II. Analysing the Impact of 1989 on the British and the American Intellectual Left

1. 1989/91 and the Prospects of Socialism: Options for a Theoretical Debate of the Left on Strategies and Agencies

Socialists who wanted to remain socialists and continue to work for an alternative to capitalism had three major options for reacting to the collapse of the Eastern Bloc. For one, they could, of course, simply argue that it did not affect them at all. The societies of Eastern Europe had never represented Western socialists' version of socialism or they did not even deserve to be called socialist at all. Their deformations were the outcomes of Stalinism and Stalin's unrealistic concept of building 'socialism in one country'. The states could not have been reformed from within without collapsing under their internal contradictions and conflicts. This position was taken by many on the left who were organised in, or sympathised with, the 'Trotskyist' movement – in Britain, for example, members of the *Socialist Workers Party*, or readers of and contributors to the political-academic journal *International Socialism*.[1] British intellectuals such as Tony Cliff, Alex Callinicos, and Colin Barker belonged to those who argued it was business as usual for socialists. As the introduction has shown, those who did not belong to these *Fourth-International* circles tended to feel more affected. Two

1 The *Socialist Workers Party*, formerly known as *International Socialists*, is the strongest among Britain's several Trotskyist parties. For details see Callaghan 1984, 1987.

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alternatives for reacting to the events of 1989/1991 seemed to suggest themselves. Reading the collapse of the East as the final declaration of political bankruptcy of Marxism-Leninism, socialists could turn to its main rival: social democracy. Although social democracy historically counts as the origin of both Marxism-Leninism and a gradual, reformist or transformative approach towards the building of socialism, such attempts at moving towards social democracy caused considerable unease. Traditionally, socialists had regarded social democrats as traitors who had made their peace with capitalism and abandoned internationalism. To label someone a social democrat was often understood (and generally meant) as an insult. As a second option, socialists could also embrace post-Marxism. This seemed to offer a possible way forward especially for those who saw the collapse of the Eastern Bloc as a crisis of Marxism in general. Again, such a move caused problems. Although post-Marxists claimed to keep what was worth keeping from the Marxist tradition, Marxists – and other more traditionally-minded socialists – accused them of having given up on a whole range of realist, materialist, and modern paradigms of thinking about the social world and of having taken up too many elements of postmodern and post-structuralist thinking. Therefore, post-Marxists were also viewed with hostility rather than as a collective worth joining.

If, however, the observations made by Walzer, Alexander and Therborn which I quoted in the introduction were correct, socialist intellectuals had, as a consequence of 1989, taken over much more from social democratic and post-Marxist ideas than most of them would have liked to admit. For some, such an acknowledgement would have diminished the status of Marxism, which would accordingly no longer function as the sole system of reference for their political analyses and self-identification. For others, their reluctance might have been caused by intra-left dynamics of distinction and factionalism, separatism or even sectarianism. I will come back to these questions in the concluding part of this study. First however, the analysis needs to establish whether such an appropriation of social democratic or post-Marxist ideas did really occur – perhaps disguised by different terminology.

The remainder of this chapter outlines how to test this thesis and how to formulate answers to these questions in a differentiated way. It starts with general characterisations of, shortly, the basic principles of the socialist

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intellectuals close to this study's journals[2] and then, a bit more in detail, social democracy and post-Marxism. The next chapter provides a general characterisation of the intellectual groups, of the historical context in which they developed and of the journals in focus.

1.1. The Intellectuals' Core Ideas of Democratic Socialism

Defining even the *basic* principles shared by the intellectuals contributing to the journals constitutes a challenge. The difficulty results from multiple factors which include not only the differences in tasks, goals and self-perceptions between the British and the American left, and the range of pluralism to which all of the journals subscribed, but also from the long distances and numerous roads which intellectual socialists and neo-Marxists had travelled from traditional Marxism and socialism (cf. Anderson 1976; Anderson 1980; Buhle 1991; Panitch 2001). Consequently, to draw a sketch of prototypical socialist positions as they were widely shared by contributors in the late 1980s and early 1990s constitutes a risky endeavour. The following characteristics should hence be understood as key words which intellectuals used as points of reflective departure and fleshed out in different ways rather than as facets of a comprehensive and unanimously shared programme. However, what radical intellectuals indeed shared at the time was the conviction that precisely this orientation towards certain key words and principles – to a certain explanatory paradigm – distinguished them from other intellectuals who understood themselves as, for example, liberal, neo-Conservative, communitarian, social-democratic, or post-modern.

Socialist intellectuals shared the notion that the organisation of economic life in capitalism depended on the existence of different classes. In turn, the emancipation of one of them, the working class, which was forced to

2 This outline is deliberately kept short. More information on the specific versions of socialist thought circulated and debated in the British and the American intellectual left in general and in the four journals in particular over the second half of the twentieth century will be provided in the historical overview (Chapter II.3).

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sell its labour power to reproduce itself constituted socialists' most important goal. Ideally, the classless society of socialism should replace the classed society of capitalism. This substitution required a radical shift in power structures, which should be achieved, in traditional versions of socialism, by a revolution – the overthrow of the existing economic and political order. The necessity of revolution followed from the perception that the institutions of the capitalist state tended to act in the interests of capitalism. Although crude notions of the state as the 'executive committee of the bourgeoisie' had long been corrected by sophisticated state theories, radical and socialist intellectuals retained the perception that states were not neutral but mirrored and often reinforced power differentials in society. Radical redistributions of power – the concept of revolution had also been thoroughly debated and starkly modified – would become a realistic option only once the part of the population which had an objective interest in it – the working class – had become sufficiently large and consequently powerful. Hence moves towards socialism were most likely to occur, or at least seemed most promising, in the most advanced – namely the highly industrialised and wealthy – societies. A successful revolution would result in the socialisation of ownership of at least a considerable part of the industrial and service sectors. Proper economic development would then require planning since a socialist economy's guiding principle would no longer be the extraction of profit, but instead the satisfaction of a society's needs. The identification of such needs required democratic structures and institutions of decision making that were not limited to familiar forms of parliamentary democracy but extended to the economic and the social spheres. Socialist democracy would thus include public works councils and mechanisms for popular planning at all levels and in all important areas of public life.

At a more theoretical level, socialist intellectuals were convinced that their approaches to economic, social and political change amounted to more than just a political programme or vision that could either succeed or fail. They observed long-term historical trends which seemed to vindicate their belief that once a certain stage of capitalist development was reached, its substitution by something different would necessarily become possible, likely, or even unavoidable. This chance for superseding capitalism would arise when capitalism had lost the capacity to solve its inherent contradictions. This approach to history was intimately linked with the principles of dialectics – the contradictions themselves would provoke or initiate pro-

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cesses through which to solve them. The most fundamental contradictions – those which directly affected people's abilities to survive and maintain themselves – usually emerged in the economic sphere. According to the principles of materialism, economic realities prominently influenced all other spheres of social life. Hence without first amending the hierarchical and exploitative structures in the economic sphere, one would stand only a limited chance of exacting a lasting change on hierarchical social relations in, for example, the political or the cultural spheres.

This framework calling for the interpretation of and intervention into historical-political developments was related to many different levels of social organisation – from the private and micro-sociological to the global. And although socialism's goal was working-class emancipation worldwide, national states played a prominent role for socialist intellectuals as they constituted the arena where most power struggles were fought and where social relations and the unequal access to political power were institutionalised. Nevertheless, in the twentieth century especially, this focus on the national state was complemented by a global perspective, which tried to establish how mechanisms of economic imperialism worked on an international scale.[3]

Over the decades, numerous tendencies and schools of thought have emerged which have tried to refine all the elements presented in this rough sketch in several ways. Generally, these attempts at fine-tuning took the direction of replacing more apodictic and determinist conceptions with more circumspect and open ones. Still, even if socialist intellectuals accepted ideas that, for example, the abolition of a hierarchical class system would not automatically end the oppression of women by men, or that, under conditions of parliamentary democracy, roads to socialism might exist which would differ from a narrow concept of a revolutionary overthrow of the existing order, they would still contend that without putting an end to class exploitation, equality between women and men remained impossible and that meaningful democracy required a much more equal distribution of

3 In this context, the works of a number of social scientists became widely discussed and were subsumed under labels such as dependency theory and world system theory. Some representatives of these theories (for example, Samir Amin, Giovanni Arrighi, or Immanuel Wallerstein) contributed to the journals discussed in this study.

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power in society. Hence, in the second half of the twentieth century, radical and socialist intellectuals retained such a set of core assumptions whose consideration was indispensable for any fruitful reflection on democratic socialism. In this sense, socialism continued to be influenced by Marxism and continued to constitute a system of thought.

1.2. Social Democracy as a Model and Social Democratic Parties as Agents of Change?

Social democracy is a Western and specifically a North Western European phenomenon. Social democratic parties and governments have considerably influenced the political, social and economic landscapes of Germany, Britain, Austria, the Netherlands, Belgium, Scandinavia and later, to a certain extent, also France. Though a real equivalent to social democracy does not exist in North America – a phenomenon that has occupied the reflections of scholars from Werner Sombart to Göran Therborn – it shares a great deal with strands of American liberalism in terms of ideas and practical policy. It even seems as if Democratic policy, from the New Deal via the uneasy embrace of 'post-materialist' issues to the Clinton-style 'New Democratic' 'third way', has often preceded, and provided a model for social democrats.

Social democracy's roots lie in the labour and socialist movements which developed from the mid-19th century onwards, to whose demands it intended to give a political voice: "Social democratic policy crucially links politics with needs and material interests. What is more, political preferences flow from interest, and interests have a collective, as well as an individual, basis" (Krieger 1999: 17). Since the times of Eduard Bernstein, social democrats have accepted parliamentary democracy. They set out to start a transformation of the economic order. Hence, they followed a gradualist logic of social change, legitimised through majority support, which would give moral authority to ballot-box or parliamentary socialism.[4] Opinions differed and changed over time as to whether socialism could only be *started* within capitalism or whether it could also be *completed* within it. In any case, mass support was required for, on the one hand, winning majorities. On the other hand, for many social democrats mass support of a more

4 For the problematics of parliamentary socialism see Miliband 1962, Przeworski 1985, Panitch & Leys 1997.

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activist kind counted as a necessary prerequisite for moves towards socialism. Important as parliamentary work was, it would be more effective if accompanied and reinforced by extra-parliamentary pressure, especially in the work place. Otherwise, power differences in society – linked with the ownership of the means of production – were likely to disadvantage working-class interests against those with more political leverage. In Britain, where the Labour Party was established – and for most of its history predominantly financed – by the trade unions, it became common to speak of the industrial and the political wing of the labour movement.

Social democrats' idea of socialism was first of all pragmatic and aimed at improving the living conditions of the working class. For some, this was social democracy's whole purpose, while others interpreted this approach as part of a Gramscian 'war of position' over hegemony in society. As Przeworski argued, capitalism was not necessarily irrational but offered chances to practice a limited functional socialism (cf. 1993: 836). However, for a long time, a rhetorical commitment to some tenets of Marxism was maintained – the West German and Austrian social democratic parties dropped the declared goal of the socialisation of the means of production in the late 1950s, the British Labour Party kept it until 1995. In this sense, social democracy constituted a "hybrid political tradition of socialism and liberalism" (Padgett & Paterson 1991: 1) and pursued a reformist or transformative rather than a revolutionary strategy. As long as they propagated some type of socialism, they generally understood it as a socialisation of (parts of) the means of production. However from as early as the 1920s onwards, this position stood at loggerheads with the 'politics of compromise' which social democrats actually pursued – in their own view for good reason:

> They find the courage to explain to the working class that it is better to be exploited than to create a situation which contains the risk of turning against them. They refuse to stake their fortunes on a worsening of the crisis. They offer compromise; they maintain and defend it. (Przeworski 1985: 46)

On the national level, their first spells of government were far from impressive. Shaken by sharp controversy with the Leninists in the recent past and also by the tragic abandonment of a commitment to internationalism on the eve of the First World War, when in power in the 1920s, they remained

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fiscally orthodox and administered 'pragmatically' over the many crises of the difficult interwar years. There were, however, important and socially ambitious activities – such as Poplarism– on the level of the local state.[5] At the national level, the turning point came with Keynesianism. It provided a route for leaving fiscal orthodoxy behind while leaving large parts of the capitalist logic and structures in place. With Keynesianism, it seemed possible to achieve more equality in society and to improve the living conditions of working-class people without disturbing the supposed positive sides of capitalist economic dynamics. It could be embraced by those who accepted capitalism for the time being, but also by those who subscribed to the ideal of 'collective sovereignty', the creation of democratic procedures by which people could change institutions and decide over the allocation and distribution of resources. All this seemed easy and relatively uncontroversial so long as growth could be stimulated and distributive policies did not necessarily amount to a zero-sum game.

The Keynes-inspired 25 years between the late 1940s and the oil crisis of 1973 became social democracy's golden age. While Keynesianism and governmental economic planning had already been applied earlier in Sweden and in the United States of the New Deal years, after the end of the Second World War, a whole group of – comparatively wealthy – countries created mixed economies, in which key industries were either transferred to national or publicly controlled ownership. In the early period, planning played a prominent role though it lost importance in most countries after only a few years. Przeworski's 'functional socialism' took the shape of welfare states which provided universal services of widely varying generosity in order to enhance social security and material equality. The gap between the richest and the poorest sections of the population became nar-

5 The East London borough of Poplar became famous for its early attempts at creating a local welfare state from below. The Labour-led council insisted on paying adequate levels of poor relief and refused to cut municipal workers' wages in the 1920s. They demanded a fairer distribution of rate revenue within London, meaning a transfer of money from richer to poorer boroughs and were sentenced to jail for passing 'illegal' budgets. Eventually they succeeded in setting up a new system of basic welfare support in the city. Similar struggles took place in Westham, Chester-le-Street and Bedwelty (cf. Lansley, Goss & Wolmar 1989: 2).

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rower. However, as already mentioned, Keynesian welfare capitalism depended on economic growth, a constantly high demand for goods and services, and a balanced increase in wages and productivity. Growth-dependent welfarism became the most acceptable egalitarian doctrine for most West Europeans and North Americans in a world split into a 'free West' and a 'communist East'. Even most conservative and Christian-democratic parties subscribed to this doctrine, though controversy persisted over its details and its political purpose.

At this stage, it seemed as if *reformist* social democracy had irrevocably won over *transformative* social democracy – a fundamental change in social relations, even if to be achieved gradually, seemed off the agenda. Although the leading British theorist of 'revisionism', Anthony Crosland, suggested as late as 1963 "to replace competitive social relations by fellowship and class solidarity, and the motive of personal profit by a more altruistic and other-regarding motive", social change was restricted to attitudinal issues (1963: 56). In his influential book, *The Future of Socialism,* Crosland had outlined a version of a social democratic society in an age of affluence which he considered to be almost completely realised in Britain: a certain degree of economic democracy had been achieved, a democracy of consumers had emerged, and class differences had become much less visible. Residues of poverty and social problems remained, but could be solved by technocratic solutions such as via reforms in the education system. Crosland anticipated that post-materialist quality-of-life issues would become more important and eventually also lead to democratisation in the field of cultural life. Similar views were expressed in the new programmes of the German and Austrian social democratic parties (although still as goals to be realised rather than already attained) and also by North America based economists such as Joseph Schumpeter (1954) and John Kenneth Galbraith (1958). In sum, social democrats had made their peace with capitalism, embraced liberal democracy, restricted themselves to rectifying the most glaring anachronistic and residual injustices and inequalities. Nevertheless, frequency of use of the term 'socialism' varied in different political cultures and depended on the perceived pressure among social democrats to distance themselves from anything that could be turned into associating their parties with those of Eastern Bloc states. With working-class people participating in consumption and becoming culturally less distinguishable from members of the middle class, it also became less advisable to retain class-struggle

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rhetoric for domestic-electoral reasons. Extending their appeal to the new and secularised middle classes, social democratic parties tended to reinvent themselves as what Otto Kirchheimer had called "catch-all parties" (cf. 1990[1966]). This idea of social cohesion and class collaboration found its institutional expression in corporatism – concerted fine-tuning and global steering of economic development by government, trade unions, and federated employers' organisations, all subscribing to scientific methods for technological modernisation. Padgett and Paterson argue that with these vaguely defined ideas, social democracy achieved a hegemonic position in Northern European political discourse, but this discourse, according to them, was ideologically empty (cf. 1991: 38).

In several countries, Britain among them, revisionism did not go uncontested. Left wingers were critical, maintaining that the goal of social equality had been translated into equal opportunities to participate in consumption and economic reform into rationalisation (cf. Padgett & Paterson 1991: 37-38). While before the late 1960s or early 1970s the left within social democracy was generally weak, it then profited from two developments: on the one hand, the Keynesian model of accumulation ran into difficulties and seemed to have reached its limits. Economic growth and increases in productivity slowed down. As a consequence, distributive struggles reappeared and – as they usually did, according to Panitch – also reappeared within social democratic parties (cf. 1988: 357). On the other hand, with activists from the late-1960s New Left, a new radical, 'post-materialist', section of the middle class joined parties of the centre-left. They criticised the narrow 'economic rationality' of welfare capitalism which was supposedly responsible for killing people's creativity, exploiting third-world societies, threatening the environment, leading murderous wars, and reproducing social divisions along the lines of class, ethnicity, and gender. As alternatives, they propagated grassroots democracy and people's empowerment, throughout society and within the parties themselves. New distributive struggles and new-left ideas met in reflections and experiments like '*autogestion*' in France, the shop stewards movement, the *Institute of Workers Control*, and the Labour Party's *Alternative Economic Strategy* in Britain, or the 'Meidner plan' (the incremental transformation of companies into workers cooperatives) in Sweden. Based on varieties of neo-Marxist analyses of monopoly capitalism, these social democrats started thinking about qualitative growth, market socialism, rainbow coalitions, and work-

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ers' co-determination.[6] On the national level, these initiatives soon ran into difficulties – in Britain in the late 1970s, in France and Sweden in the early 1980s. The social democratic New Left lacked a strategy for how to deal with the powerful resistance by financial institutions and the business world. On the local level they were more successful: in Britain the 'New Urban Left' and their 'local socialism' experimented for some time with grassroots democracy and at least partly and temporarily managed to unite different groups of the population against Thatcherite policies. Occasionally, activists were able to introduce elements of grassroots democracy in the parties themselves at both local and national levels.

Eventually however, the new-left momentum was lost. First, many former Keynesian revisionists made their peace with monetarism or neoliberalism. Padgett and Paterson see this as "a natural evolution of revisionist social democracy in a period of recession – the ideology of growth management became one of crisis management" (1991: 50). Secondly, parts of the New Left adapted to the 'new realism' as well. They continued to pursue their projects of socio-cultural liberation and emancipation, but disentangled them from a general critique of the – by now much leaner – capitalist welfare state. 'New realism' implied an acceptance of the structural changes which governments of the right had introduced in Britain, the United States, and Germany in the 1980s; it meant the turn to some vaguely nationalist project of modernisation in France; and it evoked moves towards the European Community in Sweden. No one within social democracy came up with comprehensive alternatives to the by now firmly established neo-liberal regime of accumulation. Whereas the revisionists of the 1950s had changed social democratic parties from class-based to catch-all organisations, the new realists of the 1980s and 1990s transformed them from centre-left into centrist ones.[7] Social democracy's new programmatic openness – characterised as flexibility by its supporters and as vagueness by its opponents – was compensated for through 'charismatic leadership' and

6 In many cases, invitations to workers to participate in decision making on economic policy followed a double rationale of empowering them while simultaneously persuading them to accept wage increases which were only moderate – an attempt at tackling what many politicians identified as the main problem of the 1970s: rising inflation.

7 Scandinavia was, to a certain degree, the exception to this trend.

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increasing reliance on political marketing strategies. Still, in many societies new parties and organisations emerged to occupy the space on the left vacated by social democracy – the perspective that it remained necessary to seriously reform or even transform capitalism.

The claim that there never was socialism in America (meaning Anglo-America and especially the United States) is, of course, incorrect. That socialist and social democratic parties never attained the level of mass support on which they could rely in large parts of Europe is another matter.[8] A number of explanations exist for this difference: in areas of the United States where socialist tendencies mustered some political strength, they faced massive persecution and suppression. The 'Red Scare' and the years of McCarthyism constitute only two tips of an anti-socialist iceberg. Further, as an immigrant country with a moving frontier, expansion of territory for settlement acted as a safety valve against unrest due to social inequalities. Moving elsewhere – as an individual – proved an attractive alternative to collective political pressure. Even if this chance constituted a myth rather than reality for poor working-class people, the idea of geographical mobility helped to maintain social tranquillity in the United Sates (cf. Howe 1985). Still, U.S. society harnessed the idea of equality. Although this was first of all understood as an individual's equal right to be 'free', it also had a collective dimension. Groups excluded from the equal right to be free, demanded inclusion into this category *as groups*. Unlike in Europe, where people organized via social class lines, since the era of Jacksonian democracy, in the United States these groups were very often ethnic, as immigration societies are likely to invite solidarity and collectivism along ethnic lines.[9] It stands that many of the ideas, ideals, interests and demands expressed in and around social democracy in Europe, were expressed within the broad framework of American liberalism. Standing generally for a progressive political orientation, from the late 19th century onwards, liberals

8 For detailed histories of the American left see: Aronovitz 1996, Buhle 1991, Diggins 1992, Weinstein 2004.

9 Göran Therborn argued that the European route through the twentieth century was characterised by class conflicts fought along the lines of sophisticated ideologies. The North-American path, on the other hand, consisted of conflicts about exclusion and demands for inclusion which very often activated ethnic identifications and solidarities (cf. 2000: 19-20).

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predominantly clustered around the Democratic Party even though for a long time the Republican Party also had a liberal wing.

The overlap of socialist, social democratic and liberal values is not surprising. All grew from the same roots – the Enlightenment and the bourgeois revolutions from the late 18th to the mid-19th century. Both revolutionary socialists and gradualist social democrats considered themselves to be those thinkers who took liberalism more seriously than anyone else. They aimed at developing the material and economic base upon which liberalism could prosper: social equality. American liberals differed from revolutionary socialists in so far as they did not consider themselves as revolutionaries. They saw the United States as a post-revolutionary polity in which politicians should rely on the institutions created through this revolution. Liberals did not conceive of themselves as transformers but as reformers, though one could argue that they changed the role of institutions and the scope of governmental activity at least as much as social democrats. Even so, these changes followed a rationale of compromise rather than confrontation to an even stronger degree than in the case of social democrats.

Since the last third of the 19th century, liberalism in the United States had a social, caring dimension. With the Social Gospel Movement and with the liberal Republicans, activists and politicians engaged in attempts to resolve social hardship and create a common good. They believed in good-faith efforts, careful and sensitive administration, and in the application of scientific methods (as did many social democrats – for example the British Fabians of the early 20th century and the technocratic modernisers of the Wilson cabinets during the 1960s). To a certain extent, the Populist movement of the late 19th century also embraced social liberalism, though they stood for a mixture of radical, liberal, and deeply conservative ideas. Historians distinguish three major periods of U.S. social liberalism in the 20th century: the 'progressive era' of the early years, the New Deal of the 1930s and the 'Great Society' efforts of the 1960s. Each of these phases expanded the boundaries of governmental activity and weakened (though did not kill) anti-statist sentiment. In the first period, Theodore Roosevelt propagated a centrally-planned, state supervised economy, in the name of a 'New Nationalism'. Here, the power of corporations and monopolies ('trusts'), which were perceived as threats to American freedoms, was curtailed. At the time, people disagreed about strategies. Some, like Roosevelt, believed

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that large corporations could be effectively steered into serving the interests of the U.S. population. Others, like Woodrow Wilson, were more sceptical and suggested to disaggregate them. Both strands developed ideas for a corporatist, associational democratic economy. However, liberalism lost influence after the First World War and flourished in a modified form only with the beginning of the second important period in the 1930.

This time, the problems consisted of a banking system that collapsed under its own irresponsibility, which resulted in a sudden explosion of unemployment and poverty. The consequent Great Depression required more comprehensive economic interventionism. During the New Deal era, a whole range of strategies were tested. Large-scale planning in the private sector was accompanied by the disentangling of trusts and the foundation of large public sector institutions for economic reconstruction and modernisation (the Tennessee Valley Authority is probably the best-known example). The New Deal increasingly relied on Keynesian approaches to fiscal policy, which proved to be the least controversial within the framework of a traditionally anti-statist political culture. Still, the newly created planning jobs in the large New Deal administration attracted many American radicals. Hence, during these years, social liberalism had a small left-wing minority of declared transformers.[10] The turn to Keynesianism and the consequent identification of under-consumption as the source of economic crises, the cooptation of labour unions to corporatist decision making (quite a radical innovation in U.S. politics) and later the beginning of the Cold War all contributed to a consensus which was in many respects similar to the post-war consensus in several countries of Western Europe. Expanding consumption through fiscal policies seemed the most suitable strategy for alleviating poverty and scarcity and for guaranteeing economic growth. Restricting the state's interventionist role to fiscal policy could square the circle of working for a fairer and more equal society while taking into account public antipathy to state intrusion, associated with the 'totalitarian' systems of government in the U.S.S.R. and Nazi-Germany.

By the 1950s, this type of social liberalism had achieved – despite occasional backlashes – the status of a hegemonic doctrine in the United States, even if the social dimension was neither legitimised via social democratic

10 Some of them later belonged to the early contributors to *Monthly Review*.

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rhetoric nor comparable in scope to the emerging welfare states in Britain and Germany, let alone Scandinavia. Cheryl Greenberg characterises the consensus as "protection of individual rights within a capitalist framework of growth sustained by fiscal policies" (2001: 67). This settlement was also accepted by the Republican administrations of Eisenhower and Nixon, just as Conservatives and Christian Democrats were involved in administering the "golden age of social democracy" on the other side of the Atlantic. In much the same way that Crosland celebrated the socialism of affluence, writers like Lionel Trilling (*The Liberal Imagination*, 1950) and Louis Hartz (*The Liberal Tradition*, 1955) wrote about a post-ideological era in which social liberalism was triumphant. The liberals' idea of politics as statecraft and economic-technocratic expertise meant that they remained – in the era of the early Cold War – deeply sceptical about politics as ideological struggle, mass political action and grassroots self-empowerment. Hence liberals' relationship with the Civil Rights Movement was ambivalent, and in the activist 1960s liberalism's hegemony became increasingly corrosive. The limits of the social liberal imagination prohibited an understanding of issues like racism as structural deficiencies of U.S. society. The thought ran that such problems should be treated as incidents of individual prejudice.

In the third period, the substitution of a more active liberalism for the cautious liberalism of the 1950s, following from Johnson's Great Society programme, fell prey to the rising costs of the Vietnam tragedy and the escalating ideological battle over the Cold War. Johnson's "war on poverty" was interpreted by some liberals as the introduction of socialism by stealth, while others criticised the war in South East Asia as liberalism's moral bankruptcy. Hence the centre-left of U.S. politics, symbolised by the New Deal Coalition which had given the Democrats comfortable majorities in Washington for a long time, disintegrated from the mid-1960s onwards. In the Democratic Party, a search for the soul of liberalism began, which first caused a move to the left – culminating in the candidacy of George McGovern for the 1972 Presidential elections. McGovern campaigned on a platform which included many new-left demands and which mirrored the increased influence of grassroots activists on democratic programmes. After their candidate lost heavily, the Democrats went through a long process of reorientation, in the face of the U.S. economy's being confronted with heavy competition from Japan and Western Europe, the oil crisis and inflation, a weakened currency and rising unemployment figures. Like

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European social democrats, liberals in the United States did not know how to react to the failure of the Keynesian model of welfare capitalism, which was based on continuing economic growth and rising productivity. The Carter administration embodied this confusion, Ronald Reagan suggested that government was part of the problem rather than its solution, and when Bill Clinton became the first Democratic President after more than a decade, he declared the era of big government to be over, further lending credence to Reagan's diagnosis. Thus by the early 1990s, similar to social democrats in Western Europe, liberal political opinion in North America had embraced central tenets of the neo-liberal world view and accepted its accumulation regime. Like social democracy, social liberalism seemed a spent force: the ways forward were third ways.

Thus by the late 1980s, social democracy and social liberalism seemed to be in serious trouble when asked to define the core of their political project. Still, ideas of regulating capitalism in order to make it beneficial for all members of society had long been propagated. Hence the ideas of reformist social democracy, social liberalism and welfare capitalism had become deeply ingrained into the political cultures of West European and North American societies. A certain level of equality was still seen by many as a valuable political goal. The traditional social democratic project of a strong state, capable of creating an egalitarian society in material and social terms could still serve as the political vision for an intellectual left.

1.3. Post-Marxism as a Re-formulation of, or a Departure from, Socialist Strategies for Change?

While social democracy's history began in the 19th century, the term post-Marxism appeared only recently, although some theorists argue that the body of thought it describes is as old as Marxism itself. Post-Marxism developed – under this name – as reaction to a Marxism seen as being in a serious crisis, both intellectually and politically. In order to understand post-Marxism, one must historicise it, just as it has itself done with Marxism. Post-Marxism constitutes a part of a leftwing intellectual movement which reacted to the neo-liberal onslaught of the 1980s and focused in particular on its cultural and identity politics. It tried to recapture and use the individualism of the New Left for an innovative left project, individualism which had been partly demonised and partly appropriated by Thatcher-

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ite Conservatism and by Reagan and sections of the U.S. right. Post-Marxism starts out from the proposition that the only chance to resolve an allegedly fundamental crisis in Marxism consists of a root-and-branch renewal, one which should preserve what is worth keeping from Marxism and leave behind everything else. According to Stuart Sim, not even the core of Marxist theory is retained. Post-Marxists only rescue some elements – picked at random in acts of intellectual quarrying – from "the collapse of Marxism as a global cultural and political force in the later twentieth century, and reorient them to take on a new meaning within a rapidly changing cultural climate" (2000: 1). For post-Marxists, Marxism found itself in crisis not only through the events of 1989, but also because it had discredited itself through lending legitimacy to the exclusive power of state bureaucracies in the Eastern Bloc:[11]

> Post-Marxists dislike the control aspects of Marxism (particularly as exercised at party level), totalising theories in general, the deification of Marx, and subordination of the individual to the system that communism demands. They favour pluralism, difference, scepticism towards authority, political spontaneity, and the cause of the new social movements. (Sim 2000: 3)

Assuming a link between Marxism's totalising tendencies as a system of thought and the suppression of criticism in the states of the Eastern Bloc, post-Marxists regard it as *one* framework of thought among many; it does not have all the answers (cf. Gamble 1999: 7).

The label 'post-Marxism' is used in two different ways. On the one hand, it serves as an umbrella term for all those who developed more and more doubts about the scientific validity and political usability of Marxism. In such a wide sense, the label might even include neo-conservatives, such

11 This opinion was not only shared among post-Marxists of course. Robin Blackburn's statement which opened the introduction to this study was in agreement with this perspective. Still, Blackburn would most likely not have described himself as a post-Marxist. *New Left Review*, however, was sufficiently interested in post-Marxism to publish a debate between the leading proponents of post-Marxism at the time, Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, and the Marxist Norman Geras, a member of the journal's editorial board, in its pages (cf. Geras 1987; Laclau & Mouffe 1987).

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as the American Irving Kristol, who started their political odysseys as Trotskyists. According to Andrew Gamble, the term post-Marxism might be applied to a spectrum of theorists who do not know anymore whether to assign Marxism the status of a science, a discourse, or a critique (cf. 1999: 5). In a narrower sense, however, the term is closely associated with the work of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe and especially their controversial book *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (1986). The authors argue that there is a fundamental difference between *post*-Marxists who have left Marxism completely behind and post-*Marxists* who are concerned with a 'radical' reformulation of the Marxist project or 'spirit'. Their relationship to Marxism is similar to that of postmodernists to modernism, or of poststructuralists to structuralism. It is a relationship of consideration but at the same time of moving beyond. Marxism is historicised as part of the enlightenment tradition whereas post-Marxism borrows heavily from postmodern and poststructuralist theories (cf. Daly 1999: 63).

Used in the wider, umbrella sense, post-Marxism has a long pedigree. Some commentators go so far as to suggest that Marx himself was the first post-Marxist. They point to contradictions in his work regarding the relationship of structure and agency. Wherever he emphasises agency over the laws of historical materialism and economic development (which he formulates elsewhere), he already prepares the path for one of post-Marxism's central claims: the dominance of historical contingency, of human activity and (political) activism, in shaping historical processes and the subordinate or negligible role of a teleological determinism. The discrepancies between the prognoses of Marx, Engels and others and actual historical developments in the twentieth century led to a considerable number of reflections on this topic of contingency and determinism, structure and agency. According to Perry Anderson (1976), the whole story of 'Western Marxism' in the first half of the twentieth century should be understood as intellectual attempts to come to terms with unexpected – and, for leftists, far from promising – developments, which undermined Marxists' original historical optimism. The most important milestone in re-conceptualising the contingency-versus-determinism problematic in the first half of the 20th century was contributed by Antonio Gramsci in his reflections on hegemony. With the identification of ideologically hegemonic power blocs across social classes, he thought to have found the reason which explained capitalism's failure to collapse. Later, Louis Althusser added the concepts of overdeter-

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mination and relative autonomy to shift the balance even further from determinism towards contingency. Other theorists questioned further central tenets of traditional Marxism or, more precisely, their relevance under twentieth century conditions. André Gorz and Herbert Marcuse both doubted the indispensable role of the working class for revolutionary change. Rudolf Bahro pointed to Marxism's blindness with regard to the natural limits impairing its vision of a post-capitalist society of plenty. In Britain, Stuart Hall and other thinkers close to the journal *Marxism Today* synthesised many of these issues into considerations on how the left should react to the unexpected popularity of the Thatcherite project – also among working-class people.

Post-Marxism in the narrow sense stemmed from these British reformulations. It is closely linked, as Sim points out, not only with poststructuralist thinking but with second-wave feminism. Often however, post-Marxists emphasise their difference from the poststructuralist mainstream. To some extent, they distance themselves from the latter's radical anti-foundationalism and anti-universalism. Instead they stick to specific emancipatory projects and to a normative dimension of political theory. They understand discursive operations as struggles rather than games and retain some aspects of cultural materialism (cf. Frankfurter Arbeitskreis für politische Theorie und Philosophie 2004: 17-21). Along with poststructuralism, they share the conviction that what counts as reality is constructed in the discursive sphere and that therefore exchanges within it are of utmost importance. Laclau and Mouffe's title, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, implies that they try to design a discursive project with which to argue for both socialism and what they call 'radical democracy': a plethora of open-ended and indeterminate struggles for human emancipation.

What are the main elements of such a post-Marxist project? Unsurprisingly, there is no general agreement. It seems, however, that post-Marxists understand their considerations on social and political issues as a *critique* rather than a holistic theory or an ideology. They emphasise their position's self-reflexivity and its openness to criticism. The reluctance to take criticism seriously had put traditional Marxism on the track of authoritarianism. Many post-Marxists still see the critique of political economy, Marx's analysis of the capitalist system, as useful and some would suggest it to be Marxism's most important achievement. Still, they remain unconvinced that all history is the history of class struggles, not even in 'the last in-

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stance'. Instead, they observe the co-existence of numerous struggles fought along the lines of people's different identifications. Neither the outcome of these struggles nor the emergence of new ones can be predicted. Post-Marxists are less concerned about the 'grand narrative' of the class struggle *per se,* than poststructuralists. Rather, they direct their criticism to essentialist conclusions drawn from it. Unlike traditional Marxists, they maintain that other types of struggle are not of secondary status in comparison to the class struggle and that not all struggles can be referred back to class antagonisms. The class struggle is neither superior to other forms of social conflict, nor is it inevitable.

Indeed, many attempts to explain historical change exclusively by quasi-automatic mechanisms – where the relations of production become antagonistic to the production process and hence create social conflict – have been proven wrong, both frequently and in many parts of the world. Even if one saw the analysis of the transformation from feudalism to capitalism as correct, this would be of limited use for prognoses on future developments of capitalism. Post-Marxists concede that Marxism itself has produced various reflections on this issue, but, as already mentioned, the "logic of necessity" has very often clashed with the "logic of contingency" (cf. Daly 1999: 64). According to Glyn Daly, these logics are incompatible but have produced a creative tension and thus contributed to Marxism's intellectual advances over time (ibid). For post-Marxists, the tension has been resolved by abandoning any remnants of the 'logic of necessity'. Consequently, they cannot envisage an end of history and argue against all kinds of eschatologies – to use André Gorz's phrase – of which Marxism is one. Instead, post-Marxists suggest that all emancipatory movements and projects need to – and will – seek power. Thus the future is only imaginable as an unbroken sequence of power struggles between emancipatory movements and counter-movements. Power struggles will be permanent.

This position assigns a central role to politics as the political process must not be reduced to being a mere epiphenomenon of economic relations. Post-Marxists unambiguously bid farewell to the base-superstructure model, even to its refined Althusserian variety of articulations in dominance and the determining power of the economic in the last instance.[12] The post-

12 Althusser himself had argued that the moment of the last instance never came and should be understood as an abstraction (cf. Sim 2000: 19).

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Marxist understanding of the political is discursive rather than economic. According to Daly, Laclau and Mouffe

> have affirmed that nothing can be identified outside the constitutive process itself and that all identity, order and objectivity must be considered as fully discursive: that is as phenomena which are wholly the result of articulatory and political (power) practices and which are ultimately prone to other articulatory practices. (1999: 64)

Post-Marxists observe an incremental return of the political from early on in the intellectual history of Marxism, symbolised again, above all in Gramsci's introduction of the hegemony concept. However, whereas for Gramsci different economically defined classes allied with each other and fought each other over political hegemony, post-Marxists see also these fighting and allying groups as discursively constructed. Hence it becomes impossible to predict which groups might in which ways create themselves to act politically and it would be a futile exercise to risk prognoses about the political debates and fault lines of the future. For many post-Marxists, involvement in these fluid processes and intervention into the construction and negotiation of identities through formulating political values and demands has become the primary task of radical intellectuals.

Traditional Marxism worked with dialectical methods. This implied the existence of identifiable fixed opposites and of processes through which the interaction of these creates a new third. Post-Marxists disagreed with such assumptions for two reasons. Firstly, they followed a poststructuralist, Lacanian logic of the discursive construction of objects and identities. These acquire meaning only in relation to each other and hence cannot be understood as clear opposites. With this assumption, the very base for a dialectical dynamics ceases to exist. Secondly, post-Marxists regard the idea that a new 'third', a synthesis, would be created 'automatically' in a dialectical process as dangerous. Unlike traditional Marxists, they do not believe that the outcomes of political struggles would necessarily be 'progressive'. Solutions to specific problems and controversies, strategies for overcoming differentials of power and wealth would not merely suggest themselves. Instead, such measures require planning and creative thinking. Thus it is important to overcome Marxists' traditional hesitance to imagine a socialist society: post-Marxists consider it a necessary task to design the

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structures, institutions and workings of a 'new' society and to reflect on strategies for how to attract people to these models.

In terms of people, it has already been mentioned that the working class is not conceived of as the primary revolutionary actor. Thus attracting support is not synonymous with convincing the working class. Not all post-Marxists bid an unqualified farewell to the working class but – especially in the political climate of Britain and the United States during the 1980s – they have learned to see working-class people as heterogeneous in their political outlook and a considerable number of them as conservative.[13] Of course, this deliberate un-privileging of the working class echoes the notion that social relations are characterised by manifold and fluid contradictions and conflicts in society which cannot be traced back merely to the 'master' narrative of the conflict between exploiters and exploited. Post-Marxists point to a whole range of issues which have developed, marking them as nodal points around which political identifications are created. They also expect new points of identification to arise in the future:

> [T]he historical expansion of emancipatory discourses (especially post 1968), combined with the critical Marxist identification of the increased dislocatory effects of capitalism, reveals a proliferation of the sites of antagonism which present new challenges to the social order and which go way beyond traditional questions of how we produce or consume. (Daly 1999: 81)

In this context, post-Marxists take note of an increasing individualism which has replaced the old working-class collectivism. Political struggles, initiated first and foremost by new social movements, are much more about the right to be different and to be accepted as being different than about equality in the traditional, material sense. People demand space and respect for expressing themselves. The political goal of these demands consists of giving individuals the power over their own lives – as Gorz has expressed it

13 This was the core of Stuart Hall's controversial interventions during the 1980s in which he characterised Thatcherism as an authoritarian-populist project which profited from working-class resentment and exploited working people's unease with Labour's traditional left programme – supported by many on the intellectual left – and their selling of a ticket on the welfare-state past. For the debate on Hall's interpretation see Hall 1988; Jessop et al. 1988.

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(cf. Sim 2000: 8). On the one hand, such a politics represents the 'postmodern condition' of culturally fragmented and individualised societies. On the other, post-Marxists interpret it as a reaction to capitalism's penetration of all areas of life.

It follows from this approach that the traditional Marxist conception of revolution has run its course. An obviously plural radical politics can only be imagined as a plethora of different emancipatory struggles. Even if these might lead to limited 'revolutions' (in the sense of qualitative leaps) in particular areas of social life, they need to follow certain standards of behaviour. The most important is to accept formal democratic procedures. Political actors might struggle for hegemony, but they would not be free to choose their strategies. Post-Marxists have made their peace with parliamentary democracy and its formal rules. Laclau and Mouffe remain convinced that the left is nevertheless distinguishable from the liberal political mainstream of the time: "The task of the Left therefore cannot be to renounce liberal-democratic ideology, but on the contrary, to deepen and expand it in the direction of a radical and plural democracy." (1986: 348) Claiming that they take concepts such as 'liberty', 'equality', 'justice' and 'democracy' more seriously than their opponents, post-Marxists suggest a decentralisation of politics and an expansion of grassroots democracy. Another writer often characterised as a leading post-Marxist, Paul Hirst, spent much time reflecting on the workings of what he called "associative democracy" (cf. 1994). The radicalism of this approach lies in the idea that decentralisation changes power structures (and consequently power relations) in society and thus paves the way for a continuous process of democratisation. Such a process would be a 'permanent' democratic revolution or a permanent process of reform – not in a teleological, linear or dialectical sense but simply because each solution to a particular problem or deficiency, each satisfaction of specific demands is likely to create new problems. Post-Marxists call these 'dislocatory effects'. Such a dynamics of change should not be confused with the traditional Marxist narrative of historical progress since it is completely open; it is by no means sure that the left will succeed (though decentralisation might put it into a stronger position) and it will have to defend everything it has successfully introduced.

Post-Marxists' utopian idea is moderate. Historically, the establishment of socialist structures has proved difficult. The practice of setting-up authoritarian regimes in order to introduce socialism has discredited itself.

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Social democratically inspired capitalist welfare states, with their top-down model of service provision, have also proven incapable of responding to many of the more recent emancipatory demands and unable to defend themselves against neo-liberal onslaughts. These failures do not testify to the meaninglessness of the democratic state and its institutions in capitalism. Post-Marxists agree that parliamentary work must be accompanied and reinforced by extra-parliamentary pressure in order to succeed. In the long run, associations within civil society, decentralised decision making structures and a dense network of locally organised self-help and pressure groups will probably take over many parliamentary and governmental tasks. Post-Marxists ideal scenario consists of a snowball effect of continuous democratisation and emancipation. Yet they are still aware that the snowball might be stopped or driven uphill (cf. Sim 2000: 26). With such a conception, post-Marxists move close to communitarianist models. What distinguishes them from communitarianists is their pronounced awareness of power differences and hierarchies in society. However, like communitarianists, they tacitly assume that all groups will stick to certain standards, conventions and ethics regarding political debate and decision making procedures, even if doing so means having to accept unwelcome outcomes.

Just like social democrats, post-Marxists implicitly take the nation-state as their most important frame of reference. Marxism's anti-imperialist internationalism has been replaced by an acceptance of the capitalist world system which again can only be changed incrementally (cf. Petras 1998). Post-Marxists are aware of the debates on global governance and they seem to see a chance for adapting their associational model to the global sphere. They envisage a worldwide civil society composed of transnational social movements and non-governmental organisations, which become increasingly involved in geopolitical confrontations and ideally transform them into discursive struggles over global justice and the emancipation of the poor and oppressed all over the world.

By the late 1980s, post-Marxism was advertised as a possible way out of the political and ideological impasse traditional socialist politics seemed incapable of finding. It retained many elements of the emancipatory spirit of a libertarian Marxism – enriched by the issues raised by the social movements of the late 1960s and 1970s – and tried to formulate a new political project on this base. It took seriously the criticisms of Marxism's 'grand narrative' or 'meta-narrative' status and the 'totalising tendencies'

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that followed from them. It constituted a radical project whose main emphasis was less on egalitarianism and more on self-emancipation, grassroots democracy and the vision of a society composed of loosely associated communities. Such a project could certainly become attractive for left intellectuals.

2. A SHORT HISTORY OF THE BRITISH AND THE AMERICAN INTELLECTUAL LEFT AND THE JOURNALS ANALYSED

2.1. The Many British New Lefts

The British Left was formed by a very differentiated and rich political tradition. At its centre has always been the elaborate interrelated structure of the Labour Party and the trade union movement. These unions both preceded and helped to set the party up, thereby inscribing themselves in its texture and politics. Additionally, the left founded a number of organisations and other movements, such as the Communist Party of Great Britain (influential in a couple of trade unions), a variety of competing Trotskyist groups, various currents of leftwing nationalism in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland, a social movement radicalism with – already in the 1950s – a sizeable peace movement, and several strands of radical (including Marxist) intellectual thought.[1] The latter was comprised of a number of individuals who tried to set up a New Left as a "movement of ideas" from 1956 onwards (New Left Review 1960: 2). For its initiators, the necessity of such a New Left, which borrowed its name and some of its strategies from the French *Nouvelle Gauche*, followed from the Communist Party's unwillingness to critically engage with its own history of Stalinism and from the Gaitskellite Labour Party's perceived adaptation to capitalism. The New Left formed on the one hand as a backward looking alliance, echoing the *Left Clubs* of the 1930s. However, on the other, it addressed issues of the time and stood in close contact with the *Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament*. These and other actions demonstrated the group's commitment to making socialism relevant for an era characterised by widespread

1 For a comprehensive history of the British left see Callaghan (1987).

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private material prosperity, hidden inequalities, the decline of the old industrial centres, the changing relationship between state and economy, the 'pluralisation of social identities', and the threat of nuclear annihilation (cf. Kenny: 1995: 5). Its reflections extended into four different directions: towards socialist humanism (associated with E. P. Thompson and, later, the *Socialist Register*), culturalism (represented by Raymond Williams and, from 1964 onward, the *Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies*), structural Marxism (imported from 1963 onwards by *New Left Review*) and the movement for workers control (personified within the New Left by Ken Coates and later institutionalised with the *Institute of Workers Control*) (cf. Chun 1996: 194).

The New Left developed from two different roots and both set up periodicals – *New Reasoner* and *University and Left Review.* The former was launched in 1956 after a long era of self-censorship among the Communist Historians Group (most of whose members were based in Northern England), which came to an end with the crushing of the revolt in Budapest.[2] The latter was founded after a number of Oxford and London students called attention to the persistence of British imperialism in the same year. For Gregory Elliott, these originss defined the New Left's approach: "The product of the European moment of 1956, the British New Left at the outset had sought to bridge the mutually injurious gulf between 'theory' and 'practice', culture and politics, intellectuals and workers, socialist milieu and labourist organization" (1998: 7). Both wings shared a number of characteristics, but also differed in many respects. Both were committed to the *Campagin for Nuclear Disarmament* (CND) and "positive neutralism" (a strategy for British foreign policy that implied distancing Britain from super-power politics, creating its own foreign policy and collaborating with other, especially unaligned, countries) and opposed the "pathology of anti-

2 The relationship between the Communist Historians Group and the leadership of the CPGB had been contentious for a long time. The historians avoided topics too close to recent politics and concentrated on the change from feudalism to capitalism in Britain. Relations became even more fraught when E. P. Thompson and John Saville started publishing *The Reasoner* as a journal for party intellectuals urging a self-critical assessment of the CPGB's Stalinist period. For a detailed account on the *Communist Historians Group* see Dworkin 1997: 10-44 and Woodhams 2001.

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communism" (Samuel 1989: 49). However, they regarded the Communist Party as "dogmatically theoretical" and the Labour Party as "narrowly empirical" (ibid: 43). Thus, they emphasised the establishment of "a political milieu that was neither Communist nor Labour, an alternative space on the map of the Left" (Dworkin 1997: 66). They wanted their alternative to constitute a "third way" between both Eastern and Western military blocs, and between Communism and social democracy, consistent with the 'socialist humanism' mentioned above. At its core was a strong belief in the possibility of grassroots-level human – and working-class – agency (cf. Sedgwick 1976: 137). Beyond this optimistic central tenet, they formed a pluralist group. Dorothy Thompson, one of the movement's activists, explained:

> The Left movement which grew up around the journals and clubs in the fifties and sixties was a coalition of people with varied religious and philosophical belief systems who were united around the political concept of a non-aligned European movement which would work out socialist policies independently of superpower influence and control. Not only did they not represent a single ideological position, they were by no means united in their definition of socialism – only perhaps by the negative qualities of disillusion with Soviet-style communism and West-European, especially British, social democracy. (1996: 94)

For finding likeminded people, they looked not only to the French New Left, but also to the United States. *Dissent* provided both inspiration and contributions to the British journal. The American sociologist C. Wright Mills's "Letter to the New Left" was printed in the first issue of *New Left Review* in 1960 and for some even hailed the American *Dissent* as *Universities and Left Review*'s "sister publication" (Samuel 1989: 44). The British New Left was in its majority loosely Marxist, but more attracted by Marx's early writings, more focussed on the 'humanist' than on the 'determinist' aspects, and more interested in 'alienation' (and later in 'hegemony') than in 'exploitation'. Like others (and despite their commitment to a third space), they all struggled with the question of how to relate to the Labour Party – a problem that became increasingly urgent when one division of the New Left supported the tiny Fife Socialist League in the 1959 election

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while others stayed with the Labour Party.[3] Generally, the New Left sought contact with the anti-revisionist left wing of the Labour Party (cf. ibid: 50).[4]

The most important difference between the two sections of the New Left was generational. While it has become common to distinguish between the first and the second New Left (the second consisting of those who edited *New Left Review* from 1963 onwards – Perry Anderson, Robin Blackburn, Tom Nairn, etc.), the first was already trans-generational: members were born either shortly after the First or shortly before the Second World War.[5] Though this is not much in terms of age difference, it explains the two groups' divergent political perspectives in terms of fundamentally different experiences: depression, fascism, and army life for the older group; affluence, Cold War, and university life for the younger. While the older generation wanted to revive the British socialist traditions studied in the Communist Historians Group, the younger hoped to develop new ones that took the conditions of the post-war welfare state society into consideration. According to Raphael Samuel, the younger generation wanted the movement to take "as its starting point the spirit of youth" (1989: 44). For a short time, from 1956 to 1962, the New Left indeed became a movement, with a well-known café in London as its base, and, at its peak, 45 clubs with 3,000 paying members all over the country. However, the clubs declined soon afterwards, as several political manoeuvres led to tactical disagreements within the peace movement: the Labour Party first adopted unilateralism in 1960 and renounced it only one year later. In addition, Harold Wilson's succession of Hugh Gaitskell as party leader promised the perceived chance of a leftward move by the Labour Party

In 1962, another New Left group, commonly known as the 'Second New Left' formed around Perry Anderson. It accused both generations of the prior group of populism, empiricism, and nationalism. The conflict

3 Some New Leftists, like Mervyn Jones and, for a time, Raymond Williams, became members of the Labour Party.

4 Also Peter Sedgwick observed a political-strategic overlap between New Left and Labour Left, because both tried to combine utopianism and *realpolitik* (cf. 1976: 135-7)

5 Detailed accounts of the developments, debates and conflicts between the different generations of the New Left have been provided by Chun (1996) and Kenny (1995).

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between the two groups was, according to authors such as Sassoon (1981) or Thompson (2001), more about style and terminology than about substance – both stood at the time for similar versions of a radical reformism.[6] The fight has often been presented as a showdown between E. P. Thompson and Perry Anderson – a perspective that ignores the amicable relationships and mutual respect between many of the others involved.[7] The main difference was that the second New Left took a politically more detached position and became occupied with 'theoretical practice', starting a programme of importing and familiarising themselves and others with continental European Marxist theory. All three sections of the New Left were involved in initiating far-reaching and original critical approaches towards British politics, society, history, and culture. These were institutionalised and expressed not only in the two periodicals discussed below, but also in many other new foundations of the time.

The relationship between this pre-1968 New Left and the student radicals was not always easy. The activists ignored the first New Left's *May Day Manifesto*, written by Raymond Williams, which intended to revive the original New Left as a response to the negative experience of the Wilson governments (cf. Chun 1996: 155-6). Some New Leftists, such as Ralph Miliband, John Saville, Stuart Hall, and many in the group around Anderson, supported the students, while others, like Thompson, considered the 1968 revolt as being outside the rational revolutionary tradition (ibid: 168-

6 Lin Chun argues that they developed into different directions – for example, on the question of how to define revolutionary change: whereas for the Thompsonian first New Left revolutionary upheaval was the exception and piecemeal change the historical norm, Anderson believed that the revolution was a necessity in capitalist democracies due to their repressive tendencies. Miliband was convinced that revolutions were under certain conditions but not always necessary – and recommended to analyse in detail the power structures within concrete societies and the openings they offered (cf. 1996: 227-8).

7 Obviously, Thompson and Anderson enjoyed emphasising the bellicose character of the disputes and their personal roles within them – see Thompson's *The Poverty of Theory* (1978) and Anderson's *Arguments within English Marxism* (1980).

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9).[8] In a further parallel to the United States, several of the leading student activists, for example the former *Black Dwarf* editors Tariq Ali and Sheila Rowbotham, later joined the editorial boards of the pre-1968 journals. The 1970s tuned out to be a very creative, but at the same time complicated, decade for the British left, with the emergence of new social movements, self-experiments of grassroots groups, the rise of radical trade unionism, the development of a strong left within the Labour Party, while all these innovations became overshadowed by economic crisis and decline. Furthermore, a turn from neo-Marxism to poststructuralism could be observed on the left of British academic life. It affected formerly Marxist publications such as the periodical *Economy and Society*, and academic disciplines, especially Cultural Studies. This development was prepared, welcomed and supported by a minority of the pre-1968 New Left. However, a debate about socialism continued, both in the two journals introduced below, and also in other publications such as *Capital and Class*, *New Socialist* (sponsored by the Labour Party), or the 'Eurocommunist' *Marxism Today*. By the end of the 1970s, the feeling of crisis came to dominate left analyses – as could be seen in the study *Policing the Crisis*, edited by members of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (1978), and Eric Hobsbawm's "The Forward March of Labour Halted?" (1978). Intellectuals disagreed on the merits and practicality of the Bennite Labour Left's isolationist economic strategy, the world view and the future of the British working class, the correct position towards European integration, and the sense of modernising the British *ancién regime* as a way of changing power relations in society. With the consolidation of Thatcherism (or, to put it differently, after a series of catastrophic defeats for the British left from the isolation of the Labour Left via the Falklands war and failed protests against rate-capping by leftwing local councils to the miners strike), they began to analyse its make-up and the conditions of its relative success and debated what these would mean for future socialist strategies (cf. Hall 1988; Jessop et al. 1988). The New Left's original idea of combining theory and practice was revived in the establishment of the short-lived *Socialist Society* and later the *Chesterfield Conferences.*

8 The Anderson team disagreed, however, on the issue of 'red bases' at the universities (cf. Sassoon 1981: 248).

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The multiple British New Lefts had contributed immensely to opening up new ways of left theorising in Britain. Thus, for a considerable time, they arguably reached their goal of acting as a 'movement of ideas' (although they only became a 'real' political movement for a short historical moment in the late 1950s and early 1960s and did not solve all the questions they had formulated for themselves – for example, on the relationship of the intellectual left to the *Labour Party*, or the requirements of a socialist strategy in an age of widespread but selective affluence). The events of 1989, then, affected an intellectual left that had become pluralized, increasingly detached from political movements and parties, and nervous about the unexpected persistence of Thatcherism and its radical reorganisation of large areas of public life.

2.2. *New Left Review* and *Socialist Register*

New Left Review

The number of scholarly contributions to the history of *New Left Review* testifies to its crucial importance for the British – and as several writers would claim, for the international – intellectual left (cf. Blackledge 2000, 2002, 2004, Chun 1996, Elliott 1998, Meiksins Wood 1995, Sassoon 1981, Thompson 2001, 2007). Its central role is also underlined by the impressive number of articles by 'leading thinkers' from around the world published in its pages – the journal's website proudly mentions 32 names that include Giovanni Arrighi, Pierre Bourdieu, Nancy Fraser, Jürgen Habermas, Fredrik Jameson, Göran Therborn, and Slavoj Zizek, among others (cf. New Left Review 2002: 1). However, the history of the journal is not easy to tell. First, the *New Left Review* is rather reluctant to speak about its own past, and Robin Blackburn's overview of its developmental stages on the website is correspondingly short. It also becomes difficult to balance the personal and the political in its internal conflicts and, moreover, to discern the 'voice' of Perry Anderson, often regarded as the journal's intellectual head, from those of the endeavour as a whole.[9] Finally, the *New Left Review*'s (and Anderson's) position has traditionally functioned as a political com-

9 Whereas the other journals had two editors for most of the time, Anderson acted as *New Left Review*'s sole editor from 1963 to 1982, cooperating with an editorial committee of varying size.

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pass; positioning oneself in relation to *New Left Review* (and to Anderson), has always served the purpose of making a point about one's own political perspective – more than would be the case with most other publications. Gilbert Achcar is in so far correct when calling the journal, despite its commitment to a plurality of positions, the "chief organ" of the New Left (2000: 138).

One of the magazine's peculiarities is its three birth years: 1956, 1960, and 1963. The first witnessed the foundation of its two predecessors, *New Reasoner* and *Universities and Left Review*. Both works were committed to producing a populist, activist, anti-elitist publication for the New Left movement. While they merged in 1960, the editors and the resulting *New Left Review* remained dedicated to these themes. Later a new group including Perry Anderson, Robin Blackburn, and Tom Nairn took charge of the journal, leading Dennis Dworkin to make the claim that Anderson had literally bought the journal through paying its debts (1997: 77). Under this new leadership, it changed course: "*New Left Review* adopted without apology a high intellectual style and undertook a substantial and demanding work of theoretical renewal, the political and theoretical rationale for which they soon explained in cogent and solid statements of position." (Rustin 1985: 49).[10] Hence, 1963 constituted a watershed both in terms of the purpose which the journal was supposed to fulfil as well as in terms of the personnel to carry it out. Upon the arrival of the new group, the old editorial collective left to concentrate on other types of activity or set up *Socialist Register* as an alternative to *New Left Review*. Despite the overhaul, there are nevertheless lines of continuity with the pre-Anderson *Review*: most importantly, according to Fred Inglis, a particular neo-Gramscian humanism and a permanent elaboration of Gramsci's concept of 'hegemony' (cf. 1996: 91). This connection helps to explain why many activists from the first New Left did not stop publishing in the pages of *New Left Review*.

At the core of *New Left Review*'s new direction was a programme of theory import which should provide an end to the perceived insularity of the Brit-

10 Whether this renewal was a takeover, as E. P. Thompson claimed, or the rescuing action for a project to be deserted by its founders, as Anderson recounted it, is not relevant here. For a slightly more detached and hence perhaps more reliable view on the change see Williams 1979: 364-66.

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ish left's intellectual life. This new perspective tied in, first, with a feature that Peter Sedgwick called "Olympianism", a remote, global perspective resulting from personal research interests (1976: 148). To this end, Elliott quotes a critic who claims that Anderson's oeuvre covered historical developments from 800 BC until last week (cf. 1998: XI). The new direction also related to a number of additional theoretical assumptions: the baseline of the journal's understanding of Marxism was that it constituted a method combining historical and structural analysis of economic and social change. Thus a Marxist approach had to employ a macro- and long-term perspective. This approach bore the danger of forcing an analysis in too unspecific in perspective, as was diagnosed by Duncan Thompson. He explains that *New Left Review* in the mid-1980s built, for example, its evaluation of the political situation in Europe on analyses of the major left parties but ignored the newer, smaller anti-capitalist ones (cf. Thompson 2001: 29). A second characteristic feature was the Deutscherite reading of the Cold War as a struggle between a post-capitalist Eastern bloc and a capitalist West. Finally, *New Left Review* popularised a view of British historical development that became known as the Anderson-Nairn thesis. Criticized by Thompson as over-abstract (and thus 'anti-humanist'), the thesis claimed that the British left's political achievements and theoretical perspectives were harmed by the consequences of a premature bourgeois revolution.[11] Anderson and Nairn saw utilitarianism and Fabianism as its intellectual corollaries and criticised the lack of a powerful revolutionary left tradition. Theory import became a necessary precondition for a radicalisation of the British labour movement, and intellectual engagement with leftwing theory took precedence over articles on working-class history and contemporary political struggles in Britain. The *New Left Review* collective ambitiously attempted to deconstruct the whole construction of Britain's bourgeois

11 This premature revolution resulted, according to the thesis, in an alliance between the middle class and the aristocracy, isolated the working class (that in other revolutions had liaised with the bourgeoisie) and left the emerging labour movement with a 'corporate' class consciousness, making it, in the words of Michael Sprinker, at the same time "antagonistic but effectively deferential", thus demanding their share of and stake in society rather than its transformation (1993: 101). For details of the debate on Anderson and Nairn's thesis see Anderson 1980.

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intellectual culture.[12] Surprisingly, this perspective was accompanied by an emphasis on technicist large-scale solutions not too different from those recommended within the traditions criticised. With this approach, Wood contested that the journal was in danger of falling prey to intellectual substitutionism:

> If there is an epochal rupture in the evolution of the Western left since 1956, it occurs at the point when a section of the left intelligentsia stopped thinking of themselves as an ally in popular struggles, or even as a vanguard, or even as a critic from the philosophical sidelines, the point at which people stopped thinking of themselves, to use Miliband's formula, as intellectuals *of* an emancipatory movement, and started to think of themselves as intellectuals *for* that movement, or, to put it more strongly, when they started thinking of themselves as the movement itself. (1995: 34-5)

While *New Left Review* could (at least somewhat) legitimately be accused of this type of elitism, it has certainly never been sectarian. It followed an increasingly ecumenical approach to theory which allowed for contributions far beyond (its own versions of) Marxism. It remained unclear where this tolerance ended – that is why, for example, it proved impossible to transform the journal into a 'feminist and socialist' publication (as tried in the early 1980s by a group of socialist feminists who had been invited to the editorial committee), or why the debate on whether democratic progress in the Eastern Bloc would make possible a revival of revolutionary socialism in the West led to a collective exodus of a number of editors. In general, however, in the 1980s *New Left Review* became more open to postmodern positions than *Dissent*, *Monthly Review*, and *Socialist Register*, and more open to liberal ones than the latter two, even if Robin Blackburn, the editor from 1982 onwards, claimed that the journal distanced itself from the populism, relativism, and identity politics of the broader (post-) New Left (cf. New Left Review 2002: 4). According to Donald Sassoon, the price of

12 The most explicit example of this demolition work might be Perry Anderson's all-round critique of intellectual life and theory production in Britain to be found in "Components of the National Culture" (Anderson 1992). 25 years later, Anderson stuck to the essence of his critique but regretted several of its bombastic formulations (1992: Acknowledgements).

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this ecumenical perspective and the coverage of topics from philosophy to international relations, from aesthetics to Third World issues was that the journal became a cultural rather than a political project; it provided food for thought but did not act as a political rallying point (cf. 1981: 20). On the positive side, this shift enabled the journal to become a location for important debates within the left – the best-known examples include the controversy between Nicos Poulantzas and Ralph Miliband over the capitalist state in the 1970s and that already mentioned between Stuart Hall and Kevin Bonnett and colleagues over the essentials of Thatcherism in the 1980s (cf. Poulantzas 1969, 1976; Miliband 1970, 1973; Hall 1988; Jessop et al. 1988). Occasionally, coverage changed in surprising ways: whereas the magazine remained far aloof of British industrial militancy in the crisis-ridden 1970s – to a degree that Geoff Hodgson called it the "lost sheep of the British labour movement" (quoted in Thompson 2001: 25) – they developed interest in the changing Labour Party of the early 1980s and published contributions of some of its left-wingers, such as Tony Benn, Eric Heffer, and Ken Livingstone (Benn & Heffer 1986; Livingstone 1983). *New Left Review* never hesitated to take positions different from the mainstream of the British left – for example, on the question of the importance of constitutional reform or European unification: since 1972, when Tom Nairn's article "The European Problem" was published in *New Left Review* 75, they regarded integration into Europe as an "alternative road to socialism", while in the 1980s they supported the demands for constitutional reform by the group Charter 88 (Davidson 1999: 3). Its ecumenical eclecticism extended to sporadic discussions of Third World themes, which were treated less systematically than in *Monthly Review*.

The key to understanding *New Left Review*'s theoretical development lies in its changing approaches to reform and revolution in the West. It started out with a proto-Eurocommunist phase from the early 1960s until 1968, followed by a revolutionary phase continuing until the late 1970s, at first Maoist and then inspired by the student protests, and later Trotskyist and critical of Western Marxism, finally the journal reached a 'post-revolutionary' phase starting in the early 1980s in which a new interest in labour politics became visible. For Duncan Thompson, this "reanchorage was also, at least implicitly, a recognition that the *Review*'s search since 1968 for an answer to the strategic questions facing a new left politics in the West within the canon of classical revolutionary Marxism had proved

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unavailing" (2001: 26).[13] It did not give up its belief – and in this respect sharply disagreed with *Marxism Today* – in a *potentially* anti-capitalist, though not necessarily revolutionary, working class as an agent of political transformation. When the democratic reform process began in the U.S.S.R., *New Left Review* hoped for the possibility of socialist advance in the West once more. Tariq Ali commented in 1988: "Many of us who remain socialists in the West are beginning to regard the Soviet Union once again as a country of hope" (quoted in Thompson 2001: 30). When viewed through a Deutscherite lens, and from a position still detached from domestic developments in Britain, the collapse of the Eastern Bloc seemed thus catastrophic.

Many judged *New Left Review* in the late 1980s to be a journal of 'intellectual pessimism', and accused it of ultra-theory accompanied by political eclecticism and negligence of working-class struggle.[14] Its strengths and achievements, however, are undisputed. It made continental European Marxist theory available in Britain and arguably opened up many of the theoretical routes subsequently travelled by the post-1968 left and the new social movements, provided thorough, though selective, coverage of world affairs, and offered space for a non-sectarian discussion of strategies for political change.

Socialist Register

The founding of the annual *Socialist Register* was a reaction to the changes within *New Left Review* in 1962/63. Ralph Miliband (who was of comparable importance to *Socialist Register* as Perry Anderson was to *New Left Review*) had, from the beginning, expressed scepticism about the merger of *New Reasoner* (to whose editorial group he belonged) and *Universities and Left Review*. The value and importance of *New Reasoner* for Miliband consisted not only of its particular concept of non-dogmatic, originally dissident, Communism, but also of its climate of 'comradely discussion' which strongly appealed to him as a socialist academic who had given up

13 Again, it is difficult to decide, in how far this judgment is applicable to the contributors as a whole, to the editorial committee, or just to Perry Anderson.

14 This allegation was made by, for example, Ellen Meiksins Wood. It was also the reason for her to move on to the editorship of *Monthly Review* (cf. Monthly Review 1999: 75).

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on the Labour Left and worked as an isolated Marxist at the *London School of Economics.* In his opinion, the split from *New Left Review* was provoked more by differences of style and journalistic philosophy than by theoretical substance. Unlike E. P. Thompson, whom he unsuccessfully tried to attract as co-editor to *Socialist Register* beside John Saville, Miliband did not feel personal animosity with the new editors of *New Left Review*. Instead, he highly appreciated several of their analyses and shared their interest in Marxism. However, he criticised their reluctance to test their theoretical hypotheses through empirical studies (cf. Newman 2002: 113-20).

The annual publication set up by Saville and Miliband was meant to be a 'survey of movements and ideas', as its subtitle in the early years suggested, and was committed to the revival of a 'theoretical Marxism' that was neither reduced to the base-superstructure simplifications of official dogma nor uncritical towards the structural Marxisms that would be soon to emerge. Miliband's concern with political power in capitalist societies was central to the publication, as were the related questions of socialist agency and strategy (cf. Newman 2002: 350). Most authors, though not sharing a political line in the strict sense, saw themselves to the left of social democracy, as committed to a non-sectarian socialism, and many to Marxism. They were convinced, with Miliband, that institutional power checks would still be necessary in a socialist state and remained critical of the Communist world, but nevertheless still unsupportive of anti-Communists. It could be argued that *Socialist Register* was less concerned with the downside of the Eastern Bloc than *New Reasoner* had been, due to the latter's traumatic break with the British *Communist Party*. In 1960, Miliband explained his attitude towards the U.S.S.R. in a letter to Dorothy Thompson with the following words:

> The real point is whether the kind of society they [the U.S.S.R.; SB] are creating looks like approximating 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, hesitations and this and what you will. (quoted in Kozak 2006: no pages).[15]

15 Obviously, his opinion has changed over the years. Directly after the collapse in 1989 he spoke of an "awful perversion of socialism" and of "oligarchical collectivist regimes" (cf. Newman 2002: 308).

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Socialist Register intended to design and pursue a more concrete strategy than those arguing for a vaguely defined 'socialist humanism' and thus tried to base their work, which they regarded as an exercise in "sustained socialist education", on the notion of 'socialist democracy' (Panitch 1995: 12). To realise this concept, Socialist Register hoped to build counter discourses and structures in both state and civil society (ibid: 14). The annual took pride in its internationalism (different, as Kozak suggests, from New Left Review's 'Third Worldism' [2006]) which owed a great deal to the polyglot Belgian-Jewish refugee Miliband and to his close links with the editors of Monthly Review who facilitated contacts to writers from the Latin-American left. One of the publication's most distinguishing features was its comprehensive coverage of developments in Britain and especially in the Labour Party. *Socialist Register* popularised what among political scientists and activists became known as the Miliband-Coates thesis: the dilemma of the left lay in the Labour Party's centrality for working-class politics and the unresolved problem of how to push its leadership towards more radical positions (cf. Panitch 1995: 11).

'Critique' served as the key word for *Socialist Register*'s approach and work. It focused on a wide variety of issues: changes in contemporary capitalism, Western and especially American imperialism, left wing parties (especially in Western Europe), Communist regimes, and Marxist theory. Yet coverage also extended to labour history, grassroots struggles, battles of the *Labour Party*'s left and independence movements in the Third World. Compared to *New Left Review*, the annual was characterised by a consistency in outlook and topics, although it took up several new issues over the years. For example, it paid increasing attention to the internationalisation of capital and the consequences this would have for socialist strategy. The annual's pick of contributors became more international and less British as well: in the 1980s, Canadian editor Leo Panitch with close British links first accompanied the two British editors and later replaced John Saville.

The *Register*'s primary concern lay in political changes rather than in theoretical debates. Thus it developed an interest in, but remained sceptical about, the student unrest of 1968 and the activities of guerrilla movements,

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both of which seemed to reveal the limits of voluntarism.[16] Nevertheless writers took up several of the issues central to the New Left agenda and tried to give them a socialist twist. Thus, for example, they called for a socialist women's movement separate from bourgeois feminism.[17] With this sensitivity to political changes, it is not surprising that they were deeply concerned about the offensives of a changed right in the late 1970s, about the 'crisis of the left' in the 1980s and about the 'revisionist left's (including many theoreticians') attack on the Bennite Left in the Labour Party. The latter points were denounced as a "retreat of the intellectuals" (Miliband 1994a: 16). In these times of new right hegemony, the Gorbachev reforms were welcomed by the great majority of contributors. Michael Newman even assumes that the general feeling of retreat and despair led Miliband to overemphasise the chances of the experiments in the U.S.S.R. (2002: 311).

Unlike the *New Left Review*'s Olympian detachment, the *Register* was committed to a down-to-earth non-sectarian political involvement. The perhaps most serious weakness of this philosophy was the narrow focus on critique which, as Miliband conceded shortly before his death, led to a neglect of reflections on a utopian social order for the future and on creative thought about the ways to get there:

> There are many people on the Left who would say that the answer should be 'nothing much can be done until the revolution, save preparing for it'; but even if this were to be taken as realistic, 'preparing for it' would still involve a series of struggles over specific issues, with a clear indication of what was being struggled for, and without resort to incantation. (Miliband 1994a: 6).

Miliband, always extremely critical of his own work as well as of the articles published in *Socialist Register*, listed a number of topics which the annual had not sufficiently considered: Northern Ireland, the Isra-

16 Tariq Ali, one of the leading figures of the 1968 student protests, conceded ten years later in an article for *Socialist Register* that for him the most important lesson of the events was that socialism would be achieved with the consent of the mass of working people or not at all (cf. Miliband 1994: 5).

17 Marion Kozak remarks that the *Register's* old-left editors were unsure how to relate to debates about the politics of feminism (2006: no pages).

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el/Palestine conflict, science, mass communication, and literature and the arts (cf. 1994: 18). However, its focus on political core themes made it, according to Perry Anderson, a sympathetic observer of the weaknesses and inconsistencies of the more ecumenical and eclectic *New Left Review* (cf. Newman 2002: 346). Its original anti-anti-Communist outlook, however, meant that it was forced into reflecting very seriously about its future purpose after the fall of the Eastern European Communist regimes in 1989.

2.3. Two Generations of the American Intellectual Left

Before the emergence of student radicalism in the 1960s, the intellectual left in the United States consisted of two strands which formed important parts of the 'Old Left' that had developed in the 1920s and 1930s.[18] [19] The first had their roots in the Popular Front of the 1930s and combined members of the U.S. Communist Party (CP) with New Deal leftists and radical intellectuals.[20] The great majority of intellectuals had never been members of the CP, but were, in the words of John P. Diggins, vague "Marxists of the heart" (1992: 152). Paul Buhle also emphasises that many of the intellectuals were more attracted to the politically broader appeal of the Popular Front and the left wing of the New Deal Coalition than to the narrower CP

18 The predecessor to the intellectual wing of the old left was the 'lyrical left' of the first two decades of the twentieth century – which was less concerned with political questions in a narrow sense but experminented with new aesthetic forms of expression and bohemian lifestyles. In this sense, it could be interpreted as a 'proto-New Left'.

19 Andrei S. Markovits distinguishes between an orthodox (until 1968) and a heterodox period (after 1968) within the history of the European and the American Left after 1945. The first one is characterized by a conflict between the Communist and the social democratic left, the second by the New Left and the intellectualisation of leftwing thinking (2005). It seems a bit problematic to apply this model to either the American Left (with its weak social democratic current to whose numbers, however, the former Trotskyist New York intellectuals might be counted) or the British Left (where a New Left emerged as early as 1956).

20 In 1935, Stalin had called for a "popular front" of all liberal and progressive forces to contain the fascist powers (cf. Wald 1987: 129).

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(cf. 1991: 198). The second group consisted of Trotskyists, many of whom had their roots in the New York intellectual scene (cf. Wald 1987). Their numbers were considerably smaller than those of the first group (the CP alone had about 80,000 members in 1945 and large groups of sympathizers), but nevertheless they had considerable shop-floor influence. While the immediate post-war time was one of optimism for many on the left, the climate changed in 1948 due to the disastrous Wallace presidential campaign and the damaging dynamic of the emerging Cold War.[21] Persecution intensified, and the question of how to position oneself in the conflict between the Western and the Eastern bloc became increasingly important. As a result of these circumstances – and due to dwindling ethnic solidarities in an era of sub-urbanisation – the CP became ever more isolated and lost its hegemonic role within the American left, a process that only intensified after the party's break with the New Deal Coalition in 1950. Independent Marxist intellectuals, who had supported the Popular Front and the New Deal Coalition, started looking for ways out of this impasse. In this context, Paul Sweezy and Leo Huberman founded the magazine *Monthly Review* in 1949.[22]

Like elsewhere, in the United States Trotskyism was split. However, all Trotskyists opposed the Popular Front and contested participation in a war between 'imperialist powers'. For many of them, especially for Trotskyist intellectuals confronted with working-class apathy which allowed anti-Trotskyist purges within the trade unions, vanguardist ideas changed into a mood of desperation and intellectual activity took the shape of a "melancholy critique of mass delusion" (Buhle 1991: 206). The danger of self-annihilation had replaced the promise of self-emancipation. They rejected the optimistic Marxist notion that human activity mirrored the progressive movement of history (cf. Diggins 1992: 161). They all felt and expressed hostility towards the U.S.S.R. in the Cold War. They disagreed, however, as to how far this enmity should go. Some became uncritical supporters of the Truman and Eisenhower administrations, collaborated with Joseph

21 The CP was involved in setting up a third party, called Progressive Party, as whose candidate Henry Wallace run in the 1948 presidential election. He ended with only 2.4 per cent of the vote (cf. Isserman 1993: 6-7).

22 Leo Huberman, 1903-1968, social scientist, journalist and author, taught at Columbia University.

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McCarthy, wrote for *Partisan Review*, and participated in the anti-Communist *Congress for Cultural Freedom*. A minority preferred a position that Maurice Isserman coined the "second-and-a-half camp" in the Cold War – no position of equidistance between the superpowers, but nevertheless one which was also critical towards the United States (cf. 1993: 105). This stance was taken by Irving Howe, Stanley Plastrik, Manny Geltmann and Lewis Coser, the founders of the magazine *Dissent* in 1954.[23]

Post-Trotskyists, like those close to *Dissent,* and Marxists, such as the founders of *Monthly Review,* did not have much in common, and Howe, for example, accused the editors of the latter journal to be "authoritarians of the left" (quoted in Wald 1987: 328).[24] However, they shared the view that the times looked far from promising for radical change in the United States. The emergence of the Civil Rights Movement in the South in the mid-fifties surprised both groups. This was a new type of radicalism, which many observers regarded as 'domestic American' and that altered the world view of left intellectuals. Up to this time, these intellectuals had assumed that their role was to act *for* the interests of African Americans rather than to be taught new strategies of political activism *by* them. At the same time, other intellectual and political activities began to aggregate into something that Paul Buhle called a "proto-New Left" (1991: 216). Shifts in this direction included a revival of pacifism at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, the protests of the "student wing" of the Civil Rights Movement (above all, the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee; SNCC) and the reflections of a number of writers whose background was different from both, the CP and the New York intellectual scene. Such authors include William Appleman Williams (a revisionist historian, questioning the United States' 'inno-

23 Lewis Coser, 1913-2003, born in Germany, political sociologist and conflict theorist taught at various U.S. universities, second long-term editor of *Dissent* beside Irving Howe.

24 Paul Sweezy was one of a total of 88 signers of an "Open Letter to American Liberals" in which they criticised the "American Committee For the Defense of Leon Trotsky" which held an inquiry into the charges formulated against Trotsky in the Moscow show trials in the late 1930s. Many American socialists and liberals declared sympathy for Stalin's popular front strategy and feared a weakening of the efforts to contain Fascism. Chaired by John Dewey, the committee cleared Trotsky of all allegations (cf. Wald 1987: 128-139).

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cence' in the emergence of the Cold War) who founded the journal *Studies on the Left* in 1959 and was also based at the University of Wisconsin; C. Wright Mills (a Texas-born sociologist, influenced by existentialism); C.L.R. James (a heterodox Trotskyist); and F. E. Matthiesen (a cultural critic who, through a financial gift, had made the setting-up of *Monthly Review* possible). Michael Harrington also fits the list: his studies about poverty in the 'affluent' United States (published as *The Other America* in 1963) became widely read and debated. The term proto-New Left is an adequate characterisation of these people as they shared a number of assumptions which became central for the American New Left of the 1960s: the need to abolish economistic Marxism, to break with the idea of the state as the vehicle for organising a transition to socialism, to transcend now-old and – as they argued – irrelevant distinctions (between idealists and materialists or Communists and Trotskyists)(cf. Aronowitz 1996: 17).

The "real" New Left, as a student movement and – despite a certain fashionable anti-intellectualism – as an intellectual affair, appeared with the *Students for a Democratic Society*'s (SDS) *Port Huron Statement* of 1963 and the *Free Speech Movement* at Berkeley.[25] The New Left, as Paul Buhle put it, used the experiences of the Old Left and started where the latter had stopped: with the 'race' question and with curiosity towards the political implications of popular culture (cf. 1991: 256). For the New Left, the "poverty of abundance" had replaced the "abundance of poverty" that characterised the world of the Old Left (cf. Diggins 1992: 232). Diggins also emphasised that the New Left radicalised itself on the basis of its experiences, whereas the Old Left had become increasingly moderate: "The Old Left began with a whoop of revolution and sank into a whimper of reconciliation – thanks to Russia; the New Left started in a spirit of moderation and ended calling for nothing less than revolution – thanks to America" (ibid: 219). They shared the fear of human annihilation with the former Trotskyist part of the Old Left. They differed from them in that the New Left stressed America's responsibility for preventing such destruction. In general, they did not know very much of the East Coast old-left traditions and internal conflicts as they often came from other parts of the country and often from middle-class Republican families. In its early stage, the New Left was not

25 For detailed histories of the American New Left see Katsiaficas 1987 and Gitlin 1993.

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in a narrow sense 'Marxist', but nevertheless remained hostile to U.S. anti-Communism. Activists looked for space to manoeuvre at the margins of capitalism – especially in the Third World and its national liberation movements. Receptive to Freudian psychoanalysis, they also saw the human unconscious as a site for political intervention. Their interests in Marxism extended to the "early Marx", "cultural Marxism" (as developed by the British New Left), and the concept of alienation (as elaborated especially by Existentialism and the Frankfurt School). Their interest in liberation movements temporarily attracted many to Maoism. Their political goal, apart from the concrete demand for an end to the war in Vietnam, focussed on a vague demand for the replacement of "the system" by participatory democracy. The New Left in the United States turned out to be a rather short-lived movement, disintegrating into factional struggles: some embraced militancy while others pursued intellectual careers in the expanding academic sector, tried to liaise with social movements or retreated from activism by the early 1970s. However, some of their achievements were impressive: they managed to halt the draft, contributed to the withdrawal from Vietnam, and developed an understanding of politics that facilitated the emergence of the Women's Movement and other social movements. Although they did not succeed in democratising the universities and could not convince them to cut their ties with the arms and military technology industries, these reformers radically modified the academic disciplines and curricula in higher education. Their influence became most visible in history departments in the 1970s and in English departments in the 1980s. Interestingly, despite the New Left's critique of the Old Left for sticking to anachronistic and economistic problematics or for siding with the United States in the Cold War and Vietnam, in the 1970s a number of the New Leftists became contributors to, and editorial board members of those Old Left Magazines that had not moved towards the emerging New Right. This integration allowed for a combination of old-left concerns about how to achieve socialism with new concerns about gender equality, environmental issues, and grassroots movements and thus initiated a more open debate on possible agencies and strategies for radical social change.

In the 1970s, a new division appeared between different sections of the intellectual left in the United States: while some started drawing heavily on Foucauldian and post-structuralist critical theory imported from Europe (especially from France), others remained in the tradition of socialist or

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materialist analysis. The first tendency in particular became widespread in the academic world and provoked New Right assaults on "cultural and moral relativism", "epistemological irrationalism" and "political correctness". Leftist thinkers who did not follow this trend found themselves in an odd situation. They agreed with the New Right on some of its criticisms, but were still labelled by the Right as part of the same broad left – especially because they shared a concern about "minority issues" with the postmodern left. Left thinking in the 1970s became very much a university affair; extra-university activity reached its nadir in 1979/80. In the 1980s, a renewed interest in old American radical traditions emerged (cf: Ostendorf & Levine 1992) – a concern supported by several thinkers associated with the journal *Dissent*, such as Richard Rorty, Michael Walzer and Irving Howe, for example (cf. Rorty 1982, Walzer 1983, Howe 1986). The rupture of 1989 thus affected an intellectual left that either claimed to retain the basics of materialist historiography and political economy, or instead claimed to reinvent a new radical perspective from old domestic traditions.

2.4. *Dissent* and *Monthly Review*

Dissent

For Irving Howe, the leading figure behind *Dissent*, the publication of a journal became an escape route out of what he regarded as sectarian politics (cf. Isserman 1993: 88-9). For the New York intellectuals, magazines had always been the most important medium of political debate and disagreement. With *Partisan Review*'s move to the right, a vacuum emerged that was first filled by the journal *Politics* (founded in 1944) whose contributing editors included several future *Dissenters.* The actual founding of *Dissent* in 1954 resulted from a feeling of political helplessness (as Howe later explained, whenever left intellectuals do not know what to do, they set up magazines), but also from dissatisfaction with the shape of the left in the United States and the climate of McCarthyism (cf. Plastrik 1979: 3). *Dissent* developed under the "shadow of the two Josephs" – Stalin and McCarthy (Cohen 2004: 4). This explains its originally planned name "No!". The journal wanted to be a forum for open debate – albeit within certain limits. It called itself "democratic socialist" and stood for a critical support of U.S. foreign policy in the Cold War. It disagreed with those who saw the U.S.S.R.'s nationalisation of the economy as a progressive step and thus

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took a staunch anti-Deutscherite position. Yet on the other hand, it did not participate in the "Leninophobia" of other (former) Trotskyists (cf. Wald 1987: 324). The peculiar spirit and perspective of this "Quarterly of Socialist Opinion" might best be explained through a few quotations. For Irving Howe, *Dissent*'s theoretical reflections were a process of self-cleaning: "Year by year we shook off remnants of ideology, till we seemed to have nothing, at times, but the motivating ethic of socialism; yet we wanted thereby to hold fast to the socialist vision, to give it new strength and value." (1979: 6). A commitment to democracy remained absolutely central:

> We provided a platform for Herbert Marcuse when he engaged in principled debates with Erich Fromm on psychoanalysis and politics; we parted company with him when he suggested that civil liberties should be reserved for the virtuous, with the voice of the sinful to be stilled. We printed some of C. Wright Mills's most significant essays, but we turned against him when he listened with admiration to the appeals of Castro. (Coser 1974: 4)

An external perspective on the magazine's version of socialism was provided by the liberal Joseph Epstein, writing in the twentieth anniversary issue: "Dissent's editors themselves, while insisting on their socialism, have tended to wear it lightly. Their approach to socialism, they have always claimed, is not to a fixed piety and their concentration has been on 'problematics' of the subject" (1974: 161). The journal was, according to an observation by second-generation editor Mitchell Cohen, opposed to determinism but not to utopianism. Over the years, this position has remained remarkably constant, though, in the 1980s, *Dissent* described itself as "democratic left" rather than socialist and in 2004 Cohen offered his readers a wide variety of self-identifications of *Dissenters* – "democratic socialists", "liberal socialists", "social democrats", "social liberals", and "liberal left" (cf. Cohen 2004: 4). Another defining feature, distinguishing *Dissent* from the other journals in this study, is its suspicion against 'grand theory', including supposedly over-abstract versions of historical materialism and political economy.

These misgivings influenced the choice of topics: the journal consistently focussed on actually existing political movements, on social democratic parties in other countries (with particular sympathies at times for the British Labour Party and the various Scandinavian Social Democrats), on

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the reflections of disillusioned European intellectual leftists – "refugees from the International" (Isserman 1993: 92) – as well as on those of Eastern European dissidents. In the 1950s, *Dissent*'s mood was not so much one of despair as of anger (cf. Walzer 2004: 11). Contributors controversially discussed the 'mass-culture thesis' and celebrated the uprising in Hungary and the emergence of the African American Civil Rights Movement. The latter provided hope for the emergence of further radical movements in the United States, hence *Dissenters*' pessimism about the possibilities of political change mellowed slightly. Its greatest success story was perhaps the extensive coverage of Michael Harrington's work on poverty that culminated in his important study *The Other America* (1963), many of whose findings were published in advance by *Dissent.*

The journal welcomed the emergence of the New Left in the 1960s, having anticipated several themes that became associated with the students' movement: the insistence on human emancipation, democratisation, and decentralisation of power. Nevertheless, their relationship was complicated by a number of differences. They disagreed over Vietnam – whereas Howe and others argued for negotiations (at least before the Tet offensive), the New Left demanded the immediate withdrawal of American troops. *Dissent* remained anti-Communist, whereas the New Left, though not pro-Communist, still rejected anti-Communist sentiments. They also clashed on more theoretical issues; whereas *Dissenters* had mostly abandoned Marxism, the New Left was increasingly attracted to the "early Marx", and whereas *Dissent* abhorred politically motivated violence, the New Left sympathised with Maoism for a time. Finally, there were cultural differences. *Dissent* retained the New York intellectuals' admiration for modernist high culture and was deeply suspicious of popular culture, while the New Left stood for a cultural anti-elitism. Despite the efforts by individuals, such as Michael Walzer, who acted as intellectual interlopers between the New Left and the magazine, "a sense of disappointment, of hurt pride, and toward the end, of ironic resignation flavoured *Dissent*'s attitude toward the New Left" (Isserman 1993: 122). Nevertheless, in the 1970s, a number of important figures from the former New Left began to contribute articles to the magazine. This change brought the generations of the 1930s and the 1950s closer to each other (cf. Cohen 2004: 4) and prompted Howe and other *Dissenters* to revise their view of new social movements, especially feminism (cf. Wald 1987: 333).

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During the 1970s, the journal held its political course in general. However, since others raced to the right or turned to postmodernism it created an impression of moving to the left. Despite its mentioned scepticism about 'grand theory', the journal took a hostile position towards poststructuralist anti-foundationalism and political eclecticism. This stance made it ambivalent to the issue of identity politics and deeply suspicious of 'political correctness' and its associated 'cultural relativism' (cf. Cohen 2004: 5). In many of the contributions of the time, one could find "regret for a gone era of reform" (Bromwich 2004: 110). The journal suffered, like the American left as a whole, under the experience of Reaganism, which it regarded as the worst onslaught on liberal-left achievements and thinking since the 1950s. However, it tried to avoid futile laments about being confronted with an over-powerful enemy (cf. Phillips 2004: 170). Additionally, it faced problems with recruiting younger contributors: due to the ever increasing specialisation among university intellectuals, only few were willing and able to submit articles with the generalist perspectives the journal preferred. When the Eastern Bloc collapsed in 1989, *Dissenters* felt more ambivalent about the events than might be expected from an originally anti-Communist collective. While they welcomed the disappearance of dictatorships and state violence, at the end of the neo-liberal 1980s, they were at the same time deeply concerned about future developments within Eastern European societies.

For Alan Wald, *Dissent* suffered for most of its history from an anti-theoretical perspective that prevented it from seeing the structural deficiencies of capitalist societies (cf. 1987: 334). Similarly, Maurice Isserman diagnosed that, for example, U.S. foreign policy was analysed almost exclusively on the basis of case studies rather than systematically or systemically. The journal was not willing or able to realise that the United States' role in the world was not decided by competent or incompetent specialists and politicians, but resulted instead from the context of a geo-political system of power (cf. 1993: 106-107). For the whole Cold War period, *Dissent* was, to a certain degree, a Janus-faced journal: it defended the merits of liberal democracy against radical leftists and criticized its shortcomings in discussions with liberals.

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Monthly Review

Like *Dissent*'s, the foundation of *Monthly Review* in 1949 was a reaction to the obvious left retreat in the United States in the late 1940s. For the founders and the early contributors, the New Deal liberal-left coalition had been replaced by a Cold War liberal-conservative coalition (cf. Phelps 1999: 8). The idea was to set up an "independent socialist magazine" (this was its subtitle) in order to sustain and further open debate among the non-orthodox Marxist left in the United States. This group basically consisted of an alliance of people who had united behind the Wallace presidential campaign in 1948 and were no longer willing to accept the leading role of the Communist Party which had reacted to a hostile public climate with increased authoritarianism (cf. Buhle 1991: 197). The founders, Paul Sweezy and Leo Huberman, "believed roughly in [the] extension of the New Deal into state socialism, with heightened democratic participation and international détente" (ibid: 198). Although the New Deal Coalition had already started disintegrating, the journal's founders remained convinced that it was necessary to develop a Marxist theory more closely related to American society and less axiomatically founded on Leninism. However, as Sweezy and Huberman explained in the 1953 article "A Challenge to the Book Burners", they were in no way anti-Communist. Instead, they described their position as "socialist, Marxist, non-Communist, but willing to cooperate with anyone, including Communists, on agreed aims and by agreed methods" (1953: 159).

This claim to cooperate with anyone was taken very seriously and established *Monthly Review* as a journal that tried to reach beyond academic contributors and intellectual readers. In the early years, the theoretical heads behind it were Sweezy and his friend and collaborator Paul Baran. As a former assistant of Joseph Schumpeter at Harvard, Sweezy was sentenced to three years in prison in a McCarthyite trial for his involvement in the Wallace campaign – a verdict that later was overturned by the Supreme Court. At the time, Baran was the only Marxist tenured professor at a U.S. economics department. Both formulated individually and jointly a theory of capitalist development that, by the mid-1950s, had become known as the 'Monthly-Review School'. They worked to support their major premises through numerous articles in the journal, most written from a historically informed materialist perspective (cf. Hopfmann 1999: 398). According to their basic assumption, crises were inherent to capitalist development and

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thus unavoidable and, therefore, fine-tuning strategies such as Keynesianism were doomed to fail. Furthermore, large and strong national economies were able to externalise these crises, a process that made imperialism a structure of domination intimately linked with capitalism. The task of the left, and particularly of left intellectuals, then was not to devise more sophisticated strategies of social and economic engineering, but to oppose capitalism in all its economic, cultural, political, ideological and social dimensions. *Monthly Review*'s notion of socialism, consequently, was the overthrow of capitalism in all these aspects, but most importantly, the transformation of property relations, the abolition of private profit as guiding principle for economic decision making, and the creation of a society in which the producers would control the conditions and results of economic activity. This position differed radically from a social democratic perspective, though many contributors' personal histories in New Deal agencies resulted in a gradualist approach towards achieving these goals. *Monthly Review*'s particular strength lay in its coverage of the mechanisms and intricacies of 'externalising' capitalist crises. They analysed developments in the Third World in great detail and became early popularisers of dependency and world system theory.[26] André Gunder Frank, Immanuel Wallerstein, and especially Samir Amin all became frequent contributors. Later, the editors concerned themselves with another form of externalisation: the problem of environmental devastation. In this context, the magazine searched for alternatives to the growth principle underlying neo-liberal, social democratic, but also many socialist strategies.

Despite viewing capitalism and especially finance capital as a system acting globally, *Monthly Review* insisted on the national arena as being central for anti-capitalist politics. Thus they were interested in, and supportive of, local labour and popular struggles in the United States and everywhere else. Like other leftists in North America, they reflected on working-class conservatism in the climate of the 1950s, but did not show much interest in the mass-culture thesis. While the magazine's particular strength lay in its editors' expertise in political economy, beyond this they published

26 According to Ellen Meiksins Wood, also the British journal *New Left Review* was at certain stages in its history very interested in developments in the Third World. Unlike *Monthly Review*, however, they focused more on vanguard movements and parties than on popular struggles (1995: 30).

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contributions by numerous innovative left thinkers of the time and, in several cases, articles by the same persons who wrote for *Dissent* – among them C. Wright Mills, William Appleman Williams, Todd Gitlin, and the British New Left authors Raymond Williams and Ralph Miliband. In the words of Christopher Phelps, the journal became an "arc of continuity" between the Old Left and the emerging New Left in the 1960s and profited from the rise of the latter through fresh debates and rising circulation numbers (1999: 18). Despite these cross-generational tendencies, the journal still belonged more to the Old Left than to the New:

> [I]t seems fair to say that *Monthly Review* was a journal of the old left that extended its sympathies to the new, that from the beginning it held certain beliefs identical to the new left's central tenets, and that it was further shaped over time by interaction with the movements and events of the 1960s, serving as one place of fusion for overlapping generations of the left. (ibid)

Obviously, the relationship between *Monthly Review* and the New Left was less contentious than between the latter and *Dissent.* This cordiality was facilitated by more common theoretical ground and also by generally similar positions both against the war in Vietnam (*Monthly Review* had criticised American involvement in Indochina as early as 1954) and on U.S. foreign policy (which according to the journal's definition of capitalism was imperialist by necessity). However, the magazine did not accept the early New Left's anti-Marxism; it still insisted on the centrality of class struggle in any strategy for radical change and saw all forms of oppression as linked to the class hierarchy within capitalism. Furthermore, *Monthly Review* shared the New Left's enthusiasm for liberation movements in the Third World and was initially intrigued by Maoism, but moved towards more sober analyses of post-revolutionary societies after the failure of the Cultural Revolution became obvious. Again, the Reagan and Bush years were conceived of as a time of left retreat, though the editors (the economist Harry Magdoff had accompanied Paul Sweezy since Huberman's death in 1969) had expressed less enthusiasm about the 1960s as an era of reform.[27] Like *Dissent*, the journal stuck to its original course and reacted

27 Harry Magdoff, 1913-2006, became co-editor of Monthly Review after Leo Huberman's death in 1969. As an auto-didactically trained economist, he had

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sceptically towards the academic integration and post-modernisation of the American left, and especially to its substitution of psychoanalysis and discourse theory for historical-materialist political economy as explanatory tools of social phenomena. As a result of the unsupportive political and theoretical climate, its influence on the academic left declined in the 1980s.

Another problem for *Monthly Review* was its relationship with and views of the states of the Eastern Bloc. Contributors criticised the regimes' authoritarianism, but at the same time partly excused it, attributing its cause to the introduction of socialism in such 'backward' countries, the failure of revolutions in Central Europe after the end of the First World War, and U.S. pressure and aggression in the Cold War. On the one hand, they condemned the Soviet army's crushing of revolts in Hungary and Czechoslovakia and the suppression of Solidarnosc in Poland. On the other hand, they accepted the nationalisation strategy in the U.S.S.R. as a horrendous – but nevertheless to a certain degree successful – step towards modernisation. They saw the states of the Eastern Bloc as 'transitional', as no longer capitalist but not yet socialist, and hence always in danger of sliding back into capitalism.[28] For a short time in the mid-1980s, they hoped for a democratised socialism as the successful result of the Gorbachev reforms, but became very critical of their content (and implementation) after the restructuring failed and the feared backslide to capitalism actually occurred.

Monthly Review was, to a certain degree, a pan-American journal. Its eyes were never directed exclusively towards developments in North America and Europe; it also closely followed political struggles in Latin America, as in the 1970s and 1980s, when the journal took an interest in liberation theology. The philosophy tied in nicely with the *Review*'s emphasis on the ethical dimension of Marxism, which had already been responsible for its openness to the New Left, the Women's Movement and environmental concerns. For most of its history, the journal focused on political economy (and in this context was occasionally criticised for its adventurous use of statistical material to prove its central theses [cf. Hopfmann 1999: 398]). Its

held jobs in the New Deal administration and later wrote on the nexus of capitalism and imperialism.

28 For a summary of Paul Sweezy's view on the U.S.S.R., the Eastern Bloc and Yugoslavia as transitional societies which moved back to capitalism see van der Linden 2007: 209-210.

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focus broadened with regard to historical, sociological and environmental questions when Ellen Meiksins Wood (for a couple of years) and John Bellamy Foster accompanied and later replaced the old editors. *Monthly Review*'s most distinctive features – its global perspective, its environmentalism and its effort to reach beyond academia – influenced its reactions to the changes of 1989.

2.5. Similarities and Differences among the American and the British Intellectual Lefts

The journals introduced were all set up by leftwing intellectuals at a particular historical conjuncture characterised by the first Cold War, a conservative hegemony – moderate in terms of welfarism but radical in its anti-Communism – in the leading countries of the West and a break (at times hesitant and reluctant) with a dogmatic Marxism which subordinated working-class emancipation beyond the Soviet sphere of influence to the interests of the Moscow leaderships. Against this background and alarmed by the possibility of an East-West confrontation which could lead to a nuclear war and human self-annihilation, the intellectuals surrounding the journals started discussing questions that developed into the agenda of a proto- or pre-1968 New Left. The British thinkers looked to intellectuals in the United States like C. Wright Mills for inspiration, but also to the two American journals which had been founded several years earlier (cf. Chun 1996: 207). The intellectuals' older generation in both countries was heavily influenced by the experiences of the 1930s, whether or not they supported the Popular Front and backed the Allies in the Second World War. The journals can, to a certain extent, be regarded as the brainchildren of single intellectual fathers (Irving Howe, Paul Sweezy, E. P. Thompson, Perry Anderson, and Ralph Miliband) who stood for particular versions of historical materialist analysis and who (apart from Thompson) retained their influence over the respective publication well into the 1990s, or in the case of Anderson until today. Despite important differences listed below, they were united by the act of producing historically informed analyses of political and economic power relations, struggles and developments. Although working on different levels of abstraction, this enabled contributors to submit articles to one of the other journals – which in fact happened frequently. Each journal searched for potential historical agents of change – labour organisations,

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left-of-centre parties, and social movements. All of them viewed the events of 1968 with a sceptical sympathy for the revolting students, struggled with their new forms and themes of political activism, integrated some of these issues into their own agendas, and provided shelter for several of the former activists once the revolts had died down. All became deeply concerned about the ideological radicalisation and rising self-confidence of the Right from the mid-1970s onwards and perhaps even more by the start of what is called the Second Cold War, at the end of the decade. With feelings of losing out in the 1980s, they placed high hopes in the attempts at reforms in the Soviet Union from 1985 – hopes they had soon to abandon.

The differences between the journals often mirrored specific features of and developments within American and British society. In Britain, the labour movement, the Labour Party, and class conflict played a central role. In the United States, with its more fragmented and ethnically divided society, where, the Civil Rights Movement, one of the strongest ever popular movements, emerged around ethnic identification during the formative years of the two journals. In Britain, the spectrum of the political mainstream extended slightly more to the left than in the United States, where even the revisionist British Labour Party appeared progressive. It also stands that some of *Dissent*'s positions which in Britain could have been found in publications close to the Labour Party were 'far left' in the American context. In the United States, the break with the New Deal and World War II climate was fundamental and gave way to Cold War anti-Communism, whereas in Britain, the war ushered in the era of the welfare state. The two American journals strongly disagreed with each other on many substantial political questions. The two British publications' differences were, first of all, generational and slightly less about questions of politics – although behind their controversies over epistemology lay problems of the possibilities and limits of historical agency and thus also questions of political strategy.

Each of the magazines has always had its own project, identity, and priorities, reflecting their editors' and contributors' political and personal backgrounds and perspectives. *Dissent* put great effort into defining democratic socialism *practically* and for this purpose analysed concrete policies instead of discussing 'grand theory'. Most *Dissenters* did not see themselves as equally distant from the United States and the Soviet Union, but closer to the former. Many of them shared a left Zionism. Their experiences

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as Jewish Americans or former Jewish Europeans played an important role for their political perspectives. *Monthly Review* focused strongly on political economy due to its conviction that capitalist crises (and their externalisation) explained the dynamics of domestic and international politics. This notion of inevitable crisis explained its concern with international power structures, environmentalism, and its opposition to reformism. *New Left Review* was the most theoretically inclined of the publications. Thus it focused on political philosophy and, additionally, on world history. It was deeply involved in following (and shaping) the vogues of post-1968 left intellectualism. It published a wide variety of critical theory, far transcending the boundaries of Marxism and socialism. Hence it was more open to (although often critical of) poststructuralism, but, at the same time, perhaps the least consistent of the journals in terms of political perspective. Like *Dissent* and unlike the two other publications, *New Left Review* took a consistently supportive position towards European unification since the early 1970s. *Socialist Register* was most thoroughly concerned with structures and mechanisms of power, both internationally and within the (British) state. On questions of international political economy, it was close to *Monthly Review* but more systematic in the analysis of domestic power relations and struggles. More than the others, it stressed the importance of designing democratic institutions suitable for a socialist state, although it had problems with translating this into concrete scenarios.

All journals, with the exception of *Dissent* due to its Trotskyist origin, had problems in defining their relationships towards the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc. They oscillated between foregrounding the progressive content of the U.S.S.R.'s and the East European states' nationalisation programmes – which made them post- or non-capitalist – and criticising their violations of their own populations, especially their working classes – which made them authoritarian. This fluctuation put the journals in a vulnerable position once the states of the Eastern Blocs had collapsed. Despite their differences and inconsistencies concerning these questions, all were aware that the discursive nexus between the term socialism and the forms of governance associated with the Eastern Bloc – a nexus whose formulation was, as they all, including *Dissent*, agreed, a central ideological device of the capitalist West in the Cold War – would still cause profound inhibitions to the formulation of socialist or radical projects after state socialism's end.

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