



PENULTIMATE ADVENTURES WITH  
**BRITANNIA**  
*Personalities, Politics and Culture in Britain*

Edited by Wm. Roger Louis

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## No-Man's-Land: C. Wright Mills in England

JOHN SUMMERS

C. Wright Mills had a little to say about a great many subjects and a lot to say about a few subjects of great importance. *The New Men of Power* (1948), *White Collar* (1951), and *The Power Elite* (1956), his trilogy, marked a fault line in Anglo-American cultural history, not only between the Left old and new, but also between the modern and the "post-modern epoch," as he wrote in 1959.

Modern ideologies marshaled the Enlightenment against the myth, fraud, and superstition of the medieval epoch. Liberalism and Marxism developed theories of human beings as secular, rational, peaceable creatures, then transformed these theories into collective projects. But the social structure of advanced industrial capitalism defeated the ideologies of progress. The failures, betrayals, and ambiguities of liberalism and Marxism disinherited modern man, according to Mills, who wrote as a defender of humanist aspiration as well as a witness to its eclipse.

No biography of Mills worth reading has appeared in the forty-five years since his death.<sup>1</sup> This is surprising, since he was a spiritual descendant of Stendhal's Julien Sorel, Turgenev's Bazarov, and Jack London's Martin Eden, one in a long line of "new men" born into mass society. Sons without fathers, nonparty revolutionists, they were intellectuals as well as actors, roles between which they

acknowledged no need to choose. They stole into the imagination of Europe and America in the nineteenth century, and played havoc ever after.

Mills, too, was an outlander. Born in Waco, Texas, in 1916, he endured a year in military school before enrolling in the University of Texas in 1935. In Austin, he studied sociology and philosophy with a group of professors trained in the Chicago School of pragmatism. At the University of Wisconsin, where he went for his doctorate in sociology and anthropology, he met German social thought in the person of Hans Gerth, the refugee scholar. Following an interlude at the University of Maryland, he joined Columbia College in 1945 and taught there until his death, in 1962.

A Texan by birth, an anarchist by temperament, a pragmatist by training, Mills made himself into a "Hemingway Man." An autobiographical note in 1953 envisioned his breakout from Morningside Heights: "The Hemingway Man is a spectator and an experienter; he is also a world traveller, usually alone or with changing companions. When I have travelled and camped out west, when I have thought about Europe, always when I have thought about Europe, I have tried in somewhat feeble ways perhaps even ridiculous ways, to be a Hemingway Man."<sup>2</sup>

Mills grew into the role he set for himself as if expanding in concentric circles, first focusing on the American Midwest, then widening to encompass the cities of the East, then radiating outward to Europe, where he went for the first time in 1956. Late though he was in going abroad, he was not long in making up the time. He arrived as the Cold War system in international politics was suffering shocks from which it was never fully to recover. Writing in 1957, after spending a weekend with the Students' Union of the London School of Economics, Mills saw a possible renaissance in humanist values: "I've the vague feeling that 'we' may be coming into our own in the next five or ten years."<sup>3</sup>

If 1948 was the last year of the 1930s in the United States, then let 1956 stand as the first year of the 1960s in England. Khrushchev's speech against Stalin collided with the rebellions in Poland and Hungary later that year to burn away the final residue of faith. Belief in the need for a revolutionary Left now coincided with disbelief in the Communist Party as its organizing agent and moral tutor. E. P. Thompson and John Saville, two of 7,000 who resigned their Party memberships after the events of 1956, founded the *New Reasoner* to educate the disappointed and savage the culpable. Thompson assailed Stalinism as "militant philistinism" and demanded a confrontation with its crimes.

Mills learned about the personalities and politics of the changing English Left from a Belgian Jewish émigré named Ralph Miliband, who had invited him to the LSE. Miliband was a perfect host. A member of the editorial board of the *New Reasoner*, he had joined forces with a second group of dissenters, headquartered at Oxford University. There it was the Suez affair, rather than the crisis of communism, that quickened pulses. Awareness that a post-ideological epoch had already dawned was the theme of the Oxford group's magazine, *Universities and Left Review*.

An early contribution by Stuart Hall, "A Sense of Classlessness" (1958), located the significance of the Suez affair at home. A "sense of class confusion" befogged liberal and Marxist efforts to describe post-war English society and its resource-grabbing foreign policy. Urban housing complexes were replacing brick homes in working-class neighborhoods, where attitudes were changing in favor of automobiles, kitchen appliances, and televisions. Corporations were conquering small enterprises with the aid of bureaucracies that were reaching deeper into private life. "A number of interpenetrating elites or narrow oligarchies," Hall wrote, now superintended "a permanently exploited, permanently alienated 'mass' of consumers—consuming goods and culture equally. The true class picture which so skillfully conceals itself behind the bland face of contemporary capitalism is broadly speaking that which C. Wright Mills describes in *The Power Elite*."<sup>4</sup>

Mills visited his new friends in England as often as he could. He appeared on *We Dissent*, a television documentary produced by Kenneth Tynan. He headlined a speaker series in Soho at the Partisan Cafe, a forum run by *Universities and Left Review*. He went with Miliband to Warsaw, where he met Zygmunt Bauman, Julian Hochfeld, and Leszek Kolakowski, leaders of Poland's 1956. In the best-selling pamphlet that grew out of the trip, *The Causes of World War Three* (1958), Mills asked readers to imagine "a world without passports" and argued forcefully for the political independence of Europe.

Around his academic colleagues at Columbia, Mills's manner was guarded. Around his friends in England, he let out his gregarious side. "He had this enormous intellectual curiosity, a real willingness to learn," Norman Birnbaum has said.<sup>5</sup> John Saville has "very warm memories" of him: "He was an extremely lively, very intelligent, bloody interesting intellectual."<sup>6</sup> Stuart Hall, Charles Taylor, and Peter Worsley held similar impressions.

Mills arrived in London on Saturday, 10 January 1959, for a week's visit. The next day, he appeared on a television program. On

Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday, he delivered the University Lectures in Sociology at the LSE. He found time to attend Miliband's seminar on political theory, fielding questions from the students, and to attend a meeting of the editorial board of the *New Reasoner* at Doris Lessing's flat. Dorothy Thompson, watching him on television, thought he looked like most American professors. Then she met him at Lessing's, "and this great cowboy heaved into sight." In Mills she perceived an example of left-wing integrity, a man of commitment in an age of collapsing faiths: "He was a good listener, and intellectually very curious and open. I was completely swept away."<sup>7</sup>

The BBC recorded Mills's LSE lectures and broadcast them for three weeks. *The Times* described him as "6 ft tall, with a chest like a grizzly-bear's and a face as tanned and craggy as a cowboy's." According to the *Times Literary Supplement*: "Mr. Wright Mills bursts among the pundits' discussion of the American situation with the explosive force of James Cagney at a tea party of the Daughters of the American Revolution." Michael Foot, editor of the weekly *London Tribune*, announced: "HERE, AT LAST, IS THE TRUE VOICE OF AMERICAN RADICALISM." Mills was "radical, adventurous, free of jingoism and militarism, open to exciting thought and effective popular action." Many English intellectuals believed the Cold War had snuffed out America's revolutionary heritage, "but it is not dead. And it speaks through Wright Mills."<sup>8</sup>

Mills's "Letter to the New Left" summoned these special relations to a consummatory moment. Published in September 1960 in the *New Left Review* (the project of a merger between the *New Reasoner* and *Universities and Left Review*), the letter implored English intellectuals to transform the absence of ideology into new theories of history and human nature, to take what they needed from the warring dogmas of the Cold War and leave the rest behind. Mills wrote in slangy prose and memorable wisecracks, but it was the first paragraph that endeared him to his comrades abroad: "When I settle down to you, I feel somehow 'freer' than usual. The reason, I suppose, is that most of the time I am writing for people whose ambiguities and values I imagine to be rather different from mine; but with you, I feel enough in common to allow us to 'get on with it' in more positive ways."<sup>9</sup>

Getting on with it meant going to Cuba. In August 1960, Mills took two Nikon cameras and an audio recorder out of his suitcase, dropped into a jeep waiting outside the Havana Riviera, and toured the island. Everywhere he looked, he saw a society expanding under a morning sun of success. A revolution had convulsed a despotism. The military stage of the revolution was giving way to social recon-

struction. The transition was carried along by a spirit of voluntary self-education. Standing in a downpour at the edge of a former cattle ranch, Mills listened to Fidel Castro and a cadre of military officers debate the best species of tree to plant in the fields. "So the real ideological conflict under discussion is pine trees versus eucalyptus!" he exclaimed into his recorder.<sup>10</sup>

"We are new men," proclaimed *Listen, Yankee* (1960). "That is why we are so original and so spontaneous and so unafraid to do what must be done in Cuba."<sup>11</sup> Mills's pamphlet, part explanation, part evocation, met with unified acrimony in the United States. The *New Republic* compared him to "a merger of Judas Iscariot, Benedict Arnold, and Vidkun Quisling, retaining the worst features of each." The *Washington Post* compared him to Wilhelm Reich, a genius gone mad. Syndicated columnists assailed him in towns and small cities from coast to coast. "Don't Let Prof. Mills Fool You on Cuba" ran one headline; "Author of Book on Cuba Thinks He Fools You" ran another. The Federal Bureau of Investigation deployed agents near his home in West Nyack, New York. The strain was too much. The night before Mills was to debate the revolution on NBC television, he suffered a heart attack that put him into a coma and nearly killed him. Pushed by hostility at home, pulled by the offer of a chair in sociology at the University of Sussex, he returned to England in April 1961. He took a flat in London, enrolled his daughter in school, and thought about settling.

Shortly after this, the *New Left Review* confronted its first crisis. The magazine's ambitious publishing arm had issued a series of pamphlets, but organizational bickering and financial difficulties had impeded progress. E. P. Thompson, broke and demoralized, arrived at editorial meetings with holes in his shoes. Both John Saville, chairman of the magazine, and Stuart Hall, editor from its inception, quit the board late in 1961. Other resignations followed.

The disarray enhanced Mills's value as a mentor. Perry Anderson and Robin Blackburn, part of the second generation of student radicals to rattle through Oxford, met with him often in these months. "We were pumping him for information and advice," recalls Blackburn, who also remembers looking on, guiltily, as Mills strained to climb the stairs to the fifth-floor flat where they held their tutorials.<sup>12</sup> Cuban politics and classical social theory occupied the sessions. Mills's *The Sociological Imagination* (1959) struck Anderson and Blackburn as a text at once exotic and relevant. Sociology had gained a toe-hold at the LSE, and the British Sociological Association (BSA) had opened in 1951. But most of the founders of the BSA did not identify themselves as sociologists. Membership still counted in the low

hundreds, and only two universities had departments, neither of them located at Oxford or Cambridge. "We live in a society that is essentially opaque," wrote Anderson and Blackburn in *New University*, a campus extension of the *New Left Review*: "The origin and sense of the events in it systematically escape us. This obscurity is also a separation: it prevents us seeing one another and our common situations as they really are, and so divides us from each other."<sup>13</sup>

Along came Mills, promising that sociology, classically conceived, could uncover orienting points and organizing principles, could spur "a transvaluation of values."<sup>14</sup> His radically sociological approach to power offered methodological aid as well. In 1957, a group of researchers for *Universities and Left Review* compiled the income, benefits, training, and social connections of the men who staffed the top posts in industry. The group titled its report *The Insiders* (1957) after determining that a few hundred corporations controlled the economy, and that wherever the state intervened, it became a partner in monopoly enterprise rather than its critic. "Public ownership," the slogan of state socialism, hid oligarchy. *Universities and Left Review* published *The Insiders* as a special pamphlet, which sold out quickly.

No record remains of Mills's impressions of Anderson and Blackburn, but they must have impressed him strongly. One of the last things he did in January 1962, when he went home to die, was to nominate a new editor for the *New Left Review*. Anderson assumed control and Blackburn joined the editorial board in March, the month Mills succumbed to a heart attack. He was forty-five.

E. P. THOMPSON COMPARED HIM TO WILLIAM MORRIS. "We had come to assume his presence—definitions, provocations, exhortations—as a fixed point in the intellectual night-sky," Thompson wrote in a two-part essay on Mills in *Peace News*: "His star stood above the ideological no-man's land between the orthodox emplacements of West and East, flashing urgent humanist messages. If we couldn't always follow it, we always stopped to take bearings."<sup>15</sup> Ralph Miliband mourned his death "bitterly and personally" in the *New Left Review*: "In a trapped and inhumane world, he taught what it means to be a free and humane intellect."<sup>16</sup> Miliband named his newborn son after him in 1965. "I got to feel closer to Mills than I have ever felt to any man, or shall ever feel again, I should think," Miliband wrote to Thompson.<sup>17</sup>

The editorial reconstitution of *New Left Review* instilled in veterans of *Universities and Left Review* and the *New Reasoner* "a sense of isolation," Thompson later wrote.<sup>18</sup> Those who had come to political

awareness in the 1930s and 1940s, for whom 1956 had been a pivotal year, lost the initiative to a generation that came to awareness in the late 1950s. When a Labour government assumed power in 1964 and supported the American war in Vietnam, it was Anderson and Blackburn who directed the New Left in England.

Mills's influence continued accordingly. Blackburn's long essay "Prologue to the Cuban Revolution" (1963) offered a sociological history of the "power structure" in Cuba and a political alternative to the liberal portrait of a middle-class revolution betrayed. According to Blackburn, Cuba's belated independence from Spain, the shocks delivered to its economic and political institutions in the decades thereafter, plus foreign manipulation of its markets: these peculiarities of Cuban history had inhibited social cohesion on the island. The middle-class had not developed any collective interests, had not grown conscious of itself as an ideological opponent of Fulgencio Batista's dictatorship. Rather than standing for any popular goals or social programs, Batista had ruled through a patchwork of strategic alliances, the hollowness of which was revealed by its inability to sustain a fight against the outnumbered, outgunned guerrillas. These weaknesses of ideology and social structure explained why the dictatorship had collapsed so speedily, leaving behind a vacuum. Castro's guerrillas, once in power, expanded into it with a comprehensive program of practical assistance.

Anderson's "Origins of the Present Crisis" (1965) and "Components of the National Culture" (1968) worked the theoretical side of his inheritance into a paradox. England, the cradle of capitalism, had produced neither first-class Marxist theoreticians nor bourgeois sociologists equivalent to French and German exemplars. In Anderson's struggle to see through this background of parochial complacency, in his effort to gain a total view of social structure by means of a sociological analysis that was at once historical and comparative, the hidden hand of Mills showed through.

Mills lived on as political ally, as sociological tutor, and as the author of aphorisms, epigrams, and slogans that lingered and expanded in the mind of his English readers. Labour MP Anthony Crosland complained to the BBC about the diffusion of his ideas: "Many people on the left see America as the arch-capitalist country dominated by a power elite of big industrialists, Wall Street bankers, military men and all the rest of it. And so, since they are anti-capitalist, they are inevitably anti-American. Personally, I think that this picture of America is terribly exaggerated. I do not think America is run in this crude way by a capitalistic power elite."<sup>19</sup> An essay by Denis Brogan in the *Times Literary Supplement*, titled "Spooks of



the Power Elite," also complained about his influence. Mills "appeals to the same conspiratorial tastes on the left as do the theories of the John Birch Society on the right. His diagnosis is fundamentally passive and pessimistic."<sup>20</sup> But his admirers did not fail to recognize the intentions behind his post-1956 work, his effort to forge from the homelessness of radical values a new beginning. They remembered indeed what he had said of those values in his LSE lectures in 1959: "It is time for us to try to realize them ourselves—in our own lives, in our own direct action, in the immediate context of our own work. Now, we ought to repossess *our* cultural apparatus and use it for our own purposes."<sup>21</sup>

In October 1966, the Socialist Society at the LSE published a pamphlet challenging the selection of Walter Adams as the school's new director. The pamphlet argued that Adams, recently the Principal of University College in Rhodesia, had not proved himself liberal enough on the matter of race to enjoy the privilege of leading a student body riddled with questions about colonialism. The pamphlet struck up a furor. The leader of the LSE Students' Union sought answers about the appointment from the official selection committee. He received none. Instead, he was arraigned by a disciplinary court for criticizing school authorities: an offense against regulations. Very soon, protest over the new director grew into the first major student strike in English history.

The rebellion at the LSE introduced sit-ins, boycotts, and marches that lasted for the remainder of the academic year. Here as elsewhere, not only the decisions of the authorities, but the authority to make the decisions in the first place, stimulated the indignation of students. Officials punished them for defying the rituals of dissent. The punishments spurred bolder acts of defiance. Most English universities endured such conflicts, but none rivaled the LSE for scale. More than 40 percent of the student population took part in at least one of the protests in 1966 and 1967; more than 60 percent of sociology students did so. And here as elsewhere, the confrontation escalated in 1968. Thousands of protesters were expected to come to London at the end of October to voice their displeasure over the war in Vietnam. Would the LSE allow some of them to stay on campus? Walter Adams answered no. Eight hundred students seized a building for themselves.

Robin Blackburn, recently appointed lecturer in sociology at the LSE, co-edited a volume of essays on the occupation: *Student Power* (1969). The essays connected the state of production and consumption in advanced capitalism to the misshapen condition of higher education, and challenged the image of universities as island

communities, innocent of the violence of foreign policy. As Perry Anderson wrote in his contribution: "This is a direct attack on the reactionary and mystifying culture inculcated in universities and colleges, and which it is one of the fundamental purposes of British higher education to instil in students."<sup>22</sup>

References to Mills appeared throughout *Student Power*, but the essays, ironically, bore the greater influence of French, German, and Italian Marxists. The irony lay in the ideology. Mills had made his appeal in England as a critic of left-wing cant and dogma. Alone among American intellectuals, he brought none of the moral liabilities of a communist past and at the same time exemplified unbroken radical commitment. This effort to stand in no-man's-land, taking fire from both sides, made his work uniquely available to dissenters on all sides of the Cold War. His greatest achievement was his independence. "There is now no substantial reason to believe that Marxist revolutions will come about in any foreseeable future in any major advanced capitalist country," he wrote in 1962, completing the end-of-ideology thesis in his trilogy.<sup>23</sup>

The movement for an independent Left in England, thus encouraged, had been born in its refusal to be misled by the false rivalry of communist and bourgeois. It had withdrawn from the bankrupted ideologies of the modern period so as to begin the task of rehabilitating the moral culture of humanism. And yet when the most important student strike in English history presented itself, the New Left imported its model of thinking from a knock-off edition of the same old texts.

Anderson's paradox, bemoaning the apparent fact that England had given birth to the social system of capitalism without producing any corresponding Marxist thinkers, was an actual paradox only from the perspective of the Marxist theory of history. "The starting-point here," Anderson wrote, "will be any observed irregularities in the contours of British culture, viewed internationally. That is, any basic phenomena which are not a matter of course, but contradict elementary expectation from comparative experience and hence seem to demand a special explanation. Such irregularities may provide a privileged point of entry into the culture as a whole, and thereby furnish a key to the system."<sup>24</sup> Or in other words: Anderson slipped on X-ray glasses, which afforded him metaphysical confidence that "the system" could be rendered transparent, then, looking through his "privileged points of entry into the system," he identified the very asymmetries, irregularities, and disjunctions that Marxism had keyed him to find in the first place. The bourgeois opposition he buried in overlapping contexts. His own model he

floated above time and place: "Marx's thought was so far in advance of its time and its society that it was unassimilable in the nineteenth century."<sup>25</sup>

Mills named such reasoning by fiat "Sophisticated Marxism" and likened its obfuscating function to Grand Theory in liberal social thought. In both cases, he wrote, a "sophisticated" conceptual knowledge and elaboration of radical theory coincided with a radically arrant political intelligence, for what appeared to be a bid for greater rationalism concealed a note of mysticism. Anderson wrote accordingly: "Events that fail to happen are often more important than those which do; but they are always infinitely more difficult to see."<sup>26</sup>

If Anderson was right about "the complete mutism of the past" and the "objective vacuum at the centre of the culture," did it not mean that there was nothing in society to defend?<sup>27</sup> Blackburn's contribution to *Student Power* gave a clear answer. "A Brief Guide to Bourgeois Ideology" indicated that Anglo-American social theory amounted to nothing more than the functions it fulfilled in "the system," the wheels and levers, pulleys and pumps, hooks and handles of the capitalist machine. Ideas? No more than myths by which the "power elite" ruled.<sup>28</sup> Blackburn hooted at "bourgeois analysts," "the bourgeois political theorist," "bourgeois social theory," "bourgeois economists," "bourgeois sociologists," "the myths of bourgeois pluralism," "most bourgeois theorists," "the customary refuge of the bourgeois sociologist," "the weak stomach of the modern bourgeois social theorist," "the amnesia of modern bourgeois epigones," and on and on. Subtracting the word "bourgeois" from the essay would have exposed it as a mix of phrase-mongering and finger-pointing.

The New Left gained something more decisive than polemical firepower from its turn toward Marxism. Anderson made much of the fact that both Marxism and bourgeois sociology had produced a "theory of society as a totality," arguing that without such a concept of totality, then "the era of revolutions is, necessarily, unthinkable."<sup>29</sup> It was this longing for a concept of totality, needed for the purposes of clarification and available in Marx's metaphysics, that struck Anderson and Blackburn blind when they went to judge the political significance of the occupation of the LSE.

The manifesto of the Revolutionary Socialist Students' Federation told the tale. Adopted in November 1968 and subsequently published in the *New Left Review*, the manifesto shunted aside political parties, trade unions, and student reform organizations. "Mass democracy," it said, needed "red bases in our colleges and universities" on the model pioneered by Mao Tse-tung's Cultural Revolution. Here was

a concept of totality, armed and dangerous. Begun in 1966 under the banner "Combat Bourgeois Ideas," Mao's program was in the hands of Chinese students, who were burning books, closing parks, destroying paintings, and torturing their teachers. "It should not be thought that the call to make the creation of Red Bases a strategic goal of our struggle is merely a flight of rhetoric," Blackburn explained, in the same issue of the magazine that carried the RSSF's manifesto: "Capitalist power cannot just be drowned in a rising tide of consciousness. It must be smashed and broken up by the hard blows of popular force."<sup>30</sup>

Communications from Mao appeared in the *New Left Review* alongside enthusiastic reports from the Cultural Revolution. When Anderson wrote an introduction to Marshall Mikhail Tukhachevsky, it was not difficult to share his preference for Mao.<sup>31</sup> But it ought to have been difficult to credit the comparison in the first place, morally thin as the choices were. Observe that Anderson believed Mao's theory of revolutionary practice was driving war and politics into a new unity. Recall how the Chinese students were treating their teachers. Now listen to Anderson on the occupation of the LSE: "A revolutionary culture is not for tomorrow. But a revolutionary practice within culture is possible and necessary today. The student struggle is its initial form."<sup>32</sup>

On the evening of 24 January 1969, Blackburn was presenting a paper to a conference of the British Sociological Association. Gathered on the fourth floor of the St. Clement's Building at the LSE, the conferees heard shouting through the window. A young man bounded into the room and interrupted Blackburn's presentation. While you are *talking* about the revolution, said the young man, it is *happening* outside. LSE officials had installed iron gates to guard against breaches of security. An emergency meeting of the Students' Union had threatened to rip them down. Now a crowd of students tugged and whacked at the gates with a sledgehammer, crowbars, and pickaxes. They went at it for about an hour.

Later that night, in a previously scheduled speech, Blackburn celebrated the attack on the gates. Had he fallen silent then, rather than repeating his remarks on BBC television on 30 January, he might have evaded punishment. Instead, he was instructed to appear before a disciplinary tribunal, which was empowered to reconsider his future at the school. His letter of reply jeered at "the entire clique of self-appointed capitalist manipulators."<sup>33</sup>

The "capitalist manipulators" acknowledged that Blackburn had neither committed any direct actions nor incited any. He had made his remarks after the gates had fallen. They fired him anyway and

closed the LSE for twenty-five days. The Maoists responded by occupying a building at the University of London and setting up an LSE-in-Exile. They greeted the reopening of the LSE a month later by boycotting classes, interrupting lectures, tossing stink bombs into meetings, and pulling fire alarms.

The LSE-in-Exile closed one day after it opened. The Revolutionary Socialist Students' Federation folded. By the end of the summer of 1969, scarcely a year after Anderson articulated his revolutionary prophecy, the rebellion at the LSE stammered and wheezed to a halt. Thereafter, student interest in sociology fell, while the "capitalist manipulators" moved on to other enemies: inflation, shrinking support from the state, and dwindling morale. The American war in Asia went on and on.

WHAT WOULD MILLS HAVE THOUGHT? In 1959 at the LSE, he recommended "direct action." The next year, his "Letter to the New Left" exhorted the uncorrupted to consider that "the cultural apparatus, the intellectuals" might be best positioned to initiate a new beginning. He lectured on the subject in Austria, Brazil, Canada, Cuba, Denmark, Mexico, Poland, West Germany, and the Soviet Union. By and by, he spread his message all over the world. In September 1968, the Central Intelligence Agency concluded a classified report, "Restless Youth," which identified Herbert Marcuse, Mills, and Frantz Fanon as the three leaders of the international Left. Between Marcuse's abstract Marxism and Fanon's revolutionary violence, there was his ghost, chasing both action and ideas without acknowledging the need to choose.

The New Man's dream of creating new values out of the dialectic of thought and action must always know the difference between thinking too long and acting too soon. Mills's American followers, no better at telling this vital difference than their English counterparts, met the same end. With the LSE strike about to break out, Columbia University students took over Hamilton Hall, the building where Mills had once had his office. Four additional buildings fell in quick succession. *Who Rules Columbia?* a pamphlet written by his former students on the model of *The Insiders*, justified the occupation, after which a Strike Education Committee opened a "Liberation School" that lasted not much longer than the LSE-in-Exile. Tom Hayden, an ardent admirer of Mills, presided for four days in Mathematics Hall, where he showed teams of militants how to slick the steps with soap in preparation for the police. "Columbia opened a new tactical stage in the resistance movement which began last fall," Hayden wrote after the bust, sounding like Perry Anderson.

“What is certain is that we are moving toward power—the power to stop the machine if it cannot be made to serve humane ends,” he wrote, in the same vein of misbegotten prophecy.<sup>34</sup>

As Mills's students carried his writings from 1956 into the maelstrom of 1968, the meaning of his biography changed in response to events he could not have been expected to anticipate. He may have accepted his portion of responsibility for the psychodynamics of the international Left before it reorganized into terrorist cells. Had he lived long enough to choose sides in 1968, however, his experimentalism would have seen him through many unknown contingencies, which would have altered and improved his perspective many times by then. All along, his pragmatism would have tempered his exhortations. The “Letter to the New Left” reminded readers to be “realistic in our utopianism” and asked: “Is anything more certain than that in 1970 our situation will be quite different?” Most likely, the choice of sides would not have been his to make. In his independence, he had refused to narrow the idea of radical commitment to a choice between confrontation and withdrawal. Yet these were the only terms on offer from his enemies and epigones at the end of the decade. His legacy torn apart by the very forces he unleashed, he would have been marooned on no-man's-land.

The full story of Mills's life and thought, cast across three generations of intellectuals on four continents, stands uniquely at the intersection of history and biography, illuminating the incidents, sentiments, and personalities of the international Left in all its heroism and foolishness. If that sounds trite, think of the upcoming anniversary of '68; of the leftward surge in Latin America; or of the unpopular war in Iraq, waged by American elites with the support of a Labour government—and linger on the news that David Wright Miliband is Foreign Secretary. Set against the possibilities for *another beginning*, the untold tales of Mills's life and thought may yet reveal how the New Men turned into Hemingway Men, how Hemingway Men became Castro's Men, and how Castro's Men became Mao's Men before the rest of us became . . . Academic Men.

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31. See Anderson's (unsigned) "Introduction to Tukhachevsky," *New Left Review*, no. 55 (May–June 1969), pp. 85–86; attribution in Elliott, *Perry Anderson*, p. 59.

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