

Purposeful Life

Stan Newens

Stan Newens was a Labour MP for many years, before his election to the European Parliament in 1984.

I first met Michael Barratt Brown in the mid-1950s, when he lived in a former public house, the ‘Live and Let Live’ in Dedham, north Essex, near the border with Suffolk. At the time, Michael was working as a WEA lecturer and was a deeply committed socialist with whom I, as a left-wing Labour Party activist in Essex, was anxious to make contact.

In 1958, Michael moved to Sheffield to become a lecturer in Sheffield University’s Extra-Mural Department where, along with Royden Harrison, another dedicated socialist, he lectured to miners and other trade unionists. Later he became Principal of the Northern College, which does magnificent work in adult education.

In 1956, Michael left the Communist Party over disillusionment culminating in Soviet intervention in Hungary, and he became a prominent figure in the New Left. He was a member of the editorial board of the *New Reasoner*, founded by two ex-communists, E P Thompson and John Saville, and also of that of the *Universities & Left Review*, founded by left-wing students Raphael Samuel, Stuart Hall, Charles Taylor and Gabriel Pearson. He helped merge the two journals to form *New Left Review*, which is still published. The New Left movement had a seminal effect on the development of left-wing ideas in the 1950s and 60s, and Michael’s contribution to it was considerable.

I can remember crowded meetings at which Michael was a key speaker and the brilliance of his political analysis totally captivated his audiences. He buttressed his reputation as a speaker with a steady stream of articles and books. I particularly

remember an exceptional work, *After Imperialism*, first published in 1963 and subsequently revised and brought up-to-date, but there were many more.

Michael was one of the last survivors of an outstanding generation of socialist intellectuals which included E P Thompson, John Saville, Raphael Samuel, Stuart Hall, Raymond Williams, and many others.

He continued practically up to his death to produce penetrating articles – most of which, in later years, appeared in *The Spokesman*. He was an expert on many topics: former Yugoslavia, where he was in World War Two; British industry and the economy; imperialism and the developing countries, and so on.

Michael will be sadly missed, but his exceptional contribution to socialist thought and the Labour Movement will be remembered. He led a purposeful life and made a rich contribution to left-wing ideas and the wider community.

‘At the same time that I joined the *New Reasoner* board, I was invited on to the board of *Universities and Left Review*, which had been founded in Oxford among others by Ralph Samuel and Charles Taylor, later a party leader in Canada. We decided to amalgamate the two journals and form *New Left Review (NLR)*. As a member of both boards, I was made the chairman of the meeting, and I shall not forget the complaints from Ralph Samuel, that he could not take any more “Quaker compromises”.’

Michael Barratt Brown, *Seekers*, page 125

