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OBITUARIES



Peter Sedgwick (1934–1983)*

PETER SEDGWICK's sudden death, in circumstances yet to be explained, is not only an unbearable loss to his family and friends; it bereaves the Left of a socialist intellectual it badly needed – constructive, courageous, unrancorous, clear-sighted, unreverential and unfailingly compassionate. It robs the mentally ill, the vulnerable and troubled victims of inadequate health care and misguided anti-psychiatric ideologies, of a deeply thoughtful ally. It removes the translator and major authority on Victor Serge, and a leading scholar of the movements and ideologies of the Left. It silences a unique voice, politically committed but always balanced, urgent but always laced with humour. He was at once a master of the broad view, the fine-grained and deep argument, and the hilarious send-up. His company was life-enhancing, inspiring, endlessly amusing, in ironic contrast to his personal sufferings.

Peter was born in 1934. When he was very young his mother died and he was adopted by his father's brother. Raised in Liverpool, he was deeply affected by what he described as 'a series of catastrophic events in my family home' in which finally his adoptive mother 'was admitted, in a condition of extreme dementia, into the charge of a crowded and custodial local mental hospital in which she quite shortly afterwards died. Today that hospital still stands, less crowded perhaps, but still locked and, for masses of its chronic patients, lacking in many of the elements of a humane care'. Only then did he learn of his adoption.

As a scholar at Balliol he moved from Christianity to communism and then

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out of the Communist Party in 1956 with other members of the early New Left in which he was at once a central and individual figure.

He became a psychologist at Liverpool University but was forced out of this post when an article he had written about Durex's monopoly of the contraceptive industry led to a confrontation with his professor (and support from his students). There followed jobs as a school teacher, an educational psychologist, tutor at a psychiatric prison and research psychologist at an Oxford hospital studying brain-damaged patients. He then took up a politics lectureship at York University, spent a year in New York, and, finally, a post in both politics and psychiatry at Leeds University from 1974 until his death.

He spoke to many audiences but always with his own distinctive commitments – to the linking of the personal with the political, to political activity however isolated and hopeless it might seem provided that it was intelligently conceived, to the unmasking of bogus panaceas, dogmatism and intellectual arrogance, on both Left and Right. He was for long associated with the monthly journal of the SWP, *International Socialism*, to which he gave intellectual seriousness, muscle and breadth of vision.

His Major achievement was his *Psycho Politics*, a widely and justly acclaimed masterpiece which brilliantly dissects the anti-psychiatric gurus – Erving Goffman, R. D. Laing, Michel Foucault and Thomas Szasz – who, in strikingly different ways, conspired to deny that mental illness is illness. His book was inspired by his opposition to their cultural hegemony which, in the late '60s and '70s they exercised especially strongly in the very left-wing causes and movements of which Peter was a partisan.

His compassionate concern was with 'The great seriousness and specificity of the dementing illnesses which can strike at any home including the private addresses of social workers, theatrical habitués and political militants of various progressive causes'. The book ends with a profoundly challenging socialist case for integrating 'the diverse demands of mental health workers, patients and the public'. The book's reception by psychiatrists, social workers, philosophers and indeed the Left was highly gratifying to him.

His editing and translating work on Victor Serge was a labour of scrupulous scholarship, laced with characteristic insight into antinomies and paradoxes. He was, indeed, a very good historian, sensitive to the effect of contingencies and circumstances, and the moral pressures they placed on individuals caught up in them. He translated *Memoirs of a Revolutionary* and *Year One of the Russian Revolution* and helped to edit *Midnight in the Century*. A fourth volume on the Serge-Trotsky relationship is soon to appear (published by Writers and Readers). This reveals Serge in the earlier period as compassionate and sensitive but a by no means unblemished hero. He was also working on Serge's five-part essay on Nietzsche.

In addition, there are brilliant essays on the history of the new Left and on the varieties of socialist thought; and on Herbert Marcuse (the most penetrating essay ever written about him), Isaac Deutscher, George Orwell, G. D. H. Cole, Alasdair MacIntyre and last year on Daniel Guérin, whose bi-sexualism he discussed in relation to his transcendence of political divisions, mediating between libertarian socialism and authoritarian bolshevism, anarchism and marxism. He

saw Guérin's 'entire creative life' as 'spent in the effort to interpret to one another standpoints of a partial validity but with a claim to all-inclusiveness'.

Peter Sedgwick's published writings, some of them scattered in esoteric and sectarian hiding places, urgently demand to be collected together in a handsome volume. We anxiously await any news of unpublished manuscripts. His letters to friends are no less deeply interesting and some of them too should be published. Despite his own encroaching private tragedy, amid a sense of political collapse and personal isolation, his collected writings will be a source of inspiration and will set a standard of reasonableness for socialists in the years to come. What we needed was for Peter to survive. But though he has not, his writings surely will.

Steven Lukes



Thomas Bewick

Gloden Dallas (1943–1983)

GLODEN DALLAS – friend and neighbour, died tragically on 9th July 1983, aged 40. Her death shocked both her immediate family, and the wider circle of friends in London and West Yorkshire who had come to know Gloden over the last twenty years.

I did not meet Gloden till 1976. But I know that socialism and feminism have lost a particularly fine historian. Gloden's insights into a previous generation's thinking and experience always startled me by their rare clarity for she had built up a knowledge and an understanding of the past that would be the envy of many.

After the women's movement's rebirth in the late 1960s, Gloden pioneered the opening up of women's history. This was a time when few, other than her good friend Sheila Rowbotham, appreciated the full significance of this new quest.