

THE BRITISH LABOUR MOVEMENT AND THE
INTERNATIONAL IN 1864

Royden Harrison

SOCIALISTS remember 1864 because of two events. Firstly, because Ferdinand Lassalle was killed in a duel with the **Bojard** Janko von Racowitza. Secondly, because a few months later Karl Marx attended a meeting in the St. Martin's Hall at which the International Working Men's Association was established. The first of these occurrences had very little bearing on the second. The death of Lassalle—soon to be followed by that of Proudhon—removed a rival, but it can hardly be said to have determined **Marx's** resolve to resume his organizational commitments; a thing he had not done since the collapse of the Communist League. Marx went to St. Martin's Hall and sat "mutely" upon the platform because he recognized that the Labour Movement in Western Europe was at last showing signs that it 'was regrouping and recovering its self-confidence after the disasters of 1848. There was scarcely a country which was untouched by these developments, but it was the progress of the working class in France and Britain rather than Germany which appeared as the governing factor in relation to the formation and prospects of the new association.

The aim of this paper is to look afresh at the character of the British Labour movement in 1864 and to reassess its contribution to the founding of the I.W.M.A. The generally received opinion is that the International "began primarily as a Trade Union affair."¹ This being the case it was not surprising that the British should appear prominently for nowhere else were the unions as large or as stable as they were here.

The British leaders—so the story goes—looked upon the International as a useful instrument for checking employers who attempted to break strikes by introducing foreign labour. Since they saw the International merely in the context of industrial disputes, they did not interest themselves in **Marx's** political projects. With great skill and cunning, the German socialist employed the weight of British trade unionism to push causes which the unionists neither understood nor approved. Not until the Paris Commune forced Marx to cast off his disguise did the English unionists discover the nature of the conspiracy. In Mr. Postgate's words: "It is to the Communist Manifesto that we must look for the essential character of the **International**."²

There are two main faults in this sort of approach and one is closely

related to the other. In the first place it fails to take account of the extent to which the British workers in the early 'sixties had risen above "mere" trade unionism. By 1864 they had achieved a degree of class and political consciousness which was unmatched by anything they had done since 1848. Prior to 1864 the advance had been characteristically halting and intermittent. It had been largely confined to the successful extension and consolidation of trade unionism among particular groups: the engineers (from 1851); the builders (1859-62); the miners (1857-63). There had also been some progress, although still more uneven, in the development of trades councils in the main industrial centres. From time to time the workers made protests on questions of civil rights or foreign policy. But around 1864 there occurred a change in the whole range and quality of working-class organization and political activity so that industrial, political and indeed cultural issues were raised into class questions. The experience which drew British workers into the International was not confined to watching German sugar bakers being brought in to break a strike by the gas **stokers**.³ In 1864 the British workers not only engaged in industrial struggles which observers saw as coming more and more to resemble miniature civil wars: they campaigned against the law of master and servant and created new forms of national organization in the process of doing so. They linked their trade unionism to demands for extension of the franchise. They challenged the prerogative of the wealthy to monopolize the Shakespeare tercentenary; and organized their own celebration. Robert Applegarth was chairman of the South London Working Man's Committee for the Abolition of Death Punishments. On 12 January 1864 the London workers organized a meeting against capital punishment. They refused to sing "God Save the Queen" and sang the Doxology instead. But above all, they alarmed the ruling classes by the fervour of their support for Lincoln and Garibaldi; treating these great popular chiefs as if they were their own leaders and behaving as if the cause of freedom and democracy in Poland, America and Italy was all one with the claims of English Labour. Political rather than industrial questions were uppermost in the minds of those Englishmen who became members of the Central Provisional Council of the International. Had this not been the case, they would hardly have tolerated **Marx's** Inaugural Address which contained not a single reference to trade unionism and which declared that the conquest of political power had become "the great duty of the working **classes**."⁴ In general, the London trade unionists of 1864 were by no means so tame or servile as they have been depicted. They rejoiced when their friend **Beesly** decried the "model" working man who went straight home from work and tried to follow Lord Shaftesbury's advice and become: "a good and even (sic) **affluent** citizen!" "It used," said **Beesly**, "to be good, better and best. Now it was good, affluent, and **millionaire**."⁵

A very serious consequence follows upon the tendency to dismiss

the achievements of the British Labour movement in 1864. Those who make this mistake are unable to identify the important turn which the Inaugural Address represents in the history of **Marx's** political opinions. This Address ought not to be considered merely as a muffled or diminished edition of the Manifesto. The Address contains suggestions about the line of advance open to the proletariat which are expressly excluded by some of the formulations of 1847. Largely upon the basis of English experience and the achievements of English Labour, Marx saw a new perspective for the transition to Socialism. The view that he "used" the English trade unionists simply rehabilitates a conspiratorial and vanguardist concept of revolution; whereas the great significance of the Inaugural Address lies precisely in the fact that it was exactly this conception which Marx was beginning to replace with one which corresponded more closely to the opportunities which were present to the proletariats of the industrialized countries of the West.

Both these criticisms of the conventional interpretation of the roles of the British and of Marx within the I.W.M.A. are enlarged upon in the following pages.

I

"Never within our recollection," wrote Robert **Hartwell** in 1864, "have the relations between capital and labour been in so disturbed and agitated a state as at the present time."¹ **Hartwell** was editor of the Bee-Hive newspaper. By the end of the year he was to become a member of the Central Provisional Council of the I.W.M.A. **Marx's** Inaugural Address was printed at the Bee-Hive office and the paper was adopted as the official organ of the International in England.

The principal industrial conflicts of the year concerned the miners of Staffordshire; the ironworkers of South Yorkshire; and the builders in the Midlands. These disputes were part of a widespread series of strikes and lockouts whose course was marked by particular bitterness.² Their significance for the movement as a whole lay in the fact that they were associated with a remarkably sharp **rise in** both money and real wages.³ Secondly, they were marked by the attempt on the part of the new trade union leadership to subject this militancy of the rank and file to a new degree of central direction and control. The conflict which resulted was then intensified by those in control of the fledgling Labour press, for the managers of the Bee-Hive and its competitor the Miner worked to reduce the authority of the leadership.

The case of the Staffordshire miners illustrates the power which was becoming concentrated in the hands of the leaders of the London Trades Council. The miners found that they needed the support of the Council if they were to receive assistance from other unions. They received the credentials which they needed, but this was made conditional on the miners undertaking to avoid giving any unnecessary provocation to the employers or the authorities. In the tones of a schoolmaster, the London

leaders cautioned the miners against allowing their brass bands to become a public nuisance.⁹

In the building lock-out in the Midlands, Robert Applegarth, the secretary of the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners, visited Birmingham in April with the object of getting both sides to accept arbitration. Before he could carry this policy he had to surmount the opposition of George Potter who used the Bee-Hive to oppose Applegarth's policy.¹⁰ Alexander Macdonald, the leader of the National Association of Miners, had to wage a closely parallel struggle against the manager of the Miner. The official trade union leadership found that its authority could not be made secure and wholly effective so long as the workers' press was in the hands of its rivals and critics. They had to wait until the end of the decade before they were in a position to ensure that the Bee-Hive would be "loyal." (One of Marx's first moves within the International was to try and secure control of the Bee-Hive. In alliance with other groupings he did secure the Miner and Workman's Advocate, which was renamed the Commonwealth.)

The industrial struggles of 1864 show the movement for increasing central direction and control proceeding to the accompaniment of important and deeply felt tensions: tensions which expressed themselves in petty recriminations and personal and sectional rivalries. It would be easy to allow this to obscure the real break-through which was occurring in the Labour movement: the way in which industrial militancy was associated at this time with heightened class and political consciousness and with the emergence or renewal of the forms of organization which were required if it was to find effective expression. For if new and more centralized controls were required in relation to trade struggles, they were the sine qua non of successful participation by British Labour in national and international affairs. (Rule 7 of the I.W.M.A. referred to the importance of this.)¹¹

The Trades Union Congress which was held in London in May 1864 illustrates the relationship between the growth of national trade union organization and the development of class organization and struggle. This Congress is not officially regarded as the first T.U.C. although it has some claim to that title. The Webbs recognized that it marked an epoch in trade union history. "For the first time a national meeting of trade union delegates was spontaneously convened by a trade union organization, to discuss a purely working man's question, in the presence of working men alone. The number of delegates did not exceed twenty, but these included the leading officials of all the great national and amalgamated unions."¹² The problem with which they were concerned was the law of master and servant. The essential feature of this law was that whereas a breach of contract by an employer was treated simply as a wrongful act rendering him liable to action for damages or wages owing, the same action by a workman was treated as a criminal offence punishable with imprisonment with hard labour

up to three months. In addition, cases involving workmen might be heard by a single Justice of the Peace in his own house. From his decision there was no appeal. The imprisonment was no discharge from a debt. Thus a workman could be imprisoned over and over again for the same breach of contract.¹³

In Scotland the law was even more oppressive than it was in England and it was therefore not surprising that George Newton and Alexander Campbell of the Glasgow Trades Council played a leading part in the campaign to secure amendments. They were powerfully assisted by the miners. They had always suffered from the mineowners' readiness to employ the Master and **Servant** Acts as instruments for strike breaking. At the end of 1863 a number of Durham miners "were taken out of their beds by the police and lodged in the lockup, on the charge of deserting their work without notice."¹⁴ It was because Alexander Macdonald had just managed to draw the miners into a national association and because the London Trades Council had succeeded in establishing its authority far beyond the Metropolis that a Conference of this kind could be called and a successful campaign against this class-sided measure could be mounted.

Although the Trades Union Conference of 1864 concentrated exclusively upon the question of the Master and **Servant** Acts it was bound to encourage workmen to take up again larger issues of political rights. Probably it was not a mere coincidence that in the same month in which the Conference was deliberating, the Trade Union Manhood Suffrage and Vote by Ballot Association was reorganized—it had been founded in 1862—and began to show signs of renewed activity.¹⁵ Gladstone played some part in stimulating this revival. Shamed by the contrast between his own erstwhile support for the Confederacy and the heroism of the Lancashire operatives who refused to desert American democracy for a bale of cotton, he announced that "every man **who** is not presumably incapacitated by some consideration of personal unfitness or of political danger, is morally entitled to come within the pale of the **constitution**."¹⁶ Of course Gladstone was not moved merely by sentimental considerations. In his own words, "You cannot fight against the future." Around April 1864 he appears to have come to the conclusion that a reputation for opposition or indifference to democracy abroad was certain to lead to his isolation from popular forces at home which had "history" on their side and with which statesmen would have to come to terms.

It was around foreign policy issues that the British working class accomplished its political recovery. Its great demonstrations of solidarity with the partisans of liberty and democracy in America, Poland and Italy were alarming to the Government not merely because of criticism of official policy, but because in such demonstrations it was evident that the British working people were, however vicariously, fighting their own battles. This was preeminently the case in relation

to the American Civil War. By 1863, British Labour had made it unmistakably clear on which side its sympathies lay. The London trade union leaders associated themselves with declarations that they were met to protest, not merely against slavery and its English allies, but against political privilege at home. The Confederate sympathizers who tried to recapture the *Bee-Hive* at the beginning of 1864 were not expelled from the paper, but they were compelled to hold their tongues on the American question.¹⁷

Marx observed that: "As in the eighteenth century, the American War of Independence sounded the tocsin for the European middle class, so in the nineteenth century, the American Civil War sounded it for the European working class."¹⁸

However, in 1864 it was the visit of the red-shirted martyr of **Aspromonte** which provided the main occasion for the English working class to exhibit the depth of its internationalist spirit. Garibaldi received a reception from the proletariat of London the like of which had never been seen before and has never been seen since. No head of state was ever received with such enthusiasm. The point was not lost on the ruling classes. They were well aware that it was precisely because he was a revolutionary, a republican, a man of the people in the truest sense of the phrase that Garibaldi was accorded such a welcome when he arrived in London in April. "I do not know what persons in office are to do with him," remarked Gladstone to Palmerston, "but you will lead, and we shall follow suit."¹⁹

Gladstone's faith in the Prime Minister's dexterity was well placed. Who knew better than he how to "conciliate a democratic phraseology with oligarchic views, how to cover the peace-mongering policy of the middle classes with the haughty language of England's aristocratic past . . . how to manage an apparent enemy, and how to exasperate a pretended ally?" Ten years earlier Marx had pointed out that if Lord Palmerston "betrayed foreign peoples, he did it with great politeness. . . . If the oppressors were always sure of his active support, the oppressed never wanted a great ostentation of his rhetorical generosity."²⁰ These traits were fully displayed in Palmerston's handling of **Garibaldi's** visit. It was arranged that the Duke of **Sutherland** should play host to the Italian: "a part", as the *Times* observed, "which no poor man could possibly have played so well."²¹ When this failed to prevent Garibaldi compromising himself with Mazzini and with the English Radicals it was decided to speed the parting guest. After all, this was one of the characteristics of true hospitality. The hero had been dining too richly and staying up too late. If he went on his projected tour of the provinces, his health might break down and "impair a unique historical event."

When Garibaldi decided that he would have to cut short his stay in England, there was a great outcry from Labour and Radical leaders. Although the Government denied that they had pressed Garibaldi to go, it was suspected that the Court and the aristocracy were embarrassed

by the democratic enthusiasm which he aroused. It was even suggested that the Emperor of the French had indicated his displeasure at the Italian's presence to the British Government. Edward Spencer Beesly, the Positivist professor who was soon to preside at the inaugural meeting of the International, began collecting material for a pamphlet on the episode. Mazzini told him of his meeting with Garibaldi just before the hero's departure: "I advanced towards him, shook hands, and asked him: "Is it decided and are you really going?" He answered with a shrug of his shoulders: "Yes, it is decided, I am going." I asked him immediately: "You have pledged you word, have you not?" "Yes, I have" was the answer. He saw that I was going to speak again and he said: "It is useless to insist(?) or argue; I cannot stop. I prefer to be silent on the subject. But this I can say. If you can, during the interval, persuade the Prime Minister to send me word that he would like me to stop, I *shall* stop. This is all I can say. You understand me. Don't ask me anything *more!*"

Beesly's friend and fellow Positivist, Frederic Harrison, interpreted, Garibaldi's silence as due to his belief that the English Government still might do something for him. At the same time "G. expected a violent demonstration from the people on his expulsion and acted for it. I tell you what it is: like all religious enthusiasts he greatly misconceived and exaggerated his own influence. He actually thought he could mesmerize old Pam and thinks he has inspired him a little. Poor old madman! Jesus Christ himself would have found Pam a tough one. He would have said: 'Ah—ahem—disinterested and amiable young man—ahem—rather utopian—ahem—better not get up any popular agitation—ahem.'

If Garibaldi did expect a violent demonstration on his behalf, he was not entirely disappointed. On Saturday, 23 April 1864, the Working Men's Shakespeare Jubilee and Great National Festival Committee organized a march from Russell Square to Primrose Hill where they planted an oak in honour of the poet. The workers bitterly resented the way in which they had been effectively shut out from the official Shakespeare Tercentenary Festival at which seats cost 21s. each. They protested against this and appealed to Londoners in general—and to *foreign workers* in particular—to support their own celebrations in the Agricultural Hall.²⁴ After the Shakespeare ceremony on Primrose Hill the meeting was taken over by the Working Men's Garibaldi Reception to protest against the Italian being hustled out of the country. The police ordered the meeting to disperse. "Their somewhat rough manner of pushing the people to make them 'move on,' created at last a feeling of anger in the crowd, which soon began to show itself, and nothing but the constant appeals of the committee to preserve order prevented a serious breach of the peace."²⁵ The committee protested to the Home Secretary about the conduct of the police and a few days later, under the leadership of Edmond Beales, they reassembled on Primrose Hill

in honour of Garibaldi and in order to assert the right of public meeting. Some middle-class advisers expected trouble,²⁸ but in the event there was a vast and orderly assembly with not a policeman in sight.²⁹

The national liberation and unification movements in America, Italy and Poland all had a similar impact upon English society: they divided it along class lines: they brought the Labour leaders into close **co-operation** with sections--distinct if overlapping sections--of the radical bourgeoisie: they thus prepared the ground for the formation of the International and for the Reform movement. In 1864 itself it was in relation to the Italian question that these results were most apparent. The *Times* was moved to boundless indignation by the suggestion that the working class had a special regard for Garibaldi and some sort of property in him. It was almost as bad as dragging class into the Shakespeare **Tercentenary**.³⁰ It had a special word of condemnation for a respectable magistrate like **Beales** (the friend of the Poles, soon to be leader of the Reform League), joining in the Primrose Hill **meeting**.³¹ The advertisement for the St. Martin's Hall meeting at which the International was founded bore the words of Garibaldi: "When the people of France and England understand their duties and unite, the great problem of the future will be **solved**."³²

The idea of a proletarian International had been in the air throughout the early 'sixties. The English Positivists, particularly **Beesly**, had been encouraging trade unionists to go in for political action: to make themselves felt in foreign affairs; and they had tried to develop associations between French and British workmen. During the great strike and lock-out in the London building trades (1859-62), they had attempted to get the French proletarian Positivists to organize an expression of sympathy with the men on strike in London. They saw that this might help in effecting "a rapprochement between the English and French proletariats, through positivist intervention, and seemingly might have important results." **Beesly** had already been involved with the **Cowan-Stansfeld** tendency in middle-class radicalism and had considered becoming paid secretary of an International League Association which they had projected in the late 'fifties. He was vice-president of the National League for the Independence of Poland: an organization supported by all sectors of politically conscious workmen. He played the leading part in organizing the famous pro-Lincoln meeting staged by London trade unionists under the chairmanship of John Bright in St. James' Hall on 26 March 1863. A few months later **Beesly** himself presided at a trade union demonstration in support of the Poles which was attended by a deputation of French workers. After this meeting **Beesly** translated a fraternal address which was drafted by George Odger and addressed to the working men of France. It was with the object of hearing the reply of **Tolain** on behalf of the French that the celebrated meeting was held in St. Martin's Hall on 28 September 1864.³³

In a series of articles published in the Bee-Hive in 1864, Frederic Harrison anticipated most of the main points made in the Inaugural Address. He linked the question of the workers winning political power to the progress of the shorter hours' movement and co-operation in all its forms (30 January 1864). He denounced the burning of Kagoshima as a brutal crime committed with the object of forcing the Japanese to give us silk. Dismissing with contempt the assurances of parliamentarians that the Japanese were accustomed and well prepared for being roasted alive, he remarked that when the people come to power, "they will and must sweep away every part of the old policy and its instruments, those aristocratic diplomatists who feed the avarice of the traders" (13 February 1864). When Gladstone introduced his Annuities Bill which brought the Government into competition with private insurance companies, the measure was denounced by George Potter and his friends as injurious to trade unions and to the practice of self-help. They even found that it "contained that principle which was enabling Russia at the present time to place her iron heel on the neck of Poland." Harrison told them that trade unionists had better things to do than engage in the life insurance business. To raise a cry against Government intervention was "suicidal." How can you ask for **short-time** Bills and be opposed to Government participation in economic matters? (19 March 1864). He developed further his ideas on political questions in a series of articles on "The Suffrage" in the Bee-Hive beginning with the issue of 25 June 1864.

However, Positivism was but one of a number of tendencies which anticipated the founding of the I.W.M.A. or contributed something to its formation. Another came in the **bizarre** form of the Universal League for the Welfare of the Industrious Classes. This body was sponsored by an aristocratic philanthropist, the Marquess Townshend. A man of excellent intentions, which were not joined to political understanding, the Marquess had earlier interested himself in the welfare of the miners, but had allowed himself to be used by a couple of squalid adventurers. He invited everybody to join his Universal League, from **Beesly** and Harrison to Lord Shaftesbury and Charles Dickens. Its aims were as much educational and cultural as industrial or political, but included among them: "To establish a fraternal communication with the industrial populations of all other countries, for the purpose of inducing them to adopt a mutual action with us in carrying out the purposes of the League." Townshend did receive some support from trade unionists. When the League was founded at the end of 1863 the London Trades Council and the Executive of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers showed some interest in it. At the end of 1864 its offices were used by the General Council of the I.W.M.A.²⁸

Thus the interest of the English workers in the International was not narrowly trade unionist nor did they play a secondary part in its formation. If it arose out of the international experience of the **pro-**

letariat and an international revival of proletarian organization, the English fully participated in that experience and in that revival. Marx saw that "real powers" were involved in St. Martin's Hall.³³ Primarily those powers were English and French. But it is important to grasp the fact that the leading English representatives were not the full-time officers of the principal trade unions, but men whose power and influence depended on general trade union and class movements. Thus, George Odger who became the president of the International, belonged to a small shoemakers' society and owed his authority to his talents as an orator and his position as secretary of the London Trades Council. W. R. Cremer, the honorary general secretary of the International, was a carpenter who failed to secure the general secretaryship of his Amalgamated Society. George Howell, another prominent English member of the General Council, was in a similar position to Cremer within his bricklayers' union. Like Robert Hartwell of the Bee-Hive these men owed their prominence to the new readiness of trade unionists to look beyond the horizons of craft institutions and policies. A failure to take the full measure of the British Labour movement in 1864 has been responsible for much misunderstanding of Marx's work within the International and neglect of the significance of the Inaugural Address which he supplied for it. The Inaugural Address represents a turning point in the history of Marxism.

II

In 1847 Marx revised Engels' preliminary draft of the Communist Manifesto.³⁴ In 1864 he undertook a far more radical piece of redrafting. The efforts of followers of Mazzini and of Owen to provide the International with a declaration of principles and provisional statutes were swept on one side and Marx made himself responsible for its entire production, apart from one or two minor verbal concessions to his associates.

Marx described the Address as "a sort of review of the adventures of the working classes since 1845."³⁵ Beesly acknowledged that it was "probably the most striking and powerful statement of the workman's case as against the middle class that has ever been compressed into a dozen small pages".³⁶ It began with the assertion that: "It is a great fact that the misery of the working masses has not diminished from 1848 to 1864, and yet this period is unrivalled for the development of its industry and the growth of its commerce." With a few bold strokes Marx illustrated these propositions. In their support he drew upon the testimony of Gladstone; of the Blue Book of 1863 on Transportation; of the Sixth Report on Public Health; of the Report of the Children's Employment Commission of 1863; Mr. Tremeneere's Blue Book on the Grievances of the Journeymen Bakers; the Income and Property Tax Returns of 20 July 1864. Marx acknowledged that a minority of

the working class did get their real wages advanced, but "the great mass of the working classes were sinking down to a lower depth."

It will be noticed that Marx made out his case entirely in terms of English experience. He defended this by arguing that "with local colours changed, and on a scale somewhat contracted, the English facts reproduce themselves in all the industrious and progressive countries of the Continent." The next part of Marx's argument was equally dependent upon English developments. After recalling the crushing defeats suffered following the failure of the revolution of 1848, the Address drew attention to two great victories of the political economy of labour over the political economy of property. It hailed the Ten Hours Act of 1847 as the reward of proletarian persistence improving upon a momentous split between landlords and moneylords. The factory operatives were held to have derived "immense physical, moral and intellectual benefits" from the measure. But these benefits did not exhaust the significance of this triumph. The blind rule of supply and demand which constituted the political economy of the middle class had succumbed to the principle of social welfare, to the principle of "social production controlled by social foresight" which constituted the political economy of labour. The success of the co-operative movement, particularly of co-operative factories, was greeted as a still more memorable victory. A practical demonstration had been given that the master class was superfluous and that the wages system was but a transitory form of the organization of labour. What was needed was to raise co-operative labour to national dimensions and to foster it by national means.

This led directly into the final sections of the Address. The conquest of political power had become the great duty of the working classes. The capitalists and landlords used their political privileges to defend their economic monopolies and to resist every new claim made on behalf of the political economy of labour. However, the conquest of political power required a foreign policy consistent with the fraternal concurrence of the peoples. Marx concluded with the words: "The immense and unresisted encroachments of that barbarous power, whose head is in St. Petersburg, and whose hands are in every cabinet in Europe, have taught the working classes the duty to master themselves the mysteries of international politics; to watch the diplomatic acts of their respective governments; to counteract them, if necessary, by all means in their power; when unable to prevent, to combine in simultaneous denunciations, and to vindicate the simple laws of morals and justice, which ought to govern the relations of private individuals, as the rules paramount of the intercourse of nations.

The fight for such a foreign policy forms part of the general struggle for the emancipation of the working classes.

Proletarians of all countries, Unite!"

The Address was followed by the Provisional Rules which were also

drafted by **Marx**. In the preamble no reference was made to Socialism, but a call was made for the "**abolition of all class rule.**" The economical subjection of the labourer was identified as the source of all misery and subjection. The economic emancipation of the labourer was, therefore, "the great end to which every political movement ought to be subordinated as a means."

How does **Marx's** position as expressed in the Inaugural Address differ from the one which he had taken up seventeen years earlier in the Communist Manifesto?

To judge from his own account, he considered the differences to be of little moment: limitations of a merely formal sort imposed by tactical considerations. He told **Engels** that he had to be guided by the principle *fortiter in re, suaviter in modo*. It was difficult to put his view in a form acceptable to "the present standpoint of the workers' movement." He was obliged to include phrases about truth, morality and justice. But as he explained to **Engels** these were placed in such a way that they could "do no harm,"¹⁷ i.e. if the class character of morality and justice was not indicated neither was it implied that class relations should be regulated by principles which were uncontaminated by class interests. Indeed, there were other passages in the Address which could be construed in different senses. Thus, the abolition of class rule might be understood to mean either (i) the removal of all constitutional arrangements which conferred privileged access to state power on particular classes or (ii) the abolition of all class distinctions. It was characteristic of **Marx** in **1864**, to exploit this ambiguity in the interests of getting the working class moving again so that it might attain its objective in the first of these senses and discover the necessity of going forward to the second.

Whether **Marx** recognized it or not, the Address did differ from the Manifesto in at least one fundamental respect. In **1847** **Marx** and **Engels** had pointed to three distinctive features of the proletariat as a revolutionary class. It was the first to make its revolution conscious of itself as a class. It was the first in which the revolutionary class was identified with the overwhelming majority of the population. Finally, it was the first revolutionary class that did not seek to fortify a position which it had already established within the old mode of production. "All the preceding classes that got the upper hand, sought to fortify their already acquired status by subjecting society at large to their conditions of appropriation." The proletarians, on the other hand, have nothing of their own to secure. Instead of "rising with the progress of industry, (the modern labourer) sinks deeper and deeper beneath the conditions of existence of his own class." He has nothing to lose but his chains.¹⁸

The Inaugural Address does not disturb the principle that whereas earlier revolutionary classes sought to secure and extend their own distinctive mode of appropriation, the proletariat can become masters

of the productive forces only through the abolition of wage labour. It does, however, open up a fresh perspective of proletarian progress which would make its advance rather more closely analogous to that of its revolutionary predecessors than the Manifesto would allow. It was inevitable that, in 1847, Marx and **Engels** should describe the progress of the working class exclusively in terms of its successes in eliminating competition among the labourers and in organizing itself into a class. In 1864, Marx accepted that the proletariat **might establish** its own forms of property and principles of productive organization within the capitalist mode of production. Even before working men had achieved formal political equality he saw them developing their own forms of property and principles of productive organization. **Consequently**, the working class might precisely seek to secure, extend, fortify and generalize these achievements. Its advance is now measured, not merely by the perfection of its party organization, but by the inroads which it can make on the existing mode of production: the extent to which the organization of production is brought more and more into conformity with "the political economy of labour." This is the primary difference between the Address and the Manifesto in terms of which the heavy amendment to the increasing misery thesis—(misery had not diminished)—has to be understood. The Address holds out a fresh prospect for the transition to socialism.

To point up the difference between the Manifesto and the Address in this way is not to subscribe to the view that Marx was qualifying his revolutionary position, coming to terms with a reformist Labour movement, learning to work with authentic Labour leaders, substituting realism for utopianism, or issuing a "charter of Social-Democracy." These terms are far too vague and imprecise and beg far too many questions to do justice to the place which the Inaugural Address occupies in the history of **Marxism**.²⁸ Throughout his political life Marx was an uncompromising socialist revolutionary. To misread the Inaugural Address as a turn towards reformism is to misconstrue the nature of reformism itself. The reformist is distinguished from the revolutionary not so much by his *modus operandi*, as by the limited character of his ambitions. If Mam came to terms with a reformist Labour movement, it is important to define what those terms were. If he worked with authentic Labour leaders, it is necessary to recognize that they were authentic representatives of the working class as a whole only during a limited period and that Marx himself fully understood this. With respect to England, the central paradox of the International was that it expressed the standpoint of the working class as a whole while relying upon the organizational support of the Labour aristocracy. The English trade unionists on the general council all belonged to that minority of the working class which the Inaugural Address acknowledged to have had its real wages raised since 1848. The founding of the International coincided with the most creative and ambitious phase

of development of this privileged stratum. Some of its successes were of value to the entire proletariat and indicated new lines of advance. Because he had the humility to learn from this experience does not mean that Marx was turning from utopianism to realism. The realism of 1864 would have been utopianism in 1848.

Organized Marxism in the West has paid a heavy price as a result of persistently looking upon **Marx's** early work in the International in terms of tactical manoeuvres rather than as a turning point in socialist strategy. Wedded to the doctrine of increasing immiserization and to the Jacobin revolutionary tradition, Western Marxists have looked grudgingly on the successes of the class which they aspired to lead and reproached it with not taking its stand upon barricades which were already behind its line of advance. They were led into this error by their preoccupation with the circumstances of the International's death rather than its birth. In 1871 Marx was opposed to an attempt at a proletarian revolution in Paris. But when it was made, his loyalty to the working class and his own past record left him no choice but to give it his unflinching support. By identifying the International with the Commune, Marx occasioned the break with the majority of English Labour leaders and sealed the fate of the I.W.M.A., a course of action from which there was no honourable release. In doing so he rehabilitated the Marxism of 1848 and obscured the developments of 1864. The International is chiefly remembered because it went down with the first and last successful proletarian insurrection in the West. As Marx and the English trade union leaders disowned each other, it was forgotten that the International had begun with a prospectus based on a developing trend in British political development. When Marx was saying that it was an honour not to be a recognized English Labour leader, it was easy to overlook the contribution which the English had made to the theory and practice of the Association at the time of its foundation.

III

After 100 years the Inaugural Address retains its importance for socialists. As against the practice of the Communist Parties, it shows that Marx saw closeness to the mass movement and a readiness to learn from it as infinitely more important than the organization of a **van-**guardist conspiracy. The Address with its uncompromising insistence that only the working class can emancipate itself is a standing rebuke to those who would usurp for the Party the functions of the Class.

As against the predominant tendency in social-democracy, the address offers no resting point short of the abolition of class rule and the economic emancipation of the labourer. It forbids any confusion with gradualism in the sense of a peaceful, conflict-free transition to socialism conducted under the auspices of universal reason and goodwill. If social legislation is to be placed upon the statute book; if a sector of

socially owned property is to be established and extended; if the political economy of labour is to triumph over that of capital, then it **will** only be through the conquest of political power by the workers.

A hundred years ago the International called for the fraternal concurrence of the peoples and stressed their duty to master the mysteries of international politics. It called upon them to protest against the exploitation of national prejudices in the interests of piratical and warlike policies. It required them to counteract such policies by every means in their power. What was a condition of progress a century ago has become a condition of survival now. The English working class has need of the tradition of **1864**.

NOTES

1. G. D. H. Cole, *A History of Socialist Thought*, vol. 2 (1954), p. 88.
2. R. W. Postgate, *Revolution, 1789-1906* (1920), p. 282.
3. *Leader*, 5 August 1859.
4. Inaugural Address of the Working Men's International Association (1864), reprinted in *Documents of the First International, 1864-66* (n.d. 1963), pp. 277-87.
5. *Bee-Hive*, 6 February 1864.
6. *Ibid.*, 7 May 1864.
7. "I am not at all clear we are not a good deal implicated with the miners and that we ought not to take *some step*. I dare say the men were right at first, but they seem tending towards a sort of revolutionary attitude which can come to no good," F. Harrison to E. S. Beesly (n.d. but 1864 and subsequently given this date by Harrison), Harrison Papers, British Library of Political and Economic Science).
8. B. R. Mitchell and P. Deane, *Abstract of British Historical Statistics* (Cambridge) 1962, p. 343.
9. G. Tate, *London Trades Council, 1860-1950* (1950), p. 19.
10. R. W. Postgate, *The Builders' History* (1923), p. 214.
11. Provisional Rules of the Association in *Documents of the First International, 1864-66* (n.d. 1963), pp. 288-91.
12. S. and B. Webb, *The History of Trade Unionism* (1912 edition), p. 235.
13. D. Simon, "Master and Servant" in J. Saville (ed.) *Democracy and the Labour Movement* (1954), pp. 160-200.
14. E. S. Beesly, *Spectator*, 12 December 1863.
15. *Bee-Hive*, 28 May 1864, cited in S. Coltham, *George Potter and the Bee-Hive Newspaper*, (Oxford D. Phil), 1956.
16. J. Morley, *Life of Gladstone*, vii (1903), p. 126.
17. R. Harrison, "British Labour and American Slavery," *Science and Society* (New York), vol. XXV, no. 4, pp. 291-319.
18. K. Marx, *Capital*, vol. i (1938 edition), p. xviii.
19. J. Morley, *op. cit.*, p. 109.
20. K. Marx, *Life of Palmerston*, 1, *People's Paper*, 22 October 1853, cited in D. Torr, *Marxism, Nationality and War*, pt. ii (1940), p. 22-3.
21. *Times*, 22 April 1864.
22. J. Mazzini to E. S. Beesly, 13 May 1864 (Beesly Papers, University College, London).
23. F. Harrison to E. S. Beesly, "Friday," 1864 (Harrison Papers).
24. For the procession, see *Times*, 25 April 1864. On 21 April 1864 the *Times* referred to the "official" Strafford Festival and **observed** from the prices of the seats that "the opulent classes have chiefly **been** consulted."

25. Times, 25 April 1864.
26. F. Harrison to E. S. Beesly subsequently dated 1864 by Harrison and actually written on 6 May. (Harrison had played an active part in the work of the Garibaldi Working Men's Reception Committee but he thought it would be damaging for him to go to Primrose Hill and he wanted Beesly to help find him a way out.)
27. Times, 9 May 1864.
28. *Ibid.*, 9 May 1864.
29. *Ibid.*, 9 May 1864.
30. Reproduced in L. E. Mins (ed.), *Founding of the First International* (New York, 1937), p. 55.
31. R. Harrison, "E. S. Beesly and Karl Marx," *International Review of Social History* (Amsterdam), vol. iv, pp. 22 ff and 208 ff.
32. L. E. Mins, op. cit., pp. 73-4.
33. K. Marx to F. Engels, 4 November 1864.
34. F. Engels, *Principles of Communism* (Melbourne, 1933), p. 30.
35. K. Marx to F. Engels, 4 November 1864.
36. E. S. Beesly, "The International Working Men's Association*" *Fortnightly Review*, November 1870.
37. K. Marx to F. Engels, 4 November 1864.
38. K. Marx to F. Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, concluding section of pt. 1. Bourgeois and Proletarians.
39. G. Lichtheim, *Marxism: an Historical and Critical Study*, 1961. See particularly, pp. 100-129.