

the infallibility of the best central committee' (*op. cit.*, p. 62). Now, although it is anything but true to say that the obscure and depressing chronicle of German workers massacred on demonstrations is 'historically' more instructive than the struggle for Bolshevik leadership of the Russian workers, would not Sartre be the first to decry the 'project' of having workers get themselves killed in order to produce . . . what? an 'historically' interesting text?

Leninism is, for Sartre, uncontradictory *centralism*: upon entering the 'Party', the militant is *given* his ego. 'It is a consecration. He serves, that is all.' (*op. cit.*, pp. 7ff). This is not a realm of science but of incense: his Stalinist hero, Brunet, *believes* (abstractly) and then, finally (what else?) *doubts*. But whereas the Church is not just triumphant but also militant, and the believer's faith is enriched by praxis (of a kind), the Stalinist church is just triumphant, so that such faith can develop into nothing else but doubt.

It is not appropriate to waste ammunition against such a silly conception of Leninism. To recapture the intellectual world of the 1950s in which there was the 'Party' (CP) and Trotsky could not get a hearing we cite the 1953 book of Iris Murdoch, who calls Sartre simply a liberal Social Democrat, but refers to the possibility of infection 'with a certain Trotskyist romanticism, the nostalgia for the perpetual [*sic*] revolution'. (p. 34). These words of this other philosophising novelist require no commentary, but express the political configuration in which Sartre confronted Leninism: nothing would have suggested that it posed the decisive philosophical problem in organisational form, nor would the organisational reality of French Trotskyism have provided a clue. At one point, he confronted the critique of Existentialism by the ex-Trotskyist Pierre Naville (Existentialists don't believe in causality and have a contempt for mere things) and develops towards his version of Marxism in response to some such strictures.

M. Poster writes (*Existential Marxism in Postwar France*, Princeton, 1975, p. 141) that 'with his refusal to consider the Trotskyists or the Socialists, Sartre's politics consisted of an increasingly byzantine effort to locate some feeble trace of existentialism in the Marxist-Leninism of the French CP'. But the point is that there is no Leninism in the Communist Parties, that the insight required of Lenin to create the Bolshevik Party is central to Sartre's philosophical concerns, and that Sartre knows nothing about that insight but treats of 'the Party' as just another 'practical ensemble' among others. Bolshevism is how

Sartre in Leninist

Perspective

by A. Dragstedt

The huge and diffuse literary production of Sartre poses at least two dangers due to the difficulty of its assimilation: a benign reception of Sartre, on the one hand, may reduce him to the dimensions of a great but unread icon; a malign one, on the other hand, may find some 'standpoint' from which to dismiss him as a dead dog (species: petty-bourgeois litterateur). We must essay not to reduce his achievement to some pathology, but to put it in motion, through negating its most fundamental inadequacies. This is worthwhile on our presumption that Sartre's genius for giving theoretical shape to the political appearances of the last forty years is not paralleled by any other philosopher.

The formal question of Sartre's relation to Leninism yields little and can briefly be dealt with only in order that the question of his theoretical location be *posed*. Lenin is 'Marxist dogma itself' (*Situations VI* p. 66, Paris 1964). Lenin could write 'these monstrous phrases,' whereupon Sartre cites Lenin's discussion of the Mensheviks' comparison of the Leninist Party to a factory, in which he refuses to be intimidated by it inasmuch as a factory 'is the higher form of that capitalist cooperation which has grouped, disciplined the proletariat, has taught it organisation'. Lenin then clearly differentiates the good discipline based on science from the bad discipline based on fear. Sartre, however, launches the routine tirade of reformist Social Democrats and ultra-left Anarchists: 'Here Lenin is a mystifier: the discipline of the factory is expressed by Taylorism and all the forms of rationalisation, it completes the reification of the workers' etc (*op. cit.*, p. 38). He then takes his stand with Rosa Luxemburg's attack on the Bolshevik leadership of the revolution, whereby 'The errors committed by a truly revolutionary workers' movement are, historically, infinitely more fertile and precious than

Marxism comes to life, and Sartre's inability to thematise it is the reason for the other weaknesses in the totality of his work which have been long observed but which Sartre could not see as central, and thereupon strengthen.

If one starts with the individual consciousness, how can one get to history? That is the classic dilemma of the phenomenological approach, and *Being and Nothingness* of 1943 is subtitled 'Attempt at phenomenological ontology'. The other major theoretical statement, *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, of 1960, is virtually subtitled 'Theory of practical ensembles', and its last part is entitled, 'From the Group to History'. The huge final work on Flaubert is a kind of thinking together of the individual and historical collective: 'A man is never an individual; it would be better to call him a singular universal: totalised and (by that very fact) universalised by his epoch, he retroalises it by reproducing himself as singularity in it.' Unfortunately, such a programme of interpreting men as unities of such contradictions can be carried out by presenting *descriptions* which remain idealism as long as they are merely phenomenological. The display of those mediations which move men through their *epoch* (understood concretely as the period of the specific negation of capitalist property relations) must locate the mediating role of the Party, inasmuch as there is no other path to universality: all other *praxis* is an acceptance of unfreedom — mere subjectivity.

The descriptive virtuosity of *Being and Nothingness* remains methodologically behind the Marx of the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* insofar as the presentation of alienation is concerned. Sartre's finds no way to the concretely social mediations of the world. 'As this *I* by which significations get to things, I find myself engaged in a world which *already signifies*, and which reflects back to me significations which I haven't put in it.' (Fr. p. 592.) The terms which allow of this kind of description prevent the deepening of the analysis in a materialistic way. What Sartre provides is applicable to the worker on the assembly-line, to the Vice-president shifting investments on the currency market, to Heidegger entering the Nazi militia, and to Sartre the soldier imprisoned by the Nazis after the desertion of his officers. Such as term as 'engaged' may adequately express Sartre's view of the difference between Heidegger and himself — a different *decision* made as their two consciousnesses create themselves decisionistically. The usage of other terms like 'things', 'world', is equally idealist.

Such terms vacate history from the societal phenomena they intend to bring to expression — a weakness or lacuna often noted of the phenomenological method. So Sartre can call Flaubert's mother a 'Stalinist' (*Idiot de la Famille*, p. 135), giving primacy to the characterological meaning (ego-weak, compulsively obedient) over the concrete historical reality of a whole consciousness with laws of motion of its own. ('Destalinisation multiplied neuroses in Europe' *op cit*, p. 98). Since history poses no philosophical problems, Stalinism cannot either. But the description of a Stalinist 'character' would hardly differ from that of a Nazi 'character': indeed, these two types differ only on the basis of their respective *decisions* (blank, Bergsonian 'choices'), which for Sartre are not (essentially) objective class position but ethical stances. In the tradition of Enlightenment moralists, his yield from the densest historical experience is *maxims*, not laws of motion: 'Political indifference is always counter-revolutionary.' (*op cit*, p. 104) One knows what he means, but history cannot be done that way: 'It's not that simple.'

Whereas 'every child' knows that a society would not survive a fortnight if it did not work, phenomenologists have no access to Marx's reference point, from which we realise that whatever we do or think has the previous working upon nature by man's entire history behind it. The phenomenologist creates his Robinson Crusoe island of Ego and (trivially) can find no way to society. His whole project of creation was ideological self-deception from the start, as must be all attempts to walk up to an unshakable first principle and stake one's standpoint there.

Invisible to Sartre is Lenin's achievement in completing the Marxist understanding of praxis with the required development of the concept of truth. The great achievement of the idealism of Hegel was in its articulation of a dialectical concept of experience whereby the subject changes as the object changes for him in revealing deeper substance: *truth* is no longer the static equality of subject and object, so mankind can be conceptualised as the 'product of his own labour' — the labour of the concept as mankind's experience deepens on to the attainment of spirit.

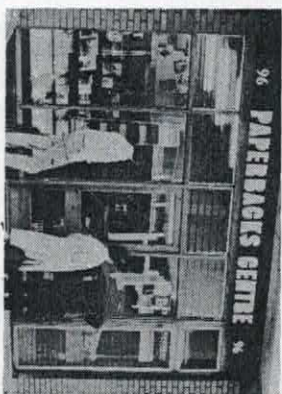
This *labour* is not yet *praxis* in the Leninist sense, to the extent that mankind's division into master and slave is not presented as entailed by the historical evolution of the struggle with nature through the labour of a social formation. The motion of history cannot be presented by Hegel through immanent laws, but retains the character of

an 'as if': as if the World Spirit were moving all. Hence, the curious empiricism of Hegel whereby historically evolved social formations must simply be accepted, since the bases for their changeability cannot be uncovered. The Leninist Party is the decisive theoretical advance precisely because it exists as the immanent moment of true historical change which can achieve the praxis negating empiricism. As such it is the precondition for truth even in the minimal meaning of *penetration of illusion*. Since Hegel cannot conceptualise the changes in social formations as caused, and able to be led back to the structure of the labour process whereby matter as nature is metabolised, even his idealism is not merely inadequate as a method, but is a producer of illusion on its own.

Such reflections as these in no way diminish the importance of Hegel's *Logic*: the indispensable tool for the methodical investigation of matter in motion. One wishes Sartre had evinced more than the reading of the *Phenomenology of Mind* which other authors than he also turned to in the 1930s, in order to trade on it for literary purposes. The concept of truth which emerges in Sartre's last work remains phenomenological (p.166): to be 'present to evidence' (undoubtedly) is to be true, and the concept of praxis bound to it is as follows: 'It is praxis itself, the relationship (double and complex) of men to one another over their labouring on the world, and of men to the world over the reciprocity (virtual or real) of human relationships.'

Such *description* of truth and *description* of praxis has no critical force: some praxis leads to illusion or recreates it (e.g. wage-labour) and the most tenacious illusions in the authority and objectivity of the bourgeois state, can only be overcome through praxis at the highest level at which theory is in unity with it, that of the revolutionary Party itself.

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would have strangled the nascent and still weak bureaucracy and restored the soviets to their original form. Their vigilance against a new Stalin would have been heightened. In any case, Trotsky never aspired to play the role of dictator. He recognised repression as a necessary revolutionary act, but no more. Even Kronstadt was a question of conscience, the necessity for which he admitted reluctantly. He was not personally responsible for the attack on the naval base held by rebellious sailors led by anarchists and enemies of the Bolshevik revolution, it was a collective decision, though he always maintained that it was necessary if the revolution was to survive.

Frankland's conclusion, which alleges that Trotsky would have been just as bad as Stalin, is as slanderous as much of the rest of his article. It amounts to saying that a workers' revolution is bound to degenerate, to end in the Gulag, to use the fashionable expression. It is thus trotted out in different forms for popular consumption just at the time when workers are turning towards revolution, in order to discourage and demoralise. Marxist theory and a study of history are the best inoculation against these attempts to spread the old poison.

The Spartacists and the Iranian Revolution

by A. Dragstedt

1979

The Marxism of today has now the responsibility of bringing the slowly and painfully gathered theoretical acquisitions of the past into the present, as the struggle to construct the leadership which the working class must have in order to conquer state power. There is no event of greater revolutionary significance than the overthrow of the Shah's regime, and therefore no event which tests the claims of political organisations of the working class to be genuine, scientific socialists more profoundly than this political revolution. In the explosive development of the world revolution, old forms are filled with new content and there arise many new and unanticipated forms; and, without a method which can see through these appearances to the fundamental class content of these forms, an organisation can only express its revisionist disorientation.

Organisations sailing under the colours of the Trotskyist movement have been tested for seaworthiness by their positions on Iran, and one can gauge the intentions and competence of their pilots with reference to the storms coming down upon the American working class right now. The dimensions of the revolution involved are indicated by the nationalisation of banks and of the main bastions of imperialist power, the oil companies. If these are not what Lenin meant by the 'commanding heights' of the economy, what is? By every Marxist assessment, one can say that the reconstitution of imperialist relationships would require full-scale counter-revolution.

Of course, the capitalists never simply give up. Asked what the impact of the 'Iranian situation' would be on Standard Oil of Indiana, the Chairman of the Board replied that: 'We can't forecast the actual impact, because we still don't know the final outcome in Iran. Our