when viewed from the standpoint of historical effectiveness, takes its form from the class structure of that society; that is to say, people grow up within a social and cultural environment which is not that of "all men" but

that of certain men with interests opposed to those of other men: they experience life as members of a class, a nation, a family. But this is not an automatic reflex in the individual's mind; he both experiences and—within the limitations of the cultural pattern of his class (traditions, prejudices, &c.)—he thinks about his experience. Obviously men with similar experiences think differently: all sorts of weird, crazy, remarkable ideas are thought up; outstanding individuals, like Shakespeare or Marx, certainly do not "reflect" their class experience only. "Reflection" (in this context) is a term describing social processes (and one with unfortunate connotations); it can be observed in history that men with the same economic interests and class experience sift and accept those ideas which justify their class interests, forming from them a system of partisan, partially false ideas, an ideology. Those ideas which do not suit the interests of any effective social grouping are either stillborn, or (like More's "Utopia") remain suspended, without social effectiveness, until new social forces emerge. But it is of first importance that men do not only "reflect" experience passively; they also think about that experience; and their thinking affects the way they act. The thinking is the creative part of man, which, even in class society, makes him partly an agent in history, just as he is partly a victim of his environment. If this were not so, his consciousness would indeed trail passively behind his changing existence; or he would cease to change:

"The materialist doctrine that men are products of circumstance and upbringing and that, therefore, changed men are products of other circumstances and changed upbringing, forgets that circumstances are changed precisely by men and that the educator must himself be educated."— (Marx, Third Thesis on Feuerbach).

In all their historical analysis Marx and Engels always kept in view this dialectical interaction between social consciousness (both active and passive) and social being. But in trying to explain their ideas they expressed them as a make-belief 'model', the "basis" of social relations (in production) and the "superstructure" of various branches of thought, institutions, etc., arising from it and reacting upon it. In fact, no such basis and superstructure ever existed; it is a metaphor to help us to understand what does exist—men, who act, experience, think and act again. It turns out that it is a bad and dangerous model, since Stalin used it not as an image of men changing in society but as a mechanical model, operating semi-automatically and independently of conscious human agency. Thus Stalin declared the "superstructure":

"is connected with production only indirectly, through the economy, through the basis. The superstructure therefore reflects changes in the level of development of the productive forces not immediately and not directly, but only after changes in the basis, through the prism of the changes wrought in the basis by the changes in production."

This is, of course, ludicrous: it is scarcely translatable into human beings at all. An idea is not a reflex of a gasometer, no matter through what "prism." This reduces human consciousness to a form of erratic, involuntary response to steel-mills and brickyards, which are in a spontaneous process of looming and becoming. But men are conscious of themselves: this "economic base" is made up of human actions—labouring, distributing, selling — and if by their actions they change their relations with one another (some becoming owners, others serfs) they are bound to experience this too, and it will very much affect their ideas. But because Marx reduced his concept of **process** to a clumsy static model, Stalinism evolved this mystique wherein blind, non-human, material forces are endowed with volition—even consciousness—of their own. Creative man is changed to a passive **thing**: and things, working through prisms, are endowed with creative will. Man's role is to serve these things, to bring more and more productive forces into being:

"The superstructure is created by the basis precisely in order to serve it, to actively help it to take shape and consolidate itself, to actively strive for the elimination of the old watchword basis, together with its superstructure."

How far we have come from real men and women, from the "educators and the educated"! Hence Stalin's statement that historical science "can become as precise a science as, let us say, biology." This is nonsense. Scientific techniques may be used in the study of history, we may speak of employing a scientific **method**, but we will never attain to a **precise** science of history, like a natural science, because of man's creative agency. No "basis" ever invented a steam engine, or sat on the National Coal Board.

It is, then, a poor model which in Stalin's hands led into dangerous abstractions. Ideas hostile to socialism or to Stalinism were seen as the last desperate rallying of an old "superstructure": it is far easier to be inhumane if one takes a non-human model. This gross fear of unorthodox thought informing a bureaucracy with the means at its disposal for manipulating opinion and eliminating dissent has brought some socialists to the point of despair. It seemed possible that the human potential of socialist society might be constricted into some monstrous bureaucratic-military form when men were on the very threshold of entering into the classless society; a constriction which might delay the human fruition of socialism for centuries, or even lead on to its own destruction. The dialectical interaction between men and their social environment which Marx saw as the dynamic force of history appeared to be frozen. But (Blake's warning): "Expect poison from the standing water." "Our view shows that circumstances make men **just as much as men** make circumstances." ("German Ideology.") The creative act by which men, themselves the product of their circumstances, change these circumstances in their turn, and thus change themselves, was impeded by a false consciousness buttressed by

the organs of state and involving a falsification of historical evidence upon a gigantic scale. Ideas were **explained away**, had **no reality**, except as **symptoms** (passive mirror-reflections) of class being — on the one hand, "weapons" of the proletariat; on the other, evidences of bourgeois penetration. If unorthodox ideas appeared, it was the business of the .O.G.P.U. to furnish evidence of the "conspiracy" which they must "reflect." We learn to our cost that ideas are indeed real and material forces within society: that false, warped, fragmentary ideas can leave their evidence in the thronged corpses, the barbed-wire encampments, economic dislocation and international conflict. We re-learn (what Marx surely understood) that man is human by virtue of his culture, the transmission of experience from generation to generation; that his history is the record of his struggle truly to apprehend his own social existence; and that Marx and Engels, through their discoveries, hoped to assist in the liberation of men from false, partial, class consciousness, thereby liberating them from victimhood to blind economic causation, and extending immeasurably the region of their choice and conscious agency. Hence the concept of mankind **mastering** its own history, of socialism bringing "pre-history" to an end, and—by enabling mankind to approximate more closely than ever before to a true self-consciousness—enthroning for the first time the human reason and conscience: "man—

"Equal, unclassed, tribeless, and nationless,  
Exempt from awe, worship, degree, the king  
Over himself . . ."

And Marxism itself is not (as Stalin described- it) "the scientific expression of the fundamental interests of the working-class," but (in nature) "means no more than simply conceiving nature just as it exists without any foreign admixture" (Engels): and (in social reality) the struggle to attain towards a similar objective self-consciousness (without the foreign admixture of class ideology) by changing men of their own changing existence. The Soviet Encyclopaedists have forgotten the continuity of human culture, that man's true knowledge and self-knowledge has advanced through the zig-zags of the distorted and the partisan. What has advanced has not been a "weapon," or a dialectic, or a new class-bound ideology, but the sum of the knowledge of man.

## WHAT IS A 'MISTAKE'?

The first feature of Stalinism, then, is anti-intellectualism, the belittling of conscious human agency in the making of history; and the revolt against it is not the revolt of a new ideology but the revolt of reason against irrationalism. A second feature of this revolt, equally challenging, equally hopeful, is the revolt against **inhumanity**, the revolt against the dogmatism and abstractions of

the heart, and the emergence of a warm, personal and humane socialist morality — moral attitudes always present in the rank and file of the communist movement and within Soviet society, but distorted by Stalinist ideology, institutions, and bureaucratic practices.

Throughout the world, East and West, people are asking the same questions. By what vile alchemy do some communists, who spring from the common people, struggle, sacrifice, and endure incredible hardships on the people's behalf, become transformed into monsters of iniquity like Beria and Rakosi—lying, slandering and perjuring, destroying their own comrades, incarcerating hundreds of thousands, deporting whole nations? Communists are asking of their own leaders, the people are asking of Communist Parties, would you also act like this if you were in power? Are those minor "mistakes" which we have witnessed—character assassination, dissemination of 'wrong information,' bad faith—signs that you also would follow the same pattern? Like old Lear in the storm, humanity regards; the leaders of world communism and cries out: "Is there any cause in nature that breeds these hard hearts?"

Stalinism is incapable of giving any answers to these questions. The Stalinist apologist simply throws his hands across his eyes and refuses to recognise their existence. Thus George Matthews:

"For Marxists every political decision is good or bad according to whether or not it serves the interests of the working people and the cause of socialism." ("World News," 30th June, 1956).

Thus John Gollan:

"If you disagree with your opponent's political line, it is easy enough to call it 'immoral.' But what has this to do with Marxism and, the determining of a class position on events?

"The moral estimation flows from, and cannot be separated from, the political estimation." ("World News," 9th March, 1957).

How many and how unaccountable, it seems, have been the wrong "political estimations" in the past thirty years! And by what standard can we be sure that they are wrong? Can we be sure only by the evidence of "practice" which Rakosi—at length and after much diligence—procured: when the people are tormented and infuriated beyond endurance and break into revolt? Let us bring to these abstractions the criticism of life: for example, the trial of Traicho Rostov.

Rostov was born in 1897, shot in 1949, rehabilitated in 1956. Secretary of the Bulgarian C.P. both during the underground struggle early in the war, and in the three years after liberation, he was condemned to death as a traitor, saboteur, wrecker and agent of British intelligence. His trial differs from the general run,

in that Rostov refused to plead guilty in court. A vignette from the trial sets the tone. In 1942 the leading members of the underground central committee in Sofia were arrested and condemned to death. Rostov's sentence was subsequently commuted to life imprisonment, although most of his comrades were executed. This fact was alleged as proof of his having broken under police methods and become an agent. Interrogated by the President of the Court, Rostov explained that Mladenov, the authority who had announced to him the commutation of his sentence, did so on higher orders:

Kostov: 'Mladenov stated . . . that the Minister of War . . . asked him 'How many death sentences were being provided for in the trial?' He replied that about 9 or 10, not definitely, were being provided for. The Minister of War had asked him: 'On Whom?' He had begun mentioning their names and having pronounced the first six names, coming to the seventh, i.e. to my name, the Minister of War had said that six were enough, but from the seventh on, i.e. from Traicho Kostov on . . .

The President: 'One moment, please. Do you know who might have taken steps before the Minister of War . . .'

Kostov: 'The Minister of War had stated that this was being done . . . on the order of the King.'

The President: 'Do you know to what this care on the part of the then King might be due?'

Kostov: 'I did not ask, Comrade President. (Laughter in the hall) I asked no one on this matter. I did not undertake any investigation.'

The President: 'But you maintained now, that your conduct there was the conduct of a Communist?'

Kostov: 'Yes, it was.'

The President: 'Why did the King then show this peculiar concern for you, but showed no concern for the other friends of yours, who, as you have said, were much less active than you? Have the Prosecutors any questions?'

"Have the Prosecutors any questions?" For, as the trial unfolds, all are prosecutors: the President, the co-defendants, the lawyers for prosecution and for 'defence.' Every random fact — a chance encounter with Tito in Moscow in 1933, an accidental visit to the house of the head of the British mission, past party decisions — is woven into the fabric of a monstrous slander. Before the war "he advanced hostile, left-sectarian Trotskyist ideas in relation to the peasants . . . and helped the monarcho-fascist power." After the war, as Chairman of the Economic Planning Commission, he was responsible for every economic dislocation—the closing of a lemonade factory here and a bread shortage there—which might have aroused discontent among the people. The man who is thus robbed of his honour and accused of betraying his own life's work is excluded from the witness box, and his 'defence' handed over to a counsel who commences by apologising for "defending" such a traitor, and concludes:

"Comrade Judges, it is my duty to declare before you in accordance with my conscience: as a lawyer, as a citizen of our Republic and as your true assistant, evaluating all these data . . .

I admit that indeed the facts of the indictment are proved . . . This is the revealed truth."

The defendants are allowed a 'last plea.' One by one they come forward: "Citizen Judges, I plead guilty . . . I deeply repent." Once again, Rostov broke the pattern:

Kostov: "I consider it the duty of my conscience to declare to the Court and through it to Bulgarian public opinion, that I have never been at the service of British Intelligence, that I have never taken part in the criminal conspiratorial plans of Tito and his clique . . .

The President: What do you want of the Court ?

Kostov: . . . that I have always had an attitude . . .

The President: What do you want of the Court ?

Kostov: . . . of respect and esteem for the Soviet Union."

A co-defendant is hustled forward to denounce Rostov once more as "the chief organiser and leader of the anti-State conspiracy . . . coward . . . traitor." This time the President does not intervene.

And what did Rostov "want of the Court"? Justice would have been too much to have asked for. What equal is there for the bitter irony with which this man, twice tried for his life before a court in which there was no justice to be found, replies to the Judge, "I did not undertake any investigation." But we—we surely must **undertake** some investigation into the moral conduct of his accusers? What moral touchstone impelled Rostov to defend, before a court of unjust Communists, the honour of his conduct as a Communist? Why should he feel it to be the "duty of my conscience" to uphold this honour, when all around him were conscienceless?

This is not a case of some chance injustice committed in the heat of revolutionary ferment. Excesses of violence in times of class confrontation, the vengeance of popular anger against quislings and collaborators — such actions can be understood, or justified, as the rough justice of the people. But the Rostov case — which is symptomatic of a thousand other actions—is a case of a deliberate, carefully-conceived act of injustice. It is in no sense an accident of passion. Its intention is plain. The removal of a political opponent is only a minor objective. It is as important to rob him of his honour as of his life. The purpose, first, is to deceive the people. As such, the action corrupts not only all those who take part in the betrayal and the deception: it will result, also, in tendencies towards the corruption of society. Its further purpose is to create a climate of fear and suspicion, within which the manipulators of power can intimidate opposition; and especially opposition from within the ranks of the Communist Party, where many of the most principled and courageous socialists will be found.

Confronted by such facts as these, the Stalinist argument as to the identity of moral and political "estimation" falls to pieces. No doubt Rakosi or Beria may have "estimated" that such actions were "in the interests of the working-class": they temporarily

strengthened the power of the state, stamped the people into "monolithic unity," drove terror into the hearts of opponents, and so on. But we are concerned not with the "estimations" of the initiators of these actions but with the moral degeneracy which such actions reveal. "Wrong theories" do not frame-up, slander and kill old comrades, but wrong men, with wrong attitudes to their fellow-men. For Ruschev to tell us that Stalin "believed" he was defending the interests of the working-class is beside the point. The scourges of mankind, from Genghiz Khan to the agents of the Inquisition, believed themselves to be instruments of some ultimate good; history may bestow a tithe of its compassion upon them, but the rest is reserved for their victims.

We feel these actions to be wrong, because our moral judgements do not depend upon abstractions or remote historical contingencies, but arise from concrete responses to the particular actions, relations, and attitudes of human beings. No amount of speculation upon intention or outcome can mitigate the horror of the scene. Those moral values which the people have created in their history, which the writers have encompassed in their poems and plays, come into judgement on the proceedings. As we watch the counsel for the defence spin out his hypocrasies, the gorge rises, and those archetypes of treachery, in literature and popular myth, from Judas to Iago, pass before our eyes. The fourteenth century ballad singer would have known this thing was wrong. The student of Shakespeare knows it is wrong. The Bulgarian peasant, who recalls that Rostov and Chervenkov had eaten together the bread and salt of comradeship, knows it is wrong. Only the "Marxist-Leninist-Stalinist" thinks it was — a mistake.

## QUESTIONS OF MORALITY

-Surely after committing—and condoning—such "mistakes" as these, Marxism is condemned to the derision or disgust of history?

Professor G. D. H. Cole has drawn, once again, this conclusion. "The entire structure of Communist ideology rests," he declares, on the belief that "there is in the real world no morality except class morality":

"It was therefore justifiable and necessary for the proletariat to use any method and to take any action that would help it towards victory over its class-enemies . . . If Communists abstained from certain kinds of action treated as 'unmoral' by bourgeois moralists . . . they did so solely because they thought them more likely to harm than to further the revolutionary cause." ("New Statesman," 20th April, 1957).

Such events as the Rostov trial and the suppression of the Hungarian Revolution reveal "the foundations of Communist philosophy nakedly exposed in action." "Real" Communists may quibble

about the tactical—or political—expediency of such actions, but they have no grounds for moral revulsion. Those who feel such revulsion are not "real" Communists, but are left-wing democratic socialists who do not, at bottom, accept Marx's ideas.

In phrasing his argument this way, I think that Professor Cole mis-states the nature of the conflict now taking place within the world communist movement. The premise which he advances ("class morality") can certainly be derived from certain writings of Marx and Engels, and more especially of Lenin, but it is certainly not the whole of their meaning, implicit and explicit. And the conclusions derived from it are — it seems to me — an accurate summary, not of "real" Communism but of the partisan ideology of Stalinism, which emerged in particular conditions and which has never been co-terminous with the whole communist movement. Hence it may equally be said that this conflict is the revolt against the ideology of Stalinism, and a struggle to make explicit the true, humanist content of "real" Communism.

This distortion of moral values also finds a root in the conditions of revolutionary struggle. It is easy, in our parochial island, to forget these conditions: the repression of the Commune, 1905, civil war and famine, the massacre of Shanghai, the fascist terror. I recall the experiences of some of those Bulgarian partisans, with whom my brother fought. One—a young peasant—had had all his hair torn from his head, when beaten in the fascist police station; a friend had been thrown alive into the boilers of the Sofia police; another had disappeared, leaving no trace, until his signet ring and gold teeth had been found in the drawer of a police agent. This collaborator had poured acid into the wounds of partisans. That man had broken under indescribable torture and been forced to enter the service of the police. The movement was penetrated by agents. Men lived in exile, underground, in daily fear of arrest . . .

Such facts emphasise the crucible within which Stalinism—with its emphasis on hard, completely selfless, unbreakable, steel-like qualities—was cast. Stalin, over Lenin's bier, was engaging in neither rhetoric nor hypocrisy: "We Communists are people of a peculiar cut. We are cut out of peculiar stuff . . ." Men were killed, betrayed, deserted: only the Party went on. The comrades themselves might be anonymous, unknown to each other. In storm and defeat, in concentration camp and partisan detachment, there grew up that intensity of self-abnegation, that sense of acting as the instrument of historical necessity, above all, that intense loyalty to the Party, as the summation of both personal and social aspirations. In Spain, in China, in Greece, in Yugoslavia, such Communist virtues signed the human record with nobility. Such virtues define the "conduct of a Communist."

But Stalinism, itself bred from such storm, turned these

virtues into instruments of destruction. The centre of moral authority was removed from the community or the conscience of the individual and entrusted to the Party. Loyalty to Party bred hostility to all 'factions' or non-conformists. A partisan ideology was buttressed by partisan moral attitudes: loyalty to Party and Cause displaced loyalty to particular human beings. Hence the phenomenon of the great purges when Stalinism found enemies in every street, and—in the name of the Party—friend denounced friend, husband denounced wife. Hence those victims who went to their deaths self-accused—even, in some cases, convinced of their own 'objective' treason—in the name of loyalty to the Party. Hence, the demoralisation of Communist victims, who found the strength to endure fascist tortures but who entered the jails of the O.G.P.U. divided against themselves. And yet all this human oppression took place under the slogans of Communism. The victims were forced to confess to betrayals of communist principles and "communist conduct." By this alchemy human qualities were transformed into their opposites, loyalty bred treachery, self-sacrifice bred self-accusation, devotion to the people bred abstract, administrative violence.

This, then, is the soil of social reality which fostered the growth of those immoral features which have congealed in Stalinist ideology. Together with anti-intellectualism, they are embodied in institutional form in the rigid forms of 'democratic centralism' of the Communist Parties. These remove the centre of moral authority from the individual conscience and confer it to the leadership of the Party. Even in Britain, extremes of loyalty, identification of the Party with personal and social aspirations, reveal themselves in attitudes towards the critic who threatens to break the "unity of the Party" of intense hatred, which are rarely displayed towards the avowed enemy—the capitalist. Such attitudes are, of course, to be found in all factional squabbles in isolated religious or political sects; where—as in China or Italy—the parties have mass membership, so they are moralised or humanised by the moral attitudes prevalent among the masses of the people. But the most serious thing is that these humanist values (which always and in every country inform the feelings of the majority of the Communist rank and file) do not find expression in Communist orthodoxy; whereas destructive, partisan, anti-humanist and abstract attitudes have found sanction, perpetuation, and even glorification in Stalinist ideology.

Professor Cole has delineated this ideology in outline; although I think it is not so much an amorality (the ends justify the means) as an immorality (a predisposition towards morally repugnant means, an abstract instead of concrete attitude to men) which finds expression in Stalinism. Its ideological form arises, once again, from the mechanical expression of the "superstructure-base"

relationship; because (Engels) "the economic movement finally asserts itself as necessary," Stalinism attempts to short-circuit the processes of social life by disclosing "economic necessity," by asserting economic, i.e. class, interests as the only "real" sources of human motivation.<sup>(3)</sup> This entirely mistakes man's nature, as revealed in his unfolding history. The Stalinist is fixated by Pavlov's dogs: if a bell was rung, they salivated. If an economic crisis comes the people will salivate good "Marxist-Leninist" belief. But Roundhead, Leveller, and Cavalier, Chartist and Anti-Corn Law Leaguer, were not dogs; they did not salivate their creeds in response to economic stimuli; they loved and hated, argued, thought, and made moral choices. Economic changes impell changes in social relationships, in relations between real men and women; and these are apprehended, felt, reveal themselves in feelings of injustice, frustration, aspirations for social change; all is fought out in the human consciousness, including the moral consciousness. If this were not so, men would be—not dogs—but ants, adjusting their society to upheavals in the terrain. But men make their own history: they are part agents, part victims: it is precisely the element of agency which distinguishes them from the beasts, which is the **human** part of man, and which it is the business of our consciousness to increase.

Nowhere is this deformation of thought, seen more clearly than in the Stalinist attitude to the arts. At bottom, the Stalinist simply does not understand what the arts are **about**: he can see "good" or "bad" political ideas ("content") expressed in artistic form: but he is puzzled to understand why it is necessary to dress them up in this way—except as a kind of salad-dressing to make political theory more palatable, or else as forms of entertainment, amusement, relaxation. Thus the Stalinist can make speeches about cultural amenities under socialism; there will be more three-decker concerts, more editions of the classics; these will "enrich" the people's leisure. But the understanding of the arts as the supreme expression of man's imaginative and moral consciousness, as media, through which men struggle to apprehend reality, order their responses, change their own attitudes and therefore change themselves—all this escapes from the categories of Stalinist mechanistic thought. Hence the enforced abasement of the moral and imagina-

(3) A comparison of the European communist press of thirty years ago with the Stalinist press which reached its apotheosis in the incredible **For a Lasting Peace**. For a People's Democracy, shows the loss of moral and emotional energies, the replacement of man by resounding abstract nouns. Compare also our "Daily Worker" with the Chartist or early socialist press. If millions are spent on armaments, people must be shown that it raises the price of beer and fags; an appeal to their moral conscience is "idealist" or—if attempted—phoney and tongue-in-cheek. Hence also the dwindling appeal of Communism to young people, whose moral and intellectual idealism is not engaged.

five faculties before the seat of political judgment. Hence political judgment is not envisaged as the—unattainable but approximate—summation of those moral, imaginative, intellectual processes which are carried on throughout a society; but as the adjustment of human beings to the dictation of expediency or of "economic necessity." If their consciousness can be adjusted as well, so much the better; and this is the role assigned to the arts.

This, then, is the second decisive feature of Stalinist ideology: like all ideologies, it is a form of "self-alienation"; man forgets himself in abstractions, he is delivered over to the State, the Party, the sanctity of public property. Is Professor Cole right to say that this is "real" Communist theory, and can logically be derived from Marx? There is colour for this view to be found, first, in the failure of Marx and Engels to make explicit their moral concepts, and in the passive connotation sometimes attached by them to the concept of "reflection" (as opposed to "cognition"). Second, in the tone which they adopted within particular—and now easily forgotten—historical conditions in their polemics against various forms of "utopian" and "idealist" theories. But implicit within their historical method, explicit in their own moral evaluations, there is a total rejection of such moral nihilism.

Much confusion starts from Engels' statement in "Anti-Duhring":

"As society has hitherto moved in class antagonisms, morality was always a class morality; it has either justified the domination and interests of the ruling class, or, as soon as the oppressed class has become powerful enough, it has represented the revolt against this domination and the future interests of the oppressed. That in this process there has been on the whole progress in morality, as in all other branches of human knowledge, cannot be doubted. But we have not yet passed beyond class morality. A really human morality which transcends class antagonisms and their legacies in thought becomes possible only at a stage of society which has not only overcome class contradictions but has even forgotten them in practical life."

It is important to realise that this statement commences with an observation derived from the study of history: it is not a statement about what morality is, or ought to be. Past moralities have not been the same thing as class interests; they have justified or challenged these interests. It is self-evident that if the moral concepts dominant in a society challenge the interests of the ruling class, these concepts must either be without effect upon conduct (and express themselves in mysticism, retreat from action) or they must be revolutionary in implication. This then is a statement about the actually observed moral conduct of men in history; although, as such it demands qualification in that men's moral consciousness may profoundly affect the form in which social antagonisms find expression, may mitigate or exacerbate their conflicts, in the same way that the degree of approximation to