

fifty or a hundred wards with four figure votes, if the week-end sales of our splendid eight pager were 5,000, as it could be, we'd be in a different ball-game (the answer to Brian Nicholl's problem of difficulty in making week-end readers is to have this linked to all the work in the locality).

What Needs to be Done

We need to distil all that is best from our recent and past experience in a variety of areas in Britain. We can learn from abroad, not only from France and Italy, but also West Germany and elsewhere. Then apply it in practice.

We must end the split between the industrial and other work, link all aspects together. Workplace branches yes, but not

isolated from localities. Workplace branches with members also linked to the branch where they live. Workplace branches that lead the way on local issues, above all at elections.

Immediate industrial struggles on wages and other issues do start workers on 'a very rich path'. But it will only lead somewhere if the Communists involved in those struggles are also candidates for local councils and for Parliament, seeking the political backing of those they have led industrially.

Both in workplace and area, vigorous propagation of Socialist ideas is essential. Socialist nationalisation as opposed to capitalist, Socialism and the individual, Socialism and freedom, Socialism and the environment, Socialism and peace. Perhaps

above all the argument that socialism is as native to Britain as fish and chips.

There is no contradiction between a greater Communist presence as a Party, and unity with Labour. All experiences show that in fact the two go together, that real unity develops better in such circumstances. A Party with mass standing and substantial votes gains far more respect.

Whilst we have had the *British Road* and its basic concepts for over twenty years, only in 1977 did we thrash them out fully. In that sense it was a radical departure. Now we have the task of changing elsewhere too, our structure, our methods of work, our attitudes, our priorities, if it is to become reality. Not change for change's sake, but because it is essential.

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Bert Pearce

The 1977 Communist Party Congress, after a process of discussion many of us felt to be a welcome further advance in the democracy of the party, produced a new edition of our programme, the *British Road to Socialism*. This also we welcomed as a decisive defeat for sectarian ideas, and a new weapon for clarity and effective united action by the party.

The two years since have shown that this expectation was not quite so easy to fulfil. Indeed rather than unity, we have met with experiences, unexpected to many in the party, of new and different divisions, and fierce polemics over just what the new elements in this *British Road* are, and how they should be put into effect.

In *Marxism Today* we have had a series of stimulating discussions, inevitably overlapping in their subject matter and analysis. (Articles and consequent contributions by Dave Cook, Graham Taylor, Dave Priscott, Eric Hobsbawm, Mick Costello, Andrew Chester and others).

This digging into our history, and into the origins of our basic ideas, is a welcome and healthy process, part of the renewal of the party, and of Marxism, which is always essential, but not always given the attention it demands. It is also a difficult and sensitive job. The life and thought of the party has been the life and thought of countless comrades, who sometimes find it a bit difficult to recognise themselves, their actions and motivations in what emerges from the historians who have been studying the time from the texts. Often the new history throws a flood of light on the situations in which we had to act and react. Pleasant or not, this is refreshing and adds strength

through our understanding of our defeats and victories.

But it is also possible for elements of caricature and selective academic analysis to creep in, which may astonish and antagonise, and even drive further from an understanding, many solid and courageous comrades who know their ideas and actions were not quite like that . . . but how are they to cope with the growing flood of research, revelations, quotations and analysis?

This is what places a big responsibility on us all. We all need to take part in this process of deepening our knowledge of our own party's life. Only so can we find good answers to to-day's problems. Only so can we go to the people with the honesty, conviction and self-confidence which in my experience has always been the characteristic of Communists, and the quality most admired and admired in us by our friends, and grudgingly by our enemies.

We are clearly into a period of mounting mass action and political debate. Our concepts are being tested now, both in action and in the relevance of our theory.

The Recent Debates

That is why I find these articles, the more historical and the more topical, overlap and the estimations of present policies tend to relate to judgements of the past. It is also why if my first reaction is one of stimulation, my second is a concern about the tendency to too great a polarisation, an artificial counter-posing of elements of our strategy which in our thinking and in life must be inter-related.

For instance if we see an alternative economic strategy as somehow diminishing the significance of the wages struggle, accentuating its 'economic narrowness' rather than mobilising its power as the

driving force for a programme of wider objectives, then we do not help to solve 'sectionalism' but open up further division.

If we view the 'community politics' element of the broad democratic alliance, as somehow 'more political' than the struggle for wages or conditions, or jobs in the workplace, again we weaken the class core of our democratic struggle, rather than using the new concepts to unify and strengthen them both, as must happen in life.

This was the point I thought Sam Aaronovitch missed in his (September) counter-arguments against Mick Costello's article (June). He says that the Costello article 'continues the tradition of narrow economism' and also that he 'largely ignores the Labour Party and the importance of changing it' and 'leaves us with only the Communist Party and the Trade Unions as the main agents . . . a massive retreat from the *British Road to Socialism*'.

It would be indeed, if it were true. But it is not. Costello begins on the 'living link between the unions and the Labour Party' and ends with a page on the effect of trade union struggles in the internal politics of the Labour Party, and the need of 'building political consciousness on a scale to decide favourably the outcome of the struggle between Left and Right for the leadership of the Labour Movement'.

The main weight of Costello's article (as of Dave Priscott's earlier contribution) was in no way to dispute the new vistas and new styles of work opened up for trade union and party work, by the concept of the broad democratic alliance, to which Dave Cook's article made many useful indications. What they aimed, I think correctly, to do was to overcome the serious imbalance in that article (and even more so elsewhere) which very much diminishes such basic issues as the

political significance of the wages struggle, trade union rights, the defence of jobs, and the central problem of capitalist state power.

To keep the balance and relationship between such fundamental questions as the wages struggle, the social contract and jobs, and all the vast spread of issues in our economic strategy and the entire field of democratic rights, living standards, peace, the environment and so on, has never been easy. But we fail to do it at our peril.

The Wages Struggle

The situation now spells it out. Already, in reply to Tory attacks on living standards, the wages struggle has emerged as a key factor in the political situation, the most powerful direct threat to the Tory government and its strategy. Hundreds of thousands of workers are already in action (many to the surprise of their leaders); millions more are lining up to come into the wages battle behind them.

But far from this being a 'narrowly economist' concern either of the trade unions or of the Communists or the labour movement, there is also mass action, demonstrations and industrial action on a growing scale against the cuts, against closures, and job losses, for a new energy policy, against racism and apartheid and much more.

The role of the trade union movement and workshop organisation has been essential in beginning to consolidate local councils and communities into resistance to the cuts.

To list these facts demonstrates the folly of trying to isolate or curtail the wages movement, rather than seeing it as the most powerful mobilising force, a spearhead for the whole frontal offensive for higher living standards. But that is a long way from arguing that such unity of purpose, let alone the potential for political changes in government policies, is grasped by most of those involved.

There are real problems here, well beyond the production of paper policies. At this time, when the tactics of uniting the varied streams of fight back against the Tories is a prime concern, we should remember the important advances actually made in working out detailed alternative economic strategies, not only by our party, but by many key trade unions as well. To cite only NUPE, it was in 1976, the year of the massive 80,000 London March and Lobby against the then cuts, that NUPE produced its excellent policy booklet *Time to Change Course*. This was a coherent, sound programme not just for the jobs of NUPE members, but for the entire British economy.

Why did it not make a bigger impact even than it did? And why when the public sector workers were in the firing line for their £60

last winter, and being accused of wrecking the Labour government, hitting at the schools, hospitals and so on, why was this convincing policy for the people's needs not brought out to back up the union's case that their members' wages were part of the fight for our social services?

I commend a study of Irene Swan's full account (Communist Party's *Economic Bulletin* No 5, Spring 1979) of how NUPE developed its economic policy, and the problems in using it.

But clearly the question we have to attack is not whether wages, or other democratic rights are 'more political' or 'more important'. It is rather how to bring them together and popularise the idea that each section does not have to fight alone, that there are in fact other economic and social policies which could lead out of the jungle, and could begin to meet the needs of those fighting for higher wages and those wanting to lower prices, fares and rents; those resisting cuts in social services and those wanting more investment and more jobs and shorter hours in industry.

One thing this seems to demand is that at the very time when any section of workers is at the height of action for wages, then is the time when the resources of the unions (as well as our political parties) should be publicising to their own members and to the country at large the alternative economic strategy which justifies their wage claim, and of which it forms a vital part. Engineers are not just in action now for more pay and shorter hours. They are fighting for more goods to be bought, more jobs to be created, more openings for young workers. The miners' claim is not just for them, it is to ensure this country's coal supplies in the years of world energy crisis which lie ahead.

Such an approach not only begins to express the leading role of the working class in the interests of the whole people in an economic sense. It opens up, instead of counterposing, a positive and fruitful relation between the immense power of the wages movement (in all sections of the working class, new and older, as Costello points out) and all the potential of the democratic movements which are so excitingly advancing new frontiers for the liberation of women, for the involvement of our communities in the creative development of all that makes up our environment and the quality of our lives, for the creation of a truly multi-racial, humane society.

The 'New' in the BRS

Dave Priscott rightly pointed out that by only selecting and building around some of the 'new' elements of the 1978 edition of the

British Road, we could fall into a reformist distortion of the essence of the programme as a whole. I think this is an important point which can usefully go even further. We have the key job of getting the ideas of the *British Road* understood and applied both by all that is best in our party, and in the Labour and progressive movement.

In tackling this job, the debate and the new concepts worked out in 1977/78 give us key new weapons whose importance cannot be overestimated. Most significantly new perhaps were the working out of the idea of revolutionary change as a process, and the analysis of how a new kind of Labour government, a government of the Left, could be the next major step, opening up a quite new stage of political development.

Other concepts, such as the broad democratic alliance, and the ways in which the ruling class maintains its leadership in society — thinking which had been within the mainstream of our policy for a long time — were elaborated and given a theoretical clarity of great importance for our practice.

I make this distinction because I feel that if we try to over-extend the area specified as 'totally new' in the present *British Road* we shall raise artificial barriers and hinder rather than help the appreciation and practice of what really is new, as well as a great deal that has been best in our history.

It can lead us to undervalue too much of our previous work as dogmatic, sectarian, narrowly economist; at the same time by taking great areas of work in which we have had a rich experience for many years and bundling them together under the heading of 'new ideas, or new methods' virtually born or at least reborn out of the 1978 BRS, we blur the edges of what are really the new and fruitful advances of our thought. Yet it is the sharpening of just these ideas, of the revolutionary process, and the potential stages of left governments, which we need most of all to give sense and coherence to our present policies, and all that is so sound and deeply rooted in our historic experience.

Our branches need help in how to campaign for sure. But much more they need the clear conviction of *why* to campaign, the relation of mass democratic work to any decisive political progress and to socialism.

A Long Tradition

There is space only to indicate fragments of what come to mind in the course of this whole discussion. The roots of our programme go far back, right into the origins of our party and before. For fifty years their development has been a complex and contradictory one. A deep devotion to popular democracy and creative, fearless Marxism, co-existed and

interacted with rigidity, dogmatism and over-mechanical 'Soviet imitationism'.

To use the shorthand of people and names — one has only to think (and re-read!) Dona Torr's marvellous study of Tom Mann to see the making of the modern revolutionary out of the amalgam of people's rights through the centuries, William Morris's passionate assertion of the nature of Socialism, Art and Culture, and the Marxist exposition of class struggle.

But follow Morris, (and Engels and the Chartists) and Tom Mann, through Pollitt, Gallacher, Horner, Gollan, McLennan and one is signposting a party life which was full of contradictions, but never lost its roots in the democratic aspirations of the British working class and labour movement (badly dented though they may have been at times).

This is why for instance combine committees with positive policies for their industries (and for their communities) were not invented since 1977. In the 1930s United Front policies to Save South Wales drew together community-wide movements with radical programmes. Policies for developing Britain's coal and energy industries are part of our heritage.

In the Popular Front period before the

war, as well as in the post-war 1945 period, much was explored in the field of transitional programmes, and specific economic policies. *Britain without capitalists* pointed beyond the formal pattern of a *Soviet Britain* as did so much of the political and cultural expansion which the Popular Front programmes required.

It was in the 1950s that I remember with the Midlands Communists working out such policies as *Men and Motors*, produced by a great deal of collective drafting in factory, university and District Committee — as well as the Austin Morris Combine Stewards, and the Engineers Confederation, working on policies for their industries which were basic to the mass concept that unemployment and redundancy were not inevitable and should be met by mass resistance, strikes and occupations.

In the same period much work was done for the reclaiming of British culture for the people. Policies for Welsh and Scottish national rights were elaborated. The UCS, Triang and Deep Duffryn (again just to mention a few) were struggles which involved whole communities and related immediate issues to the quality of life society provides.

To mention all this, does not deny, but

very much emphasises the need for the new thinking and new strategic concepts of the *British Road*. But don't let us over-simplify the problem, or we shall find the wrong answer. The counter-posing of a 'conspiracy — puppet master theory,' of capitalist ideological grip, against a new theory of 'voluntary acceptance of capitalist hegemony' puts too crude a picture to be convincing.

We were brought up (however inadequately) to some conception of how capitalist ideas permeated society, through the family, the factory, the school, and the very relations of social existence. The idea that politics was to be found, and worked at, in the Fishing Club, the Austin Chess Club, in sport, and music, was not foreign to us thirty years ago.

What the years of unresolved theoretical prospects did was to prevent us grasping how so many of these splendid mass qualities and fundamentally democratic approaches of our movement in Britain could be focused on effective political change.

A clearer estimation of what has been sound in our experience will help to dispose of the unsound and rally all our forces for the advances we all seek.

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Reviews

POLITICS AND LETTERS:

Interviews with *New Left Review*

Raymond Williams

New Left Books 1979. 390pp.

Hardback £12.75.

In form (it's well over 400 pages long) this is an unusual book, being the well-edited reproduction of a series of interviews of taped discussions between the 'subject' — Raymond Williams — and three members of the editorial committee of *New Left Review*. It is a form which has been used in recent years in the more directly political statements of such writers as Regis Debray and Santiago Carillo and, indeed, in articles in *Marxism Today*; but this is a more ambitious enterprise, in the sense that, though quite complex theoretical issues are included, a good deal of the genuine flexibility and mutual enrichment of good discussion gets across. I don't think the danger of such a form — the imposing of a suspiciously 'rigged' pattern by the 'interrogators' — is altogether avoided; but in general the dialogue form has encouraged a more direct, unaffected and open kind of talk and language than either the average article in *NLR* or Williams himself have often managed to achieve individually. That the discipline of clear communication imposed on both sides of the dialogue-form should have so successful and desirable an outcome is in itself a suggestive and encouraging fact.

One doesn't want, however, to overdo the question of form, important as it is. The main thing about this interesting, and in many ways impressive book is that it helps us come to terms with the still developing contribution to socialist thinking of an impressive man. If it also helps him, that constitutes a bonus from which we shall all gain.

For many years, and especially since the publication of *Culture and Society* in 1958, Raymond Williams has been well-known as a writer and teacher in the fields of adult and university education as well as a novelist. Since 1961 he has taught in the English Faculty at Cambridge. For a short time, as a student, he was a member of the Communist Party and he has never been in the derogatory sense an anti-communist; but for the most part his more direct political 'interventions' have been in the New Left area. That area itself, however, has not been without its internal complications. One of its strands, from the first, was an emphasis on 'cultural' investigation and politics (often in reaction to what was felt to be a 'Stalinist' crudification of the relation between what Marx called

'base' and 'superstructure'). This 'culturalist' strand which, among much else, paid a good deal of attention to the 'Britishness' of the Left radical tradition, led its adherents to an attitude of simultaneous sympathy with and revulsion from other features of the New Left. On the one hand a socialist like Raymond Williams clearly found the New Left ambience sympathetic in the sense that it was less closely tied up than the Communist Party with immediate power-struggles, national and international, and their strategies and tactics, and therefore more 'open' when it came to theoretical speculation or political experiment. At the same time the deeply-ingrained sectarianism of Trotskyist politics and the increasingly obsessive interest of much of the New Left in various highly theoreticist and academic forms of continental Marxism (themselves often based in cultural situations and traditions not at all easily reconcilable with a homespun 'Britishness') could not be very sympathetic initially to someone as consciously rooted in 'England-and-Wales' and the Leavisite principle of the 'concreteness' of literature as Williams. The present book has emerged from the tangle of contradictory trends within — and also outside — New Left thinking. One of the many good things about the whole enterprise is that the stock-taking has been conducted with a good deal of objectivity and no-one concerned has allowed the search for fruitfully uniting concepts and formulations to be dominated by what can, fatally, seem to be an easy basis for such unity — hostility to the communist parties, even the most vulnerable ones.

What in fact this book seeks to do is (i) to clarify Williams's books by drawing out the main emphases in each and examining their more problematic aspects, (ii) to probe for connecting links between his various books, experiences and interests and (iii) to examine his work as a whole in terms of its development and its relevance as a socialist response to our time.

The biographical section which opens the book offers many fascinating insights, not merely of the more personal sort (like war-experiences) but also of a more general and speculative kind. For instance, it emerges as quite significant that Raymond Williams should have gone to Cambridge in October 1939 (as opposed to, say, 1937) and joined the Communist Party during the 'phoney war' period. Had he been a very few years older the student movement in which he became involved would itself have been different, fired and dominated by the need to rouse and unite people to recognise and oppose the direct threat of fascism. Williams says very little about the anti-fascist struggle and refers

to the popular front with some distaste. And though he was to modify the political starting-point from which he confronted Cambridge — socialist revolution *before* you could defeat fascism — that emphasis gives his thought the flavour of a different generation from that of the thirties and suggest why he came, in the fifties, to feel closer to the younger socialist of the New Left than to those whose most vivid experiences were centred on attempts to build a wide unity against the main enemy.

It is also from the biographical area of *Politics and letters* that there first emerges a theoretical emphasis that turns out to be very central to Raymond Williams's achievement as a whole. At one point in the book he speaks of basing his work on 'the indissoluble unity of personal and social experience'. What becomes clear is that not only his work in general but his *style* itself, with its tendency (outside the novels) towards a complex, indirect, and rather heavy impersonality and a reliance on the passive voice, has to be seen as part and parcel of the attempt to realise this conviction.

It's impossible in a short review to do justice to the sections in which Williams's books of cultural and literary criticism are discussed in detail. The details are themselves of great interest: he seems to me splendid on Hardy, excellent on Orwell; I am less certain about the treatment of Ibsen and Brecht. But what is specially valuable — quite apart from the impressive range of reading and scholarship — is the bringing out of connections between one area of activity and another, which clarify both, as when the work on modern drama is linked and contrasted with the problems of novel-criticism and concepts like 'structure of feeling' and 'the knowable community' examined in the light of developments both social and literary. The whole discussion of realism and naturalism, again, with its many links (both appreciative and critical) with the work of Lukács, strikes me as very useful. So is the recurrent examination of the activity known to students of Eng Lit as 'Practical Criticism'. Threading its way right through the whole volume is a figure which readers who have never made an academic study of literature (especially at Cambridge) may find rather hard to know what to make of: you might call it the ghost of Dr Leavis. For it is in the course of emancipating himself from the powerful influence of Leavis that Raymond Williams has made some of his own most fruitful contributions.

If I find something missing, especially in the directly political arts of this book, it is a sufficient sense of what actual political activity, the organising of people to change