

## Introduction: Williams's Commitment

Ben Harker

It is still worth saying that 'no commitment', in literary pronouncements, often functions like 'no politics' in conservative political pronouncements. The only bad commitments are on the other side; on our side we are simply writing the truth as we see it, free and honest individuals all.

Raymond Williams<sup>1</sup>

This issue of the journal takes as its theme 'commitment'. Though the word never received an entry in Williams's own *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, 'commitment' structured his work (his commitment to socialism was constant) and unified his diverse writing (everything he wrote emerged from and expressed that commitment). In particular, the relationship between political commitment and writing was for him a key concern, and in the late 1970s he turned to the question explicitly in three overlapping essays.<sup>2</sup> Best read as one extended exploration of the same topic, these essays revisit the key episodes in international Marxist debates on literature and commitment: Marx and Engels's scattered remarks on the socialist literature of their day; the Brecht and Lukács debate of the 1930s; Sartre's *What is Literature?* (1948, translated 1950) and Adorno's response to it. But Williams's central intervention shifted scrutiny from the usual frame – the writer's alleged 'subservience to some version of desirable production decided by a party and its ideologists' (79) – to the history of those ideas typically ranged against such alleged subservience, the 'idea of the artist as a free individual' or indeed as the very essence of one (81). To explain this idea's stubborn grip, Williams traced its deep history, showing that it had arisen in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and was deeply enmeshed in the romantic movement's simultaneous protest against industrial modernity, Church, state and artistic rules (82). The idea of the artist as sovereign subject, he argued, coincided with and was reinforced by changes in the conditions of writing and publishing which conferred on writers a new professional status and independence, providing from the 1830s 'freedom to go out and compete' in a market of cheaper books and proliferating magazines, periodicals and newspapers. This rapid extension of such networks and the opportunities they afforded, he argued, expressed and affirmed in cultural terms the market's status as 'real social relations', a bourgeois definition of the market as society that precluded 'any other significant social commitments' (82). The historically diverse forms of guidance and restriction exerted over the writer by the market were hard to spot because the 'notion of what people

want that has passed through the market comes back as a strange kind of freedom' (85).

So for Williams, the necessary but insufficient focus of Cold War liberals on writers being oppressed by totalitarian regimes was dialectically related to their own unnameable unfreedom and embeddedness in the market and its restrictions. The flourishing Cold War sub-genre of protest against the incursions of actually existing socialist states onto writers' freedom screened off unfreedom 'where we ourselves are' (85). The problem with the basic terms of a 'profoundly liberal' 'commitment' debate not unrelated to the elevation of modernism into the culture of the twentieth century was that the approved position – the writer taking an individual stance against political or commercial pressure – always occluded this deeper history of cultural commodification and assumed 'a natural state of innocence, free of ideology, from which a writer may or may not choose to move'.<sup>3</sup> Commitment for Williams, if it meant anything, meant consciousness of and engagement with the deeper historical processes at work, or as 'taking social reality, historical reality, the development of social and historical reality, as the centres of attention, and then finding some of the hundred of ways in which all those processes can be written' (79). It was less, then, a question of identifying with party, state or approved cultural mode or genre but a matter of epistemology and method: making a commitment 'far enough to social reality to be conscious of this level of sociality', 'an active consciousness of those social relationships which are in any case there' (87). Commitment in these terms meant precisely a sharp awareness of, and impulse to move beyond, those repressions and evasions that stymied the debate on commitment, an 'alignment' that knowingly read social reality in and through consciousness of the processes of one's formation. For as Williams insisted, each writer was actually shaped by myriad factors, including native language, 'family relationships, a social and physical environment, a mode of education'.<sup>4</sup> Writing conscious of those processes, he suggests, was by definition at odds with dominant cultural assumptions and more likely to meet resistance from centres of cultural privilege or commercial success. Its particular charge came from 'active consciousness of those social relationships which include ourselves and our practices' (87).

\*

As a socialist, Williams's commitment was always to a different kind of freedom to that provided by the market. His socialism implied that the achievement of freedom was seen to be a structural and political matter involving the transfer of class power and the collective control of the economic surplus. But the form that Williams's socialist commitment took, which in turn framed his

sense of the place of culture and writing in the processes of political change, varied in the course of his life. The shifting form of this commitment is worth revisiting by way of providing context for the essays that follow.

‘Much of my political belief is a continuation of a very early formation’, Williams told Terry Eagleton in a 1987 interview. ‘I can’t remember any time when I haven’t felt broadly speaking as I do now’.<sup>5</sup> Like ‘alignment’, ‘formation’ would remain for Williams a key word, but he rejected the charge that his commitment might be an expression of what Terry Eagleton – playing devil’s advocate – called ‘the nostalgic memory’ of ‘an unusually warm and affectionate working-class childhood’.<sup>6</sup> To do so Williams pushed out from personal memory to history, situating his early life within the *longue durée* of struggle on the Welsh borders whose pattern was not only ‘defeat, invasion, victimization, oppression’ but ‘self-generation and regeneration, from what seemed impossible conditions’.<sup>7</sup> Viewed from here, his community represented ‘an indestructible yet also changing embodiment of the possibilities of common life’ whose historically specific structure of feeling, as he wrote in another context, stressed ‘mutual and cooperative, social practice, as distinct from the dominant bourgeois idea of individual practice’.<sup>8</sup> That such communities were themselves structured around a sexual division of labour in which working-class women were doubly oppressed was not one that Williams ever fully confronted, despite his theoretical insistence that analysis should grapple with the ways in which social formations reproduced themselves.<sup>9</sup>

Inattentive though he was to the gender inequalities that undergirded industrial working-class communities, he was convinced that capitalism and the foundational class inequality on which it depended was inherently unjust and that the alternative values he knew from his childhood should productively be generalised across society through a very different social system. This conviction was reinforced by his going up to Cambridge in October 1939. Much of Williams’s work would emerge from the clash between those values inherited at home in a submerged population and those encountered in the dominant culture. ‘Nobody fortunate to grow up in a good home in a genuinely well-mannered and sensitive community’, he later wrote with some sharpness, ‘could for a moment envy [...] the loud, competitive and deprived people’ he encountered at Cambridge.<sup>10</sup>

Politically, his was a Labour Party supporting background. With Europe facing economic crisis, fascism and war, and the betrayals of the General Strike and Ramsay MacDonald’s National Government fresh in political memory, the party of the ‘new type’ represented by the Communist Party of Great Britain seemed to many of his generation the most promising vector for reshaping history, and Williams made his commitment to it. For a bookish young man who already harboured ambitions to be a novelist, the CP’s theoretical emphasis on

the economic determination of a society's character was a welcome corrective to a theory of culture whose primary locus was the – usually English – individual genius. Likewise, the party's emphasis on the production of a 'people's' culture grounded in the sensibilities of the subordinate class chimed with his sense – sharpened at Cambridge – that 'my own class and for that matter my own people had little representation in the orthodox cultural world', and had, in fact, much to teach it.<sup>11</sup>

Ultimately, however, it was not conformity to these initially bracing positions but struggle with them that was Williams's making as a thinker. His ultimate commitment, as his late writing counselled, would be to the complexity of social reality. This soon involved challenging the formulae used by Communist doxa to map that reality, and to rethinking the place assigned to culture in its political priorities and strategies. Just as significant to his development as the CP's restricted positions were the bruising second-year undergraduate English tutorials in 1940/1 in which the Conservative Party member and faculty grandee E.M.W. Tillyard courteously but firmly exposed the limitations of the approved modes of cultural analysis in which the card-carrying young activist was then belligerently fluent. One of the most intriguing details presented in Dai Smith's biography of the young Williams tells of an undergraduate essay Williams read to Tillyard on 11 November 1940. The essay reveals that, barely a year after joining the CP, the twenty year-old was already feeling a tension between his own developing sense of the complexities of culture, creativity and consciousness and the party's approved and reductive positions. Williams's essay holds to the basic materialist position that 'economic factors are finally decisive'.<sup>12</sup> But it argues that narrow fixation with an author's biographical class position – standard methodology in much CP literary analysis – was inadequate and often irrelevant to the analysis of literature. Instead, he argued, a materialist criticism synthesising economics, psychology, sociology and linguistics was necessary to analyse what he called the 'the complex relationship between experience and creation'.<sup>13</sup> Williams already knew that an ossifying theoretical Marxism – codified in the notorious 'Short Course' (1939) textbook, largely written by Stalin, in which Communist cadres across the globe were drilled – was insufficient to get to grips with cultural complexity.<sup>14</sup> Even so, the essay was less an exercise in materialist criticism than a preliminary mapping of the critical void in which Williams now found himself.

In this sense, those demoralising sessions with Tillyard anticipated Williams's breakthrough book, *Culture And Society 1780–1950* (1958), whose long genealogy, as Francis Mulhern has argued, stretched far back into the 1940s and for which an even longer timeframe now looks necessary.<sup>15</sup> That *Culture and Society* was an 'oppositional' book that challenged the anti-modern, authoritarian implications of F.R. Leavis's work, from which Williams had by

then learned much, is well-known.<sup>16</sup> But often overlooked is that here Williams thrashed out new positions – to whose development he would commit – by authoritatively and without sectarianism identifying the intellectual errors of the Communist Party largely synonymous with Marxism in Britain up until that point.<sup>17</sup> The key chapter was the twelfth, ‘Marxism and Culture’, and the central theoretical issue the base-superstructure model – beyond scrutiny in party circles and flattened out for the sake of pedagogical clarity in the ‘Short Course’ – and its bracketing off of culture as secondary to and determined by the economic ‘base’ in ways that, for Williams, failed to recognise culture’s generative, prefigurative or productive capacity.<sup>18</sup> But crucially, what Williams wrote was provisional: he would repeatedly worry away at these questions, often in response to criticism from the Left that was sometimes comradely, sometimes not.<sup>19</sup> From here, thinking through the relationship between culture and society would form the core of his work and provoke his most enduring theoretical interventions, notably the Gramsci-inflected essay ‘Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory’ (1973), which introduced a repertoire of analytical concepts integral to what he later called ‘cultural materialism’, concepts that *Marxism and Literature* (1977) would develop into something like a method.<sup>20</sup>

Though often conceptually difficult, these were never the arcane matters they might sound. Williams’s thinking challenged and enlarged what was meant by socialist commitment. It did so by raising still unresolved questions about the relationship between culture, consciousness, class power and the appropriate forms of socialist strategy. For instance, one key pressure-point in the early New Left to which Williams was committed in the late 1950s was whether the collective emphasis should be on the creation of a political movement or party to supersede the CP, seen to be discredited by lingering Stalinism. Or should energies rather be focused on cultural and intellectual work? E.P. Thompson, recently a Communist Party man, was drawn towards the former course; Williams, not a CP member since wartime Cambridge, stressed rather the priority of intellectual and cultural work.<sup>21</sup> Though at one level this was a practical emphasis, given the limited time and resources available, it registered a key difference. For Williams, the Left’s ability to grasp the dynamic and active work of culture in shaping society, especially in developed economies, was not a secondary matter to politics as usually conceived but rather a precondition for regrouping and advance. His commitment to this position was sharpened by his conviction that socialists, under the sway for much of the twentieth-century to the distortions of an administrative Fabianism and a bureaucratic Stalinism, which shared more than either would have conceded, had consistently underestimated culture’s political importance. More controversially, Williams’s emphasis was driven by a never fully-theorised sense that Britain, with what

he termed its ongoing democratic, industrial and cultural 'revolutions', was available for a 'long revolution' to socialism through the extension and deepening of cultural and educational democratisation.<sup>22</sup> This belief he maintained, to the consternation of his now former CP comrades, through the late 1950s and early 1960s in which *The Long Revolution* (1961) and *Communications* (1962) were written and into the period of the Labour administration, with its slender majority, elected in October 1964.<sup>23</sup>

*Modern Tragedy* (1966), written in 1964, catches Williams on a cusp. On one hand, the text is deeply mindful of revolution's unconscionable twentieth-century history, still denied or repressed by many on the Left. On the other, it acutely feels the moral case for revolution in capitalist societies in which, by definition, 'the incorporation of all its people, as whole human beings, is in practice impossible'.<sup>24</sup> The significant but often overlooked switch-point, as far as Williams's socialist commitment was concerned, was the General Election of March 1966, after which, as he later explained, the Labour government, newly bolstered by the long-awaited parliamentary majority, revealed itself to be committed to the reproduction rather than even gradual dissolution of capitalist society.<sup>25</sup> Williams's always conflicted affiliation to what he called 'two latencies or traditions' on the Left – one 'revolutionary', which emphasised class struggle and direct confrontation with the capitalist state, the other 'reformist', which held that 'a Labour government with a strong majority would be able to overcome the limitations of social-democratic parliamentarianism' – was now settled in favour of the former.<sup>26</sup> 'When you have been pondering a decision for fifteen years', he later added, 'you can finally take it in two days without haste'.<sup>27</sup> Gradually since 1950 and suddenly from 1966 Williams underwent a process of political realignment, despite some of his emerging, more radical positions being muffled in the collaborative work on the two versions of *The May-Day Manifesto* (1967, 1968), with their envisaged ameliorations of parliament. By the early 1970s, his thought enriched by his deep reading of Gramsci's belatedly translated *Selections from Prison Notebooks* (1971), there was a new direction and clarity to Williams's commitment, predicated largely on his deconstruction of the 'revolution' and 'reform' binary that structured much left discourse, and still lingers today. He was critical of the self-styled Leninist or 'revolutionary' strategy focused on 'politics', as conventionally defined – capturing 'state power', 'changing the hegemony by authoritarian redirection and manipulation' – as it involved repression and radically underestimated 'the real process of the human change that has to occur'.<sup>28</sup> He added that such a strategy would never, in any case, work in the long term even if the state were captured as in advanced capitalist societies, with their highly developed strata of culture and civil society, the essential dominance of a particular class was maintained 'not only by property and power' but 'lived culture: that saturation

of habit, of experience, of outlook'.<sup>29</sup> It followed that the 'system of meanings and values which a capitalist society has generated has to be defeated in general and in detail by most sustained kinds of intellectual and educational work', including work on confronting 'layers' of an 'alien formation in ourselves', as he had long maintained.<sup>30</sup> But though necessary and qualitatively distinct from more conventionally conceived political operations, this intellectual and educational work previously designated as that of the 'long revolution' was no longer regarded as itself sufficient, according to Williams's now harder-edged account. Revolution, he now unambiguously argued, was only achieved when 'the central political organs of capitalist society lose their power of predominant social reproduction': more bluntly, 'the condition for the success of the long revolution in any real terms is a short revolution'.<sup>31</sup> In this reckoning, what Gramsci called wars of position – struggle across civil society – and wars of manoeuvre – frontal assault on the state – did not designate alternative approaches but unavoidable stages in a long, indissoluble process of socialist transformation.

As he conceded, huge, crucial questions remained unanswered, even amidst the optimism released by the upsurging industrial militancy of the early to mid 1970s (Williams's political confidence peaked in or around 1975 and is caught in his 'You're a Marxist, Aren't You?' essay of that year). The central question now became the precise nature of the socialist party or organisation capable of coordinating industrial struggle at the point of production – struggle still seen by Williams that year to be 'the most creative activity in our society' – with politics more broadly conceived, central to which was the counter-hegemonic work regarded by Williams as necessary but not sufficient for revolution.<sup>32</sup> Even more difficult questions proliferated as the grounds for optimism receded and the central tenets of that earlier analysis – especially that the economic struggle of the industrial working class was the most 'creative activity in our society' – could no longer be assumed in the face of the exemplary class struggle being executed by a radical fraction of the ruling class committed to the reconstitution of post-war capitalism on neoliberal lines, what Williams called 'Plan X'.<sup>33</sup> By the time he came to write about commitment directly in the late 1970s, the emphasis was necessarily defensive – the countering of the deeply saturated market common sense that formed the lodestar of the New Right – rather than optimistically oriented towards the processes of socialist strategy and advance that had energised his writing a few years earlier. Even before but especially after the miners' strike of 1984–85, the task to which Williams applied himself was not advance but the revitalisation of a socialist movement whose so-called political and industrial 'wings' – the Labour Party, the trade union movement – were now flapping ineffectually if at all, the term 'wings', as he grimly remarked, implying a body

that was increasingly difficult to locate.<sup>34</sup> In his last book, published in 1983, Williams predicted 'either the final incorporation of the labour movement into a capitalist bargaining mechanism' (with socialism reduced to 'a theory or sect') or 'the wide remaking of a social movement which begins from primary human needs'.<sup>35</sup> Even he underestimated neoliberalism and its ideologues, committed to the destruction rather than incorporation of organised labour. He also duly underplayed the difficulties of reinvigorating a movement towards structural critique and socialism from social movements – he mentions feminism, environmentalism, the peace movement and the struggle for human rights – with good grounds to mistrust the Left, new and old, associated with a critique of capitalism insufficiently attentive to the role of gender in the reproduction of social formations and a correspondingly narrow conception of industrial class struggle.<sup>36</sup> It was a mistrust entrenched in a climate not only of industrial and political defeat but of ascendant postmodern thought, versions of which became hegemonic in higher education and beyond.<sup>37</sup>

\*

*Key Words* 16 appears at a moment when Plan X neoliberalism – what David Harvey calls a 'class project [...] designed to restore and consolidate capitalist class power' – is proving incapable of renewing or re-legitimizing itself in the wake of the financial crisis of 2007–08.<sup>38</sup> Echoing Marx and Engels's description of the class struggle (sometimes open, sometimes hidden), Williams distinguished between class conflict, the 'absolute and insuperable conflict of interests' inherent in capitalist society, and class struggle, the 'conscious and sustained attempts to alter the social relations which are the basis of class conflict'.<sup>39</sup> The tempo of class struggle is now rising once more, and Williams's core commitment and the various writings that elucidated it over the years assume a new resonance. In particular, 1970s debates about how to imagine a socialist future beyond a model of capitalism that fails to secure consensus feel much closer than they did a decade ago. Williams's writings of that period resonate anew as significant sources for the process of re-imagining a counter-hegemonic socialist politics of the kind described in recent works, notably Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams's *Inventing the Future: Postcapitalism and a World Without Work* (2015) and Paul Mason's *Postcapitalism: A Guide to our Future* (2015). Closer to home, meanwhile, Williams's sober assessments of the Labour Party and its diverse currents and traditions reward rereading, especially 'Ideas and the Labour Movement' (1981), which linked the so-called halting of the labour movement's 'forward march' in the 1970s with the Left's failure since 1945 to think with appropriate hegemonic range and ambition and to build and support educational and cultural institutions

and networks committed to research, teaching and learning ‘based on its values and aspirations’.<sup>40</sup> It is a point that might be heeded by the Labour Party today, whose intellectual and cultural momentum comes mainly from without, and whose sepia-tinted discourse on education remains caught in nostalgia for the compromise formation of social democracy and the spirit of 1945. In the otherwise often laudable 2017 manifesto, *For the Many Not the Few*, for instance, educational policy is framed as ‘a national educational service’, and the dominant terms stress fitness for employment over critical, cultural and creative empowerment.<sup>41</sup> The two pages devoted to culture, meanwhile, demonstrate no sense of what culture is, and see no contradiction between the invocation of cultural democracy – ‘culture for all’ – with a market logic in which culture is synonymous with ‘creative industries’ and the centrepiece of ‘industrial strategy’; the proposed £1 billion ‘Cultural Capital Fund’ is to be modelled, we are reassured, on ‘enterprise zones’.<sup>42</sup> The even shorter passage on the media highlights a striking disjunction between the creative use of new forms by activists and an official discourse incapable of formulating radical proposals. Nothing is advocated beyond vague endorsement of the principle of public service broadcasting, unspecified support for the BBC and Channel 4 and an anachronistic attachment to local newspapers. The fixation of the Labour Party with the undeniably ‘hostile’ media coverage of its leadership consistently displaces real analysis of the relationship between a fragmented media discourse unable to connect events and structures and an incremental process of media marketisation and monopolisation in which the Labour Party has long been deeply implicated.

Williams’s ‘An Alternative Politics’ (1981) meanwhile, written thirty-six years ago, addresses a question on many minds now: ‘If a Labour government were to be elected’, Williams was asked, ‘what would you want the government to do?’<sup>43</sup> That many of his modest proposals seem radical is another measure of New Labour’s incorporation. But the more pertinent argument, which the current shadow front bench might heed, cautions a Labour administration imagined to be close to power on two counts: against optimistic, ungrounded projection of economic rejuvenation amidst the systemic crisis of global capitalism; and against underestimation of the ferocity of the resistance to be mounted by a class used only to winning when confronted with anything that resembled structural change. ‘What should frighten all of us’, wrote Williams chillingly, ‘is the prospect of a Labour government, in part elected on a negative vote, trying in a centralised and bureaucratic way to effect radical shifts of power’.<sup>44</sup> Then as now ‘alternative strategy’ presupposed an ‘alternative politics’.<sup>45</sup>

\*

With questions of 'commitment' to the fore, this issue of *Keywords* mirrors the breadth of Williams's own engagement with the topic. Tony Crowley makes good the absence of an entry on 'commitment' in Williams's *Key Words*, tracking the word's genealogy and gauging its contemporary meanings. Glyn Salton-Cox's essay frames the question of commitment in the terms with which this Introduction began, revisiting a formative scene in discussions on the writer and commitment, Engels's famous 1888 letter to Margaret Harkness, rightly identified by Salton-Cox as 'talismanic both for theories of socialist realism and for George Lukács's insistence on realist typicality over naturalist observation or modernist fragmentation'. Salton-Cox's particular focus is Harkness's oeuvre in the framework of Engels's strictures, and especially the place of the so-called 'lumpenproletariat' in broader socialist discourse. Re-reading Harkness's fiction, he argues, productively 'complicates our understanding of the vexed question of the lumpenproletariat and its relation to literary history'. More particularly he argues that Harkness's knowing deployment of a Zolaesque 'naturalist mode' – for Engels an unsuitable model – 'is a direct response to an ongoing project of representing unorthodox forms of labour within the informal economy'. He concludes by presenting Harkness as a writer who not only provokes us to rethink the category of the 'lumpenproletariat' and the 'retrenchments it calls forth' but strikingly 'anticipates the well-known gendered turn of post-Fordist labour, when the decline in manufacturing jobs and the growth of the service sector led to an ongoing crisis in wage-earning masculinity'. The broader questions he raises about the narrative forms of the committed socialist novel in general, and especially its gender dynamics, are further explored in Phil O'Brien's short essay on Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's recently republished *Helen of Four Gates* (1917), the first of two specially commissioned pieces dealing with ideas of commitment in our Recoveries section.

Two closely-linked contributions address the question of commitment in terms of political trajectories in and through the Communist Party of Great Britain, an organisation so important, in mainly negative ways, to Williams's own trajectory. Don Watson uses Williams's ideas about the complicated and often jarring relationship between life experience and the literary forms available to writers in the second essay in the Recoveries section. Watson's essay revisits six Cold War 'apostasy' autobiographies published between 1948 and 1953 in which former Communists publicly renounced commitments and, in some instances, justified new ones. He persuasively presents these largely forgotten books, some of which enjoyed very wide readership on their original publication, as worth revisiting for the insights they offer into Communist history and the psychology of political commitment.

Madeleine Davis's 'Edward Thompson, MI5 and the *Reasoner* Controversy: Negotiating "Communist Principle" in the Crisis of 1956' develops this emphasis on the multivalency of Communist commitment. Through close analysis of a wide range of archival material, including the recently declassified files kept by the British secret services on Williams's New Left associate Edward Thompson, Davis reinterprets the 1956 crisis and the making of the New Left. Resisting readings that straightforwardly oppose proto-New Left 'moral conscience' to Stalinist 'monolithic bureaucracy', she argues that the *annus mirabilis* of 1956 in fact 'reveals an extremely complex picture of the tensions involved in communist commitment'. Her essay develops what she sees as a productive 'biographical turn' in the study of the communist movement newly attuned to the complexity of 'experience and commitment' and 'the diversity of biographical and other contexts in party history'.

The issue closes with Nick Stevenson's conspectus, 'Raymond Williams and the Possibilities of a "Committed" Marxism', bringing us back to Williams, and echoing and developing elements of this Introduction, especially around Williams' later writing on reform and revolution, state and civil society, the instrumentalisation of culture and the limits of social democracy. Stevenson also extends the assessment, arguing for the relevance of Williams' work today in and across multiple political and intellectual contexts, some welcome, some not, including resurgent nationalisms, ecologically oriented socialism and the alter-globalisation movement. 'The hope remains', Stevenson concludes, 'that a more democratic and ecological version of Marxism', informed by William's thought, will provide a resource for progressive political advance in the years ahead. Precisely these questions will be addressed in the 2019 issue of *Keywords*, which tackles the ways in which the ongoing crisis of global capitalism since 2008 has been experienced, analysed and narrated.

Our 2018 issue marks some changes in the composition of the journal's editorial board. Cathy Clay, who has made an outstanding contribution to the journal over the past ten years, has decided to move on to other ventures. We thank her warmly for her firm commitment and tireless work for the journal. We welcome new members Dr Deborah Mutch (De Montfort University), Dr David Wilkinson (Manchester Metropolitan University) and Dr Nicola Wilson (Reading University). These new colleagues bring to the journal welcome expertise in topics including socialist fiction and socialist periodicals (Mutch), popular music and subcultural studies (Wilkinson), and book and publishing studies and working-class fiction (Wilson). This year also marks changes in the journal's online availability. From now on all back issues will be available free of charge on the Raymond Williams Society website three years after print publication: <https://raymondwilliams.co.uk/view-issues/>.

## Notes

- 1 Williams, 'Commitment', in *What I Came to Say* (London: Hutchinson Radius, 1989), 256.
- 2 The most developed of which – and his last word on the matter – was his 1980 Marx Memorial Lecture, published as 'The Writer: Commitment and Alignment' in *Marxism Today*. Williams, 'The Writer: Alignment and Commitment', *Marxism Today* (June 1980): 22–5; reprinted in Robin Gale, ed., *Resources of Hope: Culture, Democracy, Socialism* (London: Verso, 1989), 77–88. References to this are cited parenthetically in the text. The second was a short essay entitled 'Commitment' later collected in the posthumous *What I Came to Say* (London: Hutchinson Radius, 1989), 256–60. The third is the chapter on 'Alignment and Commitment' in *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 199–206.
- 3 'Commitment', 257; Williams was seldom more savage than against Cyril Connolly's American-funded modernist showcase, *Horizon*. Williams, *Politics and Letters: Interviews with New Left Review* (London: New Left Books, 1979), 72. His sharpest remarks on the construction of modernism – 'pure ideology' – come in Williams, *Politics of Modernism* (London: Verso, 1989), 34.
- 4 'Commitment', 258.
- 5 'The Practice of Possibility', Williams in interview with Terry Eagleton (1987), in Raymond Williams, *Resources of Hope: Culture, Democracy, Socialism* (London: Verso, 1989), 321.
- 6 Williams, *Resources*, 321.
- 7 Williams, *Resources*, 322.
- 8 Williams, *Resources*, 321; Williams, *Towards 2000* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1983), 167.
- 9 The absence of questions of gender in much Marxist and New Left discourse in the interwar and postwar periods would have consequences in the 1970s, as registered later in the Introduction. Williams argued that these questions were more substantially addressed in his fiction. 'That's no real excuse', he admitted in 1987. 'I ought to have been doing this in my other work too.' 'The Practice of Possibility', *Resources*, 319.
- 10 Williams, 'My Cambridge', in *What I Came to Say* (London: Hutchinson Radius, 1989), 6.
- 11 Williams, 'Notes on Marxism in Britain Since 1945', in *Problems in Materialism and Culture* (London: Verso, 1980), 240.
- 12 Dai Smith, *Raymond Williams: A Warrior's Tale* (Cardigan: Parthian, 2008), 116.
- 13 Smith, *Raymond Williams*, 116.
- 14 Edited by a Commission of the CC of the CPSU, *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union/Bolsheviks: Short Course* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1939). Williams recalls the book's status in late 1930s Cambridge in *Politics and Letters: Interviews with New Left Review* (London: Verso, 1979), 41, 48.
- 15 Williams began working on the book in 1948, was teaching a WEA course with the same title by 1951, published its key contentions as 'The Idea of Culture' in 1952 and delivered the completed manuscript in March 1956. Francis Mulhern, 'Culture and Society, Then and Now', *New Left Review* 55 (January–February 2009): 31–45.
- 16 *Politics and Letters*, 98; Francis Mulhern, *Culture-Metaculture* (London: Routledge, 2000), 68.
- 17 The book was substantially provoked by the failure of the short-lived journal *Politics and Letters* (1947–48) to engage William's now former Communist comrades in dialogue around cultural questions. Williams, *Politics and Letters*, 65–82; Ben Harker, 'Politics and Letters: The "Soviet Literary Controversy" in Britain', *Literature and History* 24.1 (Spring 2015): 41–57.
- 18 The twelfth chapter in fact scored more hits on the CP than he could possibly have known, focusing on areas of growing controversy deep within the party, especially between party leaders and cultural intellectuals with whom Williams would soon forge connections in the milieu of the so-called 'first' New Left (E.P. Thompson, Victor Kiernan, John Saville and Raphael Samuel, among others). E.P. Thompson, 'Caudwell', *Socialist Register* (1977):

- 228–76; Ben Harker, 'Jack Lindsay's alienation', *History Workshop* 82, no.1 (Autumn 2016): 83–107.
- 19 The more searching criticism came from Williams's New Left associates, especially Kiernan and Thompson, and later from his former doctoral student Terry Eagleton, and the editorial collective of *New Left Review*. Victor Kiernan, 'Culture and Society', *New Reasoner* 9 (Summer 1959): 74–83; E.P. Thompson, 'The Long Revolution', *New Left Review* 9 (May–June 1961): 24–33 and 'The Long Revolution II', *New Left Review* 10 (July–August 1961): 34–39; Terry Eagleton, 'Criticism and Politics: The Work of Raymond Williams', *New Left Review* 95 (January–February 1976) and *Criticism and Ideology: A Study in Marxist Literary Theory* (London: Verso, 1976), 21–42; Williams, *Politics and Letters: Interviews with New Left Review* (London: Verso, 1979), 97–175. The Communist Party and its remaining intellectuals would struggle to meet Williams's theoretical challenges until well into the 1970s, Arnold Kettle being usually assigned the task. Arnold Kettle, 'How New is the "New Left"?', *Marxism Today* (October 1960): 302–9; Kettle, 'On the "New Left"', *Marxism Today* (June 1961): 191–3; Kettle, 'Culture and Revolution: A Consideration of the Ideas of Raymond Williams', *Marxism Today* (October 1961): 301–7.
  - 20 First published in *New Left Review* 82 (November–December 1973) and reprinted in *Problems in Materialism and Culture* (London: Verso, 1980), 31–50.
  - 21 What might have happened had the early New Left formed a political party remains one of the great counterfactuals of the twentieth-century British Left. This period discussed in *Politics and Letters*, 362–3.
  - 22 These categories underpin *The Long Revolution* (1961) and are revisited in *Politics and Letters*, 136.
  - 23 Raymond Williams, *Modern Tragedy* (1992; London: Hogarth, 1966), 76.
  - 24 See note 23.
  - 25 *Politics and Letters*, 373, 415.
  - 26 *Politics and Letters*, 414.
  - 27 *Politics and Letters*, 415.
  - 28 Williams, 'You're a Marxist, Aren't You?' (1975), in *Resources of Hope*, 75.
  - 29 Williams, 'You're a Marxist Aren't You?', 74.
  - 30 Williams, 'You're a Marxist Aren't You?', 76, 75.
  - 31 *Politics and Letters*, 420–21.
  - 32 Williams, 'You're a Marxist Aren't You?', 75.
  - 33 Williams, *Towards 2000*, 244–71.
  - 34 Williams, 'The Forward March of Labour Halted?' (1981), in *Resources of Hope*, 248.
  - 35 Williams, *Towards 2000*, 173.
  - 36 Arguments made compellingly in Beatrix Campbell, *Wigan Pier Revisited: Poverty and Politics in the 80s* (London: Virago, 1984).
  - 37 An authoritative mapping and critique of these trends was offered by Ellen Meiksins Wood, 'The Uses and Abuses of "Civil Society"', *Socialist Register* (1990): 60–84.
  - 38 David Harvey, *The Enigma of Capital and the Crises of Capitalism* (London: Profile, 2010), 10.
  - 39 *Politics and Letters*, 412–3.
  - 40 Williams, *Resources*, 145, 60.
  - 41 *For the Many Not the Few: The Labour Party Manifesto* 2017, 33–43.
  - 42 *For the Many Not the Few: The Labour Party Manifesto* 2017, 97.
  - 43 Williams, 'An Alternative Politics' (1981), in *Resources of Hope*, 151.
  - 44 Williams, 'An Alternative Politics', in *Resources of Hope*, 160.
  - 45 Any 'alternative strategy', he continued, would actually 'require a degree of popular understanding and support which is of a quite different order from an inherited and in part negative electoral majority'. Williams, 'An Alternative Politics', 153.