



# REVIEWS

## **THE BRITISH ROAD TO SOCIALISM - New Draft Program of the CPGB.**

The redraft of the **British Road to Socialism** published in January of this year is essential reading for all those interested in the European communist movement. Compared with its predecessor, first published in 1952, it is a far stronger document. It explains the strategy and tactics of the Communist Party of Great Britain in terms of a scientific analysis of the particular conditions of Britain and it goes to some length to deal with the questions of alliances, the seizure of state power, the role of parliament, the role of the Party and the building of a socialist society.

At the same time it introduces certain new concepts. In particular, the concept of the anti-monopoly alliance is seen as tending to be narrow, economic and negative. It has been replaced by the positive concept of a broad democratic alliance, and the monopolies are identified as the major obstacle to its advance. The leading force in this alliance will be the working class, but other sections will be involved in the struggle for democracy and against the ruling elite. It is axiomatic to the document that the objective basis for the advance to socialism lies precisely in the fact that it is in the real interests of the vast majority of the people to fight for democracy and against capitalism. Clearly the respect of the democratic decisions of that majority is crucial to their unity and their continuing support, and so it follows that, in the draft, the CPGB comes out clearly for a transition to socialism in Britain without civil war.

It is therefore quite specific in the conclusions that it draws, and whether one agrees with its central strategy or not, at least it provides a firm rebuttal to those who think that European Communism is based upon a lack of analysis or a lack of theory.

The new draft provides its own summary in the following 6 points:

**First**, that the big problems we face today have their roots in the capitalist system, and can only be finally resolved by socialism.

**Second**, that to achieve socialism the working class and its allies must take political power out of the hands of the capitalist class.

**Third**, that this socialist revolution can be carried through in Britain in conditions in which world war can be prevented, and without civil war, by a combination of mass struggles outside Parliament, and the election of a parliamentary majority and government determined to implement a socialist programme.

**Fourth**, that the forces exist in Britain which can put Britain on a new course, and that the need is to unite them in a broad democratic alliance embracing the great majority of the people.

**Fifth**, that the winning of political power by the working class and its allies will not be a single act, but a process of struggle, in which the next important stage is the winning of a Labour Government which will carry out a left policy to tackle the crisis and bring about far-reaching democratic changes in society, opening up the road to socialism.

**Sixth**, that socialism in Britain can only be achieved and built by the fullest development of democracy, involving far greater participation by the people in running the country, recognition of the elected Parliament as the sovereign body of the land, freedom for all democratic parties, including those hostile to socialism, to operate, genuine freedom of the press, independence of trade unions, and the consolidation and extension of civil liberties won through centuries of struggle. (lines 15-36)

These conclusions seem to me to stem from some important points made throughout the booklet. It is, for example, important to see the development to socialism in Britain in the context of the changing balance of world forces. Of particular significance are the anti-imperialist movements for national liberation, and the developments within Europe itself. While the recent victories of the peoples of Viet Nam, Cambodia, Angola, Mozambique and Guinea-Bissau all place additional strain upon the centres of imperialist power, the overthrow of fascist regimes in Greece and Portugal, and the recent advances of the left in France and Italy provide clear evidence that the changing balance of world forces is being reflected deep within the imperialist countries themselves. Against this there is the constant economic growth of the Soviet Union and the other socialist states of Europe. Any development towards socialism in Britain is only conceivable in the context of increasing anti-imperialist struggles and further strengthening of the left throughout Europe. Further significant advances on the part of the French and Italian left could provide a totally new context in which new possibilities are opened up for left advance in Britain.

Despite the global advances for the forces of progress and socialism, the achievement of state power in Britain is no simple matter. Though there is a relatively united and powerful labor movement, the strength of reformist thinking backed up by a strong ruling class ideology pose major obstacles to advance. The support given to the Social Contract and the ready acceptance of the two-party system are prime examples of this. However, it is incorrect to see the struggle against these ideas as separate from the other aspects of political work. The strategy that is adopted, and the alliances that are forged, must be based around the positive counter-ideology that socialism provides.

Any strategy that hopes for the mass support of the British people must allow for the special role within the working class that is played by the Labour Party, and for the democratic advances won by the working people of Britain. In this context it would be quite wrong to analyse the Labour Party as objectively a non-revolutionary force, or to write of parliament as a reactionary institution. Instead, we need to realise that there is a continuing battle between the right and the left, and this reflects itself within the Labour Party, within the trade union movement, and within local and central government. The need for communists is to continually strengthen the left trend wherever we can, for socialism can only be achieved in Britain when the majority of the people see that it is in their interests.

Finally, within a broad alliance of democratic forces grouped around the working class and its organisations, there is a very specific role to be played by a marxist party. Extreme care must be taken to neither submerge the party in the alliance nor to elevate the party above the alliance. The document is very specific on this point, and it describes the essential characteristics of the party as being:

First, it must be based on Marxism-Leninism, because this enables it to analyse the nature of society, the character of class rule, and the varied forms of oppression experienced by the working class and other forces. Without such an understanding, a party cannot properly grasp the nature of different forces and the part they have to play.

Second, it has to be firmly rooted in the organised working class and labour movement, because of their leading role in society. But it must also be active and organised among all the other social forces and movements which in one way or another are reacting against the effects of capitalism. Its branches and groups must have a close relationship with all these forces if it is to be able to help them in developing a political perspective, relating the immediate struggle and possibilities to longer-term objectives.

Third, it needs to be based on the principles of democratic centralism, combining full discussion within its own ranks with collective and united work for democratically decided political aims.

Fourth, it needs to have close relations with the communist movement in other countries, based on the independence and equality of each Communist Party in the great world movement which is making history on a global scale. Such international solidarity is vital not only in the immediate struggles, but for the achievement and building of socialism.

(lines 787-806)

At its best the document represents the experience of the leading sections of the British working class combined with the developing theories of marxism-leninism. But this is not to say that it is without its weaknesses. On the question of Ireland, for example, it often seems to be applying a theory rather than developing a credible alternative strategy. To pose a united working class as the solution is insufficient unless one seriously comes to grips with the problem of sectarianism. Sectarianism, like racialism, is very strong among large sections of the British working class, and a lot more needs to be done by the left in Britain before it can be successfully routed.

The standard ultra-left criticism of the strategy is that it underestimates the strength of the armed forces and their devotion to the status quo. While I

fully believe that the army of an advanced capitalist state can be neutralised without a military confrontation. I do find the booklet weak at this crucial point. There is a need for it to be a little more specific here and analyse, for example, the effects of a big reduction in defence spending, and to say whether the reduced army would be a conscript or a professional force.

I have no doubt that these, and many other issues will be brought up in the wide-ranging debate that the CPGB has initiated around its document. What program the party adopts at its next congress in November is still an open question. But by launching the draft, and by throwing it open to the entire left for public discussion, the Communist Party of Great Britain has reaffirmed its position as the only credible revolutionary force in Britain.

- Colin Beardon.

*THE SCHOOLS*, by Barry Hill. Penguin Books (Pelican), \$3.95.

Barry Hill's book *The Schools* is well written and leads in the right direction but its conclusions are based on some unsupported assumptions.

The book describes a number of Australian state secondary schools, a prestigious private community school, and a learning exchange, a product of the deschooling philosophy of Ivan Illich.

Hill evaluates schools which have highly authoritarian and traditional teaching methods and others which are more democratic and experimental. The book focuses on how well educational innovation has succeeded and to what extent students, teachers and parents participate in decisions regarding the running of schools. There is an emphasis, too, on showing the ways in which the schools reflect the socio-economic backgrounds of the communities they service.

Hill's descriptions are vivid but his conclusions are disappointingly familiar. Like certain progressive educators of the '20s, Hill is calling for "open education" - schools where students, parents and teachers are all involved in making decisions about methods and curricula. The democratisation of schools, according to Hill, would:

"help make the idea of education towards a more open society a reality. It is to dispense with the idea of education being a matter of turning out winners and losers in a materialistic meritocratic society, and to step towards creating a society which is more co-operative, participatory and humane, a society which facilitates genuine

participation in social, cultural and political institutions .... (p.300)

Open education is called "a strategy for transforming values and social structures - a project which is essentially political", and thus Hill undervalues the essential link between the schools and the economic and political system which they are set up to serve. In capitalist society, entry into the labor force relies largely on the educational certificates one has acquired and schools provide these certificates. By sorting people into job categories schools provide a major service for employers, and what most parents and kids want from schools are the certificates that lead to the better jobs. Because occupational opportunities depend largely on school certificates, to talk of dispensing with education as a means of turning out "winners and losers in a materialistic meritocratic society", is to talk of dispensing with one of the major functions of schools. It is doubtful that any education system could have such an autonomy from the existing economic and power structures and yet Hill does not explore this problem.

Unlike many earlier writers in the same tradition, Hill is highly aware that schooling is not the means to upward social mobility for the successful and hard working that it was once supposed to be. He points to research showing that success and continuation at school depends primarily on whether the home has taught the child the kind of skills and attitudes which are the prerequisites for educational achievement. He reminds us that the matter and manner of schooling, the vocabulary and expectations of teachers, favor the child from a wealthier home and discriminate against the child from a poorer family. The myth that education is a major way to give poor kids a chance to make it in the system has been exploded.

Hill appears to assume, however, that inequality of educational opportunity is some kind of unfortunate accident, rather than an integral part of the way in which existing power structures are reproduced and legitimised. Even though one myth has been exploded, Hill seems to share in a view of governments and state education systems as institutions whose aim is to do the best they can for everybody. He talks as if the state were a neutral arbiter in society rather than the product of existing power relations and one strikes continually the unspoken assumption that social institutions are the expression of the demands of a vast mass of equal individuals who are well meaning but muddle-headed or ignorant.

Hence ignorance and apathy, rather than lack of power due to the economic and social structure of society are seen as the major source of social ills. Hill says:

"Unless some body like the school does something about it, they (the students) are

destined to be marginal participants in community life, consumers, commuters, triennial voters - essentially spectators of the public realm. The alternative is for the school to set its face against this prospect. It should build on, sustain and create political impulses. It should be out to undermine the chances of the kids lapsing - out of the ignorance which usually breeds indifference into political docility .... (p. 314)

He doesn't talk of the ignorance which springs from the fact that those with economic and political power have the major control over the dissemination of information, or the apathy which springs from the feeling that you can't fight the Fairfax or Packer empires with silk screen posters and roneoed newsletters. Inequalities of power are largely absent from the analysis and open education is seen primarily as a preparation for participation in the democratic society which presumably Hill thinks we have, or could have, if we would only change our heads and be more socially responsible.

All this is not to say that Hill is wrong in calling for greater democratisation of the schools. The schools of tomorrow may perhaps become more democratic, to serve a society where "worker participation" has become the latest expression of class struggle. Fighting for democratisation in schools is valuable and desirable because it will show that it can only be marginally achieved and only go part of the way towards effecting the kind of changes Hill wants to see. In the final analysis, schools are there to maintain and reproduce the existing power and economic relations of a society, not to overturn them. Democratisation of schools is desirable, however, not just because it would teach kids how to use the "right channels" but because when those channels are blocked people will ask themselves why. If Hill had more rigorously examined the link between economic and political power and schooling he would have come up with a better book. Like the curate's egg, it's good in parts, but those parts tend to be descriptive rather than analytical.

- Carol O'Donnell.

**A HISTORY OF THE PHILIPPINES: FROM THE SPANISH COLONISATION TO THE SECOND WORLD WAR, Renato Constantino (Monthly Review Press, 1976).**

American colonialism has had an enormous impact on the Philippines education system. Generations of Filipinos have been taught that the United States gave the Philippines "progress", "democracy" and the benefits of "partnership". In his previous books, Constantino has attacked the colonial mentality of many of his countrymen, and his writings had significant impact on the nationalist movement of the late 1960s and early

1970s. It was hardly surprising that he was placed under house arrest when martial law was declared in September 1972.

His latest book is an important contribution to Philippines historiography and is essential reading for anyone wishing to understand the nature of the present regime. Other fairly recent works, for example Usha Mahajani's **Philippine Nationalism** (1971) cover the same period - from the arrival of the Spaniards to World War II. Constantino's history is significant in that it applies a marxist analysis to Philippine history, and thus refutes the assumptions enshrined in widely used textbooks such as O.D. Corpuz's **The Philippines** and G. Zaide's **History of the Filipino People**. Other historians, notably Dan Schirmer, have recently been engaged in re-writing Philippine history, and Constantino's book is a welcome contribution to the attack on the colonial myths perpetrated by previous historians.

Most historians have either ignored or glossed over the importance of class conflict, and Constantino does much to remedy this neglect. In particular he draws attention to the importance of land ownership in Philippine history, pointing out that land which was previously communally owned was expropriated by the Spanish friars and **encomenderos** who introduced the concept of private ownership of land. The **ilustrados** who betrayed the Revolution in 1898 were only too eager to acquire the friar lands. During the American period, large estates were consolidated and rice lands converted to sugar and other cash crops. This process is still going on. Marcos's spurious attempts at land reform, as well as the Muslim secessionist movement, are ample testimony to the importance of the land question in contemporary Philippine politics.

Constantino also emphasises the tradition of agrarian revolt in the Philippines, and points out that most historians have ignored the fact that the surrender of Aguinaldo and his Cavite elite did not prevent the inheritors of the **Katipunan** tradition from continuing the guerrilla war against the American invaders. Other historians such as Dan Schirmer have also drawn explicit parallels between the Philippine revolution and Viet Nam. The use of native mercenaries, enforced concentration of civilians in camps, widespread atrocities and the use of torture by the Americans foreshadowed many aspects of the Viet Nam war.

Constantino explicitly draws the parallels with Viet Nam, and implicitly with the present martial law regime in the Philippines. He also seems to be issuing a warning against Filipinos placing too much faith in President Carter's emphasis on human rights when he states: "A durable myth .... had its origin in Aguinaldo's time: that the Democratic Party in the United States is the special friend of the Filipino people."

- R. Lim.