RALPH MILIBAND

AND THE POLITICS OF THE NEW LEFT

Michael Newman

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Foreword

Michael Newman's biography of Ralph Miliband fills an important gap in the history of the Left and it will help a whole new generation of socialists to appreciate the unique role that Ralph played in the progressive politics of the period.

Those who were privileged to know and love him, as I was, will value this book because it covers aspects of his work with which we were not familiar but everyone who reads it will gain a much deeper understanding of the man, what motivated him and how he reached the conclusions that he did.

I first heard of Ralph many years ago and his reputation was established early as an independent thinker whose contribution to the ongoing debate was always both principled and well considered.

It was much later that I got to know him better when he suggested that he might organise a small discussion group to meet at my house on a regular basis to talk over the developing situation, which provided me with an opportunity to sit at his feet as a mature student, almost as if our discussions were tutorials laid on for our benefit.

Ralph's leadership at these meetings of what we called the 'Independent Left Corresponding Society' were absolutely invaluable at a time when the Labour Left was obviously losing its influence in the party and post-modernist thinking was, to some extent, undermining our confidence and posing real difficulties for us in seeing our way forward.

At one stage in his life he had appeared to be in favour of a break with Labour; a view that was, and is, widely shared. But it became apparent that his real ambition was to clarify our thinking so that we could be effective both inside and outside the party.

His role in the establishment of the Socialist Society and later the Socialist Movement was crucial and followed a strategy that reflected his own thinking and revealed the potential for future advance that retained a strong socialist commitment but avoided both sectarianism and the futile inner-party manoeuvring which could, and did, take up too much time inside the party.

The Chesterfield Conference and those which followed did provide a useful forum for a very wide range of people who retained their socialist commitment and found fewer and fewer opportunities to meet and talk about the issues which interested them, and Ralph dominated them all with the power of his intellect and the modesty of his manner.

Ralph's teaching and writing earned for him an international reputation that carried his influence to America, Canada and well beyond, where those who were committed to socialist ideas were also struggling to make sense of the

tremendous changes taking place, many of which were designed to undermine our own faith, but which, in truth, required us to rethink our position without altering our convictions.

It was through my work with Ralph that I got to know Marion and their two sons, both now close to the Government. Evenings with them at home were always stimulating as he drew to his circle so many others who admired his mind, valued his friendship, and had their own contribution to make to the discussions that always took place there.

Ralph Miliband has long deserved a really good biography. Michael Newman's is comprehensive, scholarly, sensitive and readable. He has performed a real service, honouring the memory of Ralph and doing full justice to the kindest of men and one of the best minds of our generation.

Michael Newman reminds us how much Ralph left behind to encourage and help the generations yet to come.

Tony Benn   November 2001

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I am also very grateful to the following for allowing me to quote from their own correspondence with Ralph Miliband: Katherine Kraft, K.S. Karol, John Griffith, Frances Fox Piven, Andrew Glyn, John Saville, Leo Panitch and Hilary Wainwright. For permission to quote from the letters of Edward Thompson, Marcel Liebman, Nicos Poulantzas and Lord Edward Boyle, I would like to thank (respectively) Dorothy Thompson, Adeline Liebman, Annie Leclerc and Ann Gold. The following kindly lent me correspondence: Paul Breines, Katherine Kraft, Evi Wolgemuth and John Saville.

Interviews were a crucial source for the book and, although the final text does not include many direct quotations, my discussions with people who knew him well in Britain, France, Canada and the United States were enormously helpful. The full list of those to whom I talked is provided in the bibliography, but I would like to record my deep gratitude to all of them here. I am also grateful to those who wrote to me with recollections about Miliband and their names are also listed in the bibliography.

Many of Miliband's wartime writings and letters were in French and he corresponded with many people in French after the war, including Leszek Kolakowski, Marcel Liebman and K.S. Karol. In the book all quotations have been translated into English and I am very grateful to Lucile Desblache and Nan Keen for their help with this task. John Parker of MBA Literary Agents acted for me on this project and I want to thank him for his support and encouragement. I have been very lucky in having the Merlin Press as the publisher and would like to express my gratitude to Tony Zurbrugg and Adrian Howe for all their work on the book. I am also very grateful to my sister-in-law, Hannah Edwards, for proof-reading the manuscript, to Margaret Cornell for the index and to the Miliband-Lipman

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I want to record special thanks to a few people, who played a particularly important role. John Saville, who collaborated with Miliband so closely for over thirty-five years, took a close interest in the project, providing me with numerous insights, and he also read and commented on my manuscript. I also owe a great deal to Leo Panitch for two long and extremely productive interviews, for reading the manuscript and, more generally, for his enthusiasm for the project. I am also deeply grateful to Tony Benn for two very useful interviews, for allowing me access to the full CD Rom version of his diaries and, above all, for his exceptionally generous Foreword. I am also very grateful to John Griffith and John Westergaard for reading and commenting on Chapter Five. Their criticisms were very helpful and they also bolstered my confidence that Miliband's stance on free speech and academic freedom merited a full chapter.

I am, above all, grateful to my own family. My children, Kate, Hannah and Zack tolerated my latest obsession and were prepared to listen to me talking about it – sometimes at length. My brother, Jeff, was deeply interested and read and commented helpfully on the manuscript. Ines, as always, was a constant support. She had important insights, we discussed the book endlessly, and she even read and criticised the first draft during our summer holiday instead of reading novels – a real sacrifice!

I owe a great debt to Ralph Miliband's family. His sons, David and Edward, were always supportive and involved. They talked to me at length, with recollections and interpretations that were exceptionally helpful. They also read the first draft, providing comments and criticisms that certainly led to improvements in the final version. Miliband's sister, Nan Keen and her husband, Harry, were equally encouraging and they also contributed in numerous ways to the book. In particular, Nan provided a wealth of information on Miliband's childhood and early life and gave me copies of much of his wartime correspondence. My greatest debt is to Marion Kozak. It is not easy to allow a stranger to write a book about your late husband, particularly so soon after his death. But Marion did much more than grant permission to do this. She gave me full access to Miliband's rich collection of private papers and sustained me with numerous cups of coffee over the long period in which I was ensconced in her house reading them. She identified names that I did not know, explained events of which I was unaware, and suggested people to whom I should speak. We constantly discussed Miliband as a person and a thinker, and she provided me with judgments that were always reflective and stimulating. She also read the first draft of the manuscript, correcting factual errors and offering useful suggestions and comments for the final draft. Naturally, neither she, nor other members of the family agree with all my interpretations, but I could never have written this book without Marion's assistance and support and would like to record my deep gratitude by dedicating it to her.

Introduction

Ralph Miliband (1924-94) was a socialist academic and public intellectual. The author of several books, and numerous articles, and the founding editor (with John Saville) of the annual, *The Socialist Register*, he became 'the leading Marxist political scientist in the English-speaking world'[1]. Bilingual in French and English, and with his work translated into every major language, his reputation and outlook were international. *Parliamentary Socialism* (1961), was the most powerful and influential critique of the Labour Party ever written, while *The State in Capitalist Society* (1969) transformed the way in which the 'western' system of power was interpreted and studied. Miliband also became a key figure in debates in political science in North America, where he held a series of Professorships between 1977 and 1992, and his exchanges with Nicos Poulantzas about the nature of the state were studied throughout the world. As an outstanding university teacher he inspired generations of students, but his impact also extended well beyond the academy, contributing to the radicalisation of a whole generation in the 1960s and 1970s. This was partly because his writing was always direct and accessible, but also because his public speaking combined passionate commitment with logical analysis.

Despite the contemporary influence and continuing importance of his political thought, it has never previously been examined in any extensive form, and one important aim of this book is to remedy this omission.[2] However, Miliband's significance transcends his writing and speaking, for he was engaged in a 'project': the attempt to define and apply an independent form of socialism. His life and work can be understood only if this commitment is appreciated, for both his academic writing and his public role were organically linked through it, and from the age of sixteen in 1940 until his death at seventy in 1994, he never wavered in his fundamental convictions.

His early life was important in defining his whole approach to socialism. Forced into exile from Belgium to Britain as a Jewish refugee, he developed the habit of trying to understand the world, and to apply that understanding, almost entirely on his own. At the age of sixteen in London, he was already attempting a Marxist analysis of the war. Too independent to accept Stalinism after the War, he eventually joined the Labour Party despite his vehement opposition to its Atlanticism, and worked with the Bevanites during the 1950s. The exit of so many intellectuals from Communist Parties in 1956 and the development of the 'New Left' offered hope for independent Marxism, and Miliband joined this movement with optimism. However, his intellectual honesty and independence led him to scrutinise each new phase in detail and by the mid-sixties he had

established *The Socialist Register* and had abandoned the Labour Party. These were years of passion: bitter anger over the Vietnam war, enthusiasm and doubts about the student movement in 1968, optimism about the 'Prague Spring', and despair when it was crushed. Having come to the belief that a new Socialist Party would eventually need to be established, he attempted to achieve this goal in various ways, perhaps most notably through a close relationship with the 'Bennites' and Tony Benn himself during the 1980s. But, still more fundamentally, he tried to provide the theoretical underpinning for a democratic form of left-wing socialism that could withstand the impact of the re-assertion of the Right, revisionist thinking on the Left, and, ultimately, the collapse of the Soviet bloc.

Miliband's thinking was always distinctive. Whereas most Socialists took their lead from the parties to which they belonged, Miliband remained independent in his judgments. No one could therefore accuse him of blind obedience or unthinking conformity. Even his political opponents had no doubt of his absolute integrity, for he always refused to compromise if convinced that he was right. This approach was highly distinctive, for most people – particularly those with strong beliefs – tend to filter out negative evidence which may contradict their views. Thus for several decades Communists in Western Europe closed their eyes to the crimes of Stalinism because they were so keen to believe that a better world was being built in the Soviet Union. Similarly, because Social Democrats saw the importance of individual reforms they tended to forget that they were tinkering with capitalism, rather than building a genuine alternative to it. The particular strength of Miliband was that he avoided simplistic views of this kind: he was able to accept that positive features could exist in the Soviet Union, without perceiving it as a model, and he could acknowledge that Social Democracy was preferable to conservatism without illusions about its radicalism. And this approach extended well beyond his attitudes towards these two dominant forces of the traditional Left, for he maintained a critical distance in relation to all regimes and political movements. Yet this was combined with a constant interaction with left-wing movements and individuals.

Miliband always sought to understand the thinking of all sections of the Left, and attempted to define his own views in a constant dialogue with others. He was also an energetic letter writer, who corresponded on issues of political and theoretical importance with intellectuals in all parts of the world. This way of sharpening his own ideas through debate with others had already begun in the 1940s but was institutionalised in his thirty years as editor of *The Socialist Register*, leading to a worldwide correspondence. Analysis of such debates thus illuminates the dilemmas of socialists for half a century after the Second World War.

Throughout his life, in both his theoretical work and the practical movements in which he was involved, Miliband was trying to define and advance a particular form of socialism – a socialism which was Marxist but not Stalinist or Trotskyist, democratic without being Social Democratic, realistic without succumbing

to 'realism', and which contained a vision without being 'visionary'. It was a complex and elusive ideology, but a compelling and important one. It was also underpinned by a determination not to give up when times were hard but to accept the necessity for 'the long haul'. Naturally, at the end of his life he could see that the immediate prospects for the Left were difficult. But, for him, the way forward was to analyse the problems while maintaining a commitment to the establishment of a fundamental alternative. The last words of his final book expressed total confidence that the current situation could not endure and that:

> In all countries, there are people, in numbers large or small, who are moved by the vision of a new social order in which democracy, egalitarianism and cooperation - the essential values of socialism - would be the prevailing principles of social organization. It is in the growth in their numbers and in the success of their struggles that lies the best hope for humankind.[3]

The combination of theory, commitment and optimism meant that his socialism touched the lives of many. This was indicated a year after his death in a remarkable memorial occasion held at the London School of Economics. Tony Benn opened the proceedings to a packed audience, speaking of Miliband's importance on the British Left. But a notable feature of the event was its international nature, as academics and activists from across the world debated the themes that had preoccupied him.

This book recounts his life and explains the development of his work. In so doing it also provides a history of the independent Left in Britain and its international connections. While not uncritical, it is written in the hope that it might help to sustain Miliband's project in the twenty-first century, for it is certainly as necessary as ever.

Notes

[1] Robin Blackburn, (New Left Review 206, July/August 1994)
[2] There were some serious and useful analyses at the time of his death, particularly in the volume of The *Socialist Register 1995*.
[3] *Socialism for a Sceptical Age* (Polity, 1994), pp. 194-5

Chapter One: Socialism and Identity

1. Growing up in Brussels and London (1924-41)

Adolphe Miliband – later known as Ralph – was born in the Saint-Gilles Commune of Brussels on 7 January 1924 and was the first child of his Polish Jewish parents. His father, Sam, was one of a family of twelve brothers and sisters from Warsaw, all but one of whom had left Poland soon after the First World War.[1] One had joined the Red Army, but most had moved westwards, with several settling in Paris. Sam, who had trained as a leather worker, moved to Brussels in 1920 when he was twenty-five, and eventually his parents, brothers, sisters and many other relatives had joined him there. Ralph's mother, Renia (later known as Renée) had lived in the same Jewish quarter in Warsaw, but in 1922, at the age of twenty-one, she had also moved to Brussels, where she soon met Sam, who was now designing, making and selling high quality leather goods in a small workshop. In 1923 they married, living in an apartment in the district in which Sam worked, and it was there that Ralph was born, followed four years later by his sister, Anna. She would be given the name Anne-Marie during the war, and eventually became Nan. The changes of name reflect the complexity of the identity of the Milibands, like so many others who formed the extensive wave of Jewish migrants from Eastern Europe escaping persecution and in search of a better future in the West.[2]

Renée was an outgoing person, and managed to create an open house even in a small apartment. Sam was much quieter, but also enjoyed the warm environment that she established, so their home was the centre of big family reunions and the children's friends were always welcomed. Ralph thus came from a secure, close, and supportive family. He and Nan had a particularly good relationship. Both were more interested in books than sport and were often sent out for fresh air by their mother. The only real crisis in his childhood was when, at the age of twelve, he nearly died when an operation on his appendix led to peritonitis. But after several weeks in hospital and a long convalescence, meaning that he missed several months at school, he recovered and normal family life continued. However, while Sam and Renée were loving parents, their circumstances were often extremely difficult.

Sam was a talented craftsman whose goods could provide the family with a reasonable living when people had enough money to buy them, but the economic depression decimated the market for luxury leather products and, for

most of the 1930s, his sales were insufficient to support his wife and two children. The only way in which the family could make ends meet was by Renée also working. But there were no jobs available, so she was forced to use her initiative. She would pick up supplies of women's hats from Jewish suppliers, leave Brussels at the crack of dawn, travelling to Southern Belgium to sell her ware in markets, returning late in the afternoon to cook supper. This kept the family's head above water but at considerable personal cost. Sam was a proud man with a traditional attitude to gender roles – he was supposed to be the provider and found it deeply humiliating that Renée needed to work. But she found it equally distasteful. She was a woman with middle-class aspirations, who hated the idea of being a market trader, and kept her work secret from her neighbours. The family was never destitute and Renée and the children even took summer holidays on the coast at Blankenberge, where they rented a house or flat. But this was possible only because Renée would set up a market stall on the coast, sometimes travelling backwards and forwards to Brussels for more supplies. As a young boy, Ralph was already aware of the sacrifices that his parents were forced to make and the anguish it often caused them, and he was also involved since he would sometimes travel across the town to fetch the hats for his mother to sell the next day.

While times were often hard for Renée and Sam, they were determined that their children – and particularly their son – would do much better. Sam had not received very much formal education himself and, much later, Ralph would describe his father's family as 'authentic products of the ghetto' who 'barely had some elementary education in Yiddish and had to learn some broken French when they arrived in Belgium or France'.[3] Sam never learnt to speak French very well, but he normally spoke this rather than Yiddish to the children and he read French newspapers. Renée was much more gifted linguistically and made a greater effort to learn. Perhaps because she had been boarded out to distant middle-class relatives in Warsaw, she had learnt to speak excellent Polish, which was very unusual in her family, and in Belgium she taught herself reasonable French. She and Sam spoke a mixture of Polish, Yiddish and French to one another, and Ralph and Nan spoke both French and Yiddish. Their parents made it very clear that they were expected to succeed. Thus when Ralph's primary school reports were critical and his teacher said that he talked too much in class, he was sent to bed early. The mixture of discipline and high expectations seems to have been effective for in 1935, after six years at the Ecole Communale Primaire, he obtained 78 per cent in the prescribed exams in French, Flemish, arithmetic, the metric system, geometry, geography, Belgian history, natural sciences, hygiene, craft work, singing and gymnastics. Once he had moved to the Athenée Communal de Saint-Gilles (grammar school equivalent) at the age of twelve he really 'took off'. Responding to a teacher, Mr Defernet, whom he liked, and who shared his interest in literature, he blossomed and was soon regarded

as outstandingly bright. He was also charming, humorous, intellectually preco-
cious and enjoyed a good argument. Defernet made contact with his proud par-
ents, and together they encouraged him to become a lawyer – an ambition that
he maintained until the war.

Ralph had already revealed one other enduring quality at an early age: strong
convictions and an unwillingness to acquiesce in other people's opinions if he
thought that they were wrong, particularly if they offended him politically or
morally. One early example of this characteristic has particular significance.
In about 1935, during one of her forays to sell hats, Renée met a farmer's wife,
Louisa Vos, who came from Montignies-lez-Lens, a small village near Mons in
the South-West of Belgium. Nan was a rather sickly child who did not eat very
much, and Louisa invited the children to stay on the farm. Nan loved the animals
and the country life and subsequently spent every holiday there. But the village
was in a poor area, with high unemployment, near the 'black country' (Borinage)
and the poor farmers in the region were sympathetic to the slogans of Degrelle
and the Fascists.[4] Ralph, though only about twelve, argued with them at first but,
when he could not change their opinions, felt increasingly unhappy there and
rarely returned on subsequent visits. This is an early instance of his unwilling-
ness to compromise on issues of fundamental importance to him. Yet within a
few years Nan and Renée were to owe their lives to the people of this village.

In terms of identity, the situation was complex. In general, inter-war Brussels
was not a particularly welcoming society for the recent Jewish migrants. There
was certainly a well-established small Jewish community, but this was generally
middle class and conservative. Like Sam, the majority of the newcomers were
poorer artisans but, because they were not unionised, they remained outside the
organised labour movement. Language was another factor, partly because many
of them continued to talk Yiddish, but also because Flemish was the majority
language of the Brussels working classes, while the Jewish migrants tended to
prefer French, which was then associated with the bourgeoisie. This may have
reflected social aspirations but was also because many of them had arrived in
Belgium by chance rather than intention and French was a more useful inter-
national language. But because linguistic politics were so sensitive this created
another barrier between the Jewish migrants and the indigenous working class.
Furthermore, partly because of its prohibitive cost, very few of them became
Belgian nationals. Thus by the Second World War, only two or three thousand
of the 43,500 Jews in Brussels, Antwerp, Liege and Charleroi possessed Belgian
citizenship.[5] This meant that they could not vote and could be safely ignored
by the political parties. They thus tended to regard themselves as outsiders and
were generally seen as 'foreigners'. However, such generalisations cannot convey
the particular experience and perceptions of an individual growing up in these
circumstances. How then was Ralph Miliband's identity forged by the interac-
tion between his Belgian and Jewish environments?

He was later to give a strong impression that the family was unassimilated and that its outlook was overwhelmingly dominated by a Jewish consciousness. For example, he recalled:

> As a Jewish boy, the son of Polish Jewish parents, I could not avoid being aware of events like the coming of Hitler to power in 1933 – I was nine at the time. German refugees began to appear in Brussels in the following years; and the anti-Semitism, which was what was focused on in my family circle about Fascism, was in any case merged with earlier, Polish, Russian anti-Semitism, which made this appear as the major phenomenon in history, with the Jews as its centre. 'Jewish blood' had been spilt throughout centuries, in many parts of the world; and the world outside the Jews was therefore more or less hostile, suspect at least, not to be trusted, or even penetrated.[6]

However, he wrote this when he was nearly sixty and extremely critical of those who emphasised particular identities. In any case, he acknowledged that his mother was quite different 'and found no difficulty whatever in making contact with "goyim"'. In fact, Renée had close friends who were not Jewish, and she did not keep a kosher home. Nor was there any question of Ralph and Nan going to Jewish schools. They attended the local schools, where the majority of pupils were not Jewish, and they also had gentile friends. However, the family milieu was certainly Jewish. They attended synagogue on the High Holy days, they had a family Seder night at Passover every year (although they also celebrated Christmas), and it was taken for granted that Ralph would have his Bar-Mitzvah when he was thirteen. As a life-long atheist, he had ceased to believe in God at a very early age – perhaps by about ten – and had no interest in the event, but there is nothing to suggest that he questioned or sought to reject his 'Jewishness'. He also had direct experience of anti-Semitism when, for example, one of their landlords called them 'dirty Jews' or 'dirty Poles' if they were late with the rent. Without Belgian citizenship, they tended to relate to France rather than Belgium. Sam took an interest in French, rather than Belgian, politics, and Ralph supported French, rather than Belgian, cyclists in the Tour de France. It is therefore not clear how much he ever identified with the country in which he was brought up, although he no doubt expected to remain there as an adult.

To what extent had his socialist commitment already begun while he was a young teenager in Brussels? He tried to answer this question himself in 1983 when he began to write an autobiography:

> From ... the age of 12, I kept close attention (as did my father) on French politics ... and he and I regularly discussed daily events in Paris, changes of ministry, the respective merits of this or that leader ... The French connection was greatly strengthened by the fact that Léon Blum, a Jew, was leader of the French Socialist Party, and in 1936 Prime Minister. My father had no strong political convictions, but was very definitely left of centre, in a loose sort of way, and had for a short time

been an active member of the Polish Socialist Party in Warsaw immediately after the first world war.[7] The political climate in our home was generally and loosely left: it was unthinkable that a Jew, our sort of Jew, the artisan Jewish worker, self-employed, poor, Yiddish speaking, unassimilated, non-religious could be anything but socialistic, undoctrinally ...[8]

A childhood friend recalls:

At a very young age, Ralph became very interested in what was going on around us in the world and he was sure that his generation would be able to find solutions to all the wrongs in our society. It was, I think, the first reports on the civil war in Spain, i.e. in 1936, that triggered off our first discussions. A friend of Ralph's, Maurice Tran, would generally initiate the debate and parents and guests would participate half seriously, half mockingly. So we had heated discussions about Lenin, Trotsky, Marx, the French revolution, the Russian revolution which was to solve all the world's problems.[9]

Miliband himself later claimed that at this stage he had 'no knowledge of or real interest in politics or political ideas',[10] but this is only because the standards by which he was judging the politics of a twelve-year-old boy were those of a mature man with a consuming passion for socialist thought. It is, however, clear that Maurice Tran was a very important influence over Miliband's political development, as his autobiographical account explained:

My interest in politics came about in a roundabout way ... [M]y closest friend[Maurice Tran] ... joined a left Zionist organisation, the Hashomer Hazair and was neglecting me for it. I was very reluctant to join, I don't know why. I had no feeling whatever for Israel, but had no feeling against it either. But I realised that I [could] either lose my friend or join. So I did and discovered the CM [Communist Manifesto], though not in any blindingly strong way. I recall talking about it, and must have thought of myself as being much more on the left than hitherto but I have no clear memory of it or of anything else much, except some discussions my group had about world affairs, in which the City (of London) and Chamberlain were definitely the arch-villains.[11]

He continued by saying that he recalled being consciously on the left by May 1940, so that there must have been 'a quite intense kind of incubation' in the year or so before that.

This account is completely accurate in one sense and inadequate in another. It is quite true that by 1940 he was already thinking and writing in broadly Marxist terms. But further explanation is required as to why, by the age of sixteen, he had already formed the rudiments of the political stance that he would retain for the rest of his life. The general left-wing approach is not surprising. As he himself said, this was a typical stance in the kind of environment in which he grew up.

Nor was there anything at all remarkable about accepting a generally Marxist perspective. Again, this was quite normal amongst young Jews in Brussels in the 1930s, and Hashomer Hazair, in which both Trotskyists and Communists were well-represented, no doubt seemed to confirm the political categories which he was already developing. But what he failed to explain – or perhaps to understand – was that the commitment that he now took on was far more deep-rooted and passionate than his matter of fact account implied. By 1940 he was writing with real anger about class division and class conflict, and these sentiments were to remain with him for the rest of his life, while many who had also been attracted to Marxism in the late thirties gradually drifted to the Right after the war.

What was it that made him so angry? The origins of his attraction to Marxism probably lay in his observation of what class inequality was doing to his parents and others like them. The rise of Fascism, with the complicity of the propertied classes, then confirmed this view of the world. Of course, he might have seen all this in the terms he attributed to his family – of 'goys' oppressing Jews. And certainly in 1940 he was still very conscious of himself as a Jew. But Hashomer Hazair integrated the Jewish and socialist perspectives and, at this stage, he probably saw no need to separate the two. Thus by the time he was sixteen his hatred for Fascism and his anger about class power and oppression had combined to form his political outlook. This would subsequently become more sophisticated and subtle, but would not change dramatically. However, it was at this stage that his world was suddenly shattered.

After months of uncertainty about German intentions in the West during the 'phoney war', Nazi forces launched a decisive attack on Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg on 10 May 1940. Luxembourg surrendered within five hours, the Netherlands lasted for five days, and although the Belgians held out for a little longer, it was clear that the end would come quite soon. It was in these circumstances that the Miliband family packed and left for the Gare du Midi in Brussels. Their intention was to take a train to Paris to stay with relatives there. However, the Germans had already crossed the Meuse and had reached Sedan, and there was no chance of reaching Paris by train. The family did not know this, but there was chaos and confusion at the railway station, where they spent the day and some of the evening. Eventually they realised that there was no hope of making the journey and returned to their flat. While there Ralph heard on the radio that the Belgian army was conscripting all boys of his age. Although King Leopold had not yet ordered a surrender (he was to do so on 28 May), it was clear that Belgium was to be overrun and Ralph had no intention of joining an army which had already been defeated. He was adamant that he would escape to France, adding to the family's distress and panic. Sam and Renée would not let him go by himself but thought that Nan was too young to make a hazardous journey on foot to the French border. They therefore decided that Sam would accompany Ralph while Renée remained in Brussels with Nan. The hope was

that they would be able to join Ralph and Sam in Paris later. However, after leaving the flat Sam insisted that he and Ralph should head for England rather than France. Despite Ralph's protestations that they had no papers or passports and would not be allowed on a boat, the father and son walked day and night to Ostend – a distance of over 100 kilometres. Sam then succeeded in getting them both on the last boat leaving for Britain. Once it was seaborne, they presented themselves to one of the ship's officers and were granted refugee status. After arriving in England on 19 May, they made their way to London. Thus began a five year separation through which father and son were to sustain one another: Sam by giving whatever financial assistance he could and by ensuring that Ralph's education always came first, and Ralph by insisting that they remained optimistic about Nan and Renée however bleak the situation appeared.

They were initially put up in Chiswick in the house of a Jewish businessman. Sam immediately sought permission for the two of them to establish themselves in the leather trade, but this was turned down on 15 June and they were told to apply to the local labour exchange for suitable work. They also had to move out of the house into one room with a landlady whose rent was paid from public funds, since they had no income except for a paltry sum provided for the support of refugees. It was perhaps she who changed him from Adolphe to Ralph on the grounds that in a war against Hitler 'we can't have you going by that name'. For several years he would remain Adolphe on official documents but be known as Ralph (initially pronounced Raif). He was happy to accept the new identity, but it was no compensation for their dismal situation which was made worse because for nine weeks they had no news at all of Renée and Nan, who thought that they were in Paris rather than London. Finally, Renée managed to make contact through a chance meeting with another Jewish family, which was separated in a similar way, and correspondence was carried on intermittently via the Red Cross through third parties in Portugal, Latin America and Switzerland. But this was little compensation for the pain of separation, the anxiety about the future, and Ralph's feeling that he had been responsible for the break-up of the family.

When the intensive bombing of London began, Ralph and Sam started paid employment in a depressing job, removing furniture from bombed houses. According to his autobiographical notes, this:

> was made a lot easier by the fact that the man who led the team of five or six removers and who drove the lorry (all English except us) believed in doing the very minimum possible and would park the lorry somewhere off Chiswick High Street as often after lunch as he could, and would lead us all to the cinema, the Hammersmith Gaumont/Commodore for the afternoon, or otherwise pass the time, for instance in expeditions to Kew Gardens. However, the work, when we worked, was hard; and we found out about middle-class meanness and snobbery, and kindness; and I found out about the curious combination of kindness, cunning, ignorance, feigned servility and subordination, actual contempt which this particular part of

the unskilled worker class had for their masters.

He also recalls his political development in the same period:

> The reason why I say I must have been definitely on the left is that I do recall that I was consciously on the left by the time I got to England … So much in fact that … in August 1940, and it may have been even earlier that summer, I made my way, alone to Highgate Cemetery on a private pilgrimage to the grave of Marx … [A]nd I remember standing in front of the grave, fist clenched, and swearing my own private oath that I would be faithful to the workers' cause. I do not recall the exact formulation, but I have no doubt of the gist of it; and that I thought of myself as a revolutionary socialist or communist – the exact label was of no consequence … I must have been very 'political' even then because I do remember reading the *Daily Worker* as well as other morning papers in Chiswick Public Library and also Labour Monthly … The Communist Party was then pursuing its line of the war being an 'imperialist' war, which I found very confusing. Even then, and as early as 1940, I was already experiencing fully pulls and pressures of a contradictory nature, and since there was absolutely no one with whom I could discuss this, or rather I knew no one – I was left to my own devices. There was one young man, the son of a refugee friend of my father, whom I saw very occasionally: he was Trotskyist from his days in Belgium, a bit older than I was, and we had no discussion of any substance. I saw him after Trotsky was assassinated and was shocked by his … certainty that the Russians had done it. I only had the vaguest idea who Trotsky was, let alone what Trotskyism meant, but I knew it was anti-Russian, which I did not like. A book made a much stronger impression me, Jan Valtin's 'Out of the Night' which left me with a deep question mark about the Comintern and the reality of Communist politics, and a certain scepticism about total and unqualified commitment, or so I think now and [in] retrospect.[12] Nor did I mainly read politics in that summer: I spent a lot of time reading French novels – *Les Hommes de Bonne Volonté* was one, and trying to make sense of the new English scene. And there was the constant sense that all this was temporary, and we looked up in the warm summer night and wondered if the Germans would invade, and what we would do then.

This is a very honest attempt to reconstruct his activities and thoughts during this period, and the political development that he describes is borne out by his own contemporary diary (written in French). This gives the impression of him spending a great deal of time wandering around by himself during the Blitz – the most frightening period of the war in London – recording his thoughts on what he saw. But he was also already developing some of the enduring themes in his thinking.

Some of his entries simply noted his attempt to understand the English, based on his observations of life in the air-raid shelters. His attitudes towards them were highly ambivalent. He was struck by their tendency to queue, but also thought that the attempt to do things 'the right way', for the sake of it, was absurd. He

remarked on the importance of a cup of tea (for psychological reasons) and the generally friendly relations between the public and the police. He was bemused by English honesty, and also noted, with some astonishment:

> I have never, never heard an English person doubt the English victory.[13]

Although he believed this was the result of propaganda, he still found it remarkable. But it did not necessarily make him more positive about the country and the people:

> The Englishman is a rabid nationalist. They are perhaps the most nationalist people in the world ... When you hear the English talk of this war you sometimes almost want them to lose it to show them how things are. They have the greatest contempt for the continent in general and for the French in particular. They didn't like the French before the defeat: 1. because they don't have order, 2. because they talk too much, 3. because they change their ministers every month, etc. Since the defeat, they have the greatest contempt for the French Army ... England first. This slogan is taken for granted by the English people as a whole. To lose their empire would be the worst possible humiliation.[14]

At the same time, his consciousness of class divisions and his embryonic Marxism were certainly apparent. On 24 September he took a trolley bus ride to the East End:

> In every district that you passed, there was either a closed road or destroyed houses, unexploded bombs, roofs without tiles, etc. London is really badly hit. Everywhere it's the same thing to a greater or lesser extent. In Whitechapel, in the Jewish area, and the slums, the devastation is really terrible. Rows of people are waiting ... to be evacuated. New wretched refugees, like the others, with a bundle on their shoulder, mainly Jews ... But life goes on; the butcher is trying to rob his customers and the customers haggle. People want beigals but there aren't any now. Everywhere ... you see misfortune and devastation weighing people down. When you see them you almost feel ashamed to live in a relatively quiet area. Shame and indignation and fury ... You ask yourself: how can they live like this and how could they have lived like this until now. It is the East End ... the shame of 'their' civilisation, the permanent condemnation of their system ... But a twenty minute bus ride away, there is the parliament, rich, flanked by its church, near Buckingham Palace.[15]

A few weeks later, he looked at bomb damage in the wealthiest parts of the West End and was shocked by the force of the explosions. However:

> You feel in these ruins a wealth which hasn't gone, which will begin again tomorrow, and for which this bombing is not a major crisis. While in the East End the situation was terrible that night.[16]

And he asserted his Marxism in melodramatic terms:

> Proclamation to all the Xs of the World
> In a world delivered without mercy to the infernal powers called the powers of money, exploitation and private factories.
> In a world where all that makes the glory of man has vanished.
> In a world where a man could die for not having a metal called money.
> In a world where the big-wigs only seek profits.
> In a world where the little people are blinded by the most diabolical lies.
> In a world delivered without mercy to a vulgar materialism seeking only comfort.
> In a world where the young are educated in a contemptible way.
> In a world filled with slaves and some masters.
> In a world where even the elite is sucked into a materialist vortex.
> In a world where nothing pure exists any longer.
> In a world corrupted as no world ever was.
> And in a world which is vile, mean, powerless, eaten away, disintegrating, unbalanced, insane and sick, I, X, with a naïve and childlike stupidity, call with all my might for a better world, a new world, a renewed world, liberated and free, and, while waiting to find a philosophy which would ensure happiness for everyone, call desperately on all those who have had enough to establish at the eleventh hour the United States of the World on a Marxist basis which, despite everything, is the least bad of all existing political systems. The 14 October of a terrible year in the infamous era known as the Christian era.[17]

But if he regarded himself as a kind of Marxist, he was at least as much pre-occupied with 'finding himself' psychologically, and socially. One of the complexities in his outlook – which was to endure – was his contradictory attitude towards the 'common people'. On the one hand, his sympathies were always on the side of the masses and he felt passionately against the 'big-wigs'. On the other hand, while blaming the ruling classes for the plight of the ordinary people, he also felt removed from them. He admitted this in his autobiographical notes, when talking of his co-workers removing furniture from the bombed-out houses:

> … I remember very clearly the distance [that] I felt existed between me and them, not only on the ground of Jewishness, or being 'Belgium' [sic] or refugees, but a budding 'intellectual', to which I had absolutely no title. Why I should have felt that I was superior to them I do not know, and superior in intellectual and political terms. My English was poor though I was learning it fast and my 'status' entirely 'non-intellectual'. But I must have felt the distance in terms of ideology.[18]

And he hated the idea of ending up like many of the people he met in the air raid shelters:

> The only thing which saves me, is that I am young, that I have a potential which hasn't yet been tapped, which will not be for quite a while – the only consolation

that I can mention – that I will be something!… The risk is that tomorrow will never come and that I will also be a nobody.[19]

He set high standards of honesty and tortured himself when he failed to achieve them:

I was asked whether I was a communist and I replied no. Shame on me. Shame on those who fear their own opinions…. I was even afraid to tell Marjorie [a young woman to whom he was attracted] that I was Jewish … I have never felt so miserable, so second-rate as today …[20]

Two weeks later, he returned to a similar theme:

I am almost 17 and I am so second-rate. Everything around is second-rate, people, things – everything…. My house, but I haven't a house. I am a stranger everywhere. My days, my thoughts. In everything I do, in everything I want, mediocrity hovers and doesn't let me protest. I am nearly 17 and what have I done that is good? And I haven't even done anything bad. If at least I were really bad. But I'm not. I am spiteful with outbursts of kindness, of idiotic sentimentalism. Already, my life is wasted, already I feel that I must begin again, that I am on the wrong path. And this has so little importance. What am I doing? I'm full of self-importance.[21]

His fear of being 'second-rate' and his political stance were brought together when he received his first wage for the removal work:

I have become a worker. On Friday 8 November I got my first pay-packet. And I felt that I'd lost respect for myself and for the workers of the whole world, of whom I am now a brother. Degradation because for money, I have hired out my arms, my body, my being, and because I have lost my whole personality for six days in a row, because I no longer belonged to myself for six days in a row, because of the obligation to be on time and the need to obey for the money. My first wage packet and I wasn't happy. In a sense I have lost a second virginity.[22] Perhaps I have not as yet understood the modern world, but more and more I realise that for me there are only three possibilities: 1. Change society, 2. Dominate it materially or intellectually, 3. Give up.
Today I met someone who was in Spain during the civil war where he lost an arm. My clenched fist meant that we immediately understood one another. Wonderful feeling of fraternity, of the continuation of an idea.[23]

But he could not escape the pain of separation from his family. In late October he wrote:

A big family gives you the illusion that you know lots of people. When you are alone, that is to say without your family, you realise how few people are with you.[24]

Finally, on Christmas Eve, all his feelings poured out:

> For the first time everything that has happened comes back to me and haunts me. For the first time since I left home the past is defeating me. Perhaps for the second time (there was that afternoon in August when I cried while singing 'our' songs). It might well be the same tonight. In a haunting way the phrase returns: a year ago. A year ago, I was in Brussels, there was peace (in Belgium) without a blackout. The way was set for me. There were no exams to struggle with because I had just finished them. Friends at home, Maurice, being confident in oneself, the light that one doesn't have to hide. I don't regret anything (one must never regret anything). Since then there has been everything, the invasion, London, raids, raids.... I believe that I have succeeded in assimilating myself in London. (The Jew assimilates everywhere because he is at home nowhere) ... It's the War, it's winter and it's the blackout in England and Belgium and France and Poland and Norway and Denmark and Holland and Germany. Darkness in Europe. Christmas in London in the dark.... It's Christmas and Mum and Nana are certainly thinking of us, and Paul is 13 today[25] and it is his communion [bar-mitzvah] and I would so much like to be with you and know what you have planned for his party, to see the friendly faces of the family again, the people we can trust, who have the same fire in their eyes, the people of the 'tribe'. Man has only ever one tribe. My dear ones, my family, Mum, Nana, Maurice, all those who are so far and yet so near on this Christmas day ... I would specially like to see them today, for this evening of celebration, when it would have been so good to be together, and millions of people feel like me this evening, crying and waiting and some idiots kneel and pray to find consolation, just as millions have done for 2000 years, in vain (obviously). I don't pray, I hate. I hate all those Germans, French, English, Poles, Belgians, all those Loafers ... [and] Mr 'Moustache'[Hitler] who are responsible for the fact that I am here and my mother over there. All those people who are enjoying themselves this evening while others are cold. I hope that Christmas 1941 will let me read these pages to Mum, Nana and Maurice and Mum will be in tears and we will kiss each other while dancing [and I will say] 'Why are you crying' because it's over now and Maurice will sit with his legs crossed trying not to look emotional.[26]

1941 began in a more positive way. On 3 January he received two simultaneous offers as a result of applications that he had made: from the British Council for Regent Street Polytechnic and from the International Commission for Refugees in Great Britain for Acton Technical College. He chose Acton, probably because it was near home, and three days later he began to study for his 'matric'. In February Samuel found a job in his own trade, simultaneously improving their standard of living and his work satisfaction. But if these changes helped their morale, life remained extremely difficult and Ralph, whose English was still fairly basic, needed to reach the standard for university entrance in six months.

His essays from the college at Acton demonstrate both his progress in English, and his rebellious and radical thinking. Less than ten days after he started he was set the subject, 'For most People Books are an Escape from Real Life' , and argued

that everyone needed some escape and could find it in reading, but most people found escapism in 'silly literature'. This was not their fault – they needed education so that they too could find pleasure in good books, such as psychological or philosophical essays or novels of character. The teacher, who appears to have had little sympathy with the problems of a teenage refugee, gave him 4 out of 10 for his efforts, telling him: 'You must rewrite this in English. Ideas sound but not English idiom'. His attempt to write on 'Self-Government in British Colonial Development' earned him only one more mark. The title, 'Getting up on a Cold Morning', obviously bored him so he argued that this was not a real question for the mass of the population, who had no control over their lives and just had to turn up at the factory if they wanted to eat. For this he was awarded 6 out of 10, with no comments on the content but criticisms on the English and presentation. On 12 February he wrote an extremely interesting essay on 'Death', in which he cited Freud on the way in which funeral rituals had been taken over from primitive society, discussed the importance of the notion of an afterlife as a solace for the problems of life, and argued that Darwin and psychoanalysis had undermined the basis for religion. For this he received 5 marks and was warned that his future work would not be marked unless he wrote more legibly and corrected his previous mistakes. On 26 March his frustration erupted and he turned the bland title 'At the Writing Table' into a diatribe about his plight:

One of the worst constraints civilisation imposes upon men, is, for most of people, the necessity of sitting down and trying to write letter or essay, or anything.... But when one, like me, has to write, even is forced to write, then the torture attains inhuman limits.
Imagine, moreover, if such a thing is possible to imagine, the torture of someone, who not only has to write an essay, but has to write it in a foreign language, whose syntax and grammar seems a diabolic invention of maleficent spirit. On the nature of the subjects one has to treat let a chaste veil be laid. It embraces all the things one would never think of otherwise. Now if your imagination is rich, you have perhaps a slight idea of what my torture may be ... My essays, or what I call my essays, are of course, a poor translation of French ideas. Ah the delight of thinking and writing in French.... But instead of that one must not vex anybody. I take my six pence dictionary ... The most remarquable thing of this dictionary is that just the word you want is lacking ... I want to say: to obey. I think immediately of this French word: obéir à: and I write to obey to, most logically, one would think. Advise to all students of Anglo-Saxon languages: never consider Logic ... And what should I say ... of those verbs ... [T]hose verbs ... danse their cracy dance; like, worms who dance on a grave, they dance on my head ... This is to what amounts my writing of an English essay. Thereafter (notice my courage) I read it again. To me it is perfect. Not a syllable misplaced, not an inaccurate verb, not a paragraph which is not coming exactly where one expects it to come. I feel proud, the ideas are sensible. Perhaps, I have done a masterpiece and I am ignorant of it. Vanity of human sentiments. The essay comes back, two or three days later, crossed and re-

crossed, corrected and recorrected. The marks of the blue pencil are as abundant as words, sometimes more. In fact, these marks of pencil constitute an essay in themselves. Then it is the date, which I have forgotten to write down (this precaution seems probably necessary for the posterity, when will write my biography) … Sometimes whole pages are crossed, probably in a moment of great wrath. After the essay, some notes (most of them disagreeable) are added. The reward of my patience, my courage in fact, all the sentiments which are the best of myself and which I have laid down in my work. I think that I may conclude with the quotation of Shakespeare … "Horrible, horrible. Most horrible".[27]

The teacher disdained to comment on this *cri de coeur* and gave him 5 out of 10.

At the end of the first term he failed the two mathematics papers outright, was told that he had 'little command of English idiom', and that both maths and English needed 'great attention'. As he recorded at the end of the year (still in French):

As the months passed, I realised how difficult it would be for me to pass the matriculation in June. I started to work like never before. I spent my Easter holiday as a student alone in a badly-heated bedroom for a month. After this I began to sacrifice Saturdays and Sundays, and in the last two months, I began to work hard at night, to the fury of my father who couldn't sleep.[28]

As a result, he improved rapidly and even his English teacher started giving him higher marks. His writing was developing into the kind of clear, concise, readable style that he would retain for the rest of his life, and he was able to produce both humorous sketches on subjects, such as 'changing ration books' or the 'English climate', and perceptive analyses of political developments. For example, an essay on 'The Dilemma of the Vichy Government of France' in May 1941 presented a mature left-wing interpretation of the situation, arguing that elite forces had chosen to collaborate with Germany so as to strengthen their own position internally, but that they could not be sure that this would be accepted by the French people who had been taught for three generations that Germany was their enemy: hence the dilemma.

In June, despite fearing that he had failed Maths – always his weak point – he passed the exams in Maths, English History (1066-1914), French, Geography and English and was awarded his 'matric' in the second class division. He was now ready for the next step, but it was not at all clear what this would be. The International Commission for Refugees would provide no further support and at first he did not think that he would be able to continue with his education. He approached the British Council which sent him to the *Ministre d'Instruction Publique Belge* of the Belgian Government in exile. In a letter in late July he told the latter that he had always seen his matric as a 'springboard', rather than a goal in itself, and he asked for advice and support. In a subsequent interview he said

that he would like to go to University, and a Belgian Professor suggested LSE to which he now applied. This gave him a definite goal, but there was no immediate reply from LSE. Because his parents had never become Belgian nationals, he also needed to secure recognition as 'Belgian' in order to receive financial support from the government in exile. But this meant that he would also become a 'future volunteer' in the Belgian army and, if so, it was not clear when he would have to serve. Nothing was therefore at all certain, and he started looking for work, eventually finding a job as a clerk, while still actively trying to get into LSE, which had been evacuated to Cambridge. However, progress was slow – or so it seemed. On 9 September he received a letter from the Acting Secretary and Registrar of LSE saying that he was formally qualified for admission, but that his application was rather late and that acceptance would be dependent on being able to find him a billet in Cambridge, which would be difficult, and on two letters of recommendation. Term then began – without him – since there were further delays pending a decision by the Belgian Government to pay for his fees and billeting expenses and it was only on 30 October that he was accepted, subject to a satisfactory personal interview and a second letter of recommendation. Finally, he began the Bsc. Econ, with bed, breakfast and an evening meal for 32/6d per week in Kendal Way, Cambridge, with army service temporarily postponed.

As he was not yet eighteen, and it was less than eighteen months since he and Sam had arrived in Britain, this was a remarkable achievement. As he put it three months later: 'This was another world opening up, full of possibilities and surprises'.[29] This did not, of course, mean that his problems were over. There was little news of Nan and Renée, and it was still uncertain when he would have to join the Belgian army. But it was a vast improvement over the previous year and he now felt stronger in all respects. His childhood had ended in May 1940, but it was perhaps only as he began at LSE in October 1941 that the course of his adult life began to take shape.

2. Cambridge and LSE, 1941-43

Cambridge was a world apart from anything that Miliband had previously experienced and he would always regard it as one of the most beautiful cities in the world. And LSE itself was equally captivating for him. Based in Peterhouse College, with the centre of gravity for teaching and social life in Grove Lodge, it was a small community with around 350 undergraduate students (of whom the majority were women) and fewer than forty academic staff. The student body was also cosmopolitan, with overseas students forming 20 to 25 per cent of the total, and overwhelmingly left wing, with student union politics dominated by Communists. In these circumstances, he felt much less of an 'alien' than he had been in West London. LSE at Cambridge almost had a family atmosphere, with close relations between staff and students, and it was to be a crucial formative

experience for him.

His contemporaries recall him as already speaking English well and having no problems in communicating.[30] Naturally, he spoke with a French accent which would become less marked over the years but would never entirely disappear. But he continued to worry about his own identity, and his consciousness of being an outsider no doubt cemented friendships with other Jews with comparable backgrounds. Thus Ilya Neustadt, originally a Romanian Jew whose family had settled in Belgium, and who was already active in the Belgian Students' Association, quickly took him under his wing and was an important figure in his life until the end of the war; Claus Moser, a refugee from Germany, became a friend, as did Jacob Talmon (then Fleischer), who was originally from Poland. Talmon shared a house with him and tried (with only partial success) to increase Miliband's Jewish consciousness and commitment to Zionism.[31] Jacques (later John) Mendelson[32], a refugee from Poland, was another close associate at the time, and it is also very likely that common Jewish identity was one factor in the rapport which soon developed between Miliband and his mentor, Professor Harold Laski (see below).[33] However, he also had several non-Jewish friends, including Ephrime Eshag, Norman Mackenzie, and Chris Freeman.[34] For another, and still more important, factor in his personal networks was politics.

While Miliband claimed in his autobiographical notes that his only membership in Belgium had been in the left-wing Zionist organisation, Hashomer Hazair, in Cambridge he immediately sought out the Secretary of the local Communist Party branch, Chris Freeman, telling him that he had been in the Belgian Young Communist League and was seeking a close association with the British party.[35] He may simply have said this so as to be accepted, but it is perhaps more likely that he had associated with the Communists within Hashomer Hazair. The situation of Communists who were the nationals of other countries was complex at this time, for they were not allowed to join the CPGB. The rationale for this was that they might endanger their relatives, who were living outside Britain, if they openly identified themselves as Communists. Those, like Miliband, who made themselves known to the CP, would therefore not proclaim themselves as Communists or be 'card-carrying' members, but would generally support Communist positions. Chris Freeman, who had responsibility for 'foreign comrades', would therefore see them regularly and ask them to do such things as speaking for resolutions backed by the Party in the the Student Union, or even to stand for office.

How far does this association with the CP, which continued throughout his eighteen months at Cambridge, contradict Miliband's subsequent claim that he was always an 'independent Marxist'? He was not an 'undercover Communist' since he was not operating under conditions of party discipline or organisation, there was no membership, fee or formal arrangement involved, and it was already evident that he was an independent thinker. Even if the CP had wanted

to recruit him, he would probably therefore have found the organisation and discipline unacceptable, and he was already expressing disagreements with the Party line.[36] His association was therefore based on the intellectual and political conviction that the Communist position was generally valid and acceptable. This is related to the second factor: the climate of the times. When he began at Cambridge, the Soviet Union was already in the war, Churchill had accepted Stalin as a valiant ally and Communist or pro-Communist forces dominated the LSE Student Union. It was therefore not unusual to be closely associated with the CP and there is no reason why Miliband should have felt that this compromised his independence. Nevertheless, the connection is noteworthy. For he was not a 'run-of-the-mill' young person for whom Communism seemed to provide 'the answer' in the Popular Front or during the war. There were, of course, thousands of people in this category and many of them forgot their Communism or 'fellow-travelling' as quickly as they had adopted it. Miliband was different because he was so deeply interested in politics and political ideas and the basis of the attachment was in a form of Marxism or 'class politics', which made the commitment very much deeper. He would never be an uncritical adherent of a Communist line. But nor would he reject a particular position *because* it was Communist or Soviet-led. His 'independence' meant that he would try to interpret politics in terms of Marxism as he understood it and, at this stage, his views were broadly compatible with those of the CP.

Miliband was certainly useful for the promotion of the Communist line in wartime LSE for he had become a powerful orator. When he spoke – whether in private conversation or on a public platform – people listened. This was not simply a matter of debating style: it was because he combined passion with both logic and a command of detail. Those to whom he spoke immediately knew that he attached the greatest importance to the subject in question and his own animation compelled them to attend to what he said. His appearance no doubt also helped. He was above average height, dark, with deep-set eyes, and almost black hair. His looks, his voice, his intelligence, and his vivacity combined to make him a magnetic personality. He was thus someone who was becoming 'noticed' in both political and academic circles. And he acquired a wide set of friends and acquaintances from all over the world.

By February 1942 he had also become active in both the Belgian and International Students' Associations and, at Neustadt's suggestion, he published his first article (in French) in the spring edition of the *Bulletin de l'Association des Etudiants Belges en Grande-Bretagne*. This was a very 'straight' article, no doubt derived largely from his degree work, on the House of Lords, ending with a plea for reform so that it would be less dependent on privilege and more in line with the popular will. He did not regard the piece as particularly important, but clearly saw it as a stepping stone to something more elevated, telling his father that it was 'but a feeble beginning'.[37] He was more excited when, on the recom-

mendation of the Belgian Association to the British Council, he was nominated to spend a fortnight on an international student programme in Exeter. In theory the idea was to teach the students about English local government, but Miliband was far more interested in meeting people from eighteen different countries. Subsequently, he went to several other congresses, represented LSE in brains-trust meetings around the Cambridge area, attended the Labour Party conference, and broadcast to Belgian students, in French, on the BBC. He also acted as interpreter when a French Communist member of the resistance, Ferdinand Grenier, spoke at the LSE students' union, of which Miliband was elected Vice President in January 1943. These public activities were certainly important to him, but academic matters and the development of his own thought were still more crucial. Laski, the dominant figure in the Government Department, was a central figure in this respect.

In later life, Miliband was often viewed as an acolyte, who modelled himself on Laski, but this is a gross over-simplification. For the essence of his political thinking was already in place before he even met his mentor.[38] He was over-powered by Laski as a human being and a teacher, rather than as a theorist. His tribute when Laski died in 1950 captures these feelings. After recalling the joy and laughter in Laski's History of Political Thought lectures, Miliband continued:

> His lectures taught more, much more than political science. They taught a faith that ideas mattered, that knowledge was important and its pursuit exciting. I like to remember him in the early days of the war, when the School was in Cambridge. He would arrive every week from London and come straight to School from the station. The winter was bitter and train carriages unheated. He would appear in his blue overcoat and grotesquely shaped black hat, his cheeks blue with cold, teeth chattering, and queue up with the rest of us for a cup of foul but hot coffee, go up to the seminar room, crack a joke at the gathering of students who were waiting for him, sit down, light a cigarette and plunge into controversy and argument; and a dreary stuffy room would come to life and there would only be a group of people bent on the elucidation of ideas. We did not feel overwhelmed by his knowledge and learning, and we did not feel so because he did not know the meaning of condescension. We never felt compelled to agree with him, because it was so obvious that he loved a good fight and did not hide behind his years and experience. He was not impatient or bored or superciliously amused … His seminars taught tolerance, the willingness to listen although one disagreed, the values of ideas being confronted. And it was all immense fun, an exciting game that had meaning, and it was also a sieve of ideas, a gymnastics of the mind carried on with vigour and directed unobtrusively with superb craftsmanship …
>
> I think I know now why he gave himself so freely. Partly it was because he was human and warm and that he was so interested in people. But mainly it was because he loved students, and he loved students because they were young. Because he had a glowing faith that youth was generous and alive, eager and enthusiastic and fresh. That by helping young people he was helping the future and bringing

nearer that brave new world in which he so passionately believed.[39]

Certainly, Laski was a role model for him, and almost a father figure, and it was also immensely important to him that Laski thought well of him. But they did not agree. As he told his father in December 1942:

> I went to see Laski this morning. He was very friendly with me … As soon as I came in he started to talk to me about the need to judge things for myself and not only through the eyes of Karl Marx etc..When he had finished he said: "Sorry to talk like this, but I am talking like a father; at least that's how I feel towards you". Word of honour![40]

Miliband was one of those who argued the most vociferously with him in seminars, for at this stage he saw himself as a revolutionary Marxist, rather than as a supporter of the constitutional road to socialism. But Laski obviously saw him as both an outstanding student and engaging personality and became extremely fond of him. By 1943 he already described him as 'a grand lad – one of the best I have had in years'.[41] When Miliband was to apply for naturalisation after the War, Laski's letter of support was thus both effusive and sincere:

> … he has not only been one of the most distinguished of my students, but I have had ample opportunity to observe and admire his high character, [and] his sense of public service … I can remember few students in all the years that I have taught in this Institution in whom I have had greater confidence, both intellectually and morally.[42]

However, at this stage, at least in private, Miliband's position was hardly subtle. For example, when the Beveridge report was debated in the House of Commons and faced some opposition from sectors of the Conservative Party, he told his father:

> The debate … convinced me – if I needed convincing – that Marx, Engels and Lenin were right when they said that the bourgeoisie, be it English, French or any other, will defend itself till the bitter end before being wiped out by socialism.[43]

On the other hand, in public he was normally more restrained. Thus his second article (this time in English) in the Autumn 1942 edition of the *Bulletin de l'Association des Etudiants Belges en Grande-Bretagne* on 'The British Dominions' was a completely orthodox account of the evolution of Canada, Australia and New Zealand from Imperial to Dominion status, with some comments on current trends. A middle way between these two extremes, which was to be more characteristic of his later writings, was the attempt to provide an implicitly Marxist analysis to the subject he was discussing. An early example of this,

which his tutor submitted for an LSE prize (which it did not win) was an essay on 'Theatre and Cinema', which he wrote in June 1942. His theme was that the current war had 'accentuated and made more obvious' the deep-rooted human instinct of yearning to escape from everyday life. Good theatre, while rooted in society and representing the current climate of opinion, could express new ideas and make people think. However, it was not popular, which 'was an indictment of the degree of culture our age has been able to instil in the mass of the people'.[44] Cinema had the advantage of appearing like everyday life and could be seen by thousands of people at the same time. It was therefore commercial and profitable, but this depended on people being attracted to it as often as possible. This meant new releases all the time, with scripts produced under pressure and old ideas re-used:

> As a consequence of the fact that the theme becomes more and more banal, the value and importance attached to the script itself ... is shifted in the film to the actor ... The script is nowadays often written or 'arranged' after an actor has been chosen.[45]

Furthermore, the fact that films were intended for the masses was of the greatest importance in understanding their themes:

> Let us ... pause and consider for one moment the general condition of life of 'the masses'. Observe the mediocrity and the limitations imposed upon people by society and by the way in which they are compelled to live, the monotony, the lack of interest, often the actual misery, which are the painful but obvious characteristics of their existence. Thousands, nay, millions of people have been vanquished in the struggle for life ... and they know it consciously or unconsciously. Their life is petty, insecure, shoddy. What now does the film offer them? Evasion [Escapism]. Evasion in a different world, in a world of riches, of splendour, of palaces and private swimming pools (they, of whom many do not know the luxury of a bath room!), in a world where beautiful men and women succeed in all those enterprises where they have so obviously failed, where there is no daily routine, no need to toil for the bare necessities of life.

There were, he acknowledged, some good films in the West, although it was the Soviet Union which had distinguished itself with a totally new approach – liberation from tyranny and the struggle of the 'common man'. But the cinema was generally designed to reconcile people to the mediocrity of their own lives by making them live through the film heroes, and Miliband expected the propagandist use of film to increase in the future. However:

> It is beyond doubt that in a society where art would be given its true status and where the intention would be culture and not merely profits, both theatre and the cinema could play a tremendous part in educating man to enjoy himself. It is

also imperative to realise that neither can be improved without a corresponding advancement in the level of material and intellectual condition of the people.[46]

This is interesting in various respects. First, although his style was a little ponderous and awkward, it was remarkable how well he was able to write in English only two years after his arrival. Secondly, his awareness of the relationship between cultural and socio-economic forces in society was striking. Perhaps the argument was a little crude, but his analysis of the economics of cinema production and the attempt to explain the content of film in terms of social control, was quite impressive for an eighteen-year-old before the era of 'cultural studies'. Thirdly, the authoritative tone was also evident, forming a clear link with his later published writings.

Yet there was also continuity in the fact that Miliband was, in reality, much less confident about his abilities than he appeared. Only a few weeks after finishing this essay he confessed to himself (in English):

> 23 pages of Mehring's 'Karl Marx' [the famous biography first published in 1918] makes me realise more profoundly than ever the depth of my ignorance. I know very little indeed about world history both in detail and seen as a whole. I know next to nothing about philosophy, and have never had any direct contact with any of them: I of course mean I have never read wholly or partly any book. I know nothing whatever about Greek culture and philosophy and its ... creeds and repercussions. In fact I know nothing at all about anything. Vague ideas about this and that, some spattering of Marxism and Leninism and that's all at 18 and a half.[47]

Perhaps this was unusually self-deprecating, but it was not uncommon for Miliband to doubt his own abilities. However, he could not indulge in introspection for long, for he was constantly brought back to the plight of his family.

Throughout his time in Cambridge, he had constantly written to his father (in French) to bring him news, thank him for all his support, and raise his spirits. Sam was naturally often quite lonely, with little news of Nan and Renée and now also separated from his son. On the second anniversary of their departure from Belgium, Ralph wrote:

> Today is not a very pleasant date for you and me. I am certain that over there, in Brussels, they think of us both today as much as we think of them. No! It is not a happy anniversary. Fate and destiny as much as events are not always very fair. But it is useless to rail against what is. I don't for one minute doubt that most of our worries and pain are over. We won't have to wait for two more years before we can all see each other again. I am certain that we will be together again a year from today. Time goes by and each day that goes by is one day less in our being apart. Have courage! At least, we still have a goal, a hope. So many others have lost both![48]

Whether he really felt so optimistic, or whether he was simply trying to 'jolly along' his father, is unclear. But he was quite wrong: things got worse rather than better.

After Sam and Ralph had left, Nan and Renée had returned to the flat in Brussels. As in other parts of Nazi occupied Europe, Jews had been forced to wear the yellow star, and had been harassed by numerous petty restrictions. But Renée managed to eke out a living, courageously defying the morning curfew against Jews to travel to the South to sell her hats. However, in August 1942, as the Nazis prepared for the deportation and extermination policies, life became really grim and Renée was interrogated by the Gestapo. They had found out that Ralph and Sam were in Britain and demanded to know why they had left and what they were doing. Renée claimed that she and her husband had separated, that Ralph had stayed with his father, and that she was certain they were now in Switzerland. She was released but, while she was at the Gestapo headquarters, Nan had received a notice telling them to report to Malines – the place where the Jews were assembled before deportation to the camps.[49] Renée had no intention of complying with the order, but she and Nan pretended that they were doing so, and said their 'goodbyes'. Only one neighbour, who was in the Resistance, knew where they were really going. Their destination was Montignies-Lez-Lens (near Mons) to the farm of Louisa and Maurice Vos, where Nan had stayed so many times before the war. They knew that they would be welcome there because, in 1940, Louisa had cycled for three hours to Brussels to suggest that they moved. But at this stage Renée had wanted to stay in the capital. Now they were to be sheltered in the village for the rest of the war. It is ironic that the farmers, whom Ralph had dismissed as too sympathetic to Degrelle, had shown outstanding courage in effectively turning Montignies into a Resistance stronghold only a few miles from a German airforce base. In time Maurice and Louisa Vos and Renée also managed to rescue other members of the Miliband family, and eventually seventeen of them were given shelter there. A local priest and teacher took care of the education of Nan (now known as Anne-Marie) and provided contingency plans to house her in a convent, as Sister Anne-Marie, in the event of a raid.

Sam and Ralph knew of the round-up of the Jews in Brussels in August, but were left in agonising uncertainty about the fate of Renée and Nan. On 10 October, for the first time, Ralph explained the family circumstances to Laski, and in March 1943 Laski intervened with the Belgian government in exile to see if Nan and Renée could be traced.[50] In fact, just after this, Sam somehow received a Red Cross message dated 23 November, saying that Renee and Nan were 'both in excellent health with Louisa'. This message, Ralph assured his father, made him very happy and changed the whole situation.[51] But, of course, the news was four months old when they received it and they could not be sure that Nan and Renée were still safe. They were to live on in this kind of anxiety until the liberation of Belgium.

The other unresolved personal issue was the question of Miliband's military service. During his first academic year at LSE, he was anxious to postpone enrolment, perhaps because he did not want to leave Sam alone. But he also wanted to be sure that, when he entered active service he would be doing something really useful. His original wish was to be parachuted into Belgium to work with the Resistance, but this was impractical because he was too well known as a member of a large Jewish family in Brussels. Nor did he know France well enough to join the Resistance there. In January 1942 he passed his medical examination, but was told that he could not voluntarily join until authorisation was sought from the Polish authorities (as he was not yet a Belgian national). Thus no further orders would be issued until the end of the academic year. However, he appears to have received training for entry into the British Army after March 1942. At the end of his first academic year in the summer of 1942 he was granted a deferral for another year. By April 1943 he had, for reasons that remain obscure, become desperate to join the Navy, rather than the army. His friend, Ilya Neustadt, told him to work on Laski to try to get him into the Belgian Navy and, if not, into the British Navy. The same day he approached Laski, who 'said that he would see what he could do although he did not sound very enthusiastic'.[52] Perhaps because he was so agitated about the whole question he now uncharacteristically forgot to register for his Part I examinations. This was all the more surprising since he had told his father only a few weeks earlier just how important it was 'to do well in the three June exams, at least as far as the future is concerned' and he was studying extremely hard.[53] Although his lapse was not catastrophic – in the sense that he could take exams in these subjects with his final year work – he was now really distraught. Neustadt tried to reassure him both about his academic future and about the Navy and urged him not to be too modest and not to worry about bothering Laski.[54] He obviously took this advice and, according to his later account, the result was as follows:

> "Leave it to me", said Laski. A few days later, I had a letter from A.V. Alexander, the First Lord of the Admiralty, telling me that he was pleased to hear from Laski about my wish to join the Navy and advising me to go and see a vice-admiral at the Admiralty, who would fix it up. Which he did. He must have been very puzzled why the First Lord of the Admiralty should have particularly wanted me, a callow youth, in the Navy.[55]

The meeting in the Admiralty in mid-May was successful and at the end of June Miliband left Cambridge for his war service.

3. The Navy, June 1943 - to January 1946

The Navy led to another kaleidoscope of new experiences. Immediately after leaving Cambridge, he joined HMS Royal Arthur, which was, in effect, a vast

'camp' moored at Skegness in Lincolnshire for new recruits for the services. On arrival, their hair was cut, they were stripped, and deloused. The Chief Petty Officer, who terrorised them all, made a particular point of reserving lavatory cleaning duties for those who were not Church of England. If this was not enough for Miliband, who was always rather fastidious, he was also allocated to a tough Belgian commando unit.[56] However, when interviewed after this initiation, he was told that the plan was to put his languages to good use and that he would probably be required to take a German exam at the Admiralty within a fortnight. Fortunately, this was postponed for a few weeks and, armed with an edition of Thomas Mann's works to help extend his vocabulary, he prepared for the test, which he passed in August. He was now regarded as an interpreter, which meant that he would be part of the intelligence service, becoming the so-called 'headache' on board ship: that is, he would wear headphones to listen to German radio communications, and could be involved in the interrogation of prisoners.[57] He was told that the work would be 'extremely interesting'[58] and, after further training, he eventually joined HMS Valorous, a destroyer, in the Firth of Forth in Scotland in November. One of his contemporary writings shows his sense of excitement:

> … I get to my ship, my ship, do you realise what this means, my ship, the ship I am posted to, my sphere of action, the weapon which is going to allow me to do something. A clean ship, beautiful in shape … HMS Valorous my ship. Steady. I see some officers, am duly interrogated. The thrill of saying A. Miliband, reporting for duty sir. A young subbie, a remarkably good looking young man, fair, tall says "So you are our new headache. I hope you will like the ship and find life pleasant here".[59]

Despite this initial enthusiasm, life in the Navy would in fact consist of long months of boredom and frustration punctuated by short periods of intense excitement and by February 1944 his mood had already changed:

> I joined the Navy on June 28th 1943 and at that time I felt a tremendous sense of exhilaration at the thought of participating in the task of winning the war. It seemed to me quite beyond doubt that the mere fact of joining the Navy made it possible for me to do some really useful work. Well, that feeling is wearing off fast. I have been on a destroyer for the last three months or so, and done my work I think carefully and efficiently. There is no need to elaborate on it, but not the wildest flight of imagination would make me honestly feel that I have done anything appreciable towards winning of the war and the liberation of Europe. We have not yet met a German vessel, we have not been attacked by ship or aircraft, we have hit no mine, we have neither sunk nor shot down anything, we have killed nothing apart of [sic] some fish who died from the effect of depth charges. In fact, apart of the regular action stations, some frights, some start shells and some exercise at shooting, we have just gone along as if it had been peace time. No wonder the feeling of exhilaration has worn off. That is a euphemism. I am heartily sick of it.[60]

His frustration stemmed largely from the delay in opening the Second Front:

> I have got the Second Front fever. How happy I would be if we went in tomorrow, with everything we have got, blasting away, everyone keyed up, flushed, ready. The grand feeling. The feeling that you are in something great, tremendous, something that viewed in the historical whole, is somehow unbearably over towering.[61]

While others on board were more anxious to return to their families than to open the Second Front, the fact that Nan and Renée were still living under German occupation reinforced his determination to contribute to the defeat of Nazism. This was also fuelled by his political commitment – the fear that the West was deliberately leaving the Soviet Union to shoulder the burden of defeating the Nazis, whilst restoring occupied Europe to the 'ancien regime'.[62] He was therefore overjoyed when, in June 1944 he was involved in the D-Day landings in Normandy. This, he thought, was 'the biggest operation in history', and he 'would not miss it for anything'.[63] But after a few days intensive fighting, the boredom had returned, and was not relieved by fourteen days leave in July. He then joined the Mediterranean war fleet and found shore visits in Alexandria and Malta quite interesting, but was again more enthusiastic when involved in military action in the landings in Southern France near Toulon. Surprised to find so little resistance, he was now quite confident that the Nazis would soon be defeated, and enjoyed a few days relaxation swimming off the Italian coast, as if on holiday.

It is unclear how much personal danger he ever faced, but he had one lucky escape when he was too late to embark on a ship that subsequently sank, drowning a third of those on board. And he certainly considered the possibility of death in an honest way. In one of his introspective pieces, he asked why there had not been a complete abandonment of all ethical and moral values because of the possibility of being killed in the near future. It was, he thought:

> … [B]ecause most people just can't visualise getting killed suddenly and soon. I know I can't. I realise full well that within let us say six months I may be dead but somehow it does not assume an air of reality. The words, the idea sound hollow. Better that it does. Yet the possibility and the knowledge of the possibility do make some difference.[64]

He also believed that no one – his family or a girlfriend – could make him prefer to sit quietly in safety rather than risk death in the Second Front:

> Does this sound heroic and melodramatic. I don't care; and I honestly think I mean it. Maybe I wouldn't if we were engaged by a dozen German coastal batteries and a dozen…? and some destroyers all at the same time. I just don't know. But there is plenty of time to find out when we go in.[65]

His first real joy was the news from France in August 1944:

> Paris has been liberated. I have been thinking of this all day, shouting it to the wind at sea. I shall never forget that moment at 12.40 when the announcement came over the wireless. And that Marseillaise. Paris is free. How grand.[66]

Two weeks later the Nazis were also forced out of Brussels and he wrote to his father:

> How I would have wanted to be in London to share with you the joy you must have felt on hearing the news of the last few days! I tell myself a thousand times: Mum and Nana are free. They have nothing to fear anymore from the Boches ... For the two of them, at last the great misery is over. Soon, these last four long years will just be a bad nightmare which they will be telling us about. And for you too, the long solitude, this interminable sadness are almost over. I have no doubt that, within a few months, we shall find each other again at long last. You see – one must never despair.[67]

He was right in believing that his mother and sister were safe, but the path to family reunification was to be far longer and more difficult than he anticipated. In any case, he was soon in action again, this time in arduous fighting to regain Crete in mid-September, and a few weeks later on the Greek mainland. His ship was one of the first to enter the port of Athens after its liberation on 12 October and he also found this a moving experience.[68] But from then onwards he again became increasingly frustrated.

As soon as Brussels was liberated, he applied for leave to visit Nan and Renée, but he was asked to postpone his request so that he could remain in the Mediterranean theatre of operations. However, after the liberation of Athens, this involved frequent changes of ship and voyages throughout the Eastern and Southern Mediterranean which appeared to have little purpose. Finally, in March 1945 he was transferred to the Home Fleet and soon found himself patrolling off the Belgian coast without being able to land, and with his leave again delayed. By April the strain was beginning to tell and he confessed in his diary that: 'I have intolerable longing to see them [Nan and Renée] again. I have seldom felt so lost and despondent'.[69] He was finally re-united with them in Brussels in June 1945 when given temporary leave.

He had been only nineteen when he joined the Navy, and still had considerable 'growing up' to do. One way in which he had coped with the separation from his family and the succession of new situations that he experienced after 1940 was by intense intellectual and political thought and constant attempts to record and explain what he saw. Isolated from anyone who shared his views or his background, he found some solace by communicating with himself by constantly writing. While occasionally introspective, he more often attempted observations,

commentaries on life in the Navy, and wider political analyses. All these provide unusual insights into his development in this period.

The first notable, and hardly surprising, point, is that he was evidently still experiencing problems over his identity, at least in the early stages of his new life as a sailor. Many of those whom he had encountered at the camp in Skegness were tough fighters, who had been in the French Foreign Legion or who had fought in North Africa. He realised that he had to adapt to a world which he did not know. At university there were cultured people 'who were prepared to listen, to disagree, but to be rather gentle about it' whereas these were 'hard, if kind, and rough people of little or no education, of confused and sometimes childish views, who distrusted you at first'. Having been a Belgian refugee in Britain, he found that he had become marked by a genteel English education in Cambridge and that he now felt 'more at home here than I ever did in Belgium'.[70] Yet once on board his first ship, he confided in his diary: 'I think there is an antiSemitic trend, however weak, in practically every non Jew'.[71] Five months later, having transferred to another ship, he told Sam:

> Once again I am the only foreigner on board and I have only to walk on deck for everyone to stare at me as if I were a rare animal, which is sometimes quite amusing and sometimes irritating.[72]

On the surface, he was extremely successful in reinventing himself and, by the end of the war, he spoke and wrote English as well as French. But he remained conscious of being 'different'.

A second major characteristic was the intensity of his preoccupation with class and political analysis. The relationships between officers and ordinary sailors constantly infuriated him:

> There is nothing so real as the difference between officers and men ... Difference in comfort, first of all, flagrant, enormous. One must have lived aboard an over-crowded cruiser or destroyer, one must have slept in a smelly mess, with people on tables and under tables, to realise this. One must have gone about a mess at one o'clock in the morning: shaded lights and huddled forms on decks and oilskin for blanket and cap for pillow and dirt and water and stuffiness all round. One must have eaten at a table made for 6 people and at which twelve were trying to lap up their food. And one must have had a glimpse, however momentary, of a wardroom brightly lit with the beautiful white tablecloth and the stewards in attendance and the civilised atmosphere of it all.[73]

He was prepared to accept that forty officers would be better quartered than 650 men, but 'this is a gulf as wide as imagination can conceive', between 'the palatial 300 room country house and the Lambeth slum'. It was the negation of elementary democracy, based on the assumption that officers should live as they

did because they were 'gentlemen', while those on the Lower Deck were part of the 'swinish multitude'. And it was the responsibility of the social system, and the officer class, if the sailors ever behaved badly, for:

> Whose is the fault if their environment has been drab and uninteresting and promiscuous. Who is guilty of the fact that they are half educated and uncultured and unconscious of the beauties of life, of Art …[74]

Some of his writing about class was humorous. For example, he wrote a scene for a play about constructing a ship with the architects forgetting about providing any living quarters for the men, and the Rear Admiral not thinking that this was a problem. And he observed the social system of the cockroach community on deck, with ironic comparisons with human society. But even when he was being funny, there was no doubt about the sense of outrage at the inequality.

His political topics ranged from observations about power relations on board to detailed analyses of the probable post-war situations in France and Belgium and the nature of the Left-Right struggle. He interpreted the overthrow of Mussolini in the summer of 1943 as follows:

> It seems to me that the difference between Soviet C. [Communism] and Fascism are best emphasised by the attitude of people of both countries in the emergency in which they found themselves. One side we have Russia after 24 years of Soviet Regime faced with the invasion of Nazi Germany, a terrific onslaught … [W]e have long besieged, starving, freezing Stalingrad[75], that living symbol of confidence of free men in liberty and devotion. We have the fierce, savage determination of the Soviet people, not only its Army, but the whole people to retain their institutions, that 'new civilisation' … We have the future of a nation of innumerable nationalities, races, stages of development prepared to fight to the end, to sacrifice their all, that the Soviet Union remain the country of the workers and peasants, of the common people. Take now the invasion of Italy, the resistance which the Italian soldiers opposed to the invaders, the attitude of the whole Italian people towards the regime that had brought them into the war and to the war itself. Twenty-two years of Fascism … and what a world of difference. The Italian soldiers surrendering in masses, serving as guides to the invaders, people in Palermo crying with joy at the entry of the Allied troops, people fiercely destroying every trace of the Fascist regime, papers reappearing overnight, papers which had not seen the light of day during twenty-two dark years of unmitigated oppression … Consider these two phenomena and the work of both regimes takes on a new significance; its hold on the mind and feelings of both people revealed. Would the Italians have reacted as they did had not the Mussolini gangster regime oppressed them, destroyed all freedom in any and every field, cut their standards of living, suppressed their trade unions, stamped [out] their activities … That difference of attachment to their respective regimes of the Russian and Italian people is the greatest homage ever paid to the Soviet Union. The most significant proof of the strength of C. and of the utter rottenness and evil of Fascism.[76]

Of course, this kind of eulogy to the Soviet Union stretched far beyond pro-Communist circles in 1943, and Miliband was certainly trying to develop his own style of political analysis. His substantial piece (which he probably hoped to publish) on 'The Future of France' thus made some prescient remarks about the temptations that de Gaulle might face to establish a regime of 'personal power' and the ways in which this danger could be thwarted.[77] Of still greater interest in relation to his later political thought was an early attempt to develop a theory of 'capitalist democracy' in an unfinished essay about the tensions within the British and American systems in their struggle to defeat Fascism.[78] Although he was unable to formulate this satisfactorily, the few paragraphs that he set down show how he was striving to articulate ideas that he would develop in his mature work about the contradictions between democratic and liberal ideas and class oppression. A further characteristic of the piece was the way in which he asserted a point, which he then qualified with passages in parentheses. This revealed the thought processes that would later characterise his work. That is, he would begin with an apparently 'dogmatic' assertion, anticipate an attack on it, and modify the original statement, thereby both pre-empting the counter-argument and making his case more persuasive. At the end of 1943, he had not yet formulated his position clearly, but both the line of argument, and the way it would be developed by assertion and immediate 'toning down', were already evident. However, there were fewer nuances in his writing than there would be forty years later for, at this stage, his views did not appear to contain many reservations. Coupled with this was a tendency to 'lecture' those around him about politics and even his own diary for 12 October 1944 records him making rather long speeches about Communism in the mess, meaning that 'my reputation as a Bolshie [is] now very solidly established.[79]

A further notable point is that he had very high personal aspirations. One of the early essays he had written at Acton Technical College had been on 'Safety First as the Motto of Life'. He had deplored the slogan, arguing that only those who dared to take risks could 'make the world better, and a place where it will be possible to breathe, to think and to live <u>free</u>'.[80] He had not changed. He observed with respect the comradeship and acts of kindness of rank-and-file sailors, and he was sometimes personally very grateful for their help. But he retained an abiding fear of becoming 'mediocre', and ambitions to achieve something higher:

What is a failure? I answer the question thus. You are fourteen, fifteen, nineteen, twenty-three. Year by year while you are quite young … day by day, you think: I shall do this and that when I am older. God, how I shall do this and that. I will write or paint or compose or do whatever you fancy. And as a snowball which you roll before you, you roll your ambition and projects and ideas before you as the years go by and then it becomes a heap and a mountain and it walks before you and never do you climb the mountain and see the other side. And the mountain grows bigger and bigger as projects and ideas, all unfulfilled, and it is never climbed. But you

don't know it, up to a certain age. Then suddenly you sit up with a jerk and see the mountains before you, enormous, terrifying. You are thirty-five or forty, married with a steady job perhaps, or you are a crank, still drunk with your ideas, although at the back of your mind you know it's all over. You will never climb the mountain, you will never see the other side, you will never do what you wanted to do; the sands are running out; mediocrity has set in, was there always perhaps, must have been there. You are a failure. The mountain which you yourself have created, has beaten you. You will never see the other side ... I imagine ... that when you are forty or forty-five and one day you look back and remember what you wanted to do and know you have not done, when you know you will never do them, that you are settled for the rest of your life, I imagine the depth of desolation, the utter feeling of tragedy which surges up and drowns you is too great to bear ... [I]t must be a deadening feeling, that feeling of utter failure, or even semi- failure. I shall not be a failure.[81]

Finally, there was the problem of sex and personal relationships. He was, in many respects, a deeply conventional young man, who was shocked by 'dirty jokes' in the petty officers' mess, and talk about sex. It was obviously a revelation when he saw transvestites in a bar in Malta, and realised (near the end of the war) that homosexuality was quite prevalent in the Navy! He regarded sex as something entirely private, which was never to be talked about, and this was to be an enduring characteristic.

While based in the Firth of Forth in late 1943, he met a local Scottish young woman (Naomi) with whom he wanted to spend as much time as possible. But women were 'dangerous':

I am beginning to realise that a woman can make all the difference in the world ... I mean that a woman can make one forget that one has not achieved anything worthwhile and help a fellow to sink back in smug complacency about one's life. The slippers and the fireside. The buddies. The cinema once a week and copulation twice a week. The petty interests and petty quarrels; the petty cares. The feeling of utter waste. Worse than that. The lack of feeling of utter waste. The complacency. The perfect petty bourgeois life. The deadly, deadening influence of woman. The trouble is the woman may be attractive, perhaps intelligent enough to make one happy. The aim is not to be happy, it is to be right. Or rather there is no necessary contradiction.

The ideal, he thought, was the marriage of Karl and Jenny Marx. He produced the 'scientific foundations of a revolutionary philosophy for the working class' while she 'lost her bloom, her youth, became a care worn, suffering woman and never complained'.[82] But Naomi, whom he lectured and hectored on literature and politics, apparently did not fit the bill and on 6 April 1945 he noted in his diary: 'Now I am bored with the silly petty bourgeois stupidity. No entanglements of any kind for years to come'.

Such sentiments and his idealisation of the Marx marriage now seem embarrassingly chauvinist and suggest that he could not envisage a partnership of equals, let alone the possibility of the woman producing the great works. But he was living in a different era, was young and inexperienced, and these were his private thoughts. Their real importance is in the further light they throw on his earnestness about his politics and his single-mindedness.

By 1945, though still writing about post-war Europe and finding time to read *Das Kapital* on board ship, questions about his own future were becoming more pressing. His uncertainty about his own life after the war began to worry him as he left the Mediterranean for the Home Fleet in March 1945, and he confided in his diary that:

> … with all the frustration and annoyance these have been grand months. I have had time to think and to see … And going back also means all the cant and bullshit and stupidity. Still it is grand.[83]

Soon he decided that he would like to finish at LSE and get a good degree, but was unsure of what do afterwards. At one point he thought – no doubt for political reasons – that he should work in industry or on the land for a year or two, but he was not at all sure about this and by 15 April he confessed:

> The more I think about the future the more despondent I get. Perhaps the era of illusions as to personal possibilities is ended or rather the period of 'sober realism' has set in. I hope not. "One should live as if one were immortal".[84]

It is not surprising that he was disoriented and feeling rather low as the war ended. In one of her first letters after the liberation of Belgium, Renée had broken the news that his cousin Paul and his Aunt had been deported by the Gestapo in October 1942, and that there was no news of his best friend, Maurice Tran.[85] Soon he would learn that both Maurice and another friend, Elie, had been hanged in Auschwitz for Trotskyist propaganda and that forty-three of the wider Miliband family had been deported. His reunion with Nan and Renée in Brussels in June 1945, which Sam was unable to join, was thus tinged with sadness. Nor was his own future settled after the war for Laski could only assure him that:

> … in the light of your military service, I do not think there ought to be difficulty in your coming back to finish in the School – where I need not say there is a warm welcome for you. At any rate we can make a good fight about it.[86]

In the same letter Laski smothered any hopes of the family reuniting in the near future:

I was indeed glad to hear about your mother and sister; that must be an immense source of happiness to you all. But I do not think the Home Office is likely to agree either to your father staying here, or to your family coming. Partly, this is the business situation; partly, the housing problem; and partly because for many years to come, the era of free immigration is, alas, over. If I were your father, I should return and get going as soon as possible.

In September 1945 Ralph spent the Jewish Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) with his father in London and told Nan and Renée:

You were very much in our thoughts, the pain you felt that day, the pain felt by all those who were crying for their absent dear ones. That day must have been a sad one, sad in Brussels and everywhere else in Europe where there are some Jews left to remember.[87]

At the end of the war Miliband, like so many of his generation, was keen to look ahead rather than dwell on the past. In future years he would tell very few people about the circumstances that had brought him to Britain, the separation from his mother and sister, or the deaths in concentration camps of those to whom he had been close. If asked he would tend to say that he had been luckier than most and would move on to a new subject. But his childhood had ended abruptly and the separation had caused him both pain and guilt. Such emotions and memories could not be entirely banished by a resolute determination not to look back.

Notes

[1] One of Sam's brothers had disappeared during the war with his wife and children.

[2] To avoid confusion, they will be called Sam, Renée, Ralph and Nan in this book.

[3] 'Notes towards an Autobiography' (unpublished) April/May 1983

[4] Léon Degrelle was the flamboyant leader of the Rexist Party, which began as a Catholic youth movement emphasising national regeneration and was based mainly in the Walloon provinces. It evolved into a clearly Fascist position after 1936.

[5] Marcel Liebman, *Né Juif: Une famille juive pendant la guerre* (Duculot, 1977), p.48

[6] 'Notes towards an Autobiography'. (It is worth noting that his sister, Nan, has a different perception of their childhood and believes that Ralph exaggerated the narrowness of the family's outlook. She recalls discussion of broader political subjects).

[7] His sister Nan disagreed with this account, claiming that their father was a member of the Bund, the Jewish Socialist Party. Interview with Nan Keen, 28 May 1998.

[8] 'Notes towards an Autobiography'.

[9] Letter from Mrs Gutki Miliband to the author, 4 July 1998. (Mrs Miliband had married one of his cousins).

[10] 'Notes towards an Autobiography'.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Jean Valtin's book, *Out of the Night* (New York: Alliance Book Corporation), which is an extraordinary account of the duplicity and ruthlessness of the Comintern by one of its agents, was only published in 1941, so Miliband read it a little later than he recalled. However, it is certainly true

that it made a big impression on him and in 1984 he acquired a second copy after having lost the first.

[13] Diary, 8 November 1940.

[14] Diary (undated) 1940.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Ibid., 16 October 1940.

[17] Ibid., 14 October 1940.

[18] 'Notes towards an Autobiography'.

[19] Diary (undated) 1940.

[20] Ibid., 16 October 1940.

[21] Ibid., 31 October 1940.

[22] If he had really lost his virginity, this was more likely to have been in London than Brussels, where he lived a rather sheltered life.

[23] Diary, 8 November 1940.

[24] Ibid., 28 October 1940.

[25] A cousin who died in a concentration camp.

[26] Diary, 24 December 1940.

[27] 'At the Writing Table' , essay for Acton Technical College, 26 March 1941

[28] 'Récapitulation d'une année', 31 December 1941

[29] Ibid.

[30] Interviews with Norman Mackenzie (15 May 1998) and Chris Freeman (5 June 1998).

[31] Ilya Neustadt eventually became Professor of Sociology at Leicester University; Sir Claus Moser was to become an outstanding statistician at LSE and was a member of several government commissions; and Jacob Talmon became Professor of Modern History at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. Miliband told his father that Talmon was going to teach him Hebrew , was trying to convert him to Zionism, and had persuaded him to attend a protest meeting against the massacres of Jews in Europe. Letters of 3 December 1942, 17 January 1943 and 12 February 1943.

[32] Mendelson was Labour MP for the Peninstone division, West Riding of Yorkshire, from 1959 until his death in 1978.

[33] This really began in February 1942, as recounted by Miliband to his father: 'Last Thursday I had a class with Prof. Laski at midday. At five to 12 I was in the street and saw him. He recognised me and said: 'Good morning'; so I asked him: 'Are you going to Prof. Laski's class?' 'I think so', he answers. Since then, he has become 'pan brat [Yiddish-Polish expression for 'best buddy'] with me. We talked of this and that. It would not have taken much more for him to invite me to have dinner with him!'. Letter, 16 February 1942.

[34] Ephrime Eshag eventually became a Fellow of Economics at the University of Oxford; Norman Mackenzie a Professor of Modern History at the University of Sussex, and Chris Freeman the Director of the Science Policy Research Unit at the University of Sussex.

[35] Interview with Chris Freeman.

[36] One of his friends thus asked him: 'Do you still fume [?] at Party futilities?" Letter from Paul [no surname given], 25 March 1943

[37] Letters of 25 and 26 March 1942.

[38] I interviewed Miliband about Laski in December 1991 and my summary notes begin as follows: He first met Laski in 1941 when he was 17 … He was already a Marxist of sorts and 'revolutionary', but was also ignorant. He was spellbound by Laski's personality, vast knowledge, and the amount of people he knew … He was very influenced by him, and very fond of him. He was also influenced by his writings … But he does not think he saw any of them as a revelation in the same way as Marx, Lenin or perhaps (later) Sartre …

[39] 'Harold J. Laski' *Clare Market Review* Vol 26, No.1 Michaelmas 1950

[40] Letter, 6 December 1942

[41] Laski to Arthur Creech Jones, 31 October 1943.

[42] Letter in support of Miliband's naturalisation application, 11 February 1948.

[43] Letter, 17 February 1943.

[44] Essay on 'Theatre and Cinema', 4 June 1942.

[45] Ibid.

[46] Ibid.

[47] Note, 26 June 1942.

[48] Letter, 16 May 1942.

[49] Malines, where the Jews were rounded up before being sent to Auschwitz, is halfway between Brussels and Antwerp.

[50] Letter from Ralph to Sam, 24 March 1943.

[51] Letter, 26 March 1943.

[52] Letter to Sam, 23 April 1943.

[53] Letter, 1 April 1943.

[54] Letter from Neustadt, 5 May 1943. Miliband was obviously so desperate to join the Navy that he also approached a member of the French Resistance, for whom he had acted as an interpreter at the Students' Union, to intervene on his behalf. Letter from Ferdinand Grenier to Miliband, 26 May 1943.

[55] Miliband's talk at an event at LSE celebrating the centenary of Laski's birth, 15 February 1993.

[56] Information from Geoffrey Last, 31 May 2000.

[57] He interrogated two prisoners of war captured in the action in Greece at the end of October 1944, recording in his diary on 1 November 1944: 'Two young prisoners on board. I interrogated them. Untypical I think. Defeatist, anti-Nazi, almost anti-German, war weary'.

[58] Letter to Sam Miliband, 22 August 1943.

[59] Note, 6 November 1943.

[60] Note, 12 February 1944.

[61] Note, 13 February 1944.

[62] Diary, April/May 1944.

[63] Diary, 5 June 1944.

[64] Note, 18 February 1944.

[65] Note, 13 February 1944.

[66] Diary, 23 August 1944.

[67] Letter, 6 September 1944.

[68] Letter to Renée and Nan, 19 February 1945.

[69] Diary, 20 April 1945.

[70] Notes, 27 July 1943.

[71] Diary, 23 February 1944

[72] Letter, 24 July 1944

[73] 'The Lower Deck, n.d. 1944.

[74] Ibid.

[75] Miliband seems to have made a mistake here. He was almost certainly referring to the prolonged siege of Leningrad (from September 1941 until January 1944) in which hundreds of thousands of Soviet citizens perished, rather than the battle of Stalingrad (from August 1942 until January 1943) which was a crushing defeat for the Germans and a turning point in the war. I am grateful to Harry Keen for drawing my attention to this.

[76] Notes, 1 August 1943.

[77] 'The Future of France', 31 December 1943.

[78] 'On the Dual Character of the War', 20 December 1943.

[79] In August 1980 he received a letter: 'Can there possibly be two Ralph Milibands? Or is he whose articles appear in various publications that youthful Ralph Miliband who earnestly paced the deck of an old "V" and "W" Class destroyer, "Valorous", in the shadow of the Forth Bridge and impressed the writer of this letter with what was, even then, his skilful command of language and his wide knowledge of world affairs?... Was he that articulate "headache"?' From John Lakie. (Miliband

replied that he was the same person, but that Lakie's description of him was far too kind).

[80] N.D. Early 1941.
[81] Notes, 19 December 1943.
[82] Ibid.
[83] Diary, 6/7 March 1945.
[84] Diary, 15 April 1945.
[85] Letter from Renée, 28 January 1945.
[86] Letter from Laski, 8 August 1945.
[87] Letter, 20 September 1945.

Chapter Two: Apprenticeship (1946-56)

At the time of his demobilisation from the Navy in January 1946, Miliband was just twenty-two years old. He was a formidable intellect, with a charismatic personality, who had shown adaptability in coping with a variety of difficulties. He also had high aspirations, hoping to make a significant intellectual contribution, and he was passionate in his commitment to socialism. In many respects, he made very considerable progress towards the fulfilment of his ambitions over the next ten years. By the end of 1956 he was thus an established academic, an inspiring teacher who was a standard-bearer for the Left at LSE, and an active member of the 'Bevanite' movement. Yet these were not always easy years for him. His hopes of a 'new world' were shattered by the Cold War, which also complicated his attempt to define his own political and theoretical position. And although he was well-liked, with a gift for friendship and conversation, he was simultaneously a somewhat isolated figure in an inhospitable political and academic climate, who would only emerge into prominence with the development of the New Left after 1956.

1. Reuniting the Family

His immediate aim in 1946 was to stay in Britain with his father and to ensure that Renée and Nan could join them, but this was to prove far more difficult than he anticipated.

One of the ironies of the post-war period was that a labour shortage in particular sectors of the economy led the British government to recruit workers from groups in which anti-Semitic sentiments were quite widespread, while Jewish immigration was still governed by long-term restrictions. Thus the first stream of workers was provided by Poles from the Polish Armed Forces and by 1949 the resident Polish population from this group (and dependents) totalled 127,000. This was followed by 80,000 displaced persons, mainly of Baltic, Ukrainian, Polish and Yugoslav origins, selected under a British government programme known as the European Volunteer Worker scheme. Finally, in 1947 some 8,000 Ukrainian prisoners of war were brought to Britain by the War Office.[1] Meanwhile, other forms of immigration were governed by the Aliens Order of 1920, which sought to regulate the entry of aliens into the national labour market. Individual employers wishing to employ a foreign worker had to apply to the Ministry of Labour for a permit and satisfy three general conditions: that the employment

was reasonable and necessary in the circumstances, that the employer had made adequate efforts to find a suitable worker among British subjects, and that wages and conditions would be no less favourable than those commonly accorded to British employees. The Holocaust had not led to any significant alteration in this policy.[2] Laski's advice that Ralph's father should return to Belgium at the end of the war was thus based on a realistic appreciation of the difficulties that he was likely to face if he tried to remain in Britain.

Sam's initial hope was that he would be allowed to set up his own business, but this was refused in September 1945. Instead he was allowed to stay on a temporary basis as an outworker. A few months later Ralph asked for a visa so that Renée and Nan could visit Britain. But his plea for the family to be reunited in view of the suffering endured by his sister and mother during the war cut no ice with the Home Office. Officials saw it as a ploy for the whole family to settle in the UK and refused permission in May 1946. The following month, Renée, exhausted after years of privation, was forced to have a serious operation because of a life-threatening ear condition. Sam therefore returned to Belgium the next month, but this was to intensify the family's difficulties.

In August 1946 he attempted to re-establish his position as a leather artisan in Brussels, but because he had never taken out Belgian citizenship he was now regarded as an immigrant. Under Belgian post-war regulations, this meant that he was required to apply for a work permit, but this was refused at the beginning of 1948 and he was told to leave Belgium within thirty days. The implication was that he was expected to return to Poland – a country that he had left almost thirty years earlier. This led to a situation of complete crisis for the family and Ralph, who had now applied to naturalise as a British citizen, immediately requested a visa to allow Sam to return. On 3 February he also went to Brussels himself to plead with the authorities there and managed to secure an extension of Sam's right of residence until 15 March. In a state of complete desperation, he also turned to Laski who immediately wrote to Chuter Ede, the Home Secretary, supporting Sam's case for a visa. However, the Home Office turned the application down on 21 February. By now Ralph was at his wits end, but he kept the pressure up and on 1 March Laski again wrote to Chuter Ede.[3] Citing a Belgian Senator as his source, he now argued that the action of the authorities in Brussels amounted to anti-Semitism. This charge was referred to the Foreign Office, which denied it on the grounds that Belgian policy against immigrant workers was dictated purely by economic motives. Ede thus told Laski:

> … it is only by adhering strictly to definite categories that I can prevent the entry into the United Kingdom of a flood of additional immigrants much greater than I could justify in present circumstances.[4]

This did not satisfy Laski, who wrote again pointing out that the classification of

Jews as a specific category on Belgian police files suggested discrimination and expressing the hope that, after further enquiries, Ede would revise his views.[5]

Ede now referred the matter to Ernest Bevin, the Foreign Secretary, asking for enquiries about the intentions of the Belgian government in enforcing the departure of Sam and about the general situation regarding anti-Semitism in Belgium.[6]

In fact, the worst phase of the crisis had already passed for the Miliband family. Having obtained an offer of employment from another Jewish immigrant, Sam was able to secure a work permit and on 9 March had been told that he would not have to leave the country. This was an enormous relief but did not resolve the problems, for the family still believed that their future lay in Britain. But there was no progress on this front, for the result of the enquiries initiated by the Foreign Office was that there was no danger of Sam being deported and no evidence of Belgian anti-Semitism. Moreover, internal Home Office minutes make it clear that, even had the officials been convinced by the evidence, they would not have regarded this as a reason for allowing him in. In general, they were deeply unsympathetic to all the attempts by the family to be united in Britain.

Ralph's own naturalisation application was far more straightforward. With his Naval record, support from Laski and Sir Alexander Carr-Saunders, the Director of LSE, and clearance by Special Branch, he was granted British citizenship in August 1948. But although Sam was allowed to come over for a month later that year to buy some machinery, he was refused permission to stay on. A further request in February 1949 to visit Ralph for two weeks was again refused, but in November of that year the Home Office reluctantly allowed him to come for six months when he was offered employment (through friends) with a leather goods manufacturer who claimed that his services would increase their export trade. However, Renée's request in January 1950 to visit him in London was refused and Ralph was unsuccessful in an attempt to persuade the authorities to reverse their decision. A few months later, after Sam received a further extension of his permit until September, Ralph managed to persuade the Home Office to allow Renée to reapply and she arrived for a visit of a month in the summer. Nan also came over and found work in the book division of the *Jewish Chronicle* translating the Anne Frank diaries, on the grounds that there was no British national who had these language skills. She was therefore allowed to stay for six months and Renée was able to extend her visit for two weeks until the end of the Jewish holidays. With Sam's permit again extended until March, in November she applied to visit him again, and with Ralph's representations at the Home Office, she was now granted permission to stay for three months, and arrived just before Christmas.

More than five years after the war, the family was finally reunited but even now their position was not secure. Sam's first attempt to naturalise was rejected and it was only in July 1953 that the restrictions on his employment were removed and he was permitted to stay, with Renée granted permission to work the next

month. With some financial help from a family acquaintance, Sam now set up his own leather goods business and a year later he and Renée were finally able to naturalise.

This long post-war struggle to reunite the family undoubtedly affected Miliband deeply. Because the family was so close, and because he had vowed to make up for the war years, he had been deeply distressed about the continuing separation and had worked relentlessly to persuade the authorities in Britain and Belgium to let the family live together. Nor was the final reunification the end of the problems, for their financial circumstances remained insecure at first. And although he was overjoyed that the separation was finally over, there were inevitably some difficulties. Having lived apart since 1940, Samuel and Renée now wanted the whole family to be together. But this meant that Ralph, aged twenty-seven, now moved back into the parental home in West Hampstead, where the whole family lived together until Nan married in 1953. Even after this Ralph remained with his parents for another two years before moving into shared accommodation. He was therefore over thirty when he moved out, and thirty-four when he bought a flat of his own in 1958. He delighted in the fact that Renée now recreated in London the kind of 'open house' that she had had before the war in Brussels, but it was also inhibiting to live with his parents. Nor was it simply a question of living at home and being constrained by the kinds of pressures that most people had escaped by his age. There were also the continual feelings of having to make up for the lost years, and of not upsetting his parents any more after all that they had gone through. This meant, for example, that he would not want to cause them pain by breaking away from Jewish tradition entirely despite his own rejection of it.

It is also probable that the struggle to reunite the family had an inhibiting effect on his politics, for in the early years of the Cold War the British government was vigilant in its efforts to ensure that immigrants were not 'politically undesirable' and Special Branch investigated the affiliation of those seeking naturalisation. Miliband was far too honest to disguise his support for the Left, but he must have been aware that too great a visibility could have jeopardised the possibility of his parents living in Britain. Having always felt guilty about the first separation in 1940 he would not have forgiven himself had he been responsible for its continuation after the war. This is not to suggest that he would necessarily have joined a particular grouping or become an activist had the circumstances been different. But the situation of the family no doubt induced a degree of circumspection about expressing 'extreme' views too boldly and publicly. It is possible that this also partly accounts for the comparative sparseness of his writing at this time.

The final notable point about his personal life is that he remained single throughout these years. This was certainly not because of a lack of opportunity, for women continued to find him extremely attractive and he had several rela-

tionships. He had come close to marriage when he fell in love in the summer of 1949 while teaching for four weeks in Chicago but, when he returned there a year later, it did not work out. By 1956, at the age of thirty-two, it thus seemed probable that he would remain a bachelor. Even this may have been connected with his family circumstances and a belief that, as an immigrant without any financial backing, the main priority was to achieve some security by establishing himself in his career. Certainly, he put enormous effort into his academic work.

2. Academic Life

He had returned to LSE for the final year of his undergraduate degree in the autumn of 1946 and worked so hard that his parents were quite anxious about him. Once his final exams were over and he visited Brussels in the summer of 1947, his friend, Ilya Neustadt told him to relax and look at the flowers, the buildings and the colours:

> You suffer from a great impetuousness, not that of age, but – at least in part – from a cumulative set of circumstances. Breathe deeply and, from time to time, let a great calmness descend on you.[7]

This was the kind of advice that he was never able to take, but the result of his efforts, in July 1947, was a First Class degree. Laski immediately wrote to say:

> I never doubted the outcome; but it is great to have it officially verified, and I send you my warm congratulations. I hope it is the first big step into a distinguished career. Well done![8]

By now he was determined to become an academic and, under Laski's influence, immediately submitted a Ph.D. proposal on 'The Radical Movement in the French Revolution' – a subject on which he had already done some work as an undergraduate. In October he was awarded a Leverhulme research studentship to work full-time on this topic under Laski's supervision.

Had Miliband's background and circumstances been different, he might have paused a little, taking Neustadt's advice. But he felt that he had no time to spare and launched himself into his Ph.D. research, as the next stage in his academic career. By March 1948 he was already worrying that he should be spending more time in Paris looking at documents, but had been unable to refuse Laski's insistence that he should live in his house while Laski and his wife, Frida, were away in the United States.[9] A month later he applied (unsuccessfully) for a lectureship at University College, Southampton, although the job was not really particularly attractive, given his interests.[10] This is not to say that he worked incessantly on the Ph.D. In the summer of 1948 he accepted an invitation from the International Student Service to teach at an international summer seminar in Germany,

and from there he met Nan and they hitch-hiked in Scandinavia for a holiday. But he was certainly keen to make progress as quickly as possible.

Laski remained a key figure for him in this respect. He offered Miliband some teaching in his first postgraduate year, and in 1948-49 he was given four hours per week of tutorials in the Department of Government. He had also become an Assistant Examiner in Social and Political Theory for a Diploma in Public Administration in June 1948, and was invited by the Foreign Office to teach some German students doing voluntary work in Britain in October. But Laski provided him with the real breakthrough in two stages in 1949. First, he arranged the invitation for him to lecture for the summer in Roosevelt College, Chicago – a radical American university, where Laski himself had taught in 1948. This provided Miliband with his first entrée into the American academic scene, beginning an association which would last until his death. Secondly, he engineered his appointment to an Assistant Lectureship in Political Science at LSE , for which Miliband was the only candidate. He was interviewed for this on 1 June 1949 and, after his appointment was confirmed, he wrote enthusiastically to Carr-Saunders, expressing his delight and his hope that he would 'be able to repay, in however slight a degree, the great debt I feel towards the School for those fruitful years during which I was one of its students'.[11] In October 1949 he thus began his career as a full-time member of staff, having achieved a relatively secure academic position by the age of twenty-five. Unfortunately, in March 1950 Laski suddenly died at the age of fifty-six.

Laski had personified the radical reputation of LSE for three decades. Indeed, to a considerable extent, the association of the School with radicalism was based upon him, and this masked the deep currents of conservatism within the institution. With his death at the height of the Cold War, the governing body took the opportunity to counter the Department of Government's left-wing stance. Kingsley Martin had hoped to succeed Laski in the Graham Wallas Chair, but instead the School appointed Michael Oakeshott, the conservative political philosopher. Since it was Laski himself – rather than the Department as a whole – who had been the standard-bearer for the Left, Miliband was now quite isolated politically as a junior member of staff. Robert Mackenzie, who was appointed at the same time as Miliband and shared a room with him, later argued: 'the School authorities, who had been much embarrassed by Laski's political activities, half consciously set about exorcising the memory of his political role'.[12]

Laski's death was a terrible blow to Miliband, both personally and in relation to his life at LSE, and in January 1951 he was already writing to a friend:

> … the present position at the School may be summarised by the phrase: the bastards are winning out. Robbins[13] pontificates about the need for rearmament, building up stocks and building shelters and a "stringent financial policy". He wrote a long letter to the Times about it some days ago and spreads the good word in the Senior Common Room. And there is hardly anybody to take a different view.

Most of the staff are mentally in agreement, a very few, like David Glass[14], who is very good, but not terribly vocal, represent what there is of dissenting opinion. The same applies to the junior staff. Oakeshott has just arrived and celebrated his appointment some weeks ago with a full page review in the *Evening Standard* of James Burnham's "The Coming Defeat of Communism", praising it as one of the great books of the decade. The article appeared under the headline "The man who replaces Laski attacks the Communists". In fairness to him, I must add that he is probably not responsible for that. The Government department is jogging along unexcitingly now the interregnum is over, and we'll soon see how the new boss shapes up. I am not hopeful.[15]

Yet he was certainly not wholly negative about the situation. He thoroughly enjoyed the academic work and modelled himself on Laski in his commitment to teaching and helping the students. He generally got on well with people in the Department and even his relations with Oakeshott were perfectly cordial.[16] He was also well-liked by staff across the institution, including administrative staff who, for example, welcomed the fact that it was he who ensured that they could use the Senior Common Room which had previously been restricted to academics.[17] And students from this period recall him as an inspiring lecturer who was also extremely funny.[18]

At the time of his appointment his teaching reflected Laski's interests and the work that he had done with him. In the academic year 1950-51, for example, he was teaching the 'Problems of Comparative Government', 'The History of French Political Thought, 1715-1815', and 'The History of English Socialist Thought, 1815-1945'. The work on French political thought was closely related to his Ph.D. and the previous year he had considered writing a book on the 'Political Thought of the French Revolution, 1789-96'. But his preoccupations were beginning to change. In the United States there was naturally more demand for teaching on the contemporary British Labour Government than for his more esoteric work on the history of French political ideas, and in his second summer at Roosevelt College he gave a special course on British Socialism, 1945-50. Two successive long vacations in the United States had also prevented him from going to Paris for research on his thesis, and Laski's death removed his original source of inspiration for the topic. He was also involved in a research project which Laski had initiated on the Labour Party. The idea had been for a Research Fellow (Frank Bealey) to select appropriate documents and for a group of academic staff to write essays on particular themes, with Miliband taking responsibility for a chapter on socialist ideas.[19] By 1951 he had thus become enthusiastic about his work on 'Socialist Thought in England' and was now considering a book on this subject, but was making no progress at all on his thesis.[20] In fact, he published very little in this period – a point which was noted in May 1953, when he was considered for promotion to a Lectureship. Nevertheless, the committee recommended his appointment on the grounds that:

... the written work provides ample evidence that Mr Miliband has a scholarly approach to his subject. It is clear that he has amassed a large amount of information in two different fields during the past four years, and it is not surprising that he has as yet little completed for publication. Mr Miliband is a very capable and conscientious teacher who takes a great interest in his students. The sub-committee has no hesitation in recommending that he be promoted to a lectureship.[21]

But although William Pickles, who was now his supervisor, told the committee that Miliband had written two chapters of his thesis (out of a projected total of eight), and that most of the material for the remainder had been gathered, it took a further three years to complete, with prolonged periods of research in the *Bibliotheque Nationale* in Paris. Finally, in September 1956 he submitted his vast manuscript on 'Popular Thought in the French Revolution, 1789-94' for the Ph.D.

This was a work of immense detail, which attempted to discover, explain and evaluate the thought of the *menu peuple* ('common people')in the revolutionary era. An important part of his argument was that those who wrote and spoke for the Third Estate did not represent the thinking of the *menu peuple,* but because the overwhelming majority of the masses were illiterate, it was a complex task of historical reconstruction to establish their political outlook. He was therefore dependent on police records, the evidence of court hearings, and other reports of attitudes and speeches, and this had involved a painstaking examination of primary source material. Indeed, at his viva in December his examiners – William Pickles and Richard Cobb – congratulated him on the 'great thoroughness' of his treatment and the admirable way in which he had brought out the mechanics of the formation and development of popular opinion. However, it might be inferred that even they believed that he had overdone the detail, suggesting that, in the event of publication, it would be wise to condense much of the factual material. More pleasing was their approval of the way in which he had related his researches on popular opinion to the march of events, and their commendation of the fact that the thesis was unusually well written.[22]

Although Miliband was always thorough in his academic work, this kind of detailed historical research was no longer his major interest if, indeed, it ever had been. The fact that he appears to have made no attempt to revise it for publication, or even write articles based on it, suggests that he had come to regard it more as a rite of passage than a burning passion. He no doubt hoped that, having mounted this hurdle, his apprenticeship was completed and he could undertake the kind of work that really interested him.[23]

Given the seriousness with which he approached political questions, it was always extremely important to him to achieve an integration between his active commitment and his theory. Theory and action were to reinforce one another and to remain in harmony. Similarly, because he made no firm distinction between university work and political involvement it was also crucial to him to

regard his academic activities as contributing, in some way, to the development of socialist analysis. Nevertheless, it is helpful to discuss his overtly political involvement first and then to deal with his intellectual contribution.

3. On the Labour Left

When Miliband returned to LSE after the war, he had joined the Socialist Society, which was to the Left of the Labour Club, and contained a variety of Socialist and Marxist viewpoints. At this stage he was still sympathetic to Communism although he was certainly becoming more critical. It is thus probably indicative of his position that he published a short article, under the pseudonym of Kenneth Ward, in *Le Drapeau Rouge*, the Belgian Communist daily in February 1947.[24] Chris Freeman, who was again the CP Secretary at LSE in the period 1946-48, recalled that Miliband was now deeply involved in debates about Communism and Marxism but was in greater disagreement with Laski than he was with the CP. Thus, while both shared the view that capitalist democracy was dominated by the power of those with wealth, Miliband drew the conclusion that it was sometimes necessary to step outside the parameters of the constitution. For example, when the French and Italian Communists were excluded from government in 1947, he argued in Laski's seminar that they would be justified in taking extra-parliamentary action, through strikes and possibly insurrection. He was also sympathetic to the line within the French Communist Party which had favoured a more revolutionary policy in 1945, rather than participation in a reformist coalition. Moreover, when Laski wrote a long introduction to a centenary edition of the Communist Manifesto in 1948, Miliband shared the CP view that he had misrepresented Marx by suggesting that he had been against the establishment of a separate party. However, he was also increasingly opposed to Soviet actions and the blind obedience of the Communist Parties. Years later, when Perry Anderson suggested that there were dangers in criticising the Soviet Union at a time when anti-Communism was increasing, Miliband told him that this:

> … smacks of the kind of argument to which apologists used to engage in the good old days. 'You don't like this or that – you are therefore "objectively" counter-revolutionary, playing the Fascist game etc. I have been hearing this since 1946 … when I argued with Norman Mackenzie … and the late John Mendelson that Zhdanov[25] was not right in trying to make composers compose tunes which the people could whistle and was told that I did not understand the social function of art; or since 1948 and Tito's break with Moscow …'[26]

Chris Freeman also recalled Miliband's opposition to Stalin's policy towards Yugoslavia in 1948 and his condemnation of anti-Semitism in the Cominform journal 'For a Lasting Peace and a People's Democracy' later in the same year.[27]

Miliband dissuaded Nan from joining the Belgian Communist Party at this time, urging her to think and read much more before making any such decision. And his political disagreements broadened into wider theoretical differences as the Communist movement became ever more 'Stalinist' with the intensification of the Cold War. When Lysenko's interpretation of genetics was officially endorsed in 1948, he thus questioned the whole notion of different categories of science which could be labelled 'bourgeois' or 'socialist', and he appears to have been equally repelled by similar interpretations of literature.[28] His increasing distance from Communism may have been reinforced by the fact that, since the early post-war period, he had also been exposed to some influences on the Labour Left.

One of his closest friends was Donald Chesworth, who stood as a Labour candidate in the 1945 General Election and again in 1950. Miliband certainly helped his campaign on the latter occasion.[29] He also became friendly with Russell Kerr, an Australian, who was to become a Labour MP in 1966, and he continued to see Norman MacKenzie, who had been a CP member when he had known him at Cambridge during the war, but was now in the Labour Party working as Deputy Editor of the *New Statesman.* A meeting place was the home of Sonia and Harry Clements in Baker Street. Sonia was an outgoing American, who had a kind of 'open house' for the Left, with a fairly large contingent of LSE staff and students, and aspiring Labour MPs. Miliband was a frequent guest and he met a variety of Labour Party figures there. He already knew Jo Richardson in the late 1940s and probably met Michael Foot and Ian Mikardo at the Clements' home soon afterwards, as well, of course, as Sonia's son, Dick Clements, who was later to be the editor of *Tribune.*[30] And Laski himself continued to support the Labour Party despite his antipathy to its foreign policy.

There was, however, one further feature in his outlook, which was to remain fundamental for the rest of his life: his belief that the United States was an expansionist, counter-revolutionary power which was primarily responsible for the Cold War. While in the Navy he had seen the politics of the war as a struggle between revolutionary forces and those who wanted to restore the ancien régime, and by 1949, when he went to teach in Chicago, he already seems to have identified the USA as the main threat to peace. He was appalled by American politics, telling friends:

> I am horrified at the atmosphere here. Papers and the radio are just full of stuff about Reds, spies, loyalty and so on. The scare is really on and the Universities from what I read ... are being manhandled as much or more as any other organisation, except of course the CP and allied groups.[31]

He also witnessed the Alger Hiss and Communist trials of 1949, as the guest of the Legal Aid Society, where he was unaccountably mistaken for a British judge![32] Having experienced this kind of 'red scare' he was appreciative of Roosevelt Col-

lege, where he met radicals, including the future black mayor of Chicago, Harold Washington:

> ... I like it very much indeed, the more so when I remember the witch hunt that is going on in most universities here ... It is possible at least to recommend Lenin's "Imperialism" in class without having to worry about consequences ...[33]

He also made contacts with the independent American Left, which would subsequently be important to him, for he met Paul Sweezy and Leo Huberman, who had just begun publishing *Monthly Review*, with which Miliband would later be associated.[34] However, even though he was aware that there were exceptions, his experience of the United States in 1949 was that 'People have got Communism on the brain'.[35] Moreover, when he returned at the same time the following summer, the Korean War had begun and he was still more negative about American foreign policy and public support for it.[36] Back in Britain, he was convinced that the only hope of reversing the trend would be 'sufficient revulsion in Europe to prevent the US feeling confident of its allies'.[37] However, he was equally adamant that the foreign policies of the Labour Government were 'despicable' and that it was foolish to regard it as a 'force for peace'.[38] His bitter condemnation of the Labour Party for supporting US foreign policy would remain consistent until his death.

By now Miliband was therefore politically homeless in post-war Britain. He regarded himself as a Marxist, but was increasingly critical of the Soviet Union and Communist Party allegiance to it. He had several friends in the Labour Party, but there is little to suggest that he had any great enthusiasm for it and, in any case, the Labour Left seemed extremely weak. The prominent pro-Soviet 'fellow travellers' had been purged from the party in the late forties, along with Konni Zilliacus, the most independent left-wing critic of the government. Nor was there any longer an effective force within the party, pushing for non-alignment or a 'third-force' in foreign policy, for this view had also been squeezed out by the pressures of the Cold War. Since Miliband was never attracted to Trotskyism, there was no obvious home for him in these circumstances and no outlet in which his views could easily be expressed. However, the situation changed with the resignations of Aneurin Bevan, Harold Wilson and John Freeman from the government in April 1951. Bevan's decision had been provoked by the retrenchment in welfare spending as a result of rearmament for the Korean war, and it provided the first focus for Labour Left opposition to the leadership for several years. The Conservative victory in the General Election in October 1951 then strengthened 'Bevanism' within the party. Miliband had a high regard for Bevan at this stage[39] and it was no doubt this new situation which now led him to join the Labour Party.[40] He became a fairly active member of the Hampstead Labour Party, and was also involved in the 'hands-off China' campaign.[41] While he may

initially have joined for foreign policy reasons, he soon participated more generally in the so-called 'second eleven' of the 'Bevanite' movement.

When, in October 1952, there was intense pressure on the Bevanite group within the Parliamentary Party to disband on the grounds that they had become an organised faction, some of the leading left-wing MPs, particularly Ian Mikardo and Jo Richardson, sought to strengthen the coordination of the group outside Parliament. Committees were established on elections, contacts, policy and propaganda and conferences, with *Tribune* staff playing a key role in the organisation.[42] The general aim was to push the party to the Left through conference resolutions, the selection of suitable candidates, and so-called 'Brains Trusts'. Miliband certainly played a role – though not a central one – in these activities. He attended meetings, suggested resolutions, and was one of the group's speakers, specialising in foreign policy.[43] In 1955 he was also a delegate for the Hampstead Constituency Party for the annual conference, where he delivered an impassioned speech on nationalisation, which simultaneously set out the position of the Labour Left on this issue and on the relationship between the Conference and the leadership. The labour movement, he stated, expected a clear reaffirmation of the party's constitution:

> that we are a socialist party engaged on a great adventure; and that we have a vision which the Tories never have had and never will have; that we are concerned with building that kind of socialist commonwealth which our forebears wanted and which millions of people in our Movement have tried to build.

It was not enough to reaffirm such principles unless it was also asserted:

> that we want this Party to state that it stands unequivocally behind the social ownership and control of the means of production, distribution and exchange … We also know that we must reaffirm that we stand for a greater advance in living standards, a process that was begun between 1945 and 1951 … Furthermore [this conference] … must instruct the Parliamentary Party, which is the extension of the Movement in Parliament, to give a coherent day-to-day lead and to present the issues of socialism in Parliament and the country. Finally, we ought at this Conference to instruct the National Executive to frame concrete and detailed proposals of policy geared to and fixed in the principles which we have reaffirmed. We do not need the National Executive to reaffirm for us our faith in our principles. We know what that faith and those principles are. But what we do need urgently and imperatively is the Executive to give us at the next Conference and the Conference after that a clear and detailed programme of policy to say specifically and clearly that we stand for socialism, that we are a socialist party, and that we shall go on being a socialist party until we have built the socialist commonwealth.[44]

In an era when the trade union block vote was controlled by the right wing of the Party, the resolution for which he was speaking was naturally heavily defeated.

It is difficult to determine how much faith he really had in the Labour Party or even the Labour Left at this stage. While he was happy to speak on Bevanite platforms, help draft resolutions, and attend meetings, he does not appear to have delivered leaflets or stuffed envelopes! Nevertheless, sceptical or not, his political commitment was now to the Bevanite left, and associated organisations. But in order to appreciate the intellectual foundations of this position it is necessary to consider his writings.

4. Writings

Although Miliband established himself in both academic and political circles in this period, he published comparatively little, and no introspective writings of the kind that he produced during the war have survived. He appears to have published nothing before 1950 and in the next six years he produced a few book reviews, an article on Robert Owen, and his 1000 page Ph.D. thesis. He also wrote a very perceptive and substantial analysis of Laski's political thought, which was only published (in an abridged form) in 1995 – after his death.[45] Since he was a very conscientious teacher, who was simultaneously carrying out research for his Doctorate, it is perhaps not surprising that his output was comparatively limited. On the other hand, given his outstanding energy and talent, more might have been expected of him, and it seems that his activity was constrained by a feeling of isolation which undermined his confidence and ability to write.

By the early 1950s he was searching for a way to articulate a form of independent Marxism in the stultifying conditions of the Cold War. One attempt to redefine his own position in these years was in a review in May 1952 of a new edition of R.H. Tawney's *Equality*. In respect of the recent Labour Government's achievements on social policy, nationalisations, and changes in people's expectations, it would, he argued, 'be as foolish to minimise their importance as to exaggerate their extent'. But his main point was that so much remained to be done. Property ownership and social structure had undergone little change since the pre-war era, and many aspects of the educational system remained deficient. In comparison with the past, the social services had made great strides, but in the perspective of the future they were still in their infancy. Nor had Labour's type of nationalisation provided any sufficient solution to the problem of wage-earners' participation in the processes of industrial life:

> We have yet to learn the secret of industrial democracy without which work must remain the stony path to a leisure made mean by mean circumstances; 'alienation', meaning the frustration of potentially creative effort, is a problem too directly related to the achievement of the good society to need emphasis; nor is the relation of work to culture a new theme. Both in material and spiritual terms, our civilisation needs widening as well as refining; the assertion often encountered that the two processes are incompatible and indeed mutually destructive is an evasion, not

a solution, of the difficulties involved.[46]

Similarly, he argued, it was vital to realise that inequality on an international scale helped to poison and corrupt international life. He concluded:

> Not the least of the charges that are brought against a widening of equality is that it is fatal to freedom. It would be wrong to ignore the fact that the question of freedom in an equalitarian society deserves the most careful attention; but nothing so far suggests that Tawney's contention is invalid:
> "In so far as opportunity to lead a life worthy of human beings is needlessly confined to a minority, not a few of the conditions applauded as freedom would more properly be denounced as privilege. Action which causes such opportunities to be more widely shared is, therefore, twice blessed. It not only subtracts from inequality, but adds to freedom".[47]

This was interesting in two respects. First, the judicious balancing of different considerations in a carefully reasoned approach was now evident and this would remain the hallmark of his work. Secondly, there was no indication of his attitude as to whether equality – or substantially greater equality – could be secured by peaceful reform by another Labour government or whether revolutionary change was necessary. The general stance therefore appeared to be that of left-wing democratic socialism.

A further indication of his theoretical position came in his only published academic article in the period, on 'The Politics of Robert Owen'. His starting point was that there was a profound difference between Owen's social and economic doctrine, which undoubtedly contributed to the development of socialist thought in Britain, and his cautious and conservative approach to politics. The latter, he argued, substantially reduced his influence over the contemporary Labour movement. All this meant that:

> At the same time ... that Owen was battling against the evils he saw around him and offering his "new view of society", he was asserting a political doctrine which ran counter to the experience of those for whom his social message had real meaning. His insistence upon the futility of political agitation, his belief in the need to rely upon the enlightened benevolence of the governing orders, and his advocacy of a union between rich and poor made it impossible for him to play a central part in the movement of protest which followed the end of the wars. Above all, Owen's distrust of the 'industrialised poor' and his inveterate conviction that their independent action must inevitably lead to anarchy and chaos denied him the support of those leaders of labour who ... came to believe that the political organization of the people was the key to social progress.[48]

This suggests much about Miliband's own political and theoretical position. First, that he was quite sure that action could be effective only if it was embed-

ded in the needs and demands of the working classes; secondly, that agitation, demands and protest were necessary if change was to be effected; and thirdly, that political organisation was also crucial. This had clear relevance to his own times and it was no doubt deliberate that he also referred to the fact that the Fabians had shared Owen's belief in the powers of persuasion which 'led Beatrice Webb to whisper Fabian reform into the ear of Lord Rosebery'.[49] There was one other important theoretical point for, in this article, and other contemporary pieces, he was beginning to turn against any conventional treatment of the history of political ideas. In this case he was arguing that Owen's influence was limited because he did not engage with the concerns of the labour movement. But he was equally aware that ideas would have no purchase if they were too radical for their times. Thus in an unsigned review of John Saville's book on the Chartist, Ernest Jones, he suggested that Jones was:

> ... a remarkable illustration of the truth that men are prisoners of their times. The circumstances of the fifties doomed him to failure as a leader of labour. He preached social revolution to a working class that had turned away from it; he was a militant political organiser when both militancy and political organisation had been replaced by trade unionism geared to limited aims, primarily economic, as the typical form of working class actions.[50]

Miliband had specialised in the history of political ideas under Laski's influence, but he was now questioning the assumption that it was sufficient to treat ideas as 'reflections' of the era in which they were produced. This certainly did not mean that he was dismissing their importance – only the value of analysing them without reference to the nature of power and interests within a given society. His own distinctive emphasis was the most significant aspect of his Ph.D. thesis.

His argument, in essence, was that the overwhelming preoccupation of the *menu peuple* was always economic – a basic struggle for survival. Before the Revolution they had no specific political aspirations, but played a key role in the events leading to it because of their frequent resort to rioting when there were bread shortages. As the revolution erupted, their attitudes towards its various phases were also determined by economic issues – their hopes for an end of scarcity and high prices. But this meant that the Jacobins, 'who never ceased to proclaim their democratic and egalitarian intentions, were never able to win the allegiance of the French people' because they were unable to do anything about the economic situation, and life actually became harder for the masses.[51]

> To borrow from Marxist terminology, all that concerned the political superstructure of the new regime left the mass of the common people almost wholly indifferent. On the other hand, they certainly came to feel that, as citizens, they had rights which any government, whatever its form, must guarantee if it was to claim their allegiance. So often was the *menu peuple* told that the Revolution had been made,

not only for them, but also by them; so often were they assured that they were the embodiment of goodness and virtue, that they found little difficulty in believing that they had indeed a prior, indeed an exclusive, claim to the interest and consideration of their rulers. Saint-Just was certainly expressing a deep popular conviction when he said in March 1794 that the poor were the masters of the world.[52]

The only real test for ordinary people was whether the regime – old or new – could satisfy their basic economic requirements. However, the Revolution was unable to do this because:

> The one solution to the economic question which the activists never contemplated was the elimination of private property. Despite the extraordinary flowering of social and economic notions generated by the Revolution, despite the verbal daring and rhetorical intoxication typical of those years, the activists never made the leap from a concept of society in which property would be disciplined to a concept of society in which it would be eliminated, that is to say, socialised. While they bitterly denounced the evils and abuses of property, they never ceased simultaneously to proclaim its sanctity. What they wished to see abolished was not property but those aspects of it which appeared noxious to them.[53]

Here Miliband was putting forward a (coded) interpretation, which was of wider application. Socialism, he was arguing, was the only real solution to the economic and social problems faced by ordinary people, even if they were not conscious of this fact. Ultimately, their interest in processes and theories would always be subordinate to their concrete economic needs and their attitudes to political actors would be determined by their efficacy in satisfying these needs. He was not, in any sense, either glorifying the common people or denigrating their leaders. Indeed, the tone was sceptical in relation to any generalisation about 'virtue' or 'evil' in any class or group. Nor, certainly, was he implying that political concepts, such as justice, rights and democracy, were unimportant or meaningless. The conclusion, rather, was that such concepts could have limited impact on the situation while the social and economic structure operated against the interests of the mass of the people. If this was, in essence, a Marxist interpretation, Miliband did not state this explicitly. He hoped instead to persuade his readers that his conclusions were the only ones that could be drawn from the very extensive evidence and analysis that he had presented. This would be characteristic of much of his work.

Yet the fullest and most interesting exposition of his position was given in the long unpublished essay on Laski. This was not simply an analysis of Laski's political ideas: it was an attempt to define his own politics in relation to those of his former mentor.

5. The Legacy of Laski

When Miliband had been Laski's student he had been very critical of aspects of his political stance despite his affection for him. He, like many of the Communist students, had believed that Laski had been far too committed to the Labour Party and the parliamentary system. But, apart from his debt of gratitude, two factors led him to re-appraise his former mentor after his death. First, Miliband's increasing distance from the Soviet Union and the Communist movement drew him towards Laski as another figure who was, to an extent, an independent Marxist. Secondly, while he might once have regarded him as too 'moderate' politically, after his death it became clear that Laski represented a form of socialism which was now regarded as dangerously extreme by most of the Labour leadership and the academic establishment. He therefore saw it as quite crucial to maintain Laski's legacy both inside and outside LSE. When Kingsley Martin's biography and the Holmes-Laski letters were published, he took the opportunity to write a very sympathetic article about him, and when Herbert Deane savaged Laski's reputation as a political theorist, Miliband leaped to his defence.[54] And it may well have been his fury about the Deane book which now led him to undertake a full study of the work of his former professor.[55]

His object, he explained, was to examine Laski's main ideas on socialism, but the interest here is that his judgments provide a very clear insight into his own thinking at the time. First, he suggested that, although the growing intensity of the social and economic crisis from the mid-1920s had led Laski to become progressively more favourable to Marx's diagnosis, his Marxism 'involved much less than the acceptance as scientifically true of that vast, all-embracing structure known as dialectical materialism'.[56] He was not 'a convert to a new secular faith' for 'historical materialism to him was a supremely useful tool of analysis, not a mental straight-jacket'.[57] Miliband clearly endorsed this attitude. Secondly, Laski feared that propertied interests would do everything they possibly could to subvert a Labour government elected on a socialist programme and, in such circumstances, fundamental conflict would make impossible the continuation of the normal processes of constitutional government. He never believed that this was inevitable, but thought the likelihood was extremely high, and that Labour could not afford to disregard such fears. Miliband maintained that this position was still valid, although he thought that there was some encouragement to be drawn from the experience of the post-war years because Labour's power and influence were far greater than had been the case in the 1930s. Thirdly, although Laski had proclaimed himself a Marxist from the 1930s, he was never a Leninist, refusing to accept Lenin's assertion of the inevitability of violent revolution or his insistence that the most imperative duty of socialists was to hasten its occurrence. Laski saw Lenin's strategy as the outcome of the circumstances in a non-democratic society, and consistently condemned the attempts of the Third International to

bind all working-class parties to Bolshevik theory and practice. He was insistent that socialism would not necessarily be reached by the same road in countries in which there was a liberal tradition. This, Miliband suggested, made Laski's writings seem more contradictory and ambiguous than would have been the case had he adhered consistently either to the Leninist or to the gradualist viewpoint. But he would then also have been a much less interesting thinker. Again, Miliband could not have written about Laski in this way without generally endorsing his position, which was perhaps encapsulated in the phrase that there was 'much more than a hyphen separating Marxism from Leninism'. Fourthly, he endorsed Laski's position on the relationship between the two dominant world powers:

> He did not underestimate how heavily the legacy of the past must affect any attempt to reach understanding with the Soviet Union. Nor did he fail to see how much Russian policies increased the difficulties of such an understanding. But he also believed that, when all possible emphasis had been laid on Russia's share of responsibility for the tragic climate of the post-war era, it remained true that one of the essential causes of the post-war tensions was the determination of the West to pursue its ancient and futile crusade against the idea which Russia had come to embody. And it was one of his most bitter disappointments that a Labour Government should have been willing to pursue foreign policies which only had meaning in terms of an acceptance of the values implicit in such a crusade. The first duty of a Labour Government, he insisted, was to come to terms, despite all difficulties, with the Communist world. Nothing that has happened since he died suggests that duty to be less imperative or less urgent.[58]

Finally, Miliband considered Laski's involvement in the world of politics, noting that few 'have been so generous with their gifts in the service of good causes'.[59] The fundamental reason lay, he suggested, in the view that Laski took of the role of the intellectual in the present era. His supreme conviction was that, since the end of the First World War and the Russian Revolution, there had been a period of crisis, the root of which lay in a clash between those who wished to perpetuate an increasingly inadequate economic and social system and those who sought its transcendence. In such an age the intellectual could not remain outside the conflict and remaining aloof effectively meant alignment with the status quo. Nor was it sufficient to denounce the sickness of our society for, unless this was coupled with an affirmation of positive values, this protest would simply add to the chorus of those who insisted that there was no solution to the current predicament. This meant that the intellectual could only play a fruitful role by helping in the creation of a social order based on the enhancement of the dignity and welfare of the common people. Intellectuals must align themselves with the masses with a sense of the urgency of the times. And, argued Miliband:

> It was above all this "sense of the urgency of the times" which impelled Laski as a theorist, as a teacher and as a member of the socialist movement, and which made

him refuse to abdicate from the responsibility he felt, as an intellectual, to understand and to make understandable to others both the nature of our predicament and the means to its civilised solution.[60]

It is clear that, in some way, Miliband sought to emulate him, as one who had taught 'by precept and example, that life is a mean and pitiful adventure if it is not lived in the service of a great cause'.[61]

By the time that he had finished this paper Miliband was encountering new political and intellectual influences with the development of the New Left. He no longer wanted to look back, for he hoped and believed that there were new opportunities opening up for socialist advance. While always fully acknowledging his affection for Laski, he now sought to escape from his mantle and no doubt found it irritating when he was still seen, by so many, as his protégé. On occasion he accepted invitations for brief contributions about him – for example in a Radio programme in 1962 and a Tribune article in 1964 – but, in his maturity, he certainly did not want to be regarded as a clone for the dead professor. Thus *The State in Capitalist Society* included only one fleeting mention of Laski and he ignored John Saville's suggestion that there ought to be some 'proper reference' to his work in the 1930s in the book.[62] As time went on he also became less sympathetic to him, both because he began to see his Marxism as rather superficial and because of his 'illusions' about the Labour Party. It was only near the end of his life that he thought about him again and reverted to a more positive attitude.[63] Yet Laski's influence had seeped into Miliband's own theoretical and political framework to a greater extent than he was aware. In any case, his approach had helped to provide a rationale for Miliband's own political and theoretical position in the first half of the 1950s. It offered a justification for working with the Labour Party Left, while retaining a Marxist interpretation of capitalism; and it helped him to condemn the USA as a major threat to world peace, without becoming an apologist for the Soviet Union. But he was uneasy as a historian of political ideas, felt constrained within the confines of the Labour Party, and had not fulfilled himself in his writing. After 1956 new possibilities were arising, and he was keen to move on.

Notes

[1] Robert Miles and Diana Kay, 'The Politics of Immigration to Britain: East-West Migrations in the Twentieth Century' in Martin Baldwin-Edwards and Martin A.Schain, *The Politics of Immigration in Western Europe* (Frank Cass, 1994), p.20
[2] Ann Dummett and Andrew Nicol, *Subjects, Citizens, Aliens and Others: Nationality and Immigration Law* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1990).
[3] In August 1948 Ralph wrote the following in his diary: 'Written 24 Feb: Two last days as black as is possible. Going mad. Would give anything to know what will have happened between now (24 Feb) and this day [i.e. 24 August]'. It is not clear what he expected to happen by 24 August (although one possibility is that he hoped to hear of his own naturalisation application by then),

but the 'black days' must have referred to the rejection of Sam's application for a visa.

[4] Chuter Ede to Laski, 12 March 1948 (Home Office Files on the naturalisation of Sam and Renée Miliband).

[5] He continued: '... for I know that few things could be more agonising than the sense, not only of being exiled from what had come to be one's natural domicile,but also of separation from the other country in which you had found a refuge from persecution'. Laski to Chuter Ede, 15 March 1948.

[6] Ede to Bevin, 19 March 1948.

[7] Letter, 5 July 1947.

[8] Letter, 25 July 1947.

[9] Letter to Renée and Samuel, 11 March 1948.

[10] Letter from John Rees, 11 April 1948 and rejection letter from Southampton University, 28 May 1948.

[11] Letter, 18 June 1949 (Miliband's Personal File, LSE).

[12] Joan Abse (ed.) *My LSE* (Robson, 1977), p.99.

[13] Lionel (Lord) Robbins (1898-1984), the right-wing Professor of Economics, who dominated economics at LSE from the 1930s onwards and was to be Chairman of the Governors from 1968-73.

[14] David Glass (1911-78), Professor of Sociology and specialist in population and social mobility studies.

[15] To Ernest Wolgemuth, 13 January 1951.

[16] Interviews with Professor Norman Birnbaum, 25 May 1999, Professor Bernard Crick, 19 April 1999

[17] Interview with Ann Bohm, 29 March 1999

[18] Interview with Professor Walter Goldstein, 24 May 1999

[19] In fact, the impetus was lost after Laski's death and although the project staggered on for some time, it was never completed. Frank Bealey's contract was not renewed and although Ian Aitken was later appointed for a short period, both found themselves working without the senior academic staff taking much interest. Miliband was helpful to them, but was too junior to ensure their continued employment. Interviews with Ian Aitken, 20 April 1998 and Frank Bealey, 15 July 1998.

[20] To Ernest Wolgemuth, 13 January 1951.

[21] Note from the sub-committee on promotions by Carr-Saunders, 1 May 1953. Miliband's Personal File, LSE.

[22] Report on Ralph Miliband's Ph.D. examination. (I am grateful to the Academic Registrar of the University of London for allowing me access to this report).

[23] In fact his comparative 'lightness' in research output stood against him the next year when he sought recognition as a teacher of the University of London. Although Oakeshott supported his application and thought the recognition conditions were unreasonable, he dissuaded him from pursuing his candidature when it appeared it would be turned down. He told the new Director of LSE, Sir Sydney Caine that Miliband 'is a little depressed about the whole thing, but I did my best to encourage him'. Oakeshott to Caine, 12 October 1957, (Miliband Personal File, LSE).

[24] 'Quand les Tories souhaitent qu'il gêle encore', Lettre de Londres par Kenneth Ward, *Le Drapeau Rouge*, 13 février 1947. The article does not reveal very much about his politics, as it simply condemns the Conservatives for trying to undermine nationalisation.

[25] Andrei Zhdanov appeared to be Stalin's likely successor until his death in 1948. In August 1946 he launched a savage attack on certain writers and journals for allowing themselves to fall under 'bourgeois' influences. The criticism was then extended to virtually every field of culture, including music.

[26] To Perry Anderson, 25 January 1981. Perry Anderson became the dominant figure in *New Left Review* in 1962 and remained its editor until 1983 (when he was succeeded by Robin Blackburn).

He resumed the editorship in 1999. He is the author of numerous works, including *Passages from Antiquity to Feudalism* (1974), *Lineages of the Absolutist State* (1974), *Considerations on Western Marxism* (1976), *Arguments within English Marxism* (1980), *In the Tracks of Historical Materialism* (1983), *A Zone of Engagement* (1992), and *The Origins of Postmodernity* (1998).

[27] Interview with Chris Freeman, 5 June 1998.

[28] Chris Freeman to Miliband, 19 December (n.d. 1948[?]). (Since the 1930s the conventional study of genetics had been challenged by Trofim D.Lysenko, who claimed to speak in the name of Marxism. In 1948 his doctrine of the inheritance of acquired characteristics received party sanction, and biologists who refused to accept this were purged on the grounds of 'reactionary bourgeois idealism'.)

[29] Chesworth to Miliband, 8 March 1950. Chesworth was subsequently elected to the LCC as member for Kensington North (1952-64) and was co-opted on to the Inner London Education Authority from 1970-77. He was the Chairman of *War on Want* from 1965-76 and active in NGOs concerned with developing countries. The Donald Chesworth Educational Trust was established after his death in 1991.

[30] Interviews with Dick Clements, 28 April1998 and Mary Blumenau, 1 May 1998. Ian Mikardo, Jo Richardson and Michael Foot were key figures on the 'Bevanite' Left in the 1950s.

[31] Letter to Peter Merriton and Donald Chesworth, 16 June 1949.

[32] The Alger Hiss trial was one of the most notorious US anti-communist trials in the period. Hiss was a former US State Department official who became president of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in 1947. In 1948 Whittaker Chambers accused Hiss of having been a member of an underground communist organisation in Washington. Hiss sued Chambers for libel, but was indicted for perjury by a New York grand jury in July 1949. Although this jury failed to agree he was found guilty by a second jury and sentenced to five years imprisonment in 1950. The case gave prominence to Richard Nixon, who was a junior member of the Un-American Activities Committee.

[33] Letter to Ernest Wolgemuth, 6 July 1949. (Letter loaned by Mrs Wolgemuth).

[34] He was introduced to them by an American friend, Gus Kelley, whom he had known in Cambridge during the war, when he stayed in New York on his way to Chicago. (Letter from Miliband to Peter Merriton and Donald Chesworth, 16/18 June 1949). Morris Miller, another friend who was at the same meeting in Greenwich Village, recalls Miliband being particularly interested by the idea of a socialist journal and talking of establishing something similar in Britain. (Letter from Morris Miller to Marion Kozak, 30 June 1998).

[35] To Merriton and Chesworth, 16/18 June 1949.

[36] To Wolgemuth, 14 July 1950.

[37] To Wolgemuth, 13 January 1951.

[38] Ibid.

[39] This is evident from his review of the first volume of Michael Foot's biography of Bevan: 'The Reluctant Rebel' *Bulletin of the Society for the Study of Labour History*, No.6, Spring 1963.

[40] Miliband's autobiographical notes in April/May 1983 begin with a tantalising passage:
I call this book a political autobiography because I mainly try to explain here the political priorities I have held since the age of sixteen … I think this may be of interest because the position I have always occupied is that of an independent Marxist, unattached to any party save for a few years in the fifties when, for reasons I will presently explain, I was a member of the Labour Party.
Since the notes stopped in 1940 he never did explain.

[41] Interview with Ann Swingler (widow of Stephen Swingler, MP) and Roy Shaw (who was Vice Chair of the Hampstead Constituency Labour Party in the period), 28 April 1998.

[42] Mark Jenkins, *Bevanism – Labour's High Tide* (Spokesman, 1979), p.170.

[43] Ibid., interview with Roy Shaw, 28 April 1998; Jo Richardson's papers at the Labour History Archive and Study Centre at the John Ryland Library at the University of Manchester.

[44] *Labour Party Conference Annual Report,* 1955, p.113.

[45] 'Harold Laski's Socialism' *Socialist Register 1995.*

[46] 'Equality to Date', *New Statesman*, 17 May 1952

[47] Ibid.

[48] *Journal of the History of Ideas*, XV, 1954, pp.244-5.

[49] Ibid., p.235.

[50] Review of *Ernest Jones: Chartist*, in *The Economist*, 14 June 1952.

[51] 'Popular Thought in the French Revolution, 1789-1794', Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of London, 1956, p.895.

[52] Ibid., p.900.

[53] Ibid., pp. 915-16.

[54] 'L'influence de Laski' *La Tribune des Peuples*: *Revue internationale de la Gauche* 5 December 1953-January 1954' 'Deane: The Political Ideas of Harold J.Laski' *Stanford Law Review* 8 No.1 December 1955.

[55] It is unclear exactly when Miliband wrote this piece. He may well have begun it after being incensed by the Deane book when it appeared in 1955. In his application for recognition as a teacher of the University of London in May 1957 it was stated that 'Harold J. Laski: A Study of Political Ideas' would be published in the Autumn, but in October Oakeshott told the Director that Miliband had 'run into some difficulties with his stuff on Laski, and it will take longer to finish than he thought at first'.(Oakeshott to Sir Sydney Caine, 12 October 1957, Miliband's Personal File, LSE). Almost two years later Oakeshott again wrote to Caine to say that Miliband 'has a considerable MS about Harold Laski, but he is now rather doubtful about much of it and has put it on one side for further consideration'.(27 April 1959, Miliband's Personal File, LSE). Later Miliband also claimed that he had submitted the paper to the Fabian Society, but that Richard Crossman and Bill Rodgers had not wanted to publish it. (Information from Marion Kozak). I have been unable to verify this but the minor editorial queries on the manuscript certainly do not suggest that it would have been rejected. It seems that, having devoted considerable research and thought to the manuscript (of over 70 pages), he decided to keep it to himself. There are no references after 1956 in the manuscript, which suggests that he may have finished it in 1957.

[56] 'Harold J.Laski' (unpublished full manuscript) p.18.

[57] p.19.

[58] p.65.

[59] p.66.

[60] p.69.

[61] p.70.

[62] Letter, 6 July 1968.

[63] 'Harold Laski: an exemplary public intellectual' *New Left Review* July/August 1993.

Chapter Three: The New Left and *Parliamentary Socialism* 1956-62

1956 was a turning point in the history of the post-war Left in Britain. Krushchev's speech to the twentieth congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in February, denouncing the crimes of Stalin, sent shock waves across the Left as a whole, and the Communist movement in particular. The brutal crushing of the uprising in Budapest in November of the same year then constituted a colossal crisis in the history of the international Communist movement. In Britain alone some 7000 CP members (out of a total of 50,000), including some of the most committed intellectuals, now left the Party. While Soviet tanks were killing Hungarian workers, the British and French were joining forces in an imperialist venture in Suez, precipitating the largest demonstrations seen thus far in post-war Britain. The decision the following year to develop the hydrogen bomb as the main component in Britain's defence strategy then led to the establishment of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND). Beginning in 1958 the annual Aldermaston marches were the biggest protests in twentieth century Britain. They reached their peak in 1960, the year that unilateralism also achieved a short-lived success in winning majority support at the Labour Party conference.

These changes in the political context were coupled with a ferment of ideas, and new forums in which they could be expressed. The transformed political climate also meant that those who defined themselves as neither Communists nor Labour Party supporters could make a contribution to the development of a 'New Left'. In no sense was this a single movement, or even a phenomenon that can be encapsulated within a single definition. It was inchoate, and often characterised by political, intellectual and personal tensions which were to lead to serious conflicts and schisms. Nevertheless, during these years there was an energy to dissolve the constraints of the post-war orthodoxies. For three or four years from 1957, with the development of the two journals, *The New Reasoner* (NR) and *Universities and Left Review*, (ULR), and the establishment of New Left Clubs, it seemed possible that the New Left might have a major impact on the political life of the country. But from 1961 this optimism began to fade as the Right regained control at the Labour Party Conference, the New Left Clubs lost impetus, and *New Left Review* (NLR), which had been established by a merger between ULR and NR the previous year, was undermined by internal disputes. Finally, in 1962 the decline of CND and the effective takeover of NLR by Perry Anderson and his closest associates ended the first phase of the New Left. This is not to suggest that it no longer had an impact, for the ideas and theories initi-

ated between 1956 and 1962 were subsequently developed in various ways: CND spawned a whole range of direct action movements, and NLR continued as an innovative journal of Marxist theory with an international readership. However, after 1962 it became increasingly clear that there was no coherent New Left movement which would change the face of British politics.[1]

While Miliband was not so central a figure in this phase of the New Left as Edward Thompson, Raymond Williams or Stuart Hall, he contributed to the movement in numerous ways. ULR, which began in the spring of 1957, was initiated by four editors, with an average age of twenty-four: Raphael Samuel (then known as Ralph), Gabriel Pearson, Stuart Hall and Charles Taylor. They were initially based at Oxford University, but ULR moved to London the next year. Miliband was the first person whom Raphael Samuel had contacted at LSE to discuss the idea of launching the new journal. He was enthusiastic about this and was active (with Norman Birnbaum) in facilitating its establishment there, and he contributed to ULR. He was also keen to help develop the New Left Clubs, frequently speaking at meetings, and he supported other initiatives, such as the Partisan coffee bar, which Samuel promoted as a way of implanting left-wing culture in daily life. Apart from contributing himself, he also acted as an intermediary between the older and younger generations on the Left. For example, having already known Isaac Deutscher for some time he now brought him into the circle of the New Left. Deutscher had been an isolated figure in the post-war period, concentrating on his biographies of Stalin and Trotsky, but the revival of non-Stalinist Marxism enabled him to emerge as one of the 'gurus' of the younger generation. Similarly, after Miliband became friendly with the American radical sociologist, C. Wright Mills, he introduced him to the British New Left.

Although he supported ULR from the beginning, he was still more enthusiastic about the *New Reasoner*. NR originated in *The Reasoner*, which Edward Thompson (also known as E.P. Thompson) and John Saville had established in July 1956 as a discussion forum within the CP in reaction to the attempt to stifle all internal debate over Krushchev's denunciation of Stalin. The leadership's pressure to cease publication had widened the scope of the disagreement, but even this had not made a decisive break inevitable. By the beginning of October 1956 Thompson and Saville decided to publish the third issue, stating that this would be the last one. Then came the Soviet intervention in Hungary, which led them to redraft the editorial on 4 November demanding public dissociation from this action, and the withdrawal of Soviet troops. This precipitated their suspension, followed by their immediate letter of resignation in which they argued that, 'in our attempt to promote a serious discussion of Communist theory, we – and not the Executive Committee – have been defending Communist principle'.[2] The editorial board of *The New Reasoner* also consisted entirely of ex-Communists, who disagreed with the Party's policies in 1956.

Both the origins and nature of the NR appealed to Miliband and he was delighted when Saville contacted him in April 1958 inviting him to contribute to the journal with an essay 'on some fundamental questions for socialists concerning the transition to socialism in Britain.'[3] This was published as 'The Transition to the Transition' and in the same year NR also published another article by Miliband on 'The Politics of Contemporary Capitalism'.[4] At the end of the year he became the only person who had never been a member of the Communist Party to join the editorial board of NR. For reasons which will be explained below, he also became the main *opponent* of the merger with ULR, arguing that the two journals were entirely different. Nevertheless, once NLR was established he joined editorial board of the new journal and wanted to make it work.

Miliband was not only an active member of the New Left, but also someone who was respected by people of all age groups. Thus Edward Thompson, who was his exact contemporary, thought his political analysis was impressive and important, and also thought that he could influence the ULR group in the discussions over the merger. And when Tom Nairn, of the younger group, was developing a specific theory about the Labour Party, he was particularly keen to find out what Miliband thought about it.[5] As a passionate and persuasive speaker, he also had an influence over the way in which political events were viewed. Thus, for example, when De Gaulle returned to power in France in 1958 at a time of a threatened military takeover, Miliband, who had even worried about the General's predilection for personal power during the Second World War, had a major impact on a protest meeting. And, finally and most important, he clearly contributed through his writing and political thinking, above all with *Parliamentary Socialism*, which was published in October 1961.

At the same time, it is evident that Miliband derived enormous benefits from the first phase of the New Left. Having been relatively isolated before 1956, he now found new allies and friends with whom he shared preoccupations, a new audience to whom he could speak and write, and a new confidence in his views. Until 1956 it had been extremely difficult to be an 'independent Marxist': now the major problems were removed. It is therefore no exaggeration to suggest that his position was transformed by the first phase of the New Left. The two journals of the New Left had provided him with a forum, and *Parliamentary Socialism* would establish him as a major figure with an international reputation. Yet the significance of the New Left for him should not be exaggerated. First, his important relationships were with particular individuals rather than a generic movement, and secondly, his analyses and concerns remained very much his own.

1. New Relationships

Of all those he met in this period, the person who had the greatest intellectual influence over him was C.Wright Mills. The two first met at a weekend school

in Surrey organised by LSE in March 1957. Mills was eight years older and was already the most eminent, and also the most controversial, left-wing American sociologist. *The Power Elite* had just been published and Mills's method – combining a kind of 'sociological biography' of individuals with an insistence on the centrality of power in the interpretation and understanding of any society – immediately struck a chord with Miliband. At first he likened it to Laski's *The American Democracy*,[6] but it was soon clear that it offered an entirely different approach, which finally helped Miliband to wean himself from the history of ideas and to adopt a more sociological method. In fact, even his teaching of politics was influenced by the impact that Mills made upon him: he had already emphasised the ineffectiveness of ideas detached from power and it was the analysis of power itself that now became the central focus of his work.[7] However, Mills was not only important for Miliband as a theorist, but as an intimate friend.

In many respects, he was an unlikely soul-mate. While Miliband was hopeless with his hands, knew nothing about anything mechanical, and was a very poor driver, Mills built his own house, and devoted much of his leisure to riding and repairing motor cycles. Texan in origin, he was physically big and 'larger than life' in character. But perhaps this was one of the attractions for Miliband, who tended to be quite conventional in his behaviour. He was thus partly attracted by Mills's eccentricities but, above all, they shared a passionate interest in trying to understand the nature of contemporary society and politics, and in arguing about the meaning and significance of current trends. Their friendship was cemented by a trip which was also to have great significance in Miliband's political development. For in the summer of 1957, at Mills's suggestion, they travelled together to Poland.[8]

Krushchev's speech in February 1956 had unleashed a wave of protest amongst intellectuals in Poland about the suppression of freedom, which was followed by demands by industrial workers. This led to explosive demonstrations in Poznan, which troops finally put down with 75 deaths and 900 injuries.[9] The situation had remained very tense when Gomulka, then regarded as a reformer, became leader in October. Miliband had been following the situation with particular interest as he had met Leszek Kolakowski at a Unesco conference in Paris just before this.[10] Kolakowski, a Professor of the History of Philosophy at the University of Warsaw, was a focus for dissent, particularly through the journal *Studia Filozoficzne*. In Paris, he and Miliband had long discussions about the situation, and the possibilities of freeing European socialism from Stalinism.[11] When Mills and Miliband arrived in Poland the following summer, these intense conversations were resumed when they again met Kolakowski and other dissident intellectuals, and the experience made a deep impression on them both. As Miliband later told Edward Thompson, Mills had asked him at the time:

"If you were here, which would you be: the revisionist or the commissar, Leszek Kolakowski or Gomulka?" – and ... [he] kept me up half the night trying to work this through for and about himself.[12]

It was such arguments and discussions that stimulated their thinking. Since Mills was the older of the two, with an established reputation, Miliband's self-confidence was enhanced by the fact that his opinions were taken so seriously.

Unfortunately, their friendship was to be cut short when Mills died from a heart attack in 1962, aged only forty-five. This was a terrible blow and Miliband would later tell Thompson that 'I got to feel closer to Mills than I have ever felt to any man, or shall ever feel again, I should think'.[13] His grief was reinforced by the fact that many of the obituary notices were deeply offensive. Because Mills had launched a devasting attack on the American self-image, and had become increasingly sympathetic to the Soviet Union and Cuba, his Cold War critics now sought to demolish him. Miliband thus felt obliged not only to write his own memorial pieces to his dead friend, but also to counter those which upset him.[14] His own obituary was poignant:

C. Wright Mills cannot be neatly labelled and catalogued. He never belonged to any party or faction; he did not think of himself as a 'Marxist'; he had the most profound contempt for orthodox Social Democrats and for closed minds in the Communist world. He detested smug liberals and the kind of radical whose response to urgent and uncomfortable choices is hand wringing. He was a man on his own, with both the strength and also the weakness which go with that solitude. He was on the Left, but not of the Left, a deliberately lone guerrilla, not a regular soldier. He was highly organized, but unwilling to *be* organized, with self-discipline the only discipline he could tolerate. He had friends rather than comrades. He was desperately needed by socialists everywhere, and his death leaves a gaping void. In a trapped and inhumane world, he taught what it means to be a free and humane intellect.[15]

The State in Capitalist Society, which Miliband began in May 1962 would be dedicated to the memory of C. Wright Mills, and his first son, David, would be given the second name of Wright in commemoration of his dead friend.

Yet while Mills's influence over him was very considerable, the two also differed in fundamental respects. One of Miliband's enduring beliefs was in the primacy of the working class and a socialist party in effecting the transformation of society. However, Mills argued that the labour movement was so integrated into the institutional structures and ethos of capitalist society that it was no longer a primary agency for its transformation. Indeed in *White Collar* (1951) he even dismissed the working class as 'cheerful robots' and he eventually placed his faith in the intelligentsia – the cultural workers, especially in the younger generation. Practising the politics of truth, he argued that:

> The intellectual ought to be the moral conscience of his society, at least with refer-
> ence to the value of truth, for in the defining instance, that is his politics.[16]

Intellectuals who were prepared to stand for the truth could, Mills believed, pay
a key role in dissolving the existing structures of power.

Believing that Mills was profoundly mistaken in his view, Miliband criticised
him on theoretical grounds for failing to acknowledge the primacy of class con-
flict in capitalist societies. It was true, Miliband argued, that labour movements
were integrated within the institutional and ideological structures of those soci-
eties, but they also protested against them and, in any case, such analysis was
too static.[17] The more personal dimension of his critique is also very significant.
Mills, he argued, had tended to lack hope because he found it very difficult to
believe that there were sufficiently strong forces to counteract the abuse of power
and the spread of irrationality:

> The very emphasis he placed on the task of the intellectual in society, the clearly
> exaggerated hopes he had of the intellectuals acting as an independent force, testify
> to the bleakness of his expectations. Often, particularly in the last years, the "poli-
> tics of truth" which he advocated sounded more like the politics of despair. Hope-
> lessness is a weakness in a social scientist, almost as grave as mindless unconcern
> or the cultivation of the fixed grin.[18]

In private correspondence he was more direct. He thus told Thompson:

> Had there been a serious labour movement in the US, or a serious socialist intel-
> lectual movement there, or here, or any where, Mills might have hooked on to it,
> and nurtured the hopes which he expresses in … [*The New Men of Power*, 1948],
> and not given way to the kind of despair which becomes part of his work ever after,
> and which makes him speak of the 'cheerful robot'. Instead, there was the Cold War
> and Stalinism, and Trotskyism, and the social democrats. What a choice! He was
> still wrong I think in the directions which his work took, but it is precisely because
> of the barrenness of the alternatives at the time that he tried in the following years
> to make the breakthrough, and failed, and tried again, and failed again, and tried
> again. It is only slowly that I came to realise how lonely he felt, and felt he had to
> feel: that is why he took so warmly to 'the new left', and was so disappointed with it,
> and with the humanist revisionists. That is also why he took so hotly to the Cubans
> and Fidel Castro. He was looking for 'agencies', and even tried to invent them.[19]

Two other people, who were really important for Miliband's work in this period,
were Edward Thompson and John Saville – particularly the latter. Thompson was
quite brilliant, with a highly original and creative mind that would soon produce
The Making of the English Working Class (1963) – probably the most influential
work in social history in the post-war era. He was also an inspirational figure.
However, he was often extremely 'difficult': volatile, suspicious and disinclined

to compromise. Moreover, despite regarding himself as a Communist after he left the Party, he would soon begin to move away from his earlier positions, both in relation to doctrine and organisation, and would later react emotionally to theories which he associated with Stalinism.[20] Miliband had tremendous respect for his work and found him intellectually stimulating. This was obviously reciprocated and the two of them exhanged some important unpublished correspondence over key questions in socialist theory. However, they were also quite different in approach, both intellectually and politically, as would become more evident in later years. Moreover, they were temperamentally unsuited for close cooperation with each other. Thompson was a 'prima donna', who tended to 'hit out' in anger without expecting the victim to take it too seriously. Miliband also had a temper, but was extremely sensitive if ever criticised unfairly. Despite his admiration for Thompson he therefore found him difficult to work with. He would be important to Miliband until 1963, but subsequently their relations would never be really close. Saville, on the other hand, was to play an important political and personal role for the rest of Miliband's life.

Eight years his senior, Saville had been a committed member of the CP from his earliest days as a student at LSE in 1934.[21] He was an experienced organiser, having spent the whole of his adult life in political and trade union work of one kind or another. He had also been in India for much of the war, where he had played an active role in political education. Subsequently, he had been a keen member of the Communist Historians group, working, amongst others, with Christopher Hill, Eric Hobsbawm, Rodney Hilton, and Edward and Dorothy Thompson. He prided himself on being a 'tough character' and he could certainly be forceful. But he was also a calming influence. Unlike both Thompson and Miliband, he was not a natural individualist. This did not mean that he lacked strong opinions and the courage to act upon them. But he liked disciplined organisational life and the sense of solidarity that went with it. This, as he later acknowledged, meant that he had kept his questioning of Soviet policy under control during his long years in the CP and it had only been the suppression of internal debate over Krushchev's secret speech that had finally driven him to rebel. And a factor which continued to influence him was a deep suspicion of the Labour Party which he viewed as an accomplice of British imperialism abroad and a party of tepid reform at home. Saville's exit from the CP did not lead to any fundamental reappraisal of his past life or values although he certainly became deeply critical of the Soviet Union and of the centralised control within Communist Parties. But he appeared to be relatively unscathed by the experience of 1956. Outside the Party, he continued to talk of services to the 'movement' and of 'comrades', even though he no longer had an organisational base. This also meant that he would respond, as a matter of course, to 'struggles' as they arose. Thus Saville would often participate in local action in Hull, where he worked at the University – for example, in support of tenants or dockers. In

fact he would respond readily to all kinds of demands on his time. Miliband was attracted by his commitment, his historical knowledge of the labour movement, and his experience, while Saville soon recognised the younger man's outstanding intellect. Parodoxically, the fact that both of them preferred to talk about politics rather than personal life probably created a still stronger bond between them. In the early stages of their relationship Saville was to play a crucial role in enhancing Miliband's self-confidence in his writing.

After reading his first contribution to the NR, Saville had told him that 'you have an immense verbal facility as had your guru, Harold Laski' and that occasionally some of his formulations were too easy. [22] Miliband replied:

> I could not help being amused at your reference to my 'facility'. As a matter of grim fact, I find writing an absolute misery and have the greatest difficulty in getting anything on paper. I only manage by going on torturing myself and often wonder if the expenditure of effort is in the least commensurate with the result. On the other hand, I have little difficulty in being facile, a nice distinction, what? End of autobiographical section. I am very glad you didn't think too badly of the piece. (I was pretty fed up with both of you keeping me in suspense for so long). I have just looked at the piece again (couldn't bear to do so until now!) ...[23]

The letter indicated not only Miliband's difficulties in writing, but his insecurity and need for Saville's approval. Few who knew Miliband would have suspected that he had such anxieties, but he was aware of the service that Saville and Thompson had rendered him and at the end of 1959, he showed his appreciation in an unusually effusive letter:

A letter of thanks

... It's an awkward letter to write in some ways, but I want to do it, even if it sounds a bit embarrassing ... Actually it's just to say a personal thank you to both of you. What you have done for me needs saying now. In effect you have given me the sense of socialist comradeship (I said it would be embarrassing) which I have not had before, save perhaps in early student days. You have both made me feel that, beside the sense of belonging to a movement, I was also involved in a personal comradeship with people who had more experience than I, who could share in a direct way the political worries I have, who spoke my language and who also welcomed me as one of their number. This last point is something I do want to stress. I have felt deeply involved with NR (which is perhaps one reason why I have fought so stubbornly against its disappearance) and you have both given me a measure of confidence I might make a contribution to what you were trying to do. Assertiveness, in this context, is not the same thing as assurance; and both your praise, often to my mind over generous, and your criticism, has helped me more than I can possibly tell you. I find that you have both become part of an inner forum in why I write and what I think – not inhibiting but stimulating, and formative. I hope you will believe that it is no false pathos which makes me say that whatever I can do for NLR and for the kind of movement we want in the next few years will be better

done because of what you have done for me in the last two years. So – thank you, comrades.[24]

Both replied warmly but Saville, who may have been embarrassed by such a show of emotion, talked in rather general terms about the future. Thompson's reply was more personal:

As you know your feelings of respect are more than reciprocated. And when we were in a very tight corner indeed – with opinion generally, including 'socialist' opinion – writing us off as disenchanted *naifs*, whose only function was 'to work our passage' away from our sordid place of origin, a few – a very few – people in the universities and labour movement, who were not of our ex-CP vintage, encouraged us by putting a higher valuation upon what we were doing, and thinking it important in itself. You were the main person, and you helped us more than anyone to get out of that corner – and the mood of psychological defensiveness which went with it. You certainly became part of our 'inner forum' too …[25]

Saville's role as the midwife to Miliband's career as a writer was not yet over. In August 1958 Miliband had told him that he had been trying to press on with a project, which might eventually turn into a book, on 'The Politics of Labour'. At that stage he had hoped to finish it the next month, but it was almost two years later when he asked Saville if he would read the whole thing:

I must tell you quite frankly (and this is for you only) that I have worried myself into a fine state about the whole affair, and now feel the thing is damn awful. What I badly need is not reassurance (we all feel like that, old boy, and all that crap) but really solid criticism.[26]

Over the next few months Saville was to give him extensive constructive criticisms. But, despite his disclaimer, what Miliband really needed was reassurance from someone whose opinion he respected. Just over two weeks after receiving the initial manuscript, Saville provided this, saying that he had read it twice, liked it very much indeed and:

You are going to produce a book which will be of incalculable value to all of us and especially … to our younger comrades. It will do for them what books like Strachey and Allen Hutt did for us in the thirties.[27]

It was this kind of support which gave him the confidence to continue with *Parliamentary Socialism* and, as he recorded in the acknowledgments:

My friend John Saville has continuously given me invaluable criticism, advice and encouragement in the preparation of this book. It is scarcely too much to say that his help has often amounted to collaboration.

Parliamentary Socialism established Miliband's reputation as major figure on the intellectual Left and was the most influential critique of the Labour Party in the post-war period. Despite the acknowledgement, Saville had not been a collaborator, but a constructive and supportive critic. However, by giving the book his seal of approval, he had enabled Miliband to surmount his doubts – at least to the point of letting his publishers have the manuscript.

The book was published in October 1961, but the previous month a still more important event in his life had taken place: his marriage to Marion Kozak. Marion was eleven years younger than he was, and they had first met when she had been a student of International History at LSE in the mid fifties and had taken one of his courses. But it was much later that their relationship really began. Marion's history was one of tragedy and resilience.

Born, and named Deborah,[28] in December 1934 in Czestochowa in Southern Poland, she was the elder of two daughters of Dawid and Bronislawa Kozak. Her younger sister, Hadassa, was born four years later. They were a relatively prosperous Jewish family who owned a large factory which produced steel goods and employed about three hundred people in the area by the late 1930s. Marion's early childhood was therefore secure and comfortable. All this changed with the war and the occupation. The factory was taken over by the Germans, and her grandparents and aunt moved into their house, which was soon incorporated within the ghetto. Late in 1942, when the deportations were beginning, Marion escaped with her mother and sister, but Dawid stayed with his parents, who were too old to move: they were probably subsequently shot and he died in Auschwitz. For the rest of the war Marion, Hadassa and their mother had been in constant danger and owed their lives to several brave people, Jewish and non-Jewish, many of whom were themselves killed. Nor had the post-war years been easy and in 1947 Marion had been sent by herself to Britain through a Jewish organisation that was ferrying children out of Poland. Having had virtually no schooling until the age of twelve, and arriving in Britain in deeply traumatic circumstances and without speaking English, she had nevertheless managed to get to university at the normal entrance age.

From an early age she had been left wing, regarding herself as a Communist when she first arrived in Britain. But she had soon rejected this, largely because of the Slansky trial in Czechoslovakia.[29] By the time she met Ralph she was more attracted to direct action movements such as CND, demonstrations against the Algerian war, and the New Left. They thus shared a great deal: political commitment, elements in their personal histories, and their complex identities as secular Jewish exiles. Their relationship was to be close and complementary. She was the more spontaneous, outgoing and hospitable while he was rather 'private', despite his ability as an orator and conversationalist. He was the more theoretical, but she was a formidable critic of his work and had also commented on *Parliamentary Socialism* before it was published.

2. *Parliamentary Socialism*

The opening sentences indicate the general 'line' of the book:

> Of political parties claiming socialism to be their aim, the Labour Party has always been one of the most dogmatic – not about socialism, but about the parliamentary system. Empirical and flexible about all else, its leaders have always made devotion to that system their fixed point of reference and the conditioning factor of their political behaviour.[30]

It then sustained this point in 350 pages of concise analysis, providing an inter-pretive account of the party's history, and demonstrating that the insistence on parliamentary methods had failed to exploit the potential of the mass movement and had thwarted an advance towards socialism.

An important feature of the book – and of his general approach – was that it differed from both CP and conventional Labour Left critiques of the Party. When Communists wrote about the Labour Party, their argument – implicit or explicit – was that only the CP was truly reliable because of its working-class character and its acceptance of 'scientific socialism'. Even when advocating Left unity, the underlying proposition was that socialist advance depended on increasing the size of the CP and securing acceptance of its theses. However, *Parliamentary Socialism* rejected any such notion. The comparatively few com-ments on CP policies were negative. At the height of industrial unrest in the early 1920s, many Trade Unionists, Miliband argued, pressed their leaders for militant action, but were not prepared to support, vote for, or enlist in an avow-edly revolutionary party, and the fact that it remained tiny 'shows how small was the appeal, even to the activists in the Labour movement, of the revolutionary doctrine the Communist party preached'.[31] In the early 1930s, the result of the sectarian 'new line' which was 'grotesque in Britain and catastrophic in Germany, had been the steady isolation of the Communist Party and a constant diminu-tion of its influence in the trade union movement'.[32] In 1939 the 'Nazi-Soviet Pact ... had ... been a profound shock to the Labour movement, to many on the Left a traumatic shock ... Nor was the Russian case helped by the support of the Communist Party, then more generally suspect than ever on account of its switch from support of the war to opposition'.[33] Since Miliband did not believe that even the French and Italian Communist Parties were capable of attracting majority support, the implication is that he did not believe that the CPGB was, or was likely to become, a serious political force.

The leitmotif of Labour Left critiques of the party was the theme of leadership 'betrayal'. The assumption here was that, while the party as a whole was 'social-ist', its leaders 'sold out' by diluting agreed policies. Miliband certainly shared the insistence of the Labour Left about the importance of the Conference in deter-mining the party programme, arguing that this was one obstacle to the 'degra-

dation of the business of politics'.[34] But this did not mean that he accepted the Labour Left's characterisation of its own role. In fact, he argued, the Left of the Party had two purposes: to push the leaders into accepting more radical policies and programmes, and to press upon them more militant attitudes in response to challenges from Labour's opponents. Its acceptance of the parliamentary system had been distinguished from that of the leadership by its continuous search for a means of escape from its inhibitions and constrictions: 'What the Labour leaders have accepted eagerly, the Labour Left has accepted with a certain degree of unease and at times with acute misgivings'.[35] However, the Labour Left had never been able to mount an effective challenge to the leadership, although it had forced concessions and had at least reduced the leaders' freedom of action.[36] His claim was thus that the Party as a whole had subordinated socialism to parliamentarism.

The main argument, sustained through the detailed historical narrative, was that, in practice, the Party stood for social reform rather than socialism. Whenever there had been a possibility of more extensive change as a result of mass protest, Labour had sought to dampen down the extra-parliamentary action. The only exception to this was a situation in which such action was seen to be in the 'national interest' rather than for class purposes. Thus when, in 1920, it really seemed possible that the Lloyd George government could become involved in war against the Soviet Union, Labour and trade union leaders were prepared to take direct action to prevent Britain fighting an unnecessary war.

> The less the Labour leaders felt the issue to be of special importance to Labour and the more they were able to divest it of a socialist content, the bolder and more resolute they became.[37]

By contrast, in the General Strike of 1926, when the class element was dominant, they became paralysed:

> Most important of all ... was the belief, common to both industrial and parliamentary leaders, that a challenge to the Government through the assertion of working class strength outside Parliament was wrong. Try though they might to persuade themselves and others that they were engaged in a purely industrial dispute, almost a routine strike, they knew that it was more than that, and it was this which made them feel guilty, uneasy, insecure. In fact, they half shared, indeed more than half shared, the Government's view that the General Strike was a politically and morally reprehensible venture, undemocratic, and unparliamentary, subversive.... [I]t was the class character of the General Strike which made them behave as if they half believed they were guilty men, and which made them seek, with desperate anxiety, to purge themselves of their guilt.[38]

The secondary argument was that, despite the fact that the Labour Party had

never been socialist in practice, it had always contained some socialists. The 1918 Constitution and policy statement 'created a basis of agreement between socialists and social reformers in the Labour Party' and 'the existence of two fundamentally different views of the Labour Party's purpose was sufficiently blurred to suggest a common purpose, at least in programmatic terms'.[39] But in reality, he argued, it was the social reformers who had always been dominant.[40] His hope was that 'labourism' – the coalition between socialists and social reformers – would now finally disintegrate because of the pressures upon it. Because of its inadequacies there was, he argued, logic both in the demands of the revisionists, who wanted to retreat into a contemporary version of liberalism, and in the demands of socialists. A centrist wing would try to maintain labourism and, in an electoral system which discouraged fission, such appeals to unity appeared to be the epitome of wisdom and commonsense. But they overlooked the fact:

> ... that genuine compromise between revisionism on the one hand, and socialist purposes on the other is impossible; and that any verbal compromise which may be reached on the basis of ingenious formulas, not only perpetuates the paralysis of the last decade, but also ensures, in practice, the predominance of the policies favoured by a revisionist leadership.[41]

The way forward was to accept that the Labour Party was a 'class party', and to transcend the orthodoxies of labourism. To those who responded by saying that no elections would be won if it did so, he answered:

> Even if a socialist Labour Party had not, in the fifties, won more elections than did the Labour Party as it was, it would not have found defeat catastrophic: armed with genuine alternatives to Conservatism, it would have been able to take the longer view, and seen its electoral defeats, not as the occasion for retreat, but as a spur to greater efforts in its task of political conversion. And whether it would have won an election or not, it would certainly have provided a very different opposition to the Government in power, and made conversion more likely because of the opposition it would have provided.

True, it would also have been subject to much fiercer attacks from those whose position it threatened:

> But against this, it would elicit and enlist the kind of devotion and support which a consolidating Labour Party finds it increasingly difficult to engender.[42]

And *Parliamentary Socialism* concluded that the alternative to now becoming a genuinely socialist party:

> ... is the kind of slow but sure decline which – deservedly – affects parties that have ceased to serve any distinctive political purpose.[43]

Some of the contemporary reactions to the book, on both Left and Right, dealt with it almost exclusively in partisan terms.[44] Nor did Miliband really expect most academics to like it. But those whose reactions he cared about most were generally enthusiastic, although all expressed disagreements with some aspects of the argument. Eric Hobsbawm regarded it as 'lucid, sharply written and passionate' – 'an excellent book, which ought to be bought by every socialist'[45]; Michael Foot saw it as 'a miracle of compression' and 'the most important contribution made for many years to the study of the way the Labour Party works'[46]; Edward Thompson claimed that it 'demolishes a number of myths which have long outlived their usefulness … And on this ground alone it should be rushed like blood plasma to libraries and places of learning'[47]. The most bizarre reaction was that of Richard Crossman in the *New Statesman*:

> As an academic researching into contemporary politics, Dr Miliband has had the leisure to read widely and write slowly, and he has also been free to permit himself a degree of tendentious distortion and misquotation which no journalist or politician would dare to use.[48]

This was an extraordinary accusation and Saville immediately challenged him to provide examples of Miliband's misquotations.[49] He could not do so, declared that his use of the word 'misquotation' was unjustifiable and withdrew it with apologies, claiming that he should have said that Miliband was guilty of 'tendentious distortion and misuse of quotations', which he tried, rather unconvincingly, to point out.

There was a sub-text in this exchange. Part of this was no doubt personal, for Miliband and Crossman had disagreed strongly about the reasons for the loss of the 1959 General Election. Crossman had blamed the so-called 'affluent society' for undermining the appeal of socialism, while Miliband had regarded the main problem as the Gaitskellite emulation of Toryism. But, apart from personal antagonism, there was a more fundamental factor involved. Miliband saw *Parliamentary Socialism* as a work which urged a fundamental reform of the Labour Party before it was too late, but Crossman regarded it as a highly destructive criticism, which seemed to reflect Miliband's 'own hopelessness'.[50] While he was positive about the book, Michael Foot obviously shared Crossman's feeling on this point:

> Often Mr Miliband is vague about what he really means by extra-parliamentary action … He never examines fully the case for Parliament, and is so obsessed with the atmosphere it induces that he rarely acknowledges its potentiality as an instrument of genuine democracy. The truth is that parliamentary Socialism as practised by most of its leading Labour practitioners helps to kill both Parliament and Socialism and the injury to one also injures the other.[51]

Whereas many on the Left of the Labour Party were thus deeply critical of the Party in many respects, they could not see exactly what Miliband wanted or how they could use his work to bring about reform. Nor was this only an immediate impression: years later many in the Labour Party felt that, whatever Miliband's intentions, *Parliamentary Socialism* made it more difficult to attract support for Labour, particularly amongst the young.[52] And there were certainly radicals who subsequently argued that it was this book which led them to reject the Labour Party and to move to other forms of politics. Thus Paul Foot, later an activist in the International Socialists/SWP, wrote at the time of Miliband's death:

> I don't suppose any book made more impact on my life than *Parliamentary Social-ism* ... I read it in 1961 when I was cheerfully contemplating a life as a Labour MP. It put me off that plan for ever, by exposing the awful gap between the aspirations and achievements of parliamentary socialists.[53]

Others also found the book highly stimulating and yet somehow unsatisfying – leaving them a little unclear about precisely what he was saying. Thus Thompson felt that Miliband's 'focus is so disciplined that many themes and problems are left out of account' and that 'it is a pleasure to read a political theorist of his quality, and one would like him to argue his case more fully'.[54] Hobsbawm feared that it might under-estimate the strength of the Left and 'leave the reader with an impression of deep pessimism which history – and especially recent history – does not warrant'.[55] Similarly, one of his closest friends, Marcel Liebman, was effusive about the book's virtues but then criticised it for not saying anything about the alternatives.[56]

Parliamentary Socialism established Miliband's reputation as a major figure on the intellectual left, and, as Michael Foot had noted in his review, the fact that it would provoke arguments was one of its virtues. Yet the *politics* of the book were unclear. This was partly because it concentrated on the negative case against the Labour Party, rather than suggesting any alternatives. It was this that led to the paradox that Miliband himself had seen it as an eleventh hour exhortation for the reform of the party, whilst others viewed it as a call to action outside the party or as a pessimistic critique. But it was also because he made so few of his underlying assumptions explicit. What then were his politics in this period?

3. The Politics Behind *Parliamentary Socialism*

a) The International Context: The United States and The Soviet Bloc

The campaign for nuclear disarmament and positive neutralism were defining characteristics of the international stance of the New Left. There was general agreement that Britain should renounce nuclear weapons unilaterally, assert her independence from the United States, and actively work for peace through

the dissolution of the hostile military alliances. However, these ideas inevitably masked vast differences both in the attribution of responsibility for the current tensions, and in relation to the strategy for overcoming them. In general, the New Left was keen to provide a more specific 'line' than CND as a whole, which sought to unite a mass movement on the basis of opposition to nuclear weapons without exposing the divisions that would be created by defining an alternative policy. Miliband supported CND, but he was more preoccupied with attaining and applying a socialist analysis than with nuclear weapons *per se*. This, he believed, involved understanding the nature and role of both the USA and the Soviet Union.

He remained totally negative about the impact and purpose of US involvement in Western Europe. He did not simply regard American actions as ill-judged or provocative, but saw the whole rationale for NATO as the creation of an alliance against the Left under American leadership. During the New Deal era, he argued, the Roosevelt administrations had compared very favourably with those of Western Europe, but 'America today is everywhere on the wrong side'.

> Wherever there are to be found the leaders and spokesmen of the great international society of wealth and privilege, of parasitical appropriation, of corruption and decay, there too will also be found the best friends, or at least the most faithful clients of the United States.[57]

The US anti-Communist mission was, at root, concerned with free enterprise, rather than freedom, and was seeking to 'arrest and if possible to roll back the wave of collectivism which is irresistibly sweeping over the world'. Furthermore, war preparations had become the 'New Deal' of current American capitalism so that business would have much to lose from peace and the end of tension. This was an uncompromising view and he was dismissive of any other interpretation of US policy.

Such views were not changed by a six month sabbatical, again spent at the Roosevelt University, Chicago, in 1962. He (and Marion) were both deeply depressed by the obsession 'with the Reds, by the ignorance of the world, by the unquestioned assumption that the Russians are hellbent on imperialist expansion'.[58] His attitudes were, in fact, very similar to those he had expressed in his earlier visits and he told Saville:

> I have never been as worried as I am now about the prospects of peace; assuming that the US will, in the next few years, 'lose' more countries … at which point will they get more and more reckless, and accept the risk of war, even without wanting war itself. And at what point does escalation begin to operate? I have found since I have been here that I can think of little else.[59]

His opposition to US foreign policy was not only because it was anti-Soviet and

neo-imperialist in relation to developing countries: it was also because of its impact on Western Europe. The United States, he believed, had played a crucially important role in strengthening West European elites and pushing the political centre of gravity to the Right. Indeed, he argued that the USA had effectively replaced Fascism as a guarantor against the Left and he viewed NATO in this light:

> There is no sane Western politician who has lost a night's sleep over his country's exposure to a Russian military attack. But the same politicians have only been able to view with relative equanimity the internal challenges they have confronted, because of their certain knowledge that, come what might, they would not be abandoned by the United States.[60]

How did he view the Soviet bloc?

His rejection of individual episodes of repression and Stalinism as a whole did not lead to the kind of total renunciation of the Soviet system that was the case with some of the ex-CP members. On the contrary, he believed that, despite its weaknesses, the Soviet bloc still represented a genuine path to socialism. Thus even after the intervention in Hungary, he vested some hopes in Krushchev as a reformer and believed that the Soviet bloc could develop in ways which were far more positive than capitalism.

His trip to Poland with Mills in the Summer of 1957 was important in giving him first hand experience of the tensions within the system and he was certainly extremely sympathetic to the position of dissidents in general, and Kolakowski in particular, with whom he formed a genuine friendship. In March 1958 Kolakowski stayed with him in London for a few days and shortly afterwards Miliband wrote to him:

> Since your departure I have thought a great deal about your position and your current attitudes, above all because it touches me personally, and also because you symbolise a much more general dilemma: the intellectual and political situation of a socialist in a society with an [economic] base that is more or less socialist …
>
> Up to what point, must compromise or acceptance go, up to what point opposition, assuming however, and it is a fundamental assumption, that Poland possesses a base which is more or less socialist, and is 'in the right direction'. The dilemma doesn't exist for Djilas,[61] because he is convinced that Yugoslavia is progressively departing from any socialist conception. But it obviously exists for you …
>
> What are the concrete possibilities of <u>improving</u> the regime? What kind of reformism should a socialist intellectual practise in a society with a more or less socialist base? Where can he practise? And how? Fundamentally, it is better to be an engineer than a philosopher in a people's democracy. And if one is a philosopher?…[62]

These questions indicated his empathy for Kolakowski's plight, but contained no answers to the dilemmas and clearly implied that Miliband regarded Poland as

'more or less socialist', with the possibility of improvement within the existing system. C.Wright Mills may have influenced him further towards a more positive evaluation of the Soviet bloc.

In the late 1950s Mills was becoming increasingly alarmed about the nature of US foreign policy, which he denounced vehemently in *The Causes of World War Three* (1958) and *Listen Yankee: The Revolution in Cuba* (1960). His visit to Poland was followed by one to the Soviet Union in April 1960, and he returned with some enthusiasm for what he saw. Miliband then invited him to his flat to talk about his experiences to other members of the NLR Editorial Board. Before doing so Mills apparently urged him to exhort his associates on the Board to 'digest Russia' and the meeting was no doubt partly designed to achieve this.[63] This led Dorothy Thompson to ask whether Mills 'was rather over-enthusing about the Soviet Union for our benefit' and she cited the opinion of other experts who were much more cautious and suggested that, far from the transition to Communism being on the agenda, the transition to Socialism was still in its early stages.[64] Miliband responded:

> I too have been thinking a great deal about the evening with Mills and the talk then, [which] has crystallised ... some sharp unease I have had for sometime about much of the New Left and Russia, or rather NL vis-à-vis Russia. Look, whether we call it the transition to communism or the transition to socialism does not matter a bugger ... The real point is whether the kind of society they are creating looks like approximating to something we think is socialism and whether in the development of socialism in the world they are or are not a hopeful, indeed the most hopeful factor. On both counts my answer is yes, with all the qualifications, ambiguities, hesitations and ... what you will ... And I feel that so long as this is not resolved in our own minds, we are going to be weak, theoretically and practically.[65]

He subsequently told Mills that he thought that the question of Russia was the central weakness of the editorial board of NLR and that he felt 'that there will be great trouble when they get down to it'.[66]

A few weeks later Miliband was himself invited to the Soviet Union through Stephen Swingler of Victory For Socialism (VFS).[67] He could not go at the time because he was finishing *Parliamentary Socialism*, but he then received an invitation from the Central Committee of the CPSU for April 1961, which he accepted. Before leaving he consulted both Edward Thompson and C.Wright Mills as to what he should do while there. Thompson suggested that he should ask the Russians why they were such liars while Mills told him to concentrate on one thing and to keep a diary.[68] He accepted Mills's advice, but admitted several years later that he should have listened to Thompson![69]

In April 1961 the Soviet Union was in the midst of the Krushchev period of rule and there were certainly some signs of 'liberalisation'. The denunciation of Stalin in 1956 was subsequently followed by the symbolic removal of Stalin's body from

Lenin's tomb, and the changing of the name of Stalingrad to Volgograd. More significantly, there was some relaxation in relation to artistic freedom. Thus, for example, while there had been threats to expel Pasternak for the publication of *Dr Zhivago* in the West in 1958, in 1962 Solzhenitsyn's novel, *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* was published in the Soviet Union. Krushchev was also trying to reform other aspects of society, including education, and to reinvigorate the party and its control over the instruments of repression. However, perhaps the most tangible evidence of progress was in the economic field, with an increase in consumer goods and in technology, and while Miliband was in the Soviet Union, Yuri Gagarin became the first person ever to fly in space, when he orbited the earth in the Vostok spaceship. At this stage there were therefore certainly indications that the society was changing. On the other hand, anti-religious propaganda was intensified, Pasternak's closest friend had been sentenced to jail in a secret court for currency offences in December 1960, and the death penalty was introduced for such crimes as large scale speculation, forgery or embezzlement. The evidence was contradictory: there was no doubt that there had been a considerable relaxation in the eight years since Stalin's death in 1953, but the extent and significance of the change was much less clear.

No doubt Miliband thought he was adopting a balanced attitude, but he seems to have let his normal guard of scepticism drop a little. He might have been expected to view an invitation from the CPSU with some suspicion. VFS favoured unilateral nuclear disarmament and took an anti-US line in East-West relations. As a member of this organisation, and a socialist intellectual within the New Left, it seems fairly obvious – and surely not only in retrospect – that the Soviet leadership would seek to ensure that Miliband was impressed by what he saw. Such thoughts did not seem to occur to him. Instead he wrote to Nan and her husband Harry on 8 April, saying that he had been met at the steps of the plane when it arrived in Moscow 'and taken to a most luxurious hotel...where I occupy a magnificent suite, no less'. He was then chauffeured around the sites, and the next day given a new interpreter, who was 'an extremely pleasant quite sophisticated young man'. He was 'unbelievably lucky to be here in such circumstances and my hosts couldn't be kinder or more helpful'. Five days later he wrote to say that he had been invited to attend a parade on Red Square in honour of Yuri Gagarin, the astronaut and that he was being 'treated royally, absurdly so'. Accompanied everywhere by his interpreter, whom he now described as 'a most fluent and pleasant young man from the Russian Foreign Office', he outlined his whirlwind tour, saying that the past week 'is just about the most exciting I have ever spent, and the conditions in which I am making this trip belong to fairy tale stuff'.[70] In fact, his interpreter was a KGB agent, Mikhail Lyubimov, a 'charmer' and particularly skilful propagandist for the Soviet Union![71]

His twenty-three-day trip, including trips as far afield as Tashkhent and Sochi (on the Black Sea), consisted of numerous visits to factories, hospitals, educa-

tional organisations, and cultural events, where he talked to selected people through his interpreter and then recorded his thoughts in a diary. These certainly showed some scepticism about elements of what he saw and, at one point, he described himself as being 'permanently and terribly torn, with alternative bouts of what Lyubimov [his interpreter] would call pro- and anti-Soviet sentiments'.[72] Above all, he was troubled by the intrusiveness into people's private lives and by the pervasive propaganda. However, he almost always gave the benefit of the doubt to the Soviet system. Thus even after describing as 'repellent' the way in which young children were made to declaim propaganda, he added that a worse 'kind of muck [was] purveyed in France, and England and all over the bourgeois world.'[73]

Overall, enthusiasm was his dominant emotion and, at the end of the trip, he concluded that it was a society with 'enormous ideological dynamic' in which there was 'socialist humanism in [a] very real sense'.[74] Moreover, on his return he wrote all this up in a forty-two-page document which shows that his spectacles remained rose-coloured.[75]

While he continued to express doubts, particularly about the propaganda and the undermining of a private sphere, his general verdict was highly favourable. Noting, for example, the emphasis placed on education, further education and the upgrading of skills, he saw this as one instance:

> … of the way in which official policy and humane ideal appear to coincide. The interests of the ruler or the rulers or the representatives, or call them what you will, and the people, in this sense, do run in harness and it would appear to me that this is true in a large number of areas, indeed, I think … one would find it difficult to think of an area where the long-term interests of the people and the interests of the rulers could be said to diverge at all widely. Obviously enough, in relation to the provision of consumer goods, in relation to all those amenities which do make life easier, the divergence is real and was even more real in the past. Stalinism … implies in many ways the denial of the short-term interests of people and the short-term demands of people. Yet I think it difficult to deny that the long-term interests of people do involve the establishment of that industrial base upon which so much of the rest depends. It may well be argued that there ought to have been easier ways to achieve this industrial base, but this is a different question altogether which does not seem to me to affect the root principle.

He accepted that it would be very difficult to engage in any 'political' activity outside the Party. This raised the question of the character of the Party itself, including the nature and extent of its internal democracy. The extinction of private property and profit had, he believed, eliminated many conflicts and contradictions, but some inevitably remained. He also saw the possibility that those in authority might treat the dissenter as a trouble-maker rather than as a constructive critic and that there were no discernible external, formal, built-in

correctors to arbitrariness. But the:

> ... longer there is this emphasis on education, on self-development, the more likely is it that people will take these seriously and come to exercise that self-development in terms of criticism ... through existing channels in the multitude of organisations that exist, in possible new organisations which ... would ultimately express dissent or criticism or doubt or propose new measures through the one main channel, which is, again, the Party ...

This then led him to consider the extent to which those at the top were responsive to the rank and file in the party:

> In this context, I have thought always that the notion of a new class ... was absurd and I am confirmed in that view after this visit because I find it difficult to conceive in what important areas of life this so-called new class, the managerial, bureaucratic, Party, political, elite, call what you will, would find the long-term interests of the people essentially antagonistic to their own purposes, so that the notion of granting demands in some more or less long run is in no sense utopian or unrealistic. Where the shoe pinches is that these demands may not only not be granted now, but that the compulsion to do something about them is not very great. In this sense, people who talk of benevolent paternalism do have a point and as always in this case the real question which arises is whether this benevolent paternalism can be transformed into something different or whether it is built-in in such a way as to remain a permanent feature of the system. I myself don't think that it is a built-in permanent feature of the system, nor do I think that the way to overcome that benevolent paternalism is the creation of artificial alternative institutions like an alternative party. In the context of this society this demand seems to me absurd – changes will occur within the present institutional pattern, the responsiveness will grow as a result of the greater amplitude of life, as a result of more resources being available for purposes that people deem necessary or desirable.

Even during this trip, he certainly never succumbed to uncritical pro-Sovietism, for he constantly expressed doubts about what he saw and sometimes made negative comparisons with the positive aspects of capitalist democracies. Thus when his interpreter informed him that the Americans had just mounted the Bay of Pigs invasion in an attempt to overthrow the Cuban revolution, he countered by saying that the comforting fact was that there would be thousands protesting in Trafalgar Square and elsewhere. Nevertheless, the diary shows that he was generally predisposed to accept the message that his hosts wanted to deliver to him.[76]

Later Miliband's attitude to the Soviet Union would change considerably, but at this stage he was apparently convinced that the Soviet bloc states were gradually advancing on a socialist basis, and he was probably still not sure whether his allegiances were more to the party elites or to their critics. If we now return to the question of West-East relations it is evident that, while Miliband may have

endorsed the general notion of 'positive neutralism', his personal position was more sympathetic to Soviet than American policy. Despite the shock of Hungary, his empathy for people like Kolakowski, and his criticisms of particular features of Soviet policy, he believed that, under Krushchev, there was a basis for optimism. He also thought that the Communist bloc would grow stronger and that the 'frightful investment of the Stalinist age will pay growing dividends'.[77] The most important task was therefore to seek to change the direction of US policy and, in the British context, the key aim was to induce the Labour Party to break with Atlanticism.

B) THE NATURE OF CONTEMPORARY CAPITALISM

During the second half of the 1950s, the 'revisionist Right' within the Labour Party had taken the lead in the debate over the nature of capitalism as part of the rationale for redefining the role and ideology of the Left. John Strachey's *Contemporary Capitalism* (1956) had attempted to provide a synthesis between Marxism and Keynes, arguing in effect that although Marx had provided a valid explanation of the long-term tendencies within capitalism, these had been counteracted by pressures emanating from political democracy. The result of this had been to pressurise the state into intervening within the economy with counter-cyclical Keynesian measures, providing for full employment and welfare. However, this book never became the 'bible' of the revisionist Right. There were, perhaps, two reasons for this. First, while Strachey had certainly modified Marxism, he still took it very seriously at a time when the Labour Party leadership no longer believed that Marx had any relevance. Secondly, although *Contemporary Capitalism* described a system which differed very considerably from the laissez-faire model or from the inter-war reality of mass unemployment, it did not suggest that there had been an *irreversible* transformation. Anthony Crosland's *The Future of Socialism* (1956) was far more acceptable for the revisionist Right because it contained neither of these 'weaknesses'. Marx, along with most other pre-Second World War socialist theorists, was confined to the 'dustbin of history', as Crosland sought to demonstrate that he had no relevance for the current situation. And this was precisely because, in his view, the new balance was permanent. State intervention in the economy, the managerial revolution, and the new outlook of private and public elites meant that there had been a fundamental transformation of the system. It was, indeed, no longer 'capitalism', but a 'mixed economy' and socialism therefore also needed to be redefined. The old notions could safely be jettisoned and replaced by a commitment to efficiency and the pursuit of greater equality.

When faced with such arguments, the immediate reaction of the Communist Party and the Labour Left had been to deny that capitalism had changed in any fundamental way. One of the achievements of the 'New Left' was to break out of

this impasse by accepting that capitalism had indeed changed very extensively in numerous ways, but that none of these warranted the conclusions drawn by Crosland and the revisionists. Writers such as Stuart Hall and Raymond Williams extended the analysis far beyond political and economic questions, embracing areas such as culture, media and ideology. Miliband retained a more traditional emphasis on political analysis, but sought to counter the revisionist argument without simply resorting to 'denial' and he used a fresh vocabulary to present his case.

One of his first forays on the subject was a review of a symposium on 'Who Governs Britain?' which was published in *ULR* at the beginning of 1958. This was a succinct and beautifully written piece, which argued that the first essential was to locate the sources of power. Dividing these into 'economic', 'social' and 'political' he suggested that there was still a substantial concentration of economic power. This was a considerable, though not exclusive, source of social power which, combined with a continuing aristocratic tradition, gave effective control to a 'pluto-aristocracy'. Labour's period in power had certainly 'reduced the yawning abyss that separates the great US from the few THEM' by forcing important concessions to democracy: 'only our new Socialist thinkers mistake that measure of success for the genuine article'.[78] This was written with verve and humour and foreshadowed some of the arguments of *The State in Capitalist Society*. But it was only a brief review largely based on empirical material compiled by others.[79] Some of his underlying assumptions were explored more fully in private correspondence with C. Wright Mills to whom he had sent a draft.

Mills had liked the piece but thought that Miliband had been wrong to dismiss the importance of the 'Establishment' and told him: 'I am quite convinced that the factor of status (and in England the use of the term Establishment) is a major key to the understanding of "the decline of socialism" over the last 20 years'.[80] Miliband drafted two long replies in which he distinguished between 'the Establishment' and the 'real core of power'. The 'Establishment', he suggested in his first letter:

> means to my mind things like the old boy network, Eton and Harrow, Oxford and Cambridge, the great Clubs, *The Times*, the Church, the Army, the respectable Sunday papers, and so on. It also means the values ... of the ruling orders: keep the workers in their place, strengthen the House of Lords, maintain social hierarchies, God save the Queen, equality is bunk, democracy is dangerous, etc. Also respectability, good taste, don't rock the boat, there will always be an England, foreigners, Jews, natives etc. are all right in their place and their place is outside ...[81]

The real core of power, however, was 'capitalist power, economic power over the means of life'. The danger in concentrating attacks on the 'Establishment', which basically represented the aristocratic survival in English society, was that this was really a 'fig leaf' for the real core of power.

Now to attack the Establishment has its point, obviously enough and I am all for it. What worries me however is that concentrating upon it plays right into the hands of those Socialist re-thinkers who have invented the formula that socialism is about equality, status, prestige, 'parity of esteem'. Now even if that were true, and I don't believe it is, the way to achieve all these things, or prevent social inequality is not, as I think you would agree, by concentrating on those things which appear to be the source of inequality, but which are in fact merely the consequences of something more basic. e.g. Concentrate on education, social services, widening of opportunities and so on, and what do you get. You get a more superficially equal society, but you don't dislodge the Power elite, nor do you destroy its sources of power, which remain to my mind basically economic.[82]

Dissatisfied with this reply, he tried again, redefining the 'Establishment', omitting all reference to foreigners and Jews, and going still further in arguing against the diversionary consequences of a misdirected attack:

The attack on the Establishment has meant a reduction in the power of the House of Lords, the taxation, more and more steeply, of certain forms of wealth connected with the aristocracy, the search for a more equalitarian system of education, the widening of entry into the Civil Service, the reduction in the power of the monarchy, (the classic symbol of the Establishment) and so on. All of which leaves us pretty well where we were, about the fundamentals of power ... In fact ... the Establishment only supplies part of the cultural legitimation; it fulfils an important function, but not a vital one, not one that could not be replaced by different forms of legitimation, as it already is; e.g. the validity of free enterprise, the dangers of socialism to freedom and democracy, the virtues of parliamentary government and so on and so forth ... [T]here would be plenty of reserves to fall back on, even if the Establishment were, more or less, liquidated.[83]

For some reason he did not like this reply either and did not send it. But this attempt to explore the relationship between economic power and the 'Establishment' as a legitimising factor was important. He was effectively retaining an implicitly Marxist framework as a primary explanation for the location of power, but buttressing this with some valuable insights into the role of 'dazzle' and ideology as secondary factors. And he maintained his position in the published version of the article – unfortunately without the substantiating argument. He thus suggested that much of the 'fire and thunder' against the 'Establishment' seemed synthetic:

To misquote Tom Paine, it is too often a case of remembering the plumage and forgetting the living bird. Eton and Harrow, the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Royal Courtiers, the Royal Academy Banquet ... are the plumage of the Establishment. Pluck some of its feathers, democratise the monarchy, have the Third Programme on twelve hours a day, abolish ITV and boil Sir Harold Nicolson in oil. The difference will be negligible. It will not dislodge the power elite.[84]

'Who governs Britain?' brought Miliband into the debate, but did not really con-
front the challenge that had been set by the revisionist Right of the Labour Party.
However, Miliband's two articles in the *New Reasoner* in 1958 attempted both to
refute the notion that capitalism no longer existed, and to explain and evaulate
the changes that had occurred.

His initial letter to John Saville explained the main theme of 'The Politics of
Contemporary Capitalism':

> In a nutshell the question I have been looking at is 'Whatever Happened to Fas-
> cism?' Or, in other words, why has liberal democracy since the War seemed so
> much more compatible with the purposes of ruling classes than was thought likely
> in the 30s? Some of the answers are obvious, some less so.[85]

The first element in his answer concerned the role of the Left in Western Europe
since 1945 which, he argued, had presented no really serious threat to the estab-
lished order. He argued that Communists, even in France and Italy, had been
relatively impotent politically. The most fundamental reason for this was that :

> there has existed in every West European society a majority of people who would
> simply not support a Communist-led social revolution, whatever the Communists
> might say or do.[86]

The second element in his answer was to stress the crucial importance of the
United States in consolidating the system (as already noted). Yet the United
States could not have played this role without support within Western Europe,
and this led him to the third factor: the role of social democracy.

Miliband was not dismissive of the social reforms introduced by such parties
but he argued that social democracy was 'primarily engaged in political broker-
age between labour and the established order'.[87] It was, he suggested, mistaken
to hold the leaders solely responsible for the integration of the parties into the
capitalist system, for the process was too general and deep to be explained in
these terms:

> In a complex but potent dialectic, the social democratic Establishment is both
> the source *and the reflection* of its clientele's attunement to capitalist regimes. It
> expresses *both* the dissatisfaction with and the acceptance of those regimes by its
> rank and file.(original emphasis)[88]

Social amelioration had enabled the social-democratic Establishment to remain
afloat. But, he argued, its orthodoxy in domestic policy was outweighed by its
acceptance of conservative-inspired foreign policies and, above all, NATO and
the conversion of Western Europe into an advance bastion of American military
power, and the development of nuclear weapons. And this led to the final ele-

ment in his answer: that the system which had been established was becoming an 'illiberal democracy' based on an unstable political equilibrium.

Consent, he argued, was the result of engineering, of sloganised reiteration, of proof-by-repetition. Governments were now skilled in the process of 'thought manipulation' and elites had a vested interest in confusion, triviality, plausible misinformation and secrecy. In this climate debate did not really endanger the reality of power. Furthermore, military secrecy, a 'consensus' about the external enemy, and the use of science harnessed to defence policy, created a vast gap between the masses and the governments in terms of information. Because people were encouraged to concentrate on the private world, and partly wanted to do so because the public sphere appeared so complex, freedom was eroded as 'a continuous exercise in the habituation of society to governmental techniques which shock to-day and become part of the landscape tomorrow'.[89]

Miliband was thus suggesting that the structural conflicts within capitalism remained as clear-cut as ever and that the apparent reconciliation of the propertied elites to liberal-democracy was conditional on the contingent circumstances of the post-war era. The implication was that the case of the revisionist-right within the Labour Party was therefore false both in suggesting that a fundamental transformation had taken place, and in implying that the new settlement was a stable one. However, he had not really attempted to explain why, in the post-war period, it had been possible to establish a form of capitalism which delivered the social benefits he acknowledged to exist. Nor had he analysed the instabilities in the current situation which he had emphasised. He was certainly deeply worried about the circumstances in which De Gaulle had returned to power, taking this as a sign of the superficiality of elite support for liberal-democracy, and it was also plausible to argue that the Cold War was containing tensions which would otherwise erupt within Western Europe. But mentioning such points, in a rather polemical way, could not be regarded as cogent analysis. He strengthened some features of his argument, with particular reference to Britain, in his second article: 'The Transition to the Transition'.[90]

The Attlee government, he argued, had made changes in many important directions. The mistake was to see them as part of a general attack on capitalism, or as socialist innovations, for:

> Labour's programme and its practice in the post-war years really represented the continuation, even though in a much more deliberate and accentuated form (and the qualification is important) of social, economic and administrative changes and tendencies which did not originate with the Labour Party and which are in no way designed to further the achievement of a socialist society.[91]

Twentieth century British politics was dominated by an inescapable need to regulate capitalism by means of 'marginal collectivism'. Certainly, there were differences between the two main parties in relation both to the extent and the

desirable bias of marginal collectivism, as they were anchored to different and divergent class needs.

> But the difference has not been that between the maintenance of 'free enterprise' and the transcendence of capitalism. That has been the image which both parties have sought to give of themselves and of each other for purposes of political warfare. In practice, both have pursued policies primarily designed to adjust capitalist enterprise to the logic of its own development.[92]

This was not a specifically British phenomenon, but a characteristic of all advanced industrial societies and therefore the notion of 'free' enterprise grew more futile every year:

> Marginal collectivism, State intervention, help and control, is now the price which capitalism has learnt it must pay as a condition of its survival as a more or less going economic concern. No advanced industrial system is now capable of operating at even the bare minimum of efficiency without it.[93]

And he claimed that this was one of the basic facts of contemporary capitalism and represented an irreversible trend. The distinguishing feature of the Labour Party in the British context was that it had been the most pressing and articulate agent of State intervention throughout its history. It had remained faithful to its belief in marginal collectivism as a means of adapting capitalism, but had always run away in practice from any attempt to extend collectivism to the point where it would cease to be compatible with the economic system. It was therefore a profoundly mistaken view, though deeply embedded in Labour thinking, to see intervention or collectivism, in whatever form, as representing an erosion of capitalism and an advance to socialism.

Marginal collectivism in advanced capitalist societies had been a response to three overriding and related needs: the economic need, the welfare need and the military need. Of the three, it was, he noted, usually the second which was stressed because it was the most obvious and striking and also because the notion of the 'Welfare State' greatly enhanced the view of the State as neutrally responding with indiscriminate impartiality to all pressures, from whatever quarter. The 'Welfare State' was therefore often set in opposition to the 'Capitalist State' and was deemed to have superseded it, together with the capitalist society it upheld. In fact, the State had responded to the pressure for welfare precisely because that response was economically, socially and politically possible within the framework of capitalism, and indeed desirable for the maintenance of that system. Acute physical 'illfare' was merely a feature of capitalism in one of its phases of development. Welfare collectivism was immensely important in helping to reduce working-class alienation from capitalism and its institutions and also reduced the guilt-feelings of the segment of the middle class which traditionally

'sided with the workers'. Similarly, marginal collectivism had brought the state into negotiations between employers and trade unions, occasionally siding with the latter, and this led to the institutionalisation and bureaucratisation of the trade union movement. Furthermore, the state was brought into close relations with industry and Labour's beliefs that this was a step towards socialism were encouraged by capitalist protestations against such intervention.

> 'So long as they squeal, we must be hurting them' is Labour's profound conviction. But people often squeal when receiving an injection, even though the injection improves their health ... Of course, the 'national interest', as interpreted by the Government of the day, may conflict with the immediate interest of this or that sector of the economy, and some forms of control may be resented by all of private enterprise. But what matters here is the overall impact; and it seems clear that State control and regulation, in its overall impact, does not undermine capitalist profit-ability.[94]

State intervention and capitalist power were not antithetical and the controllers of the state and of business were ever more closely intertwined.

Nor did nationalisation mean that the system was moving towards socialism. Although the Tories, had they been returned to power in 1945, would certainly not have embarked on a nationalisation programme, they would have found it essential to maintain and possibly extend wartime controls, involving a high degree of public accountabilty and state intervention in utilities.

> But nationalisation, *so long as it remains confined to a marginal part of the economy*, does not involve much more than the radical extension of the principle of control. This is why the Tories, though they continue to dislike the nationalisation of basic utilities on principle, have learnt to accept it in practice; they have found that it need not seriously weaken the operation of capitalist enterprise and might even be made to strengthen it.(original emphasis)[95]

Labour might find this hard to believe:

> But the "public sector", so long as it remains a marginal part of the economy, cannot be made to obey criteria of behaviour fundamentally different from those which prevail in the 'private sector', and its management must remain, if not exclusively, at any rate to an important degree, geared to considerations and habits similar to those that govern comparable giants in the "private sector".[96]

Nationalisation had succeeded very well in the limited objective of improving the efficiency of a part of the economy which capitalist enterprise had found it increasingly difficult to handle properly. But it had always been short-sighted to think that this would constitute a socialist part of a capitalist economy.

Having demonstrated the social and economic needs to which marginal col-

lectivism was a response, he argued that the militarisation of the economy since 1939 had enhanced the drive towards state intervention in, and control of, economic affairs. State, army and business now formed an interlocking directorate, whose close integration was essential to 'defence'. More generally:

> ... the logic of capitalist development is driving us with irresistible force towards forms of economic organisation which bear no resemblance to the image of capitalism contained in the formula "free enterprise".[97]

Taken together with 'The Politics of Contemporary Capitalism' this provided a much more solid rebuttal of the revisionist Right argument within the Labour Party. True, Miliband did not attempt to explain the economics of the post-war system in any depth – this was not his forté. But it complemented the primarily historical interpretation in the first article with a more functional explanation of the needs that 'marginal collectivism' were serving. These two articles, with the short piece, 'Who Governs Britain?' and his letters to Mills about it, contained the germs of the argument of *The State in Capitalist Society*, although he was not to begin this until 1962. Thus he had effectively worked out many of his ideas on legitimacy, social democracy, and even the role of the state by the late 1950s.[98] But the most important contemporary point was that he had accepted Crosland's view about the irreversibility of the changes that had taken place in the post-war era, but refuted his conclusion that this made it a 'mixed economy' or constituted a step towards socialism.

c) Organisation, Agency and Change: The Politics of the Long Haul

The New Left was inevitably faced with the unavoidable problem of how change was to be brought about. In particular, was the Labour Party an appropriate agency or was it necessary or possible to create a new party? Or were loose networks of committed groups more effective? Looking back on these questions much later, when discussing John Saville's decision to leave the Communist Party, Miliband wrote:

> [It] ... left ... the question which giving up the Communist Party posed, or ought to have posed, namely in what other existing or to-be-created organisation it would be possible for Marxists to further the socialist cause. It was a question which confronted two different generations in 1956: the generation to which Saville belonged, and which had come to political life in the thirties and in the Second World War; and also a new generation which came to political life in 1956, with Suez and Hungary. As I see it, at a distance of twenty years and more, neither generation was able to return a satisfactory answer to that question; and it still remains unanswered.[99]

He also commented:

As I see it now, and as I only dimly perceived it then, the *New Reasoner* "rebellion" should have been followed by a sustained and systematic attempt to regroup whoever was willing into a socialist association, league or party, of which the journal might have been the voice. But this is no more than hindsight; and there was no steam behind any such idea.[100]

In fact, he was being too modest. For, as Lin Chun argues, while a 'major failing of the New Left was its lack of any organisational strength', Miliband was almost alone in posing the question of organisation in a direct way.[101] This was scarcely surprising since he was the only politics specialist amongst the major figures of the New Left and always thought about power and agency as obvious issues. He was unable to make his wishes prevail, but he did have the rudiments of an organisational strategy, which was one of the reasons for his opposition to the merger of the two journals.

The first key point was that during these years he remained committed to the Labour Left – even if he was often deeply sceptical of it. Indeed, in 1958 he played an active role in a new grouping called 'Victory for Socialism' (VFS). VFS had originally been established in 1944 in an attempt to push the Labour Party to the Left, but it had subsequently declined, and become almost moribund outside the London area. However, the appearance of the New Left *outside* the Labour Party had an impact on the Left within it, and early in 1958 it had been revitalised with a provisional Council of thirty-five members, including Miliband.[102] A further reason for this step was that there had been increasing pressure on the 'Bevanites' and, with the separation of Bevan himself from his erstwhile supporters following his anti-unilateralist speech at the 1957 conference, they now needed a new organisational focus. Harold Wilson had warned Stephen Swingler that the Labour Party General Secretary, Morgan Phillips, had all the details about the factional activities of the so-called Bevanite second eleven, and was preparing to take action. It was therefore also a tactical decision to 'go public' by reviving VFS, and the existing officers of the organisation, including the founder-member, Sir Fred Messer, MP, were happy to agree to this.[103] But, from the perspective of the Labour Party leader, Hugh Gaitskell, and his allies, the activating forces in VFS were the 'usual suspects', including Ian Mikardo, Jo Richardson, Konni Zilliacus, Swingler himself, and Michael Foot. Moreover, the new provisional Council now sent a letter to all Constituency Labour Parties and gave a public statement to the press on 12 February 1958 announcing its membership and plans. VFS's declared aims were stated as follows:

1) to fight apathy in the Labour Movement and the country;
2) to stimulate fresh socialist thinking and discussion, especially on the principle of common ownership stated in the Labour Party's Constitution;
3) to express the view, held in common by its members, that a socialist foreign policy for Britain must be based on the renunciation of nuclear weapons.[104]

Constituency Labour Parties were invited to apply for VFS speakers, buy and discuss its pamphlets, and encourage their members to join the association.

This caused a furore in the Gaitskellite leadership, which inadvertently helped publicise VFS, and soon over sixteen groups were established throughout the country, with a membership of over 1000.[105] A network of study groups was established, which produced pamphlets on both domestic and international policies. The Council established two sub-committees – on Home Policy and on International and Colonial Policy. Mikardo chaired the Home Policy Committee and Miliband was secretary.

He was enthusiastic about this new initiative, seeing it as an organisation which might play a significant role in converting the Labour Party to socialism. He held a watching brief for the two working parties established by the Home Policy Committee – on the Planning and Control of Industry and on Education – and was to be a member of a third working party on the Arts, which aimed to include Doris Lessing, Kenneth Tynan, Karol Reisz and Lindsay Anderson.[106] And in June he joined a further committee to consider the 'Next Steps in Social Ownership'.[107] He was also a regular attender at Council meetings, where he sometimes made suggestions which were regarded as too provocative by those who did not want to antagonise the leadership unnecessarily. At one point the minutes thus record:

> Ralph Miliband suggested that the organisation might make more of an impact if it were to issue statements on matters of public interest ... wherever possible. After some discussion it was felt that discretion must be exercised in this matter, and that, unless the circumstances were exceptional, VFS should consider each case on its merits and in relation to any statements which the Party has issued.[108]

This kind of caution would eventually alienate him from Left Labour groupings, but at this point he was committed to VFS. The development of opposition to the Gaitskellite leadership, the shift to the left amongst some of the trade unions, and the growth of the New Left outside the party were, he believed, all important signs of a change in mood and at times he became quite optimistic that the party could be changed. Thus when the unilateralist motion was passed at the Labour Party annual conference in 1960, he told Saville:

> The Labour Party Conference is the best thing that has happened to the Labour movement since February 1900, irrespective of what <u>immediately</u> follows from it.[109]

More often, he doubted whether such victories would constitute a capture of the party by the Left, particularly after Gaitskell's victory at the 1961 conference. Nevertheless, he saw no alternative, but to 'hang on', for right-wing ascendancy in the party was nothing new.[110] And he remained on the Executive Council of

VFS until the organisation disintegrated in the early sixties.

Miliband had no doubt that a political party was the essential agency through which a socialist transformation could be constructed, and the key questions for him were how to shift the Labour Party to the left, and what kinds of alliances should be built to further this endeavour. In this context the exit of Saville, Thompson and others from the Communist Party, and the establishment of the *New Reasoner* were particularly welcome. For this appeared to open the possibility of forging unity between VFS and Marxists, who were now freed from Soviet control and might be expected to share his strategic outlook. He therefore suggested a link between VFS and the *New Reasoner* to Thompson and Saville soon after he met them.

Thompson was against tying *NR* up with any strictly political grouping, but was willing to carry articles suggested by VFS, especially if it helped *NR* sales in the Labour Party.[111] He also told Miliband that he was thinking of bringing together some kind of society or organisation as a backdrop for *ULR/NR* publications and would be sorry if this was taken as a rival to VFS:

> … on the other hand, for an intellectual grouping of this sort, which has long-term aims, and which would hope to draw in as well as social scientists, poets and artists and such like who tend to be dubious about actual party membership, I think it would be a mistake to insist upon Labour Party card-holding as a condition of taking part: yet, if this condition was waived, such a society or loose association of readers would fall outside the V for S limits.[112]

At about the same time Miliband, who had probably been responsible for proposing Doris Lessing of the *NR* group as a member of a VFS working party, now found his freedom to build such links constrained by a ruling of the Executive Council of VFS which stated:

> It was agreed that the Home Policy Committee was empowered to set up study groups and invite participants … but that when invitees are not members of the Labour Party and VFS the authority of the Chairman of VFS must be established.[113]

Miliband was thus facing some opposition from within both the NR group and VFS in his attempt to bring the two groups together. However, he appeared to be making progress in more limited fields. The General Purposes Committee of VFS had thus agreed on 30 June that they might consider a joint publication on the 'Next Steps on Coal' when a draft pamphlet prepared by the NR group became available.[114] But Miliband still wanted to take this further, suggesting an article by Stephen Swingler in *NR*, about which Thompson was lukewarm.[115] Miliband's reply gave a very clear indication of his thinking at the time:

The idea was not simply that some practising Left Labour MP should write for side line intellectuals: that was really secondary since that argument has now been flogged to nausea and does not really bring anything new ... What I really wanted was for somebody to address people who are already committed up to the hilt and doing a great deal in all sorts of ways ... but who do not wish to join, be connected with, work in a political <u>party</u>, particularly the Labour Party and VFS. That is an argument which needs unfolding in all sorts of ways. Ultimately, I am convinced, fruitful efforts will have to be channelled into either the CP or the LP ... Personally, I don't mind telling you that if VFS did not exist, I should find it difficult, maybe impossible, to be in the Labour Party at all; and I do realise full well the present limitations of VFS, in all sorts of ways.[116]

Saville had been receptive to the idea of cooperation between VFS and *NR* but did not think '*NR* should ever become the official organ of the VFS',[117] but Thompson was still more negative, refusing to establish a relationship between the NR group and any faction:

... above all I do hope we can keep the thing in proportion and see the left – and especially the internationalist conscience of the left – not as being this or that section, but as being all its sections despite differences of method. After all, may it not be one of the last and longest lived of the orthodox marxist (or scientific socialist) myths, that there is always one and only one 'correct' policy which all people, despite their means and circumstances, should adopt together? Might it not be more true that in any given period ... one sees the cause of progress finding 100 different expressions in different ways? And that today we need determined faction fighters in the local labour parties and the trade unions: and determined guerrilla fighters outside, in the Campaign: and above all, a sense of common understanding and respect for each others' task and approach uniting the two?[118]

This was part of a much wider disagreement about the lessons of 1956. Thompson, who now spent years trying to come to terms with his experience in the CP, was turning against the whole notion of a party as the main agency for socialism; Miliband, who had never been a CP member, continued to regard a party as the central vehicle for change. However, he had reached an impasse and although the possibility of joint research and publications lived on for a further nine months, the close relationship that he sought between NR and VFS never materialised.[119] At the end of 1958 he ceased being Secretary of the Home Policy Committee of VFS, while remaining a member of the committee and the Council, and his decision to join the editorial board of NR perhaps indicated a shift in priorities. However, he was soon in conflict with Thompson about relations with *ULR*.

The idea of a merger between the two journals had already been mooted in 1958 although it was only finally agreed at the end of the following year. Miliband was opposed to this from the start as he believed that the two were entirely differ-

ent, with *NR*'s emphasis on the labour movement and politics and *ULR* stressing cultural approaches. In his retrospective account, he put it as follows:

> The idea soon came up that the two journals should merge. On the surface, this seemed a very reasonable and natural development. In fact, it was not. However amicable and close the relations between the two boards might be, its members did belong to two different political and cultural traditions; and while there was some overlapping between them, there was also a core of difference constituted by the fact that the *New Reasoner* board was mostly made up of Marxists who had in one way or another been deeply involved in the labour movement, personally and directly, and who also had a strong sense of political agencies as, coming out of the Communist Party, they could not help but have. *Universities and Left Review*, on the other hand, was a venture that had originated among students at Oxford. Their own responses to the promptings of the times were fresh, innovative and unencumbered by the weight and wounds of a battered tradition. But while the *New Reasoner* people were intellectuals *of* the labour movement, the *ULR* people were intellectuals *for* the labour movement, naturally so, given their youth and background; and they were also part of a more or less anti-organisation current, which was then flowing very strongly.[120]

However, when he expressed such views at the time, Thompson immediately cautioned him about sharpening the differences or lobbying too vigorously for a 'hard' political line which might prejudice negotiations with the *ULR* group.[121] This had little impact on him and on 18 February 1959 he told both Thompson and Saville:

> The more I have thought about this, the more convinced I have become that the time will soon be at hand for a journal with a clear political line on a number of issues of importance to the Labour movement here. I am also sure that we shall come to look back on the last two and a half years as a useful, inevitable necessary preparation for something a good deal more oriented ...
> Don't please let me give you the impression that I am all awhirl with the coming struggle for power. I am not. But it does not seem at all impossible that the sixties, to which I am immensely looking forward, will be much unlike, economically, politically, internationally ... the weary fifties.[122]

This was really a continuation of the argument over cooperation with VFS. Miliband, though liking some of the *ULR* group personally, believed in a clear socialist 'line', while Thompson, at least in theory, believed in letting a hundred flowers bloom.

These differences were closely connected with underlying divergences on theoretical matters. Miliband was convinced that there was a fundamental difference between capitalism and socialism, despite the changes that had taken place in capitalism since the war. In his view, the only way to effect a transformation was through the Labour Party, but this in turn depended upon converting its

members to socialism. Thompson was beginning to question the traditional Marxist analysis about the distinction between the two systems, placed great emphasis upon popular protest and spontaneity to bring about change, was increasingly wary of organisations, and had no attachment to the Labour Party. These differences were manifested in their correspondence from the time they met. Thus Miliband refused to speculate about how an ultimate transition to socialism would take place, regarding this as an abstract question in a situation when any such transition was wholly remote. He thought it far more important to concentrate on the more immediate issues of socialist education, organisation and the radicalisation of the Labour Party. When Thompson showed him a draft of a chapter on revolution that would ultimately be published in *Out of Apathy,*[123] Miliband thus took issue with him on a number of points, including organisation:

> ... the question of organisation, political etc organisation. This too is something that is bloody difficult at this stage of our affairs but your formulations suggest a total degree of spontaneity right through ... Now, I accept everyone of these formulations. But not by themselves. 'A revolution' you say ... 'does not happen, it must be made by men's actions and choices'. What are [the]instrumentalities?... Surely not 'the people' tout court? We both, I take it, reject the view that the kind of thing we are talking about is going to be the result of people emerging spontaneously in the streets. This is a very large subject, this subject of political organisation, made more difficult for us by our recoils from the bureaucratic organisations which exist. But it is a problem that, sooner or later, we'll have to thrash out, both in the transition to the transition, and in the transition itself. I think it is absolutely inescapable.[124]

But Thompson was equally critical of Miliband for maintaining too traditional an analysis of the distinction between capitalism and socialism without exploring some key questions. For example, he held that it was possible to have a bureaucratic socialism from the top which would not lead to a socialist ethos at all:

> I am suggesting that these are the kind of problems which ... are agitating many people today: the younger *ULR* sort of students, who were bred up on '1984': the disillusioned ex-Sovietists (of all varieties): and even the workers in nationalised industries ...
> What it seems to add up to is a trend of thought which says: we agree that socialism – in the sense of public ownership – is inevitable, and (as opposed to private ownership) generally desirable: it is coming anyway ... What we doubt is whether it matters. Megalithic industrial society, with its accompanying bureaucracy, is too big for any of us to influence much in any direction. The individual has got to make his own life somewhere in the interstices of the industrial machinery, despite the state, whether a board of directors or a board of technicians or a board of black-

coated trade union bureaucrats are running it.[125]

He concluded that it was necessary to prepare for a time of 'transition' by propagating antidotes to bureaucracy, forms of direct democracy, and socialist values, which could rapidly be built into the new society.[126] And, more generally, he argued, that they were constantly on the verge of a revolutionary situation:

> ... one important part of realising this, redirecting the energies of the Labour movement to take advantage of it, is to break with the evolutionary and also the errors in the revolutionary model. Therefore it is not only important but could be a theoretical task of prime importance. I am suggesting there is a way open ... which we cannot see because our theoretical glasses have got misted up. There was a cataclysmic revolution lying around in Russia in 1916-7 but it took Lenin to see it. I am suggesting that there may be a new kind of revolution lying around in Britain in 1969 or 1974, and that [it] won't get it unless I can prod Miliband or some other potential theorist to see it. If you just flatly think this is rubbish then I suppose it is: but I do beg you to look at it again.[127]

It is a pity that the two could not cooperate in an attempt to articulate and resolve their theoretical differences. It would seem possible that the combination of Thompson's creativity and intuitive insight and Miliband's clarity and rigour could have produced a really important synthesis – or, at least, a cogent statement about the points where they differed. Unfortunately, this never happened.

The differences in their underlying assumptions certainly affected their attitudes to the merger of the two journals. Because Thompson was more sympathetic to the 'anti-organisation current', he hoped that the merger of the two journals could enrich the New Left, while Miliband saw this as a step backwards from the kind of alliance between ex-communists and VFS that he had favoured.[128] He would not therefore facilitate the merger – although Thompson implored him to do so – and when the final vote took place at the joint meeting of the two editorial boards, he was alone in opposing it. However, he remained a member of the merged Editorial Board which initiated *NLR*. He also contributed articles to the journal and addressed meetings in New Left Clubs. He thought all this was worthwhile. But, as a potential vehicle for socialism, he still believed that the Labour Party was of greater importance and that the *New Reasoner* should have continued. And, in retrospect, he argued that the main reason why it was not kept going was that:

> there was no adequate perception that a new socialist organisation was needed, and where there was some kind of perception of it, there was no clear view as to what it should specifically stand for, in programmatic and organisational as well as in theoretical terms.[129]

4. A New Left Theorist?

Although *Parliamentary Socialism* itself was rather silent as to the content of the socialism that Miliband was urging the Labour Party to adopt, his other writings, as well as speeches and correspondence, clarify his politics at the time. He saw the two most crucial elements as 'a specific and unambiguous rededication to common ownership as Labour's central and distinctive purpose',[130] and a 'fundamental shift in our international international position' with nuclear disarmament, and an ending of American bases, NATO and the 'whole complex of Cold War strategy'.[131] Whether he should be regarded as a New Left theorist or as someone who was expressing a more traditional theory in a different way is arguable. However, he certainly endorsed a statement by William Morris in 1885, quoted with approval by Stuart Hall in the first edition of *New Left Review*. 'The real business of Socialists', Morris had said, 'is to impress on the workers the fact that they are a class, whereas they ought to be Society ... The work that lies before us at present is to make Socialists'.[132] Miliband believed that it was crucial to convince people of the validity of socialism through education, publications, and speeches. The function of the New Left was, he thought, to develop its own analysis of the key problems and then to carry its message to a wider audience. The main problem with the Labour movement was:

> that it only contains a minority of Socialists. Above all else, and beyond all other political commitment, this, it seems to me, is the first problem to which socialists must address themselves in the period of the transition to the transition. There are some who yearningly look for a short cut. There isn't one. Now is the time to get *in* and push.[133]

The implication was that if the push was hard enough, the conversion process could eventually be effective. Socialists, he argued, must attune themselves to the realisation that they were in for the 'politics of the long haul'[134] and must therefore provide an agenda of theoretical and practical priorities. The Labour Party was simultaneously of central importance and the major problem in any socialist strategy. The functions of the New Left were to clarify the tasks, and to permeate other organisations. It was not, he argued, a party or more than a loose organisation and it could not in itself bring about a 'shift', but 'it will help the labour movement to make [a]shift possible'.[135]

The way in which he expressed such ideas was fresh and direct, and he was also capable of skilful irony. Thus when Gaitskell attempted to revise the Labour Party constitution after the 1959 General Election by removing the socialist commitment in Clause 4 (foreshadowing Tony Blair's successful campaign to do the same thing in 1995), Miliband published 'A Re-Thinking Sermon' in the *New Statesman*. Writing as a member of the clergy and without any direct reference to politics, he began:

The title of my sermon, 'Should We Drop Christ?' will have surprised some of the more traditionally-minded among you, but facts have to be faced. And the first fact that has to be faced is that Christ, whatever attraction he may have had in the past, is now a definite hindrance to the propagation of Christianity. Our churches are getting emptier and emptier and our message isn't getting through. I am convinced the reason for this is our obsessional concern with the figure of Christ.[136]

This ability to write with humour or to make complex points in a simple way was to make Miliband one of the most accessible communicators of Marxist ideas in the post-war period. The New Left provided him with the confidence to state his views, outlets in which they could be voiced, and an audience to listen to them. But the movement had little impact in shaping or changing his ideas. The events of the later 1960s were to pose a more substantial challenge to his politics and to lead to significant shifts in his outlook and strategy.

Notes

[1] For two excellent, and complementary, explorations of the British New Left, see Lin Chun, *The British New Left* (Edinburgh University Press, 1993) and Michael Kenny, *The First New Left – British Intellectuals After Stalin* (Lawrence and Wishart, 1995). Lin Chun provides brief biographical notes on all the main figures in the New Left.

[2] Quoted in John Saville, 'Edward Thompson, The Communist Party and 1956' *Socialist Register* 1994, p.31.

[3] Letter, 11 April 1958.

[4] 'The Politics of Contemporary Capitalism' *NR* 5 Summer 1958; 'The Transition to the Transition' *NR* 6 Autumn 1958. (He had already written 'The Politics of Contemporary Capitalism' when approached by Saville, which is why this article was published first).

[5] 'The Nature of the Labour Party' in Perry Anderson and Robin Blackburn (eds.)*Towards Socialism*. (Fontana, 1965). Nairn wrote Miliband a nineteen page letter setting out his ideas on the subject and asking his advice on 28 December 1961.

[6] 'Harold J.Laski' p.56.

[7] Interview with Justin Grossman, 25 June 1999.

[8] Mills's original idea was that they should travel by motor cycle. (Letter 9 April 1957 in Kathryn Mills with Pamela Mills [eds.] *C.Wright Mills – Letters and Autobiographical Writings*, University of California Press, 2000, p.238). Miliband was not happy with this idea and they travelled by car. (The introduction to this collection by Dan Wakefield presents a vivid impression of Mills's character).

[9] The official figures at the time were 53 dead and 300 wounded, but these were revised in 1981. Ben Fowkes, *The Rise and Fall of Communism in Eastern Europe*, Macmillan, 1995, p.95.

[10] Kolakowski was already well-known as a Marxist dissident in the West in 1956. Some of his writings from the period 1956-58 are included in Leszek Kolakowski, *Marxism and Beyond,* Paladin 1971. This includes 'Responsibility and History', one of his most influential works from this period.

[11] Interview with Leszek Kolakowski, 11 December 1998.

[12] To Edward Thompson, 4 October 1963.

[13] To Thompson, 7 October 1963.

[14] See, for example, Miliband to Saul Landau, 11 June 1962. *Dissent* carried a public reply by Miliband in the Summer 1963 edition, countering the 'Personal Memoir' by Harvey Swados, which it had published in the Winter 1962 edition.

[15] 'C.Wright Mills', *Monthly Review*, September 1962.

[16] Quoted in John Eldridge, *C.Wright Mills* (Tavistock Publications, 1983), p.33.

[17] 'Mills and Politics' in Irving Louis Horowitz (ed.)*Power, Politics and People: The Collected Essays of C.Wright Mills* (OUP, 1964)

[18] Review of *Power, People and Politics*, *British Journal of Sociology* 15, no.1 1964, p.79.

[19] To Thompson, 7 October 1963.

[20] For an excellent, sympathetic analysis of Thompson's character and thinking, see Bryan D.Palmer, *E.P.Thompson – Objections and Oppositions*, Verso, 1994.

[21] I am grateful to John Saville for giving me a copy of his unpublished recollections, 'Some Personal History' (29 September 1977) on which Miliband based his own essay, 'John Saville: A Presentation' in D.Martin and D.Rubinstein (eds.) *Ideology and the Labour Movement: Essays Presented to John Saville* (Croom Helm, 1979). See also John Saville, 'The Communist Experience: A Personal Appraisal' in *Socialist Register* 1991 and 'Edward Thompson, The Communist Party and 1956'. Saville is the author of numerous works, including (with Joyce Bellamy) the classic ten volume *Dictionary of Labour Biography*.

[22] Letter, 15 August 1958.

[23] Letter, 24 August 1958.

[24] To Thompson and Saville, 5 December 1959, also quoted in Marion Kozak, 'How it all Began: A Footnote to History', *Socialist Register* 1995, p.268.

[25] Letter, 6 December 1959.

[26] Letter, 13 June 1960.

[27] Letter, 4 July 1960

[28] To avoid confusion, the name 'Marion' will be used here but she was not called by this name until she arrived in Britain.

[29] This was one of the most notorious of the Stalinist show trials and the one which was most marked by anti-Semitism. Rudolph Slansky was Deputy Prime Minister in 1951 when he was arrested and tried, with thirteen others in November 1952. Eleven of the defendants were Jewish and Zionism was a major indictment. Eleven (including Slansky) were hanged and three received life imprisonment.

[30] *Parliamentary Socialism: A Study in the Politics of Labour* (2nd edition, Merlin Press, 1972), p.13.

[31] p.90.

[32] p.217.

[33] p.269.

[34] 'Party Democracy and Parliamentary Government', *Political Studies* 6, 2 June 1958, p.174.

[35] *Parliamentary Socialism*, pp.14-15.

[36] He defined the Labour Left as the Independent Labour P arty from 1900-32, the Socialist League from 1932-37, the Bevanite movement and then organisations such as Victory For Socialism in the 1950s. But he also saw it as wider, embracing, for example, more militant members of the trade unions.

[37] p.82.

[38] pp.144-45.

[39] p.62.

[40] Indeed his draft of an article on 'The Sickness of Labourism' for NLR (which was also published in a revised form as the final chapter of *Parliamentary Socialism*) was so negative that it provoked a heated reaction from John Saville, who twice told him that he was under-stating the importance of the Left, which had been crucial to the development of the Labour Party, and more widely for 'surely it is the CRUCIAL role of the Left to have bashed this stratified society into a more democratic shape?' Letter of 21 November 1959; also 16 November 1959.

[41] p.345.

[42] p.349.

[43] Ibid.

[44] See for example, Jay Blumler in *Socialist Commentary*, December 1961 and D.N.Pritt in *Marxism Today*, January 1962.

[45] *New Left Review*, November-December 1961.

[46] *Tribune*, 20 October 1961.

[47] *Time and Tide*, 12 October 1961. However, Thompson had been more critical when reading the manuscript before publication. Although he told Miliband that it 'really is a splendid book and will be most valuable to all of us and to the movement', he also expressed some strong disagreements. In particular, he argued that it understated the importance of rank-and-file movements and dissident socialist forces and was itself too immersed in the constitutional and parliamentary system that it criticised. He also thought that the theoretical content should be strengthened, arguing that there was currently 'a kind of insinuation that as opposed to the follies of all the actors there is some correct Milibandian position which is only defined by implication'. He suggested that, if so, Miliband should 'state it with more courage'. Undated letter (probably January 1961) from Thompson to Miliband.

Many of Thompson's criticisms were related to wider differences between the two, discussed later in this chapter, in the section, 'Organisation, Agency and Change: The Politics of the Long Haul'. But it is particularly interesting that Thompson also urged him to write another book, which would be a more systematic examination of the theory of the state and, in his reply, Miliband said that he had thought for some time about writing such a book. He was thus beginning to formulate the ideas behind *The State in Capitalist Society* before finishing *Parliamentary Socialism*. Letter from Miliband to Thompson, 24 January 1961. I am grateful to Bryan D. Palmer for sending me this correspondence and to Dorothy Thompson for allowing me to quote from it.

[48] *New Statesman*, 20 October 1961.

[49] Letter by Saville in *New Statesman*, 27 October 1961.

[50] Letter by Crossman, in *New Statesman*, 3 November 1961.

[51] *Tribune*, 20 October 1961

[52] Interview with Dick Clements, 28 April 1998. Clements also recalled Miliband and Michael Foot having quite a heated exchange about the argument of the book at a party at his house. Foot's verdict nearly 40 years later was that *Parliamentary Socialism* was an excellent book, which justifiably had influence, but that Miliband was a little too damning in his condemnation of the Labour Party and his criticisms of the Labour Left. Interview with Michael Foot, 1 December 1998.

[53] *Guardian*, 6 June 1994. Hilary Wainwright made a similar point in a letter of condolence to the family when Miliband died: '… I'd read *Parliamentary Socialism* as an undergraduate and again when I did my B.Phil thesis on Nye Bevan and his failure to change the Labour Party. It has been a foundation stone of my politics – and probably, like Paul Foot, saved me from becoming a Labour MP'. Letter, 30 May 1994

[54] *Time and Tide*, 12 October 1961.

[55] NLR, Nov-December 1961.

[56] Liebman to Miliband, 2 October 1961.

[57] 'The New Capitalism: A View from Abroad', *Monthly Review*, 11, nos. 3 & 4, July-August 1959 p.77.

[58] Miliband to the Wolgemuths, 14 March 1962

[59] Letter to Saville, 24 Feb 1962.

By mid June he had become a little more sanguine on the grounds that most people were totally apathetic about the US mission in the world and that the Administration therefore 'can't afford another Korea'. (To Saville, 15 June 1962). But his interpretation of US policy had not changed in any fundamental way, and he regarded Kennedy as more dangerous than Eisenhower.

[60] 'The Politics of Contemporary Capitalism', p.44

[61] Milovan Djilas, former Vice President of Yugoslavia, was expelled from the Communist Party in January 1954 and was imprisoned in 1956 for expressing the ideas contained in *The New Class* – one of the most influential critiques of the Communist power system.

[62] Letter, 19 March 1958.

[63] Miliband to Mills, 4 June 1960.

[64] Dorothy Thompson to Miliband, 30 May 1960.

[65] To Dorothy Thompson, 31 May 1960.

[66] To Mills, 4 June 1960.

[67] VFS was a Labour-Left organisation, in which Miliband became involved when it became active in 1958. It will be discussed in section c below.

[68] In July 1960 Mills had urged him to accept the invitation to the Soviet Union even if it meant interrupting his work on *Parliamentary Socialism*. At that stage he had suggested that Miliband should concentrate on Soviet Trade Unions. (Letter 18 July 1960 in *C. Wright Mills – Letters and Autobiographical Writings*, pp. 305-6).

[69] Miliband to Liebman, 2 September 1968.

[70] Letters lent by Nan Keen.

[71] Christopher Robbins, 'The Spy who Loved Us', *Independent Magazine*, 23 July 1994

[72] Diary entry, 22 April 1961.

[73] Diary entry, 25 April 1961.

[74] Ibid., 28 April 1961.

[75] 'Notes on a 23-Day Visit to the Soviet Union, 6-29 April' (unpublished), May 1961.

[76] Nor was this only in the immediate aftermath of the visit, for a year later he published an article on one of the institutions – the Drouzhina or People's Militia. This did not repeat the excessive enthusiasm of his unpublished notes, but the message was still generally very optimistic. He argued that such an institution could either be used as an additional instrument of state authority or as a means of self-government and collective education. At present it was both and therefore an ambiguous institution, encapsulating the legacies of the past, the contradictions of the present and the promise of the future. But he was hopeful that it would be relieved of these legacies and contradictions and 'with the growth of effective participation and decision-making in a large variety of institutions, it could, in time, come to give a practical meaning to the notion of withering away of the state'. He realised that the fact that the CPSU talked of the disappearance of the state as an instrument of coercion and repression as a realistic prospect did not necessarily make it so but, he argued, 'it helps'. 'The People's Militia in the Soviet Union, *Monthly Review* 13, No.12 April 1962.

[77] 'The Politics of Contemporary Capitalism', p.51.

[78] 'Who Governs Britain?' ULR 3, Winter 1958. (His name was wrongly spelled as Milliband).

[79] In the same issue ULR published 'The Insiders' – an extensive critique of the Labour Party's policy document 'Industry and Society'. This contained more detailed evidence on the concentration of power and ownership.

[80] To Miliband, 25 October 1957.

[81] Draft reply to Mills, 2 November 1957.

[82] Ibid.

[83] Draft letter to Mills, 5 November 1957.

[84] 'Who Governs Britain?'.

[85] Letter, 18 April 1958.

[86] 'The Politics of Contemporary Capitalism' *New Reasoner* 5, Summer 1958., p.43.

[87] Ibid., p.46.

[88] Ibid., p.47.

[89] Ibid., p.51.

[90] *New Reasoner* 6, Autumn 1958

[91] p.37.

[92] p.38.

[93] Ibid.

[94] p.42.

[95] p.44.

[96] Ibid.

[97] pp.44-45.

[98] The articles do not seem to have provoked any public debate at the time, but in private correspondence Thompson disagreed with many of the assumptions. Their differences will be summarised in the section on 'organisation, agency and change'.

[99] 'John Saville: A Presentation' in D.Martin and D.Rubinstein (eds.) *Ideology and the Labour Movement: Essays Presented to John Saville* (Croom Helm, 1979), pp.25-26.

[100] Ibid., pp.26-27.

[101] *The British New Left*, xvi and note 8.

[102] Victory for Socialism Annual Report for 1958. The VFS minutes are in the Jo Richardson papers at the Labour History Archive and Study Centre at the John Ryland Library at the University of Manchester.

[103] Interview with Roy Shaw and Ann Swingler, 28 April 1998. (Roy Shaw, who was subsequently leader of Camden Council, had kept the records for the Bevanite 'second eleven' from 1954 and was subsequently a member of the Executive Council of VFS, eventually becoming its Organising Secretary. Ann Swingler is the widow of Stephen Swingler, MP, who was Chairman of VFS). The Annual Report for 1958 records that the old VFS group approved the proposals at a special meeting on 29 January 1958.

[104] Annual Report for 1958.

[105] For a vivid account of the leadership's reactions, see *The Backbench Diaries of Richard Crossman* (Hamilton and Cape, 1981), entry for 28 February 1958, p.669.

[106] Minutes of the Home Policy Committee of 20 February and 21 April 1958 (Jo Richardson papers).

[107] Minutes of the Home Policy Committee of 16 June 1958.

[108] Minutes of the Executive Council Meeting, 4 June 1958.

[109] Letter, 5 October 1960.

[110] 'The Labour Party after Blackpool', talk to the London New Left Club, 9 October 1961.

[111] Letter to Miliband, 26 June 1958

[112] Thompson to Miliband n.d. 1958.

[113] Minutes of VFS Executive Council, 2 July 1958.

[114] Minutes of VFS General Purposes Committee, 30 June 1958.

[115] Saville to Miliband, 5 July 1958.

[116] Letter to Saville and Thompson, 7 July 1958 (correspondence lent by John Saville).

[117] Saville to Miliband, 8 July 1958.

[118] Thompson to Miliband, 8 July 1958.

[119] Minutes of Home Policy Committee of VFS, 12 February, 26 February, 3 April 1959.

[120] 'John Saville: A Presentation' , p.26.

[121] Thompson to Miliband, 25 January (?) 1959.

[122] Letter to Thompson and Saville, 18 February 1959.

[123] E.P.Thompson (ed.) *Out of Apathy*, NLB 1960.

[124] Letter to Thompson, 1 April 1960.

[125] Thompson to Miliband, 12 June 1958.

[126] Ibid.

[127] Thompson to Miliband, 13 April 1960.

[128] There were also practical issues involved, which Miliband failed to appreciate fully. The burdens on Thompson in producing *New Reasoner* had been overwhelming and the merged journal appeared to offer great advantages financially and organisationally, as well as politically.

[129] 'John Saville', p.27.

[130] 'The Sickness of Labourism' NLR 1, 1960, p.8

[131] Speech to New Left Clubs Conference, London, 5 May 1960.

[132] *Commonweal*, July 1885, quoted in Stuart Hall's editorial in NLR 1, January-February 1960.

[133] 'The Transition to the Transition', p.48.

[134] He was later constantly to use this phrase, which he originally used as a heading in 'The

Transition to the Transition'.

[135] Speech the New Left Clubs Conference in London on 5 May 1960.

[136] *New Statesman*, 7 November 1959

Chapter Four: The Sixties (1962-69)

From the vantage point of the twenty-first century, there is a tendency for the Left to look back on the 1960s with nostalgia, as a time of upheaval when alternative lifestyles were avowed, interest in Marxism was renewed and student movements erupted. However, if the decade was a time of protest, it was also a time in which there was much to protest about. In October 1962 the world came nearer to nuclear war than at any other time in the post-war era over the Cuban missile crisis and from the middle of the decade the Americans pursued a brutal war in Vietnam. Later 'the events' in Paris in May-June 1968 were followed by a reassertion of control by the Right, most notably in France itself with the overwhelming victory by the Gaullists in the subsequent legislative elections. In the same year, the hopes of a democratic form of Communism generated by the so-called 'Prague spring' were crushed by the Soviet-led invasion in August. And in Britain, the first Labour Government for thirteen years, elected in October 1964 and in office for the rest of the decade (following a second election in March 1966), soon proved a bitter disappointment as it implemented increasingly orthodox deflationary economic policies at home, failed to crush rebellion by the racist regime in Rhodesia, and tamely followed the American lead in Vietnam. Thus for the Left, the sixties were far more uneven years than they may appear in retrospect.

Ralph Miliband viewed the unfolding 1960s with the whole range of emotions – enthusiasm, anger and disappointment. Some of the crises of the era were to affect him deeply and lead to important shifts in his political thinking and strategy. Other events, and particularly the student protest movement at LSE, were to have a major effect on his subsequent life, linking the personal and the political. But these were also important years in his domestic circumstances, with positive and negative 'life events' taking place. For him and Marion, the most positive of these was the birth of their children. In July 1965 their first son, David, was born, followed in December 1969 by his brother, Edward. Since Ralph was forty-one when David was born, he had been apprehensive about having children, wondering how he would be able to adapt, and he had told friends that neither he nor Marion had been feeling very excited about the prospect of parenthood. In fact, they were both overjoyed once the children arrived. The boys were to become precious to him and many people who found him formidable or daunting in public were amazed to witness his tenderness with his children. Unfortunately, David's birth was soon followed by the death of Ralph's father. Sam had not been feeling well for a few months, but cancer had not been diagnosed and his death in April 1966 was a terrible shock. The family had always been so close,

and Ralph's relationship with his father during the wartime separation had been such an important bond that he was deeply affected by the loss.[1] Even before his father's death, Miliband had been suffering from total exhaustion and in March he had been advised to go to bed early and take a holiday. This may have been because he was working harder than ever while undertaking more intense political activity – particularly in anti-Vietnam war protests – without realising the impact that a small baby was having on him. In any case, the death of his father added to his general fatigue and it was only in October that he fully recovered.

Just after David's birth, he and Marion had moved to a house in Edis Street in Primrose Hill. It was typical of their relationship, and of Miliband's indifference to his environment, that Marion had found the house, which they then bought before he had even looked at it. The house in Primrose Hill became a place where socialist intellectuals from across the world were entertained. Again it was Marion who made the Miliband home an 'open house' where visitors were drawn into animated discussions over dinner in the basement. Ralph's political world involved the creation of a socialist network, but Marion was a full participant and provided much of the warmth of the environment. During these years she was also seeking to define her own sphere. In May 1963 she had been commissioned by *The Observer* to make a selection of its nineteenth century articles for an anthology, but this was a short-term contract.[2] After David was born, she did not seek full-time work, but became a part-time History teacher at Camden School for Girls. But although her lively, radical approach certainly stimulated many of the students, she did not enjoy it very much herself. At the end of the decade, when Edward was born, she therefore decided to return to academic life and began a Masters in Economic History at LSE. To an extent, then, it was a conventional marriage, with Ralph pursuing his career, while Marion supported him and played the main role in home-making, and child-rearing, leaving little time for a satisfying job of her own. However, Marion actively discussed problems and issues with him, sharply criticised his written work, and told him when she thought he was wrong. They were co-workers in a political project and deeply dependent on each other.

1. The Break with the Labour Party

In 1961 Miliband was re-elected to the Executive Council of VFS, but attended much less frequently than he had in the late '50s. This is not really surprising since VFS was now undergoing a rather sharp decline in morale and activity, particularly as a result of Gaitskell's success in reversing the unilateralist commitment at the 1961 Party conference.[3] By November Miliband acknowledged in a meeting organised by *La Gauche* , a Belgian left-wing journal, that VFS was a weak organisation with only a few hundred activists in Constituency Labour Parties and Trade Unions, but pointed out that it was reinforced by *Tribune*,

CND and NLR and that the Left was far stronger in the Unions than during the 1950s. This, for example, had prevented Gaitskell from achieving his goal of changing the party's constitution.[4] His argument, in a series of talks to Labour Party branches, Young Socialists and New Left Clubs, was that the task was to fight within the party to strengthen the forces committed to public ownership and effect a shift in foreign policy. However, perhaps because he was now working on *The State in Capitalist Society* he also stressed the structural problems that a Labour Government would face because of the power of property owners and he related this to the need for nationalisation.[5] It is also notable that he was beginning to make more explicit references to Marx and Marxism than he had during the 1950s.[6]

In itself, his more open identification with Marxism did not necessarily signify any shift in his stance on the Labour Party, because he had *implicitly* used a form of Marxist analysis in *Parliamentary Socialism*. Nevertheless, it coalesced with various important developments which were combining to sharpen his critique of the party. First, his explicit identification with Marxism was coupled with a more extensive study of the texts when, in October 1963, he began to prepare a new course of ten lectures on Marxism for postgraduates at LSE – the first time he had taught a whole course on the subject. Secondly, his comparative analysis for his book on the state may have increased his awareness of the continuities in advanced capitalist societies and the limitations of the impact made by social democratic parties. Thirdly, from 1963 onwards he was working very closely with John Saville, who had never believed that the Labour Party was an instrument for radical change. All these factors were relevant, but none of them yet brought about a break with Labour.

He differed from many on the Left in refusing to see Wilson's assumption of the leadership, after the death of Gaitskell in January 1963, as cause for any celebration. He noted that the majority of Wilson's Shadow Cabinet were firmly on the Right of the party, and that the only left-wingers at the upper reaches of the Labour hierarchy were ageing members of the old Bevanite group. Of these, he saw Crossman as erratic and unreliable, and Castle and Greenwood as more solid, but also less influential. He viewed Foot as being the most effective left-wing speaker, journalist and pamphleteer but did not believe that he had revealed the requisite qualities of leadership and thought his views were anathema to the majority of the PLP. Wilson's only real difference from Gaitskell was, he argued, that he did not *want* to remove the confusions which lay at the core of Labour's being, for his whole career since 1951 had been built on ambiguity. Since Miliband's hope had been that Labour would eventually either become explicitly liberal, with the exit of the Left, or socialist in word and deed, with the exit of the Right, he was unenthusiastic about a leader who would constantly try to unite the party with verbal compromises. And after attending a semi-private meeting which Wilson held in House of Commons early in December 1963, he

came away feeling that a Labour government would continue to be the best ally the Americans had in Europe. However, he continued to have one ray of hope:

> [T]here are some few signs that the Labour Left is now beginning to emerge from its Wilson euphoria ... and there is, on a very small scale so far, the beginning of an attempt to pull some people together as an embryo for a serious Left parliamentary lobby if and when a Labour Government comes in. This is much more relevant than most other schemes: the one thing that may be said for Wilson is that, being such an opportunist, being in effect the very epitome of Centrism, real pressure from the Left might find him receptive – but it will have to be real pressure, well organised, and clear-sighted: so far there is very little to suggest that this will come about early. But the honeymoon will not last for ever.[7]

Miliband was therefore hardly euphoric when, in October 1964, the Labour Party was finally elected to government with a wafer thin majority. But nor was he indifferent to it. Six weeks later he told a meeting at Birmingham University that the change of government certainly did not mean that there would be a major confrontation with established interests, but that it would be wrong to think that a Labour government made no difference at all. And he advocated an immediate programme of administrative reform to reduce the power of the civil service by bringing in advisers on the French or American model.[8] Of still greater relevance, he was quite enthusiastic about the prospect of organising a series of seminars for left-wing Labour MPs on a range of policy issues. Initially he wavered between enthusiasm and cynicism about the idea, but after a meeting in the House of Commons in which he was particularly impressed by Eric Heffer he became quite keen, and at the beginning of the next year he began to plan the seminars.[9] However, within a few months he had abandoned all hopes of the Labour Party. This was not because of domestic policy – on which he still believed that the government might bring in some worthwhile legislation – but because of its support for the Americans in Vietnam.

In several talks in the USA during his sabbatical in 1962 he had argued that social revolution was almost inevitable in a number of developing countries and that the decision as to whether or not this led to war depended on the US attitude. If it insisted on resisting social revolution, wars would become inevitable and confrontation with the Soviet Union would be increasingly likely. In a meeting on 'World Socialism and War' organised by *Monthly Review* on 16 April 1962, he was already arguing that American intervention in Vietnam could be just the beginning of an ever deeper involvement. Long before President Johnson escalated the war with constant bombing of North Vietnam early in 1965, Miliband was absolutely clear in his interpretation of the conflict: the National Liberation Front (NLF) was a movement for social transformation and national liberation against whom the United States was intervening on the side of counter-revolution. There was no question of compromise, for the Americans were

external aggressors who were upholding a corrupt puppet government in the south which was trying to resist social revolution and national liberation. The only justifiable policy for anyone on the Left was total condemnation of American bombing, and a return to the Geneva agreements of 1954, with an explicit requirement that the Americans withdraw.[10]

To summarise Miliband's views on Vietnam in this way is, however, quite inadequate, for it was a question on which he was passionate. He saw it as the decisive issue of the era – the real fault line not only between Left and Right, but between morality and immorality. And it was an issue which immediately galvanised him into action. On 17 February 1965 he spoke at a public meeting organised by the Movement for Colonial Freedom at St Pancras Town Hall, chaired by Fenner Brockway, and two days later he and John Westergaard organised a protest signed by seventy-six teachers of the University of London, including twelve professors, which was sent to Wilson. From now on Miliband was to speak at scores of public meetings and protest events on the subject – one of the most notable being a teach-in on Vietnam organised by Tariq Ali at Oxford University at the end of the summer term in 1965 at which Michael Stewart, the Foreign Secretary, tried to defend the British position. Vietnam had become Miliband's cause which he saw as the acid test for the Labour government. That it had failed in his eyes was already clear by March 1965, when he told his friend Marcel Liebman that its conduct in Vietnam 'made you vomit'.[11] A month later he insisted that one of the principal tasks of the Left was absolute denunciation of the United States and that the essential test of seriousness was to demand an ending of the Atlantic Alliance.[12] And on 29 May he announced to John Saville:

> I am very seriously thinking … [of writing] a thing around the Beyond the Labour Party, i.e. what is to be done given the fact that the Labour Party is not, and will not become, a socialist party, a view which I have always held, with some intermittent flashes of illusionism, and which I now hold with final conviction.[13]

In October 1966 he also told Saville:

> Vietnam <u>illustrates</u> better than any other event in this century the fundamental elements of the world as we know it: i.e. American determination to crush social revolution; the existence and endurance of such movements; i.e. the real nature of present day imperialism; the decrepitude of social-democracy, its bankruptcy and moral collapse; ditto for liberalism; the paralysing nature of the Sino-Soviet conflicts;… the bankruptcy of liberalism, particularly liberal intellectuals; the paralysis of [Communist Parties] as agencies of protest and action; the nature of the still inchoate forces which are struggling to protest, students, ex-liberals like Russell, etc; and one could go on like this. <u>This</u> is what the world is about, and which Vietnam pinpoints in the sharpest, most dramatic and bloody way'.[14]

He was to express this publicly in an article entitled 'Vietnam and the West', the main purpose of which was to condemn the Left in Britain for failing to mount far greater opposition to the Wilson government's defence of US actions in Vietnam which he termed 'the most shameful chapter in the history' of the Labour Party.[15]

How much longer he would have remained attached to Labour had it not been for the Vietnam war is impossible to say. Clearly he had been lukewarm in his support before this crisis, and there were several other episodes which could have brought about the final break. However, this was a momentous decision which he would not have undertaken lightly. For one of his key strategic assumptions, which had led to his difficulties with some sections of the New Left, was that socialism could be established only through the agency of a political party. He had originally joined the Labour Party because he did not believe that any other party in Britain had the remotest possibility of playing this role. But when he effectively severed his connections with it, he did not transfer his allegiance elsewhere. In January 1966 he thus took part in a discussion with John Gollan of the Communist Party and expressed his position quite explicitly. The Labour Party, he argued, had the allegiance of the largest part of the working classes, but was not a socialist party and could not be transformed into one. Nor was there any alternative in the CP, in any of the Trotskyite sects, or in the establishment of a new party. The CP had a role to play but could not do so without great internal changes, which were currently stifled by its internal bureaucracy and fear of debate.[16] And a few weeks later he told Saville:

> I am more than ever convinced that we must do what we can to help transform the CP. There is where our future strength must lie, or must incorporate. But not until they have changed out of all recognition, and can be part of something larger.[17]

He saw the only way forward in socialist education and critiques of capitalism as a necessary foundation for action, and through pressure, demands and the assertion of decency and principle. Eventually, he maintained, 'a viable socialist instrumentality' would 'have to be fashioned, out of the disparate elements which now make up Labour and the socialist Left – but not for sometime.'[18] Given his belief in the crucial importance of parties this was a difficult line to take. It was also an uphill struggle to win support for such a position. Nevertheless, he was to spend the rest of his life in the attempt.

In 1966 he had few resources at his disposal. One vehicle in which he vested some hopes for a time was a new Centre for Socialist Education which he and Ken Coates animated and which he chaired.[19] This was the first of many such initiatives which Miliband pioneered, but this one proved rather short-lived. A far more significant and enduring enterprise was the *Socialist Register*, which first appeared in 1964 and was to be an outlet for his ideas until his death. His

hope now was that the Register would 'open up new perspectives and push the argument along, pointing to conclusions, action, organisation etc'.[20] Had it not existed, he may well have had more qualms about breaking with Labour because, in many respects, the Register and the network of socialist intellectuals which he created through it, served him as a substitute for a party.

2. From *New Left Review* to the *Socialist Register*

a) Miliband, Thompson and the *Socialist Register*

Many accounts have now been written of the disintegration of the 'first new left' in 1963, and the interlocking of the political and theoretical differences with conflicts between the generations, personality clashes and disputes over finance.[21] The decisive phase began with the installation of Perry Anderson as editor in March 1962 leading to the final break-up of the editorial board a year later, with Anderson reconstituting the journal with a theoretical basis and personnel that reflected his own ideas. By then the two key figures, around whom the conflict revolved, were Anderson and Edward Thompson. However, their own retrospective interpretations polarised and simplified the differences that underlay the disputes.[22] The purpose here is not to attempt a history of the events or their ideological significance, but to consider their impact on Miliband.

Miliband had been deeply opposed to the original merger because he believed the *New Reasoner* and *ULR* were quite different. However, the basis of the differentiation in 1959 was not exactly the same as the issues at stake in 1962-3. Before the merger Miliband had believed that *ULR* was both theoretically and politically diffuse and inadequately rooted in the British labour movement, and he had hoped that the *NR* board might produce a clearer political line. With Anderson at the helm, the charge of inadequate involvement with the labour movement could certainly still be made, but the journal could hardly be accused of lacking theoretical rigour. For Anderson (and Tom Nairn, who was at this time his key collaborator) had a very distinct theoretical approach: they were effectively arguing that, because of its very specific historical circumstances of an incomplete bourgeois revolution, there had never been an authentic Marxist tradition in Britain, or indeed a genuine political alternative to the existing pattern of class dominance. It was therefore the task of *NLR* to counter British empiricism by importing highly theoretical versions of Marxist work from other countries, particularly France. Although there would be attempts to apply this to Britain, notably by Tom Nairn, it was not generally thought necessary to analyse current developments on the British Left – presumably on the assumption that these were vitiated by the general disease of inadequate theoretical sophistication. It is easy to understand why Thompson found this so objectionable. Even before he had left the CP, one of his objections had been that national traditions

had been ignored in favour of imported positions set in Moscow, and his book on William Morris had already highlighted a tradition of British socialism. For him the Anderson-Nairn approach therefore appeared to be a new version of the old disease. Miliband, whose own perspective was much less rooted in Britain than Thompson's, was not predisposed to be hostile to building on continental theories. However, he was resistant to the suggestion that there was a 'correct Marxist line' and his own work paid careful attention to empirical evidence. He was therefore resistant to highly abstract theory or to anything which pronounced itself as authoritative. In the final stages in the lead up to the break in April 1963, Miliband was therefore certainly closer to Thompson than Anderson.

In March Miliband's frustrations came to a head with the publication of an article on the 'Third World' by Keith Buchanan, which argued that the working classes of the 'first world' had been the chief beneficiaries of colonialism.[23] He denounced the article in a letter to Anderson on 9 March and he was not conciliated by a reply from Nairn on 15 March, which accepted some of his criticisms and refuted others. In a further letter ten days later he thus argued that he agreed that one should push for more aid to developing countries but:

> My point is that to speak of aid, in an article of this kind, without linking the concept of aid to the need for revolutionary change in the countries concerned is either a failure of understanding of an elementary kind, or a simple dereliction of socialist duty.

And he ended pointedly:

> ... [I]n my view, [the article does not] measure up to the kind of strict and rigorous socialist analysis which I understood was now the order of the day in the journal.[24]

Despite this kind of tension, some people were certainly anxious to avoid a break. A few weeks earlier Miliband had had a meeting with Tom Nairn and reported to John Saville that:

> ... explicitly speaking for Perry and others of 'the team' [he] told me that they were all very worried about the breach that seemed to have developed between them and 'us' after the last editorial board; and that they were very keen to restore fraternal relations. I told him that the only man who could help them, and who might persuade people like you and me to take some interest in NLR again was Edward. I don't know whether it is true or not, but obviously only Edward could possibly get the oldies to go back to it in the form of an editorial board meeting quarterly. That's where it was left.[25]

If Miliband actually wanted reconciliation, it is debatable whether he was likely to get it by hitching himself quite so closely to Thompson, as Saville pointed out

in his reply:

> On the matter of the relations between the old guard and the young guard I don't think Edward is the man to bridge gaps. The patience he has shown since he became chairman is I suspect wearing thin and if he is likely to revert to normal type he will resume his former practice of thrashing around and creating storms. A good deal of the disintegration we are involved in must be laid at his door although the general situation may well have been impossible for anyone to cope with.[26]

His predictions proved accurate for just before the editorial meeting, which finalised the break, Thompson submitted a 15,000 word memo to the members of the Board, entitled 'Where are We Now?', which hardly seemed designed to calm the atmosphere. Much of it was a polemic against the celebration of violence, uncritical 'third-worldism', the claim that there was no English Marxist tradition (and a substitution of French theoretical Marxism). He argued that, instead of all this, there should be a commitment to socialist humanism.

> What is surely required … is that socialists of our kind should now be somewhat more plain-spoken and less clever: more willing to break our demands down into programmes: more willing to defend our positions, and less willing to drop them at the first hint that they ain't respectable, or that something far clever[er] has been published in Paris or said in Balliol. In other words, we should be willing to put our boots into the British scene and walk around among British people, listen to them a bit more; have a touch of humility before their experience, without a precious fear that the least contact with programmes or slogans will soil our intellectual integrity.
> It is a question of emphasis. I don't wish theoretical problems to be evaded – we have always needed at least two kinds of journal. But now we can surely see British people bumping up against facts: and we should surely be in there with them, helping to draw conclusions? Because if in our muddled way we were able to break or grow through to a new kind of socialist society, this would be an event of comparable importance for Europe with 1789.[27]

The editorial board broke up in acrimony at a long weekend session on 6-7 April, which effectively brought NLR mark one to a close. In reality, the die had been cast before the meeting and at the end of it a group of the 'oldies' – Saville, Thompson, and Lawrence Daly – went to lunch with Ralph and Marion to talk things over.[28] Later that day Miliband wrote the memorandum which was to lead to the establishment of the *Socialist Register*. He had envisaged three editors – Saville, Thompson and himself. Within the next three weeks it became clear that Saville was deeply interested, but that Thompson was not. However, his reasons were much less clear. Because of the complexity of the relationship, the differences between Thompson and Miliband in 1963 and subsequently need to be examined.

When explaining his lukewarm attitude to the venture, Thompson raised various practical concerns. But from the start he hinted that there were also political differences between them. In an undated letter in which he sent Miliband some comments and suggestions for articles, he thus added: 'I would like to jerk your editing somewhat out of the rather orthodox Marxist ruts. (This may be unfair)'.[29] A few months later, after Miliband had praised a review by Thompson of C.Wright Mills's essays, while also expressing some criticisms of it, Thompson responded that Mills's attitude had been inadequate on the Soviet Union. He continued:

> (Probably we disagree on this: perhaps I consider yours to be inadequate too, and you consider me to suffer ex-CP traumas ... and I think I probably take up a position on the syndicalist side of both you and Mills on questions of power).[30]

After Miliband expressed some annoyance at this, Thompson again suggested that there were ideological divergences between himself and Saville and Miliband:

> I don't, for example, feel happy about identifying myself as a Marxist without important qualifications on essential matters ...[31]

Miliband, who had just begun his teaching of Marxism at LSE, replied:

> My God, isn't that exactly my own position? Whatever makes you think that I should have been lacking in enthusiasm for such a piece? That is exactly the kind of piece which is most wanted in the Annual. And giving these postgrad lectures has made me the more aware of this. I wish I had got you to do a piece precisely on this.[32]

And so they continued to waltz around the problems without quite defining their differences. Having failed to elicit an article from Thompson for the first issue, Miliband persuaded him to submit 'The Peculiarities of the English' – for the 1965 volume. Neither he nor Saville had realised quite how polemical against the Anderson-Nairn line this would be and the extent to which Thompson would use the article to publicise his view of the differences between the first New Left and NLR Mark 2. It began:

> Early in 1962, when the affairs of *New Left Review* were in some confusion, the New Left Board invited an able contributor, Perry Anderson, to take over the editorship. We found (as we had hoped) in Comrade Anderson the decision and the intellectual coherence necessary to ensure the review's continuance. More than that, we discovered that we had appointed a veritable Dr.Beeching[33] of the socialist intelligentsia. All the uneconomic branch-lines and socio-cultural sidings of the New Left which were, in any case, carrying less and less traffic, were abruptly closed

down. The main lines of the review underwent an equally ruthless modernisation. Old Left steam-engines were swept of the tracks; wayside halts ("Commitment," "What's Next for CND?" "Women in Love") were boarded up; and the lines were electrified for the speedy traffic from the marxistensionalist Left Bank. In less than a year the founders of the review discovered to their chagrin, that the Board lived on a branch-line which, after rigorous intellectual costing, had been found uneconomic. Finding ourselves redundant we submitted to dissolution.[34]

Saville was appalled by some of the passages that Miliband read him from the manuscript and impressed on him that it would be fatal if *Socialist Register* was used for factional in-fighting. It was left to Miliband to tone down the invective and then to get Thompson to accept the revised version.

Thompson accepted all Miliband's cuts except his attempt to remove the ending of the article which he insisted on retaining, and he suggested that this was where there was a real disagreement between himself and the editors. The 'Peculiarities of the English' ended as follows:

> And, at last, it has not escaped all notice, even in this empirical island, that the Marxist tradition has not offered very effective defences against a rather unwholesome obsession with power – whether in intellectual terms, in the assimilation of all phenomena to crude adjuncts of class, or in more "objective" ways. There is a stridency in the way our authors hammer at class and tidy up cultural phenomena into class categories, as well as a ruthlessness in their dismissal of the English experience, which stirs uneasy memories. It is encountered most often in Nairn:
> '... they tended towards an impossible and utopian rejection of capitalism and industrialism (as with Ruskin and William Morris) or retreated into obscurity and eccentricity (like the novelists Meredith and Samuel Butler)'
> There are men who have heard *that* tone, in the past half century, and who retreated into an obscurity which was profound indeed. It was against that tone – that sound of bolts being shot against experience and enquiry (and the remoter sound of more objective bolts) – that a few of us manned our duplicators in 1956. If this is where we are in 1965, then the locust has eaten nine years. But if it should be so, and if there should be any danger that that tone will be mistaken for the voice of socialist humanism, then, if it comes to that, there are some of us who will man the stations of 1956 once again.[35]

In other words, Thompson was identifying Nairn with Stalinism. He now told Saville and Miliband that he suspected that the latter had found this distasteful and that he respected this view and had rewritten the ending so as to soften the suggestion. But he would not modify the general sharpness of his tone any further. Moreover, he now claimed that it was because of his awareness of the differences between himself and Miliband on this point that he had not accepted the original invitation to become an editor of the new journal. And he insisted that if he really believed that *Socialist Register* was a journal in which sharp opposition

to Stalinism could not be expressed, he would not want to write for it.[36]

Miliband no doubt deeply resented Thompson's allegation that he was 'softer' on Stalinism. Yet Thompson was justified in discerning a significant difference of attitude between them and only two years after the break-up of the *NLR* it was already becoming clear that Miliband's sympathies were shifting. When Perry Anderson and Robin Blackburn edited *Towards Socialism* in 1965, which included some of Anderson's earlier essays from *NLR* and Nairn's piece on the Labour Party which had infuriated Thompson, Miliband wrote to Saville:

> ... some of the pieces ... are excellent and very thought-provoking etc. How stupid of Edward not to see, or not to see more, how genuinely important some of that stuff of Perry's and Tom Nairn is. Particularly Perry ...; he is absolutely brilliant.[37]

And he reviewed it enthusiastically in *Tribune* on 4 June.[38] He was equally impressed by Anderson's reply to Thompson, although he also thought it was utterly vicious.[39] Gradually, he therefore moved back into closer relations with the *NLR* Mark 2 team, while continuing to have the highest regard for Thompson. However, Thompson would never relent in his attitude towards Anderson and Nairn, and this undoubtedly also affected his relations with Miliband and Saville. Thus eight years later he returned to the old battle-lines, when Miliband tried to tone down some passages in his 'Open Letter to Kolakowski', which was published in the 1973 edition of *Socialist Register*.

Kolakowski had been expelled from the Party in Poland in 1966, but the repression had subsequently grown more intense and two years later he had also been dismissed from his university post. In the Spring of 1968 he left Poland and went to Berkeley, California (after a short stay in Canada) arriving there at the height of the student movement. Repelled by this form of extreme Left politics, he soon began to move to the Right, although he still regarded himself as a socialist at this stage. After leaving Berkeley he came to Britain, securing a Fellowship at All Souls College, Oxford, and his separation from the Left became increasingly evident.[40] He and Miliband had resumed their friendship, but the political differences between them were now obvious and in 1972 Miliband refused to participate in a conference that Kolakowski was organising on socialism at Reading University because the issues were posed in such a negative way, and because of the political orientation of most of the people who had been invited.[41] But both of them were finding their differences quite painful, given their mutual affection and memories of their early meetings in the 1950s. Thompson had also become critical of Kolakowski and in June 1973 submitted his massive 'Open Letter'.

This was an impasssioned *tour de force* of intellectual brilliance and Miliband told him:

> I have just finished a four hour sitting with your essay, and I find myself, at the end of it, more moved and stirred by it than by any piece of writing I can remember

reading for a long time – and probably more than is good for me! I think it's a won-
derful essay and I am not in the least worried by its length ... I am delighted that it
will be published in the Register, and am grateful to you for writing it.[42]

But having praised it to the hilt, with obvious sincerity, he also implored him to
cut out snide references to Nairn and Anderson and to regard them as comrades,
despite their disagreements. Such pleas were to no avail. Thompson continued
to draw analogies between Stalinism and both the theoretical line of the *NLR*
Mark 2 and the way in which he had been treated. He also complained about the
way in which his 1965 essay on 'The Peculiarities' had been edited, saying that
he had regretted the alterations at the time and had continued to do so since.
Indeed this, he claimed, was why he had not offered anything to the Register
in the meantime. For the argument that he had been trying to put (and which
had been weakened by Miliband's cuts) was that the Marxist tradition in the
Anderson-Nairn interpretation, had lost any 'moral vocabulary', and offered a
rationalist (even if dialectical) analysis of social process which found no place, or
no adequate place, for a moral, value-making and value-choosing, process. This
meant that their tradition lacked adequate defences against arguments based on
power. Despite his closeness to Miliband and Saville, he felt isolated, he insisted,
because certain boundaries disclosed themselves in 1956, which were critically
important to him. He could no longer feel that the Anderson-Nairn form of
Marxism was one with which he had a comradely affinity. If he was inhibited
from saying this in *Socialist Register*, conducted by such close comrades as Saville
and Miliband, 'how the hell can I <u>not</u> feel isolated?'[43]

The differences with Thompson were not obvious in 1963 when he had refused
Miliband's invitation to join the new venture, and at that time he himself may
only have sensed the issues at stake, rather than being able to articulate them.
However some divergences had already been discernible in the late fifties and, as
time went on, different emphases on the Soviet Union, Communist Parties, and
Marxism itself, as well as on attitudes to Anderson and his team at *NLR*, became
apparent. And although Miliband's beliefs obviously had a strong moral basis,
he had never liked Thompson's banner of 'socialist humanism'. Such differences
were to grow in later years as Thompson ceased to regard himself as a Marxist
and they were reinforced by their strong and independent personalities. By 1975
Miliband had thus decided that Thompson was no longer 'on my wavelength
politically' and that 'for all my differences of view, style and attitude, not to speak
of my personal lack of connection with, most of the *NLR* people, I am on "their"
side'.[44]

In fact Miliband was not really on anyone's side. His approach was quite dif-
ferent from *NLR* Mark 2 and he would not have been any happier working in
the Anderson team in 1975 than twelve years earlier. He was, and would always
be, quite individual in his thinking. But it is clear that, by the mid-70s, both

Thompson and Miliband had become quite aware that, despite mutual admiration, there was a gulf between them. It is perhaps fortunate that Thompson had sensed this in 1963 for, while his brilliance and flair could have added a great deal to the *Socialist Register*, it is highly unlikely the publication could have withstood the inevitable clashes between himself and Miliband that would have occurred. As it was, the Saville-Miliband partnership was not always easy.

b) The Politics of the *Socialist Register* and the Miliband-Saville Partnership

When he proposed the 'Socialist Annual', Miliband had never previously taken charge of an enterprise. Although he had been on the editorial board of the *New Reasoner* and *NLR*, he had never taken the lead, and this was also the case in organisations such as VFS. Even in his academic work, he had not yet assumed major responsibilities (although he was soon to do so with the Masters degree in Political Sociology). To an extent it was therefore a leap in the dark for him, and some of the difficulties he would encounter arose from his relative inexperience in such matters. However, it was not fortuitous that, although he was now nearly forty, he had never taken an equivalent role before. He had kept clear of such work because he did not find sustained cooperation of this kind very easy and his relationship with Saville on the Register was to expose his somewhat brittle personality.

By May 1963 the idea for a 'socialist annual' was sufficiently defined to interest Martin Eve, the left-wing publisher, who ran the Merlin Press, who agreed to publish it as long as the two editors put up a guarantee of £150.[45] A deal was also arranged with *Monthly Review* to distribute it in the United States, but it was Eve's support – based on socialist commitment rather than the prospect of any financial gain – which was to establish it and sustain it in future.[46] And it was also Eve who, in November 1963, came up with the name – *The Socialist Register: A Survey of Movements and Ideas.* (*SR*)

The first issue of *SR* was launched in April 1964 and Miliband was to edit every volume until his death, with the exception of 1982, when he and Saville took a 'sabbatical' and the Register was kept going by Eve and David Musson of the Merlin Press. Miliband co-edited it with Saville until the early 80s and it was this relationship which was to be the most important for *SR* and one of the most significant in his political life. Saville was keen to collaborate with Miliband on *SR*. Without doubting his own formidable abilities, he nevertheless regarded Miliband as the more brilliant. He was also extremely fond of him, and had enjoyed working with him on *New Reasoner*. He also saw it as a very important venture, for which there was a real need, and he responded enthusiastically to Miliband's suggestion. However, there was an asymmetry in their attitudes which would soon become evident. For Saville the *SR* would be an important

activity – amongst a whole range of other calls on his time. Miliband was also always busy with other commitments but for him the *SR* was something more.

A fundamental aspect of his philosophy was the crucial importance of socialist education in various forms. His critique of the Labour Party in *Parliamentary Socialism* had, at root, rested on an ideological point. The party as a whole had placed the constitution above radicalism because it had not been 'socialist'. But this immediately raised the question: how could it become 'socialist'? A crucial part of Miliband's answer would be that a key educative role could be played by the highest quality socialist writing applied to contemporary politics. For Miliband *SR* was never simply a journal: it was part of a political mission. This meant that there was an inherent tension in the relationship with Saville, who never had quite such elevated aspirations for it. And, to add to the difficulties, Miliband's own personality could sometimes make cooperation problematic. For although he attached such importance to the SR, he was also used to being quite independent and always wanted to get on with his own writing. This meant that he easily became intensely irritated with all the routine and petty tasks involved in editing a publication. Similarly, although he was extremely fond of Saville and had great respect for him, he could become resentful, aggressive and even offensive if he felt that Saville was not giving enough commitment to their joint enterprise. It was undoubtedly Saville's ablity generally to cultivate 'a duck's back' and absorb Miliband's periodic outbursts which enabled the collaboration to survive and the *SR* succeed. Miliband was well aware of this and would tell Saville how grateful he was for his support and what a wonderful person he was to work with. Furthermore, for years after Saville first expressed his wish to retire from the *SR*, Miliband persuaded him to stay on, conscious of the fact that he might never find anyone else who would be so tolerant and supportive. But if Saville was crucial in keeping the enterprise going, Miliband certainly played the key role in thinking of the ideas to be explored and the authors to be approached, and in subjecting the manuscripts to rigorous criticism. In many respects it was therefore an ideal partnership, but one that was sometimes difficult for both of them.

Looking back on 'Thirty Years of *The Socialist Register*' in the 1994 volume, Miliband noted one surprising point about the collaboration:

> In retrospect, it is perhaps remarkable that at no time did John Saville and I devote any time to the discussion of the ideological and political orientation of the prospective publication. This was, I suppose, due to the fact that he and I had been discussing questions of socialist theory and practice for some years previously and had found ourselves in rough (sometimes very rough) agreement; and there was also a largely unspoken agreement between us that we would mainly publish work that would fall within the broad Marxist tradition to which ... we both belonged.[47]

Although this is true, Miliband's greater emotional investment in the SR and its 'mission' meant that he was always keener to sharpen its political edge. Saville had wanted to involve Michael Foot in the first issue and this had been agreed, but Miliband soon added:

> I don't know if I am going terribly sectarian or what, but I want people with a very sharp orientation as contributors to this annual ... [A]nything to the right of Michael Foot, indeed anybody in Michael Foot's position, except him would find it easier to pass through the eye of a needle etc. I do feel very strongly about this.[48]

He made this point several times, but it came to a head after a discussion about the future of the Register in June 1969. Having thought about their conversation, he told Saville that, without seeking a rigid line which he would not want:

> [T]here would be room for two, three or four articles that would repre-sent a definite position on major issues: by which I mean that we stand somewhere between ultra-leftism and left labourism; between Maoism and Brezhnevism; between the undialectical opposites in the world socialist movement. It is a position which is hard to define, yet which it is of crucial importance to define; and we have done this very poorly so far. i.e. things would go much better, in my view, if we decided that we want to push certain things very hard; and if we started with the idea that we do have something specific to contribute to the debate, rather than simply offering a forum for that debate. [49]

He also suggested that they should call together a group to discuss the Register and to inject some new thinking into it. However, as soon as Saville said that he would not want this kind of commitment and urged Miliband to go ahead with-out him, he dropped the plan:

> I am quite clear that I have no wish to carry on the Register without you, editorial board or not; in fact, I am sure it would not survive one year on that basis.[50]

And the only major change that was ever made was the development, from the mid-1980s onwards, of thematic volumes. However, Miliband rarely ceased complaining that it should be improved and his final word on the subject, shortly before his death was characteristic:

> I have always thought that the *Register* was doing useful socialist work, and its survival for thirty years, in a period which has not been good for the Left, may be reckoned to be a matter of some satisfaction ... All in all, I think the publication deserves the mention 'has done well, could do better'; and over the next thirty years, it will.[51]

For twenty years or so he periodically subjected Saville to outbursts of dissatis-
faction. When the first volume was finished Miliband thus told him:

> There is an important question of standards which bothers me ... I think that
> our expectations in regard to the articles received don't quite match: you seem
> much more ready to pass things, and let things go than I am. You also take a much
> more rosy view of the value of the pieces we have in this volume than I do. Most
> of them are Beta, one or two Alpha minus, and one or two distinctly gamma. This
> is hardly your fault, but I feel that this worries me much more than it does you.
> The whole idea was, you may remember, that we should bring out really top notch
> stuff: it's difficult to get, but let's at least maintain standards, and not be too easily
> pleased.[52]

This was an extraordinary verdict as the volume had been completed only nine
months after Miliband had proposed the venture and included the following: an
essay on Maoism by Isaac Deutscher, and articles by Ernest Mandel on neo-capi-
talism, André Gorz (writing under the pseudonym, Michel Bosquet) on Italian
Communism, Anouar Abdel Malek on Nasserism, an essay by Jean-Marie Vin-
cent on West Germany, one by Hamza Alavi on 'Imperialism Old and New', John
Saville on the journal, *Encounter*, Marcel Liebman on the significance of 1914
for labour and socialist movements, Royden Harrison on the relationship of the
British labour movement to the First International, Victor Kiernan on imperial-
ism, Vic Allen and Jim Mortimer on trade unionism, Michael Barratt Brown on
nationalisation in Britain, and essays by Miliband and Saville on Labour policy
and the Labour Left. But Miliband's hyper-critical reaction was typical of him
and his verdict on the second volume, which included Thompson's 'Peculiarities
of the English', a second piece by Isaac Deutscher on 'The Failure of Krusch-
chevism', and an essay by Georg Lukács on 'Solzhenitsyn and the New Realism'
elicited an equally dismissive judgment. This time he told Saville, '... the stuff is
not good enough, mate. This is not for the most part first class socialist writing.
We simply must raise our standards: this year is no improvement on last – most
disappointing'. And so it went on, with very rare exceptions when he actually
expressed some satisfaction with the achievement.

So what was the contribution of *Socialist Register*? Its first notable feature was
that it was international, both in subject matter and in its authors, and this was
almost entirely due to Miliband. In its early stages it benefited from contacts he
had made through an earlier venture in which he had been involved – the *Inter-
national Socialist Journal* promoted by the left-wing Italian socialist, Lelio Basso.
As Marion put it:

> These contacts, as well as old friendships with Leo Huberman, Paul Sweezy and
> Harry Magdoff of *Monthly Review*, K.S. Karol, André Gorz and other French intel-
> lectuals, Rossana Rossanda in Italy were essential to the development of the *Register*

. Marcel Liebman, one of Ralph's oldest friends and a former student, and Ernest Mandel in Belgium kept him in touch with events there and in West Germany, as well as with writers in France. The fact that he was bilingual in French and English made it easier for Ralph to use material he had picked up from *Temps Modernes, Nouvel Observateur* and other sources and also to write for French journals ... The fact that Ralph had never been a communist had provided him with opportunities to travel to the United States in the days when the aftermath of McCarthyism still made things difficult; and he had many American friends from the late 1940s as well as New Left acquaintances he had met through C.Wright Mills, such as James Weinstein of *Studies on the Left.* The *Monthly Review* editors put him in touch with subsequently prominent Latin American intellectuals. A very different sent of contacts was represented by the Poles whom Ralph had met on a trip there with C.Wright Mills in 1957, including Kolakowski, Schaff and Lange.[53]

The contacts developed as time went on, as did the international scope of the *Register*. But although Miliband was always keen to attract the best articles on socialist theory and strategy from across the world, he was exacting about standards however prominent the writer. Thus he rejected work by Immanuel Wallerstein and André Gunder Frank, despite their international reputations, when he believed it inadequate.[54] Nor did he allow personal feelings to make a difference to his judgments, turning down work by close friends, such as Daniel Singer and Harry Magdoff, when he thought it made no substantial contribution.[55] Unlike some Marxist academics, he never took the view that abstruse abstract theory from France was necessarily worthwhile because it was difficult to understand. He was thus not convinced of the importance of Althusser's structuralist Marxism and *SR* published a critique of it by Kolakowski in 1971. His aim was to avoid pieces that were too esoteric or academic on the one hand, and sterile polemics on the other. Since he also wanted to exclude sectarian contributions or 'ultra-leftism', it is perhaps not surprising that he was so often dissatisfied with the work that was sent in. But he was always happy to publish work which was stimulating and accessible even when he did not totally agree with it. This, for example, was the case in 1968 with André Gorz's influential article on 'Reform and Revolution' which argued in favour of socialist advance through an accumulating process of structural reform. *Socialist Register* may not have imported as much international Marxist thought into Britain as *NLR* because its editors did not share the Anderson-Nairn assumption that the British Left was singularly retarded by empiricism which needed to be cured by an injection from abroad. But it certainly succeeded in enriching British socialist thought by introducing both theoretical pieces from other countries and essays on other parts of the world.

The *Register* also carried some important controversies. Thompson's 'Pecularities of the English' (1965) and 'Open Letter to Kolakowski' (1973), with Kolakowski's reply the following year, were the most wide-ranging examples of this,

but there were other instances. There were thus debates over Marxist economic theory between Geoff Hodgson on the one hand and Ben Fine and Laurence Harris on the other (1976) and contrasting perspectives on Israel and Palestine were put forward by Mervyn Jones and Marcel Liebman in 1970. Miliband's own essay 'Moving on' (1976), calling for a new socialist formation, also led to a debate the following year in which replies were offered by writers favouring the Labour Party, Communist Party and the Socialist Workers Party (SWP). However, the editors generally preferred to commission essays on subjects they believed to be important or to carry high quality essays which were offered. The fact that the *SR* attracted a committed readership, in Britain, North America and other parts of the world, and that many articles were re-published elsewhere, demonstrates the success of their policy.

A third feature of the *SR* which, at least in its early stages, differed from *NLR* Mark 2, was that the attempt to provide coverage of the world was coupled with systematic attention to Britain, both in the number of articles exclusively devoted to it, and in the lessons that were drawn from experience elsewhere. Both Saville and Miliband were insistent on this point. However, there was a real difficulty here, given the lack of certainty about what they were really proposing as a way forward. Saville, as noted above, never had any time for the Labour Party, but was also sceptical about the possibilities of any new party. Miliband abandoned all hope that the Labour Party could be transformed into a Socialist Party after 1965 and toyed with various alternatives. However, he did not use *SR* as a vehicle to rally support for a new party. Instead it tended to reflect his search to define an independent Marxism but contained no clear 'line'. How, then, should it be evaluated?

At the end of his life Miliband himself saw the weaknesses as follows. First, there were some political topics which did not get the attention they deserved, particularly Northern Ireland, and Israel and Palestine. Secondly, there was comparatively little coverage of science. And, thirdly and most notably, there were very few articles devoted to a discussion of literature and the arts in general.[56] But this, as usual, was a rather harsh judgment, for it would have been extremely difficult for Miliband and either Saville (or later, Leo Panitch) to have covered so wide a range as this. In fact, the *Socialist Register* was a major achievement, particularly in view of the fact that Miliband was not really temperamentally suited to an enterprise of this kind. Much of the credit goes to the *sang-froid* of John Saville for the first twenty years, and later to Leo Panitch, Miliband's protegé, who effectively became co-editor from 1985 onwards – a position which was formalised in 1990, when Saville's name was finally removed.[57] Nevertheless, *Socialist Register* had been Miliband's brainchild and he wrote something in almost every issue. Its strength, like his, was the boldness of the attempt to define a non-sectarian, independent form of socialism, which owed its greatest inspiration to Marxism, but was never dogmatic or 'religious' in its attitude towards it.

3. The Crises of the 1960s

In 1966, despite his bitterness over the Vietnam war and the Labour government's support for it, Miliband's life was generally fulfilling and there seemed no reason for him to anticipate changes in the main contours of his political beliefs or in his academic or domestic circumstances. Three years later he was much less certain about some of his views, and he had become deeply unhappy at LSE. He was seriously considering moving on, with inevitable effects on his life at home. The remainder of this chapter considers the challenges which he faced in the second half of the decade.

a) Socialism, Jewish Identity and the Arab-Israeli War of 1967

The Six Day War between Israel and the Arabs in June 1967 constituted a turning point in the attitudes of the majority of the Left in Europe towards the Middle Eastern conflict. When Israel launched its pre-emptive attack against Egypt on 5 June there was widespread support for its action. Egypt's closure of the Tiran Straits on the Gulf of Aqaba to Israeli shipping on 22 May, and increasingly belligerent statements and actions by Arab leaders, including the signing of a defence treaty between Jordan and Egypt on 30 May, were seen as threatening the very existence of the Israeli state. It was therefore widely accepted that the military advantage would move towards the Arabs if Israel delayed its action. However, after Israel's lightening victory and occupation of the captured territories, support by the Left ebbed away. By October 1973 , when Syria and Egypt launched their attack in the so-called Yom Kippur war, there was much less support for Israel in the belief that it could have traded peace for territory in the intervening years. Subsequently the sympathies of the European Left have generally been with the Palestinians, with Israel viewed as an expansionist and repressive state and outpost of American power in the region. Miliband shared in this general trajectory of left-wing attitudes, but the question was far more complex for him than this suggests, for it raised issues of identity which he did not want to acknowledge.

   Jewish identity was not something that had troubled Miliband in his adult life. He would certainly never have denied being Jewish and he enjoyed traditional food and a Jewish milieu. He liked speaking Yiddish and sharing Yiddish jokes with Jewish friends. And it was not pure coincidence that Marion and so many of his closest friends, such as Marcel Liebman, Harry Magdoff, and later Leo Panitch, were Jewish (although he had several other very close friends, including John Saville and – earlier – C. Wright Mills, who were not). For it was evident that, whether conscious or not, he tended to have a close rapport with those who shared his background and convictions – socialist, Jewish, atheist intellectuals. However, he was vehemently opposed to any suggestion that Jewishness defined

his *primary* identity, and after 1945 he had been determined that his life would not be conditioned and constrained by consciousness of the Nazi Holocaust or anti-Semitism more generally. Instead he insisted that his commitment to socialism constituted his primary identity, and he always aspired to define a *socialist* position on key events and strategic decisions. In general, his Jewishness did not clash with this or even seem relevant, and there were only rare occasions when he attempted to articulate or theorise his position.

One such occasion was during the 1960s when he prepared some notes for a lecture 'On Being a non-Jewish Jew'. Although he may not even have delivered the lecture – or delivered it in this form – his notes provide a very full explanation of his views.[58] He began by explaining that he was <u>not</u> arguing for assimilation. This would mean merging Jewishness into some other national or religious identity and he did not wish for this because he rejected nationality as the supreme element of allegiance and because, as an athiest, he had no interest in substituting one religion for another. His position was to counterpose two forms of commitment to Jewishness. He was quite happy to accept one version – 'a low level kind of Jewish identity' – which included birth, family background, and culture. He found this acceptable because it was quite compatible with any other type of commitment. However, he rejected a second version which suggested that '*beyond* all such allegiances I have a bond with Jews as Jews'. This, he argued, suggested that the 'Goy whoever he may be is an actual or potential enemy' while any kind of Jew was a friend:

> I reject this, for [the] simple reason that I belong to a 'party', of people whom I recognise as *my* party, my people, be they French, English, German, Jew, Gentile, black, yellow or what. i.e. an ideology, socialism, or my understanding of it. *This* is my supreme allegiance. I ask of a man: does he believe the things I do, is he for or against the things I believe in, or not. If yes, [he is] my friend; if not, my opponent … I have more in common with my kind of socialist goy than with a conservative, reactionary … Jew.

And he thought the implications of his views were that Jews should have alliances with forces which were the least susceptible to prejudices – those who followed the Enlightenment, which he identified with socialism: 'Socialism does not exclude *my* kind of Jewishness. But [it] excludes [the] racist all-goys-are-enemies kind.' Miliband was obviously not saying anything very earth-shattering when he proclaimed his lack of fellow-feeling for racist Jews and his sense of solidarity with anti-racists whether or not they were Jewish. However, the difficulties in his position became apparent when he outlined his attitude to Israel.

He had, he said, 'certain affinities with Jews who live there' and he wanted it to survive as it was a very special case, with links with the past. This, he suggested, was not problematic because many non-Jews also wanted it to survive. But was this an adequate explanation of his position? Miliband was suggesting that his

attitude to Israel was simply an extension of his general theory: that is, that his supportive attitude (in wanting it to survive) was an instance of 'a low level kind of Jewish identity'. In fact, of course, the existence of Israel, its policies, and its survival, were intensely *political* questions with major consequences for the Arabs and for peace in the region. To make this point is not to criticise his political position: it is rather to suggest that it did not follow (or did not solely follow) from the principles that he had articulated. And in the Six Day War, when challenged to define his stance, he would attempt to justify his arguments *politically*, rather than as a result of cultural identity. In his lecture notes he implied that, in order to explain his position, it was necessary and sufficient to understand the concepts of the 'non Jewish Jew' and of socialist universalism. But other factors, including his own history and family environment, were also relevant.

The first political organisation which Miliband had ever joined, it will be recalled, was the left-wing Zionist group, the Hashomer Hazair. It is, no doubt, true that he was not particularly interested in Palestine and it is also clear that in Cambridge during the war, he had found his friend Fleischer (Jacob Talmon) too fervent in his Zionism. However, his parents had remained sympathetic to the creation of Israel and had attended fund-raising events organised by Zionist groups in Belgium in the early post-war years. They never considered emigration to Israel themselves, but they certainly saw it as a necessary refuge for the victims of anti-Semitism, and his sister, Nan, had worked for an organisation which was re-settling Jewish refugees in Israel. He himself wrote an unpublished article on Palestine for a Belgian Communist newspaper, *Le Drapeau Rouge*, early in 1947: unfortunately, this has not been located, but there is circumstantial evidence that he would have favoured the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine.[59] After the foundation of the state, he was deeply critical of the Israeli treatment of the Palestinians and of Israel's alignment with British and French imperialism in the Suez crisis of 1956, but he does not seem to have written about this or to have had major arguments about Israel with his parents, who remained broadly supportive of the state. Marion's Israeli connections were much closer: her mother and younger sister had moved to Israel in 1950, and Marion (with David) spent a month with them in 1966. None of this, of course, is of decisive importance in explaining Miliband's attitude at the time of the Six Day War, but it is surely of some significance. However, there were certainly people on the Left who did not take this line, one of whom was his closest friend, Marcel Liebman.[60]

Liebman was from a Jewish family in Brussels, which had suffered deeply as a result of the Holocaust. In July 1943 his older brother was arrested by the Gestapo, deported to Auschwitz and never returned. Marcel and his other brothers were then separated from their parents and hidden in Catholic institutions until the Liberation. In this Catholic environment he had become intensely religious, and at the end of the War he initially wanted to become an orthodox Rabbi. He was also right wing – a convinced Royalist who had seen Leopold III's abdication as a

cause for a day of mourning.[61] And he had been so anti-Communist that he had considered volunteering to fight on the American side in the Korean War. However, his political evolution began in 1953 when he came to London, and studied international relations at LSE. There this devout twenty-four year old Jew, who still wore a skull-cap, met Miliband. Their ensuing friendship, and the general environment in which he moved in London with his wife Adeline (whom he married in 1956), led to a conversion to a form of critical Marxism, which he retained until his death.[62] On his return to Belgium, Liebman became a political activist in the Parti Socialiste Belge (while also teaching at the Université Libre de Bruxelles and the Vrije Universiteit Brussel), and then became a leading member of a breakaway group on the Left, which established the journal, *La Gauche*. In fact, Liebman was far more of an activist than Miliband and was involved in numerous political and journalistic initiatives over the years. But they became as close as brothers. They wrote to each other regularly – sometimes weekly – explaining not only their activities but their interpretations of world events and socialist strategies. The two families also became intimate, often taking holidays together. They certainly did not always agree, but their views were of the deepest importance to one another, and they both sought to define a socialist position on all key events.

The origins of their differences over Middle Eastern politics lay in the Algerian war of independence at the beginning of the decade. The Liebmans had become deeply involved in the FLN's struggle against continued French rule, hiding Algerian activists and participating in a network of support. During the campaign the FLN sought a gesture of solidarity from the Israelis in favour of Algerian independence and Liebman undertook discussions on this with leaders of the international Jewish community, including Nahun Goldman of the World Jewish Congress. But he was unable to get anywhere as the Israelis generally believed that an independent Algeria would strengthen radical Arab forces in the region at the expense of Israel. As a result of the Algerian experience in general and his rebuffed initiative in particular, he became a vehement critic of Israel and the politics of the Belgian Jewish community. Thus in February 1967 he told Miliband that he and Adeline had just been to a conference on the Jewish question, which had been attended almost exclusively by a Jewish university audience and that it had left him feeling that he had more in common with everyone on the Left – including Social Democrats, Stalinists, Trotskyists and sectarian groups than with such people: 'Suddenly you find yourself in the bourgeoisie, and physically, you feel this'.[63]

Miliband had admired Liebman's commitment to the FLN and his willingness to take personal risks on behalf of this struggle and he had certainly supported the cause of Algerian independence, but he had never become such an enthusiast. One reason, which had nothing to do with Israel, was that he was not an uncritical 'third-worldist'. He had supported national liberation movements

against imperialism and colonialism, but drew a sharp distinction between this and the claim, which was common on the Left, that the regimes which were then established were either democratic or socialist. He subjected such notions to critical scrutiny and this often led him to argue with students at LSE, who accepted the rhetoric of the new regimes.[64] This had relevance for the Middle East and he certainly never shared the widespread enthusiasm for Nasser's Egypt as a model for developing countries. By 1967 Miliband's position can therefore be summarised as follows. His family background and his own long-term perspective made him generally sympathetic to the existence of the State of Israel. On the other hand, his socialism and general resistance to injustice predisposed him to favour equality between Jews and Arabs in a secular environment. These attitudes were encapsulated in a letter to Saville a few months before the Six Day War:

> An Israeli representative of Mapam came to see me yesterday and asked me if the *Socialist Register* would consider doing an issue on the Middle East, including Israel, the Israel-Arab conflict, and so forth, his main interest being the last item – he helped found New Outlook, which has taken a courageous and principled line on this. I said that I was interested and that I thought you would be ... The question is – is this the sort of thing we should devote our time and energy to? This chap would provide us with names and contacts, Arab as well as Israeli, and we could no doubt find our own; the idea would be Arab socialism; then Israel's position, from a Jewish socialist and Arab socialist standpoint, then how ... [to] integrate Israel into the Middle East etc.[65]

This indicates quite clearly his general outlook, including his sense of doubt as to whether the questions were really sufficiently central to the concerns of the *Register*. Saville presumably did not think so and nothing further was done.

When a Middle Eastern war was clearly imminent a few months later Miliband felt it necessary to define his position in relation to the conflict. On 28 May he wrote to Leo Huberman, one of the editors of *Monthly Review*:

> I have been giving a great deal of thought, as you must have done to the Arab-Israel conflict, and I think that the left is badly off beam. For the following reasons:
> a) Support for the Egyptian blocking of the Aquaba outlet can only be justified if one accepts the notion that Israel ought to be wiped out, i.e. as part of a war which must end in the annihilation of Israel and its physical disappearance.
> b) As for this, one may well have any amount of doubt about the wisdom or justice of the original settlement in Palestine or about the establishment of Israel as a state. But it does exist, so that the question has become rather academic in terms of legitimacy; and it does not seem to me to be part of a socialist duty to support the liquidation of a state. Socialists, to my knowledge, have never done so, and I don't think Israel is a good point at which to start. This, on the other hand, does not prevent me from bitterly opposing the Israelis' foreign policy, their aggression

at Suez, their treatment of the Arabs etc. All this merely means that one would like them to change orientation, as one wants to see in so many other countries: it does not justify support for liquidation.

c) there would, from a socialist point of view, be a real problem here if it could be shown that Israel, for all its imperialist or rather Western-oriented commitments, was a genuine obstacle to socialist Arab revolutions, in Egypt or anywhere else. But this is nonsense. On the contrary, Israel is an excuse which most of these regimes use for not pushing further their revolutions. It is a bad excuse.

d) Of course, socialists cannot but be very sympathetic to the progressive features of Nasserism and to the fact that it acts as a solvent on the feudal character of much of the Middle East; also, the same applies to the anti-imperialist features of Nasserism. But socialists, I think, are in real danger of going overboard, because of this, as to the nature of the Egyptian [regime] ... where the masses are rallied and manipulated in a 'holy war' by the basest and most chauvinistic slogans. Yet, many people on the left insist on seeing Egypt as a kind of Middle East Cuba and Nasser as a Middle East Castro. This too is nonsense, and part of the lamentable inability of the left to adopt a nuanced approach to these kinds of regime, i.e. to support them in their anti-feudalism and anti-imperialism, while yet being severely critical of their anti-socialist limitations. And support for the former does not in any sense demand support for their war on Israel. The present endorsement of all Egyptian demands by the Russians and the Chinese and the whole left is to my mind a token of the crudity and the facile opportunism with which these things are viewed. Which does not prevent me from being well aware [of] and opposing American and Western attempts to 'topple' Nasser and support people like Hussein and Feisal.

He ended with a question which was obviously troubling him:

Naturally, I have asked myself many a time whether my views are influenced or even shaped by the fact that I am Jewish. One cannot tell, though I would hope that even if I were not, I would still think that the liquidation of two million people, a large number of which are survivors from the camps, would be an appalling catastrophe. And certainly, being Jewish does not mean that one must, to prove one's socialist bona fides, be Nasserite à outrance.[to the utmost] [66]

On the same day he wrote, with some trepidation, to Liebman, telling him that he and Marion had been speculating about his attitude: Marion thought that he would support Nasser, while Miliband thought that he would not be 'so sectarian'. He then set out his case in a similar way to that in the letter to Huberman, but intensified his criticisms of Nasser's regime as a 'semi-military and bureaucratic dictatorship'. In reality, however, he knew what Liebman would think:

I doubt if these propositions will seem right to you. But I would like you to examine them without beginning by believing that they are the product of an Israeli sentimentalism. It is true that I consider the liquidation of 2 million Jews, includ-

ing hundreds of thousands of survivors of the camps, a frightful catastrophe. But I like to think that I would believe this as much if I wasn't Jewish myself.[67]

Liebman immediately sent a fourteen page reply saying that Marion was right and he remained entirely aligned with the Arabs. His basic argument – supplemented by detailed points on the immediate origins of the conflict – was that Israel was in the imperialist camp and that it was absolutely justified for the Arabs to regard it as threatening, and a humiliating presence in the region. He acknowledged that it would help if the Arab leadership clarified what was meant by the destruction of Israel, which was open to a variety of interpretations. But, he insisted:

> If for us the question of Israel includes a number of factors including one which is called Auschwitz, let's still recognise the right of the Arabs only to accord a very secondary importance to this factor which is so foreign to their direct or indirect experience.

And he concluded:

> In the Israeli question ... I fear that you react as a European and as a Jew and not as a socialist. You would have other demands for any other nation playing the role of Israel than those that you have with regard to 'our brothers'. At least I think so.[68]

Miliband had obviously expected him to disagree about the Middle Eastern conflict. Nevertheless, the fact that Liebman, whose family history was so similar, and with whom he shared so many views, differed from him so fundamentally, was a matter of far greater concern to him than disagreement with most other people. He replied immediately with a six page letter. He accepted many of Liebman's criticisms of Israel, but accused him of being one-sided in his criticisms and came back to the fundamental issues:

> You ask by what right the Jews are in Palestine? Or rather have they founded a state in Palestine. The question doesn't seem susceptible to a satisfactory response because it doesn't mean much. By the right of the world being as it is, of the Hitlerian persecutions, etc etc. All this isn't a response. But the fact is there ... [Y]our South African analogy ... seems pretty pitiful to me: there 3,000,000 whites physically prevent the evolution of the blacks, oppress them etc. The Israelis don't oppress 40 million Arabs; at most, they ... exercise certain (reprehensible) discriminations against their own ... Arabs. This is why it seems to me possible, apart from everything else, to postulate the continuation of the State of Israel as a valid objective ...
> [I] postulate the existence of an Israeli state with an Israeli majority. One day, I really hope, as in Europe or Latin America, larger units will be made than the nation-state. Until that day I postulate the existence of an Israeli state ... simply in

recognition of a fact, the disappearance of which would be a terrible catastrophe, given the only current conditions under which it could disappear … There are only two alternatives, two: either the state remains or it is liquidated. The details [modalités] of these alternatives can vary (i.e. the state remains but reintegrates a number of the refugees; or it is liquidated, but not <u>all</u> the Jews are exterminated, i.e. a good number are 'expelled' from the new Palestinian state) but the two alternatives remain …

[A]s a Jew, I would see the massacre of an indeterminate number of Jews and the expulsion of the rest as an atrocious thing, given the history of so many of the Jews in Israel – an event which would have the same dimensions, if not in numbers, as the Hitlerian massacres. I say as a Jew so as not to deceive myself. However, I hope with all my heart and spirit that it isn't as a Jew that I would find this awful, atrocious, <u>but as a socialist</u> …[69]

On 5 June, the day the Israelis launched the pre-emptive attack against Egypt, Liebman wrote another six page reply. Arguing that the Israelis had always been on the side of imperialism, he stated that the anti-imperialist struggle was fundamental, and he wondered whether their disagreement on the Middle East would now call into question their agreement on the fact that, despite errors, opportunism, and crimes in the anti-imperialist struggle, the Soviet Union, China and Cuba were in 'our camp'.[70]

By the time Miliband received this the war had begun. He tried to reply on 7 June, suggesting that they should both calm down, and that their fifteen year long friendship was too precious for them to break it off now. But he could not bring himself to send this letter, or two others that he drafted later in the month. Finally, on 2 July he reaffirmed his position on the necessity for Arab recognition of Israel, but said that he wanted to resume contact. Liebman, who had feared that their differences could end their friendship, immediately responded in a conciliatory way, arguing that recognition might come at the end of a long process of détente tied to changes in Israeli policy and greater realism on the Arab side. In reality, their positions remained far apart, as Liebman now devoted himself to the Palestinian cause and thus became the bête-noir of the Belgian Jewish community. Despite the death of his brother in Auschwitz and his own traumatic experiences during the Second World War, he was now to receive threats to his own life from Jewish extremists as a result of his identification with the Arabs during the Six Day War.[71] While Miliband continued to disagree with him, he admired his courage in standing up for his beliefs in this situation and their close personal relations were restored.

Once the Israelis had won the war, Miliband himself again became more critical of their policies, and during the next two years he became increasingly committed to the creation of a Palestinian state – on the West Bank or perhaps involving the break-up of Jordan – as the only viable solution.[72] He and John Saville asked Mervyn Jones, who also took this line, to write an article on the

Arab-Israeli conflict for the 1970 *Socialist Register*, and Miliband liked what Jones produced.[73] However, Liebman read Mervyn Jones's manuscript and Miliband subsequently wrote to Saville:

> That piece of course posits the continued existence of Israel, though it also sees as imperative the creation of an Arab Palestinian state. This roughly is my own position. But there is of course a second view, now very popular with the largest part of the revolutionary left, or extra-revolutionary left, which posits the disappearance of the Israeli state and the creation of a Palestinian state with full rights for the Jews. Personally, I think this is not on, save in the very long run future, and as a process of federation of two previously separate states. Marcel is a leading spokesman for the second view, and has proposed to write a piece for us, setting out the case. Personally, I should like to see the two things side by side. It does divide the Left and we would be rendering a service by setting down the two cases, well argued.[74]

Saville agreed and the 1970 Register carried the only two pieces on the Israeli-Arab conflict throughout Miliband's thirty year association with it.[75]

Before the Six Day War, he had suggested that a 'low level kind of Jewish identity' was quite compatible with socialism. Yet in his heated exchanges with Liebman he had insisted on the absolute necessity of maintaining the Israeli *state* with a Jewish majority: in other words he had moved well beyond the cultural sphere by stipulating that political power must be retained. Had he really followed his own theories in relation to Israel when taking this stance? There is no doubt that he conscientiously attempted to do so: hence his frequent reiteration that he hoped he was taking the position because he was a socialist and not simply because he was Jewish, and his obvious relief that there were many non-Jews who shared his position. The fact that he was seeking a socialist position is not in question: it is, however, more doubtful whether his stance was really derived entirely from socialism – or rather from the only kind of socialism that he recognised. And there were signs that he feared this might be the case as, for example, in his letter to Liebman on 2 June 1967, when he said that he was talking 'as a Jew so as not to deceive myself'.

To suggest that Miliband's position may not have been derived entirely from the principles he avowed is neither to suggest that it was 'non-socialist', nor to argue that Liebman's position *was* 'socialist'. It is, rather, to hold that the problem followed from the rigid polarities which both of them were assuming: *either* a stance on Israel was 'socialist' *or* it was not; *either* a Jew was universalist *or* s/he was bigoted. What Miliband could not easily accept was that he might be supportive of Israel for a mixture of reasons, some of which were derived from socialism, some from pragmatism and some from his immediate family environment. For in his own eyes his arguments could only be legitimate if they were socialist in an abstract and universal sense. But in reality there were other emo-

tional influences which were also very powerful.

Observant Jewish families follow a ritual of holding a 'stone-setting' approximately one year after someone's death. Miliband himself was anti-religious, but the family still conducted a 'stone-setting' for his father that, by coincidence, took place on the eve of the Six Day war. Commemorating his father and inevitably remembering the impact of Nazism at a time when Israel appeared threatened would almost certainly have had an emotional impact. Similarly, on the day the fighting began, he told his friend, K.S. Karol:

> Marion, whose mother is in Israel, is in a state of anguish, and ... is also very pro-Israeli, not from Zionism, but simply because one can't envisage the disappearance of the survivors of the camps and the Jews who have found a homeland there. I have a lot of sympathy with that.[76]

Had he been a different kind of socialist he might have acknowledged that his own history and family circumstances meant that there was an emotional dimension in his attitude to Israel. But to have accepted this might also have undermined his self-identity as a 'non Jewish Jew'. And as the only other possibility in his concept was effectively that of the bigot who maintained that all Jews were 'friends' and all gentiles 'enemies' he had not allowed himself an alternative position. Instead he therefore tended to read the evidence in the most pro-Israeli way that he could and he insisted that he was taking a socialist position, while Liebman read it in an unfavourable way and took the opposite line.

In fact, of course, Miliband was far from being a bigot. He was deeply critical of many aspects of Israeli policy and from 1967 onwards was increasingly committed to the establishment of a Palestinian state. Nor was this his final position, as he ultimately become far more opposed to Israel, with a decisive change in attitude following its invasion of the Lebanon in June 1982. He would subsequently argue vehemently with left-wing Jews who sought to defend Zionism or those who, in his view, were insufficiently critical of Israel. However, he never wrote about the subject.[77]

What, then, is the significance of the Six Day War in relation to Miliband? In 1967 he had believed that there was a threat to the existence of Israel and, in this situation, he had thought it vital to express his position in relation to this threat. The Middle East crisis led to a brief existential crisis for him too. He wanted to believe that his attitudes were derived entirely from socialism and that his Jewish identity was completely irrelevant, but in June 1967 he feared that this might not be the case. With Israel victorious and the balance of military power clearly shifting in its direction, it never subsequently seemed that there was a threat to its existence. As it became more right wing and aggressive, he therefore became increasingly fervent in his condemnations of it. But he continued to feel uncomfortable on the subject.

The late 1960s are still associated with a wave of mass protest in Europe, North
America and Asia that challenged the whole post-war order. While there was no
single factor uniting this massive upheaval, a catalyst was often revulsion from
the Vietnam War. Although parties and groups, which claimed to be based on
Marxist ideas, were certainly involved in some of the movements, these tended to
be Trotskyist and Maoist, bitterly condemning both mainstream Communism
and Social Democracy for their timidity and betrayals. But, in general, the mass
actions defied any attempts at control by extreme Left parties, and included deep
currents of protest against both hierarchy and formal organisation. Generalisa-
tions about the nature and causes of the upheaval tend to be simplistic, but it
can at least be asserted that there was a generational aspect involved, for the
movements were dominated by students and young people. For them, Fascism
and the Second World War were historical events rather than lived experiences,
and at least part of the protest was against the constraints of the post-war order
and the new consensus.

In reality, the eruption was not confined to a single year, but 1968 has come to
represent the turbulence of the era, with the explosion in Paris in May-June of
that year epitomising it. For the movement unleashed by the students there con-
stituted the greatest challenge to the political system of an advanced capitalist
country in the post-war era. Initially provoked by the closure of Nanterre Uni-
versity on 3rd May, following conflicts between students of the extreme left and
extreme right, it quickly spread when the Chancellor of the Sorbonne called the
police into the University. When they made arrests, students attacked the police
vans, leading to extreme police violence. Soon there were demonstrations and
street battles on an unprecedented scale but, despite government propaganda, an
opinion poll reported that 80 per cent of Parisians now supported the students.[78]
By 10 May the Lycées had joined the students and, with the government refus-
ing to negotiate, that night the protesters erected barricades and were subjected
to prolonged brutal attacks by the riot police. Until now the Communist Party
(PCF) had distanced itself from the whole movement while attacking its leaders,
but this manifestation of state violence led the Communist-led union, the CGT,
to call for a one day General Strike on 13 May, when approximately one million
demonstrated in Paris in support of the students. Despite PCF attempts to limit
the action, it now spread from industry to industry so that within a few days the
country had ground to a halt with a spontaneous strike affecting half the total
workforce. While some of the demands were those of normal industrial disputes
– higher wages and shorter working hours – the workers were also protesting
against the repressive and hierarchical nature of the French state and managerial
structures. However, the PCF did not want to jeopardise its parliamentary strat-

egy and feared the consequences of any escalation in the action into revolutionary demands. It therefore sought to counter links between the strikers and the student movement and attempted to steer the workers' protest into conventional economic demands. One part of the government's strategy was similar and there were plans for the Prime Minister, Georges Pompidou, to begin negotiations with the workers on 25 May. However, de Gaulle addressed the nation the previous day in a hesitant and ineffective speech and that night there were further confrontations between police and demonstrators in many cities in France. The following day Pompidou began his negotiations and at the end of a weekend of talks in which the government had conceded a massive increase of 35 per cent in the minimum wage, the trade union leaders emerged confident that this would be accepted by the rank and file. But the proposed settlement was rejected by the strike movement across France and there now appeared to be a power vacuum. On 29 May the CGT and students led another massive demonstration in which anti-de Gaulle slogans were shouted, but the CGT's aim was to secure a new government rather than to attempt a revolutionary seizure of power. However, the General now had a strategy of his own. On the same day he had flown to West Germany to meet his top generals and, having assured himself of their support if necessary, he returned to Paris. On 30 May he appeared on television again. This time he was confident and dissolved the National Assembly, called a General Election, announced that the armed forces would be mobilised under the authority of the prefecture, and promised tough measures to protect the French people against subversion and the threat of 'totalitarian communism'. It was the beginning of the end and now the Gaullists took to the streets with a mass rally of about 700,000 people. June was a bitter month in which the government restored control – sometimes with police brutality against strikers who continued to defy the CGT instructions to go back to work and with a ban on all street demonstrations. And in the General Election at the end of month, a slight swing to the right and the two-stage electoral system, meant a landslide victory for the Gaullists.

It is still a matter of controversy whether fundamental change might have occurred had the French Communist Party (PCF) supported the action rather than using the crisis to secure concessions over pay and conditions. But the fact remains that in France and elsewhere the established order generally reasserted control in the late '60s and early '70s. Nevertheless, mass protest movements had shaken regimes which were normally assumed to be stable liberal-democracies.

Miliband was delighted when the students rejected the existing order and were prepared to take risks in the attempt to establish a new world. Having been so frustrated by the constraints of the Cold War and consensus politics in the 1950s, and so enraged by the stance of Social Democracy in relation to the American action in Vietnam, he eagerly welcomed the new climate of direct action. This, he believed, provided a real potential for social transformation and demon-

strated the weakness of theorists of both Left and Right who had argued that the development of industrial capitalist societies had suppressed the sources of social conflict. Yet he was certainly not unreservedly positive in his evaluation of the student movement. When the 'explosion' occurred in Paris in May 1968 he had been experiencing student-led protest at LSE for almost two years. This will be discussed later in the chapter, but its relevance here is that he had already formed some views from his own experience which influenced his attitude to the events in France.

Although he was one of the few members of staff who actively supported students and bitterly opposed the way in which the administration dealt with the protests, his position was quite different from that of the majority of the student movement. In part, this was because organisations such as the International Socialists became increasingly powerful within the student body as the conflict escalated and he disagreed with their theoretical and political interpretation of both the capitalist world and the Soviet bloc.[79] But the differences were wider than this. In one way or another – whether or not their position was deeply theorised – the student protest movement was raising issues which did not fit easily into Miliband's outlook on the world. He was by now seeking a new political formation based on a rather classical Marxist analysis of class and party. The revolutionary groups amongst the student body agreed about this, but not about the way to bring about change, and the majority of ordinary students were less interested in theories than in immediate injustices and the need for direct action. And, of course, student action also involved a challenge to the older generation's attitudes to dress, sexual relations and drugs. Miliband was still deeply convetional about what he wore, was quite puritanical, and always wanted politics to be discussed rationally and carefully. Despite his support for the students he was not really on the same 'wave-length'. Nor did he accept the theory (often associated with Marcuse) that the workers were now so integrated into capitalism that revolutionary change could come about only through the non-integrated forces, such as ethnic minorities, outsiders and the radical intelligentsia.[80] On the eve of the 'events' in Paris, he replied in a private letter to someone who had put this view to him:

> You argue that the workers have become finally reconciled to capitalism. If so, there will be no socialism ... For I am quite convinced that the other groupings you refer to are simply incapable of shifting and transforming the nature of these societies without the working class or a substantial part of it. Nor do I find the evidence in the least as conclusive as you do that the working class is permanently 'lost'. In fact, history suggests that the notion of growing attunement is a myth ... I am not saying this is the only class that can be relied on to make the change ... But I do argue that without that class, the business of socialism cannot march in [advanced capitalist] countries .[81]

His perspective did not change significantly with the 'events' of May 1968 in France and he was not really surprised when the Right eventually defeated the uprising. At the height of the 'events' he told his friend K.S.Karol (who was in France) that he thought it very unlikely that the explosion would lead to a real transformation even though it was a magnificent movement, which showed that the possibilities in advanced capitalist societies were vastly greater than they had thought and that the existing ideas of revolutionary struggle were very schematic.[82] A month later, as the forces of order regained control, he continued to express his complete lack of faith in all the little groups, saying that they offered no basis for any hope of transformation even if they had short term usefulness.[83] But he saw the key issue as the role of the PCF and he did not accept the students' view, regarding it as very unhelpful for Cohn-Bendit to refer to the Communists as 'crapules staliniennes'. [Stalinist crooks].[84] Before looking at his specific attitudes towards the PCF, his general position on the Communist movement at this time must be outlined, for the two were closely related.

During the sixties Miliband had become less enthusiastic about the Soviet Union than he had been at the time of his visit in 1961, but he had remained moderately optimistic about the possibility of a gradual evolution in the system. In November 1967 he had attended a conference organised by the Institute of the International Labour Movement in Moscow and, on his return, he reported his conclusions to Liebman:

> The conference itself was a complete absurdity; 2,000 participants, almost entirely communists ... From the first day of my presence, i.e. Sunday, I told the organisers quite frankly and in a pretty vehement way that there had been a mistake, that I was wasting my time and theirs and that, having no taste for the religious services they had organised, I was going back to London as soon as possible ... the fact being that I was furious having heard a long tirade from an American communist against Sweezy, Debray, Fanon, all seen as 'radical petty-bourgeois' expressing themselves in a pseudo-revolutionary way.[85] The Russians were very embarrassed by my position, flabbergasted even, and organised a 'round table' parallel to the official conference to allow some discussions which were a little more serious. They even asked me to open the discussion at this round table, which I did, with, I must say, a remarkable welcome, despite (or because of) my accusations of ignorance, dogma, and even metaphysics in the use of slogans, such as 'working class', alienation ...; and also on the question of West European social democracy ... I told them that they were living in a world of absurd illusions; and all this made two good discussion sessions, which were quite open – much more so than would have been possible a few years ago.[86]

And his general conclusion was that there was an unmistakable intellectual shift, even though the situation remained politically blocked.

This was followed in January 1968 with an event that left him still more upbeat – the Havana Cultural Congress. Castro had organised this event in which almost

five hundred intellectuals from across the world, including Miliband, had been invited to Cuba. The underlying purposes were to rally support for the Cuban regime against American pressure and to condemn US action in Vietnam, and Miliband had participated in this enthusiastically. Once again he maintained his critical independence and even called the proceedings to a halt at one point when he believed that the regime might be trying to manipulate the conference by inserting a resolution endorsing guerrilla warfare, which had not been agreed in the drafting committee of which he had been a member.[87] But he had then taken the leading role in proposing the final resolution which called upon:

> writers, men of science, artists, teachers and students to join and intensify the fight against imperialism and to take up the part which is theirs in the struggle for the liberation of the peoples of the world. This commitment must begin with an unqualified rejection of the policy of cultural subjection of the United States, and this implies the refusal of all invitations, scholarships, employment, and participation in programmes of cultural work and research, where their acceptance could entail collaboration with this policy.[88]

He left Havana feeling cautiously optimistic about the experiment in socialism. And his hopes were raised still further by the 'Prague spring' – the movement of reform Communism – which was gathering pace in Czechoslovakia under Alexander Dubcek. This seemed to embody the kind of opening that he had always been looking for in the Soviet bloc. As he told Ernest Gellner, an anti-Communist liberal, who was then a friend and colleague at LSE:

> In a way, these events are helpful to both our positions; mine because it suggests that such regimes do have the capacity for change for the better – in the direction of individual and collective political and civil rights; yours because so [much] of the news which [has] come out of Prague confirm[s] what was already known, i.e. how bloody awful and ultimately repulsive are the things of which they are capable.[89]

On the other hand, his friend K.S.Karol was also supplying him with less optimistic news about aspects of the Soviet bloc.

Karol was a man with extraordinary range of contacts in the Communist world, and an extraordinary life. A Polish Jew in origin, he was born in 1924 in Lodz where he spent his childhood. In 1939, when the Germans invaded, he went eastwards and was surprised to find Soviet troops also invading Poland. In summer 1940 he was deported with many other Polish refugees to Siberia, but bribed a railway official and managed to return to Moscow. He then rose to positions of trust and success in the CPSU before being denounced and deported (for no apparent reason) to a Gulag on the Volga from December 1942 to January 1944.[90] After the war he returned to Poland before obtaining a scholarship

to France to study as a Polish diplomat, although he never seriously intended to become one. He then went back and forth between Poland and the West before settling as a refugee in France. He also came to London regularly and by the mid 1950s was a contributor to *L'Express*, a foreign correspondent of the *New States-man*, and a collaborator and editorialist on the *Nouvel Observateur*. When in Britain he became friendly with Aneurin Bevan – helping him with contacts in France and acting as his interpreter on a trip to the Soviet Union – and he first met Miliband through Bevanite circles in the late fifties. Despite being a refugee in the West, Karol was still able to travel in the Communist bloc as a journalist.[91] By the late 1960s he had become increasingly negative about the Soviet Union and was far more optimistic about both China and Cuba. His partner was Rossana Rossanda, who had been an influential member of the Italian Communist Party associated with the more radical Left tendency around Pietro Ingrao, but had become increasingly critical of its policies.[92]

Karol, who had probably arranged Miliband's invitation to the Congress in Havana in January, was a major source of information for him on the Communist world. He had also known Kolakowski since childhood and he kept Miliband informed about the crackdown on dissidents in Poland. [93] Anti-Semitism (under cover of anti-Zionism) was a particular feature of the new phase of repression and, by the end of the year, two-thirds of the 30,000 Jews still living in Poland had left the country. Since the Cuba conference, Miliband had been toying with the idea of establishing an international group of socialist intellectuals to protest about American imperialism, and he now argued that it also ought to protest against such 'shameful policies and persecutions' in the Soviet bloc.[94] However, his optimism about Communism – partly as a result of Prague Spring – probably outweighed his doubts when the student protest erupted in Paris. Given his assumption that fundamental social change required agencies and organisation – and that this meant, in essence, a political party – he was predisposed to be more positive about the PCF than many observers.

This did not mean that he was uncritical of the party. On 22 May 1968 he thus told Harry Magdoff:

> The upsurge has not only revealed the hollowness of the regime, but of the CP leadership as well. They are so desperately frightened of offering what they call 'provocation' and of being isolated from their allies that they have shown a most unrevolutionary face, and [are] putting a break on the movement, or at least confining it to demands which the regime can at least deal with.[95]

And he expected 'tremors' inside the party when the workers and students found that they had been fobbed off by it. However, he could not accept Karol's conclusions that both the Italian and French Communist Parties (PCI and PCF) were completely incapable of renewal and that the only thing to do was to start from scratch. He thus told Liebman:

This worries me a lot, given my absolute lack of confidence in the possibilities of the grouplets which form and dissolve ... And even if one thought that 'the revolution' no longer depended on parties and trade unions, it would be impossible to envisage 'power' itself without these structures ...[96]

And a few days later he wrote to Karol himself about the PCF:

It's obviously an awful and shameful party whose moral, ideological and political deficiencies don't need to be discussed, at least amongst ourselves. But having said this?
... [I]n my opinion the Labour Party is absolutely irretrievable, or, more precisely, is not transformable into a revolutionary party. I am less certain of this in relation to the PCF and, for the PCI, much less. This whole question would be quite different if the little formations ... or those which are in the process of formation presented a serious hope. In my view, they do not ... If so, the question remains of exactly how to *transform* these parties.[97]

He thus preferred the idea of trying to change the parties – as Rossana Rossanda was still attempting with the PCI – to writing them off. Karol disagreed:

... the whole church has shattered; the communism of the PCF is no longer a deviation in the heart of marxism, it is its flagrant negation ... I don't think this sect has any future whatsoever and I don't believe that it is any more transformable than the Labour Party (which, it must be said ... has class roots which are at least as solid as those of the PCF). Both may perhaps be constrained to change under the impact of the events which will break out outside them.[98]

Miliband was still discussing these matters with Karol and Rossana Rossanda while on holiday in the Isle of Elba when, on 21 August, Soviet troops led the invasion of Czechoslovakia to put paid to Dubcek's experiment with reform Communism.[99] This news led to a definite shift in his position. These events, he argued:

... show very well that this oppressive and authoritarian Russian socialism has nothing in common with the socialism that we demand, and we must state this very loudly, even at the risk of seeming to be anti-soviet and to echo bourgeois propaganda ... And then, there is also this question of 'bourgeois liberties' ... which, I am persuaded, we must put at the top of our programme. Or rather, denounce them as *insufficient* and to be extended by socialism. Nothing will work if it is possible and plausible to suggest that we want to abolish them. And that is one of the reasons why the democratisation of 'revolutionary' parties is essential ... [T]he internal life of a revolutionary party must prefigure the society which it wants to establish – by its mode of existence, and its way of being and acting. While this is not the case, I don't see any reason to want to see the current parties take power: they are quite simply not morally ready to assume the construction of a socialist

society … It is no doubt different in societies where the alternative to revolution is one or other kind of Fascism. But in bourgeois democracies, this isn't the case. And this kind of society is better than a society of authoritarian socialism. It costs something to say this, but it's true.[100]

Having received a letter from Liebman – who, though more emotional, was less far-reaching in his conclusions – Miliband wrote again the next day. It was, he insisted, necessary to make it clear that the Russian model was absolutely repugnant for advanced capitalist societies, and also for the USSR itself. Similarly, the current tendencies in Poland must be denounced totally because they represented a complete degeneration of socialism, and Cuba, which had sided with the Soviet Union, also had a lot to learn, particularly since Castro did not accept the necessity for the freedom of the press.[101] And on 11 September he argued that the Soviet Union should be considered a counter-revolutionary force in relation to all genuinely revolutionary forces in the world, because it was fixed in authoritarian socialism and would only defend this model elsewhere.[102]

Subsequently he became more nuanced in his attitude to the Soviet Union, but August 1968 certainly constituted a turning point in his outlook. Until then he had generally adhered to the line that the USSR and the rest of the bloc were moving gradually and fitfully towards socialism and greater democracy. After 1968 he was much less sure about this, coming to regard them as 'bureaucratic collectivist' states. As such, he did not believe that they would necessarily generate socialism – or anything that he would be prepared to term 'socialism' – any more quickly than bourgeois democratic states. And this also affected his attitude to Communist Parties in Western Europe. For although he did not completely abandon his hope that the PCF and PCI might be transformed, his requirements for any such transformation became more exacting, and he confessed that Karol had been right about these parties, after all.[103] Against Liebman's argument that too much emphasis on internal democratisation within such parties could lead to a dilution of ideological rigour and a move towards social democratisation, he argued that if internal democratisation had this effect, it meant that such trends must exist in society. If so, socialism was utopian in any case.[104] But he did not believe this and was insistent that the CPs were doomed to decline if they prevented internal democratisation. For he also argued that liberty was an integral part of Marxism. This meant that in countries with bourgeois democracy, the struggle for socialism must represent, both within the party and outside it, an expansion of democracy. And, as he told Liebman, it also meant that:

a socialist revolution in our countries can only be by the *masses* … This is the schema of Marx to which I believe that we can only return after what one could call, with exaggeration, the blanquiste deviation of Lenin.[105]

In fact he decided that this really involved some fundamental thinking about

Lenin whose influence on European socialism after 1917 he would soon describe as catastrophic.[106] And at the same time he told a Communist friend:

> ... I do believe that things will not begin to move until a really agonising reappraisal of the Soviet regime has been made, with all that this implies by way of dissociation. Such dissociation, from a principled socialist position, seems to me the sine qua non of regeneration – and we are *very* far from that ...[107]

But if the Soviet-led invasion of Czechoslavia had destabilised his political thinking, the problem was compounded by his continuing and growing doubts about aspects of the student movement.

Certainly, he continued to defend the students against attacks from the Right. He even told Gellner that, having read much about the movements in the French events, he was 'impressed with how much there is which is profound, fresh, important, and a contribution to ... socialist theory'.[108] But he told his friends K.S.Karol and Rossana Rossanda that, although – as he knew from LSE – it was tempting to close one's eyes to the negative sides in the students' protest 'because their élan and freshness are much more positive and attractive than the positions of their adversaries, including their opponents on the orthodox left', it was clear that there were weaknesses.[109] And when Liebman told him that ultra-left students at the Université libre de Bruxelles had refused to allow Roger Garaudy of the PCF to speak and had got into 'punch-ups', he wrote:

> These people represent a most worrying form of a kind of Fascism of the left. The concept is far from being new, and is used by our worst enemies; but this doesn't stop it having a real element of truth – at least in many of their attitudes if not their thoughts – to the extent that there are thoughts.[110]

Finally, in December 1968, when hearing of student protestors throwing explosives in France and Belgium he was categorical:

> Personally, I believe that it is necessary to say very clearly that there are actions which are not acceptable from a socialist point of view, even if this leads to being accused of being a reformist, traitor and whatever else. And if those who use plastic bombs and other forms of violence are thrown behind bars I am not going to campaign for them to be freed. There are circumstances when such actions are justified: in current circumstances, in Belgium or in France, they seem absurd and should be condemned and they help reactionary forces ... As you can see, my positions are hardening quite a lot. The reason is that I am struck here by the intellectual poverty of the student movement, which is accompanied by a worrying totalitarianism, despite its anti-authoritarian claims. [One of the protesting students] ... told me yesterday that in a socialist regime, "sociology would wither away". I asked him what would replace it. "Marxism", he told me. 'Meaning what?" I asked him. "The reading of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Gramsci etc" he told me, adding that this wouldn't

prevent people from reading other things if they wanted to. What strikes me in this silliness, is the total lack of respect for intellectual activity, for research, for scientific elucidation of very complex problems, even a refusal to consider that very complex problems exist. These people want a social science that the masses can whistle, to use the expression that ... Zhdanov used in relation to socialist music. It is up to us, I believe, to set ourselves against this kind of thing. Even if nothing else pushed us in this direction, the experience of the so-called socialist countries would be enough.[111]

And he reacted quite angrily against John Saville's claim that neither of them was in favour a 'liberal university':

I am, and I don't want to see it mucked up by any regime.... I want the universities to be left alone as much as possible, as centres of independent research and teaching, which is what I understand by the liberal university. I think the time has come to be tough with all sloppy thought about this, at the risk of being called a petty-bourgeois ...[112]

In other words, his lack of faith in student movements as primary agencies for change had not shifted, and aspects of some of those movements had brought to the fore a key underlying aspect of his political thought: an emotional and theoretical commitment to freedom of discussion and intellectual enquiry. And this, coupled with his shock over the crushing of the Prague spring, was causing a temporary crisis in his own thinking. Indeed the two were inter-connected in his own mind so that, for example, in the immediate aftermath of the invasion, he argued that none of the extreme Left student groups had any model for socialism:

As for the trotskyists, I find their explanations and especially their solutions absurdly basic. Too many of them are Stalinists in thought. A regime governed by them wouldn't be any more rosy than the regimes they denounce.[113]

It gave him no joy to come to these conclusions. He would have liked to have seen the student movement in a purely positive light, but – as we have seen – he had been sceptical about it even before May. Then the invasion of Prague had led him to grow really gloomy about Communism and the future of the Left. Throughout the year he had been struggling to complete *The State in Capitalist Society*, and he was trying to rewrite the last chapter in the immediate aftermath of the invasion. But as he told John Saville in October 1968, he felt a general kind of disorientation:

... the fact is that the combination of the French events and the Czech business have caused me to feel much more acutely than I can ever remember that I need to take stock, because I now feel distinctly overtaken by the political situation, and

need to find my bearings – without the time to do so. This may seem odd after six weeks away, but it is only since I have come back and read through a lot of French stuff and thought about the Czech business, and the student movement, and activism etc that I have come to realise more clearly that I haven't got a proper grip – also because that last chapter of my book has brought out certain quite basic and unresolved tensions in my thinking … In short, I am now very muddled, at least feel muddled …[114]

A month later he felt still worse, telling Marcel Liebman:

I feel more isolated than ever before, and don't see how to get out of this isolation except by artificial solutions. It's shattering and I hope temporary; but, for the moment, it is the case. And up to a certain point it is even desired in that I have a deep feeling of lacking points of reference and want to recreate them for myself. It is tempting to think that the way to do it is through action, but I doubt this very much; and anyway with whom?[115]

This mood would eventually pass, but the events of the year would have a lasting impact on his political thought. His attitude to the Soviet Union was to remain far more negative than before 1968, and his stress on the importance of democratic liberties as an integral part of socialism was to be accentuated. By integrating these lessons into his thought, his sense of *political* isolation soon passed. But his unhappiness lasted longer, for it was not simply a product of politics. It also arose from his situation at LSE.

c) The 'Troubles' at LSE

In March 1964 an appointments committee had considered Miliband for promotion to the post of Senior Lecturer. Michael Oakeshott's reference was full of praise, describing him as a forceful and lucid lecturer. He continued:

As a class-teacher, tutor and supervisor he is pre-eminently conscientious and many of his pupils owe a great deal to his care, sympathy and interest. In short, he has fifteen years of generous and dedicated service to his credit.[116]

While this was a very positive tribute to Miliband's teaching, it understates its impact for, throughout the world, there are graduates from LSE who still recall the effect he had upon them. Most of those who have contacted me have described his lectures as 'inspirational', but this is not a sufficient explanation of his enduring influence over so many people in quite different walks of life. For example, a professional photographer believed that her choice of subjects – those in situations of oppression and poverty – was influenced by his analysis of power and inequality.[117] Another recalled his brilliance as a teacher so that, without exactly knowing how he influenced her, she became more analytical and

gained in confidence.[118] A third, who was encouraged by him to work in public relations after graduating in 1965, attempted to define his particular qualities:

> He was outstanding because he had the human touch in his comments which were always delivered with empathy – rather similar to the quality which differentiates doctors of equal technical capability … His gifts as a teacher stemmed from his humanity and his wonderful teasing quality which never let you take anything as read but made you examine their reality.[119]

Yet if he built up the self-esteem of many, it was not because he always gave them an easy time. Thus a student from his second year class on Contemporary Political Thought in 1971 recalled the first seminar in which Miliband asked each member of the group in turn to talk about the French Revolution. Declaring that none of them knew anything about it, he told them all to read Eric Hobsbawm's *The Age of Revolution* and Edmund Wilson's *To the Finland Station* by the following week. While this was a daunting task, everyone in the group read the books![120]

The students with whom he formed the closest and most enduring relations were probably those who took the Masters degree in Political Sociology which he initiated, with Bernard Crick, in October 1964. This attracted many left-wing graduates, particularly from North America. An Australian from the 1970-71 cohort recalled:

> Around half the group were from the US, a couple each from Canada and Australia, and a very small number of actual English natives. Within six weeks this originally heterodox group underwent a sort of joint conversion to Marxism-Milibandism, and enjoyed a most inspiring tutelage with the master for the rest of the extended 12-month academic year …
> Through all the vicissitudes of the 'crisis of socialism' I don't think I have turned, and still lecture and publish in the Great Man's spirit … I'd be surprised if any of my old cohort have 'turned' for that matter.[121]

It was not only the students who gained from the experience, for Miliband also found the interaction deeply satisfying and prepared his lectures with immense care. Having praised Miliband's teaching to the promotion committee in 1964, Oakeshott added that he was currently writing a book on the modern state. The committee recommended the promotion (to take effect the following October) and the minutes recorded Professor Greaves' view that:

> His main book on *Parliamentary Socialism* is valuable and interesting, though not perhaps in the very first flight. Were it not for the commercial difficulties of publishing a book such as his thesis, this would have been a monument to his ability to contribute to that field, as it is very certainly an addition to scholarship and an indication of Dr Milband's high capacity as a scholar.[122]

And he concluded that when the book on the state was finished, he would clearly qualify for consideration for a Readership.

There is, of course, much subjectivity in judgments about promotions. There is a strong case for arguing that *Parliamentary Socialism* itself was sufficiently original and well-researched to have merited promotion to the position of Reader or Professor. Robert McKenzie, who had been appointed at the same time, was promoted to a Professorship in the Department of Sociology on the strength of his *British Political Parties* and it is possible that political bias prevented Miliband achieving the recognition that he deserved at this stage. Certainly, the Department of Government had been moving steadily to the right under Oakeshott's leadership and there may have been reluctance to promote someone who now had a reputation on the Left. Nor was Oakeshott keen to allow him to teach compulsory first year courses. Instead Miliband had introduced a seminar on 'Problems of Contemporary Socialism' and a series of lectures on Marxism, which did not form part of a degree course, but were open to any interested students. The assumption here was no doubt that it was fine to let him teach what he wanted so long as it was optional, but that it would be too dangerous to risk infecting impressionable first year students in compulsory courses with the socialist bug!

Yet Miliband was generally quite happy at LSE at the time. Even though he was far to the left of most of his colleagues in the Government Department, there were still several people with whom he had reasonable or good relations and he was enthusiastic about the new Masters degree in Political Sociology.[123] In October 1965, when asked if he would be interested in a Chair of Politics at Durham, he therefore did not hesitate to decline, saying that the family was rooted in London and that 'I am now doing the sort of work (mainly graduate political sociology) at LSE which interests me most'. [124] There is little doubt that he expected to remain there for the rest of his working life and anticipated further promotion. All this was to change after May 1966, when a selection committee decided to invite Walter Adams to take over as Director of LSE from October 1967 and the Court of Governors confirmed this decision on 17 June.

Adams had been Principal of University College, Rhodesia since the mid-1950s where he followed policies that he no doubt regarded as liberal and pragmatic. He made sure that no test of race was imposed for admission, but also maintained separate residential and dining facilities for black and white students. He made no public pronouncement on Ian Smith's unilateral declaration of independence in November 1965 and, indeed, tried to avoid taking a public stance on the issue of racism, but in March 1966 refused to give the police any information on a black 'restrictee' who had been seen on the campus.[125] Such compromises with the illegal racist regime were opposed by students from the LSE Socialist Society (SocSoc) which prepared a report during the summer of 1966 which concluded that Adams was not a suitable person to be placed in charge of any centre of higher education, particularly a multiracial college like LSE.[126] Miliband was in

contact with Steve Jefferys, the main author of the pamphlet, and before it was even published he hoped that the staff would take action. He was considering doing something himself to force the issue if nothing was done. He saw the only satisfactory outcome as Adams's withdrawal and, if this could not be effected, he predicted 'an unpleasant, time-wasting period'.[127]

The pamphlet was sent to the media at the beginning on 14 October 1966 and published three days later. The President of the Students Union, David Adelstein, immediately wrote to Lord Bridges, the Chairman of the Governors, with a copy, asking how much of the information in it was true and had been known at the time of the appointment, why the criticisms had been overlooked, and whether there was now a case for reconsidering the decision. Bridges clearly took this as an affront to the authority of the appointment board and refused to discuss the matter. Before receiving his answer a Students Union (SU) meeting then instructed Adelstein to obtain a reply from Adams within eighteen days about the criticisms that had been made. Failing this, the SU would oppose the appointment. Lord Bridges now wrote to *The Times* deploring the campaign against Adams and again refusing to respond to the students. The SU asked Adelstein to reply to *The Times*, but he was informed that he needed the permission of the Director to do so. Advised by two lecturers in the Law Department that this was a misinterpretation of the School's regulations, Adelstein went ahead and on 29 October *The Times* published his very moderate letter, explaining that the SU had not opposed his appointment but sought further information about his role in Rhodesia. The result was an immediate decision by the college authorities to institute disciplinary proceedings against Adelestein.

Miliband now foresaw a revolution amongst the students 'with enormous repercussions for the future of the School'.[128] At a four hour Academic Board meeting a few days later he demanded a statement on how the appointment had been made and suggested that, while they should not reject the appointment, 'candidly he hoped that Adams should withdraw'.[129] In fact, there was serious disagreement amongst the staff about both the appointment itself and the way to resolve the current situation, but the published resolution endorsed the School's decision and its procedures. However, the SU now decided to boycott lectures on the day of Adelstein's hearing on 21 November and, in this situation, the Board of Discipline attempted to calm the situation by imposing no penalty while finding him technically in breach of the regulations. Miliband saw this as a successful outcome of the student action, and he was not yet unduly troubled by the situation. He was really enjoying his teaching, regarding his group of students in political sociology, many of whom were American, as the best ever, and this remained his main preoccupation at LSE.[130] All this was soon to change.

In November 1966 the Radical Student Alliance (RSA) was formed as a national movement to challenge the leadership of the NUS. It demanded a student voice in the shaping of courses and staff appointments and a general

democratisation of education. Adelstein had been one of the signatories on its founding manifesto and the call for direct action at LSE was strengthened by the election of Marshall Bloom as Chair of the Graduate Students Association. He now called for a 'teach-in on sit-ins' for 31 January in the Old Theatre as part of a 'Stop Adams' movement. Sydney Caine, the current Director, banned the meeting when he found leaflets urging direct action and then ordered the removal of electrical fuses so that the Old Theatre would be dark. When he instructed the porters to prevent entry, there was some scuffling and one porter died of heart failure. As soon as the students realised that this had happened, they left the Old Theatre, and the SU and the School issued a joint statement expressing their 'deepest regret that the chain of events should have had this tragic end'.[131] A few days later student representatives at a staff-student committee expressed their belief that the action was likely to die out as long as disciplinary action did not inflame feelings and the staff members agreed that strong measures would worsen the situation. However, the School secretary, Harry Kidd, insisted on instituting disciplinary proceedings against Adelstein, Bloom and four other members of the SU Council. The atmosphere grew very tense as a Board of Discipline, chaired by Lord Bridges, began its deliberations on 16 February and continued for almost a month, with sit-ins and boycotts of lectures taking place throughout the period. The students were defended by three members of the Law Department, including Professor John Griffith.[132] Eventually, on 13 March 1967, the Board reached its verdict: four of the accused students were acquitted but Adelstein and Bloom were suspended for the rest of the academic year. The SU immediately held a mass meeting and launched a full-scale occupation.

Throughout the period since the crisis at the end of January, Miliband had been involved in interminable discussions with students and others about the situation at LSE. He was also becoming increasingly critical of some of his colleagues, telling Liebman, on 22 February, that their attitude to student demands resembled those of eighteenth century seigneurs to the peasantry. Significantly, after telling him that there was the possibility of a job at Cambridge, he continued: 'For the first time since I have been at LSE ... I haven't mentally rejected the idea'.[133] However, although he clearly sympathised with the students, he had not yet openly and publicly identified himself with them. This changed when the suspensions of Adelstein and Bloom were announced, for he now addressed the SU meeting which took the decision to occupy the buildings.[134] The result was that he was now seen by many of his colleagues to have crossed the line to the enemy camp, some of them apparently even believing that he had sparked off the occupation.[135] Given his belief in the ideal of a liberal university and his scepticism about aspects of student politics, this was a paradoxical position for him. On 27 March he told Karol that the events at LSE had taught him:

... several things about what the Establishment understands and doesn't under-

stand. What it understands particularly, perhaps solely, I would say, is collective and resolute pressure, in other words oppositional power. It doesn't give a damn about all the rest ... I have also had it confirmed that the university teacher, as a social type, is not at all attractive. The timidity and cowardice of the majority of these people is incredible ... All this is obviously very local, but seems to be a good enough microcosm of the struggle in the wider area, outside the confines of universities ...[136]

And to another correspondent on the Marxist left he was more pointed:

... I have learnt a hell of a lot about the Establishment in these weeks (nothing like praxis, as you would say, rightly, I see better now), about my colleagues (sophisticated Oakeshottismus is a fairly thin crust; when it cracks, as it did here, a rather ugly visceral sort of conservatism emerges) ...[137]

After a few days of the Occupation, a Standing Committee of the Governors heard an appeal from Adelstein and Bloom and agreed to allow them earlier access to the buildings under certain conditions. On 20 March, the last day of term, the Occupation was suspended and negotiations took place over the Easter holiday. On 13 April Adelstein and Bloom signed a statement saying that they wanted to work with the School through constitutional processes and, in return, the Governers suspended the penalty that had been imposed upon them. John Griffith had acted as a go-between in these negotiations, but Miliband had also worked with the students. His report to Marcel Liebman illustrated his doubts about his role in the situation:

I have learnt some things on real politics these last few weeks. I am not sure if I would have been with the Bolsheviks in '17. Impossible to know until the moment of truth, which is perhaps late. At best, I would have been a Bolshevik, but a tortured one. [138]

However, he was quite clear about his attitudes towards his colleagues:

As far as my distinguished colleagues are concerned, I don't speak to the majority of people in the Political Science department, and it isn't impossible that my academic career has reached its apogee – perhaps under a Readership as a consolation one day or another. I don't know how well I will take that, and the School in general quite disgusts me, but there it is. There is work to do, which doesn't depend on titles – unfortunately, only on talent! What is very difficult, is to work in an atmosphere like this, or rather to be in close quarters with people who inspire the most profound contempt.[139]

He was well aware that he was regarded as a traitor by many of those that had sided with the Governors, and he believed that there was a real possibility of vic-

timisation.[140] But he was not completely isolated and, in recognition of this fact, he and Professor Bill Wedderburn (and five students) were now invited to join ten of the Governors and several other Professors on a so-called 'Machinery of Government Committee' to review LSE's system of governance.

In fact, the situation at the School now calmed down. Walter Adams thus took up his post at the beginning of the academic year, 1967-68, without incident and there was comparative tranquillity throughout the session. Miliband worked on the Committee, but some of the meetings were quite acrimonious and in January 1968 two of the students walked out, arguing that power rather than ideas were proving decisive, and they subsequently produced a Minority report demanding parity between staff and students. On the other side, the Majority report (signed by eighteen of the twenty-three members) recommended relatively minor changes (with Professor Ben Roberts entering a reservation against student representation).[141] Meanwhile Miliband and Professor Bill Wedderburn presented their own Minority report between these two positions.[142] In April 1968, however, the Academic Board rejected the Majority report in favour of a scheme suggested by John Griffith under which four student members of the SU were coopted on to its General Purposes Committee.[143] Although this meant that the work on the Committee had been rather a waste of time, Miliband was not too bothered by this and, in any case, was on study leave for the spring and summer terms in 1968 to complete *The State in Capitalist Society*.

It was only in October, after having pondered the significance of the events of May-June 1968 in Paris and having agonised over the invasion Czechoslovakia, that he returned to LSE. By now the situation had changed, not least because of these events. In particular, on 14 June 1968 a new national group, the Revolutionary Socialist Students Federation (RSSF) had held its inaugural conference at LSE, addressed by two leaders of the French movement, Daniel Cohn-Bendit and Alain Geismar. Its founding statement opposed imperialism, racism and ruling-class control of education, and expressed support for national liberation struggles and workers' power as the only alternative to capitalism.[144] At its first plenary conference in London (at the Round House in Camden) in November it also passed a statement of aims calling for Red Bases in the universities, with all power to be vested in a general assembly of students, staff and administrative workers.[145] The organisation was divided by the various Far Left sects that sought to ensure that their particular revolutionary line prevailed, and it is not clear just how much support it secured amongst the student body at LSE, but it certainly gave a greater impetus to the protests. The second key change was that the former LSE Economics Professor, Lionel Robbins (now Lord Robbins), had replaced Lord Bridges in chairing the Governors. It was soon evident that it was he, rather than Walter Adams, who was to play the leading role in the institution and he had very clear views on the student movement. He did not believe that a democracy could pay 'for youngsters to do what they like' and he found the radi-

cals' critique of the bourgeois content of the curriculum 'as hideous and remote from me as the ideals of the Hitlerjugend'.[146]

This time the spark that ignited the conflict was a demonstration in London, planned by the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign – of which Tariq Ali was a leading figure – for 27 October 1968. Ten days before the event an emergency motion before the SU at LSE called for the School to offer 'sanctuary, medical aid and political discussion' for the many thousands who were expected to arrive from all over the country. Despite the expectations of the then President of the Union, Colin Crouch, that the proposal would be rejected, it was supported by a majority. The opponents of the idea then petitioned for the matter to be reopened at another meeting on 23 October, which overturned the decision by a majority of sixty, subsequently reduced to six on a recount. The meeting then broke up in disarray with a statement by Crouch that, if action was taken, the SU would remain neutral – that is, it would neither authorise nor condemn the action.[147] Adams then announced that, having consulted the Governors, he had decided to close the buildings on Saturday and Sunday (26-27 October). The predictable result was that students pre-empted this with a weekend occupation beginning on Friday 25 October. A few days later the Court of Governors decided not to take disciplinary action but issued a warning about future actions of this kind. This was coupled with a threat to staff who encouraged or took part in disorderly action.

As usual, Miliband's reactions to this series of events were mixed. He had been apprehensive about the anti-Vietnam demonstration, fearing that it would be hijacked by 'ultra-ultra Maoist type' groups who might want violent confrontation.[148] It is also unlikely that he had much sympathy with the use of LSE envisaged by the original emergency motion at the SU meeting. However, once the Governors threatened students participating in or encouraging occupations, his position was clear. He explained his views in a letter to Ernest Gellner, who was currently on sabbatical leave in the USA:

> You will have heard of the 'occupation', the director's 'closure' of the School, the Governors' threat of dismissal of 'teachers, junior or senior' who 'encourage or participate' in actions likely to damage the 'integrity' of the School and so forth. John Griffith and I made a statement to the Times describing the threats as 'intolerable' and 77 people signed a statement to Robbins 'deploring' the Governors' statement. An Academic Board meeting yesterday enabled me to attack the statement but the whole issue of the School's present situation was referred back to the General Purposes Committee. There are various rumours circulating about students proposing to heckle certain lectures, invade the Senior Common Room, and such like. But so far, there does not appear to be anything concrete … It is just barely possible that we may escape some further major fracas, but it seems unlikely. The Senior common Room is a very unhappy place, with some new extreme hardliners … As for myself, Peter Wiles, to whom I chat with pleasure, cheerfully insists

that I have been outflanked on the left, which is perfectly true, and not particularly comfortable, but bearable. I am told on reliable authority that on the morning of the 'occupation', a distinguished colleague ... was reported as saying 'That's it, Miliband must go', which is hilarious and undeservedly flattering ... The students want a shake-up, which is perfectly reasonable, but some of the things they want as part of the shake up are not (e.g. a general assembly on the basis of one man one vote to run the school).[149]

He concluded that the Governers' statements were radicalising the students, leading them to adopt whatever demand appeared to be the furthest to the Left. He now saw Robbins as worse than Bridges, and argued that the situation required the kind of understanding, flair and flexibility that was beyond the reach of most of the people in charge. Instead of this, they did things like installing iron gates between the third and fourth floor, which the students viewed as provocative.

Such views hardly indicated unconditional support for the far left groups amongst the students and by the end of the academic year he was definitely out of sympathy with them and defending the liberal ideal of the University. Just before this he told Karol about a meeting a number of left-wing teachers had had with some of the militant students to see how they were viewing the situation:

... we were very struck by their frightful ideological and strategic gaps. It isn't a question of disagreement with a particular political line: it is rather their extraordinary lack of any culture which is even very approximately Marxist – or even any culture at all, which no doubt sounds 'square' and pretentious, but is nevertheless the case. Sit they can, but think is another matter. Perhaps this is a teacher's prejudice, but I think it's an objectively valid judgement.[150]

After simmering for some time, the conflict erupted again at the beginning of the spring term. On 8 January the Director addressed a teach-in on Rhodesia and was immediately confronted with three demands: that the School should publish a list of its holdings in Rhodesia and South Africa; that the Governors should resign from the boards of companies trading with white southern Africa; and that such companies should not be allowed to recruit on the School's premises. He was visibly cowed by the pressure and failed to return later in the day with responses to the demands, although he had promised to do so.[151] Just over a week later Robbins addressed the SU and also faced hostile questioning about the involvement that he and other Governors had in companies with Southern African connections. But he was also asked why the iron gates had been installed over the summer and admitted that one reason was to prevent unauthorised access to parts of the buildings in occupations. As soon as he left, the meeting passed, by a large majority, a resolution stating that, unless the gates were removed within seven days, the students would dismantle them. On 20 January Adams wrote to say that some of the unnecessary gates would be removed and

four days later the SU reconvened to consider its response. There was a very small majority for direct action (242 for, 236 against, with 76 abstentions) which, on a recount the next day, was increased to a majority of 282 in favour, 231 against, with 68 abstentions. Some students immediately began dismantling the gates, confronting senior academic staff who tried to prevent them. At 9.30 that evening the Director declared the School closed indefinitely and the police then brought up students from the Three Tons Bar in the basement for identification by academic staff. Only three students were named, but by the time they reached Bow Street, thirty students in all had been arrested. The School authorities then took out injunctions against thirteen students not to enter the building without special permission and sent three lecturers, Robin Blackburn, Laurence Harris and Nicholas Bateson, notice that they would face disciplinary action. All this no doubt met the approval of the Government, for in the House of Commons on 29 January, Ted Short, the Secretary of State for Education denounced these 'thugs of the academic world', drawing particular attention to the fact that at least four of the students were Americans, who were being subsidised by British taxpayers to 'disrupt and undermine British institutions. And he hoped one or two of them would be 'thrown out on their necks'.[152]

A few days later, Miliband gave his immediate reactions on the latest events to Saville:

> My own view ... is that the School will not recover for a very long time, come what may, and that it is most likely to be a pretty grim place to find oneself in for the relevant future. Enmities between students and staff, and among the staff, will long endure, and make civilised life very difficult if not impossible ...
> As of now, I am sick and tired of butting my head against this particular wall, and were it not for all kinds of considerations, would gladly move. [153]

Three weeks later he explained his position more fully. Although he disagreed politically with all three of the lecturers under threat, he had initiated a declaration saying that the staff would not accept expulsions of any of them. There were, he felt, only three left-wing staff amongst the older generation – Griffith, John Westergaard and himself, with two or three younger people, who were fairly solid, and about twelve others who regularly supported them without great commitment.[154] This meant that he felt very isolated. Some of his colleagues, he suggested, had completely lost their heads and would have acted in the same way had the School been on fire and the Director assassinated. He had been against the assault on the gates, and found himself in a difficult position because he could not rally fully to the student side, either in their tactics or in their ultimate goals. For example, he regarded it as absurd to suggest that LSE should be run by a general assembly of teachers, students and workers, when the students had a majority of ten to one. On the other side, some of his colleagues saw themselves as saving civilisation and had informed the police about the student leaders. He

concluded that LSE could close and it was all very depressing.[155]

The School was now closed for four weeks but its formal reopening did nothing to calm the situation, both because the decisions of the disciplinary hearings had not yet been made, and because it was accompanied by the threat that further direct action would lead to the closure of the School with notification to grant-awarding bodies. In fact, disruption of various kinds continued for the rest of the academic year. However, the closure had led to one result which gave Miliband a little more satisfaction – the creation of 'LSE in exile' in various sites across London. He thus told Liebman:

> [T]he students at the forefront asked me to give two seminars in other places I spoke to them on 'Marxism and Revolution' and continued on the theme of the means of transformation. In particular posing problems rather than trying to resolve them; and analysing the solutions they thought they were able to produce. What was very striking, was first their lack of theoretical formation, and then their thirst to know more. I therefore think that there is a role to play, work to do ... Without being dogmatic, I hope, I believe I can see things to say and repeat, some problems to resolve, or help resolve ... I am speaking under the impact of the very difficult situation in which the students at LSE find themselves, their demoralisation, their defeat even, which is a defeat of all the 'progressives'; and I believe my warnings against all premature 'adventurism' have been confirmed.[156]

The implication was that, when the situation enabled him to act as a 'teacher', he felt he could make a positive contribution. However, this was a rather rare occurrence for it was far more common to remain ineffectively sandwiched between the LSE Establishment on the one side and far left student activists on the other. And this power struggle was now close to resolution in favour of the forces of order. On 18 April it was announced that Blackburn and Bateson would be dismissed without appeal (the case against Harris was heard later and no action was taken against him). This led to further direct action, including an invasion of the Senior Common Room and one Professor having a pitcher of water emptied over his head. Miliband deplored this attack, but supported the protests against the verdicts.[157] Griffith argued that Blackburn was being punished for advocacy rather than action (since he had not been in the building when the iron gates had been removed, although he had subsequently supported it) and that this was contrary to LSE's articles of association. In response to the pressure the School set up an appellate tribunal, but this found that Blackburn's statements were a direct encouragement to further violence which, it was claimed, he saw as a means to reform the School. The dismissal of both lecturers was confirmed. Several students had to appear before the magistrates court and later before the High Court. Four were found guilty; three were suspended from the School for varying periods; and two American students were deported. By now everyone was exhausted and, at the end of the academic year, the 'troubles at LSE' more or

less ground to a halt.

Others gradually resumed a more or less normal routine. But for Miliband the events had been deeply upsetting and had brought about a permanent transformation in his attitude to the School. Just before the start of the next academic year, he thus told Karol:

> I am absolutely fed up with the LSE and would dearly like to move; but as I don't want to leave London, and am not deluged with offers of jobs, I don't see what I can do. But I find it a most unpleasant place to work in (except for the students) and don't know how to solve the problem.[158]

Once the term started, he described a paradoxical situation (to Dorothy Wedderburn, who was in the USA) which, in other circumstances, he might have enjoyed. Having explained that things were very quiet and that the left-wing students were fairly quiescent and uncertain, he continued:

> What I find is there is a vast number of students who are deeply interested in left-wing thought and issues: I have for instance had for two weeks' running something like 250 people at my lectures on Marxism, that course of lectures not being on anybody's syllabus in particular, and I having made the point that it was not addressed to anybody's course requirements in particular. The same course in previous years has not attracted anything like that number, nothing like it. And there are other signs of the same kind.

But this increased interest in Marxism was no longer sufficient to counteract his negative views and he continued:

> … it is difficult to convey the <u>loathing</u> I feel for the place and for most people in it, on account of this business. It's just as well McCarthyism was not historically required in this country. Academics in Britain would not have compared well with the Americans.[159]

His attitude to LSE was never to change. He worked as much as possible at home and would not talk to those who had been on the side of the authorities in the years of conflict. Even long after he had left LSE, his attitude hardly mellowed. For example, when, in 1987, he was asked to write something for a commemorative booklet on LSE for a reunion of those who had been there between 1947 and 1953, he declined:

> The reason for this is that my association with LSE … was totally soured by the conduct of the majority of my colleagues during the 'events' of the late sixties. Promising careers were then blighted by the intolerance, narrow mindedness and sheer nastiness of the 'authorities', backed by the majority of teachers. I cannot divorce this episode from the rest of my association with the School, all the more so

since many of the people who supported – indeed urged – the repressive measures taken against students and teachers are still there.[160]

And in February 1993, after speaking at a centenary celebration event in honour of Laski, he refused to attend the dinner afterwards even though his old friends, John Saville, John Westergaard, John Griffith and Bernard Crick would be there. For he could not enjoy a meal in the company of some of those who had supported the Governors during the 'troubles'.[161] Why was he still so affected by these events after twenty-five years?

Part of the answer certainly lies in the depth of his convictions and principles. As far as he was concerned, staff who could act as police spies on students and support the dismissal of lecturers because of their views, were simply beyond the pale. To speak to them unless it was absolutely necessary, or to honour the institution in which these events had occurred, would be a betrayal of those who had been the victims in 1968-69. It would seem like a collaboration or act of forgiveness which was not merited. It is also true that he was marginalised after the 'troubles', not only within the institution as a whole, but even in his own sphere. For example, although he ran the Masters in Political Sociology, he was not even consulted about an appointment in this area in 1971. His position was therefore extremely difficult. Nevertheless, his response was more emotional than political. Certainly, some of those whom he wished to hurt suffered some embarrassment. Because his own integrity was so obvious, those he now shunned felt awkward and perhaps guilty. But since they were also in the majority and on the winning side, they hardly needed his approval to carry on at LSE in relative contentment. And his withdrawal made it comparatively easy for his opponents to ignore him. Others, like John Griffith, who had been just as actively involved and deeply opposed to the policies of the Director and Governors, were able to adapt to the new situation, and continued to work at the School with a reasonable degree of satisfaction.[162] Had Miliband adopted different tactics he might have been more effective, for in 1969 *The State in Capitalist Society* was published and quickly established his reputation throughout the world. LSE might have found it embarrassing to have denied him a Professorship in these circumstances and, with his London base, he might have attracted students from across the world to study with him, thereby doing something to counteract right-wing dominance in the Department. Of course, this is speculation and the results might have been quite different. However, Miliband was not even prepared to *try* such an approach, for in the academic year 1970-71 he would not apply for a Readership in Political Science at the School:

> ... I refuse to ask for anything at all from people for whom I have unlimited contempt and disgust. To not apply for the post is a little gesture worth making.[163]

But if Miliband's reaction to the victory of the LSE 'Establishment' in 1969 was not necessarily the most effective one, it would be a complete misunderstand-

ing of him to suggest that he could have acted in a calculating pragmatic way to exploit his academic success politically within the institution. The role of LSE in his life does much to explain his emotional response to the situation.

It was, after all, LSE which had transformed him from a seventeen year old refugee into an influential academic. By the mid 1960s his 'world' had become centred on London with the School as his base. No doubt he would have liked more political soul-mates amongst his colleagues and he obviously hoped that Marxist and socialist theories would become accepted within the mainstream curriculum. LSE, in his eyes, was far from perfect but he believed that it bore some resemblance to his ideal: the University as a pluralist academy with a diversity of views being contested in cogent arguments. It was one thing to argue – as he would in *The State in Capitalist Society* – that the existing curriculum and most teachers actually helped legitimise capitalism by promoting views which did not challenge the system in any fundamental sense. It was quite another to view the university as an institution in which policy would ultimately be determined by coercive power and repression. Before the 'troubles', he had certainly not viewed LSE in this way. Subsequently, this was his perception of the institution and the fact that he had qualms about aspects of the student movement only intensified his anger with the university authorities. In his view, instead of attempting to resolve the conflict by making concessions where appropriate and treating the majority of the students as reasonable people, they saw every demand as a threat to the established order and responded with inflexibility or intimidation. And perhaps because he also saw some of the students' demands as unreasonable, he became still more furious about the authorities' response.

Once the student movement had been defeated and the disciplinary action had been taken, all that appeared to remain was a victorious system of hierarchical power, closely allied with the Right. He now despised the victors because their policies during the crisis seemed to negate his assumption about the nature of LSE as an institution: it was not, after all, even an approximation of his pluralist ideal. Miliband was thus unable to adapt to the new situation, not solely because of his principles, but also because his *feelings* of betrayal were too deep. As far as he was concerned, too many of his colleagues had now crossed a line that made normal working relations impossible. Possibly he should have had fewer hopes about a university in a capitalist society. But many of his deepest instincts were as much liberal as Marxist. In any case, he could never forgive LSE for its reaction to the student movement in the late 1960s and his unhappiness there would ultimately lead him away from London.

Notes

[1] He was also worried about how his mother would cope. In fact, she was to show remarkable resilience, selling their leather goods shop within a month and beginning a job in Bedford College library later in the year.

[2] Marion Miliband, *The Observer of the Nineteenth Century, 1791-1901* (Longmans, 1966).

[3] The decline in morale in the VFS is evident from its Annual Report for 1961. Jo Richardson's papers, the Labour History Archive and Study Centre, the John Ryland Library , the University of Manchester.

[4] 'La gauche travailliste de Bevan à Cousins', Brussels, 2 November 1961.

[5] 'Power and Politics': a talk to Hampstead Young Socialists, 15 May 1963; 'The Politics of Neo-Capitalism', Problems of Contemporary Socialism Seminar, LSE, 14 January 1964.

[6] In October 1962 he gave a talk on 'Marxism and Socialism' to the Hampstead Labour Party where he stressed the need to 'build from Marx, not against Marx' and he followed this up in a talk to the students union and research students association at LSE on 26 April 1963 in Margate on 'The Relevance of Marxism Today'.

[7] Letter to Jon Halliday, 7 December 1963.

[8] Talk on 'Power and Politics' to the Ashley Society, Birmingham University, 20 November 1964.

[9] Letters to Saville, 24 and 25 November and 1 December 1964; letter to Charles Feinstein, 15 January 1965.

[10] Speech to a meeting on Vietnam, Hammersmith Town Hall, 15 September 1965.

[11] Letter to Liebman, 25 March 1965.

[12] Letter to Liebman, 26 April 1965.

[13] Letter to Saville, 29 May 1965.

[14] Letter to Saville, 29 October 1966. The next day he told Liebman that the war had haunted him for two years.

[15] *The Socialist Register* 1967

[16] Talk on 'The Transition to Socialism', 9 January 1966. He had been invited to speak in this CP discussion the previous September and had told Saville that he was tempted to agree and would develop the theme that one day there would be a need for a party of the Left, which would include the CP, but would not be the CP. Letter to Saville, 29 September 1965.

[17] Letter to Saville, 16 February 1966.

[18] Spech at the Oxford Union in a debate on the motion 'The Power of the Labour Left has declined, is declining and ought to be extinguished', 28 April 1966.

[19] This is discussed briefly in chapter 7.

[20] Letter to Saville, 16 February 1966.

[21] For a balanced discussion, see Kenny, *The First New Left*, chapter 1.

[22] E.P.Thompson 'The Peculiarities of the English' *The Socialist Register* 1965, 'An Open Letter to Leszek Kolakowski', *The Socialist Register 1973* and 'The Poverty of Theory: or an Orrery of Errors' (1978) in E.P.Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory* (Merlin, 1978). (The first two essays are also in *The Poverty of Theory*). Perry Anderson, 'Socialism and Pseudo-Empricism' *New Left Review* 35, January-February 1966 and *Arguments within English Marxism* (NLB/Verso, 1980).

[23] *NLR* 18. Marion Kozak mentions and quotes Miliband's letter to Perry Anderson in 'How it All Began: A Footnote to History' in *The Socialist Register* 1995. I have drawn extensively on this article here.

[24] Letter to Nairn, 25 March 1963.

[25] Letter to Saville, 2 March 1963.

[26] Letter to Miliband, 4 March 1963.

[27] Memorandum, 3 April 1963 (Miliband papers).

[28] Daly had been a miner in Fife and would subsequently become a member of the National Executive of the National Union of Mineworkers. He had joined Thompson and Saville in their rebellion

within the CP in 1956 and had later formed the Fife Socialist League in 1957, winning a County Council seat in Ballingon the next year. In the 1959 General Election he had stood for West Fife, defeating the Communist candidate and winning 5000 votes.

[29] Letter to Miliband (n.d). April 1963.

[30] Letter to Miliband, 5 October 1963.

[31] Letter to Miliband (n.d.) October 1963.

[32] Letter to Thompson, 29 October 1963.

[33] The Beeching Report in 1962 led to the axing of a third of the country's railway lines.

[34] 'The Peculiarities of the English' in *The Poverty of Theory* p.35.

[35] Ibid., pp. 87-88

[36] Letter to Miliband and Saville, 13 March 1965.

[37] Letter to Saville, 29 May 1965.

[38] 'Firing from the Left'.

[39] Letter to Norman Birnbaum, 9 February 1966 about Anderson's, 'Socialism and Pseudo-Empiricism'.

[40] This was revealed in 'Intellectuals, Hope and Heresy' *Encounter*, October 1971 and 'Intellectuals against Intellect', *Daedalus*, Summer 1972

[41] The conference, which took place in May 1973, was originally to have been called 'What is wrong with the Socialist idea?' but the title was then changed to 'Is there anything wrong with the socialist idea?'. The proceedings were subsequently published in Stuart Hampshire and Leszek Kolakowski, *The Socialist Idea,* Weidenfeld, 1974

[42] Letter to Thompson, 15 June 1973.

[43] Letter to Saville and Miliband, 20 June 1973.

[44] Letter to Saville, 15 July 1975.

[45] Miliband to Saville, 15 May 1963.

[46] Martin Eve (1924-1998). Eve had been a member of the Communist Party and a friend of Thompson's. He had worked for the publishing house, Michael Joseph, and established Merlin Press in the spring of 1956. In the Autumn of that year he was one of the dissidents who left the party and Merlin Press became an important outlet for the independent Left.

[47] p.2

[48] Letter to Saville, 30 May 1963. (Michael Foot had agreed to write an article, but was unable to do so because of a serious car crash).

[49] Letter to Saville, 9 June 1969.

[50] Letter to Saville, 18 June 1969.

[51] 'Thirty years of *The Socialist Register*, p.19.

[52] Letter to Saville, 15 January 1964.

[53] 'How it all Began', p.279.

[54] Both have been leading exponents of left-wing theories of international political economy and development: Wallerstein of world systems theory and Frank of dependency theory.

[55] Daniel Singer (1926-2000), was a close friend of Isaac Deutscher and was also from a Polish-Jewish family. He worked for the *Economist* from 1948, becoming its Paris correspondent from 1958. However, he left this secure position in the aftermath of the events of May-June 1968, which he regarded as a potentially revolutionary mass movement betrayed by the French Communist Party. He subsequently lived as a freelance writer, publishing *Prelude to the Revolution* (1970), *Is Socialism Doomed? The Meaning of Mitterrand* (1988) and *Whose Millenium: Theirs or Yours?* (1999). Harry Magdoff (1913-), a Jewish New Yorker from the Bronx, had worked in War Production Board during the war, becoming the chief economist in the Current Business Analysis Division at the Department of Commerce, and eventually becoming special assistant to Secretary of Commerce, Henry Wallace. In 1948 he had been a victim of the House Un-American Activities Committee, and had been barred from taking up a university appointment. Subsequently he had been forced to take various jobs – sometimes anonymously – in financial services before

joining the staff of a scholarly publishing firm in 1959. He had met Miliband in 1965 and there was an instant personal and political rapport between the two. Miliband immediately invited him to contribute an article for the 1965 edition *Socialist Register*. Since he had not written anything other than reports since the 1930s, Magdoff had been a little startled, but his article 'Problems of US Capitalism' established his reputation, giving him the confidence to write his later major works, including his highly influential book *The Age of Imperialism* (1969). Interview with Harry Magdoff, 23 May 1999.

[56] 'Thirty Years of *The Socialist Register*, p.18.

[57] Leo Panitch is the author numerous works, including *Social Democracy and Industrial Militancy* (1976), *The Canadian State: Political Economy and Political Power* ((1977), *Working Class Politics in Crisis: Essays on Labour and the State* (1986), *The Assault on Trade Union Freedoms: From Wage Controls to Social Contract* (1993), (with Colin Leys), *The End of Parliamentary Socialism: From New Left to New Labour* (1997), (with Greg Abo and David Langille), *A Different Kind of State? Popular Power and Democratic Administration* (1993). Since Miliband's death he has continued (with Colin Leys) to edit *The Socialist Register*.

[58] The notes are undated and Miliband wrote 'undelivered' on them. This may mean that it was not delivered at all, or not in this form. He and Deutscher attended a conference on 'The Identity of the Jewish Intellectual' under the auspices of the British section of the World Jewish Congress in 10 November 1963. As there is no mention of Deutscher in the notes, it is possible that this was his own title for an intervention that he had originally planned to make at that conference. The very limited reference to Israel also suggests that it may have been prepared before the Six Day War. On the other hand it could have been a first draft for a talk that he delivered to the LSE Jewish Society on 3 December 1969. This was entitled 'The Non-Jewish Jew' and was explicitly based on a discussion of Deutscher's influential essay with the same title.

[59] One of his close friends at the time wrote to him from Paris, saying that she wanted to see the article on Palestine as she was subjected to constant Arab propaganda. (Letter from Dickie Caddick, 4 March 1947). The strong implication was that she expected his article to take the contrary viewpoint, which was highly probable given the attitudes of both his family and the European Left at the time.

[60] Marcel Liebman (1929-86), author of *La révolution russe* (1967), *Le Leninisme sous Lenine* (two volumes, 1973), *Connaitre Lenine* (1976), *Né Juif* (1977) and *Les Socialistes Belges, 1885-1914*.

[61] Leopold had ordered the capitulation to Germany in May 1940 without securing the approval of the government. After the Liberation in 1944, the Belgian parliament proclaimed Leopold's brother, Charles, Regent, and subsequently decided in July 1945 to make Leopold's restoration dependent upon a majority vote in parliament. After this had been secured, Leopold appointed a commission of inquiry into his conduct during the war and in 1947 this absolved him from the major charge of collaboration with the Germans. In 1950 in a national referendum 58% of the population (mainly the Flemish) voted for his return, but this led to massive protests that led to his abdication in favour of his son, Baudoin.

[62] Liebman explained his own history in a powerful autobiographical memoir, *Né Juif: Une famille juive pendant la Guerre* (Duclot 1977). The sources for this section were also the transcript for a documentary film' Né Juif ou Le Portrait de Marcel Liebman', eventually shown as 'le Non-Conformiste' on 22 March 1996 on RTBF and a booklet, 'Le Non-Conformiste: Portrait de Marcel Liebman (1929-1986), Théatre le Public, 18 March 1996.

[63] Letter to Miliband, 25 February 1967

[64] Interview with Professor George Ross, 18 May 1999.

[65] Letter to Saville, 25 January 1967.

[66] Letter to Leo Huberman, 28 May 1967.

[67] Letter to Liebman, 28 May 1967.

[68] Letter to Miliband, 30/31 May 1967.

[69] Letter to Liebman, 2 June 1967.

[70] Letter to Miliband, 5 June 1967.

71 He explained his own position in the Arab-Israeli conflict, and his abhorrence at the role of the Belgian Jewish Establishment in relation to Nazism in *Né Juif*. In the 1970s he was to become an unofficial mediator in the Middle East conflict and in the 1980s he was also an active participant in the Union des Progressistes Juifs de Belgique.

72 Letter to Liebman, 20 February 1969.

73 Letters to Saville, 11 September 1969 and to Mervyn Jones, 20 January 1970.

74 Letter to Saville, 9 February 1970.

75 Mervyn Jones, 'Israel, Palestine and Socialism'; Marcel Liebman, 'Israel, Palestine and Zionism'.

76 Letter to K.S.Karol, 5 June 1967.

77 In November 1993 he did, however, write to Edward Said to support his opposition to the Oslo Peace Accord on the grounds that the deal was far too favourable to the Israelis. Letter to Said, 17 November 1993.

78 Ronald Fraser, *1968 – A Student Generation in Revolt* (Chatto and Windus, 1988), p.181

79 He disagreed with all the Trotskyist and Maoist groups about the possibility or desirability of insurrection as a means of revolutionary change in advanced capitalist societies, and he differed from the International Socialists (IS), which later became the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), on their interpretation of the Soviet bloc countries as 'state capitalist'.

80 Herbert Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man* (Beacon Press, 1964).

81 Letter to Mr Truman, 2 May 1968.

82 Letter to Karol, 18 May 1968.

83 Letter to Karol, 21 June 1968.

84 Letter to Karol, 18 May 1968. Daniel Cohn-Bendit (1945-) was the most prominent leader of the student movement and the PCF sometimes exploited anti-German prejudices in the attempt to discredit him. He gave his own account in Daniel Cohn-Bendit, *Obsolete Communism: The Left-Wing Alternative* (Penguin 1969).

85 Paul Sweezy (1910-) was one of the founding editors of *Monthly Review*, the American independent Marxist journal which never supported the Communist Party; Régis Debray (1941-) had been a supporter of the Cuban revolution since first going there in 1961 and became a Professor of Philosophy at the University of Havana in 1966. In January 1967 he published *Revolution in the Revolution?* and in April he was arrested in Bolivia and charged with aiding guerilla insurrectionists (led by Che Guevara) for which he was imprisoned. His book celebrated Guevara's approach and appeared to offer a distinct Latin American model for revolution; Franz Fanon (1925-61) was a francophone African revolutionary whose most famous work was *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) which disputed traditional Marxist theory by arguing that the racism of imperialism and colonialism could not be explained sufficiently in terms of the economic system and class relations.

86 Letter to Liebman, 24 November 1967.

87 He gave his own account of the Congress and a cautiously optimistic assessment of the Cuban revolution to a meeting of the LSE and School of Oriental African Studies Racial Student Alliance on 15 March 1968.

88 Helen Yglesias *The Nation* 19 February 1968.

89 Letter to Ernest Gellner, 2 May 1968. Ernest Gellner (1925-1995), philosopher, anthropologist, and sociologist, was a colleague at LSE for whom Miliband had great respect, although their political positions were always quite different.

90 He tells the full story in a vivid autobiography of the period , entitled *Solik* (Pluto, 1986). His other books include *China: The Other Revolution, Visa for Poland, The Second Chinese Revolution*, and *Guerillas in Power* .

91 Interview with K.S.Karol, 29 June 1998.

92 In 1969 she and her associates launched *Il Manifetso*. This supported grassroots social and economic organisations, sought an alliance with students and called on the party to introduce greater internal democracy. The editors were charged with factionalism and told to close the review. Their refusal to do so led to their expulsion at the end of the year.

[93] Letters to Miliband, 11 and 24 April 1968.

[94] Letter to Karol, 19 April 1968; letter to André Gorz, 21 April 1968.

[95] Letter to Harry Magdoff, 22 May 1968.

[96] Letter to Liebman, 21 June 1968.

[97] Letter to Karol, 26 June 1968.

[98] Letter to Miliband, 30 June 1968,

[99] Rossana Rossanda believed that both the PCF and PCI were completely divorced from the student movement and that the whole notion of a Leninist party was no longer relevant. Letter to Miliband, 17 August 1968.

[100] Letter to Liebman, 1 September 1968.

[101] Letter to Liebman, 2 September 1968.

[102] Letter to Liebman, 11 September 1968.

[103] Letter to Liebman 2 September 1968.

[104] Letter to Liebman, 11 September 1968.

[105] Ibid. (Blanquism – from the ideas of Louis Auguste Blanqui, 1805-1881 – was known as a left-wing form of a conspiratorial *coup d'etat*).

[106] Letter to Liebman, 19 May 1969.

[107] Letter to Monty Johnstone, 23 May 1969.

[108] Letter to Gellner, 5 October 1968. This was in the context of criticising the manuscript of Gellner's critical essay on the student movement, 'The Panther and the Dover: Reflections on Rebelliousness and its Milieux' in David Martin (ed.) *Anarchy and Culture, The Problem of the Contemporary University* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969).

[109] Letter to Karol and Rossana Rossanda, 16 November 1968.

[110] Letter to Liebman, 19 November 1968.

[111] Letter to Liebman, 15 December 1968.

[112] Letter to Saville, 31 December 1968.

[113] Letter to Liebman, 2 September 1968.

[114] Letter to Saville, 22 October 1968.

[115] Letter to Liebman, 19 November 1968.

[116] Reference by Michael Oakeshott to Appointments Committee, 18 March 1964, Ralph Miliband's Personal File, LSE.

[117] Interview with Marnie Samuelson Crawford, 20 May 1999.

[118] Interview with Ann Marcus, 25 May 1999.

[119] Letter from Gail Sheridan, 22 April 1999.

[120] Recollection of Professor John Callaghan, 23 August 1999.

[121] Letter from Professor Winton Higgins, 1 March 1999.

[122] Minutes of Appointments Committee of 18 March 1964, Ralph Miliband's Personal File, LSE. (H.R.G. [Richard] Greaves was a Political Theorist in the Government Department from 1930-75 and was the author of *Democratic Participation and Public Enterprise* [1964]).

[123] These included Richard Greaves, Dick Pear, Peter Self, Bernard Crick and William Pickles. Interview with Professor Bernard Crick, 15 April 1999.

[124] Letter to John Rex, 2 October 1965.

[125] Dahrendorf, *History of the London School of Economics*, pp.446-7

[126] *LSE's New Director: A Report on Walter Adams*, Agitator Pamphlet, 1966, quoted in ibid., p.448.

[127] Letter to Saville, 3 October 1966.

[128] Letter to Liebman, 30 October 1966.

[129] Quoted in Dahrendorf, *History of the London School of Economics*, p.451.

[130] Letters to Liebman, 25 November and 5 December 1966, and to George Ross, 9 January 1967.

[131] Harry Kidd, *The Trouble at LSE 1966-67* (OUP, 1969), p.53, quoted in Dahrendorf, *History of the London School of Economics*, p.453.

[132] J.A.G.Griffith (1918-), author of the classic text *The Politics of the Judiciary* (first published in 1977) , was to become a close personal friend of Miliband's as a result of the 'troubles' at LSE.

He was Professor of English Law from 1959 and became Professor of Public Law in 1970. From 1956 until 1981 he was also editor of *Public Law*. He was also to be the President and most active member of the Council of Academic Freedom and Democracy, founded in 1970.

[133] Letter to Liebman, 22 February 1967.

[134] *Link*, New Delhi, 26 March 1967.

[135] Letter to Robert Looker, 2 April 1967.

[136] Letter to Karol, 27 March 1967.

[137] Letter to Robert Looker, 2 April 1967.

[138] Letter to Liebman, 14 April 1967.

[139] Ibid.

[140] Letters to Liebman 28 April 1967 and to Saville, 29 April 1967.

[141] It argued that the systematic channels for a two-way flow of information between students and other members of the School were inadequate and suggested from four to eight student members on the Court (which had a membership of 60-100), three student members of the Council, and five students on the fifty strong Senate, elected by secret ballot and single transferable vote, and present for non-reserved subjects only.

[142] They argued that a university's constitution should, wherever possible, provide for self-government by its students and teachers – the academic community. They contended that the proposed senate would weaken the academic board, encourage oligarchy and reduce debate by staff on academic policy before decisions were reached. They supported stronger representation for students, but argued that on some occasions, staff and students represented separate constituencies and that this fact ought to be recognised, possibly by requiring the director's committee to hold regular meetings with the students' council. *The Times*, 20 February 1968.

[143] The Standing Committee of the Court also adopted the practice of regular meetings with student Governors.

[144] Ronald Fraser, *1968 – A Student Generation in Revolt*, p.249.

[145] David Caute, *Sixty-Eight – The Year of the Barricades*, (Hamish Hamilton, 1988), p.321.

[146] Ibid., p.322.

[147] Dahrendorf, *History of the London School of Economics*, p.461.

[148] Letter to Daniel Singer, 9 October 1968. There was in fact a Maoist faction, the British Vietnam Solidarity Front, which denounced Tariq Ali and led a breakaway march on 27 October.

[149] Letter to Gellner, n.d.[??] October 1968.

[150] Letter to Karol, 2 December 1968.

[151] He returned two days later, failed to meet most of the demands, was shouted down and left. Caute, *Sixty-Eight*, p.324.

[152] Hansard Volume 776, 1968-68, quoted in Dahrendorf, *History of the London School of Economics*, p.468; Caute, Sixty-Eight, p.325. Whitehall files released on 30 May 2000 reveal that a secret intelligence report, drawn up by the Foreign Office information research department , was submitted to the Cabinet's "anti-communism (home) official working group. This identified an influence from the American New Left in British student protesters saying many of them enjoyed "dollar remittances from home which makes them relatively prosperous in countries with devalued currencies". *The Guardian*, 31 May 2000.

[153] Letter to Saville, 2 February 1969.

[154] Letter to Liebman, 22 February 1969. (Westergaard, who later became Professor of Sociology at Sheffield University, was the author of the classic work, *Class in a Capitalist Society: A Study of Contemporary Britain* [1975]). The Academic Board also rejected by 71 votes to 34 a motion proposed by Griffith and Miliband, expressing dismay 'at the threats made by the school authorities of further closure, loss of grants, and ineligibility to sit exams.' *The Guardian*, 27 February 1969.

[155] Letter to Liebman, 22 February 1969.

[156] Letter to Liebman, 17 March 1969.

[157] Letter to Liebman, 29 April 1969.

[158] Letter to Karol, 11 September 1969.

[159] Letter to Dorothy Wedderburn, 14 October 1969.

[160] Letter to Deborah Manley, 10 March 1987.

[161] Letter to John Griffith, 12 February 1993.

[162] Interview with John Griffith, 15 April 1999. Another, younger person, who had been a close ally who continued to work at LSE was Meghnad (now Lord) Desai.

[163] Letter to Liebman, 14 December 1970.

Chapter Five: Free Speech and Academic Freedom

One of the most important indirect consequences of the 'troubles' at LSE was the formation of the Council of Academic Freedom and Democracy (CAFD). The dismissal of the two lecturers, Robin Blackburn and Nick Bateson, over the iron gates affair was one of the important catalysts for this development, and another was the non-appointment of Dick Atkinson to a post at Birmingham University, following the discovery that he had been a student activist at LSE.[1] This demonstrated that the problems were not confined to LSE, and suggested that discrimination in the appointment, promotion and dismissal of academic staff for political reasons might be widespread. In July 1970 Griffith and Miliband approached Tony Smythe, then the General Secretary of the National Council of Civil Liberties (NCCL) about the possibility of establishing a specifically academic branch within NCCL, and invited him to a meeting of a preparatory committee. By October matters had advanced and a first meeting of the proposed Council was held at Imperial College. It had now moved beyond LSE and the meeting was jointly chaired by John Saville and Peter Worsley, and included a guest speaker from the US to talk about 'The American Campaign for Academic Freedom'. This was followed by a committee meeting at which John Griffith was elected Chair, with David Page and Peter Worsley as Vice-Chairs.[2] Miliband was a member of the executive committee, and the promotion of membership sub-committee. Christine Jackson, who also worked for NCCL, became Secretary of CAFD.

Miliband was deeply committed to the work of CAFD, attending almost all the committee meetings until he moved to Leeds in Autumn 1972 (and continuing to attend regularly even after the move), and he frequently discussed policy issues with other members of the executive committee. One major activity of the organisation was to carry out unofficial, quasi-judicial inquiries into alleged cases of malpractice at individual institutions, and he did not participate in any of these. Because of his legal expertise, a disproportionate amount of this work fell on Griffith himself, but John Saville was also very actively involved. Miliband, who was interested in the wider political context, wanted to push the organisation beyond such inquiries and probably initiated a discussion at the Executive Committee in February 1972, which was recorded in the minutes as follows:

> It was generally agreed that CAFD was well established as a case-work organisation. But many felt that CAFD had not made its presence felt in other ways, and in particular had failed to show why academic freedom is relevant to more than academics. We have not defined the principles from which CAFD proceeds, or our

position on many issues.[3]

It was agreed that all members of the Committee should prepare papers on the future role of CAFD. Peter Worsley was sceptical about the possibilities, arguing that currently 60 per cent of the work was done by Griffith, 10 to15 per cent by himself and Miliband, and the rest by everybody else, and that it was therefore necessary to be realistic.[4] However, there was a general feeling that something further should be done and at the March 1972 Executive Committee meeting it was agreed that John Griffith, David Page and John Westergaard should prepare the framework of a paper that would incorporate the major issues with a view to publication as a discussion document, rather than a policy statement. [5] While this group was deliberating Miliband drafted a memo on 'NCCL – Possible Areas of Further Activity' which indicated his general approach to the issues:

> 1. I think that the NCCL badly needs to 'theorise' the work it is doing. By this I mean that it should turn civil liberties into one of the basic items of left-wing thought, not simply as a good thing (at least under liberal-bourgeois democracy) but as a fundamental issue in any kind of system, which raises many problems, theoretical and practical, that badly need to be discussed. Of course, civil liberties have to be fought for, on a continuing basis, but they also have to be <u>thought</u> about …
> 2. This relates to a second and delicate issue, which is bound to affect the whole perspective of NCCL work, namely ideological and political orientations. At present, NCCL is a fairly ambiguous body, more or less on the left but not of the left, 'all-party' etc, working against but involved with the authorities, police, Home Office, judicial bodies and so on. It may well have to continue in that role [but] this ought not, in my view, to prevent it from engaging in a much more systematic challenge to the <u>system </u>than it has done hitherto. I am aware of the danger of isola-tion and consequential 'ineffectiveness'. But isolation from what? Presumably the Establishment. For there is no reason why NCCL should be isolated from large and growing numbers of radical people, young and old, women, blacks, in short the subordinate orders, who are or ought to be part of what I will … call 'the Labour movement'. I think that NCCL ought to plug in much more than it has done to the 'Labour movement'. [6]

This is important in indicating Miliband's view that civil liberties issues were an integral part of a socialist agenda, but that the NCCL ought to be far more open in aligning itself with the Left. His perspective on CAFD was similar.

By July Westergaard had produced a draft on 'Academic Freedom and Democ-racy' and comments were to be submitted to him by 2 October.[7] Miliband had not been a member of the drafting committee but the pamphlet, which was pub-lished in late 1972 as *The Case for Academic Freedom and Democracy – CAFD*, carried his name as one of the authors, along with John Griffith, David Page and John Westergaard. [8] It is probable that the comments that he submitted to Westergaard were so extensive that he effectively became an author. Certainly,

the views expressed were very close to his own and even much of the phraseology bore his imprint.

The booklet explained that, when CAFD had been founded, it had not seemed necessary to provide a precise statement of objectives and principles, and that the current document was not intended in itself to do so, but to provide a contribution to a discussion which must come before such a statement. It dealt with the governance of academic institutions, and the role of education within society, taking an explicitly left-wing position on both issues. Its positions on the conservative power of current academic hierarchies and the structural inequalities of educational provision were important, but the most contentious issues concerned the narrower questions of academic freedom and free speech. Here again, the whole perspective was left-wing, with the argument that free speech was resisted by those who had a vested interest in the preservation of the status quo. They were threatened, it argued, because the point of freedom of speech and enquiry was precisely to deprive established social arrangements and habits of thought of the sanctity that these would otherwise enjoy merely by virtue of their existence. Academic institutions were special in the sense that they must be critical – committed to re-examining accepted knowledge, assumptions and practices, nursing scepticism and applying it to established beliefs and the present order of things. Education and research must be intellectually and socially dangerous.

The authors then approached the difficult issues:

> There are no simple rules for the definition of academic freedom in practice; no neat, cut and dried formulae for its assertion. It is easy enough – and important – to say that teachers and research workers should be appointed, promoted and dismissed by criteria relating only to their competence in teaching and research. It is even relatively straightforward, though it may be painful, to dispose of the counter-question often directed at CAFD by critics from quite diverse positions: 'would you then appoint/promote/keep in post a teacher who preaches racism/ fascism ...?' (It is not a sufficient answer, however tempting, to invoke the point that academic freedom confers no licence for unreason. That point is directed against anti-intellectual ranting of any political shade or none, and cannot be used to discriminate against racists and Fascists solely because of their convictions. The charge of 'unreason' is in any case one to be used sparingly, if at all: a potentially dangerous instrument of intellectual persecution). The answer must be two-fold. First, the expression of racist or Fascist views provides no proper grounds in itself for discrimination in respect of academic appointments, as circumstances are here and now. The second part of the answer is more important, and must be explicitly political. That is that the initial question is itself for all practical purposes a red herring. The threat to academic freedom, here and now, is a threat directed against the left, not the right. The point is not that CAFD should ignore cases of discrimination against the right; but that they are much less likely to occur, and do not represent a cumulative threat to the essential critical functions of educa-

tion and research. The pressures to conformity squeeze out Marxists, socialists, anarchists and radical liberals. The defence of academic freedom is, and must be in our society today, essentially a defence of the left. To pretend otherwise is to set up a smokescreen.[9]

This was a neat, and no doubt sincere, attempt to side-step the problems, but it was not adequate and CAFD was soon to face a series of serious challenges on the question, on which Miliband normally took the minority position.

He was quite adamant, as was the Committee as a whole, that it was illegitimate of LSE students to assault Hans Eysenck to prevent him from speaking in May 1973, despite their abhorrence of his views on IQ.[10] Under any criteria, either substantive or tactical, assault was unacceptable. He also took a more lenient view than some other CAFD members of some students at York who were sent down for anti-Semitism. He agreed that there could be 'no definition of academic freedom that guaranteed the right of antiSemites to bait Jews', but:

> The point … is that students who did engage in 'Jew-baiting' were sent down by the University as a first penalty, i.e. without any warning that the repetition of such conduct would result in penalties. Had this been done, and the offence repeated, I should have had no difficulty at all. Sending down students for any such offence, without prior warning, seems to me arbitrary and abusive. It is a matter of procedure and has nothing to do with 'guaranteeing the right of anti-Semites to bait Jews'.[11]

A third case was much closer to home since it concerned Leeds University.

Professor William Shockley was a Nobel prizewinner and currently holder of a Chair of Engineering Science at Stanford University. His main claim to eminence was that he was the inventor of the transistor and Leeds had decided to offer him an Honorary Degree for this work. However, those who had made this recommendation had not been aware that Shockley was now an adherent of eugenics who had recently advocated subsidised sterilisation of those with below average IQ.[12] When this was brought to the attention of Lord Boyle, the Vice-Chancellor, he visited Shockley at the Carlton Club in London to tell him that Leeds University would be unhappy to be associated with his views. This was an attempt to persuade him to forego the award but Shockley recorded their interview and then complained publicly about Boyle's meeting with him, which he represented as an attempt to stifle academic freedom. The Honorary Degrees Committee now withdrew the award, and Boyle informed the University of Leeds Senate that this was justified, as it was not interfering in Shockley's freedom to teach and research either in his own field of interest or others. However:

> In conferring an honorary degree, the University was bestowing a personal mark of honour and regard to be taken of the whole man, as well as of his work. In that respect, the proposals which a person might make and the causes with which is

identified could be relevant.[13]

The Senate supported Boyle.

Miliband had originally thought that, while Leeds had been exceptionally stupid in making the offer, the withdrawal of the degree was an attack on academic freedom, but by May he had reached the same conclusions as Boyle. However, by now there had been attacks on CAFD for being selective in its interpretation of threats to freedom and Michael Egan, one of its members, submitted a report, suggesting that these recent cases had shown the inadequacy of the CAFD pamphlet published the previous year. Miliband did not believe that CAFD should do anything in the Shockley case, but felt that it should have explained why it was taking this position. However, on the more general issue, he thought that they did have a problem:

> Some people, of whom I am not one, take the view that freedom of speech etc. is absolute, and that under no circumstances should anybody be prevented from expressing his opinions, on a university platform in particular. It is most unlikely that we shall be able, as an Executive, to come to an agreed view on this, and to formulate rules which satisfactorily cover all cases, right, left and centre. In fact, the chances are that any attempt to formulate such rules will cause increased and possibly crippling divisions amongst us. This is why I am all for not making any such attempt, and to stick to our original purpose, i.e. to see to it that University authorities and other authorities in the tertiary sector should not be allowed to get away with arbitrary conduct, against teachers and also against students; and to push for the democratisation of the system. This goes for the Right as well as the Left. i.e. had Shockley been a teacher at Leeds, and threatened with dismissal for his views, we should have needed to defend him.[14]

He wrote this just as the most notorious case of all was about to occur, in which his own role was to cause controversy within CAFD: the 'Huntington affair' at Sussex University.

Samuel P. Huntington was a Professor of Government at Harvard University and was currently a visiting fellow at All Souls College, Oxford. He had originally been invited to speak at the University on 28 May by the School of American studies on 'The role of the military in American government policies', but the visit was then re-scheduled so that this lecture would take place on 5 June followed by two seminars at the Institute of Development Studies the next day on US policy towards developing societies. However, as soon the invitation became public knowledge, the Sussex Indochina Solidarity Committee (SISC) began to mobilise a campaign against it.

The opposition to Huntington emanated from his role in US policy in the Vietnam War. At one time he had been a consultant to the office of the Secretary of Defense, the department of state and the Agency for International Develop-

ment. After a visit to Vietnam in 1967 he had submitted a classified document to the US State Department and had then published a condensation of this in an article entitled 'The Bases of Accommodation' in *Foreign Affairs* July 1968.[15] All this might have passed unnoticed, but Noam Chomsky had then condemned the article in his book, *American Power and the New Mandarins*.[16] The essence of the case against Huntington was that he had taken issue with the argument that wars against national liberation movements could not be won by bombing. A euphemism for bombing was 'the direct application of mechanical and conventional power' and Huntington argued that if this took place:

> ... on such a massive scale as to produce a massive migration from countryside to city, the basic assumptions underlying the Maoist doctrine of revolutionary war no longer operate.[17]

In a further example of Orwellian language he argued that the way to win a war against a rural revolutionary movement was by 'forced draft urbanization and modernization'.[18] Chomsky's interpretation of this was that Huntington was advocating saturation bombing which was a war crime under Nuremberg principles.[19] Huntington had therefore become a notorious figure amongst opponents of American action in Indochina despite his protestations that he was writing as a social science theorist rather than a policy advocate.

Although the SISC had only about fifty paid up members before the campaign, they included members of staff and postgraduate students. On 15 May they sent a letter to the Vice Chancellor, Asa Briggs, asking him to withdraw the invitation and they secured the support of a Professor of Philosophy in the University, Roy Edgley. At an inquorate Student Union meeting, 200 students voted for the withdrawal of the invitation, but Dr Rupert Wilkinson, the lecturer who had originally issued the invitation, was a defender of absolute freedom of speech, and refused to budge. The American Studies subject group was divided with six supporting the invitation and three wanting it rescinded, and this majority view was backed by the Sussex branch of the AUT. The students were also divided, but it is probable that those who wanted to disrupt the lecture were always in a minority.[20] On the other hand the minority felt extremely strongly about the issue. The President of the Student Union tried to find a way out of total confrontation by phoning Huntington to suggest that, if he would discuss his Vietnam role before his lecture, the union and the SISC would drop its objections and the scheduled talk could proceed, and Wilkinson approached him with a similar request. But Huntington was only prepared to do this with a small group of about ten, as anything larger "would simply become a slanging match". [21] With a week to go, the SISC mobilised about 500 supporters to block the meeting, at which point the University authorities alerted the police and arranged a last minute switch of time and place. But this stratagem failed and when Huntington arrived to

give his lecture, the hall was crammed full with about 500 people, and another 150 barring the way outside. The attempt to lecture was abandoned but the only show of violence was when a bag of flour was thrown at Wilkinson in mistake for Huntington.[22]

The press coverage of the incident was overwhelmingly hostile to those who had prevented Huntington from speaking. While it was predictable that the right-wing papers would take this stance, it was notable that *The Guardian* was equally condemnatory. Its editorial on the day that the lecture was planned (5 June) was headed 'Closed minds at Sussex' and when seventeen Sussex academics wrote to the paper the next week to say that they had been prepared to express opposition during Huntington's visit and believed that the invitation should have been withdrawn, it carried another editorial under the heading 'Dons against free speech':

> If in face of such threats university authorities and academic staffs generally decide to do nothing, they should not be surprised when Parliament and the public begin to believe that 'academic freedom' is a term which has lost its meaning. If the universities cease to defend it, will anyone else? It must not be allowed to die by default.[23]

It was also evident that such incidents were providing ammunition for a general attack on the denial of free speech at universities, and on 20 June 1973 the two 'victims' – Eysenck and Huntington – spoke at a Foyle's literary lunch on the subject.

In these circumstances, it was essential for CAFD to make some kind of statement and on 22 June Rodney Hilton, who was currently the Chair, wrote to the *Times Higher Education Supplement* (*THES*) with a judicious letter:

> Because CAFD stands for academic freedom we believe in the unhindered confrontation of ideas. We therefore condemn the exclusion of some speakers from the campuses through the exercise of violence by their opponents. We also condemn the much more drastic exclusion of ideas which is effected by university and college authorities when they manipulate, for political purposes, their procedures for appointment, probation and promotion.
> Because CAFD stands for the democratic management of institutions of higher education we believe that all members of these institutions, including students, should have a say in the university's or college's choice of persons on whom it is proposed to confer prestige as lecturers or honorary graduands.[24]

However, this careful compromise between condemnation of the students and the university authorities was immediately contradicted by a letter to *THES* on the same day by Miliband. He began:

> As one of the founders of the Council for Academic Freedom and Democracy and

as a present member of its executive council, I hope you will allow me to explain why I support the students at Sussex in the Huntington affair, without any sense of hypocrisy or inconsistency.

Having explained the implications of Huntington's now notorious article in *Foreign Affairs*, he concluded:

> If Professor Huntington had been a teacher at, say, Sussex, and if he had been threatened with dismissal or anything of the kind, I would have felt, however reluctantly ... that CAFD must defend him. But this is not the case. The case is that a large number of students at Sussex have marked their abhorrence of Professor Huntington's advancement of a policy whose implementation required mass bombing in Vietnam by preventing him from fulfilling an engagement as an invited speaker at Sussex ...
> I am well aware that there are dangers in this, but I also believe that the balance in this instance is very much on the students' side, and that their action does not deserve the condemnation of people who believe in academic freedom.

Apart from the controversial nature of these views, Miliband's intervention was hardly welcome to his colleagues in CAFD. A few weeks later John Griffith wrote to him:

> I did not agree with your letter to *THES* about Sussex, neither in its substance nor in its tactics. At the CAFD committee, some argued again about it all. On the <u>substance</u> of the matter, it seems to me to be necessary always to turn the question around. If the people at Sussex were right, as you say to prevent Huntington from speaking, then what do we do, where do we stand, when the right-wing prevent someone comparable on the left from speaking? If we say they should not, then we adopt a straight party political position which says that freedom of speech is a good thing for those who say what we don't disapprove of but a bad thing for those who say what we do disapprove of. This is obviously a tenable political position though not one I support in Britain in 1973. And has nothing to do with freedom.
> This argument must be kept clear of another which says that freedom of speech is not always the overriding criterion. I agree that it is not and that there could be occasions when I would seek to prevent someone from speaking. Now it is <u>possible</u> that the difference between us lies here. For in my scale of values, the circumstances at Sussex do not begin to approach the category of occasions when preventing a man from speaking would be justifiable. (That category for me would cover occasions where x was making or was known to intend making or was reasonably anticipated as likely to make, for example, an inflammatory racist speech ... So the difference between us needs to be clarified ...)
> On <u>tactics</u> I think we should not allow ourselves to be trapped into statements which can then be used by (often) deliberate perversion, against us ...[25]

Miliband replied immediately to say that Griffith's position in relation to Sussex

struck him as untenable. Before writing the letter to the *THES* he had, he said, had an argument with Mervyn Jones who would have allowed Chemistry students to invite Eichmann (had he lived) to discuss the composition of gas at Auschwitz. This struck Miliband as an absurd position, but a consistent one. In this case, the principle of freedom of speech was regarded as absolute. But Griffith did not take this position and Miliband thus told him:

> You want it both ways, or rather you invoke something approaching the doctrine of clear and present danger in circumstances which do not warrant it … This is not nearly good enough … To take the substantive grounds first: what do you mean 'inflammatory?' Some people think that Eysenck is 'inflammatory': and I find it difficult to say he is not. Or do you mean inflammatory in a particular place or a particular set of circumstances? And who is to judge? By what criteria? And why only 'racist'? What about any kind of 'incitement' to things you don't like? If you invoke the doctrine of clear and present danger (the most obvious and simplest example being that freedom of speech does not include the right to shout 'Fire' in a crowded theatre), then your inflammatory racist business is much too broad. You will have to be much more specific than that. If you insist that you want to cover broader circumstances, i.e. that you are not an absolute or near enough absolute advocate of freedom of speech, you come on to my side and we argue cases. As for cases, and still on substantive grounds, no one has denied that Huntington's advocacy entailed the mass bombing of civilians. i.e. as far as I am concerned, he is outside the pale, my pale (why is 'racism' such a privileged crime – what about mass murder which is not specifically 'racist'?) and the reason for preventing him from speaking is simply to make the point that he is near enough to being a war criminal, or an accomplice of such. 'Arguing' with him is not the point. I don't want to argue with Huntington.

Miliband accepted that there were dangers in this position:

> One of the dangers is the tactic alone. You ask … if the people at Sussex were right, 'then what do we do, where do we stand, when the right wing prevent someone comparable on the left from speaking?' I have no problem in the matter. Thus, if IS [International Socialists], never mind the right wing, organised, say, a demonstration to prevent a Soviet professor who had advocated the invasion of Czechoslovakia from speaking (a much lesser crime than Vietnam, incidentally) I wouldn't mind, indeed, I would approve. i.e. if people on the left choose to advocate what I think are criminal policies, and if enough people think likewise, and choose to act on this, it's ok by me. But I choose my cases, and with the full consciousness that freedom of speech is not a 'mere' bourgeois invention, etc. But unless you take the absolutist position, or believe that the universities are privileged places of a very special kind, I think you are on much shakier ground.[26]

John Griffith found this unsatisfactory and wrote to him again a few days later:

On Huntington. You say my position is untenable. But it is the same as yours. We both believe in the value of freedom of speech. We both believe it is not an absolute value. You believe that Huntington was rightly prevented from speaking because, in the circumstances, he was the sort of person, having the sort of views, who ought to be thus restrained. I do not believe he comes within a mile of being such a person. That is the difference between us. You are far more ready than I am to prevent people from speaking. Suppose a Black Panther had, in an article, advanced the view that in certain circumstances whites should be killed. And he was invited to LSE by some society to speak. And the National Front prevented him from speaking. In my view, you could not in this case consistently complain of interference with freedom of speech, in view of your opinion on Huntington.

Does your discrediting yourself from complaint in this latter case matter? I think it does because we, being in the position of protesting about oppressive acts done in society's name, must insist on the importance of free comment. Take this away from us and we lose two things: the <u>tactic</u> of criticism and the <u>claim</u> that free speech, in all save a small number of cases, is a good in itself, a value we believe in preserving. [27]

Miliband does not appear to have replied to this letter, perhaps because he was now given an opportunity to put his views at greater length, when invited to contribute to a book on the Huntington affair. The volume was never published because it was withdrawn at a very late stage for fear of libel action.[28] However, Miliband had already written his contribution by then. Entitled 'Concerning Academic Disruption', it has never been published in full, although an edited version appeared in the THES on 10 May 1974.

The essay began by acknowledging the strength of the absolute case – that no disruption in any circumstances is justified if someone is speaking at a university. However, he immediately rejected this in relation to visitors while accepting its essence in relation to teachers actually working in a particular institution:

The distinction I am making rests on what I conceive to be a basic difference between academic freedom on the one hand and freedom of speech on the other. The two ideas tend to be treated as if they were synonymous. But they are not. Academic freedom requires freedom of speech. But the denial of freedom of speech to someone who does not teach in the particular institution concerned, whether that denial is justified or not, cannot be described as a denial of academic freedom. By preventing a visiting academic or politician from giving a lecture or taking a seminar at a university, one is undoubtedly denying him freedom of speech, and this may or may not be reprehensible. But one is not denying him academic freedom. This is so because academic freedom … is something which applies to teachers in any given institution …; and it means first and foremost the right of a teacher to lecture, argue, comment, debate and publish, without having to fear dismissal from his institution, or the eventual termination of his appointment <u>because of his exercise of that right.</u>

This, he explained, also applied to appointments and promotion, and it stemmed from the need for such protection so as to advance education and knowledge, which also meant safeguarding the expression of mutually intolerable opinions, particularly in relation to the authorities within institutions.[29]

Having endorsed the absolute position for normal situations, he expressed doubts as to whether it was similarly applicable in abnormal circumstances: for example, in the recent situation in Chile where the government of the Left was fighting for its life in conditions of acute class war in the months preceding the military coup:

> The university is not, in any circumstances, a 'neutral' institution: that it is such an institution is a liberal illusion or a conservative deception. But there are degrees: the class struggle is not always, and indeed is not usually, waged at this pitch of intensity, with all guns blazing. When it is, when society is transformed into a fiercely active battlefield, with the university as, inevitably, one of its fronts, it is unlikely that the kind of academic freedom that I have been describing here can be preserved; and it may be that it should not be.
>
> The point is deliberately made in this tentative way because it amounts to a dangerous concession ... [R]evolutionary necessity has been invoked and exploited, decade after decade, by 'socialist' regimes for the purpose of suppressing anything resembling academic freedom, alongside other civic freedoms ... [A]cademic freedom should ... be seen as an essential element of socialist democracy. This does not prevent me from accepting the idea that revolutionary necessity, in moments of great and urgent crisis, may have to be invoked for the curtailment of academic freedom. But neither does this prevent me from seeking [saying?] that such curtailment constitutes a dangerous and ugly business, a grave and painful departure from what ought to be taken as an essential ingredient of civic life in general, and educational and intellectual life in particular.

If he thus took academic freedom as absolute, with this single tentative qualification, what about the situation in relation to visiting speakers? Some people, he explained, tried to differentiate their attitudes to disruption in terms of their scale of abhorrence: thus the expression of abhorrent views was less bad than the advocacy of abhorrent actions which was less bad than participation in such actions. But, he argued, scales of abhorrence are:

> ... relevant in so far as a judgment based on one such scale or other has to be part of a decision whether to act in a particular way or not. They are not relevant, and may be an encumbrance, in so far as they cannot, or at least for serious people on the left should not, form the decisive consideration. The decisive consideration has to be a political one, namely the degree to which the action is likely to further what should be its paramount purpose, which is political education.

He argued against alternative justifications. There were, he claimed, serious

objections to moralistic arguments, for example, that the views of the speaker were 'outrageous'. This raised problems about scales of abhorrence, which involved a high degree of subjectivity; led to difficulties in answering the question 'where do you stop?'; provoked the objection that an outrageous opinion could only be answered by a counter-argument or that moral outrage can be expressed in ways other than by disruption. He also thought it fallacious to justify disruption (as had the Sussex Indochina Solidarity Committee) by arguing that allowing certain people to speak in a university was to 'legitimate' their opinions. He suggested that the advantages of seeing political education as the main purpose were as follows. First, it made it possible to select cases 'based not upon a self-indulgent and often petulant sense of outrage ... but upon a sober assessment of whether the action is likely to reach the end in view'. Secondly, it meant that an assessment could be made as to whether in particular circumstances an alternative form of action would be more suitable: for example, a demand that such speakers should agree to put aside a period of time in which their views on the subject in the controversy should be discussed. The presumption should generally be against disruptive action:

> Disruption is an action of last resort in the university, not to be undertaken lightly and without due regard for legitimate academic susceptibilities against the prevention of free speech and the disruption of academic occasions.

Nevertheless, there were circumstances where it ought to be undertaken because no substitute would be so effective in forcing certain issues into the open and having them considered by teachers and students who would otherwise fail not only to confront them but even to take much notice of their existence. For example:

> ... if a Portuguese military attaché, formerly involved in anti-liberation actions in Guiné, is invited to give a talk on counter-insurgency to a graduate International Relations seminar, the assurance that 'discussion will be possible and any question will be allowed' is neither here nor there. Such confrontation is not likely to serve much purpose. But in any case, it will pass entirely unnoticed in the university at large, not to speak of the world outside. Prevention and disruption, on the other hand, will be noticed ... Prevention and disruption will cause a scandal, which is precisely why it may be desirable. As a result of it, a lot of people who have barely heard of Guiné, Angola and Mozambique and of the anti-Portuguese liberation struggles in these countries, will at the very least become aware of them. Whether they do more than merely become aware of them, and gain some appreciation of the issues, will depend on the care and trouble which the organisers of the action will have taken in preparing the relevant documentation.

He did not accept that this would divert attention from the issue in question to that of free speech, for the two would be bound up together. He agreed that such

Ralph and his father shortly after their arrival in England. Chiswick 1940.

Nan, Ralph and their mother reunited after the war at Montignies, Belgium 1945.

Ralph in 1945 in his Chief Petty Officer's uniform.

Ralph and his sister Nan at the house of Sonia and Harry Clements, 1952.

Ralph in 1958 (photo C. Wright Mills).

Ralph at his flat in Hampstead, 1958 (photo C. Wright Mills).

Yaroslava Mills, Ralph, Marion and C. Wright Mills, 1961.

C. Wright Mills, London, Spring 1961.

Ralph and his mother Renee, London, May 1968.

Cultural Congress of Havana, January 1968; Pepito Serguera,
Cuba's Ambassador to Algeria and later Director of Cuban
Television, and Ralph.

A prisoner in a punishment cell holds up *The State in Capitalist Society* in protest against conditions in South East Michigan State Prison, 1981. Photo: Taro Yamasaki, winner of the Pulitzer Prize for his photographs and reportage on prison conditions in the *Detroit Free Press*

Edward, Riton Liebman, David, Marcel Liebman and Marion, 1976.

Ralph lecturing at Glendon
College, Toronto, 1978
(photo: Bob Jones).

Edward, Ralph, Harry Magdoff and Beadie Magdoff, 1982.

John Griffith and Ralph, 1981.

Three editors of the *Socialist Register* at the 25th anniversary celebration, 1990; Leo Panitch, John Saville, Ralph.

John Saville's 70th birthday party at Edis Street; Ralph, John Saville and Edward Thompson (sitting on stairs), 1986.

Edward and Ralph at Edis Street, 1989.

Ralph in Central Park, New York, 1989.

Ralph, Nan and Harry Keen, 1985.

Marion, Hadassa, David, Ralph and Edward on
holiday in Scotland, 1987.

Ellen Wood and Ralph, Socialist Conference,
Chesterfield, June 1988 (photo: Caroline Benn).

Ralph, Hilary Wainwright, Jeremy Beale, Socialist Conference,
Chesterfield, June 1988 (photo: Caroline Benn).

Tariq Ali, Tamara Deutscher, Ralph, New Year's Eve Party at
Tariq's house, 1989.

Tariq Ali and Tony Benn at Ralph's 70th birthday party, Edis Street,
January 1994.

David and Ralph outside their
home in Edis Street, 1986.

Leo, Melanie, Ralph and Marion, Mexico City, December 1993.

K.S. Karol, Michel Lowy, Eric Hobsbawm: Ralph Miliband Memorial Conference, June 1995 (photo: Margaret Somers).

Leo Panitch, Edward, George Ross, David: Ralph Miliband Memorial Conference, June 1995 (photo: Margaret Somers).

Frances Fox Piven, Daniel Singer, Linda Gordon:
Ralph Miliband Memorial Conference, June 1995.

Sheila Rowbotham, Gerard Greenfield, Allen Hunter (reflected in
mirror): Ralph Miliband Memorial Conference, June 1995.

actions could be counter-productive: this was why they must not be undertaken lightly.

> Finally, there is the argument that this is a game at which two can play, and that if the Left engages in it, so will the Right. But this is not how these things work. If groups of proto-Fascist or neo-Fascist students are minded to cause disruption, they will do so anyway. The notion that the Left's 'good behaviour' and its observance of academic conventions will deter such groups is not borne out by experience ... But even if the argument were valid, it would not be sufficient to constitute a sufficient deterrent. Nor can any other argument be held to constitute an absolute deterrent: on occasion, academic disruption is a necessary part of the Left's presence in the university.

Miliband's argument does not, in my view, resolve the complex problems involved in the question of free speech. But it was certainly an extremely thoughtful and original intervention in a debate in which emotions normally predominate.[30] It is also extremely important in terms of Miliband's own overall politics. For, despite the obvious salience of his views on disruption at the time, the more significant aspect in relation to his general position was the emphasis he placed on academic freedom and free speech as essential elements in socialist democracy. His overriding concern was that the Left should not regard these freedoms as dispensable 'bourgeois liberties' but as an integral part of socialism, and he would insist on this in all the organisations in which he participated and in all his writings. However, it was his support for the action against Huntington which attracted attention at the time, and which caused problems for CAFD.

At the AGM in November 1973 there was a fierce argument about the Huntington affair, with Peter Wallington, a member of the executive of NCCL, putting forward a motion condemning the disruptive action at Sussex University, regretting CAFD's failure to issue an unequivocal public statement to this effect at the time, and instructing the executive to make the Council's position clear should any similar incidents occur in the future. In a situation of some confusion Miliband, speaking for the executive committee, succeeded in getting both this motion and another one remitted to the Executive Committee for further consideration, on the condition that a general meeting would be called in the foreseeable future to discuss the matter further.[31] A few days later Griffith wrote to Hilton, Miliband, Saville and Westergaard:

> Maybe, given all the circumstances, we did not do too badly at the AGM. Maybe, had we been wiser, we would have managed to avoid the situation. But as it now is we are in very great trouble. We five in particular (perhaps with others) need to think very carefully how we proceed.
>
> We are committed to a conference of some sort at which the mayhem will continue. We must seek to minimise its effects. I totally disbelieve in the likelihood of anything emerging from such a conference which will help us.

It may well be that we should seriously consider leaving NCCL if it is to be bullied ... into internal wars which could destroy us also.[32]

Following an executive committee meeting on 6 December it was agreed that a colloquium should be held in April and Steven Lukes agreed to convene a sub-committee to make the arrangements.[33] In mid January 1974 , at a further executive committee meeting at which Miliband was not present, it was agreed that he and Wallington should write the main background papers, and Lukes subsequently asked Miliband to present a paper for one side at the conference with Wallington on the other, thus providing continuity with the AGM debate. Miliband was very reluctant to do so, saying that he had already written a piece for the Huntington book, which defined his position, and suggesting other speakers, but he reluctantly agreed when pressed by Lukes. However, before the meeting took place the temperature was raised still further when, on 4 April 1974, the National Union of Students voted to deny speaking rights to racist speakers. The NCCL had decided to campaign against the NUS policy, so the atmosphere was very charged when the CAFD meeting took place on 27 April, with Miliband presenting his position, and Wallington accusing some university teachers of 'intellectual arrogance' and warning that CAFD was in danger of applying double standards involving 'duplicity of thought'. [34] Nevertheless, Miliband felt that the conference had gone quite well and had not proved as divisive as some people had feared.[35] The matter was then referred back to an executive committee meeting, at which resolutions on free speech were put forward by Griffith, Lukes, Wallington and Hilton before the following compromise was eventually passed:

CAFD supports the anti-racist stand of the NUS and joins the NUS in hoping that student unions and, indeed universities and colleges, will not provide any financial or material assistance to racist organisations. CAFD does not believe, however, that speakers with racist or fascist views should be physically prevented from speaking. CAFD believes that it is right to demonstrate abhorrence of racist views and to promote the maximum amount of counter argument, but it also believes it is wrong by means of a general ban to prevent all speakers holding such views from speaking at institutions of higher education.
Freedom of speech is a basic right which we are deeply reluctant to violate both because it is an essential part of the freedom we wish to extend to all and because its violation gives unnecessary publicity to those who are silenced.[36]

Miliband was not present at this meeting but, less than a week earlier, his article in the THES, putting forward a substantially different position, had appeared.[37] It may be that he realised that his presence might prevent the attainment of the compromise that was obviously necessary if CAFD was to continue to function. As it was, it survived the crisis and Miliband continued as a member of the

Executive Committee.

What is the significance of Miliband's involvement in CAFD and the stance that he had taken on the problems that had occurred in 1973-74? First, it is evident that the founding group as a whole had tended to assume too easily that the only relevant threat to academic freedom came from the Right and the Establishment. Given Miliband's own impatience with some of the 'ultra-left' students in the late '60s, this is perhaps surprising, but it is understandable in the immediate aftermath of the 'troubles' at LSE and in other institutions in the period. Secondly, even before the problems developed, it was evident that Miliband was a little restless within the generally liberal framework of analysis that prevailed in the NCCL and that he was keen to influence both this organisation and CAFD into a more explicitly left-wing position. Thirdly, when the series of high profile cases occurred he was anxious to define his stance even when aware that this was likely to differ from that of other founding members of the organisation, including John Griffith. For Miliband the issues were just too important simply to accept a consensus position which would probably be that of John Stuart Mill. He therefore took a line of his own, although it was obvious that this would provoke attacks on CAFD as a left-wing body that operated on the basis of double standards. Finally, he maintained his theory in subsequent years in the belief that it provided a guiding principle to steer through the recurrent crises on the issues while maintaining a firm commitment to both academic freedom and free speech as integral to socialist democracy. This was an important contribution to an intractable set of problems.

Notes

[1] Dick Atkinson and David Adelstein had been the authors of a 58 page Minority Report on the Machinery of Government committee, and Atkinson had had walked out of one the meetings declaring that it was 'an essentially ignorant, insensitive and superfluous charade in which power counts more than ideas'. (*Beaver*, 18 January 1968, quoted in Dahrendorf, *History of the London School of Economics*, p.457). He was initially appointed to a lectureship in Sociology at the University of Birmingham, but this was overturned when his activities at LSE became known.

[2] David Page was a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Art and Design at the then North East London Polytechnic. (Colleges of Art had been in the forefront of student action, particularly at Hornsey College of Art, where a prolonged student occupation had been followed by large-scale reprisals against students and staff in1968). Peter Worsley (1924-) was Professor of Sociology at Manchester, and one of the dissident intellectuals who had left the CP in 1956. He had been involved in the first New Left as a member of the editorial committee of both *New Reasoner* and *New Left Review*.

[3] Minutes, 17 February 1972 (Miliband papers).

[4] 'Future Policy', March 1972.

[5] Minutes, 16 March 1972.

[6] n.d., probably June 1972, Miliband papers.

[7] John Westergaard had been very closely associated with Miliband and John Griffith during the 'troubles' at LSE and always remained a friend of Miliband's. He became Professor of Sociology at Sheffield University in 1975.

[8] The pamphlet was undated, but was probably published in November 1972.

[9] *The Case for Academic Freedom and Democracy – CAFD*, pp.6-7.

[10] Hans Eysenck's views on the genetic basis for intelligence, personality, and social behaviour, including criminality in such books as *The Biological Basis of Personality* (1967) and numerous other works were highly controversial.

[11] Memorandum to CAFD, 30 May 1973, in answer to a report by Michael Egan.

[12] He denied that he advocated this, but his pamphlet on the subject stated: '..A voluntary sterilization bonus plan. The First Amendment....makes it safe for us in the US to try to find humane eugenic measures..As a step in such a search, I propose as a thinking exercise a voluntary sterilization bonus plan'. *THES*, 4 May 1973

[13] University of Leeds Senate: Standing Committee on Senate Business, 21st February 1973.

[14] Memorandum to CAFD, 30 May 1973

[15] *Foreign Affairs*, Vol.46, No.4 July 1968. (pp. 642-656).

[16] Chomsky first quoted an article by Huntington entitled 'Why the Viet Cong Attacked the Cities' in the *Boston Globe* (17 February 1968) on the process of 'urbanization' of the Vietnamese population by the US. (*American Power and the New Mandarins* [Pelican 1971, p.14]). Quoting extracts from the article, he then continued in a note: 'Professor Huntington has since expanded these thoughts in 'The Bases of Accommodation'....He explains that the Viet Cong is a 'powerful force which cannot be dislodged from its constituency so long as the constituency continues to exist'. Evidently, we must therefore ensure that the constituency – the rural population – ceases to exist. A Himmler or a Streicher would have advanced one obvious solution. This liberal social scientist, however, suggests another: that we drive the peasants into the cities by force ('urbanization').....' Ibid., p.21

[17] 'The Bases of Accommodation', p.650.

[18] Ibid., p.652.

[19] He pointed out that the German High Commissioner Seyss-Inquart was condemned to death at Nuremberg for opening the dikes in Holland at the time of the Allied invasion and quoted Eisenhower as holding this as a despicable act for which the perpetrators would be considered 'violators of the laws of war who must face the certain consequences of their acts'. *American Power and the New Mandarins*, pp.16 and 21-22.

[20] *New Society*, 14 June 1973.

[21] *Sunday Times*, 17 June 1973

[22] Ibid.

[23] *The Guardian*, 11 June 1973.

[24] Rodney Hilton had also been a dissident CP intellectual (and a member of the Communist Historians Group), who had left the Party in 1956 and had been close to the *New Reasoner* group.

[25] Letter to Miliband, 13 July 1973

[26] Letter to Griffith,16 July 1973.

[27] Letter to Miliband, 21 July 1973.

[28] The book was edited by John Mepham and was to be published by the Harvester Press. On 25 November 1974 its managing director, John Spiers, wrote to Miliband to say that the legal advice was that the book could be construed as a sustained attack on Huntington and that many of the statements in it would have been actionable. He ended: 'Naturally, we all regard this as a great tragedy. I think it would have been an important book'.

[29] He was still so bitter about LSE that he could not resist illustrating the importance of this latter point in relation to the 'troubles' there.

[30] For an extensive and highly illuminating discussion of the issues, see Alan Haworth, *Free Speech* (Routledge, 1998).

[31] Report of 3rd AGM of CAFD, 17 November 1973.

[32] Letter, 23 November 1973.

[33] Lukes is the author of several works, including *Individualism* (1975), *Emile Durkheim, his life and work* (1973), *Power: A Radical View* (1974), *Essays in Social Theory* (1977). *Marxism and Morality*

(1985).

[34] 'Dons Row over Free Speech', *Sunday Times*, 28 April 1974.

[35] Letter to Roy Edgley, 29 April 1974.

[36] Minutes of CAFD Executive Committee, 16 May 1974.

[37] A week later *THES* had carried a lively refutation of Miliband's position in the form of a dialogue by Philip Thody, a colleague at Leeds University. 'The Right to be heard, as well as the left', *THES*, 17 May 1974.

Chapter Six: *The State in Capitalist Society* and the Debate with Poulantzas

In *1969 The State in Capitalist Society* was published. This was Miliband's most influential work and was a key book for a whole generation. It reached far beyond Marxist circles and was probably more responsible than any other work for '"bringing the state back" into political science and sociology'.[1] It was translated into numerous languages and by the mid-1970s, Miliband was near the top of the American Political Science Association's list of most-cited political scientists – a feat which suggests that no one on the Left has exerted a wider influence on American political science since the 1920s.[2] The work would certainly have established Miliband's international reputation in its own right, but it became still more important because of the controversy which it provoked with Nicos Poulantzas, for this was to lead to a debate on the State, which had resonance in Marxist academic circles across the world, and spawned a vast number of further contributions on the subject. The so-called Miliband-Poulantzas debate will be discussed later in the chapter, but it is first necessary to examine the purpose and arguments of *The State in Capitalist Society*.

1. *The State in Capitalist Society*

A) THE EVOLUTION OF THE BOOK

Miliband first began active planning for a book on the state in May 1962 during his sabbatical in Chicago. As he noted at the time:

> I decided tonight – and discussed with Marion – the writing of a big book on The State, something that would take possibly five years, that would be theoretical, analytical and prescriptive, that would deal with a multitude of political questions and problems in a disciplined and tight manner – power, dictatorship, communism, democracy, representation, bureaucracy, and would do so on a comparative basis with the world as my province and with a detailed comparison of the State in capitalist countries and socialist ones, in newly independent countries too; that would bring in a multitude of connections, as between economic power and political power; that would review earlier theories and put forward new ones – on a general and also a specific plane, with history, sociology and politics combined in one intimate whole …
>
> [I]t would be something big to bite on, and an education for me to work on it; and build on. Very exciting.[3]

Over the next few months he worked intensively on the proposed book and he began his first draft in October. He soon abandoned this and, when it finally appeared, *The State in Capitalist Society* (hereafter, *The State*) was less ambitious than these original ideas . By then there was much less emphasis on theory and the work was focused almost exclusively on the advanced capitalist countries. However, his early notes are important because they explain many underlying assumptions that were not always made explicit in the final product.

The most striking point about these notes is that they reveal a *questioning* approach. He starts with definitions of the state and interrogates their useful-ness. There was no question of him simply seeing his function as *applying* an unproblematic form of Marxist theory to contemporary reality.[4] And he set out one of the key issues that he wanted to address:

> On [the] assumption that a sociology of the state is essential, such a sociology must take into account, as basic determinants, capital on the one hand and labour on the other; even these are not exclusive and comprehensive. [The] problem is to decide how these influence the state, to what degree and why. I assume but must prove that capitalism and business have the upper hand. But I cannot assume and cannot prove that they have complete authority over the state, that they have a monopoly of power and influence. Such a view is nonsense, at least in western advanced industrial societies, [though it is] not nonsense in many countries of the world.[5]

And so he continued, setting down propositions, and then examining them by drawing on a mixture of history and political experience and analysis. All this was based on a generally Marxist approach, but without particular texts or theoretical propositions ever providing 'the answer'. As he went along he also made distinctions between different societies and questioned his own presup-positions.[6]

Apart from their intrinsic interest, these extensive early notes for *The State* provide a significant piece of evidence for the 'Miliband-Poulantzas' debate. In this controversy, Miliband was later to be known as an 'instrumentalist'. This was taken to mean that he simply regarded the state as the instrument of the domi-nant class – implying that the bourgeoisie controlled the state and its policies. There is ample evidence in the book itself to refute this suggestion, but these notes reinforce the point, for it is quite clear that he did not accept the formula from the *Communist Manifesto* except as a starting point of analysis, and that he was always clear that the state sometimes acted against the interests of the 'domi-nant classes', which were in any case internally divided. The other accusation made against Miliband in the debate was that his approach was far too empirical in the sense that he was constantly testing Marxism with reference to 'the facts'. On this, the notes provide a great deal of evidence to uphold the 'charge', for this indeed was his approach. However, this was one of the outstanding strengths of *The State*.

Despite his early excitement about the project, it was to prove a long haul. Having abandoned his first draft, he began again in January 1963, giving himself the deadline of October 1964. Failing to meet this, he starting writing the whole 'final' draft in February 1965, signing a contract with *Weidenfeld* the same month and promising delivery in October of that year. Numerous target dates for delivery then passed, and he wrote the final draft during his sabbatical leave in the spring and summer terms of 1968, promising himself that he would only take a holiday if he had completed it by the end of the academic year. In June he sent the manuscript to various people for their comments. These were generally favourable, but he was destabilised by the criticisms of Ernest Gellner.[7]

Gellner, who was the editor of a series for which the book was originally intended,[8] first stated that the book called for no significant revisions and should go to press immediately as it was highly topical. He then submitted twelve pages of criticisms as part of 'our long-standing friendly debate, and of course I disagree with you as I belong to that liberal consensus which you slightly travesty at the beginning of the book'.[9] Although he made it clear that Miliband could disregard all his points, they worried him because they went to the heart of some dilemmas in his own thinking. In particular, Gellner pointed out that Miliband seemed uncertain as to whether he was really proposing a revolutionary alternative or whether his fundamental goal was to preserve the liberal freedoms of the present system by making necessary changes; and he suggested that he was being un-Marxist in apparently believing that the superstructure could maintain capitalism if the economic base was unviable.

Miliband was so devastated by Gellner's criticisms that his immediate reaction was to believe that the book was unpublishable and needed to be rewritten. Fortunately, Marion persuaded him just to deal with the minor comments and to ignore the rest. He then spent the rest of the month making amendments in a state of exhaustion, and persuaded the publishers to print everything except the conclusion. Just before he left to spend the summer in Elba he told John Saville:

> I fully intend to get myself back into some sort of physical as well as mental shape, though even getting rid of the book has already done me a lot of good, whatever my reservations about it. I had got myself utterly tied up, which is why I propose to do the last chapter again. I am quite sure it is a crucial chapter and hope to be able to tackle it after my return from Elba.[10]

But by the time he started rewriting in October, the Soviet-led invasion of Czechoslovakia had taken place and the crisis at LSE was in full swing. By now he was more uncertain about his political stance than he had been in July and was fully aware that there were unresolved tensions in his own thinking. (see pp. 143-146) The conclusion, which was only ten pages, was thus mainly devoted to the dangers of conservative authoritarianism but, following his summer of reflection, he also incorporated a critique of May-June '68 in Paris and of Com-

munist parties. The final paragraph offered a highly optimistic future of a truly democratic socialist society, but the prediction hardly followed from the analysis and was not really in keeping with Miliband's state of mind when he wrote it.[11]

B) THE ARGUMENT

During the fifties and early sixties politics specialists had paid little attention to the state. Influenced by the Cold War, consensus politics, and claims about 'an end of ideology', there was a tendency to assume the permanence of existing political structures and to dispense with attempts at theorisation of the state as a whole. Political science was thus dissolved into the study of apparently separate realms, such as constitutions and institutions, administrative processes, political behaviour, and electoral studies. Miliband's focus on the State was therefore in itself innovative. His main purpose was to refute the dominant paradigm of mainstream political science – the pluralist model – in which it was assumed that power was competitive, fragmented and diffused. As he put it:

> The strength of this current orthodoxy has helped to turn these claims (for they are no more than claims) into solid articles of political wisdom; and the ideological and political climate engendered by the Cold War has tended to make subscription to that wisdom a test not only of political intelligence but of political morality as well. Yet, the general acceptance of a particular view of social and political systems does not make it right. One of the main purposes of the present work is in fact to show in detail that the pluralist-democratic view of society, of politics and of the state in regard to the countries of advanced capitalism, is in all essentials wrong – that this view, far from providing a guide to reality, constitutes a profound obfuscation of it.[12]

Advanced capitalist societies, despite their specificities in terms of history, traditions, cultures, languages and institutions, had two key features in common: first, they were all highly industrialised countries, and secondly, the largest part of their means of economic activity was under private ownership and control. He thus argued that the pluralist view could be refuted *generally*, and an important feature of the book was his cross-national approach, drawing on examples from France, West Germany and occasionally Japan as well as, predominantly, the UK and the USA.

His secondary purpose was simultaneously to demonstrate the validity of Marxist analysis, while contributing to its development through his own work. For Marxist political analysis 'notably in relation to the nature and role of the state, has long seemed stuck in its own groove, and has shown little capacity to renew itself'.[13] Marxists had relied on the *Communist Manifesto* and Lenin's *State and Revolution*, emphasising that the state was, above all, the coercive instrument of the ruling class. Since then the only major Marxist contribution to the

theory of the state had been that of Gramsci 'whose illuminating notes on the subject have only fairly recently come to gain a measure of recognition and influence beyond Italy'.[14] But Miliband's general argument was that Marxists had made 'little notable attempt to confront the question of the state in the light of the concrete socio-economic *and* political *and* cultural reality of actual capitalist societies'.[15] When the attempt had been made it had been oversimplified in its explanation of the interrelationship between civil society and the state, so that even though the Marxist model came much closer to reality than the democratic-pluralist theory, it had been seriously deficient. Miliband's second major purpose was therefore to 'make a contribution to remedying that deficiency'.[16]

The first point of contention between the Marxist and pluralist positions was the question of whether there is a dominant class. One of the most influential arguments within mainstream theories was the suggestion that capitalism had been transformed by the separation of ownership from control. The assumption was that, whereas owners had been dominated by the maximisation of profits as their primary goal, managers had other aims, including even the acceptance of social duties. If true, this would undermine the fundamental Marxist claim that there was a perpetual and irreconcilable conflict of interests between the economically dominant class and the workers. However, Miliband had little difficulty in demonstrating that it was *not* true. The goal of the individual enterprise remained the maximisation of profits, whether the decisions were taken by managers or owners and, in any case, the proponents of the managerial capitalism thesis had overstated the differences between the two groups: managers were also often large shareholders in the companies that they ran and were high salary earners. In general, they tended also to have similar social origins, as he demonstrated with considerable empirical evidence. A second argument, within the broadly pluralist perspective, stressed the diversity of interests and ideological conceptions within the political and economic elites. For, if there was so little consensus within these groups, how could they be regarded as comprising a 'ruling class' in the Marxist sense? Miliband was certainly willing to agree that class membership did not produce ideological and political congruity and that members of the propertied classes were often divided over a multitude of specific policies and issues, not to speak of differences in religion and culture. Nevertheless,

> Specific differences among dominant classes, however genuine they may be in a variety of ways, are safely contained within a particular ideological spectrum, and do not preclude a basic political consensus in regard to the crucial issues of economic and political life.[17]

But if there was a 'dominant class', did this also constitute a 'ruling class'? Did it, that is, exercise a much greater degree of power and influence than any other class – a *decisive* degree of political power? Did its ownership and control of

crucially important areas of economic life also ensure control of the means of political decision-making?

Miliband defined his understanding of 'the state' very clearly (and his conception was one of the key points of difference in his subsequent polemics with Poulantzas). It is therefore also necessary to spell it out at some length here. There was, he argued, a preliminary problem about the state which was very seldom considered. This was the fact that the state was not a 'thing' and did not, as such, exist.

> What 'the state' stands for is a number of particular institutions which, together, constitute its reality, and which interact as parts of what may be called the state system.[18]

He then outlined these institutions as the government, the administration, the military and the police, the judicial branch, sub-central government and parliamentary assemblies. These comprised 'the state' and their interrelationships shaped the form of the state system.

> It is these institutions in which 'state power' lies, and it is through them that this power is wielded in its different manifestations by the people who occupy the leading positions in each of these institutions – presidents, prime ministers and their ministerial colleagues; high civil servants and other state administrators; top military men; judges of the higher courts; some at least of the leading members of parliamentary assemblies, though these are often the same men as the senior members of the political executive; and, a long way behind, particularly in unitary states, the political and administrative leaders of sub-central units of the state. These are the people who constitute what may be described as the state elite.[19]

He thus differentiated between the 'state system' and the 'political system', for the former did not include parties, giant corporations, Churches, the mass media and so on. Such institutions certainly had power outside the state system and were able to affect the operation of that system, but they did not themselves wield state power.

> … for the purpose of analysing the role of the state in these societies it is necessary to treat the state elite, which does wield state power, as a distinct and separate entity.[20]

More generally, it was necessary to maintain an analytical separation because the aim was to determine whether the economically dominant class could be regarded as a ruling class. In other words, Miliband was arguing that, unless there was this kind of analytical separation, it would be impossible to demonstrate empirically that the relationship was so close as to justify the claim that there was a 'ruling class'. Having explained his definitions and analytical distinc-

tions, Miliband could now explore the relationships between the economically dominant class and the state elite.

His initial proposition was that the capitalist class rarely actually governed the state. Only in isolated instances of the early history of capitalism, in such cities as Venice and Lübeck, was there direct rule by the business class itself. Apart from these cases, the capitalist class had generally confronted the state as a separate entity. On the other hand, he also cited extensive evidence to demonstrate the extent to which business interests now penetrated government itself. This did not mean that capitalists were now the governing class in the way that the pre-industrial aristocratic and landowning classes had been. However, the significance of this difference was much reduced by the social composition of the state elite proper, which was drawn overwhelmingly from the same social classes as the business elite – that is, the upper and middle classes. Once again he demonstrated this in relation to several advanced capitalist countries, suggesting that the reasons lay both in the educational attainments of higher social classes, and the class bias of those recruiting to the top universities and *grandes écoles*. Nor did the recruitment of some people with working class origins change the class nature of the state service, for they became part of the class to which they were recruited. He thus concluded that:

> In an epoch when so much is made of democracy, equality, social mobility, classlessness and the rest, it has remained a basic fact of life in advanced capitalist countries that the vast majority of men and women in these countries has been governed, represented, administered, judged, and commanded in war by people drawn from other, economically and socially superior and relatively distant classes.[21]

Each chapter of the book then explored the implications of his general propositions in relation to key elements in the debate between Marxists and pluralists. *The Purpose and Role of Governments* showed that, despite the apparent diversity of views within capitalist societies and the differences between the political parties, these hardly concerned the fundamental elements of the capitalist system. On the other hand he certainly did *not* argue that the state simply acted at the behest of large-scale capitalists:

> For governments, acting in the name of the state, have in fact been compelled over the years to act against *some* property rights, to erode *some* managerial prerogatives, to help redress *somewhat* the balance between capital and labour, between property and those who are subject to it.[22]

Such state interference with unrestrained private economic power was not in fundamental opposition to the interests of property, but was – as Joseph Chamberlain had said in 1885 – part of the 'ransom' which had to be paid to maintain the rights of property in general. And even very conservative governments had

often been forced, mainly as a result of popular pressure, to take action against certain property rights and capitalist prerogatives. This was the essence of his position on the *general* role of governments in capitalist societies, but his arguments on two specific issues are also important: the relationship between the capitalist state and Fascism, and the role of reforming left-wing governments.

There has always been a tendency to explain Fascism in ways that reinforce particular political positions. In the early 1930s the Communist International portrayed Fascism, and even Nazism, simply as an extreme form of capitalism and refused to unite with socialist forces to prevent its accession to power. The rationale for this catastrophic policy was an extreme reductionism in which all forms of capitalism were equated. At the other extreme, in the post-war period mainstream political science detached Fascism entirely from any class or economic basis, denouncing it (with Stalinism) as 'totalitarianism'. Miliband was keen to avoid either of these positions. He certainly believed that Fascism and Nazism were forms of capitalist rule, noting the support they received from large-scale capitalist interests, the continuity of personnel in elite positions from the pre-Fascist era, the economic policies that were followed by the regimes, and the fact that the economic and social structures of inter-war Italy and Germany hardly changed as a result of the Fascist regimes. However:

> ... it is also true that the privileged classes in both Italy and Germany had to pay a high *political* price for the immense advantages which were conferred upon them by the Fascist regimes. For while they retained many positions of power and influence, they had to submit to a dictatorship over which they had no *genuine* control at all. Having helped the dictators to rob all other classes, and notably the working classes, of any semblance of power, they found their own drastically curtailed and in some crucial areas, notably foreign policy, altogether nullified.[23]

He explained this, as he had already done at greater length, in 'Marx and the State' in 1965, with reference to the idea of 'Bonapartism'.[24] Thus Marx and Engels had suggested that in 'exceptional circumstances' the state assumed independence from all forces in civil society. But Miliband argued that this concept was ambiguous in that it suggested that the state became neutral with regard to all social forces, and that Marx himself had noted that 'the state power is not suspended in mid-air' and that Louis Napoleon's mission was to 'safeguard "bourgeois order"'.[25] Miliband argued that this was precisely the task of the Fascist dictators, and it was not the case that all classes were *equally* impotent and mute under Fascism. Yet the Fascist regimes were sufficiently powerful to take the decisions by themselves.

Miliband's analysis of Fascism is of intrinsic interest and importance.[26] But, as will become evident, the fact that he had thought it crucial to discuss the relationship between this and other forms of capitalist state would also assume particular significance in his attitude to Poulantzas. Similarly, his interpretation

of 'Bonapartism' would play a key role in the debate since Poulantzas accorded far more weight to Marx's references to this concept.

The extent to which reformist left-wing governments could really make a difference to class relations within capitalist society was, of course, central to Miliband's whole book. If it were demonstrable that governments of the Left could bring about substantial benefits to the poorer classes, the pluralist thesis would be plausible. If, on the other hand, it was shown that such governments had little impact on the distribution of power and resources, the Marxist argument would be reinforced. He sought to demonstrate the validity of the latter claim by considering the performance of the French Popular Front under Léon Blum in 1936, the 1945-51 Labour Government in Britain and, to a lesser extent, the participation of the French and Italian Communist Parties in coalition governments in the immediate post-war period. His method was to use an implicitly Marxist perspective in an empirical examination of the record of these governments and, without being dismissive of their reforms, he argued that they had not in any way weakened the capitalist domination of the system.

The subsequent chapters proceeded in a similar way, combining analytical arguments with a great deal of empirical evidence to draw conclusions which buttressed a Marxist interpretation. *Servants of the State* thus considered the part played by administrative, coercive and judicial elites in advanced capitalist societies. After examining their class composition, political views, networks of relationships, and the structural constraints to which they were subject, he concluded that 'the dominant economic interests in capitalist society can normally count on the active goodwill and support of those in whose hands state power lies'.[27] However, this did not mean that those interests could count on the government and its advisers to act in perfect congruity with their purposes:

> [G]overnments may wish to pursue certain policies which *they* deem altogether beneficial to capitalist enterprise but which powerful economic interests may, for their part, find profoundly objectionable; or these governments may be subjected to strong pressure from other classes which they cannot altogether ignore.[28]

This meant that capitalist interests still needed to exert their own pressure rather than simply relying on governments and state elites to carry out the policies they sought. His next task was to demonstrate that capitalist interests had far greater resources to do so than any other sector of society and in *Imperfect Competition* he contested the pluralist claim that the existence of a variety of interest groups meant that the government was relatively open to a whole range of influences in society. This, he again stressed, did not mean that business *always* succeeded in getting its way with governments, or that other interests *always* failed to do so. But it did mean that the competition was highly unequal and the odds were stacked against non-capitalist groups. Nevertheless, while the economic elites had overwhelming advantages, they could never rest content with this situation.

For the subordinate and intermediate classes also had to be *persuaded* to accept the existing social order and to confine their demands and aspirations within it. It is to these processes that Miliband now turned in two chapters on *The Process of Legitimation.*

A key task for any Marxist or theorist of the Left is to explain why pro-capitalist interests have been able to maintain such ascendancy if capitalism is, as Miliband put it:

> ... a system whose very nature nowadays makes impossible the utilisation of resources for rational human ends; whose inherent character is one of compulsion, domination and parasitical appropriation; whose spirit and purpose fatally corrode all human relations; and whose maintenance is today the major obstacle to human progress.[29]

In order to provide an answer he invoked Gramsci's concept of hegemony and Marx's famous dictum in *The German Ideology* that 'the ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas'. Much, he argued, had changed since 1845 and Marx's explanation had been insufficient even then, and much had also happened since Gramsci's time to erode the hegemony of the dominant classes. Yet that erosion had not proceeded far enough to constitute a major political threat to the existing social order. Miliband made two further important preliminary theoretical remarks. First he stressed that 'hegemony' was not something which simply happened as a derivative of economic and social predominance. On the contrary, it was in very large part, the result of a permanent and pervasive *effort*, conducted through a multitude of agencies, and deliberately intended to create a national consensus. Secondly, he noted that Gramsci had seen the establishment and perpetuation of ideological hegemony as primarily the task of the dominant classes and of the cultural institutions that they controlled. However, Miliband argued that since then the state had played a much larger role and had in fact become one of the main architects of the conservative consensus.

Having established a theoretical framework for the process of legitimation, he examined the agencies through which it took place, dealing with political parties, religion and the Churches, nationalism, advertising, schools and universities, and the ways in which each of these operated against the Left. He was careful not to overstate the case by implying that there were no dissenting or discordant views. But he also argued that forms of opposition could be functional. For example, university teachers were not, in general, sources of dissent but, as Gramsci had put it, 'experts in legitimation'. Yet such legitimation did not mean that they needed to insist on the virtues of the capitalist status quo. This could be served as effectively by criticism of aspects of the system:

> Provided the economic basis of the social order is not called into question, criticism of it, however, sharp, can be very useful to it, since it makes for vigorous but

safe controversy and debate, and for the advancement of 'solutions' to 'problems' which obscure and deflect attention from the greatest of all 'problems', namely that here is a social order governed by the search for private profit. It is in the formulation of a radicalism without teeth and in the articulation of a critique without dangerous consequences, as well as in terms of straightforward apologetics, that many intellectuals have played an exceedingly 'functional' role. And the fact that many of them have played that role with the utmost sincerity and without being conscious of its apologetic impact has in no way detracted from its usefulness.[30]

But he certainly did not intend to imply that the processes of legitimation would succeed in eliminating the possibility of transformation, and the final chapter, *Reform and Repression*, thus argued that the realistic perspective for the future of advanced capitalist societies was not one of attunement and stability, but of crisis and challenge.

There was, he insisted, no doubt of the superiority of 'bourgeois democracy' and 'bourgeois freedoms' over various forms of conservative authoritarianism -- above all Fascism. The key question was how long the existing framework was likely to remain compatible with the needs and purposes of advanced capitalism. His fear was that the strains in the system, and the inability to match performance with promise, would lead to more or less pronounced forms of conservative authoritarianism. On the one hand, there was ever increasing pressure for change:

> [Never] in the history of advanced capitalism has there been a time when more people have been more aware of the need for change and reform. Nor has there ever been a time when more men and women,though by no means moved by revolutionary intentions, have been more determined to act in the defence and the enhancement of their interests and expectations. The immediate target of their demands may be employers, or university authorities, or political parties. But ... it is the state which men constantly encounter in their relations with other men; it is towards the state that they are increasingly driven to direct their pressure; and it is from the state that they expect the fulfilment of their expectations.[31]

This could lead to reform but, save in exceptional cases when popular pressures were extremely strong, such reforms would be incapable of removing the grievances which gave rise to the protest in the first place because of the structural constraints imposed by the capitalist system.

> Even this kind of reform may help to mitigate some at least of the worst 'dysfunctionalities' of capitalist society; and, as has been stressed here repeatedly, this mitigation is indeed one of the most important of the state's attributions, an intrinsic and dialectical part of its role as the guardian of the social order. Nevertheless, reform always and necessarily falls far short of the promise it was proclaimed to hold ...[32]

The result was more likely to be repression: the reduction of the power of representative institutions, a whittling away of trade union independence, and a more stringent definition of the area of legitimate dissent. But this normally led to greater opposition, and the invocation of greater powers by the state, leading to conservative authoritarianism. This, he argued, certainly did not need to be Fascism, which had been discredited:

> In fact, the usage of Fascism as a reference point tends dangerously to obscure the less extreme alternatives to it, which do not require the wholesale dismantling of all democratic institutions, the total subversion of all liberties, nor certainly the abandonment of a democratic rhetoric. It is easily possible to conceive of forms of conservative authoritarianism … which would be claimed to be 'democratic' precisely because they were not 'Fascist', and whose establishment would be defended as in the best interests of 'democracy' itself. Nor is all this a distant projection into an improbable future: it describes a process which is already in train and which is also, in the condition of advanced capitalism, more likely to be accentuated than reversed.[33]

Historically, he argued, labour and socialist movements had been the major driving force for the extension of democratic liberties and agencies of counter-pressures to capitalism. But social democratic parties had ceased to fulfil this function and, in government, they illustrated particularly clearly the limits of reform. Confronted with demands they could not fulfil and pressures they could not subdue by reform, they also turned into the protagonists of the reinforced state – by controlling trade unions in Britain or turning to a 'Grand Coalition' in Germany. But such failures implicated all the forces of the Left:

> Because of it, the path is made smoother for would-be saviours whose extreme Conservatism is carefully concealed beneath a demagogic rhetoric of national renewal and social redemption, garnished, wherever suitable, with an appeal to racial and any other kind of profitable prejudice.[34]

The failure of social democracy would be much less sombre if Communist Parties were not afflicted by profound weaknesses, above all, their lack of internal democracy. For it was not possible to become an 'hegemonic' alternative in Gramsci's sense without free discussion, and flexible and responsive structures. This was not only the essential means of obviating ideological anaemia and political sclerosis, but:

> It is equally essential as a demonstration of the kind of social and political order which such a party seeks to bring into being. It is in its own *present* structures, in its own *present* modes of behaviour, attitudes and habits that it must prefigure the society to which it aspires.[35]

But even if Communist Parties were capable of transformation, this could only help resolve the problems of the Left in France and Italy, as such parties were too

small elsewhere. Nor was change to be achieved by spontaneous eruption:

> The events of May-June 1968 in France showed well enough the yearning for fundamental change which simmers beneath a seemingly placid political surface, and to use Régis Debray's phrase, the degree to which the 'small motor' of a student movement may activate the 'big motor' of the working class. But these events showed equally well that, in the absence of appropriate political organisation, what is possible is turmoil and pressure but not revolution.[36]

The absence of any appropriate political agencies on the Left, paralleled by deep troubles and discontents, made a shift towards authoritarianism more rather than less likely. In retrospect, Miliband's prescience about the path that would eventually lead to 'Thatcherism' in Britain appears remarkable. However, he did not provide much indication of the way in which this could be avoided and a transformation brought about. He ended with the triumphant assertion that, sooner or later, the working class and its allies would acquire the capacity to rule. But how, or when, this would come about, he could not say, except to suggest that the creation of a will for socialist change would be 'a painful, complex, contradictory, 'molecular' process'.[37] Perhaps this reticence could be justified by the fact that his real task had been to analyse the state in capitalist society – not the process of transformation. However, his failure to be more precise was certainly also the reflection of his own uncertainties as he finalised the book in 1968.

Nevertheless, *The State in Capitalist Society* was undoubtedly a tour de force and its strength lay in two of its key features. First, like *Parliamentary Socialism*, there was a constant accumulation of arguments and evidence to sustain the general case that Miliband was making. Each chapter took a particular set of assumptions and claims within mainstream political science and subjected them to a detailed process of scrutiny and refutation. The book therefore assailed the central core of pluralism from all sides, overwhelming it in a sustained onslaught. The second aspect of its force was that this was done in a highly persuasive and accessible manner, particularly as he was careful to acknowledge the positive features in 'bourgeois democracy' – such as diversity of opinion and freedoms. This made it far more difficult for its opponents simply to dismiss it as 'dogmatic Marxism'. Indeed it soon seemed that Miliband was expressing a rather obvious left-wing position. In reality, it only came to appear so because *The State* was a seminal work, unlike any other that existed at the time. As Leo Panitch put it:

> It was only with *The State in Capitalist Society* that a student reared in British and North American political science had the sense that one finally could go beyond just criticising the dominant paradigm and move to an alternative theorization. Miliband left us in no doubt that this theorization had to be a Marxist one; but he also demonstrated that it could be the kind of independent Marxism that did not cut itself off from the non-Marxist intellectual world, indeed that it would be best if one actively tried to incorporate the best insights of other approaches into the

Marxist theorization.[38]

This is not to suggest that, from a twenty-first century perspective, the book was without weaknesses. First, it is notable that his references to women are exceedingly rare, and he used the male pronoun almost exclusively. This was a work which was almost untouched by the growth of feminism during the 1960s and which continued to think of the 'working class' primarily as masculine and engaged in trade unions and parties of the Left. Secondly, the text ignored ethnicity and nationality, except in denouncing racism and nationalism in classical Marxist terms: that is largely as means of dividing the working class and diverting attention from the capitalist enemy. Thirdly, while *The State* certainly saw capitalism as an international system and even mentioned the constraints which this could impose upon the individual state, this theme was hardly developed. In general, the analysis proceeded as if state autonomy existed – at least in the advanced capitalist societies which he was considering. However, it is easy to make such criticisms more than thirty years later. The more important points were the resonance of the work in an era of protest and industrial militancy, and the enduring relevance of the main features of the analysis.

2. The Miliband-Poulantzas Debate

In April 1997 a conference in New York was held on 'Miliband and Poulantzas in Retrospect and Prospect'. Its publicity blurb encapsulated the significance of the original debate:

> In the early 1970s the debate between Ralph Miliband and Nicos Poulantzas captured the imagination of a generation of radical social scientists, sparked a resurgence in Marxist political theory, and signaled the rise of state theory as an academic field.[39]

In fact, a whole generation of academic Marxists had aligned themselves with 'structuralism'(identified with Poulantzas) or 'instrumentalism' (identified with Miliband).

The overt issues in the debate have been analysed frequently. My main concern here is to explain Miliband's attitude and, in particular, why he eventually became so angry about Poulantzas and structuralist Marxism.[40] But this is possible only if attention is first paid to some aspects of Poulantzas's theory and the Althusserian tradition. For although the debate was ostensibly about the state, it was more fundamentally about entirely different approaches to Marxism and its relationship with the 'bourgeois' world, in both theory and practice.

A) POULANTZAS AND ALTHUSSER

Nicos Poulantzas (1936-79) was undoubtedly a formidable intellect, about whom even an unsympathetic critic wrote: 'grimly professional, rigorously logical ... he seems to have read practically everything produced in this century'.[41] Bob Jessop, one of his major exponents, claims that he 'remains the single most important and influential Marxist theorist of the state and politics in the post-war period'.[42] This perhaps depends upon the attitude that is taken to 'theory'. Certainly, Poulantzas formulated an internally consistent set of concepts, which were analytically rigorous, derived from a sophisticated understanding of Marxism and other intellectual traditions, and were based on an earnest commitment to interpret and to change the world. However, those who are unsympathetic to the approach – ultimately including Miliband – are likely to regard this kind of theory as circular and accessible only to those who take it on trust or are already working within its framework of assumptions. In any case, Poulantzas himself was certainly dedicated in his attempt to provide a Marxist theory of the state and his efforts, like those of Althusser, attracted widespread support from a generation of young intellectuals for whom this kind of theorisation appeared to offer 'the answer'.

Born and educated in Greece, Poulantzas was fluent in French from childhood and moved to Paris (after a very brief interlude in Germany) in 1960. There his potential was quickly recognised and he was soon befriended by Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Simone de Beauvoir and others associated with *Les Temps Modernes*, as well as Althusser. His academic background was in law and philosophy, and he taught and wrote on these subjects before moving on to study the capitalist state as a whole. His political position throughout the 1960s was broadly Marxist-Leninist, and he was attracted to Maoism in the aftermath of the events of May-June 1968. However, after the downfall of the Greek military dictatorship in 1974, he became convinced of the need for left unity and moved towards a 'Eurocommunist' position.[43]

Poulantzas drew on the works of a vast range of Marxist theorists, but at the time of the first round in the polemic with Miliband, the most obvious architect of his approach was Louis Althusser (1918-1990), at that time a dominating figure in the French structuralist Marxist tradition. It is important to summarise certain aspects of 'Althusserianism' in order to appreciate some of the underlying assumptions of Poulantzas's approach, and, therefore, also his point of departure in the debate with Miliband.

Arthur Hirsh encapsulates the essence of Althusser's aim by arguing that his project was:

> to preserve what he judged to be the revolutionary integrity of marxism, to prevent marxism from being 'contaminated' with bourgeois ideologies that inevitably deflect it from its revolutionary goals, and to save marxism from the twin evils of

reformism and revisionism.[44]

As a key intellectual within the PCF he sought to prevent 'bourgeois ideology' from contaminating Communist parties in general and the PCF in particular, and thus aligned himself with the pro-Soviet, rather than the 'Eurocommunist' currents within it. Although he himself never openly espoused a preference for Maoism, many of his adherents did. However, if Althusser can justifiably be regarded as a guardian of 'orthodoxy', his influence lay in the originality and multi-faceted nature of his approach. In particular, he sought to strengthen Marxism by incorporating non-Marxist traditions of modern thought within it: in particular, linguistics, psychoanalysis and structuralism.

A particular aspect of his struggle against corrupting influences lay in his rejection of 'humanistic Marxism' – the tendency which paid special attention to Marx's early writings and stressed the relationship between Marx and the enlightenment tradition. Althusser, on the contrary, emphasised the crucial significance of an 'epistemological break' between Marx's early writings – up to about 1845 – and his subsequent theories. In the early period Marx was, he argued, still under the influence of Hegel and mistakenly placed 'man' at the centre of his intellectual endeavour. Later he weaned himself from such bourgeois traditions, undertook his 'scientific' work on the structure and dynamics of capitalism, and became a 'Marxist'. The first key point in the Althusserian approach – fully reflected in Poulantzas's outlook in the late 1960s – was a dismissal of 'Marxist humanism' , with its emphasis on human agency, in favour of a theory which placed the main emphasis on *structures* as the key explanatory category.[45]

Althusser drew a firm distinction between 'bourgeois ideology' and 'Marxist science' and there were no elements of relativism in his outlook: Marxism was not simply the best explanation or a means of providing crucial insights into underlying tendencies: it was scientifically valid. And this also meant that there were no compromises with those whose work was embedded in a non-Marxist theoretical framework. It was not only that Marxism had its own specialist discourse and concepts, which needed to be understood to make sense of the theory: this would be a commonplace Marxist claim. The argument was that Marx's work could be understood only if read in a particular way: that is through the structuralist approach of Althusser. [46] This meant that quotations from Marx were insufficient to substantiate his theory on a particular point. They needed to be read in particular ways and, when his own meanings were unclear, they had to be reconstituted or completed by Althusserian Marxist theorists. What, then, was the major feature of this Althusserian reading?

A simplistic intepretation of Marx, which Althusser rejected, was the reductionist claim that he had argued that the economic base directly and totally determined the superstructure of politics, law and ideas. In place of this he

argued that each mode of production contained three structures or levels: the economic, the political, and the ideological. Although there was a close inter-relationship between each of them, they were also relatively autonomous from one another. The economic structure was 'ultimately determinate', but this did not mean that it would be dominant in all modes of production.[47] In feudal-ism, for example, the political structure predominated because coercive power was necessary to maintain the economic system. Nevertheless, the economy was 'ultimately determinate' even in feudalism because it was this that determined such political predominance.[48]

In *Political Power and Social Classes*, (subsequently *Political Power*) Poulantzas accepted this general Althusserian approach. But he aimed to develop a theory of the 'political' level within the capitalist mode of production (which he described, confusingly, as a 'regional' theory). The crux of his argument was that in every mode of production, there was an interrelationship between the economic, political and ideological levels. Structures tend to reproduce and to stabilise the given mode of production while class practices tend to destabilise them by generating conflict, which could threaten the whole system of class domination. The *political* level – or state – therefore has a specific and crucial role in diffusing the class conflict generated by the production process. It achieves this in various ways, including repression and the use of ideology, but its most fundamental characteristic is to represent itself as serving the 'general interest' of the compet-ing groups while actually promoting the *political interests* of a 'power bloc' made up of the different fractions within the dominant class. He maintained that, within capitalism, there were several modes of production, giving rise to differ-ent fractions of capital and a power bloc. The existence of the power bloc did not constitute fusion but a contradictory unity of the politically dominant classes and fractions under the overall dominance of the hegemonic fraction. This frac-tion represented the common interest of the fractions within the power bloc.[49] However, and this would be very relevant to his debate with Miliband, he argued that there was no reason why the hegemonic class or fraction should necessar-ily be the class or fraction in charge of the government.[50] More fundamentally still, following his acceptance of the Althusserian distinction between the three levels (economic, ideological and political), he argued that the state exercised a relative autonomy from the dominant classes, representing their *political*, rather than their economic, interests. Countering the 'instrumentalist' viewpoint, he sought to demonstrate that such relative autonomy was necessary so that the long-term political interests of the dominant classes were served even when par-ticular policies were against their economic interests.[51] However, concessions to other classes (for example, through welfare provisions) did not mean that there was a restraint on the political power of the dominant classes.[52] The purpose of the state was to maintain the cohesion of the particular social formation and of the capitalist mode of production – and therefore of the hegemonic class and

fractions – but this could be achieved only by its relative autonomy from those interests.[53] And such autonomy enabled it to make concessions to the working classes when these were needed in order to maintain the capitalist system and the political interests of the dominant class. In other words, the role of the state within the system was determined by the *structural* position of the political level. This also meant that the functioning of the bureaucracy was not directly determined by its class membership but by the place of the state in the ensemble of a formation and its complex relations with the various classes and fractions. This, he argued, was why the bureaucracy was able to possess its own unity and coherence despite the diversity of recruitment and class affiliation of its various strata. For the bureaucracy did not exercise the power of the class in charge of the state apparatus, but of the hegemonic class or fraction in the social formation. As he therefore noted in a passage of obvious relevance to his subsequent critique of Miliband:

> It is important to point this out, since frequent attempts are made to found this relation between the bureaucracy and the political power of the hegemonic class or fraction by trying to establish the identity of this latter with the class from which the heights of the bureaucracy originate: whether in the fantastical sense of Wright Mills or by the even more fantastical method of investigating mysteries and various hidden relations of near or distant kinship between these heights and the members of the hegemonic class or fraction.[54]

Furthermore, the economic, ideological and political levels are not reducible to the institutions that compose them. For Poulantzas, the concept of 'structure does *not* refer to the concrete social institutions that make up a society, but rather to the *systematic functional interrelationships among these institutions*'.[55] In particular, this also means that in his view the state cannot be seen as a set of institutions, which hold power themselves, but needs to be understood as part of the structural interrelationships within a society in which a hegemonic class (or fractions of it) hold power.

B) THE DEBATE

This brief summary provides a context for the debate. The irony is that, while there were certainly important differences between Miliband and Poulantzas, there were also evident similarities, particularly since they were both challenging the 'vulgar' Marxist view which portrayed the state simply as a tool which the capitalist class could wield as it liked. Their most fundamental differences were not in their conclusions, but in their methods, their approaches, and their underlying attitudes. Miliband took both the theory and practice of liberal democracy seriously, but aimed to demonstrate *empirically* that a broadly Marxist interpretation of capitalist society was valid. Poulantzas was not primarily interested in

liberal democracy or empirical evidence. His purpose was to establish a theory of the political, which was based on a specific reading of Marx and which was wholly separate from 'bourgeois' approaches. Thus many of the theoretical disagreements that emerged in the debate were really quite predictable. However, the increasingly aggressive tone – particularly on Miliband's side – went beyond the ostensible differences and needs to be explained.

Before the debate began there had been a brief correspondence between the two protagonists. Poulantzas had published *Pouvoir Politique et classes sociales* in 1968 and immediately sent Miliband a copy, adding:

> I know your book, *Parliamentary Socialism* and your articles, particularly 'Marx and the State', which helped me very much in my work. Your comments and advice will be very useful.[56]

Miliband received the book just as he was finishing his own. His first impression was that it was of very considerable theoretical significance and intellectual refinement. He was, however, surprised that it did not refer to any actual state and had no empirical aspect. He was also relieved to find that it differed from his own book, although he immediately felt that it showed that his work was insufficiently theoretical.[57] He thanked Poulantzas and told him that, although he thought that the two works were complementary:

> Your book makes me only more conscious of the theoretical deficiencies of my own work, and the limitations of the method that I have chosen to use. But perhaps there is some use in showing the mechanisms of domination. Be that as it may, I am sending the work to the publishers … next month and only regret not having had the benefit of your book earlier.[58]

The mutual admiration continued in Poulantzas's reply.

> Thank you very much for your letter and what you say of my book. I am really enthusiastic about your project and book: I believe that it is <u>indispensable</u> and certainly not a duplicate of mine. I think, without false modesty, that it will be much more important than mine, as I am conscious of staying on a level which is too theoretical …[59]

However, by November of the next year – just before the public debate began -Miliband's had begun to express doubts about *Political Power*. In November he told Rossana Rossanda that he had found it disappointing. It was 'hyper-theoretical acrobatics which seemed to show the weaknesses of the Althusserian method'.[60] On the other hand he felt that his own book went too far in the other direction and he was certainly not dismissive of Poulantzas' work.

Poulantzas's review of *The State* in the November-December 1969 edition of

NLR was trenchant, but very positive and Miliband replied in the same spirit in the next edition of the journal. Despite their differences, at this stage Miliband was still very enthusiastic about their debate and wrote to Poulantzas:

> I very much appreciated your article in the last edition of *New Left Review*. As you will see in the next edition, which contains a 'Response' written at the invitation of the Review, I disagree with you on certain points but that in no way detracts from my appreciation of the article: on the contrary it seems to me to constitute a crucial contribution to a subject that we both recognise as being of the greatest importance.[61]

He was clearly enjoying the debate and, despite his disagreement with Poulantzas, continued to have high regard for his book.[62] However, as time went on he became a little more negative about Poulantzas's work. Thus when *Monthly Review* asked his opinion as to whether it should translate *Fascisme et Dictature*, he was lukewarm. He recommended publication, saying that Poulantzas was 'a most serious man' and that *Fascisme et Dictature* was more concrete than the earlier work and represented a serious contribution to the understanding of Fascism. But he prefaced the recommendation with the following remarks:

> I should perhaps say at the start that I find Poulantzas a very 'difficult' writer. I find his style very unattractive, over-abstract and often very formalistic. I had great difficulty with his *Pouvoir Politique et Classes Sociales*, which seemed to suffer from an hyper-Althusserian fear of contamination by any kind of factual information.[63]

But this was still combined with an appreciation of Poulantzas's work. However, two years later when he reviewed the translation of *Political Power* his tone had become aggressive and it was certainly Miliband who now made the polemic so much more heated.

An interesting insight into the evolution of the review is provided in correspondence about it between Perry Anderson and Miliband. As soon as he had read the manuscript, Anderson wrote to say that he was wholly in sympathy with the substance of Miliband's criticisms of *Political Power*, but that the *New Left Review* editors believed that his language was unduly intemperate. Miliband, he pointed out, conceded that there was some 'suggestive and useful material' in Poulantzas's book, and that his review of *The State in Capitalist Society* was 'stimulating'. However, many of Miliband's remarks implied that Poulantzas could simply be dismissed or ignored altogether. Since the review would probably stimulate an international debate, it was worth taking the trouble to make it as persuasive as possible and the current tone was counter-productive.[64]

Miliband replied:

> You are quite right about invective and so on. Oddly enough, and uniquely in my experience, I started out with the best of intentions ... It is as I went on that I got

more and more annoyed by the combination of insistence on rigour and scientificity with extreme sloppiness (to put it politely). I was so amazed that I actually read the bloody thing twice over, more or less word for word, and kept reading some sentences and thinking – he <u>can't</u> mean that; or what does that <u>mean</u>? I <u>still</u> may be underestimating his contribution, and would be happy to have it said and demonstrated.[65]

Thus Miliband's hostile review in the November-December 1973 edition of *NLR* Miliband would have been much more aggressive had it not been for Perry Anderson. But it was not a premeditated political attack. As Miliband told Daniel Singer, he had been happy to accept Anderson's suggestions and agreed that one should try to 'de-leninise' theoretical controversy, but that the review itself 'had, quite unexpectedly, and as a result of a careful reading of the English version, turned into a very angry piece'.[66] Poulantzas's reply in the January-February 1976 edition of *NLR* (which was also to Ernesto Laclau, who had joined in the debate) was equally sharp, adopting a contemptuous attitude to Miliband's work. This mutual hostility had not appeared at all likely in 1969.

Poulantzas's review of *The State* began with some generous tributes to Miliband's book which:

> … helps to overcome a major lacuna. As is always the case when a scientific theory is lacking, bourgeois conceptions of the State and of political power have pre-empted the terrain of political theory, almost unchallenged. Miliband's work is here truly *cathartic*: he methodologically attacks these conceptions. Rigorously deploying a formidable mass of empirical material in his examination of the concrete social formations of the USA, England, France, Germany or Japan, he not only radically demolishes bourgeois ideologies of the State, but provides us with a positive knowledge that these ideologies have never been able to produce.[67]

The essence of his critique then followed from the Althusserian approach, outlined above. That is, he argued that Miliband's *direct* reply to 'bourgeois ideologies by the immediate examination of concrete fact' was also the source of the faults in his book. Instead of explicitly dealing with the Marxist theory of the state, Miliband had taken it as a 'given'. But:

> … one has the impression that this absence often leads Miliband to attack bourgeois ideologies of the State whilst placing hmself on their terrain. Instead of *displacing* the epistemological terrain and submitting these ideologies to the critique of Marxist science by demonstrating their inadequacy to the real … Miliband appears to omit this first step. Yet the analysis of modern epistemology shows that it is never possible simply to oppose 'concrete facts' to concepts, but that these must be attacked by other parallel concepts situated in a new problematic. For it is only by means of these new concepts that the old notions can be confronted with 'concrete reality'…[68]

Many of Poulantzas's more specific criticisms followed from his first point about epistemology. Miliband's critique of pluralism, as summarised by Poulantzas, was that a plurality of elites did not exclude the existence of a ruling class, for it was precisely these elites that constituted the class. But this was to reply on the grounds of the adversary, risking 'floundering in the swamp of his ideological imagination'.[69] What he should have done was to provide a necessary preliminary critique of the ideological notion of elite 'in the light of the scientific concepts of Marxist theory'. And, had he done so:

> ... it would have been evident that the 'concrete reality' concealed by the notion of 'plural élites' – the ruling class, the fractions of this class, the State apparatus – can only be grasped if the very notion of an élite is rejected.[70]

Every concept, he argued, only has meaning within a whole theoretical problematic.[71] If a notion from another problematic is imported uncritically into Marxism, it could – at the extreme case – vitiate the use made of Marxist concepts themselves. While this had not happened with Miliband, he had sometimes allowed himself to be unduly influenced by the methodological principles of the adversary. He thus had difficulties in comprehending social classes and the state as *objective structures* and their relations as an *objective system of regular connections*. Instead he had constantly given the impression that:

> ... for him social classes or 'groups' are in some way reducible to *inter-personal relations* , that the State is reducible to inter-personal relations of the members of the diverse 'groups' that constitute the State apparatus, and finally that the relation between social classes and the State is itself reducible to inter-personal relations of 'individuals' composing social groups and 'individuals' composing the State apparatus.[72]

For Poulantzas, as for Althusser, this was to commit the 'humanistic' fallacy, in which 'man' was seen as the agent and in which explanations were ultimately sought at the level of individual motivations. The focus should rather be on 'the study of the objective coordinates that determine the distribution of agents into social classes and the contradictions between these classes'.[73]

A further key issue concerned the state and the personnel in control of it. Poulantzas argued that Miliband's examination of the social origins and common outlooks of the personnel in the state bureaucracy had been important for the purposes of demystification, but this was not the most significant issue. Since the relationship between the bourgeois class and the State was an *objective* relation, it meant that:

> If the *function* of the State in a determinate social formation and the *interests* of the dominant class in this formation *coincide*, it is by reason of the system itself: the direct participation of members of the ruling class in the State apparatus is not the

cause but the effect, and moreover a chance and contingent one, of this objective coincidence.[74]

Furthermore, Miliband seemed to reduce the role of the state to the conduct and 'behaviour' of members of the state apparatus. Had he first established the purpose of the state as the factor of cohesion, he would have seen that the participation of the dominant class, whether direct or indirect, in government in no way changed things. In fact, the capitalist state best served the interests of this class when its members did not participate in the state apparatus – when the ruling class was not the politically governing class.

Miliband was prepared to accept the criticism that *The State* was insufficiently theoretical. However, he still insisted that the only way to show the deficiencies of the democratic-pluralist approach was in empirical terms, and suggested that Poulantzas erred in the opposite direction:

> ... it is possible ... to be so profoundly concerned with the elaboration of an appropriate 'problematic' and with the avoidance of any contamination with opposed 'problematics' as to lose sight of the absolute necessity of empirical enquiry, and of the empirical demonstration of the falsity of these opposed and apologetic 'problematics'.[75]

It was not, he suggested, a crude matter of counterposing empiricist against anti-empiricist approaches, for the difference was a matter of emphasis – but the emphasis was important. He had, he justifiably claimed, repeatedly noted how the government and bureaucracy were subject to structural constraints, but should perhaps have stressed this more. However, he then attacked Poulantzas for going much too far in dismissing the nature of the state elite as of no account and for implying that the state's behaviour was wholly determined by 'objective relations'.

Miliband's defence on such points had been less convincing than it might have been because he was trying to reply in the terms that Poulantzas had set – structuralist theory and philosophy – and these were not the spheres in which he was most accomplished. He felt that the Althusserians were going too far towards abstraction in an esoteric search for 'problematics' but he was not able to articulate his own conception of the status of a theory and its relationship with evidence in the 'real world'. He thus suggested that the differences were a matter of emphasis. This tended to make Poulantzas appear the more rigorous theorist, particularly as it was he who was defining the nature of theory.[76] However, when Poulantzas moved on to the interpretation of Marxism itself, Miliband became more confident and began to express fundamental disagreements. These concerned the meaning of the 'relative autonomy of the state'; the basis for this in Marx's own writings; its implications for the understanding of Fascism on the one hand and 'bourgeois democracy' on the other; and the definition of the

state itself and its relationship with society. Their differences were embedded in crucially important conceptual and ideological divergences. Miliband had only half appreciated this when he replied to Poulantzas's review of *The State* in 1970, but the disagreements which he had articulated in a muted form at that stage became dominant in his review of *Political Power* in the Autumn of 1973. They may therefore be summarised primarily with reference to his second intervention.

He immediately adopted a negative tone. His first criticism was the obscurity of the style. Secondly, he was uneasy about the Althusserian approach, which required the texts of the Marxist classics to be 'completed', and subjected to a particular critical treatment, with the 'necessary scientific concepts contained in them ... deciphered, concepts which are either absent, or, ... are present in the practical state'.[77] He acknowledged that the approach was not illegitimate, but the question was how well the 'deciphering' had been done. In his view Poulantzas had not produced an accurate message and much of his 'reading' constituted 'a serious misrepresentation of Marx and Engels and also of the actual reality he is seeking to portray'.[78]

Poulantzas's starting point was absolutely right in wanting to reaffirm the notion of 'relative autonomy' in relation to the state, not only in 'exceptional circumstances', but in *all* circumstances. But it was necessary to know: how relative is relative? In what circumstances is it more so or less? What form did the autonomy assume? In Miliband's view, Poulantzas's *approach* prevented him from providing a satisfactory answer. In his reply in the original exchange, Miliband had argued that this mode of analysis led towards 'structural super-determinism', but a more accurate description would be 'structuralist abstractionism':

> ... the world of 'structures' and 'levels' which he inhabits has so few points of contact with historical or contemporary reality that it cuts him off from any possibility of achieving what he describes as 'the political analysis of a concrete conjuncture'.[79]

Despite Poulantzas's insistence on the need for 'rigorous' and 'scientific' analysis, Miliband now suggested that he was not really producing any analysis at all.

His third major criticism was that Poulantzas failed to distinguish between 'class power' and 'state power'. Poulantzas claimed that:

> ... the concept of power cannot ... be applied to one level of the structure. When we speak, for example, of *State power*, we cannot mean by it the mode of the state's articulation at the other levels of the structure; *we can only mean the power of a determinate class* to whose interests (rather than to those of other social classes), the state corresponds.[80]

Miliband disagreed and argued that this turned the state into the merest instru-

ment of a determinate class. Indeed Poulantzas conceptualised it out of exist-ence, with the argument that social institutions and, in particular, the institu-tions of the state, did not 'strictly speaking' have any power, but could only be related 'to social classes which hold power'.[81] The failure to distinguish between class power and state power led, he argued, to various other failures: the claim that 'ideological apparatuses' – such as churches, schools, the media – were part of the state, irrespective of whether their formal juridical status was public or private;[82] the dismissive attitude towards the importance of particular forms of state structure, such as the separation of powers; and the underestimation of the significance of the role of political parties in organising and articulating the interests and demands of various classes, notably the dominant class. The overall weakness, according to Miliband, was that Poulantzas's 'structural super-deter-minism' made him *assume* what had to be *explained* about the relationship of the state to classes in the capitalist mode of production.[83]

The final element of Miliband's attack was the most fundamental. It began with an apparently theoretical critique of Poulantzas's understanding of 'Bonapart-ism'. This followed points that he had already made in his reply to Poulantzas's original review, but this time he went a good deal further. Despite Poulantzas's assertions there was, he argued, nothing in Marx and Engels' writings to suggest that they conceived Bonapartism 'as a constitutive theoretical characteristic of the very type of capitalist state.' [84] Even if one could take a passing reference in a letter from Engels to Marx as the main pillar in the construction of a Marxist theory of the state, Engels was wrong in describing Bonapartism as the 'religion' of the bourgeoisie':

> As the extreme inflation of executive power and the forcible demobilization of all political forces in civil society, Bonapartism is not the religion of the bourgeoisie at all – it is the last *resort* in conditions of political instability so great as to present a threat to the maintenance of the existing social order, including of course the system of domination which is the central part of that order.[85]

However, for Miliband this was not just a matter of scholarship, and he then went on to make his most serious charge:

> The insistence that Marx and Engels did believe that Bonapartism *was* the 'consti-tutive theoretical characteristic of the very type of capitalist state' is not 'innocent': it is intended to invoke their authority for the view that there is *really* no differ-ence, or at least no *real* difference between such a form of state and the bourgeois-democratic form. Thus Poulantzas writes that 'in the framework of the capitalist class state, parliamentary legitimacy is 'no closer to the people' than that legitimacy which corresponds to the predominance of the executive. In fact, these are always *ideological* processes in both cases.' (p.312). But this is to pose the issues in a peril-ously confusing manner: the issue is not one of 'legitimacy' or 'closeness to the people': it is whether there is a real difference in the manner of operation between

different forms of the capitalist state, and if so, what are the implications of these differences. But suppose we do pose the question in the terms chosen by Poulantzas. Both the Weimar Republic and the Nazi state were capitalist class states. But is it the case that 'parliamentary legitimacy' was no 'closer to the people' than 'that legitimacy which corresponds to the predominance of executive'? *Let us not be melodramatic about this, but after all fifty million people died partly at least in consequence of the fact that German Comintern-Marxism, at a crucial moment of time, saw no real difference between the two forms of state.* Poulantzas also writes...that 'the popular sovereignty of political democracy finds its expression equally well in a classical parliamentarism and in a Bonapartist semi-dictatorship' (p.312). But neither is the issue here one of 'popular sovereignty'. This too is to confuse matters and to lend credence to confusions that in the past have proved catastrophic in their consequences.[86] (my emphasis)

This was a bitter and emotive accusation and Poulantzas was outraged by the suggestion that he more or less identified Fascist forms with parliamentary democracy. In his reply to Miliband in 1976 he argued that in *Political Power* he was attacking the concept of 'totalitarianism', precisely pointing to the direction that the analysis of the differences between a Fascist state and parliamentary democratic forms of bourgeois state would have to take. In his subsequent book, *Fascism and Dictatorship*, he took this much further, attacking the Comintern theoretico-political principles which led to the identifications which Miliband rightly referred to, and distinguished between Bonapartism, Fascism and other forms. It was, he claimed, amazing that Miliband should have made his criticisms after *Fascism and Dictatorship* had appeared and 'such methods made any constructive dialogue impossible'.[87]

In fact Miliband did acknowledge, in a footnote, that Poulantzas's discussion of the 'crisis state' was 'wider and much more solid' in the latter book.[88] However, since he was reviewing *Political Power*, not the whole corpus of Poulantzas's writings or the evolution of his theoretical position, it was quite legitimate to concentrate on this work. The question, therefore, is whether Poulantzas was justified in claiming that he had distinguished clearly between Fascism and bourgeois democracy in *Political Power*.

Fascism was only mentioned once in the body of the book and this was amplified in an extensive footnote. It came at a point where Poulantzas was arguing that 'totalitarianism' was not really analytically distinct from capitalist states as a whole, and needed to be understood in relation to his general analysis of political power. He then mentioned the frequent claim that the Nazi and Fascist states were often considered 'particularly intense forms of totalitarianism',[89] but stated:

I shall leave aside the problem of the fascist state. The fascist state is a very complex phenomenon which cannot be absorbed into the general phenomenon of totalitarianism: it can be studied only by examining the relation between the social

forces in the concrete conjuncture.[90]

He then continued with his footnote.[91] From this I would conclude the following. Miliband was, strictly speaking, wrong to accuse Poulantzas of identifying Fascism with bourgeois democracy. This footnote made it clear that he regarded Fascism as a distinct phenomenon which could not be encompassed within the genus of 'capitalist state'. However, Miliband's charges were not wholly misplaced. For Poulantzas was certainly arguing that there was no real analytical distinction between the 'liberal' state and the so-called 'totalitarian state'. Thus Miliband was justified in claiming that Poulantzas had failed to distinguish between different forms of non-Fascist state. But then there is a further issue, which reinforces Miliband's attack. Poulantzas certainly maintains that there is an *analytical* difference between the 'capitalist state' and the 'Fascist state'. However, in *Political Power* he does not explain the *significance* of this difference in *political* terms. From his general method it can be inferred that he would attempt to explain Fascism in relation to a particular configuration of class relations requiring a specific form of state. What he did not do was explain why this mattered *politically*, and the fact that he also failed to discuss significant differences between authoritarian and liberal states in political terms made Miliband's reaction understandable. Moreover, there is a further crucial factor here which obviously provoked Miliband's reaction: the very omission of a proper discussion of 'Fascism' in *Political Power*.[92]

Given his age, background, and experiences, for Miliband Fascism was one of the most significant developments in the twentieth century. The fact that Poulantzas could discuss the capitalist state without analysing the relationship between capitalism and Fascism was therefore incomprehensible. As he also appeared to minimise the importance of the differences between non-Fascist capitalist states – failing, for example, to discuss dictatorship as a separate category – this justified the inference that he believed that they were 'all the same'. Poulantzas did not actually think this, but his analysis was often so opaque and his omissions so striking, that it was an understandable misinterpretation.

The exchange between the two authors ended in mutual bitterness. Miliband finished his review with a patronising comment about the limited value of *Political Power*[93] while Poulantzas's final words on Miliband were contemptuous.[94] It is a pity that the exchange ended in this way, for the irony is that the political positions of the two were certainly much closer by 1976 than when their books were originally published.

c) Miliband and the Meaning of the Debate

How did Miliband view the debate and why had he taken such an aggressive line in his review of *Political Power*? As already argued, the real difference between

them was not in their political conclusions but in their starting points: ideological divergences in their attitudes to the nature of theory. When Poulantzas had reviewed *The State* in 1969 Miliband had been prepared to accept the argument that it was insufficiently theoretical both because of the apparent sophistication of the criticism and because he had felt this himself. But he had not liked the political implications of 'structural super-determinism' or the concept of ideological state apparatuses. Subsequently, his belief that Marxist writing should be persuasive and accessible made him increasingly impatient with abstract Althusserian approaches. Since he was unhappy with both the political implications of *Political Power* and the abstruse style in which it was written, the only way in which it could be redeemed would be by demonstrating that its interpretation of both the 'real world' and theory were convincing. As far as Miliband was concerned, it could not succeed in the first task because it engaged so little with empirical evidence. This meant that the only remaining possibility would be its theoretical plausibility. But by the time he wrote his review in 1973 he was also sure that it had failed in this respect. Despite the impressive references to non-Marxist theorists, he no longer believed that the research was as rigorous at it looked. He thus told one correspondent:

> They are a very odd lot, these Althusserians; and I am coming to think that there is a vast amount of sheer charlatanism in their stuff, in the sense ... that they don't <u>know</u> any economics or history or sociology, but pretend that they do, or that it is all empiricist nonsense anyway, or whatever.[95]

This then left the question of whether the interpretation of Marxism was valid. This might not have been crucial had Miliband been convinced about the work on other grounds, for he himself believed in examining Marxism critically rather than as a gospel. But, particularly since Poulantzas was implying that his approach was the only scientifically valid reading of Marx, the plausibility of this claim now became crucial. However, Miliband regarded the passing reference to Bonapartism as the religion of the bourgeoisie as the most slender possible basis on which to construct a Marxist theory – particularly one with consequences that he thought could be so damaging politically. Yet while all these disagreements partially explain the hostile tone of the review there were still deeper issues at stake than those he articulated.

Miliband treated the controversy as if it was simply a debate about the Marxist theory of the state. However, in the course of it he had accused Poulantzas of making the same mistake as the Comintern in relation to Nazism – a mistake which was partly responsible for fifty million deaths. In Miliband's mind the issues at stake were thus of overwhelming *political* importance and were certainly not matters of esoteric theory. He may not even have been fully conscious of the reasons for the antipathy that he was now expressing. Nevertheless, it is important to try to identify them and, in order to do so, it is helpful briefly to

compare his thinking with that of Edward Thompson.

After leaving the Communist Party Thompson had developed the notion of 'socialist humanism' in total opposition to Stalinism. This had emphasised human choice and morality as an integral part of any valid form of Marxism or socialism and he had reacted emotionally against theories which appeared to deny this. This was one reason for his bitter condemnation of *NLR* mark 2 under Perry Anderson, and would be the centrepiece of his polemic against the Althusserians in *The Poverty of Theory* in 1978. Miliband had, of course, differed from Thompson both in his attitude to Anderson and in relation to 'socialist humanism'. Unlike Thompson he was unhappy about explicitly focusing on moral issues and he emphasised objective structures rather than subjective experiences and choices. However, he was much closer to Thompson's outlook than he realised and this was manifested in his reaction to Poulantzas. For he did not regard Marxism as a deterministic science, which was wholly distinct from the enlightenment tradition. His approach was analysis, informed by a theoretical framework, which was sufficiently flexible to take account of contingency and human agency, and which incorporated moral judgments and distinctions. This was really the basis for his sharp opposition to Poulantzas's notion of the 'relative autonomy of the state'. If 'autonomy' implies a degree of freedom of choice, Poulantzas's concept was not really one of 'autonomy' at all. It did not mean that the people who were in charge of state policies could make choices themselves, for the 'autonomy' from the economic class interests was *structurally determined* so as to ensure that the capitalist mode of production could continue. But Miliband *did* believe that human beings were in charge of states and that they had a degree of choice, even though this was severely constrained. He did not foreclose the possibility of socialists winning power and effecting fundamental changes or of mainstream politicians resisting dictatorship and Fascism. Similarly, he reacted emotionally against a view of Marxism as a science which needed to be protected from contamination by the bourgeois world and which appeared to suggest that liberal-democratic freedoms and the institutions in civil society had no particular value. Finally, he could not accept the fact that *Political Power* had *failed* to deal with Fascism by explicitly differentiating between it and liberal-democracy in the main body of the book. It was this which led him to compare Poulantzas with the Comintern on Nazism – a charge which was not dissimilar to some of those made by Thompson. Both the arguments in his critique and the underlying assumptions which explain his vehemence thus reveal a great deal about Miliband's political and intellectual perspectives.

However, in the later 1970s and early 1980s many believed that Poulantzas had 'won' the debate with Miliband and it was his work that theorists often sought to develop and refine. This certainly did not mean that Miliband and *The State in Capitalist Society* were ignored – far from it. But it was no longer viewed as being at the cutting edge of theory – somehow it now seemed too easy, almost obvi-

ous. The fact that this was exactly Miliband's aim – to make a socialist analysis appear to be a matter of common sense – was overlooked.[96] Was Miliband upset about this?

It must have been a little galling to have witnessed the appeal of Poulantzas's work when he had come to believe that the whole Althusserian school was going up a blind alley, but this was certainly not a major preoccupation for him. He was not always sure of himself, but he was fairly confident that his own work was more worthwhile than the esoteric abstractions he associated with the Althusserian school. However, he did evaluate Poulantzas's work positively on one tragic occasion.

In October 1979 Poulantzas committed suicide and Miliband spoke at a memorial event at the Center for European Studies at Harvard. He had been genuinely moved by a sense of loss although he had never met Poulantzas, and he presented a thoughtful and generous appraisal of his contribution. He also noted the clear shift of emphasis in his last work[97], which seemed to hold out the possibility of a democratic path to socialism. Miliband continued:

> Reading this book in the knowledge of Poulantzas's death, and of the manner of his death, I have a sense of his desperation, of an impasse: 'optimism about the democratic road to socialism should not lead us to consider it as a royal road, smooth and free of risks. Risks there are, although they are no longer quite what they used to be: at worst, we could be heading for camps and massacres as appointed victims. But to that I reply: if we weigh up the risks, that is in any case preferable to massacring other people only to end up ourselves beneath the blade of a Committee of Public Safety or some Dictator of the Proletariat.' (265)
> That strikes me as rather desperate and despairing: part of a climate, a miasma, which has [a] constraining and debilitating impact. Poulantzas cannot but have been affected by this; and by the disappointments of the spring of 1978 and the defeat of the French left at the polls; and the disappointments of the Greek Communist Party of the Interior of which he was a member, and for which he stood as a candidate. Silly to say that the defeats and disappointments and uncertainties killed him, or explain his death. But it cannot have helped. He might have been less likely to take the course he did if circumstances had been less negative and gloomy and if the left was not in such political, intellectual and moral disarray. Whatever ailed him might have been more easily borne and less tragically resolved. I don't know. But I know that his disappearance is a great loss and a cause for mourning and grief.[98]

This highlights Miliband's whole approach and sense of priorities. He had differed from Poulantzas and had come to see the whole Althusserian school as a diversion from the main socialist tasks. Nevertheless, he now viewed Poulantzas – particularly in his final book – as someone who had been engaged in a common struggle. Others may have seen the Miliband-Poulantzas debate as a matter of intellectual machismo or even as a detached theoretical search for

new paradigms or *problematiques*. Some were to build their academic careers by continuing the search – until they found newer intellectual byways still more enticing. But after Poulantzas committed suicide, Miliband regarded him as a soulmate in pursuit of socialism.

Notes

[1] George Ross, 'Ralph Miliband', *Political Science and Politics* 27 September 1994.
[2] Clyde Barrow, 'An Intellectual History of the Miliband-Poulantzas Debate', Paper presented at the Conference, 'Miliband and Poulantzas in Retrospect and Prospect' held at the Graduate School and University Center, The City University of New York, 24-25 April 1997.
[3] Notes, 7 May 1962, Miliband papers. He had already been thinking about such a book before finishing *Parliamentary Socialism*. See chapter 3, note 47.
[4] His first explicit mention of the classical Marxist theory is as follows:

As starting point, as hypothesis, guide to further reflection, view of the state as executive agent of ruling class illuminating and enormously helpful, beginning of wisdom. As statement of final nature, as exhaustive definition, not enough. Qualifications and elaborations, refinements. No state is only that, no state can afford in interests of ruling class to be only that. A ruling, dominant class never rules directly but always through instruments (which is one reason why 'ruling class' is an awkward term, to which I prefer 'dominant class', I think.) An instrument is not always pliable, develops interests, values, procedures of its own. Meets up with point of Engels which worries me: Engels does make allowance for "independent" instrument, admittedly in 'exceptional circumstances'…, which is a very large theoretical loophole and which I think wrong. But need to explore. What this connects with is independent role of state, bureaucracy, above class state etc. Very large loophole. (Notes, 'The Nature of the State' p.2).

[5] Ibid, p.5 (I have added the words and phrases in square brackets to make the notes more readable).
[6] One further quotation illustrates this:

Look closely at 'concentration of power' and 'Power Elite'. How much of an exaggeration are these notions? Note the coercive character of the French state as compared with the American – in France despite the millions of communist voters, with none in America … How much depends on "consensus"? Which suggests that my old formula 'liberty is a function of security' needs to be looked at again: Perhaps 'liberty' is a function of the potential insecurity of the dominant class'. But all this is unsatisfactory. True, power is concentrated in few hands. But influence? And how much does influence react upon power, and affect it. Power as ability to impose decisions; influence as ability to affect power, not to coerceit, but to make it pay heed, with ultimate choice whether to pay heed or not left in hands of powerwielders.
Must explain convincingly why it is that those whom American state are supposed to protect best do not always get their way, and certainly do not feel they are being protected most effectively. Big business and government. Much more complex interrelation than mechanical formulas suggest. (Notes, 'Countervailing forces')

[7] Liebman and Saville criticised his definition of the State, with Liebman putting forward some of the points which would later form part of the debate with Poulantzas. Bob Looker, a former student and subsequently a lecturer in politics, thought the book under-stated the degree of transformation that had taken place in state-economy relations since 1945 and also criticised Miliband's treatment of ideology and legitimation. Miliband papers, June-July 1968.
[8] In the event Weidenfeld decided not to publish the book in Gellner's series, but as a separate volume.

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[9] Letter to Miliband, 2 July 1968.

[10] Letter to Saville, 29 July 1968.

[11] 'Sooner or later, and despite all the immense obstacles on the way, the working class and its allies in other classes will acquire ... ['the faculty of ruling of the nation', (Marx)]. When they do, the socialist society they will create will not require the establishment of an all-powerful state on the ruins of the old. On the contrary, their 'faculty of ruling the nation' will, for the first time in history, enable them to bring into being an authentically democratic social order, a truly free society of self-governing men and women, in which, as Marx also put it, the state will be converted 'from an organ superimposed upon society into one completely subordinated to it.' *The State in Capitalist Society*, (Quartet Books, 1973), p.247. (All subsequent page numbers refer to this edition of the book).

[12] Ibid., p.6 .

[13] pp. 6-7.

[14] p.8. It is worth noting that Miliband also added the following in a footnote: 'Note, however, a major attempt at a theoretical elaboration of the Marxist 'model' of the state, which appeared when the present was nearing completion, namely N.Poulantzas, *Pouvoir Politique et Classes Sociales* 1968. (Note 3, p.8).

[15] Ibid.

[16] Ibid.

[17] p.44.

[18] p.46.

[19] p.50.

[20] p.51.

[21] p.62.

[22] p.69.

[23] p.85.

[24] 'Marx and the State' in *The Socialist Register 1965*.

[25] 'The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon, quoted in *The State in Capitalist Society*, p.85.

[26] It resembled that advanced by Tim Mason in an influential article. 'The Primacy of Politics – Politics and Economics in National Socialist Germany' in S.J.Woolf (ed.) *The Nature of Fascism* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1968). Miliband had probably not read this article when he wrote *The State*.

[27] p. 130.

[28] Ibid.

[29] p.68.

[30] p.233.

[31] p.241.

[32] p.242.

[33] p.243.

[34] p.245.

[35] Ibid.

[36] p.246.

[37] p.241.

[38] 'Ralph Miliband, Socialist Intellectual, 1924-1994' in *Socialist Register 1995*.

[39] 'Miliband and Poulantzas in Retrospect and Prospect' held at the Graduate School and University Center, The City University of New York, 24-25 April 1997.

[40] A very useful explanation of Marxist theories of the State, with a full bibliography is Martin Carnoy, *The State and Political Theory* (Princeton University Press, 1984).

[41] George Lichtheim, *From Marx to Hegel* (New York, 1974), p.150, quoted in Arthur Hirsh, *The French New Left – An Intellectual History from Sartre to Gorz* (South End Press, 1981), p.190.

[42] Bob Jessop, *Nicos Poulantzas – Marxist Theory and Political Strategy* (Macmillan, 1985), p.5. (The

biographical information on Poulantzas is taken from this source).

[43] 'Eurocommunism' was never a precise concept, but implied a separation from the Soviet model and a commitment to pluralism, civil liberties, and democracy. It was associated most closely with the Italian and Spanish Communist Parties, while the French Party was more divided. The then General-Secretary of the Spanish Party, Santiago Carrillo, attempted a definition in *Eurocommunism and the State* (Lawrence and Wishart, 1977).

[44] *The French New Left*, p.161.

[45] Poulantzas was later to disavow structuralism, and would increasingly emphasise class struggles and the existence of such struggles within the state itself. For a succint explanation of his evolution, see Carnoy, *The State and Political Theory*, pp. 98-104; 107-127.

[46] As Althusser himself put it:

'That the precondition of a reading of Marx is a Marxist theory of the differential nature of theoretical formations and their history, that is, a theory of epistemological history, which is Marxist philosophy itself; that this operation in itself constitutes an indispensible circle in which the application of Marxist theory to Marx himself appears to be the absolute precondition of an understanding of Marx and at the same time as a precondition even of the constitution and development of Marxist philosophy, so much is clear.'

Louis Althusser, *For Marx* (New York, 1970), quoted in Hirsh, *The French New Left*, p.166.

[47] In the Althusserian theoretical framework a 'mode of production' was characterised as a set of concepts, while a 'social formation' was a concrete instance in an actual society in which a particular mode of production predominated. For example, the capitalist mode of production predominates in both contemporary Germany and France, but they are distinct social formations. Poulantzas explained this in the introduction to *Political Power and Social Classes* (New Left Books, 1973), where he also noted that several modes of production could co-exist in the same social formation, and did so within capitalism.

[48] Hirsh, *The French New Left*, pp. 173-74.

[49] *Political Power*, p.239.

[50] Ibid., pp.249-52.

[51] Ibid., pp. 274-90.

[52] He explained this as follows:

It is true that the political and economic struggles of the dominated classes impose this on the capitalist state. However, this simply shows that the state is not a class instrument, but rather the state of a society divided into classes. The class struggle in capitalist formations entails that this guarantee of the economic interests of certain dominated classes is inscribed *as a possibility*, within the very limits imposed by the state on the struggle for hegemonic class leadership. But in making this guarantee, the state aims precisely at the political disorganisation of the dominated classes; in a formation where the strictly political struggle of the dominated classes is possible, it is the sometimes indispensable means of maintaining the dominant classes' hegemony. In other words, according to the concrete conjuncture, a *line of demarcation* can always be drawn within which the guarantee given by the capitalist state to the dominated classes'economic interests not only fails to threaten the political relation of class domination but even constitutes an element of this relation.' Ibid., p.191.

[53] In his review of *The State in Capitalist Society*, he defined the state as 'the factor of cohesion of a social formation and the factor of reproduction of the conditions of production of a system'. 'The Problem of the Capitalist State', p. 240. The review was originally published.in *NLR* 58, November-December 1969. It was reproduced in Robin Blackburn (ed.) *Ideology in Social Science*, (Fontana, 1972), and the page references used here are to this version.

[54] *Political Power*, p.336.

[55] David Gold, Clarence Lo and Erik Olin Wright, 'Recent Developments in Marxist Theories of the Capitalist State, Part 1', *Monthly Review* 27, October 1975, p. 36, quoted in Barrow, 'The Miliband-Poulantzas Debate'.

[56] Letter to Miliband, n.d. June (?) 1968.

[57] Letter to Liebman, 21 June 1968.

[58] Letter to Poulantzas, 26 June 1968.

[59] Letter to Miliband, n.d. July (?) 1968.

[60] Letter to Rossana Rossanda, 12 November 1969.

[61] Letter to Poulantzas, 22 December 1969. He also told Liebman that he had found Poulantzas's review very interesting. Letter, 11 December 1969.

[62] For example, he told Howard Sherman that 'there is a great deal which is important and true in [Poulantzas's] insistence that what is above all required is an adequate problematic, and that my book could have done with a lot more of it'. He added that if he brought out a second edition, the really important thing to do would be to strengthen the theoretical side. Letter, 5 April 1970.

[63] Letter to Harry Magdoff n.d. September (?) 1971. *Monthly Review* did not publish it.

[64] Letter to Miliband, 9 October 1973.

[65] Letter to Anderson, 14 October 1973.

[66] Letter to Singer, 15 October 1973.

[67] 'The Problem of the Capitalist State', p.240.

[68] p.241.

[69] Ibid.

[70] Ibid.

[71] A 'problematic' was a key Althusserian notion. It has been defined as 'the underlying nexus of concepts which determined both the questions posed and silences of the empirical text'. Edward Benton, 'Louis Althusser' in R.Benewick and P.Green, *The Routledge Dictionary of Twentieth Century Political Thinkers* (Routledge, 1992).

[72] 'The Problem of the Capitalist State', p.242.

[73] Ibid.

[74] Ibid., p.245.

[75] 'Reply to Nicos Poulantzas', p.256. This was originally in *NLB 59*, 1970, and republished in Blackburn, *Ideology in Social* Science. The references here are to the latter version.

[76] Ernesto Laclau criticised Miliband for treating the issues as differences in emphasis when the approaches were based in radically different epistemological positions. He regarded Miliband's position as 'pre-theoretical'. 'The Specificity of the Political: the Poulantzas-Miliband Debate', *Economy and Society*, 1975 and republished in Ernesto Laclau, *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory* (Verso, 1979). Such criticisms depend upon a particular interpretation of the meaning and status of theory.

[77] *Political Power* , pp.257-8.

[78] 'Poulantzas and the Capitalist State', p.37. The review was originally published in *NLR 82*, November-December 1973 and republished in Miliband, *Class Power and State Power* (Verso, 1983). References here are to the latter version.

[79] Ibid, p.38.

[80] *Political Power*, p.100, quoted in 'Poulantzas and the Capitalist State', p.40.

[81] *Political Power*, p.115, quoted in Ibid.

[82] Poulantzas had defined 'ideological state apparatuses' as part of the state (whether they were public or private) in his review of *The State in Capitalist Society* and Miliband had been very critical of this in his reply. This was partly because Miliband's definition had specifically excluded them, but there were also more fundamental reasons. In the aftermath of May 1968 Poulantzas appeared to suggest that such institutions needed to be 'smashed' by a revolutionary movement. Miliband did not take this line.

[83] Ibid, pp.41-2.

[84] Ibid, p.43, quoting *Political Power*, p.258.

[85] Ibid., pp.44-45. Miliband demonstrated the way in which Poulantzas had quoted selectively from Engels to make part of the letter appear more significant than it had been in the original, and had interpreted Marx's 1869 Preface to *The Eighteenth Brumaire* in an idiosyncratic way. Laclau, who

was more sympathetic to Poulantzas than to Miliband, nevertheless agreed that Poulantzas was guilty of an 'obvious textual abuse'. Laclau, *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory*, p.66.

[86] 'Poulantzas and the Capitalist State', p.45.

[87] 'The Capitalist State: A Reply to Miliband and Laclau', *NLR 95*, January-February 1976, p.76.

[88] Note 25 in original review (note 43 in *Class Power and State Power*).

[89] *Political Power*, p.292.

[90] Ibid, p.293.

[91] The footnote stated:

> I do not intend to discuss this complex problem here. I shall note only the following. If, as is normal, we attribute a very vague sense of 'authoritarianism' or 'totalitarianism' to the term Fascist state, it loses all its specificity: in this sense, every concrete form of the capitalist state is more or less 'fascist'. Moreover, if we follow the theoretical line of the Third International before the Seventh Congress and see Fascism simply as that form of the capitalist state which corresponds to monopoly capitalism and imperialism, we end up with this same result: in this sense, every contemporary form of state should be 'fascist' in varying degrees. These conceptions are obviously insufficient, especially as they fail to allow a scientific study of specific political forms.
>
> We must attribute to the term 'fascist state' a *precise meaning* which denotes those specific state forms which appeared in Nazi Germany and (to a different degree) in Fascist Italy. We are here concerned with specific forms of state, specific in that they cannot be inserted into the typological framework of the capitalist state because they are characterized precisely by an articulation of the economic and the political, different from that specifying the capitalist type of state … [T]his is by no means the case in the authoritarian framework of the 'typical' capitalist state which allows us to conceive of Bonapartism as the 'religion of the bourgeoisie'. I note also the following two points: (i) This divergence of the fascist state … from the capitalist state poses no *theoretical impossibilities*, in the same sense that war capitalism poses no theoretical impossibilities for the analysis of the [Capitalist Mode of Production] or even of monopoly capitalism: these are *marginal historical divergences*.
>
> (ii) The fascist state as it appears in a capitalist formation, unlike other 'dictatorial' or 'absolutist' forms, of course presents numerous characteristics of the capitalist type of state, although it is situated on the margin of its typological framework. This is a theoretical problem which, *mutatis mutandis*, is formally related to that of the Bismarckian state … (iii) It is exactly this which has led to the absorption of the fascist state into the capitalist type of state, by connecting it with 'Bonapartism' … *When we have said this, we have still given no reply to the following question: what, in the concrete conjunction of a capitalist formation, are the concrete factors (i.e. the political class relations) which produce the specific political phenomenon of the fascist state?* And this problem is too complex to be discussed within the scope of this book.' Ibid, pp.293-4, Note 29.

[92] Perhaps the evolution from the 'liberal' state to the military dictatorship in Greece partially explains Poulantzas's different emphasis.

[93] … I have no wish to suggest that the reader will not find useful, suggestive and important ideas in *Political Power and Social Classes*. But I am also bound to say, with genuine regret, that it does not seem to me to be very helpful in the development of that Marxist political sociology which Poulantzas quite rightly wants to see advanced.
'Poulantzas and the Capitalist State', p.46.

[94] While going some way towards accepting his criticisms about the obscurity of the language, he rebutted his methodological and theoretical criticisms and concluded that if progress were to be made 'the impasse represented by Miliband's positions will not help us'. 'A Reply to Miliband and Laclau', p.77.

[95] RM to Steven Lukes, 3 December 1973. In the same letter he continued with a point which was particularly important for him, given his own attitude to C.Wright Mills:

> It comes as a shock, for instance to find Poulantzas so crassly misunderstanding the basic

point Mills is making about *The Power Elite;* and it suggests that he does not really look at
stuff seriously.

[96] Ellen Wood's obituary of Miliband stressed exactly this aspect of his contribution. 'The Common
Sense of Socialism', *Radical Philosophy* 68, 1994.

[97] *State, Power, Socialism* (New Left Books, 1978).

[98] Text of speech at the memorial event, 13 November 1979.

Chapter Seven: Marxism and Politics, 1970-77

In the aftermath of the 'troubles'at LSE and the publication of *The State in Capitalist Society,* Miliband remained unsettled. He was still enjoying his teaching, particularly on the Masters in Political Sociology, but he was deeply unhappy at the institution. He was also uncertain about aspects of his politics, becoming increasingly critical of the influence of Communism and Lenin himself on European socialism without being clear about the way forward. But this was combined with a more general loss of direction in his life and in May 1970 he was even thinking of abandoning *Socialist Register* after the next issue. He was enthusiastic about CAFD in its early stages, but was finding it increasingly difficult to decide what he should do more generally. With his teaching and editing, a young child and a baby at home, and an ever growing number of invitations to speak and write, he was always extremely busy – sometimes frenetically so. But he was also looking for something new without being able to define it.

By now there were certainly more academic openings for him. In February 1970 he was asked if he would consider a Chair in the Graduate Department of Sociology at the New School for Social Research in New York. He declined the invitation for a permanent appointment, but said that he would be interested in coming for one year.[1] At almost the same time he was offered a visiting Professorship for one semester at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver. He was on the point of accepting this when he heard that the University had just dismissed several left-wing staff and was suspending others. Realising that his presence might appear to legitimise what had happened, he refused the invitation.[2] However, by the end of 1970 he was turning against a North American stay and when he received two further offers through his ex-students he rejected them, saying that he really wanted to concentrate on his writing.[3] But he remained dejected and Marion, who was well aware of his unhappiness at LSE, encouraged him to accept an invitation to teach in Mexico for a summer school at the National University for six weeks in the Spring of 1971. This certainly gave him a boost. Sharing a house with Eric Hobsbawm whose company he enjoyed, he also found the teaching stimulating, thought Mexico was beautiful, and was able to develop his political ideas more constructively. But it did not provide any long-term solution to his dilemmas. However, a few weeks later he suddenly received a completely unexpected letter.

This was from Lord Boyle, the former Conservative Cabinet minister, and now Vice Chancellor of Leeds University, who wrote:

> We are trying to fill the Chair left vacant owing to the death of Professor

A.H.Hanson; and on behalf of the Committee, I am writing to invite you to come to have a talk with us about the possibility of your joining us in this Chair.[4]

Miliband immediately accepted the invitation but wondered what was going on. A few days later he told John Griffith that he imagined he was a rank outsider and was being asked so as not to raise charges of prejudice. He continued:

> Much more important, however, is the fact that I am very doubtful whether, in the remote event of my being offered the thing, I should accept. My reasons are frankly political in the broad sense. Of course, in one way, to accept would give me some influence and make it possible to shape things etc. On the other hand, going there as professor of politics and head of a department involves all kinds of responsibilities *and compromises* which I would resist but which would make life difficult. Why not remain a marginal man, free from establishment demands, and able to act and speak and write as I will. No doubt, one says that one would do so anyway – but so do all socialists who have gone into parliament, and the analogy is not all that far-fetched. So I waver, even though I shall almost certainly be rescued from the dilemma by not being offered the job – the more so as I don't intend to blunt edges when I go and talk to the Committee. If my life ambition was to be a professor of politics, things would be simple. But it honestly isn't. <u>What</u> my life ambition is is a different matter.[5]

In fact, Boyle wanted to make a new appointment which would transform the Department. Richard Greaves, a Professor in the Department of Government at LSE, was an external examiner at Leeds and in the summer of 1971 had been there for an examiners' meeting. Boyle told him that they were looking for a new Professor and Greaves recommended Miliband as an outstanding academic who had had unfortunate experiences at LSE and now needed to move on in a different environment. Boyle then consulted the acting Head of Department, Justin Grossman, who had been taught by Miliband at LSE in the late 1950s and had a very high opinion of him.[6] Another key influence was Zygmunt Bauman, who had just been appointed Professor of Sociology at Leeds, after having been expelled from Poland at the same time as Kolakowski.[7] Having originally met Miliband in Poland in 1957, he had subsequently got to know him later that year at LSE where he had spent a post-doctoral year. Bauman, who was to be a member of the appointment committee, also angled for Miliband and it was on the basis of these recommendations that Boyle had written his letter. All this meant that Miliband was actually in a far stronger position than he realised when he was eventually interviewed in September.
He then told one of his friends:

> I had an extremely interesting and amusing interview at Leeds. It began disastrously with Lord Boyle asking me why I was particularly interested in Leeds and my replying that, as a matter of fact, I wasn't particularly interested in Leeds, and

wouldn't have thought of the job if it had not been suggested to me – <u>and</u> that I was by no means sure that I would, should occasion offer, leave the LSE. However, things improved; and I was later told by Bauman, and from another independent source that the interview had gone marvellously well, that the committee had been most impressed by my frankness ...[8]

While the committee was unanimously impressed by his intelligence and the breadth of his knowledge, some of its members were alarmed by his views and feared that student rebellion would follow him to Leeds if he were appointed. They preferred another safer candidate, who would be a 'good committee man'.[9] There was therefore a considerable delay after the interview before Miliband heard anything and he was still insisting that it was 'practically certain, that if I am [offered the job], I shall turn it down'.[10]

An additional reason for his reluctance to move may have been that at just the time of the interview he was becoming increasingly enthusiastic about a new scheme he was trying to initiate – a 'counter-university'. In July he had suggested the establishment of such a body, which might begin in London, but could lead to centres elsewhere. The idea was to establish some kind of institution, with lectures and seminars of a clearly "counter-ideological" nature for students and others. He had invited fifty one people from a spectrum of positions on the Left and various age groups to an informal, confidential discussion on 23 September.[11] Meanwhile Boyle, who wanted to appoint the best possible candidate, prevailed over Miliband's opponents on the committee and at the end of October decided to come to LSE to talk to him in person again and offer him the post. Bauman told Miliband of Boyle's intentions and did his best to persuade him to accept it. By this time the scheme for a 'counter-university' already appeared much less promising, but he was still full of doubts.[12] Nor was Marion at all keen to move from London. She had recently begun a Ph.D. on women munition workers during the first world war and her main sources were in London. Moreover, all their friends were there and Primrose Hill was far more accessible for their numerous overseas visitors than Leeds. On the other hand, she knew how miserable he was at LSE and thought he had to make the decision himself. This caused him 'the worst mental tortures'[13] and the decisive influences were probably the Savilles, who stressed the political role he could play, the importance of northern radicalism, and the advantages of an outdoor life for his children.[14] However, they were unaware of the depth of Miliband's anxiety about leaving London, and the fact that he was temperamentally unsuited for the task that Saville saw as so alluring and important. Nevertheless, he finally made up his mind and on 10 November he wrote to Boyle formally accepting the offer.

His immediate reaction was one of relief and he told Marcel Liebman:

I had said to Marion that, whatever the decision, I would regret it. It isn't the case at all, and I am overjoyed. First, to leave LSE. I realise now how much the atmosphere

was weighing on me, impeding my work, depressing me etc etc. More positively, there isn't any doubt that being the head of a department of political sciences will give me possibilities of work which I would never be able to get here. There is also the fact that John Saville, particularly, has begged me to consider, that the political sciences in England are entirely in the hands of people of a heartbreaking orthodoxy, and that my 'elevation' could allow the creation of a contra-current. Or help it. Leeds,… will immediately become the place where at least someone represents something else. It remains to be seen what I will make of this chance.[15]

But his doubts soon resurfaced. Nor did it help when the gossip column in *The Times* reported, almost two weeks later, that Miliband was 'emerging through the closed selection procedures at Leeds as the most likely new professor of Politics'.[16] This led Professor H.S.Fearns of Birmingham University, and a bitter opponent of CAFD, to write to *The Spectator*.[17] Miliband was, he claimed, one of the organisers of CAFD, which had been:

active in endeavours to blacken the names of men and universities who have resisted jobbery on behalf of the Council's soul brothers. Presumably if this 'emerging' man does not emerge as Professor of Politics at Leeds there will be a campaign about political discrimination in Leeds University …

'The emerging man' and the political clique to which he belonged:

seem determined to introduce political agitation as a means of influencing decision [sic] on their behalf to the detriment of those who are too decent and too modest to engage in publicity stunts and to leak information about themselves to journalists.[18]

Miliband and John Griffith immediately threatened legal action, forcing a partial retraction of the completely false allegation, but the episode probably did not increase his confidence in the decision he had made. By the new year he was feeling 'very mixed' about it, mainly at the thought of leaving London, and knew that it was going to be 'a hell of a wrench'.[19]

As the decision was now irrevocable, he tried to reconcile himself to it, but probably became still more anxious when he and Marion decided that it would be better for him to spend three or four days a week by himself in Leeds, coming back at weekends and for the holidays, while the rest of the family stayed in London. He accepted this as a matter of practicality, but did not relish the prospect of separation. Nevertheless, they bought a house in Horsforth in the north of Leeds and he moved in before the start of the academic year.

During the 1990s Leeds was to become a centre of economic activity and cultural life in the North, and one of the most popular cities in Britain for students, with numerous clubs, bars and restaurants. However, in the early 1970s it was quite different – an area of industrial decline with a rather bleak appearance.

Miliband relayed his initial impressions – which were never to change – to Karol:

> The town is absolutely awful – a real monument to the inhuman face of capitalism; and the atmosphere is very 'provincial', which in England means really provincial. It is certain that the Leeds-London regime will last until next summer, and it isn't certain that it won't last beyond that. Neither Marion nor I want to cut ourselves off from London and we'll have to see how things work out over the next few months.[20]

His initial impression of the university was a little more positive. At the beginning of the academic year, he thus reported to a friend:

> So far so good, generally speaking; it is at least very nice not to feel entirely marginal, as I felt at LSE. And even more so to walk into the SCR [Senior Common Room] and <u>not</u> to see the many faces I have come to know and to loathe so well.[21]

However, he had been recruited to transform the Politics Department and, although he had some clear ideas on this, his real problems began as soon as he tried to put them into practice.

Politics had been included in a more general social science department and, even before he took up his post, he made it clear that he wanted a separation.[22] This was effected in time for the new academic year, but he then wanted to change the undergraduate degree, bring in a new Masters programme, and make some new appointments. However, there was permanent opposition from three members of the Department to almost everything he proposed. Particular problems arose, for example, when he wanted to introduce a new first year Politics course, which he would teach himself and to share an existing British Government course, so that the students would be exposed to an alternative view.[23] Although the introductory course was to include a range of political concepts and approaches, one of his opponents apparently found it outrageous that first year students should be taught Marxism. Such opposition was predictable: the key issue for a new Head of Department was how to react to it.

The real difficulty was that he soon found he did not like being in this position. Only a month after starting he thus told Daniel Singer:

> The trouble … is that I could, if I put my mind to it, fashion a politics degree at Leeds which would be really worthwhile … [B]ut it requires a great deal of work, persuasion, thinking, discussion and the rest. And I am torn between this and the urge to get on with other work … I am involved in dozens of departmental questions, some very trivial but which demand attention and take time; and I am still finding my way, and trying not to go too badly wrong. The thing is one has to deal with <u>people</u>, and I still find it difficult to accept the notion, indeed I find the notion grotesque, that people do worry about what attitude the 'head of the department'

is likely to take towards this and that, and towards <u>them</u>.[24]

While insisting that he did not regret leaving LSE, he was already feeling 'that a modest research fellowship somewhere would have suited me marvellously well, preferably with a first class library and within a ten or twenty mile radius of London'.[25] By the beginning of the second term he was complaining that so much of the work as Head of Department was boring and a waste of time.[26]

In reality, the problems were more fundamental than an impatience with routine administrative tasks. For he did not know how to bring about the changes he wanted when faced with opposition. Because he felt uneasy with the whole idea of being 'boss', he did not want to impose his will through *diktat*. But nor did he have the patience or the inclination to try to win over his opponents through informal discussions and negotiation. In the same way as at LSE, he tended to ignore people 'on the other side' in social gatherings and he built no bridges with them. This meant that when, in the formal context of departmental meetings, he announced his proposals there would be constant sniping from those who opposed him. Because he had been so ambivalent about moving to Leeds in any case, because at least half of him just wanted to get on with his own writing, and because the separation from the family was distressing, he found the whole experience extremely stressful. It was also physically demanding because he was trying to continue with all his London commitments as if still based there, constantly travelling backwards and forwards.

The relationship between such strains and heart problems is obviously complex, but within a few weeks of the move to Leeds he began to have pains in his chest and left arm when he walked fast or when he was in an emotional or nervy state. After several tests, this was diagnosed as angina, but he was told that it was a mild version and there was nothing to worry about. However, only a month after he returned to Leeds following the Christmas vacation and his forty-ninth birthday, he collapsed with a 'moderately severe' heart attack during a meeting in the university.[27]

He attempted to make light of this, so that some friends who visited him while he was ill found that he did not want to discuss it at all.[28] He also tried to disguise his fears – sometimes with a complete lack of success.[29] In fact the heart attack had major effects upon him, both immediately and in the longer term. He was very frightened at first and he felt unwell and extremely tired for months. These initial effects and the acute sense of panic gradually wore off. Soon the only obvious sign of the crisis was that he had given up smoking and now took a brisk walk every day to maintain his circulation. Indeed, he was so anxious not to let the attack affect him that he became still more frenetic in his work. Thus almost as soon as his convalescence was over he made his controversial interventions in CAFD, edited the *Socialist Register* and contributed two articles to it, prepared a whole new course, and wrote his hostile review of Poulantzas's book. While

Marion urged him to take it easy and learn a musical instrument to relax, he insisted on working at a feverish pace. Nor did his heart problem lead him to adopt a more relaxed attitude to politics: on the contrary, it may have made him still more passionate in his opinions. Thus in September he was fuming not only about the military coup in Chile, but also about Allende's own policies, which he believed to have been too passive.[30] In fact, one of the long-term effects of the heart attack was probably to make him an angrier and more impatient person. He had always had a short fuse but, driving himself as hard as ever without as much energy, he was more inclined to erupt and to adopt intransigent attitudes. He also now became very conscious of his own mortality and was keen to ensure that he achieved his most important goals in his remaining years. The counterpart of this was even less tolerance for trivial matters or work that he really disliked. His interest in fighting battles in the department and in routine administration therefore waned still further.

One immediate consequence of the heart attack was that Marion and the children now moved to Leeds so that this element of strain was removed when he resumed life at the University in the Autumn term of 1973. And at this stage he at least retained his enthusiasm for the academic side of his work there. As he prepared his lectures for the introductory course on politics, he thus told Harry Magdoff that this was 'the kind of opportunity which moved me to decide to leave the bloody old LSE'.[31] And he enjoyed the teaching and the positive feedback he was getting from the students. He also made the Politics Department at Leeds a far more exciting place than it had been, with staff seminars, visiting speakers, and symposia. While he had implacable opponents, he also had a lasting impact on the Department and its reputation. One particularly memorable occasion was his inaugural lecture in October 1974.

John Saville had emphasised the political importance of such an event before Miliband had even taken up his position at Leeds and then reprimanded him when he said that he was not going to cooperate if it meant dressing up:

Now this struck me ... as really very extraordinary and, let me add, as a profoundly unsocialist posture; for what you are saying here is that in this particular matter, the plumage is more important than the bird (to paraphrase one T.Paine).... Moreover in your case you are missing two rather crucial points: the first that your inaugural will allow you to state a position which no other professor of politics in the country can or would state; and, second, that your responsibility as a socialist is not to your own navel, but to your political position as the only socialist head of a department in the British Isles and to the general encouragement of your own immediate colleagues as well as to the encouragement of socialists in universities everywhere ...

As a socialist professor you are not a private person, able to indulge in personal whims or personal gestures divorced from their political consequences. As Lenin said to Chicherin in the early twenties when the latter was protesting against dress-

ing up in a frock coat for an international conference (I forget the precise refer-
ence): 'You will go in a bloody nightshirt if that is what the movement requires'.
Now Lenin may well have been wrong in this particular instance; but the principle
remains ...[32]

Even Saville's eloquence could not persuade him at first but by the time he actu-
ally prepared the lecture he had been converted. 'Teaching Politics in an Age of
Crisis' was thus a passionate invocation of his most fundamental beliefs, which
ended by demanding a fusion between 'the intellectual commitment to the pur-
suit of reality' and the 'political commitment to help in the transformation of
existing society in the direction of socialist democracy'.[33] This kind of honest
engagement and charismatic delivery made him a role model for several mem-
bers of staff and inspired students.

Yet even his success as a teacher failed to reconcile him to the university and by
early 1974 he was already saying:

> I have less and less interest in teaching as a direct form of communication, whether
> by lecture, class or seminar; and more and more interest in the written word as a
> form of communication, particularly between hard covers. The fact is that absorb-
> ing stuff is hard work, as we know; and to absorb it properly one needs to have it
> available in word form – anything else is too impressionistic ... Which is also why
> I keep talking of 'retiring', i.e. giving up teaching. Pity I can't and have to earn a
> living. And I felt this way long before, or well before I had my heart attack. There is
> so much to <u>read</u>, never mind the writing.[34]

And a few weeks later he told George Ross:

> ... the university itself is a dull place I find, and I have very little to do with it.
> Universities, for the most part,<u> are</u> dull places, I am coming to think.[35]

He still insisted that he had no regrets about leaving LSE. But less than eighteen
months after arriving he was already tempted by the possibility of a Chair in
Sociology at Essex[36] and had probably made up his mind not to stay at Leeds for
more than a few years. He and Marion certainly liked several people there and
became very friendly with the Baumans – also outsiders – but they never felt that
they had any roots in Yorkshire. They were lonely, and they missed their London
base and the frequent visitors from abroad. Such feelings were no doubt rein-
forced by the sudden death in London early in 1975 of Ralph's mother whom
he described as 'in many ways a very remarkable woman, with a most unusual
capacity for actually caring about people, even people who were not close to
her'.[37]

He had made the move because he had been so unhappy and unsettled at LSE,
but it had not really helped. Indeed, nothing was ever to provide a real solution

and he would be equally unsettled for the rest of his life. Nevertheless, he wrote an outstanding book – *Marxism and Politics* [38]– while in Leeds and attempted to put his ideas into practice in an interesting initiative.

1. Political Thought

Once the Soviet Union had ceased to be a model, many on the Left consciously or unconsciously sought to replace it with alternatives – particularly those centred on Cuba or China. Miliband, however, took the opposite approach. Although he had never, at least in adult life, been an uncritical devotee of the Soviet model, he certainly felt that he had sometimes had too many illusions about the system.[39] He was therefore determined that he would never again be tempted to seek 'models'. There was, he thought, a crucial difference between demonstrating solidarity with particular regimes, and suspending critical judgment of them. His method was therefore to define the key problems and think about solutions based on both theory and practice. He now regarded the idea of a 'model' as a barrier to the search for solutions. Nevertheless, during the 1960s he had taken a keen interest in Cuba and China since they had serious claims to be regarded as socialist states. Subsequently, he became highly critical of both of them – particularly of China. Before analysing *Marxism and Politics*, it is necessary to explain the evolution of his views.

In the immediate aftermath of the Cultural Congress in Havana in January 1968 (see above, p. 140), he had been quite enthusiastic about the progress of Cuba. He had believed it possessed a revolutionary elan and an extraordinary sense of internationalism. At the same time he thought that the system contained a permanent tension, which was built into the very structure of the revolutionary regime, between a desire for genuine socialist advance on the one hand and bureaucratic attitudes on the other. However, he had found that many Cubans were conscious of this problem and aware of the negative examples from other post-revolutionary regimes. It was, he thought, an open question how the state would develop, but he appeared hopeful, particularly about Castro himself.[40] However, his excitement had soon waned. He was alienated by Cuba's support for the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia later that year, and became extremely critical of his subsequent clampdown on dissenting opinion. By August 1970 he was still optimistic about Castro himself, but further signs of repression put paid to any remaining optimism about the regime.[41] He only referred to it in passing in *Marxism and Politics*.

One important influence on his changing attitudes to Cuba was his friend, K.S.Karol. Karol knew Castro and many of the other key figures, had often been in Cuba, and had been a strong supporter of the regime. However, he became increasingly alarmed by its ties to the Soviet Union, the suppression of dissident opinion, and bureaucratic inefficiencies. His book on Cuba, *Guerillas in*

Power, was therefore a critical work, which made a deep impression on Miliband.[42] Predictably, however, it was not greeted so favourably in Cuba where it was denounced with claims that Karol was a CIA agent or a left-wing romantic.[43] All this reinforced Karol's increasingly negative attitudes towards Castro and the Cuban revolution and, without following him completely, Miliband tended to accept his account of what was happening. However, he and Karol were eventually to disagree fundamentally about China.

After the Sino-Soviet break, 'Maoism' had attracted support amongst several groupings on the Marxist Left in Europe and the United States. This had been reinforced by the onset of the Cultural Revolution in the mid-sixties. The anti-bureaucratic movement, the invocation of youth against party elites, the ending of the distinction between intellectual and manual work, the support for rural life over city life, the claim that China represented 'the third world' against European and North American dominance – all these appealed to many who now saw the USSR and the mainstream international Communist movement as bankrupt. At the other extreme were some Marxist intellectuals, such as Isaac Deutscher, who treated Maosim as a personality cult based on the peasantry and showed disdain for the Cultural Revolution.[44]

Miliband's first comments on the Cultural Revolution were that both the party 'elitists' and the Maoists were partly right: it was necessary to find a balance between spontaneity and discipline which no Communist state had yet managed to achieve fully.[45] However, when Karol wrote an article for *Socialist Register 1968* on the Cultural Revolution, Miliband commented:

> [M]y general impression is that you see the whole cultural revolution through … rose coloured spectacles. This doesn't at all mean that I deny all the admirable and positive aspects, in the Chinese context … But don't you underestimate the negative aspects? You say something about them in the very last part of your introduction in relation to the cult of personality, which I personally find more and more repugnant and which makes me sure that in 3, 5 or 7 years we will witness a large-scale 'demaoisation'. But there are other important things. Particularly one:… you speak several times of a 'vast debate at the grass roots …', of 'a real mass participation in the discussion'. A vast *denunciation* of abuses, of bureaucracy, of 'enemies of the people', yes. But I don't really see how that is a serious discussion …[46]

He was also repelled by other practices: particularly denunciations of individuals and the replacement of normal teaching in schools by the thoughts of Mao. All in all, he saw himself as 65 per cent on Karol's side and 35 per cent on Deutscher's. Nevertheless, he remained impressed by some aspects of the Chinese experience, telling Liebman in November 1970:

> [I] am more and more persuaded that, with all their imperfections [the Chinese] are keeping on the right road: at least they represent an infinitely superior approach

from the point of view of socialist organisation, to the Soviets. I have been working a lot these last months on the question of elites and classical elitists. The Chinese, as far as I know, are the only ones to have really tried to respond in practice, and in theorising their practice, to the 'challenge' of elitism. Their analysis is often summary and even unclear, but they raise, and try to resolve, well or badly or both, the problems which are at the vital core of the whole socialist project. It remains to be seen to what point this can be applied to 'our' countries. But their problematic seems very impressive ...[47]

However, in July 1971 an important shift in his attitude occurred.

Karol had been carrying out research for his second book on China and reported his impressions.[48] The first was that the Cultural Revolution had been even more violent than it had seemed from outside and he doubted whether Mao had been surprised by this. There had been chaos by 1967 and subsequently some kind of compromise had been sought. The Chinese themselves would not really analyse what had gone wrong and tended to blame things on bad spirits and petit-bourgeois thinking, while Karol believed the failures stemmed from the massive regional inequality in China. This also meant that the 'Little Red Book' of Mao's thoughts was used in lots of different ways. Nevertheless, he still believed that the Chinese had learned important lessons and had raised key questions about socialism. He concluded that the practice was much more interesting than the theory.[49]

While Miliband was digesting Karol's letter, it was announced that President Nixon was going to visit China. Miliband was outraged by this, particularly in view of the continuing US aggression in Vietnam, and told Karol that there was an argument for a 'normalisation' of state relations, but:

Normalisation' has ... implications which go well beyond state to state relations; and this visit is likely to cause a degree of demoralisation in socialist ranks far beyond Maoist groupings. After all, if the visit does take place, we are likely to be treated to the spectacle of Nixon being acclaimed by vast multitudes ... And how is one not to think that this would be an obscene mockery of the people whom the Americans have systematically murdered in Vietnam over the years? If there was to be a 'normalisation', why did it have to involve such a visit? As you know, I have always been more agnostic about the Chinese than you have; and this announcement confirms me in that agnosticism. This is not to detract from Chinese achievements ... And Marion and I were fascinated by your letter and your preliminary reflections on the Cultural revolution. But I am worried by what you say about the Chinese inability to theorise their experience, and am rather suspicious of it ...[50]

Karol tried to counter such sentiments, which he termed 'anti-Chinese atheism' rather than agnosticism.[51] But Miliband's views were beginning to shift. By the beginning of 1972 he described Chinese foreign policy as 'awful' and inexplicable except in terms of base *realpolitik*,[52] and subsequently his whole attitude to

the Chinese experience became more negative. When reading draft sections of Karol's second book on China, Miliband found his theorisation very interesting, but thought that the Chinese thinking that he quoted was 'simplistic'. [53] And by November 1975 he had become so hostile to Chinese foreign policy that he wrote to Saville:

> One thing I would like to get on with … is an onslaught on the Chinese for their foreign policy. The indulgence which the left of all shades shows towards them is extraordinary, considering that they are urging on the worst cold warriors in the US and elsewhere. I would very much like to have a serious piece documenting their absolutely foul attitudes and pronouncements – compared to them, the Russians in the foreign field are veritable revolutionaries, which is saying something.[54]

It is notable that the Chinese rapprochement with the USA seems to have played a major role in his change of attitude. This suggested the continued salience of his vehement opposition to American external policy in his world outlook. In any case, in *Marxism and Politics* he concluded that China had not really begun to create the institutional basis for socialist democracy and that Maoism had not made any notable theoretical contribution to the question. [55]

It is not surprising that Miliband's enthusiasm for the Cuban and Chinese versions of socialism was short-lived. His long-term interests and preoccupations were focused primarily on the capitalist democracies and the prospects for their transformation into socialist systems. He was, above all, a *European* Marxist, who firmly believed that capitalist democracy could and should be replaced by a *better* system in all senses. To the extent that existing Communist regimes provided any lessons at all, he clearly thought that those in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union had a greater relevance than those in developing societies. This was evident in *Marxism and Politics*, which he completed in April 1976.

The book had been commissioned as one of a series of introductions to aspects of Marxism edited by Raymond Williams and Steven Lukes. It was, in fact, introductory only in the sense that it was written with Miliband's customary lucidity and accessibility. But it distilled his thinking about the issues that he had come to regard as the most crucial for socialists. Certainly, he was attempting to summarise and explain key concepts in Marxist writings on politics, concentrating on Marx and Engels, and dealing to an extent with Lenin, Luxemburg and Gramsci. However, his approach was not to summarise particular texts but to present an engaged debate around a number of themes and problems. In six concise chapters and less than two hundred pages, *Marxism and Politics* was authoritative without ever being dogmatic, frankly acknowledging problems and indicating the paths to possible solutions. And it also provides one of the most complete statements of Miliband's own political thinking.

He had not published anything on Marxist theory until 1965, when he wrote on 'Marx and the State' for the *Socialist Register*. In this he had argued against

the conventional wisdom that Marx was an advocate of a strong state and had emphasised his strongly libertarian instinct. He had been very excited by this but, after reading his first draft, Saville had warned him that, although he had provided a valuable corrective to a conventional anti-Marxist position, he must be careful not to go to the other extreme or he would be accused of distortion.[56] This had probably been a valuable lesson about the dangers of selective reading and in the introduction to *Marxism and Politics* Miliband insisted that the texts were susceptible to different and contradictory interpretations and that they actually incorporated tensions, contradictions and unresolved problems, which formed an intrinsic part of Marxist thought. The book followed this general approach and he tried to validate theory with reference to history and politics.

As he noted, Marx and Engels had never attempted to provide a systematic political theory and most of their political writings were in fragmentary and ephemeral texts. Thus Marxists often regarded politics as an epiphenomenon of economics, rather than a subject in its own right. Miliband provided a cogent and convincing justification for concentrating on politics, and two points about this are particularly striking. First, it was this very emphasis on the political sphere which distinguished Miliband from the majority of Marxist intellectuals. It was such questions – about power, legitimacy, reform and revolution, state-society relations, political parties – which were his preoccupation. Secondly, he was drawing attention to the consequences which had followed from the lack of attention by Marxists to political questions – the dangers that had ensued from 'an extraordinarily complacent view of the ease with which political problems … would be resolved in post-revolutionary societies'.[57] In other words, he was arguing that if politics was regarded as an epiphenomenon it would be impossible ever to construct democratic socialism in a post-revolutionary society. One of his goals was to demonstrate that democracy must be regarded as an integral part of socialism.

For Miliband, a key aspect of this task lay in an exploration of the relationships between social class and political power in different forms of society. This involved revisiting some issues addressed in his previous work – for example, the role of ideology and the state in upholding the existing order. However, he now theorised the questions more fully and extended the analysis to different forms of state, including the Soviet Union. And there were two interrelated questions which permeated the text, although they were not stated explicitly. Why had post-revolutionary regimes, particularly in the Soviet Union, gone so horribly wrong? And how could the disasters of civil war and dictatorship be avoided so that a future transformation in advanced capitalist societies would lead to socialist democracy? When discussing class and class conflict in the second chapter of the book, he made a significant observation:

To speak of class conflict is to speak of a central reality by way of a metaphor. For

classes as entities do not enter into conflict – only elements of it do … For the most part … the conflict is fought out between groups of people who are part of a given class, and possibly, though not certainly, representative of it.[58]

This point was related very directly to his exploration, later in the book, of problems in the establishment of socialist democracy. For if, as he believed, *organisations* were necessary both to bring about change and to implement socialism, their relationship with the class they claimed to represent was of key significance. He argued that the idea of the 'unity of the working class' was a very dubious notion that normally obscured permanent and intractable differences which existed in any social aggregate. The problems were then compounded when it was suggested that a 'vanguard party' could embody such unity, and he concluded:

It is clear that more-than-one party is in fact the 'natural' expression of the politics of labour. 'The party' as the single legitimate expression of the labour movement is an invention which postdates the Bolshevik revolution. [59]

However, he also acknowledged that greater representativeness, for example by two parties, could reduce effectiveness. Moreover, revolutions were probably always made by minorities and this meant that the claim that the minority represented the class – substitutionism – was a permanent problem, which was *inherent* in the very notion of a socialist revolution. Certainly, the specific conditions of the Bolshevik revolution and the civil war had been responsible for exacerbating all the dictatorial tendencies within the Party, but the problem was not simply one of historical contingencies. Since the working class was not united it could not be represented by a single party in any normal circumstances. But he went further than this, arguing that resolution of the tension between class and party was not wholly possible:

[W]hat *can* be achieved is the attenuation of this tension; and the degree to which it is attenuated is a matter of crucial importance.[60]

This led into a discussion of socialist democracy in relation to the vexed issue of reform and revolution.

Parties such as the Labour Party, the SPD and the Swedish Social Democrats were parties of 'social reform', which did not really intend to replace capitalism, whatever they claimed. But social reform was to be distinguished from 'reformism' which, he argued, was a strategy for socialism. Nor was reformism nonrevolutionary: it suggested the notion of working first within the established system, but with the ultimate intention of replacing it. Before 1914 reformism had not been contrasted with revolutionism (even though there were differences of emphasis and strategy in particular circumstances) within the socialist

movement. The difference only came after 1914 when Leninism came to mean insurrectionism, subsequently leading to a chasm between Communist and Social Democratic Parties. This, Miliband argued, was disastrous for it had led to a situation in the advanced capitalist countries in which there was a division between parties of insurrectionary politics (Leninism) and parties of social reform, with no strong socialist reformist parties. The subsequent evolution of the Communist Parties into reformist parties had not helped because they had not theorised their reformism and were too tied up with the Soviet Union. The first prerequisite for the establishment of socialist democracy was therefore the re-establishment of socialist reformist parties. But how could such parties replace capitalism with socialism?

The most familiar line of argument in the insurrectionary tradition was that the overthrow of capitalism would involve 'smashing the state' and replacing it with 'the dictatorship of the proletariat'. However, Miliband argued that Marxists had paid no serious attention to the kind of state that would be necessary *after* a revolution.[61] The general assumption was that there would be popular power with some kind of vestigial coercive instrument to prevent counter-revolution. But this was completely inadequate:

> Where power has been seized, revolutionaries have to create a strong state in place of the old if their revolution is to survive and begin to redeem its promise and purpose. This is bound to be an arduous task, particularly because the material circumstances in which it has to be undertaken are likely to be unfavourable and further aggravated by the hostility and opposition of the new regime's internal and external enemies. Inevitably some of its own supporters, and possibly many, will falter and turn away when the exaltation of the first phase wears off as it confronts the mundane and difficult requirements of the second. The new regime may retain a very wide measure of popular support and find it possible to rely on continued popular involvement. It will most probably go under quite soon if it cannot. But the tension remains between state direction and popular power; and that tension cannot be resolved by invocations and slogans.[62]

Taken together, his point about 'substitutionism' being inherent in class-party relations and his claim that 'smashing the state' in a post-revolutionary situation was a fantasy, constituted a very fundamental critique of the claims – or rhetoric – of many Marxists. In effect, he was arguing that, whatever the effects of the specific historical circumstances in creating the Soviet dictatorship, those circumstances were not a sufficient explanation. There were inescapable problems in class-party relations and there was an inescapable need for a strong state in a post-revolutionary society. The refusal to address these difficulties in advance could only exacerbate them, for they could not be wished away. In other words, it became more rather than less likely that a party-state dictatorship would follow the overthrow of capitalism if it was naively assumed that socialists did

not need to think about these issues. But Miliband was also advocating a reformist strategy which would involve the establishment of institutions to minimise the dangers.

Any reformist party which really attempted to implement policies that threatened the capitalist system would face the active opposition of all conservative forces, both inside and outside the state sector. If a government decided to press ahead in this situation its only major resource would be popular support. But this would need to be mobilised through 'a flexible and complex network of organs of popular participation operating throughout civil society and intended *not* to *replace* the state but to *complement* it.'[63] This would involve a concept of 'dual power' in which the working classes were not challenging the government, but were supporting it in a semi-revolutionary and exceedingly fraught state of affairs. If a reformist strategy was thus taken seriously it must, he argued, lead to a vast extension of democratic participation in all areas of civic life amounting to a very considerable transformation of the state. His assumption here was that the existing democratic institutions would be supplemented by new ones which would strengthen the attempts of the government to bring about fundamental change. This meant that the reformist strategy ultimately acknowledged the truth of the proposition of Marx and Engels that 'the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery, and wield it for its own purpose.'[64] But this did *not* confer validity on the notion of Marx, Engels and Lenin that the existing state must be 'smashed' and replaced by the dictatorship of the proletariat. This linkage was illusory because there would need to be a proper state in the process of transformation from capitalist to socialist society. He concluded the book as follows:

> That process of transition both *includes* and *requires* radical changes in the structures, modes of operation, and personnel of the existing state, *as well* as the creation of a network of organs of popular participation amounting to 'dual power'. The 'reformist' strategy, at least in this 'strong' version of it, may produce a combination of direction and democracy sufficiently effective to keep the conservative forces in check *and* to provide the conditions under which the process of transition may proceed.
> There are many regimes in which no such possibility exists at all; and where radical social change must ultimately depend on the force of arms. Bourgeois democratic regimes, on the other hand, may conceivably offer this possibility, by way of a strategy which eschews resort to the suppression of all opposition and the stifling of all civic freedoms. Such a strategy is full of uncertainties and pitfalls, of dangers and dilemmas; and it may in the end turn out to be unworkable. But it is just as well to have a sober appreciation of the nature of the alternative and not to allow slogans to take over. Regimes which do, either by necessity or by choice, depend on the suppression of all opposition and the stifling of all civic freedoms must be taken to represent a disastrous regression, in political terms, from bourgeois democracy, whatever the economic and social achievements of which they may be capable.

Bourgeois democracy is crippled by its class limitations, and under constant threat of further and drastic impairment by conservative forces, never more so than in an epoch of permanent and severe crisis. But the civic freedoms which, however inadequately and precariously, form part of bourgeois democracy are the product of centuries of unremitting popular struggles. The task of Marxist politics is to defend these freedoms; and to make possible their extension and enlargement by the removal of their class boundaries.[65]

Marxism and Politics was an eloquent and persuasive statement of Miliband's political stance and preoccupations. It was an affirmation of Marxism against its critics and a defence of a particular interpretation against that offered by the advocates of insurrection. In its argument that 'reformism' was not the antithesis of 'revolutionism' it resembled 'Eurocommunist' texts, with the important difference that it kept a critical distance from the parties which were claiming to implement this strategy. It was a theorised political credo proclaiming the belief that there was an ideological current that must be resurrected if democratic socialism was ever to replace capitalist democracy. Inevitably, it was also the product of a particular era and climate of opinion. At one point in the book Miliband thus affirmed that the socialist idea had vastly grown in strength in the last fifty years and:

However much more slowly and tortuously than he could ever have anticipated, Marx's 'old mole' has continued to burrow – so much so that the real question is progressively coming to be what kind of socialism towards which it is burrowing and, as a related question, how it is to be realized.[66]

In 1976, despite the difficulties and setbacks, he never imagined that the prospects for socialism would become ever more bleak and the audience for books like *Marxism and Politics* would gradually shrink. This was something that he would very gradually come to realise.

2. Political Practice: The Centres for Marxist Education and the Idea of a New Socialist Party

Since Miliband was not simply an academic but someone who was passionately committed to socialism, he was not content just to write and teach, but always felt that he must make a practical contribution outside the university. One approach, to which he attached great importance, was through radical political education. As already noted, he had been attempting to set up a counter-university just before his interview for Leeds, but he had also been involved in a project in the mid-sixties to establish 'Centres of Socialism and Activity'. In September 1964 he had been excited by the possibility (originally communicated by Ken Coates) that the National Council of Labour Colleges might transfer assets from

the TUC to a group which was genuinely interested in working class education. While Saville was sceptical, Miliband immediately talked of establishing two or three centres of lectures and courses in London, Leeds and either Birmingham or Manchester.[67] This had led to a meeting of about forty people on 7 November 1964 with Miliband serving as a member of a committee of ten to look into the whole problem of socialist education. After further discussions, he and Ken Coates sent out invitations for an all day meeting on 30 October 1965 for discussion on the reorganisation of the Left, where Miliband presented his scheme for a project, which now had the provisional title of 'Centre of Socialist Education and Activity'. A month later this was formally launched with a statement of aims which he wrote as Chair, while Coates became National Convenor. By February 1966 it was claimed that branches had been established in Birmingham, Bristol, Cambridge, Manchester, Croydon, Glasgow, Harlech, Harrow, Hull, Leeds, London, Colchester, Newcastle, Nottingham, Oxford, Scarborough, Sheffield, Sunderland, Wallsend and York. However, its work was impeded by sectarian rivalries and a shortage of funds and it faded away quite soon.[68]

A different, and enduring, project was established just as he moved to Leeds, when he was approached by a retired socialist businessman, M.J.Lipman. Lipman was a graduate of Leeds University from the early 1920s and wanted to make funds available, under Miliband's direction, for research in the field of Socialist Studies. This was finally established in 1974 as the Lipman Trust for Socialist Education and Research and it began arranging symposia on issues such as Northern Ireland and immigration, and was soon also providing small grants to help with research on projects of relevance to socialism. He remained actively involved in this work for the next twenty years and after his death it was renamed the Lipman-Miliband Trust in recognition of his sustained contribution.

Yet he also wanted to move beyond political education and play a role in the creation of the reformist party that he regarded as so essential. Ever since the mid-1960s, when he had come to believe that the Labour Party was an obstacle to radical transformation, he had thought that a new party would ultimately be necessary, but he had not actively promoted the idea.[69] However, in 1974 he decided that the time was ripe for a new initiative.

During the previous autumn a crisis situation had developed in Britain. Throughout the four year Conservative government of Edward Heath there had been greater conflict in industrial relations than at any time since the early 1920s and in October the Yom Kippur War between Israel and Egypt had led to an oil embargo and a fourfold increase in the price of oil, leading to a 10 per cent rise in retail prices, The following month the National Union of Miners called their second strike in two years. Heath responded to this by declaring a state of emergency and on 13 December announced a three day week. Early the next year, with the worst balance of payments deficit ever recorded, he called a General Election on the issue of 'Who Governs Britain?' When this took place

on 28 February, a Labour Government, with no overall majority, was returned to office. Miliband was convinced that this administration would be unable to resolve the underlying economic crisis and, in a situation of industrial militancy and political conflict, there might be an opportunity for a new movement of the Left to establish itself. However, he was equally convinced that an essential prerequisite for any such development was that socialists abandoned any illusions that the Labour Party would ever be a vehicle for radical reform.

He was not at all sure how to proceed, but his initial idea was to ask about twelve people to Leeds at the beginning of July to discuss the possibilities.[70] The previous month he wrote a discussion paper entitled 'The Case for an Independent Socialist Party' which he presumably intended to put to this group. He explained that the new party would not replace the Labour Party, but would need some ten thousand members. It should involve active socialists who would be somewhere between Lenin's professional revolutionaries and passive card-carriers. It would be local and regional and certainly not based on democratic centralism. The aim would be to work towards socialist democracy:

> a society based upon but in no way defined by the public ownership, in a variety of forms, of the predominant part of the means of material and mental production and distribution and exchange; with the largest possible amount of democratic control and self-government in economic and political life; and with the greatest possible degree of equality between people, including naturally people of both sexes …
>
> No doubt, the party would be Marxist, or Marxist-oriented; and this loose formula is also used deliberately, and meant to emphasise the fact that Marxism is not a closed system of thought, with instant solutions to all problems; that there are deep and legitimate divisons between people who think of themselves as Marxists; and that no serious socialist party ought to envisage the building of socialism except in terms of socialism-as-process. Again, an independent socialist party … would be a revolutionary party, in the sense that it would be dedicated to the fundamental transformation of the existing capitalist system … and also in the sense that many, if not most, of its members would accept the possibility and indeed the likelihood that this transformation would be a great deal more difficult and tempestuous than is envisaged in such documents as … the Communist Party's *The British Road to Socialism.* On the other hand, the party would also have to acknowledge that there is no evident and well-tested strategy for the 'transition to socialism' in advanced capitalist countries; anyone who claims to know precisely what is involved is either deluding himself or others. In consequence, such a party would include people with very different ideas on the subject, ranging from those who believe that 'reformism' is a viable strategy to those people who utterly reject it, with many different positions, including combinations of 'reformism' and 'revolutionism', in between. In other words, the party would refuse to make a dogma of the forms of the transition to socialism. On the contrary, it would acknowledge that here is a terrain for necessary conjecture and controversy and that this should be encouraged rather than shunned.[71]

The party would require a certain degree of unity of a fairly loose kind but 'too much ought not to be made of the virtues of "unity".' It would be designed to advance demands – economic, social, political, cultural – from such groups as industrial workers, teachers, nurses, and students, and in some cases it would initiate such actions. But it would always seek to interpret and situate such demands and actions in a socialist context of thought. It would be trying – in Gramsci's terms – to propagate a socialist 'common sense' as an alternative to bourgeois 'common sense'. This, he argued, was in the context of a situation in which bourgeois values were disintegrating with the country's economic situation, leaving the initiative to right-wing and proto-fascist tendencies. Against this it was necessary to rehabilitate:

> … the notion that one of their major purposes in working for a socialist society is to enlarge civic freedoms, to turn 'bourgeois freedoms' into the reality which the constrictions of bourgeois society makes unattainable. It is just as well to face the fact that this is one of the areas where socialists carry least credence, not surprisingly considering the experience of 'socialist' regimes of the Soviet type. Nor indeed should there be any underestimate of how much effort is required to persuade people who think of themselves as socialists that civic freedoms do form an intrinsic part of the socialist vision. Here too, what may be described as 'Stalinist' modes of thought have bitten deeply, not least among those who make the loudest profession of anti-Stalinism.[72]

If Miliband had clear ideas as to what was desirable, it was of course a quite different matter to convince anyone that the establishment of such a party was a practical possibility. He postponed the meeting he had initially planned for July, but in London during the summer he put his ideas to various people and encountered almost universal scepticism about the idea of a new party.[73]

While he had been thinking about how to advance his ideas he had been contacted by Geoff Hodgson, a Marxist economist who was then based in Manchester. He had been a Trotskyist but was now a member of the Labour Party, although he still had close contacts with people in the International Marxist Group [IMG] in Manchester. He was currently involved in establishing a Manchester Centre for Marxist Education with the intention of starting a course on basic Marxism in October. His eventual hope was that a new Marxist party would be formed between the Communist Party and the Trotskyists, but he believed that this could not be established or declared until there was a much more solid basis for it. In the meantime he suggested setting up a lively Marxist dicussion journal and Centres for Marxist Education on a country wide basis.[74] Miliband now agreed about the futility of talking about a new party in the short term and liked the idea of some kind of publication. However, despite his commitment to political education, he was not keen on the idea of Centres for Marxist Education and told Hodgson:

... people are put off by a purely educational focus, and I believe that there is anyway more that needs to be done, i.e. I would favour something like the formation of Socialist or Marxist Clubs, whose range of activity, which would obviously include education, could be left to local initiative ... But all this needs discussion, not least the form of coordination which local organisations would have ...[75]

The meeting, which he had originally planned for July, was now scheduled to take place in October and, in addition to Hodgson and two of his associates from Manchester, Miliband wanted to form a wider group. He had persuaded John Saville to attend, and also Martin Eve, the publisher of *Socialist Register*. His inclination was to turn to the 'first new left' – Michael Barrett Brown, Raymond Williams, Edward Thompson and Lawrence Daly and he consulted Saville about this. Saville opposed the suggestion:

I am pretty firmly against any of the old gang, except, oddly enough you. But I include myself among the old gang. So the names you suggest ... send shudders down me spine. These are not the people to build anything of the kind required ... I am quite serious when I don't include you among us. If any new departure is going to achieve anything it must be people who for the most part are in their '30s and '40s with younger people – who have enormous energy, who do believe the mountains can be stormed, and who will give seven and a half days a week to what they believe in ... Revolutions of our kind have to be led by the young. So while I will attend this first meeting, I shall not get myself involved ...
Now you too have a very serious intellectual commitment, but alone among those I have mentioned you have a political commitment of a kind that brings you close to Hodgson and his friends. You are interested in a way that I am not.[76]

In the end, Miliband got together a mixed group. He already knew some older activists in the area through *New Reasoner* contacts from the 1950s: in particular Gertie and Jim Roche, who were militant Trade Unionists who had severed their connections with the Communist Party in 1956, and Harold Best, who would become a Labour MP for Leeds North-West in 1997. Through their extensive contacts in the Yorkshire labour movement, there seemed to be a possiblity of reaching an audience for socialist ideas well beyond the university sector. But Miliband had also got to know some younger people involved in various networks: in particular, Barry Collins, a playwright, and Luke Spencer, who worked in university adult education, were both based in Halifax where they had numerous contacts in an area which was still associated with Edward Thompson and radical adult education; and Dick Taylor, who was currently in charge of the Bradford Centre of Adult and Continuing Education of Leeds University.[77] He also invited Edward and Dorothy Thompson and Ken Coates. The object, he told the Thompsons, was:

to discuss such matters as 'the state of the left', 'where are we going?', 'what is to be

done?' and similar new themes ...

The idea is to have a thorough discussion between people of different age, experience and attitude. It may clarify things and form the preliminary (very preliminary) move towards some kind of initiative – I am afraid it is that vague; or it may not. In any case it will be useful.[78]

Edward Thompson could not come (as he was attending a colloquium in Paris with Eric Hobsbawm), but Dorothy Thompson did attend. However, Edward replied that he approved of Miliband's initiative and then set out his own ideas for the mobilisation of opinion around a series of interlocking measures, which would constitute a 'transitional programme' for Britain. These would include the destruction of the power of the City and of finance capital, accompanied by withdrawal from the EEC, trade realignment, long-term agreements with the socialist and developing world, and active intervention throughout industry, with more specific demands in health or housing or the democratisation of control of industries and services.[79] The very vagueness of the invitation had made this a reasonable reply, but Miliband was really seeking a political formation rather than a programme. He put his views to the meeting and reported the outcome to Saville, who had had to leave early:

The meeting the other Saturday went off quite well ... There is a very clear line of division, partly generational, between people who are, one way and another, to be counted as part of the Labour Left (and this includes the Thompsons); and those who are not. If anything is to be done, it will have to be done with the latter lot, which includes the young Manchester people; and, need I say, me. I would like to hold a meeting, preferably enlarged, of the people who clearly belong to that latter lot, with a fairly hard line of division.[80]

On 8 November he wrote a memorandum incorporating comments that he had subsequently received from Martin Eve, Geoff Hodgson and Dick Taylor. He summarised the various proposals, but also explicitly stated that the only one he wanted to pursue was the exploration of ways of establishing the nucleus of a new and independent socialist formation as 'the beginning of a process leading to the creation of a new socialist party, entirely independent of any other political formation on the left'[81]

He suggested as the next step a meeting of about forty to fifty people in Leeds. This was taken up by Hodgson and Taylor with whom he now liaised closely. They convinced him that the best way to start was with a more limited proposal for Centres of Marxist Education. This was not really what he had wanted but he was increasingly conscious of the limited support for his more ambitious ideas.[82] The only people he personally invited to the meeting on 25 January 1975 were Anthony Arblaster of Sheffield University (whom he knew through CAFD)[83] and the Roches. He wrote yet another memorandum for this meeting:

It is agreed – and has been all along – that, while the need to seek ways of bringing into being a new political formation on the lines discussed earlier does exist, the possibility of doing so now does not. This is so for a variety of reasons, two of which may be singled out: a) those of us who want such an initiative still do so negatively, i.e. in terms of the inadequacy of existing formations, i.e. have not so far worked through sufficiently a coherently <u>distinctive</u> perspective; and b) even if we had, it would take time and preparation to attract a worthwhile number of people who are now politically homeless or critical of the formations of which they are members. There is the larger consideration that this is a period of exceptional fluidity, due to the crisis, and that time is needed to see what kind of fall-out it provokes in the next year or so.

However, it is also agreed that work <u>should</u> begin now, and that it should take the form of an initiative in the creation of Centres of Marxist Education, which would seek to apply (or discover) Marxist perspectives in relation to present-day problems, the application and discovery being mainly conducted by way of lectures, seminars, day-schools, meetings, study circles, etc ...[84]

The meeting defined the project more clearly and Miliband drafted the subsequent statement:

I. As a result of a series of meetings held in Leeds, a number of socialists drawing upon the example of the Manchester Centre for Marxist Education, have agreed to set up similar Centres in Leeds and Sheffield, and to encourage the formation of Centres in other cities.

II. As their name indicates, the Centres are intended to promote the spread of Marxist ideas in the labour movement and on the left generally, and to relate these ideas to present-day circumstances and problems. In so far as such work is being done today, it is done by organisations which are severely constrained by their other requirements. The Centres will not be affiliated to any political party, group or organisation, although its members will no doubt belong, for the most part, to different organisations of the labour movement. We believe that independent Centres of the kind envisaged, conducting their work on a non-sectarian and non-dogmatic basis, are badly needed at the present time.

III. Each Centre will be organised autonomously and will be run by a local Steering Committee and by the participants in the work of the Centre. Membership of the Centres will be open to anyone on payment of a small fee, to be determined by each Centre. Attendance at courses will be open to anyone, including non-members. The Centres will determine their own programme of activities, eg courses, study groups, meetings, debates and any other activity they may deem appropriate. It will be for each Centre to determine how best it may serve the movement in its area.

IV. The Centres will be loosely linked, eventually in a federation of Centres, so that they may benefit from each other's experience and encourage the spread of activities at local, regional and possibly national level. For the purpose of such co-ordination, a Linking Committee will be set up and an information bulletin will be circulated.

V. One task of the Linking Committee will be to organise fairly regular Confer-

ences bringing together participants in the work of the Centres. The Conferences will discuss the experience of the Centres and the best ways of expanding their work, with the possibility that this expansion will, in due course, involve the Centres in directly political activity on a joint basis. However, any such development must obviously depend on our success in establishing strong Centres. This is at present our prime concern; and we hope that many other socialists will wish to engage in this enterprise.[85]

Although his original aspirations had been scaled down considerably, he was initially very enthusiastic about the project, and the Leeds CME started planning courses for the spring, as a dry run for a full programme the next year.[86]

The idea was to mount series of lectures and discussions on aspects of non-sectarian Marxism across a range of subjects. The insistence on including 'Marxist' in the title was clearly designed to demarcate the approach from the 'labourism' that Miliband had wanted to avoid.[87] Miliband's hope was that within a year there would be a dozen such centres. In Leeds itself the CME was soon thriving and he reported to Leo Panitch:

> ... the course of six lectures I have been giving on Marxist politics has so far, four lectures given, attracted a steady 100 people or so; and the one/off Friday night lectures have got a regular 40-50 people, largely teachers, social workers, some trade unionists, civil servants, and professions of one sort or another – the vast majority under 30-35. The Manchester Centre, which has been going in a low key for some time, has got new energy because of our own venture; and Sheffield is actively forming a Centre. By autumn, we should have Centres beginning to work in such places as Bradford, Hull, York, Cardiff, Newcastle, Glasgow and one or two others – I hope not too many – in addition to Leeds, Manchester and Sheffield. It's all still very fragile, and must be nurtured, pushed, prodded etc. But the omens are not bad – there is quite clearly a genuine demand for serious stuff; and even the sectarians have been subdued and helpful at the discussions following my lectures.[88]

But as the CMEs grew, problems inevitably emerged. In June 1975 the Leeds committee decided that it would be best to avoid any constitution but to have open meetings announced well in advance. This, Miliband told Hodgson, seemed the most satisfactory way to proceed and would make it far more difficult for any one set to make a takeover bid, 'the more so as we seem to be the object of a concerted effort from the local IMG group'.[89] He also thought that they should proceed on the same basis for 'national' arrangements:

> I am prepared to act as the post office for coordination purposes, writing around etc, and making contacts, arrangements and so on, with of course meetings of the Linking Committee, but this too can be fairly loose ... This was also the feeling of the Leeds group, and they were happy to have me coordinate the national picture, in so far as 'coordinate' is the right word, which it isn't.[90]

And a week later a general meeting in Leeds agreed these ideas, including Miliband's role as coordinator, while noting that the matter was not strictly for the Leeds committee to decide.[91] This caused some tension with the Manchester group, which no doubt feared that the West Yorkshire area was taking control, and sought a more formal structure. It therefore appears not to have agreed that Miliband should act as coordinator. In addition to such turf wars, there was also some serious questioning of the purpose of the CMEs. This was evident in a meeting of the linking committee held on 29 November 1975 in Manchester. In a long general discussion there was a questioning of the academic orientation of the CMEs, their relationship with the working class and working-class organisations, their teaching methods, and their political orientation.[92]

Miliband continued to play an active role but did not want to get deeply involved in such disputes and discussions. He was still far more interested in the eventual establishment of a new party. In September 1975 he published an article in *The Guardian* elaborating his view that the Labour left would never win control of the party and that the right-wing leadership had nothing to worry about. The important issue was:

> ... how to begin the long haul towards the organisation of British socialists on a basis of something other than illusions about the Labour Party on the one hand, and the formula-mongering of schematic revolutionaries on the other ...[93]

His whole purpose, he told Peter Jenkins of the Manchester CME, was:

> to get discussion going wherever I can; and to fight the illusions which make the best people waste their time in the Labour Party, or some of the best people ... Beyond this, and beyond the CMEs and so on, I have nothing to suggest.[94]

By early 1976, though relatively pleased with the way the CME was going, he saw it as 'a limited exercise' and was sure that a new party was needed. However, he also thought it necessary to move forward very cautiously and with much preparation as he did not 'want to have anything to do with ... a fly-by-night effort which will peter out in five minutes.'[95]

His next major intervention was in the 1976 edition of the *Socialist Register* which commemorated the twentieth anniversary of the crisis of communism. Miliband's own contribution was an article entitled 'Moving On', which provided a cogent critique of all existing left-wing parties and explicitly called for:

> ... the formation of a socialist party free from the manifold shortcomings of existing organisations and able to draw together people from such organisations as well as people who are now politically homeless.

He continued to participate in the CME committee in Leeds and to lecture there

and in the other centres that had been established. But by May 1977 he was quite sure that they could not form the basis for a new political initiative. He clearly hoped that 'Moving on' might stimulate discussions that could eventually lead to the socialist party that he sought. However, while it did provoke some debate, the reactions were rather predictable. Representatives of the Labour and Communist Parties defended their organisations as the only practicable vehicles for change, while those of the 'ultra-left' parties sympathised with his critique of the Labour and Communist Parties, but explained why his strictures did not apply to their particular groups.[96] No new political formation was created.

This whole phase is illustrative of some of the key strengths and weaknesses of Miliband in relation to movements and organisations. As a charismatic speaker with great erudition he was clearly able to inspire a group of younger people to build a new socialist educational movement. Many of those who rallied to this project regarded themselves as Marxists in some way, but did not fit easily into any of the existing Left groups or were on the point of leaving them. For example, in the mid-70s Hilary Wainwright was a member of IMG in Tyneside, and she later recalled:

> Faced with the realities, complexities and opportunities of the labour movement on Tyneside, I was finding the abstract and slightly fantastical politics of the Fourth International increasingly irrelevant. But I firmly believed that there was no prospect, ever, of socialism or indeed any kind of truly transformative politics, through the Labour Party. I was determined not to drift into the Labour Party, like so many people seemed to do, rationalising their drift with a tepid reformism.
> My involvement with shop stewards committees, trades councils and local women's groups in 1975 … convinced me that there was a basis for embarking on the very practical work of 'preparing the ground for the coming into being of a (socialist) alternative' – as Ralph put it in his postscript to *Parliamentary Socialism*. Robin Blackburn or someone told me about Ralph's efforts to set up Centres for Marxist Education.
> Such an educational project seemed to me a good basis for starting an organisation in Tyneside – the Tyneside Socialist Centre – which brought together the left inside and outside the Labour Party. So I made a pilgrimage … and asked Ralph for his advice.
> He strengthened my sense of the historical importance of building the framework … of an independent left, however modest and localised were the immediate possibilities.
> He also helped me to be clear and and resolute about creating an <u>alliance</u> of socialists sharing common values and goals regardless of organisational affiliation.[97]

And Dick Taylor later recalled an atmosphere of excitement in which a real network was established around Leeds and Bradford.[98] Nor was this simply a passing phase, for the grouping that was established by the CME then became the nucleus for the far larger West Yorkshire European Nuclear Disarmament

(END) movement a few years later, in which Edward Thompson played a key role. Miliband had thus helped to galvanise some radical forces and to reinforce the commitment of younger people who would remain active into the next century. His relationship with the Manchester Centre had been far more problematic but he also attracted their largest ever attendance (of over a hundred) when he lectured there in November 1975.[99] However, the CME episode also demonstrated some of his limitations.

Because he had believed that all the existing parties of the Left were defective he had seen a new socialist party as necessary; and because he thought it necessary he appeared to believe that it could be brought into being. But there was a curious political naiveté about all this. When he had made his initial proposal in 1974 he had characteristically turned to Saville and others he had known from *New Reasoner*. He had then become associated, almost by default, with a younger group because more of them had also rejected the existing political parties. He had then allowed himself to be persuaded – against his original inclinations – to concentrate on a more limited educational project in the hope that this might eventually lead to a political formation. But there was no agreed strategy for moving to a political level or even as to whether this should happen. Nor was it clear how a movement that was primarily led by teachers, with little working-class participation, was to convince ordinary people of the necessity for socialism. Finally, when the predictable difficulties occurred – with personality clashes, and differences over ideology, organisational structures, and the nature of the curriculum – his commitment began to wane. It is true that the CMEs had not been his first choice in any case, but it is not clear that an article in *Socialist Register* ('Moving On') was any more likely to lead to a new political formation than the project to promote Marxist education.

Miliband could present an immensely persuasive critique of all the existing left-wing parties and groupings and there were also some grounds for believing that the political and economic crisis of Britain in the mid 1970s provided an environment in which a new political initiative might flourish. But it was perhaps the weakness of an intellectual – however committed – to believe that such statements would have any real purchase on the situation. Aneurin Bevan's remarks to John Strachey some forty years earlier had clear relevance:

> It is the besetting sin of intellectuals to be too much influenced by the drive of their own minds. They are too reluctant to submit themselves to the pressure of events. In intellectuals, there is a tendency to want to dominate and shape these things arbitrarily. They can influence these events only by being moulded by them.[100]

Miliband would no doubt have regarded this as too quiescent a philosophy. But his advocacy of a new socialist formation had little discernible effect, while the Centres of Marxist Education, which he had been persuaded to back against his original inclinations, had a greater impact. However, it is also true that the

Leeds CME faded soon after he left the area, and that his presence was probably necessary to sustain it. For one of his major strengths was an attribute which he never valued sufficiently himself: an exceptional ability to inspire commitment through teaching and lecturing.

By 1977 Miliband had spent five years in Leeds. Despite his his constant feeling of being in 'exile' from London, he had certainly made an impact on the University and the area. However, in July he left for the United States where he had arranged to spend the following academic year as a Visiting Professor at Brandeis University, near Boston. His real hope was that – somehow – he would subsequently be able to return to London. This was to prove far more difficult than he anticipated, but he never did go back to Leeds. He was now about to embark on a new phase in his life.

Notes

[1] Letter to Professor Fitzgerald, 21 February 1970.

[2] Letter to Julian Friedman, 6 April 1970.

[3] Letters to George Ross, 15 December 1970 and to Ann Marcus, 18 December 1970.

[4] Letter to Miliband, 6 July 1971.

[5] Letter to John Griffith, 14 July 1971.

[6] Interview with Dr Justin Grossman, 25 June 1999.

[7] Bauman is the author of numerous works, including *Between Class and Elite: The Evolution of the British Labour Movement* (1972), *Culture as Praxis* (1973), *Socialism, the Active Utopia* (1976), *Hermeneutics and Social Science: Approaches to Understanding* (1978), *Memories of Class: the Pre-History and After-life of Class* (1982), *Legislators and Interpreters: On Modernity, Post-Modernity and Intellectuals* (1987), *Modernity and the Holocaust* (1989), *Modernity and Ambivalence* (1991) *Intimations of Postmodernity* (1992), *Postmodern Ethics* (1993), *Postmodernity and its Discontents* (1997), *In Search of Politics* (1999).

[8] Letter to Daniel Singer, 25 June 1999. An example of Milibamd's frankness was his declaration that his ambition would be to turn the Department into the best socialist politics department in Europe. Panitch, 'Ralph Miliband', p.6.

[9] Interview with Professor Zygmunt Bauman, 20 November 1999.

[10] Letter to Daniel Singer, 10 September 1971.

[11] He wanted a 'sponsoring committee' to be drawn from a range of people who would not necessarily agree on everything, political or ideological, but who would nevertheless have a broadly common commitment'. 'Notes and Invitation', July 1971, 'Notes for an Insitute of Radical Studies', September 1971, and Notes for the meeting on 23 September 1971.

[12] He had been disappointed with the meeting, telling Saville:

... about 20 people turned up. No one from New Left Review. On the whole, it was a bad meeting, very ragged, lots of ideas floating about, nothing substantial. One chap from the London Coop Education committee (they have lots of money) said that if we provided lectures on cooperation and consumer protection, the Co-op would no doubt be interested to help. Raphael Samuel, very militant, and wanting the thing to be clearly labelled from the start, The Communist, or Revolutionary Marxist University, or some such. Monty Johnstone thought we ought to do it through Marx House. I found it all fairly depressing. However, some seven people volunteered to form a working a party, to look at the thing further. The question is whether I write around saying that, in the light of the meeting, I

think there is no point in proceeding. Or whether I convene the committee ... and see what is to be done. It is clear, and was generally agreed, that one ought to start ... modestly ... More grandiose schemes will have to wait. I don't think I can now say I wont proceed, but I will have to think about it.

Letter to Saville, 23 September 1971.

[13] Letter to Liebman, 12 November 1971.

[14] Letter from John Saville, 9 November 1971, and undated letters from Constance and Richard Saville.

[15] Letter to Liebman, 12 November 1971.

[16] *The Times*, 23 November 1971.

[17] In 1970 CAFD had investigated Birmingham University when it had overturned the appointment of Dick Atkinson (one of the student activists at LSE). In 1970-71 it had also investigated Fearns himself in relation to a reference that he had written when a Senior Lecturer in his department had applied for a post at the University of Singapore.

[18] Letter from H.S.Fearns to *The Spectator*, 4 December 1971.

[19] Letter to David Horowitz, 3 January 1972.

[20] Letter to Karol, 6 October 1972.

[21] Letter to Willi Guttsman, 6 October 1972.

[22] Letter to Lord Boyle, 10 November 1971.

[23] Interviews with Dr John Swarzmantel, 23 April 1999 and Dr Justin Grossman, 25 June 1999.

[24] Letter to Daniel Singer, 2 November 1972.

[25] Letter to Willi Guttsman, 2 November 1972.

[26] Letters to Amy Bridges and to Karol, 5 January 1973.

[27] Letters to Karol, 3 March 1973 and Julian Friedman, 20 April 1973.

[28] Interview with Professor Laurence Harris, 12 March 1998.

[29] Interview with Daniel Singer, 26 June 1998.

[30] Salvador Allende was President of a left-wing government from September 1970 until he was overthrown and killed in a military coup, with American involvement, in September 1973. General Pinochet then remained in control of a brutally repressive military dictatorship for seventeen years. Miliband's article 'The Coup in Chile' (*Socialist Register* 1973, republished in *Class Power and State Power*) argued that Allende could have done more to mobilise the masses in support of his government.

[31] Letter to Harry Magdoff, 5 September 1973.

[32] Letter to Miliband, 29 April 1972.

[33] 'Teaching Politics in an Age of Crisis', Inaugural Lecture to the Chair of Politics, Leeds University, 7 October 1974 in *The University of Leeds Review*, Volume 18, 1975.

[34] Letter to Harry Braverman (?), 28 January 1974.

[35] Letter to George Ross, 10 March 1974.

[36] Letter to David Lockwood, 10 February 1974.

[37] To Tamara Deutscher, 8 February 1975.

[38] *Marxism and Politics* (Oxford University Press, 1977)

[39] Draft letter to Liebman (not sent), 7 June 1967.

[40] 'Cuba – The Cultural Congress of Havana', talk to the Radical Student Alliance, LSE, 21 February 1968.

[41] In 1971 he protested about the arrest, imprisonment and self-criticism of the poet, Herbeto Padilla which, he claimed, 'recalled the most sordid moments of the Stalinist epoch'. [Original in French] Text of Protest, n.d. April/May 1971

[42] *Guerrillas in Power: The Course of the Cuban Revolution* (Cape, 1971); originally published as *Les Guérilleros au Pouvoir, L'itinéraire politique de la révolution cubaine* (Robert Laffont, 1970).

[43] Letter from Karol, 10 July 1971.

[44] 'Maoism – Its Origins and Outlook', *Socialist Register 1964* and 'The Meaning of the Cultural

Revolution', *Socialist Register 1966*. Both essays were re-published in Isaac Deutscher, *Marxism, Wars and Revolutions – Essays from Four Decades* (Verso, 1984).

[45] Letter to Karol, 26 January 1967.

[46] Letter to Karol, 19 December 1967.

[47] Letter to Liebman, 22 November 1970.

[48] His first book was *La Chine de Mau, L'autre communisme*, published in English as *China: The Other Revolution*.

[49] Letter from Karol, 10 July 1971.

[50] Letter to Karol, 17 July 1971.

[51] Letter from Karol, 23 July 1971.

[52] Letter to Karol, 1 January 1972.

[53] Letter to Karol, 9 August 1973. The book was *La Deuxieme Révolution Chinoise*, published in English as *The Second Chinese Revolution*.

[54] Letter to Saville, 4 November 1975. He became equally critical of 'Western' attempts to apply Maoist analysis to other countries, writing a devastating critique of Bruno Bettelheim's work, *Les Luttes de Classes en URSS, 1917-1923* in NLR 91, May/June 1975. This was republished in Miliband, *Class Power and State Power*.

[55] In brief comments, he criticised Chinese characterisations of the Soviet state as 'capitalist' (p. 30) and a speech of Mao's condemning creativity (p.96). The third reference to Chinas was a rather longer discussion of the failure of the Cultural revolution to resolve the problem of democratic control of party leaders. The record, he suggested, was:

> … far from impressive. It may well be argued that it is better than the Russian one; but this is not saying much. (pp. 62-3)

[56] Letter to Miliband, 29 December 1964.

[57] p.11.

[58] p.28.

[59] p. 129. He had thus totally abandoned the position which he had expressed during his trip to the Soviet Union in 1961 when he had dismissed the idea of a multi-party democracy there. (See chapter three).

[60] p.148.

[61] While he regarded this as a general weakness in Marxism, he argued it in relation to Lenin in particular. He had already provided a critique of Lenin's thinking on such issues in 'Lenin's *The State and Revolution* in *Socialist Register 1970*. This was republished in *Class Power and State Power*.

[62] *Marxism and Politics*, p.181.

[63] p.188.

[64] *The Civil War in France*, quoted on p.188.

[65] pp.189-90.

[66] p.53.

[67] Letter to Saville, 8 November 1964

[68] Ken Coates felt that the principal reason for its decline was that it fused into two other initiatives in 1966/7: the Institute of Workers Control and the May Day Manifesto. (Letter of 13 March 2001 and telephone discussion, 9 April 2001).

[69] He had also been wary of some initiatives to regenerate the Left. The most important of these had been the so-called May Day Manifesto, which had begun with a meeting in the summer of 1966 at which Raymond Williams, Edward Thompson and Stuart Hall were appointed editors of a manifesto which was originally conceived as a socialist counter-statement to the Labour government's policies and explanations. The group had soon been extended and when the Manifesto was published in 1967 so much attention was paid to it in Britain and elsewhere that Penguin Books had published an expanded edition the following year. (Raymond Williams [ed.] *May Day Manifesto 1968*, Penguin 1968). Miliband's involvement in this was minimal, although it was certainly sought by some of the organisers. In February 1967 he attended one meeting which he reported in the following terms to Saville:

It was initially decided to go ahead with the writing of a revised version, mainly to be done by Raymond with editorial assistance from Edward and Stuart, and suggestions sent in by anybody else who wanted to; and also that there should be a recall meeting to discuss the setting up of a society, body or what, proposals to be made by a committee on which I refused to serve. But I shall send in proposals …

The reason why I refused to serve is that I don't want to clash head on with alternative conceptions but would prefer to let these be canvassed; and then, to propose something different. Also, I had no wish to get involved in yet another something at this stage, with people whom I would have to argue with endlessly. But I may get myself coopted yet, depending how things go. (Letter to Saville, 4 February 1967).

However, he did not join the committee and his comments were not included in the final version of the manifesto. The following April its authors convened a further meeting (the National Convention of the Left) attended by more than 600 delegates from a variety of left-wing organisations and campaigns. At this meeting Miliband 'said that to suggest the Labour Party was not an agency for socialism was putting it the wrong way; it had been an active agency against socialism since 1900. He thought it would be wrong for the convention to tear itself apart over the Labour Party, now nearing the end of an historic process of disintegration. What was needed was a concerted effort by the Left to complete the process'. *The Guardian*, 28 April 1969.

[70] Letter to Geoff Hodgson, 25 May 1974.

[71] 'The Case for an Independent Socialist Party: A Discussion Paper' n.d. June 1974.

[72] Ibid.

[73] Letter to Geoff Hodgson, 23 August 1974.

[74] Letter from Hodgson , 22 August 1974.

[75] To Geoff Hodgson, 4 September 1974.

[76] Letter from Saville, 11 September 1974.

[77] Interview with Professor Dick Taylor, 2 April 1999.

[78] Letter to Edward Thompson, 6 October 1974.

[79] Letter from Edward Thompson, 9 October 1974.

[80] Letter to Saville, 3 November 1974. Ken Coates did not attend the meeting but had long telephone conversations about it. Miliband also classified him as one of the 'labourist' camp. Letter to Istvan Meszaros, 13 November 1974.

[81] 'Further to the Meeting held on October 19 1974' 8 November 1974.

[82] As he told Leo Panitch:

Me, I would like to work towards the formation, in due course and all possible caution and preparation, of an independent socialist party, of a kind which has never been in this country. But there are very few people who seem to think it is even a remote possibility. I think the thing must be explored, and I am pushing ahead …

Letter to Panitch, 16 December 1974.

[83] Arblaster is the author of *Democracy* (1987), *The Rise and Decline of Western Liberalism* (1984), *Viva la liberta! Politics in Opera* (1992).

[84] 'Memo for 25.1.1975 Meeting', 19 January 1975.

[85] Centres for Marxist Education Leeds Summer Programme leaflet (Miliband's original draft of 10 February 1975 included an additional sentence saying that the Centres 'would also provide the occasion for discussion of various aspects of "the road to socialism" in Britain).

[86] Letter to Saville, 2 March 1975. Royalties from *Socialist Register* were held in a special fund to help promote relevant projects and some of the money was now used to help the CME initiative.

[87] However, Edward Thompson told him it was a mistake to include the word 'Marxist', since this would allow the Althusserians in! Letter from Thompson, 19 February 1975.

[88] Letter to Leo Panitch, 6 June 1975.

[89] Letter to Hodgson, 16 June 1975.

[90] Ibid.

[91] Summary of proposals and ideas of committing meeting of 15 June put to members meeting on 22 June 1975..

[92] Minutes of meeting of linking committee, 29 November 1975.

[93] 'The smiles on the face of Labour's Right', *The Guardian* 29 September 1975.

[94] To Peter Jenkins, 8 October 1975.

[95] Letter to Panitch, 14 February 1976.

[96] See the articles in *Socialist Register 1977*.

[97] Letter to Marion Kozak and David and Edward Miliband, 30 May 1994. Hilary Wainwright is editor of *Red Pepper* and between 1982 and1986 she was the founder and coordinator of the Popular Planning Unit of the Greater London Council. She is the author of *Arguments for a new left: answering the free-market right* (1994), *Labour: a tale of two parties* (1987), *The Lucas pan: a new trade unionism in the making?* (1982), *The workers' report on Vickers: the Vickers Shop Stewards Combine Committee* (1979), and (with Sheila Rowbothom and Lynne Segal, *Beyond the fragments: feminism and the making of socialism* (1980)

[98] Interview, 2 April 1999.

[99] Secretary's report to Manchester CME AGM, 5 March 1976.

[100] Bevan to Strachey, 29 July 1931, Strachey Papers , quoted in Michael Newman, *John Strachey* (Manchester University Press, 1989), p.44.

Chapter Eight: An Uphill Struggle, 1977-91

In 1976, when Miliband completed *Marxism and Politics*, it seemed plausible to predict that socialism would eventually triumph; over the next decade it became increasingly difficult to base such hopes on observable tendencies. Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan were soon to personify the reactionary conservatism which became ever more dominant, while the Left fragmented both politically and intellectually. The collapse of the communist regimes in Eastern Europe in 1989, followed by the break-up of the Soviet Union two years later, then consolidated the triumph of the Right. Throughout this period Miliband constantly attempted to stiffen the intellectual and political resistance of the Left to the ascendancy of conservatism, refusing to accept the arguments of those who claimed that the socialist alternative was no longer tenable because of fundamental changes in the world. This was to risk isolation as many former Marxists now adopted new and more fashionable creeds, but he maintained his stance with considerable courage.

The main purpose of this chapter is to examine some of his political and theoretical interventions in these years. However, the period began for him with a 'honeymoon' year at Brandeis in 1977-78, which led him to a rash decision which was to make the subsequent years personally as well as politically difficult. This must be explained before his intellectual and political role is examined.

1. A Year in Boston and its Consequences

He arrived in Boston in July 1977 to teach at a summer school in Boston University for a month. His initial impressions were ambivalent, as he reported to John Saville:

> In a very large number of ways, this is an awful country, with a capitalism that is raw in a way in which England is not. It is crude, sharp, brutal, efficient, incredibly affluent and incredibly poor, the efficiency being with the 'rationality' of a system that seems somehow even more irrational here than in England, because it is at one level so incredibly rich and at another so sordid. Seeing main streets in a state of the utmost squalor and filth, and the subway rickety and ancient enhances the sense of contradiction ...
> At the same time, there is an openness, a looseness of manner, a certain ease which contrasts very pleasantly with the guarded, constipated, strangulated relationships of the English culture. Anyway, it is all fascinating, and we should have a very good year ...[1]

He found the summer school exhilarating with many good students from a variety of universities, including Harvard, and he was soon contrasting the experience with Leeds, realising 'how much I have missed these bright graduate students, who challenge and press and prod and read'.[2] After a month, the rest of the family arrived and they all moved to a rented house in Newton, an attractive suburb, with green fields and typical New England wooden houses. They bought a car, and Boston city centre, Cambridge and Waltham (where Brandeis is located) were all within easy reach. Edward and David were both soon settled in local schools and, although Marion had initially hoped to find a job, she was not too disappointed when this was not possible. She met several other historians with similar interests, she soon made new friends, and her sister was not too far away in New York City. In fact all members of the household were soon enjoying themselves and making an impression on the people they met as a highly unusual family with both parents committed to socialism, and encouraging their sons (then aged seven and twelve) to develop their own personalities and express their own views. Once anchored in his family, Miliband's loathing for American capitalism was temporarily overhelmed by his excitement in the new environment. As always, this was dependent upon his feelings about his work and its validity.

In 1977 Miliband was a well-known figure in US academic circles, and not only on the Left. The debate with Poulantzas had been taken up by both Marxists and mainstream political scientists and *The State in Capitalist Society* was a key text in Political Science and Sociology courses. In addition to this, the radical wave of the late sixties and early seventies, generated above all by the Vietnam war, had led to a renewed interest in Marxist and socialist theories. In California, in particular, a thriving group had initiated new work on state theory which had originally been inspired by the Miliband-Poulantzas debate, and this was replicated to a lesser extent in other US universities. The British New Left as a whole had also been a reference point for many US student radicals and Miliband – along with such figures as Edward Thompson and Perry Anderson – was also well-known in this context. When he arrived in Boston in the summer of 1977, there were therefore scores of students and academics who were keen to listen to him. The publication of the American edition of *Marxism and Politics* coincided with his arrival and he was interviewed on both radio and television about it and, during the next academic year, he received some forty invitations to speak at Universities across North America about his work. Of course, he was a 'big name' in the UK too, but the reception he was given within a few months of arrival in Boston was bound to make an impression on him, and he flourished in the new environment. Naturally, he was well aware that the American Left – more particularly, the socialist and Marxist left – was a tiny group in relative terms, but he was meeting large numbers of interesting and intellectually engaged people. Besides, always eager to learn and understand new things, he

was keen to find out why the socialist tradition was now so weak in the US and to discuss this problem with others.

Before his arrival, he had been slightly apprehensive about the fact that Brandeis was a Jewish foundation. Established soon after the second world war because of the discrimination in 'ivy league' universities, some 80 per cent of the staff and students at Brandeis were Jewish. Given Miliband's view of himself as a 'non-Jewish Jew' and his increasingly critical stance towards Israel, he was not at all sure how he would feel about working in such an institution. However, he was relieved to find that it caused no problems and after four months there he told Zygmunt Bauman that he did not find the Jewish predominance obtrusive and:

> ... the Zionist and Israel ingredient, while markedly there, is not personally obtru-
> sive, and my own position on the whole business ... namely that there should be a
> Palestine state alongside Israel, is now conventional wisdom, so that I don't have to
> argue with anybody, and don't. In fact, the Israeli business is not all that prominent,
> at least as I encounter it.[3]

And, more generally, he was well satisfied with the Department and the students.

Except for baseball, which he described as 'two and a half hours of mind-destroying boredom' in comparison to which soccer was 'positively Shake-spearian', he was thus finding the whole American experience rewarding.[4] In December 1977 he thus told the founder of the Lipman Trust:

> My first dyspeptic impressions of the USA on this visit have evaporated. All that
> I said then about the raucousness of the commercialism and the harshness of the
> society remains true, and every day that one lives here makes one sense it better.
> But there is another side, not least the fact that class struggle here is a very genuine
> aspect of American life, even if it does not have the vocabulary and the aims of
> much of European class struggle. I have been working on this in a fairly unsystem-
> atic way, namely the reality of class struggle and the absence of a socialist or even
> a labour movement ...
> All in all, it has been a very good experience indeed and we shall I think leave with
> a sense of nostalgia and even regret.[5]

This overwhelmingly positive attitude to Boston and Brandeis brought into still sharper relief his dissatisfaction with his life at Leeds and his determination not to return. John Saville tried to prevent him from making a rash decision but, having talked it over at length with Marion, he remained adamant. He now put out feelers about the possibility of continuing at Brandeis for one semester a year for the next three years as a 'stop-gap' arrangement until he found something in the London area. Presumably he received some encouragement that this would be possible, but, before receiving any confirmation of this, he wrote to

Edward Boyle, the Vice Chancellor of Leeds, informing him that he had decided to resign:

> My main reason … is that I want to devote more time to work on the books that I propose to write in the next few years. This would be difficult to combine with being the Head of Department of Politics. I have considered whether ways could be found of freeing me from the responsibilities this involves, but I don't believe that the character of the Department makes this either feasible or desirable. Also, I feel that I will be better able to do the work I have planned if I am in London …

He ended:

> I should like to tell you how greatly I have appreciated your helpfulness throughout my stay at Leeds. I do feel that I could not have asked for a more understanding and sympathetic Vice-Chancellor and I am very grateful. [6]

Boyle replied with exceptional generosity:

> You have brought scholarship and personal distinction to the Chair of Politics here … But may I plead with you … not to formally resign until you have found a new – and preferably permanent – post. Moving from one job to another is very different from resigning with no certainty for the future. [7]

This was good advice, which was reinforced in a separate letter by the University Registrar. But Miliband did not take it. Nor did he give Justin Grossman, who was acting as Head of Department while he was in the USA, any opportunity to suggest arrangements which might have induced him to return, as he had submitted his formal letter to Boyle without prior consultation. For the negative feelings he (and Marion) had always had for Leeds were heightened by the excitement of the early months in Boston. He had wanted to leave before he had set foot in the USA and now could not really bear the thought of returning. Nevertheless, it was a rash move which he probably only made because he was reasonably confident that he would soon find an alternative post in the London area. Given his international reputation and the reception he had received in North America, this was perhaps a fair evaluation of his prospects. Nevertheless, he realised that it was a risky step to take and, when he applied for the Chair of Political Science at Cambridge University almost immediately after his resignation, he knew his chances were minimal. He was also already apprehensive about the prospect of staying in Brandeis by himself if this proved to be the only option. Unfortunately, this is exactly what happened. In March he was offered a reappointment as a Visiting Professor of Sociology at Brandeis for one semester for the next three years, and two months later he received a rejection letter from Cambridge.

While the family remained with him, he continued to have a rewarding and busy time in the USA. It was perhaps only when he returned alone to Boston that he began fully to appreciate the implications of the decision that he had taken. For he hated the separation, was often deeply depressed, introspective and lonely, and never felt rooted. Unfortunately, this was a pattern of life that was to continue, with some variation, until 1992. He went back to Brandeis for every Fall semester until 1984, securing tenure as a full Professor in May 1981 and the prestigious Morris Hillquit Chair in Labour and Social Thought in December of the same year. In 1985 he moved – initially on a temporary basis – to York University, Toronto. Enjoying working there with Leo Panitch, he then accepted an offer to return, claiming that this was preferable to Brandeis both because of the quality of the students and because he could no longer stand the reactionary climate of Reagan's America. However, after teaching there for the Fall semesters of 1986 and 1987, he received a tempting offer from the City University of New York. The then Chancellor was Joseph Murphy, a radical figure. In December 1986, while in London, he had asked to see Miliband to find out whether he might be available for additional teaching opportunities in the US. In July 1987, this was followed up with an invitation which made it clear that Murphy wanted him on almost any terms. After beginning on a one semester trial basis in the Spring semester 1988 he was offered and accepted a Visiting Distinguished Professorship on a continuing basis, with a teaching load of only two hours per week. As at Brandeis and York, this was normally to be for one semester each year, although it was agreed that he would spend the whole academic year there in 1988-89, as Edward and Marion would also come to New York for much of the time. He then remained alone there in the Fall semester in 1989. Since he had spent a long continuous period at CUNY, he was due to remain in Britain until the spring of 1991, but because of illness this was delayed until the Fall of 1992, after which he finally ended his itinerant existence.

During his first years at Brandeis, he looked out for jobs in Britain, but after a while he became increasingly pessimistic about the prospects of a post at a British University and appears to have made no further applications after 1980. This was the era of university cuts in Britain and he was now fifty-six, so there were certainly fewer opportunities than he had anticipated. The political climate further reduced his chances of securing an appointment. However, his relative passivity was also because he hated making applications – never even producing a proper curriculum vitae – and he appears to have hoped that, if a British university really wanted him, someone within it would make the first move. This was unlikely since most people probably believed that he was content with an annual sojourn in North America which gave him enough time and money to spend the rest of the year writing – his professed wish. He thus continued this itinerant life for fourteen years but always found it disruptive and difficult.

It would certainly be an exaggeration to suggest that he was constantly

unhappy during these years in North America. He had numerous friends, he enjoyed his teaching, and he was intellectually stimulated. Nevertheless, he was often extremely low, despite the brave face he put on in public. Part of the reason for this was his alienation from American politics. But this is not really an adequate explanation, for he was was not much happier in Toronto than Boston. Moreover, despite his hatred of Reaganism, he was quite content when accompanied by members of his family. This was particularly evident in 1982 and 1983.

Marion's historical research on women in the East End had led her to become increasingly interested in health care issues. Since it was also difficult to secure funding for further historical research, she successfully applied for a job with the West Midlands Health Authority to look into health education issues in relation to pregnant women and new mothers. However, the job was based in Warwickshire, although much of the research would be in London. They had bought a small country cottage in Claydon, near Banbury, a couple of years earlier, which she could use as a base when she needed to be away, but this left the question of what do with the boys when Ralph returned to Boston. David would be seventeen by then and arrangements could be made for him, but Edward was only twelve and they felt that he needed to be with one of his parents. It was therefore decided that he should go with Ralph.

Having Edward in Boston transformed Ralph's experience there, for he delighted in his company. He told Marion:

> I find myself very gladly in the role of father and mother combined and spend a fair amount of time thinking about what needs to be done, and realise better how much you do and how demanding it is and how much more I should do when I am in London. [8]

Enjoying himself as a devoted parent, he also became far more positive about his work than he had been when alone. The next year Edward decided to remain in London and Miliband was accompanied by his elder son.

David had been accepted for Oxford University the previous Autumn and was taking a 'gap year' before beginning the Politics, Philosophy and Economics degree in October 1984. By now he was deeply involved in the Labour Party which he had joined at the age of fifteen. Ralph was slightly bemused by his son's activism in the party, but he was enormously proud of him and took a vicarious pleasure in his unusually rapid rise within it, including his election to the local General Management Committee when only sixteen. In Boston he worked for Mel King, the black Democrat who was standing as Mayor. David thus became much more deeply involved in 'hands on' political activism in the US than Ralph ever did, and also experienced racist violence when he was attacked when distributing leaflets in South Boston. He was not badly hurt and experienced minor celebrity status when King gave a press conference that evening denounc-

ing racially-inspired violence and David was mentioned by name in the local paper. Having one of his sons with him again helped reconcile Ralph to being in Boston and he was more positive about it. But when he was alone the next year his sombre mood returned.

The separation from his family was thus the major reason for his unhappiness for much of the time in North America. Yet, as he himself sometimes realised, this *exacerbated* his problems, but was not the sole cause. In December 1979 he had articulated this in a letter to Marion:

> While I do feel very much alone here, and miss you and the children, and hate the sense of being away from you, and the fact of it, it is not this which causes occasional depression, I don't think. It is my age, my sense of inadequacy, my fear of having nothing to say, and so on and so forth. It is true that I do have periods of depression and anxiety, which are not <u>caused</u> by the fact that I am on my own, but which <u>may be</u> increased because of it. I stress may be because it may not be relevant at all. I get depressed at home too, for the same reasons, or at least for seemingly the same reasons. This is something unpleasant: it would be much easier if it were just being away from home. But there it is. I don't like it at all, and fear it a bit, this sense of depression, futility, inadequacy and so on. I fake well but this is not the point. On the other hand, it is not a permanent condition, as shown by the fact that things have been so much better since Thanksgiving or shortly after, for absolutely no reasons that I can see.
> One thing which does worry me is how alienated I am from friends, people etc, how critical … It has something to do with a 'nobody loves me', or 'nobody appreciates me' paranoia, and of which I am aware, as paranoia – mild paranoia I hope. It also has to do, I think, with a sense of failure, lack of excellence, fraudulence, which is totally immune, or more or less totally immune from praise …
> But what I <u>must</u> do is at least try and produce serious work. If I can do that, I will feel OK. If not, not.[9]

This is a painful letter, but one which is remarkable in various respects. First, it was a totally honest attempt to understand himself rather than simply attributing his low spirits to external factors. Secondly, it reveals the extent to which his ebullience often masked his feelings: people he saw in Boston knew that he missed his family, but not that he experienced such bouts of depression. And thirdly, it demonstrated a sense of inadequacy in relation to the exceedingly high ambitions he set for himself. His 'sense of failure' and 'fraudulence' stemmed from an aspiration to be excellent and a fear that he could never produce work which would be quite important enough. He was 'more or less totally immune from praise' because others were judging him by standards which were not as elevated as his own. But this was made far worse because he would not appreciate the value of some of his most important skills and characteristics. Teaching was an obvious example of this. That Miliband was an inspirational university teacher was evident but he often refused to accept that this was important. Nor

would he really acknowledge the satisfaction he derived from the interaction with students. This led to a rather absurd situation in which he spent far more time preparing his courses than most academics of his age, enjoyed the sessions, and then played down the importance of any of this in his own mind. Almost every year he would tell Marion that the courses were going better, forgetting that he had been equally positive the previous year. This was partly because the university represented a rather minor element in his overall experience in North America in comparison with his loneliness and sense of political impotence. But he could perhaps have derived more fulfilment from it had he been prepared to recognise its personal and social value. His real problem was that he undervalued his own qualities and thought that only two objectives were really worthwhile: to produce a 'great' work and to contribute to the realisation of socialism. His fears that he would succeed in neither of these tasks were exacerbated by the separation from his family which left him more time for introspection and anxiety.

His 'honeymoon' year at Brandeis in 1977-78 had thus – paradoxically – led him to take a decision which made it more difficult for him to confront the intellectual and political problems faced by the Left in this period. For practically every year he felt unsettled in North America and partially detached from Britain. But it was the *political* environment which really preoccupied him. It is this that must now be considered.

2. Politics and the United States

Throughout the post-war period he had regarded American foreign policy as essentially imperalistic and primarily responsible for the Cold War, and it was these views which dominated his attitude to the country once he was there alone. In November 1978 he was thus already telling Marion about 'the fury I feel for the bloody Americans propping up the Shah' and that under Carter it was 'a foul, disgusting administration, which is flexing its muscles abroad and which is getting more and more conservative at home.'[10] However, it was the Reagan administration which really provoked his anger and his views never shifted from those he expressed even before the new President's inauguration:

> The new people are an awful, awful lot. God knows that the Carter people were pretty awful too, but this lot is worse, all macho and Marines. It's not that they are panting to go to war, or anything like that, but that the world is on the move, and that they will be challenged, in various parts of the world; and they will want to act and show that they are strong etc ... They are neanderthal reactionaries, pathologically anti-Soviet and anti-communist, small minds in big jobs ...[11]

But the problem was that he had little idea as to how to intervene effectively in the American context. Since he regarded the British Labour Party as an obstacle to socialism, it is hardly surprising that he dismissed the idea that the Demo-

cratic Party was a possible vehicle for radical change. But because he always saw political parties as the primary agencies for social transformation, this made it extremely difficult for him to apply his ideas to US politics. There was a further aspect to the political climate which was also highly discouraging for him: the increasing fragmentation of the American intellectual Left.

When he had first arrived in the USA the lecture invitations that he received had mainly been to speak on state theory, and this continued for the next two years. But by the time he spoke at Yale University in November 1979, he felt that he had burnt himself out on the topic, telling Marion that, although the reaction to the lecture had been 'ok', he thought it was stale and déja vu. However, he had also informed his audience that the debate on the state within the Marxist perspective had itself 'gone stale' – a view which may have been reinforced by the tragic suicide of Poulantzas two days before this lecture. For he clearly thought that Poulantzas' theory of the state would die with him, and that the main task was now to overcome the 'political, intellectual and moral disarray' of the Left.[12] His priorities were surely right, but his predictions were to prove totally false.

The main works of Poulantzas only became available to American readers in English shortly before his death and the debate on the state was then reinvigorated. Structuralist approaches now became far more dominant in US Marxist circles than had been the case in the early 1970s and Miliband – misleadingly portrayed as an 'instrumentalist' – became something of a 'whipping boy' in North American campuses. There was a further irony in this for the very disarray and weakness of the Left may well have strengthened the appeal of structuralist Marxism in the universities. Miliband's interest was never pure theory, for his overwhelming concern was to *apply* theoretical understanding in political and strategic action. But with the radical wave in sharp decline, structural Marxist theories of the state – soon to be replaced by structuralism and state theory without Marxism, and later post-modernism denying the possibility of overall theory – attracted academics and students. Miliband, who cared more about politics than theory *per se* became less fashionable. He never complained about this and appears to have been quite confident that his own approach was more useful.[13] Nor was he unduly worried that his writing was no longer so fashionable in academic Marxist circles, but he was naturally keen that his arguments would have some *political* impact. Unfortunately, this was also deeply problematic and a micro-political intervention he made in the Boston area demonstrates some of the problems that he faced.

Boston had reached the peak of its politicisation around the New Left in the early 1970s but by the time Miliband arrived this was in fairly sharp decline. However, the feminist and anti-racist movements were still quite strong and there were groups of left-wing intellectuals in the universities. He had several younger friends in these circles and in September 1980 he suggested the idea of an informal seminar series to some of them – Allen Hunter[14], Linda Gordon[15],

George Ross[16], and Wini[17] and Paul Breines.[18] They were generally enthusiastic and a wider group was then invited. The discussions began almost immediately in the house that Miliband was then renting in Lombard Street, Newton.

He initiated the first session himself with a draft of a paper on 'Military Intervention and Socialist Internationalism' which was to appear in *Socialist Register 1980* (and which will be discussed later). His presentation immediately led to a heated, but generally amicable, discussion. However, the second meeting was much stormier. This was introduced by Paul Breines, who presented a review of Alvin Gouldner's *The Two Marxisms*.[19] Gouldner argued that there were two, contradictory, Marxisms embedded in the work of Marx and Engels themselves that were evident throughout the twentieth century. The first was 'scientific' and sought deterministic laws to explain and predict social and economic development, while the second, and critical, tradition was more 'voluntaristic', stressing human agency and political struggles.[20] He adopted a sceptical position on both Marxisms, but obviously had greater sympathy with the critical approach than he did with the 'scientific' version which he connected with some of the horrors of Stalinism. Although there were certainly some brilliant insights in the book, Gouldner's attitude to Marxism was ultimately negative and he suggested that Marx and Engels had themselves tried to suppress the evidence of inherent contradictions in their work. Breines regarded the book as flawed but he found it intellectually exciting and generally sympathised with the interrogation of Marxism that Gouldner had undertaken, endorsing the notion that it was characterised by internal contradictions. He was personally sympathetic to the critical tradition, but did not believe that it had ever been dominant, although it had had some impact on the student movement in the 1960s. But he thought this era was long gone and his tone was pessimistic.[21]

Miliband disliked Gouldner's book and Breines's presentation of it and, according to Linda Gordon's contemporary account:

> There was an absolutely fierce battle. It appeared much more polarized than it really was of course, since for example Allen [Hunter] and I disagreed with Ralph a lot, as did Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto [Laclau] who were visiting, but we also disagreed with Paul's perspective which is so pessimistic and withdrawn from political activism.[22]

Miliband sent his own account to Marion:

> We had quite a session at my seminar last night, with a fierce polarisation between Paul and me, with Linda and Allen leaning towards Paul and George [Ross] and Jane [Jenson] very much on my side, on the business of 'How much can Marxism tell us about the world?' roughly speaking with Paul expressing the sceptical, god that failed (theoretically) view, and how cautious and 'humble' (his word) we should be, and me asking whether he was renouncing the idea of a 'map of

the world' never mind Marxism. There were some other people there, but those were the main protagonists and it got quite fierce, in a friendly way. It was a most instructive evening, and Allen rang me this morning to say that he felt 'emotionally drained' afterwards. [23]

Miliband may have thought it was 'friendly' but, almost twenty years later, Paul Breines, recalling the vehemence of the attack, felt that some of the things that Miliband had said had led to a distance between them which was not easy to overcome.[24]

Breines and Miliband were very different, both as people and in intellectual and political terms. Breines was a much younger man, who looked up to Miliband and sought his approval, but he approached Marx through social theory and Lukacs, rather than in the political-strategic way that Miliband did. Viewed in this way, their disagreement was predictable and could be seen as a 'storm in a tea cup' without any wider significance. However, the events in and around the seminar are symptomatic of difficulties which Miliband was now facing with much of the intellectual Left in Boston.

He and Breines had been quite close before the seminar, sometimes meeting for lunch and exchanging letters when Miliband was back in Britain. But, at least in retrospect, Breines was aware that he was really at the margins of Marxism and perhaps moving away from it and that in the seminar he was consciously or unconsciously trying to challenge Miliband to accept that Marxism was deeply and profoundly problematic. If so, the vehemence of Miliband's reaction is explicable not simply because he was being provoked, but because his whole 'project' was being undermined. His most profound political beliefs revolved around the centrality of class and class conflict as objective notions, and on the crucial role of *agencies* if change were ever to be effected. In Miliband's view, the USA lacked *any* agency of this kind and he no doubt saw the seminar as a means of raising such questions and perhaps, in time, leading to some kind of political intervention. If this was the case, Breines was apparently seeking to undermine the foundations of Miliband's ideas by questioning the definition of class and the most basic aspects of Marxism.

The argument with Breines was the most heated exchange in the seminar series, which continued with George Ross presenting a paper on 'trade unions and the crisis' and Allen Hunter on 'the New Right'. After Miliband returned to Britain in December 1980 the group, now known as 'the Miliband mafia', continued without him with sessions on such topics as Palestine, Poland, sexual politics, and 'the ambiguities and problems in feminist perspectives on pornography'. And when he came back the next Fall, they started again. However, although he was the central figure, he was beginning to lose patience with the personal and ideological conflicts which were increasingly evident in the group. These divisions, and the tensions they engendered, began to seem irrelevant to him while

'the maniacs in Washington are proceeding with the real business of blowing up the world'.[25] Since he had been the prime mover of the seminar series and was normally one of the central protagonists in the disputes, this was hardly a fair comment. But both the argument with Paul Breines the previous year and the gradual petering out of the meetings reflected underlying differences between Miliband and many of the participants.

Most of the group held him in very high esteem. They admired his fixity of purpose and found his analysis of power and political agencies stimulating and instructive. Yet many of them gradually came to believe that his kind of politics had a limited relevance for the American intellectual Left and, that in one way or another, he was trying to transplant a European form of Marxism into a hostile landscape. Thus one of the participants, Paul Joseph, recalled a European focus in the seminars with discussions of Eurocommunism and Miliband's puzzlement when he asked 'How come this is not happening in the US?'. It was not that he was uninterested in the social and issue based movements that were developing, but he was impatient with them, always asking what the *socialist* content was, and what would result from such movements.[26] Similarly, although Linda Gordon was attracted to the non-dogmatic nature of Miliband's thinking, she found that for most American leftists he was far too much of an orthodox Marxist. In particular, the socialist feminist movement was very strong in Boston and had forced the new Left to integrate a critique of male supremacy into socialist analysis. She regarded this as tremendously important, but this approach did not appear to inform Miliband's thinking. But because this form of politics was increasingly dominant on the Boston intellectual Left, it meant that he became a rather marginal figure.[27] A similar point was made by a third participant, Allen Hunter who, like Joseph, suggested that Miliband failed to understand that certain kinds of oppositional movements had promise and potential and needed to be nurtured and understood, even if they did not have any explicit socialist content.[28] And despite Breines's abiding interest in European social thought, this was also a fundamental aspect of his own difference with Miliband, for his emerging preoccupation was not really Marxism at all, but with gay rights, sexuality, race and identity politics in general. In his mind, the underlying issues in the conflict were really about the questions which were not being raised in the seminars because they were outside Miliband's framework.[29]

If these feelings were held by some of those who were the closest to him, they were far more important for others who were personally and politically more distant. Elsewhere his work was seen as irrelevant so that, for example, although Allen Hunter and Linda Gordon were working on the influential New Left journal, *Radical America*, they became increasingly conscious of the fact that it would be impossible to convince anyone else connected with it that Miliband's written work should be included.[30] This was partly because it was viewed as too Marxist, but also because it operated from assumptions about European society

in which the Left had more institutional power than had been the case in the US for most of the twentieth century.

None of this is to suggest that Miliband was completely isolated in his views. There were other Marxist intellectuals in the Boston area who had the highest regard for his work.[31] And there was a much wider circle that found his analysis important and stimulating. Nevertheless, it is evident that by the Fall of 1981 his political and theoretical position there was rather marginal. All this made him feel more isolated and rootless. He could hope that his writings and frequent lectures – on such subjects as the state, class and socialism – could have some general impact, but he was not really *engaged* in American politics. In fact, his micro-political intervention with the seminar series in Boston was the only real initiative he took throughout his years in North America.

He thus used Toronto (in the Fall semesters from 1985-1987) mainly as a base for teaching, writing and working with Leo Panitch on *Socialist Register*. Although he never disliked Canadian politics, he did not become involved. Since the USA remained the major world actor, he remained preoccupied with it even though he had found no way of engaging politically while there. And this did not really change when he moved to New York in 1988. Certainly, he had long-term political associations there, for his relationship with the independent socialist journal *Monthly Review* went back to its foundation in 1949. He had always admired its tenacity in presenting an alternative view during the McCarthyite years and in withstanding the overwhelmingly anti-Marxist pressures in the US during the Cold War, and he had kept in touch with the editors. He had periodically contributed to the journal from the late 1950s and at various stages of its life, *Socialist Register* was distributed in the United States by *Monthly Review Press* and fraternal relations between the two journals had developed. He had also formed a close friendship with Harry Magdoff, who was to join Paul Sweezy as editor in 1969 after the death of Leo Huberman. The group around *Monthly Review* in general and Magdoff in particular thus became important to Miliband during his years in New York. However, *Monthly Review* could not really provide him with an *engagement* in American politics either since this was not its primary orientation. It was a Marxist journal, based in New York, which was providing an independent analysis of the world as a whole, rather than attempting to establish an effective Left presence within the US itself.

Of course, the problems that Miliband faced in finding a way of intervening effectively for socialist purposes in the USA were in no way unique, and his writing, teaching, and numerous lectures, including those at the Socialist Scholars Conference and the Marxist School in New York, certainly had some impact. But, while American socialist intellectuals were used to working in an environment which was generally hostile to their ideas, he found it extremely difficult to adapt. He was not someone who wanted to put his main political energies into single issue campaigns or local movements, and he continued to believe in the

necessity for a socialist party based on class analysis. He thus put greater efforts into his interventions in Britain, although there too he was to find that his Marxist-based ideas were losing their appeal.

3. Analyzing 'Thatcherism'

Although Miliband was in the United States from July 1977 until December 1978, the advent of 'Thatcherism' did not take him by surprise for he had been increasingly worried about the growing climate of authoritarianism in British politics. Thus when John Griffith told him about the reaction of the Academic Board at LSE to a sensationalist report, which claimed that Higher Education was being dominated by Marxists, he replied:

> One doesn't want to get paranoid about things ... but I can't help seeing the Academic Board and the Gould report at one end of the spectrum at the other end of which there is the National Front. Of course, I am not amalgamating, but throughout that spectrum, there is the common thread of anti-leftism, and while the 'liberals' would not be seen dead with the gangsters and genuinely oppose them, there is, however unwillingly, a common effort ... And I should think that as the difficulties pile up or endure, and don't seem to find any resolution, the 'strong state' will become more pronounced, with ... help from many 'liberals', or ex-liberals, or ex-labourites.[32]

His explanation for the growth of both the extremism of the National Front and the general drift to the Right therefore lay in his interpretation of the tensions in the underlying situation, and he analysed this more fully in an article written in August 1978 – before the so-called 'winter of discontent' of strikes – and published in December as 'A state of de-subordination'.[33] The seventies, he suggested, might in future be seen as 'an uneasily transitional decade', in which the post-war settlement came apart under the pressure of forces and tendencies which pushed the country in new directions. Economic problems might be part of the reason but did not, he argued, provide a sufficient or adequate explanation for the generalised sense that the settlement which had been thought permanent in the decades since 1945 had ceased to be viable. The more fundamental strain on the system was rather that there was a process of 'de-subordination' which meant that:

> people who find themselves in subordinate positions, and notably the people who work in factories, mines, offices, shops, hospitals and so on do what they can to mitigate, resist and transform the conditions of their subordination. The process occurs where subordination is most evident and felt, namely at 'the point of production' and at the workplace in general; but also wherever else a condition of subordination exists, for instance as it is experienced by women in the home, and outside.

De-subordination, he continued, was a very old phenomenon, which had assumed a wide variety of expressions, from 'luddism' to sit-ins, and also involved, in one of its most common forms, 'a refusal to do more than the minimum that is required, or less'. But, he argued, it was a much more accentuated and generalised feature of life in Britain now than at any time since the early nineteenth century and:

> ... whatever form and content it assumes, it does at least denote a certain rejection of the validity of one or other or all of the multiple subordinations which are part of capitalist society, and particularly of the subordination at work which is an essential part of capitalism.[34]

This was not a socialist consciousness, but it still presented a central problem for those running the political system. For the development of this state of de-subordination was making it far more difficult for both Trade Union leaders and the Labour Government to control rank and file restiveness. But if there was deep and widespread de-subordination on the one side, there was equally deep resentment of this on the other. The manifestation of this was the apparently strong conviction by many people that something like a counter-revolution was essential:

> What they want is to reverse the trends of policy and thought which have dominated British politics for thirty years in regard to state intervention, welfare, the growth of trade union influence – all that might, in this context, be subsumed under the label 'Labourism' and which Conservatives are wont to call 'socialism'. It is this 'socialism' which they take to be responsible for Britain's economic decline, and which they want to see pushed back.[35]

Such people, who proclaimed that the Labour Party was in the process of being 'captured' by subversives and Marxists, created a climate of thought in which the most reactionary 'solutions' were legitimised, and this was reflected in debates on immigration and law and order. Furthermore, it was evident in the leadership of the Conservative Party which sought to end the consensus and implement 'more markedly inegalitarian, anti-welfare, anti-union policies than previous Conservative leaderships thought it prudent or were keen to attempt.'[36] This did not mean that most Conservative leaders actually wanted confrontation with the trade unions, but their policies made this a distinct possibility and:

> ... there are probably some people in the Conservative leadership who do believe that a 'confrontation' with the trade unions, from which the Government must at all costs emerge successful, is a necessary condition for the reversals of policy which they, and some of their colleagues, would want to see such a Government carry out.[37]

De-subordination was therefore provoking real dangers from the Right, but this did not mean that it was sufficient to bring into being a socialist movement which would be able to shape the policies to be adopted in coming years. His conclusions were therefore deeply pessimistic, at least for the short term:

> This being the case, the prevailing circumstances seem to point in the direction of a considerable reinforcement of state power for the purpose of containing pressure from below. This is not to engage in prophecies of the coming of an authoritarian regime. The reinforced state does have 'authoritarian' characteristics in so far as it is marked by a further inflation of police powers of a discretionary sort: but this can be accommodated without too much difficulty within the constitutional shell of the existing political power. A Conservative Government in particular would in the present period be tempted or driven to try and reinforce the state and be 'firm' with greedy workers, picketing strikers, presumptuous trade unions, subversive teachers, noisy students, tiresome blacks, welfare scroungers, sinister Marxists, misguided libertarians and everybody else standing in the way of national renewal by way of 'free enterprise' and the worship of the market. [38]

This was a remarkably prescient prediction of some of the key characteristics of 'Thatcherism' and, when the Conservatives won the General Election a year later, he had no illusions about what this signified. 'The Queen's speech', he told one of his Boston acquaintances, is 'nasty stuff and marks a real turn in British politics – the end of the era that began in 1945.' [39] However, he was much less clear about the alternative.

He had not changed his view that the only effective way to advance the cause of the Left in Britain was through the establishment of a new socialist party, but there was no sign of any such development. Given his negative view of the Labour Party he certainly did not anticipate any renewal from this source. On the contrary, he would have been heartened had he believed that Thatcher's victory would 'cure people of their Labourist illusions'. However:

> I already hear people say, once again, that what we need is a more socialist Labour Party ... which is like saying that what we need is elephants who can fly. [40]

The only hope, which he thought unlikely to materialise, was that the Labour Party would split, with the left-wing forming a nucleus for a genuinely socialist party. He was thus highly sceptical about the movement to change the constitution of the Labour Party so that the rank-and-file could secure greater control over the leadership and MPs. Having participated in the Bevanite campaign in the 1950s, he believed that such efforts were misconceived. He was so convinced that the Centre and Right would always control policies *in practice* that the attempt to make this more difficult *in theory* seemed to him to be a waste of the energies that could more profitably be devoted to the establishment of new

socialist initiatives outside the party. However, since there was vastly more sup-
port for the idea of winning control of the Labour Party than for his notion of
splitting it, his position was paradoxical. For although he constantly insisted that
he was an optimist and even 'panglossian' in outlook, his analysis was deeply pes-
simistic, and this was perhaps one reason for the comparative lack of resonance
of *Capitalist Democracy in Britain,* which was published in 1982.

He had been working on this book for several years and, as always, it was beau-
tifully written, and drew on a wide range of sources on historical and contempo-
rary developments. It certainly received some enthusiastic reviews, but it did not
have the same kind of impact as *Parliamentary Socialism* or *The State in Capital-
ist Society* and it was less original than *Marxism and Politics.* He had wanted to
focus on the political system as a means of *containing* pressure from below and
on the various institutions of the labour movement, including trade unions and
parties as fulfilling the same function. He was convinced that capitalist democ-
racy was a form of regime which the Marxist Left had not analysed sufficiently
and he saw his book as an attempt to do this via the British system.[41] But he had
been worried that his method was not adequate to the purpose and the book
took much longer than he had expected. And while he was always self-critical,
his negative judgments about the completed book were more categorical this
time. He thus told John Saville that 'I don't think much of it' and that 'for reasons
which are very unclear, I think that it has not come off' and confessed to Marcel
Liebman that he was very dissatisfied with it and worried by the question of why
it was not better.[42] The reason may have been that he had begun the work under
the Labour government and completed it during the early years of Thatcherism
without adapting it sufficiently to take account of the transformation that was
being effected. But the major problem was *political* rather than analytical, for his
impeccable logic seemed to lead nowhere. There were, he was arguing, funda-
mental reasons for the drift towards a strong state with pronounced authoritar-
ian features. This needed to be opposed by an effective challenge to the existing
structures of power from the Left. But:

> ... there is no major political force which can at present be said to offer the promise
> of an effective challenge to the existing structures of power in Britain: any such
> challenge must, at best, be rather weak and uncertain. How this is to be remedied
> is a matter of great contention among socialists; and it is also a matter of crucial
> importance. For a strong and unambiguous political force on the left is not only
> indispensable for the achievement of great economic and social changes: it is also
> essential for the purpose of opposing effectively the drift towards conservative
> authoritarianism.[43]

As pure analysis, this may have been valid, but it suggested no strategy because
he was so uncertain about this himself. Gradually, he began to involve himself
in new initiatives.

4. 'Bennism' and the Socialist Society

The first step was a more positive evaluation of 'Bennism' and of Tony Benn himself. He had been impressed by Benn's refusal to stand for the Shadow Cabinet after the 1979 General Election, but only got to know him personally the following April when invited to speak about the Labour Party at a day school in his Bristol constituency chaired by Benn himself. Although Miliband gave a long lecture explaining to Labour Party activists why their party could never be the agency which socialists needed, there were immediate signs of a personal rapport – or at least mutual fascination – between Benn and himself. This first meeting did not lead to any immediate development but it was beginning of a political and personal relationship that was to grow surprisingly close. A year later Miliband reported to one of his Boston friends:

> All is well here, though we find the political climate infuriating. Except for Tony Benn, whom I find more and more impressive. I have never properly been on his wavelenth, but I admire the way in which he has taken on the power structure, including the Labour power structure … Somebody called him the 'Salvador Allende' of Britain, which is pushing it a bit, since I don't believe he is going to be prime minister or any such. But there is a parallel; and it will be interesting to see how well he does. He has won some seemingly hopeless battles in the past, and he is remarkably persistent. But you should see the avalanche of abuse, derision, etc. to which he is subjected.[44]

By now Benn was challenging Denis Healey, a powerful figure on the Centre-Right of the Party, for the post of Deputy Leader and his candidacy was being backed by an array of left-wing activist groups. Having initially regarded these internal Labour Party battles as a sideshow Miliband now acknowledged both the progess of the Left in the party and that it was 'a new kind of Labour Left, rather different from the Labour Left I knew in the fifties' and he also saw the significance of its control of the Greater London Council.[45] Meanwhile, his own intervention in left-wing politics came with the move to establish a Socialist Society.

The discussions for some kind of new organisation began early in 1981. The idea originated in a workshop at a conference on 'Beyond the Fragments' – a classic text in socialist feminism.[46] It was taken up by a group including Robin Blackburn and Tariq Ali from *New Left Review*, and Hilary Wainwright, Michele Barrett[47] and Mike Rustin.[48] Miliband was involved from the start and his name was included on the invitation to a much wider group to discuss the formation of the new Society on 20 June, and he chaired one of the sessions at this meeting.[49] His view of the initiative was evident in a letter to one of his Boston friends a few days earlier:

Some people around NLR and myself and a few others have been talking and out-lining plans for a new Socialist Society, Socialist League or whatever in Britain, to try and organize some kind of independent socialist intervention in politics here, by way of publications, research work etc; and also to help the Bennite Left, or the left which Benn is at present leading, in their struggles in the Labour Party, but from outside (even though some people in the planning process are Labour Party members). We are getting a hundred or so people together this coming Saturday … to discuss the project some more and see how people react to it. So far the response we have had has been good. Whether anything comes of it, in any seri-ous way, is very uncertain. But it is probably worth trying. Of course some people immediately ask 'why not in the Labour Party?'. There are answers to that question! But the left in the party has done much better than I ever thought it would. There are limits though, very definitely. It's an interesting, very interesting, and complex situation.[50]

The potential divisions within the Socialist Society were already discernible before it was even launched. Was it fundamentally inspired by Marxist notions of class struggle or was it a much broader movement, incorporating the think-ing of new social movements? Was it an adjunct to Bennism or was it designed to further socialism without being preoccupied by developments within the Labour Party? Miliband had made his own position clear in some notes that he had sent Robin Blackburn in March on some of the points that the drafting committee would need to deal with. In these he had emphasised the need for a critical distance from the Labour Party, but had also called for the inclusion of a reference to Marxism, and had sought to maintain the primacy of class strug-gle.[51] The need to include socialists from both inside and outside the Labour Party was generally agreed, but Miliband failed to achieve his other two aims. Nevertheless, he regarded the meeting on 20 June as generally successful and a very heterogeneous Steering committee was charged with establishing a Socialist Society with a larger conference in the autumn. Miliband was not a member of this body or of any of the sub-groups which were set up because he was shortly to return to Boston. However, the founding conference was then postponed until January 1982 and his name was included in the invitation which proclaimed:

Without seeking to create a new party or faction, the Society would encourage socialist renewal inside the labour movement and help those fighting for socialist ideas in the Labour Party. It would help create a new forum and common frame-work for considering fundamental questions of socialist programme and purpose. It would address itself to the implications of new radical currents of thought. It would bring together intellectual workers and worker intellectuals, in the common task of developing the programme and promise of socialism. It would be open to all those prepared to subscribe to a Charter of socialist principles.[52]

The aims, borrowing Gramsci's phrase from Miliband's original notes, were to

help create a 'socialist common sense' through local and national cultural and educational work and through books and pamphlets; to provide an arena for socialists in different situations and of different persuasions to work together; and to act as a clearing house and umbrella organisation, encouraging the coordination of socialist activities in ways that would help to unify the left.

The conference, on 23-24 January 1982 at the Institute of Education in London, was attended by about 1200 people, including Tony Benn, who recorded that 'many of the "old boys" were there – Raymond Williams, Stuart Hall, Ralph Miliband, Perry Anderson and lots of others', with SWP and IMG also present.

He continued:

> Raymond Williams moved that 'the Socialist Society be founded'. A historic event. He was, of course, one of the organisers of the New Left in 1956, and he spoke about the many starts before but said this was a fresh one and he thought it would work.[53]

Those present understandably regarded it as an historical occasion, but could also hardly fail to be aware that the tide had already turned with Benn's defeat by Denis Healey in the Deputy leadership contest the previous September and with the recently formed Social Democratic Party challenging Labour as the main alternative to the Conservatives. Miliband himself was certainly conscious of this, but saw the solution as the strengthening of the Left. 'Until that happens', he argued, 'the Labour Party must remain locked in its struggles, part of the British crisis rather than a viable agency for its resolution.'[54] And although he realised that it would be premature, he still wished that a new political party was being founded rather than a Socialist Society.

He was quite pleased by the Conference itself, although he thought it a little too Labour-oriented, and he was elected to the steering committee where he was, he joked to Marcel Liebman, the oldest member by about twenty years.[55] However, he was troubled by one very notable feature, which had little to do with strategic matters, and which he noted at the end of the first day of the conference:

> A major theme, perhaps the major theme, at today's Foundation meeting of the Socialist Society was the repeated sentence [?] by many people, young and old, that they did not know what socialism was. Again and again, people repeated this, not merely in terms of how to get there, i.e. what strategies should be adopted, i.e. the means, but also and even more important the ends – what is socialism? they kept saying. We know what we are against – capitalism, imperialism, racism, sexism, domination of every sort and so forth: but what is socialism, how is it to be organised, what does it look like, how does it relate to ordinary people's lives? and so on.
> The same people were perfectly prepared to join the Socialist Society, but much less as a means of propagating what they already know to be right, correct, good, socialism, and much more as a way of discovering collectively what they were for,

and <u>then</u> hoping to make an impact on the politics of the day, the political culture, their friends or neighbours, or whatever.

This is a very remarkable stance [?], since it cannot be taken that the question 'what is socialism?' is meant quite literally: Moreover many if not most of the people who asked it would not be there: why should they be interested if they had <u>no</u> idea what socialism is about. The question therefore must be taken to mean: we roughly speaking have an idea that we want a better world from which many of the evils of capitalism have been eliminated, but 1) what are its basic themes, principles [?] 2) how is to be organised and how do we get there.[56]

This bothered him greatly and he told Ellen Meiksins Wood that the contradiction between the deep commitment to socialist ideas, for example in the radical statement of aims, coupled with 'all this questioning about the meaning of socialism' was 'due to the awful mess everyone knows we are in'.[57]

The minutes of the first few meetings of the steering group of the Socialist Society do not suggest very much agreement about how to counter the problems. Although regional groups were established, by early February Anthony Arblaster was already reporting that the Northwestern workshop discussions and comments from friends in Sheffield who had attended the founding conference suggested that it was too London-based and too dominated by intellectuals and big names.[58] Two weeks later Michele Barrett submitted a note for the next steering committee arguing that the publications programme combined 'in one operation the fears about intellectualism, London bias, famous names and top-down initiatives',[59] while Anne Showstack Sassoon expressed her frustration about the Socialist Society repeating old ideas without sufficient strategic thought as to *why* it was worthwhile to hold conferences and produce pamphlets and books.[60] Miliband was not particularly impressed with the topics in a series of London discussions Robin Blackburn had suggested,[61] and the women's caucus raised a series of issues about the organisation and ethos of the Society.[62] All this was to be expected in a new initiative bringing together diverse groups, but before the Socialist Society had really got going the problems of the British Left were vastly increased by Falklands War.

The Steering Committee, with Miliband present, opposed the British action at its meeting on 15 May, passing a resolution urging that the Socialist Society:

adopts as its watchword in response to the Falklands hostilities 'stop the war' 'bring back the fleet' and that these inform a programme of local and national activities designed to assist the campaign of opposition to the war.

Miliband (and other members of the Society) made speeches at protest meetings and demonstrations, and the Society organised a teach-in against the war which was attended by over one thousand people and published a successful pamphlet by Anthony Arblaster, *The Falklands – Thatcher's War Guilt*. But with Margaret

Thatcher wrapping herself in the Union Jack, the Labour leadership supporting the war, and appalling national chauvinism in the media, none of this made any great impact. As Miliband told Leo Panitch in the kind of language he rarely used:

> I won't writing about the fucking Falklands now. It's a most depressing and bitter business, and it seems to have turned Thatcher into a major political figure. I mean that her brand of Toryism may well now come to predominate. The Falklands has served her well to silence and subdue the wets, who were never much anyway. Now they are even less. It's a very bad look out: if she is returned at the next election, England will look a very different country than even in 1979 …
> This is very much unlike my usual view that we are going to win in the long run anyway. And we are! But it's not going well.[63]

The war in the South Atlantic gave the Conservative Right a new political ascendancy and marginalised the whole of the Left. By the end of its first year, the Socialist Society could record some successful meetings, and an active publication programme, but it had only attracted 700 members and was in financial difficulty.[64] Miliband's attempt at optimism may not have been entirely convincing but he continued to battle away to maintain the vision of a left alternative.

At the annual conference in February 1983 he pressed his view that socialists needed to 'think seriously how to bring about a new socialist party that would unite many of [the] existing forms and tendencies of the left' and claimed that a party of 10,000-20,000 activists would do wonders for the cause.[65] However, Mike Rustin obviously regarded the Society's problems as more intractable and, immediately after the conference, presented an appraisal of the situation to the steering committee. The Society, he suggested, had been good in parts, but there was no overall sense of direction, and he concluded:

> It was, I take it, partly because the intellectual left felt it was slowly dying of its own isolation that the Socialist Society was set up. Unfortunately, it requires rather hard and determined work to get out of it.[66]

One idea, originally suggested by Robin Blackburn, which appealed to Miliband, was a proposal for a Marx centenary commemoration, and it was also thought that the GLC might contribute funding for this. Miliband suggested a series of debates on Marx, while commenting wryly:

> By September, the only Marx that people will want to hear about may well be Groucho, but there still may be an audience for the kind of interesting venue which the Socialist Society could organise. [67]

He agreed to try to organise this and also to serve on a new Office Committee

which was to meet more regularly than the Steering Committee so as to give the Society a little more dynamism. However, by now both organisational and ideological matters were proving increasingly divisive.

At the Steering Committee on 19 March, at which Miliband was not present, it was suggested that he and Lynne Segal should be asked to act as public chairpersons/spokespersons for the Society.[68] (Previously, following Green and Feminist theories about non-hierarchical structures, each Steering Committee decided who should chair the next one, and the Society had no officers). But when the next meeting took place in April both he and Lynne Segal declined to take on the roles assigned to them – although Miliband had been chairing the Office Committee and she took this over at the end of May. He believed that a more fundamental organisational change was necessary. It had also been proposed that Miliband should be asked to introduce a discussion in the afternoon of the next steering committee on the relevance of Marx. When this took place Elizabeth Wilson, a member of the Steering Committee, was so alienated by the reception given to Miliband's presentation that she later wrote:

> I didn't come to the May meeting of the Steering Committee, and this was because I was so turned-off by the April meeting. I found the whole atmosphere of the discussion introduced by Ralph about Marxism extremely depressing and irritating. The general atmosphere, at least as I experienced it, was one of not even wanting to listen to what Ralph was saying and certainly very little interest in debating any of the issues he raised. This does not seem to augur very well for the future of a society dedicated to the discussion of ideas![69]

Whether he himself was equally depressed is unclear, but he was probably not surprised by the negative reaction to Marxism as he was now experiencing this almost everywhere.[70] The Socialist Society steering committee accepted his proposal to organise a Marx event in November with six academic confrontations between Marxists and anti-Marxists,[71] but by now he was deeply concerned about the future of the Society and suggested that a large of part of the June steering committee should be devoted to a discussion of its role and purpose, supported by short papers. By the time this meeting took place a further cataclysmic event for the British Left had occurred: on 10 June the Conservatives were re-elected to government in a landslide victory with the Labour Party securing its worst result since 1931, only ahead of the Social Democratic Party by the narrowest of margins in its share of the popular vote.

Despite his long-held view that the dominance of the Labour Party was an obstacle to the establishment of a genuine socialist party, Miliband was dreading this result.

Before the election he had told one of his American friends:

> I wish I could be out of the country – though I should be saying that I will be

helping locally, which I probably will. The prospects are that there will be a Tory victory, largely because Labour is discredited and not credible, and also because its programme, which has many excellent things in it, can easily be denounced – demagogically and effectively – as 'extreme', 'unreasonable' etc. The point is that you can't foist radical policies on 'the electorate' without a lot of preparation, which there has not been, and without all the leaders being known to support those policies which is not at all the case … [T]he thought of another four years of Tory government, of Thatcher Toryism is horrible; and one hopes against hope that somehow it will not happen …[72]

In the event the whole family went to Nottingham to canvas for Ken Coates, but Miliband found the election extremely depressing, even though he tried to put the best gloss on it. He thus told another of his Boston friends:

Personally I would not mind, if it was possible to create a socialist party parallel to the Labour Party, and with the task of injecting socialist ideas into the body political and affirming a socialist presence in the struggles ahead. The CP ought to be doing this, but it is now very ill (terminally I would judge, or at least it can never regain true life); and the sects can't. But nobody seems to agree with me! About the need for some new formation I mean.[73]

In any case, the election meant that the discussion about the future of the Socialist Society took place in depressing circumstances. Miliband had submitted a trenchant paper before the meeting. In theory, he began, there was every reason to think that the Socialist Society could play a very useful role in the period ahead. Socialist positions would need to be defended against attacks from many quarters; and socialist perspectives, policies and programmes would have to be reviewed, refined, debated and advanced. The Society could also play a distinctive role in the debates on the question of 'What Next for the Left?', and he argued that the coming period might well constitute one of the really historic turning points for the Left, with more fundamental questions about its future being raised than at any time since 1900, or at least since 1919. He continued:

The question is not whether all such tasks need to be performed, but whether the Society … can hope to perform them. Its record so far is not bad; but it has been in decline, and it is threatened with ultimate disappearance. In my view, one of the major reasons for this is that the Society has not had a sufficiently clear political identity and political purpose: this is why most members, who are busy elsewhere, have not felt any great commitment to it. There are many obstacles to the Society acquiring a clearer political identity and purpose; and it is by no means certain that these can be overcome. This is a central issue for consideration. One way of tackling it, to which I am personally opposed, is to seek affiliation to the Labour Party. Another would be to make the Society a forum for the discussion of the reorganisation of the left-beyond-the-Labour Party, and to view the Society as a

constituent element of a new socialist formation in Britain. This is the course I would myself favour …[74]

He also argued that a related reason for the Society's decline had been its poor organisation, and he proposed the election of a chairperson, a deputy chairperson, a secretary, a treasurer and a committee for a period of one year, accountable to the Steering Committee and to the membership. He also spoke forcefully to the Steering Committee meeting which discussed his paper (and some others which had also been submitted), arguing that: 'if we don't act very soon we will just linger on with no members'. However, there was little agreement on the way forward by the time he returned to Boston in the late summer of 1983.

The discussion continued early the next year, with Mike Rustin putting forward well-argued papers proposing broad alliance policies, which Miliband thought made too many concessions to the Centre-Left. Against this, he argued in April 1984 that a more successful Annual General Meeting and a protest meeting that the Society had organised against the imprisonment of Sarah Tisdall proved that they had a constituency.[75] The year long miners' strike had just begun and he urged that this, plus the behaviour of the police, and the treatment of the Greenham women's protest about Cruise missiles, had brought about a radicalisation:

> There is a considerable amount of work to be done in education, widening and clarifying socialist ideas especially around the defence of democratic rights, but throughout the whole spectrum of political activity including the home and personal behaviour. This was a good time to revive groups around these issues.[76]

He now succeeded in his organisational aims. Hilary Wainwright, nominated by Miliband, was elected Chair and John Palmer, whom he also nominated, became one of the Vice Chairs, with Sarah Benton as the other.[77] All London members of the steering committee were urged to attend the office committee, and Miliband also suggested that at least five more committed members should create a 'chemistry of collaboration', offering himself as one of them for the next three months. But although the Society continued and membership picked up from an all-time low of 150 in April 1984 to 350 a year later and to 375 by January of the following year, it was by now evident that it was not to be the embryo for Miliband's new socialist party.[78] Activists put great energy into miners' support groups – an initiative which certainly had a radicalising effect on many people. But the defeat of the strike in March 1985, following an unprecedented mobilisation of police forces and covert action by the government, led to further demoralisation of the Left, with divisions between the supporters and critics of Arthur Scargill, the General Secretary of the National Union of Mineworkers. Miliband himself continued to attend meetings, propose policy initiatives, and speak at meetings organised by the Society. However, there were also evident divisions over ideology, over the European Community, and over whether the society should affili-

ate to the Labour Party. And despite the slight increase in membership, and some new activity in local groups, by 1986 the most salient feature for the secretary appeared to be organisational and financial difficulties. If not totally moribund, the Society had certainly lost its elan.

In reality, the problems of the Socialist Society had been symptomatic of a much deeper strategic and ideological crisis of the Left than Miliband had originally acknowledged. As a long-term critic of the Labour Party, he had assumed that there was space for a socialist Left to confront Thatcherism effectively without recognising that its strategic position was almost certainly dependent on the continuation of a vibrant Left *within* the party as well as outside it. And, still more fundamentally, the widespread questioning of socialism which he had found so bewildering was a reflection of the erosion of support for traditional beliefs that was now taking place on the Left. The Socialist Society could not withstand these pressures: indeed it had been evident from the start that its internal debates mirrored them. Miliband was also doing his best to counter these new tendencies on the Left through his writing.

5. Confronting The 'New Revisionism'

During 1983 and 1984 he had been engaging in a private and public debate with Eric Hobsbawm, who had played an important role in setting the new intellectual climate on the Left with *The Forward March of Labour Halted?* which had originally been published in *Marxism Today* in September 1978. This was an overview of the evolution of the working class in the past 100 years, but the political sting was in three claims: that there was increasing stratification and division amongst workers with decreasing class consciousness, that unionisation had not grown for thirty years, and that working-class support for the Labour Party (and Communist Party) was in decline. The result, he argued, was that many of the working classes had 'lost faith and hope in the mass party of working people.'[79] The industrial militancy which had taken place in the early 1970s did not translate into any socialist consciousness and, he suggested:

> We cannot rely on a simple form of historical determinism to restore the forward march of British labour which began to falter thirty years ago ... [I]f the labour and socialist movement is to recover its soul, its dynamism, and its historical initiative, we, as Marxists, must do what Marx would certainly have done: to recognize the novel situation in which we find ourselves, to analyse it realistically and concretely, to analyse the reasons, historical and otherwise, for the failures as well as the successes of the labour movement, and to formulate not only what we would want to do, but what can be done.[80]

Hobsbawm had not actually made a recommendation about strategy, but the implications were fairly clear and, over the next few years, he was to advocate

'moderate' policies, oppose 'Bennism' and call for a broad alliance of the Centre-Left against Thatcherism.

Miliband knew Hobsbawm well and had respect and affection for him, but he completely disagreed with both the strategy and the assumptions behind it. Without any direct reference to him, he published an article putting forward the opposing case in *Socialist Register 1983*.[81] The declining support for the Labour vote in 1983, he argued, was neither because of the disappearance of the working class nor because the party's policies were too left-wing. The reason was that Labour governments had hit the living standards of ordinary people. The rise of left activism had meant that the leadership had been unable to maintain control over the party, but nor had the activists been able to dislodge the right. This had led to an absurd situation in which the party had fought the election on a left-wing programme which the leadership had obviously opposed. He remained sceptical as to whether or not the Left could actually win control of the Labour party but, in any case, he saw the way forward as continuing to work for a socialist programme, in confidence that even prolonged opposition did not mean impotence. Since Hobsbawm was now openly attacking 'Bennism' there was total divergence between the two, and Miliband particularly objected to another of Hobsbawm's articles in *Marxism Today* in October 1983. Here he had suggested that before the General Election many people on the Left had thought that 'a Thatcher Government was preferable to a reformist Labour Government' and they therefore felt that 'the election was lost anyway, so it didn't much matter that potential Labour voters were puzzled and demoralized by the sight of party leaders and activists tearing each other's guts out in public for years on issues difficult to see the point of'. [82]

The Milibands were holding a New Years Eve party to which Hobsbawm was invited. Political differences spilled over into personal relations and Miliband confronted Hobsbawm in front of other guests. On 3 January he apologised, but argued that the attacks on the Left played into the hands of people with whom Hobsbawm had nothing in common. Hobsbawm replied in a conciliatory way on 9 January, but reaffirmed his views. Ten days later, Miliband tried to refute his arguments, maintaining that Hobsbawm was effectively advocating a retreat when he argued that the electorate would not be willing to accept a Labour government which was more radical than the Wilson-Callaghan type. The next stage in the exchange was public with an article in *The Guardian* by Hobsbawm on 20 February 1984,[83] which was followed by Miliband's reply the next week.[84]

This argument was, to an extent, a rerun of earlier debates following the Labour Party's loss of the third successive General Election in 1959. In reality, the alternative positions – which are inherently difficult to prove – are tied up with deeper assumptions about the nature of society. If, as Hobsbawm suggested, there was no possibility of winning majority support for traditional socialist policies, this was presumably because of irreversible changes in social

structure and normative preferences. If, as Miliband argued, socialism could still secure such support, it was because the social and ideological environment presented no such insurmountable obstacles. The Hobsbawm-Miliband debate was conducted primarily in terms of *political strategy*, but others were focusing more specifically on the underlying conditions.

A key text in this shift in the intellectual climate was by André Gorz, a man whom Miliband had greatly admired and had frequently invited to write for *Socialist Register.* Gorz's intervention was originally published as *Adieux au Prolétariat* (1980) and published in English as *Farewell to the Working Class: An Essay on Post-Industrial Socialism* in 1982. It was a thoroughgoing, powerful and extremely provocative critique of Marxism. The traditional working class, it suggested, was being eroded by technology and fragmentation, and the critical edge to the argument rested on three major claims: that the working class was not a universal class with a 'mission' of human emancipation; that individual consciousness was not a part of class consciousness; and that alienation and hierarchy were embedded in the modern state and industry so that the overthrow of capitalism would not cure these problems. The solution, he argued, was to reduce labour, production and state functions to the minimum necessary and to seek liberation through the realm of autonomy outside labour rather than within it. Gorz's work was perhaps the most influential tract of this kind in the early 1980s, but there was a whole range of thinking on the Left which, from various points of view, stressed the extent to which the world had changed and suggested that the old socialist categories were no longer sufficient to analyse this or to propose alternatives.

Since the late 1970s, Miliband had been alarmed by this intellectual shift which was affecting so much of the Left, but he had not attempted any full-scale refutation of it. By 1985 his frustration had turned to anger and he wrote a powerful article, 'The New Revisionism in Britain' in *New Left Review,* which sought to counter the new currents and re-establish the socialist alternative.[85] This encapsulated the thinking and assumptions embedded in many of his other works.

He began by acknowledging the difficulties of the era for the Left in Britain:

> Clearly, these are very hard times for the whole left, and it is very natural – and very desirable – that such times should produce intense thinking and re-thinking about what is wrong, and what can be done about it. However,... the tendencies which have been very strongly predominant in the writings of the left in the last few years do not offer socialist solutions to the problems now confronting it: they constitute a 'new revisionism' ... and this ... marks a very pronounced retreat from some fundamental socialist positions. Far from offering a way out of the crisis, it is another manifestation of that crisis, and contributes in no small way to the malaise, confusion, loss of confidence and even despair which have so damagingly affected the Left in recent years ...[86]

Acknowledging that there were profound differences and even disagreements within the spectrum of thought which he was analysing, he nevertheless argued that there were 'similarities of approach, of disposition and concern, and, no less important, certain common repudiations'.[87]

This new revisionism in Britain was generated specifically by the trauma of 'Thatcherism' but was also linked to an international phenomenon nurtured from many different sources: the experience of 'existing socialism' in various locations, the withering of Eurocommunism, the emergence of 'new social movements' born of dissatisfaction with the limitations of traditional labour and socialist movements and parties, a growing disbelief in the capacity of the working class to be the agent of radical social change, and a consequent 'crisis of Marxism'. And those who formed part of the new revisionism were not right-wing social democrats, but included Hobsbawm and Bob Rowthorn from the Communist Party and others like Raphael Samuel and Stuart Hall, who had been founder members of the New Left. These, and others, situated in various parts of the labour, feminist and peace movements, remained strongly committed to radical change and many retained affinities with one or other variant of Marxism, and none of them had abjured socialism. On the contrary, they all believed that they were helping its advance by the questions they were asking, the doubts they were expressing, the criticisms they were voicing, and the directions in which they were pointing. He nevertheless argued that they constituted a retreat from socialist positions on four closely related issues of crucial significance.

The first was that of 'class politics' which was repudiated by the new revisionism in its claim that organised labour no longer had 'primacy' in the challenge to capitalist power and the task of creating a radically different social order. This was based on various claims: that the working class had not played a revolutionary role and gave no indication of wishing to do so; that the aims of organised labour had always been very limited, and could not be taken to encompass the needs and aspirations of all oppressed and exploited groups; that the working class was not therefore a 'universal class', whose own liberation would signify the liberation of all such groups; that the claim to 'universality' in any case opened the door to the perpetuation of domination by a denial of the pluralism which ought to be at the centre of the socialist project; that the 'working class' in its traditional Marxist sense was in any case disappearing through technological development and a new international division of labour; and that 'new social movements' presented at least as great and as radical a challenge to the existing social order as organised labour. It was therefore time to drop the primacy of the working class and to replace it

with a model of struggle based upon a diversity of interests, concerns and 'discourses', emanating from a multiplicity of social strata, groups and movements, with no hierarchical presumptions and pretensions, in a constantly shifting pattern

of alliances.[88]

Miliband acknowledged that there were important insights and many necessary corrections and critiques in all this, but argued that it was nevertheless fundamentally wrong. The working class, he accepted, had experienced an accelerated process of recomposition, with a decline in traditional industrial sectors and a considerable further growth of white-collar, distribution, service, and technical sectors. But this was not synonymous with its disappearance as a class. In terms of its location in the productive process, its very limited or non-existent power and responsibility in that process, its near-exclusive reliance on the sale of its labour power for its income, and the level of that income, it remained as much the 'working class' as its predecessors, and this was also true of the unemployed and those dependent on welfare payments. Nor was there any good reason to believe that this recomposed working class was less capable of developing the commitments and class consciousness which socialists had always hoped to see emerge. It was also relevant that the working class included very large numbers of people who were also members of new social movements. It was, of course, possible for women workers, black workers, or gay workers, to feel in relation to their innermost being that it was as women, blacks or gays that they defined themselves, and that it was as such that they experienced exploitation, discrimination and oppression:

> But the fact that they feel this to be so, though a matter of the greatest importance, cannot be taken to imply that it is therefore an accurate representation of reality. That reality, including the exploitation, discrimination and oppression to which women, blacks and gays are subjected, is also crucially shaped by the fact that they are workers, located at a particular point of the productive process and the social structure. Upper-class women and blacks and gays may also experience discrimination and oppression: but they do so in a different way. A white woman worker experiences super-exploitation and double oppression; and a black woman worker experiences them threefold – as a black, as a woman and as a worker; and these multiple oppressions are of course combined. To oppose gender and class, to make gender or race or whatever else *the* defining criterion of 'social being'; and to ignore or belittle the fact of class, is to help deepen the divisions that are present within the working class.[89]

He did not deny that workers practised daily discrimination against other workers, but urged that socialists should not erect this into an insurmountable barrier and should remember that sectionalism, sexism and racism had often been partially overcome in common struggles, including, most recently in the miners' strike. Arguing sharply against Beatrix Campbell who, in *Wigan Pier Revisited* (1984) was now suggesting that 'men' and 'masculinity' rather than the system were the fundamental problems, he maintained that this kind of unqualified ver-

dict of collective gender guilt was quite inadequate in socialist terms. He did not deny the existence of chauvinism and racism in the white male working class, but the approach should be 'to struggle against them with the conviction that they are remediable and that there is no insurmountable obstacle to the bringing of practice closer to what is proclaimed'.[90]

He also argued against those who stated that the working class had never played a revolutionary role. This ignored the fact that vast numbers of workers had displayed a militant activism with clear revolutionary intentions or connotations in Russia in 1917, in the years immediately following World War I in many parts of Europe, and in Spain in the 1930s. It also ignored the extent to which the resistance to Nazi occupation had been a movement of social renewal as well as national liberation, and it understated the frequent existence of militancy in the post-war years. But it also under-stated the extent to which the advances that had been made within capitalist societies had stemmed from pressure from below by working-class movements. This was because:

> ... it is the working class, male and female, black and white, employed and unem-
> ployed, young and old, which experiences most acutely (even if unequally) the
> contradictions, constraints and oppressions of capitalism: and this produces in the
> working class demands born of felt needs.[91]

Marxists had tended to exaggerate the degree to which 'social being' must produce class and socialist consciousness in the working class, but new revisionism went to the other extreme of complete indeterminacy.

> The direction in which this leads is a subjectivism in which notions of class, struc-
> ture, and society itself, cease to be regarded as proper tools of analysis. In this per-
> spective, ideology turns into a supermarket in which diverse ideological constructs
> or discourses are freely available, one (or some) of which the working class (assum-
> ing there is such a thing) will choose, more or less at will ...[92]

Against this, there was nothing deterministic about saying that the multiple alienations engendered in the working class must produce 'pressure, challenge, struggle, conflict' and an availability to ideas of radical change, renewal and even socialism. And this was what had happened in the hundred years since Marx's death which had produced a dense network of institutions which constituted a world of labour. Its history was as much one of defeats, setbacks and betrayals as successes, and its shortcomings were not difficult to see. But the process had gone on and would continue as long as capitalism endured, and indeed would need to go on for a long time afterwards. The 'primacy' of organised labour arose from the fact that no other group was remotely capable of mounting as effective and formidable a challenge to the existing structures of power and privilege. This did not mean that new social movements and other groups were not important

or ought to surrender their separate identity. But the organized working class remained the necessary, indispensable 'agency of historical change'.

The second major issue on which he disagreed with the new revisionism was in relation to the state. He quoted Stuart Hall's view that socialists were confused because they professed an abhorrence of the state at one level, yet placed great emphasis upon it at another.[93] But Miliband argued that this was not a matter of confusion, but of inevitable tension in socialist thought and practice, since socialists did seek the subordination of the state to society, yet also required a state in the struggle for reform within capitalism and would continue to do so in a post-capitalist regime. Similarly, when Hall suggested that it was no longer a 'capitalist state' because the Left also had *its* part of the state which distributed welfare, redistributed resources to the less well-off and provided amenities on a universalistic basis, Miliband saw this as a misconception of the significance of welfare measures. Certainly, the measures affected the ways in which exploitation and domination were experienced, but they did not destroy or threaten the system of which exploitation and domination were the essence.

> What the state does in this area is a response to promptings and pressures upon which it is alone empowered to act, and upon which it acts in the conviction that its response serves to strengthen, not to undermine, the system which the state seeks to defend. The fulfilment of the state's welfare function' does not in the least rob it of its class nature.[94]

There was, he argued, nothing strange about the fact that socialists sought to extend the welfare function of the state, even though there might be much substance in the new revisionists' strictures against centralism and bureaucracy in the current system of 'state administered socialism'. Furthermore, the power of the dominant class and its allies could only be overcome by an effective state.

> To say this is not statist, elitist, undemocratic, male chauvinist ('the state is male'), or to be unaware of the dangers the labels point to. But the way to obviate these dangers is not to devalue and deny the role of the state, but to seek to combine state power with class power from below, in a system of 'dual power'which brings into play an array of popular forces – parties, trade unions, workers' councils, local government, women's groups, black caucuses, activists of every sort, in a democratic exercise of power and maximum self-government in the productive process and in every other sphere of life. But the state must have an important role in the whole process.[95]

It was therefore facile to think that the state in either capitalist or post-capitalist society was that of 'anachronistic caretaker', as Hall had described it in the same article.

The third issue was that of 'the Labour Party and Socialist Advance'. Miliband's

views on these strategic questions have already been discussed and do not need to be repeated. The main additional point was his insistence, based on election results, opinion polls, and union membership that there was no evidence that 'Thatcherism' had won the hearts and minds of a very large part of the working class and the labour movement or that there had 'been a vast and catastrophic ideological and political shift to Thatcherite Conservatism'.[96] He accepted that the fears which lay behind Hobsbawm's strategy was that a populist, radical Right could become still more extreme, and he shared this concern, but thought that a broad alliance without any real alternative policies was more likely to aggravate the danger than counter it. Finally, after arguing that 'socialism in one locality' was no substitute for a socialist intervention in national politics, and condemning the parochial nature of much of the discussion, he concluded by criticising the pessimism of the new revisionism, and reaffirming the feasibility of the socialist project.

'The New Revisionism in Britain' was not one Miliband's most thorough essays, but as a *cri de coeur* about a whole climate of opinion on the Left it was extremely important.

The problem was that however plausible his arguments were, he represented a diminishing section of opinion on the Left. It had already been evident in the Socialist Society that his emphasis on Marxism and class politics was not shared by the whole of this rather small group, and although there were people within other political formations who took a similar line on some issues, he did not really agree with their politics. There was thus the so-called 'Morning Star' group within the Communist Party, some members of which had recently produced a pamphlet on Class Politics which he cited with approval in the *New Revisionism* article.[97] But he did not believe that the CP was a viable alternative as a new socialist formation, and he still saw the extreme Left groups as too prone to Leninist and insurrectionary politics. Moreover, even some of those who had been the closest to him were beginning to find it difficult to accept his stance.

Zygmunt Bauman wrote to him just after a shortened version of his *New Revisionism* article had appeared in *The Guardian*[98], effectively supporting Gorz and Hobsbawm.[99] This disagreement was not really surprising since Bauman had always taken a far more sceptical line than Miliband in their numerous friendly arguments in Leeds. But it was indicative of the general climate in which Bauman was now emerging as an influential theorist. Perhaps of greater significance was the fact that Ken Coates, for whom he had canvassed only two years earlier, now also disagreed with him, regarding Benn's alignment with the Morning Star group on a national strategy for socialist regeneration as unviable and disastrous. He regarded international links as the crucial dimension of socialist policy and thought that Miliband's support for Benn was misconceived.[100] Nor did Marion fully share his perspective, not liking his *New Revisionism* article because, in her opinion, it overstated the primacy of class and failed to attach

sufficient weight to social movements, viewing them as divisive rather than as potential allies for class based movements – as, for example, in women's groups supporting the miners. And, finally, it was evident that long-term problems in *The Socialist Register* were now reinforced by significant differences of emphasis between Saville and Miliband.

It had long been apparent that John Saville was finding the commitment to the *Socialist Register* onerous and was anxious to have more time for his historical research and he had suggested retiring from it on various occasions, only to be dissuaded by Miliband. In 1981 there had been a crisis as both of them were too preoccupied with other commitments to perform the editorial role and the 1982 volume only appeared because the publisher, Martin Eve, and his colleague, David Musson, took it on themselves. At the beginning of 1982 Miliband was therefore seriously thinking of abandoning the whole project and Saville welcomed this idea, but thought that they should end with a double volume which made a farewell political statement. He anticipated that Miliband would probably have second and third thoughts about ending the *SR*, but he declared that his decision to retire from it was final.[101] Saville was quite right in predicting Miliband's second and third thoughts, for his experience of the founding meeting of the Socialist Society, with so many people confused about the nature of socialism, convinced him that the *SR* should continue after all. He could rely on Saville not to drop out suddenly, but needed to find some other editors, and he turned to two of his former students, George Ross and Leo Panitch.

He had known Ross for twenty years and they were currently colleagues at Brandeis, which would make collaboration comparatively easy. However, Ross did not find the idea of sustained editorial work of this kind very attractive and, probably more important, was beginning to differ politically from Miliband. Having been a Marxist activist in American campus politics in 1960s, and a participant-observer in the French Communist Party in the late 1970s, he was now trying to understand the massive defeat of the Left. Although he did not say so directly, he did not really want to align himself with Miliband and the *Socialist Register* because he felt that both were tending to reassert the old positions without sufficient analysis of the underlying reasons for the changes that were taking place.[102] He therefore never directly replied to the invitation and Miliband did not refer to it again.

Miliband's relationship with Panitch was far more straightforward and they were now to develop an extremely close friendship. They had first met when Panitch had arrived at LSE as a Canadian graduate in 1967 and had been mesmerised by the lectures that became *The State in Capitalist Society*. There was an immediate rapport between them that had developed further when Miliband became Panitich's Ph.D. supervisor. As he was another 'non-Jewish' Jew, whose Marxism was democratic and pluralist, there were many similarities between them. If Miliband was the mentor in the early years, he was attracted to Panitch

because of his warm personality, intelligence and immense energy. They had therefore kept in touch after Panitch had returned to Canada in 1972, where he had rapidly risen in both academic and left-wing circles. He was flattered and enthusiastic when Miliband asked him to join him on the *SR*. However, since there had been no response from Ross, no immediate decisions were made and Saville continued as joint editor for the 1983 edition, with Panitch and Ross continuing as contributors rather than editors. The decision was then postponed for yet another year, as Marcel Liebman joined the two editors in the 1984 edition on 'The uses of anti-communism'. This was a very successful collaboration and Miliband suggested that they continued for another year. It was then that underlying political disagreements between himself and Saville became apparent.

Saville had been quite sceptical about some of Miliband's ideas for quite a while. He had, for example, been doubtful about the Socialist Society from the start. However, it was now that he expressed his concerns most vociferously. Miliband had proposed a volume on 'Beyond Social Democracy', which would not merely criticise social democracy but ask, on the basis of experience, what else left-wing socialists wanted and how they envisaged attaining it. Saville's response was completely negative:

> I am genuinely at a loss to offer suggestions on the theme you are proposing ... [Y]ou talk about the 'limits of social democracy, the role of social democracy in Britain, France, Spain, Greece, Sweden?'. And a bit later you worry that maybe the first series of articles might be a little déja vu. Well yes: most certainly. The countries you mention are not exactly the dynamic centres of the world's problems are they? Clapped out Britain, with precious little future for the most moderate of social democracy? France: an article on the failures of these past years would certainly be interesting? Spain and Greece: really rather marginal would you not say? When you talk of the <u>limits</u> of social democracy you are in fact talking about a few countries which are quite affluent, which are suffering from a massive technological revolution which is beginning large scale unemployment as a permanent factor in life, and which are being ideologically submerged beneath various forms of the market economy – ideologically and practically. What <u>is</u> there to talk about?[103]

Miliband tried several times to convince him that he was not suggesting some 'wild-eyed alternative' to Social Democracy,[104] but Saville maintained that Miliband was still using the categories that had served them since the beginning of the SR but which were no longer helpful.[105] Miliband did not accuse Saville of being a 'new revisionist', but the extent of their divergence would have made it difficult to continue without bringing in 'new blood' on Miliband's wavelength. He was fairly sure about Panitch and in March 1985 tested him on this, eliciting the reply:

> We are definitely on the same wavelength re 'The New Revisionists'. [106]

In the short-term, this was simply a discussion about the volume for 1985/86 on *Social Democracy and After*: perhaps subconsciously, it was about the whole future of the *Socialist Register*.

The difficulty in finding a co-editor who shared his general views again demonstrated Miliband's growing political isolation. This was compounded by a series of deaths in these years that affected him deeply. The first, in 1980, was that of Jacob Talmon, with whom he had lived in Cambridge during the war. Although they had been quite different politically, he had been fond of him and had admired both his scholarship and his liberal stance within Israeli politics. The next year it was Robert McKenzie, with whom he had shared an office when both were junior lecturers at LSE. Again, they had differed politically, but there had been a rapport between them – perhaps partly because both were outsiders. Then, in August 1982, Ruth First, the anti-apartheid freedom fighter and revolutionary was assassinated in Mozambique by agents of the South African security forces. He had taught her at LSE, soon after her exile from South Africa, and she and her husband, Jo Slovo, had been close friends for years. Miliband and Marion were horrified and distressed by her death and he wrote a moving tribute to her in *Socialist Register*.

> She was very self-demanding and unassuming. The idea that she could ever become a symbol and an inspiration would have sent her into fits of embarrassed laughter. But her life and death have made her so. When South Africa has had its revolution, hers will be one of the names in the roll of martyrs which new generations will honour; and she will remain a strong presence in the minds of those who knew her.[107]

And in March 1986 he was struck by the tragic loss, from cancer, of Marcel Liebman, his closest friend and a political soulmate. They were united by their Jewish and Belgian origins, their socialism, their sense of humour, their warmth and their common memories. Their friendship had been an important part of both their lives, and during 1985, when he was enduring the final stages of his painful illness, Liebman had jointly edited the *Socialist Register* for the second time and had told Miliband that their collaboration was helping him to fight off the illness. Knowing that his friend was dying, Miliband had insisted that an article in the 1986 edition should be in their joint names, although Liebman was by then too ill to contribute. Miliband was deeply affected by Liebman's death and felt so low in its aftermath that, for a while, he had little enthusiasm or energy for his normal work. Eventually, he bounced back but this loss was as painful for him as that of Mills in 1962. He now relied increasingly on Panitch to help him maintain the Register as an organ of left-wing socialism, which refused to accept the 'new revisionism', and their relationship became increasingly important to him. However, it was apparent that he was now struggling to maintain a wider support for this perspective.

His major theoretical attempt to achieve this was in *Divided Societies*, which was finally published in 1989.[108] The book had originated in the Marshall Lectures, which he had delivered at Cambridge University in spring 1982, on 'Class Conflict Revisited'. But he had then spent several years researching both the theoretical and empirical material before finalising the manuscript. Its most fundamental aims were to demonstrate that class was an objective reality, which could be defined in terms of economic and power relations, that class conflict remained the most important cleavage in capitalist society, and that only socialism could bring about a solution to the problems of oppression and exploitation. It would be quite wrong to suggest that it was an orthodox Marxist work for, as he stated in the Preface:

> I think that Marx had the essence of the matter, but that a point of departure cannot be taken as a point of arrival, and that the 'model' ... requires substantial modifications in the light of later developments.[109]

And he followed this through with some significant re-formulations of the theory, both in the definition of class itself, and in terms of class-state relations, and he distanced himself from 'the traditional Marxist perspective'. [110] As usual, he also drew on a formidable body of empirical evidence from both Britain and the US to sustain his thesis, and his argument about the primacy of class remains persuasive.

Had the book been published earlier, its political and academic impact would certainly have been greater. But in 1982 the emphasis on class was already becoming unfashionable – even on the Left – and by the end of the decade he was beginning to sound like a voice from another era. Of course, it was because of his awareness that class politics was in retreat that Miliband had written the book, for he was deliberately trying to counter the dominant perspectives. However, there were major problems in the way that he had set about this task. This was partly because he sometimes sounded as if he was re-fighting old battles and dwelling on historical issues – the nature of inter-war Fascism and the division between social democracy and Stalinism – that were not of immediate concern to the audience that he was trying to reach. However, the most important weakness of the book did not concern the past, but the present.

One of Miliband's main aims was to refute the argument that conflicts over gender, ethnicity, the environment and so on were as fundamental as those concerned with class. In other words, he was anxious to reaffirm a more traditional socialist position against the claims made by many of the exponents of new social movements. This was an important position, and he had strong arguments to substantiate it, some of which he had already introduced in 'The New Revisionism in Britain'. But, given the climate of the times, it was also important that he presented his position with care and sensitivity. It is in this respect

that the failure of *Divided Societies* was most obvious. The problem was not the argument in itself, but the way in which he expressed parts of it for, although he acknowledged the importance of the demands that were being made by new social movements and the weakness of the traditional labour movement in relation to them, he seemed to include some gratuitously offensive remarks. Liberal feminism was, he argued, raising some major issues, but:

> [I]t needs to be said that many women who are part of liberal feminism are by no means to be taken as 'liberal' on issues other than the condition of women. Women who feel passionately about their own grievances may also support quite reactionary policies on other issues of home and foreign policy. Liberal feminism is not in the least incompatible with highly conservative views in other areas and may even be quite indifferent to (or may even support) the discrimination, oppression, and injustices suffered by other sections of society, for instance, black people.[111]

And, more generally in relation to feminist views, he insisted in arguing that bourgeois men and working-class men oppressed women unequally because of their class position:

> Working-class men may oppress and exploit their wives and daughters, and wield some limited power over women at work, or engage in sexual harassment; and nothing of this is negligible. But the power thus exercised, however arbitrary and objectionable, is much more circumscribed than the power which bourgeois men, as employers, have over women.[112]

And, concluding a similar point, he suggested:

> This does not in any way mean that working-class men do not oppress and exploit women, or that they are not complicit in the oppression and exploitation of women exercised by men 'higher up'. What it means is simply that the power to oppress and exploit wielded by working-class men is much smaller than that of bourgeois (and petty-bourgeois) men. This is no consolation or comfort to a wife battered by her working-class husband, or to a daughter sexually abused by her working-class father, or to a woman sexually harassed or bullied by her working-class male 'fellow' worker. Nevertheless, a great inequality of power, in this as in all other realms, is a dimension which the notion of 'patriarchy' and the oppression of women by 'men' altogether ignores.[113]

All this seems insensitive and unnecessary to the argument and made him appear far more dogmatic than was the case when he actually discussed the issues with feminist women whom he knew. It is not clear why he retained some of these passages – particularly as their offensiveness had already been pointed out by at least one of his friends.[114] But they were, to an extent, in keeping with the book as a whole.

For *Divided Societies* was Miliband's attempt to reassert a more traditional form of class politics at a time in which he still believed that the battle could be won. While 'new realism' and 'new revisionism' might be in the ascendancy, he seemed to believe that a powerful affirmation of a Marxist-inspired position could overcome the obstacles. His objective was therefore refutation and reaffirmation rather than compromise with alternative positions and it was perhaps this which made his tone a little more strident than usual. But it is notable that even some of his closest friends were lukewarm when shown the manuscript. In particular, John Saville upset him deeply by writing:

> I am afraid that I don't like it. As you are well aware, in the past you have several times thought I was too easy on you in my comments but I never thought so. But this time, I am deeply troubled to have to say the things I am going to write: to you of all people for whom I have the deepest respect and affection, and so many years of very happy collaboration … You hardly address yourself except to mention in passing, the widespread criticisms of the Marxist position, so you are really providing a handbook for those who already think, or more or less think, in your terms. Perhaps mention in passing is not fair; but what you don't do is to take right wing arguments and critically examine them in detail. Certainly for me the striking thing about your MS is that it could have been written two decades ago. It is a very traditional position you are adopting, and you are virtually ignoring both the theorising and the practice that has gone on in these past two decades or so.

And, on the chapter on new social movements, he wrote:

> I am afraid that this is the chapter for which I have no positive comments at all … Two main points: one is that single issue movements develop and have developed in the political vacuum of the growing infirmity, in ideological terms, of Western social democracy; and two, that capitalist society is a complicated affair and cannot be reduced to confrontation at the point of production. Is not the concern for the environment precisely because capitalism is concerned with profit not human lives. Does a worker at the bench suffer more from class pressures than a worker and his family who have lived in an asbestos village for all their lives. And I always thought that anti-war propaganda was an essential part of the class struggle? Of course, the labour movements ought to be leading the struggle – integrating all these single issue movements; but just as civil liberties keeps an independent organisation, so should all these other single issue bodies. And I have said nothing about feminism which is the most important of all. I thought this chapter impossible …[115]

As Miliband pointed out, many of Saville's criticisms were unfair and based on a misrepresentation of what he had actually said.[116] But it was not surprising that Saville could view it as old-fashioned.

Nor were some of the reactions to the published work very different. Another friend and close associate, Hilary Wainwright, also upset him with a critical

review in the *New Statesman*, again drawing particular attention to his inter-pretation of new social movements.[117] Perhaps predictably his friend Zygmunt Bauman, now emerging as a major post-modernist theorist, took the criticism further, arguing in the *Times Literary Supplement*, that Miliband's analysis of class society was excellent, but that the notion of change through parties and the general imagery was too traditional, failing to recognise the fragmentation of society, the decline in importance of work and the rise of the power of consum-erism. For Bauman it seemed clear that:

> [T]he stronger the Left clings to its traditional social imagery, the less well is it prepared to fulfil its traditional function of the 'social leaven' – of a force tirelessly pressing society to deliver ever better on its modern promise of freedom, equality and brotherhood.[118]

Miliband was unlikely to accept such a criticism, arguing in an exchange of let-ters that the basic difference between them was:

> ... that you are exceedingly pessimistic about the chances of genuine human improvement, even in the long run, and that I am not. God knows there is enough to be pessimistic about; and yet, and yet, it moves.[119]

However, there was clearly a rather widespread feeling that *Divided Societies* did not have great resonance by the time it was published.

An additional reason for this is that the book had been completed at the height of optimism about Gorbachev's reform programme, but was published while the Communist regimes in Eastern Europe were being swept away. This made much of what he had written about the 'international dimension of class strug-gle' anachronistic at the time of publication. Yet it is important to appreciate his changing attitude to the Soviet bloc in the last few years before its downfall as this was an important element in his outlook and helped to sustain his political interventions and efforts to counter the 'new revisionism'.

6. Soviet-type Regimes and the Gorbachev Reforms

In 1979 major events in the international relations of the socialist countries had troubled him deeply and had made him still more negative about 'Soviet type' regimes than he had been previously. At the beginning of the year Vietnam invaded and occupied Cambodia, forcing the murderous Pol Pot regime out of power and installing its own protegés. A month later Chinese forces overran the borders of Vietnam, 'punishing' the Vietnamese for overthrowing the Khymer Rouge regime in Cambodia. Miliband was appalled by these events, telling George Ross:

I can't remember when things have been much more gloomy, what with the Chinese, Vietnamese and what not. But I suppose it was much worse at the time of the Nazi-Soviet pact. In fact, I am sure it was. But it is bad – dreadful in fact, this Vietnamese business. [120]

A few days later he told Julio Aramberri, a Spanish Marxist:

The Chinese have behaved in a ghastly way, of course. I don't think there is a precedent for a 'socialist' country talking about 'punishing' another, or 'teaching a lesson' etc. Strange socialist language! However, I am also against the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia. The only warrant for any intervention is an appeal from an authentic liberation movement: and in the case of a country with a regime that proclaims itself socialist, however awful such a regime is, one would want to look very carefully at who is making the appeal. [121]

Such concerns led him to suggest to John Saville that they should try to write a joint statement for *Socialist Register* on the subject of 'socialist international relations'. He told him that it would be difficult:

If you can dig up Marx and Engels on war … it might be helpful, though I think that we are very much 'on our own' on this one, in 1979, and when we have one socialist state attacking another, inverted commas of course. One important aspect of the exercise is that it forces us to look at the internal nature of these regimes. Is it impossibly petty-bourgeois and 'liberal' to say that demonstrations in Peking against the invasion of Vietnam would have been rather nice? I don't think it is, and the fact that we don't even think of this casts a light on our own evaluation, and on the nature of these 'socialist' regimes. And I want our article to say so, quite uncompromisingly. I hope you agree. But it will give us a chance to say a good many things which need saying, badly …[122]

In fact, Saville did not join him in the task, but Miliband continued to worry about the problems. In July, in a commentary on a book by the dissident Communist Rudolf Bahro, who was currently imprisoned in East Germany, he thus wrote that even Bahro's proposals for controlling the state in such regimes did not go far enough:

Not only are [important] decisions not subject to determination by the people: they are not even subject to genuine discussion and debate in society. It is symptomatic of a general state of affairs in these regimes not only that the people of Vietnam should have no say in that country's invasion of Cambodia, or the people of China in that country's invasion of Vietnam, but that there should have been no debate on these acts of state policy. Genuine debate, with effects on the outcome, is not part of the political culture of the countries of 'actually existing socialism'. Capitalist culture hardly shines in this respect either: but its political practice is much superior to that of Soviet-type regimes.[123]

While it was quite normal for Miliband to make unfavourable comparisons between the suppression of internal debate in the socialist countries and the relatively greater freedom in the liberal-democracies, this allusion to the lack of discussion over foreign policy was significant. But before he had taken his analysis any further, the third key event of 1979 occurred: the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan on 24 December, followed by an occupation in the hope of buttressing the new leader installed by Moscow. Miliband had no doubt that this action, which was to provide ammunition for the propaganda of the Right in the West against the 'evil empire' of Communism, was totally unjustified, and the culmination of a misguided and dangerous tendency in the external policy of such regimes. This led him to write 'Military Intervention and Socialist Internationalism' for *Socialist Register 1980*.

In my view, this article was flawed because it understated the atrocities of the Pol Pot regime and the justification for intervention following its crimes against humanity.[124] Nevertheless, it was in general a cogent and thoughtful discussion which attempted to differentiate between justifiable and unjustifiable forms of intervention in a variety of circumstances. However, the interest here is not the argument of the article but the evidence it provides as to Miliband's view of the Soviet bloc and other socialist regimes:

> The point is that the regimes in question are not simply monopolistic and repressive from temporary necessity and transient adverse circumstances, but by their very structure. I mean by this that they are based on a view of 'socialism' as *requiring* the existence of one 'leading party whose leaders do exercise monopolistic power; and monopolistic power by definition means the exclusion from power of everyone else, and also the deprivation of rights – speech, association, publication – which are essential for the exercise of power or at least pressure and which are so to speak the oxygen of civil society...
>
> [H]istory has associated this monopolistic form of regime with the Soviet Union; and it is therefore convenient to refer to it as a 'Soviet-type' regime.... All Communist regimes which have come into being since World War II bear this stamp. Some of them are less repressive than others, with the extent of the repressiveness varying not only from country to country but over time within countries. But they are all monopolistic regimes, not excluding Yugoslavia.[125]

Nor was it valid to regard these regimes as 'transitional', meaning in effect 'transitional' from capitalism to socialism. The abolition of the private ownership and control of the main means of production was a gigantic step and a necessary condition for socialism, but certainly not a sufficient one. This economic base did not necessarily produce anything like democratic and egalitarian forms in economic, social and political life or anything like a 'socialist consciousness' which would prepare the ground for them. To be credible, the notion of 'transitionality' would suggest some degree of progress towards socialism in terms of

socialist consciousness. In this respect, Soviet-type regimes were no more 'transitional' than capitalist societies. They were 'monopolistic regimes that are not socialist or 'on the way' to socialism'.[126]

These were very controversial claims within Marxist circles and the article led to a heated argument with Perry Anderson at a dinner party on 24 January 1981, which was followed by a lengthy correspondence in which they each attempted to justify their positions.[127] Anderson had found one sentence in the article particularly objectionable:

> In the only terms that are ultimately decisive, namely in terms of the generation of socialist consciousness among the people, capitalist societies are at least as 'transitional' as Soviet-type ones.[128]

But Miliband reaffirmed his position by pointing out that the issue was the *generation* of socialist consciousness and that he did think it reasonable to say that the capitalist milieu and variety of institutions made the generation of socialist consciousness at least as possible as in Soviet-type regimes.

> [Y]ou seem to dismiss much too easily how many people in capitalist countries have been touched by the socialist idea. Capitalism does 'generate' socialist ideas, however slowly and haltingly. And Soviet-type regimes tend to discredit the socialist idea among its [sic] own citizens as a free cooperative association. *Et pour cause!*[129]

Nor would he accept the Trotskyist perspective in regarding such regimes as 'workers' states' which were in transition and would eventually lead to socialism. The formulation 'workers' states' was not helpful when the working class was not in control and when much had been done against it as well as for it.

> The whole point of socialism, or much of the point anyway, is that it is a form of rule which demands popular participation, involvement etc, and control. Without this, you have, precisely, a collectivist regime, with many positive features, many negative ones, but not socialism.[130]

He rejected Anderson's claim that he was giving priority to an ideological criterion of consciousness in his definition of socialism, and he insisted that working-class power in the sense intended by Marx and Engels included socialist consciousness, since the working class could not, by definition, achieve power without this. Public ownership was not enough and he no longer believed that the Soviet type regimes would move to socialism because of their collectivist base. Furthermore, expressing a view rather similar to the one that Edward Thompson had taken against him twenty years earlier, he now argued:

The notion that there is only capitalism on the one hand, and 'socialism' or some such on the other is also arbitrary. And furthermore, there seems no question to me that the imposition of a Soviet type regime on a bourgeois democratic one must be a 'regression': <u>vide</u> Czechoslovakia in 1948. And in Czechoslovakia, there was in 1948 a large minority that was Communist; which did not avoid the Slansky and other trials and associated horrors. Imagine a country of a capitalist-democratic type, in which industrialisation and development had long been achieved, having such a regime imposed upon it, <u>without</u> any real measure of popular support. The notion that such a regime would be 'progressive' because it brought into being the public ownership of the means of production, and that it could be called 'socialist' strikes me absurd.[131]

What is the significance of these remarks in understanding Miliband's position in the early 1980s? It indicated not only his willingness to criticise the Soviet-type regimes, but also a very significant degree of detachment from them. By insisting that they were 'collectivist' regimes, and by excluding any suggestion that they were 'workers' states' (let alone socialist), he was signalling that they had no specific call on the support of socialists in other countries. The overall appraisal was characterised by a critical distance from the regimes themselves, which was confirmed with his explicit rejection of the 'Deutscher view' on their evolution. He still insisted that, while the United States and her allies were subject 'to the logic of imperialism', this was not the case with the Soviet-style regimes. Yet because he saw them as *structurally* flawed, he was effectively also arguing that their failures in foreign policy terms constituted something more than contingent errors. After all, he believed that they systematically excluded popular opinion from any debate over external policy, and that those regimes sought security by exporting the monopolistic power model of the one-party state in the territories they influenced or controlled. He did not actually draw out the conclusion that the nature of Soviet foreign policy was *determined* by the characteristics of its regime, but he came near to saying this.[132]

As international tension mounted in the 'second Cold War' of the early 1980s, Miliband criticised the peace movement for distributing blame equally between the two super-powers, and reasserted the view that the US carried the primary responsibility for the deterioration in relationships because of its counter-revolutionary policies. However, he continued to deplore the extent to which the leaders of the Soviet-style regimes believed in the monopolistic party system, and he argued that the Soviet leadership should make a settlement in Afghanistan and go much further in disarmament. It was in this context that his hopes were raised by Gorbachev's accession to power in March 1985 and his subsequent policies of *glasnost* and *perestroika*.

By October 1986 his evaluation of the Soviet Union already differed significantly from that which he had outlined in 'Military Intervention and Socialist Internationalism' and in his subsequent correspondence to Perry Anderson. He

thus replied to a student who had written to him about Djilas's theory of the 'New Class':

> The question does not seem to me to be whether the people who run the Soviet and other Communist systems constitute a class or not. Despite all the ink that has been spilt on this issue, it seems to me to be of no great consequence whether it is called a class or a stratum. The point is that the people concerned are at the apex of a structure of domination, and, the question is whether they will or will not relinquish their power, in other words, whether the system admits of genuine 'democratisation' or not. The signs are mixed aren't they? *The Soviet Union has greatly changed in this respect in the last thirty years, and even though it is very far from being a 'socialist democracy', it is also very far from being frozen into social immobility or repressive patterns.* Compared to 'third world' regimes, e.g. Brazil or Argentina, *it shows good signs of more than cosmetic changes in the direction of democratisation.* Brazil and Argentina will remain capitalist structures until there is revolutionary change, whereas one cannot say with the same certitude that the Soviet Union will remain a structure of repressive domination unless a revolution occurs. On the other hand, it would be silly, I think, to believe that there is any 'inevitability of gradualness' at work here. Much must depend on external as well as internal circumstances.[133] (My emphasis)

This was not a complete reversal of his position six years earlier, since he had then said that he was agnostic as to how change would come in the collectivist systems, but it was a major change of emphasis.

During the next two years, he became increasingly enthusiastic about Gorbachev's reforms. In March 1987 he thus told Leo Panitch: 'What is going on in the USSR is really terrific. I only hope Gorbachev does not get stopped in his tracks.'[134] In fact, he was so supportive of the Soviet leader that he refused to sign a circular letter calling on the Soviet authorities to rehabilitate victims of Stalin's purge trials:

> For one thing, I think that your letter only acknowledges very inadequately the changes which Gorbachev is trying to bring about. More important, I don't believe that this is an opportune time to mount a 'non sectarian campaign with the widest possible support' for the purposes you outline. Needless to say, I fully support the demands you make. But things are moving quite fast in the USSR and Gorbachev is taking a lot of risks and confronts many enemies. This is not a good time for the Left to try and force the pace by the kind of campaign you have in mind. I would support a statement, in measured terms, that welcomed what Gorbachev is trying to do, and that expressed the hope that the reforms would encompass the demands you make. That would be much better than the 'campaign' you propose.[135]

At about the same time in a lecture he also outlined an argument, which linked developments in the Soviet Union with the Left in the West. There were, he acknowledged, difficulties in achieving radical change in the capitalist countries,

but the problems were by no means insurmountable, and changes occurring in
the world were likely to advance the process:

> The most important such change, in the present context, is what is happening in
> the Soviet Union. Ever since the end of World War II, the Left in advanced capitalist
> countries has been woefully weakened by the Cold War and the notion, common
> to conservatism and social democracy, that these countries and for that matter the
> rest of the 'free world' were threatened by Soviet expansionism The dissipation of
> this myth ... will lift a major burden from the shoulders of the socialist left, and
> render more difficult the use by conservative forces of anti-communism as a bogey,
> so too would the success of Mikhail Gorbachev in democratising Soviet society be
> of help to the Left; for this too would deprive conservative forces of one of their
> most effective weapons.[136]

This analysis reflected Miliband's own state of mind: for while it was certainly
true that he had never accepted the view that the Soviet Union was expansion-
ist, his belief that Gorbachev was taking significant steps towards democratisa-
tion provided him with much greater confidence in his own position. Whereas
in 1979 it had appeared important to write the critical article on the external
policy of socialist states, he could now campaign against NATO and the US
without fearing that this appeared to endorse the policies of a repressive regime
in Moscow.

Although he was aware that some people were much less enthusiastic,[137] his
optimism about Gorbachev remained throughout 1988, perhaps influenced by
Tariq Ali, who was now a close friend and who was travelling extensively in the
Soviet Union at this time. And at the end of the year he even believed that the
situation in the US was being affected by Gorbachev's policies:

> His visit to New York was a triumph, and conservatives are worried about
> 'Gorbymania'. Reagan's departure from the scene will make some difference. Bush
> is much more of an opportunist and a 'pragmatist'. I would not be too sanguine,
> but there may be a shift to less reactionary policies. In any case, America's power is
> declining and this helps too.[138]

From 1985 until 1989 Miliband's views on both the international situation and
the possibilities for positive political developments in socialist and capitalist
countries were given a boost by his favourable interpretation of Gorbachev's
reform programme. This sustained his determination to take initiatives in Brit-
ain.

7. The Independent Left Corresponding Society and the Chesterfield Conferences

During the early 1980s his respect for Tony Benn had steadily mounted. He had come to view him as someone who had seen at first hand how principles were so often subordinated in the 'political game' and had learnt from the experience. He was also attracted by his energy, his constant refusal to accept defeat and his apparent conviction that socialism would eventually triumph. Benn was not a theorist, still less a Marxist, but there was a similarity between them in their optimism. It was also relevant that they were almost the same age.

By 1985 Benn's star was no longer shining so brightly as it had been four years earlier when he had nearly defeated Healey in the contest for the Deputy Leadership. He had lost his seat in the 1983 General Election and, although he had been returned in the Chesterfield by-election in March 1984, the atmosphere in the party had changed considerably. The purge of the Left had begun with the NEC's decision, before the 1983 General Election, to expel the leaders of the Militant Tendency, but subsequently the main strategy of Kinnock and Hattersley, the new leader and deputy leader, was to push Labour back to the centre of mainstream politics to squeeze out the SDP. The miners' strike (which was finally defeated in March 1985) and the government's rate-capping of Labour local authorities divided the Labour left, with many of Benn's former supporters now beginning to re-package themselves as the 'soft-left'. It was in this climate that Miliband made a proposal to Benn.

The two met by appointment on 1st February 1985 at Benn's invitation. The unpublished version of his diary records the conversation as follows:

> [Miliband] said, 'You are a great resource for the movement. Looking back from Keir Hardie, Ramsay MacDonald, George Lansbury, Stafford Cripps, Nye Bevan right through there has never been somebody with your experience of Government who has taken such a radical position on institutional questions – quite exceptional experience and you must use it properly. I would suggest that you keep absolutely away from infighting in the Party which does nothing whatever to assist.
>
> I was sorry you stood for the Shadow Cabinet because if you were in it there would be endless trouble. I don't know if you've read [the] Life of De Gaulle but you are in the position he was at Colombey les Deux Eglises, waiting, available, a senior statesman of the left and you should look ahead and address people when you think it right to do so but that is really your function.
>
> Have you got a think tank – would you like me to help you to get together a few academics who would be prepared to assist?'
>
> I was very flattered. He said, 'You underestimate your role as a leader, we need leaders, there has [sic] to be leaders and I think you should take that role ...
>
> I felt rather encouraged by this, gave me a boost. I suppose I have been reluctant to take a clear lead – not in a personal sense because I'm always thrusting myself

forward for publicity – but actually being a much tougher clear leader and I think there may be something in this.[139]

Miliband was not simply flattering Benn. After unsuccessfully attempting for so many years to convince people that a new party was needed, and finding it so difficult to make progress, he saw Benn as a potential leader who was not motivated primarily by personal ambition and who would be receptive to ideas. His recent experience in the Socialist Society had perhaps also convinced him that such initiatives were condemned to marginality unless harnessed to a figure with a national reputation. Miliband thus thought it important to bolster Benn to keep alive the kind of socialist commitment he represented by providing him with an intellectual forum. At the same time Benn's involvement with people from outside the Labour Party might eventually help galvanise a socialist movement which could lead to the new formation that Miliband sought. It is thus notable that even in this initial meeting he encouraged Benn to remain aloof from party infighting and to concentrate on a wider leadership role. But if Miliband saw Benn's importance, this feeling was more than reciprocated. Thus when Miliband's articles on 'New Revisionism' were published in April, Benn was delighted by them, and rang to thank him for them, telling him that the *Guardian* article 'really cheered me up' because 'often you really do feel you're [on your] own'.[140] He was thus in a receptive mood for the first meeting of the 'think tank', which was to take place on 5 May.

If Miliband had really told Benn that he could 'get together a few academics', they were of a rather unusual kind, for he invited Hilary Wainwright and John Palmer from the Socialist Society, and Perry Anderson, Robin Blackburn and Tariq Ali from the editorial board of NLR. He knew that the NLR group shared his general perspective because of their enthusiasm for his 'New Revisionism' article.[141] On 24 April he sent Benn his preliminary thoughts on the situation. He began by suggesting that the present situation in the Labour Party was fluid as the rank and file, inside and outside the party, wanted a lot more than the leadership was offering, and these unresolved tensions created a great deal more openness than was suggested by the constant affirmation that the Left had been defeated. But his main points again focused on the pivotal importance of Benn as a rallying point and the need for his position to be strengthened. Their business was not to further Benn's fortunes, but:

[Y]ou are now the only voice that can effectively project the case of the Left on a national scale. That is no small thing, and needs to be acknowledged, as a basis from which to proceed ...
One suitable way to proceed ... is for you to be the main voice in articulating a coherent sent of policies around what a Labour Government should do – what are the socialist policies which a Labour Government ought to implement – and which a Labour Opposition ought to be putting forward and arguing for? [142]

A series of major speeches could then be collected into a book and conferences could be held at which different issues were taken up, with Benn as the main speaker. All this would need to be organised so as to turn it into a really coherent programme, but Miliband was sure that expert help on particular aspects could easily be found.

Miliband's advisory role began immediately. Benn sent him copies of a memorandum he was submitting to the NEC on which he asked for his comments, saying: 'I deeply value your interest and encouragement', and a few days later he also provided him with a draft speech that he was going to make to the Parliamentary Press Gallery on the 1st May.[143] Miliband replied the next day with a whole range of suggestions and the enduring pattern of their relationship was established.

According to Benn's diaries, Miliband began the first meeting of the group, which Caroline Benn also attended, by outlining the three elements of the Left:

> the ultra-left (e.g. the Workers' Revolutionary Party and Militant) and some radical feminists, who were intransigent; the Hattersley to Hobsbawm left ... who lean towards the leadership; and the independent socialist left, the Bennites inside and outside the Labour Party, who wanted socialism without rocking the boat. Ralph wanted to see this last element strengthened.[144]

He also argued that this kind of independent Left had not had sustained representation – at least since the days of Cripps and Bevan – and that it was necessary to work at it over three to five years.[145] He summarised the essence of Bennism as 'the need for a democratic revolution' to tackle corporate power and the class structure. All the others spoke, with substantial agreement and some disagreements (Palmer, for example, not taking Benn's line on the European integration). But Benn was generally delighted with meeting:

> So from the beginning we decided to call ourselves the Independent Left Corresponding Society (ILCS) and meet monthly. It is what Ralph had in mind as a 'think tank', and I think we all enjoyed it.[146]

Miliband himself told Panitch (who also knew Benn) that the meeting had reviewed the situation and was quite useful:

> There is a real 'realignment' proceeding ... and it is important that the 'independent Left', i.e. people who roughly continue to back Benn should be strengthened. But it's going to be a hard business. Some Campaign MPs are likely to fall by the wayside (and be picked up by Kinnock et al), but a group will remain. [T]he desire for 'unity' is very strong, with all that this entails. The way to proceed, we agreed, is to carve out and put forward serious policies, well worked out, push issues, show the flag and keep doing it.[147]

He was afraid that Benn was 'fairly well stranded' in the party, and knew that he found it difficult to take 'the long view',[148] but saw him as 'a truly remarkable phenomenon'.[149] However, he was a little less happy with the second meeting. The discussion was obviously not very focused[150] and he was not pleased to learn that Benn had mentioned the ILCS to some members of the Campaign group, since he thought that it would be better to keep the discussions confidential (which was now agreed as future policy).[151] He told Panitch that he was a little worried about what they were trying to do, sometimes having 'the uncomfortable feeling that we are back pulling at the sleeve of the Labour leadership, even though that is not what Benn is after'.[152] He also told his son, David:

> I must admit I feel rather dubious about what can be done by these meetings. He [Benn]is incredibly active, introduces bills in the Commons, writes articles, presents memoranda to the NEC, speaks at this, that and the other meetings etc, etc. But the fact remains that he is being marginalised, and it is very difficult to see how, in present circumstances, when the accent is on 'don't rock the boat', he can be effective. Yet, it is ever more necessary to affirm socialist positions, vis-a-vis a leadership which is very much in the old mould.[153]

The meeting had agreed to ask three left-wing economists – Andrew Glyn (who was also David's economics tutor at Oxford), Laurence Harris and Robin Murray – to join the next meeting to talk about economic policies. He felt that this was probably the wrong move and that it would be more profitable to think of perspectives in terms of establishing an independent Left. Nevertheless, he found the subsequent meeting quite useful and Glyn agreed to draft a paper on full employment for use within the trade unions and the Labour Party. This was adopted at the next meeting on 16 August, which decided that it should go forward to the Campaign Group in the hope that they might sponsor it and release it to the press. The minutes also recorded a hope that relations between the ILCS and the Campaign Group would develop with a series of pamphlets supported by the latter.[154] After the last meeting before Miliband left for his first term at York University, Toronto, in September, Benn recorded his satisfaction with the situation:

> Gradually what is happening is the bringing together of the ILCS, the CG [Campaign Group], and the new Labour Left which is being organised around the TUC Left. That link has very powerful potential.[155]

Benn and Miliband were both deriving something from the initiative, but they were not entirely united in the aims: while Miliband was trying to draw Benn out from internal Labour Party politics to make him the rallying point for a new socialist movement, Benn was keen to harness the ILCS to the Labour Left and its existing organisations.

The ILCS continued to meet in Miliband's absence, and as soon as he returned he put a series of new proposals to it. In February 1986 he argued that, in comparison with Kinnock, Wilson had been quite radical in 1963, and he favoured drawing up a new manifesto of demands and establishing some kind of Centre for Socialist Studies, about which he produced a paper.[156] Benn was quite attracted to the idea, but was aware that he was walkng a tightrope between the ILCS and some members of the Campaign Group, noting in his diary that it would be very difficult to get Miliband's proposal past Alan Meale:

> who is just very hostile to the ILCS. I think it is a working class objection to intellectuals, a Labour Party member's objection to non-members, and it is a view that the Labour Party is going to be saved by the trade unions and not by academics and I can understand all that.[157]

However, Benn had also brought Jeremy Corbyn, the MP for Islington North and another member of the Campaign group, into the ILCS and in the summer Miliband persuaded them to try to launch an initiative which was close to his heart: a movement to secure Britain's withdrawal from NATO. But although Benn was prepared to do this, and formed a committee for the purpose, followed by a meeting in the House of Commons on 15 July 1986, he was conscious of differences between most of the ILCS members and himself. He was still interested in saving the Labour Party and was not sure that many of them shared this concern.

> I think I understand their role a bit and probably they are using me and I'm using them a bit …
> It is a gathering of people who are not at all sure that the Labour Party will ever be capable of delivering and since I am committed by my occupation and my history that it will deliver, I suppose there is a certain gap between us though actually in my heart of hearts, I don't believe it will.[158]

When Miliband returned to Canada in September 1986, Benn also confided in his diary:

> I find the group less effective without Ralph Miliband because he is the most thoughtful and serious …[159]

Nevertheless, he believed that the ILCS had made the only serious intellectual interventions in the last eighteen months. And Miliband gave him further support and encouragement when they spent time together at a socialist conference in Greece in November of that year.[160] At the end of the year Benn thus thought that the ILCS had 'been a flicker of hope in the very dark months since the Miners' strike'.[161] Miliband had few illusions about Benn's marginal role in the

party, but still thought it worthwhile to support him as standard bearer for the socialist Left and to criticise him openly when he thought he was becoming too involved in internecine disputes or simply making mistakes.[162] Nevertheless, he was only too conscious of the limited progress that had been made, with the Left still in decline in the Labour Party, the Socialist Society at an apparent impasse, and the Thatcher government firmly ensconced in power.

At the first meeting in 1987 he suggested that Benn should make a series of considered speeches on 'The Next Ten Years in British Politics' which would avoid rocking the boat by appearing to offer an alternative programme for the next election, and yet establish a presence. But he was finding the Left more demoralised than ever and was soon urging a wider intervention. With the prospect of Labour losing another General Election and further attacks of the Labour left, he was convinced that a further effort must be made to invigorate the Left outside the Party and in April he put forward the idea of a major social-ist conference, with a relaunch of the Socialist Society as the organising body. He explained his thinking to Leo Panitch:

> At our last meeting, it occurred to me to propose that, in so far as the Left, inside or outside the Labour Party, needs some kind of organisation, precisely to bring together people inside and outside, to affirm a socialist presence, we might 're-launch' the Socialist Society with some heavyweight people, eg. Tony himself, Jim Mortimer [Labour Party general secretary, 1982-85], Jeremy Corbyn and one or two other Labour MPs from the Campaign group, plus some intellectuals, maybe one or two people from a number of other organisations. The idea found much favour and work will soon start on a statement, and a conference is planned for October or so, i.e. after the Labour Party Conference … If things work out, I will be glad that we kept the Socialist Society alive. But it will need to be greatly changed. But there is a long way to go; and it will be necessary to think carefully what such an organisation could <u>do</u>. Nothing, in any case, must be said before the election.[163]

This tentative planning was on the assumption that Labour was going to lose the third successive election. After this proved a correct prediction, the project became more concrete.

On 14 June, three days after the election, the ILCS had its biggest meeting for years, with Jim Mortimer and Jeremy Corbyn from the Labour Party, Kevin Davey, the Chair of the Socialist Society, as well as many of the original members (and Leo Panitch). Benn recorded Miliband as saying:

> 'Where does the Socialist Left go?' He said he thought there was now [?] emerging a unified programme along four lines. One, the defence and enlargement of the rights of working people, including trade unions, local authorities and the ethnic communities. Second, the restructuring of the state in a democratic direction [?] Third, on the economic questions, the reaffirmation of the need to take over the commanding heights of the economy. Fourth, the denuclearisation and non-align-

ment. He said he thought it would be a programme that would command wide support. He said, 'The question is should we fight inside the Labour Party? On the whole, experience suggests that the Left is constrained within the Party, therefore we should struggle outside the Party as well with pamphlets, articles and speeches, but how do you organise it? The only concrete way of doing this is the Socialist Society. Who should be part of the whole thing? We should bring in Jim Mortimer, Arthur Scargill, Tony and Jeremy into the Socialist Society and there would be a row but it would attract people. We should work out a programme for the society and tonight should take a step. We must organise and we should make better use of the mass media.[164]

However, it was not agreed that the Socialist Society should organise it, for Mortimer clearly wanted to strengthen the links with the trade union left, and Benn expressed doubts as to whether the Socialist Society was strong enough to set itself up nationally and suggested broadening the Campaign Group. Panitch tried to win Benn over to Miliband's idea when he had supper with him the next night, [165] and Benn had probably accepted this by the time he attended a Socialist Society meeting on 20 June.

Miliband opened this by urging the need for a conference on the future of socialism 'to reaffirm the basic position of the Socialist Left and to reaffirm a socialist presence'.[166] He argued that this should link the Left inside and outside the Party on a continuing basis, and that the Society and Campaign Group should help each other in creating a socialist presence. Hilary Wainwright and John Palmer supported the proposal and Benn now sounded enthusiastic. As he put it in his diary:

> To cut a long story short, it was agreed to invite everyone we know on the Left in Britain – in the trade unions and the Labour Party, MPs and people outside the Party – and to hold the conference in Chesterfield. Our themes would be those we have brought forward since 1985; a million jobs a year, non-alignment and democracy …
>
> It was pretty well agreed, and I was tremendously pleased about this because Ralph has been urging it for some time, and we have all been a bit cautious.[167]

These were the origins of the Chesterfield Conference, which took place on 24 and 25 October 1987 in Benn's constituency, attended by about two thousand people, with considerable press publicity. Miliband's speech in the opening plenary session (where he shared the platform with Benn, Dawn Primarolo[168], and Betty Heathfield[169]) both emphasised the importance of the occasion and attempted to set the agenda:

> [W]e come from different parts of the political spectrum; and the differences will no doubt be brought into the open in the course of these days. But even though the debates may be heated, we should recall how much there is that is common

ground between us ... What is common to us, above all else, is the unshakeable conviction that it is necessary and possible to create an altogether different sort of society in Britain, a society whose organising principles will be cooperation and fellowship, democracy and egalitarianism. Against the compromisers and the so-called 'new realists', against those people in the labour movement who encourage retreat from socialist objectives, we affirm that our purpose remains a socialist society, free from every form of domination and exploitation, of class, of sex and of race. How to achieve such a society raises innumerable problems [which] will be a matter of contention and debate this weekend: but let us at least recall that this is our common and irrevocable commitment.

He explained that the organisers of the Conference thought that it should have three main themes: the organisation of economic life, taking into account the vast changes which are going on in every aspect of it, from the composition of the working class to the internationalisation of capital; the radical democratisa-tion of a state which has never been democratic in any real meaning of the term, and which under the current government was increasingly subject to a galloping authoritarianism; and the external dimension involving independence and non-alignment, rethinking of the defence question and pulling out of the arms race. He ended on a stirring note:

Those who organised this Conference do not see it as a weekend wonder with no follow up; on the contrary, many of us see it as the beginning of a movement to re-establish a socialist presence in this country, to insert socialist ideas and demands in political life, to make socialism count and to persuade a majority of people that there is an alternative to Thatcherism which is not Thatcherism with a compas-sionate face, but a radical new deal. We cannot count on the Labour Party leaders to do this for us: we'll have to do it ourselves, and with the growing number of people who will join the movement. So this is a point of departure.
Whether this marks new beginnings depends on the ways in which we discuss matters at issue, on the ways in which we relate to each other. So let us make this a historic Conference. Let us make this weekend the weekend in which socialism was again inscribed on the political agenda.[170]

However, this was highly optimistic. Benn's own diary gives a clear impression of the opening plenary when:

... someone from the SWP or RCP or a Spartacist got up and said the whole con-ference should be cancelled in order to force those on the platform to explain why they hadn't mobilised against the Tories so he had to be disposed of. The Russian delegation was introduced and the SWP objected to that and had to be dealt with and I must say by then people were getting a bit fed up and so was I.[171]

And the most thoughtful appraisal of the whole conference was that of Richard

Kuper, who had been one of the organisers. After summarising the practical problems that had arisen, he reached a sombre conclusion:

> Taken as a whole the Conference has barely moved us forward. We are no nearer knowing what kind of independent non-party organisation can be built in order to knit together Labour Party members, unaffiliated socialists and (hopefully) members of some of the revolutionary groups. Everything remains to be done.[172]

Miliband's own judgment was that:

> The Chesterfield Conference was a success in numbers, rather marred by the SWP at their most vociferous and sectarian, and also, somewhat by it being dominated by old Labour politics. The independent Left, which some of us were very keen to have properly represented at the Conference, since we were the prime movers of the bloody thing, did not do as well as it might have. We are too weak and need more good people to establish a viable partnership with some of the Labour Left MPs who are very good, notably Tony Benn.[173]

But while both he and Kuper shared the regret that the 'independent Left' had been squeezed between SWP and the Labour Party, they were not in full agreement on the definition of this school of thought. Kuper really sought a kind of 'rainbow coalition' and suggested that, for the future, the first step was to strengthen the organising committee, both in terms of numbers and of representation, by trying to get some black and women's representation as well as individuals from other parties such as the Greens, Plaid Cymru and the SWP. Miliband, on the other hand, still preferred a more traditional definition of socialism. But it was Kuper who now played a major role in organising a second conference in Chesterfield the following June, which was sponsored by the Campaign Group, the Socialist Society and the Conference of Socialist Economists.

When in Britain, Miliband remained involved in this as a member of the organising committee, and he was a constant friend and supporter of Benn. But by early 1988 he realised that the 'long haul' was going to be even longer than he had suspected. In January of that year he tried to dissuade Benn from standing for the leadership of the party against Kinnock,[174] explaining to Panitch:

> One reason why Tony was talking about a challenge to Kinnock is that he is convinced that he is leading the Labour Party to ruination, is more and more authoritarian, is concentrating power at the centre to an unprecedented degree, and will dilute policy to the point of meaninglessness; and that he is making no impact. All of which is true, but does not mean that there is the slightest virtue in issuing a challenge which would be drowned in ridicule and bitterness.[175]

However, Benn did not take this advice – a fact which he later regretted, for he

only secured 11 per cent of the votes in the electoral college.[176] And although Miliband shared the general view that the second Chesterfield conference in June 1988 was more successful than the first, he no longer exuded confidence that the Socialist Movement which emerged from it was an embryo for the new party that he had been seeking for so long. This did not mean that he had lost his energy to fight on, for he continued to promote the policies he believed in and to work with Benn and the Socialist Movement. However, he was well aware that, for the time being at least, the Left was in decline in Britain, with non-aligned socialists of his kind a highly marginal force, and with the 'new realists' firmly in control. Moreover, in 1989 the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe undermined the basis for his optimism that Gorbachev's reforms could revitalise socialism in both blocs.

8. The Collapse of Communism

He delivered his verdict on what was happening in the Soviet bloc in an important article in *New Left Review*.[177] Written in August 1989, he argued that the regimes which were collapsing had been 'an awful perversion of socialism'.

> This is not to deny them various advances and achievements in economic and social terms; but it needs to be said, most of all by socialists, that they nevertheless contradict in a multitude of fundamental ways the democratic and egalitarian promise of socialism. Communist regimes were, and most of them remain what, some considerable time ago, I called the Soviet Union – oligarchical collectivist regimes.[178]

It was their authoritarian nature which was the most important reason for the crisis which had engulfed them, for the lack of democracy and civic freedoms had affected every aspect of their life. He still viewed Gorbachev as a wholly positive influence:

> It has been Mikhail Gorbachev's immense merit to have seen and proclaimed that the essential and imperative remedy for the parlous state to which the Soviet Union had been brought was democracy, and to have sought to act upon that perception. *Perestroika* came from above. But it did not come all by itself, out of the unprompted wishes and impulses of an inspired leader. It was in fact engendered by the need to enlist the cooperation and support of a population whose cynicism about its leaders had brought about a profound economic, social and political crisis. The same cynicism and alienation are at work in other Comnmunist regimes.[179]

What were the lessons? By far the most important, in his view, was the subject of democracy, for the character of Communist rule gave plausibility to the conservative claim that socialism was inherently authoritarian and oppressive:

The simple fact of the matter is that capitalist democracy, for all its crippling limitations, has been immeasurably less oppressive and a lot more democratic than any Communist regime, whatever the latter's achievements in economic, social and other fields.[180]

And he insisted that the only possibility for the Left was its demonstrable commitment to democracy, built on the ancient proposition that 'only power can check power'.

Equally significant was the fact that he now emphasised the crucial importance of socialism standing for humane rule. In a TV interview that he had conducted with Bertrand Russell in 1965, he recalled him describing Lenin as 'cruel'. At the time Miliband had thought this an odd and irrelevant comment, but he now thought that this concern with cruelty was crucial and should be very high on the socialist agenda:

One of the worst aspects of Communist regimes has been their seeming indifference, in practice, to humane values, their bureaucratic insensitivity, their resort to arbitrary action ... Governments, of whatever kind, can never be trusted by their own volition, to act decently. Socialist democracy would make it one of its main tasks to build strong barriers against their acting otherwise.[181]

By September 1989 he was already declaring that 'Communism Soviet-style is done for (and the process is most likely to affect all Communist regimes in due course)'. [182] And he tried to convince himself and others that this was positive:

At one level, it's a great boost to the free enterprise, aren't we wonderful merchants. At another, what is happening removes an enormous burden from the shoulders of the Left – a burden which has been with us for a very long time, and this will in due course have its impact. In fact, it already is making an impact, in the discussion of 'defence', what next etc. It would be different if the system really did deliver a decent life all round, but it doesn't ... So long as this is so, there will be space for the Left, and I think the space will grow, and this has a cumulative effect. What about the view that a whole epoch which began in 1945 in the US, and which saw the triumph of the conservatives, is now coming to an end?
And so on. I am not a Pangloss, but I do think that there is more going on than meets the eye, and that the opposition will make itself felt.[183]

But this was rather unconvincing and, in reality, he was growing increasingly sombre about what was going on. He was already worried that 'the Russians are prepared to do almost anything to get in the Americans' good books' and was concerned about the ideological retreat in Eastern Europe.[184]

Early the next year, he set out his views to Linda Gordon:

[W]e follow events in Eastern Europe and the USSR with amazement and appre-

hension ... [T]here is a whole lot of things which remain to be unravelled, for instance the ethnic hatreds, after over 70 years of Communist rule, etc, etc. The way I try to look at this is as follows: we knew that the revolution of 1917 ... had been badly deflected from socialist purposes in the early years. We also knew that the revolution had, from the mid or late twenties, been hijacked by Stalin and a new breed of people. What was not nearly sufficiently appreciated, at least by me and many others, was how profoundly, how totally even, the revolution had been 'betrayed' and deformed. There still lurked some sense that, despite everything, there was much that was positive. And it is still possible to point to all sorts of achievements. But this palls in comparison with the negative side, even thirty seven years after Stalin's death. Too little had been repaired of that legacy until Gorbachev came along. In short, I go back to Stalinism and the immensity of the evil it represented ... As for Eastern Europe, it too is paying the price of Stalinism, and we will soon be back and indeed are already in a situation where socialists are in a minority and have to fight to make their presence felt – like anywhere else! This may be a little pessimistic ... but I doubt it. The really important question is where the USSR is going, and I fear very much that Gorbachev will be pushed aside and that with him will go the chance of some kind of socialist democratic outcome to the present turmoil. It may even be that it will be impossible even if he stays.[185]

His mood grew still more sombre after a trip to Czechoslovakia in September 1990 with the UN Research Institute for Social Development. He found his week in Prague extremely depressing, experiencing at first hand the trend towards privatisation and the restoration of capitalism, and noting that it was no longer comfortable for Czechs to be far to the Left, even if they were not Communists.[186] During that summer, a Yugoslav friend, Milos Nikolic who had organised the Cavtat Round Table socialist conferences that Miliband had attended in the past, told him that these were no longer possible since the League of Communists of Yugoslavia no longer existed, with the reorganisation of the country on national lines and the rise of anti-socialist forces. Miliband replied:

We are more or less the same age, and I too have been a socialist since my early adolescent years; and we are bound to be dismayed at so many things that are happening around us, not so much the crisis in the Communist and ex-Communist regimes, which hardly comes as a major surprise, but at the fact that people are rushing headlong into the capitalist alternative. Had people chosen the socialist alternative, or had there been a majority committed to it, we would be delighted. But it would have been naive, I suppose, to expect that this would happen. The discredit and failure of the Soviet-type system was bound to discredit any notion of socialism, wrongly, of course but not very surprisingly.[187]

By the time the final collapse of the Soviet Union took place following the abortive coup against Gorbachev in the summer of 1991, his pessimism had become dominant, and in a speech at a rally in Islington in September of that year he delivered his judgment on the events that had taken place and the probable

future. Gorbachev, he said, had encouraged the hope that the USSR would in time evolve into a socialist democracy, but he had failed. He now expected the fifteen republics to go in for extensive privatisation, encouraged and pressed by Western governments, the IMF, and the World Bank. They would at best be weak capitalist democracies, with great problems of internal cohesion, ethnic and social strife:

> This is not the soil on which democratic rule is likely to thrive. In fact, we must expect some at least of these regimes to be marked by strong authoritarian features, with the fostering of strong right-wing and demagogic nationalism, antiSemitism and assorted morbid features. This is a very gloomy picture, but I think a realistic one.[188]

It was, unfortunately, a rather accurate prediction.

What was the significance of the collapse of communism in Miliband's political thinking as a whole? There was, of course, no question of it being 'a god that failed'. By 1980 his refusal to term the Communist regimes 'socialist' or 'workers' states' had defined his political rejection of them. Yet the impact of the collapse was more complex than would have been the case had the evolution of these regimes been a matter of indifference to him. This point can be explained by considering the general situation of the Left in the 1980s.

This was, as we have already seen, a dismal decade for socialists. Miliband had found himself increasingly isolated in his attempt to maintain the essence of a more traditional Marxist approach against the 'new revisionists' and the 'new realists'. This did not stop him from expressing his views forcefully – indeed it may even have encouraged him to be more strident than normal – but he may have protested too much in constantly proclaiming that he was not panglossian. With this discouraging situation in the capitalist West, he was perhaps bound to find some genuine cause for optimism in Gorbachev's strategy in the Soviet Union. In retrospect it may seem that he suspended his normally critical faculties a little too readily, but this is hardly surprising, and he was certainly not alone in doing so.[189] For if the Soviet Union had really made significant progress towards 'socialist democracy', the whole project to which Miliband was committed would have been revitalised. It would then have been possible to have confronted the Right and sceptics on the Left with a positive alternative rather than one which tended to repel rather than attract young people in the advanced capitalist countries. While there was little hope for socialism in the West, it was therefore quite rational to believe in the significance of developments in the East – even if there was a tendency to look at them through rose coloured spectacles.

But if Miliband saw Gorbachev as a means of rescuing socialism in a situation where there were few other hopeful signs, the collapse of the Communist system inevitably affected his whole political outlook. In the first instance, he no doubt genuinely believed that the disappearance of an oppressive system lifted a

burden from the Left, but this could only have been so had the general environment been more favourable for socialism. In reality he was well aware that this was not the case. In August 1989, as the East European regimes crumbled, he wrote:

> For many years to come, socialists will be something like a pressure group to the left of orthodox social democracy. It is social democracy which will for a long time constitute the alternative – such as it is – to conservative governments.[190]

And a few weeks later he told John Saville that the end of Communism would mean:

> ... socialism has to be reinvented ... All anti-socialists rejoice in what they take to be the death of socialism. The thing is to prove them wrong, but it will require a lot of work.[191]

He was determined to contribute to this task.

Notes

[1] Letter to Saville, 22, July 1977.
[2] Letter to Marion, 26 July 1977.
[3] Letter to Bauman, 17 December 1977.
[4] Letter to Saville, 3 Oct 1977.
[5] Letter to Mick Lipman, 27 December 1977.
[6] Letter to Boyle, 3 Feb 1978.
[7] Letter to Miliband, 13 Feb 1978.
[8] Letter to Marion,18 September 1982.
[9] Letter to Marion, 6 December 1979.
[10] Letter to Marion, 18 November 1978..
[11] Letter to Leo Panitch, 6 December 1980.
[12] Text of Miliband's speech at the memorial event for Poulantzas at the Center for European Studies, Harvard University, 13 November 1979. (A year earlier, he had said that attacks on the Althusserian approach to class and Poulantzas's view of the state were 'flogging a dead horse' as their work was now 'dating rapidly'. Letter to Bob Connell, 21 December 1978).
[13] He thus tended to lose interest in some of the more esoteric debates so that when he wrote an entry on 'The State' for *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought* (Blackwell, 1983) one of his co-editors, Laurence Harris, sent a critical comment to Tom Bottomore who was the main editor, suggesting that Miliband should include some reference to theoretical work on corporatism, and to works by Offe, O'Connor, Althusser and Habermas, and perhaps also to the post-colonial state. (Harris to Bottomore, 7 September 1982). Miliband took on some of these points, but refused to include Althusser, arguing that his '"ideological state apparatuses" is nonsense.' (To Bottomore, 18 September 1982). However, at the beginning of 1983 *New Left Review* persuaded him to write an article on the relative autonomy of the state and he made one more attempt to make a contribution on the subject. The real purpose of the article, 'State Power and Class Interests' (*NLR* 138 March/April 1983), was to elucidate the key issues without dogmatism or over-simplification. He accepted Theda Skocpol's strictures against Marxist class reductionism in *States and Social Revolution* (Cambridge University Press,1979), but argued that she went much too far in suggesting that the

state could have interests which were fundamentally opposed to all forces and interests in society. Against this he argued:

> The degree of autonomy which the state enjoys for most purposes in relation to social forces in capitalist society depends above all on the extent to which class struggle and pressure from below challenge the hegemony of the class which is dominant in such a society. Where a dominant class is truly hegemonic in economic, social, political and cultural terms, and therefore free from any major and effective challenge from below, the chances are that the state itself will also be subject to its hegemony, and that it will be greatly constrained by the various forms of class power which the dominant class has at its disposal. Where, on the other hand, the hegemony of a dominant class is persistently and strongly challenged, the autonomy of the state is likely to be substantial, to the point where, in conditions of intense class struggle and political instablity, it may assume 'Bonapartist' and authoritarian forms, and emancipate itself from constraining constitutional checks and controls.

The US, he suggested, was the nearest approximation to hegemony by the dominant class, whereas in other advanced economies, this had been contested by the aristocracy on the one side and the challenge of labour on the other. And he argued that:

> ... an accurate and realistic 'model' of the relationship between the dominant class in advanced capitalist societies and the state is one of *partnership between two different, separate forces*, linked to each other by many threads, yet each having its own separate sphere of concerns.

The terms of this partnership were not fixed and were affected by many different circumstances, and notably the state of class struggle. But it was not necessarily the case that the state was the junior partner – on the contrary, the contradictions, shortcomings and class tensions within capitalism required the state to assume an ever more pronounced role in defence of the social order. This could ultimately lead to Bonapartism, but also meant that in capitalist democracies there would be a tendency to an inflation of state power with the democratic features under permanent threat from the partnership of state and capital. There could also be important tensions within the partnership, particularly when a left-wing government was in office, but these were normally contained because such governments did not challenge the hegemony of the dominant class in civil society. This notion of 'partnership', he suggested, could avoid economic reductionism on the one hand and the idea of the 'primacy of politics' on the other, and he also saw it as a useful way of analysing the nature of state-society relations that should be established in a socialist society. For even here a state would require a degree of autonomy to carry out its tasks.

In this article he was suggesting that some of the apparent problems about the relationship between class power and state autonomy would not exist if the notion of partnership was accepted. As he had told Leo Panitch, his aim was 'to break through the "instrumentalist-structuralist" bind, and some other binds which have accumulated around the whole notion'. Letter to Panitch, 12 February 1983

[14] Allen Hunter is editor of *Rethinking the Cold War* (Critical Perspectives on the Past, 1998).

[15] Linda Gordon is the author of several books, including *The Great Arizona Orphan Abduction* (1999) [winner of the Bancroft Prize for 2000]; *Pitied but not Entitled: Single Mothers and the History of Welfare, 1890-1935* (1994); *Heroes of their Own Lives: The Politics and History of Family Violence: Boston 1880-1960* (1989); *United States Womens History* (1991); *Womans Cause: The Jewish Woman's Movement in England and the United States, 1881-1933* (1990). She also edited *Women, The State and Welfare* (1991).

[16] George Ross has written several books, including *Jacques Delors and European Integration* (1995); *Workers and Communists in France – From Popular Front to Eurocommunism* (1982), and co-authored (with Jane Jenson), *The View from the Inside – A French Communist Cell in Crisis* (1984), and (with Peter Lange and Maurizio Vannicelli), *Unions, Crisis and Change: French and Italian Trade Unions in the Political Economy, 1945-1980* (1982). He was also co-editor (with Stanley Hoffmann and Sylvia Malzacher) of *The Mitterrand Experiment: Continuity and Change in Modern France* (1987) and (with James Hollifield) of *Searching for the New France* (1991).

[17] Wini Breines is the author *of Community and Organization in the New Left, 1962-1968 – The Great Refusal* (1982) and of *Young, White and Miserable: Growing Up Female in the Fifties* (1994) and was co-editor (with Alexander Bloom) of *Takin' it to the Streets: A Sixties Reader* (1995).

[18] Paul Breines is the author of *Tough Jews: Political Fantasies and the Moral Dilemma of American Jewry* (Basic Books, 1990) and co-author (with Andrew Arato) of *The Young Lukacs and the Origins of Western Marxism* (1979).

[19] Alvin W. Gouldner, *The Two Marxisms: Contradictions and Anomalies in the Development of Theory* (Macmillan, 1980).

[20] However, Gouldner also maintained that there was 'no intention of suggesting that the voluntarism/determinism differentiation is the deepest "essence" or truest meaning of that larger distinction'. He saw it as a marker in a larger set of elements constituting the two syndromes and argued that 'the precise relationship of the elements and their relative importance for the larger syndrome remain to be established empirically'. (*The Two Marxisms*, p. 36). He had intended to write a multi-volume work on the subject but died soon after the publication of *The Two Marxisms*.

[21] A copy of Breines's draft paper 'Marxisms and Gouldners' (August 1980) is in Miliband's papers.

[22] Letter to Marion, 27 September 1980.

[23] Letter to Marion, 27 September 1980. According to Miliband's account of the meeting to another friend in Britain, the debate had really been about whether one could think of a 'map of the world', however imperfect and some others 'insisting that the idea of a map pointed to the Gulag'. (Letter to John Schwarzmantel, 5 October 1980). By this, he was presumably likening Marxism to a guide through the terrain, which did not show every feature of the landscape, but helped travellers to find their way.

[24] Interview with Paul Breines, 19 May 1999. Breines's attitude to Marxism at the time is evident in his essay 'Towards an Uncertain Marxism: A Review Essay', *Radical History Review* 22, Winter 1979-80. Miliband had also differed from him on this and had sent him some comments which combined praise with criticisms.

[25] Letter to Marion, 6 October 1981.

[26] Interview with Paul Joseph, 21 May 1999.

[27] Interview with Linda Gordon, 7 April 1999.

[28] Interview with Allen Hunter, 7 April 1999.

[29] Interview with Paul Breines, 19 May 1979. (Another key participant, George Ross, who was very close to Miliband, was also beginning to disagree with him on a range of issues. However, Ross was also rooted in European politics, and their disagreements did not concern identity politics or new social movements).

[30] Interview with Linda Gordon, 7 April 1999.

[31] For example, Arthur MacEwan, a Marxist economist, believed that his importance was that he was always trying to <u>apply</u> Marxism to current problems and that this made him far more relevant for the American situation than structuralists whose interest was in pure theory or the US journal, *Monthly Review*, which made no serious attempt to engage in US politics. (Interview with Arthur MacEwan, 19 May 1999). MacEwan was not involved in the informal seminars, as he got to know Miliband better after they had already ended, but another person who tended towards his position in the discussions was Margaret (Peggy) Somers, a social historian, who had originally met him at the summer school when he had first arrived in Boston. (Interview with Margaret Somers, 16 December 1998).

[32] Letter to John Griffith, 24 December 1977. The report was 'The Attack on Higher Education: Marxist and Radical Penetration', Report of a Study Group of the Institute for the Study of Conflict by Julius Gould, Institute for the Study of Conflict Special Report, September 1977.

[33] 'A state of de-subordination', *British Journal of Sociology* vol. 29, 1, December 1978.

[34] 'A state of de-subordination', p.402.

[35] Ibid., pp. 404-5.

[36] Ibid., p.406.

[37] Ibid.

[38] Ibid. p.409.

[39] Letter to Wini Breines, 16 May 1979.

[40] Letter to Luis Rubio, 7 May 1979.

[41] Letter to Rusty Simmonds, 14 April 1980.

[42] Letters to Saville, 28 January 1982 and Liebman, 25 January 1982.

[43] *Capitalist Democracy in Britain* (Oxford University Press, 1982), p.160.

[44] Letter to Allen Hunter, 11 April 1981.

[45] Letter to Paul Breines, 30 May 1981.

[46] Interview with Hilary Wainwright, 6 July 2001. (Sheila Rowbothom, Lynne Segal and Hilary Wainwright (eds.) *Beyond the Fragments: feminism and the making of socialism*, 1980).

[47] Author of *Imagination in theory: essays on writing and culture* (1999), *The Politics of truth: from Marx to Foucault* (1991), *Women's oppression tday: the Marxist/feminist encounter* (1988) and several edited works, including (with Mary McIntosh) *The anti-social family* (1982)

[48] *Author of Comprehensive education after 18: a socialist strategy* (1982), *For a pluralist socialism* (1985) and several edited works, including (with Noel Parry) *Social work, welfare and the state* (1979) and (with Stuart Hall and Doreen Massey) *Windrush echoes* (1998).

[49] The invitation was sent out in the names of Hilary Wainwright, Raymond Williames, Michele Barrett, Ralph Miliband, Catherine Hall, Robin Blackburn, Elizabeth Wilson, Perry Anderson, Maxine Molyneux, Stuart Hall, Tariq Ali, Susan Watkins, Michael Rustin, and Fred Halliday. (The Miliband papers contain extensive material on the Socialist Society).

[50] Letter to Allen Hunter, 15 June 1981

[51] Notes sent to Robin Blackburn, 5 March 1981.

[52] The membership charter invited 'all those who believe that the building of a genuine socialist strategy must be the collective work of all those oppressed or exploited by capitalism, and who are prepared to work actively for the creation of a society in which: 1) The domination of a ruling class and the institutions of the capitalist state have been replaced by democratic control of economic, political and social life; 2) Capitalist ownership and control of the means of production, distribution and exchange have been replaced by their public ownership, popular control and workers' self management; 3)Women have full and equal status as a result of the transformation of social, family and sexual relationships in ways that ensure that all forms of sexual oppression and violence have been eradicated; 4) All types of discrimination, oppression and privilege have been removed, including those based on class, race, gender, sexual preference, age, disability and religious belief; 5) There is popular control of, and access to, education and cultural institutions and the means of communication; 6) There is freedom of expression and association; 7) Participation in the production and consumption of goods and services moves progressively towards the point at which it is based on the socialist principle of 'from each according to their ability, to each according to their needs'; 8) The indiscriminate exploitation of the environment has been ended by the consolidation of the socially and ecologically responsible use of resources; 9) All forms of militarism and state coercion have been replaced by a popular militia and democratic communal control of necessary legal processes; 10) All imperialist and neo-colonial relationships have been replaced by international socialist policies and solidarity with liberation movements'.

[53] Diary, 24 January 1982, Tony Benn, *The End of an Era, Diaries 1980-90* (Arrow Books, 1994), p.192.

[54] 'The Struggles in the Labour Party', n.d.

[55] Letter to Liebman, 25 January 1982.

[56] Handwritten notes, 23 January 1982.

[57] Letter, 6 February 1982. Ellen Meiksins Wood is the author of *Mind and Politics: An Approach to the Meaning of Liberal and Socialist Individualism* (1972*), The Retreat from Class* (1986), *The Pristine Culture of Capitalism* (1992), *Democracy against Capitalism* (1995), and *The Origin of Capitialism* (1999). She was a member of the editorial committee of NLR from 1984 until 1993 and was an

editor of *Monthly Review* from 1997 until 2000.

[58] Note from Anthony Arblaster, 5 February 1982

[59] Note by Michele Barrett for the steering committee meeting of 20 February 1982.

[60] Note by Anne Showstack Sassoon, n.d. (February [?]1982). Anne Showstack Sassoon is the author of *Gramsci and Contemporary Politics: Beyond Pessimism of the Intellect* (2000), *Gramsci's politics* (1980), *Antonio Gramsci: an introduction to his thought* (1970).

[61] Letter to Blackburn, 5 March 1982.

[62] Report to the steering group meeting, 20 March 1982.

[63] Letter to Panitch, 9 June 1982.

[64] 'The First Year of the Socialist Society' January [?] 1982..

[65] Speaking notes for Socialist Society annual conference, 5-6 February 1983.

[66] 'The Socialist Society After the Conference', n.d. February [?] 1983.

[67] 'Proposal for a Marx Centenary Commemoration' for steering committee 19 February 1983.

[68] Lynne Segal is the author of *Sex Exposed: sexuality and the pornography debate* (1992), *Is the future female? troubled thoughts on contemporary feminism* (1987), *Slow motion: changing masculinities, changing men* (1990), *Straight sex: the politics of pleasure* (1994), *Why feminism? gender, psychology, politics* (1999), and several edited works including (with Hilary Wainwright and Sheila Rowbotham) *Beyond the Fragments: feminism and the making of socialism* (1980)

[69] Elizabeth Wilson, 'The Future of the Socialist Society', 25 June 1983. Elizabeth Wilson is the author of *Hidden agendas: theory, politics and experience* (1986), *The lost time café* (1993), *Mirror writing: an autobiography* (1982), *Only halfway to paradise: women in postwar Britain*, 1945-68 (1980), *Through the looking glass: a history of dress from 1860 to the present day* (1989), *What is to be done about violence against women?* (1983), *Adorned in dreams: fashion and modernity* (1985), *The Contradictions of culture: cities, culture, women* (2001), *Hallucinations: life in the post modern city* (1988), *Bohemians: The Glamorous Outcasts* (2001)

[70] A few months earlier he had thus written to one of his Boston friends:

> The sag in socialist confidence and morale is quite terrible - I don't only mean the Labour Party, which is in the most dreadful mess, but among socialist, nay Marxist intellectuals, who keep asking 'what is socialism?' 'has socialism had its day?' (as one of them said to me yesterday, quite seriously). Not only Marxism, but socialism in any form. There must be something obtuse and limited in my thinking, because I am entirely free from that kind of questioning ... It would never even occur to me to ask it, which is I suppose obtuse and limited, though I don't really believe it.

Letter to Katherine Kraft, 22 February 1983.

And in March he had attended a Marx centenary conference in Winnipeg and reported to John Schwarzmantel that it had been very worthwhile, that the feminist contribution had been very marked and that much of it was excellent:

> But the general spirit is pretty low all over and the tendency is to flagellate rather than celebrate Marx. Not me though. I made special effort to oppose the prevailing gloom, and this was appreciated by the younger members of the Conference ...

Letter to John Schwarzmantel, 25 March 1983.

[71] Even this had to be scaled down, but a debate with his old friend Bernard Crick on 21 November 1983 was attended by about 140 people. (Socialist Society Annual Report, 1983-84).

[72] Letter to Katherine Kraft, 4 May 1983

[73] Letter to Paul Joseph, 18 June 1983.

[74] 'The Future of the Socialist Society', 25 June 1983.

[75] Sarah Tisdall was a 23-year-old Foreign Office clerk, who had passed a document to the press about the arrival of Cruise missiles, for which she was imprisoned for six months on 23 March 1984.

[76] Minutes of steering committee, 7 April 1984.

[77] John Palmer was the European editor of *The Guardian* for several years, and worked as Press Officer for the Greater London Enterprise Board of the GLC between 1982 and 1986. He is the

author of *Europe without America? The crisis in Atlantic relations* (1987) and *1992 and beyond* (1989). Sarah Benton was Deputy Editor of the *New Statesman*.

[78] The membership statistics are in the report to the steering committee, 3 April 1985, and the Secretary's report for 1986 AGM.

[79] *The Forward March of Labour Halted?,* (Verso, 1981), p.18.

[80] Ibid., pp. 18-19.

[81] 'Socialist Advance in Britain'.

[82] 'Labour's Lost Millions', p.8.

[83] 'Labour's Way Forward is with the Masses'.

[84] 'Why Labour must not retreat from the politics of radical renewal', *The Guardian*, 27 February 1984.

[85] *NLR* 150 March-April 1985.

[86] 'New Revisionism, p.5.

[87] He mentioned Hobsbawm, Stuart Hall, Bob Rowthorn, Beatrix Campbell, Raphael Samuel, Gareth Stedman Jones, Chantal Mouffe, Ernesto Laclau, Paul Hirst, Barry Hindess and the journals *Marxism Today*, *New Socialist* and *New Statesman*. He noted that this was not a simply a British phenomenon, but that he was concentrating on Britain, although he stressed the influence of Gorz in a footnote.

[88] p.8.

[89] p.10.

[90] p.11.

[91] pp.12-13.

[92] p.13.

[93] 'The State – Socialism's Old Caretaker' *Marxism Today*, November 1984.

[94] p.14.

[95] p.15.

[96] p.17.

[97] Ben Fine, Laurence Harris, Marjorie Mayo, Angela Weir, Elizabeth Wilson, *Class Politics – An Answer to its Critics* (Central Books, 1984).

[98] Agenda Extra, 22 April 1985.

[99] 'Why the Left has fallen on hard times; an alternative explanation', (unpublished) by Zygmunt Bauman n.d. 1985.

[100] Letters from Ken Coates, 29 May and 28 June 1985.

[101] Letter from Saville, 11 January 1982.

[102] Interview with George Ross, 18 May 1999.

[103] Letter from Saville, 29 October 1984.

[104] Letter to Saville, 6 November 1984.

[105] Letter from Saville, 12 November 1984.

[106] Letter from Panitch, 14 March 1985.

[107] *Socialist Register*, 1982, p.314.

[108] *Divided Societies: Class Struggle in Contemporary Capitalism* (Oxford University Press, 1989).

[109] Ibid., vi.

[110] pp.30-31.

[111] pp.101-2.

[112] p.105.

[113] p.106.

[114] Interview with Margie Mendell, 17 May 1999.

[115] Letter from Saville, 3 February 1988.

[116] Letters to Saville, 12 and 14 February 1988.

[117] 'Stalwart Class Warrior', *New Statesman*, 16 February 1990. In reply to a letter from Hilary Wainwright saying that she hoped that her review would be read as positive (n.d. February 1990), he

said that it was inaccurate, that her reading of some relevant passages must have been perfunctory, and that the review would be read 'as dealing with a book that simply trots out the old ideas'. Letter to Hilary Wainwright, 23 February 1990.

[118] Zygmunt Bauman, 'New Kinds of Conflict', *Times Literary Supplement*, 12 January 1990.

[119] Letter to Bauman, 5 January 1990.

[120] Letter to Ross, 3 March 1979.

[121] Letter to Aramberri, 5 March 1979.

[122] Letter to Saville, 16 March 1979.

[123] 'A Commentary on Rudolf Bahro's Alternative' [*The Alternative in Eastern Europe*, New Left Books, 1978], originally published in *Socialist Register 1979*, and re-published in *Class Power and State Power*.

[124] Miliband's immediate reaction to the intervention had been to condemn the Vietnamese action and to argue that, however awful the Cambodian regime had been, there was no justification for external intervention unless it had been called for by 'an authentic liberation movement'. In the light of subsequent knowledge about the Pol Pot regime, this would seem an inadequate discussion of the issues but even at the time it was rather surprising. There had been reports of atrocities immediately after the seizure of power by the Khmer Rouge at the beginning of January 1975 and it was curious that Miliband treated the intervention as if 'normal' rules applied. Soon after their invasion in 1979 the Vietnamese produced evidence of mass graves on a horrendous scale and in July claimed that the Pol Pot regime had murdered three million people. This was no doubt an exaggeration but authoritative sources still claim that approximately 1.7 million were killed. However, Miliband appears to have been influenced by the views of Chomsky who published a two volume work co-authored with E.S.Herman in 1979, entitled *The Political Economy of Human Rights* (Spokesman, 1979). This was a sustained critique and denunciation of US foreign policy and the second volume (entitled *After the Cataclysm: Post-War Indochina and the Reconstruction of Imperial Ideology*) dealt specifically with the Vietnam war and its consequences. While this certainly did not spare the Pol Pot regime from criticism, its focus was on the impact of the American crime in carrying the war against the Vietnamese into Cambodia. It also suggested that the main atrocities of the Khymer Rouge had been carried out by local officials rather than as a result of any plan devised by the regime itself. This appeared difficult to reconcile with the evidence that emerged after the Vietnamese invasion in 1979. This evidence convinced Steven Lukes that the treatment of the Cambodian issue by Chomsky and Herman was 'little short of disgraceful' (Letter to Miliband, 23 October 1980) and he wrote an article in the *Times Higher Education Supplement* to this effect on 7 October 1980. On 5 December 1980 Miliband told Lukes that he was extremely unhappy about his article and he came close to endorsing Chomsky's position. Chomsky also reasserted his views in a bitter letter to Lukes on 7 December 1980 (sending a copy to Miliband), after which Miliband wrote to Lukes again insisting that Chomsky's letter had made 'a case for you to answer, given the gravity of your charges', as had his own previous letter. (Letter to Lukes, 17 February 1981). After the *THES* published a letter by Chomsky on 6 March, which sought to refute Lukes (and another intervention by Michael Leifer), Lukes re-asserted his position in a column in the *THES* on 27 March 1981 entitled 'Suspending Chomsky's Disbeliefs'. Making no concessions to Chomsky, he again dismissed the view that the terror was not centrally planned, argued that many of those upon whom Chomsky had relied had now changed their views, and suggested that it was up to Chomsky to do the same.

Few would now contradict Lukes's view and Miliband's judgment in aligning his position so closely to that of Chomsky appears questionable. Without any real expertise on the area, he had under-stated the enormity of the crimes and endorsed a particular interpretation which appeared to minimise the responsibility of the Pol Pot regime itself. It is not entirely clear why he took this position, but three factors were probably particularly important. The first was the depth of his condemnation of American policy in Indochina: having opposed the war against Vietnam so bitterly, he may have had a predisposition to hold the US responsible for *all* the crimes in the region. Secondly, there was the perennial problem that the Right was exploiting the crimes of the Khymer

Rouge regime as part of its general anti-communist propaganda and he was probably reacting against this. And, thirdly, he was trying to develop a general theoretical argument against socialist regimes intervening in the way that the Vietnamese had done and his case would have become more difficult to sustain had he accepted that the Pol Pot had carried out crimes against humanity on a massive scale.

In the article itself, he discussed the Vietnamese action against Cambodia and the Tanzanian action against the Idi Amin regime in Uganda, as alleged justifications for intervention on humanitarian grounds. This argument was, he suggested, obviously attractive in the sense that 'one cannot but breathe a sigh of relief when an exceptionally vicious tyranny is overthrown'. (16). Nevertheless, it was also a dangerous argument:

> For who is to decide, and on what criteria, that a regime has become sufficiently tyrannical
> to justify overthrow by military intervention? There is no good answer to this sort of ques-
> tion; and acceptance of military intervention on the ground of the exceptionally tyrannical
> nature of a regime opens the way to even more military adventurism, predatoriness, con-
> quest and subjugation than is already rife in the world today.

There were, he claimed, other ways to intervene against tyrannical regimes – sanctions, boycott and even blockade – and, in his view, these were the appropriate ways to deal with the Pol Pot and Amin regimes, for:

> In socialist terms, the overthrow of a regime from outside, by military intervention, and
> without any measure of popular involvement, must always be an exceedingly doubtful
> enterprise, of the very last resort. (17)

While this does not, in my view, deal adequately with the problems raised by the crimes of the Pol Pot's regime, Miliband's *general* points were important and have considerable relevance for the post-Cold War interventions by NATO.

[125] pp.13-14.

[126] p.16.

[127] The next day Miliband sent him some comments on the discussion, which led Anderson to reply with a 30 page single spaced typed response a couple of weeks later. Miliband responded to this at the beginning of March with another lengthy defence and reassertion of his position, to which Anderson replied in another seven page letter to which Miliband again responded (closing the correspondence) on 21 April.

[128] p.15.

[129] Letter to Anderson, 25 January 1981.

[130] Ibid.

[131] Letter to Anderson, 2 March 1981. He accepted that he now questioned the historical genesis of all the regimes far more fully than he had done in earlier years:

> … I take the view that Lenin was right to take power. I think many grave mistakes were made
> once power had been taken, which made what happened later easier, though not inevita-
> ble. As for what would have happened if the Bolshevik revolution had never occurred, and
> would the cause of socialism have been retarded or advanced, I used to think that there
> could simply be no question about it, and still think that in so far as such counterfactual
> exercises are useful at all, the weight is still on that side. But I no longer refuse to think that
> there is another side to it.

He was more categorical about the expansion of the Stalinist system into Eastern Europe after the War, arguing that this was detrimental to the socialist cause everywhere.

[132] One of his former students criticised him for not going far enough in this respect. She argued that, whereas people rightly proceeded from the nature of the US regime to an understanding of its role in relation to external policy, no comparable work was done on the relationship between domestic and international policy in the case of the Soviet Union. Her own argument was that it had not been a force for liberation, but one for bringing about another form of dependency. Melina Serafetinidis to Miliband, 5 June 1981.

[133] Letter to Tony Powell, 1 October 1986.

[134] Letter to Panitch, 11 March 1987.

[135]Letter to Charlie van Gelderen, 22 March 1987. It is possible that he was influenced by the fact that van Gelderen was a Trotskyist.

[136] 'Socialist Revolution and Capitalist Democracy' n.d. 1987 [?]

[137] He thus told his friend, Zygmunt Bauman, that he thought his portrait of *perestroika* (in an essay that he had sent Miliband) was 'rather over pessimistic'.

> You make it sound as [if] the whole Soviet people (save for a tiny minority) are steeped in an Orwell-like prole situation, with anti-Semitism as their dominant common passion. I very much doubt that this corresponds to reality. God knows I have no wish to idealise Soviet society, but there must be millions upon millions of people who, at one level or another, welcome perestroika, a good many in the by now vast, educated, technical and professional bourgeoisie and petty-bourgeoisie, and so on. You seem to me to attribute the hostility to perestroika which masses of bureaucrats, people without talent, etc. feel to the <u>whole</u> of the Soviet people,and I must say that neither what I read nor what I hear from people who have recently come back from Russia give me that impression.

Letter to Bauman, 3 June 1988.

[138] Letter to Martha Dodd, 31 December 1988, Martha Dodd papers, Box 7, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress. (I am grateful to John E. Haynes, for sending me copies of the Dodd-Miliband correspondence).

[139] Diary, 1 Feb 1985, CD Rom.

[140] Diary, 23 April 1985, CD Rom.

[141] Perry Anderson had written a long memorandum for the editorial committee of *New Left Review* which argued that Miliband's article had given the Left the kind of lead that it had long needed and that NLR should follow it up effectively and constructively. Claiming that the 'resolute left' had been on the defensive while the revisionists had been making the running, he urged *NLR* now to bypass some of the barriers that divided and weakened the left. 'Notes on the Current Outlook', n.d. 1985.

[142] Letter to Benn, 24 April 1985.

[143] Letters to Miliband, 25 and 28 April 1985.

[144] Entry for 5 May 1985, *Diaries 1980-90*, p.407.

[145] Diary, 5 May 1985, CD Rom.

[146] Entry for 5 May 1985, *Diaries 1980-90*, p.408.

[147] Letter to Panitch, 12 May 1985.

[148] Letter to Panitch, 1 May 1985

[149] Letter to Panitch, 13 May 1985.

[150] Minutes of Meeting of ILCS, 16 June 1985 (Miliband papers).

[151] Benn's diary for 16 June 1985, CD Rom.

[152] Letter to Panitch, 21 June 1985.

[153] Letter to David, 16 June 1985.

[154] Minutes of ILCS Meeting, 3 August 1985.

[155] Diary entry, 1 September 1985, CD Rom.

[156] Benn's Diary entries for 2 and 23 February 1986, CD Rom.

[157] Diary entry, 23 February 1986, CD Rom. Meale was then an adviser to Michael Meacher and was elected as MP for Mansfield in 1987.

[158] Diary entry, 3 August 1986, CD Rom.

[159] Diary entry, 26 October 1986, CD Rom.

[160] Diary entries, 10 and 11 November 1986, CD Rom.

[161] 'Review of the Year', 31 December 1986, CD Rom.

[162] For example, he was openly critical of him for walking out of a Labour Party NEC meeting in March 1986 when in a minority over expulsions of alleged Militant members. Diary entry, 27 March 1986, CD Rom.

[163] Letter to Panitch, 6 May 1987.

[164] Diary entry, 14 June 1987, CD Rom.

[165] Diary entry, 15 June 1987, CD Rom.

[166] Diary entry, 20 June 1987, CD Rom.

[167] Diary entry, 20 June 1987, *Diaries 1980-90*, p.513.

[168] Secretary of Bristol South East Labour Party, 1979-83 who was elected as Labour MP for Bristol South in 1987.

[169] Wife of the General Secretary of the National Union of Mineworkers and a major figure in organising the women's support groups during the 1984-85 strike.

[170] Text of speech to Chesterfield Conference, 24 October 1987.

[171] Diary entry, 24 October 1987, CD Rom.

[172] 'The Morning After – Reflections on the Socialist Conference', Richard Kuper n.d. October 1987. Kuper, originally from South Africa, had been a leading figure in the student movement at LSE at the time of the 'troubles'. At that stage he had been in the International Socialists, but had moved away from this position by the late 1980s. After working for Pluto press for several years, he worked as a University lecturer, with an interest in issues of democratic theory and European politics. He took early retirement to further an interest in practical utopias, via a cooperative project for organic farming in the Drome in France.

[173] Letter to Robin Cohen, 28 October 1987.

[174] Letter to Benn, 19 January 1988.

[175] Letter to Panitch, 20 January 1988.

[176] Diary entry, 25 December 1988, *Diaries 1980-90*, p.556.

[177] 'Reflections on the Crisis of the Communist Regimes', *NLR 177* September/October 1989.

[178] p.31.

[179] Ibid.

[180] pp.31-2.

[181] p.36.

[182] Letter to Saville, 13 September 1989.

[183] Letter to Katherine Kraft, 19 November 1989. (Letter lent by Kathy Kraft).

[184] Letter to Monty Johnstone, 2 November 1989.

[185] Letter to Linda Gordon, 26 January 1990.

[186] Letter to Anton Alterman, 20 October 1990.

[187] Letter to Milos Nikolic, 16 September 1990.

[188] Speech at meeting on 'USSR: Democratic Socialism is the Way Forward', Islington Central Library,
18 September 1991.

[189] In his speech in September 1991, he said of Gorbachev:
'Whether he could have succeeded we shall never know. But it may well be that one of his greatest failings was the failure to reform the Party and turn it into a democratic socialist party. This might not have been possible: but it was never seriously tried.' Ibid.

[190] 'Reflections on the Crisis of Communism', p.36.

[191] Letter to Saville, 13 September 1989.

Chapter Nine: In Pursuit of Socialism

With the collapse of communism in the summer and autumn of 1989, Miliband's main ambition was to understand what was happening and to write a new book on socialism which would take account of the experiences of the Left in the twentieth century – both positive and negative. He had produced 'Reflections on the Crisis of the Communist Regimes' before the regimes had even fallen and a further indication of his new mood was evident in an important contribution to *Socialist Register 1990*. Entitled 'Counter-Hegemonic Struggles' he turned to Gramsci to argue that the socialist critique was needed not only to demonstrate that there was a desirable alternative to capitalism, but also a possible one. In fifteen pages he presented its main themes in a condemnation of both communism and capitalism, suggested elements of an alternative policy, and argued that socialist solutions would arise again, but would need to be in tune with the felt needs and aspirations of the epoch. It was notable that in both these articles the way in which the argument was presented struck a very different note from the rather strident tone of *Divided Societies*.

In September 1989 he returned to CUNY for another semester of teaching, which he thoroughly enjoyed, finding the standard excellent and the level of interest and participation extremely gratifying. But because he was always conscientious about his teaching and the autumn was a busy time for editorial work for the *Socialist Register*, he expected to make much faster progress on his book after his return to London, particularly as it had been agreed that he would remain there for the whole of 1990. He certainly now worked hard on it but, as usual, there were plenty of disruptions. In March he went to Spain for a meeting of the steering committee of a new journal, *El Futuro del Socialismo* and, almost as soon as he returned, he left for New York, where he was participating in the annual Socialist Scholars Conference. After a few months at home, albeit with the normal round of meetings and talks, he then spent three weeks on holiday in France in August, followed by ten days in Australia in September for another Socialist Scholars conference, with only four days back in London before spending a week in Czechoslovakia with the UN research institute for social development. All this was both disruptive and exhausting and, from early August there was another important diversion from his project: the impending war with Iraq.

His attitude to the crisis caused by the invasion of Kuwait in August was clear. As he told his friends, Harry and Beadie Magdoff:

Saddam Hussein is a thug and his overthrow would be fine, but not through war;

and Irak does have grievances. Negotiations [are] the only alternative to unconditional surrender, obviously; and this is what now needs to be pushed.[1]

He was in close touch with Tony Benn, who was playing a leading role in the anti-war protests, and in early August Miliband urged him to call for negotiations rather than unconditional surrender. His periodic absences from the country until mid-October meant that he could not play a sustained role in the peace movement, but he continued to be pre-occupied with the crisis in the Gulf, working behind the scenes in Benn's abortive mediation attempts. When Edward Heath demonstrated his own opposition to American policy, Miliband pressed Benn to approach him, and the two met on 24 September to discuss the situation. On 21 October Heath saw Saddam Hussein and persuaded him to release some of the British hostages, and in early November Willy Brandt also went to Baghdad with the goodwill of the UN Secretary-General, but without the support of the British and American governments. Benn had suggested to Heath that Brandt should be brought into the mediation efforts and was becoming hopeful that Miliband's original idea that he should approach Heath was leading to significant developments. [2]Then, on 6 November, the Iraqi Ambassador asked to see Benn and, when they met, invited him to Baghdad. He immediately consulted Miliband and Heath, both of whom urged him to go. [3]

Miliband played a key role in advising on the subsequent mediation attempt, with Benn submitting draft speeches and statements of his objectives to him for approval. However, he was probably less optimistic than Benn that his peace mission would succeed. On 24 November, the day that Benn flew to Iraq, he thus told one of his friends:

> Tony Benn has gone to Iraq today, and will try to persuade Hussein that he must make concessions if there is to be any chance of negotiations at all. But it may well be too late by now. [4]

And when the war started the following February, he had no doubt that it was the Americans who bore the greater responsibility for the failure of the negotiations, telling Fred Halliday:

> I heard you say on the Channel Four 7 o'clock news programme last night that 'the war had to be fought because Saddam Hussein would not negotiate'. According to Noam Chomsky on Newsnight some nights earlier, the New York Times had in earlier months carried reports of Iraqi proposals that would have made negotiations possible. Whether this is right or not, the outstanding fact about the conflict since its very beginning is that it is Bush who refused any kind of negotiation, under whatever name, and who adopted a policy of 'no negotiation, no saving of face, no reward for aggression, no linkage', i.e. only unconditional surrender. To focus on Hussein in this respect seems to me to add to the obfuscation which is going on.[5]

He never changed his view on this, interpreting the war as one element in a much more fundamental conflict:

> The struggle to make the world safe for capitalism will long continue, and will assume economic, political, cultural and, where necessary, military forms. So too will the struggle against governments which, whatever their ideological disposi-tions, might seek to disturb a status quo which the United States and other capital-ist powers are concerned to maintain. The Gulf War with Iraq is the latest instance of this struggle. The murderous dictatorship over which Saddam Hussein presided was perfectly acceptable to Western governments, so long as it served their pur-poses, as was the case in Iraq's war with Iran. The invasion of Kuwait was a different matter; and any means other than war to bring the invasion to an end were quickly brushed aside by the United States. The point had to be made that leaders of coun-tries in the 'third world' which gravely offended against what the United States and its allies considered to be their legitimate interests in a particularly important part of the world would expose themselves to fearsome retribution. The Gulf War is very unlikely to be the last such episode.[6]

But before the Gulf War was over his attention had inevitably shifted to a major personal crisis: his own health.

After his heart attack in 1973 he had been anxious about the possibility of a recurrence and continued to worry about ill-health, ageing and death. He had gradually become more relaxed and stopped having his regular check-ups, but in the autumn of 1990, after feeling breathless and unwell, he went back to the doctor. Following three hospital visits in November, he was referred to the Mid-dlesex hospital in January for further examination of some abnormalities and, after a series of visits, the cardiologist told him that there was a 'furring up' of arteries, but the extent of the damage could only be revealed by an angiogram. Miliband was due to return to New York and had to decide whether to postpone the angiogram until the end of May or to have it done immediately and to teach in the Fall semester instead. Although he claimed to feel fine, he thought it would save anxiety in the whole family if he had the angiogram done straightaway and postponed his trip to New York.[7] Following this he was advised that he needed an immediate heart by-pass operation, but when this was carried out in Febru-ary it led to horrific complications. He spent four weeks in intensive care and nearly died. By the summer he was beginning to grow stronger, but still got very tired and had to postpone his return to New York for another year – finally going back for the Fall semester of 1992.

Miliband could not work properly for the whole of 1991 and, although he subsequently tried to make light of it and resume his full schedule, he never fully recovered. As always, when he returned to CUNY he wrote entirely new lectures and stimulated the students as much as ever, but he did not enjoy his work there in the Autumn of 1992, and often seemed tired and low.[8] After his return to

London in December, he made no immediate decision about the future, but in May 1993 he finally decided to retire from university life and from his annual sojourn across the Atlantic. He insisted that this was not because of his health, but because he 'came to think that being away from my family and surroundings for nearly four months meant too much dislocation and disruption'.[9] No doubt he did miss Marion and his sons more than ever, but this was probably because of the fatigue caused by his condition. He was also constantly reminded of his vulnerability by frequent hospital appointments for check ups or to have new pacemakers fitted.

Yet it would be quite wrong to imply that his life was now without joy. First, and most important, he loved the company of his family, and took immense pride in the success of his sons. David had already been seconded to Neil Kinnock's staff at the time of the 1992 General Election and in 1993 Edward began to work for Harriet Harman, who was then Shadow Chief Secretary to the Treasury. Despite the fact that he had so bitterly condemned the Labour Party since the mid-sixties, he was enormously gratified by his sons' achievements, even if he was a little bemused about their work. Sometimes he found it difficult to credit the extent to which their world differed from his own.[10] But he continued to treasure their ongoing dialogue and the warmth of their relationship was never affected by political differences. Secondly, he continued to enjoy debate both privately and publicly, and his humour was undiminished. This was in evidence, for example, in February 1993 when he spoke at LSE (for the first time since he had left) in a commemoration event in honour of the centenary of Laski's birth, bringing the house down when recalling the way in which his mentor had arranged his entry into the navy in 1943.

There were also some very happy occasions. In December 1993 he participated in a conference in Mexico City on 'The World Today: Situations and Alternatives'. His paper on 'The New World Order and the Left' was, of course, intensely serious and presented some of the arguments that he developed in his final book. He also had political debates outside the conference, for example, with Lin Chun about the future of socialism in China – about which he was deeply pessimistic.[11] But he also simply enjoyed himself. Unlike Spring 1971, when he had spent six weeks teaching in Mexico City without the family, this time he was accompanied by Marion. Leo and Melanie Panitch were also there, and the four of them had good times together, eating in an open restaurant in the gardens near Frida Kahlo's house and drinking at a bar in the evening, with Miliband playfully donning a sombrero. Nor did the fun stop there. In January he was seventy and Marion organised a birthday party for him. This was a great occasion, with John Saville making a speech to which he replied in quite sentimental terms. He seemed quite well and was even reconciled to being seventy – something that he had dreaded a few years earlier.[12]

Just after his birthday he finally completed his book. His illness had forced him

to stop work on it for over a year and it was only in the spring of 1992 that he had taken it up again. In the summer of 1993 he had submitted it to his family and some of his friends for their comments. None of them was overwhelmingly positive and there was the further problem that the perspectives of those to whom he gave it were quite diverse. But he took the criticisms seriously and began the last revisions in the autumn. During the final stages he told one of his friends:

> I have never had so much trouble with a book, and I keep thinking that it requires more work. But it will have to do as an interim statement. [13]

As soon as he had completed it, he began work on a new book in which he intended to explore and explain conflict as a whole, as he was becoming increasingly alarmed by the eruption of ethnic and nationalist movements.

1994 was also the thirtieth anniversary of the *Socialist Register* and Miliband wrote an overview for that edition.[14] His survey ended characteristically:

> I have always thought that the *Register* was doing useful socialist work, and its survival for thirty years, in a period which has not been good for the Left, may be reckoned to be a matter of some satisfaction ...
> All in all, I think the publication deserves the mention 'has done well, could do better'; and over the next thirty years, it will. [15]

Equally characteristically, he withdrew another of his own articles – on 'ethnicity and nationalism' – just before publication in the belief that it was not good enough.

On 30 March he left for the Socialist Scholars conference in New York. He had a very crowded schedule for, in addition to the conference, he was also lecturing at the Marxist school, visiting *Monthly Review*, and meeting numerous friends. It was cold and wet and even those who were in good health were not enjoying the conditions. He did two presentations at the conference – both on aspects of democracy – and at the Marxist School he spoke 'For – and Against – Utopia'. The stress on the importance of democracy, the need for utopias, but the 'dangerous nonsense' of believing that 'we must start afresh altogether, that we must build on entirely new ground, an entirely new edifice', were also his preoccupations in his final book.[16]

In the introduction to *Socialism for a Sceptical Age*, Miliband explained:

> I started work on this book in 1989, but I had to stop working on it from the beginning of 1991 to the spring of 1992. Those were of course exceptionally dramatic years; and I am very conscious that, in one way and another, they have had a deep influence on my thinking about socialism. Over a period stretching over four decades, I have discussed in various writings some of the themes which are to be found in this book. But I believe that, taken as a whole, the book offers perspectives

which go well beyond these themes and which reflect something of the thinking to which the developments have led me. In this sense, much of the text is based on a questioning of the ideas I have held over the years, and a response to that questioning. I have throughout been extremely concerned to move away from over-familiar formulations (my own as well as those of others) and to undertake a genuine reappraisal of socialism, and of the ways in which its prospects might be advanced.[17]

And he was at pains to explain the references to Marx and other figures of classical Marxism at various points in the text:

The reason for this is that the kind of reappraisal of socialism which is undertaken here demands an engagement with Marxism. Such an engagement involves an acknowledgement of what remains of enduring importance in classical Marxism – and there is a lot more of this than is currently said; but it also involves a move away from some of its propositions. Either way, I believe that Marxism has to be taken as a major point of reference in the discussion of socialism.[18]

His purpose was to demonstrate that socialism could withstand the assault to which it had been subjected in recent years, and that it could provide meaning, hope and solutions even in an age of scepticism. It was a short book which covered an enormous range. In seven chapters he outlined the case against capitalism; the nature of socialist aspirations; the mechanisms of democracy; the form a 'mixed economy' could take under socialism; the constituencies, agencies and strategies for change; the politics of survival for a socialist government; and the prospects for the future.

The whole tone in which he elaborated his argument was quite different from the combative style of *Divided Societies*. This did not mean that his refutation of non-socialist approaches was any less severe.

In recent years, it is the very notion of socialism as a comprehensive reorganization of the social order which has come under fire, often from people who have remained more or less committed to the progressive side of politics. Each in its own way, post-Marxism, post-modernism, post-structuralism and related currents of thought, has served, whatever the intentions of its protagonists, to strengthen the recoil from general notions of human emancipation, particularly Marxism. Any such 'meta-saga' ... is viewed as a dangerous illusion. All large schemes of social renewal, however cautious and qualified, attract suspicion, hostility and denunciation ... The accent is now on partial, localized, fragmented, specific goals, and against universal, 'totalizing' perspectives ...

This erosion of the belief in a comprehensive alternative to capitalist society was a matter of immense importance which:

plays its own part in creating a climate of thought which contributes to the flower-

ing of poisonous weeds in the capitalist jungle ... – racism, sexism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism, ethnic hatreds, fundamentalism, intolerance. The absence from the political culture of the rational alternative which socialism represents helps the growth of reactionary movements which encompass and live off these pathologies and which manipulate them for their own purposes.[19]

This might appear harsh, but one of the most significant features of the book was also its frank acknowledgement of the difficulties in the classic Marxist tradition. For example, he acknowledged that warnings about the dangers of comprehensive social change could not be brushed aside:

> The whole experience of the twentieth century shows well enough how real the dangers are; and I may say here that my own approach in this book to the question of socialist advance has been greatly influenced by my awareness of the delicacy of the enterprise and of the need to guard against authoritarian pseudo-solutions to the problems it must encounter.[20]

Furthermore, rather than simply denouncing the evils of capitalism he attempted to sketch out the political, constitutional and economic requirements for a socialist system, while carefully avoiding any suggestion that this would create a utopia. It is this delineation of the rudiments of 'an alternative that could work' that makes it such a brave book. For Miliband there were:

> three core propositions or themes which define socialism, all three equally important, and each related to, and dependent upon, the others. These are democracy, egalitarianism, and socialization of a predominant part of the economy.[21]

He acknowledged that Marxists had customarily underrated the positive aspects of 'bourgeois democracy' and had too readily subscribed to the Leninist notion that all such systems are forms of the 'dictatorship of the bourgeoisie'. He was adamant that democracy was an essential characteristic of socialism, and that it must be respected both in the battle against capitalism and in the creation of a socialist system. Nor was this point simply affirmed in an abstract and general way. Rather he elaborated the need for a separation of powers and constitutional safeguards for the citizen, and he endorsed the fundamentally liberal view that even popular power must be limited in order to preserve individual freedoms. Yet none of this tempered his bitter condemnation of the current system as a travesty of democracy and constitutionalism.

When dealing with the economy he was also deeply critical of the traditional Stalinist model, and careful not to overstate the extent of the transformation that socialism could effect. He thus rejected the idea of the centrally-planned economy and, alongside a dominant public sector, he saw a role not only for cooperatives, but also for private companies. These, he proclaimed, could pro-

vide useful competition for the public sector and would do no damage so long as they were subordinate to it. He was equally restrained in recommending that a socialist administration should be very cautious in its treatment of those who had invested in privatised industries: they should, he argued, receive reasonable compensation so that they were not damaged too severely by the change of government. Indeed, more fundamentally, he urged caution with regard to private industry as a whole on the grounds that its cooperation would be necessary to restore economic regeneration, and that it might be possible and necessary for a socialist administration to win *some* allies from this sector. However, while his views about the foreseeable future under socialism were temperate, his critique of capitalism was vehement, and he reaffirmed the crucial importance of public ownership, arguing effectively that legislative regulation could not offset the overwhelming power of private corporations. This also meant that he asserted that those who denied the necessity for the socialization of a predominant part of the economy were social reformers rather than socialists. Nevertheless, he himself was cautious about the extent of equality that would be possible under socialism. It is, he suggested:

> a rough egalitarianism which differs from perfect equality, an untenable notion, but an egalitarianism which does all the same seek the elimination of the major inequalities in every sphere of life which characterize societies deeply divided on the grounds of income, wealth, power and opportunities.[22]

There are, of course, issues that can be raised about the adequacy of his analysis, but before considering some of these, it is worth asking a different question: did the book suggest any real change in Miliband's *politics* or was it simply a continuation of his earlier positions, with any difference confined to the manner of expression rather than the substance of the analysis?

This is an extremely difficult question for Miliband's political position *never* shifted suddenly or dramatically. The changes that occurred were subtle and gradual, with differences of emphasis rather than total transformations of belief and many of his arguments in *Socialism for a Sceptical Age* had been foreshadowed in earlier writings. He had frequently criticised Leninist ideas about revolution, the vanguard party, and the abolition of the state; and his detachment from Marxist orthodoxy was nothing new. He had also condemned utopianism about the post-capitalist order, had stressed that democracy was integral to socialism, and insisted that the freedoms that had developed within capitalism were not simply 'bourgeois'. Yet the combination of all these themes, and the attempt, in a reflective, cautious way, to delineate major features of a post-capitalist order did make the book different. In addition to this, influenced by the comments of his sons, he also tried to give the book greater practical application than his other works.

It is not possible to say whether his position would have undergone any fur-

ther changes had he lived, but there were some indications that he was seeking a new kind of synthesis between Marxism and liberal democracy. One interesting symptom of this was that he had shocked his friend John Griffith by signing Charter 88 and the emphasis on constitutionalism in *Socialism for a Sceptical Age* seems to reflect the influence of this type of politics.[23] Another significant sign of a possible change was his apparent rediscovery of Laski. For while his personal affection for his former mentor had never diminished, he had become increasingly critical of him as a thinker. However, this changed in 1993 when he participated in the centenary event in Laski's honour at LSE in February and wrote a review article in *New Left Review* in the summer praising him as 'an exemplary public intellectual'.[24] Since the distinguishing feature of Laski was his attempt to marry liberalism and Marxism, it seems highly probable that Miliband was now again finding that his work had resonance for his own. Furthermore, as Laski had spent thirty years working in and around the Labour Party, often with little optimism about it as a vehicle for socialism, and Miliband was now arguing that the best that the Left could hope for in the relevant future was 'the strengthening of left reformism as a current of thought and policy in social democratic parties', he perhaps also regarded Laski's practical work more favourably than he had in the past. Again, this might have been reinforced by his sons' participation in Labour Party policy-making.

Whatever the politics of *Socialism for a Sceptical Age*, it was almost inevitable that many people would find it unsatisfactory. In part, this was because there were certainly weaknesses in the work. Many of those who read the book before it was published or reviewed it subsequently were therefore critical of particular parts – normally those which related most closely to their own expertise or preoccupations. His son David, approaching it from a non-Marxist perspective, thought it needed firmer definitions of socialism and felt that:

> … at the moment your thesis that there is an alternative to capitalism will be taken to rest on optimism about human nature, and abilities for cooperation. This does not seem to … be sufficiently compelling: apart from anything else, you will get diverted into a debate about human capacities, rather than about socialist strategies.

More fundamentally, he wanted to know:

> … whether you are restating a case that has been traduced in theory or practice, or whether you are advancing a new case. I think that the book reads like the former, notwithstanding its important attempt to come to terms with the current context. Unfortunately, I don't want it to read like the former; while past socialist theory might inform developments in the present, I think that defending longstanding socialist ideals as more flexible, less statist etc. than they have been in practice does not take us very far forward. Asking people not to give up on … uncorrupted

socialist visions is not enough. [25]

He also wanted more detail and less reference to 1917 and Marxism. Miliband certainly made several changes as a result of criticisms from both his sons, but the text naturally remained inspired by a flexible Marxist analysis rather than by 'modernising' social democracy. From the other end of the spectrum one of Miliband's former students at CUNY, in a long review article, criticised him from the Left for failing to go far enough in relation to the abolition of the private sector, in explaining the transition to socialism, or on the need to 'smash' the state.[26] Others were critical of specific aspects of the argument. Thus Andrew Glyn, the socialist economist, who had worked with him in the ILCS, Tony Benn's unofficial 'think-tank, thought that he said too little about the transformations going on within capitalism. It was not sufficient just to make the point that it was paradoxical that socialism had been weakened, given the poor performance of capitalism:

> Perhaps the point is that whilst you take up the fall of communism very clearly and effectively you are rather loathe to confront the extent to which capitalism is changing and is thus weakening support for socialist ideas ...[27]

And, more generally, he implied that Miliband was effectively wishing away economic problems by simply making the valid point that there was no reason why public enterprise could not be as efficient and more democratic than private enterprise. Glyn pointed out that, in any economy which is dynamic, there would be winners and losers. There would have to be some mechanisms for dealing with this effectively, but the change of ownership did not, in itself, eliminate the problem. Despite the force of Glyn's criticisms, the final version of the text was still far stronger on the general issues of economic power and distribution, than in its analysis of the driving forces in a socialist economy. Economics was never really Miliband's forte, and at this stage he did not have the capacity to deal with these problems. A further related point noted in one review concerned the whole issue of the nation-state, the international economy and the European Union.[28]

Miliband acknowledged that there had been important changes in the world economy. But he was anxious to refute the idea that the nation-state - at least in advanced capitalist societies - had become redundant either as an economic actor or as an agency which could be used to advance socialism. These points were well worth making, for there had been a tendency for some sections of the Left to accept, too readily and uncritically, the new conventional wisdom that the state had no autonomy in the era of globalism. Yet the interactions between the domestic and international arenas are now so complex, and the need to understand them so great, that Miliband's conclusions appeared somewhat glib.

Given that modern multinationals source their products from several parts of the world, was it really sufficient to argue that, because there was predominantly national ownership of corporations in advanced capitalist countries, 'the internationalization of capital does not ... present any major technical obstacle to the socialization of an important part of economic life ... '?[29] Similarly, is it adequate to condemn the EU as an agency of free market capitalism and to argue that socialists should resist further integration in confidence that the 'nation-state must remain for the foreseeable future the crucial point of reference for the Left'?[30] These are difficult questions, and Miliband's answers are no less convincing than those of others who seem to expect a transmutation of the EU into an agency for radical change. But nor are his conclusions any *more* persuasive. In fact, he had already had personal arguments, both on the international economy in general and the EU in particular with people who were close to him. These are revealing in relation to the rather categorical statements he made in the book.

In 1974 Walter Goldstein, a Professor of International Political Economy, who was a student of Miliband's at LSE in the 1950s and subsequently a friend, wrote an article on the 'The Multi-National Corporation' (MNC) for *Socialist Register*. Having emphasised the dominance of the MNC, he had concluded:

> The nationalization of the MNC could cripple the national survival of a left régime. But the failure to nationalize the MNC banks, oil 'majors' and technology leaders would reduce socialist policy to a mere reformism. For a national movement to pit its strength against the world market strength of the MNC would lead to disaster. But to leave the MNC to its own devices would lead only to the dismembering of socialism in one country. This is the material circumstance of industrial technology that must force the left to articulate a new strategy.[31]

Miliband had not liked the implications of this, telling Goldstein that his conclusion was unwarranted for no genuinely socialist regime had attempted to defy the multinationals, and he inserted a disclaimer in the SR rejecting the formulations of the article. Their argument had continued over the years with Miliband urging him to write another article on the subject in 1983 and Goldstein declining on the grounds that he had not shifted his position significantly since 1974. Yet despite the brief mention of the international economy in *Socialism for a Sceptical Age* Miliband was obviously aware that his views on the subject were oversimplified for in his overview of thirty years of the *Socialist Register* in 1994 he wrote:

> ... the 1974 issue had a remarkably prescient article by Walter Goldstein ... I thought then that he was exaggerating the constraints which multinational corporations imposed on national states, and I indicated my disagreement with him in the Preface I wrote for the volume; he obviously had a far better grasp of what the prospects were in this respect than I had.[32]

His disagreements on the European Community were with George Ross and, to an extent, with his son David. Ross, who was partially based in the Center for European Studies at Harvard, was now working on a book on Jacques Delors.[33] He no longer believed a national road to socialism was possible for medium-sized European states and was advocating a left strategy at European level – something that he effectively proposed in an article in *New Left Review* in 1992.[34] Miliband wrote to him:

> I found your article in NLR on the EEC illuminating but am more than ever opposed to European federalism ... [My] objections ... are purely grounded in the sense that federalism is a perfect device for making more difficult if not impossible anything resembling radical reform in any given country. There are plenty of other obstacles to such reform, but this would not be the least one, and the EEC as it is, not to speak of what is contemplated (economic union, independent central bank, etc) would already be a drag on a progressive government – unless one takes the view that radical reform is not on in any relevant future, which I don't.[35]

In 1992 David, who was currently Research Fellow at the IPPR, edited *A More Perfect Union? Britain and the New Europe.* His own introduction and the book as a whole implied a pragmatic approach to the issues, in line with the policy adopted by the Labour Party from the late 1980s onwards. Just after Britain's forced exit from the ERM in September, Ralph wrote to him:

> ... I do think that leaving the ERM was the right thing to advocate, certainly from a left viewpoint. The freedom this provides may have side effects, but it is nevertheless essential for a left government to have that freedom. In the end, I think that where we differ is that [you think] this freedom is no longer available to any government, whereas I think it is, within limits no doubt, but enough all the same to make a difference. Similarly, Maastricht is a way of <u>curbing</u> any government that does not follow orthodox lines, i.e. what the bankers want.[36]

Neither of them was able to convince the other, and this was also the case with Ross, who told Miliband the next year that he was convinced that much of the left was flirting with a form of national populism which was very dangerous because it bore no positive project and played into the hands of the Right.[37] Miliband replied:

> I think we are at odds on the European business. God knows I am no nationalist/ populist or Little Englander (which would, given my background, be rather funny), but I am very much against European union, since I believe it to be directed towards putting a final nail in any prospect of Left advance in Europe. The furthest I would go is towards loose arrangements, which leave national governments as free as is possible to pursue policies which the European Commission opposes. For a long time to come, whatever independence a national state can preserve is a

resource which is essential to the Left.

And he ended on a rather poignant note:

> I know this can easily be dismissed as dinosaur stuff, but I don't think it is.[38]

The implication of all this is that he was aware that international economic interdependence might make his position on socialist transformation within a single European state untenable, but that he was unable either to shift his stance or to undertake analysis of the extent of national economic autonomy.

Perhaps it was this feeling that Miliband had not been able to answer all possible objections to his arguments which left some people disappointed with the book, finding it less elevating than they might have hoped. Thus after reading the manuscript John Griffith wrote to him:

> [I] am sure what you have written is not only publishable but a valuable contribution to a great debate (that sounds almost patronising and damning with faint praise but I mean each word, however trite, to carry its full weight). It is valuable, eminently worth saying and only you could say it as well.[39]

He suggested that Miliband should now write a further book which would explain why the socialist ideal was the only way. This would be a book of political philosophy at a high level which would revive hope. The current book would be a first draft for his truly *magnum opus.* In my view, the reasons for this sense of disappointment had little to do with any shortcomings in the book itself, but were the product of the climate of the times.

His closest friend at CUNY, Frances Piven, pinpointed this in some highly perceptive comments, both while he was writing the book and subsequently. When he told her what he was trying to do, she commented:

> Your book does sound very difficult. I would expect the values part to be easier ... It's the power part that's hard and, relatedly, the problem of morale and elan. Hard I mean to reconstruct a theory of power as persuasive and ennobling as the idea of proletarian power. So, be gentle with yourself.[40]

The comparison she was really making was with the Communist Manifesto. This, she suggested after Miliband's death, was a brilliant piece of rhetoric which showed the proletariat and the world that the future lay with them and gave them the power to create that future. It made an image of the world that was created rhetorically come true analytically, and it was the relationship between the analysis and the rhetoric that made the Manifesto so brilliant. Miliband, she suggested, would have liked to write in that spirit, but could not do so because he lacked the capacity to *demonstrate* the unity between the analysis and the

rhetoric.[41] But, as she also emphasised, this was not fundamentally because of Miliband's personal weaknesses. The problem was that the strengthening of capitalism had decimated the ranks of the industrial workers, destroyed working-class communities and culture, had weakened unions and defeated labour parties. Class analysis continued to illuminate a changing capitalist world:

> What remains to be discovered or imagined are the dialectical forces that can rise up to do battle with global capitalism. This was the problem which Miliband struggled to solve ... It is our problem as well. [42]

Because many of those who read the book in manuscript or reviewed it also felt that 'it is our problem as a well' there was a tendency to hope that Miliband would be able to solve it, and a feeling of disappointment when he failed to do so. This is not to suggest that the reactions to the book were negative: on the contrary, the majority were very positive.[43] Nevertheless, many of them left an unmistakable impression that Miliband should have been able to resolve more of the problems. This was unfair and seemed to overlook his cautionary words in the introduction when he explained that, in his attempt to reappraise socialism when writing the book:

> [I]have become more conscious than ever before of the vast problems – some old, some new – which are posed by the socialist enterprise. I do not pretend to have solved these problems, because they cannot be solved in words, only in practice. In other words, I offer no blueprint of the socialist alternative, all neat and tidy. Rather than engage in such an exercise, I have tried to indicate what, in my view, socialism should now be taken to mean, what its problems are, and how they might be tackled.[44]

Many of the reactions to the book seemed to miss this, which was in essence the real point of the book. It was, however, understood by Sheila Rowbotham :

> ... Ralph Miliband brings an intensity of purpose to his subject which transcends reason. There is an intellectual courage about *Socialism for a Sceptical Age* which inspires. In a period when many people on the left have fallen silent, he does what he believes an intellectual should do, bring learning to bear on the problems facing humanity ...

She continued by explaining that she several times said 'but' to herself about things that he had said and that he had then answered some of her doubts. She disagreed with him on several issues, including state-society relations, red-green approaches, and new social movements. There were snags and gaps in the book, but:

> ... it is nonetheless an impressive achievement ... [I]t is a book that invites readers

to take up where he had to leave off. It is a profoundly democratic and social gift, a legacy to use in order to overcome the disassociation between present discontents with a rapacious and irrational capitalism and that battered old bogey, socialism. I put the book down still unsure how people are going to vote for Ralph Miliband's left democratic socialism, but absolutely convinced I could stand on any door step and say with complete honesty. 'This would be much, much better.' [45]

This, I suspect, is how Miliband would have wanted it to be read: as an honest attempt to think through as many of the problems as he could, as an exercise in persuasion, and as stimulus to further thought. One senses that he wanted it to provoke a debate and would have enjoyed participating in it.

Unfortunately, he was no longer there to do so by the time it was published. Within a month of his return from New York from the Socialist Scholars conference he was taken into hospital with further coronary problems and, although he saw the proofs of his book, he was unable to correct them. He died on 21 May and *Socialism for a Sceptical Age* appeared a few months later. The book was thus treated as his last testament rather than as an invitation to engage in discussion about the most important questions facing the world. He was, in effect, issuing a challenge both to those who believed that socialism was dead and to those who saw it as an unproblematic solution to all difficulties. This was a challenge to which there has not yet been an adequate response.

Notes

[1] Letter, n.d. August 1990.

[2] Benn, *Diaries 1980-90*, entry for 1 November 1990, p.607.

[3] Ibid., 6 Nov 1990, p.608.

[4] Letter to John Schwarzmantel, 24 November 1990.

[5] Letter to Fred Halliday, 2 February 1991. Fred Halliday is the author of *The World at 2000* (2000), *Nation and Religion in the Middle East* (1999), *Islam and the Myth of Confrontation : Religion and Politics in the Middle East* (1996) *Rethinking International Relations* (1994), *The Making of the Second Cold War* (1983), *Iran: Dictatorship and Development* (1979).

[6] *Socialism for a Sceptical Age*, (Polity Press, 1994) pp.41-2.

[7] Letter to Harry and Beadie Magdoff, 26 January 1991

[8] Letter from Harry Magdoff to Miliband, 22 August 1993; interview with Professor Eric Hobsbawm, 6 May 1999.

[9] Letter to Dorothy Benz, 17 June 1993.

[10] When, for example, Edward was working as an intern on the American journal, *The Nation*, before going to Oxford, Ralph found it difficult to believe that he could simply phone the CIA to ask if the Deputy Director had ever been to the Soviet Union. Letter to Saville, 27 February 1989.

[11] Interview with Lin Chun, 5 July 1999. Lin Chun is author of *The British New Left* (1993) and is now working on China.

[12] Letter to Katherine Kraft, 4 February 1994.

[13] Letter Jo Murphy, 4 October 1993.

[14] There was sombre note in this edition for Edward Thompson had died the previous August, and John Saville wrote about their collaboration in the past in 'Edward Thompson, the Communist Party and 1956'.

[15] 'Thirty Years of *The Socialist Register*', *SR 1994*, p.19.

[16] Notes for 'For – and Against – Utopia', 7 April 1994.

[17] p.2.

[18] pp. 4-5.

[19] pp.69-70.

[20] p.49.

[21] p.51.

[22] p.54.

[23] Marion had persuaded him to sign the Charter in a transatlantic phone call and he later regretted aligning himself with it, largely sharing Griffith's belief that collective as well as individual rights needed to be emphasised and that constitutional reform was insufficient without social and economic transformation. However, he also agreed with Hilary Wainwright's view that the Charter 'compels socialists to think harder about institutions and what the Webbs call a 'constitution for the socialist commonwealth'. (Letter to John Griffith, 31 March 1989). Raphael Samuel drew attention to the constant emphasis on constitutionalism in *Socialism for a Sceptical Age* in his review in *New Statesman*, 1 February 1995.

[24] Harold Laski: An Exemplary Public Intellectual', *NLR* 200, July/August 1993.

[25] Comments on draft by David Miliband, 17 August 1993.

[26] David Michael Smith, 'Ralph Miliband: Socialist for a Skeptical Age', *Socialism and Democracy* 9, 1 Spring 1995.

[27] Letter from Glyn to Miliband, 2 August 1993

[28] Michael Newman, 'The West European Left today: crisis, decline or renewal?' *Contemporary Politics*, Vol 1, 3, Autumn 1995.

[29] Socialism for a Sceptical Age, p.109.

[30] Ibid., pp.179-80.

[31] *SR 1974*, p. 296.

[32] 'Thirty Years of *The Socialist Register*', p.6.

[33] George Ross, *Jacques Delors and European Integration*, Polity Press 1995

[34] 'Confronting the New Europe', *NLR* 191, January-February 1992.

[35] Letter to Ross, 15 May 1992.

[36] Letter to David, 6 October 1992.

[37] Letter from Ross, n.d. October [?] 1993.

[38] Letter to Ross, 17 October 1993.

[39] Letter from John Griffith, 22 July 1993.

[40] Letter from Frances Fox Piven, 7 February 1992. Frances Fox Piven is the author of numerous books, including *Regulating the Poor: the Functions of Public Welfare* (1972*), Poor People's Movements: Why they Succeed, how they Fail* (1977), *The New Class War: Reagan's Attack on the Welfare State and its Consequencs* (1982), and (with *Richard Cloward) Why Americans Don't Vote* (1989), *Why Americans still don't vote: And why Politicians want it that Way* (2000), *The Breaking of the American Social Compact* (1997, and (with Harvey J. Kaye), *Are we Good Citizens?* (2001)

[41] Interview with Frances Fox Piven, 21 May 1999.

[42] 'Reflections on Ralph Miliband' *NLR* 206 July/August1994.

[43] Sally Jenkinson, *Political Quarterly*, Vol 66, 3 July-September1995; William Hampton, *Political Studies* 1996, p.406; Steve Rogowski, *Critical Social Policy* 50, 17 1997, Raphael Samuel, *New Statesman* 1 February 1995; David Michael Smith, *Socialism and Democracy*, Vol 9, 1 Spring 1995; Michael Newman, *Contemporary Politics* Vol 1, 3 Autumn 1995; Victor Wallis, *Monthly Review*, January 1996; John Gray, *THES*, 6 October 1995; Monty Johnstone, *New Times*, 4 February 1995.

[44] *Socialism for a Sceptical Age*, pp. 2-3.

[45] Unpublished review, n.d. (Miliband papers).

Conclusion: Ralph Miliband Today

The funeral fused the personal and political as befitted the man. John Saville and Leo Panitch spoke primarily of Miliband's socialism and his intellectual work, while David and Edward concentrated on his importance for them. Readings by Tony Benn, Tariq Ali and another family friend, Vania del Borgo , were from Brecht's 'Questions from a Worker who Reads', Dylan Thomas's 'And Death Shall Have no Dominion' and *The Sociological Imagination* by C.Wright Mills.

The anchor of his life had been his family and his partnership with Marion, which was why he had found the periods of separation in North America so difficult. Their partnership had always been based partly on shared political values and she had read and criticised virtually everything he wrote. But his relationships with his two sons also combined the personal with the political. People who sometimes found him uncompromising and daunting in public were amazed by his tenderness with his children when they were young. Having absolutely no interest in sport himself, he had learnt to discuss football, baseball and cricket so that he could communicate with them about their enthusiasms. And when they were older he spent hours with them talking about their work and problems, as he nurtured them into independence. Yet left-wing politics was also a bedrock in their relationship. The family discussed public affairs incessantly and he wrote to his two sons about the latest developments even when they were children. As he told Edward, after giving him his thoughts about the latest developments in the Labour Party, in a letter in November 1981:

> If anyone else read this and did not know the way we talk, or you talk, they would think I was crazy to be writing this to a twelve year old boy: but I know better, and find it very nice.[1]

Their shared passion for politics and the unusually equal relationship between parents and children made them an extremely close family. It was only after Ralph's death that David was to become Head of the Prime Minister's Policy Unit and Edward an adviser to the Chancellor of the Exchequer in the 1997 Labour Government.[2] But by 1994 it was already clear that they were moving in this direction. In one respect this might seem incongruous since Ralph had spent so much time denouncing Labour and urging the need for a new socialist movement. But in fact it was not surprising. For he always supported the Labour Party in elections and after the collapse of Communism he saw Social Democracy as the only available alternative to conservatism. He and Marion had given their sons a consuming interest in politics and since they sought practical careers rather than academic ones their trajectory was predictable. Furthermore,

he genuinely wanted his sons to make their own choices rather than adopting his views or following him into academic life. There would certainly have been disagreements about some of the policies of the Blair government, but there is no doubt about his pride in his sons' achievements and the shared values that united them.

John Saville's funeral speech pinpointed some of those values:

> Ralph Miliband was an intensely political person: indeed, of all the socialist intellectuals I know probably the most political. The news of his death will have greatly saddened political activists and socialist intellectuals round the world …
>
> There are many ways in which we shall remember Ralph: his contribution to socialist debate: the excellence and lucidity of his lectures: his constant generosity to those who sought his intellectual advice …
>
> Throughout his life Ralph retained a passionate opposition to social injustice and oppression, and … he never wavered. Age did not wither his commitment; the disillusionment that affects too many of our contemporaries – the fading of youthful idealism – this was not for him. He was always sober and realistic, and he always tried to see this rapidly changing world with clear eyes. He was never a Stalinist nor a social-democrat in the west European tradition. For him … the interpretation of political life, here and now, and in the future, was always difficult and debatable. 'We shall have to reinvent socialism' he said to me on one occasion in the early nineties when we were discussing the politics of Europe in those shattering days. Ralph always felt himself part of that long tradition of the minority which had stood against the cruelties and evils of the capitalist order in its long – its too long history … Ralph felt himself part of what the 17th century called 'The Good Old Cause' and it is … his life's commitment for which we shall remember him.

Three interrelated qualities were central in Miliband's life and work. The first was the depth of his socialist convictions. There are many socialist and Marxist writers whose original political formation was not in this tradition and whose work continues to owe much to their earlier beliefs. It is evident, for example, that neither of his mentors, Laski or Mills, had originally been socialists and their work continued to manifest traces of their earlier ideologies. For Miliband this was not so. By the age of sixteen, when he arrived in Britain as a refugee from Belgium, he was already thinking and writing as a Marxist of some kind, viewing capitalism as a system of class oppression and domination. His subsequent experiences in wartime London, Cambridge and the Navy strengthened and deepened those convictions. This meant that his socialist outlook was formed before he became an adult and was the central core of his being. He doubted much but he never doubted this. It was for this reason that he found it so puzzling when, from the early 1980s onwards, even those who regarded themselves as 'socialists' expressed such confusion about the nature and viability of the doctrine. Similarly, it was his solidity on these issues which impressed so many people who encountered him – particularly, but not solely, those who themselves sought

socialist answers to the problems of the world. However, he would not have attracted people in this way had he simply asserted his socialism, for his second defining characteristic was equally important: his independence, which meant constant questioning and openness. This was also related to the origins of his political development. For Miliband had not formed his views by joining a party and following guided discussions of Marxism so as to arrive at a pre-determined set of conclusions. He had made his own judgments through constant inter-action between his reading, his experience of the world, and his debates with others.[3] Having drawn his own conclusions from observations and reflection, he would never subsequently let others prejudge the interpretation of events for him. While the core of his socialism remained constant he would probe, inter-rogate, and sift the evidence in a ceaseless attempt to understand the world. For he insisted that his ideas must provide the most cogent and convincing expla-nations, not only for those who were already convinced, but for non-socialists who were prepared to assess the arguments. And he always believed that his own position must be tested against the evidence. But this was related to the third characteristic – his integrity. Although he refused to define socialism as a set of ethical beliefs, there was no doubt that he held his own views with absolute commitment and that they were rooted in a moral code. This was recognised by both his allies and his opponents. For the former he thus often acted as a kind of 'conscience', particularly when their own convictions were wavering, while the latter always recognised that his opinions and behaviour were based on a firm set of principles. It was this core of conviction, independence, openness and integrity that also made him an outstanding teacher.

His teaching role went well beyond the confines of the university. In a variety of organisations, movements, and meetings, both formal and informal, Mili-band raised the level of debate by focusing on the key questions and controver-sies, putting his own views forward and engaging in discussion to define the fun-damental issues. Sometimes his speeches were passionate – as, for example in the numerous protest meetings in which he denounced the Vietnam war; at other times, they concentrated on detail and strategic considerations – as within the Socialist Society. But even when he felt really strongly about a subject, his argu-ments were constructed meticulously. And whether he was speaking on a famil-iar topic or a new one, he was well-prepared and introduced fresh material on each occasion. Moreover, he was keen to engage with anyone who, he believed, was genuinely interested in seeking the truth rather than following a dogma. Thus, for example, his papers include a bizarre but interesting exchange with Sir Keith Joseph in 1977.

As a key figure in the Thatcherite wing of the Conservative Party, Joseph was hardly promising material for the Left. Nevertheless, Miliband attended a talk he delivered in Leeds and subsequently engaged him in discussion. Joseph was sufficiently interested to write to him afterwards to ask for some references on

the concept of 'socialist pluralism', emphasising that 'I am genuinely interested and not merely expressing an empty courtesy'.[4] Miliband replied:

> ... there is obviously no regime in the world today which exemplifies 'socialist pluralism' or 'socialist democracy'. It is perfectly true that 'socialist pluralism' is a project, something to be developed. It is what a lot of people on the left in France, Italy and Spain as well as England are trying to work out and bring about; and this also goes for such people as the signatories of Charter 77 in Czechoslovakia. If you were to say that this project is a fantasy, I would by definition be unable to <u>prove</u> that it is not. If you were to say that it is very difficult to realise, I would of course agree, and so would any serious socialist.[5]

At this point he expressed the view that Joseph might be too deeply committed to 'free enterprise' to take the discussion seriously but: 'If I am wrong there is a lot of stuff to work through'. In this, and a subsequent letter after a further response from Joseph, he explained the indictment of capitalism while acknowledging the uncertainty about the realisation of socialist pluralism. And it was only after a final letter from Joseph on 23 June which justified neo-liberalism and argued that the socialist project was 'a hopeless task' that Miliband made no further reply, perhaps realising that the truly hopeless task was the conversion of a Thatcherite ideologue. But the episode illustrates the way in which Miliband was prepared to take on a leading radical Right intellectual in argument instead of simply denouncing him in polemical terms.

But Miliband's primary role as a teacher was, of course, in the academy and he expressed his credo about this vocation in his inaugural address at Leeds University in October 1974. In one passage he discussed the way in which right-wing ideas should be taught. Having pointed out that the notion of non-committed, non partisan teaching was an illusion, he continued:

> But this does not mean that one should not try, in the full consciousness of one's bias, to present as well as one knows how, and even as persuasively as possible, alternative and opposed views to one's own. If I am discussing the conservative style of politics, I ought to make students aware of, say, Burke's indictment of the French Revolution and of radicalism, and to present them with his case for the politics of tradition; and to show them what may be made of it in our own day. It is only after I have done this that I may properly suggest what I think are the weaknesses of the case.

With regard to left-wing ideas:

> In the same vein I think that teachers of politics are required to engage in the criticism of their own arguments and indeed to help students to see what may be said against those arguments. This is one of the major differences between the academic platform and the political platform.
> ... [T]eaching politics, if one is on the left requires an intransigent probing of all

matters which form part of the socialist agenda ... as part of the attempt to build what has so long been lacking, namely a radically-oriented, critical and demystifying discipline of political studies.

His impact upon left-wing students was immense and for those who followed in his footsteps and became university teachers of politics themselves, the influence was particularly important. David Coates paid a moving tribute to this in a talk at Leeds University shortly after Miliband's death:

> When I arrived at university in 1964, there were only two easily obtainable introductions to Marxism available to left-wing undergraduates: a sympathetic one by C.Wright Mills ... and a Cold War text edited by Carew Hunt. Politics teaching in the UK in the early 1960s ... was dominated by the conservative and mediocre, locked in a cold war vice which shut off whole areas of scholarship and debate. There was no space for left-wing scholarship. Its concerns, its theoretical traditions, and its modes of argument, were denied legitimacy. Ralph Miliband was one of that key generation of UK intellectuals who changed all that.
>
> It was the sheer power and brilliance of the Miliband material, and the work of other leading socialist academics of his generation (people like John Saville, Edward Thompson, and Eric Hobsbawm) which then won for those of us born a generation later, the space to study left-wing theory and develop left-wing arguments again. *Parliamentary Socialism* was my bible on the Labour Party for years; and shaped everything I subsequently wrote on Labourism. The *State* book was (and indeed remains) a model of how to anchor left-wing analysis in solid empirical data. Both texts carved out a clear road along which many undergraduates were able to travel from their starting point in conventional thinking to a serious understanding of the true nature of capitalism and its supporting institutions. Ralph's work recruited students to socialism by its scrupulous respect for evidence and detail, by the clarity and directness of its arguments, and by the sheer passion and conviction that underpinned it ... Ralph Miliband stood out as a beacon and as a reference point. The nicest review I ever received simply said that I was re-working the Miliband thesis, that I was one of the Milibandetti. I still hope I am.[6]

Yet the remarkable point about Miliband's impact as a teacher is that it was not simply those who followed in his footsteps, or even those who were on the Left, who were inspired by him. Numerous letters from his past students confirm that he changed people's lives by making them think in entirely new ways and that this had been a continuing influence. One letter from a Canadian student whom he taught at a summer school in Carleton University, provides a particularly clear impression of his approach:

> I was finishing up my MA at the time, and though I had come to Carleton as a liberal, by that point I was pretty much looking for an alternative. Still, I didn't want to give up my liberal-reformist politics without a fight – and I took that fight into Ralph Miliband's class ... Anyway, I remember at one point challenging the

marxist thesis about the centrality of capital in orienting politics by raising the Galbraithian counter that in advanced industrial societies, ownership of capital is separated from control, etc.... I remember that a number of the people in the class jumped on me ... urging Miliband to ignore me and get on with more important things. But he was very quick to quiet them, and responded that the Galbraithian view was an important one, and had to be met with reasoned arguments. He then proceeded to do that in considerable detail ... I was very struck by the degree of respect he showed me. And that was the moment, I think, in which I realised ... that one didn't have to sacrifice intellectual rigour or moral integrity to work within the marxian tradition.[7]

Others, who did not remain in a left-wing tradition at all, simply recalled his role in building their confidence and helping them to understand the complexity of the problems. However, his brilliance as a teacher did not mean that everybody found him easy. His personality was so powerful that some could find him intimidating and those who were not prepared to do the work he expected could be given a hard time.

He was equally demanding of himself and at one time even graded his own lectures: there were several marks of C+ marks and B- but none of A! Yet however well he prepared and delivered his academic and political talks, and however much he inspired people, by the 1970s he ceased to value this work – or value it sufficiently. Katherine Kraft, one of his Boston friends, recognised this problem and told him:

> ... on a personal level your advice, criticism, and encouragement are highly valued. You are part of many people's 'inner forum' ... Whether or not you feel yourself worthy of these expectations is a separate question: the fact is that your work, and you, have made and will continue to make a big difference to a community of people ... I think you and maybe most men underestimate the importance of personal influence, of mentorship or colleagueship. Or if you realize its importance in the abstract, you don't really feel it at a gut level, or give yourself credit for it. It doesn't carry equal weight with publications in your mind, but it should.[8]

She was, he replied, correct in thinking that he devalued personal influence, but he would not accept that this was as important as the written word:

> Of course it is important that one should behave as if personal impact mattered, and do one's best for students, or an audience, or friends ...; but I must admit that I don't attach nearly as much importance to this as to the written word. I have often given a very good lecture, or at least a lecture that was very well received by the audience (not the same thing), and have felt not at all pleased at my 'performance' – I hate that word. I know I can 'perform' well with an audience quite often, but find it in some ways demeaning to do so; and the fact that a 'performance' depends on style at least as much on substance, probably more, is not an agreeable

thought.[9]

She tried again:

> It's too bad you feel as you do about public talks in relation to writing. I ... don't see the two as quite so unrelated as you seem to. The goal is the same: to reach an audience and expand their understanding. Some people respond best to the written word, others to spoken remarks, and yet others to a combination. It doesn't seem demeaning – to me – to try and engage people's interest, attention, and intellect through an enthusiastic, witty presentation. (This assumes you believe what you are telling the listeners, of course). As a reader/listener, I am distrustful of the cold, dispassionate approach to writing and speaking. I always wonder what motivates such authors, and what they really care about, if anything, and whether they believe what they are putting forth, and how much thought went into it all. I like to feel a human presence in whatever I'm reading or listening to, and by that I mean a fully-engaged presence, not disembodied intellectual.[10]

These were highly pertinent observations, but he did not reply and was obviously not convinced. This is a pity because it meant that he under-valued some of his most outstanding qualities. He no longer appeared to recall his own words at the time of Laski's death:

> Yet, underneath all he said, there was ever present, the passionate conviction that what men had thought mattered, that the answers they had given to the problems of their time had meaning for us, and that their blindness, no less than their wisdom, held lessons; that we in this hall were engaged in a fine adventure of evocation ... No subject with which he dealt could be dull and no audience could fail to come alive at his contact ... His lectures taught more, much more than political science. They taught a faith that ideas mattered, that knowledge was important and its pursuit exciting.[11]

Had Miliband remembered the nature of this influence over himself and countless others, he might not have dismissed the personal and social importance of his own teaching for, in this respect, he was certainly Laski's heir. However, he judged himself by only two criteria: his practical and theoretical contribution to the realisation of socialism.

How important were practical political initiatives for Miliband himself and how much weight should be given to them in evaluating his work? It is evident that he could not have acted as an 'ivory tower' socialist. Because his convictions were so deep-seated he was never content simply to interpret the world – he always wanted to help change it. Nor could he believe that his teaching and writing were *sufficient* contributions to this task. Hence his constant involvement in socialist projects: the Bevanite Left, Victory for Socialism, the New Left, Centres for Socialist Education, Centres for Marxist Education, the long

quest for a new socialist party, the Socialist Society, the Independent Left Corresponding Society, the Socialist Movement, and numerous other campaigns and initiatives. Moreover, when engaged in these movements, he always took them seriously, sitting through committee meetings and taking on tasks. Thus, for example, while other 'big names' on the Left were involved in establishing the Socialist Society, only he remained deeply involved in it. Similarly, while others dropped in and out of the meetings with Benn, he stayed the course, attending and advising whenever he was in Britain. On one reading of the evidence, he thus emerges as an indefatigable activist with great staying power. There is validity in this interpretation, but it is also profoundly misleading. For he actually found it exceedingly difficult to work in organisations, resenting the time away from his writing. His initial enthusiasm normally waned when the initiative did not 'take off' as he had hoped, and when the routine administrative chores and personality clashes became dominant. He continued to play a role because he felt that he must – not because he enjoyed this kind of activity. He was happy to speak, debate, and write policy statements, but normally found meetings and organisational work very tiresome. He liked new initiatives, but he was not the kind of activist who actually found it satisfying to nurture them over time.

It is highly significant that the only project that he maintained over a really long period was the *Socialist Register*. Even in this work, he found the drudgery of the publication process galling and the role of John Saville, and later Leo Panitch, was very important in this respect. But the fact that this was an intellectual venture meant that he was prepared to devote himself to it. His aspiration to provide a forum for the very best socialist writing, which he again tended to grade from A to C, gave him the staying power to maintain an annual volume for thirty years. No doubt his original ambitions for the *Register* were a little unrealistic, for he appeared to believe that an independent Marxist journal could introduce a really significant socialist presence to counteract the dominance of Social Democracy and Communism. Yet it was this utopian streak which induced him to seek authors from across the world to make it an outstanding vehicle for engaged socialist writing. It must therefore have been particularly gratifying in December 1993 when Perry Anderson told him that it had been an extraordinary achievement to have maintained such a fine annual for three decades, and that it had shown up the weaknesses and inconsistences in *New Left Review*.[12] But if *Socialist Register* is an enduring monument to his work, what verdict should be given to the other more ephemeral movements to which he gave his time – initiatives which, in one form or another, were the embodiment of his hopes for an eventual new socialist party?

It is, of course, quite possible to pronounce a harsh and negative judgment. In Britain the years of 'Thatcherism' eventually produced 'New Labour', confining the kind of independent socialism that Miliband represented to the margins of political life. And, more generally, the global embrace of the market and the

world ascendancy of the American state, seem to have made socialism itself a lesser presence at the beginning of the twenty-first century than at almost any time in the twentieth. It might therefore be argued that Miliband was wasting his time: instead of all those attempts to kick-start a new socialist movement, he should have concentrated on writing his books. But the weakness of this argument is evident if the same logic is followed a little further. For, on these assumptions, it would appear equally obvious that he should not have bothered to write socialist books either – he should have devoted his energies to promoting the 'third way' or even the virtues of neo-liberalism! This, of course, is nonsense. However, it is also clear that his participation in the initiatives cannot be dismissed, for his activity was organically linked to his thinking. Through his writing and his participation in these extra-parliamentary initiatives he was trying to advance – and later, maintain – socialism as he understood it. Miliband cannot be judged in relation to the current global hegemony of capitalism, but by the distinctiveness and quality of the socialist alternative he sought to promote. If such a judgment is attempted in the terms that he himself set, it is evident that these are stringent criteria.

Miliband would never allow the publication of a Festschrift in his honour and even when he was dying in hospital in May 1994 he tried to dissuade Leo Panitch and Ellen Wood from producing such a volume. The reasons for his reluctance to accept an honour of this kind are important. There were, he argued, a few thinkers who, in Philip Rieff's words about Freud, had 'disturbed the sleep of mankind'.[13] Marx was obviously one such figure and, in the world of physics, Einstein was another. In twentieth century political thought Miliband included Lenin in this category and, perhaps more surprisingly, Sartre particularly because of his monumental biography of Flaubert. Naturally, he would not rank himself with any of these 'giants'. But there was also a somewhat lower category of socialist thinkers who, he believed, had made a really significant contribution: Laski was an 'exemplary public intellectual' and, subsequently, C.Wright Mills, Edward Thompson and Perry Anderson were also extremely important. But, in Miliband's own opinion, he was not on the same level as these figures and was therefore not worthy of a Festschrift. I want to dispute his self-evaluation and argue that he has indeed made a significant contribution to socialist thought, which has enduring relevance.

One element in assessing this must be the 'resonance'of his writing. In this respect, it is evident that his first two books were key works. Parliamentary Socialism spoke to so many in the 1960s who saw 'labourism' as a betrayal of socialism that it was undoubtedly a book for the age. Yet it was much more than this. It was the most probing critique of the Labour Party that has ever been published and it had wider implications for evaluating Social Democracy as a whole. It has also stood the test of time so that, for example, an invitation by the Political Studies Association to submit papers for a conference on 'Interpreta-

tions of Labour' in July 2001 began:

> Students of Labour in Britain are confronted by a variety of interpretative approaches offered by both political and historical analysts. For 40 years the critique associated with Ralph Miliband's work has influenced perceptions of Labour.[14]

Similarly, *The State in Capitalist Society* was a book for a generation which was challenging the existing status quo, but was also searching for a cogent interpretation of the system of hierarchy and power. And, once again, it is a text which continues to provide a compelling left-wing analysis more than thirty years after its original publication. Furthermore, the Miliband-Poulantzas debate was revisited in a major conference in New York in 1997. But resonance is not in itself evidence of the quality of a contribution. Vogue books can sometimes be created by politicians or parties for whom an intellectual rationale is useful. Important works may be ignored because they are saying something that goes against the prevailing climate of opinion – even amongst the groups that the author is trying to reach. Endurance is obviously a better test, but it is difficult to endure if the work has not made an initial impact. Thus Miliband's later writings have received much less attention than they deserve because of the political ethos of the era. In particular, this affected *Marxism and Politics* and *Socialism for a Sceptical Age*, the former appearing in 1977 as the tide was turning against the Left, and the latter in 1994 when Tony Blair had already become leader of the Labour Party and was gaining support for a very different alternative to Conservatism. But *Marxism and Politics* may be his most outstanding book, and *Socialism for a Sceptical Age* is a courageous and important reaffirmation of the case for socialism. Yet if the more limited impact of Miliband's later works is not necessarily a reflection of their quality, nor can it be dismissed as irrelevant. For he was attempting to demonstrate that the socialist case was as strong as ever: if he failed to carry conviction he was failing in the task he set himself. Had he any responsibility for this failure or was it entirely attributable to the character of the times? There were, I believe, weaknesses in two of his books, *Capitalist Democracy in Britain* and *Divided Societies*.

Capitalist Democracy was a demonstration of the limitations of liberal-democracy and a warning against the authoritarianism which was developing within it. Miliband was unfortunate in that, just before the publication of the book, the Falklands War reinforced Thatcher's popularity and hold on power. But even before this it was obvious that the Conservative government was dismantling the post-war consensus and constructing a radical right-wing regime within the existing political system. Miliband's discussion of the development of 'capitalist democracy' over the past century was, as always, powerfully argued but, as an analysis of the specific features of Thatcherism, it was inadequate. Moreover, it provided no guidance as to the way in which the radical Right

might be defeated. This meant that it had very little resonance. But nor was it outstandingly original in its insights and interpretation. This does not mean that it is without value: as a brief critique of the British political system and the way in which it is ideologically legitimised it remains extremely useful. However, it does not represent a really significant advance on the explanatory categories that Miliband had developed in his earlier works.

The weaknesses of *Divided Societies* are different. At a time when many on the Left were turning away from class analysis, this was a very relevant attempt to reaffirm its centrality in the interpretation of capitalism. Furthermore, the argument that class is an objective structural feature of contemporary societies, whatever the subjective consciousness of individuals or whole groups, is a convincing refutation of a whole range of alternative theories. However, the book has some flaws which certainly lessened its impact. By interpreting its terms of reference in the widest possible sense, so as to include lengthy historical discussions and interpretations of the East-West conflict, it diluted the focus and also gave the impression that old battles were being refought. Moreover, instead of exploring the strengths and potential of new social movements while pointing out their limitations, Miliband provided a rather strident and provocative critique which was more likely to alienate those that he was trying to convince than to win them over. Nor was the analysis of class itself sufficiently distinctive to make *Divided Societies* a major socialist text.

What then is important about Miliband's body of writing? The first point, which is far from negligible, is the style itself. As Ellen Wood noted just after he died:

> ... the distinctiveness of Ralph Miliband's intellectual style has always been essential to his substance and to the qualities that have continued to be such a vital resource for the socialist left, making his death such a serious blow. That style represented a project. It testified to a specific conception of the task confronting socialist intellectuals. And it may be no exaggeration to say that this style and this project distinguish Miliband from all other major socialist intellectuals of his generation.[15]

Miliband's first criticism of Poulantzas in his review in 1973 had been as follows:

> It is a pity that the book is so obscurely written for any reader who has not become familiar through painful initiation with the particular linguistic code and mode of exposition of the Althusserian school to which Poulantzas relates. But too much ought not to be made of this: serious Marxist work on the state and on political theory in general is still sufficiently uncommon to make poor exposition a secondary defect – though the sooner it is remedied, the more likely it is that a Marxist tradition of political analysis will now be encouraged to take root.[16]

A similar point can be made in reverse: Miliband's elegant and persuasive style was not sufficient in itself to make his work important, but it certainly did much to broaden the appeal of critical socialist analysis. But this was not, of course, simply because of the elegance of the writing. It was also because the critique was embedded in detailed empirical evidence that the potentially sceptical reader could not ignore.

The second key aspect in any evaluation of his significance is that he was almost alone in working in the field of *political analysis*. There have been several important Marxist historians in post-war Britain and there have been significant writers in such spheres as cultural studies, feminism, philosophy and economics. But there has been no other comparable figure whose main concern has been political power. When Miliband regarded his own work as less important than that of Thompson or Anderson, he was making an inappropriate comparison: they were writing outstanding history, but were not undertaking sustained work on the nature and problems of democracy within capitalism and socialism. Miliband's Ph.D. thesis on popular thought in the French revolution shows that he was capable of producing books of the highest quality on the history of political ideas, but he chose not to do so. It is perhaps more difficult to provide inspirational writing on power than on past historical struggles, but not less important. What, then, were the most significant and enduring themes in his writing?

One unique quality was his ability to combine a passionate commitment with the most sober reflection. Most left-wing socialists, and certainly most Marxist revolutionaries, allow themselves to carried away by their emotions at some point. Either they discern the embryo of a post-capitalist utopia in one of the existing socialist countries – Stalin's Soviet Union, Mao's China, Castro's Cuba – or they refuse to accept that existing regimes have any relevance at all. Thus Trotskyists are inclined to believe that all would have been well had Stalin not betrayed the revolution, while others appear content to assume that the abolition of capitalism will resolve all the important problems. At the other extreme are those who proclaim socialism as a wonderful idea, but only ever think of limited practical reforms. Miliband's distinctiveness was his resolute refusal to accept any of these perspectives. It was, he insisted, dangerous folly to embrace an existing regime as a model or to refuse to think about the problems of a post-capitalist system; but he was equally insistent that limited concessions would never lead to socialism or even change the fundamental injustices of capitalism. He was quite prepared to be regarded as a tepid reformer by the advocates of revolution or as a 'utopian' by the proponents of reform. In fact he was neither, but he was convinced that a genuine socialist commitment must mean neither irrational revolutionary illusions nor the abandonment of a long-term project of transformation in the name of 'realism'. This was closely related to another distinctive quality of his work: his constant attempt to incorporate the lessons of historical and current experience into his thinking. This quality is particularly

evident in *Marxism and Politics* and *Socialism for a Sceptical Age* and explains their enduring importance despite their limited resonance. But it is a feature of the whole of his work – even short book reviews. Perhaps the most significant specific element in this general approach was his attempt to define a synthesis between socialism and democracy.

There is an inevitable tension in socialist analyses of liberal democracies. Are the inequality and class oppression the most important features of such societies? Or are the democratic aspects so significant as to constitute their defining characteristics? Miliband's own term, 'capitalist democracy', was intended to indicate the coexistence of the two elements and throughout his adult life he attached importance to both of them. However, his views certainly developed as a result of his reading of history and contemporary developments. Until 1968 the indictment of capitalism was the more dominant theme in his work, and he also tended to believe that there was a good chance that the Soviet Union would gradually evolve politically. After this the balance changed. The democratic elements within liberal-democracy assumed an increasing importance in his analysis while – except during the Gorbachev years – he came to regard all the existing 'socialist' states as bureaucratic collectivist regimes. *The State in Capitalist Society* contained internal contradictions, particularly in the concluding chapter, because it was started in the first period and completed in the aftermath of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. But from the early 1970s his emphasis on democracy became ever more pronounced. The political freedoms within capitalist democracy were, he argued, profoundly inadequate but essential for all systems. Socialism could never be regarded as an advance on a regime which had previously been a capitalist democracy unless such freedoms were not only maintained but vastly extended. But he did not simply say this – he grappled with the problems in an entirely distinctive way. He insisted that it was necessary to maintain an effective state in both capitalist and post-capitalist regimes, for this was the only instrument for the establishment of measures to enhance equality and to maintain social justice. But it was vital that there should also be a whole range of organisations, institutions and movements in civil society whatever the nature of the regime. In existing capitalist societies these were vehicles through which the system could be challenged and pushed, but they were also an integral part of socialist democracy. Socialism, he argued, could only come about in the advanced capitalist societies if a genuinely radical party was elected on a popular vote and sustained by a whole range of movements outside the control of the new government but sharing many of its purposes. In such circumstances it was possible to conceive of a system of 'dual power' in which non-governmental movements simultaneously complemented and challenged the elected leaders. And in a socialist system a vibrant civil society would remain essential to ensure that a pluralist democracy could be created: indeed it could only be regarded as socialism if this were the case.

Such themes about the interrelationships between democracy, capitalism and socialism formed a dominant element in all Miliband's later work, and in his final book, *Socialism for a Sceptical Age*, he developed them further, attempting to delineate the institutional relationships that would be necessary within a socialist democracy. While always insisting that it was misleading to regard all the freedoms within capitalist democracy as emanating from the liberal tradition because so many of them had been forged by popular pressures, he was quite explicit in regarding them as an integral part of *any* democratic system. Of course there were other Marxists who believed that socialism must be democratic, but Miliband's contribution is distinctive both because it was central to his work and because of the synthesis that he sought between two theoretical traditions. On the one hand he accepted the Marxist claim that it was utopian to produce a blueprint for a socialist society and that many of its characteristics would be determined by social, economic, ideological and political forces which could not be predicted. On the other hand, he was adamant that history and reason provided some very clear lessons about the need to control and divide power. The influence of liberalism on these judgments is quite evident and this is why his work is so important. Socialists can, if they wish, scrutinise and reinterpret the texts to argue that Marx and Engels said all that was important on the subjects of democracy and freedom. Yet it is surely far more convincing to suggest that Marxism offers a devastating analysis and critique of capitalism but that it needs to incorporate liberalism if other forms of oppression are to be avoided? Miliband did not explicitly say that he was doing this, but there is no doubt that he was really importing liberal concepts into his analysis. As he once told the political theorist, John Dunn:

> Oddly, perhaps, I don't myself reject the concept of totalitarianism or of totalitarian democracy … I don't use the term 'totalitarianism' because it has turned into a Cold War concept and is used by all the wrong people; but in so far as it betokens a will on the part of rulers to impose a code of conduct and thought in all spheres of life, and therefore to control the totality of life, it seems to me to be apposite. Stalin's Russia was in this sense totalitarian. So was Hitler's Germany. So is Khomeini's Iran, though I am less certain about this last. To my mind, the question is not one of effectiveness (totalitarianism never fully succeeds), but of purpose.[17]

It was the fact that he interpreted power in this way that made his work so rich and so persuasive for those both inside and outside the Marxist perspective.

Because he dealt with issues of democracy and pluralism so often, the liberal influences are not difficult to detect. But these are part of a far more subtle and elusive aspect of his thinking, which was made explicit in an essay he wrote in 1979. The subject was a very unusual one for him to address: the philosophy of history.[18] His main concern was with various questions in relation to the role of the individual in history and the degree to which individuals, singly or in small

groups, can significantly affect the historical process. He rejected existing Marxist interpretations of the subject but agreed that over a very long period – or what he called 'transgenerational history' – individuals and groups had very little impact. For example, they had little influence on the transition from feudalism to capitalism, which needs to be explained in terms of impersonal economic, social and political forces. However, over a much shorter period of perhaps a hundred years or so – 'generational history' – individuals and groups could have a major impact, particularly in periods of instability when a dominant class or combination of classes was insecure in its hold over society. Transgenerational history provides a framework in which the actions, events and episodes of generational history occur but:

> Insofar as individuals are concerned to help shape the future at all and to 'make a difference', the fact that long-range historical processes are beyond their control is not very likely to affect their attitudes and actions in the slightest degree. The *relevant* historical processes are not 'determined' in such a way as to turn individuals into mere executants of impersonal forces and into 'bearers' of processes over which they have no influence. On any reasonable reckoning, there is enough 'openness' in generational history to make the actions of individuals count and their involvement meaningful and significant. In generational history, individuals always enjoy a certain degree of autonomy: the constraints upon them are real enough, but not totally compelling or imprisoning or paralysing.[19]

This passage encapsulates the nature of Miliband's work and its distinctiveness.

The first important element is the timescale on which he was working. Socialism, he believed, was a transgenerational project. It was for this reason that he always regarded it as a 'long haul' but never allowed himself to doubt its eventual triumph. This conviction infused his writing and helped make it so compelling. Secondly, he was arguing that social structures and systems circumscribed the range of possibilities in an era, irrespective of the consciousness of particular actors. But, thirdly, there was considerable scope for individuals and groups to make a difference: their own beliefs, judgments and determination could affect the history of the times in which they lived. In this respect, the present was characterised by indeterminacy and contingency. This explains the whole character of his thinking.

His work has always left questions unanswered. *Parliamentary Socialism* was clearly condemning the Labour Party for its excessive preoccupation with constitutionalism, but was it also arguing that fundamental change could not be brought about by constitutional means? Was *The State in Capitalist Society* suggesting that the state was *bound* to act in certain ways because of the structures and processes of the system and the personnel in key positions, or was he saying that the weight of capitalist power would make it *very difficult* for it to act in any other way? Marxist and non-Marxist critics of his work were often frustrated by

his refusal to clarify such issues, arguing that this showed that his writing was insufficiently theoretical. But a crucial aspect of his thinking was his belief that it was impossible to be sure about such matters. The crux of his argument against Poulantzas was thus contained in the passage quoted above when he stated that individuals were not 'mere executants of impersonal forces' and 'bearers' of processes over which they had no influence. What he was certainly saying in *Parliamentary Socialism* was that it was impossible to establish socialism in Britain unless the Labour Party genuinely believed that this was the goal. If it possessed this belief, and also intelligence, determination and popular support, it was impossible to predict exactly what might happen. And he maintained this position about reform and revolution for the rest of his life, refusing to accept the position of any of the Marxist groups that were certain that peaceful change was impossible. Similarly, he rejected the assumptions that all right-wing politicians were the same or that capitalists would *inevitably* accept Fascism or dictatorship in a situation of crisis. Thus he never doubted that the whole character of British policy towards Nazism had changed once Churchill replaced Chamberlain and, despite reservations about his preference for personal power, he always saw de Gaulle as a very considerable figure. Naturally, political leaders of both the Left and Right would be influenced by the forces they represented and the pressures upon them, but he was convinced that their characters and beliefs also influenced their decisions and behaviour.[20]

There is little doubt that people have often been attracted to Marxism because – particularly when mediated and interpreted by one of the revolutionary groups – it has appeared to offer certainty. There are also academics who seem to regard theory as a means of explaining everything and closing debate – preferably in opaque and obscure jargon. Miliband has little to say to either of these categories – except, of course, that they are wrong! But to those who think that a framework of interpretation must be combined with an acceptance of indeterminacy and contingency, his work speaks volumes – and not only to Marxists.

There is one final way in which his essay on the philosophy of history explains his outlook, not only in his writing but also in his initiatives to establish a new socialist movement or party. Since Miliband was a realist in so many respects these efforts may appear paradoxical. Why did he believe that a new socialist movement could be established? And why did he think that it could avoid all the errors of Social Democracy, Communism, and the ultra-Left groups? The notion of contingency again provides much of the answer. If transgenerational history made socialism a possibility, there must be a space for such a party; and if the flaws in the existing formations were the result of human errors rather than structural determination, it must also be possible to create a movement which would choose socialism. Of course, this was a rather optimistic interpretation of the possibilities, but it was consistent with his overall outlook.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century the situation may appear bleak

for socialists and some have argued that there are no longer any prospects for fundamental change. They may be right, but such judgments about the human condition are inevitably subjective and based on selective interpretations of the trends. Much therefore depends upon the temperament and character of the individual who is providing the analysis. For twenty years, in person and correspondence, Miliband debated the state of the world with the social theorist Zygmunt Bauman. According to Bauman the real difference between them was that Miliband was always looking for the silver lining while he was looking for the clouds![21] If the cause of socialism is to be advanced it is vital that people continue to search for the silver linings. Of course, they should do so in full awareness that the weather is generally unsettled with the possibility of storms. Ralph Miliband viewed the world in this way and influenced countless others to share his vision. His enduring importance is his unique combination of realism and necessary utopianism. His words on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of *New Left Review* remain as powerful today as they were in 1985:

> One of the most commonly heard slogans on the Left these days is 'Pessimism of the intelligence, optimism of the will'… It is readily taken on the Left to enshrine the only wisdom appropriate to the present epoch: it is in fact an exceedingly bad slogan for socialists. For it tells us that reason dictates the conviction that nothing is likely to work out as it should, that defeat is much more likely than success, that the hope of creating a social order free from exploitation and domination is probably illusory; but that we must nevertheless strive towards it, against all odds, in a mood of resolute despair. It is a 'noble' slogan, born of romantic pathos, but without even the merit of plausibility: for there is not likely to be much striving if intelligence tells us that the enterprise is vain, hopeless, doomed.…
>
> Twenty-five years ago, when this Review came into being, there was no thought among those who started it that they were standing on an historical escalator that was inevitably carrying them to the promised land of an easy-to-realize socialism. But neither was there any sense that the socialist enterprise, the project of creating a cooperative, democratic, egalitarian society, was illusory. Nor, for all the hard knocks which the socialist cause has taken in the last twenty-five years, is there any good reason to believe this now.[22]

Notes

[1] Miliband to Edward (who was not yet twelve), 27 November 1981.

[2] David became MP for South Shields in the General Election in 2001. In his maiden speech, on 25 June 2001, stressing the need for multiculturalism and social inclusion, he recalled that one of his predecessors as MP for the constituency had been Chuter Ede, who had refused to allow his grandfather, Sam Miliband, permission to stay in Britain.

[3] He may have participated in discussions in Belgium in the Hashomer Hazair in 1939-40 and in Communist controlled groups in Cambridge, but their influence over his development was very marginal.

[4] Letter from Keith Joseph to Miliband, 21 March 1977

[5] Letter to Joseph, 28 March 1977.

[6] David Coates is the author of several books, including *The Labour Party and the Struggle for Socialism* (1975), *Labour in Power? A Study of the Labour Government, 1974-79* (1980), *The Question of UK decline: State, Society and Economy* (1994), and *Models of Capitalism: Growth and Stagnation in the Modern Era* (2000).

[7] Letter from Mark Neufeld to Leo Panitch, 2 June 1994, also quoted in Panitch, 'Ralph Miliband'.

[8] Letter from Katherine Kraft to Miliband, 26 March 1983.

[9] Letter to Katherine Kraft, 15 April 1983.

[10] Letter from Katherine Kraft to Miliband, 25 April 1983.

[11] 'Harold J. Laski' *Clare Market Review* , 46 (1) Michaelmas 1950

[12] Letter from Perry Anderson, 19 December 1993.

[13] Philip Rieff, *Freud: The Mind of a Moralist* (Gollancz, 1960).

[14] 'PSA Labour Movements Specialist Group Conference: Interpretations of Labour. Advance notice and call for papers for a conference on 6 July 2001.

[15] Ellen Wood, 'The Common Sense of Socialism', *Radical Philosophy* 68, Autumn 1994.

[16] 'The Capitalist State' in *Class Power and State Power*, p.36

[17] Letter to John Dunn, 6 April 1982.

[18] 'Political Action, Determinism and Contigency', originally published in M.Zeitlin (ed.) *Political Power and Social Theory*, Research Annual, Vol 1, Greenwich, Conn: JAI Press Inc, 1980 and re-published as Chapter 7 in *Class Power and State Power*.

[19] Ibid., in *Class Power and State Power*, pp.149-50

[20] This view was also expressed beautifully in another historical piece: 'Barnarve: A Case of Bourgeois Class Consciousness' in I.Meszaros, (ed.) *Aspects of History and Class Consciousness*, Routledge and Kegan Paul 1971.

[21] Interview with Zygmunt Bauman, 20 November 1999

[22] 'The New Revisionism in Britain' *NLR* 150 1985, p.26.

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1. Primary Sources

a)   The Miliband Papers (Private Collection)

Miliband saved a vast amount of correspondence (both his own and letters from other people), and his papers also include diary extracts and reflections on events, lecture notes, the papers of organisations with which he was involved, and press cuttings. The material from his childhood in Belgium and the period from 1946 until 1958 is rather sparse. However, it is a very rich collection and has been the major primary source for this book.

b)   Other Private Correspondence

The following also lent private correspondence from their papers:
Paul Breines
Nan Keen
Katherine Kraft
John Saville
Evi Wolgemuth

The Library of Congress copied the correspondence from the Martha Dodds papers.

c)   Other Collections and Papers

(i)   Home Office Files on the naturalisation of Miliband and his parents to which access was provided by the Home Office Record Management Services.
(ii)   The Jo Richardson papers at the Labour History Archive and Study Centre at the John Ryland Library at the University of Manchester were a useful source for Miliband's role on the Labour Left in the 1950s, particularly in 'Victory for Socialism'.
(iii)   Ralph Miliband's Personal File at the London School of Economics and Political Science provided details on his career at LSE.
(iv)   The examiners' report on Ralph Miliband's Ph.D. examination in 1956 at the University of London.
(v)   The full CD-ROM version of Tony Benn's diaries which were a key source for the Independent Left Corresponding Society and developments on the Left in the 1980s.

d)   Interviews

The following family members and close friends were interviewed more than once and were key sources:
Harry Keen, Nan Keen, Marion Kozak, Edward Miliband, David Miliband, Leo Panitch, John Saville

Other interviews:

Ian Aitken, Tariq Ali, Perry Anderson, Clyde Barrow, Zygmunt Bauman, Frank Bealey, Tony Benn, Norman Birnbaum, Mary Blumenau, Ann Bohm, Paul Breines, Lin Chun, Dick Clements, Ken Coates, Marshall Cohen, Marnie Samuelson Crawford, Bernard Crick, Michael Foot, Chris Freeman, Bernie Gillman, Walter Goldstein, Linda Gordon, John Griffith, Justin Grossman, Laurence Harris, Eric Hobsbawm, Allen Hunter, Eileen Jaffe, Roy Jaffe, Mervyn Jones, Paul Joseph, Robbi Pfeufer Kahn, K.S.Karol, Ira Katznelson, Leszek Kolakowski, Hadassa Kosak, Katherine Kraft, Richard Kuper, Geoffrey Last, Kari Polyani Levitt, Arthur MacEwan, Norman Mackenzie, Harry Magdoff, Ann Marcus, Margie Mendell, Mike Miller, Claus Moser, Bertell Ollman, Bernard Ostry, Melanie Panitch, Frances Fox Piven, Angel Quintero Rivera, George Ross, Donald Sassoon, Danny Schechter, John Schwarzmantel, Daniel Singer, Roy Shaw, Margaret Somers, Ann Swingler, Dick Taylor, Brian Thomas, Dorothy Thompson, Hilary Wainwright, John W Watkins, Bob Weinburg, John Westergaard, George White, Ruth Winstone, Evi Wolgemuth, Ellen Meiksins Wood

e) Letters to the Author

Further useful information was derived from letters with recollections about Miliband from: Benjamin Barber, John Callaghan, Gordon Fellman, David Gater, Winton Higgins, Gutki Miliband, Richard Pankhurst, Brian Pearce, Gail Sheridan

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Michael Newman is a Professor of Politics at London Metropolitan University. He is the author of *Democracy, Sovereignty and the European Union* (1996), *Harold Laski: A Political Biography* (1993), *John Strachey* (1989), and *Socialism and European Unity: The Dilemma of the Left in Britain and France* (1983).

... comprehensive, scholarly, sensitive and readable.

Tony Benn

A very fine biography of a key figure who for so long deservedly stood as a beacon on the international left for the way he articulated and redefined socialist politics.

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The books of Ralph Miliband (1924-94) inspired a generation on the Left. *Parliamentary Socialism* (1961) remains the most powerful critique of the Labour Party ever published, and *The State in Capitalist Society* (1969) refuted the current orthodoxy in political science and stimulated new debates about the state.

This biography shows that Miliband's writings were just part of the wider project to which he devoted himself through teaching, speaking, political engagement, and correspondence with intellectuals across the world. For his lifelong aim was to help build a form of socialism which would avoid the dictatorship of the Soviet bloc and the timidity of social democracy.

Based on exclusive access to his extensive personal papers, and supplemented by numerous interviews, this book recounts the life and thought of one of the major figures of the international New Left. While concentrating on Miliband himself, it elucidates the dilemmas of democratic Marxists from the Second World War until after the collapse of Communism, and the continuing relevance of this strand of thought in the twenty-first century.