IN the last year or two, an ambitious work of analysis of British history and social structure has been set in train by Perry Anderson and Tom Nairn in *New Left Review.* This work also bears, though mainly by implication, on some major aspects of Marxist theory and analysis. The present essay is concerned to discuss some of the issues and themes which the two authors raise.

These articles, taken together, represent a sustained attempt to develop a coherent historical account of British society. Undoubtedly the seminal article is Anderson’s *Origins of the Present Crisis.* But, if Nairn’s work is less inspired, nevertheless both writers clearly inhabit the same mental universe. Both feel themselves to be exiles from an “English ideology” which “in its drooling old age . . . gives rise to a kind of twilight, where ‘empiricism’ has become myopia and ‘liberalism’ a sort of blinking uncertainty.”

Nairn extends the indictment:

“English separateness and provincialism; English backwardness and traditionalism; English religiosity and moralistic vapouring; paltry English ‘empiricism,’ or instinctive distrust of reason. . . .”

There is “the nullity of native intellectual traditions,” the “secular, insular stuñification” of British culture, “the impenetrable blanket of complacency” of British social life, “the stony recesses of British trade union conservatism,” and “the centuries of stale constipation and sedimentary ancestor-worship” of British society. The English ideology has—

“embraced a dilettante literary culture descended from the aristocracy and the crudest of lumpen-bourgeois utilitarian philosophies, and held them together in a bizarre Jekyll-and-Hyde union of attraction and repulsion.”

“The very urban world” of England “is the image of this archaic, bastard conservatism—an urban world which has nothing to do with urban civilization, as this is conceived in other countries with an old and unified bourgeois culture.” These judgments are resumed in Anderson’s *Origins:*
The two great chemical elements of this blanketing English fog are 'traditionalism' and 'empiricism': in it, visibility—of any social or historical reality—is always zero. . . . A comprehensive, coagulated conservatism is the result, covering the whole of society with a thick pall of simultaneous philistinism (towards ideas) and mystagogy (towards institutions), for which England has justly won an international reputation.”

And the essence of both authors' analysis of Labourism may be found in Anderson's phrase—"in England, a supine bourgeoisie produced a subordinate proletariat.”

No doubt in particular contexts certain of these judgments might be sustained. But what is evident, wherever such judgments obtrude, is the loosening of emotional control and the displacement of analysis by commination. There is, about them, the air of an inverted Podsnappery. "We Englishmen are Very Proud of our Constitution, Sir,” Mr. Podsnap explained with a sense of meritorious proprietorship:

"'It was Bestowed Upon Us By Providence. No Other Country is so Favoured as This Country...’

"'And other countries,’ said the foreign gentleman. ‘They do how?’

"'They do, Sir,’ returned Mr. Podsnap, gravely shaking his head; ‘they do—I am sorry to be obliged to say it—as they do.’”

But now the rôles are reversed. Mr. Podsnap (who has swelled to engross all British culture over the past 400 years) is being arraigned in his turn.

"'And other countries,’ said Mr. Podsnap remorsefully. ‘They do how?’

"'They do,’ returned Messrs. Anderson and Nairn severely: ‘They do—we are sorry to be obliged to say it—in Every Respect Better. Their Bourgeois Revolutions have been Mature. Their Class Struggles have been Sanguinary and Unequivocal. Their Intelligentsia has been Autonomous and Integrated Vertically. Their Morphology has been Typologically Concrete. Their Proletariat has been Hegemonic.’”

There is, indeed, throughout their analysis an undisclosed model of Other Countries, whose typological symmetry offers a reproach to British exceptionalism. Set against this model, the English working class is “one of the enigmas of modern history,” the historical experience of the English bourgeoisie has been “fragmented, incomplete,” English intellectuals have not constituted “a true intelligentsia.”

Every historical experience is of course in a certain sense unique. Too much protestation about this calls into question, not the experience (which remains there to be explained) but the relevance of the model against which it is judged. (We may leave aside the point that Other Countries, if we survey advanced industrial nations over the past fifty years, have not always and in every respect done Better than the British, despite their vertical intelligentsia and their hegemonic proletariat.) The Anderson–Nairn model clearly approximates most closely to the French experience, or to a particular interpretation of that experience;
and in this they follow the major, pre-1917 Marxist tradition. When set beside this, English experience fails in three important respects: (1) in the premature, unfulfilled character of the seventeenth-century revolution. In the ensuing compromises of 1688 and 1832, the industrial bourgeoisie failed to attain to an undisputed hegemony, and to remake the ruling institutions of society in its own image. Rather, a “deliberate, systematized symbiosis” took place between the landed aristocracy and the industrial bourgeoisie, in which, however, the aristocracy remained as senior partner; (2) Because the seventeenth-century revolution was “impure,” and the struggle was conducted in religious terms, the bourgeoisie never developed any coherent world-view or self-knowledge, and made do with an “ideology” of “empiricism” which has apparently characterized English intellectual culture until the present day:

“... the ideological legacy of the Revolution was almost nil. ... Because of its ‘primitive,’ pre-Enlightenment character, the ideology of the Revolution founded no significant tradition, and left no major after-effects. . . .”

(3) A premature bourgeois revolution gave rise to a premature working-class movement, whose heroic struggles during the Industrial Revolution were nullified by the absence of any commensurate theoretical growth: “its maximum ardour and insurgency coincided with the minimum availability of socialism as a structured ideology.” When this movement fell apart after Chartism (through “exhaustion”) there followed a “profound caesura” in English working-class history, and the “most insurgent working class in Europe became the most numbed and docile.” “Marxism came too late,” whereas in Other Countries “Marxism swept the working class.” Thereafter, the post-1880 Labour movement has nullified its entire existence by expressing only corporative (and not hegemonic) virtues, and by becoming subject (with Fabianism) to an ideology which mimics, with impoverished equipment, the banal empiricism of the bourgeoisie.

Our authors bring to this analysis the zest of explorers. They set out on their circumnavigations by discarding, with derision, the old speculative charts. Anderson notes “the complete lack of any serious global history of British society,” the “nervelessness of our historiography,” “no attempt has ever been made at even the outline of a ‘totalizing’ history of modern British society.” Nairn finds that there is not even “a rudimentary historical debate regarding the total development of British society.”

“Enmeshed in the dense web of archaic superstructure grafted on to British capitalism . . . the working class could not distance itself aggressively from society and constitute its own autonomous movement towards social hegemony. The cutting instrument needed for this task was lacking. That is, an intellectual stratum torn adrift from the social consensus with sufficient force and capable of functioning as catalyst to the new force striving for expression against the consensus.”10
The problem is to create “the intense rational consciousness and activity” which are “the necessary prerequisites of revolution in this society of totemized and emasculated consciousness,” with its “traditional intelligentsia once buried entirely in the tribal rites of Oxford or literary London.” With Anderson and Nairn (the tone implies) the intense cutting instrument has, at long last, arrived.

II

This is ungenerous, for Anderson’s Origins is a stimulating study—indeed, as a provocation, it is a tour de force. If it cannot be accepted as an historical statement in its own right, it is nevertheless an incitement to study and at an uncommon pitch of conceptual intensity. If it is untrue that Britain is Marxist terra incognita, it is also true that such attempts at historical self-knowledge must be made again and again, with each advance in knowledge and each refinement of our analytic equipment.

A question which troubles me, however, is whether the equipment which these authors bring to their task has been refined, or merely sophisticated. We may turn to the first proposition as to English exceptionalism, i.e. the seventeenth-century revolution and its outcome:

“What kind of a Revolution was it? It can, perhaps, be said that it was a clash between two segments of a land-owning class, neither of which were direct crystallizations of opposed economic interests, but rather were partially contingent but predominantly intelligible lenses into which wider, more radically antagonistic social forces came into temporary and distorted focus.”

“Because it was primarily fought within and not between classes, while it could and did destroy the numerous institutional and juridical obstacles of feudalism to economic development, it could not alter the basic property statute in England.” The outcome was to transform “the body of landowners into a basically capitalist class,” and “it achieved this by profoundly transforming the rôles but not the personnel of the ruling class.”

“In this sense it was a supremely successful capitalist revolution. At the same time, however, it left almost the entire social structure intact.”

This is on page 30 of Origins. But on page 39 we are told that this “bitter, cathartic revolution . . . transformed the structure but not the superstructure of English society.”

Which is it to be? And which model are we using? If it is a simple basis-superstructure model, then it is difficult to conceive “a supremely successful capitalist revolution” which nevertheless did not alter “the basic property statute in England.” I am not clear as to the meaning of “statute” in this context; but if we were to examine the decomposition of feudal property tenure and relations we would have to commence an
analysis of “the Revolution” several centuries earlier than Anderson authorizes. If the primary achievement of the Revolution was to “destroy the numerous institutional and juridical obstacle of feudalism to economic development,” then how is it possible to say that it “transformed the structure but not the superstructure of English society”? In any case, taking 1640 and 1688 together, it is commonly supposed that the function of one very important institution was considerably modified: that is, the monarchy; and that here we have a transformation both in rôle and in personnel.

In fact, the sense of Anderson’s analysis appears to be that the Revolution effected certain changes in the institutional superstructure, removing crucial obstacles to capitalist development at home and in the colonies; but that the confrontation between social forces was in other respects indecisive, leaving parts of the feudal (or post-feudal, transitional-paternalist?) superstructure intact. This is—as a description—evidently true, although scarcely original.

There is, however, a further ambiguity which grows in importance as their analysis moves from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century. Despite disclaimers, neither Anderson nor Nairn appear to be able to accept, au fond, the notion of an agrarian class, whether rentiers or entrepreneurs, as a true bourgeoisie. While the landowners are accredited as a “basically capitalist class” in Origins, and we are told, further, that “there was . . . from the start no fundamental, antagonistic contradiction between the old aristocracy and the new bourgeoisie,” yet in the analysis of nineteenth-century developments the aristocracy and industrial middle class are described as “distinct social classes” which after 1832 underwent “symbiosis,” in which process the bourgeoisie effectively capitulated to the aristocracy (“its courage had gone,” “it won two modest victories, lost its nerve and ended by losing its identity”). With Nairn the contrast is even more pointed: the landowners are “protagonists of a distinctive civilization, half-way between the feudal and the modern . . . a civilization . . . in spite of its bourgeois traits qualitatively distinct from the new social order”: the aristocratic political elite, its institutions and ethos, were “the emanation of a distinct social class, independent of and separate from the main conflicts and concerns of urban, capitalist society.” Moreover, each distinct “class” projected a distinctive ideology: “traditionalism . . . was the natural ideological idiom of the landed class, emerging with Burke;” “empiricism,” on the other hand, “faithfully transcribes the fragmented, incomplete character of the English bourgeoisie’s historical experience.” In the nineteenth century both congealed into the same suffocating fog.

The problems involved here certainly are not easy. It is a strain on one’s semantic patience to imagine a class of bourgeois scattered across a countryside and dwelling on their estates, and it is easier to see in mercantile capital “the only truly bourgeois kernel of the revolution.” But if we forget the associations with the French model which the term
introduces, and think rather of the capitalist mode of production, then clearly we must follow Marx in seeing the landowners and farmers as a very powerful and authentic capitalist nexus. We cannot say that the revolution “made possible the transformation of the body of landowners into a basically capitalist class” because, where wool or the production of commodities for London and urban markets predominated, this process was already very well advanced. But, equally, we cannot say that the revolution effected a dramatic acceleration in this process: the equilibrium of social forces was such that the full consequences of revolution were delayed for nearly a hundred years.

What was at issue, from one aspect, was exactly a capitalist redefinition of “the basic property statute,” from “ancient right” to “natural law” and purchase; of the mode and rationale of production, from quasi-self-sufficiency to the marketing of commodities for profit; and of productive relations, from the organic compulsions of the manor and gild to the atomized compulsions of a free labour market. And this entailed a comprehensive conflict and redefinition at every level, as organic and magical views of society gave way before natural law, and as the acquisitive ethic encroached upon an authoritarian moral economy. And, from another aspect, the real movement was enormously complex and protracted, commencing (for historical convenience) with the great monastic wool farmers of Domesday, and passing through the enfeeblement of the barons in the wars, the growth of “free labour,” the enclosure of the sheep-walks, the seizure and redistribution of Church lands, the pillaging of the New World, the drainage of fens, and, thence, through revolution, to the eventual acceleration of enclosure and the reclamation of wastes.

The movement which so often appears to reproduce itself is that upon which Eileen Power commented, with reference to the financial crisis of the fourteenth century, which “depressed the apex, while it broadened the foundations, of the English middle classes.” Already, three centuries before the revolution, she notes an “organic tendency” within this middle class: “though it was continually recruited from the land, it tended always to go back to the land, taking its fortune with it.”

It is impossible to understand even the beginnings of English capitalism if one peers out, through Parisian eyes, at the backward “provinces,” seeing in the landowners only a feudal aristocracy “with bourgeois traits.” The Cotswold wool hamlets, the rural rebuilding of the sixteenth century, have left evidence to this day of a style, a solidity, a dispersal of opulence.

The Revolution confirmed a title not to new property but to property which already existed—a title which was menaced by the unregulated exactions of the monarchy, and which had no secure sanction in the authoritarian and magical ideology which had outlived its feudal host. But, once revolution commenced, a quite different threat to property appeared from the Leveller Left. Ireton’s famous outburst (“All the
main thing I speak for, is because I would have an eye to property") prefigures the settlement of 1688. And this settlement registers not some half-way house between "feudalism" and "capitalism," not some adjustment of interests between a tenacious feudal superstructure and an embryonic capitalist base, but an arrangement exquisitely adjusted to the equilibrium of social forces at that time—so delicately designed, and yet, in its ambiguities, so flexible, that it was to endure not only through a hundred years of comparative social stasis but also through the next fifty years of the dual revolutions.

The beneficiaries of the settlement were exactly those people who were represented in Parliament: that is, the men of substantial property, and especially landed property. Title to the enjoyment of their property was secured by the constitutional impedimenta with which the Crown was surrounded, and by the rule of a Law which was both dispassionate in its adjudication of substantial property-rights and passionately vengeful against those who transgressed against them. At the same time a limited and manipulated franchise, and such restrictive measures as the Test and Corporation Acts, hedged out the petty manufacturers, artisans, etc. The diminished charisma of crown and aristocratic rank helped to hold together the social order, without (thanks to the Jacobite distraction) affording a base for the re-assertion of the old authority. The limp magic of a sordidly-Erastian church (itself under the local control of the gentry) supplemented the authority of the propertied over the people. In Locke the gentry found an apologist for the settlement, with his naturalistic theory of the delegation of powers to the chief magistrate in the interests of possessive individualism.

In the eighteenth century agrarian capitalism came fully into its inheritance. Around the gentry were grouped (as Anderson reminds us) those "affinal groups"—not only mercantile capitalism proper but also that widely dispersed manufacturing industry which still sought protective shelter from the State. Ascendant agrarian capitalism involved not only rent-rolls, improvement, enclosures, but also far-reaching changes in marketing, milling, transport, and in the merchating of exports and imports; while the gentry were able to employ a professional servent-class, in the lesser clergy, country lawyers, surgeons, surveyors, tutors, etc. The "complex interpenetration" of landed, mercantile, and industrial wealth, to which Anderson draws attention, has long been a concern of our "nerveless historiography," and the delicate mechanisms—economic (credit and banking, the landowners' interest in coal, transport, timber, etc.), social (marriage settlements), and political (purchase of political influence, or of land as a step towards this)—by which this was regulated have not gone unexamined. The comedy of manners attendant upon this process of adjustment between styles was in fact a central preoccupation of eighteenth-century literary culture.

Even a cursory acquaintance with the sources must dispel all doubts as to the fact that the eighteenth-century gentry made up a superbly
successful and self-confident capitalist class. They combined, in their style of life, features of an agrarian and urban culture. In their well-stocked libraries, month by month, "Mr. Urban" of the Gentleman's Magazine kept them informed of the affairs of the Town; their elegant provincial capitals and solid market towns afforded some society in the unfashionable months; their sons were urbanized at Oxford and Cambridge, and on the tour of Europe, their daughters and wives were urbanized in the London season. To compensate for the isolation of the countryside their great houses were expanded to accommodate those extended social exchanges (like select urban samples) which provide matter for the novels of fashion. In Bath, Harrogate, Scarborough, etc., they produced peculiar monuments to a civilization in which a sophisticated urbanization was a periodic passage-right, for the adolescent, for the marriageable, the matronly, and the gout-ridden. A bourgeoisie which had not yet learned hypocrisy, they valued each other, not in the scales of breed and antiquity but in round annual sums.

Nor was this the limit of economic reckoning. There is, perhaps, an important moment of transition around the mid-century when more and more of the gentry (including the great aristocratic magnates) ceased to conceive of their function in passive terms (as rent-collectors and as park-keepers, with a more or less stable revenue), but took up, instead, a far more aggressive agrarian posture, both in their capacity as substantial farmers in their own right and in the stimulation of those improvements among their tenants upon which their hopes of an expanding income must be founded. A glance at that most remarkable of trade journals, the Annals of Agriculture, in whose pages noblemen, clergy, and commoners engage in discussion of the merits of marling, enclosure costs, and stock-breeding, serves to impress upon one the profoundly capitalist style of thought of the class—zestfully acquisitive and meticulous in attention to accountancy.

Moreover, the penetration of the capitalist ethos had an outcome of more far-reaching importance. It is commonly supposed (this is overlooked by Anderson and Nairn but not, as it happens, by K. Marx) that the distinctive contribution of English ideology in the late eighteenth century was neither traditionalism nor empiricism but a naturalistic political economy, most notably with Adam Smith. But—because of the events of 1832 and the subsequent conflict between the agricultural and manufacturing interests over the Corn Laws—we persistently forget that laissez faire emerged, not as the ideology of some manufacturing lobby, not as the intellectual yarn turned out by the cotton mills, but in the great agricultural corn-belt. Smith's argument is derived, very largely, from agriculture; a main opponent was the paternalist regulation of the corn trade which—while in an advanced stage of real decomposition—was nevertheless supported by a substantial body of paternalist economic theory and an enormous force of popular (and urban) feeling. The abrogation of the old moral economy of
“provision” was not the work of an industrial bourgeoisie but of capitalist farmers, improving landlords, and great millers and corn-merchants. While Arkwright was disciplining his first refractory labour force, and while the woollen and hosiery industries were captive to traditionalism, the agricultural interest embraced an anti-political economy whose harsh profit-and-loss purgatives voided the body politic of old notions of duty, mutuality, and paternal care. And it was exactly this ideology which provided a bridge, during the Napoleonic wars, spanning the interests of cotton and of land; the first administrations profoundly imbued with the outlook of laissez faire were—not those formed after 1832—but those of Pitt, Perceval and Lord Liverpool.

It is difficult to see how the experience of this class, which enjoyed this long ascendancy and gave birth to this ideology, can be described as “fragmentary” or “incomplete.” It would appear to be unusually fulfilled. True enough, the English agrarian-capitalist mix was, if not unique, highly unusual. It arose, like every real historical situation, from a particular equilibrium of forces; it was only one of the seemingly infinite number of social mutations (in which each, nevertheless, maintains a generic affinity to others arising from a comparable conjunction) which actual history provides in such profusion. If there is no place for it in the model, it is the model which must be scrapped or refined.

What appears to present our authors with difficulties is the translation of the agrarian and mercantile capitalism of the eighteenth century into the industrial capitalism of the nineteenth. Were agrarian and industrial capitalists differing interest groups within the same broad social class, or were they distinct social classes? If mutual interpenetration was already rather fluent in the eighteenth century, how are we to account for the very considerable conflict which arose in 1832? What, in any case, was “Old Corruption”? What irks them particularly is the failure of the industrial bourgeoisie to undergo an advanced “Jacobin” experience, as any well-brought-up bourgeoisie ought to do.

The solution for which they opt is already implicit in their failure to take seriously the bourgeois revolution of the fifteenth to eighteenth centuries. Agrarian and industrial capitalists were distinct social classes, although not so hermetically sealed against each other that antagonisms were irreconcilable. But since the term “agrarian capitalism” is increasingly replaced by “aristocracy” (with its feudal associations) something portentous can be made of secondary antagonisms in institutional forms and in ideology. The fear inspired by the French Revolution, and the challenge of an insurgent proletariat at home, projected these two classes into each others’ arms:

“... no ‘compromise’ or ‘alliance’—the usual terms employed—was, in fact, possible as between contrasting civilizations. No conscious tactical arrangement, no deal lasting for a season, was conceivable between social forces of this complexity and magnitude. Amalgamation was the only real possibility, a fusion of different classes and their diverse cultures into one
This is not a genuine dialectical paradox, it is a dialectical trick: two forces (we are told) were so incompatible in interests and outlook that no compromise was possible between them; but, when we have turned our head we find they have fused. The logical deception is covered over by an implication that this was not a genuine fusion, since "the aristocracy survived, in the face of the inevitable political and ideological feebleness of the emergent bourgeoisie, as the governors of the most dynamic capitalist system in the world:

"And landowning civilization survived with them, as a mode of living, a culture and language, a type of personality and psychology, a whole dominant ethos."18

In this "symbiosis" of two classes the aristocracy emerged as the "master," keeping "control of the State and its main organs," and remaining as "the vanguard of the bourgeoisie." The failure of the bourgeoisie (which at this stage of Anderson’s argument becomes a "middle-class" subordinate to an aristocratic "ruling-class"19) to achieve an unchallenged hegemony and to rationalize State institutions is the main historical occasion for the "profound, pervasive but cryptic crisis" which afflicts British society: "the living palimpsest which is the ruling bloc in Britain is now decaying from its immemorial accretions."20

It is of course possible to see Britain in this way after watching Sir Alec Douglas-Home on television. And if this analysis relates to the perpetuation of a certain aristocratic style, and certain archaic institutional continuities, then it is both true and important. But far more than this is suggested: "a whole dominant ethos," "governors," "control of the State," "vanguard," or (at another point in Origins) "hegemonic class" which was "faced with the rise of the bourgeoisie."21 Thus this is not offered as an analysis of styles but of the real movement and equilibrium of social forces. And as such it will not do. I will not labour the point that Marx saw "this most bourgeois of nations" in a very different way. What is objectionable—apart from the elision of whole historical clauses—is the way we slide around in a shifting terminology whose treacherous instability is disguised by a certain metaphorical virtuosity.

It is true that anyone who attempts this kind of class analysis of modern British history becomes involved in terminological confusion;22 the ambiguities force their way into the analysis because they are there in the history. But one way of approaching this is to play, for a moment, a history-game in which we suppose that A did not happen and B (which did not happen) did. I have suggested, in The Making of the English Working Class, that in 1832 a revolutionary outbreak was averted only at the eleventh hour. There were reasons, but not overwhelming ones, why this was averted. If it had not been, then it is
reasonable to suppose that revolution would have precipitated a very rapid process of radicalization, passing through and beyond a Jacobin experience; and whatever form a counter-revolution and eventual stabilization might have taken it is unlikely that many eighteenth-century institutions could have survived—the House of Lords, the Established Church, the monarchy, and the juridical and military elite, would probably have been swept away, at least temporarily. Now if it had happened in this way the model-builders at least would now be satisfied; 1832 would be the English bourgeois revolution, and 1640 would have fallen into neglect, as a "premature" outbreak, a sort of amalgam of Huguenot wars and Fronde. The tendency to imply that some kind of "feudal" society existed in Britain until the eve of 1832 (as witness the quaint notion that peeps from the edges of some Marxist interpretations of the French Revolution, that "feudalism" prevailed in France in 1788) would have been reinforced.

Let us now put the pieces back and start the game with a different move. In this case we will suppose that 1832 happened as it did, but (less plausibly) 1640 did not—that the Laudian reaction was less provocative, that Charles capitulated before the Grand Remonstrance, and that a circumscribed constitutional monarchy was established, bloodlessly, in 1640, without Marston Moor, the Leveller ferment, the execution of the King, and the Glorious Revolution. In this event the model-builders would be wholly at a loss for the Revolution; and, paradoxically, might perforce be better historians, for they would have to construct, from the Wars of the Roses, the Tudor Monarchy (is there a premature Robespierre in Henry VIII, a dictatorship of the bourgeoisie?), the attainder of royal ministers, the religious conflicts of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and from 1832, pieces of that great arch which in fact, in the epochal sense, make up the bourgeois revolution.

I am objecting to a model which concentrates attention upon one dramatic episode—the Revolution—to which all that goes before and after must be related; and which insists upon an ideal type of this Revolution against which all others may be judged. Minds which thirst for a tidy platonism very soon become impatient with actual history. The French Revolution was a fundamental moment in the history of the West, and in its rapid passage through a gamut of experiences it afforded incomparable insights and prefigurments of subsequent conflicts. But because it was a gigantic experience it was not necessarily a typical one. So far from an advanced, egalitarian, left-Jacobin phase being an intrinsic part of any fulfilled bourgeois revolution, recent research into the rôle of the Parisian crowd, the actual social composition of the sections and of the institutions of the Terror and of the revolutionary armies, as well as into the national emergency of war dictatorship, calls into question how far it is meaningful to characterize the Jacobinism of the Year II as an authentic "bourgeois" experience at all. And certainly the industrial bourgeoisie

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cannot be credited with being either the "vanguard" of Jacobinism or the major social force upholding this profoundly ambiguous political moment.

It happened in one way in France, in another way in England. I am not disputing the importance of the difference—and of the different traditions which ensued—but the notion of typicality. When taken to England the model surreptitiously nudges one towards an attempt to explain 1832 and the fracas about the Corn Laws, taken together, as a kind of pusillanimous, low-pressure reproduction of the conflict in France. The term "aristocracy" affords the bridge: both were conflicts between aristocrats and bourgeois, but how petty and inconclusive does the one appear beside the other! The profound difference in the life-situations of an aristocratic order and a capitalist gentry (as well as of the disaffected groupings) blurs into an acceptable schematic mélange.

One may offer a different explanation as to what the conflict of 1832 was about. Despite all that has been observed, since Marx's time, as to the operation of élites, bureaucracies, etc., Marxists generally seek to reduce political phenomena to their "real" class significance, and often fail, in analysis, to allow sufficient distance between the one and the other. But in fact those moments in which governing institutions appear as the direct, emphatic, and unmediated organs of a "ruling-class" are exceedingly rare, as well as transient. More often these institutions operate with a good deal of autonomy, and sometimes with distinct interests of their own, within a general context of class power which-prescribes the limits beyond which this autonomy cannot with safety be stretched, and which, very generally, discloses the questions which arise for executive decision. Attempts to short-circuit analysis end up by explaining nothing.

Analysis of the governing élite in England before 1832 must surely proceed at this level. The settlement of 1688 inaugurated a hundred years of comparative social stasis, so far as overt class conflict or the maturation of class consciousness was concerned. The main beneficiaries were those vigorous agrarian capitalists, the gentry. But this does not mean that the governing institutions represented, in an unqualified manner, the gentry as a "ruling-class." At a local level (the magistracy) they did so in an astonishingly naked manner. At a national level (desuetude of the old restrictions on marketing, the facilitation of enclosures, the expansion of empire) they furthered their interests. But at the same time a prolonged period of social stasis is commonly one in which ruling institutions degenerate, corruptions enter, channels of influence silt up, an élite entrenches itself in positions of power. A distance opened up between the majority of the middle and lesser gentry (and associated groups) and certain great agrarian magnates, privileged merchant capitalists, and their hangers-on, who manipulated the organs of the State in their own private interest. Nor was this a simple "class" tension between an aristocracy of great magnates and
the lesser gentry. Certain magnates only were on the "inside," and influence swung according to factional politics, the diplomacy of the great family connections, control of boroughs, and the rest.

This is to say that the exercise of power in the second half of the eighteenth century was very much as that inverted-Marxist, Sir Lewis Namier, described it in *The Structure of Politics*—although he unaccountably neglected to go on and characterize it as a sophisticated system of brigandage. It should be seen less as government by an aristocracy (a distinct estate with a common style of life and outlook, and with institutional legitimation) than as a parasitism—a racket, which the King himself could not break into except by becoming the croupier. It was not wholly a parasitism: the business of the nation had to be carried on, from time to time the "independent" gentry—and their representatives in parliament—had to be appeased, there were even occasions (although one after another these are called in question as the disciples of Namier break into the archives of the last of the great mafiosi) when the interests of the nation or the class, rather than the family or faction, were consulted. Nor was it only a parasitism: being conducted upon so gigantic a scale, from bases in private and public wealth of such magnitude, and commanding influence which reached, by the most direct means, into the army, the navy, the chartered companies, the Church, the Law, it was bound to congeal into something that looks almost like an estate; to surround itself in a cocoon of ideological apologetics; and to nourish a style of life, of conspicuous—indeed, spectacular—consumption which is associated with a true aristocracy. Indeed, these great constitutional brigands came, not without reason, to confuse themselves with their French, Prussian, and even Russian cousins—a confusion which was to cost Europe dear during the wars.

Nevertheless, all this does not quite make up an aristocracy, conceived of as a ruling class. It was... nothing but itself. A unique formation. Old Corruption. It could scarcely have seen the eighteenth century out if the French Revolution had not occurred, providentially, to save it. If it commanded immense influence, it raised also immense resentments. It alienated the sisters and the cousins and the aunts of those who had not obtained preferment, the officers who had not been promoted, the clergy who had not found patrons, the contractors who had not obtained orders, the talented who had been passed over, the wives who had been snubbed. Something of this can be seen in the irresponsible zest with which many of the propertied supported Wilkes. Nor was it only elements in the City of London and the nascent industrial bourgeoisie which regarded Old Corruption with a baleful eye. The distance which had opened up, after the American secession, between the brigandage and the gentry from whom, in the last analysis, they derived their power, can be seen in the strength of Wyvill’s Association movement in the counties—those county meetings for
reform which were one of the only occasions, in the eighteenth century, when the gentry assembled and expressed themselves as a class.

The French Revolution saved Old Corruption, for evident reasons. (Here at least I am in agreement with Anderson and Nairn.) The disaffection of gentry and farmers evaporated in the high noon of enclosures and of corn prices. Pitt (who had once been a Chosen Son of the Associationists) effected some rationalization in the State. The industrial bourgeoisie were kept in good humour—their machinery protected, trade unions repressed, protective labour legislation dismantled. The “symbiosis” of land and commercial and manufacturing wealth continued at political, social and economic levels. But Old Corruption emerged from the wars, despite all modifications, very much as it went into them. In certain respects, through its involvement with European reaction, its repression of democratic impulses (and their auto-suppression among the gentry and middle classes), its spawning of fund-holders in the National Debt, and the accession of mysticism to the ideology of constitutionalism, it emerged in a more parasitic form than it had taken before. And Cobbett, in characterizing it as Old Corruption or “the Thing,” may have been a better Marxist than the Marxists who have tried to put him right.

Thus one must observe caution in characterizing the conflict of 1832. The enemy of the reformers was not an aristocratic estate, nor the entire agrarian capitalist class, but a secondary complex of predatory interests. While the industrial bourgeoisie had particular grievances and played a far more active part than it had done, as a group, in previous reform agitations, a considerable part of the gentry were disaffected also. From the 1770s onwards the reform movement had always found support among the gentry; and from this milieu many of its leaders were derived—Cartwright, Wyvill, Burdett, Hunt—while Cobbett always had an audience among the farmers. In the crucial general elections which preceded 1832 Old Corruption held on to most of its own rotten boroughs, but the counties (where, admittedly, there were many urban votes) were carried for reform. And reform was enacted in parliament by one faction of gentry and great magnates against another.

When it came to the push, Old Corruption found that it had little behind it, beyond what its own largesse could buy—and the institutions of State itself. If there had really been a direct confrontation between agrarian and industrial bourgeoisie, then revolution must have occurred. But in fact, as the crisis disclosed itself it appeared increasingly that “the Thing” and the people were “at issue.” And this also explains why it is so tempting to say that “the middle classes” were the beneficiaries of the 1832 settlement. If the industrial bourgeoisie had been excluded from the political game in 1688 it was not because their property was industrial but because it was petty. As their property became more substantial they felt a corresponding accession of resentment; but this
resentment was shared by many of their cousins (and sometimes literally cousins) in the country and the City. 1832 changed, not one game for another but the rules of the game, restoring the flexibility of 1688 in a greatly altered class context. It provided a framework within which new and old bourgeois could adjust their conflicts of interest without resort to force. These conflicts, not only of direct interest but of outlook, style of life, religion, were considerable; but so also were the attractive forces. We may set the conflict surrounding the Corn Laws on one side; but on the other (and simultaneously) we must set the existence of a common enemy, in Chartism, and the railway boom to which a parliament still overstocked with gentry gave tardy blessing and in the rewards of which the gentry shared.

It is true that the rôle in all this of the industrial bourgeoisie was not especially heroic. They left the longest and hardest part of the agitation to the plebeian Radicals; the parliamentary conduct was in the hands of a section of the gentry and lawyers, and they slipped in through the breach which these contestants made. In this they were not wholly untypical of other industrial bourgeois: mill-owners, accountants, company-promoters, provincial bankers, are not historically notorious for their desperate propensity to rush, bandoliers on their shoulders, to the barricades. More generally they arrive on the scene when the climactic battles of the bourgeois revolution have already been fought. Thereafter they enlarged their influence pretty much in step with their advancement in real socio-economic power. To examine this statement would require, not an exercise in theoretical virtuosity, but a close, scrupulous, and, alas, empirical examination of the actual history, of the kind which has been offered, for one important moment (1867), by Royden Harrison. It would require a sociological anatomy of the components of the “middle classes”—small gentry, farmers, industrial entrepreneurs with diverse interests, high and low finance, professional groups (independent and salaried), civil service, institutions of imperialism—their conflicts and accommodations, differing outlooks and styles. It would require also examination in strictly political terms, as the surviving positions of the old privilege were eroded, as different interests selected one or the other of the two formative parties as their protagonist, as the mediations of the party system became more complex, and as the appeal to (and the manufacture of) a middle-class public opinion became an important part of the game. One might find, in the political trajectory of Joseph Chamberlain, from the individualist radicalism of the competitive family business, through municipal and eventually State rationalization, and, thence (as the armaments industry, with its State contracts and its imbrication with finance-capital, grew in importance) to imperialism, and, finally, with the hardening of world competition, to protectionism and imperial rationalization, a figurement—which is almost too pat—of the process.

Anderson will have it that the “courage” of the industrial bourgeoisie
had gone after 1832. But what need did these bourgeois have of courage when money served them better? Why should they take up arms against primogeniture when, with increasing rapidity, land was becoming only one interest beside cotton, railways, iron and steel, coal, shipping, and finance? Classes do not exist as abstract, platonic categories, but only as men come to act in rôles determined by class objectives, to feel themselves to belong to classes, to define their interests as between themselves and as against other classes. In the case of the conflicts between 1760 and 1832 there are certainly moments when the gentry and the manufacturers appear to offer the poles around which antagonistic class institutions, ideologies, and value-systems might develop. Such class institutions can indeed be seen, in the magistracy and Church on the one hand, and in Unitarian or Quaker meetings and in the growth of a middle-class press on the other. The Priestley Riots in Birmingham in 1791 show to what extremes this class antagonism might have grown. Given this or that, all might have happened in a different way. But in fact it did not. After the French Revolution evangelicism blurred some of the differences between the Establishment and Nonconformity (the common preoccupation with disciplining the lower orders facilitated the movement). Some of the manufacturers took their places on the Bench. Coal and canals brought the two together, as did commissions in the Volunteers, common service against Luddism, common resentment against income tax. They shared, although with varying degrees of intensity, a common resentment against Old Corruption. Hence all happened as it did. Given the most perfect model of relations to the means of production (“basis”), no one, in 1760 or 1790, could have been certain as to how the cultural and institutional formations would in fact take place. But, happening as it did, it registered the fact that these were not to take the field of history as class antagonists, and that the “symbiosis” of the two social groups was already well advanced.

In what sense, then, can we accept the Nairn-Anderson thesis that the aristocracy emerged from all this as the “master,” the “vanguard,” in “control of the State”? It is evident that the 1832 settlement permitted the perpetuation of certain “aristocratic” institutions, areas of privilege, an aristocratic style of life. It also afforded some contribution to the “ethos” of the ruling group (although not the “dominant ethos”) and to norms of leadership which (as Anderson notes) was to prove valuable in the government of empire. But when we move closer a judgment must be more qualified. At the level of local government (except in the countryside) aristocratic influence was largely displaced: the Lord Lieutenancy effectually disappeared; the magistracy was partly taken over; the Board of Guardians and the organs of municipal government were satisfactorily urban bourgeois institutions; the police force (one of the first-fruits of 1832) was on an acceptable bourgeois-bureaucratic model. At a national level the record has been ambiguous. If aristocratic modes have been perpetuated in the City, they have been very
much less evident in the great institutions of industrial capitalism. If Old Corruption still presides over Oxford and Cambridge, yet London, the civic universities, the technical colleges, etc., have long developed upon a different pattern. If aristocratic privilege held on to the armed forces, it had begun to lose control, even before 1832, of the press, and it has never gained control of more recent media of communication.

Thus on the briefest survey of commonly observed evidence the picture appears very different from the over-strident portrait of our authors. This aristocratic master would appear to govern from the monarchy, the House of Lords, the armed services, Oxford and Cambridge, the City, and the institutions of Empire; and to have had an excessive influence in the two older political parties. This is without doubt an impressive list; but it becomes less overwhelming if we recall that the armed services (for reasons which are well resumed by Anderson) have never exercised an influence within the British power elite comparable to that in German or contemporary American history; and that the influence of the House of Lords has progressively diminished. Moreover, the case of the ancient universities and of the old political parties is exceedingly complex and (in the latter case) very much more complex than the quantitative methods of analysis of post-Namierite historians might lead us to suppose. In a phrase, the politicians whom the public remember are Peel, Bright, Gladstone, Disraeli, the Chamberlains, Lloyd George, and Baldwin, and not Lord Derby or Lord Salisbury, or even, unjustly, Lord Palmerston.

Even so, aristocratic influence is formidable. But to show the aristocracy as a “vanguard” one would have to show a series of significant historical moments when aristocratic influence was directly and effectively opposed to important interests of the newer bourgeoisie. Such moments can be found (Old Corruption transplanted its flag, after 1832, to Dublin Castle), but they are not common and are generally ambiguous or nugatory in their outcome. The *locus classicus* which Anderson and Nairn appear to have overlooked is Bagehot’s *English Constitution* (1867). For the devastating cynicism with which Bagehot justified the prominence given in the Constitution to “a retired widow and an unemployed youth” is a very different matter from the “suffocating traditionalism” which they suppose to have endured from the time of Burke. The point is, not whether Bagehot’s account is accurate, but that the kind of cynicism, and also self-confidence, which his account exemplifies, emasculated bourgeois republicanism in England. Locke had given to the gentry an acceptable naturalistic justification of the institution of monarchy. In the crisis of the French Revolution, Burke inflated naturalism into that traditionalism in which the wisdom of past ages appeared as a vast National Debt whose interest charges it was perpetually the business of the living generation to pay. Bagehot restored the naturalism of Locke, but in a nakedly utilitarian manner. The monarchy and aristocratic institutions (the
"dignified part" of the Constitution) were found to be useful, in distracting attention from the real operation of power in the "efficient part" (which Bagehot had no doubt was under the "despotic" control of the middle classes). The "theatrical show" of the dignified part held the masses in awe, and it became more, rather than less, necessary after 1867 since (as he noted in his introduction to the second edition (1872)) "in all cases it must be remembered that a political combination of the lower classes, as such and for their own objects, is an evil of the first magnitude." Bagehot even found a justification for the perpetuation of some aristocratic influence within the effective part:

"As long as we keep up a double set of institutions . . . we should take care that the two match nicely, and hide where the one begins and where the other ends. This is in part effected by conceding some subordinate power to the august part of our polity, but it is equally aided by keeping an aristocratic element in the useful part of our polity."

And history has confirmed Bagehot's thesis neatly. In 1688 a bourgeois parliament exiled a King because he threatened to encroach too far upon the Constitution's efficient parts. In 1937 it needed only a bourgeois Prime Minister to give another King his cards, because he was unsuited to play a sufficiently august part in the "theatrical show."

I offer Bagehot, however, not as a social scientist but as an interesting moment in bourgeois ideology. He gave to the middle classes an apologia for the aristocratic parts of the Constitution in the best of bourgeois terms: (1) they afforded security; (2) they helped to keep the working class in order. Bagehot, and Gilbert-and-Sullivan, taken together, remind us of the superb confidence of the Victorian middle class in the face of Anderson's "vanguard." They give us the reasons why the middle class tolerated the abominable Empress Brown and failed to give their support to Dilke. But in fact, as even Marxists are coming to discover, history does not work with the well-oiled cynicism which Bagehot proposed. The aristocratic ethos still had a life of its own, and some real bases for continued growth; and one of the best passages in Anderson's Origins is that in which he discusses the blood-transfusion which the imperialist climax, after 1880, gave to this influence. But even here one may suggest a certain dialectic—a limit of tolerance beyond which aristocratic influence has not been allowed to grow. It may be detected as early as the French Revolution: the rhetoric of Burke called forth the caustic response of Byron. The swelling pomp of the theatrical show at the imperialist climax was swiftly followed by the counter-swell, when even Churchill could threaten the Lords with the memory of "ironclad pikemen" and Lloyd George (as Chancellor of the Exchequer) could address cheering audiences in tones unmistakably borrowed from Tom Paine:

"[The Peers] need no credentials. They do not even need a medical certificate. They need not be sound either in body, or in mind. They only
require a certificate of birth—just to prove that they are the first of the litter. You would not choose a spaniel on these principles...."33

And, in the pathetic coda of our own time, the enervated conservative relapse which led up to the accession of Lord Home was a windfall gain for Labour, provoking, by a long-conditioned reflex, the technocratic face and the Northern burr of Harold Wilson, and the falsetto Gilbert-and-Sullivan of That Was The Week That Was.

The British aristocracy has certainly proved itself to be, as Beatrice Webb described it, "a curiously tough substance." But if we are to understand the real balance of forces, instead of importing Sartre's schema of "detotalized totality" we could do worse than refer to her fuller account of "London Society" at the climax of imperialism. This aristocracy, in her observation, certainly surrounded and solidified "Society" and no doubt influenced its style of life. But—

"... it did not surround or isolate the Court; it was already a minor element in the Cabinet; and... it was barely represented in the ever-changing group of international financiers who ruled the money market. The bulk of the shifting mass of wealthy persons who were conscious of belonging to London Society... were, in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, professional profit-makers: the old-established families of bankers and brewers, often of Quaker descent, coming easily in social precedence; then one or two great publishers, and, at a distance, shipowners, the chairmen of railways and some other great corporations, the largest of the merchant bankers—but as yet no retailers."

There were "no fixed caste barriers" of any kind:

"But deep down in the unconscious herd instinct of the British governing class there was a test of fitness for membership of this most gigantic of social clubs, but a test which was seldom recognized by those who applied it, still less by those to whom it was applied, the possession of some form of power over other people."34

Admission to the élite was not, in fact, within the gift of the aristocracy: the aristocracy, rather, registered those shifts and fluctuations of power which occurred elsewhere, and graced a "Society" which came into existence independently of its influence. They were like the staff at an elaborate and prestigious hotel, who could in no way influence the comings and goings of the clientele, who or at what time or with whom, but who could arrange the ball and appoint a Master of Ceremonies.

Beatrice Webb's account precedes the notorious "lowering of tone" of the Court and aristocracy after the accession of Edward VII: the admission of the newspaper barons (who hoisted the aristocracy's chief enemy into the premiership during the war)—not to mention more recent vulgarizations. It is true that each national bourgeoisie has its own peculiar nastiness which it has often inherited from the class which went before; with the Germans, militarism and Statism; with the
French, chauvinism and intellectual metropolitomania; with the Italians, corruption; and with the Americans, the ruthless celebration of a human nature red in tooth and law. It is true also that the peculiar nastiness of the British bourgeoisie is in shameless observances of status and obsession with a spurious gentility. It is true, finally, that the "dignified" parts of the Constitution have been in this century an effective source of mystification and that—as Ralph Miliband has documented in *Parliamentary Socialism*—the parliamentary Labour Party has been the first, and most eager, subject of hypnosis. All this is important. But in suggesting that capitalist rationalization today is crippled by this aristocratic inheritance, and that this is the most substantial element of our current crisis (Anderson's *Origins* concludes: "The unfinished work of 1640 and 1832 must be taken up where it was left off"), I think our authors misread our history, and mistake the true character of our ruling class.

More than this, I am not at all sure that they have located the real antagonist. Old Corruption has passed away, but a new, and entirely different, predatory complex occupies the State. It is surely to this new complex, with its interpenetration of private industry and the State (Government contracts, especially for war materials, of an unprecedented size, subsidies, municipal indebtedness to private finance, etc.), its control over major media of communication, its blackmail by the City, its reduction of the public sector to subordinate rôles, and its capacity to dictate the conditions within which a Labour Government must operate—it is surely to this new Thing, with its vast influence reaching into the Civil Service, the professions, and into the trade union and labour movement itself, rather than to the hunting of an aristocratic Snark, that an analysis of the political formations of our time should be addressed?

III

What is extraordinary, in our authors' discussion of the "English ideology," is the degree to which they are themselves imprisoned within the myopic vision for which they express such contempt. They have never imagined the great arch of bourgeois culture. They can see, in bourgeois ideology, only two significant moments: the Enlightenment, and the moment at which Marxism arrived. In both moments (they suggest) the British bourgeoisie had no part. Of 1640:

"Because of its 'primitive,' pre-Enlightenment character, the ideology of the Revolution founded no significant tradition, and left no major aftereffects. Never was a major revolutionary ideology neutralized and absorbed so completely. Politically, Puritanism was a useless passion."

Thereafter the English bourgeoisie accomplished its destiny by "blind empiricism," and became "estranged from the central current of later bourgeois evolution." It sat out the French Revolution and missed
Jacobinism ("the apex of bourgeois progress"). "The English bourgeoisie . . . could afford to dispense with the dangerous tool of reason and stock the national mind with historical garbage." It handed on to the working class "no impulse of liberation, no revolutionary values, no universal language. Instead it transmitted the deadly germs of utilitarianism" — the "one authentic, articulated ideology" which it was able to produce. As for Marxism, no traffic has been known between it and these barbarous shores.

The misunderstandings are so large that it is tempting to capitulate before them. They assume, in any case, hermetic divisions between national cultures which are quite unreal (one thinks of Hobbes and Descartes, Hume and Rousseau, Coleridge and German philosophy). But what our authors have done, inter alia, is (after skipping over the entire phase of the heroic annunciation of bourgeois individualism, in which the English contribution, if somewhat late, was by no possible account negligible): (1) to ignore the importance of the Protestant and bourgeois-democratic inheritance; (2) to overlook the importance of capitalist political-economy as "authentic, articulated ideology"; (3) to forget the contribution, over more than three centuries, of British natural scientists; (4) to confuse an empirical idiom with an ideology.

It should be sufficient to mention these points for them to become self-evident. And more might be added. One might offer a discussion of the realist novel, or of romanticism, if one had not already been warned off by Nairn's reference to "a dilettante literary culture descended from the aristocracy" — the thought of a professional and truly-bourgeois literary culture which would win the approval of that tone is enough to make one blench. The point is not to rush in to the defence of British intellectual traditions, or to minimize their characteristic limitations. It is to call for a more collected and informed analysis, and one which takes some account of their historic strengths. Spleen is not a particularly effective cutting instrument.

Britain is, after all, a protestant country. Catholicism (as a centre of spiritual or intellectual authority) was smashed in this country more thoroughly than in all but two or three other parts of Christendom. Moreover, it was smashed, not by one rival religious ideology with its own authority, discipline, and well-structured theology, but by the comparative decomposition of any centre of authority. All those sermons and pamphlets, all that prayer before battle, all that wrangling about oaths and altars and bishops, all that sectarian fragmentation, which Anderson finds so unenlightened, so sadly distanced from real economic motives, was in fact part of an epochal cultural confrontation. The English Revolution was fought out in religious terms, not because the participants were confused as to their real interests but because religion mattered. The wars were, in good measure, about religious authority. A man's right of property in his own conscience and religious allegiances had become just as real, and momentarily more real, than
economic property rights. At this point in the growth of the human mind, the psychic crisis between old modes and new was exactly here.

Our authors would prefer it if it had been, not about religion but against religion altogether. An historian cannot bother with this kind of objection. It is more important to note the consequences of what actually happened. To suggest that the "ideological legacy of the Revolution was almost nil" is to confuse formal with real attributes. By destroying the established magic of the Church, triumphant Protestantism made possible the multiplication of rationality, and the dispersal of rational initiatives, throughout the country and in different social milieus. Even before it had taken possession of the market economy, private enterprise and a qualified laissez faire had taken over the cultural economy. It was not necessary in Britain for a radical intelligentsia to mobilize under its chieftains to attack clericalism and obscurantism because the enemy, although it persisted, had no power to blockade intellectual life. And since the eighteenth-century Church can scarcely be said to have had an articulated ideology, it was unnecessary for its critics, in that area at least, to develop a systematic opposition. In France the armies of Orthodoxy and Enlightenment faced each other. But Britain was more like a weakly occupied country, in which—whenever orthodoxy had repelled a small frontal attack, it found itself harassed on its flanks, at its rear, or even within its own midst. The Enlightenment proceeded in Britain, not like one of those flood-tides massing against a crumbling dyke, but like the tide which seeps into the eroded shores, mudflats and creeks of an estuary whose declivities are ready to receive it.

Other countries may have produced a "true intelligentsia," an "internally unified intellectual community"; but it is rubbish to suggest that there is some crippling disablement in the failure of British intellectuals to form "an independent intellectual enclave" within the body politic. Rather, there were formed in the eighteenth century scores of intellectual enclaves, dispersed over England and Scotland, which made up for what they lost in cohesion by the multiplicity of initiatives afforded by these many bases and (as the entire record of scientific and technical advance witnesses) by the opportunities afforded for the interpenetration of theory and praxis. Much of the best in our intellectual culture has always come, not from the Ancient Universities nor from the self-conscious metropolitan coteries, but from indistinct nether regions. What our authors overlook is the enormous importance of that part of the revolutionary inheritance which may be described, in a secular sense, as the tradition of dissent.

At one end of the scale, the gentry (Newton, Fielding, Gibbon) made one contribution; and at the other end the artisans (with their scores of inventors) made another. Oxford and Cambridge, with their attempt to instate an irrelevant theocratic platonism, contributed little, except by a repulsion which accentuated the sceptical tone of those who were
repelled. Edinburgh and Glasgow contributed far more (Hume, Smith, the Scottish physiocrats, and on to—hëlas—James Mill and the Edinburgh Review), and redressed the insularity of English thought by their more fluent intercourse with France. In the midst of all this, as the major carrier for these traditions, was that mixed middle-class society, both metropolitan and provincial, somewhat Unitarian in tone—the colleges of Hoxton, Hackney and Warrington, the Birmingham Lunar Society, the Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society, and those circles at Norwich, Derby, Nottingham, or Sheffield whose conversation Coleridge found—when canvassing for The Watchman in Birmingham—to be “sustained with such animation [and] enriched with such a variety of information.”

These English bourgeois were not, all of them, the bloody fools that Nairn and Anderson take them to be. It is not an argument between them and those of Other Countries. It happened one way in France, and another way here. The French experience was marked by a clarity of confrontation, a levée en masse of the intelligentsia, a disposition towards systematizing and towards intellectual hierarchy—the staff officers, attachés, and so on, who grouped round the great radical chefs de bataille. The English experience certainly did not encourage sustained efforts of synthesis: since few intellectuals were thrown into prominence in a conflict with authority, few felt the need to develop a systematic critique. They thought of themselves, rather, as exchanging specialized products in a market which was tolerably free, and the sum of whose intellectual commodities made up the sum of “knowledge.” This encouraged, in some areas, laxness and irresponsibility. But the number of specialized producers was very large; and the historian of British intellectual culture in the latter eighteenth and in much of the nineteenth centuries is impressed with the vigour of the tradition of dissent, the manifold collisions and mutations—not the distinction of this or that mind, but the number of lesser talents, each with some particular but limited distinction.

One may agree that such a tradition was incapable of nurturing a Marx, although without it Capital could not have been written. It was, however, capable of nurturing Darwin, and the significance with which that moment illuminates the strengths of certain intellectual traditions illuminates also the fatal blindness of the Anderson-Nairn critique of “empiricism.” With the usual pig-headed refusal to conform to schematic proprieties of most British phenomena, English science was given a charter, not by insurgent encyclopædists, but by a royalist Lord Chancellor. The terms of the charter are worth recalling:

“For the wit and mind of man, if it work upon matter, which is the contemplation of the creatures of God, worketh according to the stuff, and is limited thereby; but if it work upon itself, as the spider worketh his web, then it is endless, and brings forth indeed cobwebs of learning, admirable for the fineness of thread and work, but of no substance or profit.”

And upon the heels of this there followed the astonishing injunction:

"The end of our foundation is the knowledge of the causes and secret motions of things and the enlarging of the bounds of human empire, to the effecting of all things possible."^{48}

The exact nature of the relationship between the bourgeois and the scientific revolutions in England is undecided. But they were clearly a good deal more than just good friends. In a matter of a few decades great territories of natural phenomena which had been shut against the intellectual public were thrown open. Bacon's casuistry of first and second causes ("the contemplation of the creatures of God") neatly dissociated manifest phenomena, whose exploration was fully authorized, from ulterior ideological causes, towards which a formal ritual obeisance was expected but which as effective influences were allowed to lapse. And this suited very well the mood of those intellectuals in the eighteenth century who, finding themselves to be very little opposed by theological authority, were quite content to leave it alone and get on with the exploration of nature. Many of the clergy themselves, from the security of their rectories, were able to further the Enlightenment; even the atrocious Bishop of Llandaff first founded his reputation upon his contributions, not to theology but to chemistry. The Unitarians pushed God so far back into his Baconian heaven of first causes that he became, except for purposes of moral incantation, quite ineffectual. He was left alone (alas! to be fetched out later against the people as a furious Papa) while the bourgeoisie entered into their true inheritance—the exploitation of nature.

It should not have happened this way. Heaven should have been stormed, molte con brio, and the fruits of knowledge should have been wrested from the clutches of priests. But happen this way it did. (The contrast between let us say, Zola on the one hand, and Hardy and George Moore on the other, or between Anatole France and E. M. Forster, points to a continuing difference in literary modes.) It was a happening so epoch-making that we can excuse our authors for not noticing it: we often see the houses but ignore the landscape. But it was an advance, however spectacular, that was contained within its own ideological limitations. On the one hand, the framework given by Newton to the physical and natural sciences tended to share the same naturalistic, mechanical bias as English constitutional theory. On the other hand, the licence to explore nature was not extended with the same liberality to the exploration of human nature, society.

It is this which makes the moment of The Origin of Species so moving, and, in its own terms, a vindication of the empirical mode. For from their base in "second causes" the natural sciences were massing against the First Cause itself; or, if not against God (who as events proved was willing to be shuffled off to an even more remote empyrean), then against magical notations of the origin of the natural world and of man. Biology,
geology, natural history, astronomy, after decades of empirical accumu-
lation—all were pressing matters to a decision. And the break-through,
the moment of synthesis, came, not with some English Voltaire
immersed in metropolitan tumult, but with a neurotic, secluded, intel-
lectually evasive man, once destined for a clerical career, who
nevertheless was the protagonist of an inherited empirical habit, which
was raised in him to a pitch of intensity until it became a breath-taking
intellectual courage, as he laboriously restructured whole sciences and
effected a new synthesis. We cannot come away from any account of
Darwin without the conviction that a respect for fact is not only a
technique, it can also be an intellectual force in its own right. When the
work was done the fracas could begin. Huxley could storm heaven.
Darwin, wiser than him, took evasive action and offered a comment on
the fertilization of orchids.41 He knew that no one in Heaven had the
patience to study barnacles long enough to give him any answer. We
remember Huxley as the ideologue, Darwin as the scientist.

This indicates one place where the English intellectual tradition
offered something more than "nullity." In one sense, Darwinism appears
as the natural and inevitable outcome of a culture of agrarian capitalists,
who had spent decades in empirical horticulture and stock-breeding.
Most revolutions in thought have this "natural" appearance, so that
some scholars ask, not how Darwinism happened, but why it took so
long to happen. In another sense, nothing was natural about a trans-
mutation of scientific thought which overthrew fixed categories which
had stood for centuries and which effected a new view of human nature.
There should have been more crisis than there was, more of a parting of
the ideological heavens. The intellectuals should have signalled their
commitments; signed manifestos; identified their allegiances in the
reviews. The fact that there was comparatively little of this may be
accounted for by the fact that Darwin addressed a protestant and post-
Baconian public, which had long assumed that if God was at issue with
a respectable Fact (or if a dogma was at odds with a man's conscience)
it was the former which must give way. The intelligentsia of Other
Countries have been more fortunate. They have been able to fight their
battles with more panache and more appeal to Universals because they
have managed to preserve Holy Church as a foil to this day.

Two other ideological inheritances of the Revolution (both of them
unnoticed by our authors) have this same "natural" appearance. I
cannot examine here the bourgeois democratic tradition beyond
insisting that, for good or ill, it contributed vastly more to the intel-
lectual universe of the English working class than the utilitarianism of
which they make so much. This contribution was made not only at an
articulate and institutional level but also to the sub-political consensus
of a people who (as two rather perceptive English Marxists once noted)
"have always resented harsh mechanical organization of any kind."42

I have commented already upon the genesis of capitalist political
This was a far more systematic, highly structured ideology than is to be found in purely political or philosophical areas. It was so, in part, because the more advanced agriculturalists, as well as some of the manufacturers, found themselves to be impeded by the fairly systematic (although disintegrating) system of mercantilist and paternalist theory, as well as statutory restrictions. One system called into existence a contrary, and superior, system.

Adam Smith brought to the economic functions of the State the same jealousy which Locke had shown to its political functions; like Locke he wished power and initiative to be dispersed among the propertied. The economic protestantism—the "political" (but more truthfully anti-political) economy—which Smith founded did not threaten to overthrow the State: it simply turned its back upon it, leaving to it only vestigial functions. The triumph of his theories, and the satisfactory manner of their working, explain the comparative indifference of the industrial bourgeoisie to political theory as such: it didn't matter. When placed in relation to this immensely coherent ideology, with its compelling analogies with "natural" process, Utilitarianism does not appear as the "one authentic" ideology of the bourgeoisie but simply as a subordinate tradition within it—a reminder (which the complexities of industrialism made daily more pressing) that the state had important functions.

Nor was the theoretical construction of Smith and of his successors in any sense at all the product of "blind empiricism." It was a systematic framework of thought so comprehensive and yet so flexible that it formed the structure within which the social sciences and political thought of Victorian England were still framed; it underwrote commercial imperialism; it conquered the intelligence of the bourgeoisie throughout the world; and after a sharp-fought and impressive resistance (Hodgskin, Owen, O'Brien) the English working-class movement capitulated before it and regrouped in order to maximize its rewards within the framework which it dictated. Finally, it has survived, less in sophisticated theory than in popular myth, until this day. It is in the name of some "natural" law of a free economy that the public tolerates its unfreedom in the face of the monopolists, the land-speculators, the controllers of the media of communication.

How is it possible for Marxists to overlook this when Marx himself saw at a glance that this was his most formidable ideological opponent, and devoted his life's work to overthrowing it? But in all this I cannot see empiricism as an ideology at all. Anderson and Nairn have confused an intellectual idiom, which for various historical reasons has become a national habit, with an ideology. Bacon and Hazlitt, Darwin and Orwell, may all have employed this idiom, but they can scarcely be said to have been attached to the same ulterior ideological assumptions. There has recently been an attempt, it is true, to erect empiricism into an ideology, or an end-of-ideology. But while this has no doubt been
flattering to the British, it has not been convincing, and the fashion is very nearly over—Talcott Parsons, and the new grand model of the self-regulating sociological economy, is already massing on the horizon.

Idiom is not unimportant. The empirical idiom can favour insular resistances and conceptual opportunism. But it may also conceal acute intelligence and a conceptual toughness which is immanent rather than explicit; at best it has carried the realism of the English novel, and has served—notably in the natural sciences—as an idiom superbly adapted to the interpenetration of theory and praxis.

Darwin wrote in an early letter, after a meeting with a friend, "he has a grand fact of some large molar tooth in the Trias." Marx also had this respect for "grand facts," and in both men we can see that exciting dialectic of making-and-breaking, the formation of conceptual hypotheses and the bringing of empirical evidence to enforce or to break down these hypotheses, that friction between "molecular" research and "macroscopic" generalization to which Wright Mills often referred. In any vital intellectual tradition this dialectic, this abrasion between models and particulars, is always evident. What is so profoundly depressing about so much in the various variants of Marxism since the death of Engels is their stubborn resistance to all the "grand facts" which the twentieth century has thrown into our faces, and their equally stubborn defence (or only trivial modifications) of the inherited model. We may agree as to the mediocrity, sloth, and parochialism of much contemporary British thought. And we must agree that the British working-class movement "needs theory like no other."

IV

The accounts which Anderson and Nairn offer us of the history of the British working class scarcely encourage enquiry. As we slide down the slopes of Nairn's prose (in his Anatomy of the Labour Party) there is no foothold, no growth of historical fact, however stunted and shallowly rooted, to which we may catch hold. Fabians appear, of astonishing influence and longevity, to whom—apart from the Webbs—no name is given; a "Left" is rebuked, which remains, from 1900 to 1960, almost faceless and without a voice; trade unions are moved around the rhetorical board, but which trade unions are not identified. History is
flattened, stretched, condensed; awkward facts are not mentioned; awkward decades (e.g. 1920 to 1940) are simply elided. As one proceeds, the pharisaism of tone becomes (to borrow a phrase) suffocating. It is not only that no one has ever been right; no one has ever been wrong in an interesting or reputable way. It is “doubtful... if any other working-class movement has produced as many ‘traitors’... as has Labourism”; but the thesis must be balanced by an antithetical sneer at “the angry denunciation of leaders in which sectarians and the Labour Left have always indulged.” This “Left,” which is never identified, is scourged for its “characteristic moralism,” “painful and shameful impotence,” “mindless passion which is only the obverse of its ideological subjection,” and for its “total ignorance about how the Party works and ought to work.” Labourism’s “dominant ethos” has been “timorous curmudgeony and funeral moralism,” “sunk in hope­lessly dusty routines and indescribably boring rhetoric,” “its proper place in the British firmament midway between the House of Lords and the Boy Scouts.”

We all of us make this kind of face at times, but we do not mistake a grimace for high theory. We may select four critical areas of weakness which both authors display. First, they have an inability to comprehend the political context of ideas and choices. Second, there is an absence of any serious sociological dimension to their analysis. Third, there is a crucial vulgarization of Gramsci’s notion of “hegemony.” And fourth, they display not the least insight into the impact upon the British Labour movement of Communism.

The first point—the political innocence of our authors—is the most difficult to discuss, since it could be pursued satisfactorily only in the close examination of particulars. It is the opacity of their argument whenever we come to particular historical contexts which both inhibits discussion and gives to their thesis a certain compulsive plausibility.

History, however, is made up of episodes, and if we cannot get inside these we cannot get inside history at all. This has always been inconvenient to the schematists, as Engels noted in 1890: “the materialist conception of history... has a lot of friends nowadays to whom it serves as an excuse for not studying history”:

“Our conception of history is above all a guide to study, not a lever for construction after the manner of the Hegelians. Only too many of the younger Germans simply make use of the phrase, historical materialism... in order to get their own relatively scanty historical knowledge... fitted together into a neat system as quickly as possible, and they then think themselves something very tremendous.”

The burden of our authors’ argument is that it is the tragedy of our history that Marxism passed the British working class by. This is blamed upon the insularity and sociological conservatism of the British trade unions, and upon the default of British intellectuals. A simple
objectivity-subjectivity model is employed, in which the trade unionists are seen as blind, instinctive *praxis*, and the intellectuals as the embodiment of articulate political consciousness. Since the Marxist intelligentsia did not appear, the workers became subject to a tributary stream of capitalistic ideology, Fabianism.

If, however, we place this model in a particular political context, it does not do so well. At any time between 1890 and the present day we will find a very substantial minority tradition, influencing major trade unions, which belongs to the articulate Left. We will find systematic grass-roots Marxist education—S.D.F., N.C.L.C., Communist Party—which, while no doubt doctrinaire, has been no more doctrinaire than the Marxism which (until recently) has been offered to the proletariat of Other Countries. At the same time an examination of the actual record would show that our authors have greatly exaggerated the influence of the "Fabians," and, if we leave aside the direct influence of Communism, most of the intellectuals who had an important influence upon the British Labour Movement between 1920 and 1945 were either social reformers within a Liberal tradition (J. A. Hobson, Beveridge, Boyd Orr), or *marxisant* independents (Brailsford, Laski, Strachey, Cole), or ethical socialists (Tawney, Orwell) whose contribution was somewhat more than "sentimental moralizing." Not one of these loosely defined groups conforms with Anderson's characterization of Fabianism—"complacent confusion of influence with power, bovine admiration for bureaucracy, ill-concealed contempt for equality, bottomless philistinism." The influence of the "true" Webbian Fabianism over these years was slight, and was largely confined to certain career politicians of Labour. It became vastly more important after 1945; but here we should examine the political context which favoured this tendency, rather than other tendencies which were on offer and which appeared more influential in 1945. What our authors have done is to pick up a casual impression of the trade union conservatism and the intellectual inertia of the past fifteen years, and offer it as an interpretation of a hundred years of history.

The real history will only disclose itself after much hard research; it will not appear at the snap of schematic fingers. But if we are to begin to comprehend the British Left since 1880 we must take very much more seriously the international and imperialist context. One of the "grand facts" of the twentieth century which the orthodox Marxist model finds it difficult to accommodate is the resurgent nationalism of the imperialist climax. This foul politico-cultural climate, deeply contaminating the masses in the metropolitan countries, has presented quite exceptional problems to the Left. It is sheer moonshine to present the last eighty years in a way which suggests that the Left has been offered, throughout that time, the clear alternatives of developing a "hegemonic" strategy, aimed at the conquest of class power, or of capitulation to capitalist forms. There have been fleeting moments—the early 1890s,
1911–14, 1945–47—when, in real political terms, a vigorous socialist strategy was practicable. The movement of the 1890s crashed into the Boer War; the syndicalist surge of 1911–14 was smothered in the first great war; while the potentialities of 1945–47 were abolished by the Cold War. It was the night of Mafeking, in which the most sacred class distinctions dissolved in nationalist hysteria, which signalled the entry into this terrible epoch. In the action of the dockers on the Victoria and Albert docks, who threatened to refuse to service all ships which were not decorated in honour of Mafeking's relief—those same dockers upon whose support Tom Mann had sought to found a proletarian internationalism—we can already see the overwhelming defeats ahead.46

Thereafter the common experience of the British Left has been to find itself in a context which afforded very little opportunity for strategic advance, but which at the same time imposed exceptional duties of solidarity with other peoples. The "oppositional" mentality of the British Left is certainly a limiting outlook; but it has grown up simply because our Left has had so bloody much to oppose. Anyone who has more than a bookish knowledge of the Left knows this to be so.

This Left, both working-class and intellectual, with its crude and no doubt "moralistic" refusal to compromise with imperialism, does not appear in the Nairn-Anderson canon. Indeed, at points the record is plainly falsified:

"All political groups—Conservatives, Liberals, and Fabians—were militantly imperialist in aims. . . . The nascent socialist movement shared in the general jingoism, Webb, Hyndman, and Blatchford—Fabian, 'Marxist' and ILP-supporter—respectively the most influential, the most 'advanced' and the most popular spokesmen of the Left, were all in their different ways vocal imperialists."47

This is to cut history to fit a model with a vengeance. Anderson can do this only by ignoring the acute tensions within Liberalism (the Irish conflict, Lloyd George emerging as "pro-Boer," etc.); by confusing the socialist tradition with the small elitist Fabian group;48 and by trimming his examples—William Morris, Tom Mann and Keir Hardie would have offered a different interpretation. (Similarly, Nairn offers Tillett's notorious outburst of chauvinism at the first annual conference of the I.L.P. as if it were the authentic I.L.P. article; he does not mention that Tillett was immediately rebuked.49) It is certainly true that imperialism penetrated deeply into the labour movement and even into the socialist groups; this is the tragedy of European socialism in this century. But an examination of the very examples which Anderson cites—the suspicion with which the suppressed jingoism of Hyndman and Blatchford was regarded by a substantial part of their own following, and the rapidity with which they lost this following when it became fully exposed—would reveal a very much more complex picture.
The British Left, in the past eighty years, has never been offered abstract theoretical choices, but has been immersed in ineluctable political contexts characteristic of the metropolitan imperialist power. If we glance across the past fifty years at those issues around which the Left-Right conflict was most sharply engaged, we will find that most of them arise from this context: opposition to war, the response to the Russian Revolution, the independence of India, the rise of Fascism, the Spanish War, the Second Front, the Cold War, German Rearmament, the Kenya and Cyprus wars, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. And this is the recurrent life-cycle of a Left upon which our authors never cease to heap scorn for its insularity; the parish within which they suppose the British Left to have been confined is in reality that of their own imperfect historical understanding. Increasingly compromised by, as well as confused by, its responses to Communism, it is a tradition which has lost much of its coherence and self-confidence since the last war. Nevertheless it is still there; and the temporary triumph of C.N.D. at Labour’s Annual Conference in 1960 appears not (as Nairn has it) as a “miracle” but as the authentic expression of a tradition, deeply rooted, not only in an intelligentsia but in the trade unions and constituency parties.

Triumphs, of course, have been rare. They have been, in any final form, rare also in Other Countries. But only the platonist supposes that politics is an arena in which the enlightened can pursue, in a single-minded way, only teleological ends, such as “the conquest of class power.” They are those who are living today who are oppressed and who are suffering, and politics is about them as much as about the future. A politics which ignores immediate solidarities will become peculiarly theoretic, ruthless, and self-defeating. There is even a sense (but not a Fabian sense) in which in a metropolitan imperialist country even the politics of the Left must be, on occasion, that damnable art of the possible. Have our authors really begun to comprehend the scale of human suffering in this century, and how many burning particular issues our Left has had thrust upon it where the obligations of solidarity left no choice—now the Meerut prisoners, now Munich, now Suez; now Ibadan, now Rhodesia; now Abyssinia, now Kenya; now Spain and now Viet-Nam.

The overthrow of imperialism has generally been, not the first item on the agenda, but a little lower down—among the other business—when we have tried to save these lives, or, perhaps, avert the annihilation of all historical agendas. Meanwhile it has been possible to protest, to alert public opinion, to mobilize pressure-groups in order to mitigate the rigour of imperialist rule, or to express solidarity with Other Countries. British democratic structures, with their innumerable defences against any ultimate confrontation of class forces, have nevertheless exceptional opportunities for registering partial, oppositional pressures. Nairn tells us that the Left and Right in the Labour Party
have been engaged, for about sixty years, in pseudo-conflict; but he scarcely ever bothers to tell us what this conflict was about. Whose blood was it, then, that flowed beneath those bridges which have carried history to the present day? We are in no position to pass judgment upon its failures unless we can assess whether or not the Left did succeed in influencing events in this actual situation or that. If it could be shown that the Left had contributed effectively to the defeat of Nazism, or to the detachment of India from imperial rule without an Indo-Chinese or Algerian blood-bath, then might we persuade Nairn to restrain for a moment his gestures of disgust? It would, of course, have been better if the Left had seized State power; every sectarian tyro knows that.

So let us look at history as history—men placed in actual contexts which they have not chosen, and confronted by indelible forces, with an overwhelming immediacy of relations and duties and with only a scanty opportunity for inserting their own agency—and not as a text for hectoring might-have-beens. An interpretation of British Labourism which attributes all to Fabianism and intellectual default is as valueless as an account of Russia between 1924 and 1953 which attributes all to the vices of Marxism, or of Stalin himself. And one thing which it lacks (our second point) is any sociological dimension.

This can be seen in our authors’ schematic handling of the concept of class. In their extraordinarily intellectualized presentation of history, class is clothed throughout in anthropomorphic imagery. Classes have the attributes of personal identity, with volition, conscious goals, and moral qualities. Even when overt conflict is quiescent we are to suppose a class with an unbroken ideal identity, which is slumbering or has instincts and the rest.

This is in part a matter of metaphor; and—as we see in the hands of Marx—it sometimes offers a superbly swift comprehension of some historical pattern. But one must never forget that it remains a metaphorical description of a more complex process, which happens without volition or identity. If the metaphor, in the hands of Marx, sometimes misleads, in the hands of Anderson and Nairn it becomes a substitute for history. “It”—the bourgeoisie or working class—is supposed to remain the same undivided personality, albeit at different stages of maturity, throughout whole epochs; and the fact that we are discussing different people, with changing traditions, in changing relationships both as between each other and as between themselves and other social groups, becomes forgotten.

An example may be taken from their handling of the decline of Chartism. Chartism (Anderson finds) was “wrecked by its pitifully weak leadership and strategy”; the working class then suffered “extreme exhaustion,” and with the decline of Chartism “disappeared for thirty years the élan and combativity of the class. A profound caesura in English working-class history supervened.” “Henceforward it evolved, separate but subordinate, within the apparently unshakeable
structure of British capitalism." As a description this is partly true. The end of Chartism marks a very significant turning-point in the direction of working-class agitation—a turning-point which can be found (usually later, and not always in so decisive a form) in the history of other advanced industrial capitalisms. But if Anderson had taken some account of our "nerveless historiography" he would have found that the turn can already be detected some years before 1848, and that what was going on is a far-reaching change within the working class itself. A part of this change, in sociological terms, was the pulling-apart of different occupational groups, newer and older, skilled and unskilled, organized and unorganized, metropolitan and provincial, which had been momentarily united in the great agitations leading up to the Chartist climax in 1839.

The change can be registered in various ways—the introduction of the "no politics" rule into certain trade unions (e.g. Miners’ Association, 1842) is one, the new model consumers’ co-operative movement (Rochdale, 1844) is another. What one observes is the formation of the extraordinarily deep sociological roots of reformism. What impressed one shrewd observer, when visiting Lancashire in the depths of the depression of 1842, was not the impermanence of the "factory system" but its durability:

"Suffering here has not loosened the bands of confidence; millions of property remain at the mercy of a rusty nail or the ashes of a tobacco-pipe, and yet no one feels alarm for the safety of his stock or machinery, though in case of an operative Jacquerie they could not be defended by all the military force of England."

On the contrary, the distress “has brought the masters and the men closer together, and exhibited demonstratively their mutuality of interests.” The workers had come to fear, above all, not the machine but the loss of the machine—the loss of employment.

The psychological adjustment to the "factory system" entailed further adjustments. A "profound caesura" exists, not in the history but in Anderson’s analysis; or, rather, in the kind of history of which he approves. For the workers, having failed to overthrow capitalist society, proceeded to warren it from end to end. This "caesura" is exactly the period in which the characteristic class institutions of the Labour Movement were built up—trade unions, trades councils, T.U.C., co-ops, and the rest—which have endured to this day. It was part of the logic of this new direction that each advance within the framework of capitalism simultaneously involved the working class far more deeply in the status quo. As they improved their position by organization within the workshop, so they became more reluctant to engage in quixotic outbreaks which might jeopardize gains accumulated at such cost. Each assertion of working-class influence within the bourgeois-democratic state machinery, simultaneously involved them as partners
(even if antagonistic partners) in the running of the machine. Even the indices of working-class strength—the financial reserves of trade unions and co-ops—were secure only within the custodianship of capitalist stability. One cannot rehearse the whole story. This is the direction that was taken, and, beneath all differences in ideological expression, much the same kind of imbrication of working-class organizations in the status quo will be found in all advanced capitalist nations. We need not necessarily agree with Wright Mills that this indicates that the working class can be a revolutionary class only in its formative years; but we must, I think, recognize that once a certain climactic moment is passed, the opportunity for a certain kind of revolutionary movement passes irrevocably—not so much because of “exhaustion” but because more limited, reformist pressures, from secure organizational bases, bring evident returns. Far too often in his account of twentieth-century developments, Nairn, in his attention to parliamentary epiphenomena, mistakes these for the real movement, and underestimates both the intensity of actual conflicts on the ground, and the truly astronomic sum of human capital which has been invested in the strategy of piece-meal reform. It is this sociological and institutional basis of reformism which has made it so secure, and no amount of denunciation—by Hyndman of its “palliatives” or by Nairn of its “corporative ideology”—will trouble it at all.

From these sociological formations it is possible to envisage three kinds of socialist transition, none of which have in fact ever been successfully carried through. First, the syndicalist revolution in which the class institutions displace the existing State machine; I suspect that the moment for such a revolution, if it was ever practicable, has now passed in the West. Second, through a more or less constitutional political party, based on the class institutions, with a very clearly articulated socialist strategy, whose cumulative reforms bring the country to a critical point of class equilibrium, from which a rapid revolutionary transition is pressed through. Third, through further far-reaching changes in the sociological composition of the groups making up the historical class, which entail the break-up of the old class institutions and value-system, and the creation of new ones.

It is the second possibility which has been most generally debated in the British Left, although, in my view, the third—or some mixture of the second and third—should still be kept in mind. It is abundantly evident that working people have, within capitalist society, thrown up positions of “countervailing power.” Of course, “the final balance of forces,” the “permanent net superiority of the hegemonic class,” is not in dispute. Of course, a task of the Left has long been to form what Nairn describes as “an ideological and practical synthesis uniting the immediacy of reforms with the remoter ideal of a socialist society.” This is exactly the perspective which the former New Left set itself,
although we termed it, somewhat more succinctly, "reformist tactics within a revolutionary strategy." But in any case, whichever method of analysis is pursued, a good deal of this is only warm air; we have stated a problem, but are no nearer its solution. The real work of analysis remains; the sociological analysis of changing groups within the wage-earning and salaried strata; the points of potential antagonism and alliance; the economic analysis, the cultural analysis, the political analysis, not only of forms of State power but also of the bureaucracies of the Labour movement.

An example of our authors' schematizing will be found in the adoption of Gramsci's notion of "hegemony." "Hegemony," Anderson tells us

"was defined by Gramsci as the dominance of one social bloc over another, not simply by means of force or wealth, but by a total social authority whose ultimate sanction and expression is a profound cultural supremacy. ... The hegemonic class is the primary determinant of consciousness, character and customs throughout the society.

To this Anderson adds the antithesis of a "corporate class." The English proletariat emerged in the nineteenth century as a class "distinguished by an immovable corporate class-consciousness and almost no hegemonic ideology":

"This paradox is the most important single fact about the English working class. If a hegemonic class can be defined as one which imposes its own ends and its own vision on society as a whole, a corporate class is conversely one which pursues its own ends within a social totality whose global determination lies outside it.

The short answer to this is that, by this definition, only a ruling-class can be a hegemonic class, and, by the same definition, a subordinate class must be "corporate." But Anderson translates this to the ground of ideological aspiration:

"A hegemonic class seeks to transform society in its own image, inventing afresh its economic system, its political institutions, its cultural values, its whole 'mode of insertion' into the world. A corporate class seeks to defend and improve its own position within a social order accepted as given." 57

From this point forwards it is possible for Anderson and Nairn to employ these terms, "hegemonic" and "corporate," in exactly the same way as socialists have customarily employed the terms "revolutionary" and "reformist." We do not have a new tool of analysis here but a sophistication of the old. 58

The new terms might be an improvement upon the old; or it may not matter. But it would be unfortunate if this man-handling of the concept were to distract attention from Gramsci's deeply cultured and original (if frequently ambiguous) insights. Gramsci wrote, not about hegemonic classes but the hegemony of a class—"the hegemony of a social group
over the entire national society exercised through so-called private organizations, such as the Church, the municipalities, the schools, etc.”

In the words of a sensitive expositor:

“By ‘hegemony’ Gramsci seems to mean a socio-political situation, in his terminology a ‘moment,’ in which the philosophy and practice of a society fuse or are in equilibrium; an order in which a certain way of life and thought is dominant, in which one concept of reality is diffused throughout society in all its institutional and private manifestations, informing with its spirit all taste, morality, customs, religious and political principles, and all social relations, particularly in their intellectual and moral connotation. An element of direction and control, not necessarily conscious, is implied. This hegemony corresponds to a state power conceived in stock Marxist terms as the dictatorship of a class.”

Gramsci was breaking out of the schematic model to which Lenin had reduced the theory of the State in *State and Revolution*, and restoring to it a far greater flexibility and cultural resonance. Class power might now be seen, not merely as scarcely disguised dictatorship but in far more subtle, pervasive, and therefore compulsive, forms.

I cannot say whether Gramsci's concepts fully surmount the difficulties inherent in the Marxist model of class power. But they certainly contain no warrant for their employment in the manner of Anderson and Nairn: a state of hegemony cannot be reduced to an adjectival propensity attached to a class. The antithesis to the hegemony of a class would appear to be, not the corporateness of a class but a state of naked dictatorship by a class which does not have the cultural resources and the intellectual maturity, to hold power in any other way (i.e. what Gramsci termed the “State-as-force” or “statolatry,” a condition which he implied followed upon the Russian Revolution). Strictly, the concept can only be related to that of State power, and is inapplicable to a subordinate class which by the nature of its situation cannot dominate the ethos of a society. There may be a sense in which a subordinate class could prepare for hegemony, could reach outwards towards it, by exerting increasing influence in the intellectual and moral life of the nation, within its educational institutions, through its control of organs of local government, etc.; but clearly this is most likely to be attempted through the mediation of a political party (such as the P.C.I.) substituting for a class, and at once we enter into a very different context from the kind of assured class dominance suggested by *egemonia*. The most that we are entitled to say is that a subordinate class may display an embryonic hegemony, or a hegemony within limited areas of social life.

The danger inherent in accepting the new terms is that we are led to suppose that some radically new explanation has been offered, whereas these are simply new ways of describing a long familiar set of facts. And the new account fails to give adequate weight not only to the sociological strengths of British reformism but also to its real achievements. It is strong because, within very serious limits, it has worked.
Though we must never forget the overhanging shadow of imperialism, Britain has remained a comparatively humane society; certain democratic values have been consolidated which are far from evident in the socialist world; the bargaining power of the workers is strong, not only in the matter of wages but over a wide range of further demands. The British working class has dug itself into a dense network of defensive positions. And if it has refused to move out of them and to take up an offensive posture over so many decades, this is not just because of some “corporate” conservatism but also because of an active rejection of what appeared as the only alternative ideology and strategy—Communism.

This is the most astounding lacuna in the Nairn-Anderson thesis. Nairn has accomplished the impossible, an anatomy of Labourism over the past fifty years, in 25,000 words, in which Communism as an effective influence, whether internal or external, never appears.\textsuperscript{60} This is to write \textit{Wuthering Heights} without Heathcliffe. Our authors have declaimed against the insularity of the British for so long that a wilful blindness has clouded their vision. They should look at a map. Here is this island, and there, across a few wet miles, are Other Countries. Those waters have, on occasion, been crossed. That city, London, is not in the Antarctic but has been, alongside Paris, Vienna and Prague, a great \textit{European} capital. In its East End there have been deposit after deposit of refugee and immigrant workers. In the universities there have been deposit after deposit of emigre intellectuals. Across that water there came, in the 1930s, wave after wave of refugees from Fascism; across that water there went, in the early 1940s, wave after wave of troops to assist in the liberation of Southern and Western Europe; and across that water there came, in the later 1940s and 1950s, a further wave of refugees from Eastern Europe.

Communism is inextricably part of the history of British Labourism for close on fifty years. I cannot hope to indicate here the extent of its irradiation, into intellectual life and into the “stony recesses” of British trade unionism alike. Nor do I think that this influence, in its full ambiguity, has yet found an interpreter. Those of us who have lived the experience will never be able to hold it at the distance requisite for analysis. In one sense, Communism has been present, since 1917, as the opposite pole to orthodox right-wing Labourism. Anti-Communism has provided an apologia for paralysis, an ideological cover for accommodations, the main means by which orthodox social-democracy (sometimes in active liaison with employers, the popular press, or the State) has sought to isolate the Left. The great betrayals and retreats—and most particularly those after 1945 (Bevin, Deakin, Gaitskell)—have been accompanied by a crescendo of anti-communist propaganda and measures.

In another sense, Communism has been throughout the \textit{alter ego} of the Labour and trade union Left. It is, first of all, an elementary error
to suppose that the political and industrial influence of the British Communist Party—or its intellectual influence—can be estimated from a count of party cards. A major clue to the broken circuit between theory and praxis will be found somewhere in this history, when the militants of 1920, following the advice of Lenin, formed themselves into this isolated detachment, with its intense inner life, and entered into a pattern of self-isolation already set by the S.D.F. This history is itself of great importance, most of all in the 1930s and 1940s, and not least in intellectual consequences. And, in the second place, Nairn's incomprehension at the strategic vacillation and theoretical ambiguities of the Labour Left would have been less if he had examined the peculiarly close—although not always cordial—relations between this Left and the Communist Party. The great traumatic crises of the Left over thirty years have been somewhere here—the Soviet purges, Spain, the Russo-German pact, Prague, Zhdanovism, the Hungarian Revolution—but despite this the Labour and more especially the trade union Left has over long periods operated from ideological and, to some extent, organizational bases outside the Labour Party altogether. These bases have been maintained by the Communist Party: in its press; in its trade union and shop-floor militants; and from time to time in very much broader popular-front organizations.

The compelling nature of this relationship has arisen, not from some peculiar national weakness but from the compulsive historical context, and from the British immersion within it. Similar compulsions, taking different forms, can be observed in Other Countries. And, if we except Italy, the Left in Other Countries has found it to be no easier to break out of this ideological field-of-force, and to build authentic independent bases, freed not only from Communist permeation but also from the obsessional recriminations and self-dramatizing vanguardism too often found in the Trotskyist tradition. There was some hope, at one time, that the New Left might, in an embryonic way, do exactly this. And the “miracle” of C.N.D. was a related phenomenon, when the moral bankruptcy of the C.P. after 1956 actually gave rise to the resurgence of an independent Left. It was a precious historical moment, and, in so far as we have lost it, it is an unqualified defeat.

Defeats happen. However, the notion of Anderson and Nairn that they have only to proclaim an undefined “Marxism” and the native intelligentsia will abandon their primitive empirical rites and flock to them for baptism, is peculiarly obtuse. There has been a Marxist traffic with these shores for some time—say, a hundred years. It has taken many forms. As a pattern of attraction and repulsion, Marxism and anti-Marxism permeates our culture. It permeates our Labour movement also, very much more extensively than our authors suppose. We need not labour the deficiencies of the Marxisms offered by the S.D.F. and the C.P. The characteristic movement has been one in which hundreds of thousands in the Labour movement have passed through some kind of
Marxist educational experience, to emerge after a few years—disillusioned by its irrelevance or doctrinaire tone—with some eclectic marxisant variant, articulate or inarticulate, and subded to the empirical idiom. Perhaps 100,000 passed through the S.D.F.; several times this number must have passed along the great transmission-belt of the C.P. and its auxiliaries; the Trotskyist sects of today repeat, with more factional intensity, the same experience. If our authors encounter the actual personnel of the Labour movement they will find very many of them to be a good deal more sophisticated than the conservative semplici of their imagination.

They will also find that they must encounter tedious obstacles. When Anderson affirms that "Marxism is the only thought which has rigorously united developmental and structural analysis, it is at once pure historicity (denial of all supra-historical essences) and radical functionalism (societies are significant totalities)" he provokes, even amongst the well-disposed, a tendency to become a little hard of hearing. When Nairn acclaims Marxism as "at once the natural doctrine of the working class, and the summing-up of the Enlightenment and all the highest stages of bourgeois thought into a new synthesis," the audience begins to shuffle and cough. This is an old European country. We have seen not only the rain which the new God brought to Other Countries but also the thunder and lightning—the bloody deluge. For more than a generation British intellectuals have done little else than offer blueprints for the Ark.

V

It may be useful, in conclusion, to draw together certain theoretical problems relating to Marxism and history which have arisen in this article. The main problems which we have encountered concern a model of the historical process which is undoubtedly derived from Marx. While our authors have created some difficulties on their own account, by their imperfect historical preparation or their over-schematic approach, other weaknesses appear to be inherent in the model itself. Of these we may examine the following: (1) there is the question as to the proper mode of employment of any model; (2) there is the metaphor of basis and superstructure; (3) there is some difficulty in the customary notation of an "economic" process; (4) there is the concept of class; (5) and there are problems arising from a teleological model which is preoccupied with matters of power. Since each of these problems has arisen along the way, we can proceed with the minimum of exemplification.

(1) A model is a metaphor of historical process. It indicates not only the significant parts of this process but the way in which they are interrelated and the way in which they change. In one sense, history remains irreducible; it remains all that happened. In another sense, history does not become history until there is a model: at the moment at which the
most elementary notion of causation, process, or cultural patterning, intrudes, then some model is assumed. It may well be better that this should be made explicit. But the moment at which a model is made explicit it begins to petrify into axioms. Nothing is more easy than to take a model to the proliferating growth of actuality, and to select from it only such evidence as is in conformity with the principles of selection. This is (I have suggested) what Anderson has done with the English Revolution. One can almost hear the stretching of historical textures as the garment of English events ("partially contingent but predominantly intelligible lenses") is strained to cover the buxom model of La Revolución Française. In the end, with some splitting at the seams, the job is done: it always can be. And yet if earlier Marxists had been less obsessed with the French, and more preoccupied with the English, Revolution, the model itself might have been different. Instead of one climactic moment, the Revolution, we might have had a more cumulative, epochal model, with more than one critical transition.

A further danger is that a model, even when flexibly employed, disposes one to look only at certain phenomena, to examine history for conformities, whereas it may be that the discarded evidence conceals new significances.

Must we dispense with any model? If we do so, we cease to be historians, or we become the slaves of some model scarcely known to ourselves in some inaccessible area of prejudice. The question is, rather, how is it proper to employ a model? There is no simple answer. Even in the moment of employing it the historian must be able to regard his model with a radical scepticism, and to maintain an openness of response to evidence for which it has no categories. At the best—which we can see at times in the letters of Darwin or Marx—we must expect a delicate equilibrium between the synthesizing and the empiric modes, a quarrel between the model and actuality. This is the creative quarrel at the heart of cognition. Without this dialectic, intellectual growth cannot take place.

This dialectic is always passing into a disequilibrium. We cannot get on with anything unless we accept an approximate model as a framework for our work. And the habit of the model becomes so strong, and is very often supplemented by ideological determinations, that it becomes impervious to empiric criticism. Or, under the impact of one "grand fact" after another, it disintegrates altogether and we sail through seas of inexplicable phenomena. The Marxist tradition has today fractured in both directions—on the one hand, varieties of competing orthodoxies, all of them schematic, on the other hand, the flotsam and jetsam of a system which tosses in empiric seas. It is generally true that very few, in this country, have examined with sufficient boldness and persistence, how far it may be valuable—not to revise or re-vamp—but to attempt a radical restructuring of the model.
(2) I suggested in 1957 that one crux of the question is to be found in the inadequacy of the model of basis and superstructure:

"In all their historical analysis Marx and Engels always kept in view the dialectical interaction between social consciousness... and social being. But in trying to explain their ideas they expressed them as a make-belief model.... In fact, no such basis and superstructure ever existed; it is a metaphor to help us to understand what does exist—men, who act, experience, think, and act again.

I suggested also that:

"Stalinism converted the concepts of 'reflection' and of the 'superstructure' into mechanical operations in a semi-automatic model. The conscious processes of intellectual conflict were seen not as agencies in the making of history but as an irritating penumbra of illusions, or imperfect reflections, trailing behind economic forces...."

The dialectical intercourse between social being and social consciousness—or between "culture" and "not culture"—is at the heart of any comprehension of the historical process within the Marxist tradition. If this is displaced, then we evacuate that tradition altogether. When they have reached this point on the road, my colleagues have usually either evacuated the tradition (but I can see no other that comprehends this dialectic) or have attempted to sophisticate the model (but however one emphasizes complexities, etc., the model continues to give wrong results). So we are stuck.

This may be because we have been dealing with a pseudo-problem. The tradition inherits a dialectic that is right, but the particular mechanical metaphor through which it is expressed is wrong. This metaphor from constructional engineering (similar to the boxes and building terms beloved by some sociologists) must in any case be inadequate to describe the flux of conflict, the dialectic of a changing social process. A vegetation metaphor—"this idea is rooted in this social context" or "flourished in this climate"—very often serves better, since it entails the notion of organic growth, just as biological metaphors (Anderson's "symbiosis," "sclerosed," etc.) can sometimes do. And yet these still exclude the human dimension, the agencies of human culture—the difficulty (if we follow the vegetation metaphor through) is not that a tree cannot think but that, if it could think, its thinking could not change—however imperceptibly—the soil in which it is rooted. In the end the dialectic of social change cannot be fixed in any metaphor that excludes human attributes. We can only describe the social process—as Marx showed in The Eighteenth Brumaire—by writing history. And even so, we shall end with only an account of a particular process, and a selective account of this.

All the metaphors which are commonly offered have a tendency to lead the mind into schematic modes and away from the interaction of being-consciousness. In any case, how useful has the basis-superstruc-
ture model proved to be in examining all those “grand facts” of the twentieth century—resurgent Western nationalism, Nazism, Stalinism, racialism? While it offers a point of departure, the real analysis of these phenomena must take quite different forms, in which the “superstructure” generally turns out to be interfering in quite improper ways with its “base.” The model, in fact, has an in-built tendency to reductionism, which is rather evident in Anderson:

“... the ideological terms in which the struggle was conducted were largely religious, and hence still more dissociated from economic aspirations than political idioms normally are.”

and which is all-too-evident in Nairn:

“... actual consciousness is mediated through the complex of superstructures, and apprehends what underlies them only partially and indirectly.”

Reductionism is a lapse in historical logic by which political or cultural events are “explained” in terms of the class affiliations of the actors. When a connection, or causal relationship, has been established between these events (in the “superstructure”) and a certain configuration of class interests (in the “base”), then it is thought that the demands of historical explanation—still worse, of evaluation—have been met by characterizing these ideas or events as bourgeois, petit-bourgeois, proletarian, etc. The error of reductionism consists not in establishing these connections but in the suggestion that the ideas or events are, in essence, the same things as the causative context—that ideas, religious beliefs, or works of art, may be reduced (as one reduces a complex equation) to the “real” class interests which they express.

But because we know the causative context within which an historical event arose, it does not follow that the event can therefore be explained or evaluated in terms of the cause. Attention must be paid to the autonomy of political or cultural events which, none the less, are causally conditioned by “economic” events. A psychology which reduces the infinite variety of sexual expression, from platonic love to a rape in the Romney marshes, to “sex” tells us everything and nothing. And a history or sociology which is continually reducing a superstructure to a base is either false or tedious. Old Corruption remains Old Corruption. The religious conflicts of the English Revolution were not “economic aspirations” diluted with illusions but conflicts about Church authority and doctrine. We will not understand the intensity of the conflict, the tenacity of the authoritarians nor the energy of the Puritans, unless we understand the kind of people they were, and, hence, the socio-economic context. But the mediation between “interest” and “belief” was not through Nairn’s “complex of superstructures” but through the people themselves. The Puritans did not relish the authority of the Church because they were people who
had come to dispense with (or to resent) the authority of the State in their practical lives; and the authoritarians defended the State Church with such tenacity because they were people who felt that their status and power—a whole way of ordering life—was slipping from them and must at some point be defended. If we wish to understand this mediat­ion, we require, not an incredibly cumbersome and inapposite meta­phor but a subtle, responsive social psychology.

(3) The problem is to find a model for the social process which allows an autonomy to social consciousness within a context which, in the final analysis, has always been determined by social being. Can any model encompass the distinctively human dialectic, by which history appears as neither willed nor as fortuitous; as neither lawed (in the sense of being determined by involuntary laws of motion) nor illogical (in the sense that one can observe a logic in the social process)?

“That which did all this was mind, because men did it with intelligence; it was not fate, because they did it by choice; not chance, because the results of their always so acting are perpetually the same.”

But equally, as Vico also knew, it was not will, because the outcome has been “quite contrary . . . to the particular ends that men have proposed to themselves.” 67 “What these gentlemen all lack is dialectic,” Engels exploded when, in his last years, he attempted to revise the schematic model which he, more than Marx, had been responsible for setting up:

“They never see anything but here cause and there effect. That this is a hollow abstraction, that such metaphysical polar opposites only exist in the real world during crises, while the whole vast process proceeds in the form of interaction (though of very unequal forces, the economic move­ment being by far the strongest, most elemental and most decisive) and that here everything is relative and nothing is absolute—this they never begin to see.” 68

The trouble here is of two kinds. The first concerns not so much the validity of the model as its usefulness. If the “economic movement” is thrust back to an area of ultimate causation, then, like Bacon’s first cause, it can be forgotten in its empyrean. If we relegate it to in-the-last-analysis epochal determination (and then only in the sense that productive relations entail certain characteristic and ineradicable sources of conflict, as well as certain limits which social evolution cannot transcend), then it may be asked how far—except at moments of transition between historical epochs—this model has any real relevance?

We can suppose an epochal context—feudal, capitalist, socialist—within each of which an endless variety of forms of State power, modifications of social relations, etc., may be possible. We can never guess at their range and diversity because, rich as history is, it can never exhaust possibility. But while the number of variants may be infinite, nevertheless it is infinite only within the categories of social “species.” Just as, while there may be any number of permutations of breeds of
dogs, and of mongrel cross-breeds, all dogs are doggy (they smell, bark, fawn on humans), so all capitalisms remain capitalist (foster acquisitive values, must by their nature leech the proletariat, etc.). The transmutation from one species to another is what we mean by revolution. But when we are (as historians) in the midst of an epoch, the epochal characteristics may, for us and for the generations then living, recede into unimportance beside the local particularities. What mattered to people was, not whether it was a capitalism but whether it was a ruthless or a tolerable capitalism—whether men were hurled into wars, subject to inquisitions and arbitrary arrest, or allowed some freedom of person and of organization.

In order to follow this thought through I have gone further than is warranted. For I do not suppose (any more than Engels did) that this "economic movement" is operative only in an epochal sense. It is there all the time, not only giving definition to an epoch but in the characteristic pattern of conflict and social disequilibrium in the heart of the epoch. But a second difficulty arises in respect to the customary Marxist notation of the term "economic." One part of this, sufficiently understood, is the crude assimilation of productive forces and productive relations, which reached its apogee with Stalin. But even if we effect a clear distinction the notion of economic (as opposed to social, moral, cultural) relations turns out to be an analytic category and not a distinction which can be confirmed by empirical observation:

"Production, distribution and consumption are not only digging, carrying and eating, but are also planning, organizing and enjoying. Imaginative and intellectual faculties are not confined to a 'superstructure' and erected upon a 'base' of things (including men-things); they are implicit in the creative act of labour which makes man man."

Anthropologists and sociologists have sufficiently demonstrated the inextricable interlacing of economic and non-economic relations in most societies, and the intersection of economic and cultural satisfactions. Those historians who have escaped from the toils of the Economic History Review (or of Marxism Today) are beginning to take the point. Until the late eighteenth century the common people of France and England adhered to a deeply felt "moral economy" in which the very notion of an "economic price" for corn (that is, a dissociation between economic values on the one hand and social and moral obligations on the other) was an outrage to their culture; and something of the same moral economy endures in parts of Asia and of Africa today. Or, again, in Britain it took two hundred years of conflict to subdue the working people to the discipline of direct economic stimuli, and the subjugation has never been more than partial.

The very category of economics—the notion that it is possible to isolate economic from non-economic social relations, that all human obligations can be dissolved except the cash-nexus—was the product
of a particular phase of capitalist evolution. Caudwell has described
the movement in one aspect:

"... whereas in earlier civilizations (the) relation between men is con­
scious and clear, in bourgeois culture it is disguised as a system free from
obligatory dominating relations between men and containing only innocent
relations between men and a thing... In throwing off all social restraint
the bourgeois seemed to himself justified in retaining this one restraint of
private property, for it did not seem to him a restraint at all, but an
inalienable right of man, the fundamental natural right."

And further:

"In all the distinctive bourgeois relations, it is characteristic that tender­
ness is completely expelled, because tenderness can only exist between men,
and in capitalism all relations appear to be between a man and a com­
modity... Man is completely free except for the payment of money. That
is the overt character of bourgeois relations."

From this movement we can deduce a counter-movement, which in fact
came to full expression in the great romantic critique of capitalism
which is a theme of Williams' *Culture and Society*, as men who found
themselves within the actual and mental universe of "political
economy," from which there seemed to be no escape, nevertheless
rebelled against the consequences of thus dehumanized rationality in
the name of ulterior values and sacred human obligations.

Marx and Engels, however, took this political economy as their
direct antagonist, and entered into its own categories of analysis in
order to overthrow it. Inevitably they were marked by the encounter.
Not in Marx's early philosophical manuscripts (which share many
romantic positions) but in his mature thought, revolutionary *economic*
man is offered as the antithesis to exploited *economic* man. But, first,
this was to deduce too far from a particular phase of capitalist evolu­
tion. Modes of exploitation have varied enormously, not only as
between epochs but at different times within the same epoch. We cannot
read Marc Bloch, and emerge with the view that feudal exploitation was
in any contemporary meaning primarily economic, as opposed to
military, political, etc. In eighteenth-century England the manufac­
turing workers, miners, and others, were far more conscious of being
exploited by the agrarian capitalists and middle-men, as consumers,
than by their petty employers through wage-labour; and in this country
today consumer and cultural exploitation are quite as evident as is
exploitation "at the point of production" and perhaps are more likely
to explode into political consciousness. Second, one must be cautious
about thinking of an "economic" movement as opposed to cultural,
mental, etc. When William Morris brought the romantic and the Marxist
critique together, and wrote of the "innate moral baseness" of the
capitalist system he did not indicate a moral superstructure derivative
from an economic base. He meant—and he abundantly demonstrated
his meaning—that capitalist society was founded upon forms of exploitation which are simultaneously economic, moral and cultural. Take up the essential defining productive relationship (private ownership of the means of production, and production for profit) and turn it round, and it reveals itself now in one aspect (wage-labour), now in another (an acquisitive ethos), and now in another (the alienation of such intellectual faculties as are not required by the worker in his productive rôle).

Even if “base” were not a bad metaphor we would have to add that, whatever it is, it is not just economic but human—a characteristic human relationship entered into involuntarily in the productive process. I am not disputing that this process may be broadly described as economic, and that we may thus agree that the “economic movement” has proved to be the “most elemental and decisive.” But my excursion into definitions may have more than semantic interest if two points are borne in mind: First, in the actual course of historical or sociological (as well as political) analysis it is of great importance to remember that social and cultural phenomena do not trail after the economic at some remote remove: they are, at their source, immersed in the same nexus of relationship. Second, while one form which opposition to capitalism takes is in direct economic antagonism—resistance to exploitation whether as producer or consumer—another form is, exactly, resistance to capitalism’s innate tendency to reduce all human relationships to economic definitions. The two are inter-related, of course; but it is by no means certain which may prove to be, in the end, more revolutionary. I have suggested that one way of reading the working-class movement during the Industrial Revolution is as a movement of resistance to the annunciation of economic man. The romantic critique is another kind of resistance, with revolutionary implications. The more recent long struggle to attain humane welfare services is a part of the same profoundly anti-capitalist impulse, even if advanced capitalisms have exhibited a great flexibility in assimilating its pressures. "The misery of the world is economic," Caudwell wrote, "but that does not mean that it is cash. That is a bourgeois error." It is an error which Marxists are rather too prone to fall into. And in the conclusion to his study of “Love” he wrote, with an insight which is perhaps too symmetrical:

“It is as if love and economic relations have gathered at two opposite poles. All the unused tenderness of man’s instincts gather at one pole and at the other are economic relations, reduced to bare coercive rights to commodities. This polar segregation is the source of a terrific tension, and will give rise to a vast transformation of bourgeois society.”

For men desire, fitfully, not only direct economic satisfactions, but also to throw off this grotesque “economic” disguise which capitalism imposes upon them, and to resume a human shape.

(4) No doubt Anderson might, upon reflection, accept some of these
suggestions. The fact that he is aware of the inadequacies of the model can be seen in an emphasis upon complexities, as well as in real insights and subtleties in his handling of political phenomena. Where he and Nairn are at their most schematic is in the handling of the concept of class. These classes which are marshalled, sent on manoeuvres, and marched up and down whole centuries bear so little relation to the actual people disclosed in the archives—or, for that matter, in the streets around us. It is a history-game which is infectious: in discussing their work I have found myself hypostasizing class identities—great personalized attributions of class aspiration or volition—which one knows are at best the metaphorical expression of most complex, and generally involuntary, processes.

One cannot object to the employment, upon apt occasions, of this kind of personalized metaphor. It is the cumulative attribution, in their writing, of identity, volition, and even notions of inner destiny, which evoke suspicion. When, in discussing class, one finds oneself too frequently commencing sentences with "it," it is time to place oneself under some historical control, or one is in danger of becoming the slave of one's own categories. Sociologists who have stopped the time-machine and, with a good deal of conceptual huffing and puffing, have gone down to the engine-room to look, tell us that nowhere at all have they been able to locate and classify a class. They can only find a multitude of people with different occupations, incomes, status-hierarchies, and the rest. Of course they are right, since class is not this or that part of the machine, but the way the machine works once it is set in motion—not this interest and that interest, but the friction of interests—the movement itself, the heat, the thundering noise. Class is a social and cultural formation (often finding institutional expression) which cannot be defined abstractly, or in isolation, but only in terms of relationship with other classes; and, ultimately, the definition can only be made in the medium of time—that is, action and reaction, change and conflict. When we speak of a class we are thinking of a very loosely defined body of people who share the same congeries of interests, social experiences, traditions and value-system, who have a disposition to behave as a class, to define themselves in their actions and in their consciousness in relation to other groups of people in class ways. But class itself is not a thing, it is a happening.74

If we use this control—if we keep on remembering that class-as-identity is metaphor, helpful at times in describing a flux of relationship—then a very useful dialogue can be opened up between historians and those sociologists who are willing to throw across the time-switch again. If we do not use this control, we have a very blunt cutting instrument indeed. For while we may imagine a certain internal logic, a bourgeois arch, which stretches from the twelfth century to our own time, it is rarely helpful to think of the bourgeoisie in terms so epochal that they include William de la Pole, Oliver Cromwell, and Mr. Edward Heath.
But the Nairn-Anderson employment of “working class” does exactly this; we are carried along by the impersonal pronoun, from 1790 to 1960, supposing a class with more or less unchanged sociological composition, with (after 1832) the same hermetically sealed “corporate” culture. There are continuities and family likenesses; but for most purposes they are not the epochal resemblances but the discontinuities which demand the closest analysis. It is generally a fairly easy matter to locate opposing social poles around which class allegiances congregate: the rentier here, the industrial worker there. But in size and strength these groups are always on the ascendant or the wane, their consciousness of class identity is incandescent or scarcely visible, their institutions are aggressive or merely kept up out of habit; while in between there are those amorphous, ever-changing social groups amongst whom the line of class is constantly drawn and re-drawn with respect to their polarization this way or that, and which fitfully become conscious of interests and identity of their own. Politics is often about exactly this—how will class happen, where will the line be drawn? And the drawing of it is not (as the impersonal pronoun nudges the mind into accepting) a matter of the conscious—or even unconscious—volition of “it” (the class), but the outcome of political and cultural skills. To reduce class to an identity is to forget exactly where agency lies, not in class but in men.

(5) A final reservation, which has grown more rather than less strong while reading these authors, concerns not what the model purports to explain but what it does not take into account at all. The preoccupation is with power, and with political analysts this is proper. But all human phenomena cannot be assimilated to the categories of power, nor of class; and yet there appears to be some tendency among Marxists to assume that they can, or ought to be. This arises from the teleological characteristics of the model, as it is commonly employed. The goal—working-class power—is always there, somewhere ahead, and history—and especially the history of the working class—is evaluated solely in terms of attainment towards the goal.

This is a very large question, but three comments may be made. First, history cannot be compared to a tunnel through which an express races until it brings its freight of passengers out into sunlit plains. Or, if it can be, then generation upon generation of passengers are born, live in the dark, and die while the train is still within the tunnel. An historian must surely be more interested than the teleologists allow him to be in the quality of life, the sufferings and satisfactions, of those who live and die in unredeemed time. The abolition of factory labour for children under the age of 11, or the institution of divorce, or the penny-post, may affect the power-model scarcely at all; but for those who were then living these may have affected them inexpressibly or quite perceptibly. In Nairn’s schema social reforms have scarcely any place, unless as distractions from “hegemonic” aspirations; those more subtle
inflexions in the quality of life have no place at all. But surely any mature view of history (or of contemporary actuality) must in some way combine evaluations of both kinds—of men as consumers of their own mortal existence and as producers of a future, of men as individuals and as historical agents, of men being and becoming? 

Second, there are other things left out. The model appears to brush impatiently aside experiences and social problems which appear to be very little affected by the context of class power. For example, the work-discipline entailed in industrialization appears to have affinities in quite different contexts, whether it is imposed by a Wesleyan or Stalinist ideology. Again, the scale of advanced industrial societies—the massive investment and the scope of centralized control—appear to dwarf certain kinds of individual initiatives, and to distance the individual from power, whatever the nature of this power. Problems of this kind—and there are very many of them—appear to produce only smoke and angry whirring in a power-model which, like a computer, can only answer these questions fed into it which its circuits are already constructed to answer. What goes wrong, in the examples I have cited, is not a model which insists upon the dialectic of social being and social consciousness but one which insists that this dialectic can only be mediated by, and take its significance from, social class.

And, at last, it has not escaped all notice, even in this empirical island, that the Marxist tradition has not offered very effective defences against a rather unwholesome obsession with power—whether in intellectual terms, in the assimilation of all phenomena to crude adjuncts of class, or in more “objective” ways. There is a stridency in the way our authors hammer at class and tidy up cultural phenomena into class categories, as well as a ruthlessness in their dismissal of the English experience, which stirs uneasy memories.

It is encountered most often in Nairn:

“... they tended towards an impossible and Utopian rejection of capitalism and industrialism (as with Ruskin and William Morris) or retreated into obscurity and eccentricity (like the novelists Meredith and Samuel Butler)”

There have been times, in the past half century, when that tone has accompanied retreats into an obscurity which was profound indeed. It was that tone—that sound of bolts being shot against imagination and enquiry that impelled some of us to proclaim the necessity for a New Left in 1956. If this is where we are, in 1965, then the locust has eaten nine years. If it should be so, and if there should be any danger that that tone will be mistaken for the voice of socialist humanism, then, if it comes to that, there are some of us who will man the stations of 1956 once again.
NOTES


4. Nairn—2, p. 61, and 1 and 2, passim.


9. Ibid., p. 42.

10. Nairn—2, p. 49, [sic.]


13. In this they differ from Marx whose abbreviated analysis of the genesis of capitalism, in Capital, deals largely with agrarian capitalism, and who declares unequivocally: “in the ‘categoric’ sense the farmer is an industrial capitalist as much as the manufacturer”: Capital, ed. Dona Torr (1939), i, p. 774, n. 2.


15. This is presumably not the editor of Burke’s Peerage but the same E. Burke whom Marx characterized curtly as “an out and out vulgar bourgeois”: Capital, p. 786 n.

16. Eileen Power, The Wool Trade in English Medieval History (1941), pp. 122–3. Dobb has reminded us that there had already been an almost complete turnover of landed property—a change in personnel—between the reigns of Henry VII and James I: Studies in the Development of Capitalism (1946), pp. 181–9, esp. 187. This recalls Harrington’s famous analysis in Oceana, which concludes: “a monarchy, divested of its nobility, has no refuge under heaven but an army. Wherefore the dissolution of this government caused the war, not the war the dissolution of this government.” The general problems have been discussed by Sweezy, Dobb, Hilton and others, in The Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism (1954).

17. See Christopher Hill’s discussion of “Republicanism After the Restoration,” in NLR, 3, pp. 46–51.


19. See e.g. note to Origins, p. 33.


21. Ibid., p. 49.

22. I have no doubt that I am often guilty of this in The Making of the English Working Class.

23. My objection applies with equal force to ideal types of the proletarian revolution; see my “Revolution” in Out of Apathy (1960).


25. Anderson makes very much the same point in Origins, p. 47, with illustrations from Honduras, Confucian China, etc. In his actual analysis, however, he has not sufficiently taken his own point.


27. See Royden Harrison, Before the Socialists. Studies in Labour and Politics (1965), ch. iii.


30. It is amusing to see that Bagehot is rebuked by Mr. R. H. S. Crossman for sharing the naiveties of Marx: “both succumbed to the temptation to ‘explain’ politics in terms of the class struggle,” The English Constitution (1964 edn.), pp. 30-2.


32. Frank Owen, Tempestuous Journey (1954), p. 187. See also Lloyd George’s warning to the peers (November 1909): “The Peers may decree a Revolution, but the People will direct it. If they begin, issues will be raised that they little dream of,” p. 183.

33. Origins, p. 32.

34. My Apprenticeship (Pelican, 1938), i, pp. 64-9.


38. They involve also, I suspect, an even larger confusion between ideology and ideas, between intellectual culture and the mental universe, value-system, and characteristic illusions of particular social groups, which has penetrated so deeply into the Marxist tradition that it would require a distinct examination.


40. The New Atlantis.

41. When Darwin commenced work on The Descent of Man, Emma Darwin wrote resignedly: “I think it will be very interesting, but that I shall dislike it very much as again putting God farther off.”


43. Life and Letters of Charles Darwin (New York, 1896), i, p. 495.


45. Marx and Engels, Selected Correspondence (1943), pp. 472-3.


47. Origins, p. 35.

48. See especially B. Semmel, Imperialism and Social Reform (1960), ch. iii, for the incredible story of the Coefficients. E. J. Hobsbawm, Labouring Men (1964), ch. xiv, emphasizes (in terms which may be too emphatic) that “the actual policies of the Society, up to just before the first world war, were almost always at variance with those of most other sections of the political left, radical or socialist” (p. 264).

49. Independent Labour Party, Report of First Annual Conference (1893), pp. 3, 5. Cf. Nairn—1, p. 50, and his comment: “here was the authentic spirit of Labourism; proudly anti-theoretical, vulgarly chauvinist, etc.”


52. W. Cooke Taylor, Notes of a Tour in the Manufacturing Districts of Lancashire (1842), esp. pp. 7, 43, 64, 115. Compare Marx: “The advance of capitalist production, develops a working class, which by education, tradition, habit, looks upon the conditions of that mode of production as self-evident laws of nature. The organization of the capitalist process of production, once fully developed, breaks down all resistance. . . . The dull compulsion of economic relations completes the subjection of the labourer to the capitalist” (Capital, p. 761).

53. By one estimate there were in the early 1860s in the cotton towns of South-East Lancashire, 118 co-op stores with a capital of £270,267 and an annual turnover of £1,171,066; 50 manufacturing co-ops, with a nominal capital of £2 million; mortgages to building societies of £220,000 (“the bulk of this sum consists of deposits by the lower middle, and the upper stratum of the working classes”); about £500,000 in 250 friendly societies, and “probably half as much more
owned by trades' societies"; and £3,800,498 held by 14,068 depositors (many of them skilled workers) in the savings banks (all Lancashire). J. Watts, The Facts of the Cotton Famine (1866), pp. 88-9.

54. C. Wright Mills, "The New Left," Power, Politics and People (1963), esp. p. 256: "generally it would seem that only at certain (earlier) stages of industrialization, and in a political context of autocracy, etc., do wage-workers tend to become a class-for-themselves..."; see also my "Revolution Again," NLR, 6, esd. pp. 24-30.


56. Nairn—1, p. 64.


58. See Gwyn Williams' strictures (ubi infra) upon Togliatti's "crude vulgarization, with rival classes wearing their ideologies like uniforms, a gross mutilation of Gramsci's thesis."


60. I find one mention only of an internal influence: "after 1941, with the Soviet alliance, communism became fashionable," Nairn—2, p. 37.

61. "Portugal and the End of Ultra-Colonialism," NLR, 17, p. 113. I do not intend any general criticism of this very able study.

62. Nairn—1, p. 43.


64. See my discussion of Raymond Williams' "The Long Revolution," NLR, 9 and 10.

65. Origins, p. 28.

66. Nairn—1, p. 44.


68. Selected Correspondence, p. 484.

69. I use this only for purposes of analogy. Clearly the metaphor of species introduces new rigidities and dangers.


74. I am repeating the suggestions I made in the Preface to The Making of the English Working Class, pp. 9–11. For a discussion of class-as-history, more firmly based within the sociological discipline, see S. Ossowski, Class Structure in the Social Consciousness (1963).

75. This involves also the question of ulterior and contingent historical judgments (what does one judge with? can one discover an emergent "truly human" standpoint?), which reveals itself sometimes in the muddle about historical forces which appear to Marxists as "objectively progressive" but subjectively very nasty, or vice versa. Thus Anderson (Origins, p. 29) finds the "immense, rationalizing 'charge' of the Revolution was detonated overseas" in accelerating mercantile imperialism, the slave-economy of the Carribean, etc. Other Marxists have found difficulty in deciding whether Levellers, sansculottes, and others were an "objectively" reactionary force. The problem is too large to enter into here.

76. Nairn—1, p. 41.