



1 *The primacy of practice*

The number one idea which is the precondition for all other ideas on “consciousness” is this: revolutionary class consciousness cannot be anything other than the *consciousness of strength*. A class which has little real strength cannot have much consciousness of strength — cannot have much “class-consciousness” at all. Conversely, a class which is materially strong has the possibility of being aware of its strength, the more so the stronger it really is. This is why “the class which is the dominant *material* force in society is at the same time its dominant *intellectual* force.”⁸ It is simply that the class-consciousness of a strong class must, by the very nature of things, prevail over the class-consciousness of a weaker one. To rule is to exercise material force. It is to be strong. The class-consciousness of a ruling class must always be stronger than that of an oppressed class for no other reason than that. The dominant ideas, as Marx puts it, “are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships, the dominant material relationships grasped as ideas, and thus of the relationships which make one class the ruling one; they are consequently the ideas of its dominance.”⁹ It is an *illusion* to imagine that it is the *ideas* which are the things which rule. What rules is a material force. The “strength” of this force’s ideas derives from that.

To say this is only to say that it is material social forces which determine consciousness, and *not* (except in contexts in which opposed material forces are delicately balanced) the other way around. To imagine that Marxist or revolutionary ideas obey completely different rules would be ludicrous. The laws are exactly the same. Marxist ideas cannot defeat bourgeois ideas any more than shadows can box with shadows. Revolutionary consciousness, like bourgeois consciousness, can only be the consciousness of *material* dominance, *material* strength in one social domain or another. There is no difference on that score. The difference is the class difference itself, with all the implications of that difference. Bourgeois ideology expresses the power of the bourgeoisie, revolutionary Marxist consciousness — to the extent that it is revolutionary in its practical forms — expresses the power of the working class.

The history of the labour movement can provide almost endless examples of how *practical* struggles have transformed consciousness. When a group of previously backward workers become involved in strike action, their consciousness usually becomes transformed almost overnight. The strike situation means that suddenly, the workers’ former particularist, individual or sectional standpoints can be abandoned: each striker can identify with the power of the strike as a whole. Whenever this has happened, “ideas” have changed *not* because anyone has come along and put new ideas into the strikers’ heads. The crucial fact is that the strikers, while they are on strike, can experience their collective *strength*.

If the strike itself is only a localised or sectional one, the transformation of consciousness, however considerable, may leave a mass of bourgeois prejudices accumulated during previous experiences intact. But if the strike is protracted and very powerful, if it is of national dimensions, if it becomes supported by the rest of the labour movement both nationally and (perhaps) internationally, and if the ruling class feels that its ability to rule is at stake, then that can change. Unless there are factors intervening to prevent the workers from *experiencing* their collective strength (and to some extent there always will be), a revolutionising of consciousness will occur. More and more, the workers involved will be able to adopt the standpoint of the wider movement from which their strength derives. If this happens, then the workers will begin to feel the *need* for different kinds of information, different kinds of theory, different kinds of ideas. Reactionary daily newspapers which in a previous period had seemed to the workers to be disseminating the “facts” will be torn up in disgust; the newspapers or leaflets of the left or (perhaps) revolutionary left will seem for the first time, possibly, to be “telling the truth”.

In this case, it won’t have been the leaflets of the left which came along and changed the workers’ ideas: their theoretical *needs* will have changed because of their discovery of their collective strength. Left-wing literature can never produce what isn’t there. If the real strength and unity exists,

then the literature may be able to assist in bringing consciousness into line with this new reality. It may even help "crystallise" the new consciousness, preserving it for a period (in the heads of the more advanced workers) even into the future when circumstances may have changed for the worse. But that is all. Workers who really are weak will feel weak. They will feel that they need literature of a non-revolutionary kind: literature which expresses the prejudices, sectional rivalries, feelings of insecurity and so on of any divided group of workers.

But to say that actual strength produces the consciousness of strength is to assume one thing: that consciousness is permitted to keep pace with reality. In actual fact, an immense number of factors intervene to *retard* consciousness. While a strike is in progress, *information* is needed by the strikers. Sufficient information is always difficult to obtain. The employers invariably try to withhold from the strikers as much information as possible, particularly in attempts to convey to the workers the impression that they are weaker than they really are. A strong strike leadership must combat this. The strikers in one locality must have access to reliable information as to how the strike is proceeding in other localities. They must know how much support they are getting from other unions, how hard the strike is biting, how the employers are suffering or reacting, what divisions there are among the employers — and so on and so forth. There is always a thirst for such information. And such information is power. The power has to be real in the first place — if the situation is disastrous, then even the most accurate information about it won't alter the fact. But assuming the strength to be real, then the most vital precondition for the reproduction of this strength is that the information through which it can be experienced collectively should not be obstructed.

This is not to say that reactionary forms of consciousness are simply a product of "poor information". On the contrary, bourgeois consciousness in the working class is overwhelmingly a consciousness of "reality", of *actual* weakness, *actual* divisions and contradictions (social, sexual, economic etc. etc.) within the lives and everyday experiences of the workers themselves. Nevertheless, when (or to the extent that) the workers are *really* strong, their most pressing need is to become fully aware of this strength before it is too late and conditions have changed. If they remain unaware, their consciousness will remain that of a previous period rather than of the present. There will be a lag of consciousness behind reality. It is under these conditions that reliable, convincing, tangible evidence of the workers' own strength becomes the most vital

element in their actual strength itself.

When a strike or class-confrontation situation has reached the point of challenging the entire power of the capitalist class, the amounts and kinds of "information" required suddenly begin expanding at an explosively accelerating rate. At this point, even the most advanced workers will tend to feel uncertain as to what the future might hold. Should we go the whole way, even if it means bankrupting the capitalist economic system entirely? From where, then, would we get our wages? Could we really organise production successfully ourselves? Would the scientists and technologists necessary be with us? And how would we cope with the international situation? What strength have we abroad? Can our international trade union links be relied upon? Supposing we did take over in this country, would we still be able to trade with Europe, America and the rest of the world? Or would we have to take on the entire world capitalist system? Have we the strength to be able to challenge the International Monetary Fund, the Common Market, NATO and so on? And what about the military implications? Would the Soviet Union support us or oppose us? What about the so-called "Third World"? If we took over in Britain, would we find the peoples of Russia, Eastern Europe and the "Third World" supporting us, even, perhaps, against their own governments and rulers? Or would we be quickly isolated from all sides? Aren't the risks too great to contemplate? Wouldn't it be better to stay with what we know, and reach some accommodation with our own ruling class, where at least we are on territory we partly understand?

Without sufficient information of *this* sort, *any* leading layer of trade union militants who have reached a social crisis posing the question of power will begin to back down. Information as to the strength of the movement is required which utterly transcends the normal bounds of trade union struggle. What workers need then is information concerning their national and international strength, their productive strength and capacity to plan the economy, their ability to reorganise both production and consumption, to alter all the present bases of political, economic and even family life. In short, they need information concerning their existing strength to overthrow capitalism and change the world. And this information has got to be tangible, living, convincing information about *actual* allies, *concrete* organisations and individuals, *really existing* social movements of workers, of women, of peasants in distant countries etc. etc. — and not abstract theoretical prognostications. *This* information is what Marxism really is.

2 **The position of Leon Trotsky: ideology has NO independent power**

This is the Marxist position on the question of "consciousness" and its relationship to the class struggle. When Trotsky wrote of the three conditions necessary for a working-class revolution to succeed, the third and final condition being the "subjective factor", he meant by the "subjective factor" not some arbitrary intervention of unexplained, disembodied "ideas" with mysterious power of their own. He meant the workers' own consciousness of — and hence their ability to apply — their own *existing* strength. The working class must

not only have real power, he wrote, "but must be conscious of its power and must be able to apply this power".¹⁰ He did *not* have the position that ideology is itself one of the forms of material force operating in the social world. It is *not* that there are various kinds of material forces operating in any society at various levels — economic forces, social forces, military or physical repressive forces and, finally, an additional kind of force called "consciousness". Consciousness has no independent force. It cannot combat military force, economic force or

any other kind of force. It cannot even resist or influence these forces to any degree. Neither can one kind of consciousness overthrow or combat another kind. To describe consciousness as doing any of these things would be as absurd as to describe *information* as doing any of these things.

The point is simply that social classes and groups of various kinds act on the basis of (1) their objectively-given strengths or capacities for action and (2) the information which they receive concerning these capacities and strengths. For the members of an oppressed class, the question whether or not to resist (or *how much* to resist) is always a difficult one. The only really relevant information helping the oppressed to reach a decision concerns the *degree of success which is likely in the event of resistance*. Is victory likely or not? That is the crucial issue, around which all others will revolve. Where workers feel weak, divided or for other reasons unlikely to succeed, the decisions reached will always bend in the direction of caution. In cases where the bourgeoisie is extremely wealthy and strong, the workers may hardly even realise that they are being oppressed — particularly if, as individuals, they are being privileged in various ways. On the other hand, if the bourgeoisie is economically bankrupt while the working class is united and strong, it is still necessary for the workers to *know how strong they are if their strength is to*

be realised to the full. When events are moving quickly and the strength of the workers, while immense, has only recently, suddenly, made its appearance felt, there can be a tremendous lag of consciousness behind reality. It is in *these* kinds of contexts that Trotsky stresses the extreme importance of "the subjective factor". As he puts it:

"The political relationship of forces is determined not solely by the objective factors (the role in the productive process, numerical strength etc.) but by subjective factors: the *consciousness of strength* is the most important element of *actual strength*."¹¹

Consciousness of strength, then, is the most important element of actual strength as far as the working class is concerned. Unlike the bourgeoisie, the working class cannot rule to any degree as an international force unconsciously. It can be strong unconsciously, it can begin to paralyse and disintegrate bourgeois society more or less without knowing it — and, for brief moments, it can even in effect bring state power into its hands and dominate society without knowing that it is doing so. But to definitively seize power, hold power or wield it internationally, the correspondence between "consciousness" and "being" must be restored. Unless that is done, the real power itself will be lost before very long.

3 Defeating reformism: more than a propaganda task

Consequently, to be revolutionary, a leadership of the working class must always be simultaneously doing two things:

- (1) It must be combining or aggregating together the real forces of the working class, in this way building up real strength;
- (2) It must be continually acting as a medium through which workers can obtain the information which they need concerning how strong they actually are.

On both counts, reformist leaders do the opposite. Their success in reproducing bourgeois or reformist ideology in the working class does not in any way stem from any theoretical or ideological skills. Their success stems from their *practical* behaviour. It is not that the reformist leaders somehow manage to "impose" their "reformist ideology" on the workers by making speeches, appearing on television and so on. What these leaders do is:

- (1) They reproduce the *actual* weakness of workers as much as they can (within limits, of course). That is, they use their positions for purposes of *practical* bureaucratic obstruction (refusing to back strikes, making sure that different industrial actions are timed so as to be out of phase with each other etc. etc.).
- (2) As the workers are in *practice* made to feel divided and weak by such obstruction, the reformist leaders reinforce the resultant *consciousness of weakness* by assisting the bourgeoisie in withholding information which might have the opposite effect. The result is for workers not only to *be* weak, but also to *feel* weak, and consequently to feel the need for such "ideas" as give expression to their

feelings of weakness — i.e. reformist, reactionary ideas. As long as this process is kept up, revolutionary ideas won't have much effect on the working class, no matter how "scientific" or "accurate" they are.

Reformist ideology is a form of bourgeois ideology. It is not produced by the brains of reformist leaders and then transmitted to the workers from outside. It is produced in-workers by their everyday experiences of trying to make a living and organize their lives (economically, socially, sexually etc. etc.) under capitalism. It is reproduced constantly, day in, day out, within the very pores of any bourgeois society to the extent that bourgeois power prevails. The role of the reformist leaders in all this is vital but by no means primarily ideological. The reformist leaders' role is essentially *practical*. By moving "left" whenever the workers move into action, they keep effective bureaucratic control over the organizations of the labour movement, producing at such times a consciousness of a *certain* strength in the working class as a result but always ensuring that this remains "within bounds". The *ideas* of the working class are in this way kept under control not by *ideas* but by *practical* means. By preventing the working class from moving in unison or gathering together its real forces, the reformist leaders ensure that the consciousness of the class remains a consciousness of weakness, of dependence on others, and of disunity. In other words, by *practical* means, these leaders ensure — or attempt to ensure — that the consciousness of the working class does not become revolutionary. The relations are quite the reverse of those imagined by "Marxists" of a certain sort, who think that the more the reformists betray, the more they will expose themselves in the eyes of the working class. On the contrary, the more the reformist leaders are *allowed* to betray, the weaker the working class will be. The

weaker the working class is, the more it will feel dependent upon the favours of employers or "leaders" for improvements in its living conditions, and the more immune it will appear to be to revolutionary ideas. The more the reformists are *allowed* to betray, the more easily will these reformists betray the working class movement in the future.

This means that there can be no "struggle against reformist consciousness" in the working class which isn't itself just as practical a struggle as that of the reformist leaders themselves. The reformist leaders must be deprived of the power to betray. A group of Marxists with supposedly "revolutionary consciousness" cannot hope to "go to the workers" and hope that this "consciousness" of theirs will somehow "stick". It won't. To change workers' consciousness, it is necessary to undermine the *practical* work of the reformist leaders, and — to the extent that this is possible — to do so from the *positions of control which are occupied by these reformists*.

The reformists, where they are strong, have occupied the points of intersection between one group of workers and another, between one union and another and (in Britain)

between the unions generally and their political expression, the Labour Party. The efforts to discover strength and unity which are made by the working class in periods of upswing are frustrated by the reformist leaders because these points of intersection are, to a greater or lesser extent, blocked off. One group of workers strikes, while all the others are forced to wait and see what happens. If the first group have by this means been successfully isolated and defeated, there is no need for any particular skill on the reformists' part in spelling out the "lessons" for the other workers. The demoralizing, weakening, discouraging "lesson" is there for all to see in the *practical* situation which has been brought about. All this can't be changed by disembodied "consciousness": it can only be changed by advanced workers *consciously* but *practically* — i.e. to a large extent *organizationally* — undermining the reformists' abilities to betray, to manoeuvre, to sectionalize struggles and so on. Where the reformists divide forces, we must try to get in and unite them; where the reformists withhold information, we must provide it; where the reformists try to keep (in Britain) the "industrial" and the "political" wings of our combined labour movement from intermeshing too closely, we must bind them together as tightly as we can.

4 Marxism and Science

Revolutionary consciousness, if it is revolutionary consciousness, cannot be anything other than the consciousness which we have, as workers and as socialists, of our power to unite our forces nationally and internationally and to change the world. It is possible to formulate this consciousness in all sorts of ways, and — where the information to be retrieved has been particularly inaccessible — some of the ways may be very "difficult" and theoretical. Gaining an awareness of how strong we are *may* require *some* of us to read the whole of *Capital* three times before going on to an analysis of the economic crisis of capitalism today. If this helps us to understand the post-1974 world recession, the contradictions, and hence the relative powerlessness of our capitalist class opponents, so that we can understand all the better how powerful our side in the class struggle really is or could be, then reading *Capital* will be invaluable. Through a detailed economic analysis of the present state of the world recession and crisis, we may be able to experience more clearly just what the ultimate impotence of Capital is, and just what world-changing productive power *our* class and *our* movement possesses within itself. And we may be able to communicate this sense of power and this information to others in the movement, using simpler language, perhaps, than Marx did, but expressing the same ideas. But on the other hand if reading *Capital* does not help us to understand *our* power, then we might as well not read it. It won't mean anything. The "consciousness" which will have entered our heads in that case won't be revolutionary consciousness. It will just be some form of academic erudition — a fringe component of bourgeois ideology — not giving conscious expression to any material revolutionary force at all.

But what about "theory"? What about "revolutionary consciousness"? What about Marxism as a form of science?

Isn't all that a *precondition* of any practical struggle in the movement? And isn't it a gross-oversimplification to define workers' revolutionary consciousness "simply" as the consciousness which they may have of their own strength? Didn't Lenin himself say that revolutionary consciousness has to be brought to the workers from outside, from other classes, and particularly from the educated representatives of the petit-bourgeoisie?

Arguments along these lines may seem to be valid objections to the "crude" and "simple" (perhaps even "vulgar materialist" in the eyes of some) positions on consciousness held by Trotsky and presented here. But in fact, if we take up these objections one by one, and concede fully the truth which they contain, we can see that they don't so much weaken as strengthen our positions — which in fact don't so much minimize the importance of theory as make it clear exactly why theory has the vital importance which it has.

First, science. Science is a form of information. But information about what? It may seem that the natural sciences consist of information about "objective" nature. But in reality, this is not quite true. The natural sciences are objective, but only because they express a real relationship between nature and the human species, a relationship of a technological and practical as well as mental kind. The human species as it exists on this planet is a perfectly objective reality, and the ways in which it can harness the forces around it in its own interests are strictly limited by equally objective constraints rooted in the very nature of the natural universe itself. In essence, the natural sciences consist of information about our own capacities as a species to *harness, control or predict* the forces and events with which we are surrounded on this planet. The sciences are in this sense a consciousness of human power in

relation to nature. They too are a consciousness of strength — a consciousness of our ability to exert our efforts collectively upon nature in the service of our own requirements. "Science", writes Trotsky, "is knowledge that endows us with power."¹² Science can't produce this power unless it is present within our technological capacities already. It is not a separate power in addition to technological power, economic power or the other material forms of power of the human species. But it is information about what we can do. Rather than being a separate, additional form of power over and above industry or technology, science, as Marx himself put it, "is only one aspect, one form in which the development of the human productive forces, i.e. of wealth, appears."¹³

So all science is "consciousness of strength". It is always, at every stage of its development, dependent upon *actual* strength. Without technology, no science. Without strength, no consciousness of strength. But, on the other hand, the reverse relationship also holds, for it is quite possible for us to be technologically *able* to do something (e.g. to cure a disease) without knowing it. Where this is the case, actual strength remains dormant or merely potential strength until such time as the appropriate level of information is gained necessary to activate or trigger it. In that sense, the most important component of actual strength is the consciousness of strength. Science is an absolutely vital precondition for the development of the material forces of production.

Far from being merely an oversimplification, this view of science is itself necessary to any scientific view. It is necessary if we are to be able to discriminate effectively between ideology and science.

The historian of science, T.S. Kuhn, in his *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, has pointed out that a form of knowledge only acquires the status of "science" by demonstrating that it can produce very fundamental levels of *agreement* between thinkers which rival systems of knowledge cannot. He writes that at an early stage in his studies, he noticed how different the "social sciences" were from the natural sciences in this respect:

"I was struck by the number and extent of the overt disagreements between social scientists about the nature of legitimate scientific problems and methods. Both history and acquaintance made me doubt that practitioners of the natural sciences possess firmer or more permanent answers to such questions than their colleagues in social science. Yet, somehow, the practice of astronomy, physics, chemistry or biology normally fails to evoke the controversies over fundamentals that today often seem endemic among, say, psychologists or sociologists."¹⁴

Kuhn argues that in the social sciences, contradictions and disagreements are endemic; and that this reflects the fact that these sciences remain as yet in a pre-scientific developmental stage. Ideologically-opposed sociological theorists, for example, not only cannot reach agreement with each other on fundamental issues — they cannot even find a common language of rules and concepts through which to communicate with each other in a rational way. There is a point at which rational debate breaks down and the opposing schools seem to each other to be "breaking the rules" of debate or of logic, and resorting to illegitimate techniques of persuasion or even to force. In fact, it is not just that "the rules" are broken — it turns out that there are no rules. Each camp, in essence, feels

obliged to obey only its own rules. This is in stark contrast to the normal situation among, say, nuclear physicists, who, even when they do disagree with each other on fundamental issues, nevertheless possess a shared "language" — a set of agreed rules of procedure, concepts, traditions and ideas through which fruitful communication can be achieved.

Science is always conducted in a *scientific language*. Science, in other words, differs from mere *ad hoc* knowledge, technique or "common sense" by virtue of its abstract, symbolic, formal characteristics. From the standpoint of its form, science is a *symbolic system*. This is only another way of saying that science presupposes a community of thinkers who can communicate with each other even despite differences between them in their ordinary social lives, their natural languages, their political outlooks and so on. Like any symbolic system, a scientific language has meaning which exists only to the extent that *agreements* exist between the people who use it — agreements which may well only hold on the rarified intellectual levels to which the language applies. The figure "2" only means "two" because people agree that it does. It could equally well mean "nine".

All symbolic systems — including myths and ideologies — depend in this sense upon unity or agreement between human beings. But, in the case of myths or ideologies, the scope of agreement only extends so far. A point is reached at which disagreement arises — a disagreement rooted in social conflicts or contradictions. And when this happens, the need to reconcile *incompatible* statements or "meanings" leads to contradictions of an internal kind — within the symbolic system itself. The symbols begin to "mean" opposite and mutually incompatible things.

Myths and ideologies (as well as inconsistencies between the sciences or within a science) are expressions of social contradiction and division. This is the *essential* feature which distinguishes these forms of knowledge from consistent, unified science.

But why can science produce agreement whereas ideologies cannot? The answer is this: the "consciousness of strength" which *science* embodies is of a non-sectional, non-partisan kind. Wherever a scientist goes, whether he is in Russia or America, London or Calcutta, the same experiments will produce the same results. The same information will give him the same power. The laws of physics or of chemistry do not change. Scientists agree with each other *because* they are in a position to share a certain kind of power — power to predict an astronomical event, power to harness some natural force — with each other. Their *collective* experience that a given symbolic system or method of doing something "works" is what enables them to agree. The modern advances of science have today given us an immense power to harness natural forces of all kinds and have utterly transformed the world in which we live. The resulting power over natural forces is *our* power — the power of the human species as a whole at this stage of our evolution on this planet — and not merely the political power of one group of human beings over another. It is this intrinsic internationalism of science — the global, species-wide nature of the human power it represents — which is its peculiar strength.

Ideologies, too, represent various forms of "consciousness of strength". But in their case, the strength is merely sectional. A mythical or ideological system is a social group's

consciousness of its own power — or lack of power — in its social world. This power varies from place to place on the surface of the earth, and from one social class or group within any society to another. The power of one social group is the lack of power of another group opposed to it. Consequently, there can be no *agreement* between the groups concerned. Even where the two groups share a common natural language, such as English, they are at a deeper level unable to communicate. Ideological “languages” are mutually incompatible and non-translatable; their symbolic systems are full of ambivalencies and inconsistencies; they simply don’t “add up”. It was because Marx saw social contradictions as the source of mythological contradictions that he was able to insist that *only the removal of the social contradictions themselves could remove their expressions in ideology and science*. This is what Marx meant when he wrote:

“All social life is essentially .

“All social life is essentially *practical*. All the mysteries which lead theory towards mysticism find their rational solution in human practice and in the comprehension of this practice.”¹⁵

Or again:

“The resolution of *theoretical* contradictions is possible only through *practical* means, only through the practical energy of man. Their resolution is by no means, therefore, the task only of the understanding, but is a *real* task of life, a task which *philosophy* was unable to accomplish precisely because it saw there a *purely* theoretical problem.”¹⁶

Natural science has been scientific in a way in which social science has not because, in a class-divided world, human beings have possessed in relation to nature a *unity* and a *strength* which they have never been able to possess in relation to their own social world. If Marxism, nevertheless, is a true science, it is not because it stands above society or is not itself a social product. It is because the power which it represents is, like the power of all real science, a power of a kind which does not vary from place to place over the surface of the earth or from one section of society to another. Marxism is “consciousness of strength”, but it is not the consciousness of strength possessed by any local, national or sectional human interest group or class. Social science is now possible because there has come into existence within society for the first time — and as a direct result of scientific development itself — a “class” which is not really a class at all, which has no traditional status or vested interests to protect, no power to dispense patronage, no power to divide people from each other and therefore no power to distort science in any way. Obviously, in practice in the real world today, the working class may be relatively weak, relatively divided, its power being greater in one country than in another and so on and so forth. To the extent that this class is strong, however, it cuts across all this and is immediately and intrinsically international. By comparison with the normal definition of “class”, therefore, it is the *negation* of class. And *this* is the condition for a truly independent, truly autonomous, truly universal science of humankind — the existence of:

“... a class in civil society which is not a class of civil society, a class which is the dissolution of all classes, a sphere of society which has a universal character because its sufferings are universal, and which does not claim a *particular* redress because the wrong which is done to it is not a *particular* wrong but *wrong in general*. There must be formed a sphere of society which claims no *traditional*

status but only a *human* status, a sphere which is not opposed to particular consequences but is totally opposed to the assumptions of the ... particular system, a sphere finally which cannot emancipate itself without emancipating itself from all other spheres of society, without therefore emancipating all these other spheres, which is, in short, a *total loss* of humanity and which can only redeem itself by a *total redemption of humanity*.”¹⁷

Can science and politics mix?

To say that Marxism is “pure science” and not ideology at all may seem, to some Marxists, something of an exaggeration. Isn’t Marxism, after all, *political*? And doesn’t this distinguish it from “pure science”? Isn’t it in part ideology too?

What this argument forgets is that *all* science has always been politically revolutionary under certain circumstances or to a certain degree. Science of *any* kind is politically revolutionary to the extent that dominant class interests are or feel threatened by it. It is these interests which *give* a political aspect to science. When Copernicus insisted that the earth moved and was not the centre of the universe, it was the Catholic Church and the vested interests it represented which *made* this into a “politically subversive theory”. Something similar can be said about Darwin’s theory of evolution in the later part of the nineteenth century. Marxism is admittedly the most revolutionary expression of science there has ever been, but this doesn’t necessarily make it any the less scientific. It simply testifies to the degree to which the modern bourgeoisie is threatened by the development of science.

What the bourgeoisie really feels threatened by is the existence of a human social force more universal, more internationalist and more powerful in the long run than itself. It fears all *information* concerning its own ultimate impotence. Marxism is the *form* in which this information appears. Marxism is two things which in reality are one. It is, firstly, the information which the bourgeoisie (or its social scientists or intellectuals) most *fears to recognize* — namely, the information that its economic system and power are ultimately doomed. Secondly, it is the information which the working class most requires if it is to re-organize society — namely, the information that it has the strength and the productive potential to assume power on a global scale and change the world. Both forms of information are in reality the same, for the simple reason that *what is power for one class is impotence to another*.

Marxism is *not* political in the sense of representing any pre-existing narrow or sectional social interest. Marxism is, like all science, an expression of the interests of *production* generally — an expression of the *general productive forces of humanity*. If Marxism is information, then it is information concerning the actual power of labour. This is true of all science (all science is information concerning what labour and technology *can actually do*), but in the case of natural science, the *consciousness of power is not labour’s own*. The awareness of strength is kept separated from *labour*, from the human effort and muscle on which the strength itself depends. In the case of Marxism, this separation is for the first time broken down. Marxism is “subjective”. It is labour’s *own* consciousness of what it can do. And, since labour is the universal mode

of existence of the human species, this is not "class consciousness" in the usual sense of the term. It is not prejudice — not the consciousness of strength of any limited, sectional portion of humanity. It is not the self-awareness of a "class" in the sense of a particular vested interest. Although the real working class under capitalism is divided along lines of nationality, industry, status and so on, Marxism is not the awareness which these sectional groups have of their respective positions and strengths in opposition to each other. Marxism is the consciousness of strength of a force which has no pre-existent being for itself. Until it is *aware* of its international power, the international working class has no independent political existence or power. Marxism is the consciousness of strength of *this* force. It is a global force which was objectively produced by science (the scientific and industrial revolutions produced the working class), and it is a global force which can only exist for itself as a political power to the extent that it has gained a scientific understanding of its own strength. It is not a class so much as an anti-class. And it is this anti-class, anti-sectional, utterly internationalist basis of its existence which makes Marxism a genuine science like the rest of scientific development as a whole.

To the extent that the working class exists and is strong, Marxism ceases to be ideology and becomes science. To the extent that the class is weak, divided or non-existent, Marxism itself becomes riddled with contradictions and ceases to develop as science or as a revolutionary force. As science and as a force, Marxism has no independent existence. It is nothing other than the *actual* consciousness which the working class has of its own strength. All the rest is more or less empty formalities, slogans, dogma and ideology.

The need for subjectivity

Marxism can't be "purely objective" for the reasons discussed. It can't be the consciousness of working class strength as something external. Merely to *observe* the power of the working class won't make anyone a Marxist. After all, the bourgeoisie *observes* this power (however inaccurately) for much of the time, and tries to fight against it. Marxism has to be *subjective* and *active*. It has to be *our own* consciousness of strength as members of the working class and its political movement. We have to be able to *experience* our strength. And we can't experience strength without *exercising* it. For our consciousness to be Marxist in the sense discussed here, we must be a *practical* force.

Marx himself did *not* see it as science's task to analyse the *objective* world. On the contrary, he believed that the idea

that science did this was an illusion. Science, in Marx's view, was the consciousness of *our own strength* as scientists, as workers and as a species. If it was not that, it was not true science. In fact, Marx regarded it as the *chief defect* of bourgeois materialism that it looked on the world as if it were "objective" pure and simple:

"The chief defect of all previous materialism (including that of Feuerbach) is that things, reality, the sensible world, are conceived only in the form of *objects of observation*, but not as *human sense activity* not as *practical activity*, not subjectively."¹⁸

Science is knowledge of *our* practical powers as a world-changing, labouring, species. Marxism is the knowledge of *our* strength as scientists, and as members of the working class. To understand our strength, we have to *be* strong. And the conditions for "being strong" are not purely objective. They include our own capacity for *discipline*, for achieving *unity* with the wider movement of which we are a part, and for *organizing* the forces which we have.

All this means is that we can't be conscious of our strength unless we really *are* strong. Marx wrote that "the real intellectual wealth of the individual depends entirely on the wealth of his real connections."¹⁹ We must have *real* social links, *real* links with each other as workers and socialists, *real* links with the oppressed throughout the world, if we are to experience these links in consciousness. But then this takes us to a whole series of "organizational" and "tactical" questions — to the necessity to communicate, to break down sectarian barriers, to form relationships of solidarity and discipline between various sections of the workers' movement, to form the broadest possible united front of all revolutionary and working class organizations nationally and internationally. These things cannot be separated from the "development of consciousness": they are the means by which we develop our *real strength*, without which our "consciousness of strength" cannot properly form in our heads. The gaining of revolutionary consciousness is not something which can be done "first", *before* stepping out with this consciousness into the real world of practical struggles. It cannot take place outside of the forging of a united front against fascism and capitalism. For it is only by increasing our *real joint* power that we can become aware of what strength we really have. And it is only on this basis of *real information* giving us confidence and strength that we can begin adequately to give expression to this strength in "consciousness" — in the form of books, leaflets, speeches and other means of *disseminating collective experience, collective information*. We can't produce the information from nowhere — it has to be there before we can communicate it.

5 Where do revolutionary ideas come from?

Again and again the revolutionary movement has tried to deal with the question whether "revolutionary consciousness" is brought to the workers from outside the field of their own struggles or from the experience of these struggles themselves. The early formulation of Lenin is well-known — it gets quoted time and time again by middle-class intellectuals who believe

that their own particular theories have to be taught to the working class if the latter are to be able to achieve anything at all. Lenin writes:

"The history of all countries shows that the working class, exclusively by its own efforts, is able to develop only trade-union consciousness, i.e., the

conviction that it is necessary to combine in unions, fight the employers, and strive to compel the government to pass the necessary labour legislation, etc. The theory of socialism, however, grew out of the philosophic, historical, and economic theories elaborated by educated representatives of the propertied classes, by intellectuals. By their status, the founders of modern scientific socialism, Marx and Engels, themselves belonged to the bourgeois intelligentsia. In the very same way, in Russia, the theoretical doctrine of Social-Democracy arose altogether independently of the spontaneous growth of the working class movement; it arose as a natural and inevitable outcome of the development of thought among the revolutionary intelligentsia."²⁰

Now, there is obviously, *some* truth in this. But those who cite Lenin so enthusiastically in this respect forget that in November, 1905, Lenin wrote rather differently:

"The working class is instinctively, spontaneously Social-Democratic, and more than ten years of work put in by Social-Democracy has done a great deal to transform this spontaneity into consciousness."²¹

In the same article, Lenin wrote that in the previous period he had been concerned to emphasize theory, to draw sharp lines of demarcation and to distance the Social Democratic (i.e. at that time revolutionary socialist) movement from mere immersion in "spontaneity" and trade unionism. He had had to "bend the bow" sharply in one direction because the Mensheviks and others had bent it in the other. Now, in 1905, when *practical* leadership above all was required, it was necessary to emphasize theoretical demarcations less sharply, to stress the need for *unity* with the Mensheviks and others *despite* theoretical differences, relying on the mass pressure from the workers themselves to help bring the "leaders" to their senses:

"The workers have lost almost all hope that the Party 'chiefs' will unite of themselves . . . No wonder that the workers are beginning to show signs of impatience. No wonder 'A Worker, One of Many', who wrote on unity in *Iskra* and in a pamphlet published by the 'Majority' . . . has at last threatened the Social-Democratic intelligentsia with a 'fist from below' . . .

. . . it is now possible not only to *urge* unity, not only to obtain *promises* to unite, but actually to *unite* — by a simple decision of the Majority of organized workers in both factions . . .

Join the Party organizations in huge numbers! Turn our Fourth Congress and the Second Menshevik Conference into a grand and imposing Congress of Social-Democratic workers. Join with us in settling this practical question of fusion . . . We have 'theorized' for so long (sometimes — why not admit it? — to no use) in the unhealthy atmosphere of political exile, that it will really not be amiss if we now 'bend the bow' slightly, a little, just a little, 'the other way' and put practice a little more in the forefront."²²

All of this might seem to show that quoting Lenin is not much use. He emphasized different things at different times, so that it is necessary always to be fully aware of the *context* in which he was writing. In actual fact, it is above all from a study of Lenin's *practical* application of theory that lessons can be learned. And it has to be said that very often (on this

issue as on the question of the "democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry"), Lenin's actual theoretical formulations were not particularly clear or complete in and of themselves.

Lenin certainly did understand that unity, strength, confidence and working class *practice* were *preconditions* for the development of revolutionary consciousness in the working class. But the actual formulation: "revolutionary consciousness is consciousness of strength" was never made explicit. If it had been, Lenin's discussion of the role of bourgeois intellectuals could have been presented in a much less one-sided way.

If we take another passage from *What Is To Be Done?*, we can find a hint which takes us to the solution of the problem:

"Class political consciousness can be brought to the workers *only from without*, that is, only from outside the economic struggle, from outside the sphere of relations between workers and employers. The sphere from which alone it is possible to obtain this knowledge is the sphere of relationships of *all* classes. For that reason, the reply to the question as to what must be done to bring political knowledge to the workers cannot be merely the answer with which, in the majority of cases, the practical workers, especially those inclined towards Economism, mostly content themselves, namely: 'To go among the workers'. To bring political knowledge to the *workers* the Social-Democrats must *go among all classes of the population*; they must dispatch units of their army *in all directions*."²³

The working class can only become aware of its own generalized (i.e. national and international) strength in one way: by seeing how this strength is responded to (feared, resisted, supported etc.) by *all* other classes in society. In this sense, the "strength" of the working class is *not* something which exists merely "in" the working class itself. It is something which is felt by and expressed in the consciousness and responses of society as a whole. It may even be said that the strength of the working class is an *aspect* of the capitalist class itself — namely, its relative or absolute *powerlessness*.

How can one class become aware of its own strength *except* in the mirror provided by the fears, anxieties and forebodings of the class which stands opposed to it? Or how can it experience this strength *except* in the course of experiencing the support from other social groups it receives? As far as his words about bourgeois thinkers are concerned, Lenin is right: *of course* revolutionary consciousness is derived in crucial respects through them! But it is not a matter of workers having to be taught socialism by bourgeois intellectuals. What *is* necessary is that the working class should fight for its own demands, prove itself a more or less irresistible obstacle to ruling class aims, and by doing so produce an internal crisis of consciousness within the bourgeoisie itself. The scale of the bourgeois crisis of consciousness is the crucial thing. It is only when the bourgeoisie feels nationally and internationally *impotent* that its intellectuals will begin to desert it. And it is only when the intelligentsia of the bourgeoisie deserts its own class — knowing full well "from the inside" the *impotence* of this class — that the working class itself can begin to receive the *inside information* concerning its own strength which it needs. All forms of Marxist "theory" developed by bourgeois

intellectuals consist — if they consist of anything useful at all — of *this* kind of information.

What takes place is a transfer of information from one class to another. Bourgeois intellectuals who have been in a position to appreciate the generalized crisis of their own class of origin abandon their past, carrying with them the inside secrets of the bourgeoisie. These intellectuals are confident of one thing: the absolute internal crisis, bankruptcy and impotence of their own former class. Taken to a certain point, this awareness of impotence turns into its opposite — into an awareness of the world-changing *strength* of the major social forces which stand opposed to the bourgeoisie. When this *awareness of strength* contributes in turn to the *actual strength* of the working class, a new *practical* form of revolutionary consciousness has emerged. This can only happen at a relatively advanced stage of the class struggle.

The process is described by Marx and Engels in the *Communist Manifesto*:

"Finally, in times when the class struggle nears the decisive hour, the process of dissolution going on within the ruling class, in fact within the whole range of old society, assumes such a violent, glaring character, that a small section of the ruling class cuts itself adrift, and joins the revolutionary class, the class that holds the future in its hands. Just as, therefore, at an earlier period, a section of the nobility went over to the bourgeoisie, so now a proportion of the bourgeoisie goes over to the proletariat, and in particular, a portion of the bourgeois ideologists, who have raised themselves to the level of comprehending theoretically the historical movement as a whole."²⁴

The structure of scientific revolutions

The bourgeoisie itself experiences revolutionary Marxist consciousness first and foremost as a consciousness of its own political impotence. The previous ideological supremacy of the bourgeoisie — the richness of its theoretical accomplishments, the development of its art, its literature, its science and its international self-awareness — ensures that this consciousness of impotence assumes an extremely complex and developed form. The more developed the bourgeoisie in the preceding period, the more developed will be the resultant consciousness produced.

It is not at all a question simply of individual capitalists feeling helpless in relation to the power of organised labour. That is the *root* factor at work, but as this feeling of helplessness percolates through the whole of "official" society, its form becomes more and more intricate and subtle. Ideologists who formerly might have been confident of the strength of their philosophical systems begin to feel plagued with doubts. In various fields of knowledge or science, specialists who previously were able to find some measure of intellectual agreement among themselves fall out and find that they are hardly speaking the same language to each other any more. Artists, writers, poets, journalists and others become overcome by feelings of emptiness and meaninglessness in their personal lives, in politics and in existence generally, and these feelings

are given literary expression in various forms. Within the bourgeois family, relations between the generations, between parents and children and between men and women become strained as the old structures of authority no longer command obedience or respect. Throughout the old ideological system, in other words, things no longer "add up" — all the old constraints and assumptions seem fragmented, disjointed, more or less meaningless and overwhelmingly complex.

As more and more basic moral and philosophical assumptions are called into question by bourgeois ideologists seeking answers to their own problems, an immense churning over of all fields of knowledge takes place. The ideologists or thinkers most deeply affected by this process become more and more dissatisfied with the old prevailing systems of thought, and more and more alienated from those *social* and *political* forces which still insist on clinging to these old forms. Factors of personal oppression, sexual oppression, psychological alienation and so on all play their part. But it is in the realm of science that these and other factors exercise their most decisive role. From time to time, glimpses of a new way of "adding up" the available fragments of knowledge are caught. Intimations of new ways of discovering order, internal consistency and agreement between scientists are experienced in various scientific fields. As the most conservative social and political forces turn out to be the ones most hostile to the new intellectual insights discovered, it happens that the intellectuals most capable of bringing order once again into various fields of knowledge become treated as political radicals. The new thinkers become radicalised as a result, seeking support from those social forces most feared by the conservative elements. The organised power of the working class in this way — very indirectly — begins to find expression in what looks like an independent intellectual power expressing itself in the first instance within the bourgeoisie. But in actual fact, the strength of the new forms of science as these take hold of the bourgeois intelligentsia is not an independent power at all. It is the strength of the working class, as this is reflected within the bourgeoisie.

A point is arrived at when a section of the bourgeois intelligentsia in a number of related and central scientific fields finds that it can solve the intellectual problems facing it in a simple, intellectually satisfying, intellectually powerful way — and in a way which, therefore, produces a high level of collective social agreement within the relevant scientific communities themselves. The new ways of ordering the available information seem convincing. The "power" of the concepts and theories consists in their ability to *reduce the mental effort necessary to grasp the relevant information*. The progress of "theory" is in this way measured by an elimination of "theory" — an elimination of theoretical preoccupations and of theoretical efforts which have now been made redundant by the new simpler, more efficient ways of ordering information in the brain.

The intellectuals responsible for such a "scientific revolution" (for this is what is being discussed) are and must be those who have gone furthest not only in criticism of the old ways of thought but also in repudiating the political forces which lay behind them. It was not their politics, however, which brought them to the new forms of thought. It was their intellectualised former consciousness of crisis — combined with a determination at all costs to overcome this crisis —

which led to the transformation of their politics. It was their search for intellectual integrity and scientific consistency which brought them towards the camp of the working class. It was this process which Engels had in mind when he wrote: "... the more ruthlessly and disinterestedly science proceeds, the more it finds itself in harmony with the interests of the workers."²⁵ And the more fully this scientific movement unfolds, the more support is drained away from the ideological allies of the bourgeoisie, the more information becomes available to the working class and the more confident this class becomes in its own strength.

The working class in this way becomes conscious of its power *through* science. The "revolutionary scientists" themselves bring the necessary information to the revolutionary class by progressively revealing that which the bourgeoisie itself knows or senses about its own internal impotence. But whereas, within the bourgeoisie, this knowledge of impotence (or knowledge of crisis) is fragmented, hidden from general view, distributed among a thousand specialised fields of knowledge and therefore not explicitly acknowledged even by the bourgeoisie as a whole itself, the new science brings everything together, breaks down the walls between the specialised disciplines, shows how the total picture fits together and in this way makes it harder and harder even for the ruling class to hide its condition from itself. This was why Marx wrote *Capital* in a language which, initially, was aimed as much at bourgeois economists and intellectuals as at the working

class. The broader masses of the working class gain class-consciousness by reflection, by responding to the crisis which *their* movement and strength creates in the bourgeoisie. It is necessary to search through the whole of the inner consciousness of the bourgeoisie, to bring its inner contradictions into the light of day, to show to the bourgeoisie its own ultimate historical bankruptcy and fate. For just as the most vital element of actual strength is the consciousness of strength, so, conversely, the most annihilating and overpowering element in actual impotence -- once this is sufficiently real -- is the full conscious recognition of it. To be aware of one's impotence is to be broken in will. The information has to be there in the first place -- the bourgeoisie must genuinely be in a corner from which there is no apparent escape. But once this is the case, then the more the thinkers and writers of the bourgeoisie can be made to see the facts which are staring them in the face, the more crushing will these facts become. There is nothing quite so paralysing as the conviction that there is no hope; nothing quite so fearful as fear itself. The task, then, for Marxists, is to bring out the fear into the light of day. It is a matter of making explicit what would otherwise remain implicit, crystallising into visible and unmistakeable form the otherwise confused and veiled collective impressions, experiences and thoughts of society as a whole. As Marx wrote:

"The reform of consciousness consists solely in letting the world perceive its own consciousness by awakening it from dreaming about itself, in explaining to it its own actions."²⁶

6 The origins of Marxist theory: Germany, 1844-1848

Marxist theory can be traced back to certain ideas which began to form in the brain of a young student revolutionary, Karl Marx, in Germany some time around the year 1844. In this section, an attempt will be made -- extremely schematically and briefly -- to account sociologically for the appearance of these ideas. This is *not* an account of the development of European or German philosophical or scientific thought in the early nineteenth century. Rousseau, Hegel, Feuerbach and other thinkers will not even be mentioned. The aim here is to do something different within the limited space available, namely, to account for the appearance of "communism" as *consciousness of the strength of the working class*. The preceding sections will have made it clear that this could not have happened without an immense turning inside out of bourgeois self-consciousness in all kinds of fields -- religious, philosophical, scientific, literary and so on. But for present purposes it will suffice if this is taken as understood while the *barest essentials* of the process taking place in Germany in the 1840s are sketched from a materialist standpoint.

In 1844, the German bourgeoisie -- whose great chance to accomplish its bourgeois national democratic revolution had been missed in 1520-25 (the Peasants' Revolt) and never returned -- was beginning to feel that a new opportunity for revolution was soon to present itself. Lutheranism had been the European religion of middle-class impotence *par excellence*, having crystallised out of the despair in themselves and the fear of revolt which had led Luther -- Germany's failed poten-

tial Cromwell -- to betray his peasant followers and run for the protection of the princes of northern Germany in 1525. This betrayal had sealed the fate of Germany for centuries, ensuring its fragmentation into a multitude of petty kingdoms, duchies and principalities, and condemning its economy and culture to a backwardness in some ways resembling the condition of Russia under the Tsars. But in the early 1840s, after the old Germany had been rocked to its foundations by the impact of the French Revolution, Germany's middle classes were dreaming again. The idea of revolution was in the air.

Lutheran protestantism had for some years been coming under a series of intellectual attacks (partly because political opposition, being censored, was obliged to express itself in religious guise), and most of the towns were dominated by professional and intellectual middle classes who espoused more or less liberal ideas. But though they believed very much in the power of ideas, these middle classes were in material terms extremely weak. They were not powerful industrial capitalists (these hardly yet existed as an independent political force) but lawyers, professional people, students, small traders, shopkeepers and so forth. Such was the German "bourgeoisie". It differed from its French counterpart of 1789 in the most vital of respects. Instead of being the mighty social spearhead of anti-feudal revolt, it was the reverse. For Marx and Engels, the most decisive, obvious and inescapable characteristic of this class was its social and political *impotence*. In the writings of Marx and Engels on the subject, the term "impotence" appears

in this context again and again. While Germany's middle classes initially hoped for a revolution which would unite Germany under their own hegemony at the expense of the dukes, kings and princes, they were filled with fears and forebodings as to what such a revolution might do to their own minimal positions and power. Germany's bourgeoisie feared revolution as much as — and ultimately more than — it wanted it. This was because it sensed in advance that any de-stabilisation of the prevailing power-structures might begin to unleash peasant and proletarian revolutionary forces which it would be unable to control.

It was because of the social impotence of the bourgeoisie that the German working class — numerically small and unorganised — seemed to pose a threat out of all proportion to its actual strength. The mass of the working class was employed by small tradesmen in a manufacturing system which was a relic of the Middle Ages. There were a few modern industrial factory districts, but not many at all in comparison with Britain (or even France). Yet in 1844, when Silesian and Bohemian factory workers (weavers and printers) staged riots in protest against their working conditions, official "society" was thrown overnight into a state of panic by the spectre of "communism".

The workers' anger was directed not at the Government but at their own employers. Although the riots were cruelly and successfully suppressed, this meant that from now on, the bourgeoisie as a whole, for all its "revolutionary" yearnings, was afflicted by a fear of that "communism" which it knew would begin to erupt the moment the dominance of the feudal system of kings and princes was overthrown. The middle classes felt oppressed by their feudal rulers — but they also realised that they depended upon them for protection against the proletarian "mobs".

If the working class seemed strong in Germany in the years following 1844, it was primarily because those dominating it — feudal rulers on the one hand, the middle classes on the other — were in momentary conflict with each other. But this really did make the working class momentarily strong (and something similar applied throughout much of continental Europe). When Marx wrote in the *Communist Manifesto* in 1848, "... the bourgeois revolution in Germany will be but the prelude to an immediately following proletarian revolution"²⁷, he was not being particularly original or unexpected. In a sense, he was not even putting forward any special theory or prognosis of his own. The idea was in the air. Marx was only bringing into theoretical, conceptual form the worst fears of the bourgeoisie itself, fears which had haunted it particularly painfully since the revolts of the weavers and printers of 1844.

Was Marx's "Permanent Revolution" theory (for that is what it was) wrong? Actually, it was not wrong at all. The "idea" to which Marx gave expression was the description of a "prediction" permeating the political psychology of the German bourgeoisie. This bourgeoisie knew that if it won its own revolution, it would prove impotent in the face of the "mobs", impotent to defend itself against the "communist" chaos it would have unleashed. That was not just a "prediction". It was a social fact. It was the expression of an *objective* balance of forces. Because of that, the "prediction" determined the political behaviour of the German bourgeoisie. And for this reason, it cancelled itself out as a prediction. It was because the German bourgeoisie held semi-consciously the idea which Marx consciously expressed — because it feared that a

successful bourgeois revolution would only create the conditions for its own imminent communistic expropriation — that this particular scenario extinguished itself. During 1848, the bourgeoisie took fright and became paralysed, preferring the defeat of its own political and social revolution to a success which would have threatened its own economic privileges and rights.

It was in the period preceding this fiasco that the ideas of Marx and Engels took clear shape in their heads. The essence of these ideas was: *impotence of the bourgeoisie*. This did not have to be demonstrated practically in 1848. It was already clear long in advance. But to Marx and Engels, this impotence concealed within itself its own opposite: the almost fearful promised strength of the working class. This strength was not realised, and was not directly or materially embodied in organisational, political form. It was visible only by reflection in the mirror provided by the fears and phobias of official society and the bourgeoisie.

It was this paradox — the fact that the ruling political powers of Europe were everywhere denouncing "communism", while this same communism had yet to speak in its own name — which Marx and Engels set out to resolve in the *Communist Manifesto*, which began with the well-known lines, "A spectre is haunting Europe..."²⁸

Marx and Engels, as political thinkers, had been produced by the situation prevailing in Germany itself. The German bourgeoisie, aware of its own weakness, had long been draping itself in the colours of socialism.²⁹ This meant that, long before 1848, the whole "atmosphere" of impending revolution seemed socialistic or communistic already. This magnified the impression of bourgeois weakness, made the working class seem in some ways stronger than it really was, and created a relatively large bourgeois intelligentsia whose allegiances were already to some extent with the cause of communism and the working class. Marx and Engels were in one sense only the representatives of the extreme left wing of this radicalised bourgeois intelligentsia. On the one hand, they were acutely aware from the inside of the impotence and paralysis afflicting their own class of origin. On the other hand, more ruthlessly and consistently than any other section of the intelligentsia, they were determined not to allow this impotence to obstruct the progress of the revolutionary movement itself. The task, in their view, was not to play down the impotence or try to escape from it. It was to maximise this impotence by revealing it — to give courage to the peasant and worker revolutionary masses by revealing to them how much they were feared. The structure of German society's impotence could be made to feed on itself — to "dance to its own tune" — if it could recognise itself for what it was. Likewise, the strength of the working class could become self-reinforcing if only the workers knew how strong — and how feared — they were. The task was to make each class realise its real position in relation to the other classes, in order to bring out into conscious form the hidden structures of power and of impotence which were already there:

"The point is to describe the counter-pressure of all social spheres . . . The point is not to allow the Germans a moment of self-deceit or resignation. We must make the actual oppression more oppressive by making them conscious of it, and the insult even more insulting by publicizing it. We must describe every sphere of German society as the disgrace of German society, we must force these

petrified relationships to dance by playing their own tune to them! So as to give them courage, we must teach the people to be shocked by themselves!"³⁰

The way in which Marx and Engels set about realizing this simple programme turned out — over the decades which passed following the defeat of the revolutions of 1848 — to be extremely complicated. Understanding the impotence of the bourgeoisie involved:

- (1) Understanding the way in which bourgeois ideas were the mere images and products of changing underlying relationships of power as between the various classes in society;
- (2) Understanding the ultimately insoluble contradictions to which the development of the capitalist economy would lead;
- (3) Understanding the immense creative power of labour throughout the history of the human species, a power capable of transforming the earth but at present locked up in alienated form as Capital in opposition to living labour;
- (4) Understanding the fact that the interests of the two main contending classes are irreconcilably opposed, and that the ultimate victory of Labour over Capital is inevitable (even though this inevitability depends, for its realization, on being consciously understood and acted upon by the working class).

Of course, to list such elements of Marxism in this way does less than justice to the full complexity and richness of Marxist thought. The point which is being made, however, is that *all* aspects of Marxist thought can be seen as so many ways of releasing to the working class the information which the bourgeoisie most needs to withhold — the information that its (the bourgeoisie's) social and economic crises are insoluble and that its class-rule cannot be maintained.

Consciousness against reality

However, the general, abstract, timeless demonstration that "in the long term" the crises of capitalism are insoluble carries very little conviction in periods of prolonged economic upswing, boom or social stability. Marx's *Capital* demonstrated the ultimate historical bankruptcy of the capitalist system of production, yet in the years when Marx was writing it, and in the years immediately following its publication, this message was by no means superficially obvious or accessible to the "commonsense" of bourgeois "public opinion." Quite the contrary.

Although it is possible to define "revolutionary consciousness" as (so far as it is revolutionary) the consciousness which workers have of their own strength, this in itself says nothing about the time factor discussed earlier or about the lags between consciousness and social reality which are inevitable. What happens to "consciousness of strength" when the actual strength which first produces it subsequently ebbs away? What does "consciousness of strength" look like when it is actually quite "unrealistic" — when it is held on to *despite* immediately prevailing objective conditions, *despite* working-class political weakness in practical terms?

1848 was only a *momentary* and essentially *premature* glimpse of the social and political impotence of European bourgeois rule. It provided a brief vision of certain historical possibilities, but that was all. The failure of the 1848 revolutions opened the door to a new alliance between the ruling-class social forces which had previously been in conflict with each other. There emerged an alliance between Europe's middle classes on the one hand, and the most reactionary, semi-feudal forces of Church, landlords, princes, kings and the Russian tsar on the other. And on the basis of the new relative social stability thereby achieved a new period of bourgeois economic development and prosperity opened up.

Marxism now was no longer available to give expression to any immediate, obvious, directly-visible impotence of the bourgeoisie or corresponding strength of the working class. If Marx's (and Engels') conceptual forms continued to be preserved in their heads, it was now *despite* the immediately-prevailing realities of power, not because of them. The real situation, as Marx himself later described it was his *Inaugural Address to the Working Men's International*, was one of proletarian weakness, not strength:

'After the failure of the Revolutions of 1848, all party organizations and party journals of the working classes were, on the Continent, crushed by the iron hand of force, the most advanced sons of labour fled in despair to the Transatlantic Republic, and the short-lived dreams of emancipation vanished before an epoch of industrial fever, moral marasme, and political reaction. The defeat of the Continental working classes, partly owed to the diplomacy of the English Government, acting then as now in fraternal solidarity with the Cabinet of St. Petersburg, soon spread its contagious effects to this side of the Channel. While the rout of their Continental brethren unmanned the English working classes, and broke their faith in their own cause, it restored to the landlord and the money-lord their somewhat shaken confidence. They insolently withdrew concessions already advertised. The discoveries of new goldlands led to an immense exodus, leaving an irreparable void in the ranks of the British proletariat. Others of its formerly active members were caught by the temporary bribe of greater work and wages, and turned into 'political blacks'. All the efforts made at keeping up, or remodelling, the Chartist Movement, failed signally; the press organs of the working class died one by one of the apathy of the masses, and, in point of fact, never before seemed the English working class so thoroughly reconciled to a state of political nullity. If, then, there had been no solidarity of action between the British and the Continental working classes, there was, at all events, a solidarity of defeat.'³¹

It was this *real* weakness of the English working class, and absolutely and definitely *not* any peculiar sudden sophistication or intensification of the "ideological power" of the bourgeoisie, which changed the mood and the outlook of the workers' movement in Britain. The "strengthened ideology" of the British bourgeoisie merely expressed and registered the changed balance of class forces at a deeper level. Marx at no time in his life attributed the change in working class consciousness to the supposed independent "power of bourgeois ideas" but, on the contrary, fought against interpretations of this

kind more consistently and fiercely than anyone had ever done before. It was in this that the scientific strength of Marx's own ideas lay.

In the heads of Marx and Engels, then, from 1850 onwards, had been deposited forms of consciousness which were necessarily preserved (and even, in a sense, "rigidified") *in opposition* to change, *in opposition* to the newly-prevailing transformed realities of power. The increasing isolation of Marx and Engels (only partly reversed by the later growth of the European workers' movement, particularly in Germany) stemmed from this contradiction between reality and idea. No longer were ideas similar to their own being spontaneously generated in other individuals or movements in Europe or anywhere else. Essentially, the *conditions* for the generation of such ideas were no longer there. This meant that, no matter how cogently Marx or Engels argued, it was almost impossible for them to make themselves really understood. Marx and Engels were suffering the fate of all revolutionaries in periods of weakness and downturn.

Aware of these realities, Marx and Engels turned to theory. That is, they invested their lives more and more in grasping the *underlying* realities of capitalism at the expense of the *surface* realities — more and more in the *future* practice of the working class movement despite its *present*. Their

"consciousness of strength", far from diminishing, in a sense increased with the passing of the years. It became more and more an absolutely unshakable confidence, rooted in science, in the ultimate power of the working class cause. But the key word here is "ultimate." Marx's and Engels' "consciousness of strength" was no longer a consciousness of actual, tangible, present strength but of something much harder to grasp — a consciousness of the long-term, historical inevitability of the triumph of Labour over Capital. No longer able to draw on the direct political experience of bourgeois impotence or crisis, Marx sought out the *ultimate* impotence of Capital to be found in an exhaustive economic analysis revealing the laws of development of Capital's own internal contradictions. *Capital* was to *prove* the reality of that bourgeois impotence which could no longer be directly experienced or seen. This awareness of long-term bourgeois impotence, however was only in its *potential* a vehicle for the expression of revolutionary force. To the extent that present historical circumstances had torn theory and practice apart, the theory was unavoidably torn from its own life-giving roots. This would remain largely unalterable until such time as changed social and political circumstances somewhere in Europe (or the world) could once again fill the conceptual forms of Marxism with their proper living contents — with the *actual* strength and consciousness of strength of the working class in revolutionary struggle against capitalism.

7 The Russian re-enactment

Germany before 1848 (and particularly Prussia) presents many parallels with Russia before 1905. And Russia's 1905 revolution was very much like a repetition, on a higher level and on a grander scale, of what had happened in Germany over half a century earlier.

Without producing a detailed analysis here, it may be sufficient to note the most significant point. It was not until the *pre-revolutionary* period preceding 1905 in Russia that there existed once again, anywhere in Europe, the *kind* of social situation which, in the form it had taken in Germany just prior to 1848, had created Marx and Engels as political thinkers. Not until then did a real threat of "permanent revolution" (a bourgeois revolution immediately unleashing the forces of a proletarian one) present itself to any section of the European bourgeoisie. Not until then did there exist the necessary preconditions for the kind of "cultural revolution" which *must* unfold before a working class social revolution can begin to get under way.

The preconditions for such a "cultural revolution" have already been discussed. They are (1) a bourgeoisie which is philosophically, artistically and scientifically developed and self-aware and (2) a sense of absolute inner crisis and doom afflicting this bourgeoisie as a result of the obstacle presented to it by the organized strength of the working class. In Russia, in the period leading up to 1905, such conditions prevailed. Russia's middle classes were extremely "philosophical", self-aware, gripped with literary, artistic and scientific fashions

and ideas — and also extremely cruelly cut off from the power to act on these ideas or to participate fruitfully in the productive processes of society. Impotence always goes hand in hand with an exaggerated belief in the independent power of ideas, and Russia in this respect was very like Germany half a century before. To the young Trotsky, the impotence of the middle classes was obvious on all sides. As he later described the radicals and idealists of his own class of origin:

"Their chief trait is impotence: social impotence by virtue of the economic degradation of the petty bourgeoisie; ideological impotence by virtue of the fear of the petty bourgeoisie in the face of the monstrous unleashing of the class struggle."³²

Socially, Russia's "bourgeoisie" was mainly *petty bourgeois*, not necessarily always in the sense of being small traders, shop-keepers etc. etc., but in the sense that the bulk of the membership of this class lacked substantial economic wealth and resultant social power. Trotsky's words precisely match those of Engels describing the same class in the Germany of 1848 as "great in boasting" but "very impotent for action."³³

In Russia's case, the roots of this social impotence are too familiar to Marxists for it to be necessary to document the evidence here. Suffice it to say that everything which most essentially characterized the German middle classes just prior to and during 1848 — their unbounded faith in the power of 'ideas', their practical political timidity, their eagerness to

draped themselves in the colours of the working class, their yearning for revolution and yet their mortal fear of revolution when it came to it — all of these things were if anything even more characteristic of the Russian bourgeoisie of some fifty or sixty years later. Russia's bourgeois-democratic revolution had been even more delayed than Germany's, so that when it finally did begin to erupt, it unleashed forces even less capable of respecting bourgeois limits and bourgeois property-rights. And if, in the earlier German period, "communism" had been more a "spectre" than a corporeal force (since the German working class had barely begun to develop), in the later Russian circumstances this was much less the case. What Trotsky called the "law of combined and uneven development" had meant that backward Russia (even more than backward Germany) had begun industrializing with the very latest, most large-scale manufacturing techniques — producing concentrations of industrial workers who presented a very immediate and all-too-tangible threat to the property-rights of the bourgeoisie.

The way in which Marx and Engels individually tower above other socialist theoreticians of the nineteenth century may appear at first sight a rather peculiar thing. Why was so little of enduring value produced by other thinkers in Europe? Why were the followers of Marx and Engels, generally speaking, so little able to develop the theory which "the Masters" had first propounded? Why was it so long before the ideas of Marx and Engels were accorded the general academic recognition — on scientific grounds — which they tend to have among intellectuals today? For us to look back at the later part of the nineteenth century today is to gain an impression of Marx and Engels as absolute "geniuses" who stand out almost incomprehensibly against a background which, for all the Kautskies, Bakunins, Lassalles and so on, appears in relative terms intellectually mediocre. Why is this? But even more to the point, why was it in Russia — of all places — that this intellectual tradition was eventually broken with? Why was it only in Russia that the ideas of Marx and Engels were not only afforded recognition but were re-born in a fresh, original form to such an extent as to make possible the first successful workers' revolution in history? And then again, the question arises: why mainly Lenin and Trotsky? In the conditions preceding 1917, a wealth of good Marxists had been produced in Russia, Poland and the "fringes" of Europe generally, and to some extent, these conditions continued to prevail for a decade or so afterwards. Rosa Luxemburg, Gramsci, Lukacs and others were all products of those years. But why the almost complete disappearance of new Marxist "geniuses" from then on? And why was it above all in Russia that the production of Marxist "genius" was carried to something like the levels achieved in Germany fifty years earlier? And why, from the nineteen twenties onwards, did Trotsky find it harder and harder to find allies, harder and harder to keep the torch alight, harder and harder to convince others of the essential correctness of the ideas through which the October revolution had been won?

To talk of "genius" in this connection is obviously nonsense. The point was that it was only in Russia before and during 1905 that the conditions of 1848 were first in essentials repeated. To a slightly lesser extent, similar conditions subsequently prevailed in other parts of Eastern Europe and in Italy. Lenin and Trotsky were actually the products of historical circumstances which were almost a re-enactment of those events which had produced Marx and Engels as political thinkers in the first place.

The crisis and impotence of the bourgeoisie, to Lenin and Trotsky in 1905, was not something which could only be experienced by carefully following through the logic of Marx's arguments in *Capital*. It was already an inescapable and painfully-obvious experience of Russian political life. Lenin and Trotsky, in the years when they were first becoming Marxists, could feel this impotence almost "in their bones." It was something which they began struggling against from their political births. For them to read Marx was not to feel confronted with ideas which seemed alien, difficult or new. It was almost like quenching a thirst. It was to discover the theoretical forms and concepts to express what, in another way, they already knew and needed to say.

To some extent, the same applied to a large part of the radicalized middle classes of Russia in the years preceding and following 1905. It is well known that to many of these people, Marx's writings actually promised — or seemed to promise — an escape for the bourgeoisie from its experience of impotence. It was imagined that certain iron laws of history would raise up the Russian bourgeoisie to the pre-eminent position of its English or French counterparts for a period. Just as, in Marx's youth, Germany's middle classes had espoused "socialism", so here many of the most incorrigibly bourgeois economists and liberal politicians espoused their understanding of "Marxism" with all the eagerness of drowning men clutching at straws, convincing themselves that Marxist science itself promised Russia a more or less prolonged period of bourgeois-democratic rule. Inevitably, however, the actual experience of crisis — especially after 1905 — tended to drive other intellectuals in the opposite direction, so that (both in the working class and sections of the bourgeois intelligentsia) a really proletarian revolutionary class-consciousness began to develop out of the actual power of the working class. Marx's concept of a "permanent revolution" — crystallized in 1848 as the inner secret of 1848 itself — was to varying degrees rediscovered. And the more the intelligentsia understood the impotence ("crisis") of its own class of origin, the more confidently the working class asserted its own independent strength. Lenin more than anyone grasped intuitively and in a practical way the relationship between actual strength and consciousness of strength. Whereas Trotsky, from 1905 onwards, believed far too much in the independent strength of his theory of permanent revolution, Lenin knew that no intellectual theories would mean much unless they were used to build a real organization, patiently over the years, capable of actually assisting workers to unite their practical struggles and discover their real powers. It was when Lenin fully realized — early in 1917 — just how extremely strong the Russian working class and his own party's potential really had become, that he adopted Trotsky's theory (which gave conceptual form to this strength) almost as a matter of course.

Why every revolutionary leadership needs a second chance

German historical circumstance, through the events of 1848, created a revolutionary proletarian leadership. But it did not give this leadership a "second revolution", a "second

chance" through which it could capitalize on the gains earlier made. Marx and Engels spent their lives preparing — or attempting to prepare — an international organization and an intellectual, scientific and cultural revolution which would make possible the seizure of such a new revolutionary opportunity whenever or to the extent that it presented itself. But it never came. Or, at any rate, it never came until after their deaths (in Russia in 1905 and 1917; in Germany itself once again in 1918). Consequently, by the time a new German revolutionary opportunity had begun to present itself, there was no longer in Germany the leadership, forged in a pre-revolutionary crisis and revolution at an earlier date, capable of taking advantage of it. The leaders of German social democracy had been forged in essentially non-revolutionary circumstances: circumstances in which, admittedly, the strength of the German working class was pretty inescapable and obvious, but in which also the Bismarkian state and German capitalist industry were strong, prosperous and self-confident. The long decades of bargaining with the employers and seeking political concessions from the state had left their indelible marks. Despite the earlier anti-socialist laws, the continuing brittleness and inflexibility of the ruling class and the state, the leaders of German Social Democracy had won concessions, had built up immensely powerful and prosperous organizations, newspapers and so on, had carved out a niche for themselves within the system — and had at bottom forgotten what revolution was. The leadership had had no personal experiences of revolutionary crisis at all. So how could they be real revolutionaries? They would not have paid lip-service to Marxism at all had not something of the conditions and traditions of 1848 continued to prevail in Germany (unlike, for example, in Britain). But this was not enough. While the leaders continued to acknowledge Marx and Engels as their "teachers", their own lived experiences in fact taught them something different — as did the experiences of the bulk of the working class. The immense patient historical labour of party-building was in the end destined to come almost to nothing. The revolutionary essence of the writings of Marx and Engels was ultimately missed.

But in Russia it was different. Russia's "1848" (which in turn may be compared to France's 1789 or England's 1640) appeared so late that its proletarian revolutionary components were far more developed than had ever been the case before. Moreover, in the case of Russia, the "second chance" came not after a delay of seventy years but after only twelve years. This meant that the leadership produced by the first crisis was still relatively young and active when the "second chance" came.

1905 produced Lenin, produced the mature Bolshevik party and produced Trotsky's re-discovery of the theory of Permanent Revolution. It was as if the soul of 1848 had been re-born. And then, twelve years later, it all happened again — this time with a pre-existing body of revolutionary personnel, revolutionary organization and revolutionary theory capable of giving expression to its inner logic in an adequate way. Lenin and Trotsky, unlike Marx and Engels in Germany, had not died in the meantime and neither had their ideas and writings had to be abandoned to the interpretations of others who had had no experience of the revolutionary conditions which had produced them in the first place. In Russia in February 1917, the authority of the Soviets and the other memories of 1905 were still quite fresh in everyone's mind. Trotsky's status had hardly been diminished, and he picked up the threads where he had left off a decade or more earlier. Lenin's party, above

all, provided a material embodiment of the continuity of the traditions which had been established before, during and after the previous revolutionary crisis. All the theoretical, organizational and cultural-revolutionary accomplishments of the intervening years could now be brought to bear upon the re-enacted drama. The "dress rehearsal" of 1905, in other words, was followed by the real drama before the actors had lost interest, died or forgotten their lines. Germany's "dress rehearsal" — 1848 — had not been followed up in time.

Marxist politically-committed activists — and this probably applies to all politically-committed activists to a greater or lesser extent — are distinguished from the bulk of the less politically-committed (politically "one-sided") population not by any peculiar ability to defy the laws of historical or sociological determinism but merely by their greater commitment to particular consciousness-moulding experiences or periods even in opposition to historical change. The more "normal" attitude of people of all classes is to put their family lives, immediate economic interests, leisure activities and so forth above "politics" for most purposes in most periods, and to change — within limits — their precise political commitments to some extent "as the winds change" — as the political "climate" alters in response to underlying alterations in the class realities of power. It is these people who cannot be much influenced by theory or propaganda unless a real social change is giving them new forms of strength which demand new ideas. Politically-committed activists are different. With regard to their overall direction of commitment, they change much less easily. Within the limits set by their commitment to a certain form of politics, they may change considerably on the basis of pure intellectual discussion. But basically they are moulded by certain social and political experiences which produce an enduring effect, more or less immune to subsequent, different experiences. In this sense, one-sidedly "political" workers more often tend to be (in their own terms) "principled", which means that they are characterized by their greater resistance to change than the bulk of the population. They are able to resist social pressures more.

In a crisis situation (e.g. Russia 1905, early 1917, France in May 1968, Britain from 1970 to 1974), the bulk of workers can by their actions push society quite violently to the left even while their surface political representatives, leaderships, loyalties and conceptions lag far behind. What usually happens is that those workers who previously took relatively little specialist interest in politics move fastest, while the more politically-committed elements move much more slowly. But the fast-moving currents cannot become stabilized in their new positions, or find articulate expression for their new views, precisely because the more articulate, organized elements have moved more slowly. Politically-committed "specialists" in the class struggle lag behind. This applies to all shades of the working class political spectrum, from the ultra-reformist to the far left. Consciousness always has and always will lag behind conditions, by the very nature of things, and the more theoretically-developed and articulate the consciousness concerned, the greater will be its resistance to change.

In 1917, the Bolsheviks and their supporters (such as Trotsky) were in a very real sense "conservatives". Although they were more "far ahead" than anyone else, this was because they were still living in the past. They were still, in a sense, living in 1905. And, 1905 itself, they had still been living, through the traditions of the workers' movement as embodied

particularly in the writings of Marx and Engels, in the Paris of 1870 or the Germany of 1848. When it came to the demands of the situation in 1917, this sort of "conservatism" — the ability to preserve the experiences and the lessons of 1848, 1905 and so on through all the defeats and set-backs of the intervening years — was an absolutely vital precondition for the success of the greatest leap into the future ever undertaken in historical time.

The real test of a revolutionary leadership is of course its ability to keep in touch with the *actual* pulse of events, to know what *real* forces it can command, to change and adapt to *actual* swiftly-changing circumstances as they arise. It must know how to speak a language which real workers can feel as their own. But just as the fastest-moving animal needs a backbone, so the most "flexible" revolutionary leadership must have something hard and stable at its core. A *certain* immobility and conservatism — on a certain level — has its necessary place. In order that the workers of Petrograd in 1917 should find adequate political expression for their own strivings and attempts to act, something more than "flexibility" on the part of their leadership was required. There had to be already in existence what might almost be called a "fossilized" preservation of the traditions of 1848, of 1870, of 1905 and of every other European revolutionary experience — embodied in the heads and actions of politically-organized groups and parties — available for reanimating or bringing back to life. A *pre-existing* revolutionary leadership steeled in revolutionary experience and embodying a revolutionary culture and tradition had to be

there. This leadership might have seemed to many in the immediately-preceding period to have been "wrong", "dogmatic", "orthodox", "fossilized" and so on — but it rather suddenly began to seem "right" once again now. In this sense (and the statement needs, of course, to be heavily qualified) there is always an *element* of the proverbial "stopped clock" (which tells the correct time, but only twice every 24 hours) in every genuinely revolutionary Marxist party or leadership. To take only the example of one individual, Leon Trotsky might have seemed, to many, "right" while he was Chairman of the St. Petersburg Soviet in 1905, but then "wrong" while he was in relative isolation between 1907 and 1917, then "right" again from early 1917 until about 1923, then "wrong" again by and large from then until his death — and finally "right" to many of us in the revolutionary movement throughout the world today. Trotsky's *positions* were not substantially changing in these various periods. It was the conditions in which his ideas were being expressed which changed, and which made the ideas seem mainly "right" at one time, mainly "wrong" at another. In periods of downswing and reaction, Marxists — all of us — are "wrong". Our views don't correspond with "commonsense". Our "logic" doesn't seem superficially to be the "logic" of the world we are living in at all, but is the logic of some other world. But this doesn't mean that we are dreamers or just mad. The point is that we represent the *underlying* necessities of social development rather than the surface demands, the *permanent* objective requirements of the working class rather than its changing perceptions of its own needs.

8 The future

In short, to the extent that events are against us, we represent the *future* strength of the working class, rather than the forces which exist in the *present*. Yet this "future" — if it is to mould our ideas in a scientifically adequate way — must in turn have received material embodiment of some kind already. It must already have been anticipated by history itself in the form of some "premature" pre-revolutionary crisis — in the form of an experience of crisis giving a glimpse of the future, and moulding our own consciousness in a relatively permanent way. We ourselves — the Chartists and most of the revolutionaries of our generation throughout Europe — have indeed passed through such a "premature" experience of crisis. It may be said that it began with the events in France and Czechoslovakia early in 1968 and came to an end (partially and in certain respects) with the oil crisis, the beginning of the present world recession and other events (including the revolution in Portugal and the overthrow of the Heath Government in Britain) in 1974. The dates are pretty arbitrary, but they help to delineate the characteristics of a period which has passed. In many respects, it was a period of youthful optimism and insubstantial, immature revolutionary fervour (particularly

on the part of students) quite strikingly like the year of revolutions in 1848. A cultural revolution has begun to get under way as a result, the women's movement being one of its most precious manifestations and products. In the realm of sexual politics, anthropology and all the social sciences, an immense intellectual ferment is taking place. Ideas which would have seemed almost crazily far-fetched only ten years ago are now becoming (albeit within overwhelmingly middle class revolutionary circles as yet) almost commonplace. This crisis of consciousness *within* the bourgeoisie — nourished by the ruling class experience of crisis which has remained endemic since the late 1960s — is one of the best possible auguries for the success of the workers' revolution in Britain and throughout Europe and much of the world at a later date. It is not revolutionary consciousness in and of itself. That can make itself felt only to the extent that — through organization in the trade unions, the trade union-based mass parties and a united revolutionary alliance — workers themselves are proving invincible as a class and are becoming aware of their own strength. But in embryo, the necessary ingredients are there.

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THE GUARDIAN Wednesday March 5 1980

Ex-Army chief confirms takeover talks rumour

Officers discussed military intervention in 1974.
David Pallister reports

FIELD Marshal Lord Carver, the former Chief of the Defence Staff, has confirmed that "fairly senior" officers at the army's headquarters were talking about the possibility of a military intervention at the time of the miners' strike in February 1974.

He told the Cambridge Union on Monday that he per-

sonally "took action to make certain that nobody was so stupid as to go around saying those things."

Lord Carver's remarks are the first formal admission of what were widely circulating rumours in 1974 of army dismay at the unstable political situation. There were two general elections that year.

REVOLUTIONARY CONSCIOUSNESS:

WHAT IT IS;
WHERE IT COMES FROM.

CHRIS KNIGHT

Chartist tendency

1980.

