

## *The New Left*

'I am really sorry to see my countrymen trouble themselves about politics,' wrote William Blake in 1810. 'House of Commons and Houses of Lords appear to me to be Fools; they seem to me to be something Else besides Human Life.' And yet on the next page of his notebook he was denouncing 'the wretched State of Political Science, which is the Science of Sciences.'

We share his dilemma today. Against the vast back-cloth of nuclear promise and nuclear threat, the old political routines have lost their meaning. Mr. Macmillan's business with the fur hat: Mr. Gaitskell, sharing the platform on NATO Day (the day after London's May Day), with M. Spaak and Mr. Selwyn Lloyd: these things no longer arouse scorn, or indignation, or partisanship of any kind. They are tedious. They are 'something Else besides Human Life'. Strontium-90 is a merciless critic; it penetrates alike the specious rhetoric about a 'free community of nations', the romantic *longueurs* of imperialism in retreat, the flatulent composure of the Fabian 'social engineer', the bluff incompetence and moral atrophy of the 'political realists'.

And yet it is these men who hold within their control the very course of human life. And so the business of controlling *them* is indeed the 'Science of Sciences'.

It is in recognition of this fact that some members of the younger generation are beginning to take up political activity. They are doing this, not because they have clearly-formulated political objectives, but because they think it necessary to watch the politicians.

It is a difficult generation for the Old Left to understand. It is, to begin with, the first in the history of mankind to experience adolescence within a culture where the possibility of human annihilation has become an after-dinner platitude. Tommy Steele anticipated Mr. Godfrey Liam by several years, in writing the appropriate hymn for N A T O :

The first day there'll be lightning  
The second there'll be hail  
The third daybreak there'll be a big earthquake  
So brother, forward my mail.

Rock 'n roll you sinners,  
Sing to save you soul -  
There ain't no room for beginners  
When the world is Rock 'n Roll.

It is a generation which never looked upon the Soviet Union as a weak but heroic Workers' State; but, rather, as the nation of the Great Purges and of Stalingrad, of Stalin's Byzantine Birthday

and of Krushchev's Secret Speech: as the vast military and industrial power which repressed the Hungarian rising and threw the first sputniks into space.

A generation which learned of Belsen and Hiroshima when still at elementary school; and which formed their impressions of Western Christian conduct from the examples of Kenya and Cyprus, Suez and Algeria.

A generation nourished on *1984* and *Animal Farm*, which enters politics at the extreme point of disillusion where the middle-aged begin to get out. The young people, who marched from Aldermaston, and who are beginning, in many ways, to associate themselves with the socialist movement, are enthusiastic enough. But their enthusiasm is not for the Party, or the Movement, or the established Political Leaders. They do not mean to give their enthusiasm cheaply away to any routine machine. They expect the politicians to do their best to trick or betray them. At meetings they listen attentively, watching for insincerities, more ready with ironic applause than with cheers of acclaim. They prefer the amateur organisation and the amateurish platforms of the Nuclear Disarmament Campaign to the method and manner of the left-wing professional. They are acutely sensitive to the least falsity or histrionic gesture, the 'party-political' debating-point, the tortuous evasions of 'expediency'. They judge with the critical eyes of the first generation of the Nuclear Age.

Established sources who want to see the young people 'got hold of and who are alarmed at the first symptoms of a self-activating socialist youth movement, have sounded the alarm. The Labour Party Executive has even appointed a committee to Sit on the question of Youth. But Youth has been making its own inquiries; and the Labour Party Executive has not come out of them too well.

Various remedies are proposed. Young people are ungrateful, spoiled by the Welfare State. They should be educated in the moral and spiritual values of the pioneers of the movement or perhaps the Labour Party should compete with the Young Conservatives in providing a slap-up 'social' life? Or perhaps (thinks Fabian Chairman, Mrs. Eirene White), the 'more effervescent type of political youth', who circulates round the U.L.R. Club and the nuclear campaign, will grow out of it in time:

Fabians in general have their political emotions well under control and consequently the Society will never be ... a mass organisation ... But there are other organisations in the field which may be more successful in attracting younger members. How far should this concern us? Not very much, I think, provided that by the time they are 25 or so, we can attract the kind of persons who are concerned with serious politics. (*Fabian News*, January, 1959.)

What they fail, all of them, to recognise, is that the young people who are entering political activity today are indeed 'concerned with serious politics'. Serious politics today, in any worthwhile scale of human values, commences with nuclear disarmament. Those who do not understand this are either stupid (in which case they may yet be convinced); or they have become so mesmerised with political trivia, or have pushed their emotions so far down under, that they mistake the machinery of politics for the thing itself (in which case they are no longer on the Left, but are on the other side).

The young marchers of Aldermaston, despite all immaturities and individualistic attitudes, are at root more mature than their critics on the Old Left. They have understood that 'politics' have become too serious to be left to the routines of politicians. As for 'moral and spiritual values', what can Old Left or Old Right offer, after all?

The fourth day there'll be darkness  
The last time the sun has shone,  
The fifth day you'll wake up and say  
The world's real gone ...

(Tommy Steele: *Doomsday Rock*)

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In terms of traditional 'politics', we have been living through the decade of the Great Apathy. And this has been a phenomenon common to all the highly industrialised nations, irrespective of differences in ideology and social structure. It can be traced, in part, to economic and social causes operative in East and West - the drive for 'normality' and security in the aftermath of war, growing economic affluence (in a few favoured industrial countries), an affluence which has been co-incident with the supreme international immoralities of the Cold War and of colonial repression. Above all, it can be traced to the Cold War itself, and to its military, political, economic and ideological consequences.

But the most characteristic form of expression of this 'apathy' has been in the sense of impotence, on the part of the individual, in face of the apparatus of the State. This has arisen, in different countries, from quite different causes; American 'Power Elite', Russian 'Bureaucracy', British 'Establishment', all draw their strength from greatly different social contexts, and the attempt to press superficial resemblances too far will lead to specious conclusions. Nevertheless, if we are concerned with the formative cultural influences upon the post-war generations, then the similarities acquire significance. It is important to assess how these similarities appear to the post-war consciousness:

1. *The Establishment of Power.* The increasing size, complexity, and expertise required in industrial concerns have contributed to the sense of 'anonymity' of the large-scale enterprise, to the power of the managers, and to the sense of insignificance of the individual producer. World War, followed by Cold War, and reinforced in the Soviet Union by the highly centralised economic planning of the Stalin era, further intensified these changes and helped on the process of the consolidation of immense resources at the disposal of the State. In Britain this brought into being an unholy coming-together of the Federation of British Industries, the Trades Union Congress and Government to form a super-Establishment, which has invested its own procedures with an air of 'official' sanctity so that the non-conformists or minority group ('unofficial' strikers, 'proscribed' organisations, etc.), are presented as offenders against Decency, Law and Order - a process most clearly seen at work in the treatment of the 'blue' union in the docks, the events at Briggs Motors, and the 'official' Court of Inquiry into B.O.A.C.

2. *The Establishment of Orthodoxy.* Two factors have combined to generate a climate of intellectual conformity: first, the centralised control, either by great commercial interests or by the State itself, of the mass media of communication, propaganda, and entertainment, and the consequent elimination from them of minority opinions: second, the ideological orthodoxies and heresy-hunting which have been a by-product of the Cold War. In Russia this orthodoxy has been enforced by the authority of the State; but in the U.S.A. and Britain, where the forms of democracy have been preserved, the major political parties, Republican and Democrat, Conservative and Labour, endorse officially the Cold War orthodoxies of anti-Communism, NATO strategy, nuclear arms manufacture and the rest, so that on the crucial issues of human survival, the electorate are presented with no effective choice.

3. *The Establishment of Institutions.* Here the post-war generation encounter institutions which had already become 'set' in their leadership, bureaucracy, procedures and policies, in the war or immediate post-war years. These institutions enshrine and perpetuate attitudes which have their origin in a pre-war context; they appear, to the post-war generation, as institutions set apart from and above them.

This is notably the case with the British Labour Party, which, while it may still hold the electoral support of great numbers in the post-war generation, has failed to win the loyalty or participation of the younger electors. The younger generation have no memories of Labour as a movement of storm and protest, a move-

ment of men struggling and sacrificing to lift themselves and their fellows out of cramping and de-humanising conditions. They were born, rather, into the world of the block vote; it is the trade union that tells them what they can do and what they can't do. They see restriction where their fathers saw mutual support. And the young socialist today is not only concerned with changing the direction of Labour Party policy; he is hostile to its integration with the rest of the Establishment, hostile to the party bureaucracy, hostile to the 'game political', hostile to the machine itself.

These are some of the ingredients of the Great Apathy. But 'apathy' is a mis-leading term, confusing contradictory phenomena. On the one hand we have seen the blatant salesmanship of acquisitive materialism, and the conformists in State and Party and industry - in the U.S.A. the gaudy showcase of conspicuous consumption and the great rat-race: in the U.S.S.R. the time-serving conformity of the *apparatchiks*: in Britain Mr. Gaitskell's Glossy and Mr. Macmillan's Opportunity State and the ethic of 'Room at the Top'. And as a concomitant of all these, a profound moral inertia, retreat from political commitment, failure to engage the idealism of youth, and a slowing down of the dynamic of social change. On the other hand, there have been the scarcely-concealed injustices and inequalities, the increase in criminality, the social neurosis and inarticulate frustrations - dope-addicts and 'Beats', *stilyagi*, gang conflicts and race riots. Perhaps only a minority react in this way, but the possibility of harnessing this latent aggression on a much wider scale is always there. Notting Hill is a warning. Sometimes the protest is just *against*; against nothing, as in the rock 'n roll riots. Sometimes we catch a glimpse of the immense potential of human energy and sympathy draining away for lack of channels of expression; the unutilised yearnings for something positive with which to identify oneself that find expression in gang-belongingness, or the desires to find a meaning in life which went to inflate the mass emotionality of Billy Grahame's tours.

For a multitude, East and West, 'apathy' has not been the expression of content, so much as the function of impotence. And impotence is generating its own forms of revolt, in which utter political disillusion combines with the anarchistic posturing of the isolated individual. On occasion it spills over into the frenzy of the impotent verbal assassin:

I want to run into the street,  
Shouting, 'Remember Vanzetti!'  
I want to pour gasoline down your chimneys.  
I want to blow up your galleries.

I want to burn down your editorial offices.  
 I want to slit the bellies of your frigid women.  
 I want to sink your sailboats and launches.  
 I want to strangle your children at their finger paintings.  
 I want to poison your Afghans and poodles.

(Kenneth Rexroth: *Thou Shalt Not Kill*)

The note is found among the 'beat' writers; whenever the crust breaks it can be found in Eastern Europe as well - in the cult of Hemmingway, the eager acceptance of *1984*, in the stories of Hlasko; it is present in the shriller passages of John Osborne. And, in less articulate or less histrionic forms, it is found at every level of society. It is present as a mood of anti-political nausea; a nausea which extends to the very language and routines of the orthodox, whether the rituals of Marxist-Leninist ideologues or the fireside insincerities of Western tele-politicians. It is found in the obstinate resistance to the canvasser: 'there's not much to choose between 'em, they're all in it for themselves, what's the use?' It is expressed in the derisory vote of the A.E.U. membership, when confronted with the choice of Carron or Birch. The old routines have ceased to bring the old results. Such results as they do bring are rarely a cause for socialist congratulation.

We place the problem in this context, not because we think that such hasty impressionism is a substitute for the hard work of close political analysis; not because we incline towards the attitudes of Rexroth or of Hlasko; not because we believe that advanced industrialism itself has given rise to a 'mass society' in which the antagonism between the power elite, or state bureaucracy, and the alienated individual has superseded, in importance, class antagonisms. The watershed of the October Revolution cannot be argued away; and we believe that, in an atmosphere of relaxed international tension, the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe will prove to be the area of expanding liberty and human fulfilment, whereas the West, unless transformed by a strong democratic and revolutionary socialist movement, will prove to be the area of encroaching authoritarianism. Moreover - and the reservation is of great importance - whereas in the capitalist powers, and especially U.S.A., great private interests find the maintenance of tension and arms production profitable, in the East no comparable vested interests in the Cold War are to be found. While at the rubbing edges of the "Two Camps" - Jordan or Tibet, Albania or Turkey - the actions of military strategists and politicians, East and West, can be equally fraught with danger, nevertheless it remains true that the "natural" economic and social pressures in the East

lead towards a detente, whereas in the West we are faced with the inertia of the "permanent war economy."

But the assertion of democracy in the Communist area cannot take place without a hundred contests with the entrenched bureaucracy, its institutions and ideology. And, equally, the regeneration of the Western socialist movement cannot take place without a fundamental break with the policies and orthodoxies of the past decade. And this two-pronged offensive is (it becomes increasingly clear) carrying the left Socialist in the West, and the dissident Communist in the East, towards a common objective. There is a rediscovery of common aims and principles, obscured during the violent era of the Third International. This does not constitute a conversion of sections of the Western labour movement to Communist orthodoxy, nor of disillusioned Communists to liberal social-democracy. It represents, rather, a rejection of both orthodoxies; and the emergence of a New Left which, while it draws much from both traditions, stands apart from the sterile antagonisms of the past, and speaks for what is immanent within both societies. It champions a new internationalism, which is not that of the triumph of one camp over the other, but the dissolution of the camps and the triumph of the common people.

It is the bankruptcy of the orthodoxies of the Old Left, and particularly their imprisonment within the framework of Cold War ideology and strategy, which has contributed to the characteristic political consciousness of the post-war generation - the sense of impotence in the face of the Establishment. Because there has been during the past decade no determined and effective grouping, with a clear internationalist perspective, challenging these orthodoxies, frustration has given way to disillusion, and disillusion to apathy. Now that such groupings are appearing, in different forms, in a dozen different countries, East and West, the Establishment immediately appears less firmly based; apathy appears as a less formidable phenomenon; and a certain identity of aim is discovered.

First, these groupings find a common enemy not only in the tensions of the Cold War, but also in the strategic postulates and partisan ideology of the war. The neutralist position is expressed in the diplomacy of the uncommitted Afro-Asian nations, Yugoslavia, etc., it is also a spreading heresy in the communist and Western world. It is the first sin of 'revisionism' to come under attack; it was the supreme crime of Nagy and of Harich. It is the neutralist implication, of the Nuclear Disarmament Campaign which provokes the hostility of the Establishment (Mr. Gaitskell, Mr. Bevan, and all) in Britain. As the pressure grows greater in

one 'camp', so the response will grow greater in the other.

It must be the first task for any New Left in Britain to propagate and to deepen, in the labour movement and in the nuclear disarmament campaign, not the mere sentiment of neutralism, but the internationalist outlook of active neutrality. We must seek to bring our people to an awareness of their, key position in world affairs, by fostering a far wider understanding, not only of the outlook of the colonial and Asian peoples, but also of the potential strength of 'revisionist' and democratic forces within the Communist world.

Second, these groupings find a common problem in gaining access to channels of communication to people, despite control over the cultural apparatus by the State, the Party, or commercial interests; and over the organizations of the labour movement by the party bureaucracies. This tends to keep the new groupings isolated and to emphasize their 'intellectual' character. But their importance as growing-points should not be underestimated. The problem differs greatly from one country to another. In France our comrades contest with an erratic and vicious censorship. There they present themselves as a distinct party (the Left Socialist Union) with little electoral influence but with widely influential journals (notably *France-Observateur*). In Italy, the 'New Left' tendency is to be found among elements within both the Socialist and Communist Parties, and is expressed in more than one serious theoretical journal. In Russia and in much of Eastern Europe our comrades press against the barriers of editorial inertia, and contest with State orthodoxy in a hundred tortuous ways; in China and in Viet-Nam they are being 're-educated' in the communes and on the dams - a process which may not prove as one-sided as their educators hope. In Britain, the democratic forms are unimpaired, but access to the means of communication becomes increasingly difficult - when the media of television and press are largely tuned by the Establishment and are closed to the sustained propagation of minority opinions. Channels of communication within the traditional labour movement are sluggish and obstructed by the bureaucracy. The problem presents itself as one of constructing (however painfully slow the process may seem - though steady progress is being made) an *alternative* 'cultural apparatus', firmly in the hands of the New Left, a cultural apparatus which by-passes the mass media and the party machinery, and which opens up direct channels between significant socialist groupings inside and outside the labour movement.

Third, there is taking place within these groupings a renaissance of socialist theory. It would be premature to attempt to define a

unified and consistent body of ideas by which the New Left can be identified in any country. The laboratory work is still continuing, in journals, clubs and splinter parties, in sociological theses and in novels, in discussions in cafes, communes, workshops, trade union meetings. It would be possible to trace a recurring pattern in Communist post-1956 'revisionism' - the humanist revolt, the rejection of dogmatic in favour of empirical methods of analysis, opposition to authoritarian and paternalist forms of organisation, the critique of determinism, etc. But this would tell us more about the shedding of old illusions and the re-valuation of old traditions, than about the affirmation of the enduring and the discovery of the new. It would tell us nothing about the crucial question: the confluence of the dissident Communist impulse with the left socialist tradition of the West and with the post-war generation. It is at this point of confluence that the New Left can be found.

1956 marks the watershed. In the first place, since 1956, there has been a world-wide and continuing movement of Communist dissidence which (if we overlook - as we should - Mr. Howard Fast) has not entered into the worn paths of traumatic anti-Communism, God-That-Failedism, Encounterism, and the rest; but which has, on the contrary, sought to affirm and develop the humane and libertarian features of the Communist tradition. The resilience and maturity of this heresy, which - excluded from the Communist Parties - has refused to lie down and die, or to cross to the 'other camp', but which has instead struck independent roots in the labour movement, interposing itself between the orthodox Communist apparatus and the non-Communist Left - this has aroused the particular fury of the ideologues of *World Marxist Review*. Indeed, in certain countries it would be possible to identify the New Left by saying that it stands aside from the traditional contest between SocialDemocratic and Communist orthodoxy; and looks forward to socialist re-unification, not through some formal alliance of jncompatibles, but as a result of the displacement of the ruling bureaucracies in both.

But we should go further. If there is, as yet, no unified theory of the New Left, there are many common pre-occupations. There is no prescribed 'road to Socialism'; but Socialism remains an international theory, with an international language. Confronted by the authoritarianism and anti-intellectualism of the Stalinist deviant of Marxism, Communist dissidence has broken with its scholastic framework and is subjecting the entire catechism to an empirical critique. But at the same time, confronted by the idiocies of the Cold War and the facts of power within Western 'over-

developed societies', a taut radical temper is arising among the post-war generation of socialists and intellectuals in the West. In the exchange between the two a common language is being discovered, and the same problems are being thrust forward for examination: the problem of political power and of bureaucratic degeneration: the problem of economic power and of workers' control: the problems of de-centralisation and of popular participation in social control. There is the same rediscovery of the notion of a socialist community; in Britain the Fabian prescription of a competitive Equality of Opportunity is giving way, among socialists, before the re-discovery of William Morris's vision of a Society of Equals; in the Communist world the false community of the authoritative collective is under pressure from the voluntary, organic community of individuals, which, despite all the inhumanities of the past two decades, has grown up within it. There is, East and West, the same renewal of interest in the 'young Marx'; the same concern with humanist propositions; the same re-assertion of moral agency, and of individual responsibility within the flow of historical events. The New Left has little confidence in the infallibility, either of institutions or of historical processes. A true socialist community will not be brought into being by legislative manipulation and top-level economic planning alone. Socialism must commence with existing people; it must be built by men and women in voluntary association. The work of changing peoples' values and attitudes and the summoning up of aspirations to further change by means of Utopian critiques of existing society, remains as much a duty of socialists as the conquest and maintenance of working-class power. At every stage, before, during, and after the conquest of power, the voluntary participation of the people must be enlisted, and the centres of power must themselves, wherever possible, be broken up. The New Left is made up of revolutionary socialists; but the revolution to which they look forward must entail not only the conquest but also the dismantling of State power. They are socialist theorists who distrust the seductive symmetry of socialist theory, and revolutionaries who are on their guard against the dogmatic excesses and the power-drives of the professional revolutionary.

The New Left in Britain is, as yet, scarcely identifiable in terms of organisation - a few publications and journals, several successful Left Clubs, a growing programme of conference and educational work initiated by this journal in association with *Universities and Left Review*. It is significant, however, for three reasons.

First, it is giving political expression to a mood which is very widely diffused, both within the traditional labour movement and outside it; which has already precipitated in the nuclear disarmament campaign and which may soon precipitate in more specifically socialist form. Second, it is meeting with a response from younger people, and is giving expression to their frustrations and needs in a way that alarms the older bureaucratic organisations. Third, it is operating within a context - in Britain - which is more favourable, and more pregnant with possibilities, than is, perhaps, the case of any other Western country. In Britain the 1956 dissidence within the Communist movement coincided with Mr. Bevan's accommodation with Mr. Gaitskell and the disorientation of the traditional Labour left. In both quarters the 'cult of personality' gave way to the search for principled socialist policy. This re-examination of theory and of policy among elements on the Old Left coincided with the break-through, in U.L.R., of an authentic voice from the critical post-war generation. The confluence of these three tendencies, which is now taking place, offers a unique combination of real contacts with the older and younger socialist generations. While the intellectual resources and political experience of our comrades in France and Italy are undoubtedly greater, we have the advantage of operating within a country where Communist/Social-Democratic antagonisms have never worked such havoc in the traditional labour movement; a country, moreover, whose critical position in the entire Cold War complex is becoming more and more evident.

The New Left is sometimes identified by observers by its concern with 'cultural' questions, as opposed to the basic bread-and-butter pre-occupations of the Old Left. But this is true only if it is understood that these 'cultural' questions are questions about life. For the New Left wants political and economic changes *for* something, so that people can themselves do something with their lives as a whole. We have seen enough of a socialism perverted into the worship of poods of grains and tons of steel, with men identified as producers of material values and little else, where 'consumption' has always to wait, and where 'culture' is a means of social control directed by the Establishments. These 'cultural' questions are not only questions of value; they are also, in the strictest sense, questions of political power. As even the Giants of publishing vanish from the scene, as Hultons and Newnes give way to Odhams, it becomes ever more clear that the fight to control and break-up the mass media, and to preserve and extend the minority media, is as central in political significance as, for example, the fight against the Taxes on Knowledge in the 1830s; it

is the latest phase of the long contest for democratic rights - a struggle not only for the right of the minority to be heard, but for the right of the majority *not* to be subject to massive influences of misinformation and human depreciation.

The true distinction between New and Old Left may perhaps be seen in their differing responses to the problem of political 'apathy'. To this problem there are two traditional responses on the Old Left: demonism and economism: and one organisational remedy which is proposed: fervent parasitic factionalism.

1. *Demonism.* This consists in attributing the 'apathy' of the labour movement exclusively to the machinations of the bureaucracy (Transport House or King Street, or both, according to preference), and to the treachery of the existing leaderships. This convenient excuse enables the Old Left to fall back upon the old repertoire of militant slogans, and to evade the labour of analysing the actual social forces which have contributed to the rise of bureaucracy and which enable the leadership to maintain its power. It also enables the Old Left to hypostatise and idealise a mythical militant working-class, which is bound down by the oppression of its own false leaders but which is at any moment about to break out into revolutionary actions - a working-class which is far more a construct from passages of Lenin and/or Trotsky than a derivation from actual observation of the real tensions and conflicts of contemporary working-class life.

The New Left has embarked upon the less comforting business of analysing the actual situation; notably in the analysis of Ralph Miliband in the *New Reasoner* ('The Politics of Contemporary Capitalism', 'The Transition to the Transition', *New Reasoner* 6 and 7); and in the analysis of the cultural influences at work by Raymond Williams, Richard Hoggart, Stuart Hall, and other contributors to *U.L.R.* The contributors to 'Conviction' have pursued an analysis on parallel lines. It is no longer possible (and it is still less 'Marxist!') to explain away Glossyism as the result of a crooked deal by Mr. Gaitskell; it is the authentic expression of certain features of contemporary society, and reflects the permeation of the acquisitive ethic into the centres of working-class life, and the enfeeblement of the ethic of community. The evident corruption of the traditional institutions of the labour movement has been possible only within a context of social mobility, of a 'Room at the Top' educational ladder, and of a tacit accommodation to imperialism which has compromised the working-class movement as a whole. This is not the whole story; but if we are to find remedies, we must commence with an honest diagnosis.

2 *Economism.* This doctrine of economic man is supposed to be the original sin of Marxism. As a matter of fact, it is most evident in the blatant appeal to the acquisitive and self-regarding appetites in the policies of the Labour and Tory Right. On the Old Left it is notably found in the rank-and-file of the Labour Party, in the argument that what is 'wrong' with the working people is the prosperity of full employment (usually attributed to armaments expenditure), and that we cannot hope for further socialist advance until 'the next slump'.

This pernicious argument, which is an insult to working people (can they only think with their stomachs?), an insult to Socialism (will people only be driven to it by starvation?) and a contributory cause of apathy, is based upon a complete misreading of history. Slump does not necessarily engender socialist militancy (it did not do so in the 1930s): it may equally provide the breeding-ground for authoritarianism. Some of the periods of greatest advance in our movement have been in a context of economic recovery (1889 and the new unionism), or have been the product of an enhanced political consciousness arising from non-economic causes (the anti-fascist war and 1945).

The New Left is concerned, not to wait hopefully for the old disasters and repressions to engender the old defensive responses, but to discover the new frustrations and potentials within contemporary life, the new growing-points. The way forward to Socialism lies not in frightening the children of the 1950s with the Ogre of the 1930s (although, true enough, he may still be lurking around), but in pointing the way to the great enrichment of social life potential within our society today. Enduring militancy is built, not upon negative anxieties, but upon positive aspirations; 'Merrie England' and 'News from Nowhere' helped to engender the enthusiasm and will which carried the younger generation of the 1890s away from the impoverished life of their fathers. And as certain of the basic material hardships of working people are diminishing, so fuller demands - which in the past may have appeared as 'marginal' - come to the centre of the stage; for the humanisation of the social services and of conditions of labour, for democracy in industry, for old Smoke and Squalor to be re-built as new Communit'y, for the cultural enrichment of leisure. It is always the business of the Left to foster the utmost aspiration compatible with existing reality - and then some more beyond. But if the New Left fosters these new aspirations, it certainly does not do so in the reformist spirit of Fabian gradualism; the tactics of reform must be developed within a revolutionary Strategy. And if the people move towards objectives which prove

unattainable within the framework of capitalist society, their experience will complete their political education.

3. *Parasitic Factionalism.* Demonism and economism have led the Old Left to a common organisational solution. The conquest of socialist power is equated with the capture of the machinery of the established labour movement. The organised left faction, rooted in (or parasitic upon) the institutions of the labour movement will engage in mortal struggle with the established bureaucracy. When certain key positions of power are gained, the Slump will follow; and the faction, vanguard or elite will ride on the tide of militancy to power.

This combination of demonism, economism ('The tempo of the class struggle is quickening. The tide is turning.') and factionalism reach their apotheosis in the newest offspring of the Old Left, the Trotskyist Socialist Labour League. We read in our contemporary, *Labour Review*, this editorial opinion:

Our journal has an indispensable part to play. Our allotted share of the task is enormous: no less than the education of a generation of working-class fighters and leaders, to whom it will be given to seize and hold State power, to accomplish the British Revolution.\*

We have no such confidence in the intentions of history. Nor are we confident that the British Revolution will be such a classic and cataclysmic event. The last British Revolution was a ragged and mixed-up affair; and, after two hundred years of working-class organisation, and the evolution within the capitalist framework of a hundred forms of social association and democratic control, the next Revolution is likely to appear equally messy and eccentric in the eyes of the doctrinaire historian. While the ultimate explanation of the diverse forms of social and political conflict is to be found in the class-struggle, this does not mean that the Revolution must inevitably be preceded by the total disengagement of the working-class from the capitalist State machinery, and the naked confrontation of antagonistic classes. The flash-point, which enflames the political consciousness of the people and illuminates them across the watershed of history, might be reached in some unexpected way: for example, in response to international crisis.

But we are more worried by the tactics and organizational forms (democratic centralism), adopted by the S.L.L. than by their

\* While we disagree sharply with much of the theory and tactics of the leadership of the Socialist Labour League, we regard the attempt of the Labour Party Executive to suppress its ideas by means of administrative proscription as contemptible. An open Trotskyist organisation has as much right to claim a place within the federal structure of the Labour Party as, for example, the Fabian Society; and the concern expressed by the Labour bureaucracy for "democracy" and the Party's constitution are belied by the undemocratic and unconstitutional means which it is adopting (as in Leeds) to enforce the ban.

objectives, which - if unrealistic - are consistent with traditional socialist idealism. These forms are those of vanguardism, in full Leninist purity; and after this quarter century it is difficult to look forward with elation to the seizure of State power by any vanguard, however dedicated its members. We do not want the conquest of power by the vanguard, but the distribution of power among the people. We must certainly assist in the education of a new generation of dedicated socialist leaders in the trade union and labour movements; but they must be dedicated to the enlistment of the people, in the participation, at every level, in the exercise of power.

Such vanguard theories are only the extreme expression of parasitic factionalism. It is the tragedy of the Old Left that it has, for over a decade, allowed the energies of so many active socialists to be dispersed in inner-party factional struggles. Socialists have thought too loosely of the Labour Movement, as if it were a faceless non-human *thing*, like the Rock of Ages, standing amidst the stream of British life, and growing each year larger from the accretions of trade union membership like limestone deposit. So long as one is 'rooted in the Labour Movement', one can be certain to be on the winning, side in the long run. Hence it has become customary for left groupings to form organisations which are, in essence, parasitic upon the larger institutions of the movement. Such organisations are geared, not to the general public, but to the rhythms of electoral contests and of annual conferences; they address themselves to the ageing ward party and the emptying trade union meeting; they seek to change constitutions but not to change people; their master-objective is the passing of certain resolutions, not the preparation of social revolution. Meanwhile, the Labour Movement has itself been losing its roots, not only in socialist theory, but also in the younger generation of working-people. And the Old Left has become trapped inside the machinery. It has become enmeshed in factional struggles which acquire an intensity of hatred, directed not against the capitalist system or war preparations but against the immediate antagonists in Party or trade union. It has emerged from a decade of struggle to discover, not only that it has lost most of its battles, but that the battle-field itself is shrinking. It has emerged without any clear policy; without any fresh analysis of changing society; without any organised socialist base. The parasite is in danger of dying with the host.

The New Left in Britain does not offer an alternative faction, party, or leadership to those now holding the field; and, during the present period of transition, it must continue to resist any tempta-

tion to do so. Once launched on the course of factionalism, it would contribute, not the re-unification of the socialist movement, but to its further fragmentation; it would contribute further to the alienation of the post-war generation from the movement; and the established bureaucracies, in any case, cannot be effectively challenged by their own methods - they have, on their side, all the resources of propaganda and devious influence, and they will neutralise or smash all serious contenders to their power.

But the New Left must not stand aside from the Labour Movement, and from its immediate pre-occupations and struggles, in righteous anti-political purism. The majority of those actively associated with the New Left will, as a matter of course, be active members of the Labour Party and trade union movement. There exist already many valuable organisations and pressure-groups within, or on the fringe of, the Labour Movement - the Campaign and Victory for Socialism, the Movement for Colonial Freedom, the Africa Bureau, and many others - which will command the support of socialists. The New Left does not propose itself as an alternative organisation to those already in the field; rather, it offers two things to those within and without the existing organisations - a specific propaganda of ideas, and certain practical services (journals, clubs, schools, etc.). What will distinguish the New Left will be its rupture with the tradition of inner-party factionalism, and its renewal of the tradition of open association, socialist education, and activity, directed towards the people as a whole. It will stop fooling people that international or internal problems are going to be solved by the existing Parliamentary Labour Party, or by a series of electoral contests, with slightly more 'left' candidates. It will break with the administrative fetishes of the Fabian tradition, and insist that socialism can only be built from below, by calling, to the full upon the initiatives of the people. It will insist that the Labour Movement is not a thing, but an association of men and women; that working people are not the passive recipients of economic and cultural conditioning, but are intellectual and moral beings. In the teeth of the Establishments of Power, of Orthodoxy and of Institutions, it will appeal to people by rational argument and moral challenge. It will counter the philistine materialism and anti-intellectualism of the Old Left by appealing to the totality of human interests and potentialities, and by constructing new channels of communication between industrial workers and experts in the sciences and arts. It will cease to postpone the satisfactions of Socialism to an hypothetical period 'after the Revolution', but will seek to promote in the present, and in particular in the great centres of working-

class life, a richer sense of community - a socialist youth movement (semi-autonomous, if need be), rank-and-file international contacts, and social activities.

In organisational forms the New Left will draw upon the experience of the Left Book Club movement. Publications, Left Clubs, and more sustained educational and conference programmes: propaganda, carried forward independently or in association with existing organisations. These activities will generate enthusiasm and provide a sense of common direction and purpose for socialists active within the Labour Movement; but, at the same time, the Clubs and discussion-centres will be places beyond the reach of the interference of the bureaucracy, where the initiative remains in the hands of the rank-and-file. If the bureaucracy reacts by anathemas and proscriptions, the Clubs and publications will continue, staffed by socialists who are members of no party, but who intend to provide a service for the whole movement. Since they will not be geared to the manoeuvres of parliamentary politics, they need not be inhibited by political considerations and cautious secrecy. Since they provide no positions in the power-apparatus, they will not attract the attention of the factionalist sects. Since their organisers will be without political ambitions, they will not be subject to the usual means of party discipline. Their influence will pervade the Labour Movement, as the Campaign is coming to pervade it; but because this influence derives from ideas it will elude administrative control. The bureaucracy will hold the machine; but the New Left will hold the passes between it and the younger generation.

But, in all this, we speculate. All still depends upon the context of Cold War. If this is long prolonged, into a state of permanent tension, then all optimistic perspectives will be closed, and Old Left and New Left, 'revisionism' and 'democratisation', will perish beneath the encroaching authoritarianism. But if the Campaign should succeed, if Britain should step aside from the power complex, then far more splendid perspectives will open up - of internationalism re-born and of renewed social advance. The orthodoxies of established politics will appear as irrelevant as the squabbles of the contractors who built the Great Pyramid, and the Old Left will give place to the New.

*20th May, 1959.*

*E. P. Thompson*