

THE WORKING CLASS

No student of society will deny the existence of social groups; this is sufficiently indicated by the variety of institutions of a commercial or a cultural character. But the existence of a social *class* is a different matter, and, in fact, the multiplicity of groups is taken by many theorists as a decisive argument against the class theory of society, against the recognition of a struggle between two classes, one dominant and the other rising, as society's outstanding feature.

Now it is obvious that society may be divided in all sorts of ways, but such divisions may be of very small social importance. Any function or acquirement whatever might be taken as the basis for division. For example, we speak of the "educated classes," but it must be admitted that there is no social unity among the persons commonly called "educated" and that they mix in various ways with the "uneducated." The commonest division is according to income or property; the rich are contrasted with the poor. Now, of course, riches and poverty have considerable relevance to the state of society, but to make that division the basis of social theory or practice is to overlook the fundamental fact of *production*, and, poverty being a relative term, to open the way to mere wrangling. Such divisions also over-emphasise the characteristics and the fortunes of individuals. Social theory does not begin until we recognise that society is not a resultant of individual "wills," or a field in which goodwill and illwill are exercised, but is a thing with characters of its own, acting in specific ways under specific conditions.

The contrast between the two outlooks is illustrated in the main views current in the Labour movement about the workers. According to the revolutionary view the workers are regarded as the best class in society—not best because of their breeding or of their peculiar "personalities," but best from their social position; nearest to social realities, most "socially necessary," and forming the material and the motive-force for a new society. On the other view they are regarded as the worst class in society, as requiring to be improved and uplifted, and so not as a class in the sense of a unified and active social force, but as a number of unfortunate individuals. This is the outlook of the "reformist" section of the Labour movement, and it implies a mere tinkering with social problems, as against a radical treatment of them.

What is required if social problems are to be dealt with in their own character (and this is recognised by the militant workers in the course of, and, indeed, as essential to, their activities) is the complete rejection of the politic of *philanthropy*. This is a politic of brainlessness, of "good intentions" taking the place of theory; though it may certainly be said that wealthy "philanthropists," and the press in praising them and upholding an ethic of altruism, know very well what they are about. We read not long ago of the death of Beit, the "millionaire philanthropist"; his millions show where his philanthropy began. So the posthumous benefactions of the financier Rhodes prove his solidarity to the last with

the system that had upheld him and his desire to perpetuate the conditions under which such philanthropies flourish. Again, the benefits bestowed by Carnegie on Scottish students may, among people who are taken in by altruistic talk, withdraw attention from the brutalities inflicted on Pittsburg workers. But the workers, who have learned to be specially suspicious of those who offer them gifts, may claim to have come much nearer to a social theory than their warm-hearted helpers and improvers.

The confusions of the "social worker" are apparent in the various schemes for providing work for the unemployed. Such schemes are remarkable as carrying the suggestion that a man who gets "relief work" to do is still somehow unemployed. His work is not quite work, and what he receives is not quite wages, and thus the payment to him of less than the regular wage, or, indeed, of any sort of pittance that will keep him alive, is justified. Actually this is nothing but wage reduction. And the social objective of such schemes, even if their well-intentioned agents are ignorant of the fact, is, while reducing discontent, to prevent the organisation of the unemployed and the establishment of solidarity between them and the employed.

The recognition of working-class solidarity and the part it plays in society is, of course, very far from the understanding of charitable bodies which want to "do well" and help those in need. But, in order to do well, it is necessary to take account of economic realities, of the conditions of production and not merely of the resulting distribution. It is necessary to have enough theory to see that "charity," giving a particular man what he lacks, may not improve social conditions in general. And it is desirable to have at least considered the class theory of society, and not to take for granted a solidarist doctrine according to which society is constituted by all (exploiter and exploited alike) standing together for mutual aid. This doctrine is opposed to *class* solidarity, and, until those who assume it have shown the class theory to be false, they do not escape the imputation of working to break up the solidarity of the exploited class.

The same considerations apply to schemes of "vocational guidance." Here the attempt is made to place individuals in suitable occupations, without reference even to the continued availability of such work but, more important, to the fact that these individuals will be working for employers; or, at least, it is considered sufficient to assume that what benefits employers will benefit employed, and *vice versa*. The test of success in guidance is that the individual is satisfied with his work, and the question is not raised whether workers should be satisfied with the conditions of their employment—or, again, whether an individual's satisfaction may not be gained at the expense of his fellow-workers. The fundamental assumption that there is a certain job to which a person is fitted is, under conditions of modern industry, simply a basis for subjecting workers to a *direction*

which must subserve the wants of the controllers of industry, the possessing class.

The test of successful guidance, from the employers' point of view and, it is presumed, from that of "society," is increased efficiency. But, where there are employers and employed, increased efficiency, by reducing costs of production, increases profits; and, since each unit of labour is more productive, there is less demand for labour, and, consequently, wages are lowered and unemployment increased. These consequences must follow so long as there is a competitive price for labour, i.e., so long as there are employers and employed. In practice, then, "guidance" discovers who can be most speeded up, who is most amenable to suggestion and most easily "satisfied." In theory, it assumes social unity, without having carried out any social investigation to back it up.

The same general points may be made in regard to a great amount of theorising within the Labour movement. The main issue is whether we should start from the working of actual social forces, in which case we see that "helpfulness" is in the interest of the dominant forces, that it works for the prevention of discontent and, in general, for the weakening of the suppressed elements, or from the notion that some scheme or other would be "worth trying," that, so far from our action being limited by social conditions, social conditions depend upon our choice. It is against this kind of view that Marxists are inveighing, when they reject ethics. But actually the doctrine of goodwill is no more acceptable as ethics than it is as politics or social theory.

This applies to the campaign for socialisation, in which the class issues are largely neglected and the solidarist factor of "goodwill" allowed to creep in. Socialisation, in the first place, is put forward as a scheme, not as a programme of action; it is a result to be arrived at, and not an activity to be undertaken under existing conditions. And, appearing thus as something to be done for the workers and not by them, it has to be classed with philanthropic schemes in general. Like them, it implies that existing social conditions admit of the necessary "adjustments"; i.e., it neglects the dominance, the political power, of the possessing class. Moreover, it is a distributive or consumers' theory—a theory of *sharing*. In effect, it contemplates the realisation of Socialism within capitalism; it assumes the solid society which can bring about "desirable" ends; it neglects the class war, recognition of which is essential to the recognition of the workers as a class, of their organisation as the proletariat.

Socialisation appears, then, as an example of social philanthropy, and, like all proposals of this sort, it is of no effect in improving the position of the workers (i.e., their fighting position, but equally their "lot"), but rather makes it worse. It is of such socialisers that Marx and Engels say in "The Communist Manifesto":—"Historical action is to yield to their personal inventive action, historically created conditions of emancipation to phantastic ones, and the gradual, spontaneous class organisation of the proletariat to an organisation of society specially contrived by these inventors. Future history resolves itself, in their eyes, into their propa-

ganda and the practical carrying out of their social plans.

"In the formation of their plans they are conscious of caring chiefly for the interests of the working-class, as being the most suffering class. Only from the point of view of being the most suffering class does the proletariat exist for them."

Proletarian organisations have certainly developed considerably since 1848, and the advocates of socialisation take some account of them; but in its relation to the actual movement of society, socialisation is as Utopian as the systems that Marx and Engels criticised.

In order to understand the conception of the workers as a class, we have to consider history, i.e., the nature and development of society. Indeed, the main proof of the existence of the working-class is the working-class movement; the activities, political and economic (though the latter, since they affect the state of society, are really political also), entered on by the workers, the organisations they have formed (unions, councils, internationals, Labour parties—even though these bodies have not done what many workers expected of them, and have been used, by Labour misleaders, to foster political illusions), the rights they have won (of organising, striking, demonstrating, though these rights have continually to be fought for), their appearance as a political power—and, to complete the picture, the working-class theory (Marxism) which has been developed, and its success in giving an account of social relations and in predicting or, as Marx would have it, in *leading* social actions. For we cannot, on the Marxist view, limit ourselves to mere understanding of things; true theory is that in the light of which we transform things, and which we arrive at only by being active.

For Marxism, society is *organisation for production*; or, as we might say, it is co-operation. At different periods different forms of production are established, with definite relations, economic, juridical, etc., between productive forces. When developing forces conflict with established forms, we have a revolutionary period. But there is constant conflict in society so long as property (in each epoch some special form of property being characteristic of the dominant class) exists. The State exists to keep this conflict in check; it is the organ of the dominant force, that which is interested in maintaining the established form. Thus, as against the idealist theory of the State as representing the interests of society at large, Marxism, denying that there are any such interests while property and classes exist, regards the State as existing through struggle and for the purpose of repression; it is an organ of exploiters against exploited.

On this theory, the working-class or proletariat is produced by capitalist (industrial) society. It has historical predecessors—slaves, serfs, journeymen; but it occupies a special economico-juridical position, it has a definite status, viz., that it has to sell, and has nothing to sell but, its labour-power. This position leads on to class-consciousness and solidarity. The workers are brought together in the factory, and enabled to recognise the community of their interests and their collective

strength; and being expropriated, being reduced to the basic social condition of *producers*, they can (allowing for the limitations imposed by their exploitation, and the divisions among them which the exploiters try to foster) have truly social and co-operative relations with one another. In particular, they are led to envisage the possibility of a society of producers and the abolition of property. They develop a producers' ethic, as against the consumers' ethic of the possessing class and its philanthropic supporters. But this is brought out only in the struggle against bourgeois forces; demands for a better way of living may be framed to begin with in the consumer's fashion, but the workers' function as producers and the solidarity engendered in the fight lead them to the revolutionary point of view.

The special characteristic of the proletarian revolution is that it abolishes the last class-division and makes possible for the first time a truly social state, in which co-operative motives dominate and acquisitive motives are broken up. But it is precisely the development of industry that makes this revolution possible, makes possible, that is, not a mere rising of the oppressed, which can be beaten down, or a vain experiment which cannot last (like those which have furnished ammunition to "objectors to Socialism," and which were already derided in "The Communist Manifesto"), but a thoroughly planned economy, to replace competitive anarchy and brigandage.

The possibility of this planned economy is shown in the present condition of affairs in Russia. In fact, it is an outstanding proof of the existence of the workers as a class that they, using working-class theory, can actually run society. Those who have accepted the view that everyone has his "station in life" to which he must keep and the duties of which he must perform (i.e., the hierarchical or theological conception of society), cannot believe that this is possible; those who are interested in opposing revolution spread all sorts of lies about Russia, with the intention of showing that it is governed not by a class but by a tyrannical clique, and that their rule is not successful, that they cannot build or plan. These pretences become daily more difficult to keep up, and at any time proletarian theory would have shown how the tales of tyranny should be taken.

The dictatorship of the proletariat, according to Lenin (*The State and Revolution*), "has to be a State that is democratic but only for the proletariat and the propertyless, a State that is dictatorial but only against the bourgeoisie." This rule of the proletariat, in alliance with the peasantry, occupies, as Stalin puts it (*Theory and Practice of Leninism*), "an entire historical period filled with civil and foreign wars, a period of economic organisation and reconstruction, of offensives and retreats, victories and defeats. This historical epoch is necessary not only to create the economic and cultural conditions for the complete victory of Socialism; but also to allow the proletariat, first, to educate itself and become a force capable of governing the country, and, secondly, to re-educate and transform the petty bourgeois strata in such a way as to secure the organisation of Socialist production." That this education and organisa-

tion have gone a considerable distance, that the development of a characteristically proletarian economy is well on the way, is proved by the latest achievements of Soviet industry and agriculture. That the revolution led by the Bolsheviks was never the tyranny it is said to be, is proved by its success, by the way the masses reacted against the really tyrannical "Whites." Fairy-tales, like that of Mr. Thomas Walsh, that "the great Russian revolution was engineered by 240 Bolsheviks in St. Petersburg who by terror were able to rule a nation of 140 millions," are put out of court by their own ridiculousness, though Mr. Walsh's sycophantic attitude to the employing class ("Contrast the lot of men in work with that of the unemployed and you will understand why employers can be more popular with the workers than the Communists"; *Open Letter to Professor Anderson*, p. 11) would in any case make us discount his dicta on social matters.

Corresponding to the absurd talk about Russia is the absurd talk about "unemployables." The same type of theologically-minded person, who cannot believe that the workers are capable of ruling, also cannot believe that any one could be "genuinely" unemployed, that the righteous could be forsaken, etc.—an attitude, incidentally, which implies a conception of cosmic beggary, of humanity as a mass of dole-drawers in a Universal Bureau. But again historical facts force the opposite conclusion, exhibit it, as in the case of Russia, in terms of *mass-struggles* which are incompatible with "idleness." This type of historical proof holds also against Proudhon, who imagined that the revolution was peacefully assured when some government admitted "the right to work"—which, as he saw, was a denial of the rights of property. Such admissions from such sources are valueless, except as a demonstration of the fraudulent tactics of governments.

The theory of the social priority of the class war, the struggle of the proletariat against capitalist dominance, is opposed alike from the solidarist or "monistic" point of view and from the "pluralistic" point of view in which society is regarded as a multiplicity of inter-related groups. There is certainly no limit to the number of groups we can discover, and Marxism, of course, admits that there are all sorts of remnants of older classes, forces and forms of production, and various transitional elements. But they are socially weak; they acquire force only in so far as they can ally themselves with one or other of the main contestants for power; and they fluctuate between the two. At one time the petty bourgeoisie (small farmers, shopkeepers, etc.) may be fulminating against "extremists," at another time obstructing the policy of big business. But they can have no independent line. According to the theory of Lenin, conditions are most favourable for the working-class, when they have secured the neutrality or the support of the intermediate sections of society. But the social crisis tends to bring this about by increasing the solidarity of the workers and the "contradictions" (i.e., incapacities) of capitalism, though the desperate attempts to cover up these "contradictions," by means of War,

Fascism and "White Terror," may for a time enlist the support of such sections.

It is clear, for example, that the "educated" class has no independent line, no solution for social problems; that it is not *politically* educated. It fluctuates between the other classes, though in the main it is subservient to the ruling class. Yet education, understood as scholarship, is itself of a productive character, and, in so far as it is achieved, creates a bond between the educated and the proletariat. This bond will be strongest where the political leadership of the militant workers is accepted, and schemes of "betterment" will correspondingly drop out of the picture.

In this connection it may be pointed out that schemes of "University reform," by way of increased Labour representation on the governing body, and so forth, are, like the Workers' Educational Association, *philanthropic* in character, and are inimical both to scholarship and to working-class education, which consists of education in the struggle. University reform, from the workers' point of view, will come by way of the development of organisations of those who work in Universities, and of contact between them and other workers' organisations. It will not come through the bringing to bear of outside influences, so that the brand of education offered may be of the most generally acceptable character possible. Such schemes are really solidarist and commercialist, and are of no advantage to the working class.

We are thus brought back to the direct class issues and to the relation of the workers to the State. Solidarism denies that the State is the organ of a class, but in so doing it upholds the dominance of this central power over other powers and organisations. The workers have had to fight, and still have to fight, for rights of organisation, agitation and demonstration—a fact which is sufficient to prove the existence of a ruling class. When this is recognised, it will be seen that all activities or proposals of a solidarist character, all schemes of "class-collaboration" or social unity, are for the benefit of the ruling class and for the deception of the workers. This is particularly noticeable in the case of Arbitration, the *right to strike* being the clearest indication of the independent power of the workers, as contrasted with a state of subjection and servility.

Fascism, the open dictatorship of the propertied class, in its inception and even largely throughout its development uses the language of solidarism. It makes its appearance as a "Committee of Public Safety"; but its aim is clearly safety for capitalism. Thus the A.F.A. League babbles about "honesty," meaning thereby the maintenance of existing property relations; seeking to cover capitalist reality, and, in particular, the *failure* of capitalist economy, by means of empty precepts. So Fascist movements like the New Guard propose to defend "the constitution" against "extremists," propose, i.e., to attack the working-class in its fight against penury and oppression and for political rights. The illusion of constitutional equality and civic impartiality is also kept up by the press; in relation to which Stalin says (Theory and Practice of Leninism), "Within the

capitalist system there is and can be no true freedom of expression for the exploited, if only because the buildings, paper supplies and printing works necessary for the utilisation of this freedom are monopolised by the exploiters." And it is only an extension of this contention to say that "within the capitalist regime, there is and can be no real participation of the exploited masses in the administration of the country." Nevertheless, the agitation of the workers can bring them certain political rights, and it is when this degree of political power becomes dangerous to weakened capitalism that Fascist suppression (in the name of "the safety of the country") is resorted to.

With the opposition to the capitalist State is connected the workers' opposition to Nationalism (extolled by Fascists), their assertion of the international character of their class—which is but another example of the co-operation of *producers*, as against the divisions among acquisitive *consumers*, this again being one main reason why history is on the side of the workers. The acceptance by the Australian Labour Party of the "White Australia" policy (like its acceptance of Arbitration) shows that it is not a proletarian party. Official "Labour" parties, indeed, also operate against "extremists"; their function is to pacify and disarm the workers. When elected to office they carry on government according to the usual forms and with the regular apparatus of police, judiciary, etc.; in other words, they carry on *capitalist* government, they uphold existing property relations.

Orthodox "Labour," then, whether it is showing how it can govern or inventing Utopian schemes of "socialisation," is diverting the workers' movement and concealing the true character of the proletarian revolution, which arises from the position of the workers as a *productive force* in relation to the disintegrating capitalist form of production. Only working-class organisation, preparation to take over industry, to form a workers' State with real political activity for all workers, can prevent Fascism and war, and lead on to a classless society, exhibiting real solidarity. Such a society cannot exist until after the conquest of power and dictatorship of the proletariat. Thus the working-class is the coming society, and must, like the Sinn Fein movement, form its own organisations and regard the capitalists as invaders of its industry, exploiters of its production. And in the formation of a productive, and necessarily international, society, it is for the educated, the thinkers, the active investigators, to be on the side of the producers.

The working-class becomes organised through the operation of capitalist industry, but only because of its struggle against exploitation in that industry. Thus organised, it is the protagonist of social equality against *parasitism*, against hierarchy and privilege of every kind; and in its revolutionary struggle, exhibiting the "heroic values" of the producer, it is the one truly ethical force in existing society—the one force that can annihilate the decadent "values" of helpfulness, philanthropy and patronage.

—John Anderson.