

# editorial

## WILL MR. GAITSKELL MISS THE BOAT?

A COUPLE of months ago, in the *New Statesman*, Paul Johnson started a controversy under the title, "Should we help Mr. Gaitskell?" No one was satisfied with this article. The orthodox Labour Party supporter thought it the merest waste of time to raise the question: worse, it seemed to be directed at politically immature fringe-groups. For most of those who actually bothered to put the question to themselves seriously, the doubts it raised were all too quickly and easily resolved. The conclusion seemed close to being foregone.

The orthodox find it hard to realise that what motivates many young people today is not an apathy which must somehow be overcome ("these ungrateful kids"), but downright *political* convictions, *political* doubts, which must be taken account of. The reason why Paul Johnson's article was not mistaken, at least in the problem it raised, is because, for the first time since the war, there is, particularly among young people, a Left movement which is not the prisoner of any sect, and yet which is not to be automatically won to the Labour Party, even as an opposition within it. The Party's leaders cannot get around this fact simply by muttering "irresponsible."

The major form taken by this political revolt is support for the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. That this is not a "lunatic fringe" movement has now been shown in an unmistakable way even to the most orthodox by the massively successful demonstration in London on Easter Monday. The idea of nuclear disarmament has caught on slowly; but in spite of all the methods used by opponents to confuse the issue, it is at last on its way to becoming a force in this country. It is no longer a "fringe" movement; and as for the "lunacy," more and more people are beginning to realise that it lies on the other side.

This growing movement is to an unprecedented degree a movement of young people. A glance at the long column of march of Aldermaston '59 was enough to confirm this. When certain sections of the Press see young people in politics, of course, they must cry "Bohemia." The thought that these young people are actually criticising their "responsible" elders (in a serious way) is too hard to bear. The bitchy editorial remark of the *Daily Telegraph* on All Fools' Day—"They spoil their cause by making it appear the persuasion of odd-looking and strange-sounding people"—illustrates one characteristic response. Anyone who was on the march knows what to make of this evasion.

As one young student remarked to a reporter, "We're thinking under these funny hats".

The socialist movement in the past has grown precisely in this way: mass protests against some of the most horrible and unacceptable implications of capitalism have led people to a socialist commitment, a conscious rejection of all that springs from class rule. Will the Campaign against the H-Bomb, while remaining (rightly) non-partisan, become nevertheless the central point of a new socialist consciousness?

Some are tempted to see in this uncertainty of political commitment a sign of political immaturity among the protest marchers. We see it as something quite different. What has to be recognised is that the political parties

have been by-passed by the new radical movement, which now raises the most crucial issues of the time outside the framework of the traditional parties, because people insist that issues must be stated clearly, and not muffled or muddled. So long as the Labour Party has nothing to say on these issues, or only what is corrupted by considerations of political expediency, things will continue to happen in this way. One does not know what further forms this radical feeling will take. What is certain is that it will not suddenly die away. If sufficient people continue to turn out to demonstrate their feelings about the major issues, the Labour Party may even be overcome by what it now sits upon. But if it does not do so, what goes on inside the Party will become increasingly irrelevant to the mainstream of political life. The fact that issues do not appear on Conference agendas does not mean that they cease to exist. The Conference itself becomes less important.

A burst of interest in "the problems of youth"; a spate of socialist coffee-bars, youth programmes and committees, will simply not prove enough to alter the situation. It is not a question of "making contact" any longer. It is a question of whether the Labour Party can change fast enough to keep up with what is going on outside it. People no longer wait on the Party for a lead. The belief that they do is part of the belief that the Labour Party will go on existing for ever as part of the natural order of things. Yet, like the dinosaur, Labour has no reason to assume that it will survive if it does not adapt.

The problem is not resolved once we have carefully balanced the alternatives and decided that, after all, the Labour Party must be supported because the Tory alternative is so bloody. This is where Paul Johnson's article missed the point. For all these calculations are made within the existing framework, with the existing possibilities of manoeuvre. But the new radical movement ignores the framework, and refuses to be institutionalised. The protest against the H-Bomb is not just another piece of "pressure-group" work, applied through the usual channels, seeking for a change in policy. It is the counter-offensive of people who have been pushed too far and too long in the "usual channels," who are not "applying pressure" but making an intransigent demand.

The context in which Paul Johnson wrote his article was one in which a new Left could be seen emerging in this country, especially among the young. It continues to grow in size and determination, but its links with the Labour Party remain as indefinite as before. The question now is not: "Shall we help Mr. Gaitskell?" but much more relevantly, "Will Labour miss the boat?"

In this issue we have attempted to raise four crucial contemporary issues. The first and most important of these is nuclear disarmament itself. Secondly, we introduce criticisms of the basic premises of the Cold War, so far as it compels acceptance of crushing defence burdens which will wipe out any hope of Labour's fulfilling the promises—higher social security; aid to under-developed territories—on which it will fight the election. Thirdly, we show that *Plan for Progress* will become so many empty phrases unless we recognise that the plan for national reconstruction must be linked to that of aid for under-developed countries, and not sacrificed to the financiers in the City. Finally, the whole question of imperialism is raised in the sharpest form by examining the intransigence of Sir Roy Welensky, which has already swept away the last hopes for such face-saving equivocations as "partnership" in Africa.