



Students at the London School of Economics during the takeover of the School in October, 1968.

IN SEARCH OF THE IDEAL REVOLUTION

POLITICS is certainly the art of the possible—but what is possible? For the ordinary myopic philistine, nothing very different from what is happening already. Someone has to keep the old ship afloat, and the common sense of mankind will insist that, most of the time, the task is entrusted to a reasonably accomplished navigator. Occasionally, some upstart will try his hand and throw everything out of gear, and there may be trouble in getting rid of him; but sooner or later normality of a kind will be restored.

Unfortunately for this comfortable and comforting view of the political process, we are living in the century of upstarts, the most successful of whom think in terms not of the art of the possible but of the translation of dream (or nightmare) into reality. In pursuit of visions, these men accept "overwhelming" challenges—and win. One thinks of the lonely Lenin in his sealed train, of Mustapha Kemal surveying the bare ruins of Anatolia, of Mao choosing the desperate expedient of the Long March, or of Fidel Castro, with his twelve companions, confronting an army in the Sierra Maestra. One also remembers, with a shudder, the uttering of wild words by a ridiculous fanatic in a Munich beer cellar, and the donning of a black shirt by a discredited Italian socialist.

In the light of such experiences it would be inadvisable to dismiss the predominantly youthful contributors to *Student Power* and *New Revolutionaries* as mere ranting radicals. Some of them do indeed rant atrociously, in a peculiarly repulsive language, and many of them will certainly have disappeared from public view within a year or two. But a few—and guessing their identity is about the only fun to be had from reading either volume—may

have become even more uncomfortably challenging to the middle-aged, the respectable, the intellectually indolent and the politically apathetic.

It is not the things they say, which are not highly original; nor the way they say them, which bores more often than it stimulates; but the spirit or—one has to use the wretched word—*Weltanschauung* that they represent. Consider what it is like to be young, educated and idealistic at the beginning of the last third of the twentieth century. With most of one's life still to live, one sees mankind, having just failed in two most determined efforts to destroy its civilization, poised on the brink of nuclear annihilation, while doing its damndest to ensure that, should it by some miracle escape this fate, it will collectively perish as a result of excessive multiplication or the progressive poisoning of the environment or both.

The image of the Gadarene Swine is inadequate, since the wretched animals are not rushing down a steep slope but being carried down it in vehicles they have proudly paid for, while enjoying the solace of an equally expensive programme of

Tariq Ali (Editor): *New Revolutionaries*. 299pp. Peter Owen. 38s.
ALEXANDER COCKBURN and ROBIN BLACKBURN (Editors): *Student Power*. 378pp. Penguin in association with New Left Review. 7s.

canned entertainment designed to make them forget the direction in which they are going. Can one wonder that it is precisely the young, educated and idealistic who have taken to expressing themselves with such "shocking" violence and even, on occasion, to using actual physical violence? If we are really surprised, then it is obvious that we richly deserve all the opprobrious things they say of us.

"We didn't behave like this in the 1930s", grumbles the grey-bearded ex-revolutionary. Of course he didn't. Unemployment may have been pushing at the three million mark and Hitler threatening war; but there was no H-Bomb, no population explosion that one would notice, and no threat of a "silent spring"—and there was the new-born Soviet Union, a little disfigured by birth-marks but nevertheless pointing the way forward with proud and confident Leninist finger.

(Let it be whispered, moreover, that young people, at a time when Ph.D.s were conducting buses, were very worried about their jobs and consequently did not want to offend too many of their elders too often.)

Politically, the present generation neither enjoys these advantages nor suffers from these inhibitions. "The revolution", as formerly conceived, has gone sour on it. Except among a few old cloth-capped party hacks, who have learnt nothing and forgotten nothing since they listened spell-bound to Harry Pollitt, there is no enthusiasm for the Soviet Union. Anyone who still has the temerity to suggest that it is leading anyone anywhere except up the garden path is treated with silent contempt in places where people still think. As for the regimes that claim to have kept their doctrine pure and to have returned to "sound" revolutionary practice, Yugoslavia is looking a little tarnished, while China has descended into shadows where misshapen monsters wrestle obscurely. The People's Republic, of course, has its shrill advocates among the young, but it is obvious that they know as little of what is going on there as the com-

munist of the 1930s knew of what was going on in the U.S.S.R.; and, on the evidence provided by these two symposia, Maoism divides rather than unites the new radicals.

Whereas some are as prepared to parrot the Thoughts as to repeat any other "Marxist" formulas that seem to come in handy, others are more critical. In *New Revolutionaries*, Bill Luckham, a journalist who was in China at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, finds it necessary to warn the reader of his less-than-enthusiastic account against seeing the activities of the Red Guards as entirely "negative", while the two imprisoned Poles, Jacek Kuron and Karel Modzelewski, go so far as to allege that the "Chinese bureaucracy" has been driven into alliance "with the forces of colonial revolution" only as a result of its conflict with the "Soviet bureaucracy". This, no doubt, is Trotskyism—but a lot of the young radicals are Trotskyists of one sort or another.

The only two major revolutionary establishments that now arouse universal enthusiasm among the radicals are the Cuban and the Vietnamese. The latter, of course, offers a David-versus-Goliath image of heroic proportions. Indeed, a cynic may well wonder how the radical left could get on without it, so obsessively does it dominate their thoughts. But of necessity it is still an inspiration for struggle rather than a model of achievement—a church militant rather than a church triumphant. As for Cuba, this thorn in America's side provides two figures. Fidel Castro and Che Guevara, of enormous charismatic power. Yet the Cuban regime, which is more open to inspection by sympathizers than any of the others, provokes doubts that find intermittent expression. "To paint Cuba as a Utopia would be misrepresentation", writes Tariq Ali. "Admittedly there is total cultural freedom, but there are

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