

editorial

IN this issue we have tried to draw together the discussion and research of many people in different fields in the common theme of culture and community. This theme has not existed as a subject for discussion, debate and propaganda, in its own right, for many years. We have come to it ourselves only in the course of trying to push past the limits of specialised problems, in the attempt to find some vantage point from which to make a deep criticism, not merely of some institutions, but of a whole culture—a way of life, under capitalism.

Our point of view on this is simple: that socialism is a matter of the here and now, as ugly as the conditions of a capitalist society may be. We cannot postpone it until later. We believe that it is possible to "plan for human needs," that man can control his environment, that it is possible to have not only a higher standard of life, **but** a better kind of living. If life appears to be fragmented and meaningless to more and more people today, then socialists must know what they mean when they speak of "a meaningful life." And we can test our ideas on this subject, not only in the realm of ideas, but in experience, in our society today, where things of importance *are* changing, where futility and fragmentation confront us in a **hundred** different ways in quite specific forms.

In the section on "Planning For Human Needs," Gordon Redfern, ('The Real Outrage') and John Harlow consider the problems of living in cities—the physical and human environment which we choose (within the limits of welfare capitalism) to make for ourselves. Here, the new urban centres, new planning and building, and the perspectives of future development can be spoken of in the same breath as the failures and disasters and compromises which are to be found in some of the planning (or the total absence of planning) in the past. The research and interviewing in the New Towns, done by Ellis Solomon in Harlow and members of the *ULR* Club in Crawley, is complementary to this work, and develops the controversial article by John Harlow, which discusses the new possibilities opened up in new physical environments. The articles and rapportage in the section on The Public Persuaders deal with various aspects of the so-called "mass media"—with Television, the Press and Advertising. We have been fortunate enough to have contributions from both Richard Hoggart and Raymond Williams, two people who have influenced our ideas most deeply on this question. This controversy, however, has taken shape through discussions which we have had, both at *ULR* Club meetings and in the group which worked on the exhibition for the Labour Party Conference on The Mass Persuaders. What concerns us here is not merely the more blatant vices of the new media, but their deeper and more subtle effects upon attitudes and values. We are concerned about the persuasive and manipulative effects of these new forms of communication, about the whole idea of a "mass society" itself—and about the many ways in which people are encouraged to see themselves as "the masses," and sometimes accept and participate in their own exploitation. The whole problem of *why* people accept their own exploitation, and of some alternative image of human and community relationships which can sustain us through and beyond the Stalemate State, is tackled in the ideological articles on "the welfare state," on "alienation" and on "classlessness."

The central question is—what sort of material and cultural environment are we preparing for ourselves in post-welfare Britain? Does the community increasingly control and make its own environment, or are these things still largely shaped by uncontrolled and irrational forces? Are we really building a democratic community, where people find some meaning in their lives through a genuine participation in its workings? Or are the decisions that matter—not merely the economic ones, but the human, ones—increasingly the preserve of a narrow clique, more powerful and concentrated than ever before? (Michael Barratt-Brown's piece on the British power elite is a valuable contribution in this field, developing both his own work for *ULR* and the *New Reasoner*, and pushing on the analysis made in *The Insiders*). Are we creating those conditions which, at last, with the developments which science and technology increasingly bring to us, make it possible for the full range of man's interests to find full and legitimate expression in his social life?

The answer to that is no: but a general answer will not suffice. We need to document and probe our failures—and to set over against that analysis some positive and constructive view of what life could be like. We need to know our riches and strengths, as well as our weaknesses and failings: and to bring back into the centre of socialist discussion and planning a vision of the future. We mean by that, not an empty, Utopian dream, but a concrete vision grounded in experience but fired by our convictions. Within the jungle of capitalism itself, we have begun already to sow the seeds of the new society. What we have to do now, more than ever, is to believe in it.

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by
John Hughes and Ken Alexander

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