

14. The Labour Party

DA: When did you start to talk about Sociology, or even research at all, to Philip? He must have been by that time interested in what you were doing as well as in what he was doing.

MA: Umm, I think his real interest, as distinct from just polite interest, would be when I began doing surveys for the Labour Party, which I think he disapproved of, fundamentally.

DA: Why?

MA: He didn't think a political party should base its organisation, its propaganda ... you know, its general conduct, on survey research. They should have clear-cut ideology, and stay with it.

DA: Subsequently proved wrong of course, in that belief!

MA: So that I think he didn't approve of it, but he was interested in it. For example, the first one I did for the Labour Party was on, how would the British public ... and this was for Gaitskell in '54 ... how would the British public take the idea of comprehensive schools? Did they know what comprehensive schools were? What did they think of the 11+ selection procedures, and so on? And, I think that was what first turned him against it. Because what the public said was two things. First of all they said, by and large, (these were the parents of young school children), "By the time our Johnny is 14 we want him to be up there working and making some contribution to the family income, we need the money ... the way he is spending money now, on his bicycle, we need it". Or, "By the time Doris is 14 she ought to be beginning to help the family" – you know, the long-standing tradition and attitude, and up to a point makes sense. That was one attitude. Another attitude was, "Well, no, we think the 11+ is all right, cause the brainy ones get through, don't they ... and that's fair" [laughs]¹.

And then I was asked by Gaitskell to present this to the Labour Party Executive and its educational advisers. Its educational advisers were a man called Max Morris, a communist, Margaret Cole and Tawney. I got up, gave them the results, and then the inferences from the results. That, what was needed was an educational programme for the voters and not an

¹ Sonia Jackson recalls doing some of the coding of the interviews: There seemed to me to be a complete split between middle class and working class parents but not about working but in what they wanted. Working class parents didn't expect their children to achieve. The most important thing for them was for their child to be happy. Middle class parents were just the same as now and never even mentioned happiness

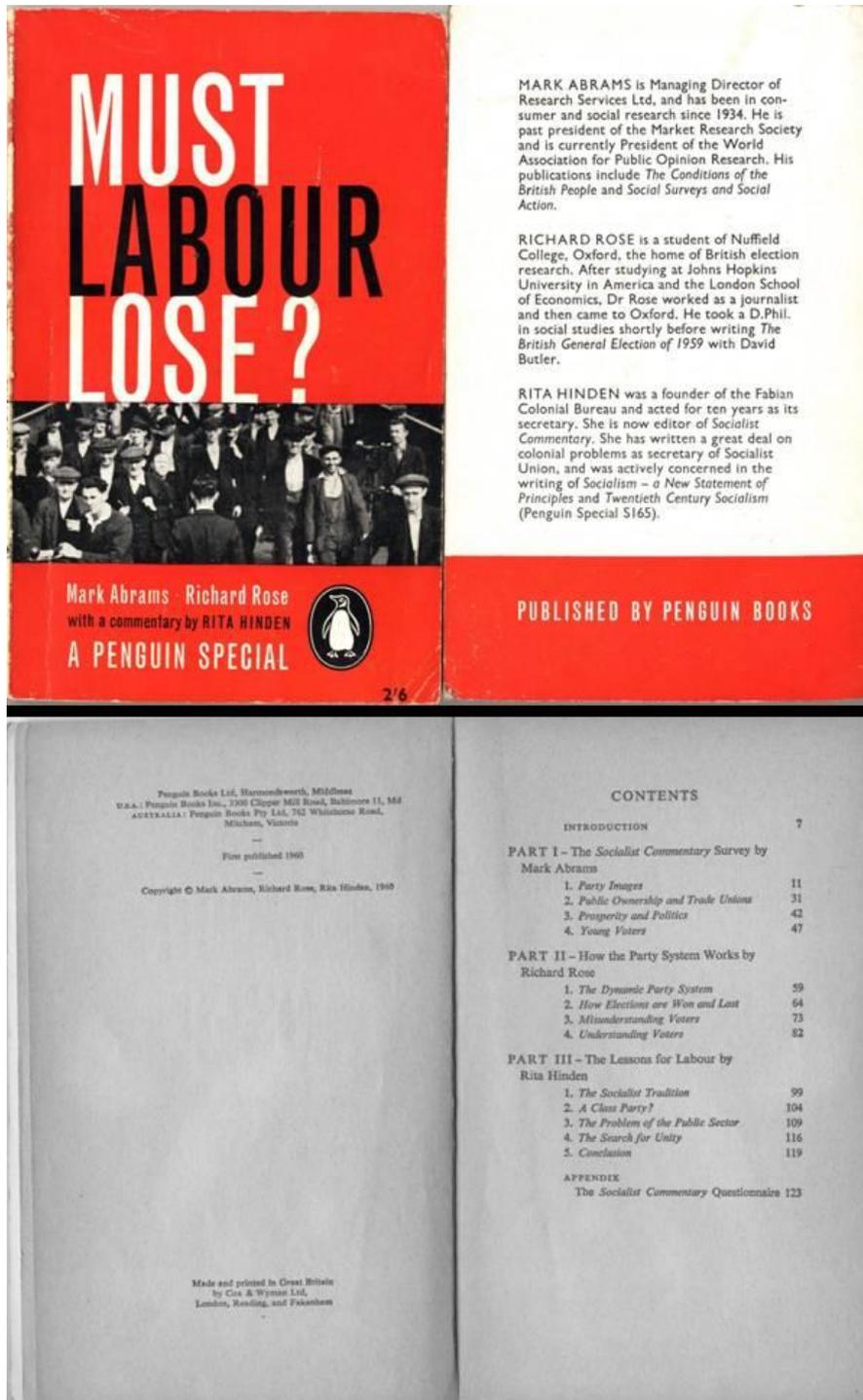
educational policy for children. That the party had not put over its social case for abandoning selection. And I was very lucky there, at that point, because evidence was beginning to emerge that something like 20% of elementary school children, who were later on being called up to the armed forces, as conscripts, were showing scores on various tests which put them way ahead of many of the middle class children who went on to universities.

Umm, I said, "You know you've simply got to educate the public ... the voters, that you have a social case to put to them and that, you have you know, an efficiency programme to put to them. That simply out of sheer self-interest ... the country's got to make the best use of its resources". And I remember, I think it was either Max Morris or Margaret Cole, got up and said, "the sort of thing you are saying reminds me of Goebells. You want to twist people's minds. We know what is good. And we shall therefore pursue what is good." And Tawney then spoke up, and Tawney said, "Well you may never have an opportunity, you may lose every election. If that is your attitude, I think, you know, perhaps we do have an education" (he did it very gently). And Gaitskell was of course on Tawney's side and my side, but I don't think Philip was at that point. So that was when he² began to take an interest, but it was a critical interest.

And I remember when one member, a woman member, of the Labour Party Executive said why they were in danger -- because they were still in office then -- of losing the next election was because they were not appealing to the altruism of young people. And would do I survey to show the extensiveness of this altruism? And then the Labour Party could appeal to the young on the basis that it was the party of altruism. I said, okay. So we had the usual sort of questions. "Have you done any voluntary unpaid work at all for anyone on any course or any organisation at any time in the past 12 months?" 3% said yes. "Would you please tell us exactly what it was?" And most of them, yes, it was accurate. You know, the description they gave justified their claims. And then we said "Right, now supposing the British government had surplus funds to dispose of, wanted to spend them on things that would benefit people in general. Here are half a dozen: send food to people who are starving in Biafra, Nigeria; increase old age pensions by five shillings a week; build bigger leisure centres for young people". You know, a dozen or so of these things. The Biafrans didn't get a showing in, it didn't even come to 1%! [laughs]. Old age pensions -- oh to hell with that as well. It was, build stadiums for young people. So I took the results back and said, "Look, I don't think you are going to win the election with these new voters based on their altruism. You can't bribe them because, in any case they say they are going to vote Labour. Don't

² i.e. Philip. Actually it was at the time of Suez. He and Sonia both joined the Labour Party when they got back to Cambridge

upset them by saying you are going to waste money on starving people in Africa, it will only irritate them.” And she never spoke to me for months and months afterwards. And that was the sort of thing, I think, that interested him.



Must Labour Lose? (1960)



Unveiling the commemorative plaque at Policy and Economic Planning (1967)³

³ Malcolm Rigg, Director of the Policy Studies Institute, located the following description from *50 years of PEP 1931-81*, in which Richard Bailey, Director of PEP until 1963, writes: "In 1966, the Joseph Rowntree Memorial Trust funded a major survey of racial discrimination in England which, as we shall see, had an almost instant impact on legislation as well as among the wider public. Thus we relaunched a full programme of work. By 1967, we had a staff of 15 researchers and about 30 in all; and Dick Davies organised two glittering public events. Following the impact of the survey of racial discrimination, there was a dinner at which Roy Jenkins, who had just left the Home Office to become Chancellor of the Exchequer, said that the PEP survey had been decisive in the government's decision to go through with the second Race Relations Act. Israel Sieff [pictured centre] presided and Edward Boyle and Mark Abrams [centre left] also spoke. We had Norman St John-Stevias to thank for the other event. His researches on Walter Bagehot had discovered that Bagehot had lived in PEP's elegant new building in [12] Upper Belgrave Street; and he suggested we ask the Greater London Council to erect a commemorative plaque. After a dignified delay they did, and the then Prime Minister, Harold Wilson [centre right], unveiled it with a knowledgeable speech." This description was echoed in my phone conversation with John Pinder (director of PEP at the time and possibly to the left of Mark in this picture, perhaps with Vic Feather, then General Secretary of the TUC). John observed that Mark was the inspiration behind the survey of racial discrimination and played an important part of PEP and its later transition to become the Policy Studies Institute.

DA: He did some work on the army, didn't he? How did that come about?

MA: Yea, that was the thing that really caught him. Well I had known Morris Janowitz from the war, we had worked together. Morris and Ed Shils and myself had done work together on German morale. And Morris became very interested in the military. Military sociology became his great obsession. And he wanted to know more and more about it. He wrote to me and said, "Who in Britain is equally obsessed, has the same set of interests?" I couldn't think of anyone. There was a man called Brian Tunstall⁴, but he was only interested in sailors, because he lectured at the Greenwich Naval College. And I said to Philip, "What about you?" "I suppose it is as good as anything else to do, isn't it?" So Morris came over ... we had discussions, and he got Philip really interested in the pure incompetence and inefficiency, and dysfunctionality, of a military caste in a democratic society. And he wrote a couple of very good papers⁵. That's the sort of stuff that I want this man Bulmer to include, .but I don't think he will. However, we won't go into that now. And that was when it started.

And then, when he went off to Chicago, and really met, as a colleague in the Senior Common Room, in seminars, the Chicago people, that he really saw that it was sociology he wanted. I remember you coming home one day and saying the kids at school were chasing you and shouting , "Whitie! Whitie! Whitie! Get that Whitie!"⁶.

DA: Did you come to Chicago to visit us?

MA: Yes, I did, I think it was you standing there that Gayle⁷ told me that you had come home and told them that.

⁴ http://www.camberpete.co.uk/sailing_pages_new/naval_warfare_in_the_age_of_sail.html

⁵ Sonia Jackson comments: I remember doing a lot of work on one of them, about the class origins of officers in the different armed forces – the RAF was much more democratic but the army had hardly changed since Wellington's days

⁶ This is in 1965-6 when Dominic was at the Charles Kozminsky school in Chicago, and was one of only a handful of white children in the school, as shown by his class year photograph.

⁷ Janowitz



Dominic Abrams (top right) at the Kozminski School, Chicago, 1966

DA: Strange place to be as a kid. By that time I was nine, I'd been around for quite a while hadn't I. And Dad's interests had moved on from that military work rather

MA: Well not entirely, he was still interested in it, I think, you know, if he'd had 36 hours in a day rather than 25 he would have liked to have gone on with it. Because he felt it wasn't exhausted. But, yea he was then ... well you see Morris, when Philip was there on his year's secondment, sabbatical, whatever it was, he got Philip to write *The Origins of British Sociology*. And that's when Philip, I think, really began to develop his theoretical ideas about sociology. And basically, his theory was that the main reason why Britain had never produced a decent sociologist (which was true when you compared it with France or Germany or America), was because its political statisticians had been too successful. That, if you were a [Charles] Booth or [Joseph] Rowntree, you could change the whole of society with the statistics you produced about poverty in England, or about old age in England. And that had acted as a powerful magnetic to draw potential sociological material away to doing survey research -- mainly concerned with poverty. And I think he was probably right in that. But was it a loss to Britain? Who the hell cares about two or three more sociologists of world renown when it comes to being able to document poverty so clearly and unambiguously that you could make people shut up talking about "They're poor because they are idle and

because they are drunkards and of course they don't like work", and being able to say, "No. They are poor because you don't pay them decent wages, or they are poor because you turn them off when you've got no orders. You know, they have nothing to fall back on".

I am sure if I had a choice, I haven't of course now, much too old. But if only I had a choice between continuing along the line of work that Booth and Rowntree had made so popular in this country ... popular is not the right word, so powerfully effective in shaping this country ... or producing a new theory of group adhesion, adhesiveness. I would have said, "Hmm. Let me do another survey". Whereas I don't think Philip ever felt that way. He was much more in the line of my grandfather, if I may say so, who was a Rebe, and was a great Talmudic scholar⁸. He would sit and look at his stuff and say, "Well now, when you use that word it has behind it a traditional meaning, it has a contemporary conceptual meaning, it has a vulgar meaning of the populace, it has an elitist meaning. Now let's separate these out". And my grandfather would spend day after day, after day going through a line after line of the Talmud to straighten out all these possibilities, and then rank them. You know, I think Philip has something of that influence.



⁸ The Rebe, or spiritual leader, was probably Annie's brother, of which she had two living in Leeds. In Rebecca's interview with Mark, he said he was sent up to Leeds at the age of 7 to stay with his mother's parents because she hoped he might train to be a rabbi. Annie had family living in Leeds at this time, Annie's mother was already living in Leeds with her second husband by 1909. This would make sense of the fact that Annie herself was clearly more educated than Abram as Mark says earlier in the interview she could read and write in Yiddish, whereas he could speak and read Yiddish, but didn't write in either Yiddish or English. According to Mark, his father's father was a horse thief! But 'horse thief' might also be a metaphor in Yiddish for a rascal.

Mark at The Boltons, 1969