

# PHILOSOPHY FROM BELOW



The early issues of Radical Philosophy Magazine devoted much space to the institutional practice of philosophy. In Radical Philosophy 1, for example, there were articles on exams and on "professional philosophers". RP3 carried notes on the experience of teaching philosophy to adults, and in RP6 we printed an article entitled "Not in front of the students". Slowly, as the magazine became more established, we turned our eyes away from this function of RP. This was, I suggest, unfortunate: the more so as it went hand in hand with other omissions. Radical Philosophy stopped trying to be the magazine of a movement (which it was at the start of the magazine - albeit a small and tenuous movement), and articles like those we published debating the very nature and aims of Radical Philosophy ceased to appear.

The articles in this supplement suggest that the possibilities of Radical Philosophy really being the magazine of a movement still exist - but they are more realistically conceived and depend on our recognising and dealing with two fundamental problems. Firstly, we need to appreciate that the interests of RP students and RP lecturers are separate interests which, if not exactly irreconcilable, may often come into conflict. In practice, this points to the need for some form of separate structures within the 'movement'. Secondly, I suggest that we need to spend more time considering the development of radical philosophy outside the academy. This seems to be desirable not only because, as the CUL article argues, of the need to develop new ways of learning, but also because the hopes of widespread infiltration of university departments by radical philosophers now seem like so many dreams. It is sufficient to mention that the teaching contract of Janet Vaux, author of the report here on Sydney University, has "not been renewed"; Education cuts can be relied on to hit radical academics first and hardest.

The revival of a Radical Philosophy movement will encourage a wider debate on the nature of Radical Philosophy and, in particular, its politics. It is appropriate then that the longest article in our supplement is a first attempt to deal with the tricky relationship between being a professional philosopher and being involved in political activities. But in all the contributions there are implicit political directions suggested - and these are often made explicit. We intend Philosophy from Below to be the beginning of a debate on the politics of Radical Philosophy as well as an impetus for a true RP movement to emerge.

D.B.



## contents

### Out of the Depths

GLASGOW	(ii)
SUSSEX	(iii)
MIDDX. POLY	(iv)
OXFORD	(v)

### Reds in the Bed

TEACHING RAD. PHIL.	(vi)
POLITICS OF PHILOSOPHY	(viii)
DOWN UNDER	(xi)

### Into the Unknown

CENTRES OF MARXIST	
EDUCATION	(xii)
COMMUNIST UNIVERSITY OF	
LONDON	(xiii)
GROUP WORK	(xiv)
i.e. SUSSEX	(xv)
CONTACTS	(xvi)

This is a supplement to Radical Philosophy 15.

The purpose of this article is to give other radical students some idea of the strangle-hold that academic philosophy has in the Philosophy Departments at Glasgow. It is written firstly, in the hope that the information will provide other students with a standard against which they can assess their own courses and, secondly, by highlighting the oppression that faces the radical student at Glasgow. I hope to revive the degree of solidarity which existed at the outset of the R.-P.G. Sadly this solidarity is fading roughly in proportion to the extent that R.P. magazine is ceasing to concern itself with the concrete problems facing radical students in Britain today.

One year of academic philosophy is compulsory for all Arts students at Glasgow. This can be taken in the form of the course in "General Philosophy" which is a conglomeration of everything that is not covered in the second course; the second course being "Moral (and some social and political) Philosophy". This basic division into two different Philosophy Departments, which continues at all levels of the degree structure, is a material example of the academic philosophers' unwillingness to see a philosopher's politics and his overall metaphysics as being integrally connected. This division also conveniently disguises the political nature and motive behind much of the work of many of the so-called "Fathers of Philosophy". Even although honours students must be in both departments there is no attempt to co-ordinate the work done between them.

The honours student is confronted with a large number of lecture courses in the four years that an honours degree takes here. These courses are extremely diverse and eclectic and once again there is no attempt to connect up the various courses even within one department.

The student leaves Glasgow no nearer to answering the question which prompted him to take the degree in the first place. And yet they talk of their success-rate! (However, the student does know 105 ways to approach any given problem.) It is my opinion that when academic philosophy, already cut off from other disciplines pursuing knowledge of the world, further divides itself up into various unconnected sections, it becomes unable to tell us anything of the very connected world in which we live and thus becomes impractical to the point of being totally useless.

In a nutshell, the student whose interests lie to the left and who is hoping for a fulfilling and worthwhile course would be well advised to steer clear of Glasgow, even although I recognize the fact that this will only perpetuate the situation here.

"More students at British universities are reading philosophy than production engineering. No single fact about this country goes as far to explain Britain's poor industrial performance" F. Cairncross. *Guardian* 12/7/76

The Department of General Philosophy simply does not recognize the need for, nor the existence of, Radical Philosophy. It indulges in good old traditional and objective "conceptual analysis". It has not yet occurred to them that conceptual analysis is far from being objective. Any intellectual pursuit dealing with "concepts" which takes no account of their continually changing nature and concerns itself only with the concepts as they exist in our society not only has no claim to truth or objectivity but is necessarily a conservative enterprise.

The Department Of Moral Philosophy is equally ignorant but perhaps a shade more arrogant. It acknowledges the existence of Marx "that 19th. Century social commentator" by granting in four years two short courses on the subject. Thankfully, they are conducted by the only Marxist lecturer in both the Philosophy and Politics Departments. (There must be a shortage of suitably qualified Marxist lecturers- or is that a contradiction in terms?) The only other time Marx was mentioned was when a lecturer, referring to Marxists as "Marxist-types" told 350 of us that Marxism answered all the questions and was virtually irrefutable and was therefore obviously false. What can you say to that? Both Marx and Hegel's overall Metaphysics is totally ignored by both departments and the rest of the course consists of the predictable bourgeois collection of "important" philosophers.

"When told by the Liverpool University Disciplinary Committee that he was to be sent down, a Liverpool student produced a toy gun and fired several caps at the committee. They are said to have immediately dived under the table"

Richard Neville, 'Playpower'.

Needless to say, the political bias in the curriculum spills over into the organisation of the courses. Students have no say whatsoever on any matters and the two professors can and do, veto proposals made by the staff. Thus, any hope of improvement is made constitutionally impossible. As if this wasn't bad enough, Glasgow's philosophy students also have to suffer at the receiving end of a teaching and assessment system which is totally out-dated. Students are examined at the end of every term right up until a few weeks before the final honours exams. These exams hinder any possible hope of a real education and, like the whole course in general, cater not for the student with a genuine interest in philosophy but for the student whose natural wit enables him to manipulate the technical jargon better than his contemporaries. Nearly all the teaching is conducted on the traditional "lecturing-down" system which makes all discussion impossible. The tutorials we do have are ruined because the students are made to feel intellectually inferior by this lecturing-system and thus do not contribute to the degree that they are able. This gulf between staff and student is aggravated even more by the fact that the majority of the staff want nothing to do with the students anyway. This is due possibly to a basic insecurity resulting from years in the cut-throat business of academic advancement.

As you can see, academic philosophy is far from being at a dead-end at Glasgow. It is allowed to flourish in a university whose catchment area contains 80% working class children but whose working class student population amounts to a mere 27%. Perhaps, it is a reflection of the system that only 2 1/2% of students continue with philosophy after their first compulsory year.

Gerard Melling



If this is to be a brief comment on what it is like to "do" philosophy at Sussex it is first necessary to destroy the myth that philosophy at Sussex is radical. Certainly it may be radical in comparison with other universities, and there are several philosophers at Sussex who are Marxists or critical of capitalist society. But it is a mistake to assume that a radical philosopher will practice his theory in his day to day role as a philosophy lecturer. There are lecturers who minimise their role as representatives of the university and what it stands for, and who do encourage free enquiry and the responsibility of the students for their own development. These are often the "radical" philosophers, but they are equally likely to be found amongst the ranks of the bourgeois philosophers. However it is certainly the case that if a student shows the desire to contest bourgeois ideology he is more likely to be encouraged by the radical philosophers at Sussex. It is also the case that over the past year the only joint lecturer/student philosophy practiced outside of the timetable has been by radical philosophers. However, these advantages are small comfort when compared to the morass of reaction and decay discovered during a year's study of philosophy at Sussex. Criticism can be levelled at both the subject matter presented and the methods used to present it. Each one is inextricably bound up with the other and the whole situation could be attacked from other standpoints, such as the student/lecturer division or the lack of practical application of dialectical method.

## A.) Subject matter.

Before entering Sussex I imagined a situation where I would be able to continue to study the philosophical questions arising from my immediate social milieu and from the contemporary world at large, while being helped to locate these questions in the discussions of contemporary and past philosophers. Unfortunately Sussex asked me to drop the questions posed by contemporary society and asked me instead to become interested in questions which philosophical tradition had decided were philosophical questions, and which philosophic tradition had also neatly divided into compartments such as aesthetics, epistemology and

so on. Alternatively I was asked to begin from what Descartes or Kant has said and somehow try to relate this to my real existence. This was the first step away from free philosophy and personal responsibility for my own education. After two or three terms, students became adept at sniffing out which lectures are likely to approach philosophy as dead, fixed knowledge by noting those who have long course handouts which narrowly define the area of study and divide the subject into weekly topics. This should not be a part of student life. We must breathe life into philosophy at Sussex. We must deal with real contemporary problems that immediately relate to each one of us sitting in the tutorial room, and then revert to what others have said, all the time referring back to real existence. Let us start with the Notting Hill Gate riots and analyse the role of the police the power of the state, Hobbes and Plato; but let us not begin and end with Plato in a vacuum. Let us start from our own experience of Sartre's "Angst" or job alienation. As radical philosophers, let us deal with the ideology of capitalism, imperialism, racialism, exploitation, intellectual elitism, which are concrete everyday attitudes and analyse them on the level of everyday events. Then let us attempt to produce the philosophy and concrete action to combat them. At Sussex the philosophy of the great dead walks while contemporary philosophy is buried alive.

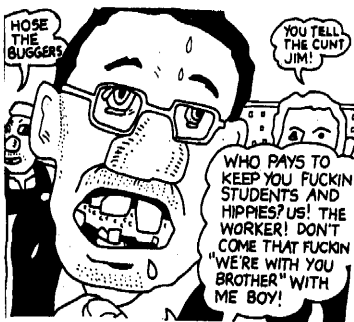
## B.) Method.

Any independent questioning, any attempt to set free captive thought and allow it to develop fully outside of the social perspective imposed by capitalism, is more difficult to handle than philosophy which is already mapped out, predictable and easily measurable when regurgitated. Generally philosophy at Sussex means questioning; but not questioning the starting conditions under which we begin questioning. Marxism or any revolutionary or socialist philosophy threatens the elite position of the lecturer in society but more particularly his power and control in the tutorial room. If all were equal in the tutorial room and knowledge was free, anything could be questioned, nothing would be sacred - and this is precisely what philosophy at Sussex should be aiming at. Generally speaking the tutorial situation as it stands at Sussex is an insult to any independent thinking student. The power of the institution, the hierarchy of dean, lecturer, student, non-student manifests itself even in the objects within the tutorial rooms. Unless the lecturer is one of the few philosophers who attempt to transcend the existing educational system at Sussex, the tutorial is so designed, consciously or unconsciously, as to disarm the student of his sense of equality and

freedom. Tutorials always occur on the lecturers' home ground in a comparatively formal situation. The office-like room, the forms, the desk and often lower chairs for the students, ensure his control over the tutorial relationship. If this is threatened, he has the power of the grade or the bad assessment. It is my personal opinion that what we must aim at is a method which breaks down this hold of the academic over philosophy, a method which works without the rigid nonsensical rules which demand an outpouring of superficial ideas every two weeks on stipulated topics which have no interest except that artificially conjured up the week before; a method which does not present the lecturer as an opponent who lives in a tutorial room between 10 and 12 on Thursday or 2 and 4 o'clock on Monday but as an adviser and friend.

150 years or so after Hegel produced his negative philosophy and Marx toolled it into his critique of capitalism, philosophy at Sussex continues to encourage a positivist philosophy which supports the given order. Sussex as a base for theoretical analysis within the field of philosophy has limited value unless it begins with a desire to free philosophy from the myths which obscure it. The student and lecturer together must begin with an analysis of the ideology which we bring to philosophy so as to destroy the limits that ideology imposes upon such philosophy. Without such a consciousness students will merely reproduce the false ideology of the bourgeoisie and will fail to gain the freedom to philosophise, and to take Sartre's cue from "A plea for Intellectuals", we must ceaselessly turn our thought back on itself in order always to apprehend itself as the universalised philosophy of the bourgeoisie. It is in opposition to this real philosophy that philosophy at Sussex, with those few exceptions, is directed. Any possible threat to academic elitism, the status quo or the University's philosophy policy is opposed. There's a one term course on Marxism, but it is my experience that outside of this Engels, Lenin, etc. are rarely included on reading lists even when they promise to provide an alternative approach to a dying subject. Any desire to study Marxist theory or criticize the philosophy as the universalisation of bourgeois ideology requires a personal endeavour to search out relevant literature for oneself. Having followed such a lone course it can result in having to present the viewpoint in opposition to the lecturers rather than exploring its potential together. To apply a quotation from Sartre's "Problem of Method" to philosophy at Sussex, we are defined negatively by the sum of the possibilities not open to us.

Nick Jenkin



# OUT OF THE DEPTHS

## iv



Wittgenstein once wrote: "What's the use of studying philosophy if all it does for you is to enable you to talk with some plausibility about some abstruse questions of logic etc. and if it doesn't improve your thinking about the important questions of everyday life?" Most of his analytical philosophy successors have been content with talking about 'abstruse questions of logic etc.' What follows is a somewhat personal and atypical account of the 'experience of doing philosophy in Oxford'. It's atypical because I didn't give up philosophy and because I'm still interested in something which is closer to the traditional discipline of philosophy than to anything else. This is in contrast to many radicals in Oxford who've been put off philosophy for good by the sterility of academic philosophy.

When I began as a philosophy student in 1972 I had only a very vague idea of what philosophy was; something 'deep' and important, answering questions about the meaning of life, resolving everyday social and political problems about which normal 'ideological consciousness' just leaves us fuzzy. I've no idea how many other people go into philosophy with similar ideas - my guess is, a great many - but I'm sure that a very very small number come out not having given them up.

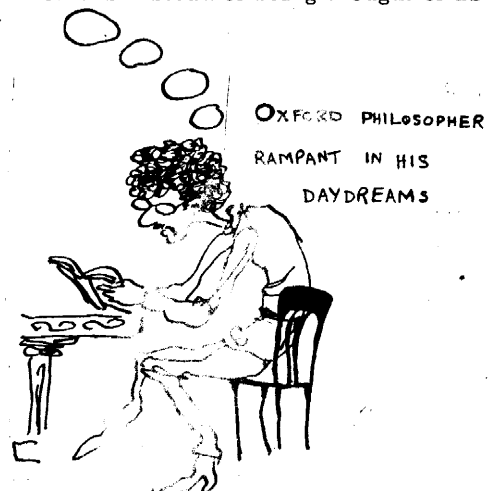
I won't describe the course I did in great detail, that was done in the last Newsletter, but a few points must be mentioned. The course I did was Politics, Philosophy and Economics. All three subjects must be studied for the first year, after that one can be dropped. Most people find it difficult to decide whether to drop Philosophy or Economics - both are almost equally boring. The first year philosophy course consists of studying any two out of Mill's 'Utilitarianism', Russell's 'Problems of Philosophy' and Lemmon's 'Beginning Logic'. For anyone who's still interested the next two years involve just two

compulsory philosophy papers (out of eight papers in all), General and Moral. The former is basically Descartes, Locke, Berkeley, Hume, and the latter is the moral philosophy of Hume, Kant, the Utilitarians and contemporary analytical stuff. It's also possible to do special papers in subjects such as Kant, Philosophical Logic, Philosophy of Mind, but no post-Kant continental philosophy. All assessment of the course is done by three hour exam papers - three at the end of the first year, eight at the end of the third year. All the teaching is done in two-person one-hour once-a-week tutorials. There are no seminars and lectures are in no way integrated into the course and therefore virtually ignored by students and dons alike. The result of this is that what you get out of the course depends very much on your particular tutor.

How do most people react to all this? Well, large numbers give up philosophy after the first year, the majority of those carrying on with it do the minimum possible, only carrying on with philosophy at all to avoid doing economics. The reasons for this flight from philosophy are not hard to find; the first year course is appalling, the finals compulsory papers have boring subject matter and are usually taught in an extremely 'academic' way. There is no apparent relevance to everyday problems, not even much consideration of 'moral' and 'political' problems in the everyday sense. In other words all the 'deep' questions which originally propelled people into Philosophy turn out not to be there at all. When many people arrive at Oxford the only philosopher they've heard of is Sartre - it's not possible to study his philosophy at Oxford. Disillusioned ex-philosophers turn in other directions, they become mystics, looking for the answers to the questions of life in the philosophies of eastern religions, or abandon 'philosophical thought' turning to

sociology or politics. Some just give up serious thought altogether, this being the best thing from the point of view of our society. If dynamic young executives can't be got to believe the ideology of capitalism the next best thing for them to be is disillusioned cynics.

In general I think it can be said that the defects of the Oxford philosophy course (and perhaps all analytical philosophy courses) stem from the analytical conception of philosophy itself - which, of course, is not to say that this conception can't be rooted in a larger context such as a Marxist class analysis or a Heideggerian analysis of the history of Being. In analytical philosophy, philosophical method is taken for granted. The combination of empiricism, the philosophy of common sense and the philosophy of ordinary language have left a legacy of unbelievable lack of self consciousness about methods. We just deal with 'problems' in a piecemeal fashion with little or no attempt at an overall view. This is not really surprising as many post-Philosophical Investigations analytical philosophers see the philosophical project in terms of explicating the essential features of our conceptual scheme from the inside. Any self conscious understanding of their own method as 'a method' rather than 'the method' would undermine this whole project by admitting in some sense the coherence of other conceptual schemes. It's not surprising that as a result of all this there's no course in Oxford dealing directly with either the history or the method of analytical philosophy. At the forefront of contemporary analytical philosophy is the discipline called in Oxford 'philosophical logic'. This is the area par excellence of problems rather than general theories, indeed it seems to me that the vast majority of 'philosophical logicians' have no idea of the overall import of what they're doing. What difference to our conception of human life does it make if the causal theory of names is correct? They've no idea. I'm not saying that the analytical conception of philosophy is 'wrong', but just that to start with it should be recognised as one method among others instead of being thought of as





# Teaching Radical Philosophy

The student movement of the late sixties focussed on breaking into the authoritarian structures in higher education. Its ideology hinged on an assumption of the student body as a repressed but essentially active critical political and intellectual force. This assumption was appropriate to the realities of the time as students began to question their destinies as elite hacks in a capitalist state system, whose worth appeared summarised in the war on Vietnam. Radical academics, usually young, found themselves at once militantly on the offensive in the anti-war movement and in the movement for college democracy, and, at the same time, tightly defensive in their academic work and their teaching. It was a time of extreme mutual hostility and fear between establishment academics and the "wild men" they had, by some error of judgement, let in the door. God only knew what these maniacs were putting across in the privacy of their teaching-chambers!

If the establishment had only known it, (and, as their paranoid references for radicals looking for jobs showed, they didn't) what was going on in the radicals' classes tended overwhelmingly to be indistinguishable from what was going on elsewhere, particularly in subjects without a "legitimate" radical tradition, such as philosophy. In my experience, this was partly a function of fear: as long as you couldn't be "got" for failing to do your "job", you could afford to speak out on issues of assessment, hierarchy and college collusion with the forces of darkness. Partly, however, and connected with this structural timidity, it was a function of the lack of a clear and bold vision of how to break out of the confines of the subject as standardly practised and defined. What helped change this situation?

As the struggles against administrations subsided, largely defeated students faced the return to the dominance of every day academic course-life with different expectations.

They openly expressed their boredom and disappointment with courses which, lacking real meaning to them, had to be faced as vocabularies and positions to be mastered sufficiently to gain satisfactory grades. Students, some of them anyway, began to put awkward questions to teachers and to debunk the extra-curricular status of their radicalism. At the same time, the very subsidence of militancy and campus turmoil subjectively at any rate took some of the heat of the academic radicals. There they were, stuck in the bourgeois academy; for a time with only memories of off-campus activities to constitute their radicalism. They began to come together, consciously, to forge a tolerable and productive academic life. And, having come together, they began with some opposition to force elbow-room, to come out in their courses. It was in something like this atmosphere that magazines like *Radical Philosophy* got to be started.

At Kent, where I have taught since 1968, this movement was helped by the official backing for "inter-disciplinary" activity, which encouraged philosophers to locate their abstractions in the context of more concrete realities—the welfare state, fascism, mental illness, colonialism, literary realism etc. (We also benefit from the existence of flourishing Marx courses in Social Science.) This "interdisciplinary" phenomenon seems to me very important; for all that, uncritical liberalism ("what do the philosophers have to tell us on this one?") prevails. Traditionally, the philosophy course confronts the young grammar-school product with a series of official "problems", problems which arose, historically, in the context of broad and deep intellectual and cultural movements (the scientific revolution, secularisation, bourgeois liberalism etc.). But throughout their schooled lives, these middle-class students have been largely hit with the packaged results of these movements. Protected from "experience", from suffering and activity, they have

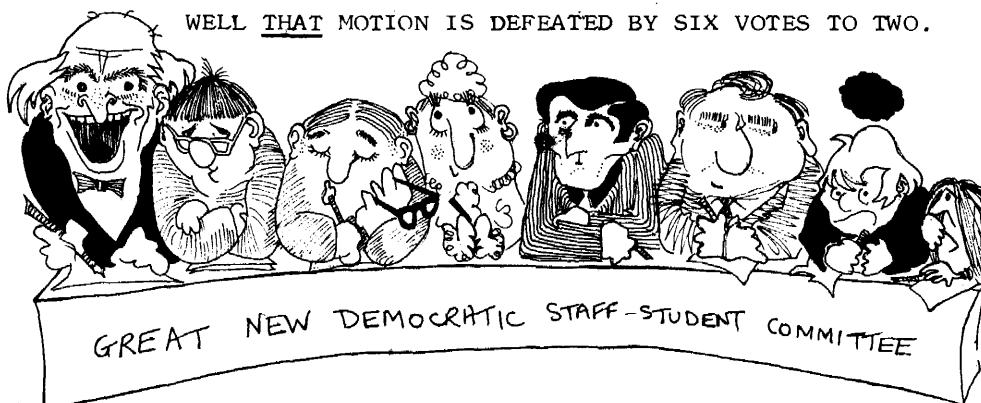
found little space to locate or raise the "kinds of questions philosophers ask". Philosophy, therefore, typically presents itself as an alien set of obstacles, as a dead subject.

This is especially true of the way historical texts, "classics" are taught — abstracted from their historical context as if that could not provide a point of contact for students trying to see the motivation for philosophical enquiry.

Speaking (as all along) from my own experience, I have found myself tending to slide, in this context, between two poles: the pole of "dogmatism", of imposing a framework on students as something they simply "have to master" and the pole of "spontaneism", of insisting that the students "choose a major question that concerns or puzzles them". In the first case what is suppressed is the fact that questions are only constituted by their being actually felt and asked. In the second, what is suppressed is the fact that questions can only arise in the context of some framework and of some means of coping with them. No wonder the average response to either of these approaches was the sense that a trip was being laid on the students. (The only intra-mural exception was when, by a coincidence, I had in one seminar five students interested in feminism).

It is no good "doing philosophy" in a state of ignorance about reality. Conceptual questions arise in the context of investigating empirical issues, and empirical facts are relevant to the sorting out of conceptual questions. If you want to know the effects of punishment, you need to be clear of what you mean by the term; but the very "language game" of punishment depends on assumptions about the roots and consequences of behaviour. A priorism in the "Philosophy of Punishment" is a joke in bad taste, for the realities behind the words (prisons, beatings, condemnations) are simply assumed to have their officially accredited effects as the words suggest on paper ("rehabilitation", "deterrence", "retribution"). The "inter-disciplinary" rubric encourages the examination of basic questions about the law, crime and punishment in the context of actually investigating law, crime and punishment ("sociologically", "historically") as real processes. Thus it is to be distinguished from the Oxford tradition of arrogant philosophical guerilla raids on "first order" writers with no thought of learning from them.

This "concreteness" of philosophical context and bearing is not merely, in my view a requirement of good philosophy, it is central to the possibility of philosophy's role in education. For, in the

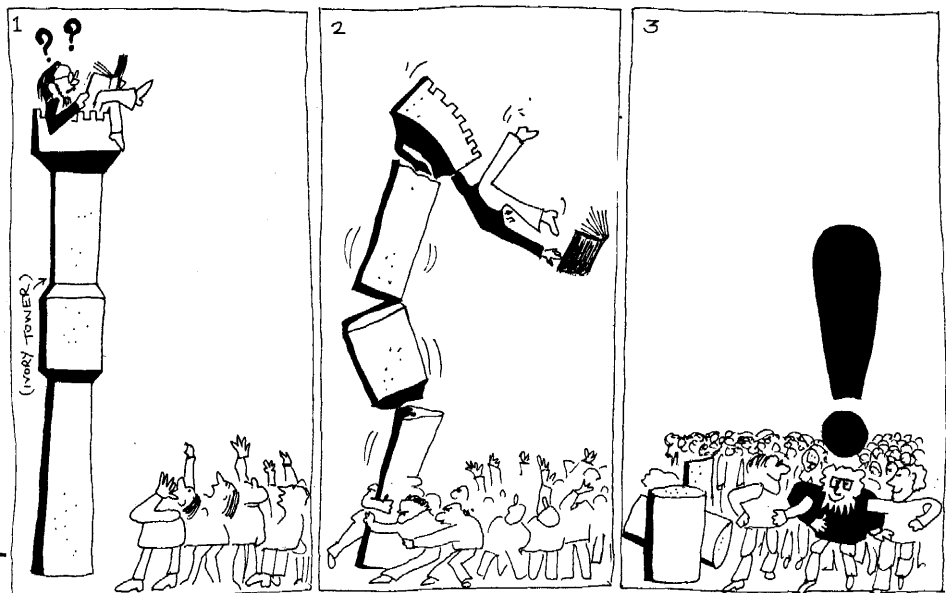


## SECTION TWO

poverty or absence of experience or expertise, the products of our school and family systems (including our academic selves) are not only indisposed to question the framework of thought the prevailing ideology penetrates them with (a problem of cultivated docility); they are incapable of doing so. (They know fuck nearly all.) It was the analytical precision and conceptual sophistication of a class of American prisoners, to whom the penetration of official ideologies was a matter of urgent and abiding concern, that brought this home to me most powerfully. Asking questions is a matter of politics, and the biggest challenge any academic radical has is to assist students to ask basic questions openly that their peculiarly impoverished lives have hitherto been posing only in a buried way (problems about knowledge, the self, freedom, determinism, education, morality and so on).

In my experience of undergraduate teaching, however, it is often unrewarding to locate problems too directly, too soon in the more immediate experience of students. For many students, especially in England, a defensive reaction is the response. Rather, I tend to find that issues whose implications are personally important but which can be approached without a paralysing ego threat are most fearlessly tackled. At the very least, though, "concrete location" of philosophy makes teaching and learning interesting.

It also produces, by the use of more or less "raw material" (I am thinking of such things as prison letters, novels and memoirs; of Jessica Mitford's The Prison Business and of visits to courts and prisons) an approach which is anti-authoritarian in that (assuming a "balanced diet") it provides a basis for thought relatively independent of the teacher's (left or right) position. It brings the angel-choir contests of the philosophers down to earth and brings home that positions have extra-academic consequences that people have to live with. More or less slowly, for the philosophical habits take a while to acquire, this approach, I suggest, helps build up the capacity and disposition to think philosophically about things, to work rather than to play, with words. What this means of course is that it is necessary to stick with a subject for a time - to actually get involved in and to a degree knowledgeable about, say, crime and punishment in Britain.



As this article has perhaps made clear, I am opposed to an authoritarian left way of dealing with the relative passivity of students. This, in my view, is reactionary pedagogy. Since, unlike their American peers, English students are predisposed to assume that their "personal" interests should be kept separate from their academic concerns, it is, I find, difficult to begin constructing course frameworks on the concrete basis, and difficult too to get out of the habit of thinking of reality in terms other than "cases" to make a point. Trial-and-error is inevitable.

What I am at present trying to do is to offer a range of project options which cohere around a common (lecture-discussion format) theme for six weeks (or in this case a common text: Plato's Republic), emphasising issues which are real to the students. By stressing the possibility of collective, literate, creative work organised through workshop-seminars and by dividing the class up on the basis of project options (rather than on a random, alphabetical basis), I am hoping that the class will get away from the authoritarian format of "covering the ground" (like a patient etherised upon a table). I want to get something out of this course too!

Whatever personal inadequacies a radical teacher may have to struggle with in his or her practice, the structurally ill-educative requirements of the academy constantly hamper progress. One has to contend, for example with the fact that one's influence on many students can be more a function of one's control over a job and status ticket than a matter of one's educational inspiration. But, ironically,

academic authoritarians take such things as the examination ritual more seriously than most employers do, so the usual arguments for allowing education to subserve the "realities" of the "outside world" lack weight even within their own terms. I should like to see Finals done away with, at least as a compulsory test, and replaced by a "file" system whereby employers would do their own assessing based on actual work.

It is interesting to note that, at Kent, those who oppose moving away from the established examination system tend to argue that "continuous assessment" tends to give the teacher excessive power. Yet they oppose any "comeback" for students even in the shape of a simple appeals procedure. All of which makes it harder for teachers to get shocked, surprised and educated by their students' exploring new things in new ways. This places a premium on students taking educational initiatives themselves. It is ludicrous that marking, especially of examinations which are claimed to be the keystone of educational standards, is conducted with the authoritarian mystery of an anti-intellectual cult.

The Radical Philosophy movement has helped open up the scope of philosophy. But I feel we have hardly woken up to what this means.

Tony Skillen

I'm glad I've got my continental quilt.



"Every course in the University is pregnant with a potential violence against the student. Every faculty member is a potential executioner, not because of his personal characteristics, although these are certainly involved, but because of the traditions of the institution and the way it is 'necessarily' organised.... I suggest therefore that the first line of defense against the violence of the rhetoric of the establishment is to learn something about rhetoric. And that means to learn something about communication. But a line of defense is not enough; the victims must take the offensive. What is required - at this admittedly minimal level - is a GUERRILLA RHETORIC! And for a guerilla rhetoric you must know what your enemy knows, why and how he knows it, and how to contest him on any ground."

Brian Walden.

# REDS IN THE BED

# Politics of Philosophy

When I was asked by Radical Philosophy to write a short piece on my own experience in attempting to combine professional philosophy with political practice on the revolutionary left, it seemed like a difficult task. It was! Too difficult, in fact, and after several tries the result was the following ramble through a few general problems and difficulties that certainly form part of my experiences, but are by no means peculiar to just me. First, though, I have to admit that I tend to analyse and resolve these 'problems' and 'contradictions' in a largely individual way. This is partly because I do not regard any of the existing political parties or organisations as being adequate to the political tasks of the revolutionary left, and partly because I think that there is useful work to be done by 'political independents' in creating the conditions for a party which would be adequate to these tasks. What follows is a rather sketchy attempt to describe and begin to analyse some of the contradictions involved in carrying out my work as a professional philosopher.



There are four problem areas that I'll try to deal with, and I'll characterise their essential features by pointing out what I loosely call 'contradictions'. The first 'contradiction' in combining philosophical work with revolutionary political practice is that I now hold a conception of philosophy such that philosophy carries no direct implications for concrete political practice. To engage effectively in political practice you need knowledge of yourself (what you can and can't do, in what ways you can/are likely to be able to develop, etc); knowledge of the characteristics of the situation to be transformed by political practice; and of the conditions under which it can be transformed. At least part of this necessary knowledge can only be produced, in my view, as the result of 'concrete' investigation/analysis with the aid of a scientific theory. I'd argue that the foundations and elementary concepts of such a theory are to be found in the discourse of historical materialism, but I also recognise that an adequate analysis of our current situation is still along way beyond the existing resources of Marxist theory. On this view of the necessity of concrete knowledge to political practice, philosophy, in so far as it can be an objective and rigorous discipline, is reduced to the work of philosophical foundation, and in particular the development of criteria of proof, validity, demonstr-

ation, etc, appropriate to a historical science. Of itself, it can never produce the substantive knowledge we need to guide our actions. The way I've tried to relate my own research work to these convictions is, first, to continue work in the philosophy of the social sciences, with particular reference to the status of different types of explanation within historical materialism, and, second, to try to use the skills I have as a philosopher in substantive historical enquiry. There are many types of historical investigation - especially "history of ideas" or "conceptual history" - in which philosophical skills are of use.

It is important, though, to resist the temptation to abandon philosophy altogether, in favour of 'substantive' enquiry. It's only too easy to despair at the glib cleverness and intellectual barrenness of a lot of contemporary philosophy and to reject it in favour of sociology or political science. But in these disciplines the dominant traditions are still marked by philosophical and conceptual underdevelopment. In my own case, coming to teach in a sociology department was what taught me for the first time the real importance of doing philosophical work. Equally, though, it confirmed the conclusion I had reached earlier, that philosophy conducted as an autonomous discipline is a pointless and sterile exercise.

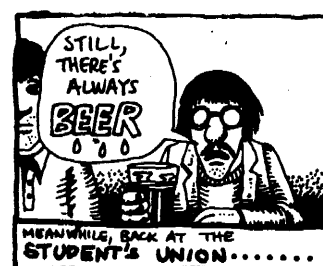


- PRIVATE EYE

So far, I have talked about how I now see the relationship between philosophy and certain politically relevant substantive disciplines. There is a second relationship which presents contradictions for most university teachers, whether philosophers or not. This is the relationship between teaching and research. This relationship, however, can't be understood independently of a third contradictory relationship - that between teachers and students. For intellectuals on the left, 'research' does not or should not mean what it means for the orthodox career academic. For the former, research should involve a different relationship to knowledge - a refusal to regard knowledge as personal 'property', a means to professional advancement, or intellectual capital. This means that there must be a willingness to engage in collective research, and to ensure that the results of that research

are presented in a form which renders them available to those involved in mass struggle. This could prevent us from becoming a narrow professional elite. All this, though, is an idealisation. How many of us have the strength to turn our backs on future promotion? Is this, in any case, a defensible strategy? Might not a few marxist professors be a step forward for the left? In any case, how can anyone get a secure job in an academic institution without the odd 'reputable' journal article? There aren't, and cannot be, any general or definitive answers to these questions. But the particular and provisional answers which each of us presupposes in the decisions s/he takes on what, where and how to 'publish' still leave unsolved the question of how to apportion time, energy, creativity as between research and teaching. The resolution of this contradiction is particularly acute for socialist teachers, since for them teaching has a distinctive importance; how it is resolved bears on the crucial relationship between teachers and students. For any socialist teacher this relationship must be a central object of political struggle. There can be no escaping the fact that there is no immediate identity of interest between teacher and student. In debates between teachers and students the teacher is inevitably at an advantage; s/he has the knowledge, the experience; s/he is on home ground,

and has the authority of qualifications and office (often recognised by the student whether or not the teacher wishes it). Above all, though, the teacher is in a position of power over the student, again, whether or not either party to the relationship wants it or recognises it. Whatever the system of assessment, whatever the syllabus, whatever the teaching methods, teacher and students are involved in a process, one of the outcomes of which is the qualification/





disqualification of the students and their distribution into differential positions in the labour market. In the face of this, the function of academics on the left is to work together with students to abolish or minimise these antagonistic features of their relationship. Petty or whimsical exercises of authority, for instance, can be abolished, whilst assessment, which cannot be abolished short of an all-out challenge to state-power, can be made a much less arbitrary and painful process than it is in most institutions. This is true similarly with the content of the syllabus. Any system which allowed complete freedom of choice in reading, in topics and issues to each



individual student, even if it were desirable, would be unrealisable given current human and material resources - even in universities. Alternatively systems which build in majority decisions on syllabus contents, or allow a limited range of choice are bound to be experienced as an imposition by some students. Again, there are no definitive solutions. Such solutions as are reached can only be the provisional outcomes of debate, exploration, criticism and organisation on the part of students and those teachers who are prepared to join in. It is the job of teachers on the left to encourage the independent critical initiatives of students and to engage in debate with them. As well as these ways of resolving teacher/student 'contradictions' which are directly connected with the teaching-situation, it is very important that academics also organise support and defense of students who do take up struggle against university authorities on such issues as rents, prices, university democracy, fees, etc. But,



of course, this takes time and energy. It can take all your time and energy, but you have to find ways of preventing this.

The features of the student/teacher contradiction that I've just sketched have become modified in recent years in such a way as to create quite special and unforeseen (at least, by me) problems. The general doctrine of mass struggle among students, and the relative de-politicisation of such struggle as continues to exist (the 'economism' of a good deal of NUS activity) makes it very easy for the "leftism" of many academics to atrophy into a routine phraseology, a manner of dress, or, perhaps, into an exclusive concern with research albeit relatively politicised and often valuable research.

This tendency is, I think, most pronounced amongst academics, who were politicised by the mass student upsurge of '68 and thereafter, and whose political activity remained confined to the student milieu. An alternative and, I think, equally unfortunate response is one that most accurately characterises my own political practice: it is to centre one's practice in the labour movement, on the grounds that that is where the key struggles are now taking place. I'll return to this question a little later. For the moment, though, there are other consequences of the down-turn in mass student struggle which have to be discussed. One of these consequences is, I think, wholly beneficial. One (false) method of 'resolving' the student/teacher contradiction - "student worship" - of which many of us on the left have been guilty, is no longer possible. Increasingly, students willingly embrace a passive relationship to their education. Many of them want to be told things, to "be disciplined", to be taught by lectures, etc. Who knows, we may soon be faced with protests that there is too much change in the syllabus, that lecturers don't enforce deadlines rigorously enough, that there is too much informality in classes etc!! The danger here is that we'll first go along with this ("the students are always right"). For example, I still find lecturing easy and even enjoyable, despite the fact that it of all teaching methods, imposes the most passive role on students. It's very easy to indulge the students'

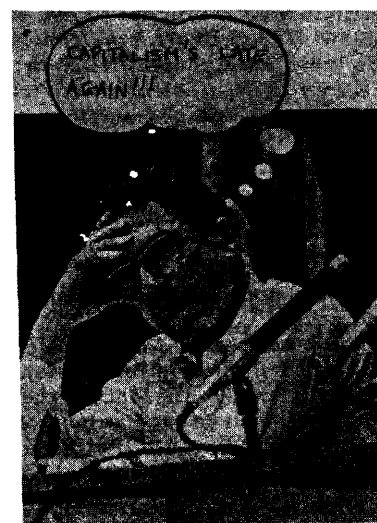
own willingness to put up with such methods. I still think, however, that the development of a more healthy and openly critical dialogue between "left" staff and students is possible.

Finally, I want to turn to the deepest and most intractable of the contradictions faced by 'left' academics - one that underlies and determines the form of all the others. This is the contradiction between a political ideology which involves abolishing the separation between "theory" and "practice" and an institutional location which embodies and promotes that separation. In more concrete terms, the various linked mass struggles against racism, for the emancipation of women, and popular class power urgently require theoretical knowledge if they are to have any chance of bringing in an effective transformation of the existing order. Theoretical knowledge not only doesn't drop from the sky, it doesn't rise like a vapour from the production-line or the kitchen sink. Theoretical

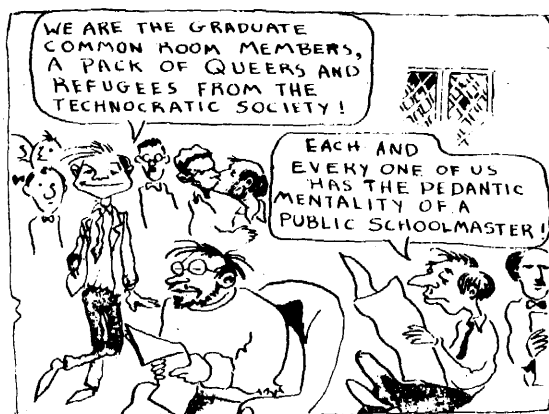
"Thus it seems today's universities are caught between two conflicting pressures. On the one hand, technocratic reform is being driven through from the outside in the interest of the ruling class. On the other, a radical challenge is emerging from within the universities but, in the absence of support in other sectors of society, it gets bogged down in utopianism and impotence.

Is there any way out of this dilemma? Are students - and 'intellectuals' in general - condemned to the choice of integrating themselves into the existing irrational and inhuman order - or engaging in hopeless gestures of revolt by individuals or small groups?

Ernest Mandel.



CONTD. »



knowledge is the result of a distinctive social practice, around or according to definite rules, obeying definite standards and protocols - scientific theoretical practise. The indispensable raw materials for this practise include reflection on the experience of the production line and the kitchen sink, but they also include the accumulated results of previous theoretical work.

For this reason, it is likely that most of the theoretical knowledge employed in mass struggles will have been brought to them from 'outside' - will have been produced, that is to say, by professional intellectuals, generally full-time employees of educational institutions. This is not to say that housewives, workers etc. cannot produce their own theoretical knowledge. It is only to say the conditions under which they can do so, outside of a university or college setting, hardly exist in this country as yet. Some vitally important work is being done in some areas to set up socialist study centres outside the universities and colleges, but even here the prime movers as yet tend to be professional academics.

The fundamental contradiction of all this is that the whole professional socialisation of the academic - the elite mode of discourse, the values of value neutrality and impartiality (often wrongly confused with 'objectivity'), the professional self-conception, the ivory tower isolation from the real world of ordinary people - enforces a separation between her/him and any direct links with mass struggle outside of the college/university. Moreover, the whole structural relation between the universities and colleges and their institutional milieu (e.g. the other agen-

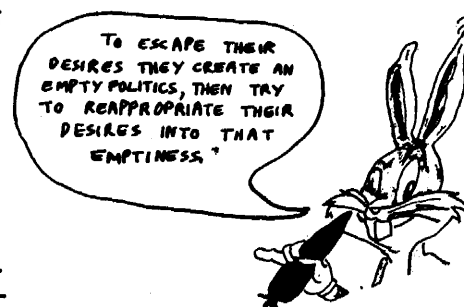
cies of the state and industrial enterprises) makes for communication of knowledge to that milieu only through channels which lead to the use of that knowledge in the service of managerial or executive authority. This feature is itself sufficient to render the class-loyalties of the academic suspect whenever s/he attempts to make direct links with Trade Unions, parties or other organisations of mass struggle in the labour movement outside the colleges/universities.

The development by a significant minority of academics of a degree of Trade Union consciousness, and willingness to organise along Trade Union lines, has opened up the possibility for left academics to become involved not only in Union activity in their place of work, but also in the broader local and national labour movement. But even so, the enormity of the obstacles to be overcome, and the tasks facing us are daunting. The knowledge we have to give often turns out not to be appropriate. Even where it is, the developing of the right organisational framework, sufficient mutual trust, the right language etc., for that knowledge to be communicated presents great problems. Equally, being prepared to learn from those with more experience, to submit to the discipline of the majority of a union branch, G.M.C., or other organisation, are difficult habits to acquire for academics used to lording it in their own classrooms.

But, I repeat the time and creative energy needed to establish anything like an effective political practice in the broader labour movement is itself a danger. The threat is that the cost of the attempt to make a con-

tribution as an intellectual to the labour movement is that you abolish yourself as an intellectual. I remain convinced that intellectuals (and, in Britain at the moment, this unfortunately means professional intellectuals) are indispensable to the labour movement and also that participation in practical mass struggles is an indispensable source of intellectual raw materials and a sense of direction in theoretical work. Without that practical involvement research can easily descend into academic sterility. But the problem of how to continue both, together with a teaching commitment, and retain some time for self-indulgence is a problem which I find insoluble. The division of labour within the political movements of the left which would render these difficulties more tractable for the individual must await the formation of a mass revolutionary party. This still seems a long way off but the development of the overall political situation in this country, and internationally, isn't entirely without hopeful signs.

Anon



# DOWN UNDER

As a result of a strike in 1973 over a professor's veto of a feminism course, the Department of Philosophy at Sydney University was split into two separate departments. One of these, the Department of General Philosophy, comprised mainly of radical and left-liberal staff, has since developed an extensive programme in radical philosophy and operates, within institutional limits, a system of staff-student control. Courses presently running in General Philosophy include Marxism I and II, Feminism I and II, Anarchism, Philosophy of Education, Aesthetics (from a Marxist perspective), Reading Capital I and II, Structuralism, and a first-year course known as 'Critique of Social Theory'. The department also conducts an important in epistemology and the philosophy of science where the methodological presuppositions (especially the empiricism) of bourgeois social science are examined and criticised. Related to a Marxist and feminist perspective, there is also a developing interest in Freudian theory, involving research at fourth year and graduate levels, and the department recently co-sponsored a conference on psychoanalysis.

Although there are a variety of approaches to radical philosophy within the department, the dominant one is Marxist, and, specifically, Althusserian Marxist. Much research within the general problematic of Althusserian marxism is being carried out by staff and post-graduate students, and the Marxism I and II courses attempt to develop the concepts of Althusser's marxism in a rigorous and systematic way.

The first year course, Critique of Social Science (popularly known as 'Counter Ideology') was first introduced in 1976 and examines the main ideological logical tendencies within contemporary social science with reference to a number of 'disciplines' taught in the Faculty of Arts. This course has been put on in the first year in order to reach as many students as possible (large numbers of students take one year of Philosophy as part of a general Arts degree). The attention of students is quite specifically drawn to the fact that what is being criticised is

also being practised in other parts of the University - for example, tutorials are held in groups which concentrate on one or another discipline of the social sciences, use is made of examples from standard university textbooks in these areas, etc. Mainly for this reason, the course has attracted a lot of opposition from teachers in other departments. Though the course is not outside the traditional scope of philosophy - it merely investigates the epistemological pre-suppositions of the social sciences, though certainly from a Marxist perspective - it is perceived by some staff in social science departments as an unwarranted encroachment on their areas of expertise. So although there have been claims that the department 'coerces students and forces on them a certain ideology', the major opposition seems to concern more pragmatic worries about how students will behave in their own lectures, or, as it was vividly put, that students 'will come to lectures with ideas already in their heads'.

Members of the department are quite active politically. Recently about 16 members of staff participated in a University-wide strike over the teaching of political economy in the University, which is being blocked by the administration and conservative economics professors. A meeting of the department strongly endorsed the strike, which was called by the Political Economy Movement.

Within the department, during 1976, there has arisen a grouping now known as the 'Marxist Caucus' which meets regularly to discuss matters concerning departmental policy. About half the staff and most post-graduate and senior students are members of the caucus, which therefore has considerable influence on departmental decisions.

Questions of appointments are a major area of friction between the department and the University. A recent permanent appointment in Feminism was rejected by the University and we are currently waiting for permission to advertise a temporary appointment in logic and a permanent position in social and political philosophy for next year (the academic year begins in January 1). Delays are helped along by the current freeze on university jobs. The department's staff/student ratio is the worst in the faculty and competition for scarce resources is a major cause of friction within the department, particularly between those who want to consolidate what's unique about the department - the radical philosophy programme - and those who favour the notion of a totally general department. There have been criticisms of the department for making appointments on 'political' grounds and for making them 'democratically'. The claim that we make appointments democratically is true within the limitations of our situation within the university. The department's appointment comm-

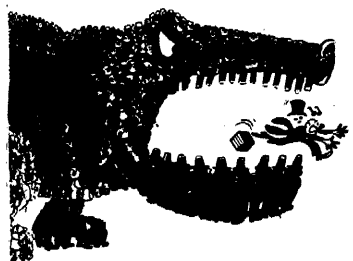
ittee is made up of both students and staff, and the final say on the department's short list for any job is made by a general meeting of the department, where all students and staff have a vote.

On the questions of 'political appointments, members of the marxist caucus would want to argue for political appointments, but within the context of a critique of the way that the question of 'political' appointments is normally discussed. This point of view has been publically argued in the student newspaper, Honi Soit, pointing out that, " Firstly, politics are not merely a matter of private convictions, but involve what a person teaches, and how she or he teaches it. Secondly, there is no such thing as ability or qualifications in the abstract. It is always a question of ability to teach particular theories which are in themselves political, whether or not this political nature is admitted." (Jean Curthoys, Honi Soit, 29.6.76)

Opposition from the right in the University is not an empty threat. They have the power, through the hierarchical university administrative machinery, to block proposed courses and appointments. There has also been more than one suggestion that there should be some form of enquiry into matters relating to the department. And in the past few days (8/9 September) there have been slightly more specific threats in the form of two proposals, one by disaffected members of the department (Michael Devitt, John Mills and Michael Stocker), and the one by Keith Campbell of the other philosophy department - Traditional and Modern. The first proposal suggests a re-amalgamation of the two departments, and the second - while it leaves two departments in existence - involves with a superficial reasonableness, the actual transfer of some of our resources to the already over-staffed Traditional and Modern Philosophy Department. In the meanwhile, the department is concerned to fight for more staff positions, as well as the right to make appointments and decide on curricula without excessive administrative interference.

Part of the purpose of this report is to publicise particularly the position in Social and Political Philosophy, which cannot yet be advertised. We hope to advertise it in the Philosophy of the Social Sciences, knowledge of classical economy an advantage. If you're interested please write to us at: Department of General Philosophy, University of Sydney, Sydney NSW 2006, Australia.

Janet Vaux  
Ted Sadler



# marxist education centres

The centres for Marxist Education were created in the spring of 1975. Taking their example from an already existing Centre for Marxist Education in Manchester, they announced as their main aim the task of 'spreading Marxist ideas in the labour movement and on the Left generally'. There are at present Centres for Marxist Education (CMEs) in Manchester, Leeds, Bradford and Leicester, and a 'Tyneside Socialist Centre' in Newcastle, which is associated with the CMEs. The aim is to create new centres in other places, over the coming months.

Those active in the CMEs include both those who are members of political parties and groups on the Left, and others who are 'politically homeless'. The Centres for Marxist Education do not constitute a political party. What defines their particular perspective is the recognition that the development of a socialist culture, of a coherent Marxist alternative to the dominant social and political orthodoxy, is one of the necessary conditions for revolutionary change in Britain. The aim is to develop forms of socialist education which would involve broad masses of the population. The existing groups and formations of the Left are either not carrying out this task at all, or are doing it in ways which are too narrowly linked to the particular perspectives and requirements of that party or group.

What then have the CMEs done, so far? What problems have they met with in their work, and what are the means to achieve the project of socialist education? One basic problem is that the very word 'education' has developed associations of an enlightened minority telling the ignorant majority 'the truth'. Some comrades,

within and without the CMEs, have argued that the traditional method of a lecture or talk followed by a discussion - which has remained the format of most CME meetings - perpetuates the division between 'teacher' and 'taught', and makes it hard for some to contribute: makes 'self-education' more difficult. What the Centres have done so far has been to provide a forum for the critical discussion and evaluation of the strategies and perspectives advanced by the various groups on the Left in Britain, and the Centres have thus made possible a confrontation of these various strategies. Each Centre has, as a central part of its activities, put forward courses of 'Introduction to Marxism', and has attempted, in a variety of ways, to clarify socialist perspectives on the issues that dominate contemporary politics. Within the Centres there has been debate, as already mentioned, about the ways of developing these forms of Marxist education. One of the aims is that of involving local militants, those with experience of the class struggles and conflicts of the locality, to talk about their particular experiences - and in that way to spread more widely the awareness of contemporary forms of class struggle. Another aspect of the activity of the Centres has been to form 'study-groups' - self-determining groups of comrades who are concerned with a particular area, or with a problem of common interest (among which, the groups concerned with 'Marxism and Feminism' have been most successful, certainly in terms of numbers).

It would be wrong to suggest that the CMEs have found answers to these problems of developing forms of Marxist education. There have been, inevitably, charges that the centres are academic, elitist, centrist, not concer-

ned with action, talking shops, involving only students, not involving the working class etc. etc... what can be claimed is not that these problems have been solved, but that the CMEs are, in the ways outlined above, performing functions which are not carried out by other parties or groups, and that the Centres have begun a project of socialist education. The question of building up links with the labour movement remains. Part of the aim of the Centres is to serve the labour movement, in the sense of arranging courses, meetings etc. which will be of use to the labour movement in the particular struggles in which it is engaged. The Leeds and Bradford centres, for example, are trying to arrange a CME shop-stewards meeting, which would discuss how the centres could act in this way. As for methods of 'teaching' and work, in CME meetings, for instance in the courses on 'Introduction to Marxism', the need is for meetings which allow the maximum of participation and discussion by those present, and each centre has experimented with a variety of methods in this respect (for instance splitting up into small groups after an introductory talk).

These problems, and the whole question of Marxist education and the labour movement, will be debated at a planned CME day-school on 'Problems of Marxist Education', to be held in Leeds on 22nd January 1977: this day-school will be open to all those interested in the future development of forms of Marxist education in Britain.

John Schwarzmantel



## communist university

### Some Problems of Counter Course

#### The experience of organising the Philosophy course at the Communist University of London No8

The object of organising the philosophy course at CUL 8 as a counter course was based on the experience of past CULs, where the philosophy course has suffered from a tension between two tasks, that of advancing our own Marxist theory, and that of countering the assumptions and methods of traditional philosophy. As many of the debates on the methodology of science, and the avowed scientific character of Marxism were being taken up by the new Science and Ideology course,

CUL 8 seemed to present a unique opportunity to take up the categories of traditional Philosophy and subject them to a rigorous critique.

The plan was to take the six principal categories of Philosophy, namely; Logic, Theory of Knowledge, Political Theory, Ethics, Aesthetics, and the Philosophy of Science, and a seventh topic, Dialectics, which has become the object of bourgeois refutations of our own philosophy, and in any case was one of the components left to philosophy by Engels in Ludwig Feuerbach. A further advantage of this approach was that it would focus attention on at

least two areas which have been paid less attention than their due by Marxists, viz. Moral Philosophy and Art and Aesthetics.

Counter course must involve more than an attack on the content of traditional Philosophy. It must also question the forms and assumptions of traditional pedagogy. Particularly the elitist and individualistic assumption which is still rampant amongst Marxists as well as elsewhere, that there are experts who actively impart their privileged knowledge to passive learners. Although I pointed this out at the outset of the course, the attitude persisted throughout, as evidenced by the initial response to a very open paper on Art and Aesthetics. Several

## SECTION THREE

participants seemed dissatisfied with an introduction to discussion which outlined the problem rather than provided the answers. Fortunately this attitude was quickly overcome in this session, and a very lively discussion followed.

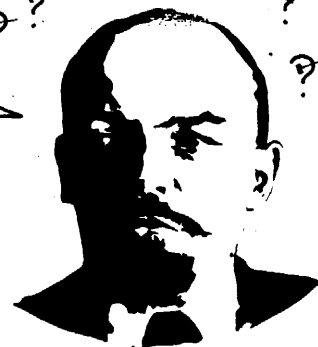
Another manifestation of "expertism" was present in the criticism at the review session, that the course had concentrated on a passive critique rather than on the positive development of orthodox Marxism, and that we were not therefore engaged in any uniquely Marxist activity. The lesson to be drawn from this is that counter-course will inevitably lead towards passivity unless the fundamental assumptions of pedagogy are questioned. Philosophy does not of course become increasingly Marxist the more often the names of the Great Socialist Thinkers are invoked, as we can see from the presence of purely academic Marxists amongst the ranks of college lecturers.

The failure of the course to develop the critique of pedagogy, was further indicated by the fact that less than a third of the people who had attended the course turned up for the final review session where there was no paper being presented. I don't believe that this poor showing was solely due to the fact that it was the last day and people were anxious to get home. Unfortunately even amongst some of those who did attend there was a tendency for people to be so used to having alienated ideas laid before them as in the traditional college lecture that they were disappointed that they were not leaving a counter-course with tidy conclusions and clear answers. It must be said however that there were others who felt that the experience had been important and that even the apparently negative effects that the course had on some participants, such as a growing confusion rather than definitive clarification of e.g. the Marxist concept of dialectics, itself shows that Marxism is more difficult than some people who had come to the course with very orthodox assumptions thought it was. A counter course should be a thoroughly unsettling experience both for people with traditional pedagogic and substantive/ideological assumptions, and for orthodox Marxists as well. In this respect the react-

WHAT SHOULD WE HAVE DONE

ions of participants in the review session would seem to indicate a measure of success.

This highlights another problem, that of levels. There cannot and should not be a qualification for participating in CUL specialist courses. However a few of the people attending didn't really seem to appreciate that we can no longer talk of a Marxist orthodoxy, and some others had registered who had never formally studied traditional Philosophy, and were unaware of the problems which exist for Marxists who are involved in formal study, either as teachers or students. There is a similar problem with expectations; in both cases the question arises as to what some one should take away from CUL. The answers which came out at the review varied between wanting to be made more politically effective, wanting to have comfortable orthodoxies reinforced, and wanting nothing more than the indirect benefit of participating in some interesting discussions. In any case the problem is probably exacerbated by the structure of CUL. The general course on Marxist philosophy tends to stop at a much lower level than the specialist course begins. Perhaps there is a need for an introductory course on Marxist philosophy, a genuinely general course and a specialist course. However purely structural changes cannot be a complete answer whilst current attitudes to pedagogy prevail. Anyone considering mounting a counter course should try to get as clear an idea as possible of their intentions in this direction, and possibly devote the first session to a conscious review of the pedagogical assumptions of the participants. While people are only interested in what they learn, and not in the way they learn, they will not be happy to limit their



expectations to the sort of gratification that a counter-course, which is not designed to provide "take-away" knowledge, can provide.

The main area of constructive criticism at the review session was that the attempted critique had been too wide, and that attempting to take on the whole category system was too ambitious. It was felt that it would have been better to take up specific problems within the categories, and approach the categories through these. This happened in some of the more successful sessions, particularly Art and Aesthetics and Moral Philosophy sessions where the speakers gave the most open papers outlining the problematic rather than attempting to close up their expositions by providing answers. In both sessions the questions of value and ideology were focussed on in discussion, and people felt that the experience had been a worthwhile one.

Finally, it has to be emphasised that a nine day course can never hope to tie up major controversies within Marxism, nor provide a comprehensive counter course from which people can emerge forearmed with all the weapons to combat bourgeois ideology. Indeed this could not be the realistic resolution of the tension I described in the opening paragraph. All that the Communist University can do is act as a vital focussing device for ongoing ideological work. Perhaps for some CUL will lay the foundations on which to build, for others it will be an opportunity to try out new ideas. I have left past CULs with the old assumptions shattered and new questions to ask, leaving behind some questions which may have been answered or which may have faded into insignificance; and of course there are some questions that carry over from year to year. But it seems to me that this modest contribution to the development of a Marxist current in Britain, is one of vital importance if we are ever to successfully challenge the hegemony of traditional categories of Philosophy, or of any other discipline.

Steve Rayner



# INTO THE UNKNOWN



# group work

Report on an experimental group for working class students. University of New South Wales, 2nd Semester 1975.

The idea arose from a discussion of personal experience of working class life, and its reflection in sociological literature. My wife suggested the application of Feminist techniques to a working class group of students. The idea formed itself along the lines of two main aims. The first, to discuss experiences of working class life with a view to developing both consciousness and theory, particularly with reference to philosophical and political issues in contemporary Marxist debate. Secondly as a means of actually helping to solve problems of theory and practice in a university context, by bringing working class people together, making them less isolated and apolitical.

With the co-operation of the School of philosophy the idea was advertised as a voluntary option for working class students, but with no restriction on non-students. The definition of working class was rough and ready. Problems of definition were tackled by discussion with the people concerned, and final decisions on all issues were left to the group itself. The group settled down to a core membership of about 7, drawn mainly from courses I was running, plus some outsiders. It met weekly for about 8 weeks, usually lasting at least 3 hours eachtime. After initial discussion, the group decided to proceed by each member in turn giving an account of her/his personal experience in an agreed subject area, followed immediately by questions

and discussion of theoretical implications.

A valuable achievement of the group was the way it clearly revealed both unifying and divisive elements in the Australian working class experience. There was a whole range of experiences, some half-forgotten or half-repressed, that the group had in common, yet the important differences between us also emerged. Some of the more important categories were as follows. Firstly, the group was well-supported by women who were quick to specify the differences as well as the similarities between male and female working class experience in a particularly male dominated society. Secondly the group was also attended by a minority of homosexuals who were interested in the sexual socialisation of the working class. In both these cases an awareness of the nature and function of sexual roles in capitalist society was brought out from personal examples of oppression and struggle. Thirdly there was a division between those from a respectable suburban background, and those from inner-city areas who knew personally of police corruption and repression, and who were directly or indirectly involved in the working class response to it - criminal activity, and class solidarity. Fourthly, the divisions between religious and non-religious, and between Roman Catholic and Protestant, also provided interesting material. There was agreement that any religious background left a personality structure that remained long after the faith had been abandoned. Fifthly, in the Australian context, the migrant/native distinction is important,

and the migrant working class experience was also represented in the group. Finally, there was a contrast, implicit in many discussions, between the academically "successful" and the "unsuccessful". There were a number of spectacular "failures", often as a result of deliberate action. It was found to be a common experience to completely lack communication with middle class lecturers and students. The difficulty of coping with middle class academic requirements, including language, style and content of thought, proved to be an unpleasant or impossible task for some. Others, however, coped more easily - often those with a religious or suburban background.

As a means of bridging the gap between the students themselves the experiment was generally considered to be a success - and also, I think, for between myself and the students. As a basis for discussing philosophy and politics it seemed to be a very promising start, but its further development was inevitably stunted by institutional pressures - the demands of work on other courses. In any case it was too short to get deep into theory. As a means of stimulating social and political consciousness it was also promising. No very concrete achievements can be recorded, but I would have no hesitation about repeating and extending the experiment. I have now left the University, but there were plans to continue the group in a different form by some of the members themselves.

Derek Clifford

## i.e.sussex

ideas in education for Sussex (ie Sussex) is an attempt by students at Sussex University to come to grips with their total situation as students. It grew out of a multitude of dissatisfactions with the way education works as a whole and the recognition that something has gone fundamentally wrong with study at Sussex University.

During the past year and a half our activities have extended from taking action within the teaching situation to producing a 'folder' magazine, setting up a learning exchange, running an alternative library and essay pool, mounting a project-orientated counter-course, and gradually becoming involved in community education locally. Within the University we are in the process of creating an Education Forum to bring all student Representatives in University committees together on specifically educational issues, and forming a federation of education activities to stimulate wider involvement among students in general. At the same time, we are becoming increasingly aware of our relatively

privileged position as University students over most of society and the necessity of orientating the University as a whole towards community needs.

The folder is designed as a non-exclusive medium for exchanging ideas publically - editorial control is shared among writers, readers and producers; individual articles are usually written only as a step to putting ideas into action, and the issues themselves are produced in response to particular situations. Eventually we would like to link with others to develop the folder as part of an ideas exchange network.

Our counter-course, Learning for the Real World, is now in its second term with projects in Science, Community education, Communication, Organisation and Creativity. Its central aim is to achieve 'learner's control' in education by forming consciousness raising groups round real projects and organising a collectively self-managed learning programme round real needs. (folder available at 20p)



The idea of a learning exchange, taken from Illich, is to help people with specific needs contact others who can satisfy those needs. The aim of the exchange is to encourage people to share resources, skills, information and interests, with others. The scheme is based on noticeboards and has not yet got off the ground outside the University, but we have made contact with many people in Brighton, and with similar projects elsewhere in the country. We hope to produce a complete folder on the Learning Exchange fairly soon. Most university libraries obscure the social nature of knowledge. The fact that ideas arise out of experience and interaction between people; that they are developed through practice, discussion and argument; that they circulate by means of written words, publishing and libraries.

The point of the street library is that it expresses our collective consciousness and aspirations directly. By pooling our books, writings and ideas, we demonstrate where we stand and we are poised to work together. Books become almost incidental to our presence, but we respect them for their value to us. The street library is the personal property of all its users, and its ultimate point is when it becomes a vehicle for our thoughts, to be communicated across space and time. Above all, we run the library, we determine its use, its

scope, its development. The street library is our prototype for a community library. An important part of it is the 'live' section where we contribute our own thoughts and intuitions, our essays and notes. At the moment there is not much to the street library, it is still struggling, an experiment, three scruffy rooms and four bookshelves. It is as far from any street as it is from its potential as a tool for collective intellectual work serving a community with ideas and information. But it is growing, slowly, into an information point, a base for action and collective work. We don't yet, however, know of any other "alternative" libraries, but we have a few articles on the basic conception which we would like to issue in the future.

Recently, some of us initiated a Critical Sources Guide for psychology as a focus for activity through which to develop a communications network in order to meet the need of students for access to ideas and information alternative to the prevailing orthodoxies.

This year, we propose to produce a Prospectus of Alternatives as opposed to an Alternative Prospectus, as a critical guide for applicants and local people, in order to stimulate greater involvement in counter-course alternative projects, and educational needs away from the university.



Our general aim is putting ideas into action, and we are particularly interested in exchanging ideas, experiences and skills with people working for social change in the education movement. The following notes on current projects are taken, from articles written over the past year and we would be happy to provide further information to anyone wanting it. Similarly, we would like to know more about other projects going on elsewhere.

'I.E.Sussex' people

## OXFORD PHILOSOPHY CONTD.

the obvious, the only possible way, of doing philosophy. These comments are extremely schematic - contemporary analytical philosophy certainly is not the philosophy of ordinary language, but the basic prejudices and attitudes remain.

This lack of self-consciousness about methodology is one important element in turning students off philosophy. Any subject is unsatisfying if you can't get a grip on what you're doing. Obviously it isn't possible to teach advanced political philosophy, to give expositions of philosophical answers to 'the problems of life' without some grounding in basic concepts, without some understanding of the various positions taken up in the history of philosophy. But this basic philosophical understanding can be taught quickly and directly.

At present this just is not done because lack of self-consciousness about its own methods prevents Oxford philosophy from understanding the methods of other philosophies. It is able to eschew its historical commitment as philosophy to self understanding and general overview by an incredibly myopic vision of the history of philosophy and a vulgarly fawning attitude to the idiocies of scientism. Analytical philosophy lacks any historical sense. A lack which runs right through English intellectual life, even as far as Radical Philosophy and has its roots deep in English history. Oxford philosophy claims to be interested in 'thought' rather than 'information' but in the Oxford context we're forced to emphasise information about the history of philosophy just because of the misunderstandings stemming from the lack of it.

My suggestions for reform of the Oxford philosophy course and similar courses in other places are as follows. More self-consciousness about method in general. More careful study of our own history and the history of philosophy in general. More study of other philosophical traditions and more relation of philosophy to the other 'life understanding' disciplines. In concrete 'course' terms this would involve courses on basic

philosophical concepts, on the history of analytical philosophy continental philosophy and on philosophy and the 'social and human sciences'.

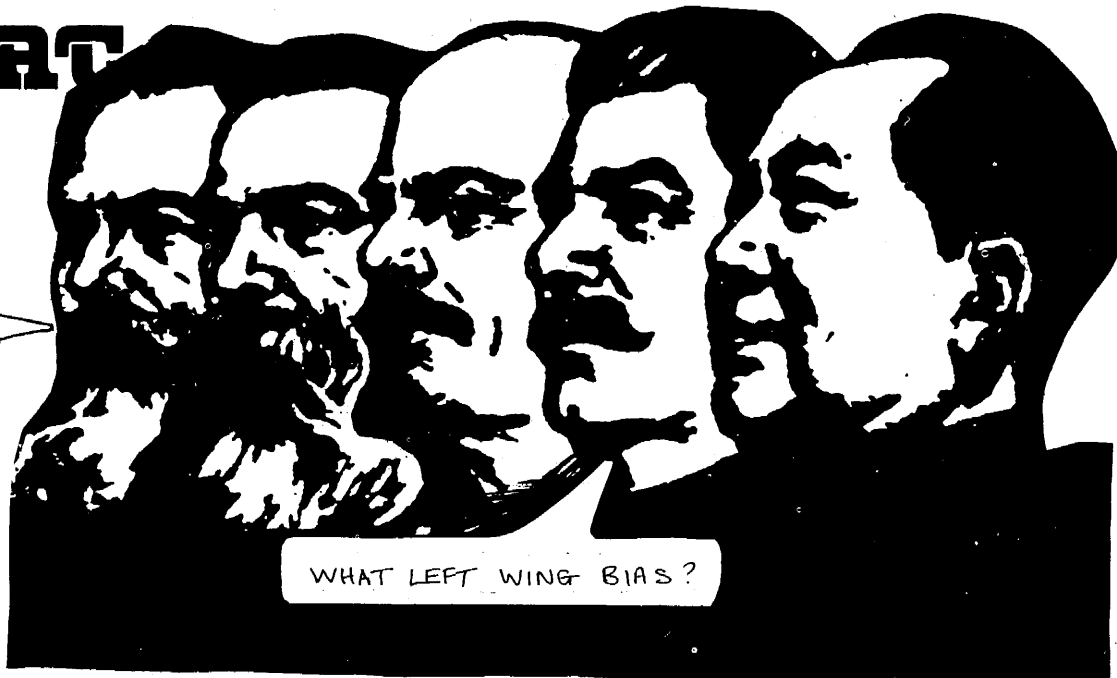
Well, these are all ways of making academic philosophy courses more relevant and interesting. I believe that with more methodological self-consciousness people could be led into thinking philosophically for themselves in an interesting way and in sufficient depth to enable serious consideration of the 'problems of everyday life' in the time available. But this isn't really radical philosophy. In our society philosophy is just one academic discipline among many - it's in the nature of our society that it remains so. Philosophy will only become truly radical when it has broken out of all academic contexts and is re-united with 'life'. This will only happen in a fundamentally changed society - although it may be one of the preconditions for such a change.

Hugh Tomlinson



# CONTACT

JOIN THE  
PROFESSIONALS



WHAT LEFT WING BIAS?

## R.P. groups

### OXFORD

Richard Whitehead  
Jesus College  
Oxford

### BIRMINGHAM

% 64 Harbury Road  
Balsall Heath  
Birmingham 12  
or % Peace Centre  
18 Moor Street

### BRISTOL

R. P. G.  
% Students Union  
The University  
Bristol

### SUSSEX

Nick Jenkin  
R. P. G.  
% Students Union  
Sussex

### LAMPETER

Chris Lawn  
Royal Oak  
Cellan  
Lampeter  
or % Students Union

### CAMBRIDGE

Julian Quan  
Churchill College  
Cambridge

If anyone is interested in forming  
a Radical Philosophy Group,  
let us know at:  
40 Langdon Park Rd., London N6

## R.P. contacts

### LONDON

S. Bank Poly ≠ Jo McCarney  
Philosophy Department  
Goldsmiths ≠ M. Sarup  
Education Department  
Garnett ≠ M. Erben  
Sociology Department  
Hendon ≠ J. Ree, Phil. Dept.  
Hornsey ≠ M. Dawney  
Philosophy Department.  
N.L. Poly ≠ A. Assiter  
Philosophy Department.

### KENT

≠ R. Norman  
Philosophy Dept.  
K. Davies  
17 Sidegate

### DURHAM

### ESSEX

≠ T. Benbon  
Sociology Dept.

### LIVERPOOL

### YORK

### ABERDEEN

\* S. Johnson, Flat 262  
Boece Court, Don St.

### COVENTRY

≠ P. Binns, Phil. Dept.  
Warwick University

### GLASGOW

G. Melting  
137 Brassley St. G20

### ST. ANDREWS

\* P. Smith, Dept. of  
Logic & Metaphysics, The Univ.  
≠ Lecturer \* interested in starting R.P.  
Group.

In Tyndeside, Manchester & Leeds, the  
Centres of Marxist Education do  
similar theoretical work.

## alternatives

### SCANUS

Dave Carter  
Scanus % N.U.S.  
3 Endsleigh St.  
London WC1

### CENTRES OF MARXIST EDUCATION

John Schwartzmantel  
70 Cobblingey Heights  
Leeds

### COMMUNIST UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

% Ken Spencer  
16 King St.  
London WC2

### L.E. SUSSEX

% Students Union  
Sussex University  
Falmer  
Brighton

### WOMENS EDUCATION COLLECTIVE

38 Earlham Street  
London W.C.2

Scanus also have a complete list  
of 'Counter Course activists' in  
universities and polys.

'Philosophy from Below' was edited by  
Dave Berry for Radical Philosophy  
Magazine. It was produced amidst in-  
numerable hassels by Trev Jago, who  
assembled the illustrations as well,  
and by Dave Berry. Ed Pope and Dave  
Christopher did most of the typing and  
Colin Gordon made the tea.

# CONTACTS CONTACTS CONTACTS