

Sartre always felt more attracted towards communism, which “embodied history on the march (*incarnait l'histoire en marche*).” So it was that he became the very prototype of the intellectual masochist, predisposed towards fellow-travelling.

THEN CAME “THE THUNDERBOLT . . . by means of irrefutable documents we learned of the existence of actual concentration camps in the Soviet Union.” Recovering from their first consternation, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty declared that “we should judge communism by its intentions and not by its actions.” “Ten or fifteen million deportees did not open my eyes”, Sartre was to say later, when the time came to confess to illusions and delusions, to own up. In 1952 he was still denouncing “bacteriological warfare” in Korea. “They manipulated me from A to Z”, he was later to admit. But why did he always allow himself to be manipulated? “The USSR wants peace; it proves that every day”, he wrote. The Communists finally caught on to the advantages they could derive from this illustrious innocent, *ce naïf au grand prestige*. They invited him to the World Peace Congress in Vienna, and brought him to Moscow. Following that visit, Sartre wrote in 1954: “There is total freedom to criticise in the USSR.” It was Ilya Ehrenburg who told him so. The Soviet writer subsequently confided (to Astier de la Vigerie) that he was forced to talk nonsense to Sartre because the KGB had him under continual surveillance: “*Je pensais sincèrement Sartre assez averti pour comprendre ma comédie et qu'il ne me croirait pas. Le con.* (I honestly thought that Sartre was smart enough to understand my play-acting and that he wouldn't believe me. Bloody fool!).”

Sartre was stunned by the events of 1956. “It was my ideas

that were falling beneath the Russian bullets. The [Soviet] intervention was a crime.”

Disillusioned with the USSR and with the Communist Party, there was only one battle which Sartre did not regret: the one he fought against France's war in Algeria. “For once history proved me right.” But it was on the occasion of a first visit to the post-Batista Cuba in 1960 that he believed he had found the ideal revolution. He spent three days with Fidel Castro, travelling all over the island, and said in a blaze of enthusiasm: “He is the island, the people, the livestock, the plants and the land, all at once.” Twenty years later he came to see Cuba differently—“a crumbling economy, poverty, the crushing police of a single Party, and total dependence on the USSR.” But meanwhile he had fallen in love with the “Cultural Revolution” in Mao's China.

May 1968 in France took him by surprise: “What an upheaval of values!” Overcome with wonder and humility, he interviewed Daniel Cohn-Bendit for the *Nouvel Observateur*. He enthused and applauded, but he kept his distance—“I was too old to take part.” Sartre then made “the great discovery that the French Communists were afraid of revolution.” They had been schooled by Stalinism into not daring to take power. “*Une nouvelle extrême—gauche est née: avec délice j'épousais leur cause* (A new Far Left was born: I embraced its cause with delight).” It was the final act of Sartre's active life. He agreed to run the journal of the most extremist group, *la gauche prolétarienne*, and became particularly involved with the young extremist leader Benny Lévy, in whom he saw “a new type of intellectual.” They were co-authors of a book called *On a raison de se révolter*. In 1972, the majority of *la gauche prolétarienne* chose to break up rather than go over to terrorism in the violent manner of the Red Brigades. To give Sartre his due, he had some influence on this decision. The revolutionaries went back to their books. Sartre gave a few more interviews, came out on behalf of the refugees from Viet Nam (shaking hands again with Raymond Aron at the Paris public meeting for “the boat people”),² and then fell silent.

² See François Fejtő, “Raymond Aron and Jean-Paul Sartre: An Historic Handshake”, *ENCOUNTER*, October 1979.

Widow Music

Here ebony on ivory dictates
A style for winter, where a widow's hands
Tell through the keys how love debilitates—

Ice-chimes recall a limousine cortège,
Black bonnets crested with an icy surf,
The lancing coolness of a husband's flesh,

This almost-nothingness of mind, the slow
White days like pages read again, again,
The pool iced-over, deckchairs furred with snow. . . .

James Lasdun

Politics & World Affairs

. . . and the Same Old Problems

Thatcherism & Beyond—By SAMUEL BRITTAN



LENIN is supposed to have said: "He who is not for us is against us." With Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, it is the other way round: "He who is not against her, unreservedly heart and soul, is really for her . . ."; and this, it would seem, is the view of much of the intelligentsia, the media, and a wide range of people, ranging from polytechnic graduates to the "old" land-owning Tory supporters.

It is all somewhat disconcerting to those of us who have never been Conservatives, and who are indeed critical of a good deal of present British Government policy (or lack of policy), but who find much of the prevalent knee-jerk anti-Thatcherism based on the wrong criticisms of the wrong issues and rooted in a Bourbon-like refusal to learn from past mistakes.

There is also a persistent unwillingness among Mrs Thatcher's critics (and some of her admirers too) to see how similar British economic policies are to those to which other Western European governments (whether called Conservative as in Germany or "Socialist" as in France) have found their way. Everywhere, governments are following "sound money", trying to reduce Budget deficits and to close down loss-making coal-mines, steel-mills, and other enterprises. Everywhere, too, some relief is sought from the strain of these adjustments by protectionist barriers against Third World and Japanese products (e.g. textiles, cars, electronics) or by levying the consumer to protect the farmer and land-owner.

There is nothing in the record to suggest that the Thatcher Government has gone further than others in its pursuit of sound money or its attempts to limit public spending. The one contrary example is the denationalisation programme known as "privatisation." Indeed, state aid for lame ducks has continued apace. The British Government has not disengaged

from British Leyland, Rolls Royce, or any other troublesome concern. At the height of the coal strike, the Prime Minister boasted of £1.3 billion per annum "support" (an inextricable mixture of subsidy and "investment") for the Coal Board, and "buying British" is an official policy.

Nor has there been anything to suggest a counter-revolution against the Welfare State. As Jock Bruce-Gardyne freely admits in his admirably candid analysis of the record,¹ Government spending and the tax burden are now both higher as a proportion of the national income than in 1979 when Mrs Thatcher took office. Moreover, Welfare spending, other than unemployment pay, has shared in this increase. Even with the most successful attempts to impose a real ceiling from now on (and the best of luck with economic growth), the Government does not expect to get these percentages all the way down to the 1979 levels after two terms of office.

Why then the anti-Thatcher hysteria, exemplified by the Oxford vote against giving her an honorary degree? Why have level-headed people placed Margaret Thatcher on a par with a supporter of violent extra-parliamentary methods such as Arthur Scargill? How could so-called liberal journalists and Anglican bishops hesitate for one moment about supporting the legitimate government against attempts to remove it by brute force? Especially when the attempts included the most odious intimidation of workers and trade-unionists by gangs reminiscent of Mussolini's private armies.

A partial answer to these conundrums is simply British snobbery. Jock Bruce-Gardyne remarks how soon Mrs Thatcher became an object of derision "in the better class of political dining-room." Members of her Shadow Cabinet when in Opposition "indulged in analyses of her character as the port was circulating which occasionally induced the bystander to wonder why they agreed to serve under her leadership. . . ." (No prizes for answering that question.)

A slightly more rational ground for passionate opposition is the thought: "What would she really like to do if she had full power?" But a little reflection should show the absurdity of using this yardstick for a very practically-minded politician. For the fact is that no peace-time Prime Minister can, heaven be praised, be a dictator; and, whatever Mrs Thatcher may say in a relaxed mood to her confidants, she does not *know* what she would do in extremely unlikely hypothetical circumstances. Because the slightest mention of anything like

¹ *Mrs Thatcher's First Administration: The Prophets Confounded.* By JOCK BRUCE-GARDYNE. Macmillan, £20.00, paper £7.95.