applying Lenin's analysis of conflicting right and left trends within the British Labour movement to the student movement, and to its mass organisation the NUS. Of course, it is important to recognise that because NUS is not a socially homogeneous *class* organisation, the left-right trends will take different forms. Lenin's analysis was that in the mass organisations of the working class was a political conflict between the right wing in the ascendant, and a left trend, often confused, not yet firmly anchored in Marxism, which challenged the dominant right. In the debate around the formation of the British Communist Party, Lenin's advice to British revolutionaries was that it was at the heart of this left trend that the revolutionary party should locate itself.

Lenin described the left-right conflict as a *political* one between two opposing *political* trends. This is in sharp contrast to the non-Leninist analysis of the IS, who confuse this political conflict into one between two sociological categories, "the bureaucracy" and "the rank and file".

Now it is sometimes the case that trade union (and student union) leaderships are both bureaucratic and right wing, and Lenin pointed out with vivid clarity why this combination *often* went together. He did not say that it inevitably did. What has happened in the student movement over recent years is that the left trend has won the ascendancy, and therefore it expresses itself both among the rank and file students *and among their leadership*.

Therefore, a vital role for the Broad Left is to strengthen the links between these two expressions, using the one to sustain and advance the other and, where necessary, to criticise the other. We must never forget that the pressures which bureaucratise leaderships are very real.

In this way, the *united* strength of the student movement can be mobilised. This does not mean that the Broad Left merely coat-tail Broad Left supporters on the NUS Executive, merely rubber stamping their initiatives (NUS Executive is responsible for its mandates to NUS Conference). On the contrary—what must be achieved are structures within the Broad Left which involve all its component parts, and which facilitate discussion and criticism, so that a common approach can be agreed. This is where regular Broad Left Conferences have such an important role to play—they provide just such an arena.

In this article, I have tried to outline what I believe should be the approach of the Communist Party to left unity in the student movement. On occasions, the revolutionary party must take a critical stance to those with whom it is in alliance, although it is of great importance that these differences are expressed in an open and comradely way. On other occasions, it will unite, usually only on specific issues, with groups claiming to be to its "left".

But the central emphasis of its work in the student movement must be to strengthen the ongoing alliance of those forces which share a common perspective for the mass movement, and at the same time expand and enrich its Marxist ideological work, and to increase its size, because without this growth students involved in the militant collective action that Broad Left policies and leadership make possible are unlikely to become Marxist-Leninists.

THE LABOUR MOVEMENT AND MILITARY COUPS.

E. J. Hobsbawm.

(*We print below the text of a talk given by Professor Hobsbawm in May of this year to the Birkbeck College Socialist Society*)

The role of the military in politics used to be a subject discussed only by those who took an interest in such parts of the world as Latin America, where it is still, God knows, a topical subject. Today, it is clear that it concerns us all. Independent military intervention in politics is always a sign of crisis. It is a symptom of social and political failure. In developed countries it is a symptom of the breakdown of the normal process of politics, or a sign that the *status quo* can no longer contain disruptive or revolutionary pressures. In the Third World it is a fairly safe symptom of an incomplete or aborted revolution. Well, we are in such a situation of breakdown even in many developed countries, including possibly ours.

It is assumed—especially on the left—that military intervention, and especially the military coup which is its most dramatic and successful form, always runs in only one political direction: towards the right. This is not the case. Military coups come in all shapes and sizes, not merely the frankly counter-revolutionary. The two recent ones, which will be most familiar to newspaper readers, are the Chilean and the Portuguese. Their political character is obviously very different indeed, whatever the long-term perspectives of Portuguese politics should turn out to be. One banned all parties and unions, massacred and jailed militants of the left, and seems inspired by a corporatist-fascist ideology; the other legalized parties and unions and introduced Communists into the government—very nearly the *only* Communists in the government of any non-socialist country in the world today.

The purpose of my talk tonight is not so much to point this out, as to consider the relations between labour movements and the military, especially in conditions of a peaceful or constitutional progress towards socialism. To avoid any misunderstanding, let me repeat the obvious: most armed forces at most times are likely to intervene against rather than for revolution, if they intervene at all. Most armed forces are likely to be quite out of sympathy with labour and progressive governments.

Some people take the view that this means that no labour and progressive government can do anything to bring a socialist transformation nearer by peaceful and constitutional means, because if it tries the armed forces will not let it. Or alternatively that the only thing such a government can do is to mobilise the people for a revolutionary confrontation with the armed forces, which amounts to saying the same thing. I do not wish to discuss the complex and difficult problems of the nature of a transition to socialism. I will merely say that all mass labour movements I am acquainted with anywhere in the non-socialist world face the problem of coexisting with the armed forces, and so do all labour and progressive governments, mostly with unsympathetic ones. That's what they have got to live with. And the main problem before us is to understand this situation. I wish to make a number of observations about it.

I.

Against Revolutionary Romanticism

My first observation is discouraging but unquestionably true. Under normal circumstances the armed forces of practically any State are amply sufficient to defeat riot or insurrection or to avoid being defeated by them; that is, so long as there is no revolutionary or para-revolutionary situation, in which the unity of the armed forces and the ruling classes which give them their orders are critically undermined. Under certain conditions the armed forces created by insurrectionaries can establish themselves and even advance, though I cannot think of any recent cases in which guerilla insurrections of this kind have been *successful* without the presence of two factors: *first*, that the enemy is a foreigner (by colour, language, religion or some other accepted criterion) and *second*, the presence of a friendly frontier across which supply or retreat is possible. But even under optimum conditions, it is rare that the enemy is defeated by *purely* military means; so rare that the case can be neglected.

The object of even protracted guerilla warfare, whatever the official theory says, is not military but political: to create the conditions in which the will of the enemy to continue fighting is broken, not because his troops have lost their physical superiority, but because they disintegrate politically, with the crisis and splits within their ruling class, or—as in the case of foreign imperialism—because the domestic political cost of continuing to fight is too high. The first happened in China and Cuba, the second in Algeria, in Vietnam, in Portuguese Africa and it may happen in Ireland. In these cases, of course, the military mobilisation may be very substantial. Normally, it need not be. The British army which kept order in the North in the first phase of Chartism (1839) consisted of 5,000 men, and during the most acute phase of Chartism in 1842 did not exceed 10,000 men in the whole country. The Chilean forces which made the coup in 1973 were probably 90,000 strong in a country of eleven millions, and stretching over 2,000 miles in length.

I make this point in order to demystify the revolutionary romanticism of barricades, bombs and portable missile throwers which is at present in vogue. Barricades have never been of great military importance, as Engels knew and said: their significance is political. "Arming the workers" is a good agitational slogan, and of course crucial in revolutionary situations, but in non-revolutionary ones it does not begin to offset the power of official armed force, and may be an invitation to disaster. Lenin knew what he meant when he warned against "playing with insurrection".

The Chilean Coup

I will merely illustrate this by reference to the Chilean coup of September 1973. Such a coup was always regarded as possible, and in the last year of the Allende government as probable. Measures to counter it had been taken, not merely by the ultra-left, but by the government itself and the parties of the Popular Unity, notably the CP; including arming the workers, insofar as this was possible under the hostile eyes of the armed forces. Allende and the CP knew well enough that this was not enough. They did not rely merely on the constitutionalism of the high command, which was expected to remain loyal to the properly elected government of the State, but attempted to make it clear from the outset that the government would never abdicate to a coup, but resist it by arms—hoping that the army would hesitate before the unpredictable prospect of a civil war.

But they also knew that this threat might be insufficient, and therefore tried at all costs to avoid an armed confrontation which they would lose. The ultra-left (chiefly the MIR and the left socialists) probably also knew that barricades, workers' militias and a few unofficial armed units were no match for the armed forces, though they probably held excessively optimistic views about the prospects of continuing resistance by guerilla tactics, which they have now formally abandoned, at least inside Chile. However, they assumed that the situation was sufficiently revolutionary for the army to split, either in the form of a refusal of the ranks to obey orders (as happened in Petrograd in February 1917) or in the form of some units of armed forces and police remaining loyal to the government (as happened in Spain in 1936).

In other words, they also put their money on a coup turning into a civil war. But in fact they totally miscalculated the political situation. The army coup did not lead to civil war. The loyal officers and men were arrested, killed or otherwise immobilised. There was sporadic armed resistance, but not enough to delay the effective military takeover for more than a few days. In short, they provoked not a confrontation which the left had even a sporting chance of winning, but total catastrophe. And, I may add, that the present policy of all the left, including the MIR within Chile, is essentially a return to the old Broad Front policy of Allende—the alliance of all forces hostile to the military, including the Christian Democrats. Only today it is no longer conducted under conditions of legal mass politics, and still less under conditions of a progressive government controlling at least some of the levers of power, but by decimated groups of illegal cadres, hunted and powerless.

Engels once observed (in the light of the 1848 revolutions) that "it is an evident fact that the disorganization of armies and the total dissolution of discipline is both a condition and a consequence of every revolution that has been victorious to date" (Engels to Marx, 26 September 1851). We need not accept this literally to recognize the core of truth in the observation. The crucial factor in revolutions is not military but political. If the political conditions are right, the military ones become more manageable. This does not exclude helping to create or precipitate the political conditions by military action in certain cases of the kind I mentioned in passing above. There is, of course, also the possibility of revolutions being victorious by the direct or indirect intervention of foreign armies on their behalf, but in the present period of history we can exclude this possibility. Intervention on behalf of counter-revolution is very much more likely, and has indeed frequently happened.

"Let Them Never Be Underrated"

The moral of my argument so far is that armed forces, even quite small and not notably efficient armed forces, cannot be wished into insignificance. They appear to be less formidable and decisive in revolutionary situations, because such situations are characterized, as Lenin observed, not only by a breakdown in the normal obedience of the masses and an increase in their independent activity, but also—and Lenin mentions this high up in his list—"when there is a crisis in one form or another among the 'upper classes', a crisis in the policy of the ruling class which causes fissures". This affects the forces of coercion and may paralyse them. But let them never be underrated. The Tupamaros in Uruguay, who were a very serious professional body of revolutionaries, thought they were doing fine because they had more or less got the measure of the ordinary police under normal political conditions. As soon as the army decided to intervene without normal legality, the Tupamaros soon discovered the limits of their own forces. They are still in existence, so far as one can tell, but nobody has heard much of their activities since the army took over.

Of course, we may beg the question by saying that it is the job of socialists to create revolutionary conditions, in which case the problem of the armed forces will become less unmanageable. But in the first place, as my illustrations have already suggested, quite a few movements have already miscalculated the probability of revolutionary situations, to their cost. Perhaps, I would suggest, because they had too much confidence in *creating* or at least *precipitating* revolutionary conditions by voluntary action. In the second place, we live in one of a very important group of countries in which revolutionary situations of the Russian type or of the Chinese type are rather unlikely. Situations of economic and political breakdown are, if anything, more likely to produce counter-revolutionary situations, as they did in Germany during the slump of the early 1930s. We are stuck with the prospect of trying to get towards socialism by some other kind of strategy. And the armed forces will be there while we are trying to do it.

II.

Politics of the Armed Forces

The second point I wish to make concerns the politics of the armed forces, i.e. of the officer corps (I will confine myself to these, since for various reasons the politics of the police are somewhat different). The conventional wisdom of the ultra-revolutionary left on this subject consists of two propositions: (1) they are the loyal strong arm of the ruling classes, and as such will forcibly prevent any serious challenge to the social system; (2) insofar as they do not share the political views of their civilian masters, they stand further to the right. And, of course, both propositions are true enough, as a rule. In stable bourgeois régimes officers obey the orders of governments, even when most of them hold opinions considerably to the right of them, and talk with contempt about them in their messes. When they intervene, it is usually to install governments to the right of bourgeois liberal democracy, though this may partly be because the very fact of a military coup lies outside the scope of bourgeois democracy.

Nevertheless, this stereotype is not always correct. It is worth pointing out, however briefly and incidentally to my argument, that the idea of army officers as a homogeneous reactionary bloc is mistaken; that there have been officer corps whose political ideology has been radical, 'progressive' or at any rate distinctly to the left of their civilian masters; and that military coups and military régimes are by no means invariably right-wing. I do not claim that this is very common, but even the single example of the Portuguese coup demonstrates that this possibility is not politically negligible either. Naturally, I do not wish to suggest either that socialists can safely have confidence in the politics of the Portuguese or any other military junta. Actually, no civilians are ever wise to have confidence in the politics of any army: when they have to rely on it, it is because they can do little else. Socialist régimes have been passionately committed to civilian supremacy, even against their own revolutionary armies (except, perhaps—temporarily—in China after the Cultural Revolution). But bourgeois politicians of right, left or centre have also had a very strong prejudice in favour of armies which obey the orders of their civilian masters and then go back to their barracks.

Over-simplified Model

What I wish to query, therefore, is not, in the concrete situation of the developed industrial countries, that the armed forces stand on the political right. The last military coup in France (1958) was in no sense 'progressive', and if ever such a thing happened in Britain, it is a safe bet that it would not have the political complexion the Portuguese has so far shown. I wish rather to criticise the grossly over-simplified model of the relationship between army, government and ruling class. I want to do so by considering some concrete examples, which are unfortunately not so remote from potential British reality today, for one important reason. The armed forces in Britain today are once again acquiring a major function in the maintenance of 'order' at home, such as they did not have for about a century after Chartism; though, of course, they had such a function abroad, including Ireland. Broadly speaking, until the development of the police in the decades after 1829, the army and armed para-military organisations of the upper classes such as the "yeomanry", were the only forces capable of defending public order against riot or insurrection. For about a century after the development of effective police-forces (which took place in the decades after 1829) the police handled virtually the entire problem of public order. The army was held in reserve, and used only very exceptionally and reluctantly, except—from the First World War on—for a special purpose which did not involve direct coercion, namely selected strike-breaking.

Of course, this might involve the protection of the uniformed strike-breakers against others, but the fact remains that soldiers unloading ships in a dock strike or trying to run a power station are acting not as a force of coercion but as a labour-force which has to obey orders, or at least which is much more likely to than the strikers. But it is unfortunately no longer the case that the maintenance of public order is left entirely to the police. Since Britain has not developed a para-military riot police the role of the army is likely to increase markedly once again, and, as you know, there have already been discussions within army circles about this, e.g. by Brigadier Michael Kitson. I would guess that there has also been a lot of contingency planning. And, not only in Ulster but also in some anti-terrorist exercises in this country, there has been practical execution of such plans.

Army, Government and Ruling Classes

I want to make a few propositions about the relationship between army, government and ruling classes. The first is so obvious that it hardly needs much argument: the officer corps is not simply the ruling class in uniform, or a section of it. Some of them used to be, but that was a hangover of pre-industrial aristocratic society—I won't say feudal society—and it is no longer very important. Most German generals are no longer Junkers, nor does a disproportionate number of French ones still come from Catholic royalist "good families" with a *particule*. It is no longer enough to think of British officers as figures out of P. G. Wodehouse, though I daresay there are still a lot of them. The officer corps, whatever its social origins, is increasingly a technical profession. The point of this observation is not to deny that it identifies itself with the middle classes or even, in the Household Brigade, with the aristocracy, but that its specialised professional interests may be at variance with those of other groups.

This professionalisation, or this separation of the army from the rest of society, is intensified in those countries in which conscription has been abolished, and therefore not only the officers but the ranks are professional soldiers. I mention this point because it has great political significance. The traditional preference of socialists was always for an army of civilians in uniform—i.e. universal military service—because they might reasonably be expected to react like civilians. And so they might. The crucial example is the defeat of the coup of the Algerian officers in 1961, which failed to a large extent because the rankers remained loyal to the civilian government in Paris (i.e. General de Gaulle) when he appealed to them. (The fact that they had transistor radios made it more difficult to cut them off from the government.)

Another obvious example is the Vietnam war. American conservatives have pointed out quite correctly that it was a basic error to wage this war with conscripts, who didn't like it and only wanted to go home or stay out. Now a professional army is not immune to the appeal of the civilian population, insofar as its ranks consist largely of workers, who join because they can't get proper jobs outside. The radical press of 19th-century Britain was widely read by rankers, and always made it a point to air their grievances. But it is undoubtedly much more easy to isolate, especially when (like today) it is offered reasonable wages rather than the traditional pittance. The more the army becomes a series of specialised and well-paid élite groups—parachutists are a good example—the less "civilian" their reactions are likely to be.

The second observation I want to make is that the army differs from other bodies of public servants inasmuch as it is increasingly an all-purpose body. As the Ulster case today demonstrates, it does not merely maintain public order, but is designed—within limits—to replace civilian activities: transport, communications, the supply of public utilities, perhaps the distribution of goods, and whatever else. Even if it can only do so to a limited extent and in brief emergencies, this still makes it potentially a much more dangerous force than ever before. In the last analysis it can "take over" almost anything—but only within narrowly defined limits.

Loyalty to Constituted Government

The third point I want to make is that, in politically stable societies, it is usually loyal to the constituted government (I am not speaking of countries in which military coups have become a way of life). There are numerous reasons for this, but the fact remains. It is often said that the armed forces would never permit a major social change, such as a government which embarks upon a socialist transformation. This may be so, but before we jump to this conclusion, let us remember one thing. What constitutes a "major social change" is a very subjective matter. Armies have kept quiet when faced with social and political changes which their officers (and the bourgeoisie) certainly regarded with horror, abomination and fear, such as the French Popular Front of 1936. (I know it was not, but that was not the feeling among the French middle class at the time.) Conversely, armies have revolted when faced with what, on the face of it, was a relatively moderate political development, such as the Spanish Popular Front of 1936. They are today overthrowing governments which are far from socialist or even threatening civil power. The fact that armies put down *rebellions*—even rebellions with which you and I would sympathise—is quite another matter. That is their business, if the government orders them to. General Napier in 1839 maintained order without hesitation against the Chartists, though he personally believed that

> "the people should have universal suffrage—it is their right. The ballot is their security and their will and therefore their right also." (Church, Nottg., p. 147)

they normally regard it as their duty to carry out the commands of the legitimate government, whether or not they agree with it.

When the Military Act on Their Own

The military have generally acted on their own, and against the government, chiefly in a few specifiable circumstances, among which I will mention the following:

A. When the normal processes of politics break down for one reason or another. I won't go into this at length, but the fact that the classical system of bourgeois-democratic politics is today showing signs of breakdown in its most traditional strongholds—such as Britain—is a real danger signal. For the first time, military intervention in countries such as ours can no longer be totally dismissed from the realm of what is politically possible. If this occurs at a time of social crisis, the risk becomes greater. It becomes even greater if combined with the second situation. This is:

B. When their specific interests and deepest feelings as a professional group are apparently jeopardized and outraged by a government, for one reason or another. The standard example is that of an army—preferably one whose self-confidence has already been undermined—which is fighting a war it believes to be totally mismanaged by the civilian government. The coups of the French army in 1958 and 1961 were made by a force which believed that the civilians had messed up the Algerian war, as they had messed up the Vietnam war, and also that, but for this incompetence and half-heartedness, they could win it. The German army tried a coup in July 1944 because it knew the war was lost and, if carried on along Hitler's lines, would lead to total disaster. The Portuguese army clearly also rebelled because it made its government responsible for getting it into an unwinnable war for which it would get the blame. If there is a risk of military intervention in this country, it will come primarily from a very similar reaction by the British army against the incompetence, half-heartedness and general balls-up made by shortsighted and vacillating civilians in Ulster. It won't be the first time that the Irish question has created a crisis in British politics.

C. When what is called "law and order" break down. Now "law and order" is probably the most powerful conservative slogan there is, and all armed forces of states are by definition as well as by predilection conservative institutions. But it is so powerful a conservative slogan because it welds two quite distinct ideas into a single whole, which is very hard to divide: the fact that most people feel disoriented, insecure, threatened or even afraid in conditions of what one might call colloquially, chaos and disorder, anyway if these are too prolonged; and second, the fact that the conditions of ordered life happen in stable societies to be the conditions of a particular form of class rule. To want "law and order" in British conditions is to want capitalist law and order; to want them in the USSR is to support the Soviet government. But the point is that the demand for "order" is not necessarily one for *capitalist* order, except of course by the capitalists. For most people, including a lot of workers, it is just the fear of avoidable insecurity, uncertainty, and general chaos and breakdown. Of course, this does not always prevail; if it did there would never be revolutions or mass movements against the *status quo*. Of course, "order" is also a relative term, and varies in different societies and periods. But the force of the slogan remains. In extreme cases it may be sufficient to maintain a totally unacceptable régime in power, simply because the worst effective government is better than the alternative of chaos or civil war. This Hobbesian argument probably saved General Franco in the years after 1944, at a time when his régime probably had very little support and very little strength. Armies faced with the breakdown of order may well be tempted to intervene to re-establish it, without necessarily being committed to any particular type of order.

D. What is perhaps the most dangerous situation: armies may intervene if they are expected to take sides politically. The Chilean situation seems to me to illustrate this. There is no real doubt that the Chilean armed forces were perfectly loyal to the constitutional government to start with. In fact, without their loyalty—their defeat of the right-wing officers who wanted to make a coup—Allende would never have come into office in 1970. There is also no doubt that their commanders remained loyal for a very long time, through a period of rapid and drastic changes by a government which made no bones of its intention to construct a socialist society.

No doubt, sooner or later a confrontation was likely. All revolutions have sooner or later abolished the old armed forces and created new ones, and had Allende done so this would have led to trouble. But there was no reason to expect this within three years. What turned the army into a counter-revolutionary force was the alienation of vast bodies of the originally neutral or even vaguely favourable middle strata from the Allende régime. When this happened, and the general strikes of the small lorry owners, shopkeepers, etc., forced Allende to call upon the army, actually to ask the army to keep the economy going, the situation was changed. The armed forces were no longer merely there to keep order on behalf of a constitutional government going about its business, of which they might or might not approve. They were expected to become active agents of that government's policy, i.e. to join one side in a deeply divided country. It is not surprising that, being asked to choose, they chose the side with which most officers sympathized rather than the one with which they did not. The crucial fact about the Chilean coup was not that armies always make coups against socialist governments, but that a minority government which splits the country down the middle is unwise to expect the armed forces to pull its chestnuts out of the fire for it, merely on the strength of being constitutionally elected. Especially if, like the Allende government, you have made a mess of the economic situation· In fact, we are back at the point I mentioned in my first section: if one goes for the politics which make sense in a revolutionary situation, one must be sure that there is such a situation. If not, one must, like it or not, recognize the limitations of what can be done in the short run. This does not automatically mean that a peaceful road to socialism is impossible. It merely means that such a road may be protracted and complex, even after socialist governments have taken office; or even power.

However, the basic fact remains that in stable political societies the armed forces are normally loyal and keep out of politics. They do their job and let the government get on with its job. And in such societies that job includes economic, social and political change, even of a kind which most officers don't like. The French army since 1799 has remained loyal to every government that looked like being the effective and legitimate national government through two kinds of monarchy, two empires, and four republics—with the exception of the period of the Algerian war, which I have already discussed. Conversely, if the army intervenes, it is by no means only against socialist governments or the threat of working-class power.

III.

The Favourite Formula

I began by saying that outside revolutionary or similar situations the idea that the armed forces can simply be got out of the way is Utopian. And we are bound to admit that they are quite likely to intervene against progressive or socialist governments, or against others, though by no means certain to; and that their intervention in most of Europe is likely to be on the right-wing side. Furthermore, that, with the general crisis of the bourgeois-democratic systems of rule today, and of the capitalist economy, such interventions are becoming less improbable. There is no denying that the favourite formula for the defence of capitalism today is not so much fascism as in the 1930s, as an administration of technocrats liberated from all constraints by military dictatorship—the Greek or Brazilian formula. What recourse have we against this possibility?

Limits of Army Intervention

Not children's games with bombs and guns. But there are, in fact, two recent examples which show the limits of army intervention. They are the Argentine and Ulster. In the first case a military régime, installed in 1955, proved unable in the long run to maintain itself because it was quite unable to destroy a strong and organized mass movement whose core lay in the organized labour and trade union movement, i.e. the industrial working class: Peronism. No permanent government was possible without and against the Peronists, even though they were excluded from elections. In the end, Peron had to be allowed back.

In the second case, a general strike of the Protestant workers was so formidable that the army itself advised against intervention, and was not very successful when it did. I am not discussing the political complexion of these curious labour movements—that of the Peronists has been much debated, that of the Orangemen is unfortunately only too clear. I am pointing out that a really solid Labour movement *representing a very large common class front* is a very formidable proposition for any army to tackle. To resist it, it is not necessary for such a movement to *fight* the army. Indeed, the Ulster Protestants have been careful (and sensible) enough not to do so.

But for the working class to resist army intervention, and indeed hopefully to stop the attempt being made at all, it must be solid; it must be united and disciplined. It must be ready for action, and —I repeat—*it must enjoy the sympathy, if not the active support, of the majority of the rest of the population.*

Importance of Unity

So let me conclude. What light does all this throw on the prospects of a transition to a socialist society under peaceful and constitutional conditions? I believe it underlines the importance of maintaining both unity and the broadest possible front of support. This may mean what the Italian Communists now call an "historic compromise"—i.e. governing down the pace of social change to what is acceptable to the potential allies or the potential neutrals among the middle strata. The working-class movement, the core of a labour and progressive government, must be seen as the representative and leader of the nation against the chief enemies of progress who must be isolated as much as possible. This is not necessarily a choice of "reformism" over "revolution".

The alternative, to provoke division and confrontation, may not get the movement further forward, but lead it into catastrophe and, what is more, make even the subsequent illegal struggle more difficult. In Chile, many of the leaders of the left after the coup were turned in to the fascist government *by their neighbours*—by men and women who had been so antagonized that they provided a mass basis for the coup, however temporary. To this day, as I was recently told, it is risky for someone even to type out a stencil in their private room at night: someone in the apartment above or below is quite likely to ring up the police, because what business has a law-abiding citizen to be typing at night?

Nor is it necessarily an *alternative* to mobilizing the masses. It may be a necessary stage in doing so.

There is a final point, which may reflect the historic scepticism of someone who remembers the last great crisis of capitalism. Now, as then, I do not believe that the labour and socialist movement is on the offensive. It is on the defensive against the forces of reaction, which find it increasingly necessary to weaken it, perhaps even to smash it, if they are to solve the crisis of the capitalist economy in a capitalist way. In such a situation it is all the more necessary to isolate the main enemy and to avoid being isolated by him. The strategy of the united front, the people's front, the national front was elaborated to meet such a situation. It is more difficult and perhaps less promising today, for various reasons, but it is the best we have. And perhaps I may remind you that such a strategy in the past did not remain defensive, but contained the possibilities of advance: it led into the resistance movements, into the only major armed popular struggles that have taken place in industrially developed countries, and closer to revolutionary transformations than any other strategy of the left in western Europe.

SIR KARL POPPER - DOCTRINAIRE ANTI-MARXIST.

Maurice Cornforth.

Sir Karl Popper's name is well known for his contributions to the philosophy of science. And with him this philosophy, supposedly a very dispassionate topic, has been linked with a violent and even rabid anti-sovietism and anti-communism which he has sought to justify in terms of his theories about science.

Popper's theories about science and scientific method have acquired almost the status of a "cult" among many younger scientists and intellectuals. And many have been deceived as a result into believing his claims that he has achieved at last the final and decisive refutation of Marxism and everything it stands for.

Popper's Arguments against Marxism

Popper has argued against Marxism from two levels. He has argued at the level of his sociological and political theories and from the level of his philosophy of science.

At the level of sociological theory, he has argued against what he calls "historicism". By this he means the idea that from knowledge of a process of historical development one may confidently make "unconditional" predictions as to its future. For the whole historical process is thought to move into its predestined future with the inexorability of fate. Popper alleges that, as "historicists", Marxists conceive of the Communist Party as the chosen instrument of Fate, and of the general secretary of the Party as the chosen Man of Destiny.

Historicism, he says, leads to "utopianism"—the idea that the future order of society will be brought into being corresponding to a kind of preconceived blue print of what it has to be like. And in this connection he contrasts what he calls "utopian" with "piecemeal social engineering". By "social engineering" he means action to bring about changes in the institutions of society. The "utopian" social engineer is a violent fellow who proposes to destroy existing institutions, root and branch, in order to build in their place the promised utopia. The "piecemeal" social engineer, on the other hand, sets about making little reforms one by one in the existing institutions.

Popper's sociological theories are, in effect, theories of how to carry on "piecemeal social engineering"—or, in other words, of how *not* to upset the existing capitalist Establishment.

At the level of the philosophy of science, Popper then argues for the rigorous procedures of scientific method in all theorising, as against what he calls "essentialism" and "dogmatism". Essentialism is the belief that by some grandiose effort of theoretical generalisation one may grasp the "essence" of whatever one is interested in—and then everything one can wish to know about it is deducible from the knowledge of its "essence".

He is, of course, quite right in opposing scientific method to "essentialism", so defined—just as he is quite right to oppose "historicism", as he defines it. The point is, however, that he accuses Marxism of violating scientific method in favour of "essentialism" and "historicism".

Popper and Traditional Positivism

I shall begin criticism of Popper's views at the second level, that of his theories about scientific method, his philosophy of science.

Popper's philosophy of science starts by criticising and opposing the traditional theory about scientific method, according to which science proceeds by first gathering in a lot of reports of "observations" and then making "inductions" from them. This theory may be succinctly labelled "positivist".

Put very briefly and crudely, the traditional positivist idea about science may be expressed as follows. In a whole set of observations things exhibiting an observed character "A" are observed to exhibit also the character "B": the scientist then arrives by induction at the scientific theory that "All A is B". Or again, in a more complex and typical case, only those A's which are also C's exhibit the character "B": the inductive conclusion is then that "If A is C it is also B".

Popper has the merit of opposing the traditional positivist theory of induction. He has pointed out that, on the contrary, science begins not with sets of observations but with *problems*. The scientist always tackles a *problem*—and such observations as he