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The Idea of the New Left

WHY NOT SIMPLY the *current* Left? What makes it new?

The themes of last century's radicals remain vivid in this half of the twentieth century. The Left has always wanted something called progress, aspired to something called human mastery over something called social destiny, seen itself as the winner in the long distance, viewed its general program as being the same thing as humanity's proper historical agenda.

A new pattern of stresses has emerged in the post-World War II world. They may imply the larger point that this same world had changed structurally since the fixing of the basic radical definitions, that it needed to be understood again, conceptualized and acted upon from a standpoint uncommon to classical Marxism and through political modes suggested no more by the experience of the Bolsheviks than by that of the parliamentary socialists or the Stalinists.

No one was thinking of anything like this when the name New Left began to acquire small currency in the America of the early Sixties, where politics had grown so used to having no Left at all that any Left at all would already be a novelty. Leftwards of Congress's famous Class of '48 lay the ruins of Henry Wallace; beyond, a few small magazines and some fugitives.

This has all been explained, of course: the purge of communists from the trade-union movement, the explicit national resumption of domestic and foreign anti-Bolshevism, McCarthyism, etc.

But why did the workers permit the purge, the people authorize the anti-Bolshevism, their leaders allow the top-down liquidation of McCarthy to provide, above all, for the continua-

tion of McCarthyism by more subtle means, etc.? The explanations do not explain themselves.

Everywhere in Europe at the end of World War II the heroes of the anti-Fascist resistance movements were the Reds. Allied war propaganda had stressed the progressive nature of the Alliance, the reactionary nature of the Axis Powers. The Soviet army had won the West's respect, the Soviet people its admiration, the Soviet government its acceptance as the voice of a Great Power. The economic ruination of the Continent, the urgency and magnitude of the forthcoming reconstruction effort seemed a self-evident case for precisely that sort of state planning for which an important strain of socialism had made itself famous.

How could the Left have been destroyed?

The centerpiece of radical politics was in that period what it had been for a century, namely, the conception of capitalism as an inherently contradictory system which was fated to destroy itself: With businesses required steadily to lower their rate of profit in order to compete, but, on the other hand, required to maximize profits in order to grow, capitalism could not protect itself from chronic social disaster—warehouses bulging with inventories everyone needed but no one could buy, machines standing idle, and unemployed workers everywhere. The maturing of the fateful economic crisis would destroy the false consciousness that had depoliticized the proletariat and deflected it from its historical mission, the making of the socialist revolution.

It is almost a carrion-bird politics. Distant and above it all for the moment, the revolutionary cadre circles, awaiting the hour of his predestinated dinner. Capitalism weakens, lay-offs and inflation converge, a rash of strikes—the bird moves in. But not so fast: the government also moves. A different money policy, stepped-up federal spending, a public-works project, selective repression of the militants—the bird resumes his higher orbit.

How could there be a practical politics for a radicalism whose most honest slogan must have been "This is a bubble which must burst"?

The Left was liquidated in the fifties because it was defenseless. It was defenseless because its most essential claims amounted to so many dire conjectures or predictions or prophecies, whether sound or not is beside the point. A politically practical Left must be able convincingly to say, "This is not even a good bubble." But how could the American Left have

said that, since it had traditionally endorsed a program whose simplest driving objective was for the same economic security "for the masses" which the "masses" in question believed themselves already to possess? If the argument for socialism is reduced in practice to the argument that capitalism cannot deliver the goods, then there is no practical argument for socialism when the goods are being delivered. Radicals tirelessly explained, first, that the general level of national prosperity was not so incredible as all that (the South, the inner cities, the blacks), and second, that this prosperity was, in any case, much less the flower of an organically healthy system than of the Cold War politics which allowed an irrational system to subsidize its incapacities through the Pentagon. Take away this annually swelling defense budget, and what will happen then to this vaunted "neocapitalism"? The first point, however, could not meet the rejoinder that things were better here than anyplace else and getting better, and the second point could hardly have been defended for long unless the American radicals had been willing to attack the main assumptions of the Cold War, something which was scarcely a task for men whose highest hopes had so recently been abused by the Stalinist consummation in Russia, and something which would scarcely have mobilized the revolution anyway.

Even during the Eisenhower Fifties, when a flagging growth rate and occasional recessions gave some substance to a conventional left-wing critique, the intellectual initiative lay with those whose chief point was that, within the West, there were no more fundamental economic problems to be solved. Granting sometimes, in parenthetical asides, that the situation elsewhere might be different, political critics like Daniel Bell argued that we had come upon "the end of ideology," meaning simply that an achieved welfare-state capitalism, equipped with Keynesian control devices, had met all the objections of the nineteenth century and the Thirties, and there being apparently no new objections, the matter was closed. Herbert Hoover's concept of a corporate society, a working national coalition of business, labor, and government meritocracies, had so nearly materialized that ideological thought in the grand manner, not even to mention revolutionary politics, was henceforth required to yield to another kind of task, the extension of administrative and technical expertise. The only practical question still left on the agenda was no longer "How must we restructure our relations of production?" but rather "How can we most efficiently maintain the present course, steadily extending to now-excluded

groups the self-evidently adequate system we have already contrived, tested, proved, and installed?" On this base of domestic tranquillity, American foreign policy could return with confidence to a modernized Wilsonian line: anti-Bolshevism with the loophole of détente, commercial and political integration of the world's Great Powers, and continued extension of the Atlantic world's mastery (*noblesse oblige*, of course, the mastery must be technologically generous and financially paternal) over the whole of the earth.

But no one can now say there was anything placid about the consciousness, the spirit, of the American Fifties, a decade which belonged also, though we tried hard to ignore the fact, to such other peoples as the Chinese, the Vietnamese, the Cubans, the Algerians, the decolonizing African states.

On the contrary. It was in that period, for example, that the phenomenon of middle-class juvenile crime emerged, posing a great mystery to liberalism's conviction that crime came from material want. Young white gangs in the best of the suburbs? What sense did that make? Crime was for the poor, for it was only the gall of poverty that could motivate the risks of crime. And the same generation which authored this mystery seemed almost purposively quiet as to its motives. The Silent Generation—queried, analyzed, and rebuked in a thousand commencement-day addresses—stood mute, unexplained, and innocent before its accusers; and choosing neither to know itself nor to be condemned, it made its uniform not only the gray flannel suit but also the beard and the fatigue jacket. The Silent Generation: Perhaps there was not so much silence after all. At least, this was also the Beat Generation—owners of that supremely ambiguous title which said: We are beaten and shall endure.

Of course it could not have been clearer to their interpreters that these Beaten and Beatified renegades—Kerouac, Ginsberg, Ferlinghetti—had precisely no political ambitions. The question hardly occurred. Who imagined that Norman Mailer would become—a Candidate? What the Beat Generation wanted was a bit of free social space for a few spiritual and literary experiments. Like any subcult, it was a nuisance, an insult, a circus, and a kind of pantomimed moral criticism: Culture Gypsies, not Candidates. So it seemed.

Elsewhere in the same period, still another demurrer from happy consciousness was being entered: "If We're So Rich, What's Eating Us?"—very typical title of a very typical mid-Fifties middlebrow essay (this one, for *Harper's*, by economist

Robert Lekachman). Vance Packard assembles three politically absent-minded indictments against an unspecified suspect: *The Waste Makers*, *The Status Seekers*, *The Hidden Persuaders* ache with unliberated conclusions about a certain form of civilization. Much more insightfully but still without a sharp conception of the political imperatives he had encountered, David Riesman reconsidered individualism and probed the loneliness of the American crowd. By the end of the decade, these themes were so commonplace as to have become the property of all points of view—Left, Right, and Center.

Everybody knew it: something was wrong.

But how could that be, since everybody also knew that there was no more need for ideology? A soft, deft pessimism became the main philosophical stance of the best of the non-Beat novelists and poets. Salinger, Roth, Updike, Bellow, Lowell, and Roethke—variously schooled on Freud but not Riech, Eliot but not Neruda, and Dewey but not Marx—developed remarkably cognate points of view, a set of implicit judgments amounting to an informal canon of the modern sensibility. The inner experience is paramount. Neurosis is man's ordinary condition and can even be husbanded to a certain eerie grace. History has been preempted by science and magic, which have fused into psychoanalysis.

Through such moves, the gap between what the world looked like and what it felt like was not so much bridged as converted into a national park for the exploratory cultivation of ambiguity, the characteristically modern adventure. There was a fey sort of loveliness, it seemed, which survived even economic perfection. One could even grow enamoured of all this melancholy. Had it remained for modern man to discover the allures of *angst*, of defeat? The famous antihero whom the Fifties had created in its image: was he the central figure in a circus? Or in a trial?

We were not to be very long in doubt.

The political imagination, necessarily banished from even so chilly an Eden, had therefore disguised itself as nostalgia, to re-infiltrate first consciousness and then discourse with a happy orgasm in its pocket like a concealed weapon—a threat and a promise, this orgasm, and in both aspects revolutionary.

There had been no end of ideology at all. Rather, ideological thought—*critical thought with historical structure*—had merely gone out of its conventional métier to prepare its negation of contemporary Western life. The advent of what we have lately been asked to call the "post-scarcity" or "post-industrial" state had confronted critical analysis with a subject matter before

which the conventional methods of political economics and sociology were insufficiently descriptive. A subject matter, moreover, whose features ran so far beyond the conceptual power of ordinary politics that it required a wild leap of the imagination to see that it was precisely politics that was being put into question. Salinger's Holden Caulfield, Mailer's *White Negro*, Kerouac's Dean Moriarty, Bellow's Augie March or Herzog: Do they enjoy capitalism?

No misunderstanding: The informal pattern of negations which such figures constituted was almost never explicitly political, nor was there much of even an underlying reprieve for the period's conception of a "radical" politics. No doubt there is some reserve of special compassion for the man who does not yet have enough, but no one supposed that his suffering was beyond the available remedies or that curing it might need structural changes in our mode of economic organization. The fear, rather, was that curing it might not even help very much. Indeed, the white writer in his white ambience would more than once see something enviable in the situation of the affluent society's outsiders. Apparently these outsiders had more soul than those who had made it—passion instead of bitchiness, a vivifying community of social pain instead of the naggingly selfish itch of a \$100-a-week neurosis. To be materially secure was evidently to be spiritually bland. How unsatisfying. The point is that the assumptions of the then-current radical viewpoint could catch the political drift of this ennui scarcely any better than the assumptions of the more familiar liberal viewpoint could dissipate it. Revolution? Something the workers were supposed to make in order that they never again be wiped out by economic (but not spiritual) depression. The radical? Either a Dostoyevskian fanatic or someone who believed that capitalism would fail to rationalize the industrial society—either a freak or a bore. Socialism? What happens to imperial states shorn of their empires. Communism? An extravagant horror produced by killer utopians.

The deepening American malady seemed beyond all known therapies. It did not even seem to have a political name.

But when a lonely and doubtless very brave American radical, C. Wright Mills, began to put political pieces together in a political way, he could hardly have guessed how quickly—a matter of half a decade?—a rising generation would move to refute one of his cardinal political observations. Refute: for even through the remarkable moral and physical energy which

sustained him, one could not fail to understand that Mills saw himself as a political desperado whose most difficult struggle was against a very persuasive despair. The first and continuing need of those whom his polemic would bring to activism would be to prove the possibility of what he considered next to impossible, a radical movement with some serious power behind it.

How could there be a radical politics without mass support? Then where were America's potentially radical masses? The poor? They have been chronically hard to organize, and even granting their possible mobility, Mills could see no barrier to their being geared into the same mass-consumer society which had emasculated everyone else. The blacks? The odds again seemed to be with the system: over and over it had shown its skills at legalistic maneuver and cooptation; and what could the blacks demand except inclusion, access to the general beehive? Labor? Bureaucratized and politically docile, the trade-unionist seemed happy to forget his prewar militancy; socialism could find no more indifferent and the Cold War no more ardent a partisan.

There remained, thought Mills, only the academic intellectuals. But what good were they? They did not even begin to constitute a class in the political sense, and as one career group among others, their postwar record had been dreary. They had professionally supported the official American equation of revolution with Stalinism; they had learned, moreover, how to fatten off the Cold War, and at their radical best, they drew the line at an unexhilarating social democracy whose most lively pursuit seemed to be the sycophantic care and feeding of welfare-state capitalism. Still, their training—and their vanities—made them on some terms prepared to answer for their views of the world. Considering themselves to be responsible to the humane criteria of classical liberalism, maybe they could be made to think some second and third thoughts. And then perhaps to make a few small waves.

Mills described from his sociological orientation essentially the same world which Herbert Marcuse faced from his philosophical one, namely, the internal rationalization of an externally irrational culture. How to make bigger bombs, crazier cars, greedier consumers: the impressive capacities of science and technology were routinely brought to bear on such projects, but the culture lacked entirely the methodological and institutional means for posing practical questions about these pursuits in themselves. One could grumble about the Bomb and Madison Avenue manipulation; people grumbled about such things

all the time. But what could be done? A letter? A petition? A committee?

Reason itself seemed arrogantly to have forgotten mere man in its sublime quest for pure knowledge. To every frail challenge which an addled humanism could muster, pure knowledge answered: sentimentality. The imperious "value-free" positivism, which still gives Western science its apologies, explained that the *idea* of "man's destiny" is an unworkable abstraction about which proper science has nothing to say. Wholly permeated with the bourgeois ideology which it therefore refused to recognize as such, science's chief assumptions, already laid out by Galileo in the seventeenth century, remained that the physical world was given and that the scientist merely interrogated it by means of hypothesis and test to discover its nature, the end objective being an integrated, global system of verified propositions. Not, for example, a better world. No doubt a provisionally successful treasure hunt, however disinterested, would make the world better. But however interesting an incidental that might be, it remained an incidental; and it could not occur to science in any practical, operational way that it remained continuously a human instrument—merely human—created and developed precisely by that same social man whom it refused to recognize as having any principled claims upon it, and that, as such, its definitive purpose might be (of all things) a *moral* one: less to discover than to *create* the "truth" of nature, the meaning of the cosmos—of human history.

That far had the spirit of the Enlightenment declined. The method of thought which the eighteenth century had imagined would liberate mankind turned out in the twentieth—we allow for ivy-day ceremonializing about miracles—not even to understand the idea of such a project. Challenge the Manhattan Project and CBW research? But not as a scientist, for between scientific thought and moral thought there is and can be no structural link. Was it not the final divorce of the two domains which defined the platform of science at the onset of the modern era? To put science again at the mercy of a moral system, whether profane or sacred, is to restore the politics of Inquisition and the need for martyrs.

Precisely. It is science's old and current servitudes which continue to demand its special war of liberation: liberation from an imperial system of social classes, from the subordination of its work to the conflict-based imperatives which class societies produce.

A humdrum example from technology: The effect of America's overland transportation system—fast cars, fast roads—is to create a worsening array of problems at the urban ganglia upon which the impeccable ribbons all converge. Neighborhoods are first lacerated, then buried under the thickening whirls of concrete and steel; the air is casually poisoned; fatalities are perpetually of epidemic scale; nevertheless, transportation is bad and gets worse. This is the objective result of our having spent the transportation share of the national budget in a certain way. There were other ways we might have spent our money—on a fast-train system, for example—if the purpose had really been to get the best transportation system, and if such decisions were really made by the disinterested science and rational technology to which we pretend we have ceded our collective social fate. That we never even had a chance to pose the alternatives is above all a *political* fact whose simple meaning is that the combined political power of the auto makers, the road builders, and the oil refiners is peerless. This combine tells us that we really *want* to ride around in mustangs, cougars, and other untamed animals (our totemistic animal cultism surpasses, even in its rituals, the known primitive atavisms)—and being civilized, we gracefully swoon. Take the auto industry as a paradigm: "What's good for General Motors is good for America," said Charles Wilson, making up in clarity what he may have lacked in finesse. The Inquisitor did not disappear at all. He was merely victorious. This "value freedom" claimed by science is nothing but a churchy dogma whose function is to disguise the difference between the special interests of a dominant class and the general interests of mankind.

Nothing new, of course, not even the magnificence of the disguise, which as usual is least understood by those who are most victimized by it. Thus, the pessimism of Mills and Marcuse. Contemporary Western culture appears to be distinguished by its failure to produce a class whose essential objectives transcend the capacities of the given order and whose presence would therefore force a structural transformation of the relations of production. Dismal surprise: a political situation which was supposed to materialize only under the auspices of the revolution has arrived prematurely, making the prospects of the revolution dimmest exactly within the culture which stands in greatest apparent need of the revolution. If Mills saw some chance that the academic intellectuals might successfully challenge, if not the System, then at least its policy, Marcuse could scarcely venture so far from despair: "[The] absolute need

for breaking out of this whole does not prevail where it could become the driving force of a historical practice, the effective cause of qualitative change. Without this material force, even the most acute consciousness remains powerless."¹

So. Does this amount to the concrete actualization of that famous whimper? Or are the disciples of an exhausted critical tradition chewing sour grapes?

But there is a third possibility. What if a changing world configuration of forces has been creating new social needs—and the political possibility of pursuing them—which remain invisible only to the old system of anticipations?

Isaac Deutscher closed a 1965 commentary on the Vietnam War with the following observation:

We may not be able to get away from the severe conflicts of our age and we need not get away from them. But we may perhaps lift those conflicts above the morass into which they have been forced. The divisions may once again run within nations, rather than between nations. We may give back to class struggle its old dignity. We may and we must restore meaning to the great ideas by which mankind is still living, the ideas of liberalism, democracy, and communism.²

Peculiar: Before class struggle can recapture an old dignity which it has apparently lost, and before the vivifying ideas can recover their meaning, also lost, we will (somehow) have to return class conflict to that national framework which it has apparently burst through. We find Deutscher here in the grips of nostalgia for a world which was at once industrialized and politically convulsed—Europe before and between the great wars. Elsewhere in the same collection of essays, he is no less disturbed by the current form of class struggle but more lucid as to its reversibility:

The impossibility of disentangling progress from backwardness is the price that not only Russia and China but mankind as a whole is paying for the confinement of the revolution to the underdeveloped countries. But this is the way history has turned; and now nothing can force its pace.³

¹ Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), p. 253.

² Isaac Deutscher, *The Ironies of History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 163.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 120.

No doubt. The problem is to try to deal somehow with this development; and it may be that the conceptual apparatus of Marxism as practiced up to the advent of the Cold War, when not only the whole of Europe but the entire world found itself fixed helplessly by the politics of class, cannot meet such a need.

The practical core of classical Marxism is the presumption of an irreconcilable conflict between capital and labor. The two must fight. If they are not fighting at some moment, that must only be owing to capital's skills at momentarily obscuring the fateful class opposition. That opposition nevertheless remains basic until the revolution liquidates it by liquidating the forms and instruments of class domination, and it is therefore present even when it seems to be absent. To explain the absence of this fight, Marxism resorted to a conceptual distinction between objective and subjective conditions, corresponding to true (or class) consciousness versus false consciousness at the level of politics and infrastructural (economic) reality versus superstructural (social) reality at the level of culture. That distinction carried with it the belief that subjective awareness must at some point encompass objective fact, that class consciousness must finally overcome false consciousness, that the pivotal realities of class relations in the system of production must at some juncture be fully and openly expressed in the politics of class conflict. The revolution will thereupon have been prepared.

Regardless of the validity of this conceptualization, the fact is that it had lost, at both the theoretical and practical levels, the power to criticize itself. It amounted to an hypothesis which could not be negated, therefore a false hypothesis. There was simply no way to put a time scale underneath the test of history. The workers will move to take control of the means of production? When, ultimately? But what can "ultimately" mean? Predictions and excuses multiplied, each more "rigorous," more "scientific" than the last. Since the situation was always in turmoil, since the air was always filled with rumors of crisis and speculations of disaster, the anticipatory stance into which the Western revolutionary had frozen himself never became embarrassing. Like Vladimir and Estragon waiting for Godot, he could never be sure that the very next moment might not divulge the practical means to that victory which his "final analysis" always guaranteed. Meanwhile, tactical battles of all sorts needed to be waged; one could keep busy. And beyond the furies of the moment, giving them scale and a mean-

ing to which he and his comrades alone were privy, a horizon about which everything but its distance was known held the revolutionary cosmos firmly in place.

But the waiting game to which the Western communist parties had committed themselves in the aftermath of the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan was, of course, by no means theoretically derived, nor was it merely a response to the success of American reconstruction of West European capitalism. The motive was simpler.

The communist parties of the Continent had matured in a period when all socialist hopes were pinned to the survival of the Soviet Union. Even for a long time after the advent of Stalin, a living strain of European Bolshevism still held that protecting the world's solitary socialist state required prompt revolutions in Europe's industrial heartland. But by the end of World War II and the emergence of the U.S.S.R. as a troubled but evidently stable Great Power, an unchanged aim was being served by a wholly reversed strategy. The security of the U.S.S.R., as central an aim as ever, was now held to require the *passivity* of European (and Asian) revolutionaries. "Socialism in one country," as Deutscher points out, was the slogan by means of which Stalin announced socialism's intention to cooperate with capitalism's intention to contain the revolution. The U.S.S.R.'s self-containment, expressed finally as the doctrine of coexistence, could hardly have been a more explicit directive to revolutionaries elsewhere *also* to coexist. A hard-fisted irony had closed: revolution needs the security of the U.S.S.R., but the security of the U.S.S.R. outlaws revolution.

Thus, the European communist parties, confronting a massive array of problems—theoretical, organizational, practical, ethical—found themselves both tempted and driven to a politics without a future. With no clear goals beyond those of more rational industrialization which Cold War capitalism seemed to have subverted, with few methods of political struggle beyond the parliamentary ones which were capitalism's proudest legal achievement, with no concrete response to the internationalizing of the class struggle which would not immediately contradict the U.S.S.R.—first dogma (standard until the Twentieth Party Congress and "polycentrism"), the communist parties of Europe (and Latin America) came upon an impasse which they could not surmount or even very honestly survey.

But it seemed they could make camp before this impasse—even build a rather comfortable suburb in the outskirts of this Cold War capitalism. Coexistence, initially a concession to a

passing strategic necessity, had finally become an unconditional demand. Struggle had been supplanted by dialogue. According to Alain Geismar, an activist in the French uprising of spring, 1968, "Under its present organization, the French Communist Party has emerged as the anti-communist structure *par excellence*."

In essence, the institutionalized European Left of the post-war period could not relate to the internationalizing of the class war because it had itself become objectively counterrevolutionary.

The fury of events, of course, did not therefore subside. Outside the West, other peoples would understand themselves to be the only liberators of their destiny; and within the West, another generation would be unable to see why the U.S.S.R. deserved so much protection—or why their own sharpening needs for a changed world should remain locked in the hands of those who no longer seemed so interested in changing it.

The New Left is properly so called because in order to exist it had to overcome the memories, the certitudes, and the promises of the Old Left. Russia-firstism had been made insupportable by Hungary and then unintelligible by the Sino-Soviet split, well before Czechoslovakia was to make it grotesque. The doctrine of coexistence had therefore lost such binding practical authority as it had formerly possessed. The internationalizing of the class war, momentous event, along with the directly connected triumph of international monopoly as the prime mode of Western economic organization, called implicitly for a new conception of the participants in the ongoing conflict of classes. "You are nothing without the workers," advises a grand old revolutionary warhorse who won in colors in the anti-Fascist resistance, and who cannot fathom why his sons should now say, "Who precisely are they?"

The confidence needed to pose such a question could not come overnight, not even in Europe, where the methods of critical philosophy were much more available than in the United States. An American generation with obscure new projects roiling in the back of its mind, not finding itself suitably identified within the class typologies of a barely audible domestic radicalism, would initially misunderstand its political motivation as bad conscience about the blacks.

The high tide of the civil-rights movement began in February 1960 with the Greensboro sit-ins which led to the formation of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). It

ended with the Democratic Party's Atlantic City convention in August 1964, when the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party's solid case for the unseating of the regular delegation was over-riden in a well-televised exhibition of backroom politics. The main political event of the following summer was the Watts rebellion.

SNCC and SDS (Students for a Democratic Society) were answering to the name New Left early in the Sixties, but this needs two cautions. Both groups shared a pathological distrust for what they sneeringly called ideology. This was often noted by the early commentators, who understood it no better than did the New Left itself. It was accounted to be anti-intellectualism and the activists cheerfully accepted that account. In fact, it was a necessary defense against the power of an exhausted but nonetheless practiced ideology, the net effect of whose truths might easily have been to send the activists packing to the socialist clubs, where they would have been made either skillful at writing themselves off as change agents, or bored. They wanted neither. They wanted instead to go south and get their hands and their heads—their lives—into the dangerous, the moral, and therefore the authentic. The instinct from the beginning was to discover the streets, and there was nothing at all anti-intellectual about this. It embodied rather a refusal to tolerate the further separation of thought from its consequences: books argued with each other and lied and in any case did not make much of a difference; only direct experience was incontrovertible.

The second caution: there was simply nothing very radical or in need of ideology about the Movement's civil rights, Heroic Period, 1960–1964. What was so leftist about SNCC's "one man, one vote" demand? Or the abiding SDS principle of participatory democracy, the view that people should make the decisions that affect their lives? No one bothered to notice in those days that such a principle, fully understood, would lead through draft-card burning toward a demand for workers' control of the means of production.

From the beginning, the Movement gave the System the benefit of every doubt. An SDS slogan in 1964: "Part of the way with LBJ." There were always Movement people who understood that the seemingly innocuous demands were saturated with deeply radical implications, but it was not before 1965 or 1966 that this consciousness began to be widely shared. "Take the bourgeoisie at its word," Marx says somewhere, and

this is precisely what the movement did, in its nearly spotless ignorance of Marx. Did it matter—as the schooled and knowing leftists insisted it did—that the early integrationist or student-power demands were only reformist or corporative? English New Leftist Tom Fawthrop, commenting on the June 1968 student rising at the University of Hull, wrote, "We chose the real politics of revolutionary democracy as opposed to the sham politics of revolutionary semantics. Every real struggle, every engagement with the power structure is worth a hundred revolutionary slogans."

German New Leftist Rudi Dutschke makes a point about this process which applies at least as forcibly to the American experience, and probably just as well to the French, English, Spanish, Mexican—and Czechoslovak. The new activists acquired their radical anti-authoritarianism at the end of police sticks that are swinging from one end of the earth to the other in behalf of everything dead and dry, in defense of social orders that prosper by denying life its possibilities and that greet every new aspiration with increasing indifference, derision, and violence. The policeman's riot club functions like a magic wand under whose hard caress the banal soul grows vivid and the nameless recover their authenticity—a bestower, this wand, of the lost charisma of the modern self: I bleed, therefore I am.

This is a ferocious but effective way to be a student—to be *educated*. By the end of the Chicago Democratic Party convention in August 1968, such young white activists as may still have supposed they were making this curiously unexamined revolution in the name of the blacks or the Vietnamese—or even the workers who (out of "false consciousness" no doubt) were cheering on the police—had had second thoughts pounded into their heads. The bad conscience which had seemed motive enough in the earlier period had been supplanted by a weightier sense of their own cultural need and hence of their own political mission. It was for themselves, these sons and daughters of the well-appointed classes, that the revolution would have to be made; for short of surrender—spiritual suicide—they seemed to have no other way to survive.

Whereupon the *need* for ideological thought, growing bit by bit as the Movement cantilevered itself steadily further from the liberal value system which had given it its first platform, had finally restored the *possibility* of ideological thought. The essentially personalistic apology for action which had satisfied

all earlier engagements had become—one could *feel* this—in-sufficient. Its power to motivate and defend had dwindled with respect to the changing character of Movement actions and mood. An undistinguished idealism, really a fetish of innocence, could support Selma but not Watts, the campus teach-ins but not the Columbia insurrection. An existential morality had precipitated a chain of collisions which could finally be explained only in terms of historical politics. It had become necessary for a “youth movement” to discover—or create—a class identity.

Thus, having begun with a misreading of Camus, the American New Left at last begins to take up Marx, more than a little fearful that yet another misreading will be required, but hoping to sustain an additive revision. Can such a project succeed? Will a habituation to old certitudes even disallow the attempt? In any case, the clubs and committees have convinced the Movement that dialogue has certain limits and that a politics rooted in class imperatives is more likely to prosper than a politics rooted in that sort of moral fineness which is one product of the idleness of the few.

What is at stake is the political self-confidence of the Movement. Does the white “middle-class” New Left constitute the embryonic beginnings of a class-for-itself? Does it embody the beginnings of an identifiable historical practice which can neither be transferred to another class nor abandoned nor permanently defeated? Or, on the contrary, is this Movement merely the suds, the effervescing, of a globalized class war in which the entire West plays the role of capital and the entire neocolonial South that of labor, and whose basic features therefore differ only in scale from the class conflict of the nineteenth century?

The sharpest form of the question: in view of modern radicalism’s unchallenged doctrine that the revolution is to be made by the army of industrial labor, how does the new radical dare to proceed (putting it mildly) in the conspicuous absence of that army?

First things first. *He does proceed*. Perhaps he has no choice and he is pure fatality; perhaps there is no fatality and he is pure will. His self-estimate may be sophisticated and in error or primitive and correct. His position may be invincible, absurd, both, or neither. It does not matter. He is on the scene, caught in events and definitively beyond silence, no longer awaiting some advance demonstration of the prudence or the conse-

quences of engagement. It is not as if he is about to do something as a precondition of doing something. The hands are out, the chips are down, the New Left is at the table with all the other gamblers.

So much for history.

For the New Left’s future, its destiny, it must serve here to say that the debate intensifies at the same tempo as the confrontation, and that the confrontation is by this time clearly general in the West. Barring, by this time, not even England, which made its impressive debut in the spring of 1968, there is no advanced capitalist country which has not given rise to an increasingly self-aware and militant postwar movement centered physically in the universities and politically in anti-authoritarianism. At the same time, none of these countries (*not* excluding France!) has produced a living socialist movement centered in the factories. Further, each of the youth movements coalesced initially around some variation of an anti-imperialist issue (the May demonstrations at Essex, for example, began in protest against a talk given by a government germ-warfare expert). That is, the igniting spark has always jumped to the interior, to the imperial metropolis, from friction points at the frontier, and it has been only in the aftermath of anti-imperialist beginnings that these movements began to develop a more clearly self-interested political stance. This is doubly true of the American New Left. Reacting first against the oppression of the blacks, whose ghettos are like so many colonial native quarters, and then against the attempted suppression of the Vietnamese independence struggle, white activists have only recently discovered in practice the ubiquity of oppressive authoritarianism—discovered that for all the obvious modal differences, they share the victimization of the most humiliated slave.

There are four basic positions on the identity of the New Left.

The first is held by a variety of left-wing liberals and Millsian radicals who believe either that the System can produce a worthwhile self-reform, or (the case with the Millsians) that the absence of radical alternatives forces one to hope that it can. The New Left is understood then as a generator of challenges, of critical energy and ideas which may bear some fruit within the evolving structures of enlightened capitalism.

Second, the most familiarly radical position, is that the industrial workers remain the essential driving force of an inevitable socialist revolution. The student movement’s main

current purposes must be the building of a radical base among intellectuals and the making of such ties with the factories and the black groups as may be possible.

Third, an exclusively New Left position, is that the composition of the work force has been significantly altered by the massive assimilation of industry and technology. Students and workers are from now on one and the same. "There are no student problems," begins *The Appeal from the Sorbonne*. The factory of the post-industrial state is the multiversity. Students are the new working class.

Fourth is a position which has not yet been argued in a sustained way, although it is perhaps suggested in some of the writings by André Gorz, Louis Althusser, and Martin Nicolaus. Diverging from the conclusions but not the methods of Marx, this view would share with the new-working-class theory the notion that students can no longer be understood as if the modern university retained all the key features of the medieval university. Students constitute the beginnings of a new historical class, produced by a workers' revolution which (within the West) is not still to come but which has already taken place. Such a view implies several departures from classical Marxism. First, it denies that bourgeois society in anything like the original model still exists: bourgeois society was above all a scarcity society, a fact which determined its chief legal, political, and economic features. What we have now, inadequately termed post-scarcity and post-industrial, is, in fact, merely the fulfilled industrial society. Second, it denies that bourgeois society (or any other) is the last of the contradictory social system. On the contrary, there is more reason to believe that each historically successful revolution will produce a new class with a new conception of need and possibility, new objectives which will motivate new historical practices. Third, it denies that the mission of the proletariat was to make the socialist revolution. The objective evidence indicates, rather, that its mission was to industrialize society—a mission which brought it into sharp conflict with the bourgeoisie. Fourth, it denies that current world politics can be understood as a clash of rival socio-ethical systems. Capitalism and socialism, as defined by their practice, are different means, corresponding to different material and political situations, for pursuing the common and general aim of industrialization. Fifth, far from hero-worshipping the proletariat, the new class (unnamed and no doubt at this point unnameable) repudiates in part and in part carries forward the proletarian culture in much the same way that the prole-

tariat both absorbed and transcended bourgeois culture. That an embryonic new class will seek alliance with the proletariat in its struggle with the bourgeoisie—this has the same kind of meaning as the fact that the embryonic proletariat made alliance with the bourgeoisie in the latter's struggle against Versailles.

So much—at the moment—for speculation.

Whether as de-classed provocateur, as an attendant upon another class's temporarily stalled revolution, as a new version of that other class, or as something new, the New Left will create itself through its actions in an arena defined as well as occupied by other forces. Even as this is written—mid-fall of 1968—George Wallace's Presidential campaign has conclusively established the presence of a serious fascist movement: militarism, chauvinism, racism—all bound together by a deformed populist nostalgia which gives this movement both its menace and its irony. At the same moment, Establishment liberalism has altogether lost its former poise, as well as its control of the nation's primary political media. Overnight, the nation's majority coalition, the Democratic Party, has become all but an also-ran. The next four years no doubt will be filled with a continuing crisis within the Atlantic economy and either the agonies of disengagement from Vietnam or the extension of the war to China, thence quickly to the world as a whole. Against this backdrop, domestic politics will be dominated by the continuing rise of the Right and a bewildered Establishment's attempts both to appease populist reaction and New Left militancy and to reassemble a functioning Center coalition, one shade to the left of Nixon. In terms of the day-to-day necessities implied by this over-all conjuncture, the New Left will have to discover or create its historical identity. What we already know is simply that it has one—that through the appropriately dis-coherent New Left movement, the postwar generations have implicated themselves in history's permanent showdown between fatality and will.

A note on the selections. In the first part, each of the seven pieces is an effort to lay out part of the portrait of life in the industrial countries. All, but notably those by Althusser, Nicolaus, and Leszek Kolakowski, are therefore in some part meditations on history, process, and methods of seeing form.

In this of all periods in the modern era, the West may not think of itself as being alone in the world. Our acute awareness of the Others has been thrust upon us by the Others' fury.

They do not permit us to forget that their situation is a leading aspect of our own. Castro and Fanon speak from that situation with perfect authority. Two major statements by black American radicals—Malcolm X and Huey Newton—are included in this second part, "The Revolutionary Frontier," because black Americans remain essentially a colonized people: Harlem is New York City's *Kasbah* in almost all respects but the geographical.

Except for Newton and Fanon (who died at thirty-seven in 1961), all the authors represented in the first two parts are over forty. Most of those in the final part, "A New Revolution?," are all under twenty-five. The university-based New Left, whatever else it may do, has already produced a fertile body of often strikingly original analysis. The included selections deal with all the major themes which preoccupy it.

Everyone will notice that only six of the seventeen selections are American. This is partly because the collection is made for Americans, who presumably have easy access to the basic American texts. There is, of course, still a larger reason. The English routinely use American coinages like sit-in, teach-in, drop-out, and—fuzz. (Pig will no doubt follow.) The Battle of Telegraph Avenue in Berkeley in 1968 began as a mass demonstration of solidarity with the French students. Demonstrators at the Democratic Party's convention carried signs that linked Chicago and Prague. The New Left is an international movement.

Carl Oglesby

PART ONE:

Understanding Leviathan