

How new is the “New Left”?

Arnold Kettle

THERE has been in the last few years, and especially since the General Election of 1959, a certain Leftward tendency among British intellectuals and especially among students and other young people. It would be an exaggeration to call this tendency a movement for it is in most respects rather vague and unco-ordinated, tentative rather than decided. It involves a number of impulses, not always consistent and not always recognised as consistent when they actually are, of which the most important are undoubtedly hatred and disgust at the whole idea of H-bombs and nuclear warfare and a sense, varying a great deal in its emphases and diagnoses, that mid-twentieth-century British society is at best unsatisfactory and frustrating and at worst hypocritical and corrupt.

The most striking expression of the tendencies under consideration has been, of course, the wide and enthusiastic participation of progressive middle-class people, and particularly students and young people, in the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and the Aldermaston marches. But it is not only in the fight against the H-bomb that there has been important activity. Over Suez, over the repression in Nyasaland, over Cyprus and over the Apartheid issue in South Africa it has been quite clear that this Left impulse was not a matter of mere talk and idealistic dreaming. Even in the thirties, when the anti-fascist movement was so strong among students, there were not larger student political demonstrations than those of the last few years. And it is not without significance that the key-points of such demonstrations have been most often no longer Oxford and Cambridge but the provincial universities and London. It is a change which corresponds with the shift from the Hons and Rebels of the thirties—the well-to-do, public-school and often thoroughly bourgeois young intellectuals who moved towards and sometimes even into the Communist Party—to the Angry young Jimmy Porters of Red Brick.

If the political emphases of this tendency centre on the struggle for nuclear disarmament and support for the aspirations of the colonial peoples, attitudes to internal British questions are a good deal less clear and positive. Except on such issues as the need to abolish the death penalty and to alter the laws about homosexuality it is doubtful if one would find unanimity on any questions of internal political policy among an average group of nuclear disarmament demonstrators, though

probably most of them would say, if pressed, that they are Socialists. This is, of course, due to a considerable extent to the position of the Labour Party which offers very little leadership of a sort calculated to win the enthusiasm of aspiring young people or radical intellectuals. But simply to blame the Labour Party is neither here nor there: the Labour Party in the thirties gave no more progressive a lead than it does today, yet the Leftward impulse among the middle class at that time was a good deal more consciously socialist and politically realistic than the present tendencies: the difference basically is that the petty-bourgeois Left* of 1960 has passed through the politically demoralising period of the failure of the Labour Government and the rigours of the anti-Communist Cold War, and is as a result a good deal further away from the working-class movement in general and the Communist Party in particular than the anti-fascist intellectuals of the previous generation had been.

One of the most noticeable features of the Left tendency under consideration is that, as far as Britain itself is concerned, much of its manifestation takes a “cultural” rather than a directly political form. Indeed, there is a strong anti-political, and especially anti-political-party flavour about much current Left feeling. When the student Left in the thirties began to achieve considerable strength and inaugurated a great deal of political activity the Socialist Clubs hit on the idea of acquiring club-rooms and snack-bars which could help hold their membership together. Interestingly, in the present period the coffee-bars have tended to come *before* the political activity: it would not be fair to say that they are seen as an end in themselves, yet there is something of that about them. You get your coffee-bar and then begin thinking of things to discuss. Again, though the thirties had their Audens and Malraux and Clifford Odets, the key reading of members of the Left Book Club was the work of Strachey (then on the Marxist side), Dutt, the Webbs and books like *Red Star over China* and *The Socialist Sixth of the World*. Today I doubt whether there is a

* I should make clear that I use the word Left in this article in relation to the progressive movement, not in relation to the Tories. In other words I do not include the Right-wing Labour leaders, however petty-bourgeois, among the petty-bourgeois Left. It is petty-bourgeois tendencies within the progressive Left-wing that I am concerned with.

single contemporary political book of any kind really widely read among Left intellectuals. Galbraith and Wright Mills are much quoted but I do not think they are much read. But Richard Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy* is widely read, so are the novels of John Braine and the plays of John Osborne (which are of course also films). And a Left-wing student is more likely to be keen on Colin MacInnes and Arnold Wesker than about any directly political work.

Two points are worth making about this situation. One is that it ties in with C. P. Snow's pertinent observations about the separation of science from literary culture in our society. The articulate intellectual Left in Britain today is almost exclusively "literary" rather than scientific. I do not mean, of course, that no scientists march from Aldermaston or that there are no Left-wing scientists. I mean that the atmosphere of the petty-bourgeois Left has, by and large, the characteristics of the literary intelligentsia, with its special tendencies towards anarchic individualism, love of self-expression (to the point quite often of exhibitionism), ignorance and near-contempt of science and general preference for living in a world of "ideas" and "values" rather than practical action. The effect of this is to deter a good many scientists and "non-literary" folk from participation in Left-wing politics and thereby deny to the *intellectual Left influences which would tend to make it a bit more down-to-earth and realistic*. In the second place, it has to be said that a concern for culture, when divorced from a sharp sense of the class basis of values, is not, especially in a period when class struggle is so intense and critical as in the world of the 1960's, an adequate substitute for a concern for politics and can very easily become a rather insidious form of self-indulgence.

The Petty-Bourgeois Left

It is important to estimate justly the significance of the petty-bourgeois Left, for it is easy either to despise or idealise it.

To despise it is not only to be, from a communist point of view, sectarian but to shut one's eyes to the actual achievements of the middle-class sections of the peace movement, which are greater in Britain than perhaps anywhere else except Japan in the capitalist world, and to the potentialities of aspiring young people in general. The Leftward impulse of young people, even when it takes forms we don't find sympathetic, is a healthy impulse, a fine impulse; and it will take *contemporary* forms, not the forms of the thirties or the forties or even the fifties. I think we should recognise that there is an element of sheer stick-in-the-mud-diness about the attitude of some middle-aged

members (the old are much wiser) of the working-class movement towards the clothes and music and social habits of young people—including working-class lads and girls.

At the same time the suspicion which often exists among the Labour movement people of the goings-on of the youth is not just a matter of the clash of generations or the conservatism of a pack of squares. It also involves something deeply important: a doubt about the class basis of the sort of political and social activity that most easily attracts up-and-coming young people. The important question isn't "Should young workers wear tight jeans or like juke-boxes or sit in espresso coffee-bars?": the important question is "Do the political actions and forms of activity young people go in for strengthen their class-consciousness, or do they rather encourage individualist, anarchistic, non-working-class attitudes?" And you can't, if you are a serious Socialist, simply laugh this question off by pretending that people who ask it are old fogies who haven't caught up with modern ideas.

Mass Political Activity

Obviously it is not a black-and-white question. Mass political activity for progressive demands is good in itself and strengthens in essential ways those who take part in it whatever their motives. The Aldermaston marches are not, in any case, demonstrations of class against class; they are demonstrations of a wide alliance of almost every section of the people against national betrayal and racial suicide. And the solidarity they engender among those who take part in them and watch them and read about them is something of great value, in addition to the importance of the particular demands they express. And to the extent that the working-class movement participates in such demonstrations to that extent will the less "committed" sympathisers come to find that their solidarity against the Bomb involves a particular sense of solidarity with the working-class movement. It is always false to draw a hard and fast line which separates "progressive demands" from "working-class demands".

All the same, though it is wrong and sectarian to despise the petty-bourgeois Left and fail to try to get the maximum unity with it, it is also wrong and dangerous not to recognise that the petty-bourgeois Left *is* petty-bourgeois. The basis of necessary unity is not the drawing of a veil over such differences but the recognition that united action is mutually helpful. And of course, once again, nothing is morally black-and-white or politically static. People's ideas change, develop, enlarge, especially when they become involved in

action. Petty-bourgeois attitudes are not, like Original Sin, something you can't escape. People, particularly young people, shed their illusions in the course of struggle, especially if their personal class background and way of life is conducive anyway to such a change. But, again, they do not shed them automatically. Young workers and students who become involved in politics through the petty-bourgeois Left lose their petty-bourgeois illusions to the extent that they come up against working-class leadership, working-class ideas, people who see life from the point of view of the class-conscious workers. Communists who sit waiting in the Party office for young people to come to them for enlightenment have only themselves to blame if the young people prefer the sort of enlightenment they get from the professional coffee-bar intellectuals. At least it is accompanied by coffee and pops.

The petty-bourgeois Left does not, of course, recognise that it is petty-bourgeois and this indeed is one of the characteristics that distinguishes it; if it recognised this feature of itself it would be well on the way to being different.

The Petty-Bourgeois Outlook

Marxists use the term petty-bourgeois Left to describe that section of the Left movement whose Left ideas and attitudes are strongly flavoured by the characteristics of the petty-bourgeoisie as a class. By petty-bourgeoisie is meant, strictly, small capitalists, small independent producers, who are not the *dominant* class in latter-day bourgeois society, these being the big industrial and finance capitalists, the monopolists. The petty-bourgeois are at once hostile to the monopolists, who tend all the time to buy them out or do them down, and yet bound up with capitalism as a system, and their ideas are essentially bourgeois in the sense of being strongly individualist (as opposed to an emphasis on co-operation and solidarity). It is a characteristic therefore of petty-bourgeois ideology that it is at once critical—up to a certain point—of capitalism and yet limited in its range by bourgeois preconceptions. Very interestingly, petty-bourgeois ideology has in twentieth-century Britain an importance quite disproportionate to the actual economic and political importance of the petty-bourgeoisie as a class and, indeed, I think it would be true to say that it is not among the petty-bourgeoisie as a class that petty-bourgeois ideology is most prevalent. Most of the theoreticians of the petty-bourgeois position, most of the more articulate purveyors of petty-bourgeois ideas are, as a matter of fact, technically speaking, members of the working-class, men and women who own nothing but perhaps their own houses

and possibly a few shares and who live by selling their labour, generally mental rather than manual.

Why is this? How does it come about that ideas and attitudes which are at bottom those of small producers in an economic system which in fact stifles small producers, should be so widespread and powerful as to be the intellectual driving-force of hundreds of thousands of people who are not themselves small producers at all?

Working-Class Ideas

It comes about, of course, because British society today is a class society in which there is both a ruling class and a class struggle. The ruling class, the monopolists, have power; but they do not have absolute power. To maintain their basic power, their control of the productive forces, their ability to make profits they are forced continuously to make concessions, economic, political, cultural. And the society which they rule is, as a result, by no means their ideal bourgeois society (which could indeed by its very nature, its competitiveness, its ultimate dependence on a "market" over which they have incomplete control, never actually exist) but the best they can settle for. But neither, for that matter, is it the ideal society of the workers, their major class antagonists. The working class, in so far as it becomes aware of its class position and potentialities, knows perfectly well that a far more satisfactory society—a classless society—is possible, and on this basis it creates, with great difficulty because it is not yet a ruling class, its own system of ideas, its own conscious values and ethics, its own philosophy which will serve its basic needs and historic potentiality. These are working-class ideas and since, even in England where home is a castle and ideas do not spread easily, different sections of society cannot be insulated from each other, working-class ideas spread and take possession of the minds of men and women who are not industrial workers at all but who share with the workers the impulses of fundamental social change.

But working-class ideas can only gradually, and with difficulty, spread, for every conscious and unconscious pressure of a society dominated by a privileged ruling group works against them. And so a rather bizarre situation comes about. Just as the capitalist class is forced, against its will yet always making the best of every concession and claiming credit for it, to pay higher wages than it wants to, maintain better social services than it wants to, and permit democratic rights and liberties which its theoreticians always condemn in advance as the thin end of the wedge of social collapse; so does it make the best of each necessary change ideologically, adopting, with a

hypocrisy so complete as to exact a grudging admiration, slogans which a generation earlier it would have condemned as treason (Imagine Mr. Macmillan's predecessors on the need for African independence!).

Balance of Class Forces

The ruling class is only too conscious, however, that such democratic concessions, though necessary, are highly dangerous. It does not, except for propaganda purposes, idealise the situation. The only people who, in fact, feel any deep inclination to idealise bourgeois democracy are the middle class—that area of the population which may, technically, belong to the working class or to some section of the owning class, but which, without having any share in the control of the country, enjoys certain privileges of income and status. This seems to me the key to the importance of petty-bourgeois ideas in present-day Britain. They are the ideas of those whom the balance of class forces in the present stage of class struggle in Britain happen to suit pretty well, simply because it *is* a balance. The middle class may not, in its own consciousness, have much of a future, but it has a considerable stake in the present and though it may feel itself in certain respects crushed between the two major classes it also sees itself as, in the short run at least, sitting pretty, with the workers strong enough to hold off the grimmer aspects of bourgeois dictatorship, and the capitalist class, morally tarnished though it may be, preventing the achievement of working-class power.

The capitalist class and the working class—as classes—have no such illusions about the *status quo*: they know that balances are temporary and that there is a struggle for power going on. But the middle class fears even to face such a reality. Everything becomes veiled in an idealism which is seen by its addicts as a superior sensibility but is in reality a reflection of the lack of solid material basis to their class position. Middle-class intellectuals are not the only people in the world whose class position can be described as falling between two stools: their peculiarity is that they manage to turn this somewhat ignominious position into a symbol of moral superiority.

Petty-Bourgeois Intellectuals

The petty-bourgeois intellectual, drawn in both directions, hates the obviously humanly indefensible aspects of capitalist-class policy—the cynical drift to war, the oppression of colonial peoples, the colour bar, the pompous and anachronistic Establishment—but remains essentially a bourgeois-democrat, with his ideas of freedom

determined by the gift of irresponsibility that the capitalist class has made to petty-bourgeois intellectuals to prevent them from becoming working-class intellectuals. Here, it seems to me, the concept of "Opposition" within the capitalist system is of particular importance. It is a godsend, not so much to the capitalist class (except in the sense that it effectively holds off something worse) nor to the working class, who know that no amount of Opposition is in the end an alternative to having power, but to the middle class, especially to careerist politicians, whose security of tenure is thus assured, and to the intellectuals who are able to combine the luxury (well exemplified by the *New Statesman*) of being eternally in the right without the obligation of ever actually being responsible for anything.

To speak, then, of the petty-bourgeois Left is by no means to fling around a cheap and vague term of abuse or denigration, but to refer to a relatively precise and certainly discussable phenomenon. The petty-bourgeois Left is that section of the genuine Left (i.e. of the movement for radical social change) that wants radical political action and is socialist (as opposed to liberal-reformist) but is held back from effective revolutionary action or theory by the prevalence, and often dominance, of petty-bourgeois ideas of which the most important are, perhaps, individualism (as opposed to class solidarity), irresponsibility (a failure to consider ideas and action in terms of their consequences in reality—a reflection of the petty-bourgeois' position between two major contending decisive classes), and lack of a basic confidence in the working class.

Alongside these tendencies should be recognised I think, a general predisposition to see everything in somewhat idealist terms, a tendency all the stronger among the intellectuals, with whom it amounts almost to a vocational disease, on account of the separation of mental from manual activity with its consequence of giving theory or ideas or a subjective version of integrity a moral priority over practice and action. It is in this context that "expediency" easily becomes a dirty word.

Two points, at this stage, should be made clear: (1) The term petty-bourgeois refers in this whole context to the class basis of certain ideas and attitudes, not to the social origin or current class position of the people who hold such ideas. (2) I am not suggesting that between the petty-bourgeois Left and the working-class Left there is some sort of complete and absolute division, let alone gulf. Neither ideas nor people are so pure as all that. Very few class-conscious workers are unaffected by petty-bourgeois thinking and all petty bourgeois Left-wingers are influenced to some extent by

working-class ideas. The distinction therefore, which is none the less valid for not being entirely clear-cut, is between those whose *dominant* tendencies bear the stamp of petty-bourgeois ideology and those whose *dominant* approach is a working class one. To recognise this is to recognise the need both for a certain humility and a good deal of flexibility as well as for a firm stand on matters of basic class principle.

The "New Left" Grouping

It is in relation to this general phenomenon of an increasing impulse Leftwards of people whose basic thinking and approaches remain petty-bourgeois that one should consider the role of the "New Left" grouping which publishes *New Left Review* and through this and a number of Left Clubs of varying composition and nature up and down the country seeks to give leadership to people feeling their way towards the Left.

Four numbers of *New Left Review* have now come out and the group has also published a symposium entitled *Out of Apathy* and some sort of assessment of its political rôle and potential is now possible. Two facts seem already quite clear: (1) that the appeal of the *Review* is limited in practice and presumably in intention to middle-class professional people and students, and (2) that, whereas in earlier days the "New Left" presented itself as a kind of forum or platform for numerous tendencies, it now appears as—given the somewhat individualistic nature of its components—a comparatively homogeneous tendency. Although not averse to an occasional (no doubt Platonic) flirtation with Trotskyism, the "New Left" no longer regards itself as a Marxist grouping (even of a Revisionist sort). It has a comparatively consistent and predictable political line of its own.

There is a good deal of rather self-conscious emphasis on the "New" in the "New Left" publications. What much of this amounts to on analysis is a way of writing which conscientiously avoids most Marxist jargon in favour of that of American bourgeois sociology. There are few mentions of "bourgeois" or "superstructure" or "self-criticism" but this lack is more than made up for by the reiteration of "countervailing", "dynamic" (as a noun), "image", "myth" and a score more. "If the image power must be remade at the base, it must also be remade at the top" begins a paragraph which accuses the Labour Party of concealing "concepts of power . . . within the cloudy metaphors of rhetoric". What this first sentence means I still (after reading *Out of Apathy*) have no precise idea, no doubt because the thought (sorry, concept) is too new for me. But

seriously, it is hard to see what good is achieved by eschewing a jargon that is at least precise and meaningful in favour of one that is vague and misleading as well as ugly.

What is New?

What in fact, on the basis of their pronouncements and activity, is new about the "New Left"?

The view that capitalism is still with us and, far from becoming less so, is in fact more monopolist than ever? Scarcely; for this has been the view put forward by the Communist Party all along.

The view that the existence of H-bombs forms the greatest single threat to humanity, that Britain should never have begun manufacturing them and should stop doing so, that the whole nuclear strategy to which both the Tory and Labour Parties are committed is either fatuous or suicidal and in either case wicked? Scarcely; for this too is and has all along been the view of the Communist Party.

The view that the struggle for socialism needs to be fought on every front—including that of winning the middle-class—and that parliamentary struggle needs to be combined with the building and support of mass movements of the people in every sphere? Scarcely; for this is precisely the view put forward in *The British Road to Socialism*.

Obviously on these fundamental questions no new thoughts are being offered. What then is new about the policy of the "New Left"? I think it might fairly be said that the following constitute the principal ways in which their policy and emphases diverge from that of the Communist Party.

Playing Down Exploitation

(1) A tendency in economic analysis to play down the question of *exploitation*. I do not mean that the existence of exploitation or profits is denied; but that it is not given the key emphasis it should have, partly perhaps because it is felt not to be sufficiently "new". Ralph Samuel in *Out of Apathy* is admirable on the *structure* of contemporary capitalism but pays relatively little attention to the actual increases in profits. Now this is a key question not merely for general propaganda purposes but for the whole of present socialist strategy. It means for instance that the struggle for higher wages is fundamental, not incidental. The alternative to the "politics of hunger" is not to switch over, as Ken Alexander implies, from "material" to "ethical" demands but to intensify

the wage struggle on the basis of the present situation i.e. by exposing the increasing exploitation of the working class in a time of capitalist "prosperity" and what that involves. The truth is that this whole distinction between "material" and "ethical", which bedevils so much "New Left" thinking and leaves them wide open to reactionary idealist attacks (like those of J. M. Cameron on the Third Programme), is false. Exploitation is material *and* ethical; production is a material activity but the relations men enter into in the course of production are non-material, but the two cannot in practice be separated. What is "new" in the emphasis of Alexander is a failure to recognise this. "There need be no antithesis" he says "between material and ethical demands" and in the same breath *contrasts* the "material reforms" of the past with the "moral revolution" needed in the future. What is new here is the replacement of dialectical thinking by undialectical, the treating of material demands in a mechanistic way and a consequent banishing of ethics to the realms of idealism. And this tendency is, it has to be said, characteristic of "New Left" thinking as a whole. Again, I do not mean that Ken Alexander is opposed to wages struggle; obviously he isn't. What I do mean is that any worker managing to plough his way through *Out of Apathy* (an "image", it must be confessed, not readily springing to mind) would be less likely to be inspired to fight harder for higher wages than to feel that the wages-struggle is on the whole a bit irrelevant, not to say vulgar. As the reader of *Out of Apathy* is however infinitely more likely to be intellectual than an industrial worker this might be thought not to matter so much; actually it matters more, for whereas the facts of the life he leads are, in the case of the industrial worker, a pretty safe counteracting force to a playing down of material demands, the intellectual's vocational tendency to separate the ethical from the material will be strengthened, to the damage of both.

Negative Attitude

(2) A negative attitude to socialism where it actually exists, especially to the Soviet Union. The "New Left" writers, except perhaps the Trotskyite lunatic fringe, would no doubt deny that they are anti-Soviet, which in itself reveals their tendency to be less concerned with practice and effects than with ideas. They would say that they are all in favour of the achievements of the Soviet Union and only against the bad side. In practice, however, the Soviet Union is scarcely ever mentioned except in a negative sense. This is partly because of an attitude to Russia which is rather like the attitude of the Labour leaders to Nationalisation; it is

seen as an electoral or polemical liability and therefore ignored as much as possible and the ignoring is in practice a gift to the Tories. There has not been a single serious article about either the Soviet Union or China in *New Left Review*. And in *Out of Apathy* the references to the Soviet Union are at best negative and more often hostile, a point which a review in (of all places) the *New Statesman* quite rightly drew attention to. When Peter Worsley in an article on imperialism which is throughout a disgracefully shoddy piece of work and manages to be confusing even about Suez (one of the issues that readers of *Out of Apathy* can almost be guaranteed to be clear about) talks of "the Russian attempt to manipulate colonial movements in the political or strategic interests of the Communist bloc" (no wonder the writer has become a regular book-reviewer for the *Manchester Guardian*), he is merely expressing more openly than usual the basic "New Left" attitude to Soviet socialism. What most of these writers seem not to be able to stomach is that a socialist country should have, not only principles and ideals, but also a strategy, a diplomacy, a defence policy—including, as long as need be, even H-bombs—and all the responsibilities and consequent impurities involved in being a great power. "Power politics" is nearly always used by the "New Left" writers in a simple derogatory sense as though there were some other form of politics.

Now what is involved here is not a matter of more or less enthusiasm about the Russian achievement. It is a basic refusal to come to terms with the facts of life as they affect Britain. You *cannot* formulate an independent British foreign policy except on the basis of a correct assessment as to who are the friends and who the enemies of the British people. You cannot argue effectively against the Right-wing opposition to an independent foreign policy unless you answer the Right-wing case—that communism is the menace. Russia an aggressive power. Similarly, on longer-term questions of the socialist future of Britain, it is as stupid and unrealistic to imagine that you can present an "image" of socialism to the British people which ignores or plays down what socialism is actually like in the places where it exists as it would be to give the impression that socialism in Britain will be indistinguishable from socialism in Russia or China.

The main reason, I believe, why the "New Left" refuses to face this problem realistically is that their thinking on the key question of the nature and basis of freedom remains essentially petty-bourgeois and individualistic. They accept, like any other Left social-democrats, an essentially idealist view of freedom which, though they do

not realise it, is in fact a cloak for their desire as intellectuals to cling on to their present position of privilege and irresponsibility. And they do not realise this precisely because the unconscious class-basis of their thinking prevents them from recognising that they are in fact irresponsible, or, to put it another way, prevents them from having a view of responsibility that is not idealist.

Neutralist Outlook

(3) As will already have been gathered, the basis of "New Left" foreign policy is neutralism. I have not the space to discuss this fully. The main point, of course, is that while it is very welcome when capitalist states adopt a neutralist, as opposed to an imperialist, position, the only reason that they ever do so is the strength of the socialist movement, nationally and internationally, which is *not* neutralist. Obviously this situation could never arise if the Socialists themselves took a neutralist position. For the Socialists of one particular country to adopt such a position is in the long run unrealistic and in the short run simply opportunist. An article in the fourth number of *New Left Review* proposes that "Britain should be a focus and rallying-point *beyond* the power systems of East and West" [their italics]. What we have here under the guise of something "new" is the good old social-democratic dream of a reality *beyond* class struggle, a society which is neither capitalist nor socialist but simply nice.

Attitude to the State

(4) An ambiguous attitude to the state and the whole problem of social change. This is partly due to an attitude to politics which, to say the least, puts an exceptionally high premium on talk. The rather absurd joke embedded in *Out of Apathy*, which reviewers have not failed to see, that a book which claims on its dust-cover to be concerned with "a serious immediate policy" should on page 305 put the question "And *how* is this to be done? At this point a new volume should begin" is a fair enough indication of that attitude.

The ambiguous attitude towards the state was well indicated in the *New Statesman's* shrewd description of the authors of *Out of Apathy* as Fabian Revolutionaries. It is worth remembering that the original Fabians thought of themselves not as gradualists but revolutionaries and indeed chose their name as a tribute to the slogan of the Roman tribune who wanted root-and-branch as opposed to piecemeal change. What drove Bernard Shaw from the working-class Socialist League into the Fabian Society was not a decline in revolutionary socialist conviction but a belief that the Socialist League was sectarian, unrealistic and isolated

and that there was more hope of making an impact—counteracting apathy—by concentrating on the middle-class intellectuals and hoping the Labour movement would be affected that way. I think the same is basically true of the "New Left", though whether they are likely to produce propagandists of the calibre of the Fabians seems doubtful.

All this is why the use of the word "Revolution" in *Out of Apathy* has the ring of empty rhetoric whereas the articles about actual conditions in the *New Left Review* are nearly always well-documented, well-written and useful. The underlying reason, perhaps, why Edward Thompson's contributions to *Out of Apathy* are so empty is that he can solemnly enumerate the pre-requisites for a socialist revolution and fail to mention the need for a revolutionary party. It is an omission, with all its implications, which will make every practical working-class politician who reads his work dismiss it simply as not serious. And it is why the "New Left" will have no appreciable impact on the working-class movement as a whole, Right, Left or Centre.

Among students and intellectuals its effect is rather more difficult to assess. In certain respects it starts—as compared with Marxist thinking—with an advantage, for the tone and language and preconceptions of the "New Left" writers, being so deeply petty-bourgeois, are more what uncommitted young people in present-day intellectual circles are used to. It is much easier for a young intellectual to become a New Lifter than a Communist and involves far fewer ideological sacrifices—no-one doubts your integrity; you don't feel that you have to defend any aspect of the progressive movement you don't feel particularly moved to defend; instead of having to wage a continuous and sometimes painful war against your old prejudices you will find them held up as positive virtues. As a student once put it to me: "Since I gave up taking the *Worker* and read *Tribune* and *Universities and Left Review* I've felt much happier, and freer somehow." One knew just what he meant. But what he had freed himself from was not, as he thought, sectarian politics but the need to struggle against petty-bourgeois ideas and attitudes.

Joint Participation in Action

But to say only that is not enough, for it is to underestimate the honesty of the impulses which turn young people Leftwards and to underestimate too the capacity of progressive middle-class people to face realities, even ones they find particularly difficult. So far as Communists are concerned the most important thing is the development of unity

in action on all those issues on which we find ourselves in agreement with other sections of the Left and heaven knows these are not few or trivial. The Communist Party has not spent its time attacking the "New Left" nor does it propose to begin now. Communists welcome sincerely every genuine impulse or action which helps build a great peace movement in Britain or strengthens the long hard fight for socialist ideas. It is common

participation in common actions for causes on which we can unite rather than long arguments of an abstract kind that will bring the communist and non-communist sections of the Left closer. Communists are always prepared to put their views and take part in discussions which will be helpful in promoting unity and activity; such debate is of the greatest value and ought to increase.

The Family and Communism*

A. Kharchev

BOURGEOIS sociologists who write about the Soviet family love to say that despite all "attempts of the Bolsheviks" to do away with the family, it has succeeded in remaining in existence. They assure us that a difficult, exhausting "war" has been going on for forty-two years, with varying success, between Soviet power and the family. In this "war" the aggressor is supposed to be the Soviet Government which, as Klaus Mehnert, for instance, says in his book *The Soviet Person*, "began waging a war against the family immediately after the revolution", intent upon destroying it. Today, in the opinion of these "strategists", "Bolshevism's first attack upon one's personal life has been repulsed", but the position of the family is still a dangerous one inasmuch as the calm that has set in does not signify that "they [the Communists—A. Kh.] have overcome their hatred for the family".

Averell Harriman, in a recent pamphlet entitled *Peace with Russia?* also keeps talking about certain contradictions between the policy of the Soviet State and the "craving for individuality and seclusion", which is alleged to be characteristic of Soviet family people.

Soviet reality fully refutes the assertions of the bourgeois ideologists who distort the position of the family under socialism. All the work of the Communist Party and the Soviet Government is directed towards strengthening and developing family relations under the new social conditions.

Change in Marital and Family Relations

The family is an intricate, many-sided social phenomenon. In it the natural biological relations of the sexes are linked with the social function of bringing up children and they are ennobled by

social consciousness. As V. I. Lenin pointed out, people in these relations have not only what is given them by nature, but also what is acquired through culture. The richer the spiritual life of society and of each of its members, the more is this life reflected in the character of marriage and the family.

Friedrich Engels, in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, showed that the monogamous family is the result not of a "natural tendency" of people towards monogamy, as many bourgeois scholars still assume. It arose as a result of the accumulation of wealth and its concentration in the hands of male owners. Before the appearance of private property the clan was the elementary social unit, and marital relations did not involve any of those prohibitions which are characteristic of a class society. As Engels pointed out, the ultimate reason for these injunctions in all their forms, legal, moral and religious, was the striving of property owners to pass their property on, through inheritance, to children "whose paternity was undisputed".

This function of the family makes it a reliable support for any exploiting regime. Hence the interest in strengthening this private-property nucleus of society, manifested by all exploiting classes of the past and present. At the same time all of them strengthened and strengthen the family chiefly by one means: strengthening the power of the men, and limiting the rights of the women in the family. This strengthening of the property foundations of family relations is accompanied by a weakening of their moral principles: cash is crowding out love; it is not the emotions, but the law or mercenary motives that keep the spouses together. This by no means signifies that in the exploiters' society there have been or are no

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