

HOW NOT TO REAPPRAISE THE NEW LEFT ■

by Ken Coates

'In Hungary in **1956** Stalin's tanks blew apart the Left in the rest of the world. Old complacencies were shattered. . . .' So opens the half-title page introduction to David Widgery's compendium on *The Left in Britain*,¹ providing the first words one meets in a labour of **549** pages. Discriminating readers soon discover how appropriate it is that even the blurb is wrong. Stalin was safely dead, and the tanks were Khrushchev's. Khrushchev himself had already 'blown apart the left' six months earlier, with his liberating speech to the closed session of the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, which had, according to the brothers Medvedev, been the result of a purely personal initiative, launched at the end of the Congress, while the General Secretary temporarily held isolated power, before the new Central Committee had been convened to elect the other members of the leadership.² It is hardly accidental that this book opens with such a mistake: not only is the whole compilation slipshod to a remarkable degree, but this particular error is not the only one which arises from a desire to establish a special reading of the events in question. It is mainly for this reason that it is worthwhile to pay some attention to the work.

On the surface, David Widgery is concerned in a modest, if nonetheless brash, act of cultural imperialism, attempting to incorporate all of the **post-1956** British New Left under the hegemony of the International Socialists, a rather shrill, if also intellectually infertile, sectarian grouping, which did in fact play a largely recalcitrant role in stimulating the argument which is inadequately treated in his pages. Widgery is a whimsical fellow, and he annexes his mental territories with a certain good humour, so that his innumerable offences against the facts may not seem so important as they might have done if they had been the work of a serious historian.

The crudest of his aggressions are structural to his account: he never misses an opportunity to offer the final word to **the International Socialist** grouping, or to their energetic, if commonly shallow, guru, Tony Cliff. Accordingly, the first section, on the 'double exposure' of **Suze** and Hungary, culminates in an oration of Cliffs delivered in **1967**, ten years after the events recorded and statements anthologised in the rest of the chapter. The summation on the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament is made over to a **much** cleverer spokesman of the same faction, Michael

Kidron. Kidron's thoughts on the anti-nuclear movement culminate with the notion that 'Education in socialism has to become a first priority for the Campaign against the Bomb'. So ended that Campaign.

The third chapter, less inaccurate than the rest, is the sole property of Peter Sedgwick, perhaps the most interesting of the genuine New Left converts to the ranks of the grouping. Four more groups of articles follow, each liberally peppered with unrepresentative selections from the writings of the faithful. Then we are in 1968, where we wind up once again with a long and irrelevant interview with Tony Cliff, reprinted from an aptly named journal called *Idiot International*.³

Yet it is worthwhile to examine such a one-sided advocacy, even one so lamentably devoid of systematic thought as this, if only to point up some of its inadvertent lessons. But first, because this work will undoubtedly have a modest circulation, it is necessary to establish exactly how unreliable it is from a factual standpoint.

In Chapter One we instantly meet the editor's obsessions. We are told at once that in 1956 'The Trotskyist Left was operating within the Labour Party to little visible effect' although they and other leftists 'possessed a formidable organized working class base'. Small though they were, 'their membership was overwhelmingly of industrial workers'. The fact is that there were at that time, three Trotskyist groups noticed by David Widgery: the forerunners of the Socialist Labour League, the 'Socialist Review Group', which subsequently became International Socialism, and the Revolutionary Socialist League. The first of these was always extremely secretive about its membership, but it is quite certain that at the beginning of 1956 this numbered less than fifty on the most generous possible count: the second grouping had not many more than twenty members, while the last grouping could not yet count a dozen. By 1956, not only British, but European Trotskyism, was fatigued: an aging, beleaguered and faction-ridden force. It is doubtful if the English sections of the movement could have survived even a few years longer, had Khrushchev not helped them with his denunciation of Stalin. Widgery goes on to say that the theorists of these currents, 'Cliff from Palestine, Healy from Ireland, James from the West Indies' gave them 'an unorthodoxy which was to give... great strength'. James, of course, had long since repudiated orthodox trotskyism, but had no organised following. He was, however, a genuine and imaginative thinker of considerable interest.⁴ The others were never in any real sense theorists: while Cliff had produced a number of books, they contain little matter of originality and that is commonly trite as well as wong-headed.' Healy has never written anything worthy of note in his life. He is simply a brilliant, if somewhat brutal organiser.⁶ Having falsified the micro-history, Widgery then blunders into the world of major events.

A little further on, he tells us that **Kardelj**, the Yugoslav foreign secretary,

was imprisoned in the 'series of trials of many real or imagined **Titoites**' which set in from **1949**. Presumably we are expected to believe that President **Tito** put this Titoist in jail. Once he has garbled this large matter, our historian goes on to announce that Khrushchev's secret speech reached England via the *Manchester Guardian*. It did not. It was first published in the *Observer*, and only subsequently reprinted by the Guardian as a booklet. In the same spirit, he returns to the small world of **leftwing** personalia. These are no more accurately rendered. Len Wincott, the Invergordon mutineer, who was imprisoned by Stalin's officials, becomes, for no good reason, Winnicott. *The Reasoner* was on public sale, and could not be, as Widgery claims, an 'internal discussion bulletin' because the British Communists possessed no constitutional mechanism for distributing oppositional materials. Peter Fryer, a young man, could only be described as a 'lifelong communist' if one were prepared to limit his span to thirteen years. Saville taught at the University of Hull, not the WEA. Thompson was an extramural lecturer. Professor Brian Simon taught at Leicester, not Leeds. Don **Renton** did not lead a strong dissident focus in Nottingham, because he was an Edinburgh party official. The **1958** Kessingland Summer Camp was organized by NALSO, the Labour Party Student body, not the *New Left Review*, and it was not held under canvas. Michael Stewart was anything but a 'leftist' when he visited this gathering as opposition spokesman on education. No new translation of Trotsky's *Revolution Betrayed* appeared at the time in question, because there was no need for any such thing. The English Trotskyists took over the American edition from Pioneer Publishers. They did not have the resources to reprint a book of this length until a year after the maturing of the crisis in the communist party. Even then they published it under the original New York imprint. Mercifully, soon after this catalogue of errors, chapter one breaks into cannibalized excerpts, and these offer less scope for creative reporting.

But then we get Chapter Two. This reports the first Aldermaston March with 'the glares of the Trots marshalling well-drilled Young Socialist squaddies on the final day': but the Young Socialist organisation was not created until after that demonstration (and indeed, I remember representing NALSO, the Labour Student Organisation of which I became the secretary, at a subcommittee of the Party's National Executive, and arguing that it would be quite impossible to develop a youth organisation if it were not allowed sufficient autonomy to be able to support the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. Sarah Barker, the Party's arch-disciplinarian, took due note of our insistent nagging on this score).

When it comes to describing **the** struggle for unilateralism inside the Labour Party, Widgery's account is a total confusion. He has the leaders of the National Union of General and Municipal Workers recall their Conference in order to reverse their unilateralist vote before the unilateralist victory at the Party Conference, when what really happened

was that this folkloric bureaucratic adjustment took place during the following summer, in the year of Gaitskell's fight back, which also reversed the overall Party decision.

In describing, in travesty, the ideas of 'positive neutralism' put forward by the New Left, he mockingly cites the examples of 'Yugoslavia and Ghana, India and Algeria'. Leaving aside his earlier deference to C.L.R. James, who had the highest opinion of Nkrumah, Algeria at the time was a French colony, engaged in bitter war against colonialism, in which the International Socialists, for a long time, took the side of Messali Hadj, a one-time fellow-traveller of some Trotskyist currents in France, who played no active part whatever in the actual liberation. While many advocates of 'positive neutralism' gave active support to the efforts of the National Liberation Front of Algeria, which finally won the war against French colonialism, they do not escape reproach for their alleged support of 'politics of a religious water colour'. Peter Sedgwick subsequently echoes this somewhat chauvinist outburst by denouncing positive neutralism in another tirade in which he blithely speaks of 'the Chinese invasion of India' as 'undermining its viability'. What really undermined this viability was the persistent **intrigue** of the Central Intelligence Agency, the massacre of the Indonesian left,⁷ the fall of **Nkrumah**,⁸ and a whole succession of similarly disastrous reverses for the radical 'neutralist' forces. The **Sino-Indian** border conflict has been the subject of a major scholarly **study**,⁹ which throws a very different light upon it from that in which it was portrayed by the Western press, and which Sedgwick uncritically accepts.

A similar random list of mistakes about those matters with **which** I am familiar could be continued for many pages. Others would surely augment it. The Centre for Socialist Education was founded in 1965, not 1967. **Clarion**, the Labour Student journal, was not founded by me, but by the Oxford University Labour Club. Before I edited it, my predecessors had included Kenith Trodd, Dennis Potter, Stephen Hugh-Jones, and, if my memory serves me fairly, Brian Lapping. Tony Smith, subsequently of **24 Hours** on BBC television, also had a hand in it. The Institute for Workers' Control never abandoned the seminar structure of its conferences, and indeed, had to defend it against various 'leftist' groupings, including the International Socialists, who were bored by practical discussions and preferred to talk about 'consciousness' and other luminous abstractions. The **International Socialist Journal** was never 'influenced by the Unified Secretariat of the Fourth International', since it was always effectively controlled by Lelio Basso. While it is true that the journal published various articles by Ernest Mandel, it was in no fundamental sense responsive to his ideas, and he regarded it, somewhat impatiently, as a 'centrist' organ. John Daniels, the first editor of **Labour Review**, never taught in an extramural department. NALSO was not 'periodically **disaffiliated**'¹⁰ from the Labour Party, but survived unscathed until it was finally broken up after a **take-**

over by the Socialist Labour League. 'Walden, Price and **Hattersley**' had all left the organisation before the 'early sixties', and in fact it was dominated by the New Left from **1958** onwards. Michel Pablo was not arrested in Holland for 'running documents, money and weapons to Algeria', but on charges concerning alleged **forgery**.¹¹

If circumstantial detail is offered, it ought to be accurate. David Widgery is blessed with sublime **over-confidence** in a shockingly bad memory, and that is a handicap in a historian. Because its errors of fact, large and small, must be numbered in hundreds, this book is absolutely useless as a source of detailed information. That is why it is not only more interesting, but also infinitely more charitable, to concentrate upon the main themes, which he appears to think should dominate our consideration of his chosen period. This would be easier if such themes were more explicitly focused in the reprints he has chosen: but he never misses a chance to republish something flippant or amusing, so that even this task is more difficult to unravel than it should be.

Nonetheless, there is one fairly clear thesis which emerges with the choice of the events which bound the work. A book which begins in **1956** and ends in **1968**, and concerns **the** development of socialist and communist ideas, might have arched between the Twentieth Congress and the Prague Spring. But this one does not: it moves from the Hungarian revolution to the 'events' in France. Czechoslovakia is just mentioned: 'A liberalising leader's need to weaken the artistic intellectual bureaucracy was turned to advantage by the working class', we are told. In the same absurd paragraph, we discover: 'The Prague Spring. . . was, far more than the Hungarian Revolution, due to impetus from above. . . Although some of the impetus for the foundation of workers' councils was actually provided by Dubcek's own need to create a counterweight to the very rapid growth of organizations among the white-collared working-class, "anti-Soviet soviets" were once again pungently in the air'. Later on, in the chronology, we learn that: 'Dubcek spends a week in Moscow accused of right-wing revisionism before returning looking pale'. Under the heading 'reaction of the British left', the index points us to an untitled page of diary reminiscence of how London members of the International Socialists occupied themselves in demonstrations and leafletting during the day after the Soviet and Warsaw Pact invasion. And that is all we learn from David Widgery about Czechoslovakia.

Of course, in this reportage, we can see a clear application of the same standards of factual accuracy as are to be discovered elsewhere in the book. The 'artistic intellectual bureaucracy' was never more firmly linked to the Czechoslovak workers than during the Spring and Summer of **1968**.¹² The growth of workers' councils began in response to the economic agitation, based on solid technocratic motives, which accompanied the strategy of Ota Sik, who might have been a bureaucrat, but could scarcely be described

as an artist.

The Hungarian Revolution, very like the later Czech upsurge, was rather much a result of 'impetus from above', involving key party leaders like Imre Nagy, the agitation of Laso Rajk's 'widow', and the growth of the Petofi circle among communist youth, students (and later, intellectuals). Until the Party hierarchy had divided, political criticism of any kind was quite impossible in either case. Almost the only perception of these unflattering lines which is very likely on target, is that Dubcek returned from Moscow 'looking pale', and well he might. Equally well might he expect the concession of a degree of solidarity from David Widgery and his snide battalions, if only they were capable of nourishing, even for a moment, a non-factional thought.

But the silences of a book are often as important as its utterance. The truth is that Widgery does not really convince even himself that 'anti-Soviet soviets' were anywhere near the offing in Dubcek's Prague, and that is why Czechoslovakia scarcely figures in his story. His primary concern is the rehabilitation of what he understands by council communism, moving from the workers' councils of Budapest across to the student rebellion and factory occupations of those celebrated French 'events'.¹³ And it is this concern which is one-sided to the point of travesty, and therefore bound to bring its proponents to stalemate unless they enrich their social vision.

It was, of course, natural that the original soviet idea should re-emerge after the fall of Stalin, who amputated all remnants of direct democracy from the Russian political structure, substituting a fraudulent semi-parliamentary system based upon absurdly rigged 'elections' involving unanimous rates of mythical turn-out for lists of approved nominees who moved in a degree of unison only equalled in our country by the Tiller Girls, to an Assembly which had hardly greater political authority than the Windmill Theatre, and remained considerably less amusing. For all that, once Stalin was displaced as the impresario of this remarkable show, it was completely plain that there remained a vast body of scriptural justification for a return to pristine Soviet forms. Yet the soviet model, which had been embraced by communists all over the world, was never successfully repeated in any subsequent revolution. Eastern Europe achieved the changes in its social structure largely as a result of conquest, except in Yugoslavia and Albania, where it resulted from guerrilla struggle in a war of national independence from the German occupation. In postwar Czechoslovakia, the change could be held to have issued in part from a parliamentary victory, not unaffected by the results of conquest and liberation.

In the East and the 'third world', China's communists fought their way into the cities on the basis of their strength among armed peasants. Cuban communism grew out of the initiative of a handful of fearless adventurers.

Mozambique, Angola and Guinea-Bissau have probably by now definitively escaped from imperialism, and there is no disagreement about the fact that they emerged from an anticolonial war which broke up the integrated power of the oldest metropolis of empire in the modern world. As for Vietnam, it is fairly clear that its revolution was by no means patterned on St. Petersburg in 1917. For the International Socialists, all these various regimes taken together, constitute the species 'state capitalism', so the social transformation which they have initiated invites no markedly curious efforts of enquiry. Nigel Harris, the main theorist of the IS group to address the problems of the Third World, describes them as 'backward economic autarkies'. . . none of which he says, 'has yet been able to demonstrate the superiority of its mode of economic development.'

In this way, we find ourselves confronting a model which offers the experience of the 1917 October Revolution, in a somewhat markedly idealised form, together with odd incidents such as the outburst of the German Rate, the Hungarian, Soviet Republic of 1919, the Catalonian upheaval during the Spanish Civil War, and possibly, less clear examples from Bolivia: none of which has been formally or explicitly stated, but all of which is invoked by hint and **analogy**.¹⁴ The Socialist revolution is workers' councils plus the Bolshevik Party, and that is that.

It would assuredly be wrong to dismiss this model. In a number of industrial countries, it remains possible, if not actively or immediately likely. Even the fall of fascist Portugal, and the unravelling of authority in Spain, have not yet produced any unambiguous support for it. Whilst the most radical section of the Portuguese Armed Forces, together with the parties of the New Left, have given a new currency to a modified form of 'popular power', the majority of Portuguese workers have also given support to the socialist and communist parties, which in the main eschew such a **programme**.¹⁵ That the revolutionary upsurge in the Iberian peninsula is still very much alive does offer a prospect that there might yet be important new developments. But the strength of Council Communism, outside Russia has up to now everywhere been divorced from the kind of centralised political apparatus which existed there in the shape of the Communist Party.

Probably communist orthodoxy is justified in claiming that decentralised 'soviets' are doomed to failure, since the seizure of power is a highly centralised business. The extent to which power must be 'seized' in late capitalism, is, however, a complex and difficult issue. Were the working class to become a genuinely hegemonic force, 'seizure' would become a rather misleading metaphor. The key question remains, how far can working-class organisations strive, from within a capitalist structure, to become the dominant social power? The 'revisionist' theses which have produced such programmes as the British Communists' 'Road to Socialism' or the different strategies of Italian and French communism, are nowhere

explicitly discussed, leave alone refuted, in Widgery's arguments. Naturally, such theses have unleashed a process of political evolution which has already seen the rise of a variety of more or less explicit tendencies in 'official' west European communism, ranging from simple Parliamentarism on the social-democratic model across to an adaptation of Gramscian grand strategy. All of this is important as well as interesting, but it cannot be discussed sensibly in a pastiche such as that we are considering.

But, it may be argued, Widgery is documenting the affairs of the British far left. Yet, to do British socialists justice, most of the controversies of European socialism nowadays quickly cross the channel. Indeed, an assiduous reader of the press from which David Widgery has culled his book might be forgiven for wondering whether poor England had not long since been dissolved in a corrosive fog of dialectics from foreign parts, so vigorously have our own factions responded to the quarrels of their opposite numbers in every imaginable European language. Certainly British communism has reflected all the tendencies which have emerged in its brother parties, from Italy down to Portugal. To regard all this with a blind eye cannot possibly rehabilitate the call for workers' councils, since what remains valid in that call must come to life in a world of labour which is alive with other ideas and stratagems, some plausible, some far-fetched, but all very conspicuously present.

The obvious point about Soviets is that they will not emerge in any society which maintains an apparently satisfactory framework of bourgeois **democracy**,¹⁶ within which the corporate interests of working people can conceivably achieve representation and a degree of satisfaction. Parallel organs can be mooted, but no-one would consent to repose power in them unless they appeared to offer greater scope for democratic action than the established machinery. Should such parallel organs gather modest strength within a still living established framework, they would commonly be assimilated once it becomes obvious that they could not be annulled in any other way. This is **what has happened** to trade unions, and is happening to shop stewards' **organisations**.¹⁷ It is quite pointless to argue that it should not happen, because the established power cannot succeed in the attempt to incorporate rebellion within its own structures without paying a real price, and if the price is real, a majority of working people will wish to accept it. At the same time, we have no reason to suspect that the political appetites of a modern working class movement are satiable. An expanding capitalism might be able to sublimate political aspirations into neat economic demands: but a moribund or contracting capitalism has no such capacity. For this reason, even a short downturn is dangerous to the stability of the balance of power, while a long one might well prove fatal. In such a case, parallel powers might well be one of the ingredients of a decisive shift in power relationships. But even while that was evolving, traditional democratic politics would be bound to reflect the shift of class

forces, and rather directly at that. In any case, while Parliament and the County Council are not easy to bypass, neither is the Labour Party in England, or German Social Democracy, or Italian Communism. Would-be revolutionists who turn their backs on the reforming institutions thrown up in the struggles of established labour movements do so at their peril. Of course, it is possible that these institutions could collide with capital, and it is possible that they might be defeated. If bourgeois democracy were rolled back in Western Europe, the scene would become radically different. No-one should be sanguine about this prospect, which would be cataclysmic in its impact. The battle to maintain and advance the conquests of bourgeois democracy remains a key priority of Labour in every advanced country, and will be neglected only at the direst imaginable risk.

This leads us to consider another major flaw in the **Widgery/International Socialist** perspective. Let us imagine, for a moment, for the sake of argument, that the Soviets erupted in one or more major West European nations, and established their power. The only thought that would pre-occupy Widgery on that day would be how they might extend their example and influence. But the lessons which come to us from Russian experience do not allow us to regress to 1917, and work only for a rebirth of innocence. The discussions of the New Left involved an extensive re-valuation of this experience, and this book does no service whatever in glossing over it.

In 1919 Bukharin and Preobrazhensky published a primer for communists which was quickly translated into all the major European languages. The ABC of Communism reflects their expectations about the immediate future of soviet power. On the question of 'proletarian justice', for instance, they write:

As far as the revolutionary tribunals are concerned, this form of proletarian justice has no significance for future days, any more than the Red Army will have any significance for the future after it has conquered the White Guards, or any more than the Extraordinary Commissions have any significance for the future. In a word, all the instruments created by the proletariat for the critical period of the civil war are transient. When the **counter-revolution** has been successfully crushed, these **instruments** will no longer be needed, and they will disappear.

On the other hand, proletarian justice in the form of the elective popular courts will unquestionably survive the end of the civil war, and will for a long period have to continue the use of measures to deal with the vestiges of bourgeois society in its manifold manifestations. The abolition of classes will not result in the immediate abolition of class ideology, which is more long-lived than are the social conditions which have produced it, more enduring than the class instincts and class customs which have brought it into being. Besides, the abolition of class may prove a lengthy **process**. The transformation of the bourgeoisie into working folk and that of the peasants into the workers of a socialist society will be a tardy affair. The change in peasant ideology is likely to be very slow, and will give plenty of work to the **law-courts**. Moreover, during the period which must precede the full development of communist distribution, the period during which

the articles of consumption are still privately owned, there will be ample occasion for delinquencies and crimes. Finally, anti-social offences arising out of personal egoism, and all sorts of offences against the common weal, will long continue to provide work for the courts. It is true that these courts will gradually change in character. As the State dies out, they will tend to become simply organs for the expression of public opinion. They will assume the character of courts of arbitration. Their decisions will no longer be enforced by physical means and will have a purely moral significance.¹⁸

One does not need to follow Solzhenitsyn's account of the origins of the Gulag Archipelago to know that Bukharin's hopes were not fulfilled. When Bukharin himself was shot, shortly after playing a major role in the drafting of the 'most democratic constitution in the world' nothing could more powerfully highlight the advantage in simple terms of civil and personal liberty, of bourgeois right in the 'bourgeois doctrine of the separation of powers'.¹⁹ Almost every dissident communist of the generation of '56 understood this simple truth, and that is why very few could be persuaded of the divine inspiration of such scriptures as *The State and Revolution*, which argues deliberately for the notion of a coalescence of administrative and executive functions. This would be an appropriate doctrine had the division of labour been finally overcome, but was a most dangerous one in the real, material and evolvingly wicked world.

Many of the more utopian neo-Leninist socialists seem to regard the separation of powers as simply itself an extension of the division of labour, and therefore retrogressive. The truth is the exact contrary: any democratic form in which the separation functions effectively will discover in it a powerful weapon against the atrophy of roles, and a constant stimulus to the erosion of particularised power-centres and fortified in-group interests.²⁰ So elementary is this truth that every workers' organisation applies it almost automatically. The simplest working-mens' clubs or associations elect a secretary, and then pace him with a separate treasurer whose job it is to stop him spending all the money, whereupon they immediately appoint separate auditors to control any lack of due public spirit in the conservation of the funds. Once an organisation is so clique-ridden that one caucus can determine the occupancy of all these offices without challenge, it is in danger, be it never so revolutionary. Of course, the bourgeoisie separated the judiciary from the executive, and imperfectly at that for a very long time, and then, after dividing the executive from the legislature, tended to cry halt.

But any transitional society which learns from Bukharin's awful fate will go far beyond the bourgeoisie in insisting on this crucial principle. This is why any statutory party monopoly is an abomination, for even if there is a juridical separation between executive and judiciary, if one caucus nominates both lists, justice will always be in danger. Bukharin's and Lenin's dream of the withering away of the state, and the over-

coming of punishment by proletarian morality, might, or might not, have been a plausible short-term target if the judges in the USSR were even as imperfectly adjusted to humanist notions of penology as the vegetarian fringes of the modern English magistracy: but it was just not on with the party in effective control of the 'elections' for the judiciary. I doubt whether there is a single Russian judge today who doesn't think that both Bukharin and Lenin were completely mistaken in their perspective on crime and punishment. If I am seriously wrong, then there is sufficient genuine schizophrenia on the modern Russian bench to keep Soviet psychiatry honourably engaged for many happy years after it has been relieved of the problem of eliminating untoward opinions.

All this reasoning was much to be heard in the arguments which took place in the socialist **forums** of 1956 and 1957. It burst into life again in the Action Programme of the Czechoslovak Communist Party:

'The Communists in the government, too, must ensure as soon as possible that the principle of responsibility of the government towards the National Assembly covering all its activities is worked out in detail. Even under the existing practice of political management, the opportunity afforded for independent activity of the government and of individual ministers was not sufficiently made use of, there was a tendency to shift responsibility on to the Party bodies and to evade independence in decision-taking. **The** government is not only an organ of economic policy. As the supreme executive organ of the state it must, as a whole, deal systematically with the whole scope of political and administrative problems of the state. It is also up to the government to take care of the rational development of the whole state machinery. The state administration machinery was often underrated in the past; this machinery must consist of highly qualified people, professionally competent and rationally organised, it must be subject to a systematic supervision in a democratic way it must be effective. Simplified ideas as if such goals could be attained by underrating and decrying the administrative machinery in general were rather detrimental in the past.

In the whole state and political system it is necessary to create, purposefully, such relations and **rules** that would, on the one hand, provide the necessary safeguards to professional officials in their functions and, on the other hand, enable the necessary replacement of officials who can no longer cope with their work by professionally and politically more competent people. This means to establish legal conditions for the recall of responsible officials and to provide legal guarantees of decent conditions for those who are leaving their posts through the normal way of replacement, so that their departure should not amount to a 'drop' in their material and moral-political standing.

The Party policy is based on the principle that no undue concentration of power must occur, throughout the state machinery, in one sector, one body, or in a single individual. It is necessary to provide for such a division of power and such a system of mutual supervision that any faults or encroachments of any of its links are rectified in time, by the activities of another link. This principle must be applied not only to relations between the elected and executive bodies, but also to the inner relations of the state administration machinery and to the standing and activities of courts of law.

This principle is infringed mainly by undue concentration of duties in the existing ministry of the interior. The Party thinks it necessary to make of it a

ministry for internal state administration including the administration of public security. The schedule that in our state was traditionally within the jurisdiction of other bodies and with the passage of time has being incorporated into the ministry of the interior, must be withdrawn from **it**. It is necessary to elaborate proposals as soon as possible passing on the main responsibility for investigation to the courts of law, separating prison administration from the security force, and handing over of press law administration, of archives, **etc.**, to other state bodies.

The Party considers-the problem of a correct incorporation of the security force in the state as politically very important. The security of our lives will only benefit, if everything is eliminated that helps to maintain a public view of the security force marred by the past period of law violations and by the privileged position of the security force in the political system. That past period impaired the progressive traditions of our security force as a force advancing side by side with our people. These traditions must be renewed. The Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia deems it necessary to change the organisation of the security force and to split the joint organisation into two mutually independent parts—State Security and Public Security. The State Security service must have such a status, organisational structure, numerical state, equipment, methods of work, and qualifications which are in keeping with its work of defending the state from the activities of enemy centres abroad. Every citizen who has not been culpable'in this respect must know **with certainty** that his political convictions and opinions, his personal beliefs and activities, cannot be the object of attention of the bodies of the State Security service. The Party declares clearly that this apparatus should not be directed and used to solve internal political questions and controversies in socialist society.

The Public Security service will fulfil tasks in combatting **crime** and'in the protection of public order; for this its organisation, numerical state and methods of work must be adapted. The Public Security force must be better equipped and strengthened; its functions in the defence of public order must be exactly laid down by law and, in their fulfilment, the service will be directed by the national committees. Legal norms must create clearer relations of control over the security force by the government as a whole and by the National Assembly.

It is necessary to devote the appropriate care to carrying out the defence policy of our state. In this connection it is necessary'to work for our active share in the conception of the military doctrine of **the Warsaw Treaty countries**, the strengthening of the defence potential of our country in harmony with the needs and possibilities, a uniform complex understanding of the questions of defence with all problems of the building of socialism in the whole of our policy, including defence training.

The legal policy of the Party is based on the principle that in a dispute over right (including administrative decisions of state bodies) the basic guarantee of legality is proceedings in court which are independent of political factors and are bound only by law. The application of this principle requires a strengthening of the whole social and political role and importance of courts of law in our society. The Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia will see to it that work on the complex of the required proposals and measures proceeds so as to find the answer to all the necessary problems before the next election of judges. In harmony with and parallel to that, it is also necessary to solve the status and duties of the public prosecutor's office so that it may not be put above the courts of law, and to guarantee full independence of barristers and solicitors from state **bodies.**²¹

How was this argument received in the other Warsaw Pact powers? Walter Ulbricht gave a consensual view in his statement at the 20th anniversary of the founding of Walter Ulbricht Academy of Political Science and Law on 12th October 1968:

'Socialist democracy has nothing in common with the bourgeois "separation of powers" or with "separation and control of power". In the struggle of the working class for the establishment of its political power we have taken issue with the theory of the separation of powers not only once. This question was already on the agenda during the November Revolution. Also the Weimar Constitution proclaimed the separation of powers and even declared it to be a typical example of a parliamentary democracy, in which "the relations of the legislative, executive and judicial organs" should be based on their reciprocal independence and reciprocal control". But this so-called separation of powers really means nothing but the limitation of the rights of parliament and the guarantee of the **class-biased** independent activity of the majority of the civil servants and masters of justice educated by the bourgeoisie. The Social Democratic Party (**SPD**) was in government power for a long time in the Weimar Republic. But the result was not "democratic socialism" but undivided imperialist dictatorship, and the final result was fascism. Today West German imperialism marshalls its state monopoly rule in alliance with American imperialism and also calls it "marshalled rule". This new phase of state development is characterised by the emergency laws, the "internal state reform", "territorial and administrative reform", and "concerted action" of **Messrs. Strauss and Schiller**, the demands for strengthening and consolidating NATO and the concentration of the rule of the most aggressive forces of imperialism. There is not the least trace of a separation of power. Solely the decorative elements of certain plenary and committee meetings are left.

The slogan of the "separation of powers" is kept handy for the socialist countries, however. But with whom are the working people to divide power? Are they to divide power with the gentlemen in Bonn, the **neo-nazis** and Hitler generals or with the adherents of the forces of the exploiting classes deprived of their power, like those who crept out of their holes in Czechoslovakia and organised themselves in the various clubs in order to annul the achievements of socialism and restore the old conditions? This twaddle about the separation of powers originates from the veiled **counter-revolution** and is part of the programme of the global strategy of imperialism.

We have drawn the lessons from the history of class struggle that only one real guarantee of democracy exists: the working people must eliminate this system of bourgeois class rule inimical to the people, its basis of power in the economy under the leadership of the unitedly acting working class and take political and economic power into their own hands and set up their own democratic state. This state can only be constructed on the foundation of the complete concentration of power in the hands of the elected people's representatives and their close active relationship with the working people and their collectives. The democratic management of all **administrative** organs of the state and of justice is effected on the basis of this sovereignty of the people. That is also the reason why there is no room in our state order for administrative courts. These administrative courts existing in capitalist countries are only to replace the activity of parliamentary committees and increase the power of reactionary administrative officials.

In the juxta-position of these two views, we see a conflict which divides

the entire socialist movement, without respect for agreement which may subsist on any lesser issues. Reformist or revolutionary, 'parliamentary' or 'soviet', every group of socialists includes those whose instinct is to concentrate power in the hands of the good and the just, and those whose instinct is to adapt institutions so as to prevent the abuse of power.

Of course, Ulbricht is quite justified in claiming that by itself the doctrine of separation of powers has no positive leverage for social transformation. Indeed, the doctrine as such will not even prevent injustice, which can only be thwarted when living and active men are prepared to make use of all the powers they have, and invent such new powers as they need, in defence of a cause. If one looks at the Czechoslovaks' *Action Programme* one sees that the Dubcek team wished to extend the doctrine of separation of powers to the development of cadres policy. This innovation would foreshadow many others. Was it not a form of separation of powers which uncovered the Watergate conspiracy in the United States? Is not the separation of the press from centralised control indispensable to a free society? Cannot the East German leaders recollect the impassioned appeals of the young Karl Marx for freedom from censorship? Is there nowadays some sinister theoretical principle which sanctifies proletarian censorship, while condemning all other forms? A careful reading of Marx would clearly establish that in his time he did not think so.

Ulbricht makes a convincing case that the doctrine of separation of powers has not undermined the bourgeois order, either in Germany or elsewhere. Why then should it undermine a proletarian order? Is Ulbricht telling us that proletarian rule is incompatible with autonomous ideas of justice? We invariably receive a similar type of response when leaders of established communist governments are asked why a genuine plurality of working class political parties cannot be allowed to contest within a socialist constitutional framework. Then we are always told that parties represent social classes, and that, since the communist party has pre-empted working class representation none other may exist without opening restorationist prospects. Yet, bourgeois states may secrete a diverse collection of parties, giving expression to an enormous variety of interests, all of which remain completely bourgeois. Is the working class less sociologically complex than the bourgeoisie? The notion is absurd.

David Widgery's instincts will all be ranged against Ulbricht, and in favour of rebellion. Yet the drift of his *argument* is painfully close to that of Ulbricht. He wishes to concentrate working class power in order to smash the capitalist state. Nowhere in his chosen readings do we see how the resultant power is itself to be dismantled.

We worried about this in 1956 and many of us worry about it still. It is possible to believe that the socialist transformation of our society is seriously overdue and yet to believe that there are urgent problems in the theory and practice of socialist democracy, the failure to resolve which must

inevitably impede the development of socialism itself.

A collection of writings which was sensitive to this side of the problems discussed in the debate of the 1956 generation would lack some of the certainties of the Widgery version, but it would have far greater permanent value.

NOTES

1. *The Left in Britain, 1956-1968*, by David Widgery. Peregrine Books, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1976. (549 pp. £4.00).
2. See the introduction to the 20th Anniversary reprint of Khrushchev's report to the closed session of the XX Congress of the CPSU, by Zhores and Roy Medvedev, *Khrushchev's 'Secret' Speech*, Spokesman Books, Nottingham, 1976.
3. Almost the last words in this interview (and in Widgery's main text) are these:

'If you look at my book on productivity I don't hide the fact at all that not one idea of it was created at the University, not one idea was created in the library, not one idea came from my own blooming brain.'

Cliff is being somewhat overmodest about the provenance of the work in question. The fact is that large sections of it were copied out verbatim, and totally unacknowledged, from various writings of Tony Topham who would probably admit to getting at least some of Cliffs ideas from a library.
4. C.L.R. James' best-known books, on *World Revolution and Toussaint L'Ouverture*, (*The Black Jacobins*) were first published while he was still an active Trotskyist. The second of these works was reprinted in a revised version of the mid-'sixties, incorporating material presenting the author's changed views of politics.
5. Cliffs most original book is *Stalin's Russia—A Marxist Analysis*, which has appeared in various editions since it was originally published as an internal bulletin in the Revolutionary Communist Party. The work argues that the USSR is a 'state capitalist' society, governed by a new ruling class. Aside from purely terminological quibbles, the 'theory' involved in this, which is utterly eclectic and incoherent, allows its 'orthodox' followers to move parallel to an orthodox trotskyst analysis at one remove and more slowly, with occasional hiccups. The same 'theory' would admit anyone who took it seriously to do almost anything he liked, since its analytic power is nil and its predictive force no stronger. The authentic interpreters of the doctrine therefore face great difficulties when presenting their history. For instance, in March 1955, the editorial in Cliffs *Socialist Review* read in part:

'A regime of bureaucratic state capitalism, with the terrific strain it imposes, needs the blood of a purge to make the wheels go round. The present set-up at the top is therefore temporary. . . The contradictions in Russian society are such that nothing could hold the system together except the iron hoops of totalitarian dictatorship.'

By the time of the 22nd Congress of the CPSU, however, Tony Cliff could cheerfully write about the development of 'Welfare state capitalism' (*New Politics*, Winter 1962, pp. 51-65).
6. Healy's most distinguished theoretical article was a blistering attack on Jock Haston, who had rashly advised his little party to proceed 'empirically' on some matter or other. This brought on his head a strenuous denunciation, for had not Lenin written a whole book against 'empirio-criticism'? The longest text actually attributed to Healy was a pamphlet published in the Bevanite hey-day, which was actually written by George Novack, the American Trotskyist thinker,

nowadays accused by the WRP of being 'an accomplice of the GPU.' Another pamphlet on *The Coming World War* was **actually** written by **Michel Pablo** who has also since been fiercely denounced for his **pains**.

7. For an authoritative account of the **CIA's** involvement in this tragedy, see Peter Dale Scott's article in *Ten Years' Military Terror in Indonesia*, Spokesman Books, Nottingham, 1976.
8. Cf. Ruth First: *The Barrel of a Gun*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, **Middlesex**.
9. Neville Maxwell: *India's China War*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1972.
10. It could not be, because it was never affiliated in the first place. Its relationship was based on a subsidy from Transport House, and a tight-rope walking dialogue with the Party's National Youth Officer.
11. **Widgery** could have found an accurate account of this case, by John Daniels and myself, in the *Socialist Review* for the relevant date.
12. Cf. **Oxley**, Pravda and **Ritchie**: *Czechoslovakia, The Party and the People*, Allen Lane, The Penguin Press, 1973.
Jiri Pelikan's *Ici Prague* will also be published, by Allison and Busby, during 1976.
13. The French 'events' did not unambiguously lend permanent support to 'soviets'. either. The immediate result was a great reinforcement of the traditional organisations of Labour, including the (communist) CGT. See **André** Hoyles: *Imagination in Power*, Spokesman Books, Nottingham, 1973.
14. The best documentary account of these movements is in **Horvat**, Markovic and Supek: *Self-Governing Socialism*, International Arts and Sciences Press, New York, 1975.
15. 'Popular Power' has **crystallised** around the new left **movement** and the candidacy of Otelo de **Carvalho** for the Presidency. After initially giving total support to this development, Widgery's co-thinkers quickly abandoned ship just before the November events, and then steadfastly failed to lift a finger in defence of Otelo throughout his confinement. The Russell Committee's report on these matters, edited by Jean-Pierre Faye, will be published in November 1976, by Spokesman Books.
16. A similar appreciation seems to be the view of Ernest Mandel, in *On the Current Stage of World Revolution* (Inprecorr, No. 53, 1976). Yet he explicitly excludes any longrange co-existence of 'workers' councils' with **bourgeois-democratic** governmental forms, which makes it difficult to see how the 'workers themselves' could ever 'experience higher **forms** of democratic freedoms on a broad scale.' If the movement for workers' control cannot establish real bases of power *within* the given structure, then only the prior destruction of that structure could bring them into being, by definition *de novo*, without prior 'experience'.
17. In this formulation, the word 'assimilated' is not to mean 'incorporated'. Both words are inadequate to express the reality which is sought after, which is visible where bodies like the National Union of Mineworkers, capable of provoking the fall of Governments, nonetheless sit in various official bodies and have an officially recognised representative status. 'Assimilation' in this sense does *not* imply any necessary abandonment of autonomous social objectives, while 'incorporation' in the normal usage, does.
18. University of Michigan, Ann Arbor Paperbacks, 1966, pp. 225-6.
19. See Stephen F. Cohen's important biography: *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution*, Wildwood House, 1974.
20. Cf. in this connection, the most important treatment by Mihailo Markovic, in *On the Legal Institutions of Socialist Democracy*, Spokesman Pamphlets, 1976.
21. *The Action Programme of the Czechoslovak Communist Party*, Spokesman

Pamphlet, No. 8, p. 12.

22. Walter Ulbricht: *The Role of the Socialist State in the Shaping of the Developed Social System of Socialism*, Verlag Zeit Im Bild, Berlin, DDR, 1968.