Dear Comrades,

In the "Editorial Comment" contained in the December 1973 issue of ALR (p.2) you report and protest recent repression in Hungary of a number of the colleagues and followers of the late Georg Lukacs.

I do not know the details of this, but am quite prepared to accept your account. My comment centres upon the grounds you give for your protest. You say: "ALR opposes the repression of people for their political and ideological beliefs ..... Wherever such violations of human rights occur, they should be the subject of protest".

What sort of mealy-mouthed liberalism is this? You presumably claim to be marxist-leninists. But a corner-stone of marxism-leninism is the idea of the dictatorship of the proletariat, which involves precisely "the repression of people for their political and ideological beliefs". Would you have called for a protest against "violations of human rights" had the Allende government repressed precisely the people who are now massacring the cream of the Chilean working class? Of course genuine marxists protest repression of socialist opponents of stalinist and stalinoid state-apparatuses. But they do so from a principled class standpoint, and not by appeal to allegedly universal "human rights".

-- W. SUCHTING.

We welcome the opportunity afforded by Comrade Suchting's letter to pursue further some of the points of our previous editorial comment, and the objections he has raised.

1. Since our last issue, more information has come to hand about the issues involving a group of Hungarian sociologists (Agnes Heller, Ferenc Feher, Mihaly Vajda, and Gyorgy and Maria Markus, among others).

The "Cultural-political work group attached to the Central Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party" has issued a statement which originally appeared in 'Magyar Filozofiai Szemle', 1973/1-2, and is republished in the 'Information Bulletin' No. 3, 1973, of the HSWP. Following are some extracts from this statement:

"(Concerning science policy) ... the Party ensures the freedom of creative research in the social sciences as well. There are no forbidden topics and foregone conclusions ..... At the same time, in accord with the earlier documents of the Party, the guidelines once more definitely rejected the plurality concept of Marxism-Leninism. 'The multitude of research trends and schools become politically and ideologically dangerous if they congeal into some ideologic and political system or trend which firstly calls the theory of marxism-leninism into question, then undermines or rejects it. The ideological concept of a plural Marxism may lead to political pluralism, which in turn may result in a denial of the leading role of the Communist Party and, in the final analysis, of the working class'."

"In the final analysis (the sociologists involved) find themselves on a common platform with the enemies of socialism, in attaching their hopes to the same 'developmental' tendencies of socialism, viz. decrease in the mass influence of the Communist parties in the socialist countries; estrangement of the masses from the established programme of socialist construction in these countries; emergence and incrustation of conflicts within the socialist society; advance of bureaucracy on the road towards pluralism; and shift in the international power conditions, favouring the growth and the exploitation of internal conflicts. No doubt these hopes and political speculations have nothing to do either with socialism or with any of the social sciences.'
“(Mihaly Vajda) ... denied the basic condition for the existence of science -- namely that there can be one truth only .......

“Those authors, once they broke loose from Marxism, have broken loose from Lukacs. To call attention to all this is highly necessary because Lukacs' life-work, contestable and calling to be contested in many points as it may appear, should still be rated as an outstanding Marxist accomplishment on the whole with the conviction that only a serious study and critical analysis can lead to a clearer recognition of all its values, can prevent its illicit expropriation and distortion.”

“(They) ... support every attempt aimed practically or potentially against our socialist society and against the unity of the socialist countries.”

* * * * * *

We have not read the works of these Hungarian sociologists, so we cannot give our views as to whether they are “anti-marxist, anti-Lukacs, anti-socialist” as claimed. But the arguments are familiar enough, as are the repressions they are used to justify.

We repeat that we are opposed to the repression and persecution of people just because of their political, theoretical, or ideological beliefs, and we do not believe any other standpoint is appropriate for socialists.

Solzhenitsyn, for example, is not a marxist or marxist-leninist, as he explicitly says, and we do not agree with all that he says. But we do support his right to say it, and not to be banned from publication in his own country.

We do not believe that it would be right, in a socialist Australia, for philosophers, sociologists and others who may be opposed to marxism, or had a different interpretation of marxism to the “official” one, to be denied by administrative means the right to publish, or to work in a university, merely because of their political, theoretical and ideological beliefs.

2. Comrade Suchting appeals to Marxism-Leninism to support his criticism. He puts it as though there were some uncontestable theoretical propositions and definition of class interests available whose truth and practical import must be immediately manifest to any socialist. But in Australia, for example, there are the Communist Party of Australia, the Communist Party of Australia (Marxist-Leninist), the Socialist Party of Australia, at least three groups comprising followers of Trotsky, and various other groupings, as well as many individuals in no organisation who claim to base themselves on marxism and the interests of the working class, yet who differ strongly on many fundamental questions.

Indeed, most of the above organisations claim to have the one true understanding and interpretation; and even when they advance identical theoretical propositions, the practical consequences they deduce from them are often diametrically opposed. And this is only a microcosm of the divisions which exist internationally.

Even were it to be accepted that there is only one true interpretation of marxism and class interests, the question arises of who is to decide what that correct interpretation is. In the absence of a manifest truth or a select group of theoreticians accepted as able, uniquely, to determine the truth, it can only be decided by struggle, and we believe that struggle should be in general restricted to ideological means.

In practice, however, what has more often happened is that those with the power for the time being have declared their interpretation to be the correct one and have used that power against opponents on the basis that they are using it ‘on behalf of the proletariat’, while in fact substituting themselves for the proletariat.

This is not to say that struggles over theory and policy are unimportant -- on the contrary. But in order that they can be properly resolved there must be the right to hold and put forward differing views. This is necessary to prevent abuses of power and to advance theory itself. These were the reasons advanced for our protest, and we do not think it incorrect to group them under a heading ‘human rights’, or that to do so is in this context a violation of ‘class standpoint’.

3. The concept ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’ deals with far more than repression of the class enemy, and we assume Comrade Suchting is aware of this. But even the aspect he deals with in his letter we think he interprets in a narrow and incorrect way.

In a society where the power derived from ownership of capital and a monopoly of the mass media has been broken, and organisations of the people exercise the new social ownership and state power, opponents should not, in general, be subject to repression merely because they believe in the old system, in religion or some other
non-Marxist system of beliefs, or in some particular theoretical orientation in the natural or social sciences.

Actions are a different matter. Every change in social system involves a fundamental change in the law, which is usually made in practice by the social forces making revolution (who, in general, must comprise the majority) before they are codified through new institutional procedures. Actions in violation of these laws of course carry various penalties, but merely holding or expressing beliefs should not.

There are, of course, emergency and civil war situations in which this dividing line may not readily be drawn. In Chile we support every action aimed at overthrowing the present dictatorship, and we certainly would have supported further action by the Allende government to suppress those who were organising the coup leading to it. Opinions differ about the measures taken, or not taken, in Chile, as do assessments of the possibilities to do so, and of the strategies involved, and we do not attempt to pronounce conclusively on them.

But it also seems clear that there would not have been an Allende government at all if its announced program had included action to suppress people, not for what they did, but just for holding unapproved beliefs. Nor do we think the working class in Australia, as in many other countries, will give its allegiance to 'Marxists' who advocate such suppression in principle.

In general, we believe that socialism must expand rather than contract freedom; we are opposed to censorship and the suppression of people just because of the political, theoretical or ideological views they may hold, and will continue to protest against such suppression in whatever country it occurs.

We believe that it is in the interests of the class struggle that people should, from their own experience, come to see that Marxists are upholders and defenders of existing human rights, and that socialism will mean a radical expansion of those rights by elimination of the power of capital over their lives, and the development of a society based on self-management and the widest democracy.

...... THE EDITORS.

POOR WHITES IN THE MARXIST WOODPILE

Paul Nursey-Bray in his article "Sectarianism and Intra-Class Conflict in Northern Ireland" (ALR, August 1973) places too heavy reliance on the role of false consciousness in his attempt to formulate a Marxist analysis of the Northern Ireland situation.

In a few lines which could summarise his analysis, Mr. Bray writes:

"Protestant workers suffer from a false consciousness that makes them see the Catholics as their main enemy and drives them into alliance with the Protestant landowners class and Protestant bourgeoisie."

The Ulster Protestant is thus cast in the diehard role of a poor white -- the "nigger" of the Marxist woodpile. The false consciousness of the Protestant working class appears in most socialist analyses as the main pitfall for socialism in Ireland. But such analyses are based on the (I suggest, false) assumption that the Ulster Protestant working class is just a sub-species of the Irish worker. Rather, specific conditions, associated with the separate and natural historical development of capitalism in Northern Ireland have isolated the Protestant working class from the mainstream of Irish working class tradition.

Before outlining some of the circumstances of this development, I will note a statement by Mr. Bray -- one of many -- which I think illustrates what is wrong with his analysis; the implicit belief that circumstances do not in fact determine consciousness, a belief that leads Mr. Bray to the assertion that:

"One can only be sanguine (for revolution) at all on the basis, as argued in this paper, that the capitalist classes in Britain and Ireland no longer have any interest in fostering the false consciousness of sectarianism ......" (p.46)

What I think Mr. Bray is suggesting is that divisions between the Protestant and Catholic working class are artificially created by the Ulster bourgeoisie and have no historical reality.

Further, he suggests that if the British and Irish bourgeoisies cease to foment
these artificial divisions, then working class unity is assured. The role of historical conditions in determining the specific consciousness of the Ulster Protestant working class is denied. Mr. Bray concludes that revolutionary working class consciousness will only emerge when the bourgeoisie permits it.

ULSTER'S SEPARATE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Ulster developed "naturally" as a capitalist economy and at a much quicker rate than the remainder of Ireland. The basis of this natural historical growth was the "Ulster custom" of tenant right under which British settlers were offered security of tenure, a fixed rent and the tenants' right to sell his interest in his holding. This system made possible capital accumulation and investment which in turn led to the development of handicraft industries. The combination of agriculture and handicraft industry provided the buoyancy on which Ulster's developing industries survived. Moreover, linen production, the major developing Ulster industry, did not rival English production. In the rest of Ireland there was no security of tenure, which made capital accumulation almost impossible. Moreover, the poverty of the peasant population inhibited the development of a home market for manufactured goods. The limited production occurring rivalled English production and was ruthlessly restricted. By the end of the 18th century, Southern (Catholic) capitalism was, where it existed, in rapid decline.

The exclusively Protestant nature of Ulster capitalism may be explained by the fact that the Ulster custom was the sole right of the planter until at least the late 18th century. Until Catholic emancipation, capital accumulation by Catholics was effectively prevented by the penal laws which prohibited Catholics from ownership of real property, from inheriting land, etc.

A measure of political control over its native society, as well as economic control of its commercial markets, is an important factor for a native bourgeoisie. The Ulster bourgeoisie, being mainly Presbyterian, was hampered in civil matters by the Test Act of 1704 which effectively deprived it of political existence. In the United Irish Rebellion of 1798, the Ulster bourgeoisie sought increased political control of Ireland, free from England, free of the Test Act and free of English restrictions on trade. The Rebellion was unsuccessful in achieving independence but British reaction favoured many of the demands of Ulster. The Act of Union which followed in 1801 meant Ulster's participation in the markets of England and the expanding Empire. Production for these markets aided and speeded the development of a strong industrial capitalism in Ulster. As a result, it is argued here, the Ulster bourgeoisie's conflict with the bourgeoisie of the oppressing nation (England) ceased. It is in competition with the bourgeoisie of another nationality that the native bourgeoisie learns its nationalism. With the removal of that competition, I suggest, the Ulster bourgeoisie abandoned its Irish national aspiration.

As Ulster's industry prospered, the various services involved in industrial production were built up. The nature of these services and facilities tended to rival southern Irish counterparts and Ulster reliance on her own developing services thereafter contributed to her separation from the Irish context. From 1801 Ulster rapidly became integrated into the British economy and specifically into the great Merseyside-Clydeside-Lagan Valley industrial triangle.

These are briefly described components of the separate-from-Ireland economic growth of Ulster which I believe tend to cast some doubt on Bray's remark that "Belfast is an Irish city in an area of Ireland artificially established as a separate statelet" (p.39) and further doubt on the continued assumption that the Ulster working class is only a Northern extension of the Irish working class.

HISTORICAL DIVISIONS IN THE ULSTER WORKING CLASS

The estimated population of Belfast shows the trend of Belfast's urbanisation. In 1708 the town had a population of 2,007. By 1834 it had risen to 60,813. A very large proportion of the incoming population was Catholic. Of the 2,007 people in Belfast in 1708 only 0.3% were Catholic. Of the 60,813 in 1834, 32.4% were Catholic. By 1857 the industrial region of Belfast with its adjacent housing, between Falls Road and Sandy Row, had divided into two areas (along Albert Street), the Catholic 'Pound' and the Protestant Sandy Row. The Belfast working class was thus divided into two distinct, separate, segregated working class communities.

Marx quotes the concentration of proletarians in towns as being responsible for the growth of working class consciousness as a result of increased communication and
sense of community, but in "The Poverty of Philosophy" recognises that in the urban situation, in the first instance, the situation is of competition between the workers. That competition could feasibly help to reinforce dependence on traditional (in Ulster, religious) allegiances, thereby accentuating differences within the working class.

It is feasible that Protestant workers and Catholic workers, rather than combining against the bourgeoisie, combined to protect what they conceived of as their respective interests against each other. That is, the mass because of prevailing and inherited circumstances did not unite but combined in division.

This division was re-emphasised by --

(i) The inevitable deterioration of material conditions experienced by the old inhabitants (Protestant) of a town that had undergone rapid industrial expansion and an influx of peasantry (Catholic).

(ii) Increased job competition, with the influx of Catholics. Unskilled Catholic workers were prepared, as on the land, to accept jobs at lower wage rates and worse conditions, thus undercutting their Protestant competitors.

(iii) The tendency for individuals in periods of social change to align with groups with whom they have traditional allegiance -- in this case, common religious and cultural allegiances.

It is suggested that these consequences of the expansion of Belfast reinforced the separate outlook of the Protestant working class as a community of interest in antagonism to the Catholic community: that in the influx of Catholics the Protestant population of Belfast saw a threat to the security of their jobs and to their living conditions (the urban equivalent of the Catholic threat to the Protestant tenantry which gave rise to the Orange Societies). The first urban sectarian riot occurred in Belfast in 1835.

FROM HERE TO FRATERNITY?

I have briefly argued that social and economic conditions in Belfast created and/or reinforced conflicts between the Protestant and Catholic working classes of that city (and by extension, Ulster). I noted that the Protestant community in Ulster post-1801 had become integrated within the British context whence lay its economic interest. One consequence of the economic integration of Ulster into Britain was the fusion of the Ulster Protestant working class with its British counterpart in an 'organic unity' motivated by a physical identity with the Mersey and Clydeside, a development with important consequences for the consciousness of the Ulster Protestant worker. This organic unity found expression in membership in British unions of more than half of Ulster's trade unionists.

It also found expression in, for example, the involvement of Ulster trade unionists in the struggle for a 44-hour week, an involvement that tends towards dispelling notions of the Ulster Protestant Working Class as a dupe of the bourgeoisie. Even Mr. Bray is forced to admit -- in bewilderment, considering his continued emphasis of the lack of working class consciousness amongst Ulster Protestants -- that,

"in terms of militancy and Trade Unionism the Protestant workers are the most advanced in Ireland ..."

Ulster's resistance to Home Rule had a firm economic reason derived from the differing needs of a then advanced capitalist economy (Ulster) and a then largely rural economy (S. Ireland). The Ulster Protestant working class's resistance to Home Rule derived from the fact that from the period of industrialisation and urbanisation onwards, the emerging Protestant working class, with a different history and development, did not regard itself, and could not be regarded, as just a sub-species of the Irish worker.

I believe the continuing tendency by socialists to regard the Ulster Protestant working class as a sub-species of the Irish worker tends to a false analysis of the situation and by extension, to misguided political practice. Socialists must recognise the separate historical development of Ulster and the implications this has had for the specific development of the Ulster Protestant working class. By implication, the claims to Ulster as an integral part of Ireland must be reconsidered. Recognition of the right of Ulster to exist outside the Irish context may allow Protestant fears surrounding what amounts to Ulster's "national question" to submerge. And once the physical and psychological borders of Ulster cease to be attacked, the opportunity may arise for social questions to emerge.

---- RUARIC DIXON.