

**U DX241**

**Essay on Harold Laski by Ralph Miliband**

**c.1958**

**Biographical Background:**

Adolphe (Ralph) Miliband was born in Brussels on 7th January, 1924. Both his parents had lived in the Jewish quarter in Warsaw. His father, Sam Miliband, a former member of the Red Army, had left Poland after the First World War and became a leather worker in Belgium. Miliband managed to catch a boat from Ostend a week after Hitler launched his Western Offensive, arriving in England on 19th May 1940. He settled in London and changed his name from Adolphe to Ralph finding work removing furniture from bombed houses. It was whilst studying a course in English History that he developed an interest in Marxism. In October 1941 he took-up a place to study at the London School of Economics (LSE) where he was taught by Harold Laski. Miliband was deeply influenced by Laski despite their different politic views.

In June 1943 Miliband joined the Royal Navy serving on *HMS Royal Arthur* and *HMD Valorous* and saw action in the Mediterranean. He still remained interest in politics and in 1944 wrote an article about the class nature of the relationship between officers and men on board ship.

Miliband was demobilized in January 1946, returning to the LSE to complete his studies, obtaining a First Class degree in July 1947. He secured a Leverhulme research studentship to work full-time on his Ph.D. on the radical movement in the French Revolution. Laski arranged for Miliband to do some teaching at the Roosevelt College in Chicago where he witnessed the early stages of McCarthyism in action. In June 1949 Laski was appointed Assistant Lecturer in Political Science at LSE which included teaching 'Problems of Comparative Government', 'The History of French Political Thought' and the 'History of English Socialist Thought'.

During this period Miliband was highly critical of Joseph Stalin and the Soviet policy towards Josip Tito and his socialist government in Yugoslavia. His main political friends were left-wing members of the Labour Party including Michael Foot, Jo Richardson, Ian Mikardo, Russell Kerr and Konni Zilliacus. Miliband joined with other left-wing historians such as E. P. Thompson, Raphael Samuel, Raymond Williams, Stuart Hall and John Saville to launch two radical journals, *The New Reasoner* and the *New Left Review*. Later he was to play a prominent role in the publication of the *Socialist Register*.

In 1961 Miliband published *Parliamentary Socialism: A Study of the Politics of Labour*. Miliband played an active role in the campaign against the Vietnam War. In an article in the *Socialist Register* (1967) he attacked Harold Wilson and his defence of the United States action in Vietnam and described it as being the "most shameful chapter in the history of the Labour Party'.

Other books by Miliband include *The State in Capitalist Society* (1968), *Marxism and Politics* (1977), *Capitalist Democracy in Britain* (1982), *Class Power and State Power* (1983), *Divided Societies: Class Struggle in Contemporary Capitalism* (1989) and *Socialism for a Sceptical Age* (1994).

Ralph Miliband died on 21st May 1994.

His two sons David (born in 1965) and Ed (1969) both became senior members of the Labour Party with Ed beating his brother to become leader of the party in September 2010.

Hull History Centre: Essay on Harold Laski by Ralph Miliband

This essay, originally commissioned in 1958 or 1959 for a Fabian Society pamphlet but never published, offers unique insights into the influence of Laski on Miliband's thought. It reveals much about Miliband's own thinking in the late 1950s just as he was writing *Parliamentary Socialism*. The article was published in *The Socialist Register* 1995, pp.239-263

An incomplete version is available on the Marxists' Internet Archive at <http://www.marxists.org/archive/miliband/1995/xx/laski.htm>

**Custodial history:**

Donated via Prof. John Saville, Department of Economic and Social History, University of Hull, 24 January 1995

**Description:**

Copy of essay on Harold Laski written by Ralph Miliband in the late 1950s.

**Extent:** 1 item

**Related material:**

Papers of Harold Laski (and Frida Laski) [Ref U DLA]  
English Constitution, notes from lectures by Harold Laski [Ref U DX320]  
Papers of Granville Eastwood relating to Harold Laski [Ref U DES]  
Misc letters to/from Laski [Ref U DX262 and U DP173]

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