

Marxists and mass workers' parties by Karl Kautsky

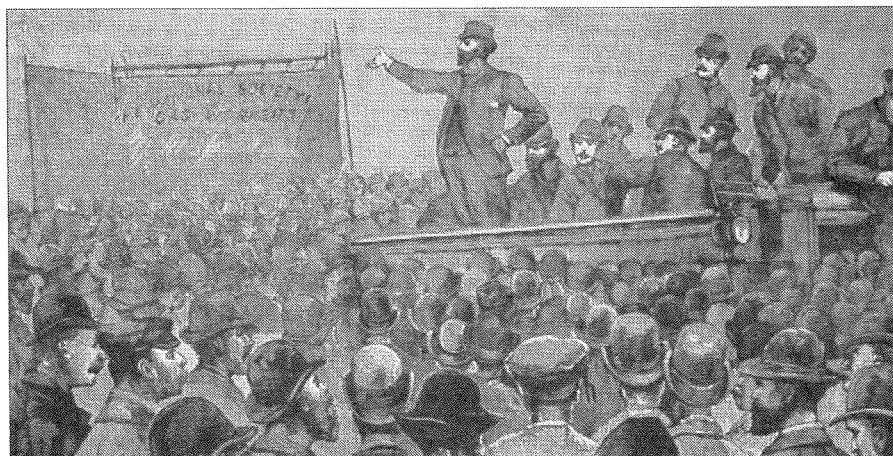
EVOLVING out of the trade unions, adopting a formal commitment to socialism only in 1918, two decades after its formation, the Labour Party puzzled and perplexed European Marxists. It was accepted into membership of the Socialist International in 1908 on the grounds that it fought the class struggle even though it did not "recognise" it and was independent. Karl Kautsky, the leading Marxist of the time, wrote a resolution to that effect. Lenin, while agreeing with Kautsky on the main point, criticised his resolution: Labour was *not* fully independent of bourgeois parties — electoral pacts with the Liberals did not end until 1918, it was only a "first step".

The second part of this article examines the relationship of the British Marxists of the Socialist Democratic Federation to the Labour Party in its first decade. Founded in the early 1880s, the SDF, later called the British Socialist Party, was to be the main component of the Communist Party of Great Britain, founded in 1920. Kautsky's article is of particular interest in that it discusses the relationship of small Marxist organisations to mass trade union-based Labour type organisations. In Holland the Marxists — Anton Pannokoek and Co — were then already an expelled faction of the Labour Party.

I. Marx and the political problems of the trade unions

I HAVE no intention of solving the problem as to which is the more important, the organisation of the proletariat into one independent class party without any definite programme or the formation of a special, though indeed smaller, working-class party, but having a definite socialist programme. I do not think there is any such problem at all. There is just as little sense in such a problem as there is in asking which is the more important — the final aim or the movement. The organisation of the proletariat into an independent class party is as inseparable from the necessity of converting them to socialism as is the movement from its aim. In the long run, the one is quite inefficient without the other. Both must go hand in hand.

The problem is not which is the more important, organisation or enlightenment, but how best they can both be united. This question, however, can by no means be answered identically for all countries, the various answers depending upon the given political and social conditions, and corresponding, to some extent, with the answers to the question regarding the relations existing between the parties and the trade unions. In general, however, one can distinguish two principal types of movements for the attainment of an all-embracing Socialist class party. The European continental type, which is



A rally of the gasworkers' union. The development of "new unionism" was an important landmark in a drive towards working-class political representation

best illustrated at present in the German Social Democracy, and the Anglo-Saxon type, which can best be studied in England, but which is also strongly developed in North America and in Australia.

The great difference between the Anglo-Saxon world and the European continent consists, in the first place, in that the political development of the latter took place under the flag of the French revolution which commenced in 1789, whereas the bourgeois revolution in England was completed in 1688, a whole century in advance, that is. The bourgeois revolution in England was thus accomplished under less highly developed conditions, and thus could bring in its train no such tremendous upheaval in the material and spiritual life of society as did the French revolution. The subsequent political advances made by the rising classes in England since 1688 until the present time always took the form of isolated struggles for one particular object. The revolutionary classes themselves held aloof from revolutionary ideas. They were far more violent than the continentals in their action, but their ideas concerned not society as a whole, but only single occurrences.

The revolutionary classes of the European continent, whose ideas were influenced by the great revolution were, on the contrary, far more prone to consider society as a whole and thus to strive to change it as a whole; they were thus revolutionary in their ideas. Consequently they were more ready than the English to look upon the winning of political rights as a means of attaining the social revolution. Besides this difference between the Anglo-Saxon and the European continental conditions there is also this to be added: When the modern working-class movement commenced in the sixties of the nineteenth century the trade union movement on the continent found greater obstruction than the political movement: politics were everywhere forbidden to the trade union as such. At the same time the European continent was still living through a revolutionary epoch which only came to an end in 1871, an epoch

in which the interests of the proletariat were entirely absorbed in political struggles and organisations. Thus, in continental Europe the political organisation of the proletariat developed before their trade union organisation; they have, therefore, the sooner formed a mass party under the socialist flag. For the propagation of socialism in general, but definite Marxian socialism, the theory of the proletarian class struggle as deduced from the study of capitalist society.

Things in England did not develop so simply. Thanks to its earlier industrial development an energetic working-class party, the Chartists were to be found there before anywhere else; but this party had no revolutionary programme. Very good socialists did, indeed, belong to it, but as a party it only fought for the universal suffrage and the ten hours' day. Its political centre of gravity lay in the industrial north of England, far from London, whereas that of socialism and of the revolutionary working-class movement in France lay in Paris, at the seat of central government. In London itself the Chartists were weak and irresolute. While the Parisian workers in February and June, 1848, show the whole of Europe by their bravery at the barricades, the Chartists could find no better weapon than a gigantic petition to Parliament, which under the circumstances gave but the impression of timidity rather than of power. During the decline of Chartism, which followed the year 1848, the trade unions, on the contrary, developed rapidly. Already in 1824 and 1825 the trade unions had won for themselves legal recognition, and during the economic development of the new Free Trade era, after 1847, they grew rapidly in strength and influence. The whole interest of the working masses was centred in the trade union movement, and a separate political party seemed quite superfluous since no obstacle hindered their political activity in England.

Under these conditions it was only possible to for a separate working-class party by amalgamating the trade unions into a common political organisation and to permeate

it with the socialist spirit.

This was also the opinion of Karl Marx, who was so influenced by the English conditions that he propagated a similar development in continental Europe.

Already in his *Poverty of Philosophy*, in 1847, Marx indicated the political character of the trade union movement — “To form a coalition, is that not pursuing political ends?... In this fight (the coalition regarding wages) — a veritable civil war — all the different elements unite and prepare for the coming struggle. Once this point is reached the coalition assumes a political character” (pp. 160, 162). Still more decidedly did Marx insist upon the political significance of the trade unions in the resolution he proposed, and which was accepted by the Geneva International Congress in 1866. Among other things this resolution says: “Indispensable as are the trade unions in the guerrilla warfare between capital and labour, of still greater importance are they as an organised means of promoting the abolition of the wage system itself.

“The trade unions have so far laid too much stress upon their local and immediate struggles against capital. They have not yet fully understood their power of attacking the whole system of wage slavery and present forms of production... On that account they hold themselves too much aloof from general, social and political movements. Lately, however, they seem to have awakened to some extent to the consciousness of the great historical problem confronting them... Apart from their original aims, the trade unions must now learn to focus the organisation of the working classes for the great purpose of attaining their complete emancipation. They must therefore support every social and political movement which has this for its aim,” and so on. We see, then, that what we demand from the Social Democracy, Marx pointed out as the functions of the trade unions.

Interesting also is an interview between Hamann, the secretary of the German Metal Workers' trade union, and Karl Marx, at Hanover, an account of which was given by Hamann in the *Volkstaat*, 1869, No. 17. (This account has been printed by Bringmann, *The History of the German Carpenters' Movement*, 1903, vol. i., p. 364.)

Marx said: “The trade unions should never be affiliated with or made dependent upon a political society if they are to fulfil the object for which they are formed. If this happens it means their death blow. The trade unions are the schools for socialism, the workers are there educated up to socialism by means of the incessant struggle against capitalism which is being carried on before their eyes. All political parties, be they what they may, can hold sway over the mass of the workers for only a time; the trade union, on the other hand, capture them permanently; only the trade unions are thus able to represent a real working-class party, and to form a bulwark against the power of capital. The greater mass of the workers conceive the necessity of bettering their material position whatever political party they may belong to. Once the material position of the worker has improved he can then devote himself to

the better education of his children; his wife and children need not go to the factory, and he himself can pay some attention to his own mental education, he can better see to his physique. He becomes a socialist without knowing it.” This quotation is only an interview, not a signed article by Marx, consequently it is possible that it does not altogether accurately represent Marx's meaning. However, it is probable that Marx saw it in print, for it appeared in the *Volkstaat*, and, if so, he would have corrected it had he found it to be erroneous. Thus, although we cannot vouch for its absolute accuracy, it is yet worthy of attention, and although such an attitude seems very strange to us now, it is yet readily explained by the position of affairs at that time.

Only in England and in France was there then a fairly wide working-class movement of some duration, and it was only from the experience of these movements that Marx could develop his ideas on the subject. In France he found, indeed, much socialism, but only in the form of sectarian societies. There were many socialist “schools,” each swearing to the genuineness of its patent pill for the cure of all the ills of society, and each trying to rally the workers round itself. The various schools were at war with one another, and were thus instrumental in splitting the working masses rather than uniting them.

None of them had chosen as their basis the class struggle, which alone could unite the

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whole class. And the same was true of the political movements which appealed to the working classes. When Lassalle's movement first came into being, it also appeared to Marx as a new sect. The ignoring of the trade unions, the prominence given to the panacea of co-operative production, seemed to him entirely sectarian, and no less sectarian also was the appeal to state help. When, after Lassalle's death, the new working-class party split, he was still further confirmed in his conclusions that such a party was only the means whereby to divide, not unite, the proletariat. It thus seemed to him that to save the trade unions they must hold aloof from political organisations.

There has been an attempt to conclude from this interview that Marx was in favour of the political neutrality of the trade unions, but this is quite unjustified. Marx was by no means of opinion that the trade unions should be as neutral towards the Liberals and clericals as toward socialists. He says expressly: “The trade unions are the schools for social-

ism... only they are about to form a real working-class party.” That means, the trade unions should not be neutral toward bourgeois political parties, but should keep away from all political parties because it is they themselves who are to form the socialist working-class party, and as such they must declare war on all bourgeois parties. Thus, explicable though this attitude may be under those circumstances, further developments have shown that it is now not altogether tenable. In the first place, the German Social Democracy lost more and more of its sectarian character. It was now no longer an organisation for the attainment of state credit for co-operative production, but it was the organisation of the proletarian class struggle, which was for a long time far in advance of the trade unions. It was the “real working-class party”, whose functions the trade unions, as they grew stronger, had neither the opportunity, reasons nor even legal rights to take over. On the other hand, the English trade unions have shown that their existence alone is insufficient to convert the worker to socialism “without him knowing it”; that they do not necessarily bring socialist convictions home to the worker because of “the incessant struggle against capitalism which is being carried on before their eyes.” Only a scrap of this struggle is really being pursued daily, and this scrap is not even always sufficient to indicate the real meaning of the whole struggle. And under certain circumstances the trade unions might even seek to evade this struggle altogether when their benefit arrangements are endangered thereby.

While in Germany the political party has become a real working-class party, the trade unions in England have more and more lost the ability to become such a party. They have ever more separated themselves from the mass of the proletariat, thus forming an aristocracy of labour and becoming means of splitting rather than of uniting the masses. Moreover, they have always shown a tendency to political dependence on the bourgeois parties, by whom the unions and, to even a greater extent, their leaders, have been bought and duped by concessions.

So it appeared that the development of events in England proved Marx wrong. His theory of the class struggle and its practical results were mainly deduced from English conditions, and it was just in England that they seemed to be brought to an ad absurdum. But, finally, Marx is seen to be right after all.

II. The Social-Democracy and the Labour Party in England

At first, indeed, Marxism made its appearance in England in opposition to Marx, when Hyndman, Bax and the other followers of Marx's teachings founded, in 1881, the Democratic Federation, later on the Social Democratic Federation, at present the Social Democratic Party. According to the intention of its founders it was to become a workingmen's party, similar to the German Social Democratic Party. It was a product of the great crisis which began in the seventies and which introduced the cessation of England's industrial supremacy. The conditions

which gave to English capital a position of monopoly and allowed it to cede a share of its fruits to the trade unions were coming to an end. Unemployment was raging and the trade unions were declining. At the same time the antagonism between capital and labour was growing; as a consequence, the English workingmen became again susceptible to the ideas of socialism, and the Social Democratic Federation was enabled to achieve considerable success.

But strange to say, beyond a certain point it could never go in its achievements. The Social Democratic Federation thought it necessary to point out to the workingmen the insufficiency of trade unionism in order to make them realise the necessity for socialism. But this provoked the opposition of the trade unionists — that element, to wit, which constitutes a portion of the working class, and which is best capable of being organised. It was this, no doubt, which made it impossible for Engels to adopt a friendly attitude toward the Social Democratic Federation. As is known from his letters to Sorge, he judged it and its sectarian character rather severely. It is true that Marx and Engels fought against the corruption and narrow-mindedness of the majority of the English trade union officials in a similar manner, and with no less energy than the Social Democratic Federation itself, but nothing could shake their conviction that, in spite of it all, the only way to create in England a strong Social Democratic working-class party was to propagate socialism in the trade unions, to loosen the bonds between them and the bourgeois parties, and to unite them into one separate party. Finally, however, Engels did not expect much from the old trade unionists. The new unionism in England, the Knights of Labour in America, seemed to him a much better soil from which a Labour Party could spring. Experience has shown that Marx has been right after all. The English workingman, insofar as he is at all capable of being organised and of fighting, is very strongly attached to his trade union, which has become an indispensable life element to him. Whoever attacks it, or even belittles it, is his enemy. And, in fact, there is no need at all for either setting the trade unions aside or lessening their importance.

The new economic and political situation dates from the eighties, and having improved for a time during the nineties, renders the class antagonism in the new century all the more pronounced and violent. This situation can no longer be met adequately by the trade unionist methods hitherto in vogue. The methods, then, certainly should be changed, by widening the sphere of action of the trade unions, and by expanding their forms of organisations, which, at the same time, will occasion a widening of the mental horizon of their members, and morally also of their leaders. But this implies that the trade unions, so far from losing, will, on the contrary, gain in importance.

The English workingman is very strongly attached to his trade union. It is for him to such an extent the all engrossing organ of all his social and political struggles, that he requires no other, and considers any other

organ superfluous. A Labour Party in England, outside the trade unions, can therefore never become a party embracing the masses. It is doomed always to be confined to a small circle, and to remain in this sense a sect.

In consequence of all this, the SDF, as well as the other socialist organisations, namely, the Fabians (1883) and the Independent Labour Party (1893), formed side by side with it, did not grow, in spite of the fact that the new situation made it an imperative necessity to create an independent workmen's party.

If smallness and an incapability to get a hold on the masses are the essential characteristics of a sect, then these other organisations were no less sects than the SDF.

When, however, the majority of the trade unions at last made up their minds to form a

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common political organisation, at once a mass-party arose to which the existing socialist organisations affiliated. Thus the Labour Representation Committee was formed (1900), out of which grew the Labour Party now in existence.

By creating this Labour Party, the path was at last entered upon, which Marx so long ago designated as the right one, and which proved for England at the present time the only path leading to the organisation of the proletariat as a class. And yet we need by no means declare the judgement passed by Engels on the SDF as justified in all points. The SDF committed indeed mistakes enough. Its Marxism was often enough a dogma rather than a method, and mixed up with additions quite foreign to the spirit of true Marxism. But, notwithstanding all this, the SDF has accomplished a good deal, and its mistakes can be partly explained by the difficulties it had to contend against.

The SDF desired to become a party like the German SDF; for this, however, the condition in England was not ripe. Failure was bound to attend these endeavours in spite of the most self-sacrificing work. It only blocked the way to the formation of a real mass party.

But this by no means implies a condemnation of the SDF; it only means that the tasks and functions of this organisation lay elsewhere than in the direction in which the SDF itself sought them.

It is, for instance, a mistake to think that the principal thing is to organise an independent working-class party, and that once such a party is in existence the logic of events will force it to adopt socialism. One is apt to forget that socialism, which is alone capable of keeping the proletariat permanently together,

and which alone can lead them to victory — namely, the socialism of the class struggle — is not a thing which lies on the surface. No doubt their very class position enables the proletarians to grasp socialism more readily than the bourgeois elements can do; true, also, that an independent class party furnishes them with the best basis for it. But for all that, a good deal of theoretical knowledge is indispensable in order to attain a deeper comprehension of the capitalist mode of production, and of the nature of the class relations begotten by that mode of production as well as of the historical tasks imposed upon these classes. Without such a comprehension it is simply impossible to create a really independent permanent class party of the proletariat, independent not only in the essence that the workers are organised separately, but that their mode of thinking is distinct from that of the bourgeoisie.

We are present rather inclined to undervalue the importance of spreading socialist comprehension among the mass movement, because it rests upon propositions which have now become familiar to us for a generation — and are now, by means of a widely-spread press, the common property of wide circles, so that they appear to us true enough. In a country, however, where you just start teaching these propositions, they are by no means so readily grasped. The logic of events will not of itself bring them into the brains of the proletariat, although it will make their brains susceptible to them.

The striving, therefore, for the organisation of an independent mass and class party is not sufficient. No less important is the socialist enlightenment. If the SDF failed in the former task, it achieved all the more in the domain of the latter. By its socialist agitation it prepared the soil upon which the Labour Party could arise, and the socialist criticism and propaganda which it still pursues is indispensable even now, when the Labour Party already exists, in order to imbue that Party with a socialist spirit and to bring its actions for occasional and partial ends into accord with the lasting aims of the struggle of the proletariat for its complete emancipation. Looked at in this light, the SDF acquires an importance very different from what it seems to possess when merely compared to the continental social-democratic parties, which being mass parties are the political representatives of the whole proletariat engaged in its class struggle.

The task of the SDF is aptly stated in what the *Communist Manifesto* says in 1847 of the Communist League: “They are practically the most resolute and active portion of the working-class party; theoretically they are in advance of the rest of the proletariat, inasmuch as they possess a clear insight into the conditions, the progress, and the general results of the proletarian movement.”

It is the endeavour of the Marxists of all countries to be worthy of this position. The peculiarity of England consists in the fact that the conditions there render it necessary for the Marxists to form a separate, solid organisation, which in countries where mass parties, with a social democratic i.e., Marxist — programme exist, would be

superfluous — nay, detrimental — inasmuch as it would only split up the party.

It is unavoidable, however, in a country where the trade unions form the Labour Party, at least so long as this Party does not accept a social democratic programme, and has not yet developed a permanent social democratic policy.

We must be very much on our guard not to look at the English conditions through continental spectacles, and not to think that the Labour Party and the SDP are two parties competing with one another, the one excluding the other. Rather are they to be considered as two organs with different functions to which one is the complement of the other, and of which one can function but imperfectly without the other.

One should not imagine that the relation of the Labour Party to the SDP in England is similar to that existing at the present moment between the Marxists and the Social Democratic Labour Party in Holland. The formation of the Labour Party was cordially welcomed in England by the social democrats. For a certain time the SDP formed a constituent part of the Labour Party, and afterward left it, not because it wanted the Labour Party to cease to exist, but because it did not agree with the policy of the latter.*

Where two independent organisations exist side by side conflicts between them are always possible, however much the attainment of their common ends makes it desirable for them to work in cordial agreement.

But it is still possible for the SDP to join the Labour Party, and resolutions to that effect, backed by considerable minorities, are again and again proposed at the SDP conferences. The British Labour Party has always desired this union. Unlike the Labour Party in Holland, it does not exclude Marxists, and yet it is contended that it is unworthy of being represented in the International Socialist Bureau side by side with the SDP.

Although the antagonism between the social democracy and the Labour Party is so great at present, the SDP itself has altogether given up the hope of becoming a mass party after the style of the German Social Democracy, recognising as it does that in England the political organisation of the proletariat, as a class, can only be attained by the inclusion the trade unions.

Since, under the given conditions in England, the functions of the SDP, just as those of the other socialist parties, are entirely different from those of the continental socialist organisations, injustice is done to it when one compares it to these organisations, and depreciates it on account of its small membership, and splits. The importance of the SDP does not consist in its electoral activity, the number of its voters, its parliamentary representation — these are the spheres dominated by the Labour Party — but in its propaganda work. The Labour Party has no press, has no literature, and its propagandist activist in the form of public meetings is also practically nil.

What is done at all in this sphere in England, is done only by the socialist parties. The Labour Party represents a tremendous

ship, but the socialist organisations are the compass and rudder of this ship — without these it would be tossed hither and thither by the waves.

What the relationship between the SDP and Labour Party should be depends upon various conditions. The Labour Party is far from being an ideal party, and I have no such liking for its politics as has Comrade Beer.

The criticisms of the SDP may, in many points, be rather overdrawn; still, the Labour Party in its present stage can easily sink into confusion and impotence when the socialism of the trade union masses consists rather in the form of a merely vague desire than in that of a clear understanding of its principles; when the Parliamentary and trade union leaders of the Labour Party, still largely influenced by the deeply-rooted traditions of co-operation with the Liberals, are by no means independent, all their ideas being saturated with bourgeois conceptions of philanthropy, of ethics, of economics and of democracy.

Only by means of the most energetic Marxist propaganda among the masses and the most determined criticism of the errors and entanglements of the leaders can the Party be made into a powerful and trustworthy organ, in the struggle for the emancipation of the proletariat.

It is, of course, open to doubt as to which is the best from of carrying on this propaganda and criticism; particularly as to whether it would be more effective were the Social Democratic Party inside or outside the Labour Party. In general, the former is to be preferred, for when one criticises an organisation from the outside the critic too often appears as an enemy who would gladly wreck it. When, however, it is criticised by a member, the very membership shows that the critic has an interest in its existence, and only opposes its immediate actions in order to make it all the more powerful.

The English worker now considers the entrance of the trade unions into the Labour Party as essential, as he formerly considered the trade unions themselves, and as formerly the agitation of the Social Democratic Party among the English workers was the more difficult because they carried it on outside the unions, so it is to be feared that it is now committing the same mistake in attempting to criticise the Labour Party from without.

Nothing benefited the Social Democratic Party more than that so many of its members could propagate socialism as trade unionists among the trade unions. Now too, many of its members are also members of the Labour Party in virtue of their trade unions, and as such they take part in the congresses of the Labour Party. Why, therefore, awaken the idea that the Social Democratic Party sees a rival in the Labour Party, which it has to destroy, instead of trying to make it better and more effective? It will be said, on the other hand, that the Labour Party refuses to have a programme to which its candidates must adhere. This is certainly a great mistake, but it is no reason for keeping away from the Labour Party. Were the Labour Party so far advanced as to adopt a socialist programme, the question as to the affiliation of the Social Democratic Party as a party would no longer

arise: the question would rather be as to whether the Social Democratic Party had not attained its purpose, and should not sink its identity in that of the Labour Party.

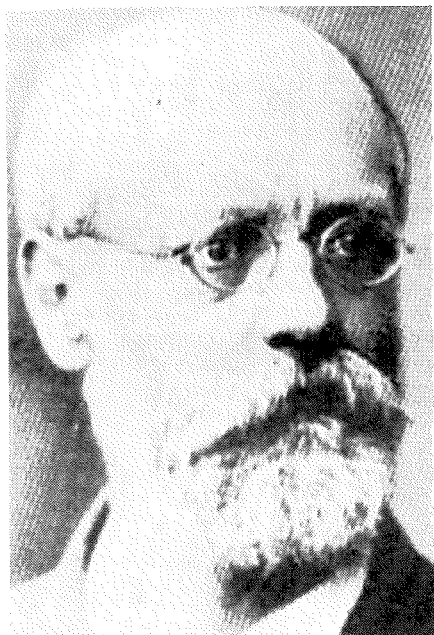
Unfortunately, we have not yet reached this stage; the social democracy as a separate body is still indispensable for the education of the Labour Party, but this could best be done as a member of the Labour Party. So long as this work of education is not made impossible to the Social Democratic Party, so long ought it not to stand outside the Labour Party. Whether this is just now impossible it is difficult for the stranger to decide. A very important role is played by the "imponderables," the importance of which can only be more or less accurately estimated by one who lives in the country and works among the people. Within the different socialist parties there is at present a movement aiming at their unification in one form or other. Whatever form the socialist organisation may take it will still remain for a long time the fact that the socialist organisations and the Labour Party have different functions, each being incomplete without the other: that under present conditions both are indispensable in the struggle for the emancipation of the English proletariat, that one can very well defend both. The Socialist International itself has very reason to use every opportunity of drawing the Labour Party into closer contact with international socialism, thus subjecting it more and more to socialist influence. There is no alternative here. It is not a question as to whether we prefer a small, resolute Social Democratic Party to a big class party with no definite programme, indeed, but still independent of all bourgeois parties: the fact is that both form one whole under the given conditions in England. A socialist organisation of the Social Democratic Party type is an insufficient by itself as the Labour Party. We must encourage both. We must further the spread and growth of the social democracy as much as the propagation of socialism in the Labour Party.

In North America things are somewhat different from those obtaining in England. Still, there is some similarity and it is possible that there, too, the long-wished-for mass party of the proletariat may be formed into an independent political party in the very near future by the constitution of the American Federation of Labour. Probably this new party will not be a definitely socialist one at first, and the Socialist Party will, therefore, have to exist side by side with it until the trade union party has been fully won for social democracy. As in England, so in the United States. The chief sphere of the Labour Party will be parliamentary and electoral, while that of the social democracy will be theoretical and propagandist.

Attempts have been made in this direction, and we must be prepared one fine day to see the rise of such a Labour Party side by side with the Socialist Party in the United States, and demanding admission to the International.

And here I am of opinion that what holds for the British will also hold for the American Labour Party.

It would, however, be quite a different



Karl Kautsky

question if such a party were formed on the European continent.

Here the new Labour Party would no longer be supplementary to the present socialist parties, but it would be antagonistic. It could only exist and thrive by the suppression of the other. It would not be, as in the Anglo-Saxon world, the only form in which the mass of the proletariat could unite into an independent party. The Social Democratic Parties are already such mass parties, and the new Labour Party would consequently enter the field as a wedge in order to disperse the mass organisation and to split the proletariat.

Finally, the present form of the English Labour Party is only a transition stage which will sooner or later develop into a class conscious Social Democratic Labour Party, with a definite socialist programme. With us this object lesson has been attained, and, consequently, the formation of a purely Labour Party is merely an attempt to crush out an already existing higher form, by a more reactionary party.

In short, although superficially similar in organisation, such a Labour Party on the continent is just the opposite to what it is in England under the given historical conditions. He who judges both these Labour Parties, isolated from their surroundings, may think we ought to repudiate the Anglo-Saxon, because the European continental parties must be fought with all the means at our disposal. In their historical connection, however, the Labour Parties assume quite different characters. What we attack here we must recognise there, indeed, we must joyously welcome it, not, of course, as an ideal organisation, but merely as the previous step to it.

The ideal organisation is the unification of all proletarian parties, the political societies, the trade unions, the co-operatives, as equal members, not of a Labour Party without a programme, as is at the present the case in England, but of a class conscious, all-embracing social democracy. ■

A new racial "science"?

Dan Katz reviews *The Race Gallery — The Return Of Racial Science* by Marek Kohn, Jonathan Cape, £17.99

THE MID-70S: a feature of my third-year O-level Geography course was the idea of "race". Mr Shortland-Ball said that there were three races — Mongoloid, Caucasoid and Negroid. He said that he was glad there were no black people in the class as he found it embarrassing to discuss the issue in front of them. Given what he then said, I'm not surprised.

The general picture of the last 20 years is that this sort of rubbish has gone the same way as racist strikes against black workers and the explicitly racist "humour" of the '70s sit-com variety.

Marek Kohn's book discusses the effect of the concept of "race" within the various branches of contemporary science. He holds his book together with a view of why "racial science" has been squeezed out. He aims to explain why, for example, GCSE Geography teachers in 1995 do not tell kids that a large part of humanity are characterised by "frizzy hair and thick lips."

Kohn's "big idea" is worth considering: "The point of departure for the *Race Gallery* is the fact that scientific anti-racism is an element of the post-war order." The recent message has been that, "in scientific terms, race is of minimal importance, if not a delusion altogether..." Over the last 20 years, the line has hardened: the concept of race has largely vanished from textbooks, except to be labelled obsolete. A century ago, equivalent books would have spoken of little else."

So Mr S-B, stuffed and propped up in a display case, could well be an exhibit in Marek Kohn's *Race Gallery* — hopefully the last of a backward species.

Kohn's worry, however, is this — if scientific anti-racism is the product of a disgust with the Nazis scientifically-justified genocide, the stability brought by the post-war boom and social-democratic Welfare Statism, then what does the future hold? Will the ethnic cleansing in the former Yugoslavia, Eastern European economic chaos, the destruction of the American inner city and the ripping to pieces of welfare provision create a climate which could lead to a return of scientifically justified racism?

For example, "if the urban crisis in America continues to worsen, white American suspicions that blacks are inherently criminal or uneducable will grow.

Such ideas will increasingly obtrude into mainstream political discourse. As they do, racial science will return as an ideology to legitimate these prejudices, and to justify the proposition that money spent on African-Americans is money wasted."

This is the context for the publication last year of Richard Herrnstein and Charles Murray's notorious book, *The Bell Curve*, in which the authors argue that America is increasingly stratified by intellectual ability, that "success and failure in the American economy are increasingly a matter of the genes that people inherit" and that black people as a group are intellectually inferior to whites. Murray's political conclusions are to abolish welfare, build orphanages and end affirmative action.

Kohn believes that *The Bell Curve* could be the beginning of a new wave of racial science. And he states: "One of the most important messages of this book is that a revival of racial science remains possible despite the rejection of traditional scientific concepts of race. The old racial categories were just the suitcases, not the whole of the baggage. What mattered were the contents, and these may find new niches within any of the scientific fields associated with the division of humankind into groups."

And yet Kohn — quite rightly — backs off from rejecting discussion about human difference: "Race is a fallacy, but human uniformity is a non sequitur." He argues for open debate, and confrontation with the new theories of racial science, as the way for anti-racist science to renew itself.

And he goes further — quite bluntly — "Historians have argued convincingly that scientific racism arose under particular historical conditions, reflecting the world-view of Northern Europeans who enjoyed political and economic dominance over the darker skinned peoples of the world. It was self-serving, self-centred, and used to justify great cruelty and oppression — but that does not necessarily mean it was wrong. If a scientific argument is shown to be rooted in a racist tradition, it should be regarded as dubious, but can not be deemed to be disproven. Refutation can only take place according to science's internal procedures." In other words, we have to be able to argue our case. Shouting "racist" at theories which we find politically offensive — like Herrnstein and Murray's — is not enough.

I've no doubt this is also right. A couple of years after Mr Shortland-Ball's Geography — and now a committed anti-racist — I got into the following argument: "If it could be shown conclusively that black people were less intelligent than whites, I would not accept it, for political reasons." The reply that utterly destroyed me was: "Well, you're an idiot then." Fine — rationality must rule. It is with reason that we must defeat the racists. ■