

IX. BREAK AND RENEWAL

In 1956 came Khrushchev's disclosures. The shock was shattering and the intellectual groupings which the British C.P. had been building up were largely destroyed. Perhaps in many ways I was better equipped to weather the shock than many other comrades who had taken a more sectarian view. Despite my enthusiasm for the Soviet Union I had always had my strong points of criticism; I had had my own personal clash with the Zhadanov-type pronouncements; I had no illusions about the harsh and dogmatic core in the C.P.s of all lands. What I was not prepared for was the revelation of insensate and quite lawless cruelties, the vast scale of the repression, under Stalin. However, with all the shock, there was an element of relief. Now one knew the worst. The confused and unfocused sense of something wrong was ended; one was down to open bedrock and knew just where one stood. If the evil had been so squarely faced, surely there would be a decisive turn in a different direction? And yet, despite all that, the moral shock was central. One's attitude to life, to history, to oneself, could never be the same again. One had been an accomplice in a great evil. And yet there had been no other possible relationship. The enemies of the Soviet Union had been proved right in a great deal of what they said; but they were not thereby proved right in themselves; for they had hated the dream of fraternity and freedom as well as its betrayal. On the other hand I, like so many others, had been defending the betrayal in the name of the dream; there would have been no solution in going over to the side of the attackers. The complexity of the moral problem, its endless casuistical contradictions, seemed insoluble.

But there it was, inescapable. I could only contract out of it by contracting out of life altogether. There was the Soviet Union, with all its imperfections and perversions, the historical embodiment of socialism; the only way forward. To deny it in any simple way was to deny history, deny life itself. The historical circumstances that had made possible the breakthrough into socialism had also ensured that the Stalinist distortions would condition it. One could neither reject the Soviet Union (in which the Khrushchev denunciations were as much a part of the reality as the Stalinist crimes) nor accept it in any unqualified terms.

Everything depended on the lessons drawn from the aberrations by the Soviet Union, by the other C.P.s, by oneself. The Soviet Union of Stalin had been the only way forward in the pre-1956 period; with all that had gone wrong in it, it had built certain bases of socialism and defeated Hitler. But what was meant by the words, “the only way forward.” Theoretically there had been a different way, the way of Lenin, with continual appeal to the people, continual effort to stimulate and release the energies from below. Why hadn’t that way been taken? One could analyse the various factors which had limited the development in Russia and made possible the Stalinist distortions; but that development now lay between one and the Leninist solution. How did one reverse the vast interconnected system which had grown up under Stalin? How did one return even in individual thought to the pure Leninist ideas, which could not but seem, in many respects, utopian and remote after the vast development which had ignored them? Where did one now start, in the problem of reconstructing and reorienting the way of life in the Soviet Union, in the problem of reconstructing and reapplying the Leninist ideas?

But whatever the agony of disillusionment, whatever the sudden pressure of apparently insoluble problems, I did not for a moment think of rejecting the international movement, the Soviet Union, the British C.P. However great the mess, I felt, as I have always felt since 1936, that any solutions must emerge from the forms already thrown up by history, by men in their bewildered struggles. That did not imply any excusing of the Stalinist crimes, any belief that the forms thrown up in 1917 were the ones that had to recur automatically at each new spasm of change. The Soviet Union had to change; the forms emerging from any new crises must be different; the C.P.s must seek to embody the lessons of Stalinist distortion in their organisations and their attitudes. But there was no way forward by simple denunciations and attempts to get a blank new start from the bottom upwards. I felt quite opposed to the emotions of so many friends who left the movement. “The Soviet Union has let me down.” Yes, I had been let down; but the problem was not my isolated and trivial self but the millions of other men. The Soviet Union had let them down, but it was also a necessary means for their freedom, their development as human beings. The problem was, not to feel

hurt and humiliated, but to understand what had happened in all its fullness, to play one's part in facilitating the progress to a new level of thought and organisation in which the Stalinist distortion was transcended, prevented from any possibility of recurrence.

Like others at the time I covered many pages with my efforts to analyse what had happened, but I published nothing of what I wrote. There was no point in repeating what others were saying; and most of the analyses I made were unoriginal. The Leninist norms had been abandoned; a bureaucracy, heartless as all bureaucracies must be, had taken control and suppressed almost all popular initiative and paralysed all the organisations at root-level. Stalin, with each step of his isolation in power, lost more and more his contact with reality; his suspicious paranoia worsened. And so on. Marxism became a narrow dogma subservient to his needs. The turn had been made possible by the isolation of Russia, its total lack of any democratic tradition, the devastation of the pre-1917 working-class by war, civil-war, famine, and the rest of it. Willynilly the dictatorship of the proletariat had become the dictatorship of the party. That would not have mattered if there had been a Lenin in charge, seeking every chance to raise the cultural level of the workers and to develop freely their political and social responsibility. But it did matter when there was Stalin to clamp the bureaucracy over the situation and thus perpetuate it.

The anarchist shooting of Lenin which shortened his life does appear as one of the incidents that radically altered history; for if Lenin had lived on another ten or twenty years, as he might well have otherwise done, the development of the Soviet Union would certainly have been very different than it was. Whatever were the precise forms taken. However, "ifs" do not make history. By building up his bureaucracy, his secret-police, his whole power-apparatus, Stalin ensured that the worst and most passive aspects of the Russian populace would be carried on. From my own experience of sectarians I feel sure that the mass-counterpart of Stalin's neurosis lay in a very wide spread paranoiac element ready to accept stories of treacheries and spies, and, like Stalin, especially suspicious of the intelligentsia. The link of the early sectarians and the later bureaucratic tyrannies is well brought out in Aitmatov's Goodbye Gulyshary, where we see the early fighters, crude and harsh but not unattractive in

their zeal, finding themselves in turn oppressed by the bureaucracy which their own attitudes have done much to foster.

For parties like the British, 1956 posited in sharp terms the question of relations and attitudes to the Soviet Union, and of inner party-democracy, the democratic centralism introduced by Lenin to hold together the Russian party under illegal or semi-illegal conditions. On both issues the party-leadership in Britain found it extremely hard to think in fresh terms; the positions built up over four decades and more of difficult back-to-the-wall struggle could not easily be reconsidered in a detached way. (In the Cultural Committee in 1953 we had decided that Harry Pollitt should write a self-critical account of party-policy in 1939, at the outbreak of the war, when he and Campbell wanted to see the war as antifascist, but Dutt triumphed with the Moscow-line condemning it as merely “imperialist.” Events had shown Pollitt to be in the right, Stalin himself later admitting that the war had been from the outset antifascist at root. But though Pollitt agreed, he did nothing. It was too hard to step outside the habits of a lifetime. He was a man, I may add, for whom I had the greatest respect and affection.)

I was a delegate at the party-congress which happened to come about just after the news of Khrushchev’s revelations. I had not much wanted to go; but, proposed at an area-meeting at Colchester, I felt it my duty to accept and vote for the more radical proposals or amendments that would come up. In the secret session Pollitt reported that he had received full authentication of the reports about Khrushchev’s speech. He and other leaders insisted that they had never any idea of the repressions and killings under Stalin apart from those generally reported; Gallacher gave in his resignation as party-chairman and his angry speech convinced me, as I think all who heard, that he had indeed never known of what was going on. (I feel that it was impossible for leading communists of any party to have had no idea of the repressions; but they may indeed have remained ignorant of their extent and brutality, as happened with many persons in Russia itself. I know many cases of older people there who refused to accept the charges against Stalin; but they were of course more or less ordinary folk, without connections with the higher levels of party-life.) In my opinion, the only self-respecting thing

for the executive was to resign and make way for younger men who had been unimplicated in the making of policy during the Stalin years – helping them to tide over the transitional period, and then leaving them to find their own way forward. But as such a course was not taken, the least to be expected was a radical examination of past policies and methods of organisation. There was a hurried attempt by various committees to suggest reforms. The report of that on inner-party democracy was confused and unsatisfactory; and Christopher Hill, presenting it, admitted its inadequacy, but asked for ratification as a first step towards grappling with the problem. I voted for the report, which was defeated.

There was thus little definite outcome of the first attempts to face up to the issues raised by Khrushchev; but at least the more sectarian members of the party were badly shaken and on the defensive. A general exodus of intellectuals began, and soon very few were left. The whole situation indeed was soon much complicated and worsened by events in Warsaw and Budapest. I signed one of the letters of protest in the New Statesman; and when Emile demurred, saying that communists had been strung up on lamp-posts, I replied that if I was a member of a party which had behaved like the Hungarian one, I should deserve such a stringing-up. Oksana asked me in Moscow in 1959, “Many here thought you would resign. Did you ever think of doing it?” I replied, “No.”¹

For the next few years there seemed little change in Russia or in the parties elsewhere; but all the same the old rigidities were slowly breaking down. “Why should you writers worry?” remarked Margot Heinemann one evening at Maurice Cornforth’s place. “You can write anything you like now.” Not quite correct; but with its element of truth. I watched the New Left, sympathetic with many of its criticisms and viewpoints, but not seeing in it any substitute for the party. In 1959 I was invited with Ewen MacColl to the 3rd Writers Congress

¹ Lindsay footnote: A writer-friend who left the party in 1956 tried to argue me into joining him: “But can’t you see that you’d have been one of the very first to be shot by a Stalinist regime?” I answered, “Of course I would, but what has that to do with it?” And I lost all respect for him. What I meant was that my personal fate was unimportant next to an historical development which at last made possible the decisive advance into brotherhood; the arrest and deformation were unfortunate but could not indefinitely hold things up, whereas inside class-society there was no hope at all.

in Moscow. I was very favourably impressed by Khrushchev's speech there. He put down his typed statement and remarked that it was better to talk freely; and his rambling comments, in which he admitted his own ignorance, had much homely peasant-wisdom. With the Pasternak affair still recent, he made some strong remarks about not kicking a man when he was down; and a long tale about his dealings with a man who had been in jail had a similarly humane and simple tone. Later, at a reception, I was close to him as Mulk made jokes about his Gandhian viewpoints, and soon after he launched out into a semi-speech on the need for satire. Watching his face, I felt him a wily peasant who was simultaneously letting himself go with much spontaneity and yet watching, listening to himself, with a canny caution. And who was also standing aside, wondering at himself with no little admiration; it really was he, Nikita Khrushchev, who had come up from so far down and was now telling writers all about their job.

It became clear that if Pasternak's Dr Zhivago had not been published abroad, it would have appeared in Russia, perhaps modified in some unimportant places. Zelinsky, at his country-cottage with his wooden objets trouvés and his lovely wife, told me how he had been talking the matter over with Pasternak, an old friend of his. Pasternak, he said, revered Goethe and wanted to appear the modern Goethe. "I said to him: Goethe opposed the French Revolution, but he didn't demean himself by throwing abuse about." I gathered that things were more or less settled when the Italian version appeared. The backwoodsmen in the Union were delighted, since now they had the stick with which to beat Pasternak and prevent the Russian publication. "You say with much truth," I observed to Fedin, "that the treatment of the book abroad is meant as provocation. Then why be provoked?" He gave a wry smile and said, "Yes." (I had long admired Pasternak; as I mentioned I put an essay of his in the first *Arena*; I used his work extensively in the translations of Russian Poetry 1917-55, which I had done as a result of my 1954 work in Russia; I used a quotation from him for the title of my first volume of autobiography, Life Rarely Tells, 1958. But until *Zhivago*, little notice of him was taken in England. Zhivago I myself felt to be a failure as a novel and as a philosophic work, though with fine passages and many virtues.)

At the Congress I spoke on the need to interpret Conflict as more than the conflict of opposed characters or social forces in a novel; every character, realised in depth, had his own inner conflict, without which he was a dummy. All that seemed obvious and hardly worth saying. But I learned in 1969, at Gagra, talking with various intellectuals, that the speech had been extremely useful to the writers fighting against the usual narrow, dogmatic, and arid formulations of the critics; it had been much quoted and used in defense of a freer and fuller approach, with particular reference to the need for psychological penetration.

What of the Congress itself? It was far less explosive and stimulating than the previous one. I wrote about it a little later in the year in Marxism Today, that even more than the 2nd Congress, it had “concentrated on saying that the writers were out of step, had lost the tempo and understanding of Soviet life, were using primitive techniques for an increasingly rich reality, and were evading the Contemporary Theme.” But it made no attempt “to discuss the nature and function of conflict in life or art, or the specific forms of conflict operating in socialist society and changing from phase to phase.” (I should have added that it was simply fear, which had become ingrained, which kept them away from analysing realities that could not but lead them to the question of the true nature of the Stalin epoch.)

The reluctance to analyse Soviet society except in the vaguest and most grandiose way is in turn linked with the heavy overweighing of the Writers’ union with old men, large numbers of whom had committed themselves fulsomely to praises of the later Stalin and resented Khrushchev’s revelations. The extent to which old men dominate the Union may be gathered from the fact that of the 497 delegates at the 3rd Congress, only three persons (or 0.6 per cent) were under the age of thirty; only 14 per cent more were between that age and forty; and more than half over the age of fifty-one. In such a situation it is inevitable that a breach between the young and the old should develop, and the speech of Paustovsky indeed brought this situation out into the open.

Clearly a problem of a socialist culture is to watch out for the “vested interests” and astute cliques that develop in unions and institutes of the cultural sphere with their many financial and other rewards. (Novels like Granin’s Those that Seek and Dudintsev’s Not by Bread Alone have dealt with this situation in the scientific sphere, but no writer has shown up the writers.) The careerists or log-rollers are mostly no theorists, but they support any forms of criticism that tamely preserve the status quo.

I should have gone on to show the link between the careerists and what Yevtushenko called the Heirs of Stalin. I discussed as typical of the worst aspects of the scene the treatment of Pasternak throughout his career. In his Last Summer:

he defines his position in 1914-6 and shows that bourgeois society held nothing bu[t] hell for the artist (or for any man); he has a strong grasp of the Marxist concept of alienation and skilfully shows how under the illusion of bourgeois freedom lies only the hopeless right to offer oneself as a thing for sale. He still halts in much confusion before the Revolution; but he has achieved a detached judgment of the bourgeois dilemma.

That was in 1934. Why then has such an artist gone backwards [in his attitude to the Revolution, I meant]² ... If we ask what the critics have done to help Pasternak over the last fence that he was facing in 1934, the answer is that they have not only not tried to help him over, they have kept on resolutely kicking him back to the wrong side by consistently stupid and insensitive criticism. For this reason I say that we cannot wash our hands of responsibility for what went wrong in Pasternak for a failure to make any intelligent effort to help him forwards. We are not here concerned with a “bourgeois artist” in the abstract, but with an actual person, a highly talented man who had made important contributions to Soviet culture, and who has thanked the Revolution for turning him into a realist. Foghorn exhortations to Socialist Realism cannot replace the constructive values of criticism that goes to the artistic and human heart of the matter in a concrete way...

[As for Zhivago]³ Pasternak wanted to write a tragic work on a Goethean level, but fell far below his conception. The question of its value however cannot be simply decided by this judgment. We must see it in the concrete situation of its genesis, which includes both the later Stalin period and the artistic struggle of Pasternak since 1934. In that situation it expresses certain of the deep resistances felt not only by Pasternak but by everyone in so far as they were human. That it presents these resistances in an “unbalanced” way does not wipe it out or make it meaningless for a socialist society. On the contrary, such unbalanced works can play a vital part in helping to clarify the post-Stalin situation.

I contrasted Zhivago with a truly distorted novel like The Brothers Yershov by Kochetov, “a demagogic work, which tried to depict the post 1956 conflicts as between wild-and-woolly or corrupt intellectuals and solid proletarians,” and was backed by the most reactionary elements in soviet culture. (Smirnov at the Congress said the periodical in which it was published found its circulation drastically falling. “Every reference to Kochetov at the Congress was hostile

² As per typescript

³ As per typescript

and received sharp applause.”) I went [on] to cite Paustovsky on the way in which the demand for “balanced” works had a most destructive and reactionary effect:

Yashin at the 2nd Congress said it was only the “inner censor” that was holding things back; and at the 3rd, Tvardovsky appealed to writers not to be deterred from telling the full truth by a censoring fear of the coming struggle with editors and publishers.

One of the inhibiting ideas was made fun of by Paustovsky: the idea of a complete or balanced picture. In criticising this idea, one is of course not asking for unbalanced and myopic writers; one is attacking the demand for mechanical or schematised completeness of statement, with a mathematically worked-out proportion of light and shade, good and bad. This sort of demand has certainly obstructed the growth of works of humour and satire; for its rigid insistence on the “positive” runs flatly counter to the whole lyrical or hyperbolic method on which humour or satire is built. To issue exhortations for satire and to insist on a method by which it cannot be let loose in the creative fantasy: the result has been what one would expect – a silence. The few tentative efforts were at once labelled as libels on Soviet reality and nothing more has happened. But the inner dynamic balance of a work of art, its driving impulse, is something that cannot be determined by these forms of criticism; and it is this that matters, this that defines the impact and the sense of values, the effect of the work on people. What has been obviously and deflatingly the result of a mechanical demand for the “balanced” work in satire has been apparent in a more devious and involved way in literature in general, making writers more afraid of nonconformity than ardent to penetrate reality, and invoking the “inner censor” at the wrong moment.

At the same time I noticed writers who were not afraid of adventuring into reality: Granin, Leonov, Panova, Dudintsev, Nikolayeva, Kirasanov, Nekrasov, Oevchkin, Tendryakov, Nilin. And I added the general warning:

The Party must never forget the extremely complex and delicate nature of the responsibility it assumes in dealing with creative questions. Its guidance can only be justified, can only be truly effective, when there is a ceaseless all-round effort to develop the Marxist analysis of society and aesthetics. To say that every work of art is essentially political is not to say that we can reduce its meaning to overt or calculable political points. The concepts of acceptance and transformation cannot have identical meaning in terms of politics and poetry ... Gramsci has some fine discussion on this point ... There need be no collision between poet and politician, between the demands made by the poetic and the political approaches to reality, if the differences of perspective are respected. To fail, however, to grasp the difference means that the political approach seems to impoverish the poetic, in the name of expediency and the tasks of the moment, and the poetic approach seeks to deny the political, in the name of fullness of comprehension

It took me some time after the strain of Khrushchev's revelations and the Hungarian uprising, to get back effectively to work. My Russian Poetry had appeared just about the time of the uprising, which rather killed any effect it might have had. Greenwood died, and Denny went off, so that for sometime the Bodley Head was rather in the doldrums. The firm however published two novels of mine, a cut version of The Great Oak, the manuscript of which I had retrieved from the ruins of Dakers' house, and Local Habitation, which continued the theme of the British Way. This latter book I also cut at the firm's request, though not so drastically as The Great Oak; and both books suffered through the pruning. Local Habitation (set in 1951) had housing as its theme, but from the angle of a way of life: Geoff (chief character of Rising Tide) is cramped and lost in a big block of flats, while Francis, the L.C.C. architect-planner, feels more and more uncertain about his job – all this against a background of old country-pictures in process of decay. With this book the British Way series entered on a series of questions: to express the breakdown of struggle in the English scene, the regression into the hectic frustrations of a consumer-society. The angle of approach was expressed by the dedication to my niece Cressida:

The faceless ogres grow so daily
 we scarcely note their speedway shadow
 scorch the grass across the meadow,
 the hellstreets paved with good intentions,
 the houses ghostly as a tombstone.
 The announcer coughs but never mentions
 The ubiquitous tick of dryrot doom
 consuming slowly
 estranging wholly.

The bloated city blurts with smoke,
 the agued country's raked with damp.
 The eunuch furies leave their stamp
 on all, till our policed desires,
 batoned around the close of cant,
 feel free only when gangster fires
 from film-pools of narcissistic phantoms.
 We yawn unawakened;
 still the dogmatic slumber's unbroken.

The Good Life – where’s a just directive?
Truth, naked as a rose is red,
without a pistol at her head;
Man mated with the Universe
in a fourposted depthless bed,
shedding the headlong birthborn curse
and signing amnesties with the dead.
This dream gives art a full perspective,
and nothing else, when all is said.

I felt the need to get back to origins and took up the idea of a trilogy on my early life. I had roughed out Life Rarely Tells about 1950, adding appendices on Nietzsche and Kierkegaard; but had shown the work to no one but Edith Sitwell. Now I rewrote the whole thing, which the Bodley Head published – following up with The Roaring Twenties (on my years in Sydney in the 1920s), and Fanfrolico and After. I sought to set out something of the pattern that is traced in the first pages of this book, but with stress on the involved details of living, not on the intellectual pattern. So I shall not dwell on them here, except to cite a few of the words that Vance Palmer wrote about it in Overland; for Palmer was an important and highly intelligent figure in the world of Australian culture for over half a century, with a subtle and thorough knowledge of the country and its people. I can therefore claim that his remarks help to authenticate my picture:

...the disturbing but stimulating air of this brash northern capital (Brisbane) impels the boy’s mind to turn both outward and inward, but principally inward ... the contrast between the poetic world to which he had given himself and the social one around him ruled by rich drapers and warehousemen was continually pulling him up with a jerk ... But the drama in Life Rarely Tells doesn’t merely lie in the determination of a youth to pit his poetic daemon against a money-crazy world; it is much more subtle and far-reaching than that: it is wrapped up with the whole business of communication ... he was committed to the belief that what was significant and profound in life could only be expressed in the grand manner through images and abstract concepts ... Altogether Life Rarely Tells has so many aspects that it is hard to cover them all ... precise descriptions and phrases that unfold in the mind like buds opening. Then there are the character-sketches, some tossed off with comic breadth, some done with feeling and penetration ... One’s final impression is that behind it stands a warm, generous, and peculiarly honest figure – one driven by an impulse to give himself to his readers and equipped with the means to do it in a frank, unselfconscious way.

It is not the tribute, though naturally that pleases me, but the complete way in which Palmer, a rare spirit with an unsurpassed sensitivity as to Australian reality, accepts my account and its setting, which drives me to cite those lines.

My friend Tony Adams, whom I had met in Trowbridge, his native town, during the war, [and who] was now working on the editorial side of Studio Books, commissioned two works from me, a revision of the Short History of Culture, and a book on the painter David. He knew that I had been impressed by the memorial exhibition of David's work at the Orangerie, which had made me feel the strong contrast between the highly organised form of the big neoclassic paintings and the direct sensibility of the portraits. So, after a visit to Paris where I met Tzara for the last time, I wrote The Death of the Hero, dealing mainly with David, but also with Gros, Géricault and the young Delacroix. I analysed the conflict inside History Painting, which, in France, where an open struggle for state-power was maturing, was claimed by both royalist and revolutionary, each seeking to use the form for his own purposes. David, so to speak, treated the themes of the Hero's Death and the Oath in classical guise, then, with the Revolution, applied them directly to the immediate struggle. He played a great part in organising the huge civic festivals which provided musicians like Méhul and Cherubini with the problem of a new massive sonority (thus making Beethoven's dimension of sound-and-concept possible); in planning the new Paris that came about in the 19th century; in creating the idea of the public art-museum, and so on. The inner conflict in his art issued in both the realism of Gros and Gericault and the romanticism of the early Delacroix. Liberty on the Barricades is the last great heroic picture, completing the arc begun by David's Death of Hector; but in the process modern painting has been created.

The Short History attempted to give securer bases to the theses of my first book with this name. To work out the links of play and art in primitive societies, of play and technique, with the bases of all the developments of organic tensions in body-spirit; to show how the relation of group to nature brought about the totemic system with its taboos and its dual organisation. What I may call this primitive form of dialectics is linked in turn with initiation ritual and its concept of death-rebirth, the rebirth coming about on a new level of life. Dance-

movements beget the dynamic concepts of form that issue in inventions like the wheel. As the totemic tribe breaks down, we get the growth of various inequalities and power-concepts; and much of the ideas and activities that were originally collective are gathered in the shaman with his dance-mimes. He thus becomes the prototype of artist, musician, poet, scientist, doctor, prophet: the leader into the unknown through the mime of the spirit-journey. The Bronze Age sees the great expansion of forms (stone-circles etc.) and of techniques born from the circling dance. The techniques include the cart-wheel, the potters-wheel, the first schemes for computing star-movements. The image of the cosmic mount (sky-pillar, world-navel, world-centre), with its roots in the earliest totemic levels, also expands in many directions providing an essential base from which man is able to place himself securely in the universe. (Forms of tribal orientation and camp-construction have been an early expression of this image-concept.)

I then attempted to show how, with the advent of settled life and effective agriculture, the original ideas and images found new and extended life at each phase of development – the cosmic mount begetting a great series of architectural forms that range from pyramid or ziggurat to pagoda or Gothic cathedral. At each new phase also the ideas and images derived from initiation-ritual and its surrogates provide the basis for new forms of poetic expression, and so on. I sketched out what seemed to me the way in which the fundamental concepts, already worked out in all essentials in the totemic tribe, were expanded, elaborated, interrelated in the periods of history reaching up to the Renaissance. Then, with the growth of the bourgeoisie in its first stages, bringing about as never before societies of the cash-nexus and mechanistic (quantitative) science, the organic bases are slowly but steadily undermined and broken down. I halted about 1600, merely indicating the new disintegrative factor which had emerged as the dominant in culture.

... till the 16th century the patterns of fertility-ritual and of initiation remain central in all fields of culture. Shakespeare's world-image still relies on a system of correspondences between earth and sky, between all aspects of organic life, and on ideas of the unity of man and nature drawn from those correspondences. His world-image has thus a close affinity with that of Sumerian or Egyptian, indeed with that of the Australian aboriginal, while there are profound differences between it and any post-Newtonian system. That is, the world is still essentially concrete for him, and there is no deep

division between what he sees, feels, hears, tastes and touches, and what he thinks. Already things were beginning to be different with Donne, when he cried. “The new philosophy puts all in doubt” – referring to the mechanistic world emerging from such analyses as Galileo’s ...

Thus we may say that in many respects Shakespeare was closer to the Australian aboriginal than to post-Newtonian man. The need of regaining a wholeness of vision, a sense of the unitary life-process, sets post-1600 culture a series of problems of a new kind. And we are still in the thick of those problems, most of which are yet unsolved – in fact, are hardly realised as problems.

The period of active organisational work on which I had embarked after leaving the army, and from [which] I began to withdraw from 1956 on, was in some ways a reaction from the quietist seclusions of the 1930’s. But in any event it was a phase through which it was necessary to pass if I were to test out all the possibilities in myself. In the first years, as shown in Marxism and Contemporary Science, I had combined my submergence in activities with an effort to detach myself and achieve simultaneously a radical critical focus. After 1949, for the various reasons mentioned earlier, I concentrated on the realistic exploration of the English scene, with work in the Peace Movement and with a polemical attitude to the Cold War as the background. The effort to carry on a Marxist critique of science fell so far in abeyance that in After the Thirties I could write, “In June, 1954, the Soviet Union announced that it had begun to use atomic energy for industrial purposes. This was one of the great moments of man, a landmark on the road to peaceful plenty.”

Within a few years I had realised that all uses of atomic energy were abominable, since they lay at the heart of the technological pollution and destruction of man’s environment. That I could have fallen so low as to praise any development of fission-methods shows the limits of the analysis I had made in Marxism and Contemporary Science, where I had much overvalued Einstein and failed to grasp what was implied by the issue of bringing concrete Time into science – concrete Time as opposed to the abstract or reversible Time of post-Galilean quantitative science. Though Einstein had very much refined the treatment of abstract Time, he had not at all transcended it.

The 1956-crisis thus had for me the value that it released my mind afresh into a thorough-going critique of all contemporary manifestations. Amusingly, the attacks which had

been made on me for revisionary bourgeoisified concepts derived from the fact that I wanted to make a far deeper analysis and repudiation of all that was bourgeois in culture than my critics did. For them “science” was a neutral field or discipline; what mattered was the *use* made of its findings. Now I had returned to the quest begun in M. and C.S., but in a more comprehensive way. I formulated the task in the Short History, following on the passage cited above:

Looked at from the other side of the Newtonian Celestial Mechanism, the great organising images which this book has discussed seem reduced to mere fantasies and delusions; and there was indeed a fantastic element in them. But if we see only that, we see nothing. The images were born vitally of an organic tension between men and their work-techniques, an organic tension and release felt by men in their most intense moments of bodily expression, in mating, in work, in dancing, in all forms of rhythmic play. They had their deep enduring reality and truth, which we experience when we look at the works that embodied them. Only, it is a reality and a truth that we cannot simply return to after the scientific mechanical abstraction splits the world of sense from the world of mind in a way as complete and as deadly as the old metaphysics of mind and body.

The problem was to regain the organic concept of the universe without losing what was valuable in the phase of mechanistic science – the quantitative systems it derived from the analysis of stable states in matter. From the Short History on I have stuck to this issue, seeking both to tackle the direct questions raised by history (including the history of science) and the problems of social and personal deformation that afflict men and women caught blindly in the seismic situation of the cashnexus and mechanistic science in their last mad convulsions.

In the later 1950s, at the request of Jim Reynolds, who [had] taken over Mullers, I also wrote some works of direct history, popularised, yet seeking to give a scholarly summary with the new implications: Civil War in England (the Cromwellian Revolution, in which I stressed the ideas stirred in large sections of the common people), The Romans Were Here (on the period of Roman occupation), Arthur and his Times (the 5th and the 6th centuries A.D. in Britain), and The Writing on the Wall, an account of Pompeii, centred on the graffiti, round which was set the explanatory chatter of a citizen of the days just before the Vesuvian

eruption. These books precluded the new attention to history set out in the Short History of Culture and the works to succeed it in the 1960s.⁴

⁴ Lindsay footnote: I had had several books done into Polish before 1956; a while after that a Pole remarked to me, “You won’t get any more done now. The publishing houses aren’t subsidised any longer. They’ll all be competing for Agatha Christie and Françoise Sagan.” He was right. During the 1960s I wrote London Letters for the Prague Plamen, which ended by being cut, then were not asked for; they were too critical of bourgeois culture. It seems to me that Czech culture became much affected by bad western influences and in 1968 there were certainly many reactionary forces at work under the standard of Liberalism. But that did not make the Russian action any more right. The good thing of the Dubcek regime was that it was bringing everything out into the open, so that a genuine fight for socialism and socialist culture could have been carried on by the C.P. A “socialist” culture maintained by suppressions and subsidising is a false one, which breeds bourgeois reactions underneath or in masked forms, and which cannot get at grips with the real situation of people.