Jack Common's

REVOLT

against an 'Age of Plenty

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Edited and produced for Strongwords by Huw Beynon and Colin Hutchinson, Newcastle 1980.
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"There is plenty for all, if we throttle the enterprise of the money-monopolists".

"Jack Common's Revolt Against the Age of Plenty and the Personality Cult", The Eleventh Hour, June 12th 1935.

CONTENTS

PHOTOGRAPH OF HOLDER

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Introduction

One December George Orwell decided to write an essay on "Christmas in prison". He planned to write an account from the inside, and this - of course - required an arrest. He talked with Jack Common about a scheme to light a bonfire in Trafalgar Square. He didn't get a sympathetic hearing. Common remembers how "I firmly held that if you were going to jail you might as well have something for it. My advice was 'take to theft; a bonfire simply suggests something undergraduate - like'". This story says a lot about the two men; it also implies much about the differing ways in which these two friends (the ex-Etonion and the engine driver's son) thought about working class life and the problems involved in writing about it, politically in the 1930's.

Jack Common was, in the words of Reg Groves: "a genuinely working class writer". He was born in Newcastle, the son of a railwayman, in 1903. He went to school there he played and fought in the streets he got a job and also the sack - all this was to be immortalised in his two autobiographic novels Kiddar's Luck and The Ampersand These novels, written in the 1950's, are unique in the immense, and delicate, detail they contain on the nature of working class life. He writes of the freedom Kiddar experienced in the streets "The street was my second home. Though for some time mainly passive among its activities I had the freedom of it by right and could come into its full heritage whenever I was able." In contrast, the school symbolised oppression. It was there that the boy acquired:

> The one faculty with which school infallibly endures its pupils, that of being bored. It is very important, of course, that every child should, in the course of time, become fitted with this negative capability. If they didn't have it, they'd never put up with the jobs they are going to get, most of them, on leaving school. Boredom or the ability to endure it, is the hub on which the whole universe of work turns.

And when it came to work, Kiddar wrote:

> With reference to your advertisement in today's North Mail, I beg to apply for the post. I am fourteen years of age, strong, healthy, bright, punctual, clean and willing. My parents are working-class, my environment is working-class, and with your kind assistance I feel qualified to become working-class myself.

On leaving school himself, Common should, by way of things, have followed his father into the locomotive sheds. But the war affected things. As he put it: "because labour was scarce, I got into a law office and became confidential clerk to a drunken solicitor". From there, he was sacked ("as a scapegoat"), spent three years on the dole ("the idleness was invaluable - without leisure there can be no culture") and then given the assault of the Means Test, he left for London. That was in 1928.

London contrasted greatly with the North East. To begin with, unemployment was comparatively low, and Common quickly found a job as a mechanic in an

automatic machine company. But factory discipline and authority was much the same as on Tyneside and as a result he was soon "thrown out for practicing an ingenious method of simplifying the job". By that time though, he had developed his interest in writing and, as he puts it:

> an essay I'd written attracted the notice of Middleton Murry, editor of The Adelphi. He took me on as circulation man for them. In a year I became assistant-editor, and up to the end of 1936 was acting editor. At the same time I was on the editorial board of New Britain

Isolated from the North East, Common brought to the left, literary world of London a critique of, and a perspective upon, society which gained strength from its reflections upon that corner of England he had left. It was a quality well recognised by Orwell who wrote: "he is of proletarian origin, and much more than most writers of this kind he preserves his proletarian viewpoint".

This viewpoint was developed by Common with a clear critical intelligence, in a variety of reviews, essays and satirical pieces in the pages of The Adelphi and New Britain. He was, as another reviewer put it: "a knowing bird, (whose) life appears to be spent with his head on one side forever questioning the quaint ways of the bourgeois, whilst he chuckles down his throat at their dependence upon the proletarians". In this "knowingness", however, there is no hint of smugness or self-satisfaction. The perspective he offered was not one of class prejudice or "workerism". (He had little time for middle class socialists who were determined - in dress, manner and speech - to outdo

the workers on their own terms!) His concern was with a humanistic analysis of capitalist society. One which saw the proletariat to lie at the heart of an immense economic and social crisis which affected all classes.

Appreciated in this way, Common's writings in the 1930's take on a uniqueness. They represent an attempt to articulate a political philosophy which is rooted in the day to day experiences of working class people. It is no accident that their criticism became most severe when directed upon socialist organisations which, while claiming to organise and speak for working class people, hector them for their apathy and ignorance. Such people, thought Common, had "got the bird but don't know it". They didn't know it because socialist theory in large part saw "the proletariat" as a "negative force": a bludgeon to smash capitalism and dig the grave of the capitalist class. For Common it needed to offer much more: it needed to offer a positive role for working class people in a new society.

In his articles ("practice sprints" he called them) in the first few years of the 1930's, Common pointed to aspects of working class experience which could be developed into a powerful force for the transformation of society. He also pointed to the dramatic changes that were taking place to the class structure of capitalism as it shifted (in the middle of slump) towards mass production and mass consumption.

No decade of this century holds such a grip upon the memory as the 1930's. The images of those years (the haunting photographs of hunger marches, swastikas and fascist rallies) are powerful ones. They are referred to repeatedly as unemployment figures rise with a regularity that points them toward the 3 million mark. Even more so as the "international situation" grows increasingly unstable, and school children talk with fatalism of "the next

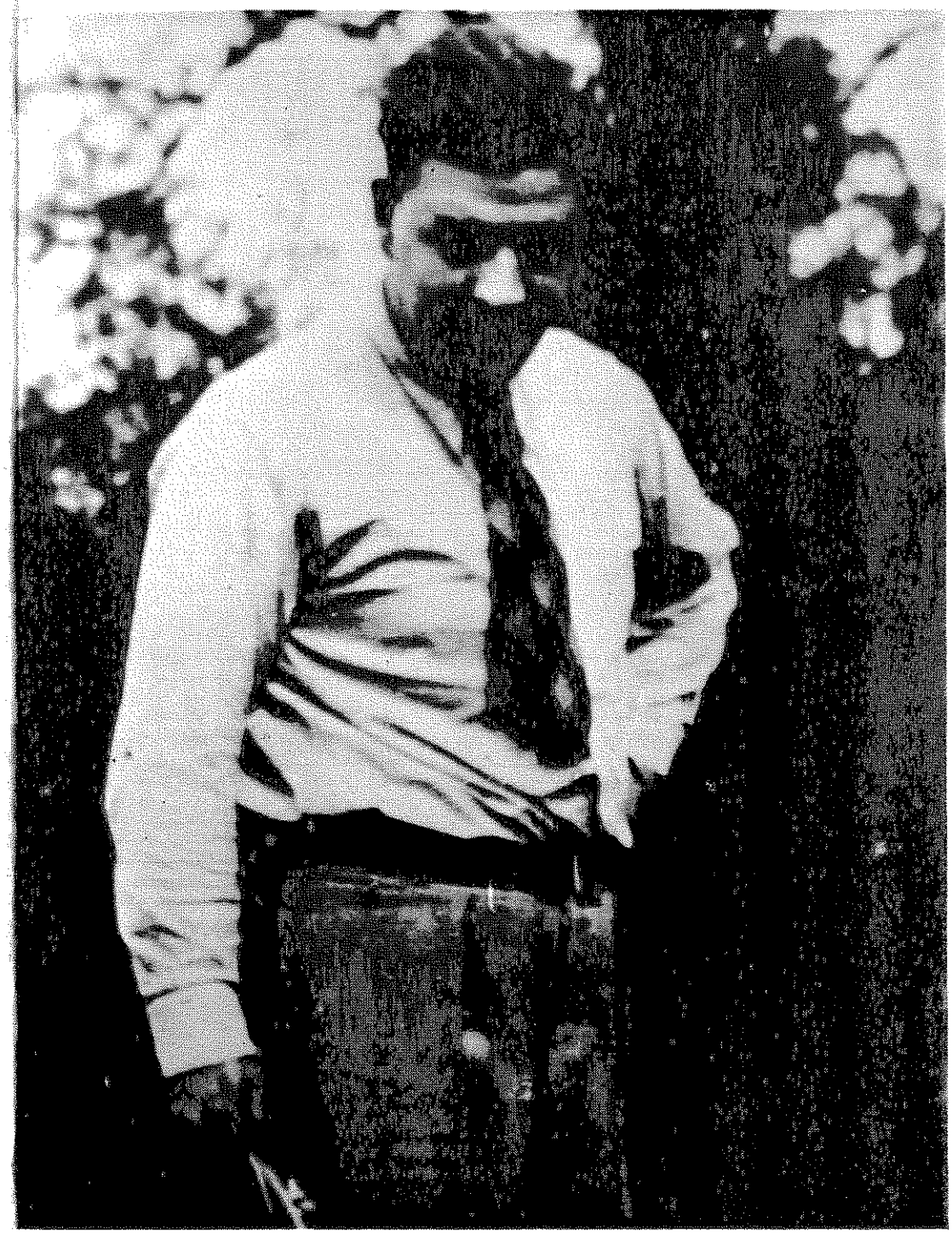
war". Now, as then, a capitalist crisis has found the working class movement divided and in a state of disarray; lacking agreement on aims, on what is possible, and the "role of the proletariat". Then, as now, capitalism seemed to be changing to a new form - this time built around the sinews of the multi-national corporations. In this context, Common's essays (while always important) take on added significance.

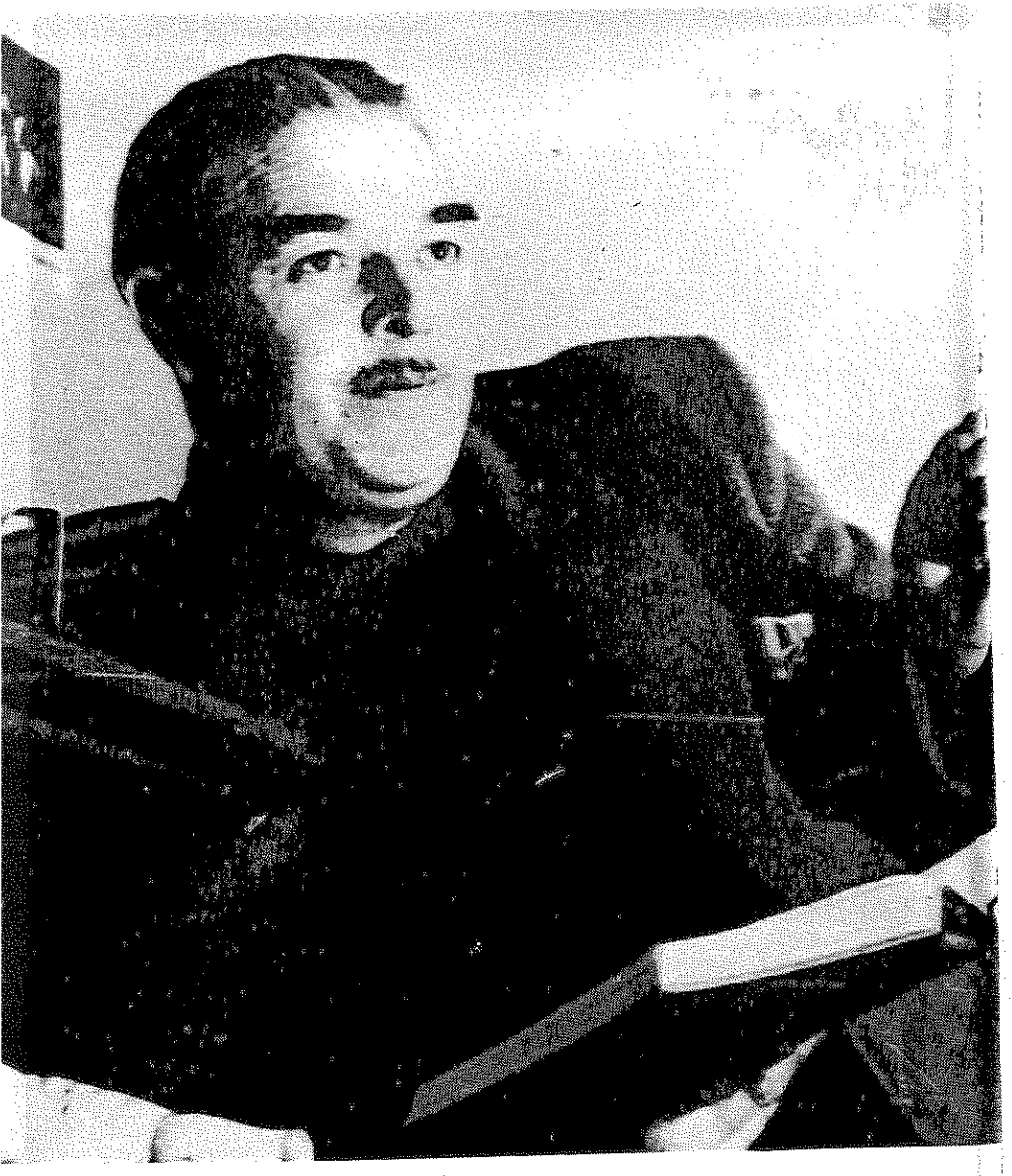
In putting together a collection like this one you go through the occasional amount of doubt and uncertainty - over balance, presentation, over "what he really meant". Certainly this has been our experience. We have found certain articles and passages confusing, even perplexing. In our own arguments and discussions it has become clear that we are out of sympathy with certain of Common's beliefs and ideas: he tends to be rather ethnocentric; if not "sexist" his preoccupations certainly tend to be with the male world; his occasional criticism of marxism are not as clear as they might be, and so on. What we agreed about (all of us in Strong Words) was the importance of the essays taken together, and the discussion that they could create. Given this, our main aim has been to present the collection in an accessible and comprehend-able way. For the most part we have eschewed textual criticism and evaluation in the hope that, in this form, the book will be widely read, discussed and argued over as a part of an ongoing debate within the socialist movement.

That this book has been published at all is due to the help and assistance we have received from any number of people. The members of Strong Words - particularly Pat, Keith, Terry and Tony - have our

thanks for putting up with our delays and our occasional obsessions. So too does Dewi for his help with the illustrations and general criticisms. We are indebted to the help which Neil Murray, Pete Dixon, Eileen Aird and Colin Cuthbert gave in the production of the Jack Common Exhibition in 1979. Also to the staff at the University Library in Newcastle (which houses the "Jack Common Collection") and the inter-library loan service at Durham University. Andy McGuffog gave us a lot of technical advice. Sheila Shippen has our thanks - yet again - for the amount of typing and retyping she has done for us over the past eighteen months. As do Northern Arts and the other individuals who financially assisted in this book's production. Finally, Connie Bickard whose original research led to the Jack Common Collection being established in Newcastle.

Most important is our debt to Connie Common, Jack's widow. She gave us unlimited access to Jack's papers and was most happy to agree to the publication of this collection as, in her view, "Jack was mainly an essayist". It is a matter of sadness that she died in 1979. We have gained encouragement from the support of Jack's son Peter, and his friend Tommy McCulloch. We hope that they (and all those others who knew Jack) will be pleased with this book.





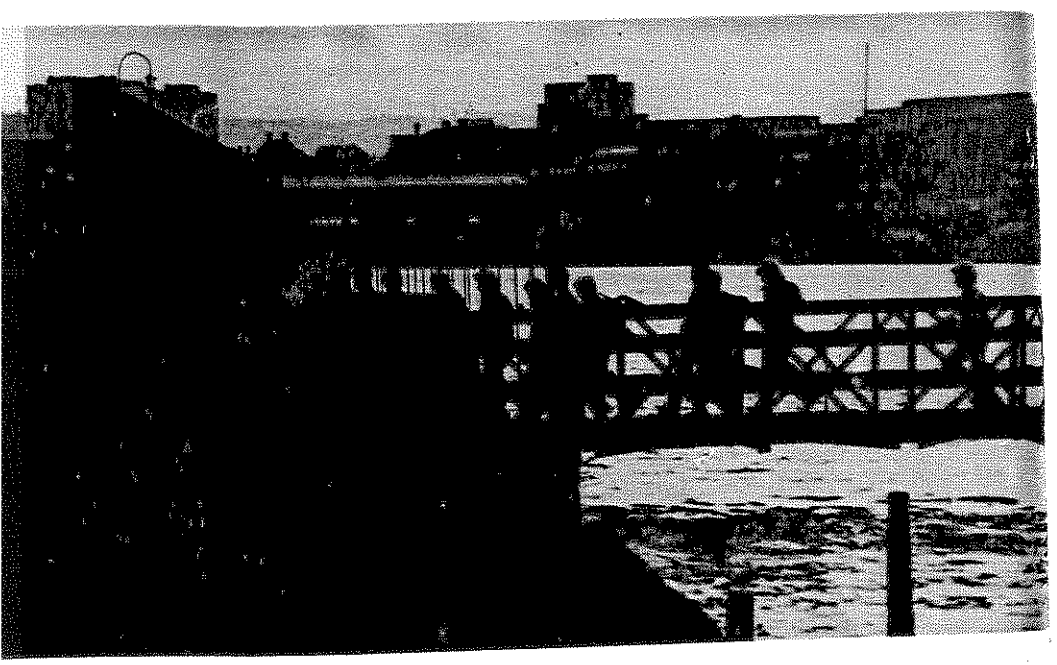
THE PROLETARIAN

Working class people -"proletarians"- are at the very heart of Jack Common's writing and politics. For him the central irony of capitalism lay in the fact that workers, who were entirely indispensable (who else would run the trains, operate the machines...) had such low public worth. This indispensibility Common saw to be the basis of power which workers frequently used, in their own ways, to achieve their own ends. A fact of which sections of government and the working class were all too well aware. Writing of the first World War, for example, Common observed how:

> There were thousands of people who had no intention of fighting, and yet who never bore the conchy label. Among the middle classes such people "used their influence", the working class men also used theirs. So long as you belonged to one of the big T.U.s you had a good prospect of keeping out of the war as long as you wanted to. The Government of that day had enough instinct not to raise too much trouble against men who could return the trouble back. They didn't want a lot of strikes, and the kind of war-resistance which was most dangerous to them was diverted harmlessly into the munition factories and associate establishments...
>
> There was a good deal of wisdom in this. For immediately after the war when all was set for trouble, the most dangerous proletarians were in the unions and without weapons, the weaponed men were in regiments outside the unions. They acted separately, and the English revolution never happened, though it turned up again as a kind of afterthought in a General Strike of 1926.

"Military Necessity of Pacifism", The Adelphi, February 1936.

he influence of Common's upbringing amongst the skilled
en of Newcastle is clear here, and is developed fully in
is essay on the "pease pudding men", the railwaymen whose
ontrol of steam power gave a lot of strength to their
lbow. But there are other sections of the working class,
ith no such skills and - on the face of it - less muscle.
hese were the conscripts in 1914 - 1918, and the unemployed
decade later. During the 1930's Common, through standing
n dole queues, and the occasional "turn at the trance"
f mass production work in factories, experienced and wrote
bout this aspect of working class life also. This first
ection of the collectionbrings together a few of these
ieces. In each of them one thing is clear: Common's
elief that working class life contained within it a
ariety of resistances (of joy and sadness) which were
ever understood (or even contemplated) by political
ctivists of right or left. To those who bemoaned
he apathy of the workers Common offered a working class
esponse - "You can keep your Christmas Pudding".



You Can Keep Your Christmas Pudding

O, the apathy of the working-classes! O, the non-militancy of the bastards! They've been pauperised and oppressed, beaten down and robbed and tricked, betrayed and doped - and do they upsurge? Do they curdle in a revolutionary mass about the rods of their oppressors? Do they storm heaven? October after October (or November after November, new time) goes by, and not a surge. All around us capitalism is crumbling and collapsing and getting fantastically unstable but still the final shove of proletarian revolution is lacking. The masses continue to play in and out the window at the Labour Exchange and the Time Office, standing themselves a drink when the Time Office is open to them, and being content with a spit when on the Buroo. O hopeless mass! O unhistoric apaths!

This lament (and its blustering counter-assurance that the masses are really ready for militant leadership only twisters get in the way) follows every year down into the past, and starts afresh with every new one. It is justified, too. Why, yes, the masses are apathetic. God, they can't be bothered about anything. And that's particularly annoying at a time when every section of our upper classes is'revolutionary' to a man, and only needs mass-support to begin transforming society. Subversive schemes such as the corporative state, the seizure of the banks by politicians or technicians, the eternal dictatorship of a National Government, are dangled before the eyes of the poor. And every time the answer is the traditional one of paupers - "You can keep your Christmas pudding..."

According to the bourgeois intelligentsia who know their Marx the reason for the rejection of all these schemes is that they are reactionary and the workers know it. So they in their turn triumphantly offer the armed uprising of the proletariat, and think that

because workers find themselves therein referred to as "mass" or "proletariat" instead of "consumers" or 'Britons" they will jump at the idea. Alas, there is no jump, comrades. The paupers' answer is as before.

Suppose for one astounding instant that the poor fellows are right, that they know instinctively these schemes are not their revolution, and feel that all the golden staircases to Utopia don't seem to be properly hooked up at the other end. Let us assume that the apathy is not stupid inertia but positive disapproval of the antics of self-regarding intellectuals - in fact, fellow-revolutionaries, we've got the bird and don't know it. Roughly you might say that all our revolutionary intelligentsia ever do is to call upon the workers to be a negative force destroying bourgeoiserie. What, after all, is "mass"? The negative of individualism. What is "proletariat"? The negative of private possession. Now a worker feels like "mass" when he is being herded into the shipyard or the Labour Exchange, but what does he feel like when he's driving an engine, or buying some drinks, or voting for a strike? Like "mass"? No fear. These bourgeois negations might do to express the rotten feeling of being exploited; they go no way towards telling the world that here is a people to believe in, for their qualities are those which the world needs to learn.

For a long time, you know, the working-class scarcely existed in the social consciousness at all. They were labour-power fed to the machines. Nobody was interested in them as long as the upper ranks of society got along comfortably and the 'nation' kept getting richer. Not until the brighter sparks reported collisions ahead, did the intellectual surveys of capitalism take any account of the capabilities of this class. And then it wasn't much account. Labour-power was allowed to congeal into mass as well as into commodities. It became a deus ex machina, which would appear in the last act of capitalism in order to rescue the middle-classes from the consequences of their competitive anarchy. Having allowed that much,

the intelligentsia went on describing the varied phenomena of decay observable in the upper stories - the basement remained black. It did not occur to them (and hasn't) that behind "mass" there is a humanity as worthy of celebration as any that has been. Even those who of late years definitely go out to create proletarian art find themselves describing class-oppression among the masses, in the same way that those who join the workers' struggles find themselves advocating mass-militancy as a revolutionary policy. When, however, the working-lads find that these friends and helpers of theirs actually intend that they shall not only be "mass" at the factory-gates, but "mass" in politics, "mass" in culture, and "mass" for evermore, they weary at the thought of playing up to bourgeois fantasy to such an extent.

Something of that feeling must have been abroad in Hungary recently. At Pecs a crowd of miners were in the perennial position of miners everywhere of badly needing a raise in wages. Now according to orthodox theory they ought to have struck work, gone militant, and kept on going militant until they or the owners couldn't stand it any longer. But probably orthodox revolutionary theory has had its day in Hungary, anyhow, all these fellows had in the way of theory was an elaboration of the classic retort of the paupers to the workhouse-master. They went down the mine and stayed there four days without food, refusing to come up until their demands were met. Their demands were not met, so rather than face death by starvation they began closing up the ventilators, and asked for a thousand red coffins. At that, and not before time, the mine-owners gave way.

The importance of this case is that it should not have happened. By all the theories of social transition which have emerged in the period of bourgeois decline it is flagrantly incorrect. Nobody has ever instructed these miners that that's how the class-war is to be fought. Now whether it is or it isn't cannot be decided on an isolated incident, even one of such heroic proportions,

but at least it may serve to indicate to us that the medley of unknown human forces called the proletariat contains possibilities unknown to the economic prophets of class-decline. In fact, we must get our eyes skinned; there are new things to see, when we can look nakedly on them.

A Turn at the Trance

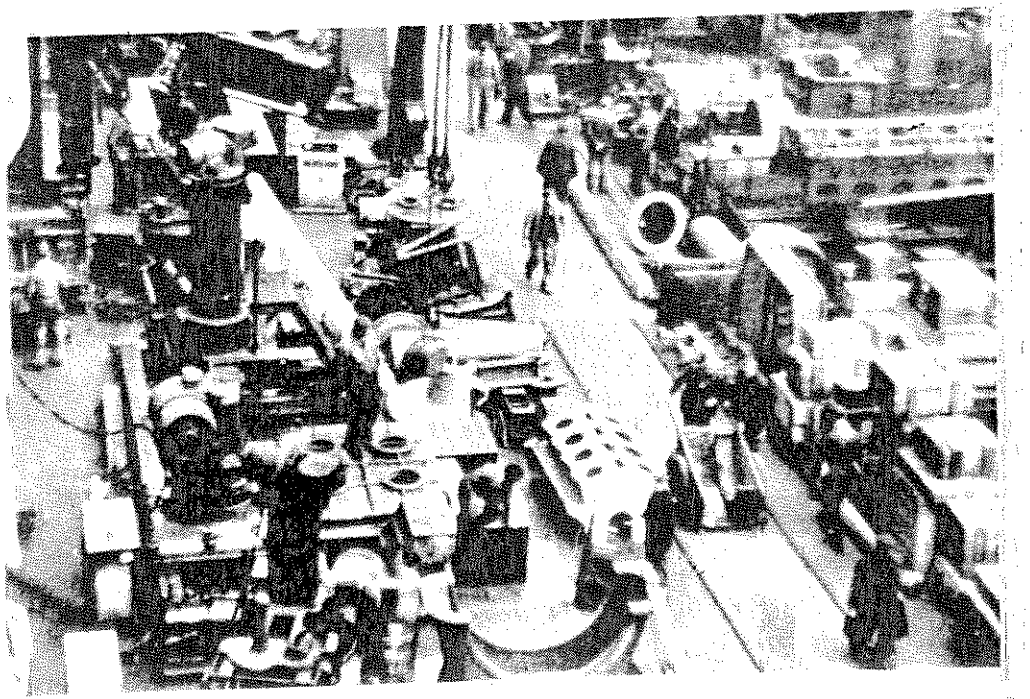
Today many of the most usual activities have a trance-like and insane look about them. Take factory work. Now that should be real if anything is, because it is the original brass tack of our civilisation. Well, hark to a slice of life.

I have been working in a local factory recently. It employed some 250 people. Note that number: in most centuries that amount of adults with their dependants would constitute a prosperous village, maintaining several farms, a handsome church, seven or eight pubs, all in the full glow of activity. In a modern town, I have known a group of just that size controlling in their spare time a dramatic society and small theatre, an orchestra, choir, lecture-hall and cafe. Only 250 - one nought in it. This place has an output, of course; it makes a great number of useful articles, hawse-pipes, petrol-tank linings, insulating tape, prepared rubber; all things of advantage to somebody. But how? Nobody has any sense of belonging to the place. Factory-tradition is that a worker is simply a casual seller of labour who gives an hour of his time for a certain price, in this case 1s. 2d. When he is no longer needed he gets an hour's notice and out goes he. That hour dominates his whole life there. If he is two minutes late in the morning, he loses half-an-hour; if he rushes out two minutes early at the end of his shift, he loses a quarter; if he is well in with the foreman, or the firm is very busy, he gets some extra hours in - it's a good week; if he is ill and loses a day, he has a thin pay-packet; in fact, throughout his working life he is on hire, a sort of human taxi. How much he's got on the clock spells new boots or wet feet for his kids, beer or fireside for Sunday night.

Now a normal day is 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. There is one hour off for dinner, so you have only nine hours on the clock. If you happen to live a good way from the factory as many of us do, it is another hour each way cycling. For nine hours actually ticking, you've spent twelve of your own. Every morning before dawn our scattered 250 are pushing off down dark roads, pursuing the uncertain wobble of a blacked-out bike-lamp, and each and all asking themselves the question, 'Shall I make the clock?' That is about all you are likely to think until hard going up the hills has warmed you, and the sight of the earliest dawn-bloom on the roofs and walls of the town has put some heart into the day. It then occurs to you that it would be rather nice to be out if you weren't going where

you are going. After that pious reflection you swing into a dodging stream of red tail-lights (there's still the ground-dark blowing on the roads), step on it for the last hill and take a deep breath of the mingled smoke of five factories. Swing left up the yard and you're at the Clock. 8.1 a.m. - made it; reach for a fag-end. 8.2 - blasphemy; light a whole fag.

The works consist of a number of long shops, machines and benches on the concrete floors, belts beneath the painted out glass-roofs, and all are grey with chalk-dust. After an hour or so the workers are grey with it, too. Grey haired men and girls pass among the benches, from machine to chalk-tray, and as production gets really under way a sight of the mill is an introduction to a new ring of the Inferno. People move dimly, shapes in a chalk-mist becoming flies in milk as they near the door; the big calendars clang, and an unbreathable chemical smell poisons all.

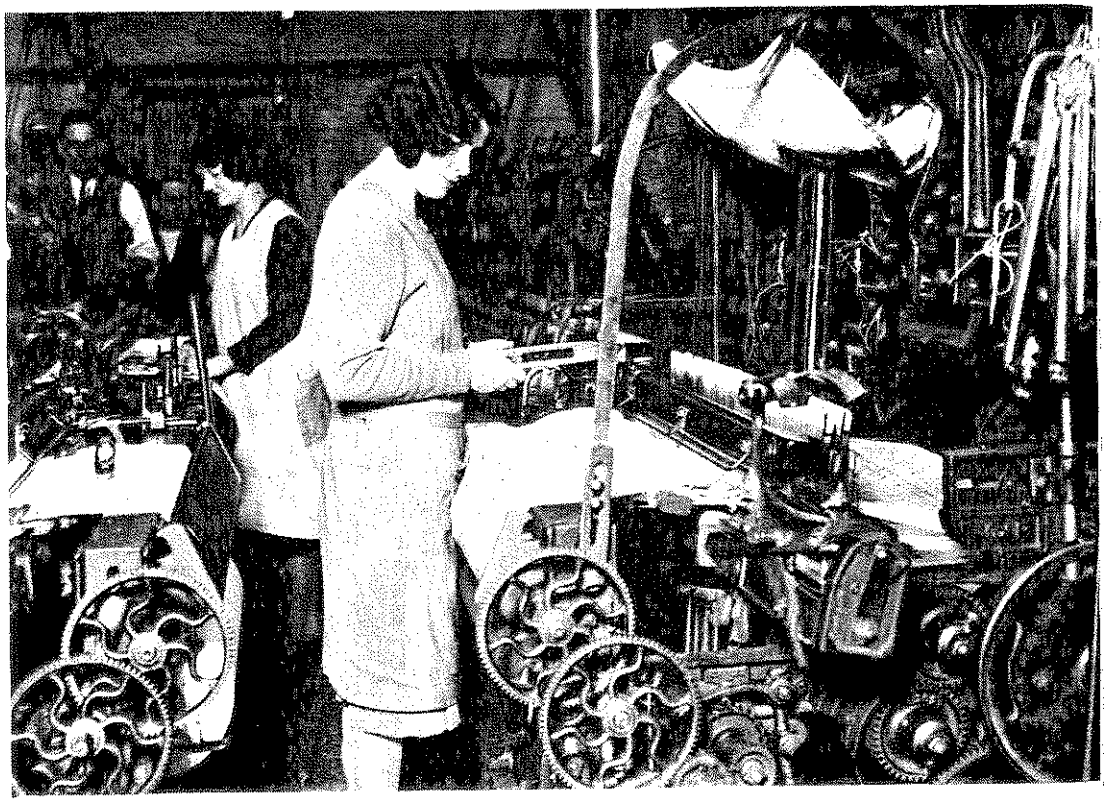


Because of that the folk in the next shop sometimes keep the communicating door shut. They have chalk themselves but not smell, only what seeps in as seep it must. The moulders never close their door. They want air of any sort so long as it's cool. They sweat always because it is hot in there - that is a bare statement stripped for publication of all the adjectives without which it has never been made before. The cutters' and packers' is cool, without chalk, and nearly taint-free, provided the spreaders' door is kept closed; for the long spreading machines continually pass great sheets of insulating tape over steam pipes in order to dry out the naphtha from the solution. That's another smell: naphtha. Next door, solution boils all day in the mixers, and a whiff of it stays in the throat like varnish.

All day long, and sometimes all night, the inhabitants of this strange place go through their accustomed motions. They are never off their feet except for a ten-minute break mid-morning and the lunch-hour. When they do emerge into sunshine, they look extremely ill, everyone of them. You could draft the whole crowd into a sanatorium immediately without anyone suspecting you'd made a mistake. They eat very little, too, and drink quantities of milk(provided free to the worst cases by the management) in order to keep the chalk down. This is lucky in one way because, if you watch the clock, the smallest restaurant meal takes one hour off the pay, a couple of pints at the local takes another, twenty of the cheapest fags yet one more. The pay-packet is a sort of egg-timer put right way up on Friday, and the sand running out all the week.

Nevertheless it is for that hourly dole these people have come together, and no other reason. There is hardly a job in the place which anyone would choose to do for his own pleasure. Why then? In peace time, fear of unemployment; to-day, fear of the army. Dissatisfaction is chronic, but if you point to the simplest solution you'll be told "I could walk straight out of here into the army," or "I've got a lovely exemption."

There's that and more. A man tends to become the thing his neighbours take him for. Nothing is so true as a long-continued libel. We know this to be correct as applied to children, since for a long time we've educated them on that principle. To one boy we say, with all the reiteration of private and public school, "You're one of the nobs, you are," until the lad can hardly help looking nobbish, no matter what his own invincible bit of singularity is whispering to him. He may be as right as you or I, rain or trivets; but he'd have hard work to get a policeman to hit him, a judge to refuse him another chance, or the army to let him stay in the ranks. What's the use of trying to recover his true colours? Most likely it is only by perpetrating another more outrageous libel on himself that he can escape the one given him.



The factory-worker's position is similar, though not so paradoxical. He starts as a boy usually, and he comes at once into a focus of regard which sees in him nothing more than another human taxi or clock-puncher. It is strong, that look - ultra-violet - so strong that even an adult like myself, well-tanned in a different slander, can be made to stumble at it. Now for years the boy will run to the clock-routine. His imagination will dwindle and dwindle, unfed in the tiring hours, the monotonous work, the oath-bound talk, until the number of things he thinks he cannot be will become far too long for him to remember. In all that time, not one bit of the factory comes under his control; he never has to think where the products are going, or to join with his mates in schemes for the improvement of the premises; he never makes a responsible decision. That is why the process is trance-like and unreal, a round like that of the thresher's horse. It disenfranchises a man completely. He is not responsible.

Because he isn't, nobody else can be. We are embarked upon his business. The whole joke of the slander business is that it is he who is to be glorified in the transmutation of our chaos. There is no possible triumph which does not lift him up. The reason is that he represents most completely the submerged manhood of us all. The name of soldier, the name of priest, the name of capitalist, the name of aristocrat, none of these say sesame to the common human creativity bolted down in every libelled man. Worker, now, that is us. It is what you are if you lose your country, your profession, your creed, your wealth or your learning; it is what you are in the bare buff to which so many are coming. The word acknowledges the truth about us: man is the animal that works. When we see that this realisation is not to be escaped by playing about with caste and race theories, we'll make something fine of it, as our way is when we can't find a mean way out. Meanwhile hang on to it yourself; and you'll get some fun out of foreign affairs yet.

A Dictionary for Underdogs

PROFITS: That part of a worker's earnings he doesn't get.

WORKING-MAN: Someone paid only for the time he spends on the job.

EMPLOYER: A part-time worker who is paid for all the time he isn't there.

PRIVATE ENTERPRISE: A method of running industries so as to secure a maximum loss to one community or another.

LOSS: A gain to the community in most cases.

PUNCHING THE CLOCK: The least exciting forms of pugilism.

HARD WORK: Lazy thinking. A consequence of cheap labour.

TIED HOUSE: A device for preventing workers from looking for better jobs.

COUNCIL HOUSE: A device for keeping working-men out of pubs (see rent).

RENT: Buying property without getting it - the neverest of the never-nevers.

OVERTIME: A method of keeping wage-rates low without contravening the Truck Act.

INDIRECT TAXATION: A device for concealing the nation's blushes over the fact that we charge the poorest more than we do the richest for what each gets of the national services.

WOMANHOOD: A biological excuse to get out of paying the rate for the job.

TELEVISION SET: A crystal-gazer's outfit for foretelling the present.

TORY VOTER: A poor man who thinks that the rich will be kind to the poor some day; a rich man who is damn sure they won't.

Why Work?

At 10 a.m. he was due to sign on at the Labour Exchange. It was the one fixed event in his day which, when that was over, relapsed into a nightmare of restlessness. For this reason it was good though it did not seem so to him. His nature was up in arms against every feature of his life, and he hated more than anything the accursed necessity which drove him to line up at the Bureau - "Bureau," "Exchange," the "dole" place, or the "Labour" - hateful words.

The hateful place stood on the corner of two streets - one a short cut between two main throughfares, but itself of no character at all, the other an artery to the suburbs, noisy with trams and motor-bicycles. The gloomy hall, built as assembly-rooms for cheap wedding parties, had degenerated to a mission, and now was slightly rejuvenated to receive the shuffling legions of the workless. From nine till four the men were marshalled there - some on the long benches inside or shuffling by the counters, the rest lined up by the doors, waiting their turn for shelter. Very often it rained, and then one saw threadbare blue serges quickly black with wet; there was no resistance in them, and as the pavement became covered with water one man would raise the toe of his left boot and stand insecurely on the heel. One watched him do that without much interest in his manoeuvres and without comprehending them, until one realised the water had reached his uppers and he was already well awash.

In twenty minutes or so he reached the door, nodded his head to shake the water from his hat, and went in. The air was sticky with damp, cloying to breathe, and tainted with the smell of old, wet clothes and of man.

His neighbour was jocose. When they got a place on the last row of the benches round which you must travel before you can reach the counter he said, "We're on the

merry-go-round. Here we go. Now we shan't be long." As the seated figures moved up, sliding their posteriors over the shiny wood, he announced that he was putting in a claim for another pair of trousers from the Government. "Wear out a pair a fortnight on this bleedin' job. It's worse than the shipyard." Sick of this man, he turned to the fellow on his left, who began a long tale of all the good jobs he had and how he'd been a fool with his money. But not the next time mate. Expecting any day now to hear of a job that should work out at four-ten a week, and this time he'll look after it. No more boozing and treating pals.

He heard the words as an unending irritating buzz, as he looked along the shabby line to the counter, where a shoulder was bent over a book and eye-glasses gleamed under the yellow electric light. How long before his turn came? A good twenty-five minutes. And then? Look for work, of course. He stared past the sodden figures by the doorway at the slanting needles of the rain. Not much hope.

Signing the book does not take long. But it gave him an immortal hate for the sleek-faced clerk in the rimless eye-glasses. The clerk bullied the old man who was holding up the line because he had to adjust his spectacles and couldn't see the right place to make his signature. Hot blood gathered behind his eyes, and his lips were twisted to harsh names.

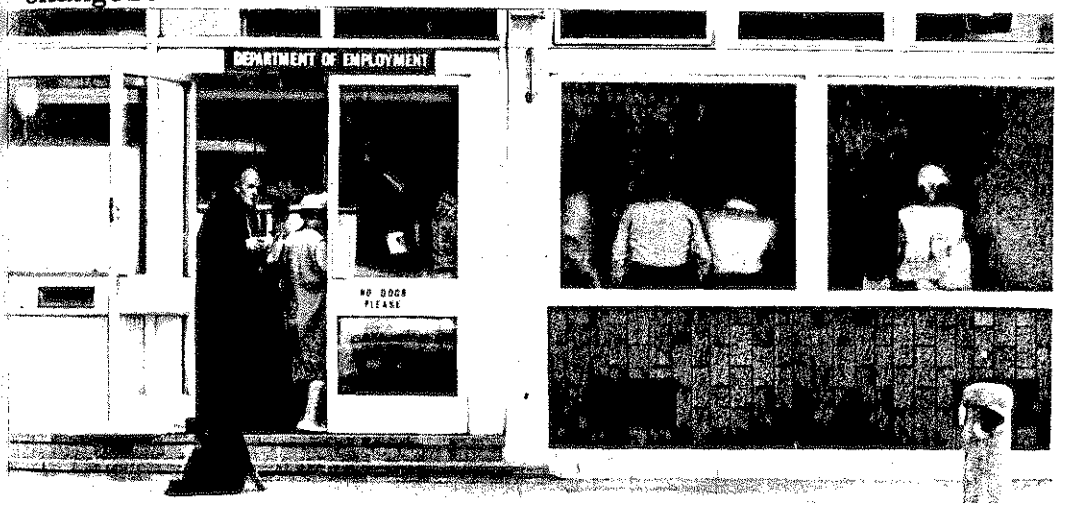
Next move was to the library to look for "Jobs Vacant." Three or four men round each paper, and only the racing pages to be seen. They read the names of horses over and over again - Captain Billy, Fiery Cross, Sister Agnes; Captain Billy's Doncaster form; Sister Agnes just a wee bit too hot for Grey Dawn at very nearly level weights; this filly stays for ever....In time a page was reached with a splash headline "Man on dole charged with drunkenness." "Good luck to him," say the group, "wish we knew where he got it.

"Situations Vacant" at last. A page of money-catching "ads." with a sprinkling of apparently genuine jobs, all slightly damaged, nearly all containing a catch in them somewhere which it is the business of the group to discover. Most of them anyone could see for himself were "haves." But here and there was one which raised hopes, and he was angrily disappointed when the fellow next to him explains from his own experience that that, too, was a swindle. Finally, having been over them again and again, he chose one and tried to be hopeful about it, scribbling down the box number at the library door.

The rain was a steady drizzle, likely to continue all day. He stopped to consume the end of the woodbine in shelter. As he struck a match on a dry part of the wall an old man nudged him, pushing out his clay pipe for a light - even matches are a problem. So are shaves, to judge by his white bristle. He will never work again.

Too wet to walk through the park, and so nothing for it but to go home and annoy the wife by reading over the fire. She knows her annoyance is illogical, since, whether he was indoors or out, work is not to be found, but the annoyance exists and is active. She would talk about the things that were needed and could not be bought. He knew about them. The hardships seemed worse indoors; it was almost worth braving the rain to dodge their company. Perhaps by the evening it would clear up and he could walk out and listen to agitators at the street corner; not with any respect for them, or for their remedies, which are too melodramatic and without personal application. But it is something to do.

What a day! An invalid's life with daily attendance at a hospital for financial incurables, maddening in every restriction, because normal good health with its healthy wants is beating in the blood. A day to be endured to be got through, like all those to come till the luck changes.

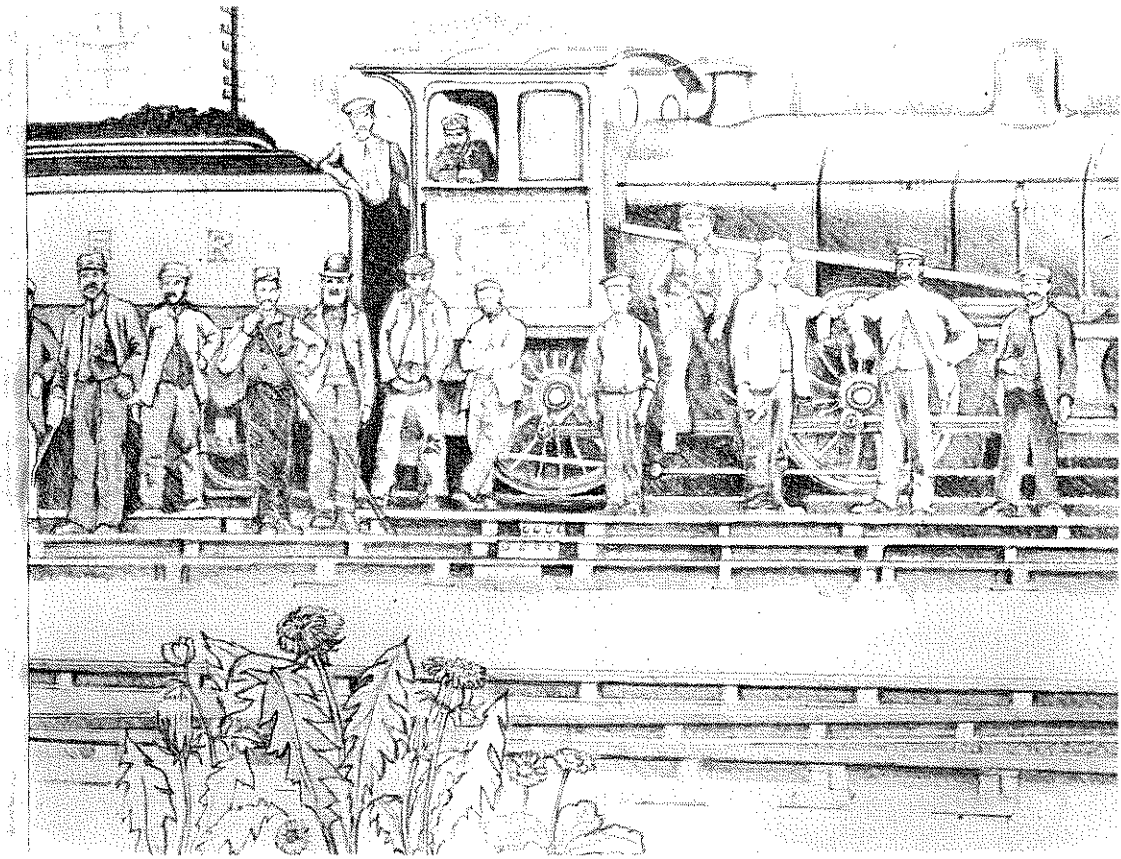


Pease-pudding Men

Before the war the skilled engineer was the aristocrat of labour. You couldn't better him; he was top-notch and knew it. So did everybody else, often you would hear the women talking at the Co-op. - "Of course, it isn't as if her man was skilled, is it, Mrs. Forbes?" And they even put up with the small pay their sons got while serving their time, for the boy's good. The unfortunate unskilled learnt their lesson. They - or at least those of them who kept kind of half-sober very often - took care to apprentice their lads. That was the working-class wisdom of the day. My own Uncle Will was full of it. He'd hold forth by the hour and through seven pubs and their side-streets, on the virtues, good fortune and essential stability of being a skilled engineer-like a later Defoe. He was one himself. All his family, bar the daughter, he put to the lathe; and there they were, four sons and the old fellow, lathing it busily right through the strenuous days of 1914-1918 and getting good money.

The war ended, though, and the aristocrats were unhorsed, they came down with a bump. Into twenty-nine shop they went - twenty nine shillings a week was the single man's dole in the first months of the peace. Twenty-nine shop was a joke at first. Nearly everybody had a bit of money saved, peace was abroad the brewers no longer rationed supplies, big football was starting again, and generally a bit of idleness did no one any harm. But as time went on and the boys were still "out," it dawned on them that an era had passed. The skilled engineer crowding the five o'clock trams with his rich, grimy cheerfulness, or turning out clean as a new pin in a new bowler on Sunday mornings, had become the ten-a-penny fitter. He was left to dig his allotment if he had one, and cut down his smokes. The sceptre of the labour world passed on-to the railwayman. This was different, though. Engineers, like my bold Uncle Will, might deceive themselves and their labourers that their

superior position was due to skill, but when they saw the railwaymen step into their place, skill was scorned. (As railwaymen don't serve an apprenticeship, not strictly speaking, and learn only enough engineering to understand the mechanical principle by which the steam engine works, not enough to make or repair one, they don't count as skilled men.) For the railwaymen's good fortune was more patently due to their power of putting a spoke in the community's wheel. Their strikes held everything up. They inconvenienced the public. So their employers found it wise to give in to them a bit, and a few bits like that made life fairly comfortable for the lads. Their hours fell to a nominal eight, more often nine, sometimes ten or eleven, but with overtime for the extra; their wages rose to round about three-ten a



week for firemen, four-ten for drivers, other grades varying, of course, down to the usual meagre subsistence wage. Still, nobody could be sacked, except for the wildest misconduct; all got a week's holiday per year paid for, passes and privilege tickets so they could travel for next to nowt. Naturally, the rest of the labour world thought these fellows were on a good thing: it was money for old rope. Things were dolloped out to them soft as pease-pudding on a paper. They were christened "pease-pudding men."

To be just to the engineers their skill was no empty boast. You see, they liked their work. They studied to know how to do it, and long after they were out of their apprenticeship, the most of them liked nothing better than to be given a ticklish job and to find a way round it, even when, as happened later under the piece system, they lost money over it. Often I've sat as a nipper watching my uncle and his lads discussing points about their work. They'd just got in, likely, and while dinner was being put out and they were still in their dirt, they'd argue, each illustrating his ideas with a stump of chalk and the front of the chimney piece for a blackboard, my aunt elbowing them out of the way of the steaming plates. That's how British craftsmanship was taught in thousands of families. It's why bridges stay up, and guns don't burst, and the little Morris runs practically for ever. It was an unrecorded but important part of the national life, how important perhaps only Soviet Russia understands, for there no such traditional training existed and it was needed. It is needed in all countries which intend living by machinery, but the dole does not keep it alive.

And to be just to the railwaymen now, their power of striking was based on a disciplined sympathy and fired with countless sacrifices. Our upper classes, who see nothing but their own reflection in those beneath, know of Jimmy Thomas and that puppet represents trade unionism to them. It isn't Thomas. It's hundreds of unknown branch secretaries, thousands of wives who wouldn't let their men down, the men themselves who incredibly put the good of

all before their own good. We take it for granted now that a family, if it happens to be working-class, will go without necessities rather than blackleg the family up the street. It would be a miracle in some suburbs, where they hear of it under the heading, "Selfishness of Trade Unions."

The pease-pudding men struck in 1912 for Nichol Knox.* Who the hell, you might well ask, was he? A nobody, a workmate whom the companies victimised. The railway lads came out solid for him. When their wives heard what the trouble was about this time, they said. "You wanted something to fight about, looks like. You're real daft this time, we'll have to cut down the milk and there'll be no bacon next Sunday, so don't look for it." They didn't say, "Go back." Now that is the moral force behind the trade unions. Of course, the railwaymen have no monopoly of it. But in their case moral force met material opportunity, and twenty years of striking raised them to a position which was enviable to miners, fitters and others for whom material opportunity had faded.

At that, progress set in. People who were keen on housing discovered in the pease-pudding man the Lord's Appointed tenant for the new houses - he alone could pay the new rents and look cheerful about it. Sellers of encyclopaedias and radiograms haunted railwaymen's pubs; music teachers moved from the older suburbs to

** The cause of it was this: Nichol was coming home from a night out, and had to cross a public bridge owned by the railway company. There were horse buses plying across this bridge and Nichol thought he'd get on one. The conductor thought not, and in the rumpus following the police came and took Nichol away. The Company then sacked him. His mates thought the Company had no right to dictate how a fellow should spend his evening, if he wanted to get drunk it was his affair. Even the teetotallers - hats off here - thought the same. Well they get old Nichol back on the footplate alright. But they were all fined a week's wages each - that was pretty iniquitous, if you like.*

housing estates which were not too far from the sheds and were recognised as being within the calling area which the knockers-up covered. It was no uncommon sight, I can tell you, to see a burly old engine-driver coming home with a bait-tin under one arm, and under the other, but much more gingerly, the first volume of some Harmsworth or Gresham or Waverley compendium. Some of the firemen took up Esperanto, which was coming it hot. Away went the overtime money on culture gadgets, and out of the general brightness children were advised to stick in at school and get out of the working-class while they had a chance. Family after family went out to the new housing estates. It was alright. They liked the gardens, and the bathrooms, but when they looked round for the pub, there wasn't one! And no fish-and-chip shop! Still, if you're a working man you get used to there being a catch in everything.

Now this is an interesting situation these fellows are in. They are at the tug-of-war point of many theories. To some they are a species of communal highwaymen flourishing on ill-gotten gains; to others, they are a section who have dropped out of the class-war, pacified by sops; to the rest, they are magnificent examples of the peaceful evolution of society. You might conclude, anyway, that their small success is not quite covered by the rules. I think you'd be right too. Th old liberal code was that if you kept everything "free" there would be a continual movement in society from the bottom to the top, that is, mind you, a movement of individuals. Opportunity for all to rise, and if you didn't it was probably because your morals weren't strong. Everybody was to have the vote, the classes to be kept fluid. That was fine old democratic individualism. It worked alright up to a point. Section after section of the community learnt how to individualise themselves, and were recruited into the middle-class fold. Culture and enlightenment spread downwards, right down to the pettiest bourgeois. Then came a halt. The liberal dog felt its rope. For what enclosed and supported this celebrated freedom of the individualists was the slavery

of labour. You couldn't recruit workers into the petty-bourgeois paradise of progress: if they moved from under, the show would collapse. There was a snag.

Essentially, the freedom, the equal opportunity which the liberals achieved was a freedom to buy and sell. You took what talent God gave you and sold that; then you practised the virtue of Thrift, got a little Capital, so you could buy - what? Labour, ultimately. The bourgeois delusion was that any man can buy and sell, and if all bought and sold things would go like wildfire. Any man can buy and sell after a fashion, yet in a world that's doing that, and nothing but, the poorest salesmen get bought and sold themselves. Which is what happened to the workers. Individualism worked for everyone but them. If they individualised they were lost. They became commodities themselves. And with scarcely any shame the democrats calmly went about buying and selling this human commodity as though it were cattle or cotton and not the very stuff of their own faith.

Then somebody thought of capitalising this non-individualism, of organising the collective sale of labour. Thus the trade unions were born. And this was the first try at giving concrete form to the deep communal loyalties of those people who are incapable of being incorporated into the spiky individualist cactus. Yet it was still a compromise, a communal organisation of men who were not salesmen, for the purpose of selling. The middle classes hated it because it was communal; revolutionaries suspected it because it did somehow manage to fit into a bourgeois world. Yet it was a phenomenon. And it produced this upsetting effect that though workers were not recruited into the middle-class, they nevertheless began to rise in the world.

This looked like revolution: so it was of a kind. It revolutionised the outlook of the middle-class intelligentsia. They had to choose between democracy and individualism, and wisely they chose democracy. They went Fabian. That is, they hoped so to transform middle-class society that the upward thrust from below could express itself through a series of institutions. A socialised state would be the mediator between the trade-unionised masses and the trustified big business. Somewhere along this line fell the corpse of private enterprise and out went forever a fine flame of human faith which for some time had given no light. The Fabians never knew their loss. They went on teaching their middle-class audiences how to solder up the class war, how to socialise themselves without sacrificing their bourgeois tone or authority, how to educate and drop some flowers of culture on the rising working-man. It was ingenious but not noble enough. Beneath was the old mercantile notion that culture is a commodity which can be transferred from one kind of man to another, not a grace belonging to a kind of life; and the worse conviction that if you do up a chap in your own duds you've done him proud. These beliefs have sprinkled Africa with gramophones and top-hats. Alas, they've also draped the best-paid proletarians in publess housing estates, and filled their cupboards with many-volumed collections of knowledge.

All this is just enough to give bourgeois apologists some reason for saying that the working-classes of this country have become bourgeois. On that prop of unfaith any number of young intellectuals bark their shins. Yet, you know, the Fabian mood fades into Fascism and despair, there's no sign of the optimism which follows a bit of successful social recruiting. It is certainly not successful in the lower reaches of working-class life, beneath the purlieus of the privileged unions. Is it even in them? The pease-pudding man is now safely ensconced in his five-roomed semi-detached, his garden is about him, the world's classics of music and literature are on his shelves, his job is a permanent one reasonably likely to be well-paid. He is, you might say, in the position of the moderately comfortable petty-bourgeois; he might set out as his predecessors in the class above him did, to impose his views and habits on the world about him. He doesn't, though. There's a catch in it. This is the catch. His present position depends upon retaining his proletarian loyalties and yet delimiting them. Let him play the individualist game in authentic bourgeois fashion, and he's down. It is his power of striking and standing by his mates, not his enterprise, which keeps him afloat. On the other hand, if he permits class loyalty to run away with him, he must unite with the unemployed and the unions of the starved crafts: it means sharing their poverty sooner or later. To do that successfully means finding a communal formula which will be a true crystallisation of the proletarian ethic. That's what is needed, a second crystallisation, trade unionism being the first.

He knows this instinctively. That's why he buys the encyclopaedias and urges his children to study hard. He can't tell them how or even why. They have to find that out. Well, most of them never come within sight of the problem. They go down the educational sink. They find that education's a racket mainly, designed to fit a fellow with the equipment for getting a bourgeois job; they are brought into keen competition with the children of bourgeois families and have to look slippy to get anything at all, especially anything better than their fathers

got without education. And all the time they feel that despite everything their old pot's a better man than the book-keeper, or chemist, or articled clerk they're going to be.

So the clever sons are unrecruited to the proletarian purpose. Those who won't study generally follow their father's footsteps on to the footplate. They learn the ethics of trade unionism as a matter of course; the more lively ones take up Socialism. Ah, and there you are again, there's the problem. They find that for half the Socialists, the clock stopped when Marx struck twelve; after him the up-pour. The other half are busy welding very sound impulses to ill-understood and irrelevant schemes of an economic character, or just letting rip in the industrial and municipal dog fights. There's any amount of material for leaders or preachers to get on with, but little for the follower to live by. Now it is a characteristic of Socialism, as it was of Christianity, that it cannot be won by leaders. Such causes as these, which represent a genuine discovery humanity is making of its own potentials, are always betrayed by their leaders. Must be. You have to be very guilty to be a leader, and sooner or later that guilt cuts you off; you shrivel into the chrysalis of personal ambitions, then when the road forks suddenly you have no pure certainty about it. Leaderborn movements are mere fantasies of mass-impotence; they arise from the distrust of man with man compensated in a wild plunge on a hundred-to-one chance. But Socialism survives its leaders as Christianity survived the popes. It lives in the body of the kirk.

In that body the cleverer and more imaginative working men feel the dim shape of a necessity about them which their fathers did not know. They neglect the trade union meetings, refuse office there; they slacken in the Labour Party hullabaloo; they lend but half an ear to revolution mongering. They'd strike, mind you; they vote; they'd help a revolution if one blew along; no question of letting their mates down; but there's some-

thing else biting them, too. Nobody thinks that's of any importance. The older or simpler type of trade unionist, seeing them reading the latest books, thinks they are caught up in highbrowism; the Labour Party branches, now crowded with petty bourgeoisie of the more idealistic and better sort, fear privately that the working classes are pretty hopeless; the revolution-in-the-street bloke says they are pampered, he prays for an intensification of capitalist crisis to sharpen them up a bit. All contemptuous views, you notice, which therefore tell us nothing.

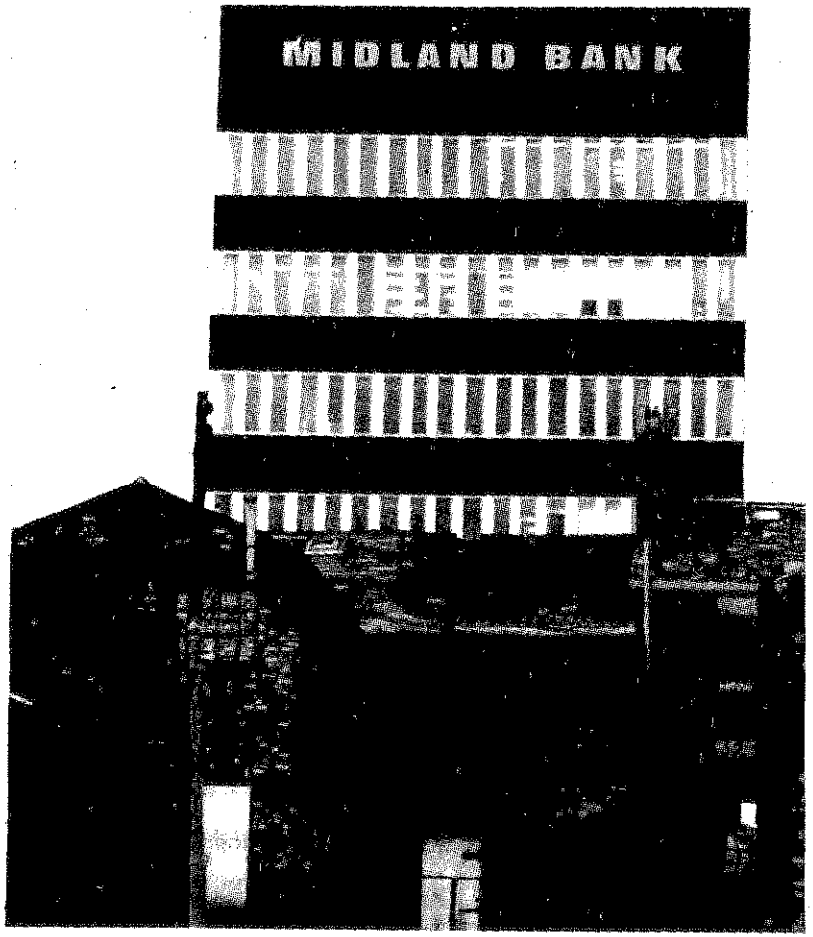
So there's a halt. However hard and bright your theory, you are helpless before the great apathy of this mass which will not move to move it. Nobody knows why they will not move. Remember we live in a time when the organs of consciousness are almost completely cut off from the mass of the people, in no contact at all. Therefore we are immensely ignorant of what is happening on any social level beneath that of the petty-bourgeois. Very likely we'll have to await the arrival of intellectuals-in-touch: the unemployed man at present reading in public libraries, the young stoker spending the mornings of his back-shift week ploughing through Shaw and Lawrence, fumbling his way through acceptances and rejections towards a cultural consciousness which squares with his communal experience. They, at any rate, might be capable of a survey which is not at root contemptuous. And from them I have heard many times recently that what the proletarian needs is a religion which is not a religion. A religion which is not a religion - that's worth pondering over, a paradox from a place that doesn't usually deal in them. Let's all ponder for a bit while I get my puff.

MONEY TALKS

In 1929 the unemployment in Britain had reached 1,341,000 and by 1932 the figure had doubled. It stayed over the two million mark for three years. The severist of slumps hit the whole of the Western world. The North East was (as now) one of the most hit areas of England and it was workers from Jarrow who came to symbolise the 1930's through their Hunger March. But alongside the starkness of this unemployment, industrial development was also taking place. The industries which were to form the basis of the post-war boom - particularly automobiles and chemicals - were laid down in this decade of slump. Many towns in the South "boomed" through the depression.

These paradoxes were not lost on Common who saw - in the presence of unemployment alongside mechanisation and the beginning of mass production and a consumption induced through advertising - the makings of a new (and disturbing) society. For him fascism in Germany and Italy was but one part of this general change: a process which undervalued the knowledge and experience of ordinary men and women, putting the planner and the advertising executive in the box seat. These changes, for Common, marked a radical (in fact revolutionary) departure from classic capitalism - a society built around the cult of individualism. In its new form, capitalism (via massification and the state) attacked this (deformed)individualism to the point of destroying the bourgeoisie itself, creating a new middle class:

> superior, fettered in a social discipline
> so firm it flattens their very speech into
> a devitalised metallic dialect ringing with
> the chink of cash (standard English in the
> B.B.C.), and shapes their gestures into a
> marionettish mockery of human motion.
> Chilly, by God. Cold as shillings in a bank.
> They lower our temperature, these fabricated



humans which the discipline of a class-State has fashioned.

"A Matter of Meridians", The Eleventh Hour, May 8th 1935

While insisting that these people had to be put "where the Tudors put their Monks", Common was acutely aware of the tragedy of lives produced within these class arrangements. Aware too, that the workers themselves were not left unaltered (or unscathed) by those new developments. "Mass" capitalism (as fascism or "liberal fascism") reduced labour power to its ultimate commodity form. Workers become increasingly interchangeable and money becomes the prime mover. The threat this posed to a continuity of working class experience and resistance was obvious and was a central concern within a growing "cultural debate" on the Left during the 1930's. Common recognised the threat; but in doing so retained a clear optimism. Within all the insecurities of these new developments he saw the potentiality for a new, and more real, individualism. One which wasn't based upon class exploitation and masked through "the many varnishes of social separateness", but rather was based upon the reality of collective dependence one with another.

Money Talks Nonsense Now

Hearing all the discussion which constantly goes on about what's wrong with the world and how to put it right, you would naturally get the idea that this is a problem for specialists, and its answer will be found in one of the sciences (so-called), preferably economics. Either wise-planning will do the trick, or nationalisation of banking. Though these devices inspire any amount of argument, sheets and sheets of it, there's is not in the whole howling cacophony any encouragement to the non-specialists to do anything more than stand

around and wait. He can chew a few economics and mooch until that happy day when the planners plan or the nationalisers nash. It is the specialist's typical error to record the trouble he finds in his own province without noticing that some form of it appears simultaneously in every province: and therefore to forget that what affects the whole life of society very likely cannot be described in the vocabulary of one special function. But the ordinary man lives that whole life in little. The microcosm he lives faithfully reflects the disturbances in the social organism. He meets the full sum of them, not merely the part which the specialist sees. And how great that sum is we may guess when we reflect that the really baffling thing, about our problem is that hardly anybody's life is credible nowadays - credible, I mean, in the sense that you would want to believe in it if it was put to you as a possibility.

Of course, it isn't put to you at all. You get it. You inherit it. It's what your fathers did, or what they dreamt of doing if they hadn't have done what they did. It's either respectable and boring, or immoral and boring. Either Suburbia stern and chaste, or the suburban idea of Bohemia. All but the lowest reaches of society are completely shrouded in suburban ideals of living. The working class is not yet encompassed by it, though nearly all schemes of reform have that end in view. But then working-class life has its own unreality. It is rendered ghostly by unemployment. So obviously if you had to choose between being a semi-rentier and being an intermittently working man, the juggle in unreality must end in you sitting where you are, bored stiff. This is the ordinary man's choice and that's what he does with it.

But the specialist does not look at this life around him: he examines a part of the social structure, usually the economic part, because economics seem more real than anything else to people with a bourgeois upbringing. And he comes to the incredible conclusion that what we

need is more money. To make the wheels go round, that's all. You would think there would be at this time any number of philosophies offering us a radically different and altogether more vivid life. But there isn't. We are offered merely a wealthier life, the same old life with knobs on. And when one really gets down to imagining Ealing or Twickenham, Salford and Edgbaston with knobs on, instinct says: change the brewer before it's too late. Then, of course, you can't do that: Mann Crossman's being Watneys' under the skin, and every skinful as chemical as the last pretty nearly. It's an old nineteenth-century habit we still have of offering people accumulation and calling it progress, of multiplying the gadgets instead of abolishing the boredom. It is true there is real deprivation in some sections of society, and that is a shame to us all, but look at the crowds leaving the City every night, a typical wedge of modern society. Do you think they could be animated by giving them more? Make their semi-detached, detached: their lawn-mowers, motor lawn-mowers; their Austins, Daimlers: their wives' teddy-bear coats, ermine; their boys' schooling always Eton or Harrow; and what's the result. No result. If you waft all society through a magic Woolworths', you'll merely floodlight existing pains in the neck.

One thing which has at last become obvious is that the celebrated Curse of Mammon (which used to be a melodramatic thundering of priests to delight rich congregations) has settled down into the irritation of money. It has become actually intolerable that a society can find no better way of expressing its relations than through a grammar of L. S. D. What a nuisance it is to everybody that a fellow still has to outwit his neighbours in order to prove that he amounts to something: that we have to ruin the eyesight of the poor in picture-palaces, and strain the hearing of the rich in unacoustic dress circles, because the successful know no better way of savouring success than by putting a price-gulf round their pleasures. It is an infernal bother to be always forking out tuppence and fourpences

Sales (in 1970)	£384 million
Profit before tax	£38.7 million
Taxation	£14.4 million
Profit after tax	£19.3 million
Total net assets	£342 million
Profit before interest and tax as a % of net assets	11.81%
Cash flow	£15.4 million
On-licences	8,000
Off-licences	1,530
Hotels	48
Number of employees	43

for bus-fares, or to have to walk because of an anti-quated habit publicans cling to of collaring all your small change when you feel so good with your neighbours that you order an extra "last round" which you really can't afford. Endless small buying and selling we've got to. It's maddening. You can't even do a useful job unless you sell it somewhere, somehow, and if you can't, you must live in weary idleness because unpaid work is not recognised on the Labour Exchange, and no stamps are given for it. The result of so much selling is only that the community is split in twain, divided into successful and non-successful sellers. It's pretty desperate when you come to think of it, that merely because a man is born in a bourgeois home he has to live his life surrounded by a social vacuum (like a blasted thermos flask), shut up in private and public schools, saloon bars, and Sunday afternoon streets, forced to regard the vast majority of his fellow-countrymen as a kind of sub-humanity that strikes and engages in mass-struggle. That was a social discipline once, I suppose. It created a class of economic warriors who led the capitalist expansion. That expansion is finished, but the boys are still hanging about, heavily armoured for a fight which has vanished out of ken, like battleships on a mudbank.

Let's be clear about one thing. It is no part of the problem to get the poor raised up to the level of the old-fashioned bourgeois burster. That's where Fabians, Wellsians, and sentimental reformers from the better suburbs go wrong. The old social discipline has to be scrapped, or people will die of it - they are dying in fact, as you'll see if you take a walk round the social cemeteries which are being laid out at Welwyn, Letchworth, and Hampstead. Hence we can't get anywhere by proposals of an economic nature, especially not by those which keep all the classes as they stand, but enable them all to go up one in the matter of wealth. They merely flatter the economic man, who is sufficient damnation already. There is only one thing to be done about money: make it completely unimportant. It is the vocabulary of buyers and sellers, as rank was

the vocabulary of warriors. A new human relation cannot be expressed in it. You must all be prepared to live a life in which there is no money-shelter between yourself and the next man, in which the differences between you find no economic expression though they will appear plainer than before in your jobs and your recreations. The pattern of that life has already been sketched out negatively. In the material, non-human sphere the result of intensive individualism has been a mass machine-production which serves men as though they were not individualists at all. In the human world the correlative result is a class called "the proletariat" because they have no individualist privileges and are indeed "mass" to those who do not feel with them. The rest of society is rendered sterile because it clings to individualism in the face of an actual equality imposed by the conditions of modern machine-production. The machine works on the assumption that what suits a million men will do for any one man. So it proletarianises each class inevitably. It herds all the individualists into income-categories, so that though you can patronise Harrods or Woolworths, the Army and Navy or the Home and Colonial (all probably amalgamated as this goes to press), you can do nothing for private enterprise.

In the face of this situation the alternatives for any upper class are to smash the machine-production (a la Fascismo) or to accept equality as beneficial. For the lower class (the proletariat, in bourgeois phraseology) the choice is already made: they have lived by equality through the centuries of individualist oppression, kept human by it while the society above tried to make them into mere labour-power. It needed a tremendous force to do that, how tremendous you can gather by a glance at the familiar marvels of mechanical production, its first material result. That force is already human and fruitful among the dispossessed, and will become more so.

Marx and the Vultures

The times are dismal, without doubt, yet it is curious to reflect that for future historians this dark and troubled twentieth century may yet be known as the Naissance. Something is dying; something is being born. It is a tremendous struggle, the new life pushing uncertainly through a maelstrom of dark forces. The issue of it depends on what strength we have to let the forces of death bear away what is old and false in us without stifling the stirrings of new birth. The old womb of the world rumbles again in the labour of creation, but few of us dare to believe that there can be anything better than ourselves. Accordingly we interpret signs of change as fulfilment of our present personalities, willing with closed eyes the survival of precisely that part of us which most needs to die. And because we are always proclaiming as new what is really the old Adam, the vultures gather about us scenting death surely beneath its utopian disguises.

What is dying is the great bourgeois synthesis : economic individualism, protestantism, liberalism, and its pseudo-democracy. These "isms" one can discuss as though they were merely a part of the landscape, environmental, and capable of external adjustment. Most of us have experienced those barren discussions and know how they end in the questioning impulse being temporarily pacified by a plan - a plan which seeks to change anything but us, and which would result therefore in an augmentation of existing life, an extra gable on the old villa in the same execrable style as the one we've got, more dividends, more wages or more gadgets. In short, more boredom, a bigger helping of existing belly-ache. That is the result of pretending that a social synthesis lives only in its external structure. But essentially, of course, its life is inside of us. Its life, and its death. This death looks stony-eyed from the faces you meet in the streets, from the masks you see performing on the films; the

stench of it comes sickeningly from every newspaper and magazine (including this one); its rattle shakes in the throat of every jazz band. You cannot escape it. The ordinary man seeks it blatantly, allowing his desire for power to dwindle into a haphazard piling together of inessential possessions or into a mechanical interest in sport, betting, and sweepstakes; letting his sensuality feast timorously on the ghostly blooms of Hollywood faces, his competitive impulse fall wearily into the form of being as like as possible to his best-off neighbour down to the very dog and lawn-mower.

But, lord knows, the extraordinary people aren't any better off. Their music explores every possible way of not being jazz, and there issues from all the ingenuity just that one virtue of not-being-jazz. They don't contemplate quite so confidently the manufactured courtesans of Hollywood - why should they when their women are home-copies of that model? They are not like their next door neighbour - unless they live in Garden Suburbs - but they are all unlike him in precisely the same way. This unlikeness can easily be communalized as it is in the Garden Suburb movement, and the result is a quite spurious community.

In all of us this death is taking place, absolutely all. There is no escape from it in any pocket of existing communities. We must learn to look it in the face, to know it for what it is wherever it is. In the sterile imagination which coops us in such ambitions and rectitudes as might have been furnished by the local building society when they built our villas; in the monotonous preciosity which fashioned the dividend-buttressed bohemia of folk-dancing and modern art - in these and a hundred similar matters we watch the slow dis integration of a once-great principle. Its chill has us all aching with boredom; its agony sends wave after wave of crisis through the bourgeois world.

Without this great repudiation we are all carrion. And don't the vultures know it. The old vulture of Rome is flapping again. There has been no need of her for

several centuries, not since the Protestant Reformation drew off all that was vital in the blood of the middle ages and left her the corpse to fasten on. Now that Protestantism is grey with death, she clanks the keys of her authority again and there are plenty of dead men who answer. Whatever offers authority offers death. There is no new authority: it isn't born yet. And as it is born, it will be born obscurely in a few of you who have rendered up to death all that could die and kept a kick left. Authority of the State is just another vulture. It asks you to acquiesce in the present domination, but calls acquiscence obedience or service. Say no, therefore, whether it is a church which appeals to you in the name of God, or a State which appeals to you in the name of your country. The external gods are dead, the existing States are damned.

A great negation must be made of all these things which smell of the grave. Say no to death and boredom, and you'll keep a little life yet. A little, freed, is enough. It will grow. It will grow into a new and magical apprehension of people and things. Life will touch life and flower where it touches more marvellously than our state imaginations can believe. There will be a new communication between us, a new salutation, a new spark set flickering into human relations. We will not be linked by a priestly creed, fellow-grovellers all; nor by a military rule, fellow-servants all; nor by money, investors, labour-sellers, and landlords all - we've tried all those entanglements, they wither on us, they stifle the whole of our society so that the sap cannot rise through it any more. They must be cast away, utterly negated.

How? If you have any reason to suspect yourself of being bourgeois in some way, if your bowels are sluggish, if you have a tendency to sell things or to save money, if you find yourself attached to your possessions or interested in credit schemes, if you think you would like to lead the workers, then you cannot do better than take a good stiff dose of anti-bourgeois cathartic This is the invention of Karl Marx, a man himself considerably afflicted with bourgeoiserie, who managed to drive it out

folks with children, three rooms for couples, and two for bachelors and spinsters. The places to be furnished completely in simple and necessary equipment. This would be a frank recognition of the reality which underlies our present pseudo-variety. We should be all alike. But only for five minutes. What a challenge to genuine individuality! You would see then what mass-production can do for you - and what it can't. You would see what you can do for yourself. Mass-production can satisfy your needs, to use an old phrase, but, to use another, it can't give you a soul if you haven't one. The pretence that it can is our present mess. Mass-production can turn out a million Jacobean fireplaces; it can't give anyone a flair for style. Let us take all that it can give. Then we'd see something like a revival of the arts and crafts. Give every house (including Beaverbrook's) a plain deal sideboard - cabinet makers would spring up in every drawing-room. Half the work you do now in order to maintain a fictitious variety would become leisure, but not leisure to hang around Drage's windows. Jobs would stare at you from every wall.

This process, of which no copyright exists, is the entirely dialectical one of opposing false individualism with its negation collectivism, and thus rescuing a genuine and native individuality.

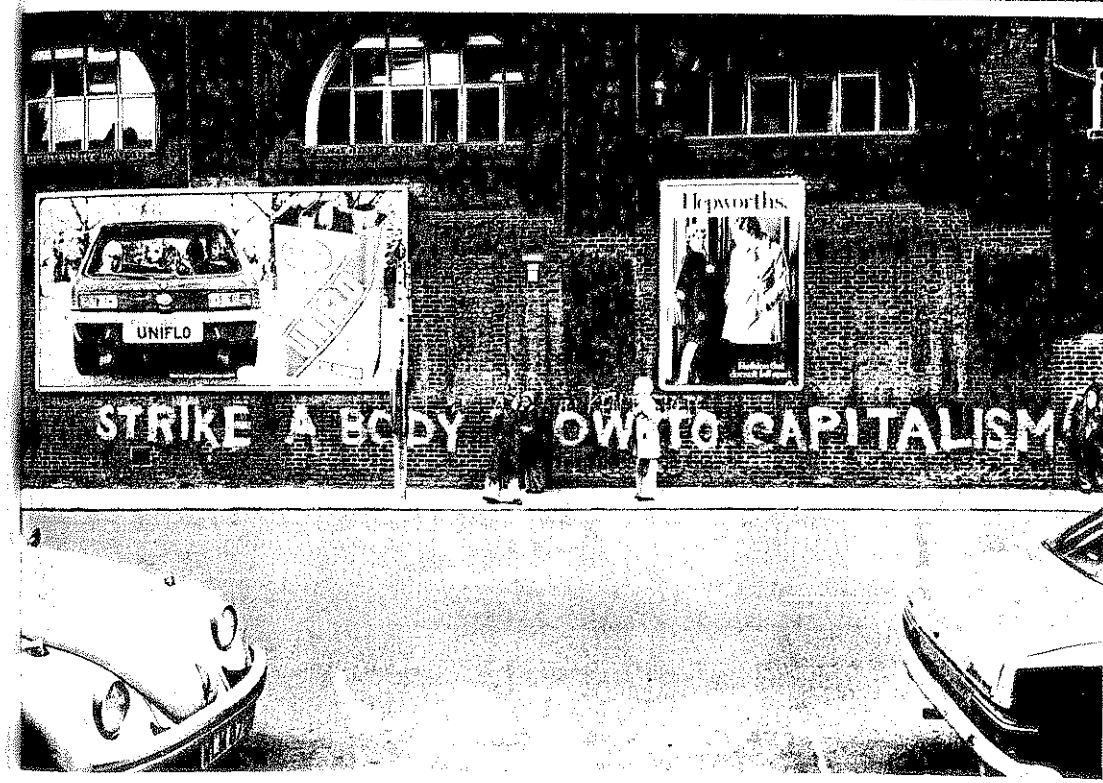
Masses

In these days of the decadence of the great Liberal creed, when all parties are apt to call in the state to organise the chaos of competitive individualism, we cannot but marvel at the magnificent act of faith which said: leave individuals to sell freely with one another and the world will be alright... One can see how mad that must have sounded to the nobility and churchmen and kings whose profession it was to put the individual in his place. What a thing to trust to! The individual conscience, better than all the popes and colleges of

A Heckle at Hoardings

The other night there appeared a portent over London, an aeroplane tricked out in red lights along its wings, the purpose being to advertise something, though what that something was I couldn't say, being in the midst of a wild fit of illiteracy brought on by trying to understand British policy at Stresa. Certainly it was advertising - and think what that leads you to. Same as motor-cars. They began with writing on their walls - P. Codpetal, Fishmonger and Florist; Evening News, Bursts with its Views. Then they grew into shapes. The streets were filled with whizzing cottages, wireless valves, and beer bottles, until at last some wizard thought of advertising motor-cars by building one motor-body on another one's back placed wrong side on, so that we saw a car apparently flying wildly backwards - this was too much for the police; they stopped it. Now we're at the stage of scribbling on aeroplanes, but do you think we'll stop at the printed plane and think that perfection? Not us. Before long the sky will be full of floating glasses of Guinness, Glaxo babies, and Bile Beans. Worthington on wings will hunt the sun down to its setting, and Mr. Drage himself will arise horribly persuasive hand in glove with the moon that shines for lovers.

The fact is, the mad ingenuity of the Western people is always fighting gallantly against the same people's faculty of general obliviousness and boredom. Time was when you'd only to write Mazawattee Tea on a hoarding and you had the population in stitches. Townsmen used to take their country relatives down to the station to read it and laugh. Alas! that hearty awareness has long been no more. As the volume of advertising grew it got more subtle (cf. the highbrow intricacies of the Mustard Club), and also more bothersome to folks. It is true you still see some tender minds spelling out and puzzling over the Bovril puns, but for the



great mass advertising is just a blur. There's not a man among us who cannot skip easily through a twenty-four page newspaper and be absolutely unconscious of the twelve of them which are advertisements. That is why the special articles now and much of the news is advertising disguised. The Woman's Page, the Healthy Child, Gardening Hints, are almost always pure puffery. So is any article mentioning meat, milk, or Ramsay MacDonald. In fact to be plain with you, in a little while now the discerning newspaper reader will simply tear off the football results and leave the rest to the winds. Then when Arsenal has succeeded in buying up everybody else's players, we'll all take to knitting. The Press of this country will be confined to the fish and chip saloons, and our type-soaked eyes will get a welcome rinse.

You see, progress mainly depends on our faculty of getting fed-up. I don't think in all history there has ever been such a bored people as ours. Partly it is because there are so many of us. It is difficult to entertain a multitude except by a ritual. You have to select something which is generally agreed to be amusing or interesting, a symbol for humour, a symbol for thrill. There's a bored comedian I know who falls down a dozen times at the beginning of his act. The theory is, as he explains it, man falling down is funny, it would make fifty people laugh; man falling down twelve times makes six hundred people laugh. There you are, the house rocks with merriment. What dupes, what simpletons, you think. But would you have them, then, retire icily to their separate chambers and break into huge horse-laughter over the ironic elbow-pokes of T.S. Elliot? There's a need to be merry in great masses. We're a crowd and all the ordinary folk know it. The feeblest joke laughed at in a great company is better than the cream of wit surreptitiously lapped up in a back bedroom. It is of a different order, an order so far neglected and left to take care of itself or to be exploited by profitmongers.

Somehow it becomes a slur on humanity that a million people should need Guinness or Glaxo or what. It would be odder, though, if each of them required a special diet all his own, and every big restaurant took on the primeval diversity of the Zoo at feeding time. To see a stockbroker contentedly gobbling ant's eggs while politicians delicately flicked flies from the air, and postmen pecked at corn, would be faintly disturbing. Much better to accept our similarities. Taken for granted, they'd disappear from the public consciousness. We all need roughly the same amount of grub, clothes and bedrooms - why bother to tease these obvious desires with miles and miles of advertising? They should be administered to automatically. Otherwise it's a sheer waste of the public attention.

And boring, too. Nothing is more likely to make your attentive faculties ache than the perpetual prize-packets we're offered which promise something different

every time, and when opened reveal the maddening sameness of individualism. We're so pelted to death in a welter of novelties that we'd welcome anyone who said, I can't give you anything but beer, baby - or baby-food, dearie. Lord, let's take a delight in our common humanity for a change, then perhaps we'll get some uncommon specimens of it. That's a kind of law. Humanity is essentially all different, like packets of foreign stamps, a lovely chaos when unsorted. But as long as its drawn up in categories of arbitrary difference, all within each category take on a dreadful similarity. Like stamps in albums they are pasted to an appropriate page. Come unstuck, folks, and get jumbled up a bit.

Hegel and the Blue Bottle

A bluebottle will annoy all beholders by buzzing for hours against a glass pane just because he's got it into his obstinate head that the thing's for going through. He wants to sail through the transparent, since for him transparent spells transit. If a Hegel among blue bottles arose, he would endeavour to give his tribe peace by pointing out that freedom is the knowledge of necessity and the necessity imposed by a pane of glass gives the freedom of looking through it, no more. But all the Blue-bottles would have buzzed back that there was no glass at all, at all.

That at any rate is what we do. We live in a glass-house civilisation which promises a freedom for development never known in the cold outside. But not all sorts of freedom. It is not a bit of use all our little tomatoes remaining yellow because they fancy themselves mangel-wurzels. Red's their fate and red's their freedom. Hegel's brand. We were lured under glass, however, by the promise of a different kind of freedom, the real, gaseous, intoxicating and all-embracing sort. Now the curious thing is that any kind of freedom but Hegel's is a foundation for slavery. If any man tells you you ought to be free to do what you like about something

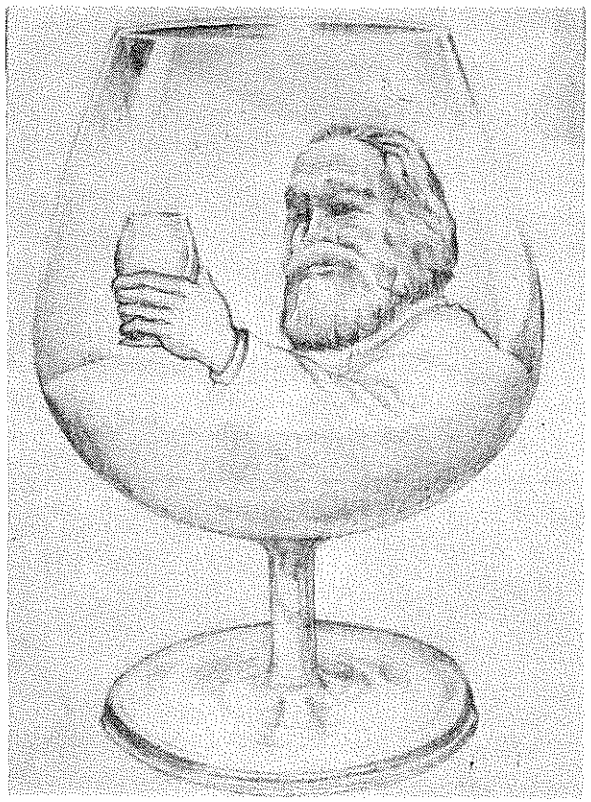
or other, it is odds on that he knows your unsophisticated or sophisticated "like" will deliver you starry-eyed and eager into a treadmill he's got ready for you.

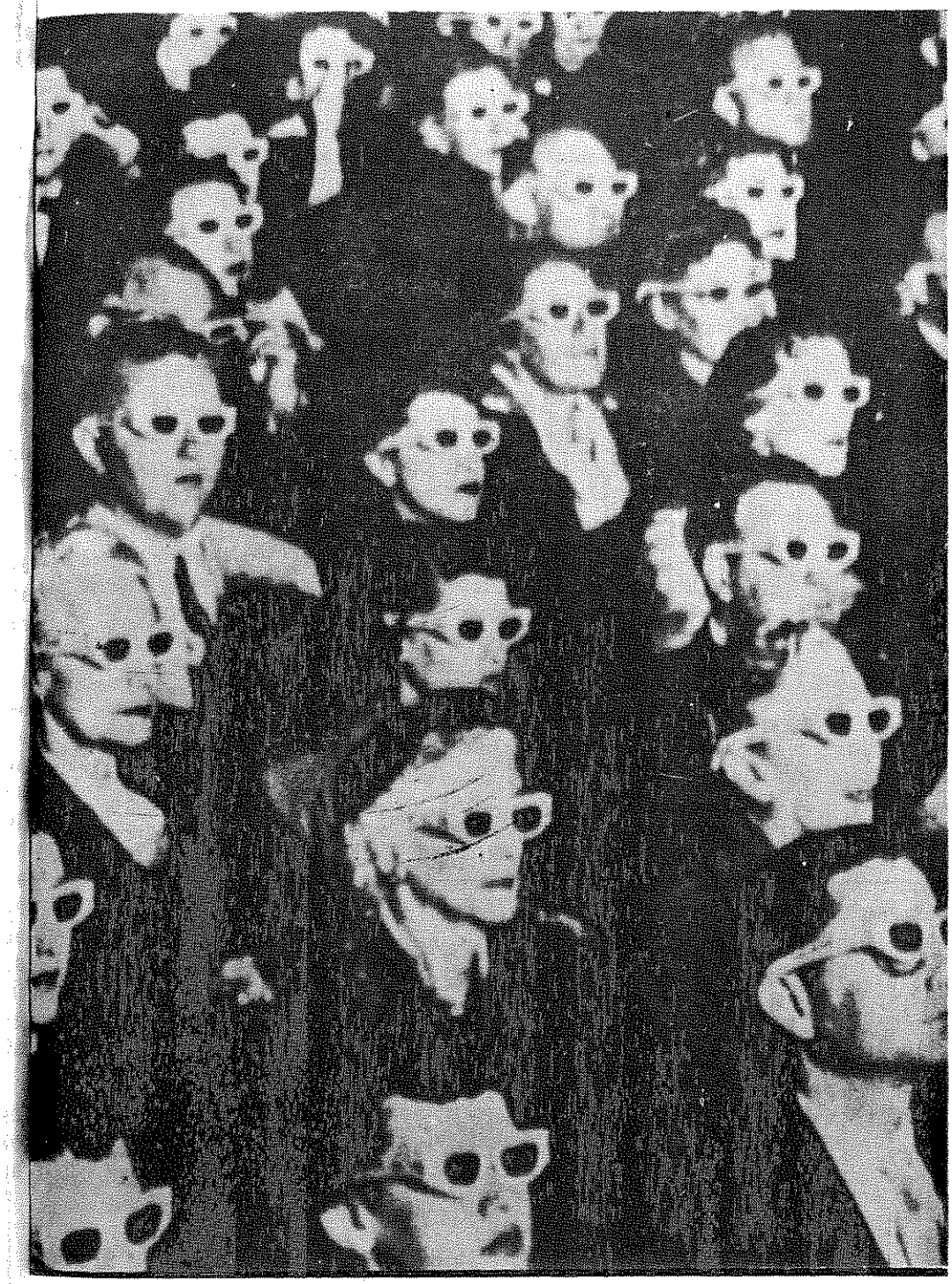
For example, the Daily Express has recently been endeavouring to pep up its mammoth circulation by appealing to the average man's sense of fairplay in the matter of the Co-ops. Isn't it fair, they plead, that the small tradesmen should be allowed to compete on equal terms with the Co-ops? Had the average man replied by asking, "Is it necessary that they should compete at all?" or, "What equation is needed before the small trader and the Co-op can be said to be existing on equal terms?" - then Beaverbrook is stumped since he himself competes on as unequal terms as he can manage with the small newspaper-proprietor, and he himself does not at all accept any equation which would put him on equal terms with the small shopkeeper.

Our clinging to ill-defined freedoms is always tying us up to tyranny. Actually now we are not free to buy any object unless we agree to buy the same thing as several millions of our fellows are buying. It is the price of mass-production that you become a mass-consumer. Now look how pathetic the business of buying has become. All the hesitation, and marshalling of one's odds and ends of taste, and anxious searching for bargains - the ghost of free standardisation only because we don't accept its necessity. We believe we are different from everybody else. We are, but only boredom of this age proceeds from the fact that people are always agitating like hell to be different from the fellow next door, and out of their ignorance always achieving a sickening sameness. We climb pane-stakingly from Woolworth's to Harrod's, from the fifty-shilling suit to the five guinea - and this process is called individualism, the freedom to be different from our fellows.

Suppose now we accepted the necessity for standardisation even at its lowest level. Suppose we arranged to supply everyone with a manageable minimum of accommodation, say, a five-roomed house or flat for

of his system by uncovering the cause of the malady where rival physicians merely treat the symptoms. It is good medicine, but unpleasant. Of course, the lavender water of the Buchamnites seems more attractive, if it didn't make you smell like a spinster. The Laudenum of Rome can be fed to you in a spoon, but its after-effects are such that you can never again look a plain argument in the face. There is the castor oil of the Fascists, too, which promises quick relief, though one notices that bourgeois sufferers are much more constipated after treatment than they were before. There is nothing for it but the tried remedy, a good stiff toddy of Marxism many times repeated. Go to it boys.





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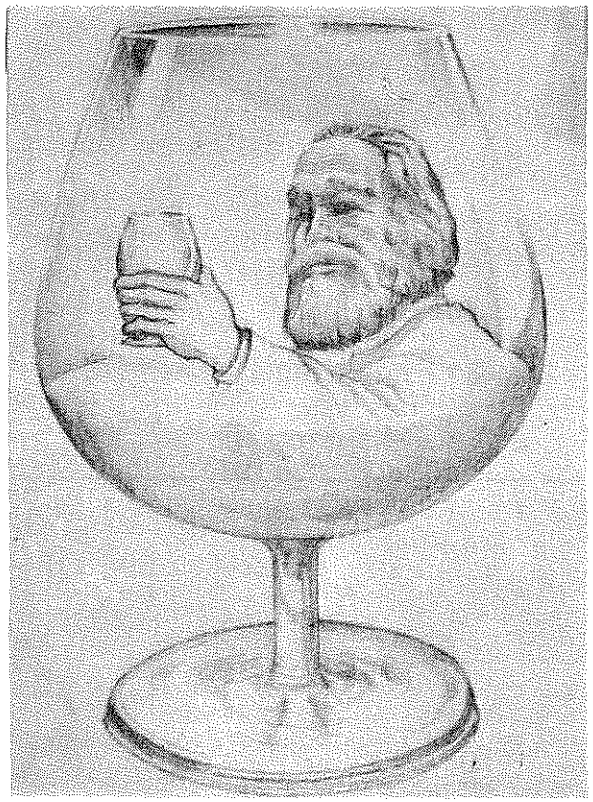
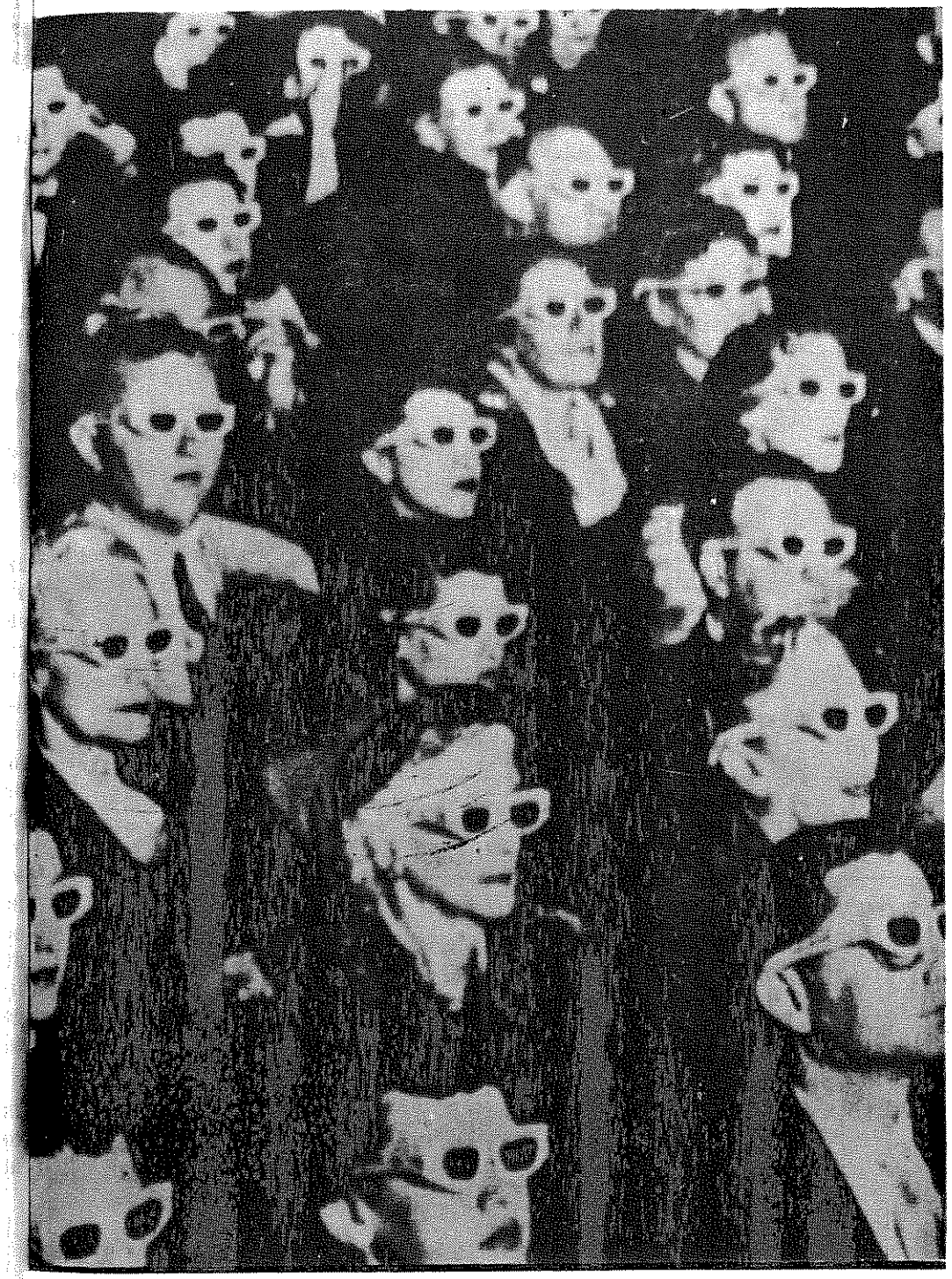




cardinals; the individual initiative, more skilful than the trained corps of the aristocracy. Those brewers and merchants and petty tradesmen had a flair for human quality, if you like. Compare their magnificent faith with the frigid planning and authority-mongering of their successors - it is the difference between eager youth and pottering age.

They were the voices of the people; they believed in the people. Not enough, perhaps, but enough to get some splendid things done. But now, the people have gone, disappeared out of cultural consciousness. Instead we have the masses. The word "masses" is as terrifying to modern masters as the word "people" was to the old catholic priesthood and nobility of reformation times. They are both words which to snobbish ears seem to oppose number to quality. To the protestant tradesman, however, the word "people" opposed the unborn quality of individuals to the dead quality of caste. It was a gamble in human potentials. It came off.

Now, we are a mass-civilisation which will not recognise its own character. All our institutions are cracked and strained by the washing of this great tide of dumb multitudes, whom no one can give a voice to. They are there, the mass must be served, but none have joy in their service. You must give the public what it wants, or else sell what you want to the few persons constituted like yourself. You cannot work for men any more: it must be either for mass or for the intelligentsia. That is a hell of a problem for us. What is it for the ordinary man?

He doesn't understand the intelligentsia, who are busy with their own problems, and the "What the public wants" school don't understand him. They give him what he is prepared to pay for; and that, they say, is what he wants. Well, he wants a bit of fun and he'll buy anything that promises to give it him. That doesn't mean that he gets what he wants. He only gets what's going. Fair-ground folk are apt to jeer at the fools they take in (one born every minute kind of thing), but

if you've ever been to a fair, you quickly realise that the boys go there intending to be taken in - it's part of the fun. Nobody really believes that the two-headed baby actually has two heads, only they appreciate anyone taking the trouble to fake it for them. Similarly it is very unsafe to suppose that people who buy the Daily Express or the Daily Mail (if anybody does buy the Daily Mail these days) believe in all the twaddle they see there. The ordinary man regards his newspaper as very much in the margin of his life.

And his newspaper, the mammoth-sale mass-journal, like his film, is a very bad guess at what he is like. It is compiled by cynics who think they are serving slaves, and who feel Barnum's own sting in their humiliation at the servitude. They give expression to what they believe is the slave-character of the masses. But the ordinary man of this civilisation is potentially free and powerful; there is nothing for which he can be enslaved. And he is enslaved, for nothing. Millions of him are kept in idleness because slavery is unprofitable, and freedom is fearful to contemplate. The slavery is unnecessary, and therefore it has to be maintained by lying. And because all those enslaved to the idea of masters hate and dread the idea of the ordinary men (whom they call "masses") being freed, the whole of popular culture is a concocted slander by which would-be superior people defend their groundless superiority.

But actually the ordinary man is fine. Not the average man. He is a cerebral abstraction, like that average child which educationalists abuse themselves by playing with. Nor the "little man," nor the "man-in-the-street." All these are the conscious belittlements of those who cannot endure the richness of mere life, and must construct smoked glasses by a mental formula to dim it down lest their own ego be quenched by it. The common male of the species is fine. So, of course, is any bird or any tree. We take the poet's word for it in the case of "natural" creatures; when it comes to men we listen to economists, or scientists, or journalistic hacks. Yet, precisely what is needed is another act of faith in the

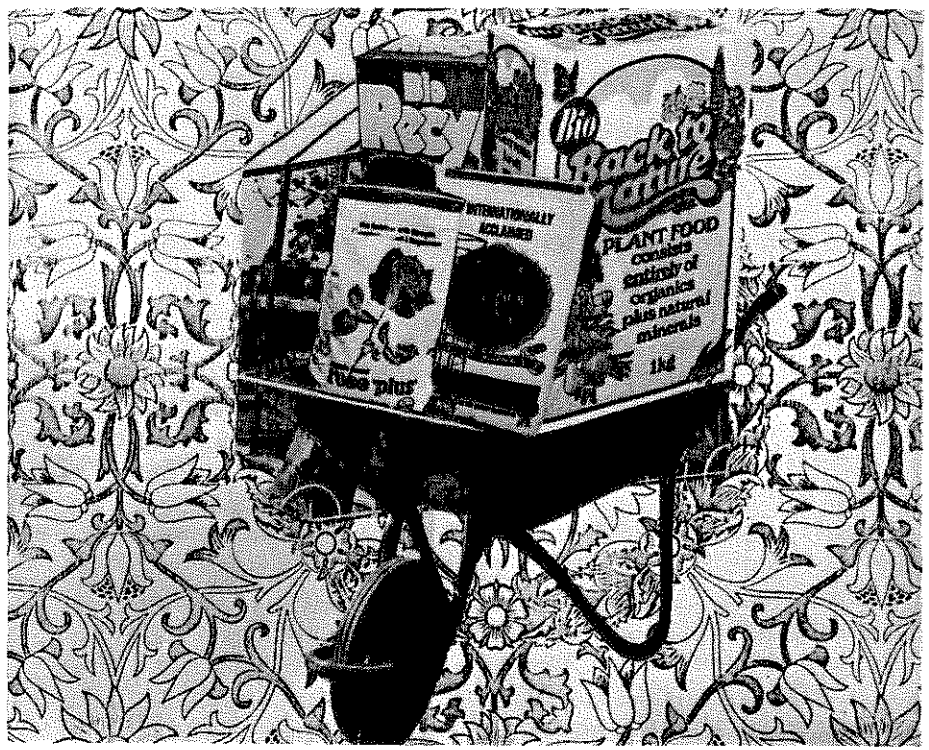
ordinary man. Give him the mastery of the machine-world which no masters of men can control, and things will be alright. You can bet on that.

Honours in Spades

If progress was a simple thing, one improved generation superseding the last in the manner of a slight of stairs, social activities would be less complicated and less commentable. Unfortunately, though, we do not get a complete set of new men to start a new epoch with. Society saves its back numbers. The aborigines of Europe are with us yet and so are their descendants of every generation. Cro-magnon man still stalks our alley-ways and backwaters. You find feudal barons buffetting about the borders of Empire. Their serfs still accept a tip and thrill at titles, or yield an admiring droit du seigneur in the back offices of the city. Hearty Elizabethans are by no means extinct in the humbler public-houses, and the Y. M. C. A., I believe, can yield its quota of eighteenth-century fops and wits.

Once upon a time man lived by blood alone, that is by hunting. And in those days a certain type was ubiquitous and useful. Now anyone would think that when the more highly-evolved arts of agriculture came in, that type would have died off. But no fear. He sank to the bottom and rose to the top. You see the majority of sound and able fellows having taken to farming, they had to find someone to rule the country for them. The law about this is that a people is always ruled by its inferiors (see any government of today for confirmation.) So they chose these obsolete hunters for an aristocracy. But as there were many more hunters than was needed, the rejects had to take to scrounging, i.e. obeying the hunter's habit of never coming home empty-handed. And down to this day you will find the extremities of society busy huntin' and scroungin'.

Thus as I write this, the whole length and breadth of the land (if you can get near it) echoes to the popping of guns. What is left of the British Aristrocracy and all their imitators are playing at being workers of long ago. What was once a way of getting a living is repeated as pastime for the benefit of odd survivals who cannot catch up with the full tide of twentieth century existence. And this raises the question what sort of noble sport shall we invent for the present ruling class now that they are getting really too obsolete and useless even for their job. I think, gardening, sure. You can see it, boy, writ plain. The old feudal class when they were pensioned off, pulled down the cottages in the moors to make way for their guns; the next lot, the bourgeoisie, are even now cutting into the parks of their predecessors in order to have room for gardens. Soon they reach the moors and then it will be funny.



Of course gardenin' is not yet quite so expensive and exclusive as huntin' and shootin'. But it's going to be. You watch. Just as of old it was pretended that grouse need acres and acres to be healthy in, so now we find that flowers won't grow unless they are fed with bonemeal, and leaf-mould and patent-manure. In every village there tends to be in addition to the cottage garden (eyesore) the real garden (burgess' delight). They are as different as wringing a chicken's neck is from stalking a deer. If you are a sporting gardener (with a proper income) you wouldn't dream of recognising anything but prize plants and bought trees. Damn it, there are catalogues and one knows where one is, what? Your hedge of withered beech or Japanese thorn or flowering currant must run prettily from the dainty laburnum to the perfectly sweet rowan. Your giant blooms, bursting with bonemeal, blazon your social status on the fainting air. Anybody can see that you have a claim to National Dividends (the Garden Cities' heartfelt cry) and that your ancestors fought for markets and were ennobled on the stricken field of trade.

In the meantime, of course, agriculture and market-gardening will be scientifically and communally organised, more or less as meat and poultry were when hunting ceased to be a practicable way of feeding society. Relatively small areas under the most intensive cultivation will probably yield enough to feed us. The rest will be to play in. For, of course, you can't expect the proletariat to show that enthusiasm for hard work which has recently smitten our young bourgeois brothers. They'll get it over as quickly as possible once they have the power to do so. The romanticism which working on the land inspires in the mercantile-industrial England will disappear when practically anybody might have to go digging. Market-gardening will stand in the same relation to sport-gardening as butchering does to fox-hunting. Yet, I suppose, there'll still be found a proletarian here and there fond of poaching an hydrangea when he can. He will take a leaf out of the gentleman's book, volume umpteen of the series, one before the last.

PROLETARIAN CULTURE

Jack Common's commitment to the virtues of the common man formed the basis of his political beliefs. For him a better - socialist - society would never be produced through political programmes designed by intellectuals, planners and professional politicians - no matter how well intentioned. The roots of a better society had to be established within the daily practices, the hopes and aspirations, of the ordinary men and women who made up the working class. Socialism cannot be programmed for, nor is it any use as an abstract notion. For the common man, the prospects of a better life had to be found, not in some idealised utopia but through forms which had been established in their everyday life. Without such happiness there could be no prospect of a better society. And how is this happiness to be achieved? How can the imagination of 'everyday life' take a hold upon society and shape it. How indeed with the twin assault of mass production and mass consumption. Who has the space to think?

In writing about this "space" and on how it was being constructed, Common coined the term "liberal fascism".

> England is pretty well agreed on what constitutes the good life. It is semi-detached, a bit of land to call one's own, a good service of trains and buses, reliable stores and nice cinemas.
>
> That's agreed. The only question is how many are to be admitted to this semi-genteel state, and how? Realists - that is strong, selfish men - believe that natural law limits the amenities to one class. On the other hand just men would let all men into it. Here is the two party opposition. The basis for this essential agreement is a working compromise by which everybody is given the same sort of life

but in grades. Graded suburbs in England's answer to world crisis. Or, in short, liberal fascism.

"More Stern Stuff", (The Sweeper Up), The Adelphi August, 1934.

"Liberal fascism", in its very nature, screws down on that amount of space which people call their own. Capitalism invades all aspects of life, even the most personal. Formalised education, with the discipline of the classroom and the lecture (note Common's stricture that no-one should listen to anyone longer than they themselves would be listened to) is but one aspect of this. Allied with this is the extent to which commerce (the world of money, cash) colonised all other cultural forms. For Common, this became a pervading theme.

As Arsenal's financial dominance ruled football, sport generally became transformed into "mathletics":

> The mathletic notion invades all the games, one after another, and as it spreads your earthly adversary gets vaguer; if you beat him it scarcely matters, the point is what figures have you put up? For instance, in the grand old game of cricket, so typically English in that it never had any point, even in this great game the mathlete appears. What is Bradman? A hitting-machine. Bradman battles against unseen adversaries. His great competitors are dead or at least retired. He is struggling against their scores.
>
> Now the effect of this on the ordinary man is to make him a by-stander and print-gulper. He has no hope of ever playing games, for how dare he fumble and foozle about for fun when the air resounds with the acclaim of people who do difficult things easily and then don't stop. He must go and look on. Only monomaniacs can be mathletes.
> "The Eno's of the People", New Britain July 4th, 1934.

And this didn't stop with sports. Pubs became the outposts of giant brewers. Holidays ("bank holiday") changed in character too. In theorising "dialectical stages" however Common held out some hope for the future. Take Christmas:

> First Christmas the magical intuition of children; next Xmas antithetical pain in the neck to adults; then-clap hands - Marxmas magic made material fact.
>
> "A Shout up the Chimney"(The Sweeper Up), The Adelphi, vol.XI, December, 1935.

But how could such a transformation take place? To begin with, working people have few books to call their own. The world of writing is so much the monopoly of others. One of Common's driving passions was to break this monopoly; to struggle for "working class books" which expressed the reality of everyday life and the views of the common man. He struggled to open up the world of books to "the lads of the unprinted proletariat". His main success was in the production of 'Seven Shifts' a collection of seven accounts by working men of their lives and views. This project meant a great deal to Common and it is perhaps worth quoting in some detail, from his preface.

> My friends include members of the literary bourgeoisie and lads from the unprinted proletariat. Both parties talk well and you'd probably enjoy a crack with them as much as I do. But here's the pity. The bourgeois ones get printed right and left - especially left; the others are mute as far as print goes, though exceedingly vocal in public houses. Now I've often felt it would be good to swap them round for a change....
>
> For years I simply bore it in mind, that's all. Then circumstances interwove. A publisher, gifted with insight, prevision and warm hearted philanthropy ...
>
> Time passed without anything happening. I exerted pressure and encouragement. This brought forth wails and moans. "I could talk it all right, lad,"

> said one, "but writing it down is hard labour." Next arrival was a bundle of closely packed hand-written sheets with a note explaining that the author had no schooling. "I am a labourer and have to labour to live, it leaves me no time or energy for this game." Of course, his stuff was very well done: these lads never let you down, if you have patience with them. One would send me a couple of sheets as sample, another a bundle of odd efforts to be thrown into the wastepaper basket if no good. All that I got I shaped up a bit and sent back with suggestions.
>
> Now and then reminders were sent out. I'd get back a card to say that the author had started work a month back and as he was getting in a lot of overtime, literature had got the knock protem. Months went by before I had successfully folded all my black sheep but one. That one is still missing. If you run across him in some pub or other, get him to talk to you - he's good.

The tension hinted at here between writing and the lively talk of the public house is something which appears again and again in Common's work. Author himself he was, nevertheless, suspicious of where the path of "writing" in isolation could lead. Too easily the writing of prose could become a pose. The social practice of writing (and the accompanying intellectual refinements) could split off the writer from the word he wrote about:

> the moment any of us shows a bit of social awareness or insight, we at once make a gentleman of him, thus segregating him from his subject matter and compelling him to work by memory for the rest of his life
> Freedom of the Streets, Secker and Warburg, 1938.

An alternative (and a corrective to this process) lay in an appreciation of the cultural significance of the spoken word, of "the monologue", poetry read and of a "good crack" in the nearest tavern. It was this which

produced in Common a deep criticism of the new cultural forms (like the cinema, and jazz) which emerged as a mass phenomenon in the 1930's. He saw "the jazz song" bearing "the same relation to the old fashioned music hall ditty that a man, talking in his sleep does to the same fellow delivering a speech. It is a kind of mirror talking" (Jeepers Creepers", Adelphi, vol. XVIII, July, 1939). In spite of this he did recognise the power of jazz and modern dance music:

> 'Perhaps then, since it speaks all tongues and says nothing, it is the right form for us awaiting the content we could give it when we awake to the fact of our general amity. In order to bring people together you have first to find their lowest common denominator and humble them into acknowledging that; then find and proclaim the brotherly quality by which they are all transcended and all sustained. "Hot Hymnal",(The Sweeper Up) The Adelphi vol.XIII, September 1936.

This quality however, he saw absent in the cinema which he also compares unfavourably, with the music hall:

> The great advantage which the cinema has over the other arts is that it is so realistic. Unjaded and not over refined palates always ask realism from an art, and it is true that all arts while they are vicarious do offer just that quality.
>
> It is the audience who makes the art, however. What an audience! Whoever wants to look the twentieth century in the face cannot do better than to stand behind the screen in a big cinema...
>
> The audience of the music hall are bright, consciously convival, aware of their neighbours, and taking their enjoyment in

> company. The music-hall spreads an invisible festive board. But in the cinema it is a ghostly bed which awaits you. There the audience is as disunited and dim as the guests of an opium den. All those parted lips and staring eyes express no convivial enjoyment, they are lulled out of life, journeying along the moonlit paths of dreamland.
>
> "Behind the Screen", (The Sweeper Up), The Adelphi vol.VII, December 1933.

There is a sense, however, in which the cinema - and the cinematic form - played upon that very contradiction which Common was so acutely aware of, and it is perhaps ironic that ten years after writing this Common's film scripts were developing the realism of celluloid to new, and important, levels.

While we are on this critical note it is perhaps worth drawing attention to the fact that the cultural forms referred to by Common as bulwarks of a proletarian world view, were all too often the preserve of the working class male. In making this point (almost in passing) it has to be qualified. While Seven Shifts contains no entry from a woman, Common's preface acknowledges this as a fault and promises another 'female' edition. Furthermore the charge of "sexism" would need to account for Common's touchingly insightful appreciation of his mother's habit for drink in Kiddar's Luck and for the following passage written in 1934:

> But what we have to see, if we're to see anything at all, is that life itself, the common life of the streets and cinemas, is miserably circumscribed. The bourgeois keeps himself to himself and prospers exceedingly. That was the theory. Its result is that outside this office at the present moment, there is a wide street full of people keeping themselves to themselves, drifting by the shops in ones and twos and

threes, indifferent to each other, little knotted creatures like small fists closed about their selves and denying their common humanity.

So many people marry, desperately, as a way of getting in touch with one fellow creature at any rate. Then they bungle that by their desperate insistent fumbling. Women should beware of the man who wants marriage. He will ask of them what they should not give. It's very bad to make the individual response of sex do duty for a social relation. That's why our women go about now so hard-faced, made up to look half-way between the screen vamp and the dressmaker's dummy. We put them in a purdah of cosmetics. For as we have no way of saluting them, except by flashing the sexual semaphore, they go endlessly about our streets numbed by a thousand impacts of sexual desire. They are prostitutes to the ineffectual gaze.

Obviously when you see a girl coming down the street, moving so delicately and rich with her own dim magnetism, you cannot walk past her like a cow by a hawthorn or a drayman by a bunch of violets. There should be a flare of recognition, a warm and steady response - it should not be sex only, especially not aware sex. But there's nothing else handy. We bare our desire - not meaning that, but as substitute - and she shields herself from the falsity. The cold glance of desire meets the cold defence, concupiscence meets cosmetic and the recognition of a precious relationship is slain. Some years of that experience and you can go about the town ungreeting, casehardened, dried-up through running on your batteries.

"Apology For Playing Hell" (The Sweeper Up), The Adelphi vol.IX February 1935.

So let's turn to some of the pieces which Common wrote about "living on your batteries" in Britain in the 1930's.

Reel One

Practically everybody I know, and I expect you could say the same yourselves, is suffering from frustration. It's a thing you ought to have nowadays if you're anybody, and one you're bound to get if you're nobody. Therefore the amount of private tantrums that goes on up and down the country is terrific. People sitting up till three in the morning over a drop o' the craythur playing hell about their prospects; two or three gathered together at the back table in the saloon or near the door in cafe's arguing hard; the shabbier ones standing about at the street corner until the moon goes out under a curtain of rain and they shove off for home - such a chewing the fat everywhere. Somehow it all gets abstracted into a general belief that something sweeping on a national scale should be done. Of course it isn't, and there you are: the tantrums go on.

In this all classes share, though not quite equally. There is a difference between the frustration of not being able to buy a pair of boots when the ones you've got leak, and not being able to do the kind of work you like best; it's the simplest frustration that is the biggest outrage. Still there's the unity of general experience: no matter who you are, you're up against something that is stopping you. But how you objectify the obstruction will differ considerably according to your general make-up and circumstances. A furniture salesman I know complains that Jews hold him back; all around him and wherever he goes there's Jews tripping him up, or shoving him when he's off his balance, or crowding him out by weight of numbers. An unemployed metal-worker pal is sure it's the capitalist system has got him in the ditch. But a barrister tells me that the real evil of the day is democracy, in democracy is every weakness and irresolution - and Granny down the lane says its the Eyetalians. Of course I have my own favourite explanation, and of course you have.

Now one of these explanations will have the quality of universal revelation for people some day. Not, as you would naturally think, because some bright lad gets the idea, more bright lads propagate it, and finally there's a sufficiency of folk for it to make it a practical scheme. No fear, the process is subtler than that. What happens is that millions of men and families go on struggling against every frustration that crops up to obtain the vaguely defined accretion of habits and pleasures and functions and possessions which goes to make a reasonable life. In the struggle and the constant thwarting there develops a kind of life very different from the one their ambitions reached for. One day it dawns on many almost at once that that kind of life, the one forged in their struggle and sweetened by it, is the basis for a better fulfilment. It is then they find what they were struggling against, the very facts they fought, chime very nicely with the life they made in order to live at all in the conflict. In our own lives it is obvious. The part that matters in most cases, is not your job, your place as citizen of a community, as subscriber to a newspaper, as rank and filer in a political party, no. Whatever your class, whatever your job, it's nearly always safe to bet that the highest point of vital interest in your life is not the same point at which you impact on the community and find yourself in the records. The community behaves towards you like a passport photographer: it forms a low estimate of you and puts that estimate on record. As there is no other record to go by, everybody thinks that is you, and you will yourself if you are not careful. Thus are we all libelled, comrades. And thus we are each of us compelled to create a surreptitious and socially unrecognised life along with the registered one. An immense amount of potential social effort is frittered away in dreams and half-realised hobbies, in half thought-out creeds and criticisms. But you don't know of that except privately. You know that you yourself are struggling with something, more or less without help, but you feel that beyond the tiny swirl of your effort

there is everywhere a glassy blank and anonymous lake of humanity - and somewhere over the far side, perhaps, a few glorious and successful individuals disporting themselves. Yours is the rare case; blankness the social mean. And if you can force society to recognise your rareness then you become a Great Man, a successful Individual; otherwise you are submerged in the alleged nothingness of others.

In the meantime, however, you look as blank as anybody. We all look alike when photographed as a crowd at a Jubilee stunt because the camera naturally does not record your motive for being there, nor mine, nor anybody's. That camera pretty well symbolises the general state of social awareness reached by the society of our day. You don't believe anything it says if you are wise, not its art, nor its science, nor its politics, nothing. And havingthus extricated yourself from deception you find that you are heartily supported by the 'masses' who have apparently no use for 'good' music, 'good' novels, sound newspapers, or wise statesmen. It is true you have a reluctance to amusing yourself with tripe and jazz as they do, and you retain a historical interest in the art of the past, but apart from these distinctions you endorse their verdict. It took you longer to come to it, that's all.

It seems pretty bad all this. We resent it, and bring our resentment periodically to boiling point in fits of blaming this or that. So looking along the line of lives you know, you see them spurting with little flames like gun-fire, all fighting back at the great frustration which presses down on them, as helpless against the enemy as were the men in the 1916 trenches. We are being pressed out of the light in a sort of reversal of the normal running of the social mechanism. This society selects its best men in order to consign them to social oblivion. It can't use them. Therefore its activities become increasingly irrelevant and mundane: it becomes incapable of carrying on any project except more and more meaningless war. Right. But that's the negative of it. Hold this picture slantwise to the sun and you see this: all the best elements in the population being drawn away from entanglements with the ordinary problems of national and personal aggrandisements, recruited almost en bloc for a purpose beyond the aims of the day - isn't this what every religion has hoped to do? If you wanted to state the recipe for social creation in the simplest way, you would say find a formula which makes the needs of simple people and of intellectuals identical. And that's what the stress of circumstance is doing to us now. It's the first reel of the next great drama; four more to come when we're ready for them.

Thinking in Prose

To live successfully is to have the art of controlling and selecting stimuli, and combining and translating them into the least wasteful thought and action. It is a knowledge only successful when it is mainly subconscious. The alert inteference of the intellect is too clumsy and fatiguing to be very effective. That can be a brake on sub-conscious ignorance and a pointer to subconscious wisdom but hardly more. As such it should swing round to danger whenever we become too dependent on a particular sort of stimulation, or on one kind of expression. We become easily dependent on books. Our minds are inflamed to activity by someone else's thought when it comes to us in a book, and yet remain comatose before the same material which moved the writer of it. When we feel mentally vigorous we read a book. After reading many books we are moved to write about them, and here begins another disastrous dependence.

It is good to think, and then to write; for the discipline of words dispels many vacuous thoughts and straightens the backs of others. But it is harmful to be able to think only with a pen in one's hand, to find that one's opinions do not crystallise until they are written down, and that the necessities of a final paragraph flog the thought into producing a conclusion. Between thought and the written expression of it goes on a continual conflict. The need of language is to be flowing, progressive, and above all communicative, and to these ends it has habitual and invariable forms; the need of thought is only to get somewhere, to a solution or a conclusion, to enable a mind floundering in perplexity to arrive safely at some belief. Stages and order do not matter: it will plunge back forty years without apology to find a parallel instance, start off on quite a different track without transition, or leap a hurdle by an act of intuition and leave no record of the way it came. The two processes thus in conflict are mutually corrective the result is good. But if one thinks only as one is writing, thought while still in the malleable stage tends

to take the shape of those forms and devices necessary to language. We get opinions paradoxical and antithetical, beliefs which are overflows of different sentimental reactions easily concreting in a colourful phrase, but in strict logic cancelling out. It is very good fun if the writer is highly-skilled, but very far from being the real thing. Thought has become an ornament of expression.

When this fault is allied to another pernicious dependence, that of pose, we get the sort of thing Shaw, Mencken, and Chesterton turn out in their worst moments. Pose is an excellent device for making a man's talents everywhere and consistently recognisable. It has the virtue of an advertising slogan, or of a Dickens character. But again it has the effect of leading a writer to forget his purpose as a seeker after truth in the more usual and amusing one of "being me." Perhaps there would be no harm in being themselves on all these numerous occasions if they really were successful in the effort. Too often they merely live up to a first hasty sketch of themselves, a caricature which could not possibly re-act with such automatic certainty to all the chances and changes of a full life were it not widely out of drawing, missing in its broad lines many of the true and most important lineaments of the real man who agilely continues to live within its confines.

The popularity of this sort of thing is due to our extraordinary appetite for knowledge which is personal and, therefore, predigested. We would rather a man even pretend to be himself, and give his knowledge some tincture of personality, than that he should become a tin mouthpiece for cold formulæ. Axioms which do not instantly relate themselves to a living purpose had better not be made. When we write that "to live successfully is to have the art of controlling and selecting stimuli, and combining and translating them into the least wasteful thought and action," we have served up the corpse of a truth to an anatomist's dissecting-table. Who shall show us the living thought, the glowing thing men can live by? Life is impelled and irritated by dead material; it flows and communicates only in tissue which is alive.

For Reactionaries Only

One night last winter I stood watching a gypsy play with fire. He and half his tribe had just turned out of the pub, the men singing and step-dancing in their heavy boots, the women aloof hunching disapproval behind their shawls. Not more than twenty he was, a sturdy lad permanently dirty and unshaven but with a clear out-door look in his eyes which gave you the improbable idea that he would strip white enough, and a shock of hair pushing his cap away from his brow. He made his fire out of newspaper on the cobbles, keeping it between his boots. There was a fair amount of wind blowing, and if you or I had tried the job, it's ten to one we'd have wasted a few matches before we got the thing started and then lost the whole issue when a ground-wind snatched at the flaming paper. But this lad was a real fire-master. He tended the flames that curled back from his corduroyed legs with caressing movements of his hands, as though he was combing a horse's tail. The newspaper he kept bundled up under his jacket so that he could tear off a strip quickly with one hand, twist it, and add it to the blaze. When it was high enough he took out half-a-dozen kippers and laid them on, jammed together as they were. In far too short a time he was treating us all to torn portions of charred but mainly uncooked kipper - a friendly act if not brilliantly successful.

Probably we are particularly liable to be struck by such simple things now because we are bound to doubt whether the so-called civilised life is worth the sacrifices we have to make in order to maintain it. The temptation is to see in the curious grace of the gypsy's fire-drawing evidence of a way of living physically more whole than ours. In much the same way, a modern anthropologist is able to observe savage communities all the more sympathetically for having left his own people in a high state of war-preparation; historians are led to take another look at the ages of barbarism; and artists find inspiration among "primitives" and negro handicrafts. This is reaction, of course; ours is a reactionary period. Well,

let's make the best of it. At any rate, we are free for the moment of the collective conceit which puts ourselves on top of all history, right in the van of all progress. Not so very long ago practically everyone you knew was a Progressive, and the debate concerned various methods of doing good amiably all round. You would get told off proper if you didn't admit that this was an age of plenty, or that you could have Socialism in our time, or that war could be abolished. Today it is impossible not to suspect your best friend of being a reactionary, and the man who has not been accused of Fascism isn't on the intellectual map at all. Such is the whirligig of our times. What has happened to the Progressives then? I suspect that they got marched over and left behind, so that they are stuck in a last ditch somewhere, dieharding in the defence of democracy while we reactionaries quarrel about how far back we are going. And the way to get rid of the reactionaries is similar. Why go back to the middle ages with Hitler when the lovely stone age nights are calling you?

From a "savage" point of view we own terrific collective powers but are ourselves deficient in all the natural graces. In singing, dancing, drawing, poetry-making, speaking, and love-making we are pretty deplorable judged by uncivilised standards. We seem to have got caught up in a kind of madly-extreme democracy, so that we bank all on a tremendous queen-bee of a Beethoven and have millions who can't sing at all; or having raised a Shakespeare, from thence on we content ourselves with smoking-room limericks and advertising slogans. What happens is that you have first a simple human pleasure which all join in, then it becomes worked on and specialised into a high art with a large audience delegating their interest to a few skilled performers, and the last stage occurs when the audience no longer keep alive the rhythms in themselves and so do not recognise the skilled delegate when he appears. Thus, if you want to exhaust yourself any time, you cannot do better than try to explain to the ordinary man what you see in chamber music. There is an envoi to this process: comes a time when the dele-

gates themselves get the wind up at the lack of backing they receive and try to re-shape themselves in accordance with the alleged demands of popular taste. Caesar gives circuses.

Have the rank and file of civilisation really become brutish, then? No savage is going to believe that. Periods of high civilisation are few and very brief, all about and around them the unadulterated and uncollectivised men are dancing and singing and making a wonder out of words. We have these free rhythms in us all right, but inhibited. So far, civilisations have been clumsy contrivances for swiftly capitalising the collective human strength for the endowment of a few individuals. Their social training has been a sort of ferreting: stopping-up all the outlets of expression save one, so as to get a concentrated power. Thus it follows that the spread of education to all and sundry does not result in a general increase in the arts of expression. Whatever the intention, the technique is inhibitory. It says, in effect, you shall not make verse or music unless you are prepared to go apart and specialise. The arts now become too difficult for the ordinary man, and few men believe they are capable of them, though as users of tools they often fall easily enough into the rhythm of gesture which is the germ of all arts.

Well, now that this civilisation-by-proxy swindle is likely to blow itself up, and we are all of us in a reactionary funk about it, there are two forms of reaction open to us. One is to tighten up the discipline and increase the inhibitions, emphasise the inner tension in actual drills and military formations, forbid even the free art of representative minority and their thought; the other to conduct our own relaxation before the discipline breaks, give back to the ordinary man the powers which he delegated to minorities, and so build a dark age of our own instead of being flung headlong into it in the Roman fashion. The great virtue of a dark age is that it discovers the value of exceedingly simple things: of the love between man and wife, for instance; of the good in working a piece of land; of the rare sympathy that springs up in small and poor communities. In a dark age the

people begin to make songs of their own, and dances; their speech becomes deintellectualised, so that word-formations accumulate without any one planning them by rule, and they therefore have a touch of magic in them. We'd enjoy a dark age fine, if it wasn't that they've got a bad name because of the poverty, plague, and social anarchy that they are generally marred with. That may have been because they were accidental, not specially wished-for like ours.

To us the new period opens as an age of exploration. We start on the assumption that all of us are libelled in our collective picture. The sum of our abilities and potentialities, as added up in the accounts of nation, republic, and empire, is quite incorrect. But even if our collectivity represented us as we are, that still leaves out what we can be. You know very well that you are much better than you've ever had the chance of being. So am I. So is my mate. Whenever I do happen to exercise a new ability, I find myself speculating on how many potentialities there may be in me that lie rotting. The fact is, nobody knows how good they are. For one freedom, we develop a hundred fears, since society likes a man to have but one face, so that he can be readily catalogued and counted on. Even my gyppo boy, for all his fine unconscious fire-love, is a tongue-tied hobbledehoy half his time.

I believe that mere ordinary humanity is an Eldorado of infinite potentiality, and that the work of endowed individuals is no more than outcrop gold indicating the quality of the greater mine. Moreover, had that dogma been generally believed, I think we should not have daunted the majority by efforts to lift them up or add to their natural capacities. No man can add a cubit to his stature; and no man needs to. It is enough to free the province of your manhood, that is, to unlearn the fears and inhibitions by which you are lessened. The dark age technique of unlearning is what is needed, and it is not such a strange thing as it seems. We have an acquisitive view of learning as of a thing you add to the personality, this being the opinion proper to an acquisitive society. Yet when you learn to swim you are really

escaping from doubt and awkwardness into an innate swimming rhythm which everybody possesses, rather marvellously, whether they use it or not. And queerer than that, there is the case of the recently developed art of cycling. When I took it up, the man who showed me how pointed out that it wasn't a question of learning to ride, what you had to do was to unlearn the inability to ride. He was perfectly right. It is all there if you can get at it.

So with the arts and graces which during the stress of a high civilisation are slurred over or made remote and rare. We can unlearn the social self-consciousness which distorts the exercise of the natural rhythms in its effort to compete with the hardy specialist in them. In the end we shall come into our birthright again, and damn those professors of progress who call only the ages of mass-slavery and isolated genius, golden.

Fire with No Smoke

We're up against something now. No fags. Without onions, bananas, pork chops or black pudding, life can still struggle gamely on. But take away tobacco, and the vacuum stills all effort. It makes a monochrome of the world in which the differences between things are just detail, and nobody can be inspired to think what's what. It lets you see. It gives you an idea what an extremely moderate man the head of Imperial Tobacco must be. Why that fellow could have been Dictator No. 1 any time he liked to announce the fact. Beside him, Hitler is a small potato. He had us all at his mercy for years, yet good as Santa Claus and more constant he kept on, week in, week out, raining down those lovely white cylinders full of vegetable gold. He should have had the Nobel Peace Prize for every year, but probably he just sat smoking and thinking, and thus didn't care either to boss or be blessed. He was all right: he had a fag on. An everlasting one.

You can't say it is impossible to write if you haven't a smoke, because Shakespeare did it. Also Aeschylus. It may even be, in the long run, that you write better. If there's never going to be a fag, not for several hundred years, perhaps your pen acquires a strange poignancy; the sense of universal lack actually strings you up to a most vivid appreciation of the less important pleasures in life. Thus Shakespeare's wonder over wayside weeds, violets, daisies, gillyflowers, was really a search for the weed not yet known, the weed. Once found, we became dependent on it, for it soothed the exasperation caused by spraying nervous energy into unuttered words and permitted a man to write fairly busily without going off his rocker. There was still peace though the typewriter raced and millions of mute words came pat to the paper. Now, if the shortage continues, the age of barbarism returns. There'll be no more writing, all the words will be spoken or sung again, and you can expect me turning up at Adelphi doorsteps with a harp and a dirge just faintly dialectical. Better get some beer in, perhaps?

When you come to look at it, there's something to be said for the idea. Words which are never spoken have only a spectral existence. It is poetry which keeps a tongue alive because poetry demands that someone speak it. As long as there is plenty of spoken poetry about, people can write well even if they haven't a fag to bless themselves with. Their ears are all right, so they soon know that if you put words in a mentally constructed order, you've said nothing until they make their chiming. If they are toneless, standing only in the rank of logic, no one will want to speak them. It is melancholy to be covering paper with the hieroglyphics of a dead language. Better to make a firm rule, a real tobaccoless self-denial, and resolve to say all you've got to say in words, in pubs and in gardens. Not in lecture-halls, mind you, lest you perpetrate the worst crime of all by actually speaking a dead language in a place where you are pretty safe from interruption. Speak to people who can answer back, and don't listen to anybody longer than they'll listen to you.

There are many impediments, though, many due to the long clerkly dominance of the writers. Nobody in ordinary conversation wants to have it thought that he is setting up to be a writer. Lyrical descriptions of scenery or of woman, analysis of emotion, dogmatic monologues, get the bird. The ordinary man has two adjectives neither of them pretty, and though he may suspend one or both when he is away from work and in company, he is thinking them all the time. His polite conversation is a sort of morse code with the dashes silent but understood. It is extraordinary how he ever got into this line of talk, unless maybe you can take it as scorn for the clerkly. It is fatiguing, you know, to make this constant copulative interpolation. You've heard of the

famous caterpillar with the wooden leg that went ninety-nine bonks? Well, practically any sentence spoken in the fields, factories and barracks of Great Britain comes put like a caterpillar with forty-five wooden legs, blank, blank, blandety-blank. Now you try to make an interpretation of Hamlet, say, such as is all too easy, given plenty of fags and a typewriter in a quiet room, try it in this language by a tap-room counter with the darts flying on your right and the dominoes rattling on your left, or at the side of a flying belt or a running tractor - it'll blankin' stump you, mate.

Leave the Bairns A-Be

Education, take it all in all, is about the heaviest of our responsibilities, heavier by far than our custody of the animals. It's tempting, we know, to make an animal into your own image, but the temptation has its bounds in the natural recalcitrance of the beasts. With children, the whole thing is fatally easy. We should remember this when we get sick of seeing pekes that look exactly like overfed women, and terriers with that awful faithful look you see in the eyes of deserted husbands and ex-officers living on pensions. Our children are similar replicas of bad social types. We have snobs of fourteen, damn it all, and childish trebles lisping dividends. That's what we do with the marvellous quicksilver stuff of new life which comes pouring into our hands every year. In the first flutter of it you can feel it is quick with something not in us, we husks of somebody's bad imagination. There is the marvel of the future, the heaven yet to be, alive now for a flutter. Then we take and crush it, shape it, until there stands up presently little So-and-So, the very split of his blighted old dad. The miraculous quality, denied growth, is held off in a static wonder, and that wonder looks at us for a time, makes us uncomfortable; it soon dies, though, into the normal myopic glance reading only the prescribed patterns. Education makes these patterns.

Thus if you want to test a faith you look to see what

it's doing to the kids. That's why Protestants were able to raise such horror at Catholic practices - Catholics, Jesuits particularly, got at the children. Leave the bairns a-be, is always a sound revolutionary slogan. It doesn't always arise, though. For many centuries the teaching of Christendom was disciplinary and defensive. It cast out pagan devils, and forced in unceasingly an ethical and metaphysical ritual of the imagination which was incubatory only. No drawing out, no free expression here. Incubation. Then the Protestant revolution announced that the egg was hatched, time to pull down the incubator. They had an amazing sure sense of the Christianity in Christians; every Christian, they felt, could testify to his own experience of salvation: education should be a drawing-out. We ought to admire, more than we do, the courage of that leap; it's a kind of courage we'll have to find sooner or later.

Of course, we are left with the cold fragments of both visions, and we've lost the clue to them. Taboos instead of metaphysical discipline, conceit instead of testimony, mechanical theories of advance instead of the miraculous sense of the unfolding. We dare not teach our children to be Christ-like because the prospect of a land full of little Jesuses meek-and-mild is somehow daunting. Christ is not now the symbol of unfolding, and therefore cannot be the pattern for educationalists. We'd sooner use our noble selves. The children are to be like us, only more so. Naturally, then, "Progress" is a procession of us's, getting more us-like with every mile. This kind of progress-faith, though a fragment or sublimation of the great Christian Golden-Age-in-the-Future vision, is not dialectical. It leaves out the Fall, and Original Sin; leaves out therefore some essential humility. Such bad theology is extremely painful to an honest materialist who respects the gods that bore him.

We all know now how overblown with foolish pride this Progress was. It has been denounced a thousand times for shallow optimism, usually by shallow pessimists shocked at war - it is shallow calling to shallow across the post-war world, storm in the middle-class teacup succeeding peace in the same vessel.

Progress, applied to education, results in the acquisitive view of knowledge. You acquire knowledge by hard work and your father's good income. As, however, the people who know a startling hell of a lot, are usually incapable of hard work and haven't much income, the theory has to be modified to allow of a get-out. This is genius. Genius can skip the rules, but don't you try it on, young snotty-nose. Now in order to exhibit this theory as she is in life, let's look at a test-case. A lunatic does some amazingly competent drawings. Mad, you know, but drawn with the skill of a practised draughtsman. By current theory such skill comes only of long practise - the looney hasn't practised. Or else it's genius. But this chap's a looney, no genius. So we can do no more than murmur, "Genius is to madness near allied," and pass on to something easier.

Let's look at a totally different theory, or something more than a theory, a myth. Time and time again, people have described their social intuitions through the picture of the Golden - Age-in-the-Past. Rousseau's "Man was born free, and is everywhere in chains" is a very well-known example of that; and its effect on us is curious. We feel at once that it is true; we think about it and it seems nonsense plain enough. It gets the immediate response because it refers to a body of knowledge which is deep like a race-memory in us, a civilisation-memory rather. After all it was a pretty constant perception to the Greeks, this Golden Age they'd fallen from; and they must have thought the early Christians were playing dialectics rather wildly when they made Greek original virtue into original sin. But to get back to our looney - look at him a la Rousseau, and his sudden skill is quite explicable. He has fallen backwards into innocence, forgotten the inhibitions which sin provokes, and felt the world again as immediacy pressing bare against his soul-touch. He has become the essential child which artists are when they are really passive, I mean the child unaware of adults, or of the ambition to grow into one; he has recaptured the wonder-stare, the eyes which are seen by and do not themselves see. Yet he has done this illegitimately by throwing off adult responsibility in a kind of suicide of the self. So his innocence is anarchy and can tell us nothing authentic. Such lunatics, one suspects, are pseudo even as lunatics, or why should they record. Seeing they are pseudo let us admit them back into the comity of men, remembering that they were never banished until we developed our medicine of the mechanical defect and thus gave the irresponsible a fine opportunity for throwing themselves out of gear and charging themselves up to the community.

However, though it would interest us immensely to see school-teachers stand on their heads and get busy arranging a curriculum designed to recapture a native grace instead of imparting an artificial gloss, this wouldn't really answer. The trouble with the original virtue notion was that it put virtue impossibly far behind;

Christians had to get it in front of you somehow so you could aim at it. Yet you know that whenever Christianity fails, it fails by losing its heaven in the future as effectively as the Greeks lost their Golden Age in the past. What we want is a Golden-Age-in-the-Present, becoming now, but not become. We have to see that our "Progress" really marches, one-two, one-two in true dialectical style. For instance, there is the well-known Brotherhood of Man idea. To an idealist it is a thing to be attained, a state of the future which we strive towards, as though there existed a kind of time-map for humanity who are all cheerfully engaged on a hike to heaven. The Brotherhood of Man exists fully dominant as unconscious reality: we know it when we sin against it. Thus man's inhumanity to man is not scot-free and is not at all inhuman. We starve the poor women of Gateshead and Salford so that they die in childbirth, having given their strength to the kids - the maternity death-rate rises in Kensington. Unnecessary starvation in one part of the human sisterhood means unnecessary neuroses in another. We forbid one class of men to live freely, and they have no art. So the other classes find the freedom of their masterhood raises only sickly and cankered blooms which they have to pretend is a flowering worth looking at. Imposed impotence in one brother means inevitable sterility in another. This is the power of the unconscious bond.

But the "Progress" faith takes no account of unconscious things except those of the individual unconscious - supposing there is such a thing. It brandishes the torch of knowledge, forgetting that knowledge is a cruse, not a torch. Progress is consuming its own oil in a blaze of increasing consciousness, that is, of faith becoming knowledge. When all the faith is knowledge then the whole show collapses, like a flame when the oil's done. The recent efforts to make the trust in individualism into a planned world will fail like that. It is only to doubtful and sceptical men that a consciously controlled world-state would seem feasible. Poor old Plato, you'll remember, thought he could manufacture a city-state in that way. He couldn't; you never can. The

world-planner trusts his fellow-man as far as he can see him, as far as he can tell him what to do. But communities are not built on mistrust, and those that get too conscious die of their doubt and wariness. It often looks as though this bourgeois part-civilisation of ours will perish in a blaze of light, like an Atlantic liner all lit up but unable with its many lights to detect leviathan in the deep. Through excess of light it will fail to find the way, because it trusted to sight instead of soundings.

The corrective or antidote to blinding by consciousness is the realisation that conscious knowledge is sin, or impediment. It shuts off the flow between world and man, so that you are presented with fragments of breakage which can be stored and possessed. It is a dead knowledge of something past. Unconscious knowing exists only in the flow, it begins and ends in passive movement. Of course, it's not for men to be wholly innocent and unconscious like the snail on the thorn or the bellbine twining up the wheatstalk. There has to be a passing in and out of the light. And no medals for being often in the sun. The conscious need to be humble. For them humility is a way back into touch again with the others; if they have arrogance it cannot be with any grace, it leaves them more and more separate and sterile. Any society can reach heaven provided it wraps its conscious people in humility and frees its innocents. For the Golden Age is present at any moment like the capacity for drawing.

One of the curses of our individualist heritage is that we tend to think of every little problem as being personal and local. There's our artists now, all of them quite at odds with the hope-in-consciousness people. After Wells-Shaw comes Lawrence-Joyce, the world-plan gives way to the dark gods. The curse of it is, it's so often the same old god with his face blacked. Thus the surrealists earnestly seek the unconscious but they assume that it's a personal unconscious - "my unconscious," one of them said the other day with quaint and unpardonable possessiveness.

They are going to be themselves still, you see, even in the trance of art; to serve their own unconscious, nobody else's. They put their shirt on nightmare as a dark horse, but they take care to hang on to the cuff-links. Lawrence, of course, knew better than that. He turned away from the world of arrogant light and sought touch among men, not in himself. But he sought it among the external proletariat, in splendid barbarians and the coolie-fragments of past civilisations, getting confused by their differences of colour and race; he'd have done better to stay at home and study the social unconscious in essence, apart from local colour.

At any rate the efforts of these men mark an advance on the old confident higher-ever-higher school. To know is a fine passion; some men in some societies can live on it alone. But if it is over-valued, then you find that for every great knower there are thousands of people to whom consciousness is a social convenience and privilege, who have lost the instinctive warmth of collective life for petty ambition and whatnot. They derive licence from the intellectually arrogant leader, as he from them. They keep round him, surrounding him with a wall of light. So his search for knowledge is a continual discovery of them. And this is an unfruitful relationship. Complex people should associate with very simple folk. If they do, they will be kept humble. They will have the constant sense of their powers being a personal sterility suffered for the good of the rest. But if they keep to the company of the conscious, they tend to see their greater consciousness as a virtue in itself, forgetting that it is useful only in relation. Now in our society today there is no relation between simple and complex, conscious and unconscious. They are divided, hostile, and alien. The sap cannot flow between them. There are the masses whom nobody knows anything about, and the people of class who have no function that is derived from the mass but only power, privilege and consciousness.

In this state of affairs education seeks merely to multiply the numbers of the uselessly conscious. More

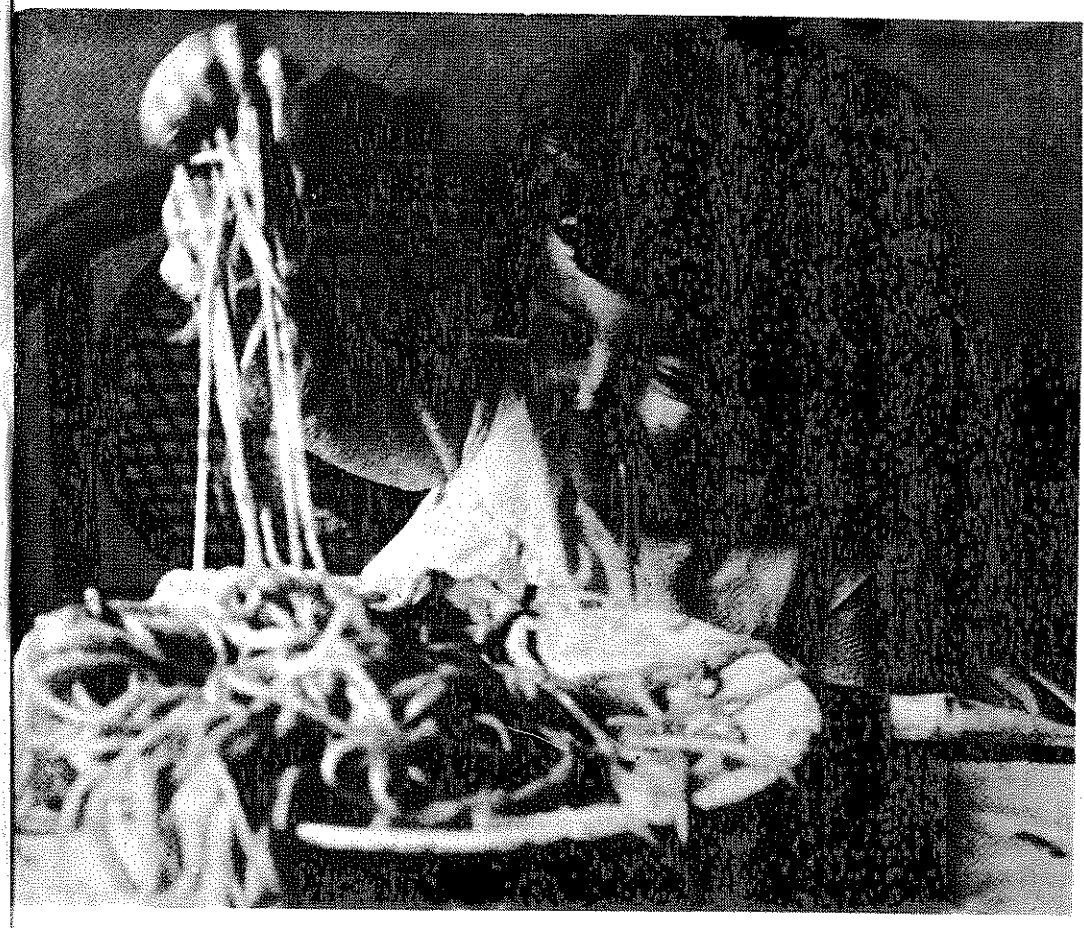
scholarships and more years at school are the slogans of self-seeking benevolence. The brutality of it is appalling. By god, they'll pile you up with learning till you're like a clerical fish-porter; and they'll tell you all the time that what you've got is not only values but prices, too, profits if you're lucky. It's so clumsy and wanting in any sense of what's holy. Look now, anybody can see by glancing at our public schools, that if you extend education beyond the age of puberty you are likely to produce narcissists. A laddie ought to grow out of the dream community of childhood into the polarised separateness of sex. Catch him on the turn, though, make him overconscious by playing on the edge of separateness he's showing and he becomes polarised to all the world, a self of facets, each of which cut him off from something that's warm and common among men. A teacher has no right to play the lapidary like that. I mean doing it off-hand without reference to any deep social need. He would not do it, either, only he has been himself taught that separation is social success. Brought up on a curriculum

for aristocrats, he is thrust into the task of educating a democracy; naturally his product is dissatisfied petty-bourgeois-whose education admits their right to rule, and who are not wanted for ruling, not now.

So we've to leave off, and start again. The only education I know, which does not break the communal touch of those affected by it, is the handing on the craftsmanship among many kinds of workers. There's an apprentice of fourteen - he's to be shown how. But, mind you, you can't come anything on him. You can't teach him by scholastic methods, for you haven't enough hold over him. He's a man among men, though the "man" is one whose ears are scarcely big enough to hold up his Woodbine. You can't make and shape his habits and tell him God Save the King and Jesus Died for You, and the population of Canada is so many million, and how many Heinz make fifty-seven. The other fellows would laugh. You are doing a job, and you show him where to catch hold of it; both of you are caught up in the run of the job. Like ducks learning to swim.

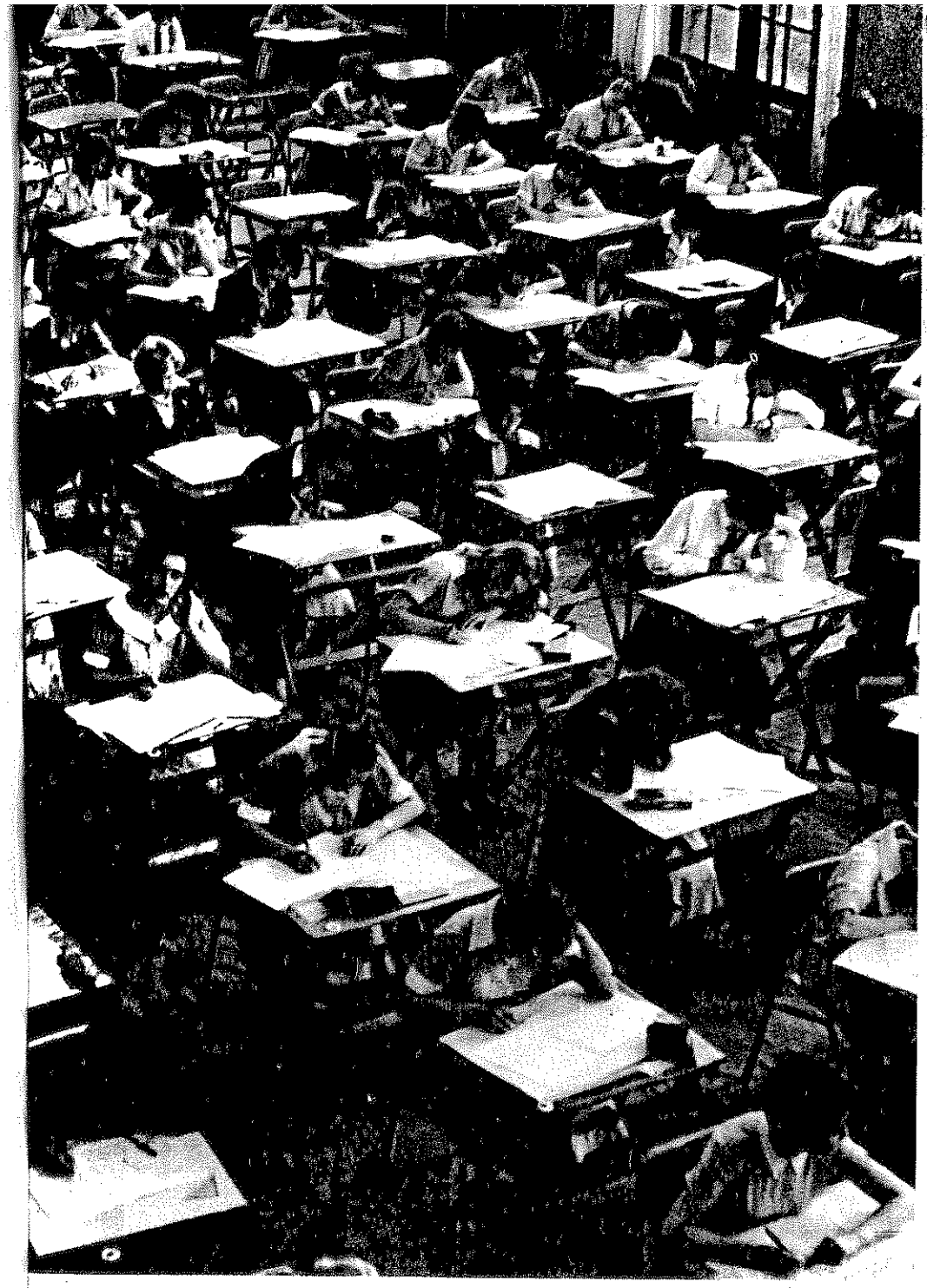
That, perhaps, is something to build on. Good workers in all spheres, whether they are craftsmen or artists, philosophers, politicians or farm labourers, keep an integrity in their jobs, an integrity and a tradition. George Lansbury, Allan Monkhouse, Tumbler Bell, Havelock Ellis, Middleton Murry, Dr. Harry Roberts, Jimmy Thompson - all these fellows maintain an integrity against the slick and cynical get-away-with-it-anyhow fellows. There are many teachers, too, who keep teaching on a higher level than ever you'd expect to find it. But the difficulty in the teacher's case is that they are expected to be such all-round specialists most of them. Now it seems to me that teaching isolated from work as a specialised function must be most damnably barren. The category of "teacher" should tend to disappear as learning ceases to be a commodity or a caste-privilege. There should not be in the community any adults whose lives are so blank and hopeless that they have nothing to teach, or are unwilling to accept the responsibility of teaching. Everyone should teach a

little bit, not too much. You see, it is bad to go into the child's world too often; and never should there be a direct contact full on of adult and child; they should touch brushingly as they move towards a common aim outside of their relation. In work, this is easily achieved. But in the classroom - well, you all remember the weary business: teacher and children facing each other; teacher trying to get through to fifty or so little minds; children resisting as best they can. Every now and then some sensitive one collapses: the contact flares like a fused wire: the lad does brilliantly. There's another scholarship won, and another poor soul cast out of community and made ego-conscious.



Behind that process was the social need of a capitalist democracy for recruiting an ever-expanding class of rulers. This necessity disappeared into nonsense and irrelevance when it reached the stage of setting up council schools. Educationalists can never make up their minds whether to teach workers' children to be workers, or to be petty-bourgeois, or to be semi-public-schoolmen. The first of these alternatives is too brutal, and anyway they wouldn't know how to do it; the second suffers by the fluidity and indeterminacy of petty-bourgeois theorising; the third is most attractive and convenient for teachers but is most contradicted by the material it is applied to. Besides, in the meantime the basic fact of socialist economy has appeared: that all are masters in relation to the machine. This makes all forms of class-education and perhaps even of speciality-education, unreal. What aristocrat nowadays wants to suffer his narcissistic separation from the crowd when it only means he suffers without functioning? What individualist now wants to be heaped up with commodity learning when he knows the markets have disappeared almost, and he cannot sell? What worker wishes to learn how to toil, when he knows the machine can toil for him?

Right. Then in respect of adults, it's de-education we need, a breaking down of their armour of separateness. But for the kids, a defence of their commonness. We have to defend the natural innumerable small traffic of their impulses against our own tendency to fit them into the kind of constellation we're cursed with. That means self-discipline for us, and belief in the dogmas of unity. Thus every man becomes the priest of a world-creed, he prepares for the temporal elevation of tomorrow's sons to a mastery of the machine-serfdom. And teachers too, become that, but not specially, like us all. I felt somehow, they'd just have to muck in with us, best they can. We're all down for a swig out of the melting-pot, and that's the whole truth of the matter.



PROLETARIAN POLITICS

The massification of capitalism represented an acute cultural crisis: the working class was at the heart of that crisis. The reorientation that this change posed for class relationships was expressed repeatedly by Common: both workers and capitalists were being altered by these new developments, and both were vulnerable to the powers of massification. ("From the machine's point of view there are no gentlemen - just men.") As a consequence the nature of politics changed:

> Equilibrium is never so safely established in the complex states of capitalism. Their organisation is highly centralised and altogether more delicate. They have an economic, a physical instability, which is reflected in the conduct of their citizens.
>
> It is not an accident that England, the oldest of capitalist countries, is the most peaceful internally. In every modern state the largest party must be the party of law and order - a psychological peasantry. They are people for whom really vigorous beliefs are impossible and dangerous luxuries. They may be mildly Christian, neither the puritan nor the Roman Catholic fury is possible for them; they may be agnostic, they must not be militant atheists; they may be Conservative or Labour, or the equivalent of these terms, they cannot be Communist or Fascist. If they are attracted by a colourful creed, it becomes, the moment they accept it, shorn of all that makes it dangerous. Thus, if they are swept away by the vitality of the Socialist or Communist vision, they are never swept far, they always stop short at unconstitutional tactics. Their instinct is sound: if they attempt to move violently the centre of gravity is destroyed, and the whole delicate, complex organisation comes tumbling about their ears.

Yet they can suffer revolutions. As the peasant suffers them, and for the same reason. They must hold to their jobs, keep on pumping water along the endless streets of their metropolis, grinding out electricity and distributing food. If they leave the machine it is as if the peasant left his fields: the result is famine, neither civil war nor revolution, just famine. But a revolution can climb over their backs, provided it does not tear away their hands from what they are doing. It is very hard for revolutionary parties to be sure of that, since most of them are not even aware of its necessity. Being unaware, they fail to develop their technique in the direction of approaching the majority of workers who actually keep the state running, they become hostile to the majority, and finally become indistinguishable from the minority parties of the reaction who at last supplant them.

These parties tend to recruit from irresponsibles who have no function in society, from rentiers and unemployed and pensioners. Their hope is to invent a function. Their programmes are a mere hotch-potch of all the current ideas, designed to placate everyone until such time as their real opportunity arrives. That comes if there is a real fear of civil war. If the centre of gravity in a nation is seriously disturbed, at once a new one is found in a Dictatorship. Hence, the strutting of uniformed minorities and their talk of machine-guns and battles in the streets is an effort to induce the fear of civil war but the fear only, for actual war would be fatal. It is an interesting manoeuvre which illustrates very well the strong necessity for peace which exists in a civilisation of gigantic cities and their hinterlands.

In Jack Common's view, the central failure of revolutionary socialist politics lay in its reliance upon an ideology

that was principally "anti-capitalist". It performed this role well, but this, in itself would not create socialists. For him, support for a politics that could create a new form of society had to be built within the very mass of the working class, and built upon their lives, ideas and understanding. To this end his criticism of intellectual politicians and political programmes was often scathing.

> Politician, rule thyself! is the text which should be hung in the bedrooms of all who have a plan for saving this country. A political programme is of no value except as it indicates a habit of life which some good men are requiring. Many of you, I dare say, spent some time in your younger days in drawing up time-tables intended to conquer your laziness and get you making the most of your abilities. And I suppose you found out, as I did, that you never kept to the programme at all, but that it did serve to focus your mind on what you wanted to do. Well, believe me, political programmes have about the same value. They look more imposing, but they mean no more.
> "The Organic Community: A Plague on Your Programmes!" New Britain, May 16th 1934.

At root this involved an understanding of "politics" which separated Common from the mainstream of both social democratic and revolutionary traditions in Britain. Commons idea of "politics" is an attack upon both conceptions of "party". For him a new working class politics had to be built around and sustained by working class "community". Arguably this places him nearer the mainstream of working class traditions than politicians of left, right or centre.

Christmas Carol

The proverb which warns us that one-half of society doesn't know how the other half lives is quite accurate. It is only one half that doesn't know; the submerged half knows too well, to a boring extent in fact. The working-man, and missus, finds his newspaper crammed full with financial news for investors, how to bring up babies when you've got a nurse, the way to dress an anchovy with charm or how to prevent one's lobster clashing with the art-furniture. Most of the unemployed know perfectly well how to carry on if you're a big business man; they know his life from the peak of noon when he answers half-a-dozen telephones to the hour he takes his mistress back to her flat. What business man, though, could be trusted to attend an impromptu proletarian ding-dong some drunken Saturday night and know infallibly how to behave?

That's just newspapers and films. Yet generally the same myopia is apparent. All the light there is in the world is concentrated on showing the despair and disbelief at present affecting our bourgeoisie, and consequently nearly all the plans and panaceas put forward have reference only to that class and are devised within the limits of that class's capacities. This predominant element in contemporary culture you have to beware of. To disentangle yourself from these forces of death you must remember that our culture, in so far as it is contemporary, is a half-culture only. It relates to a minority of selected individuals, a large minority but still a minority, who have been trained by a social discipline which now stultifies those subjected to it. Beneath this arc-lit conscious world there is a whole humanity practically unchronicled. A few tentative attempts at proletarian fiction, that is all,

Every ideological development has to be considered as the product of a half-world. The best of them, it is true, aim at a whole or classless society. Yet they cannot have the health of that state until it exists as a physical reality. Thus, one of the inevitable limitations

of socialist thought up till now is that it is wise with the wisdom of an old class, and not yet lively with the innocence of a new one. It suffers for being an inheritance from the conscience of late-bourgeois society. Its statement represented at first the bourgeois finding himself out, and was expressed naturally in an economic vocabulary, the speech which a class of buyers and sellers must use when they wish to be honest with themselves. This vocabulary cannot be bettered for a ruthless description of the mechanics of class-rule, yet as an expression of the force which supersedes class-rule it is tentative and inadequate. That is why so many people get lost in it. Because economic demonstration bulks so large in socialist philosophy they think that the most important part. It is not. That is the instrument of negation. When it is used honestly it produces an X, an unknown quantity, an act of faith. This, to keep the familiar bourgeois terms, is the celebrated belief in

the proletariat which so baffles people. But if you use this instrument of negation with reservations of any sort, leaving your religion out of it, or your art, or your vanity, then it can only produce a series of death-masks such as the corporative state, the public utility compromise, money-fantasies, or the mass-upsurge led by Bloomsbury. To one of these things, or several of them, people come who prefer to think of socialism as an economic proposal, as a mere continuation on the conscious level of the blind impulses (faith) which made capitalism. They would collectivise the economic man for his own safety. The effort produces a plan, not a faith.

That is the temptation for men brought up in the social discipline of their own class. They are familiar with the economic habit of mind, and because they are, they naturally assume that it falls to them to put into practise this socialism of economic proposals. But what are the difficulties for the inhabitants of the underworld hemisphere? Socialism, like other theories, came to them from above. It is worth while taking a look at the process of that dissemination. There ought really to be two maps of every town, as there are in every citizen's head to help us understand these matters. If you are "fortunate", the living geography of your town is a network drawn about certain theatres, the university, some restaurants, the brasseries of some good hotels, golf club, literary and philosophical societies, and of course the local Harrods. Contemporary with this world is the queer half-lit geography familiar to the proletarian, an affair of boozers, boxing-halls, fried-fish saloons, corner-ends where meetings are held, missions, secular society rooms, spiritualist haunts, odd debating societies and Labour Halls. Now social theories have to find their way round both of these systems. The passage round both is not made with equal facility. You will find Herbert Spencer and Darwin still debated round the corner-end meetings long after the University has stopped worrying about them; and Marx was a popular subject down below much before the students got the craze. With most theories the tendency is for the University to accept them with relative ease, and for the proletarian intellectuals to be suspicious of them. This process was naturally reversed in the case of Marx. But not, as you would think, because the proletarians could understand him easily and their betters couldn't. What the proletarians liked about Marx was his ruthless honesty, just what the other fellows didn't like. He was the first to really blow the gaff on class-pre-tensions, and therefore to allay the suspicion which these dispossessed must always have for bourgeois intellectuals. But mind you, that suspicion is not an unerring critical instrument. Proletarians being an unformed, unaffirmed class are very much dependent on what God sends them in the way of culture. And it's

generally Herbert Spencer. They are not as able as the universities to decide whether a man is for them or against them; and because of their fear of being taken in, they attach great value to one particular accent. The man who was most obviously for them was Marx. Well, then, if you want to talk to proletarians get a Marxian accent. Talk economics, they're genuine.

Because of this fancy, proletarian movements are always falling victim to leaders who know their economic stuff seemingly. Yet proletarians do not in their bones understand economics; they are proletarians in fact because they don't. Again and again you will hear them applaud a speech which has damnation writ all over it merely because the familiar Marxist terminology is there. Again and again you will hear them get up at meetings and put their feet in it, trying to supplement some skilled bourgeois exposition with bits of their own which merely prove how impossible it is for them to understand capitalist economics from the inside. The economic statement of social relations is to the bourgeois a cold logical analysis of the material consequences of his faith, his social discipline and his nature which has been shaped by these things. To the proletarian, however, it is merely a description of external reality, of the alien discipline which has rejected him and his qualities. Now the fact that an economic vocabulary has to do duty for both classes ought to make us suspect its adequacy. It belongs to the period when the great bourgeois negation is sinking in, and the proletarian affirmative is barely emerging. The x, the unknown quality which is really the growing tip of social life, is still unsure of itself and does not yet know how to describe its own nature except in terms of not this, not that.

It is difficult in a period like this when economic theories have an unusual attraction to remember that they must be used only to clear the way for a new faith in men. They are the debris of a collapsed system, fragments of a hard self-consciousness which it is fatal to have unless the possession leads at once to a relinquishing of the self now plainly seen. Roughly the rule

in these matters is: never believe in an ism unless it leads you to believe in men, never believe in prophets unless they lead you to believe in god. Not exceptional men, mind you, and not a supernatural God; simple humanity and the whole of which it is the most conscious part. Now no kind of socialism is worth anything unless it makes real to you that part of mankind which the concentrated consciousness of the last ruling class left in darkness. Beneath all the economic paraphernalia, the careful analysis of capitalist functioning, the arguments for efficiency and whatnot, the essential is that this faith proclaims a new humanity. It raises up the wronged, obliterates the nullifying division of classes, and brings the powers of a total humanity into the light of day. That is why it is revolutionary. A revolution takes place in any individual who is able to transcend the normal imaginative strictures of his time to the point when he realises that the portion of mankind called the proletariat is as rich in human potentiality as those other parts which have already realised their powers in the full pomp of material creation. Leave this element out and socialism is just an ism. It is the castrated faith which has strewn politics with the puppets of suburbia, Fabians, Wellsians, plansters and credit-reformers.

Theoretically, Marxism produces the revolution. It is, therefore, the foundation socialism from which the others are abstractions and dilutions. Yet Marx, whom I have called the conscience of the bourgeoise, only achieved an extra-bourgeois point of view not a proletarian one. He saw society as a bourgeois looking from a proletarian viewpoint. (And what flowers from that we may observe in Russia, where Lenin's dictatorship of the proletariat was largely a dictatorship of an enlightened late bourgoisie, who suppressed early forms of bourgeois activity in the interests of a not yet fully developed proletariat.) This is not at all the same thing as expressing the essential proletarian quality. For instance, the materialist terms of self-interest, so proper for describing the motives of possessors, are unbelievably crude when they are used to indicate the urge

which will stir the dispossessed to free all society from the shackles of ownership. The individual self-interest of the bourgeoisie had to be superseded by the mass self-interest of the proletariat. Mass self - interest - god, what a phrase! How crabbed, senile, and old in wickedness! One is instantly reminded of those psychologists who explain poetry and religion as sublimated lust. Who would suspect from such a phrase the prodigies of ethical endeavour necessary to make 'mass self-interest' the dominating virtue in a society? No, this is looking upon the dispossessed as an undifferentiated class, an amorphous humanity; it is not feeling with them, experiencing that mass self-interest as a positive thing akin to the equally mysterious 'charity' which the early Christians discovered among the slaves of the classical world. In such terms Marx speaks as the prophet of class-decline, the last word in bourgeois philosophy, not as the first voice of a new world. The true prophet of the dispossessed would be a very different character. Someone like Lawrence, perhaps, though less defeated. Like Lawrence, and like Rousseau, an inspired and rather simple man, naive and youthful in his imagination; not a Marxian mills-of-God intellect steadily and coldy grinding out the logic of social change. There must be a springtime even in philosophy.

However, our problem is not, of course, a matter of prophet-spotting. It is to keep the philisophic basis of socialism sufficiently fluid and dialectic, constantly shifting the emphasis from the critical to the creative end of it. Anti-capitalism by itself is now quite as dangerous to society as capitalism was. The critical-analytical armoury of socialism is now at the service of any kind of political adventurer. Let them have those weapons - to destroy. The essence of the philosophy is that it creates. The phase in which bourgeois people were tickled to death to find their social system a fraud is rather silly now though it was all that could be hoped for fifty years ago. For instance it has been obvious for a long time that you can't, if you have any self-respect, make jokes about Parliament. That sort of humour, like mother-in-law and seaside landlady stories, belongs to the antediluvian mental climate where dwell Sir

Oswald Mosley and subscribers to Punch. But equally out of date are those materialist historians who demonstrate the material necessity behind an ideological statement and think they've devalued the ideology - which is inverted idealism after all. From the point of view of those who fully accept the proletarian revolution, a history of faiths must be sympathetic; it should show the reactions between physical necessity and spiritual response, as a series of dialectical tides and not as a list of frauds which were found out. Creative socialism is interested pre-eminently in the acts of faith by which mankind has successively risen to the challenge of the material world. We need to put away the para-

phernalia of ranks, rights and privileges, the trusses of half-humanity. They are as out of date as mail-armour, communion, saying "sir" to the gentleman to keep him from feeling a fool in his top-hat, or charging a price for a bus-ride. Now that sort of exhortation has been made many times before by religious prophets and answered by ecstatics who felt that to put away all but their native humanity was a fine gesture. This time, however, there's no nonsense about it. If you are capable of caring more for humanity than for its trappings, here is naked humanity for you in the proletariat. This is the test which awaits all propounders of movements and schemes: if they would believe in their own manhood they must first believe in the potential, unrealised human force which has until now been kept as a sub-human labour power. The proclamation of that force is the establishment of the Socialist Commonwealth, an aristocracy of total humanity ruling a serfdom of machines.

The Great Proletarian Mystery

"Proletariat" began as an unpleasant word which reminded one half of society of its social sins, and the other of its social servitude. It has now become like one of those bothersome theological phrases: it means different things in every mouth that uses it, and wherever two citizens meet to baffle one another this word jigs in and out of the argument carrying confusion into every contention. It is a boss word, sure enough, being itself masterless. Yet after all, socialism bred it and we ought to insist on a little loyalty to the old stable. Nowadays when every fascist equips himself for a class-war foray with a bundle of borrowings from socialist literature, we ought to stick to our hosses.

The word derived from a necessity in Marx's logic. According to that worthy, a society which had its

dynamic in the unrestricted lust for possessions must sooner or later produce a class of persons who were completely dispossessed. This logical category of the dispossessed, he called the proletariat. The term was at once appropriated to the working-class, who were sufficiently near complete dispossession, God knows. Now, it might be used even more accurately of the unemployed. Wherever it is used, however, it must mean that class which is excluded from all the major benefits of the social system under which it lives. In socialist theory it is this class, the excluded, the dispossessed, which is the lever of change, the carrier of destiny, the doom of present things. Naturally, we are all of us most unwilling to believe it.

The difficulty is about equal whether you try to persuade a dispossessed man to overcome his feeling of inferiority and choose himself for one of destiny's agents, or whether you try to overcome the middle-class man's snobbery and get him to throw in his lot with a class which has never achieved anything except toil. They have not faith, neither of them. Here is this paradox: progress, all the fine things civilisation has been promising itself and hasn't got yet, must come from the weak, the ignorant, the powerless. Can you believe it? It is enough to make a man go fascist to think of it. Only, of course, you then get impaled on an equally difficult paradox: that you can make a revolution without turning the wheel, that you can keep the profits while abandoning the business. Let us stick to our own paradox.

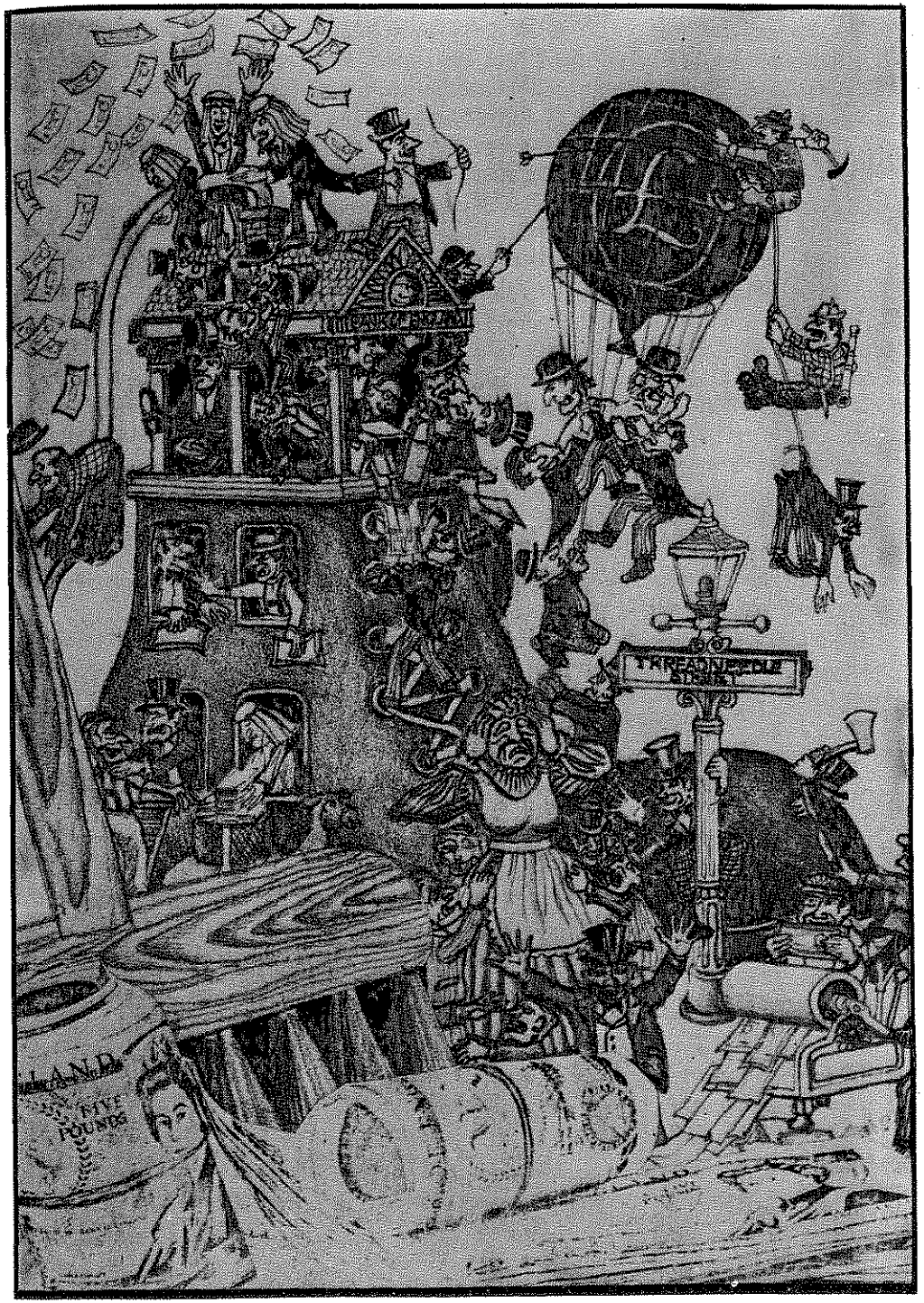
Most of the misunderstanding about the role of the proletariat is due to the class-war obsession. Because the class-war is a fundamental fact of capitalism, socialists are apt to let their ideology be domonated by it. They are afraid, naturally, that unless they continually demonstrate the reality of class-injustice they will be unable to awaken the people to the necessity for the abolition of classes. Too often the effect is to produce cynicism. When men are shown universal injustice they lose their old faith but do not necessarily get a new one. They agree that there is everywhere the

tyranny of classes, but they do not see classlessness. Instead they hear of a possible great working-class victory. It seems to them pretty much the same old story, a new class but the same injustice. And if they are middle-class they think they might as well stand by their class even if they no longer believe in it. The ranks of fascism are full of dead men, of men who have no belief and who are therefore in times of urgency at the mercy of any traditional voice which orders their lives for them. For others, the demonstration of the rottenness of present society leaves only an uncertain knowledge that somehow or other new orders of society do appear. You never know, perhaps credit reform might do it, perhaps science. That is not enough.

Introspe tive Capitalism

The man who has never admired capitalism does not understand it, and has not the right to disown it. Nor can anyone disown it merely by giving himself a courtesy-title such as communist, socialist, credit-reformer, or by engaging in agitations against some of its more flagrant injustices. Capitalism is the economic dynamic of this civilisation; it is not the machination of a few financiers, or the concerted oppression of the boss-class. It is worthy of a better effort to understand it than is involved in these fairy tales, and even the fine analyses out of which they have grown should be adopted only as skilful observations leading to others and not as final. For any theories are likely to be inadequate to describe the world-movement usually diagnosed as the collapse of capitalism, or of its financial structure.

Many people have discussed the resemblance between the Roman Empire and our own civilisation. The important thing, however, is that the resemblance stops at one point. For us there is nothing outside. We live in a world-civilisation which really embraces the whole world, and has therefore its special problems which could never arise in the past. It is neither a world-empire, a world-republic, nor a world-church. As a civilisation it is universal, and as nothing else. It



imposes the same manners, the same dress, and the same tools upon each of the clumsily contrived economic nuclei composing it. Beyond its bounds no race of men exist, and whoever wishes to live outside of it cannot, for it is inside of him.

In a few centuries its energies have swept the globe; it has built and mined and blasted its way to dominion, unleashing with miraculous divination powers known to no previous culture. Its advances in the discovery of power are so rapid that it is only with difficulty we can survey them. Yet there results from these conquests no golden age. The silly progress-anthems which the nineteenth century piped are the only attempt at that sort of thing, and their fatuity is patent. Instead we see everywhere the signs of strain. The spoils of victory are a burden to us. We are afraid to handle so much wealth, and we destroy it rather than give it to our workers whom we do not know how to rule except by the threat of poverty. We attempt to dam up the flood of commodities which machine-production pours in upon us; we sterilise our gold lest it breed goods; we cry for new markets to mop up our surpluses; and yet, at the same time, in the face of this overbounding plenty we bemoan slumps and depressions. We have reached a position in fact, when the discovery of a new continent beyond the South Pole, or of a method of making the Sahara fruitful, or of a more efficient mode of power-production would be a serious embarrassment to us.

It is the return of the tide. The splendid stream of energy beats back upon a social structure utterly inadequate to control it. And although it is not essential to harness the tide on its going out, it is on its return or it will depress and swamp our civilisation. It is well to know the direction of an uncontrolled force.

Society must become introvert. The signs of the flowing-in are obvious. There is a retreat from internationalism, tariffs, economies, development of home markets - attempts to create an artificial metaphysics; biology halts because it will not yet become metabiology;

engineering sufficiently foregoes utility to become the imminent prey of the artist. It is symptomatic that there is no public enthusiasm for the building of the Sydney Harbour bridge, the Sukkur dam, or the Zuyder Zee enclosure - the real engineering feats of the day - yet we are all thrilled by Russia's tractors and locomotives since Russia allies tractors with an ethical experiment. Already inventions are bought up and suppressed by the great companies lest they embarrass the rickety distributive system; it is but a step to the private censorship of invention. Already it becomes more difficult to attract students to the laboratories of pure science. The one science which people need as they needed Darwinism in the last half of the nineteenth century is psychology.

Though scientific advance has been the most notable achievement of capitalism, that is not its defining characteristic. The mainspring of capitalism is the lust for possessions, which has been so encouraged and emphasised by circumstances during the last few centuries that even reformers who refuse it ethical sanction, never deny its extraordinary vitality. Necessity plays on humanity as a musician on a great organ and always the note which has just been sounded seems overwhelming, the permanent vibration of human nature in full activity. The exigencies of an onward-marching capitalism demanded an insatiable greed for things in its members. Now that capitalism turns back upon itself, the lust for possessions is checked and must decay. Necessity fumbling over the keyboard passes it by.

The index of capitalist civilisation is the middle-classes. These thrifty, hard-working, possession-grabbing people who kept the blood flowing for so long through the social system, who accumulated capital and initiated enterprises, are now such a danger to us that we endeavour to cheat and discourage them, to pension them off with highly-taxed dividends, to wrench the control of their mills and factories from them and put these in the hands of the banks who have not their interest in continual expansion. Their virtues are negated. We say to them, Spend all thou hast for the

taxes go to the poor. A shiftless commandment but some approximation to what is needed: the complete abandonment of personal possessions.

The typical middle-class man is not now the land-owner, mill-owner, or shop-owner. He is a manager, a rentier, or both. He has surrendered his owner's rights for a salary or a dividend; as the worker is now surrendering his right to work for a dole. There was much talk of bread and circuses when the dole appeared; it would have showed a greater social awareness had the cry been raised over the dividends which we pay to the rentiers. The rentier has usually no control over the enterprises in which he invests his money. He is being paid out of deference to his ancient rights and to a habit of thought which the community cannot yet shed. It is panem et circenses.

So much for the middle-classes, whose spokesmen exhort them to class-suicide. The proletariat is really more worth watching, only this requires skilful eyes for they are the emerging thing always more difficult to observe than that to which we are well accustomed. Proletariat is a bad word, a bourgeois word; it represents the thing which is not us, the faceless mob, the blind force which will give to the bourgeois his sought-for suicide. A force which is human, however, will soon get itself eyes. Bourgeois communists must be careful in the assumptions they make about working-people, whose virtues are the virtues of poor men and very likely to disappear in the flux of prosperity. The proletarian is also known as the wage-slave, again a christening from the outside. The good of a wage-slave is that his work produces more than his wages. Hence, at the moment, in the general reversal of values capitalism dare not employ him. There are machines to do his work, in fact he was never more than a transition-type bridging the distance between the serf and the machine; and capitalism is faced with the problem of a host of slaves wanting work competing with an army of machines able to do the work better. The terms of the system forbid giving the wage-slave what he makes, which would indeed abolish his slavery, and the only alterna-

tive is to buy off a part of the host with doles. The dual problem of modern governments is to prevent the bourgeois from saving, and the worker from working.

The emergence of the proletariat is acknowledged in every important analysis which introspective capitalism has undertaken. Communism in its crudèr form looks to the obliteration of the upper classes by the arisen might of the worker, and telescopes the process of social change into a melodramatic revolutionary moment; in its more refined, to the abolition of all classes in favour of economic equality. Credit-reform, which is often more up-to-date in its observations because, never having repudiated capitalism, it has a greater sympathy with new developments and does not condemn them out of hand, rejects the term "worker" and asks people to regard themselves primarily as consumers, which they are of course in relation to the machine. It wishes to keep a fantasy of class-privilege while taking away the financial power which was the reality of it. Communism makes the noble assumption that to give power to the proletariat will result in a finer world; credit-reform, the still nobler, if ironical, assumption that though you take away the instrument of his oppression the worker will remain content with a very humble share of the wealth thus released. Both these extremely valuable and mutually corrective analyses recommend the admittance of the proletarian to rights and powers he has never before possessed. Who is this proletarian to whom so much is to be given and from whom so much is expected?

He is our barbarian. The advantage of a barbarian conquest of a civilisation is that the barbarian possesses a fresh and unshaped vitality which in the exercise of power may be moulded to new ends. The emphasis must not again fall on the lust for possessions. For, of course, that is present in proletarian human nature too though usually weakened, as it is weakened in the Services, by graded remunerations which are modified only at stated times or by stated achievements, and by what remains of caste-feeling. But it is there. It must be discouraged. The proletarian is usually a spendthrift, as

shopkeepers in towns near a mining area are very well pleased to see; he can live comfortably in conditions of equality with his neighbours; he does not mind if his ambition for distinction or dominance finds no reflection in his economic circumstances. These qualities are more alive in him than in his bourgeois brother since they have not been lopped off in individualist competition, and from being a handicap in his efforts to rise, if he has made any, are become a consolation for his lowly state. It is now necessary to mobilise these qualities and make them militant.

Communism must be freed from the limitations due to its bourgeois origin, and from its nineteenth century outlook. Exposures of the injustice of capitalism and of the economic reality which underlay liberal protestations were necessary when the proletariat was completely submerged in the middle-class effort to expand or to provide the capital for expansion. Nothing is more efficient than the "economic interpretation" to prick the bubble of bourgeois ideology, to show the proletarian as the helpless victim of economic forces, which having depressed him to this misery would presently raise him again, having come full circle. Men who work like beasts are in truth what economic forces have made them. It is very pitiful that there was ever a time when the only hope that could be found for a people was that some day obscure forces would lift them from their misery. The economic interpretation of history is, of course, still a legitimate interpretation - of history. It destroys not only the bourgeois ideology but all ideologies; it induces the mood of cynicism which a ruling class needs before it can fail. The cynicism is widespread. What we need is the new faith, the new ideology of the classless man.

The proletarian is still told that he is the helpless victim of economic force. Yet in England a large section of the working-class do no more work than the middle-class of the nineteenth century; another large section do much less. These last, the permanent two million which is often three, stand hopelessly waiting until they become history, which they are in a fair way of becoming, so that

economic forces can move them. Between two and three million people - far less sustained Athens in her prime - who do no more for themselves than put in a sparse attendance at a communist raid on the parish poor-box, or hang about street-corners beguiling their apathy with tales of the glorious revolution.

We must forget this bourgeois conception of the proletariat. The proletariat is men, men who must assume responsibility for themselves. The proletarian needs confidence in himself. Economic forces will never carry him anywhere he wants to go unless he becomes aware of his will, unless he disciplines it and has faith in it. The discipline of the will is ethics, as ideology is the discipline of the imagination. We need a new ethic, and a new ideology. If the shapeless, outward-striking capitalism is to be replaced by a finely balanced, structurally sound communism it is necessary to give to communal impulses first an ethical, then a legal sanction.

The nineteenth century looked outside; we must look inside. The history of socialism is too often the record of intellectual understanding and personal evasion; of misdirected fury on the part of the leaders, and of carelessly encouraged apathy among the men. Communism is not merely a social remedy; it is a question troubling our conduct. We must have done with leaders who understand the historic necessity of communism but who never let it become a personal question; of those whose fantastic preaching of class warfare is only silenced by a villa at Twickenham and a smart car. Whatever you hate in others you will find sometime in yourself. One should hate privately. The struggle with the possession-lust which is in all of us is a thing to be fought out silently, not publicly dramatised and made to colour our view of a whole civilisation. Capitalism required more from its builders than mean trickery. Its extravert phase demanded a widening of individual imaginations so that they could embrace greater spaces and large numbers, a personal discipline, a parting with old allegiances, courage and faith. So, now that it is introvert, setting towards communism, another discipline is demanded of us; we must withdraw from lax, expansive ambitions

and desires which society can no longer afford to indulge. We must believe in the new order of society as though we were already citizens of it. It will not come from without.

Fake Left

One of the distressing things about the Socialist movement is the remarkable number of twisters and crooks it turns out. Not even Borstal apparently produces so many ornaments of a piratical society as the movement which discovered the piracy. The biography of almost any Socialist leader is apt to be the story of a falling rocket.

Why is it? The obvious answer is that Socialism does at least possess an ethical purpose by which its leaders are judged so that always, in the end, you can find out whether a man is straight, a thing one would be puzzled to do in the Conservative or Liberal camps. That is an answer, and a true one so far as it goes. It explains why the phenomen of Socialist "betrayal" is so noticeable, it does not explain why it occurs.

We must blame leaders and their followers both. The real answer must be looked for in the nature of Socialist parties. They differ from other parties in this: other parties serve class interests which are already satisfactorily established, and their programmes therefore, are mainly defensive though embellished by small advances of a technical character. They are programmes, that is, of immediate practical utility. But though Socialist parties, too, serve a class interest, defensive measures are a small part of the programme. Their hope lies in attack, and their programmes have always a certain Utopian unreality about them because they cannot be immediately implemented. The Socialist has the special problem of holding on to his vision of a world which is not yet, while maintaining himself in an environment which makes vision a handicap and tempts him to abandon it. What is behind the Socialist parties and what

assures their final victory is this vision of a new world; what ruins them all is that they must prove of practical utility in the present Capitalist day if they are to live at all.

Hence to denounce the Labour Party on grounds of Socialist theory is as futile as to denounce the Leaders on grounds of moral rectitude. Both actions betray a lack of responsibility, a detachment from the problem on the part of the denouncer which is unreal; they are bolts from the blue. Only of course there is no blue. No complete Socialist theory can exist until its practice has become usual. Until then every social phenomenon must be studied in its relation to Capitalism. The system we live by is Capitalism. We cannot put ourselves artificially in vacuo because we are Socialists and wish to change the world. We continue to live in it. And it continues to make use of us.

It continues to make use of our organisations. The only begetter of Socialism is Capitalism, and the child always tends to take after its parent. What was to have been an instrument for building the new era becomes a prop for the old. And that fate cannot be avoided by denunciations of persons and the production of blustering and belligerent policies. We have to understand the laws of growth which regulate these organisations. We must not expect miracles unless we have ourselves contrived them.

It is quite irrational to hope for a pure party, since you cannot close a party against converts or against influences. A Socialist organisation necessarily opens its doors to people who are not Socialists, for Socialism is an escape from the present as well as a way towards the future and not all who flee the present are making for the future. It depends upon the vitality of those within whether they can make revolutionists of the newcomers before they are swamped by them. Finally, most parties are swamped and become first safety-valves for Capitalism and then bulwarks of it. We need not despair at this. It merely means that we must be prepared to change parties when necessary, and not to regard the political constellations as fixed. Our loyalties are to the

principle and not to any of its forms. Yet the principle must have its embodiment in some organisation. Which?

There are three parties of consequence in the Socialist movement. Of these, the Labour Party has been temporarily weakened by the events of last year, the I. L. P. is shaken; and the Communist Party remains as it was. Now one would expect a general move left, away from reformism and ballot-box Socialism towards insurrectionism. One would expect that the weakening of the right would be followed by a corresponding strengthening of the left. This movement has taken place only in the I. L. P. Why? Surely the natural thing would be for people to leave both the Labour Parties in favour of the uncompromising and uncompromised policy of the Communist Party. It would be, if the Communist Party of Great Britain were a true Left. But in this case a defeat of the Right is equally a defeat of the Left, for the two wings are linked and dependent on one another, mutual consequences of the same facts, bound to live and die in the same period. For ten years we've watched them pillow-fighting, hurling the same arguments at one another, competing for the ear of the working-man, the one with its right-wing breeziness, the other with its left-wing frightfulness, satisfying the predominant moods in their audience and in themselves. The one easily winning the big unions; the other with equal ease rippling the apathetic calm of the unemployed. This is Socialist politics. We've become so used to it that we scarcely notice that neither party has anything to say. Occasionally a Labour man reads an advanced Conservative journal and gets temporarily obfuscated in the mysteries of planning; occasionally a Communist is moved to eloquence by a reminiscence of the oratory of the pioneers; for the rest it is pillow-fighting, and the working-men know it.

Hence we have in this country a nominal Left which is incapable of supplying ideas of a revolutionising character, Marxist and revolutionary though it is in its literature and in a literary way. It is not Marxism, however, to found your movement on a literature; it is

Marxism to find your literature in contemporary movements. The analysis of the phase of Finance-Capitalism into which the world has passed was left to other minds; and this is the only solid addition to Capitalist analysis which has appeared in the last ten years. It had to be done, and done badly, by professional men, engineers and chemists, because our revolutionists were too immersed in the day-to-day struggle to spare time to see how Capitalism was getting on. They were content to live on the intellectual capital of their ancestors, to confront a complex and changing world with a literature of reiteration in which metaphors drawn from the Commune and the battles of pre-industrial Russia were made to do duty for the realistic understanding of world-movements a Socialist needs. They still are. And because of their failure to keep in touch with reality, they fall an easy prey to right-wing tactics.

For working-men are not merely passive tools and dupes. It is useless to explain away the success of the Trade Union and Labour Leaders as the natural result of duplicity and craft. The right wing have no monopoly of craft. Their success is made easy for them. They have only to hint that there is a certain unreality about their opponents' case and they've won. The Minority Movement is easily circumvented, not because of the simple and angelic nature of its members, but because it cannot command the confidence of the working-classes.

There's nothing to wonder at in that. This is the sort of thing the working-man is offered in place of a left wing. The British Communist Party feverishly pursues a policy of agitation for agitation's sake, of raising a rumpus wherever possible in the hope that some echo of it will reach Moscow and ensure the supply of funds, and lull the suspicion existing there that the British comrades are a bit useless. The resulting muddle is excused by pretending that a revolutionary situation is possible at any time from now (or then) on in England. However, as the revolution fails to materialise, we are left with the muddle. The ability to forecast correctly the revolutionary situation is as necessary to a Communist Party as

Templegate's Naps to the Herald. But the likelihood of a revolutionary situation happening is not based upon a study of capitalism but upon a guess of what Russia would like. For the revolution visualised is an October Revolution. Why? There is no necessity in English capitalism which demands an October Revolution. The necessity is neither in English capitalism nor in a Marxist analysis of it, but in Russian sentiment and in the fantasies of ambitious but impotent proletarians.

This picture of revolution is no real menace to the right wing. For you have to consider that the workers of this country are not peasants, any more than the communists of Britain are a Bolshevik Party. They are predominantly town-proletarians, old in their political history, who are accustomed to demagogues and the mockery of Vox populi, vox dei. They have exhausted some of the hopes on which revolutions are made; the promise of enlightenment, for instance, which can be held before a people to whom books are still a mystery, and which played so important a part in the French and Russian revolutions, is no incitement to our people. Here, what stands in the way of revolution is not the peasant apathy, but the terrible urban cynicism which so easily adapts materialist teaching to personal and private ends. And finally, a considerable proportion of the ablest and best of them are able to attain to the standing of a petit bourgeois by the legitimate class-activities of Trade Unionism.

The Communist Party is constrained to look for support among the most oppressed workers. In effect it must pass the big unions by, and go to those whose oppression is not mitigated by the possession of a personal skill which can be marketed by the unions. To these, in whom the hope of winning concessions from employers is necessarily remote, the idea of a miraculous reversal of class-status in a melodramatic revolution is naturally attractive. It is among the same people that the Salvation Army and the Church of Christ have won their greatest successes by preaching a blood and fire Christianity which miraculously rewards the poor and delivers the rich to everlasting damnation. If you go to the very hopeless in any fairly stable society

you must go with a dream; they have all the reality they can bear. Also, of course, the interest of Capitalism is very well served by any preaching which has the effect of drawing off the most discontented away from political machinery into sectarian activities which inevitably arouse the antipathy of those who would otherwise be their brothers.

Thus the British Communist Party is limited in its growth by its alien roots and artificial manure. Nevertheless, it has its strength. We all know that the success of English Parliamentary democracy bred dozens of pseudo-institutions hailing Westminster as the Mother of Parliaments: it is equally inevitable that the success of Moscow must breed dozens of pseudo-communist parties. The fact of their being imitations is no promise of their early demise; there are still parliaments in Argentina even though it has always been the custom of that country to set them aside when any important question was to be decided. Besides, one of the ways of evading a necessary change in the structure of a society is to set up a fiction pretending that the change has already been carried out. In that way the Czars were able for a long time to hold off the creative forces in the Russian masses by their policy of Westernisation, or change which left everything as it was before. We can see the folly of that, but it by no means follows that we can instantly appreciate the wild romanticism of a Muscovite policy for us.

We have first to realise who exactly are "us." "Us" for the Communist means the working-class. His policy is specially designed for them, and that it is a good one is proved because it is the same one which did the Russian worker so much good. The local differences don't matter! Yet in actual fact, these differences are so important that it becomes a problem to get over them by persuading the English worker to become like the Russian so that the policy will then be of some use to him.

Thus though there is a working-class intelligentsia who read Lawrence and Aldous Huxley and Bernard Shaw as busily as Golders Green or Hampstead, they all talk as if no such thing existed; and though the lowbrows of

this class spend as much time at the dogs or the football as their bourgeois exploiters do at Twickenham or the theatre, they are addressed on the assumption that what they think about is bread. The idea is that you must always talk economics to a working-man because he's got this obsession about bread. While economics were still something of a novelty, this was very well. But now there is a widespread feeling that we have heard that story before. It would continue to go down if the working man really was thus obsessed. But of course he is not. If he has brains he is in the W. E. A. or the N. C. L. C., or at least the Free Library getting mental indigestion on too much study which his lack of confidence prevents him making use of; if he has not, he is either fully occupied with the abstruse mathematics of the race-course, or else gardening, and saving his cash so as to give his children a decent education. Of course, if you say to him, "What are you thinking about - bread?" he'll say yes, since his wife is always telling him he ought to, and his conscience knows how seldom he does. Similarly if you ask a city man what he is thinking of, he will hardly ever reply "Garbo,"

because he doesn't call that thinking and he knows he is supposed to be always scheming away.

We must recognise that our working-class is semi-bourgeois and neither ignore the fact of its being bourgeois nor that it is only semi. Anyone with an appreciation of social forces will see at once how immensely important it is that there should grow up in the decline of Capitalism a class which possesses some of the cultural advantages of the bourgeois without having to pay for them by allegiance to a bourgeois conception of society. The appearance of this class is of vast significance. It may yet give to the Anglo-Saxon countries the lead in the establishment of Communism. Nobody expects that, since all our eyes are on Russia. But then nobody expected that Russia would be first to get into the transition stage.

In practice this is instinctively recognised by Labour politicians, since in the problems of actual living, as in the problems of art, practice always comes before theory. The trouble is that Labour politicians are not Socialists and their instinctive practice cannot be stiffened and given direction by theoretical statement. The only other party which is firmly rooted in the British working-clas is the I. L. P. The decay of Socialist vigour which left the Labour Party unable to act in face of a crisis, and the Communist Party beached still on the pseudo-Marxist sandbanks, finds the I. L. P. floundering in shallow water. They were always a sensitive and flexible party, quick to accept and convey new political ideas, and they alone respond to the historical moment. They alone have the courage to choose a new path to make some attempt to meet the rapid changes in Capitalism. They have broken with the Labour Party, and chosen the narrow path between Reformism and Insurrectionism. What will they do now?

What can they do but look at Russia and borrow the C. P's dream of being a Bolshevik Party; or talk to the unemployed and imagine they are speaking to a revolutionary mob; or print pictures of Russia's tractors and hope that people will be silly enough to believe that these

are products of Communism; or perfect an organisation for getting into touch with the workers and then find they have nothing new to say to them; or unearth the week's fact and interpret it as though it were a fact of fifty years ago. Inevitably there must be many I. L. P'ers who will seek to direct the present leftward urge into those activities. It is the easiest course. It involves no new thinking. Then what necessity does it serve?

It serves the immediate necessity of producing an alternative programme to that of reformism just discarded. That to a politician is a consideration. To Socialists it is nothing. For only a social necessity is worth serving. The great necessity under which the twentieth century is labouring is that of producing a satisfactory synthesis to meet and complete the analyses of the nineteenth century thinkers. From those analyses sprang Socialism; from Socialism should spring this synthesis.

It is no accident that the process of capitalist analysis has to be carried on now by men outside Socialism who are largely inspired by a need they feel of finding an alternative to it. Those inside are weary of the analytic phase. What is happening is that the nineteenth century passion for finding things out, for tracing things to their source, is giving way to the twentieth century necessity of comprehending the interrelation, the wholeness of things. The last century was one great flying asunder of concepts, an ever-spreading disillusionment, an endless uncovering of causes. It stood up against so much disheartening only because it got wealthier, and in counting its possessions conceived a final delusion of progress which the Great War blew to fragments.

The analytic process has reached its end. What we have to perceive now is not the origin of things, but their wholeness, the infinitely delicate balance of their relations. All the absolutes are dethroned, and relativity becomes our absolute. We pushed our questions to the roots of everything; the questions meet; and the answer is their sum. What is wrong with the priest? He serves

the ends of the ruling class, and is afraid of examination. What is wrong with the artist? The same. What is wrong with the ruling class? It does not now serve the community. What is wrong with the scientist? In the name of truth he makes weapons for a class. Their lives are all lies because they turn a blind eye on a part of their lives, that part where there should be a vital relation with the community, and there is not. Hence because the priest cannot find God in the streets but must shut the church-door first, his God is false; because the artist makes his art a thing apart, a private shrine, and not the music of other men's needs, his art jangles; because the business man wins wealth for himself from the community he feels like a criminal; and because the scientist sells his truths, we know him to have only half-truths in stock.

The flail of the materialist beats them all down. And what of him? All these others function imperfectly, he points out. But when we cease to follow his finger, and look at him, his own functioning is instantly suspect. They all hide a secret place which damns them. And so does he. Every materialist hides a secret romanticism, in which he finds the antidote for the cynicism he offers to others. We cannot tolerate secrets, nor he to disclose his. And it is this deadlock which holds us from materialism. If all ideals are false, then let us have them all destroyed and see what. We cannot have anyone nourishing a secret belief in predestined progress, or salvation through the machine, or justice, or magical determinism. Whoever hides his motives is a half-man. If the artist pretends that his art is not subject to material influences, or the priest that his theology is entirely spiritual, we damn them for holding half their souls in shadow. So, too, the materialist who pretends that his motives are anything but romantic and illogical is damned. We know that his talk of economic motives is half-truth only; just as we know that the Freudian talk of sex-motives is half-truth. We have been pelted so long with half-truths that our bruised cynicism can do nothing with them but pitch them at someone else. We choose a few we can manage, ignore the rest, and carry on leading half-lives. That

is obviously an intolerable state. There are too many truths nobody can do anything with. Therefore it is the task of the twentieth century to gather them up and relate them. We have to comprehend the essential wholeness of society in order to be whole men.

It follows that organisations which are merely of a party-type must fail to be the vehicles of the new concepts. Political parties are constructed on the assumtion that what is needed is an adjustment of the political machinery which serves society; revolutionary ones in the belief that a sudden transformation of the economic order will be enough; and planning parties out of the notion that tinkering with the financial mechanism will make all come right. In other days it was felt, with equal reason, that you had but to change the religious form, the canons of art, or the theory of military strategy, and you had done the trick. The assumption is, always, that one activity or the other is fundamental. Whereas we know now that no activity is fundamental. Man is the sum of his activities, not the product of any single one. And if you make an organisation on the assumption that politics is the key-activity and the others derive from that, you quickly find that your political organisation becomes a derivative of the other activities. To put it concretely, a Socialist organisation which is merely political falls a prey to members who import into it individualist conceptions derived from the art, or religion, or sport they have been engaging in outside.

The I. L. P. has always made some attempt to create a community life for its members. In this it was well-advised. It must not give up that policy, for in future the ideal for Socialist or Communist organisations must be community, not party. We have to counter the tremendous developments in social mechanism with the cultural advances which alone can handle them. What keeps us from the full use of power is the ideological habits of a bygone age. Hence, we are still hemmed in by divisions and barriers which have no sanction for existing except that we believe in them. And the way to get rid of these things is not in the organisation of vote-snatching corporations, nor in the waging of day-

to-day struggles, but in the gathering together of a body of people who are accustomed in their relations with one another to live by Socialist concepts. Socialism must be built in the working-class, by the creation of nerve-centres throughout that class which provide cultural contacts and prepare the new world-feeling which is the basis of the new order. We will have inevitably parties of the class-war. What we need is communities in which classlessness is a virtue and is understood in all its forms.

Bibliographic Note

All but one of the pieces included in this collection were published as articles in magazines and newspapers, and here we list the sources of each of them. In most cases we have included the complete article, occasionally we had selected extracts and where this is the case it is indicated (ab) below.

1. The Proletarian

"You Can Keep Your Christmas Pudding," (The Sweeper Up) The Adelphi, vol.IX, December 1934.

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2. Money Talks

"Money Talks Nonsense Now", The Eleventh Hour, December 12th 1934.

"Marx and the Vultures", New Britain, April 11th 1934

"A Heckle at Hoardings", The Eleventh Hour, April 24th 1935.

"Hegel and the Blue bottle", (The Sweeper Up) The Adelphi vol.VIII, April 1934.

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"Honours in Spades" (The Sweeper Up) The Adelphi, vol.VIII September 1934.

3. Proletarian Culture

"Leave the Bairns A-Be", The Adelphi, vol.XI, October 1935.

"Thinking in Pose", The Adelphi, vol.I, November 1930.

"Fire with No Smoke", The Adelphi, vol.XVII, July, 1941.

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4. Proletarian Politics

"Christmas Carol", The Adelphi, vol.IX, December 1934 (ab)

"The Great Proletarian Mystery", The Adelphi, vol.VIII, January 1934 (ab)

"Introspective Capitalism", The Adelphi, vol.IV, September 1932 (ab)

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Jack Common's book The Freedom of the Streets (Secker and Warburg 1938) is still out of print but Kiddar's Luck and The Ampersand have been reprinted in one volume by Frank Graham, 6, Queen's Terrace, Newcastle, NE2 2PL at £3.75p. Seven Shifts has also been reprinted, and can be obtained from E.P. Publishers Ltd., East Ardsley, Wakefield, West Yorkshire at £5.95p.