“It is a new Society that we are working to realise, not a
Cleaning up of our present tyrannical muddle into an improved,
smoothly-working form of that same “order”, a mass of dull
and useless people organised into classes, amidst which the
antagonism should be moderated and veiled so that they should
act as checks on each other for the insurance of the stability of
the system.”

William Morris, Commonweal, July, 1885

NLR is a development of Universities and Left Review and
The New Reasoner. The political discussion which those
two journals have begun, and the contacts they have
made are the basis of the New Left. Whatever we are
able to do in the journal will, we believe, be an organic
growth out of the two different traditions from which we
began. In particular, we are anxious to maintain the
wide scope of NLR. We are convinced that politics, too
narrowly conceived, has been a main cause of the
decline of socialism in this country, and one of the
reasons for the disaffection from socialist ideas of young
people in particular. The humanist strengths of socialism
—which are the foundations for a genuinely popular
socialist movement—must be developed in cultural and
social terms, as well as in economic and political. What we
need now is a language sufficiently close to life—all
aspects of it—to declare our discontent with “has same
order”.

The purpose of discussing the cinema or teen-age
culture in NLR is not to show that, in some modish way,
we are keeping up with the times. These are directly
relevant to the imaginative resistances of people who
have to live within capitalism—the growing points of
social discontent, the projections of deeply-felt needs.
Our experience of life today is so extraordinarily frag-
mented. The task of socialism is to meet people where
they are, where they are touched, bitten, moved, frus-
trated, nauseated—to develop discontent and, at the
same time, to give the socialist movement some direct
sense of the times and ways in which we live.

At the same time, the traditional task of socialist
analysis will still remain. The anatomy of power, the
relationship of business to politics, the role of ideology,
the analysis of transitional programmes and demands,
are all central to that discussion of the state, without
which there can be no clarity, either of theory or practice.

The journal, then, will range widely. But in political
terms, NLR represents a real break-through for us: a
break-through, both in terms of regular, frequent publi-
cation, a skeletal but permanent organisation, as well as
the new audiences with whom we can communicate.
Because of the disaster of the Election, and the loss of
direction within the establishments of the left, many
people are anxiously feeling their way forward. Three
years ago, such people might have regarded NLR as a
wierd intellectual junket. Now they feel that our emphasis
up cia an and education is a common
concern. On our side, we feel the urgent need to enlarge
our own experiences by drawing into discussion people
also have a different sense of the society. Our hope is that
NLR WJvViT to life genuine dialogue between
intellectual and industrial workers.

Some point, the distant wariness between intellectual
and industrial workers must be broken down. It is one of
the most dangerous aspects of the present plight of
the socialist movement. Our hope is that NLR will begin
to knit together this broken conversation. This is particu-
larly important when we consider the question of social
ownership. Many of those in the Labour Party and the
Trade Unions who declare for social ownership, have
reservations about the form which it should take. So have
we. The present form of nationalisation is not a socialist
for it does not give ordinary men and women direct
control over their own lives. Nor does the “public
corporation” form of nationalisation confront—as a
socialist measure should—the urgent problems of a
modern industrial society: such questions as bureaucracy,
the distancebetween men and decisions which affect
them, the problems of over-centralisation, ar the vested
power of the new propertied classes. Here, a whole
neglected tradition within socialism needs to be imagin-
avitively rediscovered: but that will be a sterile task, if it is
not enriched by the experience of men and women who
work in industry. We must confront this question of
bureaucracy, which touches us all, together.

A large number of people whom we have drawn
together around the two reviews are anxious to do
something—to find a form of political activity which
matches their political commitments. We are ogied
by their impatience with the hesitancies which we have
shown for organisation. This can be ignored no longer.
But we need to say, as firmly as we can, that the most
urgent task for socialism today remains the clarification
of ideas. The movement has never before been so short
on ideas, so long on pious waffle. Not until we attain this
clarity, through a decisive shift in political consciousness
throughout the movement, will we be able to work with
a revolutionary perspective in view. We shall continue
to bounce from one side to another, fighting a perpetual
rear-guard action, a “holding operation”, while the
champions of “me-too” advance into the calm waters of
an “American” future. Our hope is that people in the
New Left will feel, with a special urgency, the poverty of
ideas in the Labour Movement. The strength of the New
Left will be tested the strength of its ideas: we shall
have to hold fast to that, as the pressure builds up to
“cease talking and begin doings”.

Editorial
The journal, then, books and pamphlets getting a wide and more representative circulation, schools and conferences and discussions—these make up the spearhead of the New Left. As we open up some of the hidden recesses of “Britain: unknown country”, it would be wrong for intellectual workers to discard their proper role, or unlike the pioneers of socialism, to flatter the rank and file and ourselves into a safe complacency, by abasing ourselves before the altar of action—at any price.

Granted that, what follows? We have spoken of the New Left as a “movement of ideas”: the phrase suggests, both the place we accord to socialist analysis and polemic, and the natural growth of ideas, through people, into socialist activity. It is, in one sense, education which the socialist movement lacks most of all: the job of the New Left is to provide this kind of service for the Labour Movement. But education is too inactive and rigid a term—suggesting the stiff approach of teacher to pupil, the dull atmosphere of classroom and Party headquarters, where socialist ideas raise their ugly heads, are looked at distantly, and—for want of interest or vigour—fade and die away into the shadows again. What we need is a living movement of people, battering away at the problems of socialism in the mid-Twentieth Century, pooling their experiences, yet, at every point, breaking back into the Labour Movement, thrusting forward like so many uninvited guests into Constituency Parties and Trade Union branches, pushing within CND, picking up the quick tissues in the society, sloughing off the dead.

We are, then moving beyond education in the narrow sense to political activity in all its aspects. What we need are not only discussion groups, but centres of socialist work and activity—rallying points of disturbance and discontent within the local community, the nerve centres of a genuinely popular and informed socialist movement. We shall—in Left Clubs or Tribune Societies, informal groups and university clubs—be parallel to, rather than competing with, existing organisations of the Labour Movement: free where they are tied, maintaining a direct link with similar movements and tendencies in other countries. The Left Clubs, and other similar centres with whom we want to maintain informal links, will not look towards some centre for directives and guidance, whence the quick tissues in the society, sloughing off the dead.

One cannot prescribe forms of activity for a democratic Socialist movement. It is often a question of response as well as initiative—the quick and imaginative response to international or national crisis, or local opportunities, as they disclose themselves. But in and out and alongside all other activity, there is always the work of “the Socialist Propaganda”. The Labour Movement is not in its insurrectionary phase: we are in our missionary phase. The Left Clubs and New Left centres—the New Left in general—must pioneer a way forward by working for socialism as the ld missionaries worked: as if consumed by a fire that is capable of lighting the darker places in our society. We have to go out into towns and cities, universities and technical colleges, youth clubs and Trade Union branches, and—as Morris said—make socialists there. We have come through 200 years of capitalism and 100 years of imperialism. Why should people—naturally—turn to socialism? There is no law
which says that the Labour Movement, like a great inhuman engine, is going to throb its way into socialism, or that we can, any longer—as the Labour Party does—rely upon poverty and exploitation to drive people, like blind animals, towards socialism. Socialism is, and will remain, an active faith in a new society, a faith to which we turn as conscious, thinking human beings. People have to be confronted with experience, called to the “society of equals”, not because they have never had it so bad, but because the “society of equals” is better than the best soft-selling consumer-capitalist society, and life is something lived, not something one passes through like tea through a strainer.

How close Morris came to the bone! He looked right across history and, with remarkable insight, saw into our particular predicament. There, on the streets of Nairobi is Morris’s “tyranny”: here, in the ageing dockyards, the cluttered roads and railway stations, the decaying centres of our cities, the closing nationalised collieries, is his “muddle”. In Parliament, sit Tweedledum and Tweedledee, “cleaning up”, “improving”—the field of political vision narrowed to the dismal task of capturing control of that system of “checks” and balances—Her Majesty’s Government—“for the insurance of the stability of the system”. Only the plush carpet, the dispatch boxes and Black Rod keep them from one another’s arms. And in the country, a thousand Productivity Committees, a fleet of Royal Commissions, a covey of bi-Partisan Parliamentary Delegations, a brace of dinners in celebration of “our Bomb” and “the great Atlantic Alliance”, a scatter of knighthoods and orders and decorations, keep antagonism “moderate” and “veiled”.

Now, perhaps, we can finish the Morris quote:

“The real business of Socialists is to impress on the workers the fact that they are a class, whereas they ought to be Society...

The work that lies before us at present is to make Socialists, to cover the country with a network of associations composed of men who feel their antagonism to the dominant classes, and have no temptation to waste their time in the thousand follies of party politics.”