

## **‘Among the ordinary people’: New Left involvement in working class political mobilisation 1956-1968**

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*The British New Left’s lack of influence within working class and labour movement politics is often adduced as evidence of political weakness and contrasted unfavourably with its evident strength in matters of ideas and theory. Yet the substance of New Left efforts to reach or create a social base for its ideas has rarely been examined. Focusing on the period between 1956 and 1968, this essay demonstrates that New Left involvement in working class political mobilisation was more persistent and significant than is usually recognised. New Leftists played a key role in the Fife Socialist League founded by miner Lawrence Daly, attempted to establish a New Left ‘industrial wing’, and pursued socialist educational and agitational work among working class organisations and communities. Though not producing the ‘political breakthrough’ envisaged by some protagonists, these engagements need not be seen as having failed, but as having created links and resources of significance for local and community histories. Closer attention to such engagements also rebalances a historiography that has focused on internal discontinuities and theoretical debates, offering a fuller sense of the New Left’s activism and of its contribution to British political economy.*

### **Introduction**

The New Left, in Raphael Samuel’s words, ‘defined not so much a politics but a stance; it was concerned not so much to establish a platform but to open up a space’.<sup>1</sup> Denoting a non-aligned socialist politics rejecting both orthodox communism and western social democracy, the label was gradually claimed by a loose coalition of disaffected communists, independent socialists and student radicals for whom 1956 ‘a conjuncture—not just a year—bounded on one side by the suppression of the Hungarian Revolution by Soviet tanks and on the other by the British and French invasion of the Suez Canal zone’ was in different ways a watershed.<sup>2</sup> It was a space for rethinking and experimentation, for an open, critical discourse about the implications for socialism of Communist disillusion, capitalist modernisation and western ‘affluence’, and of Cold War international relations. Into this space would flow the swelling tide of radicalism that produced the revolutionary wave of ‘1968’ as well as the ‘new social movement’ and identity politics that the ‘New Left’ label is now commonly used to describe.

In its British variant, the New Left is generally viewed as a predominantly intellectual tendency whose history can be told in terms of two phases, a ‘first New Left’ that attempted to forge an experimental and activist ‘movement of ideas’ but petered out by 1962-3, and a ‘second New Left’ centred on Perry Anderson’s reoriented *New Left Review* and concerned mainly with theoretical production.<sup>3</sup> Historians of the New Left have long pointed out the limitations of this narrative and there now exists a range of nuanced accounts giving proper weight to the continuities between ‘old’ and ‘new’ lefts and to the diversities within the various New Left groups.<sup>4</sup> Yet there remain gaps in the historiography. In particular, efforts by the New Left to reach or create a social base have usually been overlooked or dismissed as marginal, confined to the pre-1963 period, and above all a failure.<sup>5</sup> The historical assessment of the British New Left then tends to be that it was intellectually strong but politically ineffectual. This misses the point of Samuel’s insight (quoted above) and trivialises New Left activism.

New conceptual and methodological approaches to the history of post-war Britain and its politics, often themselves displaying a New Left influence in their recognition of the importance of culture, civil society and the everyday as sites of political contestation, have stimulated fresh interest in grassroots and community histories, and in cultures of activism on the left.<sup>6</sup> This is a productive content in which to rebalance the history of the New Left itself, encouraging a shift of focus away from the oeuvres of key intellectuals and a metropolitan viewpoint toward ‘subterranean’ and local dimensions of the history, as well as more serious engagement with the New Left as practising an expressive form of cultural politics defying analysis in orthodox terms.<sup>7</sup> A different provocation to historians was offered earlier, by Dorothy Thompson, who in a sometimes intemperate review of two major studies of the British New Left criticised the absence from both of an adequate sense of the New Left as a ‘political movement’.<sup>8</sup> If Thompson’s suggestion that the term New Left be reserved for such a movement invokes a separation between the political and the intellectual that many New Leftists would reject, it reminds us of the importance of historical context. Discussions of the New Left too often seem to pivot around internal disagreements, so that it can seem like a milieu talking mainly to itself, instead of one whose discussions were invariably aimed at the clarification of problems shared and discussed within a larger community of socialist thinkers and activists.

There are, then, reasons for an approach to the history of the New Left that takes its activism (in the sense of those aspects of its practice most directly concerned with effecting immediate change) more seriously, registering its full extent, and recognising its indispensability to the New Left's 'intellectual' work. This essay addresses one aspect of this history: New Left attempts to mobilise a working class constituency for its ideas and positions in the period between 1956 and 1968. The first section considers early New Left perspectives on class, British industrial relations and economic policy, introducing a set of interrelated themes and proposals that shaped, and were shaped by, its more direct mobilising efforts. A second section discusses Lawrence Daly's Fife Socialist League, between 1958 and 1962 the only real instance of a working-class political grouping with significant New Left influence. Daly's early success emboldened some associated with the *New Reasoner* group to try to establish a 'New Left industrial wing'; these efforts are discussed in the third section. A final part addresses the period after the 1962-3 organisational crisis that resulted in the break-up of the New Left Board and the reorientation of *New Left Review*. Although direct mobilising efforts were for a time a casualty of this crisis, this period nevertheless saw a regroupment of New Leftists around propagandist and educational work within the trades union movement.

### **Class and industry: early New Left perspectives**

Assessing the record of his New Left predecessors in 1965, Perry Anderson regarded their contribution to analysis of British society and capitalism as negligible, and their links to the working class as non-existent.<sup>9</sup> Later historiography has replayed, even as it has qualified, the hyperbole of the exchanges between Anderson and Edward Thompson that followed the breakdown of relations on an unwieldy New Left board charged with overseeing NLR and the wider New Left 'movement'. This has had the effect of overstating the extent of the rupture, oversimplifying the ideological and political issues at stake, lending the New Left before 1962 a retrospective unity and coherence it simply did not have, while at the same time neglecting the range and significance of the intellectual-political project it pursued. Among the casualties of this neglect has been early New Left work on British political economy, overlooked in favour of the pioneering work in (what came to be called) cultural studies and regarded as the early New Left's most significant contribution.<sup>10</sup> This assessment chimes too with a sense that New Left agendas appealed primarily to an emergent social constituency (forerunner to today's 'metropolitan middle class liberal elite') of middle-class students and professionals working in the arts, media, education, technology or social work, and had little to say on issues relevant to

a working class or trade union constituency. There was, however, a strand of New Left work that did articulate a coherent position on British economic and political themes and, moreover, sought to make this effective within trade union and working class politics. A group around the *New Reasoner*, which included several economists and adult educationalists, contributed heavily to this work, but it also drew on theoretical and empirical work published in *Universities and Left Review*. These groups, who merged in 1959 to form *New Left Review* (NLR), had different political backgrounds and senses of audience, but these differences were productive as well as limiting and should not be overstated.<sup>11</sup>

The quarterly *New Reasoner* was set up by John Saville and Edward Thompson after their resignation from the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) in late 1956. Leaving, like thousands of others, in protest against the British party leadership's support for Soviet suppression of the Hungarian uprising, resignation came only after some months of leading an attempt to force an open discussion of the implications of Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalinism earlier the same year through publication of an 'unofficial' inner-party journal.<sup>12</sup> Many of those who had supported their efforts within the party joined them in the new venture. This group included economists Ken Alexander, Ron Meek and Michael Barratt Brown, writers Mervyn Jones and Doris Lessing, poet Randall Swingler and a little later, political theorist Ralph Miliband, the only editor not to have been a CP member. *New Reasoners* were predominantly ex-Communists in their thirties, many with experience of wartime military service. Central figures were based in universities or colleges in the north of England or Scotland, often, crucially, with a background in adult and worker education.<sup>13</sup> Claiming fidelity to a libertarian, humanist Marxist and communist tradition exemplified by Tom Mann and William Morris, the *New Reasoner* rejected Stalinism and 'its stunted opposite, dogmatic Trotskyism'. Regretting the 'snapping of links between socialist intellectuals and those who bear the brunt of the practical work of the movement', its editors assumed a self-consciously educative role in relation to a labour movement whose 'pragmatic and anti-theoretical bias' they straightaway noted as a limitation. 'Socialists who desire not only to act but to understand the context and aim of their actions' were figured as their audience, so coverage was pitched at a level intellectually serious but not 'academic', with plenty of irreverent editorial content including informal 'letters to readers'.<sup>14</sup> Its ten issue run was remarkable for the range of topics tackled. Studies of Mau-Mau rubbed up against Doris Lessing's short stories, poems by Christopher Logue, discussions of Gramsci, 'art in the community', Polish theatre, a supplement on Blake, Keralan communism, to name but a few. Four signature themes emerged:

socialist humanism (an organising perspective developed largely by Thompson that stimulated some controversy); internationalism (comprising support for de-Stalinisation in the Communist bloc, unilateralism at home, and a pioneering interest in decolonisation and the ‘third world’); culture, especially creative writing,<sup>15</sup> and questions of political organisation in Britain. On the last the Reasoners were divided; convinced of the need for the ex-CP left to regroup, there was no settled sense of what it should regroup into. Having rejected the CP’s democratic centralism and hostile to the sectarian style and tactics of the British Trotskyist groups, the Reasoners valorised democratic and ‘bottom-up’ socialist traditions and remained committed to the agency of the working class. For some, joining the Labour Party, previously impossible - the CPGB remained a proscribed organisation though wielding considerable influence in some trades unions and sections of the broader labour movement - was a logical next step, particularly given the CPGB’s own *de facto* recognition of Labour as the critical vehicle for socialist advance in Britain. However while some embarked on the attempt to transform Labour from the inside, others thought it impossible, and often, individuals wavered between these views. Thus the question of a new political organisation – and whether the New Left itself could become or initiate that organisation - repeatedly surfaced, animating and impeding the Reasoners’ efforts to make common cause with working class militants.

Fig 1 HERE

This uncertainty about organisation and a consequent openness to new political possibilities, especially on Thompson’s part, was one factor bringing the Reasoners into collaboration with *Universities and Left Review*. ULR, launched spring 1957, was produced by a younger, student cohort. Several had been influenced by GDH Cole at Oxford and were more interested in Labour Party than Communist problems, though two of its four editors including prime mover Raphael (Ralph) Samuel had been in the CPGB (indeed, Samuel knew the *Reasoner* editors and approached them early on about his plans for ULR).<sup>16</sup> The ULRers were in their twenties, based in Oxford and London, with less direct political experience. If Cole’s libertarian and guild socialism were key influences, the centre of gravity was firmly post-war: in meetings of the Oxford University Labour Club and the pages of the Oxford Clarion, this group, provoked by F.R. Leavis and inspired by Richard Hoggart and Raymond Williams, debated the implications of ‘mass society’ for working class culture and Labour’s future. ULR was trendsetting in design, using graphic art and Roger Mayne’s photography in its magazine-style format, and audacious in style and content, with a pioneering attention to youth and

popular culture. Teenagers, teddyboys, the 'secondary modern generation' featured, as did free cinema, 'angry' literature, TV and town planning. More experimental than the Reasoners and committed to the creation (rather than revival) of a 'socialism at full stretch' bridging the divorce of socialist politics from cultural life, the ULRers nevertheless harked back to the intellectual levée of the thirties and shared many reference points with the Reasoners. They were attracted by Thompson's socialist humanism, less for communist revival than for indictment of the moral bankruptcy of capitalism, colonialism and the H-bomb. In turn, the boldness of ULR, its expansiveness, activism and youth appeal excited Thompson. He shared the ULR editors' sense that the experimental left clubs network it sponsored, alongside the take-off of CND, could spark a new kind of socialist extra-parliamentary politics uninhibited by questions of party affiliation.

Attitudes toward the working class were one source of tension between the two groups as they moved closer, though the broadside unleashed by Thompson against Stuart Hall's prescient 1958 exploration of 'A sense of classlessness' both missed some of Hall's points and overstated the differences.<sup>17</sup> ULR, despite its more experimental and cross-class organisational practice as manifested in the clubs network, remained committed to the primacy of working class agency, while the Reasoners, including Thompson, worried about the 'dulled political consciousness' of working people, notwithstanding their adherence to a Marxist conception of class.<sup>18</sup> C. Wright Mills' later plea to the New Left to abandon 'the labour metaphysic' (ie belief in the industrial proletariat as *the* historic agency of change) thus accurately detected an ambivalence not fully confronted.<sup>19</sup> Both groups, however, agreed on the retrograde direction of Hugh Gaitskell's Labour Party, and between 1957-1961 developed a set of arguments and policy proposals amounting to a coherent New Left challenge to the revisionist prospectus, particularly as outlined in the 1957 Labour policy document *Industry and Society*, and in CAR Crosland's *The Future of Socialism*.<sup>20</sup> New Left writers disputed the extent of the changes to capitalism on which the revisionist thesis depended, especially the notion of a separation of the functions of ownership and control in industry. They defended common ownership as essential to socialism but rejected the bureaucratic Morrisonian model of nationalisation. Socialism for them involved not only transfer of economic power but its transformation and democratisation: industrial democracy and workers' control were key preoccupations. Notions of declining inequality and greater social mobility were challenged; the welfare state was not a 'halfway house to socialism' but a convenience to capitalism whose achievements might be undone in leaner times (its statism and inefficiency were also noted, though aspects of this were

controversial). Some of this discussion was at a high level of generality, tied into at times rather rhetorical evocations of socialist humanism and de-alienation, an intellectual case combating what was seen as Crosland's selective and faulty interpretation of socialist aims, traditions and values. However there were also detailed pieces of work with policy relevance and with a Labour left or trade union audience in mind. This coverage came, on the NR side, from ex-Communist economists with strong links to adult and worker education, and with a stronger commitment to working within the Labour Party than Saville and Thompson. John Hughes, Ken Alexander and Michael Barratt Brown were the key figures.<sup>21</sup> ULR writers also contributed. During 1957-1961 a series of articles and pamphlets appeared that taken together comprised a distinct New Left economic strategy offered as a socialist alternative to the Labour mainstream. Critical interventions included *the Insiders*, a multi-authored ULR pamphlet spiritedly rebutting the claims of *Industry and Society*; John Hughes' proposals for steel renationalisation; Barratt Brown's series *The Controllers*, a detailed analysis of the concentration of British economic power; and Hughes and Alexander's *A Socialist Wages Plan*.<sup>22</sup> This New Left analysis pressed Labour to adopt 'a new radical programme and strategy' on nationalization and the economy.<sup>23</sup> Proposals included the reconstitution and democratisation of the Boards of nationalised industries, 'experiments in worker and trade union participation', and for the trades unions, measures toward adoption of a more solidaristic and strategic perspective as opposed to a sectoral and economistic approach.<sup>24</sup> Hughes and Alexander's wages plan, which, hypothesising a future Labour government, argued for limits on union wage demands in return for measures on social policy and nationalisation, was especially noteworthy. Largely ignored in most mainstream histories of Labour, these arguments did spark contemporary debate, appearing, in Hughes' words, 'at a moment when the New Left was actually able to have some kind of dialogue with a lot of the more traditional (if you like) state socialists of the old brand, from the trade unions and elsewhere, who rose in defence of Clause 4.'<sup>25</sup> The extent of influence on Labour perspectives is arguable; though by the mid-1960s many New Leftists felt the opportunities Hughes referred to had gone, the development of what some have called a 'Labour New Left' may nevertheless be traced, and there are important lines of continuity to subsequent Labour left initiatives including the Alternative Economic Strategy and 'Bennism'.<sup>26</sup> More central to the present study, however, is the extent to which the New Left managed to get traction for its ideas within a working class base, and it is to these efforts that we now turn.

## **Lawrence Daly, the Fife Socialist League and the problem of organisation**

*'We talk a lot about the potentialities of working people in the abstract, but here one felt it in the concrete, and it has given me added faith in the real meaning and force of socialism, when people start acting for themselves from below'.<sup>27</sup>*

One of the staunchest supporters of the *Reasoner* during the months of its unofficial publication in 1956 was Fife miner Lawrence Daly, later General Secretary of the NUM from 1968-1984. Son of Jimmy Daly, miner and founding member of the CPGB, Lawrence joined the Young Communist League around the time he began work at Glenraig colliery, aged 14. He visited the Soviet Union as part of a TUC youth delegation in 1945, and in 1946 became secretary of his local NUM branch.<sup>28</sup> By the time the *Reasoner* appeared in July 1956, Daly had left the CP, convinced that the leadership would not abandon the 'blind loyalty to Soviet leaders instead of communist principle ... the basic error which has led the CP to support and defend (or deny and ignore) the most colossal mistakes and monstrous crimes'.<sup>29</sup> He wrote in support of the *Reasoner* to the *Daily Worker* and to Saville and Thompson personally, establishing a warm and regular correspondence in which he offered to distribute the journal among his contacts, commented on content, made tactful recommendations for making it more accessible (and cheaper) to a working class readership, and urged them to persist in their fight. 'You must neither surrender nor compromise.' he wrote in August 1956. 'If you do, the last glimmer of hope will be gone. The conscience of the CP has passed into your care.' Impressed by Thompson's 'socialist humanism' - his own prose could be equally stirring - Daly agreed fresh theoretical work was needed but posed questions of political organisation outside the CP as a problem of at least equal urgency. He wrote that he had 'not yet decided about joining the L[abour] P[arty]; am considering formation of a local, wide, progressive discussion group (for the winter), to be called perhaps The Reasoners ... And toying with the idea of a British Communist League (suggestions for better titles welcome) as a temporary body'.<sup>30</sup> A month later, as the likelihood of Saville and Thompson's expulsion loomed, he wrote of his hopes for their group as the basis for a new political force, carrying 500-1000 of 'the best elements close to the party' into a temporary formation:

either a British Socialist organization, which could help, ultimately, to revivify and unify the Labour movement, OR a new British Communist organisation, which could eventually reunite with the CP on terms which could generate the changes we want to see. ... I am not saying there is a basis for a new mass organization, but there is a basis and need for a new body which will revive the British labour movement and bridge the



tragic gap of these last 30 years. If there is no sign of it within the next 6 months – or of vast (and totally unforeseeable) changes in the CP, those in my position will have to join the LP or just abandon the fight.<sup>31</sup>

For those sharing Daly's predicament, Socialist Forum, a loose collaboration that organised meetings and produced a journal (*Forum*, edited by Michael Segal and Royden Harrison) briefly gave space for socialists of varying stripes, ex-CP, Trotskyist and Labour left, to exchange views about the ferment on the left. Daly and Thompson attended a Forum conference in Leeds in January 1957, where plans were made to form local discussion groups in preparation for a Spring 1957 conference at Wortley Hall in Sheffield. This was the context in which Daly started the Fife Socialist League, which first met in February 1957 at Lochgelly Miners' Institute. Adopting the 'building of democratic socialism' as its aim, membership was open to anyone over 15 for a joining fee of a shilling and contribution of sixpence a week. On 2 March Daly wrote a letter headed 'Which way to socialism?' to CP and ex-CP contacts in Scotland, referring hopefully to the plans made at Leeds for a new movement for socialism, introducing the 'new working class political group' formed in Fife, and proposing a Scottish conference to bring people and groups together.<sup>32</sup> By autumn 1957, however, the relative openness of the Forum movement was giving way as familiar sectarian pressures reasserted themselves. Daly and Thompson's letters bemoaned what Thompson described as the 'gloomy picture of defeat and fragmentation' on the left:

there is no leadership anyone trusts or organisation they can work in wholeheartedly and in such an atmosphere sects can grow on the one hand, and people drop out on the other: how the hell can one recruit young people to be socialist today and what does one recruit them to? I can see how to carry on out cultural and intellectual work all right ... but on the practical organisational side I am puzzled and depressed. I think there is a 50/50 chance a new left party may in the end get formed, because I don't see how the broader labour movement will be transformed without an electoral threat being presented on the left of the official LP.<sup>33</sup>

Thompson did not mean a 'New Left' party, but as the NR became established outside the CP, and as collaboration with ULR deepened, the question of what organisational perspective the nascent New Left should adopt (or even play) was continually debated. When Daly, who from the start harboured hopes for the *Reasoner* as a nucleus for a new organisation, began to envisage the Fife Socialist League as an electoral vehicle to build and test support for the *Reasoner's* positions in West Fife, he straightaway approached Thompson and Saville.

Thompson especially was enthusiastic about Daly's plan to stand for election for the mining village of Ballingry in the Fife county council elections of 1958, even promising that if Daly won and stood in the following year's General Election he would come and help, though he warned Daly not to expect support from more Labour-oriented *Reasoner* figures such as Ken Alexander (who did indeed refuse to endorse the candidacy).<sup>34</sup> Daly's election material emphasised his own authenticity and record ('a west fife miner for west fife'), urging electors to judge not by party label but on matters of socialist principle. It also carried 'an appeal from the universities' signed by Saville and Thompson.<sup>35</sup> His comfortable win was celebrated in the next *New Reasoner*. Describing the League as a 'small independent socialist propaganda society', and emphasising Daly's 'exceptional personal standing', the editors were careful to insist that no general organisational lesson could be drawn 'and we certainly aren't urging readers to form new parties or leagues'.<sup>36</sup>

Daly's next approach, for funds and practical help to stand as the West Fife candidate in the 1959 general election, required a more elaborate justification, and caused considerable debate among the *Reasoner* group. West Fife was an unusual seat with a strong radical tradition; stronghold of Willie Gallacher, Clydeside legend and one of only two Communist MPs, who had held it from 1935 until defeated by Labour in 1950; he subsequently acquired a status as 'Grand Old Man' of the Party and served as its President from 1956-1963.<sup>37</sup> With no chance of a Tory win, Daly thought an electorate that regarded Labour as 'the lesser of three evils' might give a decent showing to a 'militant socialist alternative', and though he wouldn't defeat Labour incumbent William Hamilton, beating the CP's Bill Lauchlan in a seat so freighted with Party symbolism might 'boost the morale of the real left'.<sup>38</sup> In the event Daly's respectable 4886 votes were mainly at the expense of Lauchlan, beaten into last place, but Hamilton's majority was reduced by some 1300. The role of New Leftists in his campaign was considerable. Saville and Thompson had developed great regard for Daly. 'He is the most impressive industrial worker I have ever met', wrote Saville, though Thompson seems to have established the closer personal relationship.<sup>39</sup> Noting in a letter the importance of Daly's influence on his own perspectives, Thompson perhaps saw in him an exemplar of the type of working class leader he celebrated in 'Homage to Tom Maguire', the 'gifted propagandist and trade unionist' who could demonstrate 'qualities of mass leadership and the rare ability to relate theory to practice without losing sight of theory in the press of events.'<sup>40</sup> There was another factor at play too: Daly had been approached by Gerry Healy and Peter Fryer's Trotskyist 'Newsletter' group with an offer to fund his campaign, provide full time local campaigners,

cars and loudspeakers, with ‘no strings attached’, and wrote to the Reasoner editors for their advice.<sup>41</sup> The two initially sent separate responses, with Thompson more unequivocal than Saville that this offer should be rejected. Healy’s apparatus, he said, was doctrinaire and authoritarian, felt ‘no loyalty to the movements with which they associate or with the working people’, and were simply out to strengthen their own faction. He doubted Daly could accept help without the Newsletter group publicising their role in the campaign, and this would undermine the basis on which Daly wanted to stand. ‘If you could fight, and come near to winning, that would be terrific, but you must do so as a Fife miner and Fife socialist and on the issues of constructive revolutionary socialism and nuclear disarmament, not smash and grab destructivism’.<sup>42</sup>

Daly, it seems, heeded Thompson’s advice, and the Reasoner editors did their best to step into the breach. Thompson offered his services as ‘extra territorial agent gathering together what help we can outside Scotland’ for Daly’s candidacy. Resources were stretched: ‘Brother, I can’t produce a loudspeaker and van’, he wrote in August 1959, but he brokered contacts with the Direct Action Committee of CND, who sent up Will Warren to act as Daly’s election agent, complete with van.<sup>43</sup> Jean McCrindle and other young volunteers mobilised by ULR and the left clubs network also helped out before and after the campaign, and the Reasoner launched an appeal to readers for funds.<sup>44</sup> Daly’s platform was distinctly New Leftish, especially in its linkage of the local to the national and global: new industries locally to reduce dependence on the declining coal industry; more schools and houses; a devolved Scottish parliament; extended public ownership; cuts in military expenditure; support for de-colonisation; and ‘a British lead to give up the H bomb’.<sup>45</sup> This time, the Reasoner editors’ public support was more strongly argued in relation to broader issues of left strategy and tactics, in a characteristically pithy ‘Note on West Fife’ written by Saville. Noting first the ‘intellectual collapse’ of the left and its failure both inside and outside Labour, Saville sought to move the debate on from the ‘in or out of Labour’ dichotomy:

our central problem is the recreation of a vigorous movement for socialism among the ordinary people. This involves both the development of a body of socialist ideas that makes sense in contemporary terms, as well as the translation of these ideas into forms of political and cultural activity that reach out beyond the existing sects and groups. We have set our face against the development of a new political party; both our past history and our present analysis reject this. But if we are to take our ideas into and among our own people in the labour movement, and then beyond the movement to begin to make

socialists from among the rising generations, we shall have to find forms of political work that in part will be traditional but in some respects will be new.

Flexibility and analysis of local possibilities and priorities, he suggested, would guide New Left strategy, not ‘a simple assertion that what is not favoured by the Labour Party organisation is in itself wrong for socialists and the socialist movement. With a Labour Party dominated by Mr. Gaitskell and a world dominated by nuclear weapons, no socialist can give that answer.’<sup>46</sup>

FIG 2 HERE

After the election, Saville and Thompson wrote warm congratulatory letters to Daly, and New Left influence on the League continued to be strong. Thompson urged Daly to have a recruiting drive, challenge Communist Party influence on workers in one or more pits, and get more local people – especially women - involved in political education.<sup>47</sup> The League hosted meetings ‘against the bomb’ with visiting New Left speakers, and produced an accessible, even chatty, monthly publication ‘The socialist’ (motto: ‘peace, freedom, prosperity’) as well as Daly’s own Balingry Bulletin. While local issues, particularly pit closures and critiques of Labour policy on the mining industry, featured heavily, a manifesto and declaration of policy were drafted in which broader New Left themes again predominated (unilateralism, abolition of racial and religious discrimination; common ownership), and in 1960 associate membership was offered to socialists outside Fife.<sup>48</sup> The League, however, remained tiny: a 1960 minute book recorded paid up members as just 32 locally and 25 associate, though the Socialist was recorded as having a circulation of some 200.<sup>49</sup> By this time ULR and NR had merged as *New Left Review*, the clubs network was reaching its height, and the tactic of standing independent unilateralist candidates in electoral fights was spreading (though controversial both within the New Left and CND). Daly was a key figure in efforts (discussed below) to link the northern clubs and organise a ‘new left industrial wing’ and accepted Thompson’s invitation to join the New Left Board. In 1960 he summarised the journey of the League in the new NLR: the optimistic note he struck about its prospects, however, was to be shortlived.<sup>50</sup>

FIG 3 HERE

Daly’s efforts to broaden the League reflected his hope that the New Left might become the basis for ‘a new socialist force on a national scale’.<sup>51</sup> But Saville and Thompson, to whom he looked for orientation, were increasingly preoccupied, first with plans for the merger, itself

precipitated by their overwork and inability to secure the NR financially, then – and even before the merger was completed – by serious strains on their own relations and those within the broader New Left. Nor did they agree about the political situation that faced them. Saville, more sober about the prospects for an independent New Left movement than Thompson, wanted to focus on building the profile of the New Left in industry, and was more attracted than Thompson to joint work with Labour leftists. Thompson's (perhaps inflated) sense of the possibilities raised by expansion of the clubs and CND contributed to his intense frustration with the working methods of those charged with production of the new NLR, which could never live up to his expectations. Through 1959 and 1960 the two had some angry exchanges, especially over Thompson's attitude to NLR and its editor Stuart Hall.<sup>52</sup> In terms of Daly's developing perspectives, the broader, national focus he sought for the League made little sense without an effective national organisation to link up with. Although the League enjoyed some modest further electoral success when George MacDonald won a District Council seat in 1961, its fortunes were dwindling. Evaporating too were Daly's hopes in the New Left.

In March 1962, amidst the breakdown of the New Left board, Daly sought Thompson's help with plans for a new 'society of socialists', as precursor to a new national organisation. Preoccupied with the New Left's internal crisis, Thompson ruled himself out. While professing himself 'a great deal closer to the view that a new socialist party should be formed than ever before', he doubted that the time was right, suggesting instead 'a national socialist society, uninhibited by Labour constitutionalism, waging a guerrilla war on the left of the party, supporting by election or even local council candidatures where and when the circumstances dictate this tactic against the Right'. Privately, he counselled Daly against collaboration with John Rex, mooted as a possible chair for such an initiative, advising Daly that if he was serious about it he was better placed to take on the task himself.<sup>53</sup> By autumn 1962 Daly had changed his position. In a confidential circular he told friends the League was in dire straits, its journal suspended for lack of funds and his own priorities shifting elsewhere. Interest in it, he admitted, had virtually disappeared, a situation he blamed partly on its limitations as a purely local phenomenon. He himself, he said, was beginning to think the immediate duty of socialists was to work to secure a Labour victory in the following year's general election; for the left this meant no independent candidates, getting into Labour and behind the best Labour candidates and pushing 'like hell'.<sup>54</sup> Though his proposal to disband the League was not finally effected until 1964, this effectively marked its end.

The fate of the League highlights difficulties the New Left had in reconciling its orientation to the grassroots and local with an impatience to contribute to a national organisational breakthrough.<sup>55</sup> Insisting that a ‘vigorous movement for socialism among the ordinary people’, must come ‘from below’, it recognised that socialist consciousness was not latent but must be created by patient propaganda, education, agitation, leadership and by the connection of local issues to the national and global. Daly’s was a rare experiment that tried to do just this, and in a working class context, but as Thompson recognised in his reply to Daly’s proposal to dissolve the League, the lack of link-up to an effective UK-wide political force limited its capacity to ‘deliver the goods’ on pressing issues of pit closures, unemployment and local economic strategy, while its unilateralist and international perspectives could seem abstract and of limited local relevance. Yet at the same time Thompson suggested (as Daly himself had in a prescient 1961 NLR piece ‘Scotland on the dole’) that the rising support for the ‘Tartan Tories’ of the Scottish National Party signalled that space might yet open for an independent left alternative to channel Scots discontent. ‘IF from your position in the Scottish NUM and Fife (& presumably LP)’ Thompson wrote, Daly was able to put pressure on a Wilson government to ‘introduce new industries in Fife under new forms of municipal or cooperative control’ or to ‘introduce new experimental forms of democratic control in selected pits’ this would give ‘real leadership to the movement in the country’.<sup>56</sup> Thompson, then, remained convinced of the need for the kind of localised ‘socialist independence’ movement represented by the FSL, not least to give ‘political clarity’ to ‘the Fife people themselves’, but recognised that with prospects for sustaining and linking up such initiatives remote, such a marginal role was unlikely to satisfy Daly.<sup>57</sup> After Labour’s election victory, the disbandment of the clubs network and the New Left board, he told Daly that ‘socialists like ourselves in the next 5 years are likely to be able to do more in local/industrial or intellectual-cultural work that in the national political field.’<sup>58</sup> Daly had already decided his only course was an ‘uphill fight’ inside Labour to ‘strengthen political consciousness among the trade unions and local parties’.<sup>59</sup> Elected to the Scottish area NUM executive as a full-time officer in 1962, he joined the Labour Party, and after election to the national executive in 1965, left Fife for Hemel Hempstead. He retained New Left links, serving on the Russell Tribunal investigating war crimes in Vietnam, before beating Joe Gormley to become NUM general secretary in 1968 and leading the miners in industrial action in 1972 and 1974.

FIG 4 HERE

## **New Left industrial work**

If Daly more than anyone personified a Thompsonian ideal of rank-and-file socialist activism, militant, internationalist and independent from the ‘sects’, the League’s example proved difficult to replicate. Saville, at least, was under no illusion about this, warning Thompson not to overstate the importance of Daly’s electoral fight – ‘we have too often in the past mistaken our own enthusiasm for a real movement’.<sup>60</sup> Though supportive of Daly, his scepticism about the possibilities for an independent New Left movement led him to prioritise a longer-run effort to develop New Left positions within the institutions of the labour movement. Key figures for this endeavour included Ken Alexander and John Hughes, Michael Barratt Brown, Royden Harrison in Sheffield, Ken Coates in Nottingham, and Tony Topham in Hull. All were or had been involved in adult and worker education and/or the CP, many were key contributors to New Left work on political economy. The political networks of the Reasoners also included a number of ex-CP activists and union militants like Leeds garment workers Jim and Gertie Roche, Derbyshire NUM secretary Bert Wynn and graduates of the Workers Educational Association like Dorothy and Joe Greenald. New Left sponsorship of a wide network of local left clubs, (which reached its peak in 1959-60 with some forty clubs and up to three thousand individual members), the prospect of merger with ULR and the take-off of CND extended collaborations and enabled joint work with the unilateralist left in the Labour Party and union movement.

The northern and Scottish clubs, (there were clubs in Bradford, Hull, Manchester, Nottingham, Sheffield, Preston, Newcastle, Huddersfield, Carlisle, Edinburgh, Aberdeen) were identified as an important connecting network for industrial work. This was not their only or even main focus; though material on the independent histories of the northern clubs is scarce and features hardly at all in histories of the New Left, the involvement of figures such as the left-wing playwright Trevor Griffiths in the Manchester club, and scattered personal recollections from elsewhere suggests a lively and varied picture.<sup>61</sup> Still, for some of the NR group, their utility as a springboard for a ‘New Left industrial wing’ was an opportunity. As well as an overall clubs coordinating committee reporting to the New Left board, a northern clubs committee was established. An industrial conference took place in April 1959, with the participation of some thirty trade union officials.<sup>62</sup> Toward the end of the same year, as Saville and Thompson debated the merits of intensifying links with Labour leftists around

*Tribune* and Victory for Socialism (VFS) on industrial work, Saville asked to be relieved of some New Left board duties ‘because the industrial work is growing and I shall have to give a lot of time to the bulletin in the next six months’.<sup>63</sup> The bulletin in question was *Searchlight* (subtitled ‘a new left industrial bulletin’) a monthly produced and edited by Jim Roche, which was circulated among union contacts in early 1960. Comprising a mix of short pieces by active trade unionists and New Leftists with editorial content by Roche, coverage during a brief four month run included the battle over clause IV in the Labour Party, arguments for a forty hour week and for economic democracy, and a report from an industrial conference held in London in January 1960 under joint auspices of VFS and the New Left. A New Left slant was evident in arguments on these topics and in inclusion of material on international issues; exploitation by ‘the great imperial corporations’ of workers in former British colonies in Africa (‘the struggle of the African peoples is similar to that of the British working class’), and unilateralism. ‘We shall try to give you the kind of information that active workers who haven’t all that much time for reading require in their daily round’, noted a ‘letter to readers’, and ‘at the same time ... a sense and a feeling of or socialist future, without which the shopfloor struggles too often lose their meaning’.<sup>64</sup> Both *NLR* and New Left pamphlets (Hughes and Alexander’s *Socialist Wages Plan*, Michael Barratt Brown’s *Who are the Tories?*, Jim Mortimer’s *The Forty Hour Week*, John Rex’s *Britain without the Bomb*) were promoted.

The northern clubs also played a central role in running a New Left fringe presence at the 1960 Labour conference in Scarborough, with production of a daily news-sheet ‘This week’ distributed to conference attendees. Hailed in *NLR* as ‘an unqualified success’, this sense of having played a role in securing the unilateralist resolution at conference released new energies around the possibilities of agitational work within the labour movement.<sup>65</sup> On October 22 1960, a meeting in the Manchester left coffee house planned publication of a (new) printed industrial bulletin, study schools and conferences. Attendees included Thompson, Daly, Jim Roche, John Robottom (clubs coordinator) Stan Orme (then a Bevanite Labour councillor, later MP) and Eric Heffer (then president of the Liverpool trades council, later Labour MP for Walton).<sup>66</sup> The minutes record Thompson urging the need for an ‘organisational breakthrough’, Daly making the case for an ‘agitational’ journal *for* industrial workers (as opposed to an ‘industrial workers’ journal’), and agreement on set-up of a dedicated New Left industrial committee. An ad hoc group was formed from those present, with others to be asked to join.<sup>67</sup> This committee was to be separate from the left clubs, but



would liaise with them. Orme, Heffer and Roche were deputised to attend the Northern left clubs conference planned for December 1960 in order to propose ways of strengthening the industrial work of the New Left. Following the Manchester meeting the attendees went on to Wortley Hall for a weekend school for miners and their communities on 'The politics of coal', with Ken Alexander and Daly the main speakers. As for the published NLR, though the plan was certainly for the journal and industrial committee activities to complement each other, in practice coordination was haphazard and coverage reliant on a few individuals. Stuart Hall wrote to Daly in November 1959 soliciting a piece on 'pithead relations' and detailing plans for a series on nationalisation and workers control. On the latter, a 'frontal assault' was planned, starting with a historical framework to set the scene for a 'major piece' from Alexander and Hughes, alongside reflection on the nature of a socialist conception of work.<sup>68</sup>

While several of these pieces materialised, plans for sustained industrial work at shop-floor level came to little.<sup>69</sup> Efforts to re-found an industrial journal stalled, and in a 1961 report to the New Left Board, Thompson described the industrial committee, which Heffer had agreed to chair, as having been 'inactive'.<sup>70</sup> The same report proposed that Heffer should join the New Left board instead, reported that John Hughes had agreed to be industrial adviser to NLR, and that Michael Barratt Brown was willing to attempt reformation of an industrial committee. The crisis that overtook the New Left not long after, leading to the reorientation of NLR and eventual dissolution of the board, made these plans abortive, but in truth, momentum had already stalled. Part of the problem, as with New Left commitment to the FSL, was simple incapacity and overwork, but there was also a lack of clarity and agreement over what was truly distinctive in the New Left's industrial work as well as how to progress it organisationally. Saville and Thompson repeatedly considered channelling such efforts through already established Labour left groups (mainly Michael Foot's *Tribune* and Victory for Socialism), but while Saville inclined to this, Thompson thought New Left industrial perspectives 'distinct and more specialised', was wary of being drawn into inner Labour factionalism and preferred to retain an independent base (though he at the same time confessed himself unsuited to leading on this and in late 1959 advised Saville to 'let [industrial work] ride' until a proper committee could be formed.)<sup>71</sup>

As Mark Wickham Jones notes, evidence for impact within the trades union movement for New Left perspectives is limited.<sup>72</sup> As his and the present study show, however, this was not due to any neglect of the importance of economic analysis and industrial policy, nor for

want of considerable effort on the part of New Leftists. Nor should it be too glibly ascribed to an inability to bridge a divide between the supposedly intellectual, middle class milieu of New Leftists and the working class constituencies they sought to reach. No doubt there were many who found New Left positions esoteric and over-intellectualized,<sup>73</sup> but the categories of working class militant and New Leftist were not mutually exclusive, especially within the ex-CP Reasoner cohort – Daly was the outstanding example. More relevant, perhaps, is the difficulty of the task the New Left faced in staking out a clear space in a crowded field, lacking the ideological discipline and party apparatus of its CP, Trotskyist and Labour competitors. Also key is the fact that New Left perspectives contained much that challenged established practices and cultures within the trades union and broader labour movement, including critiques of ‘Labourist’ defensiveness, sectionalism, insularity and bureaucratism; of free collective bargaining and of the structures and methods of the nationalised industries. This agenda could be a hard sell on the shop-floor, and while New Leftists realised this, they lacked the capacity and resources to do much about it, and their network of sympathetic contacts was small and under-resourced. Even where links were made in specific unions, these did not always prove deep or lasting. Whether there was also implicit tension between the practical, policy-focused interventions of the Hughes and Alexander type, and the uncompromising critiques of Labourism being developed for example by Ralph Miliband, is a moot point. Hughes and Alexander were clear that the measures they proposed were part of an ultimately transformative agenda (a wages plan, they suggested, would ‘probe the limits of reform’ within capitalism), but by the late 1960s Thompson would find their developing arguments too ‘gradualist’ for inclusion in the May Day Manifesto.<sup>74</sup> Early New Left efforts to weave different types and levels of analysis together into a transformative and explicitly socialist perspective were aborted by the polarisation of the milieu.<sup>75</sup> So too was the effort to coordinate a grassroots New Left industrial wing where these arguments could be pressed and tested.

### **Education and ‘workers’ control’**

Two linked themes that survived the break-up of the early New Left were worker education and the emphasis on industrial democracy and workers’ control. Work of the ‘outreach and education’ type was where many New Leftists had come from, and perhaps where they were really most comfortable. After a period of re-composition and reorientation (during which Anderson’s NLR established new coordinates, Hall and Hoggart founded the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies and Saville and Miliband set up *Socialist Register*

as a kind of successor to the *New Reasoner* – though without Thompson) these themes also provided a basis for renewed collaborations between various New Left strands.

One development of note was the establishment of Centres for Socialist Education in 1965. Impelled by gathering disillusion with the ‘retrograde direction being taken by the Labour Government’ Ken Coates and Ralph Miliband convened a small gathering of socialists ‘including academics, trade unionists and other national and local spokesmen of the left’ to discuss steps to overcome a sense of ‘fragmentation and demoralisation’, as well as produce a coherent critique of Wilsonism.<sup>76</sup> Miliband chaired a founding meeting in October 1965, at which the settled aim was to initiate and service a network of local socialist educational enterprises under the convenorship of Ken Coates, with a steering committee as backup. Plans for regional then national conferences were mooted, and it was decided that membership of centres would be open to any socialist. Coates produced a draft manifesto (headed Society for Industrial Democracy and Socialist Education - SIDSE), which included as key aims reuniting industrial and political struggles; popularising the idea of workers committees, and forging solidarity links with labour movements elsewhere. Tony Topham and Miliband worked on a statement of aims and objectives to be published in NLR. From the start there was a sense that a solely educational focus might be too abstract: Miliband was asked in November 1965 to add a sentence to his draft to make it clear that the Centres for Socialist Education would service the union movement: ‘this work of socialist education does not mean remoteness from the immediate struggles in which trade unionists and others in the labour movement are engaged – we intend the work of the centre to be of direct assistance in these struggles’.<sup>77</sup> The strategic backdrop was set out by Miliband: ‘The question is not at present one of parties and political combinations, but of a broad and sustained effort of socialist education, cutting across existing boundaries, free from formula-mongering, and carried on with patience and intelligence by socialists wherever in the Labour movement or outside they may be situated. Such an effort is not an alternative to an immediate involvement in concrete struggle but an essential element of it.’<sup>78</sup>

As with Forum and the left clubs, CSE’s were an arena in which socialists with varying allegiances worked closely together. There were figures of a broadly Trotskyist persuasion – Coates, founder of the International Group, expelled from the Labour Party in 1965 - is the most obvious example, Peter Sedgwick of the International Socialists another – who made crucial contributions within the New Left. Other factors - the general radicalisation of the mid 1960s, the greater openness of the younger NLR group to new Marxist influences and to Fourth

International Trotskyism, and a developing interest in Third World struggles on the non-Labour left - also made collaboration easier than perhaps it had been in the immediate aftermath of 1956. The CSEs then were by no means a specifically New Left initiative, though there were obvious continuities from the clubs, and figures from both New Left 'generations' were involved as speakers and organisers. Local groups were formed (Coates recorded some 30 expressions of interest in membership from different towns), there were 'read-ins' on incomes policy and a proposal to establish a bureau for Industrial Democracy within the general ambit of the centre. As the centres developed the initial broad educational focus was sharpened to a more specific role of supporting rank-and-file movements for workers' control. This was in part a result of pressure from figures like Coates, Topham and Sedgwick, keen that socialist education must not be seen as 'the job of 'providing theory'', but rather as presenting material useful to the immediate needs of union militants.

FIG 5 HERE

By April 1966, when the Steering Group took stock of progress, the CSE had an estimated membership of 150 concentrated in eight cities, and reckoned some 500 regular attendees as local centre events.<sup>79</sup> Only three of four centres were judged to be strong enough to provide the service role to the labour movement that was sought, and at last one event had had to be cancelled for lack of support. Events and schools on the theme of workers' control were proving the most successful, and the financial position was reported to be tight. The CSE convened the Fifth National Conference on Worker's Control in Coventry in June 1967. Conference proceedings show that attendees were drawn from the union movement, New Left, Labour Party, Tribune, IS, and student radicals, and that the conference featured a lively exchange between CLR James and EP Thompson. Thompson had come along to promote a different initiative – the May Day Manifesto, the first iteration of which had just been published, principally written by Raymond Williams, but with involvement from other New Leftists. Thompson described the manifesto to the assembled delegates as an attempt to offer 'a comprehensive analysis of the crisis in which the left finds itself in this country', with the aim to unify the left and work up to a national convention.<sup>80</sup>

By late 1967, then, on the eve of another Labour conference in Scarborough, there was renewed recognition of the (perennial) need to combine forces on the left, albeit in a somewhat different political context. In the proceedings of a teach-in, Williams argued for a more

‘connected socialism’ that would link up different struggles.<sup>81</sup> The May Day Manifesto, however, would prove no more able to accomplish this in a sustained way than any of its New Left predecessors. Though the 1968 Penguin edition sold 10,000 copies, and it briefly sustained local discussion and action groups, by the time the National Convention of the Left was held in 1969 the politics of the Manifesto had been overtaken by the events of 1968. With its broad focus and partial grasp of the mood of new agencies and possibilities, there was a transitional feel about the Manifesto; it was more or less rapidly subsumed by the more student-centred and avowedly revolutionary politics that came to fore in ‘68. If the Manifesto was a product of the ‘New Left university intelligentsia’, it nevertheless partly cannibalised the more didactic elements of the CSE project. The CSE morphed into the more successful Institute for Workers’ Control in 1968, an initiative that retained links with and support of New Leftists, but was by no means their sole product.<sup>82</sup>

## **Conclusion**

New Left efforts to propagandise and organise among working class constituencies were more serious and persistent than is usually recognised. They were also more central to the project of the early New Left than most presentations have allowed. Not only did the New Left make a distinct intellectual contribution to British political economy, it also, and crucially, attempted to inform and to test its analyses in practical political and mobilising efforts. Certainly, the difficulty of pursuing both ‘intellectual’ and ‘movement’ work, and repeated arguments about which should be prioritised contributed to its disintegration, but there is a deeper sense in which the effort to fuse them was essential to the self-conception of the milieu, at least for many of the key players. Political responsibility, as Thompson put it, was responsibility not to ideas, attitudes or positions, but to people involved in concrete struggles. The close orientation of early New Left work to the immediate political context, and specifically Labour debates around unilateralism and common ownership from 1957-61 meant that when the positions it argued for were marginalised within Labour, the New Left experienced a sense of demoralisation that contributed to its own crisis. Anderson’s NLR would learn that lesson, renouncing any directly mobilising role on the British political scene in favour of a gradual project to transform British (high) intellectual culture. Yet despite this rather grand disavowal of mobilising ambitions, and the widespread notion of a rupture between ‘first’ and ‘second’ New Lefts, mobilising efforts resumed after a short hiatus and

were contributed to by both ‘generations’, a phenomenon that further demonstrates the limited utility of temporal and polarising narratives of New Left development.

The full reach and impact of New Left activist work is difficult to evidence: the diffuse structure of the milieu means, for example, that material on the clubs is hard to trace, and such written sources as exist are widely scattered in collections of personal papers. New Left activism was not, of course, confined to the initiatives discussed in this essay, which has sought to make more visible one particularly neglected aspect of its practice. It is likely that there are many New Left histories still to be uncovered, in the independent lives of the clubs and regional centres, as well as the biographies of people whose names never featured on an NLR editorial board. One striking aspect of researching the New Left beyond its journals is the extent to which it turns up lines of influence, personal connection, linkages and overlaps between groups and events too often treated separately. The local and municipal socialisms that would have an impact in cities like Sheffield and Liverpool owe much to individuals whose involvement in left clubs and discussions was an important part of their political education.<sup>83</sup> The New Left’s continuation and development of traditions of worker and trade union education seems likely to have been a critical, if unquantifiable, influence on careers less stellar than Daly’s, as well as influencing the establishment of institutions such as Northern College, founded by Michael Barratt Brown, whose own career, as with those of Hughes, Alexander, Saville, Coates and numerous others, carried forward this important aspect of the New Left’s legacy. The recovery of such histories has the potential to reshape historiography of the New Left, challenging standard assessments of political inefficacy and suggesting new avenues and methodologies for research venturing beyond the usual sources and key figures to address the New Left’s insertion in broader cultural and political settings.

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## NOTES AND REFERENCES

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Acknowledgments: research for this article was partially funded by the Barry Amiel and Norman Melburn Trust. For comments on earlier versions thanks to Ben Jones, Camilla Schofield, Nick Stevenson, Andrew Whitehead and Mark Wickham Jones. Thanks also to Richard Saville, Ross Speer and archivists Claire Weatherall and Carole Wright.

<sup>1</sup> Raphael Samuel, quoted in *Out of Apathy: voices of the New Left thirty years on*, London, 1989, p.3.

<sup>2</sup> Stuart Hall ‘The First New Left’ in Robin Archer et al (eds.) *Out of Apathy: voices of the New Left 30 years on*, London, 1989, p.13.

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<sup>3</sup> The best known studies are Michael Kenny, *The First New Left: British Intellectuals after Stalin*, London, 1995 and Lin Chun *The British New Left*, Edinburgh, 1993.

<sup>4</sup> For a nuanced recent account see Wade Matthews, 'History and historiography of the New Left in Britain' in his *The New Left, national identity and the break-up of Britain*, Leiden, Brill, 2013; also Holger Nehring "'Out of Apathy": genealogies and meanings of the British "New Left" in a Transnational Context, 1956-1962' in Martin Klimke and Joaquin Scharloth (eds.) *Between Prague Spring and French May. Opposition and Revolt in Europe, 1960-1980*, New York, 2011, pp. 15-31.

<sup>5</sup> Michael Kenny's assessment that 'In Britain, the New Left became a major force within the world of theory, but proved a failure in the world of politics' ('Habits of the mind', *Public Policy Research*, September-November 2011, p.133) is a more uncompromising judgement than that ventured in his 1995 book, but broadly expresses a consensus shared by scholars and some protagonists of the New Left.

<sup>6</sup> Lawrence Black, *Redefining British Politics: culture, consumerism and participation 1954-70*, London, 2010, is an example that registers the New Left's cultural politics, though regarding it largely as having failed.

<sup>7</sup> Significant examples of recent work in this vein are Thomas Dowling 'In Spite of History: New Leftism in Britain 196-1979', unpublished PhD thesis, Sheffield, 2015, and Ben Jones and Camilla Schofield, "'Whatever community is, this is not it": Notting Hill and the Reconstruction of "Race" in Britain after 1958,' forthcoming.

<sup>8</sup> Dorothy Thompson, 'On the Trail of the New Left' *New Left Review* 1/215, Jan/Feb, 1996.

<sup>9</sup> Perry Anderson, 'The Left in the Fifties', *New Left Review* 1/29, Jan./Feb., 1965, pp.16-17.

<sup>10</sup> There are a few exceptions. Kenny, 1995, has a chapter on political economy but does not link it closely to the New Left's activist efforts. For recent assessments of New Left economic thinking see Mark Wickham Jones 'The debate about wages: the New Left, the Labour party, and incomes policy', *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 18:1, February 2013, also 'The New Left's economic model: the challenge to Labour Party orthodoxy' *Renewal*, Vol. 21 No. 1 2013, and Madeleine Davis, 'Arguing affluence: New Left contributions to the socialist debate, 1957-1963, *Twentieth Century British History*, 23:4, 2012.

<sup>11</sup> A point well made by Matthews, 2013, p.6, especially in relation to a 'provincial vs metropolitan' tension often over-exaggerated.

<sup>12</sup> It followed on from *The Reasoner*, a duplicated inner-party discussion journal produced in the aftermath of the Khrushchev revelations, whose unauthorised publication caused Saville and Thompson to face disciplinary sanctions. See Madeleine Davis, 'The New Reasoner and the early New Left' in David Howell et al (eds) *John Saville Commitment and History*, London, 2011; John Saville, *Memoirs from the Left*, London, 2003. The three issues of *The Reasoner* are re-published in Paul Flewers and John McIlroy, *1956: John Saville, EP Thompson and the Reasoner*, London, 2016.

<sup>13</sup> On the importance of adult education as background to the work of Thompson and others, see essays in Richard Taylor (ed.) *Beyond the Walls: 50 years of continuing education at the University of Leeds 1946-1996*, Leeds, 1996.

<sup>14</sup> *New Reasoner* 1, Summer 1957 editorial, p.2.

<sup>15</sup> Novelist Doris Lessing and poet Randall Swingler were among the first recruits to the *New Reasoner* editorial board; there was also a shortlived supplement in the form of the 'Rhyming Reasoner', a poetical parody of the CPGB crisis, produced by Ron Meek and George Houston.

<sup>16</sup> For a flavour of the early ULR atmosphere, see 'Document: Minutes of the Oxford University Socialist Club Executive Committee, 17 October 1956 – 27 February 1957', *History Workshop Journal* (2006) 62 (1): 205-213, also personal recollections by Jean McCrindle and Rod Prince in the same issue.

<sup>17</sup> Stuart Hall, 'A Sense of Classlessness', *Universities and Left Review*, 5 (1958), pp.26–32.

Thompson's reply was 'Commitment in Politics', *ULR*, 6 (1959), pp.50–55.

<sup>18</sup> For a fuller discussion see Madeleine Davis, 'Rethinking class: the lineage of the Socialist Register' *Socialist Register* 2014.

<sup>19</sup> Wright Mills, C. 'Letter to the New Left' *NLR* 1/5, 1960.

<sup>20</sup> *Industry and Society: Labour's Policy on Future Public Ownership*, 1957; Anthony Crosland, *The Future of Socialism* (London, 1956).

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<sup>21</sup> Hughes organised extramural classes for Sheffield steelworkers and then moved to Ruskin as a lecturer in industrial relations. He founded Ruskin's Trade Union Research Unit, advised the TUC on economic strategy during the 1960s and was later principal of Ruskin. Kenneth Alexander lectured at Leeds, Sheffield and Aberdeen before becoming Chair in Economics at Strathclyde. He played a major role in Scottish political and economic life, including stints as chair of Govan Shipbuilders, the Highlands and Islands Development Board and the Committee on Adult Education in Scotland. Michael Barratt Brown also worked at Sheffield University's extra mural department from 1959-1976, leading on developing day release courses for miners and steelworkers. He later founded Northern College.

<sup>22</sup> 'The Insiders', *ULR*, 3 (1957), Michael Barratt Brown, 'The Controllers' I, *ULR*, 5 (1958), 53-61; II, *ULR*, 6 (1959), 38-41; III, *ULR* 7 (1959), 43-49, John Hughes and Ken Alexander, 'A Socialist Wages Plan', *ULR/New Reasoner* pamphlet, February 1959. For the broader New Left analysis see Ralph Miliband, 'The Transition to the Transition', *New Reasoner*, 6 (1958); Michael Barratt Brown, 'Plan for Progress: Labour's Economic Policy', *ULR*, 6 (1959) pp.12-18; 'Polemic on the Wages Plan', *New Reasoner*, 10 (1959), 74-80; Stuart Hall, 'Crosland Territory', *NLR*, 1 (1960); Charles Taylor, 'What's Wrong with Capitalism?', *NLR*, 1 (1960); John Hughes, 'The Commanding Heights', *NLR*, 1 (1960), 11-19; John Hughes, 'Nationalisation in the Mixed Economy', Fabian Tract No. 328 (1960); John Hughes, 'Socialism for the 1960s' Tribune pamphlet (1960); Royden Harrison, 'Retreat from Industrial Democracy', *NLR*, 1 (1960), 32-38.

<sup>23</sup> The Insiders, p.59.

<sup>24</sup> Hughes, 'Commanding Heights', p.17.

<sup>25</sup> John Hughes, 'New Left economic policy' in Robin Archer et al (eds.) *Out of Apathy: voices of the New Left 30 years on*, London, 1989, p.98.

<sup>26</sup> The term 'Labour New Left' is used in Colin Leys and Leo Panitch, *The end of Parliamentary Socialism*, London, 2001. For New Left influence on Labour's economic thinking more broadly see Wickham Jones, 2013 op. cit., and *Economic Strategy and the Labour Party: Politics and Policy-Making, 1970-83* London, 1996.

<sup>27</sup> Letter from Thompson to Daly, 11 October, 1959, Papers of Lawrence Daly, Warwick Modern Records Centre: MRC MSS 302/3/13.

<sup>28</sup> For a sense of Daly's character and formidable intellect, see 'A canny lad for a' that', interview in *The Guardian* Aug 23 1979; 'How a car crash changed the life of Lawrence Daly', Sunday Express May 23 1979, and the obituary by Jean McCrindle, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2009/may/30/obituary-lawrence-daly>

<sup>29</sup> Draft letter from Daly to the *Daily Worker*, 20 June 1956, MRC MSS 302/3/3, Daly papers.

<sup>30</sup> Daly to Thompson and Saville, 14 August 1956, U DJS/1/71, papers of John Saville, Hull University Archives, Hull History Centre.

<sup>31</sup> Daly to Saville 22 September 1956, U DJS/1/60, Saville papers.

<sup>32</sup> Letter, 2 March 1957, MRC MSS 302/3/12.

<sup>33</sup> Thompson to Daly, 8 October 1957, MRC MSS 302/3/12.

<sup>34</sup> Thompson to Daly, 2 April 1958, MRC MSS 302/3/12.

<sup>35</sup> 'A message to the electors from Lawrence Daly', leaflet, May 1958, MRC MSS 302/3/12. In the 1959 general election leaflet, the 'message from the universities' was also signed by Michael Kullman and Christopher Hill. MRC MSS 302/3/9.

<sup>36</sup> Letter to our readers, NR 5, Summer 1958, p.130.

<sup>37</sup> Kevin Morgan, *International Communism and the cult of the individual*, London, 2017, p.102.

<sup>38</sup> Daly to Saville, 23 March 1959, U DJS/ 1/27, Saville papers.

<sup>39</sup> Saville to Peter Worsley 17 September 1959 U DJS/1/27 Saville papers. Thompson visited Daly in Fife in 1957 and Daly and his family visited the Thompsons at their holiday cottage in Wales, see Thompson to Saville, 17 July 1959, U DJS/1/73, Saville papers.

<sup>40</sup> Thompson, 'Homage to Tom Maguire', reprinted in Cal Winslow (ed), *EP Thompson and the Making of the New Left*, London, 2014, p. 265. For Thompson's role in the League see Christos Efsthathiou, 'EP Thompson, the early New Left and the Fife Socialist League', *Labour History Review*, Vol 81 No 1, 2016, p.44.

<sup>41</sup> Daly to Saville, 23 March 1959, U DJS/1/27 Saville papers.

<sup>42</sup> Thompson to Daly, 26 March 1959, U DJS/1/27, Saville papers.



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- <sup>43</sup> Thompson to Daly, 27 August and 31 August 1959, MRC MSS 302/3/13.
- <sup>44</sup> A record in Saville's papers gives the sum raised as £109 11s, with £45 of that from Joe Greenald U DJS/1/27. Thompson also took an ad in Tribune for funds to cover costs of Daly's campaign.
- <sup>45</sup> Parliamentary Election 1959, Lawrence Daly leaflet, MRC, MSS 302/2/9.
- <sup>46</sup> Saville, J., 'A note on West Fife', NR 10, Autumn 1959.
- <sup>47</sup> Thompson to Daly, 11 October 1959. MRC MSS/302/3/13.
- <sup>48</sup> 'Dear Friend' circular from Daly, U DJS/1/72, Saville papers.
- <sup>49</sup> Notebook titled Fife Socialist League, MRC MSS/302/3/10.
- <sup>50</sup> Daly 'Fife Socialist League', NLR 1/4 1960.
- <sup>51</sup> Daly to 'Peter' 26 July 1964, MRC MSS 302/3/4.
- <sup>52</sup> See letters between the two in U DJS 1/72, especially Saville to Thompson 30 November 1959, Saville to 'Ralph' [Miliband] 10 January 1960, Thompson to Saville 12 May (n.d), Saville papers.
- <sup>53</sup> Thompson to Daly, 16 March, 1962, MRC MSS 302/3/4.
- <sup>54</sup> Daly circular, 12 September 1962 MRC MSS 302/3/18.
- <sup>55</sup> A problem also noted by Kenny, 1995, p.38.
- <sup>56</sup> Thompson to Daly, 31 December 1963, MRC MSS 302/3/4. A later letter, around the time of the May Day Manifesto, contained an interesting reflection on the position of the miners. Noting that the outlook for the miners as a unified force was bleak, Thompson once more recommended pioneering experiments on cooperative and locally based public ownership. 'Economically –doomed' groups can sometimes – like the handworkers of chartist times – play the most progressive and conscious of roles'. Thompson to Daly 11 November, n.d but probably 1967, MSS 302/3/7.
- <sup>57</sup> Thompson to Daly 29 September 1962, MRC MSS 302/3/18.
- <sup>58</sup> Thompson to Daly, 31 December 1963, MRC MSS 302/3/4.
- <sup>59</sup> Letter from Daly addressed 'Dear Peter', 26 July 1964, MRC MSS 302/3/4
- <sup>60</sup> Saville to Thompson, 4 April 1958, U DJS/1/70, Saville papers.
- <sup>61</sup> On the Scottish picture see Thompson, W., 'The New Left in Scotland' in Iain MacDougall (ed.) *Essays in Scottish Labour History*, Edinburgh, 1978.
- <sup>62</sup> Kenny, 1995, p.45.
- <sup>63</sup> Saville to Peter and Edward dated 29 November 1959, U DJS/1/72, Saville papers.
- <sup>64</sup> *Searchlight*, Issue 2, 1960, UDJS 4/38, Saville papers.
- <sup>65</sup> 'Letter to readers' NLR 1/6, Sep/Oct 1960.
- <sup>66</sup> Also present were John Kenyon, Bob Alston, William Hannsford. Minutes of New Left industrial committee, Manchester, 22 October 1960, MRC MSS 302/3/3.
- <sup>67</sup> Those to be invited were Barratt Brown, Tom Ryan, Joe Jackson, Len Youle, Norman Atkinson, Bill Hart, and Bert Wynn.
- <sup>68</sup> Hall to Daly, 8 November 1959, MRC MSS 302/3/3.
- <sup>69</sup> See Barratt Brown 'Yugoslavia Revisited' in NLR 1 and 2, 1960; Hughes 'The commanding heights' and Harrison 'Retreat from industrial democracy', both in NLR 1/4, 1960; Butt, D. 'Workers' Control' and Armstrong, D., 'Meaning in work' both in NLR 1/10, 1961. Anderson's early contributions also emphasised industrial democracy, see 'Sweden: Mr Crosland's dreamland' NLR 1/7, 1961.
- <sup>70</sup> Chairman's report to New Left Board, 16 October, n.d but 1961, File U DJS/1/70, Saville papers.
- <sup>71</sup> Thompson to Saville, 7 July and 17 July 1959 U DJS/1/73, Saville papers.
- <sup>72</sup> Wickham Jones, 'The New Left's economic model: the challenge to Labour Party orthodoxy' *Renewal*, Vol. 21 No.1, 2013.
- <sup>73</sup> For a less than sympathetic portrayal of the New Left's industrial efforts via *Searchlight* and Roche, see N. Harding, *Staying Red: why I remain a socialist*, 2005, p. 142-144.
- <sup>74</sup> Thompson to Daly EPT 29 April 1967, MRC MSS 302/3/4. He noted that 'as usual with this end of the post-1956 left we suffer from a crumbling, incoherent, organisationally null centre.'
- <sup>75</sup> Thompson's 'Revolution!' NLR 1/3, 1960 was one of the most important pieces that attempted this – interestingly Thompson later criticised it as attempting to unify incompatible perspectives.
- <sup>76</sup> 12 April 1965, Harvester Press Archive: the Left in Britain, fiche 31 on Centre for Socialist Education, BLPES, LSE. Among the invitees to the discussion were figures from both 'first' and 'second' New Lefts as well as the wider left.
- <sup>77</sup> Centre for Socialist Education statement of aims, NLR 1/35, Jan/Feb, 1966.

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<sup>78</sup> The Labour Government and Beyond' *Socialist Register*, 1966.

<sup>79</sup> CSE steering committee notes April 16, 1966. Fiche 31, Harvester Press Archive: the Left in Britain, BLPES, LSE.

<sup>80</sup> Report of the 5th National Conference on workers control and industrial democracy' Coventry, June 10-11 1967, fiche 32 Harvester Press Archive: the Left in Britain, BLPES, LSE.

<sup>81</sup> Ken Coates, *A future for British Socialism*, Centre for Socialist Education, 1968.

<sup>82</sup> For the IWC, see David Coates and Tony Topham, *Readings and witnesses for workers' control*, Nottingham, Spokesman Books, 2005.

<sup>83</sup> For aspects of this legacy see Martin Boddy and Colin Fudge (eds.) *Local socialism? Labour councils and New Left alternatives*, London, 1984.