

# Introduction

The Congress on the Dialectics of Liberation was held in London at the Roundhouse in Chalk Farm from 15 July to 30 July 1967. The present volume is a compilation of some of the principal addresses delivered on this occasion. I would like to outline in this brief introduction how the Congress came about and in particular why we, the organizers, arranged this meeting between these particular people, why we generated this curious pastiche of eminent scholars and political activists.

The organizing group consisted of four psychiatrists who were very much concerned with radical innovation in their own field – to the extent of their counter-labelling their

discipline as anti-psychiatry. The four were Dr R. D. Laing and myself, also Dr Joseph Berke and Dr Leon Redler. Our experience originated in studies into that predominant form of socially stigmatized madness that is called schizophrenia. Most people who are called mad and who are socially victimized by virtue of that attribution (by being 'put away', being subjected to electric shocks, tranquillizing drugs, and brain-slicing operations, and so on) come from family situations in which there is a desperate need to find some scapegoat, someone who will consent at a certain point of intensity in the whole transaction of the family group to take on the disturbance of each of the others and, in some sense, suffer for them. In this way the scapegoated person would become a diseased object in the family system and the family system would involve medical accomplices in its machinations. The doctors would be used to attach the label 'schizophrenia' to the diseased object and then systematically set about the destruction of that object by the physical and social processes that are termed 'psychiatric treatment'.

All this seemed to us to relate to certain political facts in the world around us. One of the principal facts of this sort was the war of the United States against the Vietnamese people. In this latter situation there seemed to us to be a violent transformation of the idea of 'the enemy'. Firstly, the enemy became transformed into the 'inhuman': that is to say,

men who embodied all the most detested and therefore externalized attributes of the 'men' – qualities such as underhandedness, cunning, meanness (the conservation of their supplies and supply-lines), 'violence' (the wish to shit on 'us'), and 'rape' (the tearing apart of the Western-imposed family pattern – with its neat analogue, the oriental brothel).

I recently met in Cuba a Vietnamese guerilla commandant who talked about how, while he was conducting an operation against the invading U.S. and mercenary forces, he knew that his wife and three children were being slaughtered in the next village. He knew that and yet he dispassionately and successfully carried out his military or counter-military work. This man acted by choice in a way that conscripted U.S. soldiers never can do – they simply lose and are lost to their families and can never give anything up. One human fact that generates most terror in the first world, the Imperialist World, is the fact of choice, the beginning of freedom, of spontaneous self-assertion of persons or a whole people. For this reason, among others, the 'free' opponent must be categorized as 'inhuman'.

After the conversion, on these lines, of man into the 'inhuman', there is a further subtle metamorphosis. The 'inhuman' become 'non-human'. At this point they become the ultimate projected versions of ourselves, those bits of

ourselves that we wish most finally to destroy in order to become Pure Being. If we cannot destroy these bits in ourselves, we have to destroy them in this outside version. The 'sub-human' or 'non-human' are totally destructible (witness a similar process with 'Abo'-hunting, continued well into this century in Australia), and there can be no possibility of guilt. They have to be wiped out almost before they exist as the non-human in our metaphysical imaginations. They are of course wiped out by their being what they are which, of course, is what they are not. They just need some sort of *coup de grâce* wrapped up in napalm. Then, we believe, we shall know where we are. Or we shall know where *they* are – in *our* graves!

At the Congress, to bridge the gap between theory and practice, we invited people such as Gregory Bateson, Herbert Marcuse and Lucien Goldmann to represent the theoretical pole (in the best Greek sense of this term where theory is *theoria* or contemplation), and Stokely Carmichael, who is an activist in the most real sense of that term.

This book is centrally concerned with the analysis destruction – destruction in two senses: firstly, the self-destruction of the human species by racism (Carmichael), by greed (Gerassi on Imperialism), by the erosion of our ecological context (Bateson, Goodman), by blind, frightened

repression of natural instinctuality (Marcuse), by illusion and mystification (Laing and myself); secondly, closely interwoven with the first sense, these essays study the human conditions under which men destroy each other (Jules Henry's essay on Psychological Preparation for War in particular explored this subject). So it is a book about mass suicide and mass murder and we have to achieve at least a minimal clarity about the 'mechanisms' by which these processes operate before we begin to talk about liberation. However, in each of the essays I have included there are at least strong hints as to how this liberation might be achieved.

It seems to me that a cardinal failure of all past revolutions has been the dissociation of liberation on the mass social level, i.e. liberation of whole classes in economic and political terms, and liberation on the level of the individual and the concrete groups in which he is directly engaged. If we are to talk of revolution today our talk will be meaningless unless we effect some union between the macro-social and micro-social, and between 'inner reality' and 'outer reality'. We have only to think back about the personal factor in Lenin that made it possible for him to ignore so much of the manoeuvrings of the super-bureaucrat Stalin until it was too late. We have only to consider the limited *personal* liberation achieved in the 'Second World' (The Soviet Union and Eastern Europe). Then we get the point that a radical

debourgeoisification of society has to be achieved in the very style of revolutionary work and is not automatically entailed by the seizure of power by an exploited class. We must never forget that conditions of scarcity inhibit – though not necessarily prohibit – personal liberation in this sense. But in the First World we have conditions of potential affluence which must be grasped and realized.

If we are to search for possible paradigmatic instances of this conjunction in the world, the most immediate situations seem to be those in Cuba, already liberated, and Vietnam, inexorably on the way to liberation. Both countries are forced to *continue* their revolutions in the face of outside aggression. China on this issue is less certain, but one of the meanings of the cultural revolution seems to be the diffusion of power from artificial hierarchies (where the people concerned are figments) into the minds and hands of actual people. Isolated, they too seem to be *continuing* their revolution.

So I think what our Congress was all about was not the dishing up of solutions to world problems already prepared, but an opportunity to think the thing out together. This is why the 'principal speakers' mixed so freely and spontaneously with the 'audience'. It is why so many young people actually took to living in the Round-house and then

took their seminars out into local pubs, cafés and public places. This was really the founding event of the Antiuniversity of London which now functions full-time, carrying over the spirit of the Congress in what may be a permanent form.

At the Congress we were concerned with new ways in which intellectuals might act to change the world, ways in which we might move beyond the 'intellectual masturbation' of which Stokely Carmichael accuses us. We recognized that radical groups in the First World had been conventionally split – not only ideological but on personal lines. There is always some sort of spurious messiah who arouses hope and then disappoints hope. This is not the 'fault' of the 'messiah' – it is the fault of 'hope'. Hope has to have another appointment. Not now and not then, but some other time, its own time – which is our time.

D. C.

We have to take over time and own it.