ROBIN BLACKBURN

STUART HALL

1932–2014

The renowned cultural theorist Stuart Hall, who died on 10 February, was the first editor of NLR. Stepping down in 1962, he continued to play an outstanding role in the broader New Left for the rest of his life. Stuart made decisive contributions to cultural theory and interpretation, yet a political impulse—involving both a political challenge to dominant cultural patterns and a cultural challenge to hegemonic politics—pervades his work. His exemplary investigations came close to inventing a new field of study, 'cultural studies'; in his vision, the new discipline was profoundly political in inspiration and radically interdisciplinary in character. Wrestling with his own identity as a West Indian-born anti-imperialist in Oxford, London and Birmingham, he evolved into his own style of Marxist. Author or co-author of a hundred texts, subject of scores of interviews, keynote speaker at many dozens of conferences, co-founder of three journals, he managed to be strikingly original and always distinctively himself. He bore nearly two decades of illness with amazing stoicism, exhibiting a tenacious hold on life and intense curiosity about the future; and helped in all this by his companion of nearly fifty years, the historian Catherine Hall.

Much of Stuart's most original and influential work widened the scope of the political by taking account of the power relations of civil society. But he did not allow an inflation of micro-politics to obscure choices and institutions at the level of society as a whole. He returned time and again to the New Left as a macro-political project, albeit one that was exploratory and pluralist—an elusive 'floating signifier', as he might subsequently have described it—that evolved and found new expression in every subsequent decade. He was a drafter of the *May Day Manifesto*

(1967–68), editor of *Policing the Crisis* (1978), analyst of 'Thatcherism' (1980), decrier of 'New Labour' (1998) and, most recently, scourge of neoliberalism and co-author of the *Kilburn Manifesto* (2013).

Beginnings

Stuart was born in Jamaica in 1932 to middle-class parents of mixed race (African, East Indian, Portuguese, Scottish and Jewish). His father worked as an accountant for the United Fruit Company. In a revealing interview with Kuan-Hsing Chen, Stuart explained the insidious character of the colonial racial order.[1] His parents wished to see their children win acceptance from white society and tried to forbid them from consorting with those darker than themselves. Prevented from bringing his friends home, Stuart met them elsewhere. He could not understand why his father tolerated the patronizing attitude of his English colleagues. When his sister fell in love with a Barbadian who was too black the parents refused to countenance the relationship, bringing on a psychological breakdown. These disturbing events led Stuart to reject the ethos of Jamaican society and to become a nationalist and anti-imperialist. He read pamphlets by Marx and Lenin but did not yet see himself as a Marxist. He was also aware of the island's complex political culture; Orlando Patterson has described the highly articulate social world of the Caribbean islands as being comparable to the ancient Greek city states.

Stuart went to a good school—Jamaica College—with cricket lawns and an honours board that records his accomplishments, and in 1951, won a Rhodes scholarship to Oxford. After gaining a degree in English, he started doctoral work on Henry James, but political commitments prevented him from completing it. He played a part in the movement of West Indian students in the UK. He later recollected a West Indian and African celebration dinner in 1954 to mark the French defeat in Vietnam. He also visited New York, where he confirmed his passion for the music of Miles Davis, though here too political considerations left their mark, and at one point the youthful activist's contacts led to his being denied a US entry visa.

While still at Oxford, Stuart joined with Raphael Samuel, Charles Taylor and Gabriel Pearson in founding the *Universities and Left Review*, whose

---

[1] 'The Formation of a Diasporic Intellectual', in David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen, eds, *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, London 1996.

first issue appeared in 1957. Along with the *New Reasoner*, which was run by a group of expelled Communist Party oppositionists including Edward Thompson, Dorothy Thompson and John Saville, ULR was central to the formation of the New Left in Britain, and in 1960 the two journals merged to become *New Left Review*. Edward could have been editor, but declined because, after years of intense political engagement, he wanted time for research and writing. Stuart fitted the bill. He was a fluent and convincing public speaker, and his experience as hands-on editor at ULR made him the natural choice for the editorial post.

The New Left journals had spawned a movement and some three dozen New Left clubs sprang up in different parts of the country. This was the heyday of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) and the New Left played a role as a ginger group within it. The first Aldermaston March was held in 1958, and the New Left Clubs debated foreign affairs—'positive neutralism' was the phrase—as well as domestic politics. The London New Left Club met either at the Partisan coffee house in Carlisle Street, Soho, where the NLR was to be based, or, for larger meetings, at the Marquee Club in Oxford Street. The latter venue was booked for a Monday or Tuesday; on other nights it was one of the places where British jazz met visiting black American musicians playing the blues. Stuart would speak on issues of the day, as would a wide range of invited speakers, including Isaac Deutscher on 'Hungary and the USSR' and Paul Johnson on the overthrow of the French Fourth Republic.

The British New Left was defined by its repudiation of Stalinism, and the Soviet invasion of Hungary, combined with a rejection of the Cold War and of the Anglo-French invasion of Suez, in 1956. Neither the ULR nor the early NLR presented themselves as Marxist journals, though they were fascinated by Marx's youthful writings with their theme of alienation. Charles Taylor came across a French edition of Marx's Paris *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* and wrote a pamphlet explaining its central ideas. Stuart and Raphael Samuel used a Marxisant vocabulary as they analysed 'consumer capitalism' or 'contemporary capitalism'. The latter terms conveyed that, on the one hand, they were not dealing with classical 'robber baron' capitalism—this was, self-consciously, a new left for a new period and a new culture—but that on the other, Keynesianism and the welfare state had perhaps tamed capitalism a bit but not suppressed its basic urges. The contrast here was with Labour 'revisionists' like Anthony Crosland who believed that Britain had

entered a post-capitalist phase and that, as a Labour policy document famously put it, 'British industry is serving the nation well.'

The New Left came to be associated with radical and sweeping novelty, claiming to supersede the compromised and outdated politics of all branches of the Old Left, whether communist or social-democratic. The Old Left was attached to paternalism and state socialism, often complicit with Cold War politics, and failed to break with the colonial policies of the Western Powers. I recently mentioned to Stuart that, in retrospect, the early New Left claims to originality set the bar rather high. Had we really read so much and experienced so much that we could dispose of the Old Left so rapidly and completely? Stuart conceded with a smile that this did sound rather far-fetched—but necessary all the same. Of course the New Left historians, especially Edward Thompson, Dorothy Thompson and Raphael Samuel, did not reject the classical traditions. But Stuart was intensely aware of what these traditions too often excluded because of an in-built but unconscious set of ethnic, racial and gender filters.

Balancing this attempt to recover what had been ignored or rejected was a determination to study the present and in particular what was to become a central preoccupation for Stuart, the new cultures of capitalism. The editorial in the first issue of the new Review returned to a theme that he had already broached in ULR in a discussion of 'the politics of adolescence', the need to respond to the stirrings of a new youth culture: 'The purpose of discussing the cinema or teenage culture in NLR is not to show that, in some modish way, we are keeping up with the times. These are directly relevant to the imaginative resistances of people who have to live within capitalism—the growing points of social discontent, the projections of deeply felt needs.' At this time a number of writers, filmmakers and dramatists were loosely associated with the New Left, including Doris Lessing, Colin McInnes, Lindsay Anderson, Dennis Potter and Christopher Logue, among others. The same editorial also expressed the wish that 'NLR will bring to life a genuine dialogue between intellectual and industrial workers', a difficult ambition as experience was to show. The New Left Clubs did have a stab at fostering such a dialogue, and the Fife Socialist League, which had not yet dissolved itself into the Labour Party, embodied it, but the going was hard. Stuart himself had already begun analysing the daunting and deadening structures of Labourism. The latter's block votes,

smoke-filled rooms and indirect corporate affiliations did not encourage such dialogue. The fact that Labour no longer had its own daily newspaper was another sign that the party represented a passive interest rather than an active idea.

Birth of the Review

Stuart spent nearly three years launching and editing the NLR. The journal he produced, like the ULR before it, was innovative and experimental, but combining analysis and exhortation proved frustrating to all concerned. The changing global conjuncture put the peace movement at the centre one moment only to undercut it at the next. The Cuban Missile Crisis, the Test Ban Treaty and the uncertain détente between the superpowers took some of the wind out of CND's sails, though in the mid sixties it could still bring out tens of thousands, sometimes even as many as 100,000, on its annual marches. The negotiated resolution of the Cuban stand-off encouraged an optimism that helped to marginalize the movement. Whatever the exact reason, CND waned and the New Left Clubs subsided. In 1962–64, Harold Wilson's Labour Party also mounted a challenge to the Conservative government that for a time persuaded many that Labour might be worth supporting after all and that, anyway, the odds were stacked against the emergence of a New Left. The New Left strategy at this time was sometimes called 'one foot in and one foot out', but not for the first or last time this proved a difficult balancing act, especially given the great disparity between the struggling New Left Clubs and the massive institutions of Labour and its allies.

It would be difficult to overstate the deep cultural and political conformism of Britain in the fifties, and its lingering influence in the following decade. An NLR article by Stuart's friend Allan Horsfall powerfully conveys the dense smog of conservatism that lay across the land. Horsfall wanted his Labour Party branch to call for a parliamentary motion decriminalizing homosexual acts between consenting adults. Visiting the local Ward Secretary, he was puzzled at the latter's evasiveness—until his wife left the room: 'He then told me (in hushed tones) that of course he hadn't been able to refer to the matter in front of his wife but that he considered my intended action to be most unwise since homosexuality was totally unsuitable for discussion by the sort of people who attended the Ward Committee'—apparently the presence of women was the problem. When, after months of lobbying, Horsfall managed

to get a branch discussion, speakers insisted they had 'sympathy for the homosexuals . . . followed by the usual parade of humbug—across party lines—individual conscience—political suicide'. Councillor B would be 'much more ready to support the motion were it not for the fact that at least some of the agitation for reform was organized by the queers themselves'.[2] Stuart, who could make deadly use of irony himself, must have relished Horsfall's bitter wit. The article appeared in NLR 12, the last issue he edited.

Stuart's problem at the NLR was his dual role as editor and spokesman for a movement. As editor, he was the recipient of copious, well-meant, but often contradictory, advice and criticism from the thirty-strong Board of the journal. John Saville and Edward Thompson, as successive chairmen of the NLR Board, contributed vigorously to this flow. Stuart suggested, years later, that Thompson may have come to regret his decision to stand aside: 'The ambiguity of Edward's position, in relation to me, continued to be a source of tension on the editorial board.'[3] The small Carlisle Street office was besieged with visitors at all hours. I remember visiting him once to discuss a student journal. He wryly observed that the office was 'busier than Piccadilly Circus' and we should seek a cup of coffee downstairs. His generosity to collaborators, young and old, was proverbial, and he offered much encouragement to the editors of *The New University*, several of whom later joined the editorial team.[4] The war in Algeria led to a campaign in support of French students who refused military duty. The journal also submitted a proposal to the Pilkington Commission on the future of broadcasting which was said to have influenced the original—alas long abandoned—pluralist remit for Channel Four. Yet somehow Stuart found the resources to write several major pieces—on Cuba (with Norm Fruchter) and on the Europe of the 'Common Market' (with Perry Anderson).[5] By the last months of 1961 Stuart had had enough and left, taking with him a file of lengthy missives from Edward. The Board agreed that the magazine be handed over to an interim editorial group, and while the Board itself continued for a time, Stuart played no further role.

---

[2] Allan Horsfall, 'Wolfenden in the Wilderness', NLR I/12, Nov–Dec 1961, pp. 39–41.

[3] 'The Formation of a Diasporic Intellectual', p. 496.

[4] See Stuart Hall, 'Student Journals', NLR I/7, Jan–Feb 1961.

[5] Norman Fruchter and Stuart Hall, 'Notes on the Cuban Dilemma', NLR I/9, May–June 1961, pp. 2–12; and with Perry Anderson, 'The Politics of the Common Market', NLR I/10, July–Aug 1961, pp. 1–14.

Politics and culture

The student and worker revolts of the mid and late sixties, especially the dramatic clashes in France and Italy, seemed to re-open the option for a New Left beyond both Stalinism and social democracy. Stuart was one of the three original authors of the *May Day Manifesto*, published first in 1967 and then, in expanded form, as a Penguin special edited by Raymond Williams in 1968. It advanced a thoughtful case for democratic socialism across the range of social policy. It indicted the performance of British capitalism, of Wilsonian 'modernization' and managerialism, and British collusion with US militarism and widening global inequalities. British politics and culture claimed to be post-imperial, but it did not take much to trigger imperial nostalgia, and the racial, paternalist and patriarchal sentiments which went with it. As the UK withdrew from empire, the very identity of the country was thrown into doubt—and Stuart would argue that the British themselves stood to gain much from abandoning the conceits of national virtue and destiny which so often licensed aggression abroad and racial privilege at home.

The *May Day Manifesto* project had been conceived in the deceptive calm of 1967 and was overshadowed by the street theatre, Situationist posters and general strike in France of May 1968. However much delusion all this entailed, it illuminated new dimensions of repression and liberation. A civilization was on the turn. The French events, the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia and the Tet offensive in Vietnam nourished a new type of radicalism and anti-capitalism, with factory and campus occupations. Student radicalism itself functioned as a new left, although anarchist, neo-syndicalist, Maoist and Trotskyist groups disputed the terrain and rejected the term. These revenants, reflecting a very different history from that of 'power-protected' British Labourism, were themselves small vessels tossed about in the wake of large-scale 'social movements' brought into existence by students, anti-war activists, movements of oppressed minorities, squatters, women's groups and anti-imperialist struggles. Grasping the cross-class dynamic of social movements was to be central to Stuart's work.

By this time, curiosity about 'Western Marxism' had developed in all sections of the New Left in Britain, and Raymond Williams was using, often re-working, basic Marxist categories to bring them to bear on the problems of the present, and centrally the question of contemporary

culture. In 1964, together with Paddy Whannel, Stuart wrote a book on *The Popular Arts*, and in the same year he joined Richard Hoggart at the newly created Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, becoming acting director in 1968 and director in 1972. Under his leadership, the Birmingham Centre in the 1970s became the springboard for an entire new discipline—Cultural Studies—and a distinctive theoretical intervention aiming at a non-reductionist account of culture and social formations.

Now Stuart's writings focused less on the passing political scene and more on the deep structures of ideology and a brittle consensus. A long essay from 1972 explored the methodological significance of Marx's 1857 'Introduction' to the *Grundrisse*. The writings of Louis Althusser and Antonio Gramsci began more clearly to inform his writing as he grappled with the tenacity and ubiquity of racial and gender stereotyping. Edward Thompson, on the other hand, was worried that too many of the younger generation were forgetting—if they ever knew—the ruinous heritage of Stalinism. The work of Althusser in particular seemed to Thompson to involve an arcane rehabilitation of dogmatic Marxism and Stalinist obscurantism. The oracular and circular abstraction of Althusser's formulations had no place for the test of evidence and experience. Stuart resisted Edward's onslaught on 'theory', and the History Workshop conference of 1978 became the arena for a classic debate—'a theatrical confrontation'[6]—between Thompson and Hall, in which Stuart responded powerfully to Thompson's assault on the turn to 'theory' with a defence of its necessity in a new theoretical instrumentarium that would be capable of grasping the functioning of ideology and the construction of bourgeois hegemony.

In the same year, together with collaborators from the Birmingham Centre, Stuart co-wrote and edited *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State and Law and Order* (1978), an outstanding work of critical sociology illuminating the 'moral panics' which seize the national imagination in periods of unresolved crisis. This was swiftly followed by *Culture, Media, Language*, which gathered some of the most influential writings from the Centre's *Working Papers in Cultural Studies* since 1972, the years of his tenure as director of CCCS. Another Birmingham-based collection was *Resistance Through Rituals* (1976), edited by Stuart and Tony Jefferson, which explored youth subcultures in postwar Britain, both showing their

[6] Stuart Hall, 'Raphael Samuel: 1934–96', NLR I/221, Jan–Feb 1997, p. 124.

resistance to the suffocating repression of the time and testing whether it was true that purely cultural resistance could ever be effective. Looking back on this work Stuart insisted that it did have some directly political leverage because of its expanded notion of social rupture, beyond the traditional schema of 'class struggle'.

For all that, Stuart knew popular culture to be tricky ground. It was, as he wrote, 'the scene, *par excellence*, of commodification' and hence of 'the circuits of power and capital'—'the space of homogenization where stereotyping and the formulaic mercilessly process the material and experiences it draws into its web, where control over narratives and representations passes into the hands of the established cultural bureaucracies, sometimes without a murmur.'[7] *Resistance Through Rituals* did not simply discern the elements of rebellion within youth culture but also attempted an ambitious sketch of the national conjuncture. One of its schematic tables presented in the left-hand column a series of political events while in the right-hand there was a list of coincident cultural events, focusing on the period 1965–74, when the sixties had really arrived. The precise links between the Vietnam demos and the Rolling Stones in Hyde Park, or the appearance of *Spare Rib* (the feminist magazine) and the first miners' strike, were left for the reader to figure out. Stuart was the first to acknowledge the impact of feminism on his life and thought. His wife Catherine, whom he met in the late sixties, was to become a pioneering feminist historian, closely involved in the *History Workshop* journal and movement, and in *Feminist Review*. The earliest version of his classic 'Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse' includes an account of B-movie Westerns as a genre fundamentally concerned with questions of gender and above all with codes of masculinity.[8] He described to Kuan-Hsing Chen how, aware of the need for deeper engagement with gender analysis, he invited some feminists to assist the Birmingham Centre, only to be 'taken by surprise' when feminism emerged autonomously from women already working there, in one of the two 'great interruptions' of his time as Director.[9]

---

[7] Stuart Hall, 'What is this "Black" in Black Popular Culture?', in Morley and Chen, *Stuart Hall*, p. 469.

[8] See Francis Mulhern, *Culture/Metaculture*, London 2000, p. 179, and generally pp. 93–131.

[9] Stuart Hall, 'The Formation of a Diasporic Intellectual', p. 499. See also Stuart Hall, 'Cultural Studies and the Centre: Some Problematics and Problems', in Stuart Hall, Dorothy Hobson, Andrew Lowe and Paul Willis, eds, *Culture, Media, Language*, London 1980, especially pp. 38–9.

In 1980, just after his departure from Birmingham to take up the chair of sociology at the Open University, Stuart published a long review of Nicos Poulantzas's last book, *State, Power, Socialism*. It was a remarkable piece of writing, closely engaged, at once critical and generous in its response to this 'picture of one of the most able and fluent of "orthodox" Marxist-structuralist thinkers putting himself and his ideas at risk' in a patently 'unfinished' dialogue with the work of Michel Foucault. The book was 'in a very special way, exemplary', Stuart concluded, in doing so sounding a note that was reminiscent of his preferred terms of intellectual engagement, as he wrestled with his own theoretical and political concerns in working towards what he called 'a complex Marxism'. The other 'great interruption' at CCCS in the 1970s had been race, and at just this time, Stuart was identifying the failure of received Marxism to explain the strength and variety of racism, whether in the past or present. He was re-reading Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks*, a fragmentary and elliptical text and, for this very reason, suggestive and useful in the search for a more adequate account. While Gramsci wrote little directly about racism and colonialism, his Sardinian youth had certainly acquainted him with uneven development and the lived realities of semi-colonial rule, helping to explain his preoccupation with the 'Southern Question'. His theoretical categories could be mobilized to explain why capitalist development did not lead to the emergence of a homogenized wage-earning proletariat. Stuart offered important critical formulations in addressing the supposedly homogenizing effects of the 'law of value' in class formation, specifically the notion that labour market pressures ultimately create a sense of collectivity:

> Certainly whenever we depart from the 'Euro-centric' model of capitalist development (and even within it) what we actually find is the many ways in which capital can preserve, adapt to its fundamental trajectory, harness and exploit these particularistic qualities of labour power, building them into its regimes. The ethnic and racial structuration of the labour force, like its gendered composition, may provide an inhibition to the rationally conceived 'global tendencies' of capitalist development. And yet, these distinctions have been maintained, and indeed *developed and refined*, in the global expansion of the capitalist mode. They have provided the means for differentiated forms of exploitation of the different sectors of a fractured labour force.[10]

---

[10] Stuart Hall, 'Gramsci's Relevance for the Study of Race and Ethnicity', *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, vol. 10, no. 2, 1986, p. 24. This text was originally written for UNESCO, where Richard Hoggart then worked. It is reprinted in Morley and Chen, *Stuart Hall*, pp. 411–40. See also 'Gramsci and Us', in Hall, *Hard Road to Renewal*, London 1988, pp. 161–74.

In this view, political economy and culture are intertwined, and bundled in historical packages such as colonial slavery or globalized outsourcing. The further implication of this argument is that hybrid social formations require not just class alliances but political identities and principles that combine culture and class in new ways. Thus, in his celebrated 1979 text 'The Great Moving Right Show', Stuart went out of his way to commend Rock Against Racism, an initiative he described as 'one of the timeliest and best constructed of cultural interventions, repaying serious and extended analysis'.[11] This campaign did not need to remain at the level of a somewhat bland multi-culturalism but could challenge the imbrication of race, capitalism and empire, as did Bob Marley and Linton Kwesi Johnson—and as Stuart was aware, it had been launched by members of one of those Trotskyist 'sects' he often criticized.

Caribbean identities

Stuart's writings on the Caribbean and on the African diaspora raised the question of whether a common experience of slavery and colonialism could have been the missing ingredient when it came to forming an anti-colonial identity. In 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora', he insisted that, as Franz Fanon had argued, the recovery of neglected or suppressed histories of oppression and resistance was an essential moment.[12] Recovery from the wounds of colonialism could only begin once 'forgotten connections are once more set in place'. Borrowing from Edward Said, he described the need to overcome a culture of colonialism that 'rendered *ourselves* other'. However, Stuart went on to insist that identity did not 'proceed in a straight, unbroken line, from some fixed origin'. Even common histories exhibit varying mixtures of similar ingredients, as can be seen in the birth of creolized religions and languages peculiar to the 'New World': examples being Jamaican patois and Haitian Kreyòl, Jamaican pocomania, Haitian voodoo, Native Pentecostalism, Black Baptism, Rastafarianism and the black saints of Spanish America and Brazil. These vitally significant cultural facts shape 'imaginative geography and history' (Said): 'Our belongingness . . . constitutes what Benedict Anderson calls an "imagined community".' Recognizing

---

[11] First published in *Marxism Today*; Hall, *Hard Road to Renewal*, p. 42.

[12] Stuart Hall, 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora', in Jonathan Rutherford, ed., *Identity, Community, Culture, Difference*, London 1990, pp. 222–38. Fanon's book carried a powerful preface by Jean-Paul Sartre, whose *Question of Method* (1964) was also a significant reference point for anti-reductionist initiatives in Marxist theory.

these ingredients allows a necessary sense of the *Présence Africaine* but should not leave unaddressed the *Présence Européenne*: 'The dialogue of power and resistance, of refusal and recognition, with and against *Présence Européenne* is almost as complex as the dialogue with Africa.' Beyond this there is the *Présence Américaine*, known by its indigenous name and breathing the life of an imagined community looking to the future as well as the past. Such a community is not defined by its 'falsity/genuineness' but by the breadth of the spirit that animates it. The journey ends not in Ethiopia 'but with the music of Burning Spear and Bob Marley's "Redemption Song".' There can be moments of perplexity in such passages, as Stuart's sinuous prose wrestles with 'complexity'—you are not quite sure where it is all leading, but in the end, and to the end, Stuart remains a cultural and historical materialist making crucial arguments for a fully political stance.

In his 1995 Walter Rodney lecture, published in NLR 209, Stuart wrote about how struck he was by Jamaica's cultural transformation: 'When I left Jamaica it was a society which did not and could not have acknowledged itself to be largely black.' When he returned three or four decades later:

> The biggest shock to me was listening to Jamaican radio. I couldn't believe my ears that anyone could be quite so bold as to speak patois, to read the news in that accent. My entire education, my mother's whole career, had been specifically designed to prevent anybody at all, and me in particular, from reading anything of importance in that language. Of course you could say all kinds of other things, in the small interchange of everyday life, but important things had to be said, goodness knows, in another tongue.[13]

'Thatcherism'

Stuart was a brilliant essayist and broadcaster, publishing a number of landmark collections. In the 1980s he presented BBC TV programmes on Karl Marx and on the Caribbean. He also presented a radio programme on W. E. B. Du Bois, which included a recording of the great man's funeral in Accra, complete with a commendation from Nkrumah, a twenty-one gun salute and a tenacious rendering of the Internationale. However, it was Stuart's analysis of Margaret Thatcher and 'Thatcherism' that was to be most widely influential. In the pre-internet epoch

---

[13] Stuart Hall, 'Negotiating Caribbean Identities', NLR, I/209, Jan–Feb 1995, p. 12.

his keynote articles appeared first in *Marxism Today* and then in the *Guardian*, but this was just the beginning, as photocopies passed from hand to hand. Stuart had for some time been one of the more prominent public intellectuals on the left, but the work on racism, and the stream of articles on Thatcherism, made him pre-eminent, and not only in Britain. Those of us who had been inclined to see British politicians as a mediocre bunch had to admit that Thatcher was carving out a global role. She was pioneering a new right-wing politics, forging an alliance with Reagan and blazing the trail to wholesale privatization of public assets and industries. Stuart was particularly good at deconstructing the discourses through which Thatcher sold austerity and *laissez-faire* as essential to good national housekeeping, but no less scathing about the official 'opposition'. It took Thatcher years to deliver on her programme and, in the meantime, the Falklands conflict greatly enhanced her ability to mobilize national sentiment, with the effective endorsement of the Labour leadership. Stuart commented: 'More scandalous than the sight of Margaret Thatcher's best hopes going out with the navy has been the demeaning spectacle of the Labour front-bench leadership rowing its dinghy as rapidly as it can in hot pursuit.'[14]

Stuart was aware that this was just a prelude. In 1987, he predicted what Thatcher's 'regressive modernization' would require: 'Send women back to the hearth. Get the men out on the North West Frontier.' The promise of Greater Britain was: 'You will be able, once again, to send our boys "over there", to "fly the flag".'[15] Notwithstanding all this, the savagery of Thatcher's programme might have made her 'authoritarian populism' vulnerable to a left that, as Stuart put it, 'took democracy seriously'. In one dimension, this meant 'radical democracy', as theorized by his friend Ernesto Laclau.[16] In the other, it meant serious attention to the archaic institutions of British parliamentary democracy, with its first-past-the-post electoral system, 'royal prerogative' and House of Lords. Raymond Williams showed the way here in a pamphlet on

---

[14] Stuart Hall, 'The Empire Strikes Back', *Hard Road to Renewal*, p. 74.

[15] Hall, 'Gramsci and Us', p. 167.

[16] Stuart expressed his appreciation for the work of Laclau and Chantal Mouffe in several places, sometimes explaining that he preferred their article, 'Post-Marxism Without Apologies', in NLR I/166, Nov–Dec 1987, to their more fully discursive book, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, London 1985. See, for example, Stuart Hall, 'Introduction', *Hard Road to Renewal*, p. 15. In this NLR article Laclau and Mouffe were responding to the critique of their book by Norman Geras which appeared in NLR I/163, May–June 1987.

Democracy & Parliament, published by the Socialist Society in 1982, in which he made the case for sweeping measures of democratization centrally including electoral reform. If Labour had been able to offer the Liberals electoral reform, some sort of Lib–Lab alliance to keep Thatcher out of power would have been possible (Charter 88 was to press for something like this, together with a Scottish parliament and abolition of the House of Lords). As it was, the Labour Party preferred the mummery of Westminster and the anomalies and misrepresentations of the inherited system. The heroic miners' strike of 1984–85 could have been pivotal in defeating Thatcher—but only, Stuart argued, if the union leadership had reached out to all employed in the mining industry, and only if the Labour leadership had elaborated the wider significance of the strike, and brought out the suppressed issue it posed: namely the government's responsibility for the rehabilitation of the mining districts as coal entered an inevitable decline. His view was that Arthur Scargill, despite his 'great courage', was too cautious, believing the strike could be won without the ballot required to make it formally national in scope. Without such a ballot, the NUM leadership failed to carry the Nottingham area and also failed to attract support from the smaller unions in the mining industry. However, Stuart's final verdict was that the absence of overall direction was the fault of the Labour leadership: 'If Labour has no other function, its role is surely to generalize the issues of the class it claims to represent. Instead its main aim was damage limitation'.[17]

Stuart's articles on Thatcherism drew attention to the New Right's jettisoning of paternalism and reversion to the doctrine of the free market. Given that this was a major reversal and major theme, the designation of 'authoritarian populism' was some way wide of the mark, in that it did not focus clearly enough on the crucial historic novelty: the revival of market fundamentalism. The authoritarianism in the formula was, at least in part, the effect of demolishing protection and leaving vulnerable populations at the mercy of market forces. Perhaps 'free-market populism' would have been better and more telling, for when demystifying the seductions of consumer capitalism, or the demagogy of Thatcherite rhetoric, Stuart always insisted on asking why millions could be seduced by them. If the left was to develop serious alternatives it would have to start from a reckoning with its opponent's strong points. *The Hard Road* contained a marvellous essay on Gramsci in which he supplied a fascinating account of the subtle ways in which hegemony is constructed

[17] Stuart Hall, 'The Crisis of Labourism', *Hard Road to Renewal*, p. 205.

from below as well as from above. His observations on the masochism of the British public, who believe that the nastiness of the medicine they are receiving is a sign of its efficacy, have continuing relevance.

NLR, for its part, published several critiques of Stuart's theorization of 'Thatcherism', which could be seen as embodying too much 'pessimism of the intelligence' and a consequent willingness to settle for over-modest objectives.[18] The appearance of Stuart's work in *Marxism Today* was a tribute to the skills of its editor, Martin Jacques, but it also raised the question of the general filiation of Stuart's work on Thatcherism to the stance of that journal. For a moment in the early 1980s, the magazine—which reflected the thinking of the 'revisionist' trend in the British Communist Party—explored and seemed to support the radicalization of the Labour Party and the rebirth of CND/END (the latter much inspired by Edward Thompson). But by the latter stages of Tony Benn's bid to become deputy leader in 1981, it had become more critical of the Labour Left and seemed comfortable with the prospect of Neil Kinnock's becoming leader and projecting a contrastingly moderate Labour Party. Eric Hobsbawm flatly urged that Bennism should be rejected—with real impact.

The Labour Left was greatly weakened by Benn's defeat in the deputy-leadership election. The party's miserable score in the 1983 election was a further heavy blow, aggravated by Benn's losing his seat. Now outside parliament, the Left's most gifted standard bearer was unable to stand in the leadership contest that followed the election. There was still a left in some trade unions and municipal authorities, but they were unable to prevent the abolition of the Greater London Council, which Stuart defended to the finish. Combined with the shattering defeat of the miners, the epochal shift that Stuart had foreseen was evidently under way, with effects that were evident on the left as well as in the general political culture. As a contributor to *Marxism Today*, Stuart was responsible only for his own work. However, Ralph Miliband's critique of the 'New Revisionism', published in NLR in 1985 and taking issue with the broad political trend that the magazine increasingly represented, focused

[18] Bob Jessop and his co-authors in 'Authoritarian Populism: Two Nations and Thatcherism' (NLR I/147, Sept–Oct 1984), criticized what they saw as the exaltation of ideology—and neglect of the economic—in Stuart's account of 'Thatcherism'. But one does not have to look far in Stuart's writings to find the economic being analysed in very relevant ways: 'Gramsci always insisted that hegemony is not an exclusively ideological phenomenon. There can be no hegemony without "the decisive nucleus of the economic"': 'Gramsci and Us', *Hard Road to Renewal*, p. 171.

precisely on the interventions of Eric Hobsbawm and Stuart Hall. Ralph was courteous and respectful in tangling with his friends, but a number of his key political points were bang on target.[19] He objected in particular to the view, expressed by Hall and Jacques, that the further catastrophic career of Thatcherism must be blocked by 'broad alliances' aimed at 'quite modest objectives'.[20] Exactly what these objectives might be was not spelt out. Thatcher's Conservatives never won more than 44 per cent of the vote and often polled well below this. Her eventual removal by her own colleagues in 1990 reflected an awareness that she had become a liability. Her policies had sown division and hatred. Entire regions were ruined, and the smashing of the miners had been a brutal spectacle.

Ralph had good reason to question the efficacy of 'modest objectives' and to doubt that they would be sufficient to deal with such a powerful phenomenon as the Thatcherism that Stuart had delineated. The real meaning of measures surely depends greatly on context and social forces. In Thatcher's Britain there were a number of principles and policies that might have had a very radical impact and which could have been advocated as matters of elementary decency and 'common sense': reining in the banks, furnishing free child care, confronting homophobia, raising taxes on the rich, ending Trident and cruise missiles, abolishing the House of Lords. Ralph's opposition to what he called 'the sharp *dilution* of radical commitments' did not stop him supporting Charter 88. And indeed, in his introduction to *The Hard Road to Renewal* Stuart wrote that he did not favour such a dilution.[21] However, he was not wrong to query Ralph's confidence that major class confrontations would soon return and that the immense resources of the labour movements would ultimately prevail. Ralph rightly observed that Europe had been repeatedly riven by momentous clashes between classes in the twentieth century. But 1985 marked the beginning of nearly three decades of class demobilization and demoralization, strikes of all kinds became rare, and even large demonstrations failed to check the relentless advance of neo-liberalism.

---

[19] Ralph Miliband, 'The New Revisionism in Britain', NLR I/150, Mar–Apr 1985, pp. 5–28.

[20] 'Introduction' to Stuart Hall and Martin Jacques, eds, *The Politics of Thatcherism*, London 1983, p. 16.

[21] Such dilution is 'a concern that we ought to take seriously, but it must not be . . . an excuse to postpone radical re-examination of left conventional wisdom'. 'Introduction', *Hard Road to Renewal*, p. 11.

Ralph underestimated the effects of a far-reaching global recomposition of capital and labour as the century drew to its close. Had he looked at South Africa, South Korea or Brazil—all countries where union action helped to foster democratization—he might have been able to reformulate the argument in ways that would have met Stuart on the terrain of the new realities. In a bleak and sober reflection, he warned that any thoroughgoing defeat or containment of the working class would have dire consequences since 'the principal (not the only) "grave-digger" of capitalism' remained the organized working class:

> If, as one is constantly told is the case, the organized working class will refuse to do the job, then this job will not be done, and capitalist society will continue, generation after generation, as a conflict-ridden, growingly authoritarian and brutalized social system, poisoned by its inability to make humane and rational use of the immense resources which capitalism itself has brought into being—unless of course the world is pushed into nuclear war. Nothing has happened in the world of advanced capitalism and in the world of labour to warrant such a view.[22]

The final sentence of this passage must give pause for thought. The persistence of capitalism has indeed involved brutality and waste on a gargantuan scale, but it has also led to momentous public events in which millions upon millions have sought to enter the history of their country and the world. Stuart's long engagement with hybrid class formations and capitalism run amok speaks to the problem of reckoning with these 'new masses' (as Göran Therborn calls them), as they have emerged in Brazil, Greece, Egypt, Turkey, Ukraine, and who knows where next.[23]

New times?

From 1988 to 1991, when it closed, *Marxism Today* carried a series entitled 'New Times', a feature that generated some thought-provoking pieces but too much euphoria that failed to spy the clouds on the horizon. Addressing the charge that '*Marxism Today* begat Blair' Martin Jacques had the candour to write—in 2006—that there was 'an element of truth in that', since New Labour and *MT* both 'recognized the obsolescence of much of the left's proposition'.[24] However, he insisted: '*Marxism Today*'s

---

[22] Hall, 'Introduction', pp. 13–14.

[23] Göran Therborn, 'New Masses?', NLR 85, Jan–Feb 2014.

[24] Martin Jacques's words are quoted from his introduction to the *Marxism Today* archive on www.amielandmelburn.org.uk (consulted 25 March 2014).

project was the creation of a new kind of left', while Blair's project was the opposite, 'namely acquiescence in the Thatcherite agenda and a denial of the very notion of the left'. He added that he regretted 'the failure to lay sufficient stress on core values of the left like equity and the notion of the public', or, with its 'overwhelmingly Western-centric' focus, to 'address race and ethnicity'. It will be obvious enough that Stuart was not to blame for all this. Jacques may have over-done the self-criticism just as he had once overhyped 'New Times'. Better than the self-criticism was an urge to rectify. Hobsbawm, Hall and Jacques joined forces to produce a special one-off issue of *Marxism Today* in November 1998, a year into Blair's tenure, dedicated to a swingeing critique of New Labour and its wholesale surrender to the Thatcherite agenda. The cover of the issue had a photo of the Labour leader with the word WRONG spelt out in large letters beneath it. Stuart's piece was entitled 'The Great Moving Nowhere Show'.

By this time Stuart had already helped to found a new magazine, *Soundings*, representing yet another iteration of a 'New Left' publication. This was his most important publishing forum in the last phase of his life, and an interview with Bill Schwartz in late 2007 allowed him to address the 're-militarization' of relations between the 'West and the Rest' and to evoke the extreme consequences of war and globalization for many millions: 'People are displaced from their homes, forced across frontiers—living in transit camps, stowing away in the backs of lorries or underneath aeroplanes, putting themselves into life-long debt.'[25] The dislocations of war and of market fundamentalism begin to feed off one another. Responding to a question, Stuart worried that his work on difference and on Thatcherism had sometimes got too close to its object, and could be misread as some sort of recommendation—as indeed it sometimes was. The market thrived on difference, and Tony Blair was happy to pose as Thatcher's apprentice.

Just last year, Stuart co-authored, with Doreen Massey and Michael Rustin, the opening salvo of 'the Kilburn manifesto',[26] a trenchant indictment of the neoliberal model that has reordered the world in the last

---

[25] 'Living with Difference: Stuart Hall in Conversation with Bill Schwartz', *Soundings*, Winter 2007, pp. 148–58.

[26] Stuart Hall, Doreen Massey and Michael Rustin, 'After Neoliberalism: Analysing the Present', *Soundings*, Spring 2013. Stuart lived in the Kilburn area of north-west London, as do his collaborators.

three decades. At the time of the Asian crisis, the IT bubble or the 2008 bust some observers had hastily concluded that market fundamentalism was over, discredited and dead. But Stuart and his co-authors maintain that this is far from being the case. They observe that the means chosen to deal with these events had actually strengthened the banks, aggravated inequalities, redistributed debt and bred new forms of insecurity. The neoliberal order has been promoted by NATO and other strategic alliances (with Israel). It fosters a globalization linked to a new 'financial imperialism' for which London has been a major site of 'invention and dissemination' and which is driven by a planetary search for new assets. Privatization, land speculation and spiralling markets in commodity futures all fuel the new circuits (to which, most recently, the UK government has added the 'liberation' of pension funds). The Labour Party has been paralysed by the memory of its role in government as cheerleader for neoliberalism; it is 'rendered speechless' by the charge that it initiated the course the Cameron government is now pursuing, and 'appears tongue-tied' when invited to enunciate an alternative. 'The Green Party provides a bridge between environmental movements and mainstream politics', the authors observe, leaving open the question whether this or another formation might furnish the opportunity so long sought for a New Left, and calling for debate on the way forward.

In 1990, looking back on the early New Left, Stuart reaffirmed its basic impulse as justified and even timely.[27] Five years later he would do so again, at the grave of Raphael Samuel[28] in Highgate cemetery, where his own mortal remains now also lie—about fifty yards away from Raphael and close to Karl Marx, Ralph Miliband and Eric Hobsbawm. He bequeaths to us a continuing commitment, a new horizon and a challenging task.

[27] Hall, 'Life and Times of the First New Left', NLR 61, Jan–Feb 2010, pp. 177–96.

[28] See 'Raphael Samuel: 1934–96', NLR I/221, Jan–Feb 1997.