

## **An Open Letter to Edward Thompson**

My Dear Edward,

It is long since I attempted to give definition to my ideas about socialism — in fact more than four years. This is not surprising, because since I left the Communist Party I have tended to devote such energies that could be spared from fairly concentrated academic work, set in a narrow groove, to immediate issues where I found my conviction of moral and political Tightness required no specific ideological support — such as Cyprus, Suez and the Hydrogen Bomb, to mention only the more obvious ones. Unlike some who have left the Party more recently, I felt no temptation to acquire a brand new, or purified, faith for fear of appearing ideologically naked in public. For I did not leave the Party because I thought I "knew better" than my former comrades or because I had convinced myself that I was the possessor of a "guide to action" superior to theirs, but simply because I was morally outraged.

Looking back, I realise that it was the Rosenberg affair which brought up my long-accumulated nausea. Like many others, I literally had nightmares during the closing stages of that ghastly episode. I did not care very much whether Julius and Ethel had stolen atomic secrets or not. For me, they seemed two rather ordinary people whose behaviour, under appalling mental torture, displayed a quiet, dignified and sensitive heroism which I found almost unbearably moving. My realisation that their sufferings had been cynically exploited by politicians who cared nothing for them as individuals and who were simultaneously doing to death, under even more outrageous circumstances, socialists who had an equal and perhaps better claim to respect and devotion, was unaccountably delayed until the gruesome details of the Rosenberg electrocution had ceased to dominate my imagination. But, when it came, it horribly illuminated all the infamies of Stalinism in which I had — although with increasing reluctance and more and more private qualifications — placed my faith. I could remain no longer in the Party without forfeiting my moral and intellectual self-respect; so I got out. I might have immediately got into something else; but having no leanings towards Catholicism, no illusions about Trotskyism, a marked lack of enthusiasm for the Labour Party, and a strong conviction that I needed to learn a

lot more before I tried to teach anything, I decided to remain, for the time being, 'uncommitted/' except to the extent of continuing to hold doggedly to the belief, which had accompanied me ever since my early 'teens, that wherever the truth lay it was towards the left rather than towards the right

I give you this bit of autobiography because it shows both the similarity and the difference between your "case" and mine. You too have experienced the moral revulsion and it has caused you to take the same step as I took. But whereas I, in matters ideological, relapsed into a scepticism from which only now, several years later, I am beginning to emerge, you have immediately got down to the job of ideological reconstruction. Someone ought to be sticking out his neck in this way, and you are the right person to do it. Nevertheless, such exercises have their penalties, and I fear that many of your arguments, when stripped of their eloquence, fail to convince. I hate to subject them to a dry and unsympathetic treatment, because I rejoice in the spirit behind them and cannot pretend that I "know better" in any positive way; but rethinking has to be ruthless and realistic if it is to get anywhere. One cannot afford the luxury of building up new illusions and having them shattered like the old. Life is too short.

You have tried to build a bridge between scientific socialism and socialist humanism. Artistically, it is an attractive structure, but I doubt if it will bear the heavy traffic that our revolutionary epoch will wish to put across it. The preliminary demolition work, admittedly, is very well done. Your exposure of the nonsense talked by the Stalinists about basis and superstructure, and your analysis of the connection between this "false ideology" and Stalinist anti-humanism — these are excellent. But when you come to appraise Stalinism as a historical force, and even more when you attempt to find an "objective" basis for an ethic superior to, because more human and less abstract than, the Stalinist ethic, you seem to me to get yourself involved in pretty serious contradictions.

Ends and means trip you up, as they have tripped up so many. You make a great effort to prove that in Marx's, and perhaps in Lenin's, ethics there is an ends-means interpenetration deriving from non-class humanist values, and that Stalin, in his crude way, failed to see this and consequently distorted Marxism both in theory and in practice. You are right, of course, in saying that Marx and Marxists have frequently talked in perfectly straight-forward socialist-humanist terms. What you seem to miss is the fact that this *façon de parler* is not part of the general theoretical structure. It remains a foreign body, constantly setting up irritation. Stalin might even be congratulated on his Marxist consistency in eliminating it.

For the **essence** of the Marxist ethic, which both Lenin and

Stalin recognised much more clearly than Marx himself, is **its futurism**. Marxism is neither immoral nor amoral. Even its moral relativism is more important than real. There are absolute moral values, although they are never described as such or defined with any clarity. (You know what a horror Marx had of "moralists"). These "really human" values can be fully realised only in the classless society of the future, although they receive partial, fitful and distorted expression in the class-divided societies of humanity's "pre-history." To serve them, we should not, like self-styled moral reformers, attempt to persuade more people to have a more consistent regard for them here and now, because that would be a futile waste of effort. As class society moves towards the cataclysmic point where it will undergo transformation into its opposite, opportunities for practising a "really human" morality, as distinct from what might be described as a battlefield morality, will actually become more and more limited. We cannot be "really human" under conditions of increasing immiseration. Our only alternative is militancy or passivity. We **ought** to choose militancy, as by doing so we speed the advent of the classless society, when **all** the moral ultimates we have been keeping tucked away in our kit-bags while the battle is raging can be released in an atmosphere which will no longer turn them to dust and ashes. But while the battle does rage, class militancy is the only moral principle that is worth anything. As long as what we do contributes to the victory of the revolution, we can be satisfied that it is right.

Now if one assumes that revolution is the only way out of a situation which will become increasingly intolerable, and that the battlefield morality, like the state itself, will wither away when the time is ripe, this seems to be a perfectly consistent and defensible attitude. The moral inconsistencies in which Communists appear to get involved are superficial only, and due to the fact that they have to make allowances for an "objective situation" in which people have certain moral preconceptions. They will indignantly deny, for instance, that they have placed under-cover members in the Labour Party. They will say that their sense of patriotism and of human dignity is incompatible with the receipt of orders from Moscow. They will keep very quiet about their "fractional" activity in various organisations. They will move heaven and earth to bring a factory out on "spontaneous" strike. They will proclaim the Rosenberg's "innocence" of activities which from a Communist point of view are highly meritorious. They will try to win moral kudos by deploring individual terrorism, although their only real objection to it is that it is politically ineffective. They will adopt a policy of revolutionary defeatism and present it to the public as one of negotiated peace. And so on — the list could be indefinitely prolonged. Given their assumptions,

which are Marxist assumptions, they are behaving quite consistently and quite morally. The only objection they can have to any behaviour that is conventionally labelled immoral is that it does not, in fact, contribute to the realisation of their revolutionary purposes; and obviously, if they are discovered doing a large number of things which most people deplore, those things, whatever the intentions of their doers, will become "objectively" counter-revolutionary. This imposes restraint, particularly in those countries where Communists do not possess a monopoly of the means of forming public opinion. But, to the extent that a Communist is a consistent Marxist, it is a tactical restraint only.

You reject this position, and I am very glad that you do. You refuse to pack up your humanist values "for the duration." Yet you remain a Communist and a revolutionary. This means that you are faced with a contradiction, the solution of which is crucial to your whole way of thinking. If you fail to solve it, your thought becomes incoherent. But what do you do when you reach this vital point in the argument? Instead of trying to solve the contradiction, you simply patch it over with eloquent phrases. "A moral end can only be attained by moral means," you say. Do you think that this old saw of the ethical philosophers, which can mean almost anything according to the way its component words are defined, is really of any help? A couple of pages later you tell us that "socialism is the expression of man's need for his fellow men, his undivided social being, and hence must find expression in love, even when attained only through the throes of class hatred and conflict." This is a very uplifting sentiment, despite its slight syntactical ambiguity. I have no doubt that every member of the Politbureau would greet it with the Kremlin equivalent of "Hear, hear!" — and then carry on just as before. He might even be persuaded by the next, rather more specific, pronouncement of this Thompson homily to weep Christian tears while sending an erstwhile comrade to Vorkuta. " 'Forgive them for they know not what they do,' " you say, "must reassert itself whenever and to the degree that contingencies allow." What an invitation to hypocrisy this is! "Contingencies," indeed! What regard had the originator of this prayer for contingencies? I was somehow under the impression that he was at the receiving end of violence.

It is true, of course, that means and ends do interpenetrate. The end-product of a means-activity will always bear the marks of the methods by which that activity is conducted. The moral content of the end will have some relationship — although no-one can say exactly what or how much — to the moral context of the means employed to attain it. That, no doubt, is why Marxists say that new societies, emerging from revolutionary turmoil in which moral niceties are inevitably allowed leave of absence,

display certain "birthmarks." The realistic Marxist makes full allowance for this. He knows that his hard taskmaster, the "historical process," demands that the morality of means shall be incommensurate with the morality of ends, and that therefore, even on the assumption that he has correctly interpreted what history requires of him, the results of his activities are likely to be rather different from those ideally conceived. It is also true that he realises the desirability, other things being equal, of bringing means and ends into the closest possible moral correspondence, if only because the greater the divergence there is between the conception and the actuality of the new society the less positively worth-while does its attainment seem to be. In the last analysis, however, the means are chosen not by him but for him. The circumstances of the class struggle decide what must be done. These circumstances, of course, include the various moral conceptions present in the minds of the protagonists, but for one who has "grasped the historical process as a whole" such conceptions are reduced to the level of "objective data."

So long as we remain within the framework of the Marxist ideology, it is in accordance with the basic criteria of Marxism that Stalinism must be judged. To apply "socialist humanist" standards to the Stalinist record is simply pointless. To say that you deplore it because it violates every principle of "really human" morality to be found in every work of every progressive writer from Thomas More to William Morris will not impress the bureaucrats of King Street. Secretly, they will agree with you. They know as well as you do that Stalin achieved and maintained power by abominable methods; that his chosen weapons were selected from the armoury of the liar, the murderer, and the torturer. And I don't suppose for one moment that they approve of these methods as such. Most of those I know personally are very nice chaps. Yet they remain solidly, immovably Stalinist. Why? Because they have convinced themselves that the horrors perpetrated by Stalin were unavoidable steps along the road to a communist society; because their morality, unlike yours, is consistently Marxist and therefore consistently futurist.

That is why, in their vocabulary and that of their Russian mentors, the word "mistake" has been substituted for "murder." > An action is wrong, by definition, only when it hinders the advance towards communism. But "wrongness" can be of two kinds. If the action is performed by an enemy of communism, for the purpose of hindering the advance, it is clearly a "crime"; but if it is performed by a friend, with the genuine intention of facilitating the advance, it cannot be more than a mistake, however appalling in itself. The path of advance, as we know, is very complicated, so even the very best communist can miscalculate,

sometimes in quite a big way. As Palme Dutt said, "there are spots on the sun."

To your allegation-, then, that Stalin's theory was incompetent, his attitude inhuman, and his practice morally reprehensible, there is a perfectly good Marxist answer. "He was the architect of Socialism in the Soviet Union." And if you object (a) that Stalinite socialism is a caricature of the real thing or (b) that a better kind of Socialism could have been brought into existence by morally less reprehensible methods, the onus of proof is on you. Was any other path of advance open, in the backward and bleeding Russia that emerged from the Revolution and the Civil War? You yourself hold that the advance is real, for your statement that "the Soviet Union is a socialist country" is obviously made in the context of moral approval of socialism. You, yourself, moreover, admit the force of the argument "that the Bolsheviks would never have held power in Russia, in circumstances of inconceivable difficulty, if they had not strengthened the steel of endurance and summoned emotional energies by developing to their extreme point the partizan attitudes of the proletarian elite." Did not Stalinism represent that extreme point? And you even go to the extent of saying that "false ideas" (and therefore by implication the hypocrisies, oppressions and inhumanities that you believe to be their inevitable outcome) had a positive role to play during the period of the transition to socialism.

I may be obtuse; perhaps I have so far forgotten my Marxist past that I am arguing like a mechanist rather than like a dialectician; but it does seem to me that you are trying to have your cake and eat it. You have built up in your mind an ideal picture, not only of communism as a system but of the mode of advance towards it. In the centre of that picture is William Morris arousing the workers to high-minded creative endeavour. You see a mass of eager proletarians and peasants, their souls at last released from capitalist bondage, being led towards a new and better life by a Communist Party that is fully worthy of them — a Party that practices internal democracy, respects human dignity, encourages creative political and artistic expression even when it runs counter to "the line," and, while compelled to take stern action against the enemies of the revolution, does so with eyes averted and a prayer for forgiveness on its lips. But when you turn from this picture to a much less ornamental reality, you are compelled to admit that a Communist Party whose practice has displayed, to say the least, few of these characteristics, has succeeded in doing something of which you fundamentally approve, viz. multiplying the "wealth of society," vastly enlarging "cultural horizons" etc. You believe, moreover, with Deutscher, that splendid things can and will be built on the basis thus laid. Yet you find the utmost difficulty in stomaching the methods that have-

been employed. You feel that it ought to have all been done the William Morris way, and you are determined to do your best to see that it is done that way next time — at least, "to the degree that contingencies allow."

I have stated this ends-means dilemma of yours as sharply, even as harshly, as possible not because I can give you the answer to it but because I want to undermine what seems to me a growing tendency on your part to pretend that you know the answer. People listen to you, because you write and speak well and because your sincerity is above question. It is therefore a little alarming to find you dispensing a wordy balm which they can apply to their sore consciences. The fact is that neither you nor I can "solve" a problem that has been disturbing the sleep of countless intelligent and sensitive men and women more or less since civilisation began. All we can do is to be aware of it, so that whatever compromises we feel called upon to make — and I am here assuming that straightforward acceptance of a "futurist" morality is impossible for anyone but a Stalin — are made consciously, with full understanding of the issues involved.

For people like ourselves, members of a highly developed "western" industrial society, the dilemma is clearly at its sharpest in the field of international relations. Modern war, which threatens us daily with extinction, is so appalling a means to any end that the argument that the means inevitably destroys the end is winning acceptance even among the militarists. Yet everyone, except the absolute pacifist, proclaims his readiness to fight, if necessary, for something or other — usually in defence of a nation or a system or a so-called way of life. Some salve their consciences by saying that they would not, in any circumstances, use the Hydrogen Bomb, or would not use it first, or would use only a "clean" one or a "tactical" one (the dear little atom bomb, which merely killed a few hundreds of thousands of people at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, now being regarded as almost "conventional")—but we all know that such compromises would pretty soon break down once a new world war had started. In respect of our own internal social arrangements, however, the decisions we have to make are less agonising. We are a fortunate minority in the world today. By comparison with the underdeveloped countries, we have vast wealth that can be increased still further without extraordinary efforts on our part or major sacrifices of present welfare. We have civilised our industrial society — at least in its internal behaviour—• to such an extent that its wealth is distributed in a way that gives tolerable material conditions to most and more than tolerable ones to many. We have built up a working class movement to a point of strength where it can place an insuperable barrier against any who might wish to push the people back into the miseries from which they have emerged. If that movement remains united on:

essentials and behaves with reasonable intelligence there seems no reason why the positions now held should be lost or more advanced ones at present unattainable eventually reached. In spite of economic crises, the history of modern capitalism has not been one of increasing immiseration, and I can see no reason to suppose that this alleged long-term tendency is hovering somewhere in the background, ready to assert itself in the 1960's or 1970's or the 21st century A.D. Even the recessions which have given the upward movement its irregular shape and its nastiest features now seem to be more manageable. The discoveries of "capitalist" economics since Keynes have been more genuine and more profound than Marxists are prepared to admit, and the capacity of capitalists to learn from experience (they don't want revolution) would seem to be greater than that of some sections of the working class movement. In these circumstances, we are not confronted with demands anywhere near as harsh as those that confront the underdeveloped countries. Our aims, if we are socialists, are not of the kind that involve the acceptance of draconian political regimes or the sacrifice of the present generation for the benefit of future ones. We can go forward in comparative liberty (what a hullabaloo about a little telephone-tapping!), arguing with our opponents, compromising with our friends who are a little more to the left or right, endeavouring to win consent, and making full use of those liberal institutions which, like our productive powers themselves, were won for us by the sacrifices of previous generations. Or so, at least, I hope; and I am certainly not going to abandon this eminently sensible and humane path of advance until someone convinces me, or experience teaches me, that it inevitably leads to a cul-de-sac.

It is in this kind of environment, for all its "muted and sterile Philistinism," that socialistic humanists, such as yourself, can flourish and multiply. That the conditions of the masses, on the whole, have been getting better and not worse over the last century has been the "material basis" of the pragmatic optimism, or progressivism, of the Labour Party itself, which is not so far distant from your socialist humanism as you seem to imagine. (The main difference, as far as I can see, is that it "talks a less inflated language, becoming a little self-conscious among big terms like "community," "justice" and "reason.") The same upward trend has led to the demise of a succession of revolutionary parties, of which the last, the Communist Party, is now bidding fair for the distinction of being also the most ridiculous.. For nothing is more certain than that the workers will not listen to revolutionaries, except as trade union leaders, while life under capitalism or whatever else you choose to call the present system remains tolerable. And today, despite the haunting sense of insecurity, it is more tolerable than ever. The worker can see no reason to

overthrow a social order which gives him a full belly and a fourteen-inch telly, and he will simply disregard the intellectual who tells him that it ought to be overthrown because it is based on a "drive for profit," has "a tendency towards war against backward peoples," debases "cultural values into commodities" elevates "property above men" puts "things before human beings," and includes a middle class increasingly given to "irrationalism, religiosity, anti-humanist and vicious ideologies." I have never heard of a working class which made a revolution because it was being "culturally robbed."

Fundamentally, Edward, you understand, this awkward truth. But you hate capitalist society with such poetic intensity that you are unwilling to admit that the workers, who are the victims of its cultural nihilism, can feel tolerably satisfied with it. Hence you try to replace the discredited principle of increasing economic misery with the new principle of increasing general nastiness, and try to persuade yourself that, eventually, the workers are going to react to the latter in the same way as they were supposed to react to the former. At present they are "pragmatic and hostile to theory," "have no sense of direction or revolutionary perspective," tend to "fall into moral lethargy," and "accept leaders with capitalist ideas." You can no longer rely on a whacking great slump, to jerk them out of this. You know that a slump is by no means certain, that even the biggest slump is temporary, and that in any case there is no guarantee that it will have a revolutionising effect. You are also too humane, too close to working people and their problems, to want one. So you place your faith in the appeal of a new leadership, a new set of cultured and devoted radicals who, having freed themselves simultaneously from the reformist and compromising vices of the Labourites and from the dictatorial proclivities of the Communists, will be able to persuade the British workers to gird up their loins and give the final push to the rotten capitalist structure. This is not Marxism; it is romanticism. As I have said before, to your great annoyance, you are essentially a Utopian socialist. You believe, not in the dialectic of history, but in the power of the word. You would have been thoroughly happy blowing one of those trumpets round the walls of Jericho. That is why you can so easily gloss over the anguished moral choices with which the real revolutionary is confronted — unless he has succeeded in transforming himself into a Stalinist automaton. For your kind of revolution is one that will never happen. I wish to heaven it would, for I too have looked into the cultural abyss of which Mr. Hoggart is the lugubrious geographer.

Simply wishing that something would happen which one knows won't happen may make a man sad, but it doesn't confront him with a moral dilemma. It is having a real and important

choice to make that does that. Thus the moral dilemma of the revolutionary, which means so little in an advanced industrial country, where the "objective requirements" for revolution do not exist, can be very profound in an underdeveloped country, where revolution and reconstruction are the very substance of political life. Never has it been more profound — and possibly never will be—than in Stalin's Russia. Communism, in the modern world, is not the creed of the proletariat. First and foremost, it is a technique, operated by a revolutionary elite, of pushing forward the economic development of an underdeveloped country at the fastest possible rate. Now economic development, particularly when it starts from a very low level, proceeds quickly and relies almost exclusively on indigenous resources, is a very painful process. It demands great sacrifices, material and moral. People have to work harder yet consume no more, and possibly less. They have to give up old habits and learn new ones, to leave familiar environments, to submit to all kinds of inconveniences and denials of established expectations, to obey strange orders from strange officials, to behave in a "disciplined" and "responsible" way, and so on. This applies to any kind of rapid economic development, communist or non-communist. It can be illustrated as well from 19th century Britain as from post-revolutionary Russia. But this demand for sacrifices, when it comes from Communists, has particularly serious implications — for the sacrifices are explicitly demanded; they do not simply "arise" from the operations of a so-called free market. They are demanded, moreover, by men who originally came to the people as bearers of gifts and makers of promises. Consider the peasant, who after all is the most typical figure in most of the Communist regimes of which we have experience. The first thing the Communists do, after he has helped to bring them power, is to confirm him in occupancy, either as an absolute proprietor or as a state tenant, of the land he has probably already taken from the landlord. This pleases him mightily. But no sooner has he shaken the landlord off his back than the government occupies the vacant saddle, imposing what may be an even heavier burden: Yet the government has no alternative — for how can power-stations, dams, factories, roads, railways etc. be financed, in real terms, except from the agricultural surplus? The peasant, who cares very little for economic development, which he doesn't understand anyway, and a great deal for being left in peace, naturally objects and begins to have dark suspicions about the real intentions of these people who shouted so loud about Land and Bread while the revolution was on. He gets rather more than suspicious when, to collect the agricultural surplus more effectively and perhaps to "release" labour for the factories, they try to drag him into collective farms, and is not at all impressed by their high-sounding and virtually incomprehensible chatter

about "the indestructible alliance of the toilers in factory and field." This is only one example — although, as is well known, a very important one — of the social tensions that arise when a Communist Party, having won power, starts to go ahead with its economic development programme. That such tensions exist has now been explicitly admitted, for the first time, by the Communists themselves.

The result is that a very large number of people have to be driven along the path of economic development — driven by a revolutionary elite which, having "grasped the historical process as a whole," is fully prepared to sacrifice present satisfactions to future benefits — or, perhaps, obtains its present satisfactions from its sense of mission and enjoyment of power. In such a situation, democratic forms of government are obviously impossible, and the "dictatorship of the proletariat," which the Communists promised would be the most democratic of regimes, turns out to be one of the least. Nothing can be tolerated that makes the task of the revolutionary elite more difficult than it already is. Opposition parties cannot be allowed, for there are far too many people who, groaning under the burdens they have to bear, would flock enthusiastically to the banner of any group that promised a measure of relief. Even individual criticism, except in matters of detail, is hard to tolerate, because it is dangerous for people to get the idea that there is any alternative to the official way forward, or that the elite is capable of making mistakes. And the elite itself, of course, must be firmly united; for if opposition or dissident groups are allowed to develop within its ranks, it will become uncertain of itself, and this uncertainty will affect the people, who will thereby the more easily fall under the influence of "counter-revolutionary elements." Consequently, as soon as the Soviets have been "tamed," inner-party democracy itself becomes suspect, and the cult of the great man, which expresses the unity of the elite and the solidarity of the regime in a way that the masses can readily understand, makes its appearance. The stage is then set for unlimited personal dictatorship, through the rise to supreme power of that member of the elite who has the skill, cunning, unscrupulousness and demagoguery to make his way there. Once he has consolidated his position, the way he uses it will partly depend on personal characteristics; at the best, he will show some of the symptoms of megalomania; at the worst, become a bloodthirsty tyrant.

When this stage is reached, the moral dilemma of the more sensitive members of the revolutionary elite becomes pathologically acute. Shall they attempt to overthrow the tyrant, in order to restore some decency to human relations and some democracy to the Party? The most likely result will be their own physical annihilation and an intensification of the terror. But even if they

succeed, can they "contain" the movement they have initiated? Will not an enraged and disillusioned people turn against the very "achievements of the revolution" which the tyrant, for all his beastliness, was careful to preserve and extend? (Remember the Central Committee's "no panic" appeal after the death of Stalin). Can they be certain that the system he embodied was not the only possible one, under the circumstances? Can they afford to "rock the boat" when the enemy without is only too anxious to give it the extra push that will send it under?

How faint and far sound the horns of "socialist humanism!" How different a situation this is from any envisaged by William Morris or even Karl Marx. - To a society which has reached such a pass, the principles you are preaching sound pious, academic and irrelevant. And yet — perhaps the fact that a society **did** reach it and is now painfully crawling out of it will prevent a repetition of the awful experience; for the tendencies I have summarised and which were "classically" exemplified in the Soviet Union are, after all, only tendencies, not laws of history. Hence wisdom may be able to control them. Nevertheless, once a Communist Party has obtained power in an underdeveloped country and has decided to pursue the path of rapid economic development, it has inevitably willed certain means which, although easily justifiable in terms of the end, are so deplorable in themselves, by **the** standards you would have us accept, that only people "of a peculiar cut" can stomach them. Every Communist Government needs a secret political police and has to place great power in the hands of men in whom the qualities required for secret political police work are highly developed — qualities that neither you nor I, Edward, could possibly acquire without submitting to brain operations. Even if the worst excesses of secret police rule are avoided, a great deal of sheer inhumanity is inevitable. So is deceit and hypocrisy, for the simple reason that Communists, in virtue of their adherence to a theory which gives high positive valuation to words such as "democracy" and "freedom," cannot help engaging in double talk of a most vicious and nauseating kind.

As I have said, we are a long, long way from socialist humanism when we place ourselves, imaginatively, in the kind of situation which must be almost the daily experience of some of our contemporaries in lands less favoured by capitalism than our own. None the less, I still prefer to see an underdeveloped country being developed by communist methods than not developed at all or developed less effectively by methods which are equally or more objectionable — which means to say that if I was a Middle Easterner or a South Eastern Asian I should almost certainly be a supporter of communism. At the time, I can only hope that milder methods, such as the Indians are attempting, will prove

feasible and that the socialism I should like to see triumphant throughout the world will show, in some countries at least, fewer of the horrible birthmarks that have disfigured its Russian embodiment. But these fine words solve none of the basic dilemmas, which are part of the stuff of history, not merely the artificial product of Stalin's "false ideology." No real service to the cause of progress is performed by trying to patch them over with "socialist humanist" phrases.

Having reached that point, Edward, I really ought to read your essay again, for the purpose of trying to discover how deep our disagreements really are. The trouble with controversy is that it so easily degenerates into polemic, with the result that one begins to caricature one's opponent and to distort his views. (Marx himself, you **will** remember, was by no means guiltless of this). Have I caricatured you and distorted yours? I certainly have not done justice to your argument as a whole, because I have been concerned only with parts of it, and inevitably I have washed out most of the finer shades of your meaning. You might well claim, moreover, that you are quite as aware of the "dilemma" of which I persistently talk as I am, but that whereas you are doing something to help people cope with it I am content merely to restate it. But the question of how helpful you have been is one that ought to be raised. Also of importance is that of the reconcilability of Marxism, regarded as a consistent way of thinking about society, with socialist humanism — which you assert and I deny. Finally, there is the question of your revolutionism, which seems to me to draw inspiration from a great radical tradition that has spent its force. I have alleged, I think cogently, that it is precisely because this revolutionism, in the conditions of the 20th century Britain, presents you with so few of the real practical choices that face revolutionaries elsewhere, that you can serve up your Marxism in a kind of watered-down Christian sauce without being aware that you are concocting a very curious dish.

Yours,

HARRY HANSON.