**What Raymond Williams Means to Me**

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As with many others, much of my interest in Raymond Williams' work has developed since his  early death. He spoke and wrote on many varied themes; some has been superseded, with many silences, but it is worthwhile to return to much of his work and to consider how it could help to develop ideas further.

Among many threads that could be followed through his work, I highlight here just one, his early perception of Green/Red convergences. From the early 1970s onwards I became concerned about environmental threats, but at first found that many on the Left opposed such concerns as a diversion. This was partly prompted by the right-wing associations of many early Greens, and partly by the idea that any challenges to scientific and technical progress, even in its forms under capitalism, were reactionary. I discovered Sebastiano Timpanaro's On Materialism at about the same time as Williams' work.  Although much of Timpanaro's arguments seemed obscure, and attacking political controversies that seemed now to have passed into history, I was impressed by his general outlook. He asserted that the struggle for a better world had to involve struggles with nature, over which, in the final analysis, humans would fail. He insisted that biological and physical human frailty would persist despite all conceivable human development. This materialist pessimism chimed with my feeling that the modified natural environment presented great threats to human possibilities, but also that this necessitated human solidarity to deal with such dangers, rather than a fatalistic despair.

Raymond Williams seemed to be one of a small number of figures who responded to Timpanaro, and also to the arguments of Rudolf Bahro, who developed concerns about the nature of production in The Alternative in Eastern Europe. In Problems in Materialism and Culture, Williams developed critical stances over both thinkers; since The Country and the City, he had taken more nuanced views about the prospects for economic development and the threats to and by the environment. While Bahro would run off-course into a form of Green mysticism, Timpanaro would go on to develop connections between Green and Left in Il Verde e il Rosso. It was noteworthy that neither came from academic backgrounds (Timpanaro was a translator), nor founded or followed any school of thought. Williams' sympathies perhaps derived from his earlier background in adult  education, which often sought to inspire students to explore ideas for themselves, rather than to deliver authoritative top-down thinking from hierarchical disciplines. His work preceded more rigorous red-green studies like those of James O'Connor (who developed the idea of the second contradiction of capitalism, between the forces and conditions of production, from the late 1980s).

I see Williams as primarily a writer, one of a small number of twentieth century British public intellectuals who developed ideas through essays that were speculative in tone rather than conclusive. His contributions to thought presented ideas that stimulated, rather than coding concepts which would be incorporated into a theoretical framework. This could involve ambiguities that might be seen as weaknesses, failing to develop ideas with sufficient rigour and authoritativeness, with much left unexplained. Although he was deemed one of the founders of Cultural Studies, his approval of Timpanaro, and other writings, suggests that cultures, far from being superstructural, require a natural resource base. In turn, cultural forces were critical to the nature of production.

One contribution was his lecture, now transcripted, to the Socialist Environment and Resources Association in June 1984. His opening proposition in Ecology and the Labour Movement was clear: “no political development is now more necessary than a convergence of the labour movement and the ecology movement”. Part of his appeal was to the convergence of supporters; that people who might see themselves as opponents could develop alliances round common goals. His emphasis was upon movements rather than parties: the whole labour movement, rather than simply the Labour Party, and the environmental movement, not just the then Ecology Party.

Williams also appealed for the intellectual convergence of red and green thinking. He sought this, perhaps characteristically, through language that would express and reflect material realities. The Left was then, he felt, heavily committed to the expansion of production, that would, at least in social democratic terms, help to relieve poverty. Those Greens who would cast doubt on the idea of economic growth, or advocated outright “degrowth”, could be viewed as accepting and making permanent existing inequalities. He adeptly characterised the then “ecology movement” as based partly on "a kind of elegant regret for a vanished, innocent, greener, more peaceful world" that was unable to handle “hard political choices”. However, he felt that there was potential, in moving from the idea of promoting production, which was inherently part of a capitalist social order, to the enhancement of livelihood, which could be characterised both before and after capitalism. This focus on words, from the author of Keywords, was not a semantic one; he envisaged an alternative reality that these terms would define. From a Green perspective, this could converge with the idea of livelihood that would be "starting from a human place and from the interests of all the human beings involved". To achieve this, what would be essential were the powerful forces for change possessed and prosecuted by the labour movement, rather than the appeals to reason and sentiment (and to enlightened leaders in the established order) upon which many Greens, even today, would tend to focus.

The opening quarterly Symposium of 2021 for Philosophy in Pubs - a grass-roots discussion organisation of which Williams, despite his "day job" as Professor of Drama, would probably approve - focused on Williams' work. My contribution was to present a stimulus on Ecology and the Labour Movement. I drew attention to one aspect of the discussion upon which Williams did not comment in 1984. The major defeat for the British labour movement, in the form of the miners' strike that was under way in June 1984 could present major dilemmas for any prospects of red-green convergence. At the time there were 173 collieries and over 200,000 mineworkers, in a British coal industry that was being run down in preparation for privatisation, and which has now effectively disappeared. The possible opening of a single deep-mined pit in Cumbria is now seen as controversial, but it is hard to consider what a combined Red-Green perspective from 1984 would have produced.