

# The Strategy of Socialist Revolution in Britain

Bert Pearce

*The British Road to Socialism*, the programme of the Communist Party of Great Britain was first published twenty years ago, in January 1951. To-day its basic ideas are more relevant, are being more widely considered, and are more urgently needed than at any time in those twenty years.

It is significant how rapidly the militant left movement has developed since the Tory victory. In the election in June the Communist candidates, putting forward a comprehensive alternative policy both to the Tories and to Right Wing Labour, based upon an all out struggle against monopoly rule, a total rejection of incomes policies, wage restraint and legal attacks on the Trade Unions, got generally small votes. Of course in assessing the election results the whole complex of the electoral system, Labour unity, control of mass media and financial resources, has to be taken into account.

But now we have not only the powerful rise of mass resistance to Tory attacks on wages, shown in the determined strike movements of council workers, miners and many other sections, but along with this, stimulating and strengthening it, the big move towards militancy and left policies in the whole movement, the biggest and most decisive Unions, the TUC itself and the Labour Party Conference. Within four months of the General Election we have all these bodies totally rejecting incomes policies, and anti-Union legislation and endorsing varying degrees of mass action to defeat them.

The huge response to the Conference in Defence of Trade Union Rights on November 14th, and the strike movement on December 8th show the extent to which the new militant policies of major trade unions, combined with the initiative of the rank and file, are enabling the workers to develop their power and to use it. Of course the roots of this new consciousness and solidarity in action go back before the General Election. It was in the long and stubborn struggle to unite the left forces, when right-wing domination of big unions seemed unshakeable, when anti-communist and anti-militant bans were ruthlessly used, and when the right-wing theories of wage restraint still commanded Conference majorities, that the basis of to-day's movement was laid.

The patient advancement of an alternative policy of broad demands acceptable to all on the left, the refusal to give up the fight for trade union democracy and to retreat into sectarian isolation, the building of confidence in genuine relationships of left-communist co-operation—these were the lines which led to the decisive defeat of the Labour Government's *In Place of Strife* policy, and now to the massive challenge to the Tory Government's whole programme.

It is all the more important to remember that these lines of work are the expression of the basic ideas of the *British Road to Socialism*, the strategy whose practical application has been hammered out in successive Congresses of the Communist Party.

If the clarity and direction provided by the *British Road to Socialism* have been important in developing the present stage of united struggle, it is clear that they will be of even greater significance in successfully solving the decisive political problems which it must face.

## Where Do We Go from Here?

The Tory MPs, bankers and businessmen calling for a confrontation, a showdown now, are not concerned simply to break certain wage demands. They understand that at the back of the new militancy on wages is the growing understanding that our economic and social demands cannot be satisfied within the limits of the present system.

If this arouses panic in a Lord Robens or a Carr, it also raises directly and urgently the question for the Left movement—where do we go from here—not in each individual wage struggle, but in the creation of a united political movement, with a coherent strategy to change the system? How can we indeed change not just the label on the Government, but the actual class holding power?

This of course is the fundamental problem facing the working class as soon as it begins to organise itself as an independent force. For over a century and a half, as trade unionists, Chartists, socialists our movement has been grappling with it. Fifty years ago, as Reuben Falber puts it in an important article in *Comment* (Oct. 31st, 1970):

“The foundation of the Communist Party united the militant Marxist forces within the Labour

Movement and provided them with an organisation to bring a socialist perspective to the working class and its allies, to link the daily struggles with the goal of socialism."

But to apply Marxist theory adequately to British conditions, to work out a strategy for socialist revolution here, which would be effective because it would be comprehensible to the working class movement and working people generally, in terms of their own experience, was a long and difficult task. The 50th Anniversary number of *Marxism Today* describes the process vividly, carried out as it was in the stormiest conditions, by a new party which from its birth was plunged into mass political struggles, never retired from them to become an academic sect, but drew its thinking from all the efforts, defeats and achievements, national and international of the working class movement.

### The International Movement

Experimentation and mistakes were inevitable. It was the October Revolution, emerging out of the horror of the first world war, to shatter the system of world capitalism, and demonstrate that the workers could take power, could build a new socialist system, that launched the new liberating concepts of Marx and Lenin round the globe.

The new Soviet state, the first breakthrough, its survival against all odds, and then the fantastic economic, social, scientific and military achievements with which it astonished the world, dramatically symbolised and verified the profound theoretical leap which Lenin and his fellow Bolsheviks had made. Small wonder if the new Marxist parties, digesting the revolutionary new analysis of Leninism, should take over too mechanically, along with the great, fundamental lessons of the Socialist Revolution, some of its experiences and methods which have later been found to be peculiar to its own historical conditions, and not of general application, or even mistakes which the Soviet comrades have themselves been able to reveal and re-assess.

The proper weighing up of all these features was made more difficult by the very success and world significance of the Soviet Union, soaring to a leading place amongst the great powers, taking the central part in the ferocious struggle to destroy fascism, changing the whole balance of world forces and thus opening up the period of tempestuous colonial liberation, new socialist regimes from Berlin to Peking; new national regimes out of the ruins of colonialism in every continent.

Additional complication was added by the effects on international working class theory of the very complex distortions of Soviet democracy

summed up as "the cult of the individual". One of the tendencies of this period was to encourage an unquestioning acceptance of aspects of Soviet structure, policy and practice as fundamental absolutes of Marxism which are now seen not to be so.

The process of correction, historical re-assessment and new thinking, especially opened up by the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU in 1956 has undoubtedly led to a strengthening of the movement, and given an impetus to new creative Marxist thinking of historic importance for the future. While the Soviet party and people and all the socialist countries, move along their own roads to correct the effects of past errors, and to find new ways to develop their socialist democracy and economic growth, every party has been stimulated to re-examine its own national experience and programme.

This period has also been one in which the sharpest differences in the international communist movement have occurred, demanding, not only new thinking on the issues involved, but also an essential defence of the most fundamental principles of Marxism and of a Marxist party, which enemies from both right and left felt they had an opportunity to attack.

Looking at these years now one can feel that the fierce controversies on some international issues, which fundamentally underline for us the vital importance of the *British Road*, did in fact, for a time, divert the attention of much of our party from the relevance of our programme to the critical developments in British politics. Had the powerful ideas of the *British Road* been more deeply grasped, both the Party and the Left would have been better equipped to cope with international events and with the crucial problems facing the working class movement here.

### An Overall Strategy

We must all share responsibility perhaps for the fact that the theoretical basis of the programme was often only superficially treated in many discussions. All too many comrades still treat it as a sort of electoral programme, even a retreat to a supposedly easy, if unlikely, parliamentary road, designed to win votes!

With such a view the essential value of the programme, its historic purpose, was often passed over. It is worth reminding ourselves now:

*Firstly*, that it was already in 1949-50 that the Communist Party's Executive Committee turned its attention to the need for a clear statement of revolutionary strategy in British terms. It arose out of the whole experience of the party, the new balance of forces in the post-war world following the great struggles of the thirties,

the popular front and the anti-fascist war. As adopted, debated, amended (and no doubt it will be again) by successive Congresses, it represents above all the fruit of the long practical combination of Marxism with the experience of the British working class, from the days of Marx and Engels, through the impact of the world war and Russian Revolution and the 50 years of the Communist Party. It is the essential thinking of the most consistent working class leadership in Britain.

*Secondly*, after twenty years, it holds the field as the only coherent strategy for socialist revolution in Britain. It has received the tribute of silence from most of the establishment commentators and politicians. The masses of paper-back Marxist reprints include little or no reference even to the existence of a programme for revolution in Britain. Right-wing leaders who sneer at the Party are afraid to popularise its programme by so much as a mention. Snipers from the ultra-left studiously fail to provide a more revolutionary alternative. Presumably they want us to return to a theoretical vacuum, filled with revolutionary phrases of the sort which Lenin condemned as "slogans repeated without regard to the objective conditions . . . to the situation as it is."

*Thirdly*, today, life is confronting us again in sharper form with the crisis of the working class movement which the *British Road* was designed to meet. What is demanded from us today is precisely what the *British Road* contains—a road from present struggles to the conquest of power; an assessment of capitalist state power and how they maintain it; the forces which can overcome it; a programme for the revolutionary transformation of Parliament and the state machine; not an electoral manifesto, but an overall strategy combining industrial, electoral, social, parliamentary and extra-parliamentary struggles for the essential objective of changing class power.

The key significance of the *British Road* today is well argued by John Gollan in his latest pamphlet—*What is the Socialist Way Forward?*:

"We have got to realise the limits of militancy in the economic struggle, and even on the wider social and foreign policy issues . . . as society remains capitalist society, new dangers, new social problems arise . . . Increasingly the issue of wages, trade union freedom, racialism, war and peace, the defence of the social services, is bound up with the general political struggle, the nature of government policy at home and abroad, state intervention and the like. Increasingly it is the capitalist system which must be challenged.

Many young people and students approach the matter from the opposite angle. They want to bring down the system, but fail to grasp the need for immediate and more limited measures, the need to bring the masses of the people into these struggles, as the first step to involving them in the wider struggles and out of that to raise their socialist consciousness. We have the ultra-left arguments which dismiss Parliament and 'traditional politics' and talk about political power, without spelling out the ways, means, stages and forces for getting to political power . . . The political struggle must be organised. For this the political party is the instrument, with organisation, ideology and programme."

That this puts in a nutshell the challenge facing all who want to see the present Left movement develop into a decisive political force, few would deny. It points directly to the twin tasks which most of all can carry British politics to a new turning point.

### **Role of the Communist Party**

The building of a very much bigger and more influential Communist Party will speed the spread of fundamental socialist ideas amongst the decisive sections of the people.

Many more people on the Left are beginning to realise this today. But too few, inside and outside the Communist Party, searching ardently for the key to building the party more quickly, grasp the essential condition which Lenin so urgently stressed in the days when building the party was the hard, uphill task for him too—"Without a revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement".

*It is in the battle to take the ideas of the British Road to Socialism to all those most active, and most deep-thinking in the course of the present struggles that we can open their minds to the way ahead, and to the vital need for the Communist Party which is charting the way.*

This is what compels us now to make a fresh study of the basic ideas of our programme. To allow apathetic neglect of theory to leave the present mass movement imprisoned by capitalist and right-wing ideas would be to fail in the central purpose of a revolutionary party. To allow ultra-left criticism to sow confusion and lack of confidence unanswered; or to think that a scientific revolutionary strategy will just burst into people's minds on a picket line or a mass demonstration, would be to repeat some of the oldest utopian and anarchist mistakes of the movement. Maybe some young people have to make such mistakes again to learn from them. The danger of some of the ultra-left organisations today is that they crystallise these mistakes of "left-wing childishness" into a rigid barrier of dogma, behind which young comrades can decay into a distorted

sectarianism, or a cynical drop-out's dream world.

The Communist Party, embodying its own fifty years, and the whole century and more of Marxist experience, should never forget that it is its special duty to clearly understand the line of march, and in the various stages of the struggle always to represent the interests of the movement as a whole.

The greatest mistake we could make today would be to underestimate the extent to which the mass struggles are stimulating interest in the basic solutions to the chaos of the present system. Out of the confusion of right-wing theorising, and its dismal failure in practice, people want more than socialist slogans and phrases. They want an analysis of our society, a definition of the socialist alternative and the forces which can drive towards it. A study of the *British Road to Socialism* shows how effectively it meets this need.

What are some of its main concepts?

### **The Root Cause of our Crisis is Capitalism Itself**

This is one of those deceptively simple statements which grow in importance as the working class struggle develops. Repeated parrot-like it can become a sectarian platitude. Properly linked and argued it is the first basic element in raising political consciousness, giving a common purpose to the torrent of sectional struggles.

For this reason the ruling class spends so much time to provide a multitude of alternative theories to explain the crisis which can no longer be hidden. War, wages, poverty, racialism, all call into question the meaning of a society which seems unable to solve them. Anthropology, philosophy, social psychology, religion—all are called into service to point in any direction they like, except towards the horrible, glaring spectre of class struggle.

The council workers 50/- and the miners' £3 filled the papers with profound warnings about the insoluble inflation which would plunge our whole society into catastrophe. The Prime Minister's reply was a sick sermon on the subject of freedom which left the financial commentators groping for something to say. They understood all too well that the so-called new policy of a free economy, without state interference, was in reality a declaration of open and unbridled class war. The state says to the great monopolies—public and private—go ahead and bash wages down. We won't interfere, except to give you a battle-axe and all the financial backing you need; and of course we'll tie the trade unions' hands behind their backs, and if they kick out at you, we'll incite the crowd to lynch'em because they are against the public interest.

In seven pages (page 8 to 15 of the 3rd edition, October, 1968) the *British Road* gives a brilliantly simple but fundamental analysis of modern British

capitalism, its economic crisis, its imperialist basis, its development into State Monopoly Capitalism and the threat this poses even to the democratic process and rights we have gained in many years of struggle. These pages alone would repay thoughtful reading and re-reading by all who are engaged in the debates over what kind of understanding can really unite the Left for its essential purpose today.

The analysis leads directly to the strategic heart of our programme, the proposition that the very dominance of the super-trusts creates the possibilities of isolating them, of mobilising against them the overwhelming majority of the people, of all, from whatever section of society, whose interests are to some degree menaced by the monopolies and their control of the state.

This is the potential power for social change, which the working class, led by a united Left movement, could bring to bear. To achieve this should be the guiding line of Left policy and organisation.

Some critics seem to fear that in highlighting the role of the super-monopolies we are somehow making an unreal distinction and perhaps glossing over the fact that it is the whole capitalist class, and its state and system which is our enemy. Any reading of the *British Road* should dispose of this fear. From the first page to the last the out-dated capitalist system is placed historically and entirely up against the socialist society which must replace it.

### **The Giant Firms**

Again it was Lenin who reminded us that, from the long-term historical point of view, differences between bourgeois politicians, or sections of the capitalist class, might have little significance, but from the point of view of the mass struggle now, the disposition of forces and the direction of our strategy, such differences could be of vital importance.

If in Lenin's time it was important for the working class to study and make use of such differences, how much more important today, when the growth of the super-corporation and its role in international capitalism is forcing itself on the attention of every political and economic commentator.

The very existence of these giant firms, and their constant and often catastrophic effects on the lives of thousands of people, through their mergers, and wholesale re-organisations and closures, raise the issues of public ownership and control with tremendous force. They demonstrate that old free enterprise capitalism (the beloved legend) really *has* gone; that, in an economic sense, they are already ripe for socialism; and more than that, that the choice is no longer between socialism and the continuation of a supposed nation of



free capitalist units. The alternative to socialist nationalisation now is the taking over of entire, basic British industries by foreign or internationally owned monopolies, as is taking place before our eyes in motors, chemicals, drugs, oil, petro-chemicals, automatic business machines, computers and so on.

The firm core, and the greatest mass strength of any anti-capitalist and anti-monopoly alliance in Britain, is obviously the working class. It is not only by its class position, the most consistent socialist force, the most solidly organised by its industrial basis, the most experienced through its history of class organisation and struggle, it is also the great majority in numbers. But against its great potential in numbers and organisation is ranged the enormous wealth and economic power of the oldest capitalist class in the world, most deeply entrenched in the state apparatus and in the whole ramification of the social structure, education system and mass media.

### Modern Monopoly Capitalism

Faced with the problem, how to expose such an enemy, how to weaken its hold over the people generally, the working class movement would be foolish to ignore the outstanding new features which modern monopoly capitalism introduces:

- its threat to the national interests and sovereignty even of its own capitalist country can arouse and antagonise all those (even some capitalist sections) who are concerned with our national independence (which they may identify with their own sectional survival also.)
- by its very concentration of power in fewer hands it creates the possibility of “building a broad popular alliance around the leadership of the working class, fighting every aspect of the policies of the monopolies; to develop a wide movement for peace, democracy and improvement of living standards, and for a democratic programme that leads in the direction of socialism”.

(BRS, p. 28)

- This alliance is spelled out as embracing all working people. Thus workers in factories, offices, professions, working farmers, producers and consumers, owner-occupiers and tenants, housewives, young people, students, pensioners, workers in the peace movement and those active in defence of democracy—all those whose lives are immediately affected by policies framed to perpetuate and uphold monopoly capitalism, can be united in struggle.

(BRS, p. 28)

- the nature of monopoly capitalism tends towards more authoritarian methods of rule. Even in Britain, with the long heritage of relatively stable democratic institutions and its

supposedly impartial and non-interfering state, the post-war period has seen the increased use of the state in a direct and open way to serve the monopolies through subsidies, state reorganisation of industries, including nationalisation, foreign and fiscal policies, all carried out through a massive extension of the state machinery to integrate the leading personnel of government administration, the banks and monopoly industry as never before. (See for example Gollan's account of the process under the Labour Government in *Socialism in the Sixties*.)

- These developments, and the continuous Government attacks on trade union rights, civil liberties and local authority powers, make possible a much sharper exposure of the class nature of the state today, and the rallying of very wide movements to defend and extend our democratic rights against the encroachments of the monopolies and their persistent probing towards some form of corporate state (British model of course.)

### Broad Alliance

Some comrades have queried whether the list of people who could be drawn into struggle against the monopolies corresponds to a Marxist analysis of class forces, and is it therefore really a basis for an alliance of classes in the struggle for socialism.

Of course the list is not a definition of separate class forces. It includes, for instance, working class people in several different capacities—owner occupiers, housewives, tenants, producers and consumers—as well as middle strata people such as the professions, and working farmers. The point is to show the varied interests in which the great majority of the British people do in fact find themselves in conflict with the monopolies, in almost every aspect of their lives.

It is in the course of mass struggle, says the programme, that:

“understanding can be built up of the interconnection of different aspects of monopoly policy, and the fundamental issues involved (p. 29) . . . the programme which we put forward (*The Fields of Struggle*, p. 30 to p. 46) unites the interests of the working class with those of virtually all sections of the people outside big business . . . In the course of the struggle new political alignments will be created and the people's confidence will be generated in their own ability to transform the whole social system. As the battle sharpens and the power of big business is challenged, experience and knowledge will more and more show the logical need to end the present capitalist system and to build a new socialist society.”

What are the guarantees that such a broad alliance will in fact lead towards socialism, and sustain the critical battles for a government actually to operate socialist measures?

*First*—that the working class is really the numerical, political and organisational driving force.

*Second*—that the basic interests of the overwhelming majority of people are in fact opposed to the monopolies.

*Third*—that to the extent the working class is united by bold leadership, standing squarely for the interests of all workers by hand and brain, giving a militant and determined example, and clearly putting forward the case for Socialism as the only alternative—then it will obviously attract the support of large numbers of those whose sectional interests it has championed, and will at least neutralise many more whose support for the monopolies and for the Tory party has been undermined.

Making all allowances for differences in the social background, the breadth of the Left alliance which supported Allende's victorious election in Chile, and the reception of that election in the country, offers an interesting example of the political climate which a powerful revolutionary movement pursuing a broad policy can create.

### Socialism the Solution

This is the central message of the whole programme, and it is everywhere boldly stated. From page 5: "The working people will have to make a revolutionary change, end capitalism and build a socialist society"; to page 16: "There is no middle way. The only path of advance is towards socialism." and the final conclusion on page 69, putting the choice to the people of Britain as either continued state monopoly capitalism or taking the road to socialism.

Nor is it unclear what is meant. The section "Socialism the Solution" on page 16 opens its description with: "The economic basis of socialism is public ownership of all important means of production, distribution and exchange. Politically it is power in the hands of the working people."

But what some dogmatic comrades, seeking for familiar jargon, may fail to appreciate is how much the whole programme is itself a profound and detailed definition of socialism. In the period of confusion, and distortion of basic socialist ideas which has accompanied the Labour Governments, and their "Twentieth Century Fabians", "New Thinkers" and the like, the importance of such a clear and trenchant restatement of what socialism really means is tremendous. To express again the essential Marxist analysis, enriched by the exceptional experience of world wide revolutionary

movements in the past twenty-five years, and to do it in the language and applied to the actual political conditions and consciousness of the British working class movement, is a major part of the programme's contribution to the shaping of the movement for its coming victory.

There is hardly a page which does not help to illustrate the essential class nature of all our political and social problems, but in the ten pages—pp. 50 to 60—is concentrated not only a classical definition of the basic tasks of a socialist government, but an account of what these measures would mean to the liberties and social lives of the people. Page 51 summarises:

"socialist nationalisation of all monopolies and other large scale concerns in productive industry and distribution, of the banks, and insurance companies, and control of foreign trade and overseas relations;  
initiation of socialist planning to cover the economy as a whole, in order to improve working and living conditions . . .  
consolidation of political power by ensuring that those in commanding positions in the armed forces, police, the civil services and diplomatic service, are loyal to the socialist government;  
practical extension of democratic control over the press and broadcasting, the conduct of elections and the administration of the law;  
establishment of new relations with developing nations and with the socialist countries . . ."

### Socialist Democracy

In the following pages this economic, social and foreign policy is spelled out in some detail. Perhaps of greatest interest—and most explosive effect in shattering the bourgeois press caricatures of Communism—is the outline of Socialist Democracy on pages 52-54. We can naturally expect all the organs of capitalist ideas to exploit to the utmost every set-back, and every error into which their historical circumstances may have forced the first socialist countries in their long and complicated struggle. Equally naturally we will not allow this to divert our understanding of the dominating role of the socialist world for world peace, and for the opening up of world-wide liberation. It is on the basis of their pioneering that we are able today to debate and work for new roads to socialism.

It is also our responsibility to note that few things would assist the socialist countries in their efforts to advance their socialist democracy and their economic systems, as much as decisive advances (so long delayed) in the social transformation of the major capitalist countries.

All the more reason for us to make widely known and understood the expansion of democracy which we envisage in a socialist Britain, and which

all the international experiences lead us to understand as the essence of socialism, applied to our conditions.

"A socialist government requires a socialist state machine. Without this the political power of the people expressed in the democratic decision of the electoral majority cannot be effective, nor can socialism be built . . . The aim is to make the socialist state machinery the servant of the people" (p. 53).

"When a socialist majority in parliament is won it will need the support of the mass movement outside parliament to uphold the decisions it has taken in Parliament. Conversely the Parliamentary decisions will give legal endorsement to popular aims and popular struggles.

"The strength of the mass movement will be felt in Parliament, and the strength of the socialist movement within Parliament will strengthen the movement outside . . . In this way, by political action, using our democratic rights to transform traditional institutions Parliament can be made into the effective instrument of the people's will . . ." (p. 49).

"A socialist Parliament would obviously involve new principles, as the aim would be for the control of the country's affairs to be administered by the people through their elected representatives . . ." (p. 52).

"Independent of the state and retaining all their rights, they (the trade unions) would not only negotiate on all questions affecting members, but would have a leading part to play in economic planning . . . one of the main objectives attainable under socialist ownership of the key industries would be the development of industrial democracy . . . this would involve workers participation in management at all levels—in the planning of industry as a whole—in the individual factories, and departments of factories, and at workshop level." (p. 53).

"Nationalised industries would form the core of a planned economy . . . their boards would be composed of workers, technicians, technologists, scientists and managers with direct experience of the industry." (p. 58).

"The reorganisation of the press and other mass media, and the dissolution of the press monopolies, would ensure the expression of a variety of views, and the transmission of news without distortion for commercial ends. Newspapers and periodicals would be owned and controlled by political parties and social groups, trade unions, co-operatives and professional associations, organisations for women, youth, and those catering for particular fields of literature, art and sport." (p. 55).

These extracts give a picture of a Parliamentary democracy really transformed into an instrument of the people's will, radically different from capitalist democracy in the three essential ways:

—that the means of production, distribution and exchange are publicly owned, removing the

economic power of the capitalist class and transforming the social relations of production.

—that the capitalist state machine is replaced by a socialist one.

—that the mass media are removed from capitalist ownership and come under democratic control of the people.

### How Much Freedom?

All this would constitute a revolutionary extension of people's effective freedom, their power to affect their environment, their living and working conditions, to direct social wealth towards the betterment of life for all, is clear.

The *British Road* rightly emphasises what a vast fund of productive capacity and further development will be unleashed when a technologically advanced country such as Britain is freed from the restrictions of capitalist economy and neo-imperialism.

Many people frankly anxious to see great new social advance, nevertheless hold back, and ask—will it mean a loss of what personal freedom we have now? Will it mean a one-party rule that can never be shifted? Will all the law, press and civil liberties be subjected to an all-powerful state? How can we avoid the development of a dominating bureaucracy?

To these questions, which are some of the fairly major road blocks which the bourgeois and right wing propagandists put in our way, the *British Road* gives two powerful answers.

The first is in its explicit statements that:

"Civil liberties, won through the centuries, would be consolidated and extended including, freedom to think, work, travel, speak, dissent, act and believe, subject only to those limitations required in any ordered and just society to protect citizens from interference and exploitation by others, and to safeguard the state . . ." (p. 54).

"Democratically organised political parties, including those hostile to socialism, would have the right to maintain their organisation, publications and propaganda and to contest elections . . . Elections would give the people the opportunity to discuss and modify policy and to decide what government they wanted.

A socialist government which bases its policies on popular interests and aspirations, and consults and informs the people at every stage, can be confident of retaining the popular support for its programme. Such a government sees its task both to lead and to accept the guidance of the people."

How real is the prospect of such a multi-party socialism? Those who ask might answer some other questions. How likely is it that the British working class and people, with their vast experience of organisation and democratic processes, would

put up with anything else? Starting from our conditions, what basis should a socialist government seek other than the voluntary support of the majority of working people? Is it realistic to suppose that the day after the election of a socialist majority in Parliament, all fundamental differences of opinion amongst the working class will have disappeared, and all political parties will vanish? Or should they all be banned?

The great hypocrisy of capitalist democracy is not that it has several political parties, but that it makes sure that the effective choice is only between those dedicated to capitalism. Take away the economic, financial and state power of the ruling class, provide a truly democratic electoral system, end the millionaire-controlled press and TV and it will be the capitalist parties who will fear free elections, and perhaps seek to subvert them by force or fraud. But if they do, then the power of a socialist state, backed by the organised mass of the working class, is there to deal with illegal action.

### **Democratic Organisation**

And this brings in the second, and deeper, guarantee that the end of capitalist rule would indeed bring in greater freedom for the ordinary people and not less.

The very process of achieving socialist power through democratic struggle, must involve, not only the key moments of mass action, demonstrations, strikes and the most varied forms of pressure needed in the campaigning for a socialist majority, and to ensure its programme afterwards. It will obviously involve a growth of working class and united organisation on a scale we can hardly imagine now. Yet the British working class has an unusually rich experience of forming such organisations whenever it needs them. Every strike builds its leadership, often both elaborate and flexible. Whether in the Councils of Action of 1919, or the General Strike of 1926, or in the various United Front and Hunger March Committees of the thirties, or the shop stewards linking up on a combine, or entire industry scale, these organisations have shown the ability to exercise decisive power quickly and effectively while drawing the mass of workers into both decision making and action.

Such bodies, growing in the mass political struggle for socialism, at least indicate the lines on which parliament, as the supreme organ of representative power will in fact be based upon; not simply the votes which elect it in a particular general election, but upon a living political movement, composed of continuously functioning working class organisations, primarily rooted in the factories, but closely linked also through the developed

trades councils and local councils with every section of the people.

Here indeed the history of our own working class movement points clearly to its power of organisation, not as an alternative to the Parliamentary system, not as a vague anarchist or syndicalist alternative to taking state power, but rather as the living and readily understood form in which the people can both guarantee the power to carry out the laws of a socialist parliament, and ensure their democracy is defended against any tendency to a bureaucratic over-centralisation.

To our people today disillusioned with monopoly dominated government, and television elections; anxious for real participation yet scared stiff by the press bogeys of "communist totalitarianism", these sections of our programme carry a vital message.

### **Why Do Labour Governments Fail?**

This very topical question, nagging away in the minds of most thinking workers today, is an essential step towards tackling the more positive issue of how the working class is going to win. If the Labour Governments of 1924 and 1929 could partially cover their abject nakedness with the fig-leaves of "only a minority in Parliament" and "the world economic slump and the MacDonald sell out", the post-war governments 1945 to 1951 and 1964 to 1966 have no such excuses.

All the more reason that the analysis and explanation of their failure must be fundamental and generalised into conclusions about the basic fallacies of right wing Labour theory and practice so that the lessons can be learned. To go beyond the specious mathematics of each election swing and counter-swing is necessary if we are ever to break out of the descending spiral of Tory-Labour-Tory, or Right-Left-Right in the Cabinet politics of the Labour Party itself.

In eight pages (pp. 18-26) the *British Road* condenses the experience of 60 years of social democracy, and of four Labour Governments into a statement whose simplicity, clarity and directness must carry conviction to any active worker, now struggling to rally the Labour Movement, against the Tory attacks,—attacks which were made possible by the failure of the Wilson Government.

"If Labour Governments and Labour leaders accept the role of managers of capitalism; if they content themselves with restricted nationalisation controlled by a state loyal to capitalism, then inevitably monopoly is strengthened, and Labour Governments end in fiasco." (*BRS*, p. 21).

Here it is perhaps enough to recall the substantiation of this conclusion in such detailed analyses



as Gollan's *Case for Socialism in the Sixties* and E. J. Hobsbawm's *Industry and Empire*. Hobsbawm vividly illustrates how at no time, even in the 1945 period, did any Labour Government even appear to see nationalisation as a key step towards the transformation of society; or even to see the public sector as a leading force in the economy, to set the pace in growth, modernisation, social responsibility and to show the superiority of socialist ownership and planning. On the contrary the role of the nationalised industries was always seen as a secondary reserve, a supplier, and occasionally perhaps an investment manipulator for a basically capitalist economy.

A tragically wasted opportunity, and one for which the British people, and others, are still paying dearly. And it stems directly from the domination in the Labour Movement of those right-wing theories which the *British Road* so incisively exposes, and counters with the fundamental alternative, the struggle for working class unity around class and socialist policies.

This basic principle, that working class unity is the key to bringing the strength of the workers (numerical and potential) into effective action to defeat capitalism and build socialism—this is what so many modern sectarians and ultra-lefts fail to grasp. Taking “unity” as a mere tactic, a proposal for some temporary alliance, or organisational agreement between the Labour Party and the Communist Party, or between the Left—Communists and progressives—they either reject it in theory as “opportunistic” and remain in isolated “purity”—free from allies, opportunism and mass influence; or they reject it in practice, raising slogans and demands which make the real process of building unity impossible.

### Democracy and Class Struggle

It is this understanding of the process of developing unity which is the guiding and creative essence of the *British Road to Socialism*. “Unity begins wherever there is common action on the immediate issue . . .” but it must develop further. . . . “Of key importance is unity in the factories and trade unions . . . unity demands common action . . . and to end every type of prohibition and ban . . . to work for unity . . . it is necessary to combat the reformist ideas spread by right wing leaders . . . for unity is needed not just against the present attacks of capitalism, on immediate issues, but also for a common strategy of struggle against monopoly and for advance in the direction of socialism”.

In the final chapter of *Left Wing Communism—an Infantile Disorder* Lenin reminded us that the creation of a Marxist party, the bringing of Marxist ideas to the most advanced and organised section

of the working class, was a different problem requiring different methods, from that of leading the masses actually to the point of revolutionary struggle and change.

To seek out, to divine, to find in their own national and historical circumstances the strategy, policies, methods which would indeed lead their own masses into the decisive conflict with capitalism, this, he said, was now the great task facing the Communist Parties, and it was more than a matter of propaganda, or Marxist slogans.

In March 1917 he told the 7th Congress of the RCP:

“We must accept as a fact, and take account of the fact, that the Socialist Revolution will not begin as easily in the advanced countries as in Russia. To begin a revolution without preparation in a country where capitalism is developed, where it has given a culture and a democratic organisation to everyone, would be a mistake, an absurdity.”

Our experience of the past fifty years has confirmed, as so often, the depth of perception lying behind such remarks of Lenin's. British Imperialism in particular has shown its remarkable reserves both of economic and political strength, and a high degree of flexibility in using them. Forced to retreat, they do it with stubborn cunning, turning every concession to create the utmost disorientation of the working class for a further period.

Look at the span of years from Liberalism and the Lib-Lab leaders to the first Labour Government of 1924; then to 1929-31 and the switch to the “National Government” of MacDonald and Baldwin. Not till 1945 does a Labour Government appear to operate the semblance of a radical policy. Nationalisation, and the National Health and Education plans—these are carefully integrated accepted into the system, along with new policies of economic intervention and “planning” which are born as allegedly “socialist” measures yet painlessly emerge as just what the doctor ordered for a revamped state monopoly-capitalism.

Now in 1970 the new Tory Government feels its way to a further dismantling of what it hopes to be a sufficiently discredited nationalised sector of industry, and of the “welfare state”.

It is inevitable that some, considering this long and tortuous struggle, should cry out for an end to “reforms” and for a turn to some “instant revolution”. Anarchism, we were told long ago, is the punishment of the working class for right-wing opportunism.

But it is a mistake we should not make, today, when as Marxists we should see that, however cunning and stubborn, the long retreat of British Imperialism is nevertheless a retreat. Also as Marxists we understand that “reforms” represent different

things to the ruling class who concede them and to the working class which fights for them.

One of the central ideas of Leninism (stemming from the *Communist Manifesto's* statement that the first step is "to raise the working class to the position of ruling class, to win the battle of democracy") is that the struggle for democracy and the struggle for socialism are inseparable.

The working class can only win power if at every stage of its struggle, its programme of economic and immediate demands is linked to an ever-extending programme of democratic reforms, striving to advance the effective democratic power of the people, and to isolate and limit the power of the monopolies.

It is in the advance of such demands step by step, so that their purpose and justification can be understood by the great majority of the people, and in the struggle to achieve them in a mass, revolutionary way, that the best conditions develop for raising the political consciousness and unity of the people.

### Raising Political Consciousness

What is the significance of the powerful mass campaign and strike movement in defence of Trade Union rights? Based upon the defence of existing democratic rights, and living standards, it is in reality a major offensive for working class organisation and ideas. Hundreds of thousands of workers are gaining a new confidence in their strength when united for action; they are experiencing themselves the nature of the state and the mass media, and their own ability to cope with them; they are discussing the basic problems of why right-wing policies fail and what new socialist policies are needed.

The *British Road to Socialism* (p. 47) puts it:

"The working people through the experience of struggle carried out under socialist leadership, and helped by the constant exploration of socialist ideas, will come to understand the need to win political power.

"The broad popular alliance that they have established in the course of united action for a common democratic programme will give them the strength to apply the knowledge they have gained.

"In the course of struggle important inroads will be made into the power of the monopolists—economic, political and social."

The essence of this approach is to use to the full all the great democratic advances already won by the people in centuries of struggle, so as to create the widest possible alliance against the monopolists who are the core of the capitalist ruling class; to inject into every democratic right a new class content, to make it a foothold for further advance, and so to impose conditions

favourable for the advance to socialism, not without intense struggle, not without violent clashes, but without the capitalists being able to resort to civil war.

The possibility of such a new road to socialism, imposing our power on the ruling class, but by methods different from the armed insurrection and civil war necessary in some other countries and at other historical periods, arises both from our national and international conditions. The tremendous change in the balance of world forces, the power of the world wide socialist system, which supports Vietnam, makes possible the existence of socialist Cuba, also restricts the methods and resources which Imperialism can readily use in its own developed metropolitan countries.

But this can only open up possibilities, the use of which depends upon the full development by the working class of the democratic power available in its own special national conditions. In Britain these conditions include the centuries-old Parliamentary forms, the long growth of capitalist democracy involving the conceding of extensive working class rights, education, trade union organisation, press and propaganda, the vote, with political parties participating in parliament and local councils, and the widespread network of organised activity, through trades councils, co-operatives and scores of bodies, official and voluntary, through which the working class enters into discussion and administration of almost every field of social life.

Of course the process is two sided. To the ruling class, a form of safety valve, an involvement of the working class in processes really directed by the state. But to the working class these rights provide a very real platform on which to mobilise against capitalism the great majority of the people, in defence of those very democratic principles which British capitalism has so long boasted to be its glory and its justification.

### Transformation of Parliament

The Chartists fought for the vote. Eighty years later it had been won, but Parliament remained the monopoly of bourgeois parties. The working class fought for Trade Union rights and independent political organisation. The Labour Party was formed and in half a century achieved a majority government. But the Labour Party was dominated by opportunism and surrendered to the state machine. The capitalist monopolies remained in ownership and in power.

Now let the working class take up the next stage of its struggle, to defend every inch of its present rights and powers and to use them to press for the fundamental changes it needs. This is the vital strategic concept of the *British Road*, to defend working class rights and Parliamentary

democracy against all attacks from the ruling class and at the same time develop the struggle to transform Parliament from a bourgeois institution into an effective instrument of the people's will.

Does this mean that, as some comrades have feared, we simply defend bourgeois democracy, accept the present parliamentary system as the ultimate in democratic forms? Does it mean that we subordinate the mass struggle to a formal electoralism? Does posing the aim of a Parliamentary majority condemn the revolutionary movement to defeat, beheaded by bourgeois state power, or confused and dispersed by the mass media in a bourgeois controlled election?

These are important questions. But I believe the comrades who hold on to these views are themselves failing to see the revolutionary potential of our times. They would in fact, condemn the movement to sterility by trying to cramp it within abstract formulas of revolution that are not relevant to the people's experience and perspectives of advance.

### Mass and Electoral Struggle

The *British Road* presents its way forward, not as the only one possible, not as a crystal-ball look into the future, but as the most effective and beneficial, the most realistically revolutionary path ahead from where we are today. It warns correctly that the ruling class will seek to use every means including violence to halt this advance. But those leftists who can see nothing except what *the ruling class* will want to do, and whose tactical advice seems to amount to shouting "Down with bourgeois democracy—for armed struggle now and always!"—we can only urge them to reflect that such stupid adventurism would be the best guarantee that the majority of the people were never mobilised against capitalism at all, and that the ruling class indeed have it all their own way.

On the contrary, the strategy of the *British Road* is the only one which takes the economic and immediate struggles out of their narrow circle and properly links them with need for political unity, and political power. This is not a question of *either* electoral *or* mass struggle. Both must and will go hand in hand:

"We believe that this is a perspective that can be achieved, that the working class and popular movement can, at a time of mounting class struggle in which the overwhelming majority of the people is in action, be brought to the vital challenging stage where a general election, fought on the issue of socialist change, can bring decisive results." (BRS, p. 50).

Only if the people's determined effort to use their democratic, electoral rights is frustrated by

ruling class violence is it sensible to conceive of a mass understanding of the need to fight by other means for their rights. And experience in many countries seems to show that even then the recovery and extension of the broadest democratic rights is the basis upon which the movement is best rallied to expose and defeat the bourgeois dictatorship.

To say, as some comrades have, that it is a mistake to fight for decisive results on the electoral field, because here the workers are atomised and isolated at the ballot box, instead of united in mass action, is a defeatism which would leave the ruling class (and their right wing supporters) in undisputed possession of a very vital area of political power and propaganda. More seriously it perpetuates the fatal gulf between the great industrial power and organisational experience of the British working class, and the use of that power in the field of democratic political struggle where it can challenge the central structure and power of capitalism as a state.

The weakness of the working class in the electoral field is not due fundamentally to the system of voting (with all its distortions). It is due to the domination of social democratic ideas; the failure as yet to unite a decisive part of the working class around the ideas of Marxism. Today when a powerful (but still elementary) degree of industrial unity is growing up, the problem of projecting this into a united Left force on the political and electoral field confronts everyone seriously concerned with winning socialism.

That this is a difficult and complicated task no one disputes. But it is the essential next step, and in taking it we shall find not only difficulties, but also new possibilities for solving some of the obstacles which have blocked our way for so long. The emergence of a united left movement with a political programme for a broad alliance of democratic forces against the monopolies would transform the political prospects. Not only in Chile are electoral victories possible.

### Strength of the Working Class and its Allies

The overwhelming numerical superiority of the working class in Britain, plus its unrivalled organising ability, can bring to bear in the electoral field a power capable of shattering the electoral balance so painfully maintained by the right-wing-Tory two-party system. Organised in the factories and on the housing estates, and in the local councils and on every mass issue, a Left alliance could at last undermine the mass basis of the Tory party, and build up an overwhelming preponderance of votes. In considering the experience of countries such as Italy and France, we so often weigh up their experience of fascism, or occupation, and the

relative strength of British Imperialism. But we should also bear in mind that compared to their problems of large scale peasant populations, the British people are composed predominantly of the working class.

This is significant not only for the forms of mass struggle from which everything must grow, but for the decisive issues of class conflict when the mass movement, either seeking a socialist majority in Parliament, or in operating that Parliament's decisions, has to defeat and replace the old state apparatus. The experience of post-war years in Britain and other countries, has given us vivid examples of the power of workers by united action, to dominate, or hold up or defy, the operations of every part of the capitalist establishment.

In the complex of modern society everything—industrial production, communications, transport, public services, press and television, even the military and police—is dependent on the operations, increasingly technical and decisive, of workers, by hand or brain. And these workers, including the so called “white-collar” sections, and the technologists and scientists, are increasingly organised, integrated with the whole working class movement, and forming an army which could powerfully resist and frustrate the efforts of the capitalist state and mass media to sabotage a people's democratic advance.

The workers' strikes, Post Office workers and Council workers demonstrations, the peace movement and some students sit-ins and occupations, have indicated lines of mass action which might be developed in support of a socialist movement. The aim of winning an electoral majority does not in any way supersede, or limit or hold back the development of the mass political struggle in every form.

Without the simultaneous growth of political consciousness and its organised mass expression, able to exert its power, and if necessary paralyse attempts at violent resistance, or capitalist sabotage, an electoral majority could not be achieved, and could not carry out its socialist programme. To take another example, the power of the organised workers in television, radio and the press would be a decisive factor in breaking the ruling class monopoly of the mass media at a critical time.

At the same time, it is the unifying of all sections of the people around a programme of democratic advance, first against the monopolies, and then for the establishment of socialism, which will enable the people to use their mass strength, and to achieve permanent results from it. Mass actions which do not unite for the ultimate purpose of changing the system, setting up a new socialist state power, will have to retreat, leaving capitalism to regain its ground.

The aim of achieving a socialist majority in Parliament to carry through a really socialist transformation of the state and of society is the unifying purpose in our conditions. Some comrades seem to find difficulty as to how we shall breach the fixed barrier between bourgeois democracy and socialist democracy. But the fixed barrier is in their minds. The fundamental question of course is that of power—the ownership and control of industry, the economy and the state.

But in the struggle for power, the people will take and use rights won under bourgeois democracy, to press demands which go further. And when they use such rights, backed by their mass action, to enforce the legal take-over of capitalist industry, and the transformation of the state, then the class content of democratic forms is indeed changed. The nature of the struggle involved and the degree of violence which the ruling class may offer in resistance will be determined most of all by the unity and determination shown by the great majority of the people to achieve this strategy of peaceful transition.

It is the presentation of this unifying strategy which is the purpose of the *British Road to Socialism*. And the key to our problems today is to make this strategy, through discussion and shared experience, the property of the decisive Left-moving sections of the working class.

In the Britain of the Seventies, the possibilities of a very broad alliance of forces against the monopolies are obvious. To what extent it is achieved, and how far it will go, depends most of all upon the clarity and determination with which the working class movement presents itself as the heart of such an alliance.

This is why I would return in conclusion to the Section 2 of the *British Road* (pp. 18-27) and urge the most thoughtful re-reading of these pages. They are full of profound ideas, which gain a new value when considered among the events of the present time.

Left-Communist unity is growing today before our eyes. It is not a matter of formal agreements or bargains. It is a matter of establishing honest and comradely co-operation in action, of developing trust and deepening understanding in discussion of our socialist objectives. It presupposes that we have common objectives.

The *British Road* states, confident that it is a continuing trend:

“Resistance to the right wing domination of the Labour Party, both on the political wing and in the trade unions, is developing. The protest of the Labour Left deepens against policies which betray socialist principles. Former automatic votes from trade unions for right wing policies are being broken. The interest in Marxism is increasing . . .



Here is the basis to move beyond protests against right wing policies, towards the formulation of a positive alternative policy and the waging of an effective political struggle in its support."

Today already this process is further advanced. The biggest and most significant unions are pioneering new policies and more militant forms of struggle. Does this open up a real possibility of a new future for the Labour Party and those hundreds of thousands of genuine socialists who support it?

### Communist Party and Labour Party

The *British Road* answers—Yes. We do not see the Labour Party as one solid reactionary structure, condemned to be shattered into fragments by any Left struggle within it. It is the continued domination of right wing leaders, holding the movement confined within capitalist ideas, which has torn the Labour Party in endless fights between Left and Right. But the Left represent the real and ultimate interests of the working class.

"As Communists we sincerely desire the strengthening of the left trends within the Labour Party. We believe that the struggle of the socialist forces to make it a party of action and socialism will grow, and that the growth of the Communist Party will help this development. When the Labour Party rejects reformism, moves into the attack on capitalism, ends the bans and proscriptions against the left, it will ensure itself a vital role in the building of socialism." (*BRS*, p. 24).

We see this struggle to unite all left forces, inside and outside the Labour Party, for the defeat of the Right Wing, as the key to enabling the working class to realise its own potential strength. We know that the Communist Party, the only organised Marxist political party in Britain, has a vital leading

role to play. Without the Communist Party and the *Morning Star*, the growth and victory of the Left movement as a whole, the defeat of the right wing in the Labour Party would not be possible. Anyone studying the actual course of the present industrial and political movements will be aware of it, without Lord Robens and the press commentators to exaggerate the point.

The growth in numbers and influence of the Communist Party is the one essential condition for social advance. Our growing unity in action and understanding with all other left forces, is the other. Such unity is open and honest, and is based upon our both making and receiving criticism. We do not hide our criticism of the Right Wing theories and policies. These are the source of disunity and defeat. Neither will we fail to criticise what we disagree with in the arguments of our left allies. But we do so constructively, and with due modesty, seeking to strengthen our alliance, and not to destroy it.

To draw the widest sections of people into struggle is the essential beginning of political progress. But struggle alone can go round in circles, unless there is a realisable programme leading towards socialist change.

This is what the *British Road to Socialism* provides. There are no other revolutionary "short cuts". That it will be improved and developed further is probable, and this discussion in *Marxism Today* can help the process. But that it is needed now, amongst all those coming into political life and industrial action, is certain. It is to be hoped that our discussion will be carried far beyond the present readers of *Marxism Today*, and will finally reflect a very wide debate on our ideas in many sections of the mass movement.

(Contributions of up to 2,000 words on this article are invited).

(continued from page 32)

not ruled out absolutely. But they are ruled out relatively since in a revolutionary transition, the government needs to be the instrument of the dictatorship of the revolutionary class—that government to be representative of the revolutionary will of the revolutionary class and led by the revolutionary Party of the proletariat—until such time as the need for parties as such withers away.

Indeed, to one who has spent far too much time during his life being involved in "Party" politics,

meetings etc., one of the chief attractions of Communism is that, eventually, it does away with the need for parties, as such—realising that they are means to an end, not an end in themselves. I often ask my Social Democratic friends in the Labour Party who somehow confuse the existence of parties as being necessary for democracy, what they would do if the Labour Party won all the 630 seats it contested (which is presumably the logic behind standing)—would they give the Tories a few seats "to make it democratic"?

# Trends in British Psychiatry

Bruce Burns

*The author is a consultant psychiatrist in Birmingham and a Clinical Tutor, Birmingham University. Lately University Department of Psychiatry, Manchester.*

## Historical Perspective

Despite a continuing polemic as to the cause of mental illness, since the last century there has been a great advance in the care and treatment of patients with psychiatric disorders in Britain. This advance was initially made possible by legislation. Legislation was essential because of the following factors: The mentally ill were liable to harm themselves and others; they were often unable to look after themselves and their belongings; and further in order to stop people being detained in institutions unjustly. Through the Lunatics Act of 1845, the Lunacy Act of 1890, the Mental Deficiency Act of 1913, the Mental Treatment Act of 1930 and finally the Mental Health Act of 1959, progress in the care of the subnormal and mentally ill was initiated. County asylums were established and the care of the mentally ill and subnormal came under single authorities, to the slow but increasing advantage of the patient.

Despite individual pioneers like Phillipe Pinel at the end of the 18th century in France and John Conolly 50 years later in England, who literally released patients from their chains, it is only since the 1930's that a more general era of enlightenment towards patients in asylums has come about. Up to then the demoniacal theories of disease, part of the early Christian Faith, held sway: mental illness was due to possession by evil spirits. Appalling cruelty was justified by such theories, aided by a deep rooted fear and horror of psychotic behaviour. In order to drive the evil spirits out of the body patients, or the current more derogatory term lunatics, were flogged, repeatedly immersed in ice cold water and placed in leg locks, straight-jackets and solitary confinement for days. Purging and blood letting were frequently practised.

Prior to the Mental Treatment Act of 1930 the mentally ill could only be admitted to asylums if they had been certified and by so doing deprived of all civil rights. Asylums became the places of last resort. Apart from the Maudsley Hospital opened in 1915 by the LCC at the instigation of Dr. Henry Maudsley there were virtually no provisions in Great Britain for diagnosis and treatment in the early stages of mental illness; neither were there facilities for the teaching of psychiatry. The asylums were pervaded by a

stifling Victorian authoritarianism. There were no discharges amongst the thousands of patients. It was convenient to leave the many patients who had made spontaneous recoveries undisturbed to work in these custodial institutions divorced from progress in the understanding of mental illness.

From the 1930's, when asylums became open to voluntary patients, a slow, but eventually massive discharge in numbers of patients has occurred. This process is continuing to this day. Patients who have been in hospital for over 30 years are being belatedly rehabilitated. This delay has been due to a large part to the parsimony of successive governments and local authorities in providing real community services. Facilities for a true continuity of care are needed as are hostels, varied rehabilitation units, sheltered workshops, old peoples homes and so on.

## New Treatment Techniques

The average stay in hospital for new admissions has over successive years dwindled from 8 to 6 to under 4 weeks. Only approximately 4 per cent of patients are now admitted on a compulsory treatment order and these invariably expire after 28 days. With the increase in expenditure on medical care for psychiatric disorders went a reduction in the social cost of incapacity, including an earlier return to work. A recent comparison of three psychiatric hospitals showed that the one which spent most on medical care was able to discharge its patients most quickly and had the lowest cost per patient-illness for admissions.

From the '30's new treatment techniques were introduced. Patients began to be treated without the loss of human dignity that went with physical restraint. Insulin coma treatment, chemically induced convulsive therapy and later electroconvulsive therapy and the leucotomy operation were introduced from Hungary, Austria, Italy and Portugal respectively. Electroconvulsive therapy has transformed psychiatric institutions and turned into a reality the motif that the illness of psychotic patients is reversible and that patients can return home to enjoy a reasonable life.

Following the 1950's there has been a drugs explosion. Again treatments have arisen almost entirely on an empirical basis. Research into