

Strategic Questions:

“A Single Gigantic Flood”

Reflections on the Democratic Alliance

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The concept of the working class winning allies from other classes and social forces in its struggle for immediate demands and for more fundamental and far-reaching changes, for a revolutionary transformation of society, is in no sense a new, modern addition to the armoury of Marxism. On the contrary, it was a constant idea for Marx and Engels right from the very beginning of their political activity.

Marx on Allies

Thus, in *The Manifesto of the Communist Party*, first published in 1848, they explained the need for Communists to support all objectively progressive movements and parties for democratic advance. As examples, they cited Communist support for the Radicals in Switzerland, even though the latter party included part of the bourgeoisie; support in Poland for those fighting for agrarian reform and national emancipation; and collaboration with the bourgeoisie in Germany against the absolutist monarchy, the feudal squirearchy and the reactionary sections of the urban petty bourgeoisie.

The need for an alliance of workers and peasants was emphasised by Engels in *The Peasant War in Germany* (1850). It is interesting to note that while,

in this work, Engels explained the need for such an alliance from the point of view of the interests of the peasants—

“. . . the peasants alone could never make a revolution as long as they were confronted by the organised power of the princes, nobility and the cities. Only by allying themselves with other classes could they have a chance of victory.”¹

—Marx, in a letter to Engels, pointed out the significance of this alliance for the success of the socialist revolution itself:

“Everything in Germany will depend upon whether it will be possible to support the proletarian revolution by something like a second edition of the Peasant War. Only then will everything proceed well.”²

Lenin’s Approach

Lenin, in the epoch of imperialism, of socialist revolution, carried forward these ideas of Marx and

¹ F. Engels: *The Peasant War in Germany* (1927 Allen & Unwin edition), p. 48.

² Letter from Marx to Engels, August 16th, 1956.

Engels concerning the building of an alliance of all democratic forces. As early as 1902, in his work *What is to be Done?* he set out his ideas as to how to advance the revolution in the particular conditions of tsarist Russia.

The points made by Lenin in this particular work on the question of the responsibility of the working class towards other classes and social strata are so important that I make no apology for giving substantial quotations.³

The significance of Lenin's approach to this question was that he related it to the question of raising the political consciousness of the working class, of assisting it to become the leader of the struggle of all those striving for democratic change and so preparing it to act as the leading force in socialist society.

"Inasmuch as *political* oppression affects all sorts of classes in society, inasmuch as it manifests itself in various spheres of life and activity, in industrial life, civic life, in personal and family life, in religious life, scientific life, etc., etc., is it not evident that *we shall not be fulfilling our task* of developing the political consciousness of the workers if *we do not undertake the organisation of the political exposure of autocracy in all its aspects?*"⁴ (Italics in original.)

To make his point, Lenin then proceeds to cite examples of "police tyranny and autocratic outrage", such as "the flogging of the peasantry, the corruption of the officials, the conduct of the police towards the 'common people' in the cities, the fight against the famine-stricken and the suppression of the popular striving towards enlightenment and knowledge, the extortion of taxes, the persecution of the religious sects, the severe discipline in the army, the militarist conduct towards the students and the liberal intelligentsia". Again and again he returns to this theme, urging the need to train party workers who will be able to "guide all the manifestations of this universal struggle, able at the right time to 'dictate a positive programme of action' for the discontented students, for the discontented Zemstvo",⁵ for the discontented religious sects, for the offended elementary school teachers, etc., etc.

Various Social Strata

In listing the various categories in this way Lenin indicates that for him the building of the alliance was not just a question of the *class* allies of the working class, such as the peasants, but also the

various social strata, occupations and movements which embrace members of varying classes—soldiers, students, teachers, religious believers, advocates of educational reform and so on.

Relating this effort to build the basis of the alliance to the need to combat economism, Lenin draws this conclusion:

"Working class consciousness cannot be genuine political consciousness unless the workers are trained to respond to all cases of tyranny, oppression, violence and abuse, no matter *what* class is affected."

Making a sharp self-criticism on this question—"We must blame ourselves for being unable as yet to organise a sufficiently wide, striking and rapid exposure of these despicable outrages"—Lenin asserts "When we do that (and we must and can do it), the most backward worker will understand, *or will feel*, that the students and religious sects, the muzhiks,⁶ and the authors are being abused and outraged by the very same dark forces that are oppressing and crushing him at every step of his life, and feeling that, he himself will be filled with an irresistible desire to respond to these things and then he will organise cat-calls against the censors one day, another day he will demonstrate outside the house of the provincial governor who has brutally suppressed a peasant uprising, another day he will teach a lesson to the gendarmes in surplices who are doing the work of the Holy Inquisition, etc."

Clearly, for Lenin, the involvement of the working class in opposition to the oppression of other classes and strata was a vital need for the struggle of the working class itself, for its political education and political experience. Emphasising and re-emphasising this point, again and again and again, crossing frequent swords with the Economists, he stressed that it was not enough for the Communists to carry on activity "among the workers". They "*must go among all classes of the population*, must despatch units of their army *in all directions*". Contrasting the Communist leader with a trade union leader, he makes the point that a revolutionary leader must be "*a tribune of the people*, able to react to every manifestation of tyranny and oppression, no matter where it takes place, no matter what stratum or class of the people it affects; he must be able to group all these manifestations into a single picture of police violence and capitalist exploitation".

He then adds the key idea of combining all the various manifestations of struggle against oppression—"to collect . . . and concentrate all these drops and streamlets of popular excitement that are called forth by the conditions of Russian life"—into "*a single gigantic flood*" to be directed, with all its

³ Incidentally, in view of the considerable current interest in Gramsci's writings and his concept of 'hegemony', it is interesting to note how he was able to draw very much on this particular work of Lenin's.

⁴ V. I. Lenin: *What is to be Done?*

⁵ Local councils.

⁶ Peasants.

weight, against the tsarist enemy and his apparatus of repression and exploitation.

The "single gigantic flood" is, in essence, the democratic alliance.

Lenin and the Broad Alliance

Lenin never abandoned this conception of the broad alliance. When he came to write his important book, *The Two Tactics of Social-Democracy in the Democratic Revolution* (1905), in which he elaborated the strategy of a people's democratic revolution to overthrow the tsarist regime and open up the road to socialism, he based his whole approach on the idea of a two-phase revolution. In the first phase directed against the tsarist autocracy it would be the task of the communists⁷ to emerge as the leaders of the whole people, as the leaders of the people's revolution.

"Yes, the *people's* revolution. Social-Democracy has justly fought and continues to fight against the bourgeois-democratic abuse of the word 'people'. It demands that this word shall not be used to cover up a failure to understand the significance of class antagonisms. It absolutely insists on the need for complete class independence for the party of the proletariat. But it divides the 'people' into 'classes', not in order that the advanced class may become self-centred, or confine itself to narrow aims and restrict its activity so as not to frighten the economic masters of the world, but in order that the advanced class, which does not suffer from the half-heartedness, vacillation and indecision of the intermediate classes, shall with all the greater energy and enthusiasm fight for the cause of the whole people, at the head of the whole of the people."⁸

For this phase of the struggle it was essential to forge the widest anti-tsarist alliance possible. With the overthrow of the autocracy, the task of the working class would be to prepare the way, as speedily as the alignment of class forces allowed, to go over to socialism. This phase would require the main blow to be struck against the bourgeoisie, but for this, too, there was to be no question of the working class versus the rest. On the contrary, for this task as well, it was vital for the working class to win allies, especially the peasantry, the urban petty-bourgeoisie, the intelligentsia, along with the oppressed nationalities—and once again to "concentrate all the drops and streamlets of popular excitement" into "a single gigantic flood", this time against capitalism and for socialism.

Lenin's strategy could not succeed in the 1905

revolution. The popular forces were not as yet strong enough, nor was the political consciousness of the workers sufficiently advanced. And when the storm eventually broke in 1917, things turned out differently to what Lenin had originally thought. Instead of the overthrow of tsarism through a broad alliance being followed by a coalition government including the communists, February 1917 was followed by dual power. Instead of the communists being able to press forward the revolutionary process from bourgeois-democracy to socialism from within Government and by mass action from without, Lenin and the Bolsheviks had to face the reality of a struggle between two centres of power, two centres of armed power—the Soviets and the Kerensky bourgeois Government with its State apparatus, including the army. Hence followed the armed uprising, civil war, imperialist intervention.

Democratic Anti-Fascist Alliances

Following Lenin's death the ideas of the democratic alliance became in time distorted and downplayed. Sectarian views associated with Stalin⁹ on this point were particularly damaging and hampered the Communist Parties in the capitalist world in their effort to withstand the onslaught of fascism in the 1920s and 1930s. Out of the experience of the fight against fascism, helped by Dimitrov's report in 1935 to the Seventh World Congress of the Communist International and the ensuing discussion, Communist Parties began to give increased thought and attention to the question of the democratic alliance.

Space considerations prevent any detailed tracing here of the development of the strategy of the democratic alliance in the period of the anti-fascist struggle from 1935 to 1945, including the Spanish war, the French Popular Front, and the European¹⁰ war-time resistance movements. To put it briefly, these were alliances built up for a specific purpose, namely, to defeat facism; they embraced a wide spectrum of class forces, including important sections of the capitalist class (in some cases from the top strata); parts of the capitalist state apparatus, including sections of the armed forces (such as in France, symbolised by the officers around De Gaulle, and in Italy after 1944, as well as earlier with part of the Spanish Republican Army) joined the alliance; and a wide range of political forces extending beyond the Left and, in some cases, in-

⁹ Especially his narrow strategic concept of the direction of the main blow. (See, for example, his *Foundations of Leninism*.)

¹⁰ The broad national democratic alliances formed in Asia during the war, and with their own specific features, really require their own extensive treatment which, again, is not possible in this preliminary article.

⁷ At that time Lenin and his supporters belonged to the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party and called themselves Social-Democrats.

⁸ V. I. Lenin: *Selected Works*, Volume 3, p. 121.

cluding bourgeois political parties, co-operated in the common anti-fascist struggle. An important feature, too, was the participation of religious forces. These democratic alliances did not set themselves the aim of socialism, but directed themselves to defeating fascism, defending democracy or re-establishing it where fascism had temporarily conquered, and defending or winning back national independence.

Yet the exigencies of the struggle, the need to promote aims and future prospects that would arouse the support of the people, and the experiences of the anti-fascist fight itself, resulted in the democratic anti-fascist alliances evolving social, economic and political programmes which, if implemented, would mean no mere restoration of the status quo after the defeat of fascism but a significant carrying forward of the people along a new, radical path that would weaken the forces of conservatism and big capital and open up the road to socialism.

This was strikingly demonstrated during the Spanish war.

"In the process of this struggle, the Spanish people underwent a profound change, as did the political and economic life of the country, which had now set its foot on the path of progress . . . Spain, which at the beginning of the struggle was a republic of a bourgeois-democratic type, developed in the course of the war into a people's republic, a republic without big capitalists, landlords and reactionaries, a republic supported by the masses of the people and a regular people's army.

"Spain became a republic in which the masses received the opportunity and right to share in the guidance of the political and economic life of the country."¹¹

Summing up this period Santiago Carrillo has written:

". . . in Spain the response to the fascist uprising had been the taking over of the factories and other enterprises and large estates, agrarian reform, the distribution of land to the peasants, the creation of a new people's army, the creation of a new judiciary, a new police force, a new state."¹²

Of course, there were special features in Spain that made such changes possible; but everywhere democratic anti-fascist alliances led to a new political awareness among the people, resulting in a powerful thrust of the people's movement for radical social and economic change as part of and as a natural follow-up to the struggle against fascism. The demo-

cratic anti-fascist alliance was not based on a limited conception of restoring the situation as it had been before the advent of fascism, but embraced aims for far-reaching political, social and economic transformation.¹³ (Of course, world factors played a decisive part, too, notably the historic role of the Soviet Union which, in Churchill's words, "tore the guts" out of Hitler's armies and so made possible the world defeat of fascism.)

After World War II

Since the Second World War the concept of the democratic alliance has been carried forward in Europe. At first, in the immediate post-1945 period, and arising more or less directly out of the resistance struggle, broad coalition governments, including the Communist Party, were formed in a number of West European countries, notably in France and Italy, where the Party in both cases had a very weighty presence. The alliance in these cases included parties of monopoly capital as well, and the aims of the alliance were mainly for post-war reconstruction and democratic reform, although, to one degree or another they involved certain measures to weaken the most reactionary forces in their respective countries.

But gradually, and especially after Stalin's death and after the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1956, the concept of the anti-monopoly alliance took shape.¹⁴ Although, in many respects, the democratic, anti-monopoly alliance retains many of the characteristics of the democratic alliances of the anti-fascist period, and even similarities with the democratic alliances worked for by Marx and Engels in the nineteenth century, and that elaborated by Lenin for Russia at the beginning of the twentieth century, there are some new features here.

¹³ In Asia and other Third World regions it gave rise to the powerful national liberation movements aimed at ending the previous colonial systems.

¹⁴ The search for new, national roads to socialism and the elaboration of new forms of democratic alliance for that purpose, emerged clearly in the post-1945 period, as indicated in the 1946 Thorez interview with *The Times*, Togliatti's 1947 statement, and Pollitt's reference to a 'British Road to Socialism' in his book, *Looking Ahead*, published in 1947. Though the French and Italian Parties did not substantially return to these questions until after 1956, the Communist Party of Great Britain produced its first version of *The British Road to Socialism* in 1951, and was the first Communist Party in Europe to produce such a programmatic document, containing a number of new ideas (revolutionary change without an armed uprising, in conditions of peaceful co-existence and not war, making use of Parliament by transforming it into an instrument of the will of the working people, the retention and extension of democratic gains in a socialist Britain, etc.).

¹¹ Jose Diaz: *Lessons of the Spanish War, 1936-1939*. London, 1940, pp. 4-6.

¹² Santiago Carrillo: *Dialogue on Spain*. London, 1976, p. 18.

Among these are the nature of the main immediate target of the alliance; the character of the forces that make up the alliance; and the aims of the alliance. These three aspects are inter-related. The prospect of such an alliance in developed capitalist countries arises from the fact that the overwhelming majority of the people suffer economically, socially, culturally and politically (including very much in the sphere of democracy) from the domination of the economy and political life by a relative handful of powerful monopolies, linked with the State. The whole system of State monopoly-capitalism brings enormous problems to the majority of the people that can be solved only by challenging the power of the monopolies—their domination of the economy, their pre-eminence in the mass media, their control of the State, their massive influence in the entire political system—and eventually shattering that power. This would be a great, historic act of liberation, a democratic assertion by the people of their determination that they, the majority, should rule this country and not a powerful and rich minority.

But it is not merely the fact that the majority *suffer* from monopoly domination that provides the basis for the democratic, anti-monopoly alliance. It is the growing indication that more and more strata in society are *questioning their conditions, expressing dissatisfaction, and showing readiness to give battle*. This is a phenomenon which is present, to one degree or another, in all developed capitalist countries.

In Japan, for example, small and medium producers and traders have formed associations to protect their interests and in co-operation with the working class and democratic movement combat the monopolies. In France, farmers have constantly been in action to protest against Government policy; and judges, in sharp contradiction to the position in Britain, are in a number of cases handing down judgments that challenge the interests of the big firms. In Italy, wide strata of people have been in action to bring about educational reform, renew the cities, tackle pollution, change the prison system, and so on. In Britain, too, the massive actions over the past few years by the organised working class movement in support of their immediate demands (both economic and democratic) have been accompanied by the movement for women's liberation, varying forms of struggle against racism, actions against pollution and for the improvement of the environment, movements to protect the railways, activity by students, Welsh hill farmers, fishermen, university staffs, doctors, etc. The State institutions themselves are not immune to this process; top civil servants have voted to join the TUC, and the police have given massive backing to their demand for the right to strike, coupled with a significant if not yet majority voice urging the right to establish a bona-fide trade union and affiliate to the TUC.

Working Class—the Key

It is in the light of these preliminary remarks that I wish to discuss some particular aspects of the democratic alliance today.

First, it is necessary to stress that the key to the alliance is the working class. This is especially so in Britain, where there are over 25 million insured wage and salary workers.¹⁵

The formation of the alliance is an all-consuming struggle, a struggle that involves ideological work, political activity, organisational capacity, and tactical skill combining flexibility and patience with determination and a clear political perspective. If it requires a great effort to combine all the various class forces, social movements and political formations into 'a single gigantic flood' directed against the main enemy, monopoly capital, it is still more difficult and complex to maintain the alliance. This is especially why the role of the working class, and particularly its most advanced and politically aware sections, is so important.

We often talk about the "leading role of the working class"; in the alliance this leading role is expressed in helping to chart the way forward, in organising activity and in acting as the *unifying force*, uniting its own forces, rallying other classes and strata to its side, checking every vacillation, preventing adventurist excesses on the one hand, and pessimistic retreat or capitulation on the other. The *maintenance* of the democratic alliance is a permanent battle—daily, hourly, minute by minute.

Monopoly capital's hope is to keep its opponents divided; and apart from its own activities to bring about divisions in the ranks of the democratic alliance, other factors within the alliance (personal ambitions and rivalries, mistrust between different political tendencies, subjective judgments in place of sober, scientific analysis, the clash arising out of different sectional interests) constantly threaten to cause new divisions and tensions.

The more that the working class takes up the cause of the various class forces, social strata, and cultural, social, national, democratic and political movements that are basic to the alliance, *the more it will be accepted as the leading force, will be training itself as the leading force, and will be able to command respect as the leadership and unifying force of the whole alliance*.

This brings me to the second problem. All experience from other countries shows that the non-working class allies in the alliance, and those strata

¹⁵ For a number of years there have been discussions in the international working class movement as to what constitutes the working class. My comments above are based on acceptance of what has come to be termed the 'wide' conception (see, for example, Alan Hunt, *Marxism Today*, July 1977).

that are, as we might say, on the margin of the working class, tend to vacillate, especially at moments of crisis. One of the factors that will determine whether they act as allies of the main body of workers, or whether they side with big capital, is the extent to which the working class is strong, organised, giving a clear lead, and is itself *united*. Such a working class *attracts* other strata to its side, especially if it concerns itself with the problems and demands of those strata. If, however, the working class is *divided*, and hence displays a picture of irresolution and incapacity, then it can lose its allies from the professional strata and small farmers, traders and producers.¹⁶ These strata, in short, tend to go to whichever appears to be the strongest side at the given moment.

The working class, however—and this brings me to the third aspect—does not spontaneously build its own unity. Left to its own spontaneous development, it lapses into economic sectionalism and division, as well as political confusion and disunity. Working class unity has to be built just as the democratic alliance has to be patiently built. Key to the working class is its organised section, which in Britain means above all the 11-12 million trade unionists. Key to the organised section are the forces of the left; and they, too, have to be united if they are to exercise any leading and unifying role in the broader movement. Such left unity, however, also requires conscious effort; it does not develop spontaneously. This is where the Communist Party plays such a key role. The Communist Party (and it, too, needs unity) together with other left forces, are vital for the whole process. A united Communist Party, a united left, a united labour movement, a united working class, attracting to itself all the anti-monopoly forces into a broad, democratic alliance—such is the coalition which is required to bring about fundamental change in developed capitalist countries.

Against the Monopolies

It is important to appreciate the significance of the anti-monopoly character and purpose of the alliance, both in relation to the immediate stage of struggle and in the transition to socialism. In short, the aim is to form an alliance of all the class and social forces in the country against the monopolies.¹⁷ Given that the monopolies in developed capitalist

countries rely for the continuation of their power on the 'bloc of allies' they have built around themselves—small and medium capitalists, professional and technical personnel, including those employed in the State apparatus, intellectuals, and sections of workers—the obvious aim is to detach as many of these 'allies' of the monopolies as possible, without having any illusions that 100 per cent of these forces are going to come over to the side of the revolution. The point is to struggle for this change of allegiances, with the understanding that the more one succeeds in this aim, the more one facilitates victory for democratic change and the advance to socialism.

It is important to avoid giving a limited economist interpretation of the democratic anti-monopoly alliance by presenting the monopolies only in their direct economic function. It is only by revealing that the monopolies are the economic, political, social and cultural oppressors of the vast majority, both in the developed capitalist countries and in the Third World, that it becomes possible to lay the basis for directing the 'single gigantic flood' against the main enemy. Of course, if the struggle against the monopolies were conducted simply as an economic struggle between workers and their employer then the danger of 'economism' would arise.

But today in real life it is not easy to conduct such a limited struggle. As has been seen so often in recent years, struggles on wages or trade union rights tend to develop quite rapidly into a wider political struggle, involving the law, police, Government, the mass media, political parties. In these days of State monopoly capitalism, with every key aspect of workers' wages and conditions being subject to Government decision, backed by the power of the State, with the State playing a direct economic role in collaboration with the monopolies, new possibilities arise for widening the scope of each economic struggle and bringing an interpretation to the workers that begins to widen their horizon beyond the limits of economism.

Take pollution. Is it not a fact—which can be made clear to the people—that the pollution of our rivers, sea and land is primarily the fault of the rapaciousness of the monopolies and of the Government departments that, by and large, protect their interests? Is not the control of most of the press, commercial TV, and the cinema, another example of the power of the monopolies? Are not the universities, colleges and polytechnics under constant pressure and influence from the major monopoly firms? Is not the fact that armaments are a source of huge profit to the monopolies one of the factors in the capitalist Government's reluctance to take any serious steps to assist world disarmament?

One cannot touch any important (and, for that matter, numerous less important) economic or social

¹⁶ And also from less politically conscious sections of the working class.

¹⁷ The French Communist Party has presented the idea in the form of the 'union of the French people'. In the period of the Popular Front, in the 1930s, it put forward the idea of the enemy being the '200 families'; today it spotlights a much smaller list of giant monopolies.

problem without coming up against monopolies—whether it be the high cost of medicines and drugs for the benefit of the chemical combines (not to mention the often reckless manner in which new drugs are tried out on the public), the failure of the major building and construction firms to build sufficient, good quality and reasonably-priced housing for the people, the haemorrhage of capital from Britain by the major monopolies that prefer to make profits from investments abroad, thus depriving British industry of its much needed investment.

In the field of foreign policy the role of the monopolies is decisive. Just as the big German monopolies—Krupp, I. G. Farben, Thyssen, Flick—were the backers of the Nazis, and I.T.T., Kennecott Copper Corporation, etc., were the power behind the Pinochet coup in Chile, so major British monopolies play a key role in determining the British Government policy of preventing any serious step to end the apartheid regime in South Africa. No one can understand British policy towards the Middle East without an appreciation of the interests of the British oil monopolies. The role of the British-owned sugar monopolies to assist the removal of the Jagan Government in Guyana, and the involvement of Lonrho in Nimeiry's counter-coup in Sudan have been documented well enough to require no further explanation here.

The frequency with which retired top brass from the army take up posts on the boards of monopoly-firms producing armaments is a striking illustration of the links between the monopolies and the State. The connections with other State departments are equally significant. Nor can one ignore the role of the monopolies in the political system. In Britain, for example, a list of the main contributors to the funds of the Tory Party reads like a roll-call of the major monopolies in Britain.

By pointing to the anti-monopoly character of the democratic alliance one is helping the people to see who is the enemy against whom the 'single gigantic flood' is to be directed. At the same time, by drawing attention to the anti-monopoly basis of the alliance one is making clear the wide scope of the forces that can, and need to be, won for the alliance.

Not to stress the anti-monopoly purpose of the democratic alliance would leave the concept vague and diffuse, without any clear definition of class and social forces. Further, unless the fact is grasped that our society today is dominated in all its aspects—economic, social, political, cultural—by State monopoly capitalism, and that the enemy must be fought in all these fields, then there is the danger that the struggle will be limited to *overcoming the effects of monopoly rule* instead of challenging and *breaking monopoly power altogether*.

Middle Sectors

As has been already noted, the working class cannot fulfill its task of ending capitalism and building socialism if it confines itself to its own class concerns and its own immediate economic interests. Here the question of winning self-employed professional people, small and medium capitalists and high-paid employees of the State or private industry is of special significance.

Compared with, for example, the work done by the French and Italian Communist Parties, in Britain the necessary analysis of these forces and the appropriate formulation of policy is lagging. Possibly one of the reasons for this is a sectarian belief that the working class by itself can overcome capitalism, so overwhelming is its strength in Britain.

It is sometimes argued that the class allies of the working class are no longer of any significance, since everyone is becoming 'proletarianised'. Sometimes the alternative thesis is presented, namely that the 'proletariat' is vanishing and that the growth of white-collar sections is changing the character of the working class to that of a petty-bourgeoisie. As a leading Italian Communist has pointed out:

"In both cases, intricate phenomena and their effects, which are typical of the development of state-monopoly capitalism in Italy, are ignored in favour of a simplistic approach. Strategically and politically, both theses suggest that the problem of alliances no longer faces the working class."¹⁸

To some extent the same danger arises when it is argued that the co-ordination of the various social movements today can replace *class* alliance, and that such co-ordination is, in fact, the democratic alliance. Important as such social movements are, and vital as it is to overcome their tendency to act in a sectional and often politically limited way without directing their fire at the main enemy, the monopolies and their system of power, no serious revolutionary party can afford to ignore the complex realities of class forces in developed capitalist countries today; nor can it neglect the task of directly appealing to a whole range of class forces and social strata on the basis of policies worked out to meet their basic interests.

In Italy, where official figures show 1,367,000 artisans (1973), and 49,151 small and medium industrial enterprises (employing 10-50 workers) with a total work force of 2,578,000 (1974)¹⁹ compared

¹⁸ Rodolfo Mechini: "The middle strata and the policy of alliances": *World Marxist Review*, No. 10, 1976.

¹⁹ This is apart from 105,000 small and medium businesses in wholesale trade, 840 in retail trade and 192,000 in hotels and services (totalling over a million enterprises), and, in addition, 3,119,000 farms worked solely by their owners. (Mechini: *op. cit.*)

with 1,419,000 employed in 1,033 large industrial enterprises (employing over 500 workers each), the Communist Party has worked out a differentiated approach to different sections of these small enterprises and to other sections of what it terms the intermediate strata.

In France,²⁰ official figures show that out of a total of 1,800,000 industrial and commercial enterprises, no less than 1,500,000 employ no more than five workers; in fact over 1,400,000 employ no more than two workers, and over 800,000 are self-employed or family concerns. In terms of numbers employed, 4 million are in enterprises employing up to 10 workers, 5 million in enterprises with 10 to 500, and 7,500,000 in firms employing over 500 workers each. On the basis of regarding all firms with up to 500 workers as being 'small or medium' (and definitely not monopoly companies), these French Communist authors estimate, therefore, that the small and medium enterprises in France employ about 55 per cent of the employed workers.

Thus, despite the ever-growing strength of the monopolies and multi-national companies, the striking enlargement of the wage and salary class,²¹ and the steady squeezing out of the small and medium firms, they still retain a key role in the total economy of France, and the French Party regards them as vital allies in the struggle to unite the French people against the powerful monopolies.

Small Firms in Britain

In Britain, it is true, the class structure is not identical with that of France or Italy. In absolute numbers and in proportion to population, as well as of all those 'gainfully employed', we have far more wage and salary workers—over 25 million registered insured workers. On the land, too, capitalist agriculture has made such strides that there are now less than 300,000 farmers, with a total of some 300,000 agricultural workers.

But this should, in no sense, lead us to ignore the important role of these class forces, both in the struggle for democratic advance as well as in the construction of socialism. Up-to-date figures are not easy to come by. The last official study of small firms was published in 1971;²² and that was based mainly on reports up to 1966. Excluding agriculture,

horticulture, fishing and the professions, and on the basis of defining a 'small firm' as one employing up to 200 workers in manufacturing (with other criteria for other trades), the Bolton Committee found that (in 1963) no less than 94 per cent of all firms in manufacturing were small firms, in retailing it was 96 per cent, in catering 96 per cent, construction 89 per cent, motor trades 87 per cent, road transport 85 per cent. In terms of percentage of total employment in the particular trade, the small firms employed 82 per cent of all workers in miscellaneous services, 75 per cent in catering, 49 per cent in retailing, 36 per cent in road transport, 33 per cent in construction, 32 per cent in motor trades and 20 per cent in manufacturing.

The summary of the 820,000 small firms which the Bolton Committee covered in its Inquiry shows that the industries covered account for 93 per cent of all firms, employ 4.4 million people, which is over 30 per cent of total employment in those industries, and have a net output valued at over 20 per cent of total output for the industries concerned.

Other figures provided by the Bolton Committee indicate that in a number of fields the number of small firms has declined over the years especially in manufacturing, but also in retail distribution and construction. In others, it has managed to hold its position. Overall, the Bolton Committee concludes "that up to the middle 1960s the contribution of small firms to economic activity was declining in most industries with the possible exceptions of road transport and some of the miscellaneous service trades. Although there have again been exceptions, we think it likely that in most industries this decline has been going on at least since before the war and there are indications that it has continued since the middle 1960s."²³

Comparisons with other developed capitalist countries are not without interest (see Table 1).

Thus, while in manufacturing the small firm in Britain accounts for considerably less employment than its counterpart in many other developed capitalist countries (only about half of that in Switzerland, Norway and Italy), yet it still accounts for almost a third of the labour force. A later calculation,²⁴ which includes agriculture, horticulture, fishing and basing itself on a wider definition of 'small business', estimates 9,650,000 workers (39 per cent of the total) employed in "Privately-owned Enterprises"; 9,150,000 (37 per cent) in Public Companies; 2,670,000 (11 per cent) in Central and Local Civil Service and 2,590,000 (10 per cent) in national industries. (The odd 3 per cent are employed by 'foreign firms'.)

²⁰ See Jean Chatain/Roger Gaudon: *Petites et Moyennes Entreprises: L'Heure du Choix*. Paris, 1975, p. 19 et fol.

²¹ From 11.9 million in 1950 to 17.6 million in 1970 (see Claude Quin: *Classes Sociales et Union du Peuple de France* (Paris, 1966, p. 15).

²² *Small Firms*: 'Report of the Committee of Inquiry on Small Firms' (Bolton Committee Report): HMSO: Cmnd. 4811, November 1971. (See also 18 additional research reports commissioned by the Committee.)

²³ *op. cit.*, p. 67.

²⁴ A. J. Merrett and M. E. Lehr: *The Private Company Today*, 1971.

TABLE 1

Proportion of manufacturing employment in small establishments in Britain and other countries.

| | | % |
|-------------|------|----|
| UK | 1963 | 31 |
| Germany | 1963 | 34 |
| USA | 1963 | 39 |
| Canada | 1968 | 47 |
| Belgium | 1962 | 51 |
| France | 1963 | 51 |
| Sweden | 1965 | 53 |
| Japan | 1966 | 54 |
| Netherlands | 1962 | 58 |
| Australia | 1963 | 60 |
| Switzerland | 1965 | 61 |
| Norway | 1967 | 64 |
| Italy | 1961 | 66 |

Sources: Compiled by the Research Unit from national and international statistical year books and national census data. See Bolton Report.

Note: Comparability of these figures is affected by the different dates to which they relate.

Important Role of Small and Medium Firms]

Whichever criteria one uses, it is clear that the small and medium capitalists play an important part in our national life. After all, in the struggle for democratic advance and socialism it is the role played by different classes and social strata in our economy, and in the country's political life that is decisive, rather than mere numbers.

In numerous ways the small and medium firms, including farmers and self-employed, are exploited by the big monopolies and find themselves frequently at loggerheads with the Government and the State. This is the objective basis for winning them away from the side of the monopolies and embracing them in the democratic alliance. But this will not happen spontaneously. On the contrary. The crisis is hitting many of these enterprises very hard. It is primarily the policy of the monopolies that is at the root of the problems of the small and medium firms. But this cause is not readily grasped by them. Facing ruin and fearing for their future, they are easily led by demagogic slogans of racism, ultra-nationalism, 'law and order', mixed with fears about their private property and their 'freedom'.

If the working class, large as it may be—and especially its organised and most politically aware section—does not work to win these potential allies to its side, then there will not be just a yawning gap in the ranks of the broad democratic alliance. The monopolies will work to organise these forces and use them against the working class and democracy—as it did in fascist Italy, Germany, Spain and Portugal, and later in Chile. Some 40,000 Chilean truck-owners almost wrecked the distribution system.

Tens of thousands of Chilean shopkeepers, by speculation, hoarding and black-market operations, aggravated the inflation crisis and so helped to 'destabilise' the Popular Unity Government.

The owners and managers of small and medium firms have their influence on a sizeable section of the workers, too. The Bolton Committee found that "Only eight per cent of small firms are completely unionised and in each industry these tend to be the larger of the small firms. Almost two-thirds of small firms have no trade union members on their payroll."²⁵ It can be safely asserted that the bulk of these firms are havens of conservatism and political reaction, the non-unionised workers regarding themselves as having nothing to do with the organised labour movement, and its aspirations for democratic change and socialism.

But it is not our conception that winning the small and medium capitalists is important only to prevent a fascist coup or a turn to reaction. The building of socialism, too, will need their services. In a socialist Britain it will be vital to have the support of the small and medium farmers who produce the food, as well as the co-operation of the many thousands of small shopkeepers who help to sell it. Car manufacture these days depends on a whole army of

²⁵ Bolton Committee Report, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

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smaller private companies producing specialised parts, and the same role of small and medium firms can be seen in electronics and other branches of manufacture. Catering and service trades cannot operate without the 'small man', and attempts to do so in existing socialist countries have only caused difficulties for consumers, and strains on the economy.

In other words, in a socialist Britain in which the monopolies would be nationalised and all the key sectors of the economy publicly owned, there would still be a vital role for the small and medium firms for a considerable time ahead.

State Institutions

One final point needs to be made.²⁶ No signal advance can be made without tackling the question of the State institutions, including the armed forces and the police.

Chile tragically bears witness to the consequences of failing to win the middle strata to the side of the working class, and in particular to its consequences in the armed forces, especially the officers. These latter do not act in isolation from society. They are influenced, above all, by the behaviour and thinking of their class and social counterparts in civil society. The Chilean Communist Party has drawn the lesson that "There cannot be a favourable balance of forces at the military level . . . if a favourable balance of political forces is not formed (in the country as a whole), that is, if the revolutionary forces do not manage to unite around them greater social forces than those that the enemies of the people can group."²⁷

And prominent among the social forces that the enemies of the Chilean people were able to group on their side were the intermediate strata, including the small and medium capitalists. In those conditions, their counterparts in the armed forces, the officers who felt that their destinies were most closely identified with the intermediate strata in civilian life, were all too easily led to play a counter-revolu-

tionary role and carry through the coup against the Popular Unity Government.

Given the aim in most developed capitalist countries of achieving socialism without an armed insurrection, it is obvious that to avoid a harsh confrontation with the State it is necessary to bring about its democratic transformation. The more the monopolies are isolated, the more their 'allies' are won away from them, the more the local shopkeeper, the vicar, the doctor, the lawyer, the architect, the manager, the farmer, the owner of the small and medium firms, are persuaded that their future lies with democratic change and socialism, the more will the personnel in the State, including the armed forces and the police, begin to feel the pull of attraction of the overwhelming majority. For them, too, the realisation will increasingly come that their future, as well, is bound up with the democratic transition to socialism.

Concluded from page 288

To conclude, as Richard Gunn does, "that the notion of a dialectics of nature is for a materialist untenable", is to throw out the baby with the bath water, even if, as he writes, it entails "a teleological conception of nature". The crucial question is, not one of whether or not the conception is teleological, but one that asks what *kind* of teleology is it—is it one which is consistent with a materialist theory of the evolution and role of consciousness in animals and in human beings? If this can be answered affirmatively, then it has a rightful place in a materialist philosophy and should not be rejected by marxists. I take my stand on the existence of such a teleology and therefore conclude that the term 'Dialectics of Nature' most succinctly describes the way in which all the processes of nature are bound together by a common thread of relationships.

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²⁶ This article is limited mainly to one aspect of the democratic alliance. This is because of space considerations. It should be noted, however, that there are many other problems of the democratic, anti-monopoly alliance that need treatment, including the scope and character of the various social movements; the role of women and women's liberation; the role of students, intellectuals and of culture; the role and relations of different political forces, including the Tories, Liberals and Nationalist parties; and the question of democracy itself—all this is apart from a much more detailed treatment of the questions touched on in this article, notably the State institutions, as well as a further examination of the class allies of the working class.

²⁷ 'The Trojan Horse', Statement of the Central Committee of the Chilean Communist Party, September 1973.