The first question which the historian of British marxism is faced with could be formulated as follows: what are the reasons for which in Britain, although for decades it provided a home for and to some extent contributed to the development of Marx, there were no important marxist thinkers at least until the mid-war period? Any answer, even though synoptic, which could be deduced from a critical reading of evidence and relevant historiographic hypotheses, without abandoning Marx’s own perspective, has to take into account the following points:

a) The class formation of England during the second half of 19th century derives from the numerous aristocracy (with enormous estates or enormous town properties), the big bourgeois class (financial, commercial, industrial), the traditional petit-bourgeois class, which is numerious and finally the constantly increasing working class.

b) The social conflict was above all political and had to do among other things with the process of the integration of the social struggles into the functioning of the invulnerable and at the same time frigile parliamentary system. At first this integration took place through the Whig’s party.

c) The organised intervention of the Trade Unions, given the acceptance of the parliamentary system, meant the prioritisation of economic demands for the solution of immediate practical matters. The dismantling of politics leading to the development of the labour movement, «in kontinentalen Sinn» (Engels 17-6-1879: 378) did not need to appeal to the dialectics of history which Marx worked out without submitting to the empiricist tradition of English thought.

d) The Trade Unions, after the defeat of Chartism, were constituted by skilled workers with professional qualifications and the ability to

* English translation of a paper delivered in commemoration of G. Thomson organized by the Classics Department of the University of Ioannina (24-3-1987).
give high subscriptions. They functioned as mechanisms of social harmony with constant foothold in the parliamentary legislature. Even at the stage of Trade Union renewal in the last quarter of the last century priority is preserved for closed professions and the organization of unskilled workers is set aside.

e) The «Labour Representation League», although it participated in the «International Workingmen's Association», did not turn into a political Party, nor did it extend its activity outside London. This was understood early by Marx who remarked that the English possess all the necessary material presuppositions for a social revolution; they lack, however, the «Geist der Verallgemeinerung» and the «revolutionare Leidenschaft» (1-1-1870: 386). During the same period Engels (1874:496) ascribed to the British labour movement indifference for any theory. It was in other words a classic case of lack of correspondance between social position and social consciousness, where the missing links had to be detected.

f) Similarly weak was the practice followed by the «Social Democratic Federation» (founded in 1884 by one of the first English marxists, H. M. Hyndman) because of its expectation for the peaceful and historically inevitable process of transformation of English capitalist society. According to Engels, the axiomatic consideration of this possibility, which himself did not exclude (1886: 40; cf. Marx 1872: 160), is associated with the down-grading of Marxism to a «starre Orthodoxie» which the «Social Federation» undertook and which with its sectarianism seems to come «von nichts durch nichts zu nichts» (12-5-1894: 245; 10-6-1891: 112; 12-8-1892: 244; cf. Collins 1971: 47-49).

g) The founding of the «Independent Labour Party», despite Engels' initial relief (12-8-1892: 423; 22-8-1892:440), contributed to a fairly loose propagation of the ideas of the anticapitalist struggle, as it derived its ideological equipment from christian social criticism and revolutionary democracy, following the Trade Unions in the acceptance of the parliamentary system and representing mainly the «Labour Aristocracy». Engels had already remarked that the revival of the socialist movement, as it had been shaped by Owen's ideas, was unattainable, because the English working class «had a share more than anywhere else in the profit» which the big industry made from the world market (1874:496). For this reason the English worker thinks of the colonialist policies of his country «dasselbe, was die Bourgeois davon denken» (12-9-1882: 357). Of course, the «previligeed minority» (1892:276; cf. Moorhouse 1978: 61-82),
which has acquired significant facilities from the employers did not only furnish the bureaucratic leadership of the Trade Unions but it also provided those activists who advanced the rudimentary socialist movement. Finally from the cast of the intellectuals the «Fabian Society» was formed (1884) which stigmatized the «vices» of society, sought a reformist front across classes and definately rejected Marx’s ideas.

h) The constant replacement of social struggles by the political game, which shows among other things the ability of the English parliamentary system to adopt, was completed with the creation (1906) and especially the development of the Labour Party. Its birth could be seen, of course, as the realization of the first step towards the development of a socialist party, what in other words had happened in the Continent already since 19th century. As Lenin observed (1908:233), the English workers «have started even though clumsily, inconsistently and indirectly, to approach socialism». In its eighty-year history the Labour Party shifted constantly to the right the furthest limit of its programmatic aims (after the approval in 1918 of the program «Labour and the New Social Order» its leader thought that «Continental Socialism was a product of dogmatic materialism, with the class war as its guiding idea, in this country humanism was the note of Socialist thought», MacDonald 1920:48 absorbed for a long time the Liberals, did not encourage Marxism and each time, when in goverment, underwent the crisis of the management of crisis, that is the irrevocable removal of the country from the unique position it held in the world market. The Labour Socialism could be considered as a peculiar survival of Social Democracy, especially in its version of history as the «social evolution of mankind» (Snowden 1920: 16), which derives the meaning of its activity from the belief that «the creative powers of Society are in men’s minds, not in their pockets» (MacDonald 1911:143-145; 1921:12).

i) Granted that the umbilical cord between the Trade Unions and the Labour Party had never been cut, the practice of an independent socialist party simply meant the obscure shadow of the political representative of the labour unions and the weak protest against its regressions, ie. the limits of its possibilities. Through changes of name and splits a part of the socialists agrees to the foundation of the Communist Party of Great Britain (1920).
George Thomson fairly early is attracted by the ideas of socialism and in some way the history of CPGB can be a useful guide to the understanding of his ideological development.

The shadow politics meant a fruitless seasonal love-affair which apart from the inherent conditions was particularly strengthened by the various orientations of the Communist International to which it itself had been affiliated. (CPBSTI). Before this affiliation became definite, Lenin had proposed that the Communist Party support the Labour Party, while preserving the right for «complete freedom of agitation, propaganda and political activity» (1920:73). The request to the Labour Party for merging was rejected four times, when - during the period of the «comparative stability» of capitalism and the poor state of the party (Klugmann 1968:197) - the tactics of the «united front» had been chosen and the short-lived «Anglo-Russian Trade Union Committee» and been formed which in turn was dissolved partly because of the conservative shift in the political order of Britain and partly because of the change in orientation of the Third International which with the slogan «class against class» introduced an unbridgeable gap between the Labour Socialists and the Communists active in the Trade Unions. Towards the end of '20s the process of the transformation of Marxism into Marxism-Leninism had be completed in England as well, with the adoption of the implications of Stalin's revelant definition and the attempt to apply the «Moscow Road» to the conditions of the country, despite the fact that this meant an additional difference from the Labour Party which had already characterised communism as the product of «the Asiatic mind» (MacIntyre 1980:227, 223).

The Communist Party did not take enough advantage from the revision of this strategy of «Social Fascism», in 1935, as the Labour Party finally did not take part in the management of the economic crisis of 1929 and the responsibility for the reduction in incomes, something which resulted amongst other things in preventing the leakage of the middle classes towards the fascist groups (e. g. the «British Fascist Union»), which remained without particular appeal. Now in the context of the antifascist allied struggle, after the Third International had been self-dissolved, the Communist Party submitted, in 1943, a new application for merging with the Labour Party which won the first elections after the war with confortable parliamentary majority, spreading some ephemeral optimism about the future of the Greek Left after the Varkiza agreement.
A particular sensation was caused within the Communist Party and its allies by the revelations of 20th Congress of CPSU (Saville 1976:1-23) and the barrage of events which were schematically called «de-Stalinisation». At least four movements come into being, each with specific features: the first insists on «stalinism» which acquires a somewhat new appeal by adhering to Mao's thought with China's autonomous political presence after the Sino-Soviet dispute; the second is interested in controlled modernisation of the party, without rejecting completely the codified positions of Marxism-Leninism or without rejecting the analyses of «theoretical anti-humanism» which Althusser later attempted; the third favours an alignment of the party with the other western European communist parties, causing in this way a radical reorientation in its ideology and practice, something which had already been accepted in 1951 with the program of the «British Road to Socialism; the fourth, which leaves the party after the English intervention in Suez and the Soviet intervention in Hungary, founded the New Left which published initially the New Reasoner (1957) and since 1960 the New Left Review.

III

Already since the mid-war period Marxist thought did not identify itself with the Communist Party which nevertheless undoubtedly contributed to its propagation (for the translations and the relevant publications see MacIntyre 1980: 66-92) with a dynamism in inversed proposition to its organizing power. Apart from that, its political support extends to the Labour Party, the Independent Labour Party, the Revolutionary Communist Party (which was constituted by the trotskyites of the Babham Group; Croves 1974; Hunter May 1985:15-31) and of course the non-affiliated leftists. As regards its theoretical concerns which were gradually dissociated from traditional empiricist labourism and the mechanical version of the materialist conception of history, which they interpreted as demonstrating the dominance of the «economic factor» (MacIntyre 1980:17), mid-war British Marxism is concerned with

a) the absorption of freudianism  
b) aesthetics and literary criticism  
c) the theory of culture  
d) the re-establishment of social anthropology  
e) the elaboration of the theses of Historical materialism and  
f) the «dialectical» approach to the physical sciences for the verification of the principles of «Dialectical materialism». 
One could add at this point that the principle of social evolution and this included Marxists and Labour Socialists alike (MacIntyre 1980: 112) - was understood as a process equivalent to biological evolution. The marriage between Marx and Darwin became redundant in the connection between Culture and Society attempted by marxist aestheticians of the mid-war period (Lewis, West, Fox and particularly Caudwell), while it renewed its strength in the attempt to exploit the achievements of the physical sciences for the demonstration of the validity of the principles of Dialectical Materialism (in 1931 the «International Congress of the History of Science and Technology» is held in London, which establishes the beginning of this attempt with original papers and translations, as for instance with Engel's *Dialectics of Nature* which was edited by the biologist T.B.S. Haldane).

In the mid-war period these themes are dealt with in a better way both in terms of the growing group of researchers and in terms of the deeper elaboration of the methodological tools applied. Thus, for example, the «Communist Party Historians Group» is set up (Hobsbawn 1978: 21-48) which remained united until 1956, and with which G. Thomson collaborated, pushing aside the trivialities of market marxism with its original historiographic work. But the same cannot be said of the historiography of the physical sciences which did not detach itself from the «Société Engels», adopted for a while Lyssenko's ideas and ended up with «bernalisme» which prepared the ground for a consideration of science as a productive force «idéologiquement neutre» (Duparc 1983: 234). In this case, the tradition of empiricism is still dominant, which subjects social relations to the means of production. Moreover, the accumulation of merely verified data makes appropriate Marx's claim that «Positive Philosophie gleichbedeutend mit Unwissenheit über alles Positive» (20-3-1869: 284). However it must be noted that even within this perspective, at least initially, a specialised study of the history of the sciences and scientific ideas became possible complemented by research in the theory of Knowledge and the philosophy of science, sometimes with the assistance of linguistic analysis.

For the last thirty years, a synoptic account of the themes and tendencies of British marxist thought as it appears in monographs, a number of journals, the academic teaching and the ideological disputes between parties or movements, should fraw attention to the fruitful stimulation derived from the work of Luxemburg, Lukácś, Mao, Mannheim, Adorno, Habermas, Althusser, Poulantzas, Foucault, Derrida, Bar-
theses and Lacan. Moreover it could name, at least, a number of original contributions in various subjects: historiography, classics, literary criticism, aesthetics, culture, social anthropology, sociology, psychoanalysis, theory of the state, language, ethics, labour, economy, science, ecology, nuclear power, feminism, youth, mass media, etc.

IV

To precisely this wide context of English Marxism George Thomson belongs (1903-1987). The way he impregnated the Greek Studies with social anthropology and historical materialism has already been the subject of several critical reviews and is beyond the scope of the present paper. But his debt to English mid-war marxist aesthetics should be mentioned and in particular Christopher Caudwell's writings for whom he wrote that he managed to create the presuppositions for a materialist theory of art (1946:11). Apart from the voluminous writings of the Hellenist Thomson to which of course I also add his essays *Marxism and Poetry* (1946) and *An Essay on Religion* (1949), there are certain shorter works and two books written after the Sino-Soviet dispute which reveal the particularity of his marxism.

Official British foreign policy, with the exception of the involvement in Korea, encouraged the broadening of commercial exchange with Communist China, despite the pressures from U.S.A. for the opposite. On the other hand, the Communist Party was actively engaged in a campaign for the acceptance of China in the U.N. and constantly propagand the successful process of building socialism in that country. In 1951 the journalist and historian D. Torr publishes the book *Marx on China* which contains all the relevant passages with the aim of noting China's pacific social conditions without however denying the hypothesis of «the Asian mode of production». After the 20th Congress of CPSU and especially after the Sino-Soviet dispute the opportunity for independence is given to that group which insisted on preserving the third-international marxist tradition that had flourished in Britain.

Thomson allies with this group which tends towards revolutionary dialectics as expressed in our times by Mao's thought and praxis. In his book *From Marx to Mao Tse-Tung* (1971) he attempts to show the relation of the Russian to the Chinese revolution as successive stages in the world socialist revolution. The theoretical grounds for this attempt are to be found in the five Marxist classics, especially in Lenin and Mao, who put into practice revolutionary dialectics. In the world socialist re-
volution. The theoretical grounds for this attempt are to be found in the five Marxist classics, especially in Lenin and Mao, who put into practice revolutionary dialectics. In the various chapters Thomson discusses the dictatorship of the proletariat (concluding that there is only one road to socialism: «the road that leads to and through the dictatorship of the proletariat»), the proletarian revolution, the worker-peasant «alliance», the national question, the possibility of socialism in one country, the role of the party, the building of the first socialist state, the need for a «cultural revolution», the aspects of the class struggle in socialist society the dynamics of contradictions and their handling, the way the enormous superstructure reacts upon the economic base, the verification of Marx's thesis that «when theory grips the masses, it becomes a material force» This work also succeeds in giving an informative account of the main uses of Dialectical and Historical materialism, although its implicit certainty of the purity and the future of the Chinese revolution overlooks to some extent Marx's warning not to make the historical planning for the birth of capitalism in Western Europe into «eine geschichtsphilosophische Theorie des allgemeinen Entwicklungsganges» which «allen Völkern schicksalsmässig vorgeschrieben ist» (1977:111).

In his book *Capitalism and After* (1975), Thomson examines the rise and fall of commodity production. He begins by analysing the production of labour with constant references to *Capital* and occasionally *Grundrisse*, drawing the distinction between «use-value» and «exchange-value» and going on to discuss the phenomenon of surplus production, of commodity fetishism and the birth of capital. There follows a sketch of pre-capitalist society, from tribe to state («tribal society» was based on common ownership and for this reason it was «democratic»), of the creation of feudal society, and of the rise of capitalism and bourgeois democracy. The book ends with an account of the process of transition from formal to actual equality, mention of the marxian *Critique of the Cotha Programme* and praise of the Chinese commune as «forming the nucleus of the new communist society». It may be noted at his point that a kind of objective historicism can be detected - not the one known to the British as «technological determinism» - which is summed up in the thesis that commodity production was «a decisive factor in the evolution of civilised society, ancient and modern», thesis which despite the author's intention lapses into overlooking the specific class struggle From this thesis moreover there derives the identification of the «nationalization» with the «socialisation» (1973:110, 126) of the men of
production which of course requires a long process of social reform and is not limited merely to the conversion of private to state property.

V

George Thomson claimed to relate the study of the ancient world to advances in social and political theory. As a marxist he had the courage to take on the ultimate responsibility for this attempt, even though his «orthodoxy» appeared to many as outdated heterodoxy. Whatever may in fact be the case, his own observation is undoubtelly true of himself «the historian of the past is a citizen of the present» (1941:2).
ΠΑΝ. ΝΟΥΤΣΟΣ

Ο ΒΡΕΤΑΝΙΚΟΣ ΜΑΡΧΙΣΜΟΣ ΚΑΙ O GEORCE THOMSON

(π ε ρ ι λ η ψ η)

Η εργασία αυτή θέτει στην αρχή το ερώτημα: για ποιους λόγους στην Βρεττανία, που για δικαιούς φιλοξένησε και από μια άποψη συνέτελε στη διαμόρφωση του Mary, δεν εμφανίσθηκαν αξιόλογοι μαρξιστές, τουλάχιστον ως την περίοδο του μεσοπολέμου; Μια συνοπτική απάντηση, που θα μπορούσε να συναχθεί από την κριτική ανάγνωση των μαρτυριών και των συναφών ιστοριογραφικών υποθέσεων, επιβάλλεται να συνεκτιμήσει την ταξική σύνθεση της χώρας κατά το δεύτερο μισό του 19ου αιώνα, την πολιτική αφομοίωση των κοινωνικών αγώνων από το εύκαμπτο κοινοβουλευτικό σύστημα, τις οικονομικές προτεραιότητες των Trade Unions, τη συγκρότηση τους, την ευθαρσή αναντιστοιχία κοινωνικής θέσης και κοινωνικής συνείδησης, τη «μονοπωλιακή» θέση της κοσμοκράτειρας στην παγκόσμια αγορά και τις αποικίες, τον πρόωρο υποβιβασμό, από την ισχνή «Social Democratic Federation», του μαρξισμού σε «απολιθωμένη ορθοδοξία», τα όρια της ιδεολογικής παρέμβασης του «Independent Labour Party» και του «Labour Party» που μετέτεθε σινοσοβιετικά το non plus ultra των προγραμματικών του επιδιώξεων.

Στο δεύτερο μέρος εξετάζεται η συμβολή του Communist Party of Great Britain στην ανάπτυξη του βρεττανικού μαρξισμού, καταγράφονται και ερμηνεύονται οι καύριες ιδεολογικές επιλογές από την ίδρυσή του (1920) ως την περίοδο της «αποσταλινοποίησης» και τη συνοσβετική ρήξη. Στο τρίτο μέρος χαρτογραφείται η πλούσια θεματική του βρεττανικού μαρξισμού, που βέβαια δεν εξαντλείται στη θεωρητική δραστηριότητα του CPGB, και αναδεικνύονταν οι κύριες συνιστώσες του (εμβολιασμός με την παράδοση του εξελικτικισμού, «διαλ-κτικός υλισμός», «bernalismen», κοινωνική ανθρωπολογία κλπ.). Στο τέταρτο μέρος ανασυγκροτείται η μαρξιστική σκέψη του G. Thomson και αναλύονται κριτικά τα βιβλία του που έγραψε στις αρχές της δεκαετίας του 1970 From Marx to Mao Tse-tung και Capitalism and After.
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