

None of the fundamental causes of dispute has changed, none of the issues raised has been settled, and the teachers have still to fight out their own internal battle, which will affect the final outcome.

VI

What conclusions can be drawn from this story? First, that the professional workers in the public service can no longer be assumed to be outside the main stream of industrial trade unionism. They have been drawn much closer to the working class and to the working class movement by the inexorable logic of a Tory policy which unites more and more sections of the people against it. The apparent contradiction between "professionalism" and trade unionism has not been resolved, but the prevailing trend has been in favour of the latter.

Secondly, the myth of "political neutrality" has been dealt a smashing blow especially among teachers, but not yet a decisive one. "Politics" have penetrated deeply into discussion of action on economic issues but the teachers' unions are

certainly still a considerable way off fully accepting the political implications of serious struggle on these issues. For example, one of the great contradictions of the situation, still unresolved, is that, coincident with the changes described, there has been no comparable parallel change in the attitude of the organised profession to discussion of the impact of rearmament on the social service or education, or, even, of the impact of nuclear war, though the situation is steadily becoming healthier. Similarly, there is a continued resistance to regarding international professional affairs as a vital interest though, in fact, the unions at top level are active and influential in these matters, which do have a bearing on the everyday work of the teachers.

The situation has not yet been achieved in which the teachers' organisations and many other professional bodies oppose the Tories as the political and economic expression of a system and realise that it is the system, as well as the individual ills to which it gives rise, that must also be opposed by the full weight of their organisations if their aims are to be achieved.

Progress in History

Eric Hobsbawm

SINCE history is a strikingly political subject it is not surprising that the great political conflicts of our times are reflected in it, nor that the rise and fall of particular historical schools and methods reflect the fortunes of the political struggle. This has been very much the case in British historical writing since the war. The first ten years or so after 1945, and especially the cold war, saw a massive advance of conservative and reactionary historical ideas.¹ The past five years have, on the other hand, seen a distinct retreat of such ideas. This is a heartening development to which the attention of non-historians ought to be drawn. The publication of E. H. Carr's *What Is History?* (Macmillan 1961, 155 pages, twenty-one shillings) provides a good occasion for doing so.

The advance of reaction in history in the cold

¹ I attempted to record and analyse certain aspects of this advance in "Where are British Historians Going?" (*Marxist Quarterly* II, 1, January 1955). At that stage it was not yet possible to find much evidence of a contrary trend.

war period took many different forms. The most extreme and most overtly political of these (more obvious in the U.S.A. than in Britain) were naturally the most striking. There was the rise of "entrepreneurial history" which sought the key to economic development by exploring the "creative" and beneficent activities of businessmen, and, incidentally, to rehabilitate the Rockefellers and Morgans of American capitalism against the accusation of being "robber barons" launched by radicals and reds. There was the rise of "Atlantic" history or "Western Civilisation", which sought to find an historic justification for the NATO line-up, and has since been supplemented by "European" history, which seeks to do the same for a similar area. There was the rise of "sovietology", which produced a large body of historical writing of very varying merit, but united by an impassioned hostility to the U.S.S.R., and what can perhaps best be called anti-comintern history, which investigated the early development of Communist Parties all over the world with a very jaundiced eye. There were endless refutations

of Marx and, for good measure, of such pre-Marxist ideologies as nervous writers felt to have been, in one way or another, ancestors of that dangerous thinker. I do not wish to suggest that all academic writing on these subjects or even all writing in the journals devoted to these schools, or financed by the funds made available for them, can be so dismissed. But there can be no doubt that a considerable body of it was little more than anti-socialist pamphleteering with footnotes and bibliographies, and would never have come into existence but for the particular political situation of the cold war. Much of it deserves no serious discussion at all.²

At the opposite extreme from these pamphleteers stood a group of writers apparently entirely removed from day-to-day politics, because they dealt only with the great and global fundamentals of all times. Some of them, in the heat of the moment, tried to make history into a sub-department of Providence like Herbert Butterfield (*Christianity and History*, 1949) or Arnold Toynbee, who went so far as to claim that "history passes over into theology" (*Civilisation on Trial*, 1948). Most spent their time on the more precise task of proving that history did not mean and could not prove anything, at all events about the present and the future. It was not and could not be a science. It had no "laws" and no legitimate generalisations and no verifiable explanations. If it had any explanations, they were not statements about objective reality, but—to oversimplify the matter a little—about the historian's mind. Above all it was not "inevitable" and it could authorise no predictions. A number of officials thus placed themselves at the frontiers of history waving away intending immigrants with somewhat differently shaped batons—Professors Popper and Oakeshott of the London School of Economics, Sir Isaiah Berlin of Oxford. They were joined by a large number of less theoretically-minded gentlemen (and a few ladies, like Miss Veronica Wedgwood), who simply believed that there is nothing to explain anyway. History, as the late H. A. L. Fisher thought, is just one damned thing after another, though it is very interesting to find out what happened in 1688 or 1815. The stamp-collectors, the historical novelists who

saw the only task of the historian to recreate the atmosphere of the past and to get into the skin of some long-buried person—generally of good social standing—and the simple hard-working scholars who just did not want to puzzle their heads about complex philosophical issues, all tended to subscribe to such anti-theoretical views, without realising that anti-theory itself implies a theory, generally a reactionary one.

Between these two extremes lay the entire wide field of historical revision, which normally meant the rehabilitation of conservatism and conservative historians and the denigration of progress and progressive ones. The ten years after 1945 were the heyday of what has recently been called "the Panglossian view that the Industrial Revolution never did harm to anyone". It became bad form to suggest that there was such a thing as progress in British or any other history, and those who thought so were ridiculed. The "Namierites" retold the story of British politics without the issues, ideals, passions and movements which make up political history, presenting it merely (at best) as honest and sceptical administration and (at its usual worst) as a struggle for power, by which they meant office and profit. The extremist school, as usual, illustrates the drift of these currents most clearly. Mr. Ben Roberts (of that Fabian foundation, the London School of Economics) argued in his history of the T.U.C. that the Webbs had been heedless and excessive radicals, while his colleague R. Bassett spent his energies on the congenial but vain task of defending first Stanley Baldwin and later Ramsay MacDonald against the criticisms of the left.

All these views were profoundly political, and there was a system in them, whether their authors were aware of it or not. The main target of all these attacks was socialism. Why must history not be allowed to be scientific, to establish laws, to make predictions? Because the most powerful historical theory claiming to do these things, Marxism, argued that scientific history predicted the downfall of capitalism and the victory of socialism. Why must it be shown that ideas and ideals are bad things? Because they are inimical to conservatism. As the greatest contemporary conservative historian, whose reputation stood higher in the ten post-war years than ever, observed:

"Some political philosophers complain of a 'tired lull' and the absence at present of argument on general politics in this country; practical solutions are sought for concrete problems, while programmes and ideals are forgotten by both parties. But to me this attitude seems to betoken a greater national maturity, and I can

² Thus the late Sir Charles Webster, a Tory historian, but one who disliked cant, dismissed the "Atlantic" historians as follows at the Tenth International Historical Congress (1955): "The regionalisation of the world had been a theme for discussion ever since modern historiography began, but the Atlantic was not suggested as a 'region' until the Second World War. . . . For this reason the Atlantic Community might be a temporary phenomenon."

only wish that it may long continue undisturbed by the workings of political philosophy" (L. B. Namier, *Personalities and Powers*, 1955, pp. 5, 7).

Why must it be shown that men are moved in politics only by ambition and greed? Because this proves that ideas, ideals and programmes are only window-dressing, and that for instance the history of the U.S.S.R. had been merely a blood-stained struggle between the "ins" and the "outs", into which socialism did not enter. And so on.

However, though the conservative historical guns were trained on Marxism, their salvos inevitably also hit a much wider range of adversaries. All liberal and radical history in the old-fashioned sense, all history which believed that man's evolution is a progress, all history which attempted to apply reason and science to the past, or which believed that its investigation could help us to understand and master present and future, were equally dismissed. So was the ordinary man, who wanted to make sense of the past. The Marxists were, therefore, not alone. They were part of a sort of historical popular front, all members of which, whatever their disagreements with one another, had a common adversary. While the cold war was at its height, this was not so obvious, for the attempt to isolate the Marxists was for a time rather successful. But as soon as the political situation changed the strength of the anti-conservative forces once again revealed itself.

II

In the past few years the anti-conservative movement in history has therefore registered great advances. It is perhaps useful to recall some of them. Let us choose the very issues which, in 1955, could be used to illustrate the advance of the conservative side: the question of the Industrial Revolution and its social effects, the approach to political history called "Namierism", and the absence of general interpretations of British history.

Both the view that there was no such thing as an Industrial Revolution (but only "accelerated evolution") and that it did not lead to appalling hardship among the working classes, have been virtually routed since 1955. The first has disappeared for practical rather than for political reasons. Every country and every economist is today concerned with "economic growth", and in undeveloped countries this is understood to mean, broadly speaking, how to achieve an Industrial Revolution. Hence the economists, and consequently the economic historians, can hardly avoid facing the existence of industrial revolution, even if they do not like the idea of revolutions.

They can at best rebaptise them with such names as the "take-off into self-sustained growth". It can safely be said that it is no longer possible in 1962 to write an *Economic History of Eighteenth Century England*, as T. S. Ashton did in 1955, which did not so much as mention the Industrial Revolution.

The second view has been routed by a much more consciously political counter-attack. It was never based on strong evidence in the first place, but mainly on the silence of its opponents. For instance, the apologists of early industrial capitalism were only allowed to get away with the extraordinary statement that the "Hungry Forties" were not really all that hungry, because nobody troubled to point out that any decade which contains the Irish Famine is rightly so named. Dr. O. R. McGregor has recently said so, thus dismissing W. J. Chaloner's Historical Association leaflet on the subject, and for good measure he has also dismissed the attempts to deny that the 1930's were also a decade of hardship.³ A very small expenditure of research succeeded in dislodging the dominant academic orthodoxy which held that the material standard of life of the British workers had improved in the first four decades of the nineteenth century. In spite of some rearguard actions from the rose-coloured brigade, it has stayed dislodged.⁴ It is a very great change for the better, and undoubtedly represents not simply the fact that a few progressives mobilised their typewriters, but that the bulk of the historical world was much more disposed to listen to them. It is only justice that even the Hammonds, who were so much vilified in the reactionary period, have now received the public tribute of R. H. Tawney's British Academy memoir.⁵

Again, the death of Sir Lewis Namier (after whom the conservative, anti-ideologist interpretation of British political history has been named) has been followed by a very sharp reaction against his ideas and school. No doubt some of this is not political either. It is a reaction both against the excessive fashion for "Namierism" in its founder's lifetime, and the unimpressive performance of some of his followers who lacked their

³ Introduction to Lord Ernle, *British Farming Past and Present* (1961) cxvi, cxli.

⁴ For the moderate, middle-of-the-road view today, see A. J. P. Taylor, *Progress and Poverty in Britain 1780-1850*, in *History*, February 1960. This merely claims that "after an early upsurge in living-standards in the first stages of rapid industrialisation, the pace of advance slackened, and decline may even have set in [my italics, E.H.] by the beginning of the nineteenth century."

⁵ R. H. Tawney: J. L. Hammond (O.U.P. 1961).

master's brilliance. But it is also and increasingly a political reaction against the conservatism of which Namier made himself the spokesman. Namierism, the Communist Party's *Our History* (Pamphlet 15, Autumn 1959, *Party Politics in the Nineteenth Century*) pointed out, "is essentially a Tory revision. Though it is based on modern methods of research and covers up its more obvious prejudices behind an imposing edifice of scholarship, it is Tory none the less". Namier, says E. H. Carr, "appeared as the conservative historian". He chose as his fields England in 1760 when there were in British politics "no ideas, no revolution, no liberalism: Namier chose to give us a brilliant portrait of an age still safe—though not to remain safe for long—from all these dangers". But he also chose to by-pass "the great modern revolutions, English, French and Russian—and elected to give us a penetrating study of the European revolution of 1848, a revolution that failed, a set-back all over Europe for the rising hopes of liberalism, a demonstration of the hollowness of ideas in the face of armed forces, of democrats when confronted with soldiers."⁶ Here again, the atmosphere of 1961 is very different from that of the forties and fifties.

Lastly, it is significant that whereas in 1955 one could complain of a "remarkable shortage . . . of coherent histories of Britain addressed to an adult public" in the past few years this shortage has begun to be remedied. And what is even more significant, the authors of several of them represent a distinctly progressive or even Marxist point of view. Professor Asa Briggs's *Age of Improvement* (1780-1867) is now the standard history of its period; and Professor Briggs, who has done a great deal to inspire and advance the study of British working-class history, as writer, editor, and chairman of the new Society for the Study of Labour History (1960), belongs firmly into the radical tradition of British history-writing. Even more important, Christopher Hill's *A Century of Revolution* (1961) is now the leading history of the age of the English Revolution, which he has made very much his own since the publication of the pioneering *Three Essays on the English Revolution* (Lawrence & Wishart) in 1940. And the book, as well as Hill's other recent writings, have been received by the critics—even by the hostile ones—with the respect which is due to a major figure in the British historical world. Meanwhile publishers are falling over each other in the hurry to prepare general and coherent histories of Britain and of the world for the benefit of the non-specialist reader.

⁶ Carr, pp. 32-3.

Six years ago it was already possible to write: "Many historians are dissatisfied with the lack of a general view of the British people's progress, and with the marked conservative bias—implicit or explicit—of much history-writing in the past twenty-five years. There is room for discussion and co-operation between Marxists and non-Marxists on this ground. . . . Out of such discussion and co-operation a satisfactory new approach to the history of our country can emerge."⁷ It is clear that what was then a hope has come much closer to reality. Conservative ideas have receded, progressive ones have advanced. Even the direct co-operation of Marxist and non-Marxist historians has made significant progress, as witness the success of the journal *Past & Present*, which was founded in 1952 for this purpose, and which has, especially in recent years, established itself firmly in the historical world.

III

It is against this background that we must judge E. H. Carr's *What Is History*, a powerful and brilliant salvo fired against historical obscurantism. Mr. Carr is not a Marxist, though it is evident that he has been very greatly influenced by Marx, whom he admires, defends, and, incidentally, quotes more often than any other writer. But it is not the business of this article to point out where Marxists would differ from him. It is far more important to draw the attention of readers of *Marxism Today* to the powerful reinforcement which they now receive from one of the great academic historians of this country, and one of the ablest and most intelligent men working in the field of history.

Carr's book is polemical. The historical reactionaries, Berlin and Oakeshott, Popper, Toynbee and the rest, are his main targets. But the strength of his critique lies not only in the argument, but in the recognition that the different kinds of historical reaction represent a specific historical point of view—that of a dying class, empire or world system. Thus "Toynbee has made a desperate attempt to replace a lineal view of history by a cyclical theory—the characteristic ideology of a society in decline" (p. 37). "The renewed insistence by British writers on the importance of accident in history dates from the growth of a mood of uncertainty and apprehension . . . after 1914" (p. 94). In the epoch of the rising bourgeoisie "the theorists of *laissez faire* believed not in chance, but in the hidden hand which imposed beneficent regularities on the diversity of human behaviour; and Fisher's remark [about "the play

⁷ *Marxist Quarterly* II, 1, January 1955.

of the contingent and the unforeseen" in history —E.H.] was a product not of *laissez-faire* liberalism, but of its breakdown in the 1920's and 1930's" (p. 94 n.). "History was full of meaning for British historians, so long as it seemed to be going our way; now that it has taken a wrong turning, belief in the meaning of history has become a heresy."

But it follows from such a critique, that the historian who stands for reason, science and progress in history—or more briefly, for good history, must also stand for reason, science and progress at large. It is the great merit of Carr that he is fully aware of this. Humanity is progressing and this is to be welcomed. The progress of reason and science *is* the progress of man: "The expansion of reason means, in essence, the emergence into history of groups and classes, of peoples and continents, that hitherto lay outside it." Consequently "what disturbs and alarms me is not the march of progress in Asia and Africa, but the tendency of dominant groups in this country . . . to turn a blind or uncomprehending eye on these developments . . . and to sink back into a paralysing nostalgia for the past" (p. 143-4). "For myself," he concludes, "I remain an optimist; and when Sir Lewis Namier wants me to eschew programmes and ideals, and Professor Oakeshott tells me that we are going nowhere in particular and that all that matters is to see that nobody rocks the boat, and Professor Popper wants to keep the dear old T-model on the road by dint of a little piecemeal engineering, and Professor Trevor-Roper wants to knock screaming radicals on the nose, and Professor Morrison pleads for history written in a sane

conservative spirit, I shall look out on a world in travail, and shall answer in the words of a great scientist: 'And yet it moves' " (p. 151).

It is from this standpoint that Carr attempts to criticise the specific theories put forward by the reactionaries and to establish the methods and perspectives of proper history. Marxists will not always agree with him. Some of us may doubt whether scientists have abandoned the concept of a "scientific law" quite as definitively as he suggests, and are (or ought to be) "content to enquire how things work" without searching for basic laws (pp. 52-4). Some of us may feel that he has side-stepped rather than faced the tricky and much-discussed problem of the role of accident and the individual in history (pp. 92-102). But these are disagreements within a common frame of discussion. We join with Carr and all others who hold to the great tradition of human thought, which was at one time the tradition of the rising bourgeoisie and liberalism, and is so no longer, in the belief that "the dual function of history" is "to enable man to understand the society of the past and to increase his mastery of the society of the present" (p. 49). We join with him, as against the reactionaries, in the belief that history can generalise, can "teach lessons", can predict, and can investigate the world in ways quite comparable to those employed by the "sciences", especially today, when even the traditional natural sciences are becoming much more historical than they used to be. We join with him in our optimism and belief in progress. And we rejoice in seeing that those who share such views are once again on the offensive against those who deny them.

Some Reflections on Brecht¹

Yvonne Kapp

IT is clearly impossible in a brief space to do justice to a very complex, prolific, major writer, or to his works, which include over forty plays, many hundreds of poems, a considerable body of theoretical writings, two novels and a collection of short stories. Nor, in a tentative approach of this kind, is it in the least necessary to provide biographical details or literary references. For, at this date, apart from the spate of articles on Brecht that has been poured out in recent years, there are several books about him in English. One is supremely well documented, giving accurate and full information about productions, publications, collaborators, dates and places. Others are less valuable and factual about Brecht's work and, as regards his life and personality, appear to be based on a good deal of hearsay and the evidence of former acquaintances of Brecht now strenuously working their passage as ex-Communists in Federal Germany and points west.

Since these non-Marxist works are available to everyone, there can be no harm for once in having a look at Brecht as a Marxist writer and in doing so from the viewpoint that he is the only great literary artist Marxism has produced in our time. This view does not seem to require any qualification at all; for here is an artist who not only based an entire, and entirely new, aesthetic theory on Marxism, but one who consciously evolved a form of poetry, drama, narration, acting, production and a whole approach to the theatre and its function to express his Marxist interpretation of social phenomena and of the role of art as a lever: a power to be used in resistance to the force of deadweight apathy, reaction and inhumanity.

In the published material on Brecht in this country — and in others — there are frequent references to his "ambiguity", his self-contradictory theories and indeterminate attitudes. In the last analysis, these writers think, this makes him neutral. And, of course, they know why: he is a split personality, according to one critic, torn by such inner conflicts that his plays — which the split personality of this critic allows him to admire while detesting the man — give him away,

so to speak, revealing unconscious truths that Brecht himself tried to repress.

"Being a convinced Marxist and supporter of the Communist line on the one hand and a major poet on the other, his political and artistic selves were constantly involved in a peculiarly tragi-comic conflict" —

so runs the blurb to the Split Personality thesis, and one can only thank goodness for Psychology, always so obligingly at hand to peptonise the indigestible.

To approach Brecht from an avowed anti-Marxist standpoint is to make quite sure that one will not understand him; for, from start to finish, he was presenting human beings in the throes of the class struggle for their own contemplation. What interested him above all was the pressure—ethical, emotional, economic—that class-torn society exerts upon individuals and on their relations to each other and to society.

"The coherence of a character is shown, in fact," he wrote, "by the way in which its individual qualities conflict with one another."

Brecht is the dialectical artist *par excellence*. At a very early stage of his creative life, and when his mood was still an anarchistic one, he assimilated the meaning of dialectical materialism and applied his understanding in the most gifted and imaginative way we have yet seen.

Many of his ideas, indeed most of them — about production, acting, lighting and the many devices for what he called "ushering the audience into their own real world with faculties alert" — were evolved long before 1949 when, with the foundation of the Berliner Ensemble at the Theater am Schiffbauerdamm in East Berlin, he at last had the opportunity to produce his own and other people's plays as he wanted, and to set the stage — not, alas, in every case literally — for the production of the great plays written during exile and war: *Mother Courage*, *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, *Puntilla*, *Galileo*, *The Good Woman of Setzuan*, *Arturo Ui*.

Brecht's conception of the epic (non-Aristotelian) narrative drama and his much publicised theory of *Verfremdung* (an invented word, frequently translated as "alienation", but nearer to the sense of "unfamiliarising", "setting at a distance") were also of long standing, and he him-

¹ Material largely based on notes for talks given by the writer in the course of 1961.