POLITICAL THOUGHT SINCE THE FRENCH REVOLUTION by Stephen Swingler

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VOL XIX

Simple, Short, Authoritative

# AN OUTLINE OF POLITICAL THOUGHT SINCE THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

*by*

STEPHEN SWINGLER

"A great new series of books designed to reach the 'man (and woman) in the street.' Authoritative and educative"

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# AN OUTLINE OF POLITICAL THOUGHT SINCE THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

by

STEPHEN SWINGLER

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*For* ANNE,
*in love and comradeship*

# CONTENTS

# PREFACE

THIS SHORT VOLUME is an attempt to sketch the broad outlines of the development of political thought since the French Revolution of 1789. The period under review is so rich in the history of the philosophy of politics that it is only possible within such a short space to indicate to the reader a certain valid method of approach to the subject and the way in which the main ideas evolved and were utilised during this period of man's history. Great names stand out—Rousseau, Bentham, Hegel, Marx; and we shall try to recognise the essential contribution which these thinkers made to the political life of their time and how far they built up for us a tradition of political thought which both explains the nature of the society in which we live and aids us to change it for the better of humanity.

As little as possible has been presumed in this volume. However, some knowledge of the political history between the French Revolution of 1789 and the Russian Revolution of 1917 must be acquired before any attempt can be made to see the growth of political ideas in their correct perspective. It will be seen that I have examined, broadly, two different traditions having different starting-points and different approaches to the problems of politics. This method can ultimately only be validated by an appeal to the historical facts, but I hope I have shown in sufficient detail the coherence and development of these traditions for the reader to be convinced that the method adopted does give us a key to the understanding of the subject. Particular points will be questioned; for example, the inclusion of Tom Paine amongst the Utopians might be difficult to justify. Yet in every case we have got to consider not only the intention of the writer and his ideas, but also the effect

which they had, the way in which they were used at the time, what they traditionally became; and working men went to jail for selling the *Rights of Man.*

Finally, may I express the hope that some readers will be encouraged to examine the original works of these thinkers, the works that still live to-day, like Rousseau's *Essay on Inequality* and Owen's *New View of Society*, and the *Communist Manifesto* and the like?[1] I am sure that their political practice will then have a deeper significance; and by that criterion alone can any treatise on political thought be justified.

### *Explanatory Note on Terms*

This is just to simplify certain terms with which readers may be unacquainted. For example, by "idealists" and "materialists" I don't mean people of goodwill and people with bad morals, a common view. "Idealism" here means the tendency to regard pure ideas as more important than material facts and to idealise (as Hegel did) actual things without scientifically analysing them. "Materialism" means the view which treats material facts as of primary importance and applies scientific analysis to the whole natural world. Thus, to my mind, the effective people of goodwill are those with a pungent sense of reality and knowledge of the necessities of nature.[2]

The *philosophes* and "utilitarians" (Part I, Chap. I) were schools of thought at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth centuries who criticised every kind of authority and believed that every institution must be justified on grounds of social usefulness. The *Encyclopædia* (1746–73) was a French compilation of

[1] A glossary of the most important names, dates and works will be found at the end.

[2] "One may compare ideas which have no foundation in nature, to those forests of the North whose trees have no roots. It needs only a breath of wind, only a small fact, to overturn a whole forest of trees and of ideas" (Diderot, *On the Interpretation of Nature*).



essays, edited by a man named Diderot, attacking the corrupt monarchy, clerical despotism, and the oppressive land-owning class, and expressing the new outlook of rational enlightenment. It sponsored the great causes of free thought, equal rights in politics, and the scientific conquest of Nature.

*A priori* means abstract thinking as opposed to thinking about experience, i.e. empirically. *Laissez-faire*="let-do" or "let-be," e.g. no government interference in industry.

The State rights *versus* federalism controversy in America (Part I, Chap. II) concerned whether the separate states in the Union should be mainly responsible for (especially social) legislation or whether the federal government should legislate for all the forty-eight states.

By "metaphysics" (Part I, Chap. III) is meant the attempt to explain the whole Universe by some conception like spirit or mind: also the view that treats things as static and given, e.g. the ancient and absurd riddle, "Which came first, the hen or the egg?" Such thinking usually comes from those who, like university professors, lead comparatively sheltered lives.

PART I

# THE TRADITION OF *BOURGEOIS* POLITICS

## CHAPTER I

## THE SCIENTIFIC APPROACH

OUR PERIOD BEGINS with the storming of the Bastille in France and the introduction of steam-power into the cotton mills of England. It is an epoch of great technical changes and widely diffused scientific research. The bases of human life were shaken to the foundation by the mechanical discoveries of the inventors of the Industrial Revolution, and at this time European society was pregnant with new movements, new ideas, and new leaders of men. Great conflicts were taking place: in France the Revolution of '89 and then the Napoleonic Wars, and in England the political and economic battles of the Luddites, the Parliamentary reformers, and the Chartists. Economic disturbance, political unrest, and cultural decay had together rotted the old quasi-feudal society; and now men's associated desires, with the growing realisation of their new power over Nature, were crystallising into a revolutionary consciousness and a determined moral effort to recast society in a new mould. Parallel with these historical struggles and assaults upon vested interest went new thought. The ideas of the *philosophes* and utilitarians were only one factor among many in causing social change to take place; yet they were a very important factor, for they inspired the

leading men of the time and made conscious and clear the hidden aims and motives of the historical movements which inaugurated capitalism.

The creed of Diderot and Helvétius was rightly called the " philosophy of enlightenment." These thinkers and many others who compiled the *Encyclopædia* sought diligently for knowledge throughout the whole field of natural science and philosophy. Some came to politics through Locke's materialist philosophy, others through ethics; yet others approached the problem from the standpoint of the *laissez-faire* economics of Adam Smith. What were their ideas about politics and society? First of all, we must note that their analysis was essentially individualist; they dealt with the abstract ego, the rational man. Self-interest, according to them, was the basic motive force in the individual's life, being in the main a profound desire for happiness and for pleasurable enjoyment. Men consciously or unconsciously strove to advance their own interests in society and so created social interests and group interests. Men can only be happy if they have ample opportunities of freely satisfying their desires and developing themselves; but in the society we see around us (in the eighteenth century) men are thwarted and unfree because of the barriers of privilege, despotism, and superstition. If society and the institutions of the State were rationally conceived, everything would be subjected to the criterion of the promotion of men's greatest happiness, and the selfish interests of each would fuse into the social interest of all. Moreover, ignorance being the root of evil, if men were properly educated, reason would predominate in the organising of society. Thus legal equality and civil liberty are needed, for these endow men with the opportunity to seek their own interests and thus attain happiness. Helvétius went so far as to demand a certain economic equality by apportioning the land amongst all the families in society in equal quantities. A wide distribution of private property, it was agreed, was essential; for better material circumstances would produce—quite



mechanically[1]—better and more rational human beings.

In England, Jeremy Bentham and James Mill outstandingly developed the political theory of utilitarianism. Bentham regarded himself principally as a law reformer and his name is particularly connected with the utilitarian movement. He started with the individual. Every individual, according to him, seeks his own interest and is the best judge of it, but all egoisms are finally harmonised into the general interest. Every law, every institution, must be judged according to the principle of utility—what use is it? And the measure of its social rightness or wrongness is the greatest happiness of the greatest number. The aims of legislation are therefore fourfold: (1) subsistence, (2) abundance, (3) security, and (4) equality; but the fourth must always be subordinate to the third. Bentham was chiefly concerned with the identification of interests in society and promoting the greatest happiness, which led him, in *Anarchical Fallacies*, to a great attack on the theory (which we consider later) that men have natural rights upon which the State must not encroach. Bentham, it might almost be said, was more concerned with cash values than social rights; and he conceived the State's real function as the artificial identification of interests, as holding the ring in the struggle of individuals to achieve maximum happiness. The doctrine that the State must preserve security before promoting equality was also important in the days when the Luddites and Chartists began to agitate against the dominant propertied class.

James Mill's *Essay on Government* completes the utilitarian picture. Mill gives us a delightful insight into the way in which he set about political thinking. Experience, he maintains, can tell us nothing about political government, since one can see that some monarchies succeed and some democracies succeed (note the criterion of " success ") and likewise some do not. Thus we have got to rely on *a priori* reasoning to discover the best form of government. The end of government is to increase men's

[1] Lamettrie, for example, wrote a book called *Man a Machine*.

pleasures and reduce their pains. So government must insure first of all that every man derives the greatest benefit from the produce of his labour, that is to say, his property. If private property is fully secure, the greatest happiness of society will be achieved. But we must see that the government which rules has the interests of the majority at heart, and so, each individual being the best judge of his own interest, government must be both effective and representative. Bentham and Mill agree in advocating the practical measures of abolishing the monarchy, the House of Lords, and the Established Church, having annual Parliaments and voting by ballot, and manhood suffrage. (For women, of course, have the same interests as their menfolk, and as for the property-less poor, who are in a majority, their opinions, replies Mill to Macaulay's objections, are formed by " that intelligent, that virtuous rank that comes most immediately in contact with them," i.e. the middle classes. At that time the working classes were mostly led —or misled—by middle-class leaders.)

Let us at the outset notice in what sense this political theory is scientific. It is scientific because it is an attempt to explain the actual facts of politics and to elucidate their meaning, thus enabling us to draw practical conclusions as to how the State, government, and social institutions might be better organised to suit human ends and desires. No metaphysical premises are postulated. We are presented with a conception of human nature and human desires and the scientific principles upon which the political system must be founded if human beings are to achieve their purposes and enjoy their lives. This is the essential method of the utilitarians. Naturally there are exceptions. The French thinkers were more radical than the English, because they were making a more frontal attack upon the institutions of feudal privilege, especially the Church (a large number of them were atheists or sceptics). But, broadly speaking, they agree that individuals seek happiness in their own interests, that these interests are naturally identical when rationally pursued,



and that therefore utility is the correct criterion to apply to political institutions. They believe in the rational individual and *laissez-faire* government (Bentham once wrote that government was " one vast evil ").

The modifications of the utilitarian theory may be seen especially in Spencer and J. S. Mill. Spencer's utilitarianism is in many ways difficult to describe since it is such a conglomeration of different elements. He began with the idea of natural man, compelled by circumstances to enter into civilised society, but provided with a moral sense that enunciates intuitively to him four general principles of conduct: (1) justice, (2) negative beneficence, (3) positive beneficence, and (4) self-realisation. Spencer's view of justice is summed up in two main principles: first, the principle that ensures to each the natural rewards of his energy and penalties of his slackness and, second, the law of " equal liberty "— " every man has the freedom to do all he wills, provided he infringes not the equal freedom of any other man." According to Spencer, man has natural rights to property, free trade, free speech, and so forth. In *Man Versus the State*, he states the fundamental antithesis between the individual and the State in the struggle for liberty (for liberty is to be measured by the paucity of restraints which government imposes on the citizen); yet he recognises two distinct functions which the State must fulfil— defence of " society " against external and internal invaders.[1] Spencer, in mid-nineteenth-century England, still retains the belief in the rational man whose decisions are made upon the pleasure-pain calculus and in the inevitability of progress, which Darwin in the " survival of the fittest " idea had (he urged) biologically justified.

John Stuart Mill modified utilitarianism differently. He made it more radical. Clinging to the early tenets which he had been taught to accept as self-evident, he gradually took all the sting out of them. He began to admit that the State might interfere with social life to promote liberty where it did not naturally develop. He

[1] i.e. " enforcement of contracts."

no longer believed, when he wrote the famous *Essay on Liberty*, that men's interests were naturally identical in society, and even gave vent to such opinions as the following: "Whenever there is an ascendant class, a large portion of the morality of the country emanates from its class interests and its feelings of class superiority." Later on, he notes that the economic status of the worker is an effective limitation on his freedom of speech. But Mill tries to save the main structure of the utilitarian theory from discredit; and he was about the last able exponent of it.

Have these thinkers bequeathed a scientific theory of politics? The answer is emphatically no. In 1908, Graham Wallas wrote: "as a complete science of politics Benthamism is no longer possible. Pleasure and pain are indeed facts about human nature, but they are not the only facts which are important to the politician. The Benthamites, by straining the meaning of words, tried to classify such motives as instinctive impulse, ancient tradition, habit, or personal and racial idiosyncrasy as being forms of pleasure and pain. But they failed; and the search for a basis of valid political reasoning has to begin again, among a generation more conscious than were Bentham and his disciples of the complexity of the problem, and less confident of absolute success."[1]

Why did utilitarianism fail as a scientific theory of politics? Many of its contradictions are obvious to us to-day. For example, Bentham and Spencer think that the State power is obnoxious and yet they ascribe to the State important functions. Moreover, the abstractness of the utilitarian conception of human nature is patent; people do not always pursue their own self-interest and few really employ the pleasure-pain calculus. And history has shown that the natural identity of interests in society was mere wish-fulfilment. But these are not the important criticisms of utilitarianism. The fundamental critique of it is that it was a rationalisation

[1] G. Wallas, *Human Nature in Politics*.



of the prejudices of the middle classes. Bentham stopped short of scientific theory as soon as he saw the possibility of incompatible interests and said that the State *ought to* identify them. The implication is that if men do not seek happiness, they *ought to*—and they must be compelled to. And if we substitute wealth for happiness, we have the ethics and the commercial idol of monetary "success." Utilitarianism was a political philosophy designed for a society in which wealth—and individual wealth—was highly valued and the human struggle was concentrated upon maximising industrial production. In this society scientific technique was to play a very active, and the State at first a very passive, role. Civil liberty, legal equality, representative government, were all necessary means to the end of building up competitive and mechanised industry and to balance the interplay of group interests. Utilitarianism is the expression of the new *bourgeois* assertiveness which emerged in the nineteenth century to utilise the new industrial technique for social enjoyment. That is not to say that it was a conscious rationalisation. On the whole it was not. But its failure as a scientific theory of politics which caused its modification and decline during the era under review was due to the fact that it expressed only the desires of the emergent class in society at a particular phase in its development, at its period of revolutionary progressiveness.[1] Other sets of ideas began to replace the utilitarian maxims in the minds of the professional intelligentsia as capitalism entered its era of equilibrium.

[1] Cf. the still relevant passage of criticism: "What a devil of a system! Some men enjoying a superabundance of everything, while others have a stomach as insistent as theirs, a hunger that renews itself like theirs, and nothing to get their teeth into. Worst of all is the constrained attitude that want imposes on us" (Diderot: *Rameau's Nephew*).

## CHAPTER II

# ROUSSEAU AND TORY DEMOCRACY

As we examine the political theory of our period we shall see increasing difficulties in understanding the differences between the intentions of the thinkers in outlining their ideas about society and the State and the way in which their ideas are used. When the theories are relatively scientific, this difficulty is diminished; but when they are idealist and highly abstract, like unfashioned metals, men bend them and twist them to suit their particular purposes and immediate interests. Thus Rousseau, who derived much from the English Whig thinker, Locke, has been most diversely interpreted by different schools of thought, sometimes appearing as an extreme sentimental individualist (for which *Émile* gives the justification) and at other times as the extreme authoritarian or even State socialist (according to some interpretations of the *Contrat Social*). He greatly inspired the members of the Jacobin Club in revolutionary France, but he also bequeathed to Herbert Spencer the idea of "natural rights" which was used as an argument against State interference in industry and to the school of T. H. Green the religio-idealist approach to politics. Rousseauism, the inspiration of the lower middle classes in the French Revolution, was in different forms the conservative theory of the *bourgeois* revolution.[1]

Rousseau's approach to politics was abstract and ethical. He was concerned to discover the principles of the ideal State and to show why men had not yet attained

[1] It is instructive to note that Rousseau's practical efforts in drafting constitutions for Poland and Corsica were extremely conservative.



that form of political society. Rousseau believed (*a*) in a social contract and (*b*) in the natural right of the people to political sovereignty, a right which could never be taken away from them. He therefore came to evolve a theory of the "general will" whereby the people's sovereignty could be exercised. Locke's view of natural rights, which Rousseau inherited, was as follows: Locke starts from the idea of man in the state of nature, free to order his actions as he will, but acting rationally according to the law of Nature whereby all are maintained equal and every man has the right to punish the transgressor who attempts to destroy "life, health, liberty, or possessions." Mother Nature confers this latter right and Reason teaches men who live thus how to utilise it. Civil government is the proper remedy, says Locke, for the inconveniences of the natural state; it is thus established by a social contract wherein are recognised men's natural rights, principally to life, liberty, and property. Society cannot destroy rights which are actually attributes of men's nature and which are recognised in the social contract, itself the logical *sine quâ non* of society's existence. Therefore the rights must be constitutionally respected and safeguarded against usurping despots—private property must be inviolable, trial by jury be permitted, and free speech legalised. Both the French and American constitutions recognised these "natural rights."

Rousseau's view of natural rights only amended Locke's in considering that private property unless fairly equally distributed made against the natural liberty of the people. In the *Discourse on Inequality* he graphically describes how civilised society began when "the first man bethought himself of saying, 'This is mine' in appropriating a piece of land and was believed," thus leading to the artificialities of civil society which have corrupted man's natural goodness. The social contract he conceives as "a real contract between the people and the chiefs chosen by them. . . . The people having in respect of their social relations

concentrated all their wills in one, become so many fundamental laws, obligatory on all the members of the State without exception, and one of these articles regulates the choice and power of the magistrates appointed to watch over the execution of the rest." Thus we come to the general will whereby the sovereign people exercise government and appoint their executives. What is the content of this idea?

The people, according to Rousseau, have a natural right to govern themselves, a right to the sovereign power in the State. This right to govern cannot be delegated and is inalienable. The people must therefore actually legislate for themselves and appoint an executive and a judiciary from among themselves to supervise administration and to implement their will as expressed in law. Rousseau explicitly states that representation of the people is impossible. Legislation must be the direct expression of the popular will. Law is established by the people and rests entirely upon the people's authority. Although he opposed the idea of the separation of powers, Rousseau clearly distinguished legislative, executive, and judicial functions; and it was the legislative function which fell to the people as a whole to fulfil. In enunciating these doctrines, he lays down certain principles which must be obeyed; and primary among these is the suppression of all sectional interests or associations in the State which might attempt to influence the "general will" in any issue. But it must be remembered that the general will can only decide the very broadest questions affecting the society and cannot deal with particular issues.

Rousseau's conception of the State is that of a small equalitarian republic. Thinking in terms of the Athenian City-State of Geneva, where he was born, he gives two reasons for limiting the size of states: (1) that in a large State the people have less affection for and contact with their leaders; (2) that, lacking intimate relationship with the majority of their fellow-citizens, the people will lose its social cohesion: we see here the entirely different basis



of Rousseauian democracy to the parliamentary democracies of large states like England and America during the nineteenth century and how the doctrine of the people's sovereignty turns in a large state from a democratic into a highly authoritarian principle. Such was the tendency in the French Revolution, especially in regard to the suppression of associations. However, the doctrine of the general will served, in eighteenth-century France, the historical purpose of asserting the right of the rising middle classes not only to participate in, but also to control, the government of their country. Furthermore, to Rousseau are owed in part the doctrine of the rule of law as contrasted with the rule of force established by popular sovereignty and the interesting view that a civil religion was expedient in maintaining loyalty to the State.

Let us see how these doctrines were utilised in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Political ideas are tools that men use to achieve their purposes. And, like many mechanical tools, many political ideas can be utilised for very different purposes, even to the extent of opposite purposes. The political idea of equality, for example, has been passed in history from revolutionary movement to revolutionary movement, but always meant in practice something entirely different, being utilised to achieve differing ends. Rousseau's political thought had a widespread effect upon the thinkers and politicians who made the American Revolution and afterwards took over the government of their heterogeneous country. But, rather than uniting, it tended to divide the Americans and actually provided intellectual material for two opposing sides. Many would ascribe this occurrence or explain it away as due to the inconsistencies in Rousseau's thought. Rather than in intellectual inconsistencies, it is really in the essential idealistic basis of Rousseau's thought that the trouble lies. The divorce of principles and interests enabled different groups of people to use the same ideas in order to further their particular interests.

Rousseau was a predominating influence on the

American politicians who wrote the Declaration of Independence and drew up the American Constitution. These men held widely differing opinions and were responsible for the great cleavage in American politics throughout the nineteenth century. This cleavage might be represented in terms of personalities as between Jefferson and Hamilton or in terms of political tendencies as between State rights and Federalism. Let us see how both sides justified themselves by reference to Rousseau.

Jefferson, an aristocratic landowner, was steeped in Rousseau's thought. He firmly believed in the innate goodness of man. His belief in democracy made him in the United States an advocate of State rights against strong federal authority. Like Rousseau, he believed in the small State and in direct government in so far as this was possible, though he sought to minimise government on the whole. Jeffersonian democracy was able to get included in the State constitutions of a large number of states provisions for annual or biennial elections of their legislatures and officers and even in many cases the election of judges and of the civil service. Jefferson it was who wrote the Declaration of Independence with its aims of " life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness " and its theoretical recognition of equality. He was, of course, a liberal optimist, led by Rousseau to believe in natural man—particularly the American farmer, just as Rousseau had probably in mind the Continental peasant proprietor—as innately well disposed, and therefore in the decentralisation of control in a large State.

Alexander Hamilton was a man of a different temper. Comparatively incorruptible himself, he believed (and his political experience bore him out) that men were constantly vicious and evil and needed to be constrained. He was therefore in favour of strong central government. Moreover, Hamilton saw the conflict in the State between the rich and the poor and knew that property must have a strong legal sanction. He therefore favoured a federal government which secured the interests of the propertied classes. And he was a predominating influence



in the drawing up of the Constitution. But upon him and his associates Rousseau had a strong influence. One of the chief principles which Rousseau advanced was that of the rule of law. Rousseau objected to despotism because it was arbitrary and capricious government. He wished to substitute for it stable law which governments as well as peoples must obey. This idea was undoubtedly influential in the formation of the rigid Constitution of the United States. There was enacted a system of law which overshadowed also the legislators and which made the lawyers the final arbiters of government. Moreover, the difficulty of changing this system was made exceedingly great. It required a two-thirds majority in both legislative Houses and the consent of three-quarters of the state legislatures. Rousseau, in discussing the nature of the general will, admits that there are frequently, if not always, dissentient minorities, but that the will of these minorities is wrong and that they must be " forced to be free " by being constrained to obey the general will. But the general will must be generalised as far as possible. This was evidently the aim of the constitution-makers. The Constitution represented the general will of the sovereign American people (actually the interests of the propertied classes). When once enacted and established as the rule of law to which the legislation themselves may pay respect, it was made as hard as possible to change, so that theoretically no minority wills—no *volontés des individus*—could influence the course of government.

In this way we see in America politically centripetal and centrifugal tendencies supported by Rousseau's arguments. On the one hand, the need for strong, centralised federal government, for the rule of law and clear majority control; on the other hand the demand for State independence of federal interference,[1] supported

[1] The United States of America is made up of forty-eight different states, with separate state governments, united in a federation with a federal government and a President (now President Roosevelt).

by Rousseau's concept of a small State, by his theory of the invalidity of representation and his idea of direct government. Rousseau in America meant weaker not stronger government, individual and not governmental rights. It produced a democratic and not an authoritarian temper. And yet the very rigidity of the politcial system has made America economically the most highly authoritarian State in the world. Hamilton gained for the propertied classes a rule of law that tended to favour a diminishing, yet increasingly powerful, minority of the people.

Rousseau in Europe was in the main a force for nationalism. In France the Revolution of 1789 inaugurated a period of autocratic government and of revolutionary overthrowals. The national State was born anew in the nineteenth century to defend the interests of the commercial classes. Rousseau in Europe meant a strong central State; and that was why he was not so popular in England, for the English governing classes after 1832 were sufficiently strong to dispense with a strong centralised authority owing to the economic progress which English capitalism afforded at an accelerating rate, with its monopoly in the world market. And the same was really true in America, although Rousseau had considerable influence there, the Americans not being determined by the mental climate prevailing in Europe. They evolved their own peculiar interpretation of Rousseau to suit their immediate circumstances. Thus Rousseau in America became Jeffersonian democracy, sectional rights against federal authority, the election of the executive and even the judiciary. However, an element of the European interpretation did enter in. After all, the Americans had achieved a revolution in turning Britain out of their country and they had fought for this relative emancipation. Such things cannot be achieved politically without strong and central government. But the makers of the Constitution, by putting the power of interpretation into the hands of the lawyers, aggravated the tendencies



towards looseness in the federation and ensured that later the rule of law should turn in to the rule of lawyers who represented the interests of but a small portion of the nation. At the time of the Civil War this was clear; for the denial of equality to the negro seemed to contravene the principles of the Constitution. These principles in application ceased very soon to have anything to do with Rousseau's principles. They had to be continually adapted to the needs of American capitalism. Ideal philosophies can turn in growth into their opposites; the revolutionary philosopher of 1789 can be brought—however illegitimately—to testify in favour of the most reactionary class rule in the world.

The Oxonian school of T. H. Green represented a development of Rousseauism in more empirical form. Green's object was to provide, in 1879, a new philosophical basis for liberal conservatism. Green was to step right into the field of ethics and metaphysics for his theory of politics. He was an individualist, yet socially philanthropic in outlook, and believed that democracy must be founded upon religion. Starting with the abstractly conceived view that the purpose of political organisation was to permit the individual to live the " good life," he thought that the State should interfere to remove hindrances to individuals' freedom and increase the scope of opportunities. The laws of the State recognised certain rights, e.g. a right to property, which was fundamental, and—a new one—a right to knowledge, and force must be used to see that these rights are respected. Society as a whole recognises—or must recognise—some ideal good for all its members and must pursue this end. With these abstractions in mind, he considered how the State should be organised to ensure this end. Clearly it must be democratic in the sense that every individual is recognised as equally significant from a moral standpoint. But its laws must maintain certain rights essential to any individual " good life," as, e.g. property and education.

Despite Green's excursions into practical politics, it is

an essentially academic approach and gives us little insight into real political life. It brought out all the latent idealism in Rousseau, leaving the more definite content of his theories. Rousseauism became essentially the conservative philosophy of well-developed capitalism, because it justified, on the one side, with "natural rights" and the "social contract," the individual will against the State which was forced to concede Factory Acts and Trade Union Acts, and on the other side justified the authoritarian sovereignty of the national State. Green modifies the Rousseauian theory in favour, to make the analysis more concrete, of increased social services and State interference. Revolutionary spirit has turned into Tory ethics. Politics became with Green a branch of moral philosophy. Thus we come to the school whose political philosophy is all philosophy and no politics.

## CHAPTER III

# "IDEALISM" AND FASCIST MYTHS

IN THIS CHAPTER we deal with those thinkers who introduced as essential parts of their theories philosophical concepts. When Hegel evolved his theory of the State to glorify Prussian nationalism, he laid the foundations of conservative thought in politics for the future. His ideas were sponsored in England by Professor Bosanquet and now in diverse forms provide the intellectual background of Italian Fascism and German Nazism. The two idealist theories we shall deal with are the metaphysical theory of the State and Gierke's theory of group-personality.

But here, perhaps, we may be permitted a digression on German political thought in order to see how these idealist theories were at one time fighting slogans of the German middle classes and yet became the political mythology of reaction.

The division of Germany into different States at the time of the Reformation (in the sixteenth century) and the fighting of the Thirty Years' War (1618–48) on German soil were sufficient to postpone until much later the unification of Germany into a nation State. The consequences were far-reaching; the importance of social groups and their feeling of solidarity became very great, and the urge towards national unity, frustrated of realisation, increased in power and intensity and dominated political thought. There developed what Troeltsch calls a rift between the evolution of "Western" political ideas and the course followed by the German thinkers from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century.

" Western " thought that is, the ideas of the dominant thinkers of the nation states—was strongly influenced by Christian and classical philosophy and so tried to evolve universal principles of government, and, though they were actually the limited and conditioned expression of political interests at particular times, they were always expressed in such general terms as " natural rights of man," " the rule of reason," or the principles of utility and equality. These ideas were directly influenced by the discovery of scientific truth which proceeded apace after Bacon's time, at the earlier time by mathematical principles, and later by biology and psychology; and so the dominant ideas at the advent of industrial capitalism were those of inevitable progress expressed in the security of property and the desire, however illusory, to universalise the principles of nationalism.

German thought ran contrary to these ideas, though it often appeared to cohere in the general tradition. German thought became opposed to the desire for equal rights and the scientific spirit, and thus to the chief thinkers of the so-called " Western " tradition, like Rousseau and Bentham. German romantic philosophy was based upon the concept of personality and the individualising tendencies of historical evolution; it stressed the reality of personalities and the influence of *Kultur* in social groups. Its concept of society was founded upon the idea of the National Mind and its ideal was the wealth of national wills, expressing themselves in diverse and unequal ways. Law was the peculiar expression of the inner moral urge of peoples; and the State was the integrating political force. In this approach, we see the stress upon the reality of personal leadership and national solidarity, and these two trends become closely interconnected in Gierke's thought in the assertion that social groups have personal reality in their life.

Let us first take the philosophical theory of the State. This theory presents many difficulties to the political analyst. It is connected with beliefs about the universe which are scarcely intelligible to the non-specialist; and



it cannot really be divorced from these beliefs. But it is fairly clear that the metaphysical theorists were really constructing a theory of the ideal State and not trying to describe actual States. " The idea of the State should not denote any particular State, or particular institution; one must rather consider the Idea only, this actual God, by itself."[1] They claimed to be setting forth what were the absolutely necessary characteristics of *any* States, actual and possible.

To Hegel it is the highest duty of an individual to be a member of a State and only in virtue of his citizenship has the individual any purpose in life. The State, therefore, is the moral world where freedom is alone made real for the individual. But what is the foundation of the State ? The State is founded upon reason, and the conglomeration of individual wills fusing into the national will. Hegel identifies society and the State. Since the State is the moral world, law or the commands of the State constitute true justice. Therefore implicit obedience to the State and its absolute authority is necessary. But what is left of the individual's freedom ? According to Hegel, the individual finds freedom in obeying the State, (*a*) because the State is objectified reason, and (*b*) because the real will of the individual is always the same as that of the State. Hegel marks three stages of development of the individual in relation to society: (1) the consciousness of unity with others, owing to the recognition of the factor of nationality, involving individual self-sacrifice; (2) the consciousness of morality which means the recognition of the individual will to realisation; and (3) consciousness of good citizenship, involving perfect identification of the individual with the State, on recognising that in the State the individual's moral ideals can alone be realised. This progress through stages Hegel pronounced as necessary for societies as well as individuals. A people finally constituted as State is the supreme achievement of the human spirit. " The State," says Hegel, " is the self-certain absolute mind which

[1] Hegel, *Philosophy of Law.*

recognises no authority but its own. . . . To the complete State belongs, essentially, consciousness and thought."[1] Thus we find that the State is justified in doing anything to preserve and to advance its own power, subject to internal limits.

The historical context of Hegel's theory must be noted. It follows Rousseau's theory of the people's sovereign will expressed in law. Hegel substitutes for this general will the sovereign power of the State. He idealises State power; and in the State all men are related according to their special functions and the services they render—and therefore the soldier, symbolising military might, acquires the highest status. And the State, remember, has the supreme advantage of always being right.

Hegel, when he considers the meaning of war, becomes more practical. After noting that war preserves the "ethical health of nations," he says: "History shows phases which illustrate how successful wars have checked internal unrest and have strengthened the entire stability of the State."[2] Hegel for that reason favoured an absolute monarchy.

Now let us consider the theory of group personality in connection with this idea of the State. This asserts that social groups have a being apart from the particular purposes for which men create them. Thus the State is not an organisation created for the purpose of regulating life in a certain way, and maintaining certain interests. It is a natural reality from which men cannot escape, transcending their individual interests, and, as Gierke puts it, merging their egos into a Social Being of a higher order. And the loyalties of groups develop in us a feeling of organic unity. This idea was greatly modified in England to defend trade union rights and the Churches by the Guild Socialists and Dr. Figgis; but it has been particularly useful as the intellectual apologetic of Fascism. For Fascism asserts the organic unity of the State, corporatively organised, to which sectional interests ought to be subordinated, and "the higher

[1] Hegel, *Philosophy of History*. [2] Hegel, *Philosophy of Law*.



personality of the nation" which is in theory the unity of the whole nation, but in fact the class-divided totalitarian State at the disposal of which are placed all the instruments of force to maintain the social *status quo*.

True, it is common, especially when speaking of foreign nations, to talk as if they were unified entities, rather than complex aggregates of people, held together by habit, law, and force; but social groups are purposively organised and the emotions they foster are finally conditional upon the fulfilment of these purposes. National feeling can exist independently and be exploited, as it was during the War; and no one will dispute the existence of racial emotions, but the politically important factor is the end which groups pursue.

Hegel and his school gradually gathered together all the conservative elements in the bourgeois tradition—Hegel and Gierke, for example, were both conservative monarchists. If we examine the practical background we shall discover that its growth coincided with the "scramble for Africa" and the Great War. (Professor Hobhouse, a Liberal, actually wrote his book against the metaphysical theorists as a contribution to anti-Prussianism during the War—when in England the glorification of the national State was exactly parallel !) In the Fascist States, ideals have become subservient to practical necessities,[1] glorifying war and obedience to the State, "justifying" anti-Semitism, and stressing the force of nationalism. "Fascism conceives of the State as an absolute, in comparison with which all individuals and groups are relative, only to be conceived of in their relation to the State . . . the Fascist State is itself conscious, and has itself a will and a personality—thus it may be called the 'ethic' State."[2] Likewise the *führerprinzip* derives from Hegel and the idealists.

In all countries, the idolatry of the State, of order, and

[1] It is significant that the Nazis despise the intellect, preferring arguments of brute-force (*macht*), Hitler being especially fond of the word "brutal."

[2] Mussolini, *Political and Social Doctrine of Fascism*.

of " national unity," begins when the existence of democratic institutions becomes dangerous to the propertied classes, because they afford expression to social discontent.

It is characteristic of the mental elasticity of the British governing class to continue to pay lip-service tribute to " our British tradition of ordered freedom " while authoritarianism grows daily through its efforts—as, for example, recently at Harworth and in the dockyards at home, and abroad in India and through the Government's consistent refusal to stop the exploits of foreign Fascism. Tory politicians still talk about liberty and attack " dictators " (especially the Russian ones !), yet Fascist ideas are spreading, e.g. through the *Daily Mail* and the many leading Tories like Lord Londonderry, whose spiritual home is Hitler's Germany or Franco's Spain. The typically superficial theory that " Communism produces Fascism " supplies an excuse for curtailing the people's rights to express discontent against the Government on the pretence of curbing " alien " Fascism, e.g. the Public Order Act. Does anyone suppose, remembering the Ulster Rebellion and the Black-and-Tans, that our privileged classes will not, when confronted with a really formidable Socialist movement, *try to* exterminate popular freedom altogether and invoke Fascism " to save them " ?

## CHAPTER IV

# FROM NECESSARY TO FREE THINKING?

WE HAVE TAKEN THREE PHASES of the political theory of the *bourgeois* tradition, what may be called the more or less official ideology of capitalist society; which is not to say that a large number of capitalists consciously accepted these ideas about society and the State. The majority of people in any class have, so far in history, managed to do without " theory "; if politically conscious, they have been inspired by certain simple and straightforward notions about political life and certain definite emotional attitudes, concerning especially " liberty," " justice," and " equality." Only a very few people have evolved whole trains of thought and established intellectual traditions to justify ways of political organisation. These traditions are, however, important, for the ideas that are produced do change political life. And this particular tradition we have been examining did have its noteworthy practical effects in causing political events, amongst the many other causes: Voltaire, Diderot, and Rousseau, believing passionately in Nature and human potentialities, played a part in the great French Revolution, Bentham in the achievement of parliamentary reform in England, Hegel in the unification of Prussianised Germany.

Many thinkers, it will be noticed, have escaped consideration in the foregoing pages—Edmund Burke, for example. What I have been trying to consider is simply the *most important theories* and the logical development of the tradition. Readers who are acquainted with other theorists will be able to " fit them in " for themselves, to

comprehend how their ideas stand in relation to the actual development of capitalist society during the period and in relation to the other thinkers whom we have been considering.

Let us now pick out the chief characteristics of this tradition in order to discover why a satisfactory political theory did not develop out of it.

First of all its theory is *abstract*. It is really an attempt to conceive politics in " pure " theory and in set categories without continuous reference to actual experience. For example, we saw how James Mill, in setting out to discover the best form of government, deliberately eschewed all reference to actual political history, which he said could give us no solution in our quest for good government. He therefore espoused the *a priori method*, meaning that he tried to deduce from " first principles " and " pure reason " (i.e. purely out of his own head) what must be the best form of government. Similarly, Rousseau after postulating a supposedly historical social contract between the people and the government went on to develop a theory of the ideal State, considered abstractly, in which the people exercised their sovereignty directly and arrived at an abstract " general will " which was nobody's will and yet everybody's will. What are the symbols of this political tradition? The dictates of pure reason and " *l'ordre naturel* " (in the *philosophes*), the abstract interests of the majority (the utilitarians rarely examined precisely the nature of these interests), man and his natural rights (in Rousseau and Spencer), the isolated individual and his moral duties to the abstract State—any State? every State?—(in Green), and in the metaphysical theory, the State as " objectified reason," " absolute mind," and so on and so forth. Take another major instance—the conception of human nature in political life. These thinkers divide over this question into roughly two schools: they adhere either to the Hobbesian maxim (*a*) *homo homini lupus*[1] (the beneficent

[1] Literally, " every man a wolf to every other," i.e. the competition of all against all, each pursuing selfish interests.



war in which every man tries to climb on to the shoulders of every other man), or (*b*) that man is by nature good and virtuous, kind and philanthropic. The utilitarians stress the abstract rational selfishness of man; Rousseau man's abstract natural goodness. Neither conception has much bearing on actual human beings as you and I know them, owing to the abstractness of the interpretations. Thus the primary characteristic of the tradition is that it is *abstract*.

The second main characteristic which we have noted is *the process of subjective universalisation*. By this I mean the tendency to evolve ideas that are valid in a particular way or in particular instances and then to universalise them. The thinkers of this tradition were in the main in search of a universally valid method of dealing with States and societies and of theories which were universally applicable to all societies and all people. It is fairly true to say that they assumed that universal political principles could be found. But when we examine their ideas in the light of actual historical experience, we find that they unself-consciously universalised principles that were *historically conditioned*. The limited expression of particular political desires on the part of particular groups of people led to the laws of universal nature, the uniformly rational solution, the absolute moral idea. These thinkers were connected by history, whether they liked it or not, with the political struggles of their time, just as we—still not by our own choice—are to-day: the Benthamites with industrial capitalism, Rousseau with the creation of a class of peasant proprietors, Bosanquet with military imperialism. Bentham's theory that representative government would lead to the maximum happiness in society really meant that if the industrial capitalists were allowed to govern, then there would be the maximum production of wealth. But Bentham's claimed to be a universally valid idea, because everyone's interests were really naturally identical—but the Chartists and later the trade unions found that this was untrue. The idea was " universally " valid—at some

time, for some people. Thus also, the Hegelian idea that men's freedom would best be found in the maximum power of the State faithfully expressed the aspirations of the Prussian military caste in Bismarck's Empire—as also Italian and German " big business " to-day. And so the failure to examine the real conditions in which (*a*) interests, (*b*) rights, and (*c*) states exist led to this second characteristic of *subjective universalisation.*

The third principal characteristic to note is that this tradition is *idealistic,* whether latently or professedly, in the sense that it attempts to discover and claims to have discovered—in each special phase—some *final* solution to political and social problems, some *ideal* objective to be attained. When we considered utilitarianism, we saw how some thinkers—particularly among the French *philosophes*—thought that the completely rational society in which all the egoisms combined into one social interest would be attained more or less mechanically but that others, and especially Bentham, disclosed " wishful " thoughts, by saying, more or less " Well, if politics aren't as we say they are, they ought to be—and must be made so ": thus, the theory that the State must artificially identify the interests in society if they are not *naturally* identical. Utilitarianism ceases then to be scientific theory and postulates a purely ideal end, namely maximum happiness (i.e. maximum wealth-production, which is what it obviously amounts to). Rousseau's method is to consider, after a cursory glance at historical facts, what would be the ideal society and ideal State, according to abstract principles of right and duty. With Hegel and the metaphysicians, political theory becomes a branch of logic and is deduced from abstractly ascertained philosophical ideas like the Hegelian dialectic. Not only is there no reference to the *actual facts,* but theory is deliberately divorced from practice until it is eventually proclaimed as fact, i.e. Hegel works out logically the formal structure of the ideal State and then says that it is *there* in Prussia. (Certain features, like its absolutism, were, it is true,



recognisable.) In a similar way, the writings of any Fascists about " the Fascist State " or " the nation " reveal a complete divergence between ideas and facts (except when there are lapses, e.g. Mussolini, following Hegel, on war) until you are informed that the ideas *are* the facts ! Now, any theory of the State is a theory about things which actually exist. And the theorists cannot ignore the existence of their subjects. Theorising about States must be based upon analyses of what States actually are; surely you must know what the State is before you can say what it ought to be. Otherwise you are talking about a mere phantom. But the Hegelian theory is completely " ideal." The State in the theory is nowhere recognisable as having any reference of value to States as we actually experience and know them in political reality. Thus the tradition is idealistic in the sense of not cohering with the historical facts of politics.

The fourth characteristic that should be mentioned is that of *individualism.* On the one side we have the rational, calculating, self-interested individual of utilitarianism; on the other, the naturally good and morally conscious individual of Rousseau, Green, and Hegel (in different guises, of course). The State-absolutism of Hegel is even individualistic, as is also Gierke's group-personality theory, in that it is an attempt to *individualise* the State, social institutions, and social groups, ascribing to them minds and wills and consciousness. No cognisance in this tradition is taken of material-economic forces, of organic institutional growth and its effect on individuals and their actions, of the existence of social classes. Idealist theory developing in the epoch of economic imperialism carried the individualising tendency to the point of personifying—that is, attributing personal reality to—institutions like the State.[1] The personal freedom of *laissez-faire* government

[1] N.B.—The common newspaper habit of personifying " the nation," e.g. the nation versus the miners in the General Strike, " Germany wants so-and-so," etc., has considerably retarded in England recognition of the *class* issue.

is rejected, the abstract opposition between the individual and the State, as in Herbert Spencer's theory, disappears; and now the individuals collectively merge their freedoms into an exalted " freedom of the State," " State-power," etc., the State becoming itself an individual person—as a kind of consolation to the members of the State who have lost their " free individuality." *Individualism* is thus a hallmark of the *bourgeois* tradition. (When Sir W. Harcourt said in 1901, " We are all Socialists now," he merely meant that in these days of State-capitalism we all recognise the active part State institutions must play; but the many theorists went on individualising politics.)

The fifth characteristic we may note as *the property basis* of politics recognised by these thinkers. Either implicitly or explicitly, every one of these theorists presumes a fairly equal division of property amongst the members of any political society. Both Rousseau and Green explicitly stress a natural and moral " right to property." The utilitarians maintain that a main function of legislation is to see that property is secure. The background of this stress on the " sacred rights of property " came from Locke's contention that the produce of every man's labour became *his property*. But, as we know, the meaning of the word " property " in the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries is not the " produce of the owner's labour." Industrial property has rarely, if ever, been actually produced by the owner's labour. Moreover, as is historically clear, the very existence of capitalism requires a propertyless class of people whose function it is to do the work and to receive as a reward not property but wages. Capitalist society necessarily involves the existence of a class of capitalist owners and a class of people whose only property of value is their labour-power. Modern industrial organisation would be impossible if the factories, etc., were split up in ownership between every adult in the population, and, besides, there would be no one to do the work if everyone had property to live by ! And yet the utilitarians founded



the " natural identity of interests in society," Rousseau the " natural and inalienable rights to liberty and equality," upon a *property basis* for all individuals in society. No thinker in this tradition ever recognised that the system of society might require, or that the capitalist system which was growing up under their eyes did actually require necessarily, the existence of a propertyless class. On the whole, the idealists are free from such material considerations as property: property is enveloped in a mist of cosmic minds. Nevertheless, we may say that, at any rate, the more scientific and realistic *bourgeois* thinker definitely recognised that society must be founded upon a *private property basis of the widest character*.

In sum: we have enumerated five outstanding characteristics of the *bourgeois* tradition: (1) abstractness, (2) subjective universalism, (3) idealism, (4) individualism, and (5) recognition of private property as a source of political power. In evaluating these characteristics, we have seen both how and why the tradition failed to create a really scientific theory of politics. But there is another important thing which we must notice: namely, that the tradition has declined as it has developed from utilitarianism to Hegelianism and pseudo-metaphysics. (The latter, we may note in passing, denies either implicitly or explicitly the tenets of the former. See, for example, Mussolini on Liberalism. In Fascism, the Hegelian absolute monarchy takes the form of *duces* and *führers*—a concession to popular prejudice !) Utilitarianism was a virile philosophy, relatively realistic and progressive. Its analysis was within limits valid for incipient capitalism and suited its (at that time) historically progressive interests in directing political attention to the goal of maximum wealth-production and the criterion of social utility. Again, Bentham's conception of human nature fitted correctly the rising *bourgeois* class, with its pugnacity in matters of trade. Hegelianism was conservative. Crudely put, it was a glorification of the political *status quo*. Theorising about

ideal States became idealising actual States. Idealist theory, broadly speaking, fitted and fits no political facts and is scarcely intelligible in terms of the actual political world with which we are acquainted. It is a pure rationalisation of social and imperial oppression:[1] the philosophy of the "mailed fist" in India, China, Abyssinia, Spain.

The political thought of the *bourgeois* tradition began as a really independent attempt to evolve a scientific theory of politics when it was attacking the lumbering burden of feudal taxes, the expensive machinery of monarchy, and the privileges of the Church; when it was a revolt against despotic authority and a struggle to liberate mankind from feudal fetters; when it was contrasting the natural community-life of "uncivilised" peoples with the artificial conventions of "high society"; but now it is either a denial that a scientific theory can be produced, "anti-Marxism," or metaphysical fairy-tales. Why? Because political thinking must now be freed from the bonds of private property, nationalism, and class prejudice.

[1] Note that the utilitarians were often genuinely anti-imperialist: e.g. James Mill on the West Indies (*Essay on Government*) and his son on India (*Essay on Liberty*): and, in France, especially Diderot (*see* "The Old Man's Farewell" in the Supplement to Bougainville's *Voyage*).

# PART II

# THE TRADITION OF WORKING-CLASS POLITICS

## CHAPTER I

## THE ANARCHIST AND UTOPIAN THEORY

In the French Revolution, as in Cromwellian England, all the progressive forces united, from the richest of the merchants to the poorest of the labourers, in order to overthrow the remnants of feudalism. But whereas they were all anti-feudal and anti-Church, they were not all—on the positive side—good Liberals; the gospel of Benthamism became the dominant, but was not the only, social creed of that time. It was the Third Estate that made the '89 Revolution and that dominated the British Parliament after 1832—the lawyers, merchants, and industrialists; but yet there was a Fourth Estate, composed of the poor and uneducated labouring classes—namely, the propertyless. These also played their part in ridding the world of the oppressive feudal régime with its effete luxury-loving aristocracy, its educational backwardness, and religious superstition, but they obtained—not even the vote. Very soon they found themselves dragged into unhealthy factories and set to work on the new-fangled machines for appallingly long hours. Their poverty was scarcely alleviated at first and they were denied the benefits of education by law

and by fatigue. The slogans of equality and happiness were for them frightful mockeries, because on every hand in the new society industrialism and the propertied classes began to oppress them. And thus in France, in 1796, there was Babeuf's rising on behalf of the poor and the propertyless and in England the Luddites began their campaign against the hated machines which to them symbolised more than anything else the new order of profit-seeking capitalism.

The Fourth Estate had its thinkers. They were men of varied character, some springing from the working classes, like Babeuf, and others from the middle classes, like Paine and Godwin. Moreover, they varied greatly in outlook and ideas. Many of them were chiefly concerned to point out the inconsistencies in the Encyclopædists and the utilitarians, some evolved communist utopias; others, less radical on the whole, were utilitarians who carried the latent anarchism in their doctrines to its logical conclusion. Nearly all of them were anarchists of one type or another, thinkers who denied to social authority in general and the State in particular any function whatsoever, because they conceived it as purely an instrument of oppression and therefore of enslavement. They extolled the benefits of small close-knit societies in which public opinion could be a real guiding force, which, combined with the natural goodness of men and women, would enable social order and discipline to be maintained without the need of coercion. Owen, for example, put these beliefs into practice in his communist colonies. Private property, together with the State, they believed to be the root of all evils, actual and possible. Anarchism, utopia-building, the emotional urge towards equalitarian communism, characterised the beginning of the working-class tradition of political thought.

The beginnings of the tradition may be seen in Morelly and the Abbé Mably, both of whom derived much from an obscure country vicar named Meslier. These thinkers criticised the utilitarians because their



principles would lead to chaos—and they themselves admitted it. Did not the utilitarians provide for the artificial identification of interests—showing that " natural harmony " was not a fact—and Rousseau say that men might have to be " forced to be free " ? They were wrong, it was argued, in placing happiness before moral virtue; virtue must precede individual happiness. In the virtuous society, there must be no private possessions and every individual must first and foremost contribute to the social welfare of his fellows as a servant of society. Morelly conceived of a sort of patriarchal communism in which the heads of families and the chiefs in each profession jointly legislate for society economically, politically, and culturally. The social structure would be a federation of families, tribes, cities, and provinces, each having its own self-governing unit which elected representatives to the higher body on much the same lines as the structure of the Soviet Union before the new (1936–7) Constitution achieved the progression towards more direct representation of the people. Mably and Morelly both had abounded confidence (*a*) in education as a cure for social defects and (*b*) in the possibility of producing enough wealth to satisfy the needs of all, granted they performed a modicum of productive labour.

Linguet, Maréchal, and Babeuf provide the intellectual background to the rising of 1796. They preached that the productive resources of the community belong naturally and morally to its members and therefore that private property is an unjustifiable oppression and robbery. The slogan of the Revolution was " Equality." Yet where was there equality so long as one man could prevent another from earning his livelihood ? Equality before the law is a fiction, said Maréchal in his *Manifesto of Equals*; real equality means communism. All members of the community should have the same standard of life, the same education, and the same opportunities.

These writers of the Fourth Estate in the French Revolution were, as we see, utopian and idealistic—their

thought contained more moral aspiration than political principle. In England at about the same time anarchism found very different advocates in Paine and Godwin. Thomas Paine, who gained revolutionary experience both in America and in France (where he was elected to the Assembly), was a believer in natural rights and democracy. Following Rousseau, he imagined that men in the state of Nature had certain rights, which, however, they were unable properly to secure. Consequently, they formed civil society in order to make those rights to liberty and equality inviolable. But government had ceased to fulfil its function of guaranteeing these rights. It had become corrupted by superstition (the rule of priestcraft) and power (the rule of conquest), instead of pursuing the common rights of man (the rule of reason). Government must be genuinely representative and also paternalistic, but " the more perfect civilisation is, the less occasion has it for Government, because the more does it regulate its own affairs, and govern itself " (*The Rights of Man*). Godwin, whose chief work was called *Political Justice*, underlined the anarchical defence of society against the State and the idea of humanity's natural goodness.[1] Peter Kropotkin, a later Russian anarchist, called him " the first theoriser of Socialism without government—that is to say, of Anarchism." He was an extremely academic and abstract speculative thinker who drew widely from all the intellectual resources of his time. He laid tremendous stress on the idea of progress and human perfectibility. He shared the rationalist outlook of the utilitarians with the belief in *a priori* reasoning and the doctrine of the greatest happiness; and yet he combined these ideas with a recognition that the question of private property was fundamental in society, that the " system of things "

[1] Paine was also responsible, in the *Age of Reason*, for advanced Biblical criticism; he was a rational deist. His optimism, like Owen's, was unlimited: for example, he thought that " What Athens was in miniature, America will be in magnitude " (*The Rights of Man*).



must provide real equality for all human beings, and that the characters of individuals were determined largely by their environments. Godwin attacked all authoritarian institutions and traditions: government was always purely coercive; private property made the propertyless dependent; marriage was a " fraud " and hindered individual development, because in marriage women became the property of men, which was unnatural and vicious;[1] even promises were assailed as immoral and unnecessary because they *bound* people in a certain relationship! Education and social organisation would soon make the existence of all authority completely unnecessary and ridiculous. Godwin's idea of organisation was to divide the community into parish units for police purposes (that is, to suppress injustice); but, really, he did not believe in organisation at all. He carried anarchism to the lengths of regarding society as just an " aggregate of individuals."

At about the same time as Godwin, a French thinker called Fourier evolved a form of federal anarchism, later popularised by Considérant. Fourier desired that all human beings should have a full and free life and believed that if all coercion in society was once abolished the problem of freedom and equality would be solved. He therefore advocated the creation of " communal agencies " or " communes " (called phalanxes) in which people would freely associate together to produce commodities and to buy and sell. In these communes, labour would be made easy and attractive and its dignity would be amply recognised, so that no coercion would be necessary in order to get the work done and to settle how the workers should be rewarded. Education and public opinion would be sufficient within each small community to maintain adequate social discipline. The communes would be the basic units of society and would freely federate to form national and even international communities. And how were these

[1] Godwin was married for a year to Mary Wollstonecraft, a leading figure in the struggle for women's emancipation.

organisations to be set up? By permeation of capitalist society.

That faith was shared by an Englishman, Robert Owen, with whom we shall deal more fully, because Owen and Owenism occupied an important place in working-class politics during the second quarter of the nineteenth century. And in this particular instance we shall see clearly the relation of the anarchist tradition to the political history of the working-class movement.

Owenism bridged the gap in the history of the British working-class movement between the period of alliance with the middle classes after the legalisation of trade unions in 1825 and the growth of Chartism. Owen caught the workers on the rebound from the agitation for political reform, in the attainment of which they had been deceived by the middle-class leaders. The workers had contributed greatly to the obtaining of the Reform Act of 1832, but they gained nothing from it. The middle classes gained the predominant political status and rejected the working-class alliance for the purposes of enfranchising the wage-earners; so the workers felt that they had been deceived. Their reaction took two forms: first, a general anti-political form, a belief that their economic grievances could be dealt with outside of politics altogether; and, second, a gradual development towards a class-war policy and a class-war theory. To the first of these forms, Robert Owen ministered. He was a typically English Utopian Socialist, anti-political, a great believer in co-operation. He had a strong personality, and after 1832 soon secured a widespread hearing and influence amongst the workers, temporarily becoming one of their leaders both in theory and practice. But he was doomed to fail, primarily because his theories simply would not work out in a phase of rising capitalism, secondly, because he refused to have anything to do with politics, and, thirdly, because of his quarrels with other working-class leaders. But the phase of Owenism was a necessary one in the transition from the middle-class alliance to independent



working-class political activity and the forging of the Labour and trade-union movement.

Owen grew up in troublous times. As a child and adolescent, he grew up during the American and French Wars, and was on the way to manhood at the time when the radical societies and trade unions were beginning to agitate on a wide scale and to threaten the governing classes. At the age of twenty-eight he saw the Combination Laws passed on to the Statute Book, and in the thirties experienced the times of external war with Napoleon and internal unrest. During these times he was at New Lanark, after having seen something of London and Manchester in his youth as a shop-boy and later as a manufacturer of textile machinery. Owen was a thinker, but neither so original nor so encyclopædic as many of his contemporaries; however, he did acquire comparatively young certain fixed ideas which laid the basis of his work. These ideas had been in his mind before he went to New Lanark, but it was only in the period 1813–20 that he set them forth.

Owen believed that man's character was formed for, not by, him by his environment and circumstances. "Good circumstances create good characters" was his motto; and so the inferior conditions of the labourers should be abolished. With Bentham, he held that the criterion of justice was the greatest happiness. Happiness arises from the formation of character by good circumstances of living. "The inhabitants of every country are trained and formed by its great leading existing circumstances, and the character of the lower orders is now formed chiefly by circumstances arising from trade; . . . and the governing principle of trade, manufacturers, and commerce is immediate pecuniary gain to which on the great scale every other is made to give way. All are sedulously trained to sell dear and buy cheap; and to succeed in this art the parties must be taught to acquire strong powers of deception. . . . Strictly speaking, however, this defect ought not to be attributed to the individuals possessing it,

but to the overwhelming effect of the system."[1] The reformer, therefore, must widely propagate that character is formed by circumstances if he is to gain universal consent for the change of circumstances necessary to the creation of good characters. Owen set about both tasks at New Lanark; and in the period 1815–20 it became the centre of reformers' attention. Owen extended many benefits to the workers in his cotton mills, both in the forms of better conditions of work and of educational activities. He was zealous in spreading his co-operative ideas, and, after exhorting his fellow employers to follow his example, he urged the Government to consider the task of national education and national employment. Not until after 1813, in his final partnership, had he a free hand to develop New Lanark along his proposed lines. After that date he really began to mature. First he preached better conditions. He believed in enlightened management which incidentally, when combined with his business efficiency, was very profitable. As Mr. Postgate points out, he was then simply the Cadbury of his day. But by 1817 he had developed considerably. Now he began to denounce religion in a famous address as gross error and to attack established institutions. And at this time he realised that the whole system which the industrial middle class were organising made against the moral habits he desired to see cultivated. From 1817 to 1820 he was reborn as a socialist at the time when the fight for trade-union legalisation was coming to a climax. The sympathisers and fellow-reformers who had greeted Mr. Owen the philanthropist were definitely hostile to Mr. Owen the socialist. Even many of his radical friends were disappointed. Nor had any manufacturers organised the "villages of co-operation" so assiduously advocated for many years by Owen. Owen began to see more clearly the nature of society and the working-class position. But he still yearned for the new moral

[1] Robert Owen, *Observations on the Effects of the Manufacturing System.*



world. The British workers were not yet ready to acclaim him. So in 1824 he went to America, having bought the Rappite colony of Harmony in Indiana. Here he stayed until 1829, with only brief visits to England interspersed.

This is a period in Owen's development over which we may speedily pass. The colony of New Harmony was not overwhelmingly successful, but Owen was not in the least deterred by failure. Throughout his life he maintained a quite immoderate optimism. We may proceed directly to the period in which Owen became the central figure of the working-class movement—after 1832. In 1832 the workers suffered political defeat. After severe struggles they were left voteless and unrepresented. Owenism caught them on the rebound for several reasons: (1) Owen acknowledged the full claims of labour in considering it as the sole creator of value; (2) Owen promised to do by social organisation what the political agitators had failed to achieve. Co-operatives and labour exchanges sprang up in the effort to dispense with employers and so with private profit. In 1833 Owen persuaded the Builders' Union to attempt to take over the entire industry. In 1831 Owen had been agitating in the co-operative organisations and was offered rooms in Gray's Inn Road by a certain Bromley for the purposes of founding an educational institute. In 1832 he organised co-operative congresses at Manchester and London to which he proposed the opening of a labour exchange at the Institute. This was done in September and at first enjoyed considerable success. In the same year an exchange was opened in Birmingham. The theory behind these exchanges was primarily to provide separate working-class centres of distribution, co-operative producers' and consumers' societies; and also to exchange goods more in accordance with their real value. These exchanges did not last long, however: but in the agitation for them Owen conceived a new and greater ideal for which he began to work. He saw the importance of the whole trade-union and co-operative movement as a

struggle against the existing order, much as the German Weitling, author of *Guarantees of Harmony and Liberty*, progressed about the same time from moral idealism to recognising the need for political struggle.

Owen's career provides such striking examples in practice of the effects of politically anarchist views that I have devoted disproportionate space to it. Proudhon in France developed his ideas of mutualism contemporaneously. He was the first thinker actually to employ the word " anarchy " in describing his philosophy, and was a close follower of Fourier and the English socialist economists like Thompson. He was responsible for the famous saying: " *La Propriété, c'est le vol* " (" Property is theft "). Stressing the need for equality as a social end, he advocated the formation of co-operatives in production and distribution and the spread of mutual associations. The existence of the State was due to (*a*) economic inequality and (*b*) the absence of justice, but once private property was abolished and small producers' and consumers' associations were established, freely contracting amongst themselves and knit together in a federal structure, then the State would automatically disappear and human beings would enjoy the freedoms of social anarchy.[1]

Anarchism was fully developed at the time of Owen and Proudhon. At that time it was still almost possible to believe that " villages of co-operation " or " communes " could actually be established in order to supersede gradually the coercive machinery of capitalist society. Moreover, political activity had not yet brought the working classes many benefits, so that their eyes could still be focused upon distant utopias. But changes soon took place. Industrial activity began to be organised on an unimaginably larger scale through mechanised production, and, together with the expansion of industry and trade, the political system of capitalism became democratised as working-class consciousness began to

[1] Proudhon's influence, though small, still lingers on in France, e.g. Valois' " New age " plan.



express itself in political actions. Anarchism became a purely negative creed as outlined in the controversy between Proudhon, Bakunin, and Marx. Bakunin, whose disruptive influence contributed largely to the break-up of the First International, adhered rigidly to the equation, the State=negation of liberty, and therefore advocated always as the immediate aim and consequence of revolution the abolition of the State and the creation of a free federation of autonomous units—parishes, communes, and the like.

In the hands of the syndicalists led by Sorel, anarchism took a somewhat different turn. Syndicalism was almost entirely a negative philosophy deriving much from the practical experience of the French trade unions (*syndicats*). It really constituted, as has been pointed out, a revolt against certain tendencies in the working-class movement in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Its negativeness takes two forms. First, it is anti-political, in the way that it preaches to the people to desist from political activities and to concentrate purely upon economic, and especially industrial, activities as the sole means of obtaining social change. Secondly, it is anti-intellectual. Its essence is the fundamental rejection of the power of reason as a principal driving force in human affairs. It is not rational comprehension of things, but passion which spurs men on to achieve great social changes. Now, it will be seen from these two characteristics, that, on the one hand, syndicalism is chiefly concerned with method and strategy, and not with any particular theory of society or of political aims. These latter things Sorel took over almost entirely from the earlier anarchists and Marx. He believed, together with Saint-Simon and Bakunin, that the ultimate aim was " organised anarchy," i.e. complete self-government for those who work, with the disappearance of the coercive power and all its manifestations. In an ideal community everything would be based upon the syndicates which managed economic affairs. Politics, as commonly understood hitherto, would be abolished.

Anti-politicism was a protest against the Social Democratic "watering down" of revolutionary policy[1] for the sake of mixing in *bourgeois* politics and getting positions in political institutions; for already in the 'nineties there had begun the process whereby leading socialists from time to time go over to "the enemy." Millerand and Briand were, of course, two cardinal cases in France. Sorel saw (*a*) that participation in the political activities of the capitalist régime involved sacrificing immediate revolutionary tactics and conforming to certain conventions, and (*b*) that such participation was extremely liable to corrupt socialist leaders and to divorce them from their rank and file. In addition to this, he had severe theoretical objections to indulgence in politics at all. According to him, nothing could be achieved by the capture of political power, for power was in capitalist society basically economic and lay with the producers. Therefore it was capture of the factories, not capture of the parliaments, that was necessary. Capture economic power, put it into the hands of the syndicates of workers, and you have instituted proletarian democracy—as soon, that is to say, as you have brushed aside the whole State apparatus and its centralising coercive powers. Capture political power, get a majority in the Chamber, etc., and the capitalists still command the workers in their daily lives and you have no power—physical power, that is—to stop them. (Let us remember, in parentheses, that the Paris Communards in 1871 captured political power; Sorel noted carefully also how in the earlier French revolutions the *bourgeoisie* had used the working classes in politics in order to obtain their privileges; to turn the workers' attention to politics is therefore, he said, to delude the workers. But Sorel was mistaken; the Communards were not wrong to seize political powers, but wrong in their failure to utilise it correctly.) The second tendency—anti-intellectualism—is a revolt against Marxism. The Marxists, according to Sorel, had overstressed the power of reason. They thought that if only

[1] Social democracy we consider in the next chapter.



it was possible to make the oppressed understand how and why they were oppressed and what it was necessary to do in order to emancipate themselves, then revolution would come, because the people—or rather the working classes—would be rationally convinced of its necessity. Sorel kicked—and kicked hard—against intellectual rationalism of any kind, for he did not believe that men were motivated by the rational considerations at all, by the calculus of their interests or the opportunities to enlarge their freedom. He emphasised three main points: (*a*) the importance of the class war which was going on and of the employment of violence. Violence raises men's passions to a white heat; (*b*) faith in the creative urge of the workers; the workers rebel, not to promote their interests, but to express their inner urge for living; (*c*) the necessity of "myths": "Men who are participating in a great social movement always picture their coming action as a battle in which their cause is to triumph . . . these constructions, a knowledge of which is so important for historians, I propose to call 'myths.' . . . The syndicalist 'general strike' and Marx's 'catastrophic revolution' are such myths."[1] A myth is that which calls men's passions and emotions into play so strongly that they achieve a great social change.[2]

Syndicalism is important as the final development of the anarchist tradition. In Sorel, anarchism is a purely negative theory because it has shed its utopian ideas and crystallised into a bias against politics and a kind of revolutionary emotionalism (e.g. the belief in "myths"). Myths undoubtedly play a big part in politics—for example, in wars—but Sorel makes the myth the centre of revolutionary politics and the "soul of the revolutionary proletariat" a substitute for a practical socialist

[1] G. Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*.

[2] Cf. "The general strike is indeed what I have said: the *myth* in which socialism is wholly comprised, i.e. a body of images capable of evoking instinctively all the sentiments corresponding to the different manifestations of the war undertaken by socialism against modern society" (G. Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*).

policy. From the writings of the syndicalists, we can gather little or nothing about the actual nature of the future socialist society or the principles upon which it is to be conducted.

Anarchism was the instinctive reaction of working-class thought against the use of the State and social institutions to introduce capitalism. Utopianism was the instinctive escape from a world of industrial horrors, lack of education, and the idol of monetary success into a world governed by reason in which all human beings were really equal and could enjoy the benefits of wealth and education, making their own laws in their co-operative villages, communes, mutual-credit societies, and what-not. But anarchism as a practical policy was merely negative—anti-authoritarian, whatever the authority might be; and utopian day-dreaming is no substitute for a scientific theory of society. From Mably to Owen, from Godwin to Sorel, anarchism and utopianism expressed the aspirations of the disinherited under capitalism for a better world. But anarchist theory was highly abstract and anarchist practice, as the Owenites and the syndicalists[1] have shown, lacked consistency and realism. In the anarchist phase, the working classes were only just beginning to think about politics.

[1] As, for example, quite recently in Spain.

## CHAPTER II

# SOCIAL DEMOCRACY

THE GROWTH of the working-class movement in different countries was extremely diverse. Anarchist ideas were still influential in France at the time of the Commune in 1871, particularly in the form of Blanqui's theory of conspiratorial revolution that political power must be captured by a small, well-disciplined band of revolutionaries; but in England they had already died out in the 1870's, save for the short-lived vogue of syndicalism and guild socialism just before the War. In most countries the workers had built up trade-union organisations and compelled an extension of the franchise so as to include their members. As early as the 'sixties in England, working men were entering Parliament and turning their eyes to the achievement of immediate reforms, better health conditions, compensation laws, insurance benefits, and the legal protection of their associations. The earlier radicalism which inspired the Chartist Movement was developing into a desire for a working-men's party which could extract social reforms from capitalism in the way that the trade unions extracted economic reforms. The era of reform was at hand; capitalism could afford to grant concessions to the working classes. In their turn, the working classes, who were increasing in political consciousness, began to concentrate their main attention, not on ultimate objectives or communal experiments, but upon the progressive attainment of social, political, and economic reforms within the structure of the existing order. This phase of development, which saw the establishment of the Social Democratic Party in Germany, the Labour Party in Great Britain, and political counterparts

elsewhere, was not without its theoreticians and movement of ideas. Its corresponding intellectual growth took varied forms, in accordance very often with particular thinkers: revisionism and State socialism (Lassalleanism) in Germany, social reformism and Fabianism in Britain, and Saint-Simonism in France. The essentials of the new social philosophy have usually been called " Social Democracy."

Social democracy was a theory suited to the practice of a movement attempting to transform the nature and aims of the existing social structure by obtaining piecemeal reform. Freedom in capitalist society was as yet limited to those who owned industrial and landed property. But the propertyless are numerically the largest and the most productive section of the community. Therefore, through organised strength, we will compel the capitalists to extend social freedom by giving us, the workers, the vote to elect our legislators, by legally permitting us to withhold our labour in trade disputes, and by laying down minimum wage rates, etc. And, finally, we shall be politically strong enough to win elections and so capture the sovereign legislative power, and then we can, and shall be fully justified in doing so, legally and peacefully change the whole structure of society, relieve the capitalists of their property power, and make all men and women free and equal citizens by making the State, their representative, the sole owner of all productive resources and the central pivot of a co-operative commonwealth. What must be done is not, as the anarchists thought, to overthrow all authoritarianism, but to penetrate the organs of authority yourself and utilise them to introduce socialist and democratic measures rather than to maintain the capitalist *status quo*. Eschew utopian day-dreaming, cease ranting against the State, which is in the hands of others, and get down to the practical problem of organising to capture it for your own social and socialist (?) advantage.

This development naturally saw a much more



empirical approach to political problems and the production of opportunist policies. People were getting down to a detailed analysis of capitalism and its effects and to thinking out the possible roads of social change from capitalism to a future and better system. Saint-Simon it was who first expressed the beliefs and theories which form the main contentions of Social Democracy. He made his starting-point evolution of mankind socially from slavery to serfdom and from serfdom to wage-slavery. This gradual historical growth he envisaged as the march of the human race towards real material and mental freedom which had to be based upon a recognition of equality. In this progress of humanity, he recognised that the function of the State and social authority primarily originated in property, in the need to give legal and moral sanction to individual and imperial possession and acquisition of the productive resources of the earth. The establishment of capitalism meant the triumph of the industrialising and profit-seeking middle classes over the feudal landowners, with their puppet kings and puppet churches. Under capitalism everything was being subordinated to the production of wealth and to establishing man's dominance over Nature by the application of the new scientific industrial technique—for individual profit. Now, if only individual private property could be abolished and economic inequality done away with, all men and women could enjoy freely and equally the material plenty which the productive system could now provide and the opportunities for leisure and culture which a new society would afford, each giving " according to his capacity " and receiving " according to his works." How could this be done? By capturing political power and the State and using it to abolish private property. " The State would finally become the sole owner of all the lands and industrial concerns, as also the supreme regulator of all labour, the head and absolute regulator of the three main functions of social life—Art, Science, and Industry." This was the philosophy of State socialism.

In Germany the same sort of philosophy was expressed by Lassalle with the ideal of a " free people's State " and embodied in the Gotha Programme of the Social Democratic Party. But in Germany social democracy took, under Bernstein's influence, the particular form of a revision of Marxism. The Social Democrats began greatly under the influence of Marx and evolved a kind of political orthodoxy which was supposed to include the essentials of Marx's philosophy. Bernstein set himself out to break down these ideas by a criticism of Marx (with whose ideas we deal in the next chapter). Bernstein objected particularly to Marx's theory of the class nature of the State and the idea that social change involves and will involve violent and revolutionary methods. He thought that a great development of moral consciousness was taking place which would transform political life under capitalism.[1] (He therefore, he said, substituted Kant for cant.) After all, political democracy was growing up (at the end of the nineteenth century) and the working class, once enfranchised, would naturally be in number the preponderating factor in politics. Therefore, they could elect their own government and change the laws so as to give them economic freedom. The State was an impartial instrument of legislation. And the capitalist class, which was on the whole liberal-minded and respectful of the ethical duty of obedience, would peacefully accept the verdict of the majority. The worker might be under a capitalist dictatorship in industry; but in politics he was a perfectly free citizen and the State was " his " State as much as the capitalists'.[2] The State which had to be abolished to inaugurate the socialist society of the anarchists was the peak and pyramid of the future society of social democracy.

In England, where, it must be noted, " theory " developed much more slowly than on the Continent, similar ideas were expressed, e.g. by Ramsay Macdonald, Sidney Webb, and the Fabians. The idea of evolutionary progress became particularly important. Macdonald, for example, wrote a book basing his whole political theory upon the idea of organism and organic society. He supposed that all the elements of society, individuals, groups, and so forth, were organically connected and were gradually progressing in development towards a fully integrated whole. Individualism and the competitive spirit expressed the desire of small units in society to preserve themselves by dominating the other units, but as the weakest elements were eliminated in the struggle the co-operative spirit would grow up and all the organisms in society would fuse themselves into one big organism—namely, the society or the State (which tended to be implicitly identified) itself. Gradual evolution spelt inevitable progress. *Natura non facit saltum* (Nature does not make jumps). Capitalism had given and was giving to the workers political freedom, free speech, and the secret ballot; step by step, they would also gain their economic self-government by a process of municipalisation and nationalisation. The Fabians, therefore, set about producing " plans " for piecemeal social reform—" gas and water socialism." It is indicative to notice that some thinkers regarded the growth of limited liability companies as part of a democratising process going on in economic life. Technical advancement would eventually entail—and the capitalist individualists were bound to realise this themselves—social control of the important public services and industries. Was not State intervention growing day by day?

Out of these ideas there eventually evolved an important theory of the German ex-Marxist Kautsky's, the theory of ultra-imperialism. Marx and Lenin had said that the development of capitalism into a search for empire and colonies (e.g. " the scramble for Africa " in the 'nineties) was certain to lead to increasing conflict,

[1] A resuscitation of the ideas of the mid-nineteenth-century German " true " socialists, led by Karl Grün, who believed in the dissemination of brotherly love and general " uplift " as the sole means of change.

[2] Note that this doctrine led the Social Democrats to support the War " in the interests of the German State."

struggles between nations, colonial conflicts, and civil wars. No, said Kautsky, the growth of monopolies in industry, the export of capital to " backward regions," the establishment of international cartels, all meant that competition was disappearing and capitalism was internationalising its control. It was entering a peaceful stage when a League of States would be set up (and was not a League of Nations established after the Great War ?) which would tackle the problem of world organisation and world government. Thus conflict would gradually be eliminated by the ultra-imperialist governments themselves from national and international society, which would ensure—sure enough—the peaceful transformation of society from capitalism to socialism—for control would now be centralised in the hands of the financial and industrial magnates and would naturally be transferred into the hands of the government and governments as soon as the requisite laws were passed. Capitalist society, through its constant centralising and organising processes, would transform itself into a society in which the State took full control over, and responsibility for, economic, political, and social life.[1]

Such ideas as we have been examining grew, I think, out of three factors in the environment of the late nineteenth century: (1) *The influence of Darwinian biology*; (2) *the liberal humanitarian outlook of the prosperous middle classes*; (3) *the growth of State capitalism in practice*, particularly in the era of imperial competition between Britain, France, and Germany. First, Darwin had shown, it was said, how the human race had evolved from purely animal life to a more complex social life by a process of natural selection of individuals and groups. This was

[1] But the belief in inevitably gradual and " stage by stage " evolution went much further. Heinrich von Cunow, a leading German Social Democrat, justified socialist participation in the War on the grounds that it was a necessary part of capitalism's imperialist phase which had to precede the coming of international socialism. Thus also the supine parliamentarianism of " constitutional " socialism, *v.* R. Niebuhr, *Moral Man*, pp. 223-30.



historically an inevitable one; life inevitably became more heterogeneous and varied, man's command over Nature inevitably strengthened, man himself inevitably became more conscious of his powers of organisation and material and cultural betterment. Capitalist individualism was a great advance on the feudal régime, in respect of man's freedom and development. Now inside capitalism itself the seeds of collectivism were growing up, groups like trade unions were playing a vital role in society, and thus the whole of society's life was tending to become collectivised. Side by side with this, the " social conscience " was appearing. In the process of evolution, it was therefore only a matter of time before socialism—that is to say, State ownership and control of material resources for the benefit of all—would be instituted. Thus, the philosophy of " the inevitability of gradualness." Secondly, it appeared to the Social Democrats that the capitalists themselves were being converted to a quasi-socialist outlook and would therefore allow socialism to be introduced without violently resisting it. Capitalist governments had passed measures giving the vote to the working classes, permitting the secret ballot, ensuring freedom of speech and assembly (within limits), legally protecting trade union funds and the right to strike and picket, and so forth. Social service legislation was increasing year by year. Moreover, the movements for better health conditions, compensation, and insurance benefits were strongly supported by sections of the middle classes. Particularly in England, the moral sympathy of the middle classes was being aroused by liberal and humanitarian ideals, producing all sorts of voluntary bodies dedicated to the alleviation of the conditions of the poor. Green advocated democracy on purely ethical grounds and Sir W. Harcourt[1] said (1901), " We are all socialists now." Therefore, concluded the Social Democrats, following Bernstein, ethical consciousness is supplanting the rule of force in society. The capitalists will soon be in a mood to

[1] A Liberal Cabinet Minister.

surrender their arbitrary economic power when a majority decision is recorded against it. Thirdly, there were the actual facts of State intervention during the later half of the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries. The Social Democrats, as we have seen, believed that the State as it had been evolved in capitalist society as soon as political democracy was established was an impartial institution, the effective means of introducing the socialist commonwealth. Arguing, then, that to get socialism meant to increase State power in social life, they sometimes reversed the contention by saying that every increase in the State power in society meant socialism. Socialism tended to be equated with State intervention, without resort to the criterion of *cui bono ?* (i.e. in whose interests is it done ?). A cursory examination of the statute books reveals during the successive phases of capitalism—and especially when imperial ventures are indulged in—a phenomenal increase of State intervention in everything: industry, agriculture, education, entertainment; and, in addition, the State actually controlled certain enterprises, like the railways in Germany and France, or exercised a supervisory authority, as in the case of the Electricity Commission and the B.B.C. in Britain (and during the Great War, for that matter, in every country over practically all activities).

As we can see, these ideas cohered beautifully. The theory that socialism would gradually be introduced by parliamentary measures cohered with the fact that the State was interfering very widely in social activities and expanding its power and with the idea that the capitalist politicians were experiencing a moral change because they made democratic concessions to working-class agitation. And it has taken a long time to break the optimistic outlook of social democracy. The belief in inevitable progress and peaceful change and in *étatisme*[1]

[1] Lit. " State-ism," i.e. the belief in the parliamentary State as the principal instrument to establish and to preserve a socialist society.



still dominated the Labour movements of the West after the War. (Italian fascism was attributed to purely Latin characteristics !) But the coming of Nazism in Germany and subsequent political events have more than shaken its theoretical dominance, giving rise to emotional reactions of disillusionment and fatalism. Principal among its errors we may note the fundamental confusion between State capitalism and State socialism and the " illusion " that capitalism recognised the moral value of democracy as higher than the financial value of private property and so would respect its forms even if it involved the surrender of economic privileges. The philosophy of social democracy, concerned much more with *political* than with *social* change, was thus calculated —and experience has proved it—to sell the working-class movement into the bondage (and a government of national concentration, etc.) of the enemy at the critical moment.

In 1917, however, an epoch-making revolution took place in Russia, followed by several years of external and internal warfare. The Soviet Government, led by Lenin at the head of the Communist Party, proceeded to reorganise Russian society. The philosophy of the Bolshevik movement was derived from the work of two revolutionaries who lived during the middle of the nineteenth century, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. And it is to the political thought of these men that we must now turn, for they set out in earnest not only to provide a political theory for the working-class movement, but also to evolve a really scientific philosophy of politics in the human tradition.

Note (1):—It is instructive to notice that out of the theory of social democracy came the middle-class idea of socialism as the " brave new world " or the " beehive " of a mechanised society in which the State told everybody what to do, what to think, and how to behave, the State being a bureaucracy of ruthless civil servants. An unconscious, yet vital, criticism of the social-democratic theory of the State !

Note (2):—Fabian anti-Marxism in Britain was more directed

against the spurious version of doctrinaires like Edward Aveling and H. M. Hyndman than against Marx's and Engels' own works, which few Fabians ever read ! *V.* Sidney Webb's remark to Bernstein : " When we run down Marxism, we mean Aveling " (quoted in Gustav Mayer's *Biography of Friedrich Engels*, p. 270).

## CHAPTER III

# THE ROAD TO SCIENTIFIC SOCIALISM

KARL MARX was born in Trier in 1818 and died in exile in 1883. He lived through the period of a great social awakening of the working classes and the growth of widespread political consciousness. Marx was never a dry-as-dust student, but always took an active interest in contemporary politics, playing a leading part in the formation in 1864 of the First Working-men's International. As a young student, he fell under the influence of Hegel and the various reinterpretations of Hegel, such as that of Ludwig Feuerbach, which dominated the intellectual life of Germany during that time. From German philosophy, he derived, as he acknowledged, the idea of dialectical development in history and in thought. Soon after he left the university, he became mixed up in radical journalism and was eventually forced into exile through the activities of the Prussian censorship. In France, he immediately became associated with the current intellectual and social movements amongst the working classes. During this period also (in 1844) he met the man who remained a lifelong friend and collaborator, Friedrich Engels. French socialism was the second great influence in Marx's life. Close at hand, he saw how the theories of Proudhon and Blanqui actually worked out in the Revolution of 1848 and the Commune of 1871. But it was out of French socialist thought that he developed his ideas about the class struggle, the State, and the nature of socialist revolution. The third great influence in his thought was English political economy,

the writings of Ricardo and Hodgskin and Thompson, from which he evolved the labour theory of value.

The writings of Marx and Engels were voluminous. Some of them are political journalism about current issues of their time, like "The Eighteenth Brumaire" on the '48 Revolution in France and "Germany: Revolution and Counter-Revolution" about the '48 Revolution in Germany. Similarly, "The Civil War in France" about the Paris Commune. Others are more directly theoretical, more concerned with developing an adequate philosophy of politics, with leading socialism from utopia to science. Such fundamental works are the *Communist Manifesto* (published in 1848, yet the most vital contemporary political document to-day), the section on "Socialism" in the *Anti-Dühring*, *The German Ideology*, and *Capital* (dealing mainly with economic questions). But all these works are intensely Practical in the sense that the writers never lose sight of the actual world of politics and economics and continually, unlike many other political theorists, refer to the practical applications of their ideas in the real political world confronting them. We shall deal with four of the chief political theories and principles evolved by Marx and Engels and later applied in practice in Soviet Russia by the Bolsheviks: (1) the materialist conception of history; (2) the theory of class struggle and the State; (3) the theory of socialist revolution and society; and (4) the principle of the unity of theory and practice. As we shall see, all these ideas are closely interdependent and integrated in Marx's thought; and, moreover, we shall notice how Marx and Engels drew upon all the ideas of the political thought of their time. Immersed in working-class politics, these two remarkable thinkers yet read the political literature of all ages and made a consistent attempt to develop a scientific theory of politics. Let us now examine that attempt.

The study of politics must start, Marx considered, with a study of history. Before we can begin to understand what politics is about in our time, we must examine the



historical growth of political life and its relation to other forms of life. History will give us the key to the actual facts of politics. Where must we start?

"The first premise of all human history is, of course, the existence of living human individuals. The first fact to be established is therefore the physical organisation of these individuals and their consequent relation to the rest of nature."[1]

Clearly the physical basis of society is fundamental; and this basis is the productive technique or the way in which the powers of production are organised. This productive basis—whether it is simple agriculture (as in early societies), manufacture (as under the domestic system), or machinofacture (as under fully matured capitalism)—necessarily conditions society's growth. Men, who have various instincts, desires and emotions, develop under material conditions which are largely independent of their wills, for, whether they like it or not, the mass of humanity *have* still to spend a great portion of their lives creating the physical conditions of existence—that is, earning their bread and butter. Now, in order to produce, men must exercise power over Nature and the external conditions of their lives, but in doing so they must enter into social relationships, create functional divisions and status, relationships which are, broadly speaking, decided by natural necessity and into which men enter un-purposively and un-selfconsciously. "In the social production of their means of existence men enter into definite, necessary relations which are independent of their will, productive relationships which correspond to a definite stage of development of their material productive forces. The aggregate of these productive relationships constitutes the economic structure of society, the real basis on which a juridical and political superstructure arises, and to which definite forms of social consciousness correspond. The mode of production of the material means of existence conditions the whole process of social, political and intellectual

[1] Marx and Engels, *German Ideology*.

life."[1] Out of particular productive environments grow what Marx called production-relationships, the relationship between men in their activity as producers. And it is the totality of social relations which makes up the essential structure of society: its economic character (the type of property established), its politics (the means of administering persons), and its thought. In the human struggle of adaptation to natural conditions, from primitive collectivism to limited liability companies, from domestic workshops to the factory system, social relationships are primarily property relationships; and so the ownership of property divides society into classes or groups with common interests, struggling for economic satisfactions. For example, in modern British society there is a small class of privileged individuals who, by virtue of their ancestors' conquest of power in overthrowing the mediæval régime of feudalism and substituting the pursuit of profitable production, own the accumulated wealth of society, our social capital; and the rest of the British nation is compelled by circumstances, having no property, to work for lengthy hours in order to receive a wage (or else to get that pittance called " the dole "). And this relationship of classes, founded upon private property, permeates politics, education and culture.

In this conception of history, therefore, we come up against two facts: first, that every society is to a great extent modelled by the technical apparatus at its command; and, second, that the struggle to control the powers of production gives rise to conflicts between social classes. Thus two struggles are going on in society: (1) that of men in opposition to Nature and (2) that of men in opposition to each other in the pursuit of material and ideal ends. And, moreover, these struggles are not separate, but constantly interpenetrate. The technical changes caused by the first establish the need for social changes which are brought about through class struggle. Similarly, when social changes take place, progress in

[1] Marx, *Critique of Political Economy*.



productive technique and science and art is stimulated. This interaction and struggle between classes causes human freedom to be enlarged by increasing our power to control natural conditions and by the discovery of the natural laws that govern development. The class struggle, said Marx, is an objective fact in society.[1] What, therefore, is the role of the State? In every society, there is a governing class and a subordinate, dominated class. Naturally the institutions are formed and operate in the interests of the governing class. The State, Marx held, arose as the principal instrument for maintaining a certain class structure of society in existence and for furthering the interests of the class in power, e.g. under capitalism, to enforce contracts and to prosecute imperialist war (as Herbert Spencer recognised). The State, comprising the law, the armed forces, the administrative authority and so on, is the organised public power of coercion, expressing politically the economic rule of the governing class which possesses the society's productive resources. In capitalist society, does it not operate in protection of the private property of the few? And however democratised the State machinery in our parliamentary Britain, the capitalists still control the main body of the Press and the means of influencing opinion, besides the necessary finances for political campaigns.[2] Besides, the governmental machine is devised in the interests of the ruling class and not in order to effect swift changes in social relationships. Thus, whereas the capitalist State is democratic in its workings for those who enjoy the fruits

[1] Even now one hears people saying in connection with Marxism, " Of course, I don't *believe in* the class war," implying naturally that of course the class war is not a " good thing "—a typically English confusion of moral and factual judgment (cf. also the belief of religious people that Marxism is against the development of personality, etc.). For Marx, it was a question of objective fact; the class struggle, whether you like it or not, exists. Therefore, how can you utilise this fact to achieve working-class emancipation?

[2] It has been calculated that in England £390,000 is necessary to run an efficient, let alone successful, election campaign.

of private property—an income over £400 a year, education up to twenty-one years of age, and plentiful leisure—it is highly dictatorial to the working classes, whose interests are antagonistic to capitalism both economically and politically; and, therefore, more than occasionally we now see the police forces and the military used overtly against the working class in politics.[1] Marx therefore pointed out, in his *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, that the concept of the "free state" is a contradiction in terms, for the State is a weapon in the class struggle, the capitalist State does not give "freedom" to the workers, the socialist State (as in Russia to-day) does not accord freedom to those who desire to employ labour for profitable gain. The State is by necessity a coercive power, and so long as there are governing and governed classes in society the State will remain as the supreme guardian of class interests. From the Commune of '71, Marx drew the great lesson that the working class had not merely to capture the capitalist State, but to destroy it and create "their own" State to transform society in their interests. Clearly neither the parliamentary system nor the corporative dictatorship are suitable instruments for carrying out the socialisation of industry and agriculture and organising workers' democracy in the economic system. They are only useful in a society divided into social classes. In a socialist society where all are workers and no one lives by ownership, the people's own democratic organs become State institutions—their trade unions and Councils of Action, their Co-ops. and cultural societies. Thus the establishment of socialism requires a new State, founded upon progressive institutions; and only then can capitalism and private profit be abolished and social equality be created.

From this analysis of the historical struggle between social classes and the nature of the State in society, Marx proceeded to examine the character of social

[1] The present violent American struggle for trade unionism shows a naked class war in which the State machinery is used against the workers.



revolution and of socialism, having before his mind's eye the experiences of 1848. As capitalism grew, he noted, the technical forces became tremendously increased. Production of commodities was organised on a larger and larger scale, involving greater division of labour and the employment of more mechanical devices. So acts of production became more and more social, because more people took part in the production of each single product. But whilst from a technical standpoint production became socialised, stretching out to international cartels and so on, ownership continued to be individual. And individual ownership soon became a brake on productive progress; it was not profitable to produce more goods; thus restriction schemes. It was not profitable to employ better scientific technique; thus suppression of inventions. It was not profitable to shorten hours and employ more men; thus distressed areas. In fact, ultimately destruction alone is profitable, thus rearmament.[1] In fascism, the dictatorial capitalist State reaches its final climax as a force antagonistic to free civilisation and the enslaver of man to money and the machine in (*a*) the wholesale destruction of social wealth and (*b*) the complete eclipse of free thought (and even, to study Nazi education, of thought itself). The contradiction behind it all is between *socialised* production and *individualised* (private property) relations. "In our days, everything seems pregnant with its contrary. Machinery, gifted with the wonderful power of shortening

[1] Why? Because the making of profits depends either upon high prices or tremendously large sales of commodities. And, on the one side, prices can only be maintained at a high level whilst goods are relatively scarce in relation to the demand for them; and, on the other side, large sales cannot be gained whilst the mass of people are so poor. Much more liquid milk could be marketed, for example, but the producers would have to lower prices a lot to sell it because the chief consumers are the poorer classes. That would mean cutting the big distributors' profits, perhaps. The profiteers as a whole prefer to restrict production, suppress science, and get-rich-quick out of arms booms, preparing not only capitalism's self-destruction, but threatening human civilisation itself.

and fructifying human labour, we behold starving and overworking it. The newfangled sources of wealth, by some strange, weird spell, are turned into sources of want. The victories of art seem bought by the loss of character. At the same pace that mankind masters Nature, man seems to become enslaved to other men or to his own infamy. Even the pure life of science is unable to shine but on the dark background of ignorance. All our invention and progress seem to result in endowing material forces with intellectual life and in stultifying human life into a material force. This antagonism between modern industry and science, on the one hand, and modern misery and dissolution, on the other hand; this antagonism between the productive forces and the social relations of our epoch is a fact, palpable, overwhelming, and not to be controverted. Some may wail over it; others may wish to get rid of modern arts in order to get rid of modern conflicts. Or they may imagine that so signal a progress in industry wants to be completed by as signal a regress in politics. For our part, we do not mistake the shape of the shrewd spirit that continues to mark all these contradictions. We know that if the newfangled forces of society are to work satisfactorily, they need only be mastered by newfangled men—and such are the working men."[1] Capitalist society has produced great advances in productive technique and the accumulation of social capital; but a point is reached where this technique can only be utilised if social relationships are changed from an individualist to a socialist basis, because of the contradiction between profits and plenty. This social change can only come about through the class struggle, through the accession to real power of the working class which is the new force in modern society and in whose organisations, ideas, and values a future society is being born. What are the final and critical conditions of socialist revolution? " It is not sufficient for revolution that the exploited and oppressed masses understand the

[1] Marx, speech reported in *Chartist People's Paper* (1856).



impossibility of living in the old way and demand changes; for revolution it is necessary that the exploiters should not be able to live and rule in the old way. Only when the " lower classes " *do not want* the old and " the upper classes " *cannot continue in* the old way then only can revolution be victorious. . . . Revolution is impossible without a national crisis affecting both the exploited and the exploiters " (Lenin, *Left-Wing Communism*). As capitalist society was increasingly subjected to social decline and economic " blizzards " and menaced the whole of humanity with the threat of new wars for markets, so strong working-class movements should develop nationally and internationally prepared to transform society into socialism. On the one side, a crisis of the whole existing system; on the other, a movement conscious of the class struggle and disciplined to construct a new society along the lines of co-operation and equality. Hitherto, socialist thought had provided three answers to the question of the form of the State in socialist society: (1) the Utopian idea of discovering entirely new forms on the morrow of the revolution; (2) the Anarchist denial of all political forms altogether (a view which Bernstein and Kautsky accused Marx of holding); and (3) the social democratic acceptance of the parliamentary forms of capitalist democracy. We have seen the difficulties inherent in these answers. Marx stressed that the socialist State must be based upon the workers' own organisations, their trade unions and co-operatives, their political parties and social organisations. In capitalist society, these organisations express embryonically the democracy of the working classes; and thus in socialist society they necessarily become the units on which the State is based, they are democratically centralised into the State machinery. For, in the new society, the workers are the governing class. In Russia, the soviets which were the principal instruments before 1917 in the fight against Czarist oppression have now become the political organs of the new democratic socialist society of the U.S.S.R. But the social revolution

of our epoch involves a qualitative change in man's history. There is no class subordinate to the workers, as there was to the capitalists when they captured power from the feudal aristocracy. Consequently, the society in which the working classes really govern themselves can abolish the existence of classes altogether, can create a classless society. For the first time, therefore, on a social scale, there can be realised the free and equal rights for which human beings have fought and there can be achieved the emancipation not only of the working class from capitalist tyranny, but of humanity from the bondage of natural necessity (the condition of economic slaves) and social strife (the wars between nations and classes and races). "The seizure of the means of production by society puts an end to commodity production, and therewith to the domination of the product over the producer. Anarchy in social production is replaced by conscious organisation on a planned basis. The struggle for individual existence comes to an end. And at this point, in a certain sense, man finally cuts himself off from the animal world, leaves the conditions of animal existence behind him and enters conditions which are really human. The conditions of existence forming man's environment, which up to now have dominated man, at this point pass under the dominion and control of man, who now for the first time becomes the real conscious master of Nature, because and in so far as he has become master of his own social organisation. The laws of his own social activity, which have hitherto confronted him as external, dominating laws of Nature, will then be applied by man with complete understanding, and hence will be dominated by man. Man's own social organisation which has hitherto stood in opposition to them as if arbitrarily decreed by Nature and history, will then become the voluntary act of men themselves. The objective, external forces which have hitherto dominated history will then pass under the control of men themselves. It is only from this point that men, with full consciousness, will fashion their own



history; it is only from this point that the social causes set in motion by men will have, predominantly and in constantly increasing measure, the effects willed by men. It is humanity's leap from the realm of necessity into the realm of freedom. To carry through this world-emancipating act is the historical mission of the modern proletariat."[1]

Such was Marx's and Engels' conception of socialism. Marx maintained that men's ideas and beliefs arose out of their practical experiences, not as mechanically determined but as interacting theory with practice. Therefore theory and practice are and must be inseparably bound up in human life. To think correctly and form true ideas necessitates putting your theories into practice, actually verifying them; and only in that way is your reasoning validated. Likewise, practical behaviour is useless unless it is consciously directed by the processes of thought, useless that is from the standpoint of changing the circumstances of human life and human life itself. Men change and are changed by circumstances. They can only be free if there exists a conscious unity of thought and action. Thus, said Marx, abstract principles are merely misleading; for they do not take into account the historically conditioned circumstances of human life and the relativity of human thought to these circumstances. The anarchists, for example, took the idea that the State was an oppressive instrument and therefore bad and abstracted it, saying that if men were to be free the State must be immediately abolished. They did not take into account the fact that before the State could be abolished the conditions of social freedom would have to be fulfilled, that class distinctions would have to be eliminated completely, and that the State in its socialist form would have to play a part in forcing men to be free. In pacifism we see the same phenomena of abstraction. The political world is constantly changing. Not only must we be, like Hegel, self-conscious as individual thinkers, but also as persons in society.

[1] Engels, *Anti-Dühring* (Socialism).

We have examined the main theories of Marxism, the ideas which guided Lenin and the Bolshevik Party through the Russian Revolution and upon which the policy of the Soviet Government is founded. The basis of Marx's philosophy of politics is *the materialist conception of history*. Upon this he developed his approach to the *class struggle* and *the State*, thus considering the possibilities of *socialist revolution* and *the nature of socialist and communist society*. Most important of all, he considered the function of theory in social life and its relation to practice. In doing so, he provided the key to emancipating thinking itself from conscious and unconscious rationalisation. Marx not only brought socialism from Utopia to science; he provided us with the potentialities of real freedom in human thought. Marx's approach to the problem of freedom is significant. The utopians saw freedom in the escape from controlling industry and science, in communist colonies and the like, much as our modern *bourgeois* sees freedom as an escape from " work," etc. ; the social democrats saw freedom in the surrender of control to others, to a state bureaucracy, in *étatisme*, much as our modern revivalists see freedom in surrender to God and " God-Control "; Marx, however, saw that real freedom meant *self-control*, based upon organised control over natural conditions.

In 1899, Lenin, rebutting the charge of party dogmatism, wrote of Marxism as follows: " There can be no strong socialist party without a revolutionary theory which unites all socialists, from which the socialists draw their whole conviction, which they apply in their methods of fighting and working. To defend a theory of this kind, of the truth of which one is completely convinced, against unfounded attacks and against attempts to debase it, does not mean being an enemy of criticism in general. We by no means regard the theory of Marx as perfect and inviolable; on the contrary, we are convinced that this theory has only laid the foundation stones of that science on which the socialists must continue to build in every direction, unless they wish to be



left behind by life. We believe that it is particularly necessary for Russian socialists to work out the Marxist theory independently, for this theory only gives general precepts, the details of which must be applied in England, otherwise than in France, in France otherwise than in Germany, and in Germany otherwise than in Russia."[1] Marxism should not therefore become a set of theoretical dogmas, but a practical guide to politics. Let us now consider the significance of this point in the historical tradition of socialist thought.

Note:—Let us note that socialism or communism is the very reverse of an " alien " creed in Britain. Before, during, and after the lifetime of Marx and Engels, people like Godwin and Robert Owen, Julian Harney and William Morris, Robert Blatchford and Ralph Fox were beginning to think and were thinking in scientific socialist terms. Their thought constitutes our peculiar tradition, and it is a rich heritage.

[1] Lenin, *Our Programme* (1899).

# CHAPTER IV

# POLITICAL THINKING EMANCIPATED

## (*a*) Interpreting Politics

"Revolt is the right of the slave"; and the tradition of ideas that we have been considering is the tradition of revolt against capitalist society and all it stands for. From the times of the utopians to the present when considerable sections of the working classes are organised both industrially and politically on international lines, men and women have raised their voices in protest against the subjugation of humanity to the machine, against the inexorable rule of profit and the money market, and against the co-existence in society of luxury and want, comfortable ease and soul-destroying drudgery—against, in fact, the domination of greed and fear and hate in a world of unprecedented material and spiritual potentialities. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, modern socialist thought was, as we have seen, only in its infancy; the majority of the anti-capitalist thinkers were pure idealists like Owen and Fourier, with little conception of political strategy and the historical perspective of social change. They, like Rousseau, hankered after parochial utopias, relying on individual initiative and personal virtue. Then came the Social Democrats and labourites. They, on the other hand, had greatly adapted themselves to the politics of their time, to the ins and outs of the parliamentary game, to the belief in the ballot-box and a free democracy based on the broadened franchise. They reacted against utopian ideas, believed themselves practical



thinkers, and were proud of their opportunism, and in the era of big trusts in industry and State subsidies held to the path of gradual progress introduced "from above." And finally came Marxism. Did Marx, who inspired the Russian Revolution, provide a mature and scientific synthesis? Let us consider three questions, (1) democracy and dictatorship, (2) the relation of the individual and the State, (3) social freedom, and try to discover the answer.

The utopians and the anarchists approached the question of democracy in the early phase of capitalist oppression when the working classes had no say in political affairs and when Peterloo[1] signified correctly the attitude of the governing classes towards the spread of democratic ideas. The dictatorship of capitalism was at that time unrelieved by the existence of civil rights. Therefore the utopians and anarchists thought in terms of the complete abolition of capitalism, although they did not conceive very exactly how this was to be encompassed, save Sorel, who imagined the revolution as a general strike and sudden violent overthrow, and the substitution of primary economic institutions of the workers. Democracy to the utopians like Owen meant first and last economic association and co-operation. The workers must create their own institutions, such as co-operatives and mutual credit societies, in which they really governed themselves, and these institutions must gradually supersede capitalist private property and the dictatorship of the possessors. In syndicalism, this stress on economic democracy became a demand for immediate "workers' control" of the factories. To this way of thinking, politics was merely a means of diverting people's attention from the economic (and moral) issues. But to the Social Democrats like Bernstein, political democracy was all-important. In the late nineteenth

[1] The name given to a massacre on August 16th, 1819, on St. Peter's Fields, Manchester, when the Yeomanry were ordered to charge a crowd of 80,000 people demonstrating for parliamentary reform.

century, the vote and the rights of free association and free speech had been won by the organised working-class movements in many countries. Now, said the Social Democrats and Fabians, through political democracy to economic democracy via parliamentary and constitutional change. If the Labour movement can get control of the legislature, which is now democratised, they can institute State control of the economic system, thus introducing democracy into the factories and farms. "Workers' control" is unnecessary;[1] the appointed employees of the representative government will control economic policies and thus, through their politics, the working classes will achieve social self-government. *Thus, on the question of democracy and dictatorship, whilst the utopians thought almost exclusively in terms of economic democracy, built up from below, the Social Democrats considered that political democracy went most of the way towards removing the capitalist dictatorship.*

A similar division may be seen on the second problem, the individual and the State. In the prevalent atmosphere of individualism, the utopians and anarchists also relied on individual "goodness" and the individual "reason" as the motive-power of the co-operative commonwealth. The views of Helvétius, Godwin, and Owen, are nearly identical on the question of the rational perfectibility of man. Granted the right circumstances and the pervasion of society with the moral spirit of co-operation rather than competition, we can organise a democratic, peaceful, and progressive community without authoritarian control. The State exists only to perpetuate capitalist oppression and robbery, to prosecute wars in the interests of the ruling classes; therefore the State must be abolished and we must have not chaos but social anarchy.[2] Bernstein and the Fabians

[1] *V.* Herbert Morrison, *Socialisation and Transport*, for a typical view of this kind on "workers' control" in industry.

[2] English people are apt to confuse the two, thinking of anarchism as blowing up trains and the like. Anarchy simply means abolition of centralised authority.



believed precisely the opposite. Like Hegel, though without his metaphysics, they tended to glorify the State, believing it to be the impartial instrument of peaceful social change. If only the working classes could capture the State authority the necessary laws could be passed, and, hey presto! capitalist democracy would soon become socialist democracy. By persuasion, the collective authority could introduce measures of social equality which would eliminate the rule of force and acquisitiveness in society.[1] *Thus, whereas the utopians believed entirely in individual initiative and hated all authoritarianism, the Social Democrats believed that the parliamentary State was the necessary instrument of radical change.*

As we see, the utopians stress purely economic freedom and the Social Democrats mainly political freedom. The former school tended to imagine freedom as an escape from the horrible conditions of capitalism into little simple communal utopias or (later) into the ecstasy of violence. Freedom must be found in decentralised communities where real democracy could reign, away from the machines and all the integrating forces of scientific technique. The latter school tended and tends to say to the workers: "You have got the vote and political freedom: now surrender further control to us, your deputies, and we through our parliaments will see that the factories are better run and wealth is more efficiently distributed. By Act of Parliament your complete social freedom shall be granted you." *Freedom as escape; freedom as surrender....*

To the founders of Marxism, these questions appeared in a clearer, more historical light. Every democracy and every dictatorship, said Marx, has a particular social (class) character. So long as capitalism remains, there can be no real economic democracy for the working classes; therefore the capitalist State is largely dictatorial, whether politically democratised or not. Likewise, the

[1] By such ideas the Social Democrats of Vienna were impelled until February, 1934.

Soviet State is dictatorial to those with capitalist ambitions, but for the working classes—be it noted the largest sections of any modern community—democratic and the guardian of their interests. A real and full democracy can only exist when men have the same relation to " the system," i.e. enjoy an equal status in society, and that can be realised only in a classless society. Democracy and freedom can only be enlarged by social struggle from below, as it were, by trade unions and societies and progressive political parties, just as after the failure to introduce internationalism " from above " at Geneva we see it created and renewed in real struggle " from below " in the International Brigade defending Madrid. Nevertheless, *a* State is necessary—a new State created for the purposes of social advancement and international peace, to preserve the new order of socialism, to co-ordinate and to defend it, to meet the essential needs of collective leadership. Economic and political freedoms are interdependent. If the workers take control of their factories, yet leave the State-machinery in enemy hands, they cannot succeed. If the workers obtain free speech and freedom of association in capitalist society and desire to implement their socialist ideas, is their freedom effective? The answer is that under capitalism they are not free to introduce economic democracy unless they forcibly take possession of society's resources, as the experience of Labour movements the world over has demonstrated. *Freedom can only be enlarged by organisation and struggle on the part of the people, but it must be conserved against attack by State control.* Through their trade unions and co-ops., the workers can fight for a better standard of life and for more leisure and in politics demand greater freedom of speech and more power to disseminate socialist ideals. But so long as the control of the State remains in the hands of " big business " and Tory politicians, their right to struggle " from below " may be legally withdrawn and forcibly suppressed by the police force. Democratic organisation must be combined always with State control; " workers' control in industry " with the central organs of the socialist State.[1]



Such in brief was the Marxist synthesis. But Marx in his interpretation made one vital discovery: namely that thought itself evolves with practical politics. The political thinker must first discover his own prejudices and emotional attitudes and exorcise them if he is to provide a scientific theory of politics. Theorising is affected by the mental and material environment in which it is carried on, by the interests and desires that dominate the environment. Thus thought, said Marx, has hitherto been dominated by *class* and the interests of social groups. These interests have often unconsciously and consciously been rationalised in theory—for example, the belief in " natural harmony " proclaimed by the industrialists who benefited by *laissez-faire* government and the fact that the *liberté* and *egalité* of the *bourgeois* thinkers meant only *civil* liberty and *political* equality and did not touch the question of private property. One has only to examine the effects of Darwinism in political thought to observe this rationalising tendency. Thus all the thinkers prior to Marx tended to " idealise " because they did not recognise that thinking itself undergoes the process of evolution and can only be scientific if it is individually and socially self-conscious. The recognition of these facts of " rationalisation " and the non-finality of thinking makes possible a real advance towards free and scientific thought and therefore towards consciously controlled political action, which Marx called " revolutionising practice," the transition from interpreting politics to changing politics.

### (*b*) Changing Politics

Too often, as we know, political ideas merely serve as " dope," as an excuse for failing to carry out correct

[1] *V.* the Webbs' *Soviet Communism*, on the working of democratic centralism.

sincere democrats to defend our existing liberties against the encroachments of incipient fascism. But, as the Marxist analysis of capitalism had shown, a point in history is bound to be reached when capitalist society cannot grant any further social ameliorations and has to limit freedom and even totally destroy it in order to preserve its private property rights, its empires, and its class distinctions. A final crisis must come when the fetters of capitalism have to be broken and when real economic democracy and social equality can be inaugurated and realised. " The *bourgeois* period of history has to create the material basis of the new world—on the one hand, universal intercourse founded upon the mutual dependency of mankind, and the means of that intercourse; on the other hand, the development of the productive powers of man and the transformation of material production into a scientific domination of natural agencies. . . . When a great social revolution shall have mastered the results of the *bourgeois* epoch, the market of the world and the modern powers of production, and subjected them to the common control of the most advanced peoples, then only will human progress cease to resemble that Hindoo pagan idol, who would not drink the nectar but from the skulls of the slain."[1]

Marxism conceives the social struggle as a fight for every scrap of freedom and justice and betterment that can be extracted from existing capitalist society, for every wage increase, every blow struck for free speech, every organised attempt to prevent the outbreak of world war. But it conceives these immediate tasks of all people in the perspective of a radical change in political life towards a more fully democratic society without social classes in which human beings can live as real human beings and freely and equally enjoy, in the exercise of their power over Nature, the good life to which they are entitled.

[1] Marx, on India.

# PART III

# FROM ROUSSEAU TO MARX

WE HAVE SURVEYED a century of political thinking. Let us recognise immediately the inevitable shortcomings of our survey. First, we have of necessity omitted to mention or to consider carefully many of the less prominent, but not unimportant, political thinkers. For example, the early English socialists deserve a fuller treatment than they have yet been given; Voltaire is outstanding amongst the eighteenth-century liberals and his attitude to property is noteworthy; and the scientists, like Huxley and McDougall (to take varied examples), have had important things to say. But we have tried simply to discover the most definite trends of development. Second, the effects of scientific discoveries on political thought have only been implicitly noted. Readers must themselves seek further afield for enlightenment on this point. Third, much difficulty is encountered in a treatise of this kind in preserving balance of treatment. The lengthy consideration accorded to Rousseau can only be justified by the incalculable effects of his teachings. Likewise, the intellectual position of Hegelianism is not altogether made clear unless the reader has studied the Romantic Revival in Germany and its relation to the epoch of imperialism. Specific ideas have been picked out as examples of *trends*. And, fourth, it is all-important that these different ideas should be studied in co-ordination so as to notice the interpenetration of ideas. For instance, we may note the historical coherence of individualist utilitarianism (e.g. Bentham) and individualist anarchism (e.g. Godwin or Proudhon), how the evolution of the idealist theory of group-personality (in Gierke) gives rise to the anti-capitalist ideas of guild socialism and syndicalism, and

the varyingly negative reaction to Marxism of Bernstein, Macdonald, and Sorel. Fifth, we have been limited in the extent to which we could examine how thought and practice interacted. The disappearance of Benthamism with *laissez-faire* (note J. S. Mill's difficulties), the use of the " natural rights " theory by Spencer against, and by Green in favour of, State interference, the social relativity of all " rights " theories (notice the change in thought from " the right to be lazy " to " the right to work "), the Machiavellian theoretical opportunism of idealist thinkers on the State,[1] the growing importance of Marxism to-day, these things readers will, I hope, nay must have noticed in the course of our survey—from Rousseau to Marx.

At the beginning of our epoch, the intellectual atmosphere was permeated with Benthamite and Rousseauian ideas, based upon (*a*) Newtonian science, (*b*) a realistic social outlook, and (*c*) a virile movement for change. At the end, to-day, these ideas are dead in their original form, their content is fused into new thought. The challenging social philosophy of Marxism now claims the justification of science, creates a progressive outlook in life, and is rooted in a consciously planned movement for social change. Let us look again at the essentials.

### (*a*) From People's Sovereignty

What were the ideas the Jacobins and Benthamites fought for? They regarded society as the unplanned arena of competition between individual interests. These interests, if freely and equally pursued, would eventually harmonise, producing a progressive society of industry and science. But certain conditions must be fulfilled to create this state of affairs. There must be (1) civil liberty, (2) representative government (the social contract theory proved that this was a natural right), (3) reasonably equal distribution of property, (4) recognised social rights, and (5) peace between nations. Individuals would only attain happiness in a

[1] *V.* footnote *re* Bosanquet, Palme Dutt's *World Politics*, p. 122.



society which, granting these conditions, thus afforded them security. Against despotic monarchy and irrational privilege, for individual achievement and initiative, the competitive spirit, and the benefits of industrialism, these men strove for the people's sovereignty and republicanism (be it noted), free trade and legal equality. Their analysis of politics was the most realistic of their time,[1] and those it was whom they inspired who built up our modern industrial system, revived the arts, and applied science to the conquest of Nature, producing electricity, the telephone, the radio—our social capital.

### (*b*) The Dynamics of Society

But they also gave us the slums and greed of possession. As capitalism developed and disintegration took place, so competition no longer produced progress but war, individualism no longer meant new enterprise in industry and science, but pure money-making and monopoly, political democracy, once granted, began to be withdrawn. Capitalism no longer desired to utilise for human good knowledge and science; patents, for example, were and are now purchased *so as not to be used.* Benthamism suffered naturally a decline; it became irrelevant in a world of big business, imperialism, and fascism. It was replaced by the glorification of war, the idolised State, " the white man's burden." In the fascist thinkers, we all see—even our leading politicians see—the wish-fulfilment of the profiteers and the racial oppressors, a flimsy rationalisation of the debased instincts of an outworn system. But, as the process of socialised politics evolved, working-class aspirations began to crystallise in political activity, through trade unions, co-operative societies, and political parties. New ideas were spread abroad, the desire for emancipation improvised new forms of organisation. People became more and more conscious, particularly after the War of

[1] Engels, writing of the Manchester business world in the 1840's, avowed in disgust that " unyielding self-interest " was " the basis of contemporary society."

1914–1918, of the alternative to capitalism and of the class struggle before their eyes. There appeared the desperate need for a new political synthesis and a re-interpretation of our ideas of freedom and equality and justice. And out of working-class thought there emerged the philosophy of Marxism.

### (*c*) Towards Socialist Democracy

Marx and Engels, men well versed in the theory and practice of capitalism, perceiving the limitations of the ideas of Rousseau and Bentham, studying the co-operative ideas of Owen and Proudhon, the controversy between the syndicalists and the Labourites over the State, participating in the everyday affairs of the working-class movement, bequeathed to the disinherited of our time a comprehensive philosophy. They saw history as a struggle, not between atomised individuals, but between social classes which had common economic interests. Economic facts decisively conditioned human life; and the struggle to control the productive machine in society was of paramount importance. But productive technique itself, as it developed, was bound to cause social change, for there came points in history when the existing class relations only hampered the development of man's productive power. Such was the position when capitalism came under the control of the financiers and entered its period of crisis. Social progress can then be made only by a change in social relationships, by the accession of the working classes to political power. But the capitalist State could not achieve the change to socialism, for it was designed to maintain the rule of the propertied classes by coercion when necessary, as under fascism. If socialist democracy were to be instituted, new political forms were needed—the political organs of the working classes. " Freedom," said Engels, " consists in the control over ourselves and over external Nature which is founded upon knowledge of natural necessity." The workers and all oppressed by capitalism can only discover social equality by abolishing classes and class



distinction. Only when all human beings have an equal status in society and consciously participate in the direction of social policy can they be free and equal human beings. And in the peaceful construction of such a socialist democracy the workers have an international interest. To-day the socialists, fighting for the same ideals as the Jacobins, may lay claim to the heritage of Rousseau, Diderot, and Owen as well as of Marx and of William Morris.

### (*d*) The Emergence of a Human Tradition

And political thinking itself has been changed by the socialist analysis. Marx directed his eyes towards former ideologies and their determinants and saw how hitherto political thought, with its irrational and abstract elements, had been greatly conditioned by social interests and class needs—rarely consciously save in reactionary idealists; mostly through the peculiar channels of sub-conscious desire and subsequent " rationalisation." We have noted it in the utilitarians. But as soon as we know this fact, we can control both ourselves and our environment in order to achieve freer thought. We can continually put our ideas to the test in practice and be self-critically asking ourselves " How far do I *want* to think so-and-so? " as contrasted with " Do I *really* think so-and-so is true and correct? " Self-critical thinking and socially conscious thinking alone enable us to emancipate our minds from the bondage of desire, on the one hand, and the illusion of finality on the other, for we immediately realise the constant necessity of verifying our ideas and of re-applying them to new situations. This discovery of simple dialectical thinking leads to political realism, but, furthermore, inaugurates a human tradition of culture which holds out the promise of a rich and varied development in the socialist society when men and women will be released from the necessity of struggling so hard to make a living, when the disinterested pursuit of truth will be more highly valued than it is to-day, and where " politics is brotherhood."

# GLOSSARY AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

The purpose of this glossary is to give a list of the more important thinkers of the epoch, with their dates, and some of the essential writings which make up the political literature of the period or which would help the reader to understand it.

*Part I, Chapter I*

| | |
|---|---|
| Diderot, D. | (1713–1784) |
| D'Holbach | (1723–1789) |
| Bentham, J. | (1748–1832) |
| Mill, J. | (1773–1836) |
| Mill, J. S. | (1806–1873) |
| Spencer, H. | (1820–1903) |
| Huxley, T. H. | (1825–1895) |

*Part I, Chapter II*

| | |
|---|---|
| Rousseau, J.-J. | (1712–1778) |
| Green, T. H. | (1836–1882) |

*Part I, Chapter III*

| | |
|---|---|
| Hegel, G. W. F. | (1770–1831) |
| Bosanquet, B. | (1848–1923) |
| Gierke, O. von | (1841–1921) |

*Part II, Chapter I*

| | |
|---|---|
| Paine, T. | (1737–1809) |
| Godwin, W. | (1756–1836) |
| Owen, R. | (1771–1858) |
| Fourier | (1772–1837) |
| Proudhon, P. J. | (1809–1865) |
| Bakunin, M. | (1814–1876) |

*Part II, Chapter II*

| | |
|---|---|
| Saint-Simon | (1760–1825) |
| Lassalle, F. | (1825–1864) |
| Bernstein, E. | (1847–1932) |
| Macdonald, J. Ramsay | (1866–1937) |

*Part II, Chapter III*

| | |
|---|---|
| Marx, K. | (1818–1883) |
| Engels, F. | (1820–1895) |
| Lenin, V. | (1870–1924) |
| Stalin, J. | (1879) |

## Books

*Part I*


Diderot. *Interpreter of Nature Selected Writings*. Ed. J. Kemp (Lawrence and Wishart).

J. Mill. *Essay on Government* (C.U.P.).

J. S. Mill. *Essay on Liberty*, etc. (Everyman's Library).

Spencer. *Man Versus the State* (Williams and Norgate).

Rousseau. *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* (Everyman's Library).

Mussolini. *Political and Social Doctrine of Fascism* (Hogarth Press).

*Part II*

OWEN. *New View of Society* (Everyman's Library).
COLE. *Biography of Robert Owen.*
LASKI. *Socialist Tradition in the French Revolution.*
Ed. S. Webb, *Fabian Essays* (Allen and Unwin).
LOVETT'S *Autobiography* (Bell).
MARX AND ENGELS. *Communist Manifesto* (Lawrence and Wishart).
W. MORRIS. *News from Nowhere* (Newnes).
ENGELS. *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific* (Allen and Unwin).
LENIN. *Teachings of Marx, State and Revolution. Socialism and War* (Lawrence and Wishart; or in Gollancz's "Handbook of Marxism").
F. MEHRING. *Biography of Karl Marx* (Bodley Head).
G. MAYER. *Biography of Friedrich Engels* (Collett's).
R. FOX. *Biography of Lenin* (Gollancz).

Messrs. Lawrence and Wishart are, I believe, publishing a series called "Pioneers of Freedom," being selections from original works in the British socialist and popular tradition, which should be extremely useful and important. Also, Professor Sabine's *History of Political Theory* (Harrap) will be found useful, if read critically.