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RETHINKING THE SOCIALIST INTELLECTUAL IN THE BRITISH FIRST NEW LEFT

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ABSTRACT: The first British New Left formed in response to a crisis in international and British socialism. Although never a formal movement, its associated members set themselves the tasks of, first, confronting the rapid change transforming social life at both global and national scales, and second, articulating a new political culture able to accommodate the good and resist the bad of it. As part of this process, a series of intense debates took place on the role of the socialist intellectual in stimulating such a culture. In this article, I consider three of the NL's main protagonists, EP Thompson, Stuart Hall, and Raphael Samuel, and the different positions they took on this issue. I argue here that while all made important contributions to the argument, Samuel's practice as an intellectual, currently the least well known of the three, is worth closer attention for its relevance to contemporary educational debates.

Keywords: Socialist intellectual, cultural studies, socialist humanism, activist politics, new left

INTRODUCTION

For the British left, 1956 was a watershed year, for all the wrong reasons. The trouble began with Khrushchev's 'secret' speech revealing the extent of Stalinist atrocities shortly followed by the Soviet invasion of Hungary later that year. Combined, these events triggered a mass exodus of members from the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB). At the same time, the government's disastrous intervention into Suez caused public outcry,[1] with many, especially among the young, equally frustrated by the Labour Party's feeble opposition. These events were dramatic, but only symptoms of a more systemic crisis in mid-century British socialist thought. Received theories of class and traditional modes of labour organisation seemed increasingly inadequate to account for the social, economic, and cultural changes transforming Britain. Labour's multiple electoral defeats demonstrated the limits to 'managerial welfarism' against the

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forces of American affluence on the one hand and the atomic bomb on the other (Davis, 2012; Jackson, 2007; Middleton, 2014).

The first British New Left (NL) (1956–1962) emerged as a response to, and product of, these circumstances. It faced the dual challenge of understanding the changes rapidly taking place while reformulating a left movement accordingly. Arguably, the sheer breadth of this remit gave it the nebulous character its early critics complained of (Anderson, 1964, 1965). It was organised, in the first instance, around two journals – the *New Reasoner* (NR) (1956–1960), edited by ex-communists John Saville and EP Thompson, and *Universities and Left Review* (ULR) (1957–1960), from recent Oxford graduates, Stuart Hall, Charles Taylor and two more ex-communists, Gabriel 'Gary' Pearson, and Raphael 'Ralph' Samuel. In 1960, these merged to become the *New Left Review* (NLR), initially edited by Hall (Hall, 2010; Sedgwick, 1964). In distinctive ways, both founding journals proclaimed the need for a 'new socialism' rooted in a general notion of 'socialist humanism' which stressed the centrality of human agency and popular movement.

British NL scholarship has moved in waves. Perry Anderson, who assumed editorship of the NLR in 1962, set the tone, criticising his predecessors for their lack of clear organisational or theoretical structure. Later studies offered more comprehensive coverage. Although more generous in their assessment of the NL's breadth of interests, they too considered the first NL significant only in so far as it anticipated the cultural Marxism which emerged in later years (Chun, 1993; Dworkin, 1997; Kenny, 1995).[2] Recent scholarship, however, has stressed the relative uniqueness of the late fifties as a period of political and intellectual metamorphosis, and invited closer attention to the distinctive practice-based 'activist politics', independent of any formal Party structure, concentrated around the ULR cohort (Davis, 2013, 2018). This work has demonstrated a greater richness and ambition to the NL's political agenda, not least in the efforts made to reimagine the whole basis of socialist culture. As part of that reimagining, a series of debates were held on the changing role of the socialist intellectual.

Questions about the role of the intellectual in egalitarian politics were not new. Following the switch to Popular Front in 1935, the CPGB saw ferocious debates on the role of intellectuals in the movement. These, as John Coombes argued, reflected something of the internal contradictions implicit within Popular Frontism. Roughly speaking, those of a more liberal stripe tended to press the need for intellectuals to provide moral leadership and cultural uplift. Those disposed toward a more prurient Marxism considered the intellectual a relic of bourgeois culture. Raj Palme Dutt, the Party's chief ideologue, spoke for many when he declared there was no special role for the intellectual under communism. Only self-effacing forms of work, such as developing points of theory, applying technical expertise, or disseminating ideas through Party literature, were acceptable (Coombes, 1980).

In fact, these arguments only echoed what Stefan Collini identified as a wider suspicion towards intellectuals in British history and culture. The intellectual in Britain, he argued, has been routinely dismissed as something 'foreign' (usually French), and held up in a dismal contrast to the wholesome solidity of an English 'empirical idiom'. As proof of their endurance, he pointed to a tedious re-enactment of such caricatures in a bad-tempered exchange between Thompson and Anderson during the early sixties (Collini, 2006). This was true but I argue that in an earlier New Left moment such repetition proved at least partly creative. Stripped of a Party or other formal institutional framework, and relieved from upholding any settled doctrine, the disputes assumed a new urgency. For a movement-based politics made up of free-floating, unaffiliated participants, sceptical of all traditional forms of organisation, getting the role of ideas right mattered.

In this essay, I examine three of the key NL protagonists, Thompson, Hall, and Samuel, for their different stances on the role of the 'new' socialist intellectual. The issue preoccupied Thompson from the start and it was he who initiated the 'Socialist Intellectual' debate, using it as a means of working out and through his own critique of Stalin, while, at the same time, reconstructing his personal sense of political commitment and purpose in the aftermath of Hungary (Palmer, 1994; Winslow, 2014). I consider the opposition he encountered and how he defended his position. Hall, by contrast, did not enter the debate directly but pressed the case for an urgent re-theorisation of the superstructure-base relationship. Inevitably, this met with fierce opposition from Thompson but also from Samuel, Hall's fellow ULR editor. Despite sharing a critique of Hall, however, the ex-communists were not in alignment on the question of intellectuals. As such, Samuel modelled a third role, distinct from the previous two in its performative qualities. I conclude by assessing the impact of these discussions on consequent NL thinking and the implications for our own political moment.

EP Thompson (1924–1993): THE INTELLECTUAL AS POET-MORALIST

Born in Boars Hill, Oxford, Edward Palmer Thompson was the younger son of Theodosia and Edward John Thompson, a lecturer in Ancient Indian languages at Oxford University and former Methodist missionary. The Thompson household was intellectual, well versed in global affairs, and steeped in literary culture. Unique to the youngest Thompson was a pronounced moral seriousness, intensified by the strong Methodist ethos of his education at Kingswood School, Bath, and an early flare for acting (Conradi, 2012). In 1942, he went up to Cambridge to read History and Literature, conceiving a particular passion for Renaissance drama and counting Giambattista Vico (the Italian prototype cultural historian), as well as Marx, among his defining inspirations (Abelove, 1983; Thompson, 2001). It

was at this time that he followed his elder brother Frank, a brilliant poet and linguist, into the CPGB.[3] Shortly after, he began military service with the army in North Africa and Italy, fighting in the Battle of Cassino in 1944. Later, he reflected that he had been 'forged in the forties', a 'decade of heroes' (Efsathious, 2015; Hamilton, 2015; Thompson, 1978; Williams, 1979).

The early forties marked the high point in CPGB membership, a combination of the Party's switch to Popular Front and widespread disillusionment with the Labour Party's stance on the Spanish Civil War. While this allowed for much greater co-operation with progressive forces, including a significant number of artists and intellectuals, reconciling commitment to Class War with professions of sympathy for traditionally liberal principles, such as individual freedom, was difficult from the start. As noted above, the role that intellectuals should play in the Party was particularly contentious (Coombes, 1980).

Internal tensions notwithstanding, many of the new recruits genuinely believed that 'if you were for democracy, Communism was the place to go' (Rapaport-Albert, 2010). This conviction contributed to a degree of blindness (wilful or otherwise) toward the tightening of the international Party line under Zhdanov and Cominform during the early years of the Cold War (Thompson, 1973).[4] Nevertheless, tremors from these changes were felt across several of the British Party's cultural groups, especially the writers' group of which Thompson had been an active member (the historians, Eric Hobsbawm later claimed, enjoyed comparative autonomy) (Croft, 1995; Hobsbawm, 1978). Despite the policy shift to the 'British Road to Socialism' (1951), committing the British Party to 'new possibilities of transition to Socialism' beside those 'followed by the Russian Revolution' (Pollitt, 1951), many remained acutely conscious of Moscow's invisible hand.

For Thompson, then, the greatest crises of 1956 were the Party's loss of moral imagination and Communism's public loss of moral credibility. He confronted these issues head on in 'Socialist Humanism: An Epistle to the Philistines'. The piece had two aims: firstly, to penetrate and diagnose Stalinism; secondly, to sketch an alternative position. The former was more developed than the latter. By petrifying Communism into a mechanistic economic orthodoxy, he argued, Stalinism had misrepresented and grossly distorted its 'real' goal: the human society and the full development of the human individual. The clearest indication of this had been the systematic suppression of creative intellectual work

> The controlled intellectual life breeds dogmatic orthodoxy as a matter of course. "The establishment of an iron control not only over works of art, but over the very process of creation, signifies a loss of confidence in the artistic intelligentsia" [. . .] Clearly a society which inhibits the emergence of ideas in this way must find itself in increasing difficulties, economic, political, international. How does it come about that after forty years of 'Soviet power' the seats of knowledge (except technological and related sciences) should be filled by placemen, scholastics, and -

> " . . . the lofty, servile clown, Who with encroaching guile, keeps learning down." (Thompson, 1957a)

Nevertheless, he conceded, Marxists must confront the truth that Stalinism was not just a freak aberration. Marx and Engels must take their share of the blame. Not, however, for poor analysis but for poor *expression*:

> in trying to explain their ideas they expressed them as a make-belief 'model', the "basis" of social relations (in production) and the "superstructure" of various branches of thought, institutions, etc., arising from it and reacting upon it. In fact no such basis and superstructure ever existed; it is a metaphor to help us to understand what does exist – men, who act, experience, think and act again. It turns out that it is a bad and dangerous model, since Stalin used it not as an image of men changing in society but as a mechanical model, operating semi-automatically and independently of conscious human agency (Thompson, 1957a).

This was no trivial error. For Thompson, steeped in literary culture and well read in Vico, words did serious practical work. They transformed experience-as-social-being (typically unconscious) into experience-as-social-consciousness. This, in turn, made action possible and, by further framing the direction of that action, altered experience-as-social-being. A bad choice of metaphor, then, was not merely inelegant but a dereliction of intellectual responsibility.

He developed this theme further in 'Socialism and the Intellectuals' written as a riposte to Kingsley Amis' Fabian Pamphlet of the same title, but with 'Inside the Whale' (1940) (George Orwell's tirade against the 'irresponsible' political intellectuals of the thirties, especially W.H. Auden), clearly in mind. Amis (as Orwell before him), lampooned the political intellectual as an irrational romantic taking up the causes of others for want of their own, imposing their social schemes with dangerous consequences.

Thompson rejected this saying,

> Goodness knows that human reason and conscience are imperfect instruments enough; they glow fitfully amongst the bric-a-brac piled all around, which threaten at any moment to topple over and extinguish their light –self-interest and self-esteem, indigestion, guilt, class conditioning, memories of the woodshed, old superstition, the lot. But we continue our intellectual work because we believe that, in the last analysis, ideas matter (Thompson, 1957b).

The intellectual described here performed a quasi-prophetic role, stinging the public conscience, elevating its mind from the ignoble 'bric-a-brac' of everyday life, and spurring it to pursue nobler vision of itself.

These themes were expanded in a later essay, 'Outside of the Whale' (1960), where he described how the castigation of the thirties' intellectuals had triggered a climate of intellectual 'quietism'. This, consequently, reinforced a pernicious 'Natopolitan' ideology which, through its professed tolerance of 'difference', effectively neutered all ideas that might threaten it, and was, therefore, no less totalising, in its way, than what it claimed to oppose. To combat this, he renewed his

calls for 'accurate scholarship' to 'unearth the whole offence' of those years and to extract from them the lessons that needed learning. At the same time, those values that had once vitalised heroic aspirations should be preserved for use in a new liberatory socialism (Thompson, 1960).

While the basic principles of Thompson's socialist humanist stance -the realisation of human agency through active participation in an autonomous popular movement-were broadly taken up, this was not done without question (Davis, 2013). Nor were his strictures on the role of the intellectual in bringing this about completely accepted. Former Party member Harry Hanson worried about

> a growing tendency on your part to pretend that you know the answer. People listen to you, because you write and speak well and because your sincerity is above question. It is therefore a little alarming to find you dispensing a wordy balm which they can apply to their sore consciences (Hanson, 1957).

Hanson continued,

> you place your faith in the appeal of a new leadership, a new set of cultured and devoted radicals who, having freed themselves simultaneously from the reformist and compromising vices of the Labourites and from the dictatorial proclivities of the Communists, will be able to persuade the British workers to gird up their loins and give the final push to the rotten capitalist structure. This is not Marxism; it is romanticism (Hanson, 1957).

Taylor, one of the four ULR editors, also noted a contradiction between proclaiming for human agency and then prescribing what that agency should entail to qualify as 'real' agency (a tension he also perceived in Marx) (Taylor, 1957a, 1957b). Giving 'intellectuals the function of proclaiming values' he argued, 'is to assume a harmonious set of values as already there waiting to be uncovered. This assumption just doesn't seem to me to be valid.' Mervyn Jones and Harold Silver agreed arguing, instead, that an 'organic' intelligentsia, drawn directly from the working-class, were the best, most articulate, advocates of their cause, but where, they wondered, given the decline of independent working-class mutual education, were these figures to come from? (Jones, 1957; Silver, 1957).

Thompson was unmoved, 'the socialist intellectual [. . .] must keep his eye on the main task, the formation and circulation of ideas'. Doing this, he reasoned, naturally required a division of labour. First, there must be the 'specialist working honestly and to his best ability within his speciality' responsible for directing 'a coherent socialist theory' (Thompson, 1957c), not as a rigid doctrine but as an integrated symbolic framework within which people could orientate themselves, make meaning, and act upon it (Alexander, 2017). A second tier of intellectual work was necessary for communicating and propagating these well-crafted ideas 'by means of journals, educational activities, forums and discussion groups, and though the media of political organisations, pressure-groups, and platforms and petitions.' This, however, would not

be 'carried on by the same people, since the specialist who writes good novels or makes original contributions in their own fields are few' (Thompson, 1957c).

Despite his mention of 'coherent socialist theory', Thompson's higher-tier intellectual had more in common with the artist than the social scientist. The ideas they produced were as much aesthetic objects for contemplation as they were explanatory statements of material conditions. Given that Thompson believed the crisis of Stalinism to be the paucity of its moral imagination, restoring creativity to a central, even reverential, position within socialist culture was partly an insurance against the same fall into dogma. Practically, the call for a 'New Socialism', appropriate to the post-war world, also required the generation of at least some sort of unified picture about what that could mean. One could hardly have a popular movement without giving it a motivation to move, but were poetic visions enough?

Stuart Hall (1932–2014): the Intellectual as Theory-worker

Hall was born into a prosperous, middle-class, family in Kingston, Jamaica. From an early age, he was conscious of there being 'two Jamacias', the colonial one admired and reproduced by his parents, and another, the one that rose in protest in 1938, marking the beginning of the end of colonial rule (Hall, 2017, p. 51). In 1951, he won a Rhodes Scholarship to study English Literature at Merton College, Oxford where he quickly found himself plunged into a hostile and alien culture (Hall, 2017). Although never formally a CPGB member, these early experiences of what it was to *be* a colonial subject, and of the insidious, often imperceptible ways that being was reinforced, made him a sympathetic fellow traveller. This was in sharp distinction from Thompson. Despite Hall's relative wealth and academic achievement, he could never be complacent about his right to speak and be heard in his adopted country. He became active among the student left, especially in anti-colonial movements such as campaigns supporting the liberation of British Guyana. He was also a member of GDH Cole's socialist group which, with its generous internationalist outlook, forged links around the world with those already seeking alternatives to American liberalism or Russian Communism (Jacques, 2018).

For Hall, Suez, and all that it symbolised about Britain's enduring imperialism, combined with his personal encounters with a growing number West Indian migrants – the Windrush generation – were more important drives toward the New Left than Khrushchev's revelations. His sensitivity to culture as an ideological vehicle was further reinforced by his expertise in modern literature, in particular Henry James, and passion for film and music, specifically jazz. These interests received an important theoretical boost with the publication of Richard Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy* (1957), an auto-ethnographic account of the impact of modern society on 'traditional' working-class culture, and Raymond Williams' *Culture and Society* (1958), which charted the expanding definition of 'culture' as part of the development of modern industrial society.

Hall avoided direct engagement with the 'Socialist Intellectual' debate but introduced a forum on 'Commitment in Politics' in the following edition. Orwell, he acknowledged, was right

> to remind us of the orthodoxies of Left, as well as Right, to question "the subjective yielding of the writer to the party machine," to draw sharp distinctions "between our political and literary loyal- ties." His comment that "by being Marxized literature has moved no nearer to the masses" offers us, not merely a critical insight into the past, but a viewpoint on the future (Hall, 1958a).

But, he continued, this should not entail a retreat into the fallacy that art was neutral. Rather, it was now more necessary than ever to better understand the relationship between art and politics with more precision. This went beyond merely explicit ideological content and moved into matters of form, the hidden patterns of values subsumed within a text. The questions to ask now was how life got into literature and what it did when it got there.

His article 'A Sense of Classlessness' revealed more of his intellectual priorities at this time and what he believed those of the wider movement ought to be (Dworkin, 1997). Here, he argued that a more substantive break from the past had occurred than the left had so far fully grasped. Cultural change – changes in and to the conditions of subjectivity – had greater significance than traditional Marxist class theory could accommodate. At the same time, these could not be uncoupled from 'certain physical, economic and environmental pressures' (Hall, 1958b). What mattered was to determine the relationship between the two.

'People's Capitalism', he continued, relied on ever more sophisticated, and intimate, methods of psychological manipulation. These were plied through a combination of centrally organised welfare institutions, 'managerialism' in the workplace, and advanced mass communication technologies (such as mass media and including mass education). One the one hand, these produced a 'mass mentality', endorsing sets of universal ('scientific') norms around human health, needs, and achievement. On the other, it increased the sense of individual alienation by fragmenting prior solidarities (such as class or community) and dispersing these through an ever finer stratification of status, and a proliferation of 'life-styles' choices.

Only Hoggart and Williams had even begun to fully confront the ramifications of these cultural changes for a contemporary working-class politics. Socialist intellectuals, then, had to first face that

> every form of communication which is concerned with altering attitudes which changes or confirms opinions, which instils new images of the self, is playing its part. They are not peripheral to the 'economic base', they are part of it (Hall, 1958b).

As such, any meaningful revisionism had to begin with rethinking the superstructure-base relationship, which Marx and Engels had handled too crudely, to

produce anything like the understanding of modern capitalism and late-industrial society that was needed. There was, however, cause for optimism. Marx himself, Hall noted, had said that the alienation of the people would only be complete when the means of freedom lay fully to hand. That time was now. At this critical moment in the history of the left, with so much at stake, to lose or gain, intellectuals should focus on providing the disciplined insights necessary to inform a popular movement about its present condition so that it could deploy its energies more effectively.

Unlike Thompson's prophetic moralist, Hall's intellectual was not a generalist. They confined themselves to critical analysis and the production of a technical vocabulary which could then be conveyed to the people. Thompson's inevitable critique, when it came, from crushing. Working people, he argued, were not so easily manipulated, nor was the mass media an especially novel agent of cultural control (he pointed to the historic role of the church), nor was status differentiation a particularly new phenomenon within the general division of labour. Hall, he protested (Hoggart too and, in a different way, Williams), over-assumed an essentially sociological, *unhistorical*, perception of class identity. Such a straining away of historical context was reductive. Working-class identity had been shaped but not pre-determined by sets of socio-economic conditions. It was more organic than that, constituted through a whole way of struggle, of opposition and resistance, changing in step with its times (Thompson, 1958).[5]

This was not an entirely fair critique. Sociology was a strong presence in Hall's work, far more so than history, but of a kind closer to critical ethnography than to any totalising, systematic social theory (he was far from being a prototype Althusser). Alongside Hoggart and Williams, he borrowed from America, quoting from the decades' sociological bestsellers *The Lonely Crowd* (David Riesman et al., 1950) and *The Organisation Man* (William H Whyte, 1956), both of which addressed the impact of mass society on the individual human life. He also drew from C Wright Mills' *The Power Elite* (1956), a social analysis of the personnel who made up the modern American establishment (military, public service, law, and church).

In fact, these books, and their authors, were influential for all the New Left thinkers,[6] including Thompson who, despite his acidity, perfectly accepted the value of theory to the Socialist cause (something clear from his earlier reply to critics in the 'Socialist Intellectual debate). His objections, then, were less about theories in themselves than about the act – the general tone – of theorising which smacked a little too much of the technocratic expertise which was, elsewhere, pilloried as alienating. He upbraided the 'young turks of the ULR' for assuming the position of distant intellectuals, peering down at the working-class as though they were a specimen in a laboratory. He urged them to re-kindle their political commitment, to 'bring to [the working-class] hope, a sense of their own strength and potential life.'

Thompson was joined in his critique by Samuel who, despite being one of the ULR editors, was clearly an errant 'young turk' by this formula. In 'Class and Classlessness', he too rejected static sociological models in favour of historical nuance. The contemporary working-classes, he added, understood better than most that the British power elite remained firmly in charge. All that 'change' amounted to here was a move from 'Empire, Church, and Army' to the 'executive board room' (Samuel, 1959b). In one important respect, however, he departed from Thompson. He concluded his piece by asserting that (italics my own) 'Socialism must start from the *existing* strength of working people, from *their power* to assimilate what is valuable and reject what is false in post-war society … Socialism is not [. . .] a society for people – it is also a society *they will create* (Samuel, 1959a).

This was an attempted synthesis. From Thompson he took the need for an emotional, as well as intellectual, bond with the popular movement. With Hall, he agreed that the facts of social and cultural alienation required closer attention for the light they shed on how 'the people' now perceived themselves. Invoking old class solidarities would not have the same resonance for the children of the Welfare State, now the young adults of the (so-called) age of affluence. As one sense of class was breaking up, then, the other was still forming, leaving people to, in Hall's words, 'find [their] way through a maze of strange signals' (Hall, 1958b). Nevertheless, he too saw the danger of inferring overly reductive conclusions about contemporary working-class life. What was needed, then, was 'a different sort of recognition of people than that of those who see in the working class only a 'vanguard' and for those others who can see only the 'Admass' (Samuel, 1958). It was necessary to meet people on their own terms, to work through, and out, these signals together, but how?

Raphael Samuel (1934–1996): the Intellectual as Organiser

As a 'child Communist', Samuel, internalised Communist culture in a way that neither Thompson nor Hall had done. To him it was inhabited and, importantly, enacted as much as articulated. Growing up, the most influential figure in his life was his mother Minna who, having joined the Party in 1939, became a key organiser of the large Slough branch of the Party, she assumed the various roles of literature secretary, class tutor and engagements secretary for the Workers' Music Association. For most of his youth, she was a one-woman dynamo of organising and teaching (Samuel, 2006).

Unsurprisingly, Samuel's ambition was also to become a full-time Party organiser. This depended on gaining trust amongst the rank-and-file membership by never *appearing* to be authoritative. In the 'Lost World' essays he described the role in detail:

> In the localities, too, authority was expected to be self-effacing. Branch secretaries were expected to comport themselves as co-workers, taking on a good deal of the

> dogsbody work, as the price of the trust which reposed in them. At branch meetings he/she was to exercise a pastoral care, drawing the members in by allocating tasks to them, 'involving' them in the processes of decision making [. . .] encouraging new-comers to 'express' themselves [. . .] (Samuel, 2006).

and:

> One started at the 'level' of the sympathiser, emphasising common ground, 'building' on particular issues, while at the same time investing them with Party-mindedness. Plied with Party literature, invited to Party meetings, above all "involved" in some species of Party work [. . .] the sympathiser was drawn into the comradeship of the Party by a hundred subtle threats [. . .] (Samuel, 2006).

Party organisers were shrewd and pragmatic, the best could enter people's intimate psychological worlds and 'involve' them in political activity, making them the agents of their own conversion . . . Later, after over twenty years in adult education, he joked

> Recruiting -the only Party activity I was any good at- involved, I now realize, a tutor-pupil relationship, not least in its elaborate pretence of equality between the teacher and the taught; it was a learning process which demonstrated the power of knowledge. (Samuel, 2006).

Going up to Oxford in 1952, his political activity reached fever pitch. As Hall later recalled, he was soon the life and soul (but also pariah) of the student politics scene (Hall, 1997) always at the centre of protests, at every Labour and Socialist club meeting, up late in college common rooms debating who ever could stay the pace with him. In 1953, he became an editor of *The Oxford Left* (gaining sole editorship by 1954) where he wrote on 'Socialism and the Middle Classes' and 'The Mind of British Imperialism', anticipating important NL themes.

Like Thompson, Samuel was also devastated by the 1956 revelations reflecting later 'I've never been able to recreate a trust in any political leadership, I would like to but I've never been able to give my trust or faith to any political leadership of whatever kind since then' (Harrison, 1987). At the same time, he also believed in restatement rather than retreat. What he considered most worth preserving was the Party's sophisticated activist organisational methods only severed, now, from any formal political framework.

This proved timely. In the autumn of that year, the Suez crisis triggered an eruption of political activity, especially amongst students. Momentum consequently gathered around the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND). There was an energy amongst the younger generation, in particular a burgeoning student body, but one to be treated with care. As film critic Alan Lovell observed, the Direct-Action Committee (which emerged from CND) teemed with 'emotional anarchists' eager for action but proudly unaffiliated and mistrustful of Party politics (Hall, 1961).

By the spring of 1957 he had set up the *Universities and Left Review* (ULR) with Hall, Charles Taylor, and Gabriel Pearson and acquired a headquarters in Soho, which provided meeting rooms, editorial office, and a campaign base for the CND (with whom he forged an early alliance). To this was added the Partisan Café, London's first anti-expresso bar, which offered a social hub. Most importantly, he founded the New Left Club network initially assuming the role of Club secretary, later chairman. Clubs were multifaceted spaces, deliberately malleable according to the interests of local members but mostly dedicated to campaign development or to research in an earnest parody of the Labour Research Department, working groups emerged covered all the main topics of the day, from the future of capitalism to planning, housing, education, and race relations.

Clubs spread across the country with branches appearing in Sheffield, Manchester, Cardiff, Fife (Kenny, 1995, p. 39). Naturally, they flourished in Colleges and Universities where the working group models excited students and young lecturers alike, but there were exceptions. Samuel and a team of NL researchers conducted interviews with teenage boys in Bethnal Green and the new working and middle-class residents of Stevenage New Town in a bid to understand their political attitudes (Harrison, 1979; Samuel, 1960). Then, there was the Notting Hill Club set up in the wake of the 1958 race riots. Here, efforts were made to adapt the Club model for the needs of the community, such as providing free housing advice and a youth club. Ultimately, these met with mixed success (Hall, 1960; Jones and Schofield, 2019).

None of this activist architecture – journals, Clubs, study, and campaign groups – was new, it only replicated the CPGB organisational structures Samuel was already familiar with. The crucial difference was that where once those structures acted in abeyance to the Party's objectives, now they were both the means *and* the ends. In this way, Samuel picked a path through the problems frustrating the NL's development. By making people the co-producers of socialist vision, theory, and practice, he shifted emphasis from socialism as a final goal to which all activity must be directed towards socialism as an 'ethics of practice' (Graeber, 2004), an on-going learning process in which they must take an active part. This alone could truly satisfy socialist theory.

Thompson was unconvinced, as he put it to Samuel:

> You see we cut different characters: ULR is mercurial, sensational, rides loose to theory & principle, goes for gimmicks and so on: all this is excellent, and the right way to break the crust especially with the younger people. The NR is middle aged & paunchy and strikes a note of political responsibility and dogged deaf endurance (Thompson, 1957d).

These series of contrasts – youth/middle age, sensation/endurance, mercurial/responsible – were good humoured, but betrayed his belief that the ULR's political agenda lacked substance.

Samuel, in turn, harboured equal misgivings toward his ex-comrade. Like Hall, he kept aloof from the fray in the ULR's 'Socialist Intellectual' debate but stated

his view of the matter in an unobtrusive 'Left Notebook' entry (ostensibly dedicated to reporting the latest Club activities) printed at the back of the same edition. On the one hand, ideas did indeed matter: 'the splendid support which both Club and Review have received reflects a renewed awareness of the importance of socialist theory, of re-thinking, of socialism "taken at full stretch, as relevant only in so far as it is relevant to the full scale of man's activities."'. On the other, the same support reflected 'a growing conviction that socialism imposed from above [. . .] is false socialism [. . .] a libel on the socialist tradition.' Moreover, prolonged conjecture about intellectual roles felt uncomfortably like a form of 'moral cleansing' on the part of ex-Party members and was unhelpful.

'In the present mood', he continued,

> a discussion on, for example, socialism and the intellectual can easily degenerate into a discussion about politics, about everything. [. . .] We want to channel this polemic into smaller study and discussion groups, and into material that will appear in the Review (Samuel, 1957).

Rather than *start* from a coherent symbolic framework or theoretical overview, intellectual work here was piecemeal, constructed from localised, concrete case studies, such as the shortage of public housing in Notting Hill or so-called juvenile delinquency in Bethnal Green. From here, movement flowed from the particular to the general, to an understanding that these daily experiences were not isolated phenomena but 'clues to underlying structures and relationships', and that by combining fragmented knowledges, a fuller, composite understanding of the social mechanisms at work could be achieved (Gunvald Nilsen, 2009; Wainwright, 1994).

What the clubs were really providing, then, was political education via a method of collective inquiry. By this formula, the intellectual was primarily a catalyst or facilitator for the process, finding and fusing the links between the fragments. Although never explicitly prescribing the role, Samuel's 'Notebook' entry demonstrated how he put it into action. As chair of the Soho working groups, for example, he took notes from the all the various discussions, summarised them into salient points, disseminating his reports through the *Review*. He also received and summarised the reports from other Club chairs around the country (his personal address being listed for all Club correspondence). At first glance, this appears to be only the unglamorous clerical drudgery involved in one of Thompson's second tier intellectual activities, but, in fact, it gave him considerable power. As chair-cum-secretary he could guide conversations, keep them going when they floundered, identify recurrent themes across different groups, propose and continually affirm the shared goals between them. He could literally choreograph the fuller understanding necessary to sustain, and vitalise, a sense of common purpose.

Conclusion

The first NL collapsed in 1962, partly from the exhaustion of its founders, partly from financial ruin, but also because of the incessant internal tensions. Its larger project, however, far from imploding along with it, only dispersed. On taking editorship of the NLR, Perry Anderson pursued the theoretical agenda with far more rigour, as, in a very different way, did Hall at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS), University of Birmingham. Thompson, of course, wrote *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963), his astonishing peon to working-class 'strength and potential life'. This was followed by a series of brilliant, if less lyrical, studies on eighteenth century radical popular culture, began at the University of Warwick. Samuel morphed the NL Club ethos into the History Workshop at Ruskin College, Oxford, which set out to make working-class people producers of their own history.

Looking at the three accounts offered of the socialist intellectual here, one could say they simply reinforce claims that the plurality of the NL's political culture prevented it from ever coalescing as a movement. On the other, it is possible to see a shared diagnosis of the main problem between them. All agreed that intellectual and cultural orthodoxy – whether Stalinist at the extreme end of the spectrum, or Labourist in the moderate centre – had prevented socialism from evolving. At this point, however, they divided. Thompson considered the source of that orthodoxy to be the marginalisation, even eradication, of the moral imagination in favour of a technical intelligentsia. Hall thought the fault lay in the subjugation of theory work to narrow ideology rather than to the social facts of the day. Samuel, by contrast, believed the problem was the cleavage between the intellectual and popular spheres.

Despite this, there were synergies between them (not always ones they recognised). Hall and Samuel, for example, took more seriously how the new social conditions and formations were transforming the experience and language of class, especially for a younger generation. At the same time, Thompson and Samuel both resisted the view that these changes invalidated all older notions of solidarity, arguing that these were based on more than superficial circumstance. Shifting perspective from stance to style, however, it was Hall and Thompson who converged. Both retained relatively traditional roles for the intellectual as a distinctive cultural authority, only differing on the matter of costume. Should the intellectual wear the guise of an expert-advisor or the mantle of a moralist? Here, Samuel, by reconfiguring the intellectual into an organiser, made the greater leap and one that has the more significant implications for contemporary educational practice.

As noted above, all three continued to careers in higher or adult education, and all were great innovators in this sphere, but it was Samuel, the least widely known, who, by translating the spirit of the NL Clubs into the History Workshop, pioneered the wholesale democratisation of intellectual work, including his own role within it. Like his NL colleagues, he grasped the

contradictions at the heart of 'classical' socialism, but, perhaps more than the other two, he appreciated that a genuine resolution of these problems required a total transformation of political – and intellectual – practice.

To him, 'socialism at full stretch' meant confronting the radical potential of a mature democracy in which everyone becomes their own public intellectual, or, in other words, active participants in the production of social life. Achieving this required inventing new public forums where this could take place. To function, however, these spaces relied on individuals, like him, with the imagination, and endurance, to keep track of all the connecting threads between the fragments. It also demanded that he put aside personal ambition (as conventionally understood) and embrace facilitation as an intellectually dignified and rigorous activity.

The NL Club network, the Workshop and, in a different way, Samuel himself were flawed, too immersed in traditional, class-based, socialist culture to be fully inclusive (Schwarz, 2002), and yet there was something vital in each instance which can still speak to us now. Even as we continue to grapple with issues like inclusivity and diversity in further, higher, and adult education, much of the conversation here still assumes, albeit tacitly, the old meritocracy model: some are able, some are not, some are unfairly prevented from finding out. Institutional solutions for this continue to adopt a 'deficit-compensation' approach so that a few more people from 'non-traditional' social groups might, with appropriate support, reach the level necessary to join the elect. Rarely is the authority underpinning that elect subject to interrogation. What if, instead, we took Samuel's intellectual democracy seriously, valuing different forms of knowledge, and treating students as responsible partners in the learning process from the start. Arguably, this, and only this, gives substance to the appeals for inclusive education.

From another angle, for those of us attempting to teach within an increasingly market-driven, performance-based academic culture, we might also take forward the idea of rethinking both political and pedagogical spaces. We should, for example, acknowledge more fully that the academy, as an historical institution, has inherent limits to its capacity for inclusion (Haworth and Elmore, 2017), and consider where new well-springs for public culture might lie. At this point in our history, characterised, as it is, by tremendous challenge, change and uncertainty, we need more people than ever to think collaboratively and creatively. It is simply expedient, then, to demand of our educational activities that they ordain less 'Intellectuals' and generate many more thinkers.

NOTES

1. 'Franco-British attack on Suez' (1956) *Life*, 19 November. The report estimates that over 10000 people attended anti-war protests in London's Trafalgar Square.1956.

2. Dorothy Thompson (1996) opposed these accounts in 'On the Trail of the First New Left', *New Left Review*, 1/215 (Jan–Feb), 93–100.

3. Frank, who had joined up in 1939, was executed by a Fascist firing squad while helping resistance fighters in occupied Bulgaria in 1944.

4. Andrei Zhdanov, Soviet Communist Party propagandist-in-chief. The Zhdanov doctrine (1946) divided culture into camps, imperialistic (US) and democratic (Soviet Union).

5. Hall later laughed over the exaggerated nature of that debate. He had, he admitted, overstressed change, while Samuel and Thompson had overstated continuity. Private communication with author, Hampstead, London, Jan 2012.

6. These books provided 'pro-forma templates' for anglicised versions on the same themes, for example: 'The Insiders', *Universities and Left Review*, Winter 1958; Michael Barrett-Brown, 'The Controllers', *Universities and Left Review*, Autumn 1958, Spring 1959, and Autumn 1959.

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