

Enter the giant sloth, a shroud of fur.
Death of brain-stem, cortex. Shall we move
Beyond the play of all our swords and cancers
Into a dust, a very valiant dust?

Lie, under the graveyard's airy gabble,
Careless of new command, the wheel of men,
The nimble flags which sprig about our graves?

D. M. Thomas

The Foetus

A foetus was heard to cry out
while it was being aborted behind screens
the foetus showed signs of being alive
apparently it was human
apparently it was alive
some women wept
the Minister has ordered/the Minister is disturbed

the foetus did not cry it cried out
it cried out once to the world
with a voice that was human
but it did not make sense
which disturbed the Minister
and the women who were infertile
and the hospital padre

a foetus was heard to cry out
while it was being aborted behind screens
it signalled once its existence
it touched the world for an instant
it was evidently alive
it was evidently human
unlike the foetuses who did not cry out
while they were being aborted behind screens
some women wept

the Minister is disturbed
abortions should not take place
where infertile women are gathered
there is already too much crying
too much crying out
it might disturb the other foetuses
the ones that do not cry out
to hear human cries

A Conversation with Milovan Djilas

I. “Lenin’s Best Disciple”

IF HE EVER enjoyed anything, Joseph Stalin would have enjoyed the 100th anniversary of his birth (21 December 1979). This may be an appropriate time to review Stalinism—past, present, and possibly future. You, Milovan Djilas, are one of the best-equipped witnesses to do so, having embraced it, worked with it, raised doubts about it, and finally fought, renounced, and denounced it in the course of a long, tempestuous career.

Let me start with a question which has exercised students of Communist affairs more than any other because it touches on the exposed nerve of Marxism: Does Stalinism naturally follow from some aspect of Marx’s social or economic thinking? In other words, was some form of Stalinism bound to happen—or was Stalinism an abuse of Marxism? Was it, alternatively, perhaps neither, but a *sui generis* Russian phenomenon?—Or indeed a freakish development which cannot be explained in terms of either the Marxist or the Russian framework?

DJILAS: Stalinism is certainly not a natural, much

less an unavoidable, product of Marxism. Nothing in Marx’s theory foreshadows or legitimises the cult of the personality—even though the phrase was used by Marx.

It is of course true that the reception of Marx by the socialists of his time contained an element of hero-worship. Already some of these early Marxists had raised Marx’s “scientific” prophecies to the status of dogma. Still, it is impossible to derive from Marx anything like a Stalinoid cult of the personality. Indeed, Marx is on record as having been totally opposed to any form of personalised leadership.

Leninism is quite another matter. The victory of the Bolsheviks under Lenin, their claim to the leadership of the World Proletariat and the role of Lenin as head of “the vanguard” implied and indeed demanded the rise of Stalinism of one kind or another. I am not saying that Lenin personally encouraged the cult of himself as a totalitarian leader. He didn’t. Nevertheless, a cult of extraordinary proportions came into being even while Lenin was alive. Upon his death, *Pravda* immediately appointed him *leader* of the World Revolution and the World Proletariat, and Stalin—

MILOVAN DJILAS was, until his fall from power in 1954, Vice-President of Yugoslavia, President of the Federal Parliament, and a Member of the Politburo and Central Committee. He was imprisoned under the Monarchy (1933–36), and under Tito (1956–61 and 1962–66). His publications include “The New Class”, “Conversations with Stalin”, “Land Without Justice”, “The Unperfect Society”, and “Wartime.”

GEORGE URBAN’s conversations with prominent Communists, Euro-Communists, and Western historians, many of which first appeared in the pages of *ENCOUNTER*, are collected in his two recent books (both published by Temple Smith): “Euro-Communism” (1978), and “Communist Reformation” (1979).

AS WE GO TO PRESS it is not yet clear what the conse-

quences will be of Djilas’ latest altercation with the Yugoslav authorities. A fine of 10,000 dinars was imposed on him by a Belgrade court. He did not intend to pay it, for he does not recognise the legitimacy of governmental control over who should or should not edit or write, particularly for a literary magazine. But the court ordered that the fine be paid; he himself would have opted for prison. The official accusation, always accompanied by the old charge of “provocation”, was his so-called “spiritual fatherhood” of a new mimeographed cultural review entitled “Casovnik (The Clock)”. The tiny publication was, of course, quickly denounced by “Politika” (19 October) under the headline PROVOCATION IN “LITERARY” DISGUISE: “. . . Djilas has been warned several times about his anti-Yugoslav activities. However, despite all these warnings he has gone too far. . . . How long does Djilas intend to go on in defiance . . . ?”