

Where is Britain Going?

Leon Trotsky

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Preface to the American Edition

The present work is devoted to the future destiny of Britain. But it may also interest the American reader – firstly, because Britain occupies all too great a place in the world., and secondly, because the United States and Great Britain are twin stars, and the faster the one dies out, the more brightly the other flares up.

The conclusion which I reach in my study is that Britain is approaching, at full speed, an era of great revolutionary upheavals. Of course, British secret policemen and their American disciples will say that I am engaging in propaganda for a proletarian revolution – as if one could alter the direction of development of a great nation from outside, by means of a pamphlet! In fact, however, I am merely attempting, by analyzing the leading factors in Britain's historical development, to elucidate the historical path down which she has been thrust by external and internal conditions. In this respect, to make accusations of revolutionary interference in other people's business is like accusing an astronomer of causing the solar eclipse that he had forecast.

Naturally I do not mean by this that astronomical events can be identified with social phenomena. The former occur outside of us and the latter through us. But this does not mean that historical events take place solely at our volition and can be steered by means of pamphlets. Books and newspapers which have as their task the defence and protection of capitalism, British capitalism included, have been and are being published on a far greater scale than ones directed against it. The matter is not, however, decided this way. This or that idea can exert an effect only in so far as it is rooted in the material conditions of social development. Britain is moving towards revolution because the epoch of capitalist decline has set in. And if culprits are to be sought, then in answer to the question who and what are propelling Britain along the road to revolution we must say: not Moscow but New York.

Such a reply might seem paradoxical. Nevertheless it corresponds wholly to reality. The powerful and ever-growing world pressure of the United States makes the predicament of British industry, British trade, British finance and

British diplomacy increasingly insoluble and desperate.

The United States cannot help striving towards expansion on the world market, otherwise excess will threaten its own industry with a 'stroke'. The United States can only expand at the expense of Britain. Speeches on the revolutionary import of this or that "Moscow" pamphlet can only produce an ironic smile when the economic life of a great nation is being choked in the steel vice of American dominance by Mr. Dawes's ¹ patented system. Under the cloak of today's "pacification" and "recovery" of Europe, huge revolutionary and military upheavals and conflicts are being prepared for the future. Mr. Julius Barnes ², who stands close to the Washington Department of Commerce, proposes that the European debtor countries be allocated those sectors of the world market where poor and debt-ridden European cousins will not hinder the expansion of their transatlantic creditor. By helping to restore the European monetary system the United States is merely bursting one inflationary illusion after another, and helping Europe to translate its poverty and dependence into the language of hard currency. By either pressurizing or giving deferments to creditors, by granting or refusing credit to European countries, the United States is creating for them an increasingly constricted, economically dependent, but ultimately untenable position; which also provides the conditions for revolutionary social upheavals. The Communist International ³ today is ... almost a conservative institution by comparison with the New York Stock Exchange. Mr. Morgan ⁴, Mr. Dawes and Mr. Julius Barnes are the busy artificers of the approaching European revolutions.

To a considerable degree the United States is carrying out its work, in Europe and throughout the world, with Britain's collaboration and through her agency. But for Britain this "collaboration" is only the form of a growing dependence. Britain is, as it were, ushering the United States in only for her to take possession. While surrendering their world domination British diplomats and businessmen introduce the new ruler of the world to their former clients. The co-operation between America and Britain masks the deepest world-wide antagonism between

¹Drawn up in April 1924 by a committee headed by the American financier and general, Charles G. Dawes, later US Vice President in 1925-29. The plan provided for a scale of annual payments of German war reparations and reorganization of the Reichsbank, and recommended a large foreign loan for Germany.

²A major American financier, chairman of many companies and US Wheat Director under President Wilson. He had extensive business interests in Europe and received decorations from a number of European states after the First World War.

³The international organization of socialist parties formed in 1919 under the leadership of Lenin and the Soviet Communist Party to unite all those groups fighting for a consistent revolutionary Marxist policy. It embarked on a struggle to build new communist parties in opposition to the degenerated reformist organizations of the working class. From 1924 it became transformed into an apparatus to serve the interests of the bureaucracy in the Soviet Union. It was wound up by Stalin in 1943 as part of his deal with British and US imperialism during the war.

⁴John Pierpoint Morgan (1867-1943). Head of the American international banking firm founded by his grandfather, controlling large sections of shipping, railways and steel. Played a leading part in raising loans for the British war effort from 1914 to 1919.

the two powers and is preparing for fearful conflicts, perhaps in the none-too-distant future.

There is no space within the limits of a brief preface to discuss the destiny of America herself. It is clear that nowhere today does capital feel itself so secure as there. American capital has grown enormously, making itself strong first through the war in Europe and now by means of “pacification” and “rehabilitation”. But for all its might American capitalism is not a self-sufficient whole but a part of the world economy. Furthermore, the greater United States industry grows the deeper becomes its dependence on the world market. While driving Europe more and more into a blind alley American capital is preparing wars and revolutionary upheavals which will then strike back at the economy of the United States with a terrible rebound. Such is the perspective for America herself. America occupies only the second place in the line of revolutionary development. The American bourgeoisie have still to watch the great collapse of their elder sister in Europe. But the inescapable hour will strike for American capitalism too. The magnates of the American trusts, the great plantation owners, oil tycoons and exporters, the billionaires of New York, Chicago and San Francisco are irreversibly, if unconsciously, fulfilling their revolutionary function. And the American proletariat will ultimately fulfil theirs.

–24th May 1925

Preface

Britain today stands, at a point of crisis – perhaps more so than any other capitalist country. But Britain’s crisis is to a large extent also a crisis for four of the world’s continents, and at least the beginning of a shift for the fifth – and today the most powerful – America. At the same time the political development of Britain exhibits great peculiarities, flowing from the whole of her past, and in large measure blocking the path before her. Without cramming our account with facts and figures which the reader can easily find for himself in reference books and studies of Britain’s economic situation, we have set ourselves to identify and characterize those historical factors and circumstances that will define Britain’s development in the immediate period. We shall deal with Britain in particular and not the British Empire, with the metropolis and not the colonies and dominions. The latter have their own line of development which increasingly diverges from that followed by the metropolis.

Our account will be largely critical and polemical. History is made through men. An assessment of the vital forces making today’s history cannot but be an active one. In order to understand what the classes, the parties, and their leaders are struggling for, and what awaits them tomorrow, we must cut through the dense mass of political conventions, lies and hypocrisy, the all-pervading parliamentary “cant”⁵. Under these circumstances polemic becomes an indispensable method

⁵Cant: A particular form of conventional falsehood, tacitly acknowledged by all as a type

of political analysis. Nonetheless the question we have set ourselves, and to which we shall try to find the answer, has an objective character: “Where is Britain going?”

The Decline of Britain

Capitalist Britain was formed by the political revolution in the middle of the seventeenth century and the so-called “industrial revolution” at the end of the eighteenth century. Britain emerged from her civil war and Cromwell’s dictatorship as a small nation numbering hardly 1,500,000 families. She entered the 1914 imperialist war as an empire containing within its frontiers a fifth of humanity.

The English revolution of the seventeenth century, the school of puritanism ⁶, Cromwell’s harsh school, prepared the British nation, and its middle classes in particular, for their subsequent world role. From the middle of the eighteenth century Britain’s world power was undisputed. Britain ruled the ocean and in the process created a world market.

In 1826 a British Conservative publicist depicted the age of industry in the following terms:

The age which now discloses itself to our view promises to be the age of industry . . . By industry, alliances shall be dictated and national friendships shall be formed . . . The prospects which are now opening to England almost exceed the boundaries of thought; and can be measured by no standard found in history . . . The manufacturing industry of England maybe fairly computed as four times greater than that of all the other continents taken collectively, and sixteen such continents as Europe could not manufacture so much cotton as England does . . . ⁷

Great Britain’s colossal industrial domination over the rest of Europe and the whole of the world laid the foundations of her wealth and her unequalled world position. The age of industry was at the same time the age of Britain’s world hegemony.

of social hypocrisy. According to Carlyle, *caw* is the art “whereby a man speaks openly what he does not mean”. In Parliamentary-Protestant Britain this art-form has been carried to extraordinary heights – or depths. – *L.D.T.*

⁶The Puritans were those sections of English Protestants in the 16th and 17th centuries who considered that the Protestant reformation had not gone far enough. They wanted less ritual and more democratic forms of church organization. Their opposition to bishops was of a piece with their political opposition to the rule of monarchy, an intellectual opposition to reliance on tradition and superstition, and a social ethic which combined a belief in the virtues of work and individual small-ownership. They were in effect the English bourgeoisie and provided the ideology of the various opposition groups in the 1640 Revolution.

⁷Quoted in M. Beer, **A History of British Socialism** (1919), Vol.1, p.283, from **Quarterly Review**, June-August 1826, pp.92-9

From 1850 to 1880 Britain became the industrial school for Europe and America. But her own monopoly position was undermined by this very fact. From the 1880s Britain visibly began to weaken. Onto the world stage came new states, with Germany in the front rank. At the same time the fact that Britain was the first-born of capitalist states began to reveal its pernicious, conservative aspects. The doctrine of free trade was dealt a heavy blow by German competition.

It became clear during the final quarter of the last century that Britain was being elbowed out of her position of world domination: and by the beginning of the present century this had produced an internal uncertainty and ferment among the upper classes, and a deep molecular process of an essentially revolutionary character in the working class. At the centre of these processes were mighty conflicts between labour and capital. It was not only the aristocratic status of British industry in the world, but also the privileged position of the “aristocracy of labour” within Britain that was shaken. 1911 to 1913 were years of unparalleled class battles by miners, railwaymen and other transport workers. In August 1911 a national, in other words a general strike developed on the railways. During those days a dim spectre of revolution hung over Britain. The leaders made every effort to paralyze the movement. Their motive was “patriotism”: the strike was on at the time of the Agadir incident ⁸ which threatened to lead to war with Germany. Today it is well known that the Prime Minister invited the workers’ leaders to a secret meeting, and called on them to “save the nation”. And the leaders did all they could to strengthen the bourgeoisie, and thereby to prepare for the imperialist slaughter.

The 1914-1918 war seemed to cut the revolutionary process short. It put a stop to the development of the strike movements. By bringing about the break-up of Germany it had apparently restored Britain to her role of world hegemony. But it was soon to be revealed that Britain’s decline, while temporarily checked, had in reality only been deepened by the war.

In the years of 1917 to 1920 the British labour movement again passed through an extremely stormy period. Strikes took place on a broad scale. MacDonald signed manifestoes from which, today, he would recoil in horror. Only after 1920 did the movement return within bounds; after “Black Friday”, when the Triple Alliance of miners’, railwaymen’s and transport workers’ leaders betrayed the general strike. Paralyzed in the sphere of economic action, the energy of the masses was directed on to the political plane. The Labour Party grew as if out of the earth itself.

In what does the change in the external and internal situation of Britain consist?

During the war the gigantic economic domination of the United States had

⁸On July 1 1911 a German warship visited the Moroccan port of Agadir allegedly to protect German interests against French expansion. The British government threatened action against a German presence so close to Gibraltar, and the threat of imperialist war was averted by a deal under which Germany was conceded part of French Congo to compensate for her withdrawal from Morocco.

demonstrated itself wholly and completely. The United States' emergence from overseas provincialism at once shifted Britain into a secondary position.

The "co-operation" between America and Britain is the momentarily peaceful form within which Britain's continuing retreat will proceed.

This "co-operation" may at this or that moment be directed against a third power; nonetheless, the fundamental antagonism in the world is that between Britain and America, and all the other antagonisms which seem more acute and more immediately threatening at a given moment can be understood and assessed only on the basis of this conflict of Britain with America.

Anglo-American co-operation is preparing the way for a war just as a period of reforms prepares a revolution. The very fact that, by taking the path of "reforms" (i.e., compulsory "deals" with America) Britain will abandon one position after another, must force her in the end to resist" Great Britain's productive forces, and most of all her living productive forces, the proletariat, no longer correspond to her place in the world market. Hence the chronic unemployment. The commercial and industrial (and the military and naval) pre-eminence of Britain has, in the past, almost safeguarded the links between the parts of the empire" As early as the end of the last century Reeves, the Prime Minister of New Zealand, wrote: "Two things maintain the present relations between the colonies and Britain: 1) their belief that Britain's policy is in the main a policy of peace, and 2) their belief that Britain rules the waves." The second condition was, of course, the main one. This loss of the "rule of the waves" goes hand-in-hand with the build-up of centrifugal forces within the empire. Imperial unity is increasingly threatened by the diverging interests of the dominions and the struggles of the colonies.

The development of military technique militates against Great Britain's security. Aviation and chemical warfare is reducing the tremendous historical advantages of an island position to zero. America, that gigantic "island" walled off on both sides by oceans, remains invulnerable. But Britain's greatest centres of population, and London above all, can face a murderous air attack from the continent of Europe in the course of a few hours.

Having lost the advantages of inaccessibility, the British government is compelled to take an increasingly direct part in purely European matters and in European military pacts. Britain's overseas possessions, her dominions, have no interest in this policy. They are interested in the Pacific Ocean, the Indian Ocean and to some extent in the Atlantic but not in the slightest in the English Channel. At the first world clash this divergence of interests will turn into a gaping abyss in which imperial links will be buried. The political life of Great Britain is, in anticipation of this, paralyzed by internal frictions and is doomed to be essentially a policy of passivity, with a consequent worsening of the empire's world position.

Meantime, military spending must form an ever-growing share of Great Britain's shrinking national income.

One of the conditions of Britain's "co-operation" with America is the repayment of the gigantic British debt to America, without any hope of ever receiving repayment of the debt owed her by the continental states. The balance of economic power will thereby swing still further in America's favour.

On 5th March this year the Bank of England raised the Bank Rate from 4 to 5 per cent following the example of the New York Federal Reserve Bank, which had raised its rate from 3 to 3½ per cent. In the City of London this sharp reminder of financial dependence on their cousins from across the Atlantic was felt very painfully. But what were they to do? The American gold reserve is approximately \$4,500 million, while the British is approximately \$750 million, six times less. America *has* a gold currency, while Great Britain can only make desperate efforts to re-establish one. It is natural that, when the rate is raised from 3 to 3½ per cent in America Britain is compelled to reply by raising her rate from 4 to 5 per cent. Such a measure strikes at British industry and commerce by raising the cost of essential materials. In this way America at every step shows Britain her place: in one case by the methods of diplomatic pressure, in another by a banking decision, and always and everywhere by the pressure of her colossal economic domination.⁹

At the same time the British press notes with alarm the "striking progress" of

⁹Since this was written the British government has taken a series of legislative measures in the fields of banking and finance to guarantee the change to the Gold Standard. Here we seem to have a "great victory" for British capitalism actual fact Britain's decline is nowhere expressed more clearly than in this financial achievement. Britain was compelled to carry out this expensive operation through the pressure of the gold-backed American dollar, and the financial policy of her own dominions which were orientating themselves increasingly towards the dollar and turning their backs on the pound sterling. Britain could not have accomplished this recent step towards gold currency without extensive financial "aid" from the United States. But that means that the fate of the pound sterling is becoming directly dependent on New York. The United States is taking into its own hands a mighty weapon of financial impression. Britain is being compelled to pay a high interest rate for this dependence. The dividends will be charged against an already ailing industry. In order to hinder the export of her own gold she is forced to cut back the export of her own goods. At the same time she cannot refuse to transfer to gold currency without hastening her own decline in the world capital market. This fatal combination of circumstances brings on a feeling of severe malaise among the British ruling classes and gives rise to malevolent but impotent grumbling in the Conservative press itself. The **Daily Mail** writes: "By accepting the Gold Standard the British government is giving the Federal Reserve Bank (which is in practice in the power of the United States government) the *possibility of creating a monetary crisis in Britain at any moment it chooses*. The British government is bringing the whole financial policy of its own country into submission to a foreign nation ... The British Empire is being mortgaged to the United States". "Thanks to Churchill", writes the Conservative newspaper, the **Daily Express**, "Britain is falling under the heel of the American bankers". The **Daily Chronicle** expresses itself more decidedly: "Britain is in fact demoted to the position of being the forty-ninth state of America". It could not be put more clearly or vividly! To all these reproaches (which lack conclusions or perspectives) Churchill, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, replies to the effect that there is nothing else for Britain to do but to bring her financial system into conformity "with reality". Churchill's words signify: we have become immeasurably poorer, the United States immeasurably richer; we must either fight America or submit to her; in making the pound sterling dependent on American banks we simply translate our general economic decline into the language of currency; we cannot leap over our own heads; we must conform "with reality". — *L.D.T.*

various branches of German industry, and of German shipbuilding in particular. Arising from the latter, **The Times** of 10th March wrote:

It is probable that one of the factors which makes for the ability of the German yards to compete is the complete “trustification” of the material, from the mine to the fitted plate, from the financing bank to the sale of tickets. This system is not without its effects on wages and the cost of living. When all these forces are turned in the same direction the margin for reduction in costs becomes very considerable.

In other words **The Times** here states that the organic superiority of the more up-to-date German industry will once again be fully demonstrated as soon as other countries give Germany the possibility of displaying signs of life.

There are indications, it is true, that the order for ships had been placed with the Hamburg yard with the object of frightening the trade unions, and thus preparing the ground for reducing wages and lengthening working hours. Needless to say, such a manoeuvre is more than likely. But that does not weaken the force of our general contention regarding the irrational organization of British industry and the overheads resulting from it.

It is now four years since the number of officially registered unemployed in Britain fell below 1,135,000; it has fluctuated between $1\frac{1}{2}$ and $1\frac{3}{4}$ million. This chronic unemployment is the sharpest revelation of the system’s insolvency; it is also its Achilles’ heel. The Unemployed Insurance Act introduced in 1920 was designed to meet exceptional circumstances which, supposedly, would quickly pass. But meanwhile unemployment was becoming permanent, insurance ceased to be insurance, since spending on the unemployed was not covered by the payments of contributors. The British unemployed can no longer be regarded as a “normal” reserve army, contracting and expanding and constantly changing its composition, but must be seen as a permanent social layer created by industry during the period of growth and discharged in a period of recession. It is a gouty growth on the social organism, stemming from a weak metabolism.

The President of the Federation of British Industries, Colonel Willey, declared at the beginning of April that the return on industrial capital had been so insignificant during the last two years that it could not stimulate businessmen to develop industry” Business enterprises do not yield any higher return than fixed-interest paper values (gilt-edged securities and so on). “Our national problem is not a problem of production but a market problem.” But how do you resolve a market problem? It is necessary to produce more cheaply than others. Yet to do this it is necessary either radically to re-organize industry, to reduce taxes, to cut workers’ wages or to combine all three methods. Cutting wages, which can give only an insignificant result in terms of reducing production costs, will produce firm opposition since the workers are today fighting for wage rises. It is impossible to reduce taxes since it is necessary to pay off debts, to establish a gold-based currency, and to maintain the apparatus of empire and $1\frac{1}{2}$ million

unemployed to boot.

All these items enter into the cost of production. Industry could only be reorganized by investing new capital; meanwhile low profits drive free capital towards state and other loans.

Stanley Machin, the President of the Association of British Chambers of Commerce, recently declared that the solution to unemployment was emigration” The benevolent fatherland tells a million or so workers who, together with their families, make up several million citizens: “Stuff yourselves in the hold and clear off somewhere overseas!” The utter bankruptcy of the capitalist regime is stated here without the least equivocation.

We must examine Britain’s internal life from the standpoint of the abrupt and continuously declining world role of Great Britain which, while holding on to her possessions, and the apparatus and tradition of world domination, is in actual fact being relegated increasingly to a secondary position.

The break-up of the Liberal Party crowns a century of development of capitalist economy and bourgeois society” The loss of world domination has brought whole branches of British industry to a dead end and has struck a lethal blow at self-sufficient medium-sized industrial and commercial capital – the basis of Liberalism. Free trade has reached an impasse.

In the past the internal stability of the capitalist regime was in large measure assured by a division of labour and responsibility between Conservatism and Liberalism. The break-up of Liberalism exposes all the other contradictions in the world position of bourgeois Britain at the same time as it reveals the internal crisis of the regime. The upper circles of the Labour Party are politically very close to the Liberals; but they are incapable of restoring stability to British parliamentarism since the Labour Party, in its present form, itself expresses a temporary stage in the revolutionary development of the working class. MacDonald’s seat is even shakier than Lloyd George’s.

At the beginning of the 1850s Marx thought that the Conservative Party would soon quit the scene and that political development would follow the line of a struggle between Liberalism and socialism. This perspective presupposed a rapid revolutionary development in Britain and in Europe. Just as, for example, our own Cadet Party (Constitutional-Democrats) became, under the pressure of the revolution, the sole party of the landowners and the bourgeoisie, so British Liberalism would have absorbed the Conservative Party and become the sole party of property, if a revolutionary onslaught by the proletariat had developed in the course of the latter half of the nineteenth century. But Marx’s prophecy was made on the very eve of a new period of rapid capitalist development (1851-1873). Chartism finally disappeared.¹⁰ The workers’ movement took the path of trade

¹⁰The first political movement of the British working class. Chartism took up the traditional demands of universal manhood suffrage and other Parliamentary reforms, and tried to achieve them by methods including petitions, strikes and armed insurrection during the period from 1837 to 1848. The strikers were beaten back to work and the insurrectionists were transported

unionism. The inner contradictions of the ruling class took on the appearance of a struggle between the Liberal and the Conservative Parties. By rocking the parliamentary swing from right to left and from left to right, the bourgeoisie found a vent for the opposition feelings of the working masses.

German competition was the first serious threat to British world hegemony, and dealt it the first serious blow. Free Trade ran up against the superiority of German productive technique and organization. British Liberalism was only the political generalization of Free Trade. The Manchester School had occupied a dominant position ¹¹ from the time of the bourgeois, property-qualified, electoral reforms of 1832 ¹² and the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846. Over the course of the next half-century the doctrine of Free Trade seemed to be an immutable programme. Accordingly the leading role belonged to the Liberals. The workers tailed behind them. From the beginning of the 1870s the pattern was upset: Free Trade was discredited; a protectionist movement set in; the bourgeoisie was increasingly seized by imperialist tendencies. Symptoms of the Liberal Party's decay appeared as early as Gladstone's time, when a group of Liberals and Radicals led by Chamberlain raised the banner of protectionism and joined with the Conservatives. ¹³ From the middle of the 1890s trade took a turn for the better. This delayed Britain's political transformation. But by the beginning of the twentieth century Liberalism, as the party of the middle classes, had cracked. Its leader, Lord Rosebery, placed himself openly behind the banner of imperialism. However, the Liberal Party was destined for one more upsurge before leaving the scene. Under the influence of the evident decline of British capital on the one hand, and of the mighty revolutionary movement in Russia on the other, there developed a political re-awakening of the working class which, in applying itself to the creation of a parliamentary Labour Party, also poured flood-water into the mill of the Liberal opposition" Liberalism came to power again in 1906. But this upsurge could not, by its very nature, last for long. The political movement of the proletariat led to the further growth of the Labour

to Australia. The three petitions presented to Parliament in the period had enormous working class support, but were contemptuously rejected with large displays of force and arguments about the sanctity of property and the constitution.

¹¹The Manchester school of economics represented the interests of the industrial bourgeoisie at the height of British economic supremacy in the mid-19th century. It comprised an extreme form of laissez-faire, considering that prosperity would follow the lifting of all barriers to capitalist enterprise. Its most famous exponents were the Liberal politicians Richard Cobden, a calico printer, and John Bright, partner in a firm of cotton spinners. Its policies triumphed with the lifting of virtually all British tariff barriers in the 1840s, culminating in the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846.

¹²The demand to put an end to the system whereby seats in Parliament could be bought and tiny groups could elect MPs came to a head with the election of a reforming Whig government in 1830. Under intense popular pressure, and the threat to flood the House of Lords with new peers, a measure was passed abolishing the worst of the "rotten boroughs" and extending the franchise to some of the middle class.

¹³The issue of Irish Home Rule and the support for it by the Liberal Party leadership, especially Gladstone, resulted in this break-away by the more pro-imperialist Liberals led by Joseph Chamberlain, who set up the Unionist Party and ultimately united with the Conservatives.

Party. Before 1906 the Labour Party's representation had grown more or less in step with the Liberals'; after 1906 the Labour Party was clearly growing at the expense of the Liberals.

It was formally the Liberal Party which, through Lloyd George, led the war. In fact, the imperialist war, from which even the sacred regime of Free Trade could not save Britain, inevitably strengthened the Conservatives as the most consistent party of imperialism. Thus the conditions were finally prepared for the Labour Party's entrance onto the scene.

While impotently hovering over the question of unemployment the Labour Party daily newspaper, the **Daily Herald**, draws from capitalist admissions such as we quoted above, the general conclusion that, since British capitalists prefer to give financial loans to foreign governments rather than for domestic industrial expansion, there is nothing left for the British workers to do but to produce without the capitalists. In a very general sense, this conclusion is perfectly correct, only here it is drawn not at all with the intention of arousing the workers to drive the capitalists out, but merely to urge the capitalists along the road of "progressive efforts". As we shall see, the whole of the Labour Party's policy turns on this. To this end the Webbs write a whole book, MacDonald delivers his speeches and the editors of the **Daily Herald** supply daily articles. Meanwhile if this pathetic scaremongering has any effect at all on the capitalists, it is in the opposite direction. Every serious British bourgeois understands that behind the mock-heroic threats of the Labour Party leaders there lies concealed a real danger from the deeply stirring proletarian masses. It is precisely because of this that the shrewd bourgeoisie concludes that it is better not to tie up fresh resources in industry.

The bourgeois fear of revolution is not always and under all circumstances a "progressive" factor. For there can be no doubt that the British economy would derive great benefits from the co-operation of Britain and Russia" But this presupposes a comprehensive plan, large credits and adaptating a considerable section of British industry to the needs of Russia. The obstacle to this is the bourgeoisie's dread of revolution, and their uncertainty about the future.

The fear of revolution drove the British capitalists along the path of concessions and re-organization as long as the material opportunities for British capitalism were, or seemed, limitless. The shocks of the European revolutions have always found a clear reflection in Britain's social development; they led to reforms as long as the British bourgeoisie, through their world position, retained in their own hands gigantic resources for manoeuvre. They could legalise trade unions, repeal the Corn Laws, increase wages, extend the franchise, institute social reforms and so on. But in Britain's present radically altered position in the world the threat of revolution is no longer capable of pushing the bourgeoisie forward: on the contrary, it now paralyzes the last remnants of their industrial initiative. What is necessary now is not threats of revolution but revolution itself.

The factors and circumstances set out above are not of a chance and transient character. They are developing in one and the same direction, systematically aggravating Britain's international and domestic situation and making it historically intractable.

The contradictions undermining British society will inevitably intensify. We do not intend to predict the exact tempo of this process, but it will be measurable in terms of years, or in terms of five years at the most; certainly not in decades. This general prospect requires us to ask above all the question: will a Communist Party be built in Britain in time with the strength and the links with the masses to be able to thaw out at the right moment all the necessary practical conclusions from the sharpening crisis? It is in *this* question that Great Britain's fate is today contained.

Mr. Baldwin and ... Gradualness

On 12th March of this year [1925] Mr. Baldwin, the British prime minister and leader of the Conservative Party, delivered a long speech on Britain's future to a Conservative audience at Leeds. This speech, like many other of Mr. Baldwin's public utterances, was pervaded with anxiety. We consider that from the point of view of Mr. Baldwin's party such anxiety is entirely well-founded. We for our part shall approach these same questions from rather a different angle. Mr. Baldwin is afraid of socialism and in his demonstrations of the dangers and difficulties attending the road to socialism Mr. Baldwin made a somewhat unexpected attempt to gain support from the author of this book. This gives us, we hope, a right to reply to Mr. Baldwin without risk of being accused of interfering in Great Britain's internal affairs.

Mr. Baldwin considers, and not without reason, that the greatest danger to the regime he supports is the growth of the Labour Party. He hopes, of course, for victory, since "our (the Conservatives') principles are in closer accord with the character and traditions of our people than any traditions or any principles of violent change." The Conservative leader nonetheless reminds his audience that the verdict of the last election was not the final one.

Mr. Baldwin is convinced, of course, that socialism is not practicable. But as he is in a rather confused state of mind and as, in addition, he is addressing an audience already convinced of the impracticability of socialism, Mr. Baldwin's arguments to this effect are not distinguished by great originality. He reminds his Conservative audience that children are born neither free, nor equal nor as brothers. He addresses this question to each mother at the meeting: were her children born equal? The self-satisfied laughter of his audience was his answer. To be sure, the mass of the British people had heard the same answer from the spiritual great-great-grandfathers of Baldwin, in reply to their demand for the right to freedom of belief and to be allowed to set up their church as they wished. The same arguments were later brought against equality before a court, and

later, not at all so long ago, against universal suffrage.

People are not born equal, Mr. Baldwin; why then do they have to answer before one and the same court, according to the same law? One could have objected to Mr. Baldwin that although children are not born exactly alike a mother normally feeds her dissimilar children alike at the table, and makes sure, if she can, that they all have a pair of shoes on their feet. A bad stepmother, of course, might well act differently.

One could have explained to Mr. Baldwin that socialism is concerned not with the creation of anatomical, physiological and psychical equality, but tries only to guarantee all people similar material conditions of existence. But we shall not weary our readers with further exposition of these elementary ideas: Mr. Baldwin can himself, if he is interested, turn to the relevant sources; and as his world-outlook inclines him towards ancient and purely British authors we could recommend to him old Robert Owen who, it is true, had no understanding whatsoever of the class dynamics of capitalist society, but in whose works one may find most valuable observations regarding the advantages of socialism.

But the socialist aim, though reprehensible enough in itself, does not of course frighten Mr. Baldwin so much as a violent road towards it. Mr. Baldwin perceives two tendencies in the Labour Party. One of them is, in his words, represented by Mr. Sidney Webb who has recognized “the inevitability of gradualness”. But there are leaders of another kind, like Cook, or Wheatley, especially since he left his ministerial post, who believe in force. According to Mr. Baldwin the responsibility of government has in general had a salutary influence on the Labour Party leaders and has compelled them to recognize, along with Webb, the futile character of revolutionary methods and the advantages of gradualness. At this point Mr. Baldwin made a sort of god-like excursion into Russian affairs to enrich his meagre arsenal of arguments against British socialism.

Let us quote the report in **The Times**:

The Prime Minister quoted Trotsky, who, he said, had discovered in the last few years and written “that the more easily did the Russian proletariat pass through the revolutionary crisis, the harder becomes now its constructive work.” Trotsky had also said what no leader of the extremists had yet said in Britain: “We must learn to work more efficiently.” He wondered how many votes would be cast for a revolution in Britain if people were told that the only (?) result would be that they would have to work more efficiently. [*Laughter and cheers*] Trotsky said in his book: “In Russia before and after the revolution, there existed and exists unchanged Russian human nature (!).” Trotsky, the man of action, studied realities. He had slowly and reluctantly discovered what Mr. Webb discovered two years ago – the “inevitability of gradualness”. [*Laughter and applause*]

Of course it is very flattering to be recommended to a Conservative audience at Leeds; a mortal can scarcely ask for more. It is nearly as flattering to fall into

a direct association with Mr. Sidney Webb, the prophet of gradualness. But, before accepting this honour, there are one or two clarifications we should like from Mr. Baldwin.

It had never entered the heads of either our teachers or ourselves, even before the experience of “the last few years”, to deny the fact of gradual development in either nature or in human society, in its economy, politics or morals. We would merely like to make some qualifications about the nature of this gradualness. Thus, to take an example close to Mr. Baldwin as a protectionist, let us consider the fact that Germany, which gradually emerged into the arena of world competition in the final quarter of the last century, became an extremely threatening rival to Britain. It is well known that it was along this path that matters came to war. Does Baldwin regard the war as a manifestation of gradualness? During the war the Conservative Party demanded “the destruction of the Huns” and the toppling of the German Kaiser by the force of the British sword. From the standpoint of the theory of gradualness it might have been better to rely upon an improvement in German morality and a gradual Improvement in her relations with Britain. However in the period from 1914 to 1918 Mr. Baldwin, as far as we recall, categorically rejected the applicability of gradualness to Anglo-German relations and endeavoured to settle the matter by means of vast quantities of high explosive. We submit that dynamite and lyddite can scarcely be regarded as the proper instruments of an evolutionary-conservative style of operation.

Pre-war Germany, for her part, by no means emerged in shining armour one fine morning from the waves. No, she had developed gradually out of her former economic insignificance. However there were one or two breaks in this gradual process; thus we have the wars Prussia waged against Denmark in 1864, against Austria in 1866 and against France in 1870; these played a colossal role in increasing her might and provided her with the possibility of triumphantly starting out along the path of world competition with Britain.

Wealth, the result of human labour, is without doubt created with a certain gradualness. But Mr. Baldwin would agree that the years of the war caused a gigantic upward leap in the development of the United States. The gradualness of accumulation was abruptly upset by the catastrophe of a war that caused the impoverishment of Europe and the feverish enrichment of America.

A “leap” in his own personal life was recounted by Mr. Baldwin himself in a parliamentary speech devoted to the trade unions. As a young man he managed a factory which had been handed down from generation to generation, where workers were born and died and where, in consequence, the principle of patriarchal “gradualness” held complete sway.

But a miners’ strike broke out, the factory could not operate owing to the shortage of coal and Mr. Baldwin found himself forced to close it down and release “his” thousand workers to the four corners of the world. Certainly Baldwin can plead the ill-will of the miners who compelled him to infringe a sacred Conservative principle. The miners could probably have cited in their

defence the ill-will of their employers, who had compelled them to call a colossal strike that brought a break in the monotonous process of exploitation.

But subjective promptings are in the last resort immaterial: for us it is enough to know that gradualness in various spheres of life goes hand in hand with catastrophes, breaks and upward and downward leaps. The long process of competition between the two states *gradually* prepares the war, the discontent of exploited workers *gradually* prepares a strike, the bad management of a bank *gradually* prepares bankruptcy.

The honourable Conservative leader may reply, it is true, that such breaks in gradualness like war and bankruptcy, the impoverishment of Europe and the enrichment of America at her expense, are all most regrettable and that in general it would be better to avoid them. The only objection to this is that the history of nations is in considerable part a history of wars and the history of economic development is embellished with bankruptcy statistics. Mr. Baldwin would probably say that these are properties of human nature. We might concede this, but it still means that the “nature” of man couples gradual development with catastrophic leaps.

However, the history of mankind is not only a history of wars but also a history of revolutions. The seignorial rights which grew up over centuries and which economic development then took centuries to undermine were swept away in France at one stroke on 4th August 1789. On 9th November 1918 the German revolution annihilated German absolutism, which had been undermined by the struggle of the proletariat and brought to heel by the victories of the Allies. We have already recalled that one of the war slogans of the British government of which Mr. Baldwin was a member was “War till the total destruction of German militarism!” Doesn’t Mr. Baldwin think, then, that in so far as the catastrophe of the war – with a little assistance from Mr. Baldwin himself – prepared for a revolutionary catastrophe in Germany, all this took place with no little detriment to the principle of historical gradualness? Of course one can object that German militarism, and the Kaiser’s ill-will, were both also to blame here. We will gladly believe that had Mr. Baldwin created the world he would have populated it with the most benevolent Kaisers and the most kind-hearted forms of militarism. But such an opportunity did not present itself to the British prime minister; and what is more we have heard from him that people, including Kaisers, are born neither equal nor good nor as brothers. One has to take the world as it is. Moreover: if it is true that the rout of German imperialism was a good thing then it must be recognized that the German revolution which completed the work of the military defeat was also a good thing; that is to say, that a catastrophic overthrow of what had taken shape gradually, was a good thing.

Mr. Baldwin may, it is true, object that all this has no direct bearing on Britain and that only in that chosen country has the principle of gradualness found its legitimate expression. But if this is so then it was pointless for Mr. Baldwin to refer to my words, which referred to Russia, and thus to impart a universal, general, absolute character to the principle of gradualness. My

political experience, at least, does not confirm this. If my memory serves me right three revolutions have taken place in Russia; in 1905, in February 1917 and in October 1917. As regards the February revolution a certain modest assistance was provided by Buchanan (a man not unknown to Mr. Baldwin) who evidently calculated then (with the knowledge of his government) that a little revolutionary catastrophe in Petrograd would be more useful to Great Britain than all Rasputin's ¹⁴ gradualness.

But is it in the end true that "the character and history of the British people" is so decisively and unconditionally permeated with the Conservative traditions of gradualness? Is it true that the British people is so hostile to "violent changes"? The whole history of Britain is above all a history of violent changes that the British ruling classes have wrought in the lives of other peoples. For example, it would be interesting to know whether the seizures of India or Egypt can be interpreted in terms of the principle of gradualness? The policy of the British propertied classes in relation to India is most candidly expressed in Lord Salisbury's words: "India must be bled!" It is not out of place to recall that Salisbury was the leader of the same party that is today led by Mr. Baldwin. To this one must add in parenthesis that, as a result of the excellently organized conspiracy of the bourgeois press, the British people do not in fact know what is being done in India (and we are in what is called a democracy. Perhaps we may recall the history of ill-fated Ireland, which is particularly rich in examples of the *peaceful, evolutionary methods of operation of the British ruling classes*? As far as we remember the subjugation of South Africa did not evoke protests from Mr. Baldwin, and when General Roberts' forces broke the defensive front of the Boer settlers, the latter could scarcely have found a very convincing demonstration of gradualness in that.

All this, to be sure, relates to Britain's external history. But it is nevertheless strange that the principle of evolutionary gradualness, which is recommended to us as a universal precept, ceases to operate beyond the confines of Great Britain – on the frontiers of China when she had to be forced by war to buy opium, on the frontiers of Turkey when Mosul had to be taken from her, and on the frontiers of Persia and Afghanistan when submission to Britain had to be imposed on them.

Is it not possible to draw from all this the conclusion that the greater the success with which Britain applied force to other peoples, the greater the degree of "gradualness" she managed to realize within her own frontiers? Indeed it is! Britain, over three centuries, conducted an uninterrupted succession of wars directed at an extending her arena of exploitation, removing foreign riches, killing foreign commercial competition and annihilating foreign naval forces, all by means of piracy and violence against other nations, and thereby enriching the

¹⁴A peasant mystic who acquired a strong influence upon the Tsarina of Russia between 1911 and 1916. He was thought to be a German agent during the war and obtained high posts in the state for his nominees. He was assassinated in 1916 by a group of noblemen led by Prince Yusupov.

British governing classes. A diligent investigation of the facts and their inner linkages leads to the inescapable conclusion that the British governing classes managed to avoid revolutionary shocks within their country in so far as they were successful at increasing their own material power by means of wars and shocks of all sorts in other countries. In this way did they gain the possibility of restraining the revolutionary indignation of the masses through timely, and always very niggardly, concessions. But such a conclusion, which is completely irrefutable in itself, proves the exact opposite of what Baldwin wanted to prove, for the very history of Britain testifies in practice that “peaceful development” can only be ensured by means of a succession of wars, colonial acts of violence and bloody shocks. This is a strange form of “gradualness”!

A fairly well-known populariser of British history, Gibbins, writes in his outline of modern British history: “In general – though, of course, *there are exceptions to this* – the guiding principle of British foreign policy has been the support for political freedom and constitutional government.” This sentence is truly remarkable; at the same time as being deeply official, “national” and traditional-sounding, it leaves no room for the hypocritical doctrine of non-interference in the affairs of other nations; at the same time it testifies to the fact that Britain supported constitutional movements in other countries only in so far as they were advantageous to her commercial and other interests. But on the other hand, as the inimitable Gibbins says, “there are exceptions to this rule”. The entire history of Britain is depicted for the edification of her people (the doctrine of non-intervention notwithstanding) as a glorious struggle of the British government for freedom throughout the world. Every single new act of perfidy and violence – the Opium War with China, the enslavement of Egypt, the Boer War, the intervention in support of Tsarist generals – is interpreted as an exception to the rule. Thus there generally prove to be gaps in “gradualness” both on the part of “freedom” and the part of despotism.

One can, of course, go further and say that violence in international relations is permissible and even inevitable, but that in relations between social classes it is reprehensible. But then there is no point in speaking of a “natural law” of gradualness which supposedly governs the whole development of nature and society. Then one must simply say: an oppressed class is obliged to support the oppressor class of its own nation when the latter adopts violence for its own ends; but that the oppressed class has no right to use violence to ensure a better position for itself in a society based upon oppression. But this will be no longer a “law of nature” but the law of the bourgeois criminal code.

However even within the limits of Great Britain’s own internal history the principle of gradual and peaceful development is by no means as prevalent as Conservative philosophers would have us believe. In the final analysis the whole of present-day Britain has come out of the revolution in the seventeenth century. In the great civil war of that era were born the Tories and Whigs who were to set their seals alternately on Britain’s history for over three centuries. When Mr. Baldwin appeals to the conservative traditions of British history, we must

permit ourselves to remind him that the tradition of the Conservative Party itself is based firmly in the revolution of the middle of the seventeenth century. Similarly the reference to the “character of the British people” forces us to recall that this character was beaten into shape by the hammer of the civil war between the Roundheads and the Cavaliers.¹⁵ The character of the Independents: petty bourgeois traders, artisans, free farmers, small landed gentry, businesslike, devout, economical, hard-working and enterprising, this character collided violently with the character of the idle, dissolute and haughty governing classes of old England: the court aristocracy, the titled state bureaucracy and the bishops.

And yet both the former and the latter were Englishmen! With a heavy military hammer, on the anvil of civil war, Oliver Cromwell forged that same national character which over two and a half centuries ensured gigantic advantages in the world for the British bourgeoisie. Only later, at the close of the nineteenth century, was it to reveal itself as too conservative, even from the standpoint of capitalist development. It is clear that the struggle of the Long Parliament against the tyranny of Charles I and Cromwell’s severe dictatorship had been prepared by Britain’s previous history. But this means, simply, that a revolution is not made to order but grows organically out of the conditions of social development, and forms at least as inevitable a stage in the development of relations between the classes of one and the same nation as does war in the development of relations between organized nations. Perhaps Mr. Baldwin can find theoretical consolation in this gradualness of preparation?

Conservative old ladies – including Mrs. Snowden, who has recently discovered that the Royal family is the most hard-working class in society – must shudder at nights when they remember the execution of Charles I. And yet even the reactionary Macaulay came close to an understanding of that event:

Those who had him in their grip (he says) were not midnight stabbers. What they did they did in order that it might be a spectacle to heaven and to earth, and that it might be held in everlasting remembrance. They enjoyed keenly the very scandal which they gave. That the ancient constitution and the public opinion of England were directly opposed to regicide made regicide seem strangely fascinating to a party bent on effecting a complete political and social revolution. In order to accomplish their purpose, it was necessary that they should first break in pieces every part of the machinery of government; and this necessity was rather agreeable than painful to them ... A revolutionary tribunal was created. That tribunal pronounced Charles a tyrant, a murderer, and a public enemy; and his head was severed from his shoulders before thousands of spectators in front of

¹⁵The popular titles given to the soldiers on the respective sides in the Civil War. “Roundheads” was a term of abuse for the forces of Puritanism, Parliament and bourgeois revolution, referring to the fact that they cut their hair short. “Cavaliers” were the more fashionably dressed, but less efficient, forces who supported the King.

the Banqueting Hall of his own palace.¹⁶

From the standpoint of the Puritans to break up all sections of the old government machine, the fact that Charles Stuart was an extravagant, lying and cowardly scoundrel is completely secondary. Not only Charles I, but royal absolutism itself was dealt a mortal blow by the Puritans, the fruits of which are enjoyed to this day by the preachers of parliamentary gradualness.

The role of revolution in the political and social development in general of Britain is not however limited to the seventeenth century. It could be said – although this might seem paradoxical – that *all Britain's subsequent development has taken place in the train of European revolutions*. We shall give here merely an overall summary of the main elements which may prove to be of some use not only to Mr. Baldwin.

The French Revolution gave a powerful thrust to the development of democratic tendencies in Britain and above all to the labour movement, which was driven underground by the Combination Laws of 1799.¹⁷ The war against revolutionary France was “popular” only among the governing classes; the popular masses sympathized with the French Revolution and expressed their indignation against the Pitt government. The creation of the British trade unions was to a large extent the result of the influence of the French revolution on the labouring masses of Britain. The triumph of reaction on the continent, which strengthened the position of the landlords, led in 1815 to the restoration of the Bourbons in France and the introduction of the Corn Laws in Britain.

The July Revolution of 1830¹⁸ in France gave an impetus to the first electoral Reform Bill of 1831 in Britain: a bourgeois revolution on the continent produced a bourgeois reform in the British Isles.

The radical reorganization of the administration of Canada, giving much greater autonomy, was carried out only after the rising in Canada of 1837-1838.¹⁹

¹⁶Macaulay, **History of England** (1889 ed.), Chapter 1, p.63.

¹⁷During the eighteenth century a number of legislative measures were passed forbidding trade union organization in different trades. The first general measure was passed in 1799 in the wake of other restrictions on the press and democratic rights, banning all trade unions and imposing fines and imprisonment. A further measure in 1800 slightly reduced the penalties. These laws were not repealed until 1824 and although trade unions were formed in this period and bargains even made with employers, workers' organizations could be crushed at the will of the capitalists.

¹⁸On 26th July 1830 French King Charles X dissolved the parliament – dominated by the liberal bourgeoisie – in order to remove opposition to his measures against democracy and in favour of the old aristocracy. For three days the workers of Paris fought on the barricades while many soldiers refused to fire. The liberals led by Thiers took fright and proposed handing the throne to a nominee of the French people (i.e., bourgeoisie). Louis-Philippe Orleans was installed, representing the interests of the financial bourgeoisie as opposed to the aristocracy.

¹⁹In 1791 Canada had been partitioned at the Ottawa River into Lower Canada, chiefly French, and the British area of Upper Canada, which included “loyalists” who had fled from the American Revolution. In 1837 there was a revolt of French Canadians in Lower Canada led by Louis Papineau to establish an independent French state and another revolt in Upper Canada against ruling officialdom. After these revolts were put down the Earl of Durham was

The revolutionary movement of Chartism led in 1844-1847 to the introduction of the ten-hour working day, and in 1846 to the repeal of the Corn Laws. The defeat of the revolutionary movement on the continent in 1848 not only meant the decline of the Chartist movement but put a brake on the democratisation of the British parliament for a long time afterwards.

The electoral reform of 1867²⁰ was preceded by the Civil War in the United States. When in 1861 war flared up in America between the North and the South, British workers demonstrated their sympathy with the Northern states, while the sympathies of the ruling classes were wholly on the side of the slave-owners. It is instructive to note that the Liberal Palmerston, the so-called “Firebrand Palmerston”, and many of his colleagues including the notorious Gladstone, were in sympathy with the South and were quick to recognize the Southern states as belligerents rather than insurgents. Warships were built for the Southerners in British yards. The North nevertheless won and this revolutionary victory on American territory *gained the vote for a section of the British working class* (the 1867 Act). In Britain, incidentally, the reform was accompanied by a stormy movement which led to the “July Days” of 1866, when major disorders lasted for forty-eight hours.

The defeat of the 1848 revolution had weakened the British workers but the Russian Revolution of 1905 immediately strengthened them. As a result of the 1906 General Election the Labour Party formed for the first time a strong parliamentary group of 42 members. In this the influence of the 1905 revolution was clear!

In 1918, even before the end of the war, a new electoral reform was passed in Britain which considerably enlarged the ranks of working class voters, and allowed women to participate in elections for the first time. Even Mr. Baldwin would probably not begin to deny that the Russian Revolution of 1917 was an important stimulus to this reform. The British bourgeois considered that a revolution could be avoided in this way. It follows that even for passing reforms, the principle of gradualness is insufficient and a real threat of revolution is necessary.

If we look back in this way over the history of Britain for the last century and a half in the context of the general European and world development it transpires that Britain exploited other countries not only economically but also politically, by cutting its own political costs” at the cost of the civil wars of the nations of Europe and America.

sent to Canada and though he was dismissed for showing too much leniency to the rebels his report was the basis of the 1840 Act of Union which unified the two parts of Canada under more rigorous British imperial rule.

²⁰Carried out by the Tories under the leadership of Lord Derby and Benjamin Disraeli in an unsuccessful bid to “dish the Whigs” in the face of rising pressure for an extension of the franchise, including enormous demonstrations in Hyde Park. They passed the Second Reform Act extending the franchise to prosperous urban workers and continuing the process of granting more parliamentary representation to urban centres.

So what was the meaning of those two phrases that Mr. Baldwin extracted from my book in order to counterpose them to the policy of the revolutionary representatives of the British proletariat? It is not hard to show that the clear and simple meaning of my words was the exact opposite of what Mr. Baldwin was looking for. The more easily the Russian proletariat took power the greater were the obstacles it met on the path of socialist construction. Yes, I said this and I repeat it.

Our old governing classes were economically and politically insignificant. Our parliamentary and democratic traditions hardly existed. It was easier for us to tear the masses away from the bourgeoisie's influence and overturn their rule. But precisely because our bourgeoisie had appeared later and had done little, we received a small inheritance. We are now obliged to lay down roads, build bridges and schools, teach adults to read and write and so forth, that is to carry out the main bulk of the economic and cultural work which had been carried out by the bourgeois regime in the older capitalist countries. It was in exactly this sense that I said that the easier that it was for us to deal with the bourgeoisie the more difficult the business of socialist construction.

But this direct political theorem pre-supposes its converse: the richer and more cultured a country and the older its parliamentary-democratic traditions the harder it is for the communist party to take power; but *the faster and the more successfully will the work of socialist construction proceed after the conquest of power*. Put more concretely, the overturn of the British bourgeoisie is no easy task; it does require a necessary "gradualness", i.e. serious preparation; but once having taken control of state power, the land, the industrial, commercial and banking apparatus, the proletariat of Britain will be able to carry out the re-organization of the capitalist economy into a socialist one with far less sacrifices, far more success and at a much quicker pace. Such is the converse theorem, which I have more than once had occasion to set out and prove, and which has the most direct bearing on the question which concerns Mr. Baldwin.

That, however, is not all. When I spoke of the difficulties of socialist construction I had in mind not only the backwardness of our own country but also the gigantic opposition from outside. Mr. Baldwin probably knows that the British government, of which he was a member, spent about £100 million on military intervention and the blockade of Soviet Russia. The object of these costly measures, let us recall in passing, was the overthrow of Soviet power: the British Conservatives, as also the British Liberals (at least at that time) fuilly rejected the principle of "gradualness" in relation to the Workers' and Peasants' Republic and tried to settle a historical question by inflicting a catastrophe on it. It is sufficient to quote this one point to establish that the whole philosophy of gradualness has an extraordinary resemblance to the morality of those monks of Heine's who drink wine themselves, while recommending water to their flock.²¹

²¹Not wishing to overstep the limits of decency, we shall refrain from enquiring, for example, how forged documents attributed to a foreign state and exploited for electoral purposes can be regarded as a tool of "gradualness" in the development of so-called Christian morality

Be that as it may, the Russian worker, who was the first to seize power, found against him first Germany and then all the countries of the Entente, led by Britain and France. The British proletariat when it takes power will have against it neither the Russian Tsar nor the Russian bourgeoisie. On the contrary it will be able to find support from the gigantic material and human resources of our Soviet Union, for – and this we shall not conceal from Mr. Baldwin – the cause of the British proletariat is at least as much our cause as the cause of the Russian bourgeoisie was and remains the cause of the British Conservatives.

My remarks about the difficulties of our socialist construction are interpreted by the British prime minister as if I had meant: the game was not worth the candle. Yet my point had exactly the opposite sense: our difficulties flow from an international situation that is unfavourable to us, as the pioneers of socialism; by surmounting these difficulties we are changing the situation to the advantage of the proletariat of other countries. Thus not a single one of our revolutionary efforts fails to have an effect on the “international balance of forces.”

There is no doubt that, as Mr. Baldwin points out, we are striving for a greater productivity of labour. Without this the upsurge in the welfare and culture of the people would be inconceivable, and in this lies the basic goal of communism. But the Russian worker is today working for himself. Having taken into their hands an economy that had been devastated – first by the imperialist war, then by the Civil War aggravated by intervention and blockade – the Russian workers have now managed to bring their industry, which was almost defunct in 1920-21, up to an average of 60% of its pre-war productivity.

This achievement, however modest it might be when compared with our objectives, represents an undoubted and tangible success. If the £100 million expended by Britain in attempting a catastrophic overturn had been invested, as a loan or as concession capital, into the Soviet economy for its gradual uplift we should by now undoubtedly have surpassed the pre-war level, paid high interest rates to British capital and, what is most important, we would have provided a wide and ever expanding market for it. It is not our fault that Mr. Baldwin has violated the principle of gradualness precisely where he should not have done so. But even given the present, still very low level of our industry the workers’ position has considerably improved in comparison with recent years. When we

in a civilized society. But without posing this delicate question we still cannot refrain from recollecting that, even according to Napoleon, the falsification of diplomatic documents was nowhere so widely practised as by British diplomacy. And undoubtedly technique has much advanced since then! – *L.D.T.* [**Editors note in 1975:** The “Zinoviev” letter, published by the Tory **Daily Mail** during the 1924 election campaign after the fall of the first Labour Government. It purported to be from Zinoviev, then President of the Communist International, to the British party containing instructions about the military section of the British CP. In fact it was a crude forgery, concocted by White Russian émigrés in Paris and conveyed through agents connected with Conservative Central Office. Its aim was to weaken Labour’s electoral chances, and this it did not by diminishing the Labour vote but by scaring pro-Liberal middle class voters into supporting the Tories. This allowed Baldwin to become Prime Minister again in 1925. (Recent evidence published in Britain has confirmed this, save that it was composed in Riga rather than Paris. *Note by ERC*)]

reach the pre-war level – and this is the task of the next two to three years – the position of our workers will be incomparably better than it was before the war.

This is the reason, and the only reason, why we consider ourselves entitled to call upon the proletariat of Russia to raise the productivity of labour. It is one thing to work in plants, factories, shipyards and mines belonging to capitalists but quite another to work in one's own. There's the big difference, Mr. Baldwin! And when British workers take control of the powerful means of production that have been created by themselves and their forefathers they will try with every effort to raise the productivity of labour.

British industry greatly needs this since despite its lofty achievements, it is entangled in the mesh of its own past. Baldwin seemingly realizes this; at any rate in his speech he says: "We owe our position and our place in the world largely to the fact that we were the first nation to endure the pangs which brought the industrial age into the world; but we are also paying the price of that privileged priority, and the price in part is our badly planned and congested towns, our back-to-back houses, our ugly factories and our smoke-laden atmosphere". Here one must also add the fragmentation of British industry, its technical conservatism, and its organizational rigidity. For precisely this reason British industry is succumbing to German and American industry.

For its salvation it needs a broad and bold reorganization. It is necessary to look upon the soil and subsoil of Britain as the basis for a single economic system. Only in this way can the coal industry be reconstructed on a healthy footing. Britain's electrical industry is distinguished by its fragmented and backward character; attempts to reorganize it have at every step faced the opposition of private interests. Not only are British cities, by their historical origin, irrationally planned, but all British industry has "gradually" piled itself up, devoid of system or plan. New life can be poured into it only by tackling it as a single whole.

But this is inconceivable while private ownership of the means of production is preserved. The main aim of socialism is to raise the economic strength of the people. Only upon this basis is it possible to build a more cultured, a more harmonious and happier human society. If Mr. Baldwin has, despite his sympathies for old British industry, been compelled to recognize that the new capitalist forms – the trusts and syndicates – represent a step forward, then we consider that a single socialist combine of industry represents a gigantic step forward in comparison with capitalist trusts. But such a programme cannot be realized without the transfer of all the means of production into the hands of the working class, that is to say, without the expropriation of the bourgeoisie. Baldwin himself recalls the "titanic forces let loose by the industrial revolution of the eighteenth century, which changed the face of the country and all the features of our national life".

Why does Baldwin in this instance speak about revolution and not of gradual development? Because at the end of the eighteenth century there took place within a short space of time fundamental changes which led, in particular, to

the expropriation of the petty industrialists. To all those who pay attention to the essential logic of the historical process, it should be clear that the industrial revolution of the eighteenth century, which regenerated Great Britain from top to bottom, would have been impossible without the political revolution of the seventeenth century. Without a revolution in the name of bourgeois rights and bourgeois enterprise, and against aristocratic privilege and genteel sloth, that great spirit of technical innovation would not have been aroused and there would have been nobody to apply it to economic ends. The political revolution of the seventeenth century, which had grown out of the entire previous development, prepared for the industrial revolution of the eighteenth century.

Now at this moment Britain, like all capitalist countries, needs an economic revolution far surpassing, in its historical significance, the industrial revolution of the eighteenth century. But this future economic revolution – the rebuilding of the whole economy according to a single socialist plan – cannot be achieved without a political revolution first. Private ownership of the means of production today presents a far greater obstacle on the path of economic development than the craft privileges, which were a form of petty bourgeois property, presented in their time. As the bourgeoisie under no circumstances will renounce its property rights voluntarily, it is necessary that a bold revolutionary force must be set to work. History has not yet thought up any other method. And there will be no exception in the case of Britain.

As for the second quotation ascribed to me by Mr. Baldwin, here I find myself in the greatest perplexity. I firmly deny that I could have said anywhere or at any time that there exists some unalterable “Russian nature” against which revolution was powerless. Where is this quotation from? I know from long experience that not all men, not even all prime ministers, quote with complete precision. By complete chance I came across a passage in my book **Problems of Cultural Work** which deals fully with the question which concerns us. I quote it in full:

What are the grounds for our hopes of victory?

The first is that criticism and initiative has been aroused in the popular masses. Through the revolution our people have opened themselves up a window on Europe – meaning by “Europe” culture – just as two hundred or so years before, Peter’s Russia opened not a window but a ventilator on Europe for the top layers of the noble and bureaucratic statesmen. Those passive qualities of humility and meekness which the official or voluntarily idiotic ideologues declared to be the specific, immutable and sacred qualities of the Russian people but in practice were merely the expression of its slavish, downtrodden state and its isolation from culture – those wretched and shameful qualities received a mortal blow in October 1917. This does not of course mean that we no longer carry the heritage of the past with us. We do and shall continue to for a long time yet. But a great turning-point, not only materially, but also psychologically, has been

passed. No one any longer dares to recommend the Russian people to build their destiny upon the precepts of humility, submissiveness and long-suffering. No, the virtues that are henceforth entering ever more deeply into the people's consciousness are: criticism, initiative and collective creativity. And upon this, the greatest conquest of the national character rests above all our hope of success in all our work.

This, as we see, has very little similarity to what Mr. Baldwin ascribes to me. It should be said in mitigation that the British Constitution does not oblige prime ministers to quote correctly. And as for the precedents that play such a major part in British life there is certainly no shortage of them – just how many false quotations is one William Pitt good for?

It may be objected – what is the point of discussing revolution with a Tory leader? What importance can the historical philosophy of a Conservative Prime Minister have for the working class? But the fact of the matter is this: the philosophy of MacDonald, Snowden, Webb, and the other Labour Party leaders is merely an echo of Baldwin's historical theories. And in due course we shall demonstrate this, with all appropriate . . . gradualness.

One or Two Peculiarities of English Labour Leaders

On the death of Lord Curzon, party leaders and others delivered eulogistic addresses; the socialist MacDonald concluded: "He was a great public servant, a man who was a fine colleague, a man who had a very noble idea of public duty, which may well be emulated by his successors". That about Curzon! When workers protested against this speech, the **Daily Herald**, the Labour Party's daily paper, printed the protests under the modest headline *Another Point of View*. The wise editors evidently wished in this way to indicate that besides the courtiers' Byzantine, bootlicking, lackeyish point of view, there was that of the workers as well.

At the beginning of April the not altogether unknown labour leader, Thomas, secretary of the National Union of Railwaymen and former Colonial Secretary, participated with the prime minister, Baldwin, in a banquet given by the directors of the Great Western Railway Company. Baldwin had once been a director of this company, and Thomas had worked for him as a fireman. Mr. Baldwin spoke with magnificent condescension about his friend Jimmy Thomas, while Thomas proposed a toast to the directors of the "Great Western" and their chairman, Lord Churchill. Thomas spoke with great fondness of Mr. Baldwin who – just think of it! – had walked all his life in the footsteps of his venerable father. He himself (Thomas) – said this absolutely unprecedented lackey – would of course be accused of being a traitor to his class for banqueting and mixing with Baldwin but he, Thomas, did not belong to any class, for truth is not the property of a particular class.

Arising out of the debates provoked by the “left” Labour MPs over the voting of funds to the Prince of Wales for his overseas tour, the same **Daily Herald** came forth with a leading article on its attitude to royalty. Anybody who might have concluded from the debates that the Labour Party wishes to do away with royalty, says the newspaper, would have made a mistake. Yet, on the other hand, one cannot help noting that royalty is not improving its standing in the public opinion of sensible people: too much pomp and ceremonial, inspired possibly by “unintelligent advisers”; too much attention to horse-racing, with the inevitable totalisator; and what is more in East Africa the Duke and Duchess of York have been hunting rhinoceroses and other creatures who really deserve a better fate. Of course, the paper argues, one cannot blame the Royal Family on its own; tradition ties them too tightly to the habits and members of a particular class. But an effort should be made to break with this tradition. In our opinion this is not only desirable but necessary. A post must be found for the heir to the throne that will make him a part of the government machine, and so on and so forth, all in the same singularly vulgar, stupid and lackeyish vein. So in our country in the past – around 1905 and 1906 – might the organ of the Samara advocates of peaceful regeneration have written.²²

The ubiquitous Mrs. Snowden intervened in the Royal Family affair, and stated in a brief letter that only loudmouthed soap-box orators could fail to understand that royal families belong to the most hard-working elements of Europe. And since the Bible itself says: “Thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn”, then Mrs. Snowden is, naturally enough, in favour of voting funds for the Prince of Wales’s tour.

“I am a socialist, a democrat and a Christian,” this same lady once wrote, explaining why she was against Bolshevism. That, however, is not a complete list of Mrs. Snowden’s virtues. Out of politeness we shall not name the rest.

The honourable Dr. Shiels, Labour MP for Edinburgh East, explained that the Prince of Wales’s tour was useful for trade, and consequently also for the working class. He, therefore, was in favour of the voting of the funds.

Let us now take one or two of the “left” or semi-left Labour MPs. Certain property rights of the Scottish Church were being discussed in parliament. A Scottish Labour MP, Johnston, invoked the Act of Union of 1707²³ to deny the

²²The reference is obscure, but it may apply to some item of minor inner party controversy. However the term Regenerator (or Renovator) normally applies to a dissident section within the Russian Orthodox Church which broke from the Patriarchate, wanted to modernize the Church, and was prepared to take a conciliatory attitude towards the Soviet government. The mention of Samara, a large town on the River Don, adds further to the obscurity of this reference.

²³Under the Articles of Union drawn up in 1706 the Scots had abandoned their own parliament but retained independent legal and ecclesiastical institutions. The final settlement followed several years of negotiations during which the Scots held out for trading independence. England’s initial refusal led to sharp retaliation in the form of the 1703 Security Act and trading agreements with France. The Scots accepted the Articles of Union only when they included the right to trade independently and on equal terms with England’s colonies. The Church question was not even at this point the main contentious issue.

right of the British parliament to interfere with the solemnly acknowledged rights of the Scottish Church. Yet the Speaker refused to remove the matter from the order paper. Then Maclean, another Scottish MP, stated that if such a Bill went through he and his friends would go back to Scotland and call for the Act of Union between England and Scotland to be revoked and the Scottish parliament restored (*laughter from the Conservatives and cheers from representatives of the Scottish Labour Party*).

Everything is instructive here. The Scottish group, which stands on the left wing of the Parliamentary Labour Party, protests against ecclesiastical legislation, not starting out at all from the principle of the separation of church and state, or any practical considerations, but basing themselves on the sacred rights of the Scottish Church as guaranteed to it by a treaty which is now over two centuries old. In retaliation for the violation of the rights of the Scottish Church these same Labour MPS threaten to demand the restoration of the Scottish parliament, which would, of course, be quite useless to them.

George Lansbury, a left pacifist, relates in a leading article in the Labour Party's daily organ how working men and women at a meeting in Monmouthshire sang a religious hymn with great enthusiasm, and how this hymn "helped" him, Lansbury. Individual people may reject religion, he says, but the labour movement as a movement cannot reconcile itself to this. Our struggle needs enthusiasm, piety and faith, and this cannot be achieved only by an appeal to personal interests. Thus although our movement needs enthusiasm, it has according to Lansbury, no power to arouse it, but is compelled to borrow it from the priests.

John Wheatley, the former Minister of Health in MacDonald's cabinet, is regarded as a more or less extreme left. But Wheatley is not only a socialist, but a Catholic too. Or to put it better: he is first and foremost a Catholic and only then a socialist. Since the Pope has called for a struggle against communism and socialism, the editors of the **Daily Herald**, courteously not naming His Holiness, requested Wheatley to clarify how things stood over the mutual relations between Catholicism and socialism. We must not suppose that the newspaper asked how a socialist could be a Catholic or a believer generally; no, the question was posed as to whether it was permissible for a Catholic to become a socialist. The obligation for a man to be a believer remained beyond doubt; placed in question was only the right of a believer to be a socialist, while remaining a good Catholic. And it is on this ground that the "left" Wheatley takes his stand in his reply. He considers that Catholicism does not directly intrude in politics, but determines "only" the general rules of moral conduct, and obliges a socialist to apply his political principles "with due regard to the moral rights of others". Wheatley maintains that the only correct policy on this question is that of the British party which, as distinct from continental socialism, has not adopted an "anti-Christian" slant. For this "left" a socialist policy is guided by personal morality and personal morality by religion. This is in no way distinguishable from the philosophy of Lloyd George who considers the church to be the central

power station of all parties. Compromise receives here its religious sanctification.

With regard to the MP Kirkwood, who made a political attack on the Prince of Wales's travelling allowance, a socialist wrote in the **Daily Herald** that he, Kirkwood, had a drop of old Cromwell's blood in his veins, evidently meaning a drop of revolutionary determination. Whether or not this is the case we do not yet know. What Kirkwood has certainly inherited from Cromwell is piety. In his speech in Parliament Kirkwood declared that he had no personal grudge against the Prince and did not envy him. "The Prince can give me nothing. I am keeping excellent health, I enjoy independence as a man and there is only one before whom I bear responsibility for my actions and that is my creator." From this speech we thus learn not only of the Scottish MP's excellent health, but also of the fact that this health cannot be explained by the laws of biology and physiology but by the intentions of a creator, with whom Mr. Kirkwood, maintains quite definite relations, based upon personal favours on the one hand and sentiments of grateful obligation on the other.

The number of such examples could be multiplied indefinitely. Almost all the political activity of the top layers of the Labour Party could be resolved into episodes of this sort, which at first sight seem to be amusing and indecent curiosities, but on which the peculiarities of past history have been deposited rather as, for example, the complex metabolic processes of an organism are precipitated out as bladder stones. But we wish it to be remembered that the "organic" nature of this or that peculiarity in no way precludes surgery to remove it.

The outlook of the leaders of the British Labour Party is a sort of amalgam of Conservatism and Liberalism, partly adapted to the requirements of the trade unions, or rather their top layers. All of them are ridden with the religion of "gradualness". In addition they acknowledge the religion of the Old and New Testaments. They all consider themselves to be highly civilized people, yet they believe that the Heavenly Father created mankind only then, in his abundant love, to curse it, and subsequently to try, through the crucifixion his own son to straighten out this highly knotty affair a little. Out of the spirit of Christianity there have grown such national institutions as the trade union bureaucracy, MacDonald's first ministry and Mrs. Snowden.

Closely tied to the religion of gradualness and the Calvinist belief in predestination²⁴ is the religion of national arrogance. MacDonald is convinced that since his bourgeoisie was once the foremost bourgeoisie in the world then he, MacDonald, has nothing whatsoever to learn from the barbarians and semi-barbarians

²⁴A form of Protestant Christianity named after John Calvin (1509-1564), the Swiss divine and reformer. Its chief characteristics were a more radical break than its predecessors from the main doctrines of Catholicism, a belief that all were "predestined" to heaven or hell and a form of church government by "elders" from among the "elect". Calvin set up a "City of God" in Geneva in 1541 which, incorporated a severe dictatorship to enforce the values necessary for the capitalist bourgeoisie – particularly the need to work hard and accumulate wealth. Calvinism had a strong influence on the type of Protestantism that developed in Scotland.

on the continent of Europe. In this regard, as in all others, McDonald is merely apeing bourgeois leaders like Canning who proclaimed – albeit with far greater justification – that it did not become parliamentary Britain to learn politics from the nations of Europe.

Baldwin, in monotonously appealing to the conservative traditions of Britain’s political development, is doubtless hoping for support from the mighty buttress of bourgeois rule in the past. The bourgeoisie knew how to feed the top layers of the working class with conservatism. It was no accident that the most resolute fighters for Chartism came out of the artisan layers that had been proletarianized by the onslaught of capitalism within two generations.

Equally significant is the fact that the most radical elements in the modern British labour movement are most often natives of Ireland or Scotland (this rule does not of course extend to the Scotsman, MacDonald). The combination of social and national oppression in Ireland, given the sharp conflict between agricultural Ireland and capitalist England, facilitated abrupt leaps in consciousness. Scotland entered on the capitalist path later than England: a sharper turn in the life of the masses of the people gave rise to a sharper political reaction. If Messrs. British “socialists” were capable of thinking over their own history, and the role of Ireland and Scotland in particular, they would possibly manage to understand how and why backward Russia, with its abrupt transition to capitalism, brought forward the most determined revolutionary party and was the first to take the path of a socialist overturn.

The basis of the conservatism of British life is however being irreversibly undermined today. The “leaders” of the British working class imagined for decades that an independent workers’ party was the gloomy privilege of continental Europe. Nowadays nothing is left of that naive and ignorant conceit. The proletariat forced the trade unions to create an independent party. It will not stop at this however.

The Liberal and semi-Liberal leaders of the Labour Party still think that a social revolution is the gloomy prerogative of continental Europe. But here again events will expose their backwardness. Much less time will be needed to turn the Labour Party into a revolutionary one than was necessary to create it.

The principal element in the conservatism of political development has been, and to some extent still is the Protestant-based religious nature of the British people. Puritanism was a harsh school, the social disciplining of the middle classes. The masses of the people however always resisted it. The proletarian did not feel himself to be “chosen” – Calvinist predestination was plainly not for him. From out of the Independents’ movement there took shape English Liberalism, whose chief mission was to “educate” the working masses, that is to subordinate them to bourgeois society. Within certain limits and for a certain period Liberalism fulfilled this mission but in the end it as little succeeded in swallowing up the working class as Puritanism had.

The Labour Party took over from the Liberals, with the same Puritan and

Liberal traditions. If one takes the Labour Party only on the level of MacDonald, Henderson and Co. then it has to be said that they have come to complete the uncompleted task of totally enslaving the working class within bourgeois society. But there is in fact, against their will, another process moving in the masses which must finally liquidate the Puritan-Liberal traditions, and in so doing liquidate MacDonald.

Catholicism, and likewise Anglicanism, were for the English middle classes an existing tradition bound up with the privileges of the nobility and the clergy. Against Catholicism and Anglicanism the young English bourgeoisie created Protestantism as its form of belief and as the justification of its place in society.

Calvinism, with its iron doctrine of predestination was a mystical form of approach to the law-governed character of history. The ascendant bourgeoisie felt that the laws of history were behind it, and this awareness they shrouded in the form of the doctrine of predestination. Calvin's denial of free will in no way paralyzed the revolutionary energy of the Independents, on the contrary it powerfully reinforced it. The Independents felt themselves to be summoned to accomplish a great historical act. An analogy can with some truth be drawn between the doctrine of predestination in the Puritans' revolution and the role of Marxism in the revolution of the proletariat. In both cases the highest level of political activity rests not upon subjective impulse but on an iron conformity with a law, only in the one case mystically distorted and in the other scientifically known.

The British proletariat received Protestantism as a tradition already formed, that is to say, just as the bourgeoisie prior to the seventeenth century had received Catholicism and Anglicanism. As the awakened bourgeoisie counterposed Protestantism to Catholicism, the revolutionary proletariat will counterpose materialism and atheism to Protestantism.

While for Cromwell and his comrades-in-arms, Calvinism was the spiritual weapon in the revolutionary transformation of society, for the MacDonalds it merely inspires bowing and scraping before anything that has been "gradually" created. From Puritanism the MacDonalds have inherited – not its revolutionary strength but its religious prejudices. From the Owenites – not their communist enthusiasm but their reactionary Utopian hostility to the class struggle. From Britain's past political history the Fabians ²⁵ have borrowed only the spiritual dependence of the proletariat on the bourgeoisie. History has turned its backside on these gentlemen and the inscriptions they read there have become their programme.

²⁵The Fabian Society was set up in 1884 by a group of mystics who had formerly constituted the Fellowship of the New Life. It soon secured the support of a Colonial Office clerk called Sidney Webb and a then obscure novelist and music critic, Bernard Shaw. Fabians advocated various social reforms which they sought to achieve by putting pressure on liberals, trade union leaders and anybody else prepared to listen. Falsely claiming to have brought about most collectivist legislation since the time of its foundation, the Fabian Society has nevertheless exercised a strong ideological influence within right wing sections of the Labour Party providing the chief alternative to Marxism and the struggle to overthrow capitalism.

An island position, wealth, success in world politics, all this cemented by Puritanism, the religion of the “chosen people”, has turned into an arrogant contempt for everything continental and generally un-British. Britain’s middle classes have been long convinced that the language, science, technology and culture of other nations do not merit study. All this has been completely taken over by the philistines currently heading the Labour Party.

It is curious that even Hyndman, who published while Marx was alive a book called **England For All**, refers in it to the author of **Capital** without naming either him or his work: the cause of this strange omission lay in the fact that Hyndman did not want to shock the British – is it really conceivable that a Briton could learn anything from a German!

The dialectic of history has in this respect played a cruel trick upon Britain, having converted the advantages of her forward development into the cause of her present backwardness. We can see this in the field of industry, in science, in the state system and in political ideology. Britain developed without historical precedents. She could not seek and find a model for her own future in more advanced countries. She went forward gropingly and empirically, only generalizing her experience and looking ahead insofar as was unavoidable. Empiricism is stamped on the traditional mode of thought of the British – that means above all of the British bourgeois; and this same intellectual tradition has passed over to the top layers of the working class. Empiricism became a tradition and a banner, that is, it was coupled with a disdainful attitude to the “abstract” thought of the continent.

Germany for long philosophized about the true nature of the state, while the British bourgeoisie actually built the best state for the needs of its own rule. But with the passage of time it turned out that the German bourgeoisie which, being backward in practice tended towards theoretical speculation, turned its backwardness to advantage and created an industry far more scientifically organized and adapted to the struggle on the world market. The British socialist philistines took over from their bourgeoisie an arrogant attitude towards the continent in a period when Britain’s earlier advantages were turning into their opposite.

MacDonald, in establishing the “congenital” peculiarities of British socialism, states that to seek its ideological roots we “will have to pass by Marx to Godwin”. Godwin was a major figure for his time. But for a British person to go back to him is the same as for a German to seek roots in Weitling²⁶ or for a Russian to go back to Chernyshevsky.²⁷ We do not mean by this that the British labour movement does not have “peculiarities”. It is precisely the Marxist school

²⁶Wilhelm Weitling (1808-1871) was a leading German utopian socialist and a tailor by trade. His conception of an ideal communist society was partly influenced by Fourier and widely known during Marx’s early years.

²⁷Nikolai Gavrilovich Chernyshevsky (1828-1889), a Russian revolutionary democrat, utopian socialist writer, publicist and literary critic. One of the most outstanding Russian petty-bourgeois radicals during the 1870s and 1880s.

which has always devoted the greatest attention to the idiosyncrasies of British development. But we explain these idiosyncrasies by objective conditions, the structure of society and the changes in it. We Marxists can, thanks to this, understand far better the course of development of the British labour movement, and better foretell its future than can the present-day “theoreticians” of the Labour Party. The old call of philosophy to “know thyself” has not sounded in their ears. They consider that they are summoned by destiny to re-construct the old society from top to bottom. Yet at the same time they halt, prostrate, before a line chalked across the floor. How can they assault bourgeois property if they dare not refuse pocket money to the Prince of Wales?

Royalty, they declare, “does not hinder” the country’s progress and works out cheaper than a president if you count all the expense of elections, and so on and so forth. Such speeches by Labour leaders typify a facet of their “idiosyncrasies” which cannot be called anything other than conservative block-headedness. Royalty is weak as long as the bourgeois parliament is the instrument of bourgeois rule and as long as the bourgeoisie has no need of extra-parliamentary methods. But the bourgeoisie can if necessary use royalty as the focus of all extra-parliamentary, i.e. real forces directed against the working class. The British bourgeoisie itself has well understood the danger of even the most fictitious monarchy. Thus in 1837 the British government abolished the title of the Great Mogul in India and deported its incumbent from the holy city of Delhi, in spite of the fact that his name had already begun to lose its prestige. The English bourgeoisie knew that under favourable circumstances the Great Mogul might concentrate in himself the forces of the independent upper classes directed against English rule.

To proclaim a socialist platform and at the same time to declare that royal power does not “interfere” and is actually cheaper, is equivalent, for example, to a recognition of materialistic science combined with the use of magical incantations against toothache on the grounds that the witch comes cheaper. In such a “trifle” the whole man is expressed, along with his spurious acknowledgement of materialist science and the complete falsity of his ideological system. For a socialist the question of the monarchy is not decided by today’s book-keeping, especially when the books are cooked. It is a matter of the complete overturn of society and of purging it of all elements of oppression. Such a task, both politically and psychologically, excludes any conciliation with the monarchy.

Messrs. MacDonald, Thomas and the rest are indignant with the workers who protested when their ministers arrayed themselves in clownish court dress. Of course this is not MacDonald’s main crime: but it does perfectly symbolize all the rest. When the rising bourgeoisie fought the nobility they renounced ringlets and silken doublets. The bourgeois revolutionaries wore the black dress of the Puritans. As against the Cavaliers they were nicknamed Roundheads. A new content finds itself a new form. Of course, the form of dress is only a convention, but the masses – rightly enough – do not have the patience to understand why the representatives of the working class have to adopt the buffoonish conventions

of a court masquerade. And yet the masses will come to understand that he who is false in one small thing will be false in many things.

The characteristics of conservatism, religiosity and national arrogance can be seen in varying degrees and combinations in all the official leaders of today, from the ultra-right Thomas to the “left” Kirkwood. It would be the greatest error to underestimate the tenacity of these conservative “peculiarities” of the top echelons of the British working class movement. By this we do not mean, of course, that church-going and nationalistic conservatism is wholly absent from the masses. But while these traits have worked their way into the flesh and blood of the leaders, disciples of the Liberal Party that they are, they have a much less deep-seated and stable character in the working masses. We have already said that Puritanism, the religion of the money-making classes, never succeeded in penetrating deep into the consciousness of the working masses. The same also applies to Liberalism. Workers used to vote for the Liberals but in their majority they remained workers, and the Liberals always had to be on their guard. The very displacement of the Liberal Party by the Labour Party was a result of the pressure of the proletarian masses.

In other circumstances, if Britain were growing economically stronger, then a Labour Party of the present type might be able to continue and deepen the “educational” work of Protestantism and Liberalism, that is to say, it would be able to bind the consciousness of broad circles of the working class more tightly to the national conservative traditions and discipline of the bourgeois order.

But under present-day conditions – with the evident economic decline of Britain and the lack of any perspective – the development can be expected to go in exactly the opposite direction. The war has already dealt a heavy blow to the traditional religiosity of the British masses. Not for nothing has Mr. Wells occupied himself with the creation of a new religion, attempting en route from Earth to Mars to make a career as a Fabian Calvin. We are doubtful of his success. The mole of revolution is digging too well this time! The masses will liberate themselves from the yoke of national conservatism, working out their own discipline of revolutionary action.

Under this pressure from below the top layers of the Labour Party will quickly shed their skins. We do not in the least mean by this that MacDonald will change his spots to those of a revolutionary. No, he will be cast out. But those who will in all probability form the first substitutes, people of the ilk of Lansbury, Wheatley and Kirkwood, will inevitably reveal that they are but a left variant of the same basic Fabian type. Their radicalism is constrained by democracy and religion and poisoned by the national arrogance that ties them spiritually to the British bourgeoisie. The working class will in all probability have to renew its leadership several times before it creates a party really answering the historical situation and the tasks of the British proletariat.

The Fabian “Theory” of Socialism

Let us overcome our natural aversion and read the rough the article in which Ramsay MacDonald expounded his views a short time before leaving office. We warn the reader in advance that we shall have to enter a mental junk shop in which the suffocating odor of camphor has no effect on the work of the moths.

“In the field of feeling and conscience”, MacDonald begins, “in the realm of spirit, socialism is the religion of service to the people.” Behind these words there at once appears a benevolent bourgeois, a left Liberal who “serves” the people by coming in from outside, or rather – from above. Such an approach has its roots wholly in the distant past, when radical intellectuals settled in working-class districts of London to undertake cultural and educational work. What a monstrously anachronistic sound these words have when applied to today’s Labour Party, which rests directly upon the trade unions!

The word “religion” must be understood here not merely in an emotive sense. What is being discussed here is Christianity in its Anglo-Saxon interpretation. “Socialism is based upon the gospels”, proclaims MacDonald. “It is an excellently conceived [*sic*] and resolute attempt to Christianize government and society.” But are there not certain problems with this line of argument? Firstly: the peoples who are statistically reckoned to be Christian comprise approximately 37 per cent of mankind. How about the non-Christian world?

Secondly: atheism is having no small success even among the Christian peoples and especially among the proletariat. This is so far less noticeable in the Anglo-Saxon countries. But mankind, even Christian mankind, is not exclusively composed of Anglo-Saxons. In the Soviet Union which has a population of 130 million, atheism is the officially proclaimed state doctrine.

Thirdly: Great Britain has held sway over India for centuries now. European nations with this same Britain at their head long ago cleared a path to China. Nevertheless the number of atheists in Europe is growing faster than the number of Christians in India and China. Why? Because Christianity confronts the Chinese and Indians as the religion of oppressors, aggressors, slave-owners, plunderers breaking into someone else’s house. The Chinese know that Christian missionaries are sent to clear the path for the warships. That’s the real, historical Christianity! And this Christianity is to form the basis of socialism? For China and for India?

Fourthly: Christianity has, by the official reckoning, now been in existence for 1,925 years. Before becoming MacDonald’s religion it was the religion of the Roman slaves, of the barbarian nomads who settled in Europe, the religion of crowned and uncrowned despots and feudal lords, the religion of Charles Stuart – and, in a transmuted form, the religion of Cromwell who cut off Charles Stuart’s head.

Finally today it is the religion of Lloyd George, Churchill, **The Times** and, we must assume, of the devout Christian who forged the “Zinoviev Letter”, to the

greater glory of electing the Conservatives in the most Christian of democracies. But exactly how did the Christianity which took root in the consciousness of European peoples and became their official religion by means of sermons, schoolroom violence, threats of torments in the hereafter, hell-fire and the sword of the police – exactly how in the twentieth century of its existence did it lead to the most bloody and the most evil of wars, when the remaining nineteen centuries of Christianity’s history had already been centuries of bestiality and crime? And where precisely are there any reasonable grounds for hoping that “divine teaching” will, in the twentieth, twenty-first, or even the twenty-fifth century of its history, establish equality and brotherhood where it has earlier sanctified violence and slavery?

It would be futile to expect an answer to these schoolboy questions from MacDonald. Our sage is an evolutionist, that is to say, he believes that everything is “gradually” changing and, with God’s help, for the better. MacDonald is an evolutionist, he does not believe in miracles, he does not believe in leaps apart from a single one that took place 1,925 years ago: at that time a wedge was driven into organic evolution by none other than the Son of God and He put into circulation a certain quantity of heavenly truths from which the clergy collect a substantial terrestrial income.

The Christian basis of socialism is given in two crucial sentences in his article: “Who can deny that poverty is not only a personal, but a social evil? *Who does not feel pity for poverty?*” Here, behind a theory of socialism, is betrayed the philosophy of a socially-minded philanthropic bourgeois who feels “pity” for poor folk and makes a “religion of his conscience” out of this pity without, however, upsetting his business habits unduly.

Who does not feel pity for poverty? All Britain’s history is, as is well known, a history of the pity of the propertied classes for the poverty of the toiling masses. Without delving into the depths of time it is sufficient to trace this history merely, let’s say, from the sixteenth century, from the time of the enclosures of the peasants’ lands; the time, that is, of the conversion of the majority of the peasants into homeless vagrants, when pity for poverty expressed itself in the galleys, the gallows, the lopping-off of ears and other such measures of Christian compassion. The Duchess of Sutherland completed the enclosures in the north of Scotland at the beginning of the last century and the staggering tale of this butchery was given by Marx in immortal lines, in which we meet not snivelling “compassion”, but instead find the passion of revolutionary indignation.²⁸

Who does not feel pity for poverty? Read through the history of Britain’s industrial development and of the exploitation of child labour in particular. The

²⁸See Marx, **Capital**, Volume 1 (Moscow 1965), pp.729-30, which includes the following passage about the Duchess of Sutherland’s tenants: “From 1814 to 1820 there 15,000 inhabitants, about 3,000 families, were systematically, hunted and rooted out. All their villages were destroyed and burnt, and their fields turned into pasturage. British soldiers enforced this eviction and came to blows with the inhabitants. One old woman was burnt to death in the flames of her hut, which she refused to leave.”

pity shown by the rich for poverty has never protected the poor from degradation and misery. In Britain, no less than anywhere else, poverty has only gained anything in cases where it has managed to take wealth by the throat. Does this really have to be proved in a country with an age-long history of class struggle, which was at the same time a history of niggardly concessions and ruthless reprisals?

“Socialism does not believe in force”, continues MacDonald, “Socialism is a state of mental health and not mental sickness . . . and therefore by its very nature it must repudiate force with horror . . . It fights only with mental and moral weapons.” This is all very fine, though not entirely new; the same ideas were set forth in the Sermon on the Mount and, what is more, in considerably better style. We have recalled above what this led to. Why should MacDonald’s prosaic re-hash of the Sermon on the Mount result in anything better? Tolstoy, who commanded rather more powerful resources of ideological conviction, did not manage to draw even members of his own landed family over to these evangelical precepts about the impermissibility of force. MacDonald gave us a lesson when he was in power. Let us remind our readers that during that period the police force was not disbanded, the courts were not abolished, the prisons were not demolished, and warships were not scuttled – on the contrary, new ones were built. And, insofar as I am any judge, the police, the courts, prisons, the army and the navy are organs of force. The recognition of the truth that “socialism is a state of mental health and not mental sickness” in no way prevents MacDonald from strutting round India and Egypt in the sacred footsteps of the great Christian, Curzon. MacDonald as a Christian recoils from violence “with horror”; as prime minister he applies all the methods of capitalist oppression, and hands over the instruments of force to his Conservative successor intact.

So what does the renunciation of force in the final resort signify? Only that the oppressed must not adopt force against a capitalist state: neither workers against the bourgeoisie, nor farmers against landlords, nor Indians against the British administration and British capital. The state, constructed by the violence of the monarchy against the people, the bourgeoisie against the workers, the landlords against the farmers, by officers against soldiers, AngloSaxon slave-owners against colonial peoples, “Christians” against heathens – this bloodstained apparatus of centuries-long violence inspires MacDonald with pious reverence. He reacts “with horror” only to the force of liberation. And in this lies the sacred essence of his “religion of service to the people”.

“There is an old and a new school of socialism”, MacDonald says. “We belong to the new school.” Mac Donald’s “ideal” (he does have an “ideal”) he shares with the old school, but the new school has a “better plan” for realising this ideal. What does this plan consist of? MacDonald does not leave us without an answer. “We have no class consciousness . . . our opponents are the people with class consciousness . . . But in place of a class consciousness we want to evoke the consciousness of social solidarity.” Beating the air, MacDonald concludes: “The class struggle is not made by us. It is created by capitalism, and will always be

its fruit just as thistles will always be the fruit of thistles.”

That MacDonald lacks class consciousness, while the leaders of the bourgeoisie have such a consciousness, is absolutely beyond doubt, and it means that at present the British Labour Party is walking along without a head upon its shoulders, while the party of the British bourgeoisie does have such a head – and with a very thick skull and an equally solid neck at that. If MacDonald had confined himself to an admission that he is a little weak in the head as regards “consciousness” there would be no grounds for argument. But MacDonald wishes to construct a programme out of his head and its weak “consciousness”. We cannot agree to that.

“The class war”, says MacDonald, “is created by capitalism.” That, of course, is false. Class war existed before capitalism. But it is true that the modern class war – between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie – was created by capitalism. It is also true that “it will always be its fruit”, that is to say, that it will exist as long as capitalism exists. But in a war there are obviously two warring parties. One of them is composed of our enemies who, according to MacDonald, “stand for the privileged class and desire to preserve it.” It might seem that, since we stand for the destruction of a privileged class that does not wish to leave the scene, it is precisely in this that the basic content of the class struggle lies. But no, MacDonald “wants to evoke” a consciousness of social solidarity. With whom? The solidarity of the working class is the expression of its internal unity in the struggle against the bourgeoisie. The social solidarity that MacDonald preaches is the solidarity of the exploited with the exploiters, that is, the maintenance of exploitation. MacDonald boasts moreover that his ideas differ from the ideas of our grandfathers: by which he means Karl Marx. In fact MacDonald differs from this “grandfather” in the sense that he more closely resembles our great-grandfathers. The ideological hash that MacDonald puts forward as a “new school” marks – on an entirely new historical base – a return to the petty bourgeois, sentimental socialism that Marx subjected to a devastating criticism as early as 1847, and even before.

MacDonald counterposes to the class struggle the idea of the solidarity of all those charitable citizens who are trying to re-build society by democratic reforms. In this conception, the struggle of the class is replaced by the “constructive” activity of a political party which is built, not on a class base, but on the basis of social solidarity. The excellent ideas of our great-grandfathers – Robert Owen, Weitling and others – when completely emasculated and adapted for parliamentary use, sound particularly absurd in modern Britain with its numerically powerful Labour Party resting on the trade unions. There is no other country in the world where the class nature of socialism has been so objectively, plainly, incontestably and empirically revealed by history as in Britain, for there the Labour Party has grown out of the parliamentary representation of the trade unions, i.e. purely class organizations of wage labour. When the Conservatives, and for that matter the Liberals, tried to prevent the trade unions raising political levies then, in so doing, they were not unsuccessfully counterposing MacDonald’s idealist

conception of the party to that empirically class character that the party has actually acquired in Britain. To be sure there are, in the top layers of the Labour Party, a certain number of Fabian intellectuals and liberals who have joined out of despair, but in the first place it is to be firmly hoped that workers will sooner or later sweep this dross out, and in the second place the four-and-a-half million votes which are cast for the Labour Party are already today (with minor exceptions) the votes of British workers. As yet by no means all workers vote for their party. But it is almost solely workers who do vote for the Labour Party.

By this we do not at all mean that the Fabians, the ILPers and the Liberal defectors exert no influence on the working class. On the contrary, their influence is very great but it is not fixed. The reformists who are fighting against a proletarian class consciousness are, in the final reckoning, a tool of the ruling class. Throughout the whole history of the British Labour movement there has been pressure by the bourgeoisie upon the proletariat through the agency of radicals, intellectuals, drawing-room and church socialists and Owenites who reject the class struggle and advocate the principle of social solidarity, preach collaboration with the bourgeoisie, bridle, enfeeble and politically debase the proletariat.

The programme of the Independent Labour Party ²⁹ in full accord with this “tradition”, points out that the party strives “at a union of all organized workers together with all persons of all classes who believe in socialism”. This deliberately nebulous formula has the aim of slurring over the class character of socialism. No one, of course, is demanding that the party’s doors be closed to tested entrants from other classes. However their number is already insignificant, if one does not look only at statistics of the leadership but takes the party as a whole; and in the future, when the party enters on the revolutionary road, it will be even less. But the ILPers need their formula about 6 people of all classes” to deceive the workers themselves as to the real, class source of their strength, by substituting for it the fiction of a supra-class solidarity.

We have mentioned that many workers still vote for bourgeois candidates. MacDonald contrives to interpret even this fact in the bourgeoisie’s political interest. “We must consider the worker not as a worker, but as a man,” he teaches and he adds: “even Toryism has to some extent learnt . . . to treat people as people. Therefore many workers voted for Toryism.” In other words: when the Conservatives, terrified by the pressure of the workers, have learnt to adapt to the most backward of them, to break them down, to deceive them, to play upon their

²⁹Established in 1893, the ILP aimed at securing Parliamentary and local government representation for the workers on the basis of reformist political aims. It played an important role in the establishment of the Labour Representation Committee in 1900 and provided its main political life until constituency organizations of the Labour Party were firmly established in 1918. After this it put forward policies within the Labour Party opposed to the right-wing and eventually broke from it altogether in 1931. It then dwindled into centrist isolation, nevertheless providing an important focus for some debates on socialist strategy in the 1930s. [In the 30s it was one area in which Trotskyists operated. See Bornstein & Richardson, **Against the Stream**. Note by ERC]

prejudices and frighten them with forged documents – all this means that the Tories know how to treat people as people!

Those British labour *organizations* that are the most unalloyed in class composition, namely the trade unions, have lifted the Labour Party directly upon their own shoulders. This expresses the profound changes in Britain's situation: her weakening on the world market, the change in her economic structure, the failing out of the middle classes and the break-up of Liberalism. The proletariat needs a class party, it is striving by every means to create it, it puts pressure on the trade unions, it pays political levies. But this mounting pressure from below, from the plants and the factories, from the docks and the mines, is opposed by a counter-pressure from above, from the sphere of official British politics with its national traditions of "love of freedom", world supremacy, cultural primogeniture, democracy and Protestant piety. And if (in order to weaken the class consciousness of the British proletariat) a political concoction is prepared from all these components – then you end up with the programme of Fabianism.

Since MacDonald declares that the Labour Party, which openly rests upon the trade unions, is an organization above classes, then the "democratic" state of British capital has, for him, an even more classless character. He admits that the present state, governed by landowners, bankers, shipowners and coal magnates does not form a "complete" democracy. There still remain one or two defects in it: "Democracy and, for example (!), an industrial system not governed by the people are incompatible concepts." In other words, this democracy turns out to have one small snag: the wealth created by the nation belongs not to the nation but to a tiny minority of it.

Is this accidental? No, bourgeois democracy is the system of institutions and measures whereby the needs and demands of the working masses, who are striving upwards, are neutralized, distorted, rendered harmless, or purely and simply come to naught. Whoever says that in Britain, France and the United States private property is kept in being by the will of the people is lying. No one has asked the people about it. Labouring people are born and brought up in conditions not created by themselves. The state school and the state church inculcate them with concepts that are directed exclusively at maintaining the existing order. Parliamentary democracy is nothing but a resumé of this state of affairs. MacDonald's party enters into this system as an essential component.

When events – generally of a catastrophic nature like economic upheavals, crises and wars – make the social system intolerable for the workers, the latter find themselves with neither the opportunity nor the wish to express their revolutionary anger within the channels of capitalist democracy. In other words: when the masses grasp how long they have been deceived they carry out a revolution. The successful revolution transfers power to them and their possession of power allows them to construct a state apparatus that serves their interests.

But it is precisely this that MacDonald does not accept. "The revolution in Russia", he says, "taught us a great lesson. It showed that a revolution means

ruin and calamity and nothing else.” Here the reactionary Fabian steps out before us in all his repulsive nakedness. Revolution leads only to calamities! Yet British democracy led to the imperialist war, not only in the sense that all capitalist states shared responsibility for the war, but also in the sense that British diplomacy had a direct responsibility, consciously and deliberately pushing Europe towards war. Had British “democracy” declared that she would intervene on the side of the Entente ³⁰, Germany and Austria-Hungary would most probably have retreated.

But the British government acted otherwise: it secretly promised support to the Entente, and deliberately deceived Germany with the possibility of neutrality. Thus British “democracy” brought about a war whose devastation far exceeds the calamities of any revolution. Apart from that, what sort of ears and what sort of brains must one have to assert in the face of the revolution that toppled Tsarism, the nobility and the bourgeoisie, shook the church and aroused a 150 million strong people, forming a whole family of peoples, to a new life, that revolution is a calamity and *nothing else*? Here MacDonald is only repeating Baldwin. He does not know or understand the Russian revolution or even British history.

We are compelled to remind him as we reminded the Conservative prime minister. If the initiative in the economic field up to the final quarter of the last century belonged to Britain, then in the political field Britain has developed over the last century and a half in the wake of the European and American revolutions. The French revolution, the July revolution of 1830, the revolution of 1848, the American Civil War of the 1860s, the Russian Revolution of 1905 and the Russian Revolution of 1917 – all pushed Britain’s social development ahead and set the landmarks of major legislative reforms in her history. Without the Russian Revolution of 1917, MacDonald would never have been prime minister in 1924. Of course we do not mean by this that MacDonald’s ministry was the highest conquest of October. But it was at all events largely its by-product.

And even children’s picture-books teach us that if you want to have acorns you must not dig up the oak tree. Besides, how ridiculous is this Fabian conceit: since the Russian Revolution has taught “us” (who?) a lesson, then “we” (who?) shall settle things without revolution. But why then did the lessons of all previous wars not permit “you” to manage without the imperialist war? In the same way that the bourgeoisie calls every successive war the last war. so MacDonald wants to call the Russian Revolution the last revolution. But why exactly should the British bourgeoisie make concessions to the British proletariat and peacefully, without a fight, renounce its property – merely because it has received in advance from MacDonald a firm assurance that, following the experience of the Russian revolution, British socialists shall never take the path of violence? Where and when has the ruling class ever given up their power and property by a peaceful

³⁰The alliance of France, Russia and Britain that fought the Central Powers of Germany and Austria-Hungary in the First World War. The Entente was later joined by Italy, Rumania, Portugal and the United States.

vote, least of all a class such as the British bourgeoisie, which has behind it centuries of world-wide plunder?

MacDonald is against revolution and for organic evolution: he carries over poorly digested biological concepts into society. For him revolution, as a sum of accumulated partial mutations, resembles the development of living organisms, the turning of a chrysalis into a butterfly and so forth; but in this latter process he ignores just those decisive, critical moments when the new creature bursts the old casing in a revolutionary way. Here though it turns out that MacDonald is “for a revolution similar to that which took place in the womb of feudalism, when the industrial revolution came to maturity”. MacDonald in his ignorance evidently imagines that the industrial revolution took place molecularly, without upheavals, calamities and devastation. He simply does not know Britain’s history (let alone the history of other countries); and above all he does not understand that the industrial revolution, which was already maturing in the womb of feudalism in the form of merchant capital, brought about the Reformation ³¹, caused the Stuarts to collide with parliament, gave birth to the Civil War and ruined and devastated Britain – in order afterwards to enrich her.

It would be tedious here to interpret the conversion of a chrysalis into a butterfly so as to establish the necessary social analogies. It is simpler and shorter to recommend MacDonald to ponder over the old comparison between a revolution and childbirth. Can we not draw a “lesson” here – since births produce “nothing” except pains and torment (the infant does not come into it!) then in future the population is recommended to multiply by painless Fabian means, with recourse to the talents of Mrs. Snowden as midwife.

Let us warn, however, that this is by no means so simple. Even the chick which has taken shape in the egg has to apply force to the calcareous prison that shuts it in; if some Fabian chick decided out of Christian (or any other) considerations to refrain from acts of force the calcareous casing would inevitably suffocate it. British pigeon fanciers are producing a special variety with a shorter and shorter beak, by artificial selection. There comes a time, however, when the new offspring’s beak is so short that the poor creature can no longer pierce the egg-shell: the young pigeon falls victim to compulsory restraint from violence; and the continued progress of the short-beaked variety comes to a halt. If our memory serves us right, MacDonald can read about this in Darwin.

Still pursuing these analogies with the organic world so beloved of MacDonald, we can say that the political art of the British bourgeoisie consists of shortening the proletariat’s revolutionary beak, thereby preventing it from perforating the shell of the capitalist state. The beak of the proletariat is its party. If you take a glance at MacDonald, Thomas and Mr. and Mrs. Snowden then it must be

³¹The break of Christianity from the power of the Papacy and some of its doctrines began with the work of Martin Luther (*q.v.*, Chap.6 n.11) and was developed later by the Calvinists (*q.v.*, Chap.3 n.3) among others. In Britain it was initiated by a political quarrel between Henry VIII and the Pope in the 1520s and developed by the expropriation of the monasteries in the following period and the establishment of a new, national Anglican Church.

admitted that the bourgeoisie's work of rearing the shortbeaked and soft-beaked varieties has been crowned with striking success – for not only are these worthies unfit to break through the capitalist shell, they are really unfit to do anything at all.

Here, however, the analogy ends, revealing all the limitations of such cursory data from biology textbooks in place of a study of the conditions and routes of historical development. Human society, although growing out of the organic and inorganic world, represents such a complex and concentrated combination of them that it requires an independent study. A social organism is distinguished from a biological one by, amongst other things, a far greater flexibility and capacity for regrouping its elements, by a certain degree of conscious choice of its tools and devices, and by the conscious application (within certain limits) of the experience of the past, and so on. The pigeon chick in the egg cannot change its over-short beak and so it perishes. The working class when faced with the question of whether to be or not to be can sack MacDonald and Mrs. Snowden and arm itself with the “beak” of a revolutionary party for the destruction of the capitalist system.

Especially curious in MacDonald is the coupling of a crudely biological theory of society with an idealist Christian abhorrence of materialism. “You talk about revolution and a catastrophic leap but take a look at nature and see how intelligently a caterpillar behaves when it is due to turn into a chrysalis, take a look at the worthy tortoise in its motion, you will find the natural rhythm of the transformation of society. Learn from nature!” And in this same vein MacDonald brands materialism “a banality, a nonsensical assertion, there is no spiritual or intellectual refinement in it . . .” MacDonald and refinement! Isn't this indeed an astounding “refinement: seeking the model for man's collective social activity in a caterpillar, while at the same time demanding for his private use an immortal soul with a comfortable existence in the hereafter?

“Socialists are accused of being poets. That is correct,” explains MacDonald, “we are poets. There cannot be good politics without poetry. And in general without poetry there can be nothing good.” And so on and so forth in the same style. And in conclusion: “The world needs more than anything some political and social Shakespeare.” This drivel about poetry may not be so obnoxious politically as lectures on the impermissibility of violence. But MacDonald's utter lack of intellectual talent is here expressed even more convincingly, if that is possible. A solemn, cowardly pedant, in whom there is as much poetry as in a square inch of carpet attempts to impress the world with Shakespearian grimaces. Here is where the “monkey-tricks” that MacDonald ascribes to the Bolsheviks really begin. MacDonald, as the “poet” of Fabianism! The politics of Sidney Webb as an artistic creation! Thomas's ministry as the poetry of the colonies! And finally Mr. Snowden's budget as the City of London's song of love triumphant!

While drivelling about a social Shakespeare, MacDonald has overlooked Lenin. What a good thing for MacDonald, if not for Shakespeare, that the greatest English poet worked over three centuries ago: MacDonald has had sufficient

time to see the Shakespeare in Shakespeare. He would never have recognized him had he been his contemporary. For MacDonald has overlooked – fully and completely overlooked – Lenin. Philistine blindness finds a dual expression: aimlessly sighing for Shakespeare, and ignoring his greatest contemporary.

“Socialism is interested in art and the classics.” It is amazing how this “poet” is able by his very touch to vulgarize an idea in which there is, in itself, nothing vulgar. To be convinced of this it is enough to read his conclusion: “Even where great poverty and great unemployment exist as, unfortunately, they do in our country, the public must not begrudge the acquisition of pictures and in general anything that evokes ecstasy and elevates the spirit of young and old.” It is not, however, altogether clear from this excellent advice whether the acquisition of pictures is recommended to the unemployed themselves – this would presuppose an appropriate supplementary grant for their need- or whether MacDonald is advising the high-minded ladies and gentlemen to purchase pictures “despite the unemployment” and thereby to “elevate their spirit”. We must assume that the second is closer to the truth. But surely in that case we only see in front of us the liberal, drawing-room, Protestant clergyman who speaks a few tearful words about poverty and the “religion of conscience”, and then invites his worldly flock not to succumb completely to despondency but to continue their former way of life? After this let those who want to believe that materialism is vulgar, while MacDonald is a social poet yearning for Shakespeare. We consider that, if in the physical world there exists a degree of absolute cold, then in the spiritual world there must be a degree of absolute vulgarity which is equivalent to the ideological temperature of MacDonald.

Sidney and Beatrice Webb represent another variety of Fabianism. They are accustomed to assiduous work, they know the value of facts and figures and this imposes a certain restriction on their diffuse thought. They are no less tedious than MacDonald, but they tend to be more instructive as long as they do not go beyond the bounds of factual research. In the sphere of generalizations they stand a little higher than MacDonald. At the Labour Party Conference in 1923 Sidney Webb recalled that the founder of British socialism was not Karl Marx but Robert Owen, who preached not the class struggle but the time-hallowed doctrine of the brotherhood of all mankind. To this day Sidney Webb regards John Stuart Mill as the classic figure of political economy and he accordingly teaches that a struggle must be waged not between capital and labour but between the overwhelming majority of the population and the appropriators of rent. This typifies the theoretical level of the Labour Party’s leading economist well enough.

As is well known the historical process, even in Britain, does not move as Webb dictates. The trade unions represent the organization of wage labour against capital. On the basis of the trade unions there grew up the Labour Party, which even made Webb a minister. He implemented his programme only in the sense that he did not conduct a struggle against the expropriators of surplus value. But he did not conduct one against the appropriators of rent either.

In 1923 the Webbs published a book, **The Decay of Capitalist Civilization**. The book represents in essence a partly diluted and partly renovated paraphrase of Kautsky's ³² old commentaries on the Erfurt Programme. ³³ Yet in **The Decay of Capitalist Civilization** the political tendency of Fabianism is expressed in its full hopelessness, and in this case semi-consciously. That the capitalist system must be changed, say the Webbs, there can be no doubt (to whom?). But the whole question is how it shall be changed. "It may by considerate adaptation be made to pass gradually and peacefully into a new form". For this just one small thing is needed: good will from both sides. "Unfortunately", our honourable authors relate, agreement cannot be reached with regard to how to change the capitalist system for "many" consider that the destruction of private property is tantamount to halting the rotation of the earth about its axis, "but they misunderstand the position". There now, how unfortunate! Everything could be settled to the satisfaction of all by means of "considerate adaptation" if only workers and capitalists alike understood what needs to be done and how.

But since "so far" this has not been achieved, the capitalists are voting for the Conservatives. And the conclusion? Here the poor Fabians come unstuck altogether and even **The Decay of Capitalist Civilization** turns into a doleful "Decay of Fabian Civilization". "Before the great war there seemed to be a substantial measure of consent", the book recounts, "that the present-day social order had to be gradually changed, in the direction of greater equality" and so on. Whose consent? Where was this consent? – these people take their tiny Fabian anthill for the world.

"We thought, perhaps wrongly (!) that this characteristic (!) British acquiescence (!) on the part of a limited governing class in the rising claims" of the people "would continue and be extended" towards a peaceful transformation of society. "But after the War everything fell into desuetude: the conditions of existence worsened for the workers, we are threatened with the reestablishment of the *veto* power of the House of Lords, with the particular object of resisting further concessions to the workers" and so on.

What follows from all this? In the hopeless quest for a conclusion the Webbs have written their little book. Its closing lines are as follows: "In an attempt, *possibly vain*, to make the parties understand their problems and each other better ... we offer this little book."

This is excellent: "a little book" as a means of reconciling the proletariat with

³²Karl Kautsky (1854-1938) was one of the leading theoreticians of the German Social Democratic Party and the Second International. By the outbreak of the First World War he had abandoned revolutionary Marxism and took up an indecisive position between revolutionary opposition to the war and patriotic support for the German bourgeoisie. As such he became the theorist of "centrism" in the socialist movement and strongly opposed the Russian Revolution.

³³The *Erfurt Programme* of the German Social-Democratic Party was drafted by Kautsky in 1891 and, revised according to Engels' criticism, was adopted as the official programme of the party and formed the model for the programme of the Russian and other Social-Democratic parties.

the bourgeoisie! To sum up . . . before the war there “seemed” to be consent that the existing system should be changed for the better; however there was not complete agreement on the nature of the change: the capitalists stood for private property, the workers against it; after the war the objective situation worsened and the political differences sharpened yet more: *therefore* the Webbs write a little book in the hope of bending both sides towards a reconciliation; but this hope is “possibly vain”. Yes, it possibly, very possibly is vain. These honourable Webbs who believe so much in the force of persuasion ought in our view, in the interests of “gradualness”, to have set themselves a simpler task, like, for example, that of persuading certain highly-placed Christian scoundrels to renounce their monopoly of the opium trade and their poisoning of millions of people in the East.

Poor, wretched, feeble-minded Fabianism – how disgusting its mental contortions are!

To attempt to turn over other philosophical varieties of Fabianism would be a futile task, since for these people “freedom of opinion” reigns only in the sense that each of the leaders has his own philosophy – which ultimately consists of the same reactionary elements of Conservatism, Liberalism and Protestantism but in differing combinations.

We were all surprised when, not so long ago, Bernard Shaw – such a witty writer! – informed us that Marx had long ago been superseded by Wells’s great work on universal history.³⁴ Such discoveries, so surprising to all mankind, can be explained by the fact that the Fabians form, in a theoretical respect, an exceedingly cloistered little world, deeply provincial, despite the fact that they live in London. Their philosophical inventions are necessary neither to the Conservatives nor to the Liberals. Even less are they necessary to the working class, for whom they provide nothing and explain nothing. These works in the final reckoning serve merely to explain to the Fabians themselves why Fabianism exists in the world. Along with theological literature this is possibly the most useless, and certainly the most boring, type of literary activity.

In various spheres of life in Britain today the men of the “Victorian era” (i.e. public figures of the time of Queen Victoria) are spoken of with a certain contempt. Everything in Britain has moved on since that time but possibly the Fabian type has been the best preserved. The vulgarly optimistic Victorian epoch, when it seemed that tomorrow would be a little bit better than today and the day after that a bit better than tomorrow, has found its most finished expression in the Webbs, Snowden, MacDonald and the other Fabians. That

³⁴I must confess that until Bernard Shaw’s letter I had not even known of the existence of this book. Afterwards I acquainted myself with it – I cannot in good conscience say read it because an acquaintance with two or three chapters was quite enough to stop me wasting any more time. Imagine a complete absence of method, of historical perspective, of understanding of the interdependence of the different facets of social life, and of scientific discipline in general and then imagine a “historian” burdened with these qualities roaming far and wide over the history of a few millenia with the carefree air of a man taking his Sunday stroll. Then you will have Wells’s book, which is to replace the Marxist school. – *L.D.T.*

is why they seem to be such clumsy and unnecessary survivals from an epoch that has suffered a final and irrevocable collapse. It can without exaggeration be said that the Fabian Society, which was founded in 1884 with the object of “arousing the social conscience”, is nowadays the most reactionary grouping in Great Britain. Neither the Conservative clubs, nor Oxford University, nor the English bishops and other priestly institutions can stand comparison with the Fabians. For all these are institutions of the enemy classes and the revolutionary movement of the proletariat will inevitably burst the dam they form. But the proletariat itself is restrained by precisely its own top leading layer, i.e. the Fabian politicians and their yes-men.

These pompous authorities, pedants and haughty, high-falutin’ cowards are systematically poisoning the labour movement, clouding the consciousness of the proletariat and paralysing its will. It is only thanks to them that Toryism, Liberalism, the Church, the monarchy, the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie continue to survive and even suppose themselves to be firmly in the saddle. The Fabians, the ILPers and the conservative trade union bureaucrats today represent the most counter-revolutionary force in Great Britain, and possibly in the present stage of development, in the whole world. Overthrowing the Fabians means liberating the revolutionary energy of the British proletariat, winning the British stronghold of reaction for socialism, liberating India and Egypt, and giving a powerful impetus to the movement and development of the peoples of the East.

Renouncing violence, the Fabians believe only in the power of the “idea”. If a wholesome grain can be sifted out of this trivial and hypocritical philosophy then it lies in the fact that no regime can maintain itself by violence alone. This applies equally to the regime of British imperialism. In a country where the overwhelming majority of the population consists of proletarians the governing Conservative-Liberal imperialist clique would not be able to last a single day if it were not for the fact that the means of violence in its hands are reinforced, supplemented and disguised by pseudo-socialist ideas that ensnare and break up the proletariat.

The French “enlighteners” of the 18th century ³⁵ saw their main enemy as Catholicism, clericalism and the priesthood, and considered that they had to strangle this reptile before they could move forward. They were right in the sense that it was this very priesthood, an organized regime of superstition, the Catholic spiritual police apparatus, that stood in the way of bourgeois society, retarding the development of science, art, political ideas and economics. Fabianism, MacDonaldism and pacifism today play the same role in relation to the historical movement of the proletariat. They are the main prop of British imperialism and of the European, if not the world bourgeoisie. Workers must at

³⁵The eighteenth century philosophers and writers like Voltaire, Diderot, Montesquieu, Rousseau and others who anticipated the French bourgeois revolution in their ideological opposition to superstition and prejudice and propounded a materialist view of man and an idealist conception of the history of society.

all costs be shown these self-satisfied pedants, drivelling eclectics, sentimental careerists and liveried footmen of the bourgeoisie in their true colours. To show them up for what they are means to discredit them beyond repair. To discredit them means rendering a supreme service to historical progress. The day that the British proletariat cleanses itself of the spiritual abomination of Fabianism, mankind, especially in Europe, will increase its stature by a head.

The Question of Revolutionary Force

We have acquainted ourselves with MacDonald's views on revolutionary force. They proved to be a development of Mr. Baldwin's Conservative theory of gradualness. The rejection of the use of force by the "left" Lansbury has a more curious, although more sincere, character. The latter, you see, purely and simply "does not believe" in force. He "does not believe" either in capitalist armies or armed uprisings. Had he believed in force he would not, he says, have voted for the British Navy but would have joined the communists. What a plucky devil! The fact that Lansbury, while not believing in force, does believe in the hereafter, of course casts doubt on his realism.

Nonetheless, one or two events on earth have, by leave of Mr. Lansbury, taken place by means of force. Whether Lansbury does or does not believe in the British Navy, the Indians know that this Navy exists. In April 1919 General Dyer gave orders to fire without previous warning on an unarmed gathering of Indians at Amritsar – as a result of which 450 persons were killed and 1500 wounded. While we may leave the dead in peace, it must be said of the wounded that they at any rate could not "not believe" in force. But even as a believing Christian, Lansbury ought to have realised that if the rogues of the Jewish priesthood, in conjunction with the cowardly Roman proconsul Pilate, the political ancestor of MacDonald, had not in their day adopted the use of force against Christ there would have been neither crown of thorns, nor resurrection nor ascension, and Mr. Lansbury himself would not have had the opportunity of being born a devout Christian and becoming an inferior socialist.

Not believing in force is the same as not believing in gravity. All of life is built upon different forms of force, and the opposition of one force to another.) so that to renounce liberating force amounts to supporting the oppressors' force, which today governs the world.

We feel however that cursory comments are of no avail here. The question of force and its "denial" by Messrs. Pacifists, Christian socialists and other such hypocrites, occupies such a big place in British politics that a particular and detailed examination, specially adapted to the political level of the present-day "leaders" of the British Labour Party is required. At the same time we apologise in advance to the rest of our readers for this level of exposition.

What does denying any use of force really mean? If, say, a thief broke into Mr. Lansbury's flat we very much fear that this pious gentleman (we are here

speaking of the householder) would adopt force or invite the nearest policeman to do so. Even if out of his Christian mercy Lansbury let the thief go in peace – of which we are not altogether certain – then it would only be on the clear understanding that he immediately left the flat. What is more, the honourable gentleman could only permit himself the luxury of such a Christian gesture because his flat lies under the protection of the British law of property (and its numerous Arguses), with the result that on the whole nocturnal visits by thieves constitute the exception rather than the rule. Perhaps Lansbury will venture to reply that an intrusion into an honourable private Christian flat is an act of force, and thus calls for retaliation. We say to him that such an argument is an abandonment of the renunciation of force in general. It is, on the contrary, its admission, in principle and in practice, and can be wholly translated into the class struggle, where the intrusion day in and day out by the thief, capital, into the life and labour of the proletariat, and its plundering of surplus value fully justifies retaliation. Maybe Lansbury will reply to us that he understands by force not all the means of coercion in general, without which our marvellous social arrangements could not function, but only the violation of the Sixth Commandment: “Thou shalt not kill”.

To substantiate such a view many high-flown phrases about the sanctity of human life can be quoted. But here too we must ask, in the language of the Gospel parables which best suits the leaders of British socialism, how Mr. Lansbury would behave if a robber brandished a club at children before his very eyes, and if there was no other means of saving them than an immediate and accurate revolver shot. If he does not wish to resort to wholly crude sophisms he will reply, and possibly to his own relief, that our example has too exceptional a character.

But this reply would merely signify once more that Lansbury had entrusted his right to resort to homicide in such circumstances to the police, that specialised organization of force which in the majority of cases relieves him of the need to use a revolver, or even to ponder its practical purpose.

But, let us ask, what happens when armed strike-breakers beat up and kill strikers? Such incidents are quite usual in America, and not exceptional in other countries. Workers cannot entrust their right to resist strike-breakers to the police, because in all countries the police defend the right of strike-breakers to beat up and kill strikers – to whom, as is well known, the law of the sanctity of human life does not extend. We ask: have strikers the right to use sticks, stones, revolvers and bombs against fascists ³⁶, Ku Klux Klan gangs ³⁷ and other such

³⁶In 1925 when Trotsky wrote this book fascism had appeared primarily as the reactionary terrorist movement against the working class organizations that had formed the base of opposition to a right-wing bonapartist dictatorship in Italy. Only in 1926 did Mussolini's regime acquire all the features of fascism as it became known in Germany and Spain when he abolished parliament, established corporate unions and outlawed opposition parties.

³⁷Secret society formed in the southern states of the USA after the Civil War, violently hostile to black people and Catholics. Following the First World War it became increasingly noted for its acts of terrorism against socialists, pacifists and blacks.

hired scoundrels of capital? There's a nice little poser to which we would request a clear, precise and in no way evasive, hypocritical answer.

If Lansbury tells us that the task of socialism is to give the masses of the people such an education that would make fascists not fascists, scoundrels not scoundrels and so forth, then this is the purest humbug. That the aim of socialism is the elimination of force, first in its crudest and bloodiest forms, and then in other more covert ones, is indisputable. But here we are dealing not with the manners and morals of a future communist society but with the concrete paths and methods of struggle against capitalist force.

When fascists disrupt a strike, seize a newspaper's editorial offices and its safe, and beat up and kill workers' deputies while the police encircle the thugs with a protective ring, then only the most corrupt hypocrite would advise workers not to reply blow for blow, on the pretext that force would have no place in a communist system. Obviously in each particular case it is necessary to decide, with respect to the whole situation *how* to answer the enemy's force and *just how far* to go in one's retaliation. But that is a matter of tactical expediency which has nothing to do with the acknowledgement or denial of force in principle.

What really is force? Where does it start from? Where do permissible and expedient collective actions by the masses become acts of force? We greatly doubt that Lansbury or any other pacifist is capable of giving a reply to this question unless he confines himself to a simple reference to the criminal code, where what can be tolerated and what cannot is set out. The class struggle forms a continuous chain of open or masked acts of force which are "regulated" to this or that degree by the state, which in turn represents the organized the most powerful of adversaries, namely the ruling class.

Is a strike an act of force? There was a time when strikes were banned and every strike was almost inevitably linked with physical conflicts. Then, as a result of the development of the strike struggle, that is to say, as a result of the masses' acts of force against the law, or more exactly as a result of the continual blows by the masses against force used by the law, strikes were legalized. Does this mean that Lansbury considers only peaceful, "legal" strikes, i.e. those allowed by the bourgeoisie, to be a permissible means of struggle? But if workers had not conducted strikes at the beginning of the nineteenth century the British bourgeoisie would not have legalized them in 1824. But if one allows the application of force or violence in the form of a strike then one has to accept all the consequences, including the defence of strikes from strike-breakers by means of appropriate measures of counter-force.

Moreover, if strikes by workers against the capitalists, or particular groups of capitalists are permissible then would Lansbury venture to say that it was impermissible for workers to organize a general strike against a fascist government that was suppressing the workers' unions, smashing the workers' press and flooding the workers' ranks with provocateurs and murderers?

Once again a general strike can be adopted not at any hour on any day but only

under specific concrete conditions. But this is a matter of strategic expediency not of a general ,moral' assessment. As for the general strike, as one of the most decisive means of struggle, Lansbury and all his fellow-thinkers taken together have hardly devised any other means that the proletariat could adopt for achieving a decisive end. Lansbury would surely not fall so low as to recommend workers to wait until the spirit of brotherly love takes command of the hearts of let us say, the Italian fascists who are, by the way, to a large extent extremely devout Catholics. But if you recognize that the proletariat not only has the right, but is duty-bound to prepare for a general strike against a fascist regime you must draw all the conclusions that follow from such a recognition.

A general strike, if it is not to be a mere protest, signifies an extreme upheaval of society and in any event places at stake the fate of the political regime and the reputation of the strength of the revolutionary class. A general strike can only be undertaken when the working class, and above all its vanguard, is ready to carry the struggle through to the end. But fascism will not of course begin to surrender. to a peaceful protest strike. In the event of a real and immediate danger the fascists will set all their forces in motion, they will launch provocations, assassinations, and arson on an unprecedented scale. One may ask: is it permissible for the leaders of a general strike to form their own militias for the defence of the strikers against acts of force and for disarming and dispersing the fascist bands? And as no one has succeeded, at least in our memory, in disarming furious enemies by means of religious hymns then the revolutionary detachments must obviously be armed with revolvers and hand grenades until such time as they can lay hold of rifles, machine-guns and cannon. Or is it perhaps only at this point that the domain of impermissible force begins?

But then we should become completely entangled in absurd and shameful contradictions. A general strike that does not safeguard itself from acts of force and rout is a demonstration of cowardice and doomed to defeat. Only a lunatic or a traitor could call for a struggle under such conditions. By the logic of relations that do not depend on Lansbury, an "unarmed" strike struggle produces armed clashes. This happens quite often in economic strikes and in a revolutionary political strike it is absolutely unavoidable, for the strike has the task of toppling the existing state power. Whoever renounces force must renounce struggle as a whole, that is to say, he must in practice join the ranks of the supporters of ruling class victory.

But the question is not limited to this. The general strike under consideration has the object of overthrowing a fascist regime. This can only be achieved by gaining the upper hand over its armed forces. Here again there are two possibilities: a straight military victory over the forces of reaction or the winning of these forces over to the side of the revolution. Neither is practicable in a pure form. A revolutionary uprising can hold on to victory only where it succeeds in cracking the firmest, most resolute and reliable detachments of reaction and attracting the remaining armed forces of the regime over to its side. Once again this can only be achieved in a situation where the wavering government forces are

convinced that the working masses are not simply demonstrating their discontent but have this time firmly made their mind up to overthrow the government at all costs, not balking at the most ruthless means of struggle. Only this sort of impression will be capable of swinging the wavering forces over to the side of the people. The more procrastinatory, hesitant and evasive the policy of the leaders of the general strike, the less will be the waverings in the soldiers' ranks, the more resolutely they will support the existing power, and the more chances the latter will have of emerging the victor from the crisis so as then to loose all the scorpions of bloody repression on to the heads of the working class.

In other words, since the working class is compelled to resort to a general political strike to gain its freedom it must take warning that the strike will inevitably give rise to partial and general, armed and semi-armed conflicts; it must take warning that the only way for the strike to avoid defeat is if it immediately deals the necessary rebuff to strike-breakers, provocateurs and fascists. It must foresee that the government whose fate is in question will inevitably bring its armed force out onto the streets at some point in the struggle, and that on the outcome of the clash between the revolutionary masses and this armed force hangs the fate of the existing regime and consequently of the proletariat. Workers must take all measures in advance to attract soldiers to the side of the people by preliminary agitation; and at the same time they must foresee that the government will always be left with a sufficient number of dependable or semi-dependable soldiers whom it will bring out to quell the uprising; so that in the last analysis the question has to be settled by an armed clash which must be prepared with thorough planning and waged with total revolutionary determination.

Only the highest resoluteness in the revolutionary struggle is capable of striking the arms out of the hands of reaction, shortening the duration of civil war and minimising the number of its victims. Whoever does not take this road should not take to arms at all; and without taking to arms a general strike cannot be organized. And if the general strike is rejected there can be no thought of serious struggle. The only thing that then remains is to educate workers in the spirit of total prostration which is already the concern of official education, governing parties, the priests of every church and . . . the socialist preachers of the impermissibility of force.

But this is what is remarkable: rather as idealist philosophers in their practical life feed on bread, meat and contemptible matter in general and try to avoid being run down by cars instead of relying on the immortality of the soul, so also Messrs. Pacifists, the impotent opponents of force, moral "idealists" on all those occasions where it comes within the ambit of their immediate interests, appeal to political force and make use of it directly or obliquely. Thus as Mr. Lansbury is evidently not devoid of something akin to temperament, such adventures happen to him more than others. In the parliamentary debates in connection with the unemployed (the House of Commons sitting of 9th March 1925) Lansbury recalled that the Unemployed Insurance Act was passed in its present form in 1920 "not so much to safeguard the lives of men and their families but, as Lord

Derby had recently told them, to forestall a revolution". In 1920, Lansbury continued, all the workers who were serving in the army were included among those insured because the government was at the time not quite sure whether they would turn their rifles in the direction desirable to the government (**The Times**, 10th March 1925). After these words the parliamentary report records: "cheers from Opposition benches" that is from the Labour Party, and cries of "Oh!" on the government benches.

Lansbury does not believe in revolutionary force. But he nevertheless recognizes following Lord Derby, that a fear of revolutionary force brought about a law on state insurance for the unemployed. Lansbury is conducting a struggle against attempts to repeal this law; consequently he believes that a law brought about through fear of revolutionary force is bringing a certain benefit to the working class. So the benefit of revolutionary force is hereby proved virtually mathematically. For, with respect to Mr. Lansbury, if there were not acts of force there would be no fear of it. If there were not a real possibility (and necessity) of turning rifles against the government in certain circumstances then the government would have no grounds to fear it. Consequently Lansbury's so-called disbelief in force is the purest delusion. In practice he makes use of this force, in the form of an argument, at least every day. Even more does he enjoy in practice the conquests of the revolutionary force of past decades and centuries. He merely refuses to draw the threads of his ideas together. He rejects revolutionary force for the seizure of power, that is to say for the complete liberation of the proletariat. But in struggles that do not transcend the bounds of bourgeois society he is perfectly amenable to force and makes use of it. Mr. Lansbury is for retail but against wholesale force. He resembles the vegetarian who accepts duck or rabbit meat with equanimity but rejects the slaughter of larger animals with righteous indignation.

We can foresee, however, that Mr. Lansbury or his more diplomatic and more hypocritical fellow-thinkers will object: yes, against a fascist regime or any sort of despotic government, perhaps we won't argue: well, in the end a certain degree of force might be permissible; but it is quite impermissible under a regime of democracy. We for our part would right away register this objection as a surrender of a position of principle, for we were originally talking not about under what conditions force is permissible, or expedient, but whether it is ever permissible taken from an abstract, Humanitarian-Christian-socialist point of view.

When we are told that revolutionary force is impermissible only under a regime of political democracy then the question is thereby transferred to another plane. This does not however mean that democratic opponents of force are more profound and cleverer than the Christian-humanitarian ones. Here we can without difficulty be convinced that this is not so.

Is it indeed true that the question of the expediency and permissibility of revolutionary force is decided by reference to the greater or lesser "democraticness" of the *forms* of the rule of the bourgeoisie? Such a formula is wholly refuted by

historical experience. The struggle between the revolutionary and the peaceful legalistic reformist tendency within the workers' movement did riot at all begin from the moment a republic was established or universal suffrage introduced. In the era of Chartism and right up to 1868 workers in Britain were utterly deprived of the vote, that is, of the basic implement of "peaceful" development. Nonetheless, the Chartist movement was split between the supporters of physical force whom the masses followed, and the supporters of moral force, predominantly petty-bourgeois intellectuals and labour aristocrats.

In Hohenzollern Germany.³⁸ With its impotent parliament a struggle within social democracy took place between the supporters of parliamentary reforms and the proponents of a revolutionary general strike. And finally even in Tsarist Russia under the June 3rd regime³⁹ the Mensheviks⁴⁰ liquidated revolutionary methods of struggle under the slogan of a struggle for legality.

Thus to invoke the bourgeois republic or universal suffrage as the basic reformist and legalist argument is a product of theoretical narrowness, a short memory or pure hypocrisy. Legalistic reformism in its true essence signifies the subservience of slaves to the laws and institutions of the slave-owners. Whether universal suffrage forms one of these institutions or not and whether they are crowned by a king or a president are for the opportunist questions of a secondary nature. He always goes on his knees before the idol of the bourgeois state and agrees to proceed towards his "ideal" by no other way than through the asses' gate built for him by the bourgeoisie. But the gate is built so that it is impossible to pass through it.

What is political democracy and where does it start from? In other words, where, which countries, does the ban on force cover? Can for example a state be called a democracy where there is a monarchy and an aristocratic chamber? Is it permissible to adopt revolutionary methods to topple these institutions? To this the answer may be made that the British House of Commons has sufficient power to abolish royalty and the House of Lords should it find this necessary, so that the working class has a peaceful way of completing a democratic regime in its country. Let us allow this for the moment. But what is the position with the House of Commons itself? Can this institution really be called democratic, even from a formal point of view?

Not in the slightest. Considerable groups of the population are deprived of the

³⁸The ruling family of the Kingdom of Prussia from 1701 to 1871 and of the German Empire from 1871 to 1918 when the monarchy was overthrown in the November Revolution.

³⁹On 3rd June, 1907 the Russian Tsar dissolved the State Duma, arrested the Social-Democratic deputies and set up the Third Duma with a more restricted franchise excluding the peasantry. 3rd June marked the beginning of the period of harshest repression and reaction in Russia.

⁴⁰The reformist wing of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party that emerged in 1903 and against which Lenin and the Bolsheviks fought, finally splitting from it in 1912.

franchise. Women have the vote only from the age of 30 and men only from 21.⁴¹ The lowering of the age qualification is from the standpoint of the working class, where working life starts early, an elementary demand of democracy. Besides, parliamentary constituencies are divided up in such a perfidious fashion that one Labour member must win twice as many votes as one Conservative.⁴²

By keeping the age qualification up the British parliament exiles active youth of both sexes and charges the destiny of the country to primarily the older generations which, wearying of life, look more under their feet than out in front. Here lies the point of the high age qualification. The cynical geometry of the constituencies gives a Conservative vote as much weight as two Labour votes. Thus the present-day British Parliament represents the most flagrant mockery of the will of the people even taken in the bourgeois-democratic sense.

Has the working class the right, even while remaining on the ground of the principles of democracy, to demand that the present privileged. and basically usurping House of Commons introduce a really democratic franchise? But if parliament answers that with a refusal – which, we contend, would be inevitable, for only the other day Baldwin’s government refused to make women the equal of men in respect of the age qualification – would the proletariat in such an event have the “right” to win from the usurper parliament the introduction of a democratic franchise by means of, let’s say, a general strike?

If we further suppose that either the present, usurping House of Commons, or a more democratic one, resolved to abolish royalty and the House of Lords – of which there is not a hope – this would still not mean that the reactionary classes which had proved to be in the minority in parliament would submit unreservedly to such a decision. Not so very long ago we saw the Ulster reactionaries under the leadership of Lord Carson taking the path of open civil war when they had a difference of opinion with the British parliament over the question of the system of administration for Ireland, in which the British Conservatives openly supported the Ulster rebels. But, we shall be told, such a case amounts to an open rising on the part of the privileged classes against a democratic parliament and obviously such a rebellion would have to be quelled with the aid of state force. Let us record this admission but demand here that one or two practical conclusions be drawn from it.

Let us allow for the minute that a Labour majority in parliament results from the next elections and that as a start it resolves in the most legal fashion to hand over the landlords’ land to the farmers and the chronically unemployed without compensation, to introduce a high tax on capital and to abolish the monarchy,

⁴¹Women from the ages of 21 to 29 obtained the vote only in April 1928, three years after Trotsky wrote this book.

⁴²The electoral system of first past the post in each constituency has always made it possible for parties to gain more seats with fewer total votes. This nearly always favoured the Conservatives, because Labour won huge majorities in urban seats in contrast to Conservative wins on a narrower margin in rural and semi-rural areas. [This effect is less noticeable today. – *Note by ERC*]

the House of Lords and a few other obscene institutions. There cannot be the least doubt that the possessing classes would not give in without a fight, and all the less so since the entire police, judicial and military apparatus is wholly in their hands. In the history of Britain there has already been one instance of civil war when the King rested upon a minority in the Commons and a majority in the Lords against the majority of the Commons and a minority in the Lords. That affair was in the 1640s. Only an idiot, let us repeat, only a wretched idiot, can seriously imagine that a repetition of a civil war of that kind (albeit on new class bases) can be prevented in the twentieth century by the evident success of the last three centuries of a Christian world-outlook, humanitarian feelings, democratic tendencies and all the other excellent things. The same example of Ulster shows that the possessing classes do not play around when parliament, their own institution, finds itself compelled to squeeze their privileged position.

In preparing to take state power it is thus necessary to prepare for all the consequences that flow from the inevitable resistance of the possessing classes. It must be firmly understood: if a truly workers' government came to power in Britain even in an ultra-democratic way, civil war would become unavoidable. The workers' government would be forced to suppress the resistance of the privileged classes. To do this by means of the old state apparatus, the old police, the old courts, the old army would be impossible. A workers' government created by parliamentary means would be forced to construct new revolutionary organs for itself, resting upon the trade unions and working-class organizations in general. This would lead to an exceptional growth in the activity and initiative of the working masses. On the basis of a direct struggle against the exploiting classes the trade unions would actively draw closer together not only in their top layers but at the bottom levels as well, and would arrive at the necessity of creating local delegate meetings, i.e. councils (Soviets) of workers' deputies. A truly Labour government, that is to say, a government dedicated to the end to the interests of the proletariat would find itself in this way compelled to smash the old state apparatus as the instrument of the possessing classes and oppose it with workers' councils. That means that the democratic origin of the Labour government – even had this proved possible – would lead to the necessity of counterposing revolutionary class force to the reactionary opposition.

We have shown above that the present British parliament forms a monstrous distortion of the principles of bourgeois democracy and that without adopting revolutionary force one can hardly obtain in Britain even an honest division of parliamentary constituencies or the abolition of the monarchy and the House of Lords. But let us allow for the minute that these demands have been realised in one way or another, Does that mean that we would then have a really democratic parliament in London? Not by any means. The London parliament is a parliament of slave-owners. Even were it to represent a nation of forty million in the most ideal and formally democratic manner the British parliament would still pass laws for the three hundred million population of India and have financial resources at its disposal that it had acquired by force of Britain's rule over the colonies. India's population does not take part in the passing of laws

that determine its own fate.

British democracy is similar to that of Athens in the sense that equality of democratic rights (which in fact does not exist) affects only the “free-born” and rests upon the lack of rights of the “lower” nations. For each inhabitant of the British Isles there are some nine colonial slaves. Even if you consider that revolutionary force is impermissible in a democracy, this principle can in no case be extended to the peoples of India who are rising up not against democracy but against the despotism that oppresses them. But in this event even a British person if he is really a democrat cannot recognize a binding democratic force for British laws passed for India, Egypt and elsewhere. And as the whole social life of Britain herself as the colonial power, rests upon these laws then it is obvious that all the activity of the Westminster parliament as the focal point of a predatory colonial power is anti-democratic to its very roots. From the point of view of consistent democracy it has to be said: as long as the Indians, Egyptians and others are not permitted full freedom of self-determination i.e. the freedom of secession, or the Indians, Egyptians and others cannot send their representatives to an imperial parliament with the same rights as the British representatives, then not only the Indians, Egyptians and others but also British democrats have the right to rise up against the predatory government formed by a parliament representing an insignificant minority of the population of the British Empire. Consequently that is how matters stand with Britain if we judge the question of the use of force merely by the criterion of democracy but carrying through to its conclusion.

The British social-reformists’ denial of the right of the oppressed masses to use force is a shameful rejection of democracy and forms a contemptible support for the imperialist dictatorship of an insignificant minority over hundreds of millions of enslaved people. Before lecturing the communists on the sanctity of democracy and denouncing Soviet power Mr. MacDonald would do well to give his own nose a good blow!

First we examined the question of force from a “humanitarian”, Christian, priestly point of view and were persuaded that the social-pacifists in seeking a way out of insoluble contradictions were in fact forced to concede their position and admit that revolutionary force is permissible once outside the pale of democracy. We further showed that it is as hard for those who deny force to base themselves on a democratic standpoint as it is on a Christian one. In other words, we have revealed the complete inconsistency, fraudulence, and hypocrisy of social-pacifism even by its own standards.

But this does not at all mean that we are prepared to recognize these standards. In resolving the question of revolutionary force the parliamentary-democratic principle for us by no means forms, the highest criterion. Not mankind for democracy but democracy as one of the auxiliary instruments on the road of mankind’s development. Where bourgeois democracy has turned into an obstacle it has to be torn down. The transition from capitalism to socialism derives not at all from formal democratic principles elevated above society but from

the material conditions of the development of society itself. from the growth of the productive forces, from insoluble capitalist contradictions, domestic and international, and from a sharpening of the struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. A scientific analysis of the whole historical process and of our generation's own political experience, including the imperialist war, all alike testify that without a transition to socialism all our culture is threatened with decay and decomposition. The transition to socialism can only be accomplished by the proletariat led by its revolutionary vanguard and leading behind it all the toiling and oppressed masses of the metropolitan country and the colonies.

In all our work and all our political decisions our highest criterion is the interests of the revolutionary struggle of the proletariat to take power and to re-construct society. We consider that to judge the movement of the proletariat from the standpoint of the abstract principles and legal clauses of democracy is reactionary pedantry. We consider the only correct way to judge democracy is from the standpoint of the historical interests of the proletariat. It is not a matter of the nutshell but the kernel. The discussions of Messrs. Fabians about the impermissibility of a "narrow class" viewpoint is the purest blockheadedness. They want to subordinate the basic tasks of social development to be effected by the proletariat to the schoolroom pedants. By the name of the solidarity of all mankind they mean an eclectic jumble that corresponds to the narrow class horizon of the petty bourgeois. Between their property and the revolutionary proletariat the bourgeoisie sets up the screens of democracy. The socialist pedants say to the workers: you must take control of the means of production but as a preliminary you must see that the necessary holes and channels are made through these screens by means of legislation. But cannot the screens be pulled down? Not under any circumstances. Why not? Because even if we did save society in this way, we would still have upset that complex system of state force and fraud that the bourgeoisie has taught us to regard as sacred democracy.

The opponents of force, dislodged from their first two positions, may occupy a third line of trenches. They may agree to cast Christian mysticism and democratic metaphysics right out and attempt to defend the reformist, pacifist, peaceful, parliamentary road on the grounds of bare political expediency. Some of them may say roughly the following: of course Christ's teaching does not make provision for solving the contradictions of British capitalism; democracy is likewise not a sacred institution but merely a temporary, and subsidiary product of historical development; but why on earth should the working class not avail themselves of a democratic parliament with its methods, devices and legislative machinery for the effective taking of power and the re-building of society? For this would be quite natural and by all indications a more economical way of carrying out the socialist revolution.

We communists are in no event inclined to advise the British proletariat to turn its back on parliament. On the contrary when individual British communists did reveal such a tendency they met with a rebuff from us at the international

congresses.⁴³ Thus the question is not whether the parliamentary road should be made use of but what place parliament occupies in the development of society and where the class forces lie, inside or outside parliament; in what form and on what ground these forces will collide and whether a parliament created by capitalism for its own development and protection can be made into a lever for the overthrow of capitalism.

To answer this question an attempt has to be made to imagine with a certain degree of concreteness what path the future political development of Britain will take. Clearly, any attempted forecast of this sort can only be of a conditional, tentative nature. But without such attempts we would be doomed to wander in the dark.

The present government has a firm majority in parliament. Consequently it is not excluded that it will survive in power for another three or four years although its term of office could prove shorter. In the course of this period the Conservative government which began with “conciliatory” speeches by Baldwin will reveal that it has been in the last resort summoned to conserve all the contradictions and ulcers of post-war Britain. With regard to the most terrible of these ulcers, chronic unemployment, the Conservative party itself has no illusions. No substantial expansion of exports can be hoped for. Competition from America and Japan is mounting and German industry is reviving. France is exporting with the aid of a falling currency. Baldwin declares that politicians cannot bring relief to industry; it must find it within itself. The fresh efforts to re-establish the Gold Standard signify new sacrifices on the part of the population and consequently of industry, which foreshadow a further rise in discontent and alarm. The radicalization of the British working class will proceed apace.

All this will prepare the coming to power of the Labour Party. But we have every reason to fear, or rather, to hope, that this process will cause much displeasure not only to Baldwin but to MacDonald too. Above all a growth in the number of industrial conflicts can be expected and along with this an increase in the pressure of the working masses upon their parliamentary representatives. Neither the former nor the latter can be to the taste of leaders who applaud Baldwin’s conciliatory speeches and express their grief over the dead Curzon. The inner life of the Parliamentary Party as well as its position in Parliament will thereby become the more difficult.

On the other hand there can be no doubt that the capitalist tiger will soon stop purring about gradualness and start to show its claws. Under such conditions will MacDonald manage to retain his leadership until the next election? This question does not of course have a decisive importance and an answer to it can have only a conjectural nature. In any event a further sharpening of relations between the right and the so-called “left” wings of the Labour Party and, what is far more important, a strengthening of revolutionary tendencies in the masses

⁴³The main polemic on which these attacks were based is to be found in Lenin’s **Left-Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder**.

can be expected.

The possessing classes will begin to follow what is taking place in the ranks of the working class with mounting alarm and begin to prepare for the election well in advance. In such conditions the election campaign will acquire an exceedingly tense character. The last election, in which there figured a forged document, put out through all the bourgeois press and at all meetings on a signal from the centre, was only a pale shadow of elections to come.

The election, always assuming that it does not develop directly into a civil war (and generally speaking that is not excluded), will have three possible outcomes: either the Conservatives will return to power but with a sharply reduced majority; or else none of the parties will have a clear majority and the parliamentary position of last year will be reverted to, only in political conditions far less favourable to compromise; or finally an absolute majority will pass to the Labour Party.

In the event of a new victory for the Conservatives the indignation and impatience of the workers will inevitably sharpen. The question of the electoral mechanism and its swindling of constituencies will inevitably come to the fore with all its sharpness. The demand for a new, more democratic parliament will resound with greater force. This may for a while hold back the internal struggle inside the Labour Party to a certain extent but it will however create more favourable conditions for the revolutionary elements.

Will the Conservatives make a peaceful concession over a question which may become for them a question of fate? Highly unlikely. On the contrary, once the question of power becomes sharply posed the Conservatives will attempt to split the workers, finding support from the Thomases at the top and the trade unionists who refuse to pay the political levy at the bottom. By no means excluded is an attempt by a Conservative government to produce isolated clashes, crush them by force, terrify the liberal philistines leading the Labour Party and thrust the movement back.

Could this plan succeed? Such a possibility cannot be ruled out. In so far as the leaders of the Labour Party lead it with their eyes shut, without perspectives and without any understanding of social realities, they make it easier for the Conservatives to strike a blow at the movement at the next and higher stage. Such a variant would contain a more or less serious temporary defeat for the working class but it would, of course, have nothing in common with that peaceful, parliamentary road that the compromisers imagine. On the contrary, a defeat of this sort would prepare for a resumption of the class struggle at the next stage in more decisive revolutionary forms and consequently under new leadership.

If after the next election neither of the parties has a majority, parliament will be prostrated. A repetition of the Labour-Liberal coalition could hardly take place after the experience gained and in a situation of new and sharpened inter-class and inter-party relations at that. A Conservative-Liberal government would be more probable. But this would in essence coincide with the first variant,

that of a Conservative majority, that we have just been examining. In event of their failure to reach an agreement, the only parliamentary solution would be a revision of the electoral system. The question of constituencies, second ballots and so forth would become a question of the direct struggle of the two main parties for power. Would a parliament divided between parties neither of which is in a position to take power be capable of passing a new electoral act? That is more than doubtful. It would in any case require powerful pressure from outside. The weakness of a parliament without a secure majority would create a favourable circumstance for such a pressure. But this once again opens up a revolutionary perspective.

However, this intermediate variant does not have for us an intrinsic importance as it is obvious that an unstable parliamentary position must be resolved in one direction or the other, that is to say leading either to a Conservative or to a Labour government. We have examined the first case. As regards the second case, this is precisely the one that presents for us the basic interest from the standpoint of the subject concerning us. The question consequently is: can it be assumed that the Labour Party, having made sure of an overall parliamentary majority at the election and put forward its own government, will carry out by a peaceful road the nationalization of the principal branches of industry and develop socialist construction within the framework and methods of the present parliamentary system?

So as not to complicate the question at the start, we shall assume that MacDonald's grouping of compromise with the Liberals will retain the party's official leadership in its hands even during the next election so that a Labour Party victory will lead to the formation of a MacDonald government. It will no longer, however, be a simple repetition of the first experience: first, it will have behind it, according to our supposition, a safe majority; secondly, inter-party relations must inevitably sharpen in the coming period, especially in event of a Labour Party victory. Today when the Conservatives have a firm majority in their hands they tend to treat MacDonald, Thomas and Co. with a patronising condescension. But as the Conservatives are made of more serious stuff than the mock-socialists they will, when left in a minority, certainly show their claws and teeth. There can be no doubt therefore that even if the Conservatives could not prevent the formation of a stable government by the Labour Party by this or that parliamentary or extra-parliamentary method, the minority Conservatives would even in such an event, which might seem to be the most favourable from the standpoint of a peaceful development, do everything in their power to sabotage all the measures of the Labour government by means of the Civil Service, the judiciary, the military, the House of Lords and the courts.

Facing the Conservatives, as well as the remnants of the Liberals, would be the task of discrediting at all costs the first stable government of the working class. For here it is a question of life or death. It is not at all the old struggle between the Liberals and the Conservatives where disagreements never went beyond the bounds of the "family" of the possessing classes. Any serious reforms

by a Labour government in the field of taxation, nationalization and a general democratization of government would evoke a mighty flood of enthusiasm from the labouring masses, and – as appetite grows with the eating – successful *moderate* reforms would inevitably push towards the path of increasingly *radical* reforms.

In other words, each additional day would further remove the possibility of the Conservatives' return to power. The Conservatives could not fail to realize very clearly that this was no longer a routine change of government but the beginning of a socialist revolution by parliamentary means. The resources of filibustering, legislative and administrative sabotage that the possessing classes have in their hands are very great for, whatever the parliamentary majority, the whole state apparatus is from top to bottom inextricably tied to the bourgeoisie. Belonging to it are: the whole of the press, the principal organs of local government, the universities, schools, the churches and innumerable clubs and voluntary associations in general. In its hands are the banks, the whole system of public credit, and finally, the transport and trading apparatus, so that the day-to-day food supply of London, including that of its Labour government, depends upon the big capitalist corporations. It is absolutely self-evident that all these gigantic means will be brought into motion with furious violence in order to put a brake on the activity of the Labour government, paralyze its efforts, intimidate it, introduce a split in its parliamentary majority and finally to create a financial panic, dislocation of the food supply, lock-outs, to terrorize the top layers of the labour organizations and render the proletariat powerless. Only an utter fool can fail to understand that the bourgeoisie will move heaven, earth and the nether regions in the event of the actual coming to power of a Labour government.

Today's so-called British fascism is for the time being more of a curiosity than anything else, but this curiosity is nonetheless symptomatic. The Conservatives are today still sitting too firmly in the saddle to need the aid of the fascists. But a sharpening of inter-party relations, the growth of the persistence and militancy of the working masses and the perspective of a Labour Party victory will inevitably cause the development of fascist tendencies on the right wing of the Conservatives. In a country that has become poorer in recent years, where the position of the small and middle bourgeois has worsened in the extreme and there is chronic unemployment, there will be no shortage of elements for the formation of fascist detachments.

There can therefore be no doubt that at the moment of an election victory for the Labour Party the Conservatives will have behind them not only the official state apparatus but also the unofficial gangs of fascism. They will begin the bloody work of the provocateur before the parliament has even had time to proceed to the first reading of a bill for the nationalization of the coal mines. What is there left for a Labour government to do? Either shamefully capitulate or crush the opposition. The latter decision will however by no means prove so simple. The experience of Ireland bears witness that a solid material force and a tough state apparatus is indispensable to crush this sort of opposition. A Labour

government will find itself with neither the former nor the latter. The police, the courts, the army and the territorial forces will always be on the side of the disruptors, saboteurs and fascists. The administrative machinery will have to be broken up and the reactionaries replaced by Labour Party members. There will be no other road. But it is quite obvious that such abrupt state measures, although wholly “legal”, will sharpen the legal and illegal opposition of unified bourgeois reaction in the extreme. In other words: this will also be a path of civil war.

But can the Labour Party when once in power, go about the business so cautiously, so tactfully and so skilfully that the bourgeoisie will, how shall we put it? – not feel the need for active resistance? Such an assumption is in itself of course laughable. It must nevertheless be recognized that just such is the basic hope of MacDonald and Co. When today’s mock-leader of the ILP says that the Labour Party will carry out only those reforms whose realization can be “proved scientifically” (MacDonald’s “science” is already known to us) then he means that a Labour government would look inquiringly into the bourgeoisie’s eyes before every one of its reformist steps. Of course if everything depended upon MacDonald’s good will and his “scientifically” justified reforms things would never come to a civil war – owing to the lack of any ground for one on the part of the bourgeoisie. If a second MacDonald government was like the first one then there would be no cause to raise even the question of the feasibility of socialism by the parliamentary road, for the budget of the City has nothing in common with the budget of socialism.

But even if a Labour government retained its former composition its policy would necessarily undergo a few changes. It is ridiculous to think that the same mighty Labour wave that raises MacDonald to power will immediately afterwards flood deferentially back. No, the demanding mood of the working class will grow in the extreme. Now there will be no longer any place for excuses of dependence on Liberal votes. The opposition of the Conservatives, the House of Lords, the bureaucracy and the monarchy will redouble the energy, impatience and indignation of the workers. The slanders and calumnies of the capitalist press will goad them on. If their own government in these conditions displayed even the most unfeigned energy it would still seem to be too sluggish to the working masses. But there is about as much ground for expecting revolutionary energy from MacDonald, Clynes and Snowden as there is to expect perfume to rise from a rotten beetroot. Between a revolutionary onslaught by the masses and the fierce resistance of the bourgeoisie a MacDonald government would rush about from one side to the other, irritating some, not satisfying others, provoking the bourgeoisie by its inertia, exacerbating the revolutionary impatience of the workers, kindling a civil war and striving at the same time to deprive it of the necessary leadership on the side of the proletariat.

Meanwhile the revolutionary wing would inevitably grow and the most far-sighted resolute and revolutionary elements of the working class would come to the top. On this path a MacDonald government would, sooner or later, depending upon

the balance of forces outside parliament, have to surrender its position either to a Conservative government with fascist and not conciliatory tendencies or to a revolutionary government that was really capable of carrying the job through to the finish. In both the one and the other event a new explosion of civil war is inevitable, a sharp collision between the classes all along the line. In the event of the Conservatives' victory – the ruthless smashing of workers' organizations; in the event of the victory of the proletariat – the shattering of the resistance of the exploiters by means of the revolutionary dictatorship. Is this not to your liking, my Lords? We cannot help it. The fundamental springs of motion depend as little upon us as they do upon you. We can “decree” nothing. We can only analyze.

Among MacDonald's “left” self-supporters and half-opponents who like him assume a democratic stance, there are some who will probably say: obviously if the bourgeois classes attempt to put up resistance to a democratically-elected Labour government, the latter will not balk at methods of the most severe coercion – but this will be not a class dictatorship, rather the power of a democratic state, ... and so on and so forth.

It is quite futile to put the argument on this plane. To think in fact that the fate of society can be determined by whether there are elected to parliament 307 Labour MPs i.e. a minority, or 308, i.e. a majority, and not by the effective balance of class forces at the moment of the sharp clash of classes over the basic questions of their existence – to think in that way would mean to be completely captive to the fetish of parliamentary arithmetic.

And let us ask, what happens if the Conservatives, faced with a mounting revolutionary flood and the danger of a Labour government, not only refuse to democratize the electoral system but on the contrary introduce new restrictions? Unlikely! some ninny will object who does not understand that where it is a matter of the life and death of classes anything is likely.

But already in top circles in Britain a great deal of preparatory to-ing and fro-ing is going on over the reorganization and strengthening of the House of Lords. MacDonald recently stated in connection with this that he could understand the concern of some Conservative lords but “why Liberals should make endeavours in the same direction I cannot understand”. The sage cannot understand why the Liberals are reinforcing a second line of trenches against the offensive of the working class. He does not understand this because he himself is a liberal, and a profoundly provincial, petty and limited one at that. He does not understand that the bourgeoisie has serious intentions, that it is preparing for a mortal struggle and that the crown and the House of Lords will occupy a prominent place in that struggle. Having curtailed the rights of the House of Commons, that is to say, carrying out a legal *coup d'état*, the Conservatives will, despite all the difficulties of such an undertaking, still emerge in a more advantageous situation than if they had had to organize opposition to a Labour government that had successfully reinforced itself.

But obviously in such an event, some “left” phrasemonger will exclaim, we should call upon the masses to resist. To use revolutionary force, does he mean? So does it turn out that revolutionary force is not only permissible but in fact inevitable in a case where the Conservatives carry out a preemptive *coup d’état*, by the most legal parliamentary means? But in that case is it not simpler to say that revolutionary force is expedient when and where it strengthens the position of the proletariat, weakens or repulses the enemy and accelerates the socialist development of society?

But heroic promises to put up lightning resistance in the event the Conservatives should “dare” and so forth are not worth a rotten egg. One cannot lull the masses day in and day out with claptrap about a peaceful, painless transition to socialism and then at the first solid punch on the nose summon the masses to an armed response. This is the surest way of assisting reaction in the rout of the proletariat. To prove equal to a revolutionary repulse, the masses must be ideologically, organizationally and materially prepared for it. They must understand the inevitability of a sharpening of the class struggle and of its turning at a certain stage into a civil war. The political education of the working class and the selection of its leading personnel must be adjusted to such a perspective. The illusions of compromise must be fought day in and day out, that is to say, war to the death must be declared on MacDonaldism. Thus and only thus does the question stand today.

Leaving aside the concrete conditions, what can now be said is that MacDonald did have a chance in the past of greatly easing the transition to socialism and reducing the upheavals of civil war to a minimum. That was during the first coming to power of the Labour Party. If MacDonald had immediately placed parliament face to face with a decisive programme (the liquidation of the monarchy and the House of Lords, a heavy tax on capital, the nationalization of the principal means of production and so forth) and had, having dissolved parliament, appealed to the country with a revolutionary determination, he could have hoped to catch the possessing classes to some extent off guard, not letting them gather their forces, shattering them with the pressure of the working masses and seizing and renewing the state apparatus before British fascism had time to form itself – and thus take the revolution through the gate of parliament, “legalize” it and lead it to a complete victory with a firm hand.

But it is absolutely obvious that such a possibility is a purely theoretical one. It would require another party with other leaders, and that would in turn presuppose other circumstances. If we construe this possibility in relation to the past then it is only in order to reveal the more sharply its impossibility in the future. The first experience of a Labour government for all its cowardly incompetence formed however an important historical warning for the ruling classes. They will no longer be caught off guard, now they follow the life of the working class and all the processes taking place within it with ten times more vigilance. “Not under any circumstances shall we fire first,” the most humane, devout and Christian Baldwin stated, apparently quite unexpectedly, in his

speech in parliament 5th March. And on the Labour benches there were fools who applauded these words. But Baldwin does not for a minute doubt that he will have to fire. He merely wants in the forthcoming civil war to put the responsibility, at least in the eyes of the intermediate classes, on to the enemy, that is, the workers. In exactly the same way the diplomacy of each country strives in advance to transfer the blame for a coming war on to the other side.

Of course the proletarian party also has an interest in throwing responsibility for a civil war back on to the capitalist bosses and in the final count the Labour Party has and will have far greater political and moral grounds for this. Admittedly, an assault upon the House of Commons by the Conservatives would form a most “noble” motive for agitation but such a circumstance has in the end but a third – or fifth – rate importance. Here we are examining not the question of the causes of a revolutionary conflict but the question of how to take control of the state with the object of a transition to socialism. Parliament cannot in the slightest degree guarantee a peaceful transition: revolutionary class force is indispensable and unavoidable. This must be prepared for and trained for. The masses must be educated and tempered in a revolutionary way. The first condition for this is an intransigent struggle against the corrupting spirit of MacDonaldism.

On 25th March a House of Lords committee solemnly resolved that the title of the Duke of Somerset must pass to a certain Mr. Seymour who would thus henceforth acquire the right to legislate in the House of Lords and this decision in favour of Seymour depended upon the settlement of another preliminary circumstance: when a certain Colonel Seymour was married in 1787 to give Britain a few generations later a new lord, was his wife’s first husband at that time alive or dead in Calcutta?

This question is as we can see one of prime importance to the fate of British democracy. In the same issue of the **Daily Herald** with this instructive episode of the first husband of the wife of the forefather of the legislator, Seymour, the editors defend themselves from accusations of desiring to establish Soviet methods in Britain: no, no, we are only for trade with the Soviets but in no case for a Soviet regime in Britain.

But what is so bad, we permit ourselves to ask, about Soviet methods applied to British technique, British industry and the cultural habits of the British working class? Let the **Daily Herald** ponder a little the consequences that would flow from the introduction of the Soviet system in Great Britain.

In the first place royalty would be abolished and Mrs. Snowden would be spared the necessity of grieving over the excessive labour of members of the Royal Family. In the second place the House of Lords where Messrs. Seymours legislate by force of a mandate given them by the timely death of the first husband of their great-great grandmother in Calcutta, would be abolished. In the third place there would be abolition of the present parliament, whose falsity and impotence are recorded even in the **Daily Herald** nearly every day. The land

parasitism of the landlords would be done away with forever. The basic branches of industry would pass into the hands of the working class which in Britain comprises the overwhelming majority of the people. The mighty apparatuses of the Conservative and Liberal newspapers and publishers could be used for the education of the working class. "Give me a dictatorship over Fleet Street for only a month and I shall destroy the hypnosis!" exclaimed Robert Williams in 1920. Williams himself has defected and Fleet Street as before awaits a proletarian hand.

Workers would elect their representatives not within the framework of those fraudulent parliamentary constituencies that Britain is split up into today but according to factory and plant. Councils of workers' deputies would renew the government apparatus from bottom to top. Privileges of birth and wealth would disappear along with the falsified democracy based upon financial support from the banks. A genuine workers' democracy would come to power that combined management of the economy with the political government of the country. Such a government that for the first time in history really had its support in the people would inaugurate free, equal and brotherly relations with India, Egypt and the other present colonies. It would immediately conclude a powerful political and military alliance with workers' and peasants' Russia. Such an alliance would be designed for many years ahead. The economic plans of both countries would in their corresponding sectors be co-ordinated for a number of years. The exchange of goods, products and services between these two complementary countries would raise the material and spiritual well-being of the labouring masses of Britain as also of Russia.

Surely this would not be too bad a thing? So why is it necessary to try to vindicate oneself from accusations of striving to introduce a Soviet order into Britain? By terrorizing the public opinion of workers the bourgeoisie wants to instil them with a salutary fear of an assault upon the present British regime while the labour press, instead of ruthlessly exposing this policy of reactionary hypnosis, adapts in cowardly fashion to it and thus supports it. This too is MacDonaldism.

The British opportunists like those in Europe have repeatedly said that the Bolsheviks had arrived at a dictatorship only by the logic of their position and counter to all their principles. In this connection it would be highly instructive to examine the evolution of Marxist and revolutionary thought in, general on the question of democracy. Here we are forced to confine ourselves to just two brief testimonies. As early as 1887 Lafargue, a close pupil of Marx and linked to him by close personal bonds, sketched the general course of revolution in France in these lines:

The working class will rule in the industrial cities, which will all become revolutionary centres and form a federation in order to attract the countryside over to the side of the revolution and overcome the resistance that will be organized in such trading and maritime cities as Havre, Bordeaux, Marseilles and so on. In the industrial cities

the socialists will have to seize power in local institutions, arm the workers and organize them militarily: "He who has arms has bread," said Blanqui. They will open the gates of the prisons to let out the petty thieves and put under lock and key the big thieves like the bankers, capitalists, big industrialists, the big property owners and so on. Nothing worse will be done to them but they will be regarded as hostages answerable for the good behaviour of the of their class. The revolutionary power will be formed by means of a simple seizure and only when the new power is fully in control of the situation, will the socialists seek confirmation for their actions by "universal" suffrage. The bourgeoisie have for so long refused the ballot box to the propertyless classes that they must not be surprised if all the former capitalists are deprived of the franchise until the revolutionary party triumphs.

For Lafargue the fate of the revolution is not decided by an appeal to some constituent assembly but by the revolutionary organization of the masses in the process of the struggle against the enemy:

"When local revolutionary institutions are established the latter will have to organize by means of delegations or otherwise the central power upon which will be placed the obligation to take overall measures in the interests of the revolution and of impeding the formation of a reactionary party."

It is self-evident that there is not yet in these lines even a slightly formed characterization of the Soviet system which by and large forms not an a principle but the outcome of revolutionary experience. However, the construction of a central revolutionary power by means of delegation from local revolutionary organs, conducting a struggle against reaction comes very close to the Soviet system in idea. And at any rate as regards formal democracy then Lafargue's attitude to it is characterized with a remarkable clarity. The power can only be obtained by the working class by means of a revolutionary *seizure*. " 'Universal' suffrage", as Lafargue ironically puts it, "can be introduced only after the proletariat has taken control of the apparatus of the state". But even then the bourgeois must be deprived of the right to vote and the big capitalists must be transformed into the status of hostages.

Anyone with the least conception of the nature of the relations between Lafargue and Marx can be in absolutely no doubt that Lafargue had developed his conceptions on the dictatorship of the proletariat on the basis of frequent conversations with Marx. If Marx himself had not dwelt in detail on the elucidation of these questions then it is only because, of course, he considered the character of the revolutionary dictatorship of the class to be self-evident. In any case what was said by Marx on this score, not only in 1848 and 1849 but also in 1871 with regard to the Paris Commune leaves no doubt that Lafargue was only developing Marx's idea.

However, not only Lafargue stood for class dictatorship as opposed to democracy. This idea had been already advanced with adequate precision back in the time of Chartism. In the organ **The Poor Man's Guardian** the following "sole true reform" was advanced in connection with the sought-for extension of the franchise: "It is but common justice that people that make the goods should have the sole privilege of making the laws." The significance of Chartism lies in the fact that the whole subsequent history of the class struggle was as if summarized in advance, during that decade. Afterwards the movement turned backwards in many respects. It broadened its base and amassed experience. On a new and higher basis it will inevitably return to many of the ideas and methods of Chartism.

Two Traditions: The Seventeenth-Century Revolution and Chartism

The editor of the **Daily Herald** recently expressed his doubts as to whether Oliver Cromwell could be called a "pioneer of the labour movement". One of the newspaper's collaborators supported the editor's doubts and referred to the severe repressions that Cromwell conducted against the Levellers, the sect of equalitarians of that time (communists). These reflections and questions are extremely typical of the historical thinking of the leaders of the Labour Party. That Oliver Cromwell was a pioneer of *bourgeois* and not *socialist* society there would appear to be no need to waste more than two words in proving. The great revolutionary bourgeois was against universal suffrage for he saw in it a danger to private property. It is relevant to note that the Webbs draw from this the conclusion of the "incompatibility" of democracy and capitalism while closing their eyes to the fact that capitalism has learnt to live on the best possible terms with democracy and to have taken control of the instrument of universal suffrage as an instrument of the stock exchange.⁴⁴ Nevertheless British workers can learn incomparably more from Cromwell than from MacDonald, Snowden, Webb and other such compromising brethren. Cromwell was a great revolutionary of his time, who knew how to uphold the interests of the new, bourgeois social system against the old aristocratic one *without holding back at anything*. This must be learnt from him, and the dead lion of the seventeenth century is in this sense immeasurably greater than many living dogs.

Following at the tails of those living non-lions who write leading articles in the **Manchester Guardian** and other Liberal organs, the Labour Party leaders generally counterpose democracy to any sort of despotic government whether "the dictatorship of Lenin" or "the dictatorship of Mussolini". The historical mumbo-jumbo of these gentlemen is nowhere expressed more clearly than in this juxtaposition. Not because we are in hindsight inclined to deny the "dictatorship of Lenin" – his power was, through its effective influence on the whole course of

⁴⁴It is curious that, two centuries later, in 1842 in fact, the historian Macaulay as an MP protested against universal suffrage for the very same reasons as Cromwell. – *L.D.T.*

events in an enormous state, exceptional.

But how can one speak of dictatorship while passing over its social and historical content? History has known the dictatorship of Cromwell, the dictatorship of Robespierre ⁴⁵, the dictatorship of Arakcheev ⁴⁶, the dictatorship of Napoleon I ⁴⁷, and the dictatorship of Mussolini. ⁴⁸ It is impossible to discuss anything with a crackpot who puts Robespierre and Arakcheev on a par. Different classes in different conditions and for different tasks find themselves compelled in particular and indeed, the most acute and critical, periods in their history, to vest an extraordinary power and authority in such of their leaders as can carry forward their fundamental interests most sharply and fully. When we speak of dictatorship we must in the first place be clear as to what interest of what particular classes find their historical expression through the dictatorship. For one era Oliver Cromwell, and for another, Robespierre expressed the historically progressive tendencies of development of bourgeois society. William Pitt, likewise extremely close to a personal dictatorship, defended the interests of the monarchy, the privileged classes and the top bourgeois against a revolution of the petty bourgeoisie that found its highest expression in the dictatorship of Robespierre.

The liberal vulgarians customarily say that they are against a dictatorship from

⁴⁵Leader of the left wing of the Jacobin coalition in the French Revolution. Called for the king's execution. Became head of government in the second period of the revolution from 1793 to 1794 characterized by the dictatorship of the petty bourgeoisie supported by the working masses of the capital. He organized the Reign of Terror but was overthrown on the 9th Thermidor (27th July, 1794) by a counter-revolutionary coup and was executed.

⁴⁶Alexei Arakcheev was Russian War Secretary and later chief minister from 1812 to 1825 under Alexander I. He kept a meticulous control on every aspect of Russia's internal affairs and was given the highest responsibility by the Tsar. He designed the so-called "military settlements" where army units were employed in farming on special estates. This and other measures required a high level of bureaucratic and repressive administration which earned Arakcheev notoriety and hatred.

⁴⁷Napoleon I (Bonaparte) (1769-1821) was born in Corsica. He joined the French army in 1785 and took part in the Corsican rising of 1789. He turned against the Jacobins during the bloody purges of 1792. His military victories as a General in Italy and Egypt won him popularity and in his *coup d'état* on 18th Brumaire (9th November, 1799) he made himself Consul and then Emperor. His subsequent brilliant military campaigns consolidated the bourgeois revolution in France and helped to break down feudalism in Europe.

⁴⁸Benito Mussolini (1883-1945), the fascist dictator of Italy who started political life as a right-wing socialist who fervently supported the Italian war effort. Following the First World War he extended his extreme nationalism to organizing an anti-labour paramilitary terrorist movement, the Fascists or blackshirts. After the betrayal of the revolutionary working class in 1920-21 by the reformists and centrists he obtained the backing of the Italian bourgeoisie and formed a bonapartist government. By 1926 he finally abolished every trace of bourgeois democracy and freedoms. Having liquidated the organized labour movement he embarked on an imperial policy, bloodily seizing Abyssinia in 1935, sending armies to Spain and occupying Albania in 1939. In 1940 he led Italy into the Second World War in alliance with Hitler. After defeats in Greece and then in Italy he resigned in 1943. With the defeat of Nazi forces in Italy he was captured and hanged by partisans. [Note by TIA: Actually Mussolini started his career before World War I as an ultra-leftist who became editor staff of **Avanti**, the paper of the Italian Socialist Party. After the beginning of the war he became a rabid agitator for Italy to enter the war on the side of the Entente after receiving money from British and French agents to set up a pro-war paper. – cf. Angelica Balabanoff, **My Life as a Rebel**, New York 1938.]

the left just as much as from the right, although in practice they do not let slip any opportunity of supporting a dictatorship of the right. But for us the question is determined by the fact that one dictatorship moves society forward while another drags it back. Mussolini's dictatorship is a dictatorship of the prematurely decayed, impotent, thoroughly contaminated Italian bourgeoisie: it is a dictatorship with a broken nose. The "dictatorship of Lenin" expresses the mighty pressure of the new historical class and its superhuman struggle against all the forces of the old society. If Lenin can be juxtaposed to anyone then it is not to Napoleon nor even less to Mussolini but to Cromwell and Robespierre. It can be with some justice said that Lenin is the proletarian twentieth-century Cromwell. Such a definition would at the same time be the highest compliment to the petty-bourgeois seventeenth-century Cromwell.

The French bourgeoisie, having falsified the revolution, adopted it and, changing it into small coinage, put it into daily circulation. The British bourgeoisie has erased the very memory of the seventeenth century revolution by dissolving its past in "gradualness". The advanced British workers will have to re-discover the English revolution and find within its ecclesiastical shell the mighty struggle of social forces. Cromwell was in no case a "pioneer of labour". But in the seventeenth-century drama, the British proletariat can find great precedents for revolutionary action. This is equally a national tradition, and a thoroughly legitimate one that is wholly in place in the arsenal of the working class.

The proletarian movement has another great national tradition in Chartism. A familiarity with both these periods is vital to every conscious British worker. The clarification of the historical significance of the seventeenth-century revolution and the revolutionary content of Chartism is one of the most important obligations for British Marxists.

A study of the revolutionary era in Britain's development, which lasted approximately from the enforced summoning of parliament by Charles Stuart until the death of Oliver Cromwell, is necessary above all in order to understand the place of parliamentarism and of "law" in general in a living and not an imaginary history. The "great" national historian Macaulay vulgarised the social drama of the seventeenth century by obscuring the inner struggle of forces with platitudes that are sometimes interesting but always superficial. The French conservative Guizot approaches events more profoundly. But either way, whichever account is taken, the man who knows how to read and is capable of discovering under the shadows of history real living bodies, classes and factions, will be convinced from this very experience of the English revolution how subsidiary, subordinate and qualified a role is played by law in the mechanics of social struggle and especially in a revolutionary era, that is to say, when the *basic* interests of the *basic* classes in society come to the fore.

In the England of the 1640s we see a parliament based upon the most whimsical franchise, which at the same time regarded itself as the representative organ of the people. The lower house represented the nation in that it represented the bourgeoisie and thereby national wealth. In the reign of Charles I it was

found, and not without amazement, that the House of Commons was three times richer than the House of Lords. The king now dissolved this parliament and now recalled it according to the pressure of financial need. Parliament created an army for its defence. The army gradually concentrated in its ranks all the most active, courageous and resolute elements. As a direct consequence of this, parliament capitulated to this army. We say, "*as a direct consequence*," but by this we wish to say that Parliament capitulated not simply to armed force (it did not capitulate to the King's army) but to the Puritan army of Cromwell which expressed the requirements of the revolution more boldly, more resolutely and more consistently than did Parliament.

The adherents of the Episcopal or Anglican, semi-Catholic Church were the party of the court, the nobility and of course the higher clergy. The Presbyterians were the party of the bourgeoisie, the party of wealth and enlightenment. The Independents, and the Puritans especially, were the party of the petty bourgeoisie, the plebeians. Wrapped up in ecclesiastical controversies, in the form of a struggle over the religious structure of the church, there took place a social self-determination of classes and their re-grouping along new, bourgeois lines. Politically the Presbyterian party stood for a limited monarchy; the Independents, who then were called "root and branch men" or, in the language of our day, radicals, stood for a republic. The half-way position of the Presbyterians fully, corresponded to the contradictory interests of the bourgeoisie – between the nobility and the plebeians. The Independents' party which dared to carry its ideas and slogans through to their conclusion naturally displaced the Presbyterians among the awakening petty-bourgeois masses in the towns and the countryside that formed the main force of the revolution.

Events unfolded empirically. In their struggle for power and property interests both the former and the latter side hid themselves behind a cloak of legitimacy. This is put quite well by Guizot:

"Then commenced between the Parliament and the King, a conflict previously unexampled in Europe . . . Negotiations were still continued, but neither party expected any result from them, or even had any intention to treat. It was no longer to one another that they addressed their declarations and messages; both appealed to the whole nation, to public opinion; to this new power both seemed to look for strength and success. The origin and extent of the royal authority, the privileges of the Houses of Parliament, the limits of the obligations due from subjects, the militia, the petitions for the redress of grievances, and the distribution of public employments, became the subjects of an official controversy, in which the general principles of social order, the various nature of governments, the primitive rights of liberty, history, laws, and customs of England, were alternately quoted, explained and commented upon. In the interval between the dispute of the two parties in parliament and their armed encounter on the field of battle, reason and learning

interposed, as it were, for several months, to suspend the course of events, and to put forth their ablest efforts to obtain the free concurrence of the people, by stamping either cause with the impress of legitimacy . . . When the time came for drawing the sword, all were astonished and deeply moved . . . Now, however, both parties mutually accused each other of illegality and innovation, and both were justified in making the charge: for the one had violated the ancient rights of the country, and had not abjured the maxims of tyranny; and the other demanded, in the name of principles still confused and chaotic, liberties and a power which had until then been unknown.”⁴⁹

As the storm of the Civil War began to break, the most active Royalists left the House of Commons and the House of Lords at Westminster and fled over to Charles’ headquarters at York: parliament split as in all great revolutionary periods. Whether the “legitimate” majority was in this or that event on the side of revolution or on the side of reaction does not in such situations decide the question.

At a certain moment in political history the fate of “democracy” hung not upon parliament but – however terrible this might be to scrupulous pacifists! – upon the cavalry. In the first stage of the war the king’s cavalry, at that time the most considerable section of the army, filled the horsemen of Parliament with terror. It is worthy of note that we encounter the same phenomenon in later revolutions, especially during the American Civil War where the Southern horse had in the first phase an indisputable superiority over the horse of the Northerners; and most recently in our own revolution, in the first period of which the White cavalrymen dealt us a series of cruel blows before the workers could be taught to sit firmly in the saddle.

The horse is by its origin the most aristocratic branch of arms. The royal cavalry was far more cohesive and resolute than the hastily and haphazardly recruited parliamentary riders. The horse of the Southern states was the innate branch of arms for the planter and plainsman whereas the commercial and industrial North had to learn the horse from scratch. Finally, with us the very hearth and home of the cavalry was in the steppes of the South-East, the Cossack Vendée.⁵⁰ Cromwell very quickly realized that the fate of his class would be decided by cavalry. He said to Hampden: “I will raise such men as have the fear of God before them and make some conscience of what they do; and I warrant you they will not be beaten.”⁵¹

⁴⁹Guizot, **History of Charles I and the English Revolution**, translated by Scoble 1854.

⁵⁰A region of Western France which during the French Revolution was economically backward and dominated by the clergy. It became the basis of two counter-revolutionary revolts in October 1793 and the summer of 1795 backed by royalist agents. The Vendée was not fully pacified until 1800 when Napoleon sent a strong expedition to the area and did a deal with the royalist church leaders.

⁵¹Cited in Guizot’s **History**.

The words that Cromwell addressed to the free landowners and artisans that he had enlisted are in the highest degree interesting: "I will not cozen you by perplexed expressions in my commission about fighting for King and Parliament. If the King chanced to be in the body of the enemy, I would as soon discharge my pistol upon him as upon any private man; and if your conscience will not let you do the like, I advise you not to enlist yourselves under me." ⁵² In this way Cromwell built not merely an army but also a party – his army was to some extent an armed party and herein precisely lay its strength. In 1644 Cromwell's "holy" squadrons won a brilliant victory over the King's horsemen and won the nickname of "Ironsides." It is always useful for a revolution to have iron sides. On this score British workers can learn much from Cromwell.

The observations on the Puritans' army made by the historian Macaulay are here not without interest:

"A force thus composed might, without injury to its efficiency, be indulged in some liberties which, if allowed to any other troops, would have proved subversive of all discipline. In general, soldiers who should form themselves into political clubs, elect delegates, and pass resolutions on high questions of state, would soon break loose from all control, would cease to form an army, and would become the worst and most dangerous of mobs. Nor would it be safe, in our time, to tolerate in any regiment religious meetings at which a corporal versed in scripture should lead the devotions of his less gifted colonel, and admonish a back-sliding major. But such was the intelligence, the gravity, and the self-command of the warriors whom Cromwell had trained that in their camp a political organization and a religious organization could exist without destroying military organization. The same men who, off duty, were noted as demagogues ⁵³ and field preachers, were distinguished by steadiness, by the spirit of order, and by prompt obedience on watch, on will and on the field of battle."

And further:

"But in his camp alone the most rigid discipline was found in company with the fiercest enthusiasm. His troops moved to victory with the precision of machines, while burning with the wildest fanaticism of Crusaders." ⁵⁴

Any historical analogies demand the greatest caution especially when we are dealing with the seventeenth and the twentieth centuries; yet nonetheless one cannot help being struck by some distinct features that bring the regime and character of Cromwell's army and the character of the Red Army close together. Admittedly, then everything was founded upon faith in predestination and upon a strict religious morality; now with us militant atheism reigns supreme. But

⁵²**Ibid.**

⁵³Macaulay means revolutionary agitators. – *L.D.T.*

⁵⁴Macaulay, **History of England** (1889 ed.), p.60.

running beneath the religious form of puritanism there was the preaching of the historical mission of a new class, and the teaching on predestination was a religious approach to an historical pattern.

Cromwell's fighters felt themselves to be in the first place puritans and only in the second place soldiers, just as our fighters acknowledge themselves to be above all revolutionaries and communists and only then soldiers. But the points of divergence are even greater than the points of similarity.

The Red Army formed by the party of the proletariat remains its armed organ. Cromwell's army, which also embodied his party, became itself the decisive force. We can see how the puritan army began to adapt parliament to itself and to revolution. The army obtained the expulsion of the eleven Presbyterians, that is, the representatives of the right-wing, from parliament. The Presbyterians, the Girondists⁵⁵ of the English revolution, attempted to raise a rebellion against parliament. A truncated parliament sought salvation in the army and thus all the more subordinated itself to it. Under the pressure of the army, and particularly of its left and more resolute wing, Cromwell was compelled to execute Charles I. The axe of revolution was bizarrely intertwined with psalms. But the axe was more persuasive. Then Cromwell's Colonel Pride surrounded parliament and ejected eighty-one Presbyterian members. Of parliament there remained but a rump. It consisted of Independents, that is, of supporters of Cromwell and his army; but for just this reason Parliament, which had waged a colossal struggle against the monarchy, at the moment of victory ceased to be a source of any independent thinking and force whatsoever.

Cromwell was the focal point of both the former and the latter and he rested directly upon the army, but in the final analysis drew his strength from his bold solution of the fundamental tasks of the revolution. A fool, an ignoramus or a Fabian can see in Cromwell *only* a personal dictatorship. But in fact here, in the conditions of a deep social rupture, a personal dictatorship was the form taken on by the dictatorship of a class which was, moreover, the only one capable of liberating the kernel of the nation from the old shells and husks. The British social crisis of the seventeenth-century combined in itself features of the German Reformation of the sixteenth century with features of the French Revolution of the eighteenth century. In Cromwell Luther⁵⁶ joins hands with Robespierre.

⁵⁵A group of deputies in the French Legislative Assembly of 1791, most of whom came from the Gironde district around Bordeaux. Led by Brissot, Roland and Vergniaud they opposed the revolutionary methods of rule imposed by the Jacobins. They represented the reformist elements of the middle class and were hostile to the Jacobins' appeals to the masses. They were overthrown by the Jacobins on 2nd June 1793, and on 31st October all the leaders of the Gironde were executed.

⁵⁶Martin Luther (1483-1546) was the original leader of the Protestant reformation. Though from a poor peasant background, Luther received a degree from the University of Erfurt in 1503 and was ordained a priest in 1507. Shocked by the corruption of the clergy and the sale of indulgences or pardons from the effects of sin, he nailed his famous 95 theses to the Church door at Wittenburg. This brought him into conflict with the papacy and made him the champion of its opponents and of those who looked to the authority of the Bible, which he translated into the German vernacular. At the Diet of Worms in 1521 he refused to accept

The Puritans did not mind calling their enemies philistines but the matter was nonetheless one of class struggle. Cromwell's task consisted of inflicting as shattering a blow as possible upon the absolutist monarchy, the court nobility and the semi-Catholic Church which had been adjusted to the needs of the monarchy and the nobility. For such a blow, Cromwell, the true representative of the new class, needed the forces and passions of the masses of people. Under Cromwell's leadership the revolution acquired all the breadth vital for it. In such cases as that of the Levellers, where it exceeded the bounds of the requirements of the regenerate bourgeois society, Cromwell ruthlessly put down the "Lunaticks." Once victorious, Cromwell began to construct a new state law that coupled biblical texts with the lances of the "holy" soldiers, under which the deciding word always belonged to the pikes.

On 19th April 1653 Cromwell broke up the rump of the Long Parliament. In recognition of his historical mission the Puritan dictator saw dispersed members on the way with biblical denunciations: "Thou drunkard!" he cried to one; "Thou adulterer!" he reminded another. After this Cromwell forms a parliament out of representatives of God-fearing people, that is, an essentially class parliament; the God-fearers were the middle class who completed the work of accumulation with the aid of a strict morality and set about the plunder of the whole world with the Holy Scriptures on their lips. But this cumbersome Barebone's Parliament⁵⁷ also hampered the dictator by depriving him of the necessary freedom of manoeuvre in a difficult domestic and international situation. At the end of 1653 Cromwell once again purged the House of Commons with the aid of soldiers.

If the rump of the Long Parliament dispersed in April had been guilty of deviating to the right, towards deals with the Presbyterians – then Barebone's Parliament was on a number of questions inclined to follow too closely along the straight road of Puritan virtue and thus made it difficult for Cromwell to establish a new social equilibrium. The revolutionary realist, Cromwell, was building a new society. Parliament does not form an end in itself, law does not form an end in itself, and although Cromwell himself and his "holy" men regarded the fulfillment of divine behests to be ends in themselves these latter were merely the ideological material for the building of a bourgeois society. In dispersing parliament after parliament Cromwell displayed as little reverence towards the fetish of "national" representation as in the execution of Charles I he had displayed insufficient respect for a monarchy by the grace of God.

Nonetheless it was this same Cromwell who paved the way for the parliamentarism and democracy of the two subsequent centuries. In revenge for Cromwell's

the supremacy of the hierarchy over the church. A social conservative who opposed peasant risings against feudal oppression, Luther nevertheless represented an important break with the power of superstition and its political expression.

⁵⁷This assembly of 1653, named after one of its members, was one of Cromwell's attempts to establish an alternative form of political rule after he had executed the King and driven most of his opponents from Parliament. Most of its members represented various Puritan religious groups and as a result had little contact with political realities, so it was soon dissolved by Cromwell.

execution of Charles I, Charles II swung Cromwell's corpse up on the gallows. But pre-Cromwellian society could not be re-established by any restoration. The works of Cromwell could not be liquidated by the thievish legislation of the Restoration because what has been written with the sword cannot be wiped out by the pen. This, the converse of the proverb, is far truer, at least so far as the sword of revolution is concerned.

As an illustration of the inter-relations between "law" and "force" in an era of social overturns the Long Parliament will always retain an especial interest, undergoing as it did for twenty years all the vicissitudes of the course of events, reflecting in itself the shocks of class forces, truncated from the right and the left, first rising up against the King, then receiving a slap in the eye from its own armed servants, twice dispersed and twice recalled, now commanding and now demeaning itself, before finally obtaining the opportunity of passing the act of its own dissolution.

Whether the proletarian revolution will have its own "long" parliament we do not know. It is highly likely that it will confine itself to a *short* parliament. However it will the more surely achieve this the better it masters the lessons of Cromwell's era.

On the second and genuinely proletarian revolutionary tradition we shall here say but a few words.

The era of Chartism is immortal in that over the course of a decade it gives us in condensed and diagrammatic form the whole gamut of proletarian struggle – from petitions in parliament to armed insurrection. All the fundamental problems of the class movement of the proletariat – the inter-relation between parliamentary and extraparlimentary activity, the role of universal suffrage, trade unions and co-operation, the significance of the general strike and its relation to armed insurrection, even the inter-relation between the proletariat and the peasantry – were not only crystallised out of the progress of the Chartist mass movement but found out their principled answer. Theoretically this answer was far from always irreproachable in its basis, the conclusions were not always fully drawn and in the movement as a whole and in its theoretical expression there was much that was immature and unfinished. Nonetheless the revolutionary slogans and methods of Chartism are even today, if critically dissected, infinitely higher than the sickly sweet eclecticism of the MacDnalds and the economic obtuseness of the Webbs.

To use a hazardous comparison then, it can be said that the Chartist movement resembles a prelude which contains in an undeveloped form the musical theme of the whole opera. In this sense the British working class can and must see in Chartism not only its past but also its future. As the Chartists tossed the sentimental preachers of "moral force" aside and gathered the masses behind the banner of revolution, so the British proletariat is faced with ejecting reformists, democrats and pacifists from its midst and rallying to the banner of a

revolutionary overturn.

Chartism did not win a victory not because its methods were incorrect but because it appeared too soon. It was only an historical anticipation. The 1905 revolution also suffered defeat. But its tradition lived on for twelve years and its methods were victorious in October 1917. Chartism is not at all liquidated. History is liquidating Liberalism and prepares to liquidate the pseudo-Labour pacifism precisely so as to give a second birth to Chartism on new, immeasurably broader historical foundations. That is where you have the real national tradition of the British labour movement!

Trade Unions and Bolshevism

That the fundamental tasks of the labour movement cannot be assessed and defined from the formal and, ultimately, purely legalistic, standpoint of democracy is especially clearly evident from, the recent history of Britain herself, and particularly graphically so from the question of the trade unions' political levies. This question, at first sight purely practical, has as a matter of fact a huge importance in principle which, we fear, is not understood by Messrs. Labour Party leaders.

The trade unions have as their object the struggle for the improvement of the working and living conditions of wage earners. To this end union members make certain financial contributions. As for political activity the trade unions used to be formally regarded as neutral while in practice they most often followed at the tail of the Liberal Party. It goes without saying that the Liberals who, like the Conservatives, sell all sorts of honours to the rich bourgeois in return for a substantial contribution to the party's funds, needed not the financial assistance of the trade unions but only their votes. The position changed from the moment that the workers, through the medium of the trade unions, created the Labour Party. Having once brought it to life the trade unions then found themselves compelled to finance it. To do this, supplementary contributions from the organized workers were required.

The bourgeois parties protested unanimously against this "flagrant infringement of individual freedom". A worker is not just a worker but also a citizen and a human being, MacDonald teaches with profundity. Quite so, echo Baldwin, Asquith and Lloyd George. As a citizen, a worker, whether he joins a trade union or not, has the right to vote for any party. To exact from him an obligatory levy in support of the Labour Party represents an act of force not only upon his purse but also upon his conscience. It is after all a direct violation of the democratic constitution that excludes any element of compulsion in the matter of supporting this or that party. Such arguments must in themselves make a powerful impact on the Labour Party leaders who would gladly reject the obligatory anti-Liberal, almost Bolshevik methods of the trade unions were it not for this accursed need of £.s.d. without which one cannot, even in a democratic Arcady, gain a seat in

parliament. Such then is the sad fate of democratic principles that £.s.d. gives them bruised heads and black eyes. Here lies the imperfection of the best of worlds.

The history of the question of the trade unions' political levies has by now become fairly rich in turns and dramatic episodes. We shall not recount it here. It was only the other day that Baldwin rejected (for the time being!) a fresh attempt by his Conservative friends to ban the collection of the political levy. The Trade Union (Amendment) Act of 1913⁵⁸, currently in force, while permitting unions to collect the political levy entitles every trade union member to refuse to pay this levy and at the same time forbids the trade unions to persecute members, expel them from the union and so forth. If we believe the estimates of **The Times** (6th March 1925) about ten per cent of organized workers avail themselves of their right to withhold payment of the political levy. In this way the principle of individual freedom is saved at least in part. The complete triumph of "freedom" would be achieved only where the contributions could be collected solely from those members who had themselves declared their voluntary agreement.

But at present where there is a union resolution to that effect all members are obliged to pay the levy. Only those are exempted who give notice of this on the appropriate form in good time. In other words the liberal principle is turned from a triumphant rule into a tolerated exception. But even this partial implementation of the principle of personal freedom was achieved, – alas! – not by the will of the workers but the force of bourgeois legislation upon the organizations of the proletariat.

This circumstance gives rise to the question: how does it come about that the workers who constitute the vast bulk of the British population and consequently of British democracy too, are driven along the path of violating principles of "personal freedom" in the whole course of its struggle, while the legislating bourgeoisie and the House of Lords in particular come forward as the bulwark of freedom, now categorically forbidding "force" against the person of a trade unionist (the House of Lords judgement on the Osborne case of 1909⁵⁹) and now substantially restricting such force (the 1913 act)? The crux of the matter is, of course, that the workers' organizations, by asserting their anti-Liberal, "despotic", Bolshevik right of enforced collection of the political levy, are in effect fighting for the real and concrete, and not a metaphysical possibility of parliamentary representation for the workers; while the Conservatives and the Liberals in upholding the principles of "personal freedom" are in fact striving

⁵⁸The Trade Union (Amendment) Act of 1913, allowing unions to collect political contributions from members who did not object, was one of the few measures secured by the Labour Party in Parliament before the 1920s.

⁵⁹Osborne was a Liberal Party agent and member of the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants who proceeded successfully against his union taking political contributions from him. This aroused a depth of feeling against the courts in the working class movement comparable to the effect of the Taff Vale decision of 1901. Though it caused considerable financial difficulties it was effectively reversed by the 1913 Act.

to disarm the workers materially, and thereby shackle them to the bourgeois parties.

It is sufficient merely to take a look at the division of roles: the trade unions are for the unconditional right to the enforced collection of the political levy; the House of Exhumed Lords is for the unconditional banning of such extortion in the name of sacred personal freedom; finally the House of Commons forces a concession from the trade unions which amounts in practice to a ten per cent refund to the principles of Liberalism. Even a blind man can sense here the purely class nature of the principle of personal freedom which in the given concrete conditions signifies nothing but the possessing classes' attempt politically to expropriate the proletariat by reducing its party to nil.

The Conservatives defend from the trade unions the "right" of a worker to vote for any party – those same Tories who for centuries denied the workers the franchise altogether! For even today in spite of all that we have seen and experienced we cannot read the history of the struggle for a reform bill in Britain at the beginning of the 1830s without emotion. With what astonishing obstinacy, what tenacity and what insolence did the slave-owning class of landlords, bankers and bishops, in short, a privileged minority, beat back the assaults upon the stronghold of parliament by the bourgeoisie with the workers at their tail! The reform of 1832 was passed when it could no longer not be passed. The extension of the franchise was carried out with the specific intention of separating the bourgeoisie from the workers. The Liberals were in essentials in no way distinguishable from the Conservatives, for once they had won the electoral reform of 1832 they left the workers in the lurch. When the Chartists demanded from the Tories and the Whigs that workers be granted the franchise the opposition of the parliamentary monopolists took on a frantic character. Yet now that the workers have finally won the franchise, the Conservatives come out in defence of "individual freedom" against the tyranny of the trade unions.

This vile, revolting hypocrisy does not meet its true appraisal in parliament. On the contrary, the Labour MPs thank the Prime Minister for magnanimously refraining from tightening a financial noose around the neck of the Labour Party today while wholly and completely reserving the right to do so at a more suitable moment. The drivellers who amuse themselves with the terms "democracy", "equality" and "individual freedom" should be sat down on a school bench and be forced to study the history of Britain as a whole and the history of the struggle to widen the franchise in particular.

The Liberal Cobden stated on one occasion that he would more willingly live under the rule of the Bey of Algiers than under the rule of a trade union. Cobden was here expressing his Liberal's indignation at the Bolshevik tyranny implanted in the very nature of the trade unions. In speaking for himself Cobden was right. A capitalist who falls under the rule of a trade union will find it very tough: the Russian bourgeoisie will be able to tell a thing or two about that. But the whole point is that the worker has a perpetual Bey of Algiers over him in the form of the employer, and he cannot weaken the latter's tyrannical regime

otherwise than by means of a trade union. Of course the worker has to make some sacrifices for this, not only financially, but also personally. However his “individual freedom”, through the medium of the trade union will in the final count gain incomparably more than it loses. This is the class standpoint. It cannot be leapt over. From it there grows the right to contribute to the political levy. The bourgeoisie in its mass nowadays considers it essential to *reconcile itself* to the existence of trade unions. But it wants to restrict their activity to the point past which the struggle against individual capitalists passes over into a struggle against the capitalist state.

The Conservative MP Macquisten pointed out in parliament that a refusal by trade unions to make political levies is observable mainly in small-scale and scattered branches of industry; as for the concentrated branches of industry then there, he complains, “moral pressure and mass intimidation” is observable. This observation is in the highest degree interesting! And how typical of the British parliament that it was made by an extreme Tory, the sponsor of a prohibitive bill, and not a socialist. It signifies that the refusal of political contributions is observable in the most backward branches of industry where petty bourgeois traditions are strong and where, consequently, a petty bourgeois conception of individual freedom generally tied up with voting for the Liberal if not for the Conservative party is strong too. In the new, more modern branches of production the class solidarity and proletarian discipline reign supreme, and that is what appears as terror to the capitalists and their servants from the Labour renegades.

A certain Conservative MP related, as if delivering a thunderbolt, that in one trade union the secretary publicly threatened to display a list of members who refused to pay contributions to the party. The Labour MPS began indignantly to demand the name of this impious secretary. Yet such a course of action ought to have been recommended to every trade union. It is obvious that this will not be done by those bureaucrats who amid the howls of both bourgeois parties seek to chuck the communists out of workers’ organizations. As soon as it is a question of the latter there is no more talk of individual freedom: at this point arguments about state security come on to the scene. One cannot, they say, let communists who reject the sanctity of democracy into the Labour Party.

Yet in the course of the debate on the political levy, the sponsor of the prohibitive bill, Macquisten, whom we are already acquainted with, let fall a phrase regarding this same democracy which the Opposition greeted with frivolous laughter but which they really ought not only to have engraved on the walls of parliament but to have repeated and explained at every workers’ meeting. In using figures to illustrate the importance of the trade unions’ political contributions, Macquisten pointed out that prior to the Liberals’ 1913 Act, the trade unions spent only about £10,000 for political purposes, but now, thanks to legalization of political extortion, they had a fund of £250,000 in hand. It is natural, says Macquisten, that the Labour Party has grown strong. “*When you have an income of £250,000 a year you can form a party for any end you like.*”

The furious Tory said a little more than he had intended. He openly admitted that a party *is made*, and that it is made with the aid of *money* and that funds play a *deciding role* in the mechanics of “democracy”. Need it be said that bourgeois funds are immeasurably more abundant than proletarian ones? This alone completely shatters the phoney mystique of democracy. Any awakened British worker must tell MacDonald: it is a lie that the principles of democracy form the highest criterion for our movement. The principles themselves fall under the control of financial resources by which they are distorted and falsified.

Yet, nonetheless, it must be admitted: if we stand by a formally democratic point of view and if we operate with a concept of an ideal citizen and not a proletarian, a capitalist or a landlord, then the most reactionary gorillas of the Upper House will prove to be the most consistent. Every citizen has, damn it, the right freely to support with his purse and his vote the party that his free conscience dictates! The only trouble is that this ideal British citizen does not exist in nature. He represents a legalistic fiction. Nor has he ever existed previously. But the petty and middle bourgeois does come fairly close to this ideal concept. Today it is the Fabian who considers himself to be the yardstick of the ideal middle citizen, for whom the capitalist and the proletarian are nothing but a “deviation” from the ideal type of citizen. But there are not really that many Fabian philistines on earth, though there are still rather more than there need be. But in general voters can be divided into property-owners and the exploiters on the one hand, and proletarians and exploited on the other.

The trade unions – and here no amount of Liberal casuistry is of avail – represent the class association of wage labourers for the struggle against the greedy and, avaricious capitalists. One of the principle instruments of the trade union is the strike. Members’ dues go to support the strike. During a strike the workers wage a ruthless struggle against strike-breakers who are exercising another Liberal principle – the “freedom to work”. During any major strike the union requires political support and is compelled to turn to the press, the parties and parliament. The hostile attitude of the Liberal Party towards the struggle of the trade unions was indeed one of the causes that forced them to form the Labour Party.

If you go into the history of the origin of the Labour Party it becomes clear that from a trade union standpoint the party in a sense forms its political section. It needs a strike fund, a network of officials, a newspaper and a trusted member of parliament. The expense of voting a member into parliament is just as legitimate, necessary and obligatory as that of a secretarial apparatus. A Liberal or Conservative trade union member may say: I punctually pay my usual member’s dues to the trade union but I refuse the extortions for the Labour Party as by my political convictions I vote for the Liberal (or for the Conservative). To this a trade union representative can reply: in the course of the struggle for improving working conditions – and that after all is the aim of our organization – we require the support of the Labour Party, its press, and its MPs; but the party for which you vote (the Liberals or the Conservatives) in such circumstances always cracks down upon us, tries to compromise us, sows

dissension in our midst or directly organizes strike-breakers; we have no need of those members who would organize as strike-breakers! Thus what appears from the standpoint of capitalist democracy to be freedom of the individual is shown from the standpoint of proletarian democracy to be freedom of political strike-breaking.

The ten per cent rebate which the bourgeoisie have gained is by no means an innocuous item. It means that one out of every ten members of a trade union is a political, in other words a class, opponent. Of course, some of these may be won over, but the rest can prove an invaluable weapon in the hands of the bourgeoisie against the proletariat at a time of serious struggle. A further struggle against the breaches made in the walls of the unions by the 1913 Act is therefore inevitable.

Speaking generally, we Marxists hold that every honest, uncorrupted worker may be a member of his trade union, irrespective of political, religious or other convictions. We regard the trade unions on the one hand as militant economic organizations, and on the other hand as a school of political education. While we stand for permitting backward and non-class-conscious workers to join trade unions, we do so not from an abstract principle of freedom of opinion or freedom of conscience but from considerations of revolutionary expediency. And these same considerations tell us that in Britain, where 90 per cent of industrially organized workers pay political levies – some consciously, others because they do not wish to violate the spirit of solidarity – and only 10 per cent decide to throw down an open challenge to the Labour Party, a systematic struggle must be carried on against this 10 per cent, to make them feel like renegades, and to secure the right of the trade unions to exclude them as strike-breakers. After all if the citizen, taken in abstract, has the right to vote for any party then workers' organizations have the right not to allow into their midst citizens whose political behaviour is hostile to the interests of the working class. The struggle, of the trade unions to debar unorganized workers from the factory has long been known as a manifestation of "terrorism" by the workers – or in more modern terms, Bolshevism. In Britain these methods can and must be carried over into the Labour Party which has grown up as a direct extension of the trade unions.

The debate on the question of the political levies quoted above, which took place in the British parliament on 7th March this year (1925), holds quite exceptional interest as a typical example of parliamentary democracy. Only in Baldwin's speech could tentative hints be heard as to the real dangers rooted in Britain's class structure. The old relations have disappeared and today there are no longer any good old British enterprises with patriarchal customs – such as Mr. Baldwin himself ran in the days of his youth. Industry is concentrating and combining. Workers are uniting in trade unions and these organizations can present a danger to the state itself.

Baldwin was speaking about the employers' federations as well as the trade unions. It is quite self-evident that he sees the real danger to the democratic state only in the shape of the trade unions. What the so-called struggle against trusts

amounts to, we know sufficiently well, from the example of America. Roosevelt's noisy agitation against trusts proved to be a soap bubble. Trusts both in his time and afterwards have become even stronger and the American government forms their executive organ to a far greater degree than the Labour Party forms the political organ of the trade unions. Although in Britain trusts as a form of association do not play such a great role as in America, the capitalists do play no less a role. The danger of the trade unions is that they do put forward – for the moment, gropingly, indecisively and half-heartedly – the principle of a workers' government, *which is impossible without a workers' state*, as opposed to a capitalist government which can today exist only under the cover of a democracy. Baldwin is wholly in agreement with the principle of "individual freedom" which lies at the basis of the prohibitive bill introduced by his parliamentary friends. He also considers the political levies to be a "moral evil". But he does not want to upset the peace.

The struggle, once started, can have dire consequences: "we do not in any event wish to fire the first shot". And Baldwin finishes: "O Lord, grant us peace in our time!" Virtually the entire House welcomed this speech including many Labour MPs: the Prime Minister had, on his own admission, made a "gesture of peace". Thomas, the Labour MP who is always on the scene when a gesture of toadying requires to be made, rose to hail Baldwin's speech and to remark on its truly human note; he declared that both sides would gain from a close intercourse between employers and workers; he quoted with pride the fact that quite a few left-wing workers in his own union refuse to pay the political levy in view of the fact that they had such a reactionary secretary as himself, Mr. Thomas. The whole debate on the question in which the vital interests of the two conflicting classes intersect was conducted in this tone of conventions, reservations, official lies and purely British parliamentary cant.

The reservations of the Conservatives had a Machiavellian⁶⁰ character; the reservations of the labour Party stemmed from a contemptible cowardice. The front bench of the bourgeoisie resembles a tiger that retracts its claws and half closes its eyes with affection; the Labour leaders, like Thomas, resemble a beaten dog which droops its tail between its legs.

The insolvency of Britain's economic situation is reflected most directly in the trade unions. On the day following the end of the war when in the heat of the moment it seemed that Great Britain was the unbounded sovereign of the world's destinies, the working masses, aroused by the war, poured in their hundreds of thousands and millions into the trade unions. The high point was reached in 1919: after that an ebb began. At the present time the number of members of trade union organizations has sharply dropped and continues to drop.

John Wheatley, a "left" member of MacDonald's ministry, expressed himself at one of the March meetings in Glasgow to the effect that nowadays the trade

⁶⁰The advocacy of duplicity in political matters allegedly advocated by Niccolo Machiavelli (1467-1527) in his book **The Prince** (1513).

unions are but a shadow of themselves and that they were equally unfit to fight or to conduct negotiations. Fred Bramley, the General Secretary of the Trades Union Congress spoke out in clear opposition to this estimation. The polemic between these two, theoretically perhaps equally helpless adversaries, does present an eminent symptomatic interest. Fred Bramley referred to the fact that the political movement by being more “rewarding” that is to say, by opening up wider career possibilities, draws the most valuable officials away from the trade unions. “On the other hand,” Bramley asks, “what would the party be without the political levies from the trade unions?” Bramley does not in the end deny the decline in the economic power of the trade unions and explains it by reference to Britain’s economic position.

But we would seek in vain from the General Secretary of the Trades Union Congress any indication of a way out of this impasse. His thinking does not go beyond the bounds of a hidden rivalry between the trade union apparatus and the party apparatus. Yet the problem does not lie here at all. At the root of the radicalization of the working class and consequently of the growth of the Labour Party too, there lie those same causes that have dealt cruel blows to the economic might of the trade unions. The one is doubtless developing at the expense of the other. But it would be extremely shallow thinking to draw from this the conclusion that the role of the trade unions is played out. On the contrary these industrial alliances of the British working class still have a great future before them. It is just because there are no further prospects for the trade unions within the framework of capitalist society in Great Britain’s present situation that the industrial workers’ unions are compelled to take the path of the socialist re-organization of the economy. The trade unions themselves when reconstructed accordingly become the main lever for the country’s economic transformation.

But the necessary prerequisite for this is the taking of power by the proletariat – not in the sense of the wretched vulgar farce of a MacDonald ministry but in a real, material revolutionary class sense. The whole apparatus of the state has to become an apparatus subordinated to the proletariat. The working class, as the only class with an interest in a socialist overturn, has to win the opportunity to dictate its will to society. The whole administration and all the judges and public servants must be as deeply instilled with the socialist spirit of the proletariat as today’s public servants are instilled with the spirit of the bourgeoisie. Only the trade unions can provide this vital human personnel. It will be in the end the trade unions that will throw lip the management organs of the nationalized industry.

The trade unions will in the future become schools for educating the proletariat in the spirit of socialist industry. Their future role will therefore be immense. But at present they are in an undoubted impasse. There is no solution to it through palliatives and half-measures. The decay of British capitalism inevitably gives rise to the impotence of the trade unions. Only a revolution can save the British working class and with it its organizations. In order to take power it is

essential for the proletariat to have a revolutionary party at its head. To make trade unions equal to their future role they must be freed from their conservative functionaries, from superstitious dimwits who are waiting for “peaceful” miracles from god knows where and finally, simply from the agents of big capital and renegades after the Thomas style. The reformist, opportunist, liberal Labour Party can only weaken the trade unions by paralysing the initiative of the masses. A revolutionary Labour party resting upon the trade unions will become in turn a powerful instrument for their recovery and resurgence.

In the compulsory, anti-Liberal, “despotic” collection of the political levies there is contained, like the future stem and ear in a grain of wheat, all those methods of Bolshevism against which MacDonald never tires of sprinkling the holy water of his own indignant narrow-mindedness. The working class has the right and the duty to set its own considered class will above all the fictions and sophisms of bourgeois democracy. It must act in the spirit of the revolutionary self-confidence that Cromwell fostered in the young English bourgeoisie. The raw Puritan recruits were, as we have said, inspired thus by Cromwell: “I will not cozen you with perplexed expressions in my commission about fighting for King and Parliament. If the King chanced to be in the body of the enemy, I would as soon discharge my pistol upon him as upon any private man; and if your consciences will not let you do the like, I advise you not to enlist yourselves under me.” It is not bloodthirstiness nor despotism that sounds in these words but the awareness of a great historical mission which affords the right to annihilate all obstacles in its path. The young progressive class, sensing its vocation for the first time, speaks through the lips of Cromwell. If one is seeking national traditions then the British proletariat should borrow this spirit of self-confidence and aggressive courage from the old Independents. The MacDonalds, Webbs, Snowdens and others have taken over from Cromwell’s comrades-in-arms only their religious prejudices and combine them with a purely Fabian cowardice.

The proletarian vanguard has to combine the Independents’ revolutionary courage with a materialist clarity of world-outlook.

The British bourgeoisie takes unerring stock of the fact that the chief danger threatens it from the quarter of the trade unions and that only under the pressure from these organizations can the Labour Party, having replaced its leadership, turn itself into a revolutionary force.

One of the latest methods of struggle against the trade unions is the independent organization of administrative and technical staff (technicians, engineers, managers, supervisors and so forth) as a “third party in industry”. **The Times** is conducting a very clever and a very ingenious struggle against the theory of “the unity of interests between mental and manual workers”. In this as in other cases the bourgeois politicians make very skilful use of the ideas of Fabianism which had been suggested by themselves. The opposition of labour to capital would be disastrous to national development, says **The Times**, in concert with all the Labour Party leaders, and from this draws the conclusion: engineers, managers, administrators and technicians who stand between capital and labour are best of

all capable of assessing the interests of industry “as a whole” and of introducing peace into the relations between the hirers and the hired. For just this reason administrative and technical staff must be set apart as a third party of industry.

In essence, **The Times** here goes wholly to meet the Fabians. The position in principle of these latter is directed in a reactionary and Utopian fashion against the class struggle and above all coincides with the social position of the petty-bourgeois or middle bourgeois intellectual, the engineer or the administrator who stands between capital and labour, being to all effects a tool in the capitalists’ hands, but wants to imagine himself to be independent. The more he emphasizes his independence from proletarian organizations, the more completely he falls into the bondage of capitalist organizations. We can predict without difficulty that Fabianism, as it is displaced from the trade unions and the Labour Party, will increasingly merge its destiny with the destiny of the intermediate elements of the industrial, commercial and state bureaucratic apparatus. The Independent Labour Party will after its current momentary upturn be inevitably cast down and, as the “third party in industry”, will end up entangled between the feet of capital and labour.

Prospects

A rising out of the fact that Mrs. Lloyd George, the wife of the former Premier, lost a valuable necklace, the **Daily Herald**, the organ of the Labour Party, meditated on the Liberal leaders who go over to the side of the enemy and give their wives valuable necklaces. The leader-writer of the paper came to the following instructive conclusion on this matter, “The existence of the Labour Party depends on its success in restraining the workers’ leaders from following this same disastrous road.” Arthur Ponsonby, a, hopeless Liberal, who even in the ranks of the Labour Party has not ceased to be a Liberal, in the same number of the paper gives himself over to reflections on how the Liberal leaders, Asquith and Lloyd George, ruined the great Liberal Party. “Yes”, the leader-writer repeats after him “the Liberal leaders have changed their simple habits and manners for the manner of life of the wealthy with whom they continually associate; they have assimilated arrogance in reference to the lower orders”, and so on.

One would have thought that there was nothing astonishing in the fact that Liberal leaders, in other words, of one of the two bourgeois parties, lead a bourgeois style of life. But for the Liberals in the Labour Party, Liberalism is represented as an abstract system of high ideas and Liberal Ministers who buy their wives necklaces are represented as traitors to the ideas of Liberalism.

The reflection on how to save the workers’ leaders from following this disastrous road is, however, more instructive. It is absolutely clear that these considerations are timid and stammering warnings to the semi-Liberal Labour leaders on the part of the semi-Liberal Labour journalists who have to reckon with the mood of its working-class readers. One can without difficulty imagine the careerist

depravity which rules among the ministerial upper ten of the Labour Party! It is enough to mention that Mrs. Lloyd George herself, in a letter of protest to the editor of the **Daily Herald**, herself alluded to one or two facts like the “regal” present received by MacDonald from his capitalist friend. After these recollections the editors immediately bit their tongues. It is wretchedly puerile to imagine that the conduct of the Labour Party leaders can be regulated by cautionary tales of Lloyd George’s wife’s necklace and that politics can in general be guided by abstract moral prescriptions. On the contrary, the morals of a class, its party and its leaders derive from politics taken in the broadest historical sense of the word. This is nowhere more clearly seen than in the organizations of the British working class.

The **Daily Herald** has hit upon the idea of the harmful effect that hobnobbing with the bourgeoisie has upon the worldly morals of “leaders”. But this of course is wholly dependent upon the *political* attitude towards the bourgeoisie. If they stand on the position of an implacable class struggle there will be no place for any kind of hail-fellow-well-met relations: Labour leaders will not yearn to be in bourgeois circles nor will the bourgeoisie let them in. But the leaders of the Labour Party defend the idea of the collaboration of classes and the rapprochement of their leaders. “Co-operation and mutual trust between employers and workers is the essential condition for the well-being of the country” – so, for example, Mr. Snowden taught at one of the parliamentary sittings this year. We hear similar speeches from Clynes, the Webbs and all the other leading lights. The trade union leaders adopt the same standpoint: all we hear from them is the necessity of frequent meetings between employers and workers’ representatives around a common table.

Yet at the same time the policy of a perpetual “amicable” dialogue of the workers’ leaders with bourgeois businessmen in the quest for common ground, that is to say, the setting aside of what distinguishes the one from the other, presents, as we have heard from the **Daily Herald**, a danger not only to the morals of the leaders but also for the development of the party. What should be done then? When John Burns betrayed the proletariat he began to say: “I do not want a special workers’ point of view any more than I want workers’ boots or workers’ margarine.” The fact that John Burns, who became a bourgeois minister, considerably improved his butter and his boots along this path is beyond question. But Burns’s evolution hardly improved the boots of the dockers who had raised Burns up on their shoulders. Morality flows from politics. For Snowden’s budget to please the City it is necessary for Snowden himself both in his way of life and his morality to stand closer to the bigwigs of the banks than the miners of Wales.

And what is the case with Thomas? We told above of the banquet of railway owners at which Thomas, the secretary of the National Union of Railwaymen, swore that his soul belonged not to the working class but to “truth” and that he, Thomas, had come to the banquet in search of this truth. It is however noteworthy that while the whole of this foul affair is related in **The Times**,

there is not a word on it in the **Daily Herald**. This woeful little paper occupies itself with moralizing in thin air, just try reining in Thomas with the parable of Mrs. Lloyd George's necklace. Nothing would come of it. The Thomases have to be driven out. To do this it is necessary not to hush up Thomas's banqueting and other embraces with the enemies, but to cry out about them, expose them and summon workers to a ruthless purging of their ranks. In order to change the morality it is necessary to change the politics.

At the time that these lines are being written (April 1925), in spite of the Conservative government Britain's official politics stand under the sign of compromise: there must be "collaboration" of both sides of industry, mutual concessions are essential, workers must somehow or other be made the "participants" in the revenue of industry and so forth. This frame of mind of the Conservatives reflects both the strength and the weakness of the British proletariat. By creating its own party it has forced the Conservatives to orientate themselves towards "conciliation". But it still allows the Conservatives to place their hopes in "conciliation" because it leaves MacDonald, Thomas and Co. at the head of the Labour Party.

Baldwin delivers speech after speech on the need for mutual tolerance so that the country can get out of the difficulties of its present situation *without a catastrophe*. The workers' "leader" Robert Smillie expresses his complete satisfaction with these speeches. "What a wonderful call for tolerance on both Sides!" Smillie promises to follow this call to the full. He hopes that the captains of industry will likewise take a more humane approach to the workers' demands. "This is a wholly legitimate and reasonable desire", the leading newspaper, **The Times**, assures us with the most solemn air. All these unctious speeches are made under the conditions of commercial and industrial difficulties, chronic unemployment, the loss of British shipbuilding orders to Germany and threatening conflicts in a whole series of industries. And this in Britain with all its experience of class battles. The memory of the labouring masses is truly short and the hypocrisy of the rulers immeasurable! The historical memory of the bourgeoisie lies in its traditions of rule, in institutions, the law of the land and in accumulated skills of statesmanship. The memory of the working class is in its party. The reformist party is a party with a short memory.

The conciliationism of the Conservatives may be hypocrisy but it is compelled by solid causes. At the centre of the efforts of Europe's governing parties today there lies a concern to maintain external and internal peace. The so-called "reaction" against war and the methods of the first post-war period can in no way be explained merely by psychological causes. During the war the capitalist regime showed itself to be so powerful and elastic that it gave birth to the special *illusions of war capitalism*. Boldly centralized guidance of economic life, military seizure of the economic values that it lacked, the piling up of debts, unrestricted issues of paper money, the elimination of social danger by means of bloody force on the one hand and sops of all kinds on the other – it seemed in the heat of the moment that these methods would solve all problems and overcome all difficulties.

But economic reality was soon to clip the wings of war capitalism's illusions. Germany approached the very edge of the abyss. The rich state of France failed to emerge from thinly disguised bankruptcy. The British state was compelled to support an army of unemployed twice the size of the army of French militarism. The riches of Europe have proved to be in no way limitless. A continuation of wars and upheavals would signify the inevitable doom of European capitalism. Hence the concern about "regularizing" the relations between states and classes.

During the last elections the British Conservatives played skilfully upon fear of upheavals. Now in power, they come forward as the party of conciliation, compromise and social benevolence. "Security – that is the key to the position" – these words of the Liberal Lord Grey are repeated by the Conservative Austen Chamberlain. The British press of both bourgeois camps lives on rehashing them. The striving for pacification, the creation of "normal" conditions, the maintenance of a firm currency, and the resumption of trade agreements do not of themselves solve a single one of the contradictions that led to the imperialist war and were yet more aggravated by it. But only by starting from this aspiration and from the political groupings that have been formed out of it can the current trend of home and foreign policy of Europe's governing parties be understood.

Needless to say pacifist tendencies run into the opposition of postwar economics at every step. The British Conservatives have already started to undermine the Unemployed Insurance Act. Making British industry as it is now better able to compete cannot be done otherwise than by a reduction of wages. But this is incompatible with the maintenance of the present unemployment benefit, which raises the power of resistance of the working class. The first forward skirmishes on this ground have already started. They can lead to serious battles. In this sphere the Conservatives will in any case be quickly forced to speak up with their natural voice. The chiefs of the Labour Party will thereupon fall into an increasingly awkward situation.

Here it is quite apposite to recall the relations that were established in the House of Commons after the 1906 General Election when a strong Labour group appeared on the parliamentary scene for the first time. In the first two years the Labour MPs were surrounded with special courtesies. In the third year relations were upset considerably. By 1910 parliament was "ignoring" the Labour group. This was brought about not by intransigence on the part of the latter but because outside parliament the working masses were becoming more and more demanding. Having elected a significant number of MPs they were expecting substantial changes in their lot. These expectations were one of the factors that prepared the way for the mighty strike wave of 1911 to 1913.

One or two conclusions for today arise from this case. The flirting of Baldwin's majority with the Labour group must all the more inevitably turn into its converse the more determined the pressure of the workers upon their group, upon capital and upon parliament. We have already spoken about this in connection with the question of the role of democracy and revolutionary force in the reciprocal relations between classes. Here we wish to approach the swine

question from the standpoint of the *inner development of the Labour Party itself*.

The leading role in the British Labour Party is, as is well known, played by the leaders of the Independent Labour Party headed by MacDonald. The Independent Labour Party not only before but also during the war took a pacifist position, “condemned” social-imperialism and belonged in general to the centrist trend. The programme of the Independent Labour Party was aimed “against militarism in whatever form. Upon the termination of war the Independent party left the Second International ⁶¹ and in 1920 upon a conference resolution the Independents even entered into dealings with the Third International and set it twelve questions, each one more profound than the previous. The seventh question read: “can communism and the dictatorship of the proletariat only be established by armed force or are parties which leave this question open allowed to participate in the Third international?” The picture is highly instructive the butcher is armed with a jagged knife but the calf leaves the question open. Yet at that critical point the Independent party did raise the question of entering the Communist International while now it expels communists from the Labour Party.

The contrast between yesterday’s policy of the Independent party and today’s policy of the Labour Party, especially in the months where it was in power, hits one in the eye. Today the policy of the Fabians in the Independent Labour Party are distinct. from the policy of the same Fabians in the Labour Party. In these contradictions there sounds a weak echo of the struggle between tendencies of centrism and social-imperialism. These tendencies; intersect and combine in MacDonald himself – and as a result the Christian pacifist builds light cruisers in anticipation of the day when he will have to build heavy ones.

The main feature of socialist centrism is its reticence, its mediocre, half-and-half nature. It keeps going so long as it does not draw the ultimate conclusions and is not compelled to answer the basic questions set before it point-blank. In peaceful, “organic” periods centrism can keep going as the official doctrine even of a large and active workers’ party, as was the case with German Social-Democracy before the war, for in that period the solution of major problems of the life of the state did not depend on the party of the proletariat. But as a rule centrism is mostly typical of small organizations which precisely through their lack of influence absolve themselves from the need to provide a clear answer to all questions of politics and to bear practical responsibility for this answer. just such is the centrism of the Independent Labour Party.

The imperialist war revealed only too clearly that the labour bureaucracy and the labour aristocracy had been able over the preceding period of capitalist

⁶¹The international organization of social democratic parties set up in 1889. With the outbreak of the First World War the overwhelming majority of its parties abandoned revolutionary Marxism and adopted a policy of alliance with the bourgeoisie of their respective nations and the organization collapsed. In 1919 it was reconstituted out of those socialist parties that still openly propounded class collaboration and as such became a major agency in restoring some degree of political stability to the capitalist world.

boom to undergo a deep petty-bourgeois degeneration, in terms of its way of life and overall mental outlook. But the petty bourgeois preserves the *appearance* of independence until the first shock.

At one stroke the war disclosed and strengthened the political dependence of the petty bourgeois upon the great and greater bourgeoisie. Social-imperialism was the form of such a dependence within the workers' movement. But centrism insofar as it was preserved or reborn during the war and after it, expressed in itself the terror of the petty-bourgeois among the Labour bureaucrats in the face of their complete and, what is more, open enslavement to imperialism.

German Social-Democracy, which for many years, even as early as Bebel's time⁶²; had followed an essentially centrist policy, could not as a result of its very strength maintain this position during the war: it had then to be either against the war, that is to take an essentially revolutionary path, or for the war, that is to cross openly over to the camp of the bourgeoisie. In Britain the Independent Labour Party as a propaganda organization within the working class was able not only to preserve but even to strengthen its centrist features during the war by "absolving itself of the responsibility", busying itself with platonic protests and a pacifist sermon without carrying through their ideas to their conclusion or causing the belligerent state any embarrassments. The opposition of the Independents in Germany⁶³ was also of a centrist character, when they "absolved themselves of responsibility", though without preventing the Scheidemanns and Eberts from placing the whole might of the workers' organizations at the service of warring capital.

In Britain after the war we had an entirely unique "combination" of social-imperialist and centrist tendencies in the workers' movement. The Independent Labour Party, as has already been said, could not have been better adapted to the role of an irresponsible centrist opposition which criticizes but does not

⁶²August Bebel (1840-1913), a turner by trade, started his political life as a left wing liberal but in 1865 under the influence of Wilhelm Liebknecht he became a Marxist and they joined in founding the German Social-Democratic Party at the Eisenach Congress of 1869. He remained leader of the party until his death, distinguishing himself as an organizer, socialist parliamentarian and writer. He fought firmly against Bernstein's revisionism and in the International Congress of 1904 achieved the condemnation of socialist participation on bourgeois governments. Within the German party he took a sceptical attitude towards the struggle of Karl Liebknecht and the younger generation of the left wing who sought to pursue the fight for Marxism to the end on the question of war and reformism. His death shortly before the war left his formal position of hostility to war untested in practice.

⁶³This refers to the Independent Social-Democratic Party of Germany which was formed under the leadership of Kautsky and Haase and in 1917 broke away from the Social-Democratic Party mainly over its opposition to the war. Taking up a centrist position, vacillating between reformism and revolution, the party gained the support of broad layers of workers in the industrial areas. The revolutionary Spartacus League led by Luxemburg and Liebknecht acted as a separate group within the Independents until the latter went over to supporting the bourgeois republic in December 1918 when the Spartacists became the Communist Party of Germany. At the special congress of the Independents held at Halle in 1920 the majority of delegates voted to leave the party and join the Communist Party, affiliating to the Communist International. The rump, led by Crispian and Hilferding, rejoined the Social-Democratic Party in 1922.

cause the rulers great damage. However, the Independents were destined in a short time to become a political force and this at the same time changed their role and their physiognomy.

The Independents became a force as a result of the intersection of two causes: in the first place because history has confronted the working class with the need to create its own party; secondly because the war and the post-war period which stirred millions-strong masses created in the beginning favourable repercussions for the ideas of labour pacifism and reformism, There were of course plenty of democratic pacifist ideas in the heads of British workers before the war too. The difference is nevertheless colossal: in the past the British proletariat, insofar as it took part in political life, and especially during the first half of the nineteenth century, tied its democratic pacifist illusions to the activity of the Liberal Party. The latter did “not justify” these hopes and had forfeited the workers’ confidence. A special Labour Party arose as an invaluable historical conquest which nothing can now take away. But it must be clearly realized that the masses of workers became disillusioned more in Liberalism’s goodwill than in democratic pacifist methods of solving the social question and the more so now that new generations and new millions are being drawn into politics for the first time. They transferred their hopes and illusions to the Labour Party. For this very reason and only for this reason the Independents gained the opportunity to head it.

Behind the democratic pacifist illusions of the working masses stand *their awakened class will, a deep discontent with their position and a readiness to back up their demands with all the means that the circumstances require*. But the working class can build a party out of those ideological and personal leading elements which have been prepared by the entire preceding development of the country and all its theoretical and political culture.

Here generally speaking is the source of the great influence of the petty-bourgeois intellectuals and including here of course both the Labour aristocrats and the bureaucrats. The formation of the British Labour Party became an inevitability precisely because a deep shift to the left took place in the masses of the proletariat. But the political staging of this shift to the left fell to the lot of those representatives of impotent conservative protestant pacifism who were at hand. Yet in transferring their headquarters on to the foundation of several million organized workers the Independents could not remain themselves, that is to say, they could not simply impose their centrist stamp on to the party of the proletariat. Finding themselves suddenly the leaders of a party of millions of workers they could no longer confine themselves to centrist reservations and pacifist passivity. They had, first as a responsible opposition and then as the government to answer either “yes” or “no” to the sharpest questions of political life. From the very moment that centrism became a political force it had to pass beyond the bounds of centrism, that is either draw revolutionary conclusions from its opposition to the imperialist state or openly enter its service.

The latter, of course, is what happened. MacDonald, the pacifist, started to build cruisers, to put Indians and Egyptians in jail and to operate diplomatically with

forged documents. Once having become a political force centrism as centrism became a cipher. The deep swing to the left of the British working class that brought MacDonald's party to power unexpectedly rapidly, facilitated the latter's manifest swing to the right. Such is the link between yesterday and today and such is the reason why the little Independent Labour Party looks at its successes with a bitter perplexity and attempts to pretend to be centrist.

The practical programme of the British Labour Party led by the Independents has an essentially Liberal character and forms, especially in foreign policy, a belated echo of Gladstonian impotence. Gladstone was "compelled" to seize Egypt rather as MacDonald was "compelled" to build cruisers. Beaconsfield rather than Gladstone reflected capital's imperialist requirements. Free Trade no longer solves a single problem. The refusal to fortify Singapore is absurd from the standpoint of the whole system of British imperialism. Singapore is the key to two oceans. Whoever wishes to preserve colonies, that is, to continue a policy of imperialist plunder, must have this key in his hands.

MacDonald remains on the ground of capitalism but he introduces cowardly amendments to it that solve nothing, save it from nothing yet increase all the difficulties and dangers. On the question of the fate of British industry there is no serious difference between the policies of the three parties. The basic feature of this policy is a confusion born out of a fear of upheaval. All three parties are conservative and fear above all industrial conflicts. A conservative parliament refuses to establish a minimum wage for the miners. The MPs elected by the miners say that the behaviour of parliament is "a direct summons to revolutionary actions" although not one of them is seriously thinking in terms of revolutionary actions. The capitalists propose to the workers that the slate of the coal industry should be jointly investigated, hoping to prove what has no need of proof, namely that with the coal industry as it stands disorganized by private ownership, coal comes expensive even with a low wage. The Conservative and Liberal press sees salvation. The Labour leaders are following the same path. They all fear strikes that might strengthen the preponderance of foreign competitors. Yet if any sort of rationalization at all can be realised under the conditions of capitalism it cannot be achieved save under the greatest pressure of strikes on the part of the workers. By paralyzing the working masses through the trade unions the leaders are supporting the process of economic stagnation and decay.

One of the pretty clear reactionaries inside the British Labour Party, Dr. Haden Guest, a chauvinist, a militarist and a protectionist in parliament, mercilessly poured scorn on his own party's line on the question of free trade and protectionism: MacDonald's position, in Guest's words, has a purely negative character and does not indicate any way out of the economic impasse. That the days of Free Trade are over really is absolutely obvious: the break-up of Liberalism has also been conditioned by the break-up of Free Trade.

But Britain can just as little seek a way out in protectionism. For a young capitalist country just developing, protectionism may be an unavoidable and

progressive stage of development. But for the oldest industrial country whose industry was geared to the world market and had an offensive and conquering character the transition to protectionism is historical testimony to the beginning of a process of mortification, and signifies in practice the maintaining of certain branches of industry that are less viable in the given world situation, at the expense of other branches of the same British industry that are better adapted to the conditions of the world and the home market. The programme of senile protectionism of Baldwin's party can be countered not by an equally senile and moribund Free Trade policy but only by the practical programme of a socialist overturn. But in order to tackle this programme it is necessary as a preliminary to purge the party both of the reactionary protectionists like Guest and reactionary free traders like MacDonald.

From what side and in what way can there come the change in the policy of the Labour Party that is inconceivable without a radical change in its leadership?

As the overall majority on the Executive Committee and other leading bodies of the British Labour Party belongs to the Independent Labour Party, the latter forms a ruling faction in the Labour Party. This system of inter-relations within the British Labour movement incidentally provides extremely valuable material on the question of "the dictatorship of a minority", for it is just so that the leaders of the British party define the role of the Communist Party in the Soviet Republic – as the dictatorship of a minority. It can however be seen that the Independent Labour Party, which numbers some 30,000, has obtained a leading position in an organization that rests through the trade unions upon millions of members. But this organization, the Labour Party, comes to office thanks to the numerical strength and role of the British proletariat. Thus a most trifling minority of 30,000 people takes power in its hands in a country with a population of 40 million and ruling over hundreds of millions. A most real "democracy" consequently leads to the dictatorship of a party minority.

Admittedly the dictatorship of the Independent Labour Party is in a class sense not worth a rotten egg but this is a question on an entirely different plane. If, however, a party of 30,000 members without a revolutionary programme, without being tempered in struggle, and without solid traditions can come to power by the methods of bourgeois democracy and through the medium of an amorphous Labour Party resting upon the trade unions, why are these gentlemen so indignant and surprised when a theoretically and practically steered communist party, with decades of heroic battles at the head of the popular masses behind it, a party that numbers hundreds of thousands of members comes to power resting upon the mass organizations of the workers and peasants? In any case the coming to power of the Independent Labour Party is incomparably less radical and deep-going than the coming to power of the Communist Party in Russia.

But the Independent Labour Party's dizzy career presents interest not only from the standpoint of a polemic against arguments about the dictatorship of a communist minority. It is immeasurably more important to assess the rapid upsurge of the Independents from the standpoint of the future destiny of the

British Communist Party. Several conclusions suggest themselves here.

The Independent Labour Party was born in a petty-bourgeois environment and being close in its sentiments and moods to the milieu of the trade union bureaucracy, together with it quite naturally headed the Labour Party when the masses forced their secretaries to create the latter under pressure. However, the Independent Labour Party is, by its fabulous advance, its political methods and its role, preparing and clearing the path for the Communist Party. In the course of decades the Independent Labour Party has gathered some 30,000 members in all. But when deep changes in the international situation and in the inner structure of British society gave birth to the Labour Party there at once arose an unexpected demand for the leadership of the Independents. The same course of political development is preparing at the next stage an even heavier “demand” for communism.

At the present time the Communist Party is numerically very small. At the last elections it collected only 53,000 votes – a figure which by comparison to the 5½ million Labour votes may create a dispiriting impression if the logic of Britain’s political development is not fully understood. To think that the communists will grow over the decades step by step, acquiring at each new parliamentary election a few tens or hundreds of thousands of new votes, would be to have a fundamentally false concept of the future. Of course for a certain relatively prolonged period communism will develop comparatively slowly but then an unavoidable and sudden change will occur: *the Communist Party will occupy the place in the Labour Party that is at present occupied by the Independents.*

What is necessary for this? A general answer is quite plain. The Independent Labour Party has accomplished its unprecedented rise because it assisted the working class to create a third, that is, its own, party. The last election shows what enthusiasm the British workers have for the instrument that they have created. But the party is not an end in itself. From it workers expect action and results. The British Labour Party grew up almost immediately as a party directly claiming government power and having already joined in it. In spite of the deeply compromising character of the first “Labour” government, the party acquired more than a million fresh votes at the new elections. Within the party, however, there took shape the so-called left wing, formless, spineless and devoid of any independent future. But the very fact of the emergence of an opposition bears witness to the growth of the demands of the masses and a parallel growth of anxiety at the top of the Party. A brief reflection on the nature of the MacDonalds, Thomases, Clyneses, Snowdens and all the others is sufficient to appreciate how catastrophically the contradictions between the demands of the masses and the numbskulled conservatism of leading top dogs of the Labour Party will mount, especially in event of its return to power.

In outlining this perspective we are starting out from the proposition that the current international and domestic situation of British capital is not only not improving but on the contrary continuing to worsen. Were this prognosis incorrect and had Britain been able to strengthen the empire and regain its

former position on the world market, raise the level of industry, give work to the unemployed and increase wages, then political development would move in reverse: the aristocratic conservatism of the trade unions would be again reinforced, the Labour Party would enter a decline, within it the right wing would grow stronger and draw closer to Liberalism, which would in turn feel a certain surge in its vital forces. But there are not the least grounds for such a prognosis. On the contrary whatever the partial fluctuations in the economic and political conjuncture everything points to a further aggravation and deepening of those difficulties which Britain is currently undergoing and thereby to a further acceleration of the tempo of revolutionary development. But in these conditions it seems highly likely that the Labour Party will come to power at one of the subsequent stages and then a conflict between the working class and the Fabian top layer now standing at its head will be wholly unavoidable.

The Independents' current role is brought about by the fact that their path has crossed the path of the proletariat. But this in no way means that these paths have merged for good. The rapid growth in the Independents' influence is but a reflection of the exceptional power of working-class pressure; but it is just this pressure, generated by the whole situation, that will throw the British workers into collision with the Independent leaders. In proportion as this occurs the revolutionary *qualities* of the British Communist Party will, given, of course, a correct policy, pass over into a *quantity* of several millions.

A certain analogy would appear to arise between the fate of the Communist and Independent parties. Both the former and the latter for a long time existed as propaganda societies rather than parties of the working class. Then at a profound turning-point in Britain's historical development the Independent party headed the proletariat. After a short interval the Communist Party will, we submit, undergo the same upsurge.⁶⁴ The course of its development will at a certain point merge with the historical highroad of the British proletariat. This merging of ways will, however, occur quite differently than it did with the Independent party. In the case of the latter the bureaucracy of the trade unions formed the connecting link. The Independents can head the Labour Party only in so far as the trade union bureaucracy can weaken, neutralize and distort the independent class pressure of the proletariat. But the Communist Party will on the contrary be able to take the lead of the working class only in so far as it enters into an implacable conflict with the conservative bureaucracy in the trade unions and the Labour Party. The Communist Party can prepare itself for the leading role only by a ruthless criticism of all the leading staff of the British labour movement and only by a day-to-day exposure of its conservative, anti-proletarian, imperialist, monarchist and lackeyish role in all spheres of social life and the class movement.

The left wing of the Labour Party represents an attempt to regenerate centrism

⁶⁴A prognosis of this kind has of course a relative and approximate character and should in no event be equated with astronomical predictions of lunar or solar eclipses. The real course of development is always more complex than a necessarily schematic forecast. — *L.D.T.*

within MacDonald's social-imperialist party. It thus reflects the disquiet of a part of the labour bureaucracy over the link with the leftward moving masses. It would be a monstrous illusion to think that these left elements of the old school are capable of heading the revolutionary movement of the British proletariat and its struggle for power. They represent a historical stage which is over. Their elasticity is extremely limited and their leftness is opportunist through and through. They do not lead nor are capable of leading the masses into struggle. Within the bounds of their reformist narrowness they revive the old irresponsible centrism without hindering, but rather, helping, MacDonald to bear the responsibility for the party's leadership and in certain cases for the destiny of the British Empire too.

This picture is nowhere more sharply revealed than at the Gloucester Conference of the Independent Labour Party (Easter 1925). While grumping about MacDonald the Independents approved the so-called "activity" of the Labour government by 398 votes to 139. But even the opposition could permit itself the luxury of disapproval only because a majority for MacDonald was guaranteed. The lefts' discontent with MacDonald is a discontent with themselves. MacDonald's policy cannot be improved by in built changes. Centrism will, once in power, conduct MacDonald's, that is to say, a capitalist policy. MacDonald's line can be seriously opposed only by the line of a socialist dictatorship of the proletariat. It would be the greatest illusion to think that the Independents' party is capable of evolving into a revolutionary party of the proletariat. The Fabians have to be squeezed out, "removed from their posts". This can only be achieved by an implacable struggle against the centrism of the Independents.

The more clearly and acutely the question of conquering power comes to the fore, the more the Independent Labour Party will strive to evade an answer and substitute for the fundamental problem of revolution every kind of bureaucratic construction regarding the best parliamentary and financial methods of nationalizing industry. One of the commissions of the Independent Labour Party came to the conclusion that purchasing of the land, plants and factories should be preferred to confiscation as in Britain, according to the presentiments of the commission, nationalization will take place gradually, a la Baldwin, step by step; and it would be "unjust" to deprive one group of capitalists of its income while another group is still obtaining a return on its capital. "It would be another matter", the commission's report states, (we are quoting from the report in **The Times**) "if socialism came to us not gradually but all at once as the result of a catastrophic revolution: then the arguments against confiscation would lose the greater part of their force. But we", says the report, "do not think that this combination is likely *and we do not feel called upon* to discuss this in the present report."

Speaking in general there are no grounds to reject in principle the purchase of the land, factories and plants. Unfortunately however the political and financial opportunities to do this will never coincide. The financial state of the United States would make a purchasing operation wholly possible. But in America

the question itself is not a practical one and there is not yet a party there that can pose it seriously. But by the time that such a party appears the economic position of the United States will have undergone extremely abrupt changes. In Britain on the contrary the question of nationalization stands at point-blank range as a question of the salvation of the British economy. But the position of state funds is such that the feasibility of purchasing appears more than dubious.

However the financial aspect of the question is only a secondary one. The main task consists in creating the political prerequisites for nationalization regardless of whether by purchase or not. After all it is a matter of life and death for the bourgeoisie. A revolution is inevitable precisely because the bourgeoisie will never let itself be strangled by a Fabian banking transaction. Bourgeois society in its present state cannot accept even partial nationalization except by besetting it with conditions which must impede the success of the measure in the extreme, while compromising the idea of nationalization and with it the Labour Party. For to every really bold, even if partial, attempt at nationalization the bourgeoisie will respond as a class. Other industries will resort to lock-outs, sabotage and the boycott of nationalized industries, that is to say, they will wage a life and death struggle. However cautious the original approach might be the task will in the end be reduced to the need to crack the resistance of the exploiters. When the Fabians declare to us that they do not feel themselves “called upon” to consider “this contingency” it has to be said that these gentlemen are basically mistaken as to their calling. It is very possible that the most businesslike of them will be useful in this or that department of a future workers’ state where they can occupy themselves with the accounting of individual items on a socialist balance-sheet. But they are of absolutely no use as long as it is still a question of creating the workers’ state, that is to say, the basic prerequisite of a socialist economy.

In one of his weekly reviews in the **Daily Herald** (4th April 1925) MacDonald let slip a few realistic words: “The position of the parties”, he said, “is these days such that the struggle will become increasingly hot and fierce. The Conservative Party will fight to the death and the more menacing that the power of the Labour Party becomes, the more monstrous the pressure of the reactionary MPs (the Conservative Party) will become”.

This is absolutely true. The more immediate the danger of the Labour Party coming to power the stronger the influence of such people as Curzon (it is not by chance that MacDonald called him a “model” for future public figures) will grow in the Conservative Party. For once it might appear that MacDonald’s appraisal of perspectives was correct. But in point of fact the Labour Party leader himself does not understand the meaning and weight of his own words. The observation that the Conservatives will fight to the death and the more frenziedly as time goes on, was required by him only to demonstrate the inexpediency of inter-party parliamentary committees. But in its essentials the prognosis given by MacDonald not only tells against inter-parliamentary committees but cries out against the possibility of solving the whole of the present-day social crisis

by parliamentary methods. "The Conservative Party will fight to the death". Correct! But that means that the Labour Party will only be able to defeat it in event of it exceeding their determination to struggle. It is not a matter of the competition between two parties but of the fate of two classes. But when two classes fight each other to the death the question is never solved by counting votes. This has never been so in history. And as long as classes exist it never will be so.

It is not however a question of MacDonald's general philosophy nor of particular happy slips of his tongue, that is to say, not of how he justifies his activity, nor of what he wishes for, but of what he does and where his actions lead. If the question is approached from this angle then it turns out that MacDonald's party is by all its work preparing the gigantic sweep and extreme severity of the proletarian revolution in Britain. It is none other than MacDonald's party that strengthens the bourgeoisie's self-confidence and at the same time stretches the patience of the proletariat to the limit. And by the time that this patience cracks the proletariat rising to its feet will collide headlong with the bourgeoisie whose consciousness of omnipotence has been only strengthened by the policy of MacDonald's party. The longer that the Fabians restrain Britain's revolutionary development the more terrible and furious will be the explosion.

The British bourgeoisie has been brought up on ruthlessness. Leading it along this path were the circumstances of an island existence, the moral philosophy of Calvinism, the practice of colonialism and national arrogance. Britain is being forced increasingly into the background. This irreversible process also creates a revolutionary situation. The British bourgeoisie, compelled as it is to make its peace with America, to retreat, to tack and to wait, is filling itself with the greatest bitterness which will reveal itself in terrible forms in a civil war. Thus the bourgeois scum of France, defeated in the war with the Prussians, took their revenge on the Communards; thus the officerdom of the routed Hohenzollern army took their revenge on the German workers.

All the cold cruelty that ruling-class Britain displayed towards the Indians, Egyptians and Irish and which has the appearance of racial arrogance, in the event of a civil war will reveal its class nature and prove to be directed against the proletariat. On the other hand the revolution will inevitably awaken in the British working class the deepest passions which have been so skilfully restrained and suppressed by social conventions, the church and the press, and diverted along artificial channels with the aid of boxing, football, racing and other forms of sport.

The concrete course of the struggle, its duration and its outcome will depend wholly upon the domestic and especially the international conditions of the moment in which it develops. In the decisive struggle against the proletariat the British bourgeoisie will enjoy the most powerful support of the bourgeoisie of the United States while the proletariat will rest for support primarily upon the working class of Europe and the oppressed popular masses of the colonies. The nature of the British Empire will inevitably give this gigantic struggle an

international scale. This will be one of the greatest dramas in world history. The destiny of the British proletariat in this struggle will be linked with the destiny of all mankind. The whole world situation and the role of the British proletariat in production and in society will guarantee its victory – on condition there is a correct and resolute revolutionary leadership. The Communist Party must develop and come to power as the party of proletarian dictatorship. There are no ways round this. Whoever believes there are and propounds them can only deceive British workers. That is the main conclusion of our analysis.