

## HOW IT ALL BEGAN: A FOOTNOTE TO HISTORY

Marion **Kozak**

The *Socialist Register* was conceived on an exceptionally sunlit Sunday, April 7 1963, over lunch. Sitting round the table were John Saville, Lawrence Daly, Edward Thompson, Ralph and I. To an outsider it was evident that Lawrence Daly in some ways dominated the group. Daly, who had once been a working miner in Fife and later became a trade union leader, had been part of John and Edward's circle in the course of their break with the Communist Party in 1956–57 and after, and they considered him a most remarkable working class intellectual. He had attracted considerable attention in the 1959 general election campaign when he had beaten the official Communist candidate into third place in Willie Gallagher's old constituency – a traditional stronghold of Communism. But what sticks out in my memory is not the politics but that Edward wanted to talk to him about poetry and that the afternoon concluded with a discussion about Shakespeare's sonnets which Lawrence had been reading.

In their different ways, all the individuals at our little meeting were among the first wave members of the British New Left, and represented various aspects of a revived Marxist culture whose immediate antecedents were the revelations of the 20th Party Congress. On the one hand, **Khrushchev's** speech to the Congress of the CPSU had exposed the crimes of Stalinism as well as the fallibility of the Communist project as exemplified in the Soviet suppression of the Hungarian revolution. On the other hand, the broad Left and even the centre of the political spectrum in Britain had demonstrated widespread disillusion with Cold War politics, in the protest against the colonialism of the Suez invasions and in the growing movement against nuclear weapons. It was the coming together of personalities and groupings which included the left of the Labour Party and young intellectuals in the universities who previously had never had a political affiliation, which gave the New Left a coherent point of reference for political action later on. Two journals, *The New Reasoner* and *Universities and Left Review* supplied an intellectual link for disparate individuals and endowed the project with genuine excitement.

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International links were formed with dissidents in the East and West long before the birth of the New Left in the USA. In 1957 Ralph was sending copies of both journals to C. Wright Mills and had organised a meeting of the New Left group with the Polish dissident philosopher Leszek **Kolakowski** in 1958.

I sometimes mentioned that glowing afternoon of April 1963 to Ralph, but he didn't have the same memories – he certainly did not remember that we had kebabs for lunch and that he had thought that they were too 'chi-chi'; or that all four of them had just returned from an acrimonious meeting with the editorial team of *New Left Review* – which had taken up Saturday the 6th and part of the Sunday, and whose outcome had stimulated them into setting up not an 'alternative' but 'another' socialist journal to which they could give their energies.

The first memo about starting the *Socialist Register* was written by Ralph on that sunny Sunday, April 7 1963, on my portable Olivetti which he had adopted after discarding his own very noisy Remington Quiet Writer – a little fact so anachronistic in the days of the super-speed computer. How the *Register* was set up, its political purpose and its evolution, is inseparable from my own and Ralph's lifelong intellectual and emotional involvement with John **Saville**, helped along by gallons of strong black tea. Its birth is the subject of this brief *aide-mémoire*.

The fizz and determination to do something that very afternoon of April 7, 1963 arose from a gradual estrangement between the 'old new left' Board of *New Left Review*, which happened to have been of the *New Reasoner* vintage, and the new directorate, or editorial committee, of *New Left Review* Mark II as Thompson called it, who included Perry Anderson, Tom Nairn and others. Briefly, and without reproducing the careful analysis documented by Lin Chun in *The British New Left*<sup>1</sup>, a thumbnail sketch of the history of the two journals is in order. *The New Reasoner*, a quarterly established in 1957, had merged with *Universities and Left Review* in 1959 to establish *New Left Review*. The Board, whose role was advisory, represented most of the left currents of the time under the then editor, Stuart Hall. The new editorial Committee with Perry Anderson at its head took over in May 1962. Several different strands of the left were therefore struggling unsuccessfully to establish a peaceful transition to the *New Left Review*.

First, there was the *Reasoner* and the *New Reasoner* generation which represented a roll-call of well-known ex-Communists who had either left the Party or been expelled from it in 1956. The history of the Party in the UK had been punctuated by milestones of doubt and disaffection but not by mass resignations or expulsions. The 'fifty sixers' were different; they had put up with the 1939 Hitler-Stalin Pact and the absurd notion of the 'imperialist' war against the Nazis, the Slansky trials, the Soviet break with

**Tito**, the 'doctors plot' of 1953 as well as the suppression of the Berlin rising of the same year, but were incensed by the obduracy of the Party to open up the debate after **Khrushchev's** revelations to the **Twentieth** Party Congress. The issues at stake were not only the perniciousness of Stalinism but the brutal suppression of the Hungarian uprising and the uncertainty as to what would happen in Poland. The refusal to discuss these openly in a democratic spirit was ultimately the cause of 10,000 resignations and expulsions. John Saville and E P Thompson who had started *The Reasoner* in 1956, were later joined by an editorial Board which included Ken Alexander, Doris **Lessing**, Ronald L Meek, Randall Swingler, and subsequently Derek Kartun, Peter Worsley and Malcolm **McEwen**. Thompson **symbolised** the growing dissent and revulsion in his article 'Through the Smoke of Budapest' in the final issue of *The Reasoner* (November 1956). When the editors were forced to leave the Party rather than accede to the journal's suppression, it became the quarterly *New Reasoner* in the summer of 1957.<sup>2</sup>

Parallel to the ferment spilling out of the British Communist Party, the *Universities and Left Review* simultaneously provided a forum for younger left academics and students, some of whom were Labour Party members. Under the leadership of Raphael (then known as Ralph) Samuel, Peter Sedgwick, Stuart Hall, Rod Prince, Charles Taylor, Alasdair **McIntyre** and other writers and academics most of whom had never been Communists, the *ULR* provided a lively forum for the independent and activist left. Some *NR* people like Thompson and **Miliband** maintained contacts and wrote for both journals. Raymond Williams, who had left the CP in 1941, was close to Thompson and **Miliband** in age, but was not close to the *New Reasoner* people or the maelstrom of their debates in the 1950s. Although he thought the *New Reasoner* was 'a much more solid journal', he was more attracted to *ULR* by virtue of addressing itself to problems of popular culture and 'the extraordinary transformations of scene in **England**'.<sup>3</sup>

The reason for the amalgamation of *New Reasoner* and *Universities and Left Review* was that both journals seemed to be reaching out to the same constituency and both had administrative and business burdens. In particular, Thompson bore the strain of housing the editorial offices of *The New Reasoner* in his own home in Halifax. *New Left Review*, under the editorship of Stuart Hall and a large editorial board, seemed the answer to the problem, with the first issue appearing in January 1960. At first, *New Left Review* was a quarto bi-monthly with a magazine format using photographs, drawings and a mixture of long and short articles, reaching out to a committed but not exclusively academic audience of activists. The new editor, Stuart Hall, had a hard time with the heavy weight of left gurus on his Board and on his back. He left in January 1962 and was succeeded by the new editors Gabriel **Pearson**, **Denis Butt**, Raphael Samuel and Perry

Anderson.

The character of the new *NLR* or *The Review*, as it became known, gradually changed. It became a much heavier read, with fewer but longer articles, designed in an altogether more abstract style. It was a book-size journal and meant to be used as such, with no concessions to those who wanted light relief together with the serious stuff. Whereas the *NLR* Mark I used its editorial columns to address readers on current issues of British politics, *NLR* Mark II desisted from a preachy approach or political counsel. From a magazine of 60–70 pages *NLR* became a 120 page journal, and its only concession to 'popular' taste were its 'Scanner' columns, brief reviews or highly intellectual analyses of rock music which will undoubtedly one day find their way into academic books on the sociology of music. A new 'cultural' analysis was initiated by Raymond Williams. His *Culture and Society* and *The Long Revolution* (1961) were very influential texts, paralleled by theoretical perspectives on the political front led by Anderson and Nairn.

The setting up of *New Left Review* signalled a break from the participation of the non-academic left in the politics of a journal like *The New Reasoner*. That journal had continued to integrate active members of trade unions and grass roots 'movements' because of their common history in the Communist Party which had laid considerable stress on day to day collaboration with the industrial working class. In 1958, John Saville was enthusiastically planning a series of popular, *NR* sponsored lectures at the LSE which would be both 'academic and polemical' (JS to RM 25.6.58). However, neither *New Left Review* or for that matter *The Socialist Register* ever succeeded in providing a forum for the non-academic, working class audience. Some of those lost included prominent ex-CP activists greatly admired by John Saville and others such as Jim and Gertie Roche (Leeds), both ex-CP members; Walt Grenald (Hull), later President of the TGWU, Colin Barnett (Sheffield), H. W. Wynn, President of Derbyshire Miners, Reg Parker (Leeds), Harry Wright, Don Major, President of Hull Trades Council – all of whom attended an *NR* and *ULR* Industrial Weekend School in November 1958 in Leeds. (*Minutes*, 16–17 December 1958). The New Left Clubs, which also represented the activist wing of *The New Reasoner* and *Universities and Left Review*, also gradually disappeared from view in the new *NLR*. (A good few of the Left Clubs' secretaries have since become honoured academics, one a Vice-Chancellor of a University, another a Fellow of All Souls.)

Ralph had joined *NR* later than the ex-Communist members, in April 1958, and strongly opposed the merger that occurred between *NR* and *ULR*. Ralph's opposition to the merger was well known. In a letter to John and Edward he wrote that he met with Charles Taylor to discuss the project of the new consolidated journal and expressed profound doubts about its

political consistency. He wanted a journal with a 'clear **political** line . . . I am sure we shall come to look back on the last two and a half years as a useful preparation for something a good deal more oriented' (RM to JS and EPT 18.2.59). The relationship that had been forged by **Miliband** with both Saville and Thompson during the years of the *New Reasoner* had given Ralph a sense of 'socialist comradeship', an experience which he had missed since his student days and which he articulated in an uncharacteristically effusive letter to Edward and John on **5.12.59**:

**A letter of thanks**

I have just finished reading through the editorial and the Letter to our Readers in *NR* 10, received this morning, and I feel like sending a letter to the editors. It's an awkward letter to write in some ways, but I want to do it, even if it sounds a bit embarrassing. . . Actually it's just to say a personal thank you to both of you. What you have done for me needs saying now. In effect you have given me the sense of socialist comradeship (I said it would be embarrassing) which I have not had before, save perhaps in early student days. You have both made me feel that, beside the sense of belonging to a movement, I was also involved in a personal comradeship with people who had more experience than I, who could share in a direct way the political worries I have, who spoke my language and who also welcomed me as one of their number. This last point is something I do want to stress. I have felt deeply involved with *NR* (which is perhaps one reason why I have fought so stubbornly against its disappearance) and you have both given me a measure of confidence I might make a contribution to what you were trying to do. Assertiveness, in this context, is not the same thing as assurance; and both your praise, often to my mind over generous, and your criticism, has helped me more than I can possibly tell you. I find that you have both become part of an inner forum in why I write and what I think – not inhibiting but stimulating, and formative. I hope you will believe that it is no false pathos which makes me say that whatever I can do for *NLR* and for the kind of movement we want in the next few years will be better done because of what you have done for me in the last two years. So – thank you, comrades.

Both Edward and John responded to this letter in generous terms and John spoke of 'an elation that I certainly did not **feel** for most of this miserable decade we have just lived through'. Saville also described the goals of the *New Reasoner* as a way of developing 'our theoretical work **as** Marxists and really to build a **marxist** tradition in the Anglo Saxon countries and . . . to develop in our localities a lively political tradition'. (JS to RM 7.12.59) Both John and Ralph had found EPT an inspirational figure whom they admired intensely. In 1960 John and Ralph were exchanging letters confirming their appreciation of how much Edward had given to 'the movement'.

There is clearly a way in which the *New Reasoner* gave Ralph what he had been looking for in terms of group affiliation after abandoning the **Tribunite** Left and Victory for Socialism – two left groups active inside the Parliamentary Labour Party which Ralph had joined briefly in 1956 and which had included major Labour Party personalities such **as** Barbara Castle, Michael Foot, Stephen Swinger, Konni Zilliacus, Ian Mikardo and Jo Richardson. Ralph was an exception in the *New Reasoner* circles

because he had never belonged to the Communist Party – and always knew that he would never join despite the fact that in moments of political gloom he sometimes wished he could bring himself to give the Party his allegiance. Very much later, he partly explained his inhibition about becoming involved with the Communist Party by the fact that at the age of about eighteen or nineteen he had read Jan Valtin's *Out of the Night* (1941)<sup>4</sup> – a book of disillusionment with Communism which had sowed serious doubts in his mind about practices in the Soviet Union and the Comintern. In notes for a political autobiography he prepared in 1983, he wrote: 'Jan Valtin's *Out of the Night* left me with a serious question mark about the Comintern and the reality of Communist politics and a certain scepticism about total and unqualified commitment, or so I think in retrospect' (RM 22.5.83).

There had been various troubling aspects of Soviet politics which worried Ralph when he arrived in England in 1940: the Hitler-Stalin Pact and the assassination of **Trotsky**. When he was at the LSE, which was evacuated to Cambridge during the war, he was close to many Party members, got involved in hosting a visit by fraternal delegates from the Soviet army during the war but never affiliated. After the war he continued to argue with his Communist friends about issues of freedom of expression and civil rights and he retained a commitment to 'communism' but not to the Party or the Soviet State and its politics.

After 1956 the process of destalinization was painfully slow inside the CPGB, the French Communist Party and to a lesser extent even inside the Italian Party (PCI), which had the reputation of being the most democratic of all European Communist Parties. In the 1960s the CPGB adamantly refused to engage in meaningful debate with people outside the party, particularly former members, while continuing to interpret the Soviet example as the only valid route to reaching the Holy Grail. Ralph found it difficult to condone the wooden debates in the *Morning Star*, daily newspaper of the CPGB, which continued broadly speaking to put a positive gloss on the Soviet experience and to use the epithet 'Trotskyist' and 'nihilist' as an expression of opprobrium until well into the 1970s. He always agreed to enter into dialogue with Communist Party officials on public platforms. He poured scorn, however, on the politically correct concepts of 'bourgeois art', and 'bourgeois science' and the fossilised attitude to Marxism in the Soviet Union which he described as 'la pourriture du Marxisme **Officiel**' (RM to Marcel Liebman 28.5.67). Ralph was also scathing about the level of intellectual debate: 'vocables passe-partout tels que classe **ouvrière**, **aliénation** dont les social scientists soviétiques sont **pleins**' (RM to ML 24.11.67).

It is certain that in some way *The New Reasoner* compensated Ralph for not having a political home. It provided him with a forum to discuss and to

publish on issues relating to the Labour Party and western capitalism. In the late 50s, as he was writing Parliamentary *Socialism* (a work which provided him with an inexhaustible seam relating to Labour politics), it was clear that his association with The New Reasoner helped unlock his writing talents by giving him not only a place to publish but also a group of people who shared his concern for current politics. This stood in contrast to his working environment at the LSE. John Saville, in particular, and to a lesser extent Thompson, were the ones who took the keenest interest in the new interpretation of Labour Party politics which Ralph was formulating at the time. Saville made an enormous contribution to a critique of Parliamentary Socialism, as it came off the typewriter. It was the tradition of New Reasoner partnership, lost in the *NLR*, which Ralph tried to recreate subsequently in the Socialist Register.

The break between the Board and the editorial team of *NLR*, which occurred at the acrimonious meeting on April 6–7, 1963, was the culmination of a long history of strain. Relations between the old Board and new Team were edgy and had to do with divergent perspectives and ideologies. Apart from particular disagreements on issues of principle and theory, the new Review was criticised for standing aside from contemporary politics and putting too much emphasis on the intellectual task of 'deepening the analysis and theory available to the left', as a memo (undated) from the editorial team, sent out in the months before the break, put it. This memo had set out the work plan for forthcoming issues in a take-it-or-leave-it manner, and while it invited Board members to attend, it did so without naming any time or place. John had expressed the division as 'the old guard and the young guard' with Edward as the Chair bearing the burden of bridging the gap. *NLR* Mark 11 had rejected articles on economic issues relating to the Common Market by members of the old Board, about which Edward still remained angry ten years later (EPT to RM and JS 20.6.73). While everyone from the New Reasoner team was clear, as a result of bitter experience in the early days of the merger in 1960 between *NR* and *Universities and Left Review*, that the new Team had to have the independence which had been denied to Stuart Hall, the previous editor, they felt a sense of frustration about being unwanted, about disagreements with the editorial policies of *NLR* and feeling redundant. There was a lot of nostalgia for the days of the New Reasoner, especially from Ralph.

Before the final break, the increased alienation between the Old Board and the new editorial committee found expression in the prodigious memo writing talent of Edward Thompson. On April 3, 1963, just before the meeting of April 6–7, he wrote 15,000 words straight onto the skins of his old Gestetner entitled 'Where are we Now?' which was distributed to all the members of the Board and the new editorial committee. In this memo he magisterially took the new editors to task on various issues of substance,

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which he expressed at length and with superb elegance, echoing some of the criticisms of Ralph and John. Edward was harsh with the '**deraciné**' element of the new NLR, the lack of knowledge or interest among the new editorial committee in British politics, and even more emphatically their denigration of British empiricism. While the new editorial committee avowed an interest in 'intellectual work', Edward detected in their interest an 'abrupt shift to new themes and preoccupations. This is not consolidation it is rejection'. Much of the memo dealt with his concept of internationalism as opposed to the new ideas of 'Third Worldism' as propounded at the time by **Fanon, Sartre** and less so by Che Guevara, which were echoed in the pages of NLR. Edward's memo attacked their analysis of imperialism which neglected to highlight indigenous British struggles waged against it. Edward cited his own father as well as E.D. Morel, other left labour intellectuals and working class and trade union activists who had all vigorously opposed imperialism. He contrasted these activities with the 'Neo-Sorelian mystique of violence', which was becoming fashionable in the 1960s.

Ralph had expressed similar views in March 1963 in a letter to Perry Anderson about an article published in NLR No 18 – 'The Third World' by Keith Buchanan – referring specifically to the charge of imperialism against the First World's working classes as the chief beneficiaries of colonialism:

Buchanan's appeal for aid to the Third World is the worst kind of misleading liberal claptrap. If ever a country has dished out aid on a global massive scale it is the US in Vietnam, Korea, Greece and most countries of the Third World. 'Aid' is one of those notions which has to be interpreted and handled with care. Otherwise it is just cheap, heart **warming** rubbish, which conceals the fact that what the underdeveloped countries need is social revolution, to make aid fruitful. Following from this failure of understanding stems the worst feature of the piece, (a) the assumption that the Western proletariat would have to forego affluence to provide 'aid' to the underdeveloped world; this is one of those nice catch notions that warms the heart of liberals. (b) It is monstrous and grotesque to argue or rather it is monstrous and cowardly to say that in the opinion of Moussa (and Buchanan?) these efforts of Western workers to raise their standard of living have contributed more to the deterioration in underdeveloped countries than has the profit motive of industrial and commercial leaders. If you are to say such a thing, it is absolutely incumbent upon you to give some evidence.. . this is hardly a minor point; what it means, simply is that the working classes bear a larger share of guilt for poverty in the underdeveloped countries than capitalism. (RM to Perry Anderson 9.3.63).

The official break between the Old Board and the editorial Committee of NLR was formally announced on the last page of issue no 24 (April 1964) which boldly stated that the editorial team had asked the Old Board to transfer to itself the entire legal, financial, as well as editorial responsibility for the Review. 'The Review is therefore now owned by the editorial team and the New Left Board has been dissolved. It is hoped that former Board members will have close informal relations as contributors to the

Review.'

Considering the strains of those years in which *NLR* Mark I became Mark II, the correspondence of the *Socialist Register* editors from April 1963 indicates almost no bitterness towards the editorial committee of *NLR* Mark II, except for occasional references that dwelt on a sustained criticism of the contents of the new *NLR*. Despite Ralph's loyalty to his comrades on the Board, there is no evidence in his bulging files of disputations on paper with members of the new *NLR* and certainly nothing but a courteous reply from Tom Nairn about the criticism Ralph had aimed at the Buchanan article in March 1963. And even after the *Socialist Register* was initiated, there were exchanges between John and Ralph in 1965 about plans to invite Tom Nairn to review **Deutscher's** biography of **Trotsky** and to do a critical essay on *The New Statesman*.

The break had occurred because of a basic difference in style and philosophy. The new *NLR* was beating a new style among left journals from which the 'Old Board' was brusquely excluded, and the editors of the *SR* were therefore losing their political home. The fact that the new team had never been through the school of party-based Communism was also a factor. Neither Anderson, Nairn, Mitchell nor subsequent editors of *NLR* had ever been touched by the agonies of belonging to the Communist Party or its ideology. For a long time *The Review* remained resolutely non-aligned and untouched by the need to be identified with a cause.

Subsequently, the contents of *NLR* became increasingly academic and remote from contemporary British politics.

Fortunately, as they decided to set up the *Socialist Register* its editors set aside these old controversies and succeeded in carving out a new and independent, socialist path for themselves which was different from the old *New Reasoner*, different from *NLR*, but not in opposition to it. They published articles which were critical of the work of *NLR*, notably by Thompson and Kolakowski, but avoided sectarian mud-slinging. Although *NR* names were relied on, Ralph did mention that he would 'like to strike out a bit from *NR* circles (!)' (RM to JS 31.5.63). Edward described *The SR* subsequently as 'the last survivor in the direct line of continuity from the Old New *Left*'.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, one of Ralph's proudest moments was to receive two letters written on the same day from Thompson and Anderson, both congratulating him on the contents of the 1974 *Register* and on his two articles in that issue (PA and EPT to RM 25.1.74).

Everyone in the New Left had enough of editorial Boards, and in the initial stages of the *SR* it was envisaged that the three editors would be responsible for different sections.-By April 29, 1963 it was clear that Thompson would not agree to be an editor although he intended to contribute to the first issue. It was Edward who introduced Ralph to Martin Eve who became the *Register's* publisher and godfather. The production

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costs were estimated at £660 for 2500 copies which if sold at 30/- (at today's prices, £1.50) for a hardback and 15/- (75p) for a paperback, would have made some profit. The editors both made a financial contribution through standing orders to get things started.

John was very keen to enlist the support of Michael Foot and the Tribune Left which he thought might benefit from having a new Left Journal, which could provide intellectual underpinning for that wing of the labour movement. Foot was at the time regarded as an ally of the independent left, deeply involved in CND and working outside the mainstream of Labour party politics. Ralph went to see Foot who was 'enthusiastic about the annual. Like everyone else he could not think why anybody had not done it before. He is most willing to write a piece on the last years of the Labour Government. All we must hope for is that he will come up with decent stuff' (RM to JS 30.5.63). That article did not materialise because of Michael Foot's terrible car accident in 1963.

The original concept of the *Register* differed appreciably from the final product. Ralph visualised a broad based content which included articles of up to 15,000 words(!) on 'socialist theory and practice', labour history, the labour movement and aspects of 'capitalist society', 'agencies of historical change'. John was very keen on an 'international chronicle of events' and a round up of books (JS to RM 20.5.63), documents from labour history, for example Luddite documents (proposed by Edward), obituaries and an article marking the centenary of the formation of the First International in 1864. The Annual Chronicle of Events did not materialise in the end, nor did the obituaries or book reviews in a regular fashion. After six months of toying with various titles for the new Review, in November 1963, Martin Eve came up with *The Socialist Register: A Survey of Movements and Ideas*, after Cobbett's *Register*, which had figured prominently in Thompson's *Making*. Everyone thought that this was a perfect idea, with just the right, evocative tinge of radical historical perspective about it and much superior to *The Socialist Annual* which had been the working title until then.

By December 1963 the editors began work on the forthcoming issues. Ralph had been attending meetings between Harold Wilson and the National Peace Fellowship and wrote to John and Ernest Mandel on the hopeless prospects for a left Labour Party policy. There was strong agreement that something had to be carried about the welfare state, which finally materialised in volume 2 as 'Facts and Theories of the Welfare State' by Dorothy Wedderburn. Deutscher promised an article and wanted someone to review his Trotsky trilogy. Ralph began a fruitless search for a suitable candidate to review Sartre's *Critique de la Raison Dialectique*. He wrote in 1964 and 1965 to Leszek Kolakowski who had been seriously ill, in political difficulties and having problems in being published in Poland.

In an essay published in the 30th anniversary issue, *The Socialist Register 1994*,<sup>8</sup> Ralph wrote that at no time did he and John 'devote any time to the discussion of the ideological and political direction of the prospective publication', given their in-depth discussions and agreement on questions of socialist theory and practice over the previous years. They both took it for granted that it would be broadly within the Marxist tradition but certainly without a 'party line'. In writing to Ernest Mandel, Ralph defined the SR as 'une **sérieuse** revue de l'**Année**, d'**un** nombre de points de vue. J'aime dire que l'**orientation** politique de l'**Annual** sera fort **générale** – all the way from Michael Foot leftwards'. (8.7.63). He sometimes teased John about being 'a bit too Bulletin of the Society for Labour History oriented', but there were no ideological disagreements on issues to do with the *Register*.

Ralph still missed not being in a Party, but the *Register* became a substitute by providing a formal renewal of his collaboration with John, after an interval of three years, since the demise of *The New Reasoner*. Ralph saw their new publication as a vehicle, speaking to the world with one voice about the things that they wanted, particularly on issues affecting contemporary politics in Britain:

**You make me weep Saville. When I said I thought the article on Labour's 100 days should be an inside job, I meant of course that it should be done by both of us or if not by both, just me. Your suggestion that we might entrust the job to . . . is cretinous, ditto for . . . Jeeeesus, . . . I simply would not consider going outside the editorial board, so to speak. (RM to JS 3.7.64)**

The *Socialist Register* became their joint 'political' voice, which they had lost as members of the Board of *New Left Review*. There were, however, differences in style and articulation, if not on substantive issues, which separated Ralph and John on the one hand and Edward on the other. In retrospect, it may have been certain differences about the starting point of socialist engagement, allied to the pressure of work, which prevented Edward from joining the editorial Board of the *SR* in April 1963. (EPT to JS and RM, 13.3.65). At that time Thompson was completing his magnum opus *The Making of the English Working Class* published in November 1963 to great public acclaim – selling 1700 copies in the first four months. Although Edward supported the establishment of the *SR*, and so did Dorothy Thompson, he had feared 'differences over editorial policy' although not 'serious political disagreement' between the editors and himself. In fact, he offered to write an article on 'The Marxist Tradition' which both editors supported enthusiastically but which did not **materialise** until the second issue of the *Register* under the title 'The Peculiarities of the English'. Writing in March 1965 about the contents of that article, Edward stressed his commitment to 'socialist humanism' which required a regular attack on Stalinism or post-Stalinism and admitted that his decision

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not to join the Board of the SR stemmed partly from the fact that 'R. and I do have a different attitude on this point'. Differences had arisen when Ralph had criticised an attack on Communism which could have been construed as 'Encounterish'. But in the end Thompson agreed to excise it from his final version and accepted other editorial suggestions (EPT to JS and RM, 13.3.65).

Various **aspects** of these differences surface in their correspondence over the years. Part of the tension arose in the course of trying to link the ex-Communist tradition of the **NR** and independent left socialism – a strand represented by Ralph as someone who had not been a member of the CP but who was strongly committed to 'digesting the Soviet experience' rather than just rejecting it. An early sign of the tension with Edward in this respect arose in the context of Ralph's closeness to Mills and Deutscher, both of whom, in their different ways, had some positive messages about the Soviet Union at the beginning of the 1960s. When both Edward and Dorothy Thompson questioned this Ralph responded:

I too have been thinking a great deal about the evening with Mills and the talk then, [which] has **crystallised** . . . some sharp unease I have had for sometime about much of the New **Left** and Russia, or rather NL vis à vis Russia. Look, whether we call it the transition to communism or the transition to socialism does not matter a bugger. Deutscher the night before had made the point that they were in fact only at the first stage, just. The real point is whether the kind of society they are creating looks like approximating to something we think is socialism and whether in the development of socialism in the world they are or are not a hopeful, indeed the most hopeful factor. On both counts my answer is yes, with all the qualifications, ambiguities, hesitations and this and what you will. It may well be that they are adrift to hell on old people's homes, boarding schools, **Pasternak**, culture and much else. . . And I feel that so long as this is not resolved in our own minds, we are going to be weak, theoretically and practically . . . The fact is that the New **Left** just hasn't digested Russia, or still suffers from an indigestion which affects the whole system. Please let's not talk about pro-Soviet or anti-Soviet. (RM to Dorothy T 31.5.1960).

Ralph was always openly critical of the politics of the Soviet State and the Communist Parties. In essence, The Socialist Register's relationship to Communism continued to be the litmus test. as it had been for the New Reasoner, for evaluating its political message. (Indeed, the correspondence about the first volume reveals worries about contributors writing too enthusiastically about the PCI.) Whatever ambiguity he may have felt about 'real' Communism, Ralph was always ultra-sensitive to any Stalinist tendencies among contributors, or any use of CPSU-speak, such as 'petty bourgeois anarchism' in relation to a critique of an article on Soviet art in SR 1965: 'After all we have to speak for the Yevtushenkos and others who work still under highly restrictive conditions. This is also why I write with some heat.' (RM to JS 27.11.64).

Nevertheless, at that point Ralph did not, despite his doubts, write off the Soviet project or Soviet reality; and, at the same time he was very

sensitive to avoiding the kind of argument or terminology that might be taken as evidence of anti-communism. His own attitude to 'Communism' was ambiguous to this extent, and it must be said that although he remained openly critical of the Soviet Union's politics in the 1960s, he did not think at the time that the project was so fundamentally flawed as to be irretrievable. The sixties encapsulated for Ralph the grossest forms of American imperialism abroad and racism at home, in contrast to what appeared as slow progress in the 'Eastern' bloc, allied to the Soviet Union's apparent support for anti-imperialist struggles, particularly in South Africa, Cuba and, to a lesser degree, in Vietnam. This was not a view universally shared. When Ralph went to the Soviet Union in April 1961 for an extended trip he consulted Thompson about issues to raise with his hosts. His advice was 'Ask them why they are such **terrible liars**'.

A second, albeit related, aspect of the difference with Edward concerned 'socialist humanism'. The *New Reasoner* bore the subtitle 'A quarterly journal of socialist humanism', and Edward had emphasized socialist humanism in his 20 page 'Where are we Now?' memo to the NLR Board in April 1963. Addressing the younger comrades (itself an expression with a slightly archaic ring today), he wrote: 'I doubt whether socialist humanism can be usefully defined but the attempt must be made again and again . . . if we abandon the effort for one moment we fall victims to the realpolitik of **determinism**'. What bothered Ralph about such expressions as 'socialist humanism' or 'socialist morality' was not what they conveyed about the necessity for criticism of realpolitik or determinism, but rather the sloppy writing about Marxism that often went under their rubric, the kind of writing for which C. Wright Mills had coined the pithy phrase 'lyric upsurge'. In the draft preface to the SR 1965 Ralph wrote about 'a deeply felt need among socialists everywhere for the kind of strict, undogmatic and committed socialist writing'. Commitment included serious reappraisal of the Communist project. But this should not leave the way open to vague **moralising** which sometimes reflected the abandonment of the critical faculty. This was a style of writing that he was concerned to avoid in the Socialist Register.

Throughout the first decade of the *SR's* existence, Ralph's letters show an insistence on the need for a 'hard analysis', 'rigorous thinking', 'analysis and interpretation, summation of trends and events, with appropriate facts and figures e.g. strike movements in Western Europe . . . hard, factual even statistical information'. All this was seen as sustaining what he approvingly referred to as 'intransigence of belief' - which he contrasted with Edward's doubts 'about identifying himself as a Marxist without important qualifications on essential matters' (RM to EPT 31.10.1963). There are references in Edward's letter to a lost 'moral vocabulary' in the Marxist tradition which he subsequently described as having

'no defences against reasons of power' (letter from EPT to Saville and Miliband, 20.6.73 concerning 'Open Letter to **Leszek** Kolakowski').

The issue of 'power' had, in fact, been the subject of correspondence between Ralph and Edward ten years earlier. Edward had written a critical review of C. W. Mills' *Power, Politics and People* (which he had offered to *Peace News* and not *SR* out of respect for Ralph's feelings for Mills, who had been one of his closest friends). Edward had doubts about all of Mills' work after *The Power Elite*, particularly *Listen Yankee*, *Causes of World War Three* and *The Sociological Imagination*; and he sent Mills a strong critique of *The Marxists*, especially in respect of the philosophical dimensions of Marxism which went with the dismissal or even discussion of the early **Marx** writings' (EPT to RM 5.10.63). Ralph's response to this critique was sharp:

There was, as you say, . . . 'real ambiguity in his attitude to power'. For Christ's sake. Don't you feel ambiguous to power? Doesn't every serious socialist feel ambiguous to power? Isn't that exactly the underlying tension in all the stuff we are talking about, and that serious socialists have been talking about since the year dot? Wasn't Marx ambiguous about power? And even Lenin, at least in his last years? How is it possible to be anything but ambiguous about power? (RM to EPT 7.10.63)

This concern about power was central to Ralph's attempt to rescue Marx from his so-called disciples in the Soviet Union. In responding to Edward's letter about his article on 'The Marxist Tradition', Ralph wrote: 'You say "I don't for example, feel happy about identifying myself as a Marxist without important qualifications on essential matters"'. My God, isn't that exactly my own position? . . . That is exactly the kind of piece which is most wanted in the Annual. And giving these **postgrad** lectures has made me the more aware of this' (RM to EPT 29.10.63). Ralph's notes for a lecture on 'The Relevance of Marxism Today' given to the LSE Students Union and Research Students' Association (Margate, 26.4.63) confirm that he was wrestling with the concepts of Marxism, with its emphasis on class struggle, but also its 'morality, a message, a call, a vision of human regeneration'.

All this formed an essential part of Ralph's vision of 'socialist democracy'. But it was significant that it was this term which Ralph very much preferred to 'communism with a human face' or 'socialist humanism' of earlier vintage vocabulary among left dissidents both East and West. Writing to John in 1963 about the contents of the first volume, Ralph stressed this: 'an article on the Moral Basis of Socialism is an utterly lousy idea. The subject does not appeal to me and the author. . . even less. It is exactly the kind of waffle **which** this sort of piece always produces which I should like to see avoided.' (RM to JS 25.5.63). John replied by trying to steer Ralph back to the idea of 'The Morality of Socialism': 'I still think therefore that this is a subject that needs full discussion for every

generation of socialists – and I will grant immediately that it is so easy to write **crap**'. John suggested that the author in question be asked to do a piece which would include 'the moral basis and necessity of political commitment' (JS to RM 24.5.63). Ralph agreed that 'I may have been too sweeping about the Moral Basis of Socialism – the thing is that I cannot remember anything worthwhile on this subject for years. . . My objection is not aesthetic but intellectual and practical'. Finally, the editors of the **SR** compromised on the need for a contribution on the loosely defined theme of morality and invited Donald C. Hodges to put forward a highly critical analysis of Eugene Kamenka's *Ethical Foundations of Marxism* (1962) – a book which stressed the importance of the ethical vision of **Marx's** early writings.

The concern to interpret anew, but rigorously and relevantly, the politics of Marx became the hallmark of the politics of the **Register**: theory, by all means, but theory that bore relevance to the editors' preoccupations with contemporary politics. *The Register* was a journal which, among others, contributed to reviving a meaningful debate about Marxist theory away from the old calcified **base-superstructure** debates, while expressing scepticism about new 'structuralist' interpretations which soon became fashionable. Rediscovering the theoretical Marx especially preoccupied Ralph from the early sixties until the late seventies. The deformations of 'official Marxism' in the Soviet Union, and 'Marxism-Leninism' in general, were the object of his disdain. 'There is more than a hyphen which separates Marxism from **Leninism**'<sup>8</sup>, was how Ralph put it in an article in *Tribune* on November 20, 1964. Just a week before, he had communicated in a letter to John Saville a sense of excited discovery as he worked on his essay on 'Marx and the State' for the 1965 volume of the **Register**:

I have some sensational stuff for 'Marx and the State' which should set the cat among the pigeons. Nothing less on the basis of massive internal as well as external evidence, than that the whole notion of the dictatorship of the proletariat in Marx has been completely misinterpreted, from Engels onwards. You will be properly sceptical, but wait till you have seen the texts and the argument. (RM to JS, 14.11.1964)<sup>9</sup>

Ever since Ralph first became a student at the LSE at the age of 18, Marx and Marxism were the subject of long term academic interest which he continued to develop throughout his life. (In 1942 he wrote to his father that **Laski** had assigned him an essay on Marxism: 'Ce n'est pas facile mais ca m'interesse' – RM to Samuel **Miliband** 11.10.1942). The early Marx and late Marx, Marx and the State, Marx and Engels, dialectical materialism were all part of the background for Ralph's work on *The State in Capitalist Society* (1968) and for the first ever lecture series on Marxism in the LSE Political Science Department. Yet Ralph's subsequent work on Marxism bears out his determination to steer clear of any particular emphasis on **Marx's** early work, in particular the 1844 manuscripts which

became so widely read in the 1960s, and the espousal of the alienation theory as a tool of analysis. Ralph was not a philosopher by training; he was much more interested in class conflict as the yeast of social action than in alienation, which does not feature at all in his *Marxism and Politics* (1977). Ralph was preoccupied with an analysis of capitalism and the agencies of change which worked to reform it or destroy it. He took his cue from Marx in refusing to speculate on what a 'truly human' society would look like. '**Marx's** first concern is with the material, concrete reality which lies hidden, as he believes, behind the religions, the ideologies, the moralities, which men create for themselves and for others out of ignorance, fear or **design**'.<sup>10</sup>

The Socialist Register's contribution to the revitalisation of Marxism was much enhanced by the resolute internationalism that characterized the project. In its gestation period SR benefited to some extent from contacts with contributors to the *International Socialist Journal*, a venture initiated by **Lelio** Basso (a socialist member of the Italian Senate based in Milan), and with Jon Halliday as its English language editor. Ralph attended meetings in Paris at the beginning of April, 1964 where he met some of those who became future contributors to the Register. These contacts, as well as old friendships with **Leo Huberman**, **Paul Sweezy** and **Harry Magdoff** of *Monthly Review*, **K. S. Karol**, **André Gorz** and other French intellectuals, **Rossana Rossanda** in Italy were essential to the development of the Register. **Marcel Liebman**, one of Ralph's oldest friends and a former student, and **Ernest Mandel** in Belgium kept him in touch with events there and in West Germany, as well as with writers in France. The fact that he was bilingual in French and English made it easier for Ralph to use material he had picked up from *Temps Modernes*, *Nouvel Observateur* and other sources, and also to write for French journals, such as *La Gauche*, which he did regularly in the mid to late sixties. The fact that Ralph had never been a communist had provided him with opportunities to travel to the United States in the days when the aftermath of **McCarthyism** still made things difficult; and he had many American friends from the late 1940s as well as New Left acquaintances he had met through **C. Wright Mills**, such as **James Weinstein** of *Studies on the Left*. The *Monthly Review* editors put him in touch with subsequently prominent Latin American intellectuals. A very different set of contacts was represented by the Poles whom Ralph had met on a trip there with **C. Wright Mills** in 1957, including **Kolakowski**, **Schaff** and **Lange**. He took delight in the seamless internationalism of the Register whose contributors were seemingly unaffected by longstanding ethnio-conflicts even between Arabs and Israelis (RM to JS 7.6.63).

By 1963 the focus of attention for the editors of the Register was not only the Soviet Union but also China, the Sino-Soviet split, Tibet, and the

Indian dispute which were coming into prominence. Deutscher was at the time the expert on Russia and even China and was held in great respect by both Ralph and John, who both took enormous care to show him utmost personal courtesy. Deutscher was a good bit older than Ralph and according to John had not been treated well by the New Left. (This might have been a reference to a rejection by *NR* of a review of *Dr Zhivago* which was first published in *Temps Modernes* in 1959. Both Peter Worsley and EPT independently refused to use it on the grounds that the review did not deal with the **book's** literary or artistic merits but only with its politics as if it were a book of history.) Deutscher became an invaluable contributor to the *SR* until his tragically early death in 1967 at the age of 60. Unfortunately, there is no record of his exchanges with Ralph on issues of Communism and the Soviet Union, because he lived practically next door, with the result that the discussions were never put on paper.

Apart from the articles that were featured in the 1964 edition, other issues which preoccupied the editors included a socialist critique of the **Robbins Report** published in 1963. At the time the Report was regarded as a major advance towards increasing the number of entrants into British universities, opening up additional places outside the prestigious **Oxbridge** and London elite institutions. In fact, although the number of university students doubled by 1967, the **Robbins** reforms did not fulfil their democratic promise of providing a place for all A-level qualified students. The editors also pursued their political project in wanting to reappraise milestone texts by focusing on John Strachey's *The Coming Struggle for Power* which had such a deep resonance when it was first published in 1932. **Nasserism**, Cuba, a critique of the *New Statesman*, to parallel John's piece on *Encounter* scheduled for issue No 1, were all part of the diverse menu in preparation. One is also glad to see that 'the woman question' was on the agenda. Ralph had approached Dorothy Thompson for a contribution and John suggested **MacGregor** (now **Lord MacGregor**), who had published a pioneering bibliography of writing on women's issues for the *British Journal of Sociology*, and **Griselda Rowntree** as alternatives, but clearly nothing came of it until the 1976 issue with, rather typically, an article entitled 'Marxist Women versus Bourgeois Feminism' by Hal Draper and Anne **Lipow**. But *The Register* was in its first decades never comfortable with debates about the politics of feminism, except within the confines of a classical left framework.

Other central issues which were discussed but did not find their way into the first issue were the Viet-Nam (sic) war and the 'negro' (sic) movement, which James Weinstein-perceptively recognised as central to American politics. Ralph wrote to Bayard **Rustin** seeking a contribution on the 'Negro' movement but various names including Wilfrid Burchett's, suggested by the *Monthly Review* people, for an article on Vietnam were

rejected. In the end there was nothing on issues of race in the first Register. Because of the pressures of political activism, Bayard **Rustin** apologised for not doing his piece on notepaper headed 'The March on Washington'. By November 1963 President Kennedy had been assassinated and the 'Negro Movement' at the time had other priorities. The burgeoning Civil Rights struggles signalled the beginning of the New **Left** in the USA. No article on black people's struggles in the USA was published until 1968 although the debate on Third World issues was well represented in articles by Alavi, Abdel Malek and Victor Kiernan.

The first issue of *The Register* was launched at a dinner at Schmidt's Restaurant in Charlotte Street on April 29 1964, with Deutscher and Michael Foot present. Schmidt's, like the Budapest in Greek Street, was one of those cheap but satisfactory restaurants patronised by the left where you could always fill up on goulash or pancakes. I don't remember whether Lawrence Daly came to the launch dinner which cost 12/6, including the speeches, but certainly Shakespeare was back on the agenda. In January 1964 Ralph had written to John 'What about a piece on Shakespeare – socialist view for 1965, certainly I would like to jazz the thing up somewhat – you know, Culture, Freud and all that jazz'. Victor Kiernan was asked to do something for Shakespeare's 400th anniversary but he refused and that suggestion was never revived.

After the successful launch of the first issue of *The Register*, and with all sorts of luminaries lined up for the 1965 volume, Ralph jokingly suggested to John: 'Now that we have **Lukács, O'Brien**, Deutscher and Foot for 65, I think we should aim to have an **article/essay** on the Monarchy from the inside by HM Queen for 1966' (RM to JS, 23.5.1964). But however luminous their list of contributors, their main concern, as they planned future volumes, remained to make a political impact:

I still think there may be something to be said for a piece on the Labour Government and the Left. I am impressed with the fact that this conference last Saturday was a direct result of our piece in *The Register* and there may be a lot to be said for a repeat performance with an analysis of this particular version of Labourism, which is what the Government is about, on the basis of the performance in the '100 days'. . . I want to say very loud that one of the things the left must do is to begin working on the programme for the next election and the election after that. (RM to JS 11.11.64)

The partnership of John and Ralph continued until 1990, with Marcel Liebman and Leo **Panitch** co-opted in the interim. Despite the hard work and regular annual outbursts, mostly from Ralph, which were always about missed deadlines rather than issues of substance, the partnership continued with John showing remarkable, almost saintly, understanding and tolerance, never nurturing resentments – at least not for long. Ralph relied on this moral support whenever – as often happened – he got despondent, about the Register not being 'good enough': 'We shall survive, provided,

repeat provided, Hull - [the town where John lived] radiates **encouragement**, cooperation, patience etc. I have no call to say this at the moment but I do get anxious about the bloody **Register** and it is important this volume should be very good. If it is we shall have established the venture very firmly' (RM to JS 11.11.64).

A **difficult** question arises as to who were the **Register's** editors and authors and where they stood politically? The successful publication of annual volumes was largely due to an unspoken agreement between the editors as to what constituted 'being on the Left' - an agreement which had already integrated unequivocal opposition not only to Stalin but to Stalinism of every kind, as well as an overall acceptance of the basic tenets of **socialism/communism** and a clearly Marxist perspective. They were not Communists with a capital C. Their commitment to civic freedom and serious doubts about the insurrectionary model of 1917 put them beyond the pale of some left revolutionary groups. And yet, the **Register** was an open forum for many socialist thinkers of different persuasions, with the editors participating frequently in debates with the Communist Party as well as the Trotskyite groups. The **Register** consequently attracted some world famous socialist theorists who were politically homeless. **The Register** became one of the havens, a sort of missing **persons'** bureau, for the non-aligned Left. K. S. Karol or it may have been Rossana Rossanda coined in the 1960s the homely concept of a left 'Swiss Community' - a neutral, welcoming but somewhat exclusive land of debate for independent socialists. From then on Ralph and Karol would classify their acquaintances as full, potential or aspiring members of the Swiss Community. The passport into the **Community** was an independence of mind allied to a commitment to socialist values. The correspondence between Ralph and Karol was peppered with references to Swiss Community opinions on this or that world event, while playing the lighthearted power game of excluding this or that person for expressing views that ran contrary to Swiss Community canon.

It is **comforting** to see that even in the far-off 1960s there was uncertainty among people who thought of themselves as being socialists, about the relevance of Marxism, 'the left' and socialism. Nevertheless, the first issue of **The Register** was widely reviewed in the mainstream press and reviewers correctly perceived that the editors were 'influenced to a great or lesser extent by Marxism' (Robin Gollan in the **Australian** 9.1.1965). It is also surprising that most reviews of the **Register** were favourable, except for the one in **The Daily Worker** which complained that there was no article by a Communist writer in the whole volume and criticised Deutscher for offering 'a one sided, distorted approach.'" Elsewhere, there was recognition that the **Register** deserved **praise** for taking up a world-wide **compass** and that its Marxist approach was not equated with 'dogmatism and **sectar-**

ianism which has for so long characterized the "Marxism" of Communist parties'.<sup>12</sup> In a *Spectator* review by Walter Laqueur there was an implicit recognition that the *Register* represented a new type of left with positive features – later to be dubbed the 'Old New Left.' There was a respectful review in *NLR* in August 1964 by Tom Wengraf who praised the editors for breaking out of the 'theoretical and cultural parochialism of the British Left'.<sup>14</sup> Some articles in the first issue became classic texts; indeed, there were requests to reprint Hamza Alavi's article 'Imperialism Old and New' by *Temps Modernes*, as well as from as far away as Buenos Aires and Delhi (RM to JS, 3.7.64).

After the first six years, the editors embarked on one of their 'taking stock' sessions aimed at agreeing a clearer political perspective. In June 1969 Ralph reviewed the editorial policy as it had evolved over the years as 'being fairly eclectic and let a hundred flowers bloom' and concluded that this was the reason why the *SR* had not made a greater impact:

I would not want a rigid line but I think the time is long overdue for something a good deal more specific. . . Ideally this would require a review of the year from the editors and an editorial essay, an assumption of a position . . . Assuming this cannot be done there would still be much to be said for something less amorphous. We live too negatively in the *Regbter* and this makes each volume an agglutination of articles without backbone. . . We stand somewhere between ultra-leftism and left labourism; between Maoism and Brezhnevism; between undialectical opposites in the world socialist movement . . . we ought to stand for something apart from the presentation of interesting material. (RM to JS June 1969)

Ralph believed that he and John should call together a group of people who would provide feedback and inject fresh thinking into the enterprise: 'We are playing this too close to our chests and have cawed out a little enterprise for ourselves without asking anyone to react to it'. He had made similar suggestions in 1965 to Ken Coates (now Member of the European Parliament) to set up a left forum discussion group 'without the parliamentarians' (RM to Ken Coates 6.8.65). In 1966 he suggested monthly Saturday meetings to John (RM to JS 24.7.66).

However, John's response to this call in 1969 for a change in direction was a sober appraisal of what was possible and what was desirable: 'The more journals a movement has the more volumes of essays, the more socialist literature generally the better. It doesn't of course give you a political movement but in advanced industrial countries you are not likely to get a "movement" without vigorous political discussions . . . I am not sure you are right to suggest that our line has been all over the place . . . I should have thought our place in the spectrum is fairly well defined but I can see the point you are making.' The suggestion about having an advisory group meet three times a year would have meant an awful lot of correspondence and effort and far too great a commitment of time which John could not make. John responded that he had a full timetable and was

unable to devote more time to correspondence and arrangements, and if this was Ralph's wish, he could proceed without him. However, Ralph replied: 'I have no wish to carry on the *Register* without you'. That was the last discussion of substance about the way in which the *Register* was going or about its 'political' administration. They continued thereafter their kitchen cabinet meetings, in London, Leeds or Hull, sometimes by phone, but mostly by letter, to agree themes and contributions. The editors sometimes called on others to evaluate specialist materials. with Martin Eve, their publisher, an ever helpful presence when they wanted another opinion.

Ralph's worry about undue eclecticism was not shared by other readers, sympathizers and colleagues on the Left. Steven Lukes, writing in the *New Statesman* in 1975, celebrated the fact that there was no 'correct line' in the pages of the *Register* and that on every theme – Maoism, Leninism, the Labour Party or Colonialism – there were at least two different, if not opposing, viewpoints. Lukes remarked on 'the high level of argument . . . somehow managing to avoid both sectarianism and eclecticism'. Clearly the editors had hoped for more. Perhaps they visualised that the *SR* might have given expression to a political movement in the way that the Left Book Club had done in the days of the struggle against fascism. However, the *Register* provided a forum for the independent, non-Communist, Marxist movement that had sprung out of the discredited and linear CP straitjacket, publishing contributions that were unafraid to criticise the Soviet Union and showed a high degree of commitment to civil liberties.

In some ways the 1980s and 1990s provided even tougher challenges for a distinctly disoriented Left, although Ralph might have denied that anything was worse than the coldness of the Cold War. But one cannot help feeling on reading the files that to its initiators and editors the *Register* embodied a political project which was separate from their academic work although influenced by it, but with a coherent intellectual agenda of its own. Its editors had always hoped that the magazine would continue to provide alternative perspectives for troubled times. The annual sold well; the first volume almost sold out by the end of 1964 (JS Memo to contributors for the 1965 edition) and so did the 1973 edition with Thompson's 'Open Letter to Leszek Kolakowski' which was reprinted. Neither Ralph nor John, nor later Marcel Leibman and Leo Panitch, ever lost the sense of reaching out beyond the present. Yet whatever the message, Ralph remained slightly deprecating about the *Register's* achievements: 'has done well, could do better', as he wrote in the last edition which he helped to edit.<sup>29</sup> This verdict belied the endless care over commissioning articles, corresponding with authors about the texts, over the minutiae of translations, which often required re-translating, and the agonies about misprints. *The Register* owed its success to the fine-tuned collaboration between the

editors and to the generosity of its contributors whose reward did not represent publication in a 'refereed' journal but participation in a political project. This is also a belated homage to them all.

## NOTES

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## ABBREVIATIONS:

RM Ralph Miliband  
 JS John Saville  
 EPT Edward Palmer Thompson  
 PA Perry Anderson  
 ML Marcel Liebman

1. Lin Chun, *The British New Left*, Edinburgh University Press, 1993.
2. John Saville, 'Edward Thompson, the Communist Party and 1956', *The Socialist Register* 1994.
3. Raymond Williams, *Politics and Letters*, London: Verso, 1979, p. 362.
4. Jan Valtin, *Out of the Night*, New York: Alliance Book Corporation, 1941. Having lost his original copy of this book, Ralph was extremely grateful to receive the gift of a replacement copy in 1984 from Mordechai Bubis (Benjamin Books, Ottawa), an outstanding socialist bibliophile.
5. Lin Chun, p. 64.
6. Ralph Miliband, 'Thirty Years of the Socialist Register' *Socialist Register* 1994, p. 2.
7. Personal communication, RM to MK.
8. Ralph Miliband, 'Voices of Socialism; Karl Marx', *Tribune*, London, 20.11.1964.
9. John Saville disagreed with Ralph's interpretation of Marx's concept of the State (*Socialist Register* 1965) which argued that Marx was anti-Statist and that his thought had been misinterpreted. (JS to RM, 29.12.1964).
10. 'Voices of Socialism' *Tribune*, 20.11.1964
11. *Daily Worker*, London, 28.5.1964.
12. *Times Literary Supplement*, London, 18.6.1964.
13. Walter Laqueur 'Confusion Compounded', *The Spectator*, 22.5.1964.
14. Tom Wengraf, 'The Socialist Register' *New Left Review*, no 26, August 1964.
15. 'Thirty years of The Socialist Register', p. 19.