



Foreword

A pamphlet with the same title was first published in 1932. In addition to reprints, new editions were issued in 1942, 1953 and 1969, some sections in the earlier editions being omitted and new ones added as fresh issues presented themselves. Four new sections have been added to this edition.

The purpose of the pamphlet is to give in handy form statements of the attitude of the Socialist Party of Great Britain towards important problems and happenings about which questions are put to us. It includes a section on the founding of the Socialist Party of Great Britain in order to show what were the reasons that led the founder-members to draw up the [DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES \(see below\)](#) that has remained unaltered as the basis of the Party, and of our Companion Parties in other countries.

For fuller treatment of some issues the reader is referred to other pamphlets advertised at the back of this pamphlet and to the Party's monthly journal the SOCIALIST STANDARD.

Executive Committee

SOCIALIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN

March 1978

<http://www.worldsocialism.org/spgb/homepage.html>

THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN

OBJECT

The establishment of a system of society based upon the common ownership and democratic control of the means and instruments for producing and distributing wealth by and in the interest of the whole community.

DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES

THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN- HOLDS:

- 1 That society as at present constituted is based upon the ownership of the means of living (i.e., land, factories, railways, etc.) by the capitalist or master class, and the consequent enslavement of the working class, by whose labour alone wealth is produced.
- 2 That in society, therefore, there is an antagonism of interests, manifesting itself as a class struggle, between those who possess but do not produce, and those who produce but do not possess.
- 3 That this antagonism can be abolished only by the emancipation of the working class from the domination of the master class, by the conversion into the common property of society of the means of production and distribution, and their democratic control by the whole people.
- 4 That as in the order of social evolution the working class is the last class to achieve its freedom, the emancipation of the working class will involve the emancipation of all mankind without distinction of race or sex.
- 5 That this emancipation must be the work of the working class itself.
- 6 That as the machinery of government, including the armed forces of the nation, exists only to conserve the monopoly by the capitalist class of the wealth taken from the workers, the working class must organise consciously and politically for the conquest of the powers of government, national and local, in order that this machinery, including these forces, may be converted from an instrument of oppression into the agent of emancipation and the overthrow of privilege, aristocratic and plutocratic.
- 7 That as all political parties are but the expression of class interests, and as the interest of the working class is diametrically opposed to the interests of all sections of the master class, the party seeking working class emancipation must be hostile to every other party.
- 8 The Socialist Party of Great Britain, therefore, enters into the field of political action determined to wage war against other political parties, whether alleged labour or avowedly capitalist, and calls upon the members of the working class of this country to muster under its banner to the end that a speedy termination may be wrought to the system which denies them of the fruits of their labour, and that poverty may give place to comfort, privilege to equality, and slavery to freedom.

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What is capitalism?

CAPITALISM is a system of society based on the class ownership of the means of production and distribution in which wealth is produced by propertyless wage workers, to be sold on a market with a view to profit. Capitalism, therefore, is a class society with a privileged few living off the labour of the exploited many. It exists equally in Russia and China as in Britain and America. The basic contradiction of capitalism is between social production and class ownership. The actual work of producing the wealth is done by the co-operative labour of millions, while the means of production and the products belong to a minority section of society only, the capitalists. It is this contradiction that causes modern social problems since it means that production cannot be carried on to meet human needs. Consequently, where such needs conflict with profit-making the needs must come second.

Human needs are only met under capitalism to the extent that they can be paid for. This is no problem to the rich but it is to the men and women who have to work for wages or salaries and who make up the working class. The working class is composed of the men and women who, excluded from ownership of the means of production and distribution, are forced by economic necessity to sell their mental and physical energies in order to get a living. For the purpose of this definition a worker is not distinguished by the way he dresses, talks, by where he lives or the job he does, but by how he gets a living. Anybody who has to work for wages or salary is a worker. In Britain, about 90 per cent of the adult population are workers, retired workers or the dependants of workers.

Since under capitalism the worker depends on his wage or salary in order to live, it is clearly very important to understand what governs the rate of wages. Wages are in fact a price, the price of the mental and physical energies a man sells to his employer. They are not a reward for having worked, a share in the product, or even the price of the work done. Receiving a pay packet is a buying and selling transaction no different in principle from the sale of a pair of shoes or a motor car. The price of a man's ability to work—or as Marx, who first saw this clearly, called it, his 'labour power'—is fixed in much the same way as that of a pair of shoes or a motor car, roughly by the amount of labour used up in producing and maintaining it, by its value, it can thus be seen that a man's wage can never in the long run amount to much more than will cover the costs he must incur to keep himself fit to work, with additions for his family. An engineer with a college degree gets more than an unskilled labourer because it costs more to train and keep the engineer.

The wages system is a form of rationing. It restricts a worker's consumption to what he needs to keep himself in efficient working order. It means that he is deprived of the best that is available in food, clothing, housing, entertainment, travel and the like. This is made all the worse because there could, on the basis of modern technology, be plenty of the best for everyone. It is made worse still because it is the workers who produce all the wealth, the best that the rich enjoy as well as the utility items they themselves consume.

That the workers are exploited under capitalism is not hard to grasp. Exploitation does not mean that workers are shackled to the factory bench or the office desk and terrorised by bullying foremen. It simply means that they get as wages less than the value of what they produce. There is no need to go into a complicated economic analysis to prove this. Suffice it to say that, since the only way in which wealth can be produced is by human beings applying their mental and physical energies to materials found in nature, any society in which a few live well without having to work must, on the face of it be based on the exploitation of those who do work. That this is so under capitalism is clear when the peculiar quality of labour-power is understood. Labour-power can produce a value greater than its own so that whoever buys it and puts it to use can reap the benefit of this; which is precisely what the capitalist employer does. He buys labour-power for wages, puts the men and women who are selling it to work in his factory with his tools and materials, and realises a surplus when he has sold the finished product. The source of this surplus, with its divisions profit, rent and interest, is the unpaid labour of the workers.

Because capitalism is based on the class ownership of the means of production and distribution and the accompanying exploitation of the workers, depriving them of the fruits of their labour, there is an irreconcilable conflict of interest between the working class and the capitalist class. This is the class struggle which goes on all the time over the ownership of the wealth of society. Its obvious features are strikes and lockouts, trade unions and employers' associations. These are the main weapons and organisations of the two sides in the industrial field. In the political field the capitalists have the government on their side. Their

ownership and control of industry rests on their control of political power through their political parties, and as long as this is so the purpose of the government is to preserve the capitalists' monopoly of the means of wealth production. This is why in the end all governments must take the side of the employers, by protecting their ownership of property, by declaring states of emergency, by using troops to break strikes, by imposing wage freezes. by passing anti-union laws. It is also why the workers must organise politically into a socialist party with a policy based on recognition of this class struggle and its irreconcilable nature.

Capitalism is the cause of the social problems that afflict the workers today. Under capitalism the workers are, in the strictest sense, poor, that is, they lack the means to afford the best that is available. People often talk of there being a housing problem, but there is no such problem. There is no reason why enough good houses for all should not be built. The materials exist; so do the building workers and the architects. What then, stands in the way? The simple fact is that there is not a market for good houses since most people cannot afford to pay for them, and never will be because of the restrictions of the wages system. So what is called the housing problem is really but an aspect of the poverty problem or, what is the same thing — since it is the other side of the coin — the class monopoly of the means of production.

A little thought will show how capitalism, besides ensuring that the workers stay poor, needs them to be poor. If they could get a living without having to sell their mental and physical energies to the capitalists, then the system could not function — for who would do the work? By 'poor' we do not mean 'destitute' though this is an extreme form of poverty. Certainly, as long as capitalism lasts, there will be a considerable minority of people who cannot stand the pace and so fall into destitution and have to depend on Social Security.

Housing is just one aspect of the poverty problem. The same applies to the other necessities of life, clothing, shelter, education, travel and entertainment. Here again, in a world of potential plenty the consumption of the workers is restricted by the size of their wage packets and salary cheques.

Capitalism cannot produce to satisfy human needs as production is always geared to meeting market demand at a profit. This means that production is restricted to what people can pay for. But what people can pay for and what they want are two different things so that the profit system acts as a fetter on production and a barrier to a society of abundance. It is also responsible for the business cycle, with its periodic trade depressions.

One thing should now be clear about capitalism — it can never be made to work in the interests of the workers. It is based on their poverty and exploitation and can only work in the interests of the privileged owning class. A recognition of this is one of the basic principles of the Socialist Party of Great Britain. It can be summed up in the sentence 'capitalism cannot be reformed' (at least not so as to be run in the interests of the workers). Grasp this and you can quickly see the futility of tinkering with capitalism and trying to tackle each problem on its own.

To solve their problems the workers must abolish capitalism and replace it with Socialism. This will involve a social revolution, changing the basis of society from class to common ownership of the means of wealth production and distribution. When society owns and democratically controls the means of life then men and women can begin to organise production to satisfy their needs. Production solely for use can take the place of the anti-social principle of production for profit. Exploitation will be ended and a world of abundance made possible.

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Parliament

THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN has always insisted on the necessity for the workers to gain control of the machinery of government before trying to set up Socialism.

The State is the public power of coercion. It arose out of the early division of society into classes, and developed with the development of class conflicts. It is the result of the desire to 'keep order': order, that is, in the interests of the class that is supreme; order to allow the ruling class to protect its property ownership and exploit the rest of the population. Through the ages the State has been controlled, as a rule, by the class that has been economically the most important. Through its control of the State and its power to levy taxes a class that has outgrown its economic importance can often continue for a time to control social affairs. As the State grew in size and complexity it became more burdensome, and the taxes grew with it. This led to quarrels among property owners over the amount of their contributions. Much of the apparent cleavage between parties in modern States is at bottom only indicative of a struggle as to which section of the property owners shall take the weight of taxation.

In the development of the State the modern parliamentary system emerged as the most appropriate means for securing the domination of the capitalist class, the last class to obtain social control. Parliaments were subjected to modification in the course of time and the modern product ensures to the capitalist class their ownership of the means of production and the right legally to exploit the working class.

As the production and distribution of wealth developed on a tremendous scale social affairs have become correspondingly burdensome and complicated. In order to run the State smoothly and secure the peaceable flow of profit, it became necessary to alter parliamentary procedure so that the voice of the mass of the people could be heard; but only in so far as such alterations did not, in the opinion of their leading thinkers, jeopardise the rule of the capitalists. Thus, in due course, helped on by the rivalries of political parties representing sectional propertied interests, each trying to attract working class support and take the edge off working class discontent, the electoral machinery was modified until suffrage became the rule worldwide.

Subject to certain specific commitments to the European Economic Community, Parliament is the centre of power in Britain. It makes the laws and provides for their enforcement. Regional and local bodies have certain law-making and enforcing powers but these are subservient to the central body which is supreme and which, where required, supplies the local body with any extra force necessary.

The instruments of power are the army, navy, air and police forces. The final word for setting these forces in motion rests with Cabinet ministers. The Cabinet is the executive council which carries out the will of Parliament. Its members belong to the majority group, or by arrangement are allowed to function through a coalition of parties. In other words, the group that has an absolute majority in Parliament can put into operation whatever decree it wishes by means of its control of the executive — the Cabinet. In theory the Prime Minister is appointed by the Crown (though the selection is confined within narrow limits) and has a free choice in the selection of his ministers; but in fact no Cabinet could survive without a parliamentary majority to sanction its proposals.

Members of Parliament are elected by adult suffrage, and the vast majority of the voters are members of the working class. The result is near enough democratic to ensure that when the mass of the working class understand and want Socialism they have the means to bring it into being through parliamentary action.

Up to the present, the mass of the workers have lacked this political knowledge and have voted for people instead of principles. They have given their votes to those politicians who made the most alluring promises. As time proved the hollowness of those promises, the workers turned in disgust from one group of political leaders to another, and then back again, as the memory of the previous disappointments faded.

This fact has led some to question the usefulness of Parliament and to advocate industrial action. But those who have done this have forgotten that the workers have been as readily betrayed on the industrial field as they have on the political. They have forgotten that whenever the workers have placed their trust in leaders they have almost always been let down. This has not been due to the field of combat, but to the method adopted. When the workers cease to regard certain individuals as endowed with some special capacity of

leadership, they will adopt the method of issuing to delegates instructions that are to be carried out regardless of the delegates' own views or wishes. The ground will then be cut from under the feet of those who prosper out of leadership, and such people will no longer have a saleable article for the capitalist in the shape of a blind following.

There has not yet been a parliamentary test of the power of delegates acting on instructions given them by a large body of workers knowing exactly what they are after and how to get it. In fact outside of the Socialist Party (and our allied parties abroad) the method has never really been applied. Time after time the specious words of some acknowledged leader have diverted groups of workers from their original aims, generally on the plea of expediency. Expediency has for generations acted as a useful pretext to cover the compromising activities of leaders. The foolish belief in leadership has been a considerable barrier to working class knowledge and progress. The power and wealth leaders acquire induce them to fortify their positions and insist on the necessity of leadership as a permanent institution, accompanied by appropriate means of wire-pulling and mutual bargaining for position.

Socialism will not be possible until the mass of the workers understand it and are prepared to vote for it. When the workers understand Socialism they will know what to expect and what will be involved in putting it into operation.

Two other theories, both of them dangerous and impractical have been put forward by those who deny the usefulness of parliamentary action to achieve Socialism. One is that the workers can gain control of the State without the vote by means of an armed uprising. The other is that the workers can set up their own machinery of government in opposition to the capitalist State. The two theories converge because in practice the capitalist class, controlling the armed forces through their parliamentary majority, will see to it that no hostile armed force comes into being to challenge their supremacy.

When the majority of workers have become socialist there is no need for an armed uprising. They withdraw their support from capitalist parties and support the socialist party so that Parliament, which controls the armed forces, will be composed of socialist delegates. If some capitalists did try to organise resistance they would reveal themselves as a small minority, lacking popular support, trying to create chaos in the furtherance of their sectional interest against the declared will of society: they would be bound to fail.

However this is not the situation the advocates of armed uprising or the setting up of a rival State machine ask us to face. It is not majority action resisted by a capitalist minority they have in mind but a minority action against the capitalist State, with the mass of the workers still not socialist-minded and at most only moved by discontent. This is an altogether different state of affairs. The capitalist government would be in a much stronger position, politically as well as militarily, than the insurgent minority. With the passive backing of most workers, who after all would have voted them to power in a previous election, they would be able to denounce the insurrectionists as opponents of democracy and would-be dictators. Militarily they would have the armed forces and police to crush the uprising.

Minority action is suicidal folly and could not lead to Socialism even if successful. For unless the immense majority of workers want Socialism there is no possibility of it being established. Even if an insurrectionist minority managed to get control of political power, it could not alter the basic problems and processes of capitalism. It would have to contend with the anti-socialist prejudices of the majority and it might be overthrown in another insurrection.

Historically, minority action has been a feature of revolutions which Marx called 'bourgeois', that is, of revolutions which swept away barriers to the development of capitalism and led to the rule of the capitalist class. By the end of the nineteenth century, under the influence of Marx and Engels, minority action was being rejected as a socialist tactic. But after 1917 the Bolsheviks used the great prestige of the Russian revolution to put the clock back. A tactic which merely led to a change of rulers in Russia came to be popularised as the only way for the workers to win their freedom. But armed uprisings, led by a 'vanguard' party, are a method of a would-be capitalist ruling class and cannot be used by the workers. The workers' method can only be democratic political action based on socialist understanding.

In Britain, Parliament has a complete and secure grip upon the armed forces, and government interventions

in the strikes and disturbances of past years have shown on whose side they act. These were a forceful illustration of how necessary it is for the workers to obtain control of Parliament before attempting to uproot the existing foundations of society. They further show that the only way to obtain control is by sending socialist delegates to Parliament.

It has been suggested that when the socialist movement was large enough to challenge the position of the capitalists, the latter would abolish Parliament. The abolition or suspension of Parliament would, in the first instance, end the right of workers to combine, and would thus make illegal all forms of working-class combination, trade union as well as political. But the cost to the capitalists of the abolition of Parliament would be the end of their rule and the beginning of chaos. The State machine would be unable to function, owing to the conflicting views among civil and military employees of the government.

The size and complexity of a modern nation is so great that the time has long since passed when members of the ruling class could themselves occupy any considerable number of the administrative posts and manage any appreciable part of their activities. From top to bottom all departments are filled by paid or elected officials, and only a very few of these officials are drawn from the capitalist class itself. Practically all the work of controlling the activities of society today is performed by people who depend for their livelihood upon their pay — members of the working class. The armed forces, including most of the officers, are also recruited from the working class.

Thousands of functions have had to be delegated to subsidiary bodies like local councils, statutory boards and tribunals. Year by year this delegation of function grows.

Circumstances, therefore, have compelled the capitalists to place administration in the hands of elected or appointed bodies. If they were to attempt to end this in the face of a determined socialist majority, they would bring their house down about their ears.

The importance of Parliament is quite plainly recognised by the capitalists, and they give clear evidence of this at election times by the amount of wealth they spend and the inconvenience they suffer in order to ensure their control of it.

The attitude of the Socialist Party of Great Britain on the need to gain control of the political machinery has been logical and consistent. We hold the same view as Marx as to the necessity of the workers gaining control of the machinery of government before they can establish Socialism. We also hold Marx's view that in the industrially advanced capitalist countries the vote will give that control. The one way to prevent the capitalists from using political power against the workers is to refrain from voting them and their agents into political power. Accordingly we have always urged the workers not to vote for any candidate who is a supporter of capitalism.

IN THE PREVIOUS Section on Parliament we examined the proposition that the capitalists could abolish Parliament in the face of a determined socialist majority. Those who imagine that the capitalists can do this, point to Nazi Germany as an example of what would happen if capitalist power were threatened by a growing socialist movement committed to democratic political action. This of course is not a valid example as the mass Social Democratic and Communist parties of pre-Nazi Germany were not expressions of the desire of the German workers for Socialism. Nevertheless, the rise of the Hitler regime and the problems it presents are worth going into in some detail as the myth of fascism or dictatorship as the last defence of the capitalists against the workers still persists.

Under a dictatorship the traditional forms of working class political and economic organisation are denied the right of legal existence. Freedom of speech, assembly, and the Press is severely curtailed and made to conform to the needs of a single political party that has for the time being secured a monopoly in the administration of the State machine. Under political democracy the workers are allowed to form their own political and industrial organisations and, within limits, freedom of speech, of assembly and of the Press is permitted, also the possibility of the electorate choosing between contending political parties.

The Socialist Party of Great Britain has always insisted on the democratic nature of Socialism, and on the value that the widest possible discussion of conflicting political views has for the working class. From its formation the Socialist Party of Great Britain, in a manner unique among political parties in this country, has followed democratic methods, not only in its internal organisation but also by having all its Executive Committee and other meetings open to the public and by allowing all opponents at our propaganda meetings to put questions and state their case.

We do not unite with non-socialist organisations which claim to be defending democracy, neither do we minimise the importance of democracy for the working class or the socialist movement; it is simply that we are convinced that democracy cannot be defended in such a manner.

As proof of this contention the working class has a rich experience on which to draw. The policy of the 'lesser evil', that is, a policy of concessions to and compromise with non-fascist parties and elements of capitalism, was pursued and justified by the German Social Democratic Party on the ground that such a policy was dictated by the necessity of defeating Nazism. Its total failure points the lesson: that provided the threat of dictatorship is real, the formation of a bloc of non-socialist anti-fascists does not impede the advance of dictatorship but, if anything, serves to expedite its progress. In order to make this point quite clear it is necessary that we should understand the nature of democracy and its usefulness to the working class. Unemployment, poverty, insecurity and other evil effects of capitalism remain, no matter whether the form of its political administration be democratic or dictatorial. Freedom to cry working class misery from the house-tops will not, by itself, abolish that misery. Democracy is a weapon, potentially invaluable, it is true; but, like every other weapon, it can be used either for self-preservation or for self-destruction. And the painful fact is that in Germany the workers, lacking an understanding of how to use the democratic weapon in their own interests, chose instead to commit political suicide with it.

The constitution of the German 'Weimar' Republic — set up in 1919 but already doomed before Hitler took power — was formally one of the most democratic in the world. Nevertheless so miserable had the existence of wide masses of the German people become that in the last free election held in Germany in 1932, a majority of the electorate voted for the abolition of democracy. For in spite of the concern for democracy which is falsely expressed by the Communists nowadays, at the time of that election Nazis and German Communists were united in their hatred of what they called 'bourgeois democracy'. The chief difference between the Communists and Nazis was that they chose different vehicles through which to express their hatred of democracy. Lacking an understanding of their social position, disgusted by the antics and ineptitude of self-styled socialists, the mass of the German people found the source of their grievances not in the capitalist nature of the social system but in the democratic form in which it was administered. In their uninformed despair, they fell an easy prey to astute and unscrupulous demagogues, who never failed to reinforce the false belief that democracy was the cause of social distress.

Dictatorship does not exist in a vacuum: like every other social phenomenon it is related to, and has its origin in, a social background. That background is capitalism which inevitably gives rise to working class

problems, consequent frustration, prejudices and bitterness which can be exploited by the opponents of democracy. With equal inevitability it also gives rise to problems of a specifically capitalist nature: such as maintaining the profitability of production; securing new and retaining old markets; the necessity of forging 'national unity' when faced with war with rival capitalist groups, and so on. It is precisely in an attempt to solve these problems that the ruling class in certain circumstances has recourse to dictatorship. That these problems can be permanently solved is precluded by the contradictory nature of capitalism itself; but that will not prevent the capitalists from making the attempt where it appears that no other means will serve. As long as the workers support capitalism and capitalist policies they will be tempted ultimately to give their support to the policy best calculated to meet the political and economic needs of capitalism, though that policy may be one of dictatorship.

Democracy for the working class can only be consolidated and expanded to the extent that the workers adopt the socialist standpoint. To renounce Socialism so democracy may be defended, means ultimately the rejection of both Socialism and democracy.

Although the Nazis did not actually come to power until 1933, this was only the culmination of a development the origins of which can be traced back many years before. Defeat in the first world war had as its consequence the breakdown of the German military and semi-feudal State apparatus. When the Kaiser fled, the task of rehabilitating German capitalism fell into the hands of the Social Democrats. They were by far the largest party and had the greatest backing throughout the country from war-weary workers now ready to give parliamentary democracy a trial. In 1919 the Weimar Constitution was drawn up and, as a result of the elections, plus support from the Catholic Centre Party and others, the Social Democrats became the first Republican government. They were handicapped in consolidating their authority by several hostile forces. Principal among these were the Spartacists — followers of Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg — and a breakaway section of the Independent Social Democratic Party, both of which desired to imitate the Russian example (later they became the Communist party). Feeling its authority undermined the Government, in order to crush the rebels, enlisted the aid of reactionary generals and officers — the extreme right-wing, as they were called. Such action could not but spell disaster for the Republic, for these reactionary hirelings, once reinstated, plotted against their benefactors and came out openly against the government when its influence amongst the workers had waned. The rehabilitation of capitalism in a defeated country created a mass of problems for a party ushering in a new political regime. The Social Democrats were unable to master those problems and the inevitable discontent vented itself on the Weimar Constitution.

On the other hand, the capitalists, sighing for the return of their markets and trade routes, were beginning to look elsewhere, turning a sympathetic ear to the new message of Hitler's national capitalism, miscalled 'national socialism'.

From being a mere handful of disgruntled officers who had severely suffered in prestige as a result of their abortive attempts to seize power in 1923, the Nazis soon gained in influence. Adolf Hitler had learned a lot from his failure - particularly the need to win over the people. Hence the new party adopted a programme wide enough to appeal to practically all sections of the population. Mob oratory, anti-semitism and nationalism became his stock-in-trade.

The situation became ripe for the Nazis after 1930. The economic crisis which had then broken out, became aggravated by the widespread withdrawal of foreign investments and the cessation of loans. Meanwhile the numbers of the unemployed had increased to seven millions, whilst those in employment were periodically having their wages reduced. The failure of government after government to master the situation brought the democratic republic into ever-greater disrepute. A state of parliamentary paralysis had begun to set in (the Communists as well as the Nazis were to blame for this), and the Nazis were not slow to profit by anti-parliamentary sentiment. In addition, the leading capitalists ceased their support for the Republic. The Social Democrats had served their purpose. They had preserved German capitalism in the post-war years. They could no longer aid the capitalists in their long-delayed quest for aggrandisement; for that, a new type of militarism was necessary. Not the militarism of the early Bismarkian era, utilised mainly in the interests of a backward landowning group, but one which looked beyond the borders of Prussia for its ideal. A movement, in short, which could bring to reality all the unfulfilled dreams of a century — national centralisation and consolidation, with a view to re-entering the imperialist arena, this time unfettered by any feudal restrictions. The Nazi movement embodied these ideals and Hitler had set them down in *Mein Kampf*; and so it came

about.

With widespread support of the masses, Germany became a 'totalitarian state'. All autonomous regional governments were abolished. Austria, Memel and Czechoslovakia were overrun. Thus the Nazi movement was instrumental in consummating the unification of Germany as desired by the early German capitalists in 1848, in addition to preparing the ground for war.

Dictatorship came to Germany not against the will of the mass of the workers. A majority of them did not even support democracy. Many who did not want the Nazis wanted a Communist dictatorship. The German workers cut their own throats. That was the lesson of Nazism.

The political conditions existing immediately prior to the winning of power for Socialism will be quite different from those in pre-Nazi Germany. The workers will not be turning in disgust from democratic reformism to dictatorship. They will be strongly organised on the economic and political fields, ready to establish Socialism and able to cope with any who try to prevent the democratic will for Socialism from being implemented.

Marx and dictatorship

IN THE WORLD TODAY there are many countries under dictatorships of varying degrees of ruthlessness; that is to say countries in which the government is not responsible to the electorate, and in which political parties and trade unions are suppressed, or are allowed to exist only as organs of the government itself, and in which freedom of speech and opposition propaganda are denied.

The Socialist Party of Great Britain, in conformity with its adherence to democratic principles, is opposed to all dictatorships; but we are asked to believe by the Communist parties that while some dictatorships are to be condemned others, such as that in Russia, deserve the support of socialists.

It is of first importance that our reasons for rejecting that view should be understood.

The socialist movement in its formative years developed against the European background at a time when all of the governments were autocracies — not subject to control by electors on a wide franchise. They all in greater or lesser degree represented the interests of a landed class resisting the rise to political power of the industrial capitalists and, of course, were even more opposed to the aspirations of the working class. At the extreme was the so-called Holy Alliance, proclaimed by Alexander I, Tsar of Russia in 1815, as the protector of reactionary regimes everywhere against the industrial capitalists, against the movements for national independence, and against democracy and the working class effort to organise industrially and politically.

In the circumstances of the time it seemed logical to Marx and others that the workers in their own independent organisations should accept that for the moment their interests coincided with those of the capitalist democrats, until such time as the absolutist regimes had been overthrown, and should then continue their struggle against the new capitalist regimes. It was assumed that "the bourgeois democratic governments" could be placed in the situation of immediately losing "all backing among the workers". (Marx's address to the Communist League, 1850. Reproduced in A Handbook of Marxism, Victor Gollancz Ltd.. 1937, page 67.)

While Marx did not suppose that the working class could at once expect to gain political control for Socialism he did envisage the possibility of the workers' organisations retaining the initiative in their progress towards that end. Marx recognised that if the feudal estates on being broken up were handed over to the peasants as their private property (as had happened in France after the Revolution) this would set up a barrier against the development of the socialist movement and he urged that this should be prevented and instead the land should be handed over to "associated groups" of landless peasants.

Events failed to develop as Marx had at that time hoped. With our advantage of viewing the process afterwards we can see that Marx underestimated the magnitude of the problem of winning over the working class to acceptance of world-wide Socialism, and equally underestimated the strength of capitalism and the resourcefulness of the capitalist class in imbuing the workers with capitalist and nationalist ideas.

Later on, as Marx pursued his analysis of social development he was to formulate his view that "no social order ever disappears before all the productive forces for which there is room in it have been developed, and new, higher relations of production never appear before the material conditions of their existence have matured in the womb at the old society".

In its techniques and potentialities of production. European capitalism has made vast strides in the past century. It has been ousted by the United States of America; but there are many parts of the world in which the development of capitalism has not yet reached the form existing, for example, in Britain and America in which the social structure has resolved itself into a capitalist class confronting an enfranchised working class.

In some countries, such as Spain and Greece and much of Latin America, the struggle of the industrial and commercial capitalists to overthrow political regimes favourable to landowning classes was much later in being completed. The democratic forms that for a time existed were overthrown and replaced by authoritarian dictatorships. Some point to this as proof of the myth discussed in the previous section (democracy and dictatorship) that, faced with a revolutionary working class movement, the capitalist

government would just suspend democracy. In fact, it proves the opposite. It is precisely because the working class was undeveloped that political democracy proved unstable in these countries. With a large part of their populations often illiterate and still working the land under pre-capitalist conditions of exploitation, these countries' governments were able to rule in a way they could not if faced with a modern educated urban working class. It is instructive to note that with the continued industrial development which these dictatorships are powerless to prevent, they themselves are forced to come to terms with the capitalists and ditch the more reactionary elements that originally backed them. This process can be seen in Spain and Greece.

Economic backwardness and a small working class, often smaller than in the countries just discussed (in most African countries, at present, the working class makes up only a very small proportion of the population) also underlie dictatorships of another sort. These, far from favouring pre-capitalist privileged groups, use State power ruthlessly to sweep away all obstacles, social and ideological, to the spread of the capitalist relations of production for sale, capital accumulation, and wage-labour in the areas they control. Many of these regimes claim to be socialist but in fact they are pursuing a policy of State capitalism after the manner of Russia. The rulers of State capitalist Russia claim that their dictatorship is the instrument by which capitalism has been overthrown and replaced by Socialism.

This claim is defended in Communist Party propaganda on the ground of a statement made by Marx in 1875 that:

"Between capitalist and communist society lies the period of the revolutionary transformation of the one into the other. There corresponds to this also a political transition period in which the state can be nothing but the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat."

(Marx's Critique of the Gotha Programme.)

A detailed study by Hal Draper of the occasions on which Marx and Engels used this and similar phrases provides convincing proof that Marx meant here nothing more than was meant by the statement in the Communist Manifesto that the working class must achieve "conquest of political power". (New Politics, Vol. I, No. 4, Summer 1962.)

This has no resemblance to the regime in Russia where for more than sixty years a party clique has exercised dominance over the population by military force, secret police, censorship and the other manifestations of absolutist rule now being more and more challenged.

That Marx should believe a transition period to be necessary, considering the level of industrial, social and political development in 1875 is understandable. Marx accepted that a more or less prolonged transition would be required also because of the mental outlook of the people and because of the productive capacity of society being not yet equal to the demands made on it under the new conditions.

As has already been stated, the Socialist Party's view from its formation has been that there can be no Socialism until the great majority of the working class fully understands and accepts the implications of what they are consciously setting out to achieve. Dictatorship in various forms exists at the present time, basically because of the political immaturity of most of the working class all over the world. Instead of being united by world-wide class consciousness they are everywhere divided: divided between the nations by the poison of nationalism; divided inside the nations by religious, racial and other superstitions; divided also by the failure of many to appreciate the importance of democracy.

When Marx wrote of the working class winning the battle of democracy he did not foresee that the extension of the franchise was to bring into being Labour and Social Democratic governments which would continue to administer capitalism. Instead of the odium of perpetuating capitalism falling on the capitalists it has had considerable effect in bringing democracy into disrepute, thus helping demagogues such as Mussolini and Hitler to rise to power and helping the Communist parties in Russia and elsewhere to gain support for their dictatorships.

Nationalism plays a powerful role in thwarting the growth of class consciousness; by inducing workers in the

newly created countries of Africa to accept oppression for the supposed benefits they will later receive when industrial development has been speeded up; by the readiness of the workers in countries holding colonies to condone what is in effect a dictatorship imposed on the colonial peoples.

In this category falls the Russian military occupation of Czechoslovakia and other countries in the Russian sphere of interest; matched by the readiness of workers in the NATO countries to condone the similar actions of these governments on the plea that this is a necessity thrust on them by the threat of Russian military power.

Spain, in the civil war 1936-39, and Greece in the civil war and military dictatorship of later years are other examples of rival groups of powers propping up governments acceptable to their own strategic needs.

Against all these manifestations of capitalism the Socialist Party of Great Britain proclaims the need for world-wide Socialism using the methods of democracy.

Gradualism and revolution

TO MANY, the word 'revolution' conjures up visions of barricades and public executions. All it means is a complete change, without any implication as to how that change is to come about. The Socialist Party of Great Britain stands for a revolution in the basis of society, a complete change from class to common ownership of the means of production and distribution: this social revolution to be carried out democratically by the use of political power. It is possible for a majority of socialist workers to win power through democratic institutions, by use of the ballot and Parliament, for the purpose of carrying out the socialist revolution. Thus we stand for democratic revolutionary political action.

In the past, and to a much smaller extent today, others who claimed to stand for Socialism advocated what they thought was an alternative method: by working, under capitalism, to induce the government to enact reform measures favourable to workers. They stood for reformist political action which they hoped would gradually transform capitalism into Socialism without the need for class-conscious workers' political action: this policy was called gradualism.

In Britain the leading gradualist thinkers were in the Fabian Society formed in 1884. The Fabians held that by 'permeating' the civil service and the working class and 'middle class' organisations they could gradually change society. Their real aim was State capitalism in which they saw themselves as the most suitable top administrators. Gradualism, as expounded by the Fabians and adopted by the Labour Party, has always been the dominant reformist theory in Britain. Labour leaders here have always rejected Marx and never even claimed to be revolutionary.

The situation was different on the Continent and especially in Germany, where there were large parties, supported by millions of workers, claiming to be Marxist and to stand for a revolutionary policy. The German Social Democratic Party was the largest and most influential of these parties; but at the turn of the century it was rent by a controversy over gradualism which became known as Revisionism.

Edward Bernstein, a close friend of Engels, spent many years in exile in London and it has been suggested that he was greatly influenced by the Fabians. He attacked the main tenets of Marxism and called upon the Social Democratic Party to recognise that they were in reality only a reform party. He suggested that they be honest with themselves and drop their ultimate commitment to the capture of power for Socialism and instead concentrate on getting reforms within capitalism by working through Parliament, the co-operatives, the trade unions and local councils, and even by co-operating with non-socialist parties.

Bernstein and his supporters were answered and refuted by the arguments of men like Karl Kautsky who had a better grasp of Marx's writings and who did a great deal to popularise them. The German Social Democratic Party turned down Bernstein's suggestions but the decision meant nothing as far as the party's practical policy was concerned. They retained their paper commitment to the socialist revolution but continued their day-to-day reformist practices. For it was on the basis of reforms not Socialism that their mass support amongst the German workers rested. In time, as their attitude to the first world war was dramatically to show, they became bogged down in reformist politics and prisoners of their non-socialist and patriotic supporters so that they lost all claim to be called a socialist party. Even opponents of revisionism such as Kautsky were ready to defend the idea that a socialist party could engage in reform politics. Like the gradualists, they also had some odd views about Socialism, equating it with nationalisation by a democratic state and holding that the wages system and buying and selling were quite compatible with the common ownership of the means of production. Their ultimate aim, like that of the Fabians, was State capitalism — not Socialism.

The question of reform and revolution was discussed not only in Germany but throughout Europe and America. In the English-speaking world, parties with Socialism supposedly as their aim had failed to attract mass support even for reforms. This had the advantage of allowing them the chance to look at the question in an objective manner since they did not have to worry so much how their answer might offend their non-socialist supporters. One important view to emerge was that the way to avoid the dangers of reformism was for a socialist party to seek support for Socialism alone and not to campaign for so-called immediate demands within capitalism. This view was held by some members of the Socialist Party of Canada, the Socialist Party of America and the Socialist Labour Party of America. In Britain it was advocated within the

Social Democratic Federation by a group which in 1904 left to set up the Socialist Party of Great Britain.

That a socialist party should not advocate reforms has always been the policy of the Socialist Party of Great Britain. This is not to say that reforms can never bring any benefit to the workers. Some can and do, while many are futile or harmful. But a socialist party which advocates reforms would attract the support of people interested more in these reforms than in Socialism. In these circumstances the party would be dragged into compromise with capitalism and so in the end become merely another reform party even if it still proclaimed Socialism as its ultimate aim. As Socialism can only be set up when a majority of workers understand and want it, a socialist party must build up support for this aim alone. Support gained on any other basis is quite useless, even harmful.

Despite the existence there of large Social Democratic parties, Europe was both socially and politically less advanced than Britain (where capitalism had long eliminated the peasant class) and North America (which had never known feudalism). In Europe significant remnants of feudalism survived; the workers were only a minority amidst a population of peasants, artisans and small traders; many still thought of revolution in terms of a band of conspirators setting up barricades in a bid to seize important civic buildings much as had happened in France in 1830, in many other European cities in 1848 and in Italy in the 1860s.

This tradition put many of the European opponents of reformism on the wrong track. They mistakenly argued that it was parliamentary politics that had led the Social Democratic parties astray and that political power for Socialism could only be won through an armed uprising. Thus the reform and revolution controversy tended to resolve itself into Parliament versus insurrection, in which both sides assumed that parliamentary action must be reformist.

As capitalism developed, insurrection as a way to political power became more and more obviously outmoded. The advocates of parliamentary action, even though reformists, were able effectively to refute the advocates of armed uprisings. Later many of these, especially under the influence of Bolshevism, went from bad to worse and agitated for minority coups of the kind opposed by Marx and Engels as far back as 1848. The European opponents of reformism thus ended up in a blind alley.

The Socialist Party of Great Britain's contribution to socialist theory lies in having worked out a satisfactory solution to the problem of reform and revolution based on the revolutionary use of democratic institutions, including Parliament, to achieve Socialism. Parliament had only been used by the Social Democrats to get reforms and it was assumed that this was the only purpose for which it could be used. Our contribution was to point out that this was a false conclusion and that there was no reason why Parliament could not be used by a class-conscious socialist majority to win power for the socialist revolution.

The two futile policies of insurrection and reformism can be avoided by building up a socialist party composed of and supported by convinced socialists only. When a majority of workers are socialist-minded and organised, they can use their votes to elect to Parliament and the local councils delegates pledged to use political power for the one revolutionary act of dispossessing the capitalist class by converting the means of production and distribution into the property of the whole community .

The futility of reformism

THE TASK of achieving Socialism to many minds has come to be associated with movements to make capitalism run smoothly by means of social and political reforms. It is important to the socialist movement that the two purposes should be kept quite distinct. Only convinced socialists can work for Socialism; but reform movements attract conscious as well as unknowing defenders of capitalism. Some of them are anxious only to alleviate suffering, others support reforms as a method of making capitalism more secure or more palatable.

It is not only the workers who, through trade union action, endeavour to place certain limits upon their exploitation by the capitalists; the State, which today exists for the purpose of preserving capitalism, is also compelled in the course of its activities to take such steps.

Thus the landed interest, represented in the Tory Party, passed the early Factory Acts; and the tradition developed that by supporting one political party against the other the workers could gradually improve their conditions. With the further development of industry, however, the wealthy manufacturers bought land, and the landlords in turn began to invest in industry, until today the division between them has practically ceased to exist. In addition, certain of the manufacturers discovered that the legal regulation of hours of labour and the curtailment of so-called sweating could be made to hit their poorer and less effectively equipped competitors more than themselves. Hence the Liberal Party eventually took a special interest in pushing through the type of measures which they had previously opposed, and a considerable section of the workers came to regard the Liberals as their friends.

Another type of reform arose as a result of growing destitution. This constituted a standing incentive to crime, and was a constant source of expense to the public authorities and to the propertied class in whose interests they function. With the decline of feudalism in this country, in the reign of the Tudors, the ruling class cowed the destitute into submission by savage repression, but as the peasants were driven off the land in increasing numbers, the Poor Law had to be instituted to provide maintenance for the destitute. It became a permanent institution and right up to the outbreak of the second world war many workers found it necessary to appeal to the Poor Law even when in work. Coupled with the fact that the volume of Poor Law relief had reduced some local authorities to near bankruptcy, this led to the demand by various sections of the property-owning class that the central government should assume part of the burden of paying for destitution. So there developed unemployment and health insurance, old age pensions and so on designed to relieve the pressure on local authorities and, incidentally, to pacify the workers by removing the pauper stigma. Such measures, organised on a national scale, spread the burden over the entire capitalist class.

After the end of the second world war this tendency towards a simplified and all-embracing scheme of social security found its logical conclusion in the National Insurance Act of 1946, which provided for a comprehensive system of health and unemployment insurance, as well as for retirement pensions. This Act was taken over by the Labour Party as its own, though it was in fact based upon a plan drawn up by the Liberal, Beveridge, and was agreed to in principle by the wartime coalition government in 1943. The first stage, the Family Allowances Act 1945, was a coalition government measure. Indeed, whatever the political complexion of the party in power it is certain that such measures would eventually have been put on the statute book — for reasons of economy if for nothing else.

The hollowness of the Labour Party's attitude of posing as the sole champions of the so-called welfare state is most effectively exposed when we read of much the same measures being put into operation in other countries by governments without pretensions of being socialist. The plain fact is that such social reforms are necessary for the running of capitalism and are introduced by openly capitalist as well as by Labour governments.

In times of economic setback, on the other hand, when the government is under pressure to reduce its spending, the existing reforms are obvious targets for economy. Labour has always claimed that the Conservatives do this because they are opposed to social reforms anyway; but capitalism has played a cruel trick on the Labour Party. In the economic crisis which broke towards the end of 1964 there was the spectacle of the Labour government accusing the Tories of irresponsible extravagance and themselves cutting back on government spending. Later the Labour government was forced to bring back and increase prescription charges, abolish free milk in secondary schools and reduce planned spending on house and

school building. In 1977, in the next depression, it was the Labour government which cut back expenditure on education and the National Health Service. An ironic reversal of supposed roles and one which shows how all governments, no matter what their pretensions, are at the mercy of capitalism's economic forces. Sometimes the Labour Party brings in reforms; sometimes the Conservatives. Sometimes the Conservatives cut back on reform spending; sometimes the Labour Party.

Reforms in education, sanitation and housing are others for which Tory, Labour and Liberal politicians have vied with each other to claim credit. Yet it is clear that the schooling received by the children of most wage and salary earners merely fits them for their role as workers. Improved sanitation reduces the threat of epidemics which do not spare the wealthy, while subsidised housing is intended to lessen the pressure by workers for higher wages. These measures have the purpose of raising the standard of efficiency of the workers, thus making them more productive for their masters' benefit. The more astute and far-sighted members of the ruling class have long realised this.

In order to finance all these measures the State is obliged to levy increased taxation upon those who alone can bear it, the property owners; nothing is easier for Labour leaders and others to represent taxation as 'socialist' — an attempt to equalise incomes. The fact that the wealth of the large capitalists survives the increased taxation, and that it is only the small fry that get squeezed out, is ignored.

Official statistics show that despite taxation the distribution of incomes and wealth remains as it must be under capitalism: concentrated in the hands of a few. The few are rich through their monopoly of the means of life and their returns on their investments as rent, interest and profit; the workers get as wages and salaries little more than enough to keep themselves and their families in efficient working order. State action, such as tax reform and social security benefits, cannot alter these basic inequalities of capitalism any more than they can solve the problems in housing, health and education which arise for workers as a result.

On 20 July 1946 the late Aneurin Bevan claimed in a speech at Durham that: "when the next election occurs there will be no housing problem in Great Britain for the British working class" (Hansard, 14 July 1948, Col. 1202); and the Labour Party announced that "destitution has been abolished" (Labour and the New Society, 1950, page 5). Merely to recall these claims is to expose the futility of reformism.

The Labour Party has always shown disdain for the Socialist Party of Great Britain's insistence on first convincing the workers of the need for Socialism, choosing instead to put forward reforms in its electoral programmes in order to gain working class support and thus obtain political power. 'The workers want something now', we have always been told, the implication being that a workers' party should imitate the openly capitalist parties and make promises of reforms in order to catch votes. Such reasoning ignores the fact that a party which rises to power on non-socialist votes can only administer capitalism. The fate of successive Labour governments is proof of this.

Socialism cannot be imposed upon the workers from above. It is a system which requires their conscious recognition of its necessity. They cannot take the far-reaching step of making the means of life common property without being aware of what they are doing. A programme of reforms is therefore useless to a socialist party even as a strategic move. The failure of Labour governments the world over to make any appreciable difference to the workers' conditions bears eloquent testimony to the soundness of our claim that, so long as capitalism is accepted by the workers as a necessity, it must be run in the interests of the capitalist class, and not of the workers.

Wherever we turn in the world the plausible tales of the reformers concerning the need of 'something now' merely serve to hide from the workers the fact that, in spite of trade union and State action, their harassment and insecurity grow greater rather than less, and must continue to do so with every improvement in machinery, technique and the organisation of production.

The Socialist Party will not barter its independence for promises of reform. For no matter whether these promises are made sincerely or not, we know that the immediate need of the working class is freedom from exploitation, which can only be achieved through the establishment of Socialism. The workers' interests under capitalism are opposed to those of all sections of the capitalist class. Whether bankers or industrialists, landlords or commercial magnates, all capitalists participate in the fruits of exploitation.

For the party of the working class, one course alone is open: unceasing hostility to all parties that lend their aid to the administration of the capitalist social system and thus contribute, consciously or otherwise, to its maintenance. Our object is its removal and replacement by Socialism.

THE TASK of socialists has also been made more difficult by the association in many people's minds of nationalisation with Socialism. Nationalised or State capitalist industry is, in fact, just another way of operating capitalism which leaves unchanged the exploited and subject position of the workers. In Britain the Labour, Tory and Liberal parties (and the 'Left-wing' organisations) have all spread confusion by the pretence that nationalisation is Socialism. Among businessmen there has been a growing recognition of the realities of the situation as, for example, an article, 'The Rise of State Capitalism', published by Management Today (December 1976):

"Capitalism is mostly thought of as the private ownership of the means of production. The emphasis is on 'private'. In practice, however, the developed countries of the world have seen an increasing move towards State ownership of the means of production, or State capitalism".

For well over a century, governments in Britain have from time to time considered the desirability of nationalising certain industries, but it was not until the Labour Party was formed that nationalisation became a continuing issue in party politics and elections. At first the Labour Party stood for a comprehensive programme of nationalisation in the belief that it would solve many of the problems of the workers and would earn votes for Labour Party candidates. In 1945 when, for the first time, the Labour Party held office with a parliamentary majority, the election pledge to nationalise basic industries was at once put into effect and a number of industries were nationalised, including coal, transport, electricity, gas and the Bank of England. Later on there was talk of nationalising additional industries such as insurance, chemicals and the joint-stock banks, but by this time experience of nationalisation had brought about some change in the attitude of electors and the leaders of the Labour Party had clearly come to the conclusion that a pledge to extend nationalisation would no longer be the vote-catcher that it had been in earlier years.

Among the factors that had made nationalisation less attractive with electors may be mentioned successive increases of charges by the nationalised industries (coal, railways, gas and electricity) and the fact that some nationalisation schemes, notably the proposal to nationalise insurance and distribution, caused difficulties between the Labour Party and the co-operatives because the latter felt their financial interests might be adversely affected. In addition the workers soon found — as the Socialist Party of Great Britain had foretold — that nationalisation or State capitalism does not differ from private capitalism as far as the exploitation of the workers is concerned. They still needed their trade unions, and the strike weapon, to protect themselves against their employers.

The outcome of nationalised industries under Labour government was such that many leaders of the Labour Party began to express doubts about the political wisdom of introducing further nationalisation measures. This led to a controversy within the Labour Party between those in favour of more nationalisation and those against it. In the end a typical compromise was reached. Gaitskell, the leader at that time, was foiled in his bid to revise clause four of the party's constitution which committed it to wholesale nationalisation, but as an immediate demand nationalisation was tacitly dropped with the vague statement that the Labour Party would consider taking over any industry that in their view 'failed the nation'. By this they meant what harmed the general interests of British capitalism either by inefficiency or monopoly.

In reaching this conclusion the Labour Party adopted an attitude much like that of the Liberal and Tory parties in the past. It was they who nationalised the postal, telegraph and telephone services, and set up a number of public corporations such as the Port of London Authority, in each instance in order to deal with some particular problem as it arose. In general they resorted to nationalisation when other methods of curbing a monopoly and of securing an efficient and cheap privately-run service had failed. Although the railways were not nationalised until 1946 the first Act of Parliament authorising nationalisation was passed in 1844 under Peel's Tory government. It was introduced by Gladstone, President of the Board of Trade, who was at that time a Tory Free Trader, and was intended as a threat to hold over the heads of the railway companies to force them to reduce charges. It served that purpose and was not used to secure nationalisation though it remained on the statute book.

A new wave of nationalisation and government intervention began with the trade depression that coincided with the return to power of Labour Government in 1974. Unable to stand up to foreign competition, a number of big companies and industries got into financial difficulties and the issue presented itself in the

form of government action to save 'lame ducks'. The deciding factor was whether the government dared incur unpopularity with the trade unions and the investors by allowing them to go bankrupt. The issue had actually arisen when the Tory Government came to power in 1970. At first the Tory Prime Minister, Mr. Heath, had declared his intention to let 'lame ducks' sink; but under pressure inside and outside his own Party he modified his attitude and, when Rolls-Royce failed, he had to intervene to save part of it.

The Labour Government went further and introduced new nationalisation measures, for example, shipbuilding, and embarked on new forms of intervention, including the British National Oil Corporation controlling North Sea oil in collaboration with the Oil Companies. Also the National Enterprise Board which holds shares on behalf of the government in a number of companies including British Leyland, Rolls-Royce, Alfred Herbert, Ferranti and International Computers. The Government also provided millions of pounds to keep alive the American-owned Chrysler motor concern in Britain. By 1975, 30 per cent of all workers were employed in State concerns.

Nationalisation has nothing to do with Socialism and involves no infringement of the fundamental features of capitalism. Apart from nationalisation carried out for military purposes, it is usually concerned with the problem of controlling powerful private monopolies or subsidising unprofitable but vital branches of industry in the interests of the capitalist class as a whole, and to prevent an increase of unemployment. All private capitalist enterprises are, and have long been, subject to some controls, for instance their obligations under the Companies Acts, Factory Acts, Minimum Wage Acts and Equal Pay Act. Some of them, as for example, the railways, gas and water companies, were subject to additional controls in respect of charges. The problem facing governments in their administration of capitalism has therefore been that of deciding which of the various forms of control best serve the interests of capitalist industry and trade as a whole. In the early days if a monopoly had to be brought under close control the model was the Post Office in which the industry or service is run as a government department, staffed by civil servants and with its finances, its policy and day-to-day administration under control of a Minister. Later on both the Tories and the Labour Party tried out the form of organisation in which administration and finance are controlled by a Board which the Government appoints but with whose day-to-day activities the Government does not normally interfere though having the ultimate power to do so. Under these Boards, like the National Coal Board and British Rail, the workers are not civil servants. By an ironic twist of history the Post Office itself has now been reorganised as a Public Board.

From the investors' point of view nationalisation usually means giving up an investment which may pay high dividends (or none at all if the concern fails to make a profit), and receiving in return a government-backed security which pays a fixed rate of interest no matter what happens to the nationalised industry; securities which they can always sell if they wish to invest again in private industry. From this point of view of capitalism the problem is to decide which is the best way to run it.

In the United States, often held up as the model of a country of private enterprise free from nationalisation, capitalist policy has taken a somewhat different course from that favoured in Europe. Instead of nationalising monopolies, American governments have claimed that they effectively control them. The Sherman Anti-Trust Law of 1890 prohibited, under severe penalties, 'every contract, combination in the form of a trust or otherwise, or conspiracy, in restraint of trade or commerce among the several States, or with foreign nations'. Under the 1890 Act and subsequent amending Acts, proceedings were taken in a large number of cases, resulting periodically in spectacular court decisions ordering the break-up of trusts such as Standard Oil and the Tobacco trust or gaoling executives; but new violations of the law are constantly being alleged. Also legislation has in certain industries specifically allowed combinations to be formed, including shipping, marine insurance and railways. Although the predominant interests in American capitalism may hold, as they do, that anti-trust laws are a better solution of this capitalist problem than nationalisation would be, the groups whose interests are damaged by the big combinations continue to demand more effective action to restore competition.

Anti-monopoly laws have also been passed in Britain but, despite the fuss surrounding the abolition of resale price maintenance by the Tories, these have been laxly enforced and have had little impact. Indeed, the policy of the 1964-70 Labour government was to encourage monopoly, through the Industrial Reorganisation Corporation they set up, especially in the export and war-preparation industries. The Tories scrapped the I.R.C.

Neither trust-busting in America nor partial or wholesale nationalisation in Britain and Russia (whatever they may have achieved for the privileged minority in each country) has solved the poverty problem of the working class. Time alone will show, in the competitive struggle in world markets, whether Russian wholesale nationalisation or American stress on 'efficiency through internal competition', or British capitalism's compromise between the two, will prove the most effective method of organising capitalist production. There are in Russia influential advocates of greater reliance on competition and the profit motive; but no matter how the issue is decided it will leave the workers of all three countries living restricted lives as wage-earners exploited for the benefit of the privileged minority of the population. Whatever happens it seems quite clear that some amount of nationalisation is here to stay in all countries as long as capitalism lasts.

But even without nationalisation the capitalists in all countries have moved away from their nineteenth-century belief in the virtues of unrestricted competition and the carrying on of production under their own control without government interference. Now the capitalists, in America as well as in Britain, accept the position that their individual freedom of action will be limited through legal obligations and governmental controls which they would have denounced half a century ago.

But whether capitalism's policy is competition, trust-busting, nationalisation or modified government controls, it is still capitalism. And capitalism, whatever its form, offers no hope to the working class.

THE SOCIALIST PARTY and the trade unions have a common origin in the class struggle. The former is the organised expression on the political field of the conscious recognition of that struggle by the workers. Its growth is the measure of their determination to end the struggle by converting the means of living into common property, thus establishing a harmony of interests within society.

The class struggle, however, does not commence with the conscious recognition of it as a fact. Long before the origin of the Socialist Party of Great Britain the class struggle was in progress. Strikes and lock-outs, machine-breaking and penal legislation have testified to the antagonism of interests in modern society for over a century.

With the rise of the factory system the workers found themselves involved in the struggle in grim earnest. It was no choice of theirs, but thrust upon them with relentless and increasing force with every step forward in industrial evolution. The Luddite machine-smashing in the early nineteenth century was typical of this phase of the conflict, but with further experience the need for some other form of organisation impressed itself upon the workers. The grouping together of the workers in the factories provided a basis for this. They began to realise that the machines had come to stay, and that the former independence which they had enjoyed, while still often working in their homes under the old system, had gone for ever. Hence the trade unions arose, uniting the workers in similar or allied occupations in order to obtain from the employers the best possible terms.

From the first, the strike was their most important weapon. Under the handicraft system, in its closing stages, workers sold the articles they produced to merchants and had to bargain with them about the price. Later all this was changed and the price of the workers' labour-power itself became the subject of dispute. They sold their energies by the hour, day or week, and the system of piece-work, which was retained here and there, disguised but did not alter that fact. The workers had lost all substantial freedom, and their only alternative to working on the terms of the employer was starvation. Hence the right to withhold that labour-power in conjunction with their fellows became an essential means of resistance. Without it the workers would have been crushed beyond hope of recovery, and would have become, as Marx argued in his pamphlet, *Value, Price and Profit*, quite incapable of "initiating any large movement".

From the outset the trade unions found arrayed against them, not only the individual employers or groups against whom they were directly struggling, but the forces of the entire employing class, as represented by the State. For long the unions were subject to legal persecution as unlawful conspiracies and monopolies, and only by dint of considerable perseverance were those obstacles overcome. The workers indeed had their backs to the wall and only the fact that the unions were rooted in the new conditions saved them from annihilation.

By degrees, however, the employing class saw the uselessness of trying to destroy the new organisations and the unions were granted a legal status. In the course of time the employers discovered that 'respectable' labour leaders, whether in the field of industry or politics, were useful in helping to maintain industrial peace which they needed.

Judicious flattery and the hankering after political office have stimulated the ambitions of numerous leaders whom the workers have all too readily trusted. Underlying this process however has been the steady progress of capitalist industry. The constant developments in machinery, methods of working and financial organisation of the employers have for generations set strict limits upon the effectiveness of the workers' struggles.

As the magnitude of the forces engaged in the struggle on either side increases, so the intervention of the State in industrial disputes is rendered more certain. The necessity for maintaining order on behalf of capitalism leaves governments no alternative. During the six years, 1945 to 1951, the Labour government on a number of occasions used troops to do the work of men on strike. This happened during the strike of workers at some London electricity power stations in December 1949 and when London dockers struck in July 1949 and again in April 1950, and Bristol dockers in May 1949, when gasworks maintenance men came out on strike in September of the same year, and at Smithfield market in June and July.

These strikes, like almost all of the strikes that took place after compulsory arbitration was established in 1940 under Order 1305 were 'unofficial', that is, they were not backed by the men's unions and were also in fact illegal.

The Labour government, which had hitherto refrained from taking action on illegal strikes, prosecuted ten of the men involved in the gasworks dispute. They were sentenced to one month's imprisonment though on appeal the sentences were altered to fines of £50 in each case. Because of the difficulty of enforcing the law against large numbers of such strikers, and in face of trade union demands for the repeal of Order 1305, the Labour government just before it went out of office in 1951 repealed the Order and made strikes and lockouts legal again.

When, late in 1977, the firemen came out on strike to get a pay increase greater than the 10 per cent which the Callaghan government was trying to enforce on workers generally, the government at once brought in the army to break the strike.

It is argued by defenders of arbitration that when workers have the legal right to submit their claims to an arbitration tribunal then strikes are unnecessary because the tribunal, being an 'independent' body, will give a satisfactory decision. This, however, is based on muddled thinking. It is true that the tribunals can be independent in the sense that they are not instructed by the employers or the government as to what awards they are to make on each claim, but they cannot and do not disregard governmental statements of general policy on wages.

In practice arbitration bodies exist for the purpose of preventing industrial disputes from taking the form of stoppages of work, and their awards on wage claims are bound to be influenced by the attitude of the workers. If workers were to abandon all idea of strikes the employers and the arbitration bodies alike would reduce still further the amounts they were prepared to offer. The strike remains the workers' indispensable weapon.

The relatively high levels of employment for some years after the second world war put the trade unions in a strong bargaining position. Unable to rely on widespread unemployment to hold wages down, governments sought to do this by means of an 'incomes policy'. The Tories relied only on moral appeals and their 'pay pause' was ignored by the unions. But when Labour was returned in 1964 some unions dropped this opposition to wage restraint and within a few months, along with representatives of the government and the employers, had signed a Declaration of Intent agreeing in principle to restraint.

Soon the Labour government took tougher measures. In 1966 they brought in the first of a series of Prices and Incomes Acts that gave them power to ban or delay negotiated wage increases and to fine any who defied such a ban. Many workers had their increases delayed but, although some seemed to break the law, the Labour government did not take any to court as they had done in 1950.

A new phase of wage restraint opened up under the Labour Government elected in 1974. The Labour (and Tory) policy of seeking to prevent unemployment by expansion of government expenditure — in effect, inflation — had completely failed. Unemployment rose to nearly 1 1/2 millions in 1976 but inflation had reached dangerous levels and, in order to maintain British competitiveness in world markets, it became increasingly urgent to curb it. The Labour Government negotiated a new restraint with the T.U.C. named "the social contract" designed, according to the Government, to hold down prices by limiting wage increases. It had little or no effect on prices — the rise of the price level between the return of the Labour Government in February 1974 and February 1977 was 71 per cent and it was still rising fast. Its effect on wage levels, however, was drastic. In the years 1974-77 'real wages', that is the purchasing power of money wages, had fallen materially. According to figures provided by the Treasury, the purchasing power of the take-home pay of workers on the average wage fell by 12 per cent between December 1974 and February 1977 (The Times, 16 May 1977).

The workers' standard of living fell in the trade depression which began in 1974. just as it had in the trade depressions of the nineteenth century when openly capitalist Liberal or Tory Governments were in power.

The effectiveness of trade union action has clearly been blunted by support for the Labour Party, a link that

has been justified by saying that Labour is the political arm of the trade union movement. But the experience of all the Labour administrations of capitalism since the second world war has shown that, far from using political power to force employers to grant wage increases, Labour governments had used it against workers to bring about wage restraint.

In the early months of 1969, the Wilson government announced its intention to push through legislation which would have empowered a minister to impose a twenty-eight day 'conciliation pause' on certain strikes and to enforce it by fines on workers who refused to comply with an order to continue at work. Only in face of widespread trade union opposition, and the threat of some Labour M.P.s to vote against it, was the proposed legislation dropped.

Trade union effectiveness has also been blunted by the extent to which the unions have been drawn into the administration of capitalism. During and since the second world war it has become customary for individual unions and the Trades Union Congress to associate themselves with the government and government departments in carrying out government policy. In return for consultation the TUC and the executives of the unions are expected to endorse policies and to undertake to recommend them to their members.

It may be argued that some of these activities are a logical development of the functions of organisations formed to protect the workers under capitalism but it is obvious that they, like the link with the Labour Party, distract attention from the principal purpose of the trade unions: to resist the pressure of the capitalist class on the workers' conditions.

What, then, is to be the future of the unions? At present appear to have become jumping-off grounds for Labour politicians, and to that extent less useful to the workers: but there is no obvious reason why, with the spread of understanding among their members, they should not be valuable centres of resistance to capitalist attack.

As we have seen, the trade unions arose from the resistance to the pressure on the workers in the early days of capitalism. They necessarily took the form most convenient at the moment, and have been slow to adapt themselves to changing circumstances. They have tended to overemphasise the distinctions between workers of different occupations and skills, origin, and sex. The Socialist Party, organised as it is for the emancipation of the workers as a class, insists upon the necessity for subordinating all distinctions to class solidarity. On the political field the workers of all countries have but one interest, and that involves winning political power and dispossessing the capitalist class. The supreme conflict with that class leaves no room for sectional antagonisms between workers.

Syndicalists (a name derived from the French word for trade union) argue that workers need not bother with political action to dispossess the capitalists and that instead they should organise into unions and in the course of a general strike 'take and hold' the means of production. Syndicalism is based on a dangerous illusion and is opposed by the Socialist Party. Though a general strike may be useful under some circumstances to resist attacks on living standards, it cannot be used to overthrow capitalism. The capitalists' monopoly over the means of production rests upon their control of political power. To leave this in their hands while attempting to carry out the social revolution would be folly and bound to lead to unnecessary bloodshed and suffering.

Syndicalism also, with such slogans as 'the factories to the workers' and 'the mines to the miners', suggests that capitalist control of industry should be replaced by that of a federation of industrial unions or workers' councils. This is misleading and shows the futility of drawing prints for a future society, since this proposal merely reflects occupational and sectional distinctions of capitalism.

The Socialist Party of Great Britain, while recommending trade unionists to offer their utmost resistance to the worsening of conditions, never fails to point out that under capitalism the pressure on the workers is inevitable. It is not enough, therefore, merely to apply the brake to these worsening conditions. The system that gives rise to them must be abolished.

Tory, Liberal and Labour political parties

IT IS A COMMONPLACE political observation that, in and even out of office, the Conservative and Labour parties pursue very similar policies. There is a simple reason for this. Both stand for capitalism and both are used by the capitalists, with the support of the workers, to control the State in the interests of the capitalist class. The wide sectional differences which divided the ruling class in the nineteenth century have gone, with the landowners turning their land-owning into a capitalist business. The Conservatives tend to favour the farmers and the financial interests of the City of London while the Labour Party tends to favour nationalised or State capitalist industries, but the policies of the two parties are basically the same because they are both trying to solve the trading, financial and military problems of British capitalism. A further reason for their similarity is that, in order to get elected, they must compete for the votes of the workers.

Before examining the historical origins of the Tory, Labour and Liberal parties, a word about party politics. Working class problems arise out of capitalism and will last as long as the system does. Tory governments have failed to solve them; so have Liberal and Labour governments; so have coalitions of all three parties. The Tories argue that the Labour Party fails because it is incompetent and doctrinaire. Labour says the Tories fail because they do not want to solve workers' problems anyway. Labour excuses its own failures by blaming sabotage from Tory civil servants, city financiers or foreign bankers. The Socialist Party of Great Britain says that all capitalist governments must fail because working class problems cannot be solved within capitalism. No government, however well-meaning or efficient, can make capitalism work for the benefit of all. All capitalist governments must sooner or later come into direct conflict with the workers as they must run capitalism in the only possible way: as a profit-making system in the interests of the privileged few who draw a free income as rent, interest and profit from their ownership of the means of production and distribution.

Thus most political discussion about the alleged merits and demerits of the various parties is irrelevant. It is not just governments which cause workers' problems or are to blame for not solving them. It is the economic system of class monopoly and profit-making. Once this is grasped it is easy to see why no capitalist party deserves the support of the workers and why the Socialist Party has always been opposed to all other political parties whatever their label.

Before the rise of the Labour Party in the past half-century or so the two main parties in Britain were the Liberals and the Tories. Modern parties, with their centralised organisation and mass membership, only came into being after the passing of the Second Reform Act of 1867 which meant that from then on, most electors were workers (but not that most workers were electors). Before then parties were loose parliamentary groupings that altered with the changing interests of the sections of the propertied class they represented. However, two distinct groups, dating back to 1688 — the year parliamentary control of the government was firmly established — were discernible: the Whigs and the Tories. Very roughly, the Whigs represented the interests of trade and banking and the Tories the interests of landed property. The Whigs were for parliamentary control and the Tories were royalists, and so for many years were regarded as potential subverters of the constitution.

With the industrial revolution a third propertied group emerged, the factory-owner or manufacturer. Under-represented in Parliament and so excluded from political power the manufacturers agitated for the reform of Parliament. The outcome, the First Reform Act, 1832, gave them a share in political power along with the jumped-up speculators and landed aristocrats. The Tories opposed any concessions to the industrial capitalists and the latter formed an uneasy alliance with the Whigs. These manufacturers were determined to shift some of the burden of taxation on to landed property and to deprive the aristocrats of their political privileges. Their first victory was the Repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846, an issue which split the Tories with a section, including Gladstone, going over to the Liberals.

The Liberals thus became the party of industrial wealth and plutocratic privilege. The Tories became the party of landed property and aristocratic privilege. This division did not involve the workers though they were able to use it to get such reforms as the early factory acts (pressed for by the Tories to avenge for their defeat on the Corn Laws issue).

DECLINE OF THE LIBERALS

It seemed that in time the economic and political development of capitalism would lead to the demise of the Tory Party. This is certainly what the Liberals wished people to believe, painting themselves as the party of progress and the Tories as the party of privilege. The success of this Liberal propaganda can be judged by the fact that to this day anti-Toryism is exploited by the Labour Party. It was Marx who pointed out that it was a feature of the British political scene that any miserable compromise could be justified merely by pointing out that it upset the Tories!

However, the Tory Party did survive and it was the Liberals who went under. The backbone of the Liberal Party had been the alliance between the textile manufacturers of the north and the metal-working firms of the Midlands. For most of the nineteenth century their interests coincided in opposing aristocratic privilege and in demanding free trade. Britain, as the first capitalist power, was the workshop of the world and its goods were unrivalled on world markets. Towards the end of that century competition in world markets, especially from Germany and America, became tougher. The Birmingham capitalists, led by Joseph Chamberlain, began to turn against free trade and laissez-faire, and to call for State intervention to help them retain old and gain new markets. They wanted protective tariffs and imperialist expansion. The Lancashire capitalists, relying on cheap imports, remained committed to free trade. So Chamberlain took a section of the Liberals over to the Tories. The specific issue was Home Rule for Ireland. Hence the dissidents were called Unionists, a name which still appears in the official title of UK Tory Party. The Tories had thus acquired an industrial base and were in fact better equipped to survive than the Liberals who were squeezed out by the rise of the Labour Party and the loss of industrialist backing as more and more industries suffered from free trade.

The Tories are openly a capitalist party, clearly supported by the vast majority of industrialists and wealthy property owners. They are the party of the rich, though since the last war they have had to spend great sums of money to create the image of a popular reform party.

The Liberals have become a pathetic remnant, sustained only by discontent with failures of both the Tories and Labour and desperately trying to find some programme that will mark them off from the two main parties. But the fate of most of their policies has been for them to be stolen by their rivals. Only in co-partnership have they come up with a proposal so impractical that neither Tories nor the Labour party wants to touch it. Profit-sharing is merely a device for ensuring that workers work harder to provide greater profits for the owners. To imagine that the conflict of interest between workers and capitalists can be reconciled by handing out a few shares or appointing a few workers to the board of directors is indeed wishful thinking.

Those workers who had the vote in the last quarter of the nineteenth century found themselves at election times confronted with a choice between two rich men: Sir G. D'Enoch and Mr. Samuel Swales as one wit called them. Many of the politically aware workers asked why they should not also have their own party and, after a number of false starts, the Independent Labour Party was formed in Bradford in 1893. The ILP played a major role in bringing together the trade unions which in 1900 set up the Labour Representation Committee. When it won some support in parliament the LRC in 1906 became the Labour Party. The ILP left the Labour Party in 1932 and soon lost all influence on that party's affairs.

THE EARLY LABOUR PARTY

At the start the Labour Party was intended merely as a trade union pressure group in Parliament. It had no socialist pretensions, and was indeed merely the tail-end of the Liberal Party. Nearly every Labour MP returned before the first world war owed his election to Liberal votes in accordance with a shady deal Ramsay MacDonald had made with that party.

In 1918, under the influence of the Fabians, the Labour Party adopted a new constitution which included the now notorious Clause Four. This clause in fact committed it not to Socialism, but to nationalisation or State capitalism which was the real aim of the Fabians. Thus the Labour Party, committed on paper to a programme of the gradual introduction of State capitalism, began its rise at the expense of the Liberals.

By 1922 Ramsay MacDonald was official Leader of the Opposition, instead of Asquith, the Liberal leader, and by 1924 he was Prime Minister. Sections of the capitalist class were alarmed by the prospect of a Labour government and this worried the Labour Party. Led by MacDonald they were determined to show that they were fit to govern capitalism. They had themselves photographed in full court dress. But more seriously they prepared to use troops to break a threatened transport strike and they sanctioned the bombing of tribesmen in

Iraq. They did not even make a start on their State-capitalist programme. This was plausibly justified on the ground that they were only a minority government dependent on Liberal support — in other words, only a Liberal government, and indeed a number of Liberal MPs as well as voters went over to the Labour Party.

The Liberals also supported the second Labour government, returned in 1929, which was to collapse ignominiously two years later after helplessly seeing unemployment rise to record levels. They might be fit to govern in the interests of the capitalists but they could not make capitalism work in the interests of the workers.

THE ATTLEE LABOUR GOVERNMENT

When in 1945 they were returned with an overall majority the war in the East was not yet over and Prime Minister Attlee had a personal representative at the atomic bombing of Nagasaki. With the coming of peace they nationalised a large section of industry; but those who thought that State capitalism coupled with a Labour government was in the interests of the workers soon learned the truth. In administering capitalism Labour did what was required to protect and further the interests of the British capitalists. They retained war-time legislation banning strikes; they sent troops into the docks; they put gas workers and dockers on trial; they imposed wage restraint and then a wage freeze; they introduced peace-time conscription for the first time; they began the development of the British atomic bomb; they sent troops to help American imperialism in Korea — but they did not solve the housing problem as Bevan had promised.

Disgruntled workers turned to the Tories in 1951 in sufficient numbers to throw Labour out. For thirteen years the Labour leaders were in the wilderness. They fought viciously amongst themselves — the Bevanite episode, nuclear disarmament, Clause Four — but behind the scenes the Labour leadership decided it was time to stop attacking private enterprise and the profit motive. Elected in 1964 they were once again able to show their commitment to capitalism — another wage freeze, incomes policy legislation, proposed trade union legislation and a tougher immigration bar.

The Labour Party is now obviously just another party of capitalism. Its leaders (and the bulk of its members and supporters) accept the class ownership of the means of production, the profit motive, the wages system, the armed forces including nuclear weapons, and have proved willing and able to do whatever the interests of British capitalism demand. The Labour Party, from the capitalist point of view, is a useful alternative government to the Tories for the capitalists realise the dangers of a long period of one-party rule. They have, for instance, cynically exploited their link with the trade unions to try to get them to accept measures which they would not have accepted passively from a Tory government.

The evolution of the Labour Party is a practical confirmation of the theoretical case against reformism. With a working class that has never at any time understood or wanted Socialism, the Labour Party, instead of gradually transforming capitalism in the interests of the workers, has itself been gradually transformed from a trade union pressure group into an instrument of capitalist rule. It was the chairman of the Parliamentary Labour Party, Mr. Houghton, M.P. (now Lord Houghton), who claimed in 1967: "Never has any previous government done so much in so short a time to make modern capitalism work" (The Times, 25 April 1967). The result has further confused workers as to the real nature and meaning of Socialism.

The miserable failure of the Wilson Labour government has led in Scotland and Wales to growing support for nationalist parties, the Scottish National Party and Plaid Cymru. The basic argument of the nationalists is that social problems in their areas are caused by London government. The implication is that with an independent government in Edinburgh and Cardiff a start could be made in solving their problems. This is not so. Social problems in Scotland and Wales are caused not by government from England but, as elsewhere, by capitalism. Re-arranging frontiers or constructing new States is no more a solution to working class problems than electing a new government of capitalism or changing the Prime Minister. Such political changes, no matter how far-reaching, are irrelevant from a working class point of view since they leave the economic basis of society, the class monopoly of the means of production, unchanged; and it is precisely this that is the root cause of their problems.

The Socialist Party no more supports Scottish and Welsh nationalism than it does British nationalism which,

of course, is supported by the Tories, Labour and the Liberals. We are opposed to all nationalism and insist that the solution lies in the establishment of Socialism throughout the world.

PACT WITH THE LIBERALS 1977

In 1977 a new stage was reached in the Labour Party's abandonment of its 'principles' in order to hold on to office. In the years immediately following the end of the second world war the overwhelming majority of electors voted Labour or Tory. At the General Election of 1951, for example, only three per cent of those who voted supported the Liberal Party and other minor parties. But discontent with Labour and Tory Government enabled the Liberals and the Scottish and Welsh Nationalists to increase their support. The consequence was that between 1951 and 1974 the Labour vote declined by 2 1/2 million though the electorate had grown by 5 million. (The Tory vote fell by 3 million in the same period.) After the election of October 1974 the Labour Government had only a bare majority in the House of Commons, and had to depend on support by M.P.s of one or other of the minority parties. Among those who on occasion supported the Labour Government was Mr. Enoch Powell. His opposition to Britain joining the European Community, and his too extreme opposition to the immigration of coloured people, had led to his leaving the Tory Party and urging electors to vote Labour at the two elections in 1974.

On 23 March 1977 the possibility arose of the Labour Government being defeated on a vote of confidence, and in the week before the vote was held discussions took place between the Government and the Liberals, the Ulster Unionists (including Mr. Powell), and the Scottish Labour Party, with a view to getting their support on the vote of confidence. The outcome was a 'deal' with the Liberals. In return for Liberal votes in the House of Commons an arrangement was made with the Liberal Party for regular consultations on measures to be introduced by the Government. (The Liberals had had similar discussions with the Tories after the February 1974 General Election which, however, came to nothing.) According to Mr. David Steel, the Liberal leader, the arrangement made with the Government would have the effect that the Labour Government would not proceed with "the granting of more power to local authority direct-labour organisations, the nationalisation of some banking and insurance companies, and what the Queen's Speech described loosely as other measures that would be laid before Parliament" (The Times, 25 March 1977).

Thus did the Labour Party demonstrate not only its acceptance of capitalism but also its acceptance of the cynical political manoeuvrings that it had long ago denounced when practised by Liberals and Tories.

The so-called Left-wing parties

DURING THE NINETEENTH CENTURY all kinds of political action were discussed and advocated by various working class groups: political strikes, armed revolt, sabotage, bomb-throwing, assassination, demonstrations, petitions to Parliament, and seeking the help of the Liberal and Tory Parties.

With the extension of the franchise to male workers with the Reform Acts of 1867 and 1884 a new phase opened. It was then that parties were formed, claiming to be socialist, that were to have a continuing influence on working class politics: the Fabian Society and Social Democratic Federation in 1884 and the Independent Labour Party in 1893. Unsound theories from the early nineteenth century or thrown up by the new parties are still to be found in the modern so-called 'Left-wing' organisations.

Like the modern 'Left-wing' organisations all three parties claimed to seek the abolition of capitalism and the establishment of Socialism.

In 1893 the Fabian Society and the Social Democratic Federation (S.D.F.) signed the 'Manifesto of English Socialists' which declared:

"We look to put an end for ever to the wages system, to sweep away all distinctions of class, and eventually to establish national and international communism on a sound basis".

The I.L.P., which was then in process of formation, did not sign the Manifesto but would not have dissented from its declaration. Keir Hardie, founder of the I.L.P. (later to become 'father of the Labour Party'), could still claim several years later that their aim was "free communism in which . . . the rule of life will be: From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs" (From Serfdom to Socialism, 1907). Also that "The Labour Party is the only expression of orthodox Marxian Socialism in Great Britain" (My Confession of Faith 1910). Of course this was said to placate his followers and there was nothing in the Labour Party to justify it.

What separated the three parties at the beginning was their conception of how their aims were to be achieved.

Through the dissemination of specialist information among politicians and administrators, the Fabians hoped to enlighten political opinion generally on the need, step by step, to introduce measures of social reform and nationalisation — the policy known as 'gradualism'. The S.D.F. aimed to build up an independent socialist party based on Marxist ideas. It soon learned, from the very small number of votes given to its candidates at elections, that no quick growth could be expected on that basis. Seeing this the I.L.P. concluded that straight socialist principles were unacceptable to the workers and decided that growth of membership must come before growth of socialist knowledge. They adopted the policy of building up a non-socialist membership on a programme of reforms with the hope that acceptance of socialist ideas would come later. It was the policy of involvement and support for every demonstration of discontent in the trade unions and elsewhere: "getting with the workers in the day-to-day struggle", no matter how trivial the issue.

The S.D.F. also became affected by this policy which in 1904 was to lead to the breakaway movement establishing the SPGB, based on frank acceptance that winning over the workers to socialist principles is a difficult and slow process. It was made more difficult by the reformist propaganda of the Fabians, the I.L.P. and the S.D.F.

At the end of the century all three of those parties, particularly the Fabians and the I.L.P., turned their attention to building up a mass party with trade union backing — the Labour Party.

The I.L.P. line appeared to succeed beyond even what had been hoped from it. Backed by trade union votes and money, the Labour Party grew in membership and representation in Parliament, and I.L.P. influence seemed to grow with it. After the 1929 General Election more than two hundred Labour M.P.s were members of the I.L.P.,

though most were Labour, not I.L.P. nominees; but by that time the Labour Party leaders and trade unions had no further use for the I.L.P. What it had done was to bring about its own destruction. Its original justification for its policy — that of converting the Labour Party into a socialist party — had been a total failure. The Labour Party has made no progress whatever towards understanding and accepting the socialist

objective defined at the outset by the Fabians, the S.D.F. and I.L.P. Today this applies equally to the 'Tribune Group' and others in the Labour Party who style themselves 'Left-wing', and to the trade unions.

In 1917, after the Communists had succeeded in capturing power in Russia, a strong old style influence came into British politics. The Communist Party of Great Britain, formed out of the membership of several existing bodies, was before long to take the lead among 'Left-wing' organisations. Owing to its mixed membership it was divided about Parliamentary action; but along with the old I.L.P. policy of seeking reforms and "getting with the workers in the day-to-day struggle", it took its line from Russia. At that time this meant advocating dictatorship and armed revolt. Mr. W. Gallacher, a member of their Central Committee and later Communist Party M.P., declared:

"They had talked of a Revolutionary Workers' government, but did they realise what was implied? Would the organisation of the workers for the revolutionary government be a legal one? The task of fighting for a revolutionary government would be a task of bringing the workers out on to the streets against the armed forces of Capitalism" (Workers Life, 6 December 1929).

In one of the periods when they were not telling the workers to vote for MacDonald and other Labour Party leaders, they also carried on a campaign of smashing up opponents' meetings. This was announced by Harry Pollitt, the General Secretary of the C.P.G.B., in the Daily Worker (29 January 1930):

"There should not be a Labour Meeting held anywhere, but what the revolutionary workers in that district attend such meetings and fight against the speakers, whatever they are, so-called 'Left', 'Right' or 'Centre'. They should never be allowed to address the workers. This will bring us in conflict with the authorities, but this must be done. The fight can no longer be conducted in a passive manner The Communist Party and its organ, the Daily Worker, will lead the working class, fighting boldly and openly, against this present government of scoundrels and agents of capitalism".

The government of the day was a Labour Government; but before long the Communist Party was again calling on the workers to vote Labour as it had done at some previous elections. Smashing up opponents' meetings still finds favour with some of the 'Left-wing' self-styled 'democrats'.

Now, in line with the shift of policy of the Communist Parties of France and Italy, the C.P.G.B. presents itself as an ordinary, 'respectable', reformist party using parliamentary methods and seeking to compete with the Labour Party on its own ground. Its election programmes are full of reform proposals paralleling those of the Labour Party: but on each one pressing for a little more than the Labour Party considers it expedient to ask. An example of the distance travelled since the days of 'heavy civil war' is in the Communist Party's attitude to the property and incomes of the rich. In their election programme in 1929 (which described the Labour Party as "the third capitalist party) the demand was made for the confiscation of "all personal incomes over £5,000 a year", confiscation of all fortunes over £1,000 at death, and repudiation of the National Debt, In those days Communist Party propaganda scorned 'Fabian gradualism'; but their election programme in 1970 had as one of its 'principal proposals' an annual wealth tax "on all fortunes over £20,000" to be at an average of three per cent". What could be more gradual than that?

But the shift of the Communist Party over to ordinary reformist parliamentary action created a vacuum which has been filled by a medley of organisations, claiming to be 'further left', and in practice adopting policies like those of the Communist Party half a century ago, including what the Party had taken over from the I.L.P. They include so-called communists who support State capitalist China against State capitalist Russia — or the other way round — and several brands of Trotskyists'.

So now the 'further left' organisations use against the Communist Party the fallacious arguments formerly used by that Party. For example, the Socialist Worker (published by I.S., now called Socialist Workers Party), in its issue of 27 July 1973, denounced the Communist Party's "parliamentary road to Socialism". This was on the ground that the working class cannot take control of Parliament through elections; that Parliament does not control the State machine, and that the State machine cannot be used to change the rest of society completely. That the Communist Party road is not one to Socialism is true enough; but criticism of the Communist Party has no bearing on the case for a socialist working class gaining control of Parliament. An

astonishing statement by the S.W.P. in criticism of the Communist Party is that the working class would be out-voted by "the middle class and ruling class". As the working class constitute ninety per cent of the electorate (see section "What is Capitalism") they obviously do not understand who the working class are. And an article by Paul Foot, editor of the Socialist Worker (The Times, 14 August 1975) maintained that, as the Wilson Government had failed to do anything for Socialism, this proved that Parliament could not be used by Socialists — ignoring the fact that the Labour Government did not have and did not seek a mandate for Socialism from the electorate, and represents a Party which stands for the perpetuation of capitalism. The 'Left-wing' organisations generally claim to be Marxist; but they interpret this to mean either the anti-Marxist policy of Lenin based on Louis Blanqui's doctrine of minority armed seizure of power followed by dictatorship, or the equally anti-Marxist doctrine which holds that the workers can revolutionise society without needing to control the State power. In the field of economics the 'Left-wing' organisations mostly reject Marx's analysis of capitalism in favour of the myth of the Keynesians: that capitalism can be operated without unemployment through "managed expansion of demand" — that is, through inflation.

Those who accept Keynesian doctrines cannot accept the Marxist explanation of inflation. The Communist Party of Great Britain in its October 1974 Election Programme attributed inflation to a variety of causes, including V.A.T., membership of the E.E.C. and armaments expenditure, with no mention of Marxist theory.

International Socialism (March 1974) gave as explanation "The present inflation is similar in many ways to the upsurge in prices, wages and interest rates which occurred at the height of the classical boom". The boom was by then already over and the depression had begun. In the depression prices rose faster than ever. On their theory prices ought to have been falling.

The other journal of the same organisation (Socialist Worker, 4 August 1973) gave a different explanation which supported the idea that wage increases "must have some effect on prices". "Of course they do. Quite simply, business raises its prices when increases in costs threaten its profit margins".

But whereas the C.P.G.B. ignored Marx, the Socialist Worker repudiated the Marxist explanation, under the impression that it is something invented by Mr. Enoch Powell.

"But Enoch Powell says it is all the fault of the government printing too much money. This is an illusion even shared by some on the left".

Statements of socialist principles and the Marxist conception of the classless socialist system of society to replace capitalism never appear in the propaganda of the 'Left-wing' organisations.

One crucial test for the 'Left-wing' organisations concerns their willingness to create confusion by urging the workers to support capitalism administered by Labour government. At the February 1974 General Election the following organisations all told the workers to vote for Labour candidates.

Communist Party of Great Britain
International Marxist Group
International Socialists (now Socialists Workers Party)
Workers Fight
Workers Revolutionary Party

The Tory Mr. Enoch Powell was also telling the electorate to vote Labour!

The tactic of supporting one administration of capitalism against another on the ground that, on particular issues or in general, there are fine shades of difference, is a reactionary survival of the old practice of voting Liberal against Tory or Tory against Liberal. (During the second world war it led the Communist Party to support Tory candidates.)

Even if it achieved small temporary gains this would count for nothing against the harm done by encouraging the workers to believe that their interest can be served by placing in power the enemies of Socialism. On this ground alone, apart from the rest of the case against them, the so-called 'Left-wing' organisations have no claim to working class support.

Socialism and the less developed countries

'DO WE HAVE TO WAIT for the last Hottentot?' used to be a question asked of socialists. Behind it was the suggestion that the lack of industrial and social development in parts of the world might delay the establishment of Socialism. This is sometimes called the problem of the 'backward' countries but is more properly the problem of uneven development

The short answer is, No. There is no need for the whole world to be industrialised nor for the whole world population to be turned into propertyless wage-workers before Socialism can be established. We might add that perhaps the few remaining Hottentots in South Africa are wondering if they will have to wait for the last white man.

Let us get rid of one mistaken view straightaway. The less developed countries are not lagging behind because the people who live there are inherently inferior to those who live in the industrial countries. Racialism has no scientific basis. All human beings are members of the same animal species, homo sapians, and all are quite capable of absorbing modern culture in a short period of time. Such cultural differences as at present exist between the peoples of the world are not the result of different natures, but of different environments. It so happened that the peoples of Europe were the first to go through the industrial revolution and, as subsequent development of the other countries has shown, the people of other countries, given the opportunity, are just as capable of acquiring modern industrial skills. Indeed, they contributed in many diverse ways to the later development themselves. In Asia, Africa, the Middle East and Latin America, centres of highly-advanced industry are developing manned from top to bottom by local workers. It follows from this, if anyone ever doubted it, that all human beings are capable of understanding and operating Socialism.

The initial material basis for Socialism is the world-wide industrial organisation that capitalism has built up. The bulk of the wealth produced in the world today is produced by the co-operative labour of the millions of people who are employed to operate this organisation. Capitalism has brought into being the working class in whose economic interest it is to establish Socialism. This is why the strength of the socialist movement will come from the workers in the advanced capitalist parts of the world.

However, industrial development is by no means evenly spread over the world. In Europe, North America, Australasia, Japan, Russia, the great majority of the population live and work under capitalist conditions of production for profit and the wages system, while in some parts of the world capitalist industry is only an oasis in the midst of a desert of backward agriculture. In between are countries in varying stages of industrial development. As yet not all of mankind are propertyless wage-workers, many of the remainder being peasants exploited by landlords and moneylenders.

To say that a major part of mankind are not living under capitalist conditions as wage-earners is not to say that their lives are not affected by that system. Price fluctuations in the world market directly touch on their standard of living and they cannot escape the consequences of wars between capitalist powers. In view of this and in view of the fact that the bulk of the world's wealth is produced in the capitalist parts, we can say that capitalism is the predominant social system in the world today.

The Socialist Party of Great Britain rejects the suggestion that the workers must wait for capitalist production to predominate everywhere before trying to establish Socialism. A socialist society has been possible for many years now, for as many in fact as its industrial basis has existed. As soon as the workers of the world want to, they can establish the common ownership of the means of production and distribution and bring planned production to meet human needs.

Capitalism on a world scale has long been outdated so that its coming to the industrially undeveloped countries is not now a necessary stage in economic progress. Socialism involves the emancipation of all mankind and is the solution to the problems of the people of those countries as much as it is to the problems of the workers of the long-standing capitalist countries. When Socialism has been established there is no reason why these parts should not be developed under altogether different circumstances from those imposed by capitalism.

Whatever may be the long-term results, the immediate impact of capitalism on pre-industrial societies has

everywhere been disastrous. Beginning with the slave trade in capitalism's early days it has now brought the world almost to the brink of famine. Capitalism breaks up existing societies in order to get the workers to labour on the plantations, down the mines and in the factories it sets up. The overall result has been terrible human suffering.

The Socialist Party does not accept that all this suffering is necessary and that people must still undergo it for the sake of a better future.

Because capitalism has everywhere outplayed its progressive role in developing the means of production, distribution and communication, the Socialist Party does not support the capitalist movements styling themselves 'national liberation' and 'anti-imperialist' which aim to gain political power in the less developed countries and by means of a ruthless policy of State capitalism (miscalled Socialism) to modernise and industrialise the areas they govern. Many of these movements, and the regimes they set up, are modelled on the Bolsheviks who as a determined minority seized power in Russia in 1917 and by a policy of dictatorship built up a modern capitalist economy with themselves as the new privileged and exploiting class. As far as the people they aim to lead and govern are concerned, their coming to power represents merely a change of rulers and the prospect of being turned from peasants into exploited wage workers. Once again this has nothing to do with Socialism, and is quite unnecessary since the common ownership and democratic control of the means of wealth production and distribution on a world-wide scale has long been possible.

In many of the less developed countries political democracy does not yet exist. The governments there, whether representing the old landowning or the emerging capitalist class, stifle criticism and threaten the organisation of opposition parties and even of trade unions as plots to overthrow them. In such circumstances socialist activity is very difficult and the workers (being only a minority of the population), besides trying to organise into a socialist party ought also to struggle to get the freedom to organise into trade unions and win elementary political rights. As in the advanced capitalist countries, however, this should still involve opposition to all other parties in order that the socialist issue shall be kept free from confusion.

Socialists are sometimes asked about another aspect of uneven development. This relates to the possibility that the socialist movement could be larger in one country than in another and at the stage of being able to gain control of the machinery of government before the socialist movements elsewhere were as far advanced.

Leaving aside for the moment the question as to whether such a situation is likely to arise, we can say that it presents no problems when viewed against the world-wide character of the socialist movement. Because capitalist governments are organised on a territorial basis each socialist organisation has the task of seeking democratically to gain political control in the country where it operates. This however is merely an organisational convenience; there is only one socialist movement, of which the separate socialist organisations are constituent parts. When the socialist movement grows larger its activities will be fully co-ordinated through its world-wide organisation. Given a situation in which the organised socialists of only a part of the world were in a position to gain control of the machinery of government, the decision about the action to be taken would be one for the whole of the socialist movement in the light of all the circumstances at the time.

There remains the question whether in fact there will be material differences in the rate of growth of the sections of the world socialist movement. At present, throughout the advanced capitalist countries, the vast majority, because they are not yet socialist, share certain basic ideas about how society can and should be run. They accept that goods must be produced for sale with a view to profit; some men must work for wages while others must be employers; there must be armed forces and frontiers; and it is impossible to do without money and buying and selling. These ideas are held by people all over the world and it is this which accounts for the basic stability of capitalism at the present time.

It was Engels who remarked that a revolutionary period exists when people begin to realise that what they once thought was impossible can in fact be done. When people realise that it is possible to have a world without frontiers, without wages and profits, without employers and armed forces, then the socialist revolution will not be far away. But this advance in political understanding will be achieved by the same people who now think that capitalism is the only possible system. Because workers all over the world live under basically similar conditions and because of modern systems of communication, when they begin to see

through capitalism this will apply everywhere. There is no reason at all why workers in one country should see this while those in others do not.

The very idea of Socialism, a new world society, is clearly and unequivocally a rejection of all nationalism. Those who become socialists will realise this and also the importance of uniting with workers in all countries. The socialist idea is not one that could spread unevenly.

Thus the socialist parties will be in a position to gain political control in the industrially advanced countries within a short period of each other. It is conceivable that in some less developed countries, where the working class is weak in numbers, the privileged rulers may be able to retain their class position for a little longer. But as soon as the workers had won in the advanced countries they would give all the help needed to their brothers elsewhere.

To sum up, we can say that the less developed countries might present Socialism with a problems, but they do not constitute a barrier to the immediate establishment of Socialism as a world system. Nationalism and colonial independence are not matters that ought to concern workers. Everywhere, in the less advanced as well as the more advanced countries, the workers should be striving for Socialism.

THAT MANKIND CAN ABOLISH POVERTY, as Socialists assert, has often been challenged by those who claim that poverty is the natural and inevitable condition of mankind. The most notorious exponent of this view was the Rev. Thomas Malthus in his *Essay on the Principle of Population as it Affects the Future Improvement of Society*, first published in 1798. Malthus, like all the others who have held this view, failed to explain why it was that in every country a privileged minority managed to escape this curse of poverty.

Malthus, as the title of his essay suggests, was arguing against those who said that human society could be improved and, in particular, against William Godwin, an early Utopian socialist. Briefly, the 'principle of population' which he laid down stated the obvious fact that population cannot grow beyond the means of subsistence; but went on to claim that population always tended to outstrip the food supply, with the result that periodically its growth was checked by famine, disease and war. Any attempt to improve social conditions would merely bring about an increase in the birth rate and so make matters worse than they were before. This view was meant to be a defence of existing poverty and an argument against social reform. Needless to say, it was at one time very popular amongst apologists for capitalism.

In the second edition of his *Essay*, published in 1803, Malthus contradicted himself in introducing 'moral restraint' because he conceded that human beings could control their birth rate — which was one of the points at issue. Godwin answered Malthus by making the simple point that every extra human being born brought with him not only an extra mouth but also an extra pair of hands. Marx, too, showed how there was no such thing as a general law of population that applied to all societies and to all times. At times under capitalism there seemed to be overpopulation and at others underpopulation. But this had nothing to do with the birth rate. It was a feature which appeared at the various stages of the business cycle. In depressions there were more people than jobs offered by capitalist industry. In booms, on the other hand, there was a comparative shortage of workers.

What was more effective in refuting Malthus than his own inconsistencies and the arguments of Godwin and Marx, was what in fact happened to population trends in the industrialised countries. After 1880, particularly when birth control propaganda was launched on a large scale, the birth rate began to drop. Malthus had also overlooked that it was not just a question of the number of people and the food supply but that the productivity of man-made machines should also be taken into account. Beginning with the industrial revolution, technical development increased social productivity so that more food was provided for the increasing population.

In recent years, Malthusian ideas have enjoyed something of a revival. The Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations has many times warned that the world's population is increasing at a (slightly) faster rate than the food supply. The FAO itself does not accept Malthusian ideas of course and is fully aware that, with the application of modern technology to food production, there could be more than enough for everyone on this planet. But others argue that because population is increasing faster than the food supply this must always be so. The implication here is that overpopulation would be a barrier to the establishment of Socialism as a society of abundance.

Let us consider this proposition in more detail. Population growth can be controlled, and the birth rate has dropped in many countries through the extensive use of birth control. However, birth control is really a red herring: it concentrates attention on the population rather than on food supplies and why they are not being increased at anything like the rate they could. Godwin's point about every extra human being bringing in an extra pair of hands is still valid. The real issue is whether the social system allows those hands to be used to produce the extra wealth. It has long been known that the world can produce more than enough food for all. Lord Boyd-Orr, the first Director-General of the FAO, pointed out:

'There was no difficulty about producing enough food for the present population of the world, or even twice that number, but the problem was, could politics and economics arrange that the food that was produced was dispersed and consumed in the countries that needed it?' (The Times, 22 July 1949).

At the second international agricultural aviation conference in Paris in 1962, Dr. Maan, the director of the International Agricultural Aviation Centre at the Hague, was reported as saying:

'The world's population, now a little over 2,000 million was expected to reach 6,000 million in the not very distant future. It had been calculated that the earth could support a population of 28,000 million if food production were organised on lines now known to be practicable' (The Times, 24 September 1962).

Estimates such as the tripling of world food production by irrigating areas now regarded as deserts are commonplace in the literature on the subject. Sea water can be turned into fresh water for irrigation purposes and indeed the sea itself, as a source of food, has scarcely begun to be exploited.

In discussing food production it is important to grasp that it is not just the farmers and peasants who produce food. Food production is rapidly becoming a social process involving the labour of millions working in industry. With the increasing use of fertilisers, pesticides, modern tools and machines the labour spent in producing these is just as important as the labour of the farmer, also technical advances in these fields allow food production to be increased. Agriculture is now an industry in which scientific methods can be used but there are still vast opportunities for applying such methods.

The technical problem of providing enough for everyone has long been solved. The real problem, pinpointed by Boyd-Orr, is how can human society be arranged to allow sufficient to be produced and distributed amongst mankind. The Socialist Party of Great Britain holds that the only social system which will ensure this is one in which wealth is produced solely to meet human needs on the basis of the common ownership of the resources of the world by the whole of mankind.

Today under capitalism, food is not produced to meet human needs and indeed could not be since the resources of the world do not belong to mankind but only to a privileged few. That food is not produced to meet human needs cannot be denied, otherwise there is no sensible reason why, with the possibility of adequately feeding everybody, millions starve and many millions are undernourished. Food is produced to be sold on a market (increasingly the world market) with a view to profit. The starving and undernourished millions of the world do not constitute a market as they cannot pay for the food they need. So they are left to starve.

To a certain extent this is an aspect of the problem of the uneven development we discussed in the previous section. In countries where capitalist social relations embrace nearly the whole population, famine is not a problem. Capitalist industry by and large is able to provide its workers with the food they must have to generate enough energy to work year in year out under modern industrial conditions. Problems arise however from the impact of capitalism on backward pre-industrial conditions. For centuries the people of Asia and Africa survived on what they themselves could produce. Capitalism upset the balance in a number of ways: by destroying home industries through cheap competition; by encouraging cash crops in place of subsistence farming thus putting the peasants at the mercy of the world market; and by improved medical techniques thus reducing the death rate. The ironic fact that because science has been used to keep human beings alive, but not to provide the food to feed them, many have been saved from death by disease only to die of starvation. Capitalism does indeed have a food problem here. Because of the restrictions of the profit system, food production is held back while the population increases.

Agriculture is less under the control of man than the production of manufactured articles. Under capitalism this can cause violent price fluctuations. A good harvest one year brings prices tumbling; a bad harvest the next sends them soaring again. Huge amounts of capital are now invested in cash crops by large international corporations and such fluctuations cause them great inconvenience. Hence the attempts to control prices by restricting production to a given amount, divided among the producing countries. This quota system is nothing less than a huge restrictive practice applied to all foodstuffs as well as to agricultural and mineral raw materials — wheat, rice, sugar, coffee, cocoa, sisal, soya beans, rubber, tin, copper, etc.

When things go wrong then we see capitalism at its most vicious. It is then that one reads of a bumper harvest described as a disaster, to hear about 'burdensome surpluses' and the 'problem' of over-population. In a world where many millions need food how can there be a surplus or over-production of food? Yet for the capitalist firms and the peasant farmers engaged in producing crops, to have produced more than the world market can absorb is a problem. Prices fall so that they lose not only the anticipated profit but even some of

their original capital. Shareholders have to take a cut in dividends while the small farmers can be ruined.

This is the paradox of poverty in the midst of plenty which capitalism solves not by giving the plenty to the poor but by actually destroying the surplus food that has been produced, in order to keep up prices and profits. So we read in the Press of huge surpluses of fruit and vegetables being burnt, ploughed in or just dumped as vast compost heaps; hundreds of tons of tomatoes being jettisoned because of the tomato 'glut'; milk being poured down disused mine shafts; cheese and butter (and even skimmed milk that could easily be transported to famine areas) being fed to pigs. These are regular occurrences in the capitalist world.

The most dramatic examples of capitalism's inability to produce for human needs are the huge bonfires that occur from time to time. Before the second world war Brazil led the way by burning coffee. Here are two examples of the deliberate destruction of food in Africa, where many are starving:

'Sir Tsibu Darku, the Chairman of Ghana's Cocoa Marketing Board, today put the torch to about 500 tons of cocoa which went up in flames near here. He said the bonfire was the first of a series which would go on until they had completely destroyed two per cent of Ghana's basic quota, to give effect to a decision of the alliance of cocoa producing countries' (The Times, 12 December 1964).

'Over 300,000 coffee seedlings were uprooted and burned on a nursery near Nairobi today as the first step in the Agriculture Ministry's plan to restrict coffee production. Mr. G. R. Medforth, the Kenya Coffee Board's chief inspector, who supervised the burning, said about one million — or ,20 per cent — of the plants in nurseries throughout the country were surplus and would be burned. Growers would get compensation' (The Times. 12 May 1967)

In the 1930s the American government evolved a policy which, instead of waiting for the food to be produced and then destroying it, involved paying farmers not to produce it in the first place, The result of course was the same. Food supplies were artificially restricted. This policy which continues to this day was frankly described described by the late President Kennedy as 'planned and subsidised under-production'.

The stark fact is that capitalism is responsible for the starvation of millions of people. Given modern technology, famine is avoidable: wherever it occurs the blame must be laid at the door of the social system that is incapable of meeting human needs. It is not overpopulation that is the problem but the chronic and often planned underproduction that is a built in feature of capitalism. Only when the fetters which capitalism places on production have been removed by establishing the common ownership of the means of life can mankind set about ending the threat of famine.

Not only is capitalism in effect a system of artificial scarcity, it is also a system of organised waste. The most obvious example is the huge amount of wealth used up in training and keeping armed forces and in developing the most destructive weapons of war. Capitalism also diverts the labour of millions into work that would be useless in a rationally-organised society, namely, the labour of those engaged in commerce and finance; the cashiers, the computer operatives, the accountants, the salesmen, the bank clerks, the ticket collectors and the host of others working in activities concerned with buying and selling.

Socialism, with no built-in drive toward war and therefore with no need for armies and armaments, and with production solely for use instead of for sale on the market, will release the labour and resources at present wasted by capitalism to be used, as necessary, for producing food.

Increases in population are no barrier to the establishment of Socialism. Socialist society will use the resources of the earth to ensure that every man, woman and child is amply fed, clothed and sheltered. Capitalism cannot do this — it does not exist for this purpose!

Human nature

ONE OF THE PRINCIPAL objections to Socialism is the frequently expressed claim that human nature is such that people as a whole have never acted, and will never act, in an entirely co-operative manner; that for instance, greed, ambition, cruelty and the like are fundamental human traits. It is argued that each human being will do whatever is to his own immediate advantage, regardless of the effect his actions may have upon others and, ultimately, the effect they may have upon himself. Some contemporary illustrations, some guesswork about the past and some misconceptions about the future, are then put forward as evidence in support of the contention. As soon as this evidence is examined it becomes plain that the case against Socialism on this ground, is built upon practices that are uncritically accepted as if essential for all time.

That such views should be widespread amongst all sections of the population, no matter the class or the occupation of the holders is a striking commentary on the nature of the education most people receive. It leaves them completely unaware of the significance of the changes in ideas that have occurred in the recent past, and even in the lifetime of their own generation. It should be apparent that ideas which were taken for granted as universally true not very long ago would now be laughed at; ideas such as the divine right of kings; that women were incapable of taking part in social affairs along with men; that working men were incapable of taking part in government: that the British Empire was invulnerable; and so on. Yet in spite of this, and in spite of the vast accumulation of information to the contrary, resulting from the investigations of anthropologists and historians, it is still widely accepted that the acquisition of property is the only course for mankind. That social existence is impossible without money, wages, profits, the State, frontiers, wars and all the other paraphernalia that drive us to distraction today.

When we examine the meaning usually attributed to the term 'human nature' we find that the objectors lump together under this heading acts that are today regarded as anti-social. Human nature is looked upon as fundamentally bad (a carry-over from the theological dogma of original sin), and it is assumed that people commit anti-social acts because 'they are born that way'. Many of those who put forward this view contradict it by urging that the growth of religion, or 'civilising influences', will help eradicate 'evil' conduct. However, the main things people are born to do are to eat, drink, keep warm, imitate, copulate and learn. The relations they enter into with each other at a given time to accomplish these ends set the pattern for the social outlook and the social code. Those who depart from this accepted code, although they may start the movement for a new pattern, are considered to be anti-social or criminal in great or small degree. In the course of history humanity has moved from relative simplicity in the social arrangements. It has moved from a world of isolated communities into a world of large interconnected industrial complexes. But through all the changes the fundamental characteristics of humanity have remained the same; the spur to action has been the probing and planning based on these fundamental characteristics. What people think and how they act is not the result of fundamental ineradicable instincts, but is the result of customs, regulations and inhibitions that spring from the social environment in which people of succeeding centuries have had to solve the problem of living. In other words, that people are able to think and act is a fact of biological and social development, but how they think and act is the result of social conditions. Since private property came into existence, the pursuit of riches has bred murder, cruelty, fraud, enmity and other anti-social behaviour.

The thoughts and actions of human beings are influenced by their surroundings, which include customary traditions, the education they have received, their living conditions and the other people they have met. The present social arrangements and outlooks are only temporary and are associated with social conditions that can be changed. The duke and the dustman, the millionaire and the mechanic, the tycoon and the counter-hand, the oil king and the labourer; all are separated by barriers that are artificial social barriers that have grown up during centuries of the development of property society.

Ideas are not just a mechanical reflection of technological processes. In doing things in a certain way men, over a long or short period, see methods of changing these ways that are better, or that they think are better, and it is this that leads to changes in the technological processes. In other words, the process of history is the result of an interchange between man and his environment. It is man who makes the changes; but he can only make them out of the material that is at hand and part of this material, in the form of traditions from the past, slows the pace of change.

There has been little discernible change in the fundamental make-up of man yet there have been considerable changes in social conduct corresponding to the changes in social conditions. Changed social conditions have been responsible for the changes in attitude towards acts that are identical. For example, stealing today is

looked upon as a criminal act whereas in the ancient Greek city state of Sparta stealing was a virtue and was taught to the young.

A brief glance at history will reveal how great has been the change in social attitudes towards people. In the days of classical antiquity one section of mankind, the slaves, were chattels, and in the much-lauded democracies of those days they were left entirely out of account. In the Middle Ages land was the great source of riches and money-lending was frowned on. The serf was no longer a chattel, but he was tied to the land and to his lord, and if he ran away he could be forcibly brought back. In our day money is the hallmark of social standing and will buy almost everything — beauty, honour, titles and position, yet as late as Jane Austen's day, to be engaged in a trade, put a man outside the circle of gentlemen: and who, in Victorian times, would have dreamt of a miner or a boilermaker rising to the eminence of a knighthood or the House of Lords, or a relative of a royal family serving in a shop or a fashion house?

The objector will often readily agree that Socialism is a desirable system but he argues that it will be impossible to achieve because of the 'human nature' barrier. (We rarely encounter the objector who considers his own 'human nature' standing in the way of Socialism — almost always it is other people's.) It is urged that it will be impossible to get people as a whole to work together to their mutual advantage because man is selfish by nature, and each individual wants to get the better of the other, to get the lion's share of whatever is going. As to the assumption of selfishness, we would point to the thousands of people who give selfless devotion in all manner of voluntary effort including work for political parties. Let us, however, look at the matter from another aspect. In a socialist society where each would be free to take what he needs there will be no point in anyone trying to get more.

The very people who argue that the fundamental and ineradicable nature of human characteristics make Socialism impossible, are themselves often engaged in propagating reforms the object of which is to remove conditions that are believed to be responsible for certain forms of objectionable conduct — thus their own actions refute their claim that Socialism is impossible.

Finally, man's curiosity and humanity make him an essentially reasonable being: when he is free of artificial barriers he readily works in harmony with his fellows. Even within the limits of the present social order there are innumerable examples of the extent to which men are prepared to make sacrifices, even of liberty and life, in the effort to help their fellows.

The selfish, cruel, anti-social conduct that is laid at the door of human nature is really only conduct that is the outcome of systems based on private property, which compel people to engage in predatory conduct in order to survive. What else can be expected in the present social system where one section of the population monopolises the means for producing the things that are needed by all, while another section is forced to work for the privileged minority in order to obtain the necessities of life?

Once class monopoly is abolished and replaced by the common ownership of the means of living, that is, when all that is in and on the earth becomes the common possession of all mankind, people will willingly co-operate in harmonious association for their mutual benefit just because it is 'human nature' to seek that which contributes to personal well-being.

Women and class

IN 1904, THE YEAR THE SOCIALIST PARTY of Great Britain was formed, it was usual for political parties to have their women helpers. There was the Primrose League for the Conservatives and the Women's Liberal Federation. In the Social Democratic Federation the membership of men and women was on equal terms. The Object of that party included "the establishment of Social and Economic equality between the sexes", and the demand for "Equal, direct adult suffrage" had long been part of its Programme.

The SPGB has only one section and that is for socialists. The Party was formed by men and women, ex-members of the SDF, who together drafted the Object and Declaration of Principles. Clause 4 states that the emancipation of the working class will involve the emancipation of all mankind "without distinction of race or sex". The wording of this clause was no accident. It reflected the understanding that those founder members had of social evolution and economics. In capitalism the majority of men and women have a common class relationship in that they own no part of the means of production. The class division in capitalist society cuts across all differences of nationality, race or sex.

The earliest Socialist Standards pointed out that the destinies of men and women are bound up together and that Socialism is the only hope of the whole working class irrespective of sex. Both sexes of the workers are exploited and suffer as victims of the class which owns the means of life. The emancipation of woman can only come together with the emancipation of their class through the realisation of Socialism.

That women held a generally subordinate position before the capitalist era is not disputed. Frederick Engels acknowledging the work of L. H. Morgan, showed that the suppression of women had its origin in the rise of private property. Some anthropologists, and the modern women's movement, continue to attack this view of both Morgan and Engels but they fail to provide a satisfactory explanation of human social development.

Through centuries of change in property relations and the form of society, leading in Western Europe to feudalism and then to capitalism, the monogamous family and the dependence of women had become long established. This was to have special significance for women workers, when, late in the eighteenth century, the industrial revolution was to produce social conditions recognisably like those of modern capitalism.

From the earliest ages, women and children were economically productive in the home. Prior to the industrial revolution families worked in the expanding cottage industries. Village women took an active part in the work connected with their family patch of ground and stock and helped in the fields at harvest time. The growth of the factory system and of capitalist agriculture involved a number of changes in the employment of women. Cottage industries could not compete with factory production and their decline meant the break up of many small rural households. The move to the factories was not immediate and there was much unemployment and misery for single women. During the Napoleonic wars gangs of women began to be employed all the year round as field workers on large farms. In the second half of the nineteenth century the gradual increase in the field labourer's wages, and the use of agricultural machinery, reduced female employment in agriculture.

The industrial revolution condemned poor families to long hours of hard work in the factories and coalmines, leaving little time or energy for anything but the simplest meal and sleep. Yet despite the suffering and discontent caused by the rapid expansion of capitalism it is precisely this system which makes the emancipation of women feasible, since it gave women a role in social production to be fulfilled outside the home. However a role in social production does not in itself constitute freedom.

The business establishments of the rising merchants and manufacturers became separated from the home; as there was extensive employment of domestic servants their wives were isolated with little domestic work to do. They were subjected to the authority of their husbands and were in the legal position of permanent minors. Women from the 'middle class' were expected to marry. If they remained spinsters, or were widowed, there was little prospect of suitable employment. In 1859 the supply of governesses exceeded the demand by 99%. (There was an Educated Women's Emigration Society.) The early stirrings of protest about their position as compared to men really came from these women. Among the several demands made by women were for better education and employment opportunities, and for the vote. Although as early as the 1780s William Pitt, Tory Prime Minister, and his Whig opponent, Charles James Fox, had both been in favour of

what they called 'universal' franchise, it was only men they had in mind. (The possibility of Parliament agreeing to this disappeared when the French Revolution in 1789 frightened the British ruling class.)

By the 19th century political theory was developing towards the idea of individual voting rights. The 1832 Reform Act was the first statutory bar to women voting since it specifically enfranchised 'male persons' who had the necessary property qualifications.

In that same year the issue of women voting was first raised in parliament when 'Orator' Henry Hunt presented a petition for the 'enfranchisement of unmarried females with the necessary property qualifications'. Getting the vote was seen first as a way of obtaining what they called social justice but the all embracing demand was later whittled down to a demand for the vote. The year 1866 marked the start of the continuing suffrage campaign organised by women. In 1897 all existing societies devoted exclusively to women's suffrage federated into the National Union of Suffrage Societies. This was the chief constitutional association and, following the death of Lydia Becker in 1890, was led by Mrs. Millicent Fawcett. The 'militant' Women's Social and Political Union, led by Mrs. Pankhurst, was not formed until 1903. Both sections of the movement, militant and constitutional, sought the vote on the same terms as men. Two further Reform Acts of 1867 and 1884 had extended the franchise to include all male householders (£10 franchise) which still left one third of adult males without the vote. Since a much larger proportion of women would not qualify as householders the campaign essentially aimed at votes for propertied women. Some of the campaigners thought that with the vote they could look after the interests of the factory girls. There was some support for WSPU activities among working class women. The Women's Co-operative Guild supported women's suffrage.

The SPGB refused any support to the suffrage campaign. A request for financial help from Emmeline Pethick Lawrence (Socialist Standard April 1906) met with the reply that class consciousness must come first. Of what use the vote when the working class used it against their own interests. (The working class were already in the majority at the ballot box by more than 3 to 1.) And "Sex equality could not be the fruit of Suffragette humbug, it could come only through economic equality — and economic equality is impossible except through Socialism". (Socialist Standard June 1908.)

By 1918 when the franchise was extended to women aged 30 (men at 21) many of the earlier aims for which the vote was sought had in fact been realised. Women had gained entry into universities, could become doctors and get divorced. The 1882 Married Women's Property Act gave right of separate ownership over every kind of property. In 1894 duly qualified married women were permitted to vote in municipal elections. A right which single women ratepayers had received 25 years earlier.

Changes which affected a larger number of women came from the expansion of non-manual occupations. In the 1870s when the Post Office gave effect to government approval of the extended employment of women, the Postmaster General stated that the attraction from the standpoint of the Post Office as employer was that the women clerks would accept lower pay than the men and would be more docile, i.e. would not want to join the unions formed by men. Other employers counted on the same attitude. Around the turn of the century there was increasing employment for women in offices and in teaching. The first world war further accelerated changes in female employment. Women were employed in almost every kind of work, the exceptions being underground mining, stevedoring and steel and iron smelting.

Admirers of the suffragettes should remember both their limited objective and the actions of these erstwhile champions of women's rights during the war. The same kind of zeal used in the suffrage campaign was applied by them to supporting the war. There were exceptions, notably Charlotte Despard and Sylvia Pankhurst who courageously spoke against the war at public meetings. Union membership among women rose from 360,000 in 1914 to nearly 2,000,000 in 1918. The return of men from the war and high unemployment meant a retreat for women from many occupations but attitudes were permanently changed. By 1918 the number of domestic servants had shrunk by 450,000 in Britain, though in 1931 domestic servants still accounted for 23.8% of working women. The second world war again brought women into the factories but the outstanding feature of employment since the war is the increase of women in office work and the service industries.

The modern Women's Liberation Movement was formed first in the late sixties, in the United States. Its

promoters were women who had been active in the Students, Civil Rights and Vietnam War Protest Movements. They objected to women's subordinate position in society, which they said was also reflected in these movements and in the so-called 'Left-wing' parties.

Similar groups had been formed in Britain in 1968-9, but it was not until the first national women's conference, held at Ruskin College in February-March 1970, that a women's liberation movement could be said to exist; though without formal membership. It was not a single unified movement but consisted of small autonomous groups under, roughly, four headings: (a) political, incorporating or accommodating left-wing aims; (b) reformist, seeking particular improvements; (c) feminist, endeavouring to promote 'female consciousness'; and (d) radical feminist, rejecting women's biological role. Early feminist discontent had many aspects but getting the vote became the main focus of attention. The modern movement has no demand equivalent to the vote. (It is, in fact, in existence because the vote in itself proved an inadequate answer to female subjection. Women as voters did not bring to political life a new surge of determination to end exploitation and war, as it was claimed it would during the suffrage campaign.) Though it focused attention on the position of women in society it was in many ways a reflection of changes already taking place. It was women who had benefited from higher education who complained about their promotion prospects. The women's liberation movement encompassed widely divergent aims, ranging from concern with personal problems, obtaining equal opportunities with men under capitalism and covering all the muddled ideas associated with the so-called left. However, there are concerted campaigns, for example, the National Abortion Campaign, and general acceptance of the original four demands formulated at the Oxford conference. These were equal pay, equal education and opportunities, 24-hour nurseries, and free contraception and abortion on demand.

The Equal Pay Act 1970 and the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 both came into force on 29 December 1975. The intention was for the equal pay requirements to be fully met by that date. The Equal Opportunities Commission was set up to ensure effective enforcement of both Acts. Like other reformist movements seeking by legislation to change the way capitalism operates, the well-meaning people who sought equal pay and opportunities for women disregarded the fact that the aim of the employer, whether private company or state organisation, is to make profit. Legal enforcement of higher wages for women (as happens with minimum wage enforcement generally) decreases the low-pay attraction to the employer of employing women. There are already indications that unemployment among women, which was formerly less than among men, will increase. As has also always happened in minimum wage industries, at time of heavy unemployment there will be widespread breaches of the law by employers that will be accepted by women workers rather than lose their jobs.

The Sex Discrimination Act prohibits discrimination, on grounds of sex, in employment, education, credit and mortgage facilities, etc. The Act gives legal enforcement to many feminist demands, but its effectiveness with regard to employment and promotion prospects will largely depend on the needs of capitalism. It was economic necessity not women's liberation movements which opened all kinds of careers to women in many countries as for example in Russia.

The SPGB does not support women's liberation movements. Despite all the theorising they turned out to be no different from all the other movements which choose to put immediate demands before the socialist aim of a revolutionary change in the social system. Claims were made that the movements were not political, but most of their aims could only be achieved, with support from political parties, through government legislation. The likely success of these aims, and those concerned with female consciousness and personal relationships, have to be seen against the background of capitalism. The vast majority of women and men, including non-employed housewives and pensioners, belong to the working class. It is membership of this class which places limitations on the personal life of both sexes. The logical solution is for one working class organisation having Socialism as its sole object.

Common ownership, and democratic control, of the means of production and distribution will mean the end of economic exploitation. Every human being will have the same free access to the abundant social wealth. There will be no possibility for any group to hold another in subjection. Men and women will be free to arrange their personal lives according to their individual choice. Whatever form the family will take, parents will not have to care for their children in isolation and childcare will not be the sole occupation open to men or women except by choice.

The Chinese revolution

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A "Communist" regime in China in 1949 reproduced the misconceptions of the Russian Revolution thirty-two years previously. Numbers of people in other countries believed "real" Communism was being created in China; Mao Tse-tung was regarded as a Marxist and "Maoism" came into existence. These beliefs are untrue. The achievement of the Chinese revolution has been to bring China into the world of capitalism.

Between the first and second world wars the working class of China were concentrated in a small number of cities. They numbered 1 per cent of the population, and their condition was like that of workers in Britain in the early 19th century.

"Some of the match factories and carpet factories, the ceramics and glass works, and the old-style silk and cotton factories would well have served as an inspiration for even Dante's description of the infernal regions . . . When the time to stop work finally comes, these miserable creatures doss down in any place they can find — the lucky ones on bales of waste material or in the attics if there are any, and the rest on the workshop floor, like chained dogs" (J. Chesneaux, *The Chinese Labour Movement 1919-27*, 1968).

The great majority of the population, then estimated at nearly 500 million, were peasants. Their existence was characterised by poverty, oppression and early death. They were at the mercy of landlords, tax collectors and usurers. Peasant insurrections were a feature of Chinese history. Though conditions improved a little for some town workers in more modern industries in the nineteen-thirties, for the peasantry they deteriorated further as a result of the world depression.

The blame for conditions in China was placed on western and Japanese imperialism. The history of the Opium War, the British rush for spoils, the Boxer indemnity, and the control of customs, finance and key industries by foreigners produced a nationalist movement. At the end of the 1914-18 war several of its leaders were influenced by the Bolshevik revolution. Sun Yat-sen, the head of the Kuomintang (Nationalist Party), made an alliance with Russia one of his aims. However, when Sun's successor Chiang Kai-shek came to power in 1928 he attacked the Communists and relied on the support of the Chinese bourgeoisie.

The Kuomintang period lasted from 1928 to 1937. Its attempts at reform and controlling the economy failed. Technical improvements, irrigation and reforestation did nothing for the peasants. The government was unable to destroy the warlords; legislation to reduce land rent was not enforced; and the total of agricultural production increased less than 1 per cent from 1932 to 1936. Industrial advances affected only a small section of the working class in towns, and immediately after gaining power the Kuomintang had many trade-union leaders killed and brought the unions under government control. The Nationalist Party, after setting out to make a capitalist revolution, became a reactionary regime moving towards dictatorship under Chiang.

Mao emerged as the leader of the Chinese Communist Party at this time. With little opportunity to win support among industrial workers, the CCP concentrated on the grievances of the peasant population. In his Report of an Investigation into the Peasant Movement in Hunan (1927) Mao declared : "To overthrow these feudal forces is the real objective of the revolution." The Communists were more realistic than the Kuomintang in their view of how to establish capitalism in China. The peasants offered a mass of discontent great enough to overthrow the old regime. as well as providing a huge reservoir of labour for exploitation.

In 1931 Japan attacked Manchuria, and it became a full scale war in 1937. The Chinese Communist Party united with the Kuomintang to fight the Japanese. With the Japanese Imperial Army in possession of all the major Chinese ports and cities, the Communists organised successful guerrilla campaigns which led to them taking charge of areas in North China. As the war continued into World War II, the CCP made patriotic propaganda its monopoly. Presenting itself as the force of popular resistance to foreign invaders, it created a peasant nationalism which served its future purpose well. By the end of the war the party had 1.2 million members and was contending for political power.

The war produced a massive inflation in China, which lasted until 1949. Though China, with Chiang Kai-shek still the head of state, was officially proclaimed one of the victorious "Big Five" in 1945 and was one of the founder-members of the United Nations, discontent ran high. Peasant grievances against the landowners were renewed, and inflation was crippling urban workers and small business men. In 1946 the Communists

formed the People's Liberation Army and started a civil war. By January 1949 Chiang, facing defeat, asked his wartime allies — Britain, USA, Russia and France — to mediate. They refused; Chiang resigned and retreated to Taiwan (Formosa). The People's Republic of China was inaugurated on 1st October 1949.

Mao Tse-tung pointed out that the new society would not be Socialist. In his statement On People's Democratic Dictatorship (July 1949), which was incorporated into the Common Programme adopted by the Communist Party, he wrote:

"To counter imperialist oppression and to raise her backward economy to a higher level, China must utilise all the factors of urban and rural capitalism that are beneficial and not harmful to the national economy and the people's livelihood; and we must unite with the national bourgeoisie in common struggle. Our policy is to regulate capitalism, not to destroy it" (Essential Works of Chinese Communism, New York, 1972).

Though private enterprise was to continue, production and commerce were to be brought progressively under state control. Theoretically the new political institutions represented a coalition of classes — the CCP plus minor parties and national minorities; but it was laid down by Mao that the bourgeoisie "should not have the chief role in state power" because their social and economic position was too weak. The "people's democratic dictatorship" was created and had to be led by the Communist Party.

The enemies of the revolution, besides the Kuomintang, were the landowners. They were the "feudal forces" which must be overthrown. In addition, the removal of "abuses" for which the landowner-tax collector-usurer class was responsible meant the removal of obstruction to a strong central government. The land redistribution programme of 1950-53 was designed to increase agricultural production and bring it under co-operatives and state trading companies as the basis of the nation's economic development.

Other reforms had the same motive. The Communist government pushed mass education and laid emphasis on technical education to train engineers, agronomists, medical personnel and other skilled workers needed for economic reconstruction.

In the mid-fifties the movement to state control of industries accelerated sharply. Mao and the CCP started to assert that China was socialist. Private capitalists were bought out on terms described by Yuan-li Wu in *The Economy of Communist China* (1965) as follows:

"A nominal 'fixed interest' or 'dividend' of 1-6 per cent a year, payable quarterly, regardless of the profit or loss of the enterprise in question, was promised to private stockholders for a period of six years. The amount was subsequently revised to a uniform 5 per cent per annum."

Smaller capitalists were offered state agencies on relatively generous terms. By 1956 it was claimed that the proportion of the "capitalist enterprises" in the gross value of output of industry had declined to 1 per cent. This merely repeated the nationalisation schemes used in Germany in the 19th century, and later in Britain and other countries including Russia, as a method of organising capitalist production and distribution. It has nothing to do with Socialism. Dividends and profits are created in one way only, out of the exploitation of the working class.

After 1961 "open markets" were permitted to develop to try to overcome defects in the planning system. According to Franz Schurmann in *China Under Mao* (1972) this has produced free markets in agricultural and manufactured goods, advertising, and "the release of a range of 'top class goods' to retail outlets". At another time the state will seek to repress what it has licensed and encouraged — leaving the position that sometimes individual profit-makers can be discerned and sometimes not.

The "Great Leap Forward" of 1959-61 was a strategy to boost production without any increase in consumption. It failed: workers toiled to the point of exhaustion and produced shoddy goods in the factories, while the peasants were tired, hungry and resentful. The Chinese ruling class discovered what western ones had previously learned, that they could go too far in crude exploitation. Natural disasters ended the Great Leap, but its ending was marked too by the appearance of a split between China and Russia.

The two governments had signed a thirty-year Treaty of Friendship, Alliance and Mutual Assistance in 1950.

The alliance brought economic and technical aid to China, and for a time Chinese policies reflected the Russian influence. However, the bearing of "Communist" labels makes no difference to the facts of economic and political life. To state-capitalist Russia, China with its developing state-capitalism was a prospective rival. A. M. Halpern says in *China Under Mao*, using Chinese documents, that in 1959 the Russian government "made it clear that they would not actively help the Chinese People's Republic obtain an independent nuclear capability". In 1960 Russian technical support was withdrawn from China. Following this, the Chinese viewed the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty of 1963 as Soviet-American collusion. Their own atomic bomb was exploded on 16th October 1964.

The line taken in China was that Stalin's successors had departed from the principles of Lenin. Mao Tse-tung and Hoxha of Albania were the only political leaders in the world who continued to sing the praises of Stalin after the general Communist reaction against him. An editorial commemorating the 50th anniversary of the Chinese Communist Party in 1971 said:

"Khrushchev, Brezhnev and company are renegades from the proletarian revolution, and present-day social-imperialists and world storm-troopers opposing China, opposing Communism and opposing the people. It is our Party's bounden internationalist duty to continue the exposure and criticism of modern revisionism with Soviet revisionism at the centre and carry the struggle to the end" (Translated Peking Review, 2 July 1971).

This is ironical. In 1927 Stalin had ordered the Chinese Communist Party to restrain risings of the peasants and workers, and then sided with Chiang Kai-shek and the Kuomintang against the Communists.

There has never been any pretence of equality in standards of living in China. Wages vary sharply from one area to another and from one city to another, the highest being in Shanghai — as was always the case. Franz Schurmann says: "The existence of inequity has not only been admitted, it has been encouraged". It was estimated in 1964 by Charles Hoffman (*Work Incentives in Communist China*) that the wage rates of the highest grades in Manchurian industry were 2.5 to 3.2 times those of the lowest grades.

A social security system was inaugurated in 1951, covering workmen's compensation, medical treatment, cost-of-living subsidies, etc. This secures a competent and dependable workforce. It is also a familiar method today throughout the capitalist world of keeping wages in check. According to an article in a *Times Special Report* on 2nd October 1974 a Peking factory worker is paid between £11 and £13 a month. The writer says: "Because food — even in the best restaurants in Peking — is comparatively cheap, the Chinese worker has money to save for those three most desired consumer durables — a bicycle, a transistor radio, and a sewing machine". But another article in the same report described the car industry in China:

"Chinese car production is running at a meagre 1,500 units a year, rising perhaps to 5,000 units with the introduction of a new assembly line at the Shanghai plant. Additional needs are being met by importing a small number of Toyotas from Japan. The top Chinese car is the Red Flag limousine, which has a huge 5.6 litre 220 brake horsepower engine, automatic transmission and full air conditioning. It is largely hand built, at the rate of one a week."

Who rides in the Red Flags and Toyotas while the workers save up for bicycles?

The industrialisation of China was stated, in the Preamble to the Constitution of 1954, to be a "socialist transformation" which would "eliminate exploitation and poverty". Except to the wilfully blind, it is plain that what has been developed there is capitalism with its essential features of wage-slavery and inequality. It is a society of production for sale and profit. Despite the misleading talk about socialism, the Communists opposed Chiang Kai-shek because he and his supporters stood in the way of capitalist development. Mao's statement of July 1949 said:

"We want to do business." Quite right, business will be done. We are against no one except the domestic and foreign reactionaries who hinder us from doing business. Everybody should know that it is none other than the imperialists and their running dogs, the Chiang Kai-shek reactionaries, who hinder us from doing business and also from establishing diplomatic relations with foreign countries" (*Essential Works of Chinese Communism*).

According to the Times Special Report, in 1974 China was trading with more than 150 countries and regions, and had a volume of trade 2.5 times higher than in 1965. Russia and other 'Communist' countries accounted for about a quarter of the total, and the biggest gains were made by Japan, the United States, and Europe. Part of this expansion was armaments bought from several countries. A report in the Financial Times, 10 September 1974, described the growth of international trade fairs in China and efforts by the Chinese to expand their own sales abroad. There are no ideological barriers on any side. For the class which owns and controls the means of wealth production and distribution in China, as in all other countries, the necessary aim of "business" is to realise the surplus-value obtained by exploiting the working class.

One reason for widespread interest in China has been the rapid changes affecting a population now 800 millions, approximately a quarter of the world's total. Certainly it is true that vast numbers of Chinese no longer die prematurely, that they receive the necessities of life, go to school and have recreation. These conditions for the reproduction of labour-power in modern capitalism were established gradually in Europe, by reforms over a lengthy 90 period. In a large country seeking to accumulate capital quickly and get into the world of today, the process has to be telescoped. Thus it appears dramatic and is called naively a "social experiment", implying some justificative for the regimentation and political dictatorship.

All this has served to confuse the Chinese workers as to their position, and dupe many others outside China. The oppressions and disabilities removed following the revolution of 1949 were not capitalist ones; they were parts of an obsolete despotism which had to be eliminated to create the conditions for capitalist production. The social relationships which now dominate China are those of wage-labour and capital, the peasant class having been turned into rural wage-workers. The great majority of the population are members of the propertyless working class, forced to live by selling their labour-power. The capitalists' side of the class struggle has been wrapped in the mystical aphorisms of Mao Tse-tung, and the workers' side concealed by lack of information from China; nevertheless, the struggle exists.

Now that Mao is dead, whoever rules in China will claim to be his true representative. Some conflicts over political power have already taken place; the putting-down of the "gang of four" which included Mao's widow, and the adoption as Deputy Prime Minister of the formerly demoted Tens Hsiao-ping. These struggles among individuals and conspiring groups are the substitute, in what is effectively a one-party state, for rivalry among political parties. As well as expressing only different capitalist interests, they testify to the absence of democracy.

The euphoria of the post-revolution period has died down, and the rulers will undoubtedly find it harder to manage the working class in the future. The workers in their part have to learn what system they are living under; that production for markets leads to crises and war; that the fruits of their labour are taken not to build Socialism but to maintain a privileged class. With that knowledge they can help to make not a new China but a new world.

Inflation and unemployment

IN THE LAST QUARTER of the nineteenth century, during what was known at that time as The Great Depression, and again in the depression between the two world wars, an increasing number of workers — and even some professional economists — were paying attention to the analysis of capitalism made by Karl Marx in his work *Capital*. Marx showed that unemployment, and its rise to peak levels in periodical phases of trade depression, arise out of the structure of capitalism itself, and are therefore inevitable while capitalism lasts.

This growing interest in Marx was all but extinguished with the publication in 1936 of J. M. Keynes' *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money*. According to the new doctrine it only needs that the government "manage the economy in such a way as to maintain demand" for full employment to be created and trade depressions to be abolished.

Keynes described Marx's *Capital* as "an obsolete economic textbook, which I know to be not only scientifically erroneous but without interest or application for the modern world" ("*A Short View of Russia*", J. M. Keynes, 1925. p 14). Keynesian doctrines were accepted by most economists, political parties and the trade unions. Writing in 1957 (*Remedies for Inflation*) Mr. (now Sir Harold) Wilson stated that the Labour Party and all other "major parties" were Keynesian. As late as 1974, in spite of the evidence that Keynesian techniques had been a failure, the Tory M.P. Mr. Peter Walker called his party "the party of Keynes and Disraeli"; while the Liberal M.P. Mr. John Pardoe said that the Liberal Party is "the party of Keynes and William Beveridge".

Alone in this country the Socialist Party of Great Britain insisted from the outset that Marx was right; that the new doctrines were fallacies; that full employment cannot be maintained; that trade depressions cannot be eliminated, that the remedies proposed were only disguised inflation and would do nothing to serve working-class interests.

The Labour Party adopted the new policy at its Annual Conference in 1944, in a Report on Full Employment and Financial Policy, which declared:

"If bad trade and general unemployment threaten this means that total purchasing power is falling too low. Therefore we should at once increase expenditure We should give people more money and not less, to spend."

The Tory Party was committed to a similar view; but such was the confusion created by Keynes' theories that neither Party recognised that this is a policy of the crudest inflation. So at every general election in the post-war years they continued to declare their opposition to inflation. Both parties pledged themselves to maintain "full employment", defined in the Labour Party's 1945 General Election programme as "Jobs for All".

In the history of capitalism, as Marx had explained, periods of good trade and low unemployment alternate with periods of bad trade and high unemployment. One such period of low unemployment occurred in the years immediately following the second world war (helped by work on making good war damage); but Labour and Tory Governments both claimed this to be evidence of their success in "managing the economy". From 1955 onwards, however, unemployment has been on a sharp upward trend, each peak of unemployment rising to a higher level — to 747,000 in 1963, to above a million under the Heath Government in 1972, and to 1,500,000 in 1976 under Labour Government, and to over 1,600,000 in July 1977. This was capitalism operating in its normal way; but it led many who had wrongly believed that Keynesian techniques would abolish unemployment to reach the false opposite conclusion: that it was those techniques that had been the cause of unemployment. The Times, 13 February 1976, told its readers that "unemployment ... will decline as fast and as soon as we all forget Keynes".

But if Keynesian policies did nothing for unemployment, their effect on prices was that by 1977 the general level was ten times what it had been in 1938, and was rising fast.

Inflation is caused by governments going on year after year printing and putting into circulation hundreds of millions of pounds of additional paper money.

Wherever and whenever currency has been issued in excess, the price level has risen; and wherever and whenever currency has been restricted, prices have stabilised or fallen. In the period 1920-23, the printing presses of the German central bank were busy day and night pouring out notes, and prices were rocketing upwards. In Britain in the same three year period the Government had decided to halt inflation; the note issue was restricted and prices were falling fast.

Inflation is not the only factor affecting prices. In Britain, in the 90 years before 1914 when there was no inflation (the price level in 1914 being below that of 1820), prices rose moderately in trade booms and fell again in periods of bad trade, a process also explained by Marx.

The reason there was no inflation in Britain in the century before 1914, was that through the operation of the gold standard the note issue was controlled. Beyond a fixed low limit the Bank of England could not issue additional notes without adding an equivalent amount of gold to the reserve in its vaults. Also the notes, by law, were freely convertible into a fixed amount of gold — one pound or a sovereign being fixed at about a quarter of an ounce of gold. Gold coins and Bank of England notes both circulated; but because of legally enforced convertibility a Bank of England note "was as good as gold", and the combined circulation of notes and gold coins was equivalent to the circulation of a total amount of gold.

Marx showed that if that total amount of gold is replaced by inconvertible paper money, and if the amount of that paper money is then issued in excess, prices are pushed up accordingly.

"If the quantity of paper money issued is, for instance, double what it ought to be, then in actual fact one pound has become the money name of about one-eighth of an ounce of gold instead of about one quarter of an ounce The values previously expressed by the price £1 94 will now be expressed by the price £2" (Capital, Vol 1. Allen & Unwin Edition, p. 108).

Governments since 1938 have followed the policy of continually increasing the amount of currency in circulation, from under £500 million in 1938 to over £7,000 million in 1977, an increase far beyond any increase that would have been necessary because of the expansion of total production and trade. In 1976 and 1977 when the Government claimed that its "wages and incomes policy" would curb inflation the flood of additional paper money went on without interruption.

The man, more than any other, who was responsible for abandoning the nineteenth-century policy of controlling the amount of paper money was J. M. Keynes, who declared that it was no longer necessary "to watch and to control the creation of currency".

So for 40 years the major British political parties and the trade unions have been misled by the Keynesian policy of inflation into believing that capitalism could be rid of unemployment and trade depressions. It failed as it was bound to do with the market conditions and 'free' labour conditions of the western world.

Marx showed, and subsequent events have confirmed his analysis of capitalism's economic laws, that, arising from capitalism's inescapable anarchy of production, its progression is the cycle of moderate expansion of production and sales, then boom, then crisis, then depression. But just as there is no Keynesian device which will secure conditions of permanent boom, so there is no such thing as a permanent depression or "collapse of capitalism". (In the middle of "The Great Depression" Frederick Engels, three years after the death of Marx, did temporarily hold that Marx's cycle had ceased to operate and put forward a theory of "Permanent Depression"; but events soon showed this to be wrong and he returned to Marx's view — Preface to Capital 1886.)

In a depression, with bankruptcies which remove competitors, stocks of unsold goods disposed of, wages restrained by unemployment, and raw material prices and interest rates forced down, sooner or later conditions return restoring prospects of making a profit and capitalism expands again: but only to repeat the cycle. There is, however, one kind of 'collapse' that can occur, a collapse of the currency if the excess issue is expanded to the point where the currency as Marx put it "falls into general disrepute", and nobody wants to hold or receive paper money.

Although he only half understood the problem, such a situation was foretold by Herman Cahn in his *Collapse of Capitalism* published in 1919. What he foretold as inevitable, like an "Act of Nature", was that "within a few years" (or within a year if the war continued), there would be collapse and "social chaos"; out of which, though the workers were not prepared for it, Socialism would arise.

A currency collapse was at that time on the way in the great German inflation (by contrast the British Government had decided in that year to halt it). By December 1923 inflation in Germany had reached fantastic proportions and unemployment had risen to 30 per cent of workers registered as unemployed, an unknown number not registered, and 42 per cent on short time. There was indeed "social chaos" while a new currency was issued and conditions got back to normal. But chaos does not produce Socialism. In Germany it helped to prepare the way for the rise to power of the Nazi Party under Hitler.

The situation in Britain in 1977 is that, although Keynesian inflation has lost many of its adherents, the Keynesians have not given up the struggle. Under the name of 'reflation' it is still being pushed by the T.U.C., by some professional economists, by Labour Party leaders and by some of the Tories and Liberals. (Most of the 'Left-wing' organisations are all for it.) If the inflationists have their way they could produce a currency collapse here. The dilemma of all parties is that if they abandon the Keynesian belief that unemployment and depression can be eliminated under capitalism, what can they do except face the alternative — fearful for them — of getting rid of capitalism?

Some politicians and economists are now urging a return to the nineteenth century gold standard in order to get rid of inflation.

It only needs to add that getting rid of inflation is not the answer. Capitalism without inflation, as in the nineteenth century, no more solves working class problems than does capitalism with inflation, as in the years since the end of the second world war.

What Socialism means

SOCIALISM is the only system within which the problems which now face workers can be solved; but what will it be like? Socialism is a system in which the means for producing and distributing wealth will be owned by society as a whole. Under capitalism the land, factories, offices, mines, railways and other instruments of production and distribution are monopolised by a section of society only, who thus form a privileged class. Socialism will end this, for, with the means of life owned in common by the entire community, it will be a classless society in which the exploitation and oppression of man by man will have been abolished. All human beings will be social equals, freely able to co-operate in running social affairs.

Drawing up a detailed blueprint for Socialism is premature, since the exact forms will depend upon the technical conditions and preferences of those who set up and live in Socialism; but we can broadly define the essential features of Socialism.

Socialism can only be democratic. At one time Socialism was known also as 'social democracy', a phrase which shows well that democratic control would extend to all aspects of social affairs, including the production and distribution of wealth. There is an old socialist slogan which speaks of 'government over people' giving way 'to the administration of things'; meaning that the public power of coercion, and the government which operates it will have no place in Socialism. The State, which is an organisation composed of soldiers, policemen, judges and gaolers charged with enforcing the laws, is only needed in class society for in such societies there is no community of interest, only class conflict. The purpose of government is to maintain law and order in the interests of the dominant class. It is in fact an instrument of class oppression. In Socialism there will be no classes and no built-in class conflicts: everybody will have the same basic social interest. There will be genuine social harmony and community of interest. In these circumstances there is no need for any coercive machine to govern or rule over people. The phrase 'socialist government' is a contradiction in terms. Where there is Socialism there is no government and where there is government there is no Socialism.

Those who wrongly assume that government and administration are one and the same will have some difficulty in imagining a society without government. A society without administration would indeed be impossible since 'society' implies that human beings organise themselves to provide for their needs. But a society without government is both possible and desirable. Socialism will in fact mean the extension of democratic administration to all aspects of social life on the basis of the common ownership of the means of production and distribution. There will be administrative centres which will be clearing-houses for settling social affairs by majority decision.

But will not the administrators become the new ruling class? Democratic organisation does indeed involve the delegation of functions to groups and individuals. Such people will be charged by the community with organising necessary social functions. They will be chosen by the community and will be answerable to it. Those who perform the administrative functions in Socialism would be in no position to dominate. They will not be regarded as superior persons, as tends to be the case today, but as social equals doing an essential job. Nor will they have at their command armies and policemen to enforce their will. There will be no opportunity for bribery and corruption since everybody, including those in administrative jobs, will have free access to the stock of wealth set aside for individual consumption. The material conditions for the rise of a new ruling class would not exist.

The purpose of socialist production will be simply and solely to satisfy human needs. Under present arrangements production is for the market with a view to profit. This will be replaced by production solely and directly for use. The production and distribution of sufficient wealth to meet the needs of the socialist community as individuals and as a community will be an administrative and organisational problem. It will be no small problem but the tools for solving it have already been created by capitalism.

Capitalism has developed technology and social productivity to the point where plenty for all can be produced. A society of abundance has long been technically possible and it is this that is the material basis for Socialism. Capitalism, because it is a class society with production geared to profit-making rather than meeting human needs, cannot make full use of the world-wide productive system it has built up over the past two hundred or so years. Socialism, making full use of the developed methods of production, will alter the purpose of production. Men and women will be producing wealth solely to meet their needs, and not for the

profit of a privileged few.

Using techniques for predicting social wants (at present prostituted to the service of capital), a socialist society can work out how much and what sort of products and services will be needed over a given period. Men and women will be free to discuss what they would like to be produced. So with social research and after democratic discussion an estimate of what is needed can be made. The next problem is to arrange for these amounts to be produced. Capitalism, with its modern computing machines and input-output analysis, has developed the techniques which a socialist society can use.

When the wealth has been produced, apart from that needed to renew and expand the means of production, all will freely take what they feel they need to live and enjoy life. This is what we mean by 'free access'. There will be no buying and selling, and hence no need for money. What communities and individuals want does not vary greatly except over long periods, and it will be a simple administrative task to see that the stores are well-stocked with what people need. If any shortages develop they will not last long. Planned reserves will be held as a safeguard against unforeseen natural disasters.

'From each according to his ability, to each according to his need' is another long-standing socialist principle. It means what it says: that men and women will freely take part in social production to the best of their abilities, and freely take from the fruits of their common labour whatever they need.

Confronted for the first time with this proposal for free distribution according to need, many people are sceptical. What about the lazy man? Or the greedy man? Who will do the dirty work? What will be the incentive to work? These are objections socialists hear time and time again. These are perhaps understandable reactions to what seems, to those who have never thought about it, a startling proposition. As a matter of fact, behind these objections is a carefully cultivated popular prejudice as to what human nature is. We dealt with this earlier in the section on human nature. Suffice it to say here that biological and social science and anthropological research conclusively show that so-called human nature is not a barrier to the establishment of Socialism.

Work, or the expenditure of energy, is both a biological and a social must for human beings. They must work to use up the energy generated by eating food. They must work also to provide the food, clothing and shelter they need to live. So in any society, be it feudal, capitalist or socialist, men and women must work. The point at issue is how that work should be organised. A very strong argument against capitalism is that it reduces so central a human activity as work to the drudgery it is for most people, instead of allowing it to provide the pleasure it could, and would in a socialist society.

To suggest that work could be pleasant often raises a laugh; but this only shows how much capitalism has degraded human life. Most, but certainly not all work under capitalism is done in the service of an employer so that people almost without thinking identify work with employment. Working for an employer is always degrading, often boring and unpleasant and sometimes unhealthy and dangerous. But even under capitalism not all work, as we have defined it, is done in the course of employment. Men and women are working when they clean their cars, dig their gardens, or pursue their hobbies and enjoy themselves at the same time. So close is the misleading association of work with employment that many would not even regard such activities as work. They think that anything that is pleasant cannot by definition be work!

There is no reason at all why the work of producing and distributing useful things cannot be as enjoyable as are leisure-time activities today. The physical conditions under which work is done can be vastly improved. So can the relationships between people at work. Human beings, as free and equal members of a socialist community, will no longer have to sell their mental and physical energies to an employer for a wage or salary. The degrading wages system will be abolished so that there will be no such thing as employment. Instead work will be done by free men and women co-operating and controlling their conditions of work, getting enjoyment from creating things and doing socially useful tasks.

In a socialist society there will be no social stigma attaching to any kind of work. Nor will there be pressures, as exist at present (because they are cheap and therefore profitable to the capitalists) to continue industrial processes which are harmful or dangerous to those engaged in them. In any event, with human needs and enjoyment as the guiding principle, there will be no need for anybody to be tied to the same job continuously.

The opportunities for men and women to develop and exercise their talents and to enjoy doing so will be immense.

Finally, Socialism must be world-wide because the productive system which capitalism has built up and which a socialist society will take over is already international. There will be no frontiers and people will be free to travel over the whole earth. Socialism will mean an end to all national oppression - and, indeed, in its current political sense to all 'nations' — and to discriminations on the grounds of race and sex. All the people of the world, wherever they live, whatever their skin colour, whatever language they speak, really will be members of one vast human family. Socialism will at last realise the ags-old dream of the Brotherhood of Man.

THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN, which is the only party in this country that stands for Socialism, was formed on 12 June 1904 by a hundred or so members and former members of the Social Democratic Federation who were dissatisfied with the policy and structure of that party.

The SDF had been formed in 1884 as a professed Marxist organisation, although Engels who was living in London at the time would have nothing to do with it. At that time the writings of Marx, Engels and other socialist pioneers were hardly known in the English-speaking countries, except to the few who knew foreign languages. The SDF, however, did have the merit of popularising in Britain the ideas and works of Marx. This was later to bear fruit in demands for an uncompromising, democratically organised socialist party in place of the reformist and undemocratic SDF.

The SDF spent much of its time campaigning for reforms that were supposed to improve working class conditions. H. M. Hyndman, who played the major role in setting up the party, seemed to regard it as his personal possession and reacted to any criticism in a haughty and autocratic manner. The party journal Justice was owned by a private group over which the members had no control.

The opportunism and arrogance of Hyndman had already led to a break-away in 1884 when a number of members, including William Morris and Eleanor Marx, set up the Socialist League which however soon unfortunately ceased to be of use when it was dominated by the anarchists.

A second revolt led to the formation in 1903 of the Socialist Labour Party, copying the American organisation of that name. At first, along with a programme of 'immediate demands', the SLP declared its object to be the conquest of political power but soon, under the influence of its American parent it subordinated political to industrial action.

Another revolt against the Hyndman group's dominance of the SDF was organised by men and women who had a much firmer grasp of Marxist political and economic theory. For their opposition to opportunism they were contemptuously called 'impossibilists'. At first they tried to use the machinery of the SDF to get the party to reform itself, but they came up against the Hyndman clique who were ready to resort to all kinds of undemocratic practices to maintain their control of the party. Conferences were packed, branches dissolved and members expelled.

Matters came to a head at the 1904 Conference held in Burnley at the beginning of April. At the Conference more expulsions took place. When the delegates of some of the London branches returned they held a special meeting to discuss the situation and approved a statement which, among other things, urged the following:

'The adoption of an uncompromising attitude which admits of no arrangements with any section of the capitalist party; nor permits any compromise with any individual or party not recognising the class war as a basic principle, and not prepared to work for the overthrow of the present, capitalist system. Opposition to all who are not openly and avowedly working for the realisation of Social Democracy. A remodelled organisation, wherein the Executive shall be mainly an administrative body, the policy and tactics to be determined and controlled by the entire organisation. The Party Organ to be owned, controlled and run by the Party. The individual member to have the right to claim protection at the whole organisation against tyrannical decisions.'

On 12 June most of those who signed this leaflet together with a few others founded the Socialist Party of Great Britain.

The constitution of the Socialist Party was formed in such a manner that what had happened in the SDF would be impossible. The Executive Committee, elected by the whole of the membership, was to run the day-to-day affairs of the party in accordance with the policy laid down at Conferences and was required to report to the membership twice a year. All its meetings were to be open not only to members but also to non-members. The party journal the Socialist Standard, which first appeared in September 1904 and monthly ever since, is under party control through the Executive Committee. An elaborate appeals procedure — first to the Conference or Delegate Meeting and then to a poll of all the members — was written into the rule-book to protect any member charged with activities

warranting expulsion.

The rule-book of the Socialist Party lays down a thoroughly democratic procedure for the conduct of party affairs. Control of policy is in the hands of the members; there are no leaders and never have been. Democratic procedure has been maintained throughout the party's existence and is a practical refutation of those who argue that all organisations must degenerate into bureaucratic rule. In fact a democratic structure without leaders is the necessary form of any socialist party.

At its formation the members of the Socialist Party of Great Britain adopted an Object and Declaration of Principles which, without the need for any change, has remained the basis of membership of the party. Within that framework the party has worked consistently to make socialist principles known and to expose the many erroneous and dangerous theories that have attracted support among the workers.

Conclusion

THE SOCIALIST PARTY has a record of being consistently correct on a number of important issues over its seventy or so years of activity. We warned about the dangers of advocating reforms long before the shameful collapse of European Social Democracy in the first world war. We said in 1918 that the Bolsheviks could not set up Socialism in Russia, and it was we who in this country pioneered the view that Russia was developing State capitalism. We predicted the inevitable failure of Labour governments both as a way to Socialism and as a means of improving workers' living standards. From the start we realised that nationalisation was no solution to the workers' problems. We have always exposed the false and divisive nature of nationalism, racism and religion. In two world wars we declared and kept an attitude of socialist opposition.

The Socialist Party has also made its own contributions to socialist theory, in the light of further developments, going beyond some of the theories of socialist pioneers like Marx and Engels. We set out below a number of these contributions:

1. Solving the Reform or Revolution dilemma, by declaring that a socialist party should not advocate reforms of capitalism and by recognising that political democracy can be used for revolutionary ends (see *Gradualism and revolution*, p. 25).
2. Realisation of the world-wide (rather than international character of Socialism. Socialism can only be a united world community without frontiers and not the federation of countries suggested by the word 'international'
3. Recognition that there is no need for a 'transition period' between capitalism and Socialism. The enormous increases in social productivity since the days of Marx and Engels have made superfluous a period, such as they envisaged, in which the productive forces would be developed under State control and in which consumption would have to be rationed. Socialism can be established as soon as a majority of workers want it, with free access.
4. Rejection of any further progressive role for nationalism after capitalism became the dominant world system towards the end of the last century. Industrialisation under national State capitalism is neither necessary nor economically progressive (see *Socialism and the less developed countries*, p. 61).
5. For the same reason, rejection of the idea of "progressive wars". Socialists oppose all wars, refusing to take sides.
6. Exposures of leadership as a capitalist political principle, a feature of the revolutions that brought them to power and utterly alien to the socialist revolution. The socialist revolution necessarily involves the active and conscious participation of the great majority of workers thus excluding the role of leadership.
7. Advocating and practising that a socialist party should be organised as an open democratic party, with no leaders and no secret meetings, thus foreshadowing the society it seeks to establish.
8. Recognition that capitalism will not collapse of its own accord, but will continue from crisis to crisis until the working class consciously organise to abolish it.

We have refused to compromise our socialist principles by uniting with reformist organisations, and have firmly insisted that the only road to Socialism is through democratic organisation and political action based on class-conscious understanding.

[The Socialist Party Homepage](#)

Further Reading

[The Rise of Hitler: A Warning to the Workers](#) Socialist Standard 1933(.pdf)
[The Origin and Growth of Nazism](#) Socialist Standard 1943 (.pdf)

[The Dictatorship of the Proletariat in Marx and Engels](#) by Hal Draper

[Beveridge Re-Organises Poverty](#) 1943 (.pdf)
[Family Allowances - a socialist analysis](#) 1943 (.pdf)

[Nationalisation or Socialism](#) 1946 (.pdf)

[Trade Unions](#) SPGB pamphlet, 1980 (.pdf)
[Syndicalism - its origin and weakness](#) Socialist Standard 1986 (pdf)

[Is Labour Government the Way to Socialism?](#) SPGB pamphlet 1946 (.pdf)
[Labour Government or Socialism?](#) SPGB pamphlet 1968 (.pdf)
[Should the Working Class Support the Liberal Party?](#) SPGB pamphlet 1911 (.pdf)

[The Dead Russians Society](#)

[Population and Resources](#) SPGB educational document
[What Causes Famines?](#) and [How Many Die of Famine?](#) Socialist Standard 1985 (.pdf)
[Enough For All](#) Socialist Standard 2005

[Are We Prisoners of Our Genes?](#)
[Some Notes on Man's Social Nature](#) SPGB education document
[After Bulger](#) Socialist Standard 1994 (.pdf)

[Women and Socialism](#) SPGB Pamphlet 1986 (.pdf)
[Suffragette Humbug](#) Socialist Standard 1908 (.pdf)
[Up In Arms](#) Socialist Standard 1971 (.pdf)

[Marx versus Keynes](#) SPGB education document
[The Marxian Theory of Inflation](#) SPGB education document

[Socialist Standard June 2004](#)

The Socialist Party of Great Britain - Politics, Economics and Britain's Oldest Socialist Party by David Perrin, reviewed [here](#) in the Socialist Standard June 2000

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