

The Life and Politics of David Widgery

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David Widgery (1947-1992) was a unique figure on the British left. Better than any one else, his life expressed the radical diversity of the 1968 revolts. While many socialists could claim to have played a more decisive part in any one area of struggle - trade union, gender or sexual politics, radical journalism or anti-racism - none shared his breadth of activism. Widgery had a remarkable ability to "be there," contributing to the early debates of the student, gay and feminist movements, writing for the first new counter-cultural, socialist and rank-and-file publications. The peaks of his activity correspond to the peaks of the movement. Just eighteen years old, Widgery was a leading part of the group that established Britain's best-known counter-cultural magazine *Oz*. Ten years later, he helped to found Rock Against Racism, parent to the Anti-Nazi League, and responsible for some of the largest events the left has organised in Britain. RAR was the left's last great flourish, before Margaret Thatcher became Prime Minister, and the movement entered a long period of decline, from which even now it is only beginning to awake.

David Widgery was a political writer. Some of the breadth of his work can be seen in the range of the papers for which he wrote. His own anthology of his work, compiled in 1989 includes articles published in *City Limits*, *Gay Left*, *INK*, *International Socialism*, *London Review of Books*, *Nation Review*, *New Internationalist*, *New Socialist*, *New Society*, *New Statesman*, *Oz*, *Radical America*, *Rank and File Teacher*, *Socialist Worker*, *Socialist Review*, *Street Life*, *Temporary Hoarding*, *Time Out* and *The Wire*.¹ Any more complete list would also have to include his student journalism and regular columns in the *British Medical Journal* and the *Guardian* in the 1980s. Widgery was also an activist, a doctor and an author.² He attended the Ruskin conference (the founding event of British women's liberation), and edited *Oz*, after its main editors were tried for indecency in 1971. He chaired the Campaign to Save Bethnal Green Hospital, and compiled three anthologies of radical prose. He was an active supporter of Britain's first "history from below" movement, the History Workshop. Widgery was also among the first of his generation to grasp the significance of the gay rights struggles of the early 1970s.

As well as being there, Widgery also had a talent for firm friendship. His long-time partners included Sheila Rowbotham, and Marsha Rowe, editor of *Spare Rib*. Among his friends, Widgery counted leading socialist activists Paul Foot and Tariq Ali,³ radical journalists, designers and photographers, including Ruth Gregory, Syd Shelton, Red Saunders, Andy Dark and Roger Huddle, children's author Michael Rosen, first New Leftist Peter Sedgwick, the biographer

of Britain's underground press Nigel Fountain, gay activists Bob Cant and Jeffrey Weeks, left-wing historians, Raphael Samuel, E. P. and Dorothy Thompson, Barbara Winslow and Sally Alexander. Widgery was also a member of a revolutionary party, the International Socialists, the predecessor of today's Socialist Workers Party (not to be confused with the American party of the same name). The succession from the Thompsons and Raphael Samuel and their allies, to the next generation of socialists, including Sheila Rowbotham, David Widgery, Tariq Ali and Paul Foot, expresses some of the contrast between the British left of 1956 and the second wave of 1968, between a class-based left, and a second group, more determinedly Marxist, but broadening their activism so that all aspects of human life could be changed.

The intention of this paper is to draw out the distinctive categories which motivated Widgery in his activism across such different fields. The paper extends to three sections, corresponding to the main periods of Widgery's political life, 1947-1968, 1968-79, 1979-1992. In each of these sections, a key area of David Widgery's journalism is given close attention, first his place in *Oz* magazine, second, Widgery's role in Rock Against Racism, third, his work as a doctor in London's East End. The main theme is the relationship between Widgery and the party of which he was a member. A secondary theme is connected to the development of Widgery's writing. The suggestion here is that one idea which motivated David Widgery constantly was a notion of liberation grounded in the situation of the human body. There was something that drew Widgery back consistently to metaphors of human physicality. This relationship was to be explored most fully and successfully in his very last book, *Some Lives*.

1947-1968: TO BE YOUNG WAS VERY HEAVEN

Born in 1947 to a Quaker family, Widgery wrote very little about his early life. Sheila Rowbotham describes his father as socially ambitious, but his mother as a more typical member of the public sector middle-class.⁴ More decisive than this parental contrast was a period of illness. David Widgery nearly died in the 1956 polio epidemic, and spent the next five years graduating as he described, "from wheelchair and callipers to my first pair of shop-bought shoes." It was a horrific experience for a young child to go through, trapped in a hospital without his parents and with the children "crying, as I so clearly remember, ourselves to sleep at night with our nurses in tears at their inability to comfort us." The experience did have one valuable result: it gave Widgery his admiration for the National Health Service, and may even have contributed to his later decision to become a doctor.⁵

Having survived this ordeal, Widgery was then sent off to grammar school, where he became quickly contemptuous of its rituals, "My school even invent-

ed a Latin song we sang about the school's airy position above the railway sidings, which we sang like so many housewives being introduced to Royalty."⁶ He joined CND and took part in the Aldermaston march, and also wrote for the national school students' *U Magazine*. At the age of fifteen, he read Jack Kerouac's great novel, *On the Road*, and discovered in it "a coded message of discontent." Later he would claim that Neal Cassady, the hero of the novel, was the "Leon Trotsky of his time." David Widgery bunked off after hours from school to listen to jazz bands at the Rikki-Tik club in Windsor. He was expelled from his grammar school, appropriately enough, for publishing an unauthorised magazine, *Rupture*.⁷ In 1965, he interviewed Alan Ginsberg for *Sixth Form Opinion*, and was seduced by him, before escaping on his Lambretta. Later that year, Widgery spent four months travelling across the United States. He arrived as Watts, the black district of Los Angeles, exploded in riots. Widgery then journeyed to Cuba and later to the West Coast, taking part in anti-Vietnam protests called by members of Students for a Democratic Society.⁸

Widgery came of age in the middle of the 1960s, surrounded by sex, dope and psychedelia, yet also cynical about his generation's myths of cultural revolt, "All you need is love, but a private income and the sort of parents who would have a Chinese smoking jacket in the attic help." "Against Grown-Up Power," an article he wrote in 1967, spurned the values of the older generation, publicly attaching its author to the spirit of anger and revolt, that would manifested itself in the student protests of the following year's events:

Yours is the generation which calls concentration camps "strategic hamlets" and supporting the oil sheiks "a peacekeeping role." "Democratic breakthroughs" are things like letting workers at Fairfields actually talk to their boss or stopping students standing up when lecturers enter the room ... Politics becomes the business of managing a given industrial system to reward those it exploits at intervals which more or less coincide with elections. The bad joke at Westminster represents the people, and together with the TUC, the CBI and the bankers becomes something called "The National Interest."⁹

David Widgery found a place among the underground papers that sprang up to celebrate their vision of the sixties. Richard Neville, the editor of *Oz*, describes meeting Widgery by chance while listening to Bob Dylan at the Isle of Wight festival in August 1969. David "had weaselled his way there as a Trotskyite rep of the electricians' union." (Contrary to Neville's story it should be said that Widgery never later claimed any links to this union). They exchanged pleasantries, with Neville expressing surprise that a busy revolutionary could find the time to waste at a gig. "If one per cent of this celestial crowd devoted itself to throwing yoghurt bombs at the Queen or undressing in court," Widgery replied, "we'd all be a lot better off." Neville and Widgery remained on good terms, and close enough for Widgery to impersonate Neville on a Saturday night episode of TV's *Frost Report*.¹⁰

Although he had been (very briefly) a member of the Communist Party and then the ultra-orthodox Trotskyist organisation, the Socialist Labour League in the early 1960s, it was only in 1968 that David Widgery decisively attached himself to the revolutionary left, by joining the International Socialists (IS), today's Socialist Workers Party (SWP).¹¹ In one book, Widgery claimed (tongue-in-cheek) to have joined the IS because they were the only party to publish an obituary of the surrealist André Breton. Whatever the reasons for his early conversion, he was to remain a member of the IS and then the SWP for the rest of his life. Widgery was not the only young radical to become a socialist in 1968. Thousands moved to the left under the impact of the Tet offensive, when Vietnamese forces scored extraordinary victories against the greater military forces of the United States, under the influence of the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia in August, and the student protests and the general strike which broke out in France in May '68. Widgery himself describes walking round London, "with a transistor radio in my ear to catch the latest news." In Mexico, five thousand troops fired on demonstrators, killing over one hundred people, while in Germany, a generation of activists were won to the tactic of immediate, violent action against the state. The nearest that English students came to events in France and Washington was at the London School of Economics in Holborn, where David Widgery bunked medical school and joined in the protests, which culminated in January 1969 when hundreds of students and local building workers tore down steel gates which had been installed by the college principal to prevent them from occupying the university buildings.¹²

Paul Foot describes meeting David Widgery for the first time in 1968, "His eyes were shining and he had a grin on his face as though it were fixed there forever. I was off to speak on socialism at York University - he had just come from there. "It's great," he said. "Great. An enormous middle-class fun palace." Suddenly his expression changed, and he glowered at me. "They don't need you there," he said. "Not another of us. They need the proletariat." Widgery was a rare member of his generation to use the latter term spontaneously and unself-consciously. Foot continued,

David Widgery believed above all else in the struggle for socialism. He knew for certain that individuals can't get socialism on their own, and he committed himself all his life to the organisation which, he believed, tried hardest to adopt and raise its theory of socialism to the level of doing something to get it.¹³

Widgery was also attracted to the open spirit of discussion and debate within the party. Inside the IS, David Widgery found a hero in Peter Sedgwick, a member of the 1956 generation, best known for having popularised the works of the dissident former Bolshevik, Victor Serge, but also the author of *Psychopolitics* an early foray into left-wing psychoanalysis.¹⁴ Widgery made clear the emotional debt he owed to his hero:

Almost uniquely among the many Marxist intellectuals of the 1956 vintage, he didn't just write about the left but made it, shaped it and served it as an active member of first the "Socialist Review" group, then the International Socialists, and until the mid-1970s the SWP ... Sedgwick's politics were of Bolshevism at its most libertarian and Marxism at its most warm-hearted and witty. He also dressed like a Basque beatnik, wrote footnotes on his own footnotes, collected tins of mulligatwany and was founding editor of *Red Wank: Journal of Rank and File Masturbation*, whose second (and unpublished) issue was to feature "Great autoerotic revolutionary acts" and "Coming out as a worker: problems in a TU Branch."¹⁵

UNDERGROUND OVERGROUND LEFT

Widgery's most important political work in this period was his journalism for *Oz*. Widgery's role within the main editorial group was to act as the conscience of the magazine, denouncing *Private Eye* and the Sunday broadsheets, mourning the loss of Jack Kerouac, and describing what might happen, "When Harrods Was Looted." This article appeared in violet, printed on green, beside a complicated diagram presenting the affinity of William Morris's art with Rosa Luxemburg's socialism, and inside a front cover made of detachable day-glow stickers. The presentation was typical of the graphic eclecticism of *Oz*. Meanwhile Widgery's article was an earnest attempt to translate the traditional concerns of classical Marxism into the language of the new underground left,

Without these roots into and connections with working-class life, the most scintillating critique of bourgeois ideology, the fullest of blueprints for student power, and the grooviest of anti-universities could all be paid for by the Arts Council for all the danger they present. To wait for revolution by Mao or Che or comprehensive schools or BBC2 is to play the violin while the Titanic goes down, for if socialists don't take their theory back into the working class there are others who will.¹⁶

David Widgery also reminded *Oz* writers that if the magazine's language of "free love" was to have any real meaning then it must take into account the sexism which was a definite part of the male hippie dream. Here he was profoundly influenced by his close friend Sheila Rowbotham, one of the leading voices of the new movement for Women's Liberation, who was briefly a member of IS, and later helped to organise the famous Ruskin Conference, which took place in Oxford in February 1970.¹⁷ Reviewing Richard Neville's book, *Playpower* for *Oz* that year, David Widgery demonstrated that Neville's vision of sexual freedom for men meant that he was in reality a "raving reactionary" towards women. Neville, he pointed out, had not learned even the ABCs of feminism:

Women are doubly enslaved, both as people under capitalism and women by men. The hippie chick has always been one of the most unfree of women; assigned to be ethereal and knowing about Tarot and the moon's phases but busy at cooking, answering the phone and rolling her master's joints ... Neville's view of the sexual transaction is not so much advanced as insulting, and it is all the more sad he doesn't even notice it.¹⁸

David Widgery's critique of hippie misogyny was distinctive, and well ahead of its time. The first *Women's Newsletter* appeared in Britain in May 1969. Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch* was only published in 1971, while Sheila Rowbotham's major works *Women, Resistance and Revolution*, then *Woman's Consciousness, Man's World*, and *Hidden from History* appeared in 1972 and 1973.¹⁹ The point is not just that Widgery saw problems early. Some of his quality can be seen through a contrast with Widgery's fellow *Oz* contributor Germaine Greer. Greer's work is vividly alive to the oppression of the "castrated female." Hers is a developed critique of the commercialisation of the body, it is a finished argument, and in that sense her book is far in advance of anything that Widgery wrote at this time. But observe Greer's chapter titles, "Bones," "Hair," "Puberty," "Abuse," "Misery," "Resentment," "Rebellion," and it is clear that much of her specific critique of women's oppression could be extended to make an equally valid condemnation of the ways in which all human bodies have been diminished by a society in which profit is king. A call for the liberation of all bodies would not need to be less radical. It could be more angry, a point Greer herself acknowledged in the introduction to her book. "The most telling criticisms will come from my sisters of the left, the Maoists, the Trots, the IS, the SDS, because of my fantasy that it might be possible to leap the steps of revolution and arrive somehow at liberty and communism without strategy or revolutionary discipline."²⁰

The most telling criticism of Germaine Greer did not come from Widgery but from another *Oz* contributor, Michelene Wandor, and her critique was not located on Leninist terrain. Wandor rejected Greer's tendency to titillate *Oz* audiences with articles on the joys of lesbianism. "The movement doesn't seek the replacement of penis power by cunt power," she wrote, "or any generalized power. It seeks the involvement of all women cutting across the class structure." Michelene Wandor then went on to cite the 600 women "sick of doing the dance of the ovaries" at the Ruskin conference, and asked "Where was Germaine?" Greer was at home, working on the proofs of the book that would make her name.²¹

Meanwhile Widgery developed his political interests from gender to sexuality, attempting to interest the editors of *Socialist Worker* in a review of Don Milligan's pamphlet *The Politics of Homosexuality*. The piece finally appeared in *Gay Left*, endorsing Milligan's contentions that the source of sexual oppression lay in the capitalist family, and its solution lay in social revolution. "A male

worker who sneers at queers, just like one who talks of niggers and slags, is finally only sneering at himself and at his class.”²²

In the spring of 1971, Widgery acted as a lay representative for Neville when *Oz* came on trial, and defended the magazine to the best of his abilities, until Neville insisted on replacing him, as Widgery’s final medical exams drew near.²³ Writing for *Socialist Worker* during the trial, under the pseudonym of “Gerry Dawson,” David Widgery made it clear that he had his own vision of rebellion, which went beyond the narrow masculine sexual radicalism which *Oz* championed. He expressed his reservations with Neville’s project, but went on to defend it, as one expression of a greater desire for revolutionary change:

There is a sort of erotic reformism which suggests that quite literally “all you need is love.” Its attractiveness is as considerable as its ineffectuality. But in reacting against it, socialist puritans are in danger of ignoring one of the most intimate of capitalism’s contradictions. Engels was right when he pointed out “that with every great revolutionary movement, the question of free love comes to the foreground.”²⁴

Widgery was invited to edit *Oz* after the trial, as an exhausted Neville took a break. The magazine now was in decline, undercut by the rising left press, and unsure where to turn. Unwilling to reproduce its earlier staple photographs of glamorous under-dressed hippie women, the magazine had less to say, and folded in 1972. Widgery penned *Oz*’s obituary, “Whether *Oz* is dead, of suicide or sexual excess, or whether *Oz* is alive and operating under a series of new names is unclear at the moment. What is clear is that *Oz* bizarrely and for a short period expressed the energy of a lot of us. We regret his passing.”²⁵

1968-1979: ROCKING AGAINST RACISM

Leaving *Oz* as the magazine slowly died, David Widgery became more active elsewhere as a journalist. He increasingly felt that the underground press had failed. As he told the left-wing listings magazine *Time Out* in 1973, the hippie papers had not succeeded in pushing their cultural radicalism into the hearts of the working class. “At the core of the shabby myths and collective dishonesties of the underground was the belief that the class struggle had had it, that the workers had been hopelessly bribed, bamboozled and betrayed.” Yet the Bohemian milieu was impotent to change society on its own, and because of its indifference to workers, it was unable to win over the one force that could transform society. Thus the underground had become an empty vessel, incapable of turning its fine words into revolutionary actions. Widgery was to return to this theme in a later interview:

Occasionally, you’d meet shop stewards at conferences who were interested in the underground press, or got stoned, or were interested in radical music. That was always very fruitful. Otherwise

there wasn't much apparent link between the workers' struggle and this psychedelic flowering. The former was pragmatic and fairly empirical, predominantly concerned with money and making excuses for Harold Wilson. The latter was almost wholly an imported problem, which is what made the "off with the pigs" rhetoric so flimsy.²⁶

The two years between 1972 and 1974 saw some of the sharpest conflicts of the entire postwar period. David Lyddon and Ralph Darlington have described the workers' struggles of 1972, when miners, dockers and printers struck to defeat the Tories' Industrial Relations Act. The protests threatened to become an unofficial general strike. Heath dropped the act, and his government finally collapsed in 1974, following its inability to stop a second, national miners' strike.²⁷ Life itself seemed to have demonstrated the truth of the claim that workers possessed a special power to challenge the dominance of capital. This was also the period when Rowbotham and Widgery were at their closest, before rival attachments would get in their way.²⁸ Widgery's anthology *The Left in Britain* includes a warm statement of thanks to Rowbotham, who "peeled oranges, made rude remarks, wrote file cards for newspapers and put up with them and me."²⁹

After 1972-4, the period of the 1974-9 Labour government was a time of decay and cynicism, during which society shifted to the right, preparing the ground for the Tories' election victory in 1979. Although it was elected with a left-wing manifesto and significant support, following the mass strikes of 1972-4, in power Labour was a massive disappointment. The government squeezed wages and cut public spending while also bringing the trade union leaderships into close contact with the government. Bitter struggles continued through the five years of Labour rule, but the overall result was to reduce the levels of militancy within society. The number of strikes fell rapidly, while the government held the line on its compulsory incomes policy. The International Socialists were riven by a bitter faction fight, and there was no mass movement to which its members could relate. Between 1974 and 1976, David Widgery published an anthology, *The Left in Britain* (1976), and started work on *Health in Danger* (1979). He also threw himself into his new job, as an East End GP. In retrospect, however, it seems clear that Widgery was marking time, easing before a further burst of activity. Paul Foot describes these years well:

David hated orthodoxy. As the SWP turned for survival to its own orthodoxy in the long years of the "downturn," David became restless. He ventured outside the party walls, returning often to lecture us at Skegness on the campaign against abortion [sic] in the 1930s or the gay liberation movement in the 1970s. "You've got to listen to those gays," he told us in 1977.³⁰

Although the mid-1970s were quieter for Widgery than the previous decade, it was not long before there was a mass movement, and his ideas could once more be put to the test.

The challenge came initially from the British far-right. While the left was in disarray, the party which gained most from the failure of the Labour government was the National Front. First set up in 1967 as an alliance of different racist organisations, the NF only took off under Labour. In 1976, the Front received 15,340 votes in Leicester. The following year, it achieved 19 per cent of the vote in Hackney South and Bethnal Green, and 200,000 votes nationally. The strength of the organisation was on the streets. According to Ken Leech, working as a priest in London's East End, "Between 1976-8 there was a marked increase in racist graffiti, particularly NF symbols, all over Tower Hamlets, and in the presence both of NF "heavies" and clusters of alienated young people at key fascist locations, especially in Bethnal Green." By 1976 and 1977, the National Front had more activist members than ever before. Its cadres waged a violent race war, and thirty-one black people were killed in racist murders in Britain between 1976 and 1981.³¹

Members of the NF attempted to build in various milieu, among football supporters and the young unemployed. One battle was over music. These were the years of punk, when the stadium bands of the early 1970s lost touch with their audience, and a new music sprang up, libertarian and anarchistic, stripped down of the pomposity of Led Zeppelin or Queen. Caroline Coon described the anger of punk music at its birth,

The musicians and their audience reflect each other's street cheap ripped-apart, pinned-together style of dress ... The kids are arrogant, aggressive, rebellious ... Punk rock sounds simple and callow. It's meant to. The equipment is minimal, usually cheap. It's played faster than the speed of light ... There are no solos. No indulgent improvisations ... Participation is the operative word.³²

NF members attempted to tap into this new punk style. They were helped by traces of ambiguity which punk displayed towards fascism. The style was anarchistic, but politically vague and individualistic. The sound of punk, with its jagged three-chord repetitions, was the antithesis of 70s reggae, in Jon Savage's phrase, "the style had bled Rock dry of all black influences." Members of the Sex Pistols wore swastikas, as if the symbol could be a fashion statement, while one of their last singles pronounced that "Belsen Was A Gas."³³

With the National Front in the ascendant, several well-known figures expressed themselves openly in favour of some version of its racist message. In August 1976, Eric Clapton interrupted a Birmingham concert to make a speech supporting Enoch Powell, the racist Tory MP. Until then Clapton was best known for having produced a cover version of the reggae classic "Who Shot the Sheriff?" Clapton's speech led directly to the formation of Rock Against Racism (RAR), and David Widgery was one of the leading lights in this movement. Two former mods, Red Saunders and Roger Huddle, wrote a letter, which was published in the *New Musical Express*, *Melody Maker*, *Sounds* and *Socialist Worker*,

When we read about Eric Clapton's Birmingham concert when he urged support for Enoch Powell, we nearly puked. Come on Eric ... Own up. Half your music is black. You're rock music's biggest colonist ... We want to organise a rank and file movement against the racist poison music. We urge support for Rock Against Racism. P. S. Who shot the Sheriff Eric? It sure as hell wasn't you!

The letter set the tone of the new organisation. RAR published its own paper, *Temporary Hoardings*, and artists, musicians and writers participated in the creation of a musical and literary style, which drew its influence from French surrealism, Marxist politics and the best of punk. The message was angry, exciting and compelling, educational without sermonising, effective at reaching the young. David Widgery's editorial in the first issue of *Temporary Hoardings* was RAR's first manifesto, "We want Rebel music, street music. Music that breaks down people's fear of one another. Crisis music. Now music. Music that knows who the real enemy is. Rock against Racism. Love Music Hate Racism."³⁴

Part of RAR's political radicalism lay in its total acceptance of punk's rough working-class sound, the music of white bands like the UK Subs, Ian Drury or Jimmy Pursey's Sham 69. By adopting this street music as its own, RAR took it out of the hands of the racists. Yet Rock Against Racism did not simply adapt itself to the existing punk sound. Rather it sought to change and develop punk music. RAR brought together white punks and black reggae acts, Jimmy Pursey with rasta group Misty, Tom Robinson with dub act Steel Pulse. As Rock Against Racism developed, so did the sound of the main RAR bands. The Clash hired a black producer, Lee Perry, and wrote "White Man in Hammersmith Palais." The Ruts also tried to fuse reggae and punk styles, while Siouxsie and the Banshees, having worn swastikas in 1976 and 1977, now wrote "Metal Postcard," based on the collages of the German anti-fascist Johnny Heartfield.³⁵ Widgery, with his love of Jimmy Hendrix, reggae and the blues, was an important figure arguing all the while for two-tone music.

Street conflicts between fascists and anti-fascists continued, reaching an early crescendo on 13 August 1977, when thousands of anti-fascists, including large numbers of local black youths, prevented the NF from marching through Lewisham. The original National Front demonstration was publicised as an anti-mugging march, a crude attempt to intimidate the many Afro-Caribbean residents in the area. Thousands of anti-fascists gathered in protest.³⁶ The book which David Widgery later wrote as a history of the anti-racist movement, *Beating Time* (1986), takes up the story of the Lewisham riot:

An officer with a megaphone read an order to disperse. No-one did; seconds later the police cavalry cantered into sight and sheered through the front row of protesters. So, without the organisation, it might have ended. Except that people refused to

melt away from the police horses and jeer ineffectually from the sidelines. A horse went over, then another, and the Front were led forward so fast that they were quickly struggling. Then suddenly *the sky darkened* (as they say in Latin poetry), only this time with clods, rocks, lumps of wood, planks and bricks ... The NF march was broken in two, their banners seized and burnt; only thanks to considerable police assistance was a re-formed, heavily protected and cowed rump eventually able to continue on its route to Lewisham ... The mood was absolutely euphoric. Not only because of the sense of achievement - they didn't pass, not with any dignity anyway, and the police completely lost the absolute control [they] had boasted about - but also because, at last, we were all in it together.

After several hours of street fighting between anti-fascists and the ranks of the Metropolitan police, one thing at least was clear - the National Front had failed to pass.³⁷

The effect of Lewisham was to give a massive boost to anti-racists. In the days that followed, a new anti-racist movement was launched, the Anti-Nazi League. Its founding statement was signed by Brian Clough, the left-leaning football manager, playwright Arnold Wesker, Warren Mitchell, the star of TV's *Till Death Do Us Part*, and several hundred prominent trade unionists, community activists, footballers, musicians and other celebrities. Other vocal members of the Anti-Nazi League included Tariq Ali, of the International Marxist Group, and Arthur Scargill, then the Yorkshire President of the National Union of Mineworkers. While the Anti-Nazi League concentrated on confronting the fascists, Rock Against Racism continued to win young people away from the NF. The largest RAR/ANL events were the huge Carnivals, which Widgery helped to organise, as a member of the RAR Committee. The first took place at on 30 April 1978, and began with a march from Trafalgar Square to Victoria Park, where the Clash, Tom Robinson, Steel Pulse, X-Ray Spex and others played to an audience of at least 80,000 people. The historian Raphael Samuel, a member of the Communist Party from his early youth³⁸ describes Victoria Park as "the most working-class demonstration I have been on, and one of the very few of my adult lifetime to have sensibly changed the climate of public opinion."³⁹ This first Carnival was followed by local Carnivals in many areas. Thirty-five thousand attended the Manchester Carnival, 5000 took part in Cardiff, 8000 in Edinburgh, 2000 in Harwich, and 5000 turned out in Southampton. There was a second, larger, London Carnival in the autumn.⁴⁰

Between 1977 and 1979, at least nine million ANL leaflets were distributed and 750,000 badges sold. Fifty local Labour Parties affiliated, along with 30 AUEW branches, 25 trades councils, 13 shop stewards committees, 11 NUM lodges, and similar numbers of branches from the TGWU, CPSA, TASS, NUJ, NUT and NUPE.⁴¹ The cumulative effect of this campaigning was that the NF were forced onto the defensive, and thoroughly routed. Its activists were

unable to put their message across, their graffiti was painted out, and they could not march. In the April 1979 general election, the NF received a mere 1.3 per cent of the vote. Demoralised, it split into rival factions and the Front's support crumbled.

For Roger Huddle, writing at the time, the whole point of RAR was that it converted musical that was already revolutionary into an organisation which could live up to the music's radicalism, "RAR's fight is amongst the youth whose life style is rebellious ... Punk is not just the music. It was visual, it revolutionised graphics, it's anti-authority, anarchistic and loud. It has a lot to give RAR and RAR has a lot to give it."⁴² One argument that followed was that the success of the ANL was dependent on the radicalism of its music. It was also the theme of David Widgery's book, *Beating Time*, "The ANL had shown that ... the struggle on the streets set the tempo and the politicians and celebrities support and generalise but not dictate to it. It demonstrated that an unrespectable but effective unity between groups with wide political differences (the SWP, the organisations of the black communities and the Labour Party) can reach and touch an audience of millions, not by compromise but by an assertive campaign of modern propaganda."⁴³ According to David Widgery, it was the radical and cultural mix of RAR which enabled the ANL to succeed:

It was a piece of double time, with the musical and the political confrontations on simultaneous but separate tracks and difficult to mix. The music came first and was more exciting. It provided the creative energy and the focus in what became a battle for the soul of young working-class England. But the direct confrontations and the hard-headed political organisation which underpinned them were decisive.⁴⁴

THIS GUITAR KILLS FASCISTS

Within RAR and the ANL, David Widgery was one of the most consistent voices arguing that all forms of racism had to be opposed. He was the individual who did most to drive Rock Against Racism, contributing under different names to its press, recording its successes, propagandising for RAR within the other milieu in which he was already known. This article has already quoted his editorial from *Temporary Hoarding* 1. The same number also featured another Widgery article, titled "What is Racism?":

Racism is as British as Biggles and Baked Beans. You grow up anti-black, with the golliwogs in the jam, the Black and White Minstrel Show on TV and CSE dumb history at schools. Racism is about Jubilee mugs and Rule Britannia and how we won the War ... IT WOULD BE PATHETIC, IF IT HADN'T KILLED AND INJURED AND BRUTALISED SO MANY LIVES. AND IF IT WASN'T STARTING ALL OVER AGAIN ... The problem is not just the new fascists from the old slime a master race

whose idea of heroism is ambushing single blacks in darkened streets. These private attacks whose intention, to cow and to brutalise, won't work if the community they seek to terrorise instead organises itself. But when the state backs up racialism it's different. Outwardly respectable but inside fired with the same mentality and the same fears, the bigger danger is the racist magistrates with the cold sneering authority, the immigration men who mock an Asian mother as she gives birth to a dead child on their office floor, policemen for whom answering back is a crime and every black kid pride is a challenge.⁴⁵

In just a few lines, this article argued the full ANL and RAR strategy, that racism should be smashed and all the open and covert racists with it, and therefore that the fight against fascism should be turned against the racist institutions of capitalism as well.

The passage is also representative in other ways. More than any other British Marxist, Widgery would defend his politics with arguments drawn from music. How could Widgery prove that all trade union leaders had the potential to sell out? Look at the careers of their musical counterparts, the Rolling Stones.⁴⁶ Or how could you be sure that resistance had the potential to transcend the worst oppression? Just listen to the music of Billie Holliday.⁴⁷ In the RAR campaign, Widgery had the opportunity to return the favour, demanding of socialists that they rise to music's illustrative heights. Indeed, in *Beating Time*, Widgery went so far as to claim that reggae, dub and soul *drove* his life and the lives of his friends, their sex lives, their waking time. Music gave his group rhythm and purpose:

Black music was our catechism, not just something we listened to in our spare time. It was the culture which woke us up, had shaped us and kept us up all night, blocked in the Wardour Street mod clubs, fanatical on the Thames Valley R & B circuit, queuing all down Gerrard Street to see Roland Kirk in Ronnie Scott's old basement. It was how we worked out our geography, learnt our sexuality, and taught ourselves history. There was no question of slumming or inverted snobbery, we went for black music because it was so strong rhythmically, there was a passion in it, it was about life and had some point to it. And if white musicians were as good and as exciting (as George Fame, Alexis Korner and the early Stones certainly were) we worshipped them too.⁴⁸

One of the most important tasks facing Widgery's group was to tend Rock Against Racism, and to prevent the new organisation from being swamped by party activists who would take more from its organisational energy than they would give. This is not to say that Widgery or Huddle or any of their group were "anti-party," or were even seen as such. The point is more general - that in any united front project which involves people with diverse experiences, active socialists can do as much damage by pushing the "right" line over-enthusiastically, as they can by permitting less useful or duller voices to be expressed.

Members of the SWP also disagreed among themselves when it came to the direction in which the new movement should travel. Because RAR was aimed at punks, and not at existing socialists, there were many party members who regarded Widgery's group with suspicion. John Shemeld, an activist from South London, was part of the anti-RAR trend, "I was thirty, and conscious of my age ... The general problem was that there wasn't enough politics talked to the audience. We tended to surf a wave, rather than building a permanent organisation." Keith Flett agrees that the SWP failed to build a relationship with the thousands of people involved in RAR, "The emphasis, correctly, was on activity and also a horror, again correct I think, of continuing a campaign for the sake of it once it had done its job. Yet the ANL never had its own paper and we simply forgot quite quickly many of the people who were involved if they didn't join." Ian Birchall suggests that tensions between Rock Against Racism and the SWP were a reflection of a wider debate within the latter party. Several members of the party's leadership, including Chris Harman, felt that their paper *Socialist Worker* was too pre-occupied with the concerns of young punks and failed as a result to put across a full Marxist politics. The RAR comrades replied that the SWP leadership had underestimated the potential of punk.⁴⁹

One set-piece debate took place following the first ANL Carnival. The SWP's magazine *Socialist Review* duly wrote up this event. David Widgery, Roger Huddle and others argued in a letter to the magazine, that the coverage there had failed to express the energy and politics that Rock Against Racism had actually unveiled, "Atrocious articles on Carnival. Mr Calico Nickers wants to harness and channel the energy of "Youth" who have ten times more idea of what's going down than your pretty average Marxist Editor ... Working class kids NOW are political and fun without having to make five minute speeches to prove it."⁵⁰ More mainstream comrades would get their revenge when Widgery's *Beating Time* appeared in the mid-1980s. Pat Stack told the readers of *Socialist Review* that its author had exaggerated the success of Rock Against Racism "The first thing that struck me about the book was that the style of design and layout was dated, photographs thrown around the pages in chaotic style. A style, which like the fanzine, belongs now to another era ... For most of those active at the time there is little doubt that the ANL was key to the growth of RAR yet Widgery tends to put things the other way around."⁵¹

Yet it would be wrong to exaggerate the divisions. While there were differences of emphasis and rows, such were signs of a healthy, growing movement. In all important respects, Widgery's tactics won out, and the movement was stronger for the role he played.

The process of arguing for the autonomy of RAR and ANL was not purely defensive. David Widgery, Red Saunders, Ruth Gregory and Syd Shelton hoped to use RAR to generate a new political language, less verbal and more visual, more youthful and populist than the socialism which they had inherited.

Some of their politics can be seen from a one-off magazine, *Rentamob*, published by the self-appointed “Agitprop bulletin of the SWP and supporters” in 1977, in other words at the height of the RAR phenomenon. Posters, street theatre, bands and graffiti, all were promoted, with the longest article dedicated to the success of a single badge, “Stuff the Jubilee.” Beneath the slogan, “Down with Slogans,” *Rentamob* set out a vision of how RAR could bring fanzine culture to the left,

Go the average left-wing meeting - a dull pub room, a speaker who may be good, but followed by a generally lifeless question-and-answer session and a list of exhortations from the chair. Yet the struggle for socialism is the struggle to tap the immense creative, imaginative ability of working people, the enthusiasm that is crushed by class society.⁵²

In a later article, drawing on the lessons of RAR, David Widgery was concerned to attack the routine, grey and humourless attitudes adopted by some people on the left. Thatcher was in power, and many good activists had responded by making a virtue of their isolation:

If socialism is transmitted in a deliberately doleful, pre-electronic idiom, if its emotional appeal is to working class sacrifice and middle class guilt, and if its dominant medium is the printed word and the public procession, it will simply bounce off people who have grown up this side of the 1960s watershed. And barely leave a dent behind.⁵³

This is a key passage, the nearest Widgery came to a full statement of his mature beliefs. Strongly implied in the rejection of conventional British practices of self-denial, was a conception of socialism as physical pleasure, as genuine self-emancipation, which is close to the Epicurean idea of human liberation which can be found in the philosophical works of the early Marx,⁵⁴ and close also to the emphasis on socialism as play which appears in *The Right to Be Lazy*, the classic work of Paul Lafargue, Karl Marx’s utopian son-in-law.⁵⁵

So was David Widgery really a Leninist, or some kind of philosophic anarchist? The International Socialists were increasingly Leninist, having undergone a conversion towards such politics as late as 1970. In 1978, Widgery was charged with reviewing the third (penultimate) volume of Tony Cliff’s biography of Vladimir Lenin, for the SWP publication *Socialist Review*. He suggested that the true Lenin would be found somewhere between the staid reformism of British Euro-Communism, damned by Widgery as “Len Murray, *Crossroads* and the Morning Star,” and the obscure wilds of “liberal anarchism (the other big late-1970s political growth industry).” Lenin was celebrated above all for his *Philosophical Notebooks*, for having the courage to rip up his earlier admiration for Kautsky, and for having led the Soviet insurrection of 1917. The article was given a just title, “Alternative Lenin.” Certainly Widgery’s argument owed more to the confident utopianism of *The State and Revolution* than it did to the party-builders manual, *What is to be Done?*⁵⁶

The success of Rock Against Racism and the Anti-Nazi League ensured that the late 1970s was David Widgery's finest moment. One of the founders of Rock Against Racism, he later became the movement's first historian. He wrote regularly for the RAR paper, *Temporary Hoarding*, and helped to organise the hugely successful carnivals. The intervention of RAR, which involved Widgery along with many others, changed the sound of popular music, and helped to turn the racist tide in society, not just crushing the National Front, but also turning millions of young people decisively against all forms of racist prejudice. David Widgery was absolutely the prophet of the hour.

1979-1992: KEEPING ON KEEPING ON

In the 1980s, the ascendancy of Margaret Thatcher in Britain and Ronald Reagan in America combined with a sustained offensive by capital. There was a sharp downturn in class struggle. In Britain, where strikes occurred, they were lost. One by one, the steel workers, the dockers, the miners and the print workers were crushed. Meanwhile the allies of the working class also went into retreat, and by the end of the decade the socialist organisations, the women's movement, the campaigns for black liberation and for gay rights had all been reduced to a shell. Ironically, the cultural values of the left became more popular than ever, but with few exceptions, the ideas lacked forces to carry them. Few socialists prospered. Some former activists were demoralised, others retreated into their private lives to escape. Meanwhile Widgery seems to have suffered increasing pain as a result of the polio he had suffered as a child. With one leg shorter than other, he had been unable in the 1970s to take part in many of the marches he had helped to organise. By the 1980s, Widgery's illness was clearly much worse, admitting to Ruth Gregory that he was "in a lot of pain, a lot of the time." David Widgery drank more and smoked, and was often rude or worse when drunk. According to Syd Shelton, "he knew no moderation in anything."⁵⁷

Increasingly absorbed by his work-life as an GP in the East End, David Widgery took his anger and his continuing inspiration from the lives of the people that he met through his work. The first piece he wrote about his doctoring began with a description of a typical twelve hour day, "Forty-three consultations, 430 decisions, 4000 or 5000 nuances, eye muscle alterations and mutual misunderstandings have left me emotionally drained ... But don't pity me. I get paid quite well, by my patients' standards. Pity the patients instead."⁵⁸ The patients would also be the theme of the articles which Widgery wrote from the mid-1980s for the *British Medical Journal*. David Widgery used this platform to condemn the privatisation of psychiatric care, to describe the East End from the perspective of the region's single parents, and to criticise the nation's psychiatrists for listening in silence to a dull homily from Prince Charles.⁵⁹ As his

long-time partner Juliet Ash recalls, Widgery was proud to have followed Peter Sedgwick in writing about health, and proud to write for the *BMJ* - “a socialist writing within such a terribly establishment body.”⁶⁰

Three of Widgery’s books, *Health in Danger* (1979), *The National Health: A Radical Perspective* (1988), and *Some Lives* (London, 1991), were also primarily devoted to the politics of the national health service. In *The National Health*, Widgery described how as a doctor he was continually reminded of just how important free healthcare was. There was some romanticising of his own class background (which was as much private sector as public sector middle class). But Widgery was completely honest when he expressed his dedication to the values of free health care:

I had to write this book because I do care about what happens to the NHS, and I do not want to see its idealism squandered by Treasury accountants. I am an Attlee child, part of the generation shaped by Beveridge and Bevan; I got the chance to train as a doctor because of postwar education and the grammar schools; I survived childhood illness in NHS hospitals; I know what even those quite modest reforms have meant to the qualities of people’s lives; their health and human development. I cannot sit quietly by while the health service is dismantled before my eyes.⁶¹

RADICAL IN THE NHS

The narrative of *The National Health* is still in parts an institutional history of the NHS. But in David Widgery’s last book, *Some Lives*, the patients moved right to the front of his account. He described with care the lives of noisy kids and gay cruisers, cancer victims, newsagents with strike collection boxes on their counters, drunk night cleaners with daughters living in Chigwell, feuding neighbours and delicate babies, lonely grandparents and coughing dockers. Although these were his patients, they were the subject and not the object of the book, and Widgery’s East Enders emerge as people with life and dignity:

What always strikes me about those condescending documentaries about the poor East Enders, ignorant, ill and probably racist into the bargain, is exactly the reverse: how well the modern Cockneys do in circumstances which their “betters” would find impossible. How much better they would do if their material conditions were hoisted a few notches up the class system. And yet how much more common decency, respect for humanity, honour and humour they possess than so many of the middle and upper classes who despite lip service to collective interests in fact approach life in a spirit of naked self-interest.⁶²

Some Lives is an extraordinary social history of health and East London, and indeed London itself was now one of Widgery’s greatest loves.⁶³ The book is remarkable for the ease with which Widgery moves from the detail to the general, from specific accounts of one patient’s life, to broader questions of poli-

tics and class. Widgery wrote about the politics of health with an insight and an eye for detail, which have hardly been matched.

Some Lives is no dry exercise in social statistics. The arguments for democratic control of free health care are made almost accidentally. Conventional socialist authorities, both people and famous moments appear, but never with the meaning that you might expect. Jenny Marx is quoted, for a lurid passage in which she described her own suffering following her child's premature death. The Anti-Nazi League reappears, but only as an optimistic codicil at the end of a long discussion of the heart attacks, stomach ulcers and diabetes suffered by the victims of anti-Asian racism. One of the most extraordinary passages is devoted to the simple-seeming wonder of human birth:

"Delivered" through the biggest door that is ever opened in life. Such joy and physical creativity after the vomiting, piles and stretched pains of pregnancy, the dreadful force of labour and the blood and shit and waters of birth. To the final shock and delight of suckling the immaculate, slippery, vernix-coated living being: the proof that bodies aren't just wonderful ideas but they *work*.⁶⁴

Central to David Widgery's book is a method which roots more theoretical arguments in the physical reality of people's lives. In the above passage, blood and shit are creative forces that enable the body to function, and the resulting vitality serves a reminder that people can turn all social obstacles to dust. The method of the book seems to go far beyond the device of historical metaphor or allegory. People's bodies are no longer used as a means to explain another argument, they have become the most important part of the story.

Even the book's cover has a purpose, metamorphosing between hardback and paperback from an image of Widgery himself, to the monstrous phallic symbol of Canary Wharf. The rise of this huge tower block, completed in 1990s, stands in *Some Lives* for the spread of private enterprise into socialised healthcare, where it could bring only harm. In the last pages of his book, Widgery allows himself to leave behind the method of allusion, and state clearly his rejection of business involvement in health:

The despoilation of our cities concerns me not just now as a Londoner but as a doctor ... I see the social cost which has been paid for it in the streets of the East End: the schizophrenic dementing in public, the young mother bathing the newborn in the sink of a B-and-B, the pensioner dying pinched and cold in a decrepit council flat ... These were the years when hospital after hospital was boarded up in the East End and the Prime Minister told us that the health service "was safe in her hands" while waltzing off to private hospitals when she got ill.⁶⁵

Against Thatcherism stood the values of collective action and public initiative that enabled a system of free health care to work. The two ideals were portrayed as antagonistic, irreconcilable. But Widgery made no attempt to predict the outcome of their conflict.

WIDGERY'S MARXISM

David Widgery died at home following a freak accident in 1992. The episode was not foreseen, but caused enormous sadness to his family. Afterwards, several large memorial meetings were held in his name. Two incidents from this time demonstrate the regard in which Widgery was held by his friends. The first was a speech given at the official memorial meeting by Darcus Howe, the journalist, activist and follower of C. L. R. James. "Darcus Howe said that he had fathered five children in Britain. The first four had grown up angry, fighting forever against the racism all around them. The fifth child, he said, had grown up "black in ease." Darcus attributed her "space" to the Anti-Nazi League in general and to David Widgery in particular."⁶⁶ It is a powerful compliment, yet not the most striking that David would receive. The second moment was less formal, but no less resonant in its symbolic meaning. At David Widgery's funeral, Michael Fenn, who had been a leading activist among the dockers whose strikes brought down Heath's Industrial Relations Act in 1972, appeared with the London Royal Docks shop stewards' committee banner, "Arise Ye Workers," which he had kept from that time. Finding the banner, bringing it to Widgery's funeral - it is hard to imagine a more powerful epitaph for the man.⁶⁷

It is now ten years since David Widgery died. The main way in which he has been remembered has been through obituary notices. For most members of Widgery's own party, it has been impossible to separate his life from the story of the SWP. According to Paul Foot, who worked alongside Widgery as a journalist on *Socialist Worker*:

David was a restless man. He was always driving his body further than it could go in feverish pursuit of something unattainable. He was quite unlike the popular image of a revolutionary. He was the opposite of David Spart⁶⁸ or Citizen Smith.⁶⁹ He was not one for party exclusivity. Most of his friends were outside the party. If he disagreed with the party, he said so. Indeed, so terrified was he of the image of the party hack that he would often say he disagreed when he didn't.⁷⁰

In his obituary for the Socialist Workers Party's magazine, *Socialist Review*, Bob Light pointed to the tensions between Widgery and the party to which he belonged:

We need, we will always need comrades like Widgery and Sedgwick to remind us that socialism starts and finishes with human beings and their needs. We need to be reminded that there is a world outside industrial sales and contact visiting. But what Dave only fitfully understood was that without the humdrum work of organisation and routine, the world will be condemned to stay a shithole for ever.⁷¹

Ian Birchall was the author of the Breton obituary which first motivated Widgery to join the IS. Later, he sparred with the younger man over his histo-

ry of Rock Against Racism, *Beating Time*. Birchall admires Widgery's writing, but suggests there was a flightiness to his politics, "I knew David Widgery right back from '68. A man of enormous talent, wonderful speaker, wonderful writer, but a man who was moving so quickly that he never bothered to correct his mistakes. All his books are brilliant, and they're all riddled with inaccuracies. If you write like that, in his sort of way, then checking the spelling of the Leighton Buzzards isn't the most important thing." I asked Ian, how might Widgery have responded to this charge? "He called me the sniffer dog of orthodox Trotskyism."⁷²

David Widgery's relationship to his own party was complex. But the key episode was undoubtedly his involvement in Rock Against Racism. In this movement, Widgery and his friends were required to play a dual role. They themselves had been educated into a revolutionary tradition, and they hoped that some variant of their politics could inform this young campaign. But there was an equal challenge to prevent other, over-enthusiastic comrades from jumping in, and stifling the united character of the project. It is in this context that Bob Light described Widgery as "A radical humanist intellectual on permanent loan to revolutionary socialism," and there is no better summary of his political life.

This point raises in turn the question of lasting influence. To be an oppositionist within your own party is a lonely role. There is no lasting organisation or journal associated with Widgery's legacy, in the style (for example) of the library for Victor Serge in Moscow. Even those projects which have been mooted in memory of Rock Against Racism, have mostly failed to get off the ground. If Widgery's lonely situation was not at fault, then the long industrial and political downturn which followed Thatcher's victory in 1979 should be blamed. Only in the last ten years have new generations of activists broken through the ice, and even were they to be attracted to Widgery's politics, it is unlikely that the pattern of his interests would be repeated. Widgery was too much a journalist, too close to the present-day campaigns of his contemporaries, to have his works blasted out of time.

Different friends remember Widgery in different ways. Those from historical backgrounds tended to recall his work as a historian. Raphael Samuel remembered Widgery for his book *Some Lives*. "The book confronts one as a kind of giant temporary hoarding on which East End lives have been inscribed themselves as so many graffiti, often obscene, always harrowing (because this is a book of sufferings), yet also comic." Samuel enjoyed Widgery's gallows humour, "As a good libertarian, he rejoices in the Dianysiac and the transgressive. The stories usually begin staccato, as though culled from a doctor's case-book, and this no doubt was much of their original base. But he amplified them with extended passages of oral testimony - and scraps of correspondence - which clearly go beyond the needs of the case. It is as though he was acting as

an archivist for the future.”⁷³ Sheila Rowbotham remembered Widgery’s preference for emotion over fact, “The historian’s guilt at inaccuracy was merely bizarre to him.”⁷⁴ Most of all Juliet Ash recalls David Widgery’s restlessness. She recalls that he was always doing five things at once. “He packed all his life in, when he was a doctor and on call, he would be writing a book. He packed more into 45 years than most people manage in 70.”⁷⁵

One suggestion here has been that David Widgery’s work was distinguished by a consistent sense of the physical consequences of oppression and exploitation. The counter-notion of liberation as a process that could only be expressed through the work of people’s bodies appears as the unifying thread connecting Widgery’s sensitivity to women’s oppression, his passionate anti-racism, and finally the love of his patients, which is evident in *Some Lives*. Such adjectives as “Epicurean” or Samuel’s “Dianysiac” capture the sense of a man who consistently supported play over work, joy over guilt, and the pleasure of life as it could be, over the misery of life as it was and is.

¹ D. Widgery, *Preserving Disorder* (London, 1989); for Lenin on propaganda, D. Hallas, “What Do We Mean by Propaganda and Agitation?” in *Socialist Worker Review*, September 1984.

² Widgery, *The Left in Britain* (Harmondsworth, 1976); Widgery, *Health in Danger* (London, 1979); Widgery, *Beating Time* (London, 1986); Widgery, *The National Health: A Radical Perspective* (London, 1988); Widgery, *Preserving Disorder*; M. Rosen and D. Widgery, *The Chatto Book of Dissent* (London, 1991); Widgery, *Some Lives* (London, 1991). Mike Rosen’s obituary for Widgery is at <http://www.gaijin.demon.co.uk/widgery.html>.

³ Ali’s memories of the 1960s are recorded in many places, not least T. Ali, *Street-Fighting Years: An Autobiography of the Sixties* (London, 1987). The major project to which Ali contributed was of course the *New Left Review*, one of the few left-wing publications that David Widgery appears to have boycotted. Widgery’s rather acid view of the *NLR* is contained in a passage from his book, *The Left in Britain*. “Underlying the apparent sophistication of the analyses was the extraordinarily arrogant belief that it is the role of the intellectuals to make the theory, the job of the workers to make the revolution and that what is wrong in Britain is that the latter are too backward to understand the former’s instructions.” See Widgery, *The Left in Britain*, 513

⁴ Interview with Sheila Rowbotham, 13 June, 2001.

⁵ Widgery, *The National Health*, xiv, xv, 56.

⁶ Widgery, “Against Grown-Up Power” in *New Statesman*, August 1967, published in Widgery, *Preserving Disorder*, 3-6. Widgery’s contemporary Patrick Cockburn contracted polio in the same year, see P. Cockburn, “The Summer Plague” in *Independent* 7 August, 1999.

⁷ This episode is described by one of Widgery's school contemporaries at J. Gillatt, "It's My Life," <http://www.gaijin.demon.co.uk/mylife.html>.

⁸ R. Neville, *Hippie Hippie Shake: the Dreams, the Trips, the Trials, the Love-ins, the Screw-ups ... the Sixties* (London, 1996), 173, 271; N. Fountain, *Underground: the London Alternative Press* (London, 1988), 43; J. Green, ed., *Days in the Life: Voices from the English Underground 1961-1971* (London, 1988), 65.

⁹ Widgery, "Against Grown-Up Power" in *Preserving Disorder*, 5.

¹⁰ Neville, *Hippie Hippie Shake*, 73, 162, 184.

¹¹ Widgery described his time in the CP and the SLL in Green, ed., *Days in the Life*, 24, 57.

¹² Fountain, *Underground*, 56; there is a good history of the IS/SWP in I. H. Birchall, *"The Smallest Mass Party in the World": Building the Socialist Workers Party, 1951-1979* (London, 1981); while the events of 1968 in LSE and internationally are described in C. Harman, *The Fire Last Time: 1968 and After* (London, 1988).

¹³ P. Foot, "David Widgery" in *New Left Review* 196 (1992), 120-4.

¹⁴ P. Sedgwick, *Psycho Politics* (Pluto, 1982).

¹⁵ Widgery, *Preserving Disorder*, xiii.

¹⁶ Widgery, "When Harrods is Looted" in *ibid.*, 7-13.

¹⁷ Rowbotham was to review the experience of her time in the IS in S. Rowbotham, L. Segal and H. Wainwright, *Beyond the Fragments* (Manchester, 1979), 21-155.

¹⁸ Fountain, *Underground*, 105-6.

¹⁹ G. Greer, *The Female Eunuch* (London, 1971); S. Rowbotham, *Women, Resistance and Revolution* (Harmondsworth, 1972); S. Rowbotham, *Woman's Consciousness, Man's World* (Harmondsworth, 1973); S. Rowbotham, *Hidden from History: 300 Years of Women's Oppression and the Fight Against It* (London, 1973).

²⁰ Greer, *The Female Eunuch*, 22.

²¹ Neville, *Hippie Hippie Shake*, 201; Fountain, *Underground*, 106-7.

²² Widgery, *Preserving Disorder*, 101-3.

²³ Neville, *Hippie Hippie Shake*, 303.

²⁴ G. Dawson (D. Widgery), "The Politics of Pornography" in *Socialist Worker*, 24 September, 1971.

²⁵ Widgery, "Oz Obituary," published in *Oz*, 1972, also in *Preserving Disorder*, 135-8, 138.

²⁶ Fountain, *Underground*, 214.

²⁷ R. Darlington and D. Lyddon, *Glorious Summer: Class Struggle in Britain 1972* (London, 2000), 95-140.

²⁸ Sheila Rowbotham's autobiography ends in 1968, with the movement's beginning, but before Rowbotham's most creative period, and also before her

relationship with Widgery. S. Rowbotham, *Promise of a Dream: Remembering the Sixties* (London, 2000).

²⁹ Widgery, *Left in Britain*, 15.

³⁰ Foot, "David Widgery," 122.

³¹ Widgery, *Beating Time*, 17; K. Leech, *Struggle in Babylon: Racism in the Cities and Churches of Britain* (London, 1988), 84-5; Bethnal Green and Stepney Trades Council, *Blood on the Streets* (London, 1978).

³² C. Coon, "Rebels against the System" in *Melody Maker*, 7 August, 1976.

³³ J. Savage, *England's Dreaming: Sex Pistols and Punk Rock* (London, 1991), 398.

³⁴ *Temporary Hoarding* 1.

³⁵ Savage, *England's Dreaming*, 487-8.

³⁶ Widgery, *Beating Time*, 45.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 45-7, 45; C. Rosenberg, "Labour And The Fight Against Fascism" in *ISJ* 39 (1988), 55-92, 75-9.

³⁸ Incidentally, Samuel was the man who first recruited Peter Sedgwick to the left, some 25 years previously. See G. Pearson, "Red Idols: Ralph Samuel and Peter Sedgwick" in *The [Oxford] Isis*, 22 February, 1956.

³⁹ R. Samuel, "David Widgery" in *History Workshop Journal* 35 (1993), 283-5.

⁴⁰ *Rock Against Racism Edinburgh* 1, 1978.

⁴¹ Rosenberg, "Labour And The Fight Against Fascism," 81; D. Field, "Flushing out the Front" in *Socialist Review*, May 1978.

⁴² R. Huddle, "Hard Rain" in *Socialist Review*, July-August 1978.

⁴³ Widgery, *Beating Time*, 112.

⁴⁴ Widgery, *Beating Time*, 43.

⁴⁵ *Temporary Hoarding* 1.

⁴⁶ Widgery, *Preserving Disorder*, 147-53.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 76-87.

⁴⁸ Widgery, *Beating Time*, 56.

⁴⁹ Interview with John Shemeld, 31 July, 1998; letter from Keith Flett, 26 December, 1998; letter from Ian Birchall, 18 August, 1998.

⁵⁰ D. Widgery, R. Gregory, S. Shelton and R. Huddle, "Look Get it Straight" in *Socialist Review*, July-August 1978; *Socialist Worker*, 7 October, 1978; Widgery, *Beating Time*, 83-4. "Mr. Calico Nickers" was the *Review's* then editor, Alex Callinicos.

⁵¹ P. Stack, *Socialist Worker Review*, July-August 1986

⁵² *Rentamob*, issue 1.

⁵³ "Rocking Against Racism" in Widgery *Preserving Disorder*, 115-21,

⁵⁴ There is a strong family resemblance between Widgery's ideas and the early, Epicurean Marxism of Marx. The latter tradition is painstakingly examined in John Bellamy Foster's, *Marx's Ecology: Materialism and Nature* (New York, 2000).

⁵⁵ P. Lafargue, *The Right to Be Lazy*, ed. and trans. L. Bracken (Ardmore, PA, 1999).

⁵⁶ Widgery, *Preserving Disorder*, 45-53. Incidentally, *Preserving Disorder* wrongly dates this piece as 1975, before either the book or the magazine existed.

⁵⁷ Interview with Ruth Gregory and Syd Shelton, 6 January, 1999.

⁵⁸ Widgery, "Doctoring" in *New Internationalist*, 1983, and in *Preserving Disorder*, 186-9, 186. Probably the first article Widgery published on the NHS was "Unions and Strikes in the National Health Service in Britain" in *International Journal of Health Services* 6/2 (1976), 301-8. Although engagingly written, this is a formal, semi-academic history of rank-and-file organisation in the health strikes of 1972-5. The piece is not written in the autobiographical style of *Beating Time* and other work.

⁵⁹ "Correspondence" in *British Medical Journal*, 12 March, 1988; Widgery, "Out East" in *British Medical Journal*, 15 July, 1989; Widgery, "The Prince and the Psychiatrists" in *British Medical Journal*, 21 September, 1991.

⁶⁰ Interview with Juliet Ash, 5 December 1998. Beyond the items listed above, Widgery's other *BMJ* articles include D. Widgery and A. Livingstone, "The New General Practice: The Changing Philosophies of Primary Care" in *BMJ*, 3 October, 1990; Widgery, "Desert Storms" in *BMJ*, 11 January, 1992; Widgery, "AIDS Farewells" in *BMJ*, 5 September, 1992; and D. Widgery and S. Cembrowicz, "Practice Reports" in *BMJ*, 14 November, 1992. Also see "Correspondence" in *BMJ*, 13 August, 1988, 15 April, 1989, 12 August, 1989, 26 August, 1989, 7 October, 1989, 27 October, 1990, 15 December, 1990, 2 November, 1991, 29 February, 1992, 9 January, 1993, 17 April, 1993; and the obituary which appeared in *BMJ*, 14 November, 1992.

⁶¹ Widgery, *The National Health*, xiv.

⁶² Widgery, *Some Lives*, 46.

⁶³ D. Widgery, "Introduction," *A Day in the Life of London* (London, 1984), 10-13.

⁶⁴ Widgery, *Some Lives*, 51.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 234.

⁶⁶ Foot, "David Widgery," 122.

⁶⁷ Interview with Ruth Gregory and Syd Shelton, 6 January, 1999; The strikes of the London dockers in the 1970s are described in F. Lindop, "The Dockers and the Industrial Relations Act, Part 2: The Arrest and Release of the "Pentonville Five"" in *Historical Studies in Industrial Relations* 6 (1998), 65-100. The banner can be seen in many photographs of the protests of the 1970s, including the picture of the release of the Pentonville Five which is reproduced on the cover of Darlington and Lyddon, *Glorious Summer*.

⁶⁸ This imaginary leftist appears in the satirical magazine, *Private Eye*.

⁶⁹ Woolfie (Robert Lindsay) was the leader of the Tooting Popular Front in the TV sit-com, *Citizen Smith*.

⁷⁰ Foot, "David Widgery," 123.

⁷¹ B. Light, "The Human Face of Revolution" in *Socialist Review*, November 1992.

⁷² Interview with Ian Birchall, 21 October, 1998.

⁷³ Samuel, "David Widgery," 284.

⁷⁴ S. Rowbotham, *History Workshop Journal* 35 (1993), 283-4.

⁷⁵ Interview with Juliet Ash 5 December, 1998.