

## CULTURE AND LEISURE

MR. LEAVIS, in the last number of *Scrutiny*, issued a challenge which will be, I think, very welcome to Marxists: a challenge to reflect upon, and to restate, their attitude to questions of the utmost importance. It is impossible for me to go into the greater number of the issues raised in *Under Which King, Bezonian?* but I should like to offer a few reflections upon two of them; the conceptions of culture and of leisure.

Now first of all, I think Mr. Leavis is not quite correct in thinking that Marxists regard culture as the outcome of the 'methods of production.' A more accurate phrase would be 'mode of production,' that is, 'the totality of productive relations.' This may seem a small, verbal point, but it really has some importance, since it has led Mr. Leavis to conceive the connection as a rigidly determined, mechanical one rather than a fluid, dialectical one. Though secondary, the cultural level reached by a society at any point becomes in its turn a factor helping to determine productive relationships.

When we talk of 'bourgeois culture' we refer to the sum of the ideological superstructure characteristic of the present historical period, in which the bourgeoisie is the ruling class. This includes much that the Editors of *Scrutiny* would perhaps prefer to call lack of culture. The novels of D. H. Lawrence and the methods of salesmanship described in Mr. Denys Thompson's article *Advertising God* do not, indeed, seem to have much in common at first sight. A little consideration will show, however, that neither could have come into being save in an advanced industrial country and in the 20th century. Both are perfectly natural products of the capitalist system in the period of Imperialism.

There is here a possibility of an ambiguous use of the word culture, and Trotsky seems to have used it indifferently in both senses. Bourgeois culture, then, is the result of a historic process, and cannot be accepted as uniformly valuable or rejected as

entirely valueless. The purpose of *Scrutiny* seems to be to combat the harmful elements of the bourgeois 'culture complex' and to preserve what is valuable. This is entirely praiseworthy: the only question we have to ask ourselves is: what are the most hopeful means towards this end?

Is it possible, on the one hand, to purge away those elements that we find objectionable? And on the other hand, may not the proletarian revolution, while sweeping away advertising and the gutter press, destroy also the delicate flower of 'culture' in the restricted sense of that word? This seems to be the opinion of Mr. Leavis, and, presumably, of the Editorial Board of *Scrutiny*.

Here Trotsky's misleading formulations have led to a misapprehension of the nature of the transition period between capitalism and communism. The main weakness of *Literature and Revolution* is precisely its undialectical approach to this. Trotsky seems, as it were, to see capitalism on one side of a ditch and communism on the other, with the necessity to jump over, 'bearing' just so much 'culture' as can be conveniently stowed away in one's pockets. Actually, the period of proletarian dictatorship is not a ditch but a bridge, a period in which the new is growing out of the old. It is a period in which much is destroyed, but far more is it a period of enormous construction. And just as the economic structure of Communist society will be built, and can only be built, on the basis of the achievements of earlier periods, so the cultural superstructure will begin with the most valuable elements of bourgeois culture. History proves that anything which is of cultural value, far from being a 'tender organic growth' possesses a quite amazing tenacity.

Among the things that will be accomplished during the proletarian dictatorship will be the education of the masses in the use of leisure, and a reorientation of outlook on the whole question of leisure and work. This will follow inevitably the growth of responsibility among the workers as members of a ruling class.

It is important here to understand just exactly what 'leisure' is. Clearly it is not merely the state of having nothing to do. No one would think of talking about leisure in connection with the unemployed. On the other hand the Editors of *Scrutiny* are obviously extremely busy people whose time is of considerable value. Yet they have sufficient leisure to undertake the production

of a quarterly magazine. It seems to me that we must adopt a conception of leisure that is largely psychological. We cannot usefully speak of leisure except in the absence of all the anxieties and uncertainties that beset not merely the unemployed man but also the great majority of wage-earners. Nor can we speak of leisure until work is no longer the antithesis of living.

A leisure society, then, will not mean a society in which no one has any work to do. It will be a society in which drudgery is reduced to an absolute minimum, and in which for the most part the distinction between work and leisure has disappeared. And since men will not have to be relaxed in the intervals of toil, or doped into acquiescence in a system of organized exploitation, there will no longer be any place for the mass production novel or the tabloid press, and the arts will cease to be the preserve of a parasitic minority or of little groups of honest intellectuals attempting to order chaos with pitifully inadequate resources.

Here, and here only, is the 'organic community' which Mr. Leavis and I are at one in desiring. This 'organic community' disappeared not with the coming of industrialism, but, long before, with the coming of the State. (It still exists, or has existed within living memory, in obscure corners of Melanesia and elsewhere). I invite Mr. Leavis to think things over once again, to attempt to get behind that 'Marxian blanket' (which isn't there nearly as often as he imagines), to consider the proportion of means and end, and to see whether the struggle to 'maintain the tradition of human culture' can really be carried far on a basis of ignoring the struggle of classes with which it is inseparably connected. I feel that *Scrutiny* is far too valuable a weapon against the Philistines to be left permanently in the position of the two heroes who 'wept like anything to see such quantities of sand.'

A. L. MORTON.

NOTE.—Mr. Morton's communication arrived too late to be explicitly referred to in the editorial note dealing with Marxist criticism. It must be left to readers to judge whether Mr. Morton's points are adequately provided for in that note and elsewhere in *Scrutiny*. We need hardly say that we are grateful for such criticism as Mr. Morton's.

## EVALUATIONS (I)

I. A. RICHARDS<sup>1</sup>

CONVERSATIONAL comments on Richards' work, favourable or unfavourable, seldom express opinions about his actual views; they seem more often than not to be reactions to the general tone of his writing. Nor can this aspect of his work be neglected in an attempt to formulate a more precise opinion: some peculiarity of tone, or some prevailing attitude, undoubtedly distinguishes him from most scientific and critical writers. It would be laborious to analyse this attitude in detail. As a handy label for it, the term 'amateur' (with some of its implications) will perhaps do. It is suggested for one thing by the slight acerbity with which so many 'professionals'—literary critics, psychologists, metaphysicians—dismiss him, together with the slight awe that he inspires in the virginally lay. But it has more important justification than this in two essential features of his work, namely in his insistence upon the significance for 'normal practical life' of his special interests, and in the buoyancy with which he rides over difficulties of detail by means of general principles.

Take, for instance, his basic hypotheses for criticism, and consider the difficulty and labour that would be involved in proving them. Only the spirit of the amateur could enable Richards to express them with as little inhibition as he does. 'The first point to be made is that poetic experiences are valuable (when they are) in the same way as any other experiences. They are to be judged by the same standards.' (*Science and Poetry*, p. 28). 'The greatest difference between the artist or poet and the ordinary person is found, as has often been pointed out, in the range, delicacy and freedom of the connections he is able to make between different elements of his experience.' (*Principles of Literary Criticism*,

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<sup>1</sup>This is the first of a series of 'Evaluations' which will be continued in future numbers of *Scrutiny*. There will also be a series of 'Revaluations'.