



THE DIALECTICS OF SECTARIANISM

**'PHILOSOPHY'
AND
MR. SLAUGHTER
BY NEAL SMITH**

Of what use is Marxism to the working class? The working class does not develop control of a portion of the means of production within capitalism, as did the bourgeoisie within feudalism. It must seize hold of the existing means of production. It remains a class of wage slaves up to the point of taking power, and expropriating the capitalists. It must deliberately smash the old state and establish a new type of state, a workers' state, to consolidate its power and its freedom. Its readiness and willingness to act to secure its own emancipation is dependent on its conscious grasp of its own class interests and understanding of the laws of social development. Its struggle, at its highest peak, is a conscious struggle based on science, and this is central to the Marxist theory of the proletarian revolution. (The revolution will only be complete in the degenerated and deformed workers' states when the working class takes full political power.) Therefore it is an absolute prerequisite that the party which aims to lead the working class out of slavery has a scientific outlook. That can only be a materialist outlook, which rigorously pushes aside all obscurantism and all reliance on 'supernatural' activity in place of human activity. Only dialectical materialism can serve the working class to make clear its historical interests. Dialectical materialism is not an optional, but an essential weapon in the struggle of the working class to remake the world. The enemies of dialectical materialism are not only those who reject it, but also those who distort and misrepresent it, and its connection with proletarian politics. In Britain, not the least damage has been done by the attempt of the Socialist Labour League to set up a mummified caricature of dialectical materialism as a magic talisman. In this article Neal Smith shows that Marxism can only be understood as a useful weapon in the class struggle if the complexity and richness of all the different levels of analysis are appreciated, and how, therefore, the SLL's collapsing of Marxism into a mysticised 'epistemology' blocks the rational application of Marxism and even of Marxist epistemology.

ONE OF the things that immediately strikes anyone coming into contact with the Socialist Labour League is their insistent proclamation - under all circumstances, and sometimes even in mass agitation - of the prime necessity of the understanding of dialectical materialism. This insistence appears in many forms, not only, properly though exaggeratedly in their programmes of education for members and sympathisers and in pamphlets, but also in their daily agitation.

Against the 'revisionists' - whose political errors all flow, according to the SLL, from their "rejection of dialectical materialism" - the SLL find a compulsive need to proclaim the belief in dialectical materialism on every conceivable occasion. "Dialectical materialism", for them, becomes a magic wand, automatically leading to correct politics. It becomes a fetish, in fact, it becomes an alibi for an idealism in practice. Aspects of reality are abstracted from their material totality, woven

"...is it better to 'think', without having a critical awareness, in a disjointed and episodic way? In other words, is it better to take part in a conception of the world mechanically imposed by the external environment? ... Or, on the other hand, is it better to work out consciously and critically one's own conception of the world and thus, in connection with the labours of one's own brain, choose one's sphere of activity, take an active part in the creation of the world, be one's own guide, refusing to accept passively and supinely from outside the moulding of one's personality?"

Antonio Gramsci,

into pre-arranged conceptions and dished out as the fruit of pure, undiluted dialectical materialism. Thus, the Wilson devaluation of the £ signalled the cataclysmic, total breakdown of British capitalism, and was made out to be a bigger betrayal than Macdonald's capitulation to the American bankers in 1931. Every problem for British capitalism is seen as the final harbinger of utter collapse of the economy and the consequent revolutionary working class offensive, to be led by the SLL of course.

Their political practice, which is the decisive test of their application of dialectical materialism, is actually based on a methodology which is sub-empiricist. The super-activism of the League is comparable to the man who throws a medley of brilliant punches - shadow-boxing - while the real contestants get on with the fight inside the ring. The struggle against empiricism and pragmatism which does need to be waged is certainly not advanced by the shabby and often dishonest polemics, the out-of-

this-world analyses, and the self-centred, often irrelevant activities of the SLL.

The League's method is as crude as it is false - set up a straw man and then proceed to knock him down. It does not, of course, matter that the straw man they set up often is only a projection of their own preoccupations, mistakes, obsessions and distortions.

"LENIN ON DIALECTICS"

As has been said, the SLL believe that the basis of the "revisionism" of other groups is the rejection of dialectical materialism. A concrete example of the League approach and also of the muddle that they call "philosophy" is to be found in Cliff Slaughter's pamphlet - "Lenin on Dialectics" - and it is worth examining it in some detail, as by so doing it is possible to move from a criticism of its confusion to a better appreciation of dialectical materialism and its real significance for revolutionary activity.

Slaughter begins in typical SLL knock-about fashion by asserting that:

"In recent years, revisionist policies have been pursued by some calling themselves Trotskyists ... and it is becoming clear that behind these policies there lies an abandonment of dialectical materialism, a turn towards empiricism and pragmatism. This pamphlet is part of a defence of dialectics against these basic revisions! (1)

Now this sounds very fine and reasonable - very simple and precise - but it is unfortunate for Slaughter that nowhere in the pamphlet does he show in concrete detail any substantiation for these very serious charges. Nowhere in the pamphlet is there to be found a demonstration of how the political positions of these other groups flow directly from the particular epistemology they are supposed to hold.

MARX AND HEGEL

The first section of the pamphlet is on the connection between the philosophy of Hegel and the Marxism of Lenin (as expressed in his notes on Hegel's "Science of Logic"). It is in this initial section that the confusion which permeates the pamphlet appears. Put simply, it is the inability to distinguish between Marxism and Hegelianism. To understand this it is necessary to go back to some philosophical points of departure - Hegel's critique of Kant.

According to Hegel, the dialectical movement (i.e. movement through contradiction, changes from quantity to quality, the concept of immanence) of thought reflects directly the movement of reality. (2) Thought develops in a dialectical fashion because that is the way in

which the object of thought changes and develops - thought is simply determined by the movement of reality (and a peculiar reality at that).

Hegel elaborated this concept in contradistinction to the philosophy of the German philosopher Immanuel Kant who, at the end of the eighteenth century, had developed a theory of knowledge in which thought was conceived of as never being able to come to grips with the world because of the existence of certain categories of thought, such as space and causality, which existed in thought alone, determined its structure, and placed an irremovable barrier between thought and its object.

According to Kant, it is possible to have some conception of reality, but this conception will always be refracted and distorted by the presence of the categories of thought, and therefore it cannot be possible to finally understand things as they are in themselves. In other words, there exists, if Kant is right, a definite limit on the scope of knowledge - there is a point beyond which we cannot go and beyond that point the world is necessarily unintelligible and un-reachable. Hegel, on the other hand, wished to assert the intelligibility and rationality of the world, and therefore found it necessary to overcome the pitfalls put in the way of this by Kantian epistemology. He did this by the adoption of a radically different perspective from that of Kant - by conceiving of the "unity of thought and being." Thus he dissolved the Kantian formulation by denying the separation of thought and the world, and did this on the grounds of the obvious intelligibility of the world. This sort of approach can be found, expressed from a different perspective, in "Ludwig Feuerbach and the end of classical German philosophy" by Engels when he says about Kantianism....

"The most telling refutation of this (Kantianism, NS) as of all other philosophical crotchets is practice, namely experiment and industry. If we are able to prove the correctness of our conception of a natural process by making it ourselves, bringing it into being out of its conditions, and make it serve our purposes into the bargain, then there is an end to the Kantian ungraspable "thing-in-itself". (3)

If the perspective is altered from the practical, instrumental one of Engels to that of the speculative rationalism of Hegel, there is the essence of Hegel's justification for his rejection of Kant. It is this - if we can understand the world on a rational basis, and we can do this, then there is no reason to suppose thought and the world are separate, for if that were the case, then such a rational understanding as exists would be impossible. Flowing from this reasoning, Hegel drew the conclusion that for thought to grasp the world, it must allow itself to be directly determined by it - dialectical thought is therefore in essence thought which reflects the dialectical nature of the world. He says....

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¹The absolute method ... draws the determinate element directly from the object itself, since it is the object's immanent principle and soul! (my emphasis, NS)

¹The self-identity of the idea is one with the process! (my emphasis) (4)

Surely from this it is clear that for Hegel the movement of thought and of the world were one and the same in essence, and that thought is directly and passively determined by reality. This is brought out in Kojève's book - "An Introduction to the Reading of Hegel" - in which he outlines Hegel's essentially phenomenological approach. That is to say that, for Hegel, it is possible to receive information about the world in a completely passive manner, unencumbered by the distortion or selection of thought processes. The mind is seen as being a potentially blank page on which the world inscribes information by the operation of the senses and reason. Thus the process is entirely one-way, from the world to thought, and the determination is also all one way - thought being simply a receptacle into which the world is poured, although even that image is not quite precise as the receptacle does shape what is received (pouring liquids into different types of containers).

The process of the inscription on the blank page occurs, of course, according to the laws of dialectical development. This sort of approach to an understanding of the world is advocated by Hegel in, for example, the introductory passages to the "Philosophy of Nature".

Briefly then, this is the Hegelian view of the way in which thought must relate to the world in order to grasp its immanent principles. It is one in which thought is passively determined by the processes of the world, and does not interact with them. How is the Marxist theory of knowledge different from this, and how does Slaughter see the difference?

Slaughter is not at all clear in his description of the way thought relates to the world. But it seems that in a confused fashion he accepts the passive nature of this relationship. Although, in places, he does make passing references to the activity of thought, nowhere is the significance of this brought out, and consequently he appears to argue that the only real difference between the epistemology of Hegel and that of Marx and Lenin is that the determinate object of thought is different. Hegel understood the movement and development of thought as being the reflection of the movement of a spiritual, transcendental reality - the Absolute. Thus thought is fundamentally related to this transcendental entity, and its relations to the material world, while existing (instead of simply not being there as is sometimes asserted in crude caricatures of the 'idealism' of Hegel) are a result of this transcendental determination. The relations of thought to the earth are thus determined by the relation of thought to the heavens. However, for Marx, the reverse is the case. Thought is determined in its relationship to the material,

natural and social world. Thought is not the result of a divine process, but of the processes of nature and society. These are its determinants. In pointing out this fundamental and vital difference, Slaughter is quite correct. However, he does not go further than this and the question must be raised as to whether this change from heaven to earth is the only difference between Marx and Hegel.

To quote Slaughter ...

¹A study of these notes clarifies greatly what Marx and Engels meant when they said that in order to arrive at a scientific method they had only ¹to stand Hegel on his head, or rather, on his feet".! (5) (my emphasis)

Apart from the fact, amplified later on, that a study of a theory of knowledge does not automatically imply and produce a scientific method as Slaughter suggests, Marx certainly did not claim that the standing of Hegel 'on his head' was all that he did - the only thing. As Althusser and others have noted, the phrase of Marx about the extraction of the rational kernel from the mystical shell (see the Afterword to the 2nd German edition of Capital) contains within it a whole range of nuances, and indeed, if this is the only thing they needed to do, then Slaughter is forced into the position of saying that the Marxist epistemology is one which is still essentially passive. The determination of thought in a passive sense is not altered by altering its object, and thus Slaughter falls into the trap of attributing to Marx the passive epistemology of Hegel. This is precisely how he sees it. To quote from the pamphlet...

¹Our concepts are a reflection of the objective world of nature.! (6)

(It is worth noting that the social determination of thought is omitted here, as in other material of the SLL, and without this essential point there cannot be a satisfactory conception of ideology and 'false consciousness!').

Now, a reflection is something which is passive and inactive - it will not change as long as the object it is reflecting does not change. It is an eternal passive copy of the real object - there is no dynamic interaction in which the reflection changes, there is no immanent movement: a reflection can be nothing other than what it is. This image of Slaughter's coincides exactly with a massive, phenomenological epistemology - a simple inverted Hegelianism.

However, this is not a Marxist epistemology. In his 1845 Theses on Feuerbach, Marx had written that ...

¹The chief defect of all hitherto existing materialism ... is that the thing is conceived only in the form of the object or of contemplation, but not as human sensuous activity, practice, not subjectively. Hence it happened that the active side, in contradistinction to materialism, was developed by idealism - but only abstractly, since, of course, idealism does not know real, sensuous activity as such.! (7)

Unfortunately for Slaughter, it is precisely this defect of all hitherto existing materialism which occurs in his writings: he has not understood the importance of the activity of consciousness as being an essential component of Marxist epistemology. This difference between the epistemology of Marx and that of Hegel – the role of active consciousness – is absolutely vital. Furthermore, it is evident from the pamphlet that Slaughter has not only failed to integrate this conception into his account of the dialectic, but that also he has drastically misunderstood Lenin's writings on this. From a reading of the Notebooks, it can be seen that Lenin was well aware of the significance and consequences of the acceptance of the active role of consciousness; that he realised that thought was not something which could simply reflect the world, but was on the contrary something which was engaged in interaction with the world; something that was dynamic; something that actually effected our perception and understanding of the world. To quote.....

'The coincidence of thought with the object is a process.' (8) (my emphasis)

'Cognition is the external, endless approximation of thought to the object.' (9)

(Incidentally, Slaughter juxtaposes these two quotes from Lenin with the one from Hegel cited earlier. He notes that Lenin is reading Hegel materialistically, but then completely fails to notice that the 'process' referred to in each case is utterly different. For Hegel, the 'process' is the dialectical movement of reality: by contrast, for Lenin, it refers to the process of interaction between thought and the world. The two quotes from Lenin appear together in the Notebooks, and the second one reveals Lenin's position on this unambiguously.)

What then is the dialectic? For Hegel, it is the laws of development of transcendental reality and its determination, in a passive sense, of thought which is attempting to grasp that development. For Marxists, it is the laws of the development of thought and the world, and of the interaction between them. It is something which supercedes both passive materialism and passive idealism, and yet is something which contains elements of both 'materialism' and 'idealism'. It contains the notion of the existence of a material reality with its own structure and laws of development, and the notion of the activity of thought as an agent in the world, something, itself fundamentally a 'process of matter', which is constantly attempting to come to grips with the world and is acting on it. This....

'must be understood not "lifelessly", not "abstractly", not devoid of movement, not without contradictions, but in the eternal process of movement, the arising of contradictions and their resolution.' (10).

This endless struggle of thought to grasp the world, and its dialectical determination by the world, and the development of understanding through the resolution of contradictions arising out of this process is the kernel of the dialectic approach in social theory, and it is to this that the laws of Logic apply. It is not therefore a matter of knowledge being produced in our minds simply by the action of the external world, but rather a conception of the richness of the interaction involved.

A simple passive conception cannot, for example, explain the role and the generation of ideology; it cannot explain the complex interconnections between nature, society, and thought; it cannot see that knowledge is the result of the interaction of these connections; it cannot give rise to a conception of scientific methodology, other than the making of the laws of the dialectic into a magic formula, a ritual, with which one can draw analyses direct from the world. All these faults are displayed by the SLL, for they have only grasped what is materialistic in what they call 'Marxism' – they have not grasped what is dialectical. A few formulas about the laws of the motion of matter are supposed to lead directly to all the conceptions of Marxism. Thus the SLL conceive of 'matter in motion' automatically imprinting itself on consciousness, and instead of considering the very real problem of how thought is related to the real world in various modes of thought, they make metaphysical assertions about the laws of matter and then extrapolate from these to a consideration of thought – the result is entirely un-Marxist and mystical. The best that can be said of these ideas is that they are an unwitting return to the formulations of Hegel, and as such are pre-Marxist. This presentation of the Marxist epistemology as being a simple inverted Hegelianism is not something which is unique to Slaughter but is something which is in fact endemic to the SLL. For example, Healy has talked of the day arriving when we will 'know everything' – a uniquely Hegelian conception of the realisation of the Absolute. Michael Banda, writing in the 'Workers Press' on November 22nd, 1972 describes.....

'..... the Marxist theory of knowledge, which is cogently expressed by Hegel in his "Doctrine of essence".' (my emphasis)

Only thanks to the unyielding struggle of the SLL in the face of 'revisionism' are we made aware of just how much Marx owed to Hegel!

'PHILOSOPHY' & POLITICS

The SLL has obviously not got the faintest idea as to the real nature of dialectical materialism or the real relationship between epistemology and political practice. One's conscious view of the world and the processes by which one comes to understand it play a role in the formulation of politics – and for working class revolutionaries a crucial role. In general this cannot be denied,

but the concrete reality of the connection which is found in the real world does not easily correspond to neat, glib assertions, nor fit into a vulgar materialist schema.

Let us examine the example used by Slaughter and this will become clearer. In his pamphlet Slaughter attacks Raya Dunayevskaya for asserting that before Lenin read Hegel he did not fully grasp dialectical materialism. Slaughter says...

'She (Dunayevskaya, NS) has to admit that in his political practice Lenin showed a grasp of dialectics, but this appears to have remained "unconscious" while in his thought Lenin remained rigid and mechanical.' (11)

First of all, let us leave aside the question as to the status of Lenin's thought before 1914 to concentrate on the key issue - that of the role of an understanding of dialectics as an 'aid' to thought. Now the argument used by Slaughter and implied in the quotation above - that is, the absurdity of 'unconscious' dialectical thought - rests on a mistaken identity between epistemology and methodology.

'... a shrewd statement (by Hegel, NS) about Logic: it is a "prejudice" that it "teaches how to think" (just as physiology teaches... to digest ???).' (12)

Surely Slaughter is guilty of such a "prejudice". An understanding of the laws of the dialectic is not a course in instant problem solving, not like reading de Bono's course in "lateral thinking". For the SLL, though, it plays precisely this function - they have a conception in which it is possible to give somebody a list of the laws of the dialectic to learn and then all he has to do is to apply these to the world in his thought to be a Marxist. In this way, they absolve themselves from the difficulties of performing any serious concrete analysis - instead they are reduced to vague mutterings about the irresolvable contradictions of capitalism. Not that that is wrong: however it is hardly an analysis.

So, although it is necessary to realise that Marxism is concerned to discover what is immanent within a particular conjuncture, merely to say this, as does the SLL, and to parrot about the necessity of penetrating to the innermost interconnections, and so on, is no substitute for a scientific methodology that will enable you to perform that analysis. It is like pointing to the target but having no idea as to how to fire the gun. All the SLL's pronouncements on this are therefore sheer bombast they hysterically denounce other groups for not "penetrating to the essence behind appearances", and yet themselves have no conception of how to do this.

Dialectical materialism is then no substitute for thought: instead a conscious understanding of it frees one from mechanical conceptions of

the world (as Gramsci notes) and lays the basis for a conscious understanding of the role of thought in the world, as represented by science, ideology, and common-sense, and the manner in which these develop and will continue to develop. Furthermore, without such a conscious understanding, the methodology by which one analyses the world will also be derived from unconscious processes which, as Gramsci puts it, will be "mechanically imposed". However, epistemology, methodology, and scientific analysis are not one and the same. It should be really unnecessary to make this point, but the SLL certainly does not see the difference. (13)

Now, returning to the early Lenin, I hope I have made clear that to say that Lenin was not consciously aware of the intricacies of dialectical materialism is not to say that he was not a Marxist and did not provide a Marxist analysis of the situation facing the revolutionary forces and the tasks they had to fulfill. However, I think it is true to say that in much of his pre-war writing on philosophy, Lenin was mechanical and often tended towards crude materialism.

Materialism & Empirio-Criticism has familiar passages about thought passively mirroring the world, and some passages in the Notebooks written before 1914 also show this tendency.

He quotes Feuerbach: "Nor have we any grounds for imagining that if man had more senses or organs he would also cognise more properties or things of nature. There is nothing more in the external world, in inorganic nature, than in organic nature. Man has just as many senses as are necessary for him to conceive the world in its totality, in its entirety"; and comments with evident approval: "If man had more senses, would he discover more things in the world? No." (14)

But if the senses are active, if thought interacts with the world through the senses, then it is not true to say that no more would be discovered if we had more senses. For example, a major role in the development of science has been played by the improvement of instrumentation, by improving those techniques which aid, complement and substitute for our senses. Clearly Lenin - who wrote this in 1909, when his mind was heavily preoccupied with his battle against the ex-Bolshevik faction of "God-builders" who tried to fuse Marxism and a form of religion - was mainly concerned with the question of the objective existence of the material world, regardless of man's senses and level of perception. Nevertheless the "reflection" conception is unmistakable here. If our bodies were equipped with detectors for infra-red radiation, for example, we would have a whole new world open to us. Of course this is already present, but here is an example of that change from quantity into quality. If

Lenin is right, then our knowledge of the world is simply something which is given. This does not square up with his later, more dialectical formulations about "endless approximation of thought" to its object. However, I repeat, to say this does not open the flood gates of attack on all of Lenin's thought before 1914 as non-Marxist. There is a connection between Marxism and politics but it is an implication, logical, not causal as Slaughter asserts.

An epistemology, a conscious theory of knowledge, which has its objective basis in an adequate grasp of the dialectical laws of the motion of matter implies the possibility of its essence being grasped intuitively, and even finding expression in method, without full consciousness of the theoretical, epistemological grounding of the method which is actually being used. Thus Trotsky, in 'In Defence of Marxism', talks of a worker, sensuously working on and interacting with the material world, governed by the laws of dialectics, as being naturally, intuitively, prone to dialectical thinking.

What mystery, therefore, is there in Lenin, with a vast knowledge of Marxist literature, which he read critically, materialistically, and a general knowledge of dialectics, being a Marxist methodologically before he made a deep and thorough study of dialectics?

That there can, in a sense, be a reflective, 'mechanical' relationship between the underlying laws of reality and a method used at least in part intuitively, is generalised by the SLL so as to eliminate Marxist epistemology as a conscious attempt to render the process lucid - and accessible intellectually, deliberately, rationally. Thus the abstract epistemology is mummified, and the actual 'method' is a hit or miss reflection depending on feelings and prejudices - all the 'mechanical impositions' which Gramsci speaks of and which Marxism as a fully integrated conscious system can avoid.

The rest of the pamphlet is really a repetition of these same mistakes of not seeing the significance of the active role of consciousness, and of reducing dialectics to a cipher in the face of reality. Although occasionally something perceptive manages to slip past the barrier of distortion, the pamphlet taken as a whole is a lumpy, inedible mess.

One final point is worth taking up, though - that of "empiricism" and "Pabloism". This is of course, an attack on that favourite mythical monster of the SLL - "Pabloism". Slaughter attacks the United Secretariat of the Fourth International for its "rejection" of dialectical theory and a slavish devotion to "facts", to appearances. The USFI, Slaughter's polemic says, simply observes what is going on at any given moment and then draws generalised conclusions from this without any Marxist analysis. Although it is possible to criticise the USFI for being often too quick and willing to adapt to various political events (like the student upsurge of 1968 which resulted in the absurd theory of "red bases" in the universities) this has on the whole been a healthy tendency when compared with the dogmatic sectar-

ianism of the SLL/OCI forces. The USFI position shows at least an awareness of the problems facing the Trotskyist movement since the War - problems generated by the survival of Stalinism, the colonial revolutions, the deformed workers' states - whereas the SLL simply acknowledges these facts, but flatly refuses to draw any conclusions from them. As a result the SLL is fossilized in its own peculiar characterisation of pre-War Trotskyism. It is this attempt at assessment that the SLL denigrate as "empiricism": this attempt to understand the changes taking place in the world, they regard as being non-Marxist!

Safe in its shell of formulas, "dialectical" magic tricks instead of analysis, lies, distortions, the SLL does not concern itself with the actuality of the class struggle - preferring at all times the abstract to the concrete, a formula instead of an analysis. The crudity of its arguments about economic catastrophe, the movement towards Bonapartism in Britain, Ireland, and so on are the external manifestations of a barren interior. The neurotic obsession with dialectical materialism and its use as a "magic wand" is an attempt by those whose sectarianism has isolated them from the living class struggle and whose theory offers no guide to concrete activity to justify this situation as "a concern for dialectical materialism and a rejection of empiricism".

It is not what is that matters with the SLL, but what they would like to be. So, in the earlier version of Slaughter's pamphlet we find him attacking Sartre without in fact having read Sartre! (This may seem astonishing, but is in fact true. When someone expressed astonishment at such an attitude to Ideas he explained that it was all right because this was in a special category - "Polemical Philosophy"!) We find the SLL during the general strike situation of the jailing of the dockers not on the streets and among the working class, but holding their summer camp! Presumably listening to Healy rambling on about "matter in motion" is more important than the dockers fighting outside Pentonville.....

Like a snail drawing back into its shell when the world becomes too hard and difficult to cope with, the SLL have withdrawn into mysticism, dogmatism, and lies. The walls are so thick with slime that they cannot see out - nor can the world see in. It is this shabby charade that they call "the defence of dialectical materialism".

NOTES

- (1)... C. Slaughter - 'Lenin on Dialectics', Labor Publications, NY. 1971 p. 3.
- (2)... G. W. F. Hegel - 'Science of Logic', in Slaughter op. cit. p. 9.
- (3)... F. Engels - 'Ludwig Feuerbach and End of Classical German Philosophy', in selected works, Lawrence & Wishart, 1968. p. 605.

- (4)... ditto p. 10
 (5)... Slaughter op cit. p. 7
 (6)... ditto p. 5
 (7)... K. Marx - 'Theses on Feuerbach' in Selected Works, Lawrence & Wishart, p. 28.
 (8)... V. I. Lenin - 'Philosophical Notebooks', Collected Works, vol. 38, P. 194, Lawrence & Wishart, 1963.
 (9)... ditto p. 195
 (10)... ditto.
 (11)... Slaughter op. cit. p. 14
 (12)... Lenin op. cit. p. 87
 (13) Sometimes neither does the IMG, who confuse levels of analysis with reference to the party. This confusion results in such statements as the following:
 "The centralisation of the revolutionary organisation is an epistemological centralisation" - T. Whelan, 'What is wrong with Workers' Fight', p. 3.
 One can centralise one's knowledge on a methodological basis; but is it really conceivable to talk of a centralisation based on a theory of knowledge? As the IMG notes, the theory of the party involves a realisation of the 'social nature of knowledge' - but to pose this as the sole reason for centralisation is to be guilty of 'essentialism', the collapse of levels of understanding and analysis into one basic level. (Thus a similar mistake is made by those who think that all human behaviour can be explained simply by reference to a physiological level of explanation. The reason this is nonsense does not relate to the incompleteness of physiological knowledge, but to the different levels of analysis that pertain and which possess some autonomy, one from the other.)
 Although the IMG document for the fusion conference with the Spartacus League mentions, and uses in a pernicious fashion as a general analysis, the phrase of Lukacs - "the actuality of the revolution" - one cannot assume that the leaders of the IMG have read the rest of the book in which the phrase appears ('Lenin'), as they would find there an analysis of the party on all levels, political and organisational, an analysis which sees the party as an 'instrument'. There are more things under the sun than are written in works on epistemology...
 (14)... Lenin op. cit. p. 71.

Appendix: Some remarks on the O.C.I.

by MARTIN THOMAS

The recent debate between the SLL and its French former associate, the Organisation Communiste Internationaliste, has been like nothing so much as two alchemists squabbling over rival recipes for making gold.

For the SLL, as Neal Smith argues, the magic recipe is 'dialectical materialism'. For the OCI, it is 'the Transitional Programme'.

"The Marxist method only exists through its content which integrates all the moments in the proletariat's struggle for its emancipation. In this sense, the programme of socialist revolution concentrates Marxism and the defence of Marxist-theory can only be defence of the programme, that is, the struggle to resolve the crisis of leadership.... Theoretical elaboration comes from the programme..." (my emphasis, MT).

"There is no ideological battle in itself, no Marxist theory in itself, but a programme which is the expression, concentrated through the Marxist method, of the totality of the struggles of the proletariat, and upon which an organisation fights". (1)

To claim that "theoretical elaboration comes from the programme" is a totally back-to-front statement. And the "programme" (i.e. for the OCI, all Marxist theory) is not the "expression" of the "totality of struggles". The working-out of theory is not a simple reflection of the class struggle, it is a front in the class struggle itself - the ideological front. (This may not be an ideological battle "in itself", whatever "in itself" is supposed to mean, but it is certainly an ideological battle).

Thus the 'Marxism' of the OCI is a mechanical dualism. They conceive of thought as in another sphere from the class struggle and simply an "expression" of that struggle.

At root the two alchemists have a fundamental similarity of approach. Both rely on a mechanical, "Hegel-turned-upside-down" materialism. The difference is that, while the SLL collapses political methodology into epistemology, the OCI collapses epistemology (and philosophy in general) into political methodology. Thus, for the SLL, Marxist theory is the reflection of 'matter in motion' and the like; for the OCI, Marxist theory is the reflection of the 'historical experience of the class struggle'. (Although, for the OCI, 'historical experience' apparently ended in 1938).

For the OCI, therefore, the development of Marxist theory is an 'organic process' reflecting the general development of the class

struggle. OCI leader Stephane Just writes:

"Considered as a historical and organic process, the formation of the class-consciousness of the proletariat depends on the analysis of the development of the class struggle and ends the metaphysical discussions on whether class consciousness is brought in from the outside or not, and on whether the vanguard is self-appointed or not" (my emphasis, MT).

"... the proletariat builds and develops its consciousness in an organic historical process fed by all its previous history and the relations it maintains with other classes, their contradictions, their antagonisms, the political, social, and ideological struggles developed there." (2)

Having collapsed all the levels of Marxist theory into "the programme", to the point where, for example, they consider the very idea of developing dialectical materialism absurd (3), the OCI end up denouncing the basic Leninist view that scientific class consciousness must be brought to the working class from outside of its own immediate experience.

Their position on the question of the United Front illustrates the same tendency. They elevate the 'united front' into a strategy, into virtually the sum-total of their policy. Thus their agitation centres obsessively round the slogan of a "workers' government" - which means, simply, a Communist Party-Socialist Party coalition government. (On this definition, the 1964-70 Wilson government was a workers' government!) And the OCI, these stalwart defenders of "the programme", actually end up pushing the question of political programme to one side! In the 1969 Presidential elections, they campaigned for a "single candidate of the workers' organisations".

"The CP before putting Duclos forward as candidate demanded 'the elaboration of a common programme' as a condition for a common candidate of 'the left'....

"But the programme? Wasn't this necessary to the single candidate of workers' organisations? What had become of it? In these precise circumstances, the development of a programme of a government of workers' organisations flowed from this candidacy. The fight for the defeat of the bourgeois candidates gave a class content to the single candidate of the workers' organisations that the revolutionary organisations had a duty to develop" (4)

In other words - never mind about the political programme, it's the CP-SP unity that counts!

The OCI and the SLL pose as the foremost defenders of the heritage of the Fourth International. In fact, they represent, in their "inverted-Hegel" materialism and their dogmatism, a throwback to the Second International. Both the OCI and the SLL are organically right-opportunist tendencies (5); the SLL from time to time

adds a varnish of screaming ultra-leftism to its opportunism.

The OCI's (1969) political resolution for the "International Committee" conference illustrates its national-reformist approach strikingly. It centres all its discussion round one event, considered as the most important step in the world class struggle for many years the replacement of de Gaulle by Pompidou after his defeat in a referendum. It is not the 10-million strong general strike of 1968 which commands the focus of the OCI's attention - but the fall of de Gaulle. Such an assessment is possible only from a tendency narrowly tied to a 'national' point of view and severely infected by parliamentary cretinism.

NOTES

1. Declaration of the C. C. of the OCI, printed in the SLL's "Fourth International", vol 7 no 4, p. 177; and the same issue, speech of AJS representative at Essen conference, p. 189. Citations from the SLL's publications would generally not be reliable, but the study of the original texts (in French) of the OCI convinces us that in these particular instances the SLL is not distorting the position of the OCI.
2. S Just, 'Defense du Trotskysme 2'; translated in the SLL's "Fourth International", vol 7 no 4, p. 190 - 191.
3. Declaration of the C. C. of the OCI, "Fourth International", vol 7 no 4, p. 178.
4. Ibid, p. 182.
5. The title of E Germain's critique of the positions of the former "International Committee of the F. I.", 'Marxism vs Ultra-leftism', reveals an inadequate understanding of the IC tendencies. (Which is not to say that the great majority of the points of criticism made in his pamphlet are not correct).