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EARLY MARXIST VIEWS ON BRITISH LABOR, 1837–1917

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AS A TOOL OF ANALYSIS, “monolithic communism” has taken a well-deserved beating since Khrushchev’s speech on Stalin in 1956. Its simple notion looks a bit ridiculous in light of the momentous events that have unfolded in the Soviet bloc. The present study examines early evidence of embryonic diversity in Marxism-Leninism to the extent of foreshadowing a Left, Right, and Center within a basic unity. It may help in understanding the complexity of communism.

In 1842, less than a month before his twenty-second birthday, Friedrich Engels left Germany and settled in England for almost two years, working in a Manchester cotton firm owned partly by his father and gathering material for a book on the British proletariat. He brought his new friend Karl Marx on a six-weeks’ return visit in 1845, and helped him make his own initial firsthand contacts. When revived reaction on the Continent triumphantly smashed the revolutions of 1848 and unleashed a campaign of terror, Marx and Engels fled to England for permanent residence in 1849. Thus, the founders of scientific socialism spent the larger part of their lives, and certainly most of their creative years, living in the cradle of capitalism. As a result, several significant works by and about Marx and Engels read like primers on British history, politics, economics, and the working class.¹ Lenin continued this tradition through the heyday of imperialism and World War I.²

The condensed Marxist testament on the British Labor Movement to 1917 reads as follows: Immediately, Chartism and its radical heritage struck a vibrant chord in the revolutionary consciousness of Marx and Engels. Their basic evaluation of this movement as the “first working men’s party which the world ever produced,”³ was clothed in modern Marxist garb in 1919 when Lenin praised Chartism as the “first broad, genuinely mass, politically systematic, proletarian-revolutionary movement.”⁴ When the movement collapsed in 1850, Marx and

¹ See, for example: Friedrich Engels, *The Condition of the Working-Class in England in 1844* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1892); hereafter cited: Engels, *Condition in England*; Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy* (New York: Modern Library, 1936); *Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels: Correspondence, 1846–1895*, ed. Dona Torr (New York: International Publishers, 1942); hereafter cited: Marx-Engels, *Correspondence*; *Karl Marx and Frederick Engels On Britain* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1953); hereafter cited: Marx-Engels, *Britain*; Otto Rühle, *Karl Marx: His Life and Work* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1929); Franz Mehring, *Karl Marx: The Story of His Life* (New York: Covici Friede, 1935); Gustave Mayer, *Friedrich Engels: A Biography* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1936).

² *Lenin on Britain: A Compilation* (New York: International Publishers, 1934); hereafter cited: Lenin, *Britain*.

³ Frederick Engels, *The British Labour Movement: Articles from The Labour Standard* (London: Martin Lawrence, 1934), p. 35; hereafter cited: Engels, *Labour Standard*.

⁴ *Kommunisticheski Internatsional [The Communist International]*, No. 1 (May 1, 1919), col. 34. Note the prominent position of this formulation in the article on Chartism in *Bol'shaya Sovetskaya Entsiklopediya [The Large Soviet Encyclopedia]* (2d ed.; Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe Nauchnoe Izdatel'stvo, 1957), 47, 53–55.

Engels began to write profusely and bitterly of their frustrations during the paralyzing "forty years' winter sleep," which virtually stilled the radical surge of British Labor.⁵ In this period the founders of revolutionary socialism experienced such increasing disillusionment with reformist labor leaders that they developed the twin theories of a "labor aristocracy" and the "bourgeoisification" of an upper stratum of the proletariat.⁶ The communist fathers raged at the growing political "opportunism" of the English working class, which had been reduced to "nothing more than the tail of the great Liberal Party, i.e., henchmen of the capitalists" during the Liberal-Labor alliance forged after 1850.⁷ In an effort to turn up the root causes of these "winter sleep" phenomena, Marx and Engels hit upon their grand concept of Britain's world-wide industrial monopoly that "corrupted" the working class by doling out crumbs (higher wages) to it now and then. Engels summarized this theme succinctly: "Participation in the domination of the world market was and is the basis of the political nullity of the English workers, the tail of the bourgeoisie in the economic exploitation of this monopoly."⁸

The bleakness of those years as depicted by Marxist writings did not cast a solid pall of unrelieved gloom and disappointment. Marx and Engels rejoiced at the founding of the First International in London in 1864, and enjoyed its fantastic intrigues until its demise in 1876. During the 1880's, the last decade of the long "slumber," the springing up of several tiny English socialist groups and the sudden upsurge of masses of militant unskilled workers (the "New Unionism"), cheered Marx's last years. This advance encouraged Engels to proclaim that the first international May Day celebration in London on May 4, 1890, signaled the awakening of the English proletariat from its protracted "sleep." The full cycle had turned: "The grandchildren of the old Chartists are entering the line of battle."⁹ Although Marx and Engels beat the drums consistently and loudly for a new working-class party to hoist the Chartist banner again, it was not until 1892 that Engels wrote confidently of "a third party, the workers' party . . . only just being formed."¹⁰ Two years before his death, Engels hailed the formation of the Independent Labour party (I.L.P.) in 1893 as a giant stride toward proletarian political unity, but warned of the centrifugal dangers posed by personal ambitions, intrigues, cliques, and competing ideologies.¹¹ With this modest optimism the Marx-Engels period came to a close.

Lenin took the Marxist baton from Engels when exploding imperialism had vaulted into maturity and was shaping many significant contours of international politics. Marx and Engels had written early and often on the decisiveness of Britain's global industrial monopoly, growing United States and German competition, and the expectation that "a really general workers' movement will only come into existence here when the workers are made to feel the fact that Eng-

⁵ Marx-Engels, *Correspondence*, p. 469.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 461, 115-16.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 356.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 420.

⁹ Marx-Engels, *Correspondence*, p. 469.

¹⁰ Marx-Engels, *Britain*, p. 32. See also, *Ibid.*, pp. 527, 529.

¹¹ Marx-Engels, *Correspondence*, pp. 505-7.

land's world monopoly is broken."¹² Then Lenin projected this thesis into the era when rival imperialisms clashed fiercely around the globe. In 1912 he concluded that the undermining of England's monopoly was intensifying the class struggle and destroying the basis of "opportunism" and liberal-labor politics.¹³ On the eve of World War I, he trumpeted: "an end has come to British monopoly."¹⁴ This truly world-shaking development kindled a "profound revolutionary movement among the working class in England" that was unstoppable.¹⁵

Lenin distinguished the various elements that were the components of the Labor Movement.¹⁶ He was painfully aware of the "complete subordination of the proletariat to bourgeois politics, the sectarian isolation of groups and handfuls of Socialists," and the "isolation of the labour movement from socialism."¹⁷ Nevertheless, he championed the affiliation of the British Labour party to the Second International in 1908 because it marked the "first step on the part of the really proletarian organisations of England towards a conscious class policy and towards a *socialist* Labour Party."¹⁸

The outbreak of war and the sudden crumbling of the Second International forced Lenin abruptly into an extremist position. His violent denunciation of the "social-chauvinism" ("socialism in words, chauvinism in deeds") of the Right and the "social-pacifism" ("socialism in words, pacifism in deeds") of the Center of the international socialist movement, blanketed the entire British Labor Movement, except the "revolutionary internationalists in deed," the Scottish school teacher, John MacLean, and a handful of members of the I.L.P. and the British Socialist party (B.S.P.), whom Lenin numbered only in the hundreds.¹⁹ The Leeds "soviet" of June 1917 escaped Lenin's attention; but in October, less than three weeks before the Bolshevik coup in Russia, he hailed the "broad mass ferment" in England and elsewhere that erupted from the protest against the war into the "greatest turning point" in the preparation of the "world workers' revolution."²⁰

It is this legacy that we shall now dissect and scrutinize. At once we spot the seed of interpretive variety. Engels harbored a deep appreciation of everyday labor struggles. He felt the pulse of the British working class and understood the beat. His spirits rose and fell and marked time in tune with those of the proletariat. He wrote impatiently but sympathetically of the victories, defeats, stumbling, and inertia of a mass movement searching for answers. For Engels the British Labor Movement was flesh and blood — imperfect and aimless to the

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 420. Engels had been in England for less than a month, in November 1842, when he observed that foreign competition already was undermining Britain's industrial power; see, F. Engels: *Stat'i i Korrespondentzii, 1839-1844* [F. Engels: *Articles and Correspondence, 1839-1844*] (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe Izdatel'stvo, 1923), pp. 255-59. This is Vol. II of K. Marx and F. Engels, *Sochineniya* [Works], ed. D. Ryazanov and I. Stepanov (29 vols., 1923-48); hereafter cited: Engels, *Articles*.

¹³ Lenin, *Britain*, p. 100.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 76, 75.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 94.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 178-79.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 162-63.

point of despair — a dozing, adolescent giant brimming with untapped power. And someday it would join the international workers' army and help to make the world right. But only experience, not abstract theory, could awaken the giant.

On the other hand, Marx was aloof, condescending, and more theoretical. The British Labor Movement represented an awesome power that commanded a prominent place in his bold design for the coming world proletarian revolution. It had a sacred duty to perform. And when it fell short, Marx's hair-trigger temper released a torrent of savage, scorching diatribes that seared every man, woman, and child in the working class. In calmer moments, however, Marx probed uncomfortable reality with keen insight to come up with sweeping, breathtaking generalizations that cut to the heart of life itself. But the English proletariat rarely pleased him, almost never aroused his sympathy, and buried him in a pessimism that lifted only infrequently and briefly. Rather than arbitrarily label Marx the pure theoretician and Engels the pure pragmatist, we shall conclude that their fortes were complementary. Engels, the astute, warm observer of actual conditions, bridged the gulf between the daily trials of the British working class and the grandiose theorizing of Marx the irascible. Of course, these functions overlapped continuously in the devoted and enduring comradeship that was theirs. And Lenin — with his revolutionary euphoria — stood roughly midway between the two.

A diligent student of English life has called Chartism "the first social-democratic and revolutionary movement of the British working classes as the pioneers of European and American Labour."²¹ Spawned by the utopian, non-violent extremism of Robert Owen, whom Engels regarded as the "founder of English Socialism,"²² and nourished by widespread bourgeois-radical and proletarian discontent with the political and economic structure of capitalism, Chartism flourished as an organized, mass movement from 1837 to 1849. It passed through three distinct, tumultuous phases, and developed actually as a series of social-revolutionary attempts to reorganize the United Kingdom on a socialist and labor foundation.²³ At the height of its power, close to four million people out of a total population of fifteen million marched under its flag.²⁴

Chartism burst on the scene full-blown in 1838 with the publication of "The People's Charter," which demanded that Parliament enact six basic suffrage and parliamentary reforms. Quickly, the movement split into revolutionary and reformist wings — the "Physical Force Party" and the "Moral Force Party" — allied uneasily behind the universally accepted slogan: "Peacefully if we may, forcibly if we must."²⁵ The first phase reached its peak with the assembling of a national "General Convention" that sat, with interruptions, most of the year 1839 wrangling over how to persuade Parliament to adopt the Chartist petition. The withdrawal of many middle-class elements, satisfied with their political gains won by

²¹ Max Beer, *A History of British Socialism* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1940), I, 279.

²² Engels, *Condition in England*, pp. 169–70.

²³ Beer, I, 280.

²⁴ Sidney and Beatrice Webb, *The History of Trade Unionism* (new ed.; London: Longmans, Green, 1920), p. 176.

²⁵ Beer, *op. cit.*, II, 44.

the Reform Act of 1832 and now engrossed in pursuit of economic returns from their free trade (anti-Corn Law) agitation, coupled with Parliament's overwhelming rejection of the petition, shifted Chartism to the Left. Open clashes between the army and the working class broke out in Birmingham. Coal miners in Newcastle staged a giant strike. The inner contradictions and conflicts seething under the surface erupted and drowned the Convention in turmoil, dissension, and indecision. As the vision of a vigorous, centralized movement faded, local organizations seized the initiative. For two days armed insurrection gripped Newport, South Wales. Determined men trained and drilled throughout Britain. Desperate conspirators in secret meetings hatched plots, issued orders, and distributed weapons.²⁶ The imprisonment of nearly five hundred leaders by the spring of 1840, however, beheaded Chartism temporarily.²⁷

The second wave culminated in still another floundering convention and rejected parliamentary petition; but in August 1842, the entire movement rose to its zenith with a brief general strike that rolled over the northern United Kingdom to Manchester. "The nation was nearing a social cataclysm. The discontent and determination of the working class reached their highest point. . . . There were many who believed England to be on the brink of a social revolution."²⁸ Again, the opening of bitter, irreconcilable rifts within the movement combined with effective governmental repression to scatter the Chartist forces.

The parliamentary elections of 1847 and the agitation of radical refugees from the Continent sparked the "final flicker and extinction" of Chartism.²⁹ The February 1848 Revolution in France whipped up the last wave with wild enthusiasm. By this time, however, important bourgeois-sponsored reforms, such as the repeal of the Corn Laws and Corresponding Acts (1846) and the passage of the Ten Hours Act (1847), coincided with a steady improvement in living standards to blunt the edge of working-class protest and to curb the Chartist revival.³⁰ In April 1848, a mammoth procession carrying the third petition to Parliament fizzled before threatened military action. The ensuing reign of official terror and arrests completely smashed Chartism as an organized mass movement.

Friedrich Engels reached Manchester just as the second wave receded. He witnessed a sharp, bloody clash that inspired him to laud the "revolutionary courage" of the working class.³¹ His book, "an epoch-making work, the first great document of scientific socialism,"³² and early letters, besides painting a sickening picture of inhuman living conditions, set the foundation for the Marxist appraisal of Chartism. Engels recognized clearly the class composition of British radicalism:

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 49-105.

²⁷ A. L. Morton and George Tate, *The British Labor Movement, 1770-1920: A Political History* (New York: International Publishers, 1957), p. 88.

²⁸ Beer, II, 139-40.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 162.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 190-91; G. D. H. Cole, *A Short History of the British Working-Class Movement, 1789-1947* (new rev. ed.; London: Allen & Unwin, 1948), p. 125; Reg. Groves, "Chartism and the Present Day: The Illusion of Reformism," *The Labour Monthly*, 11 (January 1929), 52-53.

³¹ Engels, *Condition in England*, p. 227.

³² Mehring, p. 134.

"Chartism was from the beginning in 1835 chiefly a movement among the working-men, though not yet sharply separated from the bourgeoisie."³³ As the movement unfolded, he caught sight of the class cleavage that provoked divergent goals. For the bourgeois radicals, the Charter represented the beginning and the end of limited constitutional reforms. For the proletariat, however, it stood for a means to further ends. And this difference was crucial. As Marx saw it, the demand for universal suffrage was

the equivalent for political power for the working class of England, where the proletariat form the large majority of the population. . . . The carrying of universal suffrage in England would, therefore, be a far more socialistic measure than anything which has been honoured with the name on the Continent. Its inevitable result here, is the *political supremacy of the working class*.³⁴

To Engels goes the credit for coining an incisive phrase that, if pursued logically, would have rid him and Marx of any hope that Chartism would explode into an English-French Revolution. The culprit was "legal revolution" that "paralyzed everything"; "a contradiction in itself, a practical impossibility."³⁵ Engels, however, clung to the anticipation that the disastrous experience gained through attempted revolution by the peaceful road would convince the masses of the necessity to resort to the violent overthrow of society. The next crisis could only be delayed or hastened, but its coming was inevitable, spurred by the bankruptcy of a peaceful solution to capitalism's ills. Then

a revolution will follow with which none hitherto known can be compared . . . the vengeance of the people will come down with a wrath of which the rage of 1793 gives no true idea. The war of the poor against the rich will be the bloodiest ever waged. . . . "War to the palaces, peace to the cottages."³⁶

Engels tempered his revolutionism with an ambivalent attitude toward the effectiveness of reformism. But he never wavered from his tenacious faith in the inevitability of violent revolution. He undercut his entire analysis with the shrewd perception: "The peculiarly English respect for law still restrains them from this violent revolution."³⁷

That the English Labor Movement was built on weak, fragile, confused, or no theoretical underpinnings was unpleasantly obvious to Engels even during the Chartist surge, when he first met "the practical Englishman, for whom politics is simple arithmetic or even commerce."³⁸ Engels proposed to fashion a sounder theoretical base by blending the best of Owenite socialism, which he knew through his acquaintance with Robert Owen and attendance at public meetings, with the best of Chartism. Although he contributed to Owen's newspaper, *New Moral World*, Engels was repelled by the idyllic and anti-class-war character of the decaying movement.

³³ Engels, *Condition in England*, p. 229.

³⁴ Karl Marx, "The Chartist Movement," *The Labour Monthly*, 11 (December 1929), 723-24.

³⁵ Engels, *Articles*, pp. 259-60.

³⁶ Engels, *Condition in England*, pp. 296, 298.

³⁷ Engels, *Articles*, p. 260.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 261.

Less than a year after he landed in England for the first time, Engels met the fiery leaders of Chartism's revolutionary wing, Feargus O'Connor and George Julian Harney, co-editors of the militant central organ of the Chartist movement, *The Northern Star*.³⁹ He became a regular contributor and broadened his contacts among lesser Chartist personalities. The short return visit with Marx in 1845 renewed these friendships. When the young collaborators settled in Britain permanently, they deepened their relations with Ernest Jones, a rising star in the badly faded Chartist firmament. It is not widely realized that Jones, as well as Engels, often aided the Marx family mired in its chronic financial straits.⁴⁰

Up to 1850, Marx and Engels had little to say directly about the Chartist leaders. The reason for the scanty commentary is apparent: an almost complete identity of views prevailed between the two German exiles and the leadership. In 1850 another Harney newspaper, *The Red Republican*, published the first English edition of *The Communist Manifesto*. Then the storm broke. The rout of Chartism drove Marx and Engels to vent their spleen on their former English friends. The angry estrangement touched off salvos of polemics that swirl about the heads of British Labor leaders to this day.

It is this memory of Chartism that the famous Decree on Peace recalled to the world on November 8, 1917. It is this fundamental interpretation, embellished with Lenin's accolade of 1919, that Soviet Marxism has embraced.

The following periodization and summary of English Labor history, 1850–1917, will lay the groundwork for a further analysis of Marxist views. The years 1850–75 marked the golden age of mid-Victorian capitalism. Industry boomed to the prosperous tune of rapidly expanding markets at home and abroad. British capitalism, backed up by the British Navy, held unchallenged sway over the world. And the middle class rode firmly seated in the saddle, bearing aloft the torches of free trade and liberalism.⁴¹

Working-class reaction to this impressive power consisted of acquiescence, the spread of an extensive self-help, cooperative network, and a campaign to cut a larger slice of the full, ripe pie for itself. "The agitations of the 'fifties, 'sixties, and 'seventies were unlike those of earlier times in that . . . they were all designed to promote limited and specific reforms, and had behind them no general programme or policy hostile to the capitalist order."⁴² The proletariat became the junior partner in the respectable firm of Liberal-Labor managed deftly by the peerless William Gladstone. Labor received dividends in the form of an impressive array of comprehensive, progressive improvements. Trade-unions discouraged strikes and developed into centralized, high-dues, "friendly benefit" societies, dispensing large sums of money for sickness, unemployment, old age, emigration, and burial. Membership doubled in the first half of the 1870's.⁴³

³⁹ Rühle, *op. cit.*, p. 70; Mayer, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

⁴⁰ Rühle, *op. cit.*, p. 212.

⁴¹ Beer, *op. cit.*, II, 195; Cole, *op. cit.*, pp. 147–51.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 144.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 197–223, 152–92; the Webbs, *op. cit.*, pp. 180–357; Morton and Tate, *op. cit.*, pp. 100–128.

The only sour note in this otherwise melodious symphony sounded in London with the founding of the Working Men's International Association, the First International, in 1864. British trade-union leaders, excited by the abortive Polish rebellion of 1863, sympathy for the North in the American Civil War, and the tremendous welcome accorded Garibaldi in England, heeded the French initiative and called a meeting of European working-class delegates. The International and its executive committee, the General Council, at once encompassed a bewildering hodgepodge of contentious elements, ranging from fervent nationalists and bread-and-butter trade-unionists to revolutionary socialists and anarchists. Even Marx's deliberately ambiguous *Inaugural Address* and *Provisional Rules* could not conceal or mellow intrinsic incompatibilities. The revolutionary agitation of the organization on the Continent embarrassed conservative English members who, allied with the middle class, were waging a strictly constitutional struggle in their own country. The franchise victory of 1867 further cooled British ardor. Gradually, English participation was limited to a typically practical device — use of the new group to bar the importation of strikebreakers into the United Kingdom. The International's strong defense of the Paris Commune compelled the Labor leaders to drop out and scurry for cover, amid a hail of bourgeois charges of consorting with foreign "murderers."⁴⁴

The "Great Depression" of 1878–88 unloosed forces that molded the modern English proletarian movement.⁴⁵ The growing loss of Britain's global industrial monopoly to German and United States competition, chronic unemployment, falling wages, and the end of sweeping reforms, brought into question the fundamentals of capitalism itself. Inspired by the teachings of Henry Mayers Hyndman (a disciple of Marx), and Henry George, and stimulated by a strange amalgam of the Bible, Robert Owen, John Stuart Mill, Chartism, and anarchism, working-class and middle-class intellectuals assaulted orthodox economics. This ferment resulted in the formation of the tiny, socialist Democratic Federation (1881), Socialist League (1884), and Fabian Society (1884). The trade-union movement spurned the blandishments of independent labor politics and socialism, and remained true to its marriage with the Liberal party. Just as the slump eased, a wave of spectacular victories by masses of lowly, unskilled, and unorganized workers administered an added fillip to trade-union strength, but shunted aside the "friendly benefit" philosophy and inaugurated the vigorous strike action of the "New Unionism."

The founding of the small, socialist-oriented I.L.P. in 1893, openly committed to wooing the trade-unions away from liberalism, inflicted a serious blow on the partnership. The sharp defeat of the Liberal party in 1895 and the death of Gladstone in 1898 paved the way, finally, for the formation of the mass Labor Representation Committee in 1900, which took the Labour party name in 1906. Reluctantly, the trade-union movement had struck out on its own political road

⁴⁴ Cole, *op. cit.*, pp. 192–96; Beer, *op. cit.*, II, 200–222; Webbs, pp. 235–36; Morton and Tate, *op. cit.*, p. 126; Merle Fainsod, *International Socialism and the World War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1935), pp. 2–4.

⁴⁵ Cole, *op. cit.*, p. 224.

with its own candidates, still fending off socialism but following socialist leaders, and still preserving a link with the old allegiance by supporting the Liberal party in Parliament.⁴⁶

The decade 1906–17 clamped the British working class in a vise of paradoxes. Trade-union membership jumped two and a half times, while Labor fought heated battles to reverse two vital legal decisions (Taff Vale, Osborne) that originally spelled ruin for the organized movement. British capitalism experienced a mildly balmy Indian summer, but prices in England rose twice as fast as wages, thereby depressing the standard of living. In Parliament the Labour party rallied behind the Liberal party and its reform program to keep the Conservative party out of power, but outside Parliament the working masses erupted into a tumultuous period of “Great Unrest” (1910–14), resorting to “direct action” and “industrial insurrectionism” for political aims. Mounting working-class disillusionment with Parliament’s inability to halt the fall in real wages, and the alarming spurt in the number, magnitude, and menacing posture of strikes, moved the cautious Webbs to conclude: “British trade unionism was, in fact, in the summer of 1914, working up for an almost revolutionary outburst of gigantic industrial disputes, which could not have failed to be seriously embarrassing for the political organisation to which the movement had committed itself, when in August 1914, war was declared, and all internal conflict had perforce to be suspended.”⁴⁷

Labor supported the war overwhelmingly, agreeing to an industrial truce for its duration and permitting several leaders to join the government. Only a tiny pacifist element stood on the sidelines. A guerrilla rank-and-file protest movement, led by shop stewards, sprang up here and there in response to economic grievances left unattended by the official movement and to growing war weariness. By 1917, the mass horrors of trench warfare, the March Revolution in Russia, a flurry of international peace overtures, and revolutionary propaganda preached by Leftists in England, aroused a broad cross section of the British Labor Movement to summon a giant convention at Leeds in June. Over one thousand delegates, supposedly representing some five million strong, including every shade in Labor’s political spectrum from craft trade-unionist to pacifist to communist, stood united for one day and roared: “Follow Russia!” And just as suddenly, the startling plan to organize “Councils of Workmen’s and Soldiers’ Delegates” throughout England collapsed, thwarted by the apprehensive second thoughts of the moderates and by rowdy attacks on local follow-up meetings.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 224–99; Beer, *op. cit.*, II, 226–326; the Webbs, *op. cit.*, pp. 358–471; Morton and Tate, *op. cit.*, pp. 129–224.

⁴⁷ The Webbs, *op. cit.*, p. 690. See also *ibid.*, pp. 472–704, *passim*; Cole, *op. cit.*, pp. 300–351; Morton and Tate, *op. cit.*, pp. 225–53; B. C. Roberts, *Trade Union Government and Administration in Great Britain* (London: Bell & Sons, 1956), p. 474; A. L. Morton, *A People’s History of England* (New York: Random House, 1938), pp. 459–70.

⁴⁸ Cole, *op. cit.*, pp. 352–62; the Webbs, *op. cit.*, pp. 472–704, *passim*; Beer, *op. cit.*, II, 372–84; Morton and Tate, *op. cit.*, pp. 254–76; Morton, *op. cit.*, pp. 483–90; Philip Snowden, *An Autobiography* (London: Ivor Nicholson & Watson, 1934), I, 446–62; Tom Bell, *The British Communist Party: A Short History* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1937), pp. 35–36; William Gallacher, *Revolt on the Clyde: An Autobiography* (New York: International Publishers, 1936), pp. 149–51; Stephen Richards Graubard, *British Labour and the Russian Revolution, 1917–1924* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956), pp. 16–43; J. T. Murphy, *New Horizons* (London: John Lane The Bodley Head, 1941), pp. 43–67.

Marx and Engels grounded their analysis of the British Labor Movement after 1850 on a single, overwhelming fact: the world-wide industrial monopoly of England. This phenomenon of global historical significance conditioned and molded every move of a working class that drank from capitalism's abundant trough.

During the period of England's industrial monopoly the English working-class have, to a certain extent, shared in the benefits of the monopoly. These benefits were very unequally parcelled out amongst them; the privileged minority pocketed most, but even the great mass had, at least, a temporary share now and then.⁴⁹

Gradually, more and more deeply "demoralized" by this "corruption," shorn of all "revolutionary energy," British workingmen declared their "complete agreement with the rule of the bourgeoisie." The Liberal party had grown a "tail" and corralled "its herd of voting cattle."⁵⁰ Engels' trenchant conclusion portrayed a truly united kingdom:

This most bourgeois of all nations is apparently aiming ultimately at the possession of a bourgeois aristocracy and a bourgeois proletariat *as well as* a bourgeoisie. For a nation that exploits the whole world this is of course to a certain extent justifiable.⁵¹

Thus, the "common working of a national monopoly" forged a globe-girdling chain that linked all the classes of England.⁵²

Dialectal materialism and the economic interpretation of history, however, provided high hopes for the future. For, if Marxist analysis had constructed a view of Britain based on a joint class exploitation of a world industrial monopoly, then it followed that the dissolution of that monopoly would set in motion a host of forces shaping a new society. The wondrous struggle that pitted thesis against antithesis would create its synthesis. Engels had recorded the undermining of England's industrial power by foreign competition as early as 1842. But as long as the English worker is busy, Engels remarked, he is satisfied. Beginning in 1858, Engels touched on the thesis that promised a better Marxist tomorrow. In a letter to Marx he commented angrily on the "bourgeoisification" of the British proletariat, and predicted skeptically: "The only thing that would help here would be a few thoroughly bad years, and . . . these no longer seem so easy to come by."⁵³ By the 1880's, when the Great Depression at home and sharp United States and German competition abroad clearly heralded the fading of capitalism's vigor in England, this key Marxist interpretation blossomed. "The dethronement of England from its present dominance of the world market" triggered "a new and powerful impulse . . . for a new revolt against capitalist production."⁵⁴ The working class, faced with the loss of its "privileged position . . . will find itself generally — the privileged and leading minority not excepted — on a level with its fellow-workers abroad."⁵⁵ Inevitable historical logic, therefore, will compel all strata of the pro-

⁴⁹ Engels, *Conditions in England*, p. xvii (1892 English Preface).

⁵⁰ Marx-Engels, *Correspondence*, pp. 147, 356, 469.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 115–16.

⁵² Engels, *Labour Standard*, p. 26.

⁵³ Marx-Engels, *Correspondence*, p. 116.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 422.

⁵⁵ Engels, *Condition in England*, pp. xvii–xviii (1892 English Preface).

letariat "to take in hand its own interests, its own salvation" through "a really general workers' movement" determined "to make an end of the wages system."⁵⁶ And in 1886 Engels' crystal ball foresaw no reversal in the disintegration of Britain's hegemony.⁵⁷ International capitalist rivalry had dug the grave of British capitalism.

The communist fathers belittled the initial phase of the socialist revival. Marx doomed the founding of the tiny Democratic Federation in 1881 (adopted the names Social Democratic Federation [S.D.F.] in 1884 and Social Democratic party [S.D.P.] in 1908) from the start. The villain in the piece was the founder, Henry Mayers Hyndman, a wealthy radical who had read *Capital*. After "intruding" into the Marx home and "pilfering" many evenings, Hyndman published his program in a book, *England For All*, in 1881. It proved to be largely quotations and paraphrases of *Capital*, and Hyndman acknowledged his debt to "a great thinker and original writer." But he failed to mention by name either Marx or his book! Marx, stung to his creative quick, lashed out at the newly formed "half bourgeois, half proletarian" radical society, and swept aside Hyndman's "stupid" excuses of English dislike for foreigners and Marx's "detested" name. Although Marx denounced Hyndman for indulging a dishonest, crass ambition to parlay someone else's thoughts into money and political advantage, he conceded that the book "makes good propaganda, although the man is a 'weak' vessel."⁵⁸ That was the last kind word Hyndman heard from a Marxist. Hereafter he was an "arch-conservative," "careerist," "extreme chauvinist," and "political adventurer."⁵⁹

When Marx died in 1883, Engels took up the cudgels against the struggling movement. Although in 1884 Marx's daughter, Eleanor ("Tussy"), and her lover, Dr. Edward Aveling, helped to create the Socialist League from a dissident anti-Hyndman faction, Engels raked the offshoot for its impractical revolutionary sectarianism. He rejoiced when anarchist intrigues reduced it to impotence. Engels trained his big guns on the Fabian Society, snapping at Kautsky's charge that the group was "unfinished":

On the contrary, this crowd is only too finished: a clique of bourgeois "Socialists" of diverse calibres, from careerists to sentimental Socialists and philanthropists, united only by their fear of the threatening rule of the workers and doing all in their power to spike this danger by making *their own leadership secure . . . immersed up to their necks in the intrigues of the Liberal Party.*⁶⁰

Marx, and more emphatically, Engels, commented sarcastically on socialism "of all shades": "conscious and unconscious," "prosaic and poetic," "of the working-class and of the middle class." And Engels delivered the crowning cynicism, that "Socialism has not only become respectable, but has actually donned evening dress and lounges lazily on drawing-room *causeuses*."⁶¹ He was shrewd enough to admit that it is "hardly likely" that the movement would go "entirely to sleep again," despite the fact that the new socialist groups, largely bourgeois in

⁵⁶ Engels, *Labour Standard*, p. 26; Marx-Engels, *Correspondence*, p. 420.

⁵⁷ Marx-Engels, *Correspondence*, p. 445.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 397-98.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 442, 419, 445.

⁶⁰ Marx-Engels, *Britain*, pp. 530-31. See also, *Correspondence*, pp. 505-6.

⁶¹ Engels, *Condition in England*, p. xviii (1892 English Preface).

make-up, lacked widespread contact with the masses who still had not felt the full impact of foreign competition. A "really general workers' movement" awaited this spark of realization.⁶²

The spark was lit by the sudden outburst of successful strikes among lowly ranks of unorganized, unskilled workers — match girls, dockers, gas workers, and general laborers — in the short span 1888–90. Engels rejoiced as the "New Unionism" cemented the crucial alliance of working masses, socialist leaders, and disillusionment with capitalism. With an elation that smacked of Chartist days, Engels wrote to Bernstein: "How glad I am to have lived to see this day! If *this* stratum can be organised, that is a fact of great import. . . . A new section enters the movement, a new corps of workers. . . . Hurrah!"⁶³ Several months later he still glowed:

The movement has now got going at last and I believe for good . . . at the moment a trade union movement, but utterly different from that of the old trade unions, the skilled labourers, the aristocracy of labour.

The people are throwing themselves into the job in quite a different way, are leading far more colossal masses into the fight, are shaking society much more deeply, are putting forward much more far-reaching demands . . . they themselves do not know as yet what final aim they are working for. But this dim idea is strongly enough rooted to make them choose *only* openly declared Socialists as their leaders . . . unlike the old trade unions, they greet every suggestion of an identity of interest between capital and labour with scorn and ridicule.⁶⁴

The "general cry for the organisation of all trade unions into one fraternity and for a direct struggle against capital" meant a decisive turning point in English history.⁶⁵ As Engels proudly witnessed the first international May Day celebration in London in support of the eight-hour day, he proclaimed:

On 4 May, 1890, the English *proletariat*, newly awakened from its forty years' winter sleep, *again entered the movement of its class* . . . awakened to new and independent life and action . . . joined up in the great international army. And that is an epoch-making fact. . . . Its long winter sleep — resulting from the collapse of the Chartist movement of 1836 to 1850 on the one hand and the colossal growth of industry in 1848 to 1880 on the other — is broken at last. The grandchildren of the old Chartist are entering the line of battle.⁶⁶

The great mass of unskilled workers, "virgin soil, entirely free from the inherited 'respectable' bourgeois prejudices," marched in the vanguard of the aroused British Labor Movement.⁶⁷

For Engels, the formation of a working-class political party would ensure final success. Although the broadened franchise helped two workingmen win seats in Parliament in 1874, under the Liberal party banner, it was not until 1888 that the great leader of the miners, James Keir Hardie, contested and lost a by-election as the first independent labor candidate. In the general election of 1892, three working-class leaders successfully stood for the House of Commons on in-

⁶² Marx-Engels, *Correspondence*, pp. 422, 420.

⁶³ Marx-Engels, *Britain*, p. 521.

⁶⁴ Marx-Engels, *Correspondence*, pp. 460–61.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 463.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 469.

⁶⁷ Engels, *Condition in England*, p. xviii (1892 English Preface).

dependent labor or socialist platforms. Engels could not contain himself at the sight of the "shadow" of an unshackled workers' party:

The English working-class movement has again made a big step forward. The parliamentary election[s] . . . have given formal notice to both official parties, the Conservatives and the Liberals, that both of them would thereafter have to reckon with a third party, the workers' party . . . only just being formed; its elements are still occupied with casting off traditional prejudices of every sort—bourgeois, old trade-unionist and even doctrinaire-socialist—so that they may finally be able to get together on a basis common to all of them. . . . The spell which the superstitious belief in the 'great Liberal Party' cast over the English workers for almost 40 years is broken. They have seen by dint of striking examples that they, the workers, are the decisive power in England if they only want to and know what they want; and the elections of 1892 marked the beginning of such knowing and wanting.⁶⁸

The shadow took substance in the next year, 1893, with the formation of the I.L.P. Its avowed goal was to detach the trade-unions from liberalism while fighting for everyday reforms, and to lead the organized masses to independent political action aimed at achieving a socialist program of the collective ownership of all the means of production, distribution, and exchange, through peaceful means. It stood midway between the Fabians on the Right and the S.D.P. on the Left.

Engels received the news with cautious optimism. He lamented the fact that the "sectarian attitudes" of the new socialist societies had hamstrung them in their futile attempt to absorb "mass pressure" for socialism. Thus, "the foundation of a third Party was quite good." As "the *mass* of the membership is certainly very good" and "the main point of the programme is ours," he seconded Edward Aveling's decision to accept a seat on the executive.⁶⁹

The new party did not catch fire. Several months before he died in 1895, Engels complained of the centrifugal effect produced by the still scattered forces of the Left on growing socialist "instinct" among the masses: "nothing but sects and no party."⁷⁰ Later in the year, a parliamentary general election resulted in the defeat of all twenty-eight I.L.P. candidates, who polled an insignificant total of 44,000 votes with party membership standing at 6,000. This was a far cry from the Chartist millions!

The behavior of working-class leadership in England goaded Marx and Engels into laying down an incessant and consistent barrage of sharp criticism that frequently turned into torrents of vituperation. The two German exiles shared a deep, carping suspicion of labor leaders that remained virtually adamant throughout the entire post-Chartist period. Marx and Engels were guilty of wishful thinking in their expectation that British working-class leaders knew better, or *should* have known better, than to lapse into a degrading "sleep" that obliterated the revolutionary mission of the toiling masses. Rigid dogma almost blotted out reality. Marx and Engels never fully realized that the leaders overwhelmingly expressed the daily, bread-and-butter struggle, not abstract theory, and certainly not revolutionary theory anymore. The Marxist concept of leadership made no allowance for the reformer.

⁶⁸ Marx-Engels, *Britain*, pp. 32–33.

⁶⁹ Marx-Engels, *Correspondence*, pp. 505–7.

⁷⁰ Marx-Engels, *Britain*, pp. 537–38.

The defeated Chartist leaders received short shrift. As late as 1852 the heir apparent, Ernest Jones, still stood in good grace. Then he engineered several futile attempts to revive Chartism partly through compromises with bourgeois radicals. From the Marxist point of view, Jones became the first victim of "corruption" and "bourgeoisification." In 1857 he caught the full brunt of acid polemics: condemnation for preaching cooperation with the bourgeoisie instead of forming a genuine working-class party; bitter criticism for turning into a dupe of the middle class; and utter dismay for inflicting enormous harm on the proletariat by deserting to the enemy "on the day of battle" and wrecking the Chartist party. Early in 1859 Marx and Engels broke with the "stupid ass," now a "ruined dictator." Engels relented somewhat at the death of Jones ten years later: "The fellow is really a loss. His bourgeois phrases were only hypocrisy after all . . . there is no one who can take his place with the workers . . . who was, at bottom, entirely on our side."⁷¹

George Julian Harney, the revolutionary Chartist who had published the first English edition of *The Communist Manifesto* in 1850, fell from favor a year later. Marx accused him of befriending Marx's own personal enemies. Even John Frost, leader of the armed uprising in Newport during the Chartist ferment, joined the Jones club as "that old ass."⁷² The defectors from "the cause" stood convicted of the most heinous revolutionary crime.

Engels was convinced of the limited worth of trade-unions. He characterized them and strikes as unexcelled "schools of war" that prepared the working class for the great, unavoidable struggle. The "incredible frequency" of strikes during the Chartist period "proved" that the "social war has broken out all over England." Engels argued that trade-unions and strikes embodied proletarian resistance to bourgeois omnipotence and checked the rapacious greed of the ruling class. More prosaically, unions attempted to perform the valuable duties of confronting employers with united strength; regulating wages and hours; limiting the labor supply; and assisting the unemployed.⁷³ Some forty years later during the seedtime of the 1880's, Engels confirmed his analysis and updated it. The mass, well-financed trade-unions, strongest in the world, became a "necessity" for laborers in their struggle to obtain "at least approximately, the full value of the working power which they hire to their employer," and to wrench political and social concessions from the grudging ruling class.⁷⁴

But the Marxist dialectic reduced its own favorable analysis to tragedy. While basking in the reflected profits of British capitalism's global monopoly, the working class had allowed itself to be led down a blind alley by men "sold to, or at least paid by, the middle class."⁷⁵ Trade-unionism had merely reinforced its own prison — the wage system — and failed to free the proletariat from capitalist bondage. The vicious cycle of boom and bust, the endless battle to keep wages

⁷¹ Karl Marx, "The Chartist Movement," *The Labour Monthly*, 11 (December 1929), 726; Marx-Engels, *Correspondence*, pp. 100-102, 115-16; Rühle, *op. cit.*, pp. 212-13.

⁷² Rühle, *op. cit.*, p. 212; Mayer, pp. 133-34; Marx-Engels, *Correspondence*, pp. 60, 101.

⁷³ Engels, *Condition in England*, pp. 224, 215-19.

⁷⁴ Engels, *Labour Standard*, pp. 17, 19-20.

⁷⁵ Marx-Engels, *Correspondence*, p. 421.

abreast of rising prices — in short, the economic struggle — exhausted the Labor Movement and deflected it from its primary political goal — ownership of the means of production. Ultimately, Engels concluded, the decisive battle must be joined because “a struggle between two great classes of society necessarily becomes a political struggle.”⁷⁶

Marx and Engels established their closest contact with English trade-union leaders in the General Council of the First International, which sat in London from its founding in 1864 until it moved to New York City in 1872. The experience, unhappy from the start, ended with vicious behavior on both sides.

At all times, the British delegation to the Council comprised the largest national group and occasionally a majority of the total membership of about fifty. The first president and secretary were British. Two British journals served briefly as its organs. But it was ludicrous for bread-and-butter trade-unionists who dined contently from capitalism’s cornucopia to mix with their revolutionary brethren from the Continent. The contradiction was apparent at once, but was glossed over deliberately. Engels disclosed that Marx had drawn up the rules of the International “in such a way that *all* working-class socialists of that period could join it,” because “in 1864 the theoretical character of the movement was still very confused everywhere in Europe.” “Even the leaders of the English trade unions thought the programme laid down in the Preamble to the Statutes gave them a basis for entering the movement. The first great success was bound to explode this naive conjunction of all fractions.”⁷⁷

The English delegates strove to limit the International’s agitation in their homeland to support of franchise extension and the barring of foreign strike-breakers. The London Trades Council (loosely knit but powerful central coordinating body for many London trade-unions), whose secretary also held the presidency of the International’s General Council, refused to declare itself the English section of the International and even refused to permit a representative of the International to attend its sessions! The marriage of convenience almost foundered in 1866 when the British president and secretary of the International’s Council lost their posts, in part through Marx’s intrigues, and the limited suffrage victory of 1867 undercut much of the International’s usefulness to the British labor leaders. Marx glared in angry frustration as the leaders cooled to the International with the success of the reform movement. It “has almost killed us,” he exclaimed.⁷⁸

The divorce came in 1871. The correspondents were the International’s staunch defense of the Paris Commune and the passage of a bill in Parliament that “legalized” trade-unions whose statutes did not conflict with a prohibition against the use of force and violence. Prominent British members of the General Council resigned hastily to sever any connection with foreign “assassins” and to register their unions under the new law. Marx unloaded some of his choice epithets: “jealous intriguers,” “swine,” “possessed with a mania for compromise

⁷⁶ Engels, *Labour Standard*, pp. 12–13, 17–19; Marx-Engels, *Correspondence*, pp. 420–21.

⁷⁷ Marx-Engels, *Correspondence*, pp. 455, 329.

⁷⁸ Mehring, *op. cit.*, p. 376, as quoted.

and a thirst for respectability.”⁷⁹ The remaining influence of the International in England disintegrated when the General Council moved to New York City and abandoned the field to a rebellious rival, the British Federal Council. Events took an ironic twist in 1872 when this dissident English section censured Marx for his public accusation during The Hague congress of the International that the majority of British working-class leaders had sold themselves to the Liberals. Anarchist elements actually toyed with the idea of expelling him from the International. Karl Marx almost had been purged!⁸⁰

As the International folded in England, Marx and Engels were embittered further by the inevitable but startling result of the 1867 franchise reform — labor men in Parliament. Immediately, Engels assailed the first two victors in 1874 (members of the Liberal party) for accepting bourgeois money and votes instead of campaigning on a Chartist program reformulated by a new workers’ party.⁸¹ Parliamentary politics had completed the seduction of the working-class aristocracy that “super-profits” had begun.

Karl Marx summarized his views on the British proletariat with a characteristically slashing attack: “The Englishman first needs a revolutionary education . . . these thick-headed John Bulls, whose brainpans seem to have been specially manufactured for the constables’ bludgeons, will never get anywhere without a really bloody encounter with the ruling powers.”⁸² Friedrich Engels, on the other hand, concluded with exasperation mellowed by realistic hope:

One is indeed driven to despair by these English workers with their sense of imaginary national superiority, with their essentially bourgeois ideas and viewpoints, with their “practical” narrow-mindedness, with the parliamentary corruption which has seriously infected the leaders. But things are moving none the less. The only thing is that the “practical” English will be the last to arrive, but when they do arrive their contribution will weigh quite heavily in the scale.⁸³

Vladimir Lenin digested these ideas and applied them in the era of mature imperialism and global war. He had come to know the British Labor Movement also through firsthand study and contact. He had wiled away hours of Siberian exile, 1897–1900, translating the Webbs’ *Industrial Democracy* into a Russian edition entitled, *Teoriya i Praktika Angliiskago Tred’-Yunionizma* [*The Theory and Practice of English Trade Unionism*].⁸⁴ In 1902 Lenin had edited the Russian revolutionary newspaper, *Iskra* [*The Spark*], from the London office of the British S.D.F.⁸⁵ He had attended the Second (1903), Third (1905), and Fifth (1907) Congresses of the Russian Social Democratic Labor party (R.S.D.L.P.) in London. In 1905 he and the other editors of the Bolshevik newspaper published in Geneva,

⁷⁹ Marx-Engels, *Correspondence*, pp. 277–78, 227.

⁸⁰ Mehring, *op. cit.*, pp. 518, 512. See also, G. M. Stekloff, *History of the First International* (London: Martin Lawrence, 1928), *passim*.

⁸¹ Marx-Engels, *Britain*, p. 467.

⁸² Marx-Engels, *Correspondence*, p. 213.

⁸³ Marx-Engels, *Britain*, p. 537.

⁸⁴ Bertram D. Wolfe, *Three Who Made A Revolution: A Biographical History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955), pp. 136, 142 (the Webbs’ original title is cited incorrectly); Thomas Taylor Hammond, *Lenin On Trade Unions And Revolution, 1893–1917* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1957), p. 80.

⁸⁵ Lenin, *Britain*, pp. 118–19.

Vperiod [Forward], had acted as go-between for the transmission of money from the British Labor Representation Committee to the St. Petersburg Committee of the R.S.D.L.P. J. Ramsay MacDonald, Secretary of the English organization, had earmarked the funds for relief of the families of workers shot down during the "Bloody Sunday" demonstration before the Winter Palace and for revolutionary activity.⁸⁶ Also, Lenin followed the British press fairly closely.⁸⁷ The writings of Marx and Engels and these experiences, therefore, thoroughly familiarized Lenin with the British proletariat.

Like his predecessors, Lenin grounded his analysis on a single, overwhelming fact: the predominance of imperialism and its profound, world-shaking impact. His study, *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism*, is now read widely enough to preclude discussion here. And the English working class could not escape its toils. In fact, Lenin argued, the classic land of capitalism had provided the deplorable model: "The connection between imperialism and opportunism made itself felt in England sooner and more strongly than anywhere else."⁸⁸ The bourgeoisie of all great capitalist countries now "bribed" the "aristocracy of Labor" with "super-profits," and collected dividends in the form of liberal-labor politics. The war, merely the inevitable armed clash triggered by imperialist competition, aggravated persistent trends and shattered the flimsy solidarity of the international labor and socialist movement. The wartime phenomenon of "social-chauvinism," which deeply infected English labor, "consummated opportunism . . . this alliance with the bourgeoisie." In England, the "social-chauvinists" comprised the Labour party, the I.L.P., and the Fabian Society, "converted into watch dogs of capitalism, into *corruptors* of the labour movement."⁸⁹ Imperialism had internationalized "opportunism"; war had deepened the "corruption."

Before the war, Lenin spotted glimmers of hope in the nightmare of imperialism. He respected the fact that "cultured . . . civilised England," the "freest country in the world," enjoyed "complete political liberty."⁹⁰ The ultimate in bourgeois democracy furnished the soil in which reformism bloomed as "Lloyd-Georgism." This scheme harnessed the masses to political democracy with a "widely ramified, systematically managed, well-equipped system of flattery, lies and fraud . . . scattering promises right and left of all kinds of reforms and blessings to the workers, if only they will give up the revolutionary struggle for the overthrow of the bourgeoisie." Trade-unions flourished as an "enormous organised army," although they enlisted only a minority of the proletariat, lacked unity, were "insular, aristocratic . . . hostile toward socialism," and spawned "direct traitors to the working class."⁹¹

The flowering of reformism deepened and widened the already sharp cleavages in the Labor Movement. Lenin was highly critical, but thankful for favorable

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 107-9.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 45, 70, 72, 97, 98, 100, 110, 161, 164. See Lenin's interview with Arthur Ransome in the latter's book, *Russia In 1919* (New York: B. W. Huebsch, 1919), p. 227.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 67-69, 139, 145-46, 140-42.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 46, 131, 139, 151.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 147, 71, 148, 96.

currents. He despaired of the isolation of the working class from socialism and the sectarian isolation of socialists from the working class. The ensuing "degeneration" and "bourgeoisification" ensnared the proletariat in a bog of dismemberment — the Labour party, the I.L.P., the S.D.P., and the Fabian Society — "each with programmes and views that differ very considerably from each other." And the majority of the workers still voted for the Liberal party. Lenin reluctantly made peace with the Labour party as "something in the nature of a *broad workers party* . . . a compromise between the socialist party and the non-socialist trade unions." Thus, in 1908, he supported the affiliation of the Labour party to the Second International.⁹²

The socialist-oriented groups caught the brunt of Lenin's ire. The I.L.P. was "‘independent’ only of socialism, and very dependent indeed upon liberalism"; the Fabians suffered from "extreme, philistine opportunism"; and the S.D.P. had embraced "chauvinism," revealing its "clearly sectarian character" and bringing "disgrace" to social-democracy. Lenin drew some encouragement, however, from mounting opposition to these policies from within the organizations.⁹³

By 1912, the mid-year of the "Great Unrest," Lenin visualized the approach of a new epoch for the British working class brought on by the revolutionary coincidence of momentous events: the thorough undermining of England's monopoly; spreading want caused by the rise in the cost of living; intensification of the class struggle; the collapsing basis for opportunism and liberal-labor politics; and the transformation of mass economic strikes into political strikes. The success of the nation-wide miners' strike encouraged him to proclaim:

The British proletariat *is no longer the same*. The workers have learned to fight. . . . They have realised their power. . . . They have ceased to be the obedient sheep. . . . A change has taken place in the relation of social forces in England which cannot be expressed in figures, but which everyone feels.

During the next two years, the Bolshevik leader chronicled the "growth of a profound revolutionary movement among the working class of England," which scaled the heights with a "great heroic struggle of the masses themselves for a new system of society." Then, suddenly, the outbreak of war cut short Labor's turbulent advance. The tidal wave of "social chauvinism" washed away the era of great promise.⁹⁴

It was not until late 1916 that Lenin glimpsed a weakening of jingoism's grip on the English masses. He noted that the B.S.P. (formed in 1911 as an enlarged version of the S.D.P.) had forced the resignation of its own arch-chauvinist leader, Hyndman. By the spring of 1917, "the freest country in the world" began to resort to Tzarist tactics of censorship and suppression in an attempt to stem the growing international revolutionary socialist movement against capitalism, imperialism, and the war. The victims were "our comrade" John MacLean, the Scottish schoolteacher, and a handful of Leftists from the B.S.P. and I.L.P. — all

⁹² *Ibid.*, pp. 75, 76, 72, 98, 100, 93–95, 110.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 99, 79, 91, 111–13.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 100, 73, 106–7, 50, 130, 118, 58–59.

cast in the valiant mold of Karl Liebknecht and the Russian Bolsheviks.⁹⁵ The Leeds "soviet" of June, 1917, escaped Lenin's attention.

In October, less than three weeks before the Bolshevik Revolution, he proclaimed the arrival of the "greatest turning point in the history of the Russian and, to all appearances, also of the world revolution." The "forerunners of the world revolution" — like MacLean in England — had churned a "broad mass ferment" that presaged a world workers' revolution.⁹⁶ Then the Bolsheviks seized power in Russia. The Marxist lesson that Lenin derived from his experience with the English working class boiled down to this advice:

When objective conditions prevail which retard the growth of the political consciousness and class-independence of the proletarian masses, one must be able patiently and persistently, to work hand in hand with them, making no concessions to them in principles, but not refraining from carrying on activities *right in the heart* of the proletarian masses.⁹⁷

A critical summary of the Marxist legacy culled from British Labor history, 1837–1917, first must toss away the standard blinder — a single, rigid, and dogmatic "monolithic line" that reduces Marxism to simple, polemical cant. We cannot reduce the material that we have just examined to any one inflexible "line." It is too rich, too varied, too broad, and too well-balanced for such a glib distortion. The only exception is Marxist contempt for reformist labor leaders, heaped indiscriminately on beaten Chartists, "bribed" trade-unionists, moderate socialists, and wartime "social-pacifists" and "chauvinists." Marx, Engels, and Lenin refused to accept the frustrating reality of labor leaders, supported by the masses, who *wanted* to bargain with capitalism and *not* to overthrow it as revolutionary Marxism ordained. And, excluding the small B.S.P. and tiny groups of wartime syndicalists-shop stewards, the handful of leaders who espoused the English brand of socialism based their beliefs on gradualism, non-violence, and no class war. To this important extent, the Marxist testament was distorted.

In other major respects, however, Marxism left a portrait of the English working class that essentially mirrored the truth. The leadership problem aside, there is no evidence that the communist fathers allowed their theories to blind them to facts. They saw what was there, although they frankly did not like much of it. The British proletariat never lived up to the revolutionary expectations of Marxism. Chartism came close; but it was sporadic, confused, and did not develop into a mass, armed, nation-wide uprising. And it failed. The "Great Unrest" of 1910–14 never had a chance to realize its full potential. It was unlikely, however, that mid-nineteenth-century Chartism was about to sweep over twentieth-century England. For the working class had changed organically in the interval, and had not been simply asleep.

But — and this is crucial — there is no evidence that Marx, Engels, and Lenin lost sight of reality or lost their heads when they did not get all that they wanted in England. Since they believed that history was on their side, they willingly rode a zigzag wave of the future. Along the way they grudgingly accepted much less than their ultimate goals.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 139, 162–63, 172, 174, 178–79.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 162–63.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 96.