This is a collection of some of Miliband's best essays spread over nearly 20 years. It covers a wide range, from the renowned exchange with Poulantzas on the nature of the capitalist state, to an assessment of Allende's Chile, to a critique of what has been the connection between class and the state in capitalist society. At the heels of Miliband's main concern over the years has been the relationship between class and state is one of 'partnership'. As such, it can be harmonious or tense, and indeed can be said to characterise socialist regimes as well as capitalist ones. This suggestive notion needs to be given a substantive rather than just a theoretical treatment. The trouble with Miliband's last book, I thought, was that it hovered between another recapitulation of general and sometimes discrepant statements, and a detailed analysis of the British political formation. In that sense it was a missed opportunity, and this book is no substitute really.

Politically, Miliband's long-standing independent Marxist socialism is well illustrated here. Again, his typical strengths are evident, whether in his sympathetic but severely critical analysis of pre-coup Chile, or in his (surely correct) observation that the British Labour Party has never been socialist, or even held the pragmatic allegiance of the working class as a whole. His conclusion from the latter point is that the seriousness of the current working class 'desertion' from Labour has been, Hobshaw-wise, exaggerated, and that the historic task of building a genuinely educative and independent socialist party in this country remains the only key to a distant future.

Miliband's middle way between what he terms revolutionary 'catastrophism' and reformist 'constitutionalism' is thus a principled one, and worthy of respect. There are many 'non-aligned' socialists who share his concerns, and it is certainly wrong to think that all active and realistic socialists have to be in the Party (whichever Party that may be thought to be). Nevertheless, the logic of Miliband's stance runs the risk of being either too Utopian or too pessimistic to offer much scope for effective interventions in current British political conditions. Similarly, whilst his independent Marxism is helpfully sensitive to the dangers of both ultra-leftism and reformism, he also seems to be caught uncertainly between the two. Perhaps a more productive approach is to question the moralism inherent in that increasingly abstract polarisation, rather than to continue to seek out an ideal — perhaps illusion — compromise. Ralph Miliband would possibly not disagree with that sentiment, but it is not clear to me that his considerable contribution to left thinking amounts to a theoretical or political position which is convincing enough in its own right to point the way forward.

Gregor McLennan
Both class and power can be placed into the dichotomies of structure and agency. The class system sets some of the parameters of "structure" within which individuals act, but it also creates some of the motivations and features of consciousness that constitute the agency of class actors. Power is exercised by states -- through military and police, through agencies and bureaucracies, through legislation; it is exercised by corporations and other large private organizations; and it is exercised by social movements and other groups within society. The two social factors are intertwined in at least three ways. First, a class system constitutes a set of social inequalities within which there are deep conflicts of interest.