

COMMUNIST REVIEW

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PARLIAMENT AND THE LABOUR PROGRAMME

PHIL PIRATIN, M.P.

WHEN LABOUR WAS RETURNED with a majority in 1945, the new Government was pledged to introduce measures that would in some degree change the face of our society—the beginnings of a planned economy, nationalisation of the basic industries, and changed social relations and standards. To carry out this progressive task, the Labour Government took over a Parliamentary and administrative machine which was part and parcel of a capitalist, retrogressive society.

What were the Government's problems in relation to the Parliamentary machine, if the Labour Party programme, on which the election was fought, was to be carried out during this Parliament? It was necessary to introduce new State controls of industry, to expand and adjust the existing controls imposed on the country during the years of war. It was necessary to harness the support of the people who had just won a victory over Fascism abroad, and over Conservatism at home. Speed was, therefore, all important. The longer the delay in getting these new features working, the more difficult would be the economic position, the less the keenness and enthusiasm of the working class; and time would be given to the capitalists to recover and to counter-attack by taking advantage of the post-war difficulties and creating demoralisation.

As for the administration, to a large degree the Government machine had been geared to the war effort. Much of it could have been adjusted to the needs of peacetime reconstruction. In actuality, Government controls of production were withdrawn, Government factories were disposed of to private enterprise, and the possibilities of planning economy, developing from wartime arrangements, were lost.

The problem can be seen more clearly if considered alongside the Government's programme. There are three main aspects of the Government's policy, social, economic, and international. The last has little bearing on the subject of this article.

Undoubtedly a fair amount of legislation has been passed by Parliament in relation to the social needs of the people. Such measures as National Insurance, National Health, Industrial Insurance, passed last year, are expected, in general, to come into operation in 1948. The Education Act of 1944 serves as a typical example of cumber-

some administrative machinery, and its implementation is proceeding at a snail's pace. The adjustment of the schooling system is hardly noticeable, and in some cases no attempt has yet been made to effect it. The raising of the school-leaving age, due to have taken place in April, 1946, was postponed until April this year. The extension of the school-leaving age to 16, foreshadowed in the Act to take place three years after the extension to 15 (i.e., 1950), is most unlikely to take place, to judge by the Minister of Education's answers on this question.

The weakest aspect, however, is the economic programme. The special difficulties here were to be anticipated. On the one hand we were dealing with problems that had never yet been faced in this country, and on the other hand, whereas the Conservatives themselves had to give some measure of support to social legislation, they were absolutely opposed to any attempt by the Government to introduce any plan and control in the country's economy. On July 8, Mr. Herbert Morrison, in the Debate on "Imports," admitted the inability of the Government to make any headway in planning during the first two years of its existence. There are, no doubt, more profound reasons to explain this, but not least is the fact that the Labour Government conceived, and, I believe, still conceives, the possibility of using the capitalist Parliamentary procedure and administrative machine for purposes which were never dreamt of by those who for centuries developed our Parliamentary forms.

With regard to the nationalisation of industry, the Government set itself to nationalise coal, transport, steel, electricity, and gas, during this Parliament. It is to be assumed that its objective has reference to the actual nationalisation, and not merely the passing of a nationalisation Act of Parliament. It will, therefore, be necessary for all of these to be passed into Law, at the latest during the 1947-48 Session. To date the coal industry has been nationalised, as from January 1 this year. Transport (in a restricted form) and Electricity Nationalisation Bills have passed through the House of Commons. These are shortly expected back from the House of Lords, somewhat mutilated. Steel and gas, it is reported, are due for legislation next year. It may be possible, therefore, for a Government apologist to claim that Labour's programme is being, to a substantial degree, implemented. Unfortunately this is not the case. The reconstruction of our industries called for emergency measures and emergency powers. Above all, we required an economic plan. It would have been far easier for the Government to have achieved this had it had a closer, and in basic industries, direct control of production and supplies. To this end—revolutionary as it may sound to the British Parliamentary

conception—it would have been to the nation's benefit to have nationalised the basic industries within the course of the first week of the Labour Government. Such things have been done in other countries. In January, 1946, the bulk of Poland's industries were nationalised by Act of Parliament in two days.

The purpose of this article, however, is not to discuss Labour's programme, but the effect of Parliamentary procedure on the carrying through of that programme. Is the Parliamentary machine adequate to the demands which are made upon it—demands not only of a modern kind, but those of a Labour and progressive Government?

The Government can claim that 84 Acts of Parliament received the Royal Assent during the Session 1945-46. During the present Session, still not completed, 49 Bills have been introduced, of which 28 have received the Royal Assent, and 21 have gone to the House of Lords. At the end of the 1945-46 Session, Labour spokesmen boasted that more legislation had been passed than in any previous Session in history. Apart from the fact that many of the Acts were minor undisputed ones, credit must be given for this achievement, while at the same time everyone recognises that the existing Parliamentary machine was being strained beyond capacity, the staff could not keep up with the pace, the drafting of the Bills was often shoddy, Members of Parliament were overworked, and Ministers fell ill.

The Government recognised that the Parliamentary machine was not suitable. Early on in the new Parliament, in August, 1945, a Select Committee was appointed "to consider the procedure in the public business of this House, and to report what alteration, if any, is desirable for the more efficient despatch of such business."

Its report in November, 1946, referring to the previous Select Committee on procedure (1931-32), says:

"The problem facing that Committee was how to adapt procedure to the growing pressure of business, a problem, which as they recognised, was by no means new and presents itself 'in almost every elected assembly in all countries where modern views as to the powers and duties of the State are finding expression, and where the social, industrial, commercial and economic questions of our time are demanding Parliamentary attention and solution.' The problem facing your Committee is fundamentally the same—in the course of the intervening 15 years it has only become more acute."

This general statement of the seriousness of the problem had no bearing on the Committee's conclusions, which were affected by other factors. In its view:

"... there is not at the present time any strong or widespread desire for changes in the character of the Parliamentary institution. . . . The danger to Parliamentary Government in this country, at the present time, is less likely to arise from lack of confidence in it, than from the overwhelming burden which the growth of Parliamentary activity places upon it. . . . It is therefore a matter for constant vigilance to ensure that the machinery is continuously adapted and strengthened to bear the new burdens put upon it. It is from this point of view that your Committee approach their task."

The final recommendations were unimportant and ineffective, as was to be expected from the attitude taken. The only change worth notice which has taken place during the past year has been the extension of the number of Standing Committees to which Parliamentary Bills are referred, thus saving the time of the House as a whole. It is unlikely that any further adjustments will be made.

Newspaper readers are told how Parliament sat until 2 or 3 a.m., or sometimes through the night. Many have wondered is this really necessary, and can the M.P.s really apply themselves intelligently to the problems of State in the early hours of the morning? The answer to both questions is "No." Most serious, however, is the effect on individual M.P.s. The physical effects would be obvious to all. But the political and mental effects are not unimportant. Many M.P.s of the young and energetic type, who entered Parliament two years ago, feel frustrated, and an occasional contribution to some debate cannot overcome this feeling. Especially is this so on the part of sincere Labour Members who were active during the Second World War and feel the contrast of their present inactivity.

To offer a solution to these problems is not simple. A very tempting short-cut would be to do away completely with the present Constitution (not least the House of Lords) and curtail the debating procedure. But I am trying to present this problem as it must appear to any active member of the Labour Party.

A significant factor is the time involved. Parliament sits about 35 weeks in the year. The various divisions of the matter discussed, and the proportion of time spent on each, are (in percentages):

Government Legislation	...	...	...	50
Control of Policy and Administration	...	...	...	36.8
Control of Finance	...	...	...	10
Private Members' time	...	...	...	3.2

To study these figures more minutely is of value and would obviously show cases where duplication takes place, and time could be saved. For example, there is undoubtedly duplication in connec-

tion with the proceedings on the Budget Resolutions, and the Finance Bill. It may be suggested that there is a theoretical difference. But on reading the speeches it will be seen that there is hardly any difference at all in the Debates on these two items. But there are wider questions which occur to one on glancing at these figures.

Does Parliament call for longer Sessions, and for more time to be spent on Parliamentary work by M.P.s? Should more time be allotted for legislation at the expense of opportunities for debating policy and administration, or vice versa? Should more time be provided for private Members? What scope should the Labour Government give to "His Majesty's Opposition"? Granted the rights of the opposition and of the minority parties to criticise and debate, how far should the Government allow this "democratic" right to interfere with, or obstruct, Government legislation in the true democratic interests of the public? Can, and should, our legislative procedure (i.e., procedure dealing with Parliamentary Bills) be curtailed? Should Parliament deal with the details of legislation, or leave it to Committees of Parliament, and/or the administrative personnel?

Irrespective of the specific answers to these questions and to others that may occur to the reader, I believe that there are three main points with which Parliament and the Government need to be concerned.

(1) The speed-up of legislation. The main factor here is not merely a saving of M.P.s' time, but rather a public need for the speedy implementation of so much in Labour's programme which has yet to be fulfilled.

(2) Adequate opportunities to be provided for debating current political and administrative problems. This would have the effect of bringing the Government nearer to the back-bencher; of providing opportunities for the Opposition (and others) to criticise and to seek information; and to give more scope to the private Member, which is so necessary.

(3) M.P.s must be given opportunities in Parliament and in the administration so that their abilities and experience are properly used in the interests of the public.

So far as I know there is no Parliament in the world which spends so much time in Parliamentary discussion. The Russian Supreme Soviet meets three times a year, for a few days on each occasion. The Swedish Parliament (which example may be more acceptable to some sections of the Labour Party) meets about five months in the year; for the remainder, the individual M.P.s (except Ministers) return to their normal occupations, which, by law, must be kept open for them.

Mr. Morrison has stated that, in general, Members of Parliament should continue their normal occupations and not become professional politicians, adding that their contributions in debate would be more representative of all aspects of public life. But for the best part of the year the Standing and other Committees, involving 300 M.P.s, meet in the mornings. The House of Commons meets in the afternoon and evening, and often late into the night. It is evident that only professional and businessmen can continue their normal occupations, and even then partly at the expense of Parliamentary time. A reduced Session, however, could see a Parliament composed of representatives such as Mr. Morrison describes.

The most difficult problem is how to speed up the passing of legislation. This is difficult only because the official attitude has been to confine itself to the present procedure. But the present procedure is something which has grown up over centuries. It must be understood that all changes and adjustments (such as those made in the seventeenth century) were made to serve capitalism. In some cases it has been incorporated in the Parliamentary Standing Orders: in other cases it continues as "ancient usage." However attractive to some, and impressive to transatlantic visitors, our old customs and procedure may be, they do not conform with the times and are a hindrance to progress. A century ago not more than one or two Bills would pass through Parliament in a Session. They would be discussed on the floor of the House, and, the period being what it was, at length and in classic style. There are some today who yearn for that period and who ape the style. We who are concerned with legislation and regard Parliamentary procedure *only* as a means of achieving public good cannot put the cart before the horse.

I submit, hesitatingly, my own opinion for the solution. I believe that it is essential for Parliament as a whole to discuss the principles of the proposed legislation. But the details can be left almost entirely to Committees representative of the House of Commons. At present, after these Committees have discussed the details, Parliament still spends several days rediscussing them, very often achieving nothing more than dotting i's and crossing t's.

The House of Lords is an obstruction to progressive legislation. In its present composition it cannot be otherwise. If the Government carries out what it has occasionally threatened, that it would recommend the appointment of several hundred Labour Peers, so drastic would such action be that it might as well do away altogether with the Lords as a legislative assembly.

There is one feature in our legislative procedure that I would seriously recommend. The Government should take steps to

encourage public discussion while legislation is being prepared and passed.

The great importance of this is that the legislation which is now being passed is of a constructive character, involving the participation of the public, and particularly of the working class. As time passes, the Civil Service and Local Government Service will not number two million, but will, in the broad sense, include the whole nation. It stands to reason that as the nation owns more and more of the country and its wealth, it, the nation, must be concerned with the country's management and must participate in it.

The simplest example is the nationalisation of the coal mines. In all the circumstances the miners are doing a good job—certainly a job which they would never have done within a Conservative, non-nationalised industry. But the weakest element in the Nationalisation of the Coal Mines Act, and in the operation of it, is the Pit Consultative Committee. Not only are the miners given limited responsibility, but the constructive approach to this responsibility has not yet been adequately inspired. In Czechoslovakia and in Poland the passing of the legislation on nationalised coal mines may have been hurried, and badly drafted, and the details not worked out. But the main problem—the digging of coal—is being tackled in a way we can envy.

If the Government made a turn in this direction of involving the public, it would help to turn the balance heavily against the capitalist view expressed by the Conservative Party in the House of Commons. It would also be the best way of answering Conservative criticisms about Government legislation—its curtailment of speech, etc. Above all, it would mean that we enter into a new period in the conception of the British Parliament, bringing Parliament closer to the people, and bringing nearer to operation the "Government of the People, by the People, and for the People."

THE USE OF OUR CULTURAL HERITAGE

R. F. WILLETTS

IN THE LAST CHAPTER of his pamphlet *Marxism and Poetry*, George Thomson discusses the future of culture in general, and of poetry in particular. His argument, briefly stated, is that this future will be radically different from the cultural renaissance in the U.S.S.R. in one important respect: in Britain, Socialist culture will have no pre-capitalist reservoir to fall back upon for inspiration and vitality. To quote his own words: "In Western Europe, apart from a few

isolated pockets, pre-capitalist culture has perished, and so we cannot look for a renaissance of the same type. The only poetry in Western Europe is bourgeois poetry. But it is the finest in the world. It is a magnificent heritage. But it is not being used. The first crying need is that this treasury should be thrown open to the people."

He returns to the same point more urgently shortly afterwards: "This then is the first need—to rescue our bourgeois heritage from the bourgeoisie, to take it over, reinterpret it, adapt it to our needs, renew its vitality by making it thoroughly our own."

So far as I am aware, George Thomson's argument has not been seriously challenged. Such reviews of his pamphlet as I have read, British and American, have been generally favourable. I therefore assume that his fellow Marxists are in general agreement with his theoretical analysis and practical conclusions. It is time that responsible Communists in cultural organisations paid more serious attention to these practical conclusions.

In the cultural sphere, as in other spheres of national life, Marxists have a decisive role to play. In country after country, of recent years, the old order has crumbled, and the forces of the organised working class have assumed a major responsibility in guiding the destinies of their peoples. In our own country the process of change is less spectacular, but nonetheless continuous. The sponsors of the old order sense their failure of nerve. Culturally, this failure reveals itself in expressions of pessimism concerning man's ability to shape his environment as the many would wish it to be, rationally organised, peaceful, prosperous, and just. Under new guises, old cults of irrationalism are promoted, and the power of the human consciousness is doubted or betrayed. One result is that bourgeois interpretation of the bourgeois classics, the greatest of which were revolutionary in their day, becomes formalistic and lifeless.

We should be unwise to exaggerate the influence of these swansongs. At the same time we ought not to overlook their constant repetition in the Press, radio, theatre, and circulating libraries: wherever, in fact, the means exist to provoke thought or excite emotion, wherever the will of the people can be lulled to acquiescence or steered to hopeful resolution. The transition to Socialism in this country can be made easier by recognising this fact and by taking appropriate action. We must come forward as the rightful heirs of the cultural heritage of the past, and likewise stake our claims in the future. It is no easy matter: yet we can at least begin to decide how it should begin to be done.

Let us consider first of all the role of those cultural organisations closely connected with the Labour movement and mainly concerned

with the presentation of music and drama, and more particularly drama, since it is more extensively developed over the country as a whole. Broadly speaking, the role of such organisations may be said to be twofold: first, to present the bourgeois masterpieces of the past, reinterpreting, where the bourgeois misinterpret them; secondly, to promote the creation of contemporary work by artists and writers closely associated with the Socialist movement. These tasks are complementary in the light of George Thomson's analysis. In the past we have tended falsely to pose the second aim as being the only one worth considering. This is why so much of the discussion as to what constitutes "proletarian art" has been so barren.

In this connection, the remarks made by David Wilson in a recent article (*Modern Quarterly Miscellany* No. 1) are capable of a wider application: "... in recent years there has been a good deal of discussion about the probable emergence of a proletarian literature as a thing to be expected in our time. What is meant by this has never been agreed upon by those who argue about it. The label has been attached indiscriminately to literature written by workers, or written about workers, or addressed specifically to the working class. Surely all this is beside the point. If there is to be a proletarian literature, it can be so only by virtue of whether life is seen from a new point of view, a point of view growing out of the emergence of the working class in society, not as a dependent and subsidiary thing, but as a living and independent force."

This new point of view has to be all-embracing, equally concerned with the reinterpretation of the old and the creation of the new. We ought to recognise that, just as the bourgeois epoch has transformed the economic and political basis of society in the course of its development, so the artists of this epoch, who emerged as the bourgeoisie advanced to the leadership of the progressive forces of mankind, often expressed the latent contradictions inherent in the society which they saw coming to birth. It was no mere love of refinement that prompted Marx to pay such close attention to Shakespeare—or for that matter to re-read annually the *Oresteia* of Aeschylus.

Because Karl Marx read Aeschylus it doesn't follow that all good Communists should learn ancient Greek. But it is reasonable to suggest that the opportunities should be created to allow Communists and the working class, of which they are the vanguard, to derive inspiration, as Marx did, from the national poet whose works Marx read in what was to him a foreign language. Our Elizabethan ancestors enjoyed Shakespeare's plays when they were first produced: so do our Soviet contemporaries in translation. It is announced from time to time in the Party Press that Shakespeare is popular on the

Soviet stage: the announcement rarely seems to stir our conscience.

In theory, no one would deny that we should endeavour to present the people with the cultural heritage of the past as a help to the creation of contemporary work. But in practice several reasons are adduced for concentrating on the second task and ignoring or postponing the first, instead of acknowledging their essential unity. It is said that such and such a group isn't yet technically efficient enough to attempt a classic; that the language of the Elizabethans presents too many difficulties for a working-class audience; that our immediate aim is to promote class-consciousness by handling contemporary themes, and so on.

These objections take no account of the fact that many of the best productions of the classics are, in fact, amateur productions; that there is much to be said for training your personnel on something first-rate to begin with; that generations of workers managed to become familiar with the authorised version of the Bible, though the language of that book is as difficult as Shakespeare; that class-consciousness can often be aroused by indirect means, as it apparently was by Lorca's poetry and plays in Spain; that the result of too narrow a definition of class-consciousness may be the presentation of contemporary class-conscious themes by the class-conscious to the class-conscious—which doesn't help much.

In short, we have a right to expect that cultural organisations associated with the Labour movement should be prepared to include classical as well as contemporary productions, reinterpreting them and adapting them to present requirements. This has been done successfully, for example, by the Birmingham Clarion Singers, over the past ten years. They consist of working-class amateurs. Their repertoire includes traditional British workers' and peasants' songs; Soviet songs; Bach's "Peasant Cantata"; Mozart's "Marriage of Figaro"; Purcell's "Dido and Aeneas." They have played and sung in concert halls, in factories, at street corners, on bombed sites, at meetings. Their conviction is that the music of the past can play its part in arousing enthusiasm for the future. They refuse to classify their audience before it assembles as lowbrow or highbrow. Quite rightly, however, they are prepared to combine the more simple with the more difficult. In their limited sphere they are proving that the workers can dominate the managerial functions of art.

Many workers are habitual filmgoers. Our cultural organisations might well consider the presentation of films together with their music or plays. This would broaden their appeal, and at the same time enable the workers to see what can be done with the film when

it is not dominated by the most vulgar of commercial motives. Outside London, only the members of provincial film societies ordinarily have a chance of seeing the better Continental or Russian films. Many of our best British documentary films have similarly been seen by too few people. Projectors and films of this type are not difficult to hire; nor are they too expensive.

Cultural organisations apart, the trade unions, and the Trades Councils, nationally and locally, could play an important part in these developments. To our shame, we have no national theatre. With a Labour Government in power the trade unions could mobilise an enormous public opinion in a campaign for such a project. Many of our large cities are pitifully equipped with cultural facilities within the reach of a working-class income. Campaigns led by Trades Councils for the establishment of civic theatres would have public opinion again on their side, and the enthusiastic support of film societies, amateur repertory companies, Co-operative Guilds, and such-like.

A great demand for enlightenment exists, as our brief wartime renaissance indicated. We must point the way to its satisfaction.

RAILWAY EFFICIENCY

FRANK MOORE

TO UNDERSTAND THE PRESENT PROBLEMS of railway efficiency one has to be aware of the position in the industry during the period of rampant economy and the economic crisis of 1929 to 1931. The economy cuts did not stop at manpower, wages, and conditions, a factor in the present understaffing of the industry, but extended to removing what appeared in the eyes of the railway management anything that was superfluous. Timber, glass, and buildings were removed, all of which has had its subsequent effect upon the efficiency and working conditions of the staff and the comfort of the public.

Apart from the cut in manpower this period brought about unprecedented redundancy and with it the migration of hundreds of young men with their families over the greater part of England, Scotland, and Wales. One can see the memories which many in the industry have had to fight, with the knowledge that today many of their employers who tolerated and supported such chaos and inhumanity are still the management of the railways.

Recently a description was coined in relation to railway operation—it was, that there was "remote control" exercised from the H.Q.s of the main-line companies, and passed down to divisional centres, and from there to the numerous depots. It is this kind of managerial

function that makes participation in practical railway work differ from factories or other undertakings.

The practical worker who, from years of experience, can and does often make helpful suggestions, finds that his immediate head, or the head of the department to which he may make the suggestion, cannot act upon it because his hands are tied by higher officialdom. This is glaring in the case of the operation and movement of trains. Train crews see many moves that would lead to the more efficient movement of traffic, but because of the above and the additional fact that those employed in the telephone control offices are not recruited from the ranks of practical men, such suggestions are rarely put into operation.

An immediate remedy for this would be greater worker participation at all levels of management, with an indication that managements would act upon the suggestions made by the men's accredited representatives. There has just taken place a series of meetings, on an area basis, of the men's representatives from a number of grades and officials of the companies, but despite the fact that these meetings arose from the M.O.T. in an endeavour to overcome difficulties which became very clear during the past winter, there is no guarantee that the findings of these meetings will be acted upon.

In an industry such as the railways with its separate departments for locomotive power, marshalling and movement of freight and passenger traffic, and the numerous sides of maintenance of rolling stock and the permanent way, there is no opportunity of all sections meeting together to discuss the all-in problems. Instead of such co-operation we see watertight compartments, each dealing with one particular section of work, apart from some liaison at top level. Hence you get the position that only the keenest trade unionist who attends his branch meetings, or takes the trouble to study the problems, is aware of the difficulties which other grades are working under, both in relation to wages and conditions and the problems of day-to-day work.

The fact that railways have few modern methods of dealing with work shows a serious state of affairs. Few marshalling yards, are electrically lit, and this is also true of goods sheds and motive power depots. Welfare in the form of washing facilities, cloak-room accommodation, etc., are practically non-existent, whilst messrooms and canteens are most primitive.

The methods of carrying out maintenance repairs are ancient, whether it be for locomotive, rolling stock, or the permanent way, and are such that operations are carried out by sheer human exertion. There is little appreciation of the use of electric or other methods of

power-operated tools and equipment. Power-driven drills, grinders, and lifting apparatus are almost unknown, and depots are considered lucky that can call upon some type of cutting or welding machinery, or other appropriate mechanical device suitable for a particular job.

This is the situation that exists when in almost any machine-tool shop pieces of machinery can be purchased, which, if installed, would reduce hard, physical hours of labour. The position of supplies of spare parts for renewals is very bad, and on some sections of the system such parts may be sent hundreds of miles from depot to depot in order to put another locomotive into service.

The basic shortage of locomotive power is shown in a recent publication, *The Locomotive Building Industry*, Report No. 264, published by P.E.P. The supply and repair of existing locomotives is the subject of most bitter complaint of driver and fireman, and those concerned with repairs.

The P.E.P. report states that in 1944, 20,016 main-line steam locomotives were in use and that: "Between 1921 and 1938 the annual renewal rate averaged 2.1 per cent of the total number in use. It would appear, therefore, that, assuming very few locomotives built or purchased since 1921 have been destroyed, slightly more than 50 per cent of the railway companies' fleet are 25 years old or more."

Between 1929 and 1938 the railway companies' new construction averaged 311 locomotives per annum at the cost of £1,280,000. Repairs and partial renewals averaged £8,830,000. This was in sharp contrast to the private builder, the bulk of whose orders consisted of new construction. The domestic demand for main-line locomotives in the years 1929 to 1938 was as follows:

Year	Railway Workshops	Contractors	No.	Total Value £'000's
1929 ...	412	129	541	2,157
1930 ...	321	183	504	2,084
1931 ...	293	85	378	1,507
1932 ...	263	6	269	913
1933 ...	219	1	220	962
1934 ...	288	103	391	1,818
1935 ...	371	195	566	2,557
1936 ...	366	245	581	2,906
1937 ...	288	277	566	2,052
1938 ...	316	—	316	1,479
Totals ...	3,137	1,224	4,332	18,435

The actual rate of renewal tended to fluctuate in the periods of depression and prosperity. In 1925-29 it averaged 2.6 per cent, and in 1935-38, 2.7 per cent. To maintain the 2.1 per cent replacement figure on the number of locomotives in use in 1944 would need 435 new locomotives a year. On the basis of the prosperous periods quoted above, 540 locomotives would be required each year. Both figures, however, make no allowance for the shortage of new locomotives during the war years.

In this connection the position is that the railway companies built 1,432 locomotives in their workshops during the Second World War, or an annual rate of 229, representing less than 58 per cent of estimated capacity. The private builders' production in 1938-42 averaged 220 a year, but during the next three years production rose to an annual average which is still only about 80 per cent of estimated full capacity. The annual production all told, according to the *Monthly Statistical Digest*, Table 58, was 1940, 282; 1941, 244; 1942, 360; 1943, 795; 1944, 1,070; and 1945, 786.

The railway companies (*British Railways in the Future*) have stated that 2,800 locomotives must be built during the next five years to maintain normal building programmes and to overtake arrears which have accumulated since 1939. These arrears are estimated by P.E.P. to be 1,235 locomotives. On this basis, this would leave only 1,565 locomotives to maintain the normal building programme, or 313 per year, which is about a quarter less than the average yearly rate of replacement since the amalgamation in 1921. *It will be seen, therefore, that the railway companies' figures are a bare minimum.*

As it is, however, this represents an annual total of 560, and of course takes no account of the export of locomotives. Here is the position of annual production and export, according to the *Monthly Statistical Digest*, covering main-line locomotives:

	Production	Export	Domestic Use
1935 ...	738	141	597
1945 ...	786	139	647
1946 ...	726	358	368
1947 (estd.) ...	558	222	336

The estimate for 1947 is based on the figures for January and February only.

It is quite possible, of course, that production in 1947 will step up, but from this brief survey, it is clear:

- (a) That the 1946 rate of locomotives available for domestic use is hopelessly inadequate and does not come anywhere near the

minimum requirements stipulated by the railway companies.

- (b) That in view of this position a completely disproportionate number of locomotives is being exported.
- (c) That this situation, unless quickly improved, can still further impair the position of the railways on the eve of nationalisation.

The urgency of the present situation demands immediate Government action to increase locomotive production; and, pending this increase, locomotive exports should be prohibited.

A twin evil with the shortage of locomotives, which means a curtailment of trains, is the inadequacy of many sections of the line to cope with trains. There are, for example, main lines that are only double-tracked, which necessitates the shunting into loop lines and sidings of slower-moving traffic to make way for the passenger services and express goods going in the same direction.

Sidings of termini are not sufficient to handle the incoming traffic which requires re-marshalling to other parts of the country. Sidings are built in the centre or on the outskirts of cities, with no by-pass lines to obviate the necessity of running over the busy inner city lines. These factors are largely responsible for the bottlenecks which arose during the bad weather, and other temporary hold-ups.

That there is a need for the re-planning of British railways is obvious to the practical rail worker, and it is to nationalisation that he looks for a speedier approach to the problem. In the meantime all grades, given the opportunity to offer more of their wealth of practical experience in the management of the industry, now and under nationalisation, would do much to ensure that recent examples of rail inefficiency would not be so manifest.

The final vital issue is that wages and conditions of the workers should be improved so that they are in keeping with their responsibilities. They should take into account the abnormal hours of work, and for large sections of the staff the liability to be available for work on every day in the week, with all the anti-social effects that has upon family and personal liberty.

THE TRUSTS' HOLD ON AMERICA

H. C.

BEHIND THE OFFENSIVE OF AMERICAN foreign policy against the progressive countries of the world, and behind the offensive in America itself against the Labour and progressive movements, is the drive of the great trusts, the most reactionary section of American capitalism, to complete their domination of the U.S.A. and to extend

it over the whole world. The Second World War not only removed their chief rivals, the German trusts. It enormously increased their power and their hold upon America.

The increase of productive capacity in the United States during the Second World War put into the hands of the largest 250 non-financial corporations productive resources equal to the whole productive output of the United States in 1939. "It is clear that during the Second World War these large corporations (each employing over 1,000 employees) have come to dominate not only American manufacturing, but the entire economy as a whole," concludes the U.S. Smaller War Plant Corporation's Report on Economic Concentration in World War II. It is estimated that these big firms accounted for 44 per cent of the total employment in the U.S.A., and 55 per cent of the total payroll in 1943. In manufacturing industry alone, the big firms employed 64 per cent of the employees in 1945. In 1944, 2,947 firms employing more than 1,000 employees accounted for 52 per cent of all the employees in manufacturing industry, while 344 firms employing more than 10,000 employees accounted for 30 per cent of the workers (or five million out of a total of 16.7 million). In 1939, 967 firms employing more than 1,000 employed 4.2 million out of 10.8 million employees; and 49 firms employing more than 10,000 employed 1.4 million.

Government assistance enabled the trusts to increase their hold on America. Thus while U.S. Government contracts were awarded to 18,539 firms (out of a total of over 200,000) from 1941 until September, 1944, 67 per cent of the value of the contracts were awarded to 100 corporations. The average contract awarded was just under \$10 millions, but the smallest received by the hundred corporations was \$232 millions. These same firms acquired control of 51 per cent of all the privately-financed manufacturing facilities built in the U.S.A. during the Second World War, and 75 per cent of the Government-financed.

What this means in terms of physical plant and capacity to produce can best be quoted from the report of the Smaller War Plants Corporation. "The nation's manufacturing facilities in existence in 1939 had cost about 40 billion dollars to build. To this capacity was added by June, 1945, about 26 billion dollars of new plant and equipment."

The technical efficiency and quality of this new plant was of the highest order:

"Not only was the expansion programme of tremendous proportions, but in addition, the quality of the new plants and equipment was

generally very high. . . . Most of the plants contain the best materials. . . . The new plants usually have the most modern factory layouts, lightings, power installations, etc. . . . The quality of the new equipment is, if anything, even better than that of the plants. In 1940 there were in place 827,000 machine tools of various ages, degrees of repair, and suitability for the job they were performing. Almost 75 per cent of these were more than ten years old, and a large proportion was over 30 years old. During the last five years 747,000 new machine tools have been built and put into operation. These new tools are generally bigger, faster, hold to finer tolerances, and turn out a larger volume of work than the average pre-war tool. Most of them are designed for the use of tungsten carbide cutting tools which have brought about a great increase in both machine and worker output. . . ."

It is not just that the trusts have been re-tooled, with generous assistance from the U.S. Government. These tools, by their nature and distribution, increased the peace-time potential of the firms getting them. On this point the report says:

"A study conducted by the War Production Board . . . showed that 74 per cent of the wartime outlay for manufacturing facilities—public and private—went for facilities to make the same product which the operator produced before the war. . . . In the second place, the bulk of the machine tools and items of plant equipment built during the war years are either general-purpose types or special-purpose types designed for operations that are required in peacetime as in wartime. . . ."

Thus, for example, the electric furnace capacity of the U.S. steel industry increased from 1,614,000 tons in 1938 to 6,248,000 tons in 1945. Of this, 1,715,000 tons' capacity (or 27.5 per cent) belonged in 1945 to the Republic Steel Corporation, third in size to the Morgan-controlled U.S. Steel Corporation and Bethlehem Steel. In 1938 Republic had only 8.9 per cent of the electric furnace capacity.

The trusts were not only favoured in the distribution of contracts and machine tools. They received favoured treatment in the allocation of raw materials, which greatly strengthened their position. Thus from the allocations of strategically important raw materials to 30,130 manufacturing establishments the plants of the largest 25 using companies were allocated 30 per cent of carbon steel for 750 plants; 40 per cent of alloy steel for 664 plants; 37 per cent of stainless steel for 508 plants; 58 per cent of aluminium for 447 plants; 66 per cent of copper for 506 plants; 51 per cent of copper-base alloys for 567 plants.

In the allocation of contracts for industrial research, the 50 largest corporations receiving contracts got 62 per cent, while the 10 largest received 37 per cent of the contracts. Before the Second World War 13 firms had controlled one-third of the industrial research personnel in the U.S.A., and 140 companies had employed two-thirds. During the Second World War 68 corporations received two-thirds of the war industrial research contracts.

The expansion of physical capacity had its reflection in the financial position of the trusts. In the production of basic iron and steel the 19 largest corporations acquired a capitalisation 25 per cent greater than that of the whole industry in 1939. Seventy corporations fabricating metal products (including motor cars and trucks) increased their capital to 25 per cent more than the whole capitalisation of the industry in 1939. Fifteen non-ferrous metal corporations have 60 per cent more capital than the 1939 capitalisation of the industry. Five aircraft companies have a capitalisation 11 times as great as the whole pre-war American aircraft industry. Two hundred and twenty-one corporations making iron and steel products have double the pre-war capitalisation of their industry, and now control fifty per cent of the present level. Five shipbuilding corporations have nearly three times the capitalisation of the pre-war industry; and 15 have four times.

Naturally, markets have become more important than ever before to the American trusts. It is estimated that they must now operate at 90 per cent of capacity in order to make a profit, as against 80 per cent pre-war. The magazine *Business Week* says that the "break-even" point is now much higher; while the President of Bethlehem Steel says: "Just let a few points fall away from present operating rates and see what happens." Before the Second World War only 2½ per cent of American production was exported. The most important lines were agricultural produce and processed foods. The motor-car makers, for example, were most interested among the great manufacturing corporations, and they exported less than 15 per cent of their annual production. In 1947, the radio industry, for example, has plans to export four million radio sets, from a production that at its peak in 1946 was running at a rate of 16 million sets a year, but is now operating at only 75 per cent of that. Its agents abroad already report that the South American market is glutted with radios.

As the trusts increasingly turn to exports with the rapid saturation of the American home market, the international battle in the world market is going to become fiercer. The American trusts are preparing the ground to their own advantage in every way available to them. Through their hold on the U.S. administration, especially of the

State Department, they are pushing the foreign policy with which we are only too familiar, seeking in every way to increase international dependence on the dollar, and to open every market to American goods on the most favoured terms. The way for this was being prepared even during the Second World War, when, for example, the anti-cartel prosecutions of the American trusts had the effect of releasing them from their cartel arrangements with German and British big business. "The government anti-cartel policies," writes James S. Allen in his book *World Monopoly and Peace*, "were fully in accordance with the high objectives of big business. The result of these policies, whatever their origin or motivation, was to further the expansionist drive of American monopoly-capitalism." Thus the anti-cartel trials, which had no effect on the internal position of the trusts, had the effect of clearing the decks for a full-scale invasion of all foreign markets by American business, unhampered by any pre-war agreements with their German or British competitors.

Another factor is driving the trusts to more aggressive activity in the foreign field, besides the need for markets to keep up their profitability. It is the question of raw materials, and control of raw material supplies. Fear of exhaustion of domestic reserves has always been one excuse for the aggressiveness of U.S. oil companies in search of foreign concessions. A similar situation is driving the copper trusts, the aluminium trust, and great steel trusts to take more interest abroad. The House of Morgan, with its great interests in the motor-car, steel, copper, and chemical industries, has now added incentives for intervention in foreign affairs, apart from its already huge banking, insurance, and electric power and telecommunications interests.

U.S. business has been using up native American resources at a phenomenal and wasteful rate. Just as the economics of American lumbering and farming led to mining of the soil and destruction of its natural fertility, so American mining methods have resulted in ruthless exploitation of existing reserves for the sake of immediate profit. Now the heads of the trusts are worrying over the early exhaustion at present levels of technique, of reserves of bauxite, lead and zinc, oil, copper, and high-grade iron ore. All of these, on the basis of known reserves and present consumption rates, will be exhausted inside twenty years; the non-ferrous metals inside ten. This is leading to feverish activity in two directions. Field staffs and geologists are stepping up surveys to find new fields and ore beds. Research staffs are working out processes to use lower-grade ores and raw-material supplies. Thus U.S. scientists are working on pilot-plant methods of extracting aluminium from china clay, and iron from magnetic taconite.

But while this work is going on, the trusts are reaching out to get control of foreign supplies. Already the U.S. aluminium industry is largely dependent on foreign, especially South American, supplies of bauxite. The copper trusts have long been deeply interested in Mexican and Andean mines. Now they are muscling in on the formerly British monopoly in Africa. The activities of the oil trusts in Arabia, Iran, and North China are too well-known to require further comment. The steel trusts are now entering the field. Until the Second World War, the Mesabi Range in Minnesota satisfied their needs for high-grade ore. Their interest in Canadian, Labrador, and South American iron ores was long range, if not academic. It is now much more close and real. The interests associated with the Republic Steel Corporation (the so-called Cleveland interest group, one of the big five trust groupings) have already acquired Canadian iron ore, taking the bulk of the output of the Steep Rock development, which was given high priority and financial assistance by the Canadian Government as a war measure to develop Canadian iron and steel production (itself largely in the hands of subsidiaries of the American trusts). Long-range plans of the U.S. steel industry are considering what will be necessary to re-orient the industry on South American, Canadian, and Labrador supplies. Labrador ores, for example, require development of the St. Lawrence waterways, at present held up by Canadian opposition. The fate of Newfoundland, too, has a bearing on the problem.

It is obvious from the above that it is not for nothing that the trusts have taken a firmer hold on the U.S. administration. In the early days of the Roosevelt regime, the Du Pont family led the opposition to F.D.R. within the Democratic Party, and sponsored the notorious Liberty League to oppose the New Deal policies. The Du Ponts never broke with the Democratic Party. It was undoubtedly their wing that led the fight against Wallace for Vice-President, and promoted the Missouri stooge who now occupies the American Presidency. And the Du Pont trust did very well out of the Second World War. Apart from the expansion of its original chemical and explosives interests, its General Motors Corporation received the greatest total of contracts from the U.S. Government, nearly 8 per cent of the total, and more than twice as much as the next nearest recipient. The trust itself was given the \$500 million contract to develop and manufacture plutonium for the atom bomb. The House of Morgan has friends and associates in many branches of the U.S. administration. The railway king and banker Harriman succeeded Henry Wallace as Secretary of Commerce, while he himself was succeeded as Ambassador to Britain by the head of a Morgan-controlled insurance

company. The American Ambassador to the Vatican, and Chairman of the State Department's Committee on Post-war Foreign Economic Policy, is Myron Taylor, a director of the Morgan U.S. Steel Corporation. A new appointee to the State Department, to succeed Dean Acheson, is Robt. A. Lovett, whose father was associated with the Harriman railroad empire, and who himself received his training in the banking firm of Brown Bros. Harriman.

Although the largest 200 corporations in the U.S. utterly dominate its economy, effective control is even more narrow. The interests of the 60 most wealthy families penetrate every aspect of American business, education, and social institutions. Even narrower than that is the control exercised by the interests of the House of Morgan, the Du Pont, Rockefeller, and Mellon families, and the "Cleveland group." And just as the power behind the rise of Hitler in Germany was the Stinnes Trust, the Krupps family, and the chemical and electrical trusts, so in the U.S.A. the well-spring of the drive to reaction is the big five.

The trusts control the sources of information of the American people. Through their hold on the universities by their endowments and foundations (Carnegie, Rockefeller, Guggenheim, Mellon, etc.), they exercise an all-pervasive influence on the intellectual atmosphere and the direction of research. Their interests in the newspaper and publishing field give them control over the important organs of public opinion. Thus the House of Morgan controls the powerful Time-Life Inc., has interests in *Collier's Weekly* and the *American Magazine*, and is closely connected with the *New York Herald-Tribune*. - Through the Phelps-Dodge Corporation it controls the leading newspapers of Arizona. Through the American Telephone and Telegraph Corporation it exerts a wide influence on the Press and public opinion.

"The Bell System (of the American Telephone and Telegraph) has spent large sums on advertising, propaganda, and other public relations activities. Its annual advertising budget, in the years from 1927 to 1935, fluctuated between 4,372,000 dollars and 7,477,000 dollars. In several cases it is said to have purchased space for the purpose of influencing the editorial policy of the journals which it employed. Contracts for printing telephone directories are said to have been let to high bidders for political reasons. Between 1925 and 1934, the Bell companies and Western Electric spent nearly 5,000,000 dollars on membership dues and contributions to business, professional, scientific, social, and athletic clubs. The associated companies have sought the friendship of local bankers; in 1935 they had money on deposit in 26 per cent of all the

banks in the United States. The system has financed lecturers, subsidised the publication of books, and produced motion pictures in an effort to cultivate good will." (*Competition and Monopoly in American Industry*: U.S. Senate Investigation of Concentration of Economic Power, p. 85.)

Both directly through the big radio companies, and indirectly through the influence of their advertising contracts, the trusts control American broadcasting. Their advertising interests give them the power to exert terrific pressure on newspapers and the radio. The Du Pont interests, for example, control six to seven full pages of advertisements in a 200-page issue of the *Saturday Evening Post*.

The trusts control most of the sources of information about America that are available to the British people. But how deeply-rooted is suspicion of the trusts and their aims can be gauged in part from the hysterical lengths to which their propaganda must go in order to mask them. And how widespread is the opposition to them is reflected in the extreme measures to which they are being driven to ensure their political control of the United States.

THE GREAT BASIC QUESTION OF PHILOSOPHY

Science Versus Idealism. (Lawrence & Wishart Ltd., 12s. 6d.)

AS ITS TITLE INDICATES, Maurice Cornforth's book is a contribution to what Engels described, more than fifty years ago, as "the great basic question of all philosophy . . . that concerning the relation of thinking and being," which splits the philosophers into the two camps of idealism and materialism. More specifically it is a Marxist critique of a school of contemporary writers who, while dismissing most previous philosophy as meaningless "metaphysics," claim to be the exponents of a radically new and scientific philosophy, Logical Positivism.

Unfortunately for the general reader, to whom clearly the book as a whole is addressed, these philosophers have found it necessary to invent a "radically new" kind of language in order to express their ideas; a farrago of pidgin English and symbolical formulae which, as Cornforth says, makes any examination of their philosophy "an involved and difficult process." When Wittgenstein, for example, one of their most venerated spokesmen, solemnly asserts that: "What solipsism means is quite correct, only it cannot be said," one is prepared to accept his further dictum: "He who understands

me . . . must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has climbed up on it" (p. 159), but one cannot help wondering whether one's journey would be really necessary. Or again, it is difficult to believe that Carnap, the most recent exponent of Logical Positivism, has established a useful criterion for distinguishing "statements from pseudo-statements in philosophy" by elaborating a "formal mode" of language in contrast to the commonsense or "material mode." For in order to translate the statement that: "A thing is a complex of atoms" from the material mode into the formal mode, which alone ensures "absolute safety," one is reduced to asserting that: "Every sentence in which a thing-designation occurs is equipollent to a sentence in which space-time co-ordinates and certain descriptive functors (of physics) occur" (pp. 174-5).

But though these examples of logical positivist writing—and they can be multiplied indefinitely—may at first sight appear to be ample justification for dismissing them out of hand, Marxists cannot afford to do so. For when Bertrand Russell, whom Cornforth declares (not quite correctly, I would have thought) to be "the principal founder" of their views, set out to substitute "piecemeal, detailed, and verifiable results for large untested generalities, recommended only by a certain appeal to the imagination" (p. 98), he was, in fact, voicing "the protest of science and commonsense against the belated disciples of German idealism" (p. 99), who for fifty years or more had been the official academic spokesmen of philosophy in England. And it is a weakness of Cornforth's book that he does not develop this point more fully. Had he done so, and, in doing so, brought out more clearly the nature of the contribution to philosophical thought that they were attempting, however misguidedly and ineffectively, to make, the full social and political significance of his own painstaking and annihilating critique of them would have been more apparent.

This, however, is one of the real difficulties that confronts the Marxist polemicist in every field; a difficulty that arises from the ignorant neglect of Marxist methodology by its opponents. When, for instance, Keynes in *The General Theory, Etc.*, (1936) initiated the "revolution" in modern bourgeois economics, he attributed the signal failure of orthodox economics "for purposes of scientific prediction" to the fact that "professional economists, after Malthus, were apparently unmoved by the lack of correspondence between the results of their theory and the facts of observation." In effect, he was only repeating what Marx had already asserted some sixty years earlier of Ricardo's successors, that: "In place of disinterested enquirers, there were hired prizefighters; in place of genuine scientific research, the bad conscience and the evil intent of apologetic." But

though Keynes criticised his predecessors for being unscientific, he was not prepared to press his criticism to its logical conclusion. Had he done so, he would have been obliged to face the fact that the point at which capitalist economists ceased to be scientific was precisely the point at which, rather than face the social or class issues involved, they abandoned the materialist basis of political economy. As a result, not only is his critique superficial, but, by taking over the fantastic pseudo-scientific conceptual paraphernalia of the economists he was condemning, he made it more difficult for Marxists either to assimilate what is of positive value in his critique or to get to grips with what is false.

The Logical Positivists confront Cornforth with an analogous difficulty. Because in their critique of idealism they burke the fundamental question of "the relation of thinking and being," and instead attempt to restrict philosophy at first to logical analysis, and later, in the work of Carnap, to the analysis of language, they oblige their critics either to condemn them out of hand as ideological reactionaries, or to follow them into the morass of "speech-thinking" and "linguistic forms." By doing the latter, Cornforth has done a very real service to Marxism. It has enabled him to show beyond question that "despite its 'scientific' and even 'materialistic' pretensions [Logical Positivism] is only a variant of the old Berkeleyan pure empiricism" (p. 226); or in other words is only the most recent, fashionable hide-out of idealism. This was a necessary job, and my only criticism of this part of the book is that it does not more clearly show *why* it was necessary.

This polemic with the logical positivists takes up less than half the book, however. The first hundred pages provide a summary, but extremely stimulating, review of the growing impact of the natural sciences on bourgeois philosophy in Britain from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century. This will be of the greatest help to all students of Marxism, especially Chapters 3 and 4 which discuss the philosophies of Berkeley and Hume. Here the issue between idealism and materialism is clearly posed as it first emerged in its modern form; and is shown to hinge on conflicting theories of knowledge, a conflict which can only be resolved by dialectical materialism. These two Chapters, together with Chapter 6, which is a critique of pure empiricism, serve as an admirable introduction not only to Cornforth's criticism of Logical Positivism, but also to Lenin's *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*.

Less satisfactory are Chapter 5, which attempts to deal with Kant and the nineteenth-century agnostics in a dozen pages, and suffers

from compression; and Chapter 2, which devotes only six pages to the problems, crucial for a Marxist study, of the social roots of materialism and of the interrelations of science, religion, and philosophy. Much could be said for making this the opening chapter of the book; and more for revising and expanding it. It is surely not sound Marxism to speak of the capitalists having "first established their right . . . to expand their capital and activities *within feudal society*" "in the course of a long series of *revolutions*" (p. 35). While to assert that materialist philosophy "*absolutely smashed* the old scholastic forms of thought" (p. 34), or that "the rise of the capitalists . . . led to the *triumph* of science over church authority" (p. 36) is certainly much too sweeping an account of the impact of science on religion in the seventeenth century.

One other weakness in this first part of the book, all the more serious because it could so easily have been remedied, is the almost complete absence of dates. Apart from the convenience to the general reader of knowing when Bacon and Hobbes and Locke were writing, it is of considerable significance for the more specialised student to be aware of the actual date of publication of the various works by Russell, Wittgenstein, and Carnap; and it is misleading to find Kant and Mach lumped together in the same chapter with nothing to indicate that they are separated by a century crowded with scientific achievement.

These criticisms are superficial, however, in comparison with the very real value of the whole of this first part as an introduction to the study of philosophy. But it is the final chapter, one of the longest in the book, in which Cornforth introduces "some considerations about the foundations, methods, and meaning of science," that I personally found to be the most stimulating. Here, it seems to me, though as yet somewhat tentatively, he opens up new fields of philosophical inquiry by relating the problems of philosophy to the tremendous advances that are being made in the natural sciences in our own time. And by so doing he rescues philosophy from the private asylums to which the bourgeois philosophers are condemning it and shows how it can be used by ordinary men and women in the struggle of progress against reaction. Reading this chapter I realised more clearly what Engels meant when he said: "It is from the history of nature and of human society that the laws of dialectic are abstracted. For they are nothing else but the most general laws of these two aspects of historical development." (*Dialectics of Nature*, p. 26.) There is, however, one statement I would dissent from: that "the historian can perform no experiments" (p. 243). For, in the sense that all Marxists are necessarily historians,

they are today performing no less an experiment than building a new world. And to this purpose Cornforth's book contributes a solid and useful brick.

DOUGLAS GARMAN

A PLANNER EXPLAINS

Central Planning and Control in War and Peace.

Sir Oliver Franks. 2s. 6d.

THE EXPERIENCE OF BRITAIN'S WAR ECONOMY, the advent of a Labour Government pledged to planning, and a heavy increase in understanding by the mass of the people of what is going on in the Soviet Union and now in Eastern Europe, have all naturally provoked a powerful and continuous counterblast against planning from the Right and from all the circles concerned to preserve and defend capitalism. Mingling with this, however, one or two new notes can now be detected. The recent Tory economic programme, for example, is at pains to stress its agreement with much of the Labour Government's programme, and especially to stress the need for planning. Now three lectures delivered earlier in the year to the London School of Economics by Sir Oliver Franks have appeared in book form.

Sir Oliver Franks is a professor of philosophy and provost of Queen's College, Oxford. But the interest of his lectures lies in the fact that during the Second World War, and for a year after, he occupied various key positions in, and was eventually permanent head of, the Ministry of Supply, the key economic department. His views are, therefore, based on first-hand experience, and what is more may be regarded as reflecting the views of the highest official circles. They are, therefore, worth examination.

Before proceeding, however, it is important to avoid the confusion which bedevils much of the discussion about economic planning, by getting clear what is the nature of the economic system it is proposed to plan.

Although attempts are made from many different quarters to obscure this single fact, the British economic system is capitalist. This means, basically, three things: that the means of production—i.e., factories, land, machinery, raw materials, are owned by a small and definite class in society; that the mass of the people are wage labourers—i.e., that they own no capital in the sense of means of production and have nothing to sell but their labour power or ability to work; and that production is carried on for private profit by a

great many producers operating independently of one another. A given piece of production takes place when, and only when, the individual producer, or capitalist, can see a profit. This is the real significance of the profit motive, and profit in this sense is obviously fundamentally different from anything that is described as "profit" earned by the wage worker, operating, for example, on piecework. Confusion between profit in the two senses generally follows from the use of the term at all in the second sense; its use in this sense is generally, of course, by those whose aim is to create confusion.

Under Socialism, the means of production are not privately but socially owned and are, therefore, at the disposal of the State. It follows first that profit (or any other income from property ownership) cannot exist, and second, that production takes place or not at the initiative, in the last analysis, of the State. Consequently an economic plan is not only possible, but essential.

The foregoing brief analysis shows that central economic planning has an entirely different significance under Socialism and under capitalism. In the former case, it is the determinant of all production, or at least all production is determined within its framework. In the latter case, except to the extent that the State owns an industry, whether or not production takes place is dependent on private entrepreneurs who take their decisions in the light of the profit motive. Consequently the State can, through an economic plan, affect only indirectly these decisions, and control only indirectly the use of economic resources. But it cannot take the actual decisions themselves.

It is of vital importance to make these distinctions, but this does not in any way mean that an economic plan is not vitally important in capitalist Britain today, just as it was vitally important in war.

Sir Oliver Franks, unfortunately, seems to be unaware of these distinctions. There is no mention of the term "capitalism" or, indeed, evidence of awareness of its characteristics. He devotes his first lecture to an examination of the essentials of wartime planning and control, taking as an illustration the planning of raw-material supplies. He describes the three bodies responsible, the Combined Raw Materials Board in Washington, and the Shipping and Materials Committees in London, and how they operated. The procedure was very simple. An estimate was prepared of supplies available, shipping, or a particular raw material, as the case may have been, in a future period. Representatives of the various claimants for supplies attended the Committee; for example, when the Materials Committee were allocating copper representatives of the Service Supply Departments and, on behalf of essential civilian needs, the Board of Trade would appear. The Committee would allocate supplies in relation to

demands made by those present, who, subject on rare occasions to appeals to Ministers, would feel bound by decisions finally taken after full discussion.

After the planning came control, as Sir Oliver Franks correctly stresses. This he considers under two heads. The first he calls the verification of fact, by means of returns and statistical forms. The second he describes as measures to ensure enactment, either by agreement or by compulsion, such as the licensing of distribution, the control of acquisition and stocks by public purchase, and in the last resort the wholesale planning of and participating in production.

So far there can be no disagreement, except to note one significant fact, that Government purchase, and, indeed, the overwhelming importance of the Government as the market for so large a proportion of everything produced, is dealt with almost casually as if merely something important, but no more important than many other things.

Sir Oliver concludes his first lecture with the reasons why he believes that whatever the form of Government, central planning must continue. He stresses continually that: "From the point of view from which I am speaking the issue between private ownership and public ownership is of secondary importance" (p. 19). His first reason is the need for military security. "Politically the world is still composed of sovereign national States" (p. 20). Secondly, there is the fear by governments of large-scale unemployment. Thirdly, there is the general condition of the world: "... This is the world in which the United Kingdom will find itself, a hard world for developing and maintaining a large export trade" (p. 22).

Planning and control to serve the military needs of a still powerful imperialism; to save the Government from the wrath of a people who are liable to be unemployed, and to push exports in a fiercely competitive world against rival imperialisms! How similar this programme is to that of another imperialism which believed in "planning and control" and which found itself in difficulties in 1933.

In his second lecture, Sir Oliver deals with planning in peace-time. He begins with a somewhat tedious discussion about how planning and control are normal characteristics of all reasonable practical activity and cites the planning of her activities by the housewife, or the planning of business activities by a Board of Directors. He would have been saved a lot of time and penetrated further into the heart of the subject if he had read the succinct passage written by Engels more than half a century earlier:

"The contradiction between socialised production and capitalistic appropriation now presents itself as an antagonism between the

organisation of production in the individual workshop and the anarchy of production in society generally." (*Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, p. 59.)

The argument then proceeds along a somewhat turgid course, during which some of the more obvious objections to planning are disposed of; in which it is stressed that all large bureaucratic organisations tend to become woolly, inert, and rigid, but that such organisations are not found only in Government departments; and finally that the ends of peacetime are more varied and complex than those of war. Such a conclusion is, indeed, obvious, but no attempt is made to find out what these ends are. Yet they are not far to seek. The British people voted unmistakably in 1945 for peace and the independence of their country, for the re-equipment of industry, for a higher standard of life, including more food, houses, clothes, and schools. Such ends are attainable, given first a plan, and second unity and determination on the part of the people in the face of their enemies. But obviously there can be scant hope of a plan if the objectives of a plan are wrapped in semi-philosophic mystification.

Sir Oliver next deals with the problems of the relation between Government and business. He says, quite correctly: "The organisation required by central planning and control in peace has no chance of success if it is composed of masters and servants, of men acting with authority and men acting under authority" (p. 39). Yet the significance which he attaches to this statement and that which the working class would attach are soon shown to be widely different.

In the first place he considers that there must not be too much authority exercised by the Government on businessmen. In fact, as the extremely shrunken section on "control" in this lecture shows, he thinks there must be far fewer statistical returns, while for compulsion must be substituted agreement, "the long way round of democratic procedure." In the second place the method of voluntary discussion, of "two-way traffic," applies to the relationship between Government and business, and is not intended to apply to the workers. Indeed, the only reference to their existence is when, in order to lessen the burden on the Civil Service, the setting up of groups of industrialists is advocated, which, Sir Oliver suggests patronisingly, "would be strengthened if an academic economist and a trade unionist were also included" (p. 55).

This last refinement, along with a number of others, comes in the third and last lecture. But enough has been said to indicate the general thesis. There can, of course be no doubt of the overwhelming importance and urgency of an economic plan for Britain now. At the

same time, it is vitally important to be on guard against many self-styled "planners," especially those who claim to be non-political, and who regard capitalism as merely a term of abuse.

JOHN EAST

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