

REFLECTIONS ON REVOLUTION IN AN AGE OF REACTION

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There is not always, perhaps not often in history a clear demarcation between eras of progress and eras of regression; frequently the two things coincide. The 16th century in Europe was a time of technical, scientific, cultural advance, and also of scholastic hair-splitting and burning of heretics and witches. Its worse features marked the backward pull of the past, its better ones the magnetism of the future. Today capitalism as a system of production is flourishing, as science is, but the civilization it fostered in its earlier phases is rotting, while another is struggling to be born. A socialist economy cannot grow up within capitalism, as a capitalist economy did within **feudal-absolutism**, but something like a socialist outlook or mentality can. Positive and negative, wholesome and regressive thinking are contending in every country, every class or community, often within the same mind.

We are faced by a bewildering situation, made dangerous by the sorcerer's apprentices who rule us. Britain's economy is a precariously balanced pyramid of speculation on a dwindling productive base. In the country of the blind, as Thatcherite England (not Scotland) often seems to be, the trickster, the City slicker, is king; capitalism is degenerating into financial juggling, obsession with quick unearned gains. In old Germany there used to be jokes about a ladder of ten officials handing down instructions to one workman; in Britain now each workman seems to be expected to fill the pockets of ten money-grubbers. Modern England has experienced no political or social change except by imperceptible degrees, and this has made it hard to recognize a need for radical all-round change – other than Mrs Thatcher's cannibalizing version, the transfer of public wealth into private pockets. A fundamental inertia is masked by a perpetual barrage of novelties, household gadgets and dress styles and so on, which give the man in the street the illusion of rapid progress. We combine an avid taste for novelties with an underlying dread of genuine innovation, reminiscent of Mr Pooter's uneasiness at hearing an American say that without bold new thinking there would have been no discovery of America.

Visions of 'revolution', a mode of existence remote from what mankind has condemned itself to, have always been afloat. Through most of history

they have been no more than dreams of a lost Eden, a golden age in the far past; only in modern times has that shining past been transposed into a bright future. Christians have inherited with their book of Revelations one of the earliest glimpses of a new Heaven and a new earth, however fantastic their shape. Socialism is one of Christianity's heirs: its most prominent exponents, the Marxists, have been the most earnest porers over old revolutions and designers of new ones. Their early preoccupation, highly realistic in some senses but less so in others, was with the 'seizure of power'. Engels comprehended before his death a hundred years ago – looking at things as an old soldier – that insurrection cannot succeed in a modern country, unless there is a total breakdown of the State as in 1917. In later years Communist parties tacitly accepted this, but were slow to think about alternatives.

Obviously all socialists have much new thinking to do. With reaction so firmly in the saddle in so many parts of the Western world, and Britain in particular, it may among other things be proper for Marxist historians to ask what has enabled ruling classes to remain so tenaciously on top, in spite of all that popular forces have been able to achieve. History hitherto has been made far more from above than from below; it is this that we have to find ways of reversing. In general, Marxist thinking has brought a vital advance, but politically it has failed to keep up with the rapidity of world change, and its practitioners in this century have too often been playing billiards with twisted cues and elliptical balls. In the 1920s capitalism might well seem to have run down, exhausted its historical mission, and therefore to be ready for supersession. Instead, since then it has displayed an astonishing resilience and adaptability, under the stimulus of three principal factors: war, proliferation of technology, and the need to keep ahead of the USSR and meet the challenge of socialism. To uncritical voters with short memories, savouring their ration of the fleshpots, this acceleration of capitalist prosperity can appear impressively smooth, wonderfully bountiful. This is to forget the enormous calamities and crimes it has cost, and continues to cost, with two world wars at the head of the bill. But the dead are gone, and soon forgotten; the unemployed are forgotten nearly as easily; the exploited millions up and down the colonial world have scarcely been thought of at all.

All this must be saddening for everyone with hopes of the human capacity for meaningful, instead of ersatz, progress; but Marxists cannot very well complain, seeing that they have always expounded a materialist theory of history and bothered too little about adding to it any ethical conceptions. Party acolytes used to be admonished that the first of the cardinal virtues was 'faith in the working class'; but there was a perpetual confusion between belief in its innate progressive qualities, and a conviction that its interests, irreconcilable with those of its employers, would one day force it into rebellion. A touch of the 'pathetic fallacy' can be seen in the projection by socialists of their own feelings on to the working class, their assumption that it was by nature socialistic, or at least receptive to socialist teaching. Or it might be

compared to the old theory of Phlogiston, that inflammable substances burn because they contain a property of combustibility. And there is some analogy between the Marxist reliance on the working class to overthrow capitalism, and Western Maoists some years ago, when Maoism was in fashion, pinning their hopes on the Third World.

In England (unlike Germany) socialist ideas never caught on at all with the workers; the story has been a continual one of the horse being led to the water and refusing to drink. Labour has struggled, with admirable resolution, to better its condition; and a recent writer has emphasized that this did not mean bread and butter alone, but was concerned also with honour, the 'dignity of labour', the workman's refusal to be treated like a **serf**.¹ The boss had to be taught to keep a civil tongue in his head, as well as to pay something better than a **starvation** wage. But this did not lead on to the idea of getting rid of him. Very grudgingly, capitalism consented to improvements that it could easily afford. Fifty years ago workers might still be consoling themselves with the old Methodist **hymn**—

**We shall have a new name in that land,
In that bright, that sunny sunny land;**

but their grandchildren have found the land of sunshine nearer home, on the Costa del Sol.

Lacking socialist ideas, the labour movement has been, outside its own trade-union sphere, directionless; partly because of this, even in its own sphere its energies have been wilting. A critical point came in the years after 1945, when ailing industries were being nationalized. It was labour's opportunity to get its foot in at the door, insist on a share in management, make those industries a success and transform them into models for socialism. No such attempt was made. Leaders were timid, trade unions hidebound, there was no push **from** the shop floor except for more money for less work: a very rational aim in itself, but self-defeating when pursued too one-sidedly. Taking a share of control would have meant sharing responsibility for necessary industrial changes, some of them unwelcome. Remaining independent, labour leadership could pillow itself comfortably on time-honoured routine, until the Thatcherite storm broke over its head.

Those looking for progress towards socialism must look round for every possible ally, but not expect to find them too easily. There are no readymade socialists, no socialist classes. Today when all problems are immensely more complicated than in the days of Karl **Marx** and Queen Victoria, the great divide cannot be crossed or even contemplated without elaborate preparation. This cannot be the task of any single class; it cannot be envisaged without the participation of the working class, but it calls for a far **more** alert and intelligent one than we have today. Communist parties everywhere have done their best to bridge the gulf between labour and socialist thinking,

to bring workers and intellectuals closer together; but they relied too much on bread and butter struggles to kindle the sacred flame, and sparks cannot be struck from butter. In Britain success has been minimal, because of a prevalent 'labourism',² a long-standing alienation of the working class from nearly everything good in the national life. This did not make it immune from infection by what was bad, as the maniacal 'patriotism' of 1914 showed so tragically, or more recently and farcically the applause of part at least of the working class for adventures at Suez and in the Falkland Islands.

Political quiescence among the workers left the middle classes to enjoy a similar agreeable torpor, only disturbed by odd moments of panic. Such a state of mind has been an accompaniment of the modern, settled, well-policed style of life, surrounded by a bewilderingly vast world outside the citizen's parish that he prefers to shut his eyes to. J.G. Lockhart in 1819 was deploring the contracting circle within which men's minds moved, 'that barren spirit of lethargy into which the progress of civilisation is in all countries so apt to lull the feelings and imaginations of **mankind**.'³ More succinctly, seventy years later Oscar Wilde wrote to his compatriot Bernard Shaw: 'England is the land of intellectual **fogs**'.⁴ A good many later Victorians, oppressed by the senselessness of their daily lives, took to dabbling in spiritualism, the occult, 'Oriental wisdom', reincarnation. A typical dabbler was Rider **Haggard**.⁵ Since then the more morbid sections of bourgeois society have been sliding further down the slippery slope into a **muckheap** of freak cults presided over by well-paid Swamis and Gurus.

Weakening of social and moral fibre on one side, affluence bestowed by technology on the other, have reduced us to Thatcherism. It is a logical enough climax to Britain's failure to get a grip on itself and its affairs; there is some truth in the adage that a country gets the government it deserves – even a Thatcherite government. There could not be a more extraordinary programme than it has been able to carry out, almost unresisted by flaccid opposition parties, with its privatizing, or privateering. It sells shares in national properties, at cheap rates, mostly to the rich; it then uses its receipts to reduce income tax, mostly for the rich, thus handing their money back to them. They are to be given a further large bonus at the public expense, by a new mode of local taxation, what the government calls its 'community charge', and others call a poll-tax. It will relieve the rich of having to pay in proportion to the value of their often palatial residences; duke and cottager will pay at the same flat rate. Everything this government can get hold of is turned by its Midas-touch into gold, and bestowed on profiteers. Whether or not property is theft, privatized property certainly is. It will not be very astonishing to hear of the army being privatized – it was once very much a private – enterprise affair – , or the Church of England; or the Royal Family, which could be made much more entertaining under up to date management by businessmen like Mr Packer. Meanwhile the masses, which today include the miscellaneous middle classes. have succumbed with incredible ease to

Tory demagoguery, grunting contentedly over their crumbs from the City feast, and only afraid of being deprived of them by Labour party Reds. Tennyson summoned his church bells to

Ring out the feud of rich and poor;

Mrs Thatcher seems to have succeeded better than any bells, by making the rich richer and the rest more gullible.

What is most revolting about our capitalists is their monstrous egotism, their conviction of being entitled to prodigious salaries, boundless profits, wealth as fabulous as any in the Arabian Nights. It is a greed as mindlessly instinctual as the voracity of feudal lords or monarchs for more and more territory, or of eastern potentates for harems of hundreds of women and eunuchs. There must be a real sense in which obsolete ruling classes can be said to go out of their minds, to become sufficiently twisted in their reflexes as to be no longer sane. This is what might be said of the French aristocracy's behaviour in the two years before the Revolution, and still more of the future that our oligarchy is so blithely planning, with the atom bomb, a sharper sword of Damocles, hanging over all our heads. America's president, the most powerful man in the world as Americans like to boast, is led by the nose by his astrologers, we have been learning of late. Here is a relapse of two millennia, to the days when part of the duty of a Roman consul was to watch the flight of passing birds and draw omens from them to guide policies of State.

Unless reformers can find a way to bring sanity and a sense of direction into the bedlam that our society is fast becoming, what must be expected is not a revolutionary explosion, but creeping social disintegration. It was so in the late years of the feudal order, when there were indeed some mass outbreaks of social revolt, and many minor ones, but far more, across Europe, of elemental disorder: unemployment, vagabondage, sturdy beggars on every road, crime, and a prevalent spirit of indiscipline, old institutions in town and country in decay, the family at odds with itself, the individual frighteningly exposed and insecure. Profiteering and rat-race competition, preached as a healthy stimulus calculated to bring out the best in us all, lead more predictably to psychological wear and tear. Alcoholism and drug addiction are stages in social degeneration, part of the drying up of rational protest against the world we have made. Another effect of capitalism as we see it today, and its deteriorating social ethos, is to accumulate a latent store of unreasoning violence, that may break out anywhere. With high-life gangsters setting the tone, society indulges this bellicosity in fantasy with low-life gangsters films, in practice in drunken brawls. No doubt most of these are at any rate no sillier than the officially approved ones, **between** Mrs Thatcher and an Argentine dictator for instance, and far less harmful.

With opposition parties in Parliament that seldom oppose, and left-wing

sects outside that are usually opposing each other, it is no wonder that reaction is triumphant. As Wordsworth said of his own time, bad men, united and unhesitating, have fairly carried off the palm from the vacillating, half-hearted good. Yet reaction looks far stronger than it really is. Its inordinately aggressive behaviour, its blatant greed and egotism, have left it vulnerable to attack on many fronts. Mrs Thatcher and her spongers-up of public money have been wildly indiscreet in their liaison with the Stock Exchange, so aptly described in the New Testament as a den of thieves, – their fiddling and diddling while Britain burns, or moulders. They are polluting sea and air, at home and abroad, while neglecting the hospitals, along with the roads, sewers, schools. They have squandered billions on an atavistic colonial war, to flatter national pride, while toadying abjectly to America. They are making Britain a dumping-ground for other countries' toxic wastes. They have been letting industry run down, and Britain drift towards the level of a tourist showplace for wealthy Americans, Germans, and Japanese, with Britons respectfully polishing their shoes in hope of tips. Open land is reserved for City brokers and foreigners to shoot over, while Britons are forbidden to walk over it. Our capitalists, more predatory and parasitic than their successful rivals abroad, are nibbling away at civilized life, much as the intelligent newts in **Karel** Capek's 1936 novel nibbled away at the earth's coastlines to make more room for themselves, lulling mankind the while with soothing tunes on the radio.

Toryism is not unaware of how damagingly it has been exposing itself; this shows in its growing resolve to suffocate criticism, by gagging the press and the BBC, by frantic spending of public money (which ought to have come out of Tory party funds) in an effort to prevent the public from reading a book that might give it some insight into how our oligarchy operates, – and by domestic espionage. We have been told that the Kremlin may be spying on us; we know that Downing Street is spying on us. In a long BBC television programme on 15 September 1987 on the secret services, Mr **Callaghan** reluctantly confessed to second thoughts about the charge against MI5 of trying to destabilize a Labour government; he also admitted that when in office he gave very little time or thought to what it was doing, whether legal or not. Even Mrs Thatcher's rhinoceros-skin has failed to keep out all sense of resentments she has provoked, that must break out sooner or later. When Scotland's national Church held its annual General Assembly of representatives of the clergy and laity in May 1988, she was, very reprehensibly, allowed by the presiding Moderator to deliver an address to it, in vote-beggingly sanctimonious language. Later in the year, she astonished the country by suddenly announcing an ardent belief – despite all appearances to the contrary – in conservation. Her wardrobe of disguises and pretences must be running out when she has to resort to masquerading as a Christian or an ecologist.

When we look round to try and estimate the forces that may be counted

on for any progressive activity, the inventory may at first appear gloomy. It may indeed prove that Britain, like old India or China, has come to be so firmly locked into immobility as to be incapable of stinging, especially with conservatism now having such a range of tranquillizers, physical or ideological, at its disposal. Perhaps Britain will have to be dragged forward in the end by a changing Europe. Short of an atomic war, economic crisis may seem the likeliest banisher of slumber. A catastrophic breakdown is scarcely to be desired, however, until socialism is much stronger (and until Russia and China are economically stronger and politically more worthy of respect, and have stopped snarling at each other). As things are, a crash like that of 1929 would probably have consequences equally calamitous.

By and large the British working class has shown very little interest in or wish for more education; individuals with more aspiring minds have always been more or less obliged to migrate out of the class, a loss to it like the emigration abroad of so many of its most energetic members. Rising demand for skilled labour, rising unemployment for unskilled, must help in time to bring a change of attitude; but until this has gone fairly far the prospect is of more and more workers being educated away from the working class. Many of these are likely, for a longish spell, to feel satisfied with their promotion, and think Mrs Thatcher's world a passable one. Like the old aristocratic order before it, capitalism has always thriven by sucking up individuals from below. Often this had had the demoralizing effects of which Balzac's novels have so much to say. But by promoting mobility capitalism can also have an enlarging influence, liberating individuals as well as society from old inertias and making them capable of criticism and self-criticism.

Our middle classes are multiplying, growing more diverse; and it has always been the essence of middle-class thinking to be mixed and contradictory, far less homogeneous than the mentality of those either above or below. It has for instance been the main repository of a religion palpably at odds with the way the bourgeois lives and must live, and yet of real meaning to him. Among these miscellaneous strata, which have in common two very different attributes, property and education, there is here and there more interest in socialism and in Marxism than the working class has ever displayed. They include nearly all of those specifically reckoned intellectuals. Boundaries here are hazy, but at the two poles there is a category of spinners of conservative ideologies, ideas designed to perpetuate the status quo, and another of seekers of ideas to light the way towards a higher civilization. In broader terms we must think of an 'intelligentsia' of all men and women enlightened enough to know that our present civilization is in a mess, and quite likely heading for disaster, and to want a better world for themselves and their descendants to inhabit. A good many of these will be recruits from the working class, carrying with them its better qualities.

Socialism will have to cultivate a more Arminian spirit, a wider hope of human redemption than the Calvinistic exclusiveness that Marxism has suf-

fered from. After all, in late years we have seen one of the most conservative of all forces, official Christianity – and particularly its most benighted branch, Roman Catholicism – , beginning to turn over a new leaf. Conservatism in its more respectable days used to be fond of denouncing socialist atheism and materialism; Mrs Thatcher and her crew, with their gospel of undiluted greed and self-seeking, are **ruling** that out, or making it sound ludicrous. The long partnership between Church and Mammon is sagging, and whereas until not long ago an archbishop of Canterbury was virtually the Tory party's domestic chaplain, nowadays Anglicans dare to find fault with a Tory government – much to its indignation, like Balaam's when reproved by his ass. The further the Churches move towards Christianity, the closer they will come to socialism; the 'Christian Socialism' laughed at in the *Communist Manifesto* will be turning into a reality. It was the long-immovable Catholic Church that recognized the **need for *aggiornamento***, in principle at least, years before Mr Gorbachev began preaching it.

Labour party policy-forming has too often resembled the fight at the bridge in Macaulay's *Lays*, when

those behind cried 'Forward',
And those in front cried 'Back'.

It is necessary that the electorate should be given a clear understanding of both the immediate programme that a Labour government would carry out, and its longer-term intentions; so that while denouncing Toryism the party would also be advertising itself and mobilizing support. One great stumbling-block is the term *socialism*. Traditionally it has meant, first and foremost, public ownership of the means of production. Ultimately this must come about all over the world, if civilization is to have more than a limited future. In Britain in any near future it is unfortunately out of reach, simply because there are not enough socialists. The Labour party is not really and never has been a socialist party, but its use of the name has allowed its enemies to profit by accusing it of intentions it has never had.

Much of the pressure for socialism in the sense of public ownership has come from infiltrators into the Labour Party from Marxist splinter groups. Some of it has come from trade-union diehards, little representative of their rank and file. Ron Todd, head of the Transport and General Workers' Union, made a sensation at the party conference in October 1988 by attacking Kinnock's reformism and insisting on the movement's 'commitment to public and social ownership'. Such declarations, along with Benn's challenge to **Kinnock's** reelection as leader, heavily defeated though it was, enable Tories to go on painting the party in Bolshevik colours, as the tool of fire-raising trade unions.

Really, what left-wingers mean when they talk of 'socialism' is very often no more than *social-welfare* measures for the benefit of the old, the sick, all

disadvantaged sections of society, along with improvements for the benefit of all, in health, education, foreign policies conducive to peace. On all these issues a vigorous reforming party could make great headway, without arousing the phobias that have been implanted in the public by deafening Tory propaganda. It could hope for support on many of them from a Liberal party with a similarly active left wing. At the beginning of this century the party contained an 'Advanced Liberal Association' (some of whose members were among the opponents of the Boer War); there ought to be something of the same kind now, with an insistence on a positive plan of reforms instead of the present sterility.

But reform proposals can and must be pushed a great deal further than any programme limited to 'welfare' in its narrower meaning. In the immediate future, the prime aim should be to make democracy, so loudly trumpeted nowadays by anti-socialists, a reality instead of the sham it largely is today. Proportional representation must be one step. Better have no government than another Thatcherite minority government. Devolution should be another very early one; it may prove to be the only means of averting a total breakaway of Scotland from England, something that Mrs Thatcher has succeeded in making appear, for the first time, rational and even inevitable. A third priority should be abolition of hereditary voting in the House of Lords, and that body's transformation into a genuine Second Chamber. There have been moments lately when it could seem – a change as amazing as that of any Church – our last line of defence against the worst excesses of Toryism. The vote of May 23, 1988, when droves of backwoods peers, political zombies, were with brazen effrontery summoned to Westminster to push through the poll-tax bill – and thereby put thousands of pounds in their own bulging pockets – , was so scandalous that even Tories would now find it much harder to object to a further drastic reform, a logical sequel to the introduction of life peerages and the virtual abandonment of any new hereditary creations. As long as hereditary legislators are tolerated, we are still in the penumbra of feudalism. We shall not be completely out of it until we get rid of hereditary control of our economy as well.

A mass of 'sensitive paper' lying in the archives should be opened to inspection on terms at least as liberal as in the USA. It is imperative that firm measures be taken to bring the secret services under control, and to purge and prosecute all individuals responsible for misusing them. Finding ways to destabilize MI5 will not be a simple matter. Members of the public should be brought into an investigation of its sins.

In a longer-term programme, all former national industries, all public utilities, all enterprises putting a strain on scarce natural resources, should be brought under some degree of permanent scrutiny and direction by the government, which should have representatives on their boards. There should also be representation in their management (and eventually in that of all industries) of the workers, and of consumers. A ceiling might well be fixed on

their dividends. It may be that in countries where industry is already in being, instead of having to be built from scratch as it was in Russia, what is required, for a fairly long time, is not so much national ownership as public supervision. This could include some degree of the *dirigisme* which did so much for French industry during its post-war recovery. But the British economy is in a very half-and-half condition, because of the collapse in recent years of so much of its older industrial base, inadequately replaced by investment in newer technology. Since the gnomes of the City have so little interest in rebuilding industry, there can be no rational objection to the task being undertaken by public enterprise, both centrally and locally.

In all new undertakings, there must from the start be far broader participation in management than there was in any of the industries formerly nationalised. To make way for this, as well as for many other reasons, all the organs of the State will have to be ventilated and overhauled. Such a spring-cleaning will be indispensable for opening the way to socialism, as well as in a nearer future to national well-being; but it is clearly justifiable on democratic principles, and if the electorate does not choose to go on from democracy to socialism it will only have to say so.

Many of these reforms are in line with what the 'Bennite wing' of the Labour Party has stood for. But few of them have much chance of being ventured on by the Labour Party until the climate of opinion in the party and the country has considerably altered. Its leaders' notion of how to win votes seems to be to keep so low a profile as to be virtually out of sight or hearing. Pressure from its left wing seems only to push them into further compromise with the enemy, in their anxiety to convince everybody that a Labour government would not hurt a fly, let alone a duke or a City racketeer. The merit of the next Labour government will be largely the negative, but very great one, of not being a Tory government. Preparation for any far-reaching measures will in any case require time, for the training for example of a new sort of civil servants for new duties; this will call for special seminaries, though progressive individuals will also have to be brought in from outside, just as the Tories have been making use of strong-arm men from big business.

Because the Labour party can only slowly be transformed into a socialist or even a truly progressive one, and because it cannot be radically changed from within, but only by a change in the atmosphere round it and in public expectations, there is urgent need of a separate Socialist party; not to heckle and abuse Labour, in the old Communist style, but to give it new life by refreshing the stale political air with the oxygen of ideas. The first business of socialists is to come together, as the founders of the Communist party did in 1920. To keep a straggling set of small ineffective left-wing groups going is mere waste of effort. They are all the prisoners of their past, and the perennial vendetta of Stalinist and Trotskyite is as totally irrelevant to British affairs today as the schism between Shia and Sunni, rooted in an Islamic succession quarrel of ages ago.

Restlessly militant activists in (or expelled from) the Labour party might find themselves more at home in a Socialist party which would be teaching and learning by participation in struggle as well as in debate. Some others after serving an apprenticeship in the Socialist party might settle down as loyal Labour party members. But the rapid turnover of membership, recruits quickly gained and quickly lost, that has been a feature of all our organizations of the far left, should be less excessive in a bigger, more loosely structured, less isolated body, with more varied tasks and a less frenetic tempo of activity than was felt proper when every trade-union dispute signalled a revolution round the corner. A united Socialist party could collect, or draw on, the ideas of, a larger array of public-spirited thinkers than any other; its opinions on many issues would come to be regarded as a national asset. Its prime duty will be the more exact working out and spreading of socialist and generally progressive ideas, and campaigning for them on issues that arise. It will not need to compete with Labour for parliamentary seats, or will only want a small number to make its voice heard at Westminster.

No direct highway leading to full socialism is in sight now, or any chance of a direct assault on fundamental problems still invisible or incomprehensible to the average voter. But many other unpleasantnesses of our present condition stand out more obviously, and in the next few years progress is likeliest to come from mobilization of feeling against them, translation of feeling into opinion and opinion into action. It is the defects and abuses of an old order, far more than the appeal of a new, untried one, that do most to undermine it. To take one instance, there is growing concern about what is happening to 'our heritage', as Tories are fond of calling it, though most of it belongs to *them*, and growing sympathy with movements endeavouring to check its erosion. It is one of the contradictions of capitalism that even conservatives may be conservationists as well, impelled to challenge some destructive features of modern industrialism. Conversely, it has to be acknowledged, with the experience of the USSR before us, that socialism narrowly understood as public ownership does not automatically put an end to them.

It is being realised, again, that civil liberties are at serious risk, though hitherto there has been far too little protest. There have been times in the past when the same could be said. 'You cannot think too meanly of our people', Henry St. John wrote to a friend in 1709; blinded by party spirit, they are in danger of losing their liberties to 'victorious tyranny. . . . Britons might be driven like a flock of turkeys: nay, we are tamer still, for by my soul we should not cackle.'⁶ So one may be tempted to fear today; but a counter-current is visible, and may swell. Over a still wider field of life, the old 'Natural Rights' exploded by Bentham have come back as 'Human Rights': hitherto chiefly as convenient propaganda for 'Western democracy', but with spreading recognition of how arbitrarily, even atrociously, the individual may be treated by the modern State, capitalist as well as Stalinist. In many other fields too dissatisfaction is growing, and only needs a vigorous lead. All these

'good causes' are important partly because they depend on ethical as well as practical considerations; and the human conscience has much more to do than Marxists have commonly realised with steering mankind towards socialism. We need a vision of society as Burke, in his best moments a socialist in spite of himself, saw it, a partnership in all science and in every virtue.

Progressive movements and good causes cannot be managed and manipulated into coming together on the right course, as the Communist party in its brash youth imagined. They must find their own way. Groups confronting any of our social evils or duties will find more common ground the further they go, and along with it recognition that what they want to achieve will demand changes that must make life harder for some capitalists, beginning with the more villainous species such as arms dealers or investors in South Africa. Socialism cannot be imposed on any country without being fatally denatured. Equally, capitalism cannot be kept going indefinitely in a country where people have learned to want something better. A time must come when it will be afraid to look at itself in the mirror of public opinion, much as the aging Elizabeth was afraid to look in any mirror for fear of seeing her wrinkles. We shall be stumbling forward rather than marching, as 'scientific socialism' expected us to do. There will of course at every stage be fierce resistance from the beneficiaries of today's system of what may be called organized anarchy. Only the growth of progressive public opinion will be able to overbear it. But a Socialist party will be needed, for one good reason, as a watchdog, ready to give the alarm when conspiracy shows its teeth.

Russia's revolution like all earlier ones failed to fulfill all its promise, as Paul Dukas writes, but today 'there is an overwhelming necessity for a new revolution incorporating the best of the spirit of 1649, 1776, 1789 and 1917', – 'a revision of our historical consciousness which will help to avert conflict and promote progress.'? Marx was undeniably too optimistic in his hopes of a world transformed, but he set mankind thinking anew of such a possibility. It cannot be brought about overnight. Lenin himself knew that a revolution might take decades for its completion. It is more likely to take generations. To say this may seem a retreat to the 'inevitability of gradualness'; but there is a great difference between accepting small concessions designed to keep a bad social system intact, and pressing for limited reforms designed as stages in a continuing advance. Today's world has lurking in it so many unpredictables that the line of advance cannot be charted as seemed possible in simpler times when an abacus could do duty for a computer. Socialists must be prepared for any contingency, in the spirit of Robert Bridges' maxim that

wisdom lies

In masterful administration of the unforeseen

NOTES

1. W.M. Reddy, *Money and Liberty in Modern Europe* (Cambridge, 1987), chap. 5.
2. About the phenomenon of 'labourism' there is much to be learned from John Saville, *The Labour Movement in Britain* (London, 1988).
3. *Peter's Letters to his Kinsfolk*, Letter 55.
4. Letter of 23 February 1893.
5. See W.R. Katz, *Rider Haggard and the Fiction of Empire* (Cambridge, 1987), and P. Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness. British Literature and Imperialism* Cornell Univ. Press, 1988), Part 3.
6. Letter to Lord Orrery, 1 Sep. 1709, in a correspondence edited by H.T. Dickinson, *Camden Miscell.*, 1975, p. 147.
7. Paul Dukes, *October and the World. Perspectives on the Russian Revolution* (London, 1979), p. 189.