COMMUNISM

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY

I

COMMUNISM has become, in our own day, at once an ideal and a method. As an ideal, it aims at a society in which classes have been abolished as a result of the common ownership of the means of production and distribution. As a method, it believes that its ideal can be attained only by means of a social revolution in which the dictatorship of the proletariat is the effective instrument of change.

As an ideal, communism has an honourable tradition which reaches back to the very beginnings of Western political thought. The *Republic* of Plato already envisages a communist State; and, since his day, there has hardly been a generation in which some thinker, oppressed by the social consequences of private property in the means of production, has not sought to remedy them by its abolition. All political literature, indeed, until the Reformation, is full of doubts of the moral validity of

private property; it is only since that time that economic individualism, in any full and unmitigated sense, has asserted its full sway over the minds of men. For the previous eighteen hundred years, the Stoic notion of the equality of mankind deposited an uneasy belief that its consequences should manifest themselves in the sphere of economic fact. That there was communism in the golden age was taken almost for granted; and when that period was equated by Christianity with the time before the Fall, what was to become the classic theology of Western Europe became impregnated with a similar faith. Accordingly, the Roman Lawyers, the New Testament, the early Fathers and the mediæval Schoolmen all found it difficult to defend an economic system in which some men could suffer from privation, while others prospered. If most took refuge in the facile and convenient doctrine of stewardship, and accounted for private property by the tragedy of the Fall, there remained many who could not suffer this compromise. Nor did the modified Aristotelian view of Aquinas find universal favour. The mediæval records contain indubitable traces of men and sects, often obscure enough, who preached a thoroughgoing communism. The strict followers of St. Francis, the Beguins and the Beghards, John Ball and his disciples in 1381, are merely examples of a widely-spread temper. It is not too much to

say that at every mediæval period of social crisis, some men will be found to declare that the only radical cure for oppression is the abolition of private property.

Yet we must not make too much of this mediæval communism. For the most part, and naturally enough, it is less a coherent body of social doctrine than a reflection of the other-worldliness of the Middle Ages. That is obviously the case with the oft-discussed communism of Wycliff; the friend of John of Gaunt cannot seriously be regarded as the considered ally of social revolution. What we are confronted with is rather a fine distaste for materialism, a sense that the rich man cannot enter the kingdom of heaven, a *cri de cœur* against the rigidity of feudal structure, than a genuine social philosophy.

Much the same is true of communist teaching in the period between the Reformation and the French Revolution. That of Sir Thomas More is clearly no more than the attractive fancy of a great humanist, depressed by the economic evils of the time. Gerard Winstanley and his disciples in Cromwellian England, indeed, represent a genuinely communist view. "From each according to his powers, to each according to his needs" is no unfair summary of the *Law of Freedom in a Platform* (1652). Co-operative production, the abolition of exchange, the idea of the necessary quota of labour which each must perform under

penalty, all the regular incidents of Utopian communism are there. But Winstanley, like so many idealists, is clearer about the aims he has in view, than the methods by which he proposes to attain them. He realised the importance of education and the study of natural science; he has that sense of the possibility of changing human nature which is the foundation of reforming creeds. But the inner light which drew him to Quakerism did not shine brightly among the practical Puritans of his day; and his little band of Diggers on St. George's Hill are important in the history of thought rather than of action.

We cannot here seek to narrate the history of communism before the Industrial Revolution; it must suffice merely to give instances of the permanence of the ideal. That the grim economic facts of eighteenth-century France should have led men of sensitive temper to this view is intelligible enough; the contrast between the extremes of luxury and poverty was too glaring for its meaning to be missed. The poor parish priest Meslier, for example, was driven to communism by the horrors he encountered among his flock. "You are amazed, O ye poor," he cried, "that ye have so much evil and suffering in your lives. . . if, as I desire, all possessions were common, there would be no taxes to fear." Meslier protests with bitterness against the monstrous tyranny under which society groans; and he

sees no remedy save in revolution. But he has little to say of its coming save to urge that men have the power in their hands if they will but show the courage and the will. His *Testament* is the protest of a noble soul, tormented by the evils of his time; but it is the book of a moral prophet rather than of a social analyst.

In a less degree, this is true, also, of Mably and Morelly. The latter, of whose life practically nothing is known, presents us with a complete scheme of communism, elaborate in groundwork and detail, in his *Code de la Nature* (1755); but the work is interesting rather for its emphasis upon the moral superiority of communism over individualism, and the amazing power of imaginative detail that it reveals, than for any profound insight into the nature of social change. Mably is a more considerable figure. The brother of Condillac the philosopher, and the disciple of Rousseau, he is as noteworthy for character as for ability. The idea of equality was his passion, and it is because a system of economic equality would prevent the degradation of human impulses that he decides upon its necessity. No one has pointed out more clearly the evils that follow in the train of inequality; and he believes that Sparta and Paraguay prove that private property is unnecessary. "The state as universal owner," he wrote, in his *Doutes aux Economistes*, "will distribute to each citizen the possessions he needs." But Mably has no

knowledge of how the change may be effected. A revolution may be necessary; between the slavery of the present and a violent upheaval to secure a better future, he sees no middle term. Yet in his counsel to the Poles, who sought his advice, it is upon the slow process of inevitable change that he seems to depend. A revolution, he says, is possible in a small State, if there is a Lycurgus, but upon no other condition. He can propose, as a *pis aller*, reforms in which the right to individual property is so organised as to minimise its inevitable evil. He remains, however, pessimistic of the outcome; and, unlike his master Rousseau, he does not disguise his fears in magnificent declamation.

The benefits of economic equality were a commonplace among the advanced social theorists of France in the eighteenth century; though few had the hardihood to go so far as communism. A vague socialistic view is general; it affects alike Montesquieu and Rousseau the Encyclopedists and the more radical of the clergy. But it remains, inevitably, a doctrine without substantial power. Nor is it confined to France. Men like Ogilvie and Spence in England make it clear that the tradition is widespread; and the *Political Justice* of Godwin (1793) is, like the *Code de la Nature* of Morelly, a fully-developed communist philosophy. Its thesis is a simple one. Private property, says Godwin, means in-

equality, and inequality destroys the chance of moral and intellectual progress. Where there is wealth, there is pride and ostentation, vanity and corruption, while poverty is the nurse of a slave-mentality. Godwin has no special end or method to recommend. Opposed in principle to coercion, he desires a revolution in the mind only; and it is because material possessions hinder the free play of reason that he seems to resent them. His book, as Pitt saw, was not likely to inflame the masses; and if it inspired the poets to sing its influence was rather, as Wordsworth said in the *Prelude*, that "a strong shock was given to old opinions" than in any specific influence upon its age. It trained men's minds in new directions, and in this sense was a powerful dissolvent; but it did not make men communists, since it was rather an ethical than a political treatise.

The difficulty, indeed, with all communistic thought before the Industrial Revolution, lay in the material with which it had to deal. The obvious evils felt by men were political rather than economic in nature. The structure of industry was still too primitive and atomic for the appeal to be other than an individual one. The economic evils of a system which divides the social order into rich and poor were clearly seen. But the changes urged were moral ideals rather than social methods; and where, as with Meslier, revolution is postu-

lated, it is more the prediction of angry despair than the outcome of a deliberate insight into social process. We are still dealing with a political philosophy whose substance is theological in texture.

II

The Industrial Revolution, by changing the mechanisms of production changed also the perspective of social philosophy. The people were herded into factories, and the division of society into masters and men became the outstanding index to social categories. The new production made combination inevitable, and, with the coming of combination, the development of a theory of mass-action became essential. For the individual suffered eclipse; he was submerged into that group within the social order to which, as Burke would have said, a divine tactic had assigned him. The result is seen in the new economics of which Ricardo, rather than Adam Smith, is the founder. Not, indeed, that the vision is confined to England. Hodgskin, Thompson, and Bray are, in purpose, though not in technique, paralleled by the Utopian socialists of France. But because the Industrial Revolution found its primary completion in England, it was in England that there developed the first organised philosophy of revolt.

As the Napoleonic wars drew to their close the whole generation turned its mind to economic questions. "Man," wrote Isaac D'Israeli, with indignation, "is considered only as he wheels on the wharf, or spins in the factory." What Mr. Tawney has called the Acquisitive Society unfolds itself before us. If some were intoxicated by the new vision of unlimited wealth, others were not wanting to insist that, in its production, labour was the sole or, at least, the principal factor. Labour, accordingly, was robbed. The exploitation of the new capitalists is the main theme of radical speculation after 1815. It produced the moral communism of Owen. Thomas Hodgskin drew from it the vital principle that trade unions are essentially fighting organisations for the defence of labour; though, rather surprisingly, he ends with a plea not for socialism, but for the individual right to property. With J. F. Bray, it leads to a passionate demand that the workers, through their trade unions, and by political agitation, shall accomplish their emancipation; and the end he has in view is Owenite communism. Indeed, English social history from 1815 until 1846 is a period of revolutionary fervour. The sense that labour was robbed was everywhere widespread and deep. The combination of economic oppression and political injustice, which produced the Grand National Consolidated Trades Union of the Owenites, the

demand for a general strike from Benbow, and the Chartist Movement, is proof of how deep was the *malaise*. There are few modern ideas not discoverable in the epoch. Syndicalism, socialism, communism, universal suffrage as the means to the capture of political institutions, anarchism as the ideal when capitalism has been overthrown, the general strike as the demonstration of labour's solidarity and power, all of them were there. What was lacking was precision of method, on the one hand, and a massive analysis of facts on the other. The early English socialists are almost luxurious in suggestion. The end they envisage is clear; the cause they have at heart is set out with great ability and passionate conviction. What it still lacks is transference to the plane of universality. It is not yet either a philosophy of history, or a method evolved from that philosophy. It remains, above all, an eloquent confusion of great ideas.

Nor did France supply the necessary motive-power. Important as is the work of Saint-Simon, Fourier, Proudhon and Louis Blanc, it cannot be said that they made, in any ultimate way, the outlines of a communist philosophy. Saint-Simon saw, with incomparable insight, the importance of the new industrialism; Fourier emphasised the danger to society of a proletariat without interest in its maintenance; Proudhon—a revival of whose influence is a peculiar feature of modern French social

thought—emphasised in his own way what a disciple has happily termed a socialism for peasants; Louis Blanc defined an end to be reached by universal suffrage and the capture of the bourgeois State. Each of them is full of brilliant insight into the nature and limitations of the new capitalism. Much of what they had to say anticipates all the outstanding features of the later Marxian hypotheses. The sense of an unbridgeable chasm between rich and poor, the idea of labour exploited by the merciless capitalist, the theory of a class war, the danger of an unpropertied proletariat, the growing dependence of the small manufacturer upon the large combination, all of these conceptions were utilised by the French thinkers who sought to analyse the new society about them. But there is in the case of each a chasm between the end they have in view and the means of its attainment. Each of them has a clear view of what he ultimately desires. Few of them know how to relate the ideal to the structure of grim fact. It was easy to say, with Constantin Pecquer, that the socialisation of production is the sole way to avoid a new industrial feudalism. What they did not do was to produce a philosophy of history that could be used at once as a criterion of method and an explanation of social change. To have done this was the achievement of Karl Marx, and the history of communism after his advent assumes a totally different character because of his work.

III

From whatever aspect it be regarded, the work of Karl Marx is an epoch in the history of social philosophy. It is easy to show that he was less original than he believed, and that his debts to his predecessors were greater than he was anxious to admit. The vital fact about him is that he found communism a chaos and left it a movement. Through him it acquired a philosophy and a direction. Through him, also, it became an international organisation laying continuous emphasis upon the unified interest of the working-classes of all countries. The essence of Marx's work lies not in any special economic doctrine so much as in the spirit by which his total accomplishment was informed. He was the first socialist thinker to realise that it was less important to draw up the detailed constitution of Utopia than to discuss how the road thereto may be traversed. He was the first, also, to understand that the discovery of the road depended upon the detailed analysis of the environment about him. Marx wrote at once the epitaph of the new capitalism and the prophecy of its ultimate outcome. The first aspect of his work, both by reason of the materials he used and the theses he deduced from them, put the defenders of economic individualism finally upon the defensive; the second provided an inspiration to his followers which has increased

in profundity as the years have gone by. It may be true that Marxian economics is in no small degree self-contradictory and it is certainly true that much of the Marxian sociology bears the obvious stigmata of its special time. Yet even when criticism has done its worst, the influence of the man and his doctrine remains enormous; and nothing so well explains the nature of communism as a consideration of his effort and its aftermath.

Marx was born in 1818, the son of a middle-class Jewish family converted to the Christian faith. After a university career, where he did brilliantly, he looked forward to an academic career; but his views had already become too radical for the authorities, and after a short period of journalism in Prussia, he was driven as an exile to Paris in 1843. There he met the French socialists, among them Proudhon, and, most notably, Frederick Engels, with whom he laid the foundations of an historic friendship. Driven from France in 1845, he went to Brussels, where he lived until the outbreak of revolution in the *annus mirabilis* 1848. That stay is notable for his final break with the French socialist tradition by his publication of an attack on Proudhon, the *Misère de la Philosophie* (1847), which is fatal to the latter's system. In the Brussels period, also, he became acquainted, through Engels, with the League of the Just, whose transformation into the League of Communists was made in the

summer of 1847. It was for the second congress of this League, in December of that year, that Marx produced the classic document of communism in the famous *Manifesto*. Hardly was it complete when the outbreak of revolution summoned him to Paris. He did not stay there long; for with members of the League of Communists he was, in June, editing a revolutionary journal, the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*, in Cologne. The articles he wrote for this paper are of great importance, since they foreshadow in some detail the strategy of modern communism. But the movement was before its time. Reaction in Germany was followed by repression in France; and in the summer of 1849 Marx found himself in London, a penniless exile, without prospects or hope. In London he remained until his death in 1883.

The thirty years of his English exile have something of epic quality about them. Though he was helped by Engels from time to time, and was for ten years the poorly paid correspondent of the *New York Tribune*, it was not until the late 'sixties that Marx's circumstances allowed him even the elementary comforts of life. They were years of immense labour. Long hours of research in the British Museum alternated with struggles against the suspicions and jealousies of other exiles. The writing of *Das Kapital* had to find its place amidst the labours, at no time easy, of founding the first International, and the composition of a large

number of pamphlets, some of which, like the defence of the Paris Commune and the criticism of the Gotha programme, are amongst the most important of his works. His health, moreover, was always bad, and a temper at no time easy to live with had to adjust itself to continuous struggles with the divergent needs of Proudhonists and the adherents of Bakunin. Yet with all the difficulties he had to encounter, his death was in no sense premature; he had, as Liebknecht said at his graveside, "raised social democracy from a sect or school to a party." He was, of course, greatly aided by the circumstances of his time; and the colleagueship of men like Engels meant aid more precious than is often received in a political movement. But the history of socialism in the second half of the nineteenth century is so emphatically the history of Marx and his influence that, apart from him, the movement has little meaning of universal quality. To understand, therefore, the events which grew out of his labours, it is necessary to set them in the perspective of his essential ideas.

Marxism as a social philosophy can be most usefully resolved into four distinct parts. It is, first and foremost, a philosophy of history; and, arising from that philosophy, it is a theory of social development intended to guide the party of which he was a leader. Marx, in the third place, outlined a tactic the influence of

which has been of special significance in our own day; himself an uncompromising agitator, he had reflected, as few agitators have the leisure to reflect, upon the adjustment of means to ends. He was, finally, an economic theorist, who sought, upon the basis of the classical economics, to transform its hypotheses into arguments which justified his own philosophy of action. For Marx himself, of course, none of these aspects is properly separable from any other. They form a logical whole, the unity of which he would have passionately defended. It is, however, possible to reject the validity of his economic system, while accepting the large outlines of his social theory. The later chapters of this book will attempt, in some detail, the examination of the whole structure. Here, it is only necessary to explain the bearing of his ideas in order to show the results to which they were related.

The Marxian philosophy of history is the insistence that the primary motive force in social change is the system of economic production which obtains at any given time. To its needs, all other forms of social effort will adjust themselves, whether consciously or unconsciously. Law, religion, politics, philosophy, all these are born of the reaction upon the human mind of the methods by which men wrest from nature the necessary means of life. Clearly, therefore, those who control the means

of production occupy in society a place of special power. Their interest determines the distribution of the product. They make rules of social conduct which are adapted to the service of their interest. But this governing class, whatever the period under review, has not the interest of the community as a whole at heart. Society is divided always into those who control and those who are controlled; at the basis of the community lies the division of classes. It is the Marxian view that the struggle between classes is the vital factor in accelerating social change. As the feudal system became obsolete, the new commercial bourgeoisie struggled with the old landowning class for the control of the State. The Industrial Revolution signalised the triumph of the former, and it is in its turn engaged in a similar struggle with a wage-earning class which has no interest in common with its masters. For while the wage-earners are primarily concerned to sell their labour as dearly as they can, the master desires its purchase at the lowest possible price. And since the wage-earner must sell his labour or starve, the master, who, as the owner of capital, can afford to wait, is in a position to oppress the wage-earner in a way that makes the antagonism between them fundamental. Only, therefore, by the abolition of the master-class is it possible to resolve the conflict.

How is this abolition to be effected? It is

here that Marx made his own original and essential contribution both to social theory and political strategy. The antagonism between classes in the bourgeois State results in the development of trade unions. As these come to realise that their subjection is simply the result of the capitalist system, they become conscious that the interests of their class are one and indivisible. They realise that their combined power would enable them to overthrow the system of private ownership and establish a society in which the means of production belong to its members as a whole. They become, accordingly, increasingly hostile to the existing social order. They refuse to be satisfied with small concessions, and insist upon taking power into their own hands. There then develops the decisive struggle with the master-class, which, to retain its own power, will stop at no means, however foul. The workers must retort in kind. They must seize the State and establish a dictatorship of the wage-earners to secure the transition from capitalist to communist society. The period will inevitably be marked by bloody conflict, since a class does not peacefully acquiesce in its own suppression. The rôle of the class-conscious workers in this period is as much as possible to abridge it by their determination and courage. It would be a simple misreading of history on their part to believe that the masters can be persuaded into surrender.

All of this is, of course, a complete social doctrine, in which the economic theories of Marx are interesting without being integral. But a word upon them is useful, since they throw light upon his underlying view. Basing himself upon the Ricardian definition of value as the product of labour, Marx saw that labour must produce more than it receives. Labour, accordingly, is robbed by the capitalist since it receives only the price it can command in the market, while the surplus, however large, goes to the master. The purpose of socialism is to compel the reversal of this position. This becomes possible by the inherent contradiction of the capitalist régime. The growing poverty of the workers, the increasing concentration of capital in a few hands, the consequent depression of the small capitalist into a dependent of the master-class, the extension of the market to the whole world as a unit, with the resultant solidarity of labour the world over—all of this secures the "death-knell of capitalist private property." "The monopoly of capital," wrote Marx, "becomes a fetter on the mode of production. . . . Centralisation of the means of production and socialisation of labour finally reach a point where they become incompatible with their capitalist integument. This integument is burst asunder. . . . The expropriators are expropriated."

IV

So bare a summary, of course, does less than justice to the wealth of knowledge and ability with which the argument is advanced. But it will suffice if it serves to clarify the history of the doctrine in action. Broadly speaking, that history is now some sixty years old, and is divisible, with reasonable clarity, into two periods. In the first, which ended with the outbreak of war in 1914, socialism was waging a purely propagandist war. It was the outlook of small minority-parties in each country of importance; and even where, as in Germany, it had become a party of significance in the State, its growth was rather the expression of general discontent with existing governments, than of a belief in socialist principles. Nowhere had it seized the reins of power; nowhere, also, had it freed itself from a belief either in the virtues of nationalism, on the one hand, or of a conviction that revolution lay in the womb of some distant future, on the other. Socialists talked, indeed, of revolution, but not as men either prepared or determined to make it.

The war, in this aspect, altered the whole perspective of men's ideas. It revealed the weakness of the existing régime the world over. Socialism became the creed of millions who

before had been content with the milder doctrines of pacifist liberalism. The outbreak of revolution in Russia, the capture of the Russian State by Lenin and the Bolsheviks, their maintenance of power in the face of attack from the rest of Europe, accelerated enormously the development towards a new era. Russia made it evident that Marx was no mere doctrinaire but the expositor of a faith that could be translated, however unexpectedly, into action. With the defeat of Germany, socialism entered into the stage of offensive conflict. It became the essential opposition in all civilised States except upon the American continent. Even the collapse of the parliamentary régime, as in Italy and Spain, only meant those dictatorships of capital which Marx himself had foreseen. On the long view, we seem, at least in Europe, to have entered upon that final period of class-antagonism, of which, in the Marxian view, the inevitable end was the communistic State. Nor are observers wanting to insist that the development, in America and the Far East, of a similar condition is likely rather to be postponed than avoided.

All this is, of course, an excessive simplification of the facts; and it will be necessary, as the argument develops, to revise certain of its affirmations in the light of possibilities of which either Marx did not conceive or which have won new significance that he could not

have foreseen. But it is on any view the fact that any impartial mind must admit that the whole character of social demand has changed. We have reached a period in which the deliberate use of the machinery of the State for the mitigation of social inequality is obviously demanded. We have realised that the existence of a nation divided permanently into rich and poor is incompatible with the attainment of social justice. The choice before us is one of concessions by the governing class on a scale larger than in any previous period of history, or the overthrow of the social order by men who deny the validity of its foundations. That a peaceful compromise may be effected here and there is, clearly, possible enough; Marx himself recognised the possibility of such a compromise, as a transition, in England. But no one assuredly is to-day entitled to argue, at least if he is careful of the facts, either that revolution is impossible, or that revolution is not the inevitable outcome of organised resistance to any vital change. It is in this light that we must examine the recent evolution of socialist history.

It is unlikely that most of those who, on September 25th, 1864, met at St. Martin's Hall, Long Acre, had any notion of the significance of their Assembly. Its English protagonists, stout trade union radicals like George Howell and Odger, saw in it little more than a method of introducing English labour organisation

upon the Continent. For Mazzini and his adherents it was to be the germ of an international and secret society of republicans, and when his view failed, he withdrew from association and support. To Marx alone does it seem to have presented itself from the outset as a union of the proletariat of all countries with the deliberate aim of emancipating the working-class. Its early history was in any case somewhat stormy and diversified; and the discussion of abstract ideas such as the social influence of religion gave the good Howell ample cause to fear that a programme would be drawn up which "the good conscience" of "a Bright or a Gladstone" could not accept. Yet, though in its first few years the International displayed more than the usual pangs of socialist travail, it was clear when it met in Geneva in 1866 that it fulfilled a real want. It had, indeed, already shown signs, in the expulsion of Blanqui and his followers, of that internal doctrinal dissension which was to lead to its downfall. But seventeen English trade unions had joined; and the second Trade Union Congress, in 1869, recommended membership to all affiliated organisations. It could, of course, do little more than pass pious resolutions on such matters as the shorter working-day and the necessity of destroying the Russian Tsardom; though it is evident that its mere existence terrified the political police of the Continent, and resulted in a real

growth of trade unionism there. It was, however, too much a combination of political and industrial units with different purposes, the one having definite revolutionary aims, while the other sought merely the normal ends of trade unionism. And the different nations represented were upon the most varied levels of class-consciousness. The Swiss were individualist radicals; the Belgians had a doctrine of their own, akin to that of Proudhon; the French, as stout Proudhonists, were hostile to state-action. From an amalgam so varied, it was difficult to make a single goal the end.

After 1868, the signs of disintegration grew more intense. The addition to the International of the Germans resulted in the defeat of French proposals on Proudhonist lines. That phantasy had hardly been expelled when Bakunin and his friends made their appearance. The energy and enthusiasm of the Russian revolutionist can hardly be questioned; but he was a man without vision or mind. He was, moreover, notoriously unstable and secretive: underground intrigue was the very breath of his nostrils. To a mind like that of Marx, essentially the German *gelehrte*, Bakunin with his unscientific and haphazard dogmatism, was necessarily abhorrent. The International, indeed, grew, and even developed branches in America; but it was obvious that two such dominating temperaments as Marx and Baku-

nin could not co-operate together. They had different aims and different methods. The one desired a unified and central direction with the capture of the State for revolutionary ends; the other sought to make the International a federation of autonomous bodies aiming everywhere at anarchism. The conflict between them destroyed the International; for so strong and bitter was their antagonism that whole nations were enlisted on either side. In 1872, on the motion of Marx, it was decided to transfer the headquarters to New York. That was, of course, to destroy any prospect of European influence; and one can only suppose that Marx, ill and disillusioned, had come to believe that the International had outlived its usefulness. It lingered on for a little in New York, and actually held a congress in Geneva in 1876. But the vitality of the movement was gone, and when, at the Philadelphia Congress of 1876, only one European delegate attended, the General Council was abolished, and the first International was quietly interred.

Yet two great facts stand out in its history which, despite many of the miserable features which destroyed it, prevent its dismissal as futile. The first is the fact that to its work is directly traceable the conversion of the European working-classes to socialism. After the Congress of 1869, when resolutions in favour of the nationalisation of land were

carried, a cleavage appears, which has become permanent, between the bourgeois parties of the left and socialist parties. The one group may aim at transformation; the other aims at revolutionary transformation. This cleavage was the work of the International's propaganda, and through that instrument, of Marx himself. Upon its wisdom, opinions may differ; but, from any standpoint, it was at once an achievement of world import, and a striking tribute to Marx's powers as an agitator.

The second fact is the Paris Commune of 1871. Few events in modern history have been more unjustly treated, even by liberal-minded writers. So far from being, as it too often appears in the books, the desperate attempt of a few ruffians, the Commune was essentially a foreshadowing of the Bolshevik Revolution, led, in the main, by leaders of the International, built upon a coherent body of social doctrine, and futile only because, premature as it was, it lacked the revolutionary energy of purpose which could alone have been attended with success. Its history has been written with great insight and sympathy by Marx, even though he regarded the attempt as ill-considered. His pamphlet was an official publication of the International, and led to the withdrawal therefrom of the English representatives upon its council. To understand his point of view, it is necessary

to remember that, for the International, the Franco-German war was simply a dynastic adventure from which it stood aside; important, indeed, in that it showed how the necessity of war was secreted in the interstices of capitalism, but unrelated to the interests of the working-class. It should be borne in mind also, that the work of the International had transformed the French trade union movement from a body of craft-workers to a federation committed to Marxian socialism, convinced of the need for revolution, and of the opinion that defeat in war, with its consequent disillusion, offers the most favourable moment for its inception.

From this point of view, failure as it was, it is impossible to overestimate the significance of the Commune. Previous revolutions had been made within the categories of the existing economic system; that of 1871 sought, above all, to shatter the economic system itself. And because it aimed its main blow at the idea of private property, it was met with a repression which, considering the scale of the struggle, was as brutal as any in the historic record. Roughly speaking, the Commune demonstrated for revolutionary socialists six fundamental theorems. It showed, first of all, that it is not enough merely to seize the existing machinery of the State; for the purpose of revolution this must be shattered and replaced by more suitable forms. The army,

moreover, must become an instrument of the proletariat, and not merely the chance and mercenary instrument of the government of the day; it is a weapon of danger unless it is permeated by revolutionary ideas. The old official class, thirdly, must disappear; the civil service must be replaced by men who hold office by the will of the party that has seized power. Nor must the mere capture of authority be regarded as the end of the revolutionary task. The lesson of the Commune is the need for dictatorship. The capitalist class must be repressed, and the dictatorship must continue to use stern measures until the final triumph of its purposes is assured; in this transition period democratic socialism is impossible. The authority of government is, therefore, handed over from organs claiming to be above society to its responsible servants; it is, that is to say, the exclusive and necessary appanage of the party making the revolution. Parliamentarism, finally, must be abolished. In its place must be established "a working corporation, legislative and executive, at one and the same time." "In the parliamentary system," wrote Lenin, "the actual work of the State is done behind the scenes, and is carried out by the departments, the chancelleries and the staffs; Parliament itself is given up to talk for the special purpose of fooling the 'common people.'" In place of this "incessant quadrille," there will be representative institutions,

indeed, but institutions in which the members of the legislative assemblies are themselves submitted to the "armed vanguard of all the exploited and labouring masses."[1]

How far this analysis is legitimate, we may discuss later. Here it is sufficient to note that the failure of the Commune marks the end of an epoch. After 1871, and until 1914, the working-class was, for the most part, engaged in a peaceful development of its power. It was clear that the State was too strong to be destroyed by sudden attack, made without preparation. Revolution for the time being was abandoned, and, as socialist parties attained significance in Parliaments, was replaced by the search for possible mitigations of the capitalist régime. The growth of capitalism, indeed, especially in the guise of imperialism, seemed to suggest that the day of its end was far distant. Everywhere there grew up reformist socialism, representatives of which were even willing, like Millerand and Viviani in France, to take part in capitalist governments; and the trend of economic facts led many, of whom the German socialist, Bernstein, was the most notable, to assert that they had made the Marxian hypotheses obsolete. Certainly, the outbreak of war in 1914 found a European socialism almost wholly devoid of fighting authority.

[1] *The State and Revolution*, by N. Lenin (English translation), pp. 38–56.

V

The institutions of internationalism in the period between 1876 and 1914 were, indeed, typical of reformist socialism. The International, which was revived in 1889, was little more than a negotiating bureau, through which congresses were organised to pass resolutions. Its members were the national socialist parties, some of which were then hardly more than socialist in name, and all of which were too infected by nationalistic sentiments to be willing to co-operate for a common end. They were dominated by the German Social Democrats, who were officially Marxist; but their socialism did not mean much more than a profound hostility to war, and a vague insistence that it should be ended speedily and the crisis utilised to bring about the fall of capitalist supremacy. The resolution was simply a pious hope; for no measures of any kind to give effect to it had been thought out, and when the crisis did come, it found international socialism ineffective and unprepared. It resolved that the war was unnecessary and iniquitous, but most of its leading figures, while avoiding the cruder patriotism of the capitalist parties, united with the latter in its prosecution, and even direction.

To the communist, indeed, the position

created by the war was radically different from the view of it taken by the reformist socialists. To him, the war was simply the inevitable result of competing capitalisms in their imperialist guise; and imperialism was, in its turn, the expiring effort of nationalist capitalism to postpone its inevitable disintegration. Whether one capitalist imperialism triumphed over another was to him a matter devoid of importance. His task was to utilise the great crisis produced by the war to point out to the workers the significance of the position. The capitalist State had been, in his view, undermined at its base; consolidated revolutionary effort would secure its overthrow. To the communist, therefore, the situation was similar to that which confronted the Communards of 1871, even if the theatre of events was upon a vastly greater scale. The question of essential import was to use to the full the opportunity so uniquely afforded. Capitalism, as Marx had foreseen, had become its own gravedigger; was the working-class prepared at once to celebrate the funeral and, by force, take over the estate?

Two conferences held during the war, the one at Zimmerwald in 1915, the other at Kienthal in 1916, explain the growth of divergence between the two camps of socialism. At Zimmerwald the main emphasis is upon the horrors of war. The need for peace is

proclaimed. The socialists who have joined belligerent governments are denounced; a demand is made for peace without annexations or indemnities; and the duty of justly recognising national rights is insisted upon. Save for a phrase which calls upon the proletariat of the world to unite on action (what action is not specified) on behalf of socialism, the resolutions at Zimmerwald might well have come from any congress of pacifists. But at Kienthal, where Lenin was one of the outstanding figures, the atmosphere takes on a different hue. There cannot, it is asserted, be any durable peace under capitalism. The only way thereto lies through the conquest of political power by the masses, and the ownership of capital by the peoples. This can come only as they struggle with increasing intensity against imperialism and its wars so that the struggle may be transformed into a contest between capitalist and proletariat. The Second International is vigorously denounced and the whole tone of the conference suggests that a great event or a great leader would swing its members into the full tide of revolutionary ardour.

The great event was the Russian Revolution and the event produced the great leader in Lenin. The revolution, of course, was no sudden or unexpected event; it was based upon a series of great failures and accelerated by the utter incapacity and corruption revealed

by the Tsarist government during the war. Beginning, in March of 1917, as the normal constitutional upheaval, its early protagonists made the fatal error of assuming that the war was popular with the Russian people and that a change of system could be conducted coincidently with its continuance. The Bolshevik party, under Lenin's leadership, made no such mistake. With the promise of immediate peace they were able to win over the army and the masses to their side; and November of 1917 saw in power a body of men wedded to Marxian doctrine and trained by long experience in the habits of revolution. At home, they created an iron dictatorship the power of which was maintained less by its own effectiveness than by the folly of the European governments. For the latter, angry at the making of peace by the new Russia, and disturbed at the doctrines which it proceeded to enforce, either themselves engaged in war upon it, or subsidised a series of dubious adventurers prepared, for a consideration, to attempt its overthrow. The result was to transform the dictatorship of a party into the government of a nation. The Russian demand for peace found response among the peoples of Europe; and the refusal of governments to pay attention to the response, even when the socialist parties of England, Italy and Germany voted to go to the Stockholm Conference, was probably the worst error they

could have made in attacking the new communistic state. For, thereby, they revealed themselves as imperialistic in outlook; and the revelations of the secret treaties, published by the Bolsheviks on their assumption of power, created a disillusion throughout Western Europe which the idealism of President Wilson did little to mitigate. The Stockholm Conference was, indeed, held without them; but it did more to further cleavage among socialists than to make possible a peace of justice. It decided upon a new International, and when the armistice made possible its summons, it was discovered that reformist and revolutionary socialists had each created their separate organisation. That of the former—the restored Second International—was, in essentials, little more than a pacifist society, aiming at socialism, indeed, but within the accepted categories of law. It existed for resolution and protest; it did not exist for action. That of Moscow—the Third International—was created for, and still exists for, the making of world-revolution. It would have no dealings of any kind with the reformist elements of socialism. Its programme was simply the strategy and ends which were the staple of Bolshevist doctrine. Its control was vigorously centralised in Moscow, and it did not permit its adherents to deviate from the path indicated to them. What it was in its origins, it has in essence remained. Esti-

mates of its authority and influence will differ as widely as opinion upon the wisdom of its tactics. It remains, in any case, as a definite challenge to those who believed that social evolution is possible in the medium of peace.

VI

Those who represent the Bolshevists as a set of unprincipled adventurers in German pay do sorry service to the understanding of the greatest event in history since the Reformation. They represent simply that section of the revolutionary party which has adopted the Marxian principles in their most extreme form; their name simply expresses the fact that at a conference held in Brussels and London in 1903, their views won the assent of the majority of the delegates there. Most of their leaders, and notably Lenin and Trotsky, were old and tried revolutionaries, who had served long terms of imprisonment under the Tsarist régime, and had dedicated their lives to the service of their cause. Their methods may have been tyrannical; the price of their success may have been enormous. But it is illegitimate to question either their honesty or their idealism. They were victorious over their opponents for a number of obvious reasons. They were, at the moment of their triumph, the one party in Russia who

knew what they wanted and had the iron determination necessary to secure it. They were, also, the one party who were not prepared to compromise with any revolutionary effort which, like that of the first Revolution of March 1917, was merely political in character. They were, further, the only party prepared to buy the support of the masses by making peace at any price at which it could be purchased. The Russian people had ceased to be interested in the war because they were weary of it; the Bolsheviks had never been favourable to the war because they regarded it as simply an imperialist adventure. When to all this is added the fact that their opponents had neither a determined policy nor an efficient machinery, it is not difficult to understand their success in a country so little accustomed as Russia to political habits. And whatever chances there were of their subsequent failure were entirely negatived by the attempts of the Allies to overthrow them. For there was thus aroused on their behalf that same profound patriotism of the Russian people which had displayed itself during the Napoleonic invasion of 1812. Civil war and foreign invasion gave to the Bolsheviks exactly the breathing space they required to measure their position and to revise their mistakes. As the weakness of their Russian opponents was the chief cause of their victory, so the error of their foreign

opponents was the chief cause of its consolidation.

It is in any case difficult, and in a short space it is impossible, to assess the achievement of the Bolshevists since they first came into power. On their own confession, they have made innumerable mistakes; but it is probably a sign of their political strength that they have been able to admit them. They sought, in the beginning, to take rapid and gigantic strides towards the general socialisation of the means of production. Factories, workshops, land, the distributive process, were all of them nationalised in wholesale fashion. The expert was, if not dispensed with, at least treated with contempt; and the common man, provided that he sympathised with the Revolution, was dressed in his little brief hour of authority. A dictatorship was established, and opposition of every kind, even from socialist sources, was suppressed with what, to the outsider, seems savage cruelty. Religion was everywhere attacked; education became merely a training in communist ideas; election to the various assemblies were manipulated with a brutal directness that must have caused pangs of envy to the most powerful of American "bosses." The aristocracy and the bourgeoisie, by the mere fact of their origins, were treated as though they embodied original sin. Save thought itself, nothing was outside the sphere of communist

dictatorship; and it must be added that the discipline imposed by the party on others was perhaps less strict than that imposed upon its members. The task, it is only fair to say, was overwhelming. The war had left Russia disorganised; civil war and plague and famine made it a shambles. No party could have wrought order from this chaos without methods that savoured of something akin to terrorism.

The central mistake in Bolshevist policy was, it is probable, greatly to underestimate the psychic resistance they would encounter. The outstanding result of their effort has been the abolition of agrarian feudalism in Russia; the peasant has become *de facto* owner of the soil. Herein Russian agrarian life shares all the characteristic features of the new peasant states of Eastern Europe; and there is no special reason to suppose that the Russian village will prove more amenable to communist ideas than the peasantry of other lands. Private trading, moreover, has, though after a bitter struggle, been restored upon something approaching its pre-war scale; and the needs of production have led to the re-introduction of what would elsewhere be described as bourgeois small industry. The idea of equal wages, of which much was made in 1918, has gone; and piecework and the bonus upon output have been glorified in a way that conveys almost an American enthusiasm for

such ideas. The large industries have been organised into great trusts, and they resemble, in their working and relation to the State, nothing so much as the railway companies of England and America. Small factories are leased either to their former owners, or to other persons; and their organisation and conduct is not noticeably different from those of other countries. After a disastrous attempt to abolish a money-economy, the normal currency has been restored; and with it has come the usual habits of a State concerned to tax that its budget may be balanced.

Certain special features remain. The State holds the monopoly of foreign trade; and its complete control of the banking system places all credit facilities at its disposal. The Supreme Council of People's Economy, moreover, has its hands upon the flow of production; and since the great trusts are run by boards that it appoints, it may be said to have, and to exercise, final powers of intervention and management in the most important parts of commercial activity. The trade unions, moreover, have nothing of that freedom of action characteristic of England or France; they are rigorously disciplined and may, on an English analogy, be said to live under the shadow of a drastic and permanent Emergency Powers Act. Broadly speaking, there would not be much disagreement with the view that after a premature attempt at communism,

the Bolshevists have re-introduced some of the normal features of a capitalist economy, limited, however, by vigorous State control. They hope, it need not be said, that this reaction is merely a transition-stage; for as education in communist principles, particularly among the youth of Russia, becomes general, the movement forward may be facilitated. This is, it may be suggested, a special problem in time; for Russia remains a nation of peasants, and the latter are, very largely, their own economic masters. It is difficult to see how they can avoid an attempt to consolidate their position in the villages by insisting upon a full share in political power. If this occurs, the movement towards a general communism is likely to be slow in coming.

Yet there are certain psychological gains which must not be denied. It is, on any rational view, an immense merit to have got finally rid of the apparatus of Tsarism. A new and more powerful tyranny may have taken its place; but it is at least a tyranny conceived in the interests of the masses. There are, moreover, signs that this is realised in Russia. Observers worthy of credit report a sense of moral stature in the multitude which is a new fact in Russian history. There is a change, too, in the character of the people. "One need only spend a few hours in Moscow," writes Mr. Farbman, "to realise how the events of the last seven years have infected the people with a new fever of activity,

self-assertion, and acquisitiveness. Of the notorious dreamy and idle Slav temperament, nothing now remains in Russia." Despite all that has occurred, there seem to have emerged new impulses of hope and energy among the masses. There is widespread poverty and suffering. There is nothing of democracy or liberty in the senses in which those words are understood in Western Europe. But there is a new hope of achievement unknown in previous Russian history; and that hope has kindled a spark of ambition in the proletariat of the West which sets the temper of democratic effort there as the French Revolution did one hundred and thirty years ago.

It is yet difficult not to feel that these results are less the consequence of Bolshevism than of the Bolshevists. They are, as a party, comparable to nothing so much as the Society of Jesus. There is, in both, the same rigorous and unyielding set of dogmas, the same iron rigour of discipline, the same passionate loyalty capable of unlimited self-confidence. The Jesuit who set out to preach his faith in China or the unknown Arctic North-West is not dissimilar to the Communist who volunteers to bury the infected corpses in the cholera epidemic. Like the Jesuit, the Communist has no personal end to secure; he feels himself essentially the servant of a great idea. Like the Jesuit, also, the Russian Communist has the assurance that he works for a cause

that is bound in the end to triumph. No one can read the literature of Bolshevism without the sense that its doctrine of predestination is one of the secrets of its success; no one fights so well as the man who has assurance of his ultimate triumph. That certainty produces in its possessors the temperament of the fanatic. They know so surely the rightness of their end that they feel morally entitled to use all means for its accomplishment.

It is this assurance that they have the truth (and, with it, the future) on their side which makes the Bolsheviks so impatient of, and so intolerant to, criticism and dissent. Like all the great spiritual fanatics of history, they cannot help but equate disagreement with sin. The followers of Mahomet, the Ironsides of Cromwell, the Calvinists at Geneva, had the same sublime self-confidence and audacity. Like the Inquisitor in Mr. Shaw's *Saint Joan*, they regret the duty of persecution; but they have no shred of doubt of its absolute necessity. Mistakes are capable of pardon, but not intellectual error, since the truth is there if men will only make the effort to perceive it. Any body of men with kindred ideas will be driven to sacrifice democracy and toleration to a creed that possesses a dictatorship to enforce it.

This, it should be added, is said by way of explanation and not of apology. Anyone who deals with modern communism is dealing with a new religion which has to win its spurs;

and all new religions in that position, as Christianity itself has demonstrated, will use the sword for their propagation. It is this fact which makes the life of Marx the turning-point in communist history. Before his time, its theories were not a programme but a series of moral aphorisms. Marx supplied it with a strategy, and Lenin and his disciples have turned that strategy into an applied philosophy. Nothing is gained by dismissing it either as intellectual or moral error. For, in the first place, no philosophy ever gains a hold upon the minds of men without being a response to aspirations not otherwise satisfied; and, in the second, most great errors in social theory turn out, upon critical examination, to contain at least an index to important truth.

One other remark may be made. The study of the essential principles of communism has a special value because it compels us to submit more orthodox doctrines to a closer examination than they are wont to receive. It is a warning to us not to confound, as Tocqueville put it, the institutions to which we are accustomed with the necessary foundations of society. Englishmen especially, with over six hundred years of parliamentary institutions behind them, are accustomed to think of representative democracy as the ideal pattern towards which the progressive State inevitably moves. Yet representative democracy is, in the world as a whole, confined to a very small portion of its surface; and the sceptic might reason-

ably interject the observation that we are witnessing its increasing rejection rather than its increasing acceptance. Nor is that all. Many who have been horrified at the price paid for the establishment of Bolshevism in Russia have sometimes welcomed, and not seldom condoned, the dictatorships of Italy and Hungary, the methods of which have been remarkably similar in substance. The classic purposes of the State, liberty, equality, the career open to the talents, social justice, accordingly need examination not merely in terms of their virtue as ends, but in terms of their practicability as ends in the light of the institutions through which they are to be achieved. Communism does not deny those ends as good. But it denies absolutely and with passion that they have meaning in terms of the modern State. It brings to that denial a completely alternative view both of the meaning of historic phenomena, and of the methods by which, as ends, they be achieved. No one who seriously acquaints himself with that alternative but must be impressed by its power. For even if, upon analysis, it be rejected, it compels the adjustment of one's own philosophy to a richer and wider perspective. It emphasises neglected aspects of history and, by the authority of its emphasis, translates them into demands. The future will either secure their satisfaction or submit to its control.