SOCIALISM
AND THE
INTELLECTUALS

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FABIAN TRACT 304

ONE SHILLING
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AS will soon become obvious from what I have to say, I am not a politician, nor am I specially well-informed about politics. Since most people who write political pamphlets are usually one or the other, this at any rate will make a change. I read and argue and even sometimes try to think about politics, but I speak with no authority. And I must explain at once that the views I shall express are very far from being the views of the Fabian Society. In fact this essay is a tarted-up version of a talk given to a weekend school, in which my purpose was, if nothing else, to draw as few hear-hears as possible. In this, if in nothing else, I succeeded. Many of my arguments are likely to be wearisomely familiar, and any possible interest they hold may well be only that someone like me is advancing them, that I can give some sort of low-down on the political character of—how shall I describe myself? As an elderly young intellectual, perhaps, with connections in the educational and literary worlds and with left-wing sympathies.

I will begin by explaining how I fit into the class set-up. My father is an office worker, and I grew up in a modest but comfortable lower-middle-class home in the London suburbs. I was a scholarship boy at a large London day school and, also on a scholarship, studied English at one of the less pretentious Oxford colleges. There I went through the callow marxist phase that seemed almost compulsory for my generation. Next came the Army, which clears the mind wonderfully. In 1945 I voted Labour by proxy, and have voted Labour at all three general elections since, as well as in all local elections. I feel that unless something very unexpected happens I shall vote Labour to the end of my days, however depraved the Labour candidate may be and however virtuous his opponent.

These things being so, I often ask myself why I belong to no political organisation, except the Association of University Teachers, one of the smallest trade unions, if that is the right term, in the country. Admittedly, I have a poster in my front window at election-time, when I also lend my car to the local party—but why don't I belong to it, why don't I go out canvassing like many of my academic acquaintances (including at least one professor of philosophy)? I hope that some sort of answer to these questions will emerge as I proceed.
I want next to make a few distinctions and definitions. I take as my general field of reference the middle-class intellectual, using the phrase in a pretty wide sense. One could reel off a fairly long list of the occupations pursued by the kind of people I am discussing, and this may be helpful in attaining some sort of precision. I mean occupations like those of university, college and school teachers, perhaps the lower ranks of the civil service, journalists, industrial scientists, librarians, G.P.s, some of the clergy (predominantly the non-conformist sects?), and the various brands of literary and artistic, or arty, intellectual. This is by no means an exhaustive list, but it may serve as a guide. Obviously there will be sub-divisions among these people as far as their political attitude is concerned, and these divisions may be associated with the lines of demarcation between their various occupations. I think they often are so associated.

THE ACADEMICS

I am going to refer first to a small but important sub-group which I mentioned earlier: the academics. The decline in political activity among intellectuals as a whole must, I think, be taken as a fact in the perspective of the last twenty years, and it is particularly noticeable among our younger novelists and poets. But it does not apply nearly so strongly, in my observation, to academic people. Leaving out the apathetics, whom one might expect to find anyway in the senior common room of a university, we might divide this sub-group into two. The first I could label at once as roughly the sociological academics. They are, of course, comparatively few in number, at the most 5 per cent of college staffs, but for our present purposes they are of particular interest.

To start with, this type of academic tends to be strongly political and as a rule strongly anti-communist. They mostly adhere to the left wing of the Labour Party, although there is a Liberal fraction which is surprisingly, and rather disconcertingly, influential. But Labour and Liberal alike they are active: they work in the local parties between as well as during election campaigns and, for what it is worth, they do a good deal in the lower ranks of the Association of University Teachers. This means, of course, that they are much stronger than their mere numbers would suggest. When I called them ‘sociological’ I meant that they are made up of economists, social scientists, statisticians and the like, and I detect somewhere in the background the sinister hand of the London School of Economics.

But it is not only the reasonably high-powered sociological expert who is concerned here. I wonder whether perhaps such people round about the universities are at all paralleled by similar people outside: social workers, probation officers and so on, though I do not know about this. At any rate, it is in this general direction that we would do well to look when we try to find the sort of person who may help the Labour Party to ‘re-think’, to revise its attitude to the problems of socialism, and I should like to think that the party planners were bearing them in mind. Their potential contribution is large.
MILITANCY AND REALISM

In a place like Swansea, at least, the sociological academic has the chance of working on the rather vague inherited socialism (or radicalism) which many of the students display—it is militant in attitude though often not much else—and might help to turn it into something a little better informed. But the great quality of this kind of academic for my purpose is that he is realistic, not romantic: a point to which I shall return later. For the moment I should just like to suggest that this realism can have a short-run effect damaging to Labour interests. I have talked to sociologists who are disturbed about what they regard as the mass-production of welfare schemes, especially in housing. It is felt that these are sometimes applied with too little regard for individual preferences; a kind of blanket of welfare descends indiscriminately. Making a fuss about such things will obviously benefit Labour in the long run, but that day is not yet.

The second of my two academic categories is less definite and less interesting in this connection. They are the people on the fringe of a political party or just inside it, and I should guess that they are pretty equally divided between the two main parties, though there are a few outlandishly left-wing and militant characters here, including my professor-of-philosophy friend. I mention this category only to say that whatever side they may be on they are not romantic, they are comparatively undeluded. This I think depends simply on having a settled job which, however tenuously, does bring them into contact with reality. From this point of view, as from others, the student is the life-blood of his teacher.

I TURN now to a different group, though it has connections with the academic group, especially since the war. I refer to what might be called the intellectual pure and simple (if these terms are appropriate): I mean the literary and arty man, the writer in the widest sense, the critic, the journalist, the self-employed intelligentsia if you like. It is often said that in the Thirties we had a predominantly left-wing intelligentsia, but now it’s right-wing if it’s anything—and often it isn’t anything. For this purpose the Thirties can be stretched on until about 1945. I remember an acquaintance of mine at that period indignantly asserting his working-class background to an audience of sceptical ex-grammar school boys. It was discovered too late that this chap had been to school at Haileybury or somewhere, and his father owned half the Midlands. (This incident was a kind of ludicrous capsule parody of the career of George Orwell, a very significant witness in the case we are discussing.)

THE SELF-EMPLOYED INTELLIGENTSIA

You can see, anyway, that at the time I am speaking of it was the ‘done’ thing to be inclined to the left. A man who was not, and further was not active in the movement, was often regarded with much the same
mixture of contempt and disbelief as nowadays, I am told, greets the Oxford undergraduate who wants to be in the swim but fails to go to church. A fascinating paper could be written on that particular shift of fashion, and its conclusion would tell us a lot about the real value of such middle-class progressive sentiment. In the Thirties then we had Mr. W. H. Auden, the idol of the young, talking about the glories of working for the overthrow of capitalism by force. The great point is that it was not only politically desirable, it was also a form of spiritual salvation.

To think no thought but ours,
To hunger, work illegally,
And be anonymous.

In Auden’s wake we had not only a group of lesser writers but the hopes and aspirations, to coin a phrase, of hundreds of young intellectuals who perhaps could hardly hold a pen but who found, when the Spanish war came along, that they could manage to hold a rifle. This readiness to face death in pursuit of their principles is obviously much to the credit of the young men of the Thirties, and I think this is much too often forgotten today. It is too easy to laugh at them in retrospect, especially if one is a comfortably-off right-wing journalist who knows quite well that whatever happens he won’t get his hands dirty. (Not that I myself would fancy getting mine dirty if it meant the chance of being killed.) But there are other things about this group which do link them with the intelligentsia of the Fifties.

ATTITUDES IN THE THIRTIES

The first point is that although the political colouring in the work of writers like Auden, Spender, Day Lewis and so on was widespread, it was not the only form of colouring, and it did not go at all deep. Even in a comparatively straightforward political play like The Dog Beneath the Skin, the actual political content, even the anti-fascist content, is very small. It is jostled by a whole lot of other interests, in which the desire to shock the bourgeoisie was important. And that bourgeoisie which Auden and his friends were so interested in ridiculing and denouncing was the bourgeoisie of Flaubert rather than that of Marx, from whom they merely borrowed a few technical-sounding terms to use about it.

In some ways these people were only conducting in public a personal vendetta against their parents (see The Ascent of F6) and one or two unsympathetic headmasters. This notion of political writing and other activity as a kind of self-administered therapy for personal difficulties rather than as a contribution towards the reform of society—this I think is an important key to the whole intellectual approach to politics, not just to that of the Thirties. Indeed I sometimes think that the whole middle stratum of Britain, not just the intelligentsia, chooses its politics by temperament only. Loving what is established and customary pulls you to the right; hating it pulls you to the left. And behind that again lies perhaps your relations with your parents: your family environment can seem a warm
nest, or it can seem, in Isherwood’s phrase, ‘the enormous bat-shadow of home’, something to be fled from and rebelled against. But this is speculation.

MARXISM AND WHAT IT MEANT

I should like now to look a little more closely at the marxist element in the thought of these intellectuals of the Thirties. My own experience at the university in 1941-2—at the tail-end of the movement—suggests to me that of several possible ways of distinguishing between the marxist and the non-marxist, one is especially interesting from our viewpoint. The marxist wing included a strong faction of the more specifically literary and artistic intellectual which did not appear to the same degree in the democratic-socialist wing: a budding schoolmaster, let us say, was far less likely to be a marxist than a budding poet was. The same sort of thing held true, I feel, in the world outside the university. The actual amount of knowledge of marxism, and in particular of what it meant when applied in practical politics, was, as I have said, very small indeed.

This lack of knowledge—or this refusal to recognise what was plainly evident—can be seen in another significant example from Auden, a stanza from his poem *Spain 1937*:

To-day the deliberate increase in the chances of death,
The conscious acceptance of guilt in the necessary murder;
To-day the expending of powers
On the flat ephemeral pamphlet and the boring meeting.¹

George Orwell has an interesting and highly characteristic comment on this, less known than it might be because it occurs for some reason in his essay on Henry Miller. Orwell says:

The stanza is intended as a sort of thumb-nail sketch in the life of a ‘good party man’. In the morning a couple of political murders, a ten-minute interval to stifle ‘bourgeois’ remorse, and then a hurried luncheon and a busy afternoon and evening chanting walls and distributing leaflets. All very edifying. But notice the phrase ‘necessary murder’. It could only be written by a person to whom murder is at most a word. Mr. Auden’s brand of amorality is only possible if you are the kind of person who is always somewhere else when the trigger is pulled. So much of left-wing thought is a kind of playing with fire by people who do not even know that fire is hot.

We have now reached the point where I can connect the Auden outlook both with the intellectual climate of the Fifties and with what I was saying earlier about romanticism. To Orwell, what Auden and his various allies were doing and saying was wicked; if not deliberately so, then wicked out

¹ This is the stanza as Orwell quotes it. All the texts I have seen read ‘the inevitable increase’ and ‘the fact of murder’. It would be unlike Orwell to misquote, and my assumption is that in this extract he has preserved an earlier reading, afterwards toughed up by Auden to give it a less ruthless implication, I have not been able to consult the first edition of the poem.
of a kind of criminal folly. Folly it no doubt was; but we have to remember that a few dozen intellectuals of the Auden school, if no more, had been to Spain at the time when Orwell was writing and had certainly got to know that fire is hot. Mr. Auden was not I think present in person on that occasion; Orwell was. But my point here is that it is getting the emphasis wrong to denounce the pre-1940 intellectual as wicked. What you had there, I think, was a quality as characteristic of the Fifties intellectual as of his predecessor in the Thirties: romanticism.

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ROMANTICISM in a political context I would define as an irrational capacity to become inflamed by interests and causes that are not one's own, that are outside oneself. If this sounds hostile or bad-tempered, I had better say at once that I see myself as a sufferer from political romanticism just as much as the next man. Anyway, by his station in society the member of the intelligentsia really has no political interests to defend, except the very general one (the one he most often forgets) of not finding himself bossed around by a totalitarian government. But compared with, say, a steelworker or a banker he is politically in a void. Furthermore, he belongs to no social group which might lend him stability; his only group is the intelligentsia itself, where stability is associated mainly with alcoholic comas. In these circumstances our intellectual shops around for a group and for a cause to get excited about.

POLITICAL ROMANTICISM

At some periods these things are readily available: Spain and its committees, Abyssinia, unemployment, the rise of Fascism and so on. (I shall have something to say later about Hungary and Suez.) The Communist solution to such problems has at least two well-known attractions. First, it offers certainty in the baffling flux not only of politics but of life in general. And the intellectual, although presumably trained to look for truth, has recently shown a paradoxical preference for certainty. This, obviously enough, is the link between marxism and that other system of answers to all the intellectual's questions, dogmatic Christianity. Marxism, however, has a second attraction not offered by the Church: it involves violence. Violence has a good deal of charm for some sections of the intelligentsia (as the cult of bullfighting shows), or at any rate the thought of violence is attractive. It provides a way of getting one's own back by proxy on one's parents and one's old headmaster; one can work off the guilt of having been to a public school and so on by chatting about blowing up the class one was born into; one can compensate with some dash for one's thwarted desire for power, which is often obsessive in these circles. Quite soon it becomes natural to write airily about political murders and read about them with appreciation.
We were nicely fixed up, the romantics might say, in 1937; but what about 1957? When we shop around for an outlet we find there is nothing in stock: no Spain, no Fascism, no mass unemployment. (No Hungary? I should not like to venture a prediction.) We still read the good old New Statesman regularly, but we never find enough in it about Mr. Bevan, the one man with the touch of violence that will appeal to us. Mr. Gaitskell is running the show now, and he isn’t violent, in fact—despite a pretty good effort over Suez—not at all the sort of man one expects to see at the head of a Labour Party. (I would not be understood, by the way, as disagreeing with all points in the romantic case.) Did somebody mention Tribune? But, my dear, the book reviews are perfectly appalling. Perhaps politics is a thing that only the unsophisticated can really go for.

WHAT ARE WE TO DO?

So what on earth, the complaint might continue, are we to do? We can show how wrong the Thirties people were by turning right round and fanatically hating the Russians instead. We can buy The European and listen to Sir Oswald Mosley and his little friends telling us what we’ve been missing all these years. Or we can join the Church. Apart from giving us authoritative answers to all our problems, it gives us a sense of tradition. This is extra comforting at a time when everyone, from Dr. Leavis at Cambridge to Mr. Priestley in Reynolds News, is saying that our values are perishing before the New Barbarism—which used to mean Hitlerism, but now it means the Welfare State and commercial television.

The Welfare State, indeed, is notoriously unpopular with intellectuals. It was all very well to press for higher working-class wages in the old days, but now that the wages have risen the picture is less attractive; why, some of them are actually better off than we are ourselves. We never contemplated that. And now the Labour Party have the confounded cheek to press for more equality still. They are out to make everyone the same, you see. Levelling down. The Tories were right after all. (The argument that equal incomes, and/or the destruction of the class system, would turn everyone into replicas of everyone else is an interesting one, and although totally erroneous—as can at once be seen by noting the wild range of idiosyncrasy in even a homogeneous environment like a senior common room—it is nevertheless extremely widespread.)

THE foregoing is, of course, an exaggerated portrait, but if you will not meet one man who corresponds to all of it, you would meet many to whom a fair-sized fraction is applicable. What I have said is at any rate strikingly different from the account given by Orwell in his long series of denunciations of the British intellectual, which culminated, of course, in Nineteen Eighty-Four. I take this as a political pamphlet with a warning about totalitarianism addressed to the intelligentsia. Orwell was in fact warning the late Forties
of something that had already been averted in the late Thirties, for he had
not noticed the huge revision of feeling and opinion that began in 1940.
He was a sick man; he had also completed his long-impending develop-
ment into a hysterical neurotic with a monomania about the depravity of
British intellectuals. For him there could be no changes. I doubt if he ever re-
covered from the experience, brilliantly retailed in his *Homage to Catalo-
nia*, of seeing how Communists can treat their allies when ‘necessity’
demands. After that he must concentrate on warning, on denouncing, on stopping the
rot in Britain.

This development in Orwell has had some curious consequences. Of
all the writers who appeal to the post-war intelligentsia, he is far and away
the most potent. Apart from incessantly hearing his name spoken, we can
hardly pass a month without reading an article on him. I seem to have
counted no less than three critical biographies of him. At least one more
is, I believe, on the way. In many ways this is encouraging. No modern
writer has his air of passionately believing what he has to say and of being
passionately determined to say it as forcefully and simply as possible. Most
passionately he believed that left-wing politics are a trap for what I have
called the political romantic; so passionately, indeed, that the trap becomes
a trap and nothing else. Orwell’s insistence that the political game can be
dirty and dishonest and treacherous, that it often is, betrays him into im-
plying that it must be a dirty game, that it always is. And his warnings were
always delivered at the top of his voice.

GEORGE ORWELL AND CLASS-CONSCIOUSNESS

In another way Orwell cut at the root of things by his famous attempt
to stop being a typical middle-class intellectual and to start being a member
of the working class. Hence his perfectly voluntary spell as a down-and-out
and such painful tricks as his habit of sucking his tea noisily out of the
saucer—which few workmen would take as a gesture of solidarity, I imagine.
Changing one’s class *downwards* is more difficult than changing one’s sex,
and we really have Orwell to thank for demonstrating this. After reading
him, the only influential writer of his generation to have an honest shot
at it, no romantic could believe that ‘identification with the working classes’
was anything but a mug’s game.

I may have shown a certain animus towards Orwell, and I have not
had occasion to do more than mention some of his many fine qualities.
But animus remains, and the reason for it is this. He was the man above
all others who was qualified to become the candid friend the Labour party
needed so much in the years after 1945. But what he did was to become
a right-wing propagandist by negation, or at any rate a supremely powerful
—though unconscious—advocate of political quiescence. Had he lived to see
the Fifties he might have realised this, but I rather doubt it. In his own
highly individual way he was, I suspect, a romantic like the rest, and that
‘indifference to reality’ which he so cogently attributes to the intellectual’s
interest in politics was a leading characteristic of his own tortured prophecies.
It would be unfair, and also perhaps rather unconvincing, to blame Orwell alone for the present political apathy of the intelligentsia, though I do think him important. I should say that Mr. Arthur Koestler, whose name might be coupled with his in this connection, has exerted far less of a pull. *Darkness at Noon* was undoubtedly an important anti-Soviet novel, but our intellectual, however excessively internationalist he may be in his literary tastes, can still be insular enough to feel that British politics are too special ever to be properly understood by a foreigner. The fact that Mr. Koestler has been a continental socialist thus works against him instead of for him. This may well be far too facile an explanation, but the relative standing I have assigned to these two jeremias is not, I think, far out.

**CAUSES OF APATHY**

What are the other causes of apathy? Some have been often enough rehearsed as explanations of left-wing apathy in general, but one or two of them apply with a different emphasis in our field. The widespread loss of confidence in Russia, which Mr. Crossman has mentioned as pushing the independent voter away from the left, comes in with special force here. Some extreme romantics, it is true, could still (until very recently anyway) acclaim Russia as a cultural wonderland even after going behind the Iron Curtain, and some months ago I spent a stimulating evening with a marxist friend who described to me the touching scene he claimed to have witnessed in rural Czechoslovakia, with peasants playing a social-realist pastoral on their pipes while the local party member—the only one in the province, apparently—looked on with a benign smile. To anyone who can believe this, the events in Hungary may well seem the outcome of a Western plot.

But apart from the lunatic fringe, who must I think have ceased to become recruited to Communism after about 1940, Russia’s spiritual defection seems taken for granted. This has had the agreeable effect of stifling some of the flatulence of parlour marxism, but it has also had the corresponding effect of closing one of the traditional golden gates into the Labour Movement. It has always been an intellectual axiom that Britain is half-dead, and if there is no rallying-point abroad, some people are going to do no rallying at all. It would not occur to them that the Welfare State is worth rallying to.

At home, indeed, very few causes offer themselves to the cruising rebel. No more millions out of work, no more hunger-marches, no more strikes; none at least that the rebel can take an interest in, when the strike pay-packet is likely to be as much as he gets himself for a review of Evelyn Waugh or a talk about basset-horns on the Third Programme—so he imagines, at any rate. One can ‘identify’ oneself with a miner who washes in front of the kitchen fire and is paid something under the national average. It is less easy in the days of pit-head baths and £20 a week—of course only a minority pull in as much as that, but that escapes notice in romantic circles, in the same way as a few hundred thousand unemployed are too few to get noticed. Your intellectual has never been the man for subtleties
of this sort; it is the broad picture he cares about; and indeed to be fair to him for a change, it is hard at the moment to quarrel with that view of the broad picture; individual hardship—hardship for one person in thirty or forty, say—but general prosperity, however unequally it may be distributed.

THE DIRECTION OF CHANGE

Another matter which weighs against the left is the vague and sotto voce, but fairly general, disquiet about the direction in which our society (and the Labour party) is moving, insofar as a direction can be discerned. There is some uneasiness, for example, about nationalisation, or about the Labour party's form of it; it is felt that there are monopolistic tendencies, that workers are finding it harder to change their jobs than they should, that power-hunters and organisation-maniacs are coming into their own. Now I don't know whether these fears are justified or not, and if they are they may well be laid to rest by the 'new look' which Labour is devising for nationalisation, though it will be long before the influence of this can be felt. But, I will repeat, for our purposes matters very little whether or not the fears I have mentioned are justified: the intelligentsia—and once more I include myself—doesn't understand economics and it doesn't work in the nationalised industries.

These feelings are only feelings, and they may well be only the result of successful right-wing propaganda; but they are there just the same. I think in fact that the younger Tories have been pretty astute in this department. People like the late political commentator of the Spectator, Mr. Charles Curran—who I may say stirs my emotions as they have not been stirred for many a long year—have made a very good thing out of the technique of the advertising copy-writer whereby the effect you want to produce is stated as a fact: compare 'The intelligent modern hostess buys Higgins's soups' and 'The Unions have long rejected the Socialist solution.'

NON-POLITICAL ISSUES

To resume: it is worth noticing that the issues which will attract our contemporary romantic are non-political ones, or ones that are not in the first place political: the colour bar, horror-comics, juvenile delinquency, the abolition of capital punishment, the reform of the laws relating to divorce and homosexuality. It may be in place to say a little more about this last one. One feels that a progressive party should have this reform on its programme, but to adopt it in an election campaign, which would undoubtedly attract many romantics, would be likely to have the opposite effect on the rank and file. I cannot see myself explaining, to an audience of dockers, say, just why homosexual relations between consenting adults should be freed from legal penalty. It is a truism, but in the ways of truisms a most important fact, that what will appeal to the romantic, with his emotional substitute for political interests, will alienate the ordinary party man. And, as I suggested in my remarks about equality at the end of Section 3, the converse is just as true.
We see this clash of attitudes clearly over the question of relations with undeveloped territories. Here the romantic is surely right in agreeing that if the British working man has climbed up to some sort of prosperity, then his next job, a vital one, is to pull the African and Asian worker up the ladder after him. But if a new steel-mill is to go up at either Calcutta or Llanelli there are obviously not going to be many interested parties in Britain who will insist it must go up at Calcutta. The romantic will, if he hears about it and gets a chance of insisting, but it’s easy for him: he isn’t an interested party.

Until very recently there has really been only one political issue of anything like the same proportions and of the same kind as the Abyssinias and the Spains of the Thirties: I mean, of course, Cyprus. Here at any rate is something which potentially unites the romantic with the practical man. But what gets done about it? Compare what does get done about it with what would have got done about it in the Thirties. In my innocence I asked one of my Labour party sociological friends why there weren’t protest meetings all over the place, why people weren’t organising something. ‘We run meetings all right,’ he said, ‘but nobody turns up. Have you ever tried protesting to an empty hall?’

**SUEZ AND HUNGARY**

But now—I am writing just three weeks after the Russian assault on Hungary and the Anglo-Franco-Israeli assault on Egypt—we have a couple of first-class political issues confronting us. The intellectuals have been up in arms, protesting, helping to pass resolutions, sending letters and telegrams, even demonstrating. It is too early to say what long-term effect, if any, the Hungarian and Egyptian crises will have on the behaviour of our romantics, but I imagine (hoping to be proved wrong) that such effect will be slight. If the crises settle down quickly, as at the moment they show signs of doing, they will soon slip the minds of most people, intellectuals and non-intellectuals alike. What is needed is a good, long, steadily-worsening crisis out in the open where everyone can see it. The events likely to follow upon the oil shortage are from this point of view very ‘promising’, as a marxist might put it.

On the whole, though, politics have become, and seem all too likely to remain, unromantic. When the immediate excitement of a demonstration is over, they quickly fall away into Auden’s flat ephemeral pamphlet (no rudeness, please) and boring meeting. And while we are on boring meetings, let me complain as savagely as possible about the local Labour party meeting on Suez which, breaking a habit of nearly fifteen years’ standing, I went so far as to attend, vowing to join the party immediately afterwards. Within a quarter of an hour I had silently released myself from my vow. I had forgotten what political meetings were like. Out they poured from speaker after speaker, all the vile old sick-and-tired thought-savers: ‘I am sure I speak for all of us here when I say that we deeply deplore... act of wanton aggression... policy based on international justice... extend the hand of friendship... spirit in the country today... united as never before... go
forward to victory.' In my undisciplined way I could not, or anyhow did not, refrain from groaning slightly at some of this. Indignant glances were turned on me, as on a self-confessed Suez Grouper. And I saw that those who call for a war on clichés in popular political writing and speechifying are wasting their time. It is on clichés that majorities are and must be fed.

And so, as I said at the beginning, I put up my poster, lend my car, cast my vote, demonstrate once in ten years and the rest of the time fall back on chatting about politics with my friends. But it is never really honest to plead boredom and leave it at that. Obviously the reasons for mine are that I feel my security is not threatened—perhaps it really is, but no matter, it doesn't seem to be—or in other words I have no political interests to defend, and I have no desire for any kind of political career whatever. If I were shaken up I should act, at least I hope I should, but not until then.

And what use should I be if I did?

I MIGHT re-phrase that last question by asking what, if anything, the intellectual has to give the Labour Movement. I wonder very much if he has anything. I often feel that even the intellectual who takes up some sort of political career, attains some power or influence in that field, stands a good chance of being wrong on any given issue, a rather better chance than the ordinary Labour party or trade union man. In actual relationships within party politics he will be distrusted for the middle-class habits he is likely to have, particularly his middle-class or public-school accent. It may sound absurd or ill-natured to mention this at all, but I am sure that here we have a tremendously important badge of class-difference, one which probably did more than anything else to negate Orwell's efforts to become a working man.

In the field of political theory your intellectual is likely to be a pure theorist, much too indifferent to changing conditions, not nearly empirical enough, without a quarter of the tactical sense that your trade union official will have picked up without noticing. (I am aware that this too has its dangers.) The intellectual's love of the broad picture, which I mentioned earlier, led him to tell us in the Thirties that rational methods of distribution would solve world food problems, without bothering with the tedious checking-up process which would have told him how few bellies all that burnt coffee would have filled. I should like to see this gone into in detail, for I have not the knowledge.

SELF-INTEREST—OR GUILT?

On the whole I may seem to have shown a certain amount of acerimony towards the intelligentsia, which is rather unfair, because some of my best friends are intellectuals. Nor can I ever pretend that I am not one myself. But I do sometimes feel that if, as the evidence seems to show, many of
them have moved over to the right, or at least away from the left, then this
is not necessarily unmixed loss to the left. These fellows represent after
all only a tiny fraction of the voting strength and we can well afford to do
without a great deal of their conversation. And even assuming it is de-
sirable to entice them back I am much too little of a politician to begin
suggesting how this is to be done. All I can think of is that the obvious
place to start would be, not the literary cocktail party, but the university
junior common room.

There is another reason why I do not grieve overmuch at all this de-
fection or apathy, even though any right-wing sentiment in the mouth of an
intellectual (or anywhere else) is likely to annoy me. The reason is that
I think the best and most trustworthy political motive is self-interest. I
share a widespread suspicion of the professional espouser of causes, the
do-gooder, the archetypal social worker who knows better than I do what
is good for me. (The only edge the Tories have over the socialists from my
point of view is that they at least are not out to do anybody any good
except themselves.)

It will come as no surprise if I confess in conclusion that I feel very
little inclination to go and knock at the door of the local Labour party
headquarters. My only reason for doing so, apart from mere vulgar
curiosity, would be a sense of guilt. And this is not enough. How agreeable
it must be to have a respectable motive for being politically active.
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