

LETTERS

June 1987

Dear Comrades,

Clearly, to judge from his letter in *Radical Philosophy* 46, my review of Sartre's *Freud Scenario* (*Radical Philosophy* 44) sorely provoked Ian Birchall. I intended my remarks to be provocative but I did not expect them to be so badly misconstrued.

In my review I spoke of a 'legend' amongst 'Sartreans' concerning this scenario. Birchall says there is no such legend and that 'Sartreans' should trust to the account given in Contat and Rybalka (*Les Ecrits de Sartre*). The legend is that Sartre submitted a single 8 hour script which was too long and too sophisticated for Huston's purposes; that its severe editing led Sartre to withdraw his name from the credits of the eventual film. I said that Pontalis' account in his 'Editor's Preface' corrected this legend. Pontalis does indeed speak of 'how the story is generally told' (p. vii) and shows that 'things happened in a rather more complicated and even more Sartrean way' (p. viii). As I wrote, one respect in which



things are more complicated is that Huston asked for revisions of the first script which led Sartre to provide a second, *longer*, scenario. Clearly Huston and Sartre clashed as personalities and both had very different ideas as to the kind of film on Freud they each wanted. However, the 'legend' crudifies what took place. Contat and Rybalka do *not* mention the second version of the script. Nor can 'Sartreans' rely on their master's voice. In interviews with Kenneth Tynan (1961), Michel Contat (June 1975), and *New Left Review* (1969), Sartre does not mention the two scripts and suggests only that his difficulties with Huston were simply a result of the latter's inability to understand Freud and/or the concept of the unconscious.

Birchall finds my objection to Sartre's depiction of anti-semitic abuse of Freud naive. I could have been clearer here. I did not deny that Freud 'was the victim of anti-Semitism'; I do not

know however of any account of his being subjected to the kind of abuse Sartre portrays. More importantly for my purposes Sartre associates this abuse with the reception of Freud's defence in 1896 of the 'seduction thesis' before the Viennese Society for Psychiatry and Neurology. It is a matter now of considerable controversy as to the precise nature of Freud's reception and the reasons for it (see for instance Sulloway and Masson). I stick to my view that Sartre's account of Freud's defence of the 'seduction thesis' being greeted only with virulent anti-semitic abuse is a 'wild and largely unhelpful distortion of the truth'.

I am *not* a naive realist about literary depictions of real historical figures. The crucial issues are these: are the respects in which Sartre's Freud and the 'real' Freud do not coincide important for our understanding of Sartre and/or Freud, and why? Birchall and I agree that the two Freuds do not coincide; we disagree as to why that matters. He believes that Sartre's 'Freud' is preferable to the real one—largely, as far as I can gather, because he thinks the latter is a champion of 'determinist passivity', and the former a defender of freedom. I believe that Sartre's Freud scenario tells us nothing new about Freud, and, disappointingly, not a lot more about Sartre's Freud. I see no obvious reasons for preferring Sartre's to the real Freud; nor do I regard 'determinism' and 'human emancipation' as in obvious and complete contradiction with one another. I am not alone in believing that Freud, and Marx, were determinists, and that they also both, consistently with their determinism, believed that human beings could change their lives for the better. Nothing Ian Birchall says has changed my mind. I can only regret that he should seek to convince by some rather ungracious name-calling.

Yours, Dave Archard

Dear Radical Philosophy

Sean Sayers is surely right to labour the point that work is a human need ('The Need to Work', *Radical Philosophy* 46). For socialists it is a first principle; it is, as Marx put it, the 'essential activity' of humankind. It is the means to our self-development and livelihood. But what are we to make of Sayers' claim that 'the socialist principle of the "right to work" is a demand for jobs'? Admittedly, the 'right to work' is implicitly a demand for jobs, but is it a principle socialists should work for? Shouldn't socialists be trying to transcend that principle?

Work in capitalist society is conducted through the social relationship of wage labour and capital. It is work carried on under this relationship which causes alienation, because work is not under human control but is imposed externally by the law of value. It is this which divides working time into necessary labour (to recoup

wages) and surplus labour (surplus value); the purpose of productive activity being the extraction of surplus value through wage labour and capital accumulation. The upshot of this is that surplus value takes priority over needs, including the need to work.

What, then, is the solution to this malaise? This is where Marx comes in, but his contribution to this debate is obscured in Sayers' article. I do not know which 'socialist tradition' he refers to when he calls the 'right to work' a 'traditional socialist principle' but nowhere, to my knowledge, does Marx make such a claim. It would have been inconsistent with his own theories, since the 'right to work' - employment - is but a legal expression of the wage labour and capital relationship. Of course, Sayers calls for the liberation of the productive forces (including people) from the fetters of capitalist relations; however, there is a reluctance to specify what this entails (a problem common to *Radical Philosophy*). Instead, we get a celebration of the real as the rational. It is not particularly illuminating to be told that men and women have a 'need' for employment given that our employers own the workplace and we are dependent on wages in order to live. This kind of circular argument gets us nowhere (which is just about where the labour movement is). Nor can employment be defended by setting up an Aunt Sally in the form of André Gorz's argument about employment and leisure. We do not need Gorz to tell us that the 'right to work' is a reactionary and outdated demand; we already have Marx's demonstration that this is indeed the case. 'Instead of the conservative motto, "a fair day's wage for a fair day's work!" they ought to inscribe on their banner the revolutionary watchword, "abolition of the wages system!" (*Wages, Price and Profit*).

This is the positive proposal which inevitably follows from making work central to a social philosophy like Marx's. Unalienated work is work free from the constraints of wage labour and capital; it is free conscious activity. This and only this is liberation; it is activity consonant with human needs and human nature.

As a contribution towards that end, I strongly suggest that you put the 'Radical' back into *Radical Philosophy* and recognize employment for what it is; servile, exploitative and a denial of our need to work according to our abilities.

Yours radically, Lewis Higgins

REPLY TO MR HIGGINS

Writing is a lonely occupation and its results often seem to disappear into a void. It is pleasing, therefore, to have excited at least 'a murmur among the zealots' in the shape of this letter from Mr Higgins. I will take the opportunity of a reply to clarify my position on some of the issues that Higgins raises.

In the name of Marxism, he criticizes me for defending the demand for jobs, for insisting upon the 'right to work'. However, I do not argue for the 'right' to work. I talk rather of the *need* to work, and quite deliberately so. The 'right to work' was first used as a slogan by French workers in 1848. Since then it has become the main principle under which the labour movement, throughout the world, has fought unemployment and demanded jobs. Acceptance of this principle now extends far beyond the labour movement. Indeed, an article affirming 'the right to work ... and to protection against unemployment' (art. 23.1) is included in the 'Universal Declaration of Human Rights' adopted by the United Nations in 1948.

Higgins is correct in his belief that Marx did not invoke this principle; but this is not for the reasons he suggests. Marx was profoundly sceptical of appeals to 'rights' and other such suppos-

edly 'universal' or 'eternal' principles. It is because I share that scepticism that I talk of the 'need' to work, and stress that it is not a universal but rather a historically developed aspect of human nature.

Higgins is also correct to say that Marx regards employment - the system of wage labour - as characteristic of capitalism, as exploitative, as alienating, etc; and that he envisages the possibility - indeed the inevitability - of a higher, socialist form of social organization. Higgins, however, sees only the negative aspects of work in modern capitalist industry. He is not alone in this. There are many on both the Marxist and non-Marxist left who tend to focus exclusively upon the destructive aspects of modern forms of work and portray them as *purely* alienating, deskilling, degrading, etc. A central purpose of my paper is to suggest that it is necessary to question such views.

In the first place, it is impossible to understand the actual experience of work on this basis. As I show, responses to employment and unemployment are more ambivalent and contradictory than this simple picture suggests. People - both men and women - want work (in the form of paid employment), not only as a means to wages, and suffer when they lack it - even though they often find it irksome and oppressive in many ways.

This is the most evident lesson of unemployment; and it necessitates a rethinking of the purely negative view of employment that Higgins, Gorz and others share. The basis for this (*pace* Higgins) can be found in Marx's work. For it is a mistake to think that Marx sees wage labour *simply* as an evil and inhuman system. On the contrary, he portrays it in dialectical terms, as a particular historical stage in the development of the social organization of production. As such it has contradictory features; it has both a progressive and a regressive aspect. It is progressive and even, in certain respects, emancipating in relation to earlier, pre-capitalist, domestic and household forms of production (see Lenin, *The Development of Capitalism in Russia* for an extended argument to this effect). However, it becomes a fetter to social development as the forces of production develop. The market organization of labour becomes increasingly less able to mobilize and employ the productive forces - the machinery and particularly the people - which it itself has brought into being.

This is the position I am defending. It permits us to see that employment, though undoubtedly burdened with many negative features, also satisfies human needs. If it is less than 105% critical of capitalism, so be it. What it may lack in zeal, I hope it makes up for in practicality and truth. On the other hand, it is both scientifically absurd and politically childish to sit on the sidelines and repeat that capitalism is nasty and that everything will be all right after 'the revolution', as Saint Marx tells us in the specified chapter and verse.

Sean Sayers

