

## NOTES ON THE LABOUR ARISTOCRACY IN BRITAIN (PART I)

### "IMPERIALISM AND OPPORTUNISM"

"Out of the enormous superprofits (since they are obtained over and above the profits which capitalists squeeze out of the workers of their 'own' country), it is possible to bribe the labour leaders and the upper stratum of the labour aristocracy. And that is just what the capitalists of the 'advanced' countries are doing: they are bribing them in a thousand different ways, direct and indirect, overt and covert.

The stratum of workers-turned-bourgeois, or the labour aristocracy, who are quite philistine in their mode of life, in the size of their earnings and in their entire outlook, is the principal prop of the Second International, and in our days the principal social (not military) prop of the bourgeoisie. For they are the real agents of the bourgeoisie in the working class movement, the labour lieutenants of the capitalist class, real vehicles of reformism and chauvinism.

Unless the economic roots of this phenomenon are understood and its political and social significance is appreciated, not a step can be taken toward the solution of the practical problems of the Communist movement and of the impending social revolution."

(LENIN 1920)<sup>(1)</sup>

The importance of the existence of bourgeois ideology in the labour movement is rarely denied by socialists of any description. But increasingly over the recent decades there has developed a dominant trend of ascribing such ideas either to institutions like the Labour or Communist parties or to ideologies such as reformism or revisionism.<sup>(2)</sup> However this approach, at best, merely classifies the ideas, but does nothing to explain their influence or analyse their relationships to the economic base - the specific stage in the development of capitalism and imperialism.

Lenin's explanation on the other hand connected the super-profits from imperialism with the opportunism of leading sections of the Labour movement. He asserted as did Engels that the key reason why only the minority of any European working-class (and especially the British) developed a revolutionary Socialist consciousness was the failure effectively to combat bourgeois ideology within the labour movement. He further asserted that it was essential to understand the economic basis of that ideology. Indeed he referred to that understanding as "the pivot of the tactics in the labour movement that are dictated by the objective conditions of the imperialist epoch", and in the same work described the "connexion between imperialism and opportunism" as the "fundamental question of modern socialism." (LENIN 1916)<sup>(3)</sup>.

Since Lenin's death there does not seem to have been any real analysis of the relationship between imperialism and opportunism to take into account the developments of the last fifty years.(4). To help lay the basis for such an analysis these notes will in this first part summarise the position of Marx, Engels and Lenin in some detail in order to understand better the developments in this aspect of changing working class structure before the First World War. The second part of this article will then attempt to outline the main developments which have occurred since then and propose certain policy conclusions for the C.F.B.

### WHAT WAS THE LABOUR ARISTOCRACY?

A general outline of Marx, Engels and Lenin's approach and conclusions on this subject is more than adequately represented in the quotations from Lenin that open these notes and comprise the Appendix. The labour aristocrats were defined by their above average earnings, their mode of existence and their relationship both with other workers and the employers.(5). The economic base for this was Britain's early 'monopoly position in the world market', her 'Vast colonies', and increasingly, towards the end of the century the super-profits sucked in as a result of overseas investment. This enabled the 'bourgeoisification' of most organised workers (see for example in the Appendix Engels' letters to Kautsky (1882) and Sorge (1889)) and especially of the trade union and political representatives and leaders. By selective quotation it is not difficult to 'prove' that Engels or Lenin thought that either all workers, or all unions were totally corrupted or on the other hand only a few leaders were bought off. The only way to prevent the discussion of the labour aristocracy descending into ritual exchanges of such quotations is to proceed with a historical analysis. This is what I will endeavour to do.

### WHO WERE THE LABOUR ARISTOCRATS?

In studying the development of the labour aristocracy and its relationship to imperialism we are engaged in relating internal contradictions in society to certain external causes.(6). We know that internal contradictions are 'the basis for change' and external causes 'the condition for change'. Specifically we must note that while the artisans or skilled workers who formed the labour aristocracy were objectively members of the proletariat - selling their labour power and producing surplus value - their actual function was that of generally pre-industrial craftsmen. Builders, engineers, and shipbuilders who formed the basis of the new model unionism of the third quarter of the nineteenth century were little affected directly by the industrial revolution except in their materials and the power applied to their manual tools (see Hobsbawm 1964 op.cit. p.193 and pp.280-1)(7). Even less affected were the more traditional crafts of printing, cabinet-making, tailoring etc. It was not these workers who were controlled by the machine or carried out the repetitive and mindless jobs characteristic of the textile industry at the time. On the other hand there was none

more 'aristocratic' than the skilled textile operative who supervised the production process. As the secretary of the Operative Spinners put it - 'The employers have had a splendid selection and they select the giants...inworking capacity.' It was in these craftsmen's relation to production that lay the basis for their bourgeois consciousness and their contempt for other workers. 'The artisan creed with regard to the labourers is that the latter are an inferior class and should be made to know and keep their place,' (quoted in Hobsbawm 1964 op.cit. p.275). The intense craft consciousness and protectionism was most akin to the medieval guilds where even the beggars of Basle in the 14th century allowed no outsider to practise their trade.

A second and allied characteristic of this section was that they combined together to form trade unions. Indeed with the exception of a few sectors like the miners federation unionism in this period meant craft unionism. These model unions, believing in 'a fair day's work for a fair day's pay,' consciously reformist and collaborationist in character, were those that Lenin was describing (see Appendix). They demonstrate the most reactionary trend in British trade unionism and should help teach Marxists not to romanticise about unions. However it is equally instructive that Marx himself was able to build the British section of the 1st International around such a Junta. He saw unionisation, even on that basis, as a real step forward.

The scarcity of these workers and the results of unionisation enabled them to maintain and, until the 1st World War, generally increase the wage differentials between themselves and other workers. The details of this are unimportant for this article but Hobsbawm shows that the labour aristocrat earned about 100% more than the unskilled, and considerably more than that when the unskilled were women or children. Just as important, the artisans earnings were relatively stable at a time when unskilled workers had little or no security - infinitely less even than the present-day situation. Mayhew, writing of the 1840s described a situation where only a third of the poor were employed, with a third unemployed and a third partially employed. In comparison unemployment rates among craftsmen varied about a figure of 5%.

Most of the above notes describe a situation prevailing in England up to the 1880s. In this period the 'labour aristocrats' (a term in general use at the time) were skilled craftsmen - fitters, turners, spinners, boilermakers, carpenters, printers etc., were socially much nearer to small masters and managers than to other workers, were marked by membership of effective, narrowly-based craft unions, and had a regular income approximately double that of those unskilled in employment. The development of capitalism and its productive forces, and the dominance of British imperialism in the thirty years before the 1st World War were to have a very significant effect on the class structure of Britain and to undermine internally the craft supremacy of the labour aristocrats.

## STATE MONOPOLY CAPITALISM AND THE IMPERIALIST ERA

The profits from Britain's colonial trade of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries provided much of the original capital which projected Britain as the first industrial power. Similarly the resultant dominance: Britain's position as 'workshop of the world', not only produced a situation where as such she 'exploited the whole world' through trade, but also provided capital for the massive increase in the financial sector which heralded the imperialist epoch. The power that had been achieved by an industrial monopoly was to be maintained for a time by the export of finance capital. This development itself demanded a great increase in those employed in banking, insurance and allied sectors,(9), not to mention the considerably enlarged armed forces. But of much greater significance to the internal class structure of Britain was the growth of state monopoly capitalism. As the forces of production developed, international competition intensified and the trade cycle (booms and slumps) became increasingly more violent, a large bureaucracy, both privately and publicly employed came into existence. At the same time the fragmentation of function (division of labour) characteristic of capitalism developed further and whole new grades of technicians came into existence to service industry. Parallel with this was the growth of clerical labour to keep records and accounts for the increasing number of very large firms. Although unions for clerks and draughtsmen were founded before the 1st World War, 'white-collar' union membership was not common until after 1945. These new sectors of workers had, in their attitudes to less skilled workers and in their differentials, certain similarities to the nineteenth century labour aristocrats. Nevertheless because of the historical period of their emergence and their lack of lengthy historical craft traditions they did not display the same narrow pride or flagrant collaborationist philosophy which characterised the nineteenth century labour aristocrat.

## LABOUR ARISTOCRATS BEFORE THE FIRST WORLD WAR

In 1864, the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, in their introduction to their rules defended 'restrictions against the admission into our trade of those who have not earned a right by probationary servitude' (i.e. apprenticeship). But by 1896 the Webbs were able to point out that any man with five years experience in engineering 'even if merely as a boy or a machine-minder' was accepted into membership. The reason for this change as the Webbs explain (see note 7) was 'the disintegration of their old handicraft'. In an illuminating passage they describe the eighteenth century engineer who could use an axe, a hammer and a plane with precision, could calculate velocities and the power of machines, draw in plan and section and build bridges and canals. For all this a certain formality of training was necessary. But by the end of the nineteenth century, 'what the millwright formerly executed with a hammer and file is now broken up into innumerable separate operations, each of

which has its appropriate machine' (Webbs op.cit. p.471). Thus the skilled engineer, who had till that point benefitted materially from the industrial revolution without suffering the attendant division of labour, became inexorably subjected to the machine, so removing the basis for the wage differential and his status on which he relied for his 'aristocratic' position. It is this change in the forces of production that I believe we must see as primary in the ending of the labour aristocracy and which the decline of the imperial tribute underlined rather than caused.

It is not that super-profits were unimportant. The period of thirty years before the 1st World War is notable for a relatively slow increase in both monopoly and modern mass-production in Britain. Far from being the pioneer in new industrial methods Britain fell well behind the techniques used abroad, especially in Germany and the United State. British business was protected for the time from such competition by her previously gained technological and colonial dominance and the huge returns on foreign investment. In this way many crafts were under less pressure than the engineers, and class-collaboration flourished. Thus the Boilermakers, one of the few unions to retain its craft exclusive ideology almost untouched to the present day, (despite considerable modern 'left' rhetoric) could sing:

"Now 'tis true that capital  
All the risks must run  
Like a ship exposed to all  
Winds below the sun  
Feels the first trade's ebb and flow  
Must keen competition know.  
So 'tis just and meet  
Labour should co-operate  
And to help with all their might  
Masters to compete."

(quoted Hobsbawm 1964, p.320)

None of this should be taken to mean that the labour aristocracy were at any time passive or indeed not conscious of the essential contradiction between employer and worker. Giving evidence to the Royal Commission on Trade Unions in 1870, and on their best behaviour, William Allan of the Engineers denied that the two sides of industry had identical interests. His associate on the Junta, George Howell, stressed that strikes were 'essential for the well-being of the working class.' Daniel Guile of the Ironfounders stated, 'long experience has taught us that it is to our advantage to get anything out of capital that we can when there is a chance.' But even had they been militant craft leaders, and that would overstate the position, they would have in no way broken from the sectional nature of their trade interests.

It was the leaders of such unions who earned the special contempt of Lenin. It was not that he was against full-time

officials as such - he saw that the acceptance of their necessity was a step forward for English workers. (Lenin (10) 1902). Nor of course did he believe that workers would reach a socialist consciousness if only they would 'wrest their fate from the hands of their leaders.' (11). But it is exactly in the situation where reformist consciousness dominates, that trade union leaders, although coming from the same background as their members, tend to lose even the elementary economist class-consciousness that day-to-day exploitation makes possible. They do however retain a mode of speech appropriate to their shop-floor experience and continue to present their ideas to the membership dressed in appropriate terminology. The 'mode of production' of trade union officials is by necessity negotiation and compromise, and without the weapon of scientific socialism, a guiding collective and a revolutionary membership the result over time is almost certainly opportunism. (12). In a sense therefore the dominant tendency for trade union leaders exists regardless of whether they were representing labour aristocrats or the unskilled. But in the period Lenin was analysing it was the officials of craft unions who represented the English scene.

### SUPER PROFITS

Britain's economic dominance in the nineteenth century rested on her early monopoly of industrialisation, her colonies and increasingly on large investments overseas, both in the colonies and elsewhere. The signs of this dominance were the control exercised over international trade, and the remittance of profits from foreign investment as well as their reinvestment. In the second part of this article these factors will be quantified and compared with their decline in the last fifty years.

The 'workshop of the world' relied on foreign trade to dispose of her products. This meant 'exchanging its own manufactures and other supplies and services of a developed economy (capital, shipping, banking, insurance and so on) for foreign primary products (raw materials and food). In 1870 British trade per capita (excluding the invisible items) stood at £17.7s.0d. as against £6.4s.0d. for each Frenchman, £5.6s.0d. for each German and £4.9s.0d. for each citizen of the U.S.A.' (13).

Towards the end of the century as other industrial countries broke Britain's monopoly and as the resultant overproduction caused the first international depression - the Great Depression (from the mid 1870s to the mid 1890s) - foreign investment became the important method used to break the trend of falling rates of profit. 'On the eve of the First World War British capital abroad had grown to constitute probably about a third or a quarter of the total holdings of the British capitalist class and current foreign investment may even have slightly exceeded net home investment.' (14). Thus while capital at home is estimated to have grown between 1875 and 1914 from £5000m. to £9,200m., capital held abroad

grew from £1,100m. to £4000m.(15). The importance of these investments is underlined when Lenin, quoting a contemporary economist, Giffen, pointed out that the British ('rentier') income from foreign investment exceeded the profit on all forms of British trade by five times. Lenin then summarised the situation by saying, 'The rentier state is a state of parasitic decaying capitalism and this circumstance cannot fail to influence all the socio-political conditions of the entire countries concerned in general and the two fundamental trends in the working-class movement in particular.' These two trends were he said, quoting Hobson, the 'economic parasitism' of the ruling class which allows bribery of sections of the workers, and secondly the reliance on native armies to oppress their own countries (shades of Vietnamisation) which further increases metropolitan parasitism.(16).

### THE IDEOLOGY OF THE LABOUR ARISTOCRATS.

Lenin writing in 1912 on that year's I.L.P. conference in Britain referred to 'the petty-bourgeois craft spirit in the ranks of the labour aristocracy which has been divorcing itself from its class, trailing behind the liberals and been contemptuous of socialism as a 'utopia'.' Referring to a progressive resolution to separate the Labour group in the House of Commons from the Liberals, he nevertheless noted how it was 'drawn up in the 'pure' British manner: without any general principles (the British pride themselves on their 'practicality' and their dislike of general principles; this is an expression of the same craft spirit in the labour movement)'.(17). This pride in 'practicality', the 'common sense' of the British labour movement either expresses itself in the reformism of the Labour Party (of which the revisionism of the C.P.G.B. is merely a modern variant) or in its 'militant' strain shows itself as the surrender to spontaneity. This trend is represented by those who dismiss the importance of leadership by arguing that the working-class need not worry about national campaigns, national leadership elections (and still less about developing a scientific socialist philosophy through constant study of all aspects of class society). (18). This kind of opportunism characterizes the ideology of many union militants and can as Lenin pointed out, 'be expressed in the terms of any doctrine you like including that of Marxism.' (LENIN 1912 p.145 op.cit. note 16)

It should be clear that this 'practicality' has remained with and indeed spread throughout the British Labour movement since then. But this should not prevent us from noting that the 'narrow craft spirit' before the First World War took specific class collaborationist forms which were unique to that period. Classical among these were the Birmingham Alliances between employers and unions in that area. One such signed stated: 'The object of the Alliance shall be the improvement of selling prices, and the regulation of wages upon the basis of such selling prices...thereby



securing better profits to manufacturers and better wages for work-people.' Employers promised to employ only the signator union's members while the union promised that only employers selling goods at the agreed price would be worked for by their members. As the Webbs commented: 'To the idealist who sees in Trade Unionism a great class upheaval of the oppressed against the oppressors, it comes as a shock to recognise in the Trade Union official of this type, pushing the interests of his own clients at the expense of everybody else, merely another embodiment of the 'spirit of the bagman'.'(19).

It was in this situation that Engels noted that Trade Unions had come to be accepted by employers as 'useful means of spreading sound economical doctrines amongst the workers.' (20). Similarly the Communist International meeting in 1920 made it clear how such policies and ideology were prolonging the life of international capitalism.(21).

Until the late 1880s British trade unions were generally speaking confined to the artisans. Women, children (often Irish) and the unskilled were excluded membership. There was broad ideological agreement with the ruling class that wages were a fixed proportion within the economy and could only alter with prices.(22). (Many unionised workers in the metal industries and in mining were covered by a sliding scale which specifically related wages to prices.) 'Labour' representation in parliament was merely treated as a way of ensuring legislation favourable to unions. Most unionists were firmly attached to the Liberal Party though the leader of the Cotton Spinners stood for the Conservatives. In any case overall political aims were specifically excluded in the constitutions of many unions.

These were the illusions of privilege and it was this privilege arising from Britain's favourable economic position which was seen by Engels in 1885 as 'the reason why, since the dying out of Owenism, (that) there has been no Socialism in England,' (Engels 1892 op.cit. note 20). Similarly it was the reason why a bourgeois Labour Party was inevitable from the beginning.(23). Nevertheless the creation of a Labour Party was a necessary advance for the British working class and was itself the result of the new forces of unskilled workers organising the 'New Unionism'(24). Union membership totalled about half a million in the 1870s and 1880s. It had reached six million by 1920, organising perhaps 60% of male manual workers. At the same time there was gradual changes taking place in the ideology of even the craft unions. The Webbs in 1896 record that even the Cotton Spinners union was changing. Previously members had accepted as perfectly proper for their technical officials to go and work for the employer when they were offered higher wages. By the 1890s this had become 'stigmatised as desertion.' In the period immediately before the First War the Engineers were accepting into membership a wider range of membership



despite considerable misgivings. The growth of the shop stewards movement over the same period, and especially during the war, weakened to some extent the power of the full-time official.

It was in these changes and especially the New Unions that Engels could record in his famous 1892 Preface (see note 20) that, 'Today there is indeed 'Socialism again in Britain' and plenty of it.' What focussed Lenin's analysis upon the continued existence of the Labour Aristocracy as a key element of reformism was of course the collapse of the 2nd International into chauvinism at the outbreak of the War. However the War, the subsequent economic crisis and the further development of productive forces acted to lessen the influence of the labour aristocracy. It is these developments and the generalisation of imperialism in the post-War period that will be followed in the second part of this article.

S.M.

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#### NOTES

- (1) LENIN. Collected Works Volume 22 pages 193-194 (LENIN C.W. 22.193-4) Preface to French and German editions of 'Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism.'  
(N.B. in this, as in all subsequent quotations, stresses are given as in the original, unless otherwise stated.)
- (2) See especially 'The British Road to Socialism' (1968 edition)p.19 for the C.P.G.B. 'explanation' of reformism; and the 'The British Working Class and its Party', by the self-styled 'Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist)' for the same approach, despite differing conclusions. The latter organisation in fact explicitly denies Lenin's analysis:- '. . . as Marxists we can never say . . . that it is ever open to that power ('Imperialism') to bribe, corrupt or appease any section . . .' (op.cit.p.2), and refers to such a suggestion as merely having been 'glibly argued' (p.1). For a useful analysis of the 'C.P.B.(M-L)'s' economist and chauvinist position see 'Economism or Revolution - a critique of the C.P.B.(M-L)', published by an organisation called 'Marxist-Leninist Workers Association' (1/289 Green Lanes, London N.4.).
- (3) LENIN C.W. 23.114 and 105. 'Imperialism and the Split in Socialism'. This is perhaps the most important work by Lenin on the subject and I have therefore included a section

of it as an Appendix to this article. This section summarises the position of Marx and Engels on this subject, and will therefore do something to relieve the weight of quotations.

- (4) This statement should only be taken to apply to works by British Marxists and even here there could well be some material I have missed. However some useful ideas, despite the revisionism of some of its conclusions, are in 'Trends in the British Labour Movement' and a brilliant summary of the evidence on 'The Labour Aristocracy' was produced by the same author, Eric Hobsbawm, in an essay with that title:- both in his collection, 'Labouring Men' (publ. Wiedenfield and Nicolson 1964). In April 1970 the U.S. publication 'Monthly Review' produced a centenary edition on Lenin called 'Lenin Today', in which essays by both Eric Hobsbawm and Martin Nicolaus appeared which largely speaking summarised the views of Marx, Engels and Lenin. This latter essay by Hobsbawm was repeated in 'Marxism Today' - July 1970.
- (5) See also Hobsbawm 'Labouring Men' p.273 et.seq. for a detailed examination of the criteria involved.
- (6) See 'On Contradictions' Mao Tse-Tung 1937, especially Section I, for the relationship between internal and external contradictions.
- (7) See also 'Industrial Democracy' (1920 edition) by the Webbs, Chapter X on apprenticeship regulations changing under the influence of new machinery.
- (8) The Junta - the general secretaries of five craft unions centred in London. See for example 'British Trade Unionism' Allen Hutt Chapter 2.
- (9) e.g. LENIN C.W. 22.219 'Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism':- 'Thirty years ago, businessmen, freely competing against one another, performed nine-tenths of the work connected with their business other than manual labour. At the present time, nine tenths of this 'brain-work' is performed by employees. Banking is at the forefront of this evolution.' Lenin quoting Schulze-Gaevernitz.
- (10) LENIN C.W. 5.481 'What is to be Done'.

Summarising the Webbs approvingly he wrote "the authors relate how the English workers, in the first period of the existence of their unions considered it an indispensable sign of democracy for all the members to do all the work of managing the unions; not only were all questions to be decided by the vote of all the members, but all official duties were fulfilled by the members in turn. A long period of historical experience was required for workers to realise the absurdity of such a conception of democracy and to make them understand the necessity of representative

institutions on the one hand, and for full-time officials on the other."

- (11) LENIN op.cit. p.383 where he specifically ridicules that idea.
- (12) See for example 'The History of Trade Unionism' - Webbs (1919 edition)p.469. Here the Webbs quote the experience of a craftsman unionist, written in 1893:- "The ordinary Trade Unionist . . . believes almost as a matter of principle that in any dispute the capitalist is always in the wrong and the workman in the right. But when as District Delegate (full-time official) it becomes his business to be perpetually investigating the exact circumstances of the men's quarrels, negotiating with employers and arranging compromises, he begins more and more to recognise that there is something to be urged on the other side. There is also an unconscious bias at work. Whilst the points at issue no longer affect his own earnings or conditions of employment, any dispute between his members and their employers increase his work and add to his worry . . . he begins more and more to regard all complaints as perverse and unreasonable." The rake's progress is fully described even including the official's propensity to drink.
- (13) HOBBSBAWM 'Industry and Empire' (Penguin 1969) p.135. The whole of the chapter - 'Britain in the World Economy' - is a very useful summary of Britain's external commercial relations.
- (14) M.DOBBS 'Studies in the Development of Capitalism' (Routledge and Kegan Paul 1963 paperback edition)p.315.
- (15) DOBB Op.cit. p.317
- (16) LENIN 22.277;278/9.
- (17) Lenin on Britain pp. 142-144 'Debates in Britain on Liberal-Labour Policy'.
- (18) LENIN C.W. 5.371 'What is to be Done'.  
" . . . the indifference towards theory which is one of the main reasons why the English working-class movement crawls along so slowly in spite of the splendid organisation of individual unions."
- (19) WEBBS 'Industrial Democracy' pp.578 et.seq.
- (20) ENGELS 1892 Preface to 'The Condition of the Working Class in 1844' (p.(xiii)Allen & Unwin).
- (21) 'The industrial workers cannot fulfill their world historical mission of emancipating mankind from the yoke of capital and from wars if these workers concern themselves exclusively with their narrow craft, narrow trade interests,

and smugly confine themselves to care and concern for improving their own sometimes tolerable petty bourgeois conditions. This is exactly what happens in many advanced countries to the labour aristocracy which serves as a base of the alleged Socialist parties of the Second International. (Preliminary Draft Theses on the Agrarian Question for the Second Congress of the Communist International.)

(22) Hence the importance of Marx's 'Wages, Price and Profit' and the attack within it on Citizen Weston. See Marx and Engels Selected Works Volume I p.361.

(23) LENIN C.W.23 116-117. See note (3) above.

(24) See for example Lenin C.W. 12.361 et. seq. 'Preface to Russian Translation of 'Letters by J.Ph.Becker, J. Dietzgen, F. Engels, K. Marx and others to F.A. Sorge and others!' Lenin here explained what an advance the Labour Party marked, with all its limitations. He also stresses again and again the failure of British socialists to work within the British Labour movement. The fact that there are still 'Marxist' sects who refuse to work within the Labour movement is a measure of how little has been learned since then.

#### APPENDIX

"Neither Marx nor Engels lived to see the imperialist epoch of world capitalism, which began not earlier than 1898-1900. But it has been a peculiar feature of England that even in the middle of the nineteenth century she already revealed at least two major distinguishing features of imperialism:(1) vast colonies, and (2) monopoly profit (due to her monopoly position in the world market). In both respects England at that time was an exception among capitalist countries, and Engels and Marx, analysing this exception, quite clearly and definitely indicated its connection with the (temporary) victory of opportunism in the English labour movement.

In a letter to Marx, dated October 7, 1858, Engels wrote: "...The English proletariat is actually becoming more and more bourgeois, so that this most bourgeois of all nations is apparently aiming ultimately at the possession of a bourgeois aristocracy and a bourgeois proletariat alongside the bourgeoisie. For a nation which exploits the whole world this is of course to a certain extent justifiable." In a letter to Sorge, dated September 21, 1872, Engels informs him that Hales kicked up a big row in the Federal Council of the International and secured a vote of censure on Marx for saying that 'the English labour leaders had sold themselves.' Marx wrote to Sorge on August 4, 1874: 'As to

the urban workers here (in England), it is a pity that the whole pack of leaders did not get into Parliament. This would be the surest way of getting rid of the whole lot.' In a letter to Marx, dated August 11, 1881, Engels speaks about 'those very worst English trade unions which allow themselves to be led by men sold to, or at least paid by, the bourgeoisie.' In a letter to Kautsky, dated September 12, 1882, Engels wrote: 'You ask me what the English workers think about colonial policy. Well, exactly the same as they think about politics in general. There is no workers' party here, there are only Conservatives and Liberal-Radicals, and the workers gaily share the feast of England's monopoly of the world market and the colonies'.

On December 7, 1889, Engels wrote to Sorge: 'The most repulsive thing here (in England) is the bourgeois 'respectability', which has grown deep into the bones of the workers... Even Tom Mann, whom I regard as the best of the lot, is fond of mentioning that he will be lunching with the Lord Mayor. If one compares this with the French, one realises what a revolution is good for, after all.' In a letter, dated April 19, 1890: 'But under the surface the movement (of the working class in England) is going on, is embracing ever wider sections and mostly just among the hitherto stagnant lowest strata. The day is no longer far off when this mass will suddenly find itself, when it will dawn upon it that it itself is this colossal mass in motion.' On March 4, 1891: 'The failure of the collapsed Dockers' Union; the 'old' conservative trade unions, rich and therefore cowardly, remain lone on the field....' September 14, 1891: at the Newcastle Trade Union Congress the old unionists, opponents of the eight-hour day, were defeated 'and the bourgeois papers recognise the defeat of the bourgeois labour party'.

That these ideas, which were repeated by Engels over the course of decades, were also expressed by him publicly, in the press, is proved by his preface to the Second edition of 'The Condition of the Working Class in England', 1892. Here he speaks of an 'aristocracy among the working class', of a 'privileged minority of the workers', in a contradistinction to the 'great mass of working people'. 'A small, privileged, protected minority' of the working class alone was 'permanently benefited' by the privileged position of England in 1848-68, whereas 'the great bulk of them experienced at best but a temporary improvement'.... 'With the break-down of that (England's industrial) monopoly, the English working class will lose that privileged position....' The members of the 'new' unions, the unions of the unskilled workers, 'had this immense advantage, that their minds were virgin soil, entirely free from the inherited 'respectable' bourgeois prejudices which hampered the brains of the better situated "old unionists"'. '.....' 'The so-called workers' representatives' in England are people 'who are forgiven their being members of the working class because they themselves would like to drown their quality of being workers in the ocean of their liberalism'.....

We have deliberately quoted the direct statements of Marx and Engels at rather great length in order that the reader may study them as a whole. And they should be studied, they are worth carefully pondering over. For they are the pivot of the tactics of the labour movement that are dictated by the objective conditions of the imperialist era."

(Imperialism And The Split in Socialism.  
Lenin. 23. iii - 4.)