

R. A. P. H. A. E. L. S. A. M. E. E. L.

26.09.34. - 09.12.96.

How does a libertarian Socialist assess the life of a friend who started off as a Stalinist quizz kid and ended up a new Labour guru? That is the problem I now face. The fact that Ralph and that is how we knew him before the rather more high-falutin 'Raphael' came to be used, is buried just across the way from Karl Marx's plot in Highgate Cemetery is an indication of his standing in Labour Movement's educational structure rather than any ideological links with Uncle Charlie himself. Certainly, for those of us more or less the same age as Ralph his death from cancer seems shockingly early. At the time, at the beginning of last year, that I learnt that after virtually devoting his working life to teaching at Ruskin College he was to take up his first ever post with recognised academic standing, it was mentioned that he had cancer of some sort. His professorship in East-End Studies at the University of East London was hardly under way when he was struck down by that tyrannical disease.

When I first met him as an Oxford undergraduate in the mid-fifties, the former school-friend who introduced us was now the secretary of the Communist Club' and he had such a high opinion of Ralph that he described him afterwards as the heir in due course of Palme-Dutt, the chief theoretician of the C.P.G.B. Only a couple of years were to pass when that cell of talented student Bolsheviks spontaneously dissolved itself in protest at the Russian invasion of Hungary in 1956. Ralph and colleagues such as Stuart Hall, Stanley Mitchell, Ernst Rodker were soon to constitute themselves as the student arm of the already existing academic ~~xxxx~~ dissident movement around the New Reasoner within the C.P. Their publication which after <sup>a few</sup> ~~xxxx~~ years was to become the New Left Review, started as the Universities & Left Review. A third and parallel publication edited by Michael Segal came on the scene at the same time but Forum's constituency was that large body of largely homeless ex-members of the C.P. and other Leninist groupings of the thirties and forties. A distinctive aspect of what now regarded itself as the New Left was its Soho meeting place in the heart of London. Above the Partisan Coffee House in the half street of Carlisle St. there were a few rooms large enough to hold formal lectures and discussions in but the key feature the long tables at which you could sit all day without even buying a coffee or being pressured to do so and such are the <sup>an</sup> ~~final~~ ~~pre~~ realities of West End properties that it was inevitable that this pattern of affairs could not last indefinitely. The range of left periodicals on sale without the bolstering of more paying publications must also have been a drain on the Partisan's resources.

In addition to the small-scale facilities for meetings at the Partisan itself it soon became the pattern for weekly meetings to be held in the Oxford Street basement premises of the Marquee Jazz Club where an audience of some five hundred people became routine. For thirty years Ralph's base was Ruskin and under its auspices he pioneered the history workshops which made an