
Reviews

Denis Bradley, *Peace Comes Dropping Slow: My Life in the Troubles*, Merrion Press, Newbridge, Co. Kildare, 2024; 264 pp.; ISBN 9781785375002, £13.95, pbk.

The twenty-six years following the Good Friday Agreement witnessed a surfeit of books about the conflict in and about Northern Ireland, euphemistically termed the ‘Troubles’. Following the Good Friday Agreement and the discarding of bombs and bullets, many former participants, be they paramilitaries or politicians, ascended bully pulpits and took up the pen. The armed struggle was superseded by a war of words. Memoirs were weaponised in the contest to chronicle and control the re-telling of the past. Preferable to the death, destruction and desolation inflicted on the region for three decades, the war of words reflected that in many ways the conflict was far from over, it had simply shifted to safer terrain. The battle over the past remains ongoing as key players seek to influence the historical record. However, alternative voices are increasingly coming to the fore, breaking the once pervasive and infamous silence to which Seamus Heaney poignantly referred: ‘Whatever you say, say nothing.’ Denis Bradley’s memoir brings to the growing historiography a refreshing authenticity and searing honesty that enriches and complicates the narrative, elucidating a dark period about which much remains to be told and understood. The focus on Derry/Londonderry is particularly welcome, providing telling insights into city life during the Troubles that add to and complements Eamonn McCann’s classic *War in an Irish Town*, first published in 1974. McCann’s book was, of course, written during the early, dark days of the conflict. Bradley’s careful accounting takes the reader from outbreak to resolution and aftermath, bringing not only an abundance of personal and political detail, but significant and previously unknown and untold information about the Derry backchannel.

Bradley contributes compelling perspectives to the still unfolding history of the Troubles, helped by the very different roles he played, from priest to Policing Board, from a street combatant against addiction and homelessness to membership of the government-appointed Consultative Group on the Past. He was also an eyewitness to Bloody Sunday and for over thirty years party to a secret back-channel that operated out of Derry. The latter made a significant contribution to ending the war and is important in revealing how extensive and complex were communications between the British government and the IRA. Naturally, and

not for the first time, the question arises, could the war not have been ended far sooner, saving the lives lost and damaged over three decades. It is a disturbing question and one of many that Bradley raises throughout a memoir marked by searing honesty and uncompromising self-reflection. Bradley reveals his ongoing struggle to come to terms with the pain of the past and the moral dilemmas he confronted as a man, a priest and a seeker of peace. In doing so, he confirms what those who lived through the conflict have long known, rather than those in the higher echelons who claimed credit for ending the war, it was the collective effort of numerous courageous individuals who dedicated decades of their lives to challenging the perpetrators of violence and to promoting peace despite the danger and disappointment, the fear and frustration. These same individuals were also committed to trying to ameliorate the worst aspects for the most vulnerable within their communities, a ceaseless task. Bradley was one such individual as were his two partners in the backchannel, Brendan Duddy and Noel Gallagher. The three were bonded by an idea: 'that a successful initiative could only be built after an agreed cessation of violence and the organisations that held the greatest sway over violence were the IRA and the British government' (p.115). Each man made a critical contribution to the process, which together they brought to fruition.

Bradley identifies Brendan Duddy as the 'point man with the British, meeting and discussing with those strange, conglomerate beings who are diplomats, civil servants and secret agents rolled into one' (p.118). He credits Duddy with arranging the 1975 negotiations between the British and the IRA. Duddy's skill and persistence is commended for bringing together deeply mistrustful opponents, each wary of the other and fearful of negative responses from their respective cohorts resistant to the notion that the two parties 'had to negotiate a way out of the violence and into politics' (p.114). Gallagher, possessed of a unique understanding of republicans, became an important stanchion in facilitating the negotiations between the IRA and the British morphing into a pan-nationalist coalition, followed by Anglo-Irish negotiations, that proved transformative. Bradley presents himself simply as a 'go for', attributing more to his clerical collar than himself. Most certainly his status as a priest was a factor, given the then standing of the churches in Northern Ireland, in cultivating trust and acceptance with various parties. The Troubles began prior to the Church scandals that generated widespread opprobrium and reduced its influence North and South. Bradley's observations and analysis of the role, or lack of, assumed by the churches, will be invaluable to those interested in the religious dimension of the Troubles. For example, Bradley observes that two types of priests emerged from the conflict: 'those who engaged with what was happening on the streets and those who stayed back from it as much as possible' (p.16). Bradley fell firmly

into the former category. Hence, he and his two associates were able for over thirty years to keep going and keep secret a conduit between the IRA and the British government.

Notably, the origins of the back channel lay in promptings from the local superintendent of the RUC, Frank Lagan. Bradley's gripping and at times page turning recounting of the backchannel's mode of operation and its numerous dealings with an array of colourful figures tellingly illustrates the immense levels of accompanying paranoia and frustration as they came to know 'the enormity of the subterfuge that was inherent in our violent conflict.' (p.122) In addition to the cloak and dagger excitement, Bradley effectively engages the reader with the essence of his comrades pursuing peace, their characters and motivations, the heavy toll exacted on them and their families as they strove to stop the killing. Their ultimate success was personally costly. Without any hint of cloying sentiment or intended tribute, Bradley subtly shows the price ordinary people are prepared to pay in pursuit of a higher cause.

As well as revealing the inner workings of secret negotiations, Bradley also brings in important minutiae about the impact on ordinary folk, revealing that while some were overwhelmed, many found excitement in a war situation, found meaning and purpose. None of which of course diminishes the pain and suffering, felt equally by Bradley himself. He movingly recounts some of the deaths that continue to haunt him. He also speaks emotively about the love he felt for Derry people, a clear motivating force in his life. Love is a tool of analysis alien to most scholars but one that is coming more to the fore as those with religious vocations or deep faith convictions take up the pen.

Bradley's memoir is a riveting read that will appeal to a wide-ranging audience. It certainly deserves to be widely read and discussed. Highly recommended.

Dianne Kirby

Carmel Gallagher, *Retired Missionaries and Faith in a Changing Society*, Routledge, Abingdon, 2024; 215 pp.; ISBN 9781032680156, £108.00, hbk.

This fascinating new book written by Carmel Gallagher, an emeritus research fellow at Technological University, Dublin, is a welcome addition to the Routledge series 'Studies in Religion'. The book is based on interviews with thirty-seven Irish Catholic female and male missionaries, largely nuns and priests. Their mission fields included Asia, Africa, Central and South America. Together they served in 90 countries across the globe. All subsequently returned to live in an Ireland that had changed dramatically from the country they first left, as indeed had the status of the Church within it. As well as offering a rich

sociological study of the Irish missionary diaspora, it provides an insightful history of what was perhaps Ireland's most influential outreach to the wider world, the Irish missionary movement. The study is a telling overview of the critical ways in which the Irish Church and State changed over the course of the twentieth and into the twenty-first century. It is a story enriched by the personal testimonies, the evocative vignettes of unfolding lives, the aging process amidst oftentimes difficult and dangerous terrain that challenged and changed the missionaries as they engaged with different peoples and cultures and convictions.

Now a vanishing vocation, becoming a missionary was once a highly regarded and not uncommon choice for the young and idealistic. Generations of Irish people once took great pride in the spiritual cohorts that departed Ireland's shores to spread the true faith to the unenlightened in far flung fields. About 30,000 Irish joined missionary orders from the 1920s to the 1970s. Serving abroad today there are only about 600 Irish missionaries. The narratives from the retired and semi-retired missionaries shed considerable light on the exponential and ongoing decline. Even more illumination, as Gallagher acknowledges, would come from those that chose to leave missionary service. Certainly, a worthy future study that would complement as well as expand on Gallagher's research.

Key to the book's success as an authentic and accurate study is the frank and honest disclosures of the 37 interviewees. Their reflections on themselves and their Church reveal a willingness to confront, acknowledge and learn from past practices, subsequently abandoned, as well as personal and institutional failings. For example, it was freely accepted that Irish missionary endeavours in the first decades of the fledgling Irish state that had thrown off the shackles of colonialism echoed colonizer discourse via an evangelizing approach that discounted and dismissed the value of the indigenous cultures encountered. Missionary publications in the 1920s and 1930s revealed racist attitudes toward African people, presented as culturally and spiritually inferior. Irish missionaries travelled from a newly independent Ireland to regions where remnants of the British empire still prevailed, imbued with their own spiritual imperial project. However, engagement with local peoples and a willingness to learn from them helped develop real respect for indigenous practices and religious beliefs. Individual transformation was supercharged from the 1960s on by the profound impact of Vatican II and Liberation Theology. Although the revolutionary changes each induced were subsequently significantly curtailed throughout the Church following the imposition of a more conservative theology under John Paul II from the 1980s on, those in the missionary field continued by and large to adhere to their teachings. As Gallagher explains: 'despite opposition within the Catholic Church to Liberation Theology, mission work was firmly rooted in

solidarity with the world's poorest people through compassion and social action' (p.55).

Being with the people and attending to their needs could require, if not challenging, at least not strictly adhering to Church teachings. This was notably the case in the realm of women's health and tackling AIDS. Church teachings on contraception required some flexibility on the part of missionaries, as one explained:

Now as long as we were sort of helping people and working with people, making decisions around the use of condoms quietly, no problem. But if it meant our taking an official position, there was no way that was going to be tolerated (p 180).

Gallagher clearly empathises with her subjects. She celebrates their achievements in education, health and welfare projects, and rightly so. Missionaries dedicated themselves to supporting the most deprived, despised and abandoned sectors of society, for example, prostitutes, prisoners, the poor and the politically dispossessed. Working with the most marginalised sectors of society was physically demanding and mentally draining. Missionary projects often entailed danger, from being located in war zones or from challenging powerful interests. It could and did lead to loss of life as well as disease, distress and depression. There were high personal costs. In the early days, the Church had little if anything in place to address the heavy toll exacted by missionary life. That changed and the interviewees commended the Church for eventually recognising the need for support mechanisms, retreats and sabbaticals and opportunities for further study and qualifications. The tendency when reflecting on their missionary service was for the interviewees to acknowledge the demands and danger, the sacrifice and suffering. Nonetheless, the prevailing sentiment was that the purpose and meaning derived from a life of service to others was immensely rewarding, sufficiently so to counter the negatives. None regretted choosing the missionary life, insisting there was joy and celebration as well as trial and tribulation. Gallagher observed that: 'There was a wholeness to the lives of the missionaries that made their mission identity meaningful as they adapted, learned and changed' (p. 199).

The interviewees, of course, consist of those who remained in the Church and spent most of their lives on mission. A fuller picture requires a similar study undertaken by those who discarded that identity and left the mission field, perhaps even left the Church.

The interviewees were not without criticism of the Irish Church, its structures and practices and, of course, the egregious scandals in which it had become embroiled in recent decades. This was a subject from which they did not

shy albeit it was clear that it was a matter of deep pain and disappointment on many levels. Nor were they happy with the direction of the Irish Church to which they returned, particularly what they perceived as the failure of the Irish bishops to 'speak out' (p. 155). A notable criticism made by missionary men and women was the over clericalism of the Irish church and the failure to accord the laity a greater role. Attitudes toward and the treatment of women was a complaint from the female missionaries endorsed by their male counterparts. This was linked to the conservatism in the Irish Church which was clearly a source of great discomfort. While the returned female missionaries felt excluded, their male colleagues felt pushed to the margins in their search for 'like-minded Catholics' (p.156).

Gallagher relates how the returned missionaries 'had many ideas for the future of a very different Church in Ireland drawing on their experiences of Church in their host countries, their observations of the Church in Ireland and the involvement of some missionaries in alternative Church groups where fresh ideas were being discussed' (p.158).

In her concluding remarks, Gallagher persuasively argues that returned missionaries are 'at least an under recognised resource who have something of value to say to Irish society, to faith institutions and to the Catholic Church' (p.200). Those who read this enjoyable and informative study will agree with her.

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David Kynaston, *A Northern Wind: Britain, 1962-65*, Bloomsbury, London, 2023; 704 pp.; ISBN 9781526657572, £30.00, hbk; ISBN 9781526657565, £13.49, pbk.

This lengthy, detailed but exhilarating book is just one instalment in David Kynaston's ambitious plan to produce a vast cultural history of Britain from the coming of Attlee to the coming of Thatcher in 1979. Essentially, we are brought through an action-packed four-year period of British culture. The sheer amount of economic, popular and political changes described is almost overwhelming: Kynaston delivers in-depth depictions of the Cuban missile crisis, Beatlemania, the 1964 election of Wilson, Mod and Rocker disturbances, reaction to Kennedy's murder, the Profumo scandal, the Great Train Robbery, a move towards comprehensiveness in education as well as an expansion of university provision, slum clearances and brutalist architecture developments, the depressing rise of massive supermarket chains, sporting triumphs and fiascos, the Beeching Report, the new BBC2 channel, innovations in prose fiction, films and staged plays, developing multiculturalism and the deaths of Hugh Gaitskell, Sylvia

Plath, C.S. Lewis, T.S. Eliot and Winston Churchill. Sometimes, events are described almost in real time: I know the result of the 1964 General Election – but Kynaston's account of contradictory polls, betting odds fluctuations and Labour nerves made me quite apprehensive – I felt genuine relief when he assured me that Wilson had won by a paltry majority of four.

Kynaston's form of prose is populist in that he favours narrative over academic argument – although every source is meticulously cited, these notes and bibliographies are packed away unobtrusively. He sometimes tells us about a social development or trend that takes place over a number of years or he brings us through weeks or even days in precise chronological order. So, there is no monotony to the style. The plural nature of the narrative style is complemented by the wide, disparate range of archive sources used – as interested in history from below as in grand narratives and canonical accounts, Kynaston plunders diaries of celebrities and unknown private citizens, contemporary and retrospective academic studies of the period's economic and political debates, national and local newspapers and national and regional television broadcasts (often, as he notes, available on grainy YouTube uploads) to furnish his narrative with both a compelling overall picture of Britain in the period and a sense of its millions of underlying experiences. The micro is just as crucial as the macro.

Usually, Kynaston does not allow his own political positions to intrude greatly. His overall assumptions and arguments are fairly predictable: Britain in the early 1960s was moving away from collectivism and towards individualism; the non-white experience in Britain was gaining prominence but was met with great hostility (Kynaston uses some of his most caustic prose when describing the notorious, racism-marred 1964 Smethwick constituency Election); there was a move towards tolerance of homosexuality in liberal circles but immense homophobia remained; women, despite taking on more paid work were marginalised in many employment (and union) contexts; the North of England became culturally vital for all of Britain (many examples of Northern breakthroughs to fame are noted – Wilson, The Beatles, *The Likely Lads*, the problematic T. Dan Smith, *This Sporting Life*, *Z-Cars*). A small number of arguments possibly needed a bit more elaboration. The argument that the Profumo scandal did more harm than good is persuasive: Kynaston argues, basically, that while the affair exposed Tory sleaze and Establishment hypocrisy, it also showcased public vindictiveness towards the scapegoated Stephen Ward and craven misogyny directed at the two main women involved, Mandy Rice-Davies and Christine Keeler. Ultimately, it is probably not possible to quantify whether or not the sordid scandal had either a 'good' or 'bad' impact – if it was, to use Kynaston's words, 'an uplifting passage in our island's story.' (p.232) Kynaston's claim that the Beeching Report caused resentment in some affected parts of Britain that was 'a

significant contributory factor' to Brexit fifty-three years later has a ring of truth about it – but to be more convincing, it would need to be backed up with a tight comparison made between areas where railway lines were closed in the 1960s and geographically precise voting patterns in the 2016 plebiscite. (p.162) Chapter 17 is a particularly satisfying if melancholy chapter. It covers trades union developments in the period. Kynaston does much to complicate our understanding of the men (and they were all men) who dominated the many different unions at the time. He uses statistics to downplay the role of the Communist Party in unions and their strike actions and shows that many unions were peopled by white-collar, often pragmatic and productivity-conscious professionals as well as by more proletarian men from varying political backgrounds and loyalties. The present-day stereotype of the sub-Scargill dossier is, Kynaston insists, a false image that has come from pejorative right-wing contempt for strikers. As Kynaston puts it stridently but sadly: 'history written by the victors is not the only history.' (p.567)

On the whole, Kynaston's conclusions are arguably inessential because they are both predictable and largely incontrovertible. Therefore, this book might be thought of as supremely enjoyable rather than supremely necessary. And, I stress again, it is a fantastic read, a profoundly enjoyable and sometimes hilarious capturing of a zeitgeist. Kynaston finds humour everywhere. The Cuban missile crisis caused diarists at the time all sorts of existential angst – but pathos turns to bathos when one diarist, Pat Scott of Barking, complains that two things have conspired to 'spoil my day' – imminent nuclear war and her husband failing his driving test. (p.11) It would be easy to be overwhelmed by the scale of Kynaston's achievement, to succumb to passive awe at his mastery of such immense national and local detail and his pleasure-giving skill at delivering gripping prose. But that would be complacent and unintellectual – because there are some minor flaws with the book. Frankly, it needs tighter editing. The horrendous winter of 1962/3 is accounted for in great detail, but we are twice given the same diary entry by the East Riding farmer, Dennis Dee – he has had 'a job keeping the pigs warm' on both pages 108 and 111. Sometimes sources are accepted as being truthful accounts of fact rather than jaundiced insinuation. For example, on page 286 a Leeds University student, Veronica Lee, is quoted denigrating the (much-published) sociologist academic, Noel Parry, for being 'not very inspiring' and for being 'badly prepared' for his lectures and tutorials – although he 'often didn't turn up at all.' Is this true? Is it right to print this series of unchecked allegations about unprofessionalism? Although disinterested teaching is not unknown in British universities, students have always spoken and written nonsense about academics. On page 331, Kynaston describes the first TV Daleks as having 'a 'sucker' arm only, resembling a sink plunger.' These early Dalek

iterations did not have arms that *resembled* sink plungers – they actually *were* sink plungers. BBC budgets were laughable then. Very rarely, there is a distasteful choice of words. For example, on page 426, there is a sensitive passage about the abduction of one of the Moors Murders victims, Keith Bennett. The boy's body has never been found, as Kynaston says, but it seems callous and jarring to begin the next paragraph with a sentence beginning 'One issue not disappearing this summer was race.' (*ibid*) Obviously, no offence, is meant – but that is an insensitive juxtaposition. The many references to Jimmy Saville will upset some people too – Kynaston himself calls Saville 'ubiquitous' on page 473. Of course, history is what it is and such individuals cannot be eliminated from the record – but did Saville have to be mentioned seven times in one book? Does his ghastly memory have to be 'ubiquitous'? I could have done without the two references to Rolf Harris too. (pp.196 and 527)

As mentioned above, Kynaston writes about 'our island's story.' The suggestion that Britain is an 'island' means that Northern Ireland will not be included in his history. Oddly, though, Northern Ireland is mentioned once – in a brief and uncharacteristically vague paragraph about Ian Paisley causing riots by demanding the removal of an Irish tricolour from the nebulously described 'Republican headquarters' in Belfast. (p. 492) Kynaston says that the incident received 'little attention in the mainland press.' (*ibid*) It is the only Ulster episode noted in the entire seven-hundred-page book so if it received 'little attention' why is this incident on a neighbouring island mentioned at all in a book about 'our island's story'? Incidentally, Irish nationalists will be insulted by the term 'mainland' – for them, no part of Ireland is less 'main' than Britain. Paisley, named here, is not cited in the book's index. Indeed, there are a few lapses in the index: the index tells us that Jim Tomlinson is mentioned by name on pages 440-1 – but he is cited by name on page 449 too; Joanna Southcott is named on page 314 but cannot be found in the index; Godfrey Winn is mentioned on page 471 but he does not get an index entry; a documentary about West Hartlepool is described on pages 132-3 but there is no index entry for the town; and, likewise, Darlington gets no index entry but there is a significant reference to the town's doomed locomotive works on page 132. I was surprised that Kynaston refers to public interest in a royal visit to Canada as being an 'anxious, apolitical preoccupation.' (p.504) I'm sure that it is true that many followers of royalty are attracted by glamour and celebrity rather than acceptance of the trappings of privilege, hierarchy and the monarch's continuing sectarian role as Supreme Governor of the Church of England. But some people do make a political and/or religious choice to support the continued constitutional role of the monarchy – it is oddly coy of Kynaston to not acknowledge that. Some assertions just need more factual clarity: it is not made clear exactly why Khrushchev's fall

in 1964 would help Tory election prospects; and is there evidence to back up the claim that ‘almost certainly most professional sportsmen voted Conservative?’ (pp.513 and 507) So, future editions of this book need to be tidied up a trifle. These faults and infelicities are rare. It may seem like quibbling to draw attention to them – but it is worth doing because the book, overall, is magnificent. When finished, Kynaston’s multi-volume, shelf-filling history of Britain from 1945 to 1979 will be monumental, essential, seminal. These books bring enormous enriching pleasure on the whole – finding minute fault with them is a compliment to the author because he absolutely deserves our appreciation and admiration as well as our scrutiny. Fascinating, instructive things, Kynaston’s books deliver a cornucopia of information, observation and sheer joy as they provoke us to engage with the complexities of life and the multiple possibilities of experience.

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Domenico Losurdo, *Western Marxism: How it was born, how it died, how it can be reborn*, Monthly Review Press, New York, 2024; 309 pp.; RRP £25, ISBN 9781685900632, £75.00 (hbk); ISBN 9781685900625, £25.00 (pbk)

Lenin’s famous remark about the 1916 rising in Ireland, that ‘whoever expects a “pure” social revolution will never live to see it’, is quoted in the introduction and informs the argument of the book. Losurdo identifies two ‘Marxisms’, a Western one for whom this is a rebuke and an Eastern one for whom it is a precept. Part II of the book – ‘Socialism versus Capitalism or Anticolonialism versus Colonialism?’ – condenses the political perspectives arising from each.

The first is associated with a large number of figures, including Lenin, although his position is accused of ‘oscillations’; Perry Anderson of *New Left Review* fame; Leon Trotsky; Ernst Bloch; the Frankfurt school, including Horkheimer, Adorno and Marcuse; Althusser; Sartre; Hannah Arendt; Foucault; Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt; Slavoj Žižek and others. Some of these cannot be considered as Marxists and those that can are very different beasts. What unites them for Losurdo’s purpose is their denial of the validity and importance of the anticolonial revolution, although this is hardly the case when we consider the first three. Lenin’s anti-imperialism was informed by support for anticolonial revolution and his understanding of the national question, which is acknowledged and commended by Losurdo; Trotsky’s most famous theory of permanent revolution is precisely geared to this revolution, which is not mentioned; and *New Left Review* has been sympathetic. This highlights the issue, common to the treatment of all the authors, that a relatively short book cannot hope to deal

satisfactorily with their ideas, and that a more coherent conception of 'Western Marxism' is usually attributed to a narrower set of figures.

So, if the identification of a specific Western Marxism, at least as delineated here, is dubious, what of Eastern Marxism? For Losurdo, Stalin was 'the incarnation of Eastern Marxism', which included the Soviet Union and the Communist parties associated with it, plus the People's Republic of China and the other countries that Losurdo considers to be 'socialist'. This grouping, on the face of it, looks a more coherent one but Losurdo himself acknowledges some of the cracks in this anticolonial construction.

He notes the creation of the Popular Front policy by the Third International, which promoted an alliance of the Soviet Union with Britain, France and the United States – the old and rising colonial powers – the 'democratic imperialisms', and the reaction by some black emancipation activists who asked whether this did not mean 'turning one's back on the struggle for the emancipation of the colonial peoples?' He denies the contradiction by stating that while 'Germany and Japan did not count among the principal colonial powers', they planned their own slavery and colonial rule. Likewise, he defends the pact between Hitler and Stalin four years after introduction of the Popular Front policy by stating that 'it did not arouse any particular disturbance among the colonial peoples ...' He notes that 'the storm broke instead in the West and hit Marxists and communists hard, particularly in the North American Republic.' This included the important organisation of Trotskyists, whose 'indignation knew no limits', leading them to put 'the two countries that had signed the villainous pact ... on the same level.' He criticises Trotsky but without mentioning that in this controversy he continued to call for defence of the Soviet Union. His own justification of the pact is Mao's claim that it was a blow to Japan and assisted support by the Soviet Union for the Chinese struggle.

Of course, the pact didn't last long and the alliance with the 'democratic imperialisms' resumed for the duration of the war. Losurdo does not explain the continuation of the Popular Front policy following the war in the form of the 'national-front', which in France saw the Communist Party support war loans for the French war in Indochina. Nor does he address the policy of combating British imperialism in the Middle East through supporting the Zionist movement, which included the provision of arms to it through Czechoslovakia by breaking a UN embargo while at the same time halting the proposed sale of arms to Egypt and Syria. Training was supplied to Israeli pilots and paratroopers with military cooperation continuing until 1951. In December 1948 the Soviet Union voted against a UN General Assembly resolution which supported Arab refugees wishing to return to their homes or being compensated for loss or damage to their property. The inconsistencies and contradictions of 'Eastern

Marxism' are only partially acknowledged by Losurdo through noting the wars between the USSR and China, China and Vietnam, and Vietnam and Cambodia.

Losurdo argues that the importance of the anticolonial revolution arose at the 'turning point in world history', which was the October 1917 revolution, after which 'it became progressively clearer that the colonial question would play an essential role.' 'Objective contradictions' therefore placed 'priority' on 'the conflict between imperialism and anti-imperialism, and between colonialism and anticolonialism.' The violence and suffering imposed on the colonial world that he highlights raises for him the question—why reducing planetary social polarisation should be less important than reducing it within a single country? His answer leads to assertion of the decisive importance of national self-determination, independence and the sustained development of the forces of production in the newly independent states, achieved through economic and technological development. China is presented as the paragon of this task, becoming 'an irresistible model for the world anticolonialist revolution' and 'the most important event of the last five hundred years.'

Western Marxism, on the other hand, is accused of being idealistic and of 'ending up in religion'; of being 'charmed by the beauty of a remote and utopian future', and with the contrast between it and Eastern Marxism being one between those who exercise power and those who are in opposition. Losurdo damns the first and praises the latter by constructing a history that avoids showing capitalism – as set out by Marx – as an economic and social system with its laws of development leading to socialism. His invocation of a different one – 'the world colonialist-slavery system' – is not an embellishment or development of Marx's ideas to take account of a progression of the system that he did not anticipate; it is a radical departure from it that calls into question whether either the 'Western' or 'Eastern' version he constructs can actually be considered Marxism in any cogent sense.

What therefore disappears in the objective conditions that Losurdo presents to support the salience of 'Eastern Marxism', and also in his treatment of 'Western Marxism', is the working class, its separate interests, independent politics, and history of class struggle, including in what is called 'the West'. To return to Lenin and 1916, no one can reasonably claim that in pursuit of social revolution Lenin was satisfied by 'impurities' – indeed, even a cursory reading of his many writings will reveal his constant struggle against them.

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David McNally, *Slavery and Capitalism: A New Marxist History*, University of California Press, Oakland CA, 2025; 368 pp.; ISBN 9780520415973, £28.00, hbk.

At the heart of *Slavery and Capitalism* lies the contention that: ‘enslaved workers on New World plantations comprised a modern working class’. This is, in many ways, a restatement of assertions in W. E. B. Du Bois’s *Black Reconstruction in America* (1935), C. L. R. James’s *The Black Jacobins* (1938), and Sylvia Wynter’s *Black Metamorphosis* (unpublished manuscript 1970s). Although these works are much praised, the full implications of this idea have not been widely included in the literature. Indeed, the old assertion that the business of slavery was not even capitalist keeps resurfacing, from the renegade Eugene Genovese, through Charles Post to Nick Nesbitt and the so-called ‘Political Marxists’. This book leaves their arguments dead in the water. Central to such arguments is the proposition that the enslaved labourers were ‘Constant Capital’ in the Marxist sense of the term. Constant capital includes fixed assets, i.e. physical plant, machinery, land and buildings, as well as raw materials and ancillary operating expenses, while variable capital refers to the cost incurred in hiring labour power. Marx argues that only living labour creates surplus value, that is the surplus produced over and above what is required for the worker to survive, and that it is this surplus value, and only this, that is translated into profit under capitalism.

The class nature of the enslaved is central to arguments about whether slavery was capitalist, or in some manner ‘pre-capitalist. I would have thought that this question has been adequately resolved in recent years by Walter Johnson, Edward Baptist and Sven Beckert, who have built on the work of C. L. R. James and Eric Williams. Or by Jairus Banaji arguing ‘it is accumulation or the “drive for surplus-value” that defines capitalism, not the presence or absence of paid employment’. But there seems to be a constant need to reassert these concepts. Hopefully this book will lay arguments to the contrary to rest once and for all.

When Karl Marx defined how surplus value was generated by the employment of paid labour, I would suggest that he was using a simplified, ideal scenario to explain how one aspect of capitalism worked. He wrote *Capital* and his other works of political economy to explain how the system worked, not to shoehorn reality into his preconceived ideas. Marx was indeed quite clear that the chattel slavery of his day was essentially part of the capitalist mode of production and the international market served to transform all forms of labour into commodity production. So, the slave-owner is a capitalist and the slave economy produces profit for these capitalists. He wrote in the third volume of *Capital*: ‘The price paid for a slave is nothing but the anticipated and capitalized

surplus value or profit, which is to be ground out of him'. The capitalist buys the labour power of the enslaved worker, not from those workers themselves, but from their kidnappers. In a sense they are therefore receivers of stolen goods.

The book labours the point a little, but then moves on to a discussion of the resistance of the enslaved workers. Defining enslaved workers as 'constant capital' denies them all agency, even humanity. Aside from the intrinsic racism in this definition, it flies in the face of their resistance to enslavement. And this is where this book becomes exciting reading as well as a masterful study of the political economy of slavery.

For the enslaved workers did not sit passively and await saviours from on high to deliver. They fought on the beaches of Africa, they mutinied on the slave ships, they deserted to form free, independent communities in the hills and swamps, they engaged in day-to-day resistance such as strikes and go-slows as well as, given the slightest opening, engaging in full scale rebellions.

The day to day struggles over hours of work, food and clothing supplies or for the removal of a bullying 'driver', as well as demanding cash payments for extra work above that which was customary, show a class struggle that would be immediately recognisable to any employed worker today. Of course, there were additional grievances specifically related to enslavement, the most prominent of which is to maintain the integrity of communities, to prevent the sale of friends, family or neighbours away from home. For enslaved workers to withdraw their labour frequently required physically absenting themselves by escaping. When they were absent, so was their labour power. They would often only return to the plantation following negotiations over their grievances. And when they could not win the removal of a hated overseer by collective action, the response was often to kill them, by poison, by drowning or, most commonly, hacking them to death with an axe. The enslavers had good reason to live in fear. Sabotage frequently took the form of arson in the cane fields, in a similar way to agricultural workers in Britain during the same period. The burning of barns and machine sheds in Virginia has a parallel with the Luddites or Captain Swing in England.

Given the ghastly punishments and executions meted out to enslaved workers when their resistance was unsuccessful, it would have been good to hear more about how the solidarity was built to carry out these actions. What were the networks that enslaved activists use to organise and plan? How ere decisions taken? What made them decide that it was worth the risk in the face of such dreadful potential reprisals? However, it is a problem for all historians of clandestine resistance movements that we normally only have a record of the failures

through police courts and newspapers, which are themselves of dubious accuracy. Successful underground resistance leaves little trace.

As with strikes and other industrial action by employed workers, the small-scale collective actions of enslaved workers certainly helped to produce the solidarity necessary for larger scale resistance. The book argues that the most mature form of rebellion is the Mass Strike. Toussaint Louverture called for a mass strike against the French in 1798. In 1816 in Barbados, Demerara in 1823 and Jamaica in 1831, striking enslaved workers marched from one plantation to the next, spreading the action in the manner of modern flying pickets.

Fully supporting W. E. B. DuBois's characterisation of the resistance of the enslaved labourers on Southern plantations during the US Civil War as a General Strike, the book's exciting descriptions put flesh on the bones of that characterisation. Indeed, I originally thought that the book contained too many examples and that I had got the point. Of course, no sooner had I begun to think this, than I found an example that fascinated me immensely.

In 1859, after abolitionist John Brown and his comrades were hanged for leading a raid on the Harpers Ferry Armoury in an effort to start a slave rebellion, a mass meeting was held in Cincinnati in his memory. Two-thirds of those present were German immigrants, most of the rest were African Americans. August Willich, a German American communist, veteran of the failed revolution of 1848 in Germany, called on the audience to 'whet their sabres and nerve their arms for the day of retribution', before leading a torchlight march through the city in tribute to John Brown. He certainly put his money where his mouth was, serving alongside thousands of German immigrants in the Union Army.

From a People's History perspective, proletarians are described as much by their struggles as they are by their economic relationship with the means of production. So, to return to the underlying theme of the book: the business of slavery was capitalist, and the enslaved workers were proletarians. This book completely justifies these assertions.

Steve Cushion

Frank Meeres, ed., *Socialism in King's Lynn and Suffragism in Great Yarmouth. Minutes of the King's Lynn Socialist and Labour Societies, 1897-1916, and Minutes of the Executive Committee of the Great Yarmouth Women's Suffrage Society, 1909-1915*, Norfolk Record Society, Norwich, 2024; Vol. LXXXVIII. xii + 343 pp., illus. and maps; ISBN 9780995773677, £35.00, hbk.

This volume is a rare gem – a window into the lost world of local radical grassroots politics in the period shortly before the Great War. It reproduces the minute-books of three socialist organisations active in King's Lynn, on the north-

west coast of Norfolk, and of a suffrage society in Great Yarmouth, on the east coast. These documents – rare chance survivals – are now held at the Norfolk Record Office (NRO).

Frank Meeres, a local historian and former NRO archivist, has edited and annotated these records with impressive care and attention. The two main sections each have an introductory essay providing both local and wider political background. He has furnished the minutes with more than 700 very useful explanatory and biographical footnotes. There are also several appendices, including lists of socialist electoral contests in King's Lynn and biographical notes on the Yarmouth suffragists.

On the national level, British socialism around 1900 was divided between two main groups: the Social-Democratic Federation (SDF), with its emphasis on Marxist and socialist ideology, and the Independent Labour Party (ILP) with its focus on labour representation. There were several women's suffrage organisations, notably the militant 'suffragettes' of the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) and the 'law-abiding' National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS). But in relatively small centres like Lynn or Yarmouth, where the radical milieu was not large, there were definite advantages in blurring those distinctions. For as long as they could, both the Lynn socialists and the Yarmouth suffragists tried to avoid *exclusive* identification with any of the national bodies, to cooperate with them all, and to conserve their unique local characters.

Of the documents presented in the volume, the minutes of the King's Lynn socialists are certainly the most detailed and interesting. They depict not only the decisions of meetings, but an entire sub-culture of working-class self-organisation and education. An independent Socialist Society had been established in Lynn in July 1897; a year later it merged with the local group of the SDF to form an independent 'King's Lynn Social Democratic Party', and the SDF comrades ceased to organise separately in the area. No membership figures were declared, but internal evidence would suggest that maybe thirty socialists belonged to this organisation at any one time – general meetings would typically attract around 15 members, while social events with refreshments and entertainments might attract between forty-five and seventy members and friends. The level of activity, by today's standards, was remarkable: the secretary's report of work for 1902 claimed that 'about seventy meetings of one kind or another have been held, few political organisations could show a better record of work done'. (p.113) These included members' gatherings, talks, public meetings on various topics, and street meetings. This public activity was not always well received – at the height of the patriotic fervour around the Boer war in 1900, prominent local socialists had been attacked by 'jingo mobs' for speaking out against the war, their homes besieged and windows broken. (pp.72-73)

Education played a huge part in the socialists' calendar. Meetings would often involve a member giving a reading – from pamphlets, articles, sometimes novels or plays – followed by discussion. The literature of a wide range of

socialist and radical bodies was used for education purposes. There were even talks on ostensibly non-political topics such as bee-keeping or the social organisation of ants. There were outings to local beauty spots. The Lynn SDP rented a hall from the Rechabites, a religious-temperance group, which they turned into a club room – an early priority was to procure a piano. When Fred White, the party's secretary, referred in his report to the 1901 AGM to 'spread[ing] the gospel of socialism', this was a telling phrase. The culture of the organisation was in some respects very akin to that of a low church.

Electoral work was not a major preoccupation in the early years of the organisation, although one of its members, J. J. Kidd, was elected to the Board of Guardians in 1901. This changed in late 1903, when a Lynn Labour Representation Committee (LRC) was established. The Lynn SDP threw itself into LRC activity, providing two candidates for the town council elections on the Labour ticket. This was part of a chain of events which led to the demise of the Lynn party. The SDF nationally had withdrawn from the LRC in 1901, and non-participation in the LRC had become a kind of principle for the SDF. By early 1904 the Lynn SDF members had begun to organise independently again, in breach of the 1898 agreement which had created the Lynn SDP. Fissures rapidly opened up in the organisation, and a messy process in which the Lynn SDP as a body first affiliated to, and then split from, the national SDF ensued. In early 1906, the Lynn socialists informed the national SDF that 'the main reason' for their withdrawal from the SDF had been 'the attitude taken up by that body towards the LRC'. (p.131)

By September 1906, those Lynn socialists who were not SDF members had resolved to establish a branch of the ILP. This seems to have been a larger and more businesslike organisation than the Lynn SDP had been, more engaged both with national labour movement organisations and with wider local politics. However, its minutes do not reflect the same spirit of intellectual inquiry. There are almost no reports of member-led discussions about general issues or of purely educational talks, suggesting a significant cultural difference between the more ideological approach of the SDF element and the labourism of the ILP. Where the Lynn SDP had been concerned to acquire a piano for its club, the Lynn ILP invested in a billiard table, which it hoped would raise funds. Unlike the SDF, the ILP boasted some politicians, such as Philip Snowden, with a national profile. Lynn ILP made several fruitless attempts to book Snowden for a public meeting. By 1913 the branch was in the doldrums, and in September its chair, J. W. Spurling, tried the ruse of proposing its dissolution to shake the members into activity. It worked for a while, but the outbreak of war made politics all but impossible. The branch ceased to exist in 1916.

The minutes of the Great Yarmouth Women's Suffrage Society (GYWSS), founded in 1909, reflect a rather different world. The minutes themselves are somewhat dry, but Meeres's introduction and detailed biographical appendix are very helpful in forming a rounded picture of the Yarmouth suffragists. They

were overwhelmingly from the middle classes and the ‘respectable’ strata of Yarmouth society, with schoolteachers and guest house proprietors well represented among them. Their public events could attract the support of clergymen, army officers, and doctors. Although they did occasionally organise social and cultural gatherings, their activities were generally businesslike and focused on the issue of votes for women. In the early years the GYWSS hosted speakers and supported initiatives from all the national suffrage campaigns, but by 1913 the WSPU element in Yarmouth had departed to found its own organisation, and the GYWSS aligned fully with the NUWSS. But again, from 1914 the war made political activity increasingly difficult, and by late 1915 the remaining members abandoned suffrage work in favour of fundraising for the Scottish Hospital’s field medical services.

For anyone interested in how radical movements at the turn of the twentieth century organised outside the main metropolitan centres, Frank Meeres has performed a valuable service by presenting this most intriguing source material.

Francis King

Mélanie Torrent and Andrew J. Williams, eds, *European Socialists Across Borders: Transnational Cooperation and Alternative Visions of Europe after 1945*, University of London Press, London, 2025; 272 pp.; ISBN 9781915249739, free as PDF, other formats available.

Torrent and Williams corral together eight eclectic chapters under the rubric of Europe’s socialists and cross-border co-operation. At least a couple look like strays rounded up by accident. Chronologically they stretch back to the fall of France in 1940 and forward to the turn of the century. Three, in their very different ways, cover Anglo-French relations with, in one case, a heavy flavouring of federalism. Two are partial political biographies, the first of Europe’s pre-eminent expert on African decolonisation, Basil Davidson, and the second of Swedish Prime Minister, Olaf Palme, and his temerity in challenging Washington’s criminal enterprise in Vietnam. The last look to policy rather than personality: the left lean away from Israel towards Palestine in the seventies and early eighties; anti-racism on the European stage; Socialist grand plans to tackle EU unemployment.

The most interesting is Ben Heckscher and Tommaso Milani’s ‘*Mouvement Socialiste pour les États-Unis d’Europe*’ which looks at how Britain’s anti-Stalinist revolutionary left in the Independent Labour Party (ILP) sowed from the early 1940’s the seeds of federalism in first their domestic and subsequently their European campaigning for a United Socialist States of Europe. Close engagement found the ILP wanting in resources and influence. Hijacked by their French friends, it rapidly evolved, the Movement for a Socialist United States of Europe

became the Socialist Movement for a United States of Europe and then *de facto* the left wing of the European Movement. Their third way of neither Washington nor Moscow was killed with kindness after the announcement of the Marshall Plan in 1947. Western Europeans became the willing wards of Washington.

The converse – not that it lacks interest – is ‘Black British Labour Leaders and the Europeanisation of antiracism’ which fails to see the wood for the trees; focussing on the epiphenomena and missing the central characters almost entirely. Bernie Grant MP and two French MEPs, Djida Tazdait and Nora Zaidi, are selected as champions, with the two French identified as Green Party members, even although Zaidi was elected to the European Parliament (EP) on the French Socialist Party list. The piece misses the foreplay. European anti-racism was woken up by the emergence of Jean-Marie Le Pen’s *Front National* and their breakthrough in the 1984 EP Elections.

The result on the streets was the delivery of hundreds of thousands, in France and beyond, rallying behind Harlem Désir, *SOS Racisme* and their slogan ‘*touche pas mon pote*’, while in the EP a Committee of Enquiry was established into ‘The Growth of Racism and Fascism in Europe’ that proposed giving the EU clear competence to act against racial discrimination. In 1989 there was a second Committee of Enquiry into Racism and Xenophobia in the context of 1992, followed by a Council of Ministers Consultative Committee on Racism and Xenophobia. All of which led to the demanded Amsterdam Treaty changes. Both Tazdait and Zaidi were active members of that second EP Committee of Enquiry. All of whose work warrants, apparently, only a single lonely footnote.

The Labour Party and its relations with the *Section Française de l’Internationale Ouvrière* (French Socialist Party) saw the wartime attempts to build a bipartite Anglo-French united front against the post-war economic threats from Germany and the US, while avoiding civil war in a fractured France. The second proved easier than the first. The third French engagement concerns the role played by individual MPs in Britain under pressure from the former resistance leader, Claude Bourdet, in pressing France’s Socialists to return to respecting human rights law in the brutal Algerian War. Basil Davidson’s influence and reputation are put to the question by his alleged too-close affinity with the Soviet bloc; despite all the signals to the contrary, while Olaf Palme’s apostasy benefits from heavy behind the scenes support from his fellow socialist leaders in Austria and Germany, Bruno Kreisky and Willy Brandt. Palme speaks for all three in his condemnations; words gagged by the hard politics of Vienna and Bonn.

The European left was besotted with Israel for a long quarter of a century after Victory in Europe. It was as much driven by guilt for what they had failed to do in the thirties and forties, as by admiration for what Israeli socialists were doing in real time. The ousting of the Israeli Labour Party from power and the

increasing discriminations against the Arab population inside and outside the state saw a sea-change. Tel Aviv cried ‘wolf’ too often. Self-defence can be an offence. No longer was Israel the poster boy for socialism, even if the true extent of its derelictions took decades to acknowledge.

The last – but far from least – is two attempts to arrive at a common policy for jobs within the EU socialist family. In 1985 the Willy Claes working group for the timorous Confederation of the Socialist Parties of the European Community (CSPEC) produced ‘More Jobs for Europe’. It fell on deaf ears. Its Keynesian message was considered outdated and its very European nature saw a British Labour Party, still committed to jumping off the European ship at the first opportunity, determined to water down its federalist message. Eight years later CSPEC’s successor – the Party of European Socialists (PES) – did better. Allan Larsson, former Swedish Minister of Finance, saw his PES working group propose a ‘European Employment Initiative’ that was promoted by socialist Commission President, Jacques Delors, and was still recognizable in the employment title in the Amsterdam Treaty. Mathieu Fulla explains the very different receptions. The PES has a seriousness missing from its predecessor, Neil Kinnock had brought the Labour Party and its MEPs, who had spent the previous years sat on their bags waiting to leave, fully into the system, and most importantly its flavour had the faint bitterness of austerity that now chimed with social democracy’s concessions to a monetarist agenda.

European Socialists Across Borders is a miscellany of topics across time and space. Most will serve to spur further work in frankly what is a sadly neglected area of Labour history, particularly in Britain. Nevertheless, as someone who served in the Socialist Group in the EP between 1984–2009, I see it more as an opportunity missed than an opportunity seized; where the whole is less than the sum of the parts.

Glyn Ford

The Socialist History Society

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