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# THE SOCIOLOGICAL IMAGINATION OF THE BRITISH NEW LEFT: “CULTURE” AND THE “MANAGERIAL SOCIETY,” C.1956–1962\*

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*Castigated as theoretically naive by Perry Anderson, or praised as culturally sensitive by later writers, the political thought of the “first New Left” has often been understood in relation to F. R. Leavis’s cultural criticism. This article seeks to reframe the writings of E. P. Thompson, Stuart Hall, Charles Taylor and Alasdair Macintyre from this period as interventions in a fundamentally sociological debate about the nature of capitalism in the managed economy of postwar Britain.*

The Labour Party kept losing elections in the 1950s. In 1951 they lost by sixteen seats, in 1955 by sixty, and the Conservatives won by a hundred-seat margin in the 1959 general election. In the face of these defeats, the party increasingly divided between “revisionists” and “fundamentalists”: Anthony Crosland and Hugh Gaitskell on one side and Anuerin Bevan on the other. International politics seemed only to add to the despair. After suggestions that Stalin’s death in 1953 might help to dissipate Cold War tensions, the crushing of the Hungarian uprising three years later dashed any hopes that Khrushchev would loosen Russia’s grip on its East European satellites. For those on the Labour left, the decade presented

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a period of dismal political losses, while the events of 1956 were remembered by those in the communist camp, like Eric Hobsbawm, as “the political equivalent of a nervous breakdown.”<sup>1</sup>

Confronting these domestic and international crises, an anti-Stalinist and anti-revisionist left wing movement grew up around the journals *New Reasoner* (edited by E. P. Thompson and John Saville) and *Universities and Left Review* (edited by Charles Taylor, Raphael Samuel, Gabriel Pearson and Stuart Hall). Their editorial boards united to form *New Left Review* in 1960. Michael Kenny called this phenomenon the “first New Left.”<sup>2</sup> He dates its beginning to the fallout from the Hungarian uprising in 1956 and marks its end in 1962 when Perry Anderson took over the editorship of *New Left Review*. The intellectual history of the movement has been the subject of a number of contradictory analyses. These studies have been united, however, in placing their emphasis on domestic political failure and on an overwhelming focus on the literary and cultural sources of the New Left’s political thought.

Perry Anderson went a long way toward setting the terms of these debates when he influentially caricatured the left in the 1950s as sociologically naive, and largely untheoretical, little Englanders.<sup>3</sup> Since Anderson, a number of historians have challenged the idea that the influence of literary criticism meant that the world view of the New Left was simplistic. Following the traces of what Wolf Lepenies termed its “concealed sociology,” “left-Leavisism” often emerges as the progenitor of their political thinking—whether for good or ill.<sup>4</sup> Michael Kenny has connected the New Leftists’ ideas about the “totality of social process” and their rejection of seeing culture as “a purely epiphenomenal entity” to F. R. Leavis’s ideas.<sup>5</sup> Dennis Dworkin similarly framed the New Left’s cultural criticism in a

<sup>1</sup> Eric Hobsbawm and Gareth Stedman-Jones, “1956,” *Marxism Today* 30/10 (1986), 19.

<sup>2</sup> Michael Kenny, *The First New Left: British Intellectuals after Stalin* (London, 1995). References to the New Left throughout this paper refer to Kenny’s “first New Left” and the period between 1956 and 1962.

<sup>3</sup> Perry Anderson, “The Left in the Fifties,” *New Left Review*, 1/29 (1965), 3–18, at 17. See also Anderson, “Origins of the Present Crisis,” *New Left Review*, 1/23 (1964), 26–53, esp. 26–8. For a discussion of Anderson’s emphasis on the French example of a properly “intellectual class” see Stefan Collini, *Absent Minds: Intellectuals in Britain* (Oxford, 2006), 183. For a retrospective account of his views from the 1960s see Perry Anderson, *English Questions* (London, 1992), 2.

<sup>4</sup> Wolf Lepenies, *Between Literature and Science: The Rise of Sociology* (Cambridge, 1988), 155–88.

<sup>5</sup> Kenny, *The First New Left*, 87. These concerns have been taken to prefigure the later interest of anglophone academics in the work of Antonio Gramsci in the 1970s and 1980s: Christopher Hill, “Foreword,” in Harvey Kaye, *The Education of Desire: Marxists and the Writing of History* (London, 1992), ix–xii, at ix. For another approach to the prehistory of British cultural criticism, and the longer history of sociological

literary context.<sup>6</sup> Recent works by Christopher Hilliard, Alexander Hutton, Stuart Middleton and Guy Ortolano have all stressed the sophistication of contemporary literary criticism and tracked its influences in postwar discussions of politics and society.<sup>7</sup>

On this count, the New Left can be understood as contributors to a long-running “homolog[y] of argument” outlined by Stefan Collini.<sup>8</sup> Since at least the late nineteenth century, British intellectuals had been appealing to concepts of culture to make ethical and aesthetic critiques of the supposed alliance between utilitarianism, political economy and industrial capitalism. The New Left seemed to be this tradition’s mid-century manifestation.<sup>9</sup> Following a similar line of reasoning, Lawrence Black has characterized the political culture of the left in this period as a hostile encounter between Labour revisionists focused on raising living standards and a milieu of New Left “moralists” eager to promote socialism’s ethical ideals in a materialistic era of postwar affluence.<sup>10</sup>

What these accounts overlook is the extent to which the New Left made explicitly economic arguments and drew on sociological ideas to make them.<sup>11</sup>

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thought amongst the British left, see Alexandre Campsie, “Mass-Observation, Left Intellectuals and the Politics of Everyday Life,” *English Historical Review*, advance access, at <https://doi.org/10.1093/ehr/cew052>.

<sup>6</sup> Dennis Dworkin, *Cultural Marxism in Postwar Britain: History, the New Left, and the Origins of Cultural Studies* (Durham, NC, 1997).

<sup>7</sup> Christopher Hilliard, *English as a Vocation: The Scrutiny Movement* (Oxford, 2012); Alexander Hutton, “Literature, Criticism, and Politics in the Early New Left, 1956–62,” *Twentieth Century British History*, 27/1 (2016), 51–75; Guy Ortolano, *The Two Cultures Controversy: Science, Literature and Cultural Politics in Postwar Britain* (Cambridge, 2009); Stuart Middleton, “The Concept of ‘Experience’ and the Making of the English Working Class, 1924–1963,” *Modern Intellectual History*, 13/1 (2016), 1–30, at <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244314000596>; Stuart Middleton, “E. P. Thompson and the Cultural Politics of Literary Modernism,” *Contemporary British History*, 28/4 (2014), 422–37.

<sup>8</sup> Stefan Collini, “The Literary Critic and the Village Labourer: ‘Culture’ in Twentieth-Century Britain,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6/14 (2004), 93–116, at 100. For the outline of this tradition see 96–7.

<sup>9</sup> Donald Winch, “Mr Gradgrind and Jerusalem,” in Stefan Collini, Richard Whatmore and Brian Young, eds., *Economy, Polity, and Society: British Intellectual History 1750–1950* (Cambridge, 2000), 243–66.

<sup>10</sup> Lawrence Black, *The Political Culture of the Left in Affluent Britain, 1951–64: Old Labour, New Britain?* (Basingstoke, 2003): on “modernity” at 2, on “moralism” at 13, and on the New Left and revisionists at 125–35. For a critique of the historiography of “affluence” see Stuart Middleton, “‘Affluence’ and the Left in Britain, c.1958–1974,” *English Historical Review*, 129/536 (2014), 107–38.

<sup>11</sup> Michael Kenny has written on economics and the New Left: *The First New Left*, 139–58. For a reference to Mills’s *The Power Elite* as a contribution to the New Left’s new conception of

These critiques were not merely aesthetic, nor were they, in the first instance, moralistic. They were interventions in a struggle about the future direction of British socialism—whether it would triumph by moving to the revisionist “right” or the fundamentalist “left.”<sup>12</sup> It might be more fruitful, however, to see the conflict occurring on a different geometric plane: between “up” and “down.” This orientation depended, in turn, on an analysis of the structure of Britain’s economy after the reforms of the 1945 Labour government.

If the American writers Adolf Berle, Gardiner Means and James Burnham were to be believed, the ownership of capital and the control of industry had been separating in the industrialized world since at least the early 1930s. Labour revisionists took this to mean that capitalist relations of production had been left behind with the creation of the welfare state. If these thinkers were right, socialists needed to make sure that they were amongst the managers at the peaks of the social scale. The New Left, on the other hand, argued that the British economy remained capitalist and urged that government bureaucrats and planners were part of the “power elite” described by the sociologist C. Wright Mills. All forms of bureaucracy—social-democratic or not—were cast in the same light. Systemic critique was needed. Control had to be leveled down to the shop floor before any significant socialist overhaul could begin. Theories of bureaucratization and the nature of “managerialism” were conceptual fault lines dividing the left in the 1950s. Amidst the broad continuities evoked in Stefan Collini’s account of twentieth-century cultural criticism, it was the reception of mid-century American writings on capitalism that made the political thought of the New Left new. By reading unpublished archival material alongside published works the range of these influences can be unconcealed.

In the first section of this article, the divisions between the New Left and Labour revisionists will be outlined. Lawrence Black suggests that these arguments were about whether capitalism could be directed at social ends,<sup>13</sup> but the dispute was more fundamental than that. The evidence turned on whether capitalism continued to exist in the 1950s. This was framed as a sociological question on

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political economy see *ibid.*, 141. A recent article by Mark Wickham-Jones has also outlined some of the New Left’s economic ideas: Mark Wickham-Jones, “The New Left’s Economic Model: The Challenge to Labour Party Orthodoxy,” *Renewal: A Journal of Labour Politics*, 21/1 (2013), 24–32. For a study that has stressed the connections between the sociology of C. Wright Mills and the British left in an international context see Daniel Geary, “‘Becoming International Again’: C. Wright Mills and the Emergence of a Global New Left, 1956–1962,” *Journal of American History*, 95/3 (2008), 710–36.

<sup>12</sup> For a long-range analysis of these debates, mostly from within the Labour Party, see Ben Jackson, *Equality and the British Left: A Study in Progressive Political Thought, 1900–64* (Manchester, 2007)

<sup>13</sup> Black, *The Political Culture of the Left*, 137.

both sides. The second part of the article develops the stakes of these debates to offer a reading of the New Left's ideas of culture in light of this political and intellectual context. Finally, some suggestions will be given in conclusion about the ways that this British story forms part of a broader transnational trend in mid-century political thought.

## I

As the 1950s wore on and the Labour Party struggled to define itself in opposition, the revisionism associated with the party's leader from 1955, Hugh Gaitskell, became ever more influential. Since the publication of Evan Durbin's *The Politics of Democratic Socialism* (1940), Labour revisionists had been arguing that corporate capitalism and state planning had transformed the relations of production described by Karl Marx and his Leninist followers in the Soviet Union. Influenced by the Americans Adolf Berle and Gardiner Means, and by the work of J. M. Keynes, revisionists like Anthony Crosland argued that the ownership of capital and the control of corporations were separating.<sup>14</sup> They rejected the idea that pushing for the further nationalization of industry was necessary to create a socialist society and they criticized Marxist languages of class. Marxism seemed out of step with a world in which labour and capital were no longer facing off over the control of the means of production. In a bid to win back voters, Gaitskell tried, unsuccessfully, to remove Clause IV (a commitment to the common ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange) from the party's constitution at the 1959 Labour conference.<sup>15</sup>

The New Left disagreed with this strategy and its underlying assumptions about the structure of Britain's economy. In their writings they diagnosed a society in which, far from disappearing, industrial capitalism was being defended by the state. Only widespread nationalization would overturn the capitalists' power. They were generally skeptical of the possibilities of parliamentary democracy and the kinds of economic reform that Whitehall politics allowed. The philosopher, novelist and sometime New Leftist Iris Murdoch put it this way in the *Conviction* collection of essays (1958): "The problem of the transformation of labour is not

<sup>14</sup> Stephen Brooke, "Atlantic Crossing? American Views of Capitalism and British Socialist Thought 1932–1962," *Twentieth Century British History*, 2/2 (1991), 107–36, at 108–9, 112–17. Adolf A. Berle and Gardiner C. Means, *The Modern Corporation and Private Property* (New York, 1932), 13; J. M. Keynes, "The End of Laissez-Faire," in *The Collected Writings of John Maynard Keynes*, ed. Elizabeth Johnson and Donald Moggridge, vol. 9 (Cambridge, 1972), 289.

<sup>15</sup> For a narrative of these events see Philip M. Williams, *Hugh Gaitskell* (Oxford, 1982), 323–34. See also Jackson, *Equality and the British Left*, 151–76.

only the original centre of Socialist thought, it is the problem of the managerial society.”<sup>16</sup> Failure to grapple with the “problem of the managerial society” meant an inability to diagnose the new realities of the 1950s where capitalist relations of production were being protected by the very state that the revisionists were so keen to win.

Divisions over the nature of economic management split the New Left and Labour revisionists into two hostile camps. To the extent that they struggled over the inheritance of the post-1945 consensus, they debated on common ground. They were divided over whether capitalism had been transcended by the Labour Party’s reforms or whether it had merely changed its form. A similar debate had emerged in mid-century American political thought. Since the New Deal, Americans had been arguing about whether the growth of the administrative state and economic planning had led to a world of “postcapitalism.”<sup>17</sup> Both the New Left and the Labour revisionists thought that they could discern amongst these writers resources for their own political thinking and, Stephen Brooke writes, “lobbed” these American ideas like “grenade[s]” at the opposing side.<sup>18</sup> Both groups were in something of an intellectual crisis in the 1950s and were keen to demarcate their opposing strategies for renewal of the labour movement: the New Left after 1956 and the revisionists after the 1951 general election defeat. Looking across the Atlantic for inspiration, and using American theories to stake out different positions within British socialism, was, by mid-century, a well-established tradition.<sup>19</sup>

We can see evidence of these transatlantic influences in the editorial memo drawn up by the young Canadian political philosopher Charles Taylor for the seventh edition of *Universities and Left Review (ULR)*:

We need an article on the Managerial Revolution . . . The general Managerial Revolution thesis equates capitalism with the supremacy of private appropriation . . . and then goes on to equate this with the dominance of the individual entrepreneur, the robber baron or “moghul”. With the decline of these types and with the general rise in the standard of living and with certain gains of the working class movement, especially those won through

<sup>16</sup> Iris Murdoch, “A House of Theory,” in Norman Mackenzie ed., *Conviction* (London, 1958), 218–33, at 232.

<sup>17</sup> On postcapitalist thought in America see Howard Brick, “The Postcapitalist Vision in Twentieth-Century American Social Thought,” in Nelson Lichtenstein, ed., *American Capitalism: Social Thought and Political Economy in the Twentieth Century* (Philadelphia, 2006), 21–46; and Brick, *Transcending Capitalism: Visions of a New Society in Modern American Thought* (Ithaca, 2006).

<sup>18</sup> Brooke, “Atlantic Crossing?,” 111.

<sup>19</sup> Daniel T. Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age* (Cambridge, MA, 1998); and Brooke, “Atlantic Crossing?”

state power, capitalism is held to have disappeared. The new power elite are not considered “capitalist” a) because they aren’t so beastly b) because they are “incorporated.”<sup>20</sup>

Capitalist “moghuls” had been apparently “incorporated” in large bureaucratic structures with the creation of the postwar welfare state. This did not mean that their power had been dispersed. As Taylor went on to explain, “we can now show that the modern corporation is an organization for the defense of property.” Despite the bureaucratization of the capitalists, “private appropriation” remained “the aim” to which the whole system was dedicated.<sup>21</sup> If a managerial revolution had occurred, it had not defanged capital; quite the opposite—it had defended it. The idea that capitalists had been incorporated and neutralized by large bureaucracies in a managerial revolution was the theme of James Burnham’s *The Managerial Revolution or What Is Happening in the World Now* (1941). Taylor’s use of the term “the power elite” was a reference to C. Wright Mills’s recently published *The Power Elite* (1956). The reason why attacking Burnham’s “managerial revolution thesis” mattered to New Leftists was that they thought that his ideas had been swallowed hook, line and sinker by the Labour revisionists.

James Burnham was an ex-Trotskyist and soon to be darling of the American right. The central claim of *The Managerial Revolution* was that since the 1930s an unnoticed revolution had been occurring. The crux of his argument rested on an analysis of state planning in war economies. According to Burnham, as soon as bureaucratic structures begin intervening in the operations of a market economy, what is commonly understood as capitalism can no longer be said to exist. Like Adolf Berle and Gardiner Means he argued that the ownership of the means of production, and control over it, were separating.<sup>22</sup> He gave this argument a distinctive twist by stating that this process amounted to a “revolution.” The “managerial revolution” was changing the great nations of the world “from one type of structure of society to another.”<sup>23</sup>

Burnham’s views proved a major inspiration for George Orwell’s novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.<sup>24</sup> The influential labour revisionist Anthony Crosland had

<sup>20</sup> Bishopsgate Institute, Ruskin College Papers, RS1/012 “Draft Plan for 7th Issue.” Manuscript sources from the Bishopsgate Institute are sorted chronologically into folders. They are mostly related to Ruskin College, Oxford, and the papers relating to the New Left were collected by Raphael Samuel. Referencing henceforth will cite “Ruskin Papers,” the folder number and then a brief description of the document.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Burnham had reviewed Berle and Means’s book in 1933—see Daniel Kelly, *James Burnham and the Struggle for the World: A Life* (Wilmington, DE, 2002), 37.

<sup>23</sup> James Burnham, *The Managerial Revolution or What Is Happening in the World Now* (London, 1942), 9.

<sup>24</sup> For Orwell’s engagement with Burnham see George Orwell, *James Burnham and the Managerial Revolution* (London, 1946). For analyses of Burnham’s influence on Orwell see

read Burnham as an undergraduate and was similarly impressed. Unlike Orwell, though, he rejected the implication that there was anything ineluctable about the managers' rule leading to tyranny.<sup>25</sup> Crosland thought that capitalism had been overcome by state planning. However, far from leading to a dystopian state ruled by antihumanist technicians, the rule of the managers was humanizing civil society. The inequalities of the political world of the capitalists had ended, Crosland thought. The managers now managed and could steer society towards socialist ends.

Crosland made these claims most clearly in his essay "The Transition from Capitalism," published in *New Fabian Essays* (1952), where he concluded that "by 1951, Britain had, in all the essentials, ceased to be a capitalist country."<sup>26</sup> The Labour Party's policies should appropriately reflect this fact. He pressed home these ideas in his influential book *The Future of Socialism* (1956).<sup>27</sup> Three pieces of evidence were marshaled to support his argument. First, the "decisive levers of economic power" had been "transferred" from private business to "other hands." Second, new "levers" had emerged with the advent of Keynesian economics. This meant that the outcomes of clashes between groups or classes were "markedly less favourable to private employers than [they] used to be." Finally, Crosland argued that the "social attitudes and behaviour" of the business class had changed. They had lost their "strength and self-confidence."<sup>28</sup> This analysis led him to reject the austere views he associated with 1930s socialism: "[it is] nonsense to say people can't be perfectly happy on sex, gin and Bogart—and if that's what they want under soc[ialism], well and good."<sup>29</sup> Stressing class conflict and full nationalization of the means of production was appropriate neither for the postcapitalist economy nor for the needs and desires of an electorate that had left rationing behind it in 1954 and seemed to be on an upward trajectory towards prosperity.<sup>30</sup>

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George Steinhoff, *George Orwell and the Origins of 1984* (Ann Arbor, 1975), 43–54; Michael Maddison, "1984: A Burnhamite Fantasy?", *Political Quarterly* 32/1 (1961), 71–9.

<sup>25</sup> On the links between Crosland, Burnham and "postcapitalism" see Brick, *Transcending Capitalism*, 154–64; and Jackson, *Equality and the British Left*, 155–63.

<sup>26</sup> C. A. R. Crosland, "The Transition from Capitalism," in David Reisman, ed., *Democratic Socialism in Britain: Classic Texts in Economic and Political Thought 1825–1952*, vol. 9, (London, 1996), 33–68, at 42.

<sup>27</sup> Crosland drafted an entire chapter on Burnham, only to cut it before publication. Jackson, *Equality and the British Left*, 156.

<sup>28</sup> C. A. R. Crosland, *The Future of Socialism* (London, 1956), 26.

<sup>29</sup> Quoted in Lawrence Black, *Redefining British Politics: Culture, Consumerism and Participation, 1954–70* (Basingstoke, 2010), 69.

<sup>30</sup> On the end of rationing and the growth of "affluence" see Dominic Sandbrook, *Never Had It So Good: A History of Britain from Suez to the Beatles* (New York, 2005), 97–137.



In their first issue, the editors of *Universities and Left Review*, Stuart Hall, Raphael Samuel, Gabriel Pearson and Charles Taylor, met Crosland's ideas head-on, and presented them as the views of the Labour Party in general: "For most Labour theorists . . . discussion of socialism [is] equated with the claim that the Welfare State [is] British Socialism realized: witness the *New Fabian Essays*."<sup>31</sup> For the *ULR* group, declaring that the welfare state was the apotheosis of socialism was nothing less than a con trick, a failure of political imagination and, because of the revisionists' influence within the Labour Party, a disaster for socialist politics. The welfare state should not be rejected out of hand, as the old Marxist dogma put it, as "a gigantic fraud of 'reformist' socialism." Instead, the *ULR* editors wrote, "the welfare state is seen as a positive but limited advance on industrial capitalism in its earlier phases."<sup>32</sup> They suggested that the gains of the post-1945 Labour government only took a few steps on the long road to a fully socialist society.

In order to highlight the ongoing forms of capitalist exploitation in the managed economy, the New Left attacked what they took to be the Labour revisionists' Burnhamite inheritance. Burnham and Crosland both argued that the owners of capital had given up control of the levers of production and, in doing so, had ceased to be a capitalist class. It was into this argumentative space that the New Left poured much of their analytical and theoretical efforts. They attempted to show that the welfare state did not constitute a new social contract, but merely provided a sticking plaster over the still-present contradictions of capitalist Britain. In two extensive articles, "The Insiders" and "The Controllers," a number of New Left writers set out their vision of Britain's managerial society and the ongoing control of British industry by a dominant elite despite extensive nationalization by the Attlee government.<sup>33</sup>

Michael Barratt Brown's three-part study, titled "The Controllers," followed his editors' position and opened with the rhetorical strap line "has there been a managerial revolution?"<sup>34</sup> Barratt Brown attempted to demonstrate that no such revolution had occurred. By tracing the connections between the directors of top banks and industries he claimed that the relationship between capital and industry was as ever-present as before the war and the reforms of the 1945 Labour government. Barratt Brown provided a table for *ULR* readers (Fig. 1).

The figures in the table showed that the same small number of men sat on multiple directorships. It was intended to demonstrate the coherence of a

<sup>31</sup> Editorial, *Universities and Left Review* (henceforth *ULR*) 1 (1957), 1.

<sup>32</sup> Ruskin Papers, RS1/009, "The Fifth Issue 'The Community'."

<sup>33</sup> Stuart Hall, Ralph Samuel, Peter Sedgwick and Charles Taylor, "The Insiders," *ULR* 3 (1958), 24–64; and Michael Barratt Brown, "The Controllers," *ULR* 5 (1958), 53–61.

<sup>34</sup> Barratt Brown, "The Controllers," 53.

Directorates held on different Boards

Number and Type of Controller	Bank of England	"Big 8" Banks	20 other Banks	Top 36 Insurance Companies	Top 120 Home Industrials	30 Overseas Companies	7 Government Committees	Total Major Directorates
120 Merchant Bankers ...	4	29	37	73	59	39	6	247
168 other "Big 8" Bankers	1	168	49	114	92	44	9	477
23 Other Bankers*	2		23	8	19	11	2	65
67 Other Controllers* ...	4			10	83	14	5	114
378 TOTAL . . . . .	11	197	109	205	253	108	22	903

SOURCES : Stock Exchange Yearbook 1958. Directory of Directors 1958. Who's Who 1958. N.I.E.S.R. Classified List of Large Companies 1955.

\*Only the top 50 Home Industrial Companies were examined to discover these Controllers and Bankers.

Fig. 1. Barratt Brown, "The Controllers," *Universities and Left Review* 5 (1958), 53–61, at 53.

managerial class with a strong grip on Britain's industry and to display in stark terms the ongoing power of the old class enemy, the merchant bankers. In the words of the economist Kenneth Alexander, the goal of New Left analyses of the postwar consensus was to ask the question "Has the 'managerial revolution' gone as far in fact as it has gone in the heads of some thinkers?"<sup>35</sup> The role of Barratt Brown's empirical findings was to answer firmly that it had not.

As we saw above, Charles Taylor thought that the incorporation of capital into new bureaucracies had not ended capitalism; it had defended it by fortifying private property behind an institutional ring of steel supported and managed by the "power elite."<sup>36</sup> Henry Collins agreed with Taylor and wrote in the second edition of *ULR* that those associated with the "school" who believed in the "managerial revolution thesis" had performed a "conjuring trick in which the board of directors vanishes into thin air so that there is nothing between amorphous shareholders and decision-making managers."<sup>37</sup> New Leftists like Taylor, Alexander, Barratt Brown and Collins were intervening in an explicitly political and economic struggle and, with their empirical analyses of the boards of nationalized industries, they were using sociological tools to do so. The New Left clearly disagreed with Burnham and what they took to be his influence on Crosland. They drew much of the inspiration for their counterarguments from C. Wright Mills's books *White Collar* (1951), *Power Elite* and *The Sociological Imagination* (1959).

Mills agreed with Burnham that there were more managers in all levels of American society than ever before. A new emphasis on "symbolic" work found itself manifested in the advertising campaigns of the marketing office. New techniques aimed at the manipulation of people were expressed in the managerial

<sup>35</sup> Kenneth Alexander, "Power at the Base," in E. P. Thompson, ed., *Out of Apathy* (London, 1960), 243–86, at 243.

<sup>36</sup> Ruskin Papers, RS1/012 "Draft Plan for 7th Issue"

<sup>37</sup> Henry Collins, "What Is Happening to Capitalism," *ULR* 2 (1957), 66–7, at 67.

practices of human resources. Taken together, this reordering of work constituted what Mills called the “managerial demiurge.” However, Mills disagreed with Burnham to the extent that the power of the capitalists had not simply been replaced by the rule of scientifically trained technocrats. On the contrary, the managers existed within a corporate carapace driven by capitalist expediency.

Mills, with Burnham in his sights, argued that bureaucratization had been “erroneously taken to mean that a ‘managerial revolution’ . . . is under way.” Instead, he wrote, in words that Taylor would echo in his own analysis: “power has not been split from property; rather the power of property is more concentrated than is its ownership.”<sup>38</sup> This meant that power was concentrated at the top of society while those at the bottom were increasingly manipulated and managed.<sup>39</sup> The managerial society was quickly ushering in a new world in which old assumptions about socialist politics and the revolutionary potential of the proletariat were being challenged. The working classes were no longer forming their self-images in the ferment of class politics and solidarity but amongst the dazzles of consumerism and popular culture.

Whereas Burnham’s vision had deeply impressed Crosland, Mills’s analyses of America’s “power elite” captured the imagination of the British New Left. Evidence of this influence can be found right across their writings. He was invited by Ralph Miliband to give talks in London at the LSE in 1957 and 1959.<sup>40</sup> The lectures gained the approval of Edward Thompson and Stuart Hall and they invited Mills to write an article for the fledgling *New Left Review*, published as “Letter to the New Left” in 1960.<sup>41</sup> Mills’s concepts were mobilized by the New Leftists to argue that incorporation of capital, without sweeping reform of control in the direction of the workers, continued, extended and perpetuated the influence and political violence of Britain’s capitalist class. Furthermore, his ideas allowed the New Left to diagnose the interrelations of power and class in the managed economy of postwar Britain without recourse to the Leninism so many wanted to avoid after 1956.

Mills had argued that vast inequalities of influence and control existed between the power elite and the general population. His vision of postwar America was one in which the “summits” of the “hierarchies of state and corporation” were topped with the “command posts of modern society.” This led to a profound skepticism about the ability of popular pressure and local activism to resist such intertwined forces of economic production, military power and political

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<sup>38</sup> C. Wright Mills, *White Collar: The American Middle Classes* (Oxford, 1951), 101.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>40</sup> Michael Newman, *Ralph Miliband and the Politics of the New Left* (Talgarth, 2002), 65–8.

<sup>41</sup> C. Wright Mills, “Letter to the New Left,” *New Left Review* 1/5 (1960), 18–23.

domination.<sup>42</sup> The result, Mills thought, was a kind of “paralysis” where people were left in “profound apathy.”<sup>43</sup> Unlike Mills, New Leftists like Taylor and Barratt Brown suggested that the managerial society was an administrative option, not a political inevitability. Less despairing about the nature of postwar capitalism, and with a socialist government able to gain power only a few years before, they held out the hope that grassroots mobilization could overcome the alienation and *ennui* of modern bureaucratic life.

E. P. Thompson captured these differences in a letter he sent to Mills in 1959:

We of *New Reasoner* and of *ULR* think it vital that socialist intellectuals maintain direct two-way communication (books, journals, discussion clubs, schools, conferences, common actions of many kinds) with the active political minority in the labour movement . . . We don't see this intellectual political dichotomy in quite the way you put it: building a cultural apparatus which is in direct contact with an effective minority of working people seems to us . . . the most important direct political action we can take. These links are very precious to us.<sup>44</sup>

In a memo prepared five days later by the newly formed editorial team of *New Left Review* this position was made even clearer. The New Left were to “develop in these media [the journals, pamphlets and books to be published by *New Left Review*] not only aspects of our national and international life, but the connections between the surface phenomena—the crises and protests—and the structure and basis of our society.”<sup>45</sup> Britain seemed to be in the grip of the shadowy elite that Mills had described. Yet by using their magazines and cultural connections to the workers, the New Left thought that they could make the proletariat recognize the state of their subjection and inculcate a socialist revolution.

Thompson's valorization of the cultural links between intellectuals and the labour movement resulted in accusations of romanticism by many of those associated with Perry Anderson's *New Left Review* after 1962. These ideas also put him at odds with the conclusions that Mills had drawn from his own analyses. Yet this does not mean that New Left debates about the managerial society in the 1950s were unsophisticated. As Daniel Geary and Tim Rogan have argued, C.

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<sup>42</sup> C. Wright Mills, *The Power Elite* (Oxford, 1956), 5. On Mills's pessimism about the prospects for a proletarian revolution in the industrialized West see Geary, “Becoming International Again,” 714.

<sup>43</sup> Mills, *White Collar*, xvi.

<sup>44</sup> E. P. Thompson to C. Wright Mills, 21 April [1959], C. Wright Mills Papers, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin, Box 4B380. My thanks to Tim Rogan for pointing out this letter to me.

<sup>45</sup> Ruskin Papers, RS1/012 “THE NEW LEFT—A General Statement adopted by a joint meeting of the Editorial Boards of the *New Reasoner* and *Universities & Left Review* on Sunday April 26th 1959.”

Wright Mills and the British New Left were united in an ultimately influential attempt to reconfigure the relationship between concepts of “self” and “society” in the social sciences and to shape the cultural role of the public intellectual.<sup>46</sup>

For his part, Anthony Crosland detected a distinctly “old” kind of politics amongst the writings of the New Left. He saw in their criticisms of Britain’s managerial society a barely updated version of Lenin’s theory of finance capitalism.<sup>47</sup> He included an extended critique of the New Leftists’ class analysis in the pointedly titled *The Conservative Enemy* (1962). Crosland claimed that the New Left’s emphasis on the connections between control and ownership was factually incorrect, mistaking passive shareholders such as insurance companies for controlling stakeholders. He used his own data to reinforce the Burnhamite line and concluded, “the idea of the managerial revolution is now widely accepted.”<sup>48</sup> Crosland accepted that the New Left’s arguments might have been appropriate to the 1930s, a claim repeated here as in his *Future of Socialism*, but the bankers’ leverage over British industry and society was completely different by the late 1950s and early 1960s. Their outmoded Marxist assumptions, and their overreliance on the work of Mills, resulted in a “naive and sloppy formalism” in their writings about political economy.<sup>49</sup> He contrasted this view with an appreciation for the “seriousness” and “originality” of much of their writings on popular culture.<sup>50</sup> Querying Crosland’s division between these two sides of the New Left’s ideas will be addressed in the next section of this article.

## II

If the “managerial revolution” was a conjuring trick, and capitalist relations of production persisted amidst Britain’s welfare state, then it was imperative to reveal the secrets of the magicians’ arts. The New Left’s arguments about British society, and the nature of the new capitalism, attempted to define, and redefine, the grounds for debate about socialist politics in 1950s Britain. Far from disappearing, the capitalist class had shape-shifted, and their new appearance made them especially dangerous because they were so inconspicuous. This is why the New Left placed such an emphasis on cultural critique.

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<sup>46</sup> Daniel Geary “Becoming International Again”; Tim Rogan, “Shifting Conceptions of Self and Society in the Formation of the Anglo-American New Left,” paper presented at the North American Conference on British Studies, Montreal, Nov. 2012.

<sup>47</sup> C. A. R. Crosland, *The Conservative Enemy: A Programme of Radical Reform for the 1960s* (London, 1962), 82.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 69; criticisms of Mills, 83 n. 3.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

Stressing “culture” in their political writings served two purposes. It demonstrated the means through which power was exercised and the tools with which this influence could be uncovered and redirected. We can see this dual role at play in the editorial memo prepared for the fifth issue of *ULR*, where the controlling elite who held the reins of British society was defined as the

interpenetration of political, social and economic power at the peak of the social system. Here contemporary capitalist society is seen not merely as an economic system but as a bourgeois culture, and the capitalist class not merely as a watertight economic category but as a social elite, surmounting the apparent drift towards a classless middle in the society as a whole.<sup>51</sup>

Thus despite the much-lauded claims of “totality” in their cultural writings, this memo suggests that the New Left, in fact, proposed a world of two cultures.<sup>52</sup> Above was the bourgeois culture of the managers. Below was the culture of the working classes—under attack from individualist and acquisitive self-images dispensed from on high.

The threat to community life posed by the managers should be read as a threat to the integrity and social consciousness of the proletariat by newly emerging social forces. It represented an anxiety about the disappearance of the revolutionary force at the centre of Marx’s theory of history. In the memo prepared for the fifth issue of *ULR* the editors wrote, “Socialism, if it is to survive, must take account of the changing patterns of community life.”<sup>53</sup> That strike-through, made in pencil, is significant. The editors’ vision was to describe not simply the changes in British community life but how these transformations challenged the very existence of socialist politics. They tried to explain these stakes through an analysis of the new technologies and the new forms of society that had made this threat to socialism possible:

The mass media are seen here as the creators and purveyors of values, as potential agents of formation in the creation of the mass capitalism. They are the unconscious manipulators of persuasion and change, and the mass society can be created within a relatively short space of time, in contrast with other period [*sic*] of development in industrial societies, because the “society” is so effectively networked.<sup>54</sup>

Thus, for the New Left, cultural and sociological critique went hand in hand; thinking one meant thinking the other.

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<sup>51</sup> Ruskin Papers, RS1/009, “The Fifth Issue ‘The Community.’”

<sup>52</sup> For accounts that stress the “totality” of the New Left’s cultural criticism see Kenny, *The First New Left*, 87; Dworkin *Cultural Marxism*, 4.

<sup>53</sup> Ruskin Papers, RS1/009, “The Fifth Issue ‘The Community.’”

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

Many of these themes are registered in Stuart Hall's article "Sense of Classlessness." Hall argued that while specific changes could be observed in the material lives of affluent Britons, the more fundamental shift was in a "whole way of life . . . an attitude towards things and people" within which these new possessions were experienced.<sup>55</sup> "Consumers" were buying into a world of burgeoning postwar affluence. In doing so they were losing their capacity for freedom and self-determination. No longer "a father, a lorry driver, a pedestrian, a pensioner . . . an underpaid teacher with a mother-in-law to keep," Hall wrote in his essay "The Supply of Demand," the consumer was an abstract and ideal agent with needs that could be met by spending alone. The power of advertising was directing citizens' attention away from the socialist aims of autogestion and amounted to a strangely secular religion. To Charles Taylor, "ads are to the new religion what sermons on the Kingdom of Heaven are to Christianity."<sup>56</sup> Social good, in these terms, was not about meeting specific needs of specific classes, or even of individuals in those classes, but about smoothing over differences and maximizing generalized goods aggregated by utility. This asocial reorientation of the "good" led Hall to suggest that consumer capitalism "did not, to any significant extent, give us the goods: instead, it gave us a definition of the Good Life."<sup>57</sup>

In opposition to the individualizing *telos* of consumption, the New Left maintained a view of working-class life in which, Stuart Hall argued, the social world of the working classes was surrounded with the "barricades" of institutions such as unions and working men's clubs that stressed the cultivation of a collectivist and self-sacrificing, rather than an individualist and selfish, mentality.<sup>58</sup> Comradeship and solidarity were prized in this milieu. Yet the managers of desire, the purveyors of advertising (the group Vance Packard had influentially termed "the hidden persuaders" in his book of the same title published in 1957), and *their* managers, the captains of industry, were tearing down the barricades and replacing them with a vision of human nature in which the person was understood as an icon of individuality. Like Mills, New Leftists such as Hall and Taylor were worried that the rise of consumer capitalism, aided and abetted by ad men and sales executives, meant that the British people were emerging into an era of political apathy. Abstracted out of the supposedly traditional ties of class and community, the individual-as-consumer was becoming the new paragon of the managerial society.

<sup>55</sup> Stuart Hall, "A Sense of Classlessness," *ULR* 5 (1958), 26–32, at 26.

<sup>56</sup> Charles Taylor, "Alienation and Community," *ULR* 5 (1958), 11–17, at 14.

<sup>57</sup> Stuart Hall, "The Supply of Demand," in Thompson, *Out of Apathy*, 56–97, at 75.

<sup>58</sup> Stuart Hall, "A Sense of Classlessness," 26.

The new society of managed capitalism was often contrasted with a world of traditional working-class life. As with many New Left writings on culture and community, Stuart Hall's views were informed by Richard Hoggart's recently published *The Uses of Literacy* (1957). Hoggart had characterized the "new aristocracy" of the managerial society as "the monstrous regiment of the most flat-faced."<sup>59</sup> Impressed by the book, Hall wrote in a *ULR* editorial directive that Hoggart's text should form the "basic method of approach" for New Left cultural critique.<sup>60</sup> *The Uses of Literacy* contains what Stefan Collini has called a "classic Leavisian rhythm."<sup>61</sup> The trajectory was decline and the tempo was increasing. The newness, and increased speed, in the changes to working-class culture, the concerns about "mass-production-standardization-levelling-down"<sup>62</sup> typical of the Leavisites, led Hall and other New Leftists to increasingly see "culture" itself as an arena in which political conflict was taking place.

New Left writings on culture contain implicit political and economic critiques of welfarist policies. For ex-communists like Edward Thompson and John Saville the reforms of the post-1945 Labour government were obviously insufficient—they did not inaugurate a world commensurable with a Marxist vision of a good society. The communitarian thinkers associated with the *ULR* were similarly dismissive of social-democratic reforms. Throughout the 1950s, Hugh Gaitskell and Anthony Crosland had suggested the virtues of a "property-owning democracy" on the basis that the "desire of young people in all classes to acquire some property" was not a capitalist conspiracy, but the result of "a natural longing for a measure of security, independence and freedom of manoeuvre."<sup>63</sup> This was obviously insufficient if, at the apex of the social system, the managers were incapable of directing society towards socialist ends because they were in thrall to capital.

Scholars have made great progress detailing the ways in which the New Left's political thought can be understood as part of a tradition of Romantic critique of political economy. But an emphasis on the literary roots of their arguments occludes the more immediate context of the New Left's sociological criticisms of revisionist understandings of Britain's postcapitalist economic base. It was the confluence of earlier literary idioms with Mills's emphasis on new forms of bureaucratized power that shaped the main contours of the New Left's political thought. This shared vision united an otherwise fragmented movement with

<sup>59</sup> Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy* (London, 1957), 181.

<sup>60</sup> Ruskin Papers, RS1/009, "The Fifth Issue 'The Community'."

<sup>61</sup> Quoted in Hilliard, *English as a Vocation*, 169.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>63</sup> Quoted in Ben Jackson, "Revisionism Reconsidered: 'Property-Owning Democracy' and Egalitarian Strategy in Post-war Britain," *Twentieth Century British History*, 16/4 (2005), 416–49, at 424.



a common sociological imagination. New Leftists with diverse experiences of political mobilization and associated with the different political milieus of *ULR* and *New Reasoner* shared a common view about the dangers that bureaucracy and new communication technologies posed for socialist politics.<sup>64</sup>

The Trotskyist economist Kenneth Alexander called for increased workers' participation in the management of industry in order to undermine what he saw as the "symbiotic relationship" of managers and property owners.<sup>65</sup> According to the anticommunist Charles Taylor, modern man had become "atomized." In order to bring about properly socialist reform, citizens had to "re-acquir[e] the ability to participate" both economically and culturally.<sup>66</sup> The Marxist historian Edward Thompson desired what he called a "reorientation of British democratic thinking" to overcome "the over-centralised bureaucratic state monopoly" of political representation.<sup>67</sup> The political philosopher Alasdair Macintyre thought that nothing less than a philosophical revolution would do: "The human task is to tear away the masks, to recognize our own faces behind them and so free ourselves from the domination of the mask." Leftist intellectuals had forgotten these higher aims and had instead become "victims of the bureaucracies of the mind."<sup>68</sup> The networks that ran through British society, and which the hidden persuaders were using to indoctrinate the people with their creed of self-interest, could be used against the managers. The masks, as Macintyre put it, could be pulled off. If only the right message could be dispersed, Britain could reaffirm its culture of community and solidarity and emerge as a properly socialist society. E. P. Thompson's letter to Mills in 1959 reveals that these common attempts to combat a newly bureaucratized form of capitalism united the New Left as they began to form *New Left Review* under Stuart Hall's editorship in 1960.

### III

Norman Birnbaum placed sociological analysis front and centre of the intellectual agenda of the newly amalgamated movement in his foreword to the collection of New Left essays *Out of Apathy* (1960): "The inner structure of the new class society is our first concern. We confront a new ruling elite, more

<sup>64</sup> For an outline of the differences in political background, party affiliation and views of the Soviet Union amongst New Leftists see Lin Chun, *The British New Left* (Edinburgh, 1993), 10–16.

<sup>65</sup> Alexander, "Power at the Base," 256.

<sup>66</sup> Taylor, "Alienation and Community," 12.

<sup>67</sup> E. P. Thompson, "At the Point of Decay," in Thompson, *Out of Apathy*, 3–15, at 13.

<sup>68</sup> Alasdair Macintyre, "Breaking the Chains of Reason," in Thompson, *Out of Apathy*, 195–240, at 202, 197.

supple and opaque than its immediate predecessors; a new middle class allied to it; and an altered working class, itself internally divided.”<sup>69</sup> It was only by grasping the structure of this new society that the “spiritual climate” of Britain could be understood. Birnbaum touted the influence of Raymond Williams and Richard Hoggart on the thinking of the New Left, but he couched their work in the context of his first claim. Their analyses could help to reveal some sense of what he called a “common culture” in Britain that persisted despite the social elites’ tactics.<sup>70</sup> In order to counter the new class society, and preserve this culture, Birnbaum stressed the need to avoid the intellectual “insularity” that had “dogged” British socialism in the past.<sup>71</sup> It was by reaching out to other bodies of thought, and especially across the Atlantic to sociologists like Mills, that the New Left could understand Britain’s place amidst a broader set of global transformations. This article has presented one side of this story, but the importance of Burnham and Mills to the British left clearly suggests that worries about “managerialism” ran far beyond Britain’s borders.

Despite Perry Anderson’s framing of their political thought as parochial and non-sociological, Birnbaum clearly suggested that the New Left’s arguments were part of a wider international debate about the tendencies of modernization, changing understandings of class and the growth of state power in the economic sphere.<sup>72</sup> Ideas in Britain echoed not only American, but also French and German, socialists’ efforts to reimagine the role of bureaucracies in modern society (there is a sense in which this tendency represents a critique of both the USSR and the postwar capitalist West by reading Max Weber through the lens of Leon Trotsky and Marx’s recently rediscovered *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*).<sup>73</sup> From the writings of the *Socialisme ou Barbarie* group, especially Cornelius Castoriadis and Claude Lefort, to Herbert Marcuse, Theodor Adorno and Max

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<sup>69</sup> Norman Birnbaum, “Foreword” in Thompson, *Out of Apathy*, ix–xii, at x.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, x.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, xi.

<sup>72</sup> Brick, *Transcending Capitalism*. For discussions of these themes within European Marxist traditions of political thought see Marcel van der Linden, *Western Marxism and the Soviet Union: A Survey of Critical Theories and Debates since 1917*, trans. Jurriaan Bendien (Leiden, 2007), 79–98.

<sup>73</sup> See van der Linden, *Western Marxism and the Soviet Union*, especially 97. On Max Weber’s impact on twentieth-century political thought see Jan-Werner Müller, *Contesting Democracy: Political Ideas in Twentieth-Century Europe* (New Haven, 2011); and Joshua Derman, *Max Weber in Politics and Social Thought: From Charisma to Canonization* (Cambridge, 2012). On Trotsky and post-Trotskyist political economy see Ernest Haberkern and Arthur Lipow, *Neither Capitalism nor Socialism: Theories of Bureaucratic Collectivism* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ, 1996). For a contemporary reading of Mills that emphasizes the influence of Marx’s early work on his sociology see Alfred G. Meyer, *Marxism: The Unity of Theory of Practice* (Cambridge, MA, 1954), 164 n. 43.

Horkheimer, the first New Left were part of a significant moment in postwar political thought that married a mistrust of state power with a tendency to valorize cultural identity and human values. These thinkers, though they possessed quite different political outlooks, were nevertheless developing an influential strain of socialist rhetoric that was skeptical of bureaucracy and concerned with identity at least a decade before a putative “age of fracture” began to break apart the postwar consensus.<sup>74</sup> At a conference held to commemorate the work of the first New Left, Stuart Hall worried that his critiques of the social-democratic alliance of union power and the welfare state “may appear to have opened the floodgates to Thatcherism,” but he concluded that the New Left’s arguments were ultimately constructive because “the old agenda cannot be constituted again.”<sup>75</sup>

While the political thought of the New Leftists places them in broad continuity with later anti-social-democratic arguments, their deafening silence on questions of women’s equality and gay rights marks a break with some of the most important struggles of the following decades—a fact that has been noted, and regretted, by many New Leftists looking back on their earlier work.<sup>76</sup> Analyses of Britain’s managerial society might have been useful to survey and critique the Olympian peaks of the postwar welfare state, but they added next to nothing in struggles for equality concerning any domain outside ownership and control of a world structured by the economic and political dominance of men. New Left critics of Britain’s managerial society, like Kenneth Alexander’s call for “power at the base” and Thompson’s call for a “humanist” Marxism, relied for their political purchase on what Alexander called a “moral revolution.”<sup>77</sup> The scope of this revolution looks, in retrospect, devastatingly limited by the political imaginations of those who sought to lead it.

<sup>74</sup> Daniel T. Rodgers, *Age of Fracture* (Cambridge, MA, 2011). For Burnham’s “new class” analysis discussed as a solely right-wing phenomenon see *ibid.*, 83; for E. P. Thompson’s contribution to the fracture see *ibid.*, 91–5; for a reading of Stuart Hall’s cultural critiques as a peculiarly 1980s phenomenon see *ibid.*, 98. For account that makes these themes distinctive to the 1960s see Dick Howard, “The Anti-totalitarian Left between Morality and Politics,” in Warren Breckman, Peter E. Gordon, A. Dirk Moses, Samuel Moyn and Elliot Neaman, eds., *The Modernist Imagination: Intellectual History and Critical Theory Essays in Honor of Martin Jay* (New York, 2009), 331–45.

<sup>75</sup> Lindsay Anderson, Sheila Benson, Lawrence Daly, Trevor Griffiths, Stuart Hall, Mervyn Jones, Malcolm McEwen, Raphael Samuel and Clancy Sigal, “Conference Scrapbook,” in Diemut Bubeck, Hanjo Glock, Lesley Jacobs, Seth Moglen, Adam Steinhouse and Daniel Weinstock, eds., *Out of Apathy: Voices of the New Left Thirty Years On* (London, 1989), 129–42, at 131.

<sup>76</sup> Lynne Segal, “The Silence of Women in the New Left,” in Bubeck et al., *Out of Apathy*, 114–16; and Stuart Hall, Raphael Samuel, Charles Taylor et al., “Then and Now: A Re-evaluation of the New Left,” in *ibid.*, 145–70, at 162–3.

<sup>77</sup> Alexander, “Power at the Base,” 266.

Recognizing the sociological context of the New Left's ideas highlights the analytical strength, and pervasive reach, of their critiques, but it also points to the political weaknesses of arguments that seemed so out of step with public opinion. Technology and technocracy had concentrated power into new economic forms. This is why the notion of the "power elite" was such a useful conceptual tool. However, the New Left's discussions of higher values and humanism to combat these tendencies did little to endear them to a public that valued the increasing affluence they experienced as a result of the postwar order. What was needed was a form of political argumentation that took seriously the coercive force of the state without falling into claims about human personalities and values that could be construed as elitist, romantic or misogynist in their naturalization of "tradition" in the face of demographic, economic and social changes that so many Britons were embracing.<sup>78</sup>

As it turned out, the New Right, as Stuart Hall conceded, were the ones who were able to capitalize on the postwar antibureaucratic turn. Raphael Samuel thought that the preponderance of the "radical language" of "libertarian socialism" in the late 1950s and the 1960s had meant that Thatcher had "turned their [own] language against the left."<sup>79</sup> Speaking at the same commemorative conference, a member of the "so-called New Right," who attended left-wing meetings to "know thine enemy," asked a question about the lack of interest by the New Left in public-choice theory, in the "economic calculation argument"—one of the most basic roots of my arguments against Marxism," or in Austrian economics. The questioner concluded, "Why haven't these questions entered into your journals and books? I just don't see myself as having an opposition. I've got nobody to argue with."<sup>80</sup> Charles Taylor briefly responded, saying that he "had a quite vigorous discussion" in Chicago on some of these issues but "hadn't heard of all the things you mentioned."<sup>81</sup> Raphael Samuel ignored the comment and replied sympathetically to another question about socialism being "a movement of perpetual opposition."<sup>82</sup> And then the conversation moved on.

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<sup>78</sup> William Kornhauser wrote that the New Left harboured a view of the deformation of the consciousness of the masses which drew contradictory elements from both aristocratic critics of democratic change in the early nineteenth century and the populism of representative democracy's supporters in that it required "the social insulation of those segments of society that embody" the hoped-for values of the left. William Kornhauser, *The Politics of Mass Society* (London, 1960), 22. On the construction of "tradition" in contemporary sociology see Jon Lawrence, "Inventing the 'Traditional Working Class': A Re-analysis of Interview Notes from Young and Willmott's *Family and Kinship in East London*," *Historical Journal* 59/2 (2016), 567–93.

<sup>79</sup> Hall, Taylor, Samuel et al., "Then and Now," 156.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 156.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 157.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 155.