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Commitment in Politics

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"Intelligence enough to conceive, courage enough to will, power enough to compel. If our ideas of a new Society are anything more than a dream, these three qualities must animate the due effective majority of the working-people; and then, I say, the thing will be done."—William Morris.

BY "politics" I do not of course refer to that annexe to the Hall of Fame, rilled with self-important TV personalities and Inside People, which Mr. R. H. S. Crossman finds so "charming." Nor do I mean the heady atmosphere of closet-factions which has bedevilled the British Left for so long. The distaste which we feel for all that is a measure of our maturity before the responsibilities which "that old bitch gone in the teeth, a botched civilisation" has seen fit to dump upon our shoulders. If restraining the life-negating and lunatic propensities of capitalist society is a necessary responsibility, it is still an infuriating dispersal of human energies. It is because we still live within the anarchy of "pre-history" that we are obliged to commit ourselves to the barbaric rituals and inefficient acts of social war which make up capitalist "politics".

But any man who can find "charm" in the politics of twenty-five years of blood-letting and bewildered defensive actions stands self-condemned as a philistine. I suppose it is this tone of enthralled gossip about political trivia—this balancing of corrupt expediencies and this patter about the behaviour of rogues—which sometimes makes one want to take a half-brick down to Great Turnstile. "Politics," for many of my friends, has meant some years of agonised impotence in the face of European Fascism and approaching war; six years of war, whose triumphant conclusion and liberating aftermath were blighted by betrayals ; and ten years of makeshift defensive campaigns in face of the Cold War and the fatty degeneration of the Labour Movement. There has been little charm, much disenchantment: more spectacular quarrels than enduring friendships: neglect of personal interests, impoverishment of personal relations, leading in some to spiritual *ennui* or to self-righteous sectarian pride. The very texture of political life has been oppressive—the endless committee work, ineffectual campaigns under mendacious national leadership, electoral contests with unworthy candidates. Those who, after fifteen or twenty years of this, are still "committed" to politics, are often committed with glassy-eyed submission. They look to those first manifestations of a new generation in revolt, the N.D. Campaign and *ULR* with a mixture of suspicion and stifled hope.

The suspicion resolves itself into the jibe which I have taken as the title to this article. These *ULR* types (the jibe runs) are passionate advocates of commitment in the arts, but they evade commitment on the central issues of class power and political allegiance. They are angrier about ugly architecture than they are about the ugly poverty of old-age pensioners, angrier about the "materialism" of the Labour Movement than about the rapacity of financiers. They wear upon their sleeves a tender sensibility; but probe that tenderness, and one finds a complex of responses which the veteran recognises as "anti-working-class." They are more at ease discussing alienation than exploitation. If they mention Marx, it is the Marx of the 1844 MSS, not the Marx of *Capital* or the *Eighteenth Brumaire;* they are interested in the diagnostician but not in the revolutionary surgeon of the human condition. Like the anarchists of the 1880's, the fringe of the working class which fascinates them is the criminal *lumpen-proletariat.* They see the authentic expression of the younger generation in a squalid street-fight in Notting Hill, but the thousands of young men and women who flock every night into the Technical Colleges at Batley, Stoke-on-Trent, or Darlington, do not come

into the picture at all, except as exemplars of the ethos of *Room at the Top.* If this Partisan generation (the jibe continues) cannot be dismissed as neo-Fabians, this is only because Fabianism is too dowdy and too exacting in its practical demands. They have replaced the authority of Bentham and Mill with that of Arnold and F. R. Leavis, and if they distrust manipulative social engineering in the utilitarian tradition, they offer only educational and cultural therapy in its place. In both cases the initiative for enlightened change must still come from the intelligentsia above, even though the statistician is replaced by the sociologist and the administrator by the literary critic. They are too pure-at-heart to immerse themselves in political action which makes sustained demands upon tact or organisational stamina; but respond lyrically to individualist or sensational protests, no matter how ineffectual or divisive in conception. And so (to bring the commination service to a conclusion) the whole lot may be dismissed by the committed socialist as the last intellectual waifs and strays in the long romantic grouse against industrialism, striking in Soho the final futile attitudes of protest in the face of the inexorable approach of the nuclear age.

Place of the Working Class

THERE are two reasons why these jibes demand examination. First, because they *are* circulating, even among keen readers of *ULR.* It would be strange if this were not so. The active rank-and-file socialist has seen some pretty strange birds of passage through the movement in the past quarter-century. It is only to be expected that when a new movement of socialist intellectuals appears, it should be met with the questions: How long are they likely to stick? Are they in it with us?

Second, because the jibes are not altogether without foundation. If I thought them wholly false I would not bother to submit this article. If I thought them true in any essential point I would submit it elsewhere. The question is complex. 1 do indeed find in *ULR* one of the most healthy and constructive growing-points for revolutionary socialism in this country ; I do not doubt for a moment the integrity and commitment to the socialist cause of its editors. And yet this movement of ideas has emerged at a time when (for many reasons) the political consciousness of our working people is dulled and their creative political initiatives are at their most sluggish for many years. The younger generation which has matured within this context has, inevitably, generalised from this experience. But these generalisations—unless they are held in perspective by a sense of history—can lead on to attitudes which are both precious and self-isolating; and which, if unchecked, could be as corrosive in the socialist movement as those opportunist and philistine attitudes against which *ULR* is in recoil. These attitudes seem to me to stem from an ambiguity as to the place of the working-class in the struggle to create a socialist society: a tendency to view working people as the *subjects* of history, as pliant *recipients* of the imprint of the mass media, as *victims* of alienation, as *data* for sociological enquiry: a tendency to under-estimate the tensions and conflicts of working-class life, and the creative potential —not in the remote future but here and now—of working people: a tendency to assert the absolute autonomy of cultural phenomena without reference to the context of class power: and a shame-faced evasion of that impolite historical concept—the class struggle.

Evasion of Class Struggle?

These attitudes are never dominant in *ULR;* but they are obvious enough elsewhere, and are incipient in certain contributions to *ULR* 5. It is a matter of tone, emphases, omissions, which appear side by side with challenging analysis. Taken singly these instances may be unimportant; taken together, a certain impression is given; an impression which is unfairly precipitated early in the number by Gordon Redfern's boisterous passage of historical impressionism, *The Real Outrage.* Here the working class is seen as the passive object of social transformations which take place with geological inevitability. "The industrial conurbation grew quickly. Masses of the population drawn from the countryside became meaningless as human beings, but important as cogs in the means of production." Meaningless to whom? Surely not to themselves? Are working people to be allowed no consciousness of themselves, no power of moral reflection, no agency in shaping industrial society? The period to which (I take it) Gordon Redfern refers was meaningful enough in working-class history; it is the period of Luddism and Peterloo, trade union experiments and Owenism, the 10 Hour Movement and Chartism, and the proliferation of popular religious, educational and co-operative societies.

But Gordon Redfern's impressions leap over the agitator, the Chartist journalist, the union organiser, and come to rest on the dupe and the turn-coat. Discussing the appeal of middle-class "snob culture," he writes:

> Dim and without the faculty to interpret, to these heights the workers raised their eyes, this became their goal. (How else can we explain the anachronism of the knighted trade union leader?)

Which workers? Which trade union leaders? If we explain Sir Walter Citrine, must we not also explain Tom Mann? But the give-away phrase comes at the conclusion to his article, where he describes our people as "a population jaded almost beyond redemption."

It is worth looking at, this phrase. Gordon Redfern (and many others who *feel* in this way but who are too sly to say so) will no doubt believe that they owe some allegiance to the working-class movement, as the ultimate political force which will achieve socialism. But it is a very abstract allegiance. Real working people fill them with nausea: "they know no more than the material standards of the television and washing machine which they have gained." On every actual count they turn aside with condescension or disgust: the workers are materialist, self-interested, philistine, television-addicts, corrupted by prosperity, and so on. (The fact that some of these attitudes are akin to those held by Tory ladies in Bournemouth does not prevent them from being embraced by quite a number of working-class "scholarship boys" who have supped on a diet of T. S. Eliot.) Above all, working-class people are seen in terms of the papers that most of them read and the films and programmes that most of them watch. Since many of the attitudes embodied in the mass media are contemptible, and since the architectural environment of the industrial working class is ugly and anarchic, it is not difficult for the intellectual to effect an emotional transference from the media and the environment to the *people.* Whatever he thinks of individual working people, the idea of the working class evokes a response of contempt, dislike or fear. "A population jaded almost beyond redemption."

If this is true, then there is little left for the enlightened minority to do in politics except to strike attitudes. It is

theoretically possible to hold to a "revolutionary" hatred of "industrialism" or "the Establishment" or the mass media, but, since the working class is seen as the great Philistine force whose gullibility and taste for trivial sensation and material advantage underpins the whole thing, practical socialist politics appear as hopeless; and, in extreme cases, the hatred may be directed against the working class itself. In every effective sense, such attitudes *are* "anti-working-class."

Having made this point, it would be far too easy to rush for consolation and security back into the arms of old Auntie Dogma. Whatever the working class approves is right: it is the only true revolutionary force in society, because of its very situation: the intellectual must distrust his own responses, and submit his will to the will of the people. But we have had enough of all that; to romanticise the working class and its organisations is not only futile, it is also a flat betrayal of socialist responsibility. A realistic recognition of the forces at work which are corrupting the working-class movement is one of the points from which any socialist analysis must commence. Thousands of rank-and-file members of the Labour Movement are as anxious about these corrupting influences as are Mr. John Osborne and Mr. John Braine. Listen to the ageing Labour councillors, the W.E.A. committee, the veteran trade unionist, lamenting the lack of support for their activities: "they're all out for themselves," "it's the television," "the movement has lost its moral dynamic," "only a slump will wake them up"—this is the small change of discussion. To romanticise the working class, or to abstract from it a doctrinaire emblem of evergreen militancy, is as much a betrayal of living working people as are the attitudes which I have termed "anti-working-class."

Sense *of History*

I THINK we are lacking, chiefly, in a sense of history ; we might discuss the uses of literacy a little less, and the uses of history rather more.

The following assumptions appear in several articles in *ULR* 5; first, that "materialism" is an unworthy social motivation: second, that in contemporary "consumer capitalism" there has been some qualitative (even "revolutionary") alteration in the material drives of working people. "Capitalism as a social system is now based upon consumption," writes Stuart Hall *{A Sense of Classlessness, U.L.R.* 5); and, "not only has the working class been built into the market itself: but commodities—things-in-themselves—have accumulated *a social value* as well. They have become insignias of class and status." He offers as evidence for this a number of most perceptive insights into the degree to which the capitalist ethos has today penetrated into the centres of working-class life; but he offers no serious *historical* framework for this judgment whatsoever. When has the working class *not* been "built into the market"? Who on earth consumed the products of the early industrial revolution, if the working people had no serious share? When have commodities *not* had a social, as well as strictly utilitarian, value? The upright piano preceded the television set into the skilled workers' home; the china plaque with a biblical inscription preceded the plastic nymph; sanded floors gave way to rough carpeting and have now given way to imitation Axminsters. At every stage there has been a striving for status within the working class ; and if we are now concerned with a change in quality, and not merely in degree, we must be offered more serious evidence.

Competing Moralities

The lament about the "materialism" of the workers has, after all, appeared several times before in our history. It was heard on all sides among Chartist veterans in the prosperity which followed the Great Exhibition. In 1859 a Yorkshire Chartist was writing that his fellows were "thoroughly disgusted at the indifference and utter inattention of the multitude to their best interests" and regretting the "foolish integrity and zeal" of Ernest Jones in seeking "to bring about the enfranchisement of the unthinking and ungrateful multitude." Ten years later the former Chartist, Thomas Cooper, revisited Lancashire and summed up his impressions in a passage which has become a *locus classicus* of working-class history:

> "In our old Chartist time .... Lancashire working men were in rags by thousands; and many of them lacked food. But their intelligence was demonstrated wherever you went. You would see them in groups discussing the great doctrine of political justice .... or they were in earnest dispute respecting the teachings of Socialism. *Now,* you will see no such groups in Lancashire. But you will hear well-dressed working men talking of co-operative stores, and their shares in them, or in building societies."

Twenty years later again, and at the commencement of the Dock Strike, Engels was lamenting England's "bourgeois proletariat." And this period, from 1850 to 1880 and beyond, saw a striving for status within the working class as sharp as any to be found today: self-made man against skilled worker, the skilled unionist against the labourer, the butty system in the pits. Exploitation has never been something done *at* a cohesive working class by employers above them ; it has also been part of the very conditions of life and work of the whole people. The ethos which Stuart Hall describes so perceptively, and terms "the status ladder," went by the name, in Victorian England, of "self-help." Self-help was equally divisive, it entered as deeply into the organisations of the working people.

I am making two points. First, working-class history is not the record of a coherent "way of life"; it has always been a *way of struggle,* between competing moralities. At any given point a whole complex of objective and active, subjective factors determine which morality is dominant. The objective factors are most obvious: in times of relative prosperity and social flexibility, when it is possible for individuals or groups to "better themselves," the acquisitive ethic and the status-striving assert themselves. Conversely, in times of hardship, when it is most clear that the working class (or groups within it) can only defend themselves or advance by collective action, the communal ethic flowers.

This way of struggle, against class rule above, and between competing moralities within the working class, has never been a blind, spontaneous reflex to objective economic conditions. It has been a conscious struggle of ideas and values all the way. It has been possible for working-class organisations to hold fast to the vision of collective good, in the face of the acquisitive surge in times of prosperity. It has been possible for treacherous leadership (as at the time of the General Strike) to shatter that vision for a decade. And, the more closely we study it, the more we are forced to a recognition of the role of the politically active minority. In times of brutalisation and degradation, working people have asserted their humanity only by revolt against these conditions; and the most conscious, morally-engaged form of revolt has been

in political organisation. For 150 years the political minority has been the carrier of the aspirations of the majority; it has been the point at which the diffuse ideal of community has come to effective expression. For working people above all, the road to human fulfilment in capitalist society has been bound up, in one way or another, with political organisation. It is through conscious action against exploitation and class oppression that they have ceased to be victims of their environment, and have achieved the dignity of actors in the making of their own history.

Grounds for Hope

To describe the evolution of "industrialism" in sociological terms which belittle the organisation, influence, and ideas of the political minority, is to deprive us, not only of honourable traditions, but also of our grounds for hope in the present. It is not the "materialism" so much as the *politics* of the working-class today which is at fault.

The two of course are related. And this brings me to my second point, which is that some of us are being a great deal too precious about the "materialism" of working people. The myth of the Great Prosperity is, after all, MacMillan's. Millions do not know it; millions more live at. a distance of two or three wage-packets from poverty, and need only an accident, a separation from the husband, a sickness or death in the family, to be pushed into extreme hardship. The millions who *do* live in greater security, who do bring in the bonuses and overtime, who do go after the bedroom suites and the homemaking gimmicks, certainly are subject to most of the commercially-induced pressures towards a "middle-class style of life" which Stuart Hall anatomises; but *why* do he and others dwell so exclusively on the negative features of the situation? Why does Gordon Redfern couple sneeringly the television and the washing-machine? The first is a problem of a special order; the second is not a symbol of "status" but a machine to wash clothes with. I do not know what moral and cultural values are attached to the kitchen sink, a washboard, and the week's wash for a family of five. But if we are getting more washing-machines, we should recognise in that fact at least the *potential* of greater emancipation for working women.

I am asking, not only for a sense of history, but for a sense of the dialectics of social change. It may be true that the dominant ethic today is a blend of Joe Lampton and the Labour electoral glossy: but that does not tell us what to expect tomorrow. Less than a year after Engels had complained of our "bourgeois proletariat" he was standing on a van at London's first May Day, rejoicing at the sight of "the grandchildren of the old Chartists re-entering the line of battle." But these men were not the same as their grandfathers, and they were not entering the same battle. The Lancashire followers of Blatchford made fuller and more complex claims upon life than their grandfathers in the Plug Riots had done. Where the Bradford Chartists had fought against the Bastille and against starvation, the Bradford I.L.P. fought against infant mortality, for nursery schools, council houses, and free school meals. What do we want the present generation of working people to fight *for?* We do not want to push them back into the old, cramped, claustrophobic community which was based on the grim equality of hardship. The aspiration towards community, if it arises in the present generation, will be far richer and more complex, with far more insistence upon variety, freedom of movement, and freedom of choice, than in the old-style community.

Misuse of Hoggart

I must confess to some impatience with this nostalgia for the "whole way of life" of the old working-class community. Stuart Hall tells us that a skilled maintenance operative remarked:

> "I wanted a house and a bit of space around it: after all, that's what we came for. People are too close to you—breathing down your necks . . ." And we thought of Bethnal Green.

What did Stuart Hall think of Bethnal Green? It is one thing to recognise the positive values created in the slums in the teeth of squalor, overcrowding and hardship, so long as we recall the human cost and the many casualties on the way. But it is another matter if we exalt these positives to the point where we see the slum-dweller's desire for a house "with a bit of space" only as a melancholy falling-away from a noble "way of life". Are family privacy and the sense of community *necessarily* opposed? Is it not possible that we should look forward to a more complex inter-action between self-cultivating and civic values? Are there not new positives and potentialities in the new way of life, which are the strengths upon which we must build, in countering the self-regarding and acquisitive features?

I suspect that the current tendency to sentimentalise the old working-class community may in part be traced to a *mis-use* of Richard Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy.* I shared in the general acclaim for this book upon its appearance: it is splendidly evocative in its opening chapters, splendidly perceptive in its local criticisms. But as the book is put to uses which its author cannot have foreseen, one's criticisms tend to grow more harsh. From the standpoint of the historian of the working-class it is a valuable, but highly misleading, document. I do not refer only to the absence of conflict in the early chapters, the absence of many adult pre-occupations (especially at the place of work), the neglect of the role of the minority, the omission or under-estimation of most of those influences which combine to create the labour movement in this century. Nor am I concerned at the moment with the persistent suggestion, in the later chapters, that the readers can be identified in an over-simplified way with the attitudes in the papers which they read—the failure of Hoggart seriously to examine the tensions which exist between the actual experience and relationships of the readers, and the false consciousness of the mass media. My central criticism is of the misleading and anti-historical framework of the book. In the first part, subjective impressions, largely based on childhood memories, and unchecked by historical referents ; the whole combining in a picture of the old way of life. In the second part, impressions drawn from reading-matter alone, combining in a picture of the new. The further the reader is from the book, the more it simmers in his memory, the more he forgets the peculiar technique employed. And the more it appears to him as an historical analysis of the currents of working-class cultural change in our time. But this is precisely what the book is *not.* If it were so, the evidence of *Reveille* and the *Daily Mirror* would have to be balanced against Northcliffe's *Daily Mail* at the time of the "Hang the Kaiser" election and Horatio Bottomley's *John Bull*; or the family of Hoggart's recollections would have to be weighed beside equally close empirical insights into the family on the new Leeds housing-estates.

Culture not Peripheral

I am not underestimating the gravity of the situation which Hoggart illuminates. But his case is presented in

such a way as to emphasise the passivity of the present-day working-class reader, and so induces a sense of hopelessness. But the working-class reader has been besieged before, if not so seductively, then at least as relentlessly. He has survived the propaganda of church and squire, the Steam Intellect Tracts, the sentimental mush of the Sunday School and the orthodox Methodist pulpit, as debilitating and degrading in their way as anything offered today. Survival has not always been easy; at times, the course of social change has been diverted, or temporarily reversed, and the active political minority has been almost totally submerged. I agree that the problem of the mass media today, with their vast power, centralised control, and suggestive influence upon the very "springs of action", is of crucial importance. Questions of "culture" today are not peripheral to the "real political issues" of class power; they are central to the whole way of struggle. What is at issue is the mind of the working-class: its consciousness of itself, its knowledge of its own potential strength. I ask only that we see these problems within some historical frame of reference, and in the context of struggle. The resistance to the mass media comes not only from old strengths and traditions derived from the old working-class community; it is generated daily in the experience of working-people, and nourished by the active minority. If we see the working-class as the passive recipients of the mass media, then we may disarm ourselves in the face of them. Worse than this, we may not bring to the minority the support which they so urgently need. The suggestive forces of the mass media cannot be resisted by the fostering of a negative current of critical resistance alone. They must be met by other, positive forces which can only come from a vigorous socialist movement in which the political minority and the intellectuals make common cause. The constructive aspirations towards a full socialist community will be nourished from a hundred sources; and the socialist intellectuals, the architects who project the new cities, the scientists who can explain the hazards and the opportunities, the writers, the historians, even—perhaps—the sociologists (if they will break their Family-fixation and breathe some fresh air) must provide much of the nourishment. And in the process I hope we may become a little less self-conscious ourselves about status and class, and cease to play the game of the Establishment by drawing an abstract line between the "real working-class" of heavy industry, and the teachers, the technicians, the draughtsmen, the white-coated workers and the rest. We do not want the jealous neighbourhood community which erects barriers ; we want the socialist community which includes all.

Whole Way of Struggle

I HOPE the tenor of my criticisms has now become clear. If placed within an historical perspective, recent sociological writings can greatly add to our understanding of the very texture of life, the tissue of social and personal relationships, the cultural norms. But without this sense of history the record of our working class can appear as an instinctual, almost vegetable, evolution, in which the active role of the minority, as the agent of social change, is belittled, as well as the moral and intellectual resources which have been called forth in a whole way of struggle. Our society today—our democratic liberties and our social services—is in great part the product of this struggle, and of the adjustments to it on the part of capitalist interests. If Campaigners can meet in Trafalgar Square today, it is because of the great struggles for freedom of speech and assembly waged by radical and socialist working men in the 1880's and 1890's. And unless we have this sense of history, we will not see the potential within living working people. Commitment in politics *must* mean commitment to living people.

This does not mean uncritical allegiance to the existing social attitudes, or political institutions, of the working class. *(Which* institutions, anyway? And in what sense can certain bureaucratic organisations today be said to be the true expression of the needs of the existing working people?) Most certainly the acquisitive ethos and the politics of glossyism have got to be challenged in every centre of working class life. But the challenge must come *from within,* not from a righteous minority outside. The movement today is blighted by flattery; everyone flatters working people, from the intimate fireside tele-politician, with his appeal to the "moderate right-thinking" elector, to the self-appointed vanguardist exalting the effortless, instinctive judgment of the "true proletarian". The great pioneers never built on flattery: they denounced, they challenged, they offered the hardships of organisation, self-education, the difficult mastery of political understanding, the painful awakening of richer social aspirations: "Now, young chaps, what are *you* going to live for?" demanded Tom Mann. We have to make this challenge again, and we can offer a complexity of fulfilment unattainable sixty years ago. But we shall be listened to—we shall have the right to expect attention—only if our commitment to the living generation is beyond question.

All this is given added point in the aftermath of the Aldermaston demonstration. The presence of some thousands of young "middle-class" people was a great feature of the march. Who could have supposed, from an aloof analysis of the reading-matter of the intelligentsia three years ago—*Waiting for Godot* and *1984,* the back end of the *New Statesman* and the front end of *Encounter, The Outsider* and Mr. Kruschev's secret speech—that out of such despair and contempt for common people, this swift maturity of protest could arise? The individualists are marching, because they know that peace is the very precondition of individualism; and as they march, they discover within themselves unsuspected aspirations—new social bonds, a new sense of potential community, an intuition into the nature of class power.

Let us hope that the splendid spirit of antagonism to the expediencies and moral myopia of the orthodox politicians, which was so evident in the nuclear disarmament campaign, will not over-balance into the anti-political moral purism of the sect. Commitment to principle need not be a different thing from political commitment. In the last analysis, commitment in politics entails the assumption of the fullest human responsibility available to men in class society—a responsibility entailed by the tissue of human relationships into which we are committed by the very fact of birth—the purposive and sustained action, in association with others, to bring class society itself to an end. It is from this central human commitment that commitment in every other field must flow. And this *political* question is central to our whole discussion of both *community* and *culture.* It is *in the socialist movement itself* that the aspiration towards community should find its most conscious expression.

There is a long and honourable tradition of such total human commitment within our working-class movement. For several generations, thousands of men and women

have come forward whose lives have been enclosed within this whole way of struggle. They have officered organisations for twenty, thirty and more years, defining the meaning of their lives in terms of the wider movement, looking forward to little more than a vote of thanks, and a declining standard of living in their old age. They have lived through as many defeats as victories, and have spent much of their energy in challenging their own leaders, or in repairing their defections. They have seen their colleagues fall away, and the clever politicians find the rooms at the top. They have been the poor bloody infantry of the movement, who have been sent in to hold the positions which the dashing cavalrymen have entered. For decades at a time they have been deserted, not only by most of the intellectuals, but also by a great part of their own class. Never far from the realities of class power, they have felt the full shock of every set-back in then own lives. They have been accustomed to fighting defensive battles, and "politics" for them has meant, more often than not, dealing with contingencies as they have arisen. Confined to one community and to a few places of work, they have made their own choice between the values of community and the acquisitive ethic. It is easy enough to forget at what cost:

What is the price of Experience? Do men buy it for a song?

Or wisdom for a dance in the street? No, it is bought with the price

Of all that a man hath, his house, his wife, his children.

Wisdom is sold in the desolate market where none come to buy,

And in the wither'd field where the farmer plows for bread in vain.

Such total commitment may generate vices which are complementary to its virtues: a suspicion of the individualist, a tendency to exalt the need for organisational unity, and to fall into defensive political routines, a narrow pragmatic "realism". Today the vices may be more apparent than the virtues; and the minority, where it is still to be found, in the Labour Party, the trade unions, or the Communist Party, is often disheartened and has lost its sense of direction. I am not suggesting that our Labour Movement today is staffed at the rank-and-file level wholly by men of such single-minded purpose. But I am insisting that it is from this honourable tradition that all of us—and most especially the new Aldermaston generation—have most to learn. We must learn from the steady attention to organisation, and from the true moral realism which has enabled men, year in and year out, to meet each situation as it has arisen—each industrial or political challenge, each threat to peace—and to act in relation to it without the least regard for personal gain. If I describe this total commitment as being, in the last analysis, commitment in the class struggle, I do not mean that its truest expression is to be found in revolutionary posturing or bull-at-a-gate industrial militancy. Intelligence, resourcefulness, a sense of the needs of the wider movement, humanity, and—in the common human struggle to prevent nuclear war—restraint and a capacity for compromise; all these qualities may, at one time or another, be demanded by the logic of events, and signify a truer revolutionary maturity than the posturings of those enthusiasts who (in Shaw's phrase), "mistake their own emotions for public movements". But, however various its forms of expression, we must see this total commitment as thfe ultimate value from which the aspiration for community is constantly renewed. And intellectuals, above all, should strive to associate themselves with this tradition, as a corrective to those many influences which enable them to come to terms with the Establishment without loss of self-esteem, and which tolerate and even reward the radical providing that he does not touch the sensitive points of class-power. We need (finally) this corrective to the extravagances of utopianism. Political action consists in influencing and changing living people. The region of political choice is limited by the stubborn nature of the stuff with which we must work. And the value of utopianism is to be found, not in raising banners in the wilderness, but in confronting living people with an image of their own potential life, in summoning up their aspirations so that they challenge the old forms of life, and in influencing such social choices as there are in the direction that is desired. Utopianism and realism should not form into rival contingents; they should quarrel in a constructive way in the heart of the same movement.

I am not stating this case for political commitment in any narrow, organisationally-limited way. I do not think that there is any one single organisational solution for socialists today. Nor am I asking people to "root themselves in the labour movement" by conducting parasitic factional activities within organisations which are dying through bureaucratic paralysis and lack of an influx of youth. People *are* looking for new ways, new forms of political expression ; there must be direct channels opened up to the minds of younger working people, as well as actions in the old organisations. Next year the banners of Trades Councils must move from Aldermaston to Trafalgar Square: but the skiffle groups and the jeans-and-pony-tails must still be there. It is because *ULR* has broken free of old dogmas and organisational routines ; because its contributors voice richer aspirations than are found in the sterile formulations of Old Dogma or the seedy solicitations of New Glossy; because they bring with them a generosity of spirit without which the most "correct" political theory is impotent; because they understand that, as the old battles for bread are won, new tensions and needs are arising; because they start from the need to change people and not resolution-jobbing or institutional manipulation ; because they understand that the great battle today is for the mind of the working people, and the greatest need is for the vision' of community to be reborn; because—above all—their vision of socialism entails, not a succession of electoral rat-races, but the revolutionary transformation of the whole life of man—for all these reasons the jibes at the opening of this article may be dismissed with contempt. But let us keep steadily in view the realities of class power in our time; the community to which we look forward is potential only within our working-class movement. The "power to compel" must always remain with the organised workers, but the intellectuals may bring to them hope, a sense of their own strength and potential life. And the facts of class power in our time will not allow us the luxury of self-isolation. We are committed, with a total commitment, to meet each contingency as it arises, knowing that it is our fate and our responsibility in capitalist society, to see many of our hopes and energies ploughed into "the wither'd field", but knowing also that there is no force which can change this society except within ourselves. We have no choice in this. And if we evade this choice, we degrade our own humanity.