

## BOOK REVIEWS

HALL, STUART. *Selected Writings on Marxism*. Ed., introd., and with comm. by Gregor McLennan. [Stuart Hall: *Selected Writings*.] Duke University Press, Durham (NC) [etc.] 2021. ix, 364 pp. \$109.95. (Paper: \$24.95.)

The many tributes and appraisals that met Stuart Hall's death in 2014 rightly reinforced his reputation as one of the most important thinkers within the arts and social sciences since World War II. His continued relevance in Cultural Studies (which he helped to establish), Media Studies, Political Studies, Sociology, and Social Policy is testament to this stature, with Hall maintaining a central position in debates on the nature of multiculturalism, race, and populism. The recent series by Duke University Press, which organizes Hall's work into specific themes, has been an excellent initiative that allows students, scholars, practitioners, and readers alike to access his work thematically. His *Selected Writings on Marxism* has been edited by Gregor McLennan, who has selected the articles for the collection, placed them into sections, and provides a commentary on each of the sections at the end. For me, the result offers the reader an insight into Hall's "worldview", so to speak, which was informed and understood through his own unique brand of Marxism. This fusion of the development of Hall's theoretical position (Part One) with how such a position can be used to understand the class-ridden complexities of multicultural society (Part Two), and how such a Marxism can be evolved to understand the changing dynamics of his lived reality at the time (Part Three) brings the volume together to great effect.

As Hall has generated contrasting multidisciplinary appeal, the selection and rationale of such a volume would naturally differ depending on the interests of the collection's editor. Yet, McLennan follows an important rationale, which I feel makes good use of Hall's development of Marxism, without overstating one area of interest. As such, the first section is organized in a manner that sees Hall dismiss "prepackaged" accounts of Marxism (p. 126) in favour of a focus upon Marx's ontological spirit, seen in works such as *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, and on the complexities of class struggle. The unpicking of any rigid, dogmatic relation between base and superstructure was thus integrated into Hall's reconstructed understanding of Marxism. *Marx's Note on Method*, *Rethinking Base and Superstructure* and *The Political and the Economic in Marx's Theory of Classes* all stress the shortcomings of mechanical understandings of base/superstructure and class. Moreover, they all exhibit Hall's engagement with French Structuralism, which he viewed as the most advanced of all forms of Western Marxism, but which, ultimately, was unable to shed such packaging. As such, the centrality of Althusser in these articles imbues them with their historical significance, demonstrating the context of Marxist debate at the time

(in the 1970s) and how Hall's own understanding of Marxism responded to their influence.

Yet, Hall's most important contribution comes in the final chapter of this section. The article *The Problem with Ideology: Marxism without Guarantees* sees the coming together of all Hall's thinking on theory and provides us, in essence, with his methodological approach to critical enquiry. It remains the most important text that he produced and the central reference point for his work. It is here that Hall outlines his own answer to the question of determination and to the base–superstructure conundrum. It is also here where his understanding of articulation is explained and where his framework of “Marxism without Guarantees” is developed. Rather than socio-cultural agency being determined through a closed expression of capitalist social reproduction, it is articulated in contrasting ways, in an open terrain of civil society (pp. 152–156). Hall's understanding of hegemony is also centralized here, where it is understood as a mechanism that constantly shifts in its form and character, allowing cultures and identities to be expressed and articulated in competing and contrasting ways. It is from this departure point that the rationale of any “Hallian” or “Hall-inspired” approach should be seen.

The second section looks at the work that formed the mainstay of the Birmingham Centre for Cultural Studies. Hall led the Centre throughout the 1970s, in a period that became the fulcrum of British Cultural Studies. Two of the articles here were co-written with multiple authors and formed the backbone to the centre's focus on youth culture/sub-culture (in *Subcultures, Cultures, and Class*) and race (*Black Crime, Black Proletariat*). These classic studies of the Centre are essential empirical pieces developed in a manner that informed the emerging discipline of Cultural Studies and how class relations were forged and centralized within the field. Written in the 1970s, during a period of stagflation and crisis in Britain, these two articles formed the basis of the introduction of the two collections *Resistance Through Rituals* and *Policing the Crisis*. They are also the empirical foundation of the *Marxism without Guarantees* piece that was published in 1983. The final article in the section was written after Richard Johnson replaced Hall as head of the Centre and is an often-overlooked critique of liberal ideology. It appeared in a collection for the Open University entitled *Politics and Ideology*. Set at the height of the Hayek-fuelled fanaticism of the peak Thatcher years, Hall's critique of the dynamics of liberalism is not necessarily original but it does provide a unique insight into how he understood the longevity of the liberal tradition as an organic mode of thought (p. 245).

Hall's understanding of the liberal mindset was teased out further in the 1988 collection *Hard Road to Renewal*, in which he focused specifically on the ideological complexities of Thatcherism as a hegemonic project. Some of the chapters in the vintage final part of this collection, which McLennan terms “points of departure”, draw from that Thatcher period, whilst the last two comment more upon the post-Thatcher environment of the 1990s, which would become synonymous with globalization. Of the former, the most significant is Hall's reply to Bob Jessop, Kevin Bonnet, Simon Bromley, and Tom Ling (which also appears in the *Hard Road to Renewal*) on the concept of authoritarian populism. In *Policing the Crisis*, Hall referred to a form of authoritarian populism, increasingly used by the “new

right”, which was favoured by the Conservative opposition. He later developed this in his 1979 *Marxism Today* piece “The Great Moving Right Show”, written on the eve of Thatcher’s 1979 election victory. In “Authoritarian Populism: A Reply”, Hall dismissed accusations that his use of authoritarian populism was meant as an ideological model of Thatcherism or that such a position had in any way “achieved hegemony” (p. 287). Instead, he argued, in line with his working formula of “Marxism without Guarantees”, that it represented a specific strategy within a far wider process of building a more market-led order that was being fashioned around a wider Gramscian terrain (p. 292). In hindsight, what we now understand as the beginnings of the neoliberal hegemonic project had one specific origin within some of the dynamics that Hall pinpointed from the era of crisis in the 1970s. In light of our contemporary era of crisis, many have been quick to point to new forms of authoritarian populism, which are developing in a similar manner.<sup>1</sup> Yet, in doing so, we should not absorb the same misunderstandings that Hall himself was pointing to. Rather than seeing our present predicament as one that inhibits a new stage of authoritarianism, as some wrongly accused Hall of suggesting with his notion of authoritarian populism, we should see it according to the way he outlined in his response. Similarly, new forms of right-wing populism, which have been widespread in the contemporary era of Trump and Brexit, can be understood as part of a specific strategy that certain elements have used to facilitate new positions within the process of transformation.

The first two articles of the last section see Hall respond to Poulantzas’s *State, Power, Socialism* and to Thompson’s *Poverty of Theory*, two of the most profound pieces of work in Marxist circles of the time. Here, Hall majestically locates himself in the middle of these. He criticizes Poulantzas for being unable to fully throw off the structural shackles that he places upon himself, no matter how open he tries to be in his final book.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, he defends theory against the historical experimentalism of Thompson in his attack on structuralism. These are important interventions that provide us with greater insight into his development of “Marxism without Guarantees”, which synthesizes some of the commendable objectives that the two were attempting from their different positions, but, equally, plotted an alternative approach.

The final two articles, however, take us to an altogether different level of analysis, and here we question whether Hall did, indeed, move beyond his unique brand of Marxism towards the realms of post-Marxism (p. 344).<sup>3</sup> The engagement with postcolonialism and with cultural globalization in these last chapters reveals a more

<sup>1</sup>Ian Bruff, “The Rise of Authoritarian Neoliberalism”, *Rethinking Marxism*, 26:1 (2014), pp. 113–129; Owen Worth, *Morbid Symptoms: The Global Rise of the Far-Right* (London, 2019).

<sup>2</sup>This is even more remarkable given that, while the piece was originally published in the *New Left Review*, it would later appear as the Verso foreword to *State, Power, Socialism*. While the foreword is highly complimentary of the direction that Poulantzas takes, especially in comparison to his earlier work, he still terms it “uneven” and “incomplete” and, ultimately, highly problematic (pp. 270–271). These significant criticisms are, indeed, unconventional in the foreword of such a recent text.

<sup>3</sup>See also: Christian Lotz, “Stuart Hall: Selected Writings on Marxism: Review”, *Marx & Philosophy Review of Books* [online, no pages]. Available at: [https://marxandphilosophy.org.uk/reviews/20099\\_selected-writings-on-marxism-by-stuart-hall-reviewed-by-christian-lotz/](https://marxandphilosophy.org.uk/reviews/20099_selected-writings-on-marxism-by-stuart-hall-reviewed-by-christian-lotz/); last accessed 10 October 2023.

comprehensive engagement with Foucault and Derrida, and sees the process of articulation understood increasingly through discourse analysis. These are also the only pieces in the collection that were written after the *New Times* period, which became associated with the reformation of the left and the Labour Party in the 1990s. The turn to post-modernism also appeared to accompany this political move.<sup>4</sup> Yet, it remains debatable how far Hall had actually turned towards post-Marxism. He certainly engaged with the concept of post-modernism from the mid-1980s onwards, but regarded it as a cultural process as opposed to a political approach that specifically moved beyond class.<sup>5</sup> This is aptly discussed by McLennan in his notes at the end. He also mentions, in his last paragraph, Hall's self-criticism of such an engagement and his admission of failure to fully account for the sheer economic might of neoliberalism (p. 349). An acknowledgement perhaps that the flirtation with post-modernism had more to do with the globalization-obsessed era of the 1990s than with any rejection of Marxism.

In sum, this is an excellent selection of Stuart Hall's approach to Marxism that Gregor McLennan has expertly put together and commentated on. If I were to have a minor complaint, it would be the omission of "The Great Moving Right Show", a highly significant piece in *Marxism Today* concerning the nature of crisis, and one of Hall's later pieces from the journal *Soundings*, on neoliberalism. These would have provided the finishing touches to the collection and presented a more rounded overview of Hall's wider ontological outlook. Nevertheless, it remains an essential collection for scholars and students alike seeking a true overview of how Hall uniquely understood the social world.

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doi:10.1017/S0020859023000445

NYGAARD, BERTEL. *History and the Formation of Marxism*. [Marx, Engels, and Marxisms.] Palgrave Macmillan, Cham 2022. xvii, 251 pp. € 108.99. (E-book: € 85.59.)

Marxism is, by definition, a multidimensional phenomenon (unless you follow a programmatic or normative idea of what Marxism *should* be – truth be told, such an idea informs most writings about Marxism). From the vantage point of a history of knowledge forms, it covers a broad range from scientific paradigm, through intellectual *Weltanschauung*, or resource for social movements, to ideology of state power. It denotes a body of knowledge apt for both highly specialized expertise and everyday use "from below". Such a view of Marxism – or, rather, Marxisms – implies that its own development cannot be locked into a neat genealogy but has to

<sup>4</sup>Alex Callinicos, "Stuart Hall in Perspective", *International Socialism*, 2:142 (2014), [online, no pages]. Available at: <http://isj.org.uk/stuart-hall-in-perspective/>; last accessed 10 October 2023.

<sup>5</sup>Stuart Hall, *Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, D. Morley and K-H. Chen (eds) (London, 1996).