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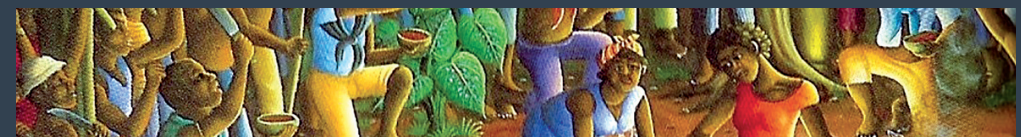
From our July 2023 symposium on the 'Contradictions of Liberalism' in history, we publish Antonio J. Pinto's examination of Haiti and the limits of the 'liberalism' of the French revolutionaries and other 'enlightened' thinkers when faced with a slave insurrection. He shows how the methods used by European 'liberal' powers to try to crush and then contain the rebellion set in train the process which has led resulted in the dysfunctional and impoverished Haitian state of today.

Finally, Mike Makin-Waite marks the centenary of the publication of György Lukács' most celebrated work, the collection of essays *History and Class Consciousness*. He shows that there is still much to be gained from reading the writings of the great Hungarian Marxist.

A salute to Willie Thompson – Francis King,
Mike Makin-Waite and Mike Mecham



The 'Miracle of Coalisland' – Fearghal Mac Bhloscaidh



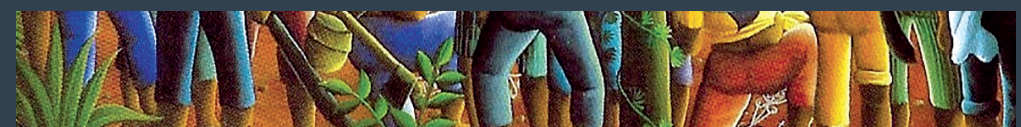
The West in front of the mirror – Antonio J. Pinto



We have not finished reading Lukács – Mike Makin-Waite



Reviews



Lawrence Wishart
Central Books Building, Freshwater Road,
Chadwell Heath, RM8 1RX
www.lwbooks.co.uk

ISBN 978-1913546-700



9 781913 546700



Socialist History 64

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London

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Editorial Enquiries: Francis King, School of History, University of East Anglia, Norwich, NR4 7TJ or francis@socialisthistorysociety.co.uk

Reviews Enquiries: Dianne Kirby, History Department, Trinity College Dublin, Dublin 2, D02 PN40, Ireland, or kirbydi@tcd.ie

Socialist History 64 was edited by Francis King

Advertisements

Write for information to Francis King, francis@socialisthistorysociety.co.uk

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Institutional subscriptions: contact francis@socialisthistorysociety.co.uk

Individual subscriptions: Free with membership of the SHS:

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ISSN 0969-4331

ISBN 978-1-913546-70-0

Cover image: 'Ceremony of Bois-Caiman', by Dieudonné Cedor (1925-2010)

Printed in Great Britain by Imprint Digital, Exeter

Socialist History is published twice a year, in spring and autumn, by:
Lawrence Wishart, Central Books Building, Freshwater Road, Chadwell
Heath RM8 1RX

Email: info@lwbooks.co.uk

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Notes on contributors

Francis King lectures mainly on Russian and Soviet history at the University of East Anglia and is co-director of UEA's 'East Centre for the Study of East-Central Europe and the Former Soviet Space'. He is editor of *Socialist History* and SHS treasurer.

Fearghal Mac Bhloscaidh originally from East Tyrone, is the author of *Fenian and Ribbonmen* (2011) and *Tyrone, 1921-25* (2014). He also co-edited *The Men Will Talk to Me* (2018) and has published articles on 'The Caledon Lockout' (ILWCH, Nov. 2020); 'Objective historians, irrational fenians and the bewildered herd' (*Irish Studies Review*, April 2020) and 'The Belfast Pogrom and the Interminable Irish Question' (*Studi Irlandesi*, 2022). In 2021 he co-edited *Bread not Profits* (2022) a collection of essays on working-class activism during the Irish Revolution. He currently lectures in History at St Mary's University College, Belfast.

Mike Makin-Waite is the author of *Communism and Democracy: history, debates and potentials* (Lawrence Wishart, 2017).

Dr Mike Mecham is Honorary Research Fellow at St Mary's University, London. He is author of *William Walker: Social Activist & Belfast Labourist, 1870-1918* (Umiskin Press, 2019). He is an active member of the Irish Labour History and on the EC of Society for the Study of Labour History. He is currently exploring a possible biography of A.L. Morton.

Antonio J. Pinto is a senior lecturer in Contemporary History, at the Department of Modern and Contemporary History of the University of Malaga. In his thesis, he explored the impact of the Haitian slave revolution on Spanish Santo Domingo. More recently he has focused on the evolution of Haiti, and its interaction with the Dominican Republic. His other research line concerns the history of energy in industrial Europe in the nineteenth and twentieth century.

Editorial

End of an era?

Francis King

This issue of *Socialist History* is the last to be published by Lawrence Wishart. From next year the journal will be published directly by its parent organisation, the Socialist History Society (SHS). While this decision has been prompted primarily by commercial pressures on our publisher, it also reflects processes of rapid and accelerating change in the world of historical journals overall. How we deal with these processes will shape the longer-term future of *Socialist History*, of the SHS itself, and of its open and pluralistic approach to socialist history.

The transformation of the Communist Party History Group into the SHS in 1992 was not simply a name-change necessitated by the self-destruction of the Communist Party of Great Britain. It represented a genuine desire to broaden both the appeal and the intellectual basis of its activity, and a belief that socialist historical inquiry is more fruitful and stimulating if it reflects a range of viewpoints. The desire to attract a more diverse set of contributions was one of the main stimuli for Willie Thompson, as *Socialist History*'s founding editor, to seek to professionalise its appearance and production standards by partnering with Pluto Press to launch it in 1993. This approach proved successful, and so the society continued to work in partnership with progressive and labour movement publishers: in 1998 the journal was taken on by Rivers Oram, and from 2015 to the present we have been published by Lawrence Wishart.

Over that period, and under successive editors, *Socialist History* has increasingly taken on the appearance and format of a modern academic-style journal. At the same time, we have tried to ensure that it is written in plain language, avoiding jargon and some of the worst excesses of some 'academic' writing. In general, the feedback we get from our readers suggests we have succeeded in this aim. Over the past three decades, we have published some excellent articles on a very wide range of topics, including many by first-time authors. However, there have been other changes during this time which present growing challenges to the entire

project of producing a journal like ours, printed on paper and mailed to subscribers.

The most important fact about *Socialist History* is that it is the journal of the SHS. It is produced first and foremost for its members, who receive it in the post as they have done since 1993. Without that relationship with the SHS, there would be little reason for this journal to exist. But both the publishing landscape, and the pressures on our authors, are radically different from what they were thirty years ago. Most historical journals now exist mainly online, and many no longer publish paper copies at all. Some are freely accessible to anyone with an internet connection, but most are hidden behind a 'paywall', available to subscribers only. Their readers, mostly within the academic sector, access their content via accounts held by public or academic libraries, and for the most part download and read individual articles rather than entire journals.¹ This is radically different from the position when journals were all physical paper artefacts. Nowadays, only the most specialist online journals can be said to have a 'readership' as such. Meanwhile, scholars and researchers working (or seeking work) in the higher education system – like most of our contributors – are under intense and increasing pressure to ensure their output is widely disseminated and available. Necessarily, at the very minimum, this involves online publication.

It has not been easy for *Socialist History* to adapt to this new landscape. Both the journal and its publishers have lacked the cost advantages enjoyed by the large commercial academic behemoths when it comes to making material available online, and it has only been in the last eight years that we have even begun to have a web presence. In this respect we have lagged far behind comparable publications.

As most readers will know, the SHS, as well as producing this journal, also publishes a series of historical pamphlets in the series 'Occasional Publications'. In this it has followed the practice first established by the Communist Party History Group in the 1970s, when, alongside the pamphlet series 'Our History' it began publishing *Our History Journal*. But this practice is not set in stone, and it is likely that the SHS will undertake a review of its entire publishing operation to see how far it matches the society and its resources as they are today. In the meantime, *Socialist History* carries on, and members and subscribers will be kept informed of our plans.

This issue

The first feature in this issue is a tribute to the life and work of Willie Thompson, our founder-editor, who died aged eighty-four in June this

year. In his introductory remarks, Mike Makin-Waite presents Willie's life and work, not least his many years of service to the Communist Party History Group, the SHS and *Socialist History* in a wide variety of roles. There are also assessments of some of his most important writings, and excerpts from a previously unpublished interview.

Northern Ireland's industrial history in the 1920s is the topic of Fearghal Mac Bhloscaidh's study of the 'Coalisland miracle', a mine which was supposed to fuel the Unionist province's transformation into an industrial powerhouse. As Mac Bhloscaidh shows, the venture was troubled from the outset and never lived up to its sponsors' expectations. The class struggles which erupted around the mine in the mid-1920s appeared to show, for a brief time, the possibilities of workers' cooperation across the sectarian divide. But the Unionist elite's tactics of divide and rule proved successful in buying off much of the Protestant section of the workforce.

In July this year, we were pleased to co-sponsor a day symposium on the 'Contradictions of Liberalism' in history, at which contributions on the Americas featured prominently. We include one of the papers from that symposium, in which Antonio J. Pinto looks at the case of Haiti and the limits of the 'liberalism' of the French revolutionaries and other 'enlightened' thinkers when faced with a slave insurrection. He shows how the methods used by European 'liberal' powers to try to crush and then contain the rebellion set in train the process which has led resulted in the dysfunctional and impoverished Haitian state of today.

Finally, Mike Makin-Waite marks the centenary of the publication of György Lukács' most celebrated work, the collection of essays *History and Class Consciousness*, in an extended review article considering his work and two recent analyses of Lukács. One hundred years on, he concludes, there is still much to be gained from reading the writings of the great Hungarian Marxist.

Notes

- 1 Anyone curious about the economics of the far-from-transparent and often frankly corrupt world of commercial academic publishing should watch 'Paywall: The Business of Scholarship' on <https://paywallthemovie.com/>

A salute to Willie Thompson

Comments on some of the work of this journal's founding editor

Francis King (FK), Mike Makin-Waite (MMW) and Mike Mecham (MM)

A lifetime of commitment

Willie Thompson's death in June 2023 was first and foremost a painful loss to his partner Myra, his son Alan and his wider family and networks of personal friends. Beyond those intimate circles, many people in socialist, green, and progressive organisations and those concerned with labour movement history have felt his passing: there have been many tributes to his work as a teacher, a radical activist and as a historian.

Willie was born in Edinburgh in 1939 and then brought up on Shetland (maintaining a strong interest and close links to the Islands for the rest of his life). In 1958, he attended the University of Aberdeen, reading history, becoming chair of the university's Socialist Society, signing up for the Labour Party Young Socialists (and writing letters 'home' to *The Shetland Times* about the publication of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, which caused consternation among the Islands' clergymen).

On graduation, he moved to Glasgow, trained as a teacher, and worked in the city's schools for three years. He also joined the Young Communist League and the Communist Party of Great Britain, of which he remained a member until its dissolution.

In 1969, he gained his PhD in economic history from the University of Strathclyde with a thesis (anticipating today's decolonisation agenda) on *Commercial Connections between Glasgow and Africa 1870-1900*. Following a short spell in Wigan, working in further education (and editing the short-lived CPGB bulletin *Wigan Red*), Willie returned to Glasgow in 1971 and took up a post at the newly established College of Technology, continuing there as the institution became Glasgow Polytechnic and then Glasgow Caledonian University, latterly becoming Professor of Contemporary History.

Amongst many other contributions during three decades as a communist, Willie acted as the Party's Scottish student organiser; edited *Scottish Marxist*; was a key member of the Communist Party History Group; and served on the editorial committee of *Marxism Today*, whilst also often taking on local organisational tasks. After leaving Glasgow Caledonian in 2001, he moved to northeast England, becoming there an active member of the Green Party – in which he characteristically gave much encouragement and consistent support to younger activists.

This piece for *Socialist History* comes nowhere near being a comprehensive or considered account of Willie's published work, but offers some reflections on a few of his books which we have been re-reading in recent weeks.¹ Nevertheless, even this short survey indicates the range, variety and value of his published legacy – and we were pleased to be reminded of what Francis describes here as Willie's 'characteristically accessible style, laced where appropriate with a dry wit'. Though we won't experience again the twinkling smile that often accompanied his observations and insights, delivered to the end of his days with a recognisably Shetland twang, Willie Thompson's writings are to be promoted as a major resource for progressive people in these weird and dangerous times.

'Historical memory, analysis and understanding are essential'

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the 'fall' of the Berlin Wall and the ascendancy of neo-liberal economics and politics, the early 1990s were a disorientating time for many on the left. One small expression of this disorientation was the sequence of decisions which led in 1991 to the dissolution of the CPGB, to establish the short-lived Democratic Left organisation.²

Willie Thompson supported these decisions – though he subsequently expressed mixed feelings about them and wondered whether dissolving 'the Party' had been a premature and mistaken move, even whilst 'moving on' to play a central role in helping to establish and develop Sunderland's branch of the Green Party.

He did, however, consistently maintain that finding ways to confirm, sustain and extend the tradition of the Communist Party History Group was important and worthwhile. Rather than declining as the CPGB headed towards its final congress, the history group was *increasing* its output of publications and attracting new members. Active members saw it as ever more urgent that we should make sense of 'our history' and critically evaluate the socialist and communist political traditions, together with other radical and progressive movements.

Responding to this energy and potential, whilst recognising that it came from ‘the experience of defeat’, Willie became one of the clearest voices proposing that the history group continue, and that it reconstitute itself as the self-standing Socialist History Society, with membership becoming open to all interested persons, regardless of party affiliation, and ‘with a remit ... to promote historical discussion and research on the left’.³

Not everyone was convinced that the plan would succeed: in a 1991 telephone conversation with Willie, Eric Hobsbawm suggested that another option would be for the CP History Group to merge with the Society for the Study of Labour History – an entirely positive proposal, though Hobsbawm soon accepted that there was space at that time for both organisations (and others concerned with labour movement and radical history), and was pleased to serve as the Socialist History Society’s Honorary President.

Always ready to put in the work which followed on from proposals he had advanced, Willie’s discussions with the radical publishers Pluto Press led to them publishing the first issue of *Socialist History* in summer 1993. Willie was the central person in the initially small editorial team, with David Parker and I providing some input and support. He introduced the journal as focussing ‘upon socialist history in both senses of the term, namely the history of the specifically socialist (as distinct from the broader labour) movement ... and on history produced from a socialist perspective but according to the highest standards of evidence and analysis’.⁴ Willie himself contributed a range of articles and reviews to the journal, including a series of ‘profiles in history’ on figures including Samuel Pepys, Edward Gibbon and Maximilien Robespierre.

In 1998, Willie continued as the key member of the significantly enlarged editorial team as, from issue 13, the journal struck a new relationship with Rivers Oram publishers. In 2000, he stepped back from the editor’s role, though continuing as an active and committed member of the editorial team until overtaken by the health issues that led to his death.

With *Socialist History* now at another turning point in terms of our publishing arrangements, and with a track record of publishing high-quality material across sixty-four issues over the last thirty years, Willie’s observation in his survey of the Communist Party History Group tradition remains as relevant as ever: ‘these are indeed challenging times around the globe and far from being the most hopeful. They are the contemporary culmination of processes which stretch back over decades and centuries. If the present realities are to be effectively faced and comprehended, historical memory, analysis and understanding are essential’.⁵

(MMW)

Preserving the legacy of the people's historian

Writing in the collection *Rebels and their Causes* (London, 1978), Eric Hobsbawm was clear that the Historians' Group of the Communist Party 'played a major part in the development of Marxist historiography in this country'. Willie Thompson added that an important impetus for its formation was A.L. Morton's 1938 volume, *A People's History of England*, a book still in print and widely translated. Morton, though not an academic, became the group's chair and, to quote Willie Thompson, its 'fountainhead'. His close interest and admiration surfaced again in Willie's contribution to a CP History Group pamphlet to mark the bicentenary of the 1688 'Glorious Revolution' which Morton had been working on before his death – and again in 2005 in a paper on Morton to a Socialist History Society conference celebrating Bill Moore.⁶ Despite this support, Morton continued to be a generally neglected figure after his death in 1987. A recent exception was a substantial article by Christian Høgsbjerg assessing Morton's book and its wider context.⁷ Though some of Morton's extensive journalism is online and his small collection of other books can still be found, an important starting point for any new study of his life and work would have to be *Rebels and their Causes* together with another essential collection, *History and the Imagination: Selected writings of A.L. Morton* (London, 1990): Willie was closely involved with both volumes, either as co-editor or contributor.

Christopher Hill observes in *History and the Imagination* that Morton's *People's History* filled what was largely a void in Marxist work on English history, adding that it was 'a foretaste and one of the best examples of history from below'. Willie described Morton's focus on 'the historical nature of class struggle throughout British history'.

The great strength of Thompson and Margot Heinemann's collection, and its contribution to Morton's legacy, is that it presents the wider and prolific Morton. Not simply the 'peoples' historian' but an outstanding literary critic, who wrote for T.S. Eliot's *Criterion* magazine, and who was able to blend the two fields together 'as social struggle and the imaginative expression and understanding of that struggle'. The collection drew on Morton's extensive writing to select key texts that would encompass the 'full sweep' of his interests and his intellectual contribution to radical thinking – no mean feat given the extent of his output. The material included essays, articles and reviews covering radical political history, literature, and music, together with a selection of Morton's poetry. They are supported by two appreciations by Hill and Raphael

Samuel. The essays ranged from the linkage between the French revolutionaries and English democrats, a personal memoir of his friend, the renowned folklorist and singer A.L. (Bert) Lloyd, to literary figures such as Eliot and E.M. Forster, and radicals such as John Ruskin and William Morris. For Thompson and Heinemann, even towards the end of his life, the clarity of Morton's thought never dimmed. He was a master of popularising historical and literary journalism, producing masterpieces of compression: a man, according to Christopher Hill, 'incapable of writing badly'.

Rebels and their Causes had been published a decade earlier to honour Morton on his seventy-fifth birthday. It was, said its editor Maurice Cornforth, a collection of historical and literary essays written not only by friends, such as Hobsbawm and Hill, but also colleagues and admirers. One of those was Willie, who was testimony to Cornforth's assertion that: 'There is no British Marxist today, young or old, who does not owe a debt to Leslie Morton's works'. While Thompson performed the crucial task of compiling the index, he also celebrated Morton's legacy by contributing an essay building on the tenets of Morton's research on the Ranters and other radicals of the English civil war period. Traditional historiography, said Thompson, had buried the 'naïve communism' of these groups who within the prevailing religious framework had developed a 'vision of social equality and property redistribution'. Thompson's own focus was also on a period of popular resistance, in seventeenth century Scotland. Picking up Morton's point about the Ranters, that historians failed to see the underlying political and class implications, Thompson argues that the Scottish revolt can be seen as a bridge between the popular movements of the Middle Ages and the emergence of modern revolutionary processes.

The framework was also a religious one and centred on the independence of the Scottish Presbyterian Church (the 'kirk'). The resisters were 'Covenanters' who pledged to resist the Stuart regime's attempt to impose new forms of church governance and worship, overriding the traditional primacy of the Scottish leadership. Greed and power grabbing were also involved. Thompson notes that the kirk had a 'deep penetration among the peasantry' and the leadership of the resisters became increasingly 'plebian'. As Stuart repression became more violent and widespread, resistance shifted from civil disobedience to armed struggle. Its most militant and uncompromising wing were the 'Cameronians', named after their founding leader Richard Cameron. In a tight narrative, Thompson re-interprets the historical record in terms of class, to offer a better understanding of

the Cameronians who had been portrayed either as saintly Calvinists or bigoted brigands. For him, 'the uncompromising stand of poor men and women in the face of arbitrary and ferocious state power deserves to be respected'.

While these two books represent a fraction of his output, they remain important contributions to preserving the legacy of A.L. Morton and preparing for an appropriate time to lift him out of relative obscurity. It would be a fitting tribute to Willie Thompson if that were to happen.

(MM)

The Good Old Cause: the author's own reflections

At the end of the 1980s, Willie Thompson responded to the likelihood that the CPGB would dissolve by working on what became the first one-volume assessment of the party's entire history. *The Good Old Cause: British communism 1920-1991* (London, 1992) covered the seventy-odd years from 'origins and development' to 'prostration', combining succinct summaries of key moments and debates with Willie's personal assessments of often controversial issues: reviewers in both the *Morning Star* and the Trotskyist journal *Revolutionary History* were united in being most unimpressed (if for divergent reasons).⁸

For many younger historians who saw British communism as a political movement and tradition which deserved to be studied and understood, however, the book became a key reference point even as, over subsequent years, a large body of relevant documentation became accessible for the first time with the opening of the Moscow archives.

In 2002, ten years after its publication, Willie spoke about his book in an interview carried out for *Socialist History* but not published at the time.⁹

Willie Thompson (WT): It's full of faults. If I were writing it now, even without what we have learned in the interim, I would write it very differently. Of course, one of the problems was that I only had 100,000 words, and it all had to be compressed in.

I am not saying that I reject it. It was a decent enough history on the basis of what was at that time available. I didn't use the party records, and it is very deficient in that respect. I used published material, of which I have quite a large collection of my own, but I didn't use the party archives.¹⁰ They hadn't been organised at that point and ... it was a sensitive time ... I was writing when the party still existed.

Mike Makin-Waite (MWW): Would it therefore be worth writing another one-volume history of the party?

WT: I would like to. I would like it to be bigger. All the subsequent ones which have been published to date have been terrible, actually.

MMW: What is there that's worth saying about the history of the CPGB that you didn't say in *The Good Old Cause*?

WT: I would like to give it a more considered analysis. I would like to deal with the differences between different parts of the country. I would like to be able to substantiate what I was saying from the party archives.

MMW: And there are aspects of the party's history which haven't yet had any significant treatment – the CPGB's representation and involvement in local government, for example ...

WT: Yes, that would be very interesting. And the whole gender dimension still awaits a full treatment.

MMW: But the big story from your book is that the CPGB was always caught, stymied, trapped, in this mismatch between having revolutionary, transformative aspirations and ...

WT: ... the reality of the situation, of being in a political culture inimical to its ambitions ... I wouldn't want to change that general conclusion ...

MMW: But the micro-stories, of mainly good people trying to do mainly good things and good things coming out of that ...?

WT: Yes, there are many of those stories still to be told.

MMW: There's an interesting debate taking place now about the degree to which the CPGB was shaped by being a section of the Communist International. What's your view about the extent to which the party had genuine domestic roots in British political culture?

WT: Well, after the 'Class Against Class' period at the end of the 1920s, the CPGB was always running to catch up with where it had been in this respect.

MMW: Are you saying that this ‘sectarian’ phase in the party’s history was determined by impositions from Moscow?

WT: Well, in his recent excellent book, Matt Worley demonstrates pretty clearly that in the end the orders came from Moscow, but that there was a powerful pressure from within the British party in the same direction ... Moscow was pushing at an open door.¹¹

There’s the example of the Independent Labour Party to consider on this. The ILP seems to suggest that a party that was (semi-) detached from Labour but at the same time didn’t have the connections that the CPGB had couldn’t survive. On the other hand, the ILP was very badly led, so that argument isn’t decisive.

Looking at it conceptually, there seems to have been so many opportunities that a left-wing party without the communists’ disadvantages could have made use of in order to establish itself as a real force in British politics. But nowhere do you find an example of that. You do not find a really revolutionary party unconnected to the communist movement which is successful in advanced capitalism.

Remember, too, that the CPGB’s liabilities were also its assets. The Soviet connection damned it, in the Cold War, but on the other hand it was the Soviet connection which had enabled it to increase to about 60,000 members during the Second World War.

MMW: And in the 1930s, the Soviet connection had been crucial in attracting the cadre that shaped the party throughout most of the rest of its existence.

WT: It’s interesting, counter-factually, to imagine something that certainly might have been a possibility – that the Stalin revolution hadn’t happened, that the Bukharinite agenda had won out and the Soviet Union had reverted openly to capitalism sometime in the early 1930s.¹² We would have had an uneven and fragmented left, adapting to local conditions ... now, of course, we have a much greater problem, in that all varieties of socialism are discredited ...

History as a progressive science: countering the excesses of postmodernism

In *What Happened to History?* (London, 2000) and *Postmodernism and History* (Basingstoke, 2004), Willie Thompson explained the ‘postmodern

turn' in history, and offered assessment and critique. The two books overlap a little in terms of themes and material, but they are organised differently, and both are well worth revisiting.

The first of his specifically historiographical books begins with Thompson's account of how his own theoretical standpoint developed, and a clear statement that 'verifiable knowledge is possible, though mostly provisional and always incomplete'. He then provides an account of 'historiographical evolution' in Europe and the United States up to the 1960s, before sketching the transformations which began in that decade, and the 'conceptual conflicts of the 1980s and 1990s'. He highlights the work of E.P. Thompson (no relation), 'which was to set the trend with which we are concerned and in due course to revolutionise English-speaking historiography'.

This is not to say that E.P. Thompson himself promoted postmodernist approaches. What happened was that his concern in *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963/1968) with 'the losers as well as the winners in the historical process', and his conviction that these 'losers' had 'historical validity in their own right', was 'the initial step in putting a new conception of social history at the centre of historiographical debate'. This new conception generated much of great value – but then the 'near-total defeat' of the left resulting from the rise of neo-liberalism, the collapse of communism and the hollowing of social-democracy 'encouraged certain courses which are ... largely though not altogether misconceived in their approach to historiography'.

The 1980s saw 'a marked turn ... from social history to cultural and intellectual history, with society treated as "social text"'. Taken together with the significant influence of poststructuralism, this laid the basis for postmodernist sensibilities. Willie noted that 'the great majority of post-structuralists/postmodernists would regard themselves as being on the left in some sense of that overworked term', and 'as standing in opposition to the powers-that-be': postmodernists were certainly seen 'by the political and academic right wing ... as subverters of Western values and Western culture'.

But postmodernist approaches made space for the voices of 'previously marginalised and subordinated subjects' in a particular way, by promoting 'theories which deny the validity of an accepted "universal" definition of reality, which show how the dominant ideology has constructed "the Other" and insist upon the equivalent appropriateness of ways of seeing and acting deriving from the margins'.

Such relativising theories reflected the left's defeat: many 'purportedly radical' writers and commentators accepted the triumph of 'global

capitalism ... as permanent and irreversible, at least over foreseeable time horizons'. This view was sometimes accompanied by the comforting delusion that 'by deconstructing categories and concepts', one was doing all that was possible to confront the structures of power in the academy or in society. Furthermore, whatever the progressive intentions of many postmodernists of the 1980s and 1990s, the idea that there is an intrinsic validity in the voicing of subjectively perceived 'truths' has also proved to be extremely productive for the populist right: as well as being 'a powerful corrective to teleological complacency ... it can also be an invitation to relativism, rejection of interpretative truth and a perspective on the historical past which denies it any coherence or evolutionary direction whatever, let alone one of improvement'.

Willie positioned shifting intellectual trends within a materially grounded account of the institutions in which historiographical production takes place: the changing world of universities, archives, journals and publishers. This means that he avoided what so many have done – generating 'historical theory ... in isolation from what most historians have actually been doing'. Instead, his explorations of issues to do with 'reality, representation, truth and narrative', and questions to do with 'grand narrative' ('does history have a meaning? is history going somewhere?') are both stimulating, peppered with wry and witty observations, and based on the understanding that 'the situation of historiography in the present has itself to be explained historically if it is to be meaningfully understood'.

His overall judgement is that however valid some of the themes which postmodernists promoted, such as pointing out that 'the degree to which historians have unthinkingly internalised a model of progress based exclusively upon the experience of Western Europe and North America' is a problem, 'none of those perceptions necessitates the insubstantial theoretical structure in which the postmodern sensibility has embedded them'.

Willie Thompson saw *What Happened to History?* as 'the best thing' he had written up that point, a book 'more or less just exactly as I want to be', whereas he was 'only too conscious of gaps, shortcomings and deficiencies' in his earlier publications.¹³ He had 'wanted to provide a response, a contribution to the fight against ... ultra postmodernists ... who were threatening the destruction of history in the same way that they had destroyed literary studies'. Nevertheless, he developed his thinking in the year or so after the book's publication, distinguishing more clearly between postmodernism and poststructuralism, which are 'not the same thing: a lot of people who are sailing under the banner of postmodernism have made not only useful contributions to historical knowledge, but

have also advanced some valid methodological arguments ... the term postmodernism is a fashionable term which some people have adopted, whereas I think that all they are really doing is extending the bounds of historical investigation in the same way that E.P. Thompson did with *The Making of the English Working Class*'.

Willie's recognition that 'many people who would be termed postmodernist are not poststructuralist' made him hopeful that what was valid in their approaches would 'be assimilated into mainstream history', and this perspective shaped his next book.¹⁴ *Postmodernism and History*, commissioned as part of a Palgrave MacMillan series on theory and history, is for the most part arranged thematically, clarifying the concept of postmodernism; interrogating 'debates' about 'the status of historical evidence'; and considering issues to do with representation, narrative and relativism. Alongside substantial considerations on theorists including Hayden White and Keith Jenkins, Thompson makes space for a chapter on Michel Foucault, who 'deserves a separate discussion' because of his 'enormous' impact on social criticism, though Thompson dryly concludes that Foucault's 'reputation owes a great deal more to his rhetoric and promotion as an intellectual superstar than to the substance of his writings – even if these are not wholly negligible'.

Thompson carefully notes a range of 'new and valid insights into society and culture' which 'have expanded the scope of historical understanding'. These 'include paying attention not only to what is said in the record, but the manner and form in which it is said and also the silences ... the identification of instances of previously unrecognised permeation of social consciousness by discriminatory and exclusionary practices; identification of the exercise of coercive power in what has been assumed to be benign relationships', and an emphasis on 'the difficulty of reaching, from the surviving evidence, the consciousness of the denizens of past centuries (possibly even of past decades)'.

Nevertheless, his concluding overall judgements are severe: 'historiographical postmodernism ... rests upon a theoretical basis which is irredeemably flawed. Its foundation is a presumption which is not merely counter-intuitive but preposterous, namely that language is constitutive of reality, not the other way round. The contrary presumption, that language is purely a reflection of material reality, is also severely flawed, if not quite so drastically. Rather there is, in traditional Marxist terminology, a dialectic between them – they work to constitute each other, and that is how historical change and development occurs, but non-linguistic reality is the primary term of the relationship'.

This is just one of the many succinct, sometimes aphoristic, programmatic statements which shape the *Postmodernism and History*. Concluding one chapter in positive tones, Willie reiterated that ‘history as a progressive science – and I see no reason for not brazenly making this claim – is all about correcting the errors of its past practitioners and constantly refining their concepts and their constructed representations – on occasion overthrowing them, but more often improving them and bringing the past into sharper focus rather than insisting that it must always remain blurry if not invisible’.

(MMW)

Developing a rich tradition

Willie Thompson’s final book, *Work, Sex and Power: The forces which shaped our history* (London, 2015) represents the culmination of his career as a historian. Written in his characteristically accessible style, laced where appropriate with a dry wit, it reflects the remarkable breadth of his interests and knowledge. It covers a much greater timespan than his earlier works: the entire history of *Homo sapiens sapiens* in fact, but with particular emphasis on the last 10,000 years.¹⁵ This sort of (very) *longue durée* history is particularly suited to Marxist and Marx-influenced analytical frameworks. It permits an examination of underlying trends and directions of development without getting too bogged down in the minutiae of specific events. In this Thompson is following a rich tradition, starting with Friedrich Engels’ *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884), and represented in the mid-twentieth century by such works as V. Gordon Childe’s *What Happened in History?* (1941) or A.L. Morton’s *A People’s History of England* (1938). A basic premise of *Work, Sex and Power* – that the development of agriculture from the dawn of the Neolithic period allowed the production of the surplus required for the emergence of class society – will be familiar to anyone versed in the ‘materialist conception of history’.

However, the classic Marxist studies of primitive society have been largely superseded by subsequent work and discoveries, not least in archaeology and anthropology. Thompson therefore draws far more extensively on the work of more recent scholars such as David Graeber, Michael Mann, Perry Anderson, Ellen Meiksins Wood and others in order, as he puts it, to ‘outline and assess’ their conclusions ‘within the context and interpretation of historical materialism’ (p3). The title indicates the three main areas of human relations in which the inequalities of

class society have played out over the centuries, and work, sex, and power are the threads running through Thompson's exploration of various historical themes.

His 'key propositions' on work and power are that for at least the last 7000 years 'human history has been principally the history of forced labour in multiple forms' (p4), while 'the most significant of power relations is the means by which elite groups [...] forcefully acquire a greater or lesser part of the product of basic producers' (p5). These observations are not startling; very similar points were made by Engels back in 1884. However, Thompson is not only building on a much greater corpus of work – anthropology was in its infancy in Engels' days – but also on the accumulated experience of modern workers', socialist, and anti-imperialist attempts to resist the power of the exploiting classes, as well as a growing awareness of the ecological consequences of human activity.

This more recent information necessarily shakes confidence in some of the certainties underpinning earlier Marxist historiography. When Karl Kautsky posed the alternative 'socialism or barbarism' in 1892 he surely had no doubt that barbarism was avoidable and socialism would prevent it.¹⁶ Thompson, who by 2015 had embraced Green politics, seems less certain. After all, Marxist and Green critiques of capitalist modernity are fundamentally different. Marxism traditionally envisages that the productive potential created by capitalism should be socialised and controlled to work for the benefit of all. Green critiques, in contrast, stress the destruction which that productive potential necessarily inflicts on the biosphere. Reflecting this, he strips the concept of 'progress' of any *inherently* desirable connotations (p6). While the book's peroration is a call to action that seeks to combine 'the emancipatory agenda of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries' with 'the effort to save the human world' from environmental disaster (p250), elsewhere the likely effects of climate change are presented in an altogether more fatalistic light, as 'likely to kill billions and fit the survivors to re-experience all the horrors of pre-modern living' (p215).

But even if the political message is less certain, the historical analysis remains sure-footed. After a brief survey of humanity's evolutionary pre-history and dispersal from Africa, Thompson examines the origins of social differentiation in the Neolithic agricultural revolution of around 10,000 years ago. As he puts it, 'a settled lifestyle means stuff can be stored' (p32). A surplus in the hands of some permits the emergence of indebtedness and relations of obligation as a constant factor – and so the process develops.

Willie had long been interested in the development of salvation-cult religions, on which topic he gave a fascinating and very detailed talk to the Socialist History Society over two decades ago. He makes good use of this research in his book, examining first the emergence of salvation religions in general, and then the rise of monotheism and its consequences – which in terms of extracting work, controlling sex and exercising power have been very considerable. While he does not doubt the sincerity of the early Christians' convictions, he stresses the material interests driving the forcible conversion of 'everyone within reach' (p138) once their cult became the Roman state religion, and similar considerations applied in the later spread of Islam.

The treatment of sex in the book is less well integrated into the overall narrative than that of work and power, particularly if we consider that, in the final analysis, the entire history of humanity is the history of the species' reproduction. A separate chapter, 'Gender Differentiation, Sex and Kindred' considers a very wide range of questions, from reproductive anatomy to longevity, religion, recreational and non-reproductive sexual activity, women's subjugation, same-sex attraction, kinship patterns etc. from antiquity to the present day. The treatment of each theme is necessarily very cursory. However, unlike much of the most recent discourse around sex and gender, Thompson's approach remains impeccably materialist, and does not lose sight of the most important aspect of the question – its essential biological function in perpetuating the species.

The exercise of power is necessarily closely related to status, hierarchy and, where expedient, the use of coercion and violence. Thompson looks at the history and development of the different social gradations and hierarchies which coalesced into forms of state power with the beginnings of human settlement. Here, as elsewhere, his vision is global, as he cites examples from the Middle East, China, India and elsewhere. State violence and coercion has to be organised, which is where the history of armies and other military formations comes in, and it needs to be codified and justified, which gives rise to laws, punishments and officially approved moral and ethical codes to determine who is to be punished, how, and on what pretext. A noteworthy – and recent – development is the almost universal rejection in principle of physical torture as an appropriate judicial penalty. The corollary of this has been a massive expansion in the use of imprisonment – a punishment mainly reserved for high-status offenders in earlier epochs.

The latter part of the book deals mainly with phenomena of more recent times – nationalism, imperialism, mass migration, capitalism and

its consequences, and movements of resistance to the existing order. Thompson notes that in Eurasia from at least the time of the Pharaohs, empire in one form or another had been ‘the default political system embracing most of the agriculturally settled populations of this area’ (p162). The question then arises: why did some of the ‘fragmented and mutually quarrelling’ successor states to the Western Roman Empire go on to conquer all the great empires of the rest of the globe? (p175) In this context, he considers the massive population movements of the past 500 years, the rise of capitalism, and the numerous contingent factors which ensured that the first industrial revolution took place in Britain, rather than, for example, China or India.

Marxist or Marx-inspired accounts of *longue durée* history would traditionally end on some hopeful note for the future, noting the rise of the socialist or communist movements, the unquashable tendency of the oppressed to resist or even just the fact that the struggle continues. Thompson’s final chapters look at the development of social critique and subsequently socialist and communist politics. But, from his standpoint in 2015, with state socialism either in ruins or providing ideological cover for the most rapacious capitalist development, and reformist ‘socialism’ offering little tangible change, Thompson ruefully concludes that ‘the foundations of both were rotten’ (p239). Moreover, although he fully recognises the ecological catastrophe facing humanity, his faith in the capacity of politics to deal with the problem seems to have been severely shaken. As Thompson observes:

So far as it is possible to speak about a fundamental human project across the millennia, that project could be defined as the struggle to escape from nature or to substitute culture for nature, to combat the natural afflictions that characterised the existence of our hominin ancestors, *H. sapiens* and its predecessors – cold, wet, unreliable food source, parasites, predators, early death. Every solution led on to further ambitions and every solution brought with it unforeseen problems (p209).

In former times, there would have been little doubt among Marxists that the benefits of such a project outweighed the costs, and that it should be developed still further, under popular democratic control, for the good of all. In the light of experience, Thompson can clearly see the intrinsic difficulties of the project – but what other project can a species of conscious social animal possibly have?

(FK)

Notes

- 1 In addition to those we refer to here, Willie Thompson's publications include *The UCS Work-In* (co-written with Finlay Hart), London, 1972; *The Long Death of British Labourism: Interpreting a political culture*, London, 1993; *The Left In History: Revolution and reform in twentieth-century politics*, London, 1997; *The Communist Movement since 1945*, Oxford, 1997; *Global Expansion: Britain and its empire, 1870-1914*, London, 1999; *Ideologies in the Age of Extremes: Liberalism, conservatism, communism, fascism, 1914-1991*, London, 2011; *Out of the Burning House: Political socialization in the age of affluence* (co-written with Sandy Hobbs), Cambridge, 2011; and many articles for academic journals and progressive publications, ranging from *Scottish Labour History*, *North East History* (which Willie edited for several years), *History Workshop* and *Contemporary Record* to *New Left Review* and *Marxism Today*.
- 2 The UK-wide Democratic Left dissolved into the 'New Politics Network' in 1998, which was in turn superseded by ever-more liberal outfits. Democratic Left's Scottish component separated off and, between 2002 and 2016, published a magazine, *Perspectives*, to which Willie Thompson contributed a range of substantial pieces. DLS continues as a non-party political network: <https://www.democratic-left.scot/>
- 3 Willie Thompson, Editorial, *Socialist History*, issue 1, Pluto Press, summer 1993.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Willie Thompson, 'From Communist Party Historians' Group to Socialist History Society, 1946-2017', *History Workshop*, April 2017: <https://www.historyworkshop.org.uk/communism-socialism/from-communist-party-historians-group-to-socialist-history-society-1946-2017/>
- 6 A.L. Morton, *How Glorious Was the Revolution? (With a preface by Christopher Hill and a section on Scotland by Willie Thompson)*, Our History Pamphlet 79, Communist Party History Group, London, July 1988. Thompson's 8 October 2005 talk at the Working Class Movement Library in Salford is referred to in footnote 8 of Christian Høgsbjerg, 'A.L. Morton and the Poetics of People's History', *Socialist History*, 58, (2020).
- 7 Høgsbjerg, *ibid.*
- 8 John Haylett, 'Left waiting for a full and frank history of the Communist Party', *Morning Star*, 13 July 1992; Al Richardson, review, *Revolutionary History*, Spring 1994.
- 9 Unpublished notes by Mike Makin-Waite on an interview with Willie Thompson, Sunderland, 6 November 2002.
- 10 Many of the relevant publications and papers of 'Willie Thompson, professor, historian and Communist Party activist' are now held by the Archive Centre of Glasgow Caledonian University.

- 11 Matthew Worley, *Class Against Class: The Communist Party in Britain between the wars*, London, 2002.
- 12 The leading Russian revolutionary Nikolai Bukharin had argued in the late 1920s that accommodating to the needs of the countryside was essential to Bolshevik survival, given that the Soviet Union was still an overwhelmingly peasant country. He proposed extending and developing Lenin's New Economic Policy with the aim of increasing agricultural productivity, so that resulting surpluses could resource 'a rising curve' of steady industrialisation. As well as food for urban workers, a prosperous peasantry, 'enriching itself', would supply cotton, wool, and leather as raw materials for industry. Purchasing power in the countryside would create a growing market for manufactured goods, and both the private and state sectors could 'grow into socialism' in mutually beneficial conditions of market relations and civil peace. A victim of Stalin's terror, Bukharin was arrested in 1937, subjected to a show trial, and executed in 1938.
- 13 Quotes in this paragraph are from MMW's notes on an interview, 2002.
- 14 MMW's notes on an interview.
- 15 Thompson notes, not without irony, that *homo sapiens sapiens*, the 'scientific' name for modern humans, can be translated as 'very wise guy' (p6).
- 16 Most famously, the phrase was used by Rosa Luxemburg in 1916, but it seems Kautsky used it first. See <https://climateandcapitalism.com/2014/10/22/origin-rosa-luxemburgs-slogan-socialism-barbarism/>

The ‘Miracle of Coalisland’

Class and sectarianism in the Tyrone Coalfield,
1922-26

Fearghal Mac Bhloscaidh

Abstract

This article uses the forgotten prospect of an industrial revolution in mid-Ulster to examine the nature of the Unionist administration and deploys ‘history from below’ to examine and understand the tensions and contradictions at the intersection between class and sectarianism. The analysis centres on the ‘Coalisland Miracle’, when Unionist insider, Sir Samuel Kelly, purchased a coal mine and various other local businesses in East Tyrone during the consolidation of James Craig’s Protestant Parliament. Ultimately, Unionist dreams of a new industrial revolution resembled fevered delusions as the new polity endured precarious finances and interminable economic decline. The article also analyses how complex issues of class and sectarianism played out on the ground when Ulster’s leading capitalist confronted a majority nationalist workforce in an area whose constitutional future appeared to hang in the balance, demonstrating how workers struggled to secure their meagre slice of the pie, while employers, managers and the state strove to defeat organised labour. An analysis of four labour disputes linked to Kelly’s scheme reveals how sectarianism worked in employment practices, a subject much talked about but seldom supported by hard evidence. The article concludes by examining an extraordinary lockout at the Tyrone Colliery itself and a subsequent and unprecedented display of working-class solidarity in 1926, when Protestant and Catholic workers united after the much-heralded Coalisland miracle turned out to be little more than pie in the sky.

Key words: loyalism, Ulster Unionism, trade unionism, partition, sectarianism, discrimination

I. Introduction

In January 1923, the *Northern Whig*, a Belfast Unionist daily, carried a piece entitled 'Ulster Coal for Ulster', in which 'Old Fogey' waxed lyrical about the potential of the Tyrone Coalfield, recently purchased by the millionaire coal importer, Sir Samuel Kelly. 'Although nibbled at for 200 years by the people of the locality, the Coalisland deposit had never been tested at a deep level ... The apparent resources of the field now owned by the firm are vast'. The piece looked forward to the enterprise 'entirely revolutionising the position as regards the fuel supply of the province. If reports speak truly, there is ample coal in this field to supply the ordinary needs of all Ulster for many years'.¹ Elsewhere *The Whig* mused that 'Tyrone bids fair to become the Staffordshire of Ulster, and Coalisland the most important manufacturing town, next to Belfast, in the Six Counties', due to 'the prospect opened out by the wonderful enterprise and energy of one man – an Ulsterman'.² Coal fever even gripped the not long-established Unionist government in Belfast. That April, James Craig's cabinet had 'no doubt that the whole economic situation in Ulster will be changed, and ... she will become ... the home of many new industries and will be in a position to give employment on a very large scale'.³

A devolved one-party Unionist administration, Northern Ireland, emerged from the Government of Ireland Act [GOIA] which represented 'not so much a sincere attempt to settle the Irish question as a sincere attempt to settle the Ulster question'.⁴ When Unionist politicians spoke of Ulster, they were not referring to the historic nine-county province or indeed to the truncated Six-Counties of Northern Ireland. As Andrew Horner, the Unionist MP for South Tyrone revealed in June 1914, Ulster was 'more a people than a place' and that 'imaginary boundaries between counties had nothing whatever to do with' the 'British settlers ... the forefathers of the Ulster Covenanters of today'.⁵ Yet, Tyrone was also the largest of the two majority-Catholic counties in Northern Ireland. The 'dreary steeples of Fermanagh and Tyrone' had created problems for British statesmen intent on partitioning Ireland since before the First World War, and Churchill ruefully noted that 'the integrity of their quarrel is one of the few institutions that has been unaltered in the cataclysm which has swept the world'.⁶

Indeed, Article XII of the 1921 Anglo-Irish Treaty anticipated the creation of a Boundary Commission, which would redraw the border 'in accordance with the wishes of the inhabitants, so far as may be compatible with economic and geographic conditions'. As such, a sword of Damocles

hovered over local Unionists' heads until the Commission's ignominious collapse in December 1925. In the intervening period, Craig's government consolidated its control over the two counties, establishing the Leech Commission, which gerrymandered electoral boundaries, abolishing PR and inserting a rateable valuation clause in the Local Government Act (1922), thereby guaranteeing control of the county council and local bodies, and the crucial patronage that went with them.⁷ When the British objected to this flagrant breach of the GOIA, Craig threatened to resign, and London averted its gaze.

Indeed, in 1924, when extremists complained that disloyal Catholics received government positions in preference to loyal Protestants, Craig ordered a full-scale investigation.⁸ By 1969, the Cameron Commission reported that across majority nationalist areas, Unionists had consistently manipulated electoral boundaries to control local government and then 'use their power to make appointments in a way which benefited Protestants' in housing and employment.⁹ Ultimately, Unionist claims to Tyrone rested on force. As the GOIA passed through parliament the British government also sanctioned the creation of the Ulster Special Constabulary [USC], a paramilitary police force for the new jurisdiction.¹⁰ In September 1920, Tyrone's three UVF commanders: Ambrose Ricardo, Robert Stevenson and John McClintock, assured the rank and file that the USC represented Carson's Army reincarnate.¹¹ On 15 March 1922, the Minister of Home Affairs (MHA), Richard Dawson Bates introduced the Civil Authorities (Special Powers) Bill, which amounted to the total suspension of civil liberties. Amid this febrile atmosphere, Samuel Kelly attempted to spark an industrial revolution in Tyrone.

II. Samuel Kelly

Kelly acquired the Coalisland [or Annagher] pit from the eccentric landlord and watercolourist, Robert Ponsonby Staples, or the barefoot baronet, who avoided footwear for fear of insulating his feet from the earth's magnetism. The land and mining rights formed part of the Castle Stewart Estate during the 1609 Ulster Plantation, eventually becoming the 'joint property of the Caulfield and Staples family'.¹² A Liberal Protestant Home Ruler, Staples recounted his futile efforts to attract investment from the Unionist elite: 'Would Belfast merchants help in such mineral developments at their own door? No! "Well", said to me one of them in 1911, "If as you say it's a Nationalist district, I won't touch it". Ned [Edward] Carson, as some here call him, was equally indifferent to my promoting

spirit'. Staples then turned to the revolutionary Sinn Féin government, Dáil Éireann, which confirmed the potential of the Coalisland fields but, with six-county partition on the cards, conceded that it couldn't help 'in what is to be a new Orange Free State'.¹³

Then, in March 1919, Staples approached Kelly, who had acquired his fortune as Ireland's leading coal merchant and the largest owner of coastal steamers in Britain. Kelly also owned coal mines at St Helens and Whitehaven in Northwest England and commissioned the Whitehaven manager, Thomas Durham, to bore for coal and plan a 'moderately extensive colliery'.¹⁴ Durham predicted that Coalisland might produce '100,000 tonnes per annum over an estimated life of 40 years', speculating that the Lough Neagh basin contained 200 million tonnes.¹⁵ Staples hoped that Kelly, 'a Belfast boy with a genius for finance and certainly on the business plane with wide vision,' might 'in a few years do more to help complete Irish unity than Carson, Griffith or De Valera rolled together'.¹⁶

In fact, Kelly was a leading financial contributor to the Unionist Party's secret arms' committee established in 1912, which included future Prime Minister, James Craig; his permanent secretary and then UVF quartermaster Wilfred Spender; George Clarke of the 'wee yard' Workman Clark, Belfast's second largest shipyard; the millionaire stockbroker, James Cunningham; and the aforementioned Dawson Bates.¹⁷ Indeed, prior to and during the abortive General Strike of 1926, Kelly sat in on cabinet meetings and advised on policy.¹⁸ As a Unionist insider, Kelly assured the Minister for Finance, Hugh Pollock, that he was 'practically sure' the Lough Neagh basin contained 120 million tonnes: 'You can appreciate what this will mean to Ulster both from an economic standpoint and in providing employment'.¹⁹

In addition to the two mine shafts, Kelly planned to build three hundred houses for English and Scottish miners. He also purchased the Ulster Fireclay Works, which produced a range of kiln-fired piping products, and the Tyrone Brickyard on the road between Coalisland and Dungannon. The Unionist government provided Kelly with a guaranteed loan to build the houses and Dawson Bates pressured the local Rural District Council [RDC] to construct the necessary infrastructure, with the Minister for Labour, John M. Andrews, providing a £40,000 grant for the project, secured from the London exchequer. When the pit officially opened amidst great fanfare in July 1924, Andrews described Kelly as a 'public spirited, patriotic Ulsterman', who 'had found for them a coal supply of their own, within their own boundaries, and within the loyal county of Tyrone'. It was 'through industry and industry alone' that they could create 'that Ulster which they pictured in their dreams and prayed for in their prayers':

industry 'promoted by the energy and enterprise of their capitalists working in friendly cooperation with their industrious workers'.²⁰

Andrew's characterisation appeared questionable on two key points. Firstly, the loyalty of majority nationalist Tyrone hardly constituted a given. While the Dungannon RDC, where Coalisland lay, had a slim enough nationalist majority, the town itself was overwhelmingly Catholic.²¹ Indeed, under the ambiguous terms of Article XII, Tyrone nationalists widely, but wrongly, anticipated that the entire county would transfer to the Irish Free State.²² Furthermore, the recent and subsequent history of the Coalisland area indicated little in the way of 'friendly cooperation' between capitalist and worker. Indeed, Kelly's intervention exacerbated existing sectarian tensions, which the employers often manipulated to their own ends.

The best historical treatment of the Kelly scheme has concluded that 'Northern Ireland's natural disadvantages overcame both the enterprise of its leading coal merchant and the enthusiasm of the Ministry of Commerce'.²³ This article seeks to further examine why the new Unionist government supported Kelly's Coalisland scheme and how complex issues of class and sectarianism played out on the ground when Ulster's leading capitalist confronted a majority nationalist workforce in an area whose constitutional future appeared to hang in the balance.

The Coalisland story sheds light on the sectarian underpinnings of Unionist rule in Tyrone and across the North more generally, wherein the elite institutionalised discrimination in the allocation of scarce economic resources and deliberately manipulated a form of reactionary Orange populism to maintain working-class Protestant support. This will involve an analysis of disputes surrounding the RDC-funded Water Scheme; a conflict between building sub-contractors and local labour over the construction of the subsidised housing at the bombastically named Newtownkelly; strikes in the Ulster Fireclay Works and, at the Tyrone Brickyard and, finally, an extraordinary lockout at the Tyrone Colliery itself. The article will conclude with an unprecedented display of working-class solidarity in 1926, when Protestant and Catholic workers united after the much-heralded Coalisland miracle turned out to be little more than castles in the air.

III. Government assistance

Kelly's Whitehaven pit manager hinted that Newtownkelly also made sense from 'the national standpoint' as the operation will 'very shortly'

require a 'large and steady' stream of English and Scotch miners. Within the context of a sectarian electoral headcount and the impending Boundary Commission, the influx of hundreds of British workers obviously bolstered Unionist claims to this contested territory. Interestingly, Durham admitted that 'it has only been possible to obtain our existing staff because of the industrial depression in other mining areas' and that, 'if trade conditions improve in their home areas, we are very likely to lose a good many valuable men'. He, therefore, advised Kelly to 'layout a modern colliery village properly sewered and with an adequate domestic water supply'.²⁴ Subsequent events suggested that many of these Scottish miners carried significant political baggage with them that not only partially explained their unemployment at home but also rendered them peculiar candidates to colonise nationalist Tyrone in the interests of Ulster loyalism.

While Kelly invested at least £100,000 of his own money, he also lobbied hard for government assistance to build miners' homes, fund local infrastructure, and eventually subsidise coal production. Pollock wrote to Kelly that he was 'in full sympathy' regarding the housing issue since the 'enterprise presents possibilities of a wonderful mineral future for Ulster'.²⁵ Indeed, Pollock warned colleagues that it 'will be well for the government to have some interest in the matter and to give some form of concrete encouragement to the enterprise and courage of a citizen who has taken great personal risks, merely, I believe, animated by a high sense of public duty'.²⁶ Pollock then petitioned the 'very sympathetic' Chancellor of the Exchequer, Stanley Baldwin, for a £1.5 million extension of Trade Facilities Act, legislation designed to enable companies to borrow money for projects which would create employment, with the state guaranteeing the capital and interest.²⁷ Indeed, while London ended its series of Trade Facilities Acts in 1926, Stormont persevered with their Loans Guarantee Act until 1934 because it helped keep Belfast's largest shipyard afloat: 'crucial not only for the industrial survival of Northern Ireland but also for the political survival of the Unionist government'.²⁸

Indeed, Andrews, Bates, and Craig formed a populist faction within cabinet which deployed a 'combination of sectarian and democratic practices' to maintain loyalist support.²⁹ With Coalisland in mind, Bates convinced the cabinet 'to include a clause in the recent Housing Bill, giving industrial centres in rural districts the same treatment as urban districts'. In effect, the government partly subsidised every house built at Newtownkelly, while the remaining finance came from the Ulster Bank under the Guaranteed Loan Act (1922).³⁰ On the other hand, water supply, sanitation, and road transport constituted areas reserved for

local government. Andrews offered Dungannon RDC a grant through the British-funded Unemployment Grant Advisory Committee to carry out the Water Scheme. Interestingly, he criticised the local RDC's 'considerable delay', adding that the MHA had 'probably gone further than they ought in putting pressure upon the local authorities to exercise their powers'.³¹

Yet, both sectarian populists orbiting Craig and fiscal conservatives around Pollock spoke with one enthusiastic voice on the Coalisland enterprise. By January 1923, Pollock outlined how 'a great deal was already being done to assist Sir Samuel Kelly in the development of his coal mining enterprise. He was obtaining money on easy terms under the Trade Facilities Act; he was receiving £60 for each house erected and the Minister of Labour was giving considerable assistance through his Unemployment Scheme'. In short, 'the government had done everything that was possible, taking into account the present financial position'.³²

The present position referred to ongoing negotiations between Belfast and London to revise the GOIA's financial terms. As such, Craig's government did not wish to appear 'more generous than the Imperial Government in such matters and this would embarrass his negotiations with the Colwyn Committee'.³³ More than once, Craig threatened London with resignation and convinced Baldwin to establish the Northern Ireland Special Arbitration, or Colwyn, Committee in winter 1922 to revise the financial terms. Craig sought to secure revisions of Belfast's imperial contribution, the funding of its social services and paying for the USC. The second Colwyn report in 1925 effectively abolished the imperial contribution, which the Belfast government redeployed in the sinkhole of unemployment relief.³⁴ Westminster would provide 'ongoing financial support', but 'total public expenditure per capita in Northern Ireland' was capped 'to the average level in Britain, despite greater demands on public expenditure, particularly unemployment' in the North. This inevitably led 'to a lower standard of public services, with opportunity costs in the areas of education, housing, and industry and infrastructure'.³⁵

Certainly, this passion for the Kelly enterprise appeared fuelled by the hope, no matter how vain, that Craig's cabinet could square the circle between its self-image as an industrious imperial province and the stark reality of his own description of the Stormont government's main function as 'to distribute the bones'.³⁶ Yet, while the threat of long-term bankruptcy receded, the Coalisland Colliery's prospects appeared less secure. Kelly soon petitioned the government 'for a subvention in aid of wages ... in order to place the colliery on parallel lines with those in

Great Britain'. As, without help, it 'would have to close down'. While an alarmed Andrews 'thought it would be disastrous if the colliery had to close', the frugal Pollock 'expressed doubt as to the view Lord Colwyn would take'. Ultimately, Craig insisted that 'we should obtain our proper proportion of' the Treasury subsidy to British mines, later adding that he 'did not want it suggested that the owners had to close down the mine owing to lack of support'.³⁷

James Craig, his wife and son paid an unofficial visit in May 1924 by 'special train' and Kelly personally 'conducted the party ... through the various departments'.³⁸ Craig remarked that 'Coalisland had a great future, predicting that 'it would be the first town in County Tyrone'.³⁹ Indeed, Kelly made Craig's son, also James, 'a humble worker' at the colliery, with the Nationalist *Irish News* retrospectively sneering that young Craig was 'selected for the post on the assumption that the venture was going to be a gigantic success'.⁴⁰ Due to the Prime Minister's illness, Lady Craig officially opened the Colliery in July 1924 during a 'luncheon for 2000 guests' who arrived by two special trains from Belfast, Lisburn, Portadown, and Dungannon. Kelly expressed his 'gratification' at 'having done something for his native province' and promised that this day marked 'only the beginning of a great era of industry and progress'. Lady Craig described the occasion as 'a red-letter day in the history of Ulster', while the Mayor of Belfast, William Turner, claimed that the 'ceremony that day marked an epoch not only in the life of Sir Samuel but also in the history of the imperial province of Ulster'.⁴¹

A standard propaganda piece with photographs appeared in all the major Unionist dailies and weekly regional papers, proclaiming the 'Gigantic Ulster Enterprise – The Miracle of Coalisland – the Romance of Newtownkelly'. The celebratory tone portrayed Kelly as an industrial titan, who, 'by his foresight, courage, and enterprise in the face of many difficulties', had 'won through, and the colliery and town bearing his name will be looked upon by every Ulsterman as work well done by a patriotic and noble son of the province'. In short, 'Ulster's industrial life will be completely revolutionised' and, 'with a reduction in the cost of their fuel, northern manufacturer should be able to beat their foreign competitors'.⁴² Elsewhere, Kelly strode the Ulster stage as an 'Alexander of Industry' who, 'once committed to an enterprise [,] never permits consideration of expenditure to stand in the way of successful achievement, especially when ... the desired consummation is fraught with vital influence upon the economic destiny of his native Province'. It continued that 'the successful development of the colliery is set to revolutionise the economic

life of Ulster'. The colliery would produce one hundred thousand tonnes per year and 'the value to the economic life of Ulster of a thriving and productive coalfield within her own borders is incalculable'. Likewise, the Ulster Fireclay Works exuded 'an air of prosperity and progressiveness' that generated 'infectious optimism'. Indeed, the workers' homes or 'palaces' built with government assistance boded well for a future where, in 'a few years, a population of some 25,000 should find ideal conditions in this new urban community, whose location will be marked on future maps by the new and magic name of Newtownkelly'.⁴³

A contemporary opinion piece by the nationalist *The Irish News* avoided much of the hyperbole, however, noting that it 'is unfortunate that the houses are not yet ready for occupation, the delay being due to a wages dispute between Messrs Collen Bros [Portadown] the contractors for the water and sewage scheme and their workers'. The reporter opined that the men's 'reasonable' demands 'should have been met in a spirit of conciliation by the contractors, who apparently assumed that they had the sole right to fix the wages, and that the men are bound to take what they get'.⁴⁴

IV. Class and sectarianism in the Coalisland coalfield

Managers across Kelly's businesses in Coalisland manipulated sectarianism to undermine the bargaining power of labour. In several instances, they locked-out Catholic workers and replaced them with strike breakers recruited from the part-time "B" Special Constabulary. Interestingly, when Craig first approached Baldwin in 1922 regarding the eventual Colwyn award, the Chancellor quickly identified the funding of the USC as the 'sole exception ... to be reserved for separate consideration'.⁴⁵ By 1924, England and Wales had one police officer for 699 people, Scotland one for 751, while, under Unionist rule, the ratio sat at one for every 160 inhabitants.⁴⁶ In 1925, one Liberal MP wryly pointed out that Craig wielded an armed force larger than the armies of Austria or Bulgaria.⁴⁷ While Craig lobbied hard for additional funds for 'the present magnificent system of Special Constabulary', the Treasury in London hinted that the force served as 'a means of providing for unemployment'.⁴⁸

Three classes of Special Constabulary existed; the full-time "A" Specials were either attached to RIC/RUC barracks or formed independent platoons. Before the force's disbandment in December 1925, Dungannon police district contained seven mixed RUC/'A' Specials barracks with a combined strength of 150 men. In addition, the independent 'A' Special No. 7 platoon of fifty men commandeered the Ranfurly Arms Hotel in

Dungannon. By early 1922 there were nine ‘A’ platoons and twenty-eight mixed barracks in Tyrone.⁴⁹ Ambrose Ricardo hinted at the USC’s utility in copper fastening the Unionist cross-class alliance when he reported that ‘every man in N.I. who has lost his job or who is at a loose end has endeavoured to get into the “A”s and in many cases has succeeded’.⁵⁰

Indeed, unsuccessful applicants to the full-time force supplemented their existing income with a position in the “B” men. Each part-time “B” Special had a rifle and Wesley revolver and mobilised once a week and during emergencies. The local “C” Specials comprised the less physically able members of the old UVF. By 1924, Tyrone contained 3,630 “B” Specials. Constables on Full Patrol received a £10 annual bounty, while those on Half Patrol got £7 with pay of 7 s. per-day in event of mobilisation. In short, “B” Specials received an increment on their ordinary salary, funded by a British government grant of £1,250,000 for the 1924 financial year alone.⁵¹

In June 1922, Dungannon mill-owner, former Irish rugby international and local “B” Specials commander, Major Robert Stevenson wrote a scathing confidential report about the USC’s sectarianism, which came ‘right down through from the politicians on top’. Stevenson claimed that the “B” force represented ‘the ordinary Protestant countryman and in many cases corner boy’, being ‘supplied with arms and clothing by his Government and “authorised” to get “on top”, as it were, of his R.C. [Roman Catholic] neighbours’.⁵² He concluded that:

North of Ireland Protestants are not saints, they have always been taught to hate R.C.’s and it is against all reason to expect that untrained, undisciplined, and almost wholly without supervision, they can be armed, uniformed, and entrusted with police duties – human nature cannot rise to that right away!⁵³

After an attack on the Police Barracks in Coalisland on 3 May 1922, the IRA shot dead local “B” Special Constable Robert Cardwell.⁵⁴ A party of USC, two of them ‘unable to stand they were so drunk’, then killed two nationalist civilians as a reprisal.⁵⁵ While Stevenson published a public letter warning the Specials of their future conduct, the RIC District Inspector [DI], Henry Jordan Walshe, described USC violence as par for the course ‘until the [IRA] gunmen were banished those people [Catholics] would have to bear the consequences’.

In addition to the local religious breakdown, the Coalisland and Dungannon nexus represented one of the most republican areas in Ulster.

The Irish Republican Brotherhood [IRB] remained strong locally through the late nineteenth and early twentieth century and exhibited a strong strain of working-class labourite politics. Indeed, local republicans had been central to strikes at the failed Congo Colliery on the southern side of Coalisland in the late 1890s.⁵⁶ More recently, local trade unions rode on the wave of industrial militancy that swept Ulster in the late war period and just prior to the post-war economic slump.⁵⁷ The same slump formed the background to the defeat of labour politics in Tyrone and Ulster more generally in the wake of the July 1920 shipyard expulsions in Belfast and the consolidation of the new Unionist one-party regime. Within this context of depression and demoralisation the Dublin-based Irish Transport and General Workers' Union [ITGWU] vied with the British-based Workers' Union [WU] for the fragments of local trade unionism. Ironically, many of the same activists had co-operated during Ulster's red wave, but a return to the successful militancy of 1918 and 1919 appeared a distant prospect.

Just prior to the signing of the Treaty in 1921, the local ITGWU's organiser reported that talk of an eight-hour-day or half-holiday on Saturday would be condemned as 'Bolshevik' by the local Unionist elite, concluding that, 'in Dungannon [,] the Fatherhood of God is proclaimed, although the Brotherhood of Man may be non-existent'. He continued that the 'boss is merely pulling the strings in his own interests', unconcerned 'as to whether a man is Catholic or Protestant, black or white, providing his labour is cheap; And that it is, sir, cheap in Dungannon'. In Coalisland, the organiser claimed that 'the philanthropist [Kelly] is giving local labour a chance, of course at the philanthropist's price! The men are showing signs of discontent with the pittance and before long there will be an improvement or a stoppage'. He concluded that 'while Coalisland is more hopeful than Dungannon ... with prosperous times ahead, if the workers mean to share that prosperity, they must of necessity combine'.⁵⁸

At Kelly's Tyrone Brickyard, workers joined the ITGWU, while the union competed against the WU to secure members in the Ulster Fireclay Works and the large clay pit that served it. John McMahon chaired the ITGWU branch at the Brickworks and Patrick Skelton acted as secretary. Both men were republicans and very likely also members of the Old Engine branch of the IRB.⁵⁹ They were also the sons of local miners, who appeared to have spent considerable time working in Scotland as well as the by-then defunct Congo mine.⁶⁰ At a large meeting, the local 'representative of the cross channel [Workers'] union', Neal O'Donnell 'was present, but neither questions nor criticisms, although cordially invited,

were forthcoming, and a good meeting ended in the appointment of shop stewards and a committee of organisers'.⁶¹ O'Donnell, however, clearly resented the ITGWU's attempts to poach members in Coalisland, especially given the much-heralded prospect of industrial revival. While the ITGWU carried the day at the Brickyard, the two unions appeared at 'loggerheads' at the Ulster Fireclay Works. The employer apparently sided with O'Donnell and the WU, however, and wouldn't 'allow any ITGWU men into the works'.⁶²

Kelly had, therefore, set upon developing his industry in an area riven by sectarian and class divisions. At the beginning of 1923, the ITGWU's *Voice of Labour* sarcastically remarked that 'one would think the golden age at last was dawning. Alas! The facts are at present' that 'some 120 employees of Sir Samuel Kelly's clay pit, brickyard, and pipe [Ulster Fireclay] yard are out on strike against a 5 shilling [s.] cut in wages'. It continued that 'those who have toiled through the muck of a clay hole in winter, or sweated in a kiln in summer, will understand best the ideas which some people hold as regards prosperity'.⁶³ At the Ulster Fireclay Works, Patrick Quinn, Con O'Neill and Joseph Quinn 'accosted' John Davis for crossing a picket line. The magistrate and local Orangeman, Robert Newton, warned that the 'workers had been getting on shaky ground, but as the strike was now settled the magistrates would dismiss the case. Sir Samuel Kelly was a wealthy man, one of the few who had made his money in Ireland'. Newton concluded that 'they had their first taste of labour trouble in Coalisland, and the magistrates hoped it would be the last'.⁶⁴

The *Voice* also reported how the fifty men at Tyrone Brick worked over fifty hours for 40s. in continuous day and night shifts producing 100,000 bricks per week. Indeed, the 'firm admits they make a profit on the brickyard, but wages must come down, although' they refused 'a proposal to accept 37s. 6d. for 48 hours' from the men. The piece continued that 'when Sir Samuel Kelly was plain Mister, we found him the best and most reasonable man amongst the hard-faced men of the Belfast coal ring. Whether the knighthood has changed him or the coal discovery, or that he has handed his power over to his managers, we cannot say, but hope to learn this week'. Nevertheless, the local ITGWU pledged to 'stand firm against an injustice, determined that if Coalisland is to be prosperous, it will be real prosperity, as found in the strong healthy bodies of free men and free women, not in the dwarfed and stunted bodies of slaves'.⁶⁵

The following week, the *Voice* noted the appearance of 'imports from Belfast', a city notorious for sweated labour, which also manufactured

'the blackleg species'. Similarly, at the clay pit, 'the blacklegs were introduced under the protection of the Specials, who, to give them credit, do not relish the task, for there's streaks of loathsomeness about the scab which makes honest men shun them'. The piece noted that 'there are still a few rebels in Coalisland against attempts to exploit them in the interests of the wealthy', concluding that 'no matter who rules, the worker intends to secure a living wage'.⁶⁶ After a conference with Kelly himself, the firm agreed to implement a smaller reduction to be reviewed in July at the Ulster Fire Clay and Tyrone Brick yards, although the men in the clay pit held out for better terms.⁶⁷

The ITGWU then alleged that O'Donnell attempted to subvert their efforts by siding with the employer for more favourable terms.⁶⁸ *The Voice* alleged that 'to be in the Irish Transport Union in Coalisland not only gets a man in the black books of the Unionist employers but good nationalists are also seeing to it that there's no work for the members of the ITGWU'.⁶⁹ After O'Donnell apparently poached back members at the Clay Pit, the ITGWU described him as the 'hidden hand of a management which hates the Transport Union', who got amongst 'members of the Transport out on strike', warning that, 'if ever a boomerang was made, the firm and the Workers Union will discover this pact as one, and it will not be long ere it whirls back with renewed force and smashes the unholy combination'.⁷⁰ A local republican and ITGWU supporter, John Quinn, criticised O'Donnell for protesting 'against the action of certain employers importing labour from country districts, while fifty or sixty men were signing the unemployment register in the town'. Quinn alleged that the blame lay with O'Donnell, who connived with employers.⁷¹ Apparently, having marginalised the ITGWU in favour of the WU, local employers then used mostly Protestant labour from outside Coalisland to undermine O'Donnell, leading to his eventual arrest in July.⁷²

At this point a relative of Constable Robert Cardwell wrote to the local Unionist *Mid-Ulster Mail* to challenge nationalist complaints that Kelly's firms employed too many 'outsiders'. David Cardwell, from the unionist townland of Ballynakilly, just outside Coalisland town, claimed that Protestants previously couldn't get jobs in the Fireclay Works before Kelly bought the business but now, things were gradually changing. Cardwell had 'lived in this district' and his 'forebears' before him and could never get a job in the town, but he trusted 'the time is at hand when this will be changed'. Indeed, it appeared 'near time there was a change in a class of hands' as the Catholics 'were always on strike and quarrelling with their masters'. Alluding to the dispute between the WU and ITGWU, Cardwell

mocked how 'they could not even agree amongst themselves, and were shifting from one agitator to another, whichever one would threaten the bosses the most, and it is not long since they went into the yard and threatened the manager'. He concluded that there was no 'use of complaining about bringing Englishmen over here to do work which the local men refused to do' and that 'the handwriting is on the wall' for local Catholics looking for work from Sir Samuel Kelly.⁷³

Having displaced the ITGWU from Ulster Fireclay Works and the Clay Pit, O'Donnell then sought a standard local rate for workers employed in building miners' cottages. The main building contractors were Teggart from Belfast and Collen Bros from Portadown, both Protestant firms. After a strike and negotiations, Collen Bros agreed to the local rate, but Teggart held out, paying 2s. 6d. per week less. During a picket of the site, Teggart employed local "B" Specials as strike breakers. WU organiser, Robert McClung, alleged that the RUC acted 'in a very offensive manner' and used 'violence towards the wives and children of our members, who are on dispute there'. He wrote to Bates that members had 'the right to peacefully picket during a trade dispute, and as the police know every man, woman and child in the Coalisland area, we do not think it is necessary ... to use violence in the slightest degree'. He then warned that it would be 'very unfortunate thing for everybody if our members get out of hand owing to the violence of the RUC'.⁷⁴

The local RUC denied using violence and reported that a 'crowd of about 250 persons including women were outside the works ... booing and their attitude was intimidatory'. When the sergeant told O'Donnell that they would have to move on, he replied that 'we can stay as long as we like as long as we don't assault anybody'. The police 'ordered the crowd to disperse and after some persuasion', the Constable apparently 'got them away'.⁷⁵ On this occasion, the workers knew the law and the Trades Disputes Act better than the police and the MHA advised the RUC 'to avoid, if possible, coming into conflict of any sort with the strikers'.⁷⁶ In response, the MHA directed the RUC to monitor the WU in a similar fashion to the ITGWU.

Then, on 27 July, while Teggart paid the strike breakers, O'Donnell approached him to ask for wages owed to men who had worked a partial week before going on strike. Teggart got the police to remove him, and O'Donnell then told another large crowd in earshot of the strike breakers that 'If you had the spirit of a dog you wouldn't work for Teggart. You are yellow dogs anyway'. The police arrested him for a breach of the peace. At the trial, one of the B Special strike breakers claimed that O'Donnell 'came into the building ground' and 'called him bad names for not coming out

on strike along with the rest'. When John Skeffington, O'Donnell's solicitor and a local Hibernian or constitutional nationalist leader, questioned Teggart as to his failure to pay the local rate, D.I. Walshe interjected in the proceedings shouting, 'don't answer that question'.⁷⁷

Two witnesses then testified that Teggart had, in fact, assaulted O'Donnell: McClung and a local Catholic labourer, Henry Hughes. D.I. Walshe questioned Hughes as to whether he was 'a very peaceful citizen?' Hughes replied, 'I belong to Coalisland (Laughter)'. Walshe then added that 'Coalisland has a bad name (More laughter)'. Skeffington interjected: 'we will see now if the workman will get the same justice as the employer'. The JP claimed that 'it was a scandal to see so much opposition to Kelly, 'a man ... prepared to spend so much money in promoting employment. It was playboys such as they had heard about that day that were destroying trade and creating trouble'.⁷⁸ He then fined O'Donnell £5; a sentence overturned on appeal.⁷⁹ The dispute lasted four months. By October, the RUC reported that the strike was 'fizzling out' and that Messrs Teggart still 'employed' the USC 'strike breakers'.⁸⁰

Nevertheless, by April 1924, the *Belfast Telegraph* reported that 'the labour dispute at Coalisland appears to be spreading'. Even before the pit officially opened, some British miners joined local workers in demanding improved conditions.⁸¹ Ominously, the issue at the Colliery revolved around 'faults' and 'varying strata conditions', which meant that sinkers in Shaft 2 did not meet their quota and management docked their pay. The men in Shaft 1 then went out on sympathy strike.⁸² The miners struck at the same time as workers, also employed by Collen Bros (Portadown), on the Coalisland Water Supply Scheme, which received a £40,000 grant from Andrews to service Newtownkelly. The Dungannon RDC hired two contractors, one working at the Coalisland end of the scheme and the other at the Washingbay on Lough Neagh nine miles to the east. A local nationalist won the Coalisland contract, while the RDC granted Collen Bros (Portadown), which had paid the local rate at Newtownkelly in 1923, the contract for Washingbay. Under the grant's terms, only workers with a 'green ticket' from the Unemployment Exchange could gain employment. Collen Bros complained that, as the strikers had not 'made any attempt to return to work', they proposed to employ 'an entirely new set of men regardless of the green ticket man and get on with the work without further today'. Nevertheless, the conditions of the grant meant that they could not employ whom they wished.⁸³

The employer then spread the rumour that the Washingbay strike hinged on the appointment of 'a new gaffer', who alleged that his position

as 'a member of the C Special Constabulary' represented the real reason for the strike. Once again, the newspapers noted 'a strong force of police has arrived under District-Inspector Walshe, Dungannon'. Collen Bros, who had previously paid the local rate, appeared emboldened by Teggart's success at Newtownkelly, paying workers at the Lough Shore end of the scheme 25s., while men employed in Coalisland Town by the local nationalist contractor, McNally, received 33s. 6d. The WU called both teams out and demanded the local rate of 35s. Similarly, carters at the Ulster Fireclay Works and at the Colliery who received 24s. struck demanding 'the local standard wage'. Collen Bros then informed its building workers at Newtownkelly that they would be cutting wages from 35s. to 32s. 6d. The Unionist *Newsletter* remained unmoved by the workers' demands but lamented the inconvenience caused by the strikes, since the 'Coalisland streets are all "up" for the laying of the water main through the town, and they are dangerous to traffic'.⁸⁴ It might help to note that the average weekly income of a labourer in Britain in 1905 exceeded what Collen Bros paid workers on the Lough shore in 1924 and that the average wage for a British labourer in 1925 sat at 55s. 7d., while a bricklayer could expect 73s. 6d.⁸⁵

The contractor for the Coalisland end of the Water Scheme eventually paid the local rate and it was 'expected that the laying of the line of pipes from Annagher will speedily be completed'. Collen Bros then agreed to pay the 'the district rate of wages' at Newtownkelly and it 'is expected that the first eighty houses will be ready for occupation in a few weeks'. The carters at the Fireclay Works and Colliery and the thirty sinkers agreed to return to work, with 'the final terms of pay ... left to the management and the union officials for final settlement'. This agreement was reached after face-to-face meetings between Robert McClung and Kelly at the latter's office in Station Street, Belfast.⁸⁶ Negotiations 'broke down', however, when Collen Bros maintained its belligerent attitude at Washingbay.⁸⁷

The WU headquarters in London then sent £107 strike fund at the beginning of May.⁸⁸ Collen Bros responded by employing three strike-breakers from Stewartstown, nine miles northwest, for the Washingbay end of the Water Scheme – each with a 'green ticket'. One morning, three WU members armed with bludgeons held them up a mile from the works. 'They were told that if they crossed a line that had been drawn across the road they would do so at their peril. The men thought discretion was the better part of valour and went to Coalisland by a circuitous route' and returned to work 'under police protection'.⁸⁹ After arranging an identity parade, Walshe arrested three strikers. One of the men, Peter Douglas,

described the strike breakers as 'three right blackguards to work so far. It would not be so bad had they been there before the strike'.⁹⁰

At this stage, several hundred people attended another 'big labour demonstration' in Coalisland Square, which pledged 'fealty to the men out on strike'. Speaking from the back of a motor car, McClung claimed that three prisoners were only guilty of 'asserting their right in a trades labour dispute'. These men were 'working in mud and slush and dirt' for the 'miserable wage' of 6d per hour. 'The Workers Union did not advocate strikes, but sometimes, as in the case of the Water Scheme at Washingbay, they are unavoidable'. Bob Getgood said that 'it was quite evident that there was something radically wrong at Coalisland'. The employer 'was certain to have his pound of flesh while you have the bone (Laughter)'.⁹¹ The RUC reported that the meeting generated 'considerable enthusiasm' and O'Donnell resolved to 'call out' Collens's workers at Newtownkelly in 'sympathy with the men' at Washingbay 'who were working for the same firm'.⁹²

Across 1923-4, the WU alleged that the police acted under the direction of local bosses.⁹³ Sam Kyle complained to the MHA that the police were 'exceeding their duty in treating members of the Workers' Union as if they were members of a secret society' and asked that police not visit the homes of WU officials and question their relatives but rather acquire information on the union from the regional office in Belfast.⁹⁴ Managers and sub-contractors across Kelly's enterprises developed a policy of reducing wages, falsely claiming the Catholic workers were sectarian and then appointing part-time members of the USC to act as strike breakers, while the RUC and full-time "A" Specials backed the employers. Within this context, the earlier tension between the WU and ITGWU rapidly dissolved and trade union organisers, many of whom were Protestant socialists from Belfast, co-operated in a struggle against a deliberately sectarian policy instigated by the employers and supported by the police.

For instance, while O'Donnell and the WU struggled to gain the local rate for labourers at Newtownkelly and on the Water Scheme, conflict re-emerged at the Tyrone Brickyard. Here, forty-three ITGWU men downed tools because 'six additional men were taken on' despite an agreement with managers that Transport members who had previously been made redundant would be re-hired. The *Northern Whig* reported that the yard then continued with 'voluntary labour under police protection, and these men are being conveyed to and from their work by motor under police escort'.⁹⁵ The ITGWU organised large meetings in Coalisland and Dungannon addressed by William McMullen, the trade union's secretary,

and Dawson Gordon, president of the Flax Roughers' Association, both Protestants from Belfast and the latter a member and close associate of the WU leadership. McMullen rejected allegations by the employer that the strike had a 'religious and political side' as 'they were both Protestants, and strongly contended that there was nothing of a religious or a political taint in the fight for an honest wage'. Indeed, 'the 43 men who were out on strike were replaced by 50 Protestants'. Rather, the management desired to make 'it a religious quarrel' and their 'deep-rooted designs' were to divide the workers.⁹⁶

The local police fully backed the employer's line, claiming that the ITGWU's 'real grievance is that the six men are imported Protestants, practically all the workers hitherto being Roman Catholics. The management have decided to take this strike to the finish, and already they have 24 strike breakers (all Protestants) engaged'. The report continued that 'the men are working under ample police protection and all precautions necessary for the protection of life and property have been taken. The works have been picketed by the strikers, but up to the present no intimidation has taken place'.⁹⁷

The ITGWU branch then hired John Skeffington to demand a correction from the *Northern Whig* about its published account of the strike.⁹⁸ According to the workers, when management ended the night shift in March 1924 because of improved mechanisation, eight workers lost their jobs. The manager agreed that 'if extra men were required those dispensed with would get first preference'. Nevertheless, he then appointed seven Protestant workers 'without any notice whatever to the branch officials', eventually telling McMahan and Skelton of the ITGWU 'that is my business; Your business is to go on with your work'. The branch committee then apparently convinced the new workers to 'stop operations immediately until the members of the union who were paid off' gained reinstatement and that the new men would be given next preference at the yard. The seven men duly 'came out with the other 43 men' but the Unemployment Bureau informed them 'that unless they went back to work, they would not be entitled to any further benefit'. The management then sent a motor car to the seven workers' homes, and they crossed the picket line.⁹⁹

The manager, Cooper, then replaced the entire workforce with 'a similar number of demobilised "Specials" – Orange and Protestant to a man'.¹⁰⁰ The ITGWU alleged that management spread a false rumour that the workers downed tools 'against the employment of Protestants – a clever, calculated perversion of the truth, told in the atmosphere where it

has most likelihood of bearing fruit'. These Orange 'scabs' were brought 'to and from their work in motors' and 'paid 5s. per week more than the old employees (dirty money) and have the company of armed protection'. It concluded that 'for crucifying their comrades, as usual, they are receiving the usual Judas fee', asserting that

religion, thank God, is never a bone of contention in the One Big Union [ITGWU] ... our members struck for the reinstatement of Protestant and Catholic alike – religion was not mentioned until the scab-hunters introduced the word. We believe that Sir Samuel Kelly would not stand for a pogrom being started in Tyrone, but we know that there are others who have not his tolerance or broad mindedness, and we know that, with the boundary question once more acute, there are many who would do much to see every Catholic cleared out of the county.¹⁰¹

The police noted that 'a certain amount of bitterness has now crept into this dispute' and that the ITGWU covered the area in 600 posters, labelling the strike breakers 'spineless jellyfish who live by scabbery'. When the ITGWU organiser 'attempted to address the strike breakers when entering and leaving work', he 'was subjected to much cross-examination by the workers and would have been assaulted were it not for the presence of a large posse of police'. All included, the manager employed 'eleven more men ... than before the strike. The men are brought to and from their work, under police protection, in motor cars supplied by the firm'.¹⁰² The strike collapsed on 21 August 1924, with pickets withdrawn the following day. One local republican described the struggle to a comrade interned on the prison ship *Argenta*: 'The strike at the brickworks still continues and looks very blue. We are down and out all through the signing of the f**king Treaty!'¹⁰³

Indeed, *The Voice of Labour* declared that 'No Catholic need apply!', adding that 'when God made the earth and placed coal in the Dungannon district, apparently, He placed it there to be worked by Protestants only, this, at least, seems to be the opinion of Sir Samuel Kelly's manager at the pit'.¹⁰⁴ Similarly, the *Irish News* reported 'that a religious test was being applied to men seeking employment at the new coal mine at Coalisland and other works in the same district'. The 'overwhelming evidence' apparently proved that 'under the cloak of industrial developments the Ulster Unionist leaders are carrying out a new plantation. The Catholic majority in Tyrone has always been a bitter pill to the Unionists, and plans were made immediately after the passing of the Government of Ireland

Act to gain the balance of power'. After citing the gerrymandering of electoral boundaries as 'the first step in the conspiracy', the paper alleged that Craig's government promoted the coal industry as 'another big effort to accomplish their purpose'. The employer apparently took care that the Cumberland and Scottish miners 'were all Protestants'. However, 'two of the Scotch miners, preferring to have working by their side men whom they knew, sent to Lanarkshire for two of their old [Catholic] mates'. These men signed a statement that they were refused work on religious grounds. The article alleged that 'this was not an isolated instance but was part of a considered policy to exclude Catholics, as far as it was possible to do so, from benefiting by the industrial development'.¹⁰⁵

V. Lockout

Then, less than four months after its July opening, the Colliery management locked workers out twice in two months. The causes can be traced back to already apparent issues with faults in the steep seams and with the workers themselves. The manager of the pit later privately confided that the lockout's 'real object .. was to get rid of some undesirable men'.¹⁰⁶ Across Kelly's enterprises, local managers had deployed a religious test to undermine workers' demands for fair pay and conditions. Indeed, some Unionists clearly hoped that the influx of solidly Protestant miners from Scotland and northern England might even tip the demographic balance in East Tyrone. Nevertheless, the unemployed miners attracted to Coalisland contained a hard core of militant trade unionists. It is likely many happened to be unemployed in their own districts because they were already blacklisted!

The RUC reported how, due to continuing under-production, the management informed the workers that, from 27 October 1924, 'they would be paid by output (or piecework) instead of at certain rates per shift as at present'. The Scotch miners 'do not belong to any trade union in this country' and 'all necessary protection is being afforded to the police, but it is feared that further strike trouble is brewing in Coalisland and district'.¹⁰⁷ The workers faced a 25s. a week cut precipitated by the dawning realisation that 'Kelly has been greatly disappointed in the results so far of the new enterprise, the output of coal not being anything like what he expected. Several of the seams which promised to yield enormous quantities of coal stopped short, while others were gradually reduced in size until they would not pay the working'.¹⁰⁸

The 150 men duly formed a branch of the Miners Federation 'and all those employed at the colliery, except the engine and pump engineer, left

their work'. The RUC noted that 'the owner of the colliery is prepared to make a stand against the men's demands'.¹⁰⁹ The resulting negotiations proved 'so unsatisfactory' that the management instituted a lockout on 28 October. The workers not only insisted on the old rate, a half holiday each Saturday and overtime for work on weekends but demanded that 'the management should meet a committee of the men each week, to "discuss the running of the mine"'. Regarding this 'as purely communistic', management 'refused to consider it'. The police identified 'several very doubtful characters' amongst the miners who were 'absolute Bolsheviks in their attitude and are a source of danger in the locality', including a miner named Shaw from Durham who 'is an out-and-out Communist'.¹¹⁰

After another meeting, the miners again 'sent a deputation to the management, who refused to negotiate unless a new deputation was appointed'. The workers duly sent a 'peace' deputation and the management laid out conditions 'that the men should return to work, and that they would discuss terms'. Most of the men decided to return.¹¹¹ Some of those unhappy with events worked a week's notice and returned to Scotland.¹¹² Yet, the dispute did not end there. The miners worked on for a further month but struck again in the face of further reductions. Kelly suspended all work on 29 November and many of the remaining miners 'returned to English and Scottish centres', while the RUC 'in the district has been strengthened following the closing down of the mine'.¹¹³

Kelly had clearly lost faith and locked the workers out the second time as a preliminary to deploying a skeleton staff of forty men to maintain the mine, which would now run for as long as the government coal subsidy continued. The RUC noted that 'only about ten men and their families of those who are locked out and who are not to be employed again at the colliery, remain in Coalisland'. The report concluded that 'it may also be taken that the branch of the Coalminers' Union formed at this place has been disbanded'.¹¹⁴ The *Irish News* reported that many of the paid-off miners made a 'large claim for unemployment benefit, which was refused until the whole circumstances were investigated by the Ministry of Labour. No decision has yet been given, but it is believed to be the intentions of the Ministry to turn down the claims'.¹¹⁵

Clearly, estimates of daily tonnage predicted in Unionist propaganda bore little relation to the hard facts on the coal face. By March 1925, the colliery was only producing fifty tons per day – the largest daily output across the period being eighty. The miners were working in 'broken ground and then about half the places they are crossing faults and that is the cause of the reduced output'. The seams were also too steep for

conventional mining techniques and many of the Scotch and English miners quickly returned home as they were not 'accustomed to' working under such conditions.¹¹⁶ By July 1926, the *Irish News* speculated that 'a series of roads through the mine' needed to be built to access the fragmented seams and that 'this would not only involve the expenditure of a large sum of money but would stop all mining operations at the pit'.¹¹⁷ By this stage, the operation was under regular inspection as part of the Coal Mines Act.¹¹⁸ That spring, the inspector did 'not think the colliery will work much longer' and Kelly's dreams appeared 'doomed to disappointment' because the seams were badly affected 'by faults and washouts' and advised against 'hanging on [while] steadily losing their money', advising that, 'if I was the owner, I should abandon the place and sell up'.¹¹⁹

It was with a certain *Schadenfreude* then that the *Irish News* reported James Craig junior's appointment as a director of Kelly's St Helens Colliery company in January 1927 and alluded to 'strange stories ... going about regarding the efforts made to pretend that the [Coalisland] mine was a paying proposition'. The report poured scorn on the Ulster Unionist government, who, 'as usual, made the most of the venture', and how 'glowing pictures were drawn of the mine being the first step in the industrial revolution of Ulster'. It concluded, rather acerbically, that Kelly's Coalisland Housing Company had not yet repaid its secured loan for the miners' palaces at Newtownkelly.¹²⁰

The Unionist government eventually bowed to the inevitable and ceased paying Kelly the coal subsidy, which was 'three times higher than in Britain', but still meant that 'coal could be mined only at a considerable loss, which exceeded that sustained by any operative British mine. Even with the subvention, the mine's accounts could not be made to balance, and with its withdrawal the mine closed in April 1927'.¹²¹ While Kelly lived, the Ulster Bank 'did not insist upon punctual payments either of interest or of principle' on the housing loan. In 1937, the Ministry of Finance noted 'a feeling of relief that' the £200,000 guaranteed loan for Coalisland Housing has been paid off without loss', noting how the Ministry had 'resisted the repeated efforts to link up the loan with this mine company and to release Sir Samuel Kelly from any other liability'.¹²²

VI. Postscript

By January 1926, Kelly's mine was no longer a going concern. The *Mid-Ulster Mail* wrongly speculated 'that the boundary question has something to do with the matter'.¹²³ The Unionist government could comfort itself,

however, safe in the knowledge that the failure of the Commission the previous month had secured Coalisland and all of Tyrone's place within the boundaries of Craig's 'Ulster Pale'. With the threat to the south gone, however, the British Exchequer appeared less inclined to maintain the previous extravagant level of funding on the USC. On 22 December, the MHA paid off the six hundred "A" Specials in Tyrone. Similarly, after 1 April, the Full and Half Patrol rates for the "B" Specials ended, with members now left to manage on a £3 Reserve annual bounty.¹²⁴ In 1926, unemployment in the North stood at 24.2% – over double the figure in Britain. Furthermore, Craig's Unionist Party had achieved a less than impressive 55 per cent of the popular vote in the 1925 elections to the Northern Parliament and Sam Kyle of the WU led the recently formed Northern Ireland Labour Party [NILP] to a respectable 4.7 per cent and three seats in Belfast. When Craig added the four independent populist loyalist MPs to the equation, the result pointed towards some fraying at the edges of the cross-class Orange alliance.

In this context, the nascent NILP held a meeting of 500 people at Coalisland Picture House in a follow-up to a similar meeting at Dungannon on 28 December 1925. Robert Brown, a Scottish coal miner resident in Newtownkelly, took the chair. Neal O'Donnell addressed the meeting as did veteran socialist, Dublin-born Quaker and recently appointed NILP senator, Bob Dorman. The WU procession, which marched through the town carrying pit lamps, 'was headed by the Coalisland Brass Band and the Coalisland Pipers Band', while the worshipful master of the Orange Lodge and president of the Ancient Order of Hibernians 'marched in the procession and IRA ex-internees marched behind "B" Special Constabulary Pipers'. The rather perplexed MHA secretaries described this as an 'extraordinary gathering', the 'composition' of which, 'must, I should think, be unique in N. Ireland'.¹²⁵

At the meeting itself, Brown protested the Ministry of Labour and the Employers' Committee decision to disallow 'a large number of our members' from unemployment benefit on 7 January, since they were 'not genuinely seeking work, when there is none to be had'. Gorman then pointed to 'two members of the RUC who were present, with good clothing, and clean hands, who were guaranteed a living, so long as they behaved themselves, and their health allowed them to perform their onerous duties'. The NILP 'wanted a similar guarantee for the working man. He asked those present to sink all differences and let North and South unite – Catholics and Protestants – Union Jack and Tricolour. He hoped the audience would do nothing by force. The Labour Party were

out to do all by constitutional means – to stand together and use the vote’. The RUC Inspector General, Charles Wickham, described the meeting as ‘an extraordinary mixture, showing unanimity between Orangemen, Hibernians, and Sinn Feiners. “B” men marched with ex-internees and Scottish miners with local labourers’.¹²⁶

Dawson Bates’s MHA felt particularly affronted by loyal “B” Specials attending a socialist meeting, ‘a practise which would appear to be altogether objectionable’.¹²⁷ Wickham claimed that the men were not in uniform and, as such, cautioned the MHA against drawing ‘a distinction between this and an ordinary political meeting, and any action taken as regards one would have to govern that taken as regards the other’.¹²⁸ Wickham clearly implied that if “B” men were banned from NILP meetings then they presumably couldn’t attend Ulster Unionist meetings either!

This exceptional Coalisland demonstration emerged from the collision between conditions and agency. The disbandment of the “A” Specials and reduction of the “B” Special increment partially undermined the material foundation of some working-class Protestant support for the Unionist party. The same government then refused to grant unemployment benefit to Catholic and Protestant workers alike in an area with a tradition of rock bottom wages, precarious conditions, and chronic unemployment. This corresponded with moves by the NILP ‘to pick up the pieces’ after what Sam Kyle described as the ‘perpetual strain’ of loyalist reaction after the 1920 expulsions in Belfast, when the new party formed on a Six-County basis in March 1924.¹²⁹

The NILP emerged as a pragmatic response by anti-partitionist trade unionists to the reality of Unionist rule.¹³⁰ While nominally opposed to partition, they recognised that even the Northern workers’ poor conditions appeared preferable to their comrades’ meagre existence in the Free State. As such, they fudged the national question to attract support across the sectarian divide and operate as an opposition to Craig’s Ulster Unionists in the Belfast parliament. A pervasive argument exists that they failed because they ‘deluded themselves by believing that a persuasively argued exposé of Unionist and Orange ideology would be enough to break the sectarian cultural stranglehold in Ulster’. In short, the position of Protestant socialists like Kyle, Gordon and McClung failed to take ‘the unionism of the Protestant working class seriously’ or ‘to realize that it was not synonymous with craven loyalty to the bosses’ but resonated with Orange ‘community, folk cultures’ sprouting from deeply sunk sectarian roots.¹³¹

This analysis partly explains why the Unionist reflex was instinctively sectarian, but ultimately fails to expose how sectarianism operated in reality. By 1929, Craig abolished PR for elections to the northern parliament in favour of first-past-the-post; not to discriminate against nationalists, this had already been effectively achieved by the 1922 local government gerrymander, rather this halted electoral momentum based on working-class Catholic and Protestant support for the NILP since, as Craig admitted, the 'old-fashioned plain and simple system' returned 'men who are for the Union on the one hand, or who are against it and want to go into a Dublin parliament on the other'.¹³² When the Great Depression further stripped the meat from Stormont's bones and the working-class temporarily combined in the Outdoor Relief Strikes, the Unionist elite doubled down on sectarianism.

In the context of permanent British-imposed dependency, baseline austerity and within the constraints of a supremacist Orange ideology, 'leading members of the Unionist political class' clearly adopted 'sectarian rhetoric' and endorsed 'exclusivist practices that actively discriminated against Catholics'.¹³³ Much of the extant historiography criticises the republican socialist tendency 'to treat Protestant working-class Unionism in the Connollyite fashion as bigotry', which dominated the thinking of twentieth-century Marxists 'from whom a serious analysis would be most expected'. Yet, according to Patterson the 'manipulated dupes' thesis 'proved incapable of even beginning an analysis of that class's political and ideological history'.¹³⁴

Yet such analysis ignores the fact that working-class loyalism operated within a governmental framework based on bigotry and despite populist rumblings the Linen Lords and Big House Unionists ran the show. In a situation of near perpetual scarcity and precarity, sectarianism operated as means of maintaining elite control. Chris Loughlin suggests that the Unionist elite based their 'regime upon a moral economy and wages of loyalty', or 'the British Imperial influenced version of the "wages of whiteness" posited by D.R. Roediger'. In a situation where the nationalist third of the population automatically occupied a profane or disloyal space, Protestants either 'accepted loyalty (and its correlates of Britishness, Protestantism and Empire), or they rejected it'.¹³⁵ Loughlin's analysis offers a more dynamic rendering than Bew et al. who, taking a lead from Althusser, condemned James Connolly's 'pre-Marxist notion of ideology' and his classical socialist analysis of the internal forces at work within the Orange monolith. Rather, Unionist leadership ideology was 'not primarily Orange at all'. Rather it represented a 'democratic',

but 'pro-imperialist ... secular ideology'. Below this level, however, ran a 'populist strain within Protestant ideology', which the leadership struggled resolutely to control.¹³⁶ In this bizarre reversal of class forces, the Unionist elite constructed a gilded cage for themselves.

Loughlin is surely closer to the reality of how sectarianism operated when he argues that 'the wages of loyalty were the cultural, psychological, and material basis for UUP control of Northern Ireland. They were the twentieth century expression of a much longer history of settler colonialism'.¹³⁷ This study has suggested that the Unionist government gave the maximum support possible to Samuel Kelly due to his history as UVF gunrunner and his personal connections to Craig and Bates in particular. Furthermore, the government hoped that Kelly's success would alleviate their structural dependence on British subvention and chronic unemployment problem. The sectarian employment practices across Kelly's enterprises and protection they received from the police and judiciary suggests that the new industrial revolution would benefit the Protestant population at the expense of Coalisland's considerable Catholic majority. Furthermore, the enthusiasm and considerable financial support for the homes at Newtownkelly partly relied on the desire to increase the local Protestant population, adding substance to Unionist rhetoric about 'loyal' Tyrone.

Ulster Unionism's determination to retain majority nationalist areas like East Tyrone and Derry City within Craig's impregnable Six-County Pale and the Orange populist character of its discriminatory rule created the long-term conditions for its eventual demise a half century later. The Tyrone Brick yard lay on the road between Coalisland and Dungannon. On 24 August 1968, the first civil rights march went down that very road when the children and grandchildren of the striking workers analysed in this piece engaged in one of those small acts, which, when multiplied, can transform the world.¹³⁸ A young Bernadette Devlin joined the same march from '90% Republican' Coalisland, which descended from a carnival atmosphere to one of 'passive anger' when an RUC cordon blocked the marchers' entry into Dungannon. Afterwards in a pub not far from empty shell of Coalisland Colliery and the Fireclay Works, Devlin criticised 'out of touch' politicians who 'thought they could come down, make big speeches, and be listened to respectfully'. It was then that 'the people all got out together' and 'turned round and said in effect to the politicians, "Clear off, you don't even think the way we think"'.¹³⁹ Here once again for any historian willing to see, in the same place amongst descendants of the same people, 'the same aspirations, fears, and tensions are there',

but 'in a new context, with new language and arguments, and a changed balance of forces'.¹⁴⁰

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The West in front of the mirror

Liberalism's contradictions in (post)colonial terms.
The Haitian case (1791-present)

Antonio J. Pinto

Abstract

The history of Haiti underlines the major contradictions of western liberalism since its inception in the eighteenth century. Those contradictions have lasted up to the present and have become evident in four historical contexts: firstly, the start of the Haitian revolution in August 1791 showed the actual limits of the liberty, equality, and fraternity that French bourgeoisie proclaimed in Paris. Secondly, when the Dominican Republic became independent in February 1844, to get Dominican friendship and control of the area, the United States promised the Dominicans protection against the Haitians, as long as they denied their own African ancestry. Thirdly, the United States continued to interfere in Haitian internal affairs throughout the twentieth century, determining the miserable fate of the country in the following decades. Finally, western intervention in Haiti since the 1980s, ostensibly inspired by the wish to guarantee political, economic, and social freedom, has turned the country into a puppet of foreign interests. The Haitian case underlines the contradictions of liberalism, especially in connection to its postcolonial legacies in the Third World.

Key words: liberalism, contradictions, postcolonial studies, Haiti, United States, intervention

The fourteenth of July 1789 marks the end of modern history and the start of contemporary times. It led to unprecedented changes: the end of absolute monarchy; the birth of liberalism; an end to caste privileges; and the dawn of social classes, in which the bourgeoisie would play a crucial role. The French revolution claimed its inspiration in the Enlightenment, though

enlightened thinkers like Immanuel Kant, Voltaire, or Montesquieu, would not have approved of a movement based on the rebellion of the mob, the *sans-culottes*. However, the principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity did come from the Enlightenment, as did the concept of the 'citizen', as opposed to the subject or serf. These were the values that Parisian masses brandished when they stormed the Bastille, convinced that the new society to be born after the fall of the *ancien régime* would grant them everything they lacked: land, political participation, better working conditions, etc. But the true leading group of the revolution, the French bourgeoisie, had other plans: it wanted the abolition of traditional society to make way for a new society permitting social mobility based on personal merit. In this way, they would take advantage of their economic strength to become the new ruling class and would also do whatever was required to send the masses back home, preventing them from participating in national politics. Ultimately, although, the French revolution began as a popular movement, it ended up as a transformation to exchange one political elite for another.¹

Though the changes that the French revolution brought were limited in scope, they transformed French, and European, society: not only did they originate a liberal regime in French territory, but they also provoked the downfall of traditional monarchy across Europe in the following decades. The 1820s saw revolutionary attempts in such places as Spain, Greece, and Portugal, and the 1830s witnessed the triumph of liberal political regimes, including in France and Spain. It is important, though, to highlight that European liberal politicians and intellectuals saw liberty, equality, and fraternity as three principles that should never be exported beyond the continent. The reason was clear: several European countries were colonial powers, and they risked losing their colonies if they were to apply the same ideas that had triumphed in the metropolis. This fear that the contagion of liberal revolutionary principles might spread overseas goes back to the early days of the French revolution: in 1789 the Marquis of Mirabeau, member of the French National Assembly, when discussing the limits of the three concepts, warned his fellow deputies: '*citoyens des Antilles, vous habitez sous le Vesuve*'.² The message was clear: in the French colonies, especially in Saint-Domingue (current Haiti), there were large numbers of coloured people who were better kept aside from the initiatives applied in France.

C.L.R. James quoted another phrase by Mirabeau that illustrates the French elite's conviction that the colonies could not take part in the revolution:

You claim representation proportionate to the number of the inhabitants. The free blacks are proprietors and taxpayers, and yet they have not been allowed to vote. And as for the slaves, either they are men or they are not; if the colonists consider them to be men, let them free them and make them electors and eligible for seats; if the contrary is the case, have we, in apportioning deputies according to the population of France, taken into consideration the number of our horses and mules?³

The reason for keeping the African people in the colonies, both the slaves and the free-coloured, apart from revolutionary principles was simple: a majority of the French bourgeois supporting the revolution in continental France were either merchants, slave traders, or absentee planters, who benefited from the exploitation of African slaves in the French Caribbean. If they applied liberty, equality, and fraternity to their colonial possessions, the Africans would become citizens and the plantation economy would break down, jeopardising the main source of income for the representatives of the revolutionary government. Saint-Domingue was the best example of the aforementioned colonial regime: taken from the Spanish crown in the peace treaty of Ryswick (1697), its French administrators had devoted their efforts to the promotion of sugar plantations, one of the few crops possible in such a mountainous territory (*Haiti*, in the *taino* language, means ‘with mountains’). Sugar cane became Saint-Domingue’s tropical crop while demand for sugar grew in the world market. The planters, most of them absentees who spent long periods of time in France, took this chance to increase production using African slaves, whom they made to work for endless hours in miserable conditions, till many of them died.⁴ The rate of import of African slaves was so high that, by the 1790s, there were 450,000 coloured people in Saint-Domingue, and only 40,000 whites.⁵

Therefore, when the deputies in the French National Assembly discussed the right of representation, to decide how the colonial white elite would choose its representatives in the metropolis, the ‘colour question’ was an issue: if the free-coloured were granted the right of representation, their deputies would outnumber the whites. And, of course, if they granted the slaves political rights, that is, if they freed them, such colonies as Saint-Domingue would explode in a black revolutionary wave.

In May 1790 the National Assembly denied political representation to free-coloured people in the colonies, evidencing the first major contradiction of liberalism: ‘liberalism’ meant ‘limited liberty’, and made distinctions based, for example, on skin colour. In October, a free-coloured man

from Saint-Domingue, Vincent Ogé, with the support of Jean-Baptiste Chavanne, started a rebellion that the colonial army quickly crushed. Ogé and Chavanne fled to the Spanish side of the island, but the Spaniards handed them back to the French authorities, who executed them in Le Cap Français, the capital of Saint-Domingue's North Province, on 25 February 1791. Nevertheless, news of the events in the metropolis had already arrived in Saint-Domingue and was known to all the slaves, who rose up in rebellion against the French white elite in the night of the 23 August 1791. Saint-Domingue's revolution, also known as the Haitian revolution, had started. For thirteen years, former slaves fought the French administration, as well as the armies of foreign powers, namely Britain and Spain, which wished to take advantage of the situation to seize that part of the island of Hispaniola. First under the leadership of Jean-François Papillon and Georges Biassou, and later under the command of Toussaint Louverture, Saint-Domingue's rebels defeated Bonaparte's army in November 1803.⁶

Unfortunately, Louverture himself did not live to see the triumph of the revolution: his men had betrayed him and handed him over to the French, who held him in Fort-de-Joux prison, on the Franco-Swiss border, where he died in late 1803. His lieutenant, Jean-Jacques Dessalines, proclaimed the independence of Haiti, the first black independent republic in world history, on 1 January 1804. Following Nick Nesbitt's interpretation of the historical process, it is necessary to highlight two features of the Haitian revolution. Firstly, as mentioned above, it reflected the contradictions of liberal thinking, as French revolutionary principles were never supposed to reach the colonies, especially Saint-Domingue. Secondly, in the sense that the Haitian revolution realised the revolutionary programme without limits, it must be judged as the only true example of the victory of what he calls 'the radical enlightenment'.⁷ Nesbitt's thesis reinforces the case made by the Haitian anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot, expressed in his essay *Silencing the past*, which argues that, since 1791, but especially after Haiti's independence in 1804, the West was so shaken that colonial powers did whatever was needed to silence what had just happened in France's former colony. Moreover, a global propaganda campaign started to frame Haiti as a country that represented a total inversion of 'the natural order of things'. Hence, Haiti's example was not to be followed anywhere, and the country itself had to remain isolated from the rest of the world.⁸

As we can see, liberal political doctrine applied to Haiti did not mean 'liberty, equality, and fraternity' at all, but discrimination, isolation, and oblivion.

The shaping of national identities: the Dominican Republic vs 'the other'

In this section, I cross the Haitian-Dominican border to explore how the definition of Dominican national identity fostered Haiti's international isolation, providing another example of how supposedly liberal principles, such as 'nation', in the modern sense, had illiberal consequences on Haitian soil. One needs to understand that interaction between both sides of Hispaniola was always complicated. The rulers in the east and the west normally expressed the relationship in terms of confrontation, a feeling that they transmitted onto both peoples. Initially, the struggle between the French West, Saint-Domingue, and the Spanish East, Santo Domingo, had been a merely political and strategic struggle that reflected the rivalries between France and Spain. The French ambition to push the frontier to the East, and the Spanish claim to recover the western side of the island, were the source of Franco-Hispanic conflicts in Hispaniola in the eighteenth century. However, with the outbreak of the French revolution 1789, ideological rivalry was added to the struggle between France and Spain, both in Europe and in the Caribbean. Hispaniola became the arena where the confrontation would be more violent, as the Spanish authorities hurried to prevent revolutionary ideas from crossing the border and spreading on Dominican soil.⁹

Then, on the night of 23 August 1791, the slaves from Saint-Domingue's North Province rebelled, setting fire to plantations and starting a movement to kill the colony's white elite and seize power. This introduced a new element into Hispanic-Dominican hatred towards the West of the island: race. Saint-Domingue's slave revolution was an example that all the powers wished to stop at once, before it reverberated in other colonies with abundant African descendants, most of them slaves. Consequently, Hispanic Dominican identity was anti-French, in the territorial sense, anti-revolutionary, and anti-black. But there was a problem with this last element that defined it: in the 1790s, Spanish Santo Domingo had around 35,000 white people, 38,000 free-coloured inhabitants, and 30,000 slaves.¹⁰ The reason was that by the early seventeenth century Santo Domingo had stopped receiving Spanish migrants, as colonists preferred to go to Spain's other American possessions, where the exploitation of gold and silver mines, together with the promise of large plots of land, would make it easier for them to prosper. To keep Hispanic-Dominican population growing, miscegenation between colonists and African slaves, often in the shape of sexual

abuse by the former against the latter, became commonplace, resulting in a majority of mixed-race people.

In their physical appearance, Hispanic Dominican people were not very different from the rebels in Saint-Domingue, but a distinction had to be made, as many free-coloured Dominicans were being incorporated in the army, and in the colony's administration. According to Dominican historian Frank Moya Pons, the way to underline the distinction between the people in the East and the rebels in the West was to invent a new concept: Dominican Spaniard. Conceived as a proto-national identity in Santo Domingo, the term 'Dominican Spaniard' was relevant not because of what it implied, but due to the elements that it excluded. In other words, being a Dominican Spaniard meant not being French, or revolutionary, or a slave and (potential) rebel, as these three concepts were linked to Saint-Domingue, later Haiti – a territory whose example no one should follow in the future.¹¹ That is how the concept of 'liberal nation', consolidated in Europe in the first half of the nineteenth century, landed in Hispaniola to highlight the supposedly 'pure' nature of Dominican Spaniards, as well as the supposed 'corrupted' condition of Saint-Domingue's rebels, later Haitians. The whole process illustrates to which extent Benedict Anderson's concept of nations as 'imagined communities' became true here.¹²

Hispanic Dominican antipathy towards Haiti increased as years went by, among other reasons because the western ex-slaves invaded the eastern side three times. In 1801, Toussaint Louverture started a one-year domination over the whole island, defying Napoleon Bonaparte's authority, but the French expedition that Admiral Victor Leclerc commanded pushed him back to Saint-Domingue, marking the start of Louverture's decay. In 1805, Haitian emperor Jean-Jacques Dessalines, known as Jacques I, father of Haitian independence the year before, attacked Dominican villages next to the frontier, to avenge previous Dominican expeditions against Haiti; and in 1822, Haitian president Jean-Pierre Boyer took advantage of the independence of Spanish Haiti, a very weak state born in November 1821 on the initiative of José Núñez de Cáceres, to invade the East and start a twenty-two year Haitian domination of the island. The fact that Dominican independence, and the birth of the Dominican Republic, took place on 28 February 1844 against Haiti, encouraged anti-Haitian feelings in the Dominican intellectual elite that chose the defining elements of Dominican national identity. This identity, again, consisted basically of denying African ancestry and exploiting the ever-present potential danger of another invasion from the west. Thus, following Eric Hobsbawm's

argument, the Dominican nation joined five basic elements together, some of them invented: the same language (Spanish); the same territory, which had to be defended against Haiti; the same religion (Catholicism) and cultural values; common physical characteristics (non-blackness); and the disposition to defend the latter even at the cost of one's life.¹³

These values, above all the (supposed) ethnic ones, became reinforced thanks to the intervention of foreign powers – especially the United States – on Dominican soil. When Dominican independence was proclaimed, the US was already a consolidated liberal regime which held elections and defended (white) people's basic rights. However, it was also a slave-owning country, in which enslaved Africans and their descendants worked on plantations in the southern states. Looking to spread its area of influence in the Americas, the United States had a great interest in Dominican Bay of Samana, in the southern part of the island. At the same time, Dominicans were looking for foreign protection against future Haitian aggressions. The US Government was ready to offer them assistance, in exchange for preferential access to the Bay of Samana. This started a debate in North American society because it seemed contradictory to offer help to a country of mostly African descendants, while many people in the US were still slave owners. The solution to this conundrum was explained in the *Evening Post* in September 1854:

It is pretended, we know, by those who are most directly interested in securing an American protectorate for the Dominican government, that the revolters (sic), and their rulers are mostly white people; but that is an error too easily exploded to prevail long. We doubt if any unprejudiced witness can be produced who will testify that there are five hundred whites in all Dominica (sic). In the public service there is not a single White man or an individual who would have been recognised as a citizen under the rules laid down by Messrs. Clayton and Webster during their respective administration of the State Department.¹⁴

In other words, if Dominicans wished to continue to get US support against Haiti, they would need to hide their African ancestry and pretend that they were not black at all.¹⁵ Such attitudes have prevailed in Dominican popular culture right up to the present moment, influencing political campaigns by parties and leaders of different ideologies, as I shall analyse in the following sections.

Armed intervention in Haiti

The United States has repeatedly intervened in Haiti from the nineteenth century onwards, and it is both an expression of US ambition to control the American space, as well as the perfect example of the contradictions of liberal policy with regard to Haitian territory. To understand the phenomenon, we need to go back to 1915, the year of the first US invasion of Haiti. The Washington government's pretext for invading was the need to put an end to the violence in Haiti: a popular outburst in Port-au-Prince, which reflected the antagonism between blacks and so-called 'mulattoes',¹⁶ concluded with the capture, slaughter and quartering of President Guillaume Sam by the rebels.¹⁷ It is true that President Sam, who had won the elections in 1915 claiming to represent the black masses, had kidnapped some young boys and girls from the Port-au-Prince mulatto elite to prevent this social group from trying to overthrow him. It might seem that events in Port-au-Prince would have worried the North American neighbour, which sought to restore peace in Haiti to stabilise the Caribbean region around the start of the First World War.

Yet, what triggered US armed intervention in Haiti, though connected to the context of the Great War, was a matter of a totally different nature. One of the most influential elite groups in Haitian domestic politics was the German merchants. They were crucial for importing most of the manufactured goods Haiti needed, as well as the other necessary commodities that the country, focused as it was on tropical crops like coffee, did not produce domestically.¹⁸ These merchants played the same role in Dominican territory as well. In invading Haiti in 1915, the US was not so worried about the preservation of social peace in the country, as it was concerned about the prospect of Germany taking control of Hispaniola Island. Although at that time the United States had not yet entered the war, the chance that Hispaniola might be a base for German operations next to US territory, in contravention of the Monroe Doctrine, scared US foreign policy experts. In the event, just one year after the US had occupied Haiti, it also invaded the Dominican Republic.¹⁹

US administration in Dominican territory lasted only eight years (1916-1924). Among other things, it meant the consolidation of sugar economy and the spread of banana plantations in that country, which contributed to the Dominican Republic's take-off. In contrast, US occupation of Haiti lasted until 1934, when President Roosevelt ended the North American military presence there. During its nineteen-year occupation of Haiti, the United States fostered the development of local infrastructures and

economy, but, unlike in the Dominican Republic, it never created the conditions for a self-sustainable, grassroots development once US investors had left. There were three major consequences of the US occupation of Haiti, which at the same time demonstrate how liberalism failed to create the conditions for Haiti's fully independent existence.

Firstly, liberalism only operated in the economic sense, and always favoured US economic interests. The North American companies and investors that became involved with the Haitian economy between 1915 and 1934 did not reinvest their profit in Haiti, so the country had to rely upon its own resources to be capable of achieving economic independence. We can conclude that the only winner in Haiti's modest economic take-off under the occupation was the United States itself. On the one hand, most of the profits from the new Haitian economic sectors and companies were repatriated to the US. On the other hand, Haiti's dependence on US capital consolidated for almost two decades, which increased US influence not only over Haiti, but over the Caribbean region in general, raising doubts about how far Haiti could be regarded as a fully independent, self-governing country.²⁰ Thus, North American liberalism put into practice the principles that Andre Gunder Frank summed up in his theory of development – that core countries, that is, rich global powers, pretend to help poor, periphery countries, while exploiting their natural resources. In doing so, they foster the specialisation of periphery countries' economy in one single economic activity, thereby making them dependent on core, rich countries, to get everything else they need for their people to survive. This renders the periphery countries incapable of developing on their own, which further strengthens the position of the rich countries. At the same time, core countries prevent political regimes in periphery countries from taking initiatives that jeopardise their source of income.²¹

Secondly, the US departure from Hispaniola meant that the balance of power on the island shifted: up to that point, Haiti had been the stronger and richer state. The Dominican Republic had constantly felt threatened by the possibility of another Haitian invasion, given Haiti's stronger armed forces and richer treasury. The end of US occupation, though, left the Dominican nation as the stronger one, in economic and in political terms, while Haiti remained at the mercy of the United States and of its neighbour to the East. The US would offer Haiti economic support, either directly, or through transnational organisations, like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) or the World Bank (WB), NGOs, etc., but, in line with the neoliberal doctrine of the 'Chicago School' of economists, in order to get funding from these organisations, and other foreign powers,

the Haitian government had to demonstrate that it could return the money it had borrowed, plus interest.²² Moreover, in the future Haiti was obliged to strengthen commercial links to the Dominican Republic to obtain the basic products that it lacked. The only way that Haiti could pay for its imports from the Dominican Republic was by exporting cheap labour to its neighbour. Workers from Haiti would be compelled to work in the Dominican Republic in the years to come.²³

Thirdly, the two decades of US occupation of Haiti triggered the 'race issue' in the country: though it was half a century since slavery had been abolished in North America, strong prejudices remained against equal civil rights between blacks and whites. This was a problem that US administration transferred to Haiti: in the shape of the *cacos* rebellion in 1918-1920, led by former officer, and now nationalist rebel, Charlemagne Péralte, who opposed President Dartiguenave, the puppet President supported by the US. Péralte defended the rights of the black masses from the North, opposing the new tax system that fell on the poor, mostly 'black' or 'African descendants', which allowed them to avoid paying taxes in exchange for performing unpaid labour on public works projects.²⁴ And, as a cultural movement, *noirisme* advocated for the rights and the pride of black people, who had been excluded from Dartiguenave's administration, and suffered racial discrimination from the representatives of the US, who barely had any contact with local black people.²⁵

All in all, the involvement of the US, the incarnation of liberal economics and liberal democracy in the world, in Haiti's domestic affairs ruined the country. Haiti was turned into a non-free nation that would continue to depend on the 'help' of those who would take advantage of its weak situation.

Duvalierism

Just as the US invasion of Haiti in 1915 was motivated by US security concerns during the First World War, the same point applies when we consider the nature of the regime led by the Duvalier clan in Haiti (1957-1986). To understand the circumstances that favoured François Duvalier's victory in 1957, and the continuation of his regime under his son, Jean-Claude, we must take into consideration the Cold War context. The electoral campaign that made 'Papa Doc' (François Duvalier) President in 1957 was marked by violence on the side of both candidates: Duvalier himself, who claimed to represent the interest of the black masses, and who promised to lead a black revolution; and Louis Déjoie, a representative of the so-called

mulatto elite. Violence by the supporters of both candidates became so crude that other potential Presidential candidates withdrew from the campaign, fearing for their own lives.²⁶

Duvalier's triumph was due to two main factors: firstly, he had been a well-respected family doctor in the Haitian countryside, helping the poor fight the *pian* disease (yaws), among others.²⁷ His years as a doctor earned him popular affection, as well as the appointment as Minister of Public Health by the government of Léon Dumarsais Estimé (1946-1950).²⁸ Secondly, Papa Doc proclaimed himself the leader of the *noiriste* cause, which meant that his government would be openly anti-mulatto, that is, anti-elite. In the campaign to win the Haitian presidency he already had shown the main features of his future regime: the identification of the 'national cause' with himself, so that everyone opposing him was anti-patriotic, and therefore had to be eliminated.²⁹ Once in office, in order to carry out these 'anti-patriotic' cleansing, Duvalier created the *tontons macoûtes*, the regime's secret police that operated as a *de facto* personal guard for the President. The *tontons macoûtes* consisted of two groups of people. There were the pro-Duvalier fanatics, and there were those who simply needed money, and were ready to commit as many human rights violations as Duvalier required, to make a living. Whatever their motives, they engaged in indiscriminate persecution, imprisonment, torture, and execution of alleged 'enemies' of the President, and consequently 'enemies of the nation'.

During the first years of Duvalier's presidency, which coincided with the end of Dwight Eisenhower's term and the start of J.F. Kennedy's era in the US, Haiti's North American neighbour faced a difficult dilemma. It had watched as rebellion spread in Cuba from 1956, until on 1 January 1959 the revolution triumphed, and the island thereafter moved inexorably into the orbit of the Soviet Union, in a period of high tensions in the Cold War. Duvalier in Haiti could be regarded by the US as a potential ally against communism. Yet, Kennedy and his New Frontier politics made great play of the need to preserve liberal democracy in the continent. Seen from that perspective, Duvalier was less an ally and more of an impediment to the US crusade against communism, and other forms of totalitarianism. In fact, the abuses that Papa Doc committed against so-called dissidents provoked such a scandal in the United Nations, the Organisation of American States, and the US itself, that President Kennedy sponsored a plot to overthrow Duvalier and bring a new regime to power in Haiti.³⁰

Kennedy's assassination on 22 November 1963 marked a change in US foreign policy: under the administrations of Lyndon B. Johnson and then of Richard Nixon, America's global priority was not the defence of liberal

democracy. Instead, its major concern was to fight communism around the world, as relations between the Soviet and the capitalist blocs deteriorated with the overthrow of Nikita Khrushchev in Moscow and the start of Leonid Brezhnev's era in October 1964. In this international context, with the US war in Vietnam gathering momentum, ideas like the struggle for global democracy gave way to a more practical, realist principle:³¹ 'my enemy's enemy is my friend'. In the Caribbean, Duvalier suddenly looked like one anti-communist ally who could be very useful for the US. This accounts for Washington's economic assistance to Papa Doc's regime, but even more so to Jean-Claude Duvalier ('Baby Doc'), who took over as Haitian President after his father's death in 1971.

Haiti's role as an exporter of tropical commodities, particularly coffee, consolidated under both Duvaliers, and consequently the country's dependence on imports for all the other products that the Haitian people needed grew. Once again, economic liberalism meant unfreedom for Haiti, which would never become a fully independent country as long as it had to rely on other countries for both basic necessities and economic aid. In exchange for financial assistance, François Duvalier relaxed his attitude towards the mulatto elite, with whom he developed a friendly relationship along the 1960s. Initially, that elite was not keen to collaborate with the regime, but, linked to Haitian business as it was, its position changed when it saw the influx of US dollars into the country, thanks to the mediation of US businessmen, including Nelson Rockefeller, vice-president under Gerald Ford's administration. Under Baby Doc, Haiti's economic dependence on external financial assistance increased, during a period that the President himself defined as an 'economic revolution'. Even Jean-Claude Duvalier's attempts to generate electricity in Haiti only served to increase the country's dependence, as the contracts he signed made Haiti's external debt even greater.

Overall, the consequences of liberal politics towards Haiti during the Cold War were: the country's growing indebtedness; increasing inflation and a rising cost of living; economic recession; and deteriorating living standards while, thanks to the Duvaliers' repression, the working class lacked trade unions to organise and present their demands to the state. Meanwhile, the regime and its acolytes became richer.³²

Conclusion

The contradictions of liberalism in Haiti have only got sharper over the past forty years. The fall of the Duvaliers led to political instability in the

country, and the governments that came after Baby Doc were no more democratic than his. There was hope in December 1990, when Father Jean-Bertrand Aristide, at the time a Salesian priest, was elected in the first democratic, and peaceful, elections in Haitian recent history. Aristide had been one of the leading characters in opposition to the Duvaliers, and later to Henri Namphy's dictatorship (1986-1988): in fact, on 11 September 1988 his parish suffered an attack by Namphy's supporters that led to several casualties among the worshippers. In the 1990 campaign, Aristide underlined his role as defender of the interests of the black masses, and presented a social programme that included, among other measures, a tax increase on the rich, and an end to economic dependence on the US. His victory was unexpected, especially considering that Washington had financed the campaign of his opponents.³³

For fifteen years, US liberal politicians and diplomats, who claimed to believe in free democratic elections and in respecting the people's choice, handicapped Aristide's *Lavalas* government.³⁴ In September 1991 they supported the coup by Raoul Cédras, who restored military dictatorship in the country, but then the US withheld its support to Cédras and sponsored Aristide's return to the Presidency in 1994, while limiting his ability to make decisions by exercising economic violence against his government, which still needed international, but particularly US, financial support. Finally, the US supported the plot that led to a soft coup in 2004 that terminated Aristide's presidency in Haiti forever. Economic and financial pressure, together with the war waged by conservative media, and by US-sponsored NGOs against the regime, ensured that Haiti remained a highly dependent country. The state was incapable of mobilising its own resources to deal with the consequences of the major earthquake of 12 January 2010. This helplessness provoked a hypocritical reaction from the same institutions and countries that had sentenced it to political death. 'Haiti fatigue', as the historian Philippe Girard has called it, denotes the general assumption that, no matter how much help is devoted to them, Haitians will never be capable of taking control of their own country.³⁵

Maybe the best expression of liberal hypocrisy about Haiti can be found in the assassination of President Jovenel Moïse on 7 July 2021. Up until the present moment (July 2023), nobody has been charged with the murder, and what is more important, the (neo) liberal West seems unconcerned that the country has had even less political stability ever since. There have been no new Presidential elections, while the media reports increasing violence on the streets of Port-au-Prince. As for the situation in other parts of the country, which the media do not report, one

can only wonder. Why is it that ‘democratic’ countries turn their backs on Haiti, leaving it to its cursed destiny? Assuming a postcolonial perspective, I can only find two complementary explanations. In practical terms, Haiti’s position in the Caribbean makes it a useful intermediate communication point between South America and North America, and those who wish to conduct shady business without official interference can take advantage of the power vacuum. In theoretical terms, and assuming a postcolonial historical, as well as critical, scope, western indifference towards Haiti – ‘Haiti fatigue’ – is heir to the historical characterisation of the country after independence: a place that represented something that no one wished to see imitated anywhere else, and so had to be ignored and isolated internationally.

Notes

- 1 Georges Lefebvre, *La Revolución francesa y el Imperio (1787-1815)*, México, 1960.
- 2 ‘Citizens of the Antilles, you live at the foot of Vesuvius’, translated by the author.
- 3 C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L’Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*, London, 2001, p49. In English in the original version.
- 4 Orlando Patterson, ‘The Constituent Elements of Slavery’, in Verene Shepherd and Hilary Mcd. Beckles (eds), *Caribbean Slavery in the Atlantic World: A Student Reader*, Kingston-Princeton-Oxford, 2000, pp33-41.
- 5 Johanna von Grafenstein and Laura Muñoz, ‘Población y sociedad’, in Ana Crespo Solana and María Dolores González-Ripoll (coords.), *Historia de las Antillas no hispanas*, Madrid, 2011, pp23-50.
- 6 Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New World: the Story of the Haitian Revolution* Cambridge MA, 2004.
- 7 Nick Nesbitt, *Universal Emancipation: the Haitian Revolution and the Radical Enlightenment*, Charlottesville and London, 2008.
- 8 Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the past: power and the production of history*, Boston, 2015.
- 9 Antonio Jesús Pinto Tortosa, *Santo Domingo: una colonia en la encrucijada, 1790-1820*, Santo Domingo-Legardeta, 2022, pp74-88.
- 10 José Luciano Franco, *Historia de la revolución de Haití* Santo Domingo, 1971, p72.
- 11 Frank Moya Pons, *Historia colonial de Santo Domingo* Santiago de los Caballeros, 1973; ‘Casos de continuidad y ruptura: la revolución haitiana en Santo Domingo (1789-1809)’, in Germán Carrera Damas (dir.), *La crisis estructural de las sociedades implantadas*, ‘Historia general de América Latina’, vol. V Paris, 2003, pp133-157.

- 12 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London and New York, 1983.
- 13 Eric J. Hobsbawm, *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge, 1984; Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Naciones y nacionalismo desde 1780*, Barcelona, 2000.
- 14 *Evening Post*, 2 September 1854.
- 15 Joseph Arthur Gobineau, *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines*, Paris, 1853-1855; Silvio Torres Saillant, 'El anti-haitianismo como ideología occidental', *Cuadernos Inter-c-a-ambio*, 9, 10 (2012): 15-48.
- 16 I use the expression 'so-called "mulattoes"' because there was no ethnic or physical difference between 'blacks' and 'mulattoes' in Haiti. Following Michel-Rolph Trouillot's thesis, on the one hand, Haitian blacks considered themselves descendants of the former slaves, and representatives of 'the masses', understood as Haitian 'working class'. On the other hand, mulattoes were the blacks who earned better positions, either due to their job, or to their links to power, so they climbed up the social ladder and 'whitened' their lifestyle, imitating the habits of the whites. Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Haiti, State against nation: The origins & legacy of Duvalierism*, New York, 1990, pp109-136.
- 17 Philippe Girard, *Haiti. The Tumultuous History – From Pearl of the Caribbean to Broken Nation*, New York, 2010, pp81-96.
- 18 Trouillot, *Haiti*, pp59-82.
- 19 David Nicholls, *From Dessalines to Duvalier: Race, Colour and National Independence in Haiti*, Warwick, 1996, pp142-164.
- 20 Miguel Ceara Hatton, Leiv Marsteintredet & Jorgen Sorlye Yri, 'Introducción', *Iberoamericana. Nordic Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Studies*, 44, 1-2 (2014): 23-45.
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- 22 Katie Willis, 'Theories of Development', in Paul Cloke et al. (eds), *Introducing Human Geographies*, London, 2014, pp297-311.
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- 24 Girard, *Haiti*, pp81-96.
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- 27 In English, yaws: a tropical infection that affects the skin, bones, and joints.
- 28 A coup overthrew Estimé in 1950 and a new dictatorship led by Paul Magloire took power in the country. Not only did Duvalier identify with opposition to Magloire, but he also presented himself as the continuer of Estimé's legacy, Girard, *Haiti*, pp97-114.
- 29 Trouillot, *Haiti*, pp163-185.

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- 32 Trouillot, *Haiti*, pp186-216.
- 33 Peter Hallward, *Damming the Flood: Haiti and the Politics of Containment*, London and New York, 2007, pp1-38.
- 34 *Lavalas* was the creole term used to define the political formation that Aristide led. It means 'the flood', which tells about Aristide's conviction that he aimed at transforming the country. The title of Peter Hallward's book *Damming the Flood*, plays on the English translation of the party's name, referencing US efforts to contain Aristide's movement.
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Review article

We have not finished reading Lukács

Mike Makin-Waite

Abstract

This review article discusses two recent books about Georg Lukács (1885-1971), offering observations on his best-known publication – *History and Class Consciousness*, published one hundred years ago – and positioning this work in the arc of his project as a whole. Highlighting some of Lukács’s theories and arguments, the review also notes the contexts and considerations which shaped Lukács’s thought. The article aims to show how Lukács’s intellectual activities were related to his political commitment, both when serving as a Hungarian government minister (in 1919 and again, even more briefly, in 1956) and during the periods in which he ‘retreated’ to unofficial research, generating books which were often at odds with the prevailing orthodoxies of ‘dialectical materialism’.

Key words: Adorno, aesthetics, class consciousness, communism, critical theory, Frankfurt school, Hungary, Lukács, Marxism, reification, Stalinism

Georg Lukács, *The Specificity of the Aesthetic: Volume one*, Brill, Leiden, 2023 [1963]; xliv + 777 pp; ISBN 9789004526068, £255.00, hbk

Tyrus Miller, *Georg Lukács and Critical Theory: Aesthetics, History, Utopia*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2022; ix + 269pp; ISBN 9781399502412, £85.00, hbk (also available Open Access and free of charge at <https://edinburghuniversitypress.com/book-georg-Lukács-and-critical-theory.html>)

Matthew J. Smetona, *Recovering the Later Georg Lukács: A Study on the Unity of His Thought*, The MIT Press, Cambridge MA and London, 2023; xiii and 395pp; ISBN 9780262545372, £72.00, pbk

The new books reviewed here serve to disprove a mistaken view which is persistently promoted by some on the left: the opinion that subsequent to his 1923 collection of essays, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist dialectics*, and a short 1924 book on Lenin, Georg Lukács became ‘a petrified Stalinist whose work henceforth ... could be of no further interest’, a thinker who committed ‘self-betrayal in the interests of accommodating himself to ... the East Bloc’.¹ Slavoj Žižek sees Lukács’s work from the early 1930s as “‘Thermidorian’”, echoing Leon Trotsky’s characterisation of the Soviet Union under Stalin’s leadership.² Chris Nineham states that ‘Lukács moved away from revolutionary politics and dedicated himself to literary criticism’.³

Let’s pass over Nineham’s judgement that Lukács’s further forty-odd years of intellectual and political work as a communist can be defined as a shift ‘away from revolutionary politics’. We’ll also leave aside the question of whether someone who others call a ‘Stalinist’ can, nevertheless, write interesting books. And the question of whether some works of ‘literary criticism’ might be more useful than shelves full of leftist tracts.

The issue this review article *will* explore is the extent to which some of the themes and questions that shaped *History and Class Consciousness* continued to concern Lukács in his writings on literature, aesthetics and philosophy in the 1950s and 1960s. It will note the shifting political contexts and the way that events across the decades shaped his choices about what themes to focus on, and how to present his arguments.

The potential value of these arguments helps explain a current renewal of interest in Lukács. This has generated several recent books, edited collections, new forewords to reissued works and the first publication in English of some of Lukács’s less well-known works. In his widely-read recent interventions on ecology, Kohei Saito has highlighted Lukács’s pioneering recognition of Karl Marx’s concept of ‘metabolism’ between humans and nature, which – convected through the writings of his student István Mészáros – is shaping an important and ongoing attempt to combine Marxism and ecological politics, expressed in the work of John Bellamy Foster, Paul Burkett and others.⁴

In the context of such promising initiatives, Viktor Orbán’s reactionary government decided to close and break up the Lukács Archive and Library in Budapest. State vandalism of this major Hungarian intellectual and cultural resource has stimulated the important work of the Lukács Archive International Foundation, which aims to counter the risk of materials from Lukács’s library being lost, and to publish a range of writings by and about him.⁵

The context of *History and Class Consciousness*

Lukács was unusual amongst leading figures in the revolutionary years following 1917 in that he had not previously been a member of a social democratic party. Whereas most prominent communists had been active in and had eventually split from parties which made up the Second International, this son of a rich banker joined the newly formed Hungarian Communist Party (HCP) at the end of 1918 as the result of an intellectual ‘conversion’. In his twenties, alongside writing remarkable books on aesthetics and literature, and increasingly influenced by Georg Hegel’s philosophy, he had taken his ‘first lessons in social science’ from the German sociologists Georg Simmel and Max Weber, ‘and not from Kautsky’.⁶

The wider context was that the Hungarian party itself was formed in quite a different manner than most sections of the communist Third International: its initial cadre comprised men who had been conscripted into the Austro-Hungarian military and then taken prisoner in Russia, being tutored there by Bolsheviks before returning to Hungary at the end of the First World War. As Béla Kun and other HCP founding members arrived back in Budapest, they established contacts with trade unionists, left-wing social democrats, and members of radical academic and cultural circles: several of the remarkable people in the discussion groups which Lukács was central to would in due course serve alongside him by taking positions in the 1919 Hungarian Soviet Republic, including the composers Béla Bartók and Zoltán Kodály, and the pioneering cinematographer and film critic Béla Balász.⁷

The Soviet Republic collapsed after 133 days: Admiral Horthy’s paramilitary thugs unleashed a murderous ‘white terror’. Lukács, initially directed to stay in Budapest to try and sustain an underground party structure, escaped to Vienna a couple of months after Kun and most other leading HCP members had scrambled there.

In straitened exile, recurrently facing the threat of deportation back to Hungary, Lukács recast articles written during the Soviet Republic and immediately afterwards, replacing some passages from 1919 and 1920 with completely different arguments.⁸ Learning from defeat, Lukács superseded his earlier utopian leftism with a ‘new conception of revolutionary realism’ which Michael Löwy saw as the ‘final stage of his ideological path from the [pre-Marxist] tragic world view to Leninism’.⁹

In new chapters written in 1921–22, Lukács applied aspects of Hegel’s philosophical method to reanimate Marxist theory. Developing themes

which he had explored before becoming a communist, Lukács argued that the proletariat's position within capitalism meant that it could and should be the 'identical subject-object' of history. In German idealism, this concept caught the dialectical development through which the split between subjective perception and objective reality would be overcome and the totality of existence properly and actively apprehended. In Lukács's Marxist application of this concept, the working class's achievement of the standpoint of totality would both express and depend on making and sustaining a successful revolution.

There were (and are) huge subjective barriers to this happening: working people were (and are) prevented from recognising that they had (have) the capacity to transform society if they were to act as a class by a range of forces which organised and promoted bourgeois ideology. Social-democracy was (is) one of these, along with many other political and cultural practices.

In this context, the crucial role of the communist party was to organise working people through identifying and promoting the steps that the class should take to overthrow capitalism. This meant 'imputing' or 'ascribing' to working people the class consciousness that they yet needed to develop.

Some people have seen this concept of 'ascribed class consciousness' as inherently arrogant and elitist, and Lukács's crediting of the communist party 'vanguard' with the right to determine what working people should think as the first step of his supposed descent into Stalinism. Read carefully, though, Lukács's argument is entirely consistent not only with Lenin's politics of leadership, but with classical Marxism itself. For Mészáros, 'Lukács's distinction between "ascribed" and "psychological" class consciousness is a reformulation of one of the basic tenets of the Marxian system'.¹⁰

The most original and influential concept in *History and Class Consciousness* is also a reformulation and development of Marx's thinking – although neither Lukács nor anyone else knew this in the early 1920s. His account of 'reification' was consistent with considerations on alienation which Marx had set out in 1844 in Paris, in manuscripts which were not rediscovered until 1930 (in a neat coincidence, Lukács was by then employed at the Marx-Engels-Lenin Institute in Moscow, becoming one of the first people to work on them, though 'circumstances' and changes in his own thinking meant that he chose to refrain from commenting on the 1844 manuscripts' validation of his 1923 positions).¹¹

Critical continuities?

Grigory Zinoviev, presiding at the Fifth Comintern Congress in 1924, angrily denounced *History and Class Consciousness* together with Karl Korsch's *Marxism and Philosophy*: 'if we get a few more of these professors spinning out their "Marxist theories" we will be lost. We cannot tolerate such theoretical revisionism'.¹²

Following a series of defeats for communist parties, particularly in Germany, the emphasis which Lukács and Korsch put on the importance of agency and political creativity was unwelcome. Zinoviev and his comrades wanted – needed – to blame 'objective' factors for the setbacks, not to admit 'subjective' shortcomings in their own thinking and practice. In order to remain active within the communist movement, Lukács's public response was to suppress his book. He refused permission for it to be republished until 1967, when he added a preface setting out his ongoing disagreements with his younger self, whilst allowing that the book had signalled some important issues (after the fall of the Soviet Union, an unfinished manuscript was found which showed that, in fact, Lukács had not immediately moved on from his book, but worked on a 'clarifying defence of *History and Class Consciousness*' in 1925 and 1926).¹³

The standard account is that, as Lukács abandoned his positions from *History and Class Consciousness*, 'reification' was taken up by the German philosophers and sociologists who would form 'the Frankfurt School'. Extending Marx's understanding of commodity fetishism, the concept 'denotes the fact that all relations between men [sic] in the world of capitalism appear as relations between things', or 'making a human process into an objective thing'.¹⁴ For Herbert Marcuse, Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno and others, reification helped explain how subjective outlooks which serve capitalism become internalised psychologically, distorting peoples' personalities and values, and generating hopes and anxieties which not only reconcile them to but integrate them within an exploitative system. (They also used the term 'reified' in a second, related, way to denote thinking which was frozen, stultified, and ossified, contrasting this with properly dialectical method).

In his new book, Matthew J. Smetona takes a fresh approach, arguing that during the decades in which Adorno and his colleagues were downplaying the influence Lukács had once had on them, with Adorno later indulging in Cold War inflected criticism of his 'reconciliation' with Soviet Marxism, Lukács *did* sustain his understanding of reification, and found ways to combine this with an activist commitment to

communism. By reading Lukács' works on literature, aesthetics and philosophy from the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s in the light of Lukács' 'theoretical framework' from 1923, Smetona asserts 'a fundamental continuity between the Lukács of *History and Class Consciousness* and the Lukács of his later writings'.¹⁵ His argument amounts to an extended positive response to a question Fredric Jameson raised in 1971: 'what if, far from being a series of self-betrayals, Lukács's successive positions proved to be a progressive exploration and enlargement of a single complex of problems?'¹⁶

Smetona's view requires him to address the fact that 'the later Lukács' stated that, in 1923, he had himself failed 'to subject the Hegelian heritage to a thoroughgoing materialist reinterpretation and hence to transcend and preserve it'.¹⁷ Smetona's explanation is that those aspects of *History and Class Consciousness* which Lukács *did* abandon still left intact his 'critique of reification from the methodological standpoint of the dialectical conception of totality', and that this provided a consistent theoretical framework, the source of the sharp 'acumen' which Lukács applied in his criticism of 'manifold ideological spheres'.¹⁸

For example, Lukács's studies of major realist novelists including Walter Scott, Honoré de Balzac and Leo Tolstoy 'revealed them to be engaged in the de-reification of nineteenth-century social life'.¹⁹ Smetona argues that books including *Writer and Critic* and *Essays on Realism*, generally seen as part of his 'Stalinist period', are in fact 'literary continuations' of Lukács's thinking in *History and Class Consciousness*, promoting the kinds of critical thinking we should apply so as to resist 'habituation to the normal functioning of capitalism', as well as anticipating themes and terms which would be further explored in the unfinished books on ontology which Lukács worked on during his last decade.²⁰ Lukács's position over the decades was that 'realism ... is the only aesthetic path to de-reification': not only a key to assessing literary works but a pointer towards how we should make sense of – and change – social relations.²¹

The political implications of Lukács's literary criticism were clearly stated in his contributions to the debate on expressionism which engaged a range of German writers during the 1930s.²² Lukács saw his role as 'providing methodological guidance for writers to produce works that de-reify', with this production consisting in tracing 'the objective forms and institutions of society back to the relations between persons that constitute them'.²³ He believed that the apparently 'radical' expressionist movement involved 'false criticism': it was an example of how romantic 'opposition' to capitalism can turn out to be 'an apology by way of

a mystifying critique of the present'.²⁴ However 'dangerous' and unsettling it appeared to be, expressionism was shaped by a 'subjective-idealist "mental escape from reality"', illustrated in the fantastic ambitions of one of its theorists to "dissolve the surrounding reality into a non-reality": it was 'an "ideology of diversion" that "necessarily collapses into reaction"'.²⁵ Lukács later extended and organised such arguments into his 1954 book *The Destruction of Reason* (this is often misunderstood and dismissed as his most 'Stalinist' work, even though it directly inspired fundamental insights of figures in the thoroughly anti-Stalinist New Left, with the book is currently being recovered by some young left intellectuals to inform critiques of current individualistic and subjectivist versions of 'radicalism').²⁶

Smetona's arguments about the consistency of Lukács's thinking are an important rejoinder to the dominant tendencies to emphasise breaks in his work, and to assume that a move into a different genre (literary criticism) means a move away from earlier (revolutionary) concerns. But the frequent doubling back from Lukács's insights from the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s to show how they echo (with different phraseology) the 1923 book can feel overdone, sometimes to the point of making it seem that Lukács, in his later works, was primarily and continually concerned to signal his commitment to *History and Class Consciousness*. Nor is it essential to Smetona's core positions to claim so strongly that the 1923 book is itself unified in its arguments: its chapters are in fact uneven in quality and emphasis. Smetona could also have done more to link the evolution, impact and deepening of Lukács's thought to changes in the wider context: for example, the way his instincts and values matched the 1930s Popular Front approach was the basis for Lukács's authority amongst many communist intellectuals, and helped strengthen the self-confidence he drew on during the twisting post-war years.

Aesthetics

These are minor criticisms: Smetona provides clear accounts of *The Historical Novel*, *The Young Hegel* and other works, offering many stimulating insights. Two chapters are devoted to considering one of Lukács's last works, *On Peculiarity as the Category of Aesthetics*, written in 1967 (and not yet translated into English). This work forms a kind of methodological complement to Lukács's wide-ranging and complex 1963 text, *The Specificity of the Aesthetic* – the first volume of which, translated by Erik M. Bachman, and edited by Bachman and Tyrus Miller, has just appeared

as volume two of 'the Lukács library' in the *Historical Materialism* book series published by Brill.²⁷

What makes aesthetics relevant to revolutionary politics? German idealists followed Immanuel Kant in treating aesthetics not as the study of features in objects, but as the study of our ways of engaging with things. One of its attractive, civilising features was that highlighting our aesthetic sensibilities points to a positive quality in human nature which is immune to the pursuit of honour and profit: on the occasions where we take genuine pleasure in beauty, this experience is independent of consideration of personal advantage.

Linking such themes to proposals for political development, Johann Gottlieb Fichte and others argued that aesthetic education was critical for producing exemplary citizens. Friedrich Schelling considered 'aesthetics the most important means for resolving the social problems of his time'.²⁸ Terry Eagleton has recently asserted that 'the aesthetic theories of ... Friedrich Schiller lie behind [Marx's] vision of communism, a society in which everyone will be free to express the wealth and diversity of their powers'.²⁹

In the twentieth century (and today) one of the biggest barriers to taking steps towards such a society was that current social arrangements corrupt peoples' consciousness, with bourgeois ideology blocking and diverting the outlooks and efforts that could establish ways of living a sustainable life, free from exploitation and oppression. Understanding how our aesthetic sense works and how it can be guided by cultural activity (writing, art, film-making) was therefore, for Lukács, a crucial part of educating and preparing people for the progressive historical actions that could lead towards socialism.

In his stimulating new introduction to *The Specificity of the Aesthetic*, Bachman addresses the question of whether the book resonates with *History and Class Consciousness*, written forty years previously. It does, in so far as both works seek to identify 'the means by which correct consciousness is to be attained in the face of reification'.³⁰ However, by 1963, these means are no longer identified with the class consciousness of the revolutionary proletariat, but with writers and their readers who call forth 'the deepest truth of Marxism: the humanisation of man as the content of the process of history which realises itself – in a myriad of varieties – in each individual human life'.³¹

As Bachman argues, this shift towards socialist humanism and associated democratic commitments expressed Lukács's responses to events from the 1950s: de-Stalinisation under Khrushchev; the need to avoid

nuclear war; the good sense of the Soviet Union's aspiration to 'peaceful co-existence' between socialist and capitalist countries; and the crushing of the 1956 Hungarian uprising (Lukács served as a minister in Imre Nagy's reform communism government, and was arrested and detained in Romania after the Soviet invasion). Lukács's resulting understanding – the basis of his substantial and multi-layered 1960s writings on this subject – was that works of art, and proper responses to them, 'have key roles to play in the formation of subjects with political agency, of personalities who understand themselves to be more doing than done-to. Art, in this view, is not so much a "sublimation and displacement of politics" as it is the incubator of political passions, commitments, and activity'.³² Smetona's related judgement is that 'Lukács grasps the particularity of the aesthetic in terms of the social-historical struggle between the old and the new, the struggle between competing classes that constitute the sum total of interrelations (i.e., the totality) in a particular society at a particular time'.³³

The long goodbye

Miller's ongoing contribution through editing 'the Lukács library' is complemented by his new book, which considers aspects of Lukács's influence and some implications of his thinking today. Miller traces how Frankfurt School figures moved on from *History and Class Consciousness* after it had made a major impact on them in the early 1920s: Adorno and Walter Benjamin were amongst those drawn decisively to Marxism through reading the book. As Martin Jay has stated, if Lukács had seen the proletariat as, at least potentially, 'as both the subject and object of history which needed only to become conscious of this role to throw off its chains', Frankfurt School members 'came increasingly to look askance at this equation', at first through developing the well-grounded 'fear that the historical moment for this event had passed without the opportunity's having been seized'.³⁴

Where Smetona continually doubles back to the 1923 book, Miller 'displaces' *History and Class Consciousness* from the centre of his discussion, 'so as to tease out other threads of Lukács's work and related motifs in Frankfurt School critical writing'.³⁵ Through 'retracing the long goodbye of infelicitous encounters between Lukács and the Frankfurt School, and particularly his collisions with Adorno', Miller opens up interesting themes including 'various concepts of utopia, the relations of theoretical critique to practice, the critical function of art ... problems of Stalinism and

other forms of twentieth-century authoritarianism, and the question of democratisation in both capitalist and socialist societies'.³⁶ He also asserts that there are continuities even longer-lasting than those which Smetona sees: Miller believes that Lukács 'continued to assume' the 'conceptual framework' which informed his pre-Marxist works, such as the *History of the Evolution of Modern Drama* (written 1906 to 1909, and only partially translated into English) 'even decades later and across the ideological and geographical divide that separates his early Hungarian period from his Moscow exile', including in his major book *The Historical Novel*.³⁷

Georg Lukács and Critical Theory showcases fascinating material, including details of the pre-war years in which the young Lukács – together with his friend Ernst Bloch – were influenced by Martin Buber and his 'messianic hope of a genuine *Gemeinschaft*' (community).³⁸ At this time, Lukács saw 'redemption' as 'the achievement of *Gemeinschaft* in this world – the temporal transcending of individuality and complete identification with others'.³⁹ According to Béla Balász, Lukács gave art 'a moral mission' in relation to this goal, 'that of providing a vision of a new, homogenous world that could inspire the actualisation of utopia'.⁴⁰ Miller notes that 'the promised redemption that Lukács and Bloch sought to prefigure' at this time, as students living in Heidelberg, 'was not ... a proletarian revolution that would inaugurate humanity's entry into the realm of freedom, but rather a religious revolution that would bring about something like a Dostoevskian religio-anarchic community of goodness, making unnecessary secular law and the state'.⁴¹

The book's second part primarily covers Adorno's understandings of surrealism, kitsch, avant-garde art, and opera. By now Miller has moved some way from Lukács's work and direct concerns, with the third part then segueing into even more 'unexpected terrains', including consideration of the Marquis de Sade and (separately) John Dewey's Commission on the Moscow Trials, which investigated the alleged 'crimes' of Trotsky and others.⁴²

Lukácsianism today?

There can be no question of easily applying Lukács's views to current issues. For one thing, some of the (mutually contradictory) criticisms of his work by a range of scholars and activists would need to be allowed so as to further develop the very method which Lukács advocated. As part of this, some – including this reviewer – would argue that there is modernist writing and art that explores and represents subjective states of mind, even in disordered

states, and is at the same time a stimulating contribution to us apprehending reality. Whatever disagreements there might be about what the criteria and standards of progressive art should be, and about which creative works should be promoted over others, we should recover Lukács's foundational assumption that these issues deserve serious and consequential argument.

Nevertheless, even to think of a simplistic 'Lukácsianism' today would be at odds with one of his key insights, which is that the possibilities of theoretical insight and effective action are both resourced and constrained by current social arrangements. The biggest shift in his own thinking was from the urgent hope that 1919 could open the way to 'the actualisation of utopia' to decades of work addressing 'the question of what a decelerated path to socialism might mean'.⁴³ Miller sees this as the question which connects Lukács's literary criticism and other writings, because for 'a socialism that may take a long time to arrive ... one needs ... not ethical leaps of transcendence, but an immanent understanding of constrained action in restricted action-contexts, insight into the opaque motivations and consciousness of actors, and attention to the many-sided dynamics of character formation and deformation'.⁴⁴

To discern any credible 'path to socialism' in our times would be a great thing: it is the most necessary and the least likely of the broad scenarios which face humanity. Part of the reason for this sorry situation is that the global dominance of neoliberal capitalism over the last four decades has spawned and been served by influential cultures which celebrate and reinforce reification. Some of these are clearly reactionary, including the denial of (or attempts to diminish) the problem of catastrophic climate breakdown, and current forms of racism. Others are mistaken reactions to the threats that we face, including 'conspiracy theories' – some of these more or less directly amplify far-right agendas, but others involve attempts to make sense of things in contexts where trust in liberal politics and 'mainstream' media has understandably diminished. Left-wingers should be particularly concerned about mystifications and misunderstandings which are influential in our movements. Since the 1980s, successive forms of postmodernism have been generating serious confusion amongst people with progressive intent: a degree of scepticism in respect of grand narratives is one thing, but theories which disregard objective reality in the name of affirming individualistic subjective 'choice' make the expressionist movement of the 1920s look like a model of rationality.

Used critically, Lukács's work will help in making sense of and responding to these cultural challenges: applying some aspects of Lukácsian realism could help provide a counter-framework to extreme relativism

and the problematic politics which result from it. His work also reminds us of the importance of conceptual models for social change which need to be realistic, transformative, and effective on a range of levels. It is an important resource for those who do not believe ‘that the possibility of de-reification has been foreclosed’, or ‘that the aggregate of human attributes and capacities has been incorporated into the commodity-form such that it is not possible to explain the commodity-relation in terms of the relation between persons’.⁴⁵

There will, however – and apart from the intrinsic challenges of his work – be considerable obstacles to recovering and developing Lukács’s realist theory so as to clarify and then counter the multiple mystifications and complex obfuscations which misshape so much social thought and political debate today. As Bachman notes, his ‘vision of art’s progressive role in the history and future of the human race bespeaks a belief in ... two master-narratives (of the emancipation of mankind and the speculative unity of all knowledge)’ that are, to say the least, out of fashion: at every turn, ‘the postmodernist’s incredulity will thus clash with what she perceives to be Lukács’s naïve faith in liberation, totality, and narrative itself’.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, as Smetona concludes, ‘the dialectic never ends, nor does the need to de-reify, so long as we live under capitalism. Thus we will never be finished with the reading and rereading’ of Lukács.⁴⁷

Thanks to Ben McCall, Sonia McCall-Labelle and Daniel Tutt for their comments on a draft of this article.

Notes

- 1 Miller, *Georg Lukács and Critical Theory*, p3 and p59. Miller is noting the misrepresentation, rather than promoting it.
- 2 Slavoj Žižek, ‘Postface’, in Georg Lukács, *A Defence of History and Class Consciousness: Tailism and the dialectic*, London, 2000, p151.
- 3 Chris Nineham, *Capitalism and Class Consciousness: The ideas of Georg Lukács*, London, 2010, p10.
- 4 Kohei Saito, *Marx in the Anthropocene: Towards the idea of degrowth communism*, Cambridge, 2022.
- 5 <https://www.lana.info.hu/en/front-page/>
- 6 Theo Pinkus (ed.), *Conversations with Lukács*, Cambridge MA, 1974, p100.
- 7 Mike Makin-Waite, ‘133 Days in 1919: The Hungarian Soviet Republic, and how it shaped the Comintern’, *Socialist History*, 55, (2019).
- 8 Michael Löwy tracks the rewriting in *Georg Lukács: From romanticism to Bolshevism*, London, 1979, pp173-179.

- 9 Ibid., p171.
- 10 István Mészáros, 'Contingent and necessary class consciousness', in Mészáros (ed.), *Aspects of History and Class Consciousness*, London, 1971, p94. Other opinions are also available: Edward Thompson railed against 'much latter-day "Marxist" writing' in which "'it", the working class, is assumed to have a real existence, which can be defined almost mathematically – so many men who stand in a certain relation to the means of production. Once this is assumed it becomes possible to deduce the class-consciousness which "it" ought to have (but seldom does have) if "it" was properly aware of its own position and real interests', E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, Harmondsworth, 1968, p10. Eric Hobsbawm, having noted Lukács's distinction 'between the actual ideas which men form about class, and which are the subject matter of historical study, and what [Lukács] calls "ascribed" class consciousness', thought it best to sidestep the tricky debate: 'historians ... are naturally more concerned professionally with what actually happened (including what might under specified circumstances have happened) than they are with what ought really to happen. I shall therefore leave aside much of Lukács's discussion as irrelevant to my purpose, which is the rather modest one of the historian'. E.J. Hobsbawm, 'Class consciousness in history' in Mészáros, *Aspects of History*, pp6-7.
- 11 Reviewers in Germany, where they were first published in 1932, noted that the manuscripts 'provided ... documentary confirmation of the primacy Lukács had given to the Hegelian-dialectical core of Marx's thought, and to the critique of reification'. Andrew Arato and Paul Breines, *The Young Lukács and the Origins of Western Marxism*, London, 1979, p209.
- 12 Grigory Zinoviev, 'The Struggle Against the Ultra-Lefts and Theoretical Revisionism', speech at Fifth Congress of the Communist International, June 1924.
- 13 Georg Lukács, *A Defence of History and Class Consciousness: Tailism and the dialectic*, London, 2000. 'Clarifying defence' is from Andrew Feenberg's speech at a conference of the Platypus Affiliated Society, University of Chicago, 1 April 2023.
- 14 Herbert Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution: Hegel and the rise of social theory*, London, 1968, p112; Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A vocabulary of culture and society*, London, 1990, p35.
- 15 Smetona, *Recovering*, p1.
- 16 Fredric Jameson, *Marxism and Form*, Princeton NJ, 1971, p163.
- 17 Georg Lukács, 'Preface to the New Edition', *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, London, 1971, pXX.
- 18 Smetona, *Recovering*, p7 and p1.
- 19 Ibid., p21.
- 20 Ibid., p23 and p86.
- 21 Ibid., p41.

- 22 Defining contributions to the debate are collected in Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin, Ernst Bloch, Bertolt Brecht and Georg Lukacs, *Aesthetics and Politics*, London, 1977.
- 23 Smetona, *Recovering*, p96 and p158.
- 24 Ibid., p40.
- 25 Ibid., p41 and p42.
- 26 In his account of the development of the Nairn-Anderson theses, Perry Anderson cites the section of *The Destruction of Reason* on ‘some characteristics of Germany’s development’: ‘Lukacs’s concern with the ideological forms and functions of class consciousness in history looked not dissimilar to Gramsci’s preoccupation with the cultural patterns of domination and submission’, Perry Anderson, *English Questions*, London, 1992, pp3-4. A forthcoming special issue of the journal *Historical Materialism* will carry a range of pieces on issues raised by *The Destruction of Reason*.
- 27 Volume one of the Lukács Library was also edited by Miller: *Georg Lukács, The Culture of People’s Democracy: Hungarian essays on literature, art, and democratic transition, 1945-1948*, Leiden, 2013.
- 28 Katerina Clark, *Moscow, the Fourth Rome: Stalinism, cosmopolitanism, and the evolution of Soviet culture, 1931-1941*, Cambridge MA, 2011, pp107-108.
- 29 Terry Eagleton, ‘Be Like the Silkworm’, *London Review of Books*, 29 June 2023.
- 30 Erik M. Bachman, ‘Art in Its *Eigenart*: Editor’s introduction’ to Georg Lukács, *The Specificity of the Aesthetic: Volume one*, p xxxiv.
- 31 Georg Lukács, *Record of a Life: An autobiographical sketch*, London, 1983, p169. The language here confirms Hegel’s influence on Lukács to the end.
- 32 Bachman, ‘Art in Its *Eigenart*’, pXXXIX.
- 33 Smetona, *Recovering*, p174. Smetona points out (p136, quoting *The Historical Novel*) that ‘totality in literary depiction does not consist of “completeness of description” but rather “the working-out of essential human and social determinants”’.
- 34 Martin Jay, *Permanent Exiles: Essays on the intellectual migration from Germany to America*, New York, 1986, p32.
- 35 Miller, *Georg Lukács and Critical Theory*, p3.
- 36 Ibid., p4 and p19.
- 37 Ibid., p65 and p72.
- 38 Lee Congdon, *The Young Lukács*, Chapel Hill NC, 1983, p77. It should be noted that *Gemeinschaft* was and is a highly complex and contested concept.
- 39 Ibid., p77.
- 40 Ibid., p79.
- 41 Miller, *Georg Lukács and Critical Theory*, p35.
- 42 Ibid., p19.
- 43 Ibid., p38.
- 44 Ibid., p38.

45 Smetona, *Recovering*, p22.

46 Bachman, 'Art and *Eigenart*', pX.

47 Smetona, *Recovering*, p355.

Reviews

Ralph Darlington, *Labour Revolt in Britain, 1910-14*, Pluto Press, London, 2023; x + 326pp, illus; ISBN 9780745339030, £19.99, pbk; ISBN 9780745348063, PDF; ISBN 9780745348070, EPub

The Great Labour Unrest (GLU), as historians have come to call it, is the name given to the wave of radicalisation and militancy that affected Britain and parts of Ireland from 1910 to its abrupt termination by the outbreak of the World War in August 1914. The dimensions were awesome. One million workers were involved in strikes. In 1912, there were 40 million strike-days. Between 1910 and 1914, trade union membership increased from 2.5 to 4 million. Famously, George Dangerfield's *The Strange Death of Liberal England* argued that the irrationalism of the *fin de siècle* had crept across the English Channel from the odd, ever-restless lands of continental Europe to express itself in syndicalism, the suffragettes, and the third Home Rule crisis. The pessimism and fear of revolution engendered among the *bien pensants* by these three convergent challenges was captured brilliantly by Dangerfield and in volume VI of Elie Halévy's *History of the English People*, first published in French in 1932. Nor can their thesis be dismissed as gloomy hindsight about the eve of one world war inordinately shaped by foreboding about another. It received a fresh endorsement in Norman Stone's *Europe Transformed* (1983). The root of the unrest lay less in myth than the mundane reality of rising prices, and the perception that real wages were falling and that union officials and Labour MPs were failing to do their job. At the same time, the intriguing appeal of Dangerfield's thesis for scholars as well as fantasists and counterfactualists, lies in the fact that the years from 1890 to 1914 were a time of mounting disdain throughout Europe for what was regarded as an obsolescent social, economic, and moral order. Even union activists who had been stoking the fire for months were astonished by the ferocity of the militancy that erupted in the very dry summer of 1911. Whether those bullets in Sarajevo prevented a revolution is one of many 'what if?'s. Much has been written on aspects of the GLU over the years, with detailed studies of events in London, Liverpool, Glasgow, and Dublin. To some extent it kick-started the genre of the labour leader memoir. Participation became a badge of honour, as if it were a war, which in

some ways it was. Echoing the point, *Labour in Revolt* includes thumbnail biographies of the main characters. (The five-line profile of James Connolly contains two errors. In fairness, the eight lines on Jim Larkin are accurate). The GLU's centenary brought renewed interest, and a few conferences and publications, though not as much as one would expect in a country that once led the world in labour studies, guided by the twin towers of E.P. Thompson and Eric Hobsbawm. Remarkably, there have been just four end-to-end accounts of the GLU, and each was from a specific angle. (George Askwith, *Industrial Problems and Disputes* (1920), George Dangerfield's *The Strange Death of Liberal England* (1935), Bob Holton, *British Syndicalism, 1900–1914* (1976), and Lewis Mates, *The Great Labour Unrest: Rank-and-file Movements and Political Change in the Durham Coalfield* (2016)) Ralph Darlington's book is the first comprehensive study, and timely given the current wave of strikes.

Darlington's aim is to re-interpret the GLU in a general theory grounded on 'a multidimensional portrayal of the context, origins, causes, actors, processes, outcomes, meanings and significance' of events (p9). His approach prioritises analysis over description. Those familiar with his extensive research on industrial relations will not be surprised that he writes from a 'distinct revolutionary Marxist' [read Trotskyist] perspective (p9) and is frankly on the side of militants and radicals. His argument essentially is that the GLU was not merely unrest, but a revolt. 'Revolt' implies a challenge to legitimacy. Class 'revolt' implies a revolutionary intent. What's the evidence, and can Darlington be objective, given his acknowledged partisanship?

Labour Revolt covers the topic in four sections – backcloth, revolt, assessment, and aftermath – and thirteen chapters. The introduction opens the case with an excellent chapter on context, setting out the nature and causes of discontent. The 'revolt' itself is explored episodically through accounts of the major strikes. More than usual attention is given to the role of women and to Ireland. An appendix of fifteen tables supports the analysis. The 'assessment' offers plenty of food for thought in discussions on the many political features of the GLU including union organisation, tensions between officials and the 'rebels', violence, class consciousness, syndicalism, Labourism, and industrial unionism. Darlington himself is an inveterate rebel. While the narrative highlights militancy and radicalism – and sources are rich in both – and treats counter-material more summarily, he does note awkward events, such as anti-Chinese racism in Cardiff. Similarly, while mustering the case for 'revolt', he takes issue with those

who stress its revolutionary content. The writing style, delightfully clear and brisk and jargon-free, makes rather too frequent use of dichotomies and paradoxes to argue that A was *both* B and C or that X was *both for and against* Y.

So where was the revolutionary element that would justify the label 'revolt'? The obvious, or most obvious, answer is syndicalism. One can trace a continuum from Tom Mann's foundation of the Industrial Syndicalist Education League at Manchester in November 1910 to the National Transport Workers' Federation, formed to create a network of direct action sufficiently extensive to make the Shipping Federation's scabbing tactics ineffective, to the seamen's strike in June 1911, which fired the opening salvo in a fresh strike wave that was more imbued with the spirit of revolt. Historians have long debated the influence of syndicalism. Pelling, Clegg, and Laybourn have pointed out that card-carrying syndicalists were marginal. Darlington comes perilously close to Holton, who chased them over all Britain to augment their profile. Yet, he also balks at Holton's claim that the unrest was 'proto-syndicalist', preferring 'Zeitgeist of workers' industrial and political militancy' (p248), but is ultimately, and unusually, uncertain about the contention.

Syndicalism is a conundrum only if treated as a regular Marxist ideology. The secret of syndicalism's success was that unlike other 'isms' it didn't tell you how the world worked if you read a book or listened to a lecture. It offered a menu of practical steps to improve your lot. Moreover, one could dine à la carte. A worker might see the value of direct action, industrial unionism, generalised action, or sympathetic strikes without embracing the full package. This made adherence to syndicalism difficult to quantify. Industrial unionism and sympathetic action became hugely influential throughout the movement. But did that mean workers were syndicalist? In some respects, it did, and it's worth emphasising the point as the impact of syndicalism has so often been overlooked. At the same time, it didn't mean that they had all become revolutionists. The limits of the GLU became evident in its greatest legacy: the merger mania that gripped trade unions in 1912-14. In 1912 alone, fifty-seven unions, with 400,000 members, sought to rationalise themselves into five amalgamations. For Connolly, this 'greater unionism' was 'old wine in new bottles', the old spirit of sectionalism poured into new industrial unions, the better to restrain the rank and file.

Darlington's supreme achievement is to raise so many questions and pinpoint the key arguments. The one lacuna is his neglect of the transnational dimension, which is given a brief acknowledgement in the epilogue.

Labour Revolt has revitalised the endless debate on the GLU. It will be essential reading on one of Britain's greatest ever waves of popular protest.

Emmet O'Connor
Ulster University

Anne Etienne and Graham Saunders (eds), *Arnold Wesker: Fragments and Visions*, Intellect, Bristol, 2021; 241pp; ISBN 9781789383645, £80.00, hbk

Arnold Wesker, the East End-born London dramatist, was born in 1932 and died in 2016. After many false starts, he embarked upon a playwrighting career that delivered an early run of enviable successes. These early plays, produced between 1957 and 1962, include *The Kitchen*, *Chicken Soup With Barley*, *Roots* and *Chips With Everything*: they combine a quasi-Brechtian intellectual and epic sweep with painfully intimate domesticity and emotional seriousness. The plays are sometimes revived on major stages and they have been the subject of much academic study. None of Wesker's later plays, despite their considerable technical ingenuity, surprisingly adroit comedy and cerebral ambition, ever received comparable audience recognition or scholarly attention. One of the purposes of this new collection of essays is to complicate the image of Wesker as an angry, proletarian writer frozen in a pre-1960s paradigm of kitchen-sink realism. It is a much-needed essay collection – studies even of Wesker's early plays have been scant in recent decades. Crucially, the contributors to this collection have been able to use the vast collection of Weskerian paraphernalia recently made accessible at the Harry Ransom Centre at Austin, Texas – Wesker was a monomaniacal collector of manuscripts, epistles, contracts and other professional and personal ephemera. The sheer knowledge of Wesker's professional business and personal affairs demonstrated by the contributors ensures that this book automatically becomes the most essential publication about Wesker to date.

Wesker was a man of charisma and substance, a devoted, prolific writer. He was a difficult individual. He wrote to me twice – on both times it was to whinge about things that I had written about his work. He even found fault with my *Times Literary Supplement* review of his 2005 novel, *Honey* – even though my review was the one review that praised the novel's lively narrative pep and its symphonic range of emotional colours. Most other reviewers panned it. That four-hundred-page novel, incidentally,

is mentioned only once in this book – and it is not even named (p2). Wesker's many short stories are over-looked entirely – so this essay collection is not a definitive, all-encompassing account of Wesker's *oeuvre*. Some of the later plays are barely mentioned too: *Denial*, for example, a late-1990s, coruscating play about the nefarious effects of false child abuse accusations, is mentioned only very fleetingly. More work on Wesker's provocative later plays is still to be done. To be fair, the editors express hope that the book will 'promote further interest in the work of Arnold Wesker' (p5). I do recommend the short stories – they are melancholy and evocative – they are about women who will never win the Pools, men who cannot write like Balzac and middle-aged men and women who gradually withdraw from life.

Denial was and is an unfashionable play because it makes an unpopular point – Wesker plays are often didactic and pointed. That unpopular point is that accusers should not be automatically believed and should be received with scepticism. Wesker was never afraid to take unpopular stances. He could start a fight in an empty room. Even in death he caused discomfort. On the day after Wesker died, the Leader of the Opposition, Jeremy Corbyn, praised his hero Wesker and asked the Prime Minister, David Cameron, to join him in a tribute during Prime Minister's Questions in the House. Cameron didn't know who Wesker was and bluffingly mumbled a vague agreement with Corbyn. It was a moment that should have united the House. Instead, it illuminated the inability of Corbyn and Cameron to articulate even bland tributes in a complementary manner. The lack of a meeting of minds over the dead Wesker seems in retrospect to foreshadow Corbyn and Cameron's disastrous inability to campaign for Remain in a constructive, bipartisan manner. Even in death, Wesker seemed to illuminate disharmony rather than invite unambiguous respect. Combative and self-righteous, defensive and truculent but suffused with humanity and interest in others, he will always be a contradictory and divisive individual.

The 'Introduction' to this book usefully outlines the two broad categories of essays: 'Early Visions' and 'Unifying Fragments'. The former refers to visions seen by characters in Wesker's earlier plays (socialist Utopias, cottage industries, international peace) as well as theatrical and cultural visions imagined by Wesker himself. The second, slightly more nebulous category, deals with the 'fragments' of identities constructed by characters in Wesker's later plays and the complicated intellectual and moral positions developed by Wesker publicly and privately. The 'Introduction' is followed by an odd 'Prologue' by Edward Bond – shouldn't this been

placed at the start? Bond uses his few pages to attack a few ancient targets. He complains about mid-twentieth-century dramatists' alleged comfort and toadying complacency under formal censorship laws and he abuses Harold Pinter for voting Conservative in 1979. Pinter has been dead for thirteen years and everybody who studies modern drama is embarrassed about Pinter's decision to back Thatcher – Pinter himself was ashamed that he did so. I just can't fathom why Bond is using a tribute to Arnold Wesker to abuse Harold Pinter over a last-century mini-scandal. The complex relationship between the works and public and private personalities of Pinter and Wesker is accounted for in the book's second essay proper, the amusingly titled 'Introducing Mr Harold Wesker'. It is a superb essay, written by one of the two editors, Graham Saunders, that does much to account for the similarities between Pinter and Wesker (their cultural Jewishness, their love of acting, their intellectual ambition, their geographical and social origins) as well as their political and temperamental differences and their chalk-and-cheese dramatic styles. Saunders points out that Wesker's characters generally seek love and withdraw from human contact only when broken and dejected whereas Pinter's characters manifest immediate 'guardedness, insincerity, mockery, lack of concern for others and sometimes outright hostility' (p45). This pithy summary of Pinterland is as good as any I have ever read.

One of Wesker's personal visions was for an all-encompassing left-wing cultural industry that would engage directly with proletarian lives and concerns. He directed the Centre 42 body to help achieve that. It failed long before his formal resignation in 1970. The failure of that project is subject to a sort of allegory in Wesker's play, *Their Very Own and Golden City* – that play is analysed in detail in a splendid essay by Chris Megson. The history of the actual Centre 42 is illuminated in an essay by Lawrence Black. This essay, richly furnished with information gleaned from the archives, offers profound and convincing explanations for the movement's failure. Wesker's astounding capacity for arousing hostility from politicians, grant-giving bodies, union leaders and other creative artists and impresarios is one reason; Wesker's patrician tastes and his inability to understand developments in 1960s popular tastes contributed to the gulf between the Centre and its desired working-class audiences. The essay is perfect in terms of facts and persuasive argument – but it is difficult to read at times. On one page it dates Richard Hoggart's seminal *Uses of Literacy* book to both 1957 and 1958 (p27) and the essay's use of acronyms makes some of it read like the tortuous minutes of a university committee meeting: it is hard to get through this sort of sentence

without some head scratching: 'The GLC and LCC were minded to hear how the ACGB felt about C42 before committing (AW1963a)' (p31). The 'Visions' section is rounded off with a stirring essay by James Macdonald about Wesker's *Roots* and a nuanced account of the enigmatic and frustrating Pip from *Chips With Everything* by John Bull.

The 'Unifying Fragments' section has two essays that are, at times, laugh-out-loud funny: both address Wesker's inability to step away from criticism and conflict. One, written by Harry Derbyshire, seeks to categorise the various, myriad troubles that followed Wesker around. As Derbyshire puts it, 'Time spent with Wesker the public commentator is time spent raising one's eyebrows, shaking one's head and occasionally having to reset one's jaw' (p112). Derbyshire accounts for four areas of Wesker wars. The first, endless battle was against reviewers – Derbyshire doesn't just dismiss Wesker as a thin-skinned egoist who petulantly reacted against bad notices but takes him seriously, believing that his tirades against reviewers derive from a deeply held conviction that theatre matters and that shallow reviewing perpetuates complacent and sterile cultural conformism as well as theatrical mediocrity. The second ongoing battle was against directors: some of these stories have been told before – it is well-known that Wesker never quite recovered from the National Theatre cancellation of *The Old Ones* in 1972 and the more notorious Royal Shakespeare Company cancellation of *The Journalists* during the same era. The third sort of battle was with other playwrights: much of this essay is deeply funny but the callousness of the rejection of Wesker by John Osborne and his family is plain sad. The fourth sort of battle is more general – Wesker's battle with various forms of extremism. Wesker's identification with Jewishness was complex but resonant. He infamously supported the invasion of Iraq in 2003 but Derbyshire takes care to give us a nuanced account of Wesker in this fourth section and indeed throughout the accounts of the many fights he fought. That said, one does not really want to be indulgent towards Wesker when one hears about him making obscene comparisons between reviewers and 'mongoloid children' (p113), about him comparing theatrical breaches of contract to 'a kind of rape' (p116) and about claiming that, metaphorically, the Provisional IRA was responsible for murdering innocent Catholics (p120). These barely lucid, eccentric opinions damaged Wesker's career and will forever besmirch his reputation.

Michael Fry's essay on Wesker's semi-autobiographical depictions of women, likewise, has moments that are disturbing as well as hilarious. Wesker wrote back to everyone who wrote to him: Fry's account of some

correspondents is hilarious: Daryl of Broadmoor Prison, who smashed a Westminster Abbey cross; a mad, would-be playwright who wanted the IRA to ‘blow up all fucking theatres and the bastards who run them’; and one Carole Denton who walked out of one of Wesker’s own readings of a one-woman play (p189). Denton told Wesker, to his chagrin, that the eponymous heroine of *Shirley Valentine* spoke to her whereas Wesker’s fictional woman was not relatable. I wonder, by the way, if Denton hit a nerve there because the creator of *Shirley Valentine*, Willy Russell, had a huge theatrical and cinematic hit with *Educating Rita* – a play about the relationship between a sleazy academic and a relatively naïve young female student. Wesker’s own play about the relationship between a sleazy academic and a relatively naïve young female student, *Lady Othello*, barely surfaced let alone sank without trace. Jealousy? Possibly. Fry goes on to carefully tease out connections between the women in Wesker’s 1980s plays and the man himself, finding much alignment. Other essays in the section are less critical of Wesker: some are even unambiguously laudatory. For example, Pamela Howard delivers a very fresh analysis of a little-known aspect of Weskerism – his drawings. Wesker drew prolifically: whereas his plays are full of fascination with people, his drawings are of things, spaces, possessions, stark emptiness. Many great dramatists have been decent visual artists in their spare time – August Strindberg, Tennessee Williams and Noël Coward come to mind. The supposedly out-of-touch Coward, by the way, had some correspondence with the new sensation, Wesker, during the early stages of the latter’s career. That correspondence is not mentioned here – although ‘Noel Coward’, sans umlaut, is mentioned in a different context on page 33, not on page 32, as the ‘Index’ claims – more about the ‘Index’ later. Several of Wesker’s drawings are reproduced here – indeed, one of the great contributions of this collection overall is its generous number of illustrations. Many of these professional and family photographs have been hitherto unseen by the public – I particularly liked Sebastian the 1970s dog (p210). Other essays in the section include a thorough examination of Wesker’s sensitivities about the curse of anti-Semitism (by Sue Vice), a thoroughly learned and informative essay about Wesker’s comparative successes in France (by the other editor, Anne Etienne) and a masterful, rather epic account of the importance and complexities of representations of community in Wesker’s professional stage plays as well as in his Ann Jellicoe-influenced, Basildon-specific community play, *Beorhtel’s Hill* (by Robert Wilcher).

Barring a disposable, short appreciation of *Roots* by a modern-day director, James Macdonald, every essay in this essential volume is full of

rich detail, is characterised by determined, serious thinking, is resplendent with thorough knowledge of primary and secondary literature and is responsibly annotated. Wesker would have found fault with the slightly inadequate 'Index'. The aforementioned Richard Hoggart is mentioned in Black's essay but there is no sign of Hoggart in the 'Index'; Bernard Kops isn't just mentioned on page 25; and the Labour Party isn't just mentioned on pages 25 and 26. Do researchers want to see an index entry that says "*Caritas*. See *Caritas*" or "*Friends, The*. See *Friends, The*" (p245). Quite baffling. But then, as Bernard Levin often pointed out, indexing is a specific skill – and not one that academics generally have. Wesker, however, might have enjoyed the outrageous description of Edward Bond in the 'Contributors' section. Bond is described here as 'widely regarded at the United Kingdom's greatest living playwright' – hopefully Bond did not write that himself and hopefully followers of Alan Ayckbourn, Caryl Churchill and David Hare will not react too brusquely to that very questionable claim (p229). Wesker would certainly be amused by the extraordinary misspelling of Bond's name – the UK's 'greatest living playwright' is referred to as 'EDWARD BONDT' (sic.). It is an embarrassing mistake but one that could be easily eliminated from future editions of this almost completely satisfying, attention-holding, knowledge-festooned essay collection. It is a terrific book, a necessary book about a great but difficult dramatist and man and I hope that it stays in print, in refreshed editions, for decades.

Kevin De Ornellas
Ulster University

Willy Maley (ed.), *Our Fathers Fought Franco*, Luath Press, Edinburgh, 2023; 189pp; ISBN 9781804250402, £12.99, pbk

Daniel Gray, *Homage to Caledonia: Scotland and the Spanish Civil War*, Luath Press, Edinburgh, 2023; 222pp; ISBN 9781913025366, £12.99, pbk

Our Fathers Fought Franco is a unique contribution to the steadily growing field of International Brigade and Spanish Civil war studies. It presents accounts of four Brigade volunteers from Scotland – Donald Renton, Geordie Watters, Jimmy Maley, and Archie ('AC') Williams – provided by in two cases their sons, in another by a daughter, and the fourth by

a grand-daughter. One of the sons is the editor, Willy Maley. All four men served with No. 2 Machine Gun Company at the Battle of Jarama in 1937, at which the British and Irish volunteers suffered devastating losses. Of the 120 members of this Company three survived, eighty-eight were killed and the remaining twenty-nine, including these four, were captured. They were held for several months in horrific conditions and under a constant fear of execution; groups of their Spanish fellow prisoners of war were shot by the Fascists on a regular basis. Eventually the British were released as part of a prisoner exchange. This common experience is one link between the four; others are their similar backgrounds as working-class men, with little formal education but well-read, active in trade unions, the Communist Party and the National Unemployed Workers' Movement (NUWM).

Archie Williams is, I believe, the only new appearance in International Brigade histories, the other three being already known. Interviews with Watters, and Renton, were published in Ian MacDougall's *Voices from the Spanish Civil War* in 1986, the interviews being conducted by Victor Kiernan years earlier. Renton's was first published in *Scottish Labour History* in 1977, and he also has an entry in the *Dictionary of Labour Biography Vol. IX*, 1993. Jimmy Maley was interviewed in 1991 as part of the Imperial War Museum project with Spanish Civil War veterans and his recording is included in their archive. His life was also the inspiration for *From the Calton to Catalonia*, a play written by his sons, which had successful tours in the 1990s. Parts of their accounts have already appeared in some histories of the British battalion, but none of the above detracts from the value of a book which points to a new direction in the field, the perspective of later generations of their families.

It seems that the children and grand-children often knew little of their relatives' time in Spain and so to expand and build on the interviews the family members have drawn on a range of sources to piece together their contributions. As Willy Maley says, 'having to read as a scholar, not as a son'. They include some surviving letters, material from the International Brigade Memorial Trust, the Marx Memorial Library, Facebook pages and internet sites, YouTube newsreels, and sometimes the Comintern archive of International Brigade records, now freely available online. MI5 maintained surveillance on the four long after Spain and some of their records are included too. Each remained politically active in subsequent years, three remaining in the Communist Party whilst Renton left it in 1956 and became a Labour councillor. In a notorious if forgotten incident Jimmy Maley was actually arrested under the Prevention of Terrorism Act in 1985

for selling an Irish Republican paper. The authors describe growing up as the children of locally well-known political activists, with the pride, strength and issues this could involve. As is not uncommon with the children of male activists of the 1950s and 1960s, Jennie Renton confesses that 'what I secretly yearned for was a Dad who was at home more'.

The accounts include fascinating material, some of it unpublished, such as AC's notebook, which he risked his life to record whilst in the Salamanca prison, and a verbatim transcript of his interrogation there. His granddaughter has researched his involvement with the Canadian unemployed movement in the early 1930s and recounts his imprisonment and deportation when the movement was suppressed. Renton, along with three other Brigade veterans, volunteered to be a human guinea pig in J.B.S. Haldane's gruelling and dangerous experiment to explain the sinking of the submarine *Thetis* in 1939. Renton's first-hand description of the experience was printed in *Tribune* at the time and is reproduced here. These volunteers' families did not know if they were alive after Jarama and confirmation only came when they saw footage of them herded as prisoners on a cinema newsreel. Watching the same newsreel for the first time on YouTube was an emotional experience for Tam Watters, realising that this was the sole photographic record of his father as a young man. The perspective of family members adds something lacking from the available interviews, and not just the amount of additional information about their backgrounds and lives after Spain. There is the sense of the personalities, the lives lived and the impact their service in Spain exerted and the meanings it had for their families.

Daniel Gray's *Homage to Caledonia: Scotland and the Spanish Civil War* was originally published by Luath Press in 2008 and it was the first study of the Scottish contribution to solidarity with Republican Spain. It is one of those books on Britain and the Spanish Civil War to take a more comprehensive approach than dealing solely with the volunteers for the International Brigades. Thus it also includes the fund raising for food ships, the support for Basque refugee children, the role played by volunteers with the medical services and the Scottish Ambulance Unit; also the support for Franco articulated by some sections of the Scottish establishment. It has been re-issued to accompany *Our Fathers Fought Franco* and it provides an essential context for the companion book. The purpose of *Homage to Caledonia* is celebratory and thus it lacks the more analytical focus of another recent work on the subject, Fraser Raeburn's *Scots and the Spanish Civil War* published in 2020. Nevertheless this popular account is an extensive and well-researched study which makes use of

the full range of Scottish sources, and with a narrative often based on the words of the participants themselves.

The initial chapter provides contextual material on the attitude of the British government towards the Spanish Republic, and the responses in Scotland, a country where the Communist Party and the NUWM were particularly strong. This is the background to an account of the recruitment to the International Brigade, travel to Spain and training, contacts with home and the reactions of families. Besides accounts of the fighting and the toll of casualties in the International Brigade – and the fate of those who were captured – he describes life in the battalion, wall newspapers, political discussion, and entertainment. He does not ignore controversial issues such as discipline, morale and desertions, and he traces the damage caused by disputes within the military hierarchy. The Scottish contribution to the medical services comes mainly through the words of Annie Murray who nursed in Spain whilst her two brothers served with the International Brigade. The Scottish Ambulance Unit made three expeditions to Spain between 1936 and 1938 and were the first Scots to arrive there. They were funded entirely from voluntary contributions and their achievements in the field were impressive; at the same time they attracted almost continual controversy and rumour, either over personal conduct or alleged political sympathies.

There is an interesting section on Scottish opposition to the Republic and support for Franco. Apart from the attempts by the Catholic Church to influence working-class opinion there was explicit support for Franco from British Union of Fascists branches, and from establishment figures who formed links with the Friends of Nationalist Spain. Neither organisation was able to build popular support, due in no small part to the opposition they encountered from anti-fascists.

Gray covers the involvement of what he terms Scotland's 'other left' in solidarity campaigns, particularly the Independent Labour Party; it was headquartered in Glasgow after all and its four MPs represented Glasgow constituencies. John McGovern had a largely Catholic constituency in Shettleston and he battled to refute the Church's allegations of Republican atrocities against Spanish clergy; the Church's vociferous support for Franco actually proved a relatively insignificant factor in influencing Scottish public opinion. Gray points out that many Scottish volunteers had Catholic backgrounds, and a large number too were from the ILP although all but a very few served with the International Brigade rather than the Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista / Workers Party of Marxist Unification (POUM), whose revolutionary alternative to the Republican Popular Front was supported by the ILP. He discusses the conflicts this

generated with the Communists, particularly after the clashes in Barcelona and the suppression of the POUM. Gray highlights the work of the ILP's David Murray, both in general Spanish solidarity work and his role in negotiating the release of POUM prisoners after the Republican purge. His most notorious case was that of Bob Smillie of the ILP, who was arrested whilst leaving Spain because of incorrect documentation during the POUM suppression; his death from peritonitis in gaol was alleged to have been the consequence of politically motivated neglect. Gray offers a clear summary of the evidence, argument and rumour that was provided at the time and subsequently about this death, ending with Murray's own conclusion – still contested – that it was the result of unfortunate circumstances.

The year in Spain spent by Glasgow anarchist Ethel MacDonald is similarly covered. In her talks in English for the CNT-FAI on Radio Barcelona, and frequent letters to the Scottish press, she was the first foreigner to cover the Barcelona street fighting and challenge the Communist narratives about the events. She was nicknamed 'the Scots Scarlet Pimpernel' for rescuing anarchists from Republican prison although this role was hampered by her inability to work with allies. Gray is explicit that these are examples of how Scotland's opposition to Spanish fascism also reflected the destructive battles within the Republican left itself. He also believes that they do not detract from the breadth and strength of the Scottish movement to support the Republic and the value of the contribution it made.

Daniel Gray's Preface to his new edition lists the events, memorials and cultural productions commemorating Scotland and the Spanish Civil War which have been held since 2008. These two books – and both are copiously illustrated – make a valuable contribution to the continuous process of education, commemoration and discussion of an iconic episode in Scottish and working-class history.

Don Watson

Kenan Malik, *Not So Black and White: A History of Race from White Supremacy to Identity Politics*, Hurst and Company, London, 2023; ix + 380 pp; ISBN 9781787387768, £20.00, hbk

At the time of writing, a Scottish First Minister of Pakistani heritage is in conflict with a UK Prime Minister of Indian heritage over the possible partition of Great Britain. The irony is no doubt delicious but such

a situation serves to reinforce the key argument of Kenan Malik's latest book, namely that the real divisions in society are about power, privilege and wealth and only incidentally about skin colour or heritage. Malik, a journalist of long standing with a regular column in the *Observer*, focuses on the modern West. This is a book aimed at a wide public rather than an academic one but Malik has researched the area, providing documented evidence. It is a well produced volume and I only noticed a couple of errors. The 'Abbaye de Saint-Denis' (more usually 'Basilique cathédrale de Saint-Denis') has become 'Abbé Saint Denis' (a cleric rather than a place of worship) on p177. On pp147-8, Malik seems to imply that the Declaration of the Rights of Man preceded the storming of the Bastille.

Malik's aim is not just to illuminate the nature of discrimination but also to challenge the current preoccupation with identity politics. He believes the problems caused by discriminatory behaviour (which is not confined to race) are best addressed by fostering class solidarity among the disadvantaged.

Skin colour is not necessarily the primary issue. Although they might now be classified as belonging to the privileged, the Irish in both the USA and the UK were severely disadvantaged for a long time and only lately admitted to the table. Like people of African heritage, the Irish were (and still are to some extent) regularly portrayed as not being intellectually bright, thus justifying discriminatory practices. Jewish people likewise suffered discrimination but this time because they were supposedly clever and in control of events behind the scenes. Indeed, Malik argues, there is still widespread anti-Jewish sentiment in Western societies. Interestingly, the trope of the crafty Jew who deviously takes advantage of the honest dealer seems now to be applied to the Irish in certain quarters. I have heard Brexiters blame the Irish for manipulating the EU to the disadvantage of the British. As one put it, the Northern Irish protocol had 'the fingerprints of Leinster House all over it'. (Notice the connotation of criminality in the image.) But then discrimination is not necessarily logical or coherent.

To make his case that discrimination is, as the title puts it, 'not so black and white', Malik quotes Carlyle on the Irish and, perhaps more surprisingly, Engels on the Slavs. Indeed, it is perhaps worth bearing in mind that the word 'slave' derives from 'Slav'. Denigration is not just racial: Frantz Fanon expressed the view that 'the Negrophobic man is a repressed homosexual'. These words, according to Malik, are indicative of 'the mindset of many postcolonial nations which regarded homosexuality as the product of morally degenerate colonial cultures, as a phenomenon alien to black

or indigenous history, leading in many cases to the merciless persecution of gays' (pp169-170).

Fanon's remarks may be dismissed as cod psychology, prejudice dressed up in scientific garb. Malik's history is valuable in showing the pernicious confluence of racism and science – especially, but not exclusively, biology. It is not just that science can be used to give racism an aura of truth. In developing taxonomies of humanity which divided people into races, scientists created a hierarchy with the then ruling elite (who happened to be white people of European heritage) at the top. Science becomes, like religion, another ideology that justifies dominance and repression.

It is noteworthy, though not mentioned explicitly in the book, that at the time the Irish and most Slavic peoples, had no country of their own – the exception in the latter case being Russia which long saw itself as lagging behind European powers and sought to recast itself along more Western lines, a process going back to Peter the Great. It also overcompensated for its inferiority complex by according itself a special leadership role. It was the Third Rome, guardian of Orthodox values, and a bulwark against the barbarians from the East whose lands it gradually incorporated into its empire alongside the more westerly Belorussia and Ukraine (which it called Little Russia, Malaya Rossiya, suppressing indigenous language and culture as Britain did in Ireland).

Racists could therefore not just accept with equanimity a genetic superiority that placed them in a privileged position but could ensure that such privilege was protected with messianic zeal. The colonial powers insisted that they were acting in the best interests of colonised peoples by bringing them the benefits of civilisation. But if that failed, then more extreme methods were to be authorised. Those who resisted were to be chastised or brought to heel by any means necessary. Indeed, it is more than ironic that the methods employed by the colonisers were sometimes nothing short of barbaric.

While proximity to the seats of power might ensure some restraint, at least in Europe, this was not always the case. There were pogroms against the Jewish populations of those parts of eastern Europe ruled by Russia. The zenith of this barbarity was the Nazi attempt to cleanse the German people of what they saw as degenerate elements such as the Jews, Roma, gays and people with mental and other disabilities. Science was summoned not just to guide the policy but also to provide the means of implementing it – the gas chambers.

Critical Race Theory, and in this it accords with Malik, seeks to draw attention to the way privilege is located in position and not genetics.

Discrimination has cultural and structural causes. However, Malik is sceptical of the efficacy of such an approach in combating the evil, believing that advocates of identity politics end up strengthening the very boundaries that keep people from coming together in the struggle for justice. It is a dead end. Group solidarity is detrimental to class solidarity. Malik is good at teasing out the difficulties inherent in adopting such an approach just as he pointed out the inconsistencies in Enlightenment liberal thought.

Malik's book is a valuable contribution to our understanding of race. The plenitude of its detail is convincing but limited in focus. It neglects huge areas of the world. Non-Western societies get barely a mention. Malik does express disappointment that those who struggled successfully to liberate former colonies did not create better societies but there is surely more to be said. Similarly, we are given the tragic tale of Lovett Fort-Whiteman, a black American communist who emigrated to the USSR in 1927 and who died in a labour camp in 1939, a victim of Stalin's purges. However, the Soviet Union, a multi-ethnic political entity and successor to the Russian Empire, surely merits more investigation. Fort-Whiteman's demise is attributed by Malik solely to his involvement with Bukharin. Many would be uncomfortable with the justification of a death in custody as having nothing to do with race and everything to do with political association – especially since Bukharin was rehabilitated in 1988. Yet the sign of a successful book is that it leaves you wanting more and my observations are an indication that Malik has started a conversation that needs to be continued. This is a book that is well worth reading. Highly recommended.

John McCann

Keith McLoughlin, *The British Left and the Defence Economy: Rockets, guns and kidney machines, 1970-1985*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2022; 232pp; ISBN 9781526144010, £85.00, hbk

Most historians have written British history since 1945 as a story that outlines the rise, consolidation and fall of the welfare state. David Edgerton has challenged that view by arguing that Britain was really a 'warfare state' that was, in good liberal tradition, hidden from much public scrutiny or attention (*The Warfare State: Britain 1920-1970*, 2005). Edgerton emphasised the ways in which military research and development played a crucial role not only for economic growth and employment until at least the

1970s, but also for regional economic structures; and he has highlighted the importance of government investment to keep this system alive. Keith McLoughlin's important book traces the debates on the British left, specifically within the Labour Party that this orientation of British statehood engendered and entailed.

The debates McLoughlin covers – the curtailing of some NHS services in the early 1950s; the discussions about the nuclear weapons development, as well as discussions within the trade union and anti-nuclear weapons movements – have been covered well elsewhere and will not come as a surprise to readers familiar with that history from other contexts. Nonetheless, McLoughlin's perspective offers a genuinely novel interpretation by interpreting these episodes as part of a history of debates about the shape of social democracy in post-1945 Britain. In doing so, he draws attention to traditions of socialist anti-militarism that have tended to be neglected for that part of contemporary history; he also shows how the Cold War in Britain manifested itself not only in ideological debates about the status of socialist ideas, but also with regard to tangible issues that affected the structure and ordering of the British economy. For him, the Cold War was a 'war over the direction of social democracy' (p4).

McLoughlin develops this argument through a range of chronological accounts – from the debate in the immediate post-war period, over the late 1950s and early 1960s, to the discussions within Harold Wilson's government in the 1960s as well as the debates about Labour's defence review in the 1970s – and two case studies: the contribution of debates around industrial relations in the Lucas Aerospace and peace activism. In his first chapter on the defence economy in the early Cold War that covers the period until the late 1960s, McLoughlin shows, following Rhiannon Vickers, how rearmament and defence investment featured in the 'socialist critique of "Atlanticism"' (p17) and how that critique picked up on traditions of socialist anti-militarism by highlighting how defence led to the weakening of a peacetime economy. Then, Harold Wilson still argued that 'state-funded science should have an economic and social utility' (p20) that went beyond merely creating jobs. In that vein, Frank Allaun and others on the left of the Labour regarded the UK's investment in nuclear weapons not merely as question of moral opposition, but also as a question of political economy.

One of the most interesting aspects of McLoughlin's book is that he demonstrates how these debates mirrored or even adopted international debates, such as Seymour Melman's work on 'Pentagon capitalism',

Lewis Mumford's book on the US military-industrial complex as well as the Stockholm International Peace and Research Institute (SIPRI) that the Swedish government had established in 1966 and whose first three directors – Robert Neild, Frank Barnaby and Frank Blackaby – all came from the UK. Mary Kaldor, one of the key intellectual voices to speak out against the political economy of the British warfare state since the 1970s, also had strong links to SIPRI and published some of her first work on arms control in the context of the Institute.

The second chapter discusses the debates around Labour's defence review around 1974-1975. Here, the positions that emerged over the course of the 1950s and 1960s clashed when Labour was in government. While Labour politicians like Roy Mason, as secretary of defence, continued to 'use employment to justify military expenditure' (pp41-42), Barbara Castle, Frank Allaun, the young Robin Cook and others continued to call for directing defence investment to socially more useful branches of the economy, such as spending on kidney machines or other healthcare-related products.

In the following years, as McLoughlin shows in his third chapter, Labour presented its record in defence as 'an example of sound economic management with the added bonuses of upskilling workers [...], technological "spin-off" to the commercial sector, a profitable arms trade and deterring the Soviet Union' (p69). The 1977 report of the Labour Party Defence Study Group, *Sense about Defence*, with contributions from Kaldor and others, provided the key politico-economic critique of that approach by highlighting the ways in which a military-industrial complex had emerged in the UK after 1945 and by proposing the 'conversion' of defence into civilian economies. The Labour government, however, continued to see the 'defence economy [as] an indispensable component of the government's wider economic and industrial strategy.

The following two chapters provide astute analyses of the ways in which such debates mattered for activism. Chapter 4 discusses how workers at Lucas Aerospace in Birmingham – a key supplier of electronics for civilian and military aircraft – sought to develop a plan for 'socially useful production' by 'challenging the profit motive from within' in 1976 (p99), and how this plan was discussed in the Labour Party and the wider labour movement. The fifth chapter highlights how the debates about the defence economy featured in the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and the Campaign against Arms Trade (CAAT) of the 1980s, thereby challenging the idea that CND was a reflection of post-materialism in British political culture and activism. Through a careful reading of the archival documents,

McLoughlin is able to show how these discussions harked back to two key initiatives from the 1970s: the St Andrews student Zoe Fairbairns' initiative *Study War No More* (1974) that questioned the morality and utility of defence contracts at British universities, and CND's *Arms, Jobs and the Crisis* (1975). The final two chapters trace these debates, over the contestations of the Conservative government's defence policies in the 1980s, to the present day.

Given the focus on the Labour Party and movement, it is not clear whether the material assembled here can support the author's bold claim that 'the Cold War was an economic and social necessity' and that it was 'primarily an economic experience' (p1). Nonetheless, based on a range of government, Labour Party, trade union and CND records, this important book encourages us to rethink not only some of the key debates among the post-1945 British left. It also provides us with a novel interpretation of the ways in which the Cold War left an impact on British politics and society and, in doing so, how the Cold War framed debates within the Labour Party materially, beyond ideological questions of social democracy and socialism.

Holger Nehring
University of Stirling

Philip B. Minehan, *Anti-Leftist Politics in Modern World History. Avoiding 'Socialism' at All Costs*, Bloomsbury Academic Press, London, 2021, 288pp; 15 illustrations; ISBN 9781350170643, £85.00, hbk; ISBN 9781350229792, £28.99, pbk

In the preface to the hardback edition the author recounts how his research into European wars of the 1930s and '40s led him to question the common conception of the Second World War as Hitler's war. He became convinced that, if Western opposition to Hitler had been genuine, war could have been averted and that a common hatred of socialism by the Western powers far outweighed opposition to Nazism until war was inevitable. The current book arises from that argument and extends it to suggest that opposition to socialism is endemic to capitalist society (pXII). To show this the author examines a wide sweep of modern history, from the early nineteenth century until the present day.

This is an ambitious project to achieve in 267 pages, so the author carefully structures the evolution of capitalism into different stages:

imperialism and Fascism run from colonialism in 1871 to the end of the Second World War. Post-war is a period of global anti-communism led by the US, examined in various sectors and geographies; Europe and Indochina, Africa and the Middle East and the US, Latin America and Europe in the '70s. Imperialism's success in these areas is seen as leading to 'overkill' and a neoliberal solution, involving wars of aggression in Latin America, Iran and Afghanistan as well as the war on terror, the globalisation of production and the collapse of the USSR.

In conclusion Trumpism and its imitators are seen as the latest form of attack on socialism, but the hope is expressed that Biden will adopt more progressive economic policies and that new social movements will have a positive effect in changing the direction of history.

The book has many strengths. It provides a panoramic picture of modern history with extensive footnotes that would be valuable both to the researcher and to the student. The illustrations alone are striking. Especially valuable are the fine-grained footnotes with their high level of detail, although the detail seems concentrated in the early periods and to fall off somewhat as we approach the present.

There are of course discrepancies in a narrative of capitalism versus socialism. There is no clear definition of what leftism is, with in some cases the definition extending to anti-colonial capitalists (p28). If hostility between capitalism and socialism is endemic, how then are we to explain the alliance of Stalin with Hitler? The switch of the USSR to collaboration with the allied powers? The effective exclusion of modern social democracy from the left and their long history of collaboration with imperialism?

Stalin's turn to the Hitler-Stalin pact and the sharp reversal following the Nazi invasion are explained as sharp strategic changes in time of war and a short collaboration with imperialism that ran against the western anti-bolshevism that preceded the war and that was resuming even before Hitler's defeat. By implication Stalin is seen as playing a bad hand skilfully, a view contradicted by many other accounts.

The pages dealing with this period (pp67-70) are essentially description rather than explanation. It is suggested that the Soviet strategy was always alliance with the West and that anti-bolshevism delayed this alliance. However, the context is that Stalinism arose around the suppression of the old Bolshevik leadership and the proclamation of 'socialism in one country'. Stalin rejected world revolution in favour of defence of the territory of the USSR. This demoralised international opposition to imperialism both before and after the war, not only in an abstract way, but in specific struggles around the Spanish civil war and in the struggle

to prevent the rise of Hitler. The critique of Stalin argued that the Yalta conference distorted post war revolutionary surges, with the suppression of Greek communism being a prime example of this process.

The role of social democracy (p95) is again described, rather than explained, as a societal shift left following the war that involved the British Conservatives as well as Labour and that coexisted with a hatred of Bolshevism and transformed the Labour party into a bulwark against communism. In fact, it is late on in the book (p212) before the author provides his model of the conflict between capitalism and socialism. He argues that the bourgeoisie, as it advances its own interests, lays the grounds for a collectivist opposition. The strategy of capitalism is to control and diminish this opposition. However, there is no final success. After each victory further progress by capitalism creates new forms of leftist opposition that have to be demolished in turn.

Philip Minehan quotes approvingly from left writers such as Eric Hobsbawm (p239), arguing that each historical moment generates its antithesis. He says that Hobsbawm did not complete the analysis and suggests that neoliberalism is itself the synthesis of liberalism and the period of war which followed the liberal age. However, of equal importance to the concepts of dialectical and historical materialism is the Marxist conception of base and superstructure. The base, the material conditions in which value is produced and the class exploitation and resulting struggle for survival, give rise to a superstructure, the various social structures and institutions that produce the binding ideologies that sanctify bourgeois rule. Material conditions are the base, ideology the superstructure.

His book is a valuable source as an account of the depredations of capitalism and imperialism, but the analysis falls short in that it focuses on ideological differences rather than on the material conditions of class struggle that give rise to these ideologies. In my view the various phases of history of capital are best seen in the raw – that is as how capitalism develops and resolves its many contradictions. The theories of imperialism, fascism and so on emerge after the fact. This applies particularly strongly in relation to neoliberalism. The liberal world order depended on high profit rates that allowed the working class to be held at bay by reform. When the rate of profit fell Regan and Thatcher moved to reverse reform, seizing on the ideas of neoliberalism and monetarism to justify their actions. The thesis would have been better presented as a battle between capitalists and workers, with anti-leftist ideology coming behind as a justification for struggles based in material reality. This makes a difference. In a battle of ideas, we can see a movement back and forward

to an indefinite future. In a materialist conception we are witnessing the disintegration of the capitalist world order and we are left with the choice presented by Marx: Socialism or Barbarism?

John McAnulty

Merilyn Moos, *Living with Shadows*, London, 2022; 94pp; ISBN: 9798405399737, £8.25, pbk

On the cover of this book is a photo of Ossip Zadkine's statue in Rotterdam called *The Destroyed City*. Merilyn's parents took her to see it as a ten-year-old child. She was never quite sure why they had crossed a stormy sea and walked through a rainy city to reach it, but it showed 'screaming defiance against those who had torn out its heart'. To her, it also appeared to be holding up an invisible world. These are two determining factors in the author's own life: defiance and the struggle to build a better world.

Merilyn Moos has spent her life haunted by shadows. 'Not', she writes, 'B- movie ghosts in gothic hallways, but something emanating a sense of death'. A distant relative of Albert Einstein and daughter of German refugees, she was born into a home of secrecy and paranoia. Her parents had lived under Nazism and Stalinism. Her father, Siegi, was a member of the Red Front and was a leading figure in anti-fascist agit-prop. He witnessed sailors declaring a Soviet on the steps of Munich Town Hall in 1918. After the Reichstag fire, he escaped the Gestapo by walking across Germany.

Her mother, Lotte, followed her Irish communist lover to the USSR and felt guilty that she may have contributed to his death. He was sent to Spain at the time of the Civil War there. In a postcard she wrote to him, she praised the leftist, anti-Stalinist POUM. He was kidnapped, sent back for 'trial' in the Soviet Union, accused of Trotskyism and died in the gulags. She never stopped mourning him, or blaming herself, for what she had innocently written.

Her parents arrived separately in the UK where, in 1940, Lotte was incarcerated in Holloway Prison as a German spy. They were burdened with regret and guilt. Her mother shut her bedroom door and found refuge in writing plays and poems, while her father expressed himself with painting. This short memoir is a penetrating and personal reflection on her early life in Durham. She communicates to the reader how much of our lives are determined by the cultural and political shadows we inhabit and absorb.

For my father culture and politics were inseparable. Our house was a bit like an expressionist museum. On one wall was a relief bust of the revolutionary, Alexandra Kollontai, over other walls hung my father's paintings. Dark and dramatic, they were clarion calls against injustice and inequality.

Of her mother she writes,

If annoyed my mother would not speak to me for days, sometimes weeks. She did this without telling me what she was upset about. I was terrified. I felt unreal and without any right to exist. I learned not to speak to her. Sometimes, as the three of us sat eating a meal, she said to my father, 'Tell Marilyn', and then he would.

Marilyn found her own comfort in books and, as an adult, in her sculptures and her own political activism. (The book contains photos of Siegi's paintings and Marilyn's sculptures.) She thought she was rebelling against her parents' politics, only to discover how similar hers were to theirs. She acknowledges that she has spent her life carrying the baton passed to her by her parents. After many years as a trade union militant in further education, Marilyn started to write about her family history. She first wrote about her parents in an earlier book, *The Language of Silence*, but in recent years, she has dealt with the history of anti-Nazism within the German working class to help counter the view there was no significant German resistance.

David Wilson

Maria Power, *Catholic Social Teaching and Theologies of Peace in Northern Ireland: Cardinal Cahal Daly and the Pursuit of the Peaceable Kingdom*, Routledge, London, 2022; 186pp; ISBN 9780367536992, £34.99, pbk

Biblical exegesis is akin to that of Marxism in terms of instrumental interpretations justifying authoritarian forms of governance, human rights abuses and violence, to name but a few of the adverse consequences that have derived from projects meant to benefit the most deprived and disadvantaged. From its origins as a religion of the poor and dispossessed, Christianity evolved into a religion of empire supported by a social and

legal framework that involved coercion, control and an alliance with state authority. The complex history of the Catholic Church bears testimony to the contradictions inherent in Christianity, which have culminated in its present-day crises, riven as it is by divisions between its conservative and progressive wings and rocked by scandals and accompanying cover-ups at the highest level. Throughout the ages, however, Catholicism has been a persistent and positive presence in numerous grassroots struggles against violence, injustice, poverty and suffering. It is difficult to quantify if the good outweighed the bad. Hence Maria Power's study of Cardinal Cahal Daly and Catholic Social teaching during the conflict in Northern Ireland, euphemistically termed the 'Troubles,' is extremely timely in terms of both nuancing and further complicating evaluations.

The scholarly consensus depicts the Troubles as an ethno-nationalist conflict. More recently, scholars have documented a religious dimension that mattered. At the very least, religion was a cultural reality, a marker of identity that conveyed a sense of belonging. Significantly, within both the churches and the warring parties there existed recognition that if religion was part of the problem, it could potentially come to be part of the solution. It is now well known how those most concerned to stop the fighting looked to involve Northern Ireland's churches. Power's sources included eight volumes of Daly's sermons, public addresses, and newspaper articles, 'all of which were concerned with peace and social justice in Northern Ireland' (p3).

In 1967, Daly, a peritus at Vatican II and a leading ecclesiastical intellectual, was appointed Bishop of Ardagh and Clonmacnoise; in 1982 Bishop of Down and Connor, which takes in most of the Belfast region; in 1990 he became Archbishop of Armagh and spiritual leader of Ireland's then 3.7 million Catholics. In 1991 he was made a cardinal. He was the only member of the hierarchy to hold office from the start of the conflict in 1968 until the cease-fires of 1996. From the beginning, Daly was one of the hierarchy's most outspoken members. Following the outbreak of violence in 1969 the Troubles became his prevailing preoccupation. Advocating for peaceful and constitutional movements for change, he continually stressed the impossibility of coercing nearly a million Northern Ireland unionists into a united Ireland. A trenchant critic of Stormont injustice, he condemned all violence, state and non-state. A hate figure among republicans, he was also bitterly criticised by Unionist politicians and the British media.

Committed to the importance of ecumenical dialogue, he was known to be the main intellectual force behind the most important statements

emanating from Irish bishops. Preaching a gospel of justice and peace to an often-hostile public, Daly wanted to provide an ethical road map to both. Using the prodigious paper-trail he bequeathed to Belfast's Linen Hall Library, Power examines the extent to which he managed to do so by attempting to understand how the Catholic Church met the challenges of the Troubles using an ecclesiological rather than a political lens. She explores how the Church spoke in the public square as it responded to the conflict, seeking to determine if a Catholic public theology emerged. She persuasively argues it did, centred upon the teachings of Christ and Catholic social teaching and inspired by Vatican II (1962-65).

Power explains how Daly sought to enable 'lived Christianity' to flourish in communities as part of his concern to eradicate the structural violence to which he attributed the origins of the conflict. Power illustrates his endeavours with key examples: 'First, instead of saying that businesses should invest more in deprived areas of Northern Ireland so as to create jobs, he placed his teachings on this within the framework of the Catholic social teaching concept of the "social mortgage," showing how such practices were fundamental to the Christian faith' (p164). This appears to have been an area in which he had some success according to Daly's *Irish Times* obituary. It noted how during his time in Belfast he was the prime mover behind a Catholic Church-inspired initiative to bring jobs to the unemployment blackspots of north and west Belfast. Aware of anxiety within the Northern Ireland Office to direct funding into community employment projects that were devoid of republican involvement, Daly encouraged priests and Catholic businessmen to set up a network of job creation and training schemes deploying British government funds.

At the heart of Power's analysis is the impact Vatican II had on Daly. Pope John XXIII's supposedly stop-gap papacy became a ground-breaking one with the 1959 call for an ecumenical council to update the place of the church in the modern world. Power's study of Daly's response helps illustrate the ways in which religion can function as an integral part of a hegemonic system and support an oppressive dominant order yet can at the same time also be one of the most vigorous critics of both and even a fervent opponent. Power's book is a powerful reminder that the post-Vatican II Catholic Church committed to a programme with revolutionary potential. Widely viewed as a watershed in Catholicism with a radical effect on other faith organisations, Vatican II embraced freedom of conscience and dialogue. It was to transform Catholicism and relations between organised Christianity the world over. It also had a profound

influence on relations with the Left. It should be recalled that well prior to the Second Vatican Council Marxists who denounced Christianity as a reactionary curse acknowledged its revolutionary potential. Karl Kautsky (1854-1938), the leading intellectual of the second generation of Marxists, proposed the idea of a Christian form of communism, referring to the impulse toward it in the gospels. While many Christians derisively labelled communism a pseudo-religion, others recognised that the intensity and commitment of communists to social justice mirrored that of Christianity. Equally important, within the churches considerable attention was devoted to the historical conditions that had contributed to the emergence of communism, particularly their own failings, something Power shows Daly fully appreciated.

In essence, Power's analysis is a theological treatise based on a historical case study of one man trying to navigate his Church through a conflict in which Christians of one persuasion were killing those of another, with victims and perpetrators alike victims of an unjust society's structural violence. Power writes persuasively in an engaging manner that is clear and accessible to all. Her research and analysis will naturally be of interest to students of conflict, peace, reconciliation and religious studies, as well as history and politics. Power has produced a unique and innovative contribution to the history of the Troubles as well as to theological studies. A thought-provoking and rewarding read. Highly recommended.

Dianne Kirby
Las Casas Institute, Oxford University

Sophie Scott-Brown, *Colin Ward and the Art of Everyday Anarchy*, Routledge, London, 2022; 294pp; 11 illustrations; ISBN 9780367569303, £27.99, pbk

After her intellectual biography of socialist historian Raphael Samuel, Sophie Scott-Brown has turned to another key and sometimes overlooked figure of the British intellectual left: the anarchist writer Colin Ward (1924-2010). This is a very interesting book, which fills a gap in the existing literature, as the first full account of Ward's life or, more precisely, of his 'life as it informed the work' (p10).

The kind of intellectual history Scott-Brown has developed is stimulating for several reasons. First, these are 'micro-histori[es]', grasping both the individual and wider historical processes through intermediary

phenomena: the relationships and organisations within which the individual evolves, works and thinks. This is not just a book about Ward: it deals extensively with several of the groups and organisations in which he was centrally involved – most notably the Freedom Press (FP) group and the Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA). Scott-Brown is constantly weaving together these different stories, and the resulting picture is made intelligible through her highly engaging style.

What is most interesting is that Scott-Brown should use such a micro-historical approach in intellectual history. Both her books are attempts to grasp ideas through close attention to the ordinary social practices and relations – producing journals, organising events, giving talks in different contexts, building working relationships with several sets of interlocutors – which gives them context and meaning. Thus, though her work includes a discussion of many of Ward's published articles and books, these are rarely interpreted in isolation, but rather in light of original archival and oral material.

Thirdly, this approach seems particularly suited to the kind of intellectual figures Scott-Brown favours. Indeed, the terms in which both Samuel and Ward often defined themselves – 'organiser', 'propagandist', 'communicator' –, and the very nature of their intellectual work – often collaborative, responding to specific contexts, and targeting many different kinds of audiences – makes it difficult to treat them like a classical intellectual historian would, reconstructing an author's system of ideas. Indeed, such an approach might neglect thinkers such as Samuel or Ward who, as Scott-Brown reminds us, had little time for abstract theoretical thought. She is thus able to offer a full appreciation of these intellectuals' importance in their own times, and to suggest the lasting interest of some aspects of their thought.

The book follows familiar chronological steps – youth (ch. 1), war experience (ch. 2), the end of the forties (ch. 4), the fifties (ch. 5 and 6), the sixties (ch. 7, 8 and 9), the seventies (ch. 10), the eighties and beyond (ch. 11 and 12). However, the order is more analytical than chronological, as each chapter is focused on the activities and relations of Ward within one or two defining social contexts. The third chapter is different from the others, as it tells the story of the FP anarchists from 1936 to 1945, when Ward became a member.

Having left school at fifteen, Ward gets a job in 1941 as assistant in Sidney Caulfield's architectural practice. He discovers the work of William Richard Lethaby, first director of the Central School of Arts and Craft. He is also an avid reader of the journalism of Orwell, who appeals

to him through his ‘faith in the “common-sense” of “common-people”’ (p28) and his colloquial style. In August 1942, posted in Glasgow, he encounters the Glasgow Anarchist Group, and starts reading FP publications – before becoming, after the war, a central if younger member of the FP group. This is at a time when *Freedom*, the group’s journal, is trying to renew itself to reach a broader public. However, according to Scott-Brown, this is made difficult by the hold the older generation maintains over the journal, the persistence of the same vocabulary and the recurrence of factional disputes. Ward represents a different generation as well as social and political background, and thus the possibility of a different standpoint, mobilising new intellectual references, and connecting anarchism with contemporary experiments in collective autonomous action. But in the 1950s *Freedom* remains marginal, and is unable to feed on the protest against Stalinism and Suez, in spite of links with the CND.

Ward only starts reaching a wider audience through editing the journal *Anarchy*, a monthly supplement to *Freedom* appearing from 1961 to 1970, with thematic issues, beautiful covers and well-researched articles. It tries to enlarge the anarchist canon and to tackle important contemporary themes such as progressive education, housing and environment, or crime. In 1973, Ward publishes his best-known book, *Anarchy in action* (1973), an accessible synthesis presenting anarchism less as a theory or as political strategy, than as any process ‘through which people enlarge their autonomy and reduce their subjection to external authority’ (Ward, quoted p156). Between 1971 and 1976, he is also appointed education officer for the TCPA’s new education unit, and tries to ‘subtly infuse his anarchist perspective’, defending environmental education as an experiment in ‘de-schooling’ allowing us to envisage what a ‘school without walls’ might be (p186).

Scott-Brown then describes Ward’s attempts to face the challenge Thatcherism raised for anarchists, with Thatcher successfully ‘playing to many of the same values and instincts that were important’ to them (p214). In his 1985 book *When we build again*, Ward criticises not only Thatcherism but also the left’s answer to it, which tends to favour ‘paternalistic state intervention’ (p215) and to see in people’s desire to own their home an expression of pathological individualism. Ward prefers to understand this desire as one for ‘control over their own lives’ (p216), and suggests ways in which an alternative socialist strategy might build upon past experiments in cooperative housing. In his column writing, Ward deploys his ‘anecdotal approach’, addressing anarchist themes (decentralisation, self-sufficiency, workers’ and dwellers’ control, etc.) through

carefully crafted stories of everyday episodes, presenting himself as ‘the archetypal “Everyman”’ and appealing to ‘plain good sense’ (p237).

In an afterword, Scott-Brown tackles a question which was ever-present throughout the book, that of the nature of Colin Ward’s anarchism. She sees a tension at work within his thought, as more generally within social anarchism, between a tendency to construct ‘intelligent social designs’ (p246), and a tendency to trust in the anarchistic tendencies lying within existing practices. Ward’s emphasis on one tendency over the other varies according to his perception of the immediate and wider contexts of his interventions. The sheer volume of these, and the very different kinds of audiences he so addressed, makes it ‘fair to say that he did more than anyone to raise the profile of anarchism in Britain’ (p248).

Though Scott-Brown is keen to highlight the inventiveness of Ward’s anarchism, she regularly suggests possible criticisms: the focus on local experiments might foster political fragmentation; the ‘common’ experience invoked is often that of white working-class children and men; and Scott-Brown detects in Ward’s thought an ‘undeniable Anglo-centrism’. These limits notwithstanding, she asserts that Ward’s anarchism remains relevant today. In seeking solutions to the present crisis, one should start from the ‘seed beneath the snow’ (*Anarchy in action*, opening words), the anarchistic potential inherent in local practices and experience.

Delphine Frasch
École Normale Supérieure de Lyon

Nathan Stoltzfus and Christopher Osmar (eds), *The Power of Populism and People: Resistance and Protest in the Modern World*, Bloomsbury Academic: London, 2022; 288pp; ISBN 9781350201996, £70.00, hbk; ISBN 9781350202009, £22.99, pbk

As a strategy for acquiring and exercising power, popular autocracy is not new, as twentieth century fascism amply exemplified. The twenty first century, moreover, has shown that the lifting of repression does not automatically advance democracy, as the weakening of the post 1989 democracies has cogently illustrated. The stability of western democracies has also been compromised by the rise of the popular political right with their anti-global and xenophobic narratives. The slide towards authoritarianism around the world is examined in an excellent collection of essays edited by Nathan Stoltzfus and Christopher Osmar. *The Power of*

Populism and People: Resistance and Protest in the Modern World brings together distinguished scholars from a variety of disciplines and perspectives to examine significant case studies of recent national experiences that investigate how while millions daily demonstrate for democratic freedoms, 'millions more collect in support of autocrats who repress individual rights' (p1). All the case studies are valuable and insightful. They include examinations of the Arab Spring, two essays, Ukraine's 'Maidans', Putin's Russia, Malaysia, China, Turkey, Poland, Hungary, Africa, Latin America, and the United States. The essays are well served by the insightful introduction.

The editors' introduction notes how the role of popular protest movements acting as catalysts that contributed to the demise of communist regimes in Poland, Czechoslovakia and East Germany led to assumptions about popular mobilisations as democratising forces. The focus of the various essays is the exploration of how popular mobilisation can support, even demand, authoritarian rule. Populist and democratic leaders alike seek legitimacy through claims of representing the will of the people, 'either enshrined in a set of institutions or embodied in an individual'. As Andrew Bacevich poignantly points out in the closing essay, Donald Trump, 'in his own bizarre way', without deliberate purpose beyond self-aggrandizement, gave voice to millions who felt 'dispossessed, abused and forgotten' (p261). Bacevich argues that the 2016 election became a de facto referendum on post-Cold War US policies revealing the collapse of the previous underlying consensus that, while it bestowed tremendous wealth on some, greatly exacerbated inequality. For Bacevich, more shocking than the top one per cent controlling more wealth than the bottom ninety per cent, was the apparent indifference of Americans to this widely known statistic. Bacevich calls out American society's chronic afflictions: pervasive alienation and despair, the epidemic of chronic substance abuse, morbid obesity, teen suicide, world's highest incarceration rate, a seemingly insatiable appetite for pornography, the permanent crisis afflicting urban schools, regular mass shootings, to name but the better-known ills. Bacevich concludes that the post-Cold War consensus 'that promoted transnational corporate greed, mistook libertinism for liberty and embraced militarised neo-imperialism as the essence of enlightened statecraft created the conditions that handed Trump the presidency' (p262).

Adam Roberts' opening essay, 'Civil resistance versus authoritarian rule: The Arab Spring and beyond', cites the overview document for the conference from which the book emerged to stress the politically sensitive and intellectually difficult propositions the contributors were required

to negotiate. It noted the proclivity toward populist dictatorships at the same time as ‘people power’ protests and initiatives were resisting tyranny. Roberts’ chapter focuses on some issues that arise when people power and dictatorship confront one another. He reaches a number of important conclusions as well as raising important questions. Noting that the transition to democracy is immensely difficult and even hazardous, he emphasises that calls for regime change that lack a clear idea of what comes next are hugely problematic. Roberts also questions how helpful it is, both as a policy framework or analytically, to cast global events in a simplified structure of democracy versus dictatorship.

Civil society as a threat to democracy is addressed by Grzegorz Ekiert. He uses the turn to authoritarianism in Poland, the country identified with ending communism, to explore a distinctive trajectory of civil society transformation that can lead to cultural and political polarisation. There is a second essay on Poland, along with Hungary, by Michael Bernard. He identifies Poland and Hungary as the two countries critical to sparking the process that made 1989 pivotal to what appeared to be the expansion of democracy. Yet three decades later both have lapsed into democratic backsliding under illiberal populist governments. Rejecting the teleological assumption that the fall of authoritarianism leads to democracy, Bernard reconceptualises the process as ‘extrication from authoritarianism’ to illustrate the uncertainty of the final outcome (p206). He presents a cautionary tale with regard to popular mobilisation by showing how in both Hungary and Poland authoritarian populists reinterpreted 1989 to their own advantage. They replaced notions of democratic breakthrough with narratives of national betrayal that justified their own authoritarian rule.

Azat Zana Gundogan examines the ebb and flow of authoritarianism across almost a century of Turkish state formation. Conceptualising the masses as ‘auxiliary power’ (p182), he situates them within Turkish history, noting their agency as well as the cultural and ideological influences on their behaviour, reflected in mass violence and mass mobilisations. Gundogan argues that: ‘As *auxiliary power*, masses remain compliant when they are dormant and contribute to populist agendas as electorates’ (p183). He examines emblematic case studies to show how when active or mobilised the masses can be ruthless, brutal and destructive, emphasising how they reflect the cultural and ideological themes that Turkish authoritarianism draws on for legitimisation. Gundogan argues that the AKP’s authoritarianism derives from an established authoritarian continuum marking modern authoritarian policies (p197).

Marina Ottaway's study of 'The Arab uprisings and people's power: Romantic views and hard realities', reaches a pessimistic conclusion. She highlights the failure of most Arab opposition movements apart from the Islamists. She argues that the Arab uprisings of 2011 illustrated the limits of grassroots participation and spontaneous action. Albeit mass participation can be transformative, it is for but a short period and quickly wanes, succumbing to organised political forces and institutions.

Olga Onuch provides some compelling insights into "Maidans" and movements: Legacies, innovations and contention in independent Ukraine'. Emphasising how from the 1960s onwards most Ukrainian activists deployed innovative cultural repertoires that relied exclusively on non-violent protest tactics, Onuch explores the turn to violence in three historical 'Maidans', or mass mobilisations in Ukraine. With a long history of contention and protest, 'cultural choices' had been key to the success of Ukrainian activism, which required '*discipline, coordination and a united master frame*' (p91). Onuch reveals the factors causing activist disunity, delay in coordination and loss of control over the dissemination of information, mistakes that facilitated those determined to use violence. The failures alienated the median voter and opened the way for a new populist leader: '2019 saw the election of a movie star, comedian and entertainment mogul Volodymyr Zelensky to the presidency ...' (p107).

It is impossible in a short review to mention never mind do justice to all the contributions in this fine collection of essays. Together they make for a very important book of immense relevance to the present and the future. Obviously of interest to students and scholars, it has important lessons for political activists. All the essays are written in lucid prose with themes and ideas made accessible for all. It deserves to be read widely.

Dianne Kirby
Trinity College Dublin

Elke Weesjes, *Growing Up Communist in the Netherlands and Britain: Childhood, Political Activism, and Identity Formation*, Amsterdam University Press, Amsterdam, 2021; 294pp; ISBN 9789463726634, €105.00, hbk

Historiographies of communism often focus on those who were at the vanguard of the movement, overlooking the lived experience of less prominent individuals and rarely delving into communists' home lives. In this

valuable book, Elke Weesjes takes an alternative look at the movement, dedicating its pages to the oral histories of cradle communists.

Growing Up Communist in the Netherlands and Britain draws on thirty-eight interviews with Dutch and British people who grew up in communist households, exploring their day-to-day lives at home, at school, at work, and – in some cases – in the party. The selection of interviews, conducted between 2001 and 2019, enables Weesjes to uncover common ground and differences among the interviewees, whilst finding trends both nationally and internationally. A number of authors including Alexei Sayle and David Aaronovitch have written autobiographical works about growing up in a communist family – but Weesjes provides a bigger picture by surveying the collective memory of individuals rather than recounting a single experience. She also uses excerpts from published autobiographies and archival material to give context.

Weesjes's decision to focus on the Netherlands and Britain is influenced by recent historiography on western communist parties, including work by Kevin Morgan, Gidon Cohen, Andrew Flinn, Norman LaPorte, and Matthew Worley. The comparative approach is critical in the analysis of political movements because it allows us to determine if some issues are the result of specific national conditions, or are indicative of a larger international trend. As a result of this method, we can see how pervasive certain issues were throughout the wider communist movement, particularly those pertaining to the cold war and Eurocommunism.

The Dutch and British communist movements shared similarities; for example, both the Communist Party of the Netherlands (CPN) and the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) only obtained minor parliamentary influence in comparison to most of their western European counterparts. Both organisations were highly involved in student, anti-fascist, and countercultural activities before dissolving in 1991, after Eurocommunists assumed control. On the other hand, the differences are stark – for example, the CPN was banned during the Second World War, with a handful of its members being sent to concentration camps; the CPGB never faced such harsh political repression, albeit members were still subject to arrests and harassment by the secret service and police.

Weesjes's book is divided into two sections. Part I examines the history of the Young Communist League of Britain (YCL), the Communistische Jeugdbond – the Dutch Communist Youth League, and the Algemeen Nederlands Jeugdverband – the General Dutch Youth League (ANJV). This section, which spans the years 1920-1991, breaks down the different developmental paths that each organisation took, how they interacted

with wider society, and their periods of decline later on. Throughout the years, the YCL and ANJV encountered similar struggles, including difficulties appealing to youth culture and ‘new social forces’, dwindling party electoral successes, and organisational decay.

By the mid-to-late 1980s, both the YCL and the ANJV had succumbed to the Eurocommunist crisis; however, whereas the former’s membership had peaked in 1967, the latter had reached its peak in the early 1980s. Despite the fact that they deteriorated at various rates, Weesjes highlights similarities in their pattern of decline, and shows that this was interconnected with trends in the larger communist movement in western Europe.

Part II delves deeper into the interviews and looks at peoples’ life growing up in communist households. Being raised by communist parents was far from orthodox, yet it had a significant influence on the formation of the interviewees’ identities and values in life. Communists in the Netherlands and Britain were often situated on the peripheries of society. This was particularly the case in the Netherlands, because of ‘pillarisation’: the political-denominational segregation of the population along the lines of different religious commitments or political ideologies. Weesjes explains that the Catholic, Calvinist, liberal, and social democratic

pillars had their own institutions: newspapers, broadcasting corporations, trade unions, schools, hospitals, building societies, universities, sports clubs, and choirs. Every pillar, which united people from all classes, amounted to a subculture (sometimes isolated) within society. As the cold war intensified in the 1950s, pillars, already not particularly welcoming to outsiders, closed their ranks to keep communists out.

Weesjes highlights how social stigmatisation also grew from key international events such as the cold war and the Hungarian uprising of 1956, fuelling anti-communist sentiments throughout Europe, and seeing communists being heckled and even attacked. To make things more difficult for households, parents’ war trauma resulted in dysfunctional family circumstances. As such experiences are retold through the eyes of children who grew up during such hostile times, we gain an idea of how their upbringing and social status influenced their identity and awareness of the world.

Weesjes notes that ‘children were born into a life rather than choosing it and, as expected, I found them to be less defensive in their responses than their parents. Even those who were initially somewhat defensive let

their guards down during follow-up interviews and shared very intimate details about their upbringing’.

The interviewees’ honest accounts provide insight into the experiences of not only themselves as children, but also their mothers and fathers. Although communist households differed in many ways from the rest of society, issues such as patriarchal values continued to persist. For many interviewees, their fathers were the most active party members, whereas the mothers were expected to do housework and look after the children. Comparing Britain and the Netherlands, Weesjes notes that a lot more of the mothers in Dutch communist families were party members.

Analysing the different types of communist family units, Weesjes distinguishes between militant hardliners, ordinary ‘rank and file’ members, and the Eurocommunist-predisposed bohemians. Such categories highlight dissimilarities in upbringing between different groups of interviewees. For example, the most militant households saw communism dominate every element of life, whilst ordinary members were able to dissociate themselves from the party in their private lives.

Reading about the various communist family units gives us a glimpse into a bygone age, and how, despite the fact that most of those who were the parents in these families have now passed away, their legacy lives on in the ongoing lives of individuals who grew up in them. Despite the fact that some of the interviewees are no longer communists, it is evident that the majority of them saw their communist upbringing as a plus rather than a negative. Many children were actively encouraged by their parents to pursue an academic career and to serve as role models in the workplace and in their communities. Through such parental influence, many of them were able to become model citizens.

Weesjes’s decision to interview such a large sample of individuals doesn’t come without its setbacks. The key difference between her two samples is that there are twenty-six Dutch interviewees and twelve British, with the Dutch sample having a somewhat higher average age. Nonetheless, Weesjes admits these shortcomings from the start, stating that the interviews will never be genuinely reflective of both parties. One interesting find is that the Dutch sample were more likely to have been born into a third-generation communist household, whilst only a minority of the British interviewees’ parents had even grown up in a socialist environment.

Unlike in regard to the Soviet Union or the larger western European parties such as the Communist Party of Italy (PCI), the history of communism in the Netherlands and Britain is not widely known to the general

public in either country. The oral testimony that Weesjes has recovered and analysed is therefore very valuable. At this current point in time, the communist movements in Britain and the Netherlands are seeing an upsurge in membership, particularly among young people born after 1991; there is a chance that we may one day see a return of communist households. Weesjes' work is important not only to communist history enthusiasts, but also to a new generation of young people who were not alive to witness both communist parties in their heyday.

Nathan Czapnik

Chief Editor of Challenge: the magazine of the Young Communist League

Tom Wilber and Jerry Lembcke, *From Vietnam's Hoa Lo Prison to America Today: Dissenting POWs*, Monthly Review Press, New York, 2021; 181pp; ISBN 9781583679098, £75.00, hbk; ISBN 9781583679081, £15.99, pbk

Wilber and Lembcke's study of Vietnam POW dissent and the extremes to which the US resorted to counter it is an informative, fascinating and revealing book. Image management is important to all governments but none more so than the United States, even now still imbued with its chosen nation conceit and the conviction it is a model democracy to the world. From the beginning of the Cold War, the United States determined to present what was essentially a power-struggle with the Soviet Union into a morality play. It deployed its vast resources, what Jonathan Herzog has termed the 'spiritual-industrial-complex', to portray its post-war bid for hegemony as a conflict between good and evil, the godly US versus the godless Soviets. It proved a tremendously successful propaganda ploy, especially on the home front, the most consequential target audience. It was crucial in persuading the American population to accept the global role to which government aspired but knew was the antithesis of inherent national isolationist convictions. The Cold War narrative constructed following the Second World War played on historical notions of the United States embedded in the popular imagination of it being a saviour nation with a God-given destiny. It was crucial in creating and consolidating domestic support for the quest to secure American hegemony.

Wilber and Lembcke expertly illustrate how the Vietnam War threatened to compromise the Cold War image the United States sought to convey abroad as well as at home. Nonetheless, as they cogently reveal,

damage limitation began virtually at the same time as the war, a war which in the beginning was popular and well supported on the home front. Wilber and Lembcke's research demonstrates the extent to which government efforts to control the narrative about the Vietnam War have been ceaseless, perhaps most cogently illustrated by Ronald Reagan's 1980 claim that the Vietnam War was 'in truth, a noble cause'. American triumphalism following the demise of the Soviet Union claimed victory in the Cold War and the historiographical terrain of the war became itself a battlefield. The Vietnam War became a conflict that the United States apparently lost at the time, but fighting it was crucial to the larger cause of winning the Cold War, hence ultimately success in the final analysis. Wilber and Lembcke provide an invaluable reminder of the levels of dissent against the war and government Cold War propaganda. The focus of the book is on the dissent within the military. It powerfully illuminates the lengths to which the American authorities were prepared to go to control the narrative and the image of America and its military forces during and after the war.

Wilber and Lembcke set out to rectify the historical neglect accorded anti-war voices within the Prisoner of War, POW, population. They are motivated by what they regard as a void in American political culture that leaves new generations of uniformed war resisters and civilian activists without significant role models. The book's in-depth research is directed toward dismantling the carefully constructed 'official story' that American POWs remained at war throughout their captivity, that they were heroes to the bitter end. They returned home with honour. Detailed attention is given to claims that American POWs were tortured. With the prisoner-at-war as the central figure in the hero prisoner story, allegations of torture, always denied by the Vietnamese, validated the notion of the POW system as a form of war. The authors challenge the torture narrative, pointing in particular to objective data from a 1975 Amnesty International report, reinforced by a subsequent 1978 report, that testified to the good physical and mental health of released POWs, including in comparison to a control group of non-captive Vietnam veterans and even POWs from previous wars.

The release and repatriation of POWs in early 1973 naturally garnered media attention. It also meant that the different claims surrounding POW treatment and behaviour were addressed. The press were interested in hearing dissenting voices from within the prison population. The Pentagon and the Nixon White House were, however, determined that those voices would not be heard. Ensuring this was the case meant

threats of courts-martial and ostracism, accompanied by the intimidation, humiliation and attempted discrediting of those who challenged the official story. Wilber and Lembcke provide detailed profiles of dissenters that reveal the extent to which for many individual conscience was a driving force. High-ranking military lawyers advised government officials against the prosecution of dissenters who had advocated peace during the war. This led to a significant and telling switch in official tactics. Rather than pursue punishing dissenters, they were recast as mental health casualties damaged by what they had endured during the course of their imprisonment as POWs. These depictions would be merged into the victim-veteran discourse that was already at play in the public sphere and an established influence on public perceptions: 'They weren't criminally "bad," but emotionally and psychologically wounded, traumatised.' (p72) It was to prove an extremely effective tactic. Strategies of punishing and stigmatising were replaced with claims of mental health problems. Dissenters were transformed. They were no longer presented as bad. Now they were simply mad. They shifted from being villains to victims. From the official perspective it was far better to medicalise than to criminalise dissent. At the same time, other Vietnam veterans were being diagnosed with PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder), victims of conflict generally rather than the Vietnam War specifically. Post traumatic stress was a preferable diagnosis to post-Vietnam syndrome. Pathologising dissent as a symptom of trauma obscured, indeed repudiated, any notion that opposition to the war was a matter of conscience.

Another important theme explored in the book is the trajectory of the brain-washing thesis that reflected American Cold War obsessions with communist mind-control and internal subversion. It was a crucial factor in the way in which the memory of POW dissent would be erased. As the authors cogently observe: 'History books, news media, memoirs, novels, film and folklore all play roles in shaping American memory of the war in Vietnam' (p76). One of the most powerful image-makers when it comes to POWs is of course Hollywood and the authors examine in detail how the dream factory scripted the POW narrative. As the authors cogently point out: 'Hollywood had begun portraying Vietnam veterans as damaged goods since the mid-1960s and, consequentially, writing political veterans out of their stories' (p101).

The authors persuasively conclude that fifty years after the Vietnam War ended the acts of conscience it aroused and the reaction to them 'continue to drive American political culture.' The book is a captivating read for all interested in the dynamics of conflict both on and off the

battlefield and particularly in the corridors of power and the machinery of propaganda. It will interest all scholars concerned about historiographical construction and national identity.

Dianne Kirby
Las Casas Institute, Oxford University

Vladislav M. Zubok, *Collapse: The Fall of the Soviet Union*, Yale University Press, New Haven, CT, 2022; 576pp; 30 b/w illus; 2 maps; ISBN 9780300268171, £14.99, pbk

This book is the best I have read on the end of the Soviet Union. Zubok has the advantage over some other commentators of being Russian, having graduated from Moscow University. He is currently Professor of International History at the LSE, and has written several earlier books on Russian politics. *Collapse* provides a comprehensive narrative and analysis of Soviet and Russian politics from the era of Andropov, through to Gorbachev's forced resignation from the Soviet presidency, as the USSR disintegrated around him. Zubok has used a wide range of sources, including interviews with some of the leading characters. This study, at over 500 pages including notes and references (and a very useful *dramatis personae*), is actually much more readable than is normally the case for an academic work covering such a complex subject.

Zubok is fairly critical of some other studies of the period, which tend to focus on the rise of nationalism in the Baltics, Georgia and Ukraine as well as in autonomous regions within the Russian Federation such as Chechnya. While not understating the role of non-Russian separatism, he rejects the view of the Ukrainian historian, Serhii Plokhy, whose 2014 study, *The Last Empire*, argues that it was Ukrainian separatism which collapsed the USSR, a view apparently shared by Vladimir Putin. (Plokhy's study is nevertheless certainly worth reading and I intentionally read that book before tackling Zubok).

Zubok's main thesis was that it was the collapse of the Soviet economy and Gorbachev's failure to manage the transition to a market economy that was the main reason for the degeneration and collapse of the Soviet state. The second main factor was the political conflicts within the political leadership, with Boris Yeltsin hitching himself to the Russian nationalist agenda. Yeltsin in effect stole the Soviet state, both what was left of the state economy and its revenues as well as key state organs such as the

KGB from Gorbachev and the Soviet leadership. Zubok is highly critical of Gorbachev's performance. He is shown as indecisive, and unwilling to exert his authority over his colleagues, partly because of his reluctance to use force. In contrast, Yeltsin is shown as opportunist and decisive, as well as being drunk, bombastic, boisterous and unpredictable – a behaviour that made him popular with Russians, while Gorbachev was seen as a distant bureaucrat, highly regarded by Western states, but increasingly unpopular within Russia. This is not surprising given the decline in living standards and basic public services as the economy and governance systems disintegrated. Much of the narrative in the later chapters focuses on the duel between Gorbachev and Yeltsin, with Yeltsin being more often the winner.

Zubok is also thorough on the alternative economic plans proposed by a range of economists on the management of the transition, with Yeltsin's team, led by Yegor Gaidar, promoting a big bang in the form of an unmanaged and speedy transition to privatisation and a fully market economy. This programme proved catastrophic, leading to the fall of Yeltsin and the return to an autocratic and centralised government under Putin. In his turn, Putin blamed Gorbachev, along with the Ukrainians, led at the time by Leonid Kravchuk, for the end of the USSR, which Putin in effect viewed as a Russian Empire, which he is now seeking to recreate.

Zubok demonstrates the extent to which Gorbachev was dependent not just on the advice of American economists, but on loans from the US and Germany in his attempt to maintain some form of Soviet state. As the Russian republic's strength grew vis-à-vis the all-Union centre, the Communist leaders of the other republics had no choice but to seek to establish their own independent states, otherwise they would have been swallowed up by Yeltsin's new Russian republic. Gorbachev's attempt to establish a new Union treaty inevitably collapsed as his argument for a Federation of republics with himself at the centre was unacceptable to the republican leaders who sought a confederal state of equals (with of course Russia as *primus inter pares*). Zubok's narrative of the attempted coup by Soviet hardliners led by the KGB's Vladimir Kryuchkov, shows how close Gorbachev came to deposition, and how he was saved by the resistance led by Yeltsin, but how he was unable to re-establish his authority and how Yeltsin used the failed coup to establish his own predominance. What is perhaps surprising is to learn that the dissolution of the Soviet Union with the agreement of Yeltsin, Kravchuk and the Belarusian soviet leader Stansislav Shushkevich in a hunting lodge near Minsk was unplanned and derived from an idea floated by Yeltsin's economist Stanislav Shatalin. This

forced the other republican leaders, notably Nursultan Nazarbayev, the chairman of the Kazakh Soviet, to choose between Gorbachev's federal union or Yeltsin's Commonwealth of Independent States (apparently based on the structure of the British Commonwealth), with the former option clearly being no longer viable. It is somewhat ironic that it was only the western states led by the US who sought to preserve a federal Soviet state, but even George Bush had to recognise that his friend Mikhail Sergeyevich, though still collaborating with him on trying to impose a peace settlement in the Middle East, was no longer a power within his own country, and that his new partner was the unpredictable Boris. Yeltsin took over not just the Soviet state bank, but managed to disconnect Gorbachev's access to the nuclear missile codes without the latter's knowledge. Gorbachev's now inactive nuclear briefcase was formally handed over on the day of his resignation, when, surrounded by American film crews, he signed with the pen of CNN's producer as his own pen could not work. A sad end, but one for which Gorbachev could only blame himself. We should however recognise that the transition of power and dissolution of what had been the second most powerful state in the world, was achieved largely without violence. The violence and economic catastrophe was still to come.

Duncan Bowie

The Socialist History Society

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