STALIN-WELLS TALK

The Verbatim Record
and
A Discussion by

G. BERNARD SHAW
H. G. WELLS
J. M. KEYNES
ERNST TOLLER
and others

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PREFACE

On October 27th The New Statesman and Nation reproduced the verbatim record of the conversation between Stalin and Wells during the latter’s recent visit to Moscow. Everyone was interested; partly because a clash of views between two such distinguished men is exciting in itself, and even more because the issues raised in their conversation are of the most profound importance to all of us in Western Europe. What is meant by the “class-war”? How far must old definitions be modified by the development of the new technical class? Was Marx substantially right, or is he an out-of-date nuisance? How much intellectual freedom is there in Communist Russia, and can Soviet writers be brought into closer contact with those of Western Europe? These questions were vigorously taken up in successive issues of The New Statesman and Nation by Mr. Bernard Shaw, Mr. J. M. Keynes, Mr. H. G. Wells, Mr. Ernst Toller and by other correspondents. The original conversation between Stalin and Wells, the articles that followed, and some of the high spots of the subsequent correspondence are reprinted in this pamphlet.
Stalin-Wells Talk

THE VERBATIM RECORD

WELLS: I am very much obliged to you, Mr. Stalin, for agreeing to see me. I was in the United States recently. I had a long conversation with President Roosevelt and tried to ascertain what his leading ideas were. Now I have come to you to ask you what you are doing to change the world.

STALIN: Not so very much.

WELLS: I wander around the world as a common man, and, as a common man, observe what is going on around me.

STALIN: Important public men like yourself are not 'common men'. Of course, history alone can show how important this or that public man has been; at all events you do not look at the world as a 'common man'.

WELLS: I am not pretending humility. What I mean is that I try to see the world through the eyes of the common man and not as a party politician or a responsible administrator. My visit to the United States excited my mind. The old financial world is collapsing; the economic life of the country is being reorganised on new lines. Lenin said: 'We must learn to do business', learn this from the capitalists. To-day the capitalists have to learn from you to grasp the spirit of Socialism. It seems to me that what is taking place in the United States is a profound reorganisation, the creation of planned, that is, socialist economy. You and Roosevelt begin from two different starting-points. But is there not a relation in ideas, a kinship of ideas and needs, between Washington and Moscow? In Washington I was struck by the same thing that I see going on here; they are building offices, they are creating a number of new State regulation bodies, they are organising a long-needed civil service. Their need, like yours, is directive ability.

AMERICA AND RUSSIA

STALIN: The United States is pursuing a different aim from that which we are pursuing in the U.S.S.R. The aim which the Americans are pursuing arose out of the economic troubles, out of the economic crisis. The Americans want to rid themselves of the crisis on the basis of private capitalist activity without changing the economic basis. They are trying to reduce to a minimum the
ruin, the losses caused by the existing economic system. Here, however, as you know, in place of the old destroyed economic basis, an entirely different, a new economic basis has been created. Even if the Americans you mention partly achieve their aim, i.e. reduce these losses to a minimum, they will not destroy the roots of the anarchy which is inherent in the existing capitalist system. They are preserving the economic system which must inevitably lead, and cannot but lead, to anarchy in production. Thus, at best, it will be a matter, not of the reorganisation of society, not of abolishing the old social system which gives rise to anarchy and crises, but of restricting certain of its bad features, restricting certain of its excesses. Subjectively, perhaps, these Americans think they are reorganising society; objectively, however, they are preserving the present basis of society. That is why, objectively, there will be no reorganisation of society.

Nor will there be planned economy. What is planned economy, what are some of its attributes? Planned economy tries to abolish unemployment. Let us suppose it is possible, while preserving the capitalist system, to reduce unemployment to a certain minimum. But surely no capitalists would ever agree to the complete abolition of unemployment, to the abolition of the reserve army of unemployed the purpose of which is to bring pressure on the labour market, to ensure a supply of cheap labour. Here you have one of the rents in the ‘planned economy’ of bourgeois society. Furthermore, planned economy presupposes increased output in those branches of industry which produce goods that the masses of the people need particularly. But you know that the expansion of production under capitalism takes place for entirely different motives, that capital flows into those branches of economy in which the rate of profit is highest. You will never compel a capitalist to incur loss to himself and agree to a lower rate of profit for the sake of satisfying the needs of the people. Without getting rid of the capitalists, without abolishing the principle of private property in the means of production, it is impossible to create planned economy.

Wells: I agree with much of what you have said. But I would like to stress the point that if a country as a whole adopts the principle of planned economy, if the Government gradually, step by step, begins consistently to apply this principle, the financial oligarchy will at last be abolished, and Socialism, in the Anglo-Saxon meaning of the word, will be brought about. The effect of the ideas of Roosevelt’s ‘new deal’ is most powerful, and in my opinion they are socialist ideas. It seems to me that instead of
stressing the antagonism between the two worlds, we should, in the present circumstances, strive to establish a common tongue for all the constructive forces.

Stalin: In speaking of the impossibility of realising the principles of planned economy while preserving the economic basis of capitalism, I do not in the least desire to belittle the outstanding personal qualities of Roosevelt, his initiative, courage, and determination. Undoubtedly Roosevelt stands out as one of the strongest figures among all the captains of the contemporary capitalist world. That is why I would like once again to emphasise the point that my conviction that planned economy is impossible under the conditions of capitalism does not mean that I have any doubts about the personal abilities, talent, and courage of President Roosevelt. But if the circumstances are unfavourable, the most talented captain cannot reach the goal you refer to. Theoretically, of course, the possibility of marching gradually, step by step, under the conditions of capitalism, towards the goal which you call Socialism in the Anglo-Saxon meaning of the word, is not precluded. But what will this 'Socialism' be? At best, bridling to some extent the most unbridled of individual representatives of capitalist profit, some increase in the application of the principle of regulation in national economy. That is all very well. But as soon as Roosevelt, or any other captain in the contemporary bourgeois world, proceeds to undertake something serious against the foundation of capitalism, he will inevitably suffer utter defeat. The banks, the industries, the large enterprises, the large farms, are not in Roosevelt's hands. All these are private property. The railroads, the mercantile fleet, all these belong to private owners. And, finally, the army of skilled workers, the engineers, the technicians—these too are not at Roosevelt's command, they are at the command of the private owners; they all work for the private owners. We must not forget the functions of the State in the bourgeois world. The State is an institution that organises the defence of the country, organises the maintenance of 'order'; it is an apparatus for collecting taxes. The capitalist State does not deal much with economy in the strict sense of the word; the latter is not in the hands of the State. On the contrary, the State is in the hands of capitalist economy. That is why I fear that, in spite of all his energy and abilities, Roosevelt will not achieve the goal you mention, if indeed that is his goal. Perhaps, in the course of several generations, it will be possible to approach this goal somewhat; but I personally think that even this is not very probable.
SOCIALISM AND INDIVIDUALISM

WELLS: Perhaps I believe more strongly in the economic interpretation of politics than you do. Huge forces striving for better organisation, for the better functioning of the community—that is, for Socialism—have been brought into action by invention and modern science. Organisation, and the regulation of individual action, have become mechanical necessities, irrespective of social theories. If we begin with the State control of the banks and then follow with the control of the heavy industries, of industry in general, of commerce, etc., such an all-embracing control will be equivalent to the State ownership of all branches of national economy. This will be the process of socialisation. Socialism and individualism are not opposites like black and white. There are many intermediate stages between them. There is individualism that borders on brigandage, and there is discipline and organisation that are the equivalent of Socialism. The introduction of planned economy depends, to a large degree, upon the organisers of economy, upon the skilled technical intelligentsia who, step by step, can be converted to the socialist principles of organisation. And this is the most important thing, because organisation comes before Socialism. It is the more important fact. Without organisation the socialist idea is a mere idea.

STALIN: There is not, nor should there be, an irreconcilable contrast between the individual and the collective, between the interests of the individual person and the interests of the collective. There should be no such contrast, because collectivism, Socialism, does not deny, but combines individual interests with the interests of the collective. Socialism cannot abstract itself from individual interests. Socialist society alone can most fully satisfy these personal interests. More than that, socialist society alone can firmly safeguard the interests of the individual. In this sense there is no irreconcilable contrast between Individualism and Socialism. But can we deny the contrast between classes, between the propertied class, the capitalist class, and the toiling class, the proletarian class? On the one hand we have the propertied class which owns the banks, the factories, the mines, transport, the plantations in colonies. These people see nothing but their own interests, their striving after profits. They do not submit to the will of the collective; they strive to subordinate every collective to their will. On the other hand, we have the class of the poor, the exploited class, which owns neither factories, nor works, nor banks, which is compelled to
live by selling its labour power to the capitalists and which lacks the opportunity to satisfy its most elementary requirements. How can such opposite interests and strivings be reconciled? As far as I know, Roosevelt has not succeeded in finding the path of conciliation between these interests. And it is impossible, as experience has shown. Incidentally, you know the situation in the United States better than I do, as I have never been there and I watch American affairs mainly from literature. But I have some experience in fighting for Socialism, and this experience tells me that if Roosevelt makes a real attempt to satisfy the interests of the proletarian class at the expense of the capitalist class, the latter will put another President in his place. The capitalists will say: Presidents come and Presidents go, but we go on for ever; if this or that President does not protect our interests, we shall find another. What can the President oppose to the will of the capitalist class?

Wells: I object to this simplified classification of mankind into poor and rich. Of course there is a category of people which strives only for profit. But are not these people regarded as nuisances in the West just as much as here? Are there not plenty of people in the West, for whom profit is not an end, who own a certain amount of wealth, who want to invest and obtain an income from this investment, but who do not regard this as their main object? They regard investment as an inconvenient necessity. Are there not plenty of capable and devoted engineers, organisers of economy, whose activities are stimulated by something other than profit? In my opinion there is a numerous class of capable people who admit that the present system is unsatisfactory, and who are destined to play a great role in future capitalist society. During the past few years I have been much engaged in, and have thought of the need for conducting, propaganda in favour of Socialism and cosmopolitanism among wide circles of engineers, airmen, military-technical people, etc. It is useless approaching these circles with two-track class-war propaganda. These people understand the condition of the world. They understand that it is a bloody muddle, but they regard your simple class-war antagonism as nonsense.

The Class War

Stalin: You object to the simplified classification of mankind into poor and rich. Of course there is a middle stratum; there is the technical intelligentsia that you have mentioned and among which there are very good and very honest people. Among them there are also dishonest and wicked people, there are all sorts of
people among them. But first of all mankind is divided into rich and poor, into property owners and exploited; and to abstract oneself from this fundamental division and from the antagonism between poor and rich means abstracting oneself from the fundamental fact. I do not deny the existence of intermediate, middle, strata which either take the side of one or other of these two conflicting classes, or else take up a neutral or semi-neutral position in the struggle. But, I repeat, to abstract oneself from this fundamental division in society and from the fundamental struggle between the two main classes means ignoring facts. This struggle is going on and will continue. The outcome of the struggle will be determined by the proletarian class—the working class.

Wells: But are there not many people who are not poor, but who work and work productively?

Stalin: Of course there are small landowners, artisans, small traders; but it is not these people who decide the fate of a country, but the toiling masses, who produce all the things society requires.

Wells: But there are very different kinds of capitalists. There are capitalists who only think about profits, about getting rich; but there are also those who are prepared to make sacrifices. Take old Morgan, for example. He only thought about profit; he was a parasite on society, simply; he merely accumulated wealth. But take Rockefeller. He is a brilliant organiser; he has set an example of how to organise the delivery of oil that is worthy of emulation. Or take Ford. Of course Ford is selfish. But is he not a passionate organiser of rationalised production from whom you take lessons? I would like to emphasise the fact that recently an important change in opinion towards the U.S.S.R. has taken place in English-speaking countries. The reason for this, first of all, is the position of Japan, and the events in Germany. But there are other reasons besides those arising from international politics. There is a more profound reason, namely, the recognition by many people of the fact that the system based on private profit is breaking down. In these circumstances, it seems to me, we must not bring to the forefront the antagonism between the two worlds, but should strive to combine all the constructive movements, all the constructive forces in one line as much as possible. It seems to me that I am more to the Left than you, Mr. Stalin; I think the old system is nearer to its end than you think.

The Technician Class

Stalin: In speaking of the capitalists who strive only for profit, only to get rich, I do not want to say that these are the most worthless
people, capable of nothing else. Many of them undoubtedly possess great organising talent, which I do not dream of denying. We Soviet people learn a great deal from the capitalists. And Morgan, whom you characterise so unfavourably, was undoubtedly a good, capable organiser. But if you mean people who are prepared to reconstruct the world, of course you will not be able to find them in the ranks of those who faithfully serve the cause of profit. We and they stand at opposite poles. You mentioned Ford. Of course he is a capable organiser of production. But don't you know his attitude towards the working class? Don't you know how many workers he throws on the street? The capitalist is riveted to profit, and no power on earth can tear him away from it. Capitalism will be abolished not by 'organisers' of production, not by the technical intelligentsia, but by the working class, because the aforementioned strata do not play an independent role. The engineer, the organiser of production, does not work as he would like to, but as he is ordered, in such a way as to serve the interests of his employers. There are exceptions of course; there are people in this stratum who have awakened from the intoxication of capitalism. The technical intelligentsia can, under certain conditions, perform miracles and greatly benefit mankind. But it can also cause great harm. We Soviet people have not a little experience of the technical intelligentsia. After the October Revolution a certain section of the technical intelligentsia refused to take part in the work of constructing the new society; they opposed this work of construction and sabotaged it. We did all we possibly could to bring the technical intelligentsia into the work of construction; we tried this way and that. Not a little time passed before our trained intelligentsia agreed actively to assist the new system. To-day the best section of this technical intelligentsia is in the front ranks of the builders of socialist society. Having this experience, we are far from underestimating the good and the bad sides of the technical intelligentsia, and we know that on the one hand it can do harm, and on the other hand it can perform 'miracles'. Of course, things would be different if it were possible at one stroke spiritually to tear the technical intelligentsia away from the capitalist world. But that is Utopia. Are there many of the technical intelligentsia who would dare break away from the bourgeois world and set to work to reconstruct society? Do you think there are many people of this kind, say, in England or in France? No; there are few who would be willing to break away from their employers and begin reconstructing the world.
ACHIEVEMENT OF POLITICAL POWER

Besides, can we lose sight of the fact that in order to transform the world it is necessary to have political power? It seems to me, Mr. Wells, that you greatly underestimate the question of political power, that it entirely drops out of your conception. What can those, even with the best intentions in the world, do if they are unable to raise the question of seizing power, and do not possess power? At best they can help the class which takes power, but they cannot change the world themselves. This can only be done by a great class which will take the place of the capitalist class and become the sovereign master as the latter was before. This class is the working class. Of course, the assistance of the technical intelligentsia must be accepted; and the latter, in turn, must be assisted. But it must not be thought that the technical intelligentsia can play an independent historical role. The transformation of the world is a great, complicated, and painful process. For this great task a great class is required. Big ships go on long voyages.

Wells: Yes, but for long voyages a captain and a navigator are required.

Stalin: That is true, but what is first required for a long voyage is a big ship. What is a navigator without a ship? An idle man.

Wells: The big ship is humanity, not a class.

Stalin: You, Mr. Wells, evidently start out with the assumption that all men are good. I, however, do not forget that there are many wicked men. I do not believe in the goodness of the bourgeoisie.

Wells: I remember the situation with regard to the technical intelligentsia several decades ago. At that time the technical intelligentsia was numerically small, but there was much to do, and every engineer, technical and intellectual, found his oppor- tunity. That is why the technical intelligentsia was the least revolutionary class. Now, however, there is a superabundance of technical intellectuals, and their mentality has changed very sharply. The skilled man, who would formerly never listen to revolutionary talk, is now greatly interested in it. Recently I was dining with the Royal Society, our great English scientific society. The President's speech was a speech for social planning and scientific control. To-day, the man at the head of the Royal Society holds revolutionary views, and insists on the scientific reorganisation of human society. Your class-war propaganda has not kept pace with these facts. Mentality changes.
STALIN: Yes, I know this, and it is to be explained by the fact that capitalist society is now in a cul-de-sac. The capitalists are seeking, but cannot find, a way out of this cul-de-sac that would be compatible with the dignity of this class, compatible with the interests of this class. They could, to some extent, crawl out of the crisis on their hands and knees, but they cannot find an exit that would enable them to walk out of it with head raised high, a way out that would not fundamentally disturb the interests of capitalism. This, of course, is realised by wide circles of the technical intelligentsia. A large section of it is beginning to realise the community of its interests with those of the class which is capable of pointing the way out of the cul-de-sac.

WELLS: You of all people know something about revolutions, Mr. Stalin, from the practical side. Do the masses ever rise? Is it not an established truth that all revolutions are made by a minority?

STALIN: To bring about a revolution a leading revolutionary minority is required; but the most talented, devoted, and energetic minority would be helpless if it did not rely upon the at least passive support of millions.

WELLS: At least passive? Perhaps subconscious?

STALIN: Partly also the semi-instinctive and semiconscious, but without the support of millions the best minority is impotent.

THE PLACE OF VIOLENCE

WELLS: I watch Communist propaganda in the West, and it seems to me that in modern conditions this propaganda sounds very old-fashioned, because it is insurrectionary propaganda. Propaganda in favour of the violent overthrow of the social system was all very well when it was directed against tyranny. But under modern conditions, when the system is collapsing anyhow, stress should be laid on efficiency, on competence, on productiveness, and not on insurrection. It seems to me that the insurrectionary note is obsolete. The Communist propaganda in the West is a nuisance to constructive-minded people.

STALIN: Of course the old system is breaking down, decaying. That is true. But it is also true that new efforts are being made by other methods, by every means, to protect, to save this dying system. You draw a wrong conclusion from a correct postulate. You rightly state that the old world is breaking down. But you are wrong in thinking that it is breaking down of its own accord. No; the substitution of one social system for another is a complicated and long revolutionary process. It is not simply a spontaneous
process, but a struggle; it is a process connected with the clash of classes. Capitalism is decaying, but it must not be compared simply with a tree which has decayed to such an extent that it must fall to the ground of its own accord. No; revolution, the substitution of one social system for another, has always been a struggle, a painful and a cruel struggle, a life-and-death struggle. And every time the people of the new world came into power they had to defend themselves against the attempts of the old world to restore the old order by force; these people of the new world always had to be on the alert, always had to be ready to repel the attacks of the old world upon the new system.

Yes, you are right when you say that the old social system is breaking down; but it is not breaking down of its own accord. Take Fascism for example. Fascism is a reactionary force which is trying to preserve the old world by means of violence. What will you do with the Fascists? Argue with them? Try to convince them? But this will have no effect upon them at all. Communists do not in the least idealise methods of violence. But they, the Communists, do not want to be taken by surprise; they cannot count on the old world voluntarily departing from the stage; they see that the old system is violently defending itself, and that is why the Communists say to the working class: Answer violence with violence; do all you can to prevent the old dying order from crushing you; do not permit it to put manacles on your hands, on the hands with which you will overthrow the old system. As you see, the Communists regard the substitution of one social system for another, not simply as a spontaneous and peaceful process, but as a complicated, long, and violent process. Communists cannot ignore facts.

Wells: But look at what is now going on in the capitalist world. The collapse is not a simple one, it is an outbreak of reactionary violence which is degenerating into gangsterism. And it seems to me that when it comes to a conflict with reactionary and unintelligent violence, Socialists can appeal to the law, and instead of regarding the police as the enemy they should support them in the fight against the reactionaries. I think that it is useless operating with the methods of the old rigid insurrectionary Socialism.

LESSONS OF HISTORY

Stalin: The Communists base themselves on rich historical experience which teaches that obsolete classes do not voluntarily abandon the stage of history. Recall the history of England in the
seventeenth century. Did not many say that the old social system had decayed? But did it not, nevertheless, require a Cromwell to crush it by force?

Wells: Cromwell operated on the basis of the constitution and in the name of constitutional order.

Stalin: In the name of the constitution he resorted to violence, beheaded the king, dispersed Parliament, arrested some and beheaded others!

Or take an example from our history. Was it not clear for a long time that the Tsarist system was decaying, was breaking down? But how much blood had to be shed in order to overthrow it?

And what about the October Revolution? Were there not plenty of people who knew that we alone, the Bolsheviks, were indicating the only correct way out? Was it not clear that Russian capitalism had decayed? But you know how great was the resistance, how much blood had to be shed in order to defend the October Revolution from all its enemies, internal and external.

Or take France at the end of the eighteenth century. Long before 1789 it was clear to many how rotten the royal power, the feudal system, was. But a popular insurrection, a clash of classes was not, could not be, avoided. Why? Because the classes which must abandon the stage of history are the last to become convinced that their role is ended. It is impossible to convince them of this. They think that the fissures in the decaying edifice of the old order can be mended, that the tottering edifice of the old order can be repaired and saved. That is why dying classes take to arms and resort to every means to save their existence as a ruling class.

Wells: But were there not a few lawyers at the head of the great French Revolution?

Stalin: I do not deny the role of the intelligentsia in revolutionary movements. Was the great French Revolution a lawyers’ revolution and not a popular revolution, which achieved victory by rousing vast masses of the people against feudalism and championed the interests of the Third Estate? And did the lawyers among the leaders of the great French Revolution act in accordance with the laws of the old order? Did they not introduce new, bourgeois-revolutionary law?

The rich experience of history teaches that up to now not a single class has voluntarily made way for another class. There is no such precedent in world history. The Communists have learned this lesson of history. Communists would welcome the voluntary departure of the bourgeoisie. But such a turn of affairs is im-
probable, that is what experience teaches. That is why the Communists want to be prepared for the worst and call upon the working class to be vigilant, to be prepared for battle. Who wants a captain who lulls the vigilance of his army, a captain who does not understand that the enemy will not surrender, that he must be crushed? To be such a captain means deceiving, betraying the working class. That is why I think that what seems to you to be old-fashioned is in fact a measure of revolutionary expediency for the working class.

**HOW TO MAKE A REVOLUTION**

**Wells:** I do not deny that force has to be used, but I think the forms of the struggle should fit as closely as possible to the opportunities presented by the existing laws, which must be defended against reactionary attacks. There is no need to disorganise the old system, because it is disorganising itself enough as it is. That is why it seems to me insurrection against the old order, against the law, is obsolete, old-fashioned. Incidentally, I deliberately exaggerate in order to bring the truth out more clearly. I can formulate my point of view in the following way: first, I am for order; second, I attack the present system in so far as it cannot assure order; third, I think that class-war propaganda may detach from Socialism just those educated people whom Socialism needs.

**Stalin:** In order to achieve a great object, an important social object, there must be a main force, a bulwark, a revolutionary class. Next it is necessary to organise the assistance of an auxiliary force for this main force; in this case this auxiliary force is the party, to which the best forces of the intelligentsia belong. Just now you spoke about ‘educated people’. But what educated people did you have in mind? Were there not plenty of educated people on the side of the old order in England in the seventeenth century, in France at the end of the eighteenth century, and in Russia in the epoch of the October Revolution? The old order had in its service many highly educated people who defended the old order, who opposed the new order. Education is a weapon the effect of which is determined by the hands which wield it, by who is to be struck down. Of course, the proletariat, Socialism, needs highly educated people. Clearly, simpletons cannot help the proletariat to fight for Socialism, to build a new society. I do not underestimate the role of the intelligentsia; on the contrary, I emphasise it. The question is, however, which intelligentsia are we discussing? Because there are different kinds of intelligentsia.
Wells: There can be no revolution without a radical change in the educational system. It is sufficient to quote two examples—the example of the German Republic, which did not touch the old educational system, and therefore never became a republic; and the example of the British Labour Party, which lacks the determination to insist on a radical change in the educational system.

Stalin: That is a correct observation.

Permit me now to reply to your three points. First, the main thing for the revolution is the existence of a social bulwark. This bulwark of the revolution is the working class.

Second, an auxiliary force is required, that which the Communists call a party. To the party belong the intelligent workers and those elements of the technical intelligentsia which are closely connected with the working class. The intelligentsia can be strong only if it combines with the working class. If it opposes the working class, it becomes a cipher.

Third, political power is required as a lever for change. The new political power creates the new laws, the new order, which is revolutionary order.

I do not stand for any kind of order. I stand for order that corresponds to the interests of the working class. If, however, any of the laws of the old order can be utilised in the interests of the struggle for the new order, the old laws should be utilised. I cannot object to your postulate that the present system should be attacked in so far as it does not ensure the necessary order for the people.

And finally, you are wrong if you think that the Communists are enamoured of violence. They would be very pleased to drop violent methods if the ruling class agreed to give way to the working class. But the experience of history speaks against such an assumption.

Wells: There was a case in the history of England, however, of a class voluntarily handing over power to another class. In the period between 1830 and 1870, the aristocracy, whose influence was still very considerable at the end of the eighteenth century, voluntarily, without a severe struggle, surrendered power to the bourgeoisie, which served as a sentimental support of the monarchy. Subsequently, this transference of power led to the establishment of the rule of the financial oligarchy.

Stalin: But you have imperceptibly passed from questions of revolution to questions of reform. This is not the same thing. Don’t you think that the Chartist movement played a great role in the reforms in England in the nineteenth century?
THE VERBATIM RECORD

Wells: The Chartists did little and disappeared without leaving a trace.

THE BOURGEOISIE IN BRITAIN

Stalin: I do not agree with you. The Chartists, and the strike movement which they organised, played a great role; they compelled the ruling classes to make a number of concessions in regard to the franchise, in regard to abolishing the so-called ‘rotten boroughs’, and in regard to some of the points of the ‘Charter’. Chartism played a not unimportant historical role and compelled a section of the ruling classes to make certain concessions, reforms, in order to avert great shocks. Generally speaking, it must be said that of all the ruling classes, the ruling classes of England, both the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie, proved to be the cleverest, most flexible from the point of view of their class interests, from the point of view of maintaining their power. Take an example, say, from modern history—the general strike in England in 1926. The first thing any other bourgeoisie would have done in the face of such an event, when the General Council of Trade Unions called for a strike, would have been to arrest the Trade Union leaders. The British bourgeoisie did not do that, and it acted cleverly from the point of view of its own interests. I cannot conceive of such a flexible strategy being employed by the bourgeoisie of the United States, Germany or France. In order to maintain their rule, the ruling classes of Great Britain have never forsworn small concessions, reforms. But it would be a mistake to think that these reforms were revolutionary.

Wells: You have a higher opinion of the ruling classes of my country than I have. But is there a great difference between a small revolution and a great reform? Is not a reform a small revolution?

Stalin: Owing to pressure from below, the pressure of the masses, the bourgeoisie may sometimes concede certain partial reforms while remaining on the basis of the existing social-economic system. Acting in this way, it calculates that these concessions are necessary in order to preserve its class rule. This is the essence of reform. Revolution, however, means the transference of power from one class to another. That is why it is impossible to describe any reform as revolution. That is why we cannot count on the change of social systems taking place as an imperceptible transition from one system to another by means of reforms, by the ruling class making concessions.

**
WHAT RUSSIA IS DOING

Wells: I am very grateful to you for this talk, which has meant a great deal to me. In explaining things to me you probably called to mind how you had to explain the fundamentals of Socialism in the illegal circles before the revolution. At the present time there are in the world only two persons to whose opinion, to whose every word, millions are listening—you and Roosevelt. Others may preach as much as they like; what they say will never be printed or heeded. I cannot yet appreciate what has been done in your country; I only arrived yesterday. But I have already seen the happy faces of healthy men and women, and I know that something very considerable is being done here. The contrast with 1920 is astounding.

Stalin: Much more could have been done had we Bolsheviks been cleverer.

Wells: No, if human beings were cleverer. It would be a good thing to invent a Five-Year Plan for the reconstruction of the human brain, which obviously lacks many things needed for a perfect social order. (Laughter.)

Stalin: Don’t you intend to stay for the Congress of the Soviet Writers’ Union?

Wells: Unfortunately I have various engagements to fulfil, and I can stay in the U.S.S.R. only for a week. I came to see you, and I am very satisfied by our talk. But I intend to discuss with such Soviet writers as I can meet the possibility of their affiliating to the P.E.N. Club. This is an international organisation of writers founded by Galsworthy; after his death I became president. The organisation is still weak, but it has branches in many countries, and what is more important, the speeches of its members are widely reported in the press. It insists upon this, free expression of opinion—even of opposition opinion. I hope to discuss this point with Gorki. I do not know if you are prepared yet for that much freedom. . . .

Stalin: We Bolsheviks call it ‘self-criticism’. It is widely used in the U.S.S.R. . . .
NOTE UPON FREEDOM IN RUSSIA

By H. G. WELLS

The following memorandum serves as an interesting addition to the preceding conversation. It was prepared as a message to the Congress of Soviet Writers held in August; copies were entrusted to Maxim Gorki and the organising secretary of the Congress, and Mr. Wells hoped that this invitation from the London P.E.N. Club would serve as a basis for a frank discussion of freedom and initiative by the younger Russian writers. But there is no evidence that this carefully worded message ever reached them. No answer of any sort, official or unofficial, has been received by the London P.E.N. Club or Mr. Wells. The authorities in Soviet Russia seem as timorous about subversive propaganda as Conservative old ladies in England. Russia is still a fastness of orthodoxy, even if the guardianship of orthodoxy has changed hands.

July, 1934.

Mr. H. G. Wells is very sorry indeed that a pressing engagement prevented him from attending the Congress of Soviet Writers. In any case, it would have been a most interesting and delightful experience, but it greatly increases his regret that the clash of dates has made it impossible for him to remain in Moscow to discuss personally a matter he has very much at heart, the establishment of a liaison between the Union of Soviet Writers and the organisation known as the International of P.E.N. Clubs, of which he is president in succession to John Galsworthy. The P.E.N. system exists for two main purposes—the maintenance of pleasant personal and social relations between writers and literary workers in different countries, sustained generally by dinners, visits, tours, excursions, an annual congress and so forth, and what is of much more importance, the practical assertion in every available way of the right of free expression and free publicity throughout the world. It is, also, as collateral activities seeking to organise and establish standards of competence in translation and to assist in bringing the various national societies for the protection of the business interests of authors, such as the British Society of Authors, into closer relationship with itself and each other. Its members have long felt the desirability of getting into touch with Russian literary activities. They would like to see a Russian P.E.N. Club established.
It is necessary, however, to point out that the general constitution of the P.E.N. Clubs throughout the world requires that every P.E.N. shall be freely open to competent writers of whatever shade of political or social opinion they may be, and shall be a self-governing body entirely independent of any Government or official control. Because of this clause the International Committee of the P.E.N. has had, very reluctantly, to disown the Berlin P.E.N., which last year expelled various writers because they were either Jewish, communistic, or pacifist, and it is now engaged in a discussion which may end in a breach with the Rome P.E.N., because it appears that that centre bars writers who are politically in opposition to the Fascist regime. In suggesting the formation of a Russian P.E.N. Club, therefore, we should stipulate from the outset that the Club should be independent of political control and should adhere to its fundamental principle of tolerance for every shade of opinion in its meetings and membership.

The problem of maintaining this tolerance, we recognise, is by no means a simple one. At present, because of the Nazi persecution, the recognised German P.E.N. has no seat on German soil and is out of touch with the mass of German people. That is a very unsatisfactory state of affairs and can be, we feel, only a temporary arrangement. We do not believe in 'exile' clubs, which are out of touch with the main masses of their community. On the other hand, we want most earnestly to keep in touch with the entire range of German thought and artistic expression. We are also not clear how far the body of Russian writers are ready to accept our principle of catholicity. We should be very glad if you would fraternally communicate your views to us in this matter. Mr. Wells personally is inclined to think it may be necessary in some cases, where full P.E.N. Clubs seated upon their proper soil are for any reason impossible, to establish what we may call corresponding relations with such more restricted organisations as may exist. This may be necessary in the Italian case, and it is a possibility to which we should be glad to hear your reactions. But we should much prefer to find you ready to enter without restriction into that world republic of thought and literary art which we seek to represent.
The Discussion

I.—MR. BERNARD SHAW’S COMMENT

The conversation, or rather collision, between these two extraordinary men has not told us anything we did not know as to their respective views; but it is entertaining as a bit of comedy; and I suspect it was not lost as such on Stalin; for he is a man with a keen sense of comedy and a very ready and genial laugh. Here are points to be noted and enjoyed.

Stalin listens attentively and seriously to Wells, taking in his pleadings exactly, and always hitting the nail precisely on the head in his reply. Wells does not listen to Stalin; he only waits with suffering patience to begin again when Stalin stops. He thinks he knows better than Stalin all that Stalin knows. He has not come to be instructed by Stalin, but to instruct him. He is going to save the world by Clissoldism. He does not know that Clissold is only the moralised capitalist of Comte, Comte being a back number because he had no better solution of the class-war difficulty. Rotary Clubs, founded to organise Clissold, almost instantly became luncheon clubs for men who had never heard of Comte or Clissold or even of H. G. Wells. But H. G., who pays no more attention to Rotary Clubs than to Stalin, and never had, as the Fabians had, to argue with Comtists whilst that species still existed, believes Clissoldism to be the latest thing, and assures Stalin, sans tact, that the class war is nonsense.

Stalin, who knows by experience what Clissolds are worth when it comes to the point, politely attempts to put H. G.’s ideas in Marxian order and proportion for him; but H. G., convinced that Stalin is obsessed with a silly formula about the class war, treats his expositions as irrelevant and tedious interruptions, and, dismissing them with a kindly ‘I agree with much of what you have said’, resumes his expatiation on the importance of Clissold.

Stalin, with invincible patience, again gives Wells a lucid elementary lesson in post-Marxian political science. It produces less effect on Wells than water on a duck’s back. Before pursuing the thread of his own remarks, he puts Stalin in what he conceives to be his place by the gentle warning: ‘Perhaps I believe more strongly in the economic interpretation of politics than you do.’
He then reproves Stalin for 'approaching these people [the Clissolds] with two-track class-war propaganda', forgetting that Stalin has found it necessary to approach them in two-track form with a job in one hand and a gun in the other. 'These people', H.G. declares, forgetting the days when Clissold's name was Ponderevo, 'understand the condition of the world. They understand that it is a bloody muddle; but they regard your simple class-war antagonism as nonsense.'

Stalin replies, in effect, that this is exactly what is wrong with them, and sorts them out nicely for H.G. But nothing can shake Wells's British conviction that Stalin, being a foreigner, and having never attended a meeting of the Institute of International Affairs in St. James's Square nor read The Round Table, has no grasp of the possibilities of Clissoldism and has had his mind destroyed by a malicious degenerate named Marx. To drive this home he makes Clissold, late Ponderevo, suddenly jump into the conversation in a new avatar as Morgan-Rockefeller-Ford. These men could organise. Then why not call them in to co-operate with Stalin? The suggestion is clinched by, 'It seems to me that I am more to the Left than you, Mr. Stalin.'

Stalin gallantly admits that these Clissolds could organise, but adds that the problem is how to organise them, which is precisely the problem that the Soviet has successfully solved, though not on a basis of private property, and not in all cases without a gentle but persistent pressure of a pistol muzzle on the Clissold occiput.

And so it went on. It is not literally true that the interview contains no evidence that our dear H.G. possesses a sense of hearing; but I will venture so far as to say that Robert Owen's famous tactic, 'Never argue: repeat your assertion', has seldom been applied more rigorously than by Wells on this occasion. I enjoy it the more because when I met Stalin the very first thing I noticed about him was that he was a first-rate listener. I never met a man who could talk so well and yet was in less of a hurry to talk than Stalin. Wells is a very good talker; but he is the worst listener in the world. This is fortunate; for his vision is so wide and assured that the slightest contradiction throws him into a blind fury of contemptuous and eloquently vituperative impatience. And to this Stalin might not have been so indulgent as H.G.'s more intimate friends at home.

Stalin gave him one opening. He said:

What can they [the Clissolds] do, even with the best intentions in the world, if they are unable to raise the question of seizing power, and do
not themselves possess power? At best they can help the class which takes power; but they cannot change the world themselves. This can be done only by a great class which will take the place of the capitalist class and become the sovereign master as the capitalist class was before. Such a class is the working class. The technical intelligentsia [Clissolds to wit] cannot play an independent historical role. The transformation of the world is a great, complicated, and painful process. For this great task a great class is required.

This is curiously like Gladstone or Bright making respectful gestures before the altar of that nineteenth-century idol, Public Opinion. H. G. might have reminded Stalin that the Bolsheviks were carried to victory by the great peasant-soldier class, bent to a man on private property in its most extreme form of peasant proprietorship. Ever since, Stalin and his colleagues have been engaged in the great task of exterminating these peasants and replacing them by cultured industrialists. Now it is not a paradox to say that this policy has the enthusiastic support of its more intelligent victims; for there can hardly be an intelligent proletarian in the world who does not heartily agree that the more different his son’s lot from his own, the better. But the ordinary workaday Russian, like other workaday folk, has to take what Stalin and his Government think good for him; and the question Wells might have asked is, were not the Bolshevik leaders the Clissolds of Russia, and is not Wells right in looking for social salvation to a conspiracy of Clissolds, self-dedicated and self-elected? And is not Stalin also right in holding that they will be men of irresistible vocation, convinced that Capitalism is an organised robbery of the proletariat, men ruthlessly determined to put it down as other sorts of brigandage are put down, and quite indifferent to their immediate interests in the pursuit of this end? That is a recognisable description of Lenin and Stalin, but not of Clissold or Rockefeller or Ford.

Anyhow, whether our deliverers are to be apostles or energetic parvenus, there is no denying Stalin’s proviso that they cannot change the world until they obtain political power. Also that unless they have a communistic ideal for which they care more than for any personal advantage to themselves, they will use their power to rationalise Capitalism instead of to destroy it. Wells has no fear of this, because he thinks that Capitalism is not a system but a chaos. He never made a greater mistake. Capitalism, on paper, is the most systematic and thoroughly reasoned of all the Utopias. It was its completeness and logic as a plan for getting the optimal social result from the institution of private property that reconciled humane thinkers like De Quincey, Austin, Macaulay
and the Utilitarians to it in full view of its actual and prospective horrors before Socialism became conceivably political. It is still taught as a standard system in our universities and still threatens the horrible possibility that Wells may study it some day and be lost to Socialism through it as completely as Asquith or Inge. The issue is really between private property with its automatic privileged distribution and public property with deliberately enforced equal distribution. Clissold can be of no use to Socialism as long as he dodges that issue. William Morris is described by Wells as a poet and decorator. That is not the significance of William Morris to us; there are plenty of poets and decorators about. Morris’s significant speciality was his freely expressed opinion that idle capitalists are ‘damned thieves’. And the word ‘damned’ was more than mere decoration. One misses that note in Clissold; yet it is the key-note of Socialism.

In this report of the Stalin–Wells collision between an irresistible force and an immovable obstacle we miss Wells’s description and opinion of Stalin.* We crave also for Stalin’s description and opinion of Wells. Wells has a genius for such descriptions; but Stalin also wields a trenchant pen, and can put controversial opponents ‘on the spot’ as effectively as Kulaks. Perhaps we shall enjoy both treats some day.

Meanwhile, let us thank Providence that they never came to grips over their differences. Stalin has exiled Trotsky and become the Pontifex Maximus of the new Russo-Catholic Church of Communism on two grounds. First, he is a practical Nationalist statesman recognising that Russia is a big enough handful for mortal rulers to tackle without taking on the rest of the world as well (Wells will have nothing short of a World State). Second, Stalin, inflexible as to his final aim, is a complete opportunist as to the means. He puts this to Wells in two memorable sentences. ‘I do not stand for any kind of order. I stand for order that corresponds to the interests of the working class.’ It is evident that Stalin is a man who will get things done, including, if necessary, the removal of Trotsky and the World Revolution from the business of the day. Wells, with his World State without Revolution, he also strikes out of the agenda for the present.

I think it unfortunate that Wells left Stalin in some doubt as to

* The omission is supplied in the second volume of Wells’s fascinating autobiography. In it he does handsome justice to Stalin’s straightness and good nature, but is blinded by his Marx phobia to Stalin’s strength of mind and realistic grasp of the historic situation.—G. B. S.
whether he is a friend or an enemy of the new Russia. On 
Wednesday of last week Mr. Chesterton, broadcasting from Portland 
Place, dealt an eloquent rebuke to Edmund Burke for the way in 
which his Liberalism crumpled up when it was put to the test by 
the French Revolution, and eulogised Fox for standing by his guns. 
And in the very same sentence Mr. Chesterton suddenly collapsed 
into the arms of the Duchess of Atholl (I write figuratively) like a 
mountain on the breast of a daisy, by quite gratuitously describing 
Bolshevism as ‘unlimited sweating’.

Now if so fearless a commentator, professing as a Distributist to 
be on the Left of Communism, can out-Burke Burke thus, whom 
in England can Stalin trust? I have long been laughed at in Russia 
as ‘a good man fallen among Fabians’; but the two old hyperfabian 
Fabians, Webb and Shaw, have stuck to their guns like Fox whilst 
the sentimental Socialists have been bolting in all directions from 
Stalin, screaming, like St. Peter, ‘I know not the man.’ Stalin is 
almost persona grata at the Foreign Office as our only bulwark 
against Japanese Imperialism, whilst our professedly Socialist 
Societies and Parties are blindly helping the rabble of capitalists 
who are trying to export our too scanty money to secure a share 
in the exploitation of Manchukuo and China, and to spite 
Communism. A pretty sort of cricket, this.

Mr. Wells, magnificently overlooking the existence of the League 
of Nations Committee for Intellectual Co-operation, and all the 
Internationals, first, second, and third, offers Russia the P.E.N. Club 
as a substitute. The offer has struck Russia speechless. I am a 
member of that Club; and I feel strongly tempted to test its political 
enlightenment and unanimity by moving that we invite Stalin to 
the next Club dinner.

II.—MR. ERNST TOLLER’S 
COMMENT

Mr. H. G. Wells—whom I admire as a great writer, and who has, 
I know, been one of the most courageous fighters for justice for 
many years—declared at a big meeting that in Soviet Russia the 
intellectual freedom of the writer has been completely suppressed, 
and that therefore ‘there was no intellectual life’. Mr. Wells bases 
his opinion on his experiences during a visit to Moscow and Lenin-
grad. I have myself just returned from Russia, where I spent two
months. I visited not only Moscow and Leningrad, but also many
autonomous republics, some of them in the Middle East. I am
afraid the Russians made the mistake of not acquainting Mr. Wells
with the mental life that is so strong in those republics. Otherwise
he could not have come to such a judgment.

My strongest impression in Russia was that, while in Fascist
countries intellectual freedom is ever more and more closely circum-
scribed, and writers who do not slavishly obey the orders of the
dictators must go into exile, in the U.S.S.R., on the other hand
intellectual freedom is growing. There are real signs that the restric-
tions of mental freedom, which the Soviet Government has hitherto
thought necessary, are being greatly relaxed.

At the Writers' Congress the representative of the Government
made the simple declaration that:

'In the U.S.S.R. every writer is at liberty to write what he likes,
but he is not at liberty to write badly.'

(Actually the writer is even at liberty to write badly, otherwise
the productions of modern Russian literature would be all master-
pieces, which they are not by any means.)

At the Congress, Russian writers like Pasternak, Babel, Tikhonov,
Oliesha, and Ehrenburg were enthusiastically acclaimed—writers
who are neither members of the Communist Party nor active
propagandists, but who were honoured because they are great
artists. The discussions took place on a high intellectual level;
they were concerned not with 'malicious propaganda', but with
questions of style and form. Joyce and Dos Passos were discussed.
Leading statesmen showed in their reports that they were familiar
with the older as well as the more modern literature, which can
scarcely be said of European statesmen. Young writers appeared
to have no fear of their critics; they fought tooth and nail against
any proposal to restrict their artistic liberty.

The mistakes of the U.S.S.R. in the early years are, to my mind,
being corrected. Black and white conceptions are rejected; in
the theatre, for instance, not marionettes are wanted, but human
beings in all their strength and weakness. The Russians are aware
that for the orthodox there is another world peopled with gods or
devils, but the gods and devils do not exist in this world—not even
in the country. Thus it is that at a Moscow theatre one may see a
counter-revolutionary officer of the White Army portrayed as a
human being, and even with sympathy. In Gorki's last play, the
capitalist is shown not as a mere demon, but as a strong personality.
Counter-revolution is ruthlessly suppressed, but people have sufficient insight to recognise that some of its supporters are idealists who would sacrifice their lives for it.

The writer in Russia is not the foundling of society, much rather the enfant gâté. Sycophantic praise is not expected of him; self-criticism is welcomed. And he is given time and leisure to work. Babel, who showed by his early books that he was an important prose-writer, but who has published nothing for seven years, told the Congress that he had been paid advances from the State Publishing House during that time, and without his being a retiring, modest individual, he has not been pressed for the manuscript. What free publisher of Western Europe would do as much?

I should like to add a personal experience of my own. I visited the country of the Bakhars and Gabardins. Their president, Kalmikov, a man of outstanding character, invited me to spend six months or a year there. 'Live here,' he said, 'look around you; perhaps you will be inspired to write about our people. I know well enough that you can't force your work. If you find after a year that you can write nothing, still you will have learned something, and that is enough.'

Fifteen years ago, 98 per cent. of these people were illiterate. To-day, only 2 per cent. can neither read nor write. In the libraries you will find the works of Russian and foreign writers. One of the most read writers is, incidentally, H. G. Wells. A sure sign of mental life in the U.S.S.R. !

The same phenomenon may be observed in many older autonomous republics of the U.S.S.R. Peoples who for centuries were suppressed by the Tsars, whose languages were forbidden, are by intensive work creating for themselves their own schools and universities, their own literature and art. Nowhere is cultural life suppressed; it is encouraged everywhere. Nowhere are spiritual values destroyed; everywhere they have become the possession of the people.

This is so even with the spiritual values of bourgeois society. One might almost speak of a renaissance of the classics. Not only are Pushkin, Gogol, Tolstoy and Lermontov read by millions, but there is as great an interest in Dickens and Swift, Balzac and Flaubert. Whereas in other countries there are insufficient readers, the only reason in Soviet Russia why the huge editions are not doubled and trebled is that there is a shortage of paper.

I wish Mr. Wells had attended the Congress of Russian writers. Then he would have seen not only that new factories and new
towns are being built in Russia, but that in addition a new type of humanity is growing up there, a type which is fundamentally different from the people of Fascist countries. While the intellect is hated and persecuted in Fascist countries, in the U.S.S.R. the working people of the whole country are striving to find an intellectual basis for their life in order to achieve a living relationship with the great cultural values of the past and the present.

The terrible isolation of the writer has been abolished. The writer lives in close contact with the people, and the people are in close contact with the writer and his work. This was shown not only by the numerous delegations of workers, peasants, and soldiers who appeared at the Congress, but by the passionate discussions about the Congress in the factories, at which I was often present.

It was unfortunate that the letter from the English P.E.N. Club was not read at the Congress. I myself do not think that there was any intentional ill will, and I am convinced that at the next P.E.N. Congress, Russian delegates will give an account of the vigorous mental life of the U.S.S.R., and that no one will be more pleased than—Mr. Wells himself.

III.—MR. KEYNES REPLIES TO MR. SHAW

What is the difference between Shaw and Wells? It is the difference between the clergy and the scientists. Shaw believes that he and we know all there is to be known, and it is only our nasty feelings that stand between us and what should be. He takes our knowledge as given and our feelings, our passions, as the variable in the system. But Wells takes our feelings as given and our knowledge as the variable. For him it is a shift in our knowledge which will work the sea-change. Wells is a searcher, an inquirer. But Shaw is such a dogmatist by now that it makes but little difference to his enthusiasm whether it is Stalin or Mussolini. He would have a good word for the Pope (as we see in St. Joan), if it were not that His Holiness is so mild and broadminded.

Hence flows Shaw's brilliantly malicious misinterpretation of the atmosphere of the interview with Stalin. My picture of that interview is of a man struggling with a gramophone. The repro-
duction is excellent, the record is word-perfect. And there is poor Wells feeling that he has his own chance to coax the needle off the record and hear it—vain hope—speak in human tones. Shaw mocks Wells’s little pretences which show him pathetically conscious that one must be polite to one’s host even when it is a gramophone. He reproves Wells as a bad listener. But, in fact, Wells’s weakness is that he can’t bear gramophones. He is enjoying the most interesting interview of his life—and he is stupendously bored. Desperately he struggles. Clumsily he coaxes. But it is no good. To the end the reproduction is excellent and the record word-perfect.

Shaw writes that Wells ‘has not come to be instructed by Stalin, but to instruct him’. Nothing could be more untrue. On the contrary. It is Wells’s trouble that he has never yet found a satisfactory instruction to give. He has nothing to offer Stalin. That is what Stalin might have pointed out, if gramophones could hear.

I ask Shaw and Stalin to allow the possibility that mere intellectual cogitation may have something to contribute to the solution, and also that their traditional interpretation does not fit the present facts. Shaw speaks of the ‘standard system’ of the economists ‘still taught in our universities’, and of how ‘its completeness and logic reconciled humane thinkers like De Quincey, Austin, Macaulay and the Utilitarians to it in full view of its actual and prospective horrors’. I sympathise with his passage—it is excellently put. But Shaw has forgotten that he and Stalin are just as completely under the intellectual dominance of that standard system as Asquith and Inge. The system bred two families—those who thought it true and inevitable, and those who thought it true and intolerable. There was no third school of thought in the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, there is a third possibility—that it is not true. A most upsetting idea to the dogmatists—no one would be more annoyed than Stalin by that thought—but hugely exhilarating to the scientists.

It is this third alternative which will allow us to escape. The standard system is based on intellectual error. The dispersal of that error and the substitution for it of a sounder economic theory, which is as obviously applicable to our problems as electrical theory is to the practical problems of the electrician, will make a greater difference to our outlook than Shaw and Stalin yet foresee. Our pressing task is the elaboration of a new standard system which will justify economists in taking their seat beside other scientists. Wells’s peculiar gift of imagination lies in his creative grasp of the possibilities and ultimate implications of the data with which contemporary scientists furnish him. At the same time he is a
social and political dreamer—or has grown so as he becomes older
—much more than a technical or mathematical dreamer; of the
school of Plato, not of Pythagoras or Archimedes. Wells's mis-
fortune has been to belong to a generation to whom their economists
have offered nothing new. They have given him no platform from
which his imagination can leap. But Wells is fully conscious all
the same, and justly so, that his own mind dwells with the future
and Shaw's and Stalin's with the past.
Not only is the old theory faulty. The facts of the world shift.
Shaw and Stalin are still satisfied with Marx's picture of the
capitalist world, which had much verisimilitude in his day but is
unrecognisable, with the rapid flux of the modern world, three-
quarters of a century later. They look backwards to what capi-
talism was, not forward to what it is becoming. That is the fate of
those who dogmatise in the social and economic sphere where
evolution is proceeding at a dizzy pace from one form of society
to another. In the second half of the nineteenth century it was
plausible to say that the capitalists—meaning the leaders of the City
and the captains of industry—held the power. It was plausible to
say that the economic organisation of society, in spite of its glaring
faults, suited them on the whole, and that, so long as they held the
power, they would successfully resist major changes coming from
other quarters. Nor was it easy to see in 1870 how the power could
pass from them by a peaceful process of evolution. Indeed, for
another generation after that their effective power increased—
mainly at the expense of the aristocratic and land-owning regime
which had preceded them. Queen Victoria died as the monarch
of the most capitalistic empire upon which the sun has (or has
not) set.
If Shaw had kept up with the newspapers since the death of Queen
Victoria, he would know that a complex of events has destroyed
that form of society. One of the principal causes may have been
a sort of natural law which prescribes that the giants of the forest
shall have no immediate successors. The leaders of the City and
the captains of industry were tremendous boys at the height of their
glory; and in due course they became tremendous old boys, with
vision dimmed but tenacity and will power untamed. Saplings
of the same seed could not survive in their shade. When the giants
fell with years, a different sort of tree was found growing in the
forest underneath. And much else has happened. The capitalist
has lost the source of his inner strength—his self-assurance, his
self-confidence, his untamable will, his belief in his own beauty
and unquestionable value to society. He is a forlorn object, Heaven
knows—at the best, a pathetic, well-meaning Clissold. Lord
Revelstoke the first, Lord Rothschild the first, Lord Goschen the
first, Sir Lothian Bell, Sir Ernest Cassel, the private bankers, the
ship-owning families, the merchant princes, the world-embracing
contractors, the self-made barons of Birmingham, Manchester,
Liverpool, and Glasgow—where are they now? There are no such
objects on the earth. Their office-boys (on salaries) rule in their
mausoleums.

Thus, for one reason or another, Time and the Joint Stock
Company and the Civil Service have silently brought the salaried
class into power. Not yet a Proletariat. But a Salarit, assuredly.
And it makes a great difference.

Moreover, the nineteenth century, with all its horrors, suited
those in power. They liked it. Well might Marx argue that
nothing on earth could bring down those Houynhnms, except
to organise the myriad Lilliputians and arm them with poisoned
arrows. But to-day's muddle suits no one. The problem to-day is
first to concert good advice and then to convince the well-intentioned
that it is good. When Wells has succeeded in discovering the right
stuff, the public will swallow it in gulps—the Salarit quicker than
the Proletariat. There is no massive resistance to a new direction.
The risk is of a contrary kind—lest society plunge about in its
perplexity and dissatisfaction into something worse. Revolution,
as Wells says, is out of date. For a revolution is against personal
power. In England to-day no one has personal power.

Yet let Stalin be comforted. When I have said all this, I have not
touched the real strength of Communism. On the surface Com-
munism enormously overestimates the significance of the economic
problem. The economic problem is not too difficult to solve. If
you will leave that to me, I will look after it. But when I have
solved it, I shall not receive, or deserve, much thanks. For I shall
have done no more than disclose that the real problem lying behind
is quite different and further from solution than before. Under-
neath, Communism draws its strength from deeper, more serious
sources. Offered to us as a means of improving the economic
situation, it is an insult to our intelligence. But offered as a means
of making the economic situation worse, that is its subtle, its almost
irresistible, attraction.

Communism is not a reaction against the failure of the nine-
teenth century to organise optimal economic output. It is a
reaction against its comparative success. It is a protest against
the emptiness of economic welfare, an appeal to the ascetic in us all to other values. It is the curate in Wells, far from extinguished by the scientist, which draws him to take a peep at Moscow. It is Shaw, the noblest old curate in the world and the least scientific, who rallies to the good cause of putting the economist in his place somewhere underground. The idealistic youth play with Communism because it is the only spiritual appeal which feels to them contemporary; but its economics bothers and disturbs them. When Cambridge undergraduates take their inevitable trip to Bolshevdom, are they disillusioned when they find it all dreadfully uncomfortable? Of course not. That is what they are looking for.

So I pay my affectionate respects to both our grand old schoolmasters, Shaw and Wells, to whom most of us have gone to school all our lives, our divinity master and our stinks master. I only wish we had had a third, equal to them in his own field, to teach us humane letters and the arts.

IV.—MR. WELLS REPLIES

The Editor has asked me whether I have anything to add to this discussion of my conversation with Mr. Stalin. Would I reply to Mr. Bernard Shaw? But who could reply to Mr. Bernard Shaw? He has acquired by habit and prescription the woman's privilege of wanton incoherent assertion. The torrent of fanciful misrepresentation and shrewd insinuation flows; one shrugs one's shoulders. I am Clissold, I am Ponderevo, I am anything but myself; I am mean, I am vain—no gentleman. If it makes Shaw happier, so be it. He has said it all beautifully time after time. And he says, too, that I change and chop about and am a cowardly runaway and a time server—and quite possibly he has managed to believe even that! But why did he repeat all this stuff about my personality when there were better things to write about? I had a conversation with Stalin, and so did Shaw and Lady Astor, but I know of no official report of that other encounter. I have only Stalin's remarks upon it, and they are not for public use; I cannot even institute a comparison and give the converse picture. Did the three of them fraternise on the class-war idea? I presume so. Did Shaw listen? He says I did not listen to what Stalin said, but does anyone believe Shaw listened to what Stalin said? Did Stalin get
a chance to say anything? About all that talk Shaw has preserved
a quite un-Shavian silence.

Shaw’s sneer at Galsworthy’s P.E.N. Club I find a trifle graceless.
The P.E.N. Club is a small ambitious body, it is scarcely more
than four times as numerous, solvent and well-known as the Fabian
Society was thirty years ago. But it is free from pretentiousness,
and it fights for liberty of speech, and I am glad to have been of
use to it after Galsworthy’s death. I won’t defend the P.E.N.
I won’t defend myself against any of this. At the utmost I will
hint only at the curiosity I feel about what Shaw imagines those
marvellous ‘guns’ were to which he and Webb ‘stuck’ so valiantly
in the great days of Clifford’s Inn. They are still, it seems, banging
away victoriously in his dear old head. To the complete exclusion
of any apprehension of what is happening about him.

I certainly do not see my mental life as an affair of sticking to
guns. I would as soon stick in the mud. But I do see it as a per-
sistent sticking to a trail. I have never regarded Fabianism and
its insurrectionary antagonist, Marxism—both of which it seems
Shaw swallowed simultaneously in those grand old Fabian days—
as the culmination of human wisdom. I have moved with the times.
Since I first broached my fermenting ideas in Anticipations and the
Food of the Gods, I have been steadily and progressively developing
my realisation of a fundamental group of contemporary facts; the
change of scale and scope in human conditions, the supersession of
toll and the necessary changes of ideas, customs, and institutions
that may ensue and should ensue upon that. Shaw has been
sticking so valiantly to those ‘guns’ of his that, in spite of the sincere,
affectionate, and entirely respectful educational efforts I have
described in my Autobiography, he has never grasped even in the
most elementary fashion what that change of scale means. He does
not understand these things at all, and now I fear he never will.
I may, as he says, be indisposed to listen to what I have heard
before, but for all intellectual ends his touchily defensive egotism
and his disposition to dramatise make so brilliant a clamour that
he is practically stone deaf.

This conception of a change of scale as the primarily important
reality in contemporary affairs, is one so wide and fruitful in
direction that it makes that queer jumble-up of greed, suspicions,
envis, fears, hates, and misconceptions which constitutes the class-
war idea, seem as grotesquely out of date for a motivating system
as the dread of witchcraft—which has also in its time moved great
masses of human beings to well-meaning violence and outrageous
injustice. Even Stalin manifestly holds to it by a considerable effort, ex officio, and for tactical purposes Shaw professes it because he is quite unable to understand why he should not do things like that. We all do things like that, more or less, and what a pity it is! For the life of me I cannot believe him unaware of the steady evaporation of the class-war delusion. The human mind, which is so much greater than the personalities it carries, is passing on towards creative realisations of the vastest sort, and this squabbling legacy from the ages of scarcity fades to unimportance even where it still extends. To realise the inspiration of modern possibilities, to realise the gigantic promises that are breaking through the confusions of contemporary reality, makes these little bits of showing-off and our mutual gibes and belittlement seem pitiful stuff. It is pitiful stuff.

What poor cramped things we shall seem to the generations ahead! Here are Shaw and I nearing the end of our lives, and we can do nothing better with each other than this personal ballyragging. It is ridiculous to be competitive and personally comparative after sixty-five. Slowly the shape of things to come is growing clear about us. It is plain that a new way of living for our kind is dawning. A multitude of people are apprehending it dimly, and presently multitudes will be apprehending it vividly. Now it is a possibility; to-morrow it will be a manifest objective. Thousands are contributing, and no one can dance ahead and say: 'This movement is mine.' Blinded by traditions, conventions, jealousies, patriotisms, prejudices, self-protective malice and amour propre, we of the passing generation grope on towards it almost unwillingly. Shaw's attack upon me and my own ill-controlled resentment have set me asking uneasily whether now it is not already time for us to go. More than we like to imagine may be being done by the unobtrusive young.

Yet I feel that I had rather keep on for a little longer, if only to say at the exit to this dreary class-war dogma: 'After you.'

V.—G. B. S. CONTINUES

Order, gentlemen: order, please. Remember your international manners!

When I was asked by the Editor of The New Statesman and Nation to make a comment on the report of the interview between Wells
and Stalin, I fully understood that he was not asking me to 'attack' Wells. It was a public occasion, in fact a European occasion; for both men have an eminence which takes a meeting between them quite out of the atmosphere of mere domestic rows and idiosyncratic touchinesses.

Just contemplate the situation for a moment. Here is Russia solving all the problems which we are helplessly trying to buy off with doles, to frighten off with armaments, and to charm away by prayers for a revival of trade. In the course of solving them, political discoveries in applied political science of the most thrilling interest and vital importance have been made. Let me cite the two greatest.

First, the Russian statesmen have discovered that in a really free country—that is to say, a country which belongs to its people and in which any group of public-spirited and able men can organise any public service they like without running to Parliament for Private Bills or paying monstrous sums to landlords and lawyers—the response to this freedom is so far greater than could have been conceived without practical demonstration, that Russia has been able to effect social transformations in ten years that under our system would take a hundred, if indeed the mere proposal of them had not involved immediate seclusion in a mental hospital for their advocates. It is this revelation of reserves of organising and administrative ability in the masses which has impressed Stalin so deeply with the indispensability of 'the people' as a political force. Lord Passfield, ci-devant Sidney Webb, probably the most scientific investigator of industrial democracy now living, put his finger on this discovery at once, and will presently tell us all about it.

The second discovery is of how, under the same conditions, a constitution takes shape, growing from-the-ground-up out of political chaos. In a recent preface I have shown how Communism produces neither a crude dictatorship nor an equally crude Committee of Public Safety blindly and desperately working the guillotine until the executioner goes on strike through exhaustion, but a self-dedicated democratic priesthood organising a democratic Church Militant and an Inquisition held together by a common faith and by vows of poverty and chastity. To put it in Wellsian terms, it produces the Samurai desiderated by Mr. Wells at a time when Liberals and Radicals were still stupefying themselves with amorphous dreams of government of the people for the people by the people. Russia has produced government of the people for the people by men and women who care sufficiently about the
condition of the people to devote themselves to the work for its own sake through a hierarchy democratic at its base and voluntary all through. She has realised Mr. Wells's dream and taken it out of dreamland into reality for all the world to copy.

Now take Stalin himself. He is 'neither duke nor peer', not a king, not a chancellor, not a dictator, not a Prime Minister, not an archbishop, not entitled to salutes enforced by youths in coloured shirts, but simply secretary of the supreme controlling organ of the hierarchy, subject to dismissal at five minutes' notice if he does not give satisfaction. This position he has attained through the survival of the fittest, and has held through years of the most appalling vicissitudes that ever attended the birth pangs of a new civilisation. He is a statesman of unique experience, compared to whom the rulers of the Western Powers, hanging on to an automatic and evil system with an equipment of empty phrases, fictitious histories, and obsolete routines, seem like rows of rickety figures in a worn-out waxworks. The privilege of an interview with Stalin is an honour and an opportunity of which the most eminent social philosopher might well be proud.

This privilege was accorded to Wells, very deservedly. And what use did our H. G. make of it? He trotted into the Kremlin and said, in effect, 'Mr. Stalin, you are a second-rate person with your second-rate head stuffed with a piece of nonsense called the Class War, which my friends in the P.E.N. Club would not listen to for a moment. Now listen to me whilst I explain to you the vast possibilities of The World of William Clissold, etc., etc., etc.'

I ask H. G. whether he is going to leave it like that. It is useless for him to protest in all sincerity that it was not like that, that he never meant it like that, and that I am all the liars and snobs and slanderers he can lay his eloquent pen to. For this paraphrase of mine is precisely what the interview came to, and how it will appear to everyone who reads it except H. G. Wells. That is how it must appear to Stalin; for Stalin, though he has shown that he recognises Wells as a man of genius, and has paid him the highest compliment in his power, cannot be expected to know what we all know in England—namely, that H. G. is just like Karl Marx in refusing to tolerate the existence of any other pebble on the beach. Wells can disarm criticism at home by fully admitting his own foibles and making us laugh at them and think none the worse of him; but this is an occasion on which British intimacy cannot be depended on; and, frankly, he had better apologise to Stalin and take it out of me to his heart's content.
The moment is one at which it is time to give a strong lead in the English language to the common diplomatic decency of treating Stalin with the most distinguished consideration. If there is anyone in the Foreign Office with twopenn'orth of foresight and any grip of the Eastern situation, the next tour of the Prince of Wales will be through the U.S.S.R. The Prince will know how to behave himself; whatever his private opinions may be. Lord Lothian and Lord and Lady Astor, to say nothing of myself, behaved ourselves irreproachably; we treated Stalin as we would have treated a friendly Emperor, and he played his part beautifully. Wells should have left the modest irresponsibilities of Atlas House behind him when he was visiting Atlas.

I repeat my appeal to him to make it clear by a final word that he really appreciates the magnitudes represented to-day by the words Russia and Stalin.

As to Maynard Keynes, I admit that he made me laugh by calling Stalin a gramophone. Stalin will not mind; we are all gramophones when it comes to the multiplication table; and Mr. Keynes well knows what shocking old gramophones our universities are, with their worn-out and obsolete records. But as to this stuff about my not being 'scientific' (a word now used in the personal sense mostly by pugilists), it will not go down with me. The Scientific Man Made Perfect is he who comes out right every time, no matter what his methods are. He does not exist and never will. Failing him, the most scientific man is he who comes out right oftenerest.

Further Comments

TO THE EDITOR OF THE NEW STATESMAN AND NATION

Sir,—The controversy in which our eminent intellectuals, Wells and Shaw and Keynes, perform their ballet to the discordant music of Stalin the 'gramophone' is illuminating in more ways than one. Certainly it explains in some measure why idealistic youth, as Mr. Keynes says, turns towards the spiritual appeal of Communism, even though the skilful debaters who teach them may be able to lay bare the flaws in its economics. These three are all in the tradition much honoured—especially at Cambridge in my undergraduate days—that intellectual debate and scientific study were the royal road to progress and reform. The greatest admiration
in that happy epoch was perhaps reserved for him whose mind was so keen and emotions so cool that he could take either side in a debate with equal persuasive skill. Mr. Shaw has told us that men grow wise in proportion as they live long and their passions die. Mr. Wells, whose own little boat still floats on the class-war flood, tells the many who are struggling around him that their drowning is an illusion, since there are many brains able and willing to divert or dam the water; Mr. Keynes could solve our economic problems to-morrow, and assures us that the dreaded capitalists are bewildered and repentant and only too willing to have someone put things right for them.

We may be only too willing to believe all this, since few can really enjoy the prospect of a revolution, but we cannot but ask how the millennium is to come about, seeing that every country in Western Europe in which Left opinions appeared to be gaining a majority by reason has been instantly engulfed by a revolution from the Right. There was, as Mr. Keynes says about present-day England, 'no massive resistance to a new direction' in these countries; on the contrary, the mass was desirous of something new. Why, then, did the reasonable and bewildered capitalists use torture and machine-guns instead of asking Mr. Keynes to deal with the economic system? Because, as Mr. Keynes again so truly sees with his mind, but perhaps not with his heart, they were opposing the growth of others' personal power and defending their own.

In England to-day no one has personal power (Mr. Keynes's words and my italics). Have not the landlords personal power, the bankers, the heads of armament firms, the lawyers, the heads of the B.B.C. and the press? Why cannot we adopt a new economic policy drawn up by Mr. Keynes to-morrow if nobody is exerting power to prevent it? As an economist, Mr. Keynes must be well aware that, our values being what they are, the measure of every individual's power in our society is his bank balance or credit. The man who buys in small quantities and pays cash has less power than the man who can run monthly and quarterly accounts; the man who has capital for reserves and advertising can float his business more successfully than his poorer rival, and get elected on committees and to clubs; the man with money can more easily defend himself at law; an inherited income gives power to live and think in a heterodox way denied to the wage-earner; Mosley has more power than the Communist leaders, because with his financial backing he can hypnotise the State into giving him protection not accorded to his opponents.
FURTHER COMMENTS

Give people more money and they will have more power, has been the argument of the Trade Unionist. True up to a point, but not true beyond unless the richer people are given less. The money fetish would remain, and it is the money fetish that the Communist wants to destroy. It is the blindness of Western Socialists in this matter of principle or values that sends them down like ninepins before the Fascists when these steal the Communists’ spiritual thunder.

In 1920, as an observer completely unversed in politics I went to Russia and wrote an article (which no one would print) saying that the paradox of the Russian Revolution was that its aim was primarily spiritual and secondarily economic, that the difference between Russia and Western Europe was that we believed we could grow into a humane and good life by means of material prosperity, while they held that beliefs about the relations of human beings should come first and the economic structure be built upon them. Mr. Wells—one of my intellectual leaders at that time—went to Russia the same year and amazed me by missing the whole point and writing frivolous articles about Karl Marx’s Shagpat beard. I was inclined to believe the Russians right then and hold it proven now. People want laws and customs about property, relations of men to others as workers, of the individual to society, of men to women, parents to children, in which they can believe. Whether they call it the Gospel according to Marx or not is scarcely relevant. We do not believe in our society, but most of us with our fine academic training behind us are too sceptical to believe in any other.

One Cambridge philosopher at least used to say that the intellect was not the master but the servant of desires, and could find good reasons for every good or bad thing the individual wished to do. In other words, Mr. Shaw, passion plays its part in wisdom; and, Mr. Wells and Mr. Keynes, do you and the lesser ones among us like you really want a new society in which many privileges that we value will of necessity be swept away? Or would you prefer it to remain, as it was for all of us before 1917, a matter of joyous academic debate?

DORA RUSSELL.

Sir,—Mr. Shaw asks whether I am going to leave it like that. The answer is that I leave him like that—gesticulating triumphantly, though, I suspect, with secret misgivings. He can have all the glory of saying that I ‘trotted’ into the Kremlin while, by implication, he and Lady Astor, with the utmost grace, strode, swam, stalked,
danced, slid, skated, or loped in, and conversed in some superior imperial fashion of which no record survives. He can have it, too, that his burlesque of my conversation with Stalin was the real conversation. There stands the official report. That sort of thing I am going to leave to his heart’s content. How can it matter to anyone but Shaw?

Nor do I see any profit in enlarging now upon the complications of fantasy, the childish search for concrete tests and obscurely relevant instances, in which your Marxist correspondents and Shaw, who is (for the purposes of his anti-Wells complex) a temporary Marxist, seek to veil the bare absurdity of the class-war interpretation of the current revolution in human affairs. It remains an exposed absurdity—which could be neglected altogether if it did not get in the way of creative effort.

H. G. Wells.

Sir,—Dora Russell asks: ‘Why cannot we adopt a new economic policy drawn up by Mr. Keynes to-morrow, if nobody is exerting power to prevent it?’ Because I have not yet succeeded in convincing either the expert or the ordinary man that I am right. If I am wrong, this will prove to have been fortunate. If, however, I am right, it is, I feel certain, only a matter of time before I convince both; and when both are convinced, economic policy will, with the usual time-lag, follow suit.

This is the essential point. Are changes for the better prevented by wicked men who know the changes to be advisable, but resist them out of self-interest? Or are they prevented by the difficulty of knowing for certain where wisdom lies? The class-war faction believe that it is well known what ought to be done; that we are divided between the poor and good who would like to do it, and the rich and wicked who, for reasons of self-interest, wish to prevent it; that the wicked have power; and that a revolution is required to depose them from their seats. I view the matter otherwise. I think it extremely difficult to know what ought to be done, and extremely difficult for those who know (or think they know) to persuade others that they are right; though theories, which are difficult and obscure when they are new and undigested, grow easier by the mere passage of time.

I suspect that Bernard Shaw’s preference for tyrants is mainly due to his being impressed with the difficulties of persuasion. It is easier to persuade a tyrant to adopt one’s policy than to persuade
the democracy. I agree with him. But it is not self-interest which makes the democracy difficult to persuade.

In this country henceforward power will normally reside with the Left. The Labour Party will always have a majority, except when something has happened to raise a doubt in the minds of reasonable and disinterested persons whether the Labour Party are in the right. If, and when, and in so far as, they are able to persuade reasonable and disinterested persons that they are right, the power of self-interested capitalists to stand in their way is negligible.

J. M. Keynes.

SIR,—Though I have no further retort for Mr. Shaw, it may be amusing to the reader to quote what Mr. Shaw himself has to say to Mr. Shaw. At the time of the Zinovieff letter this is how the celebrated guns were banging it in the Daily Herald:

... From the point of view of English Socialists, the members of the Third International do not know even the beginning of their business as Socialists; and the proposition that the world should take its orders from a handful of Russian novices, who seem to have gained their knowledge of modern Socialism by sitting over the drawing-room stove and reading the pamphlets of the Liberal Revolutionists of 1848–70, makes even Lord Curzon and Mr. Winston Churchill seem extreme modernists in comparison.

Until Moscow learns to laugh at the Third International, and realises that wherever Socialism is a living force instead of a dead theory it has left Karl Marx as far behind as modern science has left Moses, there will be nothing but misunderstandings, in which the dozen most negligible cranks in Russia will correspond solemnly with the dozen most negligible cranks in England, both of them convinced that they are the proletariat and the Revolution and the Future and the International, and God knows what else.

I speak from experience; for this is not the first time that such international misunderstandings have arisen. For many years after the death of Marx, Friedrich Engels kept the German Social Democrats estranged from all the really effective English Socialists because he was unable to conceive that he and Marx, two old men living in the most jealous isolation from all independent thinkers, had been swept aside and left behind by the very movement they had themselves created. Nearly ten years elapsed before Liebknecht and Bebel woke up to the real situation, which was (as it still is) that the living centre of English Socialism was in the Fabian Society and the Independent Labour Party, and not in the suburban bourgeois villa where the survivor of the two great Pontiffs of the Communist Manifesto lived in complete political solitude...

The Russian writings which make the most favourable impression here are those of Mr. Trotsky; but even he has allowed himself to speak of Mr. H. G. Wells with a contempt which shows that he has not read Mr. Wells's Outline of History, and has therefore no suspicion of what an enormous advance on Das Kapital that work represents.

It is this amazing Russian combination of brilliant literary power and
complete emancipation from bourgeois illusions, with an absurdly superstitious reverence from the early Victorian prophets of the London suburbs, that makes the literature of the Russian revolution at once so entertaining and so hopeless. When even a mind and character as strong as Lenin’s was so paralysed by this superstition that when Mr. Wells laughed at the Marxian idols in Moscow he seemed to Lenin to be not exercising one of the elementary critical rights of a freethinker, but simply blasphemying against a divine greatness that he was too ‘petty bourgeois’ to realise, then what hope is there of any understanding for Mr. Sidney Webb (another English writer who has gone far beyond Marx), or for Mr. Ramsay MacDonald, or may I say for myself? . . .

I think he says it there for himself plainly enough.

H. G. Wells.

Sir,—It was very good of my friend, H. G., to reprint that old article of mine; for though it has nothing on earth to do with the present discussion, it proves beyond all question that I have neither a pro-Russian nor an anti-Wells complex.

Stalin would be the last man on earth to deny that he and his Bolshevik colleagues made an unholy mess of their business at first by trying ‘workers’ control’ in industry, and ignoring ‘the inevitability of gradualness’ by suppressing private trade and Kulakism before they were ready to replace it: in short, that had they begun where Sidney and Beatrice Webb left off instead of where Marx left off, they would have avoided the crash that led to the N.E.P., and saved some years that were worse than wasted. But what they did not learn from reading the Webbs, they learnt from bitter experience; and as they have never hesitated to face their mistakes, nor lost a moment in remedying them, the tables are now turned, and the next big book of the Passfield Sages will show what Russian practice has to teach us instead of what English theory has to teach Russia.

Thus there is not a word in my old article that is inconsistent with what I have said on the present occasion. The old article is out of date, and what I am writing now is up to date: that is all.

I am sorry I have no time to waste on correspondents who can see nothing between soot and whitewash. I have explained more precisely than anyone else (as far as I know) where and how Marx went wrong. The Soot-and-Whitewash people, being incapable of critical analysis, immediately put themselves on the level of Flat Earthists by emptying the baby out with the bath and screaming that Marx was a noisy nincompoop. Because the strain set up in human society by making the sources of production ‘real’ property
does not come between our social classes, and cuts the proletariat in two instead of uniting it, you have people who ought to know better (H. G., for example) denying that the strain exists. It not only exists, and is threatening to play the devil with us just at present by tempting our proprietary governing class to ally us, contrary to our diplomatic interests, with Japan against Russia, but is, as Marx's great generalisation teaches, the explanation of many historical convulsions that have assumed all sorts of romantic and cultural disguises in our school-books, our novels, and our imaginations. When Wells got to business with Stalin by saying that the class-war key to history is exploded silliness, and that men of his stamp are not to be imposed on by such trash, he 'said a mouthful' that called for instant and emphatic contradiction and repudiation. This I have supplied; and for the moment there is nothing more to be said.

But I cannot part from the Soot-and-Whitewash gentry who scream that I am licking Stalin's boots because I claim common civility for him, and that I love tyrants because I point out that our Party System (which they understand as little as they understand the Class War theorem) is in effect a parliamentary method of making progress impossible, without reminding them that I am old enough to remember the empire of Louis Napoleon and the utter futility of Victor Hugo bellowing abuse of him from the Channel Islands, and Swinburne crying 'the dog is dead' at his corpse in exile. Mussolini, Kemal, Pilsudski, Hitler, and the rest can all depend on me to judge them by their ability to deliver the goods, and not by Swinburne's comfortable Victorian notions of freedom. Stalin has delivered the goods to an extent that seemed impossible ten years ago; and I take off my hat to him accordingly.

G. Bernard Shaw.

P.S.—I cannot withdraw the word 'trotted' as descriptive of Wells's entry into the Kremlin. A man's mood is always reflected in his locomotion. Wells did not strut: that would have been vulgar; and Wells is not vulgar. He did not stalk nor prance in the Shavian manner. He did not merely walk: he is too important for that. Having eliminated all possible alternatives, I conclude that he trotted. If not, what did he do?