

Studien zur Geschichte der Arbeiterschaft und der Arbeiterbewegung

Barrington Moore, Jr., *Injustice. The Social Bases of Obedience and Revolt*, M. E. Sharpe Inc., White Plains, N.Y., 1978, xviii, 540 pp., \$ 17.50.

Barrington Moore's *Injustice* follows his two previous major works in being an immense, important and stimulating enterprise. Its breadth, depth of reflection and wide reading reach almost Hegelian proportions; for in his attempt to analyse what leads human beings to revolt against injustice and even more importantly why so few so actually revolt against oppressive conditions, the author passes through the cases of Indian Untouchables, Nazi concentration camps, Freudian psychology, the concrete history of the German working class in the Ruhr and the philosophical complexities of the issue of moral relativism. All form part of an extended argument and all relate to the central problem of how men come to an awareness of moral outrage, which then drives them to action. In the end the outcome of the argument may not be totally convincing. There are bound to be many loose ends in such a vast project; for example, in a discussion of the phenomenon of Nazism Barrington Moore never really gets to grips with the question of why there was relatively little resistance or what shape and dimensions resistance actually assumed. Yet this would surely have direct relevance to the central theme of the book. The attempt to cover such a large area also means that the author is at times too reliant on a relatively limited number of sources, as in his discussion of the inmates of Nazi concentration camps, where little mention is made of recent works testifying to much broader resistance on their part than used to be imagined. This criticism applies also to an important part of his discussion of the German labour movement, to which I will return. Such shortcomings are, however, perhaps inevitable in a work of such ambition and do not detract from its overall brilliance.

The book is essentially divided into three sections, the first of which is an attempt to discover at a high level of generality and ahistorically what constitute the constant and varying features of a sense of injustice. As such the discussion ranges from the experience of various »exotic« societies, through Nazi concentration camps to the famous psychological experiments of Stanley Milgram, which attempted to discover when and under what conditions human beings ceased to obey legitimate authority. The conclusions are not surprising. Resistance requires not only the perception of pain but the belief that it is possible to do something to remove it. It requires various social supports and the destruction of various mechanisms of dependence. Internal tensions amongst the sufferers, on the other hand, almost invariably work to the benefit of existing authority.

The second section of *Injustice* turns its attention to a lengthy and detailed analysis of the German working class in the Ruhr between 1848 and 1920. Such an analysis serves Barrington Moore's general purpose for a number of reasons. Firstly, German workers did engage in revolutions on two occasions in this period: in 1848 and 1918 — 1920. Secondly, however, they failed to bring about the proletarian socialist revolution that some expected.

Thirdly, within the Ruhr two principle groups of industrial workers had very varied histories: miners organized from a relatively early date and protested their conditions regularly, whereas iron and steel workers were in the main quiescent until the revolutionary events that followed in the wake of the First World War. This Moore explains on the basis of a huge amount of autobiographical data and workers' responses to contemporary surveys, as well as secondary sources, although his use of such material is not as novel as the publishers would like us to believe; and his conclusion is that, whereas miners developed a sense of injustice because they had prior standards of reference from the era of state paternalism and inherited traditions of collective bargaining, and whereas they also had an organizational pre-history and were internally relatively undifferentiated, which enabled them to wage a common struggle, iron and steel workers had no such standards of reference, no previous organizational history and were internally divided in their interests and their aspirations. Hence 'the latter protested little, until late in the day. When they and other German workers did, however, as in the revolution of 1918 and the Ruhr insurrection of 1920, the author argues that the basic motivation of such working class militancy was »defensive« and not »revolutionary«.

The final section of the book ascends to a greater level of generality again, contrasting the Russian and the German revolutions, asking if Germany could have developed in a different way and finally attempting to demonstrate the nature of injustice. Here Barrington Moore comes to the following conclusions. A sense of injustice can only arise where people see their suffering, not as something inevitable, but as a plight that can be changed; where they can blame identifiable individuals for their problems and where they have some old or new standard of condemnation. Visions of a new society, so argues the author, only come to the suffering populace at large »from outside« and workers remain concerned with only the immediate issues that affect them. What leads to social revolution, however, is not only a sense of moral outrage generated by these factors, but the decay of the old order. For *effective* repression stifles discontent.

These second and third parts of *Injustice* seem open to a number of objections of different kinds. There are many empirical problems, for example, in Barrington Moore's account to the German working class. It is simply untrue to state that there was no anti-intellectualism amongst prewar German Social Democracy, as the hostility of working class trade unionists to *both* orthodox Marxists like Kautsky and revisionist intellectuals like Bernstein demonstrates. Nor is it true to say that there was no significant radicalism amongst the Ruhr work force before 1914. Klaus Tenfelde and others have pointed to growing tensions produced by technological innovation and immigration in Ruhr mining communities in the last decade before the war, echoing what has been identified elsewhere in the metalworking industries. The war was not quite the complete break some have imagined, for there was a marked hostility towards official union caution in the DMV between 1910 and 1914. Indeed, one might search here for the real origins of the later movement of Revolutionary Shop Stewards, as I have argued elsewhere. It might even be argued that the very choice of the Ruhr as an introit to the politics of the German working class is misguided. A study of, say, Bremen, Brunswick, Berlin and Stuttgart before 1914 might well produce a completely different picture.

The discussion of the revolutionary events in Germany between 1918 and 1920 is even more problematic, being based on limited and traditional historical accounts. When Barrington Moore argues that German workers were not really revolutionary and merely responded defensively to a variety of pressures but above all to the military threat from the Freikorps, it seems to me that a real terminological and methodological confusion intrudes into the argument. For most of *Injustice* the author realises the dangers of trying to pigeonhole working class attitudes and he also recognises that between 1918 and 1920 many workers wanted far more than did their ostensible and cautious leaders, including some degree of socialization and in some places perhaps even workers control. (Sadly he says absolutely nothing about the

powerful but short-lived anarcho-syndicalist movement amongst Ruhr miners in 1919/20.) Why, then, this »revolutionary — immediate concerns« dichotomy? Does a worker need a fully articulated view of a future society to be »revolutionary«? There are cases — and to some extent this may be true also of the skilled and revolutionary metalworkers in Germany in this period — in which such »immediate concerns« have given rise to demands for a total change of capitalist work relations *without* any injection of »ideology« from bourgeois intellectuals or professional revolutionaries: for example, the deskilling of engineering workers on »Red Clydeside« towards the end of the First World War led an attempt by skilled men to defend their independence, skills, status and control of the workshop into the revolutionary demand for »workers' control«; i.e. a genuinely »revolutionary« demand arose from »immediate concerns« without outside intervention. Similarly one can imagine how the traditions of independence, respectability and craft skill could lead artisans in both France and Germany to envisage a society delivered from the thralls of dependence and wage slavery spontaneously. I do not see why one needs to assume, as Barrington Moore does, that German artisans in 1848 »borrowed their conceptual tools«.

This last point suggests that in attempting to explain the presence or absence of working class protest the author of *Injustice* might have paid more attention to the detailed problems confronted by workers in a changing work situation rather than simply looking at past points of reference or the activities of »outsiders«. It is surely significant that in his analysis of the different behaviour of miners and steel workers in the Ruhr he says little about degrees of employer control facilitated by capital concentration, monopoly of labour markets in individual areas and the like; and that the role of deskilling and the emergence of a new structure of work for the semi-skilled plays little part in his analysis of the post-war revolutionary events in Germany. It may be that non-material factors, external influences, received traditions, defensive attitudes were all-important; but this cannot be established without a much more detailed analysis of different groups of workers in terms of the highly specific structural changes undergone by different industrial sectors.

All of this cast doubt on what emerge as almost Leninist conclusions concerning the inability of workers to conceive of alternative socialist orders; but it also demonstrates just how worthwhile and thought-provoking this book is.

Dick Geary

Detlev Puls (Hrsg.), Wahrnehmungsformen und Protestverhalten. Studien zur Lage der Unterschichten im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert (= edition suhrkamp 948), Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt a. M. 1979, 368 S., kart., 10 DM.

Dieser Sammelband dokumentiert aufs neue das starke Interesse, das auch in der bundesrepublikanischen Geschichtswissenschaft an einer erweiterten Konzeption von Sozialgeschichte besteht. Aus dem knappen Vorwort des Herausgebers wird dieser Diskussionszusammenhang, in den der Band gehört, allerdings nicht deutlich, sondern eher verdeckt, denn die »Distanz zu den konkreten Erfahrungen der Menschen« (S. 7) ist auch hierzulande unter den Historikern keineswegs mehr so groß, wie das Vorwort suggeriert. Der nichtspezialisierte Leser, für den dieser Band doch wohl in erster Linie gedacht ist, erhält durch den Herausgeber wenig Hilfen. Angaben über weiterführende Literatur fehlen, ebenso Hinweise auf die Autoren. Dies ist vor allem bei einem Pionier der Sozialgeschichte wie Edward P. Thompson bedauerlich, über dessen bedeutendes Werk man dem Laien, den dieser nützliche Sammelband hoffentlich erreichen wird, einige Informationen hätte geben sollen.

Daß vier der neun Aufsätze (davon vier Originalbeiträge) sich auf England beziehen, charakterisiert den Forschungsvorsprung, den die englische Sozialgeschichte bei der Analyse sozialkultureller Verhaltensmuster und deren Wandel im Industrialisierungsprozeß immer noch be-