

Editorial

"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 fragmented. The task of socialism is to meet people where they *are*, where they are touched, bitten, moved, frustrated, 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 publication, 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* WJv'rViT 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 particularly 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 distance between 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 imaginatively 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 oigcd 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".

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 tables of the Socialist Law will be dispensed, but press in upon the centre with their own initiatives. These ought to be, moreover, centres of socialist activity, where a *demonstration* of socialism can be made, and where the fragmentary sense of community and solidarity, which used to be part of the socialist movement, can be pieced together again. A movement, that is to say, whose open form and diverse activities will reflect the breadth of the New Left, but which will continually pioneer new and flexible ways of working through, between, around the frozen monoliths of the Labour Movement.

Indeed, the test of such centres as Left Clubs—or other New Left kinds of groups—might be whether or not they are able to break out of the distressingly narrow way in which socialist organisation is discussed today. This is often limited to “transforming the Labour Party from

within”, and resolution-passing—all of which is necessary, but limited. As if socialism turned today on the question of formal allegiances, as if the whole electorate were under the constant watchful eye of the Parliamentary whips! Where the candidates are good, we should concentrate our forces, swing the enthusiasm of a Left Club behind someone who will vote NO to the Bomb, when the rest of the parliamentary fraternity troop through the door into no-man’s-land: where the candidate is weak, bad, compromising, we should draw away from political blackmail as if from the plague. The last refuge of scoundrels today is no longer the appeal for “patriotism”, but the cry that we must sink our differences in the interests of Party Unity. Socialists should cease to squander their energies upon scoundrels, and should cease to allow them to betray the enthusiasm of the young. They should give or withhold their support by their own choice and according to socialist priorities. They should vote with their feet—in both directions: the protest march or the boycott.

Where there are CND or Direct Action demonstrations, Left Clubs should be the most active group. Where there are groups of houses without an active community life, where there are young people without a youth club, where there are responsible rank-and-file strikers being snubbed by Trade Union leaders, or coloured workers being frozen out by Trade Union rank-and-filers, there is work for us to do. The methods of direct action, so effectively used in the Campaign, ought to be re-interpreted by Left Clubs and similar groups. The test of such centres of New Left activity might be if, amongst their most active members, there are Party activists and political “unclubbables”, students and teen-agers, teachers and members of the Trades Council. The old timers will want to organise the young: will they take it? The younger people will want to play jazz and show films: will the old stagers let them? Can we find a way of working together which marries the two elements of a socialist movement: the theoretical analysis which gives the movement perspective, the clarion call to moral principle, taken up in an unashamed way, which gives the movement guts?

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 old 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.”



‘Shh! Don’t Rock the Boat!’

Our thanks are due to Abu and the Observer for permission to reprint cartoons.