

Mr Wilson's campaign, and perhaps the most alluring and deceptive promise which he held out to the electorate was that the election of a Labour government would be followed by a period of "peace and quiet", in which the electorate might go happily about its own business without bothering any further with the dissensions of bickering politicians. I myself have no doubt whatever that this was precisely what the great majority of the electorate wished to hear, and that such a promise, however veiled and vague, did more than anything else to win Mr Wilson his majority.

There is, however, equally no doubt that this is a promise which cannot be fulfilled. Indeed, probably no one except Mr Wilson would have the effrontery to make it. For the truth of the present situation is that Britain at the moment is faced not by one crisis but by two, of which one is domestic and is to a limited degree under our own control; and the second is external and is the result of factors on which we can, on our own, exercise no influence whatever. Of the two crises, the second is by far the most urgent and severe. It faces the bourgeois-capitalist world, to which after all we belong, with the threat of a total collapse of its monetary arrangements, with mass unemployment on a scale not experienced since the Great Depression of 1929-33, and a progressive restriction of its access to the sources of raw materials and energy on which the system

depends. What is more, the immediate world crisis is only a pale reflection of the even greater pressures and strains to which the system will in the long run be subjected as a result of the explosive growth of world population and the additional demands this imposes on the natural resources of the planet. Such pressures have already made themselves evident in large areas of Asia and Africa, in which starvation is no longer a threat but a reality, and in all probability a continuing one.

It is a sign of the insular parochialism of British politics today that such problems were not allowed to play any part in the October election. So far as they were, it was in the form of a promise by the Government that within a year we should be offered the choice at the ballot box of retreating even further into Isolationism, and it is significant that no party cared to make of this a vital electoral issue. Perhaps this was due to an underlying feeling that since we can do no more about the world crisis, and its consequences, than (say) Abyssinia or Bangladesh, we might as well not think about it. But if this was so, it was yet another mark of how far we have declined from any aspiration to be a world power, either on our own account or in association with the peoples of Europe, who by now offer us our only chance of exercising any kind of effective control over our own future or the world's.

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TO SUCH PROBLEMS, as to all others, Mr Wilson has one single answer: the Social Contract. This is the euphemism by which he has christened the corrupt bargain he has struck with the General Council of the T.U.C., by which the trade union leaders promise the Government political favours in return for economic benefits to which the Government has committed itself in its electoral manifesto. It is, of course, a gross misuse of words to dignify a bargain of this kind with the title of a "contract", whether social or otherwise. In the first place, neither of the contracting parties have the power to fulfil their commitments. The T.U.C.'s General Council has no power to restrain its members from doing whatever they choose to do; the Government does not have the means to fulfil the commitments entered into in its manifesto. In the second place, there are no sanctions which either party will incur if it fails to fulfil its part of the contract; indeed, any sanctions incurred are likely to be incurred at the expense of other parties which are excluded from the contract. It is not surprising that Mr Len Murray, of the T.U.C., should now have denied that any economic crisis exists, because it is only too evident that the Social Contract provides no means of dealing with one. What we have, according to Mr Murray, is a few local difficulties which can easily be solved with a modicum of good will.

But there is another sense in which Mr Wilson is guilty of a grave misuse of language in speaking of a Social Contract, to which he now refers as if it were some constitutional document, like *Magna Carta*, hallowed by age and dignified by time, and now sealed by the consent of the electorate. The Social Contract has indeed a long history, but its part has been played in the realm of ideas rather than of facts. An invention of Rousseau's to explain why it is that men are born equal but are everywhere in chains, it rests upon the notion of a General Will which is different from, and superior to, the will of the individuals composing any given society, and as such has the right to demand their obedience and consent. How such a will was to be identified, and where, if at all, it resided, Rousseau was never able to explain satisfactorily. It depended on the nature of the society concerned, and on the individual or individuals who identified themselves with it; and in any case it was doubtful if it would ever emerge in any community too large to be accommodated around the oak tree on the village green.

Of course, Harold Wilson may claim to have succeeded where Jean-Jacques Rousseau failed. The General Will is to be identified with the

General Council of the T.U.C. in consultation with the Labour government. Anyone who disagrees with it is, socially speaking, in a state of mortal sin, even though his views may be those of the great majority of his fellow citizens, as expressed at the polls. It is true that, between Rousseau and Mr Wilson, the General Will has rather come down in the world. Saint-Just used it to justify the Paris Terror. Mr Wilson uses it to justify a Westminster deal.

NOT EVERYONE, of course, is convinced by Mr Wilson's excursion into political philosophy, even among the trade unionists. Mr Hugh Scanlon, for one, is not deceived. He knows that there is no such thing as the General Will, and hence no Social Contract, unless in Hobbes's sense of a willing obedience to the will of the stronger, so long as it saves one from the state of nature in which life is nasty, brutish and short. Mr Scanlon is no fool; at the moment he perhaps quite rightly judges that the will of the stronger is represented by the Amalgamated Engineering Union, and other unions; and he intends to see to it that the life of many people may well be nasty and brutish unless they concede his demand for unrestricted wage increases. Mr Joe Gormley, or certainly Mr Mick McGahey, one feels, takes the same view about the National Union of Mineworkers. Is not its will socially superior to, and politically stronger than, that of the great mass of ordinary British citizens who belong to no trade union and who, poor things, could not recognise a General Will if they saw one?

Philosophical errors have a way of coming home to roost when taken as a guide to action. It is a pity that the level of political debate in Britain today has sunk so low that during the election no one cared to call attention to the implications of the Social Contract. As Alan Watkins, the *New Statesman's* political pundit, asked: why bring Rousseau into it, what the hell does a philosopher matter? But Rousseau does matter, even today. I doubt if in any other country in the world today it would be possible to pull the wool over people's eyes by resuscitating Rousseau's errors, and I fear that before his government is over the Prime Minister may find the Social Contract a very awkward and intractable weapon, which can be used just as well against him as for him by anyone who chooses to identify himself with the General Will. But the truly awful thing is that this time Mr Wilson may really believe what he is saying.

R

Freud & Jewish Marginality

By Stanley Rothman and Phillip Isenberg

"Quite by the way, how comes it that none of the godly ever devised psychoanalysis and one had to wait for a godless Jew?"

SIGMUND FREUD to OSKAR PFISTER, (9 October, 1918)



WHILE HE WAS a student at the *Sperlgymnasium* in Vienna, young Sigmund Freud flirted briefly with radical politics. The flirtation continued into his first years at the University of Vienna, though with decreasing interest, and finally came to an end. During this period of his life, Freud made the acquaintance of a number of other Jewish students who were later to become prominent in socialist politics, including Heinrich Braun and Victor Adler. All of them were, for a time, members of the *Leseverein*, a student organisation committed to "pan-Germanism" and vaguely to socialism, and Braun and Freud were quite close. Later in life Freud recalled that:

... he [Braun] encouraged me in my aversion to school and what was taught there, and aroused a number of revolutionary feelings in me. . . . I admired him, his energetic behaviour, compared him secretly with a lion and was convinced that one day he would fill a leading position in the world.

At this point Freud was contemplating a

legal and political career, dedicated to social reform. However, by the time he left the *Gymnasium* he had changed his mind and had decided to eschew politics for medicine. In both *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) and his *Autobiography* (1925), Freud ascribes his shift in plans to hearing a public reading of an *Essay on Nature*, which at the time was thought to have been written by Goethe. The decision, Freud notes, barred him from politics, for one could not be a doctor and a politician at the same time.

Carl Schorske is somewhat sceptical of the reasons Freud offers for his shift in career plans. As he points out, at least some Jewish radicals—including Abraham Fischhoff, a revolutionary of the 1848 generation, with whom Freud partly identified at one time—combined medicine and politics, and Viktor Adler himself was trained as a doctor. Schorske implies that Freud's decision was at least partly based on his feeling that liberal politics in Vienna was all but dead, and that it made more sense to seek professional success. Schorske also suggests that the later development of psychoanalysis by Freud involved an attempt to resolve the dilemmas of the political liberal on the psychological level by attaining inner freedom.¹

Schorske's explanation is not without merit. After all a reasonably large number of middle-class Jews followed much the same path that Freud did. Alienated from traditional Judaism after their emergence from the ghetto, they were attracted to radical politics while at the university, only to drop their political commitments for professional careers after graduating.

The attraction of radicalism with a pan-German tinge to a generation of Jewish students was not surprising. As Jews in a Christian society they were "marginal men", subject to discrimination and harassment by accident of birth. For those anxious to escape marginality a number of possible paths lay open. Some hoped to convert Judaism into a more acceptable faith by becoming "Reform Jews." Others thought of conversion, often involving an attempt to be more German

¹ Carl Schorske, "Politics and Patricide in Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams*", *The American Historical Review* (April 1973), pp. 328–347. Schorske's article deals with some of the same material covered in this essay (for example, the Count Thun and "Hollthurn" dreams, discussed below) but comes to quite different conclusions from those we shall develop. Lack of space prevents us from discussing his analysis here. The interested reader can refer to our essay, "Sigmund Freud and the Politics of Marginality", *Central European History*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (March 1974), pp. 58–78.